

*Translation Studies*

**ROBINSON CRUSOE  
RETOLD AND RETRANSLATED INTO ROMANIAN (1835–2023):  
FROM MIMESIS TO TELESIS<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract**

Our attempt to construe the ways in which translation redefines texts for children is based on a corpus (i.e., Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* translated into Romanian) which spans three centuries. Our conjectures are based on an in-depth analysis of a selection of 11 out of 36 identifiable Romanian versions, the main criteria for selection being their availability but also their relevance to the various periods in the history of translations and to the history of the Romanian language (which often went hand in hand). The selection goes accordingly from 1835 (the probable date of the first translation of Crusoe's story – rather than text – into Romanian) up until 2023 (when the latest version came on the market), with equally interesting editions (published in 1899, 1900, 1908, 1943, 2017, 2018, and 2022, respectively) in-between. The aspects we examine are the relationship between translation and adaptation; the reasons behind retranslation (among which linguistic change, ideological change, corrective change); the ways in which retranslation has redefined *Robinson Crusoe*; the (inverse) relationship between the two basic purposes modulating (translated) children's literature (namely to teach and to entertain). Since our selection covers three centuries, they are tagged according to the prevailing ideology regarding the translation of children's literature (e.g. translation norms, translation practice) at the time. Therefore, we consider nineteenth-century translations to be largely governed by mimesis, the twentieth century could be characterized by synopsis and meiosis, and the dawn of the twenty-first century does point to a sort of effervescence which will hopefully move towards telesis (if intelligently planned and directed). For a transnational approach, we contrast our case-study with the situation in France (which represented a model and an influence in various key moments of the Romanian translation history) and the situation in the Republic of Moldova (which was, in turn, influenced by the Romanian situation).

**Keywords:** (re)translation (history); *Robinson Crusoe*; imitation; abridgement; paratext.

## 1. Introduction

A paragon of *crossover literature*<sup>2</sup>, *Robinson Crusoe* has known a wide range of (con)versions and variations through the centuries, and translation has definitely had a crucially

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<sup>2</sup> “‘Crossover books’, those works that begin as titles for adults and then become the reading matter of children. Classics such as Swift's (1726) *Gulliver's Travels* and Defoe's (1719) *Robinson Crusoe* figure prominently in the history of children's reading...” (Stevenson, 2011, p. 181).

transformative role in reinventing it (whether via retelling, adapting, abridging, euphemising, illustrating, dramatising, or digitising it). The present research sets out to map a (re)translation<sup>3</sup> history of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* in Romania (occasionally contrasting it with the situation in the Republic of Moldova and in France), in an attempt to deduce some discernible patterns and idiosyncrasies in retranslation for children in general.

Our attempt to construe the ways in which translation redefines texts for children is based on a corpus (i.e., Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* translated into Romanian) which spans three different centuries; more to the point, it goes accordingly from 1835 (the probable date of the first Romanian version – which is the translation of an adaptation of Defoe's text) up until 2023 (when the latest – to our knowledge – version came on the market).

The panoramic look at the Romanian translation history of *Robinson Crusoe* is based on a thorough investigation of 11 of the 36 editions identified; in addition, a similar examination of the French and the Moldovan history of the novel was carried out with a view to placing the Romanian phenomenon in a larger (be it still limited) context which could afford a better understanding of the drives and mechanisms of retranslation.

Our research aims are as follows:

- outlining the translation history of *Robinson Crusoe* as a complex process in which adaptation is interlaced with translation, and therefore deserves to be taken into account as part and parcel of the phenomenon of retranslation
- screening the reasons behind retranslation of a children's classic such as *Robinson Crusoe* in their respective historical evolution (the necessity for linguistic change being gradually replaced with a need for ideological then corrective change)
- relying on conceptual metaphors (*mimesis*, *synopsis*, *meiosis*, *anthesis*, *telesis*) to encapsulate the most significant trends which have regulated translation norms in Romania since 1835 up to the present
- gauging the (inverse) relationship between the two basic purposes modulating (translated) children's literature (namely *to teach* and *to entertain*).

We are equally interested in examining the ways in which retranslation has redefined *Robinson Crusoe* (i.e., which interpretative possibilities of the source text are favoured by which retranslation era). To this end, we will refer to Thomas Keymer's enumeration of labels that have been attached to Defoe's text in the Introduction to the 2007 Oxford edition of the novel:

The novel rewards analysis as many things – an exotic adventure story; a study of solitary consciousness; a parable of sin, atonement, and redemption; a myth of economic individualism; a displaced or encoded autobiography; an allegory of political defeat; a prophecy of imperial expansion – yet none of these explanations exhausts it. (Keymer, 2007, p. i)

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<sup>3</sup> *Retranslation* is often used to designate *back-translation* (i.e., a word-for-word translation of a TT back into the SL, usually with a view to checking the adequacy of the translation – see, in this respect, Jones' 1997 book, in which retranslation is seen exclusively as a checking device in translation). On the other hand, plenty of researchers equate retranslation with *indirect translation*, also called *intermediate*, *mediated*, or *second-hand translation*: "A term used to denote the procedure whereby a text is not translated directly from an original ST, but via an intermediate translation in another language." (Shuttleworth & Cowie, 2014, p. 76; see also Palumbo, 2009, p. 62) In the present paper, however, we will use *retranslation* to designate a new translation into the same target language (in this particular case, Romanian) of a previously translated text (in this particular case, *Robinson Crusoe*). Incidentally, the history of (re)translations of Robinson Crusoe's story into Romanian happens to include not only indirect translations (usually via French or German) *per se*, but also indirect translations of adaptations of the original text. Retranslation is, therefore, the larger term here, which includes indirect translation (rather than the other way around). As for *back-translation*, it is not used conceptually but practically throughout the paper, not as a checking device but for the sake of linguistic uniformity (all citations in Romanian being translated into English, between brackets, by the author of the paper).

Terms like *mimesis*, *synopsis*, *meiosis*, *anthesis*, and *telesis* will be employed as some kind of compendious metaphors meant to suggest and capture the main features of the phenomenon of retranslation in a particular period of time, while carefully situating the translations in the context of their production.

From the wide range of meanings carried by *mimesis* (as derived from its very etymology – the Greek word *mīmeisthai* [to imitate], and as conceptualized by Plato, Aristotle, Auerbach, or Girard), we single out the following aspects:

- *mimesis* (just like retranslation) is inherently a matter of repetition with a difference
- while it may not be a perfect synonym of “imitation,” it does point to imitation (in the sense of re-presenting rather than of copying)
- the most important element in the thematic complex of *mimesis* is the imitation of role models and the reliance on mediators to help us understand what we desire (see Potolsky, 2006; Girard’s *Mimetic Theory*, 2001; 2017)

In the present paper, *mimesis* will be used interchangeably with *mimeticism* and *imitation*, and *mimetic* will be used interchangeably with *imitative*. *Mimesis* is characteristic, one way or another, of the entire translation history of *Robinson Crusoe* under consideration here. Various instances of *mimesis*, detectable in the Romanian translation history of *Robinson Crusoe*, are classified into cultural, textual, and editorial.

*Synopsis* and *meiosis* will be used in relation to the twentieth-century retranslations (in order to encapsulate the propensity towards retranslation via abridgement, on the one hand, and towards privileging just one side of the novel and producing purified, bowdlerized, censored versions, in accordance with the policy and the politics of the time).

*Anthesis* (which in Botany designates the period of opening of a flower) will be used here to refer to the b(l)ooming publishing industry oriented towards young readers after the 1990s. *Telesis*, on the other hand, defined as the attainment of desired ends by the application of intelligent human effort, summarizes our hope for a future direction in the evolution of translated children’s literature, based on progress that is intelligently (not programmatically) planned and directed.

While there is no shortage of studies on *Robinson Crusoe*’s (re)translatability in various languages (e.g. Kristiina Taivalkoski-Shilov’s 2015 “Friday in Finnish: A Character’s and (Re)Translators’ Voices in Six Finnish Retranslations of Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*”; Veronica A. Razumovskaya’s 2018 “Translatability of *Robinson Crusoe*: 300 Years Adventure in Time and Space”), there is still little research on a transnational and transcultural level, which motivates our own research in the field.

## 2. Material and Methodology

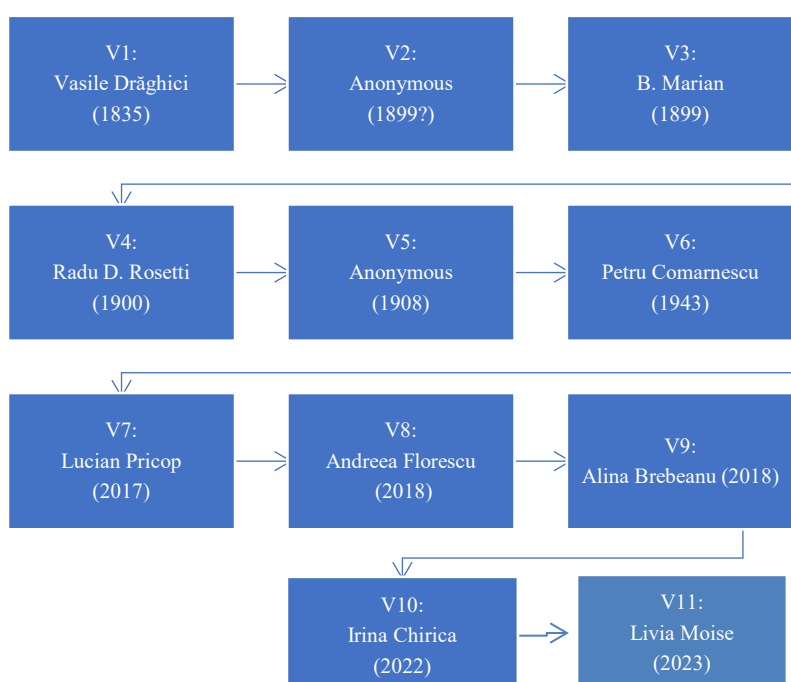
The present research uses a diachronic corpus which spans a wide historical time frame (1835–2023). For practical reasons, we divided the Romanian translation history of *Robinson Crusoe* into three relatively distinct periods, loosely termed: the nineteenth century, the twentieth century, and the twenty-first century. As with any periodization, this, too, supposes osmotic communication between the eras. Furthermore, by “nineteenth century” we understand the interval between 1835 (when the first story about Crusoe appeared in Romanian) and 1900; by “twentieth century” we understand the interval between 1901 and 1989 (in the vein of Eric Hobsbawm’s 1994 *The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991* – in Romania, too, there should be a clear-cut distinction between the epoch before 1989 – the year the Communism regime was overthrown – and the one after 1990 – characterized by a considerably more democratic attitude to reading practices, children’s literature, translation and the book market); by “twenty-

first century” we therefore understand the interval between 1990 and 2023 (the date of the latest known *Robinson Crusoe* edition in Romanian).

“nineteenth century”	1835–1900
“twentieth century”	1901–1989
“twenty-first century”	1990–2023

**Table 1.** *Translation History. Periodisation*

There are 36 Romanian texts (versions of *Robinson Crusoe*) which we were able to identify and procure; after an overall (textual and paratextual) analysis, we selected 11 translations which we contrasted with the original text as well as with one another. The 11 versions (V1–V11) are presented in the figure below (with the name of the translator and the year of the publication).



**Figure 1.** *11 Romanian Versions of Robinson Crusoe Analysed Contrastively*

The date is not clearly indicated in the case of V2 and, despite the fact that the Romanian Academy Library Catalogue indicates “1892” we believe it may actually be 1899. Our conjecture is based on some of the illustrations in the volume which bear the following signature: “F. Schirato ’99”; moreover, the volume contains pictures which purportedly reproduce (or imitate) Berwald – a painter, graphic artist and illustrator born in Berlin, who indeed illustrated a German translation of *Robinson Crusoe* published a few years later than 1892. Rodica Dimitriu also points, in a 2006 study, to 1899 as a possible date (Dimitriu, 2006, p. 75).

The 11 versions presented above were selected according to the following criteria:

- their availability (most nineteenth-century versions – and some of those published in the twenty-first – being completely out of reach)
- their relevance to the various periods in the history of translations (the nineteenth century and the 1990s being characterized by “relaxation” of translation norms, in stark contrast with the restrictiveness of the mid-twentieth-century)

- their representativity in terms of target language evolution, the progress of the Romanian literary language often going hand in hand with the fluctuations in the history of translations; thus, the nineteenth- and twentieth-century versions point to different stages in the evolution of the literary language (from the Cyrillic script – 1835 – to the Latin alphabet – 1899; from using apostrophes to signal elisions – the 1800s – to employing hyphens – the 1940s) as well as to different ideological trends and cultural norms (reflected in the more or less prominent figure of the translator among the agents of translation: a salient paratextual presence in the nineteenth and mid-twentieth century, yet a more subdued involvement in the twenty-first).

Since the history of translations of *Robinson Crusoe* is, in Romania as elsewhere, to some extent, indistinguishable from the history of adaptations of Crusoe's story, we included among the 36 target texts not only complete translations (which in reality would only be 9: Petru Comarnescu's 1943 translation and subsequent revised versions; Al. Lascarov-Moldovanu's (1945) version; Aretia Dicu's (2002); Magdalena Kis' (2007); Cristina Nicolaescu's (2008); Alexandra Petrea's (2008); Lucian Pricop's (2017), Irina Chirica's (2022), and Livia Moise's (2023)), but also (slightly) adapted texts.

As a classic of world literature, but also a classic of children's literature, *Robinson Crusoe* yielded, as expected, many types of adaptation. Leaving aside transmediation and intersemiotic translation (e.g. stage adaptations, films, radio plays, graphic novels etc.), which are fairly common but not our concern here, the dynamics of *Robinson Crusoe* retranslation is interlaced with adaptation in the sense of:

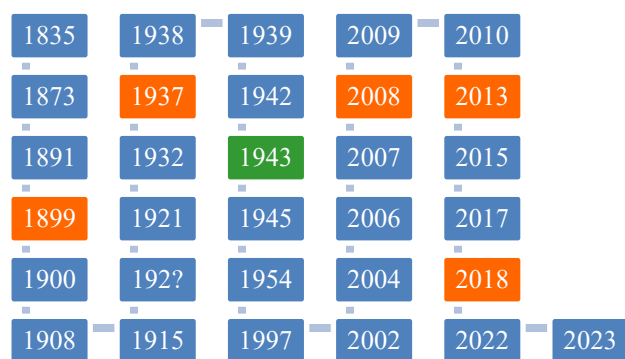
1. adapting while translating (i.e., operating textual, linguistic, and stylistic changes, like simplifying, euphemising, abridging for a young target reader)
2. translating adaptations of Defoe's novel – an (in)famous case being that of Joachim Heinrich Campe's adaptation (1779).

The reasons why we include translations of Campe's version in our corpus have to do with two main facts. First, for many years, Romanians (and the French, too, before them) were convinced Campe's story was the original one; the first Romanian translation (1835) mentions Campe as the author of Crusoe's story. Then, Campe actually largely preserves the plot and the most important details, and just operates some narratological alterations. Thus, while Defoe's book was written as a continuous, long first-person narrative with no divisions into chapters, Campe's *Robinson der Jüngere* contains a frame story (that of a father telling it to a small group of children living just outside the gates of Hamburg) and condenses the story significantly. Should we leave Campe aside, then the first translation of Defoe's text occurred in 1891, and the first complete translation appeared in 1943.

Here is the diachronic distribution of the 36 Romanian versions of *Robinson Crusoe*. In orange are the years in which multiple versions of Crusoe's story appeared in Romania. Some of these versions have been reprinted over the years, the most reedited version being the one in green (Petru Comarnescu<sup>4</sup> being the translator).

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<sup>4</sup> Petru Comarnescu (1905–1970) was a Romanian literary and art critic who translated extensively from English and Russian.



**Figure 2.** 36 Romanian Versions of *Robinson Crusoe*

For the purposes of our transnational analysis, we also identified and looked into 6 versions published in the Republic of Moldova as well as 210 versions published in France, as follows:

- 5 (the eighteenth century)
- 45 (the nineteenth century)
- 131 (the twentieth century)
- 29 (the twenty-first century).

The research design is qualitative, with occasional quantitative touches, and empirical, as it focuses on the observable aspects of translation. 11 versions from the Romanian corpus, 2 from the Moldovan corpus, and 2 from the French corpus have been analysed in full detail. Thus, real-life examples of the 15 translated texts have been compared against their source texts. Besides these bilingual parallel corpora, translators' biographical details have equally been studied with a view to ascertaining their agency.

### 3. An Outline of the Nineteenth-Century Romanian Corpus: Mimesis

The year 1835 marked a high point for the appearance of Crusoe's story in Romanian. It was not Defoe's text but Campe's adaptation that first reached Romanians. The translator, Vasile Drăghici – a Moldavian writer granted the title of boyar later in life – had been working on it ever since 1817, but it was only in 1835 that he plucked up the courage to finally print it. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Romanian state was barely in the making (it consisted of two principalities – Moldavia and Wallachia – which united in 1859). Moreover, at the time of the first translation of *Robinson Crusoe* (i.e., 1835), the Romanian language was still in the process of settling down and texts were written in Cyrillic (the Latin alphabet was introduced in the United Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia only in 1862).

Therefore, the 1835 edition – written in Cyrillic – is the one introducing Crusoe to the Romanian readers. It is highly readable – when transliterated – and extremely interesting from a paratextual point of view, as it contains a variety of elements (a dedication, a foreword, a translator's note, two illustrations, 19 encyclopaedic notes) which testify to the great responsibility the translator felt he had as an educator. The translator-turned-editor takes a lot of time to hone his message about the role of duty, moderation, and frugality in one's life. Behind his occasionally prescriptive tone, there is a paideia-like vision of upbringing and cultural training in the widest sense possible.

In all the other versions published in the nineteenth century the dual addressee is preserved and the concern to appeal to the parent as well as to the child-reader remains a must in both text and paratext. The translator's primary role was to instruct and to provide (some knowledge) rather than offer a dramatic story or insights into the characters' behaviour.

Translation thus proved vital in building a national language and literature while enjoying high status, especially when undertaken by prominent figures in public culture. Just like nineteenth-century British literary translators (described by Pym), Romanian translators were “either authors in their own right or were attached to writerly institutions, mainly manifested in small periodicals, where they operated as cultural intermediaries on more than one level” (Pym, 2000, p. 73). Just like the French and other nations in Europe, Romanians thought it right to translate Campe’s version alongside Defoe’s.

The renderings of Crusoe’s story in this period seem to exhibit what may be called “liberal norms” with respect to text integrality. While Drăghici’s text is markedly imitative of Campe’s style, all the others are not necessarily stylistically imitative, yet they are in terms of the message they are supposed to convey, as translators tend to reiterate the same sermon in both text and paratext, hoping the readers would react mimetically.

#### **4. An Outline of the Twentieth-Century Romanian Corpus: Synopsis/ Meiosis**

Petru Comarnescu’s version (first published in 1943, then revised quite a few times) is the first complete translation and by far the most reprinted version in the Romanian translation history of *Robinson Crusoe* (at least 20 times so far, by our count). His rendering is largely non-imitative, as he strives for a text which reads as naturally as possible. His is without a doubt what can be termed a *canonical translation*<sup>5</sup>. On the other hand, mention must be made of the fact that the wavering status of Daniel Defoe in the Romanian literary polysystem and the claws of censorship coerced Comarnescu (an art critic and a journalist) into presenting Defoe in rather unflattering terms in his translator’s notes and rephrasing parts of his translation several times, in order to suit the ideology of the time.

This century, like the one before, continues to see anonymous translations and the practice of translating Defoe’s text directly continues to go along with translating adaptations of Defoe’s text. If in the nineteenth century, it was Campe’s version that reigned supreme, in the twentieth, there is Paul Reboux’s version (another example of the French influence on the reception of Crusoe in Romania). Reboux’s reworking of Defoe’s text caught the attention of J. Leonard, who transposed it into Romanian in 1937.

The twentieth century could be characterized by *synopsis* (abridgement being the prevalent translation strategy), but also by *meiosis* (understatement being the main litotic mechanism translators resorted to, especially during the Communist era, i.e., 1947–1989).

#### **5. An Outline of the Twenty-First-Century Romanian Corpus: Anthesis/ Telesis**

The historical (political) reasons are definitely a major factor impacting retranslation. We refer especially to the communist period in Romania (1947–1989), with its inherent censorship, and the post-revolutionary age (1989–2000), with its legal vacuum and its self-regulating relaxation that encouraged dubious experiments in (re)translation and a soaring rate of retranslations due, to a large extent, to copyright issues, which, in time, took care of themselves.

One of the paradoxes of retranslation in Romania is the fact that communist editions continue to be found side by side with new editions. This happens because older translations

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<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, Antoine Berman’s *Pour une critique des traductions*: “...une *traduction canonique* [...] va s’imposer et parfois arrêter pour longtemps le cycle des retraductions.” [A canonic translation will impose itself and sometimes interrupt the cycle of retranslations for a long period of time.] (Berman, 1995, p. 75, translation and emphasis mine). No other Romanian version of *Robinson Crusoe* appeared after Comarnescu’s 1943 text (revised in the 1960s) until the 1990s.

are generally considered more expressive. Işıklar Kocak and Erkul Yağcı's description of the Turkish situation happens to perfectly fit the Romanian situation, too.

The reasons why old translations are sought after is the fact that they were translated by writer-translators who had a perfect command of Turkish. Old translators tried to create more natural translations. Therefore, these translations are read as fluently as they were written in Turkish. But in contemporary translations, the originality of the work is preserved as far as possible according to the standards of the translation industry in the world. This results in problems especially in fluency. (Kocak & Yağcı, 2019, p. 138)

It is why Petru Comarnescu's version is still reedited today.

As surprising as it might seem, anonymous translations and translated adaptations are still common in the twenty-first century. Deanna McFadden's retelling was translated in 2013 by Răzvan Năstase, and Ian Graham's reworking was translated by Mirella Acsente in 2015.

The dawn of the century does point to a sort of *anthesis* (should we take the b(l)ooming publishing industry into account). Didactic imperatives of all sorts (e.g. inclusion in the recommended bibliography for schoolchildren) have been instrumental in shaping an immediate necessity topos which triggered an unprecedented editorial engagement. Most of the new versions were apparently translated for purely commercial reasons, with little regard for accuracy or for the original author's image in the target culture. Thus, the truth of the matter is that the increase in retranslation (as far as *Robinson Crusoe* is concerned) is not as much the result of the increase of a renewed interest in Defoe's works as the mercantilist logic of editorial marketing.

We observe, on the other hand, a dramatic change in terms of "translator profile" (i.e., the language teacher slowly but surely taking the place of the typical translator for children, who historically used to be either an unknown – anonymous – or a well-known penman), which is a first step towards *telesis* (reaching desired ends by applying programmatic effort into developing the area of (translated) children's literature, rather than leaving it completely to randomness or consumerism).

## 6. Transnational Approach: Comparison with France and Moldova

The reason we chose to compare the reception in Romanian with that in Moldova and France has to do with the following facts: on the one hand, due to France being a cultural role model for Romania for centuries, the situation in France was bound to influence the reception in Romania; on the other hand, Moldova, as former Romanian territory, with Romanian as the official language, was bound, in turn, to be influenced by the Romanian reception of *Robinson Crusoe*.

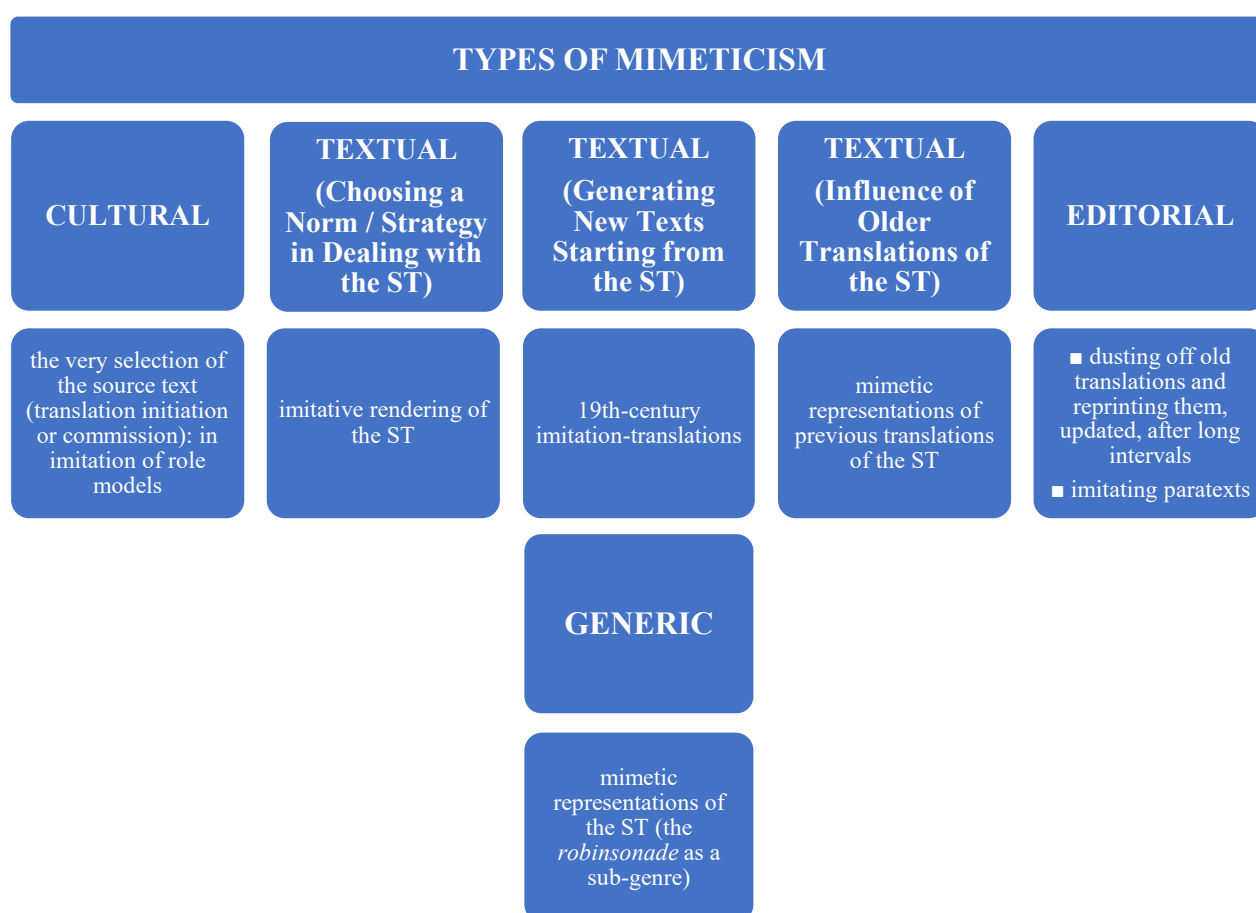
In France, *Robinson Crusoe* was translated very soon after the original text was published (namely, in 1720–1721). In the eighteenth century, a lot of adaptations (including Campe's, in 1785, by A. S. D'Arnex) appear on the market, competing with translations proper. The nineteenth century stands out from a paratextual point of view, with editions which lay emphasis on explanatory prefaces. In 1836, Pétrus Borel comes with a new version, one which would subsequently be reedited dozens of times. The preferred illustrator was, statistically speaking, J. J. Grandville (about a quarter of the books). Nowadays we notice a tendency towards full text versions (which is present in Romania, too), while coexisting with adaptations for very young readers (3 and up).

In 1940, 1955, and 1970, when Moldova was still part of the Soviet Union, three Romanian versions appeared (in Cyrillic). The 1940 and 1955 translations are anonymous, but

the one published in 1970 (and reedited in 1976) is attributed to Raisa Lungu. Another thing the Romanian and the Moldovan reception have in common is the fact that they shared some versions: for example, Petru Comarnescu's was issued by publishers from Kishinev: Litera Internațional (1997, 2002) and Prut Internațional (2008, 2021); also, Irina Chirica's text was issued in Kishinev before it was issued in Romania (2018, 2022); before Irina Chirica, in 2011 Alexandra Fenoghen produced a new version for Moldova, for the same publisher (ARC, Kishinev).

## 7. The Romanian State of Facts. Analysis

When it comes to the issue at hand (i.e., the (re)translation history of *Robinson Crusoe* in Romania(n), while also reflecting, to a considerable extent, the retranslation phenomenon in Romania in general), we may point out several types of *mimesis*/ mimeticism, as shown in the figure below:



**Figure 3.** *Types of Mimeticism Characterising the Reception of Robinson Crusoe in Romania*

Mimeticism may be identified at three levels; cultural, textual, and editorial. First of all, the very selection of the text to be translated (i.e., Daniel Defoe's novel) is mimetic, in that Romanians have always tried to align their literary trends with those of Western European countries. In 1835, especially, when *Robinson Crusoe* appeared for the first time in Romanian, the Romanian literary language was still very much in the making. With a literature of its own waiting to be established, Romania could initially do nothing but look to older ones for ready-

made models. It was mimesis that ensured cultural survival. For centuries, the French polysystem (given the common lineage from the Romance languages) and the German polysystem (given the vicinity of the Austro-Hungarian empire, later Austria-Hungary) were beacons throughout the nineteenth century for the Romanian authorities and men of culture. With little to no knowledge of English, they imported every single English and American classic via indirect translation, based on French (occasionally German) intermediate versions. The French had translated *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) soon after the publication of the original (1720–1721), then Joachim Heinrich Campe's *Robinson der Jüngere, zur angenehmen und nützlichen Unterhaltung für Kinder* [The new Robinson Crusoe: Designed for youth] (1779) was turned into French as early as 1785. Vasile Drăghici's rendition of Campe's rewriting (which he started in 1817 and ultimately printed in 1835) was definitely the result of the Franco-German ascendancy.

There are several types of textual mimeticism identifiable in the Romanian translation history of *Robinson Crusoe*. One of them regards choosing the norm or global strategy in dealing with this source text [henceforth ST] which is Robinson Crusoe's tale. As it happens in a retranslation series, some of the versions represent the source text "imitatively" – sometimes only at the macro-level, with titles, section divisions, and integrity of the source text maintained as such; at other times, at micro-linguistic level as well, "notably through the presence of ST words and phrases in the TT" – as put by Siobhan Brownlie (2003, p. 122). This choice, largely corresponding to *adequacy* in Gideon Toury's description of the "initial norm" (1995), or to Lawrence Venuti's *foreignization* (1995), is reflected in a quarter (i.e., a total of 9 texts) of the 36 Romanian versions of *Robinson Crusoe* we were able to identify. At other times, *mimesis* applies only structurally to parts of the text. For instance, in most of the renderings examined in this study, chapter titles are translated in an imitative manner, while section divisions are retained.

Another instance of textual mimeticism has to do with generating new texts due to the impetus given by Crusoe's story to creativity in both translators and authors. Nineteenth-century Romania was characterized to the extreme by "literary bulimia" (Van Tieghem, 1969, p. 162), which implied indiscriminately devouring literary works – especially translated from or via French – in an effort to recuperate centuries-long lagging. In order to counteract the aimlessness of this endeavour, Romanian men of culture (like Titu Maiorescu<sup>6</sup> or Mihail Kogălniceanu<sup>7</sup>) tried to impose a series of doctrines and guiding selection principles; they also urged Romanian authors to get involved in translation and draw inspiration from it. As a result, all nineteenth-century Romanian belletrists were also occasional translators, which was doubly beneficial: they facilitated access to world literature thereby educating the large public while also honing their own linguistic and literary skills. Conversely, this also allowed for laxity in translation, with very thin boundaries between translation proper and imitation. As a matter of fact, writers-turned-translators delighted in openly admitting that the source texts they relied on incited them to also improvise while translating.<sup>8</sup> In awe with the source text, they used to let their imagination run wild and occasionally departed from the original's letter and added (descriptive or explicative) passages of their own, only to go back to the source and pick the story up where they left off. Nowadays, such "imitations" are considered, along with adaptations, to illustrate peripheral forms of translation (see Levițchi, 1975), yet back then they

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<sup>6</sup> Titu Maiorescu (1840–1917) was a Romanian literary critic and politician with an instrumental role in the advancement of Romanian culture in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

<sup>7</sup> Mihail Kogălniceanu (1817–1891) was a Romanian politician, lawyer, historian, and publicist, one of the most influential public figures of his age.

<sup>8</sup> Poet Alexandru Macedonski (1854–1920), for example, accompanies his translation of Poe's *Metzengerstein* (1887) with the following subtitle: "jumătate tradusă, jumătate imitată" [half translated, half imitated]. Playwright I. L. Caragiale (1852–1912) too produces "imitations" when translating some of Poe's and Perrault's texts.

were considered the norm. Imitative passages can be found in some of Romanian versions of *Robinson Crusoe* published in the nineteenth century (e.g., Barbu Marian's version, published in 1899), as well as in the twentieth (e.g., Sarina Cassvan-Pas' version, published in the 1920s; Moș Ene [pseudonym of Mihail Drumeș]'s 1942 version).

In parallel, another phenomenon was starting to take place: as in many other parts of Europe, a series of reworkings of Crusoe's story appeared, a kind of archontic literature enjoying tremendous popularity. The Romanians, too, have had their own share of robinsonades (e.g., Ion Gorun's *Robinson în Țara Românească (povestire din zilele noastre)* [Robinson in Wallachia. A contemporary story], published in 1904 by "Carol Göbl" Graphic Arts Institute in Bucharest – whose protagonist, Nechifor Pădureleanu, rediscovers himself while rediscovering nature – not on an island, but in an isolated village). Such examples are included under the "generic mimeticism" branch of textual mimeticism.

Yet another illustration of textual mimeticism has to do with parasitising older versions of the ST. With translation ethics virtually non-existent in the nineteenth century, it is no wonder that some of the Romanian versions contain discernible echoes from previous translations (be they in Romanian or in French<sup>9</sup>), which the translators must have consulted. While we cannot speak of plagiarism *per se*, the occasional evidence of retranslations being influenced by previous translations – labelled by Brownlie (2006) as the "haunting" of later retranslations by earlier ones – could be classified as a form of mimeticism, especially when it occurs at the level of layout, not only of the individual phrase.

Lastly, a type of mimeticism we call "editorial" refers to the publishers' habit of dusting old versions off (versions which fared well and aspired to canonicity), updating them (primarily from the point of view of language, register, and style) and bringing them to light again, after half a century, a century, or more. The revitalised versions may or may not acknowledge the first translator's work, depending on the respective translator's symbolic capital: if the latter is convincing enough, the new version flaunts the translator's name; if otherwise, the editor takes over and the translator's name is often downgraded or altogether overlooked. In France, for instance, Pétrus Borel's translation of *Robinson Crusoe* was first published in 1836, then reprinted (slightly or heavily revised) 40 times since. In Romania, Petru Comarnescu's 1943 translation has gone through myriads of transformations (some operated by the translator himself who, depending on the fluctuations in the political regime, rephrased his text to suit the ideology of the time; others operated by editors and publishers after the book market liberalisation which took place in the 1990s – see, for instance, Lucian Pricop's 2017 version, which reproduces *ad litteram* most of Comarnescu's text).

Another type of editorial mimeticism refers to the way publishers saw fit to imitate previous translations of *Robinson Crusoe* from a paratextual point of view. As we have shown in a previous study (see Hăisan, 2024), when translated into Romanian in the nineteenth century, *Robinson Crusoe* would usually be accompanied by prefaces (with an intrinsically pedagogical and ideological design) which predictably do some (or all) of the following:

- offer biographic information on the author (e.g. explain the nobiliary particle *de* in Defoe's name by exposing it as a fraud; dwell in highly derogatory terms on Defoe's failure as a merchant)
- discuss the book at issue (e.g. speak about the enormous success of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*)

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<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, the Romanian version of *Robinson Crusoe* printed (by all accounts) in 1899 in Craiova, by Ralian and Ignat Samitca Institute (anonymous translator), which contains some French names (such as *Jacquot*) and certain turns of phrases which point to French calques, thus to the influence of a French intermediate version.

- quote from Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Émile* (1762) and other authors/philosophers in order to validate *Crusoe* as a fundamental book for children
- present *Robinson Crusoe* as a book written in a style which appeals to both children and grown-ups
- introduce the book as a cautionary tale from which the reader should learn an important lesson regarding austerity in lifestyle and obedience to (parental) authority.

By contrast, the paratext of the Romanian versions published in the twentieth and twenty-first century (with an intrinsically hermeneutical and commercial design) usually does the following:

- put things in perspective (e.g. focus on Defoe as a versatile, prolific writer, and a founding father of the English novel; outline Defoe’s place in English literature as well as in world literature; outline *Robinson Crusoe*’s place among Defoe’s other works; explain the book’s message in terms of colonialism, not only as a survival story)
- briefly describe previous translations and underline the merits of the latest version.

The covers and illustrations of many Romanian versions of Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* also point to mimesis, to varying degrees. 33 out of 36 covers show *Crusoe* on his island, while the illustrations inside the book exhibit similar styles in 26 of the volumes. Moreover, the 1899? Samitca version of *Robinson Crusoe* contains some illustrations which bear the signature “F. Schirato ’99” along pictures which purportedly reproduce (or imitate) German graphic artist Ludwig Berwald.

## 8. Conclusions

After studying the retranslation series of *Robinson Crusoe*’s story in Romania and contrasting it with the one in France and in the Republic of Moldova, we have become more aware than ever that “causes of translation coexist, interact, fuse and merge with each other in complex ways which are open only to probabilistic explanation” (O’Driscoll, 2011, p. 19). Nevertheless, we will present our tentative conclusions below, in tabular form.

First, we will outline the main reasons behind retranslating *Robinson Crusoe* for Romanian children.

Period	Main Reason behind Retranslation	Commentary
the nineteenth century:	linguistic change	Throughout the nineteenth century, the Romanian language went through dramatic transformations (gradually adopting the Latin alphabet, yet with lingering intrusions of Cyrillic script; numerous – and often contradictory – orthographic and grammatical amendments; various calques of other languages; the Latinistic trend etc.), which is why it would be safe to say that retranslation in this period was triggered by linguistic change.
the twentieth century:	ideological change	The successive political regimes and which characterise twentieth-century Romania (e.g. a constitutional monarchy in the former half of the century, then a communist state – between 1947 and 1989 – followed by democracy) had a great impact on the Romanian

		translators and translations. Our in-depth analysis of the <i>Robinson Crusoe</i> editions published in this period reveals the ascendancy ideology had on how translators dealt with issues such as slavery or economic independence. Ideological change would thus be the main factor setting retranslation off.
the twenty-first century:	corrective change	During the last 30 years, the desire to retranslate sprang (should we leave purely commercial reasons aside) from the desire to complete or correct previous versions. In his 2017 translation (reedited in 2018 and 2022), for instance, Lucian Pricop ends his translator's preface with the following words: "This new Romanian version – the first complete translation of the novel – offers the reader the chance to consider another interpretive logic which needs to take into account the enthusiastic and emphatic tone in those paragraphs of the castaway's which are full of theological accumulation and interpretation." <sup>10</sup> (Pricop, 2017, p. 9, our translation). We are therefore considering corrective change as the main factor characterising the last decades.

**Table 2.** *Main Reasons behind Retranslation*

Secondly, we will look into the ways in which retranslation has redefined *Robinson Crusoe* across the centuries, by going back to Keymer's 2007 quotation.

Period	Genres to which <i>Robinson Crusoe</i> was Assimilated	Commentary
the nineteenth century:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ religious parable (focusing on sin, atonement, and redemption, as well as the sanctity of parenthood and the momentousness of parental authority in one's education)</li> <li>▪ cautionary tale</li> </ul>	Presenting Robinson Crusoe as a religious parable or a cautionary tale implied the expectation that the reader should behave mimetically (not as the Crusoe at the beginning of the story – a rebel and a "sinner" – but rather as the Crusoe towards the end of the first series of adventures – repentant, more tolerant, and also thrifter).
the twentieth century:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ a myth of economic individualism</li> <li>▪ an allegory of political defeat</li> <li>▪ tribute to hard work (with tinges of socialist labor morality).</li> </ul>	The political side of Robinson Crusoe, reinterpreted so as to suit Communist ideology, was favoured over other aspects of the book; besides <i>synopsis</i> (abridgement being the prevalent translation strategy), we may also speak of <i>meiosis</i> (understatement being the main litotic mechanism translators resorted to, especially during the Communist era, i.e., 1947–1989).
the twenty-first century:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ an exotic adventure story</li> <li>▪ a survival story</li> </ul>	There is considerable openness to presenting and interpreting Crusoe's story

<sup>10</sup> Original source text: "Această nouă versiune în limba română – prima traducere integrală a romanului – oferind cititorului șansa intrării într-o altă logică interpretative care trebuie să țină cont de tonul însuflețit și emfatic din paragrafele de acumulari și interpretări teologice ale naufragiatului."

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ a study of solitary consciousness</li> <li>▪ a buildingsroman</li> <li>▪ an ecological tale (about the healing power of nature)</li> <li>▪ a story with a moral about political correctness</li> <li>▪ a travel diary</li> </ul>	<p>as a variety of genres at once, sometimes going against “the happy end feature of the Robinson myth established by Daniel Defoe” (Bâgiu, 2024, p. 143). It is why we proposed <i>anthesis</i> [opening (of a flower)] as a metaphor subsuming all these possible interpretations.</p>
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**Table 3.** *Ways in Which Retranslation Has Redefined Robinson Crusoe (Genre-wise)*

Lastly, we attempt to map the fluctuations in the relationship between the two basic purposes modulating (translated) children’s literature (*to teach* and *to entertain*).

Period	Relationship between Teaching and Entertaining	Commentary
the nineteenth century:	<i>to teach</i> ► <i>to entertain</i>	Teaching was priority, the young readers were supposed to learn something from this parable.
the twentieth century:	<i>to teach</i> + <i>to entertain</i>	Pedagogy and leisure seemed to be more or less on an equal footing, complementing each other.
the twenty-first century:	<i>to teach</i> ◀ <i>to entertain</i>	The entertainment factor prevails over didacticism.

**Table 4.** *The Relationship between the two Basic Purposes Modulating (Translated) Children’s Literature (To Teach & To Entertain)*

In Romania, just like everywhere in Europe, there are more and more national prizes for children’s literature but also for translated children’s literature. There is also the EFFORT project (European Framework for Translation) trying to regulate literary translation evaluation, and a lot of effort is being put into creating coherent, useful, attractive series and collections of (translated) children’s literature.

If translation quality prevailed over mercantilism and the topos of immediate necessity, it would pave the way towards *telesis*. Hopefully, the recent proliferation in retranslation (which occasionally verges on *nimiety*) will gradually move towards *telesis* (if intelligently planned and directed). Notwithstanding, judging by our case-study alone (which we contrasted with the situation in the Republic of Moldova and in France, for a transnational approach), the future of children’s literature in translation is likely to be bright.

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