

The translation of Italian opera librettos in the nineteenth century: historical and cultural milestones

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Abstract: Nella storia moderna della traduzione in romeno, il periodo 1840-1900, come sottolinea la studiosa Georgiana Lungu Badea in *Un capitol de traductologie românească. Studii de istorie a traducerii* (III) [Un capitolo di traduttologia romena. Studi di storia della traduzione (III)], è contrassegnato dalle ricerche identitarie della lingua di arrivo. In quest'ottica, la traduzione integrale o parziale di un numero significativo di libretti d'opera dall'italiano al romeno si rivela un fenomeno la cui analisi possa offrire dei validi temi di riflessione sia dal punto di vista della storia della traduzione, sia di quello della storia della lingua e della storia culturale.

Parole chiave: storia moderna della traduzione in romeno, il Teatro Italiano di Bucarest, critica musicale, proselitismo culturale, storia culturale

Abstract: The period between 1840 and 1900 saw the full or partial translation of a significant number of Italian opera librettos, a phenomenon whose analysis can prove most insightful from the point of view of translation history as well as from that of the history of language and of cultural history. The translation of the Italian librettos was carried out in an environment marked not so much by cultural endeavours, but rather economic ones, taking into account the level of the public's musical and cultural illiteracy and their reduced financial means.

Key words: history of modern Romanian translation, Italian Theatre in Bucharest, music reviews, cultural proselytism, cultural history

1. Initial milestones

In her *Un capitol de traductologie românească. Studii de istorie a traducerii* (III) [A Chapter in Romanian Translation Studies. Studies in the History of Translation], Georgiana Lungu-Badea notes that the period between 1840 and 1900 in the history of modern Romanian translation is marked by the identity search of the target language (2008, 32). In this respect, the full or partial translation of a significant number of Italian opera librettos is a phenomenon whose

analysis can prove to be most insightful from the point of view of translation history as well as from that of the history of language and of cultural history.

The interest which the Italian opera stirred in the era resulted in numerous music and drama reviews by Nicolae Filimon published in the newspaper *Naționalul*, and afterwards in the magazine *Buciumul*. Therefore we can talk about the existence of a cultural interest, an invested public and in consequence about translation strategies, albeit in nascent form. In order to identify translation strategies – applied voluntary/involuntary and homogeneous/inhomogeneous – and the possible cultural motivations which stood at their basis, it is necessary to reconstruct the atmosphere surrounding the Italian theatre at the time, and to this end we will use one of the few, but not less relevant sources of information: “Filimon’s magazines”.

2. Nicolae Filimon and the Italian Theatre

Both Viorel Cosma (1966, 9-10) and Mircea Anghelescu (in Filimon 2005, V-VI) have signalled the fact that there have been extremely few details preserved about the life and personality of Nicolae Filimon – oddly, you might add, considering the number and, most of all, the quality, of the cultural magazines he published as well as the fact that he was enjoying, among the lyrical singers and the instrumentalists of the Italian Theatre in Bucharest, the reputation of a true “terrorist” of the music world, effervescent, caustic and uncompromising (Călinescu 1983, 108).

But the lack of accurate biographical sources should not be interpreted as a sign of the writer’s limited relevance in the era and should not lead one to conclude that he could be ranked among less important authors. Plausible explanations for this scarcity have been offered mostly by Viorel Cosma, because George Călinescu states undeniably, relying solely on the music critic’s comeback announcement to the *Bucium* magazine (nr. 304 from 3/17th November 1864): “Thus the opinion that Filimon was a ‘very obscure’ man does not hold up” (212). Mircea Anghelescu, having given solid arguments (VIII-X) to support Călinescu’s statements, reaches an unfounded and somewhat naïve conclusion: “N. Iorga’s idea, expressed one century ago, in the introduction of the 1902 edition, is probably justified: ‘People who know him live, but don’t seem to remember much about him because, it seems, there was nothing unusual about him’”(VI). It becomes clear, from Viorel Cosma’s interpretative approach that Filimon was not an ordinary man, who could go unnoticed: he was a stutterer, he had a proverbial music memory and perfect hearing, he sang in the opera chorus, he was a flautist and he held charitable recitals, to a lesser or greater extent he knew Greek, German, French and Italian, he was a recognized authority in the field of music criticism (18-33, 156). Under these circumstances, what are

the reasons behind the lack of information on the life and personality of the writer, what are the reasons “that overshadowed the popularity” (159) of his creations at that time and later on? Surely, his premature death did not contribute to the consolidation of his image in the cultural environment, nor did the “[e]scape from the noisy society of the time, from the world of salons frequented by other art critics”, a natural consequences of a “physical inferiority complex that followed him constantly” (158). Beyond his shyness, Cosma points out, Filimon had a habit of not signing his reviews or of using pseudonyms²² and initials hard to decipher by the larger audience (159) and not only them²³. The distribution of his writings was also not devoid of negative aspects:

For example, once dispatched on a closed circuit - to monasteries and hermitages -, *Excursiunile* (*The Excursions*) became a book almost inaccessible to the public shortly after its release, and, according to some historical researchers, only a few decades after Filimon's death, the memoirs had acquired the status of a “rare book”.

The music reviews encountered a similar fate, if not sadder, spread out through different newspapers and magazines that quickly ceased their activity in the public life, the disappearance of the periodicals taking with them the memory of the pen that filled their pages. If we add the lack of public libraries capable of reminding the reader about some of the pieces signed by Nicolae Filimon, we will clearly understand the cause behind the narrowing of the circulation area of his critical heritage. (159)

In our opinion, apart from “Nicolae Filimon's character, nature and social attitude” (158), there are two major reasons for the shadow cast over the work of the writer, but most of all, of the reviewer. The first one has to do with the nature of the field he was interested in, or more accurately, his passion. Filimon himself points out that “Music, just as literature, has its popular and easy to understand side, as well as a sublime one, which can be enjoyed only by the ones who've gone through all the stages of art” (2005, 887) While contemporary audiences “are very behind in terms of musical culture” (783) and do not possess even the basic notions necessary to the understanding and appreciation of an opera, considered by Filimon an instrument of cultural elevation:

It is undeniable that the Italian theatre, here, as in other countries, has a lot of duties to fulfill in order to faithfully accomplish its mission. It will be thus constructed not only to serve as entertainment and fun,

²² In this respect, Viorel Cosma reaches the stunning conclusion: “Researching the notes from the ritual books of the Ieni Church, as well as the articles in the press or the manuscripts from the State Archive, we find that our critic's signature has known over 25 different forms.” p.12.

²³ “Still, V. Alecsandri didn't know the authors and mistook Philimon with Pelimon. ‘Pelimon l'auteur de Ciocoi vechi’ - he wrote in a letter.” – (Călinescu 1983, 15)

but also as a musical education for our public. [...] The true mission of an opera theatre, faithfully translating the thoughts of the masters and reproduce the works on stage as they were written, is to form the taste of the public, not to ruin it. (716)

Non-involvement in the political scene was the second cause of his reduced popularity, causing major damage to his public image, because the stark difference between him and other leading figures of the era lies in this political non-commitment²⁴. In addition, the revolutionary uprisings in 1840, 1848 and 1859 – in which he does not participate – and the intellectuals involved in these events stirred much more interest among his fellow citizens than the problems of the Italian theatre.

Thus the conclusion of the same Viorel Cosma proves itself to be legitimate, but not sufficiently nuanced:

Indeed, it would be wrong for somebody to say today that the writer lived in anonymity one century ago, as it would be equally wrong to claim that Nicolae Filimon enjoyed, in the eyes of his colleagues, the appreciation he deserved or at least equal to that of his trade colleagues. We will not impair the writer's memory, if we recognize that the appreciation of the author of *Slujnicarilor* came from the love of a small circle of contemporary intellectuals, who had the opportunity of direct contact, and not from the general public. [...] with the death of his friend and of those who supported him through personal ties, the interest for Nicolae Filimon's work diminished abruptly, the name of the author being covered by the veil of forgetfulness. (157).

The musicologist – otherwise extremely insightful and coherent in his interpretative approach – has missed, surprisingly, an obvious detail: the target audience of the music reviews. Who does the reviewer address? A small circle of intellectuals or the larger public? His reviews were aimed at a specific, non-intellectual audience, with a good financial situation²⁵ and eager to assert themselves in society, who went

²⁴ Viorel Cosma limits himself to considering that the music critic's political non-interference is "one of the explanations for his lack of popularity." (159)

²⁵ "Why shouldn't the Romanian public or the Romanians have an idea about those magical compositions which have enchanted them and for which they have often deprived themselves of many pleasures in order to sacrifice themselves on the altar of Euterpe, paying for each performance, 4 or 5 sfați for a seat – although the seats in the major European theatres are much cheaper – why shouldn't they at least know the history of the opera, although the artists that perform it don't always give them the chance to fully enjoy it? We've had opera for a long time and it would be unpleasant for us not to have any notions about it and about the composers whose works are performed most often in our theatre" (Filimon 2005, 783). "Behold the celebrities, for whom the public pays an enormous amount of money: one hundred and eight for first and second grade boxes, and seventy-two for third grade, paid in advance, like nowhere else in the world. Behold, lastly, the famous opera company for which the poor clerk sees himself obliged to pay a ticket that costs almost double the price you pay in Italy."

to the opera not because of a spiritual need, but because of a worldly concern, more interested in other aspects²⁶ than the voice and dramatic talent of the singers, without any musical education²⁷, but owning season tickets²⁸ and willing to pay large sums of money to attend a staging of dubious quality, without being able to distinguish between performances²⁹.

(860-861); “The public waits anxiously to hear the artists for whom, during an economic crisis that burdens the whole society, they will pay the enormous prices set by a contract closed between the government of Prince Ghica and today’s entrepreneurs, without consulting the season ticket holders [...]. Will the public be better respected this year than the last? Will it receive all that is right to demand after a contract and after it pays the money?” (910-911).

²⁶ “Before we conclude our review, we will allow ourselves to make a small observation on the applause damicela Guerini received during the second performance of *The Barber*, at the aria *Una voce poco fà*. The purpose is to show how deadly the applause for the progress of the theatre can be, and how they delay the perfection of musical taste: they are deadly because theatre entrepreneurs will use them to recommend and justify their artists, to protect them in case of any government protest. [...] We know that there are people amongst our theatre public who wish for this year’s artists to remain, if possible, forever on our stage, but it seems they forget that the public interest wants the individual to prevail, and so, instead of aligning themselves with the intelligent part of the audience, to value what is good and disapprove of what is bad, and so to shape a better taste and to make the impresarios more respectful toward the audience, on the contrary, through their applause they encourage them to put the most significant mediocrities of musical Italy on our stage.” (754-755)

²⁷ “The more we advance in the career of theatre columnist, the more we convince ourselves that this is a thankless and monotonous job, because a columnist with conscience seeks to give his readers a *rendiconto* (an account) of the subject of operas, of the quality of the music, more so of its performance by the artists, without losing sight of the slightest note badly sung” (950). “In our country, where music and drama knowledge is not very common, the theatre columnist has a much more serious responsibility than his colleagues from civilized countries; he has the responsibility to explain to his readers and the theatre public the dramatic fable on which opera is built, to talk about the qualities and weakness of the music and finally to analyze or critique the performance of the musical parts, because if he doesn’t fulfil these responsibilities, his writing becomes useless and lacking the logical reason to assist.” (1029)

²⁸ Nicolae Filimon applies a distinction at the lexical level between the passionate public and the connoisseur public – “amateur”; “music lover” – and the one interested in the worldly aspect of the music world – “subscriber”: “What we know, and what everybody knows is that the rights of the subscribers and of the opera amateurs, although they have never been respected, have never been trampled on as they are now by the current administration” (911). “After serious reflection on the music lover’s lamentations in general and the subscriber’s in particular, we see ourselves forced to solemnly declare that the public of our opera theatre is severely mistreated” (1025).

²⁹ Criticizing the weak performance of tenor Palmieri, Filimon concludes: “Still, he was applauded in the fashion of our audience” (726). Noting the deficiencies of two sopranos, Guerini and Gianfredi, he says: “she [Guerini] was not only frantically applauded, but also crowned together with Mrs. Gianfredi. [...] To applaud them with such enthusiasm and to crown them in *Lucretia* seems to be a parody or a mockery, which doesn’t encourage the singers, nor honor the public” (739). About soprano Gianfredi’s undeserved applause: “We know that our audience applauded her and that an applauded artist becomes immune to criticism, but these applause didn’t come from where they expected it, but from an audience having a welcoming imagination, that always applauds the artist’s screams and mistakes, and not their accomplishments” (777).

Beyond their informative scope, these reviews also denounce the transgressions of theatre company directors who, disregarding contractual obligations, have manifested their intentions to exploit the audiences' ingenuity and the lack of management experience demonstrated by representatives of state institutions³⁰, in order to obtain unjustified profits (911). The entrepreneurs' contemptuous attitude results in a prejudicial attitude of Western travellers towards the Romanian public³¹, which explains Filimon's desire to unveil and combat these negative views, in the sense of a cultural and national emancipation. Thus, in 1857, he expresses his confidence in:

the start of a theatre opera which will constantly evolve, will contribute to the musical taste formation of our public, who, learning to better enjoy and appreciate music, will know when to approve and when not to; applauses will not be handed out especially through the worst performed and even out of tune passages, so that we don't give the impresarios the opportunity to tax us for musical ignorance and lack of taste and so that we get rid of the daring expression of the foreigner that: *I Valachi non conoscono niente di musica* [the Vlachs don't know anything about music] (718).

The music critic is not the only one in this crusade against the deformed image of the population from the Principate resulting from travel journals by French, English, German and Russian author. Other writers, as Ștefan Cazimir states in *Alfabetul de tranziție* [The Transition Alphabet], have felt the need to counter the effects of such unfavorable depictions in their works:

The locally inspired proses written by Kogălniceanu, Alecsandri, A. Russo, D. Ralet and so on are written as an extension to – and sometimes as a reply to – foreign travellers' impression of us. Kogălniceanu critically reviews Anatol Demidov; A. Russo critically cites baron Trott (Tott), Wilkinson and Andreas Wolf, Saint-Marc Girardin and La Battu" [...]; Ralet, in turn, will ridicule some travel stories about Iași by travellers who have never visited it. (2006, 125)

In Filimon's opinion the only way to change the "foreigners'" mind about the Romanian public was cultural "progress", achieved

³⁰ "We know the source of this evil: it originates from the government's wrong idea of entrusting the fate of these institutions to people who, though very honorable and passionate about progress, have a lack of practical knowledge of the theatrical business and this leaves them at the mercy of foreigners, who do as they please since they do not answer to anyone." (1029).

³¹ Denouncing the numerous shortcomings of the performance of the opera Nabucodonosor (1859), Filimon concludes his review thus: "Here is again material for the foreigners to label us as ignorant and to mention us in their travel memoirs in order to give their countrymen the opportunity to amuse themselves for hours at our expense." (898).

primarily through the work of music critics, which was bound to have a popular character, given the shortage of knowledge in the field:

In our country, where music and drama knowledge is less common, the theatre columnist has a much more severe responsibility than his colleagues from civilized countries; he has the responsibility to explain to his readers and the theatre public the dramatic fable on which opera is built, to talk about the qualities and weaknesses of the music and finally to analyze or critique the performance of the musical parts, because if he doesn't fulfill these responsibilities, his writing becomes useless and lacking the logical reason to assist (1029).

Three years later, in 1864, although in the meantime translations of operas from the Italian repertoire had been published – one of them, Verdi's *Nabucodonosor*, signed by Filimon himself in collaboration with Valentineanu, in 1859, a year after the critic welcomed Canini's effort and intention to translate the Italian librettos together with Valentineanu³² – he insists on the need to provide details about the subject of opera, arguing that:

this does not stem from pedantry, nor from the habit of making sentences, this is only because European music is not widespread in our society and the musical opera is performed in a language unknown to the public, without adding that a large part of the audience does not have the slightest knowledge about the dramatic topic of the operas and other effective nuances that make up their beauty (1103).

The critic's stand seems, at first, to be paradoxical, because he seems to ignore the translations that appeared six years prior, which were praised and considered at the time extremely useful. A first step in understanding his attitude is to understand that, for Filimon, the libretto is a "dramatic text" and thus belongs to the literary domain, so it's intended for culturally elevated audiences:

During the performance of the opera *Norma*, I pleasantly noticed that the libretto, translated into Romanian by Mr. Canini and Mr. Valentineanu, was put in the spotlight. Opera and literature amateurs will experience great joy in reading this valuable work of theatrical

³² "Mr. Canini, professor emeritus of Italian and philoromanian, wanting to provide a useful service to our opera loving audience, decided that only the subject analysis of each opera wasn't enough to allow the audience to enjoy the entire poetic beauty and the dramatic subtleties of the librettos. That's why, for the intelligence of the true amateurs of the Italian theatre and aiming to be useful, he took it upon himself to translate, in an accurate style, with the help of Mr. Valentineanu, and to print at his own expense, the librettos of all the Italian operas that have been performed and will be performed from now on the stage of our theatre. We can't thank Mr. Canini enough for this beautiful help in enriching the number of quality translations into our language, and we would like our book and opera loving audience to know how to take advantage of this situation in order to achieve a double purpose: the readers' benefit and the compensation of the expenses, if not the compensation of the translator's labors" (744).

opera. Doing the same with other works from the Italian repertoire, Mr. Canini and Mr. Valentineanu will do a great service to our public (805).

This is also how the first review fragment, referring to the two translators, should be interpreted, a fragment in which Filimon doesn't do anything but point out the audience who will benefit from the translations, an "amateur" one in the Italian sense of "lover" and thus knowledgeable, a musically and literary cultivated audience, the opposite of the audience he was addressing, especially in his reviews, driven by the desire to enable cultural progress and to help this audience enjoy the beauty of the Italian theatre. To consider the public's access to the Romanian version of the operas somehow secondary is not a consequence of the reduced importance given to the libretto or of ignoring the cultural value of their translation – in his reviews, Filimon often refers to the symbiotic relationship between "poetry" (libretto) and "music"³³ in the lyrical theatre, and he appreciates the translators' work at its fair value, giving praise to Canini and Valentineanu -, but it is rather a pragmatic attitude. For an audience lacking basic notions about literature and music, meaning culturally "illiterate", it's useless to read the opera libretto in their own language, because they lack the necessary tools to understand it. Only after they have acquired them, with the help of the music critic, will reading the librettos acquire a meaning.

Here's a possible reason, besides the lack of time – taking into account his double profession as a clerk and a music critic – and his premature death, for the lack of interest Filimon had for the translation of the librettos into Romanian, despite his passion for the Italian culture and his good knowledge of the Italian language, demonstrated by numerous lexical, phraseological and syntactical calques³⁴ present in

³³ "The libretto of the opera *Lucrezia Borgia*, through the elegance of the poetry and the fierce situations, has contributed greatly to maestro's Donizetti's ability to write that beautiful music that delights the audience to this day" (807). "In last year's magazine about the opera *Traviata*, we showed, as much as our limited space allowed it, the origin from where the poet Piave got this beautiful dramatic subject and how he handled it as a theatrical play; but we have limited ourselves to that, without mentioning something about the delicious music with which the famous Verdi imbued it" (861); talking about Donizetti's *Favorita*, he notes: "The music of this opera, in the opinion of a number of today's famous maestros, lives up to almost all the requirements of musical and dramatic art. [...] Everything is characteristic in it, there isn't even the slightest contrast between poetry and music. The dramatic passions that light up and rise in the different characters of the drama are signified with the most precise and sublime colors" (887); analyzing the music of Giacomo Meyerbeer's opera *Roberto il Diavolo*, he states: "the famous Meyerbeer, in the first place, has tried to go deep into the meaning of the poetry, and after that he invested each character with music required by the rules of dramatic and local art" (901).

³⁴ In O cantatriță pe uliță [A cantatrice on the street] (published in *Naționalul*, I (1858), nr. 96, 9th November): "o eroare prea groasă" [un grosso errore]; "vă pune în relațiune" [vi mette in relazione]; "se preparau să înceapă a suna" [si preparavano per cominciare a suonare]; "lineamentele feții" [i lineamenti del volto]; "o scrisoare din parte-i în

his novellas, which contradict Călinescu's opinion – picked up by Viorel Cosma³⁵ -, which states “ It is true [...] that he can fluently converse in Italian (*Escursiuni*, p. 233), though probably by ear, due to attending the Italian singers, because he commits a basic error writing ‘il slancio’ instead of ‘lo slancio’ (”N.”, nr. 96, 4 Dec. 1860), not knowing the articulation of ‘s impura’” (154). The misuse of the definite article is extremely common amongst the Italophiles and it has little relevance, which means it can't be used as irrefutable proof to support the Călinescean theory. Filimon's language knowledge is more bookish, obtained through the reading of numerous volumes³⁶ of the history of music, of musicology and the librettos he had in his library. This form of literary Italian is different from the spoken one, which is uneven and heavily influenced by dialect. Had he been left only with the concepts acquired through conversation, he could have never understood or taken over fragments from specialty literature into his own reviews.

3. Translator Portraits

In the nineteenth century, starting in 1839 (Bălțeanu 2008, 122-123), a significant number of cultural and/or political figures, along

termenii următori”[una lettera da parte sua nei seguenti termini] etc. In Matteo Cipriani (1861): “monasterul antic” [l'antico monastero]; “un portret ce trăsesse foarte mult atențiunea sa” [un ritratto che attirò tantissimo la sua attenzione]; “se vedea imprimată pe fizionomiile lor” [si vedeva impressa sulle loro fisionomie]; “facând lectura cărților religioase” [facendo la lettura dei libri religiosi]; “din profunditatea inimei” [dalla profondità dell'anima] etc.

³⁵ “He learned the Italian language through contact with the Italian opera, be it as a chorister, or as an audience member always in attendance. The short time he spent on the Italian peninsula has, of course, made it easy for him to understand accents and phrase inflections. Although he even managed to translate lyrics (see the quotes in the opera *Magdalena* by A. T. Zissu), although he published – in collaboration with I. G. Valentineanu – the libretto of Verdi's *Nabuco*, Nicolae Filimon was still far from fully mastering the grammar of the language. ‘He commits a basic error writing ‘il slancio’ instead of ‘lo slancio’ – notes Călinescu.”(58)

³⁶ Călinescu mentions: “Upon his death 304 books in different languages and 17 notebooks on music were found” (109-110); meanwhile Viorel Cosma records the following: “A simple reading of the book titles found on the desk of Naționalul's critic will give us an image of his multifaceted musical knowledge. Thus from the books studied by Nicolae Filimon we will mention the following: Martini Giovanni Battista – *Storia della musica*, 3 volumes (1757-1781), Lichtenthal Pietro – *Dizionario e Bibliografia della musica*, 4 volumes, Milano, Ed. A. Fontana (1826), Bertini G. – *Dizionario storico-critico degli scrittori di musica*, Palermo (1814), [...], Fétis F. J. – *Notizie biografiche intorno a Niccolò Paganini* seguite dall'analisi delle sue opere e precedate da uno schizzo della storia del violino, Milano, [...], Basevi A. – *Studio sulle opere di Giuseppe Verdi*, Firenze (1859)[...]. If to this, pretty vague and incomplete list we add the periodicals *Revue des deux mondes* (where Paulo Scudo authored the music reviews), *Journal des Débats* and *La Maîtrise* (the reviewer being Joseph d'Ortigue), *Scaramucia*, *La gazetta musicale* (where he would encounter the name F. J. Fétis), *Cosmorama pittorico* (violently attacked by our press for their fancyful depictions of the Italian theatre in Bucharest), just to mention the magazines Nicolae Filimon undoubtedly studied, we will discover the source of his ample musical knowledge” (39-41)

with illustrious unknowns have translated Italian opera librettos: Gheorghe Asachi and George Baronzi, followed by M.A. Canini and I.G. Valentineanu, Nicolae Filimon, Nicolae Ținc, U.³⁷ and D. Șt. Rașianu, D.G. Cantorichi, A.D. (A. Davidescu), Teodor Aslan. In *Clasamentul primilor 12 traducători, după numărul operelor traduse* [The ranking of the first 12 translators, according to the number of operas translated], compiled by Paul Horn for the years 1830 to 1860, Baronzi is on the second place, after Heliade Rădulescu, with 21 titles, followed by Valentineanu, with 16, and two places below, with 11 titles, by Marco Antonio Caninni (Cornea 1966, 50). But the "frontrunner" Baronzi, unlike the other two, has translated numerous literary works from other languages besides Italian (Lungu-Badea 2006, 41-42 and 48-49), thus devoting a relatively reduced amount of his time to the translation of the Italian librettos into Romanian. This observation is also valid concerning Rașianu, Ținc and Aslan, while Asachi, Filimon, Cantorichi and U. were only occasional translators, with just one libretto translated – Filimon and U. in collaboration with a more experienced collaborator, Valentineanu and Rașianu respectively.

What's hidden behind these lesser known names? Are they a group of passionate admirers of the Italian culture/opera lovers or speculators interested in a safe and easy profit? In Dimitrie Radu Rosetti's *Dicționarul contemporanilor din România* [The dictionary of Romanian contemporaries], compiled, according to the author's statement, in order to preserve the memory of figures who were less visible due to their lack of involvement in politics (1897, I-II), the famous Asachi and Baronzi, but also Valentineanu are mentioned, as it would be expected. About Asachi (spelled Asaky) we find the he was a "man of letters" who studied abroad, interested in mathematics, engineering, history and passionate about the theatre; he is the one who founded the first Romanian theatre in Moldova in 1817. His prodigious political career and his cultural activism are also mentioned (14). Baronzi is described in a few sentences, as a publicist born in Greece, with unfinished studies in Romania and as a contributor to a number of magazines; a large part of his entry is devoted to the enumeration of his published works (23). Valentineanu is only mentioned as a journalist with a significant political activity: "Involved in the 1848 revolution, he was arrested by the Russians and send to prison in Kiev". He returns to the country in 1856 and, after he collaborates with a number of publications, he founds the newspaper *Reforma* (*The Reform*) (189). Surprisingly none of his numerous translations of the Italian librettos are mentioned. Either Rosetti didn't attend the Italian theatre too often – in which case it's normal for him to mistake Romani's libretto for a play – or he considered the translation of these texts totally

³⁷ Viorica Bălțeanu mistakes the abbreviation "D.D.", used in the era for "Gentleman", from Verdi's Aida opera libretto frontispiece, from 1889, for the name, or rather the pseudonym, of one of the translators. Thus Șt. D. Rașianu's collaborator is the mysterious U., not D.D.U., as the author says, in the cited article, page 125.

insignificant because they were not of interest to the general public. *Enciclopedia română. Volumul 1: A-Copenhaga* [The Romanian Encyclopaedia. Volume 1: A-Copenhaga] is published a year later, in 1898, under the guidance of Cornelius Diaconovich in Sibiu, and in 1904 *Volumul 3: Kemet-Zymotic* is published. In the pages of this monumental work one can find, besides information on the Romanian translators, a description of Canini. The similarities with D.R. Rosetti's *Dicționar* are astounding: Asachi's entry tells us that "As a theatre founder, he adapted and composed the plays: [...] *Norma* (by Romani)" (1898, 279); about Valentineanu [Valentinian] we find out that "During the 1848 revolution he was imprisoned in Kiev until 1856. He worked with a number of newspapers, and founded *Reforma*" (1188). Some significant differences can be observed in the case of Baronzi: "Romanian poet and writer of Greek origin [...] he translated several works from French and Italian" (404). Canini is an Italian publicist, philologist and poet who studied Law in Padova, but had to leave his country for political reasons. He travelled through the Orient and

He wrote political and literary brochures in Greek and Romanian; expelled from Bucharest he goes back (1859) to Italy, from where he is sent out as a political agent to the Orient in 1862. In 1866 he fights in Garibaldi's army, then goes to France, where he mostly does Greek translations; in 1876 he revolts with the Serbs and takes part in the war as a newspaper correspondent for the Russians. [...] In 1858 he publishes *Norma*, translated together with I. Valentineanu. [...] Also in 1858 he publishes a project *Institut Filologic Sciințifico-Comercial pentru educațiunea junimei* [Philologic Scientific-Commercial Institute for the education of the youth] and gets over 80 subscriptions, worth 50 *galbeni* [gold coins] each. (696)

Nicolae Iorga was also interested in Canini, but only from a political perspective, as shown in a presentation given in 1936 in Venice, at a congress about the history of the *Rinascimento*, and subsequently published in 1938. For the Romanian historian, Canini is a forgotten hero of the *Risorgimento*, "a thinker, poet, writer, philologist, professor who, instead of returning to Venice to end his days forgotten, poor, alone and plagued by unrest, went to the Latin Orient, that is Romania, one of the modest builders of the future."³⁸ There is no reference to his work as a translator in the brochure, which leaves one with the romanticized image of a solitary revolutionary, contemptuous of the salons of Bucharest:

He went everywhere under the protection of the Wallachia Government, visiting all the cities in the "mail wagon" [...] and the description of this "Terra Romanesca" [Romanian Country] is one of

³⁸ "pensatore, poeta, scrittore, filologo, professore che, innanzi di tornar a Venezia per finirvi i suoi giorni agitatissimi, dimenticato, povero e solitario, fu nell'Oriente latino ch' è la Romania uno dei modesti fattori dell'avvenire." (1938, 3)

the most interesting in this book [*Prolusione al corso di lingua rumena alla Scuola Superiore di commercio*³⁹]. This way he got to love more the endless plains, the mountain valleys and the Daco-Romanians from the villages, than that motley world of Bucharest, full of imitators of the French customs, who seemed to him to stir up the ironies of an About⁴⁰ (1938, 10).

It is not up to this paper, nor does it lie within our competence to establish the accuracy of the information provided by Iorga on Canini's opinions and political activism. Still, we can't ignore the fact that the historian omits an important detail, mentioned a few years earlier (1929), in *Istoria românilor prin călători* [The History of the Romanians through travellers], vol. IV, namely that the Italian revolutionary translated, together with I. Valentineanu, the libretto of the famous opera *Norma* (1929, 24-26). Analyzing his personality in a paper, with a clear thesis and stake, Iorga relies exclusively on Canini's autobiography, although from Filimon's accounts emerges another image than that of a withdrawn dreamer. Canini does not avoid social events, he frequents the opera – otherwise he wouldn't have translated the librettos – but also attends the galas, expressing his appreciation openly, through odes in Italian dedicated to the sopranos, after a successful performance: “The stage was flooded with flowers and white doves, decorated with red bows, and from the ceiling of the theatre it rained with different sonnets written in Italian or Romanian, from which we will print only the one written by M.A. Canini, because it's more suitable for the situation and it isn't full of flatteries” (908). Paul Cornea describes him as an “enterprising and loquacious soul, capable of quickly improvising, before knowing the language of his adopting country, a series of articles presumptuously entitled: *Studii istorice asupra originii națiunii române* [Historical Studies on the Origin of the Romanian Nation], and of laying the groundwork for a collection of translations of all the Italian librettos, which had been performed or were to be performed on our stage.” (53).

On Ținc, Davidescu, Cantorichi and Aslan one can find, in Viorica Bălțeanu's article (122-126), some information about their hometowns – Davidescu was from Buzău, and Cantorichi from Craiova – and the publishing dates of the translations, unfortunately not enough to even try to draw up a sketch of their intellectual profile. U. is hard, if not impossible to identify – he could even be Italian –, while about his collaborator Dumitru Ștefan Rașianu, from the information in

³⁹ Introductory lesson within the course on Romanian language for the School of Commerce: Venice, 1884.

⁴⁰ “Andò dappertutto, raccomandato dal Governo della Valachia, visitando tutte le città in quello “carroccio di posta” [...] e la descrizione che dà delle “Terra Romanesca” (Țara Românească) è una delle più belle in questo libro molto interessante. Arrivò così ad amare molto più la steppa infinita, le vallate delle montagne, i Daco-Romani dei villaggi che quel mondo confuso di Bucarest, pieno di imitatori della società francese, che gli pare aver potuto suscitare le ironie di un About.” (10)

the libretto *Lucia de Lammermoor* (1885) and from Victor Anestin's *Amintiri din teatru* [Memories from the Theatre], we know that he was a young tenor, who died prematurely:

Rășianu didn't stay long in Craiova, but he successfully performed in a few operettas, a tenor with a sweet voice. He was a good musician and he turned Ange Pitou into a masterpiece.

Rășianu was handsome, young, intelligent, and if he hadn't suffered from an affliction otherwise common among actors, he wouldn't have perished young. I don't know if he was 30 when he died. (Arestin 1918, 21-22).

The information provided by encyclopaedias, autobiographies, chronicles and historical works seems to confirm Paul Cornea's findings that: "We find ourselves in an unprofessional stage of the work, but of intense cultural proselytism. A membership to the philharmonic, school exercises making children learn foreign languages, the newspaper's call to enlightenment, all this undoubtedly served as an impulse, because the trend for renewal and the will to reach Europe's level where irresistible." (52-53). According to the same author, there were no translators "with a manifested vocation and some specialization" before 1848, except for Baronzi, but even in his case "It's without a doubt that [...] we are witnessing the move towards professionalism under the very likely impetus of an editorial control" (53).

Between 1840 and 1860 the economic life diversifies, resulting in, among others, a new reading audience, the small and medium bourgeoisie, with an appetite for exotic scenery and romantic dramas (57). The tastes of the new readers will determine an exponential growth of the number of novels translated. The act of translation, released by the constraints of the *pașoptiști* [Romanian Forty-Eighters] scholars, becomes an "editorial enterprise with a mercantile purpose" (62). Canini's ambitious editorial project of translating the Italian librettos into Romanian, with the help of Valentineanu, appears against this background. But this is not out of cultural proselytism, as one might infer from Paul Cornea's ironic comment on his failed commitment of "publishing every Italian classic into Romanian" and the feat of translating 11 librettos (1857-1859) representing "a less meaty read" (52), an enterprise more like "a bald man's fancy hat" and not at all "the enriching of our language with quality translations", as Filimon had hoped (54). Canini's motivation seems rather materialistic. He publishes the librettos with his own money, being sure that a limited public, willing to pay larger sums than that in Italy in order to attend poor quality performances will afterwards buy the Romanian version of the text, hoping to understand the play. If his intent had been in a more cultural vein, he would have chosen a more cultured translation partner, maybe a writer, and not a journalist like Valentineanu, with whom he shared his political views: "I had just got to Bucharest – he says -, I had just started studying Romanian, when I noticed the need

for such translations, and for to this end I partnered up with my excellent friend Mr. Valentineanu” (53). Alone after Canini’s return to Italy, Valentineanu, who had become a name among libretto readers, will still be translating for a while.

In a future study we intend to take on this subject from the perspective of translation studies in order to establish some possible translation strategies and their share in the recovery of the librettos. The contrastive approach, essential to our undertaking, will be able to offer valid solutions, proving to be a valuable tool in the research of the history of translation and implicitly that of the mentality of the Romanian culture and language.

Conclusions

The translation of the Italian librettos was carried out in an environment marked not so much by cultural endeavours, but rather economic ones, taking into account the level of the public’s musical and cultural illiteracy and their reduced financial means. The fact that some translator had a very prolific run is not a testament to the professionalism or the quality of the translations, but it’s rather what Georgiana Lungu-Badea defined, in another context, as: “the intention to insert, through the translations, foreign values into the national cultural circuit” (2008, 33) for different reasons: cultural affinity, cultural proselytizing, a commercial interest.

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Librettos

Lăutarulu abridged and translated by M.A. Canini și I.G. Valentineanu (1858) (transition alphabet)

Rigoletto abridged and translated by I.G. Valentineanu (1881)

Lucia de Lammermoor translated by U. și D. St. Rașianu (1885)

La Gioconda (Vesela) translated by D.G. Cantorichi (1888)

Aida abridged and translated by de A.D. (A. Davidescu) (1889)