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THE ART OF THE ODD: SATIRE, GROTESQUE, AND TRANSLATION IN E.A. POE

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1. Introduction

Satirical expression is considered one of the oldest and most resilient literary categories, present since ancient comedies and philosophical dialogues, all the way to contemporary postmodern practices of parody and irony. Somewhere in between stands Edgar Allan Poe, a visionary writer – a word that, at the very least, is cruelly insufficient for everything that came out of his pen. This versatile innovator in aesthetics, prose, and poetry was not only a great instigator of genres such as horror, science fiction, and mysticism. He also confronted us with another side of his work: satire, the grotesque, and parody.

In addition to being credited as the originator of detective fiction and a master of gothic horror, Poe was also a very skilled satirist. The short story *The Angel of Odd*, published in 1844, is a satirical fantasy in which the main character, a skeptic with a cynical view of life, mocks the belief in "strange accidents" or unusual and random events that seem unreal to him. However, it is his cynicism that attracts the attention of the mysterious "Angel of Odd," a supernatural being who decides to punish him with a series of bizarre and

ridiculous misfortunes. Through incredible and absurd situations, Poe uses humor, irony, and a satirical tone to mock human arrogance, blind trust in rationalism, and skepticism towards the unexplainable. Although he moves away from his familiar dark themes, his distinctive style is not entirely absent, and the story still contains grotesque elements, such as the exaggerated appearance of the Angel and his unusual Germanic speech, further emphasizing the absurdity and reinforcing the satirical criticism.

Poe often employed romantic irony, a mode described by Thompson as the recognition of “the comic, the ironic, and the absurd in an otherwise melancholy and even sinister world” (Thompson, 1973: 20), to subtly undermine characters' beliefs and reveal the unsettling layers beneath their rational pretenses. Unique in his layering, the blend of humor and the grotesque is the greatest evidence of Poe's vast creative range. The story places Poe in the ranks of writers who can easily play with light parody and sharp, grotesque satire. In addition, the absurd tone of the story surprises readers and turns everyday misfortunes into surreal, comic situations, analogous to slapstick, an effect noted by critics when they compare it to silent-film comedies. Even the editor of the *Emporia Gazette* stated in 1911:

“If there is anything in the world more gloomy and heartrending than Poe's tragic tales, it is Poe's humorous work. He hadn't the first qualification of a humorist. There was nothing buoyant or effervescent in his make-up. His 'humorous' stories are such labored things as to make the reader weep. The fact that he constantly uses italics to identify and emphasize his alleged jests is enough for any reasonable man” (Emporia Gazette, 1911).

2. Theoretical Aspects of Satire and Translation

Satire has traditionally been described as a literary form that uses wit, irony, and sarcasm to expose and criticize human folly or malice (Hight, 1962: 14-16). It often seeks to raise awareness and promote social change by highlighting disparities between ideals and reality. Satire can be direct or

indirect, and range from overt criticism to subtle, nuanced mockery, making it a very flexible literary technique. The functions of satire include:

- the use of criticism (especially of society and institutions) to challenge authority and standards (Griffin, 1994),
- the use of humorous tone to promote both entertainment and critical thinking (Hutcheon, 1994),
- and the use of irony and paradox to challenge the beliefs and assumptions of the reader (Wilson & Sperber, 1981).

Satirical humor can range from sharp wordplay and clever quips to slapstick and outright absurdity. Irony is a central satirical device, pointing out contradictions or hypocrisy by creating a gap between what is said and what is meant (Simpson, 2003). Both irony and comedy are tricky to understand and translate because they rely so much on social context, linguistic norms, and shared cultural knowledge. Because of their reliance on linguistic nuance and allusion, translating satire is often considered one of the most difficult projects for translators (Chiaro, 1992). The main challenges include: wordplay, puns, and colloquial idioms that lack direct translation in the target language (Attardo, 2001). For example, if a pun is translated literally, its humorous effect may be lost or altered (Raskin, 1985). The target audience is often unfamiliar with the socio-political realities, historical events, or cultural norms that are often referenced in satirical texts (Diaz-Cintas & Remael, 2007). The reader's reaction will vary depending on whether the translator decides to retain the original references, modify and adapt them to the target language, or add footnotes.

Irony is context-dependent and is often expressed through pragmatic cues, tone, or intonation that are difficult to replicate in writing or in another language (Giora, 1995). Without misleading or offending the intended reader, translators must know how to convey the ironic effect (Caldas-Coulthard, 1995: 230-232). It is crucial, but difficult, to preserve the unique voice and style of the satirist, as irony and comedy are often closely tied to the author's linguistic preferences and culture (Munday, 2016: 87-89). While excessive domestication risks altering the original, literal translations may lose the sarcastic tone (Venuti, 1995: 122-124).

Building on the discussion of irony and satirical humor, which rely heavily on linguistic and cultural cues to create complex effects (Giora, 1995; Caldas-Coulthard, 1995; Munday, 2016; Venuti, 1995), the concept of the

grotesque is also complex and often ambiguous. In the aesthetics of Victor Heiser (*Das Groteske*, 1957), the grotesque represents a clash between the familiar and the unfamiliar, between the normal and the distorted. It is “laughter on the edge of horror”, where the comic and the terrible are not opposed, but coexist in a hybrid expression. Mikhail Bakhtin, on the other hand, sees the grotesque through the concept of carnivalization (Bakhtin, 1965). For him, the grotesque body and the deformed speech form symbolize the folk culture of laughter, which breaks down hierarchies and relativizes absolute truths. In the light of these theories, “The Angel of the Odd” can be read as an example of the grotesque: the angel is neither sublime nor demonic, but a funny-parodic entity speaking in a distorted “Germanized” English. It is this linguistic deviation that creates a comic effect and at the same time introduces a sense of unease and absurdity, and the reader does not know whether to laugh or be afraid.

Some academics have suggested several different approaches to addressing this:

- adaptation or changing linguistic elements and cultural allusions in order to appeal to the intended audience while maintaining the satirical purpose (Baker, 2011: 54-56).
- compensation or compensating for the loss of puns or jokes that are impossible to translate, amusing aspects are added elsewhere in the text (Chiaro, 1992: 41-43).
- paratextual elements or explaining historical or cultural allusions without disrupting the narrative flow through footnotes (Diaz-Cintas & Remael, 2007: 83-85).
- collaborative translation or consulting with someone from that culture or collaborating with a specialist to ensure accurate translation and interpretation (Munday, 2016: 91-93).

3. Practical Approaches to Translating Satire

Translating the story “The Angel of the Odd” into Macedonian, or any story by Poe is a rather difficult task due to his unique expression. In doing so, the main goal was to preserve Poe's specific satirical tone, his irony, and the grotesque. At the same time, it was extremely important to avoid reducing

his original uniqueness. Translating the exaggerated speech and unusual dialect of the Angel is considered one of the greatest challenges. In the original text, his heavy Germanized accent is an essential element that emphasizes the absurd and the grotesque. This speech is constructed through a conscious violation of grammatical norms, violation of syntax, and phonetic transformations, which creates a visual and sound mask of the character: the angel, who should be sublime, is presented as irrational and absurd.

As Mihajlovski points out in his *matrix of translatability*, when translating literary fiction, it is crucial to identify the “*mode of intention*”, that is, the literary quality of the original, and to incorporate it into the target language (Mihajlovski 2006: 74–75). In the case of translating the character of the Angel, this means finding a way to convey the sound, the rhythm, and the absurd, grotesque speech into Macedonian, without diminishing the character’s satirical and ironic function.

The translator, according to Mihajlovski’s model, must first profile the narrator and his discursive position in relation to the story, or in this case, a cynical, self-centered, and satirical narrator, whose voice imbues the entire narrative with irony. Once the tone of the narration is set, the translator must pay close attention to the syntactic structure, diction, and registers used by the characters, particularly those like the Angel, whose speech is deliberately constructed through syntactic distortion and phonetic manipulation.

In this regard, it is Vladimir Cvetkoski (2017, pp. 143–147) who also emphasizes that the matrix of translatability is a model that bridges literary translation theory and practice. Drawing on concepts such as Benjamin’s *mode of intention*, Ibersfeld’s *theory of semiotic performance*, and the *defamiliarization* introduced by the Russian formalists, this model enables the translator to transform these abstract elements into concrete translation strategies. The success of a translation, then, depends not only on fidelity to the original text, but on the translator’s ability to recreate its voice, aesthetic energy, and the effect it produces on the reader. As both Mihajlovski and Cvetkoski argue, it is only in this way that the “echo” of the original can truly resonate within the target language (Mihajlovski, 2006, p. 76; Cvetkoski, 2017, p. 147)

Following this approach, the Macedonian version of this satirical story aimed to find an equivalent that would convey the comicality and paradoxicality of the Angel’s speech, and yet fit into the Macedonian

linguistic framework without confusing the reader, or imposing a weight on the text when reading. The solution was drawn from the character Ula, a German woman speaking broken Macedonian, from the popular Macedonian TV series *Prespav* (Преспав)¹, which I believe completely captures the tone of the original:

... "you mus pe so dronk as de pig, den, for not zee me as I zit
here at your zide." ... (Poe 1884)
*„Ти мора летва пијан, штом не гледа дека јас седи овде до
тебе. (Poe 2025).*

In the original, “mus pe” imitates a Germanized accent, where the English “must be” is pronounced with typical German phonemes. “Dronk” replaces the standard English form “drunk”, creating a comic effect of a phonetic error. The Macedonian translation conveys this uncertainty by replacing the verb form and adding “летва” as a colloquialism, which further emphasizes the absurdity. “Летва пијан” is a metaphorical and colloquial construction that conveys the literal “indecenty”. In this way, the English “as de pig” acquires a localized, similarly humorous connotation. From a syntactic point of view, the violation of the normal word order in the Macedonian translation (“штом не гледа дека јас седи овде до тебе”) imitates a chaotic structure, which makes the speech unpredictable and gives it a tinge of the grotesque. Additionally, the verb “седи” does not agree with the first-person singular subject “јас”; grammatically, it should be “седам”, and the form “не гледа” does not match the second-person singular context, where it should be “гледаш”. These mismatches further enhance the comic and grotesque effect, as the linguistic “errors” mirror the absurdity of the situation and the distorted speech of the character.

... "Elp !""not I. Dare iz te pottle -- elp yourself, und pe
tam'd!"...
*„Јас нема тебе помоџнам. Еве шише – помоџни ти сам, и
тебе нека носи џавол!“*

¹ *Prespav*, produced by OXO, 2016–2024, Macedonian TV series

In the phonetic aspect, the English original uses “elp” instead of “help”, “pottle” instead of “bottle”, creating the effect of a phonetic error that imitates a German accent. The Macedonian translation conveys this “imprecision” with direct constructions and archaic forms („помогни ти сам“, „нека носи ѓавол“). Again, the word order in the Macedonian translation is clearly violated, which imitates the grammatical “indecenty” of the Angel’s speech. In the Macedonian context, “ѓавол” carries a strong folk connotation, which complements the humorous irony of the English original.

...."Te wing !" "vat I pe do mit te wing ? Mein Gott ! do you
take me vor a shicken ?"

„Крилја! Мене крилја? Мајн Гот! Ти мене смета за кокошка?“

“Mein Gott” directly conveys the German phrase with authentic sonority, creating a comic effect of “foreignness.” In the Macedonian translation, the line “Крилја! Мене крилја? Мајн Гот! Ти мене смета за кокошка?” contains both syntactic and idiomatic deviations. Grammatically, the phrase “ти мене смета за кокошка” should be “ти мене ме сметаш за кокошка” to match the second-person singular subject. Additionally, the interjection “Мајн Гот!” is a widely recognized German expression (Mein Gott!) and has been retained in transliteration to preserve its cultural and emotional impact, reflecting the character’s exaggerated surprise in the original text.

These structures not only create the effect of something funny, but also build a visual linguistic mask for the character, i.e. illogical, violent, absurd, which is paradoxical for someone who presents himself as an “angel”. “Linguistic resistance” and the visible intervention of the translator is a necessity when you want to preserve a certain literary effect in the target language (Venuti, 1995). In this case, comic irony arises precisely from this disruption.

Speaking of irony, it often stems from rhythmic contrast, or a lofty sentence culminating in a banal thought. For example:

I made effort to arouse myself by aid of frequent Lafitte, and, all
failing, I betook myself to a stray newspaper in despair.

*„...се обидов да се расїоложам со неколку ѓолиќи оо
виноїо Лафїи, но коѓа ни їоа не їомоѓна, очажно се бев
файил за некој залуїан весник.“*

Here the style is deliberately exaggerated, and the subject of the expression “некој залутан весник/stray newspaper“ is trivial, which creates an intellectualized parody of depression. Poe knows how to use serious discourse to mock that same seriousness, and I tried to convey that strategy in the translation.

Although some of the lines sound archaic or unusual in the original, they are adapted in the translation with modern phraseology for humorous effect. For example, the expression:

*"Go to der teuffel, ten!"
„Еїа, їи оди їо ѓаволиїе їоѓаш!“*

The phrase "Go to der Teuffel, ten!" is a phonetic rendering of a German-accented English phrase, with "Teuffel" standing for the German word "Teufel," which means "devil." Therefore, the phrase means: "Go to the devil, then!" It's a dismissive or angry expression used to tell someone off, similar to saying "Go to Hell!". It maintains the irony, encourages the dynamics and preserves the dramaturgical function of the line.

And finally, the translation of the title “The Angel of the Odd” into Macedonian posed semantic and pragmatic obstacle that highlights a constant challenge in literary translation, especially when it comes to wordplay and double interpretation. The English word „odd“ has a broader semantic spectrum: it simultaneously denotes something strange, bizarre or grotesque, but it also refers to improbability or an improbable case. Poe deliberately played on this duality to satirize the human tendency to reject the irrational and absurd logic of random accidents. However, in Macedonian, there is no single word that preserves both layers of meaning. The translation, “Ангелот на чудното”, highlights the strangeness and absurdity of the angelic figure, but inevitably loses the semantic connection to chance and probability. In the concept of "dynamic equivalence," the translator's goal is to reproduce in the target audience the same effect that the source audience experiences (Nida, 1964). However, when a key word like „odd“ carries two opposing

connotations, maintaining this balance becomes extremely difficult. In this case, the loss of one meaning in favor of another demonstrates a "semantic gap" between the source and target languages, a gap that sometimes requires compensatory strategies elsewhere in the text (Baker, 2011).

Overall, the story is a critique not only of the angel or the accidents, but also of the narrator himself, or drunkard, arrogant, extremely gullible, but also unsuccessful in all attempts to oppose the "strange accidents". Here irony is "an ethical strategy for introducing doubt into authority, even the authority of the narrator himself" (Hutcheon, 1994).

4. Conclusion

The irony of human stupidity is reflected in the humor of this story, but that irony, when translated, can easily be distorted and warped. As someone who reads Poe a lot, I have come to understand that with him, translation is never simply "transferring meaning from point A to point B," but rather what I call linguistic, cultural, and rhetorical acrobatics, because there is always something secret, something hidden in certain sentences. The greatest challenge lay in finding a tone both sufficiently strange, humorous, and comprehensible in Macedonian. And it is not only the angel who deserves analysis, but also the narrator, who is a tragicomic caricature of a rationalist. His unsuccessful battle against fate is a satirical opera in three acts: drunkenness, humiliation, and drunkenness again.

Here's an interesting fact: the word "Cocaigne" in the original text, besides being a humorous name for London, is a strange choice because it also refers to a mythical land of abundance and laziness, where cheese just falls from the sky and geese bake and serve themselves. This allusion is yet another proof that Poe, besides being terribly grotesque, is just as good at satire.

Speaking of the translation, the balance between faithfulness to the original and adaptation of the text to Macedonian served as a guide throughout the entire process, as well as the importance of the matrix of translatability. Given how little is known about Poe's satire in Macedonia, capturing that humor for Macedonian readers was the goal. It is essential for the translator to discern when to employ colloquial or vulgar expressions,

when to create neologisms that do not exist in the target language, and, through this process, one may ultimately conclude that Poe's work is not as uniformly dark as commonly perceived.

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Мила Димишковска

УМЕТНОСТА НА ЧУДНОТО: САТИРАТА, ГРОТЕСКАТА И ПРЕВОДОТ КАЈ Е. А. ПО

Резиме

Овој труд ги открива предизвиците и стратегиите за преведување на сатирата на Едгар Алан По во кратката приказна „Ангелот на необичното“ на македонски јазик. Иако По е обично познат по своите темни, готски приказни, овде неговата употреба на сатира, иронија и гротеска открива многу поинаква страна од неговото дело. Трудот ги испитува јазичните пречки како што се играње зборови, фонетски отстапувања, искривена синтакса и идиоматски изрази што се јавуваат при обидот да се преведат хуморот и гротескните елементи на друг јазик. Црпејќи од теориите за сатира, превод и гротеска и користејќи го концептот на матрицата на преводливост (Михајловски, 2006), истражуваме како преведувачот се справува со семантичките празнини и фонетскиот хумор со цел да ги зачува комичните и ироничните ефекти на По вткаени во приказната. Преку примери од македонскиот превод, трудот ги истакнува практичните стратегии за преведување на сатира и покажува како интерпретативните избори ја обликуваат конечната верзија на преводот.

Клучни зборови: сатира, превод, кратка приказна, Едгар Алан По, иронија, сарказам, лингвистичка игра, културни референци, предизвици за превод, адаптација на текст, хумор, матрица на преводливост.