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THE UNTRANSLATABLES

A common truth has been proclaimed time and again: even a superb translation, in its turn produced by a great author, will lose the relish of its authenticity, and often seem rather an enjoyable, crafty distortion. Our lenience gladly accepts the equivalent, although the unutterable specificity has all but vanished once shifted from one language to another. Not long ago (1994), I. L. Caragiale's ideal translator, Eugène Ionesco, member of the French Academy, ventured a French version (M'sieu Léonida face à la réaction/The Hon. Leonida Face to Face with the Forces of Reaction) of his great predecessor's play; all he accomplished was a delightful "adaptation". And a good one too. The same here: the original flavor of the prose written by Creangă, Eminescu, Filimon, Ispirescu or Sadoveanu, despite the commendable English versions, must sacrifice – ultimately for the benefit of their less prominent fellow writers – some of its almost untranslatable allure; with your permission, I would draw a parallel between their writings and the works of Constantin Brâncuși, a Ion Creangă of sculpture, who reveals his authenticity all by himself, and whose interpretation or misinterpretation by art critics and historians can only be approximate. Therefore, let us console ourselves with this anthology of genuine masterpieces, while also leaving room for our flights of fancy.

