

## Cultural Transfer through (Peri)Textual Agency. *Robinson Crusoe* in Romanian

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**Abstract:** The paper discusses Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* in Petru Comarnescu’s translation (published first in 1943, then revised in 1961 and 1964) and the prefaces (penned by Comarnescu himself) which accompany the said editions along with prefaces written by Andrei Bantaș (1998) and Lucian Pricop (2017) to Comarnescu’s 1943 text. The three preface-writers regard their mission as cultural transmitters quite dissimilarly (largely depending on the cultural and editorial policy of the time). Thus, Comarnescu aims at (re)initiating and indoctrinating his readers, Bantaș attempts to rehabilitate Defoe and his text, whereas Pricop simply reminds the readers of Defoe’s classic book.

**Keywords:** *translation, peritext, Robinson Crusoe, cultural transfer, agency.*

### Introduction

Put forward by Michel Espagne and Michael Werner in the mid-1980s as the *terminus technicus* for the analysis of historical relations between France and Germany, *cultural transfer* readily caught on, challenging previous assumptions of hegemonic influence between cultures in general. When applied to (literary) translation, the concept acquires supplemental (at times overlapping or tautological) meanings due (principally) to the shared etymology of *transfer* and *translation*; to further complicate matters, there are translation scholars and Cultural Studies researchers who posit that culture itself may be read as transfer (see, in this respect, Musner 2005), in which case the relationship between cultural transfer and translation could be reduced (if rashly oversimplified) to the following syllogism: if “translation = transfer” and if “culture = transfer” then “translation = culture (= transfer).” Advocates of Transfer Studies seem to agree, however, on two aspects which we deem paramount to our subsequent analysis, namely:

1. cultural transfer (much like literary translation, in actual fact) regards the target culture to a greater extent than the source culture; “[t]herefore, it is decision-makers in the target context who control the transfer of literature” (van de Pol-Tegge 2023: 148), and

2. the specific needs of the receiving culture may often outweigh the very goods transferred<sup>1</sup>.

In this paper, our case in point is Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* translated into Romanian: more to the point, one particular Romanian version (authored by literary critic and translator Petru Comarnescu) which smoothed its way into the Romanian culture accompanied by five different prefaces, with five different intents along time (in 1943, 1961, 1964, 1998, and 2017). We are thus interested in both the textual and peritextual side of translation, and the way in which they reflect the agency of translators and / or preface-writers in setting cultural transfer in motion within a particular socio-historical target context in their capacity as *cultural transmitters*<sup>2</sup>. To this end, we will contrast the (peri)textual elements at hand while also considering them against their original (including political) backdrop.

By *peritext* we understand any material additional to the core text which is meant to explain, instruct, and add background information; in this particular case, prefaces are the most important peritextual elements, although translator's notes and illustrations will also be mentioned. Our premise is that peritext, as part of the paratext, has "spatial, temporal, substantial, pragmatic, and functional characteristics" (Genette 1997: 4) which may have a profound influence on the reader. It is equally in keeping with Kathryn Batchelor's definition (i.e. "A paratext is a consciously crafted threshold for a text which has the potential to influence the way(s) in which the text is received." (Batchelor 2018: 142)) that we endeavour to analyse the peritextual side of the editions under debate.

Since we cannot separate Comarnescu's version from the retranslation series, we will first briefly present it as part of the translation history of *Robinson Crusoe* in Romanian.

Literal back-translation, placed between brackets, is always mine.

### ***Robinson Crusoe* in Romanian: Translation History**

The story of *Robinson Crusoe* reached the Romanian public in 1835, thanks to Vasile Drăghici (1796-1861), a middle-rank Moldavian boyar who had actually been working on his version since 1817 before plucking up the courage to print it. What he translated into Romanian was not Defoe's text, but Joachim Heinrich Campe's famous 1779 German adaptation. His decidedly readable

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, the following observations: "[W]hen a successful transfer occurs, it is not only the goods themselves which become domesticated, but rather the need for those goods" (Even-Zohar 1997: 359); "[T]he receiving culture with its specific needs now became the starting point of any cultural transfer." (Middell 2016; n.p.)

<sup>2</sup> Petra Broomans uses the term ***cultural transmitter*** to designate the role of translator or other roles in the process of cultural transfer, which she describes in the following terms: "A cultural transmitter or mediator basically works within a particular language and cultural area. She/he often takes on various roles in the field of cultural transfer: translator, reviewer, critic, journalist, (literary) historian, scholar, teacher, librarian, bookseller, collector, literary agent, scout, publisher, editor of a journal, writer, travel writer, counsellor, or even businessman. Transmitting another national literature and culture, and its cultural context to one's own national literature and cultural context is the central issue in the work of a cultural transmitter. Transmission often reflects a bilateral situation." (Broomans 2021: 79)

translation (although written in Cyrillic) is equally remarkable from a paratextual point of view. The translator's name appears alongside the adapter's (i.e. Campe's), and the publisher's (Tipografia Albinei, Eșii [Iași]) on the front page. Inside the book, before the actual text, we have a Dedication to a governor who had commissioned the translation 18 years before the publication (Alecsandru Calimah – a "vornic" [an Internal Affairs minister]), a Foreword (in Romanian, *Procurvântare*) and a Translator's Note (*Însămnare* in Romanian). The text as such is adorned with two black-and-white illustrations as well as 19 encyclopaedic footnotes.

All the other Romanian *Robinson Crusoes* published in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (whether in Cyrillic or in Latin letters) were adaptations of adaptations (based on either Campe's German text or other French intermediate versions), as translations were viewed at the time as interpretations rather than faithful renderings of original works (and Campe did pass off as the original author for quite a long time). We thus have Georgiu Popa's 1873 rendition of Campe's text (printed in Pest, Hungary), two anonymous adaptations (1891, Brașov; 1899, Craiova), Barbu Marian's illustrated edition (1899, Bucharest), and Radu D. Rosetti's heavily abridged version (1900, Bucharest), which would later on be profusely reprinted (in 1914, 1922, 1927, 1934, 1938, 1941, 1943, 1947, 1948, 1992 etc.).

Second-hand or third-hand renditions of Robinson Crusoe's account continued to appear in the former half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the translators remaining anonymous (e.g. 1908, 1915, 1921, 1932, 1939) or stepping forward as writers-to-be in their own right (e.g. 192? – Sarina Cassvan-Pas; 1937 – J. Leonard, retelling Paul Reboux's rewriting of the story, and Ad. Z.'s adaptation; 1938 – Sorin B. Rareș's rewriting; 1942 – a version by Moș Ene – pseudonym of Mihail Drumeș).

It is at the beginning of 1943 that Petru Comarnescu's translation appears (successful enough to prompt a second edition the very same year), which is, by all accounts, the first one based on Defoe's original text without any intermediary. This edition (illustrated by Mariana Petrașcu and issued by Universul) preserves the first part of the seemingly endless original title<sup>3</sup> (i.e. *Viața și nemaipomenitele aventuri ale lui Robinson Crusoe* [The Life and Unbelievable Adventures of Robinson Crusoe]) as well as the chapter synopses which pass for chapter subtitles, and will be constantly reedited along the years (in 1961, 1969, 1964, 1970, 1996, 1997, 1998, 2002, 2004, 2009, 2013, 2015 etc.) by various publishers, usually with an even shorter, more manageable title (i.e. *Robinson Crusoe*) and often without the narrative subtitles inside.

An art historian, a critic, a publicist, and a translator of repute at the time of the publication of the volume in question, Petru Comarnescu (1905-1970) embodied the consummate authoritative figure to undertake not only the task of translating Defoe's text but also that of writing the preface to the Universul

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<sup>3</sup> *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner: Who Lived Eight and Twenty Years, All Alone in an Uninhabited Island on the Coast of America, near the Mouth of the Great River of Oroonoke: Having Been Cast on the Shore by Shipwreck, wherein All the Men Perished but Himself. With an Account How He Was at Last as Strangely Deliver'd by Pyrates.*

edition. Later on, in 1961 and 1964, he decided to rewrite both the translation and the preface, to be more in tune with the political regime of the time.

There are no other noteworthy subsequent versions published in the 20<sup>th</sup> century except for Al. Lascarov-Moldovanu's (1945) and a retelling by Cornel Ciucovschi (1954). During the communist years (1947-1989), retranslation was, at any rate, something of a rarity; a classic once translated was translated for good.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century, characterized almost exclusively by commercial criteria guiding the policy of private publishing houses, sees a variety of translators deal with Defoe's text (2002 – Aretia Dicu; 2004 – Nicoleta Radu; 2007 – Magdalena Kis; 2008 – Cristina Nicolaescu; 2008 – Alexandra Petrea; 2009 – Talida Magheți and Dana Scarlat; 2010 – Irina Spoială; 2013 – Răzvan Năstase – translator of an adaptation by Deanna McFadden; 2015 – Mirella Acsente – translator of an adaptation by Ian Graham; 2017 – Lucian Pricop – a version we shall bring up later; 2018 – Andreea Florescu; 2018 – Alina Loredana Brebeanu; 2022 – Irina Chirica). At the same time, Comarnescu's translation continues to be reedited and to compete with new Romanian versions.

Throughout its translation history, the Romanian *Robinson Crusoe* has been published with a preface in about a third of the versions (most of the prefaces being written by the translators themselves). In 19<sup>th</sup>-century Romanian editions, prefaces typically did some (or all) of the following:

- offer details about Defoe's life (e.g. ridiculing his failure as a merchant and exposing the nobiliary particle *de* in Defoe's name as a fraud)
- pointing out the tremendous success enjoyed by *Robinson Crusoe* in the country of origin as well as throughout the world
- lean on Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Émile* (1762) and other philosophers in order to endorse *Crusoe*'s status as a fundamental children's book, while at the same time labelling *Robinson Crusoe* as a double-addressee book, appealing to children and grown-ups alike
- recommend the book as a cautionary tale on the importance of obedience to (parental) authority.

In contrast, the paratext of the Romanian versions published in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century tends to do the following:

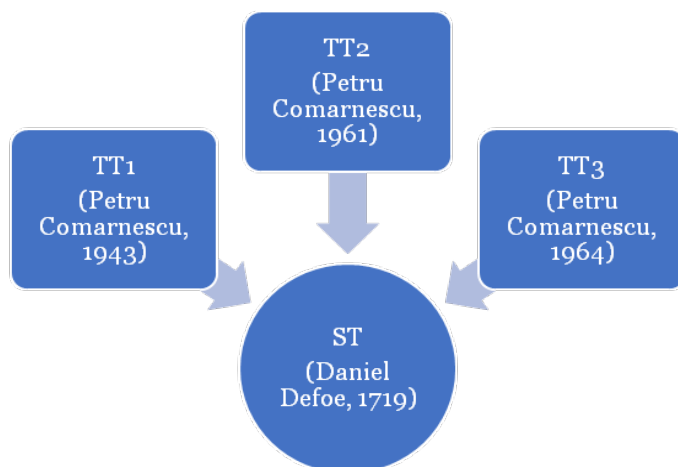
- outline Defoe's place in English literature as well as in world literature, while also stressing his role as a founding father of journalism as well as of the English novel
- promote other novels by Defoe
- lay emphasis on the documental, factual value of Defoe's writings
- interpret the book in terms of colonialism, not only as a survival story
- mention previous translations with a view to highlighting the virtues of the version in question.

In other words, if 19<sup>th</sup>-century prefaces are mainly ideological and pedagogical, 20<sup>th</sup>-century prefaces are, in return, more informative and hermeneutical, but at the same time more commercially-oriented.

## The Corpus

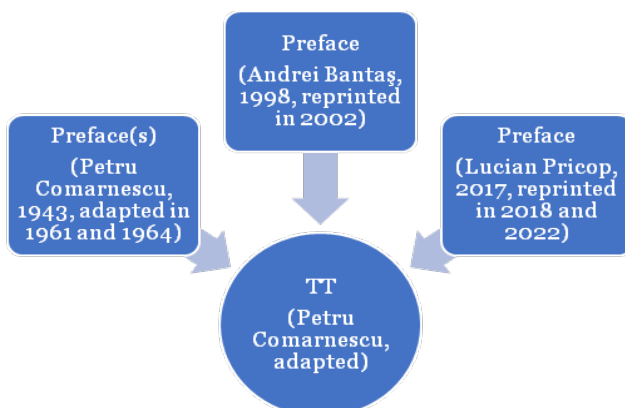
The corpus we selected for the present analysis is very much a matter of textual and peritextual recycling. At the same time, it is a testament to the instability of the original text (Comarnescu seems to have consulted slightly different English editions for his 1943, 1961, then 1964 translations) as well as – to a much greater extent – to the instability of the translated text (given that, when reedited, Comarnescu’s versions undergo various transformations).

We shall consider, in a first instance, that we have one (more or less stable) original text, and at least three Romanian versions produced by Petru Comarnescu, as shown in Figure 1 below (where ST = source text and TT = target text):



**Fig. 1. Petru Comarnescu’s Versions of Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe***

Secondly, our corpus contains Comarnescu’s text (which is the 1943 version as such and then slightly adapted) accompanied by different prefaces (authored by Comarnescu himself, then by Andrei Bantaș, then by Lucian Pricop), as shown in Figure 2. On top of the preface, the 1943 edition also contains several footnotes, which we will mention when discussing Comarnescu’s contribution as a peritextual agent.



**Fig. 2. Prefaces to Petru Comarnescu’s Versions of Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe***

Another way of looking at the corpus is presented in Table 1, which highlights the historical context as well as the ‘division of editorial labour’ for each version under consideration.

<b>Romanian Political Regime</b>	<b>Year of Publication of <i>Robinson Crusoe</i> Version</b>	<b>Translator / Preface-Writer</b>
Pre-Communism <sup>4</sup> :	1943	Comarnescu: translator. Comarnescu: preface-writer.
Communism:	1961	Comarnescu: translator. Comarnescu: preface-writer.
	1964	
Democracy:	1998 (reed. 2002)	Comarnescu: translator. Bantaș: preface-writer.
	2017 (reed. 2018, 2020)	Comarnescu: translator. Pricop: preface-writer.

**Table 1. The Corpus: A Historical and Editorial View**

**(Peri)Textual Agency: Petru Comarnescu (1943, 1961, 1964)**

Petru Comarnescu begins his preface to the 1943 edition of *Robinson Crusoe* rather abruptly, by plunging into the history of the original book and putting forward information that is partly inaccurate, partly tentative: “Cartea de față a apărut în textu-i original la 25 Aprilie 1719, la Londra, purtând titlul *The Life and strange surprising adventures (sic!) of Robinson Crusoe*. Autorul, Daniel Defoe, era la această dată un om în vârstă de 59 de ani, dacă într’adevăr s’a născut în 1660 și nu cu un an mai devreme sau mai apoi, cum cred unii sau alții dintre biografii săi.” [The present book appeared originally on the 25<sup>th</sup> of April 1719 in London, having the title *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures (sic!) of Robinson Crusoe*. The author, Daniel Defoe, was by this time a 59-year-old man, if he was indeed born in 1660 and not a year earlier or later, as some of his biographers are tempted to believe.] (Defoe 1943: 5) Comarnescu chooses an abbreviated original title, possibly in an attempt to avoid baffling his readers or having to explain the 18<sup>th</sup> century trend in titling.

Not only does the preface begin abruptly, but the entire prefatorial discourse is somewhat unconventional. Comarnescu constructs his portrayal of Defoe by relying on a juxtaposition of radical opposites. When referring to Defoe being a merchant and manufacturer, the translator-turned-editor describes him as “norocos și nenorocos” [both lucky and unlucky] (Defoe 1943: 5). As a man of letters, Defoe is shown first as prominent (“literat de frunte” (Defoe 1943: 5)), then, three pages later, as downright inferior to Homer, Cervantes, or Shakespeare. A fighter and an idealist (“o fire luptătoare și idealistă” (Defoe 1943: 5)), Defoe was at the same time – as pointed out by Comarnescu – “iubitor de intrigi și urzeli” [a devious schemer]. Moreover, the

<sup>4</sup> In 1940, the 1938 Constitution was suspended and a military dictatorship was installed until 1945; in 1947 Socialism, then Communism set in, which means that in 1943, when Comarnescu’s *Robinson Crusoe* was printed, Romania was still a monarchical state, yet on its way towards Communism.

phrase “om mijlociu” [middle-class man] is used four times in the preface as a way of reminding the reader of Defoe’s alleged mediocrity.

The book itself is presented in similarly contradictory terms, with the unflattering observations ultimately engulfing the flattering ones. On the one hand, the novel is presented as a best-seller which fascinated many generations of children and young adults all over the world, not to mention luminaries like Samuel Johnson or Jean-Jacques Rousseau; on the other hand, Comarnescu repeatedly deplores its utter lack of originality (being inspired from the real story of Alexander Selkirk rather than a product of Defoe’s imagination). Comarnescu constantly finds fault with whatever he chooses to write about: when describing Defoe’s life, Defoe’s style, some of Defoe’s other works, and so on. This rhetoric is a curious twist on what a (translator’s) preface is meant to do (among other things, recommend and defend the book it accompanies, as well as the book’s author). Comarnescu’s overtly ambivalent attitude towards Defoe is not only a reaction to the latter’s fundamentally dual personality but also an expression of a lack of affinity with the author he translated and possibly also as a word of caution for the reader, whom he advises to take Defoe’s novel with a grain of salt, despite its classic status.

After a number of random and peripheral observations regarding the Romanian edition (e.g. a vague reference to the original edition he relied upon for his translation; a sycophantic nod at the publisher for paying attention to a classic author like Defoe; accounting for various omissions in the translated text – mostly redundancies; hinting at his global translation strategy – aimed at young readers in particular), Comarnescu concludes his preface with a seemingly innocent observation, intent on providing a reading incentive, by way of imitation: a young Mihai Eminescu, too, read Defoe’s text<sup>5</sup>.

Unlike most translators, who are profusely apologetic in their prefaces, Comarnescu fully assumes a position of unshakeable authority as both a translator and a preface-writer. There is not a shred of humbleness in this preface which seems to disprove rather than approve of the book it is supposed to validate.

In the 1943 edition, neither translation, nor preface is entirely ‘purged’ of religious references. The same cannot be said about the 1961 and 1964 versions. The revisions operated on the editions issued in the 1960s go, however, far beyond leaving out details which were considered inadequate propaganda-wise. In fact, some translation scholars believe the 1961 and 1964 versions might be considered a case of interlingual translation (see Dimitriu 2006; Petraru 2015). In the table below we present a few of the changes between the three versions by Comarnescu, as outlined by Rodica Dimitriu (2006: 78-81).

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<sup>5</sup> The original text: “Tânărul Mihai Eminescu a cetit și el acest măreț poem al orientării utile a omului în cosmos.” (Defoe 1943: 9)

<b>Title</b>	<i>Viața și nemaipomenitele aventuri ale lui Robinson Crusoe</i>	<i>Robinson Crusoe</i>	<i>Robinson Crusoe</i>
<b>Edition</b>	1943	1961	1964
<b>Publishing House</b>	Editura Universul	Editura Tineretului	Editura pentru Literatură
<b>Preface</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ inappropriate repetitions for ST and TT are eliminated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the new political discourse is mildly adopted, focusing on Robinson as a symbol of man's power to change the world and himself</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ a comprehensive piece of literary criticism marked by Marxist grids (with long incursions into the history of England, Defoe's life, Marx's vs. Rousseau's interpretation of the novel – i.e. Robinson as a <i>homo economicus</i> rather than a natural man)</li> </ul>
<b>General Strategies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ made in order to target a young readership (eliminating verbosity, repetition)</li> <li>▪ more formal style</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ textual <i>omissions</i> (most of the passages referring to religious meditation) and <i>additions</i> (all the offensive allusions to the Spanish colonizers and the final episode of the main character's return to the island – deleted in the previous edition)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ more expressive turns of phrase, more appropriate words</li> </ul>
<b>Sentence Structure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ complex sentence splitting</li> <li>▪ simplifying the occasionally excessive rhetoric of the ST</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the translation is closer to Defoe's style</li> </ul>	
<b>Ideology and Conclusions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ omission of the comparison of Friday's ability to cut a savage's head to that of a German executioner</li> <li>▪ paratextual elements (footnotes)</li> <li>▪ a story of survival, a religious allegory and an economic parable</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the communist Robinson is no longer a hard-working, resourceful, colonizing Western man, but a hero who fights against nature and other discontents, and does not let himself bothered by problems of filial duties or religion</li> </ul>

**Table 2. The Pre-Communist and Communist Robinson in the Romanian Discourse on Translation, as Outlined by Dimitriu (2006: 78-81) (abridged and adapted)**

The vacillation between the extremes suggested by Brian James Bauer can be seen at its best in the 1964 edition: "Translation under communism was largely shaped by the tension between xenophobia and internationalism. [...] The regime exercised censorship at virtually every stage of the publication process." (Bauer 2011: 9) Comarnescu perspicuously hesitates between what he saw as his duty as an educator of the large public and the constraints imposed by the regime, which gradually decreases the power of his voice as an

extratextual agent from one version to another. Thus, in the 1943 edition he seems overly preoccupied with cannibalism and the way it is portrayed in Defoe's novel. In both the preface<sup>6</sup> and one of the footnotes<sup>7</sup>, Comarnescu discusses cannibalism at length, in an attempt to distance himself from Defoe's occasionally racist discourse and at the same time to impose his own views. In the 1961 and 1964 editions, however, Comarnescu is much less interested in rehabilitating Friday and the savages and much more concerned with portraying Crusoe so as to suit the communist canon.

Deeply aware of his symbolic capital as a man of culture, the highly versatile Petru Comarnescu takes hold of and fully capitalizes on the (peri)text all the way through. In the pre-communist (1943) edition, his Crusoe is depicted as a God-fearing man, and cannibals are thoroughly humanized (in both text and peritext). In the communist editions (1961 and 1964), Crusoe, lacking the complexity of his 1943 counterpart, is molded so as to fit the Procrustean bed of Socialist editorial policy.

### **Peritextual Agency: Andrei Bantaș (1998, 2002)**

In 1998 (then in 2002), Comarnescu's 1943 version of *Robinson Crusoe* is issued by Allfa (Bucharest), a smaller publishing house. The title is reduced to the protagonist's name, the text is updated to the linguistic norms of the day, the synoptic subtitles are preserved, and a new preface is added (1998: 1-5).

The volume as such is typographically modest, yet peritextually engaging, as it contains a preface by Andrei Bantaș (1930-1997). A major figure

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<sup>6</sup> "În aceste ținuturi caribee, canibalismul a fost, cândva, desvoltat, triburile indiene războindu-se între ele și mâncându-și prizonierii, așa cum scrie și Defoe, care însă nu cunoștea pe atunci deosebirile de civilizație ale Pieilor-Roșii, socotite global de el drept sălbateci..." [In these Caribbean lands, cannibalism was, once, expanded, with the Indian tribes fighting one another and eating one another's prisoners, as described by Defoe; be that as it may, Defoe was not aware of the differences among redskin civilizations, thus taking them all for savages.] (Defoe 1943: 6)

<sup>7</sup> There are three translator's notes in the 1943 edition. The first one (1943: 54) enlarges upon yards, feet, and other measurement units which Comarnescu felt the Romanian reader might not have been familiar with. The second (1943: 105) instructs the reader on how to pronounce the word *canoe* (namely *canu*). The third one, the most substantial, discusses cannibalism. Friday is first classified as a Native American, more specifically a Redskin, yet the translator indicates that not all Redskins were cannibals, nor were they as savage as Defoe depicted them. Comarnescu then proceeds to describe the Aztec, Maya, and Inca civilisations, with their "uniquely expressive" architecture and sculpture. Then, the Central America Redskins are mentioned, and their thriving art and plentiful life between 400 and 600 AD, comparable to those of Egypt, India, and China. Last but not least, Mexico and Peru are also indicated as cradles of civilisation, with the Antilles given as an actual example of Indian tribes devouring their prisoners. The original text: "Vineri, ca și ceilalți sălbateci din această povestire, făcea parte din populația băștinașă a Americii, fiind deci un Indian din America sau Piele-Roșie. Nu trebuie (sic!) să se creadă, însă, că toate Pieile-Roșii erau canibali și toate în starea de sălbăcie aici arătată. În unele regiuni, Pieile-Roșii – Aztecii, Mya, Incașii – au desvoltat (sic!) o cultură valoroasă, având o arhitectură și o sculptură unic de expresivă, ca și o înaintată viață orășenească (Pueblo). Între anii 400 și 600 ai erei creștine, Pieile-Roșii din America Centrală au cunoscut o înfloritoare viață și au ajuns la o artă vrednică de a fi comparată cu aceea a Egiptului, Indiei și Chinei. În regiunile unde sunt acum statele Mexico și Peru au existat popoare și culture foarte înaintate, deci o viață cu totul deosebită de cea a sălbaticilor descriși aici. Este drept, însă, că în pădurile tropicale și în Antile canibalismul a fost desvoltat, iar triburile indiene se războiau, mâncându-și prizonierii." (Defoe 1943: 163)

in Romanian lexicography, translation, and English teaching, and widely regarded as a pillar of Romanian Anglistics, Bantaș's contribution increases significantly the value of the book (despite the fact that his preface does not mention at all the translation as such).

Written in large italic font and brimming with bio-bibliographical information, Bantaș's preface is concerned above all with contextualizing the aspects it presents. In some respects, it resembles Comarnescu's 1943 preface, as it places at the very beginning an unusual piece of information which, like Comarnescu, he builds around a sum of contrasts:

Istoria literaturii engleze pomeneste o întâmplare cu totul neobișnuită care s-a petrecut în primii ani ai secolului al XVIII-lea: unul din cei mai mari scriitori ai timpului, pus la stîlpul infamiei și ținut legat timp de trei zile într-o piață publică din Londra pentru a fi batjocorit și scuipat de trecători, a fost aclamat de aceștia, care i-au împodobit cu ghirlande locul supliciului. A devenit astfel un erou popular cel ce fusese declarat — cum s-ar spune în secolul nostru — “inamicul public numărul unu”, într-adevăr, el se dovedise a fi un mare inamic al ocîrmuirii din acea vreme. Și cum întâmplarea face ca mulți scriitori englezi să aibă nume care aduc mai degrabă a porecle, printr-o ciudată coincidență numele său însemna chiar “inamic” — pe englezește Foe.

[The history of English literature mentions a very unusual occurrence happening at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century: one of the greatest authors of the time, who was set in the pillory and tied up for three days in a row in a public square in London so as to be mocked at and spat upon by passers-by, was actually cheered by the people, who also adorned with garlands the site of his ordeal. Thus, he who would have been declared —in today's terms — “public enemy number one” — turned into a folk hero, although he had indeed been a great enemy of the rulers of the time. Furthermore, as many English authors happen to have names which could easily pass off as nicknames, by a strange coincidence, his name really means “enemy” — or Foe in English.] (Defoe 1998: 1)

We can see Bantaș chooses to begin his preface a little bit on the sensationalist side instead of relying on his usual academic discourse. It is also from the very beginning that the reader is allowed to infer the complexity and elusiveness of Defoe's personality.

Like other preface-writers before him, Bantaș speaks of Defoe changing his name from Foe to Defoe, of his career as a merchant, of his involvement in politics. Unlike others, he also comments on Defoe's travels (to Spain, Italy, Germany, and France), of his writing pamphlets which brought him a lot of misfortune (i.e. being exposed to public derision but also persecution and imprisonment), of founding *The Review* (1704-1713) — which marked the beginnings of journalism in England. Also unlike others (and more importantly, unlike Comarnescu), Bantaș does not present Defoe's authorship as secondary or inferior to his many other occupations; on the contrary, he emphasizes his worldwide fame (“faimă mondială”), his bestselling author status and highly prolific writing activity (“scriitorul cel mai fecund și mai citit în vremea aceea” (Defoe 1998: 1)). Defoe is also praised as the founder of the English novel, with particular merits (“strălucire fără precedent” [unprecedented brilliance]) in the progress of action and adventure novels. “Personalitate neobosită, inepuizabilă” [tireless, unfailing personality], “personalitate enciclopedică, titanică” [encyclopaedic, titanic personality], and “mintă rodnică” [fruitful mind] are some of the phrases used by Bantaș to describe Defoe. His first novel, *Robinson*

*Crusoe*, is deemed unforgettable by the preface-writer, while *A Journal of the Plague Year* is seen as memorable. In relation to *Moll Flanders*, Bantaș uses “succes fenomenal” [phenomenally successful]. Defoe’s oeuvre is seen as too vast, too layered, and too diverse (“prea vastă, multilaterală și diversă” (Defoe 1998: 3)) to be covered by a mere prefatorial text.

While describing Defoe, Bantaș deftly slips in various details about Cromwell’s bourgeois revolution, colonialism, Queen Anne’s reign, the three successive *Moll Flanders* editions published in 1722, the Newgate Prison, Defoe’s contact with mariners and pirates, Alexander Selkirk’s experience on an island in Juan Fernandez (1704-1709), the rich vocabulary used by Defoe to describe Robinson Crusoe’s mental activities, the first Romanian translation of *Robinson Crusoe* (1835), the many imitations brought forth by Defoe’s novel (among which Johan Rudolf Wyss’s, written in 1813), the similarities between Defoe and Crusoe (among which the mindset of a merchant) etc.

*Robinson Crusoe* is delineated as a book about isolation and at the same time about society (as Crusoe reproduces on the island a small-scale version of the society he was used to), a story about survival but also of spiritual evolution. Robinson himself is seen as embodying both *homo faber* and *homo sapiens*.

Bantaș casually mentions Swift as superior to Defoe in terms of narrative art, yet manages to turn Defoe’s shortcomings into virtues (“Neavând preocupările alegorice și satirice ale lui Swift, și nici umorul acestuia, Defoe scrie romane propriu-zise, concentrând atenția cititorului asupra narațiunii, asupra faptelor și întâmplărilor.” [Without Swift’s allegorical and satirical preoccupations, and lacking his humour, Defoe contented himself to writing proper novels, directing the reader’s attention towards the plot, the facts, and the events.] (Defoe 1998: 3)).

Without being overly scholastic, the preface does rely on two authorities to validate Defoe: Jean-Jacques Rousseau (who recommended Robinson Crusoe as the most famous treatise on education) (1998: 5) and Walter Scott (1998: 2). It also stresses on Defoe’s writings as based on a well-documented pre-writing material.

Bantaș’s attitude towards Defoe and his novel is thus radically different from Comarnescu’s, as he cannot and would not refrain from expressing his openness and enthusiasm towards *Robinson Crusoe* and its author. The circularity of his preface (which begins and ends symmetrically, with stories about Defoe) point to Bantaș’s intent to “eulogise and fix the author in certain terms carried over across time” and to offer a “fictionalised and romanticised rendering of [the author’s] biography” (Katsarka 2013: 346).

However, a major characteristic of Bantaș’s preface is his insistence on putting things in perspective (by underlining Defoe’s place in English literature as well as in world literature, on the one hand, and by outlining aspects of his novels in their respective historical context). This is the way he sees fit to fulfill his mission as a cultural transmitter after the 1990s: by offering a lot of information to the readers, by helping them understand the historical and literary context, and also by entertaining them with various fun facts about the author’s life and the genesis of his novel(s) – in other words: *docere et delectare*.

### **Peritextual Agency: Lucian Pricop (2017, 2018, 2022)**

Lucian Pricop's contribution to the *Robinson Crusoe* retranslation series into Romanian is baffling to some extent. In 2013 he serves as a preface-writer to Comarnescu's 1943 translation [Cartex 2000, Bucharest] (pp. 9-10). The initial title is shortened to the main character's name, the synoptic subtitles are kept, but the chapters as such are no longer numbered. Pricop entitles his preface "Cel mai romanesc jurnal de călătorie" [The Most Novelistic of Travelogues] (yet the Table of Contents contains a misspelling: "românesc" [Romanian] instead of "romanesc" [novelistic]). The same preface, with the same title and some minor changes<sup>8</sup> will be published again in the 2017, 2018, and 2022 Cartex editions (pp. 7-9), only this time in Pricop's translation (the title page, in any case, reads "Traducere și prefață de Lucian Pricop" [Translation and Preface by Lucian Pricop]). Nevertheless, Pricop's translation is actually Comarnescu's, on which he operates other (minor) changes<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> The only differences between the prefaces published in 2017, 2018, and 2022 as compared to the one in 2013 are:

- omitting "24 aprilie" [April 24<sup>th</sup>] to Defoe's death date (1731) in the more recent editions
- presenting Defoe as one of the founders of the English novel (whereas in the 2013 edition Defoe was presented together with Samuel Richardson)
- adding "Defoe este omul secolului său. Nu un scriitor profesionist." [Defoe was a man of his time. Not a professional writer.] (Defoe 2022: 7), then enumerating Defoe's other jobs, such as businessman and journalist (in other words, writing is presented as a side activity)
- adding "Cum încadrarea în expectațiile familiei este o raritate în destinele scriitorilor, nici Daniel nu este o excepție..." [Since reaching the expectations of one's family is something of a rarity in writers' destinies...] (Defoe 2022: 7) (followed by Defoe's father's wish that his son would become a priest)
- adding a new paragraph in the middle of the preface: "Chiar dacă par segregate de organizări atitudinale contrarii, în cazul Defoe există două opțiuni de viață complementare: comerțul, care îi ocupă întreaga viață activă, și scrisul, care-l urmărește invariabil în toate momentele de neimplicare social-politică directă." [Even if they seem segregated by opposing attitudinal organisations, in Defoe's case there are two complementary life options: trading, which occupied his entire working life, and writing, which invariably stayed with him in all his moments of social and political non-involvement.] (Defoe 2022: 7)
- adding a new paragraph at the end of the preface, which refers to his translation: "Această nouă atitudine în limba română – prima traducere integrală a romanului – oferă cititorului șansa intrării într-o altă logică interpretativă care trebuie să țină cont de tonul însuflețit și emfatic din paragrafele de acumulări și interpretări teologice ale naufragiatului." [This new Romanian version – the first complete translation of the novel – offers the readers the possibility of an alternative interpretative logic which needs to take into account the soulful and emphatic tone which characterizes the paragraphs full of the castaway's theological accumulations and interpretations.] (Defoe 2022: 9)

<sup>9</sup> The 2017/2018/2020 Pricop version is strikingly similar to Comarnescu's version. Here is the incipit, where the parts written in italics are identical. The same holds true for the rest of the text, with paraphrases by synonymy scattered here and there.

Comarnescu 1943: *M'am născut în 1632, în orașul York, dintr-o familie foarte bună. Tatăl meu nu-și avea obârșia în acest oraș, ci se născuse la Bremen și se stabilise mai târziu la Hull, unde ajunsese, datorită negoțului, în stăpânirea unei frumoase proprietăți. Părăsind negoțul, s'a mutat la York, unde s'a înșurat cu mama. Familia mamei, Robinson, era foarte cunoscută în acea regiune. De aceea mă și numesc eu Robinson Kreutznaer, nume care apoi a ajuns, prin obișnuita prefacere a cuvintelor străine în Anglia, acela de Crusoe, așa cum ne zicem și ne scriem noi înșine numele și așa cum m'au chemat totdeauna cunoscuții.* (Defoe 1943: 11)

Pricop (2017 / 2018 / 2020): *M-am născut în 1632, în orașul York, într-o familie bună. Tatăl meu nu provenea din acest oraș, ci se născuse la Bremen și se stabilise mai târziu la Hull, unde*

Like Comarnescu, before him, Pricop presents Defoe as torn between commerce and writing, with writing taking second place (the preface-writer seems intent upon lowering the reader's expectations regarding Defoe's writing skills). Like most 19<sup>th</sup>-century preface-writers, Pricop casually highlights Defoe's mediocrity as both a merchant ("La vârsta de 43 de ani Defoe a dat faliment a doua oară." [At 43, Defoe went bankrupt for the second time.] (Defoe, 2013: 8) and a man of letters ("Defoe nu a avut acces la o educație universitară, studiind la o școală a disidenților de la periferia Londrei." [Defoe did not have access to higher education; he studied at a school for Dissenters on the outskirts of London.] (Defoe 2013: 7)

Apart from biographical details (which can hardly be considered a tribute to Defoe), we come across a sum of (slightly disconnected) observations regarding the genre ("un foarte minuțios jurnal de călătorie" [a very punctilious travelogue]; "o operă eminamente antifictivă" [an essentially antifictitious oeuvre] (Defoe 2013: 9)) and narrative technique ("documente inventate" [invented documents] (Defoe 2013: 8)). Pricop does admit, however, that Defoe holds a significant place in the history of world literature<sup>10</sup>, and insists upon the sources of *Robinson Crusoe* (beyond Alexander Selkirk's story, he also mentions Ibn Tufail's *Hayy ibn Yaqdhan* and Robert Knox's 1659 declaration about his abduction by the King of Ceylon as probable influences).

The stark contrast between the illustrated cover of the book (which undeniably points to a child reader) and Pricop's affected language in the preface creates a sense of imbalance in terms of editorial policy.

## Conclusions

Formally, the peritext of a translated book is supposed (much like the translator) to serve two masters: on the one hand, the source text / author / culture (thus ensuring a better reception); on the other hand, the target reader / culture (contributing, in turn, to a more pertinent reading of the source text / author / culture). The fluidity of the texts we analysed in the present paper suggests two main facts:

- the interests of the target culture greatly outweigh those of the source culture when it comes to cultural transfer via translation (should we only take into account the way Defoe's biography was treated in the prefaces under debate)
- peritextual agency is a little more than a leaf in the wind of political change, no matter how strong the symbolic capital of the preface-writer is.

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ajunsesse datorită negoțului, în stăpânirea unei frumoase proprietăți. Părăsind negoțul, s-a mutat la York, unde s-a însurat cu mama mea. Familia mamei, Robinson, era foarte cunoscută în acea regiune. De aceea mă și numesc eu Robinson Krautzner, nume care apoi a ajuns, prin obișnuita prefacerea cuvintelor străine în Anglia, la acela de Crusoe, așa cum ne zicem și ne scriem noi înșine numele și așa cum m-au chemat totdeauna cunoscuții. (Defoe 2022: 11)

<sup>10</sup> The original text: "...Daniel Defoe deține un loc remarcabil în istoria romanului universal." (Defoe 2013: 9)

As pointed out by Stefanie Stockhorst, “[a]ll in all, the deviations between the original text and the translation not only shed light on the linguistic potential and the aesthetic preferences of the target culture, but also on the history of mentalities.” (Stockhorst 2010: 14) Her observation equally applies to prefaces, to our mind, except that, in our case, if in 1943, allographic prefaces were really meant to influence the readers’ interpretation of the text (because readers needed to be primed and because the cultural policies of the time demanded it), in 2017, they are much less influential (discretionary at best) – judging solely by Lucian Pricop’s preface, which is considerably looser intentionality-wise, as it addresses a public which is at the same time already familiar with *Crusoe*’s story and less inclined to be reminded of all its possible subtleties. We are therefore in full accord with Daniela Maria Marțole’s reasoning that

[a]s far as transfer is concerned, we see it as a generational continuum, which does not necessarily have a diachronic directionality, that makes culture (in its broadest sense) available to subsequent users, on condition that they manifest readiness to become receptors in that interactional process. (Marțole 2023: 9)

Both Comarnescu and Bantaș take on the responsibility of being cultural transmitters. Comarnescu (the most ‘conscious crafter’) first introduces Defoe’s text to Romanian readers for the first time (with no intermediators) in troubled times, during the Second World War. Then, during Communism, he walks a tight rope between meeting the ideological standards of the time and those of the reading public. His mission, then, is one of reestablishment, recommencement, and reinitiation – and he turns it into indoctrination.

Later on, Bantaș revisits both Defoe’s text and Comarnescu’s translation with some detachment. His is an act of restitution, restoration, reinstatement, and rehabilitation of both Defoe’s and Comarnescu’s text.

As for Pricop, he does not have to sail through troubled waters, like Comarnescu and Bantaș before him, which (partly) accounts for the frugality of the details he offers on Defoe’s life and writings. His edition comes on the market at a time when *Crusoe*’s story has been part and parcel of the Romanian culture for almost two centuries. There is considerably less (ideological, political, cultural) pressure in this particular case. His edition is therefore just a reminder of *Crusoe*’s story: essentially a matter of repetition, if not of redundancy, as the need for the goods (i.e. *Robinson Crusoe*) has long been domesticated.

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