

Book reviews

HĂISAN D. (2022). A STUDY OF RETRANSLATION AND OSCAR WILDE'S TALES IN ROMANIAN. CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS PUBLISHING, 275 p.¹

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Abstract

This review examines Daniela Hăisan's study of Oscar Wilde's tales in Romanian translation (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2022). Analyzing twelve translations from 1911 to 2020, the book combines diachronic and synchronic approaches to challenge the retranslation hypothesis and illuminate translation practices in peripheral cultures. Through a flexible, text-driven methodology, Hăisan develops a template for assessing children's literature translations while exploring the relationship between source texts and their multiple translations. This work provides a valuable methodological framework for understanding the dynamics of retranslation in peripheral cultural contexts.

Keywords: Romanian literature; retranslation; Oscar Wilde; reception; children's literature.

Contrary to what the coordinating conjunction “and” in the title might initially suggest, *A Study of Retranslation and Oscar Wilde's Tales in Romanian* is not a bifurcated analysis of two separate elements, but rather an interwoven exploration of retranslation theory illustrated through the rich tapestry of Oscar Wilde's enduring legacy in Romanian literature. By bridging what might appear as separate items, the unified narrative illuminates both the theoretical landscape of retranslation and the cultural evolution of Wilde's tales in Romania.

The relevance of this book, which builds on Wilde's nine children's tales, resonates with Isabelle Collombat's view, as echoed by the author, that the 21st century is the “age of retranslation” (p. 47). It explores the evolving nature of retranslations, which are no longer limited to diachronic and chronological approaches but are increasingly synchronic, reflecting the dynamic landscape of contemporary translation practices. Through this lens, the book offers insights into the complex interplay between literature, language, and culture in the modern era. The author begins by highlighting an intriguing phenomenon: in March 2021, nine different Romanian editions of Wilde's children's stories were simultaneously available in bookshops and libraries across Romania. This remarkable accessibility serves as a springboard for a deeper investigation into the factors that have contributed to Wilde's lasting impact on Romanian literature and culture.

At its core, *A Study of Retranslation* is a multifaceted work that touches on several aspects of translation studies. It examines the internal factors of text analysis and translation

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strategies, while also considering external elements such as the roles of translators, publishers, and the broader socio-historical and institutional contexts that have shaped Wilde's reception in Romania. The motivation for carrying this study of retranslation is clearly articulated and substantiated as the author situates the work within the growing field of retranslation studies, citing numerous recent publications and academic initiatives that demonstrate the increasing scholarly interest in this area. By focusing on the retranslation of Wilde's tales in Romania, the book contributes to a broader understanding of retranslation phenomena while also shedding light on the unique cultural and linguistic context of Romanian translation.

The theoretical framework is both comprehensive and nuanced, reflecting the complexity of the subject matter. By adopting a flexible and eclectic approach to (re)translation, the study draws from a diverse range of translation theories. This approach allows for a more holistic study of the translation of Wilde's tales in Romanian, incorporating insights from narrative theory, narratology, linguistics, onomastics, and sociology.

Hăisan navigates the tension between traditional descriptive and historical approaches to translation studies and more contemporary perspectives. While acknowledging critiques of these methods by scholars like Jean-René Ladmiral, who advocates for a more forward-looking "productive traductology" (p. 244), the book makes a compelling case for the continued relevance of descriptive and historical analyses, particularly in the context of retranslation studies and when examining translations from a "major linguaculture" into a "minor" one as is the case when translating Wilde's tales from English to Romanian (p. 5).

This approach is particularly valuable given the unique position of translation within Romania's literary polysystem. As the author notes, drawing on Itamar Even-Zohar's polysystem theory, in "minor" cultures, translation often occupies "a primary position within the literary polysystem" (p. 5). This phenomenon, further explored by Venuti (2005) in his work on translation asymmetries, or Casanova (2002) in her concept of literary capital accumulation through translation, underscores the importance of historical and descriptive analyses for understanding the evolution and impact of translated works in contexts like Romania. Such analyses are crucial for illuminating the complex interplay between translated literature and the development of national literary traditions in less dominant cultural spheres.

The book's theoretical framework is further enriched by its consideration of key elements in translational reflection, as outlined by Lance Hewson. By examining factors such as the triggers for translation, the translational framework, the role of the translator, and the nature of the target text, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of the translation process and its outcomes.

Moreover, the author demonstrates a keen awareness of the specific challenges inherent in translating children's literature. By addressing issues such as cultural context adaptation, ideological manipulation, dual readership, and features of orality, the book offers valuable insights into the unique considerations that come into play when translating Wilde's tales for a Romanian audience. Perhaps most intriguingly, the study explores the concept of "hospitality" in translation, drawing on the works of Derrida and Dufourmantelle (2000) and Ricoeur (2006) whose perspectives align closely with Berman's principles of ethical translation, particularly his emphasis on respecting and preserving the foreign elements of the source text. This philosophical approach to translation allows for a deeper examination of how the Romanian language and culture have embraced and adapted Wilde's tales over time.

One of the book's strengths lies in its methodological approach. The author employs both diachronic and synchronic perspectives, offering readers a comprehensive view of how Wilde's tales have been translated and retranslated over time. This dual approach allows for a nuanced understanding of the evolution of translation practices and the changing perception of Wilde's work in Romanian culture.

The study makes a useful contribution to translation criticism by proposing a template based on universal parameters for assessing children's literature translations, with a particular focus on the unique challenges. Though she comes up with a structured yet flexible approach to evaluating translation quality and effectiveness, Hăisan admits that no single theoretical framework can fully encapsulate the complexities of literary translation – a perspective aligned with Cay Dollerup's observation on the partial nature of existing Translation Studies theories. By providing clear rationales for her analytical choices, the author guides readers through her decision-making process, offering a nuanced understanding of both general translation techniques and the specific challenges posed by Wilde's distinctive authorial voice. This approach not only allows for a robust examination of stylistic translation methods but also demonstrates adaptability to the unique demands of the source material.

The book is structured into three main parts, each addressing different aspects of the (re)translation of Oscar Wilde's tales in Romanian. This approach allows for a thorough examination of the subject matter, from broad context to specific analyses. Included between the main parts are two interludes, which serve to bridge the sections and explain the structure of the following part, thereby guiding the reader through the complex material.

To begin with, Part One, which comprises four chapters, sets the stage by providing a global view of Wilde's tales in Romanian. Particularly noteworthy is the author's careful consideration of various factors influencing translation, including the targeted audience, format, translator type, and translational act type. This multifaceted approach demonstrates the complexity of the translation process and the myriad factors that can influence a text's reception in a new cultural context.

The author contextualises Oscar Wilde's reception in Romania within the broader European landscape and explores the nuances of his tales' translations. She examines Wilde's impact on Romanian culture, notably highlighting *The Happy Prince* as his most frequently translated work and delves into the specifics of the stories. Hăisan goes on to showcase the specifics of Wilde's tales, exploring the genesis, reception, themes, and stylistic features of the stories. These provide crucial background information for understanding the challenges the tales present to translators. She further investigates key dichotomies in translation practices – primarily translation vs retranslation – and explains the selection criteria for the primary corpus of study, which consists of thirteen representative translations spanning from 1911 to 2021. While the corpus is not truly exhaustive as she acknowledges, the study provides a foundation for comparative analysis.

The interlude between Parts One and Two introduces the author's analytical framework, which is based on three major parameters: the translator, the edition, and the target text. This framework provides a structured approach to analysing each translation while acknowledging the historical context in which it was produced. The author's attention to the historicity of retranslation is particularly commendable, as it allows for a more nuanced understanding of how translation norms and practices have evolved over time.

Part Two forms the core of the book. Made up of 12 thematically organised chapters, it offers a diachronic analysis of twelve target texts spanning over a century. Each translation is scrutinised, with the author highlighting distinctive features such as translation strategies, stylistic choices, and target audience considerations. This chronological approach allows readers to trace the evolution of Wilde's reception in Romania and observe how different translators have approached the challenges posed by Wilde's unique style.

Part Three offers a cross-cutting view of the translations, focusing on specific textual elements across multiple versions. The examination of noun phrases as translation units provides valuable insights into the challenges of translating Wilde's distinctive style. The

discussion of “retranslation rivalry” in cases of synchronic retranslations adds another layer to our understanding of the dynamics of literary translation.

The inclusion of appendices, particularly the diagram of translation metaphors used to capture the essence of the analysed target texts, provides a useful visual summary of the author’s findings.

In analysing twelve Romanian translations of Wilde’s tales, the author employs creative metaphors and cultural transmission concepts to effectively summarize complex translation phenomena. While concise labels cannot provide exhaustive verdicts, they serve as practical reference points in charting the history of (re)translation. The study observes a shift from early translations characterized by hospitality and incrementality to later versions reflecting impersonality. Notably, the research challenges the retranslation hypothesis, finding no clear progression from target-orientedness to source-orientedness across the corpus. For instance, as the author argues, Dimitrie Anghel’s 1911 text, the first Romanian version of a Wildean tale, paradoxically demonstrates strong source-orientedness. Similarly, the study refutes the notion of a linear quality improvement culminating in a definitive canonical translation or Berman’s “grande traduction”. Instead, it suggests a cyclical pattern, with each historical period producing its own exemplary translation. This nuanced approach highlights the complexity of retranslation processes and the limitations of applying general hypotheses to specific literary contexts.

A key strength of the book lies in its recognition that the source text itself largely dictates the model of translation criticism. By allowing the specific difficulties and stylistic features of Wilde’s tales to guide the selection of analytical tools, the author ensures that the critique remains grounded in the text’s particularities. This approach is further enhanced by a comparative analysis of target texts and a consideration of what she refers to as “translators’ habitus and idiosyncrasies” (p. 6), providing a comprehensive view of the translation process.

Another intriguing aspect of the study is its exploration of Romania’s “cult of translation” (p. 7). The author effectively argues for the significance of examining translations into Romanian, highlighting the country’s high “translation rate” and the important role that translation has played in shaping national language and literature, thereby suggesting that “peripheral” cultures have their say as well. This focus on a “minor” language and culture provides insights into the dynamics of translation in peripheral contexts, challenging the dominant Anglo-American perspective in translation studies.

Particularly noteworthy is the examination of Wilde’s children’s tales from a unified, coherent translational perspective, addressing a significant gap in the literature. By bringing together intratextual and extratextual factors and tracing the profile of Romanian children’s book translators, the study offers a comprehensive view of the translation process that has been largely absent from previous scholarship on Wilde’s work. This approach, focusing on the translation history of Wilde’s tales, not only contributes to our understanding of their reception in Romania, but also aligns with broader European trends in translation history research. The historical perspective provides valuable insights into the evolution of translation practices and cultural attitudes towards Wilde’s work over time, enriching both Wilde studies and translation history.

The author points out several significant challenges faced in conducting this study, demonstrating her level of academic rigour and self-reflection. One of the primary challenges lies in the vast corpus of texts under examination, which encompasses multiple aspects of translation studies, including historical and contemporary translations, retranslation theory, reception studies, and the specific challenges of translating children’s literature. However, the author’s ability to navigate this complexity while maintaining a balanced perspective is a testament to the depth and breadth of the research.

Another challenge arises from the dual nature of Wilde's tales themselves which, as she indicates, were originally written for both children and adults who have retained a sense of wonder. The stories present a unique case study in translation, in as much as each generation of readers brings new interpretations and cultural contexts to the texts. This temporal dimension highlights how changing societal norms, literary trends, and cultural expectations influence both the need for new translations and their reception. Hăisan extends this duality to the study itself, aiming to appeal to both Romanian and English-speaking readers, as well as to both scholars and general audiences interested in Wilde, Irish studies, or translation. This inclusive approach enhances the book's potential impact and readership.

The study also grapples with the practical difficulties of researching retranslations, particularly in the Romanian context. The author highlights the limitations of bibliographical databases, online catalogues, and national bibliographies, as well as the often incomplete paratextual information in older editions. Despite these obstacles, the book strives to provide a comprehensive view of Wilde's tales in Romanian translation, challenging readers to reconsider established notions about retranslation, especially in the context of children's literature and "minor" languages.

In a nutshell, while this study makes a significant contribution to translation studies through a thorough analysis of Wilde's tales in Romanian, its scope could be enriched by comparative perspectives from other Eastern European translations. The methodology developed, though robust for the Romanian corpus, provides a valuable framework that could be adapted to explore translation patterns in other "peripheral" cultures. This geographical focus, rather than a limitation, opens up promising avenues for future comparative research in translation studies, potentially revealing broader patterns in the translation of children's literature across different cultural and linguistic settings. The study thus serves as both a comprehensive analysis of its specific context and a methodological springboard for wider cross-cultural investigations.

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