

Catholic vicars, Franciscan monks, Calvinist pastors and students, men and women from the area of Ciuc (Csík), Saxon pastors and students, Saxon men and women from various areas of Transylvania.

In conclusion, Antonio Guardavaglia's volume is a complex work, a monograph whose merit is to have introduced within the international scientific circuit the history of Transylvania, as seen through the eyes of Luigi Marsigli, the scholar from Bologna. The volume also opens up new paths for research in various scientific areas, such as history, geography, sociology etc.



ROBERT-MARIUS MIHALACHE

**Sir Gawain and the Grene Knyght/
Sir Gawain și Cavalerul cel Verde**

Translated with a foreword and notes
by MIRCEA M. TOMUȘ
Cluj-Napoca: Școala Ardeleană, 2021

HAD I not been a Shakespeare person, I would have turned into a medievalist after reading the translation in the mirror (Middle English into Romanian) of the medieval manuscript *Sir Gawain and the Grene Knyght*, so neatly elaborated by Mircea M. Tomuș. Twenty-first century Romanian readers might find it difficult to relate to a text that was probably composed at the end of the fourteenth century, with a manuscript dating from the fifteenth. Nor could they relate directly to an Anglo-Saxon culture whose parameters would baffle even the native English readers, as they would need a translation into Modern English. Yet here we are; Romanian culture witnesses a version of an Anglo-Saxon manuscript redacted along the lines of the

“dialogic process”—according to Susan Bassnett¹—initiated by the cultural turn in translation studies. This Romanian version is based on “the domestic inscription of the foreign” (according to Lawrence Venuti)² and it is marked by heterogeneity and hybridity, so as to suit the modern Romanian reader. When looking at the Middle English text (on the verso page), the reader is suddenly taken aback by the unintelligibility of it all—even for the specialist in English studies. We are relatively accustomed with Chaucer's language, which developed into Shakespeare's language, but this text (written in the Cheshire dialect) is radically different. However, when passing on to the Romanian version (on the recto page), things become more familiar. The language of the translation is not the abstruse medieval chronicler's idiom, but a soft and intelligent archaic version of Romanian, which brings to mind the inspired fairy-tales.

The great strength of this book lies in Mircea M. Tomuș's thorough research into the chivalry romance and the understanding of the actual circumstances in which they worked at the time of composition, as well as how they may work for the modern Romanian reader. The Preface judiciously mentions the translation techniques used to better render the Anglo-Saxon poetic creation, from the principle of alliteration (p. 8) to the number of accented and non-accented syllables in Anglo-Saxon verse forms (p. 9), homophony, play-upon-words, as well as the end-rhyme principle (p. 9), characteristic to Romance-language poetry. The translation dutifully renders the long stanzas (in which the main accented words alliterate), followed by a quatrain of short lines (which alliterate within each verse); this is the poem's

special diction, made to suit the alliterative meter. Armed with such a thorough theoretical apparatus, Tomuş proceeds to put to practice these abstract aspects and he achieves a cultural translation that is both accurate and innovative, careful and intelligible, as well as suited to the purpose of introducing the Romanian reader to an exemplary text of Anglo-Saxon literature.

The main merit of this translation is the excellent way in which it has succeeded in rendering the alliteration code, central to Anglo-Saxon poetry. As the poem starts with the mythical and loosely documented origin of the British people, in the story of Troy, the narrative goes to the story of Aeneas and then to Romulus, the founder of Rome. The verse referring to the city of Rome, “Fro riche Romulus to Rome riccis hym swipe” (Passus I, I.8, p. 18) is translated as “Ce Romulus al Romei va fi s-oridice la rang de regat” (Primul Cânt, I.8, p. 19). Not only does the translation systematically preserve the alliterative style of the original poem, but it also maintains the “r” sound of the alliteration. This proves the translator’s excellent understanding of the essence of Anglo-Saxon verse form and poetic devices. Moreover, in the true tradition of the French *chanson de geste*, when the poem uses Old French, the translator renders the text into modern French. For example, in the verse describing Gawain sitting among the knights of King Arthur’s Round Table, the knight’s position is between Guinevere and Sir Agravain: “There gode Gawan watz grayþed Gwenore bisyde, / And Agrauayn a la dure mayn on þat oþer syde sittes” (Passus I, VI.109–110, p. 32). The Romanian version visualizes perfectly Gawain’s symbolic position at the chivalric table, and it preserves the French connotation,

suggested by the suitable phrase in French: “Acolo-i Gawain, graþiosul cavaler, lângă gingaşa Guinevra, / Cu Agravain à la dure main, de partea cealaltă” (Primul Cânt, VI.109–110, p. 33). This is an impressive identification with the multicultural connections and interferences that informed medieval poetry, with its romance courtly verse structure superimposed on a more rustic alliterative Anglo-Saxon background, derived from the poem’s oral dissemination.

This compellingly readable, easily-flowing, and vigorous Romanian version recreates the original’s tableaux and landscapes, as well as its bizarre and disconcertingly dramatic narrative. Some of the most stimulating passages in the book, filled with splendid insights, occur in the poem’s descriptions of the motion of time, with the cyclical perpetuation of seasons in a year, when the beginning and end rarely converge. The medieval poet exploits this phenomenon to highlight the necessary mutability of the natural world, as the poem opposes the circular nature of a year to the linear nature of human experience. The Old English text solemnly inscribes the progress of time in the natural order, “A zere zernes ful zerne, and zeldez neuer lyke, / þe forme to þe fynisement foldez ful selden” (Passus II, I.499–498, p. 82), which, in a more literal translation, would say that the beginning and the end fold together, but seldom. The metaphor compares life to a string or a piece of fabric that does not fold together neatly, recalling the Fates of classical mythology, who measure out human life with threads. The Romanian cultural translation renders the melancholy feeling involved in the precession of seasons, while the thread or fabric metaphor is submerged: “Dar un an trece

degrabă și vine cel nou e dovada / Începutul și sfârșitul rar se îmbucă împreună” (Al Doilea Cânt, I.499–498, p. 83). The Catholic liturgical calendar is iterated judiciously, from Christmas to Lent, as in “Crystenmasse” and “lentoun” (Passus II, I.502, p. 82), translated as “Crăciunul” and “postul Paștelui” (Al Doilea Cânt, I.502, p. 83), to Michaelmas and Halloween, in Middle English “Mezelmás” (Passus II, II.532, p. 86) and “Al-hal-day” (Passus II, III.536, p. 88), translated into Romanian as “Sântu Mihai” (Al Doilea Cânt, II.532, p. 87) and “Hallowe’en” (Al Doilea Cânt III.536, p. 89). This shows that the translator is aware of the story’s mythic nature and the medieval concern with the emotional value of time past, revealing the inevitability of the fact that individuals are affected by forces outside themselves.

The pentangle is another symbol of interest in the poem, and its rendition is an indication of excellence for this Romanian translation by Mircea M. Tomuș. The five points of the pentangle represent the knight’s perfection and his triumph over evil. The symbolic figure five is metaphorically used to denote accomplishment, and it is described in precisely fifteen long lines (Al Doilea Cânt, VI. 619–634, p. 101) and twenty-five long lines (Al Doilea Cânt, VII. 640–665, p. 103), which is also maintained in the translation. Not only does the Romanian version clearly depict Sir Gawain’s shield, with the pentangle painted in pure gold, but it also maintains the “p” and “s” alliteration of the original, despite the fact that this is very difficult to achieve in a romance language. As the original text describes the shield, “Then þay schewed hym þe schelde, þat was of schyr goulez / Wyth þe pentangel depaynt

of pure golde hwez” (Passus II, VI.619–620, p. 100). In a mirror image, the Romanian translation excellently renders the visual metaphors: “Ș-apoi i-aduseră scutul, strălucind stins în roșu / Cu pentagrama de preț sculptată-n aur pur” (Al Doilea Cânt, VI. 619–620, p. 101). The symbolic colours red and green, with the pentagram painted in gold, enhance the lush visuality of the poem, which goes along with its rich acoustic world.

All those interested in the history of English language and literature, and in the Romanian rendition of this admirable poem, are invited to have this book on their bookshelves. It is interesting and splendidly researched, full of brilliant new insights into the essence of Anglo-Saxon language and literature, beautifully rendered into a mellow and oldish-sounding Romanian idiom. Romanian culture is fortunate to count such a thought-provoking translation among the versions from Middle English of Sir Gawain’s story.



MONICA MATEI-CHESNOIU

Notes

1. Susan Bassnett, “Preface,” in Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere, *Constructing Cultures: Essays on Literary Translation* (Clevedon etc.: Multilingual Matters, 1998), vii.
2. Lawrence Venuti, *Translation Changes Everything: Theory and Practice* (London–New York: Routledge, 2013), 12.