

**Babeş-Bolyai University
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**Letters from Turkey, Mulatságos napok – *Kelemen Mikes's* prose writing techniques
through his literary translations**

**PhD Thesis
Summary**

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**Cluj-Napoca
2013**

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Keywords: *literary translation, translation techniques, framed-nouvelle, frame story, enclosed stories, image of love, love vocabulary, dramatic elements in the frame story, aesthetic elements of Eastern and Western culture and literature*

The PhD thesis entitled *Letters from Turkey, Mulatságos napok – Kelemen Mikes’s prose writing techniques through his literary translations* has assumed the analysis of Kelemen Mikes’s prose writing techniques through his methods of translation in two of his works, also paying special attention to aspects of genre, and characteristics of the vocabulary (used by the author-translator) in the field of which I focused on love-expressions. These two works are Mikes’s *Mulatságos napok* and his original masterpiece, the *Letters from Turkey*.

My research concerns first of all translation techniques in both pieces of work. With the help of the method of comparison (and the support of already achieved results) I compared the *Mulatságos napok* with its source text: Madame de Gomez’s *Les journées amusantes* first published between 1722–1731. (We first got to know about the *Napok*’s source from István Szilágyi in 1878.) The process of comparison in the thesis is performed on the line of translation techniques, the application of the frame and the love vocabulary of both the source and target texts.

The *Letters from Turkey* (Mikes’s original work) is also strongly related to *Les journées amusantes* itself.

As starting point to my thesis I chose to present a detailed review of research history concerning the *Mulatságos napok*. In this first chapter I aimed at presenting the most important works dealing with the *Napok* from the perspective of translation after which I reviewed the so far results about the *Les journées*-stories incorporated into the *Letters from Turkey*.

The review of research history also touches on present-day foreign studies about *Les journées* (Shirley Jones-Day, Séverine Genieys-Kirk), special literature-conclusions about the Spanish versions of Mme Gomez’s work (the study of María Jesús García Garrosa), and about the Spanish dramatic adaptation of some of its inserted stories (i.e. Rosalía Fernandez Cabezon’s study.) It is also in this chapter where I present two studies written about Eliza Haywood’s English version (*La belle assemblée*), a writer and translator who first translated *Les journées* almost at the same time as Kelemen Mikes in his emigration (Tekirdag, Turkey):

Mrs. Haywood accomplished her translation between 1724–1734, Kelemen Mikes translated *Les journées* (according to the title page of the autograph manuscript) in 1745, but we know that he had translated parts of it earlier as well and inserted them into his *Letters from Turkey* (1724–1734). The studies written by Charles C. Mish and Séverine Genieys-Kirk supply us with information about Mrs Haywood’s translation techniques, her style as a translator in *La belle assemblée* also bringing other important information about it. It is Charles C. Mish who clears up the misunderstanding about *La belle assemblée* that has its origins in 18th century book-catalogues: notwithstanding the French title it is Eliza Haywood’s English translation of *Les journées amusantes* (and not a French work), a book just as popular at its time as *Les journées* itself. Having been informed from mistaken data, Lajos Hopp also took *La belle assemblée* for Madame Gomez’s work.

There are five short texts inserted into Mikes’s original masterpiece (the *Letters*) taken from *Les journées amusantes* (as scholars like István Szilágyi and Lajos Hopp first announced it): a Cleopatra-story (which tells us about the Egyptian queen’s tricky and cruel attempt to cure Marc Anthony of his mistrust; the story of the flattering courtiers; the story of the man (i.e. “un particulier nommé Bonneval”) escorted to the gallows; the one about Don Antonio, king of Portugal, and the reproduction of one of the letters written by Henri de la Tour d’Auvergne, Vicomte de Turenne. Besides these there is a dialogue about self-love incorporated into the *Letters* with the title *Silvia, Juliánna (Amour-propre. Dialogue* in the original version.) The fact that the *Letters* are filled up with originally adapted foreign texts is an interesting research problem concerning the Mikes research field. The most important results in this respect have been attained by literary scholar Lajos Hopp, and most recently by Gábor Tüskés. Concerning the texts borrowed by Mikes from *Les journées* and inserted into the *Letters* as a first step I presented the results that have been achieved so far: it was István Szilágyi who discovered that the story of Dom Antonio and the dialogue about self-love inserted into the *Letters* have their origins in Mme Gomez’s *Les journées amusantes*. Lajos Hopp discovered that there are four more short texts which also come from *Les journées*. It is due to István Szilágyi, György Király, László Madácsy, Béla Zolnai (who analysed the Don Antonio-story in more details) and finally Lajos Hopp that we know about these insertions, and what we know about them.

My aim concerning this aspect was to accomplish a more detailed analysis of these texts in a context of comparison regarding the original French version, Mikes’s version and that of Haywood’s paying special attention to Mikes’s innovative interpretation of them and his modifications, while giving importance to Mrs Haywood’s translation techniques as well.

I also tried to check the source of Mikes's and Gomez's Cleopatra-story through comparing them with Pliny's and Brantôme's rendering of it. László Madácsy wrote about the possibility that both Pliny's and Brantôme's texts could have been served as sources for Mikes; Lajos Hopp added that the source of Mikes's version was first of all that of Mme Gomez's, but Pliny could be taken into consideration as well, while Mme Gomez's version goes back to Pliny's and Brantôme's.

On comparing *Mulatságos napok* with *Les journées amusantes* I thought it important to pay attention to the following: Which are the alterations through which Mikes "puts his word in" the content of the original by omitting, inserting or rewriting parts of the text? I tried to draw conclusions concerning Mikes's possible target readers and his own way of thinking. Further on: What signs are there hinting at the fact that the version of *Mulatságos napok* we know is not the final one (as Lajos Hopp also considered it an authorial rough draft)? On what level are the omissions accomplished by Mikes smoothed away in the text? In what way does the translator strive to serve his own purpose of making his text enjoyable, an aim in the sake of which (according to his opinion) it is allowed to (slightly) alter the original text? Can we discern out of the omissions a certain level of consistency or tendentiousness apart from the translator's obvious aim of omitting repetitive and uselessly verbose parts? Omissions are the most characteristic to Mikes's translation method. From among these I underlined those related to love, thoughts, feelings and reflexions about different feelings; omissions of expressions of sadness, fright, suffering, weeping, of parts describing beauty, etc. Important are Mikes's insertions or transcriptions of passages that refer to Christian identity, family relations through his more personal solutions (he tends to underline these), and his more respectful discourse about other peoples. As a conclusion it can be stated that Mikes's translation and language is more reserved than that of the original version's: he underlines parts referring to Christian identity and moral issues, he refrains from exaggerated love expressions or descriptions of scenes of crying and suffering, and generally tends to avoid redundancy.

I performed a detailed analysis of *A Dona Elvir de Zuaré historiája* from the point of view of the translation techniques. In this chapter I tried to have an ample look at Mikes's translation method, while I noticed the dramatic effects of his omissions, the outline of a stronger woman-image concerning the female characters, and I cleared up the case of some narrative puzzles that seemed to confuse the reader at first reading.

I also made an analysis of the *Histoire de Léonore de Valesco* comparing the original version with that of Mikes's and Mrs. Haywood's. I drew the conclusion – adding to the

results of Genieys-Kirk and Mish – that the English translator is always ready to expand on romantic pathos, maximizing the emotional aspects with the use of poetic devices. Her more personal style is attained through the insertion of even longer passages, while Mikes's is forged through grammatical alterations and the specification of narrative elements in the sake of easier understanding. He modifies the text with the aim to make it more easily understood and followed, while Haywood does the same to make her text emotionally more expressive.

I also analysed the *Les journées*-stories inserted into the *Letters from Turkey* in a three-fold context of comparison: the versions from *La belle assemblée*, helped to discover more about that of Mikes'. There are several similar aspects in Haywood's and Mikes's attitude toward translation: they both make alterations as creative prose writers. Both Mikes and Haywood tend to accentuate the dramatic aspect of the stories: Haywood reaches her aim through poetic emphasis and 'add-ons', while Mikes attains similar effects through concealing and silencing the characters' inner thoughts and intentions, so as the surprise brought by the point be more intensive.

With the help of García Garrosa's studies I could compare Gaspar Zavala Y Zamora's and Mikes's translations of *Les journées*, this time only on the basis of Garrosa's information. Gaspar Zavala y Zamora produced one of the Spanish versions of *Les journées* at the end of the 18th century in the same time as Baltazar Driguet accomplished his own version. Garrosa cites the Spanish clerical censor's evaluation of Zavala's translation and the latter's answer to it. This is how I managed to draw the attention to the fact that there are similarities between Mikes's and Zavala's attitude toward the process of translation.

The analysis comparing Pliny's, Brantôme's, Mme de Gomez's and Mikes's version of the Cleopatra-story shows that Mikes's text can be related to that of Brantôme's only in two connections, that cannot be taken as sure proofs of whether or not it served as direct source to Mikes. In connection with Pliny's version it can also be concluded that the version from the *Letters* is similar to it only through that of Mme de Gomez's.

In what the dialogue about self-love is concerned I could also place it in the context of the history of edition of Zavala's translation, as Garrosa informs us about interesting relations about Spanish censorship opinion concerning this important question of the time in religious and moral philosophic approaches. The dialogue debates the theme of self-love from a modern perspective as it produces its apology. The Spanish clerical censor rejected the allowance for publication of the fifth volume of *Días alegres* (Zavala's translation of *Les journées*) because it contained this dialogue. Somewhat earlier (1733) Mikes inserted this dialogue into his *Letters* seeming to be amused at the discussion presented in it: he draws his

conclusion with his usual humour. In Hungarian literature the translation of this dialogue can be considered a first since it speaks about feelings (jealousy, love, self-love, and another theme: friendship) figuring female characters all in a secular context.

For the examination of the love vocabulary of *Mulatságos napok* I selected as points of reference pieces of prose fiction some of which had also been mentioned by Lajos Hopp as texts most closely related to the *Napok: Szép Magelona* (1676), *A Troja veszedelméről* (1695), Fénelon's *Télémaque* translated by László Haller as *Telemakus bujdosásának történetei* (1755) and La Calprenède's *Cassandre* translated by Sándor Báróczi as *Kassándra* (1774). I made a comparison of the image of love that unfolds in these works of prose fiction and compared it with that of the *Mulatságos napok* and *Les journées*. The particular aspects found in these texts drew my attention to the peculiarly Hungarian verse forms of love ("széphistoriák") and their approach to love and marriage. The image of love expressed in the *Napok* shows a touch of novelty, and thus it can be related more to the "széphistoriák" and from among the prose forms, to the *Szép Magelona*. I examined the love expressions used by Mikes and Gomez in each story separately. With the Cleodon- and Etelred-story I used a certain word frequency analysis to assess the level of variety of the love vocabulary, and sporadically I expressed my findings through the use of numbers in connection with the other stories, too. I examined expressions, phrases, collocations, and poetic devices. I assessed the frequency of these expressions from a stylistic point of view. I also found that the love vocabulary of *Les journées* is based on a fixed and repetitive set of expressions as well, although it uses a larger scale of words.

The *Letters from Turkey* is Mikes's masterpiece where he writes freely following his own inventions and creative skills, playing with words, expressions, exhausting to the fullest the possibilities offered by the language, what is more showing a perplexing ease and modernity in its use. Yet, the love vocabulary of *Mulatságos napok* is less various. The above mentioned 17th and 18th century prose fiction forms use a somewhat richer love vocabulary than Mikes who seems to intentionally avoid to admit into his text the exaggerated love expressions found in *Les journées*. His use of words is much more refrained and chaste. In my opinion this can be due to the fact that the *Napok* version we know is not a final one, or because Mikes had sensed that enhancing the emotional charge through words and expressions would lessen the more intensive effects of simplicity and "not telling". His style perfectly shows the character of a man who is sensitive to the movements of heart, but refrained when expressing passion. This can be seen in his original masterpiece, the *Letters*, too. In another aspect: if we presume that the text of *Napok* we know today is only a draft

which ultimately could have been filled up and adorned by the author with pathetic expressions – knowing Mikes’s character always ready to joke, laugh and make laugh – it is easy to imagine how his pen would have fallen into pure comedy.

In what the framing story of *Mulatságos napok* is concerned I concluded the following: it is also a field which reflects Mikes’s creative qualities, that of a prose fiction writer, as he adapted the frame of *Les journées* in a wholly inventive and original way – an observation also remarked by Márton Szilágyi and Gábor Vaderna. I partially join with Szilágyi and Vaderna’s problematisation. I chose to analyse the relationship between the frame and the embedded tales on the basis of Hermann Wetzel’s and Katharine S. Gittes’s research. Gittes speaks about the importance of Eastern and Western aesthetic principles blended in framed-nouvelles. I analysed the presence of these in the *Mulatságos napok* and I concluded that it has its well-defined place in the context of European story collections of the same type. It can also be listed among framed story collections which in their frame build up a world based on harmonious order that is meant to show a way of how to survive or balance chaos – a point of view from which Hermann Wetzel approaches this literary genre through several examples.

The comparison of the frame of the *Napok* with that of *Les journées* and the *Decameron* also convinced me of the intensive strive for harmony and unity in Mikes’s variant, possibly brought about by his own experience as an emigrant.

From the perspective of the common theme and the same genre I assumed to look at the *Napok* in the context of five more framed-nouvelles analysing the elements and motifs that seem to be drawn from the *Decameron*. These are the following: *Decameron*, *Heptameron*, *Les journées amusantes*, *Les nouvelles françoises ou les divertissemens de la Princesse Aurelie* (by Jean Ragnault de Segrais / Mlle Montpensier) and *Novelas amorosas* by María de Zayas.

On comparing the frames of these above-mentioned collections of stories I concluded the following:

Mikes borrowed from *Les journées* not only motifs, but parts of text as well. There are several similarities between the *Napok* and the *Decameron*, too. I drew the attention to common elements in the *Napok*, *Les journées*, *Decameron*, and the three other above-mentioned collections in the context of which it has been clarified at what level is the *Napok* an original piece of work through Mikes’s compilatory technique and his own ideas. Yet, further research shows to be highly desirable regarding this problem.

On the line of Wetzel’s and Gittes’s presumptions and conclusions about framed-nouvelles, Mikes’s frame proves to be one that strives to present a world of unity, harmony and

order in which the presence of Providence prevails: thus the frame seems to have the function to alleviate the ideas of morality and suffering somewhat far too much severe in (some of) the enclosed tales.

Another difference noted between the frame of the *Napok* and that of *Les journées* is the somewhat more ‘realistic’ characterization (of Hilaria) even if this is expressed in one clause only. In the grid presented in Appendix 2 can be detected the differences and similarities between *Les journées* and the *Decameron* and the other framing stories as well.

Another important aspect of Mikes’s frame is his intention to make it appealing to the female public – as several hints make us think so.

In my interpretation Mikes succeeded in building up the much-desired fullness of life through the way of fiction in the case of the *Napok* as well. His frame can also be considered a model of frames bearing in their fictive texture Eastern and Western aesthetic elements blended in a way apart.

The main point of my interpretation is the following: the balanced order expressed through the harmony of numbers and other elements, the question mark related to the problem of fidelity (but in the same time assuring of its existence); the interpretation of the tales without evident moralizing by the frame characters (a fact which has already been observed by Szilágyi–Vaderna and Béla Hegedüs); the ‘game’ motif – all these have the function of alienating the problems of suffering dealt with in the frame as if the writer-translator wanted to say: *Dear reader, there is nothing that should be taken far too far seriously.*

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