

# TRANSLATORS' DIARIES AS SEMINAL ROMANIAN TEXTS ON TRANSLATION: A STUDY OF ANTOANETA RALIAN'S AND IRINA MAVRODIN'S WORKS<sup>1</sup>

Ana-Magdalena PETRARU

Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași, Romania

email: [alina.petraru@gmail.com](mailto:alina.petraru@gmail.com)

## Abstract

In the larger context of the Romanian discourse on translation supported by texts of theorists and practitioners, this paper focuses on the memoirs of two great translators, namely Antoaneta Ralian from English (*Amintirile unei nonagenare: Călătoriile mele, scriitorii mei* [Memories of a nonagenarian: My travels, my writers], 2014) and Irina Mavrodin from French (*Despre traducere: Literal și în toate sensurile* [On translation: literally and in all senses], 2006). Our aim is to show how their insights are valuable to anyone interested in (literary) translation as the two figures have massively contributed to the field ever since the communist period. Thus, we will begin by grasping at the genre and methodologies, and then proceed to Ralian's and Mavrodin's works, properly contextualizing them with the help of (academic) criticism, as well as interviews and articles in the cultural media. Our aim is to distinguish various and varied stances which afford several approaches to translation, in general and the literary genres in their reception process, in particular.

**Keywords:** literary translation; translator's diaries; theory vs. practice; travelogue.

## 1. Introduction

The paper aims at accounting for the diaristic works of two reputed translators and practitioners, Antoaneta Ralian and Irina Mavrodin and their impact on the field and its stakeholders; so, we will further present some definitions and reflections on diaries and their importance in translation.

Autobiographies are a part of the heritage which allows researchers placement on such an axiological coordinate with respect to their works based on Philippe Lejeune's views applied systematically to the study of the genre (Costin, 2023, p. 93). The French critic also confirmed "that the most important outcome of any voyage of exploration is not so much knowledge of the Other as new insight into ourselves" (Popkin, 2009, p. 2). There is difficulty in the definition of the genre which comprises autobiographies, diaries and memoirs, particularly regarding 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century works (Gorovei, 2023, p. 33). They all take us on a trip down the memory lane towards a remembrance of things past; here, we (in)voluntarily grasp matters in a more or less chronological manner in which we are devoured like sons and daughters of (father) time in a labyrinthic memory palace.

---

<sup>1</sup> Article History: Received: 15.11.2025. Accepted: 05.02.2026. Published: 15.05.2026. Acknowledgement: This project is supported by a grant of the Ministry of Education, CCCDI - UEFISCDI, project code PN-IV-P2-2.1-TE-2023-0768 within PNCDI IV, contract no. 79TE/03.01.2025.

Encyclopaedias on Translation Studies such as Baker's or Shuttleworth's do not offer entries for translators' diaries and research in the field is scarce despite their undeniable value for theorists and practitioners with respect to challenges in decision making, strategies, methodologies, ambiguity, etc. The few studies available so far advise on diaries in translation education at tertiary level where various retrospection and introspection methods were employed to help students in their learning process, when translating, thus contributing to the reflective and self-analysis dimension (Pappel & Falk, 2012). Such learners' diaries which may come as "unstructured" reflections are also deemed helpful for beginner students in the acquisition of theoretical translation concepts, when applying procedures, solving problems and choosing certain strategies (Erakovic, 2013). Diary-based studies also give insights into deepening the understanding of self-translation and censorship in the case of authors that translate their works themselves and are marked by certain ideologies in their subjectivity (Kovacevic, 2015).

It is our belief that translators' diaries assess personal and professional development, may show patterns and their authors' frustration and satisfaction regarding outcomes; sometimes, such an emotional response may even occur in the re-edition of a translation (as we will further see in the case of Antoaneta Ralian). We adhere to general postulates in Translation Studies scholarship, namely that "to translate is to invent for the foreign text to new readerships who are aware that their interest in the translation is shared by other readers, foreign and domestic—even when those interests are incommensurable (Venuti, 2000, p. 482). We also agree with the fact that the cultural dimension leads to the (re)interpretation and reinvention of literary texts, among others (Venuti, 2000, p. 470).

In what follows, we will expand on the cultural context, the emotional responses and professional development entailed by the translator's job as reflected in the diaristic experience. Their cognitive processes are definitely at play, yet translation strategies are briefly mentioned, and they could be further developed in more applied studies in which functionalist approaches, in general and Christiane Nord's model (1991), in particular could be used for the analysis of parallel texts in Romanian and other languages. With respect to methods, we have already chosen the texts to study and interviews that mirror the translator's reflections in them, quintessentially provided to the readers by cultural magazines. Regarding longitudinal studies, we will show what translators in their diaries revealed in terms of constraints and practices from communist to post-communist years. We considered comparative studies, qualitative analysis and mixed methods to a certain extent as our purpose is to account for original features in these texts, we deem seminal for Romanian Translation Studies. A view we agree on in scholarly research in our country is that "translation is not a neutral conduit but an active participant in the creation of culture" (Pașcalău, 2025, p. 211). It has been so since the beginning of writing on Romanian soil and, as part of the reception process, translation as product had its importance stressed on; it is enough to recall deacon Coresi's considerations in the preface to *Întrebare creștinească* [A Christian inquiry] (1559) where he argued that translating the work was seminal for everybody to find out about Romanians as Christians; in addition, he underlined that a couple of words in our language are better than thousands in a foreign language that cannot be understood by people (Lungu Badea, 2005, p. 145)

We do not consider diaries to be paratextual elements in the sense given by Gérard Genette (1997) who includes forewords, afterwords, footnotes, endnotes and translator's notes in this category, but distinctive individual texts. They are a living proof of Venuti's (2008) translator invisibility, not marking translations proper, but accounting for the laboratory of creation where the professionals guided by St. Jerome give insights on their work. Unbiased by their feminine voices, the diaries which will be discussed below show experiences in translation against the background of a patriarchal society. Meaning is negotiated, and

alternative solutions for instances of equivalence are provided in cases of retranslation. Censorship is also a factor of the political context in communist Romania, a time of cultural resistance through reading of translated works where interpretive decisions were made based on context and experience. In a way, it can be argued that through translators' diaries, the target texts acquire a sixth sense, where the world of literature is enriched with interpretation through the process of translation. A similar view is held regarding the interpretation of literature, deemed invisible and whose 'unsaid' meanings can surface when correctly received, i.e. through the lenses of genre variety leading to the multiplication of reception/ reader-response procedures (Nicolaescu, 2023, p. 81).

## 2. Antoaneta Ralian and her Memoirs, *Amintirile unei nonagenare* (2014)

Antoaneta Ralian (1924–2015) is one of our most reputed translators, known for her approximately 125 works (novels, short stories, plays) she rendered from the English language into Romanian. She has been subject to previous research and translator portraits in which it was assessed that she spent approximately 60 years of her life engaged in the activity blessed by St. Jerome, working nine hours a day and following the model imposed by Jean Delisle (1999) which was related to her biography that allowed economy of means and simplicity of expression (Hăisan, 2019, p. 83). She translated English classics such as Ch. Dickens, D. Defoe, N. Hawthorne, Th. Hardy, O. Wilde and others, modernist authors (D.H. Lawrence, J. Joyce, A. Huxley) and more recent ones, i.e., S. Rushdie, Ch. Frazier, E.L. Doctorow, among many others. Apart from British and American writers, she translated Indian authors (Anita Desai, Amos Tutuola) or Romanian ones who wrote in English (Radu Florescu, Petru Popescu, Alex. Leo Șerban). Although most of her works are translations from English into Romanian, she also carried out translations from Italian (*Pinocchio* and a play by Pasolini) and French (a novel by Alexandre Dumas-fils in the 1990s). More or less exhaustive lists are provided in previous translator portraits, see, for instance, Hăisan, 2019, pp. 84-87. As we will see when we examine her diary, she collaborated closely with authors like the Irish British Iris Murdoch or the Canadian American Saul Bellow.

Antoaneta Ralian's thoughts on translation were made public via interviews in cultural magazines (*România literară*, *Observator cultural*) and volumes (i.e. Radu Paraschivescu, *Toamna decanei. Convorbiri cu Antoaneta Ralian* [The dean's autumn: Conversations with Antoaneta Ralian], 2011; *Nu cred în sfârșitul lumii: Articole, amintiri, interviuri* [I don't believe in the end of the world: Articles, memories, interviews], volume edited by Marius Chivu, 2016). She spoke about the fact that she neither had a mentor, nor she saw the usefulness of one; she believed that one needed to be gifted for the job, have an inner calling for it, learned much on editing and translation from Frida Papadache at Univers Publishing House whom she argued with and praised for the "superb" talent despite the predilection for archaisms. She retranslated Joyce arguing that Frida Papadache's version of *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* was close to a fairytale and Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, claiming that Vera Călin was not receptive enough to the writer's subtleties in her version (Șimonca, 2014). When asked about the main condition of a translator, she answered that talent was a must, along with love for literature and the feeling for the text and subtext where creation was needed. She has translated two books a year since she started working and has not stopped when she retired. She viewed translation as an escape that allowed her to lose herself. She put passion in her work, holidays included (Șimonca, 2015). Moreover, she did not believe in a theory of translation and the artistic act. When asked to talk about her translations, she avoided 'dissecting' and 'anatomizing' the act of translation or quoting theorists. For her, the artistic

act was a mystery, so she never taught courses in the field (Ralian, 2016, pp. 184-185), it was like an enigma that needed solving (p. 216).

Her memoirs, *Amintirile unei nonagenare* [Memories of a nonagenarian] (2014) are a mix of literary comments, autobiography and travelogue, a delight for Translation Studies in its cultural dimension. Previous research exploring her memoirs focused on the travels and TS, translation being itself a journey, transforming the translator and bringing languages, cultures and people together (Bădulescu, 2015, p. 103). The volume is also discussed along with Petre Solomon's memoirs in academia, and it was argued that the two translators were a closed community within the larger one of writers, speaking about visits they made and the personal relationships they had with the contemporary authors they translated which seem fictional sometimes (Doboș, 2022, p. 525).

Any lecture notes on A. Ralian's diary would start with her foreword which reads as follows: "In a book I translated, an old character feels so anonymous and inconsistent that he steps firmly on snow to convince himself he exists, then turns his head to see his footsteps as if they were proofs of his existence. I, too, still believe that I exist (*cogito ergo sum*)"<sup>2</sup> (Ralian, 2014, p. 9, our translation). She also spoke about the love for her husband in the unpublished work, "1949 – Jurnalul unei femei măritate"/ [Diary of a married woman] from which an excerpt is published in the preamble to the edition of *Amintirile unei nonagenare*/ [Memories of a nonagenarian] (2014).

The travelogue contains entries about Dresden which she viewed as a 20th century Pompei, when she accompanied her husband in his business trip (he was a journalist for AGERPRES); Vienna, regarded as the first waltz (her first contact with the Western world in the 60s) which shocked her due to the city's abundance that contrasted with the impoverished communist Romania; London, where it was hard to be intelligent in English: for two weeks, in 1973, she was invited by the British Council at the recommendation of the British Embassy of Bucharest as reward for her many translations from English literature; she had a busy schedule and no one appointed to accompany her because she knew the language; she saw G. B. Shaw's *The Philanderer* (Ro: *Afemeiatul, Craiul*), "academically performed as in the author's time"<sup>3</sup> (Ralian, 2014, p. 30, our translation). She fell asleep during the performance and was woken up by the noises on the stage. She had no idea of what was going on, so she dared not comment on the staging, only other members of the audience carefully watching everything around her (Ralian, 2014, p. 30). When asked what writers she would like to meet, she asked for Iris Murdoch who was living in Oxford with her husband, the critic John Bayley. A. Ralian had just finished translating one of Murdoch's novels, *A Word Child* (Ro: *Vlăstarul cuvintelor*) and they met in a pub. The translator was planning to speak to her about the early philosophical essays influenced by J. P. Sartre and S. Weil, Murdoch's turn to the symbolic realism and the Buddhist touch of her latest novels. They became friends and wrote to each other, paying one another visits for the following 25 years (Ralian, 2014, pp. 31-32). She enjoyed Christmas on British soil whereas Bucharest was left in the dark and deprived of the Christian holiday. London seemed permanent and unchanged to her (Ralian, 2014, p. 33). Three members of the Writers' Union, Romania, arrived to participate in a symposium on "Literature in Translation" organized by the Centre of Great Britain – East Europe and the School of Slavonic and Eastern European Studies affiliated to the London University. Pious Romanian translators recall "the pilgrimages" to the houses of Dickens, Thackeray, Virginia Woolf or the house of *The Old Curiosity Shop* that still ran as Dickens described it. The conference venue was the Senate Hall

---

<sup>2</sup> Original source text: "Într-o carte pe care am tradus-o, un personaj bătrân se simte atât de anonim și de inconsistent, încât, ca să se convingă că există, calcă adânc în straturile de zăpadă, apoi întoarce capul să-și vadă urmele, ca pe niște dovezi că da, există. Eu sunt convinsă că încă exist (*cogito ergo sum*)".

<sup>3</sup> Original source text: "Jucată academic, ca pe vremea lui Bernard Shaw".

of the University of London, seminar room 330 decorated with posters and “belle epoque” reproductions. Translators, editors, writers and journalists from six countries were present: Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Poland, Romania and Hungary, the lecturers from the School of South European Studies, other specialists, writers and translators from UK.

The aim was to discuss less-known literatures and the attitude towards translations in England and participating countries. The focus was on the English reception of translations, in general and of those from Eastern European countries, in particular, the role of translated literature in these countries and their contribution to the cultural heritage of world culture, along with the inevitable economic coordinates entailed by financing the activity of publishing translations (Ralian, 2014, pp. 37-39). She also talked about conference exhibits, English translations from books belonging to participating countries: versions from Eminescu, Caragiale (*Schițe/ Sketches*), poems by Arghezi, Rebreanu’s *Ion/ Ion* and *Răscoala/ The Uprising*, verses by Ștefan Augustin Doinaș, and Marin Sorescu, *Antologie de poezie românească/ An Anthology of Contemporary Romanian Poetry* translated by Brenda Walker and Andrea Deletant. Denis Deletant, lecturer of Romanian at the School of Eastern European Studies, gave an overview of translations from Romanian into English since 1854 when an anthology by E.C. Grenville Murray came out, *Doine – or the National Songs and Legends of Roumania*, followed by a nicely illustrated volume, *Rouman Anthology* by Henry Stangley which brought together 45 poems by Alecsandri, Bolintineanu, Gr. Alexandrescu, Bolliac, Heliade Rădulescu, etc.; in 1881, *Roumanian Fairy Tales and Legends* compiled by E. B. Mawer came out. The Romanian novel would be known on English soil after World War I when Lucy Byng translated *Viața la țară/ Love in the Countryside* (1926) and Alice Wise, *Pădurea spânzuraților/ The Forest of the Hanged* (1930). The latter was so successful that a version was reproduced by editor Peter Owen in 1967 (Ralian, 2014, pp. 39-40). According to Ralian, the translations from Eminescu by Sylvia Pankhurst and I.O. Stefanovic were “less qualitative”; the prefacer, G.B. Shaw, would express his doubts on the translation, as well. This would only be remedied by the English versions of Eminescu’s poems by Leon Levițchi, Andrei Bantaș and Corneliu Popescu published in our country.

After World War II and in the last decades, translations from Romanian literature became more frequent despite the gaps in the information process, selection, transposition and reception which the hosting institution in London underlined. For better information regarding Romanian literature and the relation to England, the Romanian delegation (Andrei Bantaș, the poet Liliana Ursu and A. Ralian) gave editors for consultation and publication excerpts translated into English from the works of contemporary poets and novelists. A. Ralian complains that it was a fiasco because of the authors she had to promote, excerpts from a novel by Corneliu Leu on Vlad Țepeș (portrayed as non-Dracula), a novel by Dinu Săraru and another one by Aurel Mihale. No publishing house showed any interest in contemporary Romanian literature. There were also meetings at the ‘Poetry Society’ with English writers published in Romanian translation (Ralian, 2014, pp. 40-41).

London also seemed familiar to A. Ralian due to various translations she carried out in which the city was outlined, i.e., D. Defoe’s *Journal of the Plague Year* or Galsworthy’s *End of the Chapter*. This also holds true for other geographical spaces in their sacred dimension as our historian of religions, Mircea Eliade labelled them. For instance, the house in Menton where Katherine Mansfield spent time when she was ill equally drew attention to the translator since she rendered into Romanian the author’s diary and some of her short stories (Ralian, 2014, pp. 43-44). Sometimes translations entail paranormal activity or simply eerie coincidences, notes A. Ralian: when she translated a brochure on Israel for touristic propaganda, she chose to visit the country instead of being paid for her work; on her trip, she met a male cousin on business in the area which she found weird (Ralian, 2014, pp. 47-48);

other relatives brag about the number of books A. Ralian translated, a female cousin from New York speaking about 50 translations to the neighbours, whereas, in 2014, when her memories came out, they totalled 117 (Ralian, 2014, p. 51).

Moreover, she was lucky enough to listen to lectures by her most favorite writers, John Barth, William Gas, Donald Barthelme, Thomas Pynchon or Robert Coover, among other postmodernist figures she was introduced to via a seminar group led by an Italian Americanist, Sergio Perosa (Ralian, 2014, p. 98). In this context, apart from the friendship with Iris Murdoch, she also brings into play the “subtle”, “melancholic” “very English” poet Alan Brownjohn whose poetry she translated for *România literară* (Ralian, 2014, p. 99) and the poet, pianist and painter Brenda Walker whom she rendered into Romanian, too (Ralian, 2014, p. 100). She translated and interviewed Saul Bellow who had a Romanian wife and visited our country in the communist years. A. Ralian talks about the erudition she felt attracted to in his writings which she tried to transpose in the Romanian versions, the cynical humour (especially in *Ravelstein*) in which two grumpy old men resemble Muppets characters, the untranslatable wordplay (Damocles’s sword, Deimoclis in English and Democlistir in Romanian, along with the “hermeneutics” in the source text that became ‘hormoneuți’ in the target language) (Ralian, 2014, pp. 115-116). An author she was profoundly touched by was Raymond Federman due to his narrative technique that included the creation process, the (un)making of a book (Ralian, 2014, p. 119); the author’s books she translated only came out after the fall of the communist regime in our country: *The Twofold Vibration. Smiles on Washington Square / Îndoita vibrație. Zâmbete în Washington Square* in 1989 and *Celor pe care i-ar putea interesa/ To Whom It May Concern* in 2000. With respect to Amos Oz, whose *To Know a Woman/ Să cunoști o femeie* was known to Romanian readers thanks to A. Ralian’s translation, the nonagenarian argues that the translator always has the tendency to identify the main character of the novel with the author, to detect autobiographical elements in his or her portrait and torments (Ralian, 2014, pp. 126-127). A. Ralian acknowledges the “manicheist intoxication of socialist realism”<sup>4</sup> (Ralian, 2014, p. 129, our translation). In her questioning of the characters in the novels she translated (referring to Amos Oz’s Yoel, his positive or negative dimension of victim or victimizer) (Ralian, 2014, p. 129). She also collaborated with other translators when she rendered poetry into Romanian, namely Ted Hughes’s work she “roughly” translated into our language as white verse, whilst Vasile Nicolescu, who was responsible for the General Direction of Publishing Houses for the Ministry of Culture in the 1970s, came with the final touch and rhythm (Ralian, 2014, p. 132).

She spoke about herself as translator and the author’s otherness at conferences considering the latter to be the neighbour the former needed to love; A. Ralian felt there was double duality regarding the translator who represented the author in translation, reproduced or recreated him or her in another language. The nonagenarian rejected the Italian label, *traduttore-traditore*, she had no translation models for her work lacking fixed methods and recipes that might be used again. Only the identification with the author is required, his or her appropriation, the attempt to see through his or her eyes, think and feel the same which is only partially achievable, of course. The nonagenarian felt she should have appropriated Victorian decency and modern indecency, Galsworthy’s geometrical narrative, Iris Murdoch’s cerebrality or Katherine Mansfield’s suavity. Such chameleonic traits are impossible despite a translator’s flexibility (Ralian, 2014, pp. 149-150). She only tried to understand the authors to translate similarly to the actor acting in a play written for the stage by the playwright or the musician who is guided by the conductor obeying the composer. The book to translate and the dictionary used play a major part; there is a *ghost-story* type of communication in the case of

---

<sup>4</sup> Original source text: “reminiscentele maniheiste ale intoxicării cu realism socialist”.

classics and an active communication in the case of modern writers. The translator's role is passive in his/ her subordination to the author and A. Ralian did all she could to show friendship to the authors translated, grasp what was specific to them, fluency and brightness meant to bring successful translations for target readers. Sometimes writers disappoint in their boring solutions, upsetting repetitions, confusions and contradictions such as the oxymoronic Henry Miller. There is a constant critic in the person of the translator leading to a duality in which the author is also present, a love triangle, yet no alterity of the essence (Ralian, 2014, pp. 151-152).

A. Ralian began working as editor for Univers Publishing House in 1958 as head of the department of English and American literature. She was also part of several committees engaged in censorship before 1989 where she had to deal with (philosophical, religious, literary) books considered to be subversive by Ceaușescu's regime, i.e. contravening communist or socialist ideals and encouraging capitalism. She deleted words or used periphrases in excerpts that might have offended the ruler and his wife who were travelling around the world and lacked culture. A fragment from Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* was omitted because of a traveling sailor and his monkey, another one from Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* which alluded to same sex love was rewritten to convey a Platonic relationship, and an essay from Bellow's *Humboldt's Gift* was not included in the translation because it argued that socialism might bore individuals (Ionescu, 2014, pp. 146-147)

If, among other things, eliminating erotic passages from works during the communist years was a must, preserving overt sexual language in translation became a habit she had to acquire after 1989 when she rendered not only Henry Miller's works into Romanian, but also Lawrence Durrell's or D.H. Lawrence's (Ralian, 2014, pp. 154-155) through 'naked words' (Ralian, 2014, p. 156). Despite their strong erotic stance, Miller's novels had to be kept away from being labelled as vulgar or pornographic and the poetic character of descriptions, the philosophical stream and the amplitude of life and art philosophies had to be transposed in translation in a variety of registers, argues A. Ralian (2014, p. 158).

Sometimes reedited versions bring benefits to translators whose job is a poorly paid one. This is what happened with translations sold via kiosks accompanied by newspapers in our country, a phenomenon that A. Ralian was also part of, yet she refused half of the sum she considered too high for D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover/ Amantul doamnei Chatterley*. She only felt sorry for her choice when she saw the cover of the book which harmed the reputation of the author by sending a wrong message to the readers (Ralian, 2014, p. 185).

### **3. Irina Mavrodin and her Work, *Despre traducere. Literal și în toate sensurile* (2006)**

Irina Mavrodin (1929–2012) was a translator, poet, essayist who taught French literature at the University of Bucharest and Craiova and is reputed for her seminal contributions to the field of translation and literary studies. She translated major French (and Romanian) authors (Marcel Proust, Albert Camus, Gustave Flaubert, Stendhal, André Gide, Emil Cioran, Gaston Bachelard, Jean Cocteau), was a prominent figure in promoting French culture in Romania and viceversa and was awarded several prizes for her poetry and essays (*Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres* by France in 1992, Writers' Union Prize for translations in 1982 and 1985).

Her works have been analyzed by scholars in the field who emphasized Irina Mavrodin's recurrent ideas illustrated by practice, spread over a couple of decades (in essays, reviews, paratexts, volumes), mainly viewing translation as an endless climbing of a mountain mirrored by theory and poetics bridging researchers and practitioners, the specialized and the general public (Constantinescu, 2017, p. 63). Several of I. Mavrodin's principles were outlined by research: the theory on translation is supported by practice and feeds on it; translation is

artistic creation, a plural reading and any translation expresses the translator with respect to his/ her cultural mentality, horizon of expectations, individual and collective sensibility; a translation becomes old fashioned in time and literary translations can be viewed as an open series which is never final; the use of archaisms in translation is a delicate operation which may lead to connotational disasters when mismanaged; these archaisms can be translated through archaizing words or syntactic structures and, for the translation of a dialect, the solution is to use words and structures to suggest it, not an already existent dialect in the target language; in the case of a text that produces culture shock through its stylistic devices and syntactic structures, the translator shall force the target language to renew and explore its virtues; if the original text contains mistakes and instances of negligence, footnotes may be added in the translation; verses shall observe prosody in translation despite the Romanian tradition in the field as French tradition allows to give up prosody and this solution means a new reading and meeting a new horizon of expectations; in translating Dada poetry, literalness may be the proper and only solution (Constantinescu, 2017, pp. 57-58).

She has helped researchers and practitioners understand the triangle mechanism of reading-translating and (re)writing of a text (Constantinovici, 2017, p. 67), and the reader and creator of literature with exercise in the technique and art of interpreting a translation, gauge its grammatical, stylistic and semantic stances (p. 68). This holds true for both literary translations and others, her principles leaving a mark on previous attendants to her workshops that practice translation as a side-job, “to breathe fresh air” (Roşioru, 2018).

Generally speaking, *Despre traducere. Literal și în toate sensurile* [On translation, literally and in all senses] (2006) is more philosophical than A. Ralian’s previously outlined work. In the argument, I. Mavrodin debates on the ambiguity of the term “translation” used in various fields, a *passé-partout* term depending on the one bringing it into play; in her situation, it is related to poetics and her practice as translator in the field of literary translation. We could even distinguish research questions: Is the literary translator an author? What kind of author? How is his status different from the author translated? Is the translator an author, simply a craftsman (Ro: *artizan*) or worse, a mechanical figure that only transcribes the original work? Is the translation a work in itself and how is its status different from the original? Which are the criteria that afford us to set all these differences? To which extent is literary translation a spontaneous act pertaining to inspiration and talent? Or is it an act that can be controlled, made better (Ro: *perfectibil*) through theory and practice (Ro. *practico-teorie* as Jean Ricardou coined it for literary theory) elaborated by the translator considering that practice creates theory and theory guides practice? (Mavrodin, 2006, pp. 4-6)

On translation in the writer’s daily life, I. Mavrodin often asks herself why she translated so many books and continues to do so. Her activity as translator and author are viewed as equally important. She prefers the fragmentary amount of knowledge she has access to so as to uncover new facets of translation every time. This is no translator’s manual (i.e., a didactic and systematic overview of the process). She speaks of an abyss (Ro: *prăpastie*) between a writer and a literary translator that is no author him/herself. The writer seeks his/ her strongest motivations to act as writer in the original work, and not in translation, the latter supporting his/ her endeavour, drawing a parallel territory for action which maintains the writer in a transient area which could be compared to the daily exercise of a pianist or violinist. Is the writer preparing for the language s/he is to translate into by playing with it? By translating, is s/he achieving a new (type of) reading, allowing him/ her to “taste” or understand the text only to go deeper into it? For a writer, translation is a means to stay in contact with the greatest spirits of world literature and daily absorb great artistic energies. Furthermore, a writer should not be trapped in the act of translation, but control it, turn it into a mechanism that should take off towards “literary space”, i.e. one’s own work. When controlled, daily translation may

become a ritualistic gesture allowing one to enter ‘the making of a work’ (see Proust). Translation cannot prevent the exertion of a major auctorial act (of writing one’s original work). The non-writer becomes ‘writer’ and ‘creator’ through his/ her translated work (Mavrodin, 2006, pp. 8-10).

For her, living the game as creator requires caution and she has theory to back it up. She enjoys it as literary and Translation Studies theorists do, similarly to writers and poets meditating on their own work. However, how should one call those mimicking the game? (The) Impostors? Are they compilers, plagiarizers, imitators pretending to play a game that is unknown to them? Lacking vocation, they displease readers. There are strict rules to translation as in chess; literary theory and Translation Studies thus afford a controlled infinity of possibilities. One needs to clearly define one’s operational concepts (pertaining to the “game”). Can “amazement” (Ro: *uimirea*) be defined or conceptualized? The translator is both free and imprisoned in the intertextuality s/he operates with, and which is inherited from the past and adapted to present needs. Coherence and rigour are close to mathematics in artistic awareness (Mavrodin, 2006, pp. 11-12).

Regarding the dilemmas of the translator-author, drawing on her translation from Ricoeur’s *La métaphore vive/ The Rule of Metaphor (Metafora vie*, Univers, 1985), she recalls a passage on translation which talked about the literary use of words consisting of the game of interpretative possibilities residing in the enunciation. The meaning of words needs to be grasped every time without the support of an acquired stability. The experience of translation is similar, showing us the sentence is not a mosaic, but an organism. To translate is to invent an identic constellation in which every word is supported by the others and benefits from the familiarity of the entire language. So, the translator needs to seek a proper solution, and incompetence could be fatal (a bad translation of a medical prescription can be catastrophic for the patient). In poetry, translation may be a pretext starting from the original for a new text with bad results for the (idea of) translation. Some poems need to be translated *ad litteram* so as not to falsify their original poeticity (Mavrodin, 2006, pp. 14-15).

Unlike A. Ralian who completely rejected theory, I. Mavrodin referred to herself as a translator in need of theoretical frameworks starting from her own practice, denying that a literary translation would ever be the result of applied theory; if theory applies to what is general, translation is built as a result of a series of actions, specific solutions which shed light on its creative and artistic dimension. Mavrodin strongly believed that her practice-theory was changing and legitimising itself inductively and deductively along with every new text translated. Translation may apply a plural reading theory, given the consistent materiality owing to the multiple choices incurred by language and writing. There is difficulty in maintaining ambiguity and properly translating authors like Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Char or Michaux and the translator may need to invent or create an isomorphic text from the original, and bring it to the surface hermeneutically. Yet, the role of hermeneutics here may be overrated: when there is maximum poeticity, i.e., ambiguity involved, the endeavour requires a plurisemantic textual apparatus with several readings, not only one as in the case of scientific texts (Mavrodin, 2006, pp. 20-21).

She also complained about translators not being mentioned in most reviews of translated works published in cultural magazines, relating this to the condition of the translator as servant (Latin *ancilla, ancillaris*) and his or her work, a second text, an approach she labelled as ‘terrorist’ leading to disappointment, discouragement and ultimately abandonment of a being that is regarded as a machine or robot. She recommends the French model that prints the translator’s name on the book cover alongside with that of the author, wondering whether in our country ignorance or commercial criteria guided a different choice. I. Mavrodin argues this

against the background of the poor pay (Mavrodin, 2006, pp. 23-24) which A. Ralian also frowned upon in her writings and (radio) interviews (Ralian, 2021).

A test for the translator of literature is to see if s/he loses his or her innocence as s/he advances in the process, gaining the 'science' of it and becoming more and more aware of what s/he is doing; the reader needs to be made familiar with the translation, not distanced from it (in the Translation Studies logic of foreignizing versus domesticating) and neologisms have to be avoided; Proust is a good instance to be provided here, according to Mavrodin, because it forced the Romanian sentences to strange labyrinthic turns and even shocked French readers (Mavrodin, 2006, pp. 26-27). With respect to Stendhal, she argued that a translation should not be embellished, which is a matter of paradigm shift, anyway, particularly since local colour is scarce in *Le rouge et le noir/ Roșu și negru/ The Red and the Black* (pp. 29-30).

For I. Mavrodin, the relationship between an author and his or her translator was an impossible one meant for failure, where compromise was king because the relativity of translation pertaining to the different structure of languages and their sonority; in the same hermeneutic stance, it is argued that the author does not let the translator do his/ her job, constantly perturbing him/ her via translation and its linguistic and literary system which can only result in failure; furthermore, the translator's role is not to answer the questions of the reader, explaining what the author meant in the source text, but should only question the text to translate (Mavrodin, 2006, pp. 32-34).

If the original text is reality and translation just a sensible appearance pretending to be real, a beautiful illusion that works for a while then needs replacing by another one, self-translation implies more freedom and one is tempted to rewrite the text, making the original a simple pretext, only a bilingual edition limiting this (pp. 38-39); I. Mavrodin gave the examples of Cioran and Beckett whose entire works could be regarded as a great act of self-translation (p. 40) similar to recent research on contemporary writers drawing on her where bilingualism had a say (e.g. Eiben on Dumitru Tsepeneag and Felicia Mihali, 2017, p. 151).

The duty and work of a writer are those of a translator, too, argued I. Mavrodin, departing from Proust (Mavrodin, 2006, p. 46), an author first translated in periodicals from the editions of works published during his life and then from various posthumous editions of an original that constantly circulated until a complete edition came out (Constantinescu, 2020, p. 388); the amateur is no match to the true artist who stands out and goes beyond the ordinary through a rapport of analogy similarly to causality in the world of science (Mavrodin, 2006, p. 48). When translating a masterpiece (like *Du côté de chez Swann/ În căutarea timpului pierdut. Swann/ Remembrance of Things Past. Swann's Way*), one enters another type of knowledge which is an immediate one, acutely sensorial and global, feeling the resistance of the material, successive steps in which the treacherous 'feeling of the language' is of no use; there are slippery grounds, nauseous perfumes, the translator breathes like an asthmatic, there is torment and ecstasy in every sentence, measurement by a grammatical compass until the spirit breaks towards the understanding of the text. For I. Mavrodin, Proust's masterpiece is an encounter with perfection which equals a fight against heterogeneity, something exhaustive meant to unify what is real (Mavrodin, 2006, pp. 77-78).

For translation to work as form of reciprocal knowledge and overcome the centre-margin/ periphery complex (which leads to either overvaluing or undervaluing), it needs to be come out at a (reputed) publishing house and be disseminated in the receiving cultural space, conditions that are difficult to fulfil for a minor culture and language like the Romanian one; the centre reflects its image in the periphery or margin from the perspective of translation, roles that can change, the margin challenging the centre (Mavrodin, 2006, pp. 49-50) in various theories, the Polysystem one, included.

Patience is key for the artist and the translator, it neighbours monotony which has its artistic specificity, too; in his/ her patience, a translator needs to be close to infinity yet know when to stop without questioning the reason why. Drawing on Flaubert's work whose torments are well known (Fr: *les affaires du style*), Mavrodin assesses that paradox between freedom and patience is required by the modern translator caught in-between other issues of alterity and otherness (Mavrodin, 2006, pp. 90-91).

Talking less than Ralian about her travels in her work, Mavrodin nonetheless accounts for a French-Romanian festival she went to in Bretagne that was meant to show our art under all its shapes in France. The author mentions the visits she paid to libraries, bookshops, schools that were interested in Romania despite not being familiar with our major writers (Eminescu, Caragiale, Creangă, Sadoveanu, Arghezi, Țepeneag, etc.). She wondered whether the phenomenon was related to a late translation of Romanian authors in France that were mainly distributed in our country and not the French cultural space or others, an inconvenient truth that needed accepting (Mavrodin, 2006, pp. 100-101).

I. Mavrodin also speaks about a restricted zone that has been gradually conquered since 2000, Romanian literature creating a discourse it lacked before through translations from Henry Miller and Sade; if A. Ralian translated the former by disinhibiting herself and France classicised and studied the latter, I. Mavrodin would turn down a translation from a popular contemporary French author because of its explicit register despite the challenge (Mavrodin, 2006, pp. 107-108). She compares the translation of Caragiale's plays into French with the invention of a new language, an achievement by Monica Lovinescu and Eugene Ionescu's version where adaptation was needed (Mavrodin, 2006, pp. 126-127). Overcoming the postulate of untranslatability, we are left with translatability which is required by text pragmatics in the case of poetry, as well, a rare and felicitous instance being Marin Sorescu's *Hârtie/ L'ouragan de papier* rendered in French by Alain Bousquet, claims I. Mavrodin (Mavrodin, 2006, p. 142).

#### 4. Conclusion

Antoaneta Ralian and Irina Mavrodin whose contribution to literary translation in our country stands out as major achievement for the reception of English and French culture, respectively, were very different in style and some of their reflections on the translation process. The former travelled much and rejected theory, the latter was also an academic and embraced it, linking it to practice and continuing professional development. Their translations and thought on the topic continue to inspire researchers and practitioners, hence the large number of studies published on them. If A. Ralian believed that the translator was a representative of the author in translation who needed recreation in the target text, a neighbour to love, appropriate and see the world through his or her eyes, for I. Mavrodin, the translator had to be a (meta)author, a poetician in a special relation with the source and target texts, an ingenious strategist of the translation's reception s/he circulated. Moreover, with respect to the relation(ship)s with authors, A. Ralian had the possibility to meet many of the ones she translated and benefit from their expertise, unlike I. Mavrodin who spoke of voices past whose remembrance is only available to us and their translators through memoirs, notes, etc. (as in the case of Proust and classics). When traveling to fairs abroad, her experience was close to culture shock, the French-Romanian connection leaving her a bitter taste. The translator's invisibility, as argued by Venuti in theory, is something that marked both A. Ralian and I. Mavrodin; if the former acted under the influence of censorship and became visible during the communist years when she deleted passages from the authors she rendered into Romanian (Thackeray, Lawrence, Joyce), the latter recommended for the translator to be visible in the sense of his/

her presence on the translated book's cover (following the French model) and in cultural periodicals in reviews of translations. The translator's invisibility in such magazines would only discourage practitioners whose work is viewed as automatic in the era of machine translation and AI. Last but not least, if Ralian acknowledged she had to disinhibit herself to translate the highly explicit content in Henry Miller's novels, Mavrodin, despite the challenge such an endeavour would entail, refused to render into Romanian such a work from French due to the overt sexual language in it.

### References:

- Bădulescu, D. (2015). Travelling between languages and cultures: In memoriam Antoaneta Ralian. *Linguaculture*, 6(2), 99–105. <https://journal.linguaculture.ro/index.php/home/article/view/72/60>
- Constantinescu, M. (2020). Despre retraducere din perspectiva unei istorii a traducerilor [On retranslation from the perspective of a history of translations]. *Perspectivile și Problemele Integrării în Spațiul European al Cercetării și Educației*, 7(2), 386–391.
- Constantinescu, M. (2017). Reflecția traductologică mavrodiniană: Între practico-teoria traducerii și poetica/poietica traducerii [Mavrodin's translational reflection: Between the practico-theory of translation and the poetics/poetics of translation]. In G. Badea-Lungu & N. Obrocea (Eds.), *Studii de traductologie românească. I. Discurs traductiv, discurs metatraductiv* (pp. 52–66). Editura Universității de Vest.
- Constantinovici, S. (2017). Irina Mavrodin. În căutarea traducerii perfecte [Irina Mavrodin: In search of the perfect translation]. In G. Badea-Lungu & N. Obrocea (Eds.), *Studii de traductologie românească. I. Discurs traductiv, discurs metatraductiv* (pp. 67–87). Editura Universității de Vest.
- Coresi, D. (1559). *Întrebare creștinească* [A Christian inquiry]. Coresi.
- Costin, C. (2023). O mitologie personală a scrisului: Jurnalul lui Jeni Acterian [A personal mythology of writing: Jeni Acterian's diary]. In C. Dram (Ed.), *Literatură memorialistică* (pp. 75–94). Editura Universității Alexandru Ioan Cuza.
- Doboș, D. (2022). Amintirile traducătorilor: Petre Solomon și Antoaneta Ralian [Translators' memories: Petre Solomon and Antoaneta Ralian]. In O. Ichim (Ed.), *Provocări trecute și prezente în evoluția limbii, literaturii și culturii române* (pp. 515–528). Editura Universității de Vest.
- Eiben, I. N. (2017). *Sur une visibilité de l'autotraducteur: Dumitru Tsepeneag et Felicia Mihali* [On the visibility of the self-translator: Dumitru Tsepeneag and Felicia Mihali]. Editura Universității de Vest.
- Erakovic, B. (2013). The role of translation diaries in the acquisition of theoretical translation concepts at the beginner level. *Professional Communication and Translation Studies*, 6(1-2), 149–156. [https://sc.upt.ro/images/cwattachments/118\\_3f59dd2697d460965421a3fbe805c619.pdf](https://sc.upt.ro/images/cwattachments/118_3f59dd2697d460965421a3fbe805c619.pdf)
- Genette, G. (2017). *Paratexts: Thresholds of interpretation* (J. E. Lewin, Trans.; R. Macksey, Foreword). Cambridge University Press.

- Gorovei, Ș. S. (2003). Pre-memorialiști, pseudo-memorialiști [Pre-memorialists, pseudo-memorialists]. In B. Crețu, O. Ichim, & M.-R. Clim (Eds.), *Memorialistica românească: Între documentul istoric și obiectul estetic* (pp. 33–57). Editura Universității Alexandru Ioan Cuza.
- Hăisan, D. (2019). Portret de traducător: Antoaneta Ralian/Portrait de traducteur: Antoaneta Ralian. [Portrait of a translator: Antoaneta Ralian]. In *Atelier de traduction*, hors série: *O sută de ani de traduceri în limba română/Cent ans de traductions en langue roumaine* (pp. 73–92). Editura Universității Ștefan cel Mare.
- Ionescu, A. (2014). *Romanian Joyce: From hostility to hospitality*. Peter Lang.
- Kovačević, B. (2015). *(Self)translation and censorship: A study based on diaries of Jasmina Tešanović* [Doctoral dissertation]. Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona. <https://aplicaciones.ciencia.gob.es/teseo/#/tesis/O394361/detalle>
- Lejeune, P. (2009). *On diary* (J. D. Popkin & J. Rak, Eds.; K. Durnin, Trans.). University of Hawaii Press.
- Lungu Badea, G. (2005). *Tendențe în cercetarea traductologică*. Editura Universității de Vest.
- Mavrodin, I. (2006). *Despre traducere: Literal și în toate sensurile* [On translation, literally and in all senses]. Scrisul Românesc.
- Nicolaescu, C. (2023). The invisible world of literature and its interpretation. *Cogito – Multidisciplinary Research Journal*, 1, 181–189. <https://www.cceol.com/search/article-detail?id=1193404>
- Nord, C. (1991) *Text Analysis in Translation. Theory, Method, and Didactic Application of a Model for Translation-Oriented Text Analysis* (C. Nord & P. Sparrow, Trans.). Rodopi.
- Pappel, T., & Falk T. (2012). Study diaries in translation education at Tallinn University. *Eesti Rakenduslingvistika Ühingu aastaraamat* [Yearbook of the Estonian Association for Applied Linguistics], 8, 185–194. <https://www.cceol.com/search/viewpdf?id=254083>
- Paraschivescu, R. (2011). *Toamna decanei: Convorbiri cu Antoaneta Ralian* [The dean's autumn: Conversations with Antoaneta Ralian]. Humanitas.
- Pașcalău, R. (2025). Translation – A bridge between cultures in transition. *Incursiuni în imaginar*, 16(2), 209–223. <https://doi.org/10.29302/InImag.2025.16.2.10>
- Radio România Cultural. (2021, October 12). *Antoaneta Ralian. Traducerea ca artă* [Antoaneta Ralian. Translation as art]. Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dm9tzemDdJk&t=978s>
- Ralian, A. (2016). *Nu cred în sfârșitul lumii: Articole, amintiri, interviuri* [I don't believe in the end of the world: Articles, memories, interviews]. Editura Art.
- Ralian, A. (2014). *Amintirile unei nonagenare: călătoriile mele, scriitorii mei* [Memories of a nonagenarian: My travels, my writers]. Humanitas.
- Roșioru, M. (2018, September 30). *Întoarcerea traducătorului* [The translator's return]. Roșioru.ro. <https://rosioru.ro/2018/09/30/intoarcerea-traducatorului/>
- Șimonca, O. (2015, October 27). *Toată literatura lumii este una pregnant erotică: Interviu cu Antoaneta Ralian, realizat în 2005* [All the world's literature is intensely erotic: Interview with Antoaneta Ralian, realized in 2005]

Ralian]. *Observator cultural*, (800). <https://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/toata-literatura-lumii-este-una-pregnant-erotica-interviu-cu-antoaneta-ralian-realizat-in-2005/>

Șimonca, O. (2014, May 15). *Visez foarte mult și foarte frumos: Interviu cu Antoaneta Ralian* [I dream a lot and very beautifully: Interview with Antoaneta Ralian]. *Observator cultural*, (722). <https://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/visez-foarte-mult-si-foarte-frumos-interviu-cu-antoaneta-ralian-2/>

Venuti, L. (2008). *The translator's invisibility: A history of translation*. Routledge.

Venuti, L. (2000). Translation, community, utopia. In L. Venuti (Ed.), *The translation studies reader*, pp. 468–488. Routledge.