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The Poetry pRO Project

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The MA Programme for the Translation of the Contemporary Literary Text (MTTLC), which I founded within the English Department of Bucharest University (mttlc.ro) five years ago, has grown from 15 to 250 students. It began with contemporary literature, and has gradually zeroed in on contemporary British poetry. This is how the *poetry pRO* project was born. It all began with my website (lidiavianu.scriptmania.com/). After initiating a series of interviews with contemporary British authors (David Lodge, Julian Barnes, Peter Ackroyd, Alan Brownjohn, George Szirtes, and others), I found I was receiving e-mails from many poets who were willing to be interviewed. At that point I began reading recent poetry extensively, and soon the idea came up to translate it into Romanian, with my MA students.

Translating poetry does not usually make students happy. To make the activity more appealing, I started a literary translation e-zine, which published my MA and PhD students' translations, *Translation Café* (revista.mttlc.ro/). In several years we have completed almost a hundred issues, and the speed keeps increasing. The e-zine relies heavily on a living online dictionary (groups.yahoo.com/group/translationcafe/), which includes almost 500 members today – among them, British, American, Romanian poets, novelists, and translators. Whenever my students cannot understand a word or a context, they post it there, and get numerous answers, some from the authors themselves.

Two years ago I was approached by Anne Stewart (www.poetrypf.co.uk/), a highly resourceful and enthusiastic literary agent for some 260 British poets. This is how *poetry pRO*

started. The name of this international (unfunded) project belongs to her. It is a project that relies exclusively on the enthusiasm of the poets and their translators. The MAs' translations of British poetry have been published in major Romanian magazines, have been broadcast daily for years by the Romanian Broadcasting Corporation, owing to the efforts of a Romanian editor and poet, Dan Verona, who has a splendid world poetry midnight programme.

We went further and started an online publishing house, the *Contemporary Literature Press* (mttlc.ro/editura/), with the support of Bucharest University, the British Council and the Romanian Cultural Institute. The Board of this publishing house includes important contemporary literary figures: Julian Barnes, Alan Brownjohn, Rut Fainlight, Robert Hampson, Fiona Sampson, C. George Sandulescu, Adam Sorkin, Michael Swan, George Szirtes. So far we have published bilingual volumes by Alan Brownjohn, Peter Ackroyd, Ruth Fainlight, Mimi Khalvati, Fiona Sampson, George Szirtes. In Britain and Romania, *poetry pRO* is already a brand. In a way, it is the academic translators' revenge in the contemporary unfair battle for funding, for a grant. It functions with enthusiasm as its only fuel. And it functions well. Thank God for the internet, which absorbs much labour of love and costs next to nothing when it comes to publication. If it had not been first for the fall of communism and then for the advent of the virtual adventure of the intellect (and its liberty to move in space at no expense at all), all this (the MA programme, the *poetry pRO* project, *Translation Café* and *Contemporary Literature Press*) might never have come to life. As it is, we are happy to see the virus of poetry translation is spreading, and the time has come to invite more countries to join us. We have poets, we have publication venues, and we have our Romanian MAs, whose young energy is a blessing.

The MTTLC invites poets and translators from English into all languages (and the other way round, of course) to join the club. We are interested in everything that belongs to contemporary literature and its translation. The common ground is English, certainly. We have extended our area to fiction, drama, and criticism. We have a young literary press which hopes to publish many good books and good translations.

Since there is no good translation into English without a native's endorsement, *poetry pRO* has started a remarkable translating mechanism: when the MAs translate from Romanian into English (I suppose every nation wants its writers to be known abroad), the British poets in Anne Stewart's group polish up their English. The poets work hard most of the times, since the MAs are young and our mistakes are many. But once it's done, the translated text is equal to the original, which is the most a writer can wish for: to be translated into English and not be betrayed by his co-nationals' imperfect handling of a foreign language.

Having started from a modest attempt at e-learning, at coping with the difficulty of translation via the internet, I think that the MTTLC and its *poetry pRO* project have a long road ahead. Making our e-zine and publishing house the place where many languages meet in English translation is our aim.

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