

Armine Matevosyan  
Philip Poladyan  
YSU

## The Problem of Equivalence on Charents's Poems

*In the past few decades remarkably important translations of Armenian literature into the English language have been undertaken. However, despite the significance of the initiative, the number of translations can hardly be called satisfactory as the scholarly study of Armenian literature in the English language still remains largely neglected and is overwhelmingly confined to the pages of academic journals. The very prospect of dispersing the exceptional masterpieces of Armenian classics worldwide still remains open to extensive discussions. In this regard the two highly essential questions require immediate answers; first, what is to be translated and second, how a successful translation can be executed.*

*Key words: translation, equivalence, poetry, aesthetic effect, poetic message*

Irrespective of the presence of a number of novels and novelists, it is our firm belief that Armenian literature is mostly identified with the names of its unmatched poets; such as Tumanyan, Sevak, Shiraz, Isahakyan, Charents and many others. In this respect it becomes absolutely imperative to promote, first and foremost, the works of our eminent poets to a higher degree of global acknowledgement. We may daringly assume that we will not exaggerate by putting the names of some of the outstanding figures of Armenian poetry alongside with the ones, who are rightfully conceived of as the ultimate representatives of the majestic world of verbal art: William Blake, Edgar Allan Poe, Pushkin or Lermontov, etc.

At this point, we could probably question ourselves: how is it possible that the English-speaking/reading community may indulge in taking pleasure in, for instance, Pushkin's writings, and remain unaware of the unprecedented chef d'oeuvres created by no less a poet than Yeghishe Charents himself? Who is to blame for this puzzling situation? The answer is unambiguous: we all. Even though we cannot deny the existence of English translations of some of the well-known poems by Tumanyan, Charents, Teryan or others, the quality of the English versions leaves much to be desired. It appears profoundly unjustifiable for a nation having such a tremendous poetic potential to reconcile itself with the situation where the supreme creations of its matchless poets still remain unknown to the world at large.

There is bitter irony in the fact that probably the most serious and massive translation of the Armenian poetic literature was accomplished by the efforts of the famous American journalist and human rights advocate Alice Stone Blackwell, a great friend of Armenia who laudably compiled an anthology of Armenian poems entitled “Armenian Poems” back in 1916. The anthology includes works by such nineteenth-century poets as Pedros Duryan, Michael Nalbandyan and Raphael Patkanyan who were part of the Armenian Renaissance. The second and enlarged edition came out subsequently, in 1917, containing 135 poems by Daniel Varujan, Hovhannes Tumanyan and many others that were added in the second publication.

All this was about a long, good and eventful hundred years ago. What has changed since? Practically nothing except that the world has undergone the Second World War, Albert Einstein advanced his theory of relativity, the first man set foot on the Moon, the USSR collapsed, Armenia finally gained her so much desired independence. As far as Armenian literature is concerned, poetry in particular, the 20<sup>th</sup> century proved to be fruitful as well. In fact, it was preeminently the era when our national poetic genius revealed itself to the fullest. The most outspoken, courageous and brightest minds ever, including Sevak, Shiraz, Isahakyan as well as Yeghishe Charents emerged from the ashes of gray eternity. It was exactly their priority to show to the world that despite the unprecedented torments and sufferings Armenians endured during World War I. In this

regard Yeghishe Charents was probably the most prominent figure distinguished by his ferocious and uncompromising intolerance towards the Soviet regime and Stalinian government. Charents can be considered as the Che Guevara of Armenian poetry: humanist, revolutionary and patriot. *“If you want your song to be heard you must become the breath of your time”*. He was that breath. He is the singer of many voices directed by the storm of revolution to exude the spirit of freedom and liberty through many years and centuries. He communicates directly through the poetry that flows from the depths of his soul.

Charents’ word shows no mercy for provincialism and vulgar nationalism. He criticizes repression, social oppression and exploitation. In contrast to Tumanyan, who is known als a “pan-Armenian poet”, it is our strong conviction that Charents should be considered a poet of a larger, more universal integrity and amplitude as his poetry relates not only to the Armenian people but is addressed to peoples and nations all over the world. Charents’ poetry is not confined within certain spatial or temporal dimensions. Specifically nowadays, when the world rages against tyrants, and nations are desirous to gain their freedom and independence, the necessity to render Charents’ revolutionary ideas into such an international language as English has become an urgent task. Unfortunately, despite his universality, he is little known in the West because of lack of translations and publicity.

The first translator who has done English translations of Charents' poetry is Diana-Der Hovanesian: New England born poet, a professor of Armenian poetry and author of more than 25 books of poetry and translations. Der-Hovanesian has compiled a large volume of Charents' poetry, which includes practically the whole arsenal of his works. With the help of her friend, Marzbed Margossian she published the book of Charents' poetry entitled "Land of Fire". In fact, we may conveniently claim that "Land of Fire" so far remains the only officially published collection of Charents' works in English. Nevertheless, when reading any of the translated versions found in Der-Hovanesian's book one cannot but irrevocably fix oneself in the persuasion that the translation should not be abused irresponsibly. To support this position of ours we could present a small fragment of the English translation of Charents', in all probability, most revolutionary poem "Ամբոխները խելագարված" ("Frenzied Masses" Der-Hovanesian's translation of the title).

The Frenzied Masses

*Der-Hovanesian*

1.

*To you, comrades, near and far, to you other suns*

*In other worlds to all you souls on fire,*

*To all you burning fires,*

*To you burnished spirits*

*Who light this untamed darkness called life, and death,  
To you all who are sacrificed for the sake of life  
Greetings.*

2.

*It was night but a burning night, red as flame.  
The red sun setting in the west  
Stained the fog with blood,  
As if a red poison were pressed  
From the red heart of the sun.  
The hot sun spit blood as it sat in the west.  
On the horizon a red incandescent crucible  
Spilled a lava of light over the fields  
And the wavering plains burned with the glow  
The edgeless field spread fire from the sun  
Over a sea without beginning or boundary,  
A red sea in the evening mist.*

What conclusions can be drawn in connection with “The Frenzied Masses” by Der-Hovhanessian? Most importantly it is translated as a free verse, chiefly in a prosaic style, with greater emphasis on rendering the general meaning of the original. Consequently, it does not make use of consistent meter patterns, thus lacking harmony, rhythm, and rhyming; and predominantly tending to follow the rhythm of natural speech event. This fact seriously undermines the aesthetic value of the original poem, and it is only the general meaning of the text

which is brought to the fore with little aesthetic shapeliness. However what do we understand by meaning in relation to poetry and what is the meaning of a piece of verbal art in general?

According to the theory of hermeneutics, to define the meaning of a fictional text the translator should primarily seek for the intentions of the author and uncover his aim. Sometimes the author's aim is not only decoded in meaning or meanings of individual lexical units, but in the ways by which the very meaning is conveyed. Edgar Allan Poe's outstanding poem, "The Raven" will make an exemplary case. When reading, for instance, Khachik Dashtents' Armenian translation of Poe's masterpiece one may arrive at a conclusion that the translated version is associated with the original only to a certain extent. This obvious diversity between the translated version and the original occurs due to the fact that Poe's "The Raven" comprises a specific sound sequence, mathematical calculation of sound correlation directed at the creation of exquisitely impalpable sound symbolism the reconstruction of which is simply impossible if the translator's focus rests solely on rendering the literal meaning of the original text. Similarly, in Charents' <<Ամբոխները խելագարված>> the meaning is not primarily embedded in the semantic structure of individual linguistic units, phrases or sentences, but rather in the ways it is conveyed. Therefore, despite Der-Hovhanessian's efforts to convey the overall meaning of <<Ամբոխները խելագարված>> ("The Frenzied Masses"), her version of the poem seems to have

a feeble attempt to preserve the aesthetic effect. In other words, there are poetry pieces or works of verbal art which should by no means be subjected to free verse translation technique. Der-Hovhanessian's translation in this respect can be defined as a narrative description of a sequence of events in which "the frenzied masses" finally managed to invade the "iron station". Charents, however, was not writing a story. Charents' magnificence lies in the musicality of his words, dynamism of effect and strikingly superior ways of externalizing his dauntless philosophy. If translated otherwise, particularly in free verse or prosaic style it loses the majesty of effect which is the part and parcel of the meaning. Hence it is obvious that even a mere attempt to translate Charents' poetry prosaically, no matter how precisely the meaning is conveyed, will inevitably end in total fiasco.

"The Frenzied Masses" by Der-Hovhanessian embodies the style in which the rest of Charents' poems found in "Land of Fire" are translated. This particular poem is illustrative of the book on the whole. With no disrespect to Der-Hovhanessian and the tremendous work she accomplished, we strongly believe that this is not the most appropriate way of presenting our culture to the world.

Then one may rightfully wonder what the best solution might be. In what way should an Armenian poem be converted into the English language so as to convey the precise meaning of the original and make the same (or nearly the same) aesthetic impact as the original version does upon the readers of the



source language. Undoubtedly, translating a piece of poetry is far more difficult than translating prosaic texts. Here, the translator, in addition to dealing with the difficulties inherent in translation in general, must as well consider the aesthetic aspect of the text; its beauty and style. Thus when translating a poetic work we should above all define our aim. Are we going to preserve the aesthetic value (which we believe is the most important aspect in poetry, otherwise the same content could be transmitted in prose or narrative), or do we intend to remain faithful to every single word, hence resorting to literal translation?

As we know Armenian and English greatly differ in their phonetic system, which may present certain difficulties in finding the exact rhythmical pattern and internal rhyme of a given poem. Besides, the English language has a strict syntactic order requiring rigid structures that resists free inversions, that is why, if we try to translate an Armenian poem literally, we will fail in preserving its rhyming and rhythmical pattern.

In order to preserve the aesthetic effect we shall sacrifice something from meaning. At this point, we are again facing that seemingly insoluble question: what is meaning? As already stated, the answer to this question can only be revealed by the translator's quest for the authorial intentions and deduction of the author's aim. In a piece of poetry, more often than not, the author's aim is not merely concluded in actualizing certain meaning or meanings through the content, but to induce the reader to construct and reconstruct, think of and experience the

authorial intent and poetic message. This last statement refers to Charents' poetry significantly, as the strength and vigor of his philosophy are reflected in the ways the lexical units are brought together to comprise larger segments. When reading the poem in the original one's soul is captivated by Charents' energy and enthusiasm. The words of the poem serve as a medium between the author and his readers, to induce them to actions, taking them beyond any discernible borders, to a profoundly new universe where the impossible becomes possible. Hence when speaking about Charents, we keep in mind not only the content of the message, but overwhelmingly the way in which it is conveyed. By the same token when translating Charents it becomes imperative to make somehow an audacious attempt to recreate his revolutionary spirit by means of rendering that frantic dynamism and vitality that are characteristic of Charents' most important works.

At this point we would like to present our translation of the opening part of the poem <<Ամբոխները խելագարված>> which is actualized in accordance with our personal views and perceptions of Charents' spiritual world and is aimed at merely elucidating how Charents' poetry in general, and <<Ամբոխները խելագարված>> in particular, could be translated. In this version we have put the main emphasis on transferring the rhythmical pattern of the poem by which the aesthetic aspect of the work could be preserved to a certain extent. In the course of reading our translation one may correctly identify the preference of sacrificing the precise

meaning of some lexical units or even phrases for the sake of achieving the aesthetic beauty found in the original.

*The Masses Unchained*

*To peoples, galaxies here and there!*

*To flaring spirits everywhere!*

*To those whose soul is burning bright!*

*To the spirits in sparkling flight!*

*In boundless mist of life and death,*

*To raging souls - my compliments!*

*Red was sunset, with bloody zest.*

*The sun was shrinking in the West.*

*The blood-soaked haze embraced the plain.*

*The Sun spilled poison from his vein.*

*Caught on fire, when retreating to the West,*

*He spat poison on the field of blood-washed fest.*

*The blood red glitter was dispersed over the plain,*

*By crimson torch on the horizon of endless pain.*

*The lustrous flame of the departing Sun*

*Scorched the oscillating fields of wheat,*

*Boundless, timeless the field was spread,*

*Tantalizing THEM with its fiery red.*

*Sea was the field, with no bottom, yet no end.*

*Sea was the field, in the dusk of sleeping land.*

*Inflamed by the sunset, ignited with the deceasing Sun*

*The masses unchained were fighting in the field of the days*

*bygone.*

*From every village, city, or steppe high and low*

*Had they come inflamed, were they all in a glow*

*He who had left a city large - he left the mist of hoary gray*

*The mist, which shaped a smoky cloud and set upon his present  
day*

*He who had come from a village far - he left behind his soaking  
land.*

*The land, to which the blooming life - had not blessed with a  
single plant...*

We do not announce, nor do we claim that this version is far better than the one by Der-Hovanesian. Our translation of the poem may hardly be qualified as acceptable or satisfactory. However, we do believe that this approach, which is mainly directed at preserving the aesthetic impact can be extensively made use of in more profound and efficient ways by some other ‘enthusiasts’ who truly believe in our ‘cause’. Indeed, translating a piece of poetry is not an easy task. Moreover no theory of translation can be totally helpful or readily applicable when translating a poem when you do not feel and ‘smell’ it. We may assume that when H. Tumanyan was translating Pushkin’s poem “Зимний вечер” (<<Զմեռվա իրիկունը>>), which is considered to be one of the best translations ever done into the Armenian language, he did not make use of various theories of translation; whether the one of hermeneutics or that of dynamic equivalence. He simply created a new poem which is precisely congruent with the original in meaning, and

fascinatingly sublime regarding the preservation of the superior style and aesthetic value of the original. Does this presuppose that poetry can be translated successfully only by other poets? Not necessarily. It will fully suffice to be creative poetically and highly dexterous linguistically in order to fulfill a successful piece of translation.

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## Արմինե Մաթևոսյան, Ֆիլիպ Փոլադյան

ԵՊՀ

### Համարժեքության խնդիրը Չարենցի ստեղծագործությունների անգլերեն թարգմանություններում

*Հոդվածը, որպես ուսումնասիրության առարկա, դիտարկում է Եղիշե Չարենցի “Ամբոխները խելագարված” պոեմից անգլերեն թարգմանությամբ մի փոքր հատված, փորձելով ի ցույց դնել այն խնդիրները, որոնք նկատելի են անգլերեն տարբերակում, ինչպես նաև առաջարկել համակարգային լուծումներ դրանք վերացնելու և առավել կատարյալ պոետիկ թարգմանություններ իրականացնելու ուղղությամբ:*

*Բանալի բառեր. Թարգմանություն, բառարվեստի ստեղծագործություն, համարժեքություն, բնագիր, պոեզիա, թիրախ տեքստ:*

Армине Матевосян, Филипп Поладян

ЕГУ

### Некоторые проблемы эквивалентности в переводах произведений Егише Чаренца

*В данной статье рассматриваются лингвопоэтические особенности эквивалентности в переводе с армянского на английский. Следует отметить что элементы экспрессивности и эмоциональности играют особенно важную роль в поэзии Чаренца где наиболее насыщено передаются мысли и чувства поэта.*

*Ключевые слова: перевод, эстетическое воздействие, эквивалентность, оригинал, поэзия.*