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A Few Words on the Hungarian Translation of the *Anatomy of Criticism*

Abstract

The Hungarian translator of Northop Frye's work presents instances of the history of the publication of the book in Hungary, his difficulties and eventual successes in the text of the translation, and attempts by Hungarian critics to introduce Frye's terminology into the practice of Hungarian criticism.

Résumé

Le traducteur de l'oeuvre de Northrop Frye relate l'histoire de la publication du livre en Hongrie, des difficultés et succès éventuels en sa traduction, et les coups d'essais pour introduire la términologie de Frye dans la pratique de la critique hongroise.

It was Péter Dávidházi, a colleague of mine at the Institute for Literary Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Science, who suggested to me that I translate ***Anatomy of Criticism*** for Gondolat (Thought), a publishing house in Budapest assigned to popularize scholarly knowledge under the Socialist regime. The event took place in the 2980s in the entrance hall. Péter arrived, shut the heavy entrance door in a nonchalant way, hardly conscious of the significance of the moment, and I, crossing the hall on my way to the library upstairs, stopped to greet him. I recall these details but not the exact time and date. Circumstantial evidence suggests that the date of our meeting fell close to the imminent sunset of that momentous era, the middle of the pre-post-Socialist period in Hungary.

I had a copy of the book, a paperback edition which I bought in the United States in 1966 when I was a visiting fellow at Yale. I buckled down to work but by the time I finished, historical changes in the social, political and economic orientation of Hungary had resulted in the financial bankruptcy of the publishing house. The text of the translation was approved as ready for publication, and I was paid half of the fee in advance, but that was all: the publisher no longer had the financial means for the publication of the book. The contract I signed had no clauses for the unusual situation of the bankruptcy of a state firm, or indeed the bankruptcy of the state itself with all its firms and authorities.

I realized with some satisfaction that colleagues in and outside the Institute were keen to know Frye's monumental work. I was invited to talk on the book to students of the Eötvös

Collegium, the Hungarian equivalent of the famous French institution, the ***École Normale Supérieure***. I received an encouraging message from colleagues at Szeged University who were planning to bring out a series of foreign works on theory and criticism, and in 1993 ***Határ***, a new review edited by an enthusiastic group of young literati at Debrecen University, published excerpts from my translation.

Five years later, in 1998, thanks to János Szilágyi, director of Helikon publishing house, the Hungarian version of ***Anatomy of Criticism*** was published in book form.

* * *

I enjoyed immensely the strict logic of Frye's work. It consists of four "essays", i. e. four formally independent parts, but the integrity of the work is spectacular. Logical integrity is a ***sine qua non*** condition in a text aspiring to be ranked as ***theory***. For the same reason, a theoretical system with pretensions of practical use will be drowned in a superabundance of terms to make it adaptable to special or individual problems. A systematic discussion of the actual tasks of the literary critic is more exposed to such risks than purely abstract theorizing on literature.

Northrop Frye was aware of the need of fine distinctions and of the consequential danger of disintegration. The definition of "fiction" in the Glossary is a perfect example of his awareness of the need of neat differentiation and the danger of establishing too many terms to cover all types which come in view:

> FICTION: Literature in which the radical of presentation is the printed or written word, such as novels and essays. – FICTIONAL: Relating to literature in which there are internal characters, apart from the author and his audience; opposed to thematic. ***(N.B.*** use of the term is regrettably inconsistent with the preceding one, as noted on p. 248.) (Frye 1966, 365-366)

On page 248 we find a detailed explication of the uses of the term "fiction" with an emphasis on the lack of terms to distinguish from "oral literature" what in Fye's phrasing is "genuine 'book literature'". The problem is settled with an apology:

> As I have to have some word, I shall make an arbitrary choice of "fiction" to describe the genre of the printed page. I know that I used this word in the first essay in a different context, but it seems better to compromise with the present confused terminology than to increase the difficulties of this book by introducing too many new terms. (Frye 1966, 248)

One of my major difficulties was the translation of "new terms" created by Frye, or old terms with a fresh reference to comply with the needs of the theoretical integrity of the work. For example the word "radical" is a term which is not listed in the Glossary in its own right but still it is a term specific to Frye's system. The excerpt above on FICTION opens with the phrase, "the radical of presentation". I could not use the Hungarian word "radikális": a comprehensive Hungarian-English dictionary presents two meanings of the word: one as a noun, meaning a radical minded individual, and another as an adjective, with such illustrations given as "radical party" and "drastic/radical measures" (Országh et al, 1998, 1196). The Hungarian

word "radikális", though like its English equivalent loaned from the Latin, has no direct link with the stem "radix" on which Frye based the meaning of the noun "radical" in the context above. I had to find a Hungarian word which does not mean partisanship or drastic measures. My choice was the fabrication of a compound of my own, "tőforma", i. e. "radical form", "stem form" or "stool form"; "stool" as in "the stool of a tree" (Frye 1998, 208, 248). I am not sure that the introduction of my coinage is a great help to the Hungarian reader; perhaps I should have stuck to the Hungaricized form of the word "radical" ("radikális"), because the word I coined has the tint of a strange new compound word. Yet it is its strangeness which draws attention to itself, and therefore it is perhaps less misleading than the use of a well-established term like "radikális" in a perfectly new and unusual context.

A series of problems is due to Frye's fundamentally Anglo-American literary and critical background. A prominent example is, I deem, the term "initiative" (Frye 1966, 275, 278), which occurs in a chapter of the Fourth Essay on "The Rhythm of Association: Lyric". In the Glossary it is defined as Coleridge's term: "INITIATIVE: A primary consideration governing the process of composition, such as the metre selected for a poem; taken from Coleridge" (Frye 1966, 366).

The textual source of the term is practically inaccessible for the Hungarian reader, and I am not convinced that it is part of the erudition of the British, American or Canadian literate public. If it is, it may have a universal philosophical appeal as in this excerpt from the correspondence of Coleridge:

> Lord Bacon equally with ourselves demands what we have ventured to call the intellectual or mental initiative, as the motive and guide of every philosophical experiment; some well-grounded purposes, some distinct impression of the probable results, some self-consistent anticipation as the grounds of the "***prudens questio***" (the fore-thoughtful query), which he affirms to be the prior ***half*** of the knowledge sought. (Griggs, vol. 2, 812)

Anyway, I could not use the Hungaricized Latin word "iniciatíva" as it has nothing to do with Bacon's or Coleridge's definition.

* * *

A theoretical work on literature or literary criticism which considers the language and form of poetry is, by necessity, based on the language in which the actual poetical works were or are written. This truism is not disproved by the fact that there is ample room for generalized statements on the difference of poetry from prose. There is, however, no international language whose rhythmic patterns would provide material for an international or general study of metrics. A comparative study of the field should rely on the language of poetical works, and the result may be as unique as it appears in the Fourth Essay in Frye's book.

In that part of the ***Anatomy*** the reader is made aware of the surprising fact that the language of modern English poetry co-exists with certain structural elements of its distant past. The chasms between Modern English, Middle English and Old English are great enough to consider them each as individually complete and self-sufficient entities. In other words one may consider them individual languages despite chronological interdependence due to the histori-

cal evolution of English. And this practice, the co-existence of Modern English with its past, is well established in the Fourth Essay.

Frye's findings are interesting in themselves, but some of them have a peculiar parallelism in Hungarian poetry. I keep in mind his well-documented theorem on the presence of ancient Anglo-Saxon rhythmic patterns in English poetry:

> A four stress line seems to be inherent in the structure of the English language. It is the prevailing rhythm of the earlier poetry, though it changes its scheme from alliteration to rhyme in Middle English; it is the common rhythm of popular poetry in all periods, of ballads and of most nursery rhymes. In the ballad, the eight-six-eight-six quatrain is a continuous four-beat line, with a "rest" at the end of every other line. The principle of the rest, or a beat coming at a point of actual silence, was already established in Old English. The iambic pentameter provides a field of syncopation in which stress and metre can to some extent neutralize one another. If we read many iambic pentameters "naturally", giving the important words the heavy accent that they do have in spoken English, the old four-stress line stands out in clear relief against its metrical background. Thus:
>
> To bé, or not to bé: thát is the quéstion.
> Whéther 'tis nóbler in the mínd to súffer
> The slíngs and árrows of outrágeous fórtune,
> Or táke up árms against a séa of tróubles…"
> (Frye 1966, 251)

I found that the classical Hungarian translation of Hamlet's soliloquy by János Arany has a similar twofold rhythmic pattern: one component is the loan rhythm of the iambic pentameter and the other is „the common rhythm of popular poetry in all periods, of ballads and of most nursery rhymes" and I should add, of old Hungarian poetry, folk songs and folkish romances. (The ' symbol means that the following syllable is stressed.)

> 'Lenni vagy 'nem lenni: 'az itt a 'kérdés.
> 'Akkor 'nemesb-e a 'lélek, ha 'tűri
> 'Balsorsa 'minden 'nyűgét s 'nyilait.
> 'Vagy ha 'kiszáll 'tenger fájdalma 'ellen…
> (Frye 1998, 212)

This unique coincidence of stress and metre in Arany's translation encouraged me to find similar solutions for the close translation of excerpts of poetry Frye used to exemplify certain musical effects, as in the first line of Claudio's "great speech" in ***Measure for Measure***:

> Ay,
> but to die,
> and go
> we know
> not where…
> (Frye 1966, 271)

First I quote the line from a standard modern Hungarian translation of the play by Dezső Mészöly: "De meghalni! Ki tudja, hova menni?" But I felt the need of a rhythmically closer version to illustrate Frye's analytic approach to the internal rhyming pattern of the line:

Haj!
Hát meghalj,
ellejts
s ne sejtsd
hová…
(Frye 1998, 212)

I think that this version is closer to the ***sense*** of the original, even if the metrically true but in fact freely prosaic translation meets the immediate needs of the public presentation of the play. One may however wonder if "ellejts" ("saunter away") will or will not have a slightly comic effect.

The text of the *Anatomy of Criticism* is a prose text but in certain paragraphs the translator is obliged to illustrate critical ideas which refer to types of versification and various kinds of euphony. I realized that the rendering of specific acoustic effects is an inevitable part of translation and I admit I enjoyed this test of my skill in rhyme, rhythm and alliteration as e. g. in the Hungarian rendering of a sonnet by Thomas Wyatt. In the *Anatomy* the poem is cited to illustrate a refined aspect of ***melos*** "in lyrics which combine accentual repetition with variation in speed" (Fry 1966, 271):

I abide and abide and better abide,
And, after the olde proverbe, the happie daye:
And ever my ladye to me dothe saye,
"Let me alone and I will provyde."
I abide and abide and tarrye the tyde
And with abiding spede well ye maye:
Thus do I abide I wott allwaye,
Nother obtayning nor yet denied.
Aye me! this long abidyng
Semithe to me as who sayethe
A prolonging of a diengg dethe,
Or a refusing of a desyred thing.
Moche ware it bettre for to be playne,
Then to saye abide and yet shall not obtayne.

In my translation:

Várom, kivárom, mint jobbra ki vár,
A közmondásbeli szebb napokat,
Míg hölgyem örökkön így noszogat:

"Ne bánts még: meg nem bánja, ki vár."
Várom, kivárom, kitartok az ár
Iramló hátán szelve habot,
Kivárom, várva a soha-napot,
S mit mégse hoz még, s még ki se zár.
Jaj nekem! hosszadan várakozom,
S ez, noha ő rendelte ekként,
Haldoklást nyújt, hosszítva kínt,
Tagadván tőlem vágy-okozóm.
Lenne szintén őszinte, mint
Így várat itt, s leint megint.
(Frye 1998, 241)

In Frye's words "This lovely sonnet is intensely musical in its conception: there is the repeated clang of 'abide' and the musical, though poetically very audacious, sequential repetition of the first line in the fifth. Then as hope follows expectancy, doubt hope, and despair doubt, the lively rhythm gradually slows down and collapses" (Frye 1966, 279). Perhaps I could have done more for that "slowing down" effect by replacing "hosszadan" with "hosszan" and "noha" with "bár", and changing the line "Haldoklást nyújt, hosszítva kínt" to "Haldoklást nyújt, nyújtva a kínt".

Another example for the truly musical character of the verse was a passage from Browning's "The Flight of the Duchess":

I could favour you with sundry touches
Of the paint smutches with which the Duchess
Heightened the mellowness of her cheek's yellowness
(To get on faster) until at last her
Cheek grew to be one master-plaster
Of mucus and fucus from mere use of ceruse:
In short, she grew from scalp to udder
Just the object to make you shudder.
(Frye 1966, 255-266)

The Hungarian version:
Neked még ezennel ezzel elhencegnék:
mi kencét, fencét ken szét a hercegnénk,
mitől nő e delnő arctája harcbája
(gyorsan hasson) nos, az asszony
keblén enyv, képlékeny flastrom-plasztron,
két réteg kréta meg krémek meg vegyszerek -
röviden, idenézz: skalptól tőgyig kész
a műtárgy. Kész hideglelés.
(Frye 1998, 217)

* * *

A local cult around Frye's oeuvre arose among Hungarian critics who read the original English texts before they were published in Hungarian. This development was parallel with growing interest in myth criticism and the cult of symbols which resulted in the publication of two major thesauri of symbols. ***Jelképtár*** (***A Thesaurus of Symbols***) by Mihály Hoppál, Marcell Jankovics, András Nagy and György Szemadám went into five editions between 1990 and 1997. A comprehensive collection entitled ***Szimbólumtár*** (***A Thesaurus of Symbols***) by József Pál and Edit Újvári was published in 1997.

Next came a phase in which attempts were made to adopt Frye's theories to the history of Hungarian literature, especially by introducing a new terminology in the history of the novel. This implied, with due reference to Frye's authority, the introduction of the term "romance" for the romantic type of the novel.

By this move a basic difficulty arose – the diametrical difference between the English and the Hungarian terminology. In English the distinction between ***romance*** and ***novel*** has an age-old historical background. A brief examination of the history of the problem was presented in ***The Progress of the Romance*** by Clara Reeve as early as 1785. For literary scholarship (and for the general reading public) the status of the term was underlined in the 19th century by such works as ***Wuthering Heights*** (1847), ***The Scarlet Letter*** (1850) and ***Moby Dick*** (1851). The word "romance" also appeared in titles of books by Hawthorne, ***Blithedale Romance*** (1852) and ***The Dolliver Romance*** (1876). The history of the correlation of the two terms ***novel*** and ***romance*** was summed up by Edith Kern in ***The Romance of Novel/Novella*** (Demetz et al., 511-530).

The history of the Hungarian terms "románc" and "regény" is diametrically opposed to that of their English counterparts. It is however not unique, for it resembles the fate of the terms for novel-like types of fiction in several other European languages: in French, German, Swedish and Russian the word "roman" (with necessary differences of spelling), or a word from its kindred varieties (e. g. "romanzo" in Italian), stands for "novel".

In the eighteenth century novels and romances published in Hungary were subtitled equally as "római történet" ("a Roman history"). Next the word "román" was used as a common term. This usage coincided with or rather followed the German and French usage. In the early 19th century a linguistic movement for the renovation or modernization of the Hungarian language created or coined Hungarian words to replace foreign loan words. In 1836 the word "regény", a new coinage, appeared as subtitle on the title-page of ***Abafi***, a novel (or romance) by Miklós Jósika. "Regény" became the modern Hungarian word for "novel" and "romance" alike. The word is derived from "rege" wich means ***tale, saga, legend, fable(dom), myth***. (Or, we may add, ***romance***.) In short, the Hungarian word for "novel" means "romance". Meanwhile our word "románc" stands for "a sentimental song, drawing-room ballad, love-song".

In my translation of the ***Anatomy*** I had to find an adequate Hungarian term for "romance" as it stands for "the myth of Summer" (Frye 1966, 186) and also for one of the types of fiction along with such types as tragedy, comedy, and irony or satire. Finally I chose the word "románc", though, as I mentioned above, it stands for a song or a ballad and not for a romance of book-length.

Anyway, one has to be careful with Frye's interpretation of "romance". Frye's problem was: "...are there narrative categories of literature broader than, or logically prior to, the ordinary

literary genres?" (Frye 1966, 162). The explanation lies in the double meaning of the general terms comedy, romance, tragedy and irony or satire:

> Tragedy and comedy may have been originally names for two species of drama, but we also employ the terms to describe general characteristics of literary fictions, without regard to genre. It would be silly to insist that comedy can refer only to a certain type of stage play, and must never be employed in connection with Chaucer or Jane Austen. Chaucer himself would certainly have defined comedy, as his monk defines tragedy, much more broadly than that. If we are told that what we are about to read is tragic or comic, we expect a certain kind of structure and mood, but not necessarily a certain genre. The same is true of the word romance, and also of the words irony and satire, which are, as generally employed, elements of the literature of experience, and which we shall here adopt in place of "realism". We thus have four narrative pregeneric elements of literature which I shall call ***mythoi*** or generic plots. (Frye 1966, 162)

Any analysis of literary works with such terms is exposed to the danger of an absence of the necessary distinction between the „pregeneric elements of literature" and those which belong to its generic characteristics.

In the early years of the present century there were renewed attempts to adopt the English usage and evaluate Hungarian literary history in terms of the distinction between the romance and the novel. This attempt involved, as a rule, straight or implicit reference to the term "romance" as Frye's term. Balázs Nyilasy was most prolific in this vein as he discussed poetical pieces by the Hungarian classic poet János Arany and novels by Mór Jókai, Zsigmond Kemény, Kálmán Mikszáth and Ferenc Hercegh in dozens of studies and articles and in a book on the oeuvre of Mór Jókai. As I see it, his is the most determined individual attempt to introduce the term "romance" into Hungarian criticism.

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The language of literary research is a mixture of specific terms defined by more or less comprehensive theories and an ***ad hoc*** selection of words of common usage. The influence of the vernacular is powerful and it results in fundamentally linguistic differences between literary theories developed in different national languages. The pivotal difference between the English and the Hungarian use of the terms for "novel" is a characteristic exemplar. The Hungarian word "regény" stood for "romance" in the English sense of the word when it was coined adding the suffix "ény" to the stem word "reg(e)" in 1836. With the 19th century triumph of realism the new word took upon itself all the criteria of the modern English term "novel". Consequently in Hungarian there is a word which stands for "novel" although a closer view reveals that the historical origin and the linguistic stem of the word suggest "romance". What we do not have at all is a genuine ***Hungarian*** term for the "novel".

The early Hungarian loanword "román" and its "echt" Hungarian substitute "regény" ("echt": the change was based on the German word "***der Roman***") coincide with the word for "novel" in a number of languages (French, German, Swedish, Italian, Russian etc., etc.) Consequently the problem which arises with the domestication of the novel-romance dichotomy, is not a Hungarian speciality.

It is profitable to study the similarities and dissimilarities between the languages of criticism as they function within the scope of various "natural" languages. As to Frye's conception, the definitions he gave to terms (of which "romance" represents only one intersection of his ideas) may add a new angle to the study of Hungarian literature. I think not simply of the classification of Hungarian works of fiction as "romance" or "novel", which may easily coincide with earlier classifications of "romantic" and "realistic" novels. The proper study of Frye's complex terms could reveal values otherwise indiscernible, values which make certain English and American works of fiction not simply representatives of the type "romance": they represent the "type" at its best with all their uniqueness, as in the case of great books like *Wuthering Heights* or *The Scarlet Letter*.

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