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Statue of William Shakespeare in Budapest. Image © Géza Lőrincze

"...And you, but one, can every shadow lend."
"Csak egy vagy, mégis minden árny tiéd."
Sonnet 53 in Hungarian

The first full translation of the Sonnets came relatively late, in the middle of the 19th century, by Károly Szász and Vilmos Győry. The canonical Hungarian version was created by the excellent Hungarian poet, Lőrinc Szabó in the middle of the 20th century. His work inspired the next generation of the translators, but, as it is often the case, the next generation followed the footsteps of the creative genius, and didn't try to differ from his approach. Of course, Lőrinc Szabó's work has brought great popularity to the Sonnets, but has many flaws, too, which remained in the shadow till the last decade. His conception of translation is elaborated by his generation around the periodical *Nyugat* (West). Their main goal was modernisation: to fill Shakespeare's lines with the love concept of modernity, which came from the ideas of Poe and Baudelaire. According to this love is bounded with the cult of sin, lust, sickness and spleen. That would be a very interesting approach to examine how these modern ideas transformed the understanding of Shakespeare. Till now we know only ten full Hungarian translations of the sonnets, but of course the most famous among the poems have been translated many more times. Now I have the golden opportunity to elaborate a new translation, founded on a brand new concept. Although the last complete translation came out in 2019, these versions didn't use the huge amount of materials which can give great help to the deeper understanding of the text. My approach is not only a re-reading of the Sonnets: the formal concepts of the translation also need a great revision.



Hungarian translator Lőrinc Szabó

The principles of my translation are as follows: with the help of David Crystal's reconstruction of the original pronunciation, we hear afresh how long a line of Shakespearian verse is. This seems to be obvious but in practice there are a lot of lines, the length of which cannot be determined without it - so all the previous translations were necessarily mistaken about the number of syllables. The second question is the rhythm: the translating practice in Hungary is much more loose than it should be. I try to be as faithful as possible to the rythmical structure of the iambic pentameter, so I use only iambs and spondees, but am also translating faithfully the male and feminine rhymes.

I am aided by previous editions of the Sonnets, which give me a great advantage in my effort to render a faithful translation. I am using the editions of Katherine Duncan-Jones, Colin Burrow, Stephen Booth, and the Oxquarry Shakespeare online editions. All four are important for my concept. Duncan-Jones has great vision, and gives relatively short but enlighting comments. When I need more detailed comments, I turn to Booth, who gives very specific information. But I have the feeling he sometimes tells us perhaps more than we need, and that can be confusing. When I hit a more complicated problem I always check Burrow's edition, which has laconic, simple comments, and which has helped me to keep my head clean from the multiple-meaning madness.

And to my great honour Paul Edmondson (who recently visited Budapest to deliver a Shakespeare lecture), mentioned to me a brand-new forthcoming edition not only of the Sonnets published in 1609, but of *All the Sonnets of Shakespeare*, co-edited with Sir Stanley Wells. It is due out from Cambridge University Press in September 2020. Edmondson and Wells have been so encouraging of my efforts that they have allowed me to consult their work prior to its publication. Their new edition suits ideally the needs of a translator; its concept is ideal for me. It provides literal paraphrases of all of the sonnets, and is therefore an immense help to translators of the Sonnets all over the world. I am very proud and happy to have this opportunity, but it does not solve every

problem. The paraphrases simplify the text's motifs, so my job is to benefit from the paraphrases and work them back into my poetic text. At first I felt a tension between the clarity of the paraphrases and my concept as a poetic translator of the sonnets. But now it is going well. I need to be aware of the little differences between the paraphrases and the scope of my translation. The meaning of the Sonnets is easier to decode but it can lead to a simplification of the poetry, a bit dangerous for the translator - but of course very useful to a reader who wants to understand the complicated puns and the many different levels of the meaning.

Edmondson and Wells's exciting, forthcoming edition seems to be immaculate from my point of view. For instance, it identifies mini-sequences of sonnets within Shakespeare's wider collection, which has proved useful to my understanding the manifold inherent connections of the poems. But there is no end of difficulties: in the new Hungarian version I need to be precise with the metre of the verses, to be clean in the rhythm, and also faithful in meaning - as far as it is possible - to the original text. The multiplicity of the meanings can't be given back every time: the comments and notes will be of course of major importance to the new Hungarian translation. It is necessary to give them a good, understandable, and somewhat modern language and to try and find the original meaning of the sonnets.

In working on the sonnets, I have come to see just how far away the most widely known Hungarian translation is from the original text. Szabó was an excellent poet, so he could fill the gaps of interpretations with his own creative materials - and rendered the Sonnets as lovely poems in his twice revised edition. But he used only Sir Sidney Lee's edition, and Stefan George's German translation; his work is analysed in detail in the dissertation of Anna Szabó T.

My goal is to make a usable, understandable translation, which has good notes and comments. The cult of Shakespeare is thriving in Hungary. In the future we can expect more and more new translations and paraphrases of the dramas and of the Sonnets, too. I hope my work presents the Sonnets in new light – without unnecessary modernisation, and authoritative in an enjoyable way.

Images courtesy of Sándor Fazekas.

The Shakespeare sculpture seen in the first image is a version of a statue that was created by Andor Mészáros, a Hungarian sculptor, in Ballarat, Australia. The Hungarian version was copied by his son, also a sculptor, Michael Mészáros.

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