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## Playboy, Hero, Champion – Retranslations of J. M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* in Hungary

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*Keywords: retranslation, J. M. Synge, drama translation, Hungarian drama translation*

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### Abstract

*This paper looks at four Hungarian translations of John Millington Synge’s play, The Playboy of the Western World (1907) – the published first translation that introduced the Irish writer’s work to Hungarian readers in 1960 and three retranslations commissioned for specific theatre performances of the play (Nádasdy, 2004; Benedek, 2013; Hamvai, 2019). Through the case study, the paper investigates the ways in which Synge’s modern classic, rooted in the historical specificity of the Irish cultural nationalist movement in the early twentieth century, is enabled to speak, through translation and retranslation, to Hungarian audiences from 1960 to the present. The exploration of retranslations focuses on the rendering of unique language use in dramatic literature, in this case, dialect. The Hiberno-English dialect of the play is its most conspicuous and challenging feature, partly because it has manyfold functions not easily transferrable for a non-Irish audience. The retranslators of Synge’s play approach the problems posed by translating dialect in various different ways, which in turn leads to the reaccentuation of different aspects of the play. The paper concludes considering the impact of retranslation on the play’s presence in Hungary with the observation that the strategies (re)translators use for rendering the play’s unique language is motivated by the context of the specific production, but in general, retranslation contributes significantly to the canonization of the play in Hungary.*

### Retranslation of drama as event

Discussions of drama translation often start with outlining the unique complexities that drama texts pose for translators and theorists alike because of the dual nature of dramatic texts as both literature and performance. Drama belongs to two different systems: as a piece of literature that is published and read, drama is part of the literary system. At the same time, as a script for a specific performance, a dramatic text also belongs to the theatrical system. Theorists have grappled with the question of how translation should relate to this duality, and, most importantly, what implications this has for the translator’s task.<sup>1</sup>

Drama translation, therefore, is often seen as a process that implies “simultaneous transfer into two forms of communication: monomedial literature (reading) and polymedial theatre (performance)” (SCHULTZE 1998: 178), and the reconciliation of these two allegiances of dramatic texts during translation seemed to be an inextricable

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed historical overview of the theory of drama translation, see Inmaculada Serón-Ordóñez “Theatre translation studies: An overview of a burgeoning field.”

conundrum and a subject of much theoretical discussion. It is realistic to claim, however, that a specific translation privileges one of these two systems, that is, the translation of a dramatic text is either produced as a text intended primarily for publication and reading, or it is commissioned and translated for a specific production of the play. As one of the first scholars dealing extensively with theatre translation, Susan Bassnett emphasizes, drama translation involves a decision on “whether to translate the text as a purely literary text, or to try to translate it in its function as one element in another, more complex system” (BASSNETT 2002: 129). The methods and strategies of the translator then are governed and motivated by this choice, which is not entirely of the translator, as indeed, the conditions of the commission translators receive has a considerable impact as well.

Because of the double nature of drama, performability and related notions often appear in connection with retranslation, usually cited as underlying reasons for creating a retranslation that is claimed to be better suited for a specific new performance than earlier ones. Also, the demands of performability are often used to justify idiosyncratic retranslation strategies and radical alterations introduced to the text, especially when the retranslation differs markedly from the first translation.

Translation and retranslation of drama are impacted by another crucially important aspect – the implications of theatre as an event, a communal experience embedded in the present. The rootedness of live theatre performance in the present, created to take place in a specific context for a specific audience, makes demands on the translation of the playtext. First, every specific production of a play is one of the countless potential stage realization of the play, consequently, every production is a unique interpretation of the text by the director and actors. A revival of a play needs to speak meaningfully to its new audience, and the role of the director and other theatre practitioners involved is to anchor in the presence of its audience a play written and performed in the past. In other words, a new event is created, offering a reinterpretation and re-accentuation of the original text, and theatre practitioners often feel it can be done most successfully through the play's retranslation. The notion of re-accentuation is useful to describe what is happening in retranslation, in the words of Peeters et al., “re-accentuation is a way of conceptualising the historical process of continuous reinterpretation of the classics” (PEETERS in the present collection; PEETERS & SANZ GALLEGÓ & PAULIS 2022).

Drama (re)translation is then an essential element of the event of the staging of a play in the concrete sense. At the same time, retranslation itself – and especially drama retranslation – may also be conceptualized as event. Peeters, in the present volume, claims that “retranslations should be defined not as new translations of the same text in the same language, but as new events in the foreign reception process of a work by which new translations bring changed interpretations, in changed languages, and changed target contexts” (PEETERS in the present collection). The event nature of the stage production of a retranslated play tends to generate a series of significant textual changes to earlier translations, so retranslation in this sense functions very much like (and in fact

is often the textual basis for) theatrical adaptation.<sup>2</sup> Similarly to an adaptation, a re-translation is bound to have a different linguistic shape and creates new resonances with the target audience, and the interpretation it offers differs from the interpretations earlier translations made possible – with every retranslation the process of re-accentuation takes place, that is, “the transferral of the original text and its characters to the novel soil of a different language and culture, which inevitably leads to a proliferation of multivalent meanings” (GRATCHEV 2022: 2). Consequently, questions of closeness that often arise regarding retranslation are peripheral to theatre retranslation as the new translation inevitably responds to the demands of its own context rather than to expectations of ‘faithfulness’ to the original text. The case study of the subsequent translations of Synge’s play into Hungarian will support the observation, especially relevant to the retranslation of dramatic texts, that “retranslation is a function of the dynamics of the target context, rather than a response to any inherent properties of the source text” (GÜRÇAĞLAR 2009: 236).

The most conspicuous of the inherent properties of the source text discussed here, J. M. Synge’s play, *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907), is that it is written in a strong Hiberno-English dialect, which in itself poses an enormous challenge to translators of the play. The solution for rendering the play’s dialect takes strikingly different forms and the various retranslations re-accent different aspects of Synge’s work. It is important to note that Synge’s use of Hiberno-English dialect has important functions, both ideological and poetological. Synge’s use of dialect takes on larger ideological significance apart from providing realism or local colour to a play about Irish peasants. Writing a play in Hiberno-English for the Dublin literary theatre is an act of resistance to the colonial status, a challenge to the dominance of British standard English in the theatre, and British cultural domination in general, through elevating the Irish English dialect to the level of literature. Synge’s use of dialect in his play has poetological implications, too: the unique dialectal language is the source of the heightened lyricism and poetic quality of the play. At the same time, certain features of the play’s language including its eclecticism contribute to its powerful verbal comedy element. Retranslators’ opting for a specific strategy to render the dialectal language in the Hungarian retranslations inevitably foreground some of these aspects of Synge’s dialect while other aspects fade away.

### ***The Playboy of the Western World* – the politics and poetics of dialect**

Synge’s play, written and performed in 1907 in Dublin, is deeply embedded in its very specific cultural and political moment – the Irish Literary Revival, a cultural nationalist movement whose ambitious aim was to construct a strong and independent Irish culture for a nation on a course to claim its political independence of Britain. The play, however, is far from being a narrowly nationalistic play; it is a rich exploration of the

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<sup>2</sup> On theoretical discussions relating to the overlap between translation and adaptation see Laera (2019), Ladouceur (2012), and in Serón-Ordóñez (2014).

power of imagination and language to construct identity, a theme central to Irish nation-building at the time.

The play's plot revolves around a meek, downtrodden young man, Christy Mahon, who arrives as a stranger in a Mayo village to take refuge after allegedly murdering his domineering father. In the course of the play, Christy gains the admiration of the peasant community thanks to his imagination and poetic language use. Consequently, he becomes a self-assured and confident man who can liberate himself from the abuse and oppression his father inflicted on him. The theme of the liberating and self-constructing power of language and imagination was central to the ideas of the Irish Literary Revival, whose representatives believed in the potential of art to empower the people of Ireland and to change the cultural and, consequently, the political landscape of the country.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, the language of Synge's play has a crucial cultural and political role – in a decolonizing, resistant move, the playwright intends to elevate the language of the rural inhabitants of Ireland to the level of literature. Synge uses the Irish English dialect, or Hiberno-English, which is significantly different from standard British English in terms of grammar and vocabulary. It is a so-called macaronic language, a mixture of Irish and English, characterized by a multitude of "irregular English grammatical structures" (DOLAN 1998: xxi), thanks to the presence of the Irish language substrate.

To create a literary Irish English, Synge artistically reconstructed a rural dialect, which is a patchwork of everyday Irish English dialects infused with lyricism and exoticism, which suited the Revival's aims to "put on stage the deeper thoughts and emotions of Ireland" and "to build up a Celtic and Irish school of dramatic literature" (GREGORY 1914) showing the dignity and heroism of Irish peasantry. Synge drew on what he saw as Irish "popular imagination that is fiery and magnificent and tender" (SYNGE 1981: 175) and produced a play where "reality" and "joy" were brought together on stage at the Abbey Theatre, the Irish national theatre, founded in 1904, for the advancement of a distinctive Irish drama.

The idiosyncratic Irish-English dialect Synge created for his plays highlights a paradox at the heart of the cultural nationalism of the Irish Revival – to construct their Irish national identity, Irish writers had the language of the colonizer at their disposal because by the late nineteenth century, the majority of the population had gradually become English monolingual speakers. Synge's response to this paradox was that "If he must write in English, (he) was resolved to write in an English as Irish as it is possible for English to be, an English into which toxins of the Gaelic mode of speech and syntax had been injected" (KIBERD 1979: 199).

What is Synge's dialect like? "In a good play every speech should be as fully flavoured as a nut or apple" (SYNGE 1981: 175), the playwright says in his preface to *The Playboy of the Western World*, his major play that is a perfect embodiment of his *ars poetica*. The language of the play is, on the surface, a realistic representation of the language used by

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<sup>3</sup> On Irish revival drama and cultural nationalism, see for instance Trotter, M. (2001) or Watson, J. G. (1994).

real-life Irish peasants, but “at the same time, the dialect is a studied artifact, exploited by Synge for poetic and dramatic purposes” (GRENE 1985: 60). The characters’ speeches closely resemble the simple, unsophisticated language used by the peasants of the West of Ireland<sup>4</sup>. However, the language is far from a straightforward rendering of Irish English, but an artificially and artistically created dialect. Synge imaginatively constructed a dialect based on the dialects of counties Kerry and Mayo, and that of the Aran Islands, and to this mix, he added archaic expressions, direct translations from Irish into English<sup>5</sup>, and even phrases he invented. His “dialogue is literally synthetic, in that he brings together dialect features from various parts of the country to suit his dramatic purposes” (GRENE 1985: 62). The result is a strange language full of vitality and energy, which Dublin audiences would recognise as unusual and even exotic, and as a result, highly poetic.

The rendering of dialect into another language and culture is one of the most challenging tasks, but translators of *The Playboy of the Western World* face an insurmountable obstacle in conveying the effects and connotations of Hiberno-English being the language of the play primarily because here “the language variety of the original play may have served an instrumental function which cannot be retained in the translation” (AALTONEN 2010: 108). Indeed, in the very different context of twentieth-century Hungarian culture, the political dimensions of *The Playboy*, primarily the dialect functioning as a means to help build a confident national and cultural identity during the Irish nationalist revival, are impossible to retain.

Dialect translation presents the translator with difficult decisions also because dialect is where equivalence between languages is the least likely to exist. A source culture dialect cannot be successfully translated using a target language dialect because, inevitably, there is a risk of unintended, misleading meanings and negative connotations to emerge (MASON & HATIM 1990: 40-41). Whatever existing target language dialect is opted for as a medium to render the source dialect, it will likely raise associations for the target language audience that are entirely different to the associations triggered by the original dialect, resulting in a sense of incongruity at best. Thus, the solution is often a “conservative one (...) respecting the target language expectations,” meaning that the translator avoids “challenging it with non-standard variants” (FEDERICI 2011: 10). This, in practice, means the complete omission or neutralization of the dialect.

Alternatively, translators may opt for a more “experimental approach” (FEDERICI 2011: 10), that is, when they indicate in some way that the language of the source text is not

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<sup>4</sup> Synge’s claim to authenticity seems convincing, he notes, “as with my other plays, I only used one or two words that I would not have heard in the countryside of Ireland or in my own childhood room before I was a newspaper reader. I also heard some of the turns I used from shepherds and fishermen on the coast between Kerry and Mayo, and from beggars and ballad singers in the areas closer to Dublin” (SYNGE 1981: 174).

<sup>5</sup> A direct translation from Irish: ‘playboy’ = ‘buchachaill báire’; “star of knowledge,” the translation of an Irish expression that occurs in Douglas Hyde’s translation of Irish songs titled *Love Songs of Connacht* (1893).

standard literary or urban language. One of the options to signal the presence of a dialect is borrowing (keeping some of the source text's expressions, usually realia), while another one is creating non-standard, irregular language use when the target culture's rules of linguistic norms and standards (whether it is spelling, grammar, or vocabulary) are violated. Yet another strategy is when the translator constructs an artificial dialect of the target language. These solutions, however, all involve considerable risk of distortion and misplaced interpretation. The Hungarian (re)translators of *The Playboy* made their own decisions on conservative or experimental approaches depending on their individual agendas, artistic purposes, and the broader socio-cultural context of the theatre production the translation was commissioned for. As a result, the Hungarian versions of the play create very different images for Synge's work, but also secure his place within the Hungarian theatrical canon.

### ***The Playboy of the Western World* retranslated and re-accented in Hungary**

Discussing the translation of literary language, Mason and Hatim assert that "since an important feature of poetic discourse is to allow a multiplicity of responses among source language readers, it follows that the translator's task should be to preserve, as far as possible, the range of possible responses" (1990: 11). This is an expectation that alludes to an ideal solution, but it is rather untenable. This case study of four translations of *The Playboy of the Western World* examines how a literary text with a multiplicity of potential layers of meaning, most of which is inextricably linked to the socio-cultural conditions of the time of its creation, resists the rendering of several of these features in a different language and culture. Instead, the successive translations of *The Playboy* perform a re-accentuation of certain features of the play (e.g., comic effect or covert erotic references) while disregarding others (e.g., dialect and its ideological implications), but the continuous reinterpretation and the resulting reshaping of the play ensure that it has a vibrant, continuing life in the receiving culture and, as a result, retranslation solidifies its canonicity in Hungary. The case study, therefore, illustrates that "retranslating and literary canon formation are indeed mutually dependent: retranslations help texts in achieving the status of a classic, and the status of a classic often promotes further retranslations" (KOSKINEN & PALOPOSKI 2016: 294).

### **TT1 – Tamás Ungvári's "introductory translation": *A nyugati világ bajnoka* (The Champion of the Western World, 1960)**

Hungarian readers and theatre audiences were introduced to Synge's play through the translation of the renowned writer, literary scholar, and translator Tamás Ungvári in 1960. Among the four translations of the *Playboy* examined here, it is the only one that was not commissioned for a stage performance. It is an eminent example of what Aaltonen calls "introductory translation" created for "a large and diverse audience of readers and theatre practitioners" and most often than not, published as literature. An introductory translation has "no concrete link with a particular theatrical production,

and the overall trigger to the translation process is usually found either in the publishing industry or promotional cultural centres. The expected life span of such is long” (AALTONEN 2010: 107).

Ungvári’s translation is a scholarly and literary translation that follows the original text’s content and structure closely, while stylistically, the language is a combination of colloquial and poetic language use. The strong dialect of Synge’s play, its most conspicuous stylistic feature, is almost completely omitted along with most of the culture-specific elements. There is no attempt at transferring Synge’s Irish English dialect into 1960s Hungarian; Ungvári’s translation opts for domesticating the dialect: the characters speak standard, colloquial, fluent Hungarian. What signals the Irishness of the play is some very basic realia – Irish names and Irish geographical references, and the peasant milieu is conveyed by a small number of old-fashioned Hungarian expressions that indicate that the play is set in a rural area sometime in the past.<sup>6</sup>

The rendering of one of Christy’s most poetic lines illustrates Ungvári’s overall domesticating strategy. Christy woes Pegeen, saying, “Isn’t there the light of seven heavens in your heart alone, the way you’ll be an angel’s lamp to me from this out, and I abroad in the darkness, spearing salmons in the Owen, or the Carrowmore?” (SYNGE 1981: 218). The translation conveys the poetry of the line and keeps the geographical names, but the dialectal non-standard grammar prevalent in Synge is neutralized into fluent, grammatically correct, standard Hungarian speech. As a sign of further acculturation, one culture specific term, ‘salmon’ becomes ‘trout’, a fish native to Hungarian rivers.<sup>7</sup>

When a translator opts for omitting the culture specific features of a work – dialect or realia – to compensate for the perceived loss, paratextual devices are used: a preface, afterword or postscript, translator’s commentary, footnotes, or a combination of these (SZYMAŃSKA 2017: 66) offer information on the cultural context to readers and audiences. Ungvári added an informative postscript to the Hungarian translation of the play, which provides a wealth of information on Synge’s life and times, his works, and its historical context, i.e., the Irish literary revival movement. As a true literary scholar, to introduce and approximate the Irish author to Hungarian readers, Ungvári draws a parallel between Synge and a major Hungarian poet, Endre Ady, an exact contemporary of the Irish writer, when he notes that both Synge and Ady were victims of misunderstanding and severe criticism because Synge, very much like Ady, “was promoting an idea of a nation that grows out of not self-aggrandizing praise but self-criticism, and he had the integrity to face the historical weaknesses and mistakes of his nation through realism, standing alone in the middle of a powerful, romantic mainstream” (UNGVÁRI 1960: 74-75, my translation). Emphasizing the kinship between Synge and the iconic poet Endre Ady, Ungvári invites the Irish playwright and his work into the Hungarian literary system, paving his way to canonization in Hungarian.

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<sup>6</sup> zsandár (22), kolompár (11), csoroszlya (20), kegyed, jólelkű nőszemély (19), vagy sarabolás (41). Provide English equivalent.

<sup>7</sup> „A te szívedből a hetedik mennyország fénye sugárzik. Angyalok lámpácskája lesznek nekem pizstránglesen a sötét Owen vagy Carrowmore partján” (SYNGE 1960: 53).

The parallel may also be seen as an astute step in introducing Synge in socialist Hungary in the 1960s, as anything coming from Western Europe was looked at with suspicion, but aligning Synge with one of the greatest Hungarian writers could help to fend off any criticism on the part of the authoritarian cultural regime. Ungvári's introductory translation<sup>8</sup> proved to have a long lifespan; after the play premiered in 1960 theatres relied on his translation as an authoritative one for its revivals for four decades<sup>9</sup>, so the first translation is credited with introducing as well as establishing Synge's work in Hungary as a masterpiece of world literature. It was not until 2004 that a retranslation of the play by Ádám Nádasy appeared.

### TT2 – Ádám Nádasy: *A nyugat hőse* (Hero of the West, 2004)

Four decades after Ungvári's introductory translation, a new translation of *The Playboy of the Western World* was commissioned by Bárka Theatre in 2004. Unlike the introductory translation, a performance translation is "aimed at the reception in a particular theatrical context. It is intended to be received audiovisually, and its anticipated life span can vary from one production to many, even to an afterlife as an introductory translation" (AALTONEN 2010: 108). The new performance retranslation is the work of Ádám Nádasy, the renowned linguist, poet, and literary translator, who is also the most well-known and visible retranslator in the Hungarian literary scene: he has produced highly successful retranslations of a significant number of Shakespeare plays and Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and he even created intralingual translations when he updated the language of Hungarian literary classics. With a view to make classics accessible to younger generations, he modernized the outdated language of a classic play by József Katona, *Bánk Bán* (1819) and a poetic drama by Imre Madách titled *Az ember tragédiája* (1862).

Reflecting on his project of retranslating Synge's play, Nádasy emphasizes the idea that retranslation offers difference and novelty. He says he intended to update the language moving it closer to contemporary audiences. To achieve this effect, he tuned the dialogues towards a more urbane style of expression in contrast to what he describes as the Hungarian folk style of Ungvári's translation. Nádasy justifies this choice by saying that the country-inflected style was the norm in the 1960s for translating plays about peasants, but it is not suitable anymore for the play's new audience (SEBŐK 2004: 11). Nádasy's emphasis on his version's difference to the first translation reveals that, as Venuti notes, retranslations have a "crucial awareness [of pre-existing translations] and justify themselves by establishing their differences from one or more previous

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<sup>8</sup> Ungvári revised his translation for the 1986 collection of Synge's plays in Hungarian, titled *J. M. Synge: Drámák* (Plays).

<sup>9</sup> According to OSZMI, the Institute and Museum of Hungarian Theatre History, nine stage productions of the play used Ungvári's translation between 1960 and 2004. <https://szinhaz-tortenet.hu/results/-/results/84f45dd5-1aba-4d1e-a85e-21fb995c878f/solr/0/24/score/desc#displayResult>

versions” (VENUTI 2004: 25). Difference in retranslation equals “novelty”, a new translation has to be justified by offering something new. Translators’ own pronouncements, however, should be treated with circumspection as they can be “partial and biased” (TOURY 1995, 65), and indeed, as a careful comparison of Ungvári’s and Nádasdy’s translations reveals, the retranslation is not radically different to the first translation. It is true that the Nádasdy version is written in fluent, unadorned, everyday language, but it is not marked out as noticeably “modern,” the text does not feature linguistic elements like contemporary slang, jargon, or colloquial expressions that would create a strikingly or markedly present-day style. Nor does the retranslation entirely do without the vocabulary of rural people and dated expressions,<sup>10</sup> which were the outdated features, Nádasdy claims, in Ungvári’s first translation. This illustrates Peeters observation that “translations are not necessarily replaced because they have aged; it can also be the other way around: they are replaced and therefore presented as having aged” (PEETERS in the present collection). Especially in drama translation for a specific theatrical performance, extratextual aspects (including who commissions the (re)translation and for what purpose in what context) play a role in the ways discourse about the new, retranslated play is shaped; after all, the retranslation is the creation of a new translator, for a new theatre in a new, changed cultural context, and it has to be promoted as such to ensure its success.

The translation of the unique Irish-English dialect created by Synge is approached by Nádasdy very similarly to the first translator: overall, Nádasdy, too, follows the strategy of neutralizing dialect and domesticating culture-specific elements of the text. Nádasdy explains that, “since the translation was made for a stage performance, I considered the stage effect more important than philological accuracy. Therefore, I omitted some of the Irish references that are difficult for the Hungarian audience to understand (e.g., ‘Patcheen’, the nickname for Patrick) or replaced them with comprehensible ones” (SYNGE/NÁDASDY 2004: 1). The director of the production, László Bérczes agreed that lines with Irish themes should be cut, because as he saw, “It has its drawbacks if in a comedy something is too complicated, foreign, or not immediately understandable – it slows the play down” (SEBŐK 2004: 13).

Nádasdy, similarly to the first translator, balanced the neutralization of the original dialect and the omission of references to Irish culture by providing rich paratextual material in the offprint of the play’s text. Most importantly, a welcome addition to the play is Nádasdy’s translation of Synge’s preface expressing his *ars poetica* (it was not included in the first translation). The offprint also contains Nádasdy’s “translator’s notes,” where he outlines his approach to the retranslation of the play and shares useful and intriguing linguistic and cultural information that ranges from the correct

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<sup>10</sup> Shawn talking to Pegeen uses the verb “óv,” an old-style expression for ‘protect,’ hardly in currency among young people: „Akarod, hogy itt maradjak veled és **óvjalak?**” (SYNGE/NÁDASDY 2004: 5). Pegeen to Christy sounds decidedly old fashioned: “Mert maga igen **szemrevaló legény**, és **nemes tekintetű**” (5); or: “**Jócskán megfélemlenék** én is attól az embertől, **amondó vagyok**” (6). The expressions in bold are examples for a quaint, dated style.

pronunciation of Synge's name, through a discussion of the controversial premiere of the play in Ireland to its first Hungarian translation and production.

The translator's introduction to the playtext contains a series of footnotes, which explain various Irish culture related phenomena and expressions (including an explanation of poteen, jobbing jockeys, etc.) One of the most important culture-specific elements, the title, is discussed from the perspective of translation since every element of it poses a challenge to Hungarian translators. Nádasdy explains how "the Western World" has opposing connotations for Irish and Hungarian audiences as in the European, including Hungarian tradition, the phrase refers to the civilized (i.e., Christian) world, Europe, as opposed to the exotic East, Asia (SYNGE/NÁDASDY 2004: 2). In Hungary, a country that for decades belonged to the 'Eastern Block,' 'the West' has a further, culture-specific connotation: the word is closely associated with the notions of progressive, affluent, highly advanced democratic countries in Western Europe that Hungary was at the time excluded from. In the Irish context, however, 'The West,' raises very different associations: the play takes place in the westernmost part of Ireland, "the Western world," described in the play as "the lonesome west." Within Ireland, it is an area that is underdeveloped, backward, and rural. Largely due to these qualities, however, the West of Ireland served for the Gaelic Revival as the archaic and pastoral site of origins, untouched by modernisation and progress, where remnants of the pre-colonial Irish past, for instance, the Gaelic language, were preserved, so the West of Ireland provides a source of inspiration for many of the Irish Literary Revival writers. Consequently, even the closest, direct translation of "the western world" will unavoidably be interpreted by Hungarian audiences very differently from what it means in its source context.

The "playboy" element of the title creates a different problem. It demands creativity on the part of the Hungarian translator as the English word has been present in Hungarian as a borrowing, thanks to the publication of the magazine titled *Playboy* in Hungary since the late twentieth century, but of course the word has a very different meaning in Synge's play. Therefore, the translators all tried to find a solution that conveys the original meaning, and Ungvári's first, introductory translation that led to the canonization of the text in Hungarian opts for "bajnok" i.e., "champion;" in contrast, Nádasdy changes the word to "hős", meaning "hero." Changing the title used in the first, introductory translation already signals novelty, as it befits a retranslation that posits itself as new and different.

Overall, the first retranslation of *The Playboy* emphatically and purposefully differentiates itself from the introductory translation through certain translation choices (a new title, for instance), and even more emphatically through the paratextual material as a way of justifying that the retranslation is necessary and creates novelty. A thorough comparison reveals, however, that in terms of its overall translation strategy (its approach to dialect translation and modernizing the language of the play) the retranslation of *The Playboy* into Hungarian does not significantly or conspicuously differ from the first translation. The translator's and director's shared approach to dialect translation, that is, their decision that the dialect and Irish references should be domesticated

so as the comedy aspect is foregrounded diminishes the ideological and poetological function of the original dialect.

**TT3 – Zsolt Benedek: *A nyugati világ bajnoka* (The Champion of the Western World, 2013)**

In 2013, György Harag Company of the Transylvanian Theatre named Szatmárnémeti Északi Színház staged *The Playboy*, under the same title as the introductory translation. According to the program note, Zsolt Benedek, the dramaturg, retranslated the play relying on the English language original text, and he claimed he had “a dual purpose as he attempts, on the one hand, to render Synge’s flavoursome Irish dialect into Hungarian, and on the other, to make the play’s themes relevant in the contemporary reality of Transylvania” (szinhaz.hu, n. pag., my translation).

In order to foreground the representation of Transylvanian reality through the play, Benedek introduces textual changes on such a large scale that the retranslation is closer to an adaptation than a translation, and the re-accentuation process results in a play with significant differences in terms of both meaning and style. The carnivalesque dimension of Synge’s comedy, for instance, is foregrounded just like the folk, or peasant milieu, while the play’s lyrical qualities almost disappear.

Benedek has a novel approach to rendering the Irish-English dialect, and in the process, he changes the image of Synge’s play shaped by Ungvári’s and Nádasdy’s translations. Thus, his retranslation is posited as significantly different from the two preceding translations. Benedek departs from the neutralization strategy preferred by Ungvári and Nádasdy when he opts for creating an artificial dialect that combines existing target language dialects and pseudo-dialectal elements assembled by the translator. The result is a highly idiosyncratic Hungarian dialectal language created similarly to the method Synge used to create his play’s dialect, however, its function and effect obviously cannot be the same. Synge intended to represent the rich poetic imagination of the Irish peasants that fascinated him and, at the same time, he wanted to position the Irish-English dialect as the literary language on the Irish stage. In contrast, what Benedek’s artificial dialect achieves is the foregrounding of grotesque comedy and diminishing realism and poetry, and it also reduces the multiplicity of layers of interpretation the original text offers.

Benedek attempts to render Synge’s style into Hungarian through an eclectic artificial language, however, he goes even further in creating a unique style. The retranslation exhibits robust textual changes: first, the translator added a disproportionately large number of sentences and utterances to the original text and second, he introduces a torrent of tautological expressions to the speeches of the characters, creating a strong, new stylistic feature. Shawn’s and Pegeen’s speeches, in particular, abound in tautology, although there is little evidence of this in the original play. The constant, pointless and even inane instances of repetition become central traits of the characters. As a result of these alterations, the comic effect is strengthened, but at the expense of characterisation. The

villagers are portrayed as simple-minded, uneducated, inarticulate, and even primitive,<sup>11</sup> while their other qualities disappear. Overall, the sense of dialect is preserved, but it is exaggerated in an attempt to transpose the Irish peasants' idiosyncratic speech patterns in a way that it is identifiable as a dialect in the Transylvanian context.

The artificial language variety created by Benedek, just like Synge's, is synthesizing, consisting of elements taken from many geographical variants and linguistic levels of the Hungarian language, but the accusation levelled at Synge that his is an artificial and false language seems to be rather apt here. The artificial dialect is constructed of Transylvanian dialectal vocabulary (*berbécs, koslatott*), other colloquial expressions (*bandzsali* used in East Hungary), and obsolete forms (*ürdöng*, a word resembling archaic Hungarian words (but in fact used by József Romhányi in the animated TV series, *The fantastic adventures of the Mézga family*) and irregular linguistic structures typical of regional dialects (the sense of dialect is created through an overwhelming number of non-existent verb tenses); as well as phonetic transcriptions to indicate dialectal accent (*hóttat, tunnám, üjjön*). The presence of vernacular and artificial vernacular elements in themselves would not stand out conspicuously, but the density of their occurrence makes the play's language particularly contrived and more like a caricature of simple people's style.

Many added lines contain explicit sexual references, either to strengthen the grotesque humour of the play or to foreground the theme of sexual violence. Pegeen's words of praise for Christy's gift of fine talk are rendered rather explicitly: "Even cold old women would get wet from such words, and they would come back from the grave as young girls ..." (38, my back translation). One of the village girls, Sarah, however, has a lengthy speech referring to sexual violence present in the village community: "I carve a pendant out of it, God help me, I wear it around my neck, and if old Joseph Quinn attacks me again, I thrust it into him, God help me, straight into his asshole, saying: I was brave too, just like the lad who slayed his dad, God help me, he won't finger me anymore, he won't molest me anymore, God help me!" (SYNGE/BENEDEK 2013: 19, my back translation).

Benedek's retranslation strategy for rendering the dialect together with the changes introduced to the play's text re-accentuate, or even disproportionately magnify, certain features of the original work, for instance, the intellectual poverty of the villagers, the grotesque humour and the sexual innuendos that are traceable in the original but do not feature so prominently. At the same time, other characteristics – the poetry and lyricism of the language – become barely perceptible. The central theme of Synge's tragicomedy, the idea that language and imagination have the creative power to construct a new individual (and national) identity, is hardly perceptible.

Overall, Benedek's retranslation, or rather, adaptation, simplifies the stylistic and thematic complexity of the original play because what it re-accentuates is a rather self-

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<sup>11</sup> Shawn: "as if they could hear the nowhere, nowhere, nowhere, but a soul-something, once they're stilted with fear like it stils, eh." (2); Pegeen: "There is nothing here but the great stinking nothing, nothing, if that is what it is" (3); or "His language is heavy, but beautiful, even if it is heavy" (my back translation, SYNGE/BENEDEK 2013: 79).

serving grotesque humour linked closely to dialectal language. This approach may have been motivated by the retranslator's intention to render Synge's dialect for the target audience in a form that presumably allows Hungarian speakers in Transylvania to relate to the plot and characters on stage.

#### **TT4 Kornél Hamvai: *A nyugat császára* (Emperor of the West, 2019)**

The most recent retranslation of *The Playboy* for the Hungarian stage was created by writer, translator, and playwright Kornél Hamvai for a 2019 production of the play by Pesti Színház, a theatre in Budapest. Among the four translations discussed here, Hamvai's translation of the play into today's colloquial Hungarian is the most strikingly contemporary and, therefore, the most novel version. Overall, the rural Irish English dialect is transformed into contemporary language use, but it is not a standard 'literary' version of the Hungarian language, but one suffused with slang and profanities, so a more urbane sense of setting replaces the peasant milieu. Despite the dominant low-brow style characters communicate in, traces of the pervading lyricism of Synge's play are preserved.

Paratext is, again, an important part of project; Hamvai's retranslation is accompanied by footnotes, in which the translator discusses specific solutions and provides information on the cultural and literary history of the play. Hamvai notes, for example, that Synge's phrase, "the lonesome West," is directly borrowed by Martin McDonagh, the contemporary playwright and filmmaker, for his play, *The Lonesome West*; elsewhere, he explains that Shawn and Pegeen are waiting "on Father Reilly's dispensation from the bishops, or the Court of Rome" because they are first cousins who intend to get married. Hamvai talks of his decision to neutralize the strong dialectal nature of the original text, justifying it as an attempt to "avoid everything (linguistic archaism, culturally specific expressions) that would be incomprehensible to the Hungarian audience today when listening to a live dialogue on stage (SYNGE/HAMVAI). Instead of using or creating a peasant dialect, he says he decided to set the play in the present of its audience, rendering it in "lower middle-class colloquial language" (SYNGE/HAMVAI), and indeed, the highly fragmented structure of the dialogue and the prevalence of contemporary slang, jargon, swearwords, and vulgar expressions all work towards the creation of a sense of contemporary colloquial dialogue.

Pegeen's speech describing the village's inbred population illustrates this shift of style. She says,

*It's a wonder, Shaneen, the Holy Father'd be taking notice of the likes of you; for if I was him I wouldn't bother with this place where you'll meet none but Red Linahan, has a squint in his eye, and Patcheen is lame in his heel, or the mad Mulrannies were driven from California and they lost in their wits. We're a queer lot these times to go troubling the Holy Father on his sacred seat* (177).

The passage is full of irregular grammatical features that mark the language as a strong Hiberno-English dialect, which the translator renders into a speech that abounds in contemporary Hungarian colloquial expressions, including vulgar phrases. In back translation, the Pope has a “customer service”, and Pegeen warns Shawn that given their abject “image”, they should not be “fucking with” the Pope<sup>12</sup>. Most of the idiomatic and vulgar expressions are culturally specific ones rooted in the Hungarian urban audience’s contemporary reality.<sup>13</sup>

Apart from creating a sense of contemporaneity, the Hungarian retranslation also recreates the play’s grotesque humour. The lowbrow, urban characters’ idiosyncratic style (unintentionally distorted, and so humorous expressions) and vulgar language are combined with surprisingly poetic images, a combination that becomes the source of absurd and grotesque humour, a central feature in Synge play. During a fight, Christy warns his opponents: “Mert odabaszok még egy olyat, hogy itt mindenkinek az őrangyala lefossa a felhőt, amin ül” (61) (in my back translation: I’m fucking hit you so hard that all your guardian angels will shit the cloud they’re sitting on!) while Pegeen expresses her heartbreak at losing Christy: “Menj a picsába. *(fejére kapja a kendőt, panaszos)* A szívem megszakad, elvesztettem. A Nyugat császárárt elvesztettem örökre” (SYNGE/HAMVAI 2019: 66). (“Fuck off! My heart is breaking, I have lost him. I have lost the emperor of the Western world for ever.” My back translation).

The most recent retranslation of the play conveys to the Hungarian audience Synge’s vibrant, energetic language use and the grotesque humour it often brings about. In doing so, Hamvai updates the dialogue and shifts language use towards an intensively contemporary, energetic, and humorous style that triggers verbal humour that often verges on vulgarity. What in Synge was simple peasant people’s talk, in Hamvai’s translation becomes urban lowbrow parlance, both recognisable and surprising for twenty-first-century audiences, recreating the effect of the unusual style of dialogue had on its first Dublin audience. The retranslation offers yet another new image for Synge’s work, one that blends into its new twenty-first-century Hungarian context, re-accenting the play’s carnivalesque aspects.

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<sup>12</sup> My backtranslation of the Hungarian version: ”Pont a pápa, Shawn, annak van ingerenciája veled foglalkozni az ügyfélszolgálatán. Ezzel a nyomortanyával. Hát a szmöre Linahan bandza, a Patcheen bokából lifeg, az egész Mulrannie család meg túl örült volt még Kaliforniához is, és kiutasították őket. A mi imázsunkkal, tudod, nem kéne nekünk innen, mostanában, a pápát baszkurálni” (SYNGE/HAMVAI 2019: 3).

<sup>13</sup> Slang expressions: “elrohadt a lábam,” “itt nyugi van,” “vagyon elleni tényállás” (8), “menő gazdálkodó,” “hülyeségeket tudsz ám beszélni” (9), “kibarchobázod,” “partvis” (10) “tökös gyerek,” “zombik” (12), “besokalltál” (15), “kicsinálta a férjét” (19), “csajoztál,” “hozza a rutinosat” (32), “rohadt korán,” “annyit ment, hogy eszméletlen” (24), “debil nyálgép,” “gajra mentem” (49). Swearwords and vulgar expressions abound too: “hazudós kurva” (14), “amatőr szarlapátoló proosztóknak,” “kurvaélet” (27), “Akurva! Ilyen nincs, jézusisten bazmeg!” (36), “a halál faszára küldik magukban” (17). Provide backtranslations.

## Conclusion

Dramatic texts, along with sacred texts and canonical literary works, are the most frequently retranslated literary texts (GÜRÇAĞLAR 2009: 233). A modern theatre classic, Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*, saw its first translation in Hungary in 1960, and since then, it has been retranslated three times into Hungarian. The play's rootedness in its immediate cultural and political reality, the Irish Revival movement, and the use of strong rural dialect would not warrant such an interest in the re-interpretation and retranslation. However, like all great literature, Synge's play deals with complex themes exploring the human condition and makes possible several layers of interpretation. It is a coming-of-age story, a story of first love, a story of liberation, and, most importantly, it is also a story about the power of language and imagination to construct identity and a story about the role of peer's appreciation in nurturing a healthy, strong self. Powerful dialogue, the combination of lyricism and grotesque humour, and credible psychological motivation behind the absurd and comic actions of the characters all make *The Playboy* a rewarding and valuable drama for twenty-first-century audiences beyond the borders of Ireland.

As performance translations, all three Hungarian retranslations of the play are motivated by the conditions related to the specific performance they were created for. Nádasdy's first retranslation comes nearly four decades after the introductory translation published. This significant temporal gap is used automatically to claim the alleged aging of the first translation, and consequently, in the paratextual material added by the translator the retranslation is posited as a necessary updating of the text. Nádasdy, an erudite scholar and acclaimed writer, created a scholarly and, at the same time, writerly literary translation, which, however, does not radically differ from the first translation – it applies the same domesticating strategy for dialect and realia, while the modernisation of the language of the dialogue is not conspicuous. The next two retranslations are more vehemently performance-oriented and offer genuine novelty in their treatment of the original text's idiosyncratic linguistic and stylistic features. Benedek emulates Synge's method in creating an artificial rural dialect of Transylvania for the Transylvanian theatre company's production and foregrounds the grotesque, carnivalesque humour, re-accentuating, an even exaggerating these stylistic features of the play to the point of burlesque. The most recent retranslator, Hamvai uses a modernised, urban language for a theatre in Budapest and the emphasis is also on the comic through the translator's amplification of lowbrow, vulgar colloquial style. The Irish cultural, socio-political layers and meanings that stem from Synge's engagement with the colonial conditions of Ireland seem to resist (re)translation into Hungarian as they do not resonate with the historical specificity of the particular contexts in which these retranslations were produced.

The three retranslations, with their re-accentuation of the play's various aspects, all create a meaningful event for their Hungarian-language audiences whether in Budapest or Transylvania. These case studies illustrate that retranslations, or, "multiples of one" in Deane-Cox words, "should be viewed as instantiations of the interpretive potential of the source text" (DEANE-COX 2014: 18). Retranslation is a creative cultural activity

that extends in time and spreads geographically the capacity of the source text to offer new interpretations and experiences for a new audience. Doing so, retranslation also enhances the visibility of the source text, contributing to its canonization in the receiving culture.

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