

INTERTEXTUALITY AND THE "SPHERE" OF TRANSLATOR'S LITERARY REFLECTIONS

In the continuity and variety of genres and forms literature presents itself as a variegated world whose separate parts, at diachronically different points, may come into interaction, forming intertextual links. The art of translation as a parallel process deals with this diversity of creative worlds and texts on the pragmatic level, hence intertextuality is an actual problem for a translator, too. However specific the goals, the process of translation ought to be viewed from the fundamental standpoint of understanding, and in the final analysis - the feasibility of the task.

In the linguistic theory of literature, two basic concepts prove to be serviceable in this respect, namely: the concept of "reader's literary competence" and the idea of "superreader" proposed by Michael Riffaterre. The latter of the two is an analytic abstraction which M. Riffaterre defines as a "tool" which "in no way distorts the special act of communication under study; it simply explores that act more thoroughly by performing it over and over again".¹ According to M. Riffaterre a "superreader" (this complex is by him applied to Baudelaire's "Les Chats") is composed of the original, the interpretation and the translated version. It can be deduced from the above, that a translator, who is an active reader himself, and who re-creates the text in another language through his actual understanding and interpretation, holds a unique position, inasmuch as what he produces is part of the "tool" due to which further attempts at understanding are rendered actual. A translator's expertise incorporates his sufficient linguistic, and literary responsiveness. Without this response, he will not be capable of assimilating the text which he handles professionally.

In close logical and pragmatic connection with the concept of "superreader" goes Roger Fowler's "literary competence": "For the notion of competence serves to return the reader to the forefront of critical attention, texts are to be described and interpreted in terms of the systems of knowledge which the adequate reader brings to them, and in terms of the process of decoding by which he "realizes" the structure and meaning of texts"²

It is more than obvious from the quotation that in the reader's (and hence translator's) literary competence proper, his "background knowledge" covers a major part. It is due to this knowledge that he will succeed in shortening the cultural distance between himself and the author. As David Lodge formulated in his study "The Novelist's Medium and the Novelist's Art": "To test the closeness of any translation to its original, one would have to be not only bi-lingual but - [...] - bi-cultural..."³

The situation of philological reading and interpretation is rendered far more complicated in those literary pieces whose meaning cannot be reconstructed without the analysis of their vertical context: parody in this respect stands as an intricate set of puzzles for a literary translator. A true piece of parody presents itself as literature in literature. Being at heart a "light genre", it demands readers' high level of erudition and background knowledge though. A reader performs some kind of "double decoding" of the two planes, identifying the mimiced and so to call "re-processed" layer to further settle the parodist's intention.

It is at the very point when the reconsidered literary reality and the parodist-author's idea interact, that parody comes into being. The reasoning of this can be found in V.A.Cuddon's "Dictionary of literary Terms": "Parody is difficult to accomplish well. There has to be a subtle balance between close resemblance to the "original" and deliberate distortion of its principal characteristics. It is, therefore, a minor form of literary art which is likely to be successful only in the hands of writers who are original and creative themselves"⁴

For the present discussion, I have chosen James Thurber's fable "The Moth and the Star". The fable running short, it will be quoted below wholly:

"A young and impressionable moth once set his heart on a certain star. He told his mother about this and she counselled him to set his heart on a bridge lamp instead. "Stars aren't the thing to hang around", she said. "Lamps are the thing to hang around". "You get somewhere that way," said the Moth's father. "You don't get anywhere chasing stars." But the moth would not heed the words of either parent. Every evening at dusk when the star came out he would start flying toward it and every morning at dawn he would crawl back home worn out with his vain endeavour. One day his father said to him, "You haven't burnt a wing in months, boy, and it looks to me as if you were never going to. All your brothers have been badly burned flying around street lamps and all your sisters have been terribly singed flying around lamps. Come on, now, get out of here and get yourself scorched! A big strapping moth like you without a mark on him!

The moth left his father's house, but he would not fly around street lamps and he would not fly around house lamps. He went right on trying to reach the star, which was four and one-third light years, or 25 trillion miles, away. The moth thought it was just caught in the top branches of an elm. He never did reach the star, but he went right on trying, night after night, and when he was a very, very old moth he began to think that he really had reached the star, and he went around saying so. This gave him a deep and lasting pleasure, and he lived to a great old age. His parents and his brothers, and his sisters had all been burned to death when they were quite young.

Moral: who flies afar from the sphere of our sorrow is here today and here tomorrow.⁵

The narrative is enclosed in the traditional form of a fable with its characteristic moral, and is a reminiscence of Andersen's fairy tales, particularly: "The Moth." The fairy tale sounds like a fable, too, due to its allegorical presentation. In the main outline it is this:

The moth decided to marry a pretty flower. Looking around, he could not decide on any flower at first sight. He flew to the ox-eye daisy asking her to name his promised bride. The ox-eye daisy was hurt to be called "Mother Daisy", and the Moth was soon bored with her, too. As time passed, he lost interest in the violet, tulip, daffodil, lime-blossom and apple-blossom.

Only the sweet pea, white and pink in colour and with delicious smell, was impressed in his mind. And the moth was about to marry her, when he saw the faded haricot. He was scared to have an old wife by his side, and changed his mind. Days rolled on. The last one to attract his attention was the mint, who could only offer friendship. On a rainy and windy day, he flew into a house and was pinned and locked in a box⁶

The common European cultural background is duly read through the fable, and the two motifs are heard as "echoing" each other in subtle interaction.

The second, specifically English allusive element, which is rather more overt, is played to arouse poetic associations. It is vivid and effective due to being concise, as it occurs in the moral, and wordy enough to be recognized. The phrase "the sphere of our sorrow" is a quotation from the poem of Shelley's entitled "To-," which touches upon the theme of love, desire and devotion:

*One word is too often profaned
For me to profane it,
One feeling too falsely disdained
For thee to disdain it;
One hope is too like despair
For prudence to smother,
And pity from thee more dear
Than that from another.*

*I can give not what men call love,
But wilt thou accept not
The worship the heavens reject not, -
The desire of the moth for the star,
Of the night for the morrow, .*

*The devotion to something afar
From the sphere of our sorrow?*⁷

Borrowing one of the concurrent motifs, and namely that of "the desire of the moth for the star", J.Thurber places it in a new context, transferring it from the sphere of mental reflections back to earth, and earthly relations for the sole reason of ridiculing man's concerns and ambitions. This parody is not directed to Andersen's creative world, or Shelley's poetic contemplations in the strictest sense of the word. The parodist's intention covers a wider scope. I understand this to be his generalization on man's limited capabilities and the "sorrows" of this earthly life, through exaggerating the parodied authors' treatment of their subject matters and by literary and poetic means.

It is characteristic of James Thurber to have ridiculed "the anxieties of the average individual in modern society."⁸

In his urge for perfection, Andersen's idealistic moth is finally pinned in a box, and Shelley's lyric hero is inspired to grant to his beloved the deepest worship that "the heart lifts above". J.Thurber's "impressionable" moth "flies afar" from "the sphere of our sorrow" and finds the fulfilment of his ideals in his dream.

For a responsive reader, all these themes join in one, sounding in chorus, each with its voice.

Proceeding from M.Bakhtin's dialogic principle, which is hermeneutical in essence, and according to which dialogic relations occur between author and reader on the one hand, and author and his literary characters, on the other⁹, I can conclude that in parody this dialogue is multicomponential as in multilateral interactions are placed the themes, the heroes' subjectivity and the author's treatment of the themes.

A translator's task is pragmatic. On the basis of his critical approach, which he displays as a philologist, he is to reconstruct another "code" (using the linguistic term) on behalf of the author, - in our case the parodist's, - and present this multi-layer interpretation so that, while "decoding", it his reader may have adequate literary and, I dare say, linguistic associations - an extremely difficult task.

Parody, and literary parody, specifically, belongs to a single language and literary tradition; it is confined to the realm of linguistic and literary consciousness within one culture. However conceptual, it cannot exist as a literary work independent of its original language.

These wanderings of thought now bring to the one question: "To what extent is it possible to translate parody? Can it fully be assimilated in another culture to be "here today and here tomorrow?"

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2. Roger Fowler, Cohesive, Progressive and Localizing Aspects of Text Structure, p.66// Literature as Social Discourse, Batsford Academic and Educational Ltd., London, 1981, 216 p.
3. David Lodge, The Argument from Translation (From "The Novelist's Medium and the Novelist's Art) p.52//Essays in Stylistic Analysis, ed. by Howard S.Babb, Univ. of Calif., 1972, 392 p.
4. J.A. Cuddon, A Dictionary of Literary Terms, Penguin Books, 1984.
5. James Thurber, "The Moth and the Star"//The Way It was Not (English and American Writers in Parody), Moscow, Raduga Publishers, 1983.
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7. Percy Bysshe Shelley, "To-", p.88//An Anthology of English Literature: XIX, "Просвещение", Ленинград, 1978.
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9. М.М. Бахтин, Проблема текста в лингвистике, филологии и других гуманитарных науках (Опыт философского анализа)//Литературно-критические статьи, "Худ.литература", М, 1986, 543 стр.

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Հողվածում դիտարկվում են գրական երկի, մասնավորապես գրական պարողիայի մեկնաբանման և թարգմանելիության հարցերը ներտեքստային աղբյուրների տեսանկյունից: Մեկ ստեղծագործության օրինակի վրա (Ջեյմս Թերբեր «Գիշերաթիթեռը և աստղը») վեր են հանվում մեկնաբանման այն հնարավորությունները, որոնք պարողիայի «ուղղահայաց համատեքստ» են ներմուծվում այլուզիվ տարրերի (ակնարկ, մեջբերում) շնորհիվ: