



DEFENDING “LATIN NATIONS” DURING WW2. A CASE STUDY ON VICTOR BUESCU¹

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Abstract – I aim to discuss the cultural activity of Romanian translator and Latinist Victor Buescu (1911-1971) in terms of translation and cultural transfer, keeping in mind the intellectual networks and institutions he was part of, within the intricate context of World War II. His rich translation activity targets both Romanian and Portuguese audiences, being carried out mainly within two institutions: the Romanian Institute for Latin Studies and the University of Lisbon, where he was appointed lecturer of Romanian language during World War II. Together with other key figures of Romanian intelligentsia, like Nicolae Herescu or Mircea Eliade, Buescu contributed to the dissemination of a pan-Latinist ideology, bridging Romania and Portugal as Latin nations able to (symbolically) defeat barbarian forces.

Keywords: Victor Buescu, Translation, World War II, Latinity, Portuguese Literature, Romanian Literature

In *Translation under Fascism and Nazism*, Małgorzata Tryuk (2021) reviews literature about the political instrumentalization of translation under the pressure of extreme right-wing dictatorships of the 20th century, noticing that the main focus has been directed, so far, to western countries: Italy, Germany, Portugal and Spain, as well as to the countries occupied by Germany, like Poland and France. Undocumented remain,

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amongst others, translation policies in Romania, a country that faced two right-wing totalitarian regimes: a royal dictatorship (1938-1940), followed by a military dictatorship (1941-1944), finally witnessing the transition to a communist dictatorship. Questioning the role of literary translation in the evolution of history and vice-versa, the *TranslatWar. Literary Translation at War* research project, coordinated by Christine Lombez, aims to map translation practices in many countries affected by World War II, including Romania². Within this research program, I aim to create, in this article, a portrait of a Romanian translator to shed some light on an important area in the translation history of Romania during the Second World War. I will trace the cultural activity of Victor Buescu (1911-1971)³ in terms of translation and cultural transfer, keeping in mind the intellectual networks and institutions he took part in, within the intricate context of war.

The article has three sections: the introductory part sketches the ideological and intellectual framework of Latin fascism, the second part analyzes his translations into Romanian, mostly under the aegis of the Romanian Institute for Latin Studies, and the third part presents translation policies employed in Portugal.

Romanian-Portuguese cultural transfer during WW2 on the grounds of Latinity

Victor Buescu studied at Sorbonne with well-known Latinists Alfred Ernout and Jules Marouzeau between 1933 and 1938, while teaching Romanian language and literature within the same university, as well as within École de Langues Orientales Vivantes. Holding a doctorate in

² But also Italy, Greece, Poland, Ukraine, Norway, Austria: <https://www.translatwar-erc.eu/>.

³ A Romanian cultural figure rather unknown in today's Romania, Buescu is still present in the memory of philologists from Portugal, his country of adoption, where a hall in the University of Lisbon bears his name. However, as the first translator of Eminescu into Portuguese, his name reappeared on the Romanian cultural scene in 2025, occasioned by the reissue of his bilingual (Romanian-Portuguese) volume of Eminescu's poems at Junimea publishing house, edition coordinated by Dinu Flămând.

Latin Studies with a thesis on the Ciceronian astrological poem *Aratea*, which he critically edited and published in Bucharest in 1941, he authored studies on various literary and linguistic topics regarding Latin classicism (collected in the volume *Problèmes de critique et d'histoire textuelles*, published in 1942 and he translated into Romanian from Latin and French. Moreover, he pioneered poetry translations from Portuguese into Romanian and vice-versa. He became a teaching assistant within the University of Bucharest in 1939 and three years later, he was appointed lecturer at the University of Lisbon, where he spent the rest of his life. How did Victor Buescu set his career in Salazarist Portugal during World War II? What kind of translation activity does he undertake in those particular times? In order to answer, I consider two convergent theories that pertinently apply to Victor Buescu's context: Béatrice von Hirschhausen's phantom borders and Valeria Galimi and Annarita Gori's Latin space. These may give a well-adjusted perception of the ideological framework of those times.

Firstly, Béatrice von Hirschhausen introduces the concept of *phantom borders* to explain differences between neighboring populations in Europe, tracing them back to their past affiliation with different geopolitical regions, collapsed at present but symbolically persistent in the community's imaginary. Such semiotizations of space are subject to political instrumentalization, in which case the role of “memory entrepreneurs” (von Hirschhausen 2017: 102) is to be analyzed, understanding their contribution to the construction of a symbolic continuation of some ancient borders, in a version that absolves them from their decline. *Mutatis mutandis*, the claim of Roman descent and Latin continuity, an idea that characterized Romanian propaganda⁴ during

⁴ In the aftermath of World War I, Romania exacerbated the identitarian formula of latinism, deliberately consigning to oblivion the Slavic element persistent in religion, language and culture, in order to ground a theory of Romanian anti-Slavism, providing motivation to serve the German cause on the Eastern front (Pecican 2023: 176). Thus, the war against the Soviets, called by Marshal Ion Antonescu the Holy War against Judeo-Bolshevism/ Judeo-Communism/ Slavic barbarism was fuelled by the propaganda of Romanian Latinism. On the other hand, starting from 1920, Italian fascist projects aimed to spread the respective ideology in Romania, on the grounds of the shared Latin lineage, as documented by Georgiana Țăranu,

the Second World War in its efforts to recuperate territories occupied by Hungary, Bulgaria, and the USSR can be seen through this prism: a “phantom border” that separates the Latin, civilized powers and the barbarians, in what was then called “The Holy War Against Judeo-Bolshevism”⁵. Thus, “memory entrepreneurs” of Romanian Latinity used translation and cultural exchange as an ideological tool.

Secondly, Latin space is not a mere historical and geographical concept, as Valeria Galimi and Annarita Gori illustrate in “Intellectuals in the Latin Space During the Era of Fascism” (2020). Analyzing the Pan-Latinist ideology in the interwar period from a transnational perspective⁶, their inquiry reveals the influence of interwar cultural transfer within intellectual networks on the circulation of fascist ideas around the world. Various models of cultural and political cooperation among Latin nations⁷ were operating in an interwar world increasingly

according to whom Romania held a privileged position in Mussolini’s external cultural policies: “Who better to kneel before the newly «restored» empire than one of the smaller Latin countries, whose identity was created on stories about the Roman empire’s civilizing role and on the centuries long continuity of its cultural influence?” (Țăranu 2017: 53). So, during the Second World War, Romanian latinity was an argument to fulfil national interests, on the one hand, and international interests of fascist powers, to whom Romania was supposed to show admiration, on the other hand.

⁵ This discourse was not something new in the long history of identity disputes with neighbouring populations. We can trace this phenomenon back to the historiographical discourse of chroniclers from Moldavia of the 17th century. Then, in the 18th century, the Latinist ideology that Romanian intellectuals from Transylvania had spread, motivated by efforts of political and national emancipation (Valmarin 2023: 28). A similar discourse was reinvigorated in the context of the European Romantic nationalisms of the 19th century, witnessing the independence of Romanian provinces from the Ottoman Empire (1877) (Turda-Gillette 2014: 9). Such invocation of phantom borders is criticized by Jewish-Romanian writer B. Fundoianu in his 1920 essays, considering this identitarian policy “bovarysme of «our Latin origin»” (Fundoianu *apud* Firică 2023: 117) that pushed local culture into a self-colonizing position in relation to French culture, obscuring other identitarian components.

⁶ Studies gathered in this volume reveal that Mussolini, Franco, Salazar and Charles Maurras, to name a few, were supporters of the idea of a Latin fascism.

⁷ For example, the interwar Association of Latin Press, joined by Romanian

dominated by other non-Latin “civilizations”: American, British, Slavic, Germanic (Gori 2020: 110).

Following in the two scholars footsteps and considering the importance of intellectual networks in instrumentalizing Latinity as a means to disseminate a “Latin fascism,” we have to mention a cultural agent that propelled Buescu in his career abroad, his former professor Nicolae Herescu, the then president of the Romanian Writers Society and manager of the Romanian Institute of Latin Studies, who explicitly opposed pan-Slavic and pan-Latin civilizations, placing Romania as a barricade against the latter:

Când, dacă nu astăzi, putea fi mai oportun să se vorbească de romanitatea unei țări așezată de soartă exact în locul unde se întâlnesc tendințele de comuniune pan-slavă, tendințe care nu se vor realiza niciodată, câtă vreme va exista România? (Herescu 1941: 5).

[When, if not today, could it have been more opportune to speak about the Latinism of a country placed by fate exactly where the tendencies of pan-Slavic communion meet, tendencies that will never be realized as long as Romania exists?]

This stance is combined with racial and eugenic ideas, supporting the idea of a Latin race, fighting against „haosul asiatic al Rusiei” (Busuioceanu 1942: 2) [the Asian chaos of Russia], as Alexandru Busuioceanu, a Romanian Lecturer in Madrid and friend of Victor Buescu puts it.

One of the points on pan-Latinist agendas was the establishment of “academic chairs for the five principal Latin languages of the countries belonging to the block, as well as student and professor exchanges” (Gori 2020: 117). Particularly, between Romania and Portugal, this initiative materialized during World War II under the auspices of the Romanian Ministry of Propaganda⁸, which sent the first Romanian

nationalist intellectuals Stelian Popescu and Nicolae Iorga, reunited 25 Latin countries from Europe and South America. Some official meetings were organized in Bucharest, a location chosen for its symbolic function as bearer of Latin spirit in Eastern Europe (Gori 2020: 113-114).

⁸ Thus, Romanian male lectors exempted from military service, became cultural correspondents of the Ministry of Propaganda, an attribution that provided not only remuneration, but also access to rationed goods in the host countries (Nastasă-Kovacs-Matei 2018: 70).

lecturer to Portugal, in order to catch up with Hungary, who had had a long tradition in cultural diplomacy, advocating for its pre-1918 borders (Nastasă-Kovacs-Matei 2018: 67). In its efforts to establish contacts with the Western Allies and other neutral powers during the Second World War (Hitchins 2023: 559), Romania strengthened diplomatic and cultural relations with Portugal, a neutral country that could represent its political interests, as Great Britain's traditional ally⁹ (Cazacu 2012: 91). Occasioned by the inauguration of a Romanian Lectorate at the Faculty of Letters in Portugal, animated by Victor Buescu, Mircea Eliade, cultural attaché in Lisbon between 1941 and 1945, explained the strategic importance of this bilateralism:

The longer the war continued, the more important Portugal became: a neutral country, the age-old ally of England, but with a nationalist and anti-Communist government, which long ago had severed diplomatic ties with the USSR. For us Romanians, Portugal was even more valued for its Latinity, to which we also laid claim (Eliade 1988: 103-104).

⁹ In this vein, plenipotentiary minister Victor Cădere was sent to Lisbon in 1942 to counterbalance the Hungarian propaganda efficiently organized there around the purpose of internationalizing territorial claims of Transylvania, occupied by Horthy's Hungary since 1940. Furthermore, the dialogue with Portuguese culture became increasingly animated by other Romanian agents in Romania. On 29 June 1942, the National Theater staged *Destin* by Fernanda de Castro, wife of the Portuguese propaganda secretary, Antonio Ferro (Cazacu 2012: 97). The Hispanist and university lecturer Alexandru Popescu-Telega romanticizes about Portugal in the periodical *Curentul* (Popescu-Telega 1943: 2), assuming that some of their species of folk song correspond to the autochthonous ones, like the Romanian *doina* and the Portuguese *fado*, which express the same feeling, called *dor* by Romanians and *saudade* by the Portuguese. In 1943, the same Popescu-Telega suggests the editor Ștefan Georgescu-Gorjan to publish Portuguese literature within his publishing house (Georgescu-Gorjan 2005: 20), so that a Romanian version of *A Selva* (1930) by Ferreira de Castro appears in 1944. We should add here the Portuguese national poet's biography written by Al. Bîlculescu, *Camoëns. Cavalerul mării* (1944), which comes hand in hand with an elevated interest in the literary representations of the sea, encouraged by the cultural association Liga Navală Română.

Mircea Eliade’s publications, the diplomatic documents and his own diary ascertain this ideological agenda¹⁰: building a favorable image of his country in Portugal, considering these two countries as margins of *Latinitas*, descendants of the Roman Empire that needed to defend the Latin heritage in their respective regions. Besides other notable works in this vein¹¹, Eliade outlined his theory in the Romanian newspaper *Vremea*, as an ethnogenetic narrative around the idea of the civilizing power of the Romans against non-Latin populations, equating them with the attribute of barbarism:

Barbar înseamnă în grecește cel care bâlbâie, adică cel care nu se poate exprima în mod corect. Legiuirile romane ale lui Traian, geniul colonizator al Romei, civilizația latină au transformat această regiune barbară în Dacia felix, în cea mai bogată provincie a Imperiului roman. Și limba latină creând o altă limbă, pe cea română, a ajutat pe locuitorii Daciei să se exprime în mod corect, cu alte cuvinte să-și piardă „bâlbâiala” lor de barbari (Eliade 1943: 8).

[Barbarian means in Greek the one who stutters, which means the one unable to express himself correctly. The Roman laws of Trajan, the colonizing genius of Rome and Latin civilization, transformed this barbaric region into Dacia felix, the richest province of the Roman Empire. And the Latin language creating another language, Romanian, helped the citizens of Dacia to express themselves correctly, in other words, to lose their barbarian stammer.]

Victor Buescu, a right-wing intellectual whose academic assets fit the ideological framework of his time, having legionary sympathies (Nastasă-Kovács 2016: 56), was considered the most suitable to apply such a narrative of progress (as opposed to barbarism), bridging Romania and Portugal as extremes of a mental map of Latinity. However, we should not forget the other dimensions that made him the ideal candidate,

¹⁰ A book valuable for its insights in this respect is Sorin Alexandrescu’s *Mircea Eliade, dinspre Portugalia* (2006).

¹¹ He publishes in Bucharest a book about the history of Portugal: *Salazar și revoluția în Portugalia* (1942) and in Lisbon a book about the history of Romania: *Os romenos, Latinos de Oriente* (1943), while the articles published in both Romanian and Lusitan press illustrate the same ambition to mediate between the two cultures, making them coalesce into one “federating idea” (Miculescu 2012: 330) of Latinity.

as he was the favourite student of Nicolae Herescu, who energetically supported the rebirth of Latinity as a conservative reaction to modernism, his virulent reaction against Lovinescu's translations from *The Odyssey* and *The Aeneid* considered frivolous being well-known¹². His disciple will promote him as a crafty translator of the classics, talking about his exact and original translation of Plautus, for example, in encomiastic terms (Buescu 1941: 7-8) Analyzing the Buescu-Herescu correspondence during the former's stay in Paris for studies, Lucian Nastasă highlights Buescu's academic and political opportunism:

[...] se interpun o sumă complexă de considerații pentru reușita profesională, din care nu au fost excluse cele de natură politică, dar mai ales proximitatea student-profesor. Herescu intervine pentru elevul său în obținerea de stipendii la Paris, este adus ca asistent al acestuia la universitate, iar în 1941 intervine pentru numirea lui ca lector de limba română la Lisabona (de unde nici nu se va mai întoarce în țară), totul în virtutea legăturilor directe și pe termen lung dintre cei doi, a dovezilor de loialitate etc. (Nastasă 2007: 280).

[...] a complex amount of considerations for professional success are interposed, from which those of a political nature were not excluded, but especially the student-teacher proximity. Herescu intervenes for his student in obtaining scholarships in Paris, he is brought in as his assistant at the university, and in 1941 intervenes for his appointment as a lecturer of Romanian language in Lisbon (from where he will never return to the country), all by virtue of direct and long-term ties between the two, of proofs of loyalty etc.]

Thirty-year-old Victor Buescu maintained close relations with other cultural and political authorities, like Alexandru Marcu, Undersecretary in the Ministry of Propaganda, to whom he expressed his gratitude in a letter for having been elected as member of the Philology branch of the Renaissance Studies Center, managed by him (Buescu, 1942a). Not

¹² „Toate ca toate, dar expresia « gloaba preacurviei » care apare în versiunea lovinesciană e de netolerat; «expresie crudă », care ar fi putut fi evitată! Ce să mai spunem atunci de poezia lui Bogza. Prin Herescu, se conturează deja la Fundații o reacție conservatoare” (Boia 2012: 157). [All things considered, the expression “gloaba preacurviei” that appears in Lovinescu's version is intolerable; a “cruel expression” that could have been avoided! What can we say then about Bogza's poem? Through Herescu, a conservative reaction is already taking shape at Fundații.]

surprisingly, an important distinction in the state was offered to him in 1942, as recorded in the Official Monitory. He was decorated as *Cavalier* of the Romanian Crown.

Victor Buescu's translation activity in Romania: *Ausonia* and the Institute of Latin Studies

Researching Buescu's translation activity in Romania, we can notice not only his lifelong interests and passions, but also some translation policies and networks of agents influential on the translation market. His renditions into Romanian appear in right-wing periodicals, most frequently in *Ausonia*, where he was part of the editorial board, together with others who occupied university chairs. Under the auspices of the Institute of Latin Studies¹³, created in 1937 in Bucharest, the periodical *Ausonia*, being directed by the aforementioned university professor N. I. Herescu, president of the Institute, makes propaganda for classical studies and for the Latinity of Romanians, explicitly and implicitly making fascist claims. It has a relatively short life, between 1939 and 1943, but it manages to capture public attention, a lot of Romanian periodicals showing constant appreciation for the noble mission undertaken and for the quality of translations published there. Its graphic design, as well as the quality of the page, compared to other periodicals of the time, constitute discrete signs of being a priority for public financing.

¹³ In a report of the French Association Guillaume Budé, the Romanian Institute for Latin Studies is presented as one of its branches. Enumerating the publications under the aegis of the institute, Buescu's among them,, the French association remarks on the continuation of affiliation with the Parisian publishing house Les Belles Lettres, despite the hard conditions imposed by war. However, no word about *Ausonia* is given: "Depuis 1934, nous avons une Section roumaine de l'Association [...] Nous avons appris, d'autre part, que malgré les circonstances, les ouvrages publiés par l'Institut roumain d'Etudes latines, à la Faculté des Lettres de Bucarest, continuent à porter la marque de la Société «Les Belles Lettres»" (no author 1946: 65). Indeed, all books mentioned have a double localization and affiliation: Bucharest, Institut Roumain d'études Latines and Paris, Société d'édition Les Belles Lettres, 95 Bd. Raspail, some of them being written in French, which also applies to Buescu.

As translations occupy an extensive part of the editorial space, it is important to notice the difference between scholarly translations, done by university or high school teachers, and dilettante translations, received from students incentivized by the competition organized in one of the permanent columns. Seeking to create an emulation medium in Romania, *Ausonia* addresses first and foremost young students¹⁴, who are usually given examples of high literature and of great axiological models.

Poetry plays a privileged role in its pages, compared to other genres due to the preoccupation with the craft of ancient culture, understood as a precious linguistic artifact. Victor Buescu is keen on fixedform poetry, which he translates every issue. Odes, elegies, satires and, in other periodicals, sonnets are rendered with a careful eye on metrical and prosodic structure. His translations celebrate the pleasure of seeking formal perfection and the best stylistic equivalences. Indicative in this regard is the translation of *De adventu veris* by Pentadius, constructed through the device of epanalepsis, challenging many scholars due to its complex architecture: "Twenty-two lines on the coming of Spring exploit the tedious device of the echoing verse whereby the first half of each hexameter is repeated as the second half of the following pentameter" (Baldwin 1987: 118). Buescu's rendition, titled *Elegia primăverii* [Spring elegy], recreates such a complex metrical structure, a fact that indicates that for him, translation is far from a spontaneous game, demanding labor and craft.

Moreover, the fact that he republishes this translation with some changes is illustrative of his desire to perfect his work. We have to admit that many of the translated poems appear in *Ausonia* first, being reproduced with some modifications in other periodicals, like *Dacia Rediviva* and *Revista Fundațiilor Regale*, an indication of his constant revising process, giving the impression of a permanent work-in-progress. A suggestive modification requires special attention: the rather literal translation of the verse "țărâna presimte căldura" published in *Ausonia* (Pentadius 1942a: 15) becomes "adulmecă glia căldura" a few months later, in the nationalist periodical *Dacia Rediviva* (Pentadius 1942b: 4). The modification creates a more metaphorical sense, because

¹⁴ The idea of initiating the youth in ancient values is even visually conveyed from the depiction of the Ephebic Oath, on the cover.

in this version, the earth *sniffs* the warmth of spring. On the other hand, the option for *glia*, instead of țărană, may hint at the figurative sense of nation, *glie* meaning a land with emotional resonance, as it was massively used within war propaganda, in phrases like „războiul nostru pentru credință și glie” (Bosie 1941: 1) [our war for faith and fatherland]. In short, the poem describes the exuberant flourishing of nature that makes the poet think he would be happy to die in that paradisiac refuge. Emphasizing the dimension of homeland provided by the natural space, could Buescu propose a patriotic recontextualization of the classical motive *dulce mori*?: „...Atunci mi-ar fi dulce să mor, atunci de-ar veni tinerețea./ Și-mbrățișându-te iar, atunci mi-ar fi dulce să mor” (Pentadius 1942a: 15) [Then it would be sweet for me to die, then if youth would come./ And embracing you again, then it would be sweet for me to die].

Changing the register, he also ensures the entertainment for the readers of *Ausonia*, being in charge of the column “Entertainment Page”¹⁵, which provides translations from Latin for every issue. It usually includes two parts. The first one presents Latin crosswords puzzles by Guy Michaud, the translator’s passion for crossword pus being transparent, as well as other Latin wordplays translated from Hans Weis. The second part consists of translations from *Saturnalia* by Macrobius, depicting Roman intelligentsia exchanges on cultural and political subjects within a banquet and *Factorum et dictorum memorabilium libri IX* by Valerius Maximus, a collection of anecdotes illustrating virtues and vices and having as pretext historical circumstances.

Refined comic aphorisms are presented by Buescu as the prerogative of the chosen ones, within „un ospăț între oameni instruiți” (Buescu 1942b: 28) [a banquet of educated people]. An aristocratic and elitist formula of humor is encouraged, practiced by the great men of Ancient

¹⁵ The idea to dedicate columns to humoristic texts has a long tradition in Romanian periodicals. Since the 19th century, such texts, word plays, crosswords puzzles, curiosities and humoristic questions employed a different type of interaction with the readers, who were thus invited to contribute with their solutions, as was the case of the *Recreație* column from *Biblioteca Familia*, in the 1890s. The difference is, however, notable, in terms of the humoristic register.

Rome, because „numai puțini sunt aleșii dintre cei ce se cred chemați să născocească sau să reproducă atari glume reușite” (ibidem) [only a few are the chosen among those who believe they are called to invent or reproduce such successful jokes]. Numerous explanatory notes provide contextual information regarding Latin ways of thinking, living and speaking. Only by reading them can contemporary readers reach the intended humoristic effect by means of an intellectual effort, instead of a spontaneous understanding. He also talks about the moralizing value of humor when he reviews the translation of *Miles Gloriosus* by Plautus made by Herescu, presenting *vis comica Plautina* that comes from comic situations and word plays (Buescu 1941: 7).

Moreover, *Ausonia* is indicative not only of Buescu's translation activity, but also of the work in progress he was doing, under the aegis of the Institute for Latin Studies. Many translated fragments are announced in the periodical as samples of bigger editorial projects: he works on a complete translation of *De rerum natura* by Lucretius, and on two anthologies: one of *Epistles and Odes* by Horace and another one of Latin witticisms, published in *Pagina distractivă* [Entertainment Page], collected under provisory titles like *Latins humor/ Latins in jokes/ From Ancient humor/ Caesar's humor*. Establishing his career abroad, all these projects remain unaccomplished.

A few words should be said about Buescu's translations of Portuguese sonnets, published by *Revista Fundațiilor Regale* between 1943-1944, when he had already settled in Lisbon: *Ad amicos* and *Mormânt romantic* [Romantic thumb] by Antero de Quental and *Iubite suflet blând* [Beloved gentle soul]¹⁶ by Camoens. From the desire to present the ir-

¹⁶ If the first translations are less exact, a closer look should be given to *Iubite suflet blând*, Buescu's version of *Alma minha gentil*, by Camoens. This follows *Sonet*, the translation of the same text by Al. Iacobescu, whose knowledge of Portuguese was rather improbable. Dating back to 1925, Iacobescu's version from *Universul literar* (Camoens 1925: 4) is more poetical, employing a figurative meaning of many words that deviates from the original meaning. For example, the word "levou", which means "to take," is metaphorically rendered „a răpi,” meaning "to kidnap" by Iacobescu, while Buescu uses the more precise „a lua”, perfectly preserving the meaning. Likewise, the Portuguese expression "annos encurtou" (to shorten the years) has a precise equivalent in the recent version, „anii ți-i scurtă,” while the previous one

rigation of Portuguese poetry with Latin themes and motives, the first translation is from Antero de Quental's sonnet *Ad amigos* that develops themes like disillusion and impassible destiny¹⁷. Besides the obvious Latin title, preserved *tale quale*, readers can discover the Latin roots of Portuguese literature in a nutshell, by reading this translation: thinking is a vapor, will is a wave, and, despite human aspirations towards light, freedom, and goodness, fate remains indifferent. Buescu tries to create an image of Portuguese literature coherent with the political-philosophical one already delivered by Eliade, who had introduced Antero de Quental to local readership as an anti-liberal and pessimistic thinker actively engaged in the Portuguese political scene, as depicted in his encomiastic description of Salazar, published at Gorjan in 1942, a publishing house competing for popularity with other more established ones¹⁸.

Victor Buescu's translation activity in Portugal: challenges and opportunities

Historian Ioana Cazacu reveals Buescu's competition with Hungarian diplomats in Lisbon, motivated by the problem of Transylvania. The advantage was, however, on the Romanians' side. Hungarians tried to impose a lectureship in Lisbon in reaction to the establishment of the Romanian one, but, because Hungarian was not a Romance language, the dean refused their proposals, as Buescu informed (Cazacu 2012: 98). So, Buescu had to defend and legitimize his position there while de-legitimizing the presence of Hungarian language in Portugal,

uses the metaphorical expression „Să zbori la cer,” meaning to fly to the sky. I thank my colleague and translator, Anastasia Rădac, from Babeș-Bolyai University, for her assistance in this analysis.

¹⁷ The ground has been prepared in *Ausonia*, where classical themes like memento mori or vanitas vanitatum were not only illustrated through translations but also explained by Buescu in generous paratexts. For example, the fragment chosen from *De rerum natura* by Lucretius is sectioned in three parts, which, according to the paratextual voice of the translator, cohere around three ideas: the equality of people and things in relation to death, the lack of wisdom as the source of fear of death, and the nothingness of life compared to eternal life (Lucretius 1940: 173-174).

¹⁸ As promoted in a note in *Curentul* (1943: 2).

using the arm of translation. Numerous translations into Portuguese were published, disseminating and promoting what the Romanian Propaganda Ministry considered the most important and representative Romanian works.

Buescu carries out a lot of editorial projects, coordinating the Collection of the Romanian Lectorate in Portugal, which has a Portuguese series as well as a Romanian one. More substantial is the Portuguese series, consisting of translations of Romanian authors, usually made in collaboration: *Contos romenos*, 1943 (an anthology of Romanian short stories), Liviu Rebreanu, *A foresta dos enforcados*, (1945, translated in collaboration with Celestino Gomes), *Novos contos romenos*, 1946 (the second enlarged edition of the anthology *Contos romenos*, translated in collaboration), Ion Creangă, *Recordações de infância*, 1947 (translated in collaboration with Rouiva Mousinho), Mihai Eminescu, *Poesias–Poezii*, bilingual edition, 1950 (translated in collaboration with Carlos Queirós).

Translations of Portuguese literature into Romanian constitute another ambition that animated Buescu and Eliade. In a 1943 interview for the Portuguese press, Eliade mentioned that the two were working on two Romanian anthologies of Portuguese literature: one of poetry and another one of modern novella, and stated that Buescu was at the time preparing a translation of *The Lusians* (Eliade 2006: 356-357). This effort had less practical results which will be presented at the end of this section.

Another ambitious project was the creation of the first Romanian-Portuguese dictionary, a challenge he launched to his students once he started his courses in Lisbon, according to an informative note from *Universul* (1944: 3). This project will be accomplished by his Portuguese wife, philologist and translator of Romanian literature, Maria Leonor Carvalho Buescu.

During the war, as well as in its aftermath, some difficulties impeded his translation activity. One of them was the lack of accessible source texts. Romanian copies were inaccessible in Portugal, and translations to other European languages were either nonexistent or of questionable quality. In a diplomatic report dated 15 February 1944, Eliade notifies that Buescu finished the translation of *Pădurea spânzuraților* [The Forest of the Hanged] after a French version (Eliade 2006: 413). Buescu himself complains about “the species of cabbage that is *A foresta des enforcados*” (Busuioceanu 2003: 82) in a letter from 25 October 1945 addressed to

Alexandru Busuioceanu. He even intends to show Busuioceanu's translation of the same novel, published at a Spanish publishing house, to his Lusitan editor, as a good example. His dissatisfaction comes from the French version of the novel, the only one available to him at the time, which obscured the original by shortening it.

Investigating the anthology *Novos Contos Romenos* (1946), published in the collection *Antologias Universais* from Portugália Editora, Vanessa Castagna notices that these problems were partially solved, according to Buescu's preface.

Besides being proud of the possibility to translate directly about two thirds of the stories of *Os Novos Contos Romenos* [*The New Romanian Short Stories*], the editor of the volume stresses another aspect of the translation which would shock the contemporary reader, but that at that time was much more common than we could accept, that is presenting an unabridged version of the selected short stories (Castagna 2013: 143).

Another shortcoming was the lack of financing, which he mentions in a letter from 7 August 1947 (Busuioceanu 2003: 124). Besides complaining about being unremunerated for three months, Buescu informs his friend that he has received no official funding for his publications since 1944. Furthermore, due to the financial crisis in Portugal, editors have stopped publishing, so, in order to cover the necessary expenses regarding the publication of his translations from Creangă and Eminescu, he made personal borrowings.

No doubt the turning point in Romanian political positioning was a turning point in his personal life as well. Like most Romanian intellectuals fulfilling cultural roles abroad during the Second World War, Buescu also chose the way of exile once the conflagration was over, afraid of the communist regime that came to power. Hearing that collaborators with Antonescu's regime were being sentenced to death by the communist authorities and having his university chair in the country dissolved, he decided to continue his mission in Portugal, despite all difficulties. Refusing to change sides, he rises to prominence within the Romanian anti-communist exile network.

Without neglecting translations into Romanian, Victor Buescu also works on completing a rendition of the Portuguese national epic *Os Lusíadas* by Camoens during the war, as specified by Eliade in the

aforementioned 1943 interview and confirmed by his three children, who preserve the drafts in their private archive¹⁹. The manuscripts indicate great diligence in finding the best equivalents: cuts, corrections, rewritings aiming to give a poetic touch, as well as exactness.

Only one part of the translation eventually gets published within *Destin* Collection from Madrid in 1952: *Episodul Inesei de Castro* [Inês de Castro Episode]. It depicts Inês de Castro imploring to be sent into exile instead of capital punishment, due to her relation with the son of King Afonso IV. By illustrating the cruel fate of an innocent, to whom going into exile seems the better alternative to punishment, Buescu probably touches the diasporic Romanian readers, gathered around the anti-communist periodical *Destin*, head by George Uscătescu. This episode could be useful in deciphering the literary posture of the exiled, in which Buescu invests, once he decides to remain in Portugal. In this vein, Virgil Ierunca, his main detractor, calls him a misplaced poet, who transforms his exile into a business (Manolescu 2010: 102), criticizing his volume of original poems, *Atol* (1952). Amongst the negative judgements, he states the conspicuous mention that the place of publication is the country of his exile.

Concluding remarks

The translation activity made by a Romanian Latinist during the Second World War has implications that exceed a mere refuge into the aesthetic, as long as we analyze the translated text in its context. Intellectual networks, institutions, options to translate certain texts, as well as the *modus operandi* play an important role in the critical reevaluation of Victor Buescu's portrait as a translator and a key agent who ensured a cultural transfer between Romania and Portugal on the grounds of a shared Latin identity. These sketched directions of analysis may be further applied to other Romanian translators connected with the Romanian Institute of Latin Studies, as well as to other Romanian lectorships abroad during World War II.

¹⁹ I express my gratitude to Professor Ana Isabel Buescu, one of his children, for her generous assistance in researching the history of those manuscript translations.

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