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English Translations of Ján Kollár since 1940s

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Abstract

The paper is a follow-up to the survey *One Century of English Translations of Ján Kollár (1832–1931)* and it aims to sum up and evaluate English book translations of Kollár since 1940. His appearance in five more anthologies from the 1940s to the 1970s together with previously analysed translations makes him the most frequently translated Slovak poet of all times into English although his working language was Czech. Some of the translations mentioned here are re-worked versions of previous translations (Selver), others are new (Ginsburg, French). From the point of view of versification, various methods to replace the original quantitative verse were adopted from accentual-syllabic or accentual substitution to the use of typical English form – blank verse.

Key words

translation; poetry; anthology; rhythmic substitution; semantic shift; sonnet; metaphor; blank verse

Abstrakt

Anglické preklady Jána Kollára od 40. rokov 20. storočia

Štúdiá nadväzuje na náš prehľad *Storočie anglických prekladov Jána Kollára (1832–1931)* a jej cieľom je zosumarizovať a zhodnotiť anglické knižné preklady Kollára od 40. rokov 20. storočia. Jeho účasť v ďalších piatich antológiách v rozmedzí 40. až 70. rokov vedno s už skôr analyzovanými prekladmi dokazuje, že je najprekladanejším slovenským básnikom do angličtiny všetkých čias napriek tomu, že jeho pracovným jazykom bola čeština. Niektoré preklady uvádzané v tejto štúdii sú prepracovanými verziami skorších prekladov (Selver), iné sú nové (Ginsburg, French). Z verzifikačného hľadiska prekladateľa využili rozličné spôsoby náhrady pôvodnej časomiere od substitúcie sylabotonicým či tonickým veršom až po uplatnenie typického anglického verša – blankversu.

Kľúčové slová

preklad; poézia; antológia; rytmická substitúcia; sémantický posun; sonet; metafora; blankvers

Roderick Aldrich Ginsburg: The Soul of a Century. Collection of Czech Poetry in English (1942)

The interest of English translators and editors in the poetry of Ján Kollár did not cease even in the times of WW2 and in subsequent decades. Deeply preoccupied with him was Roderick Aldrich Ginsburg (real name Oldřich Ginter, 1899–1987), who was born in a small Czech town Poděbrady and moved with his family into the United States in 1910 where he later worked as announcer in a Chicago-based radio station. In 1942, he published both the book about Kollár under the title *Ján Kollár: A Poet of Pan Slavism* and the anthology of Czech poetry *The Soul of a Century. Collection of Czech Poetry in English* in his translation.

In the foreword, Ginsburg states that the anthology “contains English translations of the poetic works of representative Czech Poets, from the first decade of the 19th century to a corresponding milestone of the 20th century. The collection is by no means exhaustive, critical, or even scholarly. The selections were made primarily on the basis of translatability, and their English readability was the final criterion of the choice”¹. The anthology begins with selections from the work of Ján Kollár accompanied by a short introduction in which the editor calls his collection of sonnets “monumental” but adds: “Though today we may criticize the sonnets and structure of this work, its author still remains as the founder of modern Czech poetry”², however, he is not more precise in giving the reason for potential criticism. For his anthology, Ginsburg chose forty lines from the Prelude to *The Daughter of Sláva* and seven sonnets, starting with the sonnets while the Prelude unusually comes last. Another peculiarity is that the sonnets (No. 18 and 110 from the first canto, 124, 219, and 259 from the second canto, and 273 and 315 from the third canto from the 1832 edition) are published in a different order than in the original. A good example to compare translational procedures is sonnet 9, earlier also translated by Bowring (the analysis of his rendition is in the above-mentioned study). Ginsburg’s version reads as follows:

*It is not the earth, nor wholly the starry skies
That are reflected in her slender mould:
It is holiness ensnared in beauty’s hold,
A soul divine that in her body lies.*

*One moment love consumes her; the next she sighs,
Refusing love, the heavens she would unfold:
Runs to your arms as a lightning, fast and bold,
Her glowing forehead, the starry world defies.*

1 GINSBURG, Roderick, Aldrich: *The Soul of a Century. Collection of Czech Poetry in English*. Chicago: Czechoslovak National Council of America, 1942, p. 3.

2 Ibidem, p. 5.

*Yes, I suspect that some omnipresent power
She borrowed from the very Gods above,
Cause in my eyes and mind she lingers every hour.*

*O, tell me lovely object of my love,
Are you a clod? Then I shall not grieve in vain.
Are you an angel? I shall worship you again.*

Both translations are structurally alike in adopting a sonnet of a hybrid type with some Italian elements like quadruple rhymes and some English ones like a heroic couplet. They both use iambic pentameter with solely masculine rhymes. Bowring's translation seems to be more metrical while Ginsburg often departs from the metre and from the number of syllables in the line (the very first one contains twelve). Ginsburg also follows Bowring in adding elements not present in the original (*"starry skies"*, *"fast and bold"*), however, they do not depart from the semantic field of the original. On the whole, semantically Ginsburg clings to the original more than Bowring, preserving expressions related to spirituality that "tie" the parts of the sonnet together – *"divine"*, *"heavens"*, *"Gods"*, *"angel"*. On the other hand, the given model of the sonnet took its toll in several inversions: *"that in her body lies"*, *"the heavens she would enfold"*, *"the starry world defies"*.

Among the other six sonnets, one No. 273 (here 5) has a special standing because all first lines of its stanzas repeat in their end, thus the sonnet grew up to eighteen lines. In all sonnets, Ginsburg preserves quadruple rhymes, occasionally adding a feminine ending, and varies tercets (CDC CDC, CDC EDE). Unlike Bowring, he is not consistent in substituting the metre, and sometimes his lines are of a trochaic flow: (*„Dearest relic of my youthful days / Tresses interwove with purest gold“*), thus dropping one syllable if they have masculine endings. Regarding the chosen model of the sonnet with the necessity to find quadruple rhymes, it was surely not easy to stick to the original semantically but – save for small exceptions – Ginsburg succeeded. In his translation of the sonnet No. 110 (here 2), he left unmarked the direct speech in which Mína promises to be faithful (*"There and here I'm yours with love at helm"*). Since in English it is not possible to identify the gender from the form of the verb, the translation does not indicate the change of the speaker in any way. From the point of view of realia, noteworthy is the sonnet No. 219 (here 6), bringing a demonym *"Nečechů"* (*"Non-Czechs"*). Ginsburg used a more general expression *"stranger"*, adding *"and not your brother"* (not present in the original) to it. In the last two lines (*"slyšte národ, ne křik Feaků, / váš je Hus, i Nepomuk, i Cyril"*), Kollár used several proper names that may not be so well-known in the English context. With the first one, he even added a note in his *Explanation to The Daughter of Sláva*: *"Phaiakes – a nation on the island of Korkyra, now Corfu; in ancient times they were an object of disgrace and derision for their stupidity, gluttony and other nasty habits of its people"*³. Here, Ginsburg can be hardly blamed for finding a solution in yet another general expression *"jackal"*. Of notable

3 KOLLÁR, Ján: *Výklad, čili přímětky a vysvětlivky ku Slávy dceře*. Pešť: Tiskem Trattnera a Károliho, 1832, p. 178 (my translation).

figures of the Czech history, he only omitted “*Cyril*” (St Cyril, born Constantine), and replaced “*Nepomuk*” with his more known first name St. John, making him more difficult to identify, with only Hus left unchanged. Ginsburg also added some extra motives to the original, like the motif of “*unsheltered door*” instead of a simple pronoun “*tam*” (“*there*”) used in the sonnet 273 (here 5). In the sonnet 259 (here 7) Kollár calls the Slavs to learn a lesson of unity from the burning coals because “*each coal... alone... slowly dies and reaches not its goal*”. The motif of reaching its goal is added probably for the sake of rhyme, even though it has no support in the original.

The last sonnet from *The Daughter of Sláva* in this anthology is the sonnet No. 315 (here 4), previously also translated by Edna Underwood and mentioned in the previous study. The comparison of both translations shows that Ginsburg is more precise in meaning than Underwood concerning the original: he preserved the expression “*popem*” (“*Pope*”) she had omitted, even though the capital letter could be slightly misleading. Similarly, he retains the synecdoche relating to Homer “*That the bard of Iliad*”. The replacement of the Sultan’s mace (“*berla*”) with “*wealth untold*” does not violate the semantic field of the original so much. The accuracy of meaning in Ginsburg’s translation is to a certain extent counterbalanced by its rhythmical looseness like in the first line of the second tercet: “*Some day, when the winds my dust will scatter*”. Even though Ginsburg followed Underwood in opting for rhyme quatrains, he was more inventive in his solutions without having to resort to undesired semantic shifts. More disturbing is perhaps too frequent usage of possessive forms within one sonnet: “*star’s*”, “*Sultan’s*”, “*heart’s*”, “*Berenice’s*”.

As was mentioned above, the extract of the Prelude to *The Daughter of Sláva* comes unusually after the sonnets. Ginsburg also added a short bibliography referring to other anthologies with Kollár’s poems like those compiled by Paul Selver or Clarence Manning. The Prelude here contains twenty lines from the beginning, ten lines with rhetorical questions from the middle part, and last ten lines. Here, too, Ginsburg is faithful to the original (sometimes even literal), even though rhythmically looser in comparison to Selver’s translations. While Selver attempted for a rhythmical substitution of the original elegiac distich (also by alternating feminine and masculine line endings), Ginsburg’s rendition seems to remove differences between the variants of the original hexameter and pentameter. Only one out of forty lines has a feminine ending, moreover, the beginnings of lines are rhythmically varied, too. They are mostly iambic but also dactyl, anapest, amphibrach, or trochee occur. Here, Ginsburg relies rather on the equal number of stressed syllables (mostly six) than a standard metrical scheme, thus his verse being close to an accentual one. Besides, in the second line of the couplet, he applies a caesura but it is followed by an unstressed syllable which somehow suppresses the knowledge of two used types of verse.

It can well be seen in the translation of line two, compared to Selver’s and Underwood’s solution:

Někdy kolébka, nyní národu mého rakev. (original)

Once ’twas the cradle, but now–now ’tis the tomb of my race. (Selver)

Once ’t was our cradle, our pride, now ’t is the grave of the Slav. (Underwood)

My nations cradle once, today its burial casket. (Ginsburg)

The anthology saw a short review written by Carl Weiskopf and published in the magazine *Books Abroad* in 1944. He called Ginsburg's translations "*accurately and diligently done*", appreciated "[s]hort biographical sketches" but was missing "*a general introduction giving the English reader some idea of the growth of Czech literature*"⁴.

Percy Paul Selver: A Century of Czech and Slovak Poetry (1946)

The last anthology compiled, edited, and translated by Paul Selver came out shortly after WW2. The book, dedicated to a Czech poet and theatre theoretician Otakar Fischer, was oriented exclusively on poetry and ranges from Ján Kollár to Jiří Wolker. Selver took some of the translations over from his 1929 anthology and added a few new names. Concerning Kollár whose *Prelude to The Daughter of Sláva* opens the anthology, the most intriguing fact is that this third Selver's translation of the *Prelude*, even though incomplete (78 lines), is significantly different from his previous renditions. The changes are quite huge (except for prosody): Selver restructured many lines, often used other synonyms and the translation sounds more modern. However, he was not able to avoid some obsolete or bookish expressions like "*tarry*", "*therein*", "*whilom*", "*of yore*" or a disturbing run-on line at the beginning of the *Prelude*. The extent of the changes is visible from the comparison of the two versions (the older, given first, and the newer one):

*Here lies the country, alas, before my tear-laden glances,
Once 'twas the cradle, but now—now 'tis the tomb of my race;
Check thou thy steps, for the places are sacred, wherever thou turnest.
Son of the Tatra arise, cast to the heavens thy gaze,
Or to the mighty old oak, that stands there yonder, incline thee,
Holding its own against treacherous time, till to-day.
Ah, but more evil than time, is the man, who a sceptre of iron,
Slavia, on thy neck, here in these lands has imposed;
Worse than savage encounters and fiercer than fire and than thunder—
He who in frenzy blind covers his kindred with shame.*

*Here I before me perceive, with tear-bedimmed glances, the land where
Cradled my race was of old; now it therein is entombed.
Tarry, for every place is hallowed, wherever thou treadest;
Son of the Tatra arise, heavenward lift thou thy gaze—
Yea, or e'en better it were to bow unto yonder great oak-tree,
Which in defiance till now havoc of time hath withstood.
Direr, direr than time is he who here in these regions,
Thee with an iron rod, Slavia, held as a thrall.*

4 WEISKOPF, Franz Carl: *R. A. Ginsburg. The Soul of a Century*. *Books Abroad*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Summer 1944), p. 293.

*Direr than baleful warfare, than fire and thunder more baleful
He is who, blinded with hate, basely his kindred assails.*

Such re-working of the previous version is a rare example of a translator who is never content with his work and always seeks new, better solutions. A similar example offers a Slovak poet and translator Karol Strmeň who came with three different translations of *The Raven* by Edgar Allan Poe from the 1940s to the 1970s.

The anthology was reviewed by a British linguist Stuart E. Mann (1905–1986) in 1948, in the April issue of the magazine *The Slavonic and East European Review*. Mann wrote: “*Mr Selver had given us a remarkably comprehensive outline of Czech and Slovak literature in a sixty-page introduction.*” Recognising difficulties an English translator from Czech or Slovak can meet with, Mann expressed some reservations about Selver’s translation that “*occasionally make awkward reading*” and reproached Selver who “*frequently twists English syntax to gain a rhyme*”. Nevertheless, he called the anthology “*a most valuable documentary work which should find a place on every literary bookshelf*”⁵.

William Edward Harkins: *Anthology of Czech Literature* (1953)

A book compiled in 1953 by William Edward Harkins (1921–2014), professor at Columbia University and expert in Russian and Czech literature, is also worthy of a mention in this survey, even though it contains original rather than translated texts from Czech literature, thus serving as a textbook for students of Czech philology. Except mentioning Ján Kollár and Pavol Jozef Šafárik as Slovak authors, it includes the Prelude to *The Daughter in Sláva* provided with the detailed notes of the editor in which he explained its distinctive language and also important circumstances from the cultural and historical point of view. Moreover, unlike some previous anthologies, the Harkins’ one emphasized the place of both poets in the history of Slovak literature: “*The editor has adhered to the view that all writing in Czech which has entered into the Czech cultural tradition is a part of Czech literature. On the other hand, he does not wish to deny such writers of Slovak origin as Kollár or Šafařík, who wrote in Czech before the development of the Slovak literary language, the place which they properly deserve in the development of Slovak literature and the Slovak cultural tradition*”⁶. In the separate chapter dealing with Romanticism Harkins praised Šafárik for his achievements in scholarship and also Kollár for his Prelude: “*The artificiality of this type of poetry in Czech, combined with Kollár’s extremely artificial sentence order and the beauty of pathetic exclamation, helps to give the work grandeur and makes it perhaps the most magnificent poetry in all of Czech literature*”⁷.

5 MANN, Stuart E.: *A Century of Czech and Slovak Poetry by Paul Selver*. *Slavonic and East European review*, Vol. 26, No. 67 (April 1948), p. 620.

6 HARKINS, William E.: *An Anthology of Czech Literature*. New York: Kings Crown Press, Columbia University, 1953, p. viii.

7 *Ibidem*, p. 14.

Alfred French: A Book of Czech Verse (1958)

The editor and translator of this tiny anthology of Czech poetry that came out bilingually in Australia was Alfred French (1916–1997) from the Department of Classical and Comparative Philology at the university in Adelaide. The book, ranging from Ján Kollár to Vladimír Holan, brings a short, sixteen-line excerpt from the Prelude to *The Daughter of Sláva* and one sonnet (No. 222 from the 1832 edition). In his short introduction, French writes about “rich and diverse literary tradition, too often ignored and neglected because of linguistic difficulties of approach, and because it represents the voice of small a people”⁸. Here is his version of the Prelude:

*Before my weeping eyes extends the land,
My people's cradle once, their coffin now.
Stir not, for where you tread is holy ground.
O Tatra's son, lift up your eyes to heaven,
Or turn towards that mighty oak
Which yet can spurn the ravages of time.
Yet worse than time is man, that in these lands
has fastened, Slav, upon your neck a yoke.
Still worse than fierce war, more fierce than fire
Or thunder, is that blinded man who turns
In anger striking down his kin,
O ages past, around me like the night!
O land that mirrors all our pride and shame!
From traitor Elbe unto the eastern plains
That touch upon the faithless Vistula,
From Danube to the Baltic's gulping foam,
Where once was heard the talk of Slavic men,
Today that tongue, by hate oppressed, is still.*

French's approach to the Prelude substantially differs from all previous ones (Selver, Underwood, Ginsburg) because he abandoned any attempt to substitute accentual-syllabic or accentual verse for quantitative. He rather opted for a type of verse used in English poetry since Milton – blank verse that is even shortened to four feet in two lines. It means that at least on the prosodic level, the principle of domestication prevails. Like Ginsburg, French also “flattens” the rhythm to a certain extent when the awareness of the two used type of verse (hexameter and pentameter within elegiac distich) in the original is lost. French's blank verse itself, though, is fluent and concerning the semantic density of English, he did not have to make any significant reductions in the meaning.

8 FRENCH, Alfred: *A Book of Czech Verse*. London: Macmillan & Co, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1958, p. 8–9.

Rather than semantically, his translation lost in its expression: it seems flatter than the original, having lost its typical elegiac character.

The only included sonnet from *The Daughter of Sláva* has also an elegiac atmosphere. The speaker's joy from its beginning of hearing the Czech language again turns to the sad knowledge in the end that in his country, the tongue of many people is sweeter than their heart. In his translation of the sonnet, French applied a quite unusual procedure of reducing its line by one foot to four, thus going against the tradition of the sonnet in the English literature that had seen a five-foot iambic line predominant from William Shakespeare through John Milton and John Keats to Elizabeth Barrett-Browning. Like in the Prelude, such reduction does not necessarily mean the reduction in meaning; most semantic shifts are brought about by wrong interpretation rather than the lack of space. French also reduced the rhyme scheme, rhyming only odd lines in quartets and even line in tercets.

It is understandable that Kollár's linguistic background will not be of utmost relevance for English speaking readers who may not spot a slight discrepancy between his mother tongue (Slovak) and extolled "*dear Czech language*" in the original therefore its replacement for "*my native tongue*" in the translation is not inappropriate. The last tercet calls for more objections:

*O, že jedno předce smutně hrozí,
to, že v této zemi krásnější
jazyk mají nežli srdce mnozí.*

*How sad the threat, how fierce the smart,
That, in this loveliest of lands,
The tongue is sweeter than the heart!*

The tercet is antithetical to the previous one, mainly due to the conjunction "*přece*" (meaning "still", "nevertheless"). This connection is missing in the translation: the change of tonality happens without this grammatical "preparation" and more than that, is far stronger in its expression due to the added phrase "*how fierce the smart*". There is also a shift in the last two lines where the translator (perhaps misled by a run-on line) mistakenly ascribes the attribute "*krásnější*" ("*loveliest*") to the land rather than to the tongue. Also, by omitting the word "*mnozí*" ("*many*") indicating the group of people Kollár reproaches, the translation turns more general and the given statement seems to apply to the whole country.

Ladislav Matejka: Czech Poetry – A Bilingual Anthology, Vol. I (1973)

This bilingual anthology of Czech poetry with the introduction of René Wellek was published by Michigan Slavic Publications and the Department of Slavic Languages and Litera-

tures at the University of Michigan Ann Arbor. Its editor was a professor of the department and Czech expatriate Ladislav Matejka (1919–2012). The work of Ján Kollár is presented here in the form of excerpts from the Prelude to *The Daughter of Sláva* translated by Alfred French and one sonnet (*Ku barbarùm – To Savage Avars*, No. 157 from the 1832 edition).

A short introduction clarifying the context and the nature of Kollár's poem precedes both translations. The editor states: "*The whole work owes much in structure to Byron's *Childe Harold*, but its literary inspiration goes back to Petrarch and Dante, and beyond them to Virgil, and Greek mythology. The strength of the book lies in its Introduction, and some of its charming love sonnets: but on the whole, it has a curiously archaic, not to say pedantic atmosphere, and some of the poems are so hard to understand that Kollár himself later published a work of notes and explanations to help the reader*"⁹.

The published part of the Prelude is an enlarged version of French's earlier, sixteen-line translation published in *A Book of Czech Verse* 1958 analysed above. For this anthology, he extended it to seventy lines, named it the Prelude, and kept blank verse it the whole excerpt.

The only sonnet included in the anthology, *To Savage Avars*, has a rare meta-translational character because it is based on the earlier translation of Sir John Bowring according to the statement in the contents. The credit for this version perhaps goes to French himself but the information is missing. This non-traditional approach to translation is very interesting because unlike quite common indirect translation (not from the original but from translation into some other language), it uses intralingual re-working substantially modifying the initial (here Bowring's) translation. Leaving out of account that – probably by mistake – one line in the second quatrain was omitted, the new version borrowed some collocations ("*in the days of old*", "*the haughty Khan demands*") or even the whole line unchanged ("*We know no wars – no arms to us belong*") from Bowring. It also repeats rhyme couples like "*old*" / "*hold*", "*hands*" – "*demands*", and "*belong*" – "*song*". (The omission of the line made the fourth one incomplete: "*sea*".) In addition to stylistic changes and more natural word order replacing some archaic wordings in Bowring's translation, French also changed the rhyme structure in the tercets – by avoiding heroic couplet, he moved the sonnet closer to an Italian type used in the original.

Even though after the anthology edited by Matejka, Slovak poetry appeared in ten more anthologies, none of them included Ján Kollár anymore. The reason is that most of them were oriented on contemporary poetry and did not reflect earlier periods of literature. That does not apply to *An Anthology of Slovak Literature* (1976) compiled and edited by Andrew Cincura, an American of Slovak descent and researcher at the Department of Comparative Literature at the University of California in Riverside. This anthology was the most comprehensive survey of Slovak poetry, fiction, and drama to that time, beginning with Kollár's contemporary, Slovak classicistic poet Ján Hollý. Why Kollár remained out of the editor's interest is unclear and we can just speculate about one of the possible reasons lying in the fact that his literary language was not Slovak but Czech.

9 MATEJKA, Ladislav: *Czech Poetry – A Bilingual Anthology, Vol. I*. Michigan: Michigan Slavic Publications, 1973, p. 169.

Conclusion

In total, the poems of Ján Kollár in English translation appeared in fifteen anthologies over almost two centuries. We may discuss if this number is or is not sufficient for a leading figure of both Slovak and Czech literary history. Perhaps more important than the overall number is the character of selected works and the quality of their translation. The survey revealed different approaches of editors and translators, however, hardly anyone cast doubts about the importance of Kollár in the context of Slavic history and literature. Still, a feeling of some debt to his work may prevail. A thought of seeing complete *The Daughter of Sláva* translated into English one day might perhaps be too daring but let us express hope that a separate edition of his poetry in high-quality English translation will sometimes become reality.

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