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ON AN ARMENIAN TRANSLATION OF SEUMAS MACMANUS'S *THE OLD HAG'S LONG LEATHER BAG*¹

ALVARD JIVANYAN

YEREVAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Abstract: MacManus's *The Old Hag's Long Leather Bag* is a unique text in terms of style in the first place. The study of its translation into Armenian is of interest since it is the very first Irish folk tale translated into Armenian. As many renderings of folktales of the time it is an indirect translation mediated by the Russian version. The translation of each particular folktale is of interest, however a number of features of the text, which are held to be resulting from the translator's individual style are in fact conditioned by the nature of the translated text as a distinct text type.

Key words: mediated translation, folklore, accepting culture, cross-cultural text

1. Introduction

The present article will deal with one of the best-known Irish folk tales *The Old Hag's Long Leather Bag* from Seumas MacManus's *Donegal Fairy Stories* collection (MacManus 1915) and its Armenian translation. The ATU catalogue classifies *The Old Hag's Long Leather Bag* as Tale Type 480 *Kind and Unkind Girls* (Uther 2004:281-2).

An old hag disguised as a beggar woman steals the bag of a widow leaving her and the three daughters destitute. One by one the daughters abandon their mother's home to seek their fortune. They all go into service in the house of the old hag, who had stolen their mother's gold, find the stolen bag and try to return home. However, only the youngest daughter succeeds in carrying out this plan because she does not refuse any help when she is asked for it.

Two extremely dissimilar settings are found in the tale: the familiar world where the widow lives with her daughters and where the three sisters return at the end of the story, and the uncanny milieu where the hag, the talking animals and objects are found, an otherworldly place, which is located "...far further than I could tell you, and twice as far as you could tell me" (MacManus 1915:234).

The temporal arrangement of the tale is quite unique. On the one hand, as in any fairy tale, the time of the story is presented very roughly in the opening part of the text: "**Once on a time, long, long ago** there was a widow woman, who had three daughters ..." (ibid., 233), on the other hand we find very accurate time descriptions further in

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the text, which create an illusion of time precision: “*A year and a day had gone by after the eldest daughter left home*” (ibid., 242). The mentioned time formulas make a remarkable contrast. It must be mentioned though that they are functionally different, especially in terms of the poetics of the tale text. The time formula *once on a time, long, long ago* opens the story, the phrase ‘*a year and a day*’ starts a new episode and can be seen as a unique cohesive device linking the successive episodes together and contributing to the integrity and continuity of the text.

The tale is worth analyzing in the first place in terms of its language and style. MacManus was not only a folklorist, but also a gifted storyteller, a *seanchaí* and the text bears the imprint of his narrating style.

The Old Hag's Long Leather Bag is a remarkably musical text and helps the reader to enter a kind of trancelike state owing to a series of consistent stylistic repetitions:

She traveled away and away. (MacManus 1915:232)
Rub me! Rub me! For I haven't been rubbed these seven years. (ibid., 237)
O, shear me! Shear me for I haven't been shorn these seven years (ibid.)
O, change my tether! Change my tether! For it hasn't been changed these seven years. (ibid.)
O, clean me! Clean me! for I haven't been cleaned these seven years. (ibid.)
O, milk me! Milk me! for I haven't been milked these seven years. (ibid., 238)

as well as many instances of alliteration and consonance:

Left her a **long** leather bag filled with **gold** and silver. (ibid., 233)
Bake me a **bannock** and **cut** me a **callop**. (ibid., 234)
With my **tig**, with my **tag**, with my **long** leather **bag**. (ibid., 238), etc.

However, as any fairy tale text *The Old Hag's Long Leather Bag* shapes mainly at the expense of two major fantasy tropes: anthropomorphism and metamorphosis. The animals and the inanimate objects in the story are personified and talk to the three sisters. The elder sisters do not respond. The youngest, however, not only talks to them thus appearing in the same dimension with them, but seems to be aware of the correct speech etiquette of the strange Otherworld.

Anthropomorphism is a common trope in folklore genres of most cultures: fables, legends and fairytales in particular. However in MacManus's tale the humanization of animals and inanimate objects is consistently shown as a major property of the uncanny world the sisters find themselves, traveling “*far further than I could tell you, and twice as far as you could tell me.*” The idea of an otherworld inhabited with anthropomorphic animals deprives the above mentioned space hyperbole of its possible conventional meaning: such a weird place should in fact be incredibly far. On the other hand, its remoteness makes the existence of talking animals and objects more credible.

The way the inhabitants of the Otherworld (the hag, the animals and the enchanted objects) communicate, is of peculiar interest. In the tale we observe a specific otherworldly discourse, which is rhymed and metrical as different from the three siblings' conversation with their mother, for instance. Little can appear in a folk tale at the teller's whim, the latter being merely the bearer of the tradition (Holbek 1987:40).

Rhymed, metric speech often sounds when the protagonists address otherworldly creatures or find themselves in an otherworldly domain. Below are some excerpts from the dialogues between the hag and the magic kiln, and the sheep and the youngest sister:

Lime-kiln, lime-kiln of mine, did you see this maid of mine, with my tig, with my tag, with my long leather bag, and with all the gold and silver I have earned since I was a maid? (MacManus 1915:241).

Cow, cow of mine, did you see this maid of mine... (ibid.)

Then she went on, and it wasn't long before she met the sheep, who said: "Oh, shear me, shear me! for I haven't been shorn these seven years" (ibid., 237).

"O, poor sheep, poor sheep," she said, "I'll surely do that," and she laid down the bag, and sheared the sheep (ibid., 250).

Metamorphosis is another fantasy trope found in MacManus's tale. It can be defined as a unique fairy tale trope belonging to the plot and the rhetoric of the tale equally (Jivanyan 2012:248). The two elder sisters are petrified by the hag. They are turned into stone later to regain their human shape. It is interesting that the wording of the trope is partly 'borrowed' from the previous passages of the text. Thus as the two elder sisters meet a horse, they strike it with a stick and when they meet a goat they fling a stone on her:

But she had not gone far when she met a horse grazing in a field, and when he saw her, he said: "Rub me! Rub me! for I haven't been rubbed these seven years" (ibid., 237).

But she only **struck him with a stick she had in her hand**, and drove him out of her way (ibid., 244).

She met a goat tethered, and he said: "O, change my tether! Change my tether! for it hasn't been changed these seven years." (ibid.)

But she **flung a stone at him**, and went on... (ibid.)

Further in the story the hag, when she finds the runaway elder girls, strikes them with a rod and turns them into stone: "*She went in and **struck her with a white rod, and turned her into a stone.** She then took the bag of gold and silver on her back, and went away back home*" (ibid., 249).

This can be seen both as an expression of justice: punishment is imposed on the siblings with the help of the objects they used when maltreating the animals, and as a more efficient use of the word stock since the folktale is an economical genre. Being turned into stone symbolizes their unwillingness to talk and their inappropriate, unfit silence when compassionate words were wanted. The rod in the tale can even be held as a kind of '*rod of justice.*'

2. The Armenian Translation

MacManus's *The Old Hag's Long Leather Bag* was translated by a celebrated Armenian poet and writer Hovhannes Toumanian (1869-1923) known for his brilliant translations of German, Italian, Russian and Japanese tales. Toumanian translated MacManus's tale from the Russian version of Semyon Zaymovsky, a literary critic and translator of fairy tales (MacManus n.d.: 205-208). The translation was first published in 1914, in Tiflis in the children's magazine *Hasker* (Toumanian 1914:73-78).

Evidence suggests that Toumanian showed some interest in Irish history and folklore. In his private library, which is now hosted by Toumanian Museum, Yerevan, books related to Irish history are found, among them Georgiy Afanasyev's *Istoriya Irlandii (History of Ireland)* (Afanasyev 1907) and three collections of MacManus's tales (MacManus 1910a; MacManus 1910b; MacManus n.d.).

The translation of each folk tale is interesting in its own right; however, the modifications found in the target text would be more comprehensible in case we viewed the translated folk tale as a specific text type endowed with a number of major qualities. The Armenian translation of MacManus's tale is not an exception.

The translated tale is the intertextual double of the source text.

In his work *The Poetics of Motif* Igor Silantyev claims that intertextual analysis dissolves the notion of plot in the notion of text (Silantyev 2004:60). Thus intertextuality can help us examine and interpret fairy tales not only as stories but as texts as well. Any text is intertextual but literally every fairy tale is webbed in a coat of intertextual relations with myriads of almost identical, similar or related texts, which differ from each other but seldom swerve from the main story line.

The translated tale is an intertextual parallel of the source text and as such it fits perfectly into the system of intertextual web of the fairy tale. The Armenian translation of MacManus's tale can be seen as a very close intertextual counterpart of the original text and the mediating Russian version.

The translated folk tale is the 'transform' of the source text.

The fairy tale is endowed with a high degree of transformability. Vladimir Propp in his *Morphology of the Folktale* claims that in terms of morphology there is only one fairy tale as all fairy tales conform to one morphological pattern. He put forward the theory that the endless variety of fairy tale tradition had been produced gradually by the process of incessant transformation. In the forward to his study Propp writes:

Nevertheless, I feel that in the present form this study is accessible to every fancier of the tale, provided he is willing to follow the writer into the labyrinth of the tale's multiformity, which in the end will become apparent to him as an amazing uniformity (Propp 1986:xxvi).

Such an approach to the study of fairy tales makes it possible to hold Toumanian's translation as a very close interlingual and intercultural 'transform' of MacManus's original text.

The translated folk tale is dependent on the folklore of the accepting culture.

The translator of the tale is under constant influence of the folklore traditions of the accepting culture and the translated tale is often adapted to a relevant folk tale in the target culture. This is especially noticeable at the level of the supernatural personnel of the tale. Lubomír Doležel (1998:20) claims that supernatural characters reside within language and do not have language independent referents.

This statement becomes even more essential in the field of translation since change of language seriously influences the naming of the supernatural creatures in folktales. The passage from one language to another is a perilous ‘journey,’ which often harms the illusive nature of imaginary creatures. Often it is utterly difficult to find true equivalents in the target language especially when distant cultures are involved. Hence the translator often replaces the name of the supernatural character by a more familiar cultural equivalent. However, such choice may inevitably result in semantic changes, make the translation covert and obscure the source mythology.

Although throughout the Russian translation MacManus’s *hag* is introduced as *ved’ma* (witch), at the very closing of the text Zaymovsky unexpectedly ‘russifies’ this character by introducing the character of *Yaga*, the Slavonic equivalent of the Hag (the word has several rather well-known versions such as *Yaga-Baba*, *Yegi-Baba*, *Yagaya*, *Yagishna*).

Toumanian does not acknowledge Zaymovsky’s choice knowing quite well that translation presents a passage not only from language to language but also from culture to culture. He avoided the undue localization of the word using a more neutral Armenian word *kakhard* (witch).

Under the influence of folklore of the target culture essential modifications reveal themselves at the level of poetics of the text, opening and closing formulae in particular. Highlighting the distant temporal character of a tale, the opening formula of MacManus’s “*Once on a time, long, long ago*” is replaced in Toumanian’s translation by the traditional Armenian opening formula, which focuses on the improbability of the events rather than on their temporal distance: ‘*Linum en, chen linum mi parav mard u knik*’ (*There was, there was not, there were an old man and a woman*²) (MacManus 1915:233; Toumanian 1914:73).

The choice of the source folk tale is dependent on the repertoire of previously translated tales in the target culture.

On the level of an individual translator this would mean that the choice of MacManus’s tale by Toumanian might be influenced by a comparable tale, known from the Brothers Grimm collection as *The Hut in the Forest* (No. 169 = ATU 431 ‘The House in the Forest’) which Toumanian had translated six years before he started *The Old Hag’s Long Leather Bag*. It was first published in the children’s magazine

² Charles Downing in his forward to *Armenian Folk tales and Fables* makes a brief reference to Armenian Idioms and tale formulas. He chooses to translate the most common opening formula of Armenian tales literally although in many collections it is replaced by its English equivalent ‘*once upon a time*.’ Downing writes: ‘There are other typical Armenian expressions in the translations to follow, but it is hoped that, though strange, they will be readily intelligible’ (Downing 1972:xi)

Hasker in Tiflis, in 1908 (No. 2; Grimm 1908). The translator was apparently attracted by ST Q2 motif *Kind and Unkind* (Thompson 1955-8, Q. Rewards and punishments).

The translated folk tale is a cross-cultural text.

This is especially true in regard to mediated translations. If translation studies often view indirect translation as inferior to direct translation, students of cross-cultural studies suggest mediated translation plays an important role in connecting distinct cultures. Here it is not so much the quality of the translation or its fidelity to the original that is seen as important, but the potential of the source text to modify.

Transferring from one language to another the texts convey the source story almost unchanged, but acquire a new poetics and a new rhetoric. Additionally, mediated translations of fairy tales could sometimes be seen as successful when they are performed by celebrated literary figures; such was the outcome of Toumanian's translation of MacManus's tale.

The translated folk tale is a text of collective authorship.

The translated tale is undoubtedly a result of 'collective work' involving at least two, in the case of MacManus's Armenian translation, three tellers: MacManus, Zaymovsky and Toumanian. If collective authorship is a criterion for identifying the text as a folklore narrative (Zipes 1979:11), the translated tale is in a certain sense rather close to it.

The translated folktale is no longer folklore.

The translated folktale is no longer folklore for two reasons. It stops being anonymous since the translator takes on an indirect 'authorship' of the translated version and it is no longer perceived as an oral narrative, since it enters a printed domain. Even the source text is not an authentic folktale in the exact meaning of the word because it is already related to the name of the person who has recorded and subsequently published it. Both the printed source text and the translated texts provide the survival of the folktale and at the same time put an end to its oral transmission and anonymity, the latter being one of the major qualities of a folktale (Zipes 1979:11; Jivanyan 2007:11). *The Old Hag's Long Leather Bag* is already associated with MacManus's name and its Armenian telling with that of Toumanian.

The translated folk tale is an addressee dependent text.

A number of changes may appear in the translation depending on the potential reader of the translated text. Seumas MacManus was a folklorist and a storyteller and the performing aspect of the folktale was of major importance for him. One of his goals was to be as faithful to the style of the Irish storytellers as possible, to preserve the formulaic expressions and repetitions of episodes as important elements of storytelling.

Toumanian was translating for child readers. The age of the intended audience was a prime issue influencing his interpretation. The poet was more interested in keeping MacManus's story exciting and legible for his audience than focusing on the style of the narrative. Such an approach has caused a series of changes in the volume of the text. Thus, in the original text the sisters having left the hag's house meet the horse, the

cow, the sheep, the goat, the limekiln, and finally the mill, which ask for help. In his enumeration of the characters above, Zaymovsky adheres to the original. Toumanian reduces their number (in the Armenian text we do not find a cow and a limekiln) implying a shorter text is preferable for the young audience.

Surprisingly, MacManus's name was not included into the first edition of the Armenian translation. This was the result of the unaccountable editorial policy in Russian and Armenian children's magazines of the time: children's texts were often published anonymously. For some reason information concerning the authorship of the texts was considered to be irrelevant to child audience.

The translated folk tale is dependent on the mediating text.

A number of alterations in the Armenian translation of *The Old Hag's Long Leather Bag* are conditioned by the modifications made by Zaymovsky in the Russian version. Thus, for instance, the Russian text lacks the Irish time formula '*She travelled away and away before her, further than I could tell you, and twice as far as you could tell me, until she came into a strange country*' (MacManus 1915:234). It is replaced by the brief statement '*Shla ona dolgo*' (*she walked for a long time*) (MacManus n.d: 206).

A very similar replacement is found in the Armenian text. If not for the change in the Russian text, Toumanian would presumably have used the traditional Armenian time formula, which is semantically closer to the time expression of the source text '*odsn ir portov, havqn ir tevov cher karogh hasnel*' (*the snake with its navel and the bird with its wing could not reach there*).

Following Zaymovsky, Toumanian shortens the episode of the tale, where MacManus introduces the dialogues between the middle sister and the animals, which literally repeat the conversations with the first sibling: "*Gnum e: sa el e mets qroj nman varvum u nra bakhtin arzhananum*" (*She goes and behaves like her elder sister and shared the same fate*) (Toumanian 1914:77).

In the hag's speech in the source text there are a number of formulaic, almost untranslatable rhythmical phrases: "*O, goat, goat of mine, have you seen this maid of mine, ... with my tig, with my tag, with my long leather bag, and all the gold and silver I have earned since I was a maid?*" (MacManus 1915:238). Since the latter were not translated into Russian they are not found in Toumanian's text either.

Illustration in the translated folktale.

Illustration can be seen as a visual recreation or intersemiotic translation of a text. It is only natural that like other intersemiotic translators (fashion designers using fairy tale motifs, for example), illustrators 'translate' only discrete episodes. Hence illustration can be held as episodic or discontinuous translation.

While interlingual translation suggests total change of the source textual material, illustration may remain the same for both source and target texts, as is the case with *The Old Hag's Long Leather Bag*. Both Russian and Armenian translations are accompanied by Frank Verbeck's drawings, as was MacManus's English text. Additionally, the first Armenian edition opens with the ornaments of Vrtanes Akhikian, a celebrated Armenian artist, the illustrator of *Hasker*, probably to hint at the cultural shift (see images 5, 6).

3. Conclusion

MacManus's *The Old Hag's Long Leather Bag* is a unique tale in terms of style in the first place. The study of its translation into Armenian is of importance since we believe it is the first Irish folk tale translated into Armenian. As many renderings of folktales of the time it is a mediated translation drawing in terms of its language and style on the Russian intermediary version. The translation of each particular folktale is of interest, however many features of the text, which are held to be resulting from the individual style of the translator are in fact conditioned by the general characteristics of the translated text as a distinct text type.

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