

## A Comparative Analysis of Translations of Lucian Blaga's Poetry into English

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### **Abstract**

The complexity of Lucian Blaga's poetry is a matter of common knowledge. Part of this complexity is related to the elements of prosody that Blaga skilfully employs, to say nothing of the philosophical vein which infuses his writings, and which derives, understandably, from his philosophical work. Mention should also be made of the lyrical character of Blaga's dramatic works, which adds significantly to the effort of translating his writings into English, or any other language for that matter. In what follows, we intend to offer a bird's eye view of the volumes that have been translated into English and to analyse a selection of poems comparatively, in order to signal challenges and discrepancies, born in the process of transferring literary material from Romanian to English, and to point out what has been lost, and, if that be the case, what has been gained in the translation process.

**Keywords:** comparative analysis, Lucian Blaga's poetry, challenges, unbalance, fidelity, figures of speech, ambiguity, lyricism, rhyme, rhythm, polysemy

### **Preliminary Considerations**

Beyond the shadow of a doubt, Lucian Blaga has been one the most important poets of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Romanian literature, one of the thinkers who came up with a very original philosophical system.

His work, however, is relatively unknown beyond the borders of his native country, given the fact that it has been translated into English selectively, or by sacrificing various elements of prosody which are essential to a proper perception of his writings. Furthermore, most editions have long been out of print so that it is now extremely difficult to procure them.

The complexity of Blaga's poetry does not need any expatiation, especially to the Romanian reader. Part of this complexity is related to the subtle metaphors, many of them springing from the philosophical vein which infuses his writings, and which derives, understandably, from his philosophical work, to say nothing of the elliptical structures generating a certain degree of ambiguity, or the elements of prosody that Blaga skilfully employs. Mention should also be made of the lyrical character of Blaga's dramatic works, which adds significantly to the effort of translating his writings into English, or any other language for that matter. In what follows, we intend to offer a bird's eye view of the volumes that have been translated into English and to analyse a selection of poems comparatively, in order to point out what has been lost, and, if that be the case, what has been gained in the translation process.

The first translation of Blaga's writings dates back to the year 1975 when the volume *Poems of Light* signed by Don Eulert, Ștefan Avădanei and Mihail Bogdan, saw the light of print, with a Preface signed by Constantin Ciopraga and an Introduction written by Don Eulert. The volume conceived as a bilingual one, included 99 poems belonging to 12 of Blaga's lyrical volumes, all of them translated in free verse. The same year saw the publication of *The Great Transition* (58 poems) in Roy MacGregor-Hastie's translation, again a bilingual volume, with an introduction by Ion Dodu Bălan. Despite the fact that both volumes were named after two of Blaga's volumes, they contain broad selections of the poet's verse, extending beyond the two volumes whose titles they bear. Another bilingual edition containing a small selection of titles (16) was published in 1983 in the USA, by University of North Carolina Press. The collection entitled *Poezii. Poems* was edited by Michael Taub and translated by Ștefan Avădanei, Andrei Bantaș, Donald

Eulert, Roy MacGregor-Hastie, Alfred Margul-Sperber and Michael Taub. Andrei Codrescu signed the volume *In Praise of Sleep* in 1989, shortly before the fall of communism and *At the Court of Yearning* the following year, both of them being monolingual volumes. The former volume was reprinted in 2019 and showcases significant changes to the initial translation having to do – as the translator admits in the Introduction – with his improved knowledge of English.

In 1995, one hundred years after the poet's birth,<sup>1</sup> a selection of Blaga's poems in Bogdan<sup>2</sup>'s translation was published by academics teaching at Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu. The volume including 120 poems featured an Introduction signed by Ștefan Augustin Doinaș. The year 2001 saw a breakthrough with regard to translations of Blaga's work into English as Brenda Walker and Stelian Apostolescu published *The Complete Poetical Works of Lucian Blaga (1895-1961)*, a monolingual volume which had been long due, and which was warmly greeted by readers. Mircea Borcilă, the author of the Foreword, pointed to the main merit of this translation which consisted in finding “a means of equating most key words in Blaga's poetry – which I myself (1972) found to be of Latin origin – with symmetrical words developed from Latin roots. Although the roots are not always the same, there is an undeniable Latin sound which they have succeeded in ‘transporting’ from the source to the target language” (8). In the same year one of Blaga's plays was published in English translation – *Zamolxis: Obscure Pagan* – as a matter of fact, the only play translated into English to date. The translation was signed by Doris Platnus-Runey and featured an Introduction by Keith Hitchins.

In 2002, Old Stile Press at Llandogo, Monmouthshire, published *The Poems of Light*, featuring impressive expressionistic hand-crafted drawings by Sara Philpott and translations (38) by Oltea Simescu and Eric Williams. The edition, a monolingual one, was limited to 200 copies, numbered and signed by the translators and the artist, as they admitted in the final note.

A new bilingual volume of translations was launched in 2003, again in a limited edition – *Stanzas along the Years*, a

volume of selective titles (74) translated by Dumitru Ciocoi-Pop, with a Foreword by Ștefan Augustin Doinaș, and an Afterword by Anthony O’Keeffe published by The Romanian Cultural Foundation Publishing House. The latest volume to be published has been *Poems of Light* (2018) by Gabi Reigh (nee Jianu) with CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, a monolingual volume. Worth mentioning is also the bibliography put together by the Romanian Cultural Institute in 2014, entitled *Romanian Authors in English*, which, curiously enough, lists in Blaga’s case only a few of the above-mentioned translations.

While these endeavours to translate Blaga’s work, his poetry in particular, are all noteworthy, especially in their effort to make the Romanian poet known beyond the borders of his native country, the translators have had to grapple with the difficulties inherent in the translation of poetry: ambiguity, polysemic lexical structures, figures of speech, rhyme, rhythm, culture-specific terms. One remembers, in this context, the challenges Roman Jakobson highlighted in the translation of poetry, “the verbal equations [which having] become a constructive principle of the text” have to be considered and dealt with. “Syntactic and morphological categories, roots, and affixes, phonemes and their components (distinctive features) – in short – any constituents of the verbal code” need “to be confronted, juxtaposed, brought into contiguous relation according to the principle of similarity and contrast” as “they carry their own autonomous signification” (117-118). These difficulties take us back to the theories related to the untranslatability of poetry. Robert Frost comes to mind instantly with his well-known statement, “Poetry is what gets lost in translation” (qtd. in Robinson 24). Clement Wood joins Robert Frost in his scepticism concerning the possibility of translating poetry: “poetry cannot be translated; it can only be recreated in a new language,” while also maintain that “If one translated poetry into another language with absolute fidelity, the poetry is dead” (qtd in Landers 97). Wood further argues that the recreation of the original can only be done by a poet: “it must be recreated by a poet of like emotional power in the other language, if it is to survive as

poetry” (98). Landers makes another interesting point: the proper attitude in the act of poetry translation is that of humility, suggesting that the translator should abandon his own views and identify with the original author completely (98).

Before focusing on English translations of several poems belonging to different stages of Blaga’s creation, which confirm the fact that however much his poetry changed over the years, his voice, as well as the central concerns of his work, remained more or less the same, we deem it important to start with theoretical considerations related to the major phases of Blaga’s poetry since these stages are characterized by different translation challenges and may explain why some translators focused exclusively on the poet’s first volumes. Marin Mincu identifies three stages in Lucian Blaga’s poetic career. The first one, which he calls expressionistic, is related to the first two volumes, and contains most of the features of Expressionism: the feeling of the absolute, the vitalist, explosive hysteria, solipsism resulting from the exacerbation of the creative self, the authentic reliving of the primitive mystical history, maximum visionary tension, as well as the spiritualizing and internalizing of the landscape. In the second stage, Blaga leaves his imprint on Expressionism and transforms it according to his image. The influence of Romanian folklore starts informing his poetry. In the third stage, beginning with the volume *At the Watershed*, Blaga’s poetry recuperates rhythm, rhyme, and other traditional elements of prosody, and sometimes overuses them by resorting to folkloric models. In its return to folklore, Blaga’s poetic ethos becomes increasingly musical and true lyricism emerges (Mincu 31-66).

### Case Study

All translators of Blaga’s poetry have approached his *ars poetica* in which he sets forth his expressionistic tenets – “Eu nu strivesc corola de minuni a lumii,” the first piece of *Poems of Light*, his debut volume. For Blaga *ars* does no longer seem to be craftsmanship, but a certain positioning of the self in the universe, in and through poetry. This explains the first-person singular used

by the poet all through the poem. The features of Expressionism are noticeable in the unequivocal expression of the author's moods and through the strong, violent artistic images, through the vital enthusiasm, the state of anxiety that is generated in the text. Its modernity lies in its ambiguous language, its metrical novelty – variable metre (ranging from two to thirteen syllables), free verse, enjambment (“Lumina altora / sugrumă vraja nepătrusului ascuns / în adâncimi de întuneric”), in its intellectualism but also in the novelty of metaphor.

Several explanations related to Blaga's approach to metaphor are in place at this stage of our analysis. In his theoretical work *The Genesis of Metaphor and the Sense of Culture* (which was part of his *Trilogy of Culture*), Blaga, the thinker, differentiated between two types of metaphors – plasticizing and revealing –, which play different roles in the cognition<sup>3</sup> process. Thus, “the revealing metaphors enhance the significance of the very deeds they refer to ... they are meant to bring to light something hidden, even about the facts they target... they somehow try the revelation of a ‘mystery’,” (36) differing from the plasticizing metaphors that “do not enrich the actual content of the fact they refer to” (31), having only an artistic function. Blaga does not conceive of metaphors as mere stylistic instruments, but as vital ways of perceiving the surrounding mystery in a gnoseological pursuit which eludes direct apprehension. They are meant to signal the abstruse nature of the object and to challenge the inquisitive mind either to search creatively for new meanings or to reinforce already discovered significance:

Man, viewed structurally and existentially, finds himself in a doubly *precarious* situation. He lives, on the one hand, in a *concrete world*, which he *cannot express* with the structurally available means, and on the other hand he lives in the *horizon of mystery*, which, however, he *cannot reveal*. The metaphor is declared as a complementary ontological moment, which tries to correct this doubly precarious situation. Admitting that this situation of man results from his very being and specific existence, we are forced to accept the thesis about *the ontological*

*purpose of metaphor* as a complementary moment of some congenitally precarious states. The metaphor cannot therefore be only the object of research and analysis of "poetics" or of "stylistics" [...] Metaphor is the second hemisphere through which human destiny is rounded, *it is a special dimension of this destiny*, and as such, it demands all the contemplative rights of anthropology and metaphysics. (51-52 my translation)

The importance Blaga ascribed to metaphors asks for increased care in the translation process, in order to aptly transfer meaning and to suggest the centrality they enjoy in the original. Thus, the richest and most ambiguous metaphor, present in the title – "corola de minuni a lumii," – a revealing metaphor suggesting the mystery of the universe, which works in tandem with "lumina" (a recurrent image in Blaga's poetry intimating the cognition process), influences the meaning of the entire poem and semantically incorporates the other symbol-metaphors of the poem – "flori," "ochi," "buze" and "morminte" –, as well as the plasticizing ones – "vraja nepătrunsului ascuns," "adâncimi de întuneric," "întunecata zare," "largi flori," "sfânt mister." All these metaphors point to the poet's recurrent concerns, the central one being his preoccupation with how to relate oneself to the universe, how to approach the mystery of the world without annihilating it. The oppositions on which the poem is built – "lumină" / "întuneric," "eu" / "alții," "mintea" / "inima," "a strivi" / "a îmbogăți," "taină" / "înțeles," "a micșora" / "a mări" make the translation process easier when Blaga uses antonyms, but generate difficulties when the poet uses antonyms derived by the addition of negative prefixes, which are very expressive in Romanian ("nepătruns," "nențeles," "nențelesuri") and which reinforce the major idea of the poem. The lexical choices that the translators come up with in this latter case range from "inexplicable," "not understood," "less understood" (MacGregor-Hastie), to "enchantment," "unknown," "unknowns" (Reigh), "unfathomed," "unfathomable" and transformation of the third element into "grows deeper still" (Bogdan) or "mysteries," "incomprehension" and again transformation into "becomes even more puzzling" (Ciocoi-Pop). Mention should also be made of the

rich Romanian vocabulary related to “mystery” which challenges the translator who is supposed to suggest the harmonious, wondrous relationship between the poetic persona and the surrounding universe impregnated by mystery.

The title metaphor has been translated quite similarly in most variants, preserving the ambiguity of the original – “the world’s corolla of wonders,” except for MacGregor-Hastie, who interprets corolla as the “petal cup of magic of the world,” which, however, in addition to being too explanatory also contains the infelicitous repetition of the genitive particle “of.” Even further away semantically is the “the aura of wonder of the world” that Reigh comes up with. The verb choice also differs slightly suggesting a difference of approach (“trample” suggests the idea of physical action, of treading, whereas “crush” is more general, and may apply to mental, spiritual actions as well, and consequently fits the context better), difference reinforced by the modal chosen in each case (“will” preferred by the great majority of translators due to its volitive nuance, as opposed to the neutral present auxiliary “do” chosen by Ciocoi-Pop, Don Eulert et al. and Reigh). Even more daring is Simescu and Williams’s translation “Must Not Be Extinguished” (as title), which seriously departs from the original: “The aura of this earth must not be extinguished / Let me not trample through the mysteries/ I meet on my path” (np). This sounds good, but it leaves out the agency of the speaker as Boris Dralyuk correctly points out (206). The translators ignore the fact that Blaga’s poem is an expressionistic manifesto which sets forth what the poet *expressly* intends not to do, the “I” holding a crucial position in the poem. “The plea ‘Let me not’ is out of character for such a bold, albeit negating, declaration” (Dralyuk 206). However, in our opinion, Simescu and Williams’ endeavours depart too much from the original and cannot be considered translations. Take, for instance, the last stanza which ends in mid-air, as all the other stanzas of the poem (this variant consists of four quintets with very loose punctuation). “The enigma, the secret, the mystery / grow under the scrutiny of my gaze / the flowers, the eyes, the lips, the graves / that I must meet and greet equally / with my love” (np).

Williams admits that he started with the literal translation of the Romanian original which he worked into a poem in English, “in the structure and rhythm that I have attempted to organize to shape my understanding and response to my reading of Blaga” (np). However, the end result cannot be looked upon as translation, not even free translation, as it blatantly lacks fidelity to the original.

Though written in free verse, as all of Blaga’s poems belonging to his first, expressionistic stage, the poem has an inner rhythm deriving from the combination of trochees, iambs and amphibrachs, which gives fluidity to the poetic meditation. Translators have approximated this rhythm to a larger or smaller extent, the result being that sometimes the translations do not reflect the original in terms of musicality. The alliterations present in the original also create difficulties: “vraja nepătrunsului ascuns,” “largi fiori de sfânt mister” – which, again, were addressed more or less successfully in the translation process (Ciocoi-Pop: “the charm of mysteries secluded / in darkness deep,” “thrills that reach a hidden sainthood” – 35; Walker and Apostolescu: “the spell of the unpierceable hidden / in the depths of the darkness,” “vibrant tremors of sacred secrets” – 51; Don Eulert et al.: “the spell of the hidden, unpenetrated / in depths of darkness,” “shivers, great shivers of sainted secret” – 77).

Another *ars poetica* signed by Blaga is “Cântăreți bolnavi,” a poem belonging to the poet’s fifth volume of poetry, *At the Watershed* (1933), which marked the beginning of the third stage of his career, according to Mincu’s classification. The artistic manifesto is written this time from the position of those who take it upon themselves to voice the inner suffering of the prisoners of silence. Blaga is consistent with himself and, in a truly expressionistic spirit, he suggests again that the artist is a singer, a minstrel who can find fulfilment only in his song. The singer emerges as a suffering Orpheus who continues to sing the mystery of the world, despite his inner wounds. He is painfully aware that he is unable, nay, he is forbidden to reach God with his song. However, the poet never laments, never sheds a single tear. Though his predicament is a dire one, the poet graces it with his song which

extends the mystery of the world. In this way, Blaga consistently develops the ideas set forth in his first *ars poetica*, “Eu nu strivesc corola de minuni a lumii,” where the same idea of the poet’s intensifying the mystery of the world is suggested. One notices here an extension of Blaga’s best-known programmatic text: “We increase endlessness / with a song, a mystery.”

The poem reminds us that the expressionist poet perceives art as subsumed to the song, to music. From the point of view of expressionistic aesthetics, it is the only art in which form becomes content and the content is formally justified in itself, i.e., it flows into form. Expressionism lays the stress on content, and form, if it exists, is a form of the content, not a form in itself. Art is a song, and the song becomes the expression of the “disease” which may plague the artist. It is a song that has the function of retotaling the broken world, but not in the sense of its fullness, of restoring the “world’s wondrous corolla,” but, on the contrary, of opening to an eschatological perspective, which cancels the individuality of dying things, preparing them, perhaps, for a new beginning (Pop 180).

The poem abounds in images of extinction (setting sun, the withering of words) which come to be internalized, resulting in images of inner combustion (the wounds, the end hidden under armour) which suggest how ravaged the singer is. Everything is contaminated by death and disease, the result being that the semantic field is that of suffering: tears, illness, wounds.

The plethora of metaphors present in the poem make the translation process a difficult one, all the more so as some of the metaphors created by Blaga are highly ambiguous. If one adds to this the metaphysical dimension, the feeling of alienation and estrangement, a certain troubling anxiety, elliptical structures, plus the strict metrical constraints (regular rhyme and rhythm), a more accurate image of the translation difficulties will emerge.

Blaga uses pentameter which combines the iambic meter with the dactylic and an extra beat. Ciocoi-Pop seems to be the only translator (out of the four who have tried their hand at translating this poem) who manages to capture some of the musicality of the original. He combines pentameter with tetrameter or hexameter to

somehow approximate the alternation of rhythms in the source language. His translation alludes to the musicality of the original, the line which can be sung, the rhythm and the succession of rhymes suggesting the Orphic dimension of poetry: "With no tears to shed / and heart-string shrilling / on and on we head / for sunset's stilling. / Our soul's fire-sword / in the scabbard hides, tamed. / Again our word / of power is drained" (85).

Walker and Apostolescu also evince a clear preoccupation with the prosodic elements, a constant effort to grapple with the challenges posed by rhythm and lines of similar length, though they sometimes fail in their efforts: "Snuffed in the scabbard / our souls are swords of fire. / Ah, again and again / the words wither" (110). They stay close to the Romanian original, rendering the meaning literally (apart from the last stanza where the verb "to spawn" connotes breeding and does not fit the context). Bogdan uses free verse which evades the musical dimension of the original, a very important dimension especially in a poem which focuses on art as a song.

Equally difficult to render are the metaphors Blaga has created in this poem. Starting with the title for which the translators have come up with versions ranging from "Minstrels of Suffering" (Walker and Apostolescu), to "Singers of Suffering" (Ciocoi-Pop), "Sick Music-Makers" (Codrescu) or "Sick Singers" (Bogdan), the poem challenges the reader with metaphorical constructions such as: "boală în strune," "soare-apune," "spadă de foc stinsă-n teacă," "punți de baladă," "crini albi în gură," which represent a very serious test for the translator. Thus, Ciocoi-Pop overtranslates, offering his own interpretation of Blaga's metaphor "crini albi în gură," rendering it as ["twilights we cross /] within lilies' whiteness," whereas "boală în strune" is ingenuously rendered as "heart-strings shrilling." The idea of disease or sickness is not emphasized by Ciocoi-Pop, who prefers to suggest the idea of disharmony, of "heart-strings" shrilling, which is, of course, another way of reading Blaga's poem. It is an interesting interpretation of Blaga's piece, all the more so as "shrilling" not only rhymes perfectly with "stilling," but is created in contrast with

it, emphasizing the poetic persona's thirst for "the sunset's stilling," for peace, for the quiet of the final sleep. Worth analysing is also the rendition of the metaphor of the soul – "[o]ur soul's fire-sword / in the scabbard hides, tamed" (the original idea of a soul "tamed," subdued by the suffering of the world). Apart from the fact that the image of the word drained of power offers excellent rhyming choices ("sword" / "word," "tamed" / "drained"), it also lends dynamism to the poem, reminding the reader of the creative power of the word, and of the poet as a demiurge.

Ciocoi-Pop also interprets the metaphor of the setting sun (Andrei Codrescu translates it as "the rising moon," which changes the perspective altogether) and takes it one step further, adding the idea of stillness which aptly contrasts with the effort invested in the singing process. He felicitously combines Blaga's two metaphors (song and mystery) in "a mystery-song" which is an excellent rhyme for the adverbial construction "for long" and which helps the rhythmical beat. The last stanza offers, again, Ciocoi-Pop's own interpretation of Blaga's stanza: "răni" is rendered as "blood-springs" (the visual image is, perhaps, too strong, if compared to the original which appositionally equates wounds with springs, but does not mention blood explicitly, only implicitly), whereas "nesfârșirea" is rendered too specifically as "time," whereas the highly ambiguous Romanian noun carries a great variety of connotations: "Blood-springs we stand / under garment for long. / Time we expand / with a mystery-song" (87). Worth mentioning is also the excellent choice of "garment," which sounds poetic, as opposed to the prosaic "clothes" used by Bogdan. The other translators are cautious and stay close to Blaga's words, trying to recuperate the music of the original at least at the level of rhyme when they fail with rhythm: "Wounds we bear – springs / open beneath our coats. / We spawn infinity / with a song, with a mystery" (Walker and Apostolescu 190).

Codrescu's translation is also interesting, though he slightly changes the source-language meaning: "We carry wounds – streams – / hidden in our fiddles. / Endlessness grows / from strings' riddles" (112). As a matter of fact, Codrescu believed that

“only the most violent remaking can render the sense,” and this is why he “trance-translated, allowing the words to go from one language into another a little below the level of consciousness, in a sort of pure musical exchange;” later, he straightened out “these orgies of translingual violence” which were finally reviewed by Marcel Comiș-Pop (vxiii-xix). The preoccupation with metrical constraints elements is also obvious, though Codrescu believed that “the strong Romanian music of the rhymed poems based on the folkloric rhythms is almost impossible to render into English” (xviii). He admitted that he tried to create “a hybrid form whose strangeness is meant to flag the appearance of an odd linguistic territory” (xviii).

The analysis of this poem reminds us of the issue of “unbalance” to which George Steiner devotes ample space, especially in the context of poetry translation. He correctly argues that a translator may take too much, in which case he pads, embroiders, “reads into,” or, on the contrary, too little – he skimps, elides, cuts out awkward corners. There is a constant “outflow of energy from the source and an inflow into the receptor altering both and altering the harmonics of the whole system. Genuine translation will, therefore, seek to equalize, though the mediating steps may be lengthy and oblique” (190). Steiner contends that when the translation falls short of the original, the authentic translation illuminates the virtues of the source-text, whereas when it surpasses the original, the real translation suggests that the original possesses potentialities as yet unrealized by itself; “The ideal, never accomplished, is one of total counterpart or re-petition – an asking again – which is not, however, a tautology. No such perfect ‘double’ exists” (190).

This discussion of the issue of “unbalance” leads Steiner to the notion of “fidelity,” which is a key issue in the translation process. Fidelity should not be equated with literalism or any technical device for rendering “spirit:” “The translator, the exegetist, the reader is *faithful* to his text, makes his response responsible, only when he endeavours to restore the balance of forces, of integral presence, which his appropriative comprehension

has disrupted. Fidelity is ethical, but also, in the full sense, economic” (190). What Steiner understands by this – and we fully agree – is that the translator, endowed with moral vision, should create a condition of significant exchange in which “the arrows of meaning, of cultural, psychological benefaction, move both ways” (190). Ideally, there should be exchange without loss. However, in actual practice, this rarely happens.

In what follows, we intend to illustrate this notion of fidelity by analysing the three translations to date of the poem “Tally,” a poem included in the volume *What the Unicorn Hears*, belonging to Blaga’s third artistic stage. It is a beautiful piece which sounds very playful in the source language. It centres on love as a state of temptation, as a continuous state of wonder, an eternally undisclosed mystery. The nameless girlfriend, identified by general descriptors with notional and affective value (“frumoasa,” “mândra”), suggests a prototypical image of femininity.

The poem consisting of four quatrains is a rhymed poem, though the rhyme pattern changes. It begins with the abcb pattern, it continues with abca, then abab, to end with abab. The consistent trochaic rhythm contains a variation with regard to the number of feet, the tetrameter alternating with the trimeter. The variable line-length adds to the playful character of the poem.

In translating this poem, Bogdan has only rendered the content – the semantic level, sacrificing the formal aspects altogether. He ignores rhyme and rhythmical beats (as a matter of fact, none of his translations display any effort of dealing with prosodic elements). However, this kind of translation does more of a disservice to Blaga’s poetry since it oversimplifies it and fails to intimate the frame of mind and the feelings expressed by the Romanian poet, as well as the folkloric vein which informs the poem. Furthermore, even at this semantic level, one notices interpreting errors. Thus, Bogdan reads and translates “cuibul Găinușei” literally, failing to realize that what Blaga had in mind was a constellation (he might have been alerted to this by the capital letter used in the text). He also erroneously renders the

image of the first stanza where he suggests that the persona is counting black and white sheep, though what Blaga intimates in Romanian is that he keeps counting the black and white days in a manner similar to a shepherd's. It is inappropriate, in our opinion, to conclude that the persona is counting sheep.

It took a poet's gift to render Blaga into English in an expressive way, and it was in Ciocoi-Pop's translation that the spirit of Blaga's poetry has also been rendered into English. This is probably the greatest asset of the translations signed by the former Rector of Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu. A poet himself, author of two volumes of poems – *Doubting Certainties* and *Love Never Fails* –, Ciocoi-Pop did more than simply translate Blaga's poems. He recreated them in the target language extending, in many cases, the ideatic level of the original and made the arrows of meaning, of cultural, emotional loading move both ways, as Steiner suggested.

A parenthesis is in place here. As Willis Barnstone aptly suggests, the act of poetry translation is characterized by a certain mystique "of living intimately with the source, of living alone, beginning fresh, from nothing; of remembering, interpreting and becoming the author" (262). The traditional passage of the mystique provides, in Barnstone's view, a useful analogy for both the original and the interpreting writer, just as the secular act of writing and physical love offered Saint John of the Cross similes for religious mystical union. The three levels of the mystical process, both for John and for the translator are *negativa* (or *purgativa*), *illuminativa* and *unitiva*; "By passing through the night of aridity, by absorbing the ray of darkness, the translator, alone with sign and object, sees, and then shapes words into an appropriate creation. At that instant, the translator becomes the interpreting creator" (Barnstone 262).

Ciocoi-Pop can be said to have been this interpreting creator, who contemplated Blaga's poems to the point of being united with them in a sort of mystical union, and then to have recreated the object of contemplation in English, even at the level of rhyme and rhythm. Thus, the variation in line length (longer odd lines alternating with shorter, even lines) in the poem under

analysis helps Ciocoi-Pop recreate the playfulness of the original which is essential to the message of the poem as Blaga intimates that the poetic self is not concerned about his future fate. All that matters to him is love (one cannot help remembering the last line of his artistic manifesto “for I’m in love / with blooms, with eyes, with lips, with tombs”), the joy produced by his beloved whose comings and goings he knows very well. The poem suggests terrestrial life and love are worth living and experiencing; the poetic persona prefers losing himself in love rather than wasting his life with thoughts about the afterlife. This message is lost in translation when rhyme and rhythm are absent. The poem also reverberates, for the Romanian reader, with folklore and its cadences, fact which gets lost entirely in the target language if rhythm is not properly dealt with.

Worth analysing are also the rhymes Ciocoi-Pop comes up with. In his translation, a verb rhymes with an adverb (“count” / “round”) and a noun with an adjective (“door” / “more”). It goes without saying that such rhymes (or slant rhymes) are the mark of a first-rate translator who handles easily rhymes such as “illusions” and “delusions,” or “hell” and “dell” (though “dell” is a more difficult lexical choice to arrive at if we think that the original uses the word “ford”).

The additions that Ciocoi-Pop provides are also worth dwelling on as they not only save the rhythm of the poem but also serve the meaning, helping the translator achieve fidelity to the original. We can safely speak here about gains in the translation process as the target language version carries forward the message of the original. The translator in this case is a creator who transforms the original in order to save and suggest the musicality of the original, but also to help carry through the message which in other translations appears impoverished. Mention should be made of additions such as “passing by” which lends dynamism to the count (1<sup>st</sup> stanza), “every night” which explains the abstract Romanian construction “cuibul Găinușei” (2<sup>nd</sup> stanza), whereas “many” in “many sins” (in the 4<sup>th</sup> stanza), coupled with the playful tone of the poem suggests the persona’s serene acceptance of

things, as well as his choosing life instead of afterlife. Ciocoi-Pop uses various compensatory strategies – he changes altogether one noun of the original (“*pietrele*”), which he renders as “footsteps,” but remains faithful to the original by preserving the meaning. Likewise, he renders “*rătăcirii și drumuri*” as “wanders and delusions.” It is interesting that “*rătăcirii*,” which might have literally referred to “roads” in the original, is rendered figuratively as “delusions,” by a successful manipulation of the polysemous nature of the Romanian word. The negative construction “Nothing goes beyond my count” is also an excellent way of capturing in English the minuteness and the thorough character of the persona’s endeavours, and an apt intensifier of meaning.

Ciocoi-Pop’s mellifluous version is worth quoting in full as it represents, in our opinion, a translation gem. If analysed comparatively with another variant, it better reveals its merits in restoring the balance of forces:

Dumitru Ciocoi-Pop

As in old days I keep tally.  
Shepherd-like I count  
black days, white days, passing by  
all the year round.

My beloved’s steps I count  
to her entrance door.  
Every night in constellations  
stars I count more.

Nothing goes beyond my count  
smoke or great illusions,  
and incessantly I count  
wanders and delusions.

Sweetheart’s footsteps all I count,  
coming through the dell –  
and the many sins for which  
I shall burn in hell. (171)

Brenda Walker and  
Stelian Apostolescu

I tally in the ancient way.  
I count like the shepherd  
how many white, how many black  
– days, all year round.

I count the steps, of the beautiful one,  
to the threshold of the door.  
I count how many stars there are  
in the nest of the Mother Hen.

However many, the lot – I count,  
smoke and illusions,  
the whole day, – count, count  
roads and missed ways.

I count the stones on which  
she crosses the ford, that beauty –  
and all the sins for which  
hell will surely burn me. (471)

Based on these last translations, mention should also be made of another difference between Romanian and English. One should remember that, unlike Romanian, where the repetition of a lexical item in a text sounds natural, in English the repetition of a word may bring about a weakening effect and may sound awkward. Consequently, the use of several synonyms for a given idea is often desirable for stylistic and aesthetic reasons. Hence the translator's dilemma: rendering the Romanian word "with the same English word each time, and weakening the word each time, or introducing synonyms that give the impression that the original text is lexically far more complex than is the case" (Johnson 41). This weakening effect is noticeable in Walker and Apostolescu's translation where "count, count" in the last but one stanza sounds unnatural.

Some considerations related to the structural differences between the two languages should also be highlighted at the end of our article. It is a matter of common knowledge that the Romanian language is more flexible than English, and this is noticeable in a number of constructions which are more frequent in Romanian. To begin with, the use of clitics,<sup>4</sup> which "sit at the interface of sound structure, word structure and sentence structure (not to mention the lexicon and language use)" (Spencer and Luis np), differentiates the two languages to a large extent. We notice quite a number of them in the Romanian poems we have analysed in this essay ("ce-i," "câte-s"), with a clear role in the realization of metrical patterns. Other phonological processes are also present, such as the syncope,<sup>5</sup> signalled either by the use of the hyphen or the apostrophe ("le-ntâlnesc," "și-ntocmai," "schimbă-n," "ne'nțeles," "ne'nțelesuri," "stinsă-n," "c-un," "până-n," "ziua-ntreagă"), or the use of the apocope<sup>6</sup>. The synaeresis<sup>7</sup> ("de-a [pururi]" "soare-apune" "ni-e") is very difficult to transfer from Romanian to English, or any other language for that matter. Characteristic of Romanian – a highly inflected language – is also the variable position of the auxiliary verb "to have" – the postposition being more expressive sometimes in that it has archaic connotations ("purces-am"). However, such structural differences between the two languages are

very difficult to suggest and are usually ignored in a process which has to pay close attention to basic and figurative meaning, to figures of speech, as well as metrical constraints.

## Conclusions

Our analysis has pointed to the various challenges and difficulties the translator faces in rendering Blaga's poetry into English. We have emphasized the importance of taking into account and engaging all the stylistic aspects of a poem, and of recreating as many as possible of the poetic effects of the original in the target language in order to capture the spirit of the source-language poem. Translation implies, in our opinion, a moral and professional obligation to the text and to the craft; therefore, in the case of poetry, it presupposes a solid theoretical understanding of the poetic characteristics, but also of the poetic traditions which vary from one culture to another. The analysis we have carried out has reinforced our conviction that it takes a combination of a critic and a poet to translate another great poet – a fact illustrated in an outstanding way by Blaga himself who offered Romanian readers a remarkable translation of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's masterpiece, *Faust*.

## Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> In 1995, one hundred years after the poet's birth, the University of Sibiu was given the name of the illustrious poet, playwright and philosopher who had also taught, during WWII, at Sibiu, where Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca was in exile, after Northern Transylvania became part of the Kingdom of Hungary, as a consequence of the territorial agreement known as the Second Vienna Award (1940).

<sup>2</sup> Mihail Bogdan ended his illustrious academic career at the University of Sibiu.

<sup>3</sup> In his article "Blaga's Legacy in America – Giving Blaga a Legacy in America," Michael Jones, one of the most authoritative critics of Blaga's philosophical system, author of *The Metaphysics of Religion: Lucian Blaga and Contemporary Philosophy* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2006), correctly uses the translation "Luciferic cognition" rather

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than “Luciferic knowledge,” stating that, in his opinion, Blaga’s book deals with “the action of knowing much more than the product of knowing” (9).

<sup>4</sup> A morpheme that functions like a word, but appears not as an independent word but always attached to a following or preceding word. In morphology and syntax, a clitic is a morpheme that has syntactic characteristics of a word, but depends phonologically on another word or phrase. In this respect, it is syntactically independent but phonologically dependent – always attached to a host (Spencer and Luis np).

<sup>5</sup> A phonological process consisting of the elision of a sound (Cuddon 945).

<sup>6</sup> The dropping of a letter or letters from the end of a word (Cuddon 53).

<sup>7</sup> A phonological process of sound change in which two adjacent vowels within a word are combined into a single syllable (Cuddon 943).

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