# Translating Ján Uličiansky's Modern Slovak Fairytale (and Musical) *Puss on Skates*

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## Abstract

This article proposes the concept of "ephemeral translations" to refer to unpublished works that are usually invisible in the history of literary translation. It focuses on the author's translations of the award-winning Slovak children's author Ján Uličiansky's *Puss on Skates* (*Kocúr na kolieskových korčuliach*, 2006) in both prose and dramatic form. Most of these translations have not been published, although they represent a five-year collaboration between the author and translator. Such ephemeral versions represent a significant lacuna in translation criticism, particularly in less-commonly spoken languages.

Nearly all critical analyses of literary translation are focused on works that have been released in published form. While this may seem obvious, in the case of less widely spoken languages, there may be an entire corpus of translated works (partial or complete) that were not fortunate enough to find a publisher. For the purpose of this article, they will be referred to as "ephemeral translations," since such texts are at the greatest risk of disappearing from literary history. These may be works that the translator intended to publish but was not able to do so (finding publishers for unknown writers is a vicious circle, particularly in the ultra-competitive English-language sphere.) However, they may also be translations produced for a specific, limited purpose, such as publicity materials for an international book fair or other event. In any case, these versions are mainly for publishing professionals and only available to the public to a very limited extent, or not at all. Generally, these undiscovered works can only be found by luck or chance, through direct contact with the translator.

Globalization has only strengthened the importance of an English translation for the circulation of works to other world languages. For every Karl Ove Knausgård or Elena Ferrante who becomes a breakaway bestseller in translation, there are hundreds of writers whose work appears in English, perhaps even to some critical acclaim, but remains unknown to a general readership. In addition, there are hundreds, possibly thousands of writers who might be esteemed or even acclaimed in their native languages, but are never translated, or to be more precise, are never published in English translation. In some cases, these authors may indeed have been translated, but due to the "ephemeral" nature of these translations, which circulate only from translator to author and perhaps a few other close colleagues, they are unable to achieve their potential connection with world readers.

This marginal existence has a particular resonance in Central and Eastern Europe, where long periods of totalitarian rule led to many works being written "for the drawer," and circulated in self-published samizdat form at best. Since the revolutions of 1989, the official government censorship of the Communist regimes is a thing of the past, but the forces of the free market limit the distribution of literary works in other ways, particularly in the case of smaller national cultures. In the case of Slovak literature, the postmodern novelist Pavel Vilikovský was widely considered the leading post-socialist writer, and was himself an acclaimed translator of Anglophone literature into Slovak, but only two of his novels were published in English, one by an American university press and one by a small British publisher, more than fifteen years apart. Even this limited availability was due not to active interest on the part of publishers but on sustained networking by the translators, myself and Julia Sherwood respectively (on my experience translating his work, see Sabatos 2020.) Nonetheless, he was more widely translated than most of his contemporaries, who have only brief excerpts available in anthologies.

In addition to Vilikovský, I have published translations of other Slovak authors such as Dominik Tatarka, Peter Karpinský, and Svetlana Žuchová; while officially published, the majority of these appeared exclusively online rather than in "hard copy" form, and due to the impermanent nature of the internet they might also be considered "ephemeral" to a certain extent. However, my most extended collaboration with a single author (mostly between 2006 and 2010) has been with one of the leading figures of Slovak children's literature, Ján Uličiansky. Although he is one of the most widely-translated of Slovak children's authors, and his work has appeared in German, Czech, Polish, Slovenian, and Lithuanian, only one of the texts I have translated into English has appeared in book form. In addition to his numerous books for children, Uličiansky is also the author of various stage plays, often based on his own stories, as well as occasional texts for adults. He has worked at both Slovak Radio and Slovak Television and is a professor at Bratislava's Academy of Performing Arts (primarily in the field of puppet theater.) One of my "ephemeral" translations was the script of his earliest and longest-running play, *Tik Tak* (which premiered at the State Puppet Theater of Bratislava in 1978 and ran for over twenty years); my English version *Tic Tok* was inserted as subtitles into a recorded CD-Rom version for foreign drama critics. In another case, I translated both a storybook and its dramatic adaptation: *Kocúr na kolieskových korčuliach* (*Puss on Skates*), which features an updated version of "Puss in Boots" who prefers rollerblades, was written as a series for Slovak Radio in 2006, then performed as a musical for children at the Slovak National Theatre in 2008.

A number of Ján Uličiansky's stories are inspired by (or parodies of) classic works of children's literature, which can sometimes cross borders more easily than writing for adults. Besides the common cultural heritage of European fairytales such as Cinderella and Snow White, English and American classics from *Alice in Wonderland* and *The Wizard of Oz* to *Harry Potter* have captured the imagination of children worldwide, and characters

like Heidi and Pippi Longstocking are better known than any other works of Swiss and Swedish literature. Uličiansky's work fits into this international tradition, with his modernized versions of well-known characters and tales, but his playful yet ironic humor is distinctly contemporary. Although he draws on universal themes of friendship, loneliness and self-discovery, the majority of Ján Uličiansky's stories take place in a recognizably Slovak or Central European setting. An important element in his writing is wordplay: his characters' names are based on such famous figures as the Count of Monte Cristo (*Mentol Krištof*, "Menthol Christopher") or Robinson Crusoe (*Robímsám*, "I'll-Do-It-Myself.") These elements offer a mix of familiarity and freshness to the Slovak reader, but sometimes bring challenges to the translator at the linguistic or cultural level.

The Slovak section of IBBY (the International Board on Books for Young People) selected *Puss on Skates* as the best book of 2006, and also nominated Uličiansky as the Slovak candidate for the international Hans Christian Andersen Award the following year. As was the case with several of his other works, it evolved through various versions across different genres. Its chapters were first broadcast weekly in 2006 as part of Slovak Radio's children's programs, and appeared in book form later that year, whimsically illustrated by Miloš Kopták. Each chapter is based on a classic children's story featuring animal characters: "Kocúr bez čižiem" ("Puss Without Boots," which introduces the title character), "Červená šiltovka" ("Little Red Baseball Cap"), "Bláznivé stretnutie" ("A Curious [literally 'Crazy'] Encounter," from *Alice in Wonderland*), "Martinova zlatá rybka" ("Martin's Golden Fish," from a Czech folktale), "Nová Popoluška" (literally "New Cinderella"), "O zvedavom chlapcovi" ("The Tale of a Curious Boy," from "The Elephant's Child" in Rudyard Kipling's *Just So Stories*), "Z čoho je jelení guláš" ("What Goulash is Made of," from *Bambi*), "Baránok v škatuli" ("Sheep in a Box," from *The Little Prince*), "Ples slobody zvierat" ("The Ball of Animal Freedom," from Aesop's "Ant and the Grasshopper"), "Snivanie o Krajine-nekrajine" ("Dreaming of Neverland," from *Peter Pan*), "The Porcelain Nightingale" (from Andersen), "Smoliarik" ("The Unlucky Boy," from a Czech and Slovak fairytale) and "Martinova archa" ("Martin's Ark.").

The chapters of *Puss on Skates* are only loosely connected due to their origin as separate stories, but they all feature a young boy named Martin Mlynár (whose last name alludes to the "miller's son" in the original "Puss in Boots") and a cat who befriends him and appears at critical moments to help. Of these thirteen episodes, inspired by stories from a wide chronological scope and range of literary traditions, I translated nine (leaving out the two based on lesser-known Czech and Slovak tales, as well as the ones based on Kipling and Aesop.) The Slovak title *Kocúr na kolieskových korčuliach* would be literally translated as "Cat (or tomcat) on Roller Skates" but the shorter version with the old-fashioned "Puss" was essential to keep the title as close to the traditional one as possible. Despite the whimsical presence of a talking cat, Martin's life is that of an ordinary young boy facing the challenges of everyday life, such as his difficult

relationships with his father (actually his stepfather) and with an older boy named Viktor Vlček ("Viki" Wolf) who bullies him for wearing a red cap (an item which today, for American readers at least, would take on a political significance that did not exist when the book was written.)

Generally, the connection between Martin's life and the original stories are in his own imagination (like "Viki" symbolizing the Big Bad Wolf), but in a few cases, his encounter with famous literary creatures is in the form of almost postmodern intertextuality, as when Puss brings Lewis Carroll's White Rabbit to visit Martin:

> Vo dverách zbadal svojho známeho kocúra na kolieskových korčuliach. Nebol však sám. Za chrbtom mu stál králik vo vestičke, z vrecka ktorej mu trčali hodinky s rozbitým skielkom.
> – Čau, tak sme teda tu! Mňau... už poznáš ale môjho kamaráta nie, lebo knihu *Alica v krajine zázrakov* si ešte istotne nečítal.
> Martin sa zatváril previnilo a kocúr pokračoval:
> – Dobre, chápem, teraz nebudeme čítať. Teraz sa budeme starať o králika. A to priam kráľovsky, lebo som mu to sľúbil. Inak vyskočí na zadné – a môžeš si ho hľadať v králičej nore.
>
> (Uličiansky 2006a, 19)

> At the door, he saw his friend Puss on Skates. But he wasn't alone. Behind him stood a rabbit wearing a vest, with a broken pocket watch sticking out of his pocket.
> "Hi, we're here! You already know me, but not my friend, because you surely haven't read *Alice in Wonderland* yet."
> Martin looked guilty and Puss went on:
> "Fine, I understand, we won't read just now. Now we'll look after the Rabbit. And we'll give him the royal treatment, because that's what I promised. Otherwise he'll jump out the back – and you can look for him down the rabbit hole."
>
> (Uličiansky 2006b)

Even this magical encounter, in which Martin starts to prepare a tea party for his new friends, is brought down to earth by the scolding presence of his mother:

> V tom jej manžel zatelefonoval, že cestou zo servisu do neho na križovatke nabúral nejaký blázon a že nech okamžite príde za ním aj s dokladmi od auta, lebo si ich zabudol na chladničke v kuchyni.
>
> BLÁZINEC! (Uličiansky 2006a, 20)

> Just then her husband called to tell her that on his way home from the mechanic's some madman had crashed into him at an intersection, and that she had to come right away with the documents for their car, because he'd forgotten them on top of the refrigerator.
>
> CURIOUSER AND CURIOUSER! (Uličiansky 2006b)

The narrator's exclamation (one of the comical expressions punctuating the text) literally means "What a madhouse!" However, in this case, I chose to include one of Alice's most characteristic phrases from the source text in English, which I used in the chapter title as well ("A Curious Encounter.")

The chapter "What Goulash is Made of" quotes passages from *Bambi*, to heighten Martin's horror when he realizes that his lunch is made of venison, and incurs his stepfather's anger when he refuses to eat it:

> Zadíval sa na hlavu srnca nad kozubom a potichu sa spýtal:
> – Čo je jelení guláš?
> – Nič nie je jelení guláš, ty ho budeš jesť, čo nerozumieš?" – zasmial sa Martinov otec a nalial si ďalší pohárik.
> – Ja som chcel vedieť, že z čoho JE, keď je jelení?
> – Keď je jelení, tak je z jeleňa, ty JELEŇ! – uštedril ujo horár Martinovi ďalšiu frčku do nosa, postavil pred neho tanier s horúcim gulášom a loveckým nožom sa pustil do rezania veľkých kusov chleba.
> Martinovi odrazu vyschlo v krku, zadíval sa na otca a tváril sa ustrašene ako srnček Bambi, keď po prvý krát uvidel človeka – LOVCA.
> *„Tento obličaj má nevýslovnú moc, od ktorej Bambi zmeravel. Je to neznesiteľná trýzeň dívať sa na tento obličaj, ale Bambi stojí tu a uprene naň hľadí...*"
> – No čo zízaš do taniera ako Bimbo, jedz! – prikázal mu otec.
>
> (Uličiansky 2006a, 41-42)

> He looked at the stuffed deer head above the fireplace and asked quietly:
> "What's venison goulash?"
> "It's what you're eating, what's eating you?" Martin's father laughed, pouring himself another shot.
> "I wanted to know what venison is FROM!"
> "Venison is from deer, you little BUCK!" said the forester, giving him another fillip on the nose, putting a hot plate of goulash in front of him, and cutting a big piece of bread with his hunter's knife.

> Martin's heart almost stopped. He looked at his father, and looked as fearful as the little deer Bambi did, the first time he saw a human – the HUNTER.
> *That face has an unspeakable power, which leaves Bambi numb. It is an unbearable torture to look at that face, but Bambi stands here and stares at it. . .*
> "Well, what are you staring at the plate for, Dumbo? Eat!" his father ordered him sternly.
>
> (Uličiansky 2006b)

Martin's stubborn refusal to do what he feels is wrong, yet his fear of being punished, gives a feeling of psychological realism to the scene. Finally, he is rescued by Puss, who jumps up and knocks over his plate. His father's use of the common insult "Dumbo" is also the name of the classic animated film about an elephant, as well as a hidden allusion to the film version of *Bambi* (both were produced by Walt Disney in the early 1940s.)

The original radio series included episodes based on Anderson's "Ugly Duckling," the Brothers Grimm's "Little Donkey," *Winnie the Pooh*, and even *The Wizard of Oz*, which did not appear in the final collection. In the latter episode, "Ako sa hľadá odvaha" ("How to Find Courage,") Martin encounters a lion statue, inspired by a socialist-era monument representing the Czechoslovak state (the lion being a symbol of the Czech Republic) that formerly stood in front of the Slovak National Museum, which has since been moved to the riverside shopping center Eurovea. (Although this episode was not included in the published version, an illustration apparently inspired by it, featuring a lion, was used as the frontispiece of the book.) If we had been able to find an American publisher, I would have recommended including the unpublished chapter, since *The Wizard of Oz* is better-known to young American readers than some of the other stories included. Unfortunately, despite the humor, originality and international relatability of the text, this was not the case, due to the difficulty of convincing American publishers of the value of "small" international literatures.

In 2008, Ján Uličiansky adapted *Puss on Skates* into a musical play which was performed at the National Theater in Bratislava. In contrast to the loose structure of the original book, the play features a more tightly integrated plot in which the episodes have been rearranged to take place on a single day, Martin's birthday (July 7). In the script, each scene is given a title rather than a number: "Potopa v posteli" ("A Flood in Bed"), "Kocúr bez čižiem" ("Puss without Boots"), "Obedový baránok" ("The Little Lamb at Lunch," which is a pun on the phrase "obetný baránok," sacrificial lamb, and also refers to Martin's birthday cake, which resembles a traditional Easter cake), "Popoluško" (a masculine form of the name "Cinderella," for which I borrowed the name of an old Jerry Lewis movie, "Cinderfella"), "Nepodarené origami" ("Unsuccessful Origami"), "Martin záchranár" ("Martin the Lifesaver") and "Nočná dúha" ("The Night Rainbow.") The play

begins as the book ends, with Martin playing Noah's Ark using plastic animal figurines, although in the original story the ark is an ironing board, while on stage it is a cutting board. In this version, most of the characters are given different last names which refer to animals, allowing for additional wordplay, and even the cat is given a name that is intentionally similar to Martin: Markus.

Instead of the Mlynár or Miller family, Martin and his mother have the last name of Baran ("Ram,") which I translated as the more frequently used "Ramsey". In the original book Martin's father is only referred to in passing as his "stepfather" and the fact is not openly discussed (implying that his mother remarried when Martin was very young, although this may also show that the author added new aspects to his characters while the original weekly episodes were being written.) In the dramatic adaptation, his stepfather is not yet married to his mother (which is a key point of the plot) and is called Maco Medvecký (both names meaning "bear,") reflecting his rather intimidating personality but also with a hint of the word "macocha" (stepmother,) which like its English equivalent has a negative connotation lacking in "otčim" (stepfather.) I translated this as "Ted Baer", obviously in reference to "teddy bear" but using a spelling (originally from German) that is more common as a last name in English than "Bear" (of course, in a stage production this distinction would only be visible in the program.).

In the book version, Martin is only vaguely aware of the tensions between his mother and stepfather, and in the last chapter, his grandmother's favorite saying about any problem, "It's the end of the world!" reminds him of what his stepfather shouts at his mother:

> – Medzi nami je definitívny koniec!
> Martin nevedel, čo to presne znamená, ale jeho mama sa vtedy celé tri dni utápala v slzách. Potom sa otec zničoho-nič objavil – a doma bolo všetko v pohode. Nijaký koniec sa nekonal a nad ich rodinou sa znovu klenula dúha normálneho rodinného života. Dúha? Áno, dúha. Presne taká, aká sa zjavila vtedy, keď sa skončila potopa sveta.
>
> (Uličiansky 2006a, 71)

> "This is definitely the end for us!"
> Martin didn't know exactly what that meant, but Mother was drowning in tears for three days. Then Father showed up again as if nothing had happened – and everything at home was fine again. Nothing had ended and the rainbow of ordinary family life arched above their family once again. The rainbow? Yes, the rainbow. Just like the one that had appeared when the Great Flood ended.
>
> (Uličiansky 2006b)

This flood is an allusion to Noah's Ark, the animal theme for the chapter, and a foreshadowing of the final dramatic event of the book, in which the basement of the apartment building is flooded by a broken pipe. Reflecting the differences between a narrative and dramatic version, the stage adaptation features this same scene as a private dialogue between the parents, which ranges from apologetic to bitter and resentful:

> Maco: No tak, myšička...
> Barbara (ironicky): Kocúrik, daj pokoj! [...]
> Maco (pokúša sa ju rozosmiať).
> Barbara: Nerob na mňa opičky, nijako ti to nepomôže.
> Maco (túli sa k nej): Žabka, veď sa vlastne nič nestalo.
> Barbara: Nelíškaj sa, dobre? Povedal si: odchádzam, po mne potopa.
> Maco (naštve sa): Nemusíš to opakovať ako papagáj.
> Barbara (smoklí): Ja, ťava, som sa tri noci utápala v slzách.
> Maco (pokúša sa o vtip): Hádam ovečka, keď si Baranová?
>
> (Uličiansky 2010, 180)

> Ted: Now then, my little mousie...
> Barbara (ironically): Leave me alone, you tomcat! [...]
> Ted (tries to make her laugh)
> Barbara: None of your monkey business, it won't help you at all.
> Ted (cuddling up to her): But my little froggie, nothing happened.
> Barbara: You're crazy like a fox. You said: I'm leaving, and after me, the deluge.
> Ted (gets angry): You don't have to repeat it like a parrot.
> Barbara (sniffles): For three nights I was drowning in tears, I'm such a goose.
> Ted (tries to joke): I'd say a sheep, since you're Mrs. Ramsey?
>
> (Uličiansky 2008)

This sequence of zoological nicknames, while comical on the surface, reveals Uličiansky's perceptive exploration of the genuine pain caused by human relationships. Barbara and Ted's attempt to reconcile after their separation can be best appreciated by an adult audience (although the scene may be amusing to children due to Uličiansky's wordplay). In some cases, these names have the same connotations in English, such as a "parrot" repeating the same phrases, while others are somewhat different: "líškat sa" (which sounds like líška, "fox") means to flatter, while the phase "crazy like a fox" refers to cunning concealed by foolishness. The word "žabka" (froggie), being feminine, is a common affectionate term for girls, whereas in English it sounds merely funny, but is acceptable in the context

of an apologetic lover returning to "make up." However, the feminine "ťava" (camel) which Mrs. Ramsey uses to berate herself implies a foolish woman, whereas in English the animal most suitable for that connotation is goose (also used in this sense in Slovak.)

To expand the presence of female characters on stage, the role of Martin's grandmother, here called Hermína Holubová ("Hermione Pigeon") is considerably larger, serving as a narrator to the dramatic developments, and an entirely new character appears, an adventurous young girl named Rebeka Rybková (literally "Rebecca Fish," but I translated it as "Fisher," which also sounds more natural in English.) This time, Rebecca is the one who brings Martin his "golden fish", and who brings up the topic of his stepfather:

> Martin: Teda, Rybková, ďakujem! Je krásna. Nechcela si prísť poobede na oslavu?
> Rebeka: Nikto ma nepozval.
> Martin (zahanbene): Nevedel som, či niečo bude.
> Rebeka: Kvôli macochovi?
> Martin: Macochovi?
> Rebeka: On. Medvecký. Tvoja mama mu hovorí macko a moja ho volá, že Martinov maco...ch. Veď nie je tvoj vlastný, či áno?
>
> (Uličiansky 2010, 182)

> Martin: Well, thanks, Becky Fisher! It's beautiful. Would you like to come to my party this afternoon?
> Rebecca: Nobody invited me.
> Martin (embarrassed): I didn't know if there would be anything.
> Rebecca: Because of the Step-Ted?
> Martin: Step-Ted?
> Rebecca: Him. Mr. Baer. Your mom calls him Ted and my mom calls him Martin's Step-Ted. He's not your real dad, right?
>
> (Uličiansky 2008)

This play on words between "macko" (my little bear, as Martin's mother calls Ted) and "macoch" (a neologism created by their neighbor, Rebecca's mother) is not easily replicable in English, which has similar words for stepmother and stepfather, but a specific pun with the name "Ted" can be made using "stepdad."

A similar complication arises soon afterward in the same scene, when Rebecca and Martin discuss their astrological signs. Although some of these, of course, also refer to animals, English uses names of Latin origin whose meaning is not always transparent while Slovak uses the ordinary modern term. Therefore, some extra explanation needs to be included in the translation for context:

Martin (s radosťou sa díva na rybku): Je zlatá. (Hravo.) Rybka od Rybkovej.
Rebeka (usmeje sa): Ja som aj narodila v znamení rýb. Ty si čo?
Martin: Rak.
Rebeka: Fakt? Ryba a rak. To normálne ide spolu, nie?
Martin (zahanbí sa): Ryba a rak? Asi. Neviem.
Rebeka: Myslela som, že budeš baran, keď sa voláš Martin Baran.
Martin (zasmeje sa): Moja mama je v znamení barana. A machoch je STRELEC.
Rebeka: Preto je taký strelený?
Martin: Nie. Preto, že je poľovník.

(Uličiansky 2010, 182)

Martin (looking with pleasure at the fish): She's as lovely as real gold. (Jokingly.) A fish from Becky Fisher.
Rebecca (laughs): And I was born under the sign of Pisces the Fish. What's yours?
Martin: Cancer the Crab.
Rebecca: Really? A fish and a crab. Those two normally go together, don't they?
Martin (embarrassed): A fish and a crab? Maybe. I don't know.
Rebecca: I thought you'd be Aries the Ram, since your name is Martin Ramsey.
Martin (laughing): My mother's sign is the Ram. And Step-Ted's is the Archer.
Rebecca: SAG-ittarius. That's why he makes you sad?
Martin: No. That's why he's a hunter.

(Uličiansky 2008)

The first line shows some cultural differences between English and Slovak: the word "golden" (zlatý/zlatá) is often used as a compliment, especially for young children; in this case, the fish itself is also literally a goldfish and this play on words could only be paraphrased. Martin also refers to Rebecca only by her last name (literally, "a fish from Fish[er]") which is an extremely uncommon usage in English for children today, except perhaps in some British boarding schools. In the manuscript version from which I prepared my translation, Martin says, "A otec je STRELEC" (My *father* is a Sagittarius) rather than using Rebecca's pun on "stepdad" as in the final published version, showing how the characters continued to evolve as the text was prepared for production. Rebecca's friendship with Martin leads to another change from the original story: when she rejects an invitation to the circus

from their nasty neighbor Robbie (originally "Viki") Wolf, he takes revenge on Martin by trapping the cat Markus in a box.

At the end of the book, Martin's neighbor tells him to call the emergency services because the cellar is flooding. After calling the number, he runs downstairs:

> Keď sa vrátil do pivnice, boli tam už nejakí chlapi a šomrali:
> – Praskla celá stupačka!
> Martin nevedel, čo je to stupačka, ale voda v pivnici naozaj povážlivo stúpala. Len-len, že sa mu nenabrala do čižiem. Obraz, ktorý sa mu naskytol, bol naozaj katastrofický! V suteréne medzi pivnicami z drevených latiek bola všade voda.
>
> (Uličiansky 2006a, 74)

> When he went back to the cellar, there were already some men there, who grumbled: "The whole uptake burst!"
> Martin didn't know what an uptake was, but the water was certainly taking up the whole basement. It had almost filled up his boots. The scene that met his eyes was truly catastrophic! Between the wooden partitions of the storage lockers, water was everywhere.
>
> (Uličiansky 2006b)

A similar play on words between "stupačka" (an ascending pipe or uptake) and "stúpať" (to rise, ascend, etc.) occurs in the dramatization, but this time it is used by the cat Markus himself when Martin saves him from the box, where he is in danger of drowning:

> Martin (roztrhne škatuľu): Markus!
> Markus (vyskočí von): Ďakujem!
> Martin (kocúrovi): Utekaj von!
> Markus: Neviem plávať!
> Martin: Máš predsa čižmy!
> Markus: Aha! A čo ty? Nezostávaj v pivnici! Môže prasknúť celá stupačka!
> Martin: Neviem, čo je stupačka. Voda však podozrivo stúpa.
> Markus: Tá hrdzavá rúra! Poď von! Rýchlo!
>
> (Uličiansky 2010, 218)

> Martin (tears the box apart): Markus!
> Markus (jumps out): Thank you!
> Martin (to the cat): Get out of there!
> Markus: I can't swim!
> Martin: But you have boots!

Markus: Aha! And what about you? Don't stay in the cellar! The whole uptake might burst!
Martin: I don't know what an uptake is. But I'll take you up on it.
Markus: That rusty pipe! Get out of here! Quick!

(Uličiansky 2008)

In this case, the pun with "stupačka/stúpa" (pipe/rises) is similar in both Slovak versions, but although I used the word "uptake" in both, I changed the play on words based on the situation. From my perspective, the effort I spent on these "ephemeral" translations (enjoyable as it was) was equal to that I devoted to some of their published counterparts.

Both versions of *Puss on Skates*, needless to say, end happily: Martin rescues Puss/Markus, the cat is allowed to stay with the family, and Martin's stepfather brings him the rollerblades he had been hoping for since the beginning. In the dramatic adaptation, this gift for Martin is accompanied by a gift for his mother, an engagement ring, which gives the adult characters a fairytale conclusion as well. In terms of publication, this happy ending was only partially shared by the translations themselves: from my English version of the book, only the first chapter was printed, in a bilingual English-German brochure distributed to book fairs by the Slovak Literary Information Center, and the English translation of the dramatic adaptation was projected as "supertitles" for a performance of the play with international guests.

In 2009, when Slovakia was the annual guest country at the Bologna Children's Book Fair, Ján Uličiansky's book *Štyria škriatkovia a víla* (*The Four Elves and the Fairy*, 2009) was released simultaneously in the original and in my English translation, in a nearly identical edition illustrated by the noted artist Peter Uchnár. This tale of four brother elves who play a magical music box to change the seasons, their friend Viva the fairy, and the evil tree frog Futura, although partly inspired by Vivaldi's "Four Seasons", was a fully original story with an underlying message about protecting the environment. It remains perhaps my favorite of Uličiansky's books, and my experience translating *Puss on Skates* helped me with similar issues of wordplay and humor in the later story, such as my use of the term "hurdy gurdy" rather than the more ordinary "music box" to represent Uličiansky's playful style. (Uličiansky 2009a, 7) Although *The Four Elves and the Fairy* was displayed at the Slovak stand of the Bologna fair, the publisher never distributed it outside of the Slovak Republic and it has now gone out of print. In such cases, even printed translations end up as "ephemeral" (although I did send one copy to be preserved at the Library of Congress in Washington, which has an extensive but not exhaustive complete collection of Slovak literature.) I also helped to prepare a Turkish translation of *Four Elves* but could not find a publisher there either.

My personal experience with the phenomenon of "ephemeral translations" has convinced me that unpublished works remain a significant

lacuna in translation studies. Due to the obstacles facing smaller languages within current publishing and distribution networks, many completed translations will inevitably remain unpublished for the foreseeable future. Further research may consider the questions of how to find, obtain and preserve such manuscripts. One potential strategy is to build contacts between active translators and researchers in the field of literary translation, although some translators may be understandably unwilling to share work in progress for the purpose of theoretical analysis. Just as the field of translation studies has risen in academic prestige over the past quarter-century, the archives of translators should be valued and documented just like those of authors, even to the point of actively acquiring such papers for repositories such as national and university libraries (although correspondence and draft versions may be more difficult to access in electronic form than in the pre-digital age.) Another option is for research journals to publish issues featuring previously unpublished work in translation with accompanying analysis, an approach already taken by such prestigious periodicals in English as *Translation Review* and *World Literature Today*. This would not only introduce little-known authors to international readers and create a potential readership for further publication of their works, but also serve to document ongoing work in translation that might otherwise disappear.

To conclude on an optimistic note, just as Martin and Puss on Skates became fast friends through their shared escapades, my own translation "adventure," in which I worked closely with Ján Uličiansky, led to my personal friendship with the author and to long-term collaboration on other projects (including in television) which I consider my most rewarding experience in translating Slovak literature. As Puss on Skates/Markus says in his final line (in both the book and stage versions): "Takto si ja predstavujem šťastný koniec!" ["Now that's what I call a happy ending!"] (Uličiansky 2006a 76, 2010 220).

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