

Polyphonic Poe

Daniela Maria MARTOLE

danielamartole@yahoo.com

“Ștefan cel Mare” University of Suceava (Romania)

Translated Poe brings together a plethora of researchers from four continents, with the purpose to “examine the specific vehicle that delivers Poe to the world – translation” (xii). This impressive volume is structured into two parts that group the thirty-one chapters under the titles *Poe Translations in Literary Traditions* and *Poe’s Fiction and Poetry in Translation*. The eighteen chapters in the first part follow a diachronic perspective, unfolding the history of Poe’s reception in the given cultures, while the thirteen chapters included in the second section are case studies dealing with various translations of a particular text, with the work of a prominent translator or the translators’ account of their own experience in the process of appropriation of Poe’s work.

Translated Poe also translates in the complex historical evolution of his works in translation. Poe’s work and the receiving cultures seem to have been in a relationship of mutual interdependence, as translations subjected his writings to a constant, vivifying process of rereading, reinterpretation and redefinition, while, in their turn, Poe’s ideas had a great impact on the rethinking and reshaping of the national literary systems by challenging established norms and bringing a refreshing infusion of modernist values into the target cultures.

Most Romance language countries owe a great cultural debt to Charles Baudelaire whose versions of Poe’s prose were used as intermediary texts for their first 19 century translations but the history of Poe’s translation in those countries is also the story of the breaking away from tradition and the

establishing of new translation paradigms. In the chapter “Poe Translated in France” Lois David Vines follows the evolution of Poe’s translations from the founding texts of Baudelaire, Mallarmé and Valléry to the versions of contemporary translators such as Alain Jaubert and Jean Hautpierre pointing out the fact that “talented writers continue to perfect translations and produce analytical studies” (54). Although Baudelaire’s texts stood the test of time and space, in the second half of the volume, Henry Justin, in the article “Retranslating Poe into French”, offers a translator’s perspective upon the need of retranslating Poe’s work, stating that “though Baudelaire felt an intimate kinship with his American “brother”, he stumbled more than once” (204). The urge for retranslation is also motivated by the need for a new theoretical and methodological frame: “I do not believe in a choice of priorities between source language and target language. Both must be respected” (206).

Margarita Rigal-Aragon, in “A Historical Approach to The Translation of Poe’s narrative works in Spanish” underlines Baudelaire’s cultural heritage in Spain, where “he was the dominant voice among Spanish translators of the U. S. writer and in Spanish letters in general” (15) and of the long series of Poe’s translators until the middle of the twentieth century. Another emblematic figure that had a huge impact upon Poe’s reception in the Spanish speaking world was the writer Julio Cortázar, whose translations “continue to attract Spanish readers because of his ability to place Poe’s fiction within the context, both national and personal, in which Poe wrote it” (23). Emron Esplin’s case study in the second part of the volume places Cortázar in the same tradition with Baudelaire, but while Baudelaire translations functioned as interlingual bridges between English and other European languages, Cortázar brought together intralingual communities “from the southern cone to the Spanish peninsula and from Mexico to Peru” (259). The prominence of Poe’s work around the globe and the long history of his reception are partly due to such outstanding translators. This is also the case of Fernando Pessoa, one of the main representatives of Portuguese modernism, whose own work, in its turn, carried the mark of Poe’s influences. George Monteiro discusses, in the second section, the implication of Margarida Vale de Gato (one of the editors of the present volume) in successfully flashing out Pessoa’s original plan of translating Poe’s *Principais Poemas* and comments upon the ‘spriritualized’ version of “The Raven” in which the carnal fact of death and the carnal idea of resurrection are evaded (288). As Ugo Rubeo shows, in Italy, Mario Praz’s version of the same poem, “The Raven”, became canonical, both due to the translator’s literary skill, as well as due to his “sinister aura in which he delighted, in this again claiming descent from the original raven” (28).

In “Edgar Allan Poe in Romanian Translations”, Liviu Cotrău shows that “Romania’s attraction to all things French” (75) made separation from French masters difficult. However, due to the revived interest in Poe’s work in the second half of the twentieth century, “translators of Poe’s poetry and prose have entered what might be called a Harold Bloomian phase, each of them being

anxious to outdo their predecessor in a lively and productive game of emulation” (85). To support this view, Daniela Hăisan, in the second section, draws a comparative analysis of the fifteen Romanian translations of “The Mask of the Red Death” published between 1885 and 2012.

Maria Filippakapoulou focuses upon the impact Poe’s translations had on the theoretical frame of Greek literature in general. While identifying the French influences on the Greek translations, the author also explains the success of Poe’s European story, as orchestrated by Baudelaire: “His appropriation of Poe worked through a series of these mini plot-lines which have, in effect, opened up an overdetermined space of reception that invited further localized readings and uses” (39).

Marius Littschwager describes the reception history in Germany, where Poe is the only U.S. writer to have five different editions of his completed works translated into German (64). The same popularity characterizes Poe’s translation history in Russia. Elvira Osipova follows the evolution of Poe’s reception from Dmitry Mihailovsky’s translations of “The Black Cat” and “The Tell-Tale Heart” in 1861 to Vladimir Sarihjvili’s latest translations of the poem “The Raven” in 2000.

Daniel Göske, in the case study of Arno Schmidt’s intriguing appropriation of Poe introduces “an eccentric postmodernist” to whom “structural consistency and lexical precision became less important than local effects of euphony, semantic ambiguity and verbal wit” (220).

Johan Wijkmark considers the high quality translations at the end of 19th century Sweden despite irreconcilable grammatical particularities such as the gendered nouns in Swedish while Ástráður Eysteinnsson essays on the reception of Poe’s work in Iceland, where the translations of the American writer are still a work in progress.

Outside Europe, the reception of Poe’s work is documented in Mexico (Rafael Olea Franco, Pamela Vicenteno Bravo and Cristopher Rollason), Brazil (Lenita Estevez, Renata Philippov), Morocco (Bouchra Benlemlich), Turkey (Hivren Demir-Atay, Ayse Nihal Akbulut), Egypt (Magda M. Hasabelnaby), Japan (Takayuki Tatsumi, J. Scott Miller), China (Zongxin Feng, Aimei Ji) and Korea (Woosung Kang,). Lenita Esteves comments upon Baudelaire’s influence in Brazil and focuses on the adaptations of Poe’s work for the teenage public. Another article in the volume dealing with children’s literature is Alexandra Urakova’s case study of the first anonymous translation of “The Gold-Bug” that secured the place of the story in the Russian canon of juvenile fiction as early as 1940. Hivren Demir-Atay analyses the way in which the linguistic changes from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Turkey are reflected in the language of Poe’s translations and comments upon the translation and reception of “Annabel Lee”, “a prominent example of how some pieces of Western literature became part of the Turkish literary cannon trough translation” (140).

Takayouki Tatsumi offers an interesting account of the translation status in modern Japanese literary history, “A peculiar institution that somehow allows writers to adapt what they translate into something original” (167) and talks about translation as “cannibalisation” (164). Also dealing with matters of translation status and authorship issues, Woosung Kang’s article documents the history of Poe’s reception in Korea and the changing condition of translation as a professional environment in recent years.

Although the editors of the volume make it clear in the introduction that “*Translated Poe* is not preoccupied with judging the ‘quality’ of any given Poe translation nor with assessing what a specific translation must or should have done” (xviii-xix), the authors of the articles bring forth their own hierarchy, opening spaces of inter(and intra)cultural dialogues. Either due to the translators’ reputation that set a tradition in literary translations within a particular cultural space, or because of the unquenched interest in Poe’s work, researchers must deal with an impressive number of translations, therefore, as the editors mention in the introduction, “each region covered within the volume leaves some space for future scholarship” (xx). The history of Poe’s translation in national languages is also the history of the evolution of the concept of translation in those particular cultures and, as it has been shown in some of the articles, it can also identify, in some respects, with the history of the target language. *Translated Poe* is not a book to read in one sitting. It is a book to read slowly, to digest, to run away from, to come back to again. Whatever our target language, whatever our region covered within, whatever our research direction, the present volume is a fascinated place to start from.

Emron Esplin; Margarida Vale de Gato (eds.), *Translated Poe*,
Bethlehem, Lehigh University Press, London, 2014, 471 pp.