

**Lilla Kárpáti**

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## Lilla Edit Kárpáti

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As the slogan in the 2024 video campaign of The Hungarian Association of Literary Translators states, “[a] szerző ismert, a fordító láthatatlan” (the author is known, the translator is invisible).<sup>1</sup> The Association makes a clear allusion to Lawrence Venuti’s widely discussed theory of the invisibility of the translator<sup>2</sup> so as to bring the translator’s figure to the forefront of cultural awareness. The volume entitled *Klasszikus művek újrafordítása* (The Retranslation of Canonical Works) edited by Adrienn Gulyás, Judit Mudriczki, Enikő Sepsi and Géza Horváth aligns well into contemporary aspirations to “demystify” (c.f. VENUTI 1995) the translation process by providing an extensive look into the Hungarian literary (re)translation practice and theory. Canonical works of English, Russian, German, and French origin appear in the focus of its chapters demonstrating the lively richness of Hungarian literary culture. Indeed, as several authors in the volume, e.g. László Márton and András Kappanyos, point out, retranslation can be seen as a testimony of a work’s liveliness, which Massardier-Kenney calls the “success of translation [...] [as it] provide[s] a space in the receiving culture and language” (2015:78) to the foreign language originals. Therefore, the volume is not merely an inspiring collection of expert knowledge but a dedicated “creed” of translation as well.

The book presents the results of two professional events organised by a research group interested in translation and intercultural studies at Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary on 16 November 2018 and 4 December 2019. Structurally, it is divided into four sections preceded by the editors’ foreword, and it ends with a chapter introducing the authors of the volume. The four sections guide the reader through a substantial segment of literary history and its related questions of (re)translation in the following chronological order: 1) Canonical works from Medieval and Renaissance Europe in Retranslation; 2) European Classics from the Age of Enlightenment until the 19<sup>th</sup> Century in Retranslation; 3) 20<sup>th</sup> Century European and American Prose in Retranslation; and 4) The Theory and Practice of Translation and

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<sup>1</sup> All translations in this book review from Hungarian into English are mine. The video campaign “Főszerepben a fordító” is available on You Tube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d8dPjDHVokY&list=PLA9BLeTEFUR8pdQghP-PlsupkwTmI-UEo1>.

<sup>2</sup> VENUTI, Lawrence (1995): *The Translator’s Invisibility: A History of Translation*. London – New York: Routledge.

Retranslation Today. The contributions are of various genres: essays, treatises, workshop diaries, transcriptions of roundtable discussions, and even a book review can be found among the titles.

The first section offers four chapters on retranslations of Medieval and Renaissance literature. Andrea Nagy, who co-translated *Beowulf* with Ágnes Kata Miklós, introduces the challenges translators of Old English poetry and specifically of *Beowulf* face when examining the unique alliterative poetry and language use of its own time, highlighting the need of extensive familiarity with scholarship written on this topic. Nagy's further emphasis on the ambiguity of words might be considered the most intriguing part of the reading as it frames *Beowulf*'s translations as a fascinating study material, which represent *together* the complex richness of the Old English poem. In the second chapter, László Márton shares his views on *The Nibelungenlied* and presents the retranslation process as a dialogue with the author and a debate with previous translators. In the 19th century, Károly Szász, the former translator, Márton supposes, possibly wished to pair the poetry of János Arany, the most prestigious and influential poet in his time, with the Nibelung tradition while translating the poem. Whereas Márton aimed to highlight the intentions of the anonymous German poet to revitalise the work in the 21st century, while confronting ambiguity, the questions of poetic form, logical "mistakes" and a sometimes homodiegetic narrator. Thirdly, Adrienn Gulyás offers an enjoyable chapter discussing the Hungarian translations of Rabelais's *Gargantua*. By concentrating on the humour and obscenities in the novel, Gulyás points out the previous translators' bashful approach in censoring or euphemising the said features through which they essentially deprived both the work and the author of their indispensable characteristics. In addition, Gulyás also provides interesting comparisons between the translations highlighting the nuanced importance of portraying lower bodily functions. The last chapter in this section focuses on yet another genre, Shakespeare's Renaissance drama, with Ádám Nádasdy, a highly renowned Hungarian (re)translator and linguist, discussing addition and omission in his own Shakespeare translations. Nádasdy argues that in faithfulness to Shakespeare's originals, the translator should not merely concentrate on the content and length of lines but on their dramatic effect as well. The categories reviewed by the translator include rhyming, humour, and syntactic clarifications, but he also emphasises the length of words on which Shakespeare likely built his texts.

The second and lengthiest part of the volume consists of five chapters from both translators and critics of post-Enlightenment literature and philosophy. András Fáber offers a highly detailed overview of Pierre Carlet de Chamblain de Marivaux, marivaudage style and theatre even to unfamiliar readers, however, leaves relatively short space for the discussion of the challenges he faced while translating the *La Nouvelle Colonie* into Hungarian. He recollects that he had to let go of portraying the societal differences between the characters to put enough emphasis on the work's feminist motif. Ultimately, the chapter works as a translatory argument for the contemporary value of Marivaux's plays. The next chapter by Veronika Ruttkay is very impressive, although it does not specifically focus on retranslation but delineates manifold issues topical in the study of translation: the question of untranslatability, the history of comparative

literature, the cultural significance of folk poetry, the flower-seed simile of translation, and commerce between nations. Her paper discusses the poem “To a Mountain Daisy” by Robert Burns, and thereby lists relative flower motives in Hungarian literature arguing for the possibility of translation. Géza Horváth guides the reader into the world of German philosophy in the third chapter, which reviews his retranslation of, and thus claims contemporary value to, the works of Friedrich Nietzsche. It is exceptionally enjoyable to read about the indivisibility of language and Nietzsche’s philosophy, which asks a similar inventiveness from the translator as that of the author. Horváth also stresses the importance of transmitting style and tempo of a language in translation with a quote from *Beyond Good and Evil*. The fourth chapter is an interesting “odd one out” in the collection as Zsuzsa Csikai departs from Hungarian practices of retranslation and analyses the Irish dialectal translations of Chekhov’s *The Seagull*. Nevertheless, her words pose translation as a phenomenon that can transform and establish culture because the first Irish dialectal translation of the drama can be seen as the foundation of Irish national theatre. The unique directorial concepts of later translations testify to the impact of politics on theatre while also contrast foreignizing and domesticating approaches. The fifth chapter, written by Péter Ádám and Sándor Albert offers a portrait of Endre Illés, who was the director of the Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, one of the most dominant publishing houses before the end of the Communist regime in Hungary. The characterisation is exceptionally negative, which is strengthened by the authors’ detailed analysis of a characteristic paragraph from Illés’ insensitive, mistaken and stylistically wrong retranslation of Stendhal’s *The Red and the Black*.

The third part enters the 20<sup>th</sup> century with its four chapters and explores the notion of canonical status. In the first chapter, Dávid Szabó as an editor praises Ildikó Lőrinszky’s Hungarian retranslation of *Elles se rendent pas compte*, a 1974 novel written by Boris Vian and lists the reasons why the publishing house thought it necessary to retranslate this less significant novel. Therefore, it is not merely the decisions for retranslation that Szabó explores in his paper, but the exclusivity of the works that are deemed canonical. Among his arguments comes up the context of further retranslations and the stylistic mistakes in the previous translation. Kornélia Kiss offers a workshop diary as the second chapter of the section, dealing with the retranslation of Camus’s *The Stranger*, which she made with Péter Ádám. In this way, her contribution highlights the various advantages of “four-handed translation” (165) while also dismissing the notion or existence of timeless translations; retranslation, she argues, helps readers to remain connected to the given works and therefore, are necessary. At the end of her paper, she also includes a bibliography of reviews written on their translation. In the third chapter, Enikő Bollobás focuses on the highly controversial retranslation of Sallinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* by Imre Barna in 2018. Interestingly, Bollobás’s chapter characterises both the original and the first translation by Judit Gyepes from 1964 as a cultic work in their own linguistic context, moreover, refreshingly praises both translations. Even though her words resound more critical towards Barna’s literal title, she argues his translation is much livelier than Gyepes’s. In the last chapter of this section, Anikó Sohár enters the world of science-fiction with her thorough analysis of the sole

Hungarian translation of Isaac Asimov's short story collection, *I, Robot*. Sohár explores the Communist regime's impact on literary culture and the role of translation in domesticating a new literary genre. In addition, the author highlights the canonised status of Pál Vámosi's translation and its connection to the preferences of Hungarian readers for stylised, domesticated translations. At the end of her paper, she also provides a list of the numerous publications of the short stories and voices the pressing need for re-translation.

The fourth and last part of the book, which consists of five chapters, generalises its focus of retranslation to entail the translation of contemporary works as well. András Kappanyos's theoretical first chapter recounts translatory choices of register throughout history and voices the impact of the possibly changing prestige of such canonical works of European literature as *Hamlet*, *Alice in Wonderland* or *The Divine Comedy*. The author makes a contrast between virtuoso and domesticating, fluent translations and connects these types to the work's current prestige, however, stresses that translatory approaches change through time. Currently, he suggests, foreignizing translation prevails due to the widespread availability of information. The second chapter offers the transcription of a roundtable discussion on drama translation led by Enikő Sepsi between András Kozma, Zsolt Pacskovszky and Zsófia Rideg, dramaturges and translators. The conversation touches upon various French and Russian, older as well as contemporary plays stressing the difference of translating to stage and spoken language. Furthermore, new directorial concepts and approaches are recognised as a decisive basis for new translations. The participants also talk about the authorial tendency to write plays on given actors, and thus, highlight the importance of collaborating with actors in the finalisation of a given translation. Judit Mudriczki's third chapter presents the reader with an intriguing look into audiovisual (re)translation by analysing the Hungarian dubbings of four film adaptations of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. Mudriczki's thorough investigation of language use in both the English and the Hungarian versions frames the role of Lőrinc Szabó's translation in our contemporary Hungarian context as an equal to Shakespeare's original in English speaking countries. In other words, the conservative approach in audiovisual translation testify to the canonisation of the 1938 Hungarian translation by Szabó. The fourth chapter written by Johanna Domokos is exceptional in this volume as it reviews a German-language anthology of contemporary Hungarian poetry, *Dies wird die Hypnose des Jahrhunderts* edited by Orsolya Kalász and Peter Holland. As the author does not specifically deal with retranslation of canonical authors, this is the point where the book's section generalises. Domokos understands the process of translation as reenactment, a term borrowed from theatre studies, that revitalises the given literary work and thereby the recipient (literary) culture. Her suggestion appears quite palpably in the closing image of the hypnotic phoenix. In her appendices, Domokos provides an extensive list of Hungarian literature published in German. The last chapter contains the transcript of the second roundtable discussion, in which Enikő Sepsi conversed with Attila Jász, László Kúnos, Dániel Levente Pál and Vera Tönkö, editors and publishing professionals. This chapter offers an interesting look into the workings of publishing houses regarding the choice

of new authors and volumes for translation in Hungary today. The participants highlight the impact of PR marketing and word-of-mouth recommendations both in the choice and the sale of books, besides stressing the need for a widely read Hungarian platform for professional reviews. The closure of the chapter introduces a grant system that could support translators, and touch upon the distribution of Hungarian literature into foreign countries.

Altogether, *Klasszikus művek újrafordítása* is an enjoyable, well-edited, thought-provoking reading. I highly recommend it to everyone interested in the study of (re)translations in Hungary. As literature is an ever-growing winged creature, whom our translators continually revitalise into a visible phoenix, it is a great honour to read these analyses written by Hungarian scholars and retranslators.

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