

The Profile of the Poet-Translator - A Case Study on the Translation of the Poetic Work of Charles Baudelaire

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Abstract

This article explores the intersection between poetic creation and literary translation by focusing on a selection of translators who have engaged with the poetry of Charles Baudelaire. Rather than offering a historical overview, the study aims to examine how individual translator profiles - particularly those of poet-translators - shape the reception and reinterpretation of Baudelaire's verse in another linguistic and cultural space. The discussion draws attention to the nuanced dynamics that emerge when a poet attempts to translate another poet: the interplay between fidelity and creative voice, the presence or absence of aesthetic affinity, and the ways in which a translator's own poetic identity influences the act of translation. By analyzing case studies of Romanian translators who have contributed to the rendering of Baudelaire's work, this article questions whether poetic sensibility is an asset or a hindrance in achieving effective translation. It also addresses the implications of assigning a major literary figure the task of translating another one, and whether such a pairing inevitably leads to interpretative transformation. Ultimately, the article considers how the translator's dual role - as interpreter and creator - may alter both the translated text and the translator's own poetic output. The study contributes to broader debates on poetic translatability, authorship, and the ethics of literary mediation.

Keywords: *poetic translation, poet-translator, Charles Baudelaire, Romanian literature, literary fidelity.*

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The translation of Baudelaire's work into Romanian represents a particularly fertile ground for the study of the history of translations and translators (Baudelaire, 1968). The translation chain extends over three centuries, and in the 1968 edition of the anthology Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du mal - The Flowers of Evil*, more than 100 translators are mentioned. This is yet another reason why Baudelaire has become a true phenomenon in Romania, in addition to his influence on the development of literature. Given the richness and diversity of this range of translators, we have chosen to present a selection, with an emphasis on those who have either specialized in translating Baudelaire's poetic creation or have formulated relevant reflections alongside their practice.

Theoretical approaches to the translation of poetic texts reveal the existence of a particular translator profile: the poet-translator, who is best suited to translate poetry. From this, one may already deduce that whoever wishes to engage in the translation of lyrical discourse must themselves be a poet. However, this seemingly simple relationship can give rise to an entire series of questions.

When examining the translation chain of Baudelaire's poetic work into Romanian - particularly the volume *Les Fleurs du mal* - one aspect immediately drew our attention: the reference translation is that of Philippide, which is rather surprising considering that two other Romanian poets, Arghezi and Bacovia, were much more deeply influenced by Baudelaire's creative universe. This raises an essential question: can the translation of a major poet be entrusted to another major poet? Is the translator's own poetic voice an asset or an obstacle in the process of translation?

Another issue we aim to address concerns the notion of affinity between the author of the source text and the translator. Could such affinity constitute a prerequisite for producing a high-quality translation? A final point we intend to investigate is the extent to which the poet's creative force exerts influence on the act of translation - and vice versa.

In order to shed light on the relationship between creative activity and translational activity, this article will be devoted to the presentation of several translators who have worked on Baudelaire's poetic work.

In certain cases, the boundary between creation and translation is imperceptible. One of the names we may evoke in this regard is Șerban Bascovici (1891 - 1968), who received the prize of the Society of Romanian Writers for his volume *Destăinuiri (Confessions)*, from 1937, and for the collection Charles Baudelaire, *Florile răului (The*

Flowers of Evil), published in 1940 at the printing house Școala de Perfecționare în Arte Grafice (School of Advanced Studies in Graphic Arts), Bucharest. This weighs heavily in highlighting his qualities as a translator, also emphasized by the literary critic and historian Dan Mănuță. In his view, Șerban Bascovici preserves the atmosphere of the original, an essential role given his predilection for symbolism, cultivated in his personal poetry (Mănuță, 2003). He showed a particular interest in drama and translated into Romanian plays by Molière, Victor Hugo, Jules Renard, and Francis de Croisset.

Constantin Z. Buzdugan (1870 - 1930), a lawyer, poet, and translator, held a significant place in the cultural environment of his native city, Galați. Founder of several publications, for example *Dunărea (The Danube)*, *Dunărea de Jos (Lower Danube)*, *Votul universal (Universal Vote)*, *România muncitoare (Working Romania)*, he turned his house into a meeting place for the scholars of the time through the literary circle he organized, *Cenaclul artistic literar (The Literary and Artistic Circle)*. Author of the poetry volume *Singurătate (Solitude)*, published in 1897 - Bucharest, Tipografia Populară (Popular Printing House), he demonstrated from his youth a concern for translation, being one of the dedicated translators of Baudelaire's work, as evidenced by the information provided by Geo Dumitrescu in the anthology *Les Fleurs du mal - Florile răului (The Flowers of Evil)* (1968). Among his favorite authors were Victor Hugo, Alfred de Musset, Charles Baudelaire, Sully Prudhomme, Paul Verlaine, and Albert Samain, but given his affinity for the socialist movement, he was also the author of the Romanian version of *L'Internationale*, the famous socialist anthem.

According to our research, a posthumous collection published in 1942 by the publishing house of the journal *România tânără (Young Romania)*, Brașov, *Poezii (Poems)* - translated from modern French poets, contains, in the first part, translations of Baudelaire's work, numbering fifty pieces, a volume which served as one of the sources for Geo Dumitrescu's anthology.

Based on the information provided by the anthologist, we note that some versions were first published in periodicals.

In contrast to Constantin Z. Buzdugan, the professor, poet, and translator Mihail Bantaș (Bantăș) (1890 - 1959), born in Iași, contributed to the cultural life rather anonymously and wrote under the pseudonym *Pierrot*. A graduate of the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, he dedicated a large part of his time to teaching, as evidenced by the activity he carried out. Author of French language school textbooks, he collaborated with the Institute of Linguistics of the

Academy for the first edition of the *Grammaire de la langue roumaine* (*Grammar of the Romanian Language*) and for the revised edition of the *Dictionnaire français-roumain* (*French-Romanian Dictionary*).

As a writer, he published his poems in periodicals such as *Versuri* (*Verses*) and *Versuri și proză* (*Verses and Prose*), which he founded together with his friend I. M. Rașcu, *Însemnări ieșene* (*Iași Notes*), of which he was a member, *Viața Românească* (*Romanian Life*), *Minerva*, *Zări senine* (*Clear Horizons*), *Însemnări literare* (*Literary Notes*) etc. From his poetic output, he published only one volume during his lifetime, in 1921, *Versuri* (*Verses*).

Regarding his translational work, one aspect must be noted: he translated Baudelaire into Romanian and Eminescu into French. The list of translated authors is completed by Heinrich Heine, Paul Verlaine, Francis Jammes, etc. His translations were published mostly in journals, but some of them were included in anthological editions, such as that of Geo Dumitrescu, *Les Fleurs du mal - Florile răului* (*The Flowers of Evil*) (1968), or *Luceafărul* (*Lucifer - Vesper - Der Abendstern - Лучафэр - Hyperion - L'astro - Az Estcsillag - O astro da Tarde*), coordinated by Vasile Vlad (1984). The posthumous collection Mihail Bantaș - *Choix de poésies* (*Selection of Poems*), a French-Romanian edition published in 1996 in Bucharest by Teora, brings together a part of the translated pieces.

For the first three names mentioned, we can observe a relationship of equality between creative activity and translational activity. This is not the case for Nicolae Davidescu (1888? - 1954), whom we may call an occasional translator. A representative of Parnassian literary current, he published volumes of personal poetry, *La fântâna Castaliei* (*At the Fountain of Castalia*) and *Inscripții* (*Inscriptions*), the latter including translations from the work of Charles Baudelaire - *L'Âme du Vin / Sufletul vinului* (*The Soul of Wine*) and *Les Chats / Pisicile* (*The Cats*), of Paul Verlaine (one piece), and of Albert Samain (one piece).

Worth noting is the way in which the translated poems are integrated into the book. The writer includes the translations among his own verses, with the mention *După...* (*After...*), without dedicating a separate section to them. This allows us to infer that, for him, translation is a form of creation and the original is a starting point for a new text.

Another occasional translator is Panait Cerna (Stanciof at birth) (1881 - 1913), who made his debut at the age of sixteen in the weekly *Foaia interesantă* (*The Interesting Sheet*), coordinated by George Coșbuc. His first publication was a translation, *Trecut* (*The Past*),

offered as a rendering of a poem by Nikolaus Lenau, published in issue no. 33 of the periodical (24 August 1897).

The beginning of his literary career was praised by the critic Ion Dodu Bălan, who noted his talent coupled with a strong command of the expressiveness of the Romanian language (Cerna, 1981). One year later, he published a personal poem, *Oriental* (*Oriental*), in the journal *Carmen*. As a student at the Faculty of Physics and Chemistry and at the Faculty of Philosophy, he contributed poems and translations to various publications such as *Floarea albastră* (*The Blue Flower*), *Epoca* (*The Epoch*), *Noua revistă română* (*The New Romanian Review*), *Revista modernă* (*The Modern Review*) etc.

Even though the list of poets he translated is dedicated to the Romantics (Byron, Hugo, Lenau), given his inclination toward Romanticism, he was one of the first translators of the poem *L'Albatros* into Romanian. His version, *Albatrozul* (*The Albatross*), published in the third issue of the journal *Convorbiri literare* (*Literary Conversations*), 1st of March 1901, is included in the volumes *Poezii* (*Poems*), 1963, published in Bucharest by Editura Pentru Literatură (Publishing House for Literature), and *Poezii* (*Poems*), 1981, published by Minerva Publishing House, Bucharest.

The range of young poets is completed by Ioan I. Ciorănescu (1905 - 1926). He made his debut at the age of fifteen in children's and youth literary magazines such as *Lumea copiilor* (*The Children's World*), *Universul Copiilor* (*The Universe of Children*), and *Foaia tinerimii* (*The Youth's Paper*) (for which he also served as editor), and he collaborated with the periodicals of the time: *Adevărul literar* (*The Literary Truth*), *Viața literară* (*The Literary Life*), *Cuvîntul literar* (*The Literary Word*), and *Gîndirea* (*The Thinking*).

Between 1924 and 1925, under his coordination, the magazine *Vlăstarul* (*The Offshoot*) appeared, written entirely by the students of *Spiru Haret High School* in Bucharest. A student at the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, specializing in French and Italian, he displayed a preference for children's literature and published, in 1925, at *Cartea Românească*, Bucharest, the volume *Povești în versuri* (*Stories in Verse*). However, most of his work was published posthumously, including translations of French poetry collected in *Antologia poeziei franceze* (*Anthology of French Poetry*), 1926, *Cartea Românească*, Bucharest.

Poems translated from German were published in journals, while the translation of the play *Esther* by Jean Racine appeared in 1924 at the *Socsec publishing house* in Bucharest. From English literature, he translated notably Edgar Allan Poe and William

Shakespeare (the translation of the tragedy Macbeth remained in manuscript form), and from Italian literature, Giacomo Leopardi and Gabriele D'Annunzio.

The volume we consulted, *Vestiri, versuri și Antologia poeziei franceze - traduceri (Stories, verses and Anthology of French Poetry - translations)*, published in 1980, Minerva, Bucharest, republishes the texts from the posthumous volume *Vestiri (Tidings)*, 1937, Institutul de Arte Grafice Tiparul Universitar (Institute of Graphic Arts Academic Printing), Bucharest, and the translations from the 1926 anthology. Among the thirty translated authors, Baudelaire is represented by the pieces *Le Flacon / Flaconul (The Flask)*, *La Béatrice / Beatrice (Beatrice)*, *Harmonie du Soir / Armonia serii (Evening Harmony)*.

A similar fate was shared by the Symbolist poet Barbu Nemțeanu (real name Benjamin Deutsch) (1887 - 1919), who made his literary debut at the age of seventeen in the periodical *Înainte (Forward)*. Four years later, he founded the literary and scientific weekly *Pagini libere (Free Pages)*, where he published original texts and translations. As in the case of the poet Ioan I. Ciorănescu, due to his premature death, he only had time to publish two volumes during his lifetime: one dedicated to personal poetry, *Stropi de soare (Drops of Sun)*, and the other to translations of Heinrich Heine.

Nevertheless, his work was not influenced by the traits of the authors he translated. According to Mihail Dragomirescu, he maintained his optimism despite Heine's irony and Lenau's pessimism. (Nemțeanu, 1926) Besides the original pieces, the 1926 anthology *Antologie: poezii (Anthology: Poems)* includes versions from the work of Heine, Lenau, Schiller, Goethe, Baudelaire, and Hugo, grouped under the title *Comori străine (Foreign Treasures)*, the French Symbolist being represented by a single text, *Recueillement / Înseninare (Meditation)*.

By contrast, the personal poetry of Dumitru Iacobescu (Armand Iacobson) (1893 - 1913) was marked by his activity as a translator, as noted by Perpessicius in the preface to the volume *Quasi*, published in 1930 in Bucharest by Cultura Națională. The collection includes a section entitled *Tălmăciri (Translations)*, dedicated to versions offered for texts by Baudelaire - *Le Revenant / Strigoiful (The Ghost)*, *Recueillement / Reculegere (Meditation)*, *Le Squelette laboureur / Scheletul plugar (The Skeleton Ploughman)*, *Chant d'Automne / Cântece de toamnă (Autumn Song)*, *Tristesse de la Lune / Tristețea lunii (Sadness of the Moon)*, *La Géante / Uriașa (The Giantess)*, Verlaine (one piece), Mallarmé (one piece), Samain (two pieces), and Longfellow (one piece).

Even though the analysis conducted by the Romanian critic concerns the poet's original creation, Perpessicius's reflections anticipate, ahead of their time, the modern perspective on poetry translation as a dialogue between multiple poetic voices. In his view, D. Iacobescu's work retains the traits of French Symbolism, due to two factors: on one hand, the Romanian literary context was eager to assimilate foreign models, and on the other hand, there was a certain affinity of the poet for the French Symbolists with whom he resonated - we need only consider the similarities between his fate and that of Samain.

Further on, the critic also speaks of a connection between the title of the volume, *Quasi*, and the work of Verlaine, the fifth verse of the poem *Le piano que baise une main frêle* (*The piano kissed by a frail hand*) containing the word *quasiment*, (*Rôle discret, épeuré quasiment*) (*Wanders discreetly, almost fearfully*). But beyond these influences, D. Iacobescu's writing is nourished by his agony (Iacobescu, 1930).

From the same period dates the name of Constantin T. Stoika (1892 - 1916), poet and translator who experienced the war. He led a very active literary life starting in high school, when he established the magazine *Tinerimea literară și artistică* (*The Literary and Artistic Youth*) and directed the literary society *Gion*. The list of translations includes verses by Latin poets (Lucretius, Virgil, Horace) and by French Symbolists (Baudelaire, Verlaine). Noteworthy in his trajectory as a translator is the fact that he received the Hillel Prize for the Romanian version of Lucretius's poem *De rerum natura* (*On the Nature of Things*), produced in collaboration with Perpessicius.

In the 1968 edition prepared by Geo Dumitrescu, the translator is represented by a single translation, *La Cloche fêlée / Clopotul spart* (*The Cracked Bell*), previously published in the journal *Vieața nouă* (*New Life*), issue no. 8, 1912 - 1913, and included in the volume *Poezii* (*Poems*), published in Chișinău in 1928.

The work of the poet Victor Tulbure (1925 - 1997) shows an orientation toward proletarian culture. In the volume *Aur: versuri din mai multe caiete* (*Gold: verses from several notebooks*), published in 1963 by Editura Pentru Literatură (Publishing House for Literature), Bucharest, the section *Privighetori străine* (*Foreign Nightingales*) contains a few translations, among them the Baudelairean poem *Je n'ai pas oublié, voisine de la ville / Eu n-am uitat-o încă* (*I Have Not Forgotten, Neighbor of the Town*).

A graduate of the Faculty of Letters in Bucharest, he also translated poetry from Russian (A. S. Pushkin, A. Blok, N. Tikhonov, N. Gorbachev), Ukrainian (Taras Shevchenko), Bulgarian (Khristo Botev, N. Vaptsarov), and Armenian (Nahapet Kuchak), the latter in collaboration with Dan Deșliu (Beșleagă) (1927 - 1992), politician, actor, and poet, who made his debut in 1949 with the volume *Goarnele inimii* (*The Bugles of the Heart*).

He authored a few articles on literary criticism of poetry, but according to I. D. Bălan, his real objective was to praise socialism through literature. (Deșliu, 1962) Thus, his poetry became a mirror reflecting his political and social attitudes, undergoing a transformation after the 1980s, when he expressed his dissent toward the communist regime.

Published in 1964 by Editura Pentru Literatură (Publishing House for Literature), Bucharest, the volume *Minunile de fiecare zi* (*The Everyday Wonders*) includes, among personal texts such as *Minunile de fiecare zi* (*The Everyday Wonders*), *Cum am învățat să merg pe bicicletă* (*How I Learned to Ride a Bicycle*), *N-ați văzut o balenă albastră?* (*Haven't You Seen a Blue Whale?*), etc., translations of Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud, Valéry, Apollinaire, Aragon, Prévert, and Blas de Otero.

The translated poems (one piece by each author) are grouped under the title *Interpretări* (*Interpretations*), a choice that may be perceived as a form of warning to the reader. It is announced, in an indirect way, that the proposed versions are rather the result of creative work. From Baudelaire's work, he translated *Le Crépuscule du soir* / *Asfințit de seară* (*Evening Twilight*).

Two years later, in 1966, at Editura Tineretului (Youth Publishing House), Bucharest, George Dan (alias George Danubia) (1916 - 1972) published the volume *Corabia cu cincizeci de catarge* (*The Ship with Fifty Masts*). Chapter IV, titled *Trei păsări străine* (*Three Foreign Birds*), includes three translations from the work of Poe, Baudelaire, and Valéry, the second being represented by the poem *L'Albatros* / *Albatrosul* (*The Albatross*).

Just like Dan Deșliu, he sees his translations as interpretations, but unlike the former, George Dan - a committed poet, founder of the journal *Nenufar* (*Water Lily*), and editor for the publications *România liberă* (*Free Romania*) and *Flacăra* (*The Flame*) - is also known as a translator of Persian poetry (Ferdowsi) and Indian poetry (Tagore). The list of translations is expanded by several authors from Russian literature (Konstantin Simonov, K. M. Stanyukovich, Sergej Mikhalkov).

Nevertheless, he showed a preference for exotic poetry, given his profession as a sailor.

From these portraits of translators (we selected a few, particularly those for whom we directly consulted the published volumes), we can observe, despite differences in their educational background, a convergence in their translation perspective. George Dan and Victor Tulbure use a metaphor to describe translation. The versions are birds, nightingales, renowned for their song, and this indicates a heightened attention to the translation of sound - a topic later developed by another Romanian poet-translator, Ștefan Augustin Doinaș.

Whether a politician (Dan Deșliu) or a sailor (George Dan), the translator is aware that the translation process is not limited to linguistic transfer, but implies a more complex endeavor that also includes interpretation. This is a modern vision that links the act of translation with the act of creation.

Conclusions

As for the initial issues, we can formulate a few observations. Very often, the act of translation is influenced, to a certain extent, by the creative universe of the poet-translator. For example, Șerban Bascovici succeeds in preserving the atmosphere of the original because he already cultivates Symbolism in his own work. In turn, individual creation can be influenced by foreign pieces if the poet-translator identifies with the mindset of the original author, as in the case of Dumitru Iacobescu. But there are cases in which the translator maintains a distance from the writer, a situation encountered with Barbu Nemțeanu.

Sometimes, the boundary between creative work and translational work is entirely erased, if we think of Nicolae Davidescu, who brings together personal texts and translated texts, or of Dan Deșliu, who considers his translations rather as interpretations. All these observations lead us to conclude that the translator of poetry must also have, to a greater or lesser degree, a tendency toward lyricism.

Among them, some have only briefly engaged with Baudelaire's work (Panait Cerna, Ioan I. Ciorănescu, Constantin T. Stoika, etc.), while others have specialized in the translation of the French poet (Șerban Bascovici, C. Z. Buzdugan). As for the impact of their translations, it is connected to the notoriety of their own work (the originality of their creative force). Hence the fact that none of them has provided a reference version like that of Philippide.

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