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Built upon His Rock

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Built upon His Rock

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Szerkesztette
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Transnational Scissors-and-Paste Journalism

Victorian Women Writers in the Hungarian *Szépirodalmi Figyelő*

The Hungarian *Szépirodalmi Figyelő* [Literary Observer], a most prestigious journal of literature and literary criticism edited by János Arany, Hungary's national poet, published two articles related to well-known Victorian women writers: Margaret Oliphant and Elizabeth Barrett Browning in 1861. While the first article, a book review titled *The House on the Moor* focused on introducing the main characters of Oliphant's novel without providing much detail about its plot,[1] the second narrative, an obituary titled *Barrett Browning Eliza*, and written on the occasion of the poetess's death on June 29 1861, recounted the most decisive moments of Barrett Browning's life and literary career.[2]

According to the Hungarian journal, the source for both articles was provided by one of the leading weeklies of the Victorian period, the *Athenaeum*. Moreover, a closer inspection of the English and the Hungarian texts reveals that the articles published in the *Szépirodalmi Figyelő* were in fact close translations of the originals printed in the *Athenaeum.*[3] In other words, the editor of the Hungarian journal cut, translated, and then pasted the English articles into his Hungarian magazine.

As a matter of fact, scissors-and-paste journalism was a common feature of nineteenth-century periodical press. The absence of a clear copyright agreement or commitment to authors' rights made for countless similar cases of national and international textual exchange. While scholars have long recognized this phenomenon,[4] investigations have usually focused on textual interchanges and reproductions within the same language communities and ignored the intercultural migration of periodical texts.

Hence, in this article I explore instances of scissors-and-paste journalism and translation in the Hungarian *Szépirodalmi Figyelő* to offer a particular example of the unseen work of editors who circulated and (re)used an impressive body of disparate texts in the

1. "A mocsárszéli ház," [The House on the Moor] *Szépirodalmi Figyelő* [Literary Observer] *1* (1861) 1, 172–173.

2. "Barrett Browning Eliza," [Elizabeth Barrett Browning] *Szépirodalmi Figyelő* [Literary Observer] *1* (1861) 39, 621–622.

3. "The House on the Moor," *Athenaeum*, 1860/1727, 749; "Elizabeth Barrett Browning," *Athenaeum*, 1861/1758, 19–20.

4. Andrew Walker, "The Development of the Provincial Press in England c. 1780–1914," *Journalism Studies 7* (2006) 3, 373–386.; Johan Jarlbrink, "Mobile/sedentary," *Media History 21* (2015) 3, 280–293; Stephen Pigeon, "Steal it, Change it, Print it: Transatlantic Scissors-and-Paste Journalism in the Ladies' Treasury, 1857–1895," *Journal of Victorian Culture 22* (2017) 1, 24–39.

nineteenth century. Although historians of print culture have long detected this journalistic practice in nineteenth-century press, they have generally examined it within particular language communities and described it as a straightforward task of reading, cutting and pasting an old text to make it "new" again. Nevertheless, assessing this phenomenon in a cross-cultural perspective may reveal how texts migrated across national boundaries and how they undertook new functions within changing cultural and national environments. For the editor of the *Szépirodalmi Figyelő* scissors-and-paste journalism, instead of a three-step process of reading, cutting and pasting, became one of cutting, *translating* and pasting.

Beyond demonstrating the international influences that contributed to the Hungarian *Szépirodalmi Figyelő*, this article proposes a methodological contribution as well. It demonstrates how a cross-cultural investigation of scissors-and-paste journalism illuminates an important cultural phenomenon, a phenomenon that text reuse detection, enabled by a vast amount of digitised newspapers and employed to investigate the "culture of reprinting," simply cannot unveil.[5]

Transatlantic history of book and print culture studies have already established that texts tended to migrate in an east to west direction, from Britain to the United States. However, recent findings of similar interest have given much more attention to American content going in the reverse direction.[6] In a similar way, it appears that significantly more texts migrated from Western to Eastern Europe than the other way round. Western European literature has always functioned as a model to be followed for Eastern European literatures, and this was the case regarding nineteenth-century Hungarian literary culture as well.

János Arany, a most prominent figure of Hungarian literary history then and now, launched his journal of literature and criticism titled *Szépirodalmi Figyelő* in November 1860. He endeavoured to establish a genuinely elite magazine of literary criticism, a type of journal that the Hungarian literary market lacked at that moment. Arany aimed to create a journal of literature, criticism and aesthetics similar to the French *Revue des Deux Mondes* and the English *Athenaeum.*

Nevertheless, *Szépirodalmi Figyelő*, lacking a sufficient number of subscribers, proved to be rather short-lived: the last issue of the journal was published in October 1862. But Arany soon reconceptualised some of his editorial principles and started a new magazine

5. Scholars at the College of Computer and Information Science and Department of English at Northeastern University, Boston, USA, have presented efficient algorithms for detecting clusters of reused passages embedded within longer documents in large collections. See a description of their enterprise in: David A. Smith, Ryan Cordell, Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, "Infectious Texts: Modeling Text Reuse in Nineteenth-Century Newspapers," in *2013 IEEE International Conference on Big Data*, IEEE Conference Publications, 2013 (accessed 15.05. 2017).

6. Pigeon, pp. 28–34.

titled *Koszorú* [Garland] in less than three months, in January 1863. He stopped publishing it in June 1865.

The recent critical edition of János Arany's marginalia in the journal *Europa—Chronik der gebildeten Welt* (published in Leipzig) revealed how the German magazine influenced the content published in *Koszorú*. For the original copies of *Europa*, read and annotated by Arany, have fortunately survived among the poet's literary remains. From these copies it has become clear that Arany annotated those articles in the German magazine that were to be translated and transposed into his own journal. The new critical edition clearly identified a total number of 333 articles originating from *Europa* between January 1863 and June 1865. Furthermore, the editor of this impressive volume, Katalin Hász-Fehér deduced that around 700 articles in *Koszorú* were borrowings from foreign magazines.[7] Hence, one can establish that scissors-and-paste journalism distinctly characterizes both Hungarian journals.

Surviving copies of *Europa* also confirm that Arany subscribed to the German magazine during his editorship of the *Koszorú*. Previously, while editing *Szépirodalmi Figyelő*, Arany read several foreign newspapers at the headquarters of the journal *Pesti Napló* [Pest Journal],[8] a leading Hungarian daily of the nineteenth century, whose editorial office regularly collected various foreign periodicals, among them the *Athenaeum*.

Accordingly, the journal *Szépirodalmi Figyelő* occasionally borrowed articles from the London-issued *Athenaeum* as well. For instance, besides the two articles mentioned above, it also published the translation of two other long texts in November 1860 and January 1861. The first article was a translation of a review of the volume titled *Ancient Danish Ballads*,[9] an English translation by R. C. Alexander Prior, which was published in the *Athenaeum* on September 15, 1860.[10] In a similar way, the second article transposed into Hungarian was a review of J. F. Campbell's collection, titled *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*,[11] which appeared in the *Athenaeum* on 24 November 1860.[12] While these articles were rather close translations of the originals, *Szépirodalmi Figyelő* at times also produced brief extracts of longer texts from the English journal. For instance, in May 1861 in its column *Vegyes* [Miscellanea] it published a short summary of a longer

7. Arany János, *Lapszéli jegyzetek. Folyóiratok I.* [Marginalia. Journals I], ed. Hász-Fehér Katalin (Budapest, Universitas, 2016), p. 25.

8. Arany, p. 43.

9. "Régi dán balladák," [Ancient Danish Ballads] *Szépirodalmi Figyelő [Literary Observer] 1* (1860) 2, 23–24; *1* (1860) 3, 40–41.

10. "Ancient Danish Ballads. Translated from the Originals, by R. C. Prior, M. D. 3 vols. (Williams & Norgate.)," *Athenaeum*, 1860/1716, 343–345.

11. "Nyugot-felföldi népmondák (Popular Tales of the West Highlands)," *Szépirodalmi Figyelő [Literary Observer] 1* (1861) 12, 183–185; *1* (1861) 13, 198–200.

12. "Popular Tales of the West Highlands. Orally collected, with a Translation, by J. F. Campbell. 2 vols. (Edinburgh, Edmonston & Douglas; London, Hamilton, Adams & Co.)," *Athenaeum*, 1860/1726, 701–702.

article from the *Athenaeum* under the title *Modern pictures*, a narrative reflecting on the periodization of modern art—a current theme brought to the fore by the occasion of the international exhibition of 1862.[13]

Apart from cutting, translating and pasting the original articles into the Hungarian magazine, the editor of *Szépirodalmi Figyelő* always referred to the source of his articles with short notes or interlinings such as: "Az Athenaeum után" [After the *Athenaeum*]; "…igy nyilatkozik az Athenaeum" […observes the *Athenaeum*]; "az Athenaeum egyik közelebbi czikke az alább olvasható ismertetést hozza" ["a recent issue of the *Athenaeum* published the following review"]. Moreover, the translated texts were generally related to current Hungarian cultural issues as well. For instance, the book reviews considering *Ancient Danish Ballads* and *Popular Tales of the West Highlands* emphasised the importance of folklore collections through foreign examples, a most relevant topic in Hungary in the 1860s.[14]

Similarly, the articles about Victorian women writers touched upon a current Hungarian debate concerning women's writing, suitable professions for women, and finally, their role in contemporary society. Even though János Arany, the editor of *Szépirodalmi Figyelő* had never been a committed supporter of women's writing, he had a keen interest in its development and read up-to-date publications produced by female writers. Hence, he regularly accepted writings from and about Hungarian women in his magazine. Moreover, he often published short news items and longer reviews about foreign women writers.

The truth of the matter is that the most important debate about women's writing in Hungary had just been sparked by an article against female authors, signed by Pál Gyulai,[15] an influential critic of the nineteenth century, in 1858. The debate, a long-drawn-out affair in Hungarian literary life, came to its conclusion precisely in the *Koszorú*, one of János Arany's magazines, in 1863. As a result, articles about Hungarian and foreign women writers were once more topical in Hungary in the second half of the century.

Nonetheless, the editor's choice of publishing a review of Margaret Oliphant's novel *The House on the Moor* seems rather strange. For the review focuses primarily on the characters of the novel, leaving the readers puzzled about its plot, since the Hungarian public presumably could not read the book. In addition, Oliphant's name was fairly

13. "International exhibition of 1862. Points for Consideration. I. Modern Pictures," *Athenaeum*, 1861/1739, 262–263.

14. See Judit Gulyás's detailed comparative analysis of the original and the translation: Gulyás Judit, "Egy skót népmesegyűjtemény magyar recepciója (Arany János: Nyugot-felföldi népmondák)," [The Hungarian reception of a Scottish folktale collection in the 19th century (Popular Tales of the West Highlands)] *Ethnographia 127* (2016) 4, 520–542.

15. Gyulai Pál, "Írónőink," [Our Women Writers] in *Kritikai dolgozatok: 1854–1861* [Criticism, 1854–1861] (Budapest, MTA, 1908), 272–307.

unfamiliar to Hungarian readers, as her writings had not been translated to their language either at that time or later. In contrast, the obituary about Elizabeth Barrett Browning might have been more instructive. Even though her work was also quite unknown for Hungarians, the article translated from the *Athenaeum* offered a complete overview of her life and literary oeuvre, thus conveying a general impression about her.

Oliphant had already been a prolific writer when her novel *The House on the Moor* was published both in London and New York in 1861. The book was written between 1859–1860, and it is often considered to be the novel that marks the chronological end of Oliphant's early period. The plot follows the story of 17-year-old Susan and her brother, the 22-year-old Horace. They both live a lonely life on Lanmoth Moor in Cumbria. The motherless siblings stay with their father, Mr Scarsdale, a bitter, controlling recluse who shows them no love. In spite of the absence of parental affection, Susan remains a sweet-natured girl. Horace, however, expresses bitterness and hatred towards everyone and tries to manipulate others. Susan is attracted to a certain Roger Musgrave, whose godfather has recently died, leaving Roger penniless. Nevertheless, Susan and Horace's Scottish uncle, Colonel Sutherland, arrives for a short visit and offers his help to all three young people. Still, Horace leaves home to work for a dishonest attorney, and later experiments with blackmail. It appears he might get involved in a murder, too.

The review published in the *Athenaeum* focused mainly on the characters of the novel, bringing into the limelight the relationship between father and son. According to the reviewer, the plot of the novel was interesting and as a piece of writing was surely superior to Oliphant's previous attempts. The reviewer also asserted that the "quiet tragic power in the picture of the lonely house, the joyless fireside, the unloving household" were "perfectly lifelike and unexaggerated." The narrative then moved on to praise the great skill of the author in sketching the characters of the novel: "though both father and son are as detestable as they well can be, yet the reader is not allowed to hate either of them; the wrongs and perversity which have driven both wrong are kept fully present to the reader's sympathy. The climax to which evil thoughts, enmities and malice lead a man, is carefully and firmly worked out." According to this interpretation, the daughter's character, in contrast with the misery of her father and brother, suggests "that no outward circumstances can work any real harm to a human being unless he consents to it himself—unless he lets evil and bitter feelings into his own heart." However, as stated in the review, the character of Colonel Sutherland was not "so vigorous in its handling, nor effective in its result." The reviewer thought that the "delicate shading" of the evil-natured men made their character outstanding, a feature that the figure of the Colonel lacked. This analysis concluded that the story of the novel was a "well-compacted, well-managed" one, and encouraged readers to read the novel.[16]

Though published anonymously, the database of the Athenaeum Project hosted by the City University of London reveals that the review was written by Geraldine Jews-

16. "The House on the Moor," *Athenaeum*, 1860/1727, 749.

bury, a regular contributor to the *Athenaeum.*[17] Jewsbury, herself a novelist and a book reviewer as well, wrote extensively for the magazine. She is believed to have reviewed over 2300 books for the journal between 1849 and 1880.[18] In 1854 she was frequently allotted the entire "New Novels" section, where her review of Oliphant's novel also came out.[19] She was very much a moralising critic and throughout her career placed the art of creating characters above the skill to invent a good plot.[20] Furthermore, her chief criterion of aesthetic judgement was the ability of the characters to distinguish right from wrong, a prevailing aspect in her review about *The House on the Moor*, too.

As to the other text published on 6 July 1861, the obituary about Elizabeth Barrett Browning begins by praising her as "the greatest of English poetesses of any time" and, in defence of women writers, claiming at the same time that "[G]enius has no sex."[21] The narrative then moves on to trace significant moments of Barrett Browning's life: her descent from a middle-class merchant family, her strict training, first publications and early successes, her delicate health and marriage to the poet Robert Browning, her move to Italy, and finally, her various literary endeavours prior to the publication of *Aurora Leigh.* It was this long poem featuring a female writer, whose spectacular reception, as stated by the *Athenaeum*, "was without precedent in the annals of poetry by women."[22] In addition, regarding Browning's last work, *Poems before Congress*, the author of the obituary claims "that no woman has written anything approaching to them in strength, imagination and versatile knowledge, since women wrote poetry."[23] Eventually, the text concludes by stating that those who had known Elizabeth Barrett Browning would remember her "by her womanly grace and tenderness, yet more than by her extraordinary and courageous genius."[24] Unlike the author of the review of Oliphant's novel, the author of this obituary is still unknown at the moment, as The Athenaeum Project includes only the *Index of Review and Reviewers.*

The Hungarian translations of the above two articles were published in the *Szépirodalmi Figyelő* with a delay of one and a half months and around three weeks, respectively. The interval was probably necessary for their selection and adaptation. The translations closely follow the originals and were most likely the work of János Arany. As a result, the editor's comments are minimal in both texts: in the review about Oliphant's novel, Arany inserted just one short comment in the following sentence at the

17. http://smcse.city.ac.uk/doc/cisr/web/athenaeum/

18. Monica Correa Fryckstedt, "Geraldine Jewsbury's 'Athenaeum' Reviews: A Mirror of Mid-Victorian Attitudes to Fiction," *Victorian Periodicals Review 23* (1990) 1, p. 13.

19. Correa Fryckstedt, p. 15.

20. Correa Fryckstedt, p. 18.

21. "Elizabeth Barrett Browning," p. 19.

22. "Elizabeth Barrett Browning," p. 20.

23. "Elizabeth Barrett Browning," p. 20.

24. "Elizabeth Barrett Browning," p. 20.

beginning of the article: "'The House on the Moor' is superior to Mrs. Oliphant's later works." Arany included a short explanation, "ez a szerző neve" [this is the author's name] in brackets after Mrs. Oliphant's name,[25] a comment that clearly revealed that Margaret Oliphant's name was quite unfamiliar to nineteenth-century Hungarian readers. Furthermore, the Hungarian version omitted one sentence referring to the depiction of the lonely house at the beginning of the article: "It is perfectly life-like and unexaggerated." Similarly, it also ignored one single sentence of little importance in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's obituary, and again closely followed the original.

Both articles were published in the magazine's column titled *Értesitő* [Report], a section that regularly published reviews about Hungarian and foreign publications as well. In view of the Hungarian reception of nineteenth-century British women's writing, these accounts were certainly unique, for, unfortunately, the corpus of British women's writing was seldom translated to Hungarian during the nineteenth century. The proper reception of the most celebrated British women authors, such as Jane Austen and the Brontë sisters, only started in the twentieth century.[26] Moreover, some pieces by Oliphant and Barrett Browning have just lately been translated into Hungarian. Therefore, the relevance of the translated review about Margaret Oliphant's novel and the obituary occasioned by Elizabeth Barrett Browning's passing lies in their particularity and uniqueness. They were presumably among those very few (if not unique) Hungarian texts that introduced two popular women writers of Victorian England to Hungarian readers.

Nonetheless, the scissors-and-paste technique that the editor of *Szépirodalmi Figyelő* practiced, apart from providing material for his journal, also produced 'new' articles with stylistic characteristics peculiar to the Hungarian language and to the editor's own language competence. In addition, his scissors-and-paste journalism of cutting, translating and pasting offers significant data regarding the impact of the *Athenaeum* beyond the English speaking world. Thus, seen in a transnational context, it also contributes to a better understanding of nineteenth-century print culture and the migration of texts across national boundaries.

25. "A mocsárszéli ház (The House on the Moor)," p. 172.

26. For the reception of Jane Austen in Hungary see Nóra Séllei, *Jane Austen: Our Contemporary in Hungary*, in *The Reception of Jane Austen in Europe* eds. Anthony Mandal, Brian Southam (London–New York: Continuum, 2007) 239–256.