



## Notes on the theory and practice of translation in Central-Europe: The confrontation of translation approaches in the Czech and Hungarian translations of *The Raven* by Edgar Allan Poe and its position in the Czech and Hungarian literary context

*Simona Kolmanová*

Charles University, Czech Republic

[simkol@centrum.cz](mailto:simkol@centrum.cz)

### **Abstract:**

The study focuses on Czech and Hungarian translations of the poem, *The Raven*. It also discusses the relation of these translations to the theory of translation, in selected Czech and Hungarian translations of *The Raven*. It confronts both with the contemporary translation usage (e.g. the role and subjectivity of the translator), and within the context of the target literature, literary traditions, as well with their implementation in the translation practices. Translations of *The Raven* have been published since the mid-19th century in both Czech and Hungarian languages; contemporary translations are no exception. At the present moment, more than 20 translations of the poem are available in both languages. The national aspect has, ever since Romanticism played an important role in the formation of the Czech and Hungarian literature, been significantly promoted even in translation practices. However, in the Hungarian environment there appears to be a more significant element, as a consequence of several external factors. In terms of language, there is a factor of linguistic differences obviously in contrast to the Slavic world and to the other Slavic literature. However, this is contradicted by certain tendencies in the translations of *The Raven*, since in the translated texts, compared to Hungarian translations, we see the national tradition and context more explicitly and powerfully present in the Czech variants.

**Keywords:** Poe, Edgar Allan, *The Raven*, Levý, Jiří, Hungarian translation, Czech translation, theory of translation.

**Observaciones acerca de la teoría y la práctica de la traducción en Europa Central. Contraste entre los enfoques traductivos de las traducciones al checo y al húngaro de *El cuervo* de Edgar Allan Poe y su posición en el contexto literario checo y húngaro**

### **Resumen:**

El presente estudio se centra en las traducciones al checo y al húngaro del poema *El cuervo*. En este se comparan ambas versiones con el uso traductivo contemporáneo (p. ej., el papel y la subjetividad del traductor) y, dentro del contexto de la literatura meta y las tradiciones literarias, con su implementación en la práctica traductiva. Desde mediados del siglo XIX se han publicado traducciones de *El cuervo* tanto en húngaro como en checo, incluimos aquí también las traducciones contemporáneas. Actualmente, existen más de 20 versiones del poema en ambas lenguas. Puesto que el Romanticismo jugó un papel importante en la formación de la literatura checa y húngara, el aspecto nacional ha sido muy promovido, incluso en la práctica traductiva. No obstante, como consecuencia de varios factores externos, parece que hay un elemento más significativo en el contexto húngaro. En términos del idioma, existe un factor de diferencias lingüísticas que está

obviamente en contraste con el mundo eslavo y con la otra literatura eslava. Sin embargo, algunas tendencias en las traducciones de *El cuervo* contradicen esto puesto que, en los textos traducidos, en comparación con las traducciones al húngaro, se puede observar que la tradición y el contexto nacional son más explícitos y están muy presentes en las variantes checas.

**Palabras clave:** Edgar Allan Poe, *El cuervo*, Jiří Levý, traducción húngara, traducción checa, teoría de la traducción.

**Notes sur la théorie et la pratique de la traduction en Europe centrale : Comparaison entre les traductions tchèques et hongroises de *The Raven* d'Edgar Allan Poe et sa position dans le contexte littéraire tchèque et hongrois**

**Résumé :**

Cette étude se concentre sur les traductions tchèques et hongroises du poème *The Raven*. On réalise une comparaison entre les deux versions et des concepts actuels de la traduction tels que le rôle et la subjectivité du traducteur. On met en relation aussi ces traductions avec le contexte de la littérature ciblée, les traditions littéraires et la pratique de la traduction. Les traductions de *The Raven* ont été publiées en tchèque et hongrois depuis le milieu du 19<sup>ème</sup> siècle ; on évoque ici des traductions contemporaines de l'œuvre, à l'heure actuelle on trouve plus de 20 traductions du poème dans ces langues. Étant donné que le romantisme a joué un rôle important dans la formation de la littérature tchèque et hongroise, l'aspect national a été considérablement encouragé, même dans les pratiques de traduction. Cependant, dans le contexte hongrois, cet aspect se considère plus fort en raison de plusieurs facteurs externes. En ce qui concerne les langues, il existe des différences linguistiques évidemment en contraste avec le monde slave et avec l'autre littérature slave. Néanmoins, cela peut se contredire par certaines tendances dans les traductions de *The Raven*, puisque dans la comparaison entre les traductions hongroises et les tchèques, on observe que la tradition et le contexte national sont plus explicites et présents dans les variantes tchèques.

**Mots clés :** Edgar Allan Poe, *The Raven*, traduction hongroise, traduction tchèque, théorie de la traduction.

## 1. Introduction

Research and professional discourse concerning Central Europe (in this context – the narrower concept of the ‘*Visegrad*’ states) has been increasing steadily over the past decades, especially in the face of national differences and parallels. In the field of translation studies, it is interesting to note, in general, that due to the historical and cultural proximity, Czech literature in many respects shares more common features with Hungarian literature than with other neighboring Slavic literature. Therefore, I would like to introduce the present study by asserting a paradox, to be discussed below, lurking in translations of Poe’s poem, *The Raven*, both in Czech and Hungarian literature (including related disciplines). We may nevertheless notice in the practice of Czech translations that more attention has been devoted to the neighboring Central and Eastern European literature, especially that written in Slavic languages, whereas the Hungarian literary area has been mostly ignored. Obviously, similarities among Slavic languages, and on the contrary, gross differences between the Czech and Hungarian languages play a substantial role in this regard. Therefore, I decided to show some similarities and differences concerning the Czech and Hungarian translations of Poe’s *The Raven* and thereby at least

partially fill in the gap, as just described, in the context of Central-European literature. Translations of *The Raven* were chosen because of their frequency; they can be good examples to illustrate translation methods and tendencies.

Following the theoretical works of Jiří Levý, I would refer at this point to two different tendencies observed in the Czech and Hungarian translation theoretical approaches. 1) We often see in the case of a national literature that that theories in literature and translation are treated mostly in parallel, and applied simultaneously in practice. In Hungary, however, these lines are distinctly separate: while Hungarian literary studies had applied new theories already in the 1980s (even in advance of their Czech counterparts), the theory of translation began to reflect them only about 20 years later, e.g. reader–response criticism, polysystem theory. 2) It is also interesting from the perspective of the Czech translation that although Czech structuralism had a strong influence on the Hungarian literary science in the 1960s, still hardly any references can be found to the works of Jiří Levý, who followed the tradition of Czech structuralism. This is even more noteworthy if we take into account that the works of the Slovak theorists (e.g. Anton Popovič<sup>1</sup>) were available in Hungarian translation as well, in a period within Czechoslovakia, when Czech and Slovak science were quite closely interconnected. Although there is no explicit reference to the works of Jiří Levý, his theses and theoretical approaches can be found in the Hungarian context, mainly due to the strong influence of Czech structuralism and following Prague formalism. Even though the works of Levý were not translated into Hungarian they were, within Czechoslovakia owing to language proximity, accessible to Slovak researchers and translators and thus to the Hungarian minority living in Slovakia. This was reflected also in literary and translation studies.

In connection with the theory of Levý, this influence mainly concerns issues of functional equivalence. Levý, in this regard, says that the functional aspect “explores what the different elements of language the communication functions have and which of the communication means can fulfil the same function”<sup>2</sup> (1998, p. 26). Functional equivalence thus preserves the forms that have some semantic function, but does not insist on the maintenance of language form (Levý, 1998, p. 27) In Hungarian translation theory dominates the linguistic approaches practically until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (e. g. works of Kinga Klaudy<sup>3</sup> and her theses: Hungarian and Indo-European languages in translation comparison, their transformation typology in translation), they are basically consistent with the theory of Jiří Levý – or it applies similar approaches and functional equivalence as J. Levý.

In the next part, I will focus on selected Czech and Hungarian translations of *The Raven*, which I will confront both with the contemporary translation usage (e.g. the role and subjectivity of the translator), and within the context of the target literature, literary traditions, and with their implementation in translation practices. Translations of *The Raven* have been published since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century in Czech and Hungarian. At present, more than 20 translations of the poem are available in both languages. Poe’s essay *The Philosophy of*

<sup>1</sup> (1933–1984) Slovak translation scientist and text theoretician.

<sup>2</sup> Translated SK.

<sup>3</sup> (1945–), Hungarian linguist, professor of translation studies.

*Composition* presents a specific element that extends into the translation process, essentially influencing it all the time. The essay has always posed a challenge, still today provoking reflections, polemics, and comments, as many translators have experimented with the essay's aspect to be taken into account, or to explain/justify modifications they had applied/introduced.

## 2. Czech translations of the poem *The Raven* and the contemporary translation approach

### 2. 1. Czech translations in the 19<sup>th</sup> century

The first Czech translation was published in 1869, assigned to Vratislav Kazimír Šembera<sup>4</sup>. In our discussion, it is relevant to note that elements of Czech Romanticism are detectable at various levels in Šembera's translation. The use of the trochaic and dactylic meter follows the tradition of a literary group known as *Májovci*<sup>5</sup>, drawing on patterns worked out by their representative poet, Karel Hynek Mácha<sup>6</sup>, further continued in the poetry by Karel Jaromír Erben<sup>7</sup>, yet present even in the tradition of folk ballads (Bejblík, 1990, pp. 25–28). Similarly, in the rhyme scheme and internal rhythmicality inside strophes, there were certain changes usually understood as a free interpretation in the spirit of Romanticism. The Romantic influence is also reflected in the choice of vocabulary, as well as in various stylistic elements. For example, the influence both of Erben's ballads and the folk ballads suggests a shared use of terminology, especially a selection of concepts referring to the otherworldly spheres, or to that from beyond the grave. A particularly striking example is the diction of the poet in strophes 15 to 17, where a selection of dramatic, stylistic and lexical elements strongly evokes the atmosphere and style of Czech romantic ballads. Generally, we can say that Šembera's approach had brought strong links to the domestic literary context, especially to Czech Romanticism, into the Czech translations of *The Raven*, powerfully influencing subsequent translations. It is, therefore, no coincidence that the Czech commentaries highlight the parallels between E. A. Poe and K. H. Mácha as contemporaries both regarded as romantic writers with a similar personal fate, as is evident in later translations (see below D. Wagnerová). Šembera translated the name and main theme of the poem, i.e. the 'raven' as "*havran*", although the English binary name is "rook", and in Latin "*corvus frugilensis*". This term (the equivalent of rook) has been used by all later Czech translations and Poe's poem is known in the Czech literary commonly under this name. The only exception is Miroslav Macek (Macek, 1982), proposing the revised version (see below).

<sup>4</sup> (1844–1891) Czech poet, journalist, translator.

<sup>5</sup> A significant group of Czech novelists and poets, who were inspired by the work of Karel Hynek Mácha. The first yearbook of the group named *Máj* (The *May*) after Mácha's poem, was published in 1858.

<sup>6</sup> (1810–1836) was a Czech romantic poet.

<sup>7</sup> (1811–1870) was a Czech historian, poet and writer, best known for his collection *Kytice* (*Bouquet*) which contains poems and ballads based on traditional and folkloric themes.

Another important translation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was signed by Jaroslav Vrchlický<sup>8</sup> (1881). Unlike other translations, his text preserves the rhyme scheme to the maximum extent, also showing more accuracy and rhythmic precision. In contrast to Šembera, it is less dramatic, Vrchlický's literary language and his own poetic style prevailing over colloquialism. Further, we also encounter a different terminology in the representation of the supranatural world. While Šembera works with concepts strongly associated with religious experience (the prophet, true believer, pious vision), Vrchlický remains identical with the author in more general terms. Another characteristic element is the initial capital letter in spelling the word "*Havran*", which highly emphasizes excellence, personification and the symbolic character of this creature. Overall, we can say that Vrchlický's translation seeks to maximize formal and content fidelity, without denying the translator's own poetic atmosphere (he applies the stylistic and language resources that are characteristic of his poetic work or he applies his poetic individualism). In this case, we may witness the poet's increased self-awareness, with his profile consciously engraved in the translation. In this approach, it becomes a challenge to reflect on the role of the poet-translator and to promote his individualism in the translated work.

Vrchlický's translation was also important because it has provided, for the next generation of literary modernism, an impetus toward rethinking current approaches, as it is noticeable in the review of *The Raven* by Jiří Karásek in 1895 (Levý, 1957, pp. 480–493). This criticism, together with subsequent polemical articles, presents a significant milestone in the context of Czech translations. Karásek characterized Vrchlický's translation as in fact a paraphrase, criticizing him for giving preference to fidelity to form over loyalty to content, onomatopoeia, and atmosphere in the poem, especially at the expense of its fantastic and horrific tone. In terms of form, Karásek heavily drew on the spirit of modernism, giving priority to free translation while still preserving content elements, namely the ideas and thoughts of the work. In this context, it should be noted that literary modernism emphasized the principle of translation congeniality as a repetition of the creative process and the possibility of translating poems in rhythmic prose (Levý, 1957, p. 199., p. 202). Vrchlický responded with the (then unpublished) paraphrase *The Modern Raven (Moderní Havran)* where the raven personifies realistic critics and describes Czech literature as "purely non-existent" (Bejblík, 1990, p. 34).

If we compare the methods of solution in translation and confront them with contemporary theoretical approaches, with special regard to translations of *The Raven*, it is necessary to briefly outline the evolution of translation practice in the previous period. Translations in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were perceived as original works with their own value, essentially aiming to shape and enrich national culture – an attitude stressed with particular emphasis both on language and on its creative component. This view was yet undergoing significant changes in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as the emphasis shifted to the content and topic. In this context, we may observe a clearer distinction between the translation and the original work (Levý, 1957, pp. 150–151).

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<sup>8</sup> (1853–1912) was a Czech poet, prosaist, dramatist, translator from various languages.

Further, still in this period, the aspect of national identity was interconnected with pan-Slavic sentiments, more often than not defined in opposition to the German element. Viewed from the perspective of translation, two differently defined approaches had crystallized into two groups by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: 1) the followers of Josef Václav Sládek<sup>9</sup> – prioritizing the content and sense for details, with emphasis on applying the national poetic forms, and on the other hand, 2) the followers of Jaroslav Vrchlický – typically giving priority to form loyalty, subordinating details to the whole, with a preference for aesthetic perspective over reproduction, and especially favouring the use of foreign poetic forms (Levý, 1957, p. 182). But these contradicting features actually appear in translations of *The Raven* to a lesser extent, since translators usually subordinated their text to the specific intentions described by Poe in his afore mentioned essay, *The philosophy of Composition*.

## 2. 2. Czech translations of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century

The subsequent polemic about translations of *The Raven* focuses mainly on aspects of sound, especially in the refrain. The translation of Karel Dostál Lutinov (1918)<sup>10</sup> solves the onomatopoeia of the refrain in a specific way. That is, for the name of the bird and his answers Lutinov uses transcription and leaves the English formula “nevermore” in the Czech text. Lutinov expressed his views on the refrain in his commentary, in which he rejected the solution offered by Vrchlický (“*nikdy víc*” stands for “never more”). With reference to Poe’s essay, Lutinov highlighted the importance of the use of phonemes “o” and “r” and the word closing “-or” - pointing out that his transcription preserved the sound aspect, albeit at the expense of the content (Bejblík, 1990, pp. 104–105).

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the translation by Vítězslav Nezval<sup>11</sup> (1928) is considered as a significant modern approach offering an example of the transformation of Czech poetry in the spirit of poetic modernism that manifests itself for example in enhancing the tenderness of the poetic subject. The term “poetic creation”, coined by the poet himself, means that, in his translation, Nezval applied the principle of congeniality as repetition of the creative process. Following the initiative, poets began to introduce forms of common and colloquial language, promoting the pursuits of naturalness, thus triggering changes in poetic diction, as indeed we may notice in the translation approaches of the period. Just as colloquial language is a distinctive characteristic of Nezval’s translation, whereby the use of simple and everyday language eliminates the sense of pathos, the use of regular word order, e.g. without inversions, brings about the sense and style of the original work of art. These aspects also weaken the mystical layer, blurring the contrast of the mythical with the rational. This point also applies to the refrain, which combines both elements mentioned by Poe, i.e. melancholy and triviality. Nezval emphasizes the formal area in the spirit of Poe’s intentions concerning aesthetic elements and mathematical precision. On the ground of the characteristics briefly outlined above, it can be said that Nezval represents the trend of a

<sup>9</sup> (1845–1912) was a Czech poet, prosaist, journalist, translator.

<sup>10</sup> (1871–1923) was a Czech catholic priest, poet, writer, translator.

<sup>11</sup> (1900–1958) was a Czech avant-garde poet, writer.

most genuine poetic modernism, inspiring contemporary and later translation approaches. The substitution method was strongly advocated in prosody before World War I, meaning that foreign prosodic forms were replaced by domestic equivalents (Levý, 1957, pp. 215–216). However, after 1920, in relation to the influence affected by the publication of a collection of modern French poetry (*Francouzská poezie nové doby*, 1920), we observe a turn toward, or we are inclined to say, a return to the approach proposed by J. Vrchlický. At the same time, there is some “loosening” of the principles in translation, which Nezval also called “poetic creation”. Otto František Babler<sup>12</sup> (1930) argues against Nezval’s approach and solution in his translation and commentary. Babler stressed the need to preserve the somber tone, also by emphasizing certain religious elements and prompting greater irrationality. For example, for the raven’s refrain (here raven written with an initial capital letter) Babler’s solution is “*marný blud*” (vain / futile delusion). As he explains in the commentary, he was inspired both by the book of Ecclesiastes, referring to the expression “vanitatum vanitas”, and by the operas of Richard Wagner (Bejblík, 1990, p. 116). Overall, however, these elements do not in fact work consistently together, thus the atmosphere of the poem loses its coherent nature.

In later translations Mácha’s and Erben’s romantic tradition was revitalized, explicitly in the translations of Eugen Stoklas<sup>13</sup> (1939), Rudolf Havel<sup>14</sup> (1946), or Dagmar Wagnerová<sup>15</sup> (1945). For example, the choice of language devices is apparent in Stoklas’ solution, as in the change of the name Lenora to Lora, with an obvious hint to Mácha, who called his lover Eleonora by a short form of the name, Lori.

The translation of Dagmar Wágnerová (1945) openly refers to the tradition initiated by Mácha. This is a specific interpretative approach that unlike other translations explicitly applies the achievements of Mácha’s poem “*Máj*” (*May*). Wágnerová explains her decision in a comment providing details on her point to consider “time” as the central theme of the poem, as well as on her reasons for translating the refrain in this spirit, too. As Wágnerová relied on the philosophical concept of time in Mácha’s poem and in this sense applied it in the translation, apparently, her aim was to incorporate the text into the Czech literary tradition. As Bejblík pointed out, the concept of the Raven is more concrete with Wágnerová, while the concept of the girl is more abstract, thereby eliminating the typical characteristic ambiguity of translation, as well as reducing its mythical and logical dialectic (Bejblík, 1990, pp. 48-49). It is also noted in this context that the raven is written with an initial capital letter. Further, the refrain is built up in the spirit of her concept of “time” and its transience in different variations. The name of the raven is made by the phrase “give me time” (*vrať mi čas*), whereas the answers are changing in this phrase in various ways (to turn back time – *vrátit čas*). The name “Lenore”, which according to Wágnerová in English has “another aesthetic and emotional value” (Bejblík, 1990, p. 136), therefore she

<sup>12</sup> (1901–1984) was a Czech translator, poet, writer, literary historian.

<sup>13</sup> (1882–1963) was a Czech translator, poet, writer, dramatist.

<sup>14</sup> (1911–1993) was a Czech literary historian, translator.

<sup>15</sup> (1922–2000) was a Czech translator.

substitutes it with Jarmila, because it is the name of the heroine of the poem of reference, Mácha's *Máj*. Yet, she also notes that in addition to these intertextual links, Jarmila also comprises further associations, such as "spring, brightness, grace, ruin, vanity" – *jaro, jas, milost, zmar, marnost* (Bejblík, 1990, pp. 48-49). Examples of the above-mentioned features of her translation include the prioritization of the Czech (target) literary tradition, whereby the translation approach takes into account the Czech (target) reader, but also promotes the personality of the translator. On this account, we can say that her translation also reflects some of the new challenges to the theory of translation including, for example, reception aesthetics.

### 2. 3. Czech translations after 1945

The translation of Rudolf Havel (1946) refers to the poetic means of symbolism and mysticism of Otakar Březina<sup>16</sup>. With these associations Havel's text also incorporates itself into the Czech literary context, however unlike the former translations, not in the line of the romantic concept, but in the tradition of mystical symbolism (which mysticism can be perceived as a particular interpretation of Poe's mysterious and enigmatic world). This is related to the fact that this translation works with specific images of death in the poem, even if not explicitly used in this way by Poe. Apart from the literary context mentioned above, we may find the explanation in the fact that the translation was worked out in the oppressive atmosphere of World War II, thus likely to be loaded with experiences thereof (Bejblík, 1990, p. 49).

One of the recent translations was provided by Miroslav Macek (Macek, 1982), mentioned in connection with the title of the poem and discussed in the context of Šembera's work. Macek complements his own text with a "*Medico-literary reflection*", in which he analyzes the poem as a mirroring of the physical and mental state of the alcoholic type delta. This is followed by a "*Zoological Note*" by Karel Šamšišák<sup>17</sup>, clarifying the difference between "the raven" and "the rook" and its analysis serves as rationale for the translator's decision concerning the choice of title. This translation is, in fact, the first that does not use the established Czech concept "*havran*" (the rook, *corvus frugilensis*), because it is considered to be semantically wrong, and therefore it is translated as "*krkavec*" (the raven, *corvus corax*). He justifies this choice in a commentary about zoological classification of the animal and the consequent characteristics: properties of the raven (*krkavec*) are loneliness and learning to imitate human speech. Unlike the rook (*havran*) which eats insects and plants, the raven is carnivorous. This aspect corresponds to the image in the poem when it says: "Take thy beak from out my heart", as it would make no sense in the case of a rook. The fact that it is a carnivore has its importance as well in a mythological concept, because the raven is often depicted in the environment of execution sites, as a sinister, or a ghostly creature. These characteristics, including carnality, is actually more consistent with the bird depicted in the poem. It is also necessary to note that ravens occur even in Czech folklore, usually as messengers of bad and ominous news. However, none of the other properties,

<sup>16</sup> (1868–1929) was a Czech symbolists poet, writer.

<sup>17</sup> (1923–2008) was a Czech zoologist



such as being a carnivore or imitating human speech, would apply to the raven in Poes's poem. This contradiction shows that all the Czech translations over 150 years have accepted the tradition initiated by the first translation, and no translators' comments suggest that any of the authors pondered another variant.

#### 2. 4. The Raven as a literary parody

Besides translations, there have been parodies of the poem created over time. Let me introduce here two examples, in which it shall be clear that Poe's poem in various forms has been incorporated into the Czech literary context. I have already mentioned J. Vrchlický's poem, as a response to the criticism of his translation approach: his parody follows the formal aspects of the original, including the refrain; however, the content is an ironic and satirical ridicule to contemporary literary trends, in the same spirit bitterly characterizing contemporary Czech literature and criticism. One of the modern parodies is a poem by Josef Váchal<sup>18</sup>, which also complies with the formal aspect of Poe's text, but Váchal complements the refrain with a figurative element – namely, with the visualization of the “fart”. Váchal retains the form of dialogue with the raven, yet the content is a polemic over the situation of the writer, publishers (Váchal himself was also engaged in editing and printing books), as well as a fierce criticism on contemporary culture in general.

### 3. Hungarian translations of the poem *The Raven* and the contemporary translation approach

#### 3. 1. Hungarian translations of the 19<sup>th</sup> century

The first Hungarian translation of *The Raven* was a work by Károly Szász<sup>19</sup> (1858), whose text has become an inspiration for subsequent translations. Although this text includes some content inaccuracies, in general, it preserves the overall idea and the form of the original. The poem is also tinged with the contemporary political atmosphere of Hungary (Ferencz, 1999, pp. 82–88), having in view the defeated revolution in 1848/49. As shown in recent studies (see below Benyovszky), *The Raven* is perceived in the context of post-revolutionary poetry, particularly *The Old Gypsy* by Mihály Vörösmarty<sup>20</sup>. This aspect illustrates the literary situation and reception in contemporary Hungary, since the readers expected political reflection even in literature. Other translations, e.g. József Lévy's text<sup>21</sup> (1882), were still prepared within the same literary target context, also perceived in association with the poetry of the period, most prominently with the ballads by János Arany<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> (1884–1969) was a Czech writer, poet, painter, printmaker.

<sup>19</sup> (1829–1905) was a Hungarian poet, translator, dramatist, protestant bishop.

<sup>20</sup> (1800–1855) was an important Hungarian romantic poet, dramatist.

<sup>21</sup> (1825–1918) was a Hungarian poet, translator.

<sup>22</sup> (1817–1882) was a Hungarian important poet, translator, journalist.

In general, we can say that very similar tendencies are detectable in the Hungarian translation approaches of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the Czech environment. The Romantic phase of the nation-building process had been completed by the 1860s, which in terms of translations, reflected the emphasis on the national element, tradition, and history, whereas in the aspect of the form on the other hand, in the preservation of poetic form and genre. However, the national aspects conspicuously reappear in the translations of *The Raven*. We may find certain references to the national romantic context, but unlike Czech translations, they are not as significant and no major interpretive changes were introduced in the Hungarian translations. However, unlike Czech translations, there is a clear link to the political context, as I wrote above.

### 3. 2. Hungarian translations of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially at the advent of poetic modernism organized around the literary journal *Nyugat* (meaning: *The West*), a new period had started in the field of translations, too. Although the translators followed the approach of the 19<sup>th</sup> century tradition, it was no longer in the spirit of the nation-building process. By the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there had been a change in the way in which translation was understood, the emphasis shifting to specific fields such as language, art, and coinciding with debates on the influence and the possibility of translation, as well as on the questions of authenticity, loyalty, or even usefulness. Generally, we can say that there is a shift in thinking about translation toward more abstract philosophical and theoretical levels (Józán, 2009, p. 87). (However, this study does not deal with this, but focuses on the translation methods.) The so-called *Nyugat*-poets<sup>23</sup> had played a decisive role in this respect, whose translation works in the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century established a role model, not only leading contemporary thinking about translation, but in fact affecting the form of criticism in translation until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In particular, we should draw attention to translations by Mihály Babits<sup>24</sup>, Dezső Kosztolányi<sup>25</sup> and Árpád Tóth<sup>26</sup>, still to be discussed in the present study. In these translations, we may notice direct and indirect confrontation with the translation approaches, or even theoretical thinking of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with new inspirations, especially related to the target text, and the readers. This – otherwise generally not-preferred – aspect becomes more pronounced in their translations exactly in the context of “poetic individualism” (or else use their poetic style and poetic language); it is definitely marked as the most powerful trend of theories in the Hungarian translation all over the 20<sup>th</sup> century. What was at stake in this new wave of translation was whether the translator may intervene or not in the relation between the original text and the reader of the translation (Józán, 2009, p. 132). This factor is related to the fact that the poets of this generation also edited their translation works into their own collections of poems,

<sup>23</sup> *Nyugat* was an important Hungarian literary journal in 1908–1941.

<sup>24</sup> (1883–1941) was a Hungarian poet, writer and translator.

<sup>25</sup> (1885–1936) was a Hungarian poet, writer and translator.

<sup>26</sup> (1886–1928) was a Hungarian poet and translator.

which leads to questioning of the author of any of these translations. It is so because the authors themselves seem, deliberately, to have created the illusion that the poem is not a translation – but an original one. The author of the original is being left in the background – moving the translator to this position (typically e.g. in the works by M. Babits). In practice, this means that the poets/translators considered all their translation work as part of their poetry, hence as part of the national literature.

Here it is necessary to mention the role of Poe's essay, often referred to in the translators' comments, contributing to the fact that discussions on the translation of the poem leave hardly any trace on the translation – the original and the translations are judged by the extent to which they are able to maintain the formal and content fidelity to the original, as we see e.g. in the critique/criticism by A. Elek (Elek, 1913). It is shown mainly on comparing the “predetermined” interpretation of the original with the resulting interpretation, and in any case when differences were perceived as arbitrary, the translations ought to have been considered as failed solutions. Among the aspects so problematic in translating *The Raven*, rendering it virtually untranslatable, Elek mentions the musicality including rhythm, rhyme scheme and intellectual rhythm, repetition of words, as well as sentence units.

Dezső Kosztolányi's translation (1913) was published in the journal *Nyugat*. It was immediately subject to criticism and comments but also reached the center of considerations of translation approaches. Artúr Elek, a highly influential critic mentioned above, was the first to react. Basically, he considered *The Raven* to be an untranslatable work. This question of untranslatability and impossibility of translating the poem is one of the main topics of the contemporary theory of translation. In Kosztolányi's translation Elek appreciated the musicality and atmosphere, the virtuosity of rhythm and melody. On the other hand, he criticized Kosztolányi for having created a poem that does not work as translation, but as an original piece of literary work. He regarded as a serious shortcoming that the poem does not present Poe's poem, but Kosztolányi's poetic style.

Kosztolányi responded to the criticism promptly in the next issue of the same journal, i.e. *Nyugat* (Kosztolányi, 1913). His attitude was based on the reception approach, regarding the text in the target literature. This view is the opposite of Elek's requirement of the “ideal, non-realizable” original in the translation. As Kosztolányi formulated his point, namely “the poem speaks for itself”, he also claimed that his aim was to make the translation work just as well as the original did. He responded to the criticism concerning inaccuracies in the content, defining his work as literary translation. He explained that the translation was based on differences in language material. He claimed that every language expresses a common and something common of the human existence that is external to any language, therefore can be represented in any other language. Kosztolányi's idea from another text appropriately illustrates this response: “The relationship between my translations and the original works is not the same as that of a relation between a painting and its copy, but rather as between a painting and the object

that represents<sup>27</sup>.” (Józan, 2009, p. 164) From this brief characterization, it should be obvious that Kosztolányi promotes his interpretation of the original, arguing that by eliminating this element the translation would lose something essential. A textually faithful translation, would miss the spirit of the original text. In his view, the poet-translator must identify himself with the original and pay tribute to the spirit of the original. Kosztolányi understood literalism so as to preserve the original semantic context, sticking to the spirit of the poem.

Mihály Babits (1923) in principle endorsed Kosztolányi’s response concerning the translation of *The Raven*, thereby rejecting Elek’s arguments. If we briefly describe the translation methods of Babits, it is necessary to mention that he persistently followed the 19<sup>th</sup> century trends. Regarding *The Raven*, for instance, he referred to views already formulated by Ferenc Kazinczy<sup>28</sup>, or János Arany, justifying the right to use any of the excellent solutions of earlier translations (Józan, 2009, p. 154). For Mihály Babits is also typical his own intellectual views, concern with artistic value, and similarly, the application of forms of the same poetic value in the translated work. These aspects are related largely to the fact that he translated mostly antique and classic poets (most notably Dante’s *Divina Comedia*), therefore classical forms play a more significant role in his translations. He considers the translated text to be temporary in comparison with the original work. That is probably the reason why he is one of the poets who incorporates translations into their poetic corpus, as mentioned above. Babits, in *The Raven*, focused on the transfer of musicality, onomatopoeia and forms, also highlighting in his commentary the need to use everyday language without unnecessary poetic ornaments (Rába, 1969, p. 196). This ordinariness reinforces the irony or self-irony in the tone of the narrator, as is especially evident with the introduction of the poem.

Árpád Tóth (1923) was regarded by his contemporaries as the embodiment of the faithful translator. Compared with Kosztolányi, he still represents a second line of literary translation simply because Tóth considered “the input” of the translator between the original and the translation unnecessary, arguing that the translation ought not bear any traces of the translator’s poetic character. Paradoxically enough, that view is in contradiction with his own translation approach (Józan, 2009, p. 139). First it should be noted that musicality and somber tone, so characteristic of the atmosphere original of *The Raven*, are precisely the hallmarks of Tóth’s poetry. Nevertheless, the introductory part of the translated poem sounds mythically, rather than being dominated by the typical gloominess of his poetry. For Tóth *The Raven* meant a challenge in the sphere of confrontation between fantasy and the real world. The question he posed was how to connect fantasy with real images, otherworldly (mystical, mysterious) elements with the ordinary and real things. Tóth also attempted to preserve Poe’s bizarre and unusual language in his translation (Rába, 1969, p. 442).

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<sup>27</sup> Translated SK.

<sup>28</sup> (1759–1831) was a Hungarian writer, poet, cultur and literary organiser, an important agent in the language reform.

By providing these brief characteristics I should outline that the translations of these three authors – despite the differences in their individual personalities – form a tightly interconnected unit. Noteworthy is the extraordinary effort to integrate the translated works into the context of Hungarian literature, enabling the translations to act permanently as original literary gems which therein could further influence Hungarian literature. Nevertheless, this point – even in the case of translations of *The Raven* – is not realized in the form of explicit adjustments and reflections, as we see in some Czech translations. For these reasons, it is understandable that literary and translation criticism would discuss all of them together as if in a translation generation (group) with a consistent goal, i.e. to define a modern translation approach, that be raised as standard for the next generations. Their joint effort in terms of the methodology manifests a more strongly applied aspect in order to create the illusion of the original. This, however, is realized rather in the language and stylistic level, than in the formal (prosodic) level – here they preserve the form of the original. Similarly, in the Czech translations, we see the application of everyday and ordinary language too, in the spirit of poetic modernism.

### 3. 3. Hungarians translations after 1945

In the postwar period, after 1945, the translation tradition of the *Nyugat*-poets was essentially reduced to the issue of fidelity to form and content, fully complying with the spirit of the then-prevailing Marxist ideology pushing a shared, single message of literary works. Similarly, the official ideological trend denied the formerly much debated aspect of untranslatability, too, since within a common ideological framework, all true poetry ought to be translatable. From the perspective of criticism on “mere formalism”, the relevance of the content, the so-called “ideal element” of the work far exceeds the questions of form. The role of the translator must be subordinated to the writer, which actually resulted in suppressing translation subjectivism (Józan, 2009, p. 175), or individualism and reader-response approaches. In spite of these ideological contradictions, the translations of *The Raven* by *Nyugat*-poets still remained standard currency, further serving as permanent inspiration to new translations. In the present study, I avoid discussing translations of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, since no significant changes were introduced in this period.

Let me still draw attention to a contemporary translation by Balázs Szigeti, who completed his translation with a commentary explaining his inspiration from “classic” Hungarian translations and his concept of poetry. Szigeti considers the main idea of the work, the motive of damnation, as is apparent from the title of his essay: *The cackling of the damnation – A kárhozat károgása* (Szigeti).

### 3. 4. The Raven as a parody and inspiration

As mentioned at the beginning of the study, Poe’s poem, *The Raven* has always meant a constant challenge for translators. In this context, it should be noted that besides translations we may also find various inspirations, parodies, and intertextual discourse

in contemporary Hungarian literature. Exactly this issue is being addressed in a scholarly study by Krisztián Benyovszky (2013). These inspirations with creative handling of forms are being linked to Hungarian translations and their variants of interpretation. Among the contemporary parodies, the poem by Dániel Varró *A Boring Autumn Poem about the Boredom* (*Unalmas őszi vers az únalomról*) is worth mentioning. It calls into question and relativizes the particularly horrific and gloomy atmosphere of Poe's poem (Benyovszky, 2013). It seems obvious in this presentation that the efforts of poets-translators around the literary journal *Nyugat* to integrate the translations into the target literature were successful and in the case of *The Raven*, they were richly realized. Benyovszky in his study focuses on another form of discourse which links to the target context in connection with a CD recording of 1997, on which *The Raven* and Vörösmarty's famous poem *The Old Gypsy* are both recited (Benyovszky, 2014). This record has revived discourse on the parallels in the context of Romantic poetry and the connection with the canon of national literature, as discussed above.

#### 4. Excursions into the Hungarian thinking about translation from the 1960s

In conclusion, even briefly looking at the Hungarian theoretical approaches in the second half of the 20th century, especially the period since the 1960's, when the Czech literary thinking promoted mainly the influence of structuralism, and the works of Jiří Levý began to exert in the theory of translation. In the Hungarian environment two works were published with important, long-lasting effects on the approaches toward translation. The first of these works, entitled *The art of the translation* (*A műfordítás*, 1968) by Ede Szabó, provides a summary of problems concerning translation, yet without major reflections. It is basically dedicated to comparing and analyzing various translations. The second work, by György Rába *The beautiful unfaithful* (*A szép hűtlenek*, 1969) focuses on the artistic works of the poet-translators of *Nyugat*, especially on the contrast between faithful and autonomous translations. Although not explicitly devoted to the theory of translation, Rába deals in this work with the subject in the spirit of structuralism and applies certain views of Roman Jakobson. György Somló's works from the 1970's include hallmarks of the transition from the former, even structuralist approaches to modern theories, virtually however, left without response. Kinga Klaudy then applied the linguistic approach in her works since the 1980s. As mentioned in the introduction, Hungarian translation theory was not affected by structuralism, unlike theories of literature, wherein disputes of the 1970's were often carried out in the spirit of structuralism. In particular, it was an essential question to integrate the reader (recipient) into the communication process. This process of rejection of foreign theories in translation might be somehow attributed to the "legacy" of the implementation of the national aspect in the literature in the 19th century which in various forms survived in the approaches of the 20th century. As Ildikó Józán pointed to, at multiple sites (Józán, 2009), the central and "breaking" motive here is the perception of translation as a "national genre". The fact that this mindset persisted even in the 20th century, confirms that the Hungarian translation theory had had to wait until the first anthology of translation theoretical texts by foreign authors *Kettős megvilágítás: Fordításelméleti írások Szent Jeromostól a 20. század végéig* was published in 2007. The anthology of Hungarian authors *A műfordítás*

*elveiről – Magyar fordításelméleti szöveggyűjtemény* (the equivalent of *The Czech theory of translation* by Jiří Levý, 1957) was also published in 2008. Unlike the theoretical thinking about Hungarian literature, which was – in the spirit of world literature and literary theory – in the 20<sup>th</sup> century opened to foreign theories, we can see in the theory of translation an opposite approach. Although Hungarian thinking about translation lacked a comprehensive work, such as “*The Art of the Translation*” by Jiří Levý, it is clear that, as already mentioned several times, applied methods were also inspired by Czech/Czechoslovak thinking in the spirit of structuralism and functional equivalence of Jiří Levý.

## 5. Conclusion

We can observe similarities in both Czech and Hungarian literature, also at the level of translation theory: the impact of the domestic translation tradition and the question of individuality of the translator. The tendency of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, promoted in the Czech environment even as late as in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as the aspect of the adequacy and functional equivalence is frequently mentioned. It was decisively influenced by theoretical texts by Jiří Levý. The tendencies of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (poets-translators of *Nyugat*) will be also applied/noticed in the Hungarian environment almost up to the present. Thinking about the translation in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century focused primarily on the question of the translatability and of integrating the translated works into national literature; on the implementation of the faithful translation, including the structuralist approach. Since 1980s we see the beginning of the aspects of reception aesthetics and some other theories. In particular, it was a question of integrating the reader (recipient) in the communication process.

From these examples and translation methods, it is clear that the national aspect played an important role in the formation of the Czech and Hungarian literature and it was significantly promoted even in translation. However, in the Hungarian environment appears to be a more significant element, which is a consequence of several factors. In terms of language, there is obviously applied a factor of the linguistic differences – in a confrontation with the Slavic world – and the associated feeling of threat to the nation and the need to reinforce national identity. However, this is contradicted by certain tendencies in the translations of *The Raven*, in which we see that the Czech variants present more explicit and stronger the national tradition and context than Hungarian.

In relation to the influence of the work of Jiří Levý in Hungarian the environment, we must conclude that even if we don't directly meet references to his works, yet his translation approach (functionality, functional equivalence) penetrated in Hungarian translation methods mainly through the Slovak environment and through the Hungarian minority in Slovakia.

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