

'Censorable' Structures in W. S. Maugham's Novels- Linguistic and Cultural Elements

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Abstract

Communist censorship stigmatised the Romanian cultural life in general, literature in particular. Rejecting and banning anything related to fascism, mysticism, chauvinism, religion, anything demoralising or sentimental, confusion causing or hostile to the regime was common practice. W. S. Maugham's novels contain many of the historic, cultural and social elements the regime intended to keep people away from. Therefore, some of the translations of his novels (into Romanian) were banned and other versions were published later. The Razor's Edge and The Painted Veil are two of the censored novels and the present paper deals with these aforementioned aspects from the linguistic point of view, by considering also the translation issues.

Keywords: censorship, communism, literature, Maugham, target texts.

The present paper aims at showing that the literary activity and the existence of texts (both as original texts and as translations) are often conditioned by the cultural and political context. As a matter of fact, the paper is an investigation into the literary and linguistic reasons that led to the total censoring of Somerset Maugham's works in Romania. Nevertheless, the approach refers mostly to the target culture and texts inasmuch as the banned texts (mentioned in the documents referring to censorship) were the translations, not the originals. Therefore, the three categories of concepts and research methods employed refer to history/culture, literary criticism, linguistics, and translation studies. The first stage of the present analysis approaches the translations "within a target-oriented framework", as Toury puts it, especially concerning the cultural and the political elements of the target system (1995: 23).

As regards the historical or socio-cultural context, communism and censorship are closely related. One of the crucial moments in the censoring process was the Congress of the Romanian Workers' Party in

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February 1948 – the moment when all the relations with the Occident ceased and the phenomenon was described as Romania’s “independence from foreign domination” (Thompson 2013: 524). Nevertheless, politics, culture, science etc. were all following the Soviet Union’s model as Romania became a satellite of the USSR and the constitution adopted in 1948 was a Soviet-like one (Dwyer 1980: 130). The communist leader Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej argued that the foreign influences, especially the ones coming from the rotting Occident (in particular capitalist countries) were easily piercing in ideology, literature, art and science; therefore, fighting against the Western ideology was the essential task of the communist party (Petcu 1999: 167). In this sense, censorship was supposed to function for “ideological sanitation” and for promoting the working class ideology (Costea, Kiraly, Radosav 1995: 82).

Even though periodicals like *Secolul XX* praised the 1944-1978 period as a very productive one in terms of literary and translation activity (Popescu 1978: 260-263), no reference to censorship was made inasmuch as everything was meant to praise the ideology, the communist party and its achievements. Censoring in Romania meant a fusion of the Romanian ideology with the Soviet one, on the one hand, and avoiding contact with the Western civilization, on the other. This was possible by “disinfecting” the field of publishing by forbidding and eliminating from people’s consciousness and lives (Petcu 1999: 167) any elements referring to the cultural and social elements that in this paper are also referred to as censorship criteria. The censorship aims were reached by using censorship *instruments* like the brochures or lists and the related instructions for censoring. The 1948 brochure, considered to be the most important one (in Romanian called *Lista publicatiilor interzise*), is a list of 8000 banned books (including the titles mentioned in the previous brochures from 1945 or 1946). The one called *Publicatii nedifuzabile* is the 1949 list, where the most important part is the added introduction that also included instructions for censoring. The 1957 list is the last one, followed by booklets (the last booklet was published in 1962-1963). The brochures, the instructions in the brochures and the reports written and presented by the representatives of the Communist Party—who were in charge of censoring publications in universities, libraries and even publishing houses—contain what we called *censoring criteria*.

Furthermore, mention should be made that, according to the Annexe VII of the 1949 brochure (Costea, Kiraly, Radosav 1995: 224) and

to the long list of censored works in Professor Paul Caravia's *Scrieri cenzurate*, the literary works making up the corpus of our research were amongst the eight texts (by the same author) completely banned like many other texts that were part of the *forbidden library*, mostly because they were written by American or English writers and translated between 1920 and 1945 (Petcu 1999: 174). Somerset Maugham was one of the most translated authors in Romania (Popescu 1978: 262), but also one of the most censored during communism. To all this, no significant study has been done so far on the texts (from the linguistics and translation theory perspective), hence the term *ensorable* in the present paper applies to what Lefevere called *frames*. These are "the linguistic forms of the utterances" that might have caused Maugham's works to be censored, in other words the terms and structures used to refer to the *scene* – the "personal experience that gives rise to the frame" (Lefevere 1992: 100).

One of the hypotheses on which this short study is based (and that also takes into account literary critics' arguments) is that the facts and actions depicted by the writer are to a certain extent related to the reality he witnessed (the scenes). Literary critics are convinced that most of the facts and stories that Maugham and his secretary (the journalist Gerald Haxton) witnessed or heard when they were travelling to the South Seas, China, South-East Asia and Mexico "appeared almost verbatim in Maugham's fiction and plays" (Drabble 1995: 654). Moreover, Maugham was included in the category of realistic fiction writers from the late 1890s to the Edwardian period who "wrote about modern life and often portrayed subjects such as extreme poverty, sexual misadventure, or the remote reaches of the British Empire" (Drabble 2000: 682). Therefore, it was agreed on the fact that

to read Maugham and to read about Maugham translate into learning about the world from the thirty-seventh year of Victoria's reign to the thirteenth year in the reign of Elizabeth II. To view the world of Maugham and his work is to view the tensions of the Boer War, World War I, and World War II [...] and to grasp the subtleties weaving through the inner weaknesses of a supposedly strong British colonial system in such romantic places as China, Malaya, Borneo, and India. Maugham lived through all of that, observed it all, played a part in it all, and wrote about all of that – and more (Rogal 1997: vii-viii).

By considering the accurate description of this reality, by taking into consideration the censoring criteria (enlarged upon in the

forementioned brochures or the related instructions), as well as by closely analysing the linguistic elements, it becomes obvious that the identified frames refer to the following (presumably real) social and cultural aspects, particularly in English speaking countries and in the colonies:

- foreign (in particular) Western culture and ideology;
- cosmopolitanism – associated with capitalism, democracy and – according to communists–also with exploitation (Petcu 1999: 172), bourgeoisie, American and English imperialism and their ideological “poisoning”;
- religion in general, and the catholic one in particular, mysticism and superstitions;
- relations between states;
- concepts and ideas different from or against the communist ideology;
- chauvinistic, demoralising or sentimental elements;
- feelings like resignation or indifference;
- morbid or exaggerated aspects of life ;
- pornographic or lust-stirring;

The identified frames are mentioned at this stage of our study, not in the conclusion section, because, for reasons of space, an analysis of all the identified frames (linguistic elements) is not possible. Therefore, in order to emphasise the controversial aspects that caused the novels to be banned, we shall proceed to choose the most representative frames and look into the way these elements were translated into Romanian.

According to the censorial measures imposed in that period, elements related to “the venomous capitalist culture”, “the rotten bourgeois culture” or what the communists called cosmopolitanism (whose adherents were considered representatives of a decaying culture) might have been the thorny aspects that should neither have been rendered into Romanian nor known by the Romanian audience. Therefore, the second stage–approaching the texts from the translation point of view, or better said by means of a target-oriented ‘strategy’ (whose preliminary stage was understanding the cultural circumstances) – focuses on the analysis of the structures in the texts from the linguistic and translation point of view. For this purpose, the central concepts taken into consideration are Gideon Tour’s initial norms – *adequacy* and *acceptability*. The former presupposes subscription to the norms of the source text, culture and language and this might not fit the norms in the

target system. The latter refers to norms in the target texts language and culture (Toury 1995: 56).

This stage presupposes comparing the source texts and the target texts in order to identify the relationships between them, i.e. considering linguistic elements characteristic to different levels (lexical, semantic or pragmatic) and to understand what norms the translators conformed to. Jul Giurgea's translations of the novels *The Painted Veil* and *The Razor's Edge*, published by Remus Cioflec publishing house in the 1940s, are the target texts that were mentioned in the Instructions for censoring published between 1950- 1955 (Costea, Kiraly, Radosav 1995: 260). The fact that these translations were banned proves that they were done in keeping with the adequacy norms, whereas the other translation of *The Painted Veil* (by Rady Lupan, published in 1972 by Eminescu publishing house) seems to obey the target culture norms as it will be shown below. A possible explanation for the production and existence of the latter version on the market during communism might be that the publishing houses were controlled and mostly owned by the state. Radu Lupan was the editor-in-chief at the editorial board of the publications (issued) for abroad and at the State Publishing House for Literature and Art (*Editura de Stat pentru Literatura și Artă*). This can make us draw the conclusion that the text was not only translated during communism, but the translation was also allowed on the market inasmuch as it was done according to norms imposed by the political system. Therefore, in the case of this novel, apart from analysing the elements in the ST-TT pair source text, it is also useful to compare the two translations, a method impossible for *The Razor's Edge* as the one mentioned above is the only translation produced until Andrei Bantaș's version was published after the communist period. However, the source text and Giurgea's translation provide enough evidence of censorable structures and enable us going through the above mentioned stage.

The first category of frames (in a random order) that may have triggered the censoring of Giurgea's translations is wealth, cosmopolitanism and corruption as a characteristic of the capitalist Western states and their politics respectively. In *The Razor's Edge* – Maugham's most important novel that takes a mystical turn and the title inspired from Katha-Upanishad (Drabble 2000: 260) – the author depicted American individuals (bourgeoisie) and society, provided "extended descriptions of, and commentary on, France, French life and foreigners residing in Paris and in other parts of the country" as

Maugham visited France in 1940 and took notes upon the people and facts or scenes in this country (Rogal 1997: 56, 57). A particular aspect is the way America is presented (by means of the characters' words) as the best place to live in and its rich citizens as the kindest people:

ST1: "We're the greatest, the most powerful people in the world. We're going forward by leaps and bounds. We've got everything. It's your duty to take part in the development of your country. You've forgotten, you don't know how thrilling life is in America today." (Maugham 1964: 66)

TT1: "Noi suntem cel mai mare și mai puternic popor din lume. Progresăm cu pași și salturi uriașe. Avem tot ce ne trebuie. Tu ai uitat și ar fi imposibil să-ți dai seama cât de emoționantă este astăzi viața în America." (Maugham 1945: 106-107)

In the 1945 translation, the description of the American people is not only rendered adequately, but also enriched by the coordinating conjunction "și" that links the characteristics "cel mai mare" and "puternic" as two characteristics that cannot exist alone and by adding the structure "ce ne trebuie" to the clause "Avem tot". Moreover, the expression "by leaps and bounds", that refers to the evolution of the American people and state, is translated literally "cu pași și salturi uriașe" instead of the Romanian expression "cu pași repezi". Also, the rhythm in which this evolution took place seems to be somehow exaggerated in the target version by translating the main clause "you don't know" by the longer and more complex two-clause structure "ar fi imposibil să-ți dai seama" that emphasises the impossibility for the interlocutor to imagine the quality of life in America. Voluntarily or not, the translator creates a perlocutionary effect equivalent to, or greater than the one the character (the utterer) intended for the person he was trying to convince about the superiority of America. The same preference for emphasising the importance of the connection between two elements by using the coordinating conjunction is also manifested in the first sentence of the Romanian version of the following excerpt :

ST2: "He's rich. He's highly respected. He built us a new church at Marvin and he's given a million dollars to the University of Chicago." (Maugham 1964: 22-23)

TT2: "E un om foarte bogat și se bucură de respectul tuturor. Ne-a clădit o biserică nouă și a dăruit un milion de dolari Universității din Chicago." (Maugham 1946: 40)

In addition, the different syntactic structure of the translation unit (the rank shift) – the structure “highly respected” that becomes “se bucură de respectul tuturor” – seems to imply that the fact expressed by this main clause (in the target text) is, in fact, a consequence of what is expressed by the previous main clause to which it is connected (“E un om foarte bogat”), unlike the original version where the first sentences seem to refer to being “rich” and “respected” as two features that do not entail or imply one another. In addition, luxury and exaggeratedly comfortable life in particular of brokers or snob elitists like Elliot (character in the novel) is constantly described in this novel. The translation of an English author’s novel, where foreign colour (Lefevere 1992: 127) is added by keeping the foreign terms referring to the elements mentioned above would not have been approved in communism ideology. According to the communist doctrine the proletariat is the “class in society which lives entirely from the sale of its labour and does not draw profit from any kind of capital; whose weal and woe, whose life and death, whose sole existence depends on the demand for labor” (Engels 1969, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/11/prin-com.htm>). Consequently, accurate description of what was considered to be good life in capitalism was against all the communist principles, and therefore possibly controversial:

ST3: “This really was life. It gave her a thrilling sense of being in the midst of things. This was real. The setting was perfect. That spacious room with the Savonneric carpet on the floor, the lovely drawings on the richly panelled walls, the petit-point chairs on which they sat, the priceless pieces of marquetry...” (Maugham 1964: 74)

TT3: “Aceasta era viață adevărată . Și-i da plăcuta senzație că se găsește și ea în mijlocul evenimentelor zilei. Aceasta era realitate într-un cadru desăvârșit. Camera spațioasă cu covorul Savonnerie întins pe parchet, desenele frumoase de pe pereții lambrisați, scaunele cu tapițeria în petit-point pe care erau asezate, prețioasele mobile încrustate...” (Maugham 1946: 119)

The Romanian version does not overlook any of the details of what seems to be the opposite of the proletariat’s life. Moreover, this instance might also function as exoticising translation – a type of what Nord calls documentary translation (Munday 2008: 82) – by keeping terms like “(covorul) Savonnerie” or “(tapițeria în) petit-point” that maintain the local colour. Paradoxically, the term Savonnerie is not used in the original. Maugham used the anglicised adjective “Savonneric”, but the Romanian

translator's preference for the noun (from French) accounts for an adequacy that goes beyond the English language in which the author wrote his novels. Besides, it emphasises the cultural *universalia* like French style, elegance and luxury that many cultures adopted. As it can be noticed, a similar element, the noun phrase "petit-point chairs" is translated by means of explicitation, i.e. addition which consists in adding the modifier (prepositional phrase) "cu tapițeria în", an explanation of what the characteristic petit-point applies to. This counterbalances, to a certain extent, the use of foreign terms in the target text and facilitates the understanding of these elements by the reader. The other details referring to luxurious interiors „richly pannelled walls” and „priceless pieces of marquetry” contain modifiers that refer to notions like wealth and welfare – richly and priceless – all these being defined as real life and “perfect setting” in the sentences at the beginning of the paragraph.

The Painted Veil, the story of a woman in search of *the truth*, who learns about what is really important in life is (even if on a second level) also a novel about imperialism, colonialism and the social, political and religious aspects in the Crown Colony (Hong-Kong). Even though in the early English versions, the name of the colony was changed in Tching-Yen, because of the colony government's objection, the English people's life, society and status both in the colonies and in England (in contrast to the colonised peoples) are the main scenes depicted in the novel following Maugham's visit to Hong-Kong in 1920 (Rogal 1997: 94).

Politics and the hierarchies in society are some of the aspects depicted in this novel. The notion of political canvass or using material resources to obtain important social and leadership positions, characteristics of non-communist-like ideology, were also kept in the 1972 translation (TT2), probably for pointing at the flaws of capitalism or imperialism and therefore, this might be one of the few instances when both adequacy and acceptability were achieved. The structure “nurse the constituency” was translated “să-i atragă pe alegători” by using a verb that overtly explains and at the same time emphasises what the connotative “nurse” referred to.

ST4: “to spend enough money to nurse the constituency.”

TT4a: “să doneze pentru propagandă o sumă suficientă.” (Maugham 1943: 35)

TT4b: “să cheltuiască îndeajuns de mulți bani ca să-i atragă pe alegători.” (Maugham 1972: 21)

Religion is another controversial matter in terms of communist ideology. According to Engels (in *Principles of Communism*), “all religions so far have been the expression of historical stages of development of individual peoples or groups of peoples. But communism is the stage of historical development which makes all existing religions superfluous and brings about their disappearance”. Consequently, this might have been the reason for elements related to key concepts in religion disappearing in the 1972 version, while in the first translation the features of the original were kept unaltered. In the first excerpt, the Mother Superior, with her “air of authority” and “habit to command”, is described as a representative of the church she serves and that gives her the support (see the use of the verb *uphold*) and the authority of which she is “deeply conscious” (Maugham 2007: 206). The notions of church and authority, even if in a fictional context, could not have been accepted in a text published in a communist country. In the second TT, the sentence “You could not fail to see she was deeply conscious of the authority of the church which upheld her” was omitted, whereas the first translation is faithful. The verb “uphold” intensifies the effect created by the context of the church’s authority.

ST5: “To be obeyed was natural to her, but she accepted obedience with humility. You could not fail to see she was deeply conscious of the authority of the church which upheld her” (Maugham 2007: 206)

TT5a: “Era de altfel firesc ca cei din jurul ei să o asculte, dar stareța primea supunerea celor care o ascultau, cu toată umiliința. Era imposibil să nu-ti dai seama, cât de profund conștientă era de autoritatea bisericii care o susținea”. (Maugham 1943: 168-169)

TT5b: “Să fie ascultată i se părea firesc, dar primea ascultarea cu umiliință.” (Maugham 1972: 96)

As Popovic argues, the translator “has the right to differ organically, to be independent” (quoted in Bassnett 2000: 88), hence the inevitability of shifts of expression in the translation process. Nevertheless, Radu Lupan’s purpose did not seem to be an endeavour “to convey the semantic substance of the original” (Popovic quoted in Bassnett 2000: 94), but to deliberately conceal aspects referring to religion. The strategy of omitting the controversial sentence definitely made the text

acceptable, but did not conform with the norms regarding adequacy, that according to Popovic and his entry in the 1975 *Dictionary for Analysis of Literary Translations* refers to “faithfulness to the original” and “stylistic equivalence in translation” (Popovic quoted in Munday 2008: 62). Procedures meant to avoid religion terms were used for the excerpts below, but instead of omitting the controversial verb “communicated” (that refers to the religious ritual of receiving the communion) the translator replaces it by a totally different verb “*m-am hotărât*” (I decided/made a decision). The syntactical structure is kept, but there is no equivalence as far as the semantic content is concerned, whereas in the pre-communist translation the equivalent is both adequate - it refers to the correspondent ritual in the orthodox religion “*m-am împărtășit*” – and acceptable in a context that was not communist, but unacceptable in the cultural and political context in discussion.

ST6: “But the morning when I communicated I made the vow...” (Maugham 2007: 307)

“By what right should we refuse it, said my mother, if it is the will of God?” (Maugham 2007: 310)

TT6a: “În dimineața acelei zile însă, după ce m-am împărtășit, am făcut legământ...” (Maugham 1943: 245)

“Cu ce drept i-am putea refuza această permisiune, dacă aceasta este voia Domnului?” (Maugham 1943: 280)

TT6b: “Dar în dimineața aceea, când m-am hotărât, am făcut legământ ca...” (Maugham 1972: 140)

“Cu ce drept aș putea dacă aceasta este v (Maugham 1972:

Similarly, in the other excerpts, “the will of God” was translated faithfully by Giurgea, but the censorable religious element “(of) God” was substituted by the possessive adjective “ei” (her) in the second TT. This translation shift was obviously a deliberate choice inasmuch as the structure in the ST is not ambiguous or unclear; therefore, the substitution procedure could be justified only by the translator’s intention of conforming with the rules and conditions of the target culture. This way, the idea that divinity decides for the people and that God should be obeyed was totally eliminated.

Considering the type of scenes depicted in Maugham’s works and the communist censorship criteria, it becomes obvious that Jul Giurgea’s variants were banned because these texts are mostly source-oriented translations and therefore achieved adequacy by using equivalent linguistic structures (frames) to create equivalent scenes and

effects in the target text. These versions were not considered acceptable in the communist context. They were done in other political contexts, before the political turn in 1948, but not acceptable because they contained a lot of elements that did not fit the communist ideology. On the contrary, Radu Lupan's version is target-oriented (done and published in the communist political and cultural context) and the different translation procedures might have diminished the effects on the target readers. To conclude, the cultural and the political environments are crucial to the process of translation determining the translators' choices with a view to achieving two of the most important translation coordinates, i.e. *adequacy* and *acceptability*.

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