

Profile – András Soproni

Written by Nóra Dudás



András Soproni conducted his studies at Makszim Gorkij Hungarian-Russian School, where all of the subjects were held in Russian, and most of his teachers were Russians as well. During the 8 years he spent there, he developed a Russian knowledge that he would make use of in the future. He maintained this language skill via reading a vast number of Russian books during secondary school. Later he graduated at the Faculty of Hungarian and Russian Literature and Linguistics at Eötvös Loránd University.

Soproni started his career as a translator when he was a senior at ELTE. The book publisher Európa Könyvkiadó held a contest at the university's department of Russian studies in which he had to translate a passage of a Russian literary book. The publisher gave two passages from the book that were around 3 pages long. They were quite difficult texts, but at the end Soproni was placed second in the contest. From this time on he started to receive small translation works by the publisher, and since he was at the beginning of his translating and teaching career, he gladly accepted it. His first translation was published almost exactly 50 years ago, in 1966. Eventually, he became more known and started to work for other book publishers, such as Móra, Gondolat and Magvető. Although he was a teacher at the countryside, he received translation works regularly.

Despite the fact that he usually works alone as a translator, he considers that it is essential to have an experienced and skilled editor from whom one can learn more. For example, he learned a lot about translation while he worked with the editors of various publishers; among many there were Katalin Dezsényi and Ágnes Osztovics. Another possibility to learn is attending translator study groups. He also organized a study group about Russian literary works under the auspices of the journal called *Szovjet Irodalom*. The group's leader became Imre Makai, who translated several Russian classics into Hungarian, such as *War and Peace* and *The Brothers Karamazov*, and who offered help to young translators. The members of the group met monthly; translated texts given by Makai, then analysed their translations thoroughly. Through these meetings Soproni understood the essence of translation, meaning that translators do not translate sentences from word to word, but they render scenes and figures, and they are cultural mediators as well. These are the two key concepts of literary translation.

When it comes to the aspects of translation, Soproni believes that translation is similar to acting. Ideally, the text does not just “flow through” the translating person – such as entering through the eyes and exiting through the fingers – because the translator’s duty is to shape the text. According to him, it is important to hear and feel each sentence, because if he cannot hear it, he struggles to write it down. This is also among the features of an actor or an interpreter.

The majority of the literary works he translated were from Russian into Hungarian; however, he translated a smaller amount of English works as well. The translation he enjoyed to work on the most was Aksyonov’s *Volterjanci*, whose Hungarian title is *Volterjánosok és volterjankák*. It was such an invaluable experience that he could not repeat it with any other literary work. He is also the proud translator of Solzhenitsyn’s *The Gulag Archipelago*. Concerning English translations, he predominantly translated technical essays. These fields include strategy, hunting, naval history, demographic works, and the history of time. He also translated one of Stephen King’s novels.

One of his currently published works is the retranslation of Dostoyevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*. Since most of the Russian classics were translated into Hungarian in the 1950’s, he felt honoured to accept such an opportunity. On 10 November he introduced the first printing of his translation, and during the event he talked about the issues he faced during translation. One of the thought-provoking questions was the Hungarian title of the book, and whether they should keep it or search for a title that is more loyal to the Russian one. Some argue that the Russian title only means Raskolnikov’s committed sin and its following punishment; therefore the Hungarian title, *Bűn és bűnhődés*, might be misleading. However, according to Soproni, the novel does not only examine Raskolnikov’s fate. Almost all of the characters in the book have their own sins and punishments; for this reason, he thinks that the first, elevated Hungarian title is correct.