

BOOK REVIEW

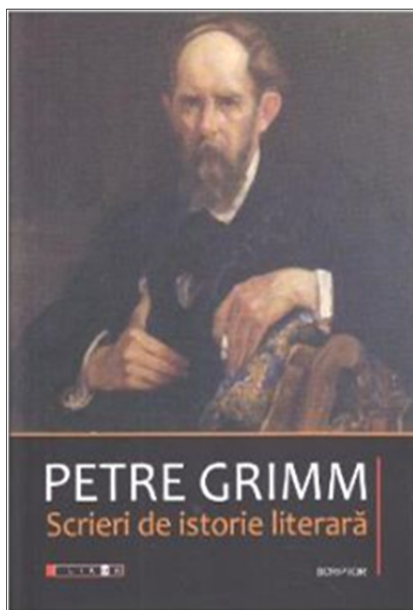
LIANA MUTHU (ed.), *Petre Grimm: Scrieri de istorie literară*, Cluj-Napoca, Eikon & Scriptor Publishing House, 2012, 237 p.

Liana Muthu, linguist and lecturer with the Department of Applied Languages of the Faculty of Letters, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, collects the main articles and translations authored by Petre Grimm (1881-1944) for the contemporary reader. The works, as we shall see, relate to the diverse fields (literary history, translation studies, sociology and anthropology) of current academic research for which they still represent a valuable resource.

But, who was Petre Grimm?

Born in Bucharest¹, son of a German engineer, Frederick Grimm, and of a French teacher, Leontina Leclerc, he graduated in modern philology from the University of Bucharest (1904). Until 1914, he taught French and German in some smaller towns in the Southern part of Romania. Meanwhile, he also specialized in aesthetics (Paris – 1908), English and aesthetics (London and Oxford – 1911), and German studies (Freiburg – 1912, Heidelberg – 1913, Vienna – 1914).

The study journeys abroad had an impact not only on the quality and methodology of his literary and linguistic research, but also on the educational ideas and policies he afterwards advocated for. As Liana Muthu points out in her introductory essay (7-8), Petre Grimm put forward the idea of a multi-centered university education. Replicating the English model of Oxford and Cambridge, the Romanian universities were to get out of the big cities in order to be more accessible



to the masses. After the 1918 Union of the three Romanian provinces, a new higher education institution, “Dacia Superior” University was founded in the Transylvanian city of Cluj-Napoca. Within this university, the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy was set up in 1919. In the same year, Petre Grimm took a temporary position as lecturer with the English department. In 1920 he was tenured, then promoted full professor (1925), and later dean. Besides the positions held in the academia, he was also the Secretary of

¹ According to the bio presented in *Grimm* 17-20.

the Museum of Romanian Language (appointed in 1920) and, at some point, school inspector for secondary education.

Getting a closer look at Peter Grimm's education and his professional career should help us understand his impact on the study of English literature in Romania, comparative literary studies and translation studies, both as a researcher, and a representative of important cultural institutions. Although the "Dacia Superior" University and its Faculty of Letters and Philosophy were founded only in 1919, literary studies in Cluj-Napoca, especially in German, had already developed a tradition of comparative approaches. Hugo von Meltzl, the head of the German Department within the "Franz Josef" University² was also the editor of the first journal of comparative literature worldwide³. It is within this tradition – to which he added his own academic background – that Petre Grimm defended his doctoral thesis in 1924: "Romanian Translations and Imitations from English Literature. Study of Comparative Literature". The paper (included in the volume *Scieri de istorie literară*), to my endless surprise, not only carefully searches and then thoroughly lists the Romanian translations of various English poems and plays (prose writings are not included in the study), but it also traces the respective works in the writing of Romanian authors, and very often, also in French and German literature.

² A Hungarian higher education institution founded in Cluj, in 1872.

³ See <http://lett.ubbcluj.ro/prezentare/istoric/>

Though difficult to believe for the twenty-first-century (young) reader, the English language was little known in the Romanian provinces during the nineteenth century. Grimm inserts a minor, but suggestive incident in this respect. Thus, he shows (28) that in 1837 the English Government sent a note to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bucharest which was returned with the request for such communications to be accompanied by their translation in French. Translations of literary works from English into Romanian appeared late and were rare. English authors were often translated into Romanian via French or German.

In an article first published in 1948 and now included in the chapter on Petre Grimm from *Scieri...*, Dumitru Popovici points out that Grimm's work on the English-Romanian literary relations was that of a pioneer and that, at the time, Grimm was the only one to have the necessary competencies for this assignment. The Romanians' approach to English literature was often mediated by French or German and thus, "the researcher had to be exquisitely knowledgeable not only of English and Romanian, but also of the mediating languages. Grimm met these criteria to an extent to which, until today, no other Romanian researcher has done it." (Popovici in *Grimm* 196).

To illustrate how Grimm traced the translations and their influences on local literary productions both in terms of content, and lexicology, I shall give an example. Edward Young's *Night-Thoughts* is "the first work that gets to be known among Romanians and it has a strong influence for over a

generation; even today some of the elderly recall this book as one of the most uplifting that they read in their youth" (*Grimm* 30). The poem was therefore translated, first by Lazar Asachi in 1819, from Russian or Polish; then, in 1831, by Simeon Marcovici after the French version done by Letouneur; and then, in 1864, by Andrei Mureșanu, from German. Grimm covers all the details: who the translators were and what their educational background was, the publishing years, and the number of editions. Then, he goes more in depth to analyze the translations: how faithful each of them was to the original in terms of content and prosody; the quality of the target language. The Romanian version signed by Marcovici is praised for its lexical value: "it was used for the words and phrases it comprises in the construction of the great Dictionary of Romanian Language published by the Academy" (*Grimm* 32). Inspiration from Young was to be found in the work of the following Romanian poets: Cezar Bolliac, Grigore Alexandrescu, and Gheorghe Asachi. Petre Grimm shows similar attention to details in the analysis of all literary translations he included in his 1924 doctoral thesis, "Romanian Translations and Imitations from English Literature. Study of Comparative Literature". In the case of dramatic texts, he would also include statistics with the number of performances of a certain play (120).

Since the research is conducted both intensively and extensively, its quality is impressive. Therefore, this study is a valuable research resource for the literary historian, the lexicologist, the literary translator, the sociologist and the anthropologist, and also for

the pedagogical research. Grimm's remarks on the use of language: neologisms (84), translation of wordplay (98), archaisms (106) and especially the conclusions of the study "Romanian Translations and Imitations..." (128-134) should be definitely revisited by literary translation scholars and students for their relevance, their illustrative strength, and the beauty of the language in which they are expressed.

A skilled user of languages, Grimm himself was also a translator. The volume also includes a series of examples: two of Robert Burns's poems translated into Romanian and five of Mihai Eminescu's poems translated into English, which can surely be taken as reference translations. Grimm was interested not only in the translation of English literature into Romanian, but also the other way round. An article dedicated to the first literary translations from Romanian into English is also included in the collection.

The profiles of Shakespeare, Keats, Chaucer, Shelley, and Robert Burns - short articles probably used in his English literature classes- are concise and meaningful. They give some information about the life and the major works of the respective poets. They make an entertaining reading, especially in the paragraphs in which the writers are excused in such a metaphorical language for their failures to exemplary conduct: not having been a good husband (Shakespeare), drinking himself to death (Robert Burns), etc.

The note on English literature and its features was, unquestionably, part of the power discourse of the first half of the twentieth century. According to Grimm, the qualities of a national literature are derived from its peo-

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ple and the English are the bravest, the first to have national pride and conscience; they are good Christians and have high moral conduct, etc. One can smile seeing how in tune the Romanian scholar was with the policies and politics of the then British Empire.

Liana Muthu's endeavor to collect the main studies and translations authored by Petre Grimm is more than welcome and necessary. I am also inclined to think that this body of works could be very actively revisited in the realm of translation studies and literary history.

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