MARIÁN ANDRIČÍK – TARAS SHMIHER: Translating Milton into the Slavic World

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On line 232 of *Paradise Lost*, John Milton writes of "[a] mind not to be changed by place or time", and yet, the subject of this review is arguably dedicated to a mind – since surely a literary text can be considered a kind of a mind, or a reflection of one – being altered by both place and time as it is transplanted into different cultural and linguistic contexts. In 2023, Marián Andričík and Taras Shmiher published a joint volume – in English – on translations of John Milton, *Translating Milton into the Slavic World*, which provides a look into approaches used by translators of Milton into Slavic languages. The distinction made in the title by using Slavic *world* rather than Slavic *languages* proves to be significant. The book explores how the poems *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes* were translated into multiple Slavic languages, but does not concentrate solely on linguistic aspects of translation: it pays attention not only to translation difficulties arising from strictly linguistic differences between Slavic languages and (Milton's) English, but also from differences in culture and history. Before we delve deeper into the content and the minutiae of the book, let us take a step back and introduce the volume as a whole.

Translating Milton into the Slavic World was published by a Slovak press specialising in publishing poetry and literary criticism in 2023 and was authored by a duo of translation scholars – Marián Andričík from Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice, Slovakia, and Taras Shmiher of the Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, Ukraine. It is comprised of four chapters, two by each author, and a short interview between them. The publication is introduced by a brief foreword written by Marián Andričík and closes with a summary.

The first chapter in the volume, "A Long Journey of Milton's *Paradise Lost* into the Slavic World", was authored by Andričík and provides a detailed overview of when, by whom and how the poem was translated into each Slavic language from the 18th century – when the first Russian and Polish translations appeared – until the present day, while placing emphasis on complete rather than partial translations. As Andričík states: "it is not surprising that its first translations appeared in major cultures such as Russian and Polish" (31). The long tradition of the *Paradise Lost* translation into Russian also results in many "firsts" apart from just the first complete Slavic translation – Russian also saw the first translations in prose, verse, indirect translation from Latin, and direct translation from English, etc. Translations through an intermediary language, most commonly French, and prose translations were common among early Slavic translations of *Paradise Lost* in general, owing to translational paradigms of the times (31). Some of the translations also include alterations, omissions, and additions of e.g. religious aspects due to religious differences between the source and target cultures as is evidenced, for instance, in the 18th-century Polish translation. The chapter also highlights the significance of certain translations for their target literatures, such as the 19th-century Czech translation, and discusses translation strategies

that arise from linguistic differences, such as longer lines and often expanded number of lines in translations. It is, however, worth noting that while the descriptions of the specifics of each translation are quite interesting, they would have benefited from the inclusion of illustrative examples. This lack of examples, however, is rectified in the remaining chapters, especially the last two.

The second chapter, "Trying Not to Get *Paradise Lost* in Translation" also by Andričík, includes some examples from Czech, but mainly focuses on the Slovak translation as the text presents Andričík's reflections on his own translation of the titular poem published in 2020. Andričík discusses his decision to adhere to the form of the original poem by preserving the number of lines and the blank verse of the poem. According to the author (35), neither is a common feature in Slavic translations as both are made difficult by "constitutional differences between the two languages and their different semantic density" (103–104). He also explains that the existence of the ecumenical Bible – which is the result of cooperation of all relevant Christian denominations in Slovakia and is thus generally accepted – helped him avoid tying his translation of biblical elements in the poem to any particular denomination. However, he also acknowledges most languages will not have an analogous version of the Bible available, hence translators into other languages will likely not be able to apply a similar strategy.

The third chapter is "Text through Time: Time-distant Originals, Time-distant Translations (John Milton's *Samson Agonistes* and Its Translations into Ukrainian by Ivan Franko and into Slovak by Marián Andričík)" by Shmiher. It is dedicated to the analysis and comparison of the Ukrainian translation of Milton's *Samson Agonistes* poem by Ivan Franko (1912, 1913) and Andričík's Slovak translation (2022) in terms of translation strategies and issues arising from linguistic and cultural or political differences between Milton's English and monarchical society, Franko's Ukrainian and imperial society (Austro-Hungarian Empire), and Andričík's Slovak society and republic. In regard to the latter, Shmiher hypothesizes that Franko would have understood Milton's poem better than Andričík, but ultimately finds that both translations render the text adequately and not so differently. Another hypothesis of Shmiher's is that Franko's translation would prove to be archaic after over a century, but it turns out not to be the case – Shmiher concludes that some editing "in the domains of spelling, grammatical forms, and punctuation" (62) would not be amiss, "but no essential shift in the lexical expression of the world-view is observed" (62). In other words, he believes Franko's translation is still fully functional and does not require any significant alterations or updates. As for Andričík's translation, Shmiher notes Andričík's use of abstract nouns in place of specific high-flown lexemes as an effective translation strategy to address lingual asymmetry.

The last and most expansive chapter, "'Royal English' as a Translation Problem for Kingless Nations (John Milton's Epic *Paradise Lost* via the Prism of Its Translation into Slovak by Marián Andričík and into Ukrainian by Oleksandr Zhomnir)", by Shmiher also analyses and compares two translations – Andričík's Slovak translation of *Paradise Lost* and Zhomnir's Ukrainian translation, and does so in great detail. The author focuses not only on "royal English", as the title suggests, but more generally on high-flown English as it is a highly elevated form of the language often associated with royalty. This association displays significant linguistic social stratification that is not present in either Ukrainian or Slovak. Translators are, however, "aided" by Biblical overtones Milton employed that are easier to decode in cultures "that share common a [sic] Christian collective memory" (97). Shmiher concludes that both translations largely succeed, although via different means – Zhomnir relies more on "incorporating formulaic folklore phrases and low colloquial senses", thereby contributing "to the Ukrainian linguoculture by stimulating searches for highly formal

vocabulary" (97), and Andričík relies more on neutral lexis to "construct a powerful text of glorification" (97).

As stated before, the book concludes with a brief interview in which Taras Shmiher questions Marián Andričík about his career, translation and literary interests, his translation of *Paradise Lost*, and more.

It is worth noting that three of the chapters in the book are based on previously published articles with a relatively narrow focus. A brief look into the previous versions of the articles suggests that the authors did not make many significant changes in the book version of the texts and perhaps – for the sake of greater coherence of the volume – some minor adjustments might have been made. However, the volume is unified by the thematic focus and the ruptures are not dramatic. The book then – perhaps by its very nature – also carries an increased risk of being repetitive to some degree. For instance, the first chapter discusses the history of *Paradise Lost* translations into Czech in some detail and the second chapter reiterates some of the same information in a more condensed manner. While this is certainly not the only example, it is not a significant issue as the repetitiveness is not excessive.

In conclusion, each chapter testifies to a deep interest and unquestionable expertise of the two authors. In the foreword, Andričík claims that the intention of the book is "to make a small contribution to Miltonic studies in both countries [Slovakia and Ukraine]" (7). I dare say their contribution is more than small and it represents a valuable and very interesting read for anyone interested in Miltonic translation studies.

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