

The Language Switch of István Domonkos. Translation as a Metaphor of Being

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Traditionally, translation was conceived as a bridge linking cultures to each other; we attributed a mediating role to it. It may be imagined, however, that we shall never meet the other on this bridge, on the contrary: differences become more sharpened. Naturally, we may ask whether the strangeness we perceived in the other is our own strangeness at the same time. In some points we are strangers in the eyes of the other. And thus we are familiar: being a stranger does not seem strange to the other. From this point what becomes exciting is what have not been and could not be translated: that which remains intangible like a shadow. A translation becomes credible when it throws light on that shadow which in turn fades away with the arrival of light. We should then explore our way through darkness with a flashlight:

Translation As Culture, Culture As Translation

Referring to Walter Benjamin, Homi K. Bhabha speaks about the strangeness, foreignness of translation: “With the concept of 'foreignness' Benjamin comes closest to describing the performativity of translation as the staging of cultural difference.”¹ Our question concerns the same problem: whether the translating practice of the authors of *New Symposion*, especially of István Domonkos defined or rather removed cultural differences? Generally speaking: is translation itself a definition or rather a removal of cultural differences?

The periodical of Hungarian writers living in Serbia named *New Symposion* (1965-1992) had published translated works from its very beginning. They already published translated works in the pre-form of the periodical when it was a supplement of another Vojvodinian magazine *Ifjúság* (*Youth*). Thus translation was a definitive characteristic of the Hungarian group of authors in Novi Sad; showing not only the reception of world literature but also their own poetical tendencies. According to Itamar Even-Zohar translation is the most active system of literary polysystems. It is activated when either the literary

polysystem is not built out yet or it is “peripheral”, “weak”, or when turning points, crises or literary vacuums occur in literature.² For the *New Symposion* all three attributes was given.

Even before the periodical appeared on the scene, Vojvodinian Hungarian literature had been still unformed and had not had its sharp face. This problem is already highlighted by Kornél Szenteleky before World War II, in 1932: “The atmosphere of the land, the special nature of our problems inhabits at last the souls of our poets, nevertheless we are still far from forming a permanent characteristic from the colour local that appears now and then. [...] So true Vojvodinian literature is still in travail before birth, up to now we have only had literature in Vojvodina.”³ In the sixties Symposion-authors faced this condition of travail too. The second case in Even-Zohar’s taxonomy is labelled “peripheral” and “weak”; *New Symposion*’s position was doubtlessly peripheral: it could not have joined the Hungarian literary centre due to political reasons and it also had a marginal position among contemporary Yugoslavian literatures. And as there was no tradition for the authors of the periodical to which they could have linked themselves, they started to experiment, to search for their own form instead of writing „rural” or „anecdotal” literature. *New Symposion*’s discourse was formed in the intersection of several cultural traditions. Although we could—in this discourse—feel the influence of its environment, it has nevertheless managed to fill the vacuum of Vojvodinian Hungarian literature with a characteristic content. About peripheral literatures Even-Zohar claims that these tend to adopt the forms of external literatures, and for them translation is not merely an important channel of fashionable world literature but also the source of great transformations and new alternatives replacing the old system.⁴ In the case of *New Symposion* “external literature” means ex-Yugoslavian (Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian, Bosnian, Macedonian etc.) literatures and cultures. Meanwhile, ongoing translations produced a new language, translators created their own world which have succeeded the old out of date system (the perspective of “rural” Vojvodinian Hungarian literature). Writer and artist György B. Szabó, late teacher at the Hungarian Department of Novi Sad and (with Ervin Sinkó) an intellectual mentor of the *Symposion* authors said rightly: “What we can never spare for ourselves in the work of the translator is the courage and power to create a language; the ability to develop language and to make it grow. You need

not be a translator to recognise our linguistic backwardness: it is enough to experience interactions of bilingualism in a direct way. We should care much more about our language; we should develop it and make it able to express new contents, new meanings and new connections; we should keep the necessity of linguistic effort awake.”⁵ The name of the periodical *New Symposion* already shows the claim to this “new” cultural image; and after analysing the elaborated discourse of the magazine we could say: the claim was not without result.

Difficulties of approaching space

When we open the early volumes of the periodical, we may notice that its translatory activity functioned not at all in the name of communist “fraternity-unity”. Though they produced translated works of left side authors, all of these authors turned with critique towards contemporary social atmosphere and problems; they wrote experimental and existentialist literature in spite of socialist realism propagating war; and they frequently referred to other artistic media like film, music or fine arts (cf. the work of Miroslav Krleža, Radomir Konstantinović, Antun Šoljan, Ivan Slamnig, Slobodan Tišma, Slavko Bogdanović, Miroslav Mandić, Vojislav Despotov, Vladimir Kopicl). Nevertheless, we cannot say without hesitation that this literary discourse was born in the name of multiculturalism, especially if we take the term in its normative function. The term was not in use in the discourse of the '60s, '70s or '80s Yugoslavia; it was not mentioned on the lines of the periodical either. In retrospect we could of course discover traits which make us define the literary discourse of *New Symposion* as multicultural. But we would get into controversies soon. One of the periodical's interpreters, Zoltán Virág surely gets into one of those when he says in his volume on István Brasnyó that symposionist authors all “approached questions of polyglot texts and multiculturalism with surprisingly similar intellectual conceptions”⁶. In a later study he corrects himself (by alluding to Slavoj Žižek) and considers multiculturalism the inverse form of racism which fact was realised by the “most prominent symposionists”⁷. The Voivodinian intercultural situation of the period is also labelled multicultural by the Serbian Miško Šuvaković: “It is important to realise that the interest of Voivodinian authors in the problems of text and

textuality is a product of Voivodina's characteristic historical and **multicultural** situation where language is not a mark of natural identity, rather the artistic trace of performing speech through sign and sign through speech."⁸ In case we use here multiculturalism as a descriptive term then the cited passages are adequate: the cultural map of Voivodina is drawn by nations living in the closest proximity. The use of the concept becomes complicated though when it is meant in its current meaning as it has developed in Western democracies, and it is applied on a different cultural field. A one time symposionist Alpár Losoncz calls late Yugoslavian intercultural politics "multiculturalism directed from above". He writes: "In retrospect we could see that the speciality of the Yugoslavian constellation is secured by the fact of the period-making failure of an ideologically inspired hypernational programme. It brings to surface the fact of lack of understanding between ethnic groups, the violent solutions of interpretive conflicts, the intensifying misunderstandings under the ideological cover, and the process of pseudo-dialogue working under the banner of ideological multiculturalism directed from above."⁹ "Multiculturalism directed from above" means here the central definitive point of the common life space of ex-Yugoslavian nations. According to Will Kymlicka minority politics of Eastern European countries is characterised by the principle of security: "Their aim is to make sure that minorities could not get into such a position from where they would be able to threaten the territorial integrity and the very being of the state"¹⁰. It seems that Losoncz borrows the conception of Kymlicka about the principle of justice working in Western European minority politics when he claims in his cited study that "The ideals of Western multiculturalism may be fruitful in Middle and Eastern Europe only if the ethnic groups of the region have the necessary receptive and innovative tendencies."¹¹ This shows that in late Yugoslavia it was not that ideal of multiculturalism at work which is characteristic of Western democracies. Meanwhile, it is questionable whether imported ideas from the "West" can be applied to the Balkan. According to István Fried, "though the interactive exchange relations of the Balkan with Central European polyculturalism cannot be reduced to a surface level, they also cannot reach the deep structure of culture."¹² To this Fried adds that „the way (fashionable) western ideas are articulated in the Balkan stems from the debates of polyculturalisms."¹³ So while investigating the Balkan we should not leave out the historical and cultural problems of the region. The phenomenon of *New*

Symposion should not be detached from the questions of Balkan. Naturally, I would not say that social models of western democracies should be completely ignored in their relations to the Balkan or to the Yugoslavia of Tito. I would like to call attention rather to the perspective also referred to by Fried in his interpretations of novels by Ivo Andrić and Meša Selimović: violent democratisation of the Balkan cannot reach deep structures; it remains on the surface. Ignoring this, and following Kymlicka, Losoncz also urges a utopistic world model in the Balkan. However, we should treat the name “Balkan” itself with care before we would start to fight a phantom Balkan image. Bearing in mind the heterogeneity of cultural, religious and historical problems the statement of Beáta Thomka about cultural identity is worth of reflection: “Cultural identity is an attitude, an attribute under construction, an activity, a form of action, and an element of the relation attaching the individuum to its environment. It could act as a community-forming force among people of different ethnic roots, different religions who live in many-layered interethnic relations.”¹⁴ Thus we should not spare discussing the role of environment in the creation of the cultural identity of an individuum. And we should not spare it either when discussing *New Symposion*.

In relation to the cultural life of Voivodina in the Tito period it is also unclear which model of multiculturalism is preferred by theoreticians in favour of multiculturalism: the “melting pot” of America or the “cultural mosaic” of Canada. It is Slavoj Žižek himself (cited by Zoltán Virág without comment) who states that Western multiculturalism is the ideology of globalist politics and thus a “distance-keeper racism”: “And, of course, the ideal form of ideology of this global capitalism is multiculturalism, the attitude which, from a kind of empty global position, treats *each* local culture as the colonizer treats colonized people – as ‘natives’ whose *mores* are to be carefully studied and ‘respected’.”¹⁵ It is easy to detect the echo of Stanley Fish’s critique of “boutique multiculturalism” in the Žižekian thought: even if we support multiculturalism in words, we must remain “uniculturalists”, and, in the name of pluralism, would not tolerate anything which is not pluralist; consequently, according to Fish, multiculturalism simply does not exist.¹⁶ Contemporary Sloven philosopher Dean Komel condemns “multiculturalism” as the strategy of global politics, and supports instead the concept of European interculturalism. In his phenomenological

differentiation multiculturalism is the mouthpiece of “end of history” ideology, and according to this ideology we cannot speak with the other because there is no difference: and thus we cannot speak about the Europe of many different cultures and long historical past. That is why intercultural dialogue is important: “When we speak about the need to determine intercultural sense, then we do not emphasise any culture *in* the world and its central role but rather the culture *of* the world which opens up *in its own centre as culture in speech*.”¹⁷ Fish, Žižek and Komel criticise the critical discourse of the American intercultural situation (cf. debate of the canon). It is problematic to claim with Virág that symposionists were clear about these late interpretations. Symposionists did not interpret Western democracies or multiculturalisms, but rather their own cultural situation.

We would get a similar controversial result if we reduce the discourse of *New Symposion* to another currently fashionable term, *postcolonialism*. Among similarities we can recognise several differences. Though both discourses share the problem of cultural foreignness, we should not ignore their differences, which is the result of different geographical, historical and literary situatedness. One of the most striking differences is that postcolonial authors write primarily in postcolonial English, or, to be more precise, they write in a transformed version of the language of the colonising power (beside their own mother tongue): “One has to convey in a language that is not one’s own the spirit is one’s own. [...] I use the word ‘alien’, yet English is not really alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up – like Sanskrit or Persian was before – but not of our emotional make-up. We are all instinctively bilingual, many of us writing in our own language and in English. [...] Our method of expression therefore has to be dialect which will some day prove to be as distinctive and colorful as the Irish or the American.”¹⁸ Authors of *New Symposion*, in contrast to postcolonial authors, write in Hungarian, in their mother tongue: even if their Hungarian language is not exactly alike the Hungarian of Hungary, and even if some of them tried to write in the language of the majority, of “Serbian-Croatian” culture. The language of symposionists is not a variety of the coloniser’s language, but rather the (mother) tongue of the experience of “centaur-existence” shaped by the intersection of several cultures. This use of language was characterised by first-generation symposionist László Végel (contemporary of Domonkos and Tolnai) in the following way: “In each word there is a hidden

dimension on which you stare helpless; you make complex detours to avoid the impossibility of naming. Thus you become the martyr of indirectness and self-reflection. [...] It is not merely a matter of self-defence. You involuntarily become doubled by two languages, and, in return, this doubling influences your gestures in your mother tongue.”¹⁹

Eluding the notions of multiculturalism and postcolonialism perhaps it would be more fruitful to set out from the *delta*-metaphor of Ottó Tolnai: „[...] delta is something that suits the border-situation. [...] Delta is both river and sea, but both beyond and before the river. The river is the path. Delta is the spring along the path, the recurrence of the spring, and its permanent possibility.”²⁰ Erzsébet Csányi interprets Tolnai’s metaphor in the following way: „Delta is the reservoir of the pendulum existence springing from the I and the Other, the familiar and the strange, the small and the large, the beginning and the end, the periphery and the centre, the marginal-minor and the dominant.”²¹ Following Tolnai Beáta Thomka names the Vojvodinian cultural context a delta space: „At another point he reflects on Vojvodina as an imaginary region where cultural, intellectual values and tendencies flood through, are received and involved. A virtual gate standing in the crossway of cultures, directions and civilisations.”²² According to Tolnai István Domonkos and the early symposionists reflect on this in-betweenness and swinging back and forth, on a condition between cultures and identities where everything is possible and nothing is permanent except for the continuous oscillation.

Tension of the other language

What is the difference between the literary language of symposionist authors and that of Hungarian authors from Hungary? It is not merely a different vocabulary that contains Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian, etc. words, but also a fundamental difference of poetics that stems from the experience of the *foreign* as one's *own*. Foreign is in a close relation to the own here because the construction named Yugoslavia had rendered the ideological conditions for the coexistence of different nations: state-defining ethnic groups and nations were officially equal (the possession of leading positions show a different picture though). In other words, ideologically speaking the national identity of others did not prevent the

citizens of the state from thinking of themselves and of each other as Yugoslavians. In the meantime the literary interest of symposionists was not defined by Yugoslavian political commitments. It is discernable from the very beginning what kind of ex-Yugoslavian literary works catch their attention; mostly the works they chose to translate. So it is not barely a matter of passive reception, but rather that of active reading that produced translations among else. This translation practice was not a way to celebrate the communist regime, instead it enabled them to make the most of the intercultural situation. It allowed for joining the tendencies of world literature regarding the fact that—for instance—in those times Yugoslavian cultural atmosphere was much more open than the Hungarian one. In his comparison of the Vojvodinian Hungarian literature and the cultural atmosphere of contemporary Hungary Mihály Ilia claims that “Bori should not be eliminated from Vojvodinian Hungarian literature and not even from the whole of Hungarian literary history. What he has done to the avantgarde opened the gates for the youth of the region: it is not up to Budapest to define the canon but to our value judgements depending on our taste, on our knowledge. Besides, we should not forget that Voivodinian, or, as we put it, Yugoslavian Hungarian literature received, along the side of Serbian literature, Serbian literary orientation with great intensity. It had a considerable variety, it was very rich, and if it did not exist, Hungarian literature would have been shaped differently. [...] Everything was translated, and they reflected on it quickly. In Hungary closedness was very strong even after 1957, especially towards the West, but rather towards all directions. To the East too: the best of Russian authors had not been translated.”²³ Among other things the cultural perspective of the symposionists differed in this point from provincial Vojvodinian literary circles buried in their own narrow-minded regionality where the value of a literary work is not defined by aesthetics but by origin. Symposionists widened their perspective through Southern Slavic cultures. Meanwhile, their translation practice not only manifested itself as active reception, but as a creative impulse to their own work. Hungarian and doubtlessly Southern Slavic cultural life—as influence and tradition—also contributed to the development of New Symposion.

The Hungarian language of symposionists is unimaginable without its *own foreignness*. In connection with this, once symposionist László Végel claims that “the language of a minority writer necessarily brings with itself otherness

and foreignness.”²⁴ Texts of Ottó Tolnai, István Domonkos, Katalin Ladik, László Végel, Ottó Fenyvesi, János Sziveri and others all reflect on the problem of language loss (the original mother tongue Hungarian transforms) and on the creation of a new language that can be regarded as intercultural language (Deleuze-Guattari). In this sense *New Symposion* differentiates between the standard literary Hungarian and the intercultural symposionist language. As a result, for the authors of *New Symposion* the question of minority literature is not about preserving a national self-image in the name of survival. For them it is rather the problem of linguistic re- and deterritorialisation (Deleuze-Guattari), the philosophical and poetical conception of the experience of minority-existence and of the foreign mother tongue in the Derridean sense.

prevodi trajanja

Naturally, we cannot say that all symposionist authors showed the same attitude towards the experience of minority existence and towards cultural translation. Here I would like to highlight only one representative symposionist author: István Domonkos. He can be regarded a representative author because, as the editor of the periodical, he was present in all kinds of writing practice: he wrote poems, prose, essay, he translated from Croatian, Serbian, German and Swedish, and later his writings were translated to Serbian(Croatian).²⁵ He is the most characteristic artist of his generation as it is evidenced by the rich reception of his works. He voiced the experience of rhizomatic language not only in Hungarian but in the language of the *other*: it is testified by his book written in Serbian(Croatian) *prevodi trajanja* (1970). Finally, he arrived at the perfect poem of Mallarmé, at the empty sheet, at the Rimbaudean contempt of poetry, at the aesthetics of silence.

If we look at the translational practice of István Domonkos, we can see that he did not work as a missionary. Most of all he translated those works to Hungarian which were close to his own authorial poetics. From this point of view it is not by chance that mostly he translated poems (e.g. Miloš Crnjanski, Branimir Miljković, Ivan Slamnig, Slavko Mihalić, Danijel Dragojević). Similarly to the linguistic polyphony of Joyce, Beckett, Pound, Eliot, etc. Domonkos used the technique of linguistic montage; in his short stories he also

cited Southern Slavic verbal discourses (see his 1972 writing titled *Hangok [Sounds]*). In this way Domonkos's works can be linked to Central European literatures of plural language-perspective, even if, as István Fried claims: “it cannot be denied that tendencies opposing this direction had a much stronger impact in East Central Europe and in its literatures”.²⁶

The linguistic experimentation of Domonkos finally led to the conclusion that for him language, more precisely mother tongue is not the home of being in the Heideggerian sense, but rather its absence. This absence-poetics is the most strict and clear in his most frequently cited poem written in *Gastarbeiter*-language, *Kormányeltörésben* (1971). Here *Gastarbeiter*-language use becomes the experience of a world. Of a foreign world where words are ruins of a broken (ungrammatical) language. As Zoltán Kulcsár-Szabó puts it “the »unpoetic quality« can point out that poetry could never be the mother tongue of humanity, or, perhaps more precisely, it is not the mother tongue of humanity”²⁷. But this poem was preceded by the borrowing of the other language: by writing poetry in Serbian. It is difficult, as János Bányai has already emphasised, to put Domonkos's book *prevodi trajanja* into Hungarian. The Serbian(Croatian) word 'trajanja' means guarantee, duration of being, duration of time, being; while 'prevodi' means simply translations. So the book is titled “Translations of Being/ Time”. The word translation refers to foreignness not merely in a metaphoric sense in this case: Domonkos's Serbian volume remained unnoticed both by Hungarian and Serbian critical reception. It is only after 29 years (first publication: *Híd* [periodical] 2000/8) that once co-editor János Bányai interprets this volume in the following words: “Serbian poems outside Serbian poetic tradition – this is the poetic distinctive feature of István Domonkos's being-translations.”²⁸ It is a question though that in what Slavic language Domonkos wrote: in Serbian or in Serbian-Croatian? Below »Contents« at the end of the volume we can read: “the author has written his poems in Serbian-Croatian”. In those times the official literary language was either Serbian-Croatian or Croatian-Serbian. If we look at them from a linguistic point of view we may say that Domonkos wrote his poems in Serbian, even if the volume's language use may sound unfamiliar to the Serbian reader because of its Hungarian-like syntax. However, if we take the contemporary context, then the volume is embedded in the ex-Yugoslavian “Serbian-Croatian” poetic tradition; regardless of Bányai's

opinion about the volume's outsider-position. This outsidership provides the volume's foreignness-experience to which the word translation in the title has already alluded. Being in this case is the condition of continuous translation, permanently facing the impossible task, the final failure. The failure of completely knowing the other and thus ourselves. Beside the title the volume does not point directly at this epistemological and ontological failure. Perhaps the only poem which can be linked directly to failure is *i tako uvek reka nosi jedan leš...* [and so the river always carries corpses...] dedicated to Serbian avantgarde poet and writer Rastko Petrović (1898-1949) who created synthetic works in almost all isms²⁹. Among other things the lyric subject speaks about the impossibility to follow Petrović's ecstasy: “*i duša... / i telo / i reči moje / i muzika ova / iz komšiluka / i ne pomaže / pratiti te / tom ek-stazom*”³⁰ [literally: and the soul.../ and the body / and my words / and this music / from the neighbourhood / won't help me / to follow you / into that ecstasy]. In the poem the expression “won't help me” recurs several times referring to the failure. Domonkos rewrites the 1920 poem by Petrović *O trenju između duše i tela* which denies the direct and homogeneous nameability of things; poetry can only express the intermediate condition of existence: “*To nije velika šuma koja šumori, / Ni široke poljane koje se smeju, / Tiha je reka ovo između pustih obala!*”³¹ [It is not the humming of the great woods / Nor the laughing of the wide plains, / It is the silent river running between bare banks!] The title itself refers to the intermediate condition: *Of the Friction Between Soul and Body*. Though the lyric subject of Domonkos borrows the simultaneity, the associative construction, the unusual association of Petrović's avantgarde poetic speech, he—at the same time—encounters the fact that it is impossible to follow Petrović's ecstasy and belief in words.

We can draw a parallel between Domonkos's Hungarian-like syntax and the »free poetic speech« concept of Petrović that ignores grammatical rules, obeys the unconscious flow, the automatic poetic speech. Svetlana Velmar-Janković interprets the agrammatic poetic speech of Petrović in the following way: “But at moments of great poetic power Rastko Petrović was unwilling to acknowledge any sentence-pattern as he was unwilling to acknowledge any rule. He wished to realise pure rebellion through poetic speech which would be able to express a new type of consciousness: the »vigilant«.”³² According to Velmar-Janković this new type of consciousness is in connection with ecstasy: “The first

thing is that it is about the reality which consists of the ecstasy of non-reality and thus of the ecstasy of reality; the second is that this articulated part of reality must have its suitable form.”³³ Writing poetry is a physical activity; a vital function for the documentation of ecstasy. To realise this Petrović constantly changed the viewpoints, the time- and space-coordinates of poetic speech, and in this way he also made reader-positions uncertain.³⁴

From the perspective of Petrovićean agrammaticality Domonkos's poems are not in broken Serbian(-Croatian) but in experimental Serbian(-Croatian). Meanwhile, for him the word ecstasy is not that unequivocal, because he splits the word in two pieces: *ek-staza*. *Staza* means path, a way that can be followed to its end. For him this is lost though, which is already shown in the unfinished, fragmented sentences of the poem. The split of the word suggests that the word does not have one single meaning in which one can ecstatically believe. The experience of foreign existence has its open expression in the poem: “*i ne pomaže / vraćati se sam / niotkuda / i sedeti neprozvan / ni od sebe / u praznoj sobi / i prosuti seme / dovoljno / za poemu neku*” [and it won't help / if I return alone / from nowhere / and uncalled / even by myself / in the empty room / and spread away the seeds / that are enough / for a poem]. One lesson that Domonkos's Petrović-rewriting gives is that it is impossible to express the ecstatic sense of being of the avantgarde poet: neither in Serbian, nor in Hungarian. The ecstasy of being is beyond language; and all experiments to make it verbal are deemed to fail. In the oeuvre of Domonkos suspicion about words is frequent; it is discernable even in his first volume *Rátka* (1963); in *Áthúzott versek* ([Crossed-out Poems] 1971) it is conceptualised which is shown most clearly by the poem *Kormányeltörésben*. Chronologically the Serbian(-Croatian) volume is between the two. *Prevodi trajanja* contains the poetic reflections of both of the other two, but the irony and the banal situations are not as characteristic in it as they are in *Áthúzott versek*. *Prevodi trajanja* has a much stronger elegiac tone with the enigmatical circumscribing of questions of existence and love. A shared feature in all three volumes is the use of metanarrative poetic solutions. But while *Rátka* has only a few texts which shows it directly, *Áthúzott versek* shows it in its very title. The condition between the two speaks itself out in a foreign language, in a *private foreign* language. In the context of Domonkos's oeuvre Bányai interprets *prevodi trajanja* in the

following way: “Translation’ is the experience of linguistic foreignness in the Serbian(-Croatian) poems of István Domonkos. The poem *Kormányeltörésben* is the ‘pre-translational’ condition and situation of language (before the language switch).”³⁵ The interval is shown by the fact that some pieces from the *kiki*-cycle of *Áthúzott versek* [Crossed-out poems] are from *prevodi trajanja*; more precisely, they are recognisable rewritings. Interval poems towards being crossed out. Some poems are really crossed out – crossed out at least in their Serbian form: in order to get a Hungarian suit.

The transubstantiation of kiki

Domonkos's *kiki*-poems raise the problem of self-translation. How could we know which language was translated to the other? These poems were first published in *New Symposium* 1967/29-30, and, among them, those that were later rewritten in his Serbian(-Croatian) book: *A költőkről [Of Poets]*, *Az életről és halálról [Of Life and Death]*, *A szerelmesekről [Of Lovers]*. Later in *Áthúzott versek* 1971 the author repeated the whole cycle without change, except for a typing mistake: in the poem *A szerelmesekről [Of Lovers]* stands “*mintha*” [‘as if’] in the place of “*mintá*” [‘pattern’] (so the line goes: “*nyújtózó mintha a szőnyegen*” [‘stretching as if {pattern} on the carpet’])³⁶. In Serbian(-Croatian) versions of *kiki*-poems the Montparnassian avantgarde muse goes through another “transubstantiation”. In Serbian(-Croatian) versions the name *kiki* is not mentioned. In Hungarian the name* could stand for the other who is addressed: it can be interpreted as anyone, one by one, but it can also function as a question: who is this other without whom no dialogue, no communication is possible, without whom there is no poem? But the name *kiki* may refer to the once-Yugoslavian candy's advertisement slogan: “*Bilo kuda, Ki-ki svuda*” [Wherever you are, Ki-ki is there]. In all of the *kiki*-poems there is *kiki* indeed: either explicitly, or as the addressed other to whom the speaker of the poem speaks. It is possible that the reason for the name's absence in the Serbian(-Croatian) versions is that it has no other potential connotations in Serbian – beside the one to the candy. In case we would like to imply the question about personality, it would require *kiki*'s modification in Serbian(-Croatian) to *koko*.

Among the three poems the one titled *A költőkről [Of Poets]* shows the greatest differences in Serbian(-Croatian). Even the title itself has only a slight allusion to the original one: *među pesnicima grada* [among poets of the city]. Only the first line is similar, with the exception of *kiki*: “*leže tako na suncu*”³⁷ [thus they lay in the sun]. In the Hungarian version it runs: „*kiki a napon hevernek*” [kiki in the sun they lay]. The rest of the Serbian(-Croatian) poem is wholly different. Versions of the other two poems are relatively similar (in their title too) with the exception that *kiki* is never mentioned in Serbian(-Croatian). Reference to the muse can be found only in *o životu i o smrti [Of Life and Death]*, but even there she is called as “my love” and not named: “*ljubavi ti dobro poznaješ / one koji govore: smrt*” [my love you know them well / those who say: death]. In the Hungarian version: “*kiki ti* jól ismeritek / azokat akik azt mondják: halál*” [kiki you know them well / those who say: death]. (Here the identity of *kiki* is further more complicated with the plural 'you'. Is that possible that *kiki* is not even a single person?) The Serbian(-Croatian) version of the poem *Of Lovers* does not mention *kiki* either, and thus the inner, unanswered dialogic game of the Hungarian version is left out (Hungarian: “*az egyikük kiki a múltban előre*” [one of them kiki straight through the past]; Serbian(-Croatian): “*jedan od njih / u dubokoj prošlosti*”). In Hungarian there is the possibility of questioning right after “*egyikük*” [one of them]: *ki-ki?* [i.e.: 'Who is who?'] In Serbian(-Croatian) this linguistic playfulness is left out. Another important difference appears in the closing stanzas. In the Hungarian version they run like this: “*csónakba szállt / s evezett egész éjen át / az ég és víz közé szorultan*” [he got into the boat / and rowed all night / stuck between water and sky]. In Serbian(-Croatian) “*u barku je seo / i veslao celo popodne / celo več je veslao / veslao je celu noć / al' kraja nije bilo / niti vodi / niti nebesima*” [he sat into an ark / and rowed all through the afternoon / rowed all through the evening / rowed all night / but there was no end / neither of water / nor of sky]. The Hungarian version directly refers to the intermediate condition; the Serbian(-Croatian) only implies the Petkovićian meta-physical friction between the poles.

The question can thus be raised: which *kiki*-poem is the original? Which one is the copy? Similar questions are frequently asked about self-translations of Samuel Beckett. Beckett, like Domonkos, wrote basically in two languages; he himself translated some of his works from French to English and vice versa.

According to Lance St. John Buttler Beckett's self-translations stem from "the radical incommensurability of languages"³⁸. He thinks that rather points out the impossibility of translation than any authorial intention. Steve Connor remarks about the English translation of *Mercier et Camier* that Beckett's self-translation calls attention to self-repetition as a movement of reconstructing the subject. He says that we may consider both the original and the copy as finished texts: »Each one becomes the variety of the other and each can be received only as difference-values in relation to the other texts.« A similar thing can be said about the kiki-poems of Domonkos: either none or both of them are original. It is the difference of each one to the other that makes it possible to conceive them as individual but doubled works. In relation to Danto I have already mentioned, here translation has not changed the original work, but rather metaphorically transubstantiated it to another original work in which you can recognise traces of the former.

Meanwhile, it was not solely Domonkos among symposionists who experimented with Serbian(-Croatian) texts. Long before him Katalin Ladik wrote Serbian(-Croatian) poems, and long after him Ottó Tolnai published a Serbian(-Croatian) book *Krik ruže* (Scream of the Rose, 1988). But neither of them thematised openly the question of language switch in the way Domonkos did; when the verbal translation of being confronts us with the impossible. The Serbian(-Croatian) language of Domonkos is not Serbian(-Croatian) language, it is not identical with its own tradition. This language has never existed—it is the creation of Domonkos. The doubled language of the experience of foreignness. It communicates the Domonkosian sensibility towards the intercultural condition. Identity is always formulated in the shadow of the other language: in the Serbian(-Croatian) syntax one can feel the presence of Hungarian language. The situation of Domonkos is of course different from that of Jacques Derrida of Maghrebian and Sephardic Jewish ancestry who was compelled to speak French. Domonkos was allowed to speak in his mother tongue. But this mother tongue existed in the direct proximity of several cultures. And this close coexistence left its trace. Experiencing the other became a universal foreignness-experience: a metaphor of being. For Domonkos being is what for Derrida is translation: "the name of the impossible other". The language switch of Domonkos might mean that while Rilke has chosen homelands, Domonkos has chosen "mother tongues". And none of these chosen languages is able to perfectly express the (Rastko

Petrovićian) ecstatic totality of being. All mother tongues are translations of themselves, and thus only shadows of the always unuttered universal condition.

French thinker Henri Meschonnic claims that “considering that translations never translate words or sentences, but rather works and discourses, we might say those translations are places for the interactivity of language [*langage*] and of literature; a kind of literature that can only be recognised and analysed through practical conceptions; literature as expression and not as proposition. Comparative stylistic or psychological descriptions could not bear witness to this kind of literature.”³⁹ In case we conceive translation as interaction with literature and its discourses, then we can draw the conclusion: the translational practice of István Domonkos lines out a reception story; a creative reception of ex-Yugoslavian literatures. It is important for both South Slavic and Hungarian literature hither and beyond the borders. In this sense translation is proposed as a way of interpreting the other, the foreign. One of the most productive translator of Hungarian literature, Sava Babić says: “The translator should be interpreted as a reader who, after reading the work, returns to it.”⁴⁰ That is why I think that sometimes we should return to a forgotten volume. We might find hidden treasures – as in the case of Domonkos.

¹ H. K. B.: *The location of culture*, London – New York, Routledge, 227.

² Cf.: Itamar Even-Zohar: “The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem.” [= *Poetics Today* 11:1 (spring 1990)], pp. 45-51.

³ Kornél Szenteleky: “A vajdasági magyar kultúra és irodalom élete” [The Life of Vojvodinian Hungarian Culture and Literature], In: K. SZ.: *Új lehetőségek – új kötelességek. Egybegyűjtött tanulmányok, kritikák, cikkek II. (1931–1933)*, ed. by Imre Bori, Forum, Újvidék, 2000, 149-150.

⁴ EVEN-ZOHAR, op. cit.

⁵ György, B. Szabó, “A fordító megbecsülése” [The Appreciation of the Translator]. In: idem, *Éjszakák, hajnalok*, ed. István Bosnyák, Forum, Újvidék, 1990, 153.

⁶ Virág Zoltán: *A termékenység szövegtengere*, Forum –Messzelátó, Újvidék – Szeged, 2000, 23.

⁷ Virág Zoltán: *A margó vándorai. Az Új Symposionról*, Híd 2005/6, 47.

⁸ „Bitno je uočiti da interesovanje vojvodanskih autora za problem teksta i tekstualnosti proizlazi is specifične istorijske i **multikulturalne** situacije Vojvodine u kojoj sam jezik nije upis *prirodnog* identiteta, već artifičijelni trag prikazivanja govora u pismu i pisma u govoru.”, Miško Šuvaković: *Slavko Bogdanović. Politika tela*, Književni novosadski krug K21K – Prometej, Novi Sad, 1997, 15-16.

⁹ „Retrospektivno gledano, posebnost konstelacije u Jugoslaviji garantuje činjenica epohalnog poraza jednog ideološki inspirisanog nadnacionalnog programa. Ona izbacuje na površinu činjenicu nedostatka razumevanja između etniciteta, nasilnog razrešavanja interpretativnih konflikata, neraspozume koji se intenziviraju pod ideološkim krovom kao i građevinu kvazi-dijaloga koji se odvija pod zastavom ideološkog, odozgo regulisanog multikulturalizma.”, Alpar Losonc: *Multikulturalnost u „evropskom zajedničkom prostoru”: 1989 kao izvor mita*, Habitus 1999/mart, 93.

¹⁰ Will Kymlicka: *Igazságosság és biztonság*, Ford.: Karnis Andrea, *Fundamentum* 2001/3, 5.

¹¹ Quotation from the Hungarian abstract: LOSONC: i. m. 115.

¹² István Fried: *Balkanisztikai kétségek*, In: F. I.: *A közép-európai szövegüniverzum*, Lucidus, Bp., 2002, 156.

¹³ FRIED, op. cit.157.

¹⁴ Beáta Thomka: *Prózai archívum. Szövegközi műveletek*, Kijárat, Bp., 2007, 136.

¹⁵ Slavoj Žižek: *The Ticklish Subject*, Verso, London – New York, 2000, 216.

¹⁶ Vö.: Stanley Fish: *Butik-multikulturalizmus, avagy miért képtelenek a liberálisok a gyűlölet beszédéről gondolkodni*, Ford.: Farkas Zsolt, *Lettre* 2000/31.

¹⁷ „Ko govorimo o nujnosti konstituiranja interkulturalnega smisla, ne zagovarjamo te ali one svetovne kulture in njene centralne vloge, marveč se pogovarjamo o kulturi *sveta*, ki se v svoji *sredini* odpira kot kultura v *pogovoru*.” Dean Komel: *Multikulturalnost in interkulturalnost – neko fenomenološko razlikovanje*, Nova Revija 2007/300, 52.

¹⁸ Cited by Raja Raot Dennis Walder, In: D. W.: *Post-colonial Literatures in English*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 1998, 43.

¹⁹ László Végel: *Kisebbségi elégia*, In: V. L.: *Hontalan esszék*, Jelenkor, Pécs, 2003. 37.

²⁰ Ottó Tolnai: *Delta III*, Új Symposion 1971/59, 2.

²¹ Erzsébet Csányi: *Vajdaság: az átalakulás tégelye*, In: *konTEXTUS KÖNYVEK I.*, Ed. Erzsébet Csányi, Bölcsészettudományi Kar, Vajdasági Magyar Felsőoktatási Kollégium, Újvidék, 2007, 53.

²² Beáta Thomka: *Egy Tolnai-metafora visszavezetése*, In: *konTEXTUS KÖNYVEK I.*, i. m. 11.

²³ „Nem élhet az ember haragban...”. Brassai Zoltán beszélgetése Ilia Mihálllyal, Ex Symposion 2007/59, 23.

²⁴ Végel László: *Gyökerek az idegenségben. Peremvidék – kisebbség – irodalom*, Forrás 2003/11., 53.

²⁵ *Ja biti*, prev.: Judita Šalgo, Matica Srpska, Novi Sad, 1973, *Havarija*, prev.: Judita Šalgo, Prosveta, Beograd, 1987. Danilo Kiš has also translated one of Domonkos's poems.

²⁶ István Fried: *Kétnyelvűség, kettős kulturáltság Kelet-Közép-Európában*, In: F. I.: *Írók, művek, irányok*, Tiszatáj könyvek, Szeged, 2002, 161.

²⁷ Zoltán Kulcsár-Szabó: *Költőietlenség, versszerűtlenség, nyelvtelenség. Domonkos István: Kormányeltörésben*, Tiszatáj 2006/4, 92.

²⁸ János Bányai: *Létezés-fordítások*, In: B. J.: *Egyre kevesebb talán*, Forum, Újvidék, 2003, 159.

²⁹ Cf.: Gojko Tešić: *Na grobnom kamenu srpske avangarde (Delo Rastka Petrovića u polemičkom kontekstu)*, In: *Otkrivanje drugog neba: Rastko Petrović*. Zbornik, Uredili: Mihajlo Pantić i Olivera Stošić, Kulturni centar Beograda, Beograd, 2003

³⁰ ištvan domonkoš: *prevodi trajanja*, tribina mladih, novi sad, 1970, 11-12. (The whole of the volume is written in small letters except for the name Rastko Petrović. As if it has to do something with the fact that Domonkos is a guest of the other language; he is not at home in it.)

³¹ In: Rastko Petrović: *Sabrane pesme, Izbor i predgovor*: Svetlana Velmar-Janković, Srpska Književna Zadruga, Beograd, 1989, 57.

³² „Ali, u trenucima svoje najveće pesničke snage Rastko Petrović nije hteo da zna ni za kakve obrasce, kao što nije hteo da prizna ama baš nikakva pravila. Žudeo je da ostvari čistu pobunu u pesničkom jeziku kojom će moći iskazivati jedan novi tip svesti, one »probudene«.”, Svetlana Velmar-Janković: *O Rastku Petroviću, pesniku*, In: PETROVIĆ: i. m. XXXVI

³³ „Prvo, da je u pitanju ona stvarnost što je sva od ekstaze ne-stvarnosti koliko i od stvarnosti ekstaze i, drugo, da taj *iskazani* deo stvarnosti mora imati oblik koji mu odgovara.”, PETROVIĆ: i. m. XXXVI-XXXVIII

³⁴ See: Radivoje Mikić: *Pesnički postupak*, Narodna Knjiga/Alfa, Beograd, 1999, 24-45.

³⁵ BÁNYAI: i. m. 160.

³⁶ In: Domonkos István: *Áthúzott versek*, Symposion könyvek 31, Forum, Újvidék, 1971, 31.

* The Hungarian word 'ki' means 'who'. In its doubled form 'ki-ki' it has a meaning that can be translated as 'each and everyone'. [Translator's note]

³⁷ DOMONKOŠ: i. m. 9.

* In Hungarian 'ti' stands for 'you' in the plural (while 'te' means 'you' in singular). [Translator's note]

³⁸ Lance St. John Buttler. *Two Darks: A Solution to the Problem of Beckett's Bilingualism*, In: Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui: An Annual Bilingual Review/Revue Annuelle Bilingue 1994/3, 115.

³⁹ „Budući da prijevodni ne prevode ni riječi ni rečenice, već djela, diskurze, one su mjesto interakcija jezika (langage) i književnosti koju samo koncepti proizašli iz prakse mogu prepoznati i analizirati, ne kao iskaze već kao iskazivanje. O čemu ne svjedoče ni recepti »komparativne stilistike« jezika, ni psihološki opisi.” (*Tema*, prev.: Brankica Radić, Zagreb, 2004/5-6., 98-99.)

⁴⁰ „Prevodioca uvek treba shvatiti kao čitaoca koji se i posle čitanja vraća određenom delu.” (S. B.: *Radionica i argumentum. Između prevoda i originala, kézirat*).