

Marko Teodorski

Institute for Literature and Arts, Belgrade, Serbia

Book Review: Aleksandra Mančić, *Egzotizam i kanibalizam. Transmisije drugog i avangardni oblici prevođenja* [*Exoticism and Cannibalism. Transmissions of the Other and the Avant-Garde Forms of Translation*]. Beograd: Službeni glasnik, 2017, 204 pp., ISBN 978-86-519-2096-0

In Aleksandra Mančić's book *Exotism and Cannibalism: Transmissions of the Other and the Avant-Garde Forms of Translation* [*Egzotizam i kanibalizam. Transmisije drugog i avangardni oblici prevođenja*], translation theory emerges as an experimental and trans-theoretical chimera. From literature to painting and documentary, Mančić moves along an imaginary line connecting two opposite parts of the world – the Balkans and Latin America – two cultural conglomerates that devour and translate, consume and digest one another. This culturophagic process incessantly defines and redefines them, while in its centre stands but one, equally ephemeral and transformative, figure: the translator, namely the author herself. Building upon her decades-long personal, historical and, above all, corporeal experience of mentioned cultures, the author discusses translation theory as a reflection on intercultural dependencies and significations. Exotism and cannibalism, thus, emerge in her analysis as crossroads of semiotical, historical and imagological communication, and as concepts whose dismantling and reconsideration offers not only a plethora of ambivalent meanings, but the methodology of her experimental translation theory as well.

In the introduction, titled “Transmissions” [“Transmisije”], the author poses questions that clearly establish the tone and resonance of the text to follow: “What could I say, as a Hispanist and translator, from my own experience, which would trace even remote contours of a *theory*? What experience of mine could formulate – give shape – express – an *experimental theory* of translation as transcultural movements?” Faced with the inherent polymorphism and hybridity of a translation act, Mančić propounds manifold and disruptive readings of literary works, as well as of the culture they originated from. These readings, however, in their essentially kinetic nature escape the rational and irrational intellection equally, turning into ‘mantic palpations’ (the term Mančić borrows from Julio Cortázar). Translating literature always already exceeds its object, spreading over the whole culture and the translator herself in the process, thus “translation [as] the machine for expanding of the choice possibilities

[...] can follow utterly unpredictable paths”. A question arises whether translation theory can be established as a form of transcultural theory, in which mutual domineering of cultures is overshadowed by their immixture in a space that pervades, bridges and overcomes them individually. Would that be a new Babylon, Mančić asks, a “world in which all people share one language, understand one another [...] a world without translation and translating?” Reassessing and overcoming Ortiz’s concept of ‘transculturation’ and Welsch’s concept of ‘transculturality’, Mančić decides for a methodological position of inexhaustible translating acts whose manifold, fluid nature demands not only a constant change of perspective and reassessment of the genealogies of the present, but an extra-discursive shift on the level of personal, everyday experience as well. Therefore, translation as a transcultural act could be envisaged as a “proliferation of freedom, a constant production of subjectivity, an invention”.

The introduction is followed by four organically linked chapters/essays that apply and deepen the posed theoretical questions, while discussing the translatory understanding of exotism and cannibalism as methodologies of transcultural practices. In the chapter “Towards the aesthetics of otherness” [“Ka estetici različitosti”], Mančić explores the connections between exotism and translatory acts, leading us via the European imagining of the Polynesian otherness in life and work of two artists – the painter Paul Gauguin and the writer Victor Segalen. Both Gauguin (who spent last thirteen years of his life in the Polynesian islands) and Segalen (who travelled to Polynesia and acquired Gauguin’s works after his death) are explored as European subjects who, on the unstable periphery of the Polynesian islands, experience an “encounter [with the otherness] already in advance signified as exotic”, while searching for means to overcome the autoreferentiality of that encounter. Primarily discussing Segalen’s work *A Lapse of Memory* [*Les Immémoriaux*, 1906] and *Essay on Exoticism* [*Essai sur l'exotisme: une esthétique du divers*, 1904–1918], Mančić locates the transcultural aspect of translatory acts in Segalen’s insight that exotism is not a mere signification of the far-removed and the other, but a “relation that moves through multiplicity of mutual gazes” in which the (Eurocentric) spectator becomes different and exotic to the object of his gaze in return. In Gauguin’s visually conducted inner turmoil, Segalen finds strength of an “artist outside of law [...], an artist of the unforgettable [...], a man who perform miracles”, therefore the exotism in his essay postulates Otherness that exceeds limits of the European mind, “opening up towards a multitude of human cultures”. He establishes exotism as a transcultural field that pervades the faced individuals and their cultures, and in which the question of the subject and object of translation becomes lost in the unending fluctuation of difference/otherness.

Two subsequent chapters – “The Amazonian cannibalism and the Balkan barbarogenius” [“Amazonski kanibalizam i balkanski varvarogenije”] and “The Other in Ourselves and Ourselves in the Other” [“Drugi u nama i mi u drugom”], explore the idea of cannibalism and barbarism as cultural translatory acts that produce geolocal identities. Reading the avant-garde literary movements of anthropophagy in Latin America and zenitism in the Balkans simultaneously, Mančić points to the semiotical

practices of devouring and consuming as translation of dominant cultures (the Other) into local ones (ourselves). In the centre of her research are Oswaldo de Andrade's *Manifest of Anthropophagy* (1928) and Ljubomir Micić's journal *Zenit* (1921–1926) which, world apart, ideally communicate through figures of the cannibal and the barbarogenius. In Latin America, Andrade's anthropophagic movement adopts the cannibal as the habitual trope in defining of Latin American identity and turns it into the essence of the *avant-garde* emancipation: a savage that swallows and digests the dominant culture appropriating its powers; in the Balkans, Micić creates the figure of the Balkan barbarogenius who, in his own barbarism and otherness towards European cultures, calls for an authentic Balkan identity and art. Both movements (both figures that signify them) Mančić reads as points of cultural translation and metamorphosis: they adopt these redefining and empowering images of the barbaric and the wild-thought with the aim of "including the difference within the self". Therefore, anthropophagic and zenitistic manifests create a "space for artistic experiment", in which peripheral cultures of the dominant intellectual discourses pervade and translate one another in the transcultural manner.

The last chapter, "The Volcanoes from the Balkans" ["Vulkani sa Balkana"], explores eruptions of Latin American literary texts and translations, focusing on the notion of violence. Guided by her reading of Roberto Bolaño's novel *2666*, Mančić tries to locate her own personal experiences of social, political and semiotic eruptions in the Balkans. In this chapter, translating establishes itself as a spodomantic act, namely as an act of reading "letters written in the ashes of a human offering, scattered over a windy place, where it was left overnight". The artistic, literary and translatory acts essentially emerge as products of violence, and as parts of that violence. Spodomantic readings, thus, divine from the remains of created/translated texts that become ashy residues of violent, eruptive translatory practices. For that reason, the notion of translation in this chapter establishes a sequence of geological/volcanic and political eruptions of terror, which are the crux of the transcultural methodologies of translation theory. Can the spodomantic be read as the transcultural? Is that which introduces culture and text (and their eruptions of terror) into the domain of the transcultural just their residue, remains of a human offering, divination – neither rational nor irrational – from the ashes of the volcano that in the author's Balkan experience erupts with equal force (equal terror) as the volcanoes from the Pacific rim? Assuming that the act of literary translation is always already marked as a translation of culture and of a personal, historical experience, Mančić moves towards a 'literary spodomancy', concluding that the first thing she can offer on this path is "an experience [...] that reads itself from its own ashes".

The book *Exotism and Cannibalism* is a graphic embodiment of the theories and *avant-garde* literary corpses that the author explores. Its form combines fragmentary, crumbling and, even, lexicographic style of writing that generates a mosaic of ideas, experiences and texts into a whole that expresses all the complexity and polymorphism of translatory acts. These acts metastasize here, exceeding the habitual

lexical practices and delving into impossible knots of thoughts, ideas, languages, cultures, identities and experiences. Assuming the form of an interrupted narrative, very much like the modernists texts of Joyce or Crnjanski, the stream of the author's thought guides the reader through densely intertwined lanes of intercultural signifying, devouring and translating, not offering finite answers but incessantly asking questions. In the same fashion of the discussed *avant-garde* manifests that "turn into a space for artistic experiment, where not only different genres and registers meet, but every attempt at systematizing ends in collage questioning the literary conventions of rational and logical chaining of ideas, sentences and words", *Exotism and Cannibalism* streams through various ideal and stylistic registers devoid of teleology or a metaphysical fulfillment. Its very form contours a transcultural field in which numerous artists, writers, ideas, forms and cultures coexist without losing their own identities. "This is a story without beginning", asserts the author, "it has no end either. I do not rely on conclusions, but I hope for a discussion. It can start in any of the suggested points; it can end in any moment".

And, truly, *Exotism and Cannibalism* reads as a book with no beginning or end: its end preceding its beginning, its beginning devouring and digesting itself. It feels rhizomatic, multidirectional, mantic: a metabolic process rather than a linear narrative. In its essence lies an experimental theory of translation that can exist only by dislocating itself, in movements and questions.

Who translates? Who is being translated?