

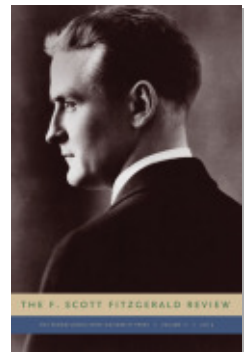


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Hungarian: With a Focus on Metaphors of Emotion and
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The Challenges of Retranslating *The Great Gatsby* into Hungarian

With a Focus on Metaphors of Emotion and Embodiment

Anna Kérchy

The Hungarian Critical Reception of *The Great Gatsby*

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* was first published in Hungarian in 1962 in a collection entitled *Újra Babilonban* (*Babylon Revisited*) that included a selection of short stories. The translation was by Elek Máthé, who had also translated into Hungarian fiction by Hemingway, Harper Lee, and Irving Stone, among others. Máthé's *Gatsby* was republished on its own, in a separate volume, first in 1968 and numerous times afterwards, most recently in 2012, by a smaller Hungarian publisher, Alinea, which primarily specializes in issuing books related to the themes of "Money, Economics, and Business"—a niche that reveals a great deal about the firm's interpretation of the primacy of finance in the novel. Two thousand twelve also saw the long-awaited new translation of *Gatsby* appearing courtesy of perhaps the most prestigious Hungarian publishing house of *belles lettres*, Európa Kiadó. This imprint had been responsible for publishing Máthé's translation of *Gatsby* as a separate novel in 1968. More recently, it had issued a new series of the complete collected and retranslated works of F. Scott Fitzgerald fancily advertised with an art deco design, an independent logo, and huge banners and posters. The translator in charge was the publisher's prominent in-house translator István Bart, who has produced about 80 percent of his literary translations (from Walter Scott to Cormac McCarthy) for Európa Kiadó, and who has excelled in recent years in the praxis, theory, and meta-levels of translation. Bart has also written and edited volumes like an American-to-Hungarian Cross-Cultural Dictionary (followed by French and German equivalents), exercises for students for translation from/into English, essays about contemporary American cultural life, and even a book about the

art of book production. Thanks to Bart and Európa Kiadó, Hungarian admirers of *The Great Gatsby* are now the beneficiaries of a unique situation—extremely rare in their country—of having two translations of the same novel simultaneously available. Usually in Hungary a re-translation appears many years after a previous translation has gone out of print.

Before turning to a comparative analysis of the two translations, I would like to provide a brief historical overview of the changing evaluation of the novel in Hungary. *The Cambridge Companion to F. Scott Fitzgerald* (2002), edited by Ruth Prigozy, traces three major stages in the formation of the popular image of Fitzgerald and his work through the twentieth century. The first stage, of *glamour and genius* associated with the myth of the legendary couple, the beautiful hedonist intellectuals F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald celebrated by the mass media of Roaring Twenties America, is mostly missing from the Hungarian critical reception due to the belated translation of the novel. (The first publication on jazz by Hungarian musicologist Antal Molnár, published in 1928 under the title *Jazz band*, condemned the jazz era and jazz music as destructive of both morals and good taste.)

The first serious Hungarian literary critical reflections on Fitzgerald date from the early 1960s, coinciding with Máthé's translation. They are the products of the gradual advancement of American studies in the Hungarian academy, enabled by prominent figures like László Országh, compiler of the first and still-authoritative English-Hungarian, Hungarian-English dictionary, author of the groundbreaking *Az amerikai irodalom története* (*A History of American Literature* [1967]), and contributor to *Az amerikai irodalom a XX. században* (*American Literature in the 20th Century* [1962]). Both of these books devoted sections to Fitzgerald and *Gatsby*. (In 1978, Országh was appointed by Queen Elizabeth II an Honorary Commander of the British Empire for his promotion of English culture and literature in Hungary.) The analyses of Fitzgerald by Országh and two other Hungarian critics of the era, Miklós Kretzoi and Mihály Sükösd, reflected what *The Cambridge Companion* refers to as the *second* stage of Fitzgerald's critical reputation, one marked by notions of *failure and doom* that dominated American commentary throughout the 1950s and the 1960s. This stage was heavily influenced by the publication of Budd Schulberg's best-selling novel *The Disenchanted* (1950) and Arthur Mizener's scholarly biography *The Far Side of Paradise* (1951), both of which depicted Fitzgerald as an alcoholic who died a has-been and a largely forgotten writer.

The 1960s Hungarian critical reception is replete with gloomy biographical sketches that blame the author's failed life(style) for his failed artistic career.

They also regard Jay Gatsby as an autofictional embodiment of the tragic failure of an American dream that promises financial and professional success. This unanimous view was reflected in Országh's portrayal of Fitzgerald as a careless squanderer burdened by a mentally ill wife, a writer prevented from achieving his full artistic promise by a premature death caused by alcoholism, and a personality hampered by a frail magic that could not shine bright for long ("Bevezetés" 311–12). In Miklós Kretzoi's evocative account, despite being granted a glimpse of glamour, exploring New York with his stunning young wife like naughty kids on the loose in an enchanted city, Fitzgerald was soon forced to turn his fashionable flappers and philosophers into brute capital; he acquired money by writing easy and witty pieces, all the while grinding his teeth with dissatisfaction, and ended up like an aged, disillusioned, old actress who could not leave behind the role of the dancer-soubrette in which she was cast in her youth. Like the actress, he was doomed forever to dance a *danse macabre* on tired, varicose-veined legs, in constant pain and disillusion, behind a mandatory pretended smile (269–70).

The chapter on Fitzgerald by Miklósné Kretzoi in *Az amerikai irodalom a XX. században* (*American Literature in the 20th Century*) begins with a particularly picturesque depiction of the tragic end of the author's life, seeing him as a moral cadaver, an outmoded ghost of times past that people looked through as he stumbled among them with eyes clouded by alcohol and an awkward, apologetic smile on his face. All this time he was polishing with relentless craftsmanship the fragments he wished to fit into the colorful and artistically truthful mosaic he worked on crafting in the final years of his life, *The Last Tycoon* (265). Echoes of this dark authorial image prevailed in some later criticism, too. György Tibor Szántó's "Utószó" ("Afterword") drew a parallel between creator and character, suggesting that the authenticity of Fitzgerald's characterization was because of his similarity to Gatsby. Szántó saw Fitzgerald as the superficial man of the Lost Generation who earned fame through playboy debaucheries, found the great moments of his life in alcoholic delirium, fast cars, luxury shopping, sexual licentiousness, and spendthrift habits, and who smoked despite his weak lungs and drank prodigiously despite what Szántó called his digestive problems. In Szántó's sinister retrospective vision, Fitzgerald smoked endlessly, drank intemperately, and gathered himself together each night with difficulty to go fight at the barricades of local bars and pubs. His oeuvre was discontinuous, disrupted like jazz, and lacked any serious achievement. He only improvised, scribbling many pages of writing, returning to the same topic yet never reaching closure. He lost his compass and could not find his way in the wilderness of

the Jazz Age; he sensed that the inhuman and ruthless twentieth century's only innovation was jazz, but he could never play the music and so just took on its rhythm (208–9).

Hungarian critics' early preoccupation with American studies in the 1960s was regarded as a rebellious, politically suspicious activity by the era's socialist regime. Nevertheless, overtones of the regime's dominant Marxist ideology, constantly critical of capitalist consumer culture, lurk in American studies analyses of this period as they lament Fitzgerald's and Gatsby's failure to integrate properly into the labor market. Accordingly, *The Great Gatsby* was defined as a romance of/with money (Géher, "Egy megszakadt" 82), set in a Roaring Twenties erroneously associated with happiness at a time when the majority of the population struggled with financial difficulties in an unchallengeably frozen, unjust class system in which morals were undermined by corrupting interests in power and wealth (Ország, "Bevezetés" 24). Jay Gatsby is described as born on the wrong side of this divided system, in the shadows of misery instead of the bright side of money (Szántó 208); like Fitzgerald, he is prone to commit the greatest sin of hunting for easy success and illusory happiness instead of hard-earned satisfaction in serious work (Kretzoi 282). This envy of the empty world of millionaires infiltrating Gatsby's (and Fitzgerald's) worldview is only slightly offset by the novel's tenderly ironic recognition of the insupportable but inevitable moral decline in a meaningless era, of the American dream turned into a nightmare and disillusioned awakening (Ország, *Az amerikai* 311), a Quixotic struggle with windmills (Kretzoi 280). Critics agreed on the novel's authentic cultural-historical documentary values but were concerned about its failure to represent the real social issues (Ország, *Az amerikai* 311) that other members of the Lost Generation such as John Dos Passos excelled in problematizing. In Kretzoi's words, Fitzgerald's authorial image could never be canonically embellished into a Saint George fighting the dragon of capital because his aversion to the rich originated from the base envy of the disinherited poor relative and from a stubborn adherence to his artistic freedom and individual dignity (284).

The critical shift in the Hungarian reception of Fitzgerald and *Gatsby* came three decades later with Zsolt Virágos's essay in the seminal collection *Huszonöt fontos angol regény* (*Twenty-five Important Novels in English* [1996]), which was designed for Hungarian students and scholars. The essay celebrated the novel's transcendent-mythical-fairy-tale-like connotations rather than its cultural-historical ones by describing it as the tragic and romantic story of a selfmade man on a spiritual quest for the Holy Grail, the love of a woman unworthy of

him (182). This redefinition of the American dream in terms of romantic idealism gained canonical status via Enikő Bollobás's *Az amerikai irodalom története* (*A History of American Literature* [2005]), the second comprehensive study after Országh's 1967 book. Bollobás's proficiency in gender studies also brought her reading the closest to what is described in *The Cambridge Companion* as the *third* stage of the changing public evaluation of Fitzgerald and his work, which prevailed from the 1970s until today. This was largely inspired by the revisionist legend introduced in Nancy Milford's 1970 feminist biography, *Zelda*: "the American girl living the American dream," a heroine-victim whose creativity was stifled by the patriarchal oppression maddening her and now revindicated by the women's liberation movement and feminist literary criticism. For Bollobás, the flapper embodying the transitoriness of youth is a tragic emblem of the male *Bildungsroman*, fusing the *carpe diem* and the *ars moriendi* traditions. She is the idealized vessel of male ambition—the token of his power and the emblematic subject and bearer of the romantic American dream of the constitutional right to happiness. The conjoined failure of idealism and materialism constitutes a fairy tale gone awry, in which the hand of the princess cannot be won back. Gatsby is the reincarnation of the first settler of the frontier about to conquer the feminized virgin territory of the United States, but he is also a philosophical figure driven by a desire for the totality of being; as a selfmade man, he also reflects the poststructuralist subject's complex identity construction (Bollobás 382–83). Éva Federmayer follows a similar line of thought on associating with Gatsby "power, politics, and heterosexual male desire seemingly sublimated into timeless aesthetic contemplation in a Kantian metaphysics of 'purposiveness without a purpose'" so that "[d]esire becomes so universal that it ceases to be desire" (104).

The tagline advertising the new 2012 Hungarian translation of *Gatsby* by István Bart seems to take up this central theme of impossible romantic love with the lines "Azt mondom, hogy a múltat nem lehet újra élni? Miért ne lehetne?" (144). These can be retranslated as "Do you say that the past cannot be relived? Why can't it?," which sounds a bit more melancholic and tragically foreboding than Gatsby's original, wildly determined cry, "Can't repeat the past? . . . Why of course you can!" (*Gatsby* 70).¹ The immediate contemporary Hungarian critical reception seems to have been highly responsive to the tagline's call by associating the text's meaning with romance, calling it a story about ecstasy and Ash Wednesday (Takács), about mad love and a dream that is too big to become real (Karafiáth), but not about fake-erotic but truly mysterious saxophone music that you can never fully comprehend and never get bored by (Tandori).

The changing meaning of a literary work certainly depends on the social-historical context in which the interpretation takes place, but it is equally influenced by the translation; the latter acts both as a filter and a spotlight for transmitting highlighted original meanings. In Michel Viel's view—summarized in his essay on *Gatsby* in French—translations are microscopes that shed a new light on the original work of fiction. They enable readers to realize details concealed from direct observation in the source-text and make visible formerly invisible parts of the narrative (29). My aim in the following is to examine the visualization of this invisibility in Hungarian literary translations of *Gatsby*, focusing on the most prominent textual occurrences of the unsaid and the unspeakable.

Some Problems of Translating *Gatsby* into Hungarian

As the recently deceased translator, literary historian, and poet István Géher puts it, translators face a doubly impossible, absurd challenge. On the one hand, they must create an ideal text and authorial voice that has never actually existed (a Hungarian *Gatsby*, a Hungarian Fitzgerald). On the other hand, they are also trying to recreate something that already exists (Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*) (*Mesterségünk* 236–37). Because the translator aims to fine tune the original text for another community of readers, Géher and Bart agree that a good way to adapt historically charged, culturally specific expressions, such as slang or colloquialisms, is to make use of the stylistic turns and linguistic registers of the target language's canonized literature that are contemporaneous with the text being translated (Géher, *Mesterségünk* 234; Bart 16). The problem, however, is that these turns and registers do not have one-to-one equivalents. The style of the Roaring Twenties is a specifically American phenomenon, so slippages of meaning necessarily surface in the attempt to domesticate it in a non-American context.

As one example, the simple address “old sport” that *Gatsby* so often uses has different connotations (and thus allows, in the long run, for different textual interpretations) in the two Hungarian translations. The phrase “öreg bajtárs” (50) in Máthé's 1962 translation,² meaning “old comrade” or “old brother-in-arms,” evokes a shared military past and a shared experience of virility, patriotism, tragedy, and triumph as the foundation of a bond between the two men. The word “öregfiú” (64) in Bart's 2012 translation, meaning “old chap” (literally “old boy”), is a less democratic, more intimate, and more patronizing term

of endearment, suggesting how Gatsby gently forces his friendship on Nick. Neither Hungarian expression bears the connotations of upperclass fraternity that the English term does.

Whereas both Hungarian words could have been used in 1920s Hungarian literature and life, “old comrade” sounds archaic today as do many other word choices in the 1962 translation. These include phonetic transcriptions of the English words “löncs” for “lunch” and “nörsz” for “nurse” (123) and the use of words like “daddy” (121) instead of a Hungarian equivalent. The latter did not so much mark the translation’s *foreignization* strategy, defined by Venuti as retaining information from the source text and thereby breaking the conventions of the target language to preserve original meanings (20). Rather, these word choices are discursive indicators of refinement widely used by the Hungarian upper-middle class during the lifetime of translator Elek Máthé, who was born in 1895 and was nearly seventy when he translated *Gatsby*. The respectful, formal form of addressing someone (*önözés*) had a similar status in Máthé’s time and translation, but its transformation into first name interactions in Bart’s modernized text version also affected the meanings of characters’ interpersonal relations. The most frequently emphasized point in connection with the 2012 retranslation of the novel was its satisfying the pressing need for a modernized text to replace the outmoded, obsolete, previous translation. One of the most prominent contemporary specialists in Hungarian literary translation, István Géher, has argued that the warranty period of a translation lasts for about fifty years (“Ujjaim”). This is the exact time span between the two Hungarian translations of *Gatsby*. This brings into focus the dilemma of translation studies. Can the stylishness of a past era be expressed only by means of reference to fashionability standards contemporary with the current readership? And does not the modernization of meanings risk depriving the source text of its historical flavor and authenticity?

Of course, we know that translations are always simultaneously interpretations as well, both reinforcing and reflecting the changing canonical status of a text. The most disturbing mistranslation in Máthé’s 1962 text might have to do with his over-strenuous effort to communicate to the Hungarian audience Gatsby’s disillusion with what Fitzgerald saw as the “meretricious” quality of the American dream. For example, Jay Gatsby’s original introduction of Meyer Wolfshiem to Nick—“he’s a gambler. . . . He’s the man who fixed the World’s Series back in 1919” (*Gatsby* 47)—was translated by Máthé as “tőzsdespekuláns. . . . [Ő] robbantotta ki tizenkilenben a nagy tőzsdekrachot” (76), or roughly, “he’s a stock-exchange stag responsible for sparking the big

stock market crash of 1919.” Máthé probably presumed that Hungarian readers would be more familiar with the serious financial effects of the stock market crash of 1929 than with the American baseball championship a decade earlier in which the Chicago players conspired with gamblers to lose the games. The translator here commits a serious mistake given the fact that the “big stock market crash” took place four years *after* the publication of *Gatsby*, and seven after the events of the novel.

Perhaps the most inevitable loss of meaning comes with historically charged, culturally specific terms—particularly ones related to fashion, style, and slang—which resist translation and can only be conveyed through some inventive and imaginative thinking: “pompadour” (*Gatsby* 60) becomes in the 1968 Máthé translation “felfelé fésült frizura” (“upward coiffure” [97]) and “tüskefrizura” (“spiky hair” [123]) in the Bart 2012 translation to suggest trendiness. “Castle Rackrent” (*Gatsby* 55), an allusion to Maria Edgeworth’s novel of an Irish family’s decline, is simply “élvarázolt kastély” (“an enchanted castle” [112]) in the 2012 Bart translation and more inventively “a kóbor szellemek kastélya” (“the castle of vagrant ghosts” [88]) in the 1968 Máthé translation. Fitzgerald’s “Adam study” (*Gatsby* 59) becomes, in the 2012 translation, “egy klasszikus eleganciával berendezett dolgozószoba” (“a study-room furnished with classical elegance” [120]) and “17. század-beli, angol stílusú fogadószoba” (“a seventeenth century English style reception room” [94]) in the 1968 translation; “moving her hands like Frisco” (*Gatsby* 27) becomes “szólótánc” (“a solo dance” [43]) in the 1968 translation and “kígyózó taglejtésekkel, tánclépésben kiperdül” (“spinning into dance with serpentine moves” [55]) in the 2012 translation. The “gypsies” (*Gatsby* 27) at Gatsby’s parties are referred to with wonderful alliteration as “lidérclángként lebegő leány” (“a girl fluttering as a marsh fire” [43]) in the 1968 translation and as “pillangók” (“butterflies” [a euphemism for prostitutes; 55]) in the 2012 translation; finally, simple phrases like “my girl” (*Gatsby* 17) have slightly different connotations when translated in 1968 as “nőismerősöm” (“my female acquaintance” [26]) or in 2012 as “a barátnőm” (“my girlfriend” [34]).

Translating Fitzgerald’s Metaphors of Emotion and Embodiment into Hungarian

One of the biggest challenges a literary translator faces is the appropriate adaptation of metaphors from one language into another. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s now-classic *Metaphors We Live By* (2003) convincingly

demonstrates that metaphors, besides shaping the way we communicate, also shape the way we think and act. Moreover, metaphors structure our most basic understanding of our experience of being or existing in *culturally specific* ways. They not only reflect but also constitute cultural models and prove to be significant cognitive mechanisms of speakers of that language.

Zoltán Kövecses's 2000 cross-linguistic analysis on metaphors of emotion further complicates our understanding of metaphors as patterns of thought. He argues that metaphorical language, cultural aspects, and human physiology function in an integrated system; since metaphors of emotion arise from recurring embodied experiences grounded in biological-physiological processes of the human body interacting with the external world, there is also a universal aspect to their particularities. The most prominent example is that throughout various languages the global "master metaphor" of the inherently metaphorical notion of emotion is *force*.

This idea is vividly illustrated by the concluding metaphor of *Gatsby* where the poetic trope of a romantic fight to pursue one's dream against all odds and circumstances—reminiscent of Tennyson's Ulysses's adventurous efforts "to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield"—is preserved more or less intact in both the Hungarian translation and retranslation. The original image of the relentless internal struggle encapsulated in Fitzgerald's line as "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past" (*Gatsby* 115) is geographically externalized and expanded—albeit in a somewhat catachrestic manner—onto land and water in Máthé's "Így törjük a csapást, hajtjuk hajónkat előre, szemben az árral, hogy a végén mindig a múltba érkezzünk" ("This is how we force our way onto a path, as we row our boat ahead, always to arrive in the end back in the past" [190]). Similarly, the struggle of progress is emphasized in an intensity that matches the extreme futility of the fight, due to the very elusiveness of dreams and the careless disinterestedness of society, in Bart's "Mi azonban fáradhatatlanul evezünk tovább, szemben az árral, mely szüntelenül visszasodor bennünket a múltba" ("But we keep on rowing tirelessly against the current that sweeps us back ceaselessly into the past" [236]). Inevitably lost in translation, however, are the original's alliteration and the affective charge and corporeal stakes of the forceful effort that takes place through heartbeats by Fitzgerald's use of the verb "beat."

Grasping the universal particularities of metaphors is especially challenging in the case of the translation of literary texts distinguished by poeticity or other forms of linguistic inventiveness that make an author's style unique. The translator must use his "interpretive instinct" to decide whether a metaphor

in a text is: (1) a fixed figure of speech, an idiom easily recognized by all speakers of the language of origin, and one that the translator should find a just as automatically decodable equivalent for in the target language, or (2) a unique product of the author's creative imagination meant to provoke surprise by linguistic inventiveness rather than reassuring with the recognition of familiarity—hence, a figure-of-speech the translator can adapt into another language through relying on the *universal* ground of imagination. In the latter instance, the translator can try to reach an effect similar to that of the original either by (1) inventing metaphors of his own he believes to be more intelligible for the target-language readers, or by (2) mirror-translating the source text in the hope that its invitation to unusual cognitive/emotional/imaginative mechanisms holds the same element of surprise and charm on a transnational level.

The poetic nature of Fitzgerald's prose has always been praised by Hungarian critics; however, no in-depth stylistic analyses followed the brief acknowledgments of his narrative's lyricism (Bollobás 383), his free-flowing poetic style (Országh, *Az amerikai* 312), and the subconscious musicality of his language (Kretzoi 284). Nor has anyone ever questioned the translatability of his figures of speech into Hungarian. Zsolt Virágos even claimed that the language of *The Great Gatsby* was reminiscent of Mark Twain's easy, idiomatic prose and thus was not a particularly challenging task for translator Elek Máthé (176). In the few examples that follow I wish to show the contrary—that is, I call attention to the pitfalls that the Hungarian translations confront while employing two different kinds of strategies in trying to convey Fitzgerald's metaphors. Both Máthé and Bart attempted the translation technique of *domestication*, but in my view, while both came up with exciting solutions, neither of them achieved fully satisfactory results.

Both Máthé in 1962 and Bart in 2012 played down the poetic power of Fitzgerald's text by neutralizing his original metaphors' sensuous stimulation, vivid emotional investment, and corporeal immediacy; instead they both "refamiliarized" the poetic prose into conventional idioms or translated them literally, thereby depriving them of their lyrical power. A few examples: Fitzgerald's original, highly poetic image of "walking into a deep sleep" (*Gatsby* 53) is transformed by both Hungarian translators into the much more conventional and literal "mély álomba merültem" ("falling fast asleep" [1968, 86; 2012, 109]); Fitzgerald's impressive image of "a gorgeous scarcely human orchid of a woman" (*Gatsby* 67) becomes in Bart "egy megdöbbenően orchideaszerű nő" ("an astonishingly orchid-like woman" [137]) whereas in Máthé she is reduced

to “feltűnően kicicomázott nő” (“a pompously over-decorated woman” [109]). Fitzgerald’s marvelous synesthesia “the pale gold odour of kiss-me-at-the-gate” (*Gatsby* 58) is “a kankalin aranyárga áradása” (“a golden flow of primrose” [118]) in Bart and simply “aranyárga árvácskák” (“gold-yellow pansies” [94]) in Máthé; the original metaphor identifying Nick’s house as an “eyesore” (*Gatsby* 5) becomes a “pörsenés” (“blister” [11]) in Bart and the metaphor is totally abandoned in Máthé where it is “dísztelen” (“undecorative” [8]). Fitzgerald’s “frosted wedding cake of a ceiling” (*Gatsby* 7) is made literal in Bart as “az esküvői torták cikornyás cirádáival díszített mennyezet” (“ceiling decorated with the frosted sugar arabesques of wedding cakes” [15]) and in Máthé appears as the even more prosaic “fehér gipszmintákkal borított mennyezet” (“ceiling with a white plaster pattern” [11]); Fitzgerald’s description of Daisy’s “opening up in a flower-like way” (*Gatsby* 15) reads in Bart as a “képes egy pillanat alatt kinyílni, mint egy virágszál” (“capacity to open up suddenly like a single flower” [30]), while Máthé abandons the image entirely in his “derűs jókedve megint visszatért” (“a return of her cheerfully good mood” [23]). Fitzgerald’s poetically polysemic “roaring noon” (*Gatsby* 44), charged with multiple sensory (thermal, tactile, auditory) implications, is separated into two distinct components in Bart’s “Rekkenő dél” (“sultry noon” [91]), which emphasizes the heat, and Máthé’s “a teljes déli forgalom dübörgése” (“the roar of full noon traffic” [74]), which stresses the noise.

In Bart’s 2012 take on *Gatsby*, he seems to have overplayed his translatorial role. Instead of trying to render or reconstruct Fitzgerald’s original metaphors, he often completely reimagined them, at times in a far-fetched, associative manner, thereby imposing his personal interpretation on Fitzgerald’s poetic text. The most troubling revision Bart made was attributing a maternalistic, matrophiliac quality to the emotions between Daisy and Gatsby. Daisy’s clandestine, romantic exclamation to Gatsby, “I’d like to just get one of these pink clouds, put you in it and push you around!” (*Gatsby* 60) is translated with an emphasis on the vehemence of her passions in Máthé’s “Elcsípnék egy rózsaszín felhőt, ráültetném magát, és húznám magam után” (“I’d like to catch a pink cloud, make you sit on it, and drag you with me!” [97]), whereas in Bart her statement takes on an oddly matronizing overtone by saying “Szeretnék elcsípni egy ilyen rózsaszín felhőt, belebugyolálnám magát, és föl-alá tologatnám, mint egy kisbabát” (“I’d like to catch one of these pink clouds, wrap you up in it, and cradle you up and down as if you were a baby! [literally, ‘push you up and down’ with a verb clearly evoking moving a baby carriage]” [123–24]). According to Kövecses, in Bart’s translation emotions are metaphorized in

terms of movements, but instead of being violently carried away by a streetcar named desire—as in a later, equally passionate American love story—we get hit here by cozy, saccharine babble about a baby carriage. Bart uses the same imagery in describing Gatsby's bliss of feeling life to the fullest prior to his first kissing Daisy: Gatsby's original vision that "he could suck on the pap of life and gulp down the incomparable milk of wonder" (*Gatsby* 71) is associated with the easily decodable Biblical story of temptation and fall in Máthé's line "odaöfönn övé lenne az élet fájának gyümölcse és ihatná máshoz nem hasonlítható csodák édes tejét" ("he could have the fruit from the tree of life up there and drink the sweet milk of incomparable wonders" [116]). Yet in Bart the same image is transformed thanks to an arch-matriarchal metaphor: "odaöfönn várja az élet anyamelle, hogy ő kiszopja csecseéből a csodák semmihez sem fogható tejét" ("the maternal breast of life awaits him up there, so that he can suck from its mammaries the milk of wonder comparable to none" [145]).

The emphasis in Fitzgerald's novel on the distinctions between the voices of the different characters is handled inconsistently in the two translations. Bart does faithfully render Daisy's charming little stutter ("M-megbénultam az örömtől!" [16] reads the same as the original "I'm p-paralysed with happiness!" [*Gatsby* 8]). And Máthé does reproduce the brutal nasality of Wolfsheim ("Ogzford" [75] for "Oggsford" [*Gatsby* 46]) as well as the inarticulate howl of Wilson ("Ó, i-i-istenem! Ó, i-i-istenem! Ó, i-i-istenem! Ó, i-i-istenem!" [146] for "Oh, my Ga-od! Oh, my Ga-od! Oh, Ga-od! Oh, my Ga-od!" [*Gatsby* 89]). Even so, the translators are only sporadically aware that these speech idiosyncracies function as identity markers of the characters.

Consider one such marker: Daisy's irresistibly seductive voice, full of money and glamour, attracts all the characters—Nick just as much as Gatsby—and is thus integral to her character. Her mellifluousness has slightly different nuances between the two translators but is faithfully rendered by both. Her voice's transverbal, erotic allure is expressed with varying onomatopoeic expressions: a voice that is "playing murmurous tricks in her throat" (*Gatsby* 67) in Fitzgerald, becomes "halk mormolással évődött" ("softly cooing and flirtatious" [109]) in Máthé, and "elbűvölt bűgó hangja" ("mesmerizes moaning" [137]) in Bart. However, neither translation associates with her voice the ominous fatality that lurks in the original text. For Fitzgerald, even in Daisy's and Gatsby's first kiss there is an ironic foreshadowing of Daisy's refusal to accept responsibility for Myrtle Wilson's death, which will lead to the sacrificial death of Gatsby: "that voice held him most, with its fluctuating, feverish warmth, because it couldn't be overdreamed—that voice was a *deathless song*" (*Gatsby* 62;

emphasis added). Translating this sentence, Máthé emphasizes the hysterical, excitable, capricious, passive-aggressive, fundamental *vitality* of Daisy's voice: "Gatsbyt leginkább Daisy hangja tartotta bűvöletben: ez a tétovázó, túlfűtötten meleg hang, amelynél csodálatosabbat álmodni sem lehet—ez a hang a halálon győzedelmeskedő élet diadaléneke volt" ("Gatsby was mesmerized the most by Daisy's voice, that hesitant, overheated, warm voice that no one could dream to be more wonderful—this voice was a *song of life triumphing over death*" [100]; emphasis added). Bart stresses its mannered, erotic, and mysterious qualities, associated with the voice of a muse through a reference to *immortality*: "Gatsbyt a legjobban Daisy hangja idézte meg, az a fátyolos, lázasan fűledt hang, melynél elbűvölőbbet nem is álmodhatott—a haláltalan élet éneke volt" ("Gatsby was spellbound the most by Daisy's voice, that veiled, feverishly husky voice he couldn't have imagined to be more enchanting that was *the song of a life without death*" [126]; emphasis added). Daisy's voice is transformed in these two translations from a "deathless song" first into "a song of life triumphing over death" and then into "the song of a life without death." The connotations of her voice thus change from an ominous fatality into a radical vitality and then into an enigmatic immortality.³ These changes certainly do not have much to do with denotative dictionary meanings; rather they alter the charged layers of poetic meaning in the novel and make explicit what is much more ambiguously suggested in Fitzgerald's text.

This is especially so because impossible dreams and desires constitute a central theme of *Gatsby* and a real challenge for translators. In a memorable passage, Nick, who aims to function throughout the novel as an (im)passive, rational observer-narrator, is momentarily contaminated by Gatsby's irrational passions: Gatsby's nostalgic and sentimental vivid memory of walking with Daisy on a summer evening in Louisville brings about in Nick's account a narrative lapsus, a discursive disruption, provoked by the unspeakability of longings which elude human expression and comprehension. Because of the power of the emotions to which Nick does not want to submit himself, his language remains vague, extremely poetic, full of fleeting impressions, and is stream of consciousness-like. It is necessary for the sake of an indepth analysis to quote this passage at length:

Fitzgerald's original:

Through all he said, even through his appalling sentimentality, I was reminded of something—an elusive rhythm, a fragment of lost words, that I had heard somewhere a long time ago. For a moment a phrase

tried to take shape in my mouth and my lips parted like a dumb man's, as though there was more struggling upon them than a wisp of startled air. But they made no sound and what I had almost remembered was uncommunicable forever. (*Gatsby* 71)

Máthé's translation:

Amikor hallgattam, amit mond, elképesztő érzelgőssége ellenére is valami megfoghatatlan harmónia, régen hallott, de már elfelejtett mondatok zsongó emléke vet körül. Egy pillanatig ki nem mondható szavak tolultak ajkamra, számat úgy nyitottam ki, mintha néma lettem volna, és csak halk, szakadozott sóhajtás jött ki a torkomon; képtelen voltam szólni, mert amire emlékeztem, azt nem lehetett többé szavakba önteni. (116)

When I listened to what he said, despite his baffling sentimentality, I was surrounded by a kind of elusive harmony, a buzzing memory of words heard and forgotten long ago. For a moment unspeakable words surged to my lips, I opened my mouth as if I was mute, and only a silent, ragged gasp left my throat; I was unable to speak up, because what I remembered could no longer be put in words. (Author's English retranslation.)

Bart's translation:

Mindabban, amit mondott elképesztő érzelgőssége ellenére is, nekem volt valami ismerős—az a megfoghatatlan ritmusa, s az elfelejtett szavak törmeléke, melyeket nem tudom hol s mikor hallottam. Egy pillanatra, mintha ajkaim közt egy mondat formálódott volna, de csak tátogtam, mint a néma, mintha nem bírnék megküzdeni vele. Nem jött ki hang a számon, csak egy sóhaj, és örökre kimondatlan maradt, amit pedig már majdnem sikerült kimondanom. (146)

In all that he said, despite his baffling sentimentality, there was something familiar—that elusive rhythm, the debris of forgotten words that I cannot tell where and when I've heard. For a moment it seemed that a sentence would take shape between my lips, but I only gaped like a mute, as if I couldn't handle the struggle with it. No voice left my mouth, only a gasp, and it remained forever unspoken what I nearly managed to phrase. (Author's English retranslation.)

The non-verbal activity that Nick struggles with in this passage is described in many languages by such metaphors as a “tip-of-the-tongue” experience or a partial recall, a *presque-vu*. This occurs when the failure to

retrieve a word from memory is conjoined with the feeling that the retrieval is imminent because the (affective, cognitive, physical) state associated with the half-forgotten item is triggered in the process. Metacognitive research proves that issues eliciting emotional arousal are especially likely to stimulate such experience (Schwartz 82). Inspired by Gatsby's passions, Nick's talking *about* his experience of losing words instead of finding and spelling the words *themselves* out also bears an exciting metanarrative significance. It reflects the incompleteness and compensatory nature of any discursively constructed fictional universe—especially one that is (dis)organized by someone else's emotional turmoil filtered and focalized through the perspective of an unreliable secondary character narrator, as in the case of *Gatsby*. Nick's epiphany concerning unspeakability remains incomplete, because, as Cousineau argues, he is reluctant to surrender himself to the pursuit of all-engulfing desires and allocates to Gatsby the position of a "surrogate sacrifice" at the altar of passion (113). Gatsby surrenders to sentiments and "pursues the romantic dream in Nick's stead" (Cousineau 114). Nick acts as an eyewitness with an ambiguous, sincere but subjective gaze. He is both the boy next-door and Daisy's cousin, equally distanced from and involved in the action, alternately idealizing, degrading, pitying, protecting, or criticizing Gatsby who initiates him into the illusoriness of reality and the reality of illusions. Excitingly, what varies in the translations is the degree of Nick's awareness of his hesitation about embracing extreme emotions and of his projecting them instead, by means of a defense mechanism, onto Gatsby's mythified persona. The moment of his self-doubting identity crisis surfaces in Nick's description of his elusive impressions about the unspeakability of sentiments, his frustrated verbal attempts peaking in poeticity.

In Fitzgerald's original text, the *presque vu* feel of the unspeakable (passion)—"an elusive rhythm, a fragment of lost words, that I had heard somewhere a long time ago"—seems to relate to the incapability of verbalization that attests to the narrator's inexperience and innocence. Vague memory-information cannot be retrieved and remains *preverbal* because the original sense-impression has not even ever reached the level of conscious cognition (normally preceding and presupposed by verbalization). Nick's "lips part like a dumb man's" and produce merely a "wisp of startled air" with "no sound" because he has no idea what to say. His use of the word "uncommunicable"—instead of "unspeakable" and "unspoken" used in the Hungarian translations—regarding his "almost remembering" emphatically spells out the stakes of his struggle with words: his not knowing how to create intensive and intimate contacts with others.

In Máthé's version, Nick is tormented by a trans- or rather *post*-verbal unspeakability: in his sudden flashback he knows and fully (not just "almost") remembers those enigmatic words he had heard, understood, and forgotten long ago. An internal psychic and an external social (self-)discipline prohibit him, however, from uttering them aloud. His mute mouth and "silent, ragged gasp" signal a self-conscious denial of the desire to speak by a skeptic or a shy young man who does not think the confession of secrets to be worthwhile "any longer"—unlike how it presumably used to be in a nostalgically idealized past symbolized by Gatsby. Paradoxically, even the translator's adding the verb "forgotten" suggests that Nick had once been fully aware of the sense of the words which now noisily surface to consciousness—buzzing in harmony instead of just being in a haphazard rhythm—only to be repressed again, hoping that the telling silence will come to express what should not be said for the moment.

Bart's translation renders the narrator's rather melancholic awareness even more emphatic. This is done by explicitly spelling out Nick's familiarity with the forgotten words he surely did hear despite his being uncertain about the time and whereabouts of this past speech that proved to be so indefinably formative of his identity. His associating the forgotten words with "debris" reinforces this assumption: the scattered remains of an edifice that used to be there and was destroyed (but not fully annihilated) underlines the historical existence of a meaning turned monumental. Similarly, the simile of the "mute-like gaping" denotes a simulated and symptomatic discursive deficiency that attests to a highly self-reflective "struggle with words" and, thus, can be most easily related to a sort of negative *ars poetica* of a mature poetic voice. The implied metadiscursive conclusion here is that there is no such thing as "unspeakability"; only "unspokenness" remains an inevitable side-effect of the "spoken" that inherently and inevitably comes to replace and repress all that which fails to be said.

Matthew J. Bolton attributes a particular significance to the fact that the above passage—about the "fragments of lost words" which escape Nick's mind without us knowing what they are—functions as a narrative crux. Depending on how we interpret it, the passage has a crucial effect on our overall interpretation of the work as a whole. Nick's near-epiphanic moment and his failure of adequate recollection or verbalization pervade the text with an omnipresent absence. This absence in turn unifies the motifs of elusive meaning, incommunicability, and loss (Gatsby's of Daisy; Nick's of Gatsby) into the symbolic core of the text (Bolton 197).

However, it would also seem worthwhile to complicate the wide range of interpretations further. We do this by taking into account how changing cultural-historical contexts may influence the sense made of unspeakability emerging as a leitmotif in the novel. Nick the unreliable narrator's laconic stance may have evoked for readers in 1960s communist Hungary the self-censorship they experienced daily and hence could easily identify with; but it could also have reminded them of the alcohol-induced, amnesiac black-outs resulting from the hedonistic debauchery of 1920s capitalist youth from which they certainly distanced themselves. Since readers of the recent Hungarian translation inhabit a more globalized world, they will likely interpret the narrative voice's hovering between speech and silence in terms of a general philosophical dilemma such as the postmodern condition of collective existential uncertainty. Nonetheless, the difference in their nationality will prevent them from wholeheartedly embracing the vision of "us, beating on, boats against the current" as an emblem of glorified, collective, transcendental Americanism.

Even so, *Gatsby* remains an exciting read throughout the world precisely because of the narrative gaps resulting from the protagonist's epitomizing unspeakability and elusive signification himself; as Fitzgerald confessed in a letter a few months after the publication of the novel: "You are right about Gatsby being blurred and patchy. I never at one time saw him clear myself" (qtd. in Turnbull 358). The point is precisely that each reader can fill in this "blurry patch" with meanings of his/her own making.

In Place of a Conclusion: Translation as a Carnal Struggle with the Unspeakable and a Means of Cross-Cultural Bonding

As I have tried to demonstrate, *Gatsby* and its translations and changing readerly reception illustrate how metaphors can function as culturally specific universals in Kövecses's sense. In a multitude of complex ways metaphors substitute for the unspeakable. However, from a metaperspective stance we must note that the artistic struggle with the unspeakable and the quest for speakability are crucial concerns for all translators. Translators often reflect on their impossible task with embodied, emotional metaphors that dramatize the very effort to transmit meaning from a source-language to an equivalent target-language. István Géher, the doyen of Hungarian literary translation, defined this struggle as feeling the text between one's fingers and shaping it relentlessly, like a devoted potter molds its material ("Ujjaim"). His wording is highly reminiscent of Walter Benjamin's

account of the oral storyteller's engaging his community of listeners in the narration process while leaving in the story traces of his presence like "the handprints of the potter on his pot" (91–92). Similarly, the latest Hungarian translator of *Gatsby*, István Bart, adopts an embodied metaphor to describe the translator's pleasurable wrestling with the author, testing whether one has enough breath, enough Hungarian language to cope (9). Translator Edith Grossman, meanwhile, claims that "the essential challenge of translation is hearing, the most profound way I can, the text in [the source language] and discovering the voice to say (I mean to write) the text again in [the target language]" (xix). Jean Cocteau's statement to the French translator of *Gatsby* echoes the same notion: "il faut une plume mystérieuse pour ne pas tuer l'oiseau bleu, pour ne pas le changer en langue morte" ("you need a mysterious feather quill so as not to kill the bluebird, so as not to change it into a dead language" [qtd. in Turnbull 343]).

It is highly illuminating to discover the similarity across different languages among these embodied metaphors. Meta-metaphors, as we might more properly call them, describe with the help of poetic figures of speech the substitutive activity of translation, the process by which a word denoting one idea is used in place of another to suggest likeness or analogy. This linguistic task holds the promise of mutually enriching cross-cultural encounters. Likewise, looking at the American and the Hungarian versions of *The Great Gatsby*—similar to any comparative analysis drawn between an artistic text and its literary translation—will eventually remind us of the transcultural bonding powers of literary translation. Rainer Schulte, co-founder of American Literary Translators Association, wonderfully captures the initiative of bonding in the mission statement on the association's Web site: literary translation is meant to create "bridges [for] the delicate emotional connections between cultures and languages," to "further the understanding of human beings across national borders," make the soul of another culture transparent, and "recreate the refined sensibilities of foreign countries and their people through the linguistic, musical, rhythmic, and visual possibilities of the new language."

Notes

1. All translations in this essay from Hungarian into English are by the author.
2. All parenthetical page references to Máthé's translation are to the 1968 edition.
3. Barbara Hochman's intriguing analysis "Disembodied Voices and Narrating Bodies in *The Great Gatsby*" convincingly points out how "Nick's recurrent cycle of involvement and recoil from Daisy's voice provides a paradigm for the way readers and listeners become first implicated in, then detached from, a narrator's story" (19).

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