László Márton's Three Short Novels as a Translational Challenge

Marko Čudić

University of Belgrade, Beograd, Serbia

This paper deals with the problems encountered while translating the book of short novels *M. L., a gyilkos* (*The Murderer L. M.*), written by the contemporary Hungarian author László Márton (b. 1959). One of the most important reasons why the translator of this book (who also happens to be the author of this paper) has chosen to translate into Serbian this particular book, and not some other, more famous work of Márton, lies in the thematic, geocultural, and historical parallels with the Serbian context, which form the main fabular line of these short stories. The other, from the perspective of this paper, even more relevant reason for this translational choice can be found in the non-everyday challenge that Márton's hardly translatable style and language pose to the translator. This kind of a situation almost requires that the translator sacrifices formal fidelity to the original text and tries to find more creative solutions; in other words, it suggests choosing the principle of the so-called dynamic equivalence over the formal equivalence principle. In this respect, a special problem is the need to translate the so-called "talking names", a narrative trick with a great tradition in Hungarian literature. The aim of this paper is to try to answer, with the use of a representative corpus of examples, the following question: Is it possible and where can we draw limits in this author-translation related field of play, and what should be the level of consistency allowed to the translator, i.e., to what extent can he/she become the "coauthor" of the translated work?

Keywords: translation challenge, dynamic equivalence, translating names

Introduction

One of the many possible negative definitions of a translator could sound like this: The translator is basically a literary deceiver and manipulator. Frankly speaking, he may not be paid in accordance with his quite high merits on the field of literary fraud and manipulation, surely not as well-paid as he could earn on frauds and manipulations on other professional fields (politics, trade, banking, entertainment, sports, etc.), but this does not decrease his manipulative abilities, his room for maneuver in carrying out different kinds of fraud. In this translator-led manipulation often participate the writers themselves, sometimes even with a great pleasure (happy with the fact that their book is being translated into a foreign language) by helping and encouraging the translator in his deceiving and manipulating activity. The motivation for this usually comes from the strive for glory and/or the (relatively high) copyright fees.

The space for this kind of conscious translator's manipulation is even broader when it comes to translation from smaller languages and literatures less known for the general reading public. This seems to be the case even

Marko Čudić, assistant professor, Ph.D., Department of Hungarian Language and Literature, Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade.

with the Hungarian language in Serbia, despite the fact that there is a significant Hungarian national minority in Hungary's southern neighbour country. This quite high level of manipulative potential which the Hungaro-Serbian literary translator possesses might be coming from the fact that there is a relatively small number of competent controllers of this manipulation. Translation criticism as a specialized literary-linguistic discipline practically does not exist here, and even perfectly bilingual people who could be competent critics of these kinds of translations, refrain from this, probably because they would not like to make new enemies in a relatively small intellectual community of friends and colleagues they have known for decades. Which means that these translators-manipulators have a freedom to do (for a small amount of money) practically whatever they want: to choose whichever texts they would like and to do whatever they want with them. But this is not all. If this kind of translator-manipulator wants to explain, justify or hypocritically, with a great amount of false modesty, criticise his solutions, or to reveal, to some extent, his own conscious translational manipulations, then, in a situation like this, this kind of manipulating translator gets a unique opportunity for a certain type of meta-manipulation, as well. The following text is an adapted English version of my Serbian paper on this subject (Čudić, 2016, pp. 179-194).

The Main Problems of the Translation

Quite aware of the meta-manipulative nature of the task I am undertaking, I would, nevertheless, like to make an overview of my own translation of a book *M. L., a gyilkos* (*The Murderer L. M.*) written by the contemporary Hungarian author, László Márton (b. in Budapest in 1959). Márton is a relatively well-known author outside of Hungary as well (his name sounds familiar mostly to the German public), but this is his first book translated into Serbian. The first common sense question which could arise concerning this fact is, of course, why this, a relatively fresh book (originally published in 2012), and not some other work of this prolific author has been chosen for translation, maybe one of his more famous and critically acclaimed, more frequently translated older books. The answer, if there is any, is relatively complex, but one of the keys to it may be lying in the aforementioned manipulative potential of the translator himself.

When the translator does not take into account the position of the chosen author in the canonical, hierarchical structure of his own, native literary and cultural context, that kind of a move, apart from being a proof of the aforementioned manipulation, can also be a conscious risk-taking, since the translator cannot be sure what kind of critical reception, if any, the given translation is going to have in the target language and culture. The translator, of course, cannot predict if a reception of a translation of a critically recognized or even celebrated work in the source language, will be similarly good in the target language either, but in that case, he could cynically try to find excuses, such as "Look, I tried my best, I have given them one of the best (contemporary) Hungarian authors, but they weren't interested". The former (i.e., choosing a much less known work of the author for translation), however, implies a much greater risk, since there is a real danger that a much less celebrated work of the given author would not be met with sympathies by the public, which means that the responsibility of the translator who has chosen to translate that particular work is much greater now. Nevertheless, I have chosen to translate exactly this, and not some other, more famous book by Márton, driven by the feeling that these three stories (or short novels, rather) with a relatively classic style of narration, which do not require neither some special contextual and cultural knowledge from the target-language readers nor the unique ability to decode the

postmodernistic textual and metatextual enigmas. One of the encouraging factors which contributed to take the translation challenge was the plot of the three short novels of the book. I considered that the almost unbearably tough army service in socialist Hungary depicted in the first of the three novels (*M. L., a gyilkos – The Murderer L. M.*), the hazardeous holiday that a Hungarian family undertakes in war-struck Croatian seaside in the summer of 1993, depicted in the second one (*Izgalmak romok – Exciting Ruins*), as well as students' life in Hungary at the end of the seventies and the beginning of the eighties, which the third short novel (*Közepes fogorvos – The Mediocre Dentist*) deals with, would most probably turn out to be much more receptive and understandable for the Serbian readers than the majority of other books by Márton, which would very likely face them with almost unsolvable cultural and textual tasks. This, of course, has nothing to do with underestimating the (intellectual) abilities of the target-language readers; it is merely based on the assumption of how far their contextual knowledge goes and on the dilemma what would be better: to face both them and the translator with special cultural-textual riddles or to offer them a book that is relatively easy to read. Whether it is relatively easy to translate, however, is another question, which I will try to answer in the rest of this paper.

There is, of course, a field in which the translator's responsibility is even bigger, more direct than in the selection of a particular work (the choice itself can, as we know, quite often depend on other, not only literal, but sociological, political, financial, and other factors). We are talking, of course, about the translation itself, or, more precisely speaking, about its textual embodiment in the target language. The translator's responsibility on this level is even bigger if we are talking about the first book of a certain author to be published in the given target language, because it is of utmost importance what introducing tunes, what opening chords will be resonating in the ears of the target-language readers while they would prepare themselves to read the next translated books of the given author. And in creating this picture, these primarily linguistic and stylistic expectations which are, quite rightly, attributed to a good author—in spite of his possible search for new forms of expressions in each and every new book—the translator could (and should) play a crucial role. Without a piece of exaggeration, we could state that only one bad choice could ruin the whole reception.

The Murderer L. M., this book of three short novels, could be interpreted as a compendium of artistic tricks which have characterised quite a big portion of Márton's novels so far: humorous play with meanings, literal interpretations of idiomatic phrases, de-centeredness, the dispersivity of a rich tableau of characters, i.e., the lack of one central character around whom the plot would be structured, although some of his novels do have central or pseudo-central characters (such as the historical novels *Jakob Wunschitz igaz története (The True Story of Jakob Wunschitz)* or *Minerva búvóhelye (Minerva's Hideout)*), as well as playing with humorous or otherwise meaningful names, surnames, and nicknames.

If we take the famous Wittgenstein metaphor, in which the great philosopher compared the language and its rules to the rules of chess (we only have a certain number of allowed moves, but the possibility to combine those moves is infinite), than translation, which, as we have already indicated, by its mere nature means taking a big risk, could also be compared to a chess game, but an unusual, hazardeous game in which the translator, who usually is not a grandmaster, unfortunately has to consciously sacrifice some of his most valuable pieces in order to try, well, if not to win the game, but at least to force out a draw. Unlike the author who is, in most cases a grandmaster or at least an international master who knows every piece of the puzzle he created, the translator is, even in the best scenario, only a national master who, by the mere nature of his language-oriented, mosaic-like,

fragmentary job, is focused on the micro-details, thus usually not being able to see the whole picture. Or, in other words, if we go on with this comparison with chess, he cannot predict more than two or three moves, thus not being able to see whether the painful sacrifice of a valuable piece payed off at all.

Some pieces, however, especially when it comes to playful, humorous authors with great knowledge of the literary tradition such as László Márton, simply need to be sacrificed, in order to make the text in the target language at least a little bit closer to the Nida-Catford type of “dynamic equivalence” or, to say it in a more old-fashioned way, to try to induce the same, or at least, a similar “effect” on the reader of the target-language text as it had (or at least as we supposed it had) on the reader of the original.

It is especially the first and the third novel which are full of these kind of traps or, said in a military fashion, “landmines”, where stubborn insisting on literal or word-by-word translation, or sometimes even on mere linguistically faithful translation would lead to a much greater betrayal of the original text than trying to find a more creative, but, formally speaking “unfaithful” solution which obviously has to differ quite significantly from the literal meaning in the original.

In this regard, the problems and challenges which the translator faces in the first story could basically be divided into several groups. Considering the number of examples and the problems, by far the biggest group of all would be the “names with certain meaning” group, or the group of the so-called “speaking names” (“beszélő nevek” in Hungarian). When it comes to Slavic languages and writers, especially the Russian ones, we can find plenty of these types of names in classical masterpieces (for instance, Gogol and Dostoyevsky used the names such as Akaky Akakievich, Netochka Nezvanova, Raskolnikov, Razumikhin, and so on). If these texts and names are to be translated into another Slavic language (Serbian, for instance), obviously, no translation of these names is needed nor recommended (although the famous linguistic “false friends” can of course occur here as well). The problems occur when we have to translate a text with this kind of “speaking names” from a lexically and grammatically different language group, and such is the case of Hungarian and Serbian, where sometimes translating or adapting this kind of names might seem necessary. Many Hungarian writers created and used such names in their poetry and prose, one of the most prominent ones being Dezső Kosztolányi (1885–1936), whose famous novels *Pacsirta* (*Skylark*), *Aranysárkány* (*The Golden Kite*), and *Édes Anna* (*Anna Édes*) contain some of the best known examples of this kind of names in Hungarian literature: Vajkay Ákos (his surname probably coming from the verb *vájkál*, meaning *to grube*, *to grope*, or, less literally, *to search* for something, or *Édes Anna* (Sweet Anna, Anna the Sweet one, an incredibly good and obedient maid who eventually slaughters her masters while they are asleep), to mention just the most well-known ones. So it might not sound strange at all that the late Hungarian translation critic from Yugoslavia (Vojvodina), György Papp (one of the very few ones in this region), analysing the Serbo-Croatian translations of Kosztolányi's novels back in 1985, asked (himself?) why on Earth has nobody even tried to translate these names into Serbian (Papp, 1985, 1355-1362).

The contemporary Hungarian literary historian György Tverdota, writing about Dezső Kosztolányi and Attila József in terms of their frequent use of names with meanings, concludes that these two authors have had a raised “sensitivity to onomastics” (Tverdota, 2015, p. 1). László Márton, being a writer who greatly relies on the Kosztolányi style prose writing tradition, seems to be continuing and even developing, broadening this sensitivity to onomastics. However, the translator of this book by Márton (who happens to be the author of this text as well) have had a fairly easier task, partly thanks to the author's suggestions and partly thanks to the (somewhat

extenuating) circumstance that the narrator himself was not totally consequent in this respect, i.e., that the text is practically a mixture of the so-called “talking Hungarian (sur)names” (which in many cases really do exist in Hungary), from which many ironical nicknames are being masterfully derived on the one hand, and the so-called “normal”, regular surnames without a directly visible, noticeable meaning, on the other hand. This has given the translator a certain level of freedom, but it was far from getting even near to do off with the difficulties and struggles. The name of the character mentioned in the title of the first novel and the whole book, and probably the name of the only real major or central character of the entire book, Lajos Molnár, could, of course, by no means be changed, not even with the risk that the narrator would sometimes play with the literal meaning of his surname (miller). Luckily enough, the narrator does this only once and very discretely, which means that the very rich allusive potential of this surname is not lost. On the other hand, it is not an impossible expectation that the Serbian reader could guess what type of profession the surname Molnár implies, due to the ethymological similarities (*miller* is *molnár* in Hungarian, *mlinar* in Serbian).

A more serious translational problem occurs when it comes to the names and surnames of the minor characters, the fellow soldiers (privates) and even some officers with whom the narrator, as he states, “spent his time”, once upon a time, in a barracks in Alföld, in the dust and mud of Hungarian Pannonia. Immitating life and its inconsistency (but, as we know, simply applying the logic of life on the logic of fiction, which has always had its own logic, mostly quite different from the chaos of life, is not necessarily a useful move), I decided to apply the system of combined solutions: I translated some of the surnames and nicknames, whereas some others, those with a less obvious meaning, or those that I was unable to decode, I left in the original form (transcribed into Serbian, as our orthography requires). When it comes to translating surnames, at some places I even dared to translate, or, more precisely speaking, adapt into Serbian some really existing Hungarian surnames (which, apart from being real surnames, have a meaning as well), thus making nicknames out of them. This means that sometimes in the translation we have nicknames instead of the original surnames and vice versa. So, how does this function in reality?

Totally opposite to the character of Lajos Molnár, the sergeant first class (who admits to his fellow soldiers under his command that he killed a man and served a jail sentence for it before coming to serve the army and whose main purpose seems to be the mistreatment of the newcomers, or, in the specific Hungarian jargon of the time, the “rabbits”, *nyulak*, especially the intellectuals in the obligatory communist Hungarian army service) is *Jámbori őrmester* (master sergeant Jámbori), with the surname Jámbori literally meaning *tame, docile, peaceful*. It is by no chance a pure coincidence that the narrator gave this surname to a really good-tempered, but, from the soldiers' point of view, unfortunately very minor character in the novel. So, in this case, obviously something had to be done. I decided not to stick to the somewhat childish and vulgar option of adapting the surname by giving it an -ić suffix as most Serbian surnames finish with -ić, but to give it an extra twist by changing the standard -ić with a more foreign-sounding -ič, like it was a South-Slavic surname, but in a Hungarian, or, even better, Austro-Hungarian interpretation. This guy really has something old-fashioned and historical in his appearance and behaviour. So, choosing among several options (*Pitomovič, Pitomkič, Pitomkovič, Mirič*—this latter sounds a bit like Slovenian, doesn't it?), I settled at the solution *narednik Dobričič* (master sergeant Dobričič). If we want to list the solutions (or the lack of them) in a hierarchical order, then we would need to mention two more military seniors, *Bors hadnagy* and *Csató őrmester* (lieutenant Bors and master sergeant Csató). And although Bors does

have a clear meaning (*pepper*—somewhat in accordance with the character's nature), I dared not to intervene and translate it in this case, since I felt that surnames like *Biberčević*, *Biberčić*, or *Biberko* would sound too frivolous and trivial and would look more like nicknames, whereas it is quite clear from the text that they are not surnames. So he stayed as *poručnik Borš* (lieutenant Bors) in the translation as well.

It is, however, the case of *Csató őrmester* that is more interesting. I left it untouched in the translation (apart from sticking to the obligatory, above mentioned transcription rule in the Serbian version), so he stayed as *poručnik Čato*. Unfortunately, though, this did not spare me from the problems. At one point the narrator of Márton's short novel says: "Csatót pedig elneveztük Tócsának. Most már nem féltünk tőle, ő most már csak egy tócsa volt. Sekély, poshadt víz. Egykettőre kiszárad" (Márton, 2012, p. 47). A literal translation would sound approximately like this: "And we renamed Csató into Tócsa [*tócsa* means *puddle* in Hungarian]. Now we weren't scared of him any more, as he became nothing more than a puddle. A shallow, stale water which quickly dries up". The demistification of the otherwise very strict Csató is carried out by the soldiers by turning upside down the syllables his surname consists of, thus turning his otherwise meaningless surname into a harmless, low kind of thing such as a shallow, muddy puddle (*Tócsa*). However, since the distinction between dangerous and harmless here comes from the acoustical similarities of the words with changed syllable orders, which in Hungarian accidentally mean what they mean, it is obvious that the translator needs to change some things, it is clear that he cannot translate literally, word by word, as it could mean straying from the original effect, not to even mention the possible, but by no means recommended, use of clumsy explicative footnotes. Luckily for the translator, though, in Serbian there is an expression auditive quite similar to Csató (*Čato*), and that is *čata*, a slang and somewhat derogative term for the soldier, usually an intellectual, who serves the obligatory army as a clerk (scribbler). Quite obviously, being a scribbler is not such a bad thing, especially in a though army like the Hungarian national army once used to be, but it still has a somewhat harmless, almost "castrated" connotation, especially in a macho and anti-intellectual surroundings of the barracks. Some significant sacrifice was necessary, though. The effective, almost slangish change of the syllables would do nothing in Serbian in this case, so, in the translation, instead of the underestimating description of the puddle, an underestimating description of Csató (*Čato*) was applied. By this transformation from *Čato* (his original name in Serbian transcription) to *Čata* (a scribbler), the original Čato, at least symbolically, lost his power. This, of course, means that the whole mini-context of this picture needed to be changed, the few sentences describing it as well: "A Čatoa smo nazvali Čatom. Više ga se nismo plašili, srozao se u običnog Čatu. U glupog, nekog cvikeraša. U bedno, štrebersko piskaralo" (Marton, 2014, p. 48). The possible English translation of this Serbian version would sound like this: "And we renamed Čato to Čata. We weren't afraid of him any more, he sank and became an ordinary Čata [scribbler]. He became a stupid, weak nerd with glasses. A miserable, pathetic scribbler".

As for the soldiers, the "rabbits", the ratio of translated and non-translated names is approximately fifty-fifty: It was obvious that *Pásztor* and *Szabó* should have stayed untouched (due to the fact that those are some of the most common Hungarian surnames, albeit they do have a meaning, *Shepherd* and *Tailor*, respectively). I did not, however, manage to find a proper solution for the soldiers with surnames (or maybe nicknames?) such as *Halápi*, *Surczy*, and *Gyaraki*, so they were left with their original (nick)names in Serbian transcription. Maybe there are translators who would risk to translate these names as well, by trying to find out at least the approximate meanings of these words (if there are any meanings, of course), thus making them sound more "Serbian". But,

even when left in this, more or less original form (apart from the transcription), some of these (sur)names did not cease to be the source of many dangers and struggle for the translator. Who would, for instance, even think that such a common surname like *Szabó* would ever become a problem in terms of translation? But here it did. During a roll call, the merciless Molnár is looking for Szabó, but Szabó seems to have disappeared. Still, one of the soldiers found enough courage to say: “Szabó ott áll” [literally: “Szabó is standing there”] (Márton, 2012, p. 24). The terrible Molnár would (mis)use this sentence, of course; he would pretend that he overheard it, and understood it as “szabotál” (“he is sabotaging”), which is, at least auditively, really quite similar to the sentence “Szabó ott áll” (“Szabó is standing there”), and could be overheard one for the other (Márton, 2012, p. 24). So, this kind of acoustical game in this meaning and context could not be translated without totally losing the point of the whole situation. The translator had to search for something similar and at least nearly as effective. Which means the translator was once again forced to change the context of the whole situation and even to give Szabó (in his absence) something he never possessed, a power to choose (in this case, to choose the workers out of fellow soldiers for the autumn agricultural works in the fields), solely for the purpose of creating a similar audio-effect and describing the misunderstanding based on these audio-similarities, as in the original. So, in the translation, the soldier who accidentally opens his mouth (to his most probable misfortune), says “Sabo bira” (literally: “Szabó’s choosing”), which in Serbian could be mistaken for “sabotira”. (“He is sabotaging”). (Marton 2014, p. 23).

On the other hand, though, it was quite obvious that, for instance, *Kuczorgó Árpi* could not be a real name, even when written with that “noble” *cz* instead of the ordinary *c* (probably in order to resemble a possible “real” surname). It is more likely a pejorative nickname, which means something had to be done. I decided to change his name to *Arpika Šćućurko* (almost literally: *Little Arpi, the Cowerer*), since the most approximate meaning of the Hungarian verb “kucorog” would be “šćućuriti se” in Serbian (to cower—bend down in fear). This simply needed to be done, especially bearing in mind that, according to the logic of the inner junctures of the whole book, an Arpi with a quite similar surname would pop up in the second short novel of the book, in the form *Toporkó Árpi*. While decoding and translating this surname, I made a mistake I quite often make, I mixed up the voiced and unvoiced consonants (in writing!), and I translated him as *Arpika Nemirko* (literally *Arpi the Restless*) in a firm (but false) belief that his surname in the book was *Toporgó*, which would be a surname (or a pejorative nickname) derived from the verb *toporog* (meaning “milling around restlessly”). In reality, however, *Toporkó* with the unvoiced *k* instead of its voiced pair *g*, which appeared in my (mis)interpretation, is not even referring to a verb. In this case, however, not only the surname (nickname?) was translated and adapted, the names have been changed a bit as well. Adding the suffix *-ka* to a men’s name in Hungarian means making a diminutive out of it (*Lacika* would mean “Little Laci” a nickname from László with an extra diminutive, familiar meaning, *Ferike* “Little Feri” from Ferenc, and so on). In Serbian language, however, especially in the region of Bačka (Bácska) and Banat (Bánát) in northern Vojvodina, where ethnic Hungarians make up a significant percentage of the population, this *-ka* suffix (*Lacika*, *Ferika*—note the difference between *Ferike* in Hungarian and *Ferika* in Serbian; this is due to the fact that there is a rule of vocal harmony in Hungarian) does not necessarily make a diminutive out of a given name, it just makes it sound like a Serbian nickname of Ferenc, strongly influenced by Hungarian suffixation, of course. But the point is that these suffixes generally do not have the same nuance in the two languages. Otherwise, I am not an advocate of using this quasi-diminutives in Serbian, because it can give a

text a somewhat regionally coloured, if not provincial note, but in this context and in this particular case, it seemed to be useful and even necessary.

Let us stay a bit more at the “magic of names”. It can sometimes happen that some surnames, which do exist in the source language, in some contexts sound in a way that they almost ask the translator to translate them anyway. One of those surnames is the surname *Bolonyai* (literally: the one from Bologna). It is the name of the character from the first short novel, *Sanyi Bolonyai*, known for his outstanding cleverness and resourcefulness. He is a cheater capable of acquiring the most inaccessible, but very useful objects, food, etc. This being said, he is actually a very useful, precious man in the inhumane circumstances of the barracks. Due to his “Hermes-alike” character, I decided to change his name into *Šanjika Bolonjeze* (almost literally: Sanyi à la Bolognese), giving him, with the already mentioned -ka suffix, a certain amount of kindness and almost childish playfulness, bearing in mind that in socialist Hungary it was not easy to acquire some otherwise quite ordinary goods, especially food specialities that were considered “western”, and, since the acquiring of these goods in the army was Sanyi’s greatest, most useful, and most exploited ability, I decided to change his otherwise normal, existing (though not very common) Hungarian surname into some kind of a nickname in the translation. It might have been an attempt for a translational compensation for some other “talking” names throughout the book, for which I could not find an appropriate adequate in translation, so I decided to keep them in the original form, thus depriving the Serbian readers from enjoying these semantic games.

In those places, however, where it is quite clear that we deal with nicknames, and in most cases probably only temporary nicknames which will fall off of their bearers after they have finished with the army service, translation or at least adaptation of these nicknames should be an imperative for the translator. So, for instance, private *Gugolya* has become *Čučko* (literally: *Squatter, Croucher*), *Pirók* has become *Rumenko* (literally *Rosy Cheeked*), *Tóásó* has been turned into a somewhat linguistically clumsy *Jezerokopač* (*Lake-digger*), *Targoncás* into *Tragačić* (although he could have been quite easily been transformed into *Viljuškarević* as well, since *targonca* basically means *forklift*), and, probably the most interesting one, *Vízhányó* (literally: *The one who vomits/spews out water*, probably coming from the similar *Tűzhányó*, meaning *volcano*—literally: *spewing out flames/fire*), has become, quite literally translated, *Vodobljuv*. The problem here is that the narrator states that this used to be a profession once, i.e., *vízhányó* was the man who helped the fishermen by sitting in the boat and throwing out the incoming water, thus preventing the boat from sinking. The only lucky circumstance here is that he is a fictitious character, so there is no chance of him complaining to the translator and the publisher! And finally, there is this recruit with the surname *Csillag* (*Star*), who is (maybe willingly?) humiliated every single night by Molnár, the bully, by being forced to kneel in front of Molnár’s iron bed and orally please him. There is, however, a further twist with this surname, *Csillag*. One of the most notorious prisons in Hungary, where Molnár has admittedly served his sentence for murder, is the famous Csillag prison in Szeged. Given the fact that (forced?) homosexual encounters with sadistic elements (in this master/slave context, without the slightest hint of love or emotions) can and probably will at some point happen in prisons and the army likewise, the parallel is quite obvious. I decided to translate this otherwise existing surname into a Serbian name, *Zvezdan* (derived from *star*), thus maybe taking at least a little bit of an intellectual revenge on one of the most notorious murderers in newer Serbian history (the name of the man who physically assassinated the first ever democratically elected Prime Minister in Serbian history, Zoran Đinđić in 2003, is Zvezdan Jovanović), by putting Zvezdan into such a

humiliating, almost pornographic situation (he is forced to orally please Molnár in front of the other “sleeping” soldiers in the dormitory). One must admit that this is, strictly speaking, not a big revenge, but still, the mere fact that a person named Zvezdan can find himself in such a situation, even in a fiction, is somewhat satisfying.

The third short novel in this book, entitled *Közepes fogorvos* (*The Mediocre Dentist*) is also full of interesting and, from the translator's perspective, challenging surnames, names, and nicknames. Only a few of them will be mentioned here. One of the main character's name, the young man who had been prepared by his restrictive, petit-bourgeois father to become a mediocre dentist (because that is, in his father's opinion, the most secure carrier of all), is *Rajzoló Pál* (literally: *Paul the Drawer*). The name of his father, the passionate lover of all the mediocre things in life (presented in Márton's unique humorous and ironical narration), is *György Rajzoló* or, when addressed in a more intimate, familiar way (if such a rigid, narrow-minded, strict person can be addressed in that way at all), *Rajzoló Gyuri bácsi* (*Uncle Gyuri the Drawer*). This surname is, of course, derived from the verb *rajzol* (to draw, *crtati* in Serbian). It is an existing, though quite rare surname in Hungary. Since there have already been too much surnames translated with the common suffix -ić, it seemed that it was time to break the monotony, so I decided to translate it with the suffix -čki, used mostly in Vojvodina (the northern autonomous province of Serbia, which once belonged to Austria-Hungary). So they became *Pal* and *Đurika Crtački*, where this suffix probably gives them, in the eyes of the Serbian readers, a somewhat provincial, petit bourgeois character.

A different solution was needed when it came to a fictitious, or, better said, potential surname, which one of the characters in the novel, a citizen of Jewish origin, running by the name of *Bálint Holzhauser* considers to take. Changing a Jewish surname into a Hungarian one was quite a common practice in Hungary, both before and after World War Two. But Holzhauser is quite a bit of a snob, as well, so he is considering a possible surname which would sound as noble as possible. So, finally, he settles at the surname *Holdvilághy*, where *holdvilág* does not mean only *moonlight* (*mesečina* in Serbian), but is, as the narrator, not without a hint of fine irony, informs us, reminds us of a name of a Hungarian village in Transylvania (Erdély, today's Romania), *Holdvilág*. Here I decided to use a somewhat ironical (and of course fictitious) surname *Mesečinski*, where this -ski suffix can be understood as both a noble-sounding, or a petit-bourgeois-sounding one, similar to Mr. Domaćinski, a villain in the famous Croatian and Yugoslav writer Miroslav Krleža's novel *Na rubu pameti* (*On the Edge of Reason*).

The solutions for the funny and mocking names or nicknames came up relatively easily, so *Bőrös Pisti* (Pisti with the skin) became *Pisztika Kožica* (Pisti the little skin) and the even more bizarre nickname of *Tőrös Kocsárd* (Kocsárd with a Dagger, where Kocsárd is a famous historical surname) was a little bit banalized by turning into *Bocko Nožić* (The Knife Stabber) in the translation. One of the more problematic questions was what to do with the name of the stubborn bureaucrat whose official name was *Ervin Hivatal* (or, in literal translation, *Ervin the Office* or *Ervin of the Office*), whose main (life)task is to put all the possible administrative obstacles in front of a poor Hungarian-born student girl whose only wish is to give up the relative comfort of her emigrant life in Paris in order to study in Budapest (because her boyfriend is from Hungary), thus making her life miserable. The possible solutions, such as *Službić*, *Službovčić*, or even *Službeniković* (all with the approximate meaning of *Clerk*, *Clerkson*, *Clerkley*) or the diminutive *Službeničić* (*Clerky*) did not sound convincing enough, so, after quite a bit of pondering, I finally found an almost ancient soccer game in my memory, a friendly international game between Yugoslavia and Argentina played in 1991, where one of the Argentine football player's name was

Gabriel Kancelarić (a real name, probably originating from the Balkans, most probably from Croatia). So, I dared to use, without his permission, the surname of this former Argentine soccer player, because the surname Kancelarić (*kancelarija* means *office* in Serbian) seemed really suitable for that narrow-minded and evil communist clerk. So, in the translation, *Hivatal Ervin* was transformed into *Ervin Kancelarić*.

The name and the surname of one of the main protagonists of the last short novel is *Dezső Varjú* (literally *Dezső the Crow*). Varjú is a tragic character from the beginning, a wannabe photographer without any talent for the job/art he so badly wants to pursue. Eventually, his death is also tragicomical: he drowns (himself?—It is not quite clear whether it is a suicide or not) in a trough full of slops, while feeding the pigs (after an unsuccessful attempt to become a photographer, he is forced to leave Budapest and come back to his village, where he starts to drink heavily). There is, however, an autobiographical twist in this story: The character of Dezső Varjú was inspired by a real person, the poet András Holló (literally translated, his surname *Holló* would mean *Raven*, or, if literally translated into Serbian, he would be *Andrija Gavran* or *Andrija Gavrančić*). The difference between the role model and the literary character here is, as it turns out to be so many times in literature, only in some nuances, in this case, in the type of art the two are pursuing (photography and poetry), in the way they committed suicide (Varjú drowns himself in a bizarre way, while Holló jumped from an overpass onto a highway) and finally, in the type of birds their surnames represent (crow and raven). Since the narrator at some point plays with the literal meaning of his character's surname (which, in Márton's ever cynical perspective, does not go in the character's favour at all, of course), here I was forced to choose a much less effective, combined solution, so the character's name in the translation is *Deže Vranić*. I can only hope that the reader would assume that it is a translated and adapted surname combined with a transcribed Hungarian name, which does not sound overly artificial or forced out.

These unusual names and nicknames are, of course, just part of the problems which the translator of Márton's stratified prose faces. Márton's linguistical games very often extend to other elements of the narrative structure as well. Márton's narrators in the author's previous books quite frequently use the technique of persiflage and parodising very well, or less well-known texts, or, by using the same or similar stylistic means in often totally incompatible contexts, they provoke the effect of artistic estrangement. In this book, a concrete example of this stylistic mean can be found in the first short novel, where the beauty of a village prostitute, given from the perspective of Lajos Molnár, the murderer and the bully of the young soldiers (or maybe from the narrator's *post festum* interpretation?), is described in the style of the *Song of the Songs*, with the only difference that the system of comparisons suits the given, not really romantic context of the barracks, which gives these, otherwise beautiful biblical-sounding comparisons a somewhat bizarre nuance. The main point here from the translator's perspective, would be to try to immitate the elevated biblical style in the new, tough context. Given the relative shortness of this passage, citing all three versions (the Hungarian original, the published Serbian translation and the possible English translation, respectively) would not, in my opinion, be a total waste of space:

Termete sudár, mint a szögesdrót mögött az őrtorony, vagy mint a börtönparancsnok irodájában álló fikusz. Haja selymes, mint a zacskóragasztáshoz használt selyempapír.

Szeme átlátszó és kerek, mint a zárkaajtón a kémlelőablak. Nevetése ezüstös fényű, mint a vadonatúj kézibilincs. Dereka ruganyos és karcsú, mint a gumibot. Karjai megtartó erejűek, mint két párhuzamos vezetőlánc.

Foga fehér, mint a Csillagbörtön asztalosműhelyében a luxuskivitelű konyhaszekrény. Mellei frissek és gömbölyűek, mint az állampusztai rabgazdaságban a primőr paradicsom! (Márton, 2012, pp. 48-49)

Stas je njen vitak poput osmatračnice iza bodljikave žice, poput fikusa u kancelariji zatvorskog upravnika. Kosa je njena svilenkasta poput svilene hartije za lepljenje kesa.

Oči su njene prozirne i okrugle poput špijunki na vratima ćelija zatvorskih. Osmeh njen ima srebrnkasti sjaj, poput lisica za ruke, novih novcijatih. Struk je njen gibak i tankovijast, pendreku sličan. Stisak ruku njenih čvršći je od dva robijaška lanca, paralelno postavljena.

Zubi su njeni beli poput kredenaca luksuzne izrade iz stolarske radionice zatvora Zvezda. Dojke su njene jedre i oble poput ranih rajčica sa zatvoreničkim farmi u pustarama mađarskim! (Marton, 2014, p. 50)

Her stature is tall like the watch tower behind the barbed wire, or like the fig which stands in the prison commander's office. Her hair is silky like the silky paper used for bag-sticking.

Her eyes are transparent and round, like the viewing window on the cell doors. Her laughter has a silverish light, like brand-new handcuffs. Her waist is spingy and slender, like a baton. Her arms possess a retention force, like two parallel leading chains.

Her teeth are white like the luxurious kitchen cabinet made in the carpentry of the Csillag prison. Her breasts are round and fresh, like the early tomato produced by prisoners on the state sheer!

Even the use of (pseudo) proverbs or, so to say, improvised, to the given historical moment adjusted "wisdoms" with the compulsory element of comparison in them, did not require any special translational creativity. One of the newly-used proverbs of this kind would be this one: *Leverlek, mint a ruszkik a forradalmat* (*I am going to crash you like Ruskie did with the revolution*—it is obviously related to the relative recent past, the massive but unsuccessful Hungarian antisoviet uprising of 1956). The solution here was relatively literal, with the only difference that I used the Serbian slang for the Russians, of course: *Umlatiću vas ko Ruje revoluciju*. It is much more difficult, however, to solve those situations when Márton is successfully playing with the literal meanings of some frequently or less frequently used idioms. The Hungarians, for instance, use the idiom *Ő sem jobb a Deákné vásznánál*, which literally means *He is not any better of Mrs. Deák's linen*, *neither*, meaning "He is similarly bad as the other one, there is no real difference between them". Given the fact that at some point Márton's narrator is playing with the literal meaning of Mrs. Deák's linen (no one in Hungary would ever think of any existing linen, let alone of anybody by the name of Mrs. Deák, while using this frequent idiom), I needed to deviate from the literal meaning, and even to change the micro-context here as well (Márton, 2012, p. 153). Some relatively modern Serbian idiom or phrase was needed, which would allow us to play with its literal meaning. The whole situation, like in one of the previously described situations, needed to be changed, so the search finally ended with the phrase "radio-Mileva" (literally "radio-Mileva", with Mileva being a women's name, although the real meaning of this phrase is "according to gossips", "it is rumoured that", etc.). So it was (poor) Mileva, who became the object of linguistical play with the literal meaning in this case (Marton, 2014, p. 161). Even the possible accusations for a slight misogyny would have to be shared between the author (or his narrator) and the translator in this case, because the "victims" of both this linguistical plays are two different (hypothetical) women.

Somewhat paradoxically, it is sometimes the simplest of word-games that are the most difficult, if not completely impossible to solve. In the second short novel of the book, *Izgalmas romok* (*Exciting Ruins*), while a family of Hungarian tourists, spending their summer holiday on the Croatian seaside in the middle of the Yugoslav civil war in 1993, risking their own lives and wanting to satisfy the curiosity of their 10-year old son, obsessed with the ruins of ancient castles, are searching for such ruins, their 14-year old daughter, sitting on the back seat of the car, is holding a lemon in her hand. While she (quite nervously) plays with the lemon, she is

stubbornly repeating, like a mantra, one word, *citrom* (lemon), but by separating the two syllables this word consists of, so her “mantra” sounds like this: *cit-rom, cit-rom, cit-rom, cit-rom...* Or, turned upside down, *rom-cit, rom-cit, rom-cit*, where *rom* literally means *ruin(s)* (as a noun) in Hungarian. In lack of other efficient solutions, I decided to stick to the original and to take the word *limun* (lemon) as a “mantra” in the translation, so in the Serbian version, the girl is stubbornly repeating the word *li-mun, li-mun, li-mun*, or, with the syllables turned upside down, *mun-li, mun-li, mun-li*. The main problem here, however, turned out to be the significant semantical loss, since the syllables *mun* or *li*, taken separately, do not have a meaning in the target language.

When it comes to toponymes and the eternal translational dilemma whether to translate them or not, in this book, luckily, only one such, “translatable” toponym occurs. It is a hill on the outskirts of Buda, known as the *Hármshatár-hegy* (literally *The Hill on the Junction of Three Borders*). Luckily, it sometimes happens that an older, more experienced translator already solved a problem while translating a completely different author's book, thus giving the other translators a chance to simply “steal” his solution in another book, or, let's not be so harsh towards ourselves, to “borrow” it without formal permission. In this case, this toponym was solved by the experienced translator Árpád Vickó in his Serbian translation of István Örkény's book *Egyperces novellák* (*Jednominutne novele, One Minute Stories*) as *Tromeđ-planina*. It is in this form that the translator of Márton's book expresses his collegial gratitude to him.

A special type of problem, and a specific translational challenge as well, are those situations in the texts when foreigners (in Hungary) speak (Hungarian) with a foreign accent or use phrases characteristic to a foreign language (i.e., their own mother tongues). One thing that complicates the situation even more is when the character in question has learned Hungarian quite good and speaks it almost perfectly, only rarely does he/she make some likable language slips. That is the case with one of the central characters of the last short novel, the charismatic Vietnamese student Tsang who had lived and studied in Budapest in the seventies (there were many Vietnamese students, mostly refugees of war, studying in Eastern and Central European countries of the socialist block, especially in Hungary). He tells his Hungarian friends a really moving story of the tragic faith of his little dog Hoan, whom he loved very much and who used to alarm the whole village before every single American bombing. As soon as the war had ended, however, Tsang's parents decided to slaughter and eat Hoan, according to the Vietnamese customs. Describing, in a really touching manner, his last evening with his doggie, Tsang says that Hoan expressed his love towards him by licking his face and, as he puts it, *boldogan csóválta a farkáját*. (Márton, 2012, p. 185) (*the doggie was happily wagging its tail*). Here we have the wrong use of a case suffix, Tsang should have said *Csóválta a farkát*, without that additional inserted syllable. This, however, could be observed as a reasonable linguistic error, since this resembles the logic of a child who, while learning a new language (or even his/her mother tongue whatsoever) “invents” the rules of grammar, not taking the exceptions into consideration (the famous example of goose – geese in English, for instance). So, here I decided to translate it in a diminutive form, but in an incorrect diminutive form for this type of word, i.e., not as *veselo mahao repičem* (correct form), but as *veselo mahao repancetom* (Márton, 2014, p. 197). This incorrect form (incorrect in this word, but otherwise usable) could be used, in given circumstances, by a foreigner who learned Serbian quite well, but sometimes commits errors of this type. The only trouble for the translator would be if somebody would cite this sentence or passage without the whole context, since

in that case the translator would turn out to be guilty (and illiterate, as well).

Conclusion

The number of examples, as in the case of almost any translation, could multiply very quickly. In this paper, I mentioned only some of the most characteristic and difficult dilemmas I was constantly facing while translating this stratified book by László Márton. Many of these problems remained unmentioned and unanalysed here. Still, the biggest problem is not that. The biggest problems in translating these types of texts are the undetected difficulties and other translational “landmines” we are not even aware of during the process of translation, so we continue our work without stopping, not noticing that we stumbled over an obstacle, happily lulled in the false belief that nothing escaped our attention. Of course, the goal of every relatively ambitious literary translator, during the second and third parallel reading of the original and the translation, should be to try to minimize these omissions, caused by hurry, carelessness, lack of attention, holes in the translator’s education and knowledge, insurmountable cultural differences and many other debilitating factors. Has he or has he not managed in this ambition of his, is up to the readers and scholars to estimate. But until the moment of those special, close readings finally comes, I can only hope that the rest of the readers will enjoy the illusion that they are reading a faithful copy of the original.

References

- Čudić, M. (2016). Zbirka pripovedaka *Ubica L. M. Lasla Martona kao prevodilački izazov* (The collection of László Márton’s short novels *The Murderer L. M.* as a translational challenge). In A. Vraneš and L. Marković (Eds.), *Translating cultures* (Vol. 1). Belgrade: University of Belgrade, Faculty of Philology.
- Márton, L. (2012). *M. L., a gyilkos (történetek egy regényből)* (The Murderer L. M. (Stories from a novel)). Pozsony (Bratislava): Kalligram.
- Marton, L. (2014). *Ubica L. M. (pripovesti iz jednog romana)*. (M. Čudić, Trans.). Beograd: Levo krilo.
- Papp, Gy. (1985). Egy Kosztolányi-regény szerbhorvát kiadásának fordítástörténeti tanulságai (The translato-historical “Moral” of a Serbo-Croatian edition of one novel by Dezső Kosztolányi). *Híd, Novi Sad, XLIX*(10), 1355-1362.
- Tverdota, Gy. (2015). *A fordító és a tulajdonnév* (The translator and the personal names). In manuscript, courtesy of Prof. Tverdota.