

Translation and National World Literature

National Cultures at the Crossroads

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Abstract

Zwei Texte von Jan Mukařovský dienen hier als Ausgangspunkt für die Analyse tschechischer Übersetzungstheorien. Der erste, eine Besprechung von Šklovskijs Buch zur Prosa-theorie, geht weit über eine Rezension hinaus und zieht wichtige theoretische Schlussfolgerungen bezüglich des Unterschiedes zwischen russischem Formalismus und Prager Strukturalismus. In einer anderen Rezension bietet Mukařovský seine Einsichten anlässlich Karel Čapeks Übersetzung französischer Poesie aus dem Jahre 1936 dar. Čapeks Übersetzung von Guillaume Apollinaire verwendete Milan Kundera wiederum, um seine Idee nationaler Sichtweisen der Weltliteratur zu präsentieren.

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An anthology of texts about translation published first in 1957 under the title *České teorie překladau* (*Czech Theories of Translation*), edited by theorist Jiří Levý, shows the wide scope and long tradition of Czech theories of translation. *Umění překladau* (1963; *The Art of Translation*, 2011), Levý's own theory, became the cornerstone of Czech and international translatology.¹

Levý's anthology includes an article by Roman Jakobson about translation of poetry especially about semantic differences of the same meter in Russian, Polish and Czech, written in 1930. According to Jakobson, language of translation should correspond with the original in its function and not strive for external similarity. Levý's reprint of this short essay precedes Jakobson's influential study *On Linguistic Aspects of Translation* (2000), which was published in English first and subsequently in other languages. He distinguishes three types of translation:

1. Intralingual translation or rewording is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language.
2. Interlingual translation or translation proper is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language.
3. Intersemiotic translation or transmutation is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems. (Ibid.: 114)

1 | The belated English translation of this work confirms the lasting importance and the continuing topicality of this work.

It is the second type that will be discussed here from the point of view of the reception of theories and poetry.

Not included in Levý's anthology are two studies of translations by another member of the Prague Linguistic Circle: Jan Mukařovský's reviews of the Czech edition of Viktor Šklovskij's *O Teorii Prozy* (1925, *Theory of Prose*) (Mukařovský 1934) and his brief analysis of the second edition of Karel Čapek's translations of French poetry (cf. Mukařovský 1936). Admittedly the first text pays less attention to the translation (it does not mention the translator, comment on the translation itself or the organization of the book) but focuses on Šklovskij's theory with regard to the Prague Linguistic Circle. Yet, each of these texts contains important observations relating to theory of translation: prompted by the translation into Czech, the first one sheds light on the reception of Russian Formalism by Prague Structuralism, while the second one examines the impact French poetry in Čapek's renditions had on contemporary Czech literature. As the title of my contribution suggests my focus will be on translations as the crossroads of national cultures and the creation of national perception of world literature as described by Milan Kundera (see below).

Šklovskij's *Theory of Prose* originally published in Russian in 1925 was translated by Bohumil Mathesius² and appeared in Czech in 1933.³ As Mukařovský remarks, it entered into »quite a different scholarly, literary and general cultural context« (Mukařovský 1977: 134).⁴ This disparity between one of the pivotal works of the Russian theorists labeled as the Formal school and the structuralist approach launched by the Prague scholars is to some extent due to the fact that the conditions of Russian and Czech scholars in the Nineteen-Thirties could not have been more different. As Lubomír Doležel says about the Czech context »the artistic trends of the avant-garde and their theoretical ally, the structuralist poetics and aesthetics, were defining the cultural atmosphere of the time« (Doležel 1996: 339) whereas in the Soviet Union the avant-garde movements and formalist aesthetics were repressed as Šklovskij's *Pamjatnik naučnoj ošibke* (1930, *Monument to a Scientific Error*) illustrates:

Formalism is a trodden path for me, a path along which I have already passed and left several stages behind. The most important stage was the shift to the consideration of the function of literary form. What is left of the Formal method is the terminology, which is now being used by everyone. To study liter-

2 | A cousin of Vilém Mathesius who was an Anglicist (René Wellek's mentor) and founding member of the Prague Linguistic Circle created in 1926. Mathesius provided the text, which follows the second edition of the original, with a well-informed afterword in which he explains the development of the Formal school, and some obstacles the scholars were facing. Incidentally, any reference to *Pamjatnik naučnoj ošibke* (1930, *The Monument to a Scientific Error*) is missing. This is somewhat surprising since his commentary informs the reader about the Russian and Czech context, and the index provides valuable information about translated terminology.

3 | An English translation of *Theory of Prose* appeared in 1990.

4 | If not indicated otherwise, the translation into English follows the version of the text in Mukařovský 1977.

ary evolution in the context of functionality, one must, in my opinion, become familiar with the Marxist method in its entirety. Of course, I am not declaring myself a Marxist, because one doesn't adhere to scientific methods. One masters them and one creates them. (Šklovskij [1930])⁵

Almost concurrently with Šklovskij's attempts to explain and defend his position and the work of his colleagues, the »structuralist theory reaches full maturity« (Galan 1985: 36). František Galan speaks about Mukařovský's »new historical and dialectical orientation« (ibid.), as expressed in the review of Šklovskij's book. Unlike Šklovskij who »claims that the formalist critic should be concerned with internal laws of literature« (ibid.: 37), Mukařovský like Jurij Tynjanov (whose term *rjad* [series; řada] was later replaced with *structure*), turns to questions of literary history.

As Galan says:

The incipient dissolution of the conventional form-content dichotomy, the realization that a work of art as semantic whole in which every part – »content« as well as »form« expresses meaning, [...] was according to Mukařovský, the starting point for the structuralist overcoming of formalist limitations. (Ibid.)

Taking Šklovskij's notion of composition as a semantic aspect of the work as a point of departure Mukařovský arrives at the following definition: »Composition is a set of means characterizing the literary work as a semantic whole.« (Mukařovský 1977: 138) The idea of the semantic gesture (cf. for instance Jankovič 1972) as the unifying force of a work of art, developed by Mukařovský comes to mind here.

Mukařovský sees Šklovskij's book as »a bellicose challenge addressed to those who do not differentiate between poetic language and the communicative utterance« (ibid.: 135), which in fact is a position represented by the conservative linguistic journal *Naše řeč* (*Our speech*), attacked by the Prague School in one of its first publications, a collection of public lectures turned into articles collected in *Spisovná čeština a jazyková kultura* (1932, *Written Czech and the Culture of Language*).

Mukařovský's review also shows his interest in visual arts and his tendency to extend his field of enquiry beyond the individual work of art: »[E]very literary fact appears to be resultant of two forces: the internal dynamics of structure and external intervention« (Mukařovský 1977: 140). By and large, Mukařovský confirms Šklovskij's claim about the spread of formalist vocabulary, because he uses their terminology, and further develops Tynjanov's concepts such as »literary fact«, »literary evolution« and »series« (ibid.: 141). However, the review also includes a variety of topics discussed later by Mukařovský himself and by other members of the Prague School, and places some aesthetical ideas within

5 | I wish to thank my colleague Professor Yana Meerzon for providing me with various versions of Šklovskij's article.

the Czech/Prague tradition (there are traces of Herbartian aesthetics, Bühler's theory of linguistic functions and Husserl's phenomenology).

Mukařovský's text surveys some differences and similarities between the Formalists and Structuralists, and acknowledges the role Šklovskij and his colleagues had in discovering »a new field of study« (ibid.: 142), namely literary study. For him the translation serves as an opportunity to revisit his own approaches and the views of the Prague School to mark the distance between both groups. Mukařovský's review questions the often repeated claim that Prague School was but a continuation of the Russian Formalism, implied for instance in Victor Erlich's comment »that in many crucial areas the Prague Linguistic Circle merely amplified the Formalist insights« (Erlich 1981: 200). Drama, translation, architecture, fine arts were mostly outside the purview of the Formalists, as was semiotics, which Prague structuralists effectively applied to literature and arts in general.

»In Prague we speak only Czech. But when you speak French those who know the language will answer you with pleasure.« (Apollinaire 1965c: 3) The narrator of *Le Passant de Prague* (*The Wandering Jew*, 1965c), Guillaume Apollinaire's short story published in a collection of his stories *L'Hérèsiarque et Cie* (1910, *The Heresiarch & Co.*), comments on this alleged Francophile atmosphere of Prague at the turn of the century by pointing out how the city celebrated the centenary of Victor Hugo:

There were handsome posters announcing Czech translations of Victor Hugo's novels. Bookshop windows looked like bibliographical museums, illustrating the poet's life and work. Clippings from the Paris press describing the visit to that city of the Mayor of Prague and the Sokols [a gymnastic and nationalist organization] were posted in shop-windows, though I am still not quite clear as to the precise role of gymnastics in poetry (ibid.: 4).

Apollinaire mocks both the Francophile atmosphere of Prague and the patriotic tendency, which at once embraces literature and gymnastics. The story is set in Prague of 1902, i.e., in the year, in which another French artist, Auguste Rodin, came to Prague and accompanied by his friend Alphonse Mucha, visited not only the exhibition of his own works, but also the Moravian countryside that he considered another Hellas.

Rodin, Hugo, Apollinaire, and the French ambassador to Prague (1910/11), the poet Paul Claudel exemplify the Czech-French relationship, which started at the end of the 19th century. During the so-called Great War, in 1916 a group of Czech artists, many of them poets (Karel Čapek, Viktor Dyk, Hanuš Jelínek, Arnošt Procházka), intended another fusion of art and politics by expressing their allegiance with the »nation loosing blood at Verdun« (Čapek 1968: 177) by translating French poetry into Czech. But there was also a literary interest in Apollinaire that Čapek expressed in 1914:

Apollinaire suppressed punctuation in his poems [...]. It is evident, however, that his poems benefit from this feature, which is no mere graphic novelty. His images flow in a more boundless, intangible way, becoming more spiritual [...]. Now even the discursive syntax is relaxed and strict sequencing has been abandoned (Čapek 1914: 271f., quoted in Levý 2011: 300)

Karel Čapek remained the only one of the original group to present his translations after the war. As a result, »[t]he discovery of Apollinaire in Bohemia dates from 9 February 1919, when Karel Čapek published his translation of ›Zone‹ in the journal *Červen* (June) [Vol. 1, February 6, 1919: 291–304] with woodcuts by his brother Josef.« A year later, his »splendid anthology of French poets« (Ripellino 1994: 260) appeared.

As Angelo Ripellino and others agree, Apollinaire (1880–1918) has been admired and followed by many Czech artists. The notion of his influence on Czech arts became a cliché often used without questioning its origins, or the Francophile tendency of Czechs prior to the publication of *Pásmo* (1919, *Zone*). For example Deborah Garfinkle claims that »Čapek's rendering of Guillaume Apollinaire's modernist masterpiece ›Zone‹ is the cornerstone upon which the Czech modern literary identity has been constructed« (Garfinkle 2003: 345). She even goes so far as to suggest a rather simplified correlation between Čapek's translation of *Pásmo* and Czech modernity: »Czech modernity traces its roots back to what is essentially an adaptation, a copy.« (Garfinkle 2003: 345) As odd as this extreme view of translation as a mere copy is, it can be used as a point of departure to question such automatized statements which, to use Šklovskij's expression, became »stony« (Shklovsky 1991: 6) or in Mukařovský's rendition of a similar concept (*ostranenie* and *aktualizace*) automatized.

In contrast to this odd understanding of translation, Czech poet Vítězslav Nezval claims the opposite, for him Čapek created »a miracle in the art of translating poetry« (Nezval 1959: 65). Nezval explains the reasons for his claim in his introduction to the second edition of Čapek's slightly modified collection under the simplified title *Francouzská poezie* (*French poetry*) published in 1936, that includes four poems by Apollinaire, among them *Zone*. Mukařovský's review of this volume appeared in journal of the Prague Linguistic Circle *Slovo a Slovesnost* (*Word and Verbal Art*). As Nezval in his introduction, Mukařovský too acknowledges the importance of the book not only as mediator between Czech and French literature but also as an important step in the development of Czech poetry. He stresses that such a »task is just rarely achieved by books of original poetry« (Mukařovský 1982: 651).

Yet, Mukařovský mentions predecessors of such an impact on the »history of indigenous poetry« (ibid.). He does not specify whom he has in mind, but more than a decade later, in 1948, another member of the Prague School literary historian Felix Vodička, presented his ground breaking study of Josef Jungmann's translation of Chateaubriand's *Atala*, in which he shows how that work was »transposed into a new context, and assumed there a special function« (Vodička 1948: 122). The translation stimulated a new development of Czech prose (cf.

Vodička 1948: 122). Vodička's conclusion confirms Mukařovský's view of the role of translation:

The contemporary literary theory showed a translation can be the most effective means to solve structural problems presented to the development of the home-grown literature: during the process of searching for an appropriate equivalent of the foreign text, a re-creation of the poetic structure at home appears as a by-product, which could have been outside the intention or focal point of the translator.⁶

Mukařovský quotes Karel Čapek who considers the goal of translation to present the original without showing the personality of the translator (cf. Mukařovský 1936: 254). It comes as a surprise, however, that Mukařovský assumes that such a task is facilitated by the fact that Čapek as a prose writer »swerves from his own artistic environment« without being determined by his own poetic work (ibid.). Čapek however, was also a poet, a fact perhaps occluded due to his co-operation with his brother Josef. Nevertheless his/their dramatic work ever since *Lásky hra osudná*⁷ (1910, *The Fateful Game of Love*) until Čapek's *Matka* (1938, *Mother*) incorporated either a character of a poet or some parody of contemporary poems; some verses are also present in his fiction (e.g. the short story *Básník* [*The Poet*] in the *Povídky z jedné kapsy* [1939, *Tales from One Pocket*]). The language of these characters confirms Nezval's claim expressed in the foreword to the second edition of *French poetry* and cited by Mukařovský, that Čapek »adopted the language of the poets writing at the beginning of the century« (ibid.).

Mukařovský describes how Čapek contributed to the modification of Czech poetic language, which at the turn of the century was characterized by automatization of meter, and consequently also rigid syntax and limited lexical choices. Čapek's translation started with his modification of word order that accommodated the spoken language, which imposed a transformation of the lexical, and syntactic system of the verse. As a result Čapek achieved an »unmarked« poetic expression, which created new possibilities of opposition between rhythm and the selected linguistic material.

Concurrently with his *Czech Theories of Translation*, Levý examined Karel Čapek's translations in the context of the Czech translatology and Czech verse. He concludes his *Art of Translation* with a chapter on integrating style and thought, which quotes Mukařovský's comments on Čapek's prose as akin to the latter's above mentioned analysis of Apollinaire: »The result of the fact that all semantic units are situated on the same level series, is that their sequence (see

6 | »Moderní teorie literatury ukázala, že překlad bývá leckdy nejúčinnějším prostředkem k vyřešení strukturních problémů, které vývoj domácí literatury ukládá: při hledání a nalézání ekvivalentu pro cizí text se jako vedlejší produkt objeví přetvoření domácí básnické struktury, které mohlo být i mimo záměr překladatelův a jeho zorné pole.« (Mukařovský 1936: 253; engl. transl. by author)

7 | The inversion of the title implies a poetic licence inherent in the play.

Tynjanov's rjad used in many of his works) aims at boundlessness, toward an uninterrupted flow without a beginning and an end.«⁸

In his introduction to the anthology of Apollinaire's work *Alkoholy života* (1965, *Alcohols of Life*), Milan Kundera tries to trace what Jakobson calls »creative transposition« of Apollinaire into Czech context. He poses the speculative question »What would Czech poetry be were it not for the completely fortuitous fact that Čapek translated ›Pásmo?‹«⁹ In Kundera's view, »[e]very nation has its own history of world literature«¹⁰ and in the Czech history of literature, »Apollinaire most likely takes a more important place than in others«¹¹.

Surprisingly neither Garfinkle nor most of the other authors quoting this text analyze it in the context of the book and the introduction itself. On the contrary, Garfinkle remarks ironically: »Kundera's reverential attitude toward Čapek appears a contradiction given his later diatribes against translators.« (Garfinkle 2003: 345) The anthology of Apollinaire's work, however, which Kundera co-edited with Adolf Kroupa, includes only two translations by Čapek: in addition to the seminal *Pásmo (Zone)* the poem *Zvony (Les Cloches)* flanked by the original and its other versions by Stanislav K. Neumann (1914) and Petr Kopta (1965). They do not substantiate a »reverential attitude toward Čapek« but let the reader question her own expectation of fidelity, a single possible and desirable interpretation, and disclose the creative potential of each solution, i. e., the complexity of the translation process.

Providing the cultural and historical context, Kundera examines artistic experiments at the beginning of the 20th century and shows the affinity between the optimistic views of the future, Apollinaire shared with the artists of Bohemia whose works he inspired. Kundera's analysis of the poem's structure leads him to the conclusion that it is not based on images or ideas, but presents a stream of consciousness. This tendency characteristic of surrealist poetry and its *écriture automatique* is also among the sources of the affinity between Apollinaire's Czech counterpart, the poet Nezval, to which Kundera pays close attention. He distinguishes between Joyce's interior monologue which is conveyed by the character, while the surrealist automatic text is the expression of a lyrical subject (cf. Kundera in Apollinaire 1965b: 13). Kundera's assertion corresponds with Čapek's observation of Apollinaire and Mukařovský's comment on Čapek's prose.

Zdeněk Pešat suggests another aspect of this phenomenon; in his view Apollinaire blurred the dividing line between prose and poetry. Pešat sees in *Zone* a

8 | »Následek toho, že se všechny významové jednotky stavějí na touž úroveň je ten, že řada jejich směřuje k neohraničenosti, nepřetržitému plynutí bez začátku a konce.« (Mukařovský 1948: 498, engl. transl. by author)

9 | »Jak by asi vypadala česká poezie, nebýt toho nahodilého faktu, že Čapek přeložil Pásmo?« (Kundera in: Apollinaire 1965b: 9; engl. transl. by author)

10 | »Každý národ má svou vlastní, historii světové literatury.« (Ibid.: 6; engl. transl. by author)

11 | »Apollinaire zaujímá pravděpodobně větší místo než v kterékoliv jiné« (ibid.; engl. transl. by author).

weakening of the function of theme, there are many components instead of a central one; they are autonomous to such a degree that they cancel the connection with the central theme (cf. Pešat 1966: 115). The polythematic tendency, as Pešat calls it, is accompanied by a propensity toward polyphony. The interior monologue is a device used by both Apollinaire and Čapek, but in both, the apostrophes conjure up dialogicity of the text – a phenomenon discussed by Mukařovský. Thus the link between Čapek and Apollinaire, between the translator and the author, marks the crossroads of modernity which they both co-created.

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