

Shakespeare Translation and Taboo: A Case Study in Retranslation

Márta Minier

This article examines the critical discourse around two Hungarian versions of *Hamlet* by István Eörsi. The first one, from 1983, was commissioned by a prosperous theatre company, because the prestigious 1867 translation by the eminent poet János Arany was losing its appeal on the stage, mainly due to changes in the spoken language. Eörsi's first *Hamlet* is not a 'translation proper' but a dramaturgical revision of Arany's text. However, Arany's translation is so strongly canonised and so much part of the national cultural heritage that this new text met with many critics' rejection. Without having been commissioned, Eörsi translated the play again, with a new translation strategy. In the 1988 version he meant to provide a new text, translating the original into Hungarian rather than translating Arany into a contemporary Hungarian idiom. Still, he could not avoid leaving untouched a few well-known expressions and aphoristic quotations from Arany's work. This raises the question how much his second, 'proper' translation differs from the first in methodology. Both cases display a certain taboo around Arany's text at work.

This paper will examine the critical discourse around two Hungarian "translations" of Shakespeare's "*primus inter pares*" play, *Hamlet* by the playwright, poet and essayist István Eörsi. Before delving into the examination of taboo in the Hungarian translation history of Shakespeare, a brief overview of this part of Shakespeare's reception history in Hungarian culture seems necessary. Shakespeare - even though in radical cultural adaptations - first became available in Hungarian during the Enlightenment. The systematic, institutionalised translation of Shakespeare was urged in 1848 by the actor Gábor Egressy, but the venture, involving the great triumvirate of János Arany, Sándor Petöfi and Mihály Vörösmarty was unsuccessful because of the outbreak of the 1848-49 revolution and war of independence.

The first Hungarian Shakespeare Committee, consisting of poets, writers, actors and literary historians, was established in 1860, and the first collected Shakespeare (a series of nineteen tomes) supervised by them was out by 1878.

The centre of the Hungarian *Hamlet* canon is Arany's translation (1867). He was a careful, conscientious translator whose three Shakespeare translations (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Hamlet*, and *King John*) can be considered translations in a modern sense. Nevertheless, it is not only this character of his translation of *Hamlet* that let it endure for more than a century, without a strong rival appearing. His engagement in translating Shakespeare can be linked to his image as a "national bard." He is a "master of the Hungarian language" even in the rhetoric of some contemporary critics. The term "Ur translation" (ősfordítás) introduced by poet and critic András Ferenc Kovács aptly demonstrates the reverence and pathos attached to these translation classics (33). Miscellaneous translations of *Hamlet*, namely by Árpád Zigány (1899), Béla Telekes (1901) and Attila Szabó T. (1929) had no authority behind them to back them up and secure them a place in the canon (no matter how changeable that position may be). These scattered examples of retranslating classical translations are doomed to oblivion.

The issue of retranslating the texts with an artistic agenda that Arany had already translated only came up in the 1980s, when revised, as well as new translations of both *Hamlet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that were accompanied by heated debates. These texts were commissioned by theatre companies that did not feel comfortable with performing the century-old texts anymore. These practitioners claimed that Arany's almost archaic language did not match modern-dress performances and interpretations. With hindsight (writing in 2003), one can draw the conclusion that the new translations, such as Dezső Mészöly's (1996) and Ádám Nádasdy's (1999, revised 2001) have not "replaced" the prestigious canonical one; they have rather shaken up the canon by challenging the authority of highly revered texts, such as Arany's *Hamlet*.

There are a number of forums (such as academia, committees of the Hungarian Academy) as well as textual apparatuses (prefaces, forewords, afterwords, and other paratexts and metatexts) that - perhaps even inadvertently - contribute to maintaining the classical status of Arany's translation(s). For instance, the introduction to the 1972 edition of the collected plays of Shakespeare in Hungarian adamantly reinforces the canonical status of Arany's work. "Arany munkája a műfordítás felülmúlhatatlan remeke, klasszikus irodalmi hagyományunk nagy kincse" [Arany's work is an un-

surpassable work of literary translation, a great treasure of our classical literary heritage] (quoted Somlyó 1142).

There was, and to some extent, still prevails an intermediary practice between using the canonical translation per se and retranslating the classic from English, and this is the revised, dramaturgical adjustment of an existing translation (here: Arany's text) for the stage of the day. Such adjustments of the translations (which are indeed treated as "originals" in such enterprises) have been widespread and customary, if not ratified practices in (and probably beyond) the Hungarian theatre; however, attaching a name to these "in-between" or mongrel versions was rather unusual. This is what happened to István Eörsi's revised version of Arany's *Hamlet* (1983), which rapidly became famous and infamous as "Eörsi's *Hamlet*." We should bear in mind, however, that Eörsi's first version is a theatrical text with significant omissions (it is, in fact, a promptbook version), so it is not even a "full" text in a literary sense. (This is not an imperfection of the text, since it was not meant for readers in the first place). In spite of that, it has had a great influence on issues of literary and theatrical translations.

The first major debate concerning the retranslation of Shakespeare was inspired by this revision of Arany's translation done by Eörsi for the Csiky Gergely Theatre in Kaposvár, which was probably the leading provincial theatre at the time.¹ What Eörsi did in this first version was a reverential "rectification" of Arany's text. Even though he consulted an English edition, the main concern of this project was not retranslating the text from the original but prolonging the stage durability of Arany's text, re-dating the "Best before end" tag. Famous passages, such as the "To be or not to be" soliloquy or *sententiae* were left almost intact in the same form, as they were supposed to ring a bell for the audience.

In retrospect, Eörsi clearly recognises the shortcomings of his methodology. The problem seems to be the lack of a unified style or authorial voice in the translation. The revised (and interpolated) script had an uncanny feel to it, due to a juxtaposition of familiar and unfamiliar elements. Here is his recollection from our interview in 2002:

1. Note on István Eörsi (born 1931): a playwright, poet, essayist, dramaturge and translator. Many of his plays share a number of characteristics with the Hungarian theatre of the absurd. He has promoted American beat poetry in Hungary by translating poems by Allen Ginsberg and others and by organising poetry readings. During the communist era in Hungary, between December 1956 and 1960, he was imprisoned for political reasons. Eörsi is devoted to the cause of translating Shakespeare into a contemporary idiom. He is also a translator of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1980), *Coriolanus* (1985), *The Tempest* (1985) and *Othello* (1988, revised 1993).

When I took up the job, I decided to try and preserve whatever was unsurpassable in Arany's text. I got a loosely typed copy of Arany's text from the theatre, and I wrote my corrections on the line above. Of course, I didn't alter everything. The result was a catastrophe. Arany's translation is so much a part of our national heritage that the more educated members of the audience knew it very well, if not by heart. Familiar sentences ended up sounding very strange, or vice versa: an unfamiliar beginning would turn into a well-known phrase. Géza Fodor, the celebrated dramaturge, said it was not the characters fighting against each other but the two texts.

The rhetoric of the debate has a similar tone to what Douglas Robinson finds in various examples of Western discourse in connection with a taboo on translation (and occasionally retranslation, although the latter is not Robinson's main concern, and he does not treat retranslation as a separate issue). Beyond the intellectual level of the Eörsi debate, there seems to be an irrational dread of interference with the classic translation, which does indeed seem to have taken the position of "the original," "the authentic," "the sacred" text in Hungarian culture. The unofficial ban on retranslation can be viewed as a variation of the taboo on translation in general, since the widespread and canonical translation is regarded as the primary or originary text within cultural memory. Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier comment on the sacrosanct view of Shakespeare's oeuvre in connection with regard to rewriting in general. "[M]uch of the long history of appreciating and thinking about Shakespeare has stressed his unsurpassed originality, the sanctity of his texts, and the cultural taboo on presuming to alter them" (1).

In the debate over "Eörsi's *Hamlet*," literary magazines and review sections of newspapers directed attention to different opinions. Tamás Koltai, a leading theatre critic, argued for the re-translatability of Shakespeare texts that are already canonised, and thus, guarded translations. He emphasizes that retranslating these texts from the original is better than adjusting old translations to contemporary taste and the spoken language of the day. However, he maintains that some of Arany's translation of Shakespeare is unsurpassable. Thus, in principle, he acknowledges the idea of an adaptation of the Hungarian canonical text for contemporary spectatorship (and he stresses the needs of the theatre here) if the text is adjusted with inspired sophistication ("érzékeny ihlettel átigazítva"). It is an exaggerated and false reverence of Arany's text against which he raises his voice.

Ami nyugtalanító (és közügy), az éppen az újrafordításokat akadályozó, hamis kegyelet. Működik egy megfélemlítő mechaniz-

mus, már-már terror, ami költőt, műfordítót, színházat egyaránt lebéni. Ezért marad sokszor titkos színházi belügy egy-egy átdolgozás.

[What is unsettling about this - and this is a public matter - is the false worship blocking instances of retranslation. A terrifying mechanism - almost terror - is at work, which paralyzes poets, translators, and theatre alike. This is why many times revised versions remain a secret internal matter of a playhouse].

Paralysis is used as a metaphor here, but Douglas Robinson indeed describes a fear, or rather, horror of corporal punishment for translating or retranslating a sacred text. For instance - and apologies for this explanatory digression - Robinson provides a close reading of abbot Aelfric's (c.955-c.1010) letter to his (secular) patron, Aethelweard, explaining why he wouldn't translate the whole of *Genesis*. Robinson summarizes the monk's apology as follows. (He paraphrases Aelfric's words in what Dorrit Cohn would call a quoted monologue).

He insists, I didn't translate the whole book of Genesis, only half, so that if my translation should fall into the wrong hands, the danger would be minimized; and I'm not going to translate another word, so don't ask me to, lest I have to disobey you or break my word; and if some scribe introduces corruption into my translation, that's his problem, not mine, so don't come hurling your accusations at me. (Robinson 83)

Robinson tends to explain this with an irrational fear of taboo.

His words surge with scarcely suppressed fear, a fear that overrode even a direct command from his bishop, so that even in obeying it, he wheedled the command down to a mere half of the original (translate Genesis), did that half under polite but anxious and insistent protest, and stated flatly that he refused to do any more. [...] But this reassurance still wasn't enough for Aelfric. He still was terrified. He still felt his translation was not right, was dangerous. (Robinson 84)

To return to the debate around Eörsi's sacrilege, Tamás Koltai uses the terms *istenkisértés* (tempting the divine) and *sirgyalázó merénylet* (assail of abusing a tomb) when describing the argumentation of the other party. The language of discussion is interspersed with phrases reminiscent of ecclesiastical language, the idiom of a semi-sacred literary cult of Shakespeare (investigated closely by Péter Dávidházi in *The Romantic Cult of Shakespeare*).

The writer and literary historian Vargha responds to Koltai, who again replies criticising the cultic attitude of his opponent (3 June 1983). “Vargha Balázs [...] magát a jogot vitatja, hogy valaki egyáltalán makulát találhat Arany fordításán. Egy szent szövegen. Egy sérthetetlen klasszikuson. Ezt nevezem hamis tekintélytiszteletnek, még inkább tekintélyfétisnek.” [Balázs Vargha disputes the very right to find any spots in Arany’s translation. In a sacred text. In an inviolable classic. I call this false reverence of authority, or rather the fetishisation of authority].

A main difference underlying the two ways of thinking comes from the intellectual backgrounds of the two disputants. Vargha’s background is primarily in literature. For literary scholars, it is quite natural to view a canonized translation as part of the literary oeuvre of the translator, and thus, a “closed” text at least in its material form, yet, “open” in a broad sense: open to a variety of interpretations. In this context, it is understandable that there is some resistance to rewriting – that is, materially interfering with – an already completed work, even if it is a translation. Rewriting, which is an act carrying the connotations of copying, duplicating, mirroring, and, in any case, providing a double, poses a threat to the masterpiece status of a work, since the notion of masterpiece is associated with unrepeatable, incompatible and inherent values. Paradoxically, or rather, only paradoxically on the surface, a “measurement” of classics can be the degree and typology of its adaptation and translation, whether intracultural or intercultural. However, it would be logical exactly from a literary perspective to accept “new” translations (not influenced by previous translations of the same “original”) as alternative interpretations of the “original” and the intertextual network around it (potentially comprising the previous translations). Still, such translations often meet with animosity, and the second, third, etc., translation of a work in the same language does not come across as a different take on that work.

On the other hand, theatre-makers have a more practical attitude to the act of translation as well as to individual translations. A translation for them is a functional text, an aid in their direction of a performance – not necessarily a text they pay tribute to, but material they use and, occasionally, or more than occasionally, alter to their needs. Furthermore, it can work as a source of inspiration from which they can divert if they wish to. What Jakobson conceives of as intersemiotic translation is apparent in the theatre, where in the majority of the productions a primarily verbal text is adapted to the stage (cf. 145 and 151). (Yet one should keep in mind that theatre is not necessarily something verbal.) The main focus when “staging” a text obviously is not on the text, but on creating a good production with the aid of the text, even

though literary scholars often do not expect much more from a performance than paying tribute or doing full justice to the playtext. For this reason, a text highly canonical on literary grounds is not necessarily sacred for theatre practitioners; it can be cut or added to, it can be rewritten, and combined with other texts as well as paralinguistic elements.

Balázs Vargha is a representative of the side Koltai quarrels with. In fact, it is Vargha's brief article in the weekly *Élet és Irodalom* [Life and Literature] (22 April 1983) that encourages Koltai to express his views (29 April 1983). Vargha describes his viewing experience of a performance that uses István Eörsi's reworking of Arany's translation. He is appalled by a language that is neither Arany's nor anybody else's; it is a mixed version. However, he does not clarify here whether he would object to proper retranslations (done from an English original). He uses the Latin term *perfidia* (treachery, perfidy) to emphasise the unfaithfulness to Arany's work exercised by Eörsi. He finds faults especially with the fact that he hears even the (by now) aphoristic sentences in altered versions. He succinctly summarises what he perceives as iconoclasm in Eörsi's work: "Átdolgozta Aranyt. Átdolgozni merészelte." [He revised Arany. He dared to revise it]. He closes his article with a perfect example of the cultic idiom. "Hallják, mit fűtyül a tavaszi szél a Kerepesi temető érckoporsójánál? Hagyjatok békében nyugodni!" [Can you hear what the spring wind is whistling at the ore coffin in Kerepesi cemetery? Let me rest in peace.] Charging Eörsi and like-minded intellectuals with disturbing the peace of the deceased - with one of the gravest possible of sins - is again a well-known trick for those versed in classical rhetoric. However, this is a somewhat emotional conclusion to an argument.

Koltai in his next contribution to the debate (3 June 1983) brings the English translations of Shakespeare as an example to support the necessity of the Hungarian retranslations. He quotes Peter Brook from an interview with Caroline Alexander in September 1974. As Koltai reminds us, Brook explains that he had Ted Hughes translate *King Lear* from English into English because it was too archaic for the film he was preparing. This parallel is used by Koltai to respond to Vargha, when the latter argues that if the four-century-old English text is good enough for the English viewers, the century-old Hungarian text should also be suitable for the Hungarian audience. Besides, Koltai sheds light on the fact that Eörsi is far from being the first person to adjust Arany's (or Petöfi's or Vörösmarty's) translation; he is only one of the first persons to give his name to it. Again, one encounters the problematic issue of authorship and authority, name and power. There have been a number of "distorted" versions of Arany's translation(s)

on the stage, prepared by dramaturges or directors, but these were usually “nameless” versions. Koltai mentions these as home-made (or, theatrically speaking, rather house-made) adjustments (“házilagos szövegkiigazítások”). His cardinal example is Laertes’ famous phrase “Mi nézi Hamlet bíbelő kegyét.” This is Arany’s by now absolutely non-colloquial, and, thus, largely incomprehensible rendering of “for [. . .] the trifling of his favour” (Act I, Scene 3, line 5), which, as he claims, was turned into “Mi Hamlet széptevését illeti” [Regarding Hamlet’s courting] twenty years before his article. Now that Eörsi took responsibility for this kind of engagement openly, with his signature, he exposed his work to a series of attacks.

“Can one interfere with a translation of classic status by Arany?” (“szabad-e belenyúlni egy klasszikusnak számító Arany-fordításba?”), poses the question the translator and dramaturge József Czímer in his contribution to the debate in the weekly *Élet és Irodalom* (17 June 1983). Interestingly enough, he turns to Arany’s spirit (or should we say, ghost) to ask him whether he supports Vargha’s argument or not.

Szerintem, és még valaki szerint, akinek az álláspontjára többet adok, mint a magaméra, egyértelműen Eörsi István vállalkozásának és Koltai Tamás elvi álláspontjának van igaza. [...] Koltai Tamás feltételezné, mintha Arany János nem támogatná Vargha Balázst az állásfoglalásában. Én tovább mentem, és megkérdeztem Arany Jánost magát, mi a véleménye. És ő teljes egyértelműséggel Koltai elvi álláspontját támogatta. Márpedig drámafordítói kérdésekben én Arany véleményére adok a legtöbbet.

[In my opinion, and in somebody else’s opinion, which matters to me more than mine, it is evidently István Eörsi’s venture and Tamás Koltai’s principle that are right. Tamás Koltai seems to assume that János Arany doesn’t support Balázs Vargha’s claim. I went further and asked János Arany himself for his opinion. And he is fully convinced in backing up Koltai’s view. And, for that matter, I count on Arany’s opinion most when it comes to drama translation.]

Parenthetically speaking, there is a similar rhetorical figure later on in the translator Dezső Mészöly’s apology. In his *Shakespeare-napló* [Shakespeare Diary] Mészöly publishes an essay about the process of his translation of *Hamlet* (a more or less “new” text which, nevertheless, borrows about 150 lines from Arany). The translator directly addresses Arany in an imaginary monologue in this essay, contextualizing his indebtedness to Arany.

Mester, sokkal többet kaptam Nagyságodtól, mint azokat az átvett

sorokat. Követendő módszert és szemléletet kaptam. Nagyságod művészi merészsége ébresztett rá, hogy drámatolmácsoláskor sosem szövegeket, mindig szerepeket kell fordítani. S egymástól elválaszthatatlan költői és emberi nagyságod tanított meg, hogy mindig éberem figyeljem, hol tör fel a drámában a líra. S hadd mondjam meg: úgy érzem, Nagyságod “börtön-Dániájában,” abban a sok “rekeszben,” “dutyiban,” s azokban az egymást figyelő és besúgó figurákban nem csak a Tudor-uralom: a Bach-korszak is ott kísért. S hadd teszem hozzá: Mester, megéltünk egyet-mást mi is! Nem csak krónikákból tanultuk meg, milyen egy emberéletekkel játszó rendőrállam. Van miből gazdálkodnia a sokat tapasztalt magyar írónak, ha Shakespeare-fordításba fog.

[Master, I have received much more from your Highness than the lines I borrowed. I received a method and a way of thinking to follow. Your artistic intrepidity made me aware that when one translates drama, he has to translate roles, and not only texts. Your greatness that is poetic and human at the same time taught me to seek acutely and continuously where the poetic springs up in the drama. And let me tell you: I feel that in your Highness's prison-like Denmark with so many confines and wards, and in the characters peeping and spying on one another, it is not only the reign of the Tudors but also the Bach period that haunts.² And let me add, Master, that we have also survived one or two hard situations. It was not only from chronicles that we learnt about police-governed states that toy with human lives. A Hungarian writer has a good storage of experience to work from if he sets out to translate Shakespeare].
(Mészöly 256)

It is noteworthy that an imaginary, spiritual altercation is a recurrent strategy for justifying a position when it comes to Shakespeare translation.³ Returning to the Eörsi debate, Károly Szokolay takes a position in between. He allows for new translations, which, if successful, can enrich Hungarian

2. The Bach period was a rather totalitarian decade in Hungary after the defeat of the Hungarian war of Independence in 1849.

3. A similar past-evoking technique is used in an imaginary interview with ‘national poet’ Sándor Petőfi, which is the theme of a short story by Mészöly. In “Füstbe ment interjú Petőfi Sándorral” [An Unmaterialised Interview with Sándor Petőfi] Mészöly uses Petőfi's name and authority in order to voice his own opinion about the different aspects of Petőfi's reception (mainly Sándor Márai's allegedly ignorant and superficial underrating of Petőfi and others) and negative changes in Hungary since the poet's time.

literature, but he does not think these are necessitated by the supposedly archaic nature of Arany's language. He joins the debate with a publication in the academic journal *Filológiai Közlöny* [Newsletter in Philology] complaining about the lack of translation criticism in Hungarian. Further on, drawing on (the literary historian) Riedl, (the director) Hevesi, (the actor) Miklós Gábor,⁴ Kosztolanyi (as a theatre critic), (the translator) Mészöly and others, he claims that Arany's translations of Shakespeare are not outdated. A few expressions which are out of use and difficult to understand can be corrected. He also implies that whoever takes up retranslation, engages in a competition with Arany. The title of his article asks whether Arany's Shakespeare translations should be retranslated ("Újra kell-e fordítani Arany Shakespeare-fordításait?"). His way of thinking amply exemplifies the phenomenon that in the public mind and beyond (as he himself is a rather distinguished critic) there is an overwhelming identification of the canonised translation with the original. This opinion can be joined to what Ádám Nádasdy referred to in our interview on the subject of translation:

[M]any people felt that I retranslated Arany's translation into contemporary Hungarian. I was accused of altering the text. Some people said, the original goes like this... and they started to recite Arany's translation. I had to draw attention to the fact that the original is not by Arany, but by Shakespeare. (Minier 313)

At a convention of the Hungarian association of writers (Írószövetség) - specifically organised for the discussion of this cause - György Somlyó, the poet and translator, gave a plenary speech on the subject. His is the most scholarly and detailed discussion of the issue from that period. Somlyó sets up a sharp division between drama as reading and drama as theatre. He draws on Petöfi, Hugo and the modernist Babits, who saw Shakespeare as literature primarily, and the director Sándor Hevesi, who thought of drama as theatre. In Somlyó's opinion, drama lives the life of an amphibian (1140). Its respiration works in two distinct ways: on the page and on the stage. As Somlyó argues, original plays carry the amphibian existence within themselves "by nature," while translated works might emphasise one side or the other. "[A] fordításnak mint műfajnak a különössége: az, hogy rejtélyes módon romlandóbb az eredeténél" (1142). [It is specific to translation as a genre that it is more perishable than the original].⁵ He also points out that

4. An actor famous for his delivery of Hamlet, he is also recorded in Marvin Rosenberg's *Masks of Hamlet* (one of the few Hungarian Hamlets mentioned in English language studies).

5. He calls translation a genre in itself. This usage - left rather unexplained by Somlyó - is

what is precious in world literature is that which is retranslated (“világi-rodalmi érték az, amit újrafordítunk,” Somlyó 1142). Still, he supports the untouchable feature of Arany’s Shakespeare translations from a slightly different angle.

Arany Hamletje, Szentivánéji álma a magyar nemzeti irodalom eredeti “műveivé” váltak, elsőrendű értékei közé tartoznak. Mint a remekműveket általában, műfajukra való tekintet nélkül, inkább magyarázni, megvilágítani, örízni és ápolni kell, semmint félretenni. (1142)

[Arany’s *Hamlet* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* have become original works and supreme treasures of Hungarian national literature. As masterpieces they should be interpreted, elucidated, guarded and nurtured rather than put aside].

Thus, the respective Shakespearean works should not be retranslated because (some of) their Hungarian counterparts are already masterpieces that should be cultivated or nurtured. However, he does not always strictly distinguish revision (the adjustment of existing translations according to the needs of the times) and retranslation carried out from an English “original.”

The metaphors he uses to explain the act of revising already existing translations require looking into. Somlyó elaborates on the metaphor of artistic restoration as a parallel with what happens when a dramaturge (or someone acting in a similar role, such as a literary adviser or literary manager) introduces minor changes in order to update the language for the sake of the audience (and the actors who speak the lines). Although Somlyó himself does not fully agree with the analogy, he quotes it from the arguments evolving around the 1950’s edition of the collected plays of Shakespeare in Hungarian. That committee took into account the theatrical call for a revised Shakespeare, at least in the case of Vörösmarty’s and Petöfi’s translations. The committee viewed this work to be similar to the restoration of classic paintings (Somlyó 1142). It is also Somlyó who uses the metaphor of doing a “beautician’s” work on the translation. For example, changing the tense from an archaic one to a now colloquial one should count as a kind of “beautician’s” involvement.

As mentioned above, Eörsi realized that his translation, or rather, adaptation strategy of revision, as opposed to translating from scratch, was a

open to debate. In my view, different literary and non-literary genres are translated, but translation itself does not constitute a specific genre. I rather see translation as a modality of the text. A translation is primarily a text, and thus, it can bear traits of a particular genre whether it is the same genre as that of the original or not.

false way of translating. Fellow-translators of classics, such as László Marton (re-translator of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*) and György Petri (re-translator of plays by Molière) voiced a similar opinion in the 1990s. Without being commissioned, Eörsi translated the play again, adopting a new methodology. It is ironical of literary and theatre history not to take much notice of his second version, which rather deserves the term translation than his first attempt. (Let it suffice to say that this text has never been “tried” on the stage). Nevertheless, a close reading of the textual cluster (constituted by the New Arden *Hamlet*, Arany, and the two Eörsi texts) reveals that Eörsi’s two versions are not that far away from each other in terms of language. It is apparent in the 1988 text that he was mainly translating from English into Hungarian rather than translating Arany into a contemporary Hungarian idiom. Still, he could not resist the temptation to insert a few well-known expressions and aphoristic quotations from Arany’s work into his text. He elaborates on this in a short introduction to his translation in his collected volume of Shakespeare translations, as well as in our 2002 interview. He gives an explanation for having borrowed from Arany, but even this reasoning seems to turn into justification for why he diverted from Arany.

In this new version I borrowed very little from Arany, with the exception of the occasional line, such as his rendering of “Frailty, thy name is woman,” because it is pointless to replace *gyarlóság* (“fallibility”) with another noun which would probably not be so apt. If something has been absorbed into our national culture, especially if a phrase has been turned into a saying, it can only be justifiable to change it if there is some meaningful reason to do so. For example, I changed “*Kizökkent az idő*” (“*Time has been derailed*”) - Arany’s version of “*The time is out of joint.*” I did some philological research and discovered that Shakespeare was using an image from everyday life here. Arany’s *kizökkent* (derailed, dislocated) is beautiful, but I thought the notion of spraining is better suited to this context, making the line even more heart-rending and humane. *Kizökkent* does not ache, *kibicsaklott* (sprained) does. I diverged from Arany here despite the fact that his version has found its way into everyday speech. I couldn’t find a better version of a number of word-plays either, but overall I retranslated the play.

The case is as if Arany had provided a firm linguistic frame into which the *Hamlet* material can be fused. Eörsi’s rendition does not come across as borrowing; it rather seems as if Arany’s language had already been there as something unavoidable, deeply ingrained in cultural memory. Even though

Eörsi's main principle on this latter occasion was to (re)translate *Hamlet* from English, at the heart of his venture the previous "translation strategy" - of retaining what is "unsurpassable" in Arany's text - prevails.

Approaching the conclusion, I wish to add an anecdote that succinctly summarizes the status of Arany's text as an original. The story was related by Anna Földes in *Is Shakespeare Still Our Contemporary?* and was further quoted from here in Zoltán Márkus's contribution to *La traduzione di Amleto nella cultura europea*. It also appeared in such a non-academic source as *The Guardian Review* in autumn 2003. The anecdote features the reputed Hungarian director during his visit to England in 1949, when he was invited to direct *Hamlet*. Having been asked by the BBC about this experience, he quipped, "Of course it is a great honour and a challenge, but to tell you the truth, it's strange to hear the text in English because *I am used to the original version, translated by Janos Arany*" (Elsom 94, emphasis mine). Both Justin Cartwright, the author of the article in *The Guardian* and Zoltán Márkus, the Hungarian theatre scholar, point out the joking manner, which certainly is part of Bárdos's reaction. However, there is more to be said for this anecdote than that it illustrates "Shakespeare ha[ving] gone global" (Cartwright 7) or that it highlights "the contradiction between a universal Shakespeare tradition and its local and national appropriations" (Márkus 17). The story reads in a different light, with a knowledge of the debate around Eörsi's revision. It tells about the place of a text in personal cultural memory.

One of the key terms of the debate analyzed above is retranslation, and what it may imply. When Eörsi's first version was prepared, it was not very clear in critical discourse whether the term *translation* is suitable to describe the end-product of this kind of revisionary work specifically done for theatrical use. The fact that the Kaposvár play-text was attributed to him, made the term *translation* feasible in this context. The condition in which he prepared this version after Arany - both in terms of succeeding Arany chronologically and using his text as a base - justified the use of the term *retranslation*. Now, about two decades after Eörsi's first *Hamlet* the term *retranslation* has a more specific, though clear-cut use. It tends to refer to works translated from a foreign-language original (like Eörsi's second *Hamlet*), yet the term retranslation also sheds light on the fact that these "new" texts often try to compete with, emulate and are measured against already existing canonical translations of the "same" source text (the sameness of the source text is another convenient but false fiction when comparing translations, since a number of editions can be used by translators; for instance, *Hamlet*, even in the strict sense of the source text, has three "Shakespearean" versions, and that is only in the strictest sense of the term

“source text”). When one looks at cardinal passages and aphoristic sentences, both Eörsi texts display that they are blocked as well as generated by a certain taboo surrounding Arany’s canonical version. This taboo is what the Bardos anecdote also illuminates so clearly: Arany’s presence as a point of reference even when an English *Hamlet* is read or directed by the Hungarian producer.

University of Hull
United Kingdom

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