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Ana Olos, *Folklore From Maramuresh / Folclor din Maramureș, Baia Mare: Editura Ethnologica, 2004*

A number of translations of Maramureș folk poetry into international languages have appeared in the context of works of anthropology such as Gail Kligman's *The Wedding of the Dead* (University of California Press, 1988) and Jean Cuisenier's *Le feu vivant* (Presses Universitaires de France, 1995) and *Mémoire des Carpathes* (Plon, 2000). However volumes dedicated exclusively to translations of Romanian folk literature in general (not to mention the specific traditions of Maramureș), remain rare, and have tended to gravitate towards the genres of ballad and wonder tale (in English, see, for example, *Romanian Folk Tales*, trans. Ana Cartianu, Minerva, 1979 and *Balade populare românești / Romanian Popular Ballads*, trans. Leon Levițchi et al., Minerva, 1980). The publication of two bilingual volumes of Maramureș folk poetry by Editura Ethnologica in Baia Mare in 2004 was thus an important contribution towards making the traditional verbal arts of Romania more accessible to an international readership. Of these two volumes, one, Sanda Golopenția's *Learn to Sing, My Mother Said*, translated in collaboration with Peg Hausman, focuses on the repertoire of a small number of women in a single village, Breb, where the editor collected the texts in the 1970s. An additional feature, of particular interest for students of translation, is the inclusion in the volume of correspondence between Sanda Golopenția and Peg Hausman regarding problems arising and choices made in the process of translating the songs. In the other, *Folklore From Maramuresh / Folclor din Maramureș*, translated by Ana Olos, the editor/translator takes a very different approach, offering a bilingual anthology of sixty-nine texts chosen from a wide range of sources.

It has, in fact, been observed that *Folklore from Maramuresh* is only the second anthology of Maramureș folk poetry to be published, the other being *Antologie de folclor din județul Maramureș* (1980), co-ordinated by Ion Chiș Șter.¹ The two are clearly very different anthologies. The 1980 volume is a substantial work of reference, containing 651 texts systematically organized by genre and theme – a valuable resource, but a somewhat intimidating one for the learner of Romanian, or indeed for any reader with no prior familiarity with folk poetry. Ana Olos's anthology of sixty-nine texts, on the other hand, makes no claim to systematic organization, but in fact it succeeds in offering the reader an accessible and compact introduction to the rich variety of folk poetry in Maramureș tradition: carols, wedding verses, charms, ballads, and lyrical poems expressive of a variety of emotions:

¹ Dorin Ștef, *Istoria folcloristicii maramureșene*, Baia Mare: Editura Ethnologica, 2006, p. 121.

the joy of singing, love, longing, sorrow, bitterness, attachment to nature, etc. The care that has gone into the selection of texts is evident from the range of published and unpublished sources from which they have been taken. Among the published sources cited are the classic collections of Alexandru Țiplea (1906), Tit Bud (1908), Ion Bîrlea (1924), and Tache Papahagi (1925), and the 1980 collection of articles and texts *Calendarul Maramureșului* (to which it may be mentioned in passing that Ana Olos herself contributed a number of translations of African folk poetry based on versions in English).

The translation of Romanian folk poetry into English is no easy task if the target is a translation that will convey the poetic character of the original, and not just the bare literal meaning of its words. A prose rendering might give the reader a sense of the ideas expressed and the imagery used, but would mean sacrificing much of the effect of verses that were made to be sung or to be shouted rhythmically. On the other hand, the characteristic forms and stylistic conventions of English-language folksong are of little help in translating songs coming from such a very different tradition. Ana Olos has, I think with good reason, sought in her translations both to preserve the form of the verses as far as possible (without insisting on a regular syllable count, which would have appeared forced in English, not to mention the near-impossible constraints it would have imposed on the translator) and to find a stylistic equivalent for the language of the original texts.

Only occasionally has she permitted herself to resort to the sort of mildly archaizing style that used to be regarded in English as ‘poetic diction’. This sort of language is most noticeable in her translations of carols, where indeed it is appropriate to the archaic, ritual character of the texts: ‘Dear host, now blithesome be’ (‘Să fii, gazdă, vesălos’, 46–47), ‘Rise, good folk, on this fine morn’ (‘Sculați, sculați, boieri mari’, pp. 160–161), etc. Elsewhere, the generally simple and direct language of the originals is matched by a plain, colloquial style in the translations. In translating texts of this sort, a less courageous translator (or one with romantic preconceptions about how folk poetry should sound) might have shied clear of solutions like ‘Please, don’t tell it to my Mum’ (‘Nu spune la maica me’, pp. 70–71) or ‘People say he’s off his nut’ (‘Zâc oamenii că-i bolund’, pp. 94–95), but in fact it is hard to imagine more appropriate equivalents in the context. Such lines bring home to the reader how much the language of these poems is in fact the language of everyday life in the communities where they were created.

In some cases, Ana Olos has been able to achieve equivalents in which the sense, form, and style of the original are transposed so perfectly into the target language that they might seem to have fallen into place of their own accord. Thus we find, for example: ‘In your hands you rest your head, / Your husband’s gone to face the lead’ (‘Și-ț pune căpuțu-n pumni, / Bărbatu țâ-i dus la plumbi!’, pp. 80–81) or ‘Come, my love, and run with me / Through the groves of wild cherry’ – the stress on the second syllable of ‘cherry’ echoing a common feature of English folksong, where words ending in -y are often treated this way at the end of a line – (‘Hai, mândrule, să fugim / Prin pădurea de mălin’ pp. 100–101). Of course such felicitous solutions cannot be expected in every line: inevitable it is sometimes necessary to introduce additional words in order to preserve the metre or to provide a rhyme.

However, this has been done sensitively, and at times even in such a way that the additions are not mere metrical fillers but draw attention to meanings that may be present unstated in the original text: '[They] pick the one, the most desired, / And walk away when they get tired' ('Să preumblă, nu știu ce face, / Rupe floarea care-i place', pp. 104–105). In an inspired solution, the carol refrain 'florile dalbe', whose literal translation, 'white flowers', would on its own have none of the evocative, incantatory power of the original, is expanded to 'White flowers and moonlight' (pp. 80–81). Additional words are also used effectively to create a natural English equivalent for the otherwise untranslatable effect of the repetition of a word with a small addition, a stylistic feature found particularly in verses of a ritual nature: 'White-tailed birdie-bird, don't stay' ('Pasăre albă, codalbă', pp. 32–33), 'The hill is white, alight. / But not with snow aglow' ('Albu-i, dalbu-i cela deal, / Da' nu-i dalbu de umăt', pp. 82–83).

Ana Olos's English translations of Maramureș folk poetry are certainly a valuable contribution to the international appreciation of the traditional verbal arts of Romania, and those of Maramureș in particular, but they are also to be appreciated and enjoyed in their own right as the work of a translator who is in the rare position of being able to bring together a familiarity developed over many years with Maramureș and its traditional culture, a scholar's sensitivity to the nuances of both Romanian and English (not to mention considerable experience in the translation of English poetry into Romanian), and the creative talent of a poet who writes in both languages. Together, of course, with the volume of translations by Sanda Golopenția and Peg Hausman published in the same year, Ana Olos's *Folklore From Maramuresh / Folclor din Maramureș* may be considered a reference point in the translation of Romanian folk poetry, and at the same time it throws down a challenge to future translators of this rich body of texts.

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