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Invisible Authors and Other Illusionists: Hungarian Translation in the First Half of the Twentieth Century

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Illusionist Translation and the Invisible Translator

Writing in the 1960s, Czech translation theorist Jiří Levý (2011, pp.19-20) identified two methods of translation, 'illusionist' and 'anti-illusionist.' The former 'require[s] a work of literature to "look like the original, like reality"', much like illusionist theatre (Levý 2011, p.19). The latter, on the other hand, 'boldly play[s] on the fact that [it is] offering the audience a mere imitation of reality' (Levý 2011, p.20). Levý (2011, p.20) compares anti-illusionist translation methods to experimental theatre, where '[c]haracters on stage declare themselves actors, removing their masks', and to self-referential fiction, where the author 'abandons the epic illusion – he addresses readers and reaches an agreement with them on what a character is to do.' For Levý, anti-illusionist translations are 'parodies and travesties', and as such rank behind illusionist, 'realistic' modes, which better fulfil the function of '"captur[ing]" the source' (Levý 2011, p.20). Accordingly, in *The Art of Translation* he sets out to establish an illusionist translation theory, based on a contract between translator and reader – the translator will 'hide behind the original, as though they were presenting it to the reader directly rather than as intermediaries', and reader in turn will be 'prepared to believe' that they are reading the original (Levý 2011, p.20). Levý (2011, p.20) calls illusionist translation methods 'functional' from a linguistic perspective, and 'realistic' in aesthetic terms.

Levý's take on illusionist translation is optimistic – he upholds it as the only practical way to translate. Thirty years after the first publication of *The Art of Translation* (1963), this optimism was challenged by Lawrence Venuti in his seminal work, *The Invisibility of the Translator: A History of Translation* (1995, 2008). Focusing on the 'invisible translator' in British and American translation theory and practice, Venuti critically re-examines the concept from economic, aesthetic, political, and ethical perspectives. He draws attention to the status of 'fluency' as the single most important criterion by which translations are judged by English-speaking publishers, reviewers, and readers. Based on several contemporary reviews of translations, he concludes that

> A fluent translation is immediately recognizable and intelligible, 'familiarised', domesticated, not "disconcerting[ly]" foreign, capable of giving the reader unobstructed "access to great thoughts", to what is "present in the original." Under the regime of fluent translating, the translator works to make his or her work "invisible", producing the illusory effect of transparency that simultaneously masks its status as an illusion: the translated text seems "natural", that is, not translated. (Venuti 2008, p.5)

The above description of 'fluent translation', which in British and American practice is synonymous with 'good translation', is similar to Levý's concept of illusionist translation methods. However, while for Levý there is no real alternative to illusionist translation, as its antithesis, 'abstract, athematic translation would in fact be an anti-translation' (Levý 2011, p.20), Venuti's opposition to the dominance of fluency is implicit in his definition of 'fluent translation': 'The concept of the translator's 'invisibility' is already a cultural critique, a diagnosis that opposes the situation it represents' (Venuti 2008, p.13). For Venuti, illusionist translation is highly political, and the imbalance between the vigorous translation practice from English into other European

languages and the rare and overly domesticating translations from other languages into English has had an adverse effect on the cultures of the United Kingdom and the United States. It has made them

> aggressively monolingual, unreceptive to foreign literatures, accustomed to fluent translations that invisibly inscribe foreign texts with British and American values and provide readers with the narcissistic experience of recognizing their own culture in a cultural other. (Venuti 2008, p.12)

Current British and American translation practice is unethical in more than one way. It marginalises the translator, denies them appropriate cultural and legal recognition, and forces them into economically disadvantageous arrangements. Furthermore, it is

> symptomatic of a complacency in British and American relations with cultural others, a complacency that can be described – without too much exaggeration – as imperialistic abroad and xenophobic at home. (Venuti 2008, p.13)

Venuti sees illusionist translation as a logical consequence of the rise to dominance of 'plain styles' in English-language literatures. He attributes the perceived value of fluency in contemporary literary (as well as non-literary) discourses to factors such as 'the enormous economic and political power acquired by scientific research during the twentieth century', developments in communication technology, and the rise of the discourse of advertising, which 'valoriz[e] a purely instrumental use of language and other means of representation and thus emphasiz[e] immediate intelligibility and the appearance of factuality' (Venuti 2008, p.5). John Hinds (1986, p.144) identifies English as a writer responsible language:

> [t]he desire to write or speak clearly in English permeates our culture. The point of view has even been made into an aphorism: "Tell 'em what you're going to tell 'em, tell 'em, then tell 'em what you told 'em." It is the responsibility of the speaker to communicate a message.

It is hardly surprising, then, that the mode of realism has come to occupy such a prominent position in contemporary English and American literature, with 'free, prose-like verse' as 'the most prevalent form of poetry' (Venuti 2008, p.5). It is important to note, however, that although the developments mentioned here by Venuti are relatively recent, the idea that translation is inferior to 'original' artistic creation, and the translator to the author, is much older:

> [t]ranslation, so highly prized in the Middle Ages, had come to be seen as secondary and derivative by the seventeenth century, by the age that saw the rise in importance of the concept of the Original. (Bassnett 2011a, p.4)

Venuti's analysis focuses on English and American translation (into English), and the concept of the invisible translator is now widely used by critics to describe current translation practice in these parts of the world. Recent scholarship has pointed out that the critical terminology used in the theorisation of 'Western' translation cannot adequately describe non-Western traditions. However, this does not mean that Venuti's paradigm bears no relevance to the study of the latter. His ideas of illusion and invisibility can be applied to translation in literary cultures that have been shaped by different historical forces from the West.

In this essay I will use Venuti's concepts to discuss Hungarian translation in the first half of the twentieth century. I will show that 'illusion', 'invisibility' and 'fluency' are very much at the heart of this particular East European tradition, although this context requires the introduction of the 'invisible author' to replace the invisible translator. Drawing on Brian James Baer's analysis of East European translation, I will outline the main factors that have influenced the formation of a translation tradition unique to the region. I will then explore

Hungarian translation in more detail, taking as an example Dezső Kosztolányi's translation of 'The Raven' by Edgar Allan Poe, published in 1913 in the literary journal *Nyugat*. Finally, an overview of the debate surrounding the 1955 publication of *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* in Hungarian will reveal that in spite of changing attitudes to translation, it was still regarded as a highly prestigious activity in the middle of the twentieth century.

Invisible Authors: 'Europe's Internal Other'

In his introduction to *Contexts, Subtexts, Pretexts: Literary Translation in Eastern Europe and Russia*, Baer writes that

> [t]he exploration of alternative, non-Western translation traditions – largely Asian but recently African, as well – has become increasingly visible in recent years as a reaction to hegemonic Western models of translation and the general eurocentrism of contemporary Translation Studies. (2011, p.1)

The problematisation of 'the East' has been a prominent dimension of literary and cultural criticism since the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978, and the undoing of the Orient-Occident dichotomy has been extended to the field of Translation Studies as well. However, Baer points out that although we no longer conceive of 'the East' as a monolithic entity, and the plurality of 'Eastern' translation models has been discussed by notable scholars such as Gayatri Spivak (2008), the heterogeneity of 'the West' from a Translation Studies perspective has not been adequately theorised (Baer 2011, p.1).

Baer (2011, p. 1) argues that a fixed notion of 'Western Europe' obscures the differences between individual European cultures which, much like Gayatri Spivak's 'pluralized Asias' (Spivak 2008, p.2, quoted in Baer 2011, p.1), should be 'examined on a case-by-case basis' (Kothari and Wakabayasi 2009, p.5, quoted in Baer 2011, p.1). He draws attention to Eastern Europe as 'Europe's *internal* other' (Baer

2011, p.1), and claims that '[t]he examination of the role of translation in the cultural development of Eastern Europe and Russia has much to contribute' to the field of translation studies (Baer 2001, p.2). However, despite the fact that this collection of essays aims to 'challenge […] the romantic notion of Eastern Europe as a community of oppressed nations' (Baer 2011, p.2), Baer does acknowledge the existence of forces which give a certain degree of unity to the cultures discussed in the book. Among the factors that make it possible to talk about Eastern Europe as distinct from Western Europe he cites the perception of East European countries as cultural latecomers, the cultural impact of Communism, and the shared imperial past.

The sense of 'belatedness' is the persistent idea that Eastern Europe needs to '"catch up" to a more developed West and […] compensate for their belated entry into modernity,' which 'made translation a visible, often self-conscious, and much-discussed practice there' (Baer 2011, p.4). This perceived inferiority in relation to the West is strikingly illustrated by the fact that in Hungary the most influential literary journal that provided a platform for the intellectual élite in the first half of the twentieth century was called *Nyugat* [West], a name synonymous with ambition and cutting-edge literary production.[1] György Rába opens his discussion of the *Nyugat* poets by emphasising the importance of translation as a socio-cultural force:

> [t]his statement applies especially to the literary history of smaller Central-Eastern European countries that are

[1] Although sometimes described as a Central rather than Eastern European country due to its location, Hungary is firmly positioned within the cultural community of Eastern Europe. The title of *Nyugat* suggests that the country saw itself as a cultural latecomer compared to the West at the beginning of the twentieth century. It was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire between 1867 and 1918, and was under Communist rule from the late 1940s until 1989. Part of the imperial legacy is the importance accorded to foreign languages, which have long been an integral part of all levels of Hungarian education, and functional multilingualism is common to this day. Therefore Baer's analysis of Eastern European translation can at least partly explain the peculiarities of early twentieth-century Hungarian translation, discussed in the second half of this essay.

> lagging behind in terms of social development. Hungarian literary history attests to the fact that the appearance of powerful new ideologies has been followed by numerous translations transmitting these new ideas, and the advance of the Reformation by the proliferation of translated literature. [2] (Rába 2008, pp.367-8)

But this desire to belong to and learn from a 'more developed West' through the reading of foreign texts only partly explains the historical prominence of translation within Eastern European cultural output. The legacy of Communism, which imposed literary censorship and a centralised cultural policy on the countries of Eastern Europe, affected translation practice in a way no doubt unforeseen by the political leadership. Translated works were generally less heavily censored than vernacular literature, which led to the fostering of 'an intelligentsia that looked to world literature to express and preserve what it saw as eternal aesthetic and moral values', and the turning of translation 'into a vehicle for expressing alternative, if not openly oppositional, views' (Baer 2011, p.6).

Although the reliance on Western ideas mediated through literature enhanced, and still enhances, translation activity in Eastern Europe, the purpose of translation has not always been simply to make texts accessible to an audience that for linguistic reasons would not be able to comprehend the original. In other words, East European translation does not always share the functionality of the Western (British and American) paradigm. The uses of translation in multi-ethnic, multi-lingual empires such as Austria-Hungary, the Soviet Union, or indeed present-day Russia, differ from the uses of translation in the West in a number of ways. Baer (2011, p.6) observes that 'the nation-state remains a somewhat problematic concept throughout

[2] All translations from Hungarian sources are my own.

much of this region,' and therefore literature, whether written in the vernacular or translated into it, has played an important role in the construction of collective identities. Baer (2011, p.10) describes Eastern Europe and Russia as 'cultures of translation':

> the notion of a communal identity retrieved *through* translation served as a heroic metaphor representing a triumph over perceived backwardness and as a way to survive the onslaught – or flood – of foreign influences. (2011, p.10)

Furthermore, the only way representatives of minority cultures within multilingual empires could advance was by learning the language of the dominant cultures, which produced a multilingual intelligentsia that was 'often fluent in the administrative language of the empire, the "local" language(s), and the prestige language(s) of the West' (Baer 2011, p.7). They could read and understand foreign texts without necessarily having to resort to translations, which resulted in 'an expectation that translations would function as independent works of art, not as mere conveyors of source text content' (Baer 2011, p.8). Unlike in the West, translation was seen as an art rather than a craft, and the status of the target texts was close to, if not higher than, that of vernacular literature (Baer 2011, p.10). One way in which this approach to translated works was manifested is the inclusion of literary translations by writers and poets in their collected works (Baer 2011, p.5). There is a fundamental tension, then, between the privilege of translated literature of being less closely monitored than vernacular artistic production under the Communist regime, and the consequent reliance of the intelligentsia on translation to communicate 'dangerous' – and 'foreign' – ideas, and the insistence that the target text is not simply equivalent to national literature, it *is* national literature.

Nyugat

This (now peculiar) attitude to translated literature as having an equal or higher status to vernacular literature was characteristic of Hungarian translation for a large part of the twentieth century. László Scholz cites as an example the editorial board and contributors of *Nyugat*:

> [S]ince its founding in 1908, the *Nyugat* generation of translators developed and established a concept of translation that aimed to eliminate any indication of the relationship between the original texts and their translations, in order to make the original author disappear and to elevate the translations to the status of autonomous texts within the sphere of Hungarian literature (Józan: 422-426). This attitude evidently led to a marked literarization of translations, placing the emphasis on the act of creation rather than transformation […] which created a rapidly canonized paradigm that was maintained for decades. (Scholz 2011, pp.206-7)

Adopting Venuti's terminology, we could say that in contrast with the invisible translator of Western translation practice, Hungarian translation during the first half of the twentieth century made the *author* invisible, and instead brought the translator to the fore as the producer of valuable, artistic, and original work. Lőrinc Szabó's translation of 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud' as 'Táncoló tűzliliomok' [Dancing Fire Lilies] (Szabó 2002), is frequently cited as an example of the degree of freedom translators in this period enjoyed. By substituting fire lilies for daffodils, a common flower in Britain as well as Hungary, Szabó introduces an element of passion and exoticism not present in Wordsworth's text. Scholz (2011, p. 207) claims that the approach to translation outlined above remained dominant 'almost monolithically for at least forty to fifty years' in spite of 'violent socio-political transformations', although politics did have an impact, albeit limited, on literary production in the post-war years through the 'declaration of the omnipotence of so-called socialist realism' and 'the elimination of all private publishing houses in the country.'

The difference in historical attitudes to translation between Britain and Hungary is reflected in the strongly gendered nature of translation work. Bassnett (2011b, p.95) observes that '[a] glance at the history of literary translation reveals a long history of gifted female translators,' and proceeds to cite the examples of Lady Mary Sidney, St Thomas More's daughter Margaret Roper, Elizabeth I, Mary Wollstonecraft and George Eliot. Although there is much debate surrounding the question of why there have been so many women translators since the Renaissance, and it is unclear whether the phenomenon can be accounted for by the low status of translation in Western Europe (Bassnett 2011b, p.95; Robinson 1995), it is certain that renowned female translators are conspicuously absent from Hungarian literary history. The fact that all translations of canonical works were undertaken by men may indicate the prestige accorded to translation in Hungary until the mid-twentieth century. Notable translators from the nineteenth century include poet Mihály Vörösmarty (1800-1855), playwright Ede Szigligeti (1814-1878), and poet János Arany (1817-1882), all of whom translated Shakespeare and were members of the most prestigious academic institution, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences [Magyar Tudományos Akadémia]. *Nyugat* was also a male-dominated scene, with prominent translators including Mihály Babits (1883-1941), Dezső Kosztolányi (1885-1936), Árpád Tóth (1886-1928) and Lőrinc Szabó (1900-1957) regularly contributing translations to the journal.

According to the history of twentieth-century Hungarian literature published by the Academy in 1966, *A magyar irodalom története 1919-től napjainkig* [The History of Hungarian Literature from 1919 to the Present Day], 'the outstanding poets of the [*Nyugat*] movement wished to establish the consciousness of more developed societies by naturalising contemporary literary trends and styles' (Szabolcsi 1966,

p.844). Translation played an important part in this, with 'faithfulness of form and content' as the ideal, but, as the authors explain, 'combined with a style alert to modern sensibility' (Szabolcsi 1966, p.844). What exactly this combination meant is unclear from the vague wording, but the authors see it as an ambition that remained unfulfilled, as the next sentence reveals a discrepancy between theory and practice:

> However, bringing translation into harmony with bourgeois taste and the naturalisation of the new sensibility, they put it in the service of the construction of their own lyric personalities. Even Babits, who generally remained faithful to the text, characterised his own early translations as follows: "It was the Hungarian poem that mattered, not the English or the French. It was my poem that mattered, not that of the foreign poet. I often changed the text simply because I liked something else better in the Hungarian." (Babits 1920: Prologue, quoted in Szabolcsi 1966, p.844)

The authors then proceed to explain what they term the 'individualising aesthetic of poetry', characteristic of the *Nyugat* generation's pre-war poetry translations. It is defined as 'a freer, experimental rendition of the original style', and is combined with 'faithfulness of form' (Szabolcsi 1966, p.844). Babits and Tóth's translation style 'moved towards the realist approach, complete faithfulness in form and content' after the war, but not Kosztolányi's, who 'remain[ed] a "beautiful unfaithful" [szép hűtlen] all along' (Szabolcsi 1969, p.844).[3]

'A Hungarian trouvaille:' Kosztolányi's 'The Raven'

[3] Ildikó Józan ([n.d.]) challenges the established view of Kosztolányi as a notoriously 'unfaithful' translator. A detailed analysis of the debate surrounding this complex issue is beyond the scope of this essay. I will therefore use examples from Kosztolányi's translations as illustrations of a Hungarian translation practice that permitted greater disagreement between source text and target text than what would be acceptable today. Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that 'faithfulness' is not a clear category, and that the several forms of correspondence – word-for-word, meaning-for-meaning, function-for-function, etc. – are often incompatible and cannot be ranked in any absolute order.

Kosztolányi's translations are generally regarded as notoriously arbitrary (Józan [n.d.]), and this was the case even in a cultural milieu where faithfulness to the original was not taken very seriously. His tendency to manipulate the meaning, conjure up new images, or even simply omit certain passages from the prose or a whole stanza from a poem, did not go unnoticed by his contemporaries. His translation of Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Raven', published in *Nyugat* in 1913, sparked an interesting debate in the journal about free versus literal translation and the duties and responsibilities of the translator. Kosztolányi's version was neither the first nor the last in a long list of translations prepared by well-known literary figures. The first translation, by poet Károly Szász (1829-1905), was published in 1858 in the journal *Budapesti Szemle* [Budapest Review]. Tóth, another *Nyugat* contributor, also published his own translation in 1923. Nevertheless, Kosztolányi's rendition was unique in its treatment of Poe's text. It succeeded in preserving the musicality of the original, including the tight rhythm and many of the alliterations and internal rhymes. In terms of meaning, the correspondence was not as close, as can be seen from the following examples (stanza numbers refer to the source text, emphases added):

5 Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing,
Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before
A sürű sötétbe nézek, álmodok vadat, merészet,
Mint az őrült, mint a részeg, bódorogva kétesen
[I look into the dense darkness, I dream wild, daring {dreams},
Like the madman, like the drunk, rambling doubtfully][4]
6 Let my heart be still a moment and this mystery explore
Csöndesülj szív, *tébolyult szív*, az okát megkeresem
[Calm down, heart, *frantic heart*, I will find the reason]

[4] All of my translations are purely functional and as close to the Hungarian wording as possible. I have made no attempt to retain formal characteristics such as alliteration or word play, as the translations serve no artistic purpose and are simply part of a theoretical discussion of translation.

8 Back into the chamber turning, all my soul within me burning
A szobámba már *fehéren* mentem vissza, *forrt a vérem*
[I returned to my chamber *white, my blood boiling*]

9 But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door
Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door –
Perched, and sat, and nothing more.
A szobám szobrára lebben s úgy ül ott, *mint a lesen*,
Pallas szobrán mozdulatlan ül, csak ül, *mint a lesen*:
Nem történik semmisem.
[It perches on the statue of my room and sits there *as if preying*,
Motionless on Pallas' statue it sits, just sits, *as if preying*:
Nothing happens.]
11 "Doubtless," said I, "what it utters is its only stock and store"
"*Bamba szajkó*", így beszéltem, "*nincsen egy ép sora sem*."
["*Dim parrot*", I said, "*it does not have a single sane line*."]
15 "Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil! – prophet still, if bird or devil!"
"Jós! felelj nekem", könyörgök, "bármi légy, *angyal* vagy ördög"
["Prophet! Answer me", I beg, "whatever you may be, *angel* or devil"]
17 "Be that word our sign of parting, bird or fiend!" I shrieked, upstarting –
"Pusztulj innen a *pokolba*" ordítottam *fuldokolva*
["Go to *hell*" I shrieked *choking*]

It is clear from these changes that the translator is inscribing passions not present in the original on the Hungarian text, turning the dark and vaguely unsettling tale into a much more dramatic poem. The raven '[p]erched, and sat' in Poe's text, but 'sat as if preying' in Kosztolányi's rendition, adding an element of threat to the scene. When the bird refuses to explain his meaning, the narrator concludes that 'what it utters is its only stock and store', but in the Hungarian it also becomes a 'dim parrot' (lit. 'dim jay'), someone who mechanically repeats what they are told without comprehending any of it. The ninth stanza, starting with '[m]uch I marvelled this ungainly fowl to hear discourse so plainly,' is omitted altogether from the translation.

Writer, translator and critic Artúr Elek was so unhappy with Kosztolányi's translation that he published a critique of it in a subsequent issue of *Nyugat* (Elek 1913). Among his many objections was the fact that Kosztolányi had made significant and – in his view – unjustifiable changes to the last stanza. I will quote the full stanza and its translation for comparison:

18 And the raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;
And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon that is dreaming,
And the lamp-light o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;
And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor
Shall be lifted – nevermore!

És a Holló meg se moccan, néz reám meredve hosszan,
A szoborról, a komorról tűz reám két tompa szem.
Úgy ül, mint egy omladékon, mélyen alvó éji démon,
A padlón a lámpa vékony sávja himbál csöndesen:
Nő az éjjel, nő az árnyék, terjed egyre csöndesen
S nem virrad meg - sohasem!
[And the Raven never flitting, looks at me staring at length,
From the statue, from the stern {statue}, two dim eyes stare at me.
It sits as though on a ruin, nocturnal demon fast asleep,
On the floor the narrow strip of the lamp sways silently:
The night grows, the shadow grows, it keeps spreading silently
And it will never dawn – ever again!]

Interestingly, the first point Elek raises concerning Kosztolányi's translation is that he started from scratch instead of making use of his predecessors' work, meaning those who had translated 'The Raven' before him. 'Those who came later had every right to reach into the tool-shed of those before them, and make use of what they had already tried out', he writes (Elek 1913). Today's translators, readers, and critics would no doubt find the idea unusual that translators not only can but

should appropriate sections of previous translations in their search for an ideal translation. Elek's concept of the sacred original that should not be tampered with, on the other hand, is a familiar one. Although he acknowledges Kosztolányi's talents and success in capturing the atmosphere of the original, he laments that the end product reads like a work of art on its own right, and not as a mirror of the original:

> In vain does Kosztolányi's "Raven", unlike all the other Hungarian translations before it, appear to be an original creation rather than a translation, this happy circumstance does not mitigate the charge. Because this translation appearing to be an original creation is in fact even further removed from its original, as in reality it does not present Poe's poetic style, but Kosztolányi's. (Elek 1913)

Part of Elek's argument here evokes Venuti. A translation masquerading as non-translation is unethical and deceitful because it pretends to be something it is not. Of course the two theorists differ on a fundamental point: while Venuti's assumption is that a translation by its very nature cannot reflect the original completely, and that translators should embrace this and inscribe themselves more on the text, thus becoming more visible, for Elek the translator's task is to hide the nature of his work by producing something so close to the original in every possible respect that it will not read like *an* original but *the* original, the source text. Venuti objects to the translator being made invisible, as this obscures the fundamental nature of translation. Elek objects to the author being made invisible, as this obscures the original work.

Kosztolányi replied to Elek's accusations:

> it is not possible, and not allowed, to demand faithfulness to the letter from the literary translator. Because faithfulness to the letter is unfaithfulness. Languages differ in their material. (Kosztolányi 1913)

He revisits the well-known conflict of word-for-word versus meaning-for-meaning translation, and concludes that 'the beauty, the music is more important in this poem.' He also reiterates the point which summarises the *Nyugat* generation's attitude: 'My main ambition is to give a beautiful Hungarian poem, which is as close to the original as possible.' His idea of a 'beautiful Hungarian poem' is one that is fluent, where the flow of reading is not broken by strange or foreign-sounding phrases: 'It is prohibited, and a thousand times prohibited, to violate the Hungarian language' (Kosztolányi 1913). Once again, an 'immediately recognizable and intelligible, "familiarised", domesticated' translation is required (Venuti 2008, p.5), but this time not because it gives readers 'unobstructed "access to great thoughts", to what is "present in the original"' (Venuti 2008, p.5), but because it offers an aesthetic experience in the reader's own language of the *joint* work of author and translator. Kosztolányi is not prepared to relinquish credit and retreat into obscurity:

> True, the poem shows the influence of my personality. If this poem is recomposed by a poet, the charge is always the same. But I see it as natural that I gave voice to 'The Raven' with words filtered through my blood […] Because it was not only Poe's name that appeared in the poem published in *Nyugat*, but mine, too. (Kosztolányi 1913)

Not only is Kosztolányi willing to acknowledge his active role in the translation process, he conceives of the relationship between translator and target text as a highly personal one, even conveying a sense of sacrifice and almost organic harmony with the expression 'words filtered through my blood.' His defence of the changes he made to the last stanza is based on the claim that, in addition to the familiar observation that either form or content has to be prioritised over the other in translation, the needs and culture-specific frame of reference of the reader must also be considered:

> The original says that the poet will never escape the shadow swaying on the floor. In the English the effect is astonishing. The Hungarian, however, sees eternal night as "it will never dawn". This closure stems from the spirit of our language, it is a Hungarian trouvaille, and I believe and confess that the Hungarian "Raven" can only end in this way. (Kosztolányi 1913)

The underlying assumptions here are that the poem's primary function is to create a particular effect on the reader, and that this effect should resonate with 'the spirit' of the reader's language. The aesthetic of poetry is not only 'individualising' (i.e. the target text is not only mediated but influenced by the translator's consciousness), but also culturally determined, building on pre-existing knowledge rather than introducing a new paradigm.

'Our Great Classics': The 1955 Shakespeare Edition

Although *Nyugat* only ran until 1941, the legacy of their view of translation as a noble and prestigious pursuit, and the translated text as the translator's very own creation, was still felt in the 1950s. Mária Borbás (b. 1930) is a renowned Hungarian translator of fiction. In an interview she talks about her participation in the publications of *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* in Hungarian in 1955, which was published for a second time with very minor changes in 1988 (Szele [n.d.]). She relates her memories of the laborious editing process that preceded the publication of the 1955 edition, where a committee of prominent literary figures debated whether it was necessary to revise nineteenth-century translations by Arany, Vörösmarty and Sándor Petőfi (1822-1849). Although a similar volume had been published only seven years earlier, which was 'extremely popular', Borbás explains that 'in 1950 or 1951 publishing houses were nationalised, and Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó [Belles-Lettres Publishing] began to consider the re-evaluation of Franklin's edition of Shakespeare.' This move was in line with the centralised cultural policy characteristic of Hungary in

the second half of the century: no matter how popular the previous translations were, they were not canonical, and their value had to be reassessed by professionals. However, Borbás's minutes of the meetings reveal conflicting approaches to translation.

'We had extremely heated debates', Borbás recalls. The main question was 'whether it is a sacrilege to revise classical translations', and opinions ranged from heavy opposition through the advocating of minor changes to that of heavier editing. There was a sense of two competing values, that of the sanctity of the original (Shakespeare), which had to be communicated as faithfully as possible, and the almost equally high status of the prestigious translations. Poet, writer and dramatist Gyula Illyés was in favour of revision, as the translations were not 'Petőfi's or Vörösmarty's original thoughts.' He stated that '[t]he problem is not that Arany's Shakespeare-manuscripts have burned away, it would be a bigger problem if even one of his poems was missing' (Szele [n.d.]). He had a very specific vision for the new translations: 'We would like to create a literary past at last; let us have permanent poles, usable, good Shakespeare translations.' There is an interesting paradox inherent in his argument: existing translations are not sacred, and therefore can and should be changed to create what *will* be 'permanent poles', unchangeable, canonical works that will be read by all subsequent generations. 'Let us have perfect translations in our literature, let us stage them, the most important thing is usefulness', he continued. 'It is a great service to Vörösmarty and Petőfi that their translations will be the eternal Hungarian Shakespeare.' When someone suggested that King Lear should be translated anew by Lőrinc Szabó, he protested: 'We are trying to save Vörösmarty, if Lőrinc Szabó translates it, we can bury Vörösmarty' (Szele [n.d.]). Although he clearly prioritised the source texts that translations try to capture for 'students

and workers who want to enjoy Shakespeare, not literary gossip', he also saw this as a means to protect 'our classics,' the translators' work.

There was also some disagreement over what new translations to include in the publication. A translation of *Othello* by Dezső Mészöly was considered and discarded because, although theatrical circles preferred this translation to the alternatives, 'it is Shakespeare we want to publish and not Mészöly' (Szele [n.d.]). Borbás provides an explanation for this, pointing out that 'Mészöly was not yet fully accepted in "more elegant" literary circles' (Szele [n.d.]).[5]

Borbás finishes the interview with an amusing yet revealing anecdote: when the proof-sheet was presented to the director of the publishing house, he was infuriated and demanded that the names of 'our great classics' – Arany, Vörösmarty, Petőfi – appear in bold to distinguish them from 'ordinary' translators. The desperate Borbás turned to Gábor Devecseri, translator and Major in the People's Army. He put on his uniform, visited the director and 'defended' the rest of the translators, so in the end all the names were printed in the same font (Szele [n.d.]).

This plurality of opinions regarding the status of particular translations, as well as the function of translation in general, signals a changing theory of translation in the 1950s. Attempts to preserve canonical originals through translation had to be reconciled with the desire to make these originals available to a wider audience through modernisation as well as the desire to preserve the translations that had become canonical themselves. What is clear from Borbás's account is that the individual translator's reputation was crucial in the assessment of the translation itself, that being a translator was considered a privilege

[5] Mészöly later became vice president of the Hungarian Shakespeare Committee and received ample recognition for his work, including one of Hungary's most prestigious awards, the Kossuth Prize, in 1999.

and as such only the best – or the most prestigious – could partake of it as far as state-controlled publications were concerned.

Conclusion

Hungarian translation in the first half of the twentieth century was very much translator-centred. In critical terms this can be described as a reversal of Venuti's model of the invisible translator. This approach was epitomised by the *Nyugat* generation in the early twentieth century but continued well into the 1950s. It was still dominant in 1955, although other concerns, such as preserving the original work of the author, also played an important part in the discussions surrounding the 1955 Shakespeare edition. The Revolution of 1956 brought about a paradigm change: as all literature was supposed to serve one goal, the good of society, clarity became a fundamental requirement for translations. 'An artistic work that contained elements that were difficult to define or understand were [*sic*] considered unpublishable' (Scholz 2011, p.208). There was no room left for innovation, playfulness, experimentation or self-reflection. Attention was turned to the classics, because they offered 'authority, continuity, legitimacy, and education for the people, and, above all, they efficiently restrict[ed] the notion of progress' (Scholz 2011, p.208).

Communism in Hungary came to an end in 1989, and translation has since undergone significant changes. There are signs suggesting that contemporary Hungarian translation has moved closer to the English and American paradigm. In a 2011 interview Borbás explains that

> [u]sually the translator receives very little feedback. They are glad if their name appears at all, say, on a cover, or if they are mentioned in a review. These days I keep getting reviews of new books from Bookline[6] – the translator's name is never ever indicated. So feedback is haphazard, shall we say. The reception of a book is really the

[6] A Hungarian bookstore chain.

> publisher's joy or pain. The translator is always the last on the list. (Anon. 2011)

Borbás's words evoke Venuti's assessment of the situation of the marginalised translator in British and American cultures. This suggests a literary milieu very different from that in which Kosztolányi proudly announced that he had rendered 'The Raven' in Hungarian 'with words filtered through my own blood.' In her analysis of the Hungarian translation of the *Harry Potter* books, Márta Minier (2004, p.154) calls the translator, Tamás Boldizsár Tóth, 'an exception to the general tendency of the invisibility of the translator.' Contemporary Hungarian translators are as badly paid and excluded from reviews as Venuti's invisible translators. However, it remains to be seen how much actual translation practice – the translator's approach to the source text, as opposed to the translator's place in literary culture – has changed. Close readings of twenty-first-century translations would reveal whether fundamental differences between Hungarian and English translation still exist, and whether Hungarian translators still inscribe their personalities on the text at the expense of making the author visible.

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