

## A STYLISTIC APPROACH TO MIRCEA CĂRTĂRESCU'S ESSAY "COMPUTER GAMES FOREVER"

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**Abstract:** *When translating a text we should consider the correct understanding of the source language text, with all its implied subtleties and connotations. It is considered that, before translating, a text should not only be studied by means of traditional level of linguistic analysis (semantic) but also analyzed stylistically. A thorough stylistic analysis is a must in case of literary text translations, as it presupposes the investigation of the phonemic, grammatical, figurative or prosodic levels, all the elements that contribute to the individuality of a particular creation. Stylistics also enables us to evaluate losses due to certain linguistic transformations. Thus, the aim of this paper is to investigate all the linguistic difficulties determined by the language incompatibility and to provide a justified best English version of post-modernist Romanian essay writing. The present research aims at literary prose, namely, a prose passage, an essay in which the metaphorical language is hidden in the form of encoded meanings.*

**Keywords:** *linguistic analysis, stylistics, semantic, connotation, source language*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The present paper is part of a wider project with a well-built theoretical foundation in the field of translation studies and stylistics. The aim is to investigate all linguistic difficulties determined by the language incompatibility as well as to provide a justified best English version of post-modernist essay writing. The theoreticians have considered language as the most important when it comes to any literary translation. According to E. Coşeriu (2004), „language with all its given functions is concentrated in it, as they are the richest texts of a given language”, but more, as they carry traditions and cultural values. Wellek and Warren (1984) have a different opinion, considering language used in literary text as being faulty and deficient as compared to scientific language. According to them, literary language abounds in ambiguities. Susan Bassnett (1991) sees it as a process of rendering a source language text into the target language, in order to ensure that the surface meaning of the two will be almost similar. Meaning remains the core issue and the hardest to preserve from one language into another. Without stylistics, any translation loses meaning. Saussure's view on language is not to be forgotten (1972). He considers that *langue* can only be approached through *parole*. Consequently, one has to find out what corpus of *parole* should be used in

establishing the model of *langue* against which the text is to be matched. Such a matching is inevitable as long as stylistic is defined as the study of individual expression or as the linguistic of *parole*. Thus, the author finds necessary to draw a comparison between *la linguistique de la parole* and *la linguistique de la langue*. Therefore, to get style, the investigator must begin by setting up a corpus of reference to find the norm from which a particular text differ – which I initially tried to accomplish before translating the text properly. Leon Leviţchi gives the following author-centred definition of style:

Style is the specific manner in which the author has organised his or her message as regards coherence and expression in order to value it at its utmost in the conscience of the potential reader. (Leviţchi, 1994:98; my translation)

This definition focuses on the issues that the translator needs to take into account when dealing with a literary work: logical organisation (coherence), connotation, denotation, accentuation, modality, and the specific manner of organising the message.

According to *Logman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (2000), “style is the particular way someone uses words to express ideas, tell stories, etc”. It also refers to meaning. In order to acquire a good translation, I searched for

theoreticians' views on it. What is meaning? It has been long debated and discussed upon. Wermuth (1969) argues that the only reason that a term should mean something is the history of its application, the fact that it has meant something. The meaning of a term in given instance is what any man decides to make it. If a term has not a real meaning, it has at least an ideal one, something to which the term should refer, if it is to be used without producing nonsense. He argues that words should convey their language meaning, and at the same time be a non-linguistic tune, perhaps in harmony with the language meaning. What is certain is that one may say different things about the same topic, or different things, which are very much alike. Different words make different meanings. Meaning is not identical with words.

In terms of style and context, theoreticians consider that stylistics is not purely formalist. It is important to realise that "context" does not necessarily just mean context. Context literally means anything that comes "with the text", that circumscribes its meaning. More, literary stylistics is not a mechanical answer machine. That is, it cannot be laid over a text to produce the meaning, since the meaning also depends on the contextual use, which accompanies the text. The roots of modern stylistics can be uncovered in the work of Charles Bally (1905) and Leo Spitzer (1988). Bally's *Precis de stylistique* stresses the description and analysis of a language's generally available stylistic properties. Literary texts are particular examples of language use, and the analysis of their style is not a central part of the general stylistics, Bally emphasises. In contrast to the "stilistique" of Bally, Spitzer insisted upon following the more philologically based tradition of textual analysis. Such work, while using the analytical techniques of modern linguistics, strives to unite the analytical description with a critical interpretation that relates the style to a larger conceptual frame. Style is seen as an expression of a particular social or historical sensibility or moment, rather than as general property of particular language. The rapidly established importance of Chomsky's linguistics within his own discipline provided a strong argument for the importance of transformational generative grammar within literary stylistics as well. But beneath that academic cause there lay particular features of the theory that further explain the explosion of stylistic work using transformational generative grammar. Chomsky's approach to language gave a boost to the era, one of the most

dramatic in the formation and growth (1986) of stylistics. Numerous descriptive categories have been created to provide some order among the resulting variety of approaches to style, but the most common and useful taxonomies are those designed around a communication model such as that of Jakobson's (1963).

This paper is just an attempt to prove that a post-modernist text, with many difficulties regarding the meaning of the words, can be translated, taking into account all the connotations and present realities that it has brought about. The text has not been easy to translate as the translator had to render the mood, the atmosphere and the impact the computer game had on the author.

At first, the text seemed sombre and the vocabulary easy to render into the target language, but, after a deeper reading, very interesting and philosophical meanings came out.

The choice of this essay has been made according to the present realities, to what is mostly read during these days. It is obvious that such a text aims at different categories of readers, including teenagers, adult and all the other people interested in the development of communication by computers and Internet. But, we shall not forget about the impact it has on humankind and that's why I considered it proper for a translator to render the deep emotional involvement of the game player during the process of completing the game.

## 2. COMPUTER GAMES FOREVER

**2.1 The topic.** This essay is a fine and, at the same time, a very dynamic description of a computer game, played by the author, being focused on the author's mental and emotional perception of it. The process of playing the game is described as something demonic, as a kind of passing into another world, full of strange creatures and monsters, where the author cannot find his place. Nevertheless, he does not give up. He fights all the fiends, the Evil and finally completes all the levels without knowing why he has to do it. He sees no ultimate reality at the end of the game. His perception, concerning the other world he gets into, is very sombre and, consequently, he has all sorts of bad feelings. Everything seems to be a mixture between Good and Bad, God and Evil, Weapons and Crystals, Monsters and birds, etc. Thus, the text is built on a series of antitheses (frosts/lava; mountains/abysses; crystals which signify power and flowers which mean brittleness; Hell and Annunciation), which give a certain

ambiguity and the reader no longer knows which will be the next step in the process of playing the game. The readership does not know what will exactly happen next and the tension increases as the game is further played. The realism of the piece of writing keeps one close to the text, and to the game, too. It is as if the reader is in the same room with the writer, playing the same game, passing through the same emotional levels. The author seems to dislike the game, the fiends and monsters that are attacking him, but the game must be played up to the final level, which he easily completes. He willingly gets into this abstract world and, at the same time, he seeks to escape it, no matter the consequences. The game is played quickly, with little time to think. He wants to reach the essence of all things and the crystals, arms and the keys help him. However, to do that, he has to kill the Monster. He finds himself alone facing the creature that he finally kills and thus, the last level is completed.

**2.2 Stylistic Approach.** In this section of the paper we will discuss upon my English version of the essay 'Computer Games Forever' by Mircea Cărtărescu. The text is made up of four paragraphs.

**2.2.1 The first paragraph.** It introduces the reader into the world of computer games. It also bears a strong sign of affectivity by using the personal interrogation: 'Why am I here for?'. It is the description of an imaginary place. The text draws axes of time and space, but the indefiniteness of the two terms induces a fairy tale atmosphere. The time is described as a *never-ending* sequence of forms of relief: *never ending frosts, mountains and abysses*, being stressed by the repetition of the verb *to be (there are)*. The place reference is also important and it is as indefinite as time itself ('*Dar numele Lui nu este binevenit în aceste ținuturi*'), therefore the translator has to pay attention to it and come with notable ideas for translating it. Even from the very beginning we face the time-space references.

The first interrogative sentence introduces the spatial co-ordinates (*Here*) but also the temporal ones, in a more ecclesiastic way, symbolised by God's presence (E.g. *Ce Dumnezeu caut aici?*). The verbal structure 'caut' has been translated by the verb *to be*, correlated with the interrogative adverb *Ce*, the latter, has been translated through *Why for*, which is stronger than *What* and implies not only the place co-ordinate but also the emotional struggle that the author is faced with. This clause is, later on, reiterated under the same interrogative question 'Who am I?', followed by a

more obvious explanation: 'I can't figure it out' which has almost the same meaning as 'Why am I here for?'. I chose the structure 'I can't figure it out' instead of 'I can't remember' for the Romanian '*Nu-mi pot aduce aminte*', as I considered the former version more proper and adequate for rendering the exact meaning the author had in mind. The sentence expresses not only the forgetfulness of the author but also the non-adjustment into a world of computer games.

The epithet *eterne* (my version: *never-ending*), associated with *ghețuri* (my version: *frosts*) has a special connotation, as it signifies coldness, that is, the idea of death, while *never-ending* means eternal, something celestial, beyond human powers, closer to Divinity, as the writer himself is, through this creative deconstruction and construction of a demonic computer game.

This paragraph, as the rest of the text, is built upon distinct antitheses such as: *frosts* and *lava*, *mountains* and *abysses*. The landscape seems to be great but also unclear. For the term '*abstrus*' I considered proper the English variant '*abstruse*', which means 'misty', 'rather cloudy', but also 'unclear', 'uncertain', thus embodying best the meaning the author wanted to render. The Weapon, capitalised, also governs this first part, as if it were emphatically the Weapon of the Weapons. It represents not only a tool but also a means of completing the game. It is the symbol of power, but also of death. The author goes further and explains the meaning of the Weapon. It is a sceptre, not a usual one, but a winged one. For this reason, I chose the English paraphrase '*Hermes' winged sceptre*', which also draws us back to mythology, being a short rod carried by kings and queens on ceremonial occasions as a sign of power. I introduced Hermes God, as, in the Greek mythology, he was the messenger of the gods. He is usually shown in pictures bearing wings on his shoes and on his helmet. His sceptre is also winged. As we shall see later on, there are also series of capitalised nouns (*Crystals, Monsters, Dragon, Annunciation, Keys*), they represent all the good and evil means that are present in this game, that is, in fact, the projection of life, seen as a stage with actors and audience.

The first paragraph abounds in nouns: *ghețuri, râuri, lavă, munți, prăpăstii, ținuturi, peisaj, iaduri, instinct, încălțări, putere, arma*. Most of them are concrete, but some are abstract ones (*instinct, iaduri, sănătate, lumină*). If, in the first lines the nouns describe some forms of relief, in the following ones, they change to another register,

that of animals: *pășări, zombies, mumii, vîrcolaci, nevertebrate*. It is in fact an enumeration and description of beings that are part of the imaginary world of this game.

The next lines switch to nouns denoting flowers and stones: *Cristale, violacee, roze*. Thus, for the structure *limbi de jad*, I have considered it proper to use the version *jade of stripes* instead of *jade of strips*, because the former structure has the vowel *e* the same as *jade*, and as a whole, *jade stripes* renders a certain musicality that is a very important part of the text. For the term *ținut* I chose the English *realm*, as it introduces the reader into the imaginary world, that is under the rule of Hermes' sceptre, as a realm that is usually governed by kings and queens.

There are many adjectives that accompany these nouns: *eterne, măreț, abstrus, extropiați, inomabile, sulfuroase, închircit, dureroase*. They have highly affective connotations and that's why I took great interest when I translated them. Thus, I usually used compound adjectives: *never-ending, ice-clear*, which are stronger in meaning than the simple ones. *Never-ending* suggests continuity, while *ice-clear* is associated with sensations and visual perception. *Ice-clear* suggests the easiness so see through but also transparency. They also give fluency to the sentences. The adjective *inomabil* means 'unknown' and I have chosen to translate it by *unidentified*, which means that the name, its nature and origin are unknown, thus I have considered it to be the more appropriate version of translation. For the epithet 'o mare lumină', I chose 'an intense light', because it renders not only the greatness but also the extreme sensitive feeling that such light can radiate.

Verbs have an important role in the whole text and in the first paragraph, too. Thus, the verbal tenses used in my English version are the present tenses, mainly the Present Tense Simple, used to denote that the action is placed in an eternal present, that of computer games, being forever a source of skipping the everyday realities. The verbs of motion describe dynamism and keep the reader stuck to see what is to follow next: *pătrund, intru, se deschid, caut, ucid, trec, alunec, se furișează*. For the translation of the sentence: 'For Monsters do come out', I used the auxiliary 'do' to emphasise the fact that the monsters come, no matter if one wants that or not. For the predicate *vor* I used the English verb *to hanker after*, which means a strong wish for something, being the best choice in the given context. For the Romanian elliptic clause: 'Violacee, roze sau limezi ca

*gheața*, I considered proper to introduce a predicate in order to better render the image of the flowers which also have a chromatic element. (my version: 'They look violet, pink or ice-clear')

Adverbs are rare, the time and manner adverbial phrases are prevailing: *metal-like, hardly, forward, fortunately, suddenly*.

The syntax of the first paragraph is equally interesting. The great number of main clauses makes the message clearer to the reader. Usually, sentences are short: *Who am I? I can't figure it out(...)* *For Monsters do come out(...)* *Fortunately, Crystals are sprinkled on earth. They look violet, pink or ice-clear. They radiate strength and health.* There are also elliptic sentences: *Căci apar Monștrii* (my version: *For Monsters do come out*) or *Violacee, roze sau limezi ca gheața* (as I mentioned above, my version is not elliptic, as I considered more adequate to render the image by using the verb to look: *They look violet, pink or ice-clear*). These short sentences, which usually contain verbs of motion, give dynamism and liveliness to the passage.

The attributive clause is the most often syntactic construction the author resorted to. The word order in the sentences of the first paragraph shows few or no deviations (verb phrase - noun phrase). The musicality of the text should equally be taken into account by the translator in their attempt to create a good version and it will be closely analysed by us later on.

**2.2.2 The second paragraph.** It introduces the reader into the proper game. It is seen as a fortress, a world from which one cannot escape easily. The paragraph is dominated by verbal phrases, with a multitude of verbs of motion used in the present tense: *pătrund, intru, se deschid, caut, ucid, trec, alunec, mă atacă, trec, nu pot găsi, se furișează*. The scenery is restricted from the imaginary setting to a more undesired one, dominated by coldness, blood and monsters.

As far as space is concerned, we come across a cold, bloody, hellish and abstract space, totally different from the author's and the reader's mental representations. Space is described in terms of the dichotomy: concrete versus abstract space. The concrete space can be sensed, felt or seen and it is either narrow (e.g. the dungeon, the fortress) or open (*never-ending frosts, mountains and abysses*). The abstract space surrounds the ideal world of Heaven but also Hell. A very important part is played by the spiritual place with emotional valences, that is, the large space, a scene where various feelings, moods and sensations come and

go. Sadness, hopelessness, inner struggle, restlessness characterise the game player. It is a continual longing for something that should be attained and completed. This fight with monsters, representing the Evil, is rendered by verbs, used this time, in the Present Tense Simple and Continuous (*I'm stepping into dungeons, I'm bleeding...*). This paragraph is also full of common nouns that suggestively describe the setting (*prison, fortress, Devil's signs, frontispieces, corridors, doors, cages, mortals*).

The author prefers simple adjectives and few compound ones that are short so as not to affect the sequence of happenings (*artfulness, bloodstain*). There are also adjectives coming from participles: *slashed, pulled, crucified*. In point of form, two types of endings are preferred: the participial – *ed* and the –*ing* (*winding, slashed, crucified*). The *Weapon* appears again, being capitalized, denoting origins and the *Keys* as well, which are a link and a means of escaping this world, connected with the two formerly mentioned key words. Among the other adjectives we can distinguish some referring to colour (the malachite, the opal and the turquoise). Thus, the opal stone is a precious one that looks like milky water containing colours in it. The turquoise stone is a greenish – blue mineral and the malachite is green, too. The semantic fields, related to the adjectives, are similar to those of nouns: there are adjectives related to death and blood (*iron cages, slashed mortals, crucified, bloodstain, lava, stone bowels, phosphorous* – that is a yellowish substance that shines faintly in the dark and starts to burn when brought out into the air). All these chromatic elements help in creating a horrible but real image of the setting described.

A last characteristic of the adjectives the author makes use of is the comparison: *Aici cristalele sunt mai rare(...)/ Here, the crystals are ever rarer*. The comparative of superiority is encountered through the whole text. The degrees of comparison help the author place his ego to complete the game somewhere close to the ideal, while the crystals appear as a perfect tool. Crystals are miraculously shaped pieces of a natural mineral that look like ice.

Semantically, those few capitalized nouns are based on an antithesis; on the one hand, the Devil and on the other hand the Weapon and the Keys. Crystals are not of a great importance in this part of the text, thus, they are not capitalized. Most nouns are concrete: *prisons, cages, stairs, etc.*, but there are also some abstract ones, too: *thinking, breath, life*. The next lexical category under discussion is the verb. It is obvious that most of the

semantic fields in which the verbs are included have already been mentioned for the nominal categories above. Thus, some verbs denote movement: *pătrund, intru, caut, apăs, fug, trag* and some denote feelings: *nu mi-e frică, îmi ard tâlpile*.

The state verb *to be* coexists with the verbs of movement, being often met through the paragraph. (*I'm stepping..., I enter..., I'm looking for..., I'm bleeding..., I'm not afraid..., I cannot stop..., I am exactly as they are, I'm good...*). The verbal structure: *Îmi dau duhul* has been translated by: *I almost give my last breath*, as being the most appropriate in the given context. There are three uses of the Present tense Continuous: *I'm stepping into..., I'm looking for..., I'm bleeding....* The first suggests the very moment of stepping into another world and the second marks the immediate need to search for the tools followed by the physical feeling of bleeding. Adverbs are rare as compared to the other lexical categories. The time and manner adverbials are prevailing here, too (*exactly, constantly, and desperately*).

The second paragraph also abounds in main clauses, introduced by *and, but* and commas. Most of them begin with the first person personal pronoun *I*, as the author is the most active participant to the game. This implies his strong emotional involvement in everything that constitutes the process of completing the game.

Thus, the syntax of the paragraph is equally interesting. As we have already mentioned above, the two types of co-ordination between sentences the author prefers are the copulative co-ordination, achieved with the help of the conjunction *and*, and the disjunctive co-ordination, accomplished with the help of the adversative conjunction *but* (*And they're all cunningness; But I'm good*). The conjunction *and* is placed at the beginning of the sentence so that the new information which is added can be followed more logically. The main clause introduced by *but* brings about a new piece of information, which changes the perspective created by the previous main clauses. That is why it is but natural to be placed at the beginning of the sentence. There are also two relative clauses and an adverbial clause of manner

They are just a weapon that **burns everything down**; I slip down to the lava floors that **burn my soles**; I'm exactly **as they are**).

Regarding the sentence *In iron cages, there lie slashed mortals (...)*, I considered appropriate to replace the hyphen with *there*, as the English phrase *there lie* implies the visual aspect of the

scene described. It also gives fluency to the text, as the hyphen would have broken up the text.

**2.2.3 The third paragraph.** It is constructed around some key words: *Weapon, Annunciation, God and Dragon*. The action goes on around these four words. This passage is again dominated by verbs of motion but also by verbs of perception and ability: *can, see, defend, run, hide, scream, to be, enter, find, fight, notice, surround, crawl, touch*. Most of the verbs are used in the Present Tense Simple. There is only one sentence in which the verb is used in the Present Tense Continuous: *I am fighting the Dragon*. Towards the end of the paragraph there are also sentences in which the verb is used in the Present Perfect Tense Simple: *I have never been here before; It has finally been defeated*. The dynamism of the essay continues throughout this paragraph, too. The action and the tension intensify, more than in the previous paragraphs as the author is on the point of reaching the end of the game. By the end of the paragraph there are some reflexive verbs that refer to the monster: *Suddenly it petrifies. It vitrifies. It breaks down into pieces*. The use of the reflexive suggests the author's detachment from the monster he has just defeated, from now on following two separate ways. The monster is going to die and the writer tries to save his diminishing powers in order to reach the final destination, *the magical sign*. There are some verbs that create visual images: *disappear, see, petrifies, vitrifies, crawl, touch* as well as verbs of auditory sensations: *scream, to spit*. The most used verbs are *to be* and the modal verb *can*.

The game goes on, but the beginning of the paragraph is like an awakening, like an escape from that hellish world of fiends and all that is to be done now is to fight the Dragon. It is the last confrontation between Good and Evil, between the real and the imaginary world, between the author and the game. Thus, the first sentence begins with an adverb, emphatically placed first to draw once again the reader's attention as to what is to happen at this point of the game:

Deodată, arma-mi dispare și-mi văd acum înaintea doar brațele goale, păroase. [My translation: *Suddenly, the Weapon disappears and all I can see now before me are my bare, hairy arms.*]

Cărtărescu prefers to use simple, common nouns but full of meaning. This time, the passage does not abound in nouns but in adverbs and adjectives. Consequently, the choice of nouns is almost perfectly made, as almost every noun has

its purpose and meaning related to the atmosphere and to the author's feelings towards this level of the game. Thus, for *punte ca o lamă de brici*, I have chosen the phrase: *razorblade bridge*, as bridge means not only a surface very close to the ground but also a link to another world. The religious part is expressed through the Annunciation, a very important moment celebrated by the Christians, namely, the occasion on which the angel Gabriel appeared and told the Virgin Mary that she would bear the baby Jesus Christ. In the same way, the author receives the Dragon and fights it, feeling the Divine force inside him. For the Romanian word *jerbe* I considered proper to translate it by the term *wreaths*, as it means exactly the arrangement of flowers, such as one given at a funeral. The term has the meaning of death, the wreaths of iridium expressing the action of burning everything around.

Nouns are accompanied by adjectives under the form of epithets that give a certain emotional color to this paragraph: *razorblade bridge, dramatic great salty rocks, final grotto, magical sign*. As for the sentence: *Sînt steiuri de stîncă, tragice și mărețe*, I have considered proper to drop the conjunction and render the meaning using a compound adjective in order to avoid the referential contrast between *dramatic* and *great*: *dramatic great salty rocks*, which expresses best the characteristics of the rocks and gives fluency to the sentence. The phrase: *transfinită lumină* is full of meaning and incorporates the visual image that has to be rendered as it is of a great importance, being the only light in the dark world of the game. Thus, the translation should be very adequate and close to this image. I have translated it by a paraphrase as being the only choice I had: *light beyond light*. The word *transfinită* has the meaning of something that is beyond light.

The adverbs are another lexical category that, this time, is more often used. The adverb *suddenly*, which opens the third paragraph, is reiterated later on, towards the end. The time and manner adverbials are again the most frequently used ones, but there are also few adverbials of place: *now, anymore, never, exultantly, unbearable, agonizingly, suddenly, hardly, slowly, here, there*. All the adverbs determine the verbs. Some of them are placed at the beginning of the sentence: *Suddenly the Weapon disappears (...)*. As for the sentence: *Sînt dincolo*, I intentionally placed an adverb at the beginning of the sentence: *Now, I am on the other side*. There is another sentence that required an extra adverb: *Într-o nișă gădesc (...)*

which I have translated by: *Down there, in a niche (...)*, as it was adequate to render the meaning of a certain place.

As the pronouns are concerned the only ones that appear are the first person singular, *I* (the author), and the impersonal *itself* that represents the monster. They also appear under the reflexive form (*itself, myself*) and possessive form (*my, its*). They are the only game players, the only protagonists of the so-called plot. They also mark the two sides of the story, the Good and Evil parts of the game and of the world itself. It is, in fact, a life game, of reality versus the imaginary.

Regarding syntax, the text abounds again, as in the previous paragraphs, in main clauses linked by *and*. In fact, almost all of them are main clauses. There are only two sentences:

Led by it, as if it were an Annunciation, I enter the final grotto; I can hardly crawl myself to the malachite gate that rises, slowly, to let me in.

The former one is an adverbial clause of manner and the latter is a relative clause, but they are also short. They give certain dynamism to the text. They suggest simplicity, even lack of any doubt. For the imperative construction: *Evoe!* I used the syntagm: *Thank God!*, as the term comes from Greek and it means *beyond everything*. Thus, the translation implies the fact that nothing is beyond God. It is the expression of relief, success and completion.

Sentences follow the normal word order, but there is one clause I have deliberately translated by a rather unusual wording:

Se zbate agonice, nu mai poate sufla jerbele lui de iridiu. [*Agonizingly does it struggle, unable to spit it wreaths of iridium.*]

I emphatically fronted the adverb in the first position, followed by *does*, as the auxiliary increases the tension that has already been created by the last moments of the monster's life.

The essay abounds in interrogative clauses, especially in the last paragraph: *Whom have I defeated? Whom have I saved? Whose hero am I?* These clauses give a certain ambiguity as to the author's nature and the impact of computer games upon his mind and personality. The text begins with a question and ends in almost the same way: *Ce Dumnezeu caut aici? Pe cine am învins? (For God's sake why am I here for? Whom have I saved?)*. The author seems to be unable to figure out his role in the so-called 'play' (which is the computer game he is playing), throughout the

passage. There are some very short interrogative clauses at the beginning of the last paragraph but the essay ends up with a long, complex sentence as if it has summed up everything that hasn't been said. There is a conclusive clause as well, that describes the author's physical and mental transformation throughout the game.

**2.2.4 The last paragraph.** It also abounds in verbs (*am învins, am salvat, a fi, beau, mă dizolv, mă reîntrupez, văd*). The use of the Present Tense Simple and continuous switches to Present Perfect (*have I defeated*), which marks the end of the game in no definite time. There is also the modal verb *can* used towards the end of the text that suggests the ability to see the screen for the last time. Both nouns and adjectives are scarce in this part of the passage (*water, metempsychosis, screen, and hero*). They are either concrete or abstract. For the syntagm *apa uitării*, I have chosen the structure *water of oblivion* as it also means the state of being completely forgotten, unconscious or not noticing one's surroundings.

The final line refers to an enumeration of what is seen on the computer's screen. Words are highly technical, they refer only to the game and not to the author anymore. Words are capitalized, figures are introduced and everything seems to be detached from the world we live in. It comes as a conclusion, in which we find out that it was just a game, nothing happened for real. All the other capitalized words that we encountered in the whole passage were just tools to completing the game that had 26 levels. Most of the monsters have been killed, most secrets have been discovered and it took the player almost one hour and a half to complete it.

Cărtărescu's essay is, in point of morphology, not only noun-oriented but also verbal-oriented text, revolving around concrete notions. It is, indeed, a text of delicate emotional sensations as well as of powerful feelings, controlled, at times, by reason!

Usually, nouns are associated with pre-modifiers. Through their association, the nouns turn into symbols and metaphors. Without such pre-modifiers, the nouns would function as tenors, that is, as non-figurative meaning. By means of the association with such adjectives, those nouns are carried from the non-figurative meaning into the figurative metaphorical meaning. As the narrative structure is concerned, it is like a monologue, everything is said and felt through the author's eyes.

The phonological level is closely associated with the musicality of the text, in case of both the

Romanian and English versions. Although it seems rather cold and even glacial, there are some passages full of 'musical notes' that suggest the author's fast and deep falling into an unknown place. The whole text is constructed on two dimensions: the first one is the horizontal dimension associated with the proper game and its physiological space, and the second one is the vertical dimension, represented by the depth of the character's soul.

When analyzing a text one should consider at least three fundamental elements. Firstly, the text as a sign, made up of a signified and a signifier; secondly, the text having a communicative goal and as such it implies several levels of organization (the phonological, morphological, syntactic, lexical and semantic levels) and several functions. Thirdly, the text as an act of generating meaning, having a deep structure that converts itself into surface structure through interpretation.

The interaction of different levels takes place in the surface structure of the text and the very study of the interaction of these levels is capable to reveal the profoundness of the macrostructure. To identify the way the microstructure works, there several types of combinations have been highlighted: the one-to-one, the one-to-many, the many-to-one type. The last one characterizes the link between the phonological, morphological, semantic and stylistic levels on the one hand, and the symbolic and thematic strata, on the other hand. Usually, all these patterns apply to poetry writings, but the present text is full of poetic valences, as the author was very much influenced by his poetry when he wrote his essays. Thus, our text has certain passages which best show this link between all the levels mentioned above. One of them is the following:

Pătrund acum în temnițe. E o cetate a morții și a vicleniei. Meterezele – i depășesc norii, iar pe frontispicii sînt semnele Diavolului. Intru pe coridoare de piatră. Uși secrete se deschid, trape cedează. În cuști de fier – muritori sfîrtecați, trași în țepă, răstigniți pe ziduri însîngerate. Fiecare nouă odaie e înșesată cu demoni. Sunt doar o Armă care carbonizează. Și viclenie. Acum caut cheile.

The passage abounds in alliterations and assonances, patterns that mainly contribute to the musicality of the text. We may notice the alliteration of *t*, that is, the repetition of the same consonant sound in different positions: *pătrund, temnițe, cetate, meterezele, sfîrtecați, trași, răstigniți, însîngerate, înșesată, sunt, caut*. This

*/t/* alliterative pattern is inserted in meaningful morpho-syntactic items such as: verbs, nouns (in which the pattern is predominant), participles and adjectives. Another suggestive alliteration is that of the */m/*- consonant sound (*acum, temnițe, meterezele, morții, semnele, muritori, demoni, armă*). We should also have in view the */n/*- alliteration (*pătrund, temnițe, vicleniei, norii, frontispicii, sînt, semnele, intru, răstigniți, însîngerate, nouă, demoni, sunt, carbonizează, viclenie*). The */m/* and */n/*- alliterations give certain gravity to the text, they are nasal consonants, which sound stifled and thus, rather somber.

Last, but not least, there is the */c/*- alliteration that produces a very strong sound effect when the words that contain it are pronounced (*acum, vicleniei, depășesc, coridoare, secrete, deschid, cuști, sfîrtecați, fiecare, cu, care, acum, caut, cheile*). This last clause of the chosen paragraph, *Acum caut cheile*, is a kind of a 'key-clause', a very strong one, as the first syllable takes the heavy stress. This suggests the very important moment of the game, when the player should find means and tools in order to kill the monsters. The author's desire to kill the fiends, by all means, is beautifully expressed by this alliterative pattern.

The */p/*- alliteration increases the dynamism and the gradual descent into the realm of dungeons and of all Evil (*pătrund, depășesc, frontispicii, pe, piatră, trape, țepă*). The */d/* (*pătrund, deschid, cedează, depășesc, coridoare, ziduri, odaie, demoni, doar*) and */ș/*- alliterations (*depășesc, cuști, uși, trași, și*) are also to be mentioned here, as important patterns for the increasing of the tension inside the prisons.

Vowels are also grouped into patterns that grant musicality upon the text. The */a/*- assonance (*acum, cetate, coridoare, piatră, trape, cedează, trași, țepă, odaie, înșesată, doar, Armă, care, carbonizează, acum, caut*) increases the tonality, as *a* is an open vowel and it gives a bright resonance to the sad atmosphere. As for the */i/*- assonance, it reinforces the passage in discussion, thus joining the former entities (*temnițe, morții, vicleniei, norii, frontispicii, Diavolului, intru, coridoare, piatră, uși, deschid, cuști, fier, muritori, sfîrtecați, trași, răstigniți, ziduri, odaie, demoni, carbonizează, viclenie, cheile*).

The entire passage is like a mixture of tonalities. The */e/*- assonance (*temnițe, cetate, viclenie, meterezele, depășesc, semnele, coridoare, secrete, se deschid, trape, cedează, fier, sfîrtecați, însîngerate, fiecare, odaie, e înșesată, care, cheile*) is like a link, a bridge between the real, beautiful,

warm place of human existence and the unreal, somber, cold world of computer games. Being a middle tonality vowel, /e/ sound marks the slow but inevitable passing through the use of close vowels that are also present. One fine example is the /u/- assonance (*pătrund, acum, intru, uși, cuști, muritori, ziduri, nouă, sunt, acum, caut*). The same as /c/- alliteration, the /u/ assonance best suggests the idea of falling into another space. This fall is not desired, but the close tonality renders the fact that it is, by all means, inevitable. Here, we may also remark another assonance, that of the close vowel sound /ă/ which completes the close sonorous series of the passage (*pătrund, depășesc, piatră, cedează, țepă, răstigniți, nouă, înșesată, Armă, carbonizează*). This passage, as we have already mentioned above, is full of vivid sounds that increase the tension, emotions and shows a complete image of how a computer game looks and sounds like.

The English version of this passage preserves most of the patterns identified above. But, there are also some other patterns like the alliteration of /d/ (*dungeons, death, clouds, Devil, corridors, doors, slashed, pulled, crucified, bloodstain, and demons*) and /s/ (*stepping, fortress, slyness, signs, stone, secret, slashed, stakes*). They have the same purpose as in the Romanian version, that is, to intensify the emotional experience of everything that happens in the game. The vowels have an important role, too. Thus, we encounter the /e/- assonance (*stepping, fortress, death, Devil, enter, trap, away, cages, slashed, stakes, chamber, weapon, everything*) which bridges the transgression from consonants to vowels.

This passage is not focused on any decent. The register changes and the dynamism increases. It is like a poem with short, dynamic lines. The rhythm is interrupted only by the full stop. Sentences are short and it is as if one could recite the whole poem as if it were a stanza. Thus, the sound patterns are very important here, they should be remarked and identified in order to better understand what is going on in the game. The author seems to be out of time, out of place but his mind is still working and everything he sees is the projection of his mind, i.e. the images and the sounds.

The idea of waving movement is best rendered by the /t/- alliteration (*timp, alte, atacă, răătăcit, resorturi, poartă, cristalele, sint, piatră, poarta, turcoaz, pot, treia, monștrii, spate, disperat*) which is the most often used pattern in this passage. Another alliteration is that of /p/ (*timp, pentru,*

*viespi, pe, apă, spirală, podele, tălpile, căpcăuni, pînă, prima, poartă, aproape, prin, opal, pot, spate, disperat, esplanade*). If we stress all these consonant sounds when reading the passage, we will obtain a wonderful piece of poetry, with a certain trochee and iambic mixture of rhythms, and also a gravity of what happens in that very moment.

We may also notice the presence of another alliteration, that of /m/- (*timp, mă, m-am, prima, mai, mațele, îmi, monștrii*) accompanied by that of /n/- (*pentru, gânduri, mecanice, alunec, căpcăuni, pînă, monștrii, esplanade*). These two patterns appear only in nouns, which are the morphological parts that create the scenery; they provide the components of what represents a computerised game. Although nasals are softer than other consonant sounds, here, they increase the terror and also the meaning of the entities the author has to fight against.

Other remarkable alliterations are those of /r/- (*rătăcit, resorturi, scări, spirală, ard, hoarde, cristalele, rare, poarta, a treia, monștrii, disperat, fosfor*) and /l/ (*alte, culoare, spirală, alunec, podele, lavă, tălpile, cheile, cristalele, duhul, mațele, opal, alunec, esplanade*).

Regarding the vowel sounds, we also have many patterns that are worth mentioning. Thus, we come across the assonance of the close vowel /u/ (*pentru, gânduri, culoare, resorturi, fug, sus, alunec, ucid, căpcăuni, duhul*). As in the previous mentioned text, the /u/ - vowel sound suggests the idea of ascending, of going up. It is like a trip to nowhere, which the author is ready to take, no matter the consequences. But this going up is followed by a descent, which is best suggested by another assonance, that of the vowel /ă/ (*atacă, răătăcit, apă, scări, spirală, lavă, căpcăuni*). It is also a close vowel that suggests the falling down to nothingness.

In opposition to it, we have also some assonances of open vowel sounds, such as that of /i/ (*timp, viespi, mecanice, răătăcit, tălpile, cristalele, piatră, viața, treia, furișează, frig, disperat*). The idea of going up is best suggested by this vowel sound but also by another open /a/ (*alte, atacă, mecanice, culoare, hoarde, spirală, poartă, viața, spate, esplanade*). All these patterns are met through the whole passage, each of them having its well-determined purpose, that of rendering the musicality of the text.

Musicality represents a part of the author's own style of writing. There are words throughout the text that are repeatedly used. The repetition of

the same word, under a different case, increases not only the tone but also the meaning of the text.

The whole text is built on symbols. The eyes and feet stand for human body features; the weapon, crystals stand for the material world; evils, fiend and monsters stand for the animal kingdom. Thus, the text is a highly figurative one. The text is exceptional, as the structures that form it are not only metaphorically, but also syntactically and phonologically patterned. These schemes produce impressive stylistic associations in the head of both the reader and the interpreter of it. The text has apparently illogical constructions as if the author were not mainly concerned with reality but with experience. In such texts, our basic concern would be not how things are, but how they seem to be.

The basic relations that occur are either of similarity, or of contrast. The author also seems to be on extremes. He consciously experiences the feeling that he lacks the sense of his own identity, that he is part of a background where he does not actually fit, but he continues to play the game, which he does not like at all.

The reader seems to share with the author not only background knowledge, but also a set of presuppositions, sympathies and standards, of what is pleasant and unpleasant, right and wrong, good and bad. For a reader to change himself and give up his disbeliefs and become the 'appropriate reader', he has to become aware of certain facts. He has also to make all kinds of linguistic, social and moral allowances. An obvious allowance is the way in which we, as readers, deal with modern standards. The text is modern, the reader, and implicitly, the translator, has to understand the mechanism of the game, and all its implications. The author, as an *I* narrator, manages to establish a personal relationship with the reader, which inevitably pushes the reader into liking, even admiring the narrator. The narrator succeeded in converting the reader to sympathize with the text.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

As seen in this paper, translation is a very complex process, which consists mainly in transferring the meaning of a source language text into another language known as target language. A good translator should not only possess reliable knowledge about the two languages but he/she should also be aware of the two different cultural backgrounds.

The prose translation is not an easy thing to do as the relationship between the parts that make up a text (the words) and the text as a whole are extraordinarily complex. There is only a limited understanding of the mechanism, which makes single words influence the whole, and the whole influence the content of single words. This question cannot be solved without investigating the stylistic value of individual words. Researchers have taken diametrically opposed views on the question whether words have a semantic and stylistic value of their own or if they obtain their meaning and value from and through their context.

One possible feature would be the word's potency for meaning, or the extent to which a word can be predicted to influence or be influenced by its context. It is possible to establish general rules for the meaning potential, and one of the decisive variables for this is the stylistic value of a word. A word with strong connotative associations in the stylistic register should influence context rather than be influenced by it. This hypothesis cannot be put to the test before such lexical connotations have been established.

The text interpretation has been made according to the changes that appeared during the process of translation. I have insisted on some important phrases where I have considered that my translation is different from the Romanian version, thus, I insisted on giving reasons for it.

Regarding the phonological texture of the text, I considered it of tremendous importance for enacting the meaning of the whole essay. Normally, a prose text does not have sound patterns. This usually applies to poetry. But, after a deep reading and understanding of Cărtărescu's style, I have discovered that the text has great musical passages and I have thought it will be proper to expose them in detail. Thus, I have enumerated some sound patterns that are dominant and I have exemplified them in two short passages from the essay. I have dealt with the Romanian versions and then, I have drawn a comparison with their English variants.

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Annex 1

### COMPUTER GAMES FOREVER

Mircea Cărtărescu

„Ce Dumnezeu caut aici? Dar numele Lui nu este binevenit în aceste ținuturi. Aici sunt ghețuri eterne printre care curg râuri de lavă, sunt munți și prăpăstii. Cine sînt? Nu-mi pot aduce aminte. Tot ce văd în fața mea e peisajul măreț și abstrus – și o Armă. Nu pot privi în jos ca să-mi văd măcar vârful încălțărilor, pe care le simt de metal. Încep să alunec, cu arma în fața (e un fel de caduceu înaripat), prin aceste iaduri. Nu am timp să-mi pun alte întrebări despre condiția mea. Căci apar Monștrii. Nici eu nu știu cine sînt și de ce putere sînt însuflețiți. N-au instinct de conservare. Păsări de foc, diavoli extropiați, zombies, mumii, vârcolaci, legiuni de inomabile nevertebrate se azvîrl înaintea, scuipe sfere de flacără, te năpădesc cu duhori sulfuroase. Îi extermin cu zecile, eliberînd limbi de jad din magicul caduceu, alunec rapid prin ținutul melancoliei, cu cîte-un copăcel închircit pe alocuri, mă feresc de văpăile dureroase ale celor care-mi vor sîngele. Cînd sînt atins, viața îmi scade, puterea se duce. Din fericire, pe pămînt sînt presărate Cristale. Violacee, roze sau limpezi ca gheața. Ele sunt forță și sănătate. De cîte ori ating unul, o mare lumină iradiază și mă simt deodată mai bine.

Pătrund acum în temnițe. E o cetate a morții și a vicleniei. Meterezele – i depășesc norii, iar pe frontispicii sînt semnele Diavolului. Intru pe coridoare de piatră. Uși secrete se deschid, trape cedează. În cuști de fier – muritori sîrtecați, trași în țeapă, răstigniți pe ziduri însîngerate. Fiecare nouă odaie e înțesată cu demoni. Sunt doar o Armă care carbonizează. Și viclenie. Acum caut cheile. Cea de opal, cea de turcoaz și cea de malachită. Sîngerez din sute de răni, dar nu mi-e frică și nu mă pot opri. Sînt întocmai ca Ei. Dar bun. Nu-i

timp pentru alte gînduri. Mă atacă viespi mecanice. M-am rătăcit pe culoare. Apăs resorturi. Fug în sus pe scări în spirală. Alunec pe podele de lavă care-mi ard tălpile. Am Cheile. Ucid hoarde de căpăuni pînă dau de prima poartă. Aici cristalele sînt mai rare. Aproape că-mi dau duhul prin mațele astea de piatră. Trec de poarta de opal, apoi de cea de turcoaz. N-o pot găsi pe a treia. Viața îmi scade mereu. Monștrii mi se furișează prin spate și mă frig cu ghearele lor. Alunec disperat pe esplanade de fosfor.

Deodată, arma-mi dispare și-mi văd acum înainte doar brațele goale, părăse. Nu mă pot apăra. Fug, mă ascund, diavolii zbiară triumfători. Merg în echilibru pe o punte ca o lamă de brici. Sînt dincolo. N-am mai ajuns pe aici. Sînt steiuri de stîncă, tragice și mărețe. Intru în defileul putreziciunii, înțesat de carcace de om. Într-o nișă găsesc – Evoe! – o formidabilă Armă. E un crin de transfinită lumină. Cu el înainte, ca o Bunăvestire, pătrund în grota finală. Lupt cu balaurul. N-am timp să văd cum arată. Îl învălui cu bilioane de steluțe otrăvite. Urletele-i sînt de nesuportat. Se zbate agonice, nu mai poate sufla jerbele lui de iridii. Se înțepenește brusc. Se vitrifică. Se sparge în țandări. E praf și pulbere. Dar și sănătatea mea e aproape la zero. Abia mă mai tîrăsc către poarta de malachită, ce se ridică, încet, ca să mă primească. Ating cu palma rășchirată semnul magic.

Pe cine-am învins? Pe cine-am salvat? Al cui erou sînt? Beau apa uitării și, pe cînd mă dizolv ca să mă reîntrez în eterna, absurda mea metempsihoză, apuc să mai văd ecranul final: LEVEL 26 COMPLETED//KILLED: 56/64// SECRETS:4/7 // TIME: 1:23:45.”

## COMPUTER GAMES FOREVER

Mircea Cărtărescu

## (My Translation)

For God's sake why am I here for? However His name is not desired in this part of the world. Here, there are never-ending frosts through which streams of lava flow, there are mountains and abysses. Who am I? I can't figure it out. All I can see before my eyes is the landscape, grandiose and abstruse – and a Weapon. I can't even look down to see the toe cap of my shoes, which feels metal-like. I start sliding, through these hellish areas, facing the Weapon (a kind of Hermes' winged sceptre). I have no time to question my condition. For Monsters do come out. Even I myself hardly know who they are and what kind of strength empowers them. They have no self - preservation instinct. Fire birds, crippled fiends, zombies, mummies, were-wolves, legions of unidentified invertebrates throw themselves forward, spit fire balls, flood you with their sulphurous stinks. I exterminate them by the dozen, releasing jade stripes out of the magic sceptre of Hermes, I slip fast through the realm of melancholy, with a small, cowered tree, stuck here and there, I avoid the burning flames of those who hanker after my blood. When I'm touched, my life dies out, my powers fade away. Fortunately, Crystals are sprinkled on earth. They look violet, pink or ice - clear. They radiate strength and health. Each time I touch one, an intense light radiates and I suddenly feel better.

I'm stepping into dungeons, now. This is a fortress of death and slyness. Its walls tower the clouds and Devil's signs mark the frontispieces. I enter corridors of stone. Secret doors open, trap doors give away. In iron cages there lie slashed mortals pulled on stakes, crucified on bloodstain walls. Each new chamber is filled with demons. They are just a Weapon that burns everything down. And they are all cunningness. Now, I'm looking for the keys: the opal, the turquoise and the malachite one. I'm bleeding due to hundreds of wounds but I'm not afraid and I can not stop. I am

exactly as they are. But I'm good. There's no time for further thinking. Mechanical wasps harass me. I've got lost on corridors. I push the springs. I run up the winding stairs. I slip down to the lava floors that burn my soles. I've got the Keys. I kill hoards of ogres before reaching the first gate. Here, the crystals are ever rarer. I almost give my last breath away outrunning these bowels of stone. I pass through the opal gate, then the turquoise one. I can not find the third. My life constantly fades away. Monsters sneak behind my back and burn me with their claws. I desperately slide down on phosphorous esplanades.

Suddenly, the Weapon disappears and all I can see now before me are my bare, hairy arms. I can't defend myself anymore. I run, hide and the devils scream exultantly. I keep my balance while pacing on a razorblade bridge. Now, I am on the other side. I have never been here before. Here are dramatic majestic salty rocks. I enter the narrow path of putrefaction, filled with human remains. Down there, in a niche, I find – Thank God! – a formidable Weapon. It's like a lily of light beyond light. Led by it, as if it were an Annunciation, I enter the final grotto. I am fighting the Dragon. I don't have time to see what it looks like. I surround it with billions of poisonous little stars. Its roars are unbearable. Agonisingly does it struggle, unable to spit its wreaths of iridium. Suddenly it petrifies. It vitrifies. It breaks down into pieces. It has finally been defeated. But my health is also gone out, as well. I can hardly crawl myself to the malachite gate that rises, slowly, to let me in. I touch the magical sign with my palm.

Whom have I defeated? Whom have I saved? Whose hero am I? I drink the water of oblivion and, when I begin to dissolve myself in order to reintegrate into my eternal, absurd metempsychosis, I still get to see the final screen: LEVEL26 COMPLETED // KILLED: 56/64 // SECRETS: 4/7 // TIME: 1:23:45.