
Four-handed Chirping of Birds or, The Adventure of two Hungarian Translators with Flann O'Brien's Book-web

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Abstract. The essay articulates the specific translation problems encountered in translating Flann O'Brien's ludic novel *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939) into Hungarian in a framework of translation studies, also drawing on research on Joyce in translation. It tackles issues such as the necessity to invent literary styles for the book's embedded style parodies, especially where the 'originals' are unknown in the TL culture; and the choice of idiom/ minor language(s) (Hiberno-English, as well as the Finn/Sweeny translatores), for which a form of the TL that could function as a translated idiom had to be invented. As a possibility, harnessing Transylvanian Hungarian is explored – somewhat similarly to A. Oțoiu's Romanian version of *ASTB* (2005), which also resorts to Transylvanian Romanian accents for rendering the same idiolects. Further points of interest are the issue of Gaelic red herrings and direct translations from the Gaelic; the possibilities of foreignizing language use, especially in the frame of Latinate pedantry; the strategies for rendering the (mis)quotes, literary references, Joycean allusions; and, last but not far from least, the translators' adventures with Flann O'Brien's vicious puns. The essay also explores the four-handed translation process, resulting in a dialogic, and multilayered, Hungarian text that attempts to speak in as many styles and voices as the original.

Key Words. Flann O'Brien, translation studies, intertextuality, cultural translation, style parody, linguistic/semantic, cultural untranslatability, idiom/idiolect/minor language.

Resumen. El ensayo se centra en los problemas específicos de traducción encontrados al traducir la novela lúdica *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939) de Flann O'Brien al húngaro dentro del marco de los estudios de traducción, así como de investigación sobre la traducción de la obra de Joyce. Se abordan aspectos como la necesidad de inventar estilos literarios para verter las parodias de estilo insertadas en el libro, especialmente cuando los 'originales' son desconocidos en la cultura de la lengua de destino; y la elección de modismos/lengua(s) minoritaria(s) (el hiberno-inglés, así como las traducciones artificiales de Finn y Sweeny), para los cuales ha sido preciso inventar una forma en la lengua de destino que funcione como giro traducido. Una posible camino a explorar es recurrir al húngaro de Transilvania, como hiciera A. Oțoiu en su versión rumana de *ASTB* (2005) al verter los mismos idiolectos en la modalidad rumana de Transilvania. Otros puntos de interés son la cuestión de las pistas falsas y traducciones directas del gaélico; las posibilidades de estranjerizar el uso de la lengua, especialmente en forma de pedantería latinizante; estrategias para verter (falsas) citas, referencias literarias, alusiones Joyceanas, sin olvidar las aventuras de los traductores con los maliciosos juegos de palabras de Flann O'Brien. El ensayo explora asimismo el proceso a cuatro manos de la traducción que da por resultado un texto húngaro dialógico e intrincado que intenta hablar a través de tantos estilos y voces como el original.

Palabras clave. Flann O'Brien, estudios de traducción, intertextualidad, traducción cultural, parodia estilística, intraducibilidad lingüística/ semántica/cultural, modismo/idiolecto/lengua minoritaria.

My tale begins with two translators and junior Flanneurs, the present party and Gábor Csizmadia, who in the privacy of their respective bedrooms – situated at quite some 800 miles’ remove from each other in the farthest East of Transylvania, Romania, and the wild West of Hungary, but whose respective washstands proudly held up for inspection several indispensable, if somewhat tattered, volumes by the venerable De Selby – committed themselves to the translation of a book curiously entitled *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939), into their own mellifluous Hungarian. As soon as the two parties, then both PhD students writing their theses on, or partially on, the very difficult pieces of puzzlement in the books of the very revered Irish author Flann O’Brien, bumped into each other on the Red Swan premises, they decided that counterpoint was an even number and united their twin texts, entwined with laughs low, into one odd translation under the frighteningly unhyphenated title *Úszikkétmadáron* (literally, *On Swim-Two-Birds*).¹ The text – complete with annotations, afterword and a chronology, and published, after two years of delays, inside orthodox green covers bearing the countenance of the Dublin Diversion by the bilingual publishing house Koinónia, Cluj/Kolozsvár, Romania – took its shape in about two and a half years, during which the present party kept weaving the webs of the two initial versions into successive new translation variants, into

1. The Hungarian title is a verbatim rendering of the outlandish English translation of the Gaelic placename *Snámh-dá-én*, which plays such a deceptive role in the Sweeny/Suibhne saga; its sheer unhyphenated length (in accordance with Hungarian norms of spelling) and its reproduction of the original’s order heightens its sense of strangeness and, if possible, makes this weird syntagm even more strikingly foreign than in the English original. The closing Hungarian suffix *-(o)n* [“on”] is in accordance with recent research based on Eva Wäppling, who traced down the origin of the toponym and pointed out that *Snámh-dá-én* was an island *in* the Shannon, rather than a place *by*, or a ford on the river. Our title variant, as against earlier Hungarian references to *ASTB* as “At the Ford of the Two Birds” [*A két madár-gázlónál*] thus parallels Harry Rowohlt and Helmut Mennicken’s verbatim German title choice *Auf Schwimmen-zwei-Vögel* (2002). The Hungarian text will henceforward be referred parenthetically in the text as (*Ú*).

which Gábor then invariably stuck a tobacco-free fingernail, so that in the course of our contrapuntal chirping-together an umpteenth Excellence evolved from two Futilities.

We worked the text into successive stages of a translation-palimpsest and, at the end of each stage we shared our doubts about the current version, which then served as a starting-point to a next stage of elaboration. Our objective in writing a joint version was to create a seamless text where each discourse parody appears as distinct, yet allowing for internal hybridization. Throughout this process, the two continuously rewritten initial translations, with their poignant differences and less conspicuous common denominators, read and re-read each other, often resulting in the creation of a third (sometimes even tenth), inherently dialogic text variant for a certain passage, rather than the substitution of one of the initial versions in a patchwork-like ensemble. Cases when a lengthy passage was inserted unchanged from the one version into the joint translation were few and far between (such as the *pomes* of Jem Casey, the Poet of the People and of the Pick – who in our version bears the sprightly dactylic Homeric adjective “Kétkezi Költő” [Handworking or, Menial Poet] and whose attribute is changed to “Kalapács” [hammer] – transplanted from Gábor’s version). As a rule, it was mostly words, turns of phrase, inflections from the one version hybridizing the syntax, phrasing, or rhythm of the other variant to such extent that in many passages of the final text it becomes well-nigh impossible to distinguish the one, or the other, initial translation.

In so doing, we feel we have furthered a strategy at the heart of the text: of adding, and appropriating, entangled voices and forked idioms in order to emphasize the fact that texts always generate meaning in dialogue – and indeed in polylogue – with other texts, a polylogue that inevitably eschews authorial control. The blending of the two initial translation versions is illustrated by the example below: a passage from the Finn Mac Cool parody, in the initial translation versions (violet: Erika Mihálycsa, green: Gábor Csizmadia) and in the middle, in the final, joint version. The colour coding illustrates the extent of blending of the two translators’ initial texts; the phrases and words in light blue signal

translation solutions found in the final, joint version only.

With that he rose to a full tree-high standing, the sable cat-guts which held his bog-cloth drawers to the hems of his jacket of pleated fustian clanging together in melodious discourse. Too great was he for standing. The neck to him was as the bole of a great oak, knotted and seized together with muscle-humps and carbuncles of tangled sinews, the better for good feasting and contending with the bards. The chest to him was wider than the poles of a good chariot, coming now out, now in, and pastured from chin to navel with meadows of black man-hair and meated with layers of fine man-meat the better to hide his bones and fashion the semblance of his twin bubs. The arms to him were like the necks of

beasts, ball-swollen with their bunched-up brawnstrings and blood-veins, the better for harping and hunting and contending with the bards. Each thigh to him was to the thickness of a horse's belly, narrowing to a green-veined calf to the thickness of a foal. Three fifties of fosterlings could engage with handball against the wideness of his backside, which was wide enough to halt the march of warriors through a mountain-pass.

I am a bark for buffeting, said Finn,
I am a hound for thornypaws.
I am a doe for swiftness.
I am a tree for wind-siege.
I am a windmill.
I am a hole in a wall. (ASTB 10-11)

Azzal felemelkedett teljes szálfenyő-magasságában, dallamosan megszólaltatva az éjszín macskabél húrokat, melyek kordbársony zekéjének szegélyére erősítve tartották ágyékának díszét, kapcaphozó bugyogóját. Nem látsz természetre hozzá hasonló egész Erinben. Akár százados tölgy dereka az ő nyaka, mit izomkötegek és karbunkulus inak csomóznak: válogatott lakomákon és bárdok társaságán edződött. Szélesebb az ő mellkasa egy jó harcocsinál, állától köldöke kútjáig férfiszőr sűrű rétje nővi be és kitűnő férfihús borítja, csontjait fedőn, iker mellbimbóit jobban duzzasztón. Az ő karja, mint vadállatok nyaka, barna inakkal és vérerekkel dagadó labda: hárfa húrjainak pengetésén, sok vadászaton és a bárdokkal való versengésen edződött.

Azzal felemelkedett teljes szálfenyő-magasságig, dallamos feleselésre összehajlítván az éjszín macskabél húrokat, melyek redőzött kordbársony zekéjének szegélyére függeszték lápigyapot bugyogóját. Irdatlan vala az ő nagysága álltában. Akár százados tölgy dereka az ő nyaka, mit izomkötegek és karbunkulus inak csomóznak, nem másért, mint helytállni tivornyázásban és az énekmondókkal való vetekedésben. Szélesb vala az ő mellkasa egy jó harcocsi rúdközénél, állától köldöke kútjáig fekete férfiszőr sűrű legelő rétje borítja s alatta húsnak több réteg kitűnő férfihús, nem másért, mint elfedni csontjait és megformálni iker mellbimbói párját. Az ő karja, mint vadállatok nyaka, barna inakkal és vérerekkel dagadó labda, nem másért, mint hárfajátékra, vadászatra és bárdokkal való versengésre.

S avval felegyenesedett szálf magasságig, miközben a koromszínű bélhúr madzagok, amelyek hozzáfogták lápigyapot-gatyáját redőzött kordbársony zekéjének szegélyéhez, dallamos feleseléssel összehajlítottak. Irdatlan vala az ő nagysága álltában. Az ő nyaka oly vastag vala, mint órjas tölgyfarönk, göcsörtös, s kusza izomcsomók dülledő kötegei fogak körül, nem másért, mint helytállni tivornyázásban és az énekmondókkal való vetekedésben. Az ő mellkasa szélesb vala, mint jó harci szekér rúdköze, ütemesen emelkedett-süllyedt, s álltól köldökig fekete férfiszőrzet dús legelő mezeje borította, s alatta húsnak több réteg finom férfihús nem másért, mint elfedni csontjait és megformálni iker mellbimbói párját. A karjai önéki olyanok valának, mint vadállatok nyaka, dinnyényire duzzadt izomnyalábokkal és erekkel, nem másért, mint hárfajátékra, vadászatra és bárdokkal való versengésre.

<p>Combjainak vastagsága egy ló hasának vastagságával vetekedett, lábikrájának formája csikóhasnyira sudarasodott. Másfélszáz pula kényelmesen eljátszadózhatott roppant hátsójának terjedelmén, mely akár egy csapat hegyszorosban vonuló harcos útját is el tudta zárni.</p> <p>Ütésre fának kérge vagyok, mondta Finn, Tüskemancsnak véreb vagyok, Gyorsaságra őzsuta vagyok, Szélostromra fának koronája vagyok, Szélmalom vagyok, Falban lyuk vagyok én.</p> <p>(E. MIHÁLYCSA)</p>	<p>Két combjának vastagsága egy ló hasának vastagságával vetekedett, lábikrájának formája csikóhasnyira sudarasodott. Másfélszáz pula kényelmesen eljátszadózhatott hatalmas hátsójának terjedelmén, mely feltartóztatható akár egy hegyszorosban vonuló harcos alakulatot.</p> <p>Vagyok bárka hullámverésben, mondta Finn, Vagyok véreb tüskemancsnak, Vagyok őzsuta gyorsaságra, Vagyok terebély fa szélostromra, Vagyok szélmalom, Falban lyuk vagyok én.</p> <p>(E. MIHÁLYCSA + G. CSIZMADIA)</p>	<p>Combjai egyenként olyan vastagok valának, mint ló hasa, amely egy csikó vastagságú zöldekes lábikrába keskenyedett. Háromszor ötven rajkó labdázhatott ülepe széltében, amely elég vala ahhoz, hogy feltartson egy hegyszoroson átvágni akaró harcoló alakulatot.</p> <p>A hányatást bárkaként viselem - szólt Finn, Karmos mancsokra kopóként ugrom Fürgeségem szarvasünnőé Szél ostromát faként állom Szélmalom vagyok Lyuk vagyok a falban.</p> <p>(G. CSIZMADIA)</p>
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Translating Flann O’Brien’s “vertiginous extravagance,” “anatomy of a novel” (Donohue 2002: 23, 24), “parodic symposium of textual strategies and stylistic conventions” (Imhof 1985: 13) into any language undoubtedly means to venture on premises where poetic, linguistic and stylistic license is the *conditio sine qua non*. In the following, I will try to take untranslatability by the (t)horns and explore a few of the poignant translation problems we encountered, as well as present our strategies for coping with them.

Arguably the greatest translation problem is the rendering of the “manivaried” parodies of style, most of which have no stylistic “original,” nor any, diachronically analogous stylistic relatives in the target language literary heritage on which to rely. This task necessitates a double invention in the target language (TL): firstly, of linguistic-stylistic forms that would function as equivalents of the original’s parodies and pastiches which could rely on the reader’s recognition of some pre-existing stylistic framework in the source language (SL)

cultural memory; and secondly, the transfer of O’Brien’s parodic effects. In other words, the translator has to create a specific locus of foreignness within the TL where style and its marked idiosyncrasies consistently frustrate the reader’s expectations of domestication to native discursive and linguistic norms, yet evoke by “faking” a (nonexistent) tradition – for instance, that of medieval Irish legends – which is to become subject to parodic manipulation. In this respect, the road to Flann O’Brien’s prose leads through the Joyce of *Ulysses* (1922) perhaps even more than that of *A Portrait* (1916). One of the “control texts” on which to draw and from where to depart, should thus be the TL version of *Ulysses*, which already established a framework for parodying (Irish, English as well as Anglo-Irish) prose styles that can, by definition, be only evoked in the TL – and which, in its turn, is parodied in *At Swim-Two-Birds*. For the Hungarian translator, this means to signal the relation of one’s text to Miklós Szentkuthy’s canonic Hungarian version of *Ulysses* (1974), with its explosive,

Gargantuan humour, whose excesses of language and disseminative language poetics fuelled the so-called postmodern “prose turn” of Hungarian fiction in the 1970s to a degree probably unparalleled by any other translation text.²

Too abstruse to follow intelligently”

O’Brien’s strategy of parodying writing, of creating a book-web of stylistic found objects, relies partly on the treatment of English as a dead language. One gets the impression that the author drew the most grist to his own metafictional mill from the murmuring meadows of Joyce’s “Eumaeus” and “Ithaca,” and the “high falutin stuff” of “Aeolus”, where the text foregrounds its own rhetorical artifice. Reading becomes an act of internal translation forcing the reader to supplement meaning by correction and to a fresh reconceptualization of language. The translator would have to aim at creating an effect of puzzlement by delayed understanding: (s)he is given the green light to play on Latinate jargon, mixed (dead) metaphors, and shopsoiled literariness to such extent and in such concentration as to turn them into the text’s principal stylistic marker, blatantly defying norms of fluency and communicative readability.

Stylistically, the student-narrator’s fiction strains to emulate his literary models in the shape of Joyce and Huxley with rather lagging footsteps; however, most of the time it becomes an accumulation of preformulated grooves of a decidedly miscellaneous collection, of syntagms of the clichéd persuasion, sporting an impressive

2. The Hungarian translation of *Ulysses* by metafictional novelist Miklós Szentkuthy (1974), the second version of Joyce’s novel in the language after Endre Gáspár’s first rendering (1947), has been hailed as well as criticized for its rather too apparent ambition to out-Joyce Joyce himself, celebrating all-pervading wordplay, linguistic inventiveness and excesses, musicality as well as Gargantuan humour, but in the process often sensibly overlooking important structural connections, lowering register as well as levelling stylistic and linguistic plurivocity. Szentkuthy’s *Ulysses*, which had a decisive impact on the emergence of postmodern Hungarian writing, also paved the way to a new disseminative language poetics by virtue of its “Wakean” bend: its pervasive use of portmanteaux-like constructions that seem to look at *Ulysses* from the vantage point of Joyce’s later *Work-in-Progress*.

array of borrowed stylistic plumes: tropes meticulously pointed out, classical (mis)quotations, formulae or dandy choice words going occasionally askew in comic instances of sliding signification.³ This offers ample playground for translators to operate with pedantry driven *ad absurdum*, inviting lapses and slips of the pen – always bearing in mind that translation is an opportunistic trade, so that some of the *translips* would necessarily occur, and aim elsewhere than O’Brien’s originals. In the description of the uncle and Mr Corcoran’s operatic rapture, for instance, the narrator infers that the uncle and Mr. Corcoran were “likewise situated” (92) – meaning, singing in the baritone voice in the Rathgar and Rathmines opera society. The Hungarian version [“hasonlóan szituált”: *Ú* 121] plays with the contextual inappropriateness of “situated” – a mildly pretentious word used in Hungarian exclusively for social and economic standing; similarly, the infelicitous figurative in the sentence “my uncle *took a stand* near the fire” (90) is conveyed with an equivalent mislaid idiom, “nagybátyám a kandallónál *foglalt állást*” (*Ú* 117), *standing for* the expression of one’s opinion in a debate. In rendering the descriptive phrase “Adjacent stools *bore the forms* of Brinsley and Kelly, my two true friends” (34), we made recourse to a conspicuously pedantic turn-of-phrase “a szomszédos székek Brinsley és Kelly, két igaz barátom *mivoltával voltak terhelve*” (*Ú* 45) [were laden with], whereas the two friends’ forms are supplanted by an obsolete term for self-identity [*mivolt(a)*], approximately “whatness”. We also chose to do a bit of discursive leg-pulling on the side and sprinkled our translated student-narrator with a good pocketful of extra recondite Latinisms barely understandable for the Hungarian reader – certainly far less so than for the English one.

3. Keith Booker extensively discusses sliding signification in *At Swim-Two-Birds* in a Bakhtinian framework, as a prime textual strategy for undermining authorial control and energizing a wilfully deadened language (1995: 28-45); Keith Hopper in his seminal study of O’Brien addresses it in the context of Saorstát censorship and repressed homoeroticism, as the “metonymic code” that runs through O’Brien’s fiction (1995: 56-107). The latter reading is favoured also by Keith Donohue’s exegesis, informed by a rigorous close reading of O’Brien’s bilingual work (2002: 67-84).

In the original, Brinsley expresses his relief over the exit of the uncle with a “pious ejaculation” (26); our translation text lets off an “ájtatos ejakuláció” (Ú 35) in purest classical idiom. Since “ejakuláció” as a Hungarian Latinism is only used for the natural phenomenon situated at a considerable downwards remove from the organs of speech, the Hungarian reader will have to back-translate the term into pristine Latin while the text winks at him with a rolling eye: *honi soit qui mal y pense*.

In a similar vein, the “*Memorandum of the respective diacritical traits of Messrs Furriskey, Lamont and Shanahan*” penned for the benefit of doubting Brinsley, is a hilarious exercise in academic clowning, its main source of humour being the use of (mock-)medical terminology to classify and describe physical features and objects that are singularly banal and down-to-earth – thus situating form at the farthest possible remove from content:

Head: brachycephalic; bullet; prognathic.(...)
Unimportant physical afflictions: palpebral ptosis; indigestion; German itch. (159)

Fej: brachycephal; golyóbis; prognát. (...)
Mellékes szervi panaszok: palpebrális ptosis; emésztési rendellenességek; pikkelysömör. (Ú 211)

The strategy behind such presumptuous verbiage is, again, delayed understanding: the reader first has to translate the foreign terms into a more “homely” language. Hungarian, not being part of the family of Indo-European languages and therefore accommodating foreign terms to much less extent than English, has obviously far narrower possibilities to play upon the difference of register between “palpebral ptosis” (meaning, a hanging of the eyelids) and “German itch,” with its suave touch of vernacular xenophobia. The Hungarian translator here either performs the transfer that would be required of the reader – that is, makes intelligible at once what the English-language reader has to work out, also levelling the difference of register felt in the sequence – or, by preserving the Latin term, as we did, makes it markedly less accessible and therefore of an even more defamiliarizing effect than in English. Without the intimidating Latin diagnostic (Hungarian medical jargon uses a descriptive, homely Hungarian term) the

the banality of the symptom loses its inherently comic effect.

“*Melodious is your voice...*”

However, the penchant for academic clowning in the frame narrative and in Orlick’s book-web is relatively straightforward in comparison with the linguistically more remote parodies of style which in the SL function as double translations – of Gaelic originals and of their English translatores, none of which have any possible linguistic or stylistic analogy in the TL. One of the most explosively comic threads of such parody in the novel is the one centred around the Hercules-like mythological figure of Finn Mac Cool, some of whose early *Fianna* legends – the ones best preserved in oral tradition – already contain the grain of hyperbolic descriptions and mushrooming catalogues. As Joycean scholar Maria Tymoczko shows, Joyce’s parodies of “Irish discourse” already continue a comic tradition within Irish literature, at the core of the early Irish texts themselves which abounded in scatological humour, grotesquely overblown descriptions and hyperbolae, and were often demonstrably already pastiches, ridiculing even the greatest epic heroes (1994: 54-58). O’Brien’s Finn parody should be compared to both the tame English translation versions circulated by the Revival and to Joyce’s Finn-style portrait of the Citizen; the constitutive difference brought by *At Swim-Two-Birds* is, on the one hand, its greater proximity to the medieval Irish originals (especially to the nature poetry of *Buile Suibhne*, as a comparison with Seamus Heaney’s modern English rendering, *Sweeny Astray*, 1983, reveals), and on the other hand, the sweeping, unbuttoned comedy of language.

In rendering the valences of the Finn parody’s Gaelicizing prose, the translator can resort to archaic variants of the TL. A major problem is the invention of formulae and turns-of-phrase which could create an effect similar to the defamiliarizing phrasing of the original, functioning as a “translatores” from Gaelic studded with calques: “The neck *to* him was as the bole of a great oak... Each thigh *to* him was *to* the thickness of a horse’s belly...” (11). Whereas Gaelic-type compound words (“wheyface,” “ball-swollen”), for instance, come almost naturally to Hungarian with its

vast synthetic possibilities, the rendering of “foreign” prepositional phrases is much more problematic: an agglutinating non-Indo-European language, Hungarian has no prepositions but expresses spatial and temporal directions by postpositions (suffixes) attached to the qualified word, and these as a rule have a narrower semantic field than prepositions in English. The solution we adopted was that of stylizing in excess, departing, where possible, from the (contemporary, or archaic) linguistic norm; of carrying language effects over the top and occasionally risking a grammatically odd adverbial suffix that could “fake” or create the semblance of a translatoresque with calque from Gaelic. For example, in the phrase “Azzal felemelkedett teljes szálfenyő-magasságig” [(Ú 14), “With that he rose to a full tree-high

standing,” *ASTB* 10], the adverbial suffix highlighted and literally meaning, “to a height” is strikingly non-standard, whereas the possessive used for the much-pierced nipples of the Irish birdman of sorrows becomes “mellbimbaja” (Ú 114) – a “faked” archaic form of the normative “mellbimbója,” which thus carries extra ironic valences. Our version thus uses alliterative cadences in excess (internal alliteration included), often resorts to antiquated inflections, word forms, occasionally even tenses, and capitalizes on rhythm and musical effects that nicely clash with the grotesque imagery – as shown on two examples below from the Finn prose, and from the Sweenyified journey of the assembled company to witness Orlick’s birth:

The knees and calves to him, swealed and swathed with soogawns and Thomond weed-ropes, were smutted with dung and dirt-daubs of every hue and pigment, hardened by stainings of mead and trickles of metheglin and all the dribblings and drippings of his medher... (*ASTB* 12)

Az ő térdeit és lábikráit, melyeket vaskos pólya pólyált és hatfonatú hajókötelek kötöztek, százféle árnyalatú szítyek és szutyok színezte, méhsőr folyása és mézbor csermelyei edzették keményre és csupra csurranó cseppjei... (Ú 16)

The Finn parody is also a unique terrain for linguistic carnivalization and for the eventual coming-into-being of additional meanings, language effects, and of translatorial *metaphormosis*. Finn’s catalogue of birds, for

On the brink of night they halted to light faggots with a box of matches and continued through the tangle and the grasses with flaming brands above their heads until the night-newts and the moths and the bats and the felicaun-eeha had fallen in behind them in a gentle constellation of winking red wings in the flair of the fires, delightful alliteration. (*ASTB* 128-9)

Az éjszaka mezszyéjén rózsetüzet gyújtani megálltak egy doboz gyufával, és továbbhaladtak a fű és az ág-bogak között lángoló üszkökkel a fejük fölött, míg az éjjeli molyok és éjjeli lepkék, denevérek, papillelangók felsorakoztak mögégjük ragyogó rőt röpték kecses konstellációjába a láng-keltette illat mellé, felette kellemes alliteráció. (Ú 169)

[papillelangó – playing on *pillangó* (*butterfly*) explained in a note 53, Ú 301]

instance, is made up to a considerable extent of fanciful names (“maritime wren, green-lidded parakeet,” 10) playing on ornithological terms, with a fair share of sexual punning. Among these names Gaelic red herrings occur, turning

the reader's expectations upside down and poking fun at an audience that enthusiastically embraces the cause of the ancestral tongue, while it has presumably lost touch with it to such extent as to take these items of doubtful pedigree for winged specimens. Accordingly, much of the linguistic comedy derives from the ludic interplay between languages, "Irish and English being woven together in a knot more complex than any Celtic tracery" (Donohue 2002: 67). The list's *passepourtout*, the *pilibeen* (*pilibín*) is certainly a "quare sort of a baste": the name of a common sea-bird, lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*) and the diminutive of Philip in Gaelic, it also metonymically stands for a small man or thing and, *mutatis mutandis*, for a diminutive male organ of procreation. In addition, it encapsulates an echo of Joyce's ironic revision of the myth of Icarus and Daedalus with whom Stephen Dedalus enthusiastically identifies in *Portrait*, only to bitterly dismiss such identification after his unheroic exilic venture: "Fabulous artificer, the hawklike man. You flew. Where to? Newhaven-Dieppe, steerage passenger. Paris and back. Lapwing Icarus. *Pater, ait*. Seabedabbled, fallen, weltering. Lapwing you are. Lapwing he" (*Ulysses* 9.952).

In the overall translation of the bird catalogue our version chose to add a metamorphic twist to the language games of the original, "sinning" on the side of alliteration and over-the-top sexual punning, rather more explicit in the Hungarian version that covers the whole arsenal of male and female genitals in mild slang terms, than in the original. Thus, our Hungarian birds' directory includes such items as a stuttering alpine "red-necked chough": "vörösgalléros havasi *csocsóka*" [combining "csóka", *chough* with a slang term, "csocsó(zik): (to) masturbate]; a rigorously alliterating, womanly-male "Mohar gannet": "mohari mufftafa" [combination of an effeminately lisped "Mustafa" with "muff" (*muff*, slang for *vagina*)] and a stammering "maritime wren": "tengöri tökörszöm" ["tengeri ökörszem" hybridized with "tök", *testicles*]. The cream of the chirping jest are undoubtedly Gábor's contrivances for the Gaelically demure *pilibeen*, tucked away in the annotations for readers of a scholarly disposition:⁴ "fütyfiritty" is based on

4. Here we faced the dilemma whether to supplant *pilibeen* and other Gaelic elements with homely

"fütyfiritty" [*trifle, nought*], "fütyty" [*whistle*] and "fütyi" [mild slang for *penis*]; "fütymallat" plays on the obsolete, both lyrical and folksy-sounding word for *dawn*, "pitymallat," and the anticlimactic "fütyma" [*prepuce*]. The fact that many of these creatures come packaged in portmanteaux in Hungarian is a further deferring gesture to the "Hungarian voice of Joyce" – Szentkuthy's pronouncedly Wakean appropriation of *Ulysses* which occupies a hardly negligible role in Hungarian cultural memory and whose text serves as principal subtext, as well as *context*, for the Hungarian version of *At Swim-Two Birds*.⁵

"It's a quare one and one that takes a lot of beating"

Perhaps the highest ambition of our joint work was to *translude* (*Finnegans Wake*, 1939, 419.24) our protean author's text, meaning that we took occasional liberties in the sense of driving self-parodic stylistic bends over the top, stylizing in excess, sprinkling our parodies with extra alliterative phrases or resorting to recondite 19th century prep-school Latinate Hungarian with often a slippery contingency. As a side-kick "off the toptic" (*Finnegans Wake* 419.24), we were not above introducing, when the occasion presented itself, some intertextual byplay into the invented comic-archaic language of the Finn and Sweeny passages. In the Hungarian description of Finn's

equivalents in order to drive the joke home for the Hungarian reader, or to preserve them as Gaelic red herrings – that is, whether to suppress the foreignness of the *other* (unfamiliar) language and the text's hybridity, or to preserve this foreignness as essential part of the joke and marker of context, substituting direct translation with an endnote. We decided for the latter, since Gaelic words function as signals of difference and internal hybridization, which have an important role not only in (re)creating the context but also in the multiple play with language(s) and "originals."

5. As critic Dávid Szolláth and myself have shown on a series of textual examples, Szentkuthy often seems to be actualizing the reading experience of the *Finnegans Wake* language with its unbound semiosis in translating the previous work, sprinkling the *Ulysses* text with ubiquitous multilingual contrivances, such as portmanteaux-like "Szentkuthysms" that closely parallel the wording strategies of the *Wake*: cf. Szolláth (2010: 6) and Mihálycsa (2012: 76-80).

eyeballs, for instance, oblique echoes from *Toldi* (nineteenth-century Hungarian national verse epic by János Arany) surface, heightening the effect of bombast and grotesquely underlining the epic quality of the Finn prose and its critical stance towards the Revival's rediscovery and appropriation of Celtic legend and lore – all the more so, since the historical hero of the Hungarian epic (a 14th century knight) achieved fame through his legendary strength rather than for his wits or sophistication:

Mint növendék cserfaerdőé, olyan a szemét strázsáló szőrök sudársága, *mint* hóban lemészárolt hadak, *szeme pillantása*. (U)

[To each of the two eyes in his head was there eye-hair to the fashion of a young forest, and the colour to each great eyeball was as the slaughter of a host in snow.]

„*Mint* komor bikáé, olyan a járása,/ *Mint* a barna éjfé, *szeme pillantása*.” [Like of a sullen bull's, so is his stride,/Like the gloomy midnight, so is his glance.]

(János Arany, *Toldi*, 1846, my translation)

In addition, the repetitive verses recited by Finn whose robust imagery speaks of universal self-identifications (“*I am* a bark for buffeting ... *I am* a doe for swiftness... *I am* the breast of a young queen”: 11-12) are ghosted in our Hungarian version by the repetitive cadence “*Vagyok – vagyok*,” coming from one of the programmatic pieces of early modern poetry in Hungarian by poet Endre Ady: in his poem with Symbolist leanings, *Vision on the Marshland* (*Vízió a lápon*, published in his breakthrough 1906 volume *Új Versek* [“New Poems”]), the poetic self, heroic, solitary, hypersensitive and rather in the shape of Baudelaire's albatross, is set in sharp contrast to the backwardness and general paralysis of the mythologized Hungarian marshland.⁶ The

6. Cf. the Ady poem's programmatic self-identifications speaking of *fin-de-siècle* decadence and nervousness, “*Vagyok fény-ember ködbe bújva,/ Vagyok veszteglő akarat,/ Vagyok a láplakók csodája/ Ki fényre termett s itt maradt*” [I am a light-man in mists hid,/ I am a will lingering awhile,/ I am the wonder of marsh-dwellers/ Born to light, entrapped to live here, *my translation*], and the distinctive Ady touch surfacing in my initial version: Finn's “*I am* a dark castle against bat-flutters” was rendered as “*Vagyok ködvár denevérszárnycsattogásba bújva*” [I am a mist-castle

miscegenation of Finn's melodious Irish verse with the heroic upbeat of Ady's manifesto of decadent-modern sensitivity adds a touch of irony not very far removed from the ironies generated around Joyce's hawklike alter ego Stephen Dedalus.

Among the myriad-minded other parodies of style and discourse in *ASTB* we may find a wide range of savoury low-brow entertainment books, mainly westerns, populated by herdsmen imported into Dublin suburbia (Shorty, Slug) and genuine representatives of the Plain People of Ireland (Shanahan, Lamont, Furriskey). In conveying these styles the translator ought to consider the nearest correspondences of such traditions and discourses within the TL literary heritage. In the case of Hungarian, the latter is synonymous with Jenő Rejtő, alias P. Howard, prolific author of savoury, self-parodic pulp fiction, whose grotesquely improbable adventure stories have become classics for generations of readers.⁷ In the battle scene between third-rate

in bat-flutters hid], later palliated to “*Vagyok ködvár, ha denevérszárny csattog*” [I am a mist-castle if bat-wings flutter] in the final joint version (*Ú* 16). The repetitive verse openings and recurrence of keywords such as mist [*köd*] are nevertheless ghosted by Ady.

7. The career of the author, born Jenő Reich in a Jewish family in Budapest (1905-1943), who hid behind a plethora of pen-names – P. Howard, Gibson Lavery and, most notoriously, Jenő Rejtő (the last name meaning “the one who hides”) – shows curious parallels with that of Brian O’Nolan/Flann O’Brien/Myles na gCopaleen. One of the most widely read Hungarian novelists of all times, his double-decker oeuvre of deceptively readable, yet overtly self-parodic pulp fiction in which he ironized the whole genre was only posthumously recognized for its literary merits, a series of his “two-penny novels” being republished from 1966 by a prestigious publishing house. After adventurous journeys around the globe, he returned to his native Budapest in 1927, set up a literary hoax announcing his miraculous return from the dead with the best-known comic writer of the age, Frigyes Karinthy, and embarked on a prolific literary and theatre career, writing burlesques, comic screenplays and parodies of westerns first as Gibson Lavery, then grotesquely improbable stories of gangsters and of the Foreign Legion under the pseudonym P. Howard. An habitué of the Budapest cafés and literary scene, he was hounded by the Hungarian fascist press from 1942 onwards, leading

writer Tracy's hirelings and the bandit Red Kiersay, a character invented by another author of westerns, or in Shanahan's account of Sergeant Craddock's jumping bravado, we could liberally draw on turns-of-phrase reminiscent of Rejtő's burlesques.

"But the man in the street, where does he come in?"

Another issue related to the Ringsend cowboys' lingo, a juicily undereducated version of the brogue of the Plain People of Ireland, is *into what language* to translate. Flann O'Brien's PPI brogue is a very distinct brand of Hiberno-English, a minor variant within the (Deleuzian) minor language consecrated in literature mainly through the agency of the Revival and having as direct precedent, among others, the pub-dwellers' lingo in Joyce's "Cyclops". This jocose, ex-centric language abounding in Gaelic inflections and verbatim translations from the Gaelic, with recognizable inflections of Dublin speech, is a minor dialectal version of (Hiberno)-English and certainly has no equivalent in Hungarian, a language that lacks dialects or minor languages with their own established literary traditions, having only subdialects – regional variants or accents. Even more importantly, for the translation of Hiberno-English one would need to find – or rather, invent – a language that could function as a translated idiom, founded on hybridity and linguistic miscegenation, within the standard version of the TL. What our translation proposed was a deliberately eclectic, invented Hungarian "brogue," both urban and rural at the same time – which also provided a common denominator for the two translators' differing linguistic luggage, since in my initial version the cowboys speak an undereducated Hungarian with recognizably Transylvanian inflections, while in Gábor's translation, a mix of slightly dated urban slang with touches of German and Yiddish, reminiscent of Rejtő's Budapest lingo.

The inflections of Transylvanian Hungarian have, for the ears of the average Hungarian speaker, a distinct non-standard ring, owing to the region's long-standing historical, cultural marginality within the Hungarian-speaking area; Transylvanian regional dialects have,

accordingly, become stereotypes of archaic, folkloric picturesqueness. Whereas a parallel between the two marginal idioms should always be taken "with a grain of salt," to quote learned Shanahan, Transylvanian Hungarian – which, due to the multilingual history of the province, sports a vast repertory of linguistic cross-breeds and hybrids – has nevertheless been used in translating Irish plays using Hiberno-English by authors such as Brian Friel or Martin McDonagh.⁸ A close parallel here is Adrian Oțoiu's congenial Romanian translation of *At Swim-Two-Birds*, where the cowboys' idiom is a savoury mixture of Transylvanian – thus, poignantly non-standard Romanian – verbiage and turns-of-phrase, *ardelenisme*, their table talk at the same time evoking end-of-19th century comic playwright Ion Luca Caragiale's characters, half-educated upstarts from the outskirts of the Romanian capital who speak a corrupted lingo teeming with hilarious malapropisms and misnomers. Besides the use of subdialectal vocabulary, often of German and Hungarian extraction, Oțoiu's translation also harnesses stylistic correspondents available in Romanian folklore and literary tradition. Thus his renderings of the Sweeny *lays* and of Finn's mushrooming celebrations of nature are, in effect, cultural translations that ring with the cadence of the Romanian folk *doina de jale*, a lament expressing sorrow or melancholy, and of *doina de dor* respectively, a characteristically

8. Although the substitution of dialect for dialect is virtually anathema in translation studies and "serious" translation practice, elements and touches of dialectal or regional versions of the standard language have been fruitfully used in the area of translation from, and into, Hiberno-English. One may mention here the tradition of stage *transadaptations* into Hiberno-English of Chekhov, for instance (by prominent Irish playwrights Brian Friel, Frank McGuinness, Thomas Kilroy, Tom Murphy), or Seamus Heaney's own practice of domesticating translations, discussed in his lecture "Mossbawm via Mantua: A Reading with Commentary," held at the 7th EFACIS Conference "Ireland in/and Europe," at the University of Vienna (3-6 September 2009). Conversely, Hungarian theatre productions have occasionally used the non-standard valences of Transylvanian Hungarian in translating plays by Irish authors – cf. poet Anna T. Szabó's translation of Martin McDonagh's *The Cripple of Inishmaan*, 2002, or my own version of Brian Friel's *Translations*, 2001.

to his deportation and death in a work camp in the Ukraine in January 1943.

melancholy form of folk love song (O’toiu 2007: 64, 69).

Rather than ear-marking our cowboys with such, culturally charged labels as typical Transylvanian Hungarian collocations and inflections, we tried to imbue their talk with a note of extra rhetorical flourish, excessive verbal over-elaboration, aphoristic gravity and a general playfulness that Transylvanian Hungarian shares with Hiberno-English, which nicely clashes with the low colloquial upbeat of their pleasantries. Within the final version, the *querelle* of rustic bogmen with citified pub-dwellers might be exemplified by the idiomatic solutions for translating “This is all my bum”: of “here’s a pocket(ful) of plum jam” (i.e., here’s something entirely worthless, grab it) with its suave Transylvanian *couleur locale*, and the Budapestified “go feed your nanny” – i.e., go tell this yarn to your nanny. The only conclusion the translators arrived at in striking a balance was to (mis)quote gentleman Lamont on the art of fiddling: The ear is the main thing and the aspiring translator can wear the last tatter of skin off his/her knuckles and still won’t get as far as his/her own shadow if s/he hasn’t got the ear. But “have the ear and you’re half-way there before you start at all” (152).

Putting a Transylvanian touch on the conversation of the Furriskey-Lamont-Shanahan triumvirate also generated an unforeseen layer of semantic instability and extra textual allusions. Lamont’s story of sergeant Craddock, champion at the long jump is one of the most richly comic instances of contrapuntal stylistic incongruity in the book, since it punctuates Finn’s narrative of *Buile Suibhne*, the medieval Irish verse legend of the madness of Sweeny – being at the same time a grotesque replica of the boxing match rendered in gigantic prose parody in the “Cyclops” episode of *Ulysses*:

Go to Russia... go to China, go to France. Everywhere and all the time it is hats off and a gra-ma-cree to the Jumping Irishman. Ask who you like they’ll all tell you that. The Jumping Irishman.
It’s a thing, said Furriskey, that will always stand to us – jumping. (85)

Menjen akár Oroszországba... vagy Kínába, vagy Franciaországba, mindenütt és mindenkor csak le a kalappal és *gra-ma-cree* a Szökő

Írlandi előtt. Akárkit megkérdezhet, mind ugyanazt mondják. A Szökő Írlandi.

Olyasmi ez – mondta Furriskey –, ami mindig is menni fog nekünk: a szökés. (Ú 111-112)

The verb chosen for jumping – *szök(ni)* – shows an additional ambiguity: whereas in Transylvanian Hungarian it means “to jump“, in “standard” Hungarian its first meaning is “to escape, to flee,” tracing an aura of unheroic connotations that undercuts the sporting, military valour proclaimed with such earnest insistence by the company. The (Irish) fact that the champion jumper happens to be a police agent sent to a Gaelic League sports event “to keep his eye open for sedition” further enhances textual irony, as does the contingency that the narrative of the jumping feat interrupts the Sweeny staves that have previously been praised, in a glorious instance of sliding signification, as “the stuff that put our country where she stands today” (72).

“They go above me and around and through me”

At Swim-Two-Birds is by reputation a book of untranslatibilities, revelling in language games; it would far exceed the scope of the present essay to enlist all its puns, translators’ cruxes and juicy malapropisms – one such being the famously difficult “Crutch Sonata” that made the name of the champion fiddler Pegasus, and which in our version became “Krajcár szonáta” [Farthing Sonata], playing on the pronunciation of *Kreutzer*. The most vicious of these puns, humiliating all translators of the foreign-language versions accessible to me and for which we could only come up with a very painstaking solution, a truly “astonishing parade of nullity,” is the student-narrator’s double-decker witticism on the licensed premises: recognizing his friend’s intimation that he should pay for his own drink, the narrator retorts, “The conclusion of your syllogism... is fallacious, being based on licensed premises” (17). In our translation this became, “Szillogizmusod konklúziója téves... mert én leszek az, aki ennek *premissza a levét*” (Ú 23), where the highlighted phrase plays on the homonymy of *premissza* [premise] and the idiom “*megissza a levét* (vminek)” [to drink the juice (of sg.)] meaning, to bear the consequences of one’s mistake. Still, we didn’t

throw up our hands at most of the verbal sparkles. For the translation of Brinsley's optimistic programme for getting rich ("There are two ways to make big money... *to write a book or to make a book*," 20) we played on the verbal prefix of the same verb *to come* – the equivalent of English phrasal verbs: "ha *kijön* a könyved és *bejön* a lovad" (Ú 27) [if your book comes out (=is published) or your horse comes in (=the horse you bet on wins the race)].

The request of the small-size pub acquaintance who lectures the company on the subject of French philosopher Rousseau, only to cover them in vomit at a later stage, metamorphoses from items of clothing to the ardent wishes of a gardener, hiding the botched-up orders for drink:

Buy a scapular or a stud, Sir. (35) [=buy us a cup of lager or a stout]

Főnök, fizessen má' nekem egy keertet, vagy essót. (Ú 46) [distortion of "kertet vagy esót": garden or rain = "kevertet vagy egy sört": one "mixed" or a beer]

The latter overtone might illustrate the thesis that in translation content is hardly ever delivered safely: stout, this attribute of Irishness, is reterritorialized to Central Europe, the "mixed" being a not too enticing, plebeian beverage concocted of brandy/rum and sweet liquor or fruit syrup.

On the other hand, a heart-pleasing solution concerning one of the novel's key sentences has been reached. The double-decker maxim *Ars est celare artem* [Art is the concealment of art/of the artificial, 215] outwardly celebrates an ethos of the (Joycean, Modernist) invisible author, yet such ethos is subverted not only by the novel's nested, unruly narratives, but also by the double Latin pun, with a byplay on the (Irish) pronunciation of "ars," the joke dating back to Chaucer's times. Furthermore, as Keith Booker points out, the original Latin phrase in Trellis/O'Brien's double pun "already contains an embedded pun, because *celare* (to hide) resonates with *caelare* (to engrave, i.e., to make obvious). Thus, art simultaneously involves both a hiding and a declaration of art, as O'Brien demonstrates by employing a subtle pun, then explicitly calling attention to it" (1995:32). Gábor Csizmadia's conceit, playing on the change of one letter, reads *Altest celare artem* [*Posterior/Backside celare artem*, Ú 285].

The immediate context of the fundamental law of poetics implied by the phrase, turned upside down with such unprecedented insolence in the book-web of *At Swim-Two-Birds*, is the novelist *emeritus* Trellis, contemplating the opulent posterior of Teresa where the presence of a corset, of the cheap industrially-tailored variety, is unequivocally perceptible. The simultaneous hiding and declaration of art(ifice) is thus short-circuited in Hungarian to the charmingly old-fashioned plump (though not necessarily stately) posterior, drawing attention to the occurrence of a corseted pun.

Members of the author class in whose work every sentence is an event of style and language do not populate our bookshelves in overplus, but most readers will probably agree that Flann O'Brien belongs to that coterie. The fact that his ludic novel reflects, at every step, on his great predecessor Joyce's *eventful* writing in addition to virtually the whole of English/Anglo-Irish literary tradition tends to complicate the already far from straightforward task of the translator, reminding him/her how close this task [*Aufgabe*] falls to its impossibility and the ineluctable giving up [*aufgeben*] (De Man 1986: 80). Once this translator acknowledges that the author s/he threw in his/her lot with also happens to write a language that is inherently bilingual – an English that frets in the shadow of Gaelic, to paraphrase Joyce yet again – no amount of presumptuousness will ward off the sobering epiphany that no translator can comprehend the totality of O'Brien's discourses. In coping with the kaleidoscopic text of *ASTB* it is therefore not a disadvantage to be sitting with another translator "in twosome twiminds" (*FW* 188) in the one boat, even if the oars have been taken away: the specific linguistic, stylistic knowledge of two is likely to cover more ground in a text that discards any master discourse to revel in multiplicity. At the same time, partners working on a joint translation can act as each other's – as well as the successive joint versions' – critics and proofreaders, correcting errors and lapses, but also curbing self-serving translatorial idiosyncrasies, on condition they can get sufficiently detached from their own variant(s).

According to Benjamin's famous dictum, the task of the translator is to recreate in the TL, the effect the original had on its own language;

accordingly, the old dichotomy between fidelity and freedom in translation is turned inside out, freedom being reinterpreted as the emancipation of linguistic creation from the communication of “sense” and, ultimately, the recognition that in all communication there will forever remain something that resists it. Benjamin likens the act of translation to the movement of a tangent:

Just as a tangent touches a circle lightly and at but one point, with this touch rather than with the point setting the law according to which it is to continue on its straight path to infinity, a translation touches the original lightly and only at the infinitely small point of the sense, thereupon pursuing its own course according to the laws of fidelity in the freedom of linguistic flux. (80)

In this poetic metaphor, fidelity and freedom both seem dependent on flux. In attempting to

approximate the effect of self-estrangement of O’Brien’s original in our translation, we may have all too often traded in fidelity for freedom, the inherent bilingualism of O’Brien’s text for all-too monolingual vagaries – yet we tried to prioritize linguistic flux even in the deferring gestures our text brings to the canonic Hungarian version of *Ulysses*. In so doing, we inevitably imposed a layer of interpretation on O’Brien’s text as well as bringing it *home* – that is, to the self-estranging Hungarian rendering of its closest relative, Joyce. However, this paradoxically domesticating movement is countered, we hope, by the sheer exuberance and oddity of the stylistic antics deployed on the pages of *Úszikkétmadáron*, that propels the Hungarian language on a weird birdlike journey to the ever-pleasing meadows of Glen Bolcain.

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