

## *TRANSNATIONALISM UNDERMINING THE CANON: A CLOSE AND DISTANT READING OF SEVERAL TRANSATLANTIC LITERARY NETWORKS IN TRANSLATION*

### TRANSNACIONALISMO DESMANTELANDO O CÂNON: UMA LEITURA PRÓXIMA E DISTANTE DE VÁRIAS REDES LITERÁRIAS TRANSATLÂNTICAS NA TRADUÇÃO



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**Abstract:** *This essay argues that random acts of poetry translation in transnational context play a significant role in turning any apparently homogenous literary system into a network with many access points. In doing so, they overtly or covertly undermine the idea of a literary canon, since they position, more or less explicitly, such canon against their own literary taste and network of acquaintances. In addition, the lack of financial conditioning makes this kind of translation barter reach literary audiences more easily. Since these exchanges are more commonly initiated by translators working in lesser-known languages, it follows that transnational translation barter level out cultural imbalances by having the translator-poets' work translated into languages of wider circulation. This contribution presents four kinds of transnational exchanges in Romanian context and argues that more complex translation mechanisms result into a more open, more diverse, and a more dynamic literary scene, in which translators play a prominent role. From a methodological point of view, this essay combines the traditional close reading of the texts and paratexts with quantitative analysis and network visualization to lay out the blueprint of Romanian translations of US and Canadian poetry in periodicals between 2007 and 2017 and quantify the number of random exchanges against a transnational backdrop.*

**Keywords:** *Transnationalism. Literary Translation. Network Analysis. Randomness. Translation Barter.*

**Resumo:** Este ensaio argumenta que atos aleatórios de tradução de poesia no contexto transnacional desempenham um papel significativo na transformação de qualquer sistema literário aparentemente homogêneo em uma rede com muitos pontos de acesso. Ao fazer isso, eles minam abertamente ou dissimuladamente a ideia de um cânone literário, uma vez que posicionam, mais ou menos explicitamente, tal cânone contra seu próprio gosto literário e rede de conhecidos. Além disso, a falta de condicionamento financeiro faz com que esse tipo de permutas de tradução chegue mais facilmente ao público literário. Como essas trocas são mais comumente iniciadas por tradutores que trabalham em línguas menos conhecidas, segue-se que as trocas transnacionais de tradução nivelam os desequilíbrios culturais, fazendo com que o trabalho dos tradutores-poetas seja traduzido para línguas de maior circulação. Essa contribuição apresenta quatro tipos de intercâmbios transnacionais no contexto romeno e argumenta que mecanismos de tradução mais complexos resultam em um cenário literário mais aberto, mais diversificado e mais dinâmico, no qual os tradutores desempenham um papel proeminente. De um ponto de vista metodológico, este ensaio combina a tradicional leitura atenta dos textos e paratextos com análise



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quantitativa e visualização em rede para traçar o plano das traduções romenas de poesia americana e canadense em periódicos entre 2007 e 2017 e quantificar a quantidade de intercâmbios aleatórios em um cenário transnacional.

**Palavras-chave:** Transnacionalismo. Tradução literária. Análise de rede. Aleatoriedade. Permuta de traduções.

### ‘Minor’ is Yet Another Word

2 In previous research on contemporary poetry translation, I argued that minorness is reflective of new, creative modes of thinking and doing translation (Tanasescu 2018, 2019, 2020a) because it leverages a wide range of factors that are otherwise not common in more hegemonic cultures, where the rules of the literary translation game are dictated by mainstream publishers. In the so-called ‘minor’ cultures, translators’ agency is paramount in initiating, carrying out, and completing cultural transfers, and their networks of personal contacts is often the driving force behind such projects. More recently, situating my work within the paradigm of complexity thinking (Marais, 2014), I have also maintained that randomness should be acknowledged as an important factor in the dynamics of any translation system, no matter how all-of-a-piece it may have been traditionally conceived (Tanasescu 2020b, 2021). Rather, such translation systems ought to be seen in their diversity and non-linearity, which account for both mainstream exchanges and for transfers that lack any identifiable pattern. Two contemporary phenomena need to be considered as triggers for randomness, namely, transnationalism and digitalisation. The former keeps translation at the intersection between cultures, but problematizes the issue of translators’ allegiance: the allegiance to their home culture is no longer self-evident, as it is doubled by tributes paid by translators to their host-cultures, or the cultures of the ‘originals.’ The latter phenomenon—the prevalence of digital media over the analogue ones—increased the access of translators to international audiences exponentially, thus rendering any so-called ‘minor’ status even more irrelevant than it has ever been. Transnational digital platforms, such as the *Asymptote*,<sup>1</sup> make translators working in lesser used languages more and more visible and permanently question the relevance of a canon.

This essay<sup>2</sup> examines the issue of random translation—or unpredictability in translating patterns—in the context of transnationalism, using as case studies several examples of contemporary poetry translation exchanges between Romania and the United States and Canada. These case studies are covert reactions to a long contested literary canon that has been relying heavily on the state budget and promoting a “flimsy contingent” of authors (Nicolau, 2020: 86). By contrast, the poet-translators presented in this essay have taken upon them the

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task of bringing new voices in Romanian literature and thus made for a sizeable corpus of translations of contemporary poetry.<sup>3</sup> In section “Exile as Transnationalism”, I look at the case of an exiled Romanian writer in a privileged political position in Germany both before and after the anti-communist revolution in 1989. Then, in the next three sections, I will focus on three case studies of transfers that could be regarded as literary barter fueled by literary kinship and academic mobility. The academic mobility of English language and literature scholars in the 2000s has long prompted translation projects from Canadian and U.S. poetries into Romanian. The most visible and fruitful academic exchange program that benefited Romanian universities has been for years the Fulbright program, supported by the U.S. Department of State. It has been customary for Romanian-born American scholars traveling to universities in Romania for such exchanges to have their work translated into Romanian and, depending on their Romanian language proficiency, to translate themselves other American fellow poets. However, such exchanges are not as predictable as one may be inclined to believe: rather, as we will see, they are highly dependable on the translator’s circumstances. A customized methodology becomes, thus, necessary. In analyzing these case studies, I will employ both the close reading of the texts and the paratexts, and quantitative measurements (distant reading)<sup>4</sup> that will position the cases under scrutiny within the wider literary translation system.

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### **Exile as Transnationalism**

The first exile-born translation project of contemporary American poetry after 1989 was the 1993 anthology<sup>5</sup> put together by George Ciorănescu, a writer and translator who spent most of his life exiled in Paris and Munich. In Munich, he was Editor-in-Chief of Radio Free Europe, as well as in charge of the Romanian Department of the same station. It is during his time in Munich, towards the end of his life, that he put together this anthology. His eight poetry books, along with his two anthologies, one on contemporary American poetry and one on religious poetry, indicate that these books were all his own personal projects. The publishing house, *Apoziția*, bore the name of the journal founded by the Romanian literary circle in Munich, which he co-edited with Ion Dumitru towards the end of his life. Ciorănescu had been a fervent supporter of Romania’s European calling: in 1948 he defended his PhD thesis titled “Românii și ideea federalistă” (Romanians and the Idea of a Federation), in which he used historical facts to make the case for a united Europe and ignored the Soviet occupation of his country (Ștefănescu, 1999). Poetry was for Ciorănescu the privileged literary form and the ultimate path towards knowledge: while his own poems reveal a complicated, stern relationship

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with the craft, the poet is praised for his anthologies and is dubbed an importer of good poetry who moves easily between registers, an anthologist who believed he had a duty to bring valuable literary pieces to his own culture (Ștefănescu, 1999).

The anthology is pretty slim, only 112 pages including color illustrations, but the contents list important American poets, such as Frost, Masters, Sandburg, Pound, Cummings, Eliot, and Ginsberg. The agency of the translator is clearly visible at the level of lexical choice. A comparison of his translation of “Howl” by Allen Ginsberg with the translation done by Petru Ilieșu (2010, p. 28)<sup>6</sup> for mainstream publisher Polirom reveals a much more accurate and engaged version by Ciorănescu. For instance, “The method must be purest meat / and no symbolic dressing” becomes in Ciorănescu’s words *fără sos simbolic* (very idiomatic, as in the culinary *doar carne, fără sos*), while in Ilieșu’s version the rendition is *și nu un sos de înfrumusețare*, which offers an unnecessary over-interpretation of ‘symbolic’ as ‘beautification’ (*înfrumusețare*). Then, “actual visions & actual prisons / as seen then and now” benefits from a literal translation in Ilieșu’s version, but becomes *închisori adevărate / așa cum au fost percepute și așa cum sunt* (“actual prisons / the way they used to be perceived and the way they actually are”), an interpretation ostensibly influenced by the former Communist regime in Romania, which the translator had fled. Ciorănescu also preserves the original punctuation, but Ilieșu drops the comma at the end of the second line, a technique which allows for a double interpretation of the Romanian version and masks the translator’s insecurities. Finally, the last stanza—“A naked lunch is natural to us, / we eat reality sandwiches. / But allegories are so much lettuce. / Don’t hide the madness.”—reveals a very conservative translation by Ilieșu, who chooses to render the absence of a subject before “don’t hide” as “they [the allegories]”. Instead, Ciorănescu interprets correctly the final line as an imperative and also translates “the madness” as “your madness”; in addition, he uses a much stronger word for the key in the whole text: *Nu vă ascundeti demența* (Don’t hide your dementia<sup>7</sup>). In stark contrast with his rendition, Ilieșu’s awarded version<sup>8</sup> inappropriately renders “a naked lunch” by *un prânz gol* (an empty lunch), although the original poem contains a deliberate allusion to the phrase “naked truth”.<sup>9</sup>

Although accurate in terms of translation and relevant in terms of selection, Ciorănescu’s anthology remains widely unavailable and unreferenced today, although only a few others such anthologies have been historically been published in Romania. This situation reflects one of the main pitfalls of random translation initiatives: the danger of either staying too local or remaining unacknowledged by your local audience and peers. However, as we will

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see in the following examples, consistent “balance” acts between two cultures eventually amount to accumulating building blocks of literary systems that are otherwise presented as stable and homogenous.

### Poet Meets Poets

Another example of a Romanian-born writer who lives abroad and translated U.S. and Canadian poets into Romanian is Flavia Cosma. Now a Canadian citizen based in Toronto and a patron of the arts running a literary residence in Val David (Quebec), Cosma translated acclaimed former Parliamentary Poet Laureate George Elliott Clarke’s *Selected Poems*<sup>10</sup> in 2006, followed by selections from the work of Gloria Mindock<sup>11</sup> (Poet Laureate of Somerville, Massachusetts), Dae-Tong Huh (Korea-born Canadian poet),<sup>12</sup> and Jim Heavily (poet and poetry editor of Los Angeles-based online literary journal [www.hinchasdepoesia.com](http://www.hinchasdepoesia.com)).<sup>13</sup> It might be that these eclectic projects were fuelled both by her personal literary taste and by her various collaborations with the poets she translates: Mindock is, for instance, the founding editor of *Cervena Barva*, the press that published two of Cosma’s poetry volumes<sup>14</sup> and for which Cosma is, according to her own website, an international editor; Jim Heavily turns out to be the editor who published one of Cosma’s poems<sup>15</sup> in the Romanian original and in Spanish translation the very year when a selection of his own poems appear in Romania); finally, her literary barter with poet Dae-Tong Huh becomes apparent in the publication of one of her books of children’s literature<sup>16</sup> with Korean-Canadian Literary Forum-21 Press. Even her translation of Clarke’s work—which marked her debut as a translator—appears to be, according to one of the very few reviews done in Romania, the result of literary gratitude that adds to a not so apparent, yet plausible, degree of literary kinship:

This [translation] cannot be only an elegant gesture out of her gratitude for the enthusiastic forewords he wrote to her own poetry books. I would feel inclined to think this is a reading experience that touched the poet’s receptiveness, hardened by her harsh destiny and her own sense of displacement. This is the source of her openness to acute existential problems, her understanding and compassion. We get a glimpse [in this translation] of a Flavia Cosma that speaks about Human Rights to Canadian students, the TV producer that documented homelessness in Toronto or the orphans in her home country [...]. In all these, she resonates with George Elliott’s Clarke’s militant social activism. (Oloş, 2007)

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Just like the poets she translates (with the notable exception of Clarke), her translation projects stay very regional: the books are published with very small, provincial presses, either in her home town, Oradea, or in Iași, and the poetry selections generally appear in literary journals that are very regional (e.g., *Vatra Veche* from Târgu Mureș, *Citadela* from Satu Mare, both cities in north-western Romania).

What seems to connect these publishers and journals, though, is the “Lucian Blaga” International Festival in Sebeș, another small city in Transylvania, where Cosma was awarded in 2009 the “Title of Excellence for Outstanding Contribution to the Promotion and Enrichment of the Romanian Culture within the European Region and throughout the World.” From one of the two reviews of her translation of Clarke to date it is clear that the Canadian poet had visited Romania prior to the launch of his 2006 book, on the occasion of another literary happening in Satu Mare, *Zilele Poesis* (Pop, 2008). After his return in 2006 for the launch of his translated poem collection, various further selections by other translators appear in a number of literary magazines: two translations by Canadian Studies specialist Ana Oloș,<sup>17</sup> who also favorably reviewed Cosma’s rendition and dedicated a more in-depth academic study to Clarke’s work (Oloș, 2012), and other two by Diana Manole,<sup>18</sup> a Toronto-based writer, director, and scholar specialized in Drama Studies. While Oloș’s 2008 translation followed Clarke’s 2006 lecture at the Nord University, her home institution, and an award he received from the local literary journal, *Poesis*, her 2013 translation and Manole’s translation the very same year may be a reflection of Clarke’s appointment as the Toronto Poet Laureate at the beginning of 2012. It may also be a natural development of a series of encounters between Cosma, Clarke, and Manole. This network also prompts a substantial interview in the *Transilvania* literary journal (Oloș, 2012) by Oloș and Crina Bud, lecturer at the Romanian Lectorate with York University, in Toronto.

The frequency of the translations in Clarke’s case shows us that his literary stardom only intensified the series of translations already initiated by Cosma as both literary barter and literary kinship. Cosma’s interest in charity and immigrants’ sense of displacement must have felt at home, I would suggest, in Clarke’s literary work, while the Canadian poet might have appreciated Cosma’s poetry, as a note on her website states that one of her volumes, *Leaves of a Diary*, was studied in Clarke’s literature class at the University of Toronto during the 2007-2008 academic year. Similarly, Manole, who holds a doctorate from the same University of Toronto, was perhaps familiar with Clarke’s interest in the loss of a sense of belonging, which resonated with Manole’s own interest in foreign/immigrant notes in theater and performance.

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Her pairing Clarke with Ede Amatoritsero<sup>19</sup> in the translation feature dedicated to African-Canadian writers—another illustration of network-driven translation—likely influenced the roster of attendees in and the idea behind an event titled “Shared Dreams of Freedom,” organized by the Romanian Consulate in Toronto in January 2014. The event was held as part of Romania’s National Cultural Day and the anniversary of iconic early Modernist Mihai Eminescu—Romania’s national poet—and Martin Luther King, Jr.

### **Literary Kinship Meets Academic Mobility**

If the above examples revolve around certain literary journals and affiliated presses and seem to be grounded in a barter logic, the next examples were fueled by three different factors, namely literary kinship, scholarly research, and academic mobility. Translators’ literary kinship to the authors they translate has been largely ignored by TS literature and typically discussed in relation with translational poetics (Simon, 2007; Médiçi Nóbrega & Milton, 2009; Bradford, 2009; Jacobs, 2014; Galvin, 2014). In the context of contemporary poetry translation, academic mobility is often the trigger of such projects, hence the associations of the two in the title of the present subchapter.

The Romanian translator whose work and trajectory is very much in line with a transnational paradigm and a progenerative model is Chris Tanasescu. Tanasescu was working towards a Ph.D. in American poetry in 2007, writing a thesis on rock “poetry,”<sup>20</sup> a category in which he included mainstream poetry informed by rock music, lyrics, or culture, when he came across a long poem of David Baker’s (Holler, 2010), “Sweet Home, Saturday Night,” the title poem of a collection from 1991. In it, the speaker tells the story of a rock concert he gave as a guitarist in a band playing in a pub somewhere in the Southern US. The Romanian translator was intrigued by the alternation of scenes from the show and the night bar ‘crazy life,’ classic rock lyrics, personal musings and lyric fragments, and excerpts of literary and cultural criticism, all fused in a polyphonic and alert discourse. He felt closely related to such an approach, as his own poetry was informed by notions of performance, polyphony, and multiple cross-boundary discourse, and after looking deeper into Baker’s work he decided to write the American poet and translate some of his poetry. One year earlier, Tanasescu had published a collection in which he experimented with syllabic verse (a meter never employed in Romanian poetry since its late medieval and early modern periods) and camouflaging ‘classic’ forms, such as sonnets and ottava rimas, under heterogeneous dictions and nonconventional typography (Gulea, 2010). He discovered in Baker a master of syllabic verse, and, if not an

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experimental, then an extremely subtle ‘translator’ of classic forms into new contexts and discourses. Besides discovering a great poet that shared some of his topics—along with and maybe more significantly than rock culture, the poetry of place, environment, and landscape which somewhat matched Tanasescu’s rather urban topologies—he discovered in Baker a famous advocate of poetic options that the translator thought crucial in revitalizing the poetry written by the poets that were emerging in Romania in the two decades after 1989. In November 2009, Tanasescu published a volume<sup>21</sup> of Baker’s *Selected Poems* in Romanian translation—preceded by a selection published in *Viața românească*<sup>22</sup> and further selections in *Convorbiri literare*<sup>23</sup> in 2010. He also applied, through the Margento Foundation, for a grant with the U.S. Department of State to bring the poet to Romania for a series of book launches. In an interview, Baker recounts of himself:

8 [It was a] completely *random* thing, Mr. Baker says of that experience. This fellow, maybe two, two and a half years ago, emailed me. Chris Tanasescu, who is a Romanian poet at the University of Bucharest, had come across a poem of mine and wanted to translate it for a magazine. And he just kept going and about a year ago said that he would like to put together a ‘selected poems’ from all my books and show it to a publisher. He did, the publisher took it, the book was published [in November 2009] and I went over for the launch. I’d never been there, I know two words of Romanian, but I’d apparently written a book called *Omul Alchimic* and had an amazing time. (Holler, 2010, emphasis added)

This random act of translation occasioned a chain of other projects that furthered the long-standing relationship between U.S. and Romanian cultures. In 2012, inspired by his Romanian tour, David Baker initiated a translation experiment<sup>24</sup> dedicated to his Romanian translator (“To Chris, who opened the door”), which is to be considered a literary barter for Tanasescu. Baker departed from Tanasescu’s translation of his poem “Hungry” and submitted the Romanian “Foame” to a process of back-translation and re-translation between Romanian and English for a total of fourteen times. The introduction describes the translator team as a network of acquaintances of the author and the translator and spells out author’s hope that “each iteration would be a coherent poem on its own merit.” (Baker, 2012) The translators’ dialogue, a sort of literary telephone game (as one of the translators put it), bore no translation limitations and resulted in a whole new poem in English, which contained only those parts



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(syllables or whole words) of the original text that still existed in the last English translation. Baker's final poem was the embodiment of Tanasescu's tenet that a good translatable poem is always "transmutational and communal." (Baker, 2010). Ramifications of Tanasescu's translation of Baker's poetry into Romanian led to the participation of the American poet in the International Poetry Festival in Sibiu in 2014 and in a translation into English and publication in the renowned *Kenyon Review* of a poem<sup>25</sup> by the organizer, poet Radu Vancu, and by other participants in the festival.

While searching the internet for young American poets to write about<sup>26</sup> and translate, Tanasescu came across the poetry of Ilya Kaminsky. A Jewish-Russian poet who emigrated from Odessa at the age of 16, when his family fled a war going on at the time in neighboring Moldova and who came from a region and had a background so relevant to the Romanian translator. Moreover, Kaminsky's energetically painful and rabbinically musical lyricism appealed to Tanasescu for its genuine fusion of the most privately subjective and the traditional, the latter involving both a mythologized and yet tragic history of Odessa (and actually Eastern Europe) and deep immersions in the works and biographies of Russian classic modernists like Mandelstam and Akhmatova. Tanasescu's choice seems to have been right, as the translation was met with great interest and even enthusiasm by many young poets, and both the book and the poet are still greatly admired in Romania ten years after the publication.<sup>27</sup>

When he arrived in San Diego, California, on a Senior Fulbright Award hosted by the department where Ilya Kaminsky was a member, Tanasescu met Rothenberg, a legendary figure whose work he had admired, taught, and written about.<sup>28</sup> Being directly in touch with the remarkably personable master allowed the younger poet to observe two complementary aspects of the former's personality and approach—one, Rothenberg's amplitude and complexity was indeed amazing, as grounded in an ongoing impatience to learn about poetries and cultures that could never be too (or rather enough) strange or uncanny, and, two, his ([de]constructed) indebtedness to Romanian iconic figures like Tristan Tzara and Mircea Eliade. Under the circumstances, it was fascinating for Tanasescu and his co-translator to render in Romanian<sup>29</sup> the way in which one of the most internationalist and eclectic poets in the world spent an impressive part of his creative energy dialoging with master figures of the Romanian culture and recuperating the historical and cultural experience of his ancestors, while at the same time opening the door of his poetry to localisms and untranslatable traditions from all corners of the world (Tanasescu, 2013, pp. 184-185). Selections appeared in *Poezia* in

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2011<sup>30</sup> and 2012,<sup>31</sup> then in *Poesis International* in 2013<sup>32</sup>, just before the publication of his *Selected Poems* in Romanian.

More than is the case with other Romanian poet-translators, Tanasescu's own poetic work reveals his use of translation as a generative and creative act, "an integrative and restitutive gesture, a non-linear act of language" (Mironescu, 2013). One of the features that characterise his poetry is an unmasked, playful and transgressive translational poetics which "affirms [his] ethnic and linguistic identity even more thoroughly by a 'live' dialogue with the other [poets]" (Patraş, 2010). As Patraş rightfully notes, his poems engage in a dialogue—a jam-session—with the poetry of many of the authors he translates, from Baker to Kaminsky to Woodside or Starzinger, "in a universal language of poetry and mathematics, which is essentially musical" (*id.*), making Patraş compare him with John Ashbery. Patraş was certainly not mistaken in tracing the literary lineage. Such as is the case with transnational literary contamination, which "reveals concerns about the development of innovative domestic poetics," (Galvin, 2014, p. 480) Tanasescu had indeed translated Ashbery,<sup>33</sup> motivated by the desire to challenge and redesign contemporary literary fashions in native Romania. The networks established in real life move into the poem of the self-dubbed '(trans)nationalist poet' whose band of translators grows with every worthy poet he meets and, as Woodside (2014) notes, is a reflection of his... passport: this is how he gets to translate John Taylor,<sup>34</sup> whom he met in Paris, or Page Hill Starzinger,<sup>35</sup> whom he met in Romania, alongside other writers like Meghan O'Rourke,<sup>36</sup> Roger Craik,<sup>37</sup> or D.A. Powell<sup>38</sup>—young poets who may prove relevant to their Romanian peers. Furthermore, what Marjorie Perloff would call 'uncreative writing'—"poetry that is entirely "unoriginal" and nevertheless qualifies as poetry" (Perloff, 2010, p. 8)—is further networked by Tanasescu in a series of assemblages he defines as "graph poems": "an ongoing communal [...] poetry project that involves poets and writers from various parts of the world collaborating by the principles of mathematical graph theory and in the spirit of jam sessions" (Tanasescu, 2011). As noted by Nicolau, translation is not only vital for the poetic dialogue, but also makes possible the live connection of poems and people, in a transnational poetics in which "diverse poets launch lines of creation and others develop and multiply them" (Nicolau, 2014, p. 319). The diasporic condition of the poet and the network he builds around (and in) his poetry invite multiple ways of translation within the same volume: from translating other poets' work and engaging in a dialogue with them to self-translation and inviting other poets to translate his own poems. At the end, all become translators and play in "a global, multi-

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language, powerful performance troupe,” (Baker, 2014), “an international coalition of writers and translators” (Woodside, 2014).

Another example of translations fueled by academic mobility is Boston-based scholar and poet Mihaela Moscaliuc, a Fulbright fellow with the Al. I. Cuza University in Iași during the 2014-2015 academic year and during whose tenure a selection from the work of poets Gerald Stern<sup>39</sup> and Michael Waters<sup>40</sup> is published in a local literary journal and a poetry reading featuring translations of Michael Waters’ poems by her students is organized during the International Education Festival in Iași in 2015. Another selection appears three years later in *Convorbiri literare*,<sup>41</sup> also based in Iași. While the attention devoted to Waters can be certainly explained by the incontestable value of his work, I also found out that Moscaliuc and Waters have long been married (Welsh, 2013) and that Waters had himself been a Fulbright lecturer with the same university only a few years before Moscaliuc’s residency (*id.*). Since the local literary scene might have been somewhat familiar with his work, a series of translations followed by an interview<sup>42</sup> towards the end of his wife’s tenure made good sense. The association of Waters’ work with translations of the celebrated poet Gerald Stern in the same journal feature, though, might appear as striking, but it can be easily explained by Moscaliuc’s long-lasting academic interest in Stern’s work.<sup>43</sup> All these unique sets of conditions have led to a heterogeneous set of translation projects that cannot be the initiatives of anybody else but the translator herself. However, her exclusive focus on Waters and Stern makes her rank very low in all centralities and keeps her disconnected in the transnational graph.

In terms of subsequent translation projects, Moscaliuc’s residency with the university in Iași differs significantly from Tara Skurtu’s experience during her two fellowships at the University in Sibiu. Although of Romanian extraction, Skurtu’s level of Romanian did not allow her to translate from the English, but only into English. However, her encounter with Radu Vancu, a prominent player on the local and national literary scene, resulted in numerous selections of her poetry being translated into Romanian. The prospect of relocation to Romania, which took place in 2017, after two Fulbright residencies, as well as the prospects of an adjustment to and an integration in a new literary scene, likely asked for a generous number of translations that would properly introduce her to Romanian audiences, and especially tightly-knit literary networks. Skurtu’s selection of seven poems translated by Radu Vancu<sup>44</sup> was most likely occasioned by her participation in the 2014 International Literary Festival in Sibiu, a mention that appears in his translator’s note after a very detailed enumeration of eleven American journals that have published her work to date, alongside a fellowship and a prize.

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After two more selections in 2014<sup>45</sup> and 2015,<sup>46</sup> in 2016 Vancu even translates a full volume of Skurtu's, one that has been only very recently launched in the United States—in January 2018. The release of a Romanian translation before the launch of the original book may be very pertinently related to her adjustment to the new literary network she was about to join. Another translation of her work was occasioned by the passing of Romanian contemporary poet Andrei Bodi, to whom she dedicated a poem.<sup>47</sup> As a matter of fact, many of the poems she wrote during her academic residencies were heavily anchored in her new life in Romania, which on the one hand made them very exotic for the American readership, and on the other made them easily translatable and approachable for a Romanian audience. Her presence in the transnational graph is due to Micu's one-time contribution, which is not enough to give her any kind of prominence. However, in the general network of translation in printed periodicals (Figure 1 presented in the conclusion) she belongs in the giant component due to the translations done by Vancu. This is one of the most relevant examples of how translators influence the network they are part of: although insignificant in the transnational component where one would naturally place her because of her profile, she gains more prominence in the general network because of the numerous translations by a translator well-positioned in that network.

Skurtu's translation experience as an American scholar and poet is different from those of other scholars and poets involved in the same exchange. No other poet has benefitted from so many translations like she did. For example, Christopher Bakken, a Fulbright scholar in 2008, had only a journal selection of his poetry<sup>48</sup> translated by Ioana Ieronim. Ieronim—a poet who made a name for herself as one of Andrei Codrescu's translators, but who also happens to be the sister of Mihai Moroiu, American Program director with the Fulbright Commission in Bucharest since 2003—translates in 2011 Fulbright grantee Martin Woodside.<sup>49</sup> She had met Woodside in person at a conference and literary festival in Neptun, an academic and literary dissemination venue for all Fulbright fellows each year. This is where Ieronim also met Canadian writer Cheryl Antao Xavier and followed up with a translated selection of her work.<sup>50</sup> The event also prompted a translation from her long-time acquaintance, New York City-based Andrey Gritsman.<sup>51</sup> Although Woodside's fellowship did not result in many translations of his own work, his meeting with Chris Tanasescu in Bucharest was the trigger for further, more ample projects. Besides being translated for the first time into Romanian by Tanasescu,<sup>52</sup> Woodside put together an anthology of Romanian poetry in English translation in 2011<sup>53</sup> and co-translates with the Romanian a volume of selected works by surrealist poet Gellu Naum in

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2013.<sup>54</sup> Finally, I would like to also mention here the translation done by Aura Taras Sibişan, a lecturer at the Transylvania University in Braşov, of the poetry of Jeremy Hawkins,<sup>55</sup> a Fulbright grantee in 2008-2009 with the same institution, alongside the one-time translation by Felix Nicolau of visiting Master of Arts' student D.M. Andrei.<sup>56</sup>

### **Literary Translation and Scholarly Work**

Scholarship and poetry translation have been specifically researched by Josephine Balmer (2013), who shrewdly notes there is a symbiosis between academic research and classical poetry translation which often leads to poetry production on the part of the translator. In this section, I present projects that have occurred as a result of academic mobility, but which have not been backed by literary affinities or by the translators' poetic appropriation. Poetry translation as complement to scholarly research has a strong representative in Rodica Grigore's work, the main node in the main component. A senior lecturer in Comparative Literature at the Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Grigore translated Margaret Atwood<sup>57</sup> following an essay<sup>58</sup> inspired by her work in 2010, a literary analysis applied to the Romanian translation of Atwood's novel<sup>59</sup> in 2008. Grigore's translation of Michael Ondaatje's poetry<sup>60</sup> is followed a year later by an essay<sup>61</sup> dedicated to his poetic work. She also translates selections from the writings of Paul Auster<sup>62</sup>, a selection preceded and followed by at least two scholarly articles.<sup>63</sup> Her translation of Ted Berrigan<sup>64</sup> seems to be related rather to her work on Andrei Codrescu, the Romanian-born American poet that is difficult to pin down because of his affinities with numerous other writers, among whom Berrigan and other New York School poets—very often mentioned in her scholarly essays<sup>65</sup> on Codrescu. Finally, Grigore's selection of Elaine Equi's work<sup>66</sup> appears to be an isolated occurrence, not doubled by any scholarly work. However, Equi's interest in Frank O'Hara, the iconic poet of the New York School, seems to be the red thread that guided this translation choice. Grigore's translator notes are very informed and analytical and focus more on the themes and literary quality of the translated work than on the author's biography and literary recognitions. She generally prefers literary criticism and scholarly essays published in mainstream literary or scholarly journals—venues that further legitimize the scholarly nature of her pieces. A dedicated follower of the literary translation scene in Romania, she devoted at least two reviews<sup>67</sup> to the translation of T.S. Eliot's poetry in 2012.

Grigore's example is not singular. Elena Ciobanu is a professor of British and American poetry at the University of Bacau in North-East Romania. Her list of selected academic papers

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shows an overt interest in the poetry of Sylvia Plath whose *Selected Poetry* she translates in a volume<sup>68</sup> and publishes with Paralela 45 Press in 2012. Her research interest in contemporary poetry results in further sporadic selections from T.S. Eliot<sup>69</sup> and Canadian Jeramy Dodds,<sup>70</sup> hosted exclusively by local literary journal *Ateneu*, which also presented reviews of her translations and awarded her rendition of Plath with the 2013 Translation Prize. Another example comes from Craiova, where Victor Olaru (presented in the previous section) works as a professor of Anglophone studies and publishes most of his translated selections in local *Scrisul românesc*, already mentioned extensively in this chapter in relation to other translation initiatives.

### Conclusion

If we think about all the translations in a certain language as forming a system, the most useful way to visually represent and quantitatively analyze such translations is by building a graph (or network), in which the nodes are the authors and translators, and the edges are the publication venues. Since many of these translations were actually published as poetry selections in Romanian literary journals, it is in this context that we visually position the authors presented.

Figure 1 shows a network that represents the whole corpus of contemporary English-language US and Canadian poetry translated into Romanian and published in print periodicals between 2007 and 2017 and highlights (in circles) the position of the translators featured here.<sup>71</sup>



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amount of U.S. and Canadian poetry translated as a result of transnational exchanges and by transnational poets is definitely quite large. Such transnational networks are highly interpersonal, even when they are the result of exchanges supported by various institutions. As Francis R. Jones rightfully argues, “[p]oetry translation is produced by networks of agents working across a ‘distributed’ space. This implies that it is simplistic to conceptualise literary translation in terms of one agent’s loyalty to one cultural space” (Jones, 2009, p. 301). Furthermore, a transnational paradigm and a network approach bring into discussion the idea of subjectivity, randomness, and even opportunism and nepotism as significant driving forces behind any translation project, all related to an increasing translator agency and resulting in a highly heterogeneous web of relationships.

Most importantly, such random acts of translation have a dual function in relation to minorness. On the one hand, they positively undermine local patterns of transfer that are enforced by an existing literary canon. By engaging in non-monetized exchanges that value interpersonal relationships and their personal didactic canon, translators from ‘minor’ cultures enlarge the boundaries of local publication programs. It is by means of such contributions that any literary system becomes a network with a thousand entrances. On the other hand, due to a permanent balance act between two cultures, (random) transnational transfers have a snowball effect that results in larger amounts of poetry being translated and in a wider range of connections being established. As a result, such translators are more easily assimilated to a global network of cultural agents that do not necessarily bear the burden of a biased minor status, but positively contribute to the global circulation of literary products. The dynamics of such transfers empower poet-translators, whose work no longer bears the burden of a ‘minor’ cultural status and, instead, gets translated promoted more democratically than by means of institutional aesthetic and didactic canons. In this complicated and refreshing web of relationships, ‘minor’ is, indeed, just another word.

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<sup>3</sup> All these translations are presented as footnotes throughout the essay.

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<sup>8</sup> The translation was awarded the "Andrei Bantaș" Foundation Prize for Translation from the English at the Romanian Writers' Union Gala in 2011.

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