

## The First Romanian Translations of John Steinbeck. Norms, Strategies and Censorship Practices

### Primele traduceri românești din John Steinbeck. Norme, strategii și practici de cenzură

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#### Abstract

*Drawing on Gideon Toury’s “norm theory,” and on André Lefevere’s concept of “rewriting,” this paper examines six Romanian translations of John Steinbeck issued between 1942 and 1946, seeking to reveal the norms and strategies adopted in their production, as well as shed light on the role of ideology in shaping the target texts.*

#### Rezumat

*Pornind de la „teoria normelor” propusă de Gideon Toury și de la conceptul de „rescriere” introdus de André Lefevere, ne propunem să examinăm șase traduceri românești din John Steinbeck apărute între anii 1942-1946 pentru a releva normele și strategiile adoptate în producerea lor, precum și rolul factorului ideologic în modelarea textelor țintă.*

**Keywords:** *John Steinbeck, first Romanian translations, translation norms and strategies, ideology, censorship*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *John Steinbeck, primele traduceri românești, norme și strategii de traducere, ideologie, cenzură*

#### Introduction

Drawing on the cultural orientations in Translation Studies, and more precisely on the “norm theory” developed by the Israeli scholar Gideon Toury, and on the concept of “rewriting” proposed by André Lefevere, this paper discusses the norms and strategies which underpinned the Romanian translations from John Steinbeck produced in the 1940s, highlighting at the same time the role of ideology in shaping the target texts.

The polysystem theorist Gideon Toury introduces the concept of “norm” to discuss the constraints involved in the translation behaviour within a particular socio-cultural context. The norms that govern the translation process in the target system at a certain moment in time account for the translators’ decisions, while they also are an indication of their orientation. In fact, the translation’s orientation is what Toury calls “initial norm,” which pertains to the basic choice made by the translator between “adequacy” (subscription to the norms derived from the source text) and “acceptability” (adherence to the dominant norms in the target system) [1]. If priority is given to source text norms, the translation runs the risk of breaching the target system conventions and thus the degree of acceptability is significantly lower.

The two possible directions that translators may undertake - adequacy or acceptability - somehow reflect the two opposing translation strategies specified by Lawrence Venuti, namely foreignization and domestication. Whereas a domesticating or a fluent translation fits into the linguistic and ideological expectations of the target culture, a foreignizing or resistant translation rejects social norms and constraints in an attempt to show the reader the foreignness of the text [2]. Our analysis between the source texts and their target realisations will try to determine the degree of

compliance with various linguistic and cultural norms in the target system, and, with it, the higher or lower degree of acceptability of the translated texts in the receiving culture. We thus purport to reveal the extent to which the norm of fluency prevailed over other translation strategies adopted by the Romanian translators of John Steinbeck in the 1940s.

In addition to the basic category of “initial” norms, Gideon Toury further distinguishes between “preliminary” and “operational” ones. Whereas the latter direct the decisions made during the act of translation, and they may be linguistic or literary, the preliminary norms, of particular interest to this paper, refer to the translation policy existing in the target culture at a given moment [3]. Censorship in translation is also reflected in the preliminary norms, which may favour or even forbid the selection of specific authors and works from a source culture at particular times in history, as well as determine the decision whether to translate directly from the original language, or from an intermediate one [4]. A consideration of the historical context in which the translations occurred and of the dominant norms in the Romanian system will allow us to gain insight into the factors that governed the choice of Steinbeck’s texts to be imported through translation in the fifth decade.

Furthermore, an approach to translation via the issue of norms, a concept that has its basis in social interaction, needs to take account of questions such as ideology, power and manipulation, which are perceived by André Lefevere as elements guiding the choice of texts to be translated in the target culture. The translation scholar, whose discourse is also informed by a (poly)systemic view of literature, argues that the selection and reception of a writer’s work in a different cultural space is performed under certain constraints and for certain purposes. Control factors act both from outside the literary system (“patronage”), by means of institutions (academies, censorship bureaus, educational establishments, critical journals) exerting their influence in the service of power through the ideological, economic, and social component, as well as from within the literary system, through “rewriters” (literary critics, reviewers, teachers, translators) who “adapt, manipulate the originals they work with to some extent, usually to make them fit in with the dominant ideological and poetological currents of their time” [5]. Accordingly, since the translators-as-rewriters are the ones likely to construct the image of a certain culture, they exercise a great power which allows for a certain degree of manipulation. In our analysis of the Romanian rewritings, we will thus try to determine the extent to which Steinbeck’s original texts have been ‘manipulated’ to suit the ideological trends and the poetics of the Romanian culture.

### ***The Grapes of Wrath***

The beginning of John Steinbeck’s literary fortunes in the Romanian cultural space is marked by the 1942 translation of *The Grapes of Wrath* by G. Ionescu-Areff. Published in 1939 in the United States, the novel depicts the hardships and suffering endured by the Joads as they are forced to journey from Oklahoma to California during the Great Depression. The book instantly achieved widespread popularity, which gave rise to numerous translations in various languages. The critic David Wyatt actually reports that, immediately after its publication in the US. overseas translations were arranged in several languages, including Romanian [6]. However, the outbreak of war delayed the novel’s wide distribution, so that its translation reached Romanian readers in times of intense political turmoil.

After the interwar years, one of the most flourishing periods in Romania’s modern history, the Royal Dictatorship (1938-1940) gradually reduced the freedoms Romanians enjoyed under the 1923 Constitution, setting as well the pattern for censorship practices that will be further perpetuated under Marshal Ion Antonescu’s military dictatorship (1940-1944). At the time the first translation of *The Grapes of Wrath* came out, Romania was already at war, having had joined the Axis Powers in June 1941. Although the United States had already become an enemy, it appears that the patronage system did not deem necessary to ban this book. Conversely, Steinbeck’s exposure of the social and economic ills faced by Americans has turned the book into a suitable candidate for translation and publication. The novel had also been printed in Germany as early as

1940 in spite of Steinbeck's refusal to grant permission for a German edition [7]. Furthermore, in France, the Germans urged the Gallimard publishing house to issue the novel during the occupation, because, as Jean-Paul Sartre stated, "they tried to use pessimistic American books for propaganda purposes" [8]. Thus, there is a clear ideology behind the selection of this text, which reveals itself in the manner in which it was censored and rewritten to be used as a propaganda tool. For instance, the passage in which the writer mentions the names of famous political figures is left out in the Romanian translation:

If you who own the things people must have could understand this, you might preserve yourself. If you could separate causes from results, if you could know that that Paine, *Marx*, Jefferson, *Lenin* were results, not causes, you might survive [9].

This is not the only fragment that was considered ideologically unacceptable. None of the passages in which Steinbeck's characters speak of the radical need to revolt against the economic system that is destroying them are included in the target text. The Romanian readers are merely left with the perception of the migrant workers' fatalistic attitude:

"I got to figure," the tenant said. "We all got to figure. *There's some way to stop this. It's not like lightning or earthquakes. We've got a bad thing made by made, and by God that's something we can change.*" The tenant sat in the doorway [10].

- Trebuie să mă gândesc, zise învoitul. Noi toți trebuie să ne gândim. Învoitul se așeză în pragul casei [11].

Moreover, whereas it was convenient to cast the United States in a bad light, one could not go as far as to attack one of the pillars of capitalism – the banking system. Throughout the novel, the land-owning banks that drive the tenant farmers off the land are described as monsters, created by men but out of men's control: "The bank – the monster has to profit all the time. It can't wait. It'll die. No, taxes go on. When the monster stops growing, it dies" [12]. Not only are all such passages removed, but the word "bank" is simply deleted from the Romanian version.

The ideological factor has clearly determined both the selection of this novel, and its textual censorship. Yet, it should not be perceived as the only factor governing the production of the translation. As previously mentioned, the quick worldwide attention the book had attracted was an incentive for the Socec publishing house to make arrangements for printing it back in 1939. As for the publishers' decision, it might simply have been that they saw our country as an eager market for a novel that had been banned in the US for its rebellious topic. Furthermore, like most Romanian private publishing companies of its time, Socec was mainly interested in bringing out popular literature that would sell quickly. The commercial criteria imposed by the publishing house as the dominant preliminary norm also had a substantial bearing on the outcome of the translation process. Accordingly, editors would dictate drastic space constraints, so that, apart from the ideologically motivated cuts, chapters are shortened and fragments are randomly left out in the Romanian version. Additionally, as Rodica Dimitriu argues, editors used to attribute a low status to translators, which is shown by "their tendency to avoid professionals who were more expensive and more difficult to manipulate" [13]. The first Romanian rewriting of Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* stands proof of the translator's inability to successfully overcome translation difficulties, as he constantly oscillates between domesticating and foreignizing (practically leaving untranslated terms in the target text). Still, G. Ionescu-Areff strives for a high degree of acceptability especially when dealing with the language coloured with profanity used by Steinbeck's characters.

### ***The Moon Is Down***

The postwar period (1944-1946) saw the first wave of translations from John Steinbeck. The first novel that reached the Romanian readership was *The Moon Is Down*, whose translation and publishing history proves that Steinbeck's early reception in our country was shaped by political history. Written and conceived as a work of anti-Nazi propaganda, *The Moon Is Down* (1942) tells the story of a small town invaded by troops of unspecified nationality, with the moral message that free men will always win in such struggles. When the novel came out, it ignited a fierce debate in American criticism over the writer's soft portrayal of the invaders, and his credentials as an antifascist and patriot, as most critics were arguing that a more belligerent tone should have been taken. The book, which was issued in agreement with the US secret services [14], quickly achieved widespread notoriety, and was greatly admired in countries under German dominion, where resistance groups risked their lives to distribute it [15].

Shortly after the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August 1944, when Romania broke its alliance with Germany and joined the Soviet Army, the first Romanian version of *The Moon Is Down* was serialized in twenty-eight installments (September 2, 1944 – October 7, 1944) in *Semnalul (The Signal)*. Its title - *Nuits sans lune* - indicates that Marvède-Fischer's 1943 French version, printed by Éditions Marguerat in Lausanne, had served as translation material. Indeed, the Romanian text closely follows the French translation, containing distortions, and even howlers. To provide only one telling example, the French phrase "saper leur moral" [16] (for Steinbeck's "fight their nerves" [17]) is rendered "să le săpăm moralul" [18]. Literalism thus appears to be less the result of the anonymous translator's choice than of an insufficient mastery of French, and an inappropriate use of the target language stylistic resources.

The Romanian rewriting has obviously been hastily produced to serve as propaganda at a time when our country was undergoing radical political changes. Its propaganda role is also testified by the publication in *Semnalul (The Signal)*, a newspaper that had been closed down in 1940 by the Royal Dictatorship, and reappeared on September 1, 1944 to promote an underlying political agenda. Despite the space constraints (it was a four-page paper), the anonymous translation was included on every second page of the periodical, which covered at the time World War II political and military news subsumed within Communist propaganda. Thus, the patronage system that would rapidly consolidate itself to regulate the distribution of literature and promote the Communist ideology appears to have already been displaying its power.

Secondly, the work garnered the interest of Mihail Sebastian, the renowned Romanian writer and playwright, who produced its theatrical adaptation (*Noaptea fără lună*). Interestingly enough, besides the inevitable modifications entailed by adapting a novel for the stage, M. Sebastian decided to make additional changes. Thus, whereas in Steinbeck's novel the invaders' nationality can only be inferred from references to England, the war in Russia, and the occupation in Belgium, Sebastian's play is 'uncensored': "the occupiers" are called "Germans," "Nazis" and "Fascists," and their "Leader" is identified as "Führer" or "Hitler" [19]. Thus, the play was produced 'in conformity' with Romania's historical context, as it perfectly fitted in with the political and ideological changes occurring in those days. In considering the reasons for which Mihail Sebastian undertook the adaptation of this particular novel, we cannot leave aside the antifascist message of the book, the historical context marked by the horrors of dictatorship and Holocaust, and Sebastian's own experience as a Romanian of Jewish origin. Yet, it should also be pointed out that the theatrical adaptation was most likely produced by the Romanian playwright on request for the Barașeum Theatre, where it was staged during the season of 1944-1945. According to the press reviews of the time, it was a great success, "the first theatrical performance of an anti-Nazi play in liberated Bucharest" [20], and, unfortunately, M. Sebastian's last work before his death in an accident.

At the end of 1944, when Mihail Sebastian was preparing his stage adaptation, a friend of his, the poet and novelist Felix Aderca, was working on a different translation of the novel (*Noaptea fără lună*), which was printed by the Forum publishing house. Compared to the translation in

*Semnalul*, Felix Aderca's version (whose source text is the same 1943 French translation) is evidence of the translator's concern to ensure high literary standards to his work. This translation also has a clear domesticating orientation, which may be gleaned, for instance, in the decision to naturalize the characters' names (Joseph - Iosif, Christine – Cristina, Alexander - Alex). On the other hand, it is significant that *Noapți fără lună* is introduced to the Romanian readership by means of a foreword, in which the editors make reference to the German nationality of the invaders, thus indicating that, as argued by André Lefevere, "patronage is usually more interested in the ideology of literature than in its poetics" [21]. The authors of the foreword also touch on the American writer's sympathetic portrayal of the German soldiers, a leitmotif in the critical debate about the novel, and attempt to explain his decision by highlighting that the book had been written at the start of the war, i.e., before crimes were committed on such a vast scale [22]. The success of *The Moon Is Down* is finally ascribed both to its antifascist message, and its literary value, which is however only skimmed over, once more testifying to the pivotal role played by the political and ideological factors in the novel's warm reception in our country.

The novel's rapid translation into Romanian was also largely due to its popularity in France since both target texts are, to use Gideon Toury's words, "secondary translations." Furthermore, Mihail Sebastian, an expert translator from English, also confesses to having used Marvède-Fischer's text to write his theatrical adaptation: "I have made a play from *Nuits sans lune*" [23]. To be sure, the French translation of *The Moon Is Down* was at that time more easily accessible to the Romanian publishers. Given possible financial implications and the obvious concern with printing the translations in the shortest span of time, it was only natural to put the first available version at the translators' disposal. The Romanian rewritings are actually a reflection of the undisputed prestige the French culture and literature still enjoyed in our country. Furthermore, if we were only to consider that the serialized translation in *Semnalul* appeared under the title *Nuits sans lune*, our culture definitely had a high degree of tolerance to the practice of using French mediating texts. Still, in such 'second hand' translations, the usual problems of any translation are intensified since the mediating version may have been adjusted to the norms of acceptability in its own target culture, as is the case with Marvède-Fischer's text.

### ***In Dubious Battle***

The end of the war was followed by a brief interval of relative democracy, albeit characterised by governmental instability and by the actual assumption of power by the Communist left. ***After three transition governments, a pro-Communist government was installed for the first time in 1945, and its position was consolidated after the 1946 elections.*** The Marxist-Leninist ideology and the socialist realism, as the new type of literature meant to replace the old literary forms, started to be aggressively promoted. Translations were assigned an important part in this process, as they were the means by which the Soviet model could be effectively forced upon the Romanian culture. Accordingly, translations from Russian gradually gained prominence over those from other foreign literatures, on which began to operate very effective censorship mechanisms.

The reasons for the translation of the novel *In Dubious Battle* in 1945 (as well as for its republication in 1958) may be traced back to the ideological discourse of the time. *In Dubious Battle* is the story of a strike among migrant agricultural workers who unite under Communist leaders to challenge the establishment of a fruit growers' association in California. The book immediately gained a worldwide reputation as Communist propaganda even though Steinbeck had deliberately refrained in the novel from taking sides with either of the central antagonists – the Communists and the capitalists –, and confessed to have written the work "without looking through the narrow glass of political and economic preconception" [24]. As the influential critic Harold Bloom also explains, "nowhere in the book does Steinbeck show any theoretical or political interest in Communism" [25]. The novel is about victims and 'monsters' on both sides of a 'dubious battle', which cannot be won by either party. Actually, Steinbeck implies that people are exploited for the advancement of an abstract (Communist) cause, and this perspective is consistent with the writer's

belief expressed throughout his work that the human being is more important than any cause or political party.

However, this was not the reason for the novel's warm reception in Romania, where publishers were quick to print it because it had been labeled as pro-Communist. Since the book apparently complied with the newly imposed ideology, it was not necessary to remove or amend any parts of the text. Nonetheless, its title was simply rendered "*Bătălia*," as one could not suggest in those days that the nature of Communist struggle is inconclusive. Furthermore, in subsequent years, when its full meaning started to be gleaned, the message of the novel was distorted to serve the mainstream ideology. Accordingly, Romanian reviewers resorted to gross simplifications, implying that Steinbeck comes up in the novel with a solution of subverting capitalism, and even contending that the author shows "a manifest respect for the Communists who sacrifice their lives for a future world from which others will benefit" [26]. Eventually, the book was consigned to oblivion due to its undesirable political potential and it has not been reprinted in Romania since 1958.

The publication of *In Dubious Battle* in 1945 may also be regarded as evidence of the commencement of an active translation campaign that would go beyond mere financial considerations, as opposed to what happened in the interwar period. On the one hand, there exists a definite editorial policy. Thus, the newly founded Forum publishing house, which issued both Silvian Iosifescu's translation of *In Dubious Battle* (1945) and Felix Aderca's version of *The Moon Is Down* (1944), informs readers that its main agenda is to print timely literature and Soviet works:

By beginning its activity with the publication of [*The Moon Is Down*], the Forum publishing house wants to affirm its determination to follow a precise line of orientation, i.e., to make available to the Romanian public a literature that expresses the problems of our times. (...) Our editorial policy will mainly be directed towards the publication of Soviet literature, a true reservoir of spiritual energy and of art constantly enriched by the social experience of life [27].

On the other hand, there is an actual preoccupation with quality and competence in translation, testified by the recruitment of professional translators such as Silvian Iosifescu. The Romanian critic's version of *In Dubious Battle* reflects his attempt to strike a balance between Steinbeck's originality and the Romanian cultural, literary and textual conventions. Yet, although the translator pays regard to Steinbeck's intimate knowledge of working men's language, the translation does not run against target culture acceptability.

### ***Tortilla Flat***

***The next work by the American author to appear in Romanian translation was Tortilla Flat, a novel*** that relates the adventures of a close-knit group of "paisanos" (a mixture of Spanish, Indian, Mexican and Caucasian bloods) living a carefree, happy life on the outskirts of Monterey, California. Steinbeck thus tells of a community that values camaraderie and honor over the bourgeois values. The novel was mainly lauded for its colourful characters and good humor, and is regarded as a landmark in Steinbeck's career, for it was the first to bring him popularity in his native country.

In Romania, the translation of *Tortilla Flat* was undertaken by Eugen and Paul Marian, and printed by the Vatra publishing house, which promoted at that time both national and world literature. The editorial policy of Vatra reflects both a tendency to please the newly imposed regime by printing, for instance, Constantin Titel Petrescu's *Ce este socialismul (What Is Socialism)* in 1945, and a concern for profit and consumer demand by focusing on popular foreign writers such as the Americans Pearl S. Buck, Upton Sinclair, and Louis Bromfield. To be sure, in those days, John Steinbeck also enjoyed considerable fame among the Romanian reading public due to the previously issued translations.

Still, because of Steinbeck's use of frank, unadulterated language, the text was tampered with before publication. For instance, the passage in which the drunken protagonist shouts profanities at a group of fishermen, calling them "bastards," "scum," and "dogs" is simply omitted, even though the target text reader may have difficulty following the story line:

"At last his wavering bowlegs took him toward the wharf where, at this early hour in the morning, the Italian fishermen were walking down in rubber boots to go out to sea. Race antipathy overcame Danny's good sense. He menaced the fishermen. "Sicilian bastards," he called them, and "Scum from the prison island," and "Dogs of dogs of dogs." He cried, "Chinga tu madre, Piojo." He thumbed his nose and made obscene gestures below his waist. The fishermen only grinned and shifted their oars and said, "Hello, Danny. When'd you get home? Come around tonight. We got new wine."

Danny was outraged. He screamed, "Pon un condo a la cabeza."

They called, "Good-by, Danny. See you tonight." And they climbed into their little boats and rowed out to the lampara launches and started their engines and chugged away. Danny was insulted. He walked back up Alvarado Street [28].

În cele din urmă picioarele sale încovoiate care se clătinau, îl duseră spre port, unde pescarii italieni, cu cisme de cauciuc, se pregăteau să iasă în larg. Ora era matinală.

- „Hello!” strigă el văzându-i.

Ei îi răspunseră: „Noroc, Danny. Treci astăseară.”

Săriră în bărci și porniră.

Jignit, Danny se întoarse în strada Alvarado [29].

Actually, the translators' concern with attenuating the vulgar language is obvious in their rewriting of Steinbeck's text, and it should be perceived as a question of meeting target reader expectations of what was deemed acceptable in the Romanian polysystem at that particular time. For instance, given the historical circumstances, the decision to omit the instances in which Steinbeck pejoratively uses the word "Jew" for "money-lender" is understandable. All in all, the translators of *Tortilla Flat* predominantly employed fluent rather than foreignizing strategies or, as Gideon Toury would put it, acceptability in the target culture has overshadowed adequacy with respect to the source text. Nonetheless, the preservation of certain culture-bound terms ("viejo," "tortilla," "tamales," "Airedales," "fan-tan," "euchre") without providing explanatory notes is not a very inspiring decision since it confuses the readers who may not be familiar with the culture in which the text is rooted.

### ***Of Mice and Men***

The last of Steinbeck's works to be translated into Romanian and published in the 1940s was *Of Mice and Men*. Like *The Grapes of Wrath* and *In Dubious Battle*, *Of Mice and Men* is set in the 1930s, and was most deeply influenced by the economic turmoil of the times. The novel bears witness to the suffering of the Americans, as it portrays the effects of the Great Depression, and deals with the challenges faced by the agricultural workers.

***The first Romanian translation (Oameni și Șoareci) reached readers in 1946. Although it is difficult to ignore the political and ideological implications in the receptive process of a foreign work in those days, the selection of the novel Of Mice and Men appears to have been determined by factors of a different nature. The book was translated by S. Sanin, and printed by the newly established Pro-Pace publishing house, a most active publishing company of its time.*** The list of translations that Pro-Pace brought out in no more than three years of existence (1945-1947) is quite impressive. Besides translations from French, British, and Italian literature, it includes a significant

number of works by American authors - Ernest Hemingway, Erskine Caldwell, Walt Whitman, Eugene O'Neill, and Thornton Wilder - . This testifies to the existence of a coherent translation policy, aiming at filling certain gaps existing in our culture in terms of translations. One should neither rule out the possibility that *Of Mice and Men* may have been selected by the translator, who confesses to being an admirer of Steinbeck's writings in a "Translator's Note" that accompanies the Romanian version. S. Sanin's nine-page preface to the book is actually the first well-informed and original presentation of John Steinbeck in the Romanian literary milieu.

A professional translator from German and English, S. Sanin is fully aware of his role as mediator between the two cultures connected through translation. Unfortunately, he does not discuss the difficulties encountered in reconstructing the flavor of the original. Still, his assessment of the work as "a grim tale pervaded by an ineffable poetry" [30], and his recurrent reference to Steinbeck's poetical style, indicate that he has paid particular heed to preserving the novel's lyricism in translation. Yet, in translating *Of Mice and Men*, one is faced with numerous difficulties since the text is a heterogeneous combination of styles: lyrical passages composed in formal English alternate with dialogues, written in dialect and slang. Thus, Steinbeck's text also has the feature of being highly colloquial, characterised by the deliberate flouting of syntactical and grammatical rules, and the use of double negatives, sound reductions, numerous interjections, and curses. S. Sanin's version attempts to strike a balance between the innovation that the novel was supposed to present in the Romanian literature, through the use of vernacular language, with all its novelty and natural vulgarity, and the conservatism that was still characterising the literary tastes of the Romanian readers. Hence, the translator readjusted a number of colloquial expressions using a more 'acceptable' language for the target readership of the time. For the same reasons, the racial slur is not acknowledged in the following passage:

"Listen, Nigger," she said. "You know what I can do to you if you open your trap?"(...) "Well, you keep your place then, Nigger. I could get you strung upon a tree so easy it ain't even funny" [31].

-Ascultă negrule, zise ea, știi ce pot să-ți fac dacă mai deschizi gura ? (...) Atunci vezi-ți de treabă negrule. Ar fi așa de lesne să te fac să atârni cu capul de o creangă, încât n'ar avea nici măcar haz [32].

As in the case of *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Tortilla Flat*, the coarseness of expression that characterizes the original text could not be fully transposed into Romanian, as the translator chose to domesticate the 'vulgar' language of Steinbeck's characters. Actually, the American writer was charged with offensive language upon the publication of *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Of Mice and Men*. Both books were banned and challenged for many years, but Steinbeck defended his decision, arguing that "for too long, the language of books was different from the language of men. To the men I write about profanity is adornment and ornament and is never vulgar and I try to write it so" [33].

## Conclusions

To attribute John Steinbeck's warm reception in our country in the 1940s to the literary merits of his works, and their appeal to the Romanian readership is only half the story. No doubt, the American writer's worldwide popularity at the time has been an incentive for the publication of the Romanian translations, but, as we have tried to show, the reasons for selecting works by Steinbeck are complex, involving politics and ideology at least as much, if not more than their literary value.

The past historical circumstances in Romania largely accounted for the acceptance and appreciation of Steinbeck's work in the fifth decade. The 1940s Romanian versions serve as a mirror, reflecting the radical changes occurring on the political and ideological scene - from the



1942 translation of *The Grapes of Wrath*, meant to serve as anti-American propaganda, to the issue of no less than three rewritings of the anti-Nazi novel *The Moon Is Down* immediately after the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August 1944, and the quick reception in 1945 of the allegedly pro-Communist work *In Dubious Battle*.

In terms of translational policy, these years have enjoyed the mixed status of a period of transition. There are numerous and at times contradictory preliminary norms that governed the production of the Romanian rewritings, ranging from the business criteria for selection imposed by the publishing houses, and the translators' affinities, to the prestige of the French culture, and the high threshold of tolerance in the Romanian polysystem, which allowed for indirect translations. The examination of the versions produced in the 1940s and the integration of the corpus of translations from the American writer with the dominant preliminary norms reveal, however, a growing concern with the quality of translations and a shift towards a more coherent, yet ideologically-motivated, translation policy.

The choice the translators made with respect to the texts they tackled largely depended on the literary fashion of those times, with its restrictions, its already established canons and criteria, or to what André Lefevere calls the poetics of a period. Consequently, the Steinbeck literature that reached Romanian readers in the 1940s often lost in translation the usual 'political suspects,' as well as those elements that were judged to be excessive in violence and profanity. Thus, the first translations of John Steinbeck were generally made acceptable in the Romanian polysystem by means of a domesticating strategy that attenuated the American writer's use of unadulterated language. In spite of all the drawbacks, all these early translations have an important socio-cultural function, as they introduced John Steinbeck to the Romanian readership and paved the way for the issue of subsequent translations.

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[14] As reports Jackson J. BENSON, John Steinbeck wrote *The Moon Is Down* on assignment for the Foreign Information Service (a propaganda agency headed by playwright Robert E. Sherwood), which was a newly established unit within the Office of Coordinator of Information (forerunner of the CIA). The detailed story of the genesis and composition of *The Moon Is Down* is related by BENSON, Jackson J., *The True Adventures of John Steinbeck, Writer: A Biography*, The Viking Press, New York, 1984, pp. 486-88, 491- 92.

[15] For further details on the novel's translation, clandestine publication and dissemination in occupied countries, see COERS, Donald V., *John Steinbeck as Propagandist: "The Moon Is Down" Goes to War*, University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa, 1991.

[16] STEINBECK, John, *Nuits sans lune*. Transl. by Marvède-Fisher, Éditions Marguerat, Lausanne, 1943, p. 170.

[17] STEINBECK, John, *The Moon is Down*, Penguin Books, New York, 1995, p. 62.

[18] STEINBECK, John, "Nuits sans lune / Nopti fără lună." Anonymous translation, in *Semnalul (The Signal)*, No. 744, September 28, 1944, p. 2.

[19] SEBASTIAN, Mihail, "Nopti fără lună. Dramatizare în opt tablouri după romanul cu același titlu de John Steinbeck," In *Opere alese*, Vol. I, București: ESPLA, 1956.

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[21] LEFEVERE, André, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

[22] EDITORS' Foreword to *Nopti fără lună / The Moon Is Down*. By John Steinbeck. Transl. by Felix Aderca, Forum, București, 1944, p. VII.

[23] SEBASTIAN, Mihail, *Journal 1935-1944: The Fascist Years*. Transl. by **Patrick** Camiller, Pimlico, London, 2003, p. 622.

[24] John Steinbeck qtd. in LISCA, Peter, *The Wide World of John Steinbeck*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 1958, p. 114.

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[27] EDITORS' Foreword, *op. cit.*, pp. VII-VIII.

[28] STEINBECK, John, *Tortilla Flat*, Bantam Books, New York, 1965, p. 9.

[29] STEINBECK, John, *Tortilla*. Transl. by Eugen Marian and Paul Marian, Vatra, București, 1945, p. 12.

[30] SANIN, S., "Translator's Note" to *Oameni și Șoareci / Of Mice and Men*, Pro Pace, București, 1946, p. 14.

[31] STEINBECK, John, *Of Mice and Men*, Penguin Books, New York, 1993, p. 100.

[32] STEINBECK, John, *Oameni și Șoareci / Of Mice and Men*. Transl. by S. Sanin, Pro Pace, București, 1946, p. 140.

[33] John Steinbeck qtd. in SHILLINGLAW, Susan, *A Journey into Steinbeck's California*, Roaring Forties Press, Berkeley, 2006, p. 144.

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