

Paliga, Sorin

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Slavica litteraria. 2020, vol. 23, iss. 1, pp. 107-115

ISSN 1212-1509 (print); ISSN 2336-4491 (online)

Stable URL (DOI): <https://doi.org/10.5817/SL2020-1-10>

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/142647>

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Access Date: 22. 02. 2024

Version: 20220831

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Translating Holan's Major Works

Sorin Paliga (Bukurešť)

Abstract

The paper presents author's experience as a translator of Vladimír Holan's major works, beginning with *Toskána* (Romanian Toscana), the first to be translated at the beginning of the 1980s, then successively revised several times. It was followed by *Bolest* (Rom. Durere, Eng. Pain), Holan's poetic diary containing (very) short poems written from 1949 to 1955. At the end of the 1980s the third translation: *Noc s Ofélií* (A Night with Ofelia, Romanian Noapte cu Ofelia), the first to be included in an anthology. The last arrived in the series was the translation of Holan's most acclaimed work: *Noc s Hamletem*, Rom. Noapte cu Hamlet, Eng. A Night with Hamlet, finalised in July – August 2019. With the generous support of the Culture Ministry of the Czech Republic, Holan's major works are now published in a bilingual Czech-Romanian edition in 3 volumes.

Key words

Vladimír Holan; contemporary poetry; bilingual edition; promotion of the cultural heritage

Abstrakt

Překlady Holanových stěžejních děl

Článek prezentuje autorovu zkušenost s překládáním stěžejních Holanových děl. *Toskána* se stala prvním dílem v rumunském překladě, a to již začátkem osmdesátých let. V polovině osmdesátých let na řadě byl autorův diář *Bolest*. Jedná se o básně psané v letech 1949–1955. *Noc s Ofélií* se stala třetím překladem knižně vydaným v antologii světové literatury (1988). *Noc s Hamletem* se stala zatím autorovým posledním překladem, který přibližuje Holanovo nejznámější dílo. Překlad byl dokončen v červenci až srpnu v roce 2019. S velkorysou podporou Ministerstva kultury ČR všechna hlavní Holanova díla jsou v současnosti vydaná dvojjazyčně (česky a rumunsky) v třech svazích.

Klíčová slova

Vladimír Holan; současná poezie; dvojjazyčné vydání; podpora kulturního dědictví

My first contact with Vladimír Holan goes back to the mid-1970s towards the end of my school years. I used to read poetry during those years, and was fond of Japanese Haiku and of short prose. Jorge Luís Borges was, during those years, my favorite writer, and has remained as such. In the 1970s Univers publishing house had a series of poetry, the volumes were usually thin with grey-bluish covers. One volume included a translation of Holan's *A Night with Hamlet*, as well as a selection of his short poems, mainly from *Bolest* (Pain). By chance, some two years later, in 1976, I began to study Czech. My initial intention was to study Polish, as I explained in a recent interview¹, but this is another story.

The first contact with Holan's poetry in its original language goes back to 1979–1980, i.e. towards the end of my student years. It is the year when Holan passed away, so I did not know him personally. I had a meeting in the summer of 1985 with his widow at their house in the Malá Strana. It was the moment when, with more than my basic knowledge of Czech, I attempted to dig deeper into the subtleties of this language. To begin with, I chose Holan's *Toskána!*. I finalised the translation in 1982, as far as I remember, and soon after began translating *Pain* (*Bolest*). In 1985 or so, Holan's *Toskána* and *Bolest* were translated in their entirety, soon after Holan's shorter poem *A night with Ofelia*. To note that, while preparing for print the final form 3–4 years ago, I discovered that some poems were missing in the edition of *Bolest* published during the communist years. Censorship was curious indeed, the missing poem did not seem to have any peculiar political connotation or allusions, but who knows... The missing poems were added in the edition published in 2017 (see the references below).

The reader may easily notice that I began translating Holan's untranslated works. Perhaps from the very beginning I had the conscious or unconscious (or subconscious) plan to translate Holan's main works into Romanian. That is why *A Night with Hamlet* was left for later times. In my case, these 'later times' came at the beginning of 2019, when the Bucharest branch of the association of Romanian translators planned a conference on 're-translations' (Romanian *retraduceri*), i.e. new translations of works which have been translated at least once before. The conference was scheduled for the beginning of November 2019, so in the spring of 2019 I decided to make a new translation of *Noc s Hamletem*. An incentive towards this step was the information that *Moravská zemská knihovna* (The Regional Moravian Library) and the Czech Literary Fund offer a one-month residence scholarship for literary translations. I applied and soon received the good news that a one month residency was granted in Prague during the last 10 days in July and the first 2 weeks in August.

So, the decision was taken: a new translation of *Noc s Hamletem* more than 40 years after the first translation into Romanian was published! Concentrated on this task only, the translation – which I began a week or so before leaving for Prague – was finalised. I had the linguistic support of several native speakers: Robin Ujfalusi (just nominated the new director of the České centrum in Bucharest), Martin Brát and Vladimír Křivánek, one of the best known 'Holanologists'. Isn't it eerie indeed that the two main critics of

1 *Jak vidí češtinu bohemisté ze zahraničí?* <https://protisedi.cz/bohemiste1/> [Oct. 11, 2019]

Holan's work bear the same name, Vladimír Justl (whom I have never met, but had some exchange of letters in the 1980s) and Vladimír Křivánek.

The history of Holan's translations into Romanian may be summarised as such:

1974. *Noapte cu Hamlet* (Noc s Hamletem) and some other shorter poems, Bucharest, Univers. Translated by Ovidiu Genaru and Dragoş Şesan.

Mid-1980s. Some poems in *Bolest* (Pain) in my translation, and enthusiastically published in the cultural weekly *Amfiteatru* by an admirer of Holan: Dinu Flămând. Soon after, he emigrated to France and had cultural broadcasts with Radio France International.

1988. *Noapte cu Ofelia* and some other short poems selected from *Bolest* (Pain, Romanian Durere) in the reference anthology of Laurenţiu Ulici *Nobel contra Nobel*. This seems to be my first presence as Holan's translator in a printed volume, be it an anthology.

A limited edition 'for friends' of *Toscana* at the end of the 1990s. Following the reported model of *Noc s Hamletem*, the young stage director Nona Ciobanu made an adaptation for a small theatre show, approximately 50 minutes. Unfortunately, there is no recorded document of that show, but I still hope an adapted form for a (small? big?) theatre may be possible somehow, sooner or later, directed by Nona Ciobanu or by someone else. It was, in fact, a local interpretation of the initial variant for the stage of *Noc s Hamletem*, which was successfully adapted as a theatre play. I did not see this variant, but it is reported in Holan's biography.

With this long history behind, in 2015 I decided to have a coherent and complete series of Holan's major works in Romanian translation. So, with the generous support of the Culture Ministry of the Czech Republic, the first two volumes of the series were published in 2017: *Bolest/Durere* and *Toskána/Toscana*, both in bilingual edition with the Czech original on the left page and the Romanian translation on the right page. To note that I had to convert the printed versions into editable forms via an OCR application. As you know, such conversions are never perfect, and errors may occur. On this occasion I also made a pioneering action: Holan's *Bolest* and *Toskána* in electronic form! No Czech publisher had such a form or at least I could not get them.

The next step was, as already mentioned, in 2019 when I decided to publish in the same way, i.e. a bilingual edition, *Noc s Hamletem* together with its logical continuation *Noc s Ofélii* (A Night with Ofelia). The latter was scanned and converted in the same way like the previous two volumes. In the case of *A Night with Hamlet*, I came across an e-version on the internet, but – as found later – full of errors. The scanned text was obviously converted via an OCR application, but without any further confrontation with the original printed text and without correction.

In this very moment, the series I have translated and published in bilingual editions includes:

In 2017, two volumes: *Bolest/Durere* and *Toskána/Toscana*;

In 2019: *Noc s Hamletem/Noapte cu Hamlet* and *Noc s Ofélii/Noapte cu Ofelia*.

I do hope the Czech original is clean or, at least, without major errors as I found in the case of *Noc s Hamletem*. But, even if errors may be identified, they can be easily corrected.

At this very moment, I have the satisfaction to inform the readers that the main works of Vladimír Holan are published in Romanian, all of them in bilingual editions. I think this series may be a model for other translations. I attach a first attempt with a version in Korean of a very short poem: *I když / Chiar dacă*. It was translated before the presentation of this series in the Bucharest Czech Center on Monday, January 27, 2020. The translation is by a former student of mine, Silvia Pencu, who studied Czech one year only! She then chose to study journalism, and soon after got a scholarship in Seoul, and... she has remained there for several years. It would be really wonderful if a Korean translator would take over this task, and translate Holan into Korean. I cannot figure out how Holan's frequent allusions to European tradition, culture and major historical figures may be 'translated' or 'adapted' for the Korean reader. This would be a challenge, perhaps. Whosoever this translator may be, I wish him/her good luck.

Of course, from the perspective of the Czech literature to be promoted abroad, a translation into international languages like English, French, Spanish, Portuguese and German would be most welcome, and I do hope that translators from the whole world with the support of the Czech Ministry of Culture would go on with the series I have proposed and published in Romania. I do hope this model will be continued in various local variants, or even in multilingual editions with – say – Czech and English versions on the left (odd) page, and two translations, in any other two languages, on the right (even) page. The first steps have been done, the further steps are open to various solutions and ideas.

Perspectively, a fourth volume is planned for 2020 or 2021. It would contain a selection of Holan's "minor" works, critical texts (two Holanologists have been mentioned, the two Vladimír's – Justl and Křivánek), a biography, pictures etc. With or without this fourth volume, I am satisfied with this project, the beginnings of which go back to the early 1980s when, from 1980 to 1985, *Toskána* and *Bolest* were gradually translated, then *Noc s Ofélií* and, in 2019, *Noc s Hamletem*. In other words, all the major works of Vladimír Holan are now published in a new bilingual edition. It is indeed a pleasure to look back with delight and satisfaction that such a hard, but beautiful, work has been completed.

Vladimír Holan's works in Romanian and the translators

(only those published in volumes)

1974. *Noapte cu Hamlet* (*Noc s Hamletem*, *A Night with Hamlet*). București: Univers. Ovidiu Genaru and Dragoș Șesan.

1988. *Nobel contra Nobel* (*Nobel against Nobel*), an anthology of world literature compiled by Laurențiu Ulici, 2 vols., București: Cartea Românească. Sorin Paliga, vol. 2, pp. 151–162. Includes some short poems in *Bolest* (*Pain*) and *Noc s Ofélií* (*A Night with Ofelia*). Holan is mentioned for the year 1965 competing with Mikhail Sholokhov.

1998. *Toskána / Toscana*. București: Lucretius. Sorin Paliga. In the spring of 2000, a variant for a small, experimental theater was directed by Nona Ciobanu.

2017–2019. The 3 bilingual volumes analyzed in the main text above. Sorin Paliga

Captions

- 1, 2, 3. The covers of the 3 volumes published in 2017 (first and second) and 2019 (the third).
 4. The poster for the presentation at the Czech Center in Bucharest, January 27, 2020.
 5. The Korean version of *I když / Ši dacě* (Even if...)
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Vladimír Holan

Durere

Vladimír Holan este, fără nicio îndoială, cel mai mare poet ceh. S-a născut la 16 septembrie 1905 la Praga și s-a stins din viață în același oraș fascinant, la 31 martie 1980. La vârsta de șase ani pleacă, împreună cu părinții, în Boemia de Nord, ținutul lui Karel Hynek Mácha, reprezentantul cel mai de seamă al romantismului ceh. Încă în anul 1926, fiind în clasa a șaptea, a publicat primul volum, *Evantaiul visător (Blouznivý vějíř)*. După obținerea examenului de maturitate, timp de șapte ani lucrează ca funcționar la Oficiul de pensii din Praga. Apoi, între 1933 și 1938, a fost redactor al revistei Asociației artiștilor *Život (Viața)*, iar în anii 1939–1940 a condus Programul teatrului E.F. Burian. După această dată s-a dedicat exclusiv literaturii, creației personale și traducerilor (a echivalat în limba cehă 160 de autori reprezentând 16 literatur).

Sorin Paliga

ISBN 9786069100554



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VLADIMÍR HOLAN DURERE



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Vladimír Holan

Toscana

Holan a avut o evoluție complexă și complicată. Debutul s-a aflat sub puternica influență a poetismului apoi, începând cu anii '30, a fost reprezentantul curentului meditativ, găsindu-și treptat o voce originală, ce îl delimitază net de colegii de generație. Începând din anii '50, Holan începe să atingă marile culmi poetice. Poemele scrise capătă acum acorduri tragice, pătrund în atmosfera nopții, prezintă caracterul accidental și absurditatea vieții umane. În sfârșit, în anul 1963 Holan publică *Toscana*, un extraordinar poem, deocamdată puțin cunoscut prin traduceri în alte limbi. Î prezentăm aici în versiune integrală, pentru prima oară în versiune românească (deși traducerea acestui poem de 961 de versuri era deja încheiată în anul 1982, fiind revizuită între timp de două ori, în 1985 și în 1986).

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ISBN 9786069100561



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VLADIMÍR HOLAN TOSCANA



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Noapte cu Hamlet (Noc s Hamletem), considerat cel mai bun poem al lui Vladimir Holan, și *Noapte cu Ofelia (Noc s Ofélii)*, păstrat doar ca fragment (autorul însuși distrus mare parte din poem, conform afirmațiilor văduvei Holan, cu care traducătorul a discutat în vara anului 1985), reprezintă al treilea volum în ediție bilingvă cehă-română din seria operelor majore ale lui Vladimir Holan în traducere românească. Anterior au apărut volumele *Durere (Bolest)* și *Toscana (Toskána)*.

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Seară pentru Vladimír Holan

27.01.2019, ora 19:00
Centrul Ceh (Ion Ghica 11)
cu Peter Sragher,
Dinu Flămând,
Sorin Paliga



I KDYZ...

I když mi, lásko, stále unikáš,
jsi moje ustavičná přítomnost, ó jistě!
Tak jako vodopád:
i když jej stále opouští voda stále táž,
on stále zůstává na tomtěz místě ...

CHIAR DACĂ...

Chiar dacă, iubire, mereu fugi
Ești prezentul meu statornic, o desigur!
Așa precum o cascadă:
chiar dacă apa, mereu aceeași, o părăsește
Pe mai departe rămâne aceluiași loc...

설사...
내사랑, 넌 항상 도망가도라도
물론, 내 인연이지!
폭포처럼 :
설사 물이 떠나는데도
여전히 끝까지 폭포에 속한다.



