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Translators and the Literary Politics of Socialism in Hungary

Abstract:

In this paper I summarize my findings from a ten-year research project in the history of Hungarian literary translation, from 1947 to the 1960's, in a period when the vast majority of the best Hungarian poets were forced to survive professionally by doing literary translations because their own work could not be published due to state censorship. With the literary politics of the period based on a Stalinist conception of literature, anyone whose work did not follow the official party line was banned. As a result Hungarian writers and poets were forced instead to create translations in unbelievable numbers, and statistics from the period show that half of the books published in Hungary were translations. A well-controlled translation industry was developed by government officials with the help of literary people to assign the tasks to the translators and to review the translations. In this system some translators found it very hard to find inspiration for doing quality work, although some tried to do their best despite their moral and esthetic convictions, and some devised their own *modus vivendi* to survive. In this paper I will discuss the work of ten Hungarian translators, Anna Hajnal, Gyula Illyés, Zoltán Jékely, László Kálnoky, Ágnes Nemes Nagy, Ottó Orbán, György Rónay, Lőrinc Szabó, István Vas, and Sándor Weöres, all of whom were also creative writers. I will detail their strategies for coping with the intellectual, moral, and financial pressure the translation industry exerted upon them.

Keywords: Literary translation, Hungarian literary translators, translation analysis, cultural politics of translation, censorship and translation

The four-year period after the "liberation" of Hungary in 1944-45 saw a quick and aggressive introduction of Soviet communist practices, including a total control of literature and publishing. Practically all authors who had published before the war were silenced for several years on ideological grounds, and a secret inventory was drawn up to determine which authors were loyal enough to the Communist Party. The official literary politics favored Marxist aesthetics and criticism, which imposed serious limitations on the freedom of literature and developed a one-sided socialist norm that had a negative effect on authors, public education officials, as well as on readers (Vasy 2005). The objectives of literature were also laid down, in a five-year plan by Márton Horváth, the communist politician who executed the party's Stalinist cultural politics in the Rákosi-era (from 1947 to 1956), and who was a chief promoter of voluntarist cultural politics finally leading to general schematism, wrote the following:

The five-year plan determines the main directions and topics of our literature too. This does not mean a

limitation, as the requirement for literature is to deal with the most important topics of our present-day life, and the most important task in our new life is the building of socialism. Anyone who feels this a straitjacket would consider the whole of new Hungary as a prison, so there is no place for him/her in our new literature [...] Democratic literature means a literature that addresses millions, that is plain and of general interest. This is the literature of the new heroes of the people, living for the people. This is new elevation, the literature of the pathos of building.[1]

Az ötéves terv meghatározza irodalmunk fő irányát és fő témakörét is. Ez nem leszűkítést jelent, hiszen úgy is lehetne ezt a követelményt fogalmazni, hogy az irodalomnak elsősorban mai életünk legfontosabb kérdéseivel kell foglalkoznia - hiszen a szocialista építés alakítja ki döntően új életünket. Akinek ez kényszerzubbonyt jelent, az csak börtönnek érezheti az egész új Magyarországot, annak aligha lehet helye az új irodalomban [...] Demokratikus irodalom annyit jelent, hogy milliókhoz szóló, közérthető és közérdekű irodalom. A népből jött és a népért élő új hősök irodalma ez. Új emelkedettség: az építés pátoszának irodalma ez. (Horváth 1949)

These requirements meant that the majority of the best Hungarian writers were partly or fully excluded from literary life and were forced to abandon writing their own pieces because of the ideological and existential circumstances of the period. Some were excluded because of their previous writings, which were either labeled "aestheticist" pieces, useless in class war, or expressed social criticism that did not fit the official point of view of the Party. Some other writers were encouraged to produce "real" socialist pieces and to commit themselves to the new order, and if they did not do so, their works were rejected (Vasy 2005).

Although in the period between 1947 and the late 1960's it was impossible for many writers and poets to get their own pieces published, the new political system did offer some kind of livelihood and let many writers earn money somewhere on the verges of literature. This primarily meant literary translation as there was a strong urge to present the literature of the Socialist Bloc to the Hungarian reading public, including social realist pieces together with the great classics. Some pieces of what the regime called Western "progressive" literature were also translated and published. Another possible source of income for writers was to produce books for children and young people for the Ifjúsági Könyvkiadó [Young People's Publisher], which was established in 1950 to publish both translations and original pieces. Finally, there was a possibility to dramatize pieces of literature for the radio, and to hold lectures to the general public. This contributed to a general feeling of loss, and many regretted not being able to produce their own writing.

A great part of Hungarian literary translation was a product of pressure coming from the cultural authorities as the writers and poets silenced in the late 1940's and the 1950's and 1960's all referred in some way to the fact that literary translation was the only means of survival and the only chance for self-expression. The literary translators of the famous Hungarian literary periodical titled *Nyugat* [West], who had been free to translate whatever they wanted, were a thing of the past. The translation industry that was gradually and efficiently set up by the new regime, employing an army of editors, raw translators, and 'control editors' (who check the translation and compare it to the original text), was also a way of putting writers under

control, both financially and in regard to the content of their translation work. The only achievement of this new system was that the writers and poets silenced by the communist regime published a number of translations and translation anthologies during the period, well illustrated by the following comments by two famous translators, Ágnes Nemes Nagy and István Vas:

"In the Rákosi-era we strove for silent survival. We - young writers and poets deprived of any possibility to publish our pieces - huddled up against each other as sheep in hail. We read and criticized each other's pieces. We played a lot and laughed too, even if it was black humor. For most of us, children's literature and literary translation offered a shelter" [A Rákosi-korszakban a néma túlélésre törekedtünk. Többen - a publikálás lehetőségétől megfosztott írók-költők, akkori fiatalok - összebújtunk, mint birkák a jégesőben. Egymás műveit olvastuk, bíráltuk. Sokat játszottunk, ha fekete humorral is, de neveltünk. Legtöbbünknek a gyerekirodalom meg a műfordítás volt a menedék], wrote Ágnes Nemes Nagy about the 1950's (Nemes Nagy 2011, 2: 463). "I do not know of another literature where so many great poets devoted so much energy to literary translation" [Nem tudok olyan irodalomról, ahol ennyi nagy költő ekkora energiát fordított volna a fordításra, mint a mienk], said István Vas, summarizing the facts (Vas 1974: 571).

The mixing of domestic and foreign poetic cultures is very conspicuous in Hungarian poetry, and this phenomenon was further facilitated by the cultural politics of the 1950's, when the best poets, after being silenced, were encouraged to translate. According to Nemes Nagy this led to "something that oftentimes happens in the case of small nations: we made a virtue of necessity and (as a fellow-writer says) took advantage of our handicaps. We began to translate with pleasure. This resulted in the fact that Hungarian literary translation contains an element of creation, more so than literary translation in general" [ami kis népek közt gyakori: a szükségből erényt fabrikáltunk, vagy (ahogy egyik íróársunk mondja) kihasználtuk helyzetünk hátrányait. Elkezdtünk gyönyörűséggel fordítani. Az eredmény az lett, hogy a magyar műfordítás sokkal inkább alkotásjelleget, mint a fordítás általában] (Nemes Nagy 2011, 1: 93).

In the following sections I am going to present strategies some Hungarian literary translators used to cope with the intellectual, moral, and financial pressure the translation industry exerted upon them, which show us how creative they were in finding ways of expressing their own styles and personalities through their translations. I will also discuss how translators and their critics resisted the regime while playing according to its rules. The result was a mixture of subdued resistance and hypocrisy so characteristic of socialist Hungary. After an analysis of the life and work of ten well-known Hungarian literary translators, I found that some accepted the new rules to some extent, and some even liked making translations, even if it was forced upon them. There were translators who simply accepted their fate without much hesitation, while there were others who resisted the system with whatever indirect means available to them, but there was also one translator who sacrificed his own literary career for the sake of quality translations.

In the Hungary of the 1950's there were many translators who accepted working on literary translations and thus found their respective places without much discomfort in the new literary landscape of the period. One important representative of those translators who accepted the rules of the new regime was Gyula Illyés (1902-83), who had taken part in some left-wing political activity before the war and was a member of

parliament for a few years in 1945-47. He was not among those writers who were banned from publication for a long time, but only between 1956 and 1961, with the exception of an anthology of poems titled *Kínai szelence* [Chinese Box] that he published in 1958.

Even during those years he kept up a dialogue with representatives of cultural politics, who respected him to some extent. For Illyés, translation was not only an activity forced upon him by the state as he had already translated a lot starting as early as the 1920's, although sometimes he did more such work than he would have wanted to, as he stated in 1937 interview: "I translate a lot, I have to make a living: with such an activity I have not got the tranquility, time, and most important of all, the mood to be involved in literature" [fordítok, kenyeret kell keresnem: ilyen elfoglaltság közben sosem szokott nyugalmam, időm és főleg kedvem maradni, hogy irodalommal foglalkozzam] (Földes 1986: 46). In 1942 he published an anthology of French literature (*A francia irodalom kincsesháza* [Treasure Trove of French Literature]) as an homage to France, which was a brave act of solidarity with the country invaded by the Nazis.

After the war he attempted to learn Russian from a friend but, as he said, he acquired only a "horrible kitchen knowledge of the Russian language" [borzalmas konyha-oroszsgot sajátítottam el], as he himself put it (Földes 1986: 665). Nevertheless, his self-described incomplete knowledge was enough for him to understand and translate written Russian literature. Still, he could have felt the translation of Soviet poets as a nuisance. The very disingenuous-sounding answer he gave to a question in an interview in the 1980's shows that "this work was useful as a means of making a living as there was a time when we were compelled to do it. However, we did want to translate, we did want to get acquainted with Soviet literature" [hasznos volt ez a munka mint kenyérkereset is, hiszen volt egy idő, amikor rákényszerültünk erre. Emellett azonban akartunk is fordítani, meg akartunk ismerkedni a szovjet költészettel] (Földes 1986: 668).

György Rónay (1913-78) started his translator's career at a young age. Editors soon recognized his talent and gave him more and more work so he quickly became a professional, and as such was allowed to recommend books to the editors and would also offer to translate certain works himself. Rónay was the kind of scholarly translator who also studied the original with a critical eye. To ensure his livelihood he applied for a job at Ifjúsági Könyvkiadó where he worked as a translator of children's tales, along with a number of other notable writers, among them Zoltán Jékely, László Kálnoky, and Ágnes Nemes Nagy. Although Rónay felt translation was a noble task, a way of enriching Hungarian culture, there was also an underlying cause behind his prolific oeuvre, as he used translations as a means of expressing what he could not say in his own poetry, and he also said that he liked translation because "it was a sort of orientation and nourishment for me" [számomra a fordítás elsősorban tájékozódás és táplálkozás volt], as he said (Rónay 1973: 7). He never complained if he had to work long hours and saw translation as an activity where he enjoyed the pleasure of craftsmanship and re-creative art. He somehow managed to make himself like the text even if it was given to him as a task from an editor, and he considered each text equally important and worthy of translation, ideas he had to believe in given that he felt "people only translate texts that are really important for them" [az ember elsősorban azt fordítja, ami a szívügye] (Rónay 1973: 10). Although he was banned from publication for many years, Rónay always did his utmost to be present in Hungarian literary life if only with his

translations.

Ágnes Nemes Nagy (1922-91), who [was unusual in that she] translated poems and plays from three languages, French, German, and English, was similar to Rónay in a way: she did not mind having to do translations. As she said: "translation has always been an ambition of mine, ever since my childhood, which was lucky for me [...] because I had a period in my life when I was not allowed to publish, only to translate - but I did not belong among those who translated only out of necessity" [énnekem a műfordítás mindig is ambícióm volt, már diákkoromtól kezdve, nagy szerencsémre, [...] hiszen volt egy jó nagy időszak az életemben, amikor nem jelenhettem meg, csak fordíthattam - nem tartoztam a kizárólag kényszerből fordítók közé] (Nemes Nagy 2011, 2: 498). As a young poet she was marginalized by the political system as a representative of bourgeois poetry and thus she was only accepted by literary authorities as a literary translator. Determined to make the best of the situation she regarded translation as art, a way of complementing her own poetry, and what is more, a way of producing 'original' pieces that fit into the tradition of Hungarian literary translation. "I translated a lot, old and new poetry and plays, not only because my circumstances compelled me to do so, but because this has been a tradition in Hungary for four hundred (or even a thousand) years. The best poets are traditionally translators, too" [Jó sokat fordítottam, régi és modern világeköltészetet, drámákat, nemcsak azért, mert körülményeim erre kényszerítettek, hanem azért is, mert ez Magyarországon négyszáz éve (vagy ezer éve) divat. Szokás nálunk, hogy a legjobb költők műfordítók is] (Nemes Nagy 2011, 2: 164). "I believe in literary translation. Despite everything" [Hiszek a műfordításban. Mindennek ellenére], she once said (Nemes Nagy 1975: 910). Sándor Rákos, one of the best Hungarian translators and literary critics noted in an article that Nemes Nagy "was able to accommodate in her personality even the tasks that were given to her by force or by chance" (Rákos 1974: 334). She saw translation not only as art but also a profession where maintaining a certain standard is necessary to satisfy the customer.

István Vas (1910-91), one of the best-known Hungarian translators, also started translating in his youth. During the Second World War when he was in constant danger because of his Jewish origin he used translation, as he later expressed it, as 'a kind of drug'. Realizing that the intellectuality of his own poetry was a kin to Donne's and Marvell's passionate and intellectual poetry, he wrote about his translations of Shakespeare:

I started to translate *Henry VI* amidst a threat of constant danger and how the first line reflected my feelings - 'Hung be the heavens with black, yield day to night!' - and how well I found the equivalents to his curses while being in terror of raids! And right after the war I continued with *Richard III*, and when I started to translate the text sitting on the ruins of my own life, I cannot tell how the first line expressed my own feelings: 'Now is the winter of our discontent / Made glorious summer by this sun of York;'
Már a közvetlen fenyegetés árnyékában kezdtem el a *VI. Henrik*-et, és mennyire szívemből kezdhettem el: „No, feketedj el, ég, nap, éjre változz", s a razziáktól rettegés közben milyen könnyen győztem az átkozódásait! De rögtön a felszabadulás után Shakespeare-rel folytathattam életemet, a *III. Richárd*-dal,

s amikor életem keretének romjai között belevágtam: „York napsütése rosszkedvünk telét / Tündöklő nyárrá változtatta át,” mennyire a magamét mondhattam vele! (Vas 1974: 566-7)

Vas, who was politically silenced in 1949, could not publish again until 1953, but by 1955 he published a collection of his translations (*Hét tenger éneke* [Songs of Seven Seas]), and in the 1960's he continued to translate a number of poems and plays. Poetry and translation made up an organic whole in his oeuvre, meaning two aspects of the same creative process. "I do translations with the same intensity, with the same inspiration and objectives as anything else... the point is that I can express some of what is trying to come out of me [a fordítást is ugyanazon a hőfokon, ugyanazzal az ihlettel és igénnyel csinálom, mint egyebet... A lényeg az, hogy elmondjak valamit abból, ami éppen kikívánkozik belőlem] (Gách 1962: 18). Although Vas was allowed to publish his anthology of translations, it was heavily criticized on political grounds by several critics. One critic said Soviet literature was missing from the book and hinted at the fact that this might be a symptom of the age (Bori 1958: 831). Another critic also complained about the lack of Soviet poetry in the anthology (Réz 1956: 412), while a third claimed that rather than having a look around himself in the present Vas was harping on issues from the past.

While literary translators, such as the foregoing authors did manage to produce fine translations, others who had been Hungary's best translators before the war found it very hard to accept the new literary rules after 1949 and struggled, wasting their creative energies on translation, still, they accepted their fate and did not resist the Socialist cultural system. Lőrinc Szabó (1900-57), one of the greatest Hungarian translators who had started his career in his twenties and accomplished many famous translations, for example the poetry of Omar Khayyam and the Sonnets of Shakespeare, first published in 1922. From the 1920's he translated a lot and gradually became the most experienced Hungarian translator, and the pioneer of a new attitude to translation that advocated a perfect intellectual equivalence between the original and the translation, and a confinement of musical sound in lyrical poetry. His subsequent anthology of translations, *Örök barátaink* [Our Eternal Friends], published in 1941, was the work of an accomplished translator. It is important to note that all these translations and the majority of Szabó's oeuvre had been done before the imposition of socialist controls on translation. After the war years the poet had to defend himself against politically motivated attacks, and he could not publish until 1947. Between 1945 and 1947 he did a lot of translations of plays, poems, and novels, which consumed his time and had an adverse effect on his health, moreover, his financial situation slowly deteriorated and he found it increasingly hard to keep the deadlines. As Professor Lóránt Kabdebó summarises:

Lőrinc Szabó, the poet, only lived in the *memory* of literature-lovers in this period, but he had a significant role in Hungarian literary translation. [...] People rely upon the translations of the renowned poet; the poet whose 'individualistic' tone in not 'yet' needed in the period, but his qualities are recognized and his participation as a translator enhance the value of literary projects.

Bár a költőnek ekkor csak az *emléke* él a köztudatban, jelentős hangsúlyt kap jelenléte a műfordítói

irodalmi életben. [...] A rangos költő műfordítói munkájára számítanak, annak a költőének, akinek 'individualista' hangjára épp akkor 'még' nincs szükség, de kvalitásait elismerik, és fordítói részvétele emeli a vállalkozások értékét. (Kabdebó 1980: 299-300)

Consequently, Szabó was always commissioned to translate the most difficult pieces. He said "literary translation is hard work but if it is really significant, it becomes part of the original oeuvre of the poet, giving and getting insights and explanations. [...] Literary translation is a living dialogue with world literature and at the same time [...] ideal patriotism; and a critique of the original and self-criticism of the translator. [A műfordítás hálátlan mesterség, de ha igazán jelentős, odakerül a költő eredeti műve mellé, s annak ad és attól kap bizonyos sugárzásokat és magyarázatokat. [...] A versfordítás eleven társalgás a világirodalommal, s ugyanakkor [...] eszményi hazaszeretet; egyben kritika a fordított műről és önkritika a fordítóról] (Szabó 1984: 422). The poet also noted a very interesting episode of his life in 1944-45. When his hometown was occupied by the Red Army, he met the Kirgiz poet Temirkul Umetoli, who at that time was serving as a lieutenant. They soon became friends and held regular meetings to discuss poetry, and it was Umetoli who saved Szabó's home from being occupied by Red Army officers. Szabó Lőrinc saw this as a piece of divine help and decided to translate the works of Russian poets from then on. He won a prize for his translations of Mayakovski in 1954.

Sándor Weöres (1913-89) was one of the most prolific translators and one of the most playful poets of the twentieth century in Hungary. As he was unable to publish between 1947 and 1957, he found he could make a living from translations. As he said

"to me literary translation was never a thing of inspiration. It was simply earning a living. I started translating when I could not publish my own pieces. I was dismissed from my job, too, so I had to make a living, that is how I started translating. I translated everything I was given."

Nekem a műfordítás sohasem volt inspiratív dolog. Kenyérkereset volt. Akkor kezdtem el fordítani, amikor a Rákosi-időben saját írásaimmal nem szerepelhettem. Állásomból is kiraktak, valamiből élni kellett, így kezdtem el fordítani. Fordítottam azt, amivel éppen megbíztak (Rákos 1993: 250).

When his collection of translations appeared in 1958, titled *A lélek idézése* [Conjuring the Spirit], he was already the busiest literary translator in Hungary. This was seen as a privilege compared to other poets who were completely silenced and struggling to make a living.

Weöres' translator's credo can be pieced together using several different sources. Here, three of these are quoted to illustrate his work as a translator. "Usually I did not translate the pieces I chose myself" [Javarészt nem azokat fordítottam, akiket magam választottam], said the poet in an interview (Nádor 1993: 378). "I was not really interested in literary translation apart from earning my living. With the exception of a few really complicated tasks" [Alapjában sohasem érdekelt a műfordítás a kenyérkereseten túl. Kivéve néhány

igen nehéz feladatot], he added in another interview (Rákos 1993: 250). "Poets are commissioned with translations. People who write will never make a living from their writings, because they would have to dilute and exploit themselves to such an extent that would harm their art. One can only make a living from translation" [Az ember fordítás-megbízásokat kap. Aki ír, az a saját írásaiból megélni soha nem fog, illetve akkor kénytelen lenne önmagát annyira hígítani, túlszigázni, hogy az a művészetnek ártana. Megélni csak fordításból lehet] (Weöres 1972: 468).

Weöres took advantage of the fact that there was an unprecedented demand for foreign poetry in the market. Hungary's relations within the Socialist Bloc flourished, and as a consequence, a method had to be devised for handling an industrial-size mass of translations. There were very few people in Hungary who spoke Czech, Bulgarian, Polish, Serbian or Croatian, not to mention Russian, and the uncountable number of smaller languages existing in the Soviet Union. As politics called for an interpretation of Soviet poets for the Hungarian reading public, a system was set up which started out from a rough, word-by-word translation of the original, which was 'stylized' by a translator, and finally a control editor compared the translation to the original and corrected the mistakes. Weöres was a perfect stylist, he was capable of re-structuring any rough translation into a finished poem, but in his translation work he sometimes considered quantity more important than quality, that is to say sometimes he translated carelessly, as if he were saying to the political system "I'll treat your translations as you treat me and my fellow poets."

There were some Hungarian translators who resisted the system with the indirect means available to them, and also one translator who sacrificed his own literary career for the sake of quality translations. The element of resistance seen above in Weöres' work can also be traced in the literary translations of Anna Hajnal (1907-77), who had already translated German and English texts before the war. In her case it is quite obvious that she only translated texts that editors gave her; she translated what "the translating industry assigned to her" [amit a fordítói ipar kiosztott rá] (Rónay 1973: 51). Her humble personality, professionalism, and self-consciousness as a poet let her accept her fate and do some translations even if it was hard work for her. Hajnal published her literary translations in a four hundred-page book titled *Kölcsönkenyér* [Tit for Tat, in word-by-word translation Borrowed Bread] (1968). The book is ironic in its very title as it refers to the money earned with the exhaustive work of translation. The book contains the translations of seventy-one German, and fifty-seven English and American poems, as well as fifteen poems from other languages. The rest of the book is taken up by the translation of *The Merchant of Venice* by Shakespeare. The poems are some of the lesser-known pieces of their authors, so it can be assumed that Hajnal's choice of text did not depend on her at all but rather it is likely that she got the less significant poems that had not been assigned to the 'great' translators. This makes it clear why she did her work the way she did. Most of her translations - although they are still very good - fall short of the formal and content standards established by the Hungarian translators' tradition, as if she had not wanted to waste too much time and effort on interpreting them. Hajnal was "in no mood to discover foreign lands, what is more, in borrowed clothes, György Rónay said, she was in no mood to look for the best-fitting clothes from the rich wardrobe of world literature" [Nincs sok kedve idegen tájakon hódító kalandozásokat végezni, ráadásul

kölcsönruhákban, nincs kedve ahhoz, hogy kikeresse a világirodalom gazdag ruhatárából a neki testhezállókat] (Rónay 1973: 51). Speaking of Hajnal's translation mistakes, he unintentionally ranked her among second-rate translators: "we are not in the mainstream" [nem a főág sodrában vagyunk] (Rónay 1973: 52). As if Rónay had not known the way the pieces to be translated were assigned by the editors to the translators; there is a fine example of hypocrisy in the words of the critic. But, in fact, Anna Hajnal did a lot to remain among the lesser-known translators.

There was a translator, the renowned poet Zoltán Jékely (1913-82), who chose a tactic somewhat similar to Hajnal's. "Jékely is a great poet, but we cannot be sure that a great poet, when he translates, is also a great translator. Jékely sometimes is a great translator, on par with the greatest" [Jékely nagy költő, de nem biztos, ha egy nagy költő, ha fordít, nagy fordító is. De Jékely néha nagy fordító, egyenrangú a legnagyobbakkal], wrote György Rónay about him, somewhat at a loss (Rónay 1973: 602). The critic, who was renowned for his objectivity and clear judgment, was this time unable to pronounce that Jékely, sometimes, contented himself with mediocre solutions. His translations were very good when he was able to identify with the original text and its writer, that is, if he found pleasure in the text he was translating.

It is a safe assumption that Jékely would never have translated anything if he had not been forced to do so. He was the kind of poet who had to waste his own inspiration on foreign pieces. Being a sovereign author, he tried to avoid the influence of great literary personalities. That is why he was strongly drawn to folk literature and folk ballads. He also preferred to translate lesser-known pieces of lesser-known poets, trying to avoid any kind of poetic competition. Obviously, he did not want to excel as a translator. This modesty is partly understandable, partly not. Jékely knew perfectly well which of his translations were good and bad, so we can suppose he did not want anyone to mix up the two. It was easier to remain silent and say almost nothing about his translations. However, he said a few things about translation in general, revealing his strategy, such as "literary translation is the most complete and devoted homage to an author," and being a translator means "a complete identification with the author and the spirit of the original piece." This means that "the success of the translation depends on the level of identification and the linguistic skills of the translator" [a szerző iránti legteljesebb, legodaadóbb hódolat [...] a szerző, az eredeti mű szellemébe minél jobban beleélni magunkat [...] az átültetés sikerültségét a beleélés hőfoka s a fordító nyelvi készsége határozza meg] (Jékely 1981: 17). According to Jékely, this devotion cannot originate from any outside source, as identification comes from the inside, and linguistic skills are given. If a translation is bad, there is not much to feel ashamed about, and there is no need to apologize, either. At the same time, he believed that sometimes there can be pieces that are really close to him, and in such cases the translation will satisfy both the reader and the translator. His best translations include pieces of folk literature and Renaissance pieces from Italy and France. The summative collection of his translations appeared in 1959 under the title *Keresztút* [Crossroads]. Jékely's translations are a very interesting section of Hungarian literature. The ones he translated with pleasure are excellent; the ones assigned by editors are poor; one has the impression that he, perhaps intentionally, set lower standards when translating the latter. No other reason can be found for his weak solutions, formal distortions, and mistranslations.

Ottó Orbán (1936-2002) is one of the poets who only engaged in translation because they were forced to. As he was not allowed to publish until 1960, he had to translate, and after his first volume was published (what is more, only in a censored version), he was silenced again. "I was similar to a circus magician, I was good at many things. And when I was finally killed as a poet, between 1963 and 65 [...] I acted as a translator" [afféle cirkuszi bűvész is voltam, sok mindenhez értettem. És amikor mégiscsak kinyírtak mint költőt, 63-tól mondjuk úgy 65-ig [...] akkor fölléptem mint műfordító] (Domokos 1994: 84). His translations were only published in anthologies, the publication of his own collection of translations happened as late as 1972. By this time he had become one of the best translators of English and Spanish literature. Orbán chose to make a virtue of necessity and he tried to make the labor of translation as enjoyable as possible. "The translation industry [...] - for I was known as a quality supplier - gave me lots of orders; the slave was given a tiny hope of escape, an illusion of adventure and liberty. I dreamt while being awake, and I roamed in my dreams, as did my notorious ancestors" [A fordítóüzem [...] - minőségi munkájáról ismert beszállítóját - bőségesen ellátott megrendeléssel; egy rabszolgát a szökés meg-megújuló reményével, a kaland és a szabadság illúziójával. Én pedig ébren álmodtam, és álomban kalandoztam, mint hírhedt elődeim.], he said in an interview (Orbán 1998: 424). Orbán took translation, the text, and the process of translation very seriously, but spoke about his work as a translator with continuous irony. "I tried to sweeten the monotony of piling lines with various seasonings, and the constant changing of my disguises. All good translators play the 'cook' and disguise themselves, but I, myself, because I really needed this to conserve my spiritual health, used more spices than usual and changed my disguises more often" [A sokasodó verssorok egyhangúságát a fűszerezéssel és álöltözeteim változtatásával igyekeztem változatossá tenni. Minden valamire való fordító „szakácskodik" és alakoskodik, csak én, minthogy lelki egészségem függött tőle, az átlagosnál több fűszert használtam, és gyakrabban váltottam álöltözetet] (Orbán 1998: 425). His individual talent comes to light in many of his best translations. He excelled in interpreting the poems of Robert Lowell, Thomas Wyatt, John Donne, William Carlos Williams, or Vachel Lindsay, and he found voices very similar to his own in the poems of Dylan Thomas and Allen Ginsberg. The unique mistakes and inaccuracies in his translations, or rather his re-tunings of the original melody reveal that Orbán wanted to enjoy what he was doing, and he was waiting for the critics to discover his ingenious playfulness. In one of his essays he even brought them to book for not recognizing it (Orbán 1980: 292).

The last translator to be discussed, László Kálnoky (1912-85), is probably the most unfortunate of all Hungarian translators. In his poem *A műfordító halála* [The Death of the Literary Translator] he writes: "Szilánkra kell annak hasadnia, / aki fordított teljes életében" [He must rip into splinters / The one who translated in his whole life]. Reading these bitter lines we would think that the pressure of translation left marks in his oeuvre as a translator, but we find that no other translator can match Kálnoky in conscience and accuracy. No matter what kind of task he got, he did his job according to the highest possible standards. Kálnoky never wrote any essays about his translations and was also not interested in translation theory but he just clenched his teeth and did the arduous labor of translation. Building the extraordinary oeuvre of his translations was coupled with a constant bitter feeling of loss. This feeling is nowhere as conspicuous in

Hungarian literature as in Kálnoky's work. The irreplaceability of original poems, the feeling of losing invaluable inspiration is pronounced in the poem titled *Ami örökre elveszett* [What is Lost Forever]:
Megírhatjuk-e, amit meg nem írtunk / kellő időben? Mintha egy kopasz / férfi keresné, gyűjtögetné / erdőn,
mezőn, szobában / régen kihullt hajszálait. [Can we write what we had not written / in due time? As if a bald
man / was looking for and collecting / his spilled hairs / in woods, fields, and rooms.] The narrator of
another poem, quoted above, *A műfordító halála*, even calls himself a 'fool':

ez a bolond, ki buzgón töltögette
saját vérét idegen szellemekbe,
s ha rendelésre új munkába kezdett,
lefarigcsált szivéből egy gerezdet.

this fool who devotedly poured his blood
his own blood into alien spirits,
and at times when a new piece was ordered ,
he did carve away a piece of his heart.

The poet took every occasion to speak about where this feeling of self-sacrifice came from. "Translation prevented me from writing my own poems because it consumed the same internal supply. I never did translation as routine work, I always put all my creative powers into it" [A fordítás akadályozott a versírásban, mert ugyanazt a belső tartalékot fogyasztotta. Sosem fordítottam csak rutinból, mindig teljes alkotóerőmet beleöntöttem a munkába] (Kabdebó 1984: 1297). Kálnoky revealed in a letter that he created in himself the inspiration necessary for real poetry, and tried to do his translations at the highest possible standard, using his skills to the full, devising methods to conjure up an inspiration, or at least a fake inspiration (Kálnoky 1975: 16). He did everything to identify with the foreign poet and this done, he recreated the texts in Hungarian. In the meantime he wasted his own poems: he spoke about "three volumes of unwritten poetry" in the interview quoted above (Kabdebó 1984: 1297).

The ten Hungarian translators presented in this paper give us a comprehensive inventory of the strategies used by the different translators, and, at the same time, also show us their different attitudes ranging from a willing acceptance, through an indirect resistance, to a bitter feeling of self-loss. The worst period was during the 1940's and 50's, but as early as in the late 1960's, and especially in the 1970's, the years of János Kádár's 'soft dictatorship,' poets were allowed again to publish and make a living from their own writing. Authors started working enthusiastically and they tried to get rid of the memories of silent years, even if some sort of censorship was still in operation. Some survival techniques remained necessary for safety reasons, and many of the poets did not dare to record their memories until later. It is well visible in this paper too that the quotations by the translators are almost always dated to the 1970's and 80's, or even later.

The confessions can be seen as a part of oral history, and, as such, might not always be accurate. Their general significance is clear, however. Being an author is hard even in a soft dictatorship, and there were still dangers lurking around translators. It is enough here to refer to the mysterious event involving the famous literary translator János Elbert (1932-83), who died in the spring of 1983 in Siófok, at lake Balaton. According to the official police report it was an accident: he went down to the lake to wash his face in the water, and, having taken off his thirteen-diopter eyeglasses, he slipped on the rocks surrounding the lake, and he drowned in the water only 60cm deep. Soon after his death his wife and his son also died mysteriously. Nobody has ever found out what happened. But his contemporaries could still have felt that their lives were in danger right until 1989, the fall of the state Socialist system.

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[1] All translations from Hungarian sources are mine.