On Slipping Beauty and Gender Identity in Poetry Translation: Notes on James Sutherland-Smith's Translations of the Poetry of Mila Haugová

Ivana Hostová
Institute of Slovak Literature, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Slovakia
hostova.ivana@gmail.com

: it's been raining for days, I enter the room as I enter life, your body as the body of a poem: I love it I love you.
: the huge space that opens with every new touch of the word render/surrender? who is it that I translate for? what should I be careful about? what should I care about? poems pass one by one in a close sequence, then rhythmically with exactly measured distances between them: getting close to be able to "understand", getting far to be able to "translate".
: trace, searching for the trace: the calling of a bird, letters in flowing water, peace, disquieting force and violence of the thoughts of the other, words – enemies: to be lazily a coward, to give up because it threatens my own words somehow.
: with ease as if breath was an indefatigable growing truth, imprecise sensing of the words that emerge from the folds of speech, fan-like growth of meanings, nudity of a single word heaved out of nothingness.

Mila Haugová[1]

Abstract

The past few decades have seen a surge in research into translating minor literatures into the hegemonic English. Several contributions on translating Slovak literature have also been published or presented at

[1] In the original:
: prší celé dni, vstúpim do izby ako do života, tvoje telo ako telo básne: milujem to milujem ťa.
: obrovský priestor, ktorý sa otvára každým novým dotykom slova preklad/poklad? pre koho to prekladám? na čo dávať pozor? defilujú básne tesne za sebou, potom v presných odstupoch: približovanie aby som mohla „pochopiť" text, vzďaľovanie, aby som ho mohla „preložiť".
: stopa, hľadanie stopy: vtáčie volanie, písmená v prúdiacej vode, pokoj, znepokojujúca prudkosť a agresivita cudzích myšlienok, nepriateľských slov: byť lenivo zbabelá, vzdať sa lebo to akosi ohrozuje moje slová.
: s ľahkosťou akoby dych bol neúnavnou narastajúcou pravdou, nepresné tušenia slov, ktoré sa naraz v záhyboch reči objavia, vejárovité rozrastanie významov, nahota jediného slova vytiahnutého z ničoty
(Haugová 1994, 193)
If not stated otherwise, all translations are by the author.

conferences.[2] Few of these, however, have endeavoured close readings. Loosely inspired by the applications of psychoanalysis in translation studies, this article looks at James Sutherland-Smith's translation of the poetry of Mila Haugová – one of the leading Slovak poets. Since her writing deals with female identities, the translation conducted by a male translator also provides fruitful ground for the investigation into the question of whether the gender of the author and translator has bearing on the target text. As it turns out, in this case, it does.

1. Introduction

Following the fall of the Iron Curtain, the Western world showed an increased interest in the culture of the nations formerly belonging to the Soviet bloc. Literature was perceived as one of the possible mediators of histories, values and worldviews which were previously more imagined than really known by the global Anglophone infosphere. This curiosity was still connected with the ethos ascribed to the Eastern writer who had, especially during the 1950s-1970s, been seen as a politically engaged subject struggling against totalitarian oppression (Jones 2018, 316). The interest also stretched to poetry, although verse is – from the point of view of audience size – a marginal genre.

An example of the post-1989 initiatives in this respect in the UK was a series of anthologies of translated poetry published in the 1990s by Forest Books run by Brenda Walker. The series included selections of writing by authors of the younger generation from Romania, Bulgaria, Poland and German-speaking countries.[3] The publisher also planned to put out an anthology of Czechoslovak poetry. However, due to political changes taking place in Czechoslovakia, the anthology was not published.[4] The political circumstances Slovakia found itself in between 1992 and 1997 were the underlying factors which prevented it from effectively exporting

[2] These include Adamová (2011, 2012), Pánisová (2014, 2015, 2019), Hostová (2015). In November 2019, Julia Sherwood initiated a conference on Slovak literature and its translation into English. The conference Raising the Velvet Curtain: Slovak literature since 1989 was organised by UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies and held in London.

[3] These included *Young Poets of a New Romania* (1990), *Young Poets of a New Bulgaria* (1990), *Young Poets of a New Poland* (1993), and *Young Poets of Germany* (1996).

[4] "Originally *Not Waiting for Miracles* [anthology of Slovak poetry in English translation published in 1993] was going to come out with Brenda Walker 's Forest Books and all the poets had been translated. She then wrote to me abandoning the project at the time of the Czech and Slovak split on the advice, so she wrote, of Professor Susan Bassnett. Peter Milčák [the owner of the publishing house Modrý Peter] came to the rescue of the project." Email correspondence with James Sutherland-Smith from 17th October 2019.

cultural commodities including poetry. It was only after the fall of Mečiarism – a regime verging on totalitarian – and the start of EU accession talks that the UK publishing sphere opened to Slovak poetry – long after the novelty of post-socialist cultures had waned. In this article, I would like to concentrate on translations published in the UK since British and Irish publishers have made more significant efforts in putting out single-author volumes of translations of living Slovak writers than the presses in the USA who have mostly published anthologies of various scope. The fact that UK-based publishers have been interested in individual Slovak poets indicates an attempt at a deeper understanding of Slovak literature. This in turn justifies the close reading approach (as opposed to a more sociological one) taken in this article.

Despite this late start, however, currently there are several volumes of Slovak poetry in English translation that were published in UK-based presses accessible to the global reader. Recently, there has also been a surge in research and translational and promotional activities connecting Slovak and British cultural spaces in general.[5] Not much attention has, however, been devoted to more in-depth comparative textual analyses of the existing translations. In this article, I would like to provide one such analysis, partly inspired by psychoanalytical approaches as applied in translation studies (Venuti 2013, Serrano Tristán 2014), I will focus on a few English renditions of the poetry of Mila Haugová, one of Slovakia's most respected and translated poets.

Haugová made her debut in 1980 and has been a key figure in the Slovak literary field since the early 1990s. The first English translations of her poetry came out in a Slovak publishing house a few years after the Velvet Revolution. These were done by James Sutherland-Smith, a British expatriate poet living in Slovakia, who has been active in Slovak-to-English verse translation for nearly three decades now and who consistently devotes his time to translating Haugová's oeuvre. The greatest achievements in this respect are his two translations of selections from her work published by Arc; *Scent of the Unseen* (2003) and *Eternal Traffic* (2020). Both volumes are bilingual and came out as part of Arc's "Visible Poets" and "Translation" series respectively. In both cases, Sutherland-Smith worked with the philological support of a native speaker of Slovak – in *Scent of the Unseen*, he was aided by his wife Viera Sutherland-Smith and *Eternal Traffic* lists his daughter Katarína Šoltis Smith as the co-translator.[6] Both renditions, although separated by a time period of more than fifteen years, employ basically the same strategy – they closely observe the source text's morphological, syntactical and formal

[5] To a great extent, owing to the activities of Julia Sherwood, a prominent contemporary translator of Slovak fiction into English who has put significant effort into promoting Slovak literature on various platforms.

[6] *The Scent of the Unseen*, however, also contains poems that were published in the anthology *Not Waiting for Miracles* (1993). These he co-translated with Štefánia Allen who is uncredited in *The Scent of the Unseen*.

characteristics and attempt at bringing similar stylistic properties into the English version as well. The translator formulated this strategy in the beginning of his translating career in these words:

> I have not attempted to create original poems out of the rough translations, determined by my own poetic personality. […] I have attempted to produce versions which try to give an impression of the original in terms of meaning and form. (Sutherland-Smith 1993, 6)

This approach results in texts that follow the original's word order and line breaks and are sensitive to the stylistic colouring of the lexemes – a thing which the translator consults with the poet herself. The strategy does bring unusual wording and other foreignising effects into the target text and as such reflects the strategy defended by Antoine Berman (2012, 252), that is, an approach that does not simply retell the semantics of the source text, but dwells on its the form of the source text as well:

> Labor on the letter in translation is more originary than restitution of meaning. It is through this labor that translation, on the one hand, restores the particular signifying process of works (which is more than their meaning) and, on the other hand, transforms the translating language.

The conditions in which Sutherland-Smith's translations were created included access to the philological support of a native speaker of Slovak, cooperation with a renowned publishing house, the translator's own vast experience, involvement of a poet-translator, contact with the author – all this combined with a strategy of close rendering. Nevertheless, despite meeting all these prerequisites, Haugová's writing style posed such obstacles to interpretation that the renderings still deform the image of the source text to a considerable degree, numerously introducing what Anton Popovič (1975, 282) termed as negative shifts into the target text.[7]

Even so, it is not my intention to collapse the translation into the original or point to semantic discrepancies only to have them listed. Instead, I would like to approach the volatile ecosystem of the echoing texts – be these generally categorised as originals, translations, back-translations, appropriations or deformations – as a mesh that, through multiple reverberations, offers a rare opportunity to glimpse the inconsolable tensions and intimate and crooked connections between languages that form and limit our imprecise and always already predefined, yet eternally shifting, worldviews. I will only discuss a few textual fragments appearing in the translations of two poems, but in speaking about the translation of the two poems, I will also speak about

[7] A negative shift as an error in translation caused by incorrect interpretation of the source text.

more than two – I will speak about versions of the Slovak poems, about their English translations and about poems by Jorge Luis Borges and Sylvia Plath and their Slovak variations. Through these, I will try to show how resistance and subjugation of textual elements in the encounter with the other (the reading and translating subject, language, poetic tradition) results in inspiring contaminations pointing to the richness and irreconcilable difference that makes up textual universes.

The poems on which I chose to focus were selected after a thorough comparative reading of both selections. I picked the poem "Tesná maska" – "Tight mask" and "Priesvitnosť" – "Translucency" because they (1) have several Slovak versions ("Tight mask"), (2) bear explicit traces of this poetry's dialogue with the texts of others (both poems), and (3) deal with female identity (both poems). As such, they offer fruitful ground for the study of the phenomena I would like to address in the following, namely the irreducible intertextuality of any text (translated or not) and the complexity of the mechanisms (conscious or not) which carry textual fragments from one verbal unit to another and which can be seen as traces the authorial and translational agents leave on the verbal product.

2. Translation slips and remainders

One of the techniques Haugová employs in her poetry is the decomposition of the word which signals emotionally marked, broken speech and points to a site of a wordplay. This device opens in the text spaces into which the reading subjects are able to semiotically insert themselves and, as such, also makes the text more vulnerable to misreadings. The translator, in his attempt to convey as much of the source text in his translation as possible, did his best not to neglect these and treated the mutilated words as places of semantic layering and ambiguation. However, he was not able to avoid slips in translation. One of these can be found in the poem "Tight mask" from Haugová's sixth poetry collection *Nostalgia* (1993, 49). The translation was included in the first selection Sutherland-Smith translated for Arc, *Scent of the Unseen*:

> *pomaly sa spúšťajúca kotva... dievčatá sa ústami ne-*
> *ustále dotýkajú smrti, starého rímskeho skla... pravidelne*
>
> (Haugová 1993, 49)
>
> *[the slowly dropping anchor… girls with their mouths un-*
> *ceasingly touch death, old Roman glass… regularly]*
>
> *slowly dropping anchor… with their lips girls un-*
> *steadily touch death, old Roman glass… regularly*
>
> (Haugová 2003, 21)

The separation of the negative morpheme "*ne-*" from the word *neustále* – "ceaselessly/unceasingly" pushes the fragment "*-ustále*" into the line below it. The orphaned leftover part of the lexeme, regardless of its exact morphological composition is, from the point of view of common reception, a deformation of the word *stále* – "always". The "*u*" at the beginning of the cluster enables it to resonate more pronouncedly with the preceding "*ústami*" – "with their mouths" and intensifies the persistency coded in the word chain and the sensory experience it introduces. The translator's misreading springs from the similarity of the word "*neustále*" with *nestále* – "unstable/volatile" – the excess "*u*" at the beginning of the cluster as an asemantic element got skipped.

Such shifts, when produced by experienced translators, have been interpreted from the psychoanalytical point of view. In his survey of literature on how translation studies has employed psychoanalytical concepts in its methodology, Meritxell Serrano Tristán (2014) provides, among other things, an overview of its applications not accessible in the English language. The complexity of origins of any text (translation or not) have been succinctly formulated by Amalia Monroy Rodríguez in her *El saber del traductor* (1999): "[t]he messages we write or speak do not originate from a stable source—the source text—but emerge from a combination of the signifiers that represent us, and the signifiers of the languages we are working with" (ibid., 71). In this light, the slip in the quoted passage is a result of the make-up of the text worked on and the make-up of the translating subject as a node of signifiers acquired during his personal trajectory. From the technical point of view, Sutherland-Smith's misreading can be interpreted as a simple moto-sensorial error – as different from an error caused by unconscious motivations. However, as Serrano Tristán (ibid., 74) asserts, "moto-sensorial errors are never void of (potential) meaning" in the sense that the way we err – in misreading or mistranslation – points to the meaning desired by the recipient.

While Serrano Tristán is of the opinion that such lapses can only be understood through individual analysis, Lawrence Venuti (2013) does not deem this inevitable – his "hermeneutic move fixes the meaning of the translation slip as if the critic had access to the translator's dynamic history and psychic life" (Serrano Tristán 2014, 76). While Serrano Tristán views this approach as less thoroughly grounded, Venuti's interpretations nevertheless come across as valid. Inspired by Jean-Jacques Lecercle's work, he introduces the concept of the remainder into translation studies: "In translation […] a remainder may be unconscious on the translator's part, but highly significant in relation to the source text and the receiving culture. For example, a translator can unwittingly misconstrue a source text lexical item or syntactical construction, and the error may reverberate with meanings that amount to a repressed interpretation of the source text." (Venuti 2013, 38). The definition of the remainder in translation Venuti offers limits itself to "linguistic forms and textual effects that simultaneously vary both the current standard dialect of the translating

language and the formal and semantic dimensions of the source text" (ibid., 37). However, the examples he analyses are looser with respect to deviating the norms of the receiving language. Remainder in translation then is more generally a misreading and subsequent mistranslation that can be interpreted as the manifestation of the translator's repressed desire for a certain meaning. This is the scope of the concept with which this article will work.

A mistranslation in this view can stop serving as a simple accusation of the translator's impotence and become a departure point for interpretation. The semantics released in this act marks the text with a sign indelibly inscribed with a fault, deeply injured by the memory of the gap between the inaccessible "thing" what was supposed to be contained in the text and the text itself. A shift then becomes a focal point where the agencies and meshes of embodied languages actively meet and are fused in fluid conversation. Translation slips as places where tensions, crevices, fear, violence, tradition, ideologies, linguistic memory meet are traces of "the unconscious [that] might operate somehow in the translator's choices and be visible in the translated text, available for reconstruction" and "signs of an unconscious motivation" (ibid., 33).

The slip introduced by James Sutherland-Smith into his version of "Tight mask" gives a glimpse into the translator's conception of the qualities the textual personas should be invested with when coming into close contact with death. In the translation, the girls do not touch death *un- / ceasingly*, as the Slovak source text suggests, but "*un- / steadily*", i.e. hesitantly, insecurely. Attributes ascribed to females in Haugová's poetry include such characteristics as endurance or (more passive than active) inner strength – qualities which are accentuated by the adverb she used in the quoted passage. Following Venuti's theorisation of mistranslations as remainders of unconscious desires (ibid., 39), Sutherland-Smith's version can be understood as a representation of the translator's own understanding of female identities, which is more traditional and conventional in its nature (girls and women invested with fragility or inconstancy rather than with stability and fearlessness).

At the same time, translation puts more interpretational gravity on the motive of death and the reverence of it than on the qualities of the female protagonists. The hierarchy the English text introduces foregrounds the sacred unknowable of the demise and of what lies beyond its liminal space. The activity of the personas is secondary – they are clearly profane, worldly subjects submitting themselves in awe to the immensity of the untranslatable of the death they encounter. Contrary to this, Haugová's writing, while equally increasingly interested in the spiritual, addresses the transitional experience of becoming a woman with similar intensity. The intimate sensory (tactile and potentially gustatory) contact pre-adult females have with death then points to the liminal experience of coming of age: the lines that follow the passage say that "*pravidelne / im na stehnách tmavne prvá krv...*" (Haugová 1993, 49) "*regularly / first blood darkens on their thighs…*" (Haugová 2003, 21). The source text further

develops the motive of death understood more metaphorically than literally. The two liminal experiences permeate each other, the girls' changing into women acquires the properties of the death of an identity and demise gains the quality of being able to be approached in this intimate and unique way only by the female subjects in a transitional state.

3. Radical intra- and intertextuality

Another device Haugová employs to increase the text's interpretative instability is her way of carrying motives from poem to poem, from book to book, from language to language. Through repetition with variation, constant reworking, revisiting of earlier textual fragments, her writing also communicates with its older layers. Hers is a poetry deeply immersed in intra- and intertextual references, both explicit and implicit. Half-forgotten memories of the voices of others and of her own come together and weave a dense polyphonous web with single poems serving as nodes always vulnerable to centripetal and centrifugal forces acting upon them. The poem "Tight mask" also illustrates this living, moving character of her writing very well. In 1989, Haugová published two different but interrelated texts bearing the same title. A textual variant of the first of these (1989a) later appeared in her fourth collection of poems *Čisté dni* – Pure days (1990) and the other one (1989b) became part of her *Nostalgia* (1993). The poem translated by Sutherland-Smith (2003) is the English rendition of the 1993 version. The only direct textual reference connecting all four of them – beside the title – is located in the motive of lovers resembling each other in sleep and in death:

> *V smrti sa ti podobám, v spánku.*
> [In death I resemble you, in sleep.]
>
> (Haugová 1989a, 21)

> *v smrti sa ti podobám, v spánku:*
> [in death I resemble you, in sleep:]
>
> (Haugová 1990, 35)

> *Ten, ktorý sa ti v smrti podobá / v spánku.*
> [The one who in death resembles you / in sleep.]
>
> (Haugová 1989b, 52)

> *v smrti / sa podobáte, v spánku...*
> [in death / you resemble each other, in sleep…]
>
> (Haugová 1993, 49)

in death / you resemble yourself, in sleep…

(Haugová 2003, 21)

In succumbing to an alternative interpretation of the passage, the translation releases new meanings. It foregrounds the speaking subject and her reaching of the ultimate level of authenticity, being-in-herself, sameness with herself in letting go of the chaos of sensory inputs and the self-control of consciousness. It also renders the transition of the worldly being of the subject into the afterlife identical with the self before and after crossing the threshold of dream or death – bearing the same appearance before and after the liminal experience, being recognisable in life after life. Contrary to this, the source text speaks about the ultimate experience of erotic love, of lovers becoming one or continuing each other's identity in the transitional state of sleep as the image of death and in death itself. Generally, in this poem, death is a transformative experience, a pulsating transitory point, connected with rebirth or resurrection and more broadly with a radical bodily and spiritual change. It is coded in the image of the movement and erosive work of the sea waters, in the image of the regrowing lizard's tail, in girls' coming of age, menstruation and in orgasm ("*a high tone from the throat of love*", Haugová 2003, 21). The quoted passage in the source poem uses death as a metaphor for the transformative force of erotic love and the translation, on the other hand, shifts the focus towards transcendental and spiritual meanings.

The motive of death as used in the source text – as a means of intensification of a feeling – is something that can rarely be found in Slovak poetry during state socialism apart from the periods of political thaw (the 1960s and the second half of the 1980s). Death as mystical and erotic experience enters Haugová's work through her dealings with the texts of others (Sylvia Plath, Paul Celan, Ingeborg Bachmann, Jorge Luis Borges, etc.) – in translation, reading or reviewing. The two earlier versions of "Tight mask" (1989a, 1990) bear a motto from Borges' poem "Límites" – "Limits". It was published in his *El Hacedor* [The Maker] (1960) and is attributed to the apocryphal Uruguayan poet Julio Platero Haedo. Borges' mystification reverberates with the unclear origin of the Slovak version of the motto. Haugová is not fluent in Spanish and to this day, no Slovak translation of the poem exists (Ďurčová 2015). In the Slovak cultural space of the 20th century, Czech translations often filled such gaps, but the translation of "Limits" only appeared in book form in Czech in 2013, so the two lines Haugová (1989a, 1990) used might be her own retranslations of a German or Hungarian translation.[8] However, it is not the two lines used as the motto that leak into the other variation of "Tight mask", but the last line of the poem – a line which speaks about the unceasing ("*incesante*") work death does on the living:

[8] Email conversation with Mila Haugová from 14th December 2020.

La muerte me desgasta, incesante.
[Death wears me out, incessantly.]
[Smrť ma neustále opotrebúva.][9]

(Borges 1972, 256)

Death invades me, constantly.[10]

(Borges 1972, 257)

The combination of the pulsating persistence and death resonates with the image of the girls incessantly touching death with their mouths in the lines quoted earlier. In this context, the shift introduced by Sutherland-Smith serves as a kind of corrective mirror for Haugová's Borgesian inspiration. While her appropriation of the motive of the unceasing touch with death can be considered a feminist and psychoanalytical reading of Borges, Sutherland-Smith's English version restores the hierarchies and reinstates the supremacy of death, suppressing the bodily and stressing the spiritual.

4. Translation – back-translation – retranslation

All of Haugová's poetry is marked by the voices of others, be these explicit, present in imprecise echoes or in absence. Haugová translated Plath in the 1980s and this experience had a profound effect on her writing – corpus analysis of the changes in word frequency gives empirical evidence of this (Hostová 2013). Similarly to the motive of death used as exalted intensification of the experience of life and its transformations, open sexuality and bodily eros was not commonly tolerated in pre-1989 Slovak literature.

One of the reverberations that seeped into Haugová's poetry from intimate dealings with Plath's writing was the increased use of the lexeme *lono* which Haugová used as the Slovak equivalent of Plath's *womb* (ibid., 34). Slovak *lono* refers to (1) the front part of the lower trunk and thighs, (2) outer reproductive organs of a female (poetic), (3) inner reproductive organs of a female (poetic) and, metonymically, to (4) a protective inner part of something. The English lexeme, on the other hand, does not possess meanings (1) and (2), but is similarly poetically charged. Both words are connected with female fertility. Owing to the realised translational choice, Plath's poems gain extra sensual and sexual connotations in translation while losing some of the accent on the reproductive function of sexual organs. This shift does not only point to the incommensurability of the linguistic handling of the female genitalia in the two languages, but is also in accordance with the model of womanhood

[9] I would like to thank Barbara Sigmundová for her help with the literal Slovak translation.
[10] Translated into English as "Limits (Or Good-byes)" by Alan Dugan.

in Haugová's own poetry. When it comes to the social and biological functions of women as mothers, female personas are much more liberated in Haugová than in Plath. In his translations of Haugová, Sutherland-Smith almost without exception opted for "lap" when confronted with *lono* and only used "womb" once in *The Scent of the Unseen* – in the context that is explicitly an "inside" and speaking about fertility: "*pohyb plodu v lone*" (Haugová 1991, 23) – "*the stirring of the fruit of the womb*" (Haugová 2003, 55). Otherwise, the translations use "lap" – a word not only downplaying erotic connotations of the source text, but also the marking of gender identity as such. An example of this handling can also be found in "Tight mask" that was analysed above:

> *…pobrežie, rozdrobený múr,*
> *smaragdová koža mŕtvej jašterice, šperk vo vlhkom*
> *piesku mora... kvet nikoho... lono napoly spiace...*
>
> (Haugová 1993, 49)

> *… shore, a crumbled wall,*
> *the emerald skin of a dead lizard, a jewel in the damp*
> *sea sand… flower of no-one… a lap half-asleep…*
>
> (Haugová 2003, 21)

In such cases, the translation is, compared to the Slovak text, markedly chastised: not only the choosing of "lap" as the equivalent for *lono* removes the rich connotations of sexuality and fertility from the text, but so does the choice of adjective "damp" as the translation of *vlhký* in the description of the qualities of sand. Besides other symbolic meanings, the sea is also a place of birth – in creation myths, in the evolution of humankind, as well as in art and literature and the adjective *vlhký* – similarly to "wet" in English (but not "damp") – in Slovak does bear sexual connotations. The female identity the source poem repeatedly projects through her sexuality is markedly less libidinal in English. A possible explanation might lie with the fact that it was a heterosexual man handling a heterosexual woman's text. The more timid portrayal of sexuality would spring from internalised social conventions of male-female professional communication and from the fact that open female sexuality is still considered a taboo and might have been suppressed in the translation so that the text is deemed appropriate. The male translator thus might have subconsciously felt compelled to censor some parts of the text or elevate them in tone. This chain of inevitable mistranslations reveals an interstitial space through which one can glimpse the intricate web of mis-fitting cultural-linguistic handling of the sexual female body, gender and libido and its richly layered and interwoven romantic, reproductive, protective and maternal implications.

The indelible plurivocity of Haugová's expression carries Plathian (and other) reverberations over long stretches of time. While her renditions of the American poet were conducted in the 1980s, traces of this intimate linguistic contact can be found in poems published several decades later. One such example is the poem "Translucency" from Haugová's 2008 book *Miznutie anjelov* – The Disappearance of Angels.

> ***Tvoja duša čistá kocka ľadu***
> *Tvoja duša čistá kocka ľadu (hudba) nesúlad v odriekaní:*
>
> (Haugová 2008, 59; emphasis in the original)

> *Your soul a pure ice cube*
> *Your soul a pure ice cube (music) dissonance in self-denial:*
>
> (Haugová 2020, 71)

The intertextual reference is coded in the image of the soul likened to an ice cube. It was inspired by a fragment from Plath's "Love letter" written in 1960 and included in her posthumously published collection of "transitional" (Perloff 1984, 10) poems *Crossing the Water* (1971):

> *Now I resemble a sort of god*
> *Floating through the air in my soul-shift*
> *Pure as a pane of ice. It's a gift.*
>
> (Plath 1981, 147)

> *Na akéhosi boha sa teraz podobám,*
> *čo letí vzduchom do vrstiev mojej*
> *duše čistej ako kocka ľadu. Je to dar.*
>
> [A sort of god I now resemble,
> that flies through the air into the layers of my
> soul pure as an ice cube. It is a gift.]
>
> (Plathová 1989, 10)

The first version of Haugová's translation was published in 1985 in *Revue svetovej literatúry* [World literature review] along with seven other Plath poems. Significant in this respect is not only that "Love letter" was one of the first Plath texts the Slovak poet-translator chose to render into Slovak, but also the fact that it was selected despite it not belonging among Plath's most well known and critically acclaimed works. The main reason behind this choice most probably lies in Haugová's inclination: She has consistently investigated the psychological and physical modifications her female speaking subjects and personas undergo under liminal

circumstances (coming of age, confrontation with death, immersion into an intense erotic relationship, aging, etc.).

The fragment that seeps into her later work is based on her Slovak version of Plath's likening of the speaking persona (or her "*soul-shift*") to a "*pane of ice*". In choosing "*čistá ako kocka ľadu*" [pure as an ice cube] to translate Plath's image, Haugová opted for a collocation which introduced a thematic shift in the target text and removed a certain amount of receptive resistance from it. Plath's image indicates a somewhat "see-through," invisible, self-annihilating lyric persona in line with the death/resurrection motives in her later poetry. She almost resembles "[a] good translation [which] is like a pane of glass" (Kratz and Shapiro 1986, 27). The image in the Slovak version suppresses these connotations and gives more materiality, substantiality to the soul and the subject as the gravitational centre of the meanings – which is a position the lyric persona occupies in Haugová's own poetry. Non-linearity created by Sutherland-Smith's back-translation releases a decentring force into the intertextual communication and makes visible the inconsolable gaps between linguistic handlings of female identities by different languages and agents using them.

5. Concluding remarks

In his concluding discussion of the remainder in translation, Lawrence Venuti (2013, 55) poses the question of "whether the gender identity of the source author or the translator has a bearing on the nature and significance of the symptomatic textual features that might occur". The few notes on James Sutherland-Smith's translation of Mila Haugová's poetry brought up by this article suggest that when a heterosexual male translator handles a text written by a heterosexual woman author – and a text intensely dealing with how it feels to be a woman in a certain culture at that – the translation can indeed be marked by the gender of the writing and rewriting subjects. As the analysis has shown, the target text has downplayed the eros and bodily presence of the female subject, restored metaphysical hierarchies disrupted by the feminine/feminist reading of cultural tradition and chastised the text. While the translation still deals with female identities, these become less immersed in their embodied and sexual contexts and more characterised by such stereotypical qualities as hesitance, weakness, fragility, chastity and innocence. Gender and sexual identity that is at the core of Haugová's writing is also less pronounced in the translation which is, owing to such translation choices as rendering the Slovak *lono* as "lap".

The remainder released by Sutherland-Smith's translation points to the internalised societal constraints that control male – female professional communication. Desexualisation of the target text results in the strengthening of the transcendental and spiritual message of Haugová's poetry. Readings as the one presented in this article point to echoes of textual fragments reverberating back and forth through languages and

poetries and to the social and psychological pre-structuration of text-producing agents as structured and structuring nodes of signifiers and sources of textual momentum. In this view, languages and their manifold interactions, point less to the idyllic spaces of the perfect unity of languages as Benjamin (2007, 72) saw them and reveal more the cold Lacanian inhumane character of language, in which "we are all decoders of transmitted messages in a language that is not our own – messages that even when addressed to us are meant for someone else" (Porter 1989, 1077).

This work was supported by the Slovak Research and Development Agency under Grant APVV-18-0043.

References:

Adamová Ľudmila. 2011. Súčasná slovenská literatúra v anglických prekladoch. In: Janecová, Emília and Kráľová, Barbora (eds.). 2011. *Tvorivé prekladateľské reflexie. Umelecký preklad v teórii a praxi EU*, 2011. pp. 69-77.

Adamová Ľudmila. 2012. Perspektívy prekladania slovenskej literatúry do cudzích jazykov. In: Biloveský, Vladimír (ed.). 2012. *Preklad a tlmočenie 10. Nové výzvy, prístupy, priority a perspektívy*. Banská Bystrica: UMB. pp. 135-141.

Benjamin, Walter. 2007. *Illuminations*. Trans by. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books.

Berman, Antoine. 2012. Translation and the trials of the foreign. In: Venuti, Lawrence (ed.). 2012. *The Translation Studies Reader*. London and New York: Routledge. pp. 240-253.

Borges, Jorge Luis.1972. *Selected Poems 1923-1967*, ed. by Norman Thomas di Giovanni. London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press.

Ďurčová, Barbara. 2015. *K špecifikám prekladu prozaických textov Jorgeho Luisa Borgesa do slovenčiny (možnosti a hranice kritiky prekladu)*. Unpublished PhD dissertation. Univerzita Komenského v Bratislave.

Haugová, Mila. 1989a. Tesná maska. In: *Romboid*. 24(3): p. 64.

Haugová, Mila. 1989b. Tesná maska. In: *Slovenské pohľady*. 105(5): p. 52-53.

Haugová, Mila. 1990. *Čisté dni*. Bratislava: Slovenský spisovateľ.

Haugová, Mila. 1991. *Praláska*. Bratislava: Slovenský spisovateľ.

Haugová, Mila. 1993. *Nostalgia*. Bratislava: Slovenský spisovateľ.

Haugová, Mila. 1994. Veľké ospravedlnenie prekladania alebo janieja. In: Huberová, Christine (ed.). 1994. *Záhyby reči. Nová rakúska lyrika*. Bratislava, Logos. pp. 193-195.

Haugová, Mila. 2003. *Scent of the Unseen*. Trans. by James Sutherland-Smith. Todmorden: Arc.

Haugová, Mila. 2008. *Miznutie anjelov*. Bratislava: Slovenský spisovateľ.
Haugová, Mila. 2020. *Eternal Traffic*. Trans. by James Sutherland-Smith. Todmorden: Arc.

Hostová, Ivana. 2013. *Haugovej Plathová, Plathovej Haugová: o prekladoch poézie Sylvie Plathovej*. Prešov: Prešovská univerzita v Prešove.

Hostová, Ivana. 2015. On contemporary Slovak poetry in English translation. In: Gromová, Edita and Kusá, Mária (eds.). 2015. *Preklad a kultúra 5*. Nitra and Bratislava: UKF and Ústav svetovej literatúry SAV. pp. 133-140.

Jones, Francis R. 2018. The politics of literary translation. In Fernández, Fruela and Evans, Jonathan (eds.). 2018. *The Routledge Handbook of Translation and Politics*. Oxon and New York: Routledge. pp. 309-22.

Kratz, Dennis and Shapiro, Norman. 1986. An Interview with Norman Shapiro. In: *Translation Review* 19(1): pp. 27-28.

Pánisová, Ľudmila. 2014. *Slovenská literatúra v anglickom preklade – história a súčasnosť (1832–2013)*. Nitra: UKF.

Pánisová, Ľudmila. 2015. Diachrónna analýza prekladu slovenskej literatúry do cudzích jazykov s primárnym zameraním na angličtinu. In: Gromová, Edita and Kusá, Mária (eds.). 2015. *Preklad a kultúra 5*. Nitra and Bratislava: UKF and Ústav svetovej literatúry SAV. pp. 141-147.

Pánisová, Ľudmila. 2019. Crossing Borders through Translation: On Reception of Slovak Literature in English-Speaking Countries. In: *Scientia et Eruditio* 3: pp. 61-75.

Perloff, Marjorie. 1984. The Two Ariels: The (Re)making Of The Sylvia Plath Canon. In: *The American Poetry Review*. 13(6): pp. 10-18.
Plath, Sylvia. 1981. *The Collected Poems*. Ed. by Ted Hughes. New York: Harper & Row.

Plathová, Sylvia. 1989. *Luna a tis*. Trans. by Mila Haugová. Bratislava: Slovenský spisovateľ.

Popovič, Anton. 1975. *Teória umeleckého prekladu*. Bratislava: Tatran.

Porter, Dennis. 1989. Psychoanalysis and the Task of the Translator. In: *MLN* 104(5): pp. 1066-1084.

Serrano Tristán, Meritxell. 2014. Psychoanalysis and Translation: A Literature Review. In: *Letras*. 2(56): pp. 55-88. https://www.revistas.una.ac.cr/index.php/letras/article/view/8605.

Sutherland-Smith, James. 1993. Translator's preface. In: Milčák, Peter and Hochel, Igor (eds.). 1993. *Not waiting for miracles*. Levoča: Modrý Peter. pp. 6-9.

Venuti, Lawrence. 2013. *Translation Changes Everything*. London and New York: Routledge.