

OF MICE AND WOMEN: TRANSLATING FOR DUAL READERSHIPS

CĂTĂLINA ILIESCU-GHEORGHIU

University of Alicante

Abstract: *The aim of this paper is to discuss the translator's decisions in the Spanish version of two plays by Romanian-born American writer Domnica Radulescu, which were conditioned by the presumed target readership duality (mainly Spanish, but also Romanian, first and second-generation diaspora). The first part of the analysis is based on Marco's (2004) model, revealing a high degree of translator's intervention in the culturemes' referential and informative frames. The second part of the analysis delves into imagological categories (ethnotype, image) and their inherence in the translator's decisions. This paper advocates scholarly observation of authors' and translators' priorities in contexts implying different imagological frames of host and diasporic target readerships.*

Keywords: *cultureme, dual readership, imagology, migration, theatre translation*

1. Aims and background

Diasporic identities are permanently re-constructed in literary works written by ectopic authors and translated by diaspora translators for host societies and sometimes for diaspora receivers. Vernier (2014) defined translingual writers as double self-translators in this 'renegotiation of the self' that migrants experience living as 'translated beings' between multiple cultures, languages and national identities. This paper approaches two theatrical texts, *Exile is my Home* and *The Virgins of Seville* by Domnica Radulescu, an American writer of Romanian origin, and their translation into Spanish. It addresses mainly the Spanish host society but also the Romanian diaspora (first and second generation). In these texts, the author takes the point of view of female refugees and immigrants, desperate mothers looking for lost sons, migrant workers and sex workers on the margins of society, women of all walks of life searching for a place to live, questioning and reinventing the notion of home. As the author confesses in an interview (Alexandru 2016: 10), "once uprooted from their initial birth place, my characters suffer from a spatial promiscuity, that is they move from place to place, country to country, and planet to planet in an almost demented drive to settle somewhere, yet always dissatisfied by something in each new place, and all the while being haunted by fragmented memories of an initial birth home that they were forced to leave". Radulescu's endings are utopian, with immigrants who are welcome and embraced in the 'totality of their individuality'.

Inspired by modern wars, the realities of immigration, displacements and traumatic experiences, *Exile Is My Home* focuses on the female sufferers of these realities, most often initiated and performed by patriarchal societies. As Domnica Radulescu herself recalls (Lecture at the University 'Jaume I de Castellón', entitled *Dream in a Suitcase*, July 2016), the two heroines echo the more realistic heroines from her novel *Country of Red Azaleas* (Radulescu 2016), Marija and Lara,

survivors of the Bosnian war, only in fantastical, at times carnivalesque style. *The Virgins of Seville* was inspired by a visit Radulescu paid to her son who was studying in Seville, where she was amazed by the number of hypostases of the Virgin Mary, as she confesses (Book launch, Castellón, November 2017):

The Virgins of Seville was inspired by the obsessive abundance of streets carrying names of the Virgin in Seville and the overwhelming cult of the Virgin in that town. Equally so I was shocked by the multitudes of Romanian migrant workers in Seville and other Spanish cities, by the complementary reality of the Roma, both Spanish and Romanian. Harsher realities of the abundance of Romanian sex workers in Spain and Italy clashed in my imagination and created an amalgam of all these realities neutralizing and taking out both the negative or idealizing stereotypes – neither are the Virgins so virgin, being creations of male fantasy projected upon women, nor are the sex workers so depraved, being objects of male sexual fantasies but in reality human beings who made some hard choices – so I am desensationalizing these female figures. The reality of motherhood is also intensely present in both plays in tragic but also hopeful imagery and situations. Lina, Mina, Ramona all are strong mother figures but not idealized mother figures, they are women of action, picaresque heroines, fighters, but also whimsical, over the top at times, and at other times distracted and absent minded, adventurers. Through my heroines I am building my own feminist humanist utopias.

Both plays were written in 2014 and were translated into Spanish (Radulescu 2017) and several staged readings took place in Alicante (Teatro Principal; Centro ‘Mario Benedetti’; Cursos de Verano ‘Rafael Altamira’ – University of Alicante) and Castellón (Institute for Feminist Studies ‘Purificación Escribano’). In what follows, excerpts from both texts will be analysed from two perspectives: the concept of *culturemes* and the theoretical model of *auto-hetero-meta-image*, in the light of the recent scholarly convergences developed between imagology and Translation Studies.

2. The translation of culturemes in *Exile is my Home*

One of the translator’s main preoccupations (in all genres, but especially in theatre translation) is to preserve the dramatic tension. In *Exile is my Home*, this tension arises not so much from the plot (absurd, weaved in extreme situations with even more absurd, unexpected solutions), as it does from human relationships, for instance, between the two heroines, Mina and Lina, born in uncertain lands with changing borders, somewhere in the Balkans. They had a son, who was kidnapped during the Bosnian war by organ thieves and was sold in America. The rapes and tortures which Mina and Lina underwent caused memory loss, even of motherhood, their most sacred memory. When they come across their own son, they fail to recognize him because they do not remember they ever had a son. The exercise of recalling the past is as traumatic as the motives of their amnesia. However, they go through this therapeutic process of retrieving memories in order to save their son from the ‘Woman who eats hearts’. Dramatic tension also emerges from the manner they narrate their own selves. As in thrillers, terror comes from apparently peaceful, calm, idyllic images, such as the gentleness of a paper boat floating on a pond, which heralds misfortune here.

Of the many challenges such a text poses, I have chosen *culturemes* as a complex category to analyse, both from a translational perspective, drawing on the translator’s decisions and solutions bearing in mind a determinate reader, and

from a creative perspective, tackling the mother-son relationship in a diasporic context that acts as an intensifier, altering emotional impact and expectations on both sides (first and second-generation migrants) regarding each party's rights and duties.

A *cultureme* is, according to *The Encyclopedia of Semiotics* (Bouissac 2007), "any portion of cultural behaviour apprehended in signs of symbolic value that can be broken down into smaller units or amalgamated into larger ones". Its usage can be seen in cultural expressions, idioms, jokes, slogans, literature, religion, or folklore. This definition is challenged by Lungu Badea (2004: 35), who sees it as the smallest unit bearing cultural information, indivisible, otherwise the target readers' perception would be hindered. A detailed insight into the concept of 'cultural references' is offered by Mayoral (1999 - 2000). Whether they are called 'presuppositions' (Nida 1945), 'cultural items' (Newmark 1991), 'realia' (the Leipzig school), 'textual segments culturally marked' (Mayoral and Muñoz 1997) or 'specific cultural elements' (Franco 1996), 'culturemes' (Nord 1997) are increasingly used in translation studies in the late twentieth century to distinguish units with a strong cultural connotation likely to produce a translational gap.

In Coulthard's view (1992), the translator's first and major difficulty is the construction of a new ideal reader who, even on the same academic, professional and intellectual level as the original reader, will have significantly different textual expectations and cultural knowledge. Lvovskaia (2000: 50) refers to *culturemes* in terms of 'cultural intertextuality', encompassing non-coincidence in material and spiritual life as well as in verbal and non-verbal behaviour. Nord (1997: 34) explains the notion as follows: 'a social phenomenon of a culture X that is regarded as relevant by the members of this culture and, when compared with a corresponding social phenomenon in a culture Y, is found to be specific to culture X', while Molina (2006: 79) defines *culturemes* as verbal or para-verbal elements that possess a specific cultural load in one culture, likely to provoke a problem when in contact with another culture, to which Leppihalme (2010: 128) adds (as valuable information for analyses) the translation situation, the attitudes and even the ideology of the translator. According to Lungu Badea (2004: 69) *culturemes* are: monocultural (belonging mostly to one cultural context), relative (depending on participants' encyclopaedic knowledge and expectations) and autonomous (not relying on translators, who tend to blur them as meaningless in target languages). Katan (2004) sees *culturemes* not only as lexical and cultural gaps or lack of equivalents (*macho*, *glasnost*), but also culturally bound differences of connotation within the same notion (e.g. instances of political correctness). Three devices seem to prevail in Katan's view: generalisation (by using hyperonyms), omission/explicitation (to give access to implicitness), and distortion (a sort of zoom lens allowing focus on certain aspects). Prodan (2016) adopts a five-category classification of *culturemes* (natural context; cultural heritage; material culture; social culture; linguistic culture) in her analysis of translations of Catalan prose (novel and short-story) into Romanian between 1995 - 2010. But one of the most complete models is proposed by Marco (2004: 138) inspired by Hurtado, as a continuum from the lowest to the highest translator's intervention (and the consequent degree of rapprochement with the target reader). The balance between a maximum cultural characterization obeying original style and a minimum cultural characterization for the sake of comprehension on this continuum is given by the envisaged receiver. In Marco's model, strategies for coping with *culturemes* range from: *loan* (pure or domesticated); *literal translation*; *neutralisation* (through

description or generalisation / particularisation); *amplification / compression*; *intracultural adaptation* (in search of verisimilitude, to the extent of creation) and finally, *intercultural adaptation* (the highest degree of translator's intervention and of rapprochement with the target reader). Two non-dependant strategies (the very last and the very first action a translator considers) are *omission* as an extreme case of neutralisation and *coined equivalents*, as an option 'by default' which a translator checks before anything else. Marco (2004: 139) warns that the discussion on the translator's decisions regarding *culturemes* should go further and include two supplementary variables: the degree of 'culturality' that the solution itself acquires in the target language and the amount of information available to the translator compared to the initial information available to the original author. In what follows, Marco's model will be applied to an excerpt of the theatrical text *Exile is My Home* and its translation into Spanish.

In Act III (The Third Planet, Snow Planet, Snow White), we discover, at the same time as Lina and Mina do, that they have a son, Billy, whom they must save. He is now a talking heart because his body has been separated from his heart and is kept in a drawer by the 'Woman Who Eats Hearts' who is planning to devour him. In order to find him, among hundreds of other prisoner bodies, they must remember his name. This is the dialogue:

LINA: (<i>Quietly, just with large movements of her mouth.</i>) What's his name?	LINA: (<i>Sin voz, sólo moviendo la boca exageradamente para que lean sus labios.</i>) ¿Cómo se llama?
MINA: (<i>Also quietly.</i>) What?	MINA: (<i>También sin voz.</i>) ¿Qué?
LINA: What's his name? The name of the child?	LINA: ¿Cómo se llama? ¿Qué cómo se llama el niño?
MINA: (<i>Quietly, with silent stress on every syllable.</i>) I don't know.	MINA: (<i>Sin voz, pero vocalizando las sílabas.</i>) No lo sé.

During the crusade in which his mothers bravely engage to save him, and which can be easily compromised by a tiny detail such as his name, forgotten under trauma, Billy says:

CHORUS OF HEARTS MEMBER 4: My name is Billy, mamas! Billy, like in Billy goat.	CUARTO MIEMBRO DEL CORO DE CORAZONES: ¡Me llamo Billy, madres! Billy, como 'Billy el Niño'.
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One possible choice for the translator was to recreate a childhood, happy-time-atmosphere through which Billy tried to trigger his mothers' flow of pre-war images and memories, and make them recall their life together, when he was being told fairy-tales (such as *The Three Billy Goats Gruff* in English, the famous Norwegian fairy-tale in Asbjornsen and Moe's collection, or *Capra cu trei iezi* [*The Goat and her three kids*] by Ion Creangă, in Romanian— most outstanding children's literature author – corresponding to the plot of *The Wolf and the Seven Young Goats* in Brothers Grimm's collection). For such a purpose, the translator might have come up with an *amplification* of the *cultureme* 'Billy goat' such as 'Billy, del cuento de los cabritillos' [Billy, from *The Three Billy Goats* fairy-tale] which would have:

- (1) enlarged the reply to the detriment of performability;
- (2) eliminated the hint of masculinity inherent in other connotations of 'Billy' and

- (3) failed to reconstruct the original's humour based on polysemy: apart from denoting a male, the term also defines a kind of sexual act or a man who likes dating much younger women, and in Chicago (where Radulescu spent half of her exile), it is the name of a famous chain of taverns, founded by a Greek immigrant.

We do not know whether the playwright meant all these implicit elements to converge in order to add to the absurd, or just specifically one of them, but what is clear is that she wanted a striking, unexpected association concurring with the style of the play. *Amplification* is closer to the target end of Marco's continuum, denoting the translator's intervention, making her visible in the attempt to domesticate the cultureme, which, in turn, is based on cultural intertextuality, since it belongs to universal literature. The original Norwegian tale circulating in English since the mid-nineteenth century intermingles with the German tradition retrieved in Romanian by the end of the nineteen-hundreds, reducing the number of billy-goats from seven to three and preserving the tragic end, which in Spanish is played down. Interestingly, translations of *Capra cu trei iezi* into English do not use the term 'billy-goats', but 'kids', and Brothers Grimm's billy-goats are 'young goats', ignoring the masculinity or rather avoiding confusion with the Norwegian tale. Domnica Radulescu's cultureme is presumably a mixture of her childhood contact with Creangă's tale of murder and vengeance, her youthful study of children's literature as a philologist and her post-migration motherhood contact with the Norwegian story, which she probably read to her own sons. Aware of not being able to transfer this complex *cultureme*, the translator opted for what Marco called *intercultural adaptation*. Since the name 'Billy' (as a *dramatis persona*) was irreplaceable, then a familiar collocation for the Spanish audience containing this name had to be found. Although with violent, criminal connotations, 'Billy el Niño', seems to be not so far from the Romanian tale's violence, in which two of the three billy goats are devoured by the wolf and their skulls exhibited at the windows. Through this adaptation, irony and absurd are still triggered, only by different mechanisms. The reader is not taken to a childhood, idyllic atmosphere (with tales and paper boats floating on a pond from which Billy the child is brutally whisked) but to the surreal, grotesque situation in which a son must desperately resort to mnemotechnic strategies to make his point. This utterance (*My name is Billy, mamas! Billy, like in Billy goat*) entails an illocutionary force based on the complexity of the *cultureme* (triggering images from several traditions), and a perlocutionary effect (to make his own mothers recall his name, a question of life or death), based on the absurdity both of the nature and the necessity of the hint. Through this option (intercultural adaptation), the translator intensifies this perlocutionary effect by adding to the grotesque situation a supplementary connotation of criminality/youth/notoriety, inexistent in the original text. At the same time, the target reader is offered a different scenario, which no longer contains the fairy-tale, but a real criminal legend as a background for atrocities. The surprise-effect might be lower, but the balance is compensated by a reinforced semantic field. Ultimately, this option avoids interference with performability (not enlarging the reply), preserves the absurd and grotesque dimension of the scene and avoids the omission likely to impoverish target versions. Had the translation been done into Romanian, 'Billy the Kid' would have been appropriate for an older generation of theatre-goers, but maybe for youngsters, something like 'Billy, iedul cel mic' [Billy, the third little goat] would have been a better choice. However,

Spanish adult theatre-goers/ readers would be familiar with Billy the Kid, as they are with Al Capone or Bonnie and Clyde. Even to younger generations the name would ring a bell, because of a recent political debate and press reports on a baleful character nicknamed 'Billy el Niño', allegedly a torturer under Franco's dictatorship.

Through this option, the target reader should be rewarded with the expected poetic effects and amount of information. In Marco's model, both the translator's degree of intervention and the rapprochement with the intended receiver (a Spanish adult educated theatre-goer) are at their highest level. Regarding the degree of 'culturality' that this solution acquires in the target language, the Spanish version 'Billy el Niño' obviously deviates from the idyllic frame intended to clash with the abominable war crimes. However, these are presaged by the label (anthroponym + nickname). Original and translation, through different itineraries, reach the same effect and their 'culturality' is based on trans-national references. As for the information available to the translator compared to information available to the original author initially, the translation does not widen the spectrum, but replaces a childhood informative perimeter with an adult one.

3. The translation of ethnotypes in *The Virgins of Seville*

The Virgins of Seville is a fresh and dynamic approach to the diaspora experience, which offers profound insights into the lost and found identities of migration. The main character is an alter ego of the playwright, a Romanian born American mother, searching for Marcos, her son who left the States to recover his identity. But in Spain, the main destination of Romanian migration in the recent years, he becomes involved in drugs and crime. The Balkan mafias force him to work for them, while the huddle of Virgins (the Virgin of Silk, the Virgin of the Caves, the Virgin of Antigua, etc.) passively witness his decline, and on occasions sleep with him.

In Spain, Marcos discovers ethnotypes of Romanians, such as their "obsession with bread" and their "predisposition for begging and stealing". When the dramatic tension reaches its highest point and the characters have no escape, the author reveals that the whole story is a theatrical play and the characters (the desperate mother, the prostitutes who look like Virgins and are named after Virgins, the fugitive boy, the mafia thugs) are all immigrant actors in a street-show which disturbs the authorities and persuades the Mayor of Seville to have them arrested. However, they remind him of his electoral programme, manage to avoid prison, and even make him promise them a real stage, where they can put on the show. *The Virgins of Seville* poses the translator an ethical dilemma on whether to preserve the degree of intensity of the criticism or to smooth over some of the hard comments on either Romanian migrants or Spanish hosts.

Rather than the broader category of stereotypes, this analysis is concerned with its more specific variant, the *ethnotype*. Joep Leerssen (2016) defines ethnotypes as a stereotypical attribution of national, supra-national or ethnic characterization, responding not to an anthropological reality, but to an opposition between the *auto-image* and the *hetero-image*, i.e. between the Self and the Other. Like prejudice and stereotype, the ethnotype is promoted in times of tension and deflated in periods of stability. In Leerssen's view, ethnotypes use rhetorical formulae and moral tropes (honesty, piety versus fanaticism, superstition) and are based on oppositions and on behavioural profiles (temperamental patterns or

psychological predispositions), obviously not drawn from historical constants, but from images and counter-images. The danger of ethnotypes is their ontological half-life and their diluted presence in texts. Leerssen warns that even if we have more than one frame for a nation, the active frame pushes the others into latency.

On the other hand, *meta-images* are neither ‘auto’ nor ‘hetero’ images but the projection of something in between. In Chew’s (2006: 180) view, ‘stereotypes colour, to a large extent, not only our self-perception (our ‘auto-image’) via the image of the other (our ‘hetero-image’), but determine for better and, regrettably, for worse our behaviour toward the other’. Leerssen (2007: 344) argues that the images nations form of each other involve an ‘imputation of images’ and the way a nation believes it is perceived constitutes a ‘meta-image’. An illustration of this ‘imputation of images’ is the derogatory synecdoche coined by Romanian media in the mid-2000s homogenising the Romanian population in Spain as ‘căpânari’ (strawberry harvesters) who were not aware of such a nickname. The number of Romanian migrants in Spain reached almost one million at that time and obviously, only a small part of them (women mostly) worked as strawberry harvesters in poor conditions, in the southern part of the country. This image of Romanian migrants was spread among the home population as the way their co-nationals were considered by Spaniards. In 2006, a group of representatives of the Romanian community on Spanish territory asked for rectification and elimination of the pejorative term ‘căpânar’ in the Romanian media. They also argued that this image was actually a Romanian creation attributed to Spaniards. The press campaign coincided with the Romanian government calling upon diaspora to return home and contribute to the country’s development.

If we consider the following example:

<p>THE VIRGIN OF SILK: Yea, what is it with you and bread, you Romanians? Why are you the beggars of Europe, the vagabonds, the thieves of the European Union? And what’s with your bread obsession?</p> <p>RAMONA: Shut up you all! So, we are thieves, all right. So, we are OCD about bread, because we never had enough of it during the Communist dictatorship, big deal. [...]</p>	<p>LA VIRGEN DE LA SEDA: Seh, ¿qué os pasa a los rumanos con el pan? ¿Por qué mendigáis por Europa? ¿Por qué sois la chusma de la Unión Europea? ¿Y por qué esa obsesión por el pan?</p> <p>RAMONA: ¡Callaos todas! Vale, seremos ladrones, ¡y qué! Sufrimos trastorno obsesivo compulsivo con el pan porque nunca tuvimos suficiente durante la dictadura. [...]</p>
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we observe that the translator opted for a modification strategy, aimed at reducing the impact of the alleged *meta-image* European host societies have of Romanians (as the beggars of Europe, the vagabonds and thieves of the EU). These labels have been gathered under ‘chusma’, which adds a note of humour, making the accusation more diffuse. At the same time, by choosing a different verbal tense (dubitative future: *seremos*), meant to cast doubt on Ramona’s admission (*So, we are thieves all right*), the translator actually softens the *hetero-image* in the source text and also the original clash between the *hetero* (we are thieves) and the *auto-image* (but we are not to blame, dictatorship is).

Therefore, the conclusion to be drawn is that in this excerpt, the translator softens the *meta-image* (out of respect for the host society, which appears to be slightly more discriminatory in the original) and also softens the *hetero-image*,

a device meant to avoid offending the diaspora readership. By combining priorities from both models, the translator walks a tightrope between both sides' expectations and seeks to reconcile Tymoczko's (1999) idea of translation as a metonymic (substitution through a part/attribute of the whole) rather than metaphoric practice (substitution through analogy), which stems from the observation that translation is always partial because, as Jansen (2015: 166) summarizes, it construes its own image on the source text/culture with a view to target readers. The images 'perpetrated' by translators are in turn based on new metonymical relationships, encoding features of the receiving culture, exposing thereby its *auto-image*. This type of reconciliation, not in traditional terms (of faithfulness and to whom), but in terms of metonymy (Tymoczko 1999, Jansen 2015) might be one of the many strands of inquiry that the confluence of imagology and TS opens.

In translational terms, the strategies employed in the example above were:

- *a transposition*; a verb ('¿Por qué mendigáis por Europa?' / 'why do you beg in Europe') is used instead of the noun 'the beggars of Europe', which seems to imply Romanians are the only holders of this title;
- *a modulation*; within the same semantic field, a hypernym is used to avoid the repetition of a stronger accusation. Thus, 'the vagabonds, the thieves of the EU' was translated as 'la chusma de la UE' (which means 'rabble', 'vulgar people', 'riffraff'). In fact, 'vagabond' meant in Romanian a 'good-for-nothing', an 'idler', 'someone who is a failure' (during the seventies and the eighties, when Radulescu fled the country), whereas in Spanish 'vagabundo' would have added a bohemian nuance to the image of a vagrant.

In Ramona's reply, the *auto-image* is reinforced (by toning down the *hetero-image*); she admits Romanians are thieves and bread-eaters, but softens the accusation by combining both images to attenuate gravity and put the blame on dictatorship. This *auto-image* is maintained by the translator. The *omission* of the specification 'Communist' seems to obey geographic rather than imagological reasons. Its presence might help young American readers to locate events in Eastern Europe, while it seems to be unnecessary for a Spanish audience, who refer to their own dictatorship as 'la dictadura' (the dictatorship), without adding 'fascist'. This omission is probably meant to create connivance with Spanish readership.

4. Conclusion

The translator's decisions when producing the Spanish version of two plays by the American writer of Romanian origin, Domnica Radulescu, are found to be conditioned by several variables related to the author's style and obsessions, but most significantly to the target readership/audience's duality (comprising both the Spanish host society and the Romanian diaspora, first and second-generation).

Excerpts from both plays have been analyzed in the light of two productive avenues of inquiry: the study of *culturemes*, starting from Marco's (2004) model as a continuum on which the degree of translator's intervention also reveals the rapprochement with receivers; and the imagological approach to translology, starting from Leerssen's (2007, 2016) triadic model encompassing *auto/hetero/meta-image*.

Some of the findings show that, in the case of *Exile is my home*, translation difficulties were posed mainly by cultural elements or lexical-semantic units in

English that had no direct equivalent in Spanish. So, the translator's decisions had to do with the selection from among a repertoire of devices to resort to, including *adaptation* ('Billy el Niño'), with a change in the cultureme's assignment of genre from fantastic to real (criminality) and of informative scope from childhood to maturity, as we have seen in the example hereby discussed. These choices situate the translator's degree of intervention at its highest level. This is also true for the rapprochement with the intended receiver, whose effort to decode the clue is rewarded with a considerable amount of poetic effects – in this case, the absurd, reached differently in the target language as compared to the original.

The second part of the analysis focused on the imagological categories of *ethnotype* and *image* in the play *The Virgins of Seville* and their inherence in the translator's decisions. The original implication of this endeavor lies in approaching the dual readership/audience of translated (theatrical) texts and advocating scholarly observation of authors' and translators' priorities in contexts implying different imagological frames of host and diasporic target readerships.

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