

## ***The House of Usher or the House of Mirrors: A Recast of the Double***

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**Abstract:** Turning to good account the translating practice and the techniques which have been applied so far, the comparative analysis in translation highlights the similar or different aspects when rewriting the original. Both translations submitted to attention reflect linguistic knowledge, social and cultural awareness besides personal perspective, talent and intuitive grasp of the literary text. In order to acquire the accurately reflected (*i.e.* translated) image of E. Allan Poe’s ‘House of Usher’, the translator should analyse several other reflections (*i.e.* steps) which help him or her obtain the most faithful resemblance (*i.e.* translation) to the original. Two remarkable Romanian translators – Ion Vinea and Liviu Cotruș – have already beaten this devious path.

**Key-words:** translator, translation, translation techniques

Metaphorically comparing it to a mirror, the act of translation plays on the viewer (*i.e.* the translator) a farcical game, as it is recreated by a different image, sometimes faithful, sometimes distorted, depending on the mirror’s translucence and on the viewer’s optical perspectives. This catoptric game has bewildered civilisations for millennia, while translations have precipitated the cultural growing rhythm of nations throughout the world, thus contributing to define cultural awareness.

Most theorists agree upon the connection between the original text and the translator who follows three steps: reading and understanding the source text, where he or she connects to

linguistic and extra-linguistic contexts, deverbalisation or decoding the linguistic signs and reformulation or restoration. According to A. Neubert (q. in R. Dimitriu, 2002: 63), there are five parameters of translational competence: language competence, textual competence, subject competence, (bi)-cultural competence and transfer competence. The variety of methods and tools of translation apply mainly to expressive texts which are imbued with an aesthetic component, leading to a particular aesthetic effect on the audience. The translators' task is to achieve an analogous stylistic outcome, availing oneself of the translation devices at his or her disposal. A narrative source-text 'calls for the translator to identify with the sender' (Cay Dollerup, 2006: 178) and should be 'analysed text-internally for semantic, lexical, grammatical and stylistic features' (*ibid.*: 147).

When the text is full of the 'signs' that trigger cultural awareness, it becomes very difficult for the translator to understand what he or she reads, not to mention to know what to write in the target language. This means that special techniques should be devised in order to make a cultural text understandable. A pervasive stylistic effect is achieved at the use of communicative marks within the translated text in the form of culturally-defined patterns. Literary texts represent real touchstones for either the experienced or the inexperienced translator who has 'to be faithful to the writer, to his intentions, to the tradition, culture and language from which and into which he translates' (E. Croitoru, 1996: 34). The generally accepted statement categorises the translator as a bilingual mediator between two cultural realms. *In extenso*, he or she undertakes inter-textual, intra-textual and extra-textual items necessary for a pertinent transference or, as A. Banta underlines in a more poetic definition, a translator's position is 'similar to that of a producer who prepares to stage a play, or to

make a film, or perhaps to that of a performer, or a conductor preparing to play a piece of music' (*ibid.*: 33).

The literary work submitted to analysis on which relies the Romanian double version provided by Ion Vinea and Liviu Cotru poses laboriousness in translation due to E. A. Poe's positioning in favour of fantasy and hallucination. Perceived as having emerged from one of his stories or poems, Edgar Allan Poe embodies the eerie literary genius of his past, present and future readership. The writer's turbulent condition, developing an almost neurotic obsession with death and violence, was undoubtedly prolonged into his work of mysterious reality.

The translators' mirrored renderings of 'The Fall of the House of Usher' have distinctly reflected the wish to remain faithful to their epoch readership. Vinea yielded to a reader-oriented translation which 'has always been regarded as a viable translation option counteracting literal tendencies' (R. Dumitriu, 2002: 23), while Cotru has submitted to source text preservation. On the one hand, Vinea's brilliant translation is the outcome of a superior knowledge and appreciation of Poe, as well as of a spiritual fidelity towards his artistic creeds and masterpiece. A great poet himself, Ion Vinea magnificently transposed the rhythm and musicality of each word and line which he studied intensely to imprint the same stylistic expression on the Romanian text. On the other hand, contemporary translator Liviu Cotru employs an up-to-day lexis and firmly organised syntactic structures, so as to cope with the 21<sup>st</sup> century reading audience.

Embracing a domain firmly rooted in theory and practice, a translator's *modus operandi* should mirror his ability to analyse, compare and convert two cultural systems, or, in Andrei Banta's own words (q. in E. Croitoru, 1996: 32) 'he must discern the author's general as well as specific intentions', concentrate on finding the appropriate expression to transmit a certain meaning at a certain point in time and in a

certain context. In an attempt to offer the most realistic image of the translator immersed in the act of translation, Ion Vinea is betrayed by his 'nervous and elegant handwriting' which reflects the 'inner vibrations'<sup>1</sup> arising out of the earnestness to exploit the text and discover the most attainable solution in translation. The laboriousness of a today's translator does not diverge much, a valid exemplification being Liviu Cotr u's scientific research before endeavoring to translate. Both translators toiled on this noble field of text agreement and term reconciliacion, the resulting reproductions of Edgar A. Poe's 'The Fall Of the House of Usher' reflecting their particular approaches and styles.

Both portrayals mentioned above appertain to the binomial situation in which resides a translator, who is either a practitioner or a theorist: 'the *translator* becomes, by necessity, the *theorist* of his own act of translating' (I. Mavrodin, 2006: 26, italics mine). A first glance at both Romanian versions denotes that I. Vinea and L. Cotr u **approach** the original text from different perspectives. The target-orientedness (domestication) of the former opposes the source-orientation (alienation) of the latter, one explaining this dissonant route due to their different formation. The artistic nature of I. Vinea, the avant-garde writer of visual poetry and reinvented narrative changes order of sentence parts, naturalises lexical constructions, adjusts complex stylistic forms by merely employing a simple but surprising vocabulary. The academic nature of L. Cotr u inclines towards a semantic rendition by maintaining the contextual meaning of the story within the semantic and syntactic structures of the target text. His translation adheres quite closely to the syntax of 'The Fal of the House of Usher', deprived of any useless deviation from the

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<sup>1</sup> Vaida, Mircea, 1973. 'Ion Vinea, a Translator' in *Magazine of the Twentieth Century*, Romanian Writers' Union (ed.), 1: 151-57.

original. Literal (semantic, source-oriented) translations aim at achieving formal equivalence by preserving the author's idiolect. The author's **idiolect** is preserved through formal equivalence, also known as faithfulness to the source in order to reveal its authenticity.

<b>Target-Orientedness</b>	<b>Source-Orientedness</b>
<p>‘Am spus o jale de nesuferit’  ‘câteva trunchiuri de copaci  c run i i gârbovi’  ‘Era un mister cu totul de  nep truns’  ‘F r a pierde din vedere  aceste am nunte,  m-am îndreptat c lare pe o  alee scurt  ce ducea spre cas .’  ‘Chipul lui (...) purta expresia  unei josnice  iretenii amestecat cu  perplexitate.’  ‘chip cadaveric’  ‘Disp ruse obi nuitul s u  fel de a fi.’  ‘(...se pr bu i...) peste trupul  fratelui ei’  ‘v zând cum m re ele ziduri  se pr bu esc  despicate’  ‘aidoma glasului a o mie de  cascade’</p>	<p>‘Spun <i>insuportabil</i>’  ‘câteva trunchiuri de arbori  albi i usca i’  ‘Era un mister pe de-a-  ntregul insolubil’  ‘Observând aceste lucruri,  am trecut  c lare peste un pode pân  în dreptul casei.’  ‘Chipul lui (...) poart  pecetea unei viclenii  josnice, îmbinat cu  stupoare.’  ‘culoarea cadaveric a fe ei’  ‘Nici urm nu se mai vedea  din obi nuitele  lui purt ri: disp ruser .’  ‘(... se pr bu i ...) peste  fratele ei’  ‘c nd v zui puternicele  ziduri pr v -  lindu-se rupte în dou ’  ‘ca glasurile a mii de  cataracte’</p>
<p><i>Pr bu irea Casei Usher,</i>  trad. Ion Vinea</p>	<p><i>Pr bu irea Casei Usher,</i>  trad. Liviu Cotr u</p>

### Original Text

*I say insufferable; a few white trunks of decayed trees; It  
was a mystery all insoluble;  
Noticing these things I rode over a causeway to the  
house; His countenance (...) wore  
a mingled expression of low cunning and perplexity; a  
cadaverousness of expression;  
His ordinary manner had vanished; (... she fell ...) upon  
the person of her brother; as  
I saw the mighty walls rushing asunder; like the voice of a  
thousand waters.*

'The Fall of the House of Usher' by E. A. Poe

Thus, the audience of the target language finds Vinea's translation closer to specific phrases and collocations which spring out from ordinary, genuine lexical overflows, carriers of linguistic beauty and national culture ('vis de apoi', 'via a de toate zilele', 'ochi f r priviri', 'f r z bav ', 'vrednic de luare-aminte', 'cu totul str in ', 'f r preget', 'pe temeiu', 'pe îndelete', 'cu de-am nuntul', 'pe de-a-ntregul'). Moreover, Vinea appeals to **idiomising translation** by using 'idioms or familiar phonic and rhythmic patterns' (N. Armstrong, 2005: 16), such as 'aveam de gând', 'fusesem strâns lega i', 'luasem cuno tin ', 'nu pot pune la îndoial ', 'mi-a încol it în minte', 'a fost de ajuns s arunc o privire', 'am s -mi dau sfâr itul', 'mi-e cu neputin ', 'mi-a intuit (...) aten ia', 'nu încape îndoial ', although this procedure implies 'sacrificing nuances of meaning and tone' (*ibid.*) of the authentic text. Considering the literary grounds of his epoch open to new forms of symbolism and expressionism on the one hand and continuing its traditional course on the other hand Vinea uses neological and scientific terms so as to convey emotional subtext. Liviu Cotru preserves and even overemploys them in order to

promote an up to date act of translation which meets the demands of the contemporary readership. Both tendencies of **historicising** and **modernising** the translations reflect highly understanding of choosing the appropriate nuances, given the different approaches. Ion Vinea's unelevated, ethnocentric equivalence of the lexical units below follows Leon Levi chi's project in 1964 to translate Shakespeare's plays using an authentic national language, free of modern influences (*i.e.* without Latin or French borrowings).

<b>Equivalent lexical units used in translation</b>	
'neguroas ' 'de nep truns' 'hele teu' 'l ca al triste ii' 'copaci trunchia i i fantomatici' 'tulburare mintal ' 'coborători' 'ciudata îndoielnica denumire' 'se ridica' 'semne de adânc p r ginire' 'stupoare' 'alc tuire trupeasc ' ' uvoi de triste e' 'am nunte secundare' 'u urin a îinfl c rat ' 'se zb teau cu tres riri' 'mi-am dat seama numaidecât'	'sumbr ' 'insolubil' 'iezer' 'conac al triste ii' 'arbori spectrali' 'dereglare mintal ' 'descenden ' 'bizara i echivoca denumire' 'exala' 'pu ine semne de instabilitate' 'perplexitate' 'conforma ie fizic ' 'radia ie de triste e' 'detalii auxiliare' 'p tima a dezinvoltur ' 'se leg nau spasmodic' 'am conchis degrab '
<i>Pr bu irea Casei Usher, trad.            Ion Vinea</i>	<i>Pr bu irea Casei Usher,            trad. Liviu Cotru</i>

### Original text

*dull, insoluble, tarn, mansion of gloom, ghastly tree-stems,  
mental disorder, line  
of descent, the quaint and equivocal appellation, had  
reeked up, little token of instability,  
perplexity, physical confirmation, radiation of gloom,  
accessory points, fervid facility,  
swayed fitfully, I at once concluded.*

‘The Fall of the House of Usher’ by E. A. Poe

Concerning the **translating techniques** adopted, it is to be noticed Ion Vinea’s *staging* version deprived of calques and literal renditions replaced by lexical modulations and transpositions; professor Liviu Cotr u’s exegetic perspective of the target language is rendered by means of **extratextual gloss** (*i.e.* the use of footnotes, endnotes, glossary) which supplement the reader’s cultural information. The use of loan translations highlights the literal characteristic of the contemporary translator who maintains the understanding of the borrowed structure but replaces its morphemes by those of the native language. The solutions both translators adopt reveal a deep linguistic sense and endeavor to transpose into Romanian the ominous gloom which pervades the reader.

Yet, another aspect which a translator should not omit when translating is the projection of his decoded work between the two coordinates of time and space. In other words, his translation must obey the linguistic confinement of ‘when’ and ‘where’ the action of the original literary text takes place. Ion Vinea seems to respect all **cultural demands**, while Liviu Cotr u’s variant obtains a slightly opaque socio-cultural background of the aristocratic main character in the story. Thus, ‘the chair’ and ‘the sofa’ in the source text are rendered in the target text by ‘fotoliul’ and ‘sofaua’, respectively. His

counterfellow employs for the same words ‘divan’ (a Turkish term which entered our vocabulary in the 19<sup>th</sup> century) and ‘jil’ (an archaic term of German origin). Semantic ambiguity arises at the use of ‘Arabesque’ and ‘Hebrew’ referring to Roderick Usher’s physical appearance, where Vinea recasts the semantic perspective by lexical modulations and Cotru resorts to calques.

<b>Translating techniques</b>	<b>Ion Vinea’s procedure</b>	<b>Liviu Cotru’s procedure</b>
<b>borrowing</b>	<i>lady Madeline; impromptus; sir; in-octavo; in-quarto</i>	<i>lady Madeline; ennuyé; in octavo; in-quarto</i>
<b>calque</b>	‘Casa Usher’; ‘în pas tiptil’; ‘instrumente muzicale’; ‘singura (sa) rud pe p mânt’; ‘vals’; ‘din odaie în odaie’; ‘încoace i încolo’ ‘fenomene electrice’; ‘într-o parte i într-alta’; ‘b taia inimii’	‘Casa Usher’; ‘obiecte naturale’; ‘agita ie nervoas ’; ‘tip ebraic’; ‘boal trupeasc ’; ‘lege paradoxal ’; ‘echivoca denumire’; ‘b rbie modelat ’; ‘arcada gotic ’; ‘unei morbide acuit i a sim urilor’; ‘expresia ei arabesc ’; ‘Palatul bântuit’; ‘urletul de moarte’; ‘densitate a norilor’; ‘paloare a pielii’; ‘conforma ie fizic ’; ‘p r m t sos ‘instrumente muzicale’; ‘impresii supersti ioase’;

		‘obiecte terestre’; ‘fenomene electrice’
<b>transposition</b> (through expansion)	<i>unsatisfactory conclusion</i> – ‘r spuns <b>care nu m mul umea</b> ’; <i>a short causeway</i> – ‘o alee scurt <b>ce ducea spre cas</b> ’; <i>upon my entrance</i> – ‘când <b>intra</b> ’; <i>its Arabesque expression</i> – ‘ <b>n zdr vana</b> lui expresie’; <i>I at first thought</i> – ‘acesta fu primul meu <b>gând</b> ’; <i>even with effort</i> – ‘oricât <b>m-a fi str duit</b> ’; <i>beyond doubt</i> – ‘ <b>nu încap</b> <b>îndoial</b> ’	<i>beyond our depth</i> - ‘ <b>care ne dep esc</b> ’; <i>its capacity for sorrowful impression</i> – ‘capacitatea ei <b>de a produce</b> un sentiment de triste e’; <i>habitual</i> – ‘ <b>un lucru obi nuit</b> ’; <i>ushered me into the presence of his master</i> – ‘ <b>m prezent</b> st pânului s u’; <i>in this there was much that</i> – ‘în <b>treaba</b> asta era ceva care’
<b>modulation</b>	<i>beyond our depth</i> – ‘ce dep esc <b>cuno tin ele noastre</b> ’; <i>in a distant part of my country</i> – ‘pe dep rtatele mele <b>me-leaguri</b> ’; <i>what must have been a dream</i> – ‘ceea ce <b>nu putea</b> fi decât vis’; <i>through a remote portion of the apartment</i> – ‘dintr-un <b>ungher</b> mai îndep rtat	<i>with an utter depression of soul</i> – ‘cu o cumplit <b>povar</b> în suflet’; <i>allowed me no room for hesitation</i> – ‘nu-mi îng duia nici o <b>clip</b> de ov ire’; a fine tangled <b>web-work</b> – ‘ <b>es tur fin de borangic</b> ’; <i>in the maturity of youth</i> – ‘în <b>floarea vârstei</b> ’; <i>a</i>

	al înc -perii'; <i>a train of thought</i> – 'o <b>înl n-uire</b> de idei'; <i>nose of a delicate Hebrew model</i> – 'un nas <b>sub irel i coroiat</b> '; <i>its Arabesque expression</i> – ' <b>n z-dr vana</b> lui expre-sie'	<i>train of thought</i> – 'un <b>ir</b> de idei'
<b>equivalence</b>	<i>there can be no doubt that</i> – 'nu pot pune la îndoial c '; <i>on account of</i> – 'pentru'; <i>I did not feel at liberty to</i> – 'nu m sim eam în stare s '; <i>it was no wonder that</i> – 'nu era de mirare c '; <i>presence of mind</i> – 'limpede la minte'	<i>there can be no doubt that</i> – 'nu încape îndoial '; <i>on account of</i> – 'pentru'; <i>I did not feel at liberty to</i> – 'nu m sim eam îndrept it s '; <i>it was no wonder that</i> – 'nu era de mirare c '; <i>presence of mind</i> 'prezen a de spirit'
<b>adaptation</b>	<i>upon the bleak walls</i> – 'cu zidurile lui <b>b tute de vânturi</b> '; <i>time out of mind</i> – 'din <b>noaptea tim-purilor</b> '; <i>with no disturbance from the breath of the external air</i> – 'f r nici o atingere cu suflul aerului dinafar , <b>i care î i p strau totu i o în el toare tr ini-cie</b> '; <i>wore a mingled expression</i> – 'purta <b>pecetea</b> '; <i>he accosted</i>	<i>his countenance, I thought</i> – 'chipul lui, gândeam <b>în sinea mea</b> '; <i>he roamed from chamber to chamber</i> – 'umbra <b>de colo colo</b> , dintr-o înc pere într-alta'

	<i>me with trepidation – ‘îmi strânse mâna cu emo ie’; a settled apathy – ‘o înd r tnic stare de nep sare la tot i toate’</i>	
<b>explicitation</b>	<i>of the peasantry who used it – ‘folosit de ranii din partea locului’; the studio of his master – ‘camera de lucru a st pânului’; ‘The Haunted Palace’ – ‘Palatul bântuit de strigoi’; there was blood upon her white robes – ‘pe albele ei ve minte erau pete de sânge’</i>	<i>I welcomed his presence as a relief – ‘i-am salutat prezen a cu un sentiment de u urare’</i>
<b>omission</b>	<i>a servant in waiting took my horse – ‘un servitor îmi lu calul’; the general furniture – ‘mobilierul’</i>	<i>a servant in waiting took my horse – ‘un servitor îmi lu calul; the general furniture - ‘mobilierul’</i>

Description – either of animate and inanimate entities and implying both visual and auditory perceptions – represents the dominant narrative device which governs the ‘House of Usher’. Availing himself of this technique, Poe settles the dreary tone of the short story by **imagery and style**. Each text type has its own translation trajectory, literary texts representing a veritable *pierre de touche* for any skilled

translator because of their predominant expressive function, suffused with an aesthetic ingredient created by the author.

Although involving in their translating process different approaches, both translators maintain *dès le commencement* the unwelcoming despondent atmosphere by the funereal rhythm of alliteration: ‘t cut i posomorât’ (I. Vinea) and ‘era un fior de ghea , o scufundare, o durere a inimii’ (L. Cotr u). The idea of confinement and terror within the story is also suggested by the overwhelming use of word and phrase repetitions, a device largely adopted by the Romanian translators as well.

The poetic, superfluous language of Ion Vinea, full of idiomising structures applies nowadays to a quasi-elitist audience. The recent variant signed by Liviu Cotr u offers the general public a straightforward translation of Poe, considered to be better attuned to the contemporary expectations. Both translating strategies, either ‘classical’ or contemporary, adhere to the criteria of competence, despite the similar proneness to syntactic intricacies. Sentences in both renderings mimic the original and are hardly juxtaposed, always changing perspective and following impetuously like kaleidoscopic images.

‘The Fall of the House of Usher’ as a ‘tale proper’ is thoroughly built on metaphors and symbols, posing great dilemmas to any venturer in translation. As a matter of fact, the first translations of Poe’s short stories emerged from a sort of mirroring effect as well, considering that Charles Baudelaire recognised, prior to translating, much of his own poetic theory and personal life within Poe’s literature. Without the French Symbolist, the influence of Poe’s work would have been severely diminished. A century later, the Romanian writer Ion Vinea’s life and work unequivocally mirrors Edgar Allan Poe’s, while a total commitment in translation has been reflected in the contemporary professor Liviu Cotr u’s analysis and accurate translations of the American writer.

The widely accepted theory according to which a translator's competence is measured by his ability to overcome language, cultural and time boundaries highly applies to Ion Vinea and Liviu Cotr u. One cannot proceed with the translating process without possessing thorough knowledge of theory and practice. A new stage of the debate on source and target orientedness was opened by the Romanian translators, who both tackled differently the original text. The aesthetic component which prevails in literary texts should meet an analogous stylistic effect in the target language, by taking into consideration the linguistic principles in the source language.

Accordingly, the short story rendered into Romanian acquires both its translators' writing touch, as a result of the contrasting cultural backgrounds of the translators and their subjective opinions; in other words, a translator turns into a 'servant of two masters': the author of the original production and its readership in the target language.

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