THE ARMENIAN TRANSLATIONS OF “HAMLET” IN THE APPRAISALS OF HOVHANNES TOUṂANYAN

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In the history of world culture there are distinguished names which are the heirs of the spiritual values and thinking of the nation they represent. They feel and live with all the problems of the time and depict them in their works with high professionalism and without bias. Such distinguished personalities are William Shakespeare in the English and H. Toumanyan in the Armenian literatures.

The goal of this article is to reveal the exceptional appraisal that Toumanyan gave to the works of the English genius. A century later we address the importance of this appraisal as it proves once again that Shakespeare has always been and still remains an eternal luminary in the world literature, “the colossal sun”. We also intend to enhance the idea that the greatest Armenian poet has quite correctly, typically and professionally described Shakespeare’s talent, and it sounds very valuable even today.

In the basis of our research lies the appraisal of the translations of Shakespeare’s tragedy “Hamlet” given by H. Toumanyan. The issue is especially important in the sense that the translated literature is an essential prerequisite for international contacts, approaches, and developments. It is of great help for knowing each other and understanding the spiritual and moral values. As Toumanyan mentions, “there is no better soil than literature to know the nations well and to instill in them love and mutual respect, literature depicts the best emotions, the national originality and spirit. For the Armenian nation, the translations of works created by other nationalities are also of great importance.
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However, Toumanyan was holding the position that the material to be translated shouldn't be chosen on the spot. The chosen works should encompass ideas of humanism and coexistence, and should also satisfy the high demands of translation art. The requirements get much stronger when the material to be translated is a work of a world famous writer. One of those is “Hamlet” the Armenian translation of which becomes an object of study for Toumanyan.

It's a well-known truth that Shakespeare is the greatest poet of world renaissance literature who can find human values even in the most tragic situations of life. Human life with all its colors is reflected in his works with genuine mastery: passion, ruining soul and thinking, aspirations and wishes, kindness and evil, devotion, love and endless hatred, superhuman force and weakness, lie and constantly burning secrets. The tragic heroes of Shakespeare, whose life is ruined on the way to humanity and truth, are souls that bear bright and kind emotions in them.

With his strong moral feelings, genius, thoughts, spiritual sufferings Hamlet has always been the most noble representative of the world literature. Surviving through all the experiences of the time, this tragedy has been accepted with admiration by many nations of the world and translated into many languages. It seems Natural, that the Armenian intellectual potential could by no means miss this exceptional work. The tragedy “Hamlet” was translated and was presented to the Armenian reader.

Back at school, Toumanyan watched “Hamlet” in Tiflis. He was deeply impressed and inspired. “That night was a magic night for me, it and became almost decisive in my whole literary life: that night I liked Hamlet and then Shakespeare so much that I wrote some dramas and then destroyed all, as none was like Shakespeare's work”¹. For the Armenian poet Shakespeare is a unique eminence, whose tragedies “Hamlet”, “Othello”, “King Lear” are the “most noble works, the height of which can't be reached even by the force of understanding of the most excellent critic”².

In Toumanyan's articles on the issues of literary translation, there are many notes on the translations of Shakespeare's “Hamlet”. In the 80s and 90s of the 19th century “Hamlet” was published three times: 1889 (Tiflis, translated by

¹ Toumanyan H., Complete Collection of Novels, volume 7, Yerevan, 1995, p. 255.
² Toumanyan H., Complete Collection of Novels, volume 6, Yerevan, 1994, p. 54.
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Senekerim Artsruni), 1894 (Tiflis, translated by Hovhannes Masehyan) and 1899 (Vienna, translated by Garegin Babazyan). All three translations catch the attention of Toumanyan, and on the last two, the poet writes fairly large reviews.

It's not a secret that Shakespeare is one of the authors, whose works are rather difficult to translate: his language and vocabulary encompass almost all the stylistic layers of the English language. Thus, the translator should possess a high mastery. In order to evaluate Masehyan's translation of "Hamlet" (1984) in a correct and reliable way, Toumanyan studies all the accessible literature in any way associated with "Hamlet" and only then presents his points.

In 1896, in the "Matenagryun" division of "Taraz" N 40, 41, 43, 44, 45, Toumanyan's article on "Hamlet's" translation is published. Toumanyan starts the review on Masehyan's translation of "Hamlet" by highlighting the unique and exceptional role that Shakespeare holds in the world literature. Certainly, it is irreplaceable among all the appraisals given to the great tragedian. "Shakespeare has become a measure to decide on the level of the development of a nation" says Toumanyan. If a nation doesn't translate him, it is supposed to be illiterate. If a nation doesn't understand him, it is supposed to be immature. If it doesn't understand him, it means it is sick. In the light of this, we can say, that we have a progress which, however, seems to me a sudden flight.³

Addressing the translation by Masehyan, Toumanyan first of all points out two things, the existence of which he considers necessary: there is need for an introduction, where the material and the opinions of some famous critics should be presented, then, also explanations for some difficult names and places. As a criterion for appraisal of the translation Toumanyan focuses on how close has the translator remained to the original of the work, how correctly he has understood and interpreted the writer's ideas.⁴ Here an important point should be taken into account: the translated work can't keep the magic self of the original, its inner flight of thought and soul, when expressed with the appropriate units of another language. The translated work gains new shades characteristic of the meanings and grammar of the target language.

The poet and the translator have different peculiarities. Toumanyan believes that the scientific and fictional thinking of the nation should coincide with the

⁴ Ibidem, p. 57.
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inner meaning and psychology of the material to be translated. The poet stresses the importance of the intelligence of a translator. However, for such a literary masterpiece as “Hamlet”, even the understanding of the inner soul is not enough to translate and represent it to the Armenian reader in footnotes. There is need to study the time, customs, traditions, daily life, interpersonal relationships and so on, as the psychology of the heroes is largely dependent of certain historical situations.

It's not our aim to focus on Toumanyan's detailed philological works. However, we need to stress out that not knowing the language of the original, Toumanyan could compare the translation of “Hamlet” line to line with six different translations in Russian. Highly praising Masehyan's “famous” work, the poet, however makes some suggestions and corrections. Toumanyan especially focuses on the translations of the parts, which reflect the psychology of Hamlet. These are in act two, scenery two, and also act three, scenery three. Toumanyan thinks that especially unsuccessful are the translations of idioms, which, as Masehyan confesses, are very hard to translate. Instead of the beautiful and sharp discourse in the original, the translator tries to use homonyms and rhymed pieces in order to render the word plays as they are in the original. Toumanyan holds a

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5 It is interesting that Toumanyan had a great wish and constantly made efforts to study English, which he considered important for to reading the works of Byron and Shakespeare in the original. Teacher, writer and pedagogue Gevorg Asatour writes in his memories that at the very beginning of their meeting, the summer of 1891, “Toumanyan was taking English language classes from the Consul of England in Tiflis – Mourtag. How much he progressed in this field, I don't know” – writes G. Asatour, “But I know that he studied English to translate the “Shilion prisoner” from the original. Mr. Mourtag was helping him in this work”. Toumanyan's wish to learn English was most importantly directed towards translating “Hamlet” by Shakespeare and some other works.

6 Драматические сочинения Шекспира, перевод с английского Н. Кетчера, М., 1873; Шекспир в переводе и объяснении А. А. Соколовского, СПб., 1894; Гамлет, принц датский, трагедия Шекспира, перевод П. П. Гидича, СПб., 1891; Полное собрание сочинений В. Шекспира в прозе и в стихах, т. I, СПб., 1894; Гамлет, принц датский, перевод П.А. Канинина, Гамлет, принц датский, перевод А.И. Кронеберга, 1880; Гамлет, принц датский, перевод Н.А. Полевого, М., 1889.
strong position that the translator should not go far from the original by Shakespeare and use correct and adequate words.

Focusing on the comparison of the translations of “Hamlet” in Russian and Armenian Toumanyan points to some defects, which exist in the Russian text but not in the Armenian one. He particularly indicates Hamlet's words directed to Horace “which show the situation of Horace and the opinion of Hamlet on what a good person should be like”8. The poet accuses the publishing companies for some defects stating that “the publishers should be sure that bad language spoils every beautiful idea, even if it is written by Shakespeare. For this, there is need to have the translations edited by masters of Armenian before publishing it, so as the professionals of the Armenian language could read, correct the language. Editing is also an art there is more to be done than simply knowing the language: there should also be a mastery of an eye”9.

In the house museum of H. Toumanyan, a copy of the translation of Shakespeare's “Hamlet is still kept (translation by Hovhannes Khan-Masehyan. Published in Tbilisi by the Armenian publishing house, 1894). When studying the notes written in the margins of his own copy it becomes obvious that Toumanyan studied Masehyan's translation of “Hamlet” very thoroughly. Later, in 1899, another translation of “Hamlet” by Garegin Babazyan is published in Vienna which was immediately studied by Toumanyan with the same intense attention and compared with Masehyan's translation. On the pages of the newspaper “Taraz” kept in the house museum of Toumanyan (issues 43, 44, 45), one can see the words and expressions from Babazyan's translation written in front of the equivalent expressions and words in Masehyan's translation.

This thorough study is followed by an article. On March 12, 1900, in the column of “Matenakhosutyun” in the magazine Taraz, issue 9, Toumanyan published an article starting with an exclusive reflection on the art of translation. It reads “Translation is a rose under a glass, and it is almost impossible for a translator to be able to transfer the spell and beauty characteristic of the original work. However, it is essential, that the translator be devoted to the original and

7 In the translation of 1921, Masehyan revises the part, but the approach stays almost the same. The word-play is carried out with other words of matching sounds, but it doesn't reflect the correct meaning of the words in the original.
8 Toumanyan H., Complete Collection of Novels, vol. 6, p. 72.
give it to the reader in a comprehensible way. This requirement is especially big, when the material to be translated is a work, in which every word and sentence, measured and weighed have their deep importance and constant place. Such a literary piece is "Hamlet" by Shakespeare\(^{10}\).

Sure enough, translation is an important work that requires great responsibility. Thus, the translators, as a rule, can never expect their translations to be considered flawless. The same intent has G. Babazyan. Toumianyan doesn't accept the latter's unfriendly hint expressed indirectly about Masehyan's translation. As an impartial critic Toumianyan represents his studies about Masehyan's translation of "Hamlet" adding: "He shouldn't think that with this type of remarks we intend to deny the importance of his or other people's works"\(^{11}\).

Then some remarks follow with regard to wrong translations of some words, usage of grammatical structures in the sentences which give rise to controversy in Hamlet's psychology and views. Toumianyan also points to some missing parts in Masehyan's translation. The poet pays close attention to some editorial mistakes and carelessness.

The study of the two articles shows that Toumianyan gave a higher appreciation to Masehyan's translation, which in spite of some flaws, sometimes even excels the best translations of "Hamlet" in Russian (in his own book, on page 139, Toumianyan writes that the Armenian one is the best).

Many years later in his article "Translations and publications in our life" (the time of publication is approximated to the 1900s), Toumianyan again writes about Masehyan's translation as one of the best. "My heart is full of respect to Mr. H. Khan-Masehyan, who translates Shakespeare from English into Armenian, and plants it in poor Armenian land.... With special pleasure I should say that Masehyan's translation of "Hamlet has such strong parts, with which even the best Russian translations cannot be compared"\(^{12}\). Then he gives examples from "Hamlet"'s translation (Laert's advice to his sister, Polonius's advice to his daughter, the horrified scream of Hamlet in front of his father's ghost) and writes with admiration. "Can you see how luxuriously speaks the dignified Armenian

\(^{10}\) Ibidem, p. 124.
\(^{11}\) Ibidem, p. 125.
\(^{12}\) Ibidem, p. 461.
language in the mouth of the Danish prince, how Armenian transfers the long and deep breath of the titan - Shakespeare\textsuperscript{13}.

However, in the same article, addressing the work style of the publishing companies and their approaches to translation, he again focuses particularly on the translation of tragedies “Hamlet” and “Macbeth” (translated by S. Malkhasyan and H. Masehyan). Toumanyan raises the flaws and drawbacks which become obstacles for the work of publishing companies. Leaving aside the indifference of the society, press and critics, Toumanyan draws attention to the necessity of focusing on literature seriously. He points to his suggestions on “Hamlet”’s translations and reports with a pity that after the publication of his article in “Taraz” in 1896, there were no serious reflections, some even considered Toumanyan’s suggestions as not smart, for he did not know English. This fact doesn’t confuse the poet and he adds new points and comments to his article about Masehyan’s translation of “Hamlet”. He writes “I have got the English of Shakespeare and now I add new suggestions to my previous ones, especially to the publishing company. I have the English original by Robert Longlist and the words are checked with Aleksandrov’s English-Russian famous dictionary”\textsuperscript{14}. Toumanyan draws the attention of the publishing house to his suggestions, approaches and flaws, reminding the readers that Shakespeare is a writer, whose every word is very constant and meaningful\textsuperscript{15}.

Thus, the evaluations by Toumanyan left room for new solutions. In 1921, in the second publication of “Hamlet”, most of Toumanyan’s suggestions including the ones about the introduction and footnotes were taken into account by Masehyan. In 1921, in the introduction to the publication the translator wrote that he didn’t make corrections in the translation, rather he made fundamental changes in it.

Toumanyan’s detailed attention towards the translations of Shakespeare was grounded not only on his admiration towards the English genius, but also his concept of the art of translation in the Armenian literature. The literary critic Eduard Jrbashyian wrote that, Toumanyan had created his own version of the

\textsuperscript{13} Ibidem, p. 463.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibidem, p. 465.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibidem.
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translation of “Hamlet”, which “encompassed his understanding, taste, and linguistic thinking. He, in fact, unites a poet and a scholar”\textsuperscript{16}.

In 1916, April 28, the Association of Armenian writers held a meeting in the Caucasus devoted to the 300 death anniversaries of Shakespeare and Servantes. Among the guests were the three members of the medical committee distributing welfare to Armenian refugees: Harold Backstone, Alfred Backhouse and George Hachkin. Toumanyan made an opening speech, where he stressed out the greatness of the two geniuses. “This is a day that should be celebrated by the whole intellectual world. It should be celebrated by everyone: people who live in peaceful cities, people who are on the way, the English people, who have given birth to Shakespeare, the German people, who have adopted and loved Shakespeare, the Russians, the French, the Italian, the the Austro-Hungarian, everyone and every single person. The fame of Don Kishot's frank craziness and the divine tyranny of Shakespeare have reached so far, that peoples' souls are liberated from any kind of tyranny, and are controlled by the spirit of creativity only”\textsuperscript{17}.

Comparing Shakespeare with a huge sun, Toumanyan firmly states that the shine of Shakespearian genius reaches on the one hand to Eskiless and Sofokless times, on the other to the furthest future of literature. The writers of almost all nations see their ways enlightened with the light of Shakespeare and bow in front of him. He says “The great Gyote who can always have a look at the face of every great writer, when reaching Shakespeare says “I am scared to approach the huge literary oak, at which all the branches of literature join and separate.”\textsuperscript{18}

Toumanyan was very well aware of the famous Scottish historian, essayist Thomas Carlyle's work and often cited his words, particularly from his series of lectures the “On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History”. In the lecture entitled “The Hero as a Poet: Dante, Shakespeare” Carlyle writes very highly about the two poets. Here Shakespeare is seen as an English national poet, and is appreciated as a hero.

Citing from Carlyle, Toumanyan once again signposts the exceptional force of art and particularly the incredible strength that exists in Shakespeare’s works. No English king can have authority over the English people spread in the world.

\textsuperscript{16} Jrbashyan Ed., The Literary Heritage of Toumanyan, Yerevan, 2000, p. 155.
\textsuperscript{17} Toumanyan H., Complete Collection of Novels, vol. 7, p. 223.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibidem, p. 230.
“There is only one king, who can invade and have authority over the whole English nation; that is Shakespeare. But it is not only the English nation that he ties and urges to live in harmony. He unites and joins all the nations as he does with the English people. That is where the divine strength of poetry or art in general lies: each is kept with its smell and charm, but this variety serves as basis for creating a harmony of completeness”\textsuperscript{19}.

Later, (on 29.04.1916) Toumanyan sends a telegram to the Armenian literature fans in London with the following content “Please inform the president of the committee of Shakespeare 300th anniversary Sir George Alexander, that the union of Armenian writers of the Caucasus, together with the population gathered to commemorate the 300th anniversary of Shakespeare, express their respect and admiration towards the English genius and his magnificent creations. With deep gratitude they bow to the memory of the immortal son of Great Britain”\textsuperscript{20}.

Toumanyan was sent a replying telegram from the president of the Anglo-Armenian Committee Anguine Williams (dated 17.05.1916). “I informed of it Sir George Alexander. I am sure, that he and his committee will greatly appreciate this expression of admiration and sympathy from the Armenian people towards our national poet and all the phenomena of our national life. I believe, that in future, there are great chances for the development of the literature of the Armenian nation”. On 16 May, the Union of Armenian Literature Fans organized an event devoted to the English genius. During the event, the advocate of the Armenian Question Lord Brais, Hovhannes Khan Masehyan and archbishop Yuturjan made speeches.

In conclusion, summing up all the discussions and insights presented above, it is possible to say, that Toumanyan thought highly of the translations of Shakespeare’s “Hamlet”. In particular, he stressed out the following:

1. The translations of “Hamlet” are an important means of recognizing and connecting nations, developing cultural sensitivity, and fostering intellectual growth.

2. Translators choose “Hamlet” by Shakespeare on purpose: it encompasses universal feelings, values, and humane ideologies.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibidem, p. 454–455.
\textsuperscript{20} Horizon, N 125, Tiflis, 1916.
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3. Translators need to be very proficient to be able to translate “Hamlet”. They should be intellectually very developed.

4. Armenian translations of “Hamlet” should have an introduction, which would present the materials and opinions of some critics, as well as the explanations of some difficult names.

5. In many cases the Armenian translations of “Hamlet” excel the Russian translations and the Armenian language could represent “Hamlet” by Shakespeare with the necessary luxuriance.

Thus, the great Armenian poet Hovhannes Tumanyan thought that the Armenian language is able to present “Hamlet” with the required luxury and flexibility. It is undeniable that the Armenian translations of “Hamlet”, particularly by Hovhannes Khan-Masheyan, can be rated among the brilliant examples of the art of translation.

«ՀԱՄԼԵՏ» ՀՐԱԴԱՐՄԱՆՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ Ձևակերտելու Հայերենով

ՄԱՐԱԿԵՏ

19-րդ դարի 80-90-ական թվականներն է. «Համլետ» հրատարակվել է 1889 թվականի 1 մայիսին. 1894 թվականի հունիսի 28-ին և 1899 թվականի 12-ին. Պատմության ստորև նշվել է Հայերենում. Գրականության մեջ Համլետն առաջադրվել է Ուրարտույցերի կերպարվեստի նմուշներից. Հաճախ պատմություն հայերենում կրկնակիցվում է բացահայտվել գրականագիտական նորոգությունների անցում։

Համլետի անիմացիան ունի այն համարման երևույթը, որ Համլետի հարցման գլխավոր երգերն ու գաղափարները շատ շատ հրամանագրական եությամբ կոչվում են. Համլետի հարցնաբազմազանությունը այս գրականագիտական ճյուղի մեջ փորձվում է դառնալ այլ այլ պատմականությունների հետ. Համլետի հետո ֆիլիմակայի ալտերատիվ դասերը երևում են իրենց նորմալիզացված գործընթացներ։ «Համլետ» նորմալիզացված է հայերեն գրականության ոլորտում.

«Համլետ» հրատարակվել է 1921 թվականի հունիսի 28-ին. Գրականության առաջադրվածության հիման վրա Համլետի նկարագրումը այս հրատարակությունում է իրենց հետագազորերի հետ համակցվում, իսկ այսինքն այս հրատարակությունը հայերենում որոշակի զարգացում է երկրի և հայերենության համար։

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В 80–90-х гг. XIX века «Гамлет» был трижды издан: в 1889 г. (Тифлис, в переводе Сенекерима Аришун), в 1894 г. (Тифлис, в переводе Ованеса Масегяна) и 1899 г. (Вена, в переводе Гарегина Бабазяна). Все три перевода привлекли внимание Туманяна, а о последних двух переводах поэт написал пространные рецензии.

Посточно сравнивая перевод Масегяна с шестью русскими переводами, О. Туманян пришел к заключению, что, несмотря на ряд недостатков, этот перевод превзошел лучшие русские переводы Шекспира.

Во втором издании «Гамлета» в 1921 г. замечания Туманяна были учтены Ов. Масегяном. В предисловии к изданию 1921 года он признается, что не просто пересмотрел прежние переводы, а внес в них существенные изменения.