

DONNING AN EDITOR'S HAT: (PARA)TEXTUAL AMBIGUITY IN *ROBINSON CRUSOE* (RE)TRANSLATED INTO ROMANIAN (1943)

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Résumé : *L'article met en évidence la capacité du discours préfaciel de légitimer l'œuvre qu'il est censé recommander chaleureusement au public cible. Notre étude de cas vise, dans un premier temps, une préface 'auctoriale' (Robinson Crusoe, 1719) et, dans un deuxième temps, une préface allographique, plus exactement une préface de traducteur (le traducteur-préfacier étant Petru Comarnescu, pour une édition de 1943). Les deux préfaces analysées montrent, chacune à sa façon, l'ambivalence des auteurs vis-à-vis des sujets et des objets décrits.*

Mots-clés : *paratexte, discours préfaciel, traducteur-éditeur, (re)traduction, ambivalence, littérature (de jeunesse), double destinataire.*

Introduction

In the present paper we intend to carry out a paratextual (or rather paratextological) investigation concerned with the prefatory discourse as a means to validate literary works. In order to address the broader issue of interest here, we have selected a sample case study of prefaces to Daniel Defoe's celebrated novel *Robinson Crusoe* – one of the best examples of *crossover literature*, as it was claimed by the sub-field of children's literature soon after publication. We will thus have a look first at the 'authorial' preface, and then at an allographic, translatorial one (namely, a preface penned in June 1942 by one of the Romanian translators, Petru Comarnescu, and published in 1943). Before zooming onto the prefaces as such we will first consider the functions of prefatorial discourse of allographic prefaces to works in translation in general, and on the series of Romanian retranslations of *Robinson Crusoe* (with special focus on the paratextual side).

The “donning an editor's hat” part in our title is to be understood in two ways: the author posing as an editor, and also a translator posing as an editor (as we analyse two different prefaces: a supposedly authorial preface to the original edition of *Robinson Crusoe*

published in 1719, but also a translator's preface published in Romanian in 1943, due to art critic Petru Comarnescu). As regards the two prefixes (*para-* and *re-*), which we placed between parentheses, they are meant to suggest, on the one hand, that ambiguity can be found in both text (the novel at issue here) and paratext (the prefaces concerned), and on the other hand, that the 1943 Romanian version of *Robinson Crusoe* is, indeed, a retranslation (since Defoe's novel had already been translated quite a few times since 1835), but could also be deemed a 'first translation' (since it is apparently the first direct translation in the entire series of Romanian versions).

What we have in mind is thus the author/editor duality as well as the translator/editor duality, along with the intrinsic ambivalence stemming from this polarity. Ambiguity (as defined by Empson: "a puzzle as to what the author meant, in that alternative views might be taken" (1949: x)) is especially true of translator's prologues, which have "a rather ambivalent status due to the prologue referring to both the author's work and the translator's own rendering of it" (Buesa Gómez, 2003: 189).

Descriptive and comparative methods are used to discuss the respective prefaces.

Back-translation, usually placed between brackets, is always mine.

Current State of Research

Central to our approach is obviously Genette's 1997[1987] theory of paratextuality which we apply to translated books – a conjunction which, thanks to a research group at the University of Vigo, bears the name of *paratranslation* (see Yuste Frías, 2012). If, however, Genette defines *paratext* as the relationship between a text and a specific set of subordinate texts which are "more or less legitimated by the author" (1997: 2), our own view is more in line with Kathryn Batchelor's notion of "consciously crafted" paratextuality (2018), which is freed from authorial legitimation and lays more stress on the functionality of the text-paratext relationship ("A paratext is a consciously crafted threshold for a text which has the potential to influence the way(s) in which the text is received." (Batchelor, 2018: 142)).

Bringing this topic to the fore are several issues of *Palimpsestes* (i.e. *Quand les traducteurs prennent la parole: préfaces et paratextes traduits*, issue 31/2018, <https://doi.org/10.4000/palimpsestes.2524>; *Archives des traducteurs*, issue 34/2020), and also Pascale Sardin's illuminating article "De la note du traducteur comme commentaire: entre texte, paratexte et prétexte" (in *Palimpsestes* 20/2007)); a series of collective volumes (e.g. Alistair Rolls and Marie-Laure Vuaille-Barcan's *Masking Strategies. Unwrapping the French Paratext*, 2011; Anna Gil-Bajardí, Pilar Orero, and Sara Rovira-Esteva's *Translation Peripheries. Paratextual Elements in Translation*, 2012; Valerie Pellat's *Text, Extratext, Metatext and Paratext in Translation*, 2013). Other influential (though small-scale) studies are: Rodica Dimitriu's "The Translators' Prefaces and Translation Studies: A Mutually Enriching Relationship" (2007) and "Translators' Prefaces as Documentary Sources for Translation Studies" (2009), Watts (2000), Tahir-Gürçaglar (2002), and Nitsa Ben-Ari's "The Translator's Note Revisited" (2021). Hosseinzadeh (2015) addresses the issue of translatorial prefaces as valuable primary sources, whereas Buesa Gómez (2003) argues for the value *per se* of the prologue as a literary vehicle and genre in its own right.

Regarding the functions fulfilled by (translator's) prefaces, for Genette (1997: 267-268), there are essentially two: the *informational* function (providing details about the creation of the original work and biographical details about the author, and situating the presented

text either within the context of the author's entire *œuvre*) and the function of *recommendation* (which Genette considers to be far more important and which usually remains implicit). Buesa Gómez, too, feels that the *translator's prologue* (as she calls it) has a twofold function: "firstly to introduce the work of a foreign author and secondly to introduce himself by using all the methods of classical rhetoric (*topoi* of *captatio benevolentiae*, false modesty etc.) so that the reader may judge and accept his translation and the work itself" (Buesa Gómez, 2003: 190). Two functions are also identified by Marella Feltrin-Morris:

"Translators' prefaces are posited here as spaces of individuality, which, much like the interiors of a house, offer countless design possibilities, to the point that translators, unaccustomed to such largesse, are often tempted to reduce the range of options to two basic floor plans: a) a confession booth; b) a bunker. The former collects all admissions of guilt and inadequacy with respect to an unmatched original text. [...] The latter is hardly more appealing, as it implies that an invitation for a translator to speak is equivalent to a need to defend one's choices, and therefore, a need to turn an otherwise attractive setting into a shelter against possible attacks." (Feltrin-Morris, 2016: 39-40)

For Rodica Dimitriu, on the other hand, there are three specific roles translators' prefaces play: *explanatory*, *normative/prescriptive*, and *informative/descriptive* (Dimitriu, 2009: 195).

Even if paratranslation (in general) and translator's prefaces (in particular) have been either tangentially or (more or less) methodically analyzed (especially in relation to issues of reception), the prefatorial discourse offers rich material for further research in the field of translation.

The Author Donning An Editor's Hat

The original edition of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, which appeared in 1719 in London (publisher: William Taylor), is accompanied by a short preface (page iv) which seems to be written by a third party, an editor, but is in fact believed by many critics to belong to Defoe himself.

In but three short paragraphs, Defoe manages to achieve three things:

1. advance one of the most famous literary mystifications of all time (An unnamed editor introduces the novel as his character's autobiography, therefore as non-fiction; he even underscores the veracity, the 'factuality' of the manuscript, by stating that "The Editor believes the thing to be a just History of Fact; neither is there any Appearance of Fiction in it." Given that in 1719 the novel was not yet firmly established as a genre in itself, Defoe could not but appeal to popular taste, by surrounding his text with an artificial aura of authenticity. Moreover, readers believing they were reading a true story were much more likely to be influenced by Defoe's message (i.e. "the Instruction of others by this Example").

2. advertise the book as a most extraordinary account of a man's adventures ("If ever the Story of any private Man's Adventures in the World were worth making Pvblick, and were acceptable when Publish'd, the Editor of this Account thinks this will be so. The Wonders of this Man's Life exceed all that (he thinks) is to be found extant; the Life of one Man being scarce capable of a greater Variety."), written in the most appropriate of styles ("The Story is told with Modesty, with Seriousness, and with a religious Application of Events to the Uses to which wise Men always aply (sic!) them to the Instruction of others by this Example...").

3. propose the book for both education (“Instruction of others”, “Instruction of the Reader”) and entertainment (“the Diversion... of the Reader”) (Therefore, the fact that *Robinson Crusoe* soon became a classic of children’s literature – a genre in which the issue of distraction usually goes hand in hand with the issue of didacticism – should not come as a surprise.).

At the same time, the original Preface also emphasizes yet another aim of the book it promotes: namely, “to justify and honor the Wisdom of Providence in all the Variety of our Circumstances.” It is this message that the first Romanian editions of *Robinson Crusoe* (published in the 19th century) insist upon in their paratext: the religious, parablelike side of the novel, which is meant to persuade the reader of the importance of penitence and of moral compass, and the consequences of disobeying one’s father (with Crusoe’s father obviously epitomizing the Heavenly Father).

We therefore have, on the one hand, Crusoe’s experiences (an adventure story which is at the same time a survival story), which are presented to the reader by an exceedingly fact-oriented narrator (after all, the Preface did indicate the narration is nothing but a “just history of fact”); on the other hand, we are also faced with an exemplary tale, told for purposes of moral and religious guidance (ultimately, “to justify and honor the Wisdom of Providence”). It is why most critics have read Defoe’s book (which contains many references to Providence, to sinfulness and to the Bible) in the light of religion: as either a religious allegory or a spiritual (auto)biography. The two levels (pragmatic and theological) are so closely intertwined in the novel that are often indistinguishable from one another. The novel’s perpetual tension between the practical and the religious is a major source of hermeneutic ambiguity. Though seemingly repentant for his repetitive sins, and having ostensibly learnt his lesson about austerity – in every sense of the word – while living on the island for over 20 years, Crusoe is nonetheless keen on possessions, power, and prestige from the beginning up to the very end (the last chapter of the book emphasizes Crusoe’s wealth acquired after being salvaged). His surviving skills are not very different, in fact, from his business skills, and economic individualism is something Defoe promotes as vigorously as he does atonement. The authorial (mock-editorial) preface, therefore expresses, just like the entire manuscript, Defoe’s own vacillation between his religious convictions and his attraction for the world of business.

An Overview of the (Re)Translation Series, Paratextuality-wise

Robinson Crusoe in Romanian means a variety of translations, spanning almost two centuries (1835-2022): both abridged and unabridged, direct and indirect (via German or French intermediate texts), retold or adapted specifically for children. Judging by their covers at least, it would be safe to say that all Romanian versions are aimed at child readers, but this never precludes posited ‘adult’ readers (whether in their capacity as parents, teachers, educators or without such an immediate relation to the younger addressee). In any case, the heavily expurgated versions are, just like the complete, bilingual, didactic editions, characterized by *double address*¹.

¹ In her study *The Narrator’s Voice: The Dilemma of Children’s Fiction*, Barbara Wall distinguishes between: “double address” – used to label 19th-century works like J. M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan*, in which narrators address children and also, (c)overly, adults; “single address” – dominant in English-language children’s literature since the early 20th century, which children being straightforwardly addressed; “dual address” – which presupposes that “a child narratee is addressed and an adult reader simultaneously satisfied.” (Wall, 1991: 36)

There are, from all appearances, six Romanian versions of *Robinson Crusoe* published in the 19th century. The first one, *Robinson Cruzoe sau întâmplările cele minunate a (sic!) unui tânăr* [Robinson Crusoe or The Wonderful Happenings of a Young Man], printed in 1835 in Iași, is remarkable in a number of ways (e.g. for the fact that it is an example of Romanian while still written in Cyrillic; it is illustrated; it is actually a translation of a German adaptation by Joachim Heinrich Campe, and therefore Campe, not Defoe, is indicated as the original author). Moreover, the 1835 edition is noteworthy for its lavish paratext, made up of a Dedication (to Alecsandru Calimah, who may have commissioned and sponsored the publication), a Foreword (in Romanian, *Procurvântare*), a Note (in Romanian, *Însămmare*), not to mention the 19 encyclopaedic footnotes (most of which providing geographical details about this or that proper name) and two black-and-white illustrations. Vasile Drăghici, the translator, is the one who penned the Dedication and Foreword, in an attempt to win the reading public over with a sum of persuasive arguments (references to Plato, to the Ten Commandments in the *Old Testament*, to Peter the Great are resorted to in order to reinforce the overall message about the significance of obedience, moderation, and frugality in one's life).

In 1873, Georgiu Popa proposes another translation of the same adaptation (by Campe): sections of the book (titled *Robinson Cruzoe*) were serialized in his magazine (*Albina* [literally, the bee]), printed in Hungary (Pest). *Robinson Crusoe sau Aventurile minunate ale unui naufragiat* [Robinson Crusoe or The Wonderful Adventures of a Castaway] appears in 1891 in Brașov (publisher: Editura Librăriei Nicolae I. Ciurcu), another adaptation, this time attributed to "Defoë." A 1899 version, *Aventurile lui Robinson Crusoe* [Robinson Crusoe's Adventures], contains traces of a French intermediary, and illustrations which seem to be reproduced from a German edition. In a sort of Postface, the editors (a Publishing Institute from Craiova, run by two brothers – Ralian and Ignat Samitca – advertize *Robinson Crusoe* as part of a series of books for children they were launching. Barbu Marian's translation, also published in 1899, in Bucharest (publisher: Editura Tipografiei Adeverul), contains a *Notiță biografică* [Biographical Note] (pp. 3-4), in which the translator presents Defoe in a rather derogatory way, as someone who wrote extensively on the art of getting rich, yet died a poor man. At the turn of the century, in 1900, Radu D. Rosetti produces a new version of Defoe's most celebrated novel, which will be subsequently reprinted in 1914, 1922 (by Editura Librăriei H. Steinberg, Bucharest), then in 1927, 1934, 1938, 1941, 1943, 1948 (by Cartea Românească), and in 1992 (by Edinter). Some of the 20th-century editions contain prefaces (e.g. 1943, pp. 5-6) which detail the genesis of both the original and the translated text.

Up until the 1950s, other Romanian versions will intermittently appear: in 1908 and 1915 (anonymous, abridged versions); in 192? (an abridged version by Sarina Cassvan-Pas); 1921 and 1932 (anonymous adaptations); 1937 (a translation of an adaptation by I. Leonard and an adaptation by Ad. Z.); 1938 (adaptation by Sorin B. Rareș); 1939 (anonymous adaptation); 1942 (an adaptation by Moș Ene [approx. the Sandman] – pseudonym of author Mihail Drumeș); 1943 (Petru Comarnescu's version, reedited in 1946, 1961, 1964, 1969, 1970, 1996, 1997, 1998, 2002, 2004, 2009, 2013, and 2015); 1945 (translator: Al. Lascarov-Munteanu); 1954 (story retold by Cornel Cincovschi); 1997 (anonymous version); 2002 (translator: Aretia Dicu); 2004 (translator: Nicoleta Radu, bilingual edition); 2006 (anonymous version); 2007 (translator: Magdalena Kis); 2008 (two versions by Cristina Nicolaescu and Alexandra Petrea); 2009 (adaptation by Talida Magheți

and Dana Scarlat); 2010 (translator: Irina Spoială); 2013 (two adaptations: George Huzum, on the one hand; Deanna McFadden and Răzvan Tănase, on the other); 2015 (a graphic novel translated by Mirella Acsente); 2017 (translator: Lucian Pricop); 2018 (two volumes translated by Andreea Florescu; another version, by Alina Loredana Brebeanu); 2022 (translator: Irina Chirica). Of these, the only ones containing substantial paratextual material (leaving aside Petru Comarnescu's version) are the ones published in 1937 (an *Introduction* composed by the translator himself, I. Leonard), and two others, published after 2000, with prefaces written by the translator and by the editors, respectively (i.e. Lucian Pricop, 2017 – *Cel mai romanesc jurnal de călătorie* [A Most Novelistic Travelogue] (pp. 7-9); Irina Chirica, 2022 – *Introducere* [Introduction] (pp. 5-6); a note on and picture of Daniel Defoe (p. 9); *Faceți cunoștință cu personajele* [Meet the Characters] (pp. 10-12), a section containing illustrations and short presentations of five of the main characters in Defoe's novel: Robinson; Robinson's father; the captain of the first ship Robinson travelled with; the captain of the ship who rescued Robinson and Xury; Friday).

Against this background, Petru Comarnescu's version (published, with a preface by himself, in 1943; with another, by Andrei Bantaș, in 1998; and yet another, by Lucian Pricop, in 2013) is at the peak of paratextual popularity. For obvious reasons of space, however, we will only deal with the preface Comarnescu himself produces for the second edition of *Robinson Crusoe* printed in 1943.

Traditional Rhetoric and *Topoi* in the Translator's Prefaces

As can be noted above, the most common paratextual element to be found in the Romanian editions of *Robinson Crusoe* is the translator's preface (which may not always be generically called *preface*, but nevertheless meets all the criteria for prefatorial discourse). Largely speaking, allographic prefaces are supposed (just like authorial prefaces) to promote and guide a reading of the work concerned. In Genette's words (1997) and Katsarka's (2013), this promotion is done by presenting and recommending: presenting information about the creation of the work, about the author of the text (sometimes about other works by the same author) and then recommending the text from a position of authority. In addition to that, translators' prefaces also explain the motivation for the translation and adopted strategies. Another constant of such prefaces is the inclusion of data regarding the book's popularity and circulation (widely read, liked, translated, sold etc.). If the respective translation happened to be commissioned and put under the protection of someone to whom it was dedicated, then the translator's preface will inevitably be "full of praise of all kinds, declarations of his incompetence as a translator, his lack of knowledge of the language, affirmations of the great social distance between him and the receiver and thankful statements of all kinds" (Buesa Gómez, 2003: 190). Such a situation (less and less common after 1900) can be found in the 1835 Romanian version of *Robinson Crusoe*, with Vasile Drăghici, the translator, addressing Alecsandru Calimah, the commissioner and sponsor, in highly obsequious terms. Other translators and editors used to insist on the patriotic aspect of their task (see, in this respect, the 1899 Samitca version). André-Patient Bokiba (1991) considers that, besides the obvious conative function of translator's prefaces (i.e. of recommending the book), there is also another function most prefaces fulfill – namely the metalinguistic function, which comes in the form of intertexts².

² Cf. Lawrence Venuti, for whom paratexts themselves constitute "a more immediate form of intertextuality" (Venuti, 2013: 10).

When (re)translated into Romanian, *Robinson Crusoe* would usually be accompanied by prefaces which predictably do some (or all) of the following:

- explain the nobiliary particle *de* in Defoe's name by exposing it as a fraud;
- present Defoe as torn between commerce and writing and underscore (often disdainfully or derisively) his failure as a merchant;
- give prominence to Defoe as a multifaceted, highly productive writer, and a founding father of journalism and of the English novel;
- put things in perspective (outline Defoe's place in English literature as well as in world literature);
- popularize other novels by Defoe;
- stress on Defoe's writings as based on a well-documented pre-writing material;
- enlarge upon the enormous success of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (in Defoe's time as well as in his afterlife, whether translated or not);
- quote from Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Émile* (1762), in order to validate *Crusoe* as a fundamental book for all children, who are bound to see in *Crusoe* an example of practical ingeniousness and self-sufficiency³;
- present *Robinson Crusoe* as a book written in a style which appeals to both children and grown-ups (i.e. double address);
- introduce the book as a cautionary tale from which the reader should learn an important lesson regarding frugality in lifestyle and obedience to (parental) authority (especially in editions published in the 19th century);
- explain the book's message in terms of colonialism, not only as a survival story (especially in editions published in the 21st century);
- briefly describe previous translations with a view to showing off the merits of the latest version.

The Translator Donning an Editor's Hat

Petru Comarnescu produced in 1943 his own version of *Robinson Crusoe* working (ostensibly for the first time) on the English original, not on intermediate texts, and having in mind a complete edition (which he will nevertheless thoroughly revise in the 1960s⁴, in order to fit the ideology of the time regarding translations). The two editions which appeared in 1943 (as well as of the ones published in 1946 by "Universul" Publishing House) and the one printed by Mondero in 1997 bear the title *Viața și nemaipomenitele aventuri ale lui Robinson Crusoe* [The Life and Unbelievable Adventures of Robinson Crusoe], while all the other ones (e.g. Editura Tineretului, 1961, 1969; Editura pentru Literatură, 1964; Editura Ion Creangă, 1970, 1996; Editura Abeona, 1992; Tedit FZH, 1996, 1998; Editura Vizual, 1997; Litera (Kishinev), 1997; ALLFA, 1998, 2002; Adevărul Holding, 2009; Cartex, 2004, 2013, 2015; Litera (Bucharest), 2013 etc.) only have the protagonist's name for a title.

³ Cf. Eva Brann, who considers Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Émile* (and, by extension, *Robinson Crusoe*) "as perverse pedagogically as can be; Jean-Jacques' charge is to be practically self-sufficient, but he is trained to be psychically dependent on his mentor for life" (Brann, 2011: 91).

⁴ Petru Comarnescu's translation (1943), incessantly reedited until today, was actually revised by the translator himself at least twice (1961, 1964). Thus, in the 1961 version one can feel Socialist echoes in Robinson's speech, who is presented as a missionary and not as a colonizer; in the 1964, on the other hand, *Crusoe* appears, as noted by Rodica Dimitriu (2006: 81), not as a troubled soul, but rather as a hero tormented by the hostile nature.

The edition we are interested in is the one published in 1943 by Universul (labelled “second edition”), illustrated by Mariana Petraşcu (28 etchings, drawings and cover) and equipped with a *Cwântul traducătorului* [lit. Translator’s Word] by Comarnescu himself (pp. 5-9). We are thus dealing with an allographic preface (more to the point, with a translator’s preface), a paratextual space in which the translator chooses to don an editor’s hat.

Graphically, if the actual text of Comarnescu’s translation is typeset in rounded, bold letters, the Preface (pp. 5-9), in exchange, relies on a regular font (boldface type being reserved for titles, instead of the usual italics). We, however, will use italics for titles, while sticking to Comarnescu’s inconsistent way of dealing with capital letters.

In terms of substance, the preface covers three main thematic areas, as shown in the table below (although they are not organized as such, nor are they absolutely coherent). Each of the areas (the original author, the original book, the Romanian edition) is, however, carefully contextualized (see the fourth column of Table 1):

Table 1. The Content of Petru Comarnescu’s Preface (1943)

The Original Author (bio-bibliographical presentation of Defoe, interspersed with other kinds of details)	Defoe’s Life	educated son of a butcher from London, writer, journalist, pamphleteer, merchant	Contextualization: constantly contrasting Defoe with other authors (Homer, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Dryden, Swift, Steele, Addison etc.), in order to make his position clearer in the context of world literature, including in terms of literary movements (Defoe being classified as pertaining to Classicism while at the same time foreshadowing Realism).
	Defoe’s Œuvre	author of other books as well: <i>The farther adventures of Robinson Crusoe</i> <i>Serious reflections during the life of Robinson Crusoe</i> <i>Captain Singleton</i> (1720) <i>Moll Flanders</i> (1721)	
The Original Book	Origin, Sources, Plot	date and place of publication; Alexander Selkirk’s real-life story, indicated the main source of the novel’s plot	Contextualization: background, encyclopaedic information about Selkirk’s island, cannibalism, the religious tensions in the England of Defoe’s time etc.
	Popularity, Purpose, Moral, Addressee	popularity and circulation (very popular in Defoe’s time, then a classic for children, translated in most languages)	
	Style	a gifted storyteller; authenticity	

The Romanian Edition	The Translation	indicating the original text (an English classic edition) and giving grounds for various omissions	Contextualization: the translation as both text and book is considered in terms of provenness and scientificity.
	The Publisher	complimentary statements about the publisher's involvement in printing classic authors in appropriate conditions	

Petru Comarnescu (1905-1970) begins his preface (in a rather abrupt way) by plunging into the history of the original book: “Cartea de față a apărut în textu-i original la 25 Aprilie 1719, la Londra, purtând titlul *The Life and strange surprising adventures (sic!) of Robinson Crusoe*. Autorul, Daniel Defoe, era la această dată un om în vârstă de 59 de ani, dacă într’adevăr s’a născut în 1660 și nu cu un an mai devreme sau mai apoi, cum cred unii sau alții dintre biografii săi.” [The present book appeared originally on the 25th of April 1719 in London, having the title *The Life and strange surprising adventures (sic!) of Robinson Crusoe*. The author, Daniel Defoe, was by this time a 59-year-old man, if he was indeed born in 1660 and not a year earlier or later, as some of his biographers are tempted to believe.] (Defoe, 1943: 5) Comarnescu is wrong; in actual fact, the original title is: *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe of York: Mariner: Who lived Eight and Twenty Years, all alone in an un-inhabited Island on the Coast of America, near the Mouth of the Great River of Oroonoke; Having been cast on Shore by Shipwreck, wherein all the Men perished but himself. With: An Account how he was at last as strangely deliver’d by Pyrates. Written by Himself*. He cannot have been unaware of Defoe’s full title (as he claims, towards the end of the preface, that he consulted a classic English edition of *Robinson Crusoe*), yet he chooses to present an abbreviated title to the readers, to avoid disconcerting them from the very beginning.

He then proceeds to portray Defoe in a somewhat Dickensian manner. Much like Dickens in the incipit of *A Tale of Two Cities*, Comarnescu relies on a sweeping pairing of contrasting concepts. For example, as a merchant and manufacturer, Defoe is described as “norocos și nenorocos” [both lucky and unlucky] (p. 5). As an intellectual, he is delineated both as a “literat de frunte” [a prominent man of letters] (p. 5), and as one who will never reach Homer’s grandeur, Cervantes’s sublime, Shakespeare’s vitality (“Nu a ajuns până la măreția lui Homer, la sublimul lui Cervantes sau la vitalitatea lui Shakespeare.” (p. 8)), just as Robinson will never have Don Quixote’s greatness and complexity (“Desigur, Robinson nu are măreția și complexitatea lui Don Quichotte⁵...” (p. 7)). Defoe is also termed “iubitor de intrigi și urzeli” [a devious schemer] who, despite his fickleness and kowtowing (“în ciuda nestatorniciei și ploconirilor sale”), was nevertheless a fighter and an idealist (“o fire luptătoare și idealistă” (p. 5)). “Fiu al unui măcelar londonez” [a butcher’s son from London], Defoe nevertheless received a very thorough education (“trecut prin școli serioase”) and even contemplated priesthood at some point in his life (“gata să devină preot” (p. 5)).

⁵ The spelling used by Comarnescu is French, while the name usee in Romanian texts is usually transferred from Spanish (i.e. Quijote).

If most translator's prefaces are built around a defence of the source book, of his/her author, and of the topic of the book, it is not entirely the case here. Comarnescu resorts to the same rhetorical device, of juxtaposing radical opposites, in a splendid (if somewhat pernicious) example of intentional stylistics, and of what Kathryn Batchelor calls "consciously crafted threshold." On the one hand, he speaks of Defoe's book in a glorifying fashion: "...*Robinson Crusoe* fiind mereu, dela apariție și până în zilele noastre, una din cărțile de teme ale omenirii, cartea care a fascinat atâtea generații de copii și tineri, din toate țările lumii..." [*Robinson Crusoe* being, ever since it was published up until now, one of mankind's fundamental books, a book which has fascinated so many generations of children and young adults from all over the world] (p. 5). He also mentions some luminaries ("spirite strălucite") like Samuel Johnson, who likened Defoe's book to *Don Quixote*, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who recommended it, in his *Émile* (1762), as the ultimate book for educating children, which will never fall out of fashion ("Samuel Johnson [...] care a orânduit-o alături de *Don Quichotte*, sau ca Jean-Jacques Rousseau, care a găsit cu cale ca *Emil* al său să citească, înainte de orice, viața și aventurile lui Robinson, una din cărțile menite prin excelență educării tineretului" (pp. 5-6)). On the other hand, Comarnescu fleetingly and nonchalantly points (twice) to Defoe's lack of originality, as his book was actually inspired from reality, and not the product of his imagination ("Materialul povestirii aici traduse – putem spune al romanului – i-a fost furnizat lui Defoe de aventura reală a unui marinar scoțian, Alexander Selkirk." [The material of the story – or shall we say novel – which we have here in translation was supplied to Defoe by the real-life adventure of a Scottish sailor named Alexander Selkirk.]; "Intriga, conflictul sau tema povestirii lui Robinson nu au fost, așadar, născocite de Daniel Defoe." [The plot, conflict, and topic of Robinson's story were therefore not concocted by Daniel Defoe.] (p. 6)).

Furthermore, while enlarging upon Selkirk's actual island (Juan Fernandez, in the Pacific) as compared to Robinson's (close to Venezuela and Trinidad) and enlarges upon cannibalism, Comarnescu deliberately slips his (be it mild) criticism of Defoe's less than thorough research on the civilization of the 'savages' he portrays in *Robinson Crusoe* ("În aceste ținuturi caribee, canibalismul a fost, cândva, desvoltat, triburile indiene războindu-se între ele și mâncându-și prizonierii, așa cum scrie și Defoe, care însă nu cunoștea pe atunci deosebirile de civilizație ale Pieilor-Roșii, socotite global de el drept sălbateci..." [In these Caribbean lands, cannibalism was, once, expanded, with the Indian tribes fighting one another and eating one another's prisoners, as described by Defoe; be that as it may, Defoe was not aware of the differences among redskin civilizations, thus taking them all for savages.] (p. 6))

Defoe's style is described in similar, antithetical terms. *Robinson Crusoe* is now introduced as an interesting, charming book, due to Defoe being a consummate storyteller ("*Robinson Crusoe* farmecă și interesează datorită darului de povestitor, pe care Defoe, ca puțini alții, îl are deplin." (p. 6)), now pummelled on account of being too naive and didactic ("În lucrarea lui Defoe există multă naivitate și mult didacticism..." (p. 7)).

In but half a paragraph, Petru Comarnescu manages to inform his readers of the enormous popularity of Defoe's book, of its wide reception outside England, as well as of some of Defoe's other works, which he finds fault with, not to mention a synthesis of Defoe's life, phrased as a sum of contrasts:

Cartea apărută în 1719 a plăcut atât de mult încât imediat s'au tipărit alte ediții și s'au făcut nenumărate traduceri și prelucrări în mai toate limbile lumii. Încurajat de marele succes, Defoe a scris nu mult după cartea de față o urmare cam forțată, numită *The farther adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, iar, în anul viitor, o seamă de reflecții religioase și sociale legate de viața lui Crusoe, *Serious reflections during the life of Robinson Crusoe*, acestea socotite perimate, pentru că aparțin prea mult mentalității și problematicei vremii lui Defoe. [...] *Captain Singleton* (1720), *Moll Flanders* (1721), precum și celelalte romane și eseuri din anii următori au adus autorului o bună stare materială, dar în ultimii ani îl găsim iarăși în stare neclară, viața lui Defoe fiind o necurmată alternanță de prisosinți și neajunsuri, de mulțumiri și lipsuri, de bune adăpostiri și crunte primejdii, așa cum este de altfel și viața lui Robinson.

[The book published in 1719 was so popular that it was very soon reprinted and there have been numerous translations and adaptations in most languages of the world. Encouraged by this great success, Defoe wrote, not long after, a rather far-fetched sequel entitled *The farther adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, and, the following year, he produced a series of religious and social reflections on Crusoe's life, *Serious reflections during the life of Robinson Crusoe*, which can be considered outdated, for they are way too illustrative of the mentality and problems of Defoe's time. [...] *Captain Singleton* (1720), *Moll Flanders* (1721), as well as the other novels and essays written in the following years brought the author a steady income, yet in his final years we find him again in a difficult financial situation, Defoe's life being an endless alternation of prosperity and penury, of contentment and shortages, of security and terrible danger – just like Robinson's life, in fact.] (p. 8)

Far from being an attempt to make *Robinson Crusoe* stand out from the rest of Defoe's writings, Comarnescu's presentation is in line with the rhetoric employed throughout the preface. Unlike most prefaces, which display a tendency to "eulogise and fix the author in certain terms carried over across time" and to offer a "fictionalised and romanticised rendering of [the author's] biography" (Katsarka, 2013: 346), Petru Comarnescu's introduction does the exact opposite. Given the fundamental duality of Defoe's personality and status in world literature, Comarnescu's own attitude is overtly ambivalent. As a matter of fact, as shown in the table below, the list of negative observations is considerably longer than that of positive ones:

Table 2. Praise vs. Criticism of Defoe(? Works) in Petru Comarnescu's Preface

Praise directed at:		Criticism directed at:	
<i>The Author</i>	<i>The Author's Book(s)</i>	<i>The Author</i>	<i>The Author's Book(s)</i>
<i>lătitat de frunte</i> [a prominent man of letters]	<i>una din cărțile de teme ale omenirii</i> [one of mankind's fundamental books]	<i>om mijlociu</i> (4 occurrences) [middle-class man]	<i>naivitate și didacticism</i> [naivety and didacticism]
<i>scriitor clasic</i> [classic writer]	<i>carte de neuitat</i> [a memorable book]	<i>iubitor de intrigi și urzeli</i> [a devious schemer]	<i>urmare cam forțată</i> [a rather far-fetched sequel]

<p><i>autor clasic</i> [classic author]</p>		<p><i>nestatornicie și ploconiri</i> [fickleness and kowtowing], as shown in changing his name⁶ (from Foe to Defoe) and leading a hectic, reckless, excessive life, with many ups and downs</p>	<p>[reflectii] <i>perimate</i>⁷ [outdated reflections]</p>
<p>precursor: among the first authors to usher nautical fiction in (based on a cautionary tale) and pave the way for Romanticism⁸</p>		<p><i>agitatul și avântatul om practic</i>⁹ [the agitated, overly impulsive practical man]</p>	<p>Lack of originality of the plot.</p>
<p>a gifted storyteller</p>		<p>Defoe: inferior to Homer, Cervantes, Shakespeare.</p>	<p>Robinson: presented as inferior to other famous characters, like Don Quixote.</p>
		<p>Defoe was admired by luminaries like Samuel Johnson or Jean-Jacques Rousseau, but it is implied that he was not one himself.</p>	<p>Defoe's ignorance of the redskins, which he globally presents as savages.</p>
		<p>On the other hand, many illustrious contemporaries (e.g. Dryden, Swift, Steele,</p>	

⁶ “...Daniel Defoe (care și-a modificat până și numele, căci îl chema Foe, pur și simplu)...” [Daniel Defoe (who went so far as it change his own name, which was Foe, plain and simple)...]. (p. 7)

⁷ In the first paragraph of his Preface, Comarnescu says: “Autorul, Daniel Defoe, era la această dată un om în vârstă de 59 de ani, dacă într-adevăr s’a născut în 1960 și nu cu an mai devreme...” [The author, Daniel Defoe, was by this time – i.e. the time he published Robinson Crusoe – a 59-year-old man, if not older...] (p. 5). Then, on page 6, he stresses on the fact that Samuel Johnson – who happened to approve of Defoe, was “mult mai tânăr” [much younger] than the creator of Robinson Crusoe. This insistence on a particular stage of life could also be interpreted as ageism and double standard on Comarnescu’s part, who is not willing to consider Samuel Johnson’s validation of Defoe (on account of being too young), while at the same time dismissing Defoe as a valid author (on account of being too old).

⁸ E.g. “*Robinson Crusoe* aduce cu mult înainte de alți moderni romanța aventurii marine, a dorului de necunoscut, a mediului exotic, a educării omului prin încercările aprige ale vieții.” [*Robinson Crusoe* brings along, long before other modern writings the romance based on sea adventures, the thirst for the unknown, an exotic environment, and educating man through life’s hard-fought trials.] (p. 7) Romance should here be understood in its secondary meaning (e.g. a prose narrative in which imaginary characters get involved in events – of a heroic, adventurous, or mysterious nature – usually remote in time or place). “Dacă în formă Defoe a procedat mai curând ca un scriitor clasic, prin unele idei și sentimente din carte el deschide o cale imaginației romantice...” [If formally, Defoe is closer to Classicism, through some of his ideas and feelings he paves the way for Romantic imagination.] (p. 7).

⁹ “Mai mult, în *Crusoe* unii au văzut – și pe bună dreptate – portretul idealizat al agitatului și avântatului om practic, care a fost însuși Defoe...” [Moreover, some people have seen in *Crusoe* – and rightfully so – the idealized portrait of the agitated, overly impulsive practical man, who was Defoe himself.] (p. 7)

		Addison) took exception to Defoe's works ¹⁰ .	
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What is particularly striking in this preface is that Comarnescu uses the phrase “om mijlociu” [middle(-class) man] four times in his preface in order to refer to (and define) Defoe. Besides pointing to middle-class, the Romanian *mijlociu* signifies (just like in English, only more derogatorily) mediocrity, averageness, ordinariness. Table 3 presents the context in which this particular phrase was used, and the recurrence is highly significant in terms of the reserve the preface-writer is trying to convey to the reading public:

Table 3. Occurrences of *om mijlociu* in Petru Comarnescu's 1943 Preface

Defoe = “omul <i>mijlociu</i> ” ¹¹ [middle-class man]	
“...puțința de fericire a <i>omului mijlociu</i> , care nu se cade să aibă ambiții prea mari...” (p. 5)	[the possibility of happiness of the middle-class man, who is not allowed to reach too high]
“...acest reprezentant al <i>omului mijlociu</i> din Anglia...” (p. 6)	[this exemplar of English middle class]
“...îndemânarea <i>omului mijlociu</i> ...” (p. 7)	[the middle-class man's deftness]
“Defoe a avut limitele <i>omului mijlociu</i> ...” (p. 8)	[Defoe was as limited as any middle-class man.]

As for the Romanian edition, it is very tersely presented, by:

- indicating (rather vaguely) the original edition the translator relied upon for his translation (“În ceea ce privește traducerea de față, am făcut-o integral după o ediție clasică englezească, respectând stilul și celelalte caracteristici ale acestei cărți de neuitat...” [As far as the present translation is concerned, I have done it completely based on a classic English edition, following the style and other characteristics of this memorable book.] (p. 8))

- complementing the publisher for paying the right amount of attention to this classic author (“...carte pe care editura *Universul* a ținut să o prezinte cu toată atenția științifică și în condițiuni vrednice, fără de care tipărirea autorilor clasici devine o impietate.” [...a book for which the *Universul* publishing house made all the necessary efforts in terms of scientificity and appropriate printing conditions, without which editing classics would be an utterly impious act.](p. 8))

- justifying omissions in the translated text (“Am eliminat doar puține repetiții din textul original, repetiții ce nu se mai potrivesc cu dinamismul și ritmica nu numai ale noastre, dar chiar și ale cărții însăși.” [I only eliminated a few of the repetitions in the original text, repetitions which are not consistent anymore with our rhythm, nor with that of the book itself.] (pp. 8-9))

- indicating, once again, the book's addressee, while also hinting at his global translation strategy (“Am căutat totuși a nu uita că cei mai numeroși cetitori ai traducerii vor fi copiii și tinerii români...” [I did my best not to forget that my translation will be read mostly by Romanian children and young adults...] (p. 9))

¹⁰ “...unii din iluștrii săi contemporani, Dryden, Swift, Steele și Addison [...] nu i-au dat lui Defoe nicio considerație.” [...some of his illustrious contemporaries Dryden, Swift, Steele, and Addison paid absolutely no attention to Defoe.] (p. 8).

¹¹ Emphasis mine all along the table.

▪ concluding his preface with a seemingly random observation, clearly meant as a reading incentive, by way of imitation (much like the “reputation models” used in advertising): a young Mihai Eminescu, too, read Defoe’s text¹².

Comarnescu thus addresses his translated text to children, and his Preface to adults. The main function of any preface (which may be summarised by the topos of *docere delectandū*) can best be seen here, where the translator-turned-editor focuses on his actual public. The moral of the tale, however (as expressed by Comarnescu, at least), is for the grown-ups, not for the younger generation. In saying that Defoe was a believer, in saying that God will let us struggle when we feel strong, yet comes to our aid when we feel weak and lonely (“Defoe a crezut în [...] Dumnezeu, Căruia nu-i scapă niciuna din faptele noastre, lăsându-ne să ne izbim de viață, atunci când ne credem mai tari și mai mulți, dar venind în ajutorul nostru, când ne credem mai slabi și mai singuri.” (p. 8)), Comarnescu not only condenses the ecclesiastical essence of Crusoe’s experience; he also sums up a perspective he needs to convey to his readers, without resorting to the homiletic rhetoric employed by his predecessors (e.g. Vasile Drăghici, in the 1835 Romanian edition of *Robinson Crusoe*). At the same time, there are moments when Comarnescu lets the dominant ideology of his time interfere with Defoe’s message, as, for example, when he says that cannibals were no worse than some of Crusoe’s compatriots, who contemplated leaving their boss on a deserted island (“...Canibalii, care nu apar totuși mai răi decât unii din compatrioții săi, acei marinari răzvrățiți, care vor să-și părăsească șeful, lăsându-l pe insula socotită pustie...” (p. 8)).

The most conspicuous feature of Comarnescu’s preface, however, is the way he relies on references (Homer, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Pope, Johnson, Dryden, Swift, Steele, Addison, Rousseau etc. Are mentioned throughout the Preface). According to Bokiba (1991: 84), highly recurrent references in the prefatory discourse allows for considering intertextual embedding as a sort of canon of the genre called *translator’s preface*. However, in Comarnescu’s case, the intertextual dialogue does not enhance Defoe’s singularity as an author; on the contrary, the authority of the names quoted only serves to belittle him.

Likewise, if many translators are usually profusely apologetic in their prefaces, in Petru Comarnescu’s case, there is never a denial of competency, nor is there humbleness (of any kind). For Comarnescu, the preface is neither confession booth, nor bunker (in Felrin-Morris’s 2018 metaphors). It was the translator’s habitus and large experience as a man of letters (art critic, literary critic, essayist, journalist, translator of T. E. Lawrence and Eugene O’Neill before he embarked upon translating *Robinson Crusoe*) that allowed Comarnescu to fully take a position of authority as a preface-writer. At the time of the publication of the volume in question, Petru Comarnescu’s (literary) reputation was already very well-established: he was known as a brilliant public speaker with a PhD in *Æsthetics* from the University of Southern California, Los Angeles), a friend of Constantin Noica’s and Mircea Eliade’s, and a founding member of the *Criterion* association (in the 1930s), which brought together many of the most influential literary figures of the time. It was this symbolic capital that enabled him to take on the task of writing the Preface in the first place, and in doing so, he took upon himself the task of validating (or rather invalidating) Defoe’s text.

¹² The original text: “Tânăruț Mihai Eminescu a cetit și el acest măreț poem al orientării utile a omului în cosmos.” (p. 9).

Conclusion

Petru Comarnescu's 1943 preface is closer to a commentary than a theoretical study. It is informative and slightly (and very subtly) normative. Neither translation, nor preface is entirely 'purged' of religious references. The most striking feature of the preface is the critical stance the translator takes when donning a preface-writer's hat, dominated by ambivalence towards the author and the book translated. Leaving aside idiosomatics (the translator possibly taking a dislike to Defoe's works) and propaganda (a particular ideology that was imposed on the preface-writer), one may also consider Comarnescu's prominent reserve in terms of "prefatorial malaise" or a kind of "generic hyperconsciousness" since, as Genette puts it, "[n]o one writes a preface without experiencing the more or less inhibiting feeling that what's most obvious about the whole business is that he is engaged in writing a preface" (Genette, 1997: 257). The ambivalence of Comarnescu's preface might stem, for example, from his being faced with the task of recommending a book which does not entirely correspond to his own view of art (which inevitable leads to a compromise between "la sincérité du jugement critique et la courtoisie de la recommandation" [the impartiality of the critical judgement and the courtesy of recommending the book] (Bokiba, 1991: 80).

Comarnescu's preface then seems to invalidate rather than validate Defoe's book, thus foreshadowing Jorge Luis Borges's (1975) aphorism: "When a preface is successful, it is not a type of toast; it is a lateral form of criticism."

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