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I

Polish and World Writers on the “Barbaric”
and the “Civilized”
Interpretations

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The Slavic Barbarian in Adam Mickiewicz's Paris Lectures*

I

Adam Mickiewicz's view on Slavic nations is more complicated than has been presented thus far. What has mostly been noticed is that he idealised Slavs in his Paris lectures (see Cieśla-Korytowska). But this idealisation has its specific complexities, obscurities and ambiguities—which are characteristic not only for a work in formation, in which the concept is still being shaped, but also for an idea recognising/creating an unstable identity, in this case the Slavic identity (these issues were referred to by Rudaś-Grodzka). An example of such ambiguities is the motif of the Slavic barbarian—and the accompanying concept of the necessity (at least a potential necessity) of destroying European culture—which has been marginalised in the interpretations of the lectures but which seems striking in the thoughts of a poet so profoundly and consciously immersed in European cultural tradition.

Some other contexts, mostly overlooked so far, are also significant, especially the ones connected with the issues of colonialism and orientalism (Said 1ff.) characteristic of European discourse in the 18th and 19th century. The view of the Slavs that emerges from the Paris lectures is dialogic—partly in the sense that it constitutes an answer to the above discourse. Mickiewicz voiced his opinions on Slavic nations in the context of slavophile thought

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(this issue has been written about—see Walicki) and the Western reflection on Slavs. Mickiewicz saw this problem himself as he felt compelled to tell the truth about the Slavs, arguing with the existing archive of knowledge about them. The deliberations on the Slavic barbarian presented in his Paris lectures also constitute an answer to the orientalising of the Slavs and are an attempt to go beyond either idealistic or negative stereotyping of these people.

And, last but not least, there is the issue of language that Mickiewicz applies to speak about the Slavs. This language changes throughout the Paris lectures just as if the author was striving to escape the trap of the initially adopted language, originating from the works of Johann Gottfried Herder who underscored the pastoralness of the Slavs, the noble savages of Europe, but also showed their inability to create their own civilisation. The passage about the Slavic barbarian, associating the nation not with an idyll but with sublimity, becomes the conclusion of the search for a new language to talk about the Slavs.

II

In order to understand the uniqueness of this conclusion one has to start at the beginning, that is at the question of what and how Herder wrote about the Slavs as Mickiewicz initially assumes Herder's point of view. The passage of *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man* dedicated to the issue of Slavic nations is frequently referred to as the Slavic chapter, albeit it seems a slight overstatement since it is but a minute fragment, modestly separating the abundant chapters on other nations. It did, however, become the starting point of a Slavic renaissance occurring at the turn of 18th century in Europe and it was, to a greater or lesser extent, accepted by the Slavs themselves as the language of their identity.

On the one hand—and this drew the attention of the Slavs—Herder listed a catalogue of characteristics which at first glance may seem positive and idealistic. They result from connecting Slavic identity with the countryside, from the idyllic nature of a nation consisting of quiet and hard-working farmers, shepherds and craftsmen who sold the products of their land and industry (but, as the philosopher notes, the Slavs also built cities and followed mining

and casting of metals; it seems noteworthy that Mickiewicz omits this statement thereby radicalising Herder's discourse).

On the other hand, though, one has to remember that Herder's remarks come from within the orientalisising discourse responsible for creating the opposition of Us vs. Others. In this opposition it is Us who possess the values related to civilisation (such an opposition does not, however, exclude the sympathy for the oppressed nor the criticism of the oppressors; see Wolff 284ff.). As we read in Herder's text: "It is unfortunate for these people, that their love of quiet and domestic industry was incompatible with any permanent military establishment, though they were not defective in valour in the heat of resistance" (Herder, 1966: 483). It seems therefore that the Slavs lacked the skill of self-organisation. They also did not make their mark in history. Other nations threatened their "gay and musical" lives (ibid.) and oppressed the Slavs who were helpful and hospitable up to the point of excess, freedom-loving, averse to military conquests or plundering while being submissive and obedient. But as Herder also notes, when they were oppressed, the Slavs' character changed into "the artful, cruel indolence of a slave" (ibid.). This issue, it seems important to note, will be accounted for by Mickiewicz (along with Slavic laziness and sybaritism described by the philosopher), who follows, as we will see, the logic of the moral economy of messianism which proves that the Slavs have already done their penance.

This is the view that emerges from Herder's Slavic chapter. In the *Journal of my Voyage in the Year 1769* he also writes about the future of Europe which belongs to the Slavs and is connected to them realising the idea of their full humanity: "its [the Slavic nation's] spirit from the northwest will spread over Europe which now lies asleep and make a spiritual conquest of it" (Herder, 1969: 90). This particular notion seemed to resonate particularly strongly in the 19th-century Slavic countries and also in the works of the Polish poet.

As Said notices, the orientalisising discourse—when paired with Western discourse of modernity and of the progress of civilisation—is responsible for the violence against others (see Said 4ff.), in this case the Slavs. At the same time one must add that Herder demanded a holistic approach to these nations, the creation of "a general history of *this race*" (Herder, 1966: 484). He also presaged changes—which were possibly the political aftermath of the Enlightenment

thought—that would lead to the liberation of Slavs and their return to their happy old lives.

III

An important dialogical context for the discussion about the Slavic nations in Mickiewicz's Paris lectures is Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's thought which constitutes one of the most important modern discourses of hegemonic character, legitimising the dominance of the West as the source and model of rationality (see Gall). Hegel's thought on the Slavs is in its main outline identical to Herder's as Hegel also derives Slavic characteristics from these peoples' agricultural origin; however, he makes the orientalisising discourse more radical by abandoning both the sympathy resulting from the oppression of these people and the prophecy concerning them. Curiously enough, Mickiewicz states in his lectures that Hegel nonetheless speaks of a future Slavic mission (a thought, as the poet-professor claims, that proved inspirational to Russian authors).

According to the philosopher, Slavic countries are the ones who appear on the stage of history too late and hence cannot contribute to it. Also, they are in constant contact with Asia which has a negative stigma. In his teleological vision of history, which also takes progress into account, the philosopher assumes that: "The History of the World travels from East to West, for Europe is absolutely the end of history, Asia the beginning" (Hegel 121). Hegel justifies the exclusion of Slavs from the historical discourse:

These people did, indeed, found kingdoms and sustain spirited conflicts with the various nations that came across their path. Sometimes, as an advanced guard—an intermediate nationality—they took part in the struggle between Christian Europe and unchristian Asia. The Poles even liberated beleaguered Vienna from the Turks; and the Slaves have to some extent been drawn within the sphere of Occidental Reason. Yet this entire body of peoples remains excluded from our consideration, because hitherto it has not appeared as an independent element in the series of phases that Reason has assumed in the World. Whether it will do so hereafter, is a question that does not concern us here; for in History we have to do with the Past. (Hegel 367)

Therefore we learn about the marginal and inferior position of the Slavs and, most of all, about their lack of autonomy. Interestingly, Hegel treats all Slavic nations as one entity—"the great Slavonic nation" (Hegel 366)—without distinguishing particular nations and cultures, sometimes merely mentioning Poland and Russia.

And one more passage from Hegel's work which develops Herder's view of the Slavs:

The Slavonic nations were agricultural. This condition of life brings with it the relation of lord and serf. In agriculture the agency of nature predominates; human industry and subjective activity are on the whole less brought into play in this department of labor than elsewhere. The Slavonians therefore did not attain so quickly or readily as other nations the fundamental sense of pure individuality—the consciousness of Universality—that which we designated above as political power, and could not share the benefits of dawning freedom. (Hegel 439)

It was therefore the peasant state of the Slavs which was responsible for their identity deficits; Slavic passivity and formlessness come from their fatalistic dependence on their natural conditions.

In Hegel's discourse political power is the fulfilment of historical rationality as it allows the real freedom to be realised, taking minorities into consideration. As the philosopher notes, Poland was not capable of keeping its independence. It collapsed trying to accomplish the unreal freedom. The philosopher criticises free elections, magnates enslaving the whole nation and the attempts to eliminate Protestantism in the old Poland. A nation devoid of political power has no place in the holistic logic of history. It becomes excluded from the European discourse of civilisation.

At this moment the introductory parts of Mickiewicz's lectures, whose topics are later elaborated on, begin to gain a fuller meaning; their aim was either to explain the civilising and historic contribution of Slavs (a whole, diversified and developing Slavic continent) and their antiquity or to explain why there has been no such contribution (e.g. by underscoring that the Slavs defended Europe from the invasions of Asian empires, constituted the bulwark of Christianity—and they created themselves during these fights) and also to

argue their openness to the West.¹ Similar thoughts are presented in those parts of the lectures where Mickiewicz talks about the idealised regime of the old Poland; there are also notions like the resistance to Protestantism, diversifying the Slavic nations and emphasising the relationships of the Slavs, especially Poles, with Europe. Also, the reference to Hegel may explain Mickiewicz's emphasis on a spiritual model of community (as opposed to a material state), the criticism of naturalistic determinism or rationalism which, as it turns out, goes beyond the epistemological plain. The author says: "Hegel does not specify in which kingdom God currently resides; but according to his system, it is not difficult to guess that God is now in Prussia. The political God has become a Prussian" (IX, 232).²

Moreover, it seems the philosophy of action, emphasised by the poet professor as the specificity of Slavic thought, is related to challenging the notion of history's rationality and to demanding its radical recreation.

IV

Let us move on to the subject of the Slavic barbarian(s) in the Paris lectures. The appearance of this figure in Mickiewicz's thought results from the logic of Slavic discourse in his lectures or, to be more precise, from the logic of critical distortion of this discourse. On the one hand, if the Slavic barbarian appears in the pejorative context in the modern European discourse (as opposed to the figures of modernity), then the poet-professor extracts this figure from this discourse and uses it—rewrites it—for the purposes of his own discourse, giving it a subversive meaning.³ On the other hand (and this issue will be discussed

¹ I have already addressed this subject (see Kuziak, 2010).

² All quotes from Mickiewicz's texts have been translated based on the following edition: *Dzieła*. Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1955. The Roman number refers to the volume, the Arabic—to the page.

³ One should note here a cultural—aesthetic—rehabilitation of barbarians which has already been done in the period of Romanticism (and which also was a manifestation of orientalisation). Namely, they are connected with the founding myth of modernity, especially the Middle Ages, where the Romantics searched for their roots. Mickiewicz does a similar thing in his *Preface* to his *Ballads and Romances*. We read for instance that "the Northern hordes mixed with local people settled on the ruins of the Roman empire were to awake

again in this paper), the Slavic barbarian becomes a sign of radicalising the Slavic author's discourse that was initially influenced by the modernity. In the first two courses of his lectures Mickiewicz refers to the achievements of civilisation as to a significant value, carefully pointing out that the Slavs did have such achievements and also emphasising the benefits (both pecuniary and spiritual) for the West from studying Slavic nations.

The figure of the Slavic barbarian appears in the 3rd and especially the 4th course of Paris lectures (the 11th lecture of this course is entitled *Barbarians. The Infinite Human*). The author, having critically discussed European culture, literature, philosophy and Church, looks for a model of power, charisma and action. He seeks to transform mid-19th century Europe which has found itself, as he claims, in crisis. One should also underscore that he became fascinated by the strength of the Asians, whom Hegel orientalised. Earlier Mickiewicz divided the Slavs into Western Slavs, connected to the universe of Roman culture, and Eastern Slavs, leaning towards Asia. In this opposition the former, especially the Poles, were granted positive characteristics; the latter included Russians.

The author no longer seeks to justify the Slavs nor does he point out their cultural heritage or historic deeds. He also does not create any economic systems in order to convince the West that there is a substantial benefit in getting acquainted with the East. Moreover, he does not accept the concept of a rich pre-Christian Slavic culture (such an opinion was voiced for instance by Zorian Dołęga-Chodakowski). The idea of a different spiritual culture of the Slavs (founded on the category of civilisation deficiency) also seems to be emphasised in a different manner than in the first two courses of Paris lectures. This notion no longer constitutes a purely cognitive phenomenon; it turns out to be primarily the source of the will to act. The poet-professor notes that contemporary Slavs have ceased imitating the West.

the long-asleep imagination and initiate a new type of poetry" (V, 190). A similar aesthetic thought can be found in the Paris lectures: "Indeed, whenever Western, Greek or Roman armies, or even crusaders, crossed the lower Danube, they abandoned, so to say, the realm of history and entered the land of poetry; and whenever they moved even further, towards the Don River, they submerged in the land of tales and legends. And vice versa, barbarian leaders, leaders of nomadic hordes, were known only by an uncertain tale as long as they remained beyond the Danube; but once they crossed the Danube, they entered history" (VIII, 41).

Mickiewicz is aware how the figure of the barbarian functions in the hegemonic discourse—to put it in modern categories. He notices the violence lying at the core of seemingly neutral cultural discourse: “Civilised societies, when they reach their ultimate development, call every new nation barbaric” (XI, 467). In the 3rd course of the lectures he presents the historical connections between Slavs and barbarians (“Our history is therefore connected more than any other with the history of barbarians” [XI, 407]) and links the currently discussed sculptures depicting barbarians with the depictions of Slavs, pointing out the history of the Slavic people inscribed in these monuments (“srb”): from greatness (military service by the kings of Nineveh at Babylon), through enslavement to redeeming sacrifice.

Mickiewicz scrutinizes the sculpture of the *Barbarian (Arrotino)*, arguing that it could not be of Scythian origin and persuading the reader that the figure has Slavic physiognomy. He sees that the figure could be a Slavic torturer: “. . . with his errant gaze painfully fixed on his victim, he shudders to think that he has to torture him but his silent smile reveals that he cannot hinder the necessity” (XI, 242f).⁴ The author, similarly to Herder, describes the obedience of a Slavic slave (his tamed physical strength) and, also similarly to the German philosopher, Mickiewicz notices a gradual corruption of this character, as seen in the sculptures of caryatids, showing—according to the Polish poet—slaves who “have come to the perdition of all moral feelings, already devoid of both will and movement” (XI, 244). There is, however, an optimistic solution to this story, based on messianism and the concept of redeeming sacrifice. According to the author, the sculpture depicting the *Dying Gladiator* (whom Byron recognised in his *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* as a Dacian and Mickiewicz—as a Slav; see Sinko 521) was to be the proof that “. . . the Slavic nation is ready to adopt Christianity” (XI, 246).

It seems that Mickiewicz's thoughts on barbarism were based on the interpretation of barbarian invasion of the ancient world (and the criticism of the civilisation model linked with it). The author argues with the view that the barbarians stopped the development of civilisation (“[that] they interrupted the

⁴ Marta Ruszczyńska, who puts the Slavic barbarian in the title of her paper, deals in her article with everything but the passages directly connected to this issue. These fragments are of main interest in this article (see Ruszczyńska).

progressive march of human spirit, that they stopped the flight of imagination, destroyed sciences and pushed humanity back into the darkness" [XI, 467]) and that the only positive aspect of their actions may be the rejuvenation of the Western race. The poet-professor assumes that providence sends the barbarians. In his approach progress is a spiritual, not a substantial phenomenon. Those who had invaded Europe and pushed it into the Middle Ages were the people of the Word, who gave saints and warriors to the world, lived wishing to achieve grand deeds and to transform the face of the world.

Similar people, says Mickiewicz, are appearing today, in the 19th century: these are the Slavs and (this may seem surprising but is compliant with the author's political plan) the French. As we read: "But neither one nor the other have found peace on earth so far. Neither industry nor philosophy could rivet the French spirit. Also no government could satisfy the Slavic spirit" (XI, 473). Both nations remain insatiable, at the vanguard of European revolution, living true Christianity (see Ruszkowski 131ff.). One has to remember, though, that the France Mickiewicz talks about is the France of Napoleonic legend, living "the military spirit" (XI, 433) while Slavs consist mainly of Poles (legitimised by their suffering and the resultant spiritual power), but also Russians (having their material power originating from Asia). These three nations are to change the face of Europe.

Mickiewicz constructs a parallel juxtaposing the times of the fall of Byzantium and the Islamic invasion with the 19th-century reality. When depicting the defeat of Greeks, he states: "Let us not regret those ruins of aqueducts, those grand cities torn down; the human spirit could have been petrified in them, just as now it is being petrified in some of the Italian cities, exposed to a horrible future" (XI, 432). The thoughts on barbarism become a part of the prophecy resulting from the hermeneutics of history (in this passage Mickiewicz refers to the work by the Russian author Sergei d'Oubril *A few thoughts in connection with the conflict between state and clergy*): "Such a state of affairs indicates better than anything else that an era is coming to an end. Such a state of affairs once brought barbarians to civilised countries. Now we can understand that the barbaric invasions were an act of Providence" (XI, 431). Barbarians, as the poet professor lectures on, appear in eras of decadence and excessive development of unproductive culture—"rich in words, unable to act" (XI, 432): "people

who devise systems, who invent social truths but who have done nothing and dared nothing, these are the people who bring the barbarians to you” (XI, 432). One of such eras is, according to Mickiewicz, the middle of 19th century (“Is European literature of the civilised nations not in the same state as were the literatures of Greeks and Romans in the 5th century?” [XI, 469]). Evidence may be for instance well-developed rationalism and the tendency to construct systems and doctrines, separation from spirituality and morality, the crisis of truth and also the emerging capitalism which can be associated with confusing values with capital.

The author presents the situation of Slavs suffering under foreign rule, rebelling against that state of affairs and waiting for a change. He admits, in accordance with the orientalisng discourse: “These people have remained passive so far; they cover immeasurable areas on the world map but are of no importance in the literary, artistic and politic history, in the history as we see today, in the history marked with buildings and written down” (XI, 279f.). He adds (also in accordance with the rules of the orientalisng discourse, this time emphasising the kenotic character of Slavic experience): “We, the Slavs, have nothing but a fresh memory of the country we come from, this country common to all people, the country where the soul stays. Having entered the world scene as the last, we still remember the pictures from our former spiritual homeland” (XI, 342). Therefore the barbarians bring the memory of the transcendent cultural source to Europe.

The above statement was taken from the 4th course in which Mickiewicz adopts the concept of the Slavs as a nation immersed in transcendence (which I have already discussed: Kuziak 1999). It transpires then that these people have a rich mythology—a fact which the author denied in the 1st course, pointing therefore to the reasons for the deficits of Slavic civilisation. The poet-professor summarises his thoughts on barbarism: “We have boldly accepted this name: we are indeed the barbarians of today” (XI, 467). This way the figure of the barbarian allows Mickiewicz to make a transition from seeing the Slavs the way Herder did (as a nation both virtuous and having certain deficits of civilisation) to perceiving them as a nation of power; it allows for a fundamental change in the language of this nation’s identity. Barbarism has also become a way to avoid the traps of orientalisation set in Herder’s discourse which fully show their

consequences in Hegel's thought—even if for the fact of joining the Eastern and Western nations.

One should note that Mickiewicz's reflection on the Slavic barbarian is also the conclusion of a messianic vision constructed in the Paris lectures, at the centre of which there is the image of a God combining characteristics of Jesus and Jehovah. The poet professor, arguing with the picture of Christ as a weak peasant (falsified by the Church—as he claims), refers to Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* showing anger as the Son of God's main attribute. In this perspective it is the Slavs who could be the tool of this anger, the scourge of God for the 19th-century Europe. At the same time the author dilutes the significance of the new barbarism: "Nobody will set fire to libraries, but let us hope that people will not attend them as much when the public life has become more illuminating" (XI, 478).

If we remember that the thoughts on the Slavic barbarian are presented by the author who—as I have mentioned before—formulated the model of civilisation for philomaths, which had stemmed from the Enlightenment vision of culture, we must realise the author's tragedy and despair. The way that led Mickiewicz to the concept of the Slavic barbarian had begun around the time he had written *The Books and The Pilgrimage of the Polish Nation* (in the 3rd part of *Forefathers' Eve* one may find the famous polemic with the pastoral image of Slavic nations and the replacement thereof with sublimity), where for the first time he so abruptly broke up with European cultural tradition for it had not remedied the partitions of Poland. Mickiewicz also exhibits barbarism in the style of his lectures which does not comply with academic standards—not only in the content but also by repeated violations of rhetoric and logic.

It is worth underscoring that Mickiewicz in ways universalises barbarism by making it inherent to Christian tradition. The barbarians, as it has been shown, are the true Christians who, by reviving the religion, will make its rules applicable to politics. This way they turn out to be the Other for whom Europe waits while at the same time they originate from a heritage common to all European nations.

The discourse on the Slavic barbarian is filled with sublimity—for it is a discourse of a great historic action, awaited by Mickiewicz who predicted that a catastrophe would happen to revive Europe. One cannot help but notice in Mickiewicz's thought on the history of the Slavs—on their exclusion from the European society by the West and their return in the 19th century—the realisation of the heroic myth, described by Joseph Campbell, presenting the initiation rite of a hero who shows a community the way to regenerate their powers (Campbell 34ff.).

Mickiewicz arrives at the discourse on barbarism by abandoning Herder's way of depicting Slavs and by addressing the orientalisng tendencies present there. According to the poet-professor, a Slav is not only a good savage of modern Europe, not only someone who will bring spiritual and moral rebirth but also someone who threatens 19th-century Europe with destruction; someone who does not want to be a suffering victim anymore.

Trans. Katarzyna Bielawna

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Summary

The article discusses the concept of barbarian and barbarism in Mickiewicz's Paris Lectures. The orientalisation of the Slavs by Herder and Hegel provides the context for this study. The author of the article presents how Mickiewicz originates his language from the works of Herder—who describes the Slavs as an idyllic nation, connected with the countryside—and later outlines the vision of the Slavs as a nation of power that wants to change the history of the 19th century.

Key words: comparative literature, romantic literature, the Slavs/the Slavic/Slavic mission, barbarism, postcolonialism, Paris lectures, Adam Mickiewicz, Herder, Hegel

Słowiański barbarzyńca w wykładach paryskich Adama Mickiewicza

Streszczenie

Artykuł poświęcony jest zawartej w prelekcjach paryskich Mickiewiczowskiej koncepcji barbarzyńcy i barbarzyństwa. Kontekstem podjętych rozważań jest orientalizująca Słowian myśl Herdera i Hegla. Autor wskazuje, jak polski romantyk wychodzi od myślenia Herderowskiego, ukazującego Słowian jako lud łagodny, związany z naturą, i zmierza ku wizji Słowian jako ludu mocy, pragnącego zmienić historię XIX wieku.

Słowa kluczowe: komparatystyka literacka, romantyzm, Słowianie/Słowiańszczyzna/misja słowiańska, barbarzyństwo, postkolonializm, prelekcje paryskie, Adam Mickiewicz, Herder, Hegel

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Appelé à prendre la parole:

The Parisian Romanticism of Adam Mickiewicz and George Sand

In October 1840, Adam Mickiewicz returned from Lausanne, Switzerland, where he had spent the preceding year teaching Latin literature at the local university. Friends in the French government in Paris had created a fund to appoint a lecturer of Slavic literature at the Collège de France, nominating Mickiewicz to be the first professor. Although the poet enjoyed financial stability in Switzerland, he pined for the cosmopolitanism of Paris and its community of Polish émigrés; in France, Mickiewicz could more freely craft a radical discourse about Poland, “in the interests of our national cause” as he told a friend (qtd. in Koropeczyk 266). While the poet’s French critics rarely openly espoused his call for Poland’s political liberation, they were inspired by the mystical vocabulary in which he couched his ideas. In part because he purposefully used his brilliance as a rhetorician to distance himself linguistically from the French, his French colleagues were able to hijack the political dialogue on Poland, focusing the conversation on the concept of speech, and on the style and eloquence of his performances rather than on their content. This paper examines an aspect of Mickiewicz’s relationship with French intellectuals by contrasting his self-presentation in his Parisian lectures with George Sand’s reaction to his poetic image.

Although Mickiewicz’s lectures at the Collège de France, known as *Les cours de littérature slave*, primarily investigated the history of Slavic and Polish literatures, the poet’s impromptu discussions broadly explored diverse philosophical, literary, religious, and artistic subjects. For instance, he frequently directly and

indirectly stressed the concepts of speech and language—understandably, since he was a poet. Interestingly, however, Mickiewicz wrote very few poems during his stay in France. While the causes of Mickiewicz’s literary reticence are much debated, the Polish bard made the act and idea of speech itself central to his political and literary discourses rather than emphasizing his written words.

While the transcripts of Mickiewicz’s lectures indicate that he spoke French extremely well, in his courses, he repeatedly mentioned his unease at lecturing in French.¹ The Polish bard opened his very first lecture by noting the difficulty of speaking a foreign language. He doubted that a language student could learn even the first part of a language (that of “posses[ing] all the secrets of the language”), asking his audience, “Can a foreigner ever achieve this?” Yet acquiring a language’s secrets was only half the task: the language student could possess knowledge of the language, and yet fail at making his or her speech “artistic.” After all, Mickiewicz noted, “the wrong word, a word improperly used, or even one badly pronounced sometimes suffices to destroy the effect of an entire exposition” (Mickiewicz, vol. 1: 2-3).

As Mickiewicz continued with his opening lecture, he lamented his supposed inability to speak French in the face of all these obstacles. Yet, he recognized that this language was the burden he had to bear in order to propagate his ideas on Poland to the French. If he hoped to gain a sympathetic audience, to impel the French to action on behalf of Poland, he had to speak French:

I know these difficulties, Sirs; with each movement of my thought, I feel the weight of the chain just as you hear its noise. If I listened only to my literary pride, if I worried only about my artistic interests and my personal dignity, I would abandon the honor of speaking to you here out of fear; it is painful to present oneself before the public, when one feels that one does not possess the force which eases the facility of expression; but very serious issues (*considérations*) tie me to this chair. I was called to speak (*appelé à prendre la parole*) in the name of the people with whom my nation is intimately linked by its past and its future; I was called

¹ The reviews of the Pole’s lectures also suggest that Mickiewicz was proficient in French, though he reputedly never lost his Polish accent (see, for example, George Sand’s review in Mitosek 205-210). Wiktor Weintraub also points out that Mickiewicz had spoken French for some time, having improvised poetry in French since his time in Russia in the 1820s (Weintraub 124). There were, of course, detracting opinions about the poet’s mastery of the French language.

to speak, in a time when speech is a very great power, in a city that I, a foreigner, am permitted call the capital of speech.” (Mickiewicz, vol. 1: 3)

Likewise, Mickiewicz contrasted French with his native language, linguistically distancing himself from his Parisian audience—thereby emphasizing his perceived Polishness and his status as an exile and a foreigner. “Sirs,” he opened his first lecture, “I am a foreigner, and moreover, I must express myself in a language whose origins, form, and character has nothing in common with the one which normally organizes my thoughts. I not only must literally translate my ideas and feelings into what are for me foreign idioms, but must also, beforehand, entirely transform their expression” (Mickiewicz, vol. 1: 2). From the beginning of his courses, thus, Mickiewicz stressed the difference between the two languages as well as the incompatibility of French and Polish. In thus emphasizing the distance both of himself and of his own thoughts from French, he fashioned himself as a linguistic outsider in Paris. He was ill at ease to speak French before such a large audience, because he so highly valued the word and its discursive power.

Several years later, at the end of his Parisian lectures, Mickiewicz returned to this same theme. He again claimed that French was the most difficult language he had learned (he had studied many), and that he could articulate his thoughts only with difficulty:

Sirs, I speak your language badly; I have learned it only by use . . . I express myself with difficulty: often, in an ordinary conversation, my sentence gets tangled up, and I cannot find the right word; and moreover, I have to speak the most difficult language I know, the language which I have never studied, speak it before the audience at the Collège de France! But I must speak to you about my religion and my nation; I cannot permit myself to feel all these difficulties; I cannot permit myself to construct my sentences or to weigh my words. I am a Christian; I am reminded of this verse from the Gospel, where those who wish to speak of higher truths are forbidden, I repeat expressly forbidden, to carry in one’s head previously-made sentences (*phrases toutes faites*).² Everyone knows this law, both moral

² See Mark 13:9-11: “But take heed to yourselves: for they shall deliver you up to councils; and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten: and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them. And the gospel must first be published among all nations. But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that

and literary. But is it practical? For myself, I decided as a rule never to prepare my speeches in advance. As a Christian, I thought I could prove my faith in the promises of the Gospel by this fact; as a Pole, I had to count on the promised assistance of the Holy Spirit. (Mickiewicz, vol. 5: 278-279)

Here, Mickiewicz associates his use of speech with biblical mandates; the Christian and mystical connotations inherent in this discussion about speech pervade many of his other lectures on the same theme. Furthermore, he emphasized his use of speech in the Parisian lectures not merely to sweet-talk his audience, but because language and one's ability to express oneself were the very center of one's humanity. "Speech is the flesh and spirit melted together by the divine spark which resides in man," he claimed (Mickiewicz, vol. 5: 117).

Mickiewicz drew further parallels between Catholicism and speech. He claimed that the concept of speech played a central role in early Christianity, but pointed out that the contemporaneous church deemphasized this concept: "We must prove to you today that the official Church no longer understands what speech is, that it has completely lost the idea and tradition of living speech, and that it has exposed all peoples to the temptation of confusing speech (*la parole*) with the word (*le mot*), things that were not confused in the time of the early Church" (Mickiewicz, vol. 5: 114). The Polish poet echoed France's historic relationship with the Roman Catholic Church, drawing on medieval traditions which viewed France as "the eldest daughter of the church" (see Mickiewicz, vol. 1: 4). Because of his host country's superior religious faith (which Mickiewicz ascribed to the possession of "the sacred fire"), he envisioned that France would mentor Poland (Mickiewicz, vol. 5: 228). Thus Poland would learn from France's superiority, just as the latter taught the former.

Speech, for the Polish bard, was not merely a mystical "divine spark" or flame, but also the proof of civilization. In Mickiewicz's imagination, French, the language of Paris, the capital of speech, marked individual speakers as civilized. He claimed that the Slavs wished to learn French to gain civilization—distinctively "Christian" civilization—for themselves. "In order to prove that they have the right to belong to the Christian community," the poet declared, "the Slavs

hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost" (King James Version [See also Matthew 11:17-20 and Luke 21:12-15]).

for some time have tried to acquire speech, to speak your language, to push their works into the same trends as your literature” (Mickiewicz, vol. 1: 4-5).

Although Mickiewicz claimed that France held the capital of speech, he still believed that the Slavs still had much to tell Western Europe. Quoting the “Bohemian” poet, Ján Kollár, the Pole told his audience that “all peoples have uttered their last word: now, Slavs, it is our turn to speak.” As he continued, he claimed that “the Slavs have already spoken more than once; they have spoken, in their manner, with spears and canons (*à coups de lance, à coups de canon*)” (Mickiewicz, vol. 1: 9). After all, as Mickiewicz argued in one of his final lectures, “*Qu’est-ce que la parole?*” (“What is speech?”), Slavs and speech were fundamentally intertwined: “Slav means a people of speech, or, more accurately, of the verb (*du verbe*).” Today the relationship of the words “Slav” and “word” in Slavic languages are debated, though the two do appear similar in Polish (*Słowianie* and *słowo* respectively), thereby giving Mickiewicz the opportunity to claim that his Slavs preserved “the pure tradition of the idea of speech” to the present day. For the poet, this implied that the Slavs still understood the “sanctity and creative power” of speech (Mickiewicz, vol. 5: 114).

Thus, although Paris was the capital of speech, Mickiewicz argued that Slavs better preserved historic traditions where literature, words, speech, politics, and religion related as one coherent whole. Literature was not a diversion from other parts of life, but an integral aspect of it. The bard pointed to an example from his personal correspondence:

From the beginning of this course, I daily receive letters from Slavic savants who sometimes criticize my plan, sometimes address objections on certain details of this course. I make you a part of this correspondence because it is rather significant. It characterizes, in effect, the state of literature among the Slavs. Literature for us (*chez nous*) is not yet detached, like a dried flower, from the common tree of life. There, one does not write for pleasure, one does not do art for art’s sake. Literature is still intimately linked to religion, history, and political life. Sometimes it suffices to criticize a poet, to incite all the religious and political questions which divide the Slavs. (Mickiewicz, vol. 1: 51-2)

In summary, having received a chair at the Collège de France, Mickiewicz knew he—as an educated Slav in Paris—represented Poland for the French. Not only his ideas, but also Poland itself, were to be judged by the poet’s speech.

Because the audience at the Collège was primarily comprised of academics and writers, wordsmiths in their own right, Mickiewicz saw his reception in France as occurring in his imagined sphere of divine speech. Although Mickiewicz gave lectures for the French, he spoke on behalf of Poland. His speech thereby became a tangible link between France and Poland, as Poland, through the poet's words, aspired to achieve recognition in the capital of speech.

In a sense, by so clearly locating the relationship between France and Poland in religious speech, Mickiewicz became a prophet mediating between the two nations. He was, in fact, referred to as a prophet in Paris—in both Mickiewicz's imagination and that of members of his Parisian audience, his words, poetry, and language had direct religious import. Mickiewicz's lectures became the liturgy of a cult increasingly enveloped in radical messianism. It was this liturgy, the spiritual language and fervor of the Polish poet, which fascinated and enraptured the French. If Mickiewicz mattered in France during the July Monarchy, it was because the French believed the poet was indeed something of a prophet or an ecstatic.

The French novelist, George Sand, was one of the French intellectuals most fascinated and impressed with Mickiewicz although she was not religious herself. Often, in her reviews and discussions of Mickiewicz's lectures, improvisations, and poetry, she highlighted the same themes of language and religiosity which the bard himself had stressed. For instance, Sand praised the poet's skills as a rhetorician in her review of his *Cours de slaves*, harkening back to Mickiewicz's own conception of artistic speech: "the Polish poet's speech is as beautiful as his writing," she exclaimed, "the Slavic professor does better than to possess the French language; he guesses it, he forces it to reveal itself to him . . . he achieves eloquence." The novelist located the poet's eloquence in his "manner of feeling, of diction, of style"; Mickiewicz spoke with "color" (qtd. in Mitosek 205-206). While Mickiewicz had depicted French as a chain around his tongue, Sand declared it a pliable tool in the hands of a master orator. For Sand, Mickiewicz did understand and capture the spirit of French, revealing the language's "divine spark" to his audience. Their two visions could scarcely be more dissimilar.

Sand had also latched onto the religiosity inherent in Mickiewicz's poetry even before he had begun his lectures in Paris; she especially emphasized his

connection with the Roman Catholic Church. In 1839, the French writer published an essay in the famous *Revue des deux mondes*, titled “Essai sur le drame fantastique” (“Essay on Fantastic Drama”), and which compared Goethe, Byron, and Mickiewicz, repeatedly underscoring the religiosity of each poet. In doing so, Sand stressed the differences of Catholicism between France and Poland:

One more word will silence every pedantic censorship: Poland is Catholic and Mickiewicz her mystical poet. His ideal has not yet developed a new form. The majority of the Slavic race is settled under the sincere law of the Gospel. We should respect a naive faith which has not been degraded as it has been among us by a restoration of the Jesuits . . . Recall the sublime word of M. de La Menais in speaking of the infamous concession made the by sovereign pontiff with allied powers . . . Before passing from Christian philosophy to a more advanced philosophy, France endured the glorious expiation of a terrible revolution. Right now, Poland suffers its no less painful and no less respectable expiation. It would be as cowardly to criticize them for their Catholicism today, as it would be for them to criticize us for our atheism. (Sand, 1839: 628-9)

According to Sand, the essence of the Pole’s poetry was religious. “Mickiewicz’s language is Catholic” and “sincere,” she summarized (Sand, 1839: 630). However, this Catholicism was by no means traditional: rather, the novelist wrote that “this Catholicism is a more audacious and advanced philosophy than the legendary Catholicism of Faust” (Sand, 1839: 644).³

We saw earlier how Mickiewicz emphasized his status as an outsider in Paris; Sand also stressed this same theme, arguing that exile had purified and strengthened Mickiewicz’s religiosity:

Perhaps there has been a moment in Mickiewicz’s life where he has been given genuinely supernatural inspiration . . . persecution, torture, and exile have developed previously unknown powers in him; for nothing in his first productions (of a less serious order, but already admirable) incited such a string of misfortunes

³ Sand was not the only French writer to perceive Mickiewicz’s writings as Catholic. In his journal, French historian Charles de Montalembert wrote that “I am also still continuing my Polish studies; I just read the fourth volume of Mickiewicz’s poetry, which consists of a drama where he tells of the persecutions in Vilnius [*Wilna*] in 1823. As poetry and also as Catholicism, this is without rival” (Montalembert 726).

and of pain in the poet as has the concurrent vibrating, thundering, and moaning of the ruin of his homeland (Sand, 1839: 627).⁴

Thanks to these struggles, Mickiewicz achieved “the sublime fury” of genius (Sand, 1839: 598). She emphasized the poet’s madness elsewhere in her writings, describing the Polish poet as “the only great ecstatic I know . . . he is touched by that *grand intellectual disease* that makes him akin to the famous ascetics, to Socrates, to Jesus, to St. John, Dante, and Joan of Arc” (qtd. in Koropeckyj 274); he was “a soul led to dizzying rapture through love for his country and the sanctity of its customs” (Sand, 1991: 1103). As a religious figure, “Adam Mickiewicz is not only a great poet . . . he is the moral expression of Poland” (qtd. in Mitosek 1993: 207). Therefore, Mickiewicz’s Catholicism was integral to his artistic brilliance. He thus became a moral or divine figure, something of the prophet-arbitrator he had imagined himself. For Sand, and many of Mickiewicz’s other critics, divinely-inspired language did exist, and the Pole was its fountainhead *par excellence*.

When Sand wrote positively of Mickiewicz’s poetry, she imagined she did more than compose a favorable review. “I picture myself,” she writes, “as accomplishing a religious duty toward Mickiewicz.” When Mickiewicz uttered his sacred speech, he elicited religious obediences from his admirers. Sand told her readers that since the Polish bard was such a great, religious figure, he ought not be easily criticized. Because Mickiewicz was more than an ordinary poet, Sand interceded with his other critics to “weigh his judgments when such a great name is in the scale” (Sand, 1839: 598); because Mickiewicz’s speech and writing was explicitly religious, Sand thought his works achieved new poetic heights, and that could not be evaluated by standard criteria.

⁴ Interestingly, Félicité de Lamennais (whom Sand refers to with an alternate spelling of his name: M. de La Mennais), one of Mickiewicz’s early friends in Paris, emphasized a similar theme of exile and alienation in a letter he wrote to the Polish poet: “My soul, strengthen yourself, for soon you shall have nothing more than God. Men will go off and leave you alone. You have loved truth and justice; you wanted that, nothing but that; but for their part, they love the opinion that floats and passes; they wish for a soft bedside where they can lay their head. My soul, strengthen yourself, for you have more to endure; at the back of the chalice, there still remain several mouthfuls of the dregs which you must drink” (qtd. in Kridl 244).

Mickiewicz's reputation as a man of religious speech in Paris came not merely from his poetry and his lectures, but importantly also from his improvisations. Mickiewicz improvised in Polish from his early student days in the Philomath Club in Lithuania, and he began to improvise in French during his exile in Russia. These improvisations reputedly had a hypnotizing effect on his audiences, many of whom tried to copy him. Andrzej Walicki writes that Edgar Quinet and Jules Michelet, two of Mickiewicz's colleagues at the Collège de France, "deeply felt the greatness of the Polish poet, admired and tried to imitate (unsuccessfully) his inspired improvisations" (Walicki 267). If the French, and Mickiewicz himself, thought the poet's speech had religious import, his improvisation most clearly demonstrated this mystical prowess.

In her *Journal intime*, Sand recounted an anecdote about Mickiewicz's improvisations at a gathering in Paris, which she recalled as "a rather strange event" (*un fait assez étrange*). She recounts how "in a gathering of Polish émigrés, a certain, one might say, rather mediocre poet, and somewhat jealous, recited a piece of verse addressed to Mickiewicz, in which, in the middle of his lavish praises, he complained with sincere resentment, although not in bad taste, of the superiority of this great poet. It was, as we understood it, both a reproach and a tribute." After this young poet had finished his poem, "the somber Mickiewicz, as insensible to one feeling as to the other, rose and improvised a poem in response, or rather a discourse of prodigious effect." The bard sent his audience into hysterics:

No one could say exactly what happened; everyone who was there left with a different memory. Some said he spoke for five minutes, others for an hour. It is certain that he spoke so well and said such beautiful things, that they all fell into a sort of delirium. One could hear only screams and tears, several had nervous breakdowns, others could not sleep at night. The Count Plater, on returning home, was in such a strange state of exultation that his wife thought him mad and was extremely terrified. But, as he recounted to her as he best could, excluding Mickiewicz's improvisation (no one could repeat a single word of it) but only the effect of his speech on his audience, the Countess Plater fell into the same estate as her husband and began to cry, to pray and to ramble deliriously (*à divaguer*). (qtd. in Mitosek 93)

Although Sand emphasized the hypnotic nature of the event, she also located the importance of the poetry in its religious significance: "those there were

convinced that there was something superhuman in this man, that he was inspired like the prophets, and their superstition was so great that one of these mornings they could well have made him a God” (in Mitosek 94). Mickiewicz had ceased to be merely a fountainhead for divine speech, and nearly achieved divinity himself. Although Sand wrote that she herself did not wish to immortalize Mickiewicz, she still pointed out that the poet existed in a different sphere of reality than the average mortal: “Between reason and madness is a spiritual state which has never been well-observed or quantified, in which religious faiths of all times and all peoples have assumed man to be in direct contact with the spirit of God” (qtd. in Mitosek 94). Under this assumption, Mickiewicz certainly was in direct contact with the spirit of God. The bard’s poetry, regardless of its actual content, was understood to be a revelation of other-worldly realities. He became a “prophet.”

Even though he fashioned himself as a prophet, and even though he was perceived as a superior religious being, Mickiewicz still (at times) bowed to the perceived cultural superiority of France. However, precisely because Poland’s literary tradition was less-developed, the French had to study Polish literature; after all, in a sense, Mickiewicz pointed out, the more educated one is about one’s inferiors, the longer one’s superiority is bound to last. Many Parisian reviewers highlighted this theme in their reviews of Mickiewicz’s Paris lectures, enjoying the bard’s assertion that Rome fell because it did not know and understand the barbarians around it. One French critic wrote that Mickiewicz “congratulated France and Paris for having understood the necessity of examining more deeply (*d’approfondir*) the history of these numerous and powerful neighbors, of studying their history and their intellectual development (*le mouvement actuel de leur intelligence*) to assess its flow before it menaces Europe once again. Rome and Greece, he said, did not deign to know the barbarians” (qtd. in Mitosek 190).⁵

⁵ Another reviewer wrote that “after having traced the geography of Slavic language and literature, Mr. Mickiewicz, in an animated spectacle, showed the importance of their study. Rome had to repent of having too much neglected the knowledge of its barbarian brothers, who, in the professor’s beautiful expression, took the future of Europe into their forests: France will not commit the same mistake” (qtd. in Mitosek 192).

When Mickiewicz said that Poland has suffered partition because the country had not written enough, he simultaneously indicated that Poland's perceived cultural inferiority made its literary tradition more important to the French. Though Poland may have been a cultural periphery to France, Mickiewicz emphasized that France, if she were to avoid the fate of Rome, had to know the cultures of her inferiors. Similarly, by promoting himself as a promulgator of myth, as a nineteenth century version of a prophet, an improviser and spiritual leader, Mickiewicz made himself the link in French and Polish romantic relations. He both imagined for himself a place of spiritual importance in French cultural life, and successfully defended his own place in it. He allowed himself to become an outsider—an ecstatic—in order to achieve even greater importance in Paris. Because he let himself be perceived as the most cultivated of the supposedly barbaric Poles, as their cultural avant-garde, Mickiewicz—the prophet, the poet—both legitimized the position of France as a cultural leader, and forced Parisian artists to address the imagery of Poland to bolster their supremacy.

Finally, the concept of speech, the word, played a much larger role in the *Wielka Emigracja*—the Great Emigration, the community of Polish exiles in Paris who sought refuge abroad after the Russians quelled the November Uprising in Poland; and this theme merits further research. While Mickiewicz may have been the most prominent Polish exile in Paris, many of the other immigrants were also writers. Words shaped the relationship not merely between Mickiewicz and the French, but also between the French and the Poles at large. Through the efforts of Mickiewicz and his followers, Poles and Parisians created a romantic discourse on Poland which functioned primarily via a religious vocabulary. But this discourse remained never much more than a carefully-crafted set of words. Words, written or spoken, were the essence of the relationship between France and Poland. The most influential Polish individuals in Paris were wordsmiths, as were the Parisians who received the Polish ideas. Adam Mickiewicz, not to mention Juliusz Słowacki, Cyprian Norwid, Zygmunt Krasiński, and the Polish bookseller, Aleksander Jełowicki, each based his artistic and political significance during his years in Paris off his written work. These Poles gained prominence thanks to their poetry, to their novels, to their plays, to their university lectures: to their words.

The French recognized the importance of the word in the relationship between France and Poland; or at least, the French who deigned to recognize the Poles in Paris were frequently authors, or journalists themselves, and used their pre-existing talents to engage the Polish cause. In Paris, it was the numerous French poets, playwrights, authors who believed Polish Romantic thought—political, religious, and artistic—could and would make a contribution to European humanity. These poets used rhyme, cadence, and meter to engage “the Polish Question,” especially in the first few years of the July Monarchy.⁶ In the direct aftermath of Poland’s 1830 November Uprising, playwrights took up their pens to craft plays in support of the Polish cause, capturing the power of the word both written—via the play’s text—and spoken—via the play’s performance. Banking on the social power of the written word, on essays, a group of radical Parisians founded a journal, *Le Polonais*, to defend Polish and European political liberalism in 1833. In this same period, the Marquis de Lafayette gave speeches in the National Assembly on behalf of Poland. Edgar Quinet asked “who has heard speech (*une parole*) more sincere, more religious, more Christian, more extraordinary than that of this exile in the middle of the rest of his people,” than that of Mickiewicz, “a prophet under the willows (*sous les saules*)” (qtd. in Mitosek 223). And in 1834, Félicité de Lamennais, inspired by Mickiewicz’s *Księgi narodu polskiego i pielgrzymstwa polskiego* (*Books of the Polish Nation and the Polish Pilgrimage*), wrote the book *Paroles d’un croyant* (*Words from a Believer*).⁷

The fate of Poland was discussed in parliaments, in streets, on sidewalks, in cafes, in essays, in newspapers; but this web of Parisian interlocutors rarely stopped talking to take concrete, political action. French artists and Polish artists were mostly satisfied with the effect of the written or spoken word; they found the activity of writing and speaking to be comfortable, more comfortable—and more possible—than direct political action. The familiarity of the discourse

⁶ See for example, Christian Sénéchal. *La Pologne de 1830 à 1846 dans la poésie romantique française*. Paris: Bibliothèque Polonaise, 1937.

⁷ On the relationship between Mickiewicz and Lamennais, please see Manfred Kridl, “Two Champions of a New Christianity: Lamennais and Mickiewicz,” *Comparative Literature* 4.3 (1952): 239-267 and Manfred Kridl, *Mickiewicz i Lamennais: Studium porównawcze*. Warszawa: W księgarni E. Wende, 1909. Lamennais’s name also appears frequently in vol. 5 of Mickiewicz’s Slavic lectures.

of the ecstatic, religious word created a mutually comprehensible community between Polish and French artists. However, through such an obsession with the word, Poland itself, the territory, was reduced to a simple rhetorical device. Poland was no longer a cause, but an image, a series of words—the Polish Question.

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Summary

This paper examines the role of the word, whether spoken or written, in Adam Mickiewicz's reception in France during the July Monarchy. It begins with a discussion of the poet's conception of speech (*parole*) and self-presentation in his Parisian lectures at the Collège de France, demonstrating the religious nature of the poet's relationship

with language. It subsequently explores the writings of George Sand about the Polish poet, arguing that she was interested primarily in Mickiewicz's religiosity and the style and eloquence of his improvisations. Finally, the paper concludes with a discussion of the role of speech within the Parisian reception to the *Wielka Emigracja* at large.

Key words: comparative literature, Polish romantic literature, French romantic literature, concepts of speech, Adam Mickiewicz, George Sand

Appelé à prendre la parole:

Paryski romantyzm Adama Mickiewicza i George Sand

Streszczenie

Artykuł analizuje rolę słowa, zarówno mówionego, jak i pisanego, w kontekście recepcji Adama Mickiewicza we Francji w czasie Monarchii Lipcowej. Autor rozpoczyna swoją analizę omówieniem koncepcji mowy (*parole*) poety i jego autoprezentacji w wykładach paryskich w Collège de France, przedstawiając religijną naturę związku poety z językiem. Następnie autor omawia teksty George Sand poświęcone polskiemu poecie, dowodząc, że była ona przede wszystkim zainteresowana religijnością oraz stylem i urokiem improwizacji Mickiewicza. W konkluzji omówiona zostaje rola języka w paryskiej recepcji *Wielkiej Emigracji*.

Słowa kluczowe: komparatystyka literacka, polska literatura romantyczna, francuska literatura romantyczna, koncepcje języka, Adam Mickiewicz, George Sand

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Annihilation or Revival?

On the Binary Topos “barbaric vs. civilized” in Russian and Polish Poetry at the Beginning of the 20th Century*

Dating back to ancient Greece, the classic dichotomy of “barbaric vs. civilized” has become a multifunctional topos in European languages and cultures. Constructing a binary between the “self” and the “other,” the term denotes differences between individuals, nations, races, religions, and even aesthetics. As such, this topical binary may be conceived as a rhetorical device and (depending on the given perspective of a person, group or culture) it can always be reactivated, reconstructed, and accommodated to shifting conditions. In the process of marking “the other” as a different individual, or a different ethnic group or class, all “othering” categorizations simultaneously construct the identity of the “self,” who assumes a position of superiority vis-a-vis the “other.” Such “othering” strategies in defining or constructing subaltern identities have become prime targets of critical discussions in postcolonial studies and have generated projects of “re-writing” the identities and (hi-)stories of the oppressed and marginalized.

In this paper, I will describe two mutually interacting fields in which the topos “barbaric vs. civilized” is constructed and functionalized: in the political, where the lines are drawn between nations and civilizations, and in the aesthetic,

* Many thanks to Hartmut Lutz, who patiently corrected my English text. Any remaining error is, of course, my own.

where the lines are drawn between groups or literary periods in a single culture. The political and aesthetic functions of the binary topos are not mutually exclusive in the works of any author or group, but they may co-exist synchronically or intermittently. I will outline this process by analyzing a few examples from the poetry of Russian symbolism and Polish modernism. As a first example, I shall look at the discussions among Russian symbolist poets of the classical modernist period, who addressed an assumption based on deeply ingrained convictions held by members of their contemporary intelligentsia, i.e. that they had reached and even surpassed the peak of contemporary civilization and were now approaching its demise. The expectation of the unavoidable apocalypse of existing culture became a central topos in symbolist creativity, and it generated numerous variations of the theme. One of them is the motif of the downfall of an advanced civilization through the onslaught of a barbaric people. This motif will be analyzed in its fluctuation between political and aesthetic functions, thus using it as an example for the construction of the binary between “barbaric” vs. “civilized” peoples in the works of Valerij Brjusov and Aleksandr Blok. By mentioning the Skythians, the Huns and the Mongols, both poets evoke the memories of equestrian nomadic peoples, whom European cultures had traditionally conceptualized as barbarians. Central to my analysis are two well-known and often discussed poems by the Russian symbolists Valerij Brjusov and Aleksandr Blok, which were written between 1899 and 1918, and which both construct the binary “barbaric vs. civilized” in an aesthetic, respectively a political context. Following that, I will contrast Blok’s self-construction of Russia as “antemurale Europae” with the Polish traditional self-conceptualization as “antemurale christianitatis.”

Valerij Jakovlevič Brjusov (1873-1924) shared a conviction, which was then widely held by the Russian intelligentsia, that the existing Russian and European civilization was doomed to end and would soon perish in a cataclysm.¹ The motif of the barbarian appeared rather early in his poetry, even before 1900 (Koreckaja 180). At the time, he used it exclusively in an aesthetic context without any reference to a war of civilizations. In the poem “Skify” (1899,

¹ Brjusov depicted his idea of a perfect world of art (Langer 1990: 39-73) and his expectation of the coming destruction of the existing civilization in numerous poems, tales and dramas—e.g., those of the volume *Zemnaja Os’* (Langer 112-120).

“The Skythians”), for example, the persona imagines his metamorphosis into a *drevnij skif* (ancient Skythian), who recommends himself to “his people” by his prowess as a horseman, a hunter, and a warrior. He is not only accepted by the Skythians as their “son,” but also, by their priests (*volchvy*), as one of them (Brjusov, vol. 1: 152f.). By naming and addressing the barbaric Skythians as his own ancestors and contemporaries, the persona identifies with them. He conceptualizes them (and himself) as *vol’nye volki* (“free wolves”), who roam the wide spaces of the steppe in unlimited freedom, and whose priests and singers possess the power to perform two roles simultaneously: that of a member of the elitist group of spiritual leaders, and that of hunter, warrior and lover. The Skythian barbarian is here given as the idealized model of a poet’s and a male’s all-encompassing self-realization²; and the Skythians are constructed as part of the persona’s own past and origin. Sixteen years later, in the midst of the Second World War, Brjusov further extended the motif of the Skythians as ancestors of the Russians. His poem “My – Skify” (“We—the Skythians”) presents them as the historical embodiment of the barbarians, who raided the ancient world from their strongholds in the steppes “like demons” (*kak demony*) and destroyed it (Brjusov, vol. 2: 248f.). Their life is described as an existence in a state of permanent ecstasy, based on war, blood, riding, drunkenness, dancing, and singing, and their strength is constantly revived by their “true friend and teacher,” the “barley-wine” (*jačmennoe vino*, Brjusov, vol. 2: 248). In this ecstatic warrior culture, art is ascribed only a marginal function.

In 1906, Brjusov published his best volume of poems, *Stephanos* (Siwczyk-Lammers 99), which contained “Grjaduščie gunny” (“The On-coming Huns”). Here, the change from the Skythians to the Huns points to a new orientation in Brjusov’s conceptualization of the “barbaric vs. civilized”-binary: while the historical Skythians dominated the space of the later Russian Empire in pre-Christian times, and hence may be imagined as ancestors, the Huns, by contrast, came to Europe from Asia in the fourth century A.D., and they are therefore connected with a threat to Christian Europe and are conceived as its opponents. Until then, the Russian symbolists had lived purely for their art, in almost total

² In the same year, 1899, Konstantin Bal’mont published a poem by the same title “Skify,” where he depicted the Skythians in a similar way as embodiments of an unlimited desire for freedom and constant change (Bal’mont 103).

detachment from the everyday-world around them, but the volume *Stephanos* reflects two contemporary incidents of great importance, which changed profoundly the symbolists' attitude to their surroundings: The Russian-Japanese war of 1904-1905, and the first Russian revolution of 1905.³ The year 1905 marks not only a turning point in Russian history, but also in the creations of the symbolists. They began to turn to the conditions and circumstances of social and political reality. In the central cycle of *Stephanos*, "Sovremennost" ("The present time"), Brjusov reflects upon the development of the Russian-Japanese war in a series of nine poems. They document the persona's reactions: from his initially patriotic euphoria to his increasing disillusionment with, and then outright horror of, the Russian defeat and the atrocities of war.⁴ Some of the poems deal with the immediate reactions of a contemporary witness, while others reflect the events retrospectively. Another group of nine poems in the cycle depicts the revolution of 1905. Among them is the aforementioned poem "Grjaduščie gunny," which utilizes the opposition between barbarism and culture by evoking the impending ruin of European civilization from the onslaught of Asian barbaric people (Koreckaja 177-191). Here, as before, the apocalypse is pictured as part of a cyclically progressing course in the history of alternating cultures.

The poem is fashioned as the monologue of a persona, who, as a member of the old civilization, turns to the barbarians—the Huns—and invites them to begin their onslaught on Europe: They are asked to raid culture's "decrepit body" and to revitalize it in a "wave of flaming blood" (*Оживить одряхлевшее тело / Волной пылающей крови*, Brjusov, vol. 1: 433⁵), to level towns and palaces to the ground, to burn books and to desecrate temples. Destruction is linked to the myth of the life-giving strength of blood, and thus to renewal. Based on Brjusov's esoteric beliefs, this picture corresponds to his idea of the cyclical succession of civilizations, their blossoming and their decay, in the course of mankind's history. The persona's vision of the imminent destruction

³ For more detailed information on the history of the cycle, its publication and reception and on its political background see Siwczyk-Lammers 76-82.

⁴ For more detailed information on the iconography and symbolism of this volume see Siwczyk-Lammers 91-98.

⁵ This applies to all citations from the poem.

of civilization is encoded in reiterating imperatives given to the expected conquerors: *На нас . . . Рухните* (“Pounce . . . upon us”), *Поставъте . . . шалаши у дворцов* (“Set up . . . your tents at the palaces”), *Сложите книги кострами* (“Erect pyres out of books”), *Творите мерзостъ во храме* (“Desecrate the temples”). The imperative mode also dominates the epigraph at the top of the poem—*Топчи их рай, Аттила* (“Trample down their paradise, Attila”), a citation, taken from Vjačeslav Ivanov’s poem “*Коčevniki krasoty*” (1904) (Ivanov, vol. 1: 188f.). But whereas Vjačeslav Ivanov’s poem had addressed the artists in their role as the “nomads of beauty,” who explode the narrow confines of petit-bourgeois everyday-life, thus anticipating the aesthetic renewal expected from the so-called “barbarians,” Brjusov is concerned about a total destruction of the existing material and intellectual civilization. Brjusov’s persona uses the personal pronoun “us,” and thereby presents himself in a victim position as one of those to be vanquished, but at the same time he identifies with the victimizers by summoning the “intoxicated horde” (*ордой опьянелой*) of Huns to devastate his own civilization. However, when the persona in an act of carnivalesque interprets the blood spilt by the Huns as a renewal of culture, their barbaric drunkenness is turned into Dionysiac ecstasy. A similarly carnivalesque trope is used in the request to transform the throne room into a “merry acre” (*veseloe pole*), in suggesting a restoration of fertility in a previously infertile ground, and in exulting in the barbarians’ victory. The persona celebrates the burning of books in the bonfires and the desecration of temples as the deeds of “innocent children” (*Вы во всем неповинны, как дети!* 433). In the persona’s mind the Huns thus become the longed for Barbarians, who are at once merry and wild, naïvely “innocent” and untouched by civilization, but destined to deliver the death-blow to old European culture, and thereby providing the chance for its renewal.

The persona himself belongs to the old civilization which is threatened by destruction, but he distances himself from the masses of ordinary people and, as a prophet and visionary, he identifies with the elitist group of “sages and poets” (*мудрецы и поэты*), as the “guardians of sacraments and faith” (*Хранители тайны и веры*). At the approach of the Barbarians this elite will withdraw into caverns, catacombs and deserts to guard the “burning lights of knowledge,” and, as so often in his work, Brjusov here uses a metaphor, which

goes back to esoteric topoi of arcane knowledge.⁶ The future of these “sages” and of the secrets they guard is left open; the persona is unable to answer the question if their “testamentary works” (*заветны[е] творени[я]*) will vanish without a trace, or if they will be preserved. The persona ends his monologue by announcing the intention to welcome the Barbarians (and thus his own destruction) with a hymn.

Brjusov transforms the idea of civilization’s aesthetic renewal through the bewildering and liberating effects of innovative and free art, into the historiosophical notion of the downfall of mankind’s historical cultures through the onslaught of Barbarians. At the end of the 19th century “civilization” as a term here designates not only national Russian culture, but it includes European, respectively Occidental culture in its entirety, predicting that Russia as an integral part of this civilization, will fall victim to the new Huns from the farther East. Brjusov’s approach to the “barbaric vs. civilized”-binary is representative for many of the Russian symbolists. Similar changes from the aesthetic to the political (and vice versa) functionalizing of the topos are found in the works of e.g. Vladimir Solov’ev, Dmitrij Merežkovskij und Vjačeslav Ivanov.

The overthrow of the tsarist state and society in the revolutionary year 1917 was read by most of the Russian intelligentsia as a confirmation of their conviction that the ruin of the old society was necessary. Brjusov was one of the first Russian writers who openly declared themselves in favour of the Soviet regime; he even became a member of the Communist Party of Russia—a singular case among the non-emigrated symbolists (Siwczyk-Lammers 41). Aleksandr Blok’s reaction to the revolution was more ambiguous: Like Brjusov, he was convinced of the necessary destruction of the existing order, but at the same time he experienced the chaos of revolution and civil war as very distressing, and he was often filled with horror at the outrages of his time. His long poem “The Twelve” (“Dvenadcat,” 1918) has Jesus Christ being in command of a platoon of twelve Red Army soldiers on night patrol in the deserted streets of Petrograd, but they are depicted as wanton murderers and plunderers nonetheless.

⁶ See for example, Brjusov’s cycle of sonnets *Torches of Thought* (*Svetoč mysli*, 1918) where he presents the succession of human civilizations as a passing on of the “torch of thought”; Brjusov, vol. 4: 383-389.

In his poem “The Skythians” (“Skify”), which was written during his work on “The Twelve,” Blok depicts the relation of Russia to Europe and Asia in a new way. The poem was produced in a period, when Blok was in close contact with a group of poets and critics, who in 1917 and 1918 edited two volumes under the title “The Skythians.”⁷ The group was named after this emblematic title, and its members were poets like Andrej Belyj, Sergej Esenin and Nikolaj Kljuev, the journalist and publisher D. Mstislavskij (Maslovskij) and the critic R. V. Ivanov-Razumnik. The “Skify” propagated the idea of “spiritual maximalism” (*duchovnyj maksimalizm*), and they advocated an “eternal revolution” and a life spent in the “holy madness” (*святое безумие*) of spiritual search (Blok, vol.5: 462). They rejected reforms and compromises, as well as sobriety and reason. Their books combine reflections on the given crisis of civilization with a trust in the higher purpose for the historical upheavals of 1917, and faith in the messianic mission of Russia in the world. As they compared unfavourably the cold, rationalistic and technocratic civilization of Europe with the young Russia searching for social justice and a spiritual absolute, they continued and transformed the old 19th century celebratory and ethnocentric discourse of Slavonic cultural exceptionalism, regarding the relationship between Russia and Europe. In the 19th century Aleksandr Gercen had already described the future role of Russia in Europe as the “new coming of barbarians” (*novoe prišestvie varvarov*), as the campaign of untamed youth, driven by unbridled force against the old world. In his articles, Ivanov-Razumnik summarized the old discussions and gave them a new focus: The “Skythians” contrasted the expected downfall of old, soulless Europe with the great future awaiting the young Russian civilization, the “light from the East.” The poets understood the political revolution of 1917 as a prologue to a new revolution of the spirit, as a historical divide, which would mark the beginning of a third era of human history after the paganism of classical antiquity and the Christianity of Europe, and they talked about the necessity to develop a new human, a new value system, and a new faith. Their ideas show strong affinities with the Soviet discourse on the creation of a new human, and a new Socialist society, but in developing their theories,

⁷ A third volume, which would contain among others Blok’s “Skify” and “Dvenadcat” could not be realized any more.

both groups—the Soviets as well as the “Skythians”—exhibit a fundamentally Eurocentric view of the evolution of human civilizations.

After Blok had grown more closely acquainted with Ivanov-Razumnik in 1914, he grew more and more concerned about the problem of the crisis of European and Russian civilization and the necessity of its renewal. In the preface to the first volume of “Skify” (1917) the Skythians are celebrated as the bearers of an invigorating and rebellious maximalism. As the incarnations of a healthy barbarianism they are contrasted with a sickly and sclerotic Europe. The volume also reprinted Brjusov’s aforementioned poem “My – Skify” (“We—the Skythians”) under the new title “Ancient Skythians” (“Drevnie Skify”).⁸ In recorded conversations with Ivanov-Razumnik Blok criticized the inclusion of this poem as not fitting the contents and aims of this volume.⁹ Blok felt irritated by Brjusov’s portrayal of the Skythians as an ancient historic people, and he suggested that they had better be presented as contemporaries or at least as “eternal Skythians” (*večnye skify*; Blok, vol.5: 463), i.e. essentialized as eternal barbarians. In his own poem “Skify” Blok presents the name of these ancient horsemen to signify the contemporary Russian self-image.

Blok wrote the poem in the course of two days (January 29th to 30th, 1918), while he was working on the long poem “The Twelve” and on the paper “The Intelligentsia and the Revolution” (“Intelligencija i revoljucija”; Blok, vol.5: 470). The epigraph preceding “The Skythians” is taken from Vladimir Solov’ev’s poem “Panmongolizm” (“Pan-Mongolianism,” 1894), which followed contemporary archaeological assumptions and presented the Skythians as a Mongolian people, appropriating their name as a synonym for the role of Russians in Europe. The slightly altered epigraph reads: *Панмонголизм! Хотя имя дико / Но нам ласкает слух оно . . .* (“Panmogolism! However strange the name, / But it flatters our ears”).¹⁰ Blok then utilizes this self-image of Russians as Skythians to address Europe in a poem consisting of 19 quatrains,

⁸ Brjusov had initially thought of publishing the poem in the volume *Devjataja Kamena*, which could not be realized in the end. Many of the poems designed for that volume were edited in newspapers and almanacs during the lifetime of the author. The volume was finally reconstructed and published in 1973 (Brjusov, vol. 2: 248f.).

⁹ Choosing for the group the ethnonym “Skify” points to the actuality of the discussions on the crisis of contemporary culture in its Russian context see Langer 74-217.

¹⁰ Solov’ev’s second line is: “Но мне ласкает слух оно,” Соловьев 104.

in which the persona's monologue reiterates the binary "you, the Europeans" vs. "we, the Skythians." Thus, the persona presents himself as the speaker of the nation, who argues against an-"other" antagonistic collective. His initial argument to affirm the superiority of Russia over Europe rests on demographic quantity. It is enlisted in the very first verse of the poem: *Мильоны – вас. Нас – тьмы, и тьмы, и тьмы* ("You are millions. We are—vast numbers, vast numbers and vast numbers").¹¹ His second argument ironically adopts the European stereotype of Russians as Asians¹²: *Да, Скифы – мы! Да, азиаты – мы, – / С раскосыми и жадными очами!* ("Yes, we are Skythians! Yes, we are Asians, / With greedy slitted eyes!"; 77). His identification of Russians as Asians is then revoked in the following quatrains where the Russians are depicted as inhabiting the borderlands between Europe and Asia: The Russians had for centuries formed a bastion between the hostile races of Mongolians and Europeans, and had thus secured the safety of the continent and facilitated its unhindered cultural development. Europe, however, had failed to acknowledge the Russian self-sacrifice, but had exploited Russia and had seen it as an object of colonial desires and anticipated wars of conquest. But now the persona sees the end of Europe to have come: *Вот – срок настал. Крылами бьет беда, / И каждый день обиды множит, / И день придет – не будет и следа / От ваших Пестумов, быть может!* ("Now the time has come. Disaster flaps its wings, / And every creature breeds insults. / And the day will come—when there will not be left a trace of your Paestum, possibly!"; 77). But the threat to Europe's ancient civilization is followed by a conciliatory gesture. With a reference to the Paestum of classical antiquity, the sixth quatrain urges Europe to remember the wisdom of Oedipus and to solve the riddle of the Russian Sphinx: Russia the enigmatic Sphinx is depicted as a monster, filled with a love-hate for/against Europe, threatening to break the "frail bones" of Europe in the powerful embrace of its paws. At the same time however, Russia is pictured as the embodiment and store-room of European cultural memory: in contrast to Europe, which neither knows nor respects Russia, Russians are familiar with European civilization. They were educated by Europe and are familiar with

¹¹ Blok, "Skify," 1999, 77-80; here: 77. This applies to all citations from the text.

¹² For information about the displacement of Russia from the North to the East of the imaginary map of Europe see Lemberg.

French esprit and German genius, they remember Paris, Venice, lemon groves and Cologne cathedral. Russia has two faces, a European and an Asian one, which it can opt to turn to friend or foe respectively. The threat of an embrace by this sphinx-like Russia ends with an offering of peace—albeit contingent on Europe’s capitulation:

Придите к нам! От ужасов войны
Придите в мирные объятия!
Пока не поздно – старый меч в ножны,
Товарищи! Мы станем – братья! (79)

Come to us! From the horrors of war
Come into our peaceful embraces!
Even now it’s not too late—the old sword into the sheath,
Comrades! We will become—brothers!

And again, the offer is followed by another threat. In case that the Europeans are not ready for peace, the Russians will present them their Asian faces (*Мы обернемся к вам / Своею азиатской рожей!*, “We will turn on to you / Our Asian trap!”; 79) and suggest the Ural mountains as the site for the last battle between the European “steel-machines” (*Стальных машин*; 79) and the “wild Mongolian horde” (*С монгольской дикою ордою*; 79). The Europeans will have to fight this battle against the Mongolians all by themselves, however, because the Russians will stand aside and watch them through their “slit eyes” (*узкими глазами*; 79). This time they will not intervene, not even if the (*sic!*) Mongol, who is now addressed as a “cruel hun” (*свирепый Гунн*; 80), is mutilating the corpses, ravaging the towns and using churches as stables. The concluding quatrain condenses and repeats both threat and offer for a last time:

В последний раз – опомнись, старый мир!
На братский пир труда и мира
В последний раз – на светлый братский пир
Сзывает варварская лира! (80)

For the last time—come to your senses, old world!
To the brotherly feast of work and peace
For the last time—to the bright brotherly feast
The barbaric lyra is calling!

In this poem, Aleksandr Blok uses the names of Skythian, Asian, Mongolian and Hun as synonyms, the core of which he finally translates into “Barbaric.” He construes the Russians as Barbarians on the one side, and as the bearers and preservers of European civilization on the other. In turning against Europe, and in accepting the European definition of Russians as Asian Barbarians, he draws a dividing line between Russia and Europe. Concomitantly, he also draws a dividing line between Russians and Asians—the Russians will not take part in the annihilation of European civilization, but they will not prevent it either.

As mentioned before, Blok’s poem “Skify” was written at the end of January 1918, and it expresses an immediate emotional reaction to the impending break down of the Bolsheviks’ peace negotiations with Germany. While the leaders of the Bolshevik Party propagated a peace without annexations, Germany demanded high territorial requisitions of Russian lands as the price for a premature conclusion of peace. Due to the disintegration of the Russian Army after the Revolution, the Bolsheviks were hardly in a position to reject these conditions, but despite of the war-weariness of the Russian people these conditions gave rise to outraged protests (Hildermeier 127-129).¹³ Blok’s poem takes an immediate stand in these political developments. It employs a Russian self-image, which takes up the European stereotype of Russia as a half-Asian country and turns it against its propagators. It is due to the heat of the contemporary discussion; politically, it can be read as a statement from the perspective of a formerly great power, which has lost its clout, made to a neighbour and former partner who seems suddenly superior. Shortly after, Blok rejected the poem as tendentious, and he no longer wanted to acknowledge it as part of his oeuvre (Blok 476).

When in this poem Blok construes Russia as the “bulwark of Europe” against Asia, he returns to the centuries old concept of “*antemurale christianitatis*” (Tazbir 21-30; Morawiec 250). Depending on their concrete geographic and geopolitical positions, various European countries were identified with this concept of a country on the border of two worlds, and they were named accordingly:

¹³ At the beginning of March, 1918, the leaders of the Bolshevik party declared a one-sided peace without determining the borders to their Western neighbours.

So wurden etwa die Staaten der gegen die Osmanen gerichteten „Heiligen Liga“ wie das Heilige Römische Reich, Venedig und Spanien als eine solche Vormauer der Christenheit angesehen. Die Erinnerung an die Schlacht auf dem Kulikovo-Pol'e von 1380, in der Dmitrij Donskoj den ersten großen Sieg des aufstrebenden Moskauer Reiches über die Tataren errang, und an die (verlorene) Schlacht der Serben auf dem Amselfeld im Jahre 1389 sowie das Bild von der Rolle Finnlands als Bollwerk gegen den Kommunismus in den 1930er Jahren sind Ergebnis von antemurale-Vorstellungen, die in bestimmten Situationen zitiert werden, um die Bedeutung des Volkes, des Staates bzw. Ereignisses für die Gemeinschaft, zu der es sich zugehörig erklären will, herauszuheben. (Hein-Kircher 129)

In central and eastern Europe the term “antemurale christianitatis” was associated predominantly with Poland, where it was particularly popular. Poland had claimed the recognition and status of “antemurale” as early as the end of the Middle Ages, when the title signified the bulwark against the Ottoman Empire. At the same time the title also served a pragmatic political function, and the status of “antemurale christianitatis” entailed concrete political and financial support from European neighbours and especially from the Vatican. In turn, the pope and the central European kingdoms regarded the defence of the borders against the Ottomans as Poland’s duty, and they repeatedly reprimanded Polish kings to fulfill this function correctly. By the turn to the 17th century the Polish interpretation of “antemurale christianitatis” was extended to that of serving as a bastion also against the rising power of Moscovia, which was perceived as a schismatic culture (Hein-Kircher 133). Now, the concept covered not only the defense against a non-Christian enemy from outside of Europe, but it also served to demarcate dividing lines within the Christian world. Poland in turn began to define herself as a barrier against European contacts with Moscovia, and acted politically on that premise (Morawiec 253). In the 18th century, when the Ottoman Empire as well as the Polish Rzeczpospolita lost their formerly powerful position, and when simultaneously Prussia and Russia emerged as the new powers in eastern and central Europe, the status of antemurale lost its pragmatic function, and the concept shifted from the religious-political field to that of myth. It moved semantically towards signifying a “bulwark of civilization” against the Barbarians in the East. From the Polish point of view, the Russians were looked upon as a Barbaric and Byzantine-Asian people of the Orient, who did not belong to the catholic civilization of the Occident. This

concept was propagated most forcefully in the context of 19th century nationalism, as well as by the shift of the European cultural center to the middle of the continent, entailing Russia's (and Poland's) displacement in the mental map of Europe from North to East. But the notion of a superiority of Polish culture over Russia was conserved in Polish thought and made the annihilation of their state by the division 1795 especially painful and grievous (Lemberg 74-77). Then, in the second half of the 19th century, Bismarck's policy of suppressing the Catholic church and the Polish language as the guardians of Polish identity in the occupied regions, expanded the semantics of *antemurale* to include the concept of a people living in an interspace between two equally hostile barbaric powers (Hein-Kircher 133f.). Depending upon the perspective of the special group, Poland now was construed either as the bulwark of freedom and culture against the Barbarism of Russian despotism, or, by boosting and transforming the Russian enthusiasm for Slavonic cultures and pan-Slavic ideas, as a bastion of Slavic spiritual culture against European rationalism and industrialization (Morawiec 256f). In this variant of the notion, Poland became a part of a Slavic *antemurale* against Western European civilization, and in the years following the First World war the concept of "antemurale" gained an additional dimension, and a renewed actuality, when the Polish state was re-erected and then campaigned for a clearer demarcation of its ill-defined Eastern borders with Bolshevik Russia: Poland then began to interpret herself as an *antemurale* of European civilization, freedom, and democracy against Bolshevik Barbarianism and despotism (Tazbir 178; Hein-Kircher 138f.).

In the period between the First and the Second World War, a series of essays, articles and poetic texts were published, which continued the discourse of "antemurale" in the context of Poland's new role in Europe (Tazbir 164-177). In 1908, in his story "Zemsta" ("Vengeance"), Bolesław Prus had still pleaded for the option which had dominated the discourse in the second half of the 19th century, i.e. to lay at rest the concept of Poland as an "antemurale" guarding European civilization, and to relinquish the idea of an armed rebellion against the dividing powers; thus, he opted for a strategy of regaining national sovereignty through what he called "organic work," i. e. by developing land and people through reforms and negotiations in order to prove their maturity. Ten years later, Stefan Żeromski in his prose poem "Wiatr od morza" ("Wind from

the Sea”; written 1917, published 1918) resurrected the concept of “antemurale” as a historical myth: Poland had defended Europe’s freedom and well-being against Barbaric onslaughts for centuries, but at the cost of falling behind economically and culturally, whereas whenever Poland herself had conducted wars of conquest of her own, she had done so purely as the agent of a civilizing mission. Reprinted frequently, Żeromski’s prose poem was adopted into the national school curricula and coined the image of Poland as the self-sacrificing “knight of Europe,” which soon became an overarching topos (Tazbir 174). The Polish victory over the Red Army at Warsaw in 1920 was interpreted as the “miracle at the Vistula,” saving not only Poland, but all of Europe from Bolshevism. Thus Poland was seen as continuing the function as defender of Europe against the East, and this interpretation of the victory served further to consolidate the myth of antemurale.

Demarcating one’s nation against a neighbouring culture is always, and simultaneously, an act of self-identification and of re-defining one’s own culture. Poland, by defining herself as Europe’s bulwark against Russia, positioned herself as an inherent and representative part of European culture. This may be demonstrated by a few examples from Polish literary texts. When Ludwik Hieronim Morstin in “Oda na cześć kultury łacińskiej” (“Ode to the honour of Latin culture”) sings the praise of Italy, the latter becomes a synonym for the praise of Poland, which had internalized Latin culture: since the 16th century, the poem suggests, the Polish tongue articulates itself in Italian rhythm. Since then the colours and hills of Poland simulate those of Italy, where the Latin Gods had found their refuge, and where “the Latin race is in the blood of the people” (*we krwi narodu jest Latynów rasa*, Morstin 251). In his volume *Return to Europe (Powrót do Europy)*, 1931) Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz constructs a picture of Europe as the Polish homeland in a similar vein, and, seeing it from the perspective of a Polish European, he presents it as self-evident that Poland belongs to Europe; e.g., the poem “Europe” depicts the collective flight of Polish artists and writers from the narrow old continent into exotic fields, and it celebrates their eventual return to Poland, as arriving at their true homeland, the country of Mickiewicz. The poem traces a change from wanderlust to being homesick for Europe. Whereas the splendours of flowers blooming, colours shining and jewels glittering in the sunlight of the far South remain unfamiliarly exotic to

them, the returnees greet the shores of Europe as their old and dark, but familiar home. Besides texts like “Nostalgia for Italy” (“Tęsknota Italii”), which evokes the old Northern and central European longing for Italy, there is one poem addressed “To Russia.” The text relies exclusively on a series of questions which convey the persona’s ambivalent relationship to Russia—a part of which was the former homeland of the poet himself. The initial question structures the entire poem “What shall I say to you, o Russia?” (*O czym mam ci powiedzieć, o Rosjo?*), which then enumerates several aspects of the persona’s personal bonds with Russia, some of which are presented ambivalently as positive or negative, while others are clearly positive. First of all, the poem names Russian literature as a simultaneously attractive and repulsive bond—while the work of the “heavenly Puškin” attracts the persona, Dostoevkiĵ’s negative pictures of Polish people repels him. The beauty of Ukrainian nights and landscapes is attractive, and so is the music of Skrjabin, but it is so in an emotionally unsettling, sweetly exciting and painfully “gothic” way, which haunts and hurts the persona “like a non-healing wound, given by a poisoned knife” (*jak nożem zatrutym zadana nieuleczalna rana*). In the last verse, the sequence of questions culminates in a variation of the poem’s first, articulating the persona’s conflict between antithetical emotional relations with Russia: “Shall I tell you I hate you? Or shall I call you beloved one?” (*Mam ci rzec, że cię nienawidzę? Czy rzec, jesteś ukochana?*). Having grown up in Ukraine, which was then a part of the Russian empire, but having left it for the newly erected Polish Republic, Iwaszkiewicz avoids all direct allusions to actual historical and political contexts. He depicts the conflict between his emotional commitment to his homeland Ukraine, and his repulsion from Russia, as a personal and private one, while simultaneously presenting this conflict as the collective experience of the Polish people from the Ukrainian *kresy*.

When we compare the Polish relation to Europe, as presented by Żeromski, Morstin and Iwaszkiewicz, with the Russian relation, as depicted by Blok and Brjusov, it becomes quite evident that the Russian self-image is dominated by a certain strangeness vis-a-vis Europe and an insecurity about belonging to the continent: in the poem “Skify,” Aleksandr Blok talks about the Russians’ intimate knowledge of European culture and contrasts it to the Europeans’ ignorance about a Russia, which remains a sphinx to Europeans.

Blok draws an enigmatic Russia which puzzles Europe by its otherness, which harbours both Europe and Asia in its womb, and which can freely choose between behaving in a “civilized” way, which is ethnocentrically euphemized as familiar to Europeans, or in a strange, Barbaric way that is constructed and “othered” as Asian. In contrast, Morstin and Iwaszkiewicz present Poland as clearly and wholly European; Poland is defined as an integral, and inseparable part of European culture. Thus, the myth of “antemurale Europae” is presented by these neighbouring cultures from two opposing directions, in the Polish case from the inside of Europe, in the Russian case from an insecure position on the border with Asia.

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Summary

Dating back to ancient Greece the classic dichotomy of "barbaric vs. civilized" has become a multifunctional topos in European languages and cultures. Constructing a binary between the "self" and the "other", the term denotes differences between individuals, nations, races, religions, and even aesthetics. As such this topical binary may be conceived as a rhetorical device, and, depending on the given perspective of a person, group or culture, it can always be reactivated, reconstructed, and accommodated to shifting conditions. The paper describes two mutually interacting fields in which the

topos “barbaric vs. civilized” is constructed and functionalized: in the political, where the lines are drawn between nations and civilizations, and in the aesthetic, where the lines are drawn between groups or literary periods in a single culture. The political and aesthetic functions of the binary topos are not mutually exclusive in the works of any author or group, but they may co-exist synchronically or intermittently. The paper outlines this process by analyzing a few examples from the poetry of Russian symbolism (Brjusov, Blok) and Polish modernism (Morstin, Iwaszkiewicz).

Key words: comparative literature, “barbaric vs. civilized,” Russian poetry, Polish poetry, Valerij Brjusov, Aleksandr Blok, Ludwik Hieronim Morstin, Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz

Zagłada czy odrodzenie? O toposie „barbarzyński/cywilizowany” w rosyjskiej i polskiej poezji początku XX wieku

Streszczenie

Sięgająca czasów starożytnej Grecji klasyczna dychotomia „barbarzyński/cywilizowany” stała się wielofunkcyjnym toposem w językach i kulturach europejskich. Termin ów, oparty na binarnej opozycji „Ja – Inny”, określa różnice, które dzielą poszczególne jednostki, narody, rasy, religie, a nawet estetyki. Dzięki swojej wielowymiarowości może być traktowany jako narzędzie retoryczne. W zależności od potrzeb danej osoby, grupy czy kultury może być reaktywowany, rekonstruowany i dostosowywany do zmieniających się warunków. Artykuł prezentuje dwa pola wzajemnych interakcji, na których jest budowany i funkcjonalizowany topos „barbarzyński/cywilizowany”: polityczne (gdzie dokonuje się podziałów pomiędzy narodami i cywilizacjami) oraz estetyczne (gdzie w danej kulturze wyróżnione zostają odrębne grupy artystyczne czy epoki literackie). Pojawiający się w pracach poszczególnych twórców czy grup binarny topos nie zawsze pełni wyłącznie polityczną bądź estetyczną funkcję – w niektórych utworach zaobserwować można ich częściowe lub pełne współistnienie. Artykuł przedstawia to zjawisko w oparciu o analizę rosyjskiej poezji symbolicznej (Brjusov, Blok) oraz polskiej poezji modernistycznej (Morstin, Iwaszkiewicz).

Słowa kluczowe: komparatystryka literacka, „barbarzyński/cywilizowany”, poezja rosyjska, poezja polska, Valerij Brjusov, Aleksandr Blok, Ludwik Hieronim Morstin, Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz

Ewa Rajewska

Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu

E.E. and the American Dream.

Barańczak, Białoszewski, Sosnowski

The term “barbarian” is hardly a compliment, though in the recent Polish poetic tradition it has evidently lost some of its most crude, vandalistic connotations. The “barbarians” of the early 1990s could be viewed as reviving, rather than destroying the contemporary poetic idiom, even (or especially) in their rebellion against fossilized metaphors and lifeless synecdoches, unable to express anything, including lofty ideas, “those watery substitutes for blood” (Świetlicki 279).¹ The history of Polish literature proves they were not the first to rebel. However, from a historio-literary perspective, the very concept of barbarism as an artistic or intellectual pose need not contain belligerence—it could also be a placid mock self-diagnosis.²

In the latter half of the 20th century two other modern Polish poets—sophisticated, refined, and already renowned—claimed to be “barbarians,” both in similar circumstances, as they were then traveling from their native Eastern Europe to experience the West. Historically and geographically speaking, they were coming from *barbaricum*, the uncivilized lands never included in the Ro-

¹ Karol Maliszewski, who coined the term “barbarians,” claimed: “I prefer the barbarians. They are closer to the bloodstream” (Maliszewski 93).

² As opposed to barbarism defined as the violation of the mental and physical identity of the other, discussed by Julia Kristeva in her lecture *Comment surviennent les actes de barbarie?* delivered in L’Université populaire du quai Branly in Paris on October 27, 2006 (for Polish translation see Kristeva, 2010).

man Empire; at the same time, they were citizens of Europe and heirs to both its Mediterranean and its barbaric tradition.³ The first crossed the ancient Roman *limes* to walk in the garden of art and architecture, starting with Paleolithic cave paintings in Lascaux; the second “left the cloudy provinces behind” to “come to the capital of the world” (Miłosz, 1995: 271)—Paris.

Zbigniew Herbert’s famous essays, the fruit of his travels to France and Italy, were published in 1962 under a rather provocative title: *Barbarzyńca w ogrodzie* (“Barbarian in the Garden”). Their reader is tempted to propose the thesis that the barbarian is the first-person narrator, Herbert himself—the same erudite art connoisseur who later praised (with ironic emphasis indeed) the power of taste. It is worth noting that Herbert uses the adjective “barbarous” very sparingly in his book—it is barbarous, i.e. mindless and therefore destructive, to drink Chianti in haste or to demolish Gothic churches, which in 19th-century Paris were considered “masterpieces of poor taste” (Herbert 114, 118). The author of *Barbarian in the Garden* does not avoid the epithet “cruel,” nor mentions of cruelty—of the Cro-Magnons, Dorians, or the Inquisition—but in his narrative their cruelty always has its own grounds, it is not “disinterested,” destructive for the sake of pure destruction. According to Herbert, apart from showing the precision of a perfect murder, the Paleolithic painters of bull hunts also demonstrate great tenderness (Herbert 7-9). Does he empathize, then, with the (in this case pre-) barbarians, or stress his provincial origins from behind the Roman *limes*, is self-mockery his reason for having chosen his title for these essays, or is it genuine humility in his first direct confrontation with works by old masters? Adam Zagajewski claims the reason is love. In his preface to the French edition of Herbert’s essays, Zagajewski draws an interesting antinomy: a passionate, zealous barbarian versus a decadent. “Only a barbarian can gaze lovingly at the form of a Gothic cathedral, at an outline of Tuscan hills,” argues Zagajewski (107). It may be not as cut and dried; love, in Herbert’s gaze, is often

³ Karol Modzelewski stresses the influence of the cultural heritage of the barbaric tribes on the European culture in his *Barbarzyńska Europa* (Modzelewski, 2004). Cf. Maria Janion’s remarks on “easterly-western” Polish identity, based on a thesis that “The ancient antinomy of ‘civilization’ and ‘barbarity’ in the modern world turned into the antinomy of ‘West’ and ‘East’,” with Poland located at their juncture (Janion, 2004).

tinged with decadent distance, with irony. Still, it is an intriguing assumption that love is an attribute of a barbarian.

The poem by the second “barbarian,” Czesław Miłosz, dated “Berkeley, 1980” and included in his volume *Hymn o perle (Hymn of the Pearl)*, (1981), contains reminiscences of his youthful visits to Paris in the 1930s:

Mijając ulicę Descartes
Schodziłem ku Sekwanie, młody barbarzyńca w podróży,
Onieśmielony przybyciem do stolicy świata.

.....
Wkraczałem w uniwersalne, podziwiając, pragnąc.⁴
(“Rue Descartes”; Miłosz, 1995: 270-271)

This reminiscence soon turns into a morality tale: embarrassment about the particular (“the customs of our homes”) can be as lethal as the misappropriation of “the universal, beautiful ideas”—these are the fatal consequences of bypassing the path of *ratio*. Empires fall, the world’s capitals vanish, abolished provincial customs are restored. Eventually the only sign of the speaker’s alleged barbarism is his act of mindless, disinterested cruelty, breaking a taboo:

A z ciężkich moich grzechów jeden najlepiej pamiętam:
Jak przechodząc raz leśną ścieżką nad potokiem
Zrzuciłem duży kamień na wodnego węża, zwiniętego w trawie.⁵
(Miłosz, 1995: 272-273)

Bias versus a fresh, even naïve fascination mingled with love; the inferiority complex of a provincial versus the conviction of one’s own moral, and therefore cultural, superiority. The attitudes of both “barbarians” confronted with the otherness initially regarded as “better” than what they knew contain elements we might recognize to various degrees in prose and poetry by other Eastern Europeans, or more precisely, Eastern European intellectuals, E.E.s, whose model could be the titular protagonist of Stanisław Barańczak’s essay referred

⁴ “Bypassing rue Descartes / I descended toward the Seine, shy, a traveler /A young barbarian just come to the capital of the world. / . . . / I entered the universal, dazzled and desiring.” (Trans. Renata Gorczyńska, Robert Hass)

⁵ “As to my heavy sins, I remember one most vividly: / How, one day, walking on a forest path along a stream, / I pushed a rock down onto a water snake coiled in the grass.”

to in the title of my paper. The average E.E. Barańczak describes is setting out on his journey at a specific point of time—in the very middle of the second half of the 20th century—and is going even further West, to America. At that time America had been the Promised Land to immigrants from Eastern Europe for at least a hundred years, a land of hope, as shown in a survey conducted in 1890 by Colonel John B. Weber, first commissioner of Ellis Island (Szejnert 18-19). In the second half of the 20th century America also became the land of another kind of hope for intellectuals, and writers in particular. The cultural capital of the world had moved further West, claimed Miłosz; in the United States poetry still could win readers (mostly in campuses, however), as well as professorships and awards. International renown began there. “I realize that if I had stayed in France I would have received neither the Neustadt Prize, the ‘small Nobel Prize,’ in 1978, nor then the Nobel Prize,” wrote Miłosz in his *Abecadło* (Miłosz, 1997: 26).

I would like to focus on three visits to America, one short-term, one returning, and one which turned out to be permanent; all were made within ten years, beginning in the early 1980s, by three Polish poets especially preoccupied with language and its possibilities: Stanisław Barańczak, Miron Białoszewski, and Andrzej Sosnowski. Their preoccupation should have made them feel even more acutely the first, onomatopoeic meaning of the Greek noun *bárbaros*, a stranger whose native tongue is perceived as gibberish and incomprehensible.

Historically and geographically speaking, Barańczak, Białoszewski and even Sosnowski, who visited the United States on several occasions between 1989 and 1991, i.e. in the final years of the Cold War, were all newcomers from the ancient *barbaricum*, but with the baggage of the European cultural tradition; they came from the Old Continent, but their native country has been “rebarbarized,” cut off from the rest of Europe in the Sovietization process, and was economically, technologically, and also culturally backward. The E.E.s come to a land whose dominant cultural tradition was incomparably younger than their own, and which in many respects originated from Europe’s. Was it derivative, and thus barbarian? The Americans take pride in their national ethos of liberty bringing prosperity, the widespread use of advanced technology and living standards incomparable to those the E.E.s left behind the Iron Curtain. A paradox: a citizen of a civilized country could not be a savage *per se*;

however, “civilization” has varying degrees, and a foreigner could be regarded as more or less “civilized.” According to the dictionary, the adjective “barbaric” “frequently applies to a state about midway between full civilization and tribal savagery” (Merriam-Webster’s, 2000). From this point of view, the E.E.s might be perceived as semi-civilized strangers, freakish foreigners.

As diagnosed by Jean Baudrillard, who visited the States on several occasions in the 1970s and 1980s, the America of the time was a land of radical modernity, though inhabited by “the only remaining primitive society,” rootless and therefore primal and vital, yet technologically refined; a country where savagery to the first degree coexisted with a third degree of hyperreality, absolute *simulacrum*, with nothing in between (Baudrillard 7, 101). Baudrillard made this point—about the alleged lack of anything in between, of a second level involving analysis and reflection, a domain where only subtle European minds excel—even more strongly elsewhere: American intellectuals, shut away in their campuses, were incapable of analyzing their own society; there was no culture, no cultural discourse in America (Baudrillard 22, 97). I recount Baudrillard’s rather superficial comments on alleged American superficiality, mocked by Dennis Dutton⁶ as “frivolous,” “amusing,” “bombastic,” and “brazen” (“I do hope Baudrillard will continue to visit the States . . .,” wrote Dutton in 1990), because in many respects they seem to coincide with the views held by the E.E. from Stanisław Barańczak’s essay, as well as by the speaker in some of his American poems.

Mr. Baranazack does not socialize

Stanisław Barańczak’s visit to America began in March 1981—and continues to this day. Barańczak, a laureate of the Alfred Jurzykowski Prize (1981), was a visiting professor at Harvard University till 1984. When his passport expired and his request to prolong his leave at Adam Mickiewicz University was rejected, he was appointed Alfred Jurzykowski Professor of Polish Language and Literature at Harvard. It was a long-awaited visit: Barańczak, the repressed

⁶ And defended by Alan N. Shapiro (2009).

founding member of KOR (The Workers' Defense Committee) had to wait three years for an exit visa from Poland.

His essay *E.E.: The Extraterritorial*, written in 1984, seems to start with the fascination and bedazzlement we have observed in the attitudes of the “barbarians” in Herbert and Miłosz. Barańczak’s main character, “the average Eastern European, (E.E., for short),” discovers that the New World is much brighter and bigger than he expected; “brilliantly multicolored, pluralistic” America stands out against the dreary background of communist Eastern Europe:

E.E. never expected houses to be painted so brightly purple or blue, schoolbuses to be so warmly yellow, street signs to be so invitingly green. The way America is painted seems to him shockingly but pleasantly different from the drab colorlessness that envelops everything—streets, cars, housing projects, peoples’ complexions—in his own country. The color of Eastern Europe is gray (with occasional flashes of red on national holidays) . . . Besides being gaudier, the components of American reality are also bigger . . . [E]ven the gulls at the beach seem to be somewhat oversized here, as if they had been fed all their lives with some especially nutritious gull food, sold in easy-to-open cans. (Barańczak, 1990: 9)

To the overwhelmed newcomer from a backward country America is brighter, bigger—should it not also be better? A note of irony appears in the quoted excerpt, but for now, the other parts of this picture are allegedly painted in good faith, with comparably bold brush strokes: E.E. is a fatalist, of course. A statement: “In Eastern Europe, one always expects the worst” has the depth of a question: “*La Pologne? La Pologne?* Isn’t it terribly cold there?” from a famous short piece *Słówka* by Wisława Szymborska.⁷ Barańczak continues as follows:

In Eastern Europe, one always expects the worst. Nothing is guaranteed or even predictable; everything—from the meat supply to the course of your own career—is subject to the mysterious whims of “them,” meaning those who hold power at all levels (even the plumber is one of “them”—his power derives from his being in constant demand) . . . In America, “them” seems to be replaced by “me.” . . . Acceptance of the idea that everything in America works or can be worked out, whether this idea is true or not, is perhaps the watershed moment for someone who has recently arrived from Eastern Europe. Having gotten used to this, he becomes a new man. (Barańczak, 1990: 10)

⁷ Translated by Stanisław Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh as *Vocabulary* (Szymborska 27).

Interestingly enough, a similar turn from “them” to “me” occurs at the time in Barańczak’s poetry—with the reference to the topic: from the volume *Atlantyda i inne wiersze z lat 1981-1985* (1986) (*Atlantis and Other Poems 1981-1985*) onwards his perspective, previously more clearly concerned with language of politics and dilemmas of the socialist society, becomes much more personal, focused on individually perceived details.⁸ In the essay under discussion we also observe a passage from a generalized construct, the figure of an “average E.E.,” initially quite euphoric and willing to believe in the American dream, to “me,” a translator of literature, who in spite of his proficiency, can express neither his general mental state nor his political views in the foreign language. It is virtually impossible to express what he really feels (“The question one hears at [stand-up] parties—‘Is everybody happy?’—if translated literally into Polish, would seem to come from a metaphysical treatise or a political utopia rather than from social chitchat”; Barańczak, 1990: 12) or what he stands for (“‘I’m neoconservative’ would more or less transfer the desired meaning to the American ears, but E.E. cannot force his lips to pronounce that; ‘conservative’ sounds like the opposite of what he has always considered himself”; Barańczak, 1990: 13). Being an indispensable part of the culture, “AA” language, i.e. “Authentic American” language, is presented as much poorer in subtle shades of meaning and less sophisticated than “EE,” “Eastern European.” This assessment is projected on the whole of American culture—and the figure of E.E. is like a handy shield which allows Barańczak to express this.

I don’t mean to say that Americans are a nation of superficial, backslapping enjoyers and happy-makers, as opposed to our suffering Slavic souls. What I’m trying to point out is only one example of the semantic incompatibilities which are so firmly ingrained in languages that they sometimes make mutual communication impossible—or, rather, they turn into a ritual exchange of meaningless grunts and purrs. ‘Are you happy?’ E.E. is asked by his cordial host. ‘Yes, I am.’ ‘Are you enjoying yourself?’ ‘Sure I am.’ What else could be said? (Barańczak, 1990: 13)

Confirmation through denial? The above conversation could have served as a model for the concept on which the poem “Small Talk” from *Atlantis* is

⁸ Jerzy Kandziora argues that this is the beginning of Barańczak’s new poetical path, when a language regarded as a social construct ceased to be the world represented in his poetry (Kandziora 159).

based. In this poem, the eponymous verse that opens the poetic cycle, casts Barańczak in the role of a host feigning cordiality in the world, *ten świat, gospodarz przyjęcia, . . . poświęca / chwilę cennego czasu, całkiem przy tym świadom / że wszystko, co odpowiem, i tak nie będzie mieć większej / wagi*⁹ (“Small Talk,” Barańczak, 2006: 309). But Barańczak also writes poems which do not adopt this level of generalization. It is hard to read “Garden Party” as anything other than a bitter satire on American society. Even if Barańczak does not truly mean to say that America is superficial, some of his poems clearly seem to express this. In “Naród, któremu się lepiej powiodło” (“The Nation Which Has Been More Successful”) the figure of E.E. finds his counterpart in the person of an American student at the School of Dentistry:

Naród, któremu się bardziej udało,
ma, domyślasz się, swoje własne poważne problemy,
trądzik młodzieńczy, egzamin, od którego wszystko zależy,
skandaliczny koszt studiów, niezrozumiały fakt,
że Jane z drugiego roku udaje obojętność.

Naród, który wygrał lepszy los,
jest godny twojego podziwu, nie taniej kpiny.
.....
Przechodzisz obok niego, a naród znad ramy roweru
ogarnia cię pojemnym, nie czyniącym różnic uśmiechem.¹⁰

(“Naród, któremu się lepiej powiodło,” Barańczak, 2006: 300)

The smile aimed at anyone without exception becomes indifferent. Immune, self-advertising, empty, as Baudrillard puts it, calling the smile a key element of American culture (Baudrillard 31-32). The “serious problems” of “The Nation Which Has Been More Successful” may seem laughable compared

⁹ “. . . dedicating / a moment of his precious time, fully conscious / that all my answers will be of no / importance anyway.”

¹⁰ “The nation, which has had more luck, / does have, as you could expect, his own serious problems, / adolescent acne, the exam which determines everything, / scandalous costs of studying, the incomprehensible fact / that Jane, the sophomore, feigns indifference. // The nation, which has had a better chance, / deserves your admiration, not cheap derision. / . . . / As you are passing by, the nation takes you in / its all-embracing, all-including smile from above the crossbar.”

to those E.E. has (only physically) left behind. They are youthful, immature—and selected unjustly and superficially, without aspiring to objectivity, as *Atlantis* is a subjective record of subjective first impressions by an alienated foreigner. Barańczak makes similarly bold comparisons at least twice more in this volume, in “Garden Party” and “Nowy świat” (“The New World”), which opens with a statement: “The only problem—to find a parking space,” and closes with a postcard bearing greetings from a Polish friend, who was “arrested in the meantime.” The protagonist of Barańczak’s poems is “not quite social” (he may not be willing to chat with his American neighbors, but a poetic dialogue with Robert Frost and Emily Dickinson is a different story) and hates “small talk,” which ranks fifth on E.E.’s partial list of American things perceived as alien. At the same time he himself could be perceived as alien, not an E.E., but almost an E.T. A stranger, whose name is impossible to pronounce and therefore becomes mangled: “Banaczek,” “Mr. Baranazack.”¹¹ A barbarian. A significant detail: *Breathing under Water*, the collection of essays in which “E.E.: The Extraterritorial” is included, are published under the name “Stanisław Barańczak.”

Miron Białoszewski comes out of the closet

Miron Białoszewski, the 1982 winner of the Alfred Jurzykowski Prize, came to collect his award in October, and spent six weeks visiting New York, Buffalo, and Boston. His Wanderlust had been sparked both by curiosity (“I want America in America,” he wrote in his prose work *AAAmeryka*, published posthumously [Białoszewski, 1988: 72]) and by anxiety: “I came here for the prize. I could have collected it through a bank. But I was tempted. Then frightened. But it would have been a shame to cancel the journey” (Białoszewski, 2012: 802), he noted in his *Tajny dziennik (Secret Diary)*, kept at the time and published only in 2012. Distinct traces of his impressions of America are also found in the poems in *Oho* (1985), and in a poetic cycle, “Wiersze amerykańskie” (“American Poems”) from *Wiersze ostatnie* (“Last Poems,” 1988).

¹¹ The phenomenon of Barańczak’s “escaping name” has been discussed by Leonard Neuger (2007).

Białoszewski's visit to America was preceded by a cruise around Europe, reportedly undertaken in hope of seeing Sibyl, sitting in the middle of the sea, and sewing a huge shirt; the world was to end with her last stitch. Białoszewski sees the end as unsettling and intriguing. His account of his trip to the New World is at the same time his parting with this world, suggests Tadeusz Sobolewski; it is how he gains evidence that *omnia ubique*, everything is everywhere; it is the poet's self-confirmation (Sobolewski, 1989: 119, 120). Indeed, if Białoszewski was as overwhelmed as E.E. by his first contact with an America that was bigger and brighter than he had expected, his strategy was to conceal. He entitles one of the poems "W Ameryce jak gdzie indziej" ("In America as Elsewhere"). "Na rzymskim równoleżniku / ale w Ameryce / prędko zwyczajnieje / wszystko / i ja"¹² (Białoszewski, 1988: 128), he notes in another. Białoszewski likes New York. "That is, Manhattan. Metropolitan and what is familiar" (Białoszewski, 1988: 63). The familiar Polish sights are his constant point of reference, sometimes quite amazing (Manhattan by night—like Przasnysz). Title *AAAmerica* seems to allude to his misinterpretation of subway markings.

I see an approaching train marked "AA." It makes me think of America. Double "A" is like a huge exclamation point. I asked if it was a special one. On the contrary. Single "A"s are fast trains, double "A"s are standard. (Białoszewski, 1988: 61)

AAAmerica with a triple "A" may be something that was supposed to be worthy of the highest admiration, but turned out to be quite ordinary. Or is it just an initial domesticating gesture? For Białoszewski, New York becomes a "narcotic," "absorbingly curious" (2012: 809) and "orgiastic" (1988: 95) only after the poet gets used to his room in a hotel run by nuns, relieves his anxiety about possible "traps," and starts to treat his bed as a safe center.

At the beginning of 20th century Slavic immigrants sailing to New York were instantly recognizable by their attachment to their feather quilts as the most important part of their baggage (Szejnert 27). Several decades after the event, Danuta Mostwin tells the story of a fire in Baltimore in 1912 in her collection of essays on Polish immigrants in the United States. Out of all the belongings rescued from the fire by a mother of a bride, a feather quilt was the only one

¹² "On the Roman parallel / but in America / everything / soon gets commonplace / including myself."

aleś zwierzęco
wolniejszy
cicho idź
cicho bądź¹⁴ (Białoszewski, 1988: 129)

Białoszewski is silent wandering the streets of New York City, visiting museums and male porn clubs he acts as if he was deprived of the power of speech. “Here in New York I do not use language at all. I can wrangle everything using signs. In NY they reportedly speak bad English anyway” (Białoszewski, 2012: 805). Pretending to be mute, he strikes the pose of a barbarian—a “mute”: *niemy*, or *niemiec* was an old Slavic equivalent of the ancient Greek *bárbaros* (Modzelewski 9).¹⁵

An earthling writes a letter home

Andrzej Sosnowski visited the United States several times between 1989 and 1992, while he was doing a doctorate on Ezra Pound at the University of Western Ontario. His American impressions, written between autumn 1989 and spring 1991, were initially sent to Bohdan Zadura as (un)common letters (Zadura 113). The volume, published in 1994 as *Nouvelles impressions d'Amérique*, was a tribute to Raymond Roussel and his *Nouvelles impressions d'Afrique*; titles of impressions by Roussel accompanied by drawings by Henri A. Zo serve as a structure for Sosnowski's book.

Reading *Nouvelles impressions d'Amérique* is a serious challenge for people who appreciate sense in poetry; they may feel prompted to interpret it *ad infinitum*, in an effort to find a method to its composition, linking a title, a picture, and a text. Is there meaning, apart from sheer association, in this shifting from one “impression” to another? “Poezja. Czy gdzieś na krawędzi świata można

¹⁴ “in a foreign country / in an unknown language / meanings are flying by / whirling / want to / cluster / around / me / think / around / And I say to myself: / – you are losing / but you are more free / animal-like / go quiet / be quiet”

¹⁵ Still, Białoszewski, being silent, can—and does—write. But in his writing he is so focused on himself that “his America consisted of dumb Americans and dumb Poles. A pity,” observed Bogusława Latawiec, “Obserwacja się opłaca,” *Kultura Niezależna* 1984; text reprinted in Latawiec, *Zegary...*, 2012, 181-186.

by położyć kres fabule w boskiej monotonii wstrzymanyh sezonów?”¹⁶ The book certainly is not a linear account of Sosnowski’s American travels. Nor is America the subject of these impressions. *Nouvelles impressions* seem reminiscent of Roussel not only in their outline, but also in the method, described by Sosnowski in a poem “R.R. (1977-1933)”: “. . . utwór / nie może zawierać nic rzeczywistego, żadnych obserwacji, / a tylko zupełnie wymyślone struktury”¹⁷ (Sosnowski 2006: 64).

D’ from the title *Nouvelles impressions d’Amérique* refers less to a description of something (America), as it does in *un roman d’amour* (“A Story of/about Love”) than to its origin (impressions *from* America). If their content is not a subjective view of reality (“Każda rzecz powinna kosztować tyle, ile słowo w tym telegramie. Dopiero wówczas udałoby się ustalić związek między rzeczą a słowem”¹⁸ writes “Columb” in one of the impressions), then what is it? To define this would be to suspend the flow of meanings, the eruption of erudite allusions, most beautiful and most seducing feature of the volume (“I fell in love with the book—at first / sight,” wrote one critic [Majeran 7]).

I chciałbym cię ukryć w ciemnej masie prozy, bo przecież nie w szczupłym wierszu, z tym białym marginesem niebezpieczeństwa, który pozostawia tyle miejsca na plotki i donosy: ktoś liczy kroki, ktoś je interpretuje, ktoś kreską zaznacza miejsce zbrodni i dopisuje ołówkiem: Leta – w mitologii: rzeka.¹⁹

¹⁶ “Poetry. Would it be possible, somewhere at the edge of the world, to put an end to the plot in the divine monotony of suspended seasons?” (“XLVII Mężczyzna przy zastawionym stole, odczytujący etykietkę na fiolce z lekarstwem,” Sosnowski, 2004: 11)

¹⁷ “. . . a text / should never contain anything real, any observations, / but wholly imaginary structures.” Dorota Walczak-Delanois has commented upon the incongruity of the observed world and the observer in Sosnowski’s volume *Stacje* (1998: 6).

¹⁸ “All things should cost as much as one word in this telegram. Only then could we establish a relationship between a thing and a word.” (“XIV Kobieta otwierająca telegram, na jej twarzy maluje się niepokój,” Sosnowski, 2004: 33)

¹⁹ “I want to hide you away in a dark mass of prose, not in a slender verse with its white margin which opens up so much space for rumors and denunciations: someone counts the steps, someone else interprets them, another one underlines place of the crime and adds in pencil: Lethe. In mythology: the river of oblivion.” (“XLV Głowa myśliciela [sama głowa] – zmarszczka między brwiami,” Sosnowski, 2004: 97)

The subject is indeed well hidden, elusive and magnetic. I would risk the assumption that it is also female; Sosnowski's dream of America is an erotic dream (of golden-haired Kansas, happy and indifferent among skylarks and sunflowers; of Missouri, shameless in her voluptuous dance; of naked Arizona with a saguaro flower in her teeth and a wren on her brown breast; Sosnowski, 2004: 41-42). However what interests me most in the context of this discussion is Sosnowski's specific writing regime. The image of Sosnowski as the author of *Nouvelles impressions* is more one of an Earthling²⁰ than of an E.E. Yet his elusive, magnetic prose is the result of having set in motion a certain defense mechanism:

At first I wrote two or three very inept poems, weak, dull, and monotonous—because it turned out that, in using a foreign language, hearing different rhythms everywhere around, one starts to defend some basic Polish rhythms in his writing, and ends up with some eleven-syllable poems etc. And then I thought I could try to write something that would be an adventure for my native language, which was under siege by a very different linguistic force, by completely different rhythms. At the same time, this siege resembled a love affair, so I wanted to write with open arms, without sticking to my identity in transition (Sosnowski, 2010: 30-31).

Paradoxically, in writing *Nouvelles impressions d'Amérique* in accordance with Roussel's outline, Sosnowski tried to defend his poetics less against "barbarisms," foreign (American) words, or expressions offending contemporary standards of acceptability in the Polish language, than against insistent echoes of Polish classical poetic rhythms, which were amplified by the foreign language element.

Barańczak, Białoszewski, Sosnowski. The protagonists of their writing are very different incarnations of an E.E., an intellectual from behind the Iron Curtain visiting America. Confronted with the American otherness, they adopt different attitudes—hold an alienating belief that painful personal experience

²⁰ This was also Sosnowski's pen name; it was how he signed his articles published in *Odra* in the latter half of the 1990s.

equals psychological maturity and cultural superiority; set off on a prejudiced exploration resulting in their own numbness; develop a controlled fascination that cannot reach fulfillment—as their creators adopt different poetic strategies. What they all have in common, however, is their focus on self-observation: the journey evidently and not surprisingly increases their self-consciousness, which in case of a poet would be considered a gain.

This fragmentary picture certainly could—and should—be expanded with other examples, especially female (perhaps those of Ludmiła Marjańska, Julia Hartwig, Adriana Szymańska and others).²¹ The question if any aspects of the E.E. concept are still valid today, after more than two decades, would require further research. America of *E.E.: The Extraterritorial*, of *Atlantis*, of *AAAmerica* and *The Secret Diary*, and of *Nouvelles impressions d'Amérique* belongs to the past—and history, again, is a foreign country.

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²¹ The same goes for the prose incarnations. Dorota Kozicka discusses a genre called "scholarship prose" (*proza pobytowa*), analyzing Polish participants' prose reports of Paul Engle's International Writing Program in Iowa City (Kozicka, 2012).

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Summary

The authoress discusses the uses of the concept of a barbarian as a pose, a mock self-diagnosis of an Eastern European intellectual experiencing the West. She traces the notion of a "barbarian" in Zbigniew Herbert's book of essays *Barbarzyńca w ogrodzie* ("Barbarian in the Garden," 1962), as well as in the poem "Rue Descartes" ("Bypassing Rue Descartes," 1981) by Czesław Miłosz. Key elements of this "barbaric" attitude—bias versus a fresh, even naïve fascination mingled with love; the inferiority complex of a provincial versus a conviction of one's own moral and, therefore, cultural superiority—could be recognized in prose and poetry reports made by other Eastern Europeans intellectuals, whom Stanisław Barańczak dubbed "E.E.s" in his essay "E.E.: The Extraterritorial" (1990).

With this notion in mind, the author focuses on three visits to America made within ten years, beginning in the early 1980s, by three Polish poets: Stanisław Barańczak, Miron Białoszewski, and Andrzej Sosnowski, all of whom were especially preoccupied with language and its possibilities—and therefore more concerned with the first, onomatopoeic meaning of a Greek noun *bárbaros*, a stranger whose native tongue is perceived as gibberish and impossible to understand.

Key words: comparative literature, Eastern European, the West, America, "barbarians," Polish poetry, Zbigniew Herbert, Czesław Miłosz, Stanisław Barańczak, Miron Białoszewski, Andrzej Sosnowski

E.E. wobec *American Dream*. Barańczak, Białoszewski, Sosnowski

Streszczenie

Tekst koncentruje się na koncepcie barbarzyństwa rozumianego jako poza, autoironiczna autodiagnoza intelektualisty z Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej, który odbywa podróż na Zachód. Pierwowzór takiej „barbarzyńskiej” postawy autorka odnajduje w esejach Zbigniewa Herberta „Barbarzyńca w ogrodzie” (1962) oraz w wierszu „Rue Descartes” (1981) Czesława Miłosza. Najistotniejsze elementy: ambiwalencję skonstrastowaną z silną, miłosną wręcz fascynacją, prowincjonalny kompleks niższości przeciwstawiony przekonaniu o własnej moralnej, a co za tym idzie, kulturalnej wyższości, można jednak odnaleźć w poetyckich i prozatorskich relacjach innych środkowoeuropejskich intelektualistów, których Stanisław Barańczak w swoim znanym eseju określił mianem „E.E.s”. Tekst analizuje literackie świadectwa trzech wizyt na Zachodzie, konkretnie zaś w Ameryce, które w latach 80. i na początku 90. odbyli Stanisław Barańczak, Miron Białoszewski oraz Andrzej Sosnowski – poeci szczególnie wyczuleni na język i jego możliwości, a zatem tym bardziej świadomi pierwszego znaczenia greckiego rzeczownika *bárbaros*: cudzoziemiec, którego język brzmi bełkotliwie i niezrozumiale.

Słowa kluczowe: komparatystyka literacka, mieszkańiec Europy Wschodniej, Zachód, Ameryka, „barbarzyńcy”, poezja polska, Zbigniew Herbert, Czesław Miłosz, Stanisław Barańczak, Miron Białoszewski, Andrzej Sosnowski

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**Jan Skácel and Adam Zagajewski:
The Czech and the Polish Poet on the Civilization
and the Barbarians**

Edward Said observes in his classical study *Orientalism* (1978) that “the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience.” (Said, 2003: 1-2). The relation the West has entertained with the Eastern part of Europe is in many ways analogous to the colonial perspective applied to the Orient (as was convincingly demonstrated by Said). In a comparable manner, the East has thus been defined by the West in a negative way: The East is what is NOT the West. East-Central Europe has always been regarded by Western intellectuals and writers as something between the West and the Orient, a transitory and ambiguous space, the homeland of the barbarians from the Classical times. Therefore, we suggest reflecting on the striking discrepancy between the Western idea of the civilization of Eastern Europe and the way East European poets tend to understand themselves. Indeed, we will show how in the poems of Adam Zagajewski (born in 1945) and Jan Skácel (1922-1989) the identification with the classical Western civilization and culture is one of its major defining elements. The Antiquity and classical culture seem to represent for both poets a major aspect of their own bonding with the civilization of the West. We will focus especially on their creation of the 1980s, last years of Skácel’s life and also the last years of the totalitarian regime in Eastern Europe when the East-West division was still a tangible, everyday reality and in Zagajewski’s case also on his texts written in the 1990s that very

well reflect the post-communist transformation of the Eastern part of Europe and the new challenges it brings along.

We will start by going back to the original sense of the word “barbaric” or “barbarian.” The Latin word *barbarus* was originally used to designate all other peoples and tribes than the Greeks or the Romans, those who did not share the values of the classical civilization. This South-North division typical of the Classical times (the civilized South and the barbaric North) was perpetuated in the Renaissance time Italy whose representatives were seeing themselves as the heirs of the classical civilization (Wolff 5).

By extension, the word *barbarus* was later used to label the “foreigners,” those who are different to “us.” This use clearly shows the intention behind it: to strengthen one’s own identity by contrasting one’s own civilization with the bizarre otherness of the foreigner. (Only later had the word acquired the negative connotation of “uncultivated,” “cruel” or “rogue.”) It is hence interesting to study the role the classical culture plays in the works of Central and East European authors, those who have been constantly linked by their Western counterparts to the barbaric North-East of Europe.

In his book entitled *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*, Larry Wolff argues that the image of Eastern Europe was to a large extent coined during the 18th century and was much more based on fantasies than on real knowledge of the region. During this period, the South-North division was gradually being replaced by a new, West-East division (with new emerging industrial and cultural centers in the North—Paris, London or Amsterdam). It is also in the 18th century that the word “civilization” enters, as a neologism, English and French dictionaries. Indeed, Wolff argues that it was in contrast to the Eastern part of Europe that the West succeeded in defining the term of “civilization”—by contrasting it to the barbaric, under-developed manners of the Eastern margins of the continent:

It was Western Europe that invented Eastern Europe as its complementary other half in the eighteenth century, the age of Enlightenment. It was also the Enlightenment with its intellectual centres in Western Europe, that cultivated and appropriated to itself the new notion of “civilization,” an eighteenth-century neologism, and civilization discovered its complement, within the same continent, in shadowed lands of backwardness, even barbarism. (Wolff 4)

Undeniably, many of the important figures of the 18th century Western Enlightenment, be it Voltaire, Rousseau or Herder, wrote major and vastly influential texts on Eastern Europe and its inhabitants without extensively travelling through the region. As Wolff reminds us, Voltaire's most exotic travel was from Paris to Berlin, Herder certainly spent several years among the German community of Riga and visited also other parts of the Russian Empire of that time but on his travel from Riga to France he did not go through Poland but chose rather to sail through the Baltic Sea. Nevertheless, in spite of the lack of real knowledge of the region, the image of Eastern Europe presented by these intellectual authorities of their time largely prevails up to these days in the Western commonly shared knowledge on Eastern Europe. Thus, for Voltaire and his successors, as claims Wolff, "scarcely known" Eastern part of the European continent simply meant "less civilized" (Wolff 91). Later on, other Western eminent intellectuals perpetuated this stereotypical image of Eastern Europe. Thus, after his well-known trip to Poland in 1790, the great Goethe summed up his experience in a letter to Herder in these words: "In these eight days I have seen much that is remarkable, even if it has been for the most part only remarkably negative." (Wolff 333). Fichte made a month-long trip to Poland, a year after Goethe. In Silesia, he saw: "villages worse than the Saxon ones, that already appear very Polish" (Wolff 333) and this is how Fichte comments on his crossing of the Prussian-Polish border: "The first village is Ponikowo, German, but a shudder came over me, especially at the sight of the large dogs running freely around . . . The dress of the peasants takes on here already in the first village something wild and neglected." (Wolff 334).

Let us now contrast this very clear-cut image of the barbaric East with the notion of civilization expressed in the poetry of East-European artists themselves. Jan Skácel (1922-1989) is a well-known Czech poet (who significantly influenced a whole generation of young Czech poets of the 1990s) and also, in the 1960s (1964-1969), the editor-in-chief of an important literary journal in Czechoslovakia, *Host do domu* (*A Guest to the House*). For this journal, he developed a special column, entitled "Little reviews" ("Malé recenze"). In these witty, warm and charming poetic texts, he was regularly commenting on topical issues of his time but also on general existential

problems of human existence. It is difficult to find in the gentle texts of this poet the word “barbarian” or “barbaric.” We succeeded in finding the word in an introductory text to a collection of poetry of one of his friends, the poet Oldřich Mikulášek (1910-1985), *Svlékání hadů* (*Serpents’ Sloughing of Skin*), dating back to 1963.

In this text Skácel remembers a dialogue he apparently once had with an old man of his region, the Southern Moravia. Not very well known outside the Czech Republic, this is a region famous for its mild climate, the indigenous folklore (still very much alive) and the local wine. Most of the people living in the countryside would have at least a small vineyard and make their own wine, which they would feel particularly proud of:

Znával jsem staříčka, který byl chytřejší než já. Jednou mne učil pít víno. Říkal: nejprve se podívej skrz pohárek na slunce, abys měl radost z barvy. Potom přivoň kvůli tomu bukétu. Pak si přitukni a podrž skleničku u ucha. Uslyšíš potopené zvony. No a potom – nepij. To už nestojí za to. To nech barbarům.¹ (Jan Skácel, 1963, qtd. in Kožmín 99)

This tender and humoresque division line that is drawn between the civilized world and the territory of barbarians will serve us as a guiding line for our study. Transcending the simply comical effect, Skácel’s story indicates a certain concept of culture and civilization. It is interesting to note that the bordering region of Southern Moravia was the only one in the Czech lands that had certain (though limited) contacts with the Roman Empire whose northern frontiers collided with this region. References to classical Greek and Roman culture are frequent in Skácel’s poetry and they even increase at the end of his life and we would thus like to explore their general significance within poets work.

¹ “I used to know this old man, who was smarter than me. On one occasion, he was teaching me how to drink wine. He was saying: first, look at the sun through the cup, so that you would feel the joy from the color. Then smell it for the bouquet. Then clink glasses and put the cup to your ear. You’ll hear bells sunk under water. And then—do not drink. That is no longer worth it. Leave that to barbarians.” (Trans. Petra James)

The interest in classical plays and the figure of Oedipus

The interest in classical texts is no chance in Skácel's works. Apart from being a poet and a journalist, he also wrote several adaptations of classical texts for theatre. He is, among other, the author of a Czech adaptation of Plautus' play *Pseudolus* and Sophocles' *Oedipus*. The figure of Oedipus seems to be particularly important for the poet and he was regularly returning to the text of *Oedipus* since the 1970s till his late years. His interest in this particular classical tragedy, though universal, can be better understood if we take into account the conditions of Skácel's life during that period. After the defeat of the reform movement of the Prague Spring in 1968-1969, Skácel was demised from his position of the editor-in-chief of the journal *Host do domu* in spring 1969, though he could continue to work as an editor for poetry till the final closedown of the periodical in 1970. Subsequently, he lost his job (as everyone else from the staff), his books were banned, he had difficulties finding another work and lived in very difficult material conditions throughout the 1970s. He finally could start publishing again in 1981, not in a major publishing house in Prague though, but in a regional publishing house in Brno called Blok. Although he could then publish, it was extremely difficult and his life was never the same as before. The work on the translations for theatre was a way to continue to write and work in spite of the fact that he was a proscribed author and in the beginning of the 1980s his first texts for theatre were appearing under a cover name, František Raný, for example in the programme of the *Snow Queen* staged at the Theatre *Laterna Magika* in Prague (Kožmín 168).

In 1984, the Mahen Theatre in Brno staged Skácel's adaptation of *Oedipus*. Skácel later reworked the text, which was then performed during the season 1987/1988 in the theatre Divadlo na Vinohradech in Prague. Apparently, Skácel also wished to give his own Czech version of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. However, at that time, he could not publish and he did not find anyone who would be ready to "lend" his name as a cover for the translation. All these personal loves and affinities of Skácel's are reflected in his poetry of the same period. We would like to concentrate in particular on the collection *Kdo pije potmě víno* ("Who drinks wine in darkness"), published in 1988, a year before the poet's death.

“Weeping for Hecuba”

Apart from some references to the Slavic folklore and local history (the mention of the Queen Eliška Rejčka, buried in Brno, for example), this collection of poetry is full of classical references to the occidental culture—classical drama, classical mythology and Shakespeare. The motto of the book is a quote from Blaise Pascal—“I can agree only with those who continue to seek in anxiousness.”² The section with the most frequent classical references is called “Weeping for Hecuba.” A figure that appears very often is that of Oedipus. The opening poem of the section “Teiresias čte zprávu o králi Oidipovi napsanou Braillovým slepeckým písmem” (“Teiresias reads the message about king Oedipus written in braille”) helps us to understand the meaning Skácel attributes to the figure of Oedipus: . . . *Oidipus / chtěl poznat pravdu ano / po celý život o ni usilujeme / nechtějme ji však mít / dokonce vlastnit jako sandály a dům // Nepatří nikomu a všichni oslepli / kterým se podařilo prohlédnout // Takový byl i případ Oidipův . . .*³ (Skácel 319).

Skácel gives us also other clues as to the understanding of the motive of Oedipus and of blindness in his answer to a question of 1984 why he chose *Oedipus*:

Sofoklova hra o Oidipovi mne fascinuje. V této tragédii dovedl antický básník lidskou bytost do krajnosti lidské tíživosti i lidské bídy, aby nakonec zahrnul člověka nesmírným soucitem a soustrastí. Drama klade otázku svobody a ptá se, jsou-li lidé pány svých osudů, anebo podřízení slepé nutnosti. Zatímco ti, kteří vidí, jsou zaslepeni, moudrý slepec Teiresias vidí. A Oidipus prohlédne teprve, až se zbaví zraku. Tuto krásnou a smutnou metaforu jsem vždycky obdivoval.⁴ (Jan Skácel, 1984, qtd. in Kožmín 173)

² “Mohu dát za pravdu jen těm, kdo v úzkostech hledají.”

³ “. . . Oedipus / wanted to know the truth yes / we strive for truth the whole life / but let us not wish to have it / own it even like sandals or a house // It does not belong to anyone all went blind / those who succeeded in seeing // That was the case of Oedipus as well . . .” (Trans. Petra James)

⁴ “I am fascinated by Sophocles’ play about Oedipus. In this tragedy, the poet of antiquity led the human being to the edge of human ambition and misery, in order to, in the end, cover the man with compassion and sympathy. The tragedy poses the question of liberty and asks whether men are masters of their own destiny or whether they are subdued to a blind

The motive of blindness by Skácel is often combined with the motive of silence. As if those who accept blindness and silence can arrive at a higher level of understanding and knowledge. To be blind (or to be banned) is to be an outcast, someone who is neither seen, nor heard, whose existence is ignored or even denied. Nevertheless, this marginal position enables the outsider to see things others would not notice. Thus, the figure of Oedipus helps Skácel to better seize his own existential situation:

Zakázaný člověk

.....
Pomalů přivýkám si na ticho a vůně

.....
A jsem zas neslyšný jak neslyšné je světlo

Tak dopodrobna zabývám se tichem
Že podle hmatu podřezávám strach

Cizí i svůj

A proto když se slepí ohlédnou
Jako bych patřil k nim

Spolu se provlékáme potmě uchem jehly⁵
(Skácel 286-287)

necessity. Whereas those who see are blinded, the wise blind Theireisisas sees. I've always admired this beautiful and sad metaphor." (Trans. Petra James)

⁵ "A Banned Person // . . . / Slowly, I am getting used to silence and smells / . . . // And again I cannot be heard as light cannot be heard / I am so focused on the exploration of silence / That, in the darkness, I slit the throat of fear by touch // Of mine and that of the others // That is why when the blind people look back / I feel as if I belonged to them // Together we are threading the needle into darkness." (Trans. Petra James)

The poem “Weeping for Hecuba” and its classical references

This poem of the section bearing the same title refers to the famous Shakespearean tragedy, *Hamlet*, and to the character of the classical mythology, Hecuba. The wife of the Trojan king Priam and mother of many children (among them Hector, Paris and Cassandra), all of which gradually die in the war conflict with the Greeks and its aftermath, is usually considered as a symbol of an utmost female grief—losing her husband and all her children, only to be finally taken by Ulysses as a slave to Ithaca.

In Shakespeare’s drama, Hamlet has the intention to re-enact the story of the mourning of Hecuba (as it is described by Aeneas to Dido in the classical epic poem *Aeneid*) in the presence of his mother and his uncle in order to reveal their true feelings. When he asks an actor to perform the speech in front of him before the actual representation, the actor is so moved by the story that tears come into his eyes when he describes the sorrows of Hecuba:

But if the gods themselves did see her then,
When she saw Pyrrhus make malicious sport
In mincing with his sword her husband’s limbs,
The instant burst of clamour that she made
(Unless things mortal move them not at all)
Would have made milch the burning eyes of heaven,
And passion in the gods.
Hamlet, 2, 2, 499-505 (Shakespeare 82)

After the actors leave, Hamlet reflects in his soliloquy on the nature of acting and the illusion of feeling and passion it has the power to produce. Are these true feelings or just professional pretension? Can someone be truly moved by a destiny, though tragic, of someone to whom he has no personal connection? He also contrasts the apparent expression of feelings of the actor with his own inability to act and to express in a concrete way his anguish at the death of his father:

Is it not monstrous that this player here,
But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
Could force his soul so to his own conceit
That from her working all his visage wanned,

Tears in his eyes, distraction in's aspéct,
A broken voice and his whole function suiting
With forms to his conceit; and all for nothing!
For Hecuba!
What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,
That he should weep for her? What would he do,
Had he the motive and the cue for passion
That I have? He would drown the stage with tears,
Hamlet, 2, 2, 535-547 (Shakespeare 83)

Skácel focuses in his poem particularly at the contrast between the feelings of the actors and those of Hamlet:

Pláč pro Hekubu

Umírá Hamlet
A čtyři kapitáni na ramenou nesou
Do zákulisí mrtvého
A vojsko – vojsko střílí

Potom se herci v šatnách odlíčí
A jdou se po svém trápit
Po schodech jdou si dolů do klubu
Zaplakat pro Hekubu

Hra pokračuje

Srdce napovídá nad rozlitým vínem
Noc bývá rozpůlena jako jablko
A pilně ryjí krtci
V nepletých zahradách duše
Ofélie
S rukama nahýma až po loket
Azalky trhá mezi kopřivami

Hra trvá dál

Ještě se celí z pravdy nevyhlali
A teprve až k ránu bílému
Kdy luna jako labuť umírá a zpívá,
(ten divný pták)
teprve k ránu odcházejí domů

se šmouhou na tváři jak od krve
se šminkou která zbyla

Až do skonání světa budou Hamleti
Umírat na scéně
A herci nahlas plakat pro Hekubu⁶
(Skácel 323-324)

Skácel thus, in the years of his most acute existential distress, stands on the side of a silent pain, taciturn anguish that he prefers to the inauthenticity of the superficial and fake weeping of the actors. In his poem, the mourning actors (whose lamentation is just pretence) survive and after the end of the play, they go to drink in a bar, and later go back home. The one who dies from his sorrow and emotional anguish is Hamlet. The silent Hamlet, who doesn't openly show his grief and is hesitant about taking a visible, decisive action.

The Central European fate, bound strongly in the 1970s and 1980s to the fate of the Eastern block is grasped by the Czech poet not through some local, Eastern European context, hero, or epic story but rather through transcribing it into a larger context of classical European culture and civilisation. The figure of Hamlet is just another variation on the blindness and silence of Oedipus, a reaction to the horrors of human existence. As for Hecuba, she represents the utmost example of human sorrow. All these figures taken from classical Western cultural canon represent extreme examples of human misery and also of the absurd aspects of human existence. By choosing these references, Skácel transcends his local historical context and personal situation and in his poetry succeeds in reaching general existential resonance.

⁶ “Weeping for Hecuba // Hamlet is dying / on their shoulders, four captains / carry the dead to the backstage / And the army – the army fires / Then, the actors take off their make-up in the cloakroom / And go to mourn in their proper way / They walk down the stairs to the club / To weep for Hecuba // The play continues // The heart prompts over spilt wine / The night is split in half like an apple / And the moles dig diligently / In gardens of the soul full of weeds / Ophelia / With hands naked up to the elbows / Is picking azaleas among nettles // The play goes on // They have not lied themselves out of truth yet / only early in the morning / when the moon, like a swan, is dying and singing, / (that strange bird) / only early in the morning do they go home / with a smear on their cheek as if it was blood / with a bit of make-up left behind // Till the end of times Hamlets will be / dying on stage / And actors will be weeping loudly for Hecuba.” (Trans. Petra James)

As an emigrant, Zagajewski is more aware than Skácel of the ambiguous position of a Central (Eastern) European intellectual, who is being torn between the historical heritage of the geographical region he was born to and his intellectual affiliation with the universal occidental cultural, heritage he feels he belongs to. Zagajewski's poem entitled "Barbarians" reflect clearly poet's difficult position:

Barbarzyńcy

To my byliśmy barbarzyńcami.
To przed nami drżeliście w waszych pałacach.
Na nas czekaliście z bijącym sercem.
To o naszych językach mówiliście:
*chyba składają się wyłącznie z spółgłosek,
z szelestów, szepcótów i suchych liści.*
To my żyliśmy w czarnych lasach.
To nas bał się Owidiusz w Tomi,
to my czciliśmy bogów o imionach
których nie umieliście wymówić.
Ale my także zazналиśmy samotności
i lęku, i zapragnęliśmy poezji.⁷

(Zagajewski, 1999: 20)

Zagajewski's definition of the barbaric and the civilized seem to follow the original classical South-North divide and he is well aware of its classical Greek and Latin origins as the poem visibly demonstrates. The most important criteria to distinguish the lands of the civilization from those of the barbarians, and that constitutes an important link between Zagajewski and Skácel, is that of culture:

Czy iść z pogodnymi i niewinnymi malarzami Sieny, artystami quattrocenta, dla których nawet piekło miało pewien pastelowy wdzięk, dla których diabeł nosił

⁷ "The Barbarians // We were the barbarians. / You trembled before us in your palaces. / You awaited us with pounding hearts. / You commented on our languages: / they apparently consist of consonants alone, / of rustles, whispers, and dry leaves. / We were those who lived in the dark forests. / We were what Ovid feared in Tomi, / we were the worshippers of gods with names / you could not pronounce. / But we too knew loneliness / and fear, and began longing for poetry." (Trans. Clare Cavanagh. Zagajewski, 2003: 54)

tylko kostium diabła? Czy raczej z malarzami Północy, którzy wiedzą dobrze, czym jest brzydota, objawiająca się i w ludzkich twarzach, wykrzywionych spazmem nienawiści, i w niedoskonałej unii natury i cywilizacji? Nie ma wyboru; trzeba jeździć do Włoch i podziwiać ten kruchy cud utalentowanego narodu, ale wracając z Italii trzeba od nowa uświadamiać sobie, iż Europa składa się z łacińskiego Południa i barbarzyńskiej Północy i że ten podział jest starszy niż Jałta i inne zdradzieckie traktaty, a ta Północ też jeszcze jest podzielona, i ja także jestem podzielony. (Zagajewski, 1998: 185)⁸

The culture (and thus the civilization) is then for Zagajewski more a state of mind than a geographical notion. Whether the poet lives in the East or in the West he can carry culture with him (that is also what Zagajewski experiences himself). This tension is in our opinion common to a great number of East European poets and writers who struggle with their cultural affiliation to the West and their geographical belonging to the East. Even if the references to the classical culture stay central for Zagajewski's work in the 1990s and 2000s, he seems to be more and more interested in reflections on the specificities of East European history, especially that of the 20th century. A good example of this shift is his book *Niewidzialna ręka* (*The Invisible Hand*) published in Cracow in 2009. Indeed, the loss of the Eastern Polish territories to the Soviet Union and the forceful displacement of its population to the newly acquired Western part of Poland seem to represent an important subject in Zagajewski's poems since the second half of the 1980s. Zagajewski was himself born in Lwov (in 1945) and soon displaced with his family. His poetic work enables him to go back to this history. The experience of an exile and the fact that Zagajewski has lived through the period of the post-communist transformations of the former Eastern block, unlike Skácel, permits the Polish poet not only to seize

⁸ "Should we follow the serene painters of Sienna, full of innocence, and the artists of Quattrocento for whom even the hell had a certain pastel charm, for whom the devil was actually only wearing a costume of a devil? Or should we rather follow the artists of the North who know what ugliness is, manifesting itself in the faces of men deformed by spasms of hatred or in the imperfect union between nature and civilization. We do not have a choice: we have to go to Italy in order to admire the fragile miracle of a talented people, but on our return, we have to realize that Europe consists of the Latin South and the Barbaric North and that this division goes further back than Yalta and other treacherous treaties and that this North is also divided and so am I." (Trans. Petra James)

the universal from the Western cultural tradition but to explore more in detail the specific features related to the East European fate.

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Summary

The article reflects on the striking discrepancy between the Western idea of the civilization of Eastern Europe and the way East European poets tend to understand themselves. Indeed, it shows on the examples of the poems by Adam Zagajewski (born in 1945) and Jan Skácel (1922-1989) that the identification with the classical Western civilization and culture is one of the major defining elements of the creation of these authors. The Antiquity and classical culture seem to represent for both poets a major aspect of their own bonding with the civilization of the West. The study focuses especially on their creation of the 1980s, last years of Skácel's life and also the last years of the totalitarian regime in Eastern Europe when the East-West division was still a tangible, everyday reality and in Zagajewski's case also on his texts written in the 1990s that very well reflect the post-communist transformation of the Eastern part of Europe and the new challenges it brings along.

Key words: comparative literature, Czech poetry, Polish poetry, Western civilization and "barbarians," Jan Skácel, Adam Zagajewski

Jan Skácel i Adam Zagajewski:
Czeski i polski poeta o cywilizacji i barbarzyńcach

Streszczenie

Niniejszy artykuł prezentuje uderzającą rozbieżność pomiędzy zachodnim wyobrażeniem cywilizacji Europy Wschodniej a sposobem, w jaki skłonni są postrzegać siebie poeci wschodnioeuropejscy. Analizując poszczególne wiersze Adama Zagajewskiego (urodzonego w 1945 r.) i Jana Skácela (1922-1989), można zauważyć, iż jednym z głównych elementów twórczości tych autorów jest ich identyfikacja z klasyczną kulturą i cywilizacją Zachodu. Do podstawowych czynników budujących więź twórców z Zachodem należy – jak się zdaje – starożytna kultura klasyczna. Przeprowadzone w pracy badania skupiają się przede wszystkim na twórczości obu poetów z lat 80., czyli ostatnich lat życia Skácela, a także ostatnich lat istnienia totalitarnego reżimu w Europie Zachodniej (kiedy podział Wschód-Zachód był jeszcze wymiernym elementem codziennej rzeczywistości) oraz, jeśli uwzględnić także teksty Zagajewskiego z lat 90., wizjach trafnie odzwierciedlających postkomunistyczną transformację wschodniej części Europy oraz przyniesione przez nią nowe wyzwania.

Słowa kluczowe: komparatystyka literacka, poezja czeska, poezja polska, cywilizacja zachodnia i „barbarzyńcy”, Jan Skácel, Adam Zagajewski

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**Mr Cogito Tells Crow about Spinoza but Crow Goes
on Laughing: “Civilization” and “Barbarism”
in Zbigniew Herbert’s *Mr Cogito* and Ted Hughes’s *Crow***

The name of Zbigniew Herbert probably appeared for the first time in the Anglophone world in 1958 in an anthology entitled *The Broken Mirror: A Collection of Writings from Contemporary Poland* (Karcz 191). The collection included Herbert’s drama “Jaskinia filozofów.” It was Czesław Miłosz who wrote to Herbert to inform him about this publication and who later became the first translator and promoter of Herbert’s poetry in the United States. As Miłosz said in an interview, “Ja, w pewnym sensie, jestem odpowiedzialny za istnienie Herberta w poezji anglosaskiej i częściowo za jego bardzo wysoką pozycję w Ameryce. Całe środowisko wie, kim jest Herbert”¹ (qtd. in Karcz 192).

The first book of Herbert’s poems translated into English by Miłosz and Peter Dale Scott was published by Penguin Books in 1968. The first collection translated by Bogdana and John Carpenter (Zbigniew Herbert, *Selected Poems*, Oxford University Press) appeared in 1977. Until 2007 (when Alissa Valles’s translations were published), Herbert’s poetry was associated mainly with the Carpenters’ interpretations. Herbert was lucky to have his poetry translated and promoted by such great authors and translators as Czesław Miłosz and the Carpenters, who created the image of Herbert abroad.

¹ “In a certain sense I am responsible for Herbert’s existence in the Anglo-Saxon poetry and also partially—for his very high position in America. The whole community knows who Herbert is.” (Translation mine)

This brief account of the reception of Herbert's poetry shows that the works of the Polish poet definitely did not go unnoticed in the United States or the United Kingdom. Ted Hughes—the British poet laureate appointed by Queen Elizabeth II—was also familiar with Herbert's poetry. For twenty years, Hughes worked together with another English poet Daniel Weissbort on the magazine *Modern Poetry in Translation*, which they founded in 1965. One of their principal ambitions was to get poetry out from behind the Iron Curtain ("About MPT"). In the first, unsigned, editorial we read: "This poetry is more universal than ours. It deals with issues universally comprehensible. It does not fight shy of philosophy. It does not hide behind perverse imagery. As compared with our poetry, it comes out into the open" (qtd. in Gifford 88). In the fifth issue (1969), we read that "There is a tendency for the Western poet to become isolated and turn inwards, whereas the poet of East is in tune with the rhythm of his people in a much more direct and dynamic way" (ibid.). As Weissbort explains, these editorials, though written jointly, largely express Hughes's views and intentions (ibid.). Weissbort also edited an anthology of Central and Eastern European poetry entitled *The Poetry of Survival* (1991)—with Herbert as its main contributor (Jarniewicz, 2010: 16). Furthermore, Hughes was one of the editors of "Penguin Modern European Poets"—a series of translations of authors as Tadeusz Różewicz, Vasko Popa, Miroslav Holub, and, of course, Herbert (Jarniewicz, 2001: 146). In the preface to the *Collected Poems* of the Yugoslavian author Vasko Popa (originally published in 1969 and later reprinted in the collection of Hughes's essays *Winter Pollen. Occasional Prose*, 1995), Hughes mentions Zbigniew Herbert as one of the generation of Central European poets who "were caught in mid-adolescence by war" (1995: 220). Hughes does not refer to Herbert's poetry directly; however, he remarks that what is common for this group of poets (he mentions also Holub of Czechoslovakia and Yehuda Amichai of Germany/Israel) is a shared experience of totalitarianism. He underlines the fact that these poets—with Herbert among them—sought to "record man's awareness of what is being done to him by history and by his own institutions" (Hughes, 1995: 221). What Hughes especially admires about the Central European poets is the fact that they were capable of adopting a role of participants and depicting the cruel reality without retreating into the absurd. As Hughes writes:

It [the poetry of Herbert and other authors] seems closer to the common reality, in which we have to live if we are to survive, than to those other realities in which we can holiday, or into which we decay when our bodily survival is comfortably taken care of . . . Their poetic themes revolve around the living suffering spirit, capable of happiness, much deluded, too frail, with doubtful provisional senses, so undefinable as to be almost silly, but palpably existing, and wanting to go on existing . . . Their poetry is a strategy of making audible meanings without disturbing the silence, an art of homing in tentatively on vital scarcely perceptible signals, making no mistakes, but with no hope of finality, continuing to explore. In the end, with delicate maneuvering, they precipitate out of a world of malicious negatives a happy positive. And they have created a small ironic space, a work of lyrical art, in which their humanity can respect itself. ("Vasco Popa" 220-221, 223)

Czesław Miłosz, who introduces Herbert to English-language readers in his *History of Polish Literature* (first edition was published in 1969), presents him as a poet of civilization, who does not retreat into nihilistic or catastrophic tones:

Herbert's treatment of the basic theme of Polish postwar poetry—the tension between an artist's concern with form and his compassion for human suffering—places him at the opposite pole from Różewicz. In his outlook, he is a poet of civilization, not a rebel decrying the "nothing in Prospero's cloak." His good training in humanities has made him somewhat wary of the longing for a state of perfect innocence. The tragedies of our century pervade his crystalline, intellectual, and ironic poetry, but they are counterbalanced by his reflections on historical situations from other ages, and are rather alluded to than approached directly. (Miłosz 470)

The two short extracts quoted above—published exactly in the same year—may perfectly reflect how Herbert was perceived abroad at the end of the 1960s. Hughes's admiration for Central European authors may also result from the fact that English poetry of that time was indifferent to historical and political events. Jerzy Jarniewicz claims that Herbert's poetry appeared in England as a strong contrast to English poetry that was not interested in changes that had occurred after the Second World War. Herbert was perceived as a role model and his poetry was distinguished by "developed historical consciousness" (Jarniewicz, 2010: 16). The Polish poet was admired for his attitude of resistance. Jarniewicz writes: "Herbert był formatowany na przekór poezji angielskiej, by

tę poezję, znajdującą się w chronicznym kryzysie, odświeżyć i przekierunkować”²; 2010: 16-17). The author of *Mr Cogito*, in contrast to English poets, was not afraid to bring up the so called “great subjects” (Jarniewicz, 2001: 146). However, Hughes was one of the first English poets in the second half of the twentieth century to make a fundamental attempt to reorient English poetry by undermining “the discourses of English civility and decorum in which the Movement had its being, in the interests of a response to the historical realities of post-war Europe” (Corcoran 114).

I cannot claim with certainty that Herbert knew the poetry of Hughes (though the Polish author read in English). Acquaintance with Hughes’s poetry in Poland is rather limited. The selected poems of the British poet (from the collections *Hawk in the Rain*, *Lupercal*, *Wodwo* and *Crow*) were translated by Teresa Truszkowska and Jan Rostworowski and published in 1975 by Wydawnictwo Literackie in Kraków. In 1995 the publishing house Zysk i S-ka issued *Pieśni czterech pór roku* (*Season Songs*), translated by Marek Obarski. Finally, a small selection of Hughes’s poems was also published in 2001 in the series “Liryki najpiękniejsze” (translated by Truszkowska and Rostworowski). Hughes may be better known to the Polish reader as the author of stories for children: *Pogromca Snów i inne opowieści o stworzeniu świata* (*The Dreamfighter and other creation tales*), 2006, translated by Magda Heydel, or *Żelazny olbrzym* (*The Iron Man*), 2002, translated by Małgorzata Grabowska.

However, Hughes not only knew Herbert’s work, but the Polish poet, as Jerzy Jarniewicz remarks (referring in turn to Terry Gifford’s and Neil Roberts’s *Ted Hughes: A Critical Study*)—might have influenced his poetry. Gifford and Roberts draw an analogy between the poetic imagery of Hughes’s *Crow* and the conversion of pathos and wit that can be found in Herbert’s poetry—especially in the poem “At the Gate of the Valley” (“U wrót doliny”) coming from the volume *Hermes, Dog and the Star*. According to Gifford and Roberts, the poem is an expression of revived pagan religion, a pagan cult, which is supposedly suggested by the attachment of the lumberjack to his axe (*nawet drwal / którego trudno posadzić o takie rzeczy / stare zgarbione chłopisko / przyciska siekiere do*

² “Herbert was profiled against the grain of English poetry, which was in a state of permanent crisis, so as to refresh and reorient it.” (Translation mine)

*piersi / – całe życie była moja / teraz też będzie moja*³; SP, 16). This kind of fetishism is supposed to indicate an intense love for the material world. Jarniewicz regards this interpretation as a curiosity (Jarniewicz, 2001: 248). Interestingly, Miłosz also refers to this poem in his study on Polish literature. However, what Gifford and Roberts understand as a revival of a pagan cult is read by Miłosz as an ironic gesture: “Some of Herbert’s poems, it is true, pervert the great images of Christian civilization by irony: ‘At the Gate of the Valley’ suggests that the angels dividing the damned from the saved behave like guards in a concentration camp” (Miłosz 470).

In my analysis I will also refer to the subject of (Christian) civilization in Hughes’s and Herbert’s poetry. I would like to show that Hughes’s and Herbert’s attitudes towards the question of civilization are different—despite Hughes’s appreciation of Herbert’s poetry and stand. I will focus on Hughes’s *Crow* (1970) and Herbert’s *Pan Cogito* (1974). These two volumes were published at the beginning of the 1970s by authors of a similar age (Herbert was six years older, though both poets died in 1998). Both volumes are regarded among the most important collections of poetry in the respective literary histories of England and Poland (and thus of European literature). Both authors were assigned the role of national poets—Hughes in a literal sense as a Poet Laureate, while Herbert “po wydaniu Pana Cogito stał się poetą narodowym, wypowiadającym przeżycie narodowe”⁴ (Śliwiński 6). Thus, both volumes can be considered as representative of Polish and English—and in a wider sense—of European poetry at that time. Finally, both volumes present a particular perspective on paroxysms of twentieth-century history. Accordingly, my analysis will present a juxtaposition between poetry as chaotic prophesy of catastrophe, written in “super-ugly language” and depicting the destruction of Western values and civilization (here I mean the poetry of Hughes), and poetry containing a strong moral message, seeking to preserve humanistic values and to praise order and

³ “Even a lumberjack / whom one would never suspect of such things / an old bowed fellow / catches to his breast an axe / – all my life she was mine / she will be mine here too,” trans. Czesław Miłosz (SP, 17). Except this one, all poems by Zbigniew Herbert quoted in this article were translated by Bogdana and John Carpenters.

⁴ “after publishing *Mr Cogito*, became a national poet expressing the national experience.” (Translation mine)

meaning (here I refer of course to Herbert's poetry). In other words, I will present a juxtaposition between the poetry of "barbarism" and the poetry of "civilization."

Herbert and Hughes created characters that have become symbolic figures in Polish and English poetry. Both poets depict the journeys of protagonists who struggle with the shallowness and wretchedness of the contemporary world. Both poets refer to the subjects of loneliness, the sacred, and humanity. However Mr Cogito is someone who can be related to civilization—with his faith in tradition, humanism, the search for harmony, and his attachment to the achievements of Mediterranean culture. Crow—on the other hand—is not even a human being, but rather someone in between. He is a spokesman for amorality, chaos and destruction—a cheeky Trickster from "barbaric" shamanic mythology.

Therefore, I will organize my analysis around the following themes: 1) two grotesque protagonists: trickster vs. contemporary intellectual; 2) the "in-between"; 3) two envoys. In this way, I will attempt to discover how "civilization" is perceived through the lenses of two contemporary poets—one from the West and the other from the East.

Two grotesque protagonists: trickster vs. contemporary intellectual

According to Neil Roberts Ted Hughes's *Crow*—a mixture of "desolation and sometimes raucous humor, and of exquisite poetic skill and deliberate crudity"—shocks, provokes and outrages (75). Paul Bentley also remarks that the book's language and imagery "have proved hard to swallow for some critics." Indeed, one of them refers to Hughes's book as violent, sadistic and anti-human; another calls Hughes a total nihilist (39). Hughes himself refers to his poems as "songs with no music whatsoever, in a super-simple and a super-ugly language" (1970: 107).

Hughes's *Crow* encompasses not only the different symbolic meanings associated with the figure of this black bird in general (death, bad luck, supernatural forces etc.), but most of all the symbolism of the trickster figure. One critic remarks that Hughes "creates an extensive folk-mythology of his own, complete with a fallible God, and with a questing hero" (Skea, "Ted Hughes

and Crow”). Many critics underline the fact that Hughes constructs his Crow-Trickster protagonist in reference to the mythology of Native Americans. In Paul Radin’s study on Native American culture we read that the Trickster is:

at one and the same time creator and destroyer, giver and negator, he who dupes others and is always duped himself. He wills nothing consciously. At all times he is constrained to behave as he does from impulses over which he has no control. He knows neither good nor evil yet he is responsible for both. He possesses no values, moral or social, is at the mercy of his passions and appetites, yet through his actions all values come into being . . . Laughter, humour and irony permeate everything Trickster does . . . he is primarily an inchoate being of undetermined proportions, a figure foreshadowing the shape of man (qtd. in Skea, “Ted Hughes and Crow”).

The most important link between Hughes’s Crow and the Trickster of Native Americans is the fact that both figures are struggling to become human—but they never quite manage to get there (Bentley 40).

Hughes mentions that *Crow* was originally inspired by Leonard Baskin’s drawings of crows. Baskin’s picture of an anthropomorphized crow with very strong legs, massive body, feather-muscles and human male genitals made the cover of early editions of the book so that readers would probably associate Hughes’s crow with this image (Roberts 81). Because of its in-between position, the ontological status of Crow is not clear. He is not merely a bird and definitely not a human being. Crow is a hybrid of both. Hughes constantly collides the animalistic with the humane. In the poem “The Black Beast” (C, 18), Crow “like an owl, swivelled his head,” “flailed immensely through the vacuum” and “screeched.” Such descriptions connect Crow with the animal world. On the other hand, when Crow “hid in its bed” and “sat in its chair, telling loud lies,” we recognize connections with the human world. However, the boundaries between these two worlds are fluid, as a man can also “screech” or “flail.” Moreover, Crow occupies not only the earthly space of humans and animals, but can also detach from it and become something more—something or someone god-like: “Crow roasted the earth into a clinker, he charged into space . . . he screeched after the disappearing stars.” Thus, the identity of Crow is never definite. In “Crow Communes” (C, 20), we read: “Crow, the hierophant, humped, impenetrable.”

The undefined position of Crow and his tricky nature makes him a grotesque character. Stanisław Barańczak remarks that Mr Cogito is a self-representation of Zbigniew Herbert, but also “twór z lekka groteskowy”—“a slightly grotesque creature” (qtd. in Kornhauser 61). As Julian Kornhauser claims: “bez wątpienia poeta na własnym przykładzie ukazuje tragiczne rozdracie współczesnego intelektualisty, pochodzącego z naszej części Europy, ale odgórnie wydziedziczonego z tradycji śródziemnomorskiej”⁵ (61). Thus, the “grotesqueness” of Mr Cogito is rather the result of this schizophrenic state than a specific feature of Mr Cogito himself. Nevertheless, in the poem “O dwu nogach Pana Cogito,” (“About Mr. Cogito’s Two Legs”) we can find some aspects of the grotesque representation of the body: *tak oto / na obu nogach / lewej którą przyrównać można do Sancho Pansa / i prawej / przypominającej błędnego rycerza / idzie / Pan Cogito / przez świat / zataczając się lekko*.⁶ The deformed body of Mr Cogito serves here to depict the duality of his state—the in-between position that Kornhauser describes as follows: “Pan Cogito zawieszony jest między dwiema skrajnościami: popolitością życia a wysoką kulturą, świadomością bylejakości a siłą dziedzictwa, wątpliwościami a wiernością wobec przeszłości”⁷ (61). But—in contrast with Crow—Mr Cogito cannot become someone god-like: his dilemmas are strictly of a human nature. In the poem “Pan Cogito obserwuje w lustrze swoją twarz” (“Mr Cogito Looks at his Face in the Mirror”; SP, 55) Herbert depicts a man of flesh who cannot escape the restrictions of his body (*spadek po praszcurze*, “a legacy from an ancestor”), but who struggles to defeat them by resorting to Mozart or “the fragrance of old books.” The grotesqueness of Crow is brutal, animalistic and supernatural, whereas if Mr Cogito seems to be grotesque, it is a result of Herbert’s juxtaposing the imperfections of the body and primitivism of thoughts (*kobiety złoto ziemia nie dać się strącić z konia*, “women gold

⁵ “Undoubtedly the poet shows on his own example the tragic dilemma of a contemporary intellectual who comes from our part of Europe but who was disinherited from the Mediterranean tradition.” (Translation mine)

⁶ “in this way / on two legs / the left which can be compared to Sancho Panza / and the right / recalling the wandering knight / Mr Cogito / goes / through the world / staggering slightly.” (Transl. B. and J. Carpenter)

⁷ “Mr Cogito exists between two extremes: the commonness of life and high culture; the consciousness of mediocrity and the power of heritage; doubts and faithfulness to the past.” (Translation mine)

earth don't let yourself be knocked from the horse") with noble values and the enduring nature "marble greenness of Veronese." Crow is definitely not caught in this dilemma. Thus, if Mr Cogito struggles to release himself from primitive reflexes and barbaric habits, Crow succumbs to them completely.

One of the most characteristic features of the trickster is—of course—the fact that he plays tricks. In "A Childish Prank" (C, 8), Hughes depicts a scene with God, the Worm ("God's only son"), man and woman, and the *spiritus movens* of the action—Crow. The "action" takes place in Eden shortly after God's creation of Man and Woman. In the first part of the poem, we are confronted with sleeping God and the lifeless bodies of man and woman. This calm motionless atmosphere is shattered by a trick—"a childish prank"—played by Crow. At first sight, Crow's prank seems to be perfidious, macabre and gruesome. However, paradoxically, Crow's deed introduces a sparkle of vitality into the unbearably motionless Eden. Still, this vitality is caused by destruction and pain. The Worm, cut in half by Crow, tries to bring his two parts together. Since the first half was put by Crow into the woman's body and the second into the man's, he drags the bodies across the grass. Neither the man nor the woman holds any decisive power. They are both passive and unresisting. We encounter here another paradox: the Worm displays more emotion than the humans and God himself. Hughes also reverses here the cycle of life—the man and woman created by God are actually dead (as they are without souls) and only the Worm in their intestines is able to wake them. This is a world turned upside-down—the antithesis of Eden. Indeed, it represents the deconstruction of Christian myth.

In contrast to Crow, Mr Cogito seeks to reestablish order and bring back sense and meaning to life in difficult times. As a contrast to the scene depicted by Hughes in "A Childish Prank," we may examine Herbert's description of the temptation of Spinoza ("Pan Cogito opowiadania o kuszeniu Spinozy" 'Mr Cogito Tells About the Temptation of Spinoza'; SP, 74), where God is also presented in a very un-godlike fashion. God "cracks his knuckles," "clears his throat," but—unlike Crow—Mr Cogito does not cross the boundary between blasphemy and irony. In other words, his irony is not blasphemous. Although the dialogue between Spinoza and God ends with the image of God retreating the stairs, the gesture depicted by Herbert does not negate Christian values.

The sudden lack of God—the darkness, the emptiness—becomes a dissonance and evokes feelings of incompleteness. By contrast, the final lines of Hughes's poem read: "God went on sleeping. / Crow went on laughing." The diabolical laugh of Crow-Trickster fills the space of Eden and devaluates the sacred.

In-between: West, East, Far West

As many critics have observed (for instance, Kornhauser 78), Herbert's poetry places a strong emphasis on a tradition that is juxtaposed with the devaluation of contemporary culture (see "Pan Cogito a pop" 'Mr Cogito and Pop'). Nevertheless as Kornhauser remarks, "powrót do kultury i tradycji śródziemnomorskiej nie jest oczywiście ani łatwy, ani pozbawiony wątpliwości"⁸ (78). Stanisław Barańczak in his *Uciekinier z Utopii* underlines that a typical trait of Herbert's poetry is the tension between heritage (the Mediterranean tradition) and disinheritance (as experienced by a citizen of contemporary Eastern Europe). Both of these elements co-exist simultaneously, and the latter does not prevail over the former (or vice versa) (Barańczak 73). It can be claimed that Hughes's poetry is also torn between heritage and disinheritance. However, the English poet refers to different geo-cultural areas. What is understood as "civilization" by Hughes is the heritage of Christian values that are no longer valid or justified in the post-war world. Therefore, Hughes's Crow serves as a symbol of disinheritance that seeks to free itself from Western traditions and the values imposed by Christianity. The Poet Laureate reestablishes the idea of heritage by resorting to the legacy of West—of the Far West, to be more precise—that is to the "primitive" mythology of Native Americans. However, this turn to "primitivism" does not bring an appreciation of a raw human nature but rather releases the cascade of untamed brutality.

As Dennis Walder observes: "In a post-Christian age, or at least one in which the whole structure of beliefs associated with Christianity is disintegrating, other myths must be created, or rediscovered (60). In many *Crow* poems (for instance, "Crow Blacker than Ever," "Apple Tragedy," or "Crow's Song of

⁸ "The return to the Mediterranean culture and tradition is of course not easy or free from doubts." (Translation mine)

Himself”), Hughes reconstructs the myths of creation, the myth of fall, or the myth of redemption. In Crow’s world, there is no place for faith (in its broad sense), since faith is naïve, childish and incapable of giving any consolation in a world torn by wars, deadly instincts, excessive consumption and mechanistic gestures. From Hughes’s “Notes for a Little Play” (C, 80)—one of the last poems in the cycle—we learn that “demolition is total” and the world lies in eternal darkness, “without guest or God.”

Therefore, the retreat into barbaric gestures—for instance, as depicted in “That Moment” (C, 11)—may be the only way to survive in the contemporary world. In “That Moment,” Hughes collides the metaphysical and the sublime with the material and the trivial. The whole drama and seriousness of the death scene depicted in the poem are undermined by the final sentence: “Crow had to start searching for something to eat.” Jarold Ramsey remarks that “The implications of this detail are at once macabre and eminently practical—the essence of Crow” (121).

In contrast with Crow, Mr Cogito does not give up trying to uproot barbaric impulses, for instance, “the instinct of self-preservation” that characterizes the citizens of the ancient city of Utica. In the poem “Pan Cogito o postawie wyprostowanej” (“Mr Cogito on Upright Attitudes”; SP, 89) we can observe the slow degradation of moral values: *obywatele / nie chcą się bronić / uczęszczają na przyspieszone kursy / padania na kolana* (“the citizens / don’t want to defend themselves / they are attending accelerated courses / on falling to the knees”). The line *poza tym jak zwykle / handel i kopulacja* (“aside from that as usual / commerce and copulation”) could also describe the world of Hughes’s *Crow*. However, Hughes’s protagonist serves as an accelerator of such attitudes, whereas Mr Cogito finds himself unwillingly involved in a situation that becomes a test of his humanity. All he can do is to choose the position in which he wants to die, a gesture and a last word. The latter seems to be especially important. Language can serve a salutary function: a word can preserve or restore humanistic values. In *Crow*—on the contrary—a word destroys. The poem “A Disaster” (C, 23) begins with the following lines: “There came news of a word. / Crow saw it killing men. He ate well. / He saw it bulldozing / Whole cities to rubble.” The “word” depicted by Hughes is power-hungry—it devours men, sucks them like a gigantic lamprey. Hughes personifies the “word” and deprives it of its

linguistic functions. It does not bear any specific meaning, it does not stand for anything, its content has evaporated. The meaningless, “earless, eyeless” word that is only able to kill becomes a weapon of mass destruction.

Mr Cogito is a citizen of Eastern Europe who seeks refuge in the heritage of Western culture in order to define his humanity. Crow is a spokesman of Western dehumanization presented by the means of a reconstructed Trickster mythology. Both authors establish a similar diagnosis: the contemporary world has reached the end of its previous existence. Western values are slowly evaporating. However, they propose different solutions: Mr Cogito tries to find meanings that might rescue some of the values, while Crow rejects them completely.

Two envoys

“Przesłanie Pana Cogito” (“The Envoy of Mr Cogito”; SP, 94) is Herbert’s most famous poems. However, according to Piotr Śliwiński, today it is the poem that arouses the strongest resistance. It is too uncompromising and does not allow for any conflict or tension. The lines *Idź dokąd poszli tamci do ciemnego kresu / po złote runo nicości twoją ostatnią nagrodę* (“Go where those others went to the dark boundary / for the golden fleece of nothingness your last prize”) provoke more irritation than approval (Śliwiński 9). Here Mr Cogito clearly formulates a code of conduct of the civilized man: *idź wyprostowany* (“go upright among those who are on their knees”), *bądź odważny* (“be courageous”), *strzeż się dumy niepotrzebnej* (“beware of unnecessary pride”), *powtarzaj stare zaklęcia ludzkości bajki i legendy* (“repeat old incantations of humanity fables and legends”), *Bądź wierny Idź* (“Be faithful Go”). If we compare this very strong poetic statement of an ethical code with Crow’s “envoy”—the last poem of Hughes’s book, entitled “Littleblood” (C, 89)—it becomes clear that Cogito and Crow are as different from each other as night and day. “The Envoy of Mr Cogito” is the affirmation of humanism and moral beliefs, while “Littleblood” praises animalism, primitivism, and carnality:

O littleblood, drumming in a cow’s skull
Dancing with a gnat’s feet
With an elephant’s nose with a crocodile’s tail.

Grown so wise grown so terrible
Sucking death's mouldy tits.

Sit on my finger, sing in my ear, O littleblood.
(*Crow*, 89)

Littleblood is very active indeed, and this liveliness resembles a kind of activity that might be associated with Dionysus. The song of Littleblood embraces the whole world. It becomes a metonymy of the universe as Littleblood is omnipresent—it is a flowing force, “eternally self-creating, eternally self-destroying” (Nietzsche 117). The boneless and skinless “body” of Littleblood allows it to transform itself and transgress all boundaries—its constant Dionysian flow announces revival and the manifestation of regenerating chaos. Thus, if we associate Hughes’s poem with Dionysus, the attitude of Mr Cogito can be referred to the figure of Apollo. Mr Cogito’s voice is the voice of reason, while Crow’s is the voice of lust and primal instincts. Cogito seeks to restore civilized man; Crow wishes to liberate him(self) from the tight corset of “great words.”

In the end—I paraphrase here Hughes’s words about the Central European poets quoted above—Herbert creates a small ironic space in which humanity can respect itself. Hughes—on the other hand—releases the beast: the wild, sexual and violent energy that devours civilized man. The British Poet Laureate “sees his age as an age of crisis, of irreversible decay in the ethical-metaphysical system of enlightened, Western European culture” (Walder 60). Nevertheless, the nihilistic attitude does not prevail in Hughes’s poetry. *Crow* is a record of a particular stage of Hughes’s work—and probably also life. The book is dedicated to the memory of Hughes’s lover Assia, who (like Sylvia Plath) gassed herself and their daughter Shura. Hughes as an “animal poet”—as he is often characterized—describes in his works various embodiments and anthropomorphic expressions of the wild forces of nature. But he is also capable of presenting positive images of the natural world and its close relation with man (for instance in *Season Songs* [1976], *Moortown* [1979], *River* [1983]).

In contrast with the figure of Crow, Mr Cogito accompanies Herbert for most of his career (until his final book of poetry, *Epilog burzy* [*Epilogue of the Storm*, 1998]). Cogito’s multi-dimensional existence is not contained in a single poetic book, but is constantly reintroduced and recreated again and again in

other poems and books. For instance, in *Raport z oblężonego miasta* (*Report from the Besieged City and Other Poems*, 1983), Herbert depicts Mr Cogito, who “has made up his mind and return / to the stony bosom / of his homeland” (“Mr Cogito—The Return”, SP, 103). In later collections, Mr Cogito becomes more and more autobiographical: “Pan Cogito nabiera cech autora, pierwsza osoba występuje częściej, egzystencjalny konkret, detal, epizod dostają więcej miejsca, horyzont się ścieśnia, alegoria zanika, personifikacja ustępuje personalizacji”⁹ (Śliwiński 8). Crow is only an allegorical figure. He embodies collective impulses, representing a wild expression of the timeless and universal *Id*. Crow is somehow detached from reality, from the “here and now.” The existence of Mr Cogito—on the other hand—is more mundane and temporal. He changes with time. In the poem “Pan Cogito a długowieczność” (“Mr Cogito and Longevity”), we read:

teraz znajduje się
między ostatecznym czasem
węgorza
i ostatecznym czasem
słonia

tu
szczerze mówiąc
wygasają ambicje
Pana Cogito

wspólna trumna ze słoniem
wcale go nie przeraża

nie łaknie być długowieczny
jak papuga
lub *Hippoglossus vulgaris*

.....

⁹ “Mr Cogito gains more attributes of the author, the first person becomes more common. Existential specificities, details, episodes from life gain more space. The horizon becomes narrower, allegory disappears, personification is replaced with personalization.” (Translation mine)

Pan Cogito
chciałby do końca
śpiewać urodę przemijania

.....

z troską dobrego ogrodnika
hoduje zmarszczki na twarzy¹⁰

(from: *Raport z oblężonego miasta*, SP, 116)

If we compare this poem with Hughes's "Littleblood," we can notice some similarities. Both poems reflect transience of nature. Mr Cogito consents to his place on earth among other species and accepts the laws of nature. He sings "the beauty of the passage of time." Littleblood also sings a song—but, in contrast with Mr Cogito's, it is a song of decomposition, fragmentation, dismemberment. There is no central subject to organize this chaotic universe filled with bits and pieces of different creatures—a subject that might civilize this space and assign meaning to it (as Mr Cogito clearly does).

Both poets share the heritage of European culture. However, Herbert looks for continuity and consistency of Europe's civilizational legacy through the character of Mr Cogito, while Hughes breaks with this heritage and creates his own mythology on the canvas of "barbaric" shamanic stories in order to describe the post-Holocaust and post-nuclear world.

¹⁰ "now he finds himself / between the final moment / of an eel / and the final moment / of an elephant / here / to speak more truthfully / the ambition of Mr Cogito / come to an end / a coffin shared with an elephant / does not frighten him at all / he doesn't hunger for longevity / like the parrot / or Hippoglossus vulgaris / . . . / to the end / Mr Cogito would like to sing / the beauty of the passage of time / . . . / with the care of a good gardener / he cultivates the wrinkles on his face." (from: *Report from the Besieged City*, trans. B. and J. Carpenter, SP, 117)

A dated poet

Anna Nasiłowska remarks that after the political transformation in Poland Herbert became “niemodny i nie z tej epoki” (“old-fashioned and not of this era”; 40). Piotr Śliwiński also claims that:

Ranga nadana Herbertowi w latach siedemdziesiątych i osiemdziesiątych, przesądziła o pewnej jego degradacji po roku 1989. Z chwili na chwilę uwierzyliśmy, że Utopia nam już nie zagraża . . . Odrzuciliśmy wielkie pojęcia i związane z nimi egzaltacje. Herbert z jego rygoryzmem moralnym stał się kimś obcym. Tym bardziej, że poeta zamiast sprzyść się z nowym, odczarowanym, odessanym z grozy światem, upierał się przy swoich imperatywach, wzniecając wokół siebie zamęt ideologicznych sporów.¹¹ (Śliwiński 6-7)

The major criticism of Herbert’s poetry probably came from the authors associated with *brulion*. In the tenth issue of *brulion*, published in 1989, we find a text with the significant title “Kamienny posąg komandora” (“The Stone Statue of Commander”), which records a discussion between Robert Tekieli, Krzysztof Koehler (who use the pseudonyms X and Y), Marian Stala and Tadeusz Komendant. The disputants wonder if the poetry of Herbert was overestimated due to the historical circumstances. For Komendant, Herbert is an exaggerated moralist. He claims that the ethical values of Herbert’s poetry are too persistently emphasized (121). Komendant was also the initiator of the “League for the Defense of Polish Poetry Against Herbert” (“Liga Obrony Poezji Polskiej przed Herbertem”), which opposed the treatment of Herbert as a national bard. Marcin Świetlicki in his poem “Wiersz dla Zbigniewa Herberta (dedykowany Wisławie Szymborskiej)” (“A Poem for Zbigniew Herbert” [Dedicated to Wisława Szymborska]) also ironically refers to the “statuesque” image of Herbert that was created “in the times when Adam Michnik knew

¹¹ “The authority attributed to Herbert in the seventies and eighties determined his decline after 1989. Suddenly we believed that Utopia was no longer a threat to us . . . We rejected the big concepts and associated exaltations. Herbert with his moral rigor became a stranger. And the poet himself insisted on his own imperatives instead of concurring with the new disenchanting world from which all horror had been sucked out. This attitude provoked confused ideological disputes.” (Translation mine)

a lot about poetry” (*żyliśmy w czasach / w których Adam Michnik / wybornie znał się na poezji; Pieśni profana*, 15).

Herbert’s poetry was certainly regarded as old-fashioned by the “barbarians” who came after him. They rejected the poetic pathos of classicist idealism and were irritated by the “official” image of Herbert as a national bard. But in Poland of the 1970s, such a figure as Hughes’s Crow probably could not have been created.¹² The English poetry of the same period needed a shock to wake it from its lethargy—Hughes’s *Crow* to some extent delivered this shock. Hughes was the first English poet of “post-war European catastrophe” (Corcoran 115). Mr Cogito provoked in a different way—he did not retreat into barbaric gestures, he did not prophesy the ultimate destruction of civilization. Instead, he sought salvation in the heritage of European civilization. And to some—his poetry represented just such a salvation.

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¹² However, one of the readers of the unpublished version of my text drew my attention to the fact that in 1972 Krzysztof Karasek, a Polish poet, published the poem “Drozd” (“Trush”), that can be regarded as a faint reflection of Hughes’s Crow.

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Summary

Zbigniew Herbert (1924-1998) and Ted Hughes (1930-1998) are not often compared in critical studies, though—as Terry Gifford claims—Herbert was one of several Eastern European poets who influenced Hughes's work. In this paper, I refer to Hughes's remarks on Eastern European poetry and present the possible reasons for Hughes's admiration of Herbert at the end of 1960s. I wish to present Herbert's and Hughes's poetry as introducing certain new qualities into post-war European poetry. However, the main aim of my work is to juxtapose the protagonists of Herbert's and Hughes's collections, *Mr Cogito* (*Pan Cogito*, 1974) and *Crow* (1970), thus initiating a kind of dialogue between the "civilized" figure of Herbert's Mr Cogito and the "barbaric" figure of Hughes's Crow. I examine how "civilization" (especially Christian civilization) is perceived through the lenses of two contemporary poets – one from the West and the other from the East.

Key words: comparative literature, Polish poetry, English poetry, "barbarians" and "civilized," Zbigniew Herbert, Ted Hughes

Pan Cogito opowiada Krukowi o Spinozie, ale Kruk wybucha śmiechem. „Cywilizacja” i „barbarzyństwo” w *Panu Cogito* Zbigniewa Herberta i *Kruku Teda Hughes’a*

Streszczenie

Zbigniew Herbert (1924-1998) i Ted Hughes (1930-1998) nie są często zestawiani w badaniach literaturoznawczych, pomimo że, jak zauważa Terry Gifford, niektórzy poeci Europy Wschodniej – a wśród nich także Zbigniew Herbert – oddziaływali na twórczość angielskiego poety. W swoim tekście odnoszę się m.in. do spostrzeżeń Hughes'a dotyczących poezji wschodnioeuropejskiej i przedstawiam możliwe przyczyny fascynacji Hughes'a poezją Herberta. Moim zamiarem jest także przedstawienie poezji Herberta i Hughes'a jako wprowadzających nowe jakości do powojennej poezji europejskiej. Skupiam się jednak przede wszystkim na porównaniu głównych postaci najważniejszych cyklów poetyckich obu poetów: *Pana Cogito* (1974) oraz *Kruka* (*Crow*, 1970), w celu zainicjowania rodzaju „dialogu” pomiędzy „barbarzyńskim” Krukiem a „ucywilizowanym” Panem Cogito, a także przedstawienia, w jaki sposób „cywilizacja” (zwłaszcza chrześcijańska) postrzegana jest przez dwóch współczesnych sobie poetów – jednego ze Wschodu, drugiego z Zachodu.

Słowa kluczowe: komparatystyka, poezja polska, poezja angielska, „barbarzyńcy” i „ucywilizowani”, Zbigniew Herbert, Ted Hughes

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Larkin, Miłosz and the Pathos of Western Civilisation

I

Phillip Larkin and Czesław Miłosz have a lot more in common than the latter would care to admit. What divides them are different aesthetic rules they apply and different literary beliefs. However, the close reading of their texts may reveal meaningful similarities. Larkin's poem entitled "To the Sea" (1969), which opens the volume *High Windows* (1974), could be taken for a work by Miłosz as it would fit very well into Miłosz's mature and polyphonic poetics.

Echoing Walt Whitman's phrasing,¹ the poem is characterised by narration, metonymy and understated metaphors. The image built by employing synecdoche evokes the eye of the telescope whose movement from the particular to the whole and back functions as a symbol. The lines are similar in length; rhymes are inexact, slight, but artfully put together.

The poem presents a vision in which a memory and the current state of things are confronted. While analysing a particular sensual experience, it reflects upon identity and the hiatus of time. It offers contradictory suggestions: that of constancy and that of change. It can be understood as a mimetic attempt

¹ "Catalogues which on other continents of poetry, in Walt Whitman for instance, could vouch for the opulence of the presented world, its ebullient richness and unrestrained vitality . . . , in Larkin attest to something quite contrary: to a lack of a subordinate organizing whole" (Jarniewicz, 2006: 111-112). Perhaps one should look for a different patron for Larkin's and Miłosz's enumerations within the English language tradition: William Wordsworth, who remains suspicious of the effects of his enumerations. For more on that, see Wiśniewski.

at preservation or as a symbolic creation. Both are subject to doubt which is expressed in the final lines and which brings to mind the mimetic and symbolic irony of Miłosz's volume *Świat: poema naiwne* (*The World: Naïve Poems*), as well as the lack of faith in language recurring in his later compositions.

Not unlike any modern-day literary work (or, to be more precise, not unlike every work in modern interpretation), Larkin's poetry draws attention to itself, from its origin and development to its figuration. His poem *To the Sea* bears witness to this. We find the recorded impression of the continuity of experience ("Still going on, all of it, still going on!") and at the same time we find the disillusionment with the inauthenticity of experience. There is evidence of a vacuum, a lacking, a break or unfamiliarity—reflections of a conscious convention ("Strange to it now," "It may be that through habit these do best, / Coming to the water clumsily undressed / Yearly; teaching their children by a sort / Of clowning; helping the old, too, as they ought.") In other words, we are dealing with both an experience of a whole unifying the self and the universe in a symbol, and a feeling of ritual emptiness, very characteristic of Larkin, which I would like to refer to as the experience of discontinuity. The former aims at stopping time; it tries to reduce time to space (a seaside beach), while the latter brings back time precisely because it breaks, creates a gap or a rift and, by doing so, it stresses the relation to what has been broken up. It sends us back in time, ceaselessly and unreliably.

These could be the author's simultaneous sensations or the feelings of the protagonist of the poem as programmed by the author (yet another favourite tricks of Larkin). We cannot determine which viewpoint should win: whether the sense of the poem lies in recording the experience of a whole or, to the contrary, losing the experience of a whole, losing any experience in general. Both scenarios are equally possible. In neither can we determine the relation of the self to presentational process or to the language: whether we are dealing with vision of the author's subconscious and his experience unified in his signature, or with a distanced creation of the protagonist. Lyricism and the irony of consciousness are both equally palatable.

All the layers of indefiniteness probably originate from yet another level, quasi-transcendental in relation to them: the level on which we decide whether to read the poem in a hermeneutical and symbolic way or as an allegory;

whether we shall look for the whole of experience and presentation, or accept the heterogony of literature.

If we attempt the former, we will find solemnity in this poem (a trait apparently uncharacteristic of Larkin), which slowly crescendos only to collapse suddenly. It only requires one step over the low wall to get to the promenade that both separates and connects land and sea. The author/protagonist, the reader and the poem, are facing the sea which surrounds the depicted reality. As we know, thanks to philosophers and our own direct experience, the view of the sea, be it rough or simply vast, can evoke in the observer the feeling of sensuous limitlessness and an urge to harness this limitlessness mentally. Since Larkin (just like Miłosz) is as far as possible from any attempt to elevate nature, the sea becomes nothing more than just the horizon, a borderline which, unlike the low wall, cannot be crossed.² Solemnity gradually builds through the presentation of those ordinary, human, encountered and comprehensible activities taking place on the beach, yet so close to the incomprehensible: the sea, the sand and the sky.

Everything crowds under the low horizon:
Steep beach, blue water, towels, red bathing caps,
The small hushed waves' repeated fresh collapse
Up the warm yellow sand, and further off
.....

To lie, eat, sleep in hearing of the surf
(Ears to transistors, that sound tame enough
Under the sky) . . .
(Larkin, 1974: 9)

It is here that the solemn mood finds its culmination: adults leading children, children who would like to push wheelchairs of the elderly—thus human continuity is maintained, keeping dangerous nature at bay, as time stands still. As noted by Jerzy Jarniewicz, the white steamboat becomes the symbolic centre of the timeless symbol: “and further off / A white steamer stuck in the

² Jacek Dehnel translates “To step over the low wall that divides” into Polish using a diminutive form (*murek*) of the word meaning wall (*mur*). The diminutive makes it even easier to step over it. See Larkin, 2008: 97.

afternoon—// Still going on, all of it, still going on!” (Jarniewicz, 2008: 114-115). This time Larkin, the master of enjambment generating heterology of meaning, distributes coordinated sentences (building blocks of the image and the awe of it) in between stanzas. Exceptionally though, the pause between them does not change the register or ruin the figuration but it reinforces the symbol. This could be the most perfect “eternal moment” of Miłosz.

The impression of the sublime increasing and subsiding is induced by narration, i.e. allegory. It does not necessarily mean the evolution or disillusionment of conscience as the figuration has its shortcomings which breaks up the flow of the poem and brings confusion among its many emotions. The poem does not create a uniformed self distinguishable from others; the signals of distance, closeness, solitude, participation and distinction are intermixed. Stepping over the low wall, one is here and there. Here the lyrical he is awestruck and there he participates; there he becomes disillusioned and here he doubts the ritual. He doubts the identity of the ritual and participation. He questions culture, that is: the unity of experience and communication; he resigns from lofty poetic symbols:

. . . till the first
Few families start the trek back to the cars.
The white steamer has gone. Like breathed-on glass
The sunlight has turned milky. If the worst
Of flawless weather is our falling short,
It may be that through habit these do best,
Coming to the water clumsily undressed
Yearly; teaching their children by a sort
Of clowning; helping the old, too, as they ought.
(Larkin, 1974: 10)

He doubts and invalidates culture and at the same time, conversely (since the change within the poem originates from narration and not from consciousness), he encounters the redeeming unity of experience and ritual.

I do not see indecision in Larkin’s poetry. Instead, I see indefiniteness: a balance of timeless (i.e. extracting out of time) symbolism as unity of experience and the rift of unity between experience and language (which is contrary to the perseverance of symbols and is necessarily temporal)—the fall of the ritual. Not only does Larkin leave this ambiguity unsolved but he artfully keeps it

alive. Barańczak saw Larkin as the poet of sadness; to Miłosz, he was the poet of despair; Jarniewicz, in turn, considered him a skeptic. This last point of view seems the most adequate to me.

The equivocality noticed by Jarniewicz, upon which I am trying to expound here, does not originate in the irony of language. It results from a poetic decision. According to Jarniewicz, the author of *High Windows* employs the prosaic technique of creating a protagonist (usually more distant from the author than the lyrical self in a poem) thus making it less easy to pinpoint the intentions of the poet (2008: 136-155). The more general ambiguity gives rise to a derivative in the form of a non-self-sameness of voice which appears to cast a shadow on the possibility of efficient hermeneutics.

It was probably this non-self-sameness that deceived Miłosz, who reduced Larkin's intentions to despair while publically accusing him of nihilism. In all likelihood, Miłosz reduced the significance of Larkin's poetry to the unity of the lamenting voice. He castigated the despairing poet in the following words:

I learned to live with my despair,
And suddenly Philip Larkin's there,
Explaining why all life is hateful.
I don't see why I should be grateful.
It's hard enough to draw a breath
Without his hectoring about nothingness.

My dear Larkin, I understand
That death will not miss anyone.
But this is not a decent theme
For either an elegy or an ode.
(Miłosz, 718)

In what we can hardly call a dialogue, Miłosz alludes to *Aubade*, a poem which appeared in *Tygodnik Powszechny* in the Polish translation by Stanisław Barańczak (see Larkin 2000) in the same year as Miłosz's volume *To (This)*. Bitter words uttered by the protagonist of Larkin's poem, ambiguous and present throughout the poem, and transformed into an attitude/ a point of view/ an approach, could well have displeased Miłosz and triggered the repeated accusations of nihilism.

According to Jacek Dehnel, Larkin's translator and a poet strongly attached to Miłosz's poetic tradition, this attack could have resulted from a less

than thorough reading of Larkin. It could also have had to do with the desire to create a negative reference point.³ Jarniewicz believes that both poets “belong to the same team, to [a group of] artists concerned with what becomes in their eyes a slow degeneracy of the spiritual bearings of the Western world.” But Larkin does not concede sublimity, which has become the driving force in Miłosz’s poetry (see Jarniewicz, 2001): “the dual language of the poem saves it from falling into the trap of pathos and sounding declarative” (Jarniewicz, 2006: 134).

II

Values are a question of reading, not of solemnity words. Drawing values cannot be brought down to the polysemy of a given word, because the communicative efficiency of solemnity word is one of the values, one connected to a special kind of relation between experience, aesthetics and language. The naturalism of the aesthetics of sublime communication is an effect of literary choices and the conviction that they are effective, as long as the poet and the reader keep

³ See the interview “Ten stary szelma, Larkin. Z Jackiem Dehnelem i Jerzym Jarniewiczem rozmawia Jakub Winiarski” (“Larkin, that old rascal. Jakub Winiarski talks with Jacek Dehnel and Jerzy Jarniewicz”) published online on the website: http://biuroliterackie.pl/przystan/czytaj.php?site=240&co=txt_4219. The interview features, among others, the following statements by Dehnel: “It seems to me that Miłosz simply didn’t read Larkin carefully. Although there might have been more to it: Larkin was created by Miłosz so that the latter could have a negative reference point for his concept of dutiful poetry, in which ethics complete aesthetics.” “Mind you, while poets from Sidney to Shelley would defend poetry, Miłosz writes <against poetry>. But that’s just an aside. When Miłosz uses the epithet ‘funereal’ [translator’s note: present in the original but absent in translation by Miłosz and Hass], which is close to your ‘gloom,’ it is meant to discredit the poet. But in Larkin’s case, categorising his poems in this way is simply wrong. It is hard to read Larkin without noticing his sense of humour, which can manifest itself even at the least expected moments, for example, in the first stanzas of the meditative ‘Church Going.’ Where will you find more tomfoolery? I am not saying there is no sadness in Larkin, but one cannot reduce his poetry to this one dimension, because Larkin’s sadness (or more precisely: melancholy, as his feeling of loss is present in many of his poems) is completed by comedy, irony, absurdity, grotesque, tenderness, anger, which we can all find in his poems. I will say this in spite of what is usually said about Larkin: it is a poetry of a particularly wide amplitude. And if it is so, then I guess you have the answer to your question: why he is worth reading.”

faith in the literary communion. Superficially, the accusation has to do with what Miłosz considers a nihilist approach (the belief that the sensual human life ends in an emptiness which takes away the point of all action). But, in fact, it concerns the communicative ambiguity resulting from the incompatibility of the poet's experience and the language of poetry.

Although Miłosz doubted the unity of designations and objects on multiple occasions, he firmly believed in the hermeneutics of meaning: in the word which is a unity in reading encompassing the incomprehensible experience and the poetic meaning. He would never settle for just acknowledging ambiguity and ceasing further reading, both traits Larkin specialised in. All inconsistencies in the latter's poetry have to be resolved to his disadvantage. Larkin challenges poetic reason and moral vitality. It seems to me that all reading done by the author of *The Land of Ulro* would require a comparative scrutiny for seeking out hidden accusations of inconsistency with the aesthetic ideology of the identity of the word. What deserves reconstruction even more urgently is the hermeneutics of his own works, which, for obvious reasons, became the dominant key to reading Miłosz. The sheer gravity of his vast and vibrant biography, rich in political and cultural connotations, exerts a pressure on the modern polyphony of his works, explored and exposed in different ways, especially those written in the period between the 1950s and the 1990s.

In the hermeneutic interpretation, the autobiographical self levels the differences in meaning resulting from the allegory of the lyrical self, and from many poetic protagonists. Such an interpretation of Miłosz's works: *The Captive Mind*, *A Poetical Treatise*, or *Where the Sun Rises and Where it Sets* can be justified on political, historical, religious or—precisely—biographical grounds. We need to remember, however, that in doing so we go above the heteronymous surface of the text which is built out of ambiguities bereft of any depth.

III

Solemn reading in model execution can be found in Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, a canon for European modernity, interpreted in a convincing way by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1999). She points to the fact that the experience of solemnity (which is not insignificant as it is the only kind

which legitimately combines cognition and morality) is only accessible to the civilised man, who converts the experience of sensual infinity into a belief in supra-sensual control over the external and the experienced. In the aesthetic myth of modernity, primitive man, the barbarian, is not subject to solemn emotions as he lacks the necessary moral concepts. In this way, on the one hand, he is excluded from subjectivity which corresponds with communicable and communicating rationality and, on the other, he is an essential condition for the subjectivity of the civilised man, as a concept which upholds the culture vs. nature dualism. The subject capable of cognition and morality inevitably requires a hostage: an Other, an alien figure who is outside of culture and who does not possess the essential concept of free will. Aliens can be subjected to education (Kant) or be dubbed nihilists (Miłosz).

Seen from this perspective, the modern equivalent of the barbarian—Larkin the nihilist—can only despair (from the point of view of Miłosz's lyrical subject equipped with moral concepts) because he cannot control the presented solemnity and, like Kant's savage, resorts to fleeing at the sight of a precipice. The pathetic poetic "I" requires and creates an external immature not-I in order to consolidate its own identity. Familiarised with its own discontinuity, it constructs a communicative fiction of experience and language integration. The pathos of the hermeneutic formula of modern Western culture, represented by Miłosz's opinions incongruous with his own poetry, is the result of expecting or striving to reach efficient communication between moral concepts and cognition through art: an aesthetic identity relying on mutual translatability or the consonance of experience and language. Failing to meet these requirements can lead to being accused of nihilism or barbarism, as in the case of Larkin and his sustained ambiguity.

The purported nihilism is barbarism by choice, which is particularly dangerous for the civilised consciousness of Miłosz as it undermines the necessity of communication within culture as a whole. Moreover, it weakens the essential unity of this culture and suspends the necessity of communication as a vehicle for transferring concepts in general. It does not defy poetical sense but supports the post-Schillerian model of aesthetics as the harmony of concept, imagination and word.

It would appear that there are at least two main paths which modern interpretation can follow, and pointing to them is, of course, nothing groundbreaking. One of them is hermeneutics, which refers us to tradition and which assumes the unity of reason. The second is the equivocality of interpretation in which we cannot decide on one model of rationality. The origin of both is empirical, as both depart from experiencing the vastness of the sensual and social world, and both lead to doubting in the unity of designations and phenomena. While hermeneutical solemnity refers to the universal *logos* from whose domain barbarians and nihilists are excluded as their use of language is illegitimate, sceptical inconclusiveness fractures any solemn figuration, exposing the figurative structure of hermeneutics which appreciates an efficient translatability of life and literature. Instead, when embarking on reading, we must choose between them.

Trans. Anna Kruk

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Summary

This paper compares poetic strategies of Czesław Miłosz and Philip Larkin in the context of the sublime—category constitutive for the modern aesthetics. Kantian sublime implies the exclusion of cognitive and ethical subjectivity of the so-called wild man. According to Kant, “savage,” as a non-entity incapable of the sublime, cannot experience world in an aesthetic way and, as a result, has no access to – mediated by the aesthetics—rationality of a civilized man. Miłosz’s and Larkin’s poetic strategies represent in a different way the modern lyrical pathos of subjectivity and meaning.

Key words: comparative literature, sublime, subject, Czesław Miłosz, Philip Larkin

Larkin i Miłosz wobec patosu zachodniej cywilizacji

Streszczenie

Artykuł porównuje strategie poetyckie Czesława Miłosza i Philipa Larkina w kontekście wzniosłości – kategorii konstytutywnej dla nowoczesnej estetyki. Wzniosłość w ujęciu Kanta zakłada wykluczenie tzw. dzikiego z poznawczej i etycznej podmiotowości. Według Kanta barbarzyńca, jako niezdolny do przeżywania wzniosłości, nie może doznawać świata na sposób estetyczny, a co za tym idzie, nie ma dostępu do zapośredniczonej estetycznie racjonalności cywilizowanego człowieka. Strategie poetyckie Miłosza i Larkina w różny sposób przedstawiają nowoczesny liryczny patos podmiotowości i znaczenia.

Słowa kluczowe: komparatystyka literacka, wzniosłość, podmiot, Czesław Miłosz, Philip Larkin

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What We Learned From the British Barbarians

The impetus to write about British and Polish Barbarians came from my response to the ideas expressed by the Polish poet and translator Piotr Sommer in an interview I had conducted with him (Sommer, 2010). In 1983, two years after the declaration of martial law, Sommer, very close to the generation of the Polish New Wave, edited an anthology of the “new” British New Wave Poets. In the conversation Sommer says:

. . . when I was priming myself to do this British anthology, I was meeting the poets every night, and then during one of these visits when I was recording our interviews [1975-1978], I really did feel I was a part of that literary landscape . . . , perhaps I should speak of it in terms of British and Irish-bound “generational consciousness.” Poets from Northern Ireland were crucial for me, because I connected them so much with Poland. It was in Northern Ireland where one could easily see the disgusting politics which was devouring everything . . . At the same time, the most interesting poets from Northern Ireland were saying ‘we shall not give any political lessons; there will be no direct gestures—we shall be in-direct. (Sommer, 2010 b)

In the *Anthology of New British Poetry (Antologia nowej poezji brytyjskiej)*, the term “Barbarians” is used in reference to the poets from “the islands,” poets who started writing poetry in the 1960s and at the turn of the 1960s. These poets came from “the fringes of the official culture,” fringes designating primarily their class background. Sommer included in this category Douglas Dunn, Tony Harrison, Seamus Heaney, and Glyn Hughes. Certainly, they were men of the fringes in more than one way. They were from the fringes of England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and to a lesser degree from Wales.

They were beneficiaries of the free education reform which was introduced by the Conservative minister R.A. Butler, soon before the victory of the Labour Party in 1945. In his classic guidebook *English Poetry Since 1940*, Neil Corcoran writes about the Butler Education Act which provided secondary and tertiary education to children and youth from working class backgrounds, thus enabling their social advancement. Corcoran writes that the act “brought a range of new class and regional interests, histories and attachments into British poetry in 1960” (153). Corcoran remembers artistic interests and themes which were characterized by the work of “social advancement” artists. Both in poetry and in drama, they were interested in “otherness.” The cultural difference between an educated child and their parents, the geographical difference between English cities of the South and the pastoral landscape of the Northern family nest were themes addressed in poetry and in drama. Unlike Corcoran, Derek Mahon sees these differences in a much more political light. Speaking to Sommer, Mahon mistakenly associates the reform of secondary schools with healthcare and social reforms introduced by the labour government in 1948. He says:

. . . since this 1948 reform, the government has paid for our [working class children’s] education. As a result, a group with working class background came to have a say in public matters. They were highly articulate, they were close to one another especially in Queens University in Belfast where they studied; they started the Civil Rights Movement in Northern Ireland. Because the response of the government was obscurantist and caused all the violence and bloodshed, this group of people is charged with responsibility and the ensuing Troubles.¹

In the introduction to his anthology Sommer writes about a shared search for values to help the “new” poets familiarize with the world. We are talking

¹ D. Mahon, *Stworzyliśmy to wszystko prawie z niczego [We Created All This Almost from Scratch]* (Sommer, *Zapisy rozmów* 251). Civil Rights Movement (initially American Civil Rights Movement fighting against racial discrimination in the United States) inspired Northern Irish Civil Rights Association (1966), an organization established to protect the rights of the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland. With Mahon’s statement in view, it seems a paradox that the Butler Educational Act introduced by a conservative minister on behalf of the British Empire paternalism led to the revival of a civil resistance movement in Northern Ireland at the turn of the 1960s. The euphemistic term “the Troubles” refers to bloody fighting which occurred in Northern Ireland from the end of the 1960s until the late 1990s.

about people for whom WWII was but a “vaguely remembered fact from childhood;” people who developed their sense of history based on their experience of the cold war and the Suez Canal Crisis, this last phase of the disintegration of the Empire, as well as the Irish crisis. New categories of identity and experience were being built on the personal fields of experience of the “little poor street in the port town of Hull,” of “looking at fellow passengers in the metro, workers on a building site, salesmen in a local store, and the last, traditional farms in Scotland and Ireland” (Sommer, 1983: 17-18). Sommer writes about “Barbarians from the poems” by British poets, not about “barbaric” poets. These qualifications certainly call for a note of explanation.

English literary critics reserve the term “Barbarians” to refer to Douglas Dunn and Tony Harrison. Dunn is considered a “Barbarian” primarily because of his 1969 collection *Terry Street*, one of the most political books of this Scottish poet. He is identified as a “Barbarian” also because of his political and engaged, in tone, volume *Barbarians* from 1979. Harrison, a native of Leeds, is a “Barbarian” because of his use of language. In England, both Dunn’s and Harrison’s poems are read often in the context of Marxist criticism.² Sommer is known as Dunn’s translator in Poland. In a conversation with him Dunn notes:

Plechanov, I do not know everything he wrote, but I know he says what these days is, more or less, accepted: art is a social phenomenon. This is obviously true. Art is created for people by other people, nobody creates it for themselves. That is why, art is a social phenomenon. This is the whole idea of culture, the whole idea of art. These movements in modern art which reduced it to something almost silent, something meaningless—well, I do not think these tendencies are

² In literary criticism in Britain, writing about Douglas Dunn and Tony Harrison together and in the context of class conflicts seems prevalent. Neil Corcoran thus analyzed their poetry in the book already referred to in this paper, in the chapter titled “Barbarians and Rhubarbarians.” See also the books of Sean O’Brian, *The Deregulated Muse* (O’Brian, 1998); Jerzy Jarniewicz, *W brzuchu wieloryba. Szkice o dwudziestowiecznej poezji brytyjskiej i irlandzkiej* [*Inside the Whale: Notes on British and Irish Poetry of the Twentieth Century*], here the chapter “Barbarzyńcy z Północy” [“Barbarians of the North”] (Jarniewicz, 2001: 88-106); Luke Spencer, *The Poetry of Tony Harrison*, especially the chapter “Tony Harrison and working class poetry in postwar Britain” (Spencer, 1994: 1-20); David Kennedy, *Douglas Dunn* (2008).

healthy. I think it is a sign of weakness, of the inability to resist pressures (Sommer, 2010 c: 108-109).³

For Dunn, the poem should be “approachable for any adult person,” and an opposing view is “simply an insult” to ordinary people, an insult which only highlights the feeling that “art is a bourgeois business.” Dunn adds that “if art has any significance, it is not limited to any single group of people. And this is one of the reasons why I am really full of anger when I discuss the condition of today’s debate about poetry in Great Britain; the fact that so much discussion is going on about this argument, this battle of books . . .” (Sommer, 2010c: 109). Jerzy Jarniewicz comparing the poetics of the commonplace in Larkin and Dunn writes:

Larkin . . . opened the way to the introduction of humdrum urban life, to images of the trivial and the commonplace. Dunn made use of these newly discovered terrains for his own purposes. If in the case of Larkin the introduction of the common place was a gesture against high art . . . , or the manifest of the poet’s declared empirical, anti-romantic, anti-idealist stance . . . then in Dunn’s work the commonplace becomes an element of his own poetic discourse on culture—in the broad sociological meaning of the term . . . functioned as the opposite of the established culture often associated with the privileged classes and their *Weltanschauung*. (Jarniewicz, 1994: 94)

Dunn’s “commonplace” relates to specific historical times and social groups; this makes his poetry much more topical. His presentations neither rely on metaphors nor do they rely on universalizing poetic generalizations. Potential universalizing cannot reach beyond the moment to which poems are bound. The evil and pain which constitute determinant subjects of Larkin’s poems, become in Dunn social evil and pain, not existential pain. According to Corcoran, in the context of Dunn’s subsequent work, *Terry Street*, Dunn’s first volume of poetry, represents “a displacement of his [Dunn’s] own Scottish working-class background onto the ‘backwaters’ of Hull; and that background itself features prominently in a large number of anecdotal poems anatomizing class resentment” (Corcoran 155).

³ Dunn directs his critical remarks most of all against theoretical experiments of Charles Olson connected with Black Mountain College which in the 1970s, like many American avant-garde movements in poetry, were gaining more and more popularity in Britain.

The characteristic angry style of Dunn's earlier poetry, the "temperature" of his political views finds its parallels in the style of the other Barbarian, Tony Harrison. The poet gained recognition in Great Britain most of all thanks to his "television" poems. Poem *v.* was composed during the miners' strikes in 1984-1985 and produced in 1997.⁴ *Prometeus* was directed in 1998 by Harrison himself. The screenplay was based on a long poem with the same title. The title figure brings to mind Marx's Prometeus from his *Capital*, a figure personifying the enslavement of the working class. In Harrison's film, Prometeus, chained to a rock, embodies the problems of the workers resulting from the closing of mines in Yorkshire. He also drew attention to the ecological and existential consequences of industrialization in Copșa Mică in Romania, and reminded about WWII death factories like Auschwitz.

Harrison, who was also a professor of Classics in Leeds University, wrote poetry appealing to classical formulae and motifs. Harrison often counterpoints their refinement with his class-based experiences and the language of the author as a "Barbarian" from the social, working-class margins. His poem *v.* shocks with its obscenity and vulgarity even the reading public, previously exposed to the Liverpool pop poetry, and familiar with poetry written against high English modernist traditions. It should be stressed that in his poetry Harrison's "barbarism" acts as a kind of a driving mechanism, it operates in the linguistic sphere. His most well-known and most analyzed poem is "Them & [uz]" from the volume *The School of Eloquence* (1978). The poem starts with a recollection of the stuttering Demosthenes who, with his mouth full of pebbles, was trying to learn to pronounce words by outshouting sea waves, ("αἰαί, ay, ay! . . . stutterer Demosthenes / gob full of pebbles outshouting seas—"; Harrison 122). The key point of the poem lies in the manner of pronouncing words by the speaker. Acting in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, because of his Northern English accent, the speaker says he could only take the role of the drunken porter. When reading aloud a poem by John Keats, a poet known

⁴ Poem *v.* describes a trip to see the author's parents' grave in a cemetery in Leeds, "now littered with beer cans and vandalized by obscene graffiti." The title lends itself to several possible interpretations: victory, versus, verse etc. Proposals to screen a filmed version of *v.* by Channel 4 in October 1987, drew howls of outrage from the tabloid press, some broadsheet journalists, and MPs. About *v.* see: Sandie Byrne, *v. opposition, antagonism, blasphemy* (Byrne 66-69).

for his Cockney accent, the speaker says he was scolded for not articulating the “h”s.⁵ In a chapter dedicated to Barbarians in *W brzuchu wieloryba* (*Inside the Whale*) Jerzy Jarniewicz notices that the class conflict which, at its “roots has unsolved social problems,” and which “goes as far as discrimination of regional Englishes which are regarded as non-conforming with the grammatical norm, also as vulgarized language forms,” (Jarniewicz, 2001: 89) in Harrison’s poetic language receives special attention:

[This work] Comes . . . out of a reflection on the archeology of modern English as well as the issue of the complex social, political, and cultural phenomena . . . Perhaps it carries more radical conviction that language does not reflect only the configuration of forces in extra-linguistic reality and the standing hierarchy of values but that language helps to create them. (Jarniewicz, 2001: 94)

The most important conclusion reached so far is that, applied by English critics to “new” poetry of the cultural fringes of Great Britain, the adjective “barbaric”, possessed a politically coloured dimension. It was connected with specific names and carried very distinctive “class” meanings. This adjective is not used as extensively as it seems to feature in Sommer’s introduction to his anthology of British poetry. Although the poems of his favourite Northern Irish poets are not as active politically, maybe not even as dynamic and as provocative as the poems by Dunn and Harrison, they nevertheless are marked by political impulses. Sommer uses “Barbarians” as a category, he uses it in

⁵ It is precisely this motif “4 words only of *mi’art aches* and ... ‘Mine’s broken, / you barbarian, T.W.!’ // All poetry (even Cockney Keats?) you see / ‘s been dubbed by [^s] into RP, // ‘We say [^s] not [^z], T.W.!’ that has become the major theme of drama text called *The Big H* (In: Tony Harrison, *Theatre Works 1973-1985*). As Byrne says, in this text those who scold the student for dropping “h,” so typical of the Northern English accent, are associated with those who drop “H” (hydrogen) bombs, “Word power for Harrison is not just a matter of *how* words are spoken, but also *which* words, and *whether* they are articulated ‘properly,’ or at all. ‘My father still reads the dictionary every day. He says your life depends on your power to master the words.’ In Harrison’s poetry, the illiterate have no defense against the injustice brought about by legalese, bureau-bubble, and other mystification” (Byrne 22).

his own way meaning possible political and journalistic threads but also other things. Sommer thinks about a style peculiar to “new” English poets which, elsewhere, he understands as standing in opposition to that which “in poetry is mannerly”—universally British, academically-canonical. These poets bring instead their own locality, particularity, their own sense of historicity, and most critically, their language. I am most interested in this search for poetic affinity, and the chances to become inspired by some features of language and poetic stance among Polish translators of poetry written in the English language, translators and poets like Piotr Sommer, translator of Northern Irish poets (Seamus Heaney, Michael Longley, Derek Mahon and Michael Longley); Bohdan Zadura (translator of Tony Harrison and Michael Longley), and of the youngest of them, Jerzy Jarniewicz (translator of Craig Raine and Brian Patten). Through the use of a personal and “localized” language, their work on the syntax of the spoken phrase, through their relaxed attitude towards the typically Polish romantic call to testify on behalf of an imagined public community, in the 1980s and the 1990s, the poets-translators, Zadura and Sommer, contributed to a significant enhancement of the idea of poeticity in Poland. They contributed also to the enhancement of the poetic sensitivity and diversification of the language of the lyric. What seems interesting, they were inspired mostly by the diversity of the languages “fighting for legality” in the English poetry of the 1970s, not by the “working class” revolutionary tension of English barbarisms. It is important to acknowledge that these translators looked for poetic inspiration in English poets rather than in Polish New Wave poets, much more conscious of the public duties of art. In the afterword to the second edition of poems by Seamus Heaney, Sommer in his special idiom juxtaposes the political character of the New Wave and its subsequent poetic consequences with the political character of British poetry, much less predictable and linguistically much more attractive. Sommer says:

In Polish poetry, the mid-1970s, were already an overpoliticized time. Ethical obligations and the more and more predictable and unequivocal character of literary languages were vigorously suppressing more nuanced tones. They were producing a more and more predictable set of expectations . . . The Northern Irish . . . , because of their multiple belongings, concerned me much more than the English. And the fact that at times they happened to yield to pressures of immediate obligations to a lesser degree than our close-to-heart native folks

did (those at home and abroad), added to my interest as a “linguistically other” confirmation of a more fruitful, more multi-layered attitude to a poem and less lordly attitude to the reader. This attitude was not necessarily exclusive of politics; it did not allow politics to control the poem. This attitude did not allow reducing the reader to the status of a student. So from this perspective, this wisdom which I was intending to pluck, my three Northern Irish favourites born at the turn of the thirties—Seamus Heaney, Derek Mahon, and Michael Longley (also the somewhat younger Carson and Muldoon) were, for me, immensely interesting. I am embarrassed to say, maybe my messing about with their poems was not as lovingly disinterested as I had thought? (Sommer, 2010a: 105)

Sommer was not the only one to express such interests. In the mid-seventies, the Katowice group “Kontekst” was trying to create an alternative against the post-new wave, dissenting model of Polish poetry. In the book *Spór o poezję* (*Dispute about Poetry*) the group was calling for, among others, a Polish reading of Liverpool poetry (Sławek 90-95),⁶ as was the Łódź-based *Puls* (*Pulse*), edited, among others, by Jacek Bierezin and Zbigniew Jaskuła. *Puls* was where Jerzy Jarniewicz started his work, where first translations of Allen Ginsberg poetry were appearing, and where a concealed version of a poem by Brian Patten was produced by Antoni Pawlak (Walc, 1998).⁷ Possibly, in the eyes of younger poets, younger than Barańczak, Zagajewski, Krynicki, and Kornhauser, our representatives of the world student revolution of the 1968 revolted too narrowly—revolting mostly on political grounds. As it turned out later, the New Wave carriers of “linguistic” or poetic revolt created a lyrical pattern that in time

⁶ Sławek discussed not only the Liverpool school, Brian Patten and Arien Henri, but also American Beatniks. The book called for other kinds of avant-garde as a response to the simplifications resulting from the New Wave social programme which, according to members of the “Kontekst” group, influenced negatively the quality of the theoretical and programmatic reflection as well as the artistic consciousness of the poets.

⁷ Jan Walc quotes a significant extract from a poem by Pawlak, discussing also contrasts which were produced by the diverse circle of KOR (Workers Defense Committee), made up of the leftist “admirers of Ginsberg” and the Catholic artists, connected with the church, all obliged by the situation to publish in the same paper. The long poem “I śmierć i wiele śmierci” (“And death, and much death”), would appear next to an anti-Marxist essay by Simone Weil. And the fragment “my penis / I entrust it to you with trust / I know you like to hold it in your hands / look at how it awakens in them / how it slowly lifts up / in your fingers it becomes / a flower bursting into blooms” (Walc 38-39) evokes Patten’s poem “Now We Will Either Sleep, Lie Still, or Dress Again” (Brian Patten, “Teraz będziemy spać, leżeć bez ruchu, lub ubierzemy się na powrót”).

became quite repetitive and in some cases too obvious perhaps. The Polish lyrical tradition of literary engagement did not allow the particularity of the poetic language. This tradition veered more towards the solemn, elevated style of the dissident, generational “Solidarność.” One can argue, finally, that the spirit of the “language” revolt of the British “Barbarian” poets from the cultural margins found its expression in the Polish poetic translations of British poets. It should be added that some elements of the translating experience of the poets-critics have constituted a very important component of the translated poems. The “language” revolt was not present, nor was it necessary for the “collectivistic” sense of the world particular for the subject of the Polish postwar poetry. In the seventies, the authors did not remain in the situation of those seeking cultural promotion, rather in a well-familiar situation of the sons of the motherland, they were the ones who, unsuccessfully, were demanding an exchange of the false canon of culture for one that would be right and one which would be rooted in the truly free Poland. Polish dissidents always supported the universal language of a tradition understood in communal terms.

The British poetic consciousness of the student revolt in the 1970s would have aimed at exposing in a poem the tension between the canonical and official in poetry and the particular languages expressing non-imperialistic attitude and individuality. It is feasible to argue that the translation of the social revolt which found its expression in the poetry of British Barbarians—people from the cultural margins—led to the taking away of the subject of the Polish late modern lyric from the burdensome role of the social authority. The speaker in this poetry, builds his language presentation of the world from a distance—a condition which assures him not so much of the “sublime” and the solemnity of poetry, but the opposite, of the low, marginalized place which in reality he occupies in the social space. Paradoxically, this speaker can afford to obtain more in language, which is competitive with the canon because it does not aspire to this appellation, even though it always remains in conflict with the official.

If we take a look at the wave of translations from English published by the publishing house of Fort Legnica in 1998 (volumes of poetry by Longley, Carson, and Heaney), and the translations from 1999 (volumes of poetry by Dunn, Raine, and Harrison), then we can see that this wave constitutes a continuation

of the earlier British interests of our translations. What surprises, towards the end of the first decade of freedom of Polish poetry, a period which was characterized by political indifferentism, led to the translators' anti-establishment. Sommer's translations return not only to the anthology of poetry from the eighties, discussed earlier, but also to the volume *Sześciu poetów północnoirlandzkich* (*Six Northern Irish Poets*) published by Świat Literacki (Literary World) in 1993. In the foreword to the volume of Douglas Dunn from 1969-1993 *A Removal from Terry Street*, Sommer writes:

I wanted . . . to remember the older, "social" poems by Dunn, poems which, starting from the sixties, created such a strong impression in their original versions and in translations into foreign languages . . . I wanted to bring to mind the "earlier" Dunn, curious how those supposedly historical poems from his "heroic" period in Hull will be read now in Poland, in a country where questions about the political and publicist poem have not been asked in a long time in the critical sphere or in the poetic practice. (Sommer, 1999: 81)

Zadura translated Tony Harrison for the anthology in question. In 1990, he also prepared a separate collection titled *A Kumquat for John Keats* (published by PIW). While translating the poems by the author of *The Rhubarbarians*, Zadura was working on a volume of his own poems, mostly sonnets, *Prześwietlone zdjęcia* (*Overexposed Photographs*). A few of his poems refer to Harrison's poetics, and one *Życie pozagrobowe* (*Life after Life*) starts with the inscription from Harrison's poem "Newcastle is Peru." As Sommer writes in *Po stykach* (*Face to Face*), in the beginning of the eighties, the eight-verse stanza contributed to the formation of the famous Zadura's "Cisza" ("The Silence")—poem from the period of martial law. The poem, published as late as 1992, can be heard in many translations from the volume *Sztuka i zagłada* (*Art and Extinction*). It seems that we owe the self-unobvious quality of "Cisza," this best Polish political poem, to these translations, to the concentrated attention on the peculiar political character of the new English "class" poem so full of refined irony, humour, and poetic craft, as well as the "low" poetics approximating neo-avant-garde experiments with the everyday. We owe, finally, to those experiments with proper artistic biography, so typical of the times of performance art, artistic happenings of the post-Beatnik social revolt. In the afterword to the "fort" edition, which comprises the repetition of translations from the previous editions, Zadura writes

that he would not call Harrison his fellow from Leeds. He explains that today, poems like “The Curtain Catullus,” “The Bedbug,” and “Curtain Sonnets” “do not have the taste of the fruit partly forbidden.” Zadura says:

My consciousness has changed, ten years later I no longer believe in a straight-forward social transmission of the poem; believing in the gift of the poetic word, I do not believe in its power . . . Calling him a fellow, I would be opening a register in which it would be possible to ask a question if by any chance he was not a slacker. And I would not ask this type of a question. Even if I have doubts if a poem written after the *fatwa* was issued on Rushdie is more than a noble and brave rhyming gesture. (Zadura 59– 60)

It is curious how very different these words sound now, when ten years after the publication of the English series, political poetry yet again enjoys great popularity. In his new books *Makijaż (Make-up)* and *Na dzień dzisiejszy, na chwilę obecną (For To-Day, for the Present Moment)*, Jerzy Jarniewicz mixes the erotic immediacy with elements of recent propaganda of the world politics, with its image from the media and the diverse styles of rejecting what belongs to the establishment. All these gestures appear also in Zadura’s translation of “The Bedbug” or “The Curtain Catullus,” where we hear the famous lines: “Astraea! Stalin’s chocolate-Santa-Claus- / like statue’s made piecemeal. Descend! Descend! / We’re human, young, lustful, sick of wars. / I want this gorgeous red bird for my friend” (Harrison 52).

Working in 1998 on his sketch about the reception and translation of the Northern Irish poets (especially about Heaney) in Poland, Sommer saw the problems of translations of the “barbaric” Northern Irish poetry in a different light. When, with a dose of bitterness, Sommer confirmed a real lack of Polish market for Irish poetry in the past, when “the presence of diverse embodiment of history in poems” was calm because of the small volume of radical political gestures; and also at the end of the 1990s, when the British-Irish series of translations was coming out, and when:

. . . it seemed that Polish poetry stopped caring for history for a while, when poetry apparently got used up in a “new wave” political journalism. In Poland, writing about politics and history has not been forbidden for years, therefore, there is no reason to write. Today, even those who up till yesterday couldn’t have imagined the existence of Polish literature other than in political paradigms . . . , those people

came to accept the change of literary sensitivity and literary expectations. Though, as it is to be expected in the case of changes of official norms, by agreeing, they merely attempt to secure themselves against responsibility, they adhere to passing fashions. . . . In Poland new traditions are looked for today, extra-historical and extra-political. History, politics, locality, regardless if urban or suburban, are embarrassing matters, really shame. (Sommer, 2005: 158-159)

In the following part of his sketch, Sommer states that the characteristics of poetry such as locality and history function prominently in Irish poetry, irrespective of time. "In the setting of a poem and in language," history, if "we are to treat it without falsifications and complexes," "speaks for itself; it does not need to be buttressed and publicized." Finally, Sommer, the major agent of the former boom for the full of social ease "New York School" of poetry, concludes:

Do not the Irish by any chance show that what really concerns the writer, let's say the questions of language, of privacy, of public matters cannot be treated separately? And is it not a paradox that almost everything written by Frank O'Hara, this "frivolous dandy" who became in Poland an embodiment of an apolitical stance and freedom, is very closely connected with "reality," and therefore is political? (Sommer, 2005: 160)

If we recollect the pronouncements of Polish Barbarians at the beginning of the 1990s, it should be stressed that their texts were read most widely with a view of "apolitical" categories.⁸ The term "Barbarians" was used as a result of the *brulion* anthology of poetry published as *przyszli barbarzyńcy (barbarians have arrived)*. It was signed by the poetic group "b.g. wstajmfske." The *brulion* generation, openly indifferent to ideas of good citizenship, strongly opposed the decisively political ethos of the literature of unofficial circulation which

⁸ A significant number of critics included the appearance and work of the *brulion* generation of the 1990s in a much wider and widely-recognized interpretation context based on theses from Adam Zagajewski's *Solidarność i samotność (Solidarity and Loneliness)*. Reflecting on the ostentatious break from the "New Wave" political past, Adam Zagajewski was to procure this kind of aesthetic and "apolitical" turning-point for artists to remain preoccupied with poetry only (Zagajewski 75-86, 90-93). Critics as Julian Kornhauser, Tadeusz Komendant, Jarosław Klejnocki express similar views of the literary process of the early "apolitical" 1990s. It is mentioned as well in the first monograph to come out in the nineties (Czapliński, Śliwiński 193, 169-170).

had inherited most of its characteristics from the new wave literature in its late formulas absorbed by the writers of martial law. This opposition reflected a familiar tradition in Polish criticism of not so much a dialectical class struggle for the central place in culture but rather clashes of romantic *agon* between the elder and younger generations. However, referring to the diverse authors of *brulion* as “Barbarians” was not entirely justified, especially with view of the character of their poems. Robert Tekieli’s intelligent marketing strategy was partly the reason for the choice of the label. Polish reasons for the use of the “Barbarians” label were other than those which we find in English qualifications of “Barbarians.” Although also connected with political life, the English label was based on very different premises.

The Barbarian from the poems by Dunn and Harrison could honourably identify with the famous words by Ovid: “I am a barbarian because nobody understands me.” The ambiguity of these words went hand in hand with that Classical dandy exiled among the barbarian Gets. Barbarity was then regarded in the context of the “foreign,” incomprehensible language, marked as sub-standard, believed to be a departure from the cultural norm (this departure could include the accent of a given dialect, stutter, and silence). If in Polish criticism the word “Barbarian” possessed its own political context, its use was much more simplified and in meaning it was closer to Ortega y Gasset’s *The Revolt of the Masses*. Julian Kornhauser initially in favour of the poets of the so-called “turning point,” writing in *Barbarzyńcy i wypełniacze* (*Barbarians and Fillers*) from the mid-1990s asserted:

All this was interesting and rather funny. Interesting because, really, all of a sudden there appeared programmatically anarchic and nihilistic texts destroying common ideas about the responsibilities of the writer and his/her intellectual message. These were linguistically aggressive and unbelievably bold as far as the social manners were concerned. Old boundaries became ruins, old values were denied their say. Young or still young Barbarians welcomed the era of freedom with a deafening scream. . . . This demonstration was also funny because it testified to a lack of adjustment to life, about some nervous tendencies of its authors, usually escaping into the most intimate sphere of privacy which, beyond narcissistic self-glory, did not contain anything else. There was no attention paid to the diversity of emerging options, turning the radical individualism, which was to become a herd phenomenon of dubious literary value, into a superior and unshakable value. (Kornhauser 13)

According to Kornhauser, and many older critics, although the new era demanded a new stance, the young felt satisfied with a total negation of the world of politics, which for them meant a rejection of the dominant model of literature in the last two decades. Kornhauser says that with the fall of censorship and the patronizing of the state, post-Communist postmodernism gave birth to a social revolution which brought about a derisive, joyful game with conventions. The world in this world appeared as an unending cabaret. It was not helping the reputation of the “Polish school of poetry” as an agent “saving values of literature.” The happy emersion in the mass and common market circulation of art was seen as a threat which could potentially lead to flattening of the Polish lyric. It was already in danger from commercialization, prepared by American literature (it seems that the name of Frank O’Hara as well as the immense impact of the American influence on poetry appeared here rather unintentionally).⁹

The most important features which were to characterize the Barbarians were not restricted to poetry. They were understood within publicist categories of the descriptions of a civil stance. Both “the Barbarians who were to be some solution” from Cavafy’s poem, ironically summoned at the back of the *brulion* anthology, and, though more justifiably recalled, Herbert’s “Barbarians” feasting at the walls of the besieged city, Barbarians standing in stark opposition to the famous underground, “power of taste,” remained “Barbarians” without their own linguistic and ideological representation. It could only wait to be complemented with time.

In critical and social perspectives, Polish “Barbarity” was left without a political argument; it lacked a cultural base. The young were denied their own language, not because of the way they were using language but because

⁹ We find a similar treatment of American influences, present particularly in the criticism of Julian Kornhauser and Mariana Stala, as well as younger critics from *brulion* like Krzysztof Koehler who conducted polemics with Marcin Świetlicki. It was published in *brulion* and titled *O’harism* (Koehler 142). Reserved in tone, but also full of disgust, attitudes towards American influences were triggered most likely by pronouncements of Czesław Miłosz. In conversations published at the beginning of the nineties, among others, in the Kraków journal *Na Głos (A-loud)*, Miłosz commented very negatively on the influence of American poetry on Polish poetry (Miłosz, 1990: 15-35). See also Czesław Miłosz, “Z poezją polską przeciw światu” (“With Polish Poetry Against the World,” 1989: 126).

they were charged with being mere imitators of the “New Wave.” It can be said that in Poland, the new poets who willingly accepted the role of Barbarians met with the kind of critical and literary reception from the establishment which was similar to the reception which provided poetic subjects for poets like Dunn and Harrison. This sort of reception created a dialectics of poetic tensions. To an extent, more senior Polish critics reacted towards “new” and foreign poetic languages like English imperials towards children from working class backgrounds, be them Scottish, Northern English or Northern Irish. Kornhauser’s statement, quoted above, can serve as a confirmation of these excluding generalizations. Their poetry stands in ambiguous, tense relationships with the Polish canon, defined by the last two decades of The People’s Republic of Poland and, in its “individual” nuances, it stands transparent for the readers. Depreciated in the past, this poetry has somehow started to play a function of a new canon with a much wider range. And this is where the similarities and differences between Anglo-Saxon and Polish “Barbarity” seem to end.

Trans. Teresa Bruś

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Summary

In the *Anthology of New British Poetry (Antologia nowej poezji brytyjskiej)* prepared by the Polish poet and translator Piotr Sommer in 1983, the term "Barbarians" is used in reference to the poets from "the islands" who started writing poetry in the 1960s or

at the turn of the 1960s, and who came from “the fringes of the official culture,” fringes designating primarily their class background. Sommer writes about “Barbarians” in a much wider context than English literary critics, who reserve the term “Barbarians” to refer to Douglas Dunn and Tony Harrison. Sommer deems the distinctive style of the “new” English poets to be standing in opposition to what “in poetry is mannerly”—universally, academically-canonical. Instead, “barbaric” poets bring their own locality, particularity, their own sense of historicity and, most critically, their language. Exploring Polish translations of poetry written in the English language, I am most interested in the search for poetic affinity and of language and poetic stance. I claim that in the 1980s and the 1990s, through the use of a personal and “localized” language, the work on the syntax of the spoken phrase and—what is even more important—through their relaxed attitude towards the typically Polish romantic call to testify on behalf of an imagined public community, Bohdan Zadura, the translator of Tony Harrison’s poems, and Piotr Sommer, the translator of Douglas Dunn’s poems, contributed to a significant enhancement of the idea of poeticity in Poland.

Key words: comparative literature, “barbarians,” English poetry, Polish poetry, Douglas Dunn, Tony Harrison, Bohdan Zadura, Piotr Sommer

Czego nauczyliśmy się od brytyjskich Barbarzyńców

Streszczenie

W *Antologii nowej poezji brytyjskiej* zredagowanej przez poetę i tłumacza Piotra Sommera w 1983 roku pojęcie „barbarzyńcy” zostało użyte w odniesieniu do poetów z „wysp”, którzy debiutowali w latach 60. lub na przełomie lat 60. i 70., a pochodzili z marginesów oficjalnej kultury, marginesów określanych głównie przez ich pochodzenie klasowe. Sommer pisze przy tym o „barbarzyńcach” w o wiele szerszym kontekście niż brytyjska krytyka literacka, która rezerwuje to pojęcie zazwyczaj dla Douglasa Dunna i Tony’ego Harrisona. Sommer ustawia „nową” angielską poezję w opozycji do tego, „co w poezji układne” – uniwersalne i akademicko-kanoniczne. „Barbarzyńscy” poeci zaś stawiają na swoją lokalność, partykularność, własny zmysł historyczności, oraz, co szczególnie ważne, swój język. Przyglądając się polskim tłumaczeniom poezji angielskiej, najbardziej interesuję się poszukiwaniem poetyckiego pokrewieństwa, inspirowania się pewnymi cechami wiersza i języka. Stawiam tezę, że na przełomie lat 80. i 90., poprzez użycia spersonalizowanego i „lokalnego” języka, i – co najważniejsze – poprzez „luźny” stosunek do typowo polskiego, romantycznego obowiązku świadczenia na rzecz wspólnoty, Bohdan Zadura jako tłumacz Tony’ego Harrisona i Piotr Sommer jako tłumacz Douglasa Dunna, przyczynili się do znacznego skomplikowania pojęcia poetyckości.

Joanna Orska

Słowa kluczowe: komparatystyka literacka, „barbarzyńcy”, poezja angielska, poezja polska,
Douglas Dunn, Tony Harrison, Bohdan Zadura, Piotr Sommer

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Barbaric Poetry? The Challenges of Contemporary Civilization (A Comparative Polish-Belgian Study)

*nasza epopeja jest epoką z ekranu
równie zagadkową jak kryształ w meblościance*

“our epic poem is a screen epoch as mystifying
as a crystal trinket on a shelf of the wall-unit”

(Kopyt, 2011: 12)

When civilization accelerates

Looking at the fluctuating fortunes of civilizations, we can easily notice that there are moments in the histories of various countries, or even continents, when the axes of different cultures intersect one another and epicentres of individual literatures seem to pulsate with a common, strongly accelerated rhythm. In this way in the early 20th century the technological innovations which changed the way of estimating distance, generated first the admiration for machines and cities, and, consequently, new modes of expression. These changes were followed by a deep reflection on how it became necessary for people to find themselves again and redefine their place in the quickly changing and growing world. Naturally it meant also looking for a new poetic formula adequate for these changes. This subject was discussed, among others, by Tadeusz Peiper in his collection of essays *Tędy (This Way)*:

Jeśli poezja żywi się człowiekiem, to jakżeż może pozostać z dala od spraw, które stanowią większość dnia większości ludzi. Byłoby to śpiączką wrażliwości, tępotą oka lub niemocą.¹ (Peiper 87)

These words turn out to be particularly relevant in the context of the growing tension between modernity and tradition in Polish culture and literature (Jedlicki 66). It seems that today, at the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century, we feel a similar need to re-define ourselves. It is related to the shifting boundaries of what is possible in life and literature, the growing influence of computers in everyday life, the economic and institutional crisis, problems in the job market, but also with the achievements in the fields of medicine, astrophysics and biogenetics, to quote just a few areas of changes which the contemporary people have to confront. Poetry has been a great touchstone for these changes; the issues of high culture and the development of individual self-expression, mass culture and utilitarianism, in view of the increasingly interchangeable positive and negative values, and the widespread belief in both the decline and the fall of the contemporary world into barbarity, seem more legitimate now than ever before. Just like Tadeusz Peiper, Aleksander Wat, Bruno Jasiński, Tytus Czyżewski, Jan Brzękowski, who were in the centre of European futurism and the first international avant-garde, also contemporary poets try to diagnose society, often in an irreverent way, or at least to try a new approach. The awareness of changes and the need to keep the formula up-to-date seems to be as pressing as they were at the turn of the 20th century, with one important difference—the discourse created in the 19th and 20th century around the idea and canon of “beauty,” is not valid anymore. The 21st century probably replaces the relevance and meaning of the category of “beauty” in poetry with the media popularity, technical brilliance and variously defined functionality. Umberto Eco may have been right when he wrote in *On Beauty*:

... the gap between the art of provocation and the art of consumption grew narrower. What is more, while it seems that there is still a gap between “cultivated” and “popular” art, in the climate of the so-called post-modern period cultivated art offers new experimental work that goes beyond visual art and revivals of

¹ “If poetry feeds on man, how can it stay away from things which occupy the better part of any day in the lives of most of people? It would be a coma of sensitivity, insensitivity of the eye or impotence.”

visual art at one and the same time, as the tradition is continually reassessed. For their part, the mass media no longer present any unified model, any single idea of Beauty. (Eco 426)

The earlier parameters used by the poets (the social standing, the way of publishing and the contact with the readers) changed drastically. Today international publishing market, the ability to upload one's own realization and presentation to YouTube, the developed and heterogeneous system of poetry awards, "niche" and "celebrity" poets transform the definition of the center and the peripheries influence the the character of being a poet. In order to demonstrate that, let us start, then, with the poets.

Poets facing their bodies here and now

As Michał Paweł Markowski stated when writing about Baudelaire, Kant and the modern readings of Kant:

Dla Baudelaire'a ciało jest ciałem, przede wszystkim postrzeganym. To zaś jest ciałem znaczącym i odwrotnie: znaczenie ciała nadaje postrzeganie, a mówiąc ściślej przedstawianie. Oznacza to, mówiąc najkrócej, że ciało niezobaczone, nieprzedstawione nic nie znaczy, nie posiada żadnego sensu, z czego można wysnuć następujący wniosek: *sztuka jest nadawaniem sensu ciału*, które poza sztuką jest ciałem pozbawionym sensu.² (Markowski 77)

It seems that the contemporary existence of the poet has to be defined clearly in the new formula through the body. It gives evidence to his/her existence, the biological being often in the opposition to no longer the machine, but to the illusion, an image created virtually through the media on the screen. This existence is not always appealing. Regardless of the geographical latitude, the present has created a template for the self-realization of the poetical body.

² "For Baudelaire the body is first and foremost the perceived body. The perceived body, in turn, is a signifying body and the other way round: the significance is conferred upon the body by perception, or, to be more precise, depiction. It means, to put it succinctly, that the unseen and undepicted body does not mean anything, does not have any meaning, which leads us to the conclusion: *art is giving meaning to the body*, which outside of art is the body deprived of meaning."

The self-realization which is, generally speaking, one of the many components of the poetical world, which is a far cry from the Romantic idea of uniqueness and individuality. This is a quality imitating the surrounding universe, with which one has to communicate—the poets communicate with their own bodies since they are not an integral part of their own beings. The old dissociation between the body and soul, indispensable for metamorphosis, is replaced with the dissociation between the voice addressing the body and the poet's body. It is caused naturally by the growing pressure of immediacy. The acceleration and adjustment of the new form has already been observed in the world around us already by the poets who are still active yet considered classics: such as Ewa Lipska, Tadeusz Różewicz, Julia Hartwig or even much younger Tomasz Różycki. On the other hand, we have hypertext realizations, cyber poetry or “liberature”³ written by such authors as Judy Malloy, Johannes Auer, Tatiana Matveeva, Piotr Czernski or Zenon Fajfer. Their texts clearly declaring their intentions and functioning in particular reading circles, are not necessarily very innovative, but can boast of possessing well-defined communication codes and recognizable means of communication.

However, I would like to concentrate in my discussion of barbarity and its opposite on the young poet and musician Szczepan Kopyt who was shortlisted in 2011 for the prize “Paszport Polityki” awarded by a major Polish weekly *Polityka* for his pioneering new genre of “record-volume.” Originally entitled *BUCH*, the genre in question constitutes a combination of a volume of poetry and a musical album thus comprising a multimedia experiment. The penchant for combining various art genres is already apparent in his previous book, which is double-sided and contains two volumes of poetry in one: *możesz czuć się bezpiecznie* [you can feel safe] is in a way the reverse of the accompanying *Yass*. Kopyt is a young poet but he has already attracted critical notice, for instance as the laureate of the 10th Jacek Bierozin National Poetry Contest (2004) and one of the nominees for the Gdynia Literary Award. He is the author of the poetical volumes *Yass* (2005), *Yass/możesz czuć się bezpiecznie* (*Yass/you can feel safe*) (2006), *Sale sale sale* (2009). My choice of him as analysis material is dic-

³ *The idea of total literature* where “the text and the book as a physical object form the organic whole,” proposed by Zenon Fajfer in 1999—cf. Katarzyna Bazarnik “What is Liberature?” in *Bartkowiaks Forum Book Art 2005/2006*, p. 465.

tated by the particular sensitivity of this young author to the problems of the contemporary world and the surprising poetical forms he employs. The author I would like to compare Kopyt's "barbarity" with is a French-speaking Belgian poet Vincent Tholomé, Kopyt's contemporary, also when it comes to the dates of publishing his books, although Tholomé is slightly older. The texts of both of these poets show a pleasantly surprising coherence, employing both the form as well as content in the poetical discourse on the contemporary (the barbaric and the civilized) world as well as literature (high and low). It seems that their volumes meet in the middle of their mirror dialogue and while both poets-observers are deeply engaged, the formulas they use in facing the contemporary civilization are completely opposite. Contrary to Kopyt, for Vincent Tholomé, one of the dimensions and sizes of the experiment is not an abbreviation but an elongation of the word, sentence, or the whole poetical text. Both poets also experiment with the printed word, by avoiding the traditional linear order of the print, pages and table of contents. The qualities that the new formulas have in common are their modifiability and potentiality, expressed also in the constantly changing *locus poeticus*. This is not surprising, since the mobility of "here" destroying "there" causes the contemporary poets to be constantly on the move, in the state antithetical to contemplation, constantly requiring to define themselves in relation to something. The distance and mobility can be expressed through the use of the stylistic means derived from the street culture of hip-hop and rap:

szczepan wyluzowany tej ziom
pije bro pali faję ziom, cytuję wińską:
„mam pięć chujów w mieszkaniu
wczoraj byłam w katedrze i się
śmiałam, o boże” słońce, słońce, słońce
dymek fioletowy, zaraz spada na tramwaj
przewietrzony, biciki zapuszczone don
guralesco – liryczny mesydz kuzynie
loczki się kręcą w lirycznej maszynie
na kaponierze kontempluje kłącza
miasto poznań, jedzie na wykład z logiki
nie znając definicji i aksjomatyki tej
razi go słońce i ma polew bo w kuchni
pani maria postawiła na podłodze gipsowego buddę

śmieszny taki z brzuszkiem i małymi stópkami
nie nudzi mu się, nawet jeśli – to go szczerze wali
brejka rule, jedzie oldskooolem, potem
instytut las – morasko, gdzie gra yass na próbie
taki z niego luzer, ziom sprawdź to, yo.⁴
(Kopyt, 2006b: 8)

Movement, mobility and changeability are also proportionate to the information content, which in turn is in proportion to the modernity of technologies (Ballafard 60). Both poets use in their poetic formulas visible **excess**. It is mostly expressed through lists and repetitions. Kopyt is moving, passing various things, continually registering things passing in front of him; Tholomé, on the contrary, stops moving things. His whole volume *Chacun est quel'qun* (*Everybody is somebody*), is based on lists, but the titles read in succession are also important, since they become more and more ordinary, trivial and at the same time improbable. Here are a few examples:

1. tous ces gens qu'on croise chaque jour en rue ou sur une place et qu'on ne croisera plus
 2. gens à qui je pense souvent
 3. il y a des fois des gens qu'on connaît rien qu'à les voir une
 4. il y en a qui existe que dans le conflit
 9. certaines on les bouleversantes histoires de l'amour
 16. tous ceux qui sautent de coque à l'âne
 23. parmi ces gens il y a des sans-gêne qui viennent à la maison et s'y croient comme chez eux.
 24. gens que j'aurai pu ne pas rencontrer⁵
- (Tholomé, 2007: 5-27)

⁴ “szczepan chilled out here homie / drink brew smoke cigs homie quoting wińska / ‘i’ve got five dicks at my place / yesterday I went to the cathedral and I / laughed, o god’ sun sun sun / purple smoke, soon falls down on the / airy tram, beats are jamming, don / guralesko—lyrical message I mean / hair is curling in the lyrical machine / at the kaponiera he contemplates rhizome / city of poznań, he goes to the lecture in logic / without knowing its definitions and axioms / the sun is dazzling, lhao cause in the kitchen/ms maria put on the floor a plaster Buddha / so funny with his tummy and small feet/he’s not bored, and if he is, he doesn’t give a shit, / breakarule, play oldschoool then / forrest institute—morasko where yass rehearse/he’s so chilled-out, homie check it out, yo.”

⁵ “1. all the people we pass everyday on the street or in a square and whom we will never meet again 2. people I often think about 3. there are some people I know just by briefly

Also, the conscious prosaism of poetry, and their careful rhythmization are aspects important for both poets. The noticeable features of their poetry are the particular attention paid to the visual aspect of the poems and experimentation. Obviously, these formal aspects do not make the poems non-poetic and do not make either the authors or the texts created by them “barbaric.” However, when we follow this train of thought to its logical conclusion, the following unavoidable question arises:

What, then, barbarity is?

How can we qualify barbarity? If we look at the original *barbare* in the histories of national literatures in the countries of both poets, we can see that in the 21st century this descriptive epithet is sometimes replaced with two interchangeable other: *exotic* and *peripheral*. If the geographical location in relation to the centre does not play its former role, it is still important when it comes to reaching the readers. A more sensible solution is an attempt to define the degree of “barbarity” in the context of the previously accepted and generally accepted values indicated by the poetical text through its formal adaptation to the new, loosely defined modernity. It could of course turn out that the poet—“*Barbarzyńca w ogrodzie*” (*Barbarian in the Garden*, Herbert, 1962)—only poses as a barbarian, since s/he is actually classical. The barbarity of the contemporary poet is only a barbarity as long as it rebels in a way against the norm of the poetical civitas. It is very difficult to define its boundaries with reference to the last two decades. Nevertheless, a constant feature of transgressing the classical canon as a rebellious act is the peculiar use of hyperbole and litotes which show and explain the disordered world in its excess or drastic deprivation, through the reduction of meaning, tautological with regard to the expressed point, or the multiplication of meaning which makes us doubt its very existence. The poetical barbarity of the formula reflects the barbarity

looking at them 4. some people exist only in the conflict 9. some have experienced appalling love stories 16. all those who switch the subject 23. among them there are those who come to the house and unceremoniously make themselves at home 24. people that I could not have met”

of the modern world. I understand here “barbarity of the formula” as a kind of a clearly noticeable transgression of a poetical contemporary form. Such a poem can be a quite original and rebellious text. And often it is.

On the other hand, the “barbarian” poem returns to the systems, sounds and images which have already been established in literary tradition. The barbarian constantly flirts with the civilized and the primitive. This is, in fact, one of the characteristics of a “barbarian” formula: the possibility of being several forms at the same time and to explore the depth of dissonance. Such a poem (a barbarian one) becomes a patchwork model and shows the disintegration of the modern world, the world which wants to be civilized, yet is unable to do so. It also means that “barbarian” is not in an obvious way a negative thing. On the contrary—it happens that such a poem has a very positive background.

Last but not least, I propose to read the word “formula” as a matrix for not only one but for many poems. Let us see some more specificities of this kind of poetic formulas in the poetry of Szczepan Kopyt and Vincent Tholomé.

Katolicy w barach mlecznych śmierdzą niemiłosiernie
bóg dał im wątróbkę i smażone buraczki
zginął za ich grzechy
za bony obiadowe kazał im kupić święty kisiel wiśniowy
oglądajcie seks w telewizjach! katolicy oglądają
seks w złym wydaniu powodujący niemiłosierne mdłości
a potem traci na tym cały kościół, młode córki jadą na saksy
panie z radia maryja mało nie zaczną roznosić
strażnicy, gorliwość, predestynacja, obierki od ziemniaków
hej panie jezu zatańcz ze mną, gruby ksiądz z gitarą
ma cukrzycę i lubi młodzież⁶
(Kopyt, 2006b: 9)

A characteristic feature is the lack of consistency in using the categories of “deprivation” and “excess.” There is little choice between them; both of these

⁶ “Catholics in canteens stink dreadfully / god gave them fried liver and beetroots / died for their sins/told them to buy holy cherry kissel for their meal tickets / watch sex on TV! catholics watch / bad sex causing severe nausea / and then the whole church loses, their young daughters go to work abroad / radio maryja ladies nearly start distributing / the watchtower, zeal, predestination, potato peels / hey dear lord jesus dance with me a fat priest with the guitar/he is diabetic and likes young people”

categories are mixed and present the total lack of any control. Here in the most recent poetry we can find the symptoms of barbarity, not only through the experienced multiplicity and variety, but also through negatively marked “all-inclusiveness.” The accumulation of the effects, props, views and old histories have to be domesticated in order to acquire significance again; the repetitions separated by commas or slashes are a sign of the barbarity of contemporary civilization. One can observe the process in the poem “chwaliszewo”—the title is the name of one of the districts of Poznań. In its depiction the formal part of the poem consistently supports building the content of the poem:

chaos/równość + cośtam buzujące w winie
w żyłach/w starożeczach/gdzie upadają knajpy
gdzie się gnieźdzą pogrzebowe zakłady/na zakrętach
po zmroku solaryczne dresiarzy/zapachy kebab
+ sos czosnkowy ścieka im po udach/te mury
pamiętają karnawał/wielkie szalone łapanki
tu krzyżowały się szlaki/tu mówiono językami
tu łądowali obcy gdy ziemia była im obła
.....
dzielnica pełna ruin/czarne cegły
bezdomni/bezbarwni/beznodzy/na wózkach
na dyktach/czekający na skucie lodem +
w rzece + kominy + księżyc + noc⁷
(Kopyt, 2006b: 44)

When we apply the theory of Tadeusz Sławek to Kopyt’s poem, it turns out that the graphic signs in place of punctuation signs eliminate the discrepancy, introducing the new meanings between the text and the blank, apparently empty space: “the conjunction ‘and,’ not present in the material sense, delays the appearance of one or the other meaning, announces them, forecasts them” (Sławek 18). The elimination of the conjunction shows most vividly the inco-

⁷ “chaos/equality + something buzzing in wine / in the veins/old river beds/where eateries go bankrupt / where the funeral parlours nestle/at the corners / after dark sunbed chavettes/smells kebab / + garlic sauce dribbling down their thighs/these walls / remember the carnival/big crazy round-ups / here trails intersected/here one spoke in tongues / here the strangers landed when the earth was rotund for them / . . . the district full of ruins/black brick / homeless/colourless/legless/on wheelchairs / on plywood/waiting to be icebound + / in the river + chimneys + moon + night”

herence of the world, the duplicity of its phenomena and the accumulation of the categories of the meaning.

The poem under the significant title “all the young punks (new boots and contracts)” dedicated to two cities Wrocław and Poznań (not capitalized) defines barbarity anew as an invasion, all the greater since it is confronted with the psalm formula. The re-adaptation of the old, time-hallowed poetical formula not only emphasizes the invasion of China-made products, but also takes away the character of *sacrum* and *nobilis* from the old poetical formula:

niech będzie błogosławiony rozum i telefon nokia
(made in china) i sto poranków jednego ranka

za zimna śmietanka, papieros i przewód pokarmowy
kobieta współłokatorka, co czyściła kuchnię i

robi na raz: śniadanie i obiad; miałem takie plany
żeby się zabrać za siebie, chodzi przecież o władzę

jak rozdrabniamy się w tych brudnych knajpach
i o kobiety chodzi, które wstają jeszcze gorzej

niż ja; niech będą błogosławione nowe trampki
(made in china), kupieckie miasto, studia pozbawione

sensu i znaczenia, początek wieku i bezkształcie

.....
wiersze piszą coraz młodszy & dla ciebie ta wieczność
potrwa jeszcze lat kilka – nie oglądasz telewizji?

to stąd ta filozofia, buta i chore spojrzenie, check it out
trzeba wyemigrować do czech, być jak havel i blant

i żadnych roszczeń w sprawie dostępu do morza i kultury
niech będą błogosławione przedustawne struktury

kanapowa lewica, tańsza prasa i nowa wrażliwość
brak właściwego wykształcenia, dorobku i mieszkania

przetłuszczające się włosy i nowe pryszcze z rana
i żadnych porównań; chciałbym dokończyć te książki

zakończyć poezję – wiesz dobrze kiedy nie piszę
dla nisz, i dzięki temu jest zwrot podatku i żalność

i noc, którą by mogła osądzić nas na szalkach, cokolwiek
o czym mówi nam dziennik, to prawda i jeszcze

niech sądzi nas monika olejnik z czarną szarfą na ustach
jestem jak spot, co przerywa taką sygnitywną ciszę

ach! piękny jesteś wierszu, o mediach, akumulacji i spermie
trzeba kupić karabin, koniecznie, i jeszcze zapuścimy brody

wszyscy⁸

(Kopyt, 2006b: 50)

The modernity as a symptom of barbarity is depicted by Tholomé in a completely different way. It seems that in his case we have to deal with the re-adaptation of primary barbarity. An example of such an action is the volume *KIRKJUBAEJRKLAUSTUR* saga published in the series whose name is worth quoting “Le clou dans le fer expérience poétiques,” (“A nail in the fetters of poetical experience”). This book develops a story which actually becomes poetical prose, alluding through its construction, rhythm and poetical articulation of sentences to the primeval sounds of human language. But similarly to the poems

⁸ “blessed be reason and Nokia phone / (made in china) and one hundred dawns of one morning / cream too cold, a cigarette and oesophagus / the female flatmate who has cleaned the kitchen and / makes breakfast and lunch at a one go; I had plans / to do something about myself, it is about power / how we get sidetracked in these dirty bars and it’s about women who get up even worse / than I do; blessed be the new trainers / (made in china), merchant city, university studies / deprived of sense and meaning, the start of the century and shapelessness / . . . poets get younger and younger & for you this eternity/is going to last a few years more—don’t you watch TV? / hence the philosophy, arrogance and sick look, check it out / one should emigrate to the czech republic, be like havel and joint / and no claims for the access to sea and culture / blessed be the pre-well-laid-out structures / the armchair left, cheaper press and new sensitivity/lack of proper education, achievements and apartment / greasy hair and new zits in the morning / and no comparisons; i would like to finish these books / finish poetry—you know well when i am not writing / for the niche audience, and thanks to that there’s tax return and grief / and the night which could judge us on its scales, whatever / you hear about in the news, its true and let / monika olejnik judge us with a black ribbon across her mouth / I am like a spot interrupting such a signitive silence / oh! you’re beautiful, my poem on the media, accumulation and sperm / I have to buy a rifle, absolutely, and let us grow beards / all of us”

quoted above, an important figure in the poem is the accumulation, multiplicity of words and beings, as well as the repetition—as if the poetical logorrhea to which the rumbling title alludes was a magical spell, an anti-rational formula. The broken poetical narrative is signified formally in Kopyt's poetry often by the use of “/” (slash). Tholomé uses instead a logorrhoea discourse. For instance, the monologue of the speaker is interrupted by the conversation about the results of football games, club names, and the character of the play of individual footballers, all of which are not congruous with the previous narration. The poem ends with a reflection on patterns, matrices and stereotypes appearing in human existence, expressed through the repetitive structure of the poem, on purpose constructed like a primitive and monotonous message:

la matrice
nous restons à la matrice
nous restons attachés à la matrice
il y a pour toujours un reste de nous
comme un bouton est boutonné
nous sommes comme un bouton boutonné
nous sommes le bouton de la matrice
la matrice nous boutonne le bout
le petit bout de nous fixe à la matrice
nous restons nous
les animaux à quatre pattes
avec un bout noué
à la matrice
nous ne nous détachons pas
nous ne cherchons même pas à nous en détacher
la matrice nous tient
nous demeurons tenus moulus
et boutonnés par le bouton
du petit bout à une boutonnière
c'est la matrice
Les boutonnières nous tiennent les nerfs⁹
(Tholomé, 2007: 70-71)

⁹ “matrix / we remain in the matrix / we are attached to the matrix / there's always some remnant of us / like a button is buttoned / we are like the button all buttoned-up / we are the matrix's button / a bit of us affixed to the matrix / we remain ourselves / four-legged animals / with the end tied up / to the matrix / we do not detach / we do not even try to

The monotony, repetitiveness and re-adaptation of the old form are important since they point to the problem of the reception of culture (poetry included) of modern people and modern society, through their consciously caricatured and distorted use. This is what Vincent Tholomé writes about, taking into account the education of modern Europeans.

. . . en négligeant la pratique des arts, en la réduisant à la portion congrue, le système éducatif de Belgique, Europe, fait de nous des spectateurs. Pas des acteurs. Des consommateurs de biens culturels. Pas des individus conscients de ce que peuvent l'art et la culture. Pas des individus participatifs et créatifs.¹⁰ (Tholomé, 2009: 52)

The centre of poetical reflection: material and form

Employing the existing poetical matrices and schemes of social communication in their transformed and caricatured form shows how sensitive both poets are to the question of form. The point is not only in finding the most appropriate expression for the thought, but also in comprehending the whole communication process and its atrophy. To quote Tholomé again:

Ainsi, en Belgique, en Europe, le système éducatif m'aura permis de maîtriser vaillamment quelques aspects techniques de la langue. Par chance, grâce à une maîtrise suffisante de la lecture, de l'orthographe et de la grammaire, j'arrive maintenant à écrire de façon convenable des lettres de motivation et des curriculum vitae. Je reste poli dans mes lettres de réclamation. J'ai parfois quelque peine à écrire des lettres d'amour mais, à notre époque électronique et téléphonique, cela n'a peut-être plus tellement importance.¹¹ (Tholomé, 2009: 49)

detach ourselves / the matrix holds us / we remain bound formed / and buttoned up in the little / piece of the button-hole / it is the matrix / the button-holes hold our nerves"

¹⁰ “. . . by neglecting the practical aspect of art, and reducing art to doled-out portions, the education system in Belgium and Europe turns us into observers. Not actors. Consumers of culture. Not the individuals, conscious of what art and culture can do. Not the committed and creative individuals.”

¹¹ “So in Belgium, in Europe, the education system helped me to learn somehow the technical aspects of language. Thanks to reading, spelling and grammar I can now write correct cover letters and CVs. My letters of complaint are always polite, although sometimes I find

For that reason, according to the above argument and the assessment of one's ability to write and read, one of the favourite forms for the poetical diagnosis of the condition of contemporary civilization is the miniature and all kinds of abbreviated, broken, cut messages, reflecting communication difficulties. A miniature message can complete a longer poetical narrative, as in the case of *Kirkjubaejarklaustur*:

On est assis sur caillou blanc. On se raconte une fois de plus ce qui se passe. Ici.
Tonnes de choses qui arrivent. Un jour. Une fois.
A Kirkjubaejarklaustur

Puis c'est fini. Fini. Fini.
Fini fini?
Oui. Fini fini.
Ah bon.
Oui¹²
(Tholomé, 2009: 147)

The poem can be a one-sentence statement, more of a slogan than an aphorism, or a text message as in Kopyt's poems "a poem for gail," in "komitety" ("committees") or a "sms od mamy" ("sms from mum"):

I am for the naked society
(Kopyt, 2009: 24)

nie twórzcie komitetów
palcie własne¹³
(Kopyt, 2009: 31)

babcia tak płacze aż nie
może jeść 2 dania bo
zmarła taylor i jest jej
pogrzeb w 3701

it difficult to write love letters, but in our era of electronic and phone communication it does not matter that much anymore."

¹² "We are sitting on a white stone. We tell again each other one more time what is happening. Here. Tons of things / happen. One day. Once. / In Kirkjubaejarklaustur / Then it's finished. Finished. Finished. / Finished finished? / Yes. Finished finished. / All right. / Yes"

¹³ don't set up committees / burn down your own"

odcinku mody na
sukces¹⁴
(Kopyt, 2009: 32)

The awareness of the described fall and the return to non-standard solutions does not mean releasing oneself from the signs of culture. Szczepan Kopyt, alluding to Dostoyevsky, uses the intertextual literary crime not in order to remind the readers that new crimes are constantly committed, but treats it rather flippantly, describing it in a humorous way and depriving it of all seriousness. In the poem below words are also miniaturized since “sli/spr/hun” attract more attention and reflect the means of expression of social niches than “slice/spread/hungry.”

m.c. raskolnikov
nie odślonię rolety choć ciemno
nie założę skarpetek chodź piździ
nie odszukam rogała choć jest gdzieś
nie pokro' nie posma' go dżemem

choć głodny to przez to syty
choć nieświadom to jednak świadomy
gdziez ty jesteś rogała ukryty
jestem gło' jestem gło' jestem głodny¹⁵
(Kopyt, 2006b: 10)

Below we can read a very interesting poem “dzieci postmoderny” (“the children of postmodernism”), which tackles the evolution and stagnation of civilization and culture in a different way. Telling readers what they can see, or, in other words, the visual aspect of the poem becomes omnipresent, through the analogy to children’s cartoons, the graphic shape of the stanzas, square and rounded brackets, numbering, spaces, and comments on the appearance of the protagonist of the poem. However, one should not be misled by this peculiar attack on poetry, since it is grounded in extensive reading in literature and philosophy

¹⁴ “grandma cries so much she / can't eat the main course cause / taylor died and her funeral is / in episode 3701 of / the bold and the beautiful”

¹⁵ “won't pull up the blind though it's dark / won't put on the socks though it's fucking cold / won't find the bread roll though it's somewhere here / won't sli' won't spr' it with jam / though hungry it makes me sated though unconscious i'm yet conscious / where are you the hidden roll / i'm hun' i'm hun' i'm hungry”

as well as the knowledge of social mechanisms. In other words, the barbarity of the formula never equals the barbarity of the author.

[strofa_01]

jej kwiat nazywa się kroton (stoi na stojaku
na płyty winylowe), jej pies to matylda
a drugi to popak (teraz jest bardzo ciemno)

[strofa_02]

teraz ona rozmawia z błażejem (błażej robi
filmy, ma kręcone włosy, ja też takie posiadam
a raczej miałem), mój kwiat nie ma nazwy

[strofa_03]

(nie zapytałem) co zrobimy z lustrem od mamy?
co z markiem rothko? (mark rotko też jest martwy)
święci z ikony (w planie amerykańskim) [cięcie]¹⁶
(Kopyt, 2006b: 17)

Kopyt and Tholomé are similar also in their use of the formula which I would call infantile/primitive. It is expressed through such texts as the one by Kopyt:

wobec piękna
test pieroga:

oto pieróg – zobacz
został sam na talerzu
kawałek cebulki masło

hm

hm hm hm
ha!

¹⁶ “[stanza_01] / her potted plant is called croton (it stands on / the vinyl records rack), her dog is matylda / and the other is popak (now it’s very dark) / [stanza_02] / now she’s talking with błażej (błażej makes / movies, he’s got curly hair, just like I do / or rather i did), my plant is nameless / [stanza_03] / (i didn’t ask) what are we going to do with the mirror from my mother? / what with mark rothko? (mark rothko is dead, too) / the icon saints (American shot) [cut]”

e-ę pieróg nie czuje
nie mów że prosi jak piesek
że jak język cichutko
robi: yf yf yf yf
na co się decydujesz?¹⁷
(Kopyt, 2006a: 36)

And Tholomé's text "Un totem (poésie) inuit n° 5"

mia
miapa
tumia
miorapa
tunpoura
mia
miavoir
tuma
tumapa
pamila
outupansa
gesupia
outupansa
at
at
atan
atan
atan
atrapé
atrapé
gesuime
ankola
gesuime
palapa
dantédoi
gesuipa
dantébra
gesuipa

¹⁷ "in the presence of beauty / dumpling test: / 36 / here's a dumpling—see / it's left alone
on the plate / a piece of onion butter / hm/hm hm hm / ha! /e-e the dumpling can't feel
/don't say it's begging like a puppy / that like a little hedgehog it makes / the soft sound: yf
yf yf yf / what's your decision?"

outucroi
gemémi
miapar
gemémi
miapar
tumboufa
lalala
tubboufa
lalala
tumboupfa
(Tholomé, 2012: 20)

However, the point of the poem is not “words in freedom,” John Cage’s “imaginary landscapes” or William Burroughs’s cut-up technique. In the article “Powrót do zakłóceń. Sondowanie progu tolerancji” (“A Return to Interference. Determining the Threshold of Tolerance”) Roman Bromboszcz trying to combine the research on literature, visual arts and music, writes¹⁸:

W literaturze znajdziemy takie egzempli jak poezja fonetyczna, pozbawiona znaczeń i umuzyczniona. Poeta mówi, krzyczy, gra mimiką, emocjami, ale nie wiemy do końca, co nadaje. Z kolei pewien wycinek poezji wizualnej nastawiony jest na grę asocjacji, w miejsce jasności. Istnieje także cały nurt eksperymentalny, w którym fabuła jest zdestruowana.¹⁹ (Bromboszcz 103)

However, both Tholomé and Kopyt in their most mature poetical works create poetry in which they are aware of the gesture and posture in which it is delivered; by putting the visible and audible poetic nature of the posture in the brackets, they maintain their detachment and deprive such a message constructed message of the seriousness of primitivism. In order to rebuild the primitivism of the genre and the awareness of the barbarity of the poetic “I,” one requires a credibly primeval message. Paradoxically, in order to construct the message,

¹⁸ For a more extensive discussion of the subject, see Roman Bromboszcz, *Estetyka zakłóceń*. Poznań: WSNHiD. 2010.

¹⁹ “In literature we can find such examples as phonetic poetry, musical and deprived of meaning. The poets speak, shout, act through mimic and emotions, but we do not quite realize what their message is. On the other hand, a certain branch of visual poetry uses a game of associations instead of clarity. There is also a whole experimental trend in which the plot is destroyed.”

we need to give voice, sounds and phonemes to the category different than human beings, since a great, primarily extra-poetical change of roles has taken place: **the personification of objects and the reification of the human being.** In order to return to the glorious past of civilization, we need to start from scratch, from square one. It means re-awakening of the sensitivity reduced by consumerism and taking up the game with what is ugly, primitive, untamed, low—as for instance Anatol Stern used to do.

Conclusion

The challenge of the contemporary poets is abolishing the rigid canon, all-inclusiveness and chaos. That is why a category of chaos and fragmentation becomes the new norm. Once *szumy, zlepy, ciagi* (*hums, blends, strings*), to use the title of a book by Miron Białoszewski (1976), were a challenge, now they are common. In contrast to Claude Shannon's mathematical theory of communication (1963), the hum does not interfere with the poetical message but forms its integral part. The claim made by Roy Ascott in late 20th century seems to be still valid:

The revolution in art which prompts these questions lies in the radically new role of the artist. Instead of creating, expressing, or transmitting content, he is now involved in designing contexts within which the observer or viewer can construct experience and meaning. (qtd. in Schanken 11)

In the most extreme cases poets settle their accounts with society, which is not a new thing, but the way in which this message is delivered can be difficult and lead to drastic poetical expressions. In the poem titled “we śnie przychodził do mnie lenin” (“lenin came to me in my dreams”) the following words form a sharp counterpoint: “Byliśmy w obozie zagłady, będziemy w obozie zagłady, jesteśmy w obozie zagłady”²⁰ (Kopyt, 2006a: 7-8). At the same time the enduring programmatic and long-ranging barbarity of the form turns out to be finally impossible. Its brutalization, defamiliarization, experimentations can be meaningful only as long as they contain depth, intertextuality, wide range,

²⁰ “We were in a death camp, we will be in a death camp, we are in a death camp.”

ear for music, the knowledge of history, literature and the increasingly important in the modern world money and economy. It does not deduce from the originality of the message. Both Kopyt and Tholomé show civic engagement, acute sense of observation of contemporary literature and openness to dialogue. They sometimes also employ the figure of the poet who feels more and more acutely, and shares his observations and warnings with the reader. In order to understand their poetical message it is important to know even more than ever before their individual and generational message. Fiona Sampson seems to be correct when she observes:

The European notion of the writer-and-intellectual may be biased towards the cerebral, and fail to recognize other aspects of a poetic role, such as that of “troubadour” performer travelling from gig to gig. But it is at its most helpful idea about a thickened-up poetic practice, a professional collegiality in which reviewing, for example, is a serious act of engagement rather than a simple barter-system, and where poets both young and established display a genuine and continuing curiosity about our limitless genre and the world beyond it. Connective, discursive, public and written, such poetry culture isn’t founded solely on gossip and personality . . . Thinking and writing a poem is not an act committed against the other, rival poets . . . but an act towards them. (Sampson 281)

To sum up, one could say that truly barbaric poetry, as long as it is authentic, does not exist, in contrast with the depicted barbarity. Barbarity is civilized by poets in many ways, sometimes funny, at other times iconoclastic, and the poetical formula, even when it seems to be vulgar, pared down, anti-lyrical and apparently unsuitable for the serious message about emotions and thoughts, is ennobled—and this is very good news!

Trans. Monika Mazurek

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Summary

The Polish poet Szczepan Kopyt and the French-speaking Belgian poet Vincent Tholomé craftily take part in the poetical discourse on the contemporary world (the barbaric and the civilized) as well as literature (high and low). They experiment with the printed word and the new formulas of hip-hop and rap in their modifiability and potentiality, which is also expressed in the constantly changing *locus poeticus*. Yet the barbarity of the formula never equals the barbarity of the author. Finally, truly barbaric poetry, as long as it is authentic, does not exist, in contrast with the depicted barbarity. Thus barbarity is civilized by poets in many ways, sometimes funny, at other times iconoclastic, and the poetical formula, even when it seems to be vulgar, pared down, anti-lyrical and apparently unsuitable for the serious message about emotions and thoughts, is ennobled.

Key words: comparative literature, new Polish poetry, new Belgian poetry, Szczepan Kopyt, Vincent Tholomé

Poezja barbarzyńska? Wyzwania współczesnej cywilizacji (polsko-belgijska analiza komparatystyczna)

Streszczenie

Polski poeta Szczepan Kopyt i belgijski poeta francuskojęzyczny Vincent Tholomé zręcznie uczestniczą w poetyckim dyskursie o współczesnym świecie (barbarzyńskim i cywilizowanym) oraz literaturze (wysokiej i niskiej). Eksperymentują ze słowem drukowanym i nowymi formułami hip-hopu oraz rapu, wykorzystując ich modyfikowalność i potencjalność, które przejawiają się m.in. w nieustannie zmieniającym się *locus poeticus*. Ale barbarzyńskośći formy nie należy utożsamiać z barbarzyńskością autora. Ostatecznie, barbarzyńska poezja nie jest prawdziwie barbarzyńska, w przeciwieństwie do przedstawianego barbarzyństwa. Barbarzyńskość jest przez poetów cywilizowana na wiele sposobów, czasami w sposób zabawny, czasem obrazoburczy, a poetycka formuła – nawet jeśli wydaje się wulgarna, antyliryczna i pozornie nieodpowiednia – jest w istocie nobilitowana.

Słowa kluczowe: komparatystyka literacka, nowa poezja polska, nowa poezja belgijska, Szczepan Kopyt, Vincent Tholomé

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Civilized/Barbaric? Changed Connotations in Indian Dalit Poetry

In 1937, almost at the fag-end of his long and creative career, Rabindranath Tagore, India's lone Nobel laureate, composed a poem entitled "Africa."¹ In this, he painted a picture of Africa's ancient "primordial" past, its simplicity and its uniqueness before embarking on the "blood and tears" saga of the continent, the "history of its indignity" under the raids of Slave traders. He also voices, quite clearly and incisively, the latent conundrum behind the "civilized"—barbaric polarity. He says that even as the "barbaric greed of the civilized" lay bare their "shameless inhumanity," back home, church bells were ringing out in their neighbourhoods in the name of God, and children played in their mother's laps, and poets sang paeans to beauty. Thus highlighting the stark contrast of the standards of humanism and value for life the invaders practised back home and the barbarism displayed by them in the colonies, leads him to voice his poetic dilemma: are there any infallible yardsticks by which these two categories can be defined? Tagore's belief in universal Humanism and the intellectual prowess of European thinkers and so their civilization, was undying. Yet in the face of such atrocities on fellow human beings by their own kind, he was left disconsolate. This little example from Indian poetry seems to be an illuminating entry point into one of the most debatable and contentious global issues that has ever assailed the world: the on-going polarity of civilization and

¹ See the appendix.

barbarism. Even if the origins of the tension lay in the comparatively less loaded Greek word *barbaros* simply denoting non-Greek, the constant juxtaposition with the word “civilized” has injected an inescapable and irreversible politics into it—civilized variously meaning having a highly developed society and culture, showing evidence of moral and intellectual advancement; humane, ethical, and reasonable and marked by refinement in taste and manners; cultured; polished and so on. More often than not, this has implied a face-off between two people or peoples, the one accusing the other of barbarism, while self-importantly ascribing a *superior* civilized position to the self.

It is quite evident that the historical project of colonization gave a special piquancy to this binary in the outsider, the usurper, feeling the need to name the indigene as barbarian and the self as civilized, in a bid to legitimate his intrusive action. No wonder that the notions of civilization and barbarism that were imposed on, and later ingrained in the native psyche were received “western” notions which characterized a whole culture with all its markers, one of which is literature—as civilized or not civilized, barbaric or not barbaric. Broadly then, the concepts of civilization and barbarism taught by the colonizers were meant to keep the natives in place. This uncomfortable distillation makes it necessary that this highly wrought and political categorization be addressed in the hope that it will lead to clarification while engendering new modes of knowing, comparing and theorizing, more so, because the ripple effect of this dichotomization inevitably percolates down time to colour and direct perspectives. It emerges that this largely nineteenth century currency has subsequently been reincarnated in thematic strains in both popular discourse and creative writing, the rhetoric continuing to be powerful in fuelling the identity politics amongst various groups. Consequently, even today, this re-inscription of the civilized/barbarian dichotomy in the culture and identity dynamic, demands a critical examination of the civilized/barbarian discourse as “This Land” (2008), a Dalit poem by Anu highlights quite succinctly, giving word to this tension remarkably:

A sure gaze
maze it will tackle
A quiet race
survived shackles

This soil ours
our toil yours
Yet we live
not in anger
Like so many others
You are just visitors
in our home
wrote tomes
To grab, steal, own
what was never yours
It's 3000 years,
you see, vanish we won't
This land is us!²

But it would seem that the ideas inherent in the civilized/barbaric polarity handed down from above do not give the complete picture when seen in the context of the history of India as one of the oldest literate cultures in the world. Moreover, though it is apparent that this binary is as much at home on the Indian subcontinent as it has been in the Western world, the hues of the competing contestations are evidently quite different and the indigenous, inherited ideas much more complex. Here too, one can see the cyclic appearance of the barbaric and the civilized that Joseph Conrad discerned in the West in his 1899 *Heart of Darkness*: he notes that England, the “biggest,” “the greatest” nation of the world, “has [also] been one of the dark places of the earth” (Conrad 9). Simply put, civilized England was once regarded as barbaric by its Roman invaders. The acme of civilization can still, as the examples of Tagore and Conrad amply highlight, have the darkness of barbarism gnawing away at its innards. As Walter Benjamin says in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, VII (1940) “There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.”

It would do well to recognize some basic facts about Indian literary history at the outset. The take-off point lies in the recognition, as already posited, that India boasts of one of the oldest known civilizations in the world. These evidences come from the fact that India has one of the oldest traceable histories

² “This Land” posted by Anu on November 12, 2008. <<http://castory.wordpress.com/tag/dalit-poetry/>> Accessed 25 Dec 2012.

on the face of the earth corroborated by the fact that it has some of the oldest extant literature in the world. And with the ultimate origins of the literary in orality, the history becomes even longer and the “texts” even older. This early literary character shows itself in the The Vedas, the Epics and the Puranas, all texts that have subsequently risen in stature to become revered as religious and sacred texts. It is a point worth noting that all these early texts were metrically composed for mnemonic reasons and are therefore, the earliest examples of poetry on the Indian subcontinent. Further, if age, growth, development is a meter for the civilization of a culture, then certainly, this early creativity displayed in the field of poetry becomes its distinctive mark. The fact that the verses from these texts continue to be used and recalled even today at important junctures of Hindu life—birth, marriage, death, festivals—makes this poetry the most persuasive reminder of this civilized identity.

In addition to these early beginnings, Indian civilization particularly stands out for its openness and assimilative tendencies as evidenced by historical events. The successive waves of migrants—invaders or otherwise starting from 1500 BCE—hat came and mingled with the locals gave rise to a great deal of intermingling at the linguistic and cultural levels. Already, the extent of the land had multilinguality written in as an essential feature. The interplay with outsiders gave rise to further languages and variants, both at the spoken and the written levels. This makes India, the land of many languages and as a result, the land of many literatures, and so of poetry in many languages. But it has to be recognized that historically, when two languages and literatures come face to face, some tension would automatically get written into the scene, each purporting to speak for a superior (and therefore more civilized) culture. The multilingual multicultural scenario and the arising tensions could be dealt in several ways:

1. Acceptance, which is a first display of civilization.
2. Acceptance and assimilation, the tolerance marking the next, sophisticated level of civilization.
3. Resistance to another culture: this would bring into play the notion of the binary of civilization and barbarism. In the complex multicultural, multilingual Indian setting, a tremendous degree of play is possible and indeed, is constantly on where these categories are concerned.

It has been found that the poetry, in particular, gives word to this tension. Quite often then, the focus falls not only on this theme, but quite often, the poetry itself sometimes comes to display civilized or barbaric qualities—and this is rather strange—in the kind of language used; the former in the sophistication of language and the latter in abrasive, frontal attacks as in the Marathi Dalit poet, Namdeo Dhasal’s “Hunger”:

Then we will screw
Seventeen generations of you
Hunger, you and your mother.
(qtd. in Meshram 41)

and in Anu’s poem “Cruelty”:

I am a venereal sore in the private part of language...

A rabid fox is tearing off my flesh with its teeth;
And a terrible venom-like cruelty
Spreads out from my monkey-bone.³

Clearly, unequal power structures inevitably factor in additional complications and tension to this binary.

- a. It could prompt the one with the upper hand to press home the advantage and to remind the other that it is the superior one which it would do by emphasizing the latter’s “inferiority.” The first available way of inking this in would be by positing the self as the best example of “civilization” and the other as “barbaric.”
- b. The one occupying the lower position, constantly reminded of its limitations and character as barbaric, would be under pressure to rise from the dumps and achieve “civilization.”

This is what happened when India was colonized.⁴ When, in 1922, British Orientalist, Sir John Woodroffe, published a book pointedly titled, *Is India*

³ Anu, “Cruelty.” <<http://castory.wordpress.com/tag/dalit-poetry/>> Accessed 25 Dec 2012.

⁴ Though Vasco da Gama landed in Calicut in 1498 in the pursuit of trade, colonization by the Europeans in India really began in 1502 with the Portuguese. Thereafter, towards

Civilized? he was enunciating the on-going palpable cultural tension between the “civilized” notions of culture with which the colonizer associated himself, and the facile, dismissive identification of the native with the “barbaric.”

Despite the fact that this resulted in the injection of a sense of inferiority in the local population, there were some like Sri Aurobindo, poet and philosopher, who refused to be beaten down. He fiercely reacted to William Archer’s diatribe that “India achieved nothing of importance, produced no great personalities, was impotent in will and endeavour, her literature and art are a barbaric and monstrous nullity not equal even to the third-rate work of Europe, her life story a long and dismal record of incompetence and failure.” (Sri Aurobindo, *A Defence of Indian Culture*). Turning the tables on the white man, he rises to a defence of Indian culture by summarily dismissing Western rationalism as “the formula of an intelligently mechanized civilization supporting a rational and utilitarian culture” and rooting for a solution in the poetry and the philosophy of the east, applauding it roundly as the more civilized.

The polemics that began in the colonial period can be seen in the continuing rhetoric in contemporary India and is played out at many levels and in many ways: barbarism and savagery comes under attack in literature documenting the atrocities perpetrated during the holocaustic Partition; it also appears in the poetry (and this is ironical) written under the influence of the west in the post ’60s when the angst at the unfulfilled promises of a free nation and the death of ideology appeared in images of barbaric and self-consuming sex, carnality and violence. But in a highly fraught social and economic tense scenario, where two classes are constantly pitted against each other: the higher classes versus the marginalized lower castes, the Dalits, this uneasy conversation is most likely to erupt.

With these preliminary ideas, I take the example of contemporary Dalit poetry from India to explicate this idea, believing that this discourse not only informs it but also becomes an enabling entry point to understanding it. This

the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth, the British, and to a lesser extent, the French, the Dutch, the Danish and the Spanish set up trading posts in the country. The British East India Company went on to become the de facto ruler of most of the nation which was formally replaced by British government rule in 1858. They ruled India till August 1947.

attempt will naturally lead to some understanding of the evolving connotations of the terms in the context of India through time.

Starting with the general premise that the treatment of this binary in poetry would be highly charged and highly political, the verse most likely to take it up would be written by:

- a. poets from the centre who consider themselves civilized and feel threatened by their horrifying Barbaric Other

or

- b. poets from the margins who, like the Dalits, question their relegation to the barbaric and who throw the civilization motif back at their accusers.

A beginning could be made by first accepting the validity of the innate paradox that any culture that can produce poetry would be patently civilized and that talk of the civilization or barbarism of cultures would be purely at the thematic level and second, by getting to identify the “centre” and the “margin” in the context of India and the caste system. It soon becomes clear that even here, classifications and notions of civilization and barbarism have come to be re-read and re-written.

At this point, it is necessary to define Dalit as a concept for audiences not familiar with the socio-political scene in India. Originally, the term referred to the untouchables of Maharashtra, Dalit being the Marathi word for “the spurned.” First used in this limited sense in 1930, today, it has panned out to comprehensively include the Harijans (such as Mahars), Mangs, Mallas, Chambhars and Pulayas, in fact any community which is regarded as “lowly,” and is therefore marginalized. The literature that gives voice to their struggle and which protests against all forms of exploitation based on class, race, caste or occupation is called “Dalit literature.” Practitioners may be divided about whether only “Dalits” can write this kind of literature or whether the term should include even upper caste and upper class writers who write for and about the Dalits. In its revolutionary avatar, it takes on the garb of the subversive radical “minor” literature in the Deleuze and Guattari mould.

Finding the accusation of being uncivilized, barbaric continually being hurled at them by the higher castes, the poet from the conflicted Dalit community turns against them in his poetry. His *enoncé*, his articulated critique

is unabashedly political as he attempts the Deleuzian by deterritorializing the repressive enunciation of his self-professed “superior” antagonists.⁵ This poet not only aims to insert himself, his marginality and his marginalized experience within the central hegemonic space that the Other has reserved for himself but also enables him to lay claim on a unique “civilized” identity. It goes without saying then that this act of creation becomes one that invests power to his marginalized self and his writing.

So why should these writers not strongly believe that their poetry affords them a platform to engage in socio-political commentary and allows for constructive critical engagement? These writers make a fervent plea for a complete civilizing overhaul of society. As Arjun Dangle, the Marathi Dalit writer puts it, “even the Sun needs to be changed.” They are out and out activists in the field seeking to bring about an amelioration of the lot of their marginalized subjects as a community. In effect, they are looking for a true civilizing process to take over their society hoping that the collective utterance enshrined in their writings will have a collective value.

Talking about the complications that arise due to the interplay of caste, class and gender in this tussle for supremacy, these poets seek restitution in being raised to a higher social tier. In enunciation lies part solution because through enunciation, they have acquired agency. Hira Bansode, for example, takes a personal experience of being attacked as uncivilized to speak for her whole community. The intimate descriptions become a collective utterance in the Deleuzian mould and also take on the colour of a public critical intervention demanding that she and her kind be viewed with catholicity and understanding; that it is, in fact, her attacker who is the uncivilized one. Her poem, “Bosom Friend” (qtd. in *The Individual & Society* 49) will serve to accentuate all that I have put forward. She begins by welcoming and applauding her civilized, upper caste, upper class friend, “Today you came over to dinner for the first time.” This magnanimous act, something quite unheard of, quite overwhelms the ingenuous Dalit girl

⁵ Paper entitled “Major and Minor Literatures: The Indian Case,” presented at the FILLM Congress on “World Languages and World Literatures” at Halden, Norway, 5-8 October 2011.

You not only came, you forgot your caste⁶ and came
Usually women don't forget that tradition and inequality
But you came with a mind as large as the sky to my pocket size house
I thought you had ripped out all your caste things
You came bridging that chasm that divides us
Truly, friend I was really happy (49)

She idealistically believes that her upper class friend had this civilized outlook on life but she is in for a rude shock. Old habits, it would seem, die hard. When she arranges the food on her plate with "naïve devotion," she notes with horror,

. . . the moment you looked at the plate, your face changed
With a smirk you said Oh My—Do you serve chutney koshambir this way?
You still don't know how to serve food
Truly, you folk will never improve (49)

Hearing this accusation, she reels under the apprehension of her inferiority, of being uncivilized:

I was ashamed, really ashamed
My hand which had just touched the sky was knocked down
I was silent . . .

The last bit of courage fell away like a falling star
I was sad, then numb (49)

But it is not long before she retaliates with new found assurance in herself, firm in the realization that she is neither to be blamed for any apparent backwardness nor should she have any cause to feel humiliated:

But the next moment I came back to life . . .

⁶ Indian society had been divided traditionally into four castes: the *Brahmins* or the priestly class, the *Kshatriyas* or the warrior class, the *Vaishyas* or the trading community and finally, the *Shudras*, the menial workers. Initially meant to be purely a facilitating and organizational arrangement, the caste system became a rigid structure which imprisoned the lower castes in their groups. The untouchables were often entirely beyond the cover of the caste system, outcasts. This group, thus stigmatized and marginalized, has been at the receiving end of discriminating atrocities. The state has now put into place laws to safeguard their rights and though there has been a change, total recuperation is slow in coming.

You know, in my childhood we didn't even have milk for tea much less yoghurt
or buttermilk
My mother cooked on sawdust she brought from the lumberyard wiping away
the smoke from her eyes
Every once in a while we might get garlic chutney on coarse bread
Otherwise we just ate bread crumbled in water
Dear Friend—Shrikhand was not even a word in our vocabulary
My nose had never smelled the fragrance of ghee
My tongue had never tasted halva, basundi (49)

She now recognizes that her friend has

. . . not discarded [her] tradition
Its roots go deep in [her] mind . . . (49)

that it is not she but her friend who is uncivilized; her friend's "tradition" that is limited. Confidently, she turns back to hurl damning accusations at her "superior" guest

Are you going to tell me what mistakes I made?
Are you going to tell me my mistakes? (49)

The poem clearly marks out the vast gulf that divides the upper and the lower castes even today, the chasm created by a notional separation on the basis of civilized and the barbaric. It traces some kind of a history and identifies developments in the relationship as a result of education. But so deep rooted is the difference that both the upper caste and the lower caste girls find it impossible to get out of the caste-induced internalized superiority and inferiority. The upper caste girl "smirks" and the lower caste girl responds by being "ashamed." It is also quite clear that the lower castes have been economically repressed. Being consigned to abject poverty, most of the time they "just ate bread crumbled in water." This has made for such a huge cultural difference that the distance seems insurmountable; the chutney *koshambhir*⁷ served the wrong way, the manner

⁷ Chutney made of fresh coriander leaves, green chilies and lemon, an add-on dish that scales up the class and quality of the meal. As do *halva* (a grain flour or more typically, semolina dessert of a somewhat gelatinous consistency, made with clarified butter and sugar.), *ghee* (clarified butter), and *basundi* (another Indian dessert made of thickened milk garnished with saffron and dry fruits). These are food items for the upper castes and classes.

of service of the food. But, the low caste speaker has discovered a voice and places the onus of the repression squarely on the other by throwing her attacking rhetorical questions at her. By so doing, she has laid claims to a new space for herself, has ventured into “untrodde,” exclusive civilized territory.

The verse written by the Dalit writer in which s/he poetically accosts the supposedly civilized cadres of a society that “barbarically” side-line her/him then, becomes the site for spotlighting this tug of war. Writing against the mainstream, the literary space of the so-called civilized, s/he is attempting the brazen and seemingly unthinkable. The civilized/barbaric polarity becomes the means of an unprecedented opening out of the mind to radical postures in this poet’s writing which opens out new paths, unlocks doors to give birth to a truly revolutionary literature, a literature which has adroitly accessed the ruptures between the “civilized” mainstream and the “barbaric” marginal to enunciate something of far-reaching significance, something that is absolutely novel and striking in its attempts at completely eradicating this chasm.

I spit on this great civilization
Is this land yours, mother,
because you were born here?
Is it mine
because I was born to you?
(L.S. Rokade, “To be or not to be born.” Trans. by Shanta Gokhale,
qtd in Dangle 1)

APPENDIX

Africa

(Samayik Patra)

In a restless ancient age
 When the discontent Creator
Was pondering again and again the new creation
 On one such day punctuated by
 Dissatisfied shakes of His head
 The raging arms of the sea wrested you away
From the earth's eastern bosom, Africa—
Bound you behind guarding walls of opaque jungle
 Embedded in a core of miserly light
 There in dark secluded leisure
 You pieced together remote mysteries
 Unraveled enigmatic signs of the waters and the sky
 Learnt Nature's hidden magic
Devised in your mind spells and chants
 To taunt the monstrous terrors
 You desired to intimidate fear
 Adorning majestic cloaks of horror
Turning yourself fearsome a separate line in a frenzied greatness of terror
 Amid drumbeats of destruction

 O shadowy silhouette
 Under your dark veil
The turbid gaze of neglect
 Kept your human face obscure
 They came with their iron bracelets
They whose nails were sharper than your wolves'
 They came, the trappers of humanity,
They whose pride blinded them into darkness
 Darker than your forest canopies
 Barbaric greed of the civilized
 Stripped naked brazen bestiality
Your wordless wailing condensed on jungle paths
 Your tears and blood mingled to pollute dusty earth
 Forever now the fetid clumps
 Beneath hobnailed boots of assailant's feet
Have left their muddied imprints on your reviled history
That very moment by the shores of the sea
 In every temple of every town
The church bells morning and evening rang

In the name of their most merciful God
While the children played in their mothers' laps
And their Bard devotion to beauty sang

Today, when on the western horizon
The twilight hour is breathless under raging winds
When the beasts from their hidden caves have all come to light—
To sound the ominous toll of their dusk
Come new age poet
Now in the final rays of impending night
Come stand at the doorway of the affronted woman
To say, "Forgive!"
Above the wild delirious rants
Let this be the last benediction of your civilization⁸

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⁸ Rabindranath Tagore, "Africa." Translated by Rumana Siddique. *The Essential Tagore*. Ed. Fakrul Alam and Radha Chakravarty. Camb., Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2011. 299-300. There have been many translations of this poem. This is a more recent, more contemporary translation. I quote this poem as a convenient entry point to the location of the civilized/barbaric polarity on Indian soil. It is by no means the first, or the last, word on the multilayered, enigmatic play of the binary in Indian society.

Summary

When, in 1922, British Orientalist, Sir John Woodroffe, published a book brazenly entitled, *Is India Civilized?* he enunciated the on-going palpable cultural tension between the “civilized” notions of culture with which the colonizer was associated, and the facile, dismissive identification of the native with the “barbaric.” But these received notions of civilization and barbarism are at odds with the indigenous ideas of the terms. With one of the oldest literate cultures in the world, the location of India in the contemporary world becomes very enigmatic. In this paper, I attempt a contemporary understanding of the terms in the context of poetry from India, both in English and the indigenous languages while trying to see the evolving connotations of the terms through time.

Key words: comparative literature, “civilization” and “barbarism,” Indian Dalit poetry, Rabindranath Tagore, Anu, Namdeo Dhasal, Sri Aurobindo, Hira Bansode, L.S. Rokade

Cywilizowany/barbarzyński? Przemiany znaczeń w poezji Dalitów („niedotykalnych”)

Streszczenie

Kiedy w 1922 roku brytyjski orientalista John Woodroffe opublikował książkę pod wyzywającym tytułem *Czy Indie są cywilizowane?*, ujawnił istniejące wówczas napięcie pomiędzy kulturowymi wyobrażeniami o kolonizatorach jako o ludziach „ucywilizowanych” a powierzchowną i lekceważącą identyfikacją tubylców jako „barbarzyńców”. Stworzone w ten sposób pojęcia cywilizacji i barbaryzmu pozostają w sprzeczności z lokalnymi wyobrażeniami. Biorąc pod uwagę fakt, iż Indie są jedną z najstarszych piśmiennych kultur, jej umiejscowienie we współczesnym świecie staje się bardzo enigmatyczne. W niniejszym artykule ukazuję współczesny sposób pojmowania wspomnianych pojęć w kontekście poezji indyjskiej – pisanej zarówno w języku angielskim, jak i w językach rodzimych – starając się przedstawić, jak na przestrzeni czasu zmieniały się znaczenia pojęć „cywilizowany” i „barbarzyński”.

Słowa kluczowe: komparatystyka literacka, „cywilizacja” a „barbarzyństwo”, poezja Indii, Dalitowie („niedotykalni”), Rabindranath Tagore, Anu, Namdeo Dhasal, Sri Aurobindo, Hira Bansode, L.S. Rokade

II

Source Analyses

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“Two Poets” in Czesław Miłosz’s Unknown Letters and Other Writings

1. Introduction

Ever since European civilization upgraded the unknown Polish poet Czesław Miłosz to the top rank of the world’s men of letters by awarding him the Nobel Prize in 1980 and “some different civilization,” as Miłosz used to think about his second home—America, acknowledged the fact and upgraded the translator to the rank of a Poet, every newly found piece written by him has attracted special attention. Such attention is far from being unproblematic though, particularly when the poet’s private correspondence is considered. Since the four letters written by Czesław Miłosz to Paul Engle, the director of the Iowa Writing Program at the University of Iowa, reveal unknown aspects of Miłosz’s sojourn in the US at the turn of the 1960s, taking interest in these letters seems to be justified, particularly because Paul Engle is not even mentioned by Miłosz’s biographers. There is not a word on him either in the old biographies (by Andrzej Zawada, by Jan Błoński or by Aleksander Fiut) or in the new one (by Andrzej Franaszek, 2011). Only Marek Skwarnicki, in his memoirs *Mój Miłosz* (*My Miłosz*) evokes Paul Engle’s name several times but mostly in the context of his own experiences as a grantee of the program. Skwarnicki even makes the assumption that Miłosz might have backed up his application (Skwarnicki 121), which does not seem to be the case in the light

of the letters found in the IWP Archive.¹ Miłosz himself recalls Paul Engle in one of his public talks. Yet he does so in the context of wars, the American Civil War in particular, and human experience in general, rather than in the context of the program (Miłosz, 2006: 131).

What is much more important, the four letters in question also reveal some intriguing aspects of Miłosz's literary opinions. The fact that Miłosz is a "civilized" rather than a "barbarian" poet is easy to agree upon, whether we understand these vague metaphoric epithets as denoting high/low artistic standards, or high/low morals. (One should also remember that, with time, Miłosz became the canonized poet, the Poet of the Country). The fact that Miłosz preferred some poets to others, usually "civilized" over "barbarian," is also a well-known and perhaps quite a natural phenomenon, yet that Miłosz clearly supported poets whom he found more "civilized" than others may be a problematic piece of news. Particularly since it is Artur Międzyrzecki who appears in these four letters to be the essence of civilization (due to his literary knowledge, literary achievements, and personal qualities) while Tadeusz Różewicz seems to be portrayed not only as a less "civilized" person (due to his disposition, such as Miłosz perceived it) but also as a worse equipped man of letters. In consequence, it was Międzyrzecki who received Miłosz's support for a prestigious international literary program. Giving Międzyrzecki priority over Różewicz sounds almost ridiculous in 2013, when the former writer is still recognized primarily as a translator and only secondarily as a poet, and the latter—as one of the major post-war Polish poets and playwrights. One could say that it might not have been that obvious at the turn of 1969/1970, yet especially at that time, contrary to what Miłosz wrote to Engle, Międzyrzecki was more a translator, an author of literary essays, and a co-author of books for children than an acknowledged poet.

There is also one more important hero of the mentioned letters and of the story behind them: Ernest Bryll, a problematic follower of Miłosz, criticized by him severely, and denied support both on the basis of his dubious poetical achievements and his undoubted political skills. Thus the letters provoke at least two questions: who is "civilized" enough to obtain Miłosz's support

¹ The letters were found in November 2011 by the PhD student Agnieszka Moroz during her research in the IWP archives on the Polish grantees of the program.

for the participation in the worthwhile international literary program? And, more seriously: what ideal of poetry writing and poets' behavior is presented in the letters? The reflections which the letters evoke must be discussed against the broader background of Miłosz's literary, political and ethical opinions if they are to shed light on what poetry means to Miłosz, and what poetry and poets should be like according to the author of *The Captive Mind*.

Despite the fact that Miłosz calls himself a "young barbarian" in the poem on his first trip to Paris ("Rue Descartes"), it is not the lack of European cultural experience that makes any poet a real barbarian in the face of civilization. It is something else which Miłosz often describes as being "inhuman," or "nihilistic." I will try to demonstrate how this characteristic is represented both in the letters and other writings by Miłosz. The utter negation of any human being's goodness and the harsh denial of the value of life that human beings create always prompted the poet to react, both in his public and private writings.

I would like to begin with a short analysis of the content of the letters in question, then I shall proceed to the issues evoked by the opinions about Tadeusz Różewicz expressed both in the letters and Miłosz's other works and finally elaborate on the topic of the "inhuman" poetry with regard to yet another of Miłosz's letters (recently published by Andrzej Fraszek in his biography). To my mind one passage of the said letter creates an interesting comparative perspective since there the Polish poet (Różewicz) is juxtaposed with an American poet (Jeffers) as examples of "atheist despair."

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SANTA BARBARA · SANTA CRUZ

DEPARTMENT OF SLAVIC LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES
BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA 94720

November 11, 1969

Professor Paul Engle
Director
The Program in Creative Writing
Department of English
The University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa 52240

Dear Professor Engle:

The time I was in Iowa City seems to be centuries ago. I see you have been very energetic and the list of writers you have brought to this country grows imposingly. I know you now have Strykowski from Poland, a very good choice.

I am writing to you on the subject of a man whom I should very much like to see in America and who needs such a trip badly, who is stifling in the suffocating atmosphere of present-day Poland. He is a gifted poet and translator of poetry, Artur Międzyrzeczki. His specialty is modern French poetry (he lived several years in France after the end of World War II), and he could bring into discussions his knowledge of two literary workshops - Polish and French. I like also his literary essays and his autobiographical book on soldiering in Italy. His wife, Julia Hartwig, is a gifted writer too, author of poetry translations and of imposing studies in French literature. Her book on Guillaume Appollinaire won her renown in France and has been published in French. Such a couple would be able to bring quite a contribution to your Center. Międzyrzeczki speaks good English. He has spent one summer in the United States as a member of the International Seminar at Harvard.

Let me state briefly my reasons for backing Międzyrzeczki. I know him personally, and it is difficult to find a man so warm, so open to other people, so affectionate - particularly among writers. We see each other every few years, for instance at Knokke-le Zoute, or, the last time, at the poets' gathering in Paris attended also by Professor Will.

Międzyrzeczki is a man of integrity and for that reason he is now in trouble. Writers in Warsaw either observe a certain unwritten code of behavior as he does or else become lackeys. He pays for his integrity by losing opportunities to earn money and deserves respect and sympathy.

To be frank, I have been cool toward one of your guests, Bieńkowski, just because of his pusillanimity and manoeuvring. I believe, after all, in a community of writers as a sort of brotherhood. Recent events in Russia or in Poland show to what extent such a feeling of brotherhood is necessary when writers have to oppose the pressures of the authorities.

I see no better candidates for your Center than Międzyrzecki and his wife. If you see any possibility, please write to him directly - he is at the present moment in Paris and his address is

c/o Professor Piotr Słonimski
Résidence du C.N.R.S.
Gif sur Yvette (91)
France

With friendship,


Czesław Miłosz

CM:ns

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BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA 94720

December 2, 1969

Professor Paul Engle
Director
International Writing Program
School of Letters
The University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa 52240

Dear Professor Engle,

Thank you for your letter of November 18. Perhaps there is a misunderstanding as to Artur Międzyrzecki. He is a poet and a good poet. He is also a poetry translator and essayist, but I recommended him to you knowing you are interested primarily in poets.

Międzyrzecki, as far as I know, has no plans to leave Poland for good. For a poet this is usually an extremely painful decision as deprived of his language he is mute. The Polish authorities would like to get rid of some disobedient writers and this is an additional argument for some of them against choosing exile. His plans may change in the future, but his is not the case of an immigrant. He is simply looking for some breathing space. A few days ago I received a letter from him from Paris, written on the eve of his return to Warsaw. He asks that correspondence to him be directed to his friend's French address (c/o Professor Piotr Słonimski, Residence du C.N.R.S., Gif sur Yvette (91), France), and it will be transmitted to him in Warsaw through private channels.

Ernest Bryll. I am in an awkward position as Bryll considers himself a sort of disciple of mine, at least in his verse technique. Yet I would not recommend him. The man has decided he must make a career, adapting himself to the anti-intellectual climate created by the government. Attacking liberals, practicing mental acrobatics in his ambiguous poetry full of political innuendoes, he might have fallen into his own trap. That is my guess, as I do not know why he has been refused a passport. He is gifted, but lacks the kind of integrity which I consider a necessary quality for a writer.

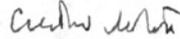
Michał Chmielowiec. I have much respect for him. Intelligent, open-minded, a perspicacious literary critic, he proved of late to be an excellent editor of *Wiadomości*, a literary weekly founded in 1924 in Warsaw and published since the beginning of World War II in London. Thus, a periodical with a forty-five-year record. Of course, the fact that Mr. Chmielowiec both knows

Polish contemporary literature well and can express himself perfectly in English would make him an interesting participant in your group. As the center of Polish literature moves to exile in consequence of a wave of new migrations after 1968, it would be profitable to both sides to have at your Center an editor of a serious émigré periodical.

First of all, however, I am anxious to help Międzyrzecki in view of his dramatic situation in Warsaw - dramatic primarily in a psychological sense. He has been one of the most active members of that liberal community of writers who have been silenced by censorship. He is backed unreservedly by Leszek Kołakowski, a philosopher widely known abroad because of his books on Marxism. Kołakowski, deprived of his university chair in Warsaw, is at the present moment a Visiting Professor in the Department of Philosophy at Berkeley. I hope you will be able to do something.

I shall always be pleased to provide you with any information at my disposal.

Very sincerely,



Czesław Miłosz
Professor of Slavic Languages
and Literatures

CM:ns

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BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA 94720

Czesław Miłosz

Apr. 3, 1970

Dear Professor Engle,

Thank you for the news
and materials.

As to Boyle, I would not
hesitate. Since he was not
able to come on time, it
is obvious you had
to make arrangements for
somebody else. I feel his

Country may be safely postponed.
I am applying humane-pragmatic
criteria. Bryll is a skilful
operator in that mess over
there, while Miodzyrecki
is deprived of means of
subsistence because of his
liberal stand.

Best wishes

Czesław Miłosz

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August 14, 1970

Dear Paul Engle,

Thank you for your letter of August 5. I had called you as I was anxious to learn something about the perspectives of Międzyrzecki's coming to Iowa. In your letter you give the data on Bryll's and Różewicz's arrival. What about Międzyrzecki whom you mention in your letter to Jelenki? As to the quality of mind, literary knowledge, openness to others and moral integrity he is far superior to the two others.

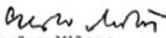
The case of Bryll is not exactly what you seem to believe it to be. Convinced Marxists, true believers, belong in Poland to the past. Bryll belongs to a generation which has no firm convictions whatsoever. People of his kind are interested in success and money only and for that reason join the Communist Party. Their cynicism, as they do not hide their motives, may even be disarming. They are as far from Marxism as is President Nixon.

I am not against bringing Bryll to this country. What I am worried about is a certain lack of equilibrium in a cultural exchange. As a rule, those who are pliable enough to curry favor of the Warsaw government are invited here. Others, often more gifted, are rarely able to travel - either nobody invites them or they do not get passports.

Różewicz is a poet of talent and I rather like him personally, though I do not know whether many people will find his company stimulating, as he is taciturn, bitter and aloof.

Thank you for the invitation. My wife and I will be coming back from Europe and the East Coast in the second half of October, but I am not sure whether October would suit you. As to meeting Bryll, well, it is true that he has been strongly influenced by my poetry, so that he is considered my pupil. Yet he puts a technique which he learned well to a doubtful and ambiguous use, so I am not too eager to talk to him. I have belabored cruelly his poetry in one of my recent essays on the Polish literature of today. If Międzyrzecki is in Iowa - that would be something else.

Many best wishes,


Czesław Miłosz

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2. Poets in the letters to Paul Engle

The first letter written to Paul Engle, dated 11 November 1969, clearly indicates that Miłosz had already visited Iowa City and met Engle personally. The letter begins by congratulating Engle on “energetically” bringing writers to the US—Miłosz mentions Strykowski (Julian, a Polish prose writer), calling his participation in the program a “very good choice”—then Miłosz goes on to promote Artur Międzyrzecki’s candidature for the IWP. From the very beginning an approval of his professional qualifications goes together with an appreciation of his personal virtues. Międzyrzecki is presented as both a “gifted poet and translator of poetry,” married to Julia Hartwig, herself a “gifted writer too,” and an author of literary essays, knowledgeable on French culture and literature, who also speaks good English and has respectable international experience, both in Europe (France) and in the US (Harvard). In personal contacts Międzyrzecki is “so warm, so open to other people, and so affectionate,” a phenomenon rare among writers, that it is difficult for Miłosz to find another person like him.

One particular virtue of Międzyrzecki is emphasized in the letter, namely, his allegedly being a “man of integrity,” what will become a recurring motif in the subsequent letters. In the first of them the integrity is presented as a reason for Międzyrzecki’s inability to function in the Communist Poland, a flaw that should win him even more “respect and sympathy,” according to Miłosz and contrary to those men of letters who know how to “maneuver pusillanimously.” Bieńkowski (Zbigniew), Polish poet and essayist, the IWP grantee in the years 1967, 1968 and 1969 is a negative example in the letter. (According to Międzyrzecki, Bieńkowski was “pathologically prudent,” Międzyrzecki, 1999: 75.) In the subsequent letters more critical remarks on immoral attitudes of Polish writers can be found.

In the letter dated 2 December 1969—we do not know if it is the letter which immediately follows the one mentioned above; it very well might be—which is the answer to Engle’s letter of 18 November, Miłosz emphasizes, perhaps due to some objections on Engle’s part, Międzyrzecki’s qualities as a poet (“He is a poet and a good poet. He is also a poetry translator and essayist . . .”), and explains in depth his situation in Poland. According to Miłosz, Międzyrzecki’s

wish is rather to find “some breathing space” than to leave the country for good since this latter move makes poets “mute” (Miłosz’s experiences of being in exile seem to be reflected in this conclusion). In the last passage of the letter, Miłosz expresses his anxiety “to help Międzyrzecki in view of his dramatic situation in Warsaw,” dramatic in a “psychological sense” he adds. As an “active member of liberal community of writers” Międzyrzecki is said to have been “silenced by censorship,” which, according to the historical facts and Międzyrzecki’s own diaries comes across as only partly true. Having resigned from his post as a vice-president of the Polish PEN-Club in 1968 (the year of serious political turbulences in Communist Poland), Międzyrzecki was removed from several editorial boards and he was not allowed to publish his essays in the weekly *Świat*, but his translations and novels (*Wielki pościg* written with Julia Hartwig, and *Złota papuga*) were published in 1969-1970 (Międzyrzecki, 1999: 71-72). His professional and material situation at the time was very difficult of course, which his recently published letters to Miłosz vividly demonstrate (Hartwig, Międzyrzecki, Miłosz, 2012). Thus a scholarship abroad could have been of a real help to him and it seems Miłosz was ready to help Międzyrzecki in every possible way. He ends his letter to Engel with calling upon the authority of Leszek Kołakowski, a “philosopher widely known abroad,” to back up his candidature.

Between the passages emotionally devoted to the poet of integrity, a rather harsh passage on the poet who lacks this feature is inserted. The hero, or rather the villain of the passage, is Ernest Bryll. Despite his being considered a disciple of Miłosz, “at least in his verse technique,” the Master does not have any wish to recommend his problematic pupil. This is mostly because of his moral qualities: being a careerist, Bryll “adapted himself to the anti-intellectual climate created by the government.” His “practicing mental acrobacies (sic!) in ambiguous poetry full of political innuendoes” might make him—Miłosz makes a guess—fall in his own trap. Thus the reason why (or if) Bryll was refused a passport is unclear to Miłosz. In the conclusion of the passage he admits that Bryll is a gifted poet, however he “lacks this kind of integrity” that Miłosz considers a necessary quality for a writer. In the letter dated 3 April 1970 Miłosz expresses something of a relief that Bryll was unable to come to Iowa as well as a strong support for Engel’s endeavors to make arrangements for somebody else’s arrival. In Miłosz’s

eyes, Bryll's coming to America may be "safely postponed," according to some unspecified "human-pragmatic criteria." Then, jotted down hastily, in the only letter which was handwritten, the strongest argument against Bryll is presented. He is said to be a "skilful operator in that mess over there," a formulation which might be read as an allusion to co-operation with the Communist Poland authorities (or services). Międzyrzecki, on the other hand, is said to "be deprived of means of subsistence because of his liberal stand."

Miłosz's last letter, dated 14 August 1970, is a clear expression of anxiety and annoyance at the fact that Engle writes about the data of Bryll's and Różewicz's coming to Iowa, while Międzyrzecki is not even mentioned by the director of the IWP. This fact perhaps made Miłosz express the ultimate comparative opinion on the three poets. Astonishingly, it is Międzyrzecki who, "As to the quality of mind, literary knowledge, openness to others and moral integrity . . . is far superior to the two others." To understand the level of Miłosz's exaggeration when formulating such a statement, especially with regard to Różewicz, it suffices to recollect Miłosz's 1948 poem "To Tadeusz Różewicz a Poet" in which he greets a new genuine talent in the realm of Polish poetry. Two lines of the poem are still quoted in all sorts of handbooks, essays or anthologies on the Polish postwar poetry. They were also meaningfully cited by a president of Polish PEN Club Adam Pomorski in 2011, the year of Różewicz's 90th birthday:

Szczęśliwy naród który ma poetę
I w trudach swoich nie kroczy w milczeniu.
(Miłosz, 2011: 284)

Happy is the nation who has got a poet
And who does not suffer its hardship in silence²

Moreover, in Miłosz's first anthology of Polish poetry published in the US in 1965, eleven poems by Różewicz were translated by Miłosz along with the three poems by Bryll of which Miłosz translated too. No poem by Międzyrzecki was translated, although he was Różewicz's junior by only one year and thirteen

² If not specified otherwise, translations are mine.

years older than Bryll and was a poet who had published several collections of poetry³ by the time the anthology was prepared.

Miłosz's last letter to Engle also brings additional negative opinions on Bryll's position in the Communist Poland. He is said to "belong to a generation which has no firm convictions whatsoever," and which is interested mostly in money. In Miłosz's view, Bryll is mostly a cynical person, and certainly he is not a convinced Marxist, contrary to what Engle might have thought. In order to make things clear, Miłosz uses a suggestive comparison to define a group of people among whom he counts Bryll: "They are as far from Marxism as is President Nixon." In the last passage, Miłosz denies any wish to meet Bryll, "strongly influenced by his poetry", in Iowa City since Bryll simply "puts a technique which he learned well to a doubtful and ambiguous use." In addition, Miłosz mentions that he himself "belabored cruelly his [Bryll's] poetry in one of his recent essays on the Polish literature of today" (this is probably an allusion to one of Miłosz's essays later published in Paris in 1972 in the collection entitled *Prywatne obowiązki*; see Miłosz, 2001: 108-109, 116-119, 125-127). The last sentence of the last letter sounds almost like emotional blackmail: Miłosz does not wish to meet Bryll in Iowa City but: "If Międzyrzecki is in Iowa—that would be something else." After this only best wishes for Paul Engle follow.

Yet, there is also one more interesting short passage in the letter, inserted between Miłosz's sharp criticism of Bryll, and this passage is wholly devoted to Różewicz, a "poet of talent" whom Miłosz "rather likes personally" (a similar opinion was voiced by Miłosz in the early 1950s, cf. Fraszek 643) but whose company people might not find stimulating since he is "taciturn, bitter and aloof." Not a word on integrity is jotted down this time but it is obvious that the feature most appreciated by Miłosz is not among Różewicz's characteristics.

It must be speculation if and how the letters influenced Paul Engle (and what role the State Department, the US Embassy in Warsaw and the Polish authorities would play), yet the fact is that Bryll finally took part in the IWP while Różewicz did not. Artur Międzyrzecki and his wife Julia Hartwig attended the seminar twice: in 1970 and in 1986. Both Międzyrzecki and Miłosz gradually became good friends with Paul Engle, whom they considered a fine

³ In 1957 a prestigious publishing house in People's Poland, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, issued Międzyrzecki's *Wiersze wybrane* (*Selected poems*).

and honest but ill-informed person, and kept suggesting Polish candidates for the Program (cf. Hartwig, Międzyrzecki, Miłosz 2012: 65-66, 77-83). Julia Hartwig has kept Paul Engle and his wife Hualing in her grateful memory (Hartwig 46-48, 54-55, 430).

How are we supposed to read these four letters? Should we assume that Miłosz had his own "hierarchy" of poets and poetry, or rather that sometimes he was highly subjective when trying to put his opinions through and support his friends? Perhaps the letters might also convince us that Miłosz would easily get annoyed by the naïve Americans who could not make a difference between poets and Poets, light-heartedly causing a "certain lack of equilibrium in a cultural exchange." To quote his own words from the last letter: "As a rule, those who are pliable enough to curry favor of the Warsaw government are invited here. Others, often more gifted, are rarely able to travel—either nobody invites them or they do not get passports." However, in 1970 it was not Międzyrzecki who became a victim of such an unfair treatment but Różewicz,⁴ a "more gifted poet" indeed, one who is considered to be a true innovator of Polish verse. Maria Dłuska, the highly respectable author of a theory of Polish lyrics, emphasizes that he found his own unusual verse technique (Dłuska 282); the same opinion is given by another leading authority on the matter, Lucylla Pszczołowska (Pszczołowska 355-356). Moreover, this quality of Różewicz poetry was recognized also by Miłosz. In the anthology mentioned above Miłosz wrote: "he invented his own type of antipoem, stripped of "devices" such as meter, rhyme, and even, most often, of metaphors, and limited to the simplest words" (Miłosz, 1965: 61). It would not be an exaggeration to say

⁴ According to Międzyrzecki, it was Różewicz himself who decided not to come to the US (Hartwig, Międzyrzecki, Miłosz, 2012: 198, 271), yet it does not seem to have been that simple. One should remember that most writers in Communist Poland were manipulated by being offered or denied passports, honors or prestigious awards, sometimes just in order to disunite the members of the literary circles. In the light of his letters to Miłosz, it is clear that Międzyrzecki thought of Różewicz as of a privileged writer (16, 52, 83) who all too easily criticizes the West. Paradoxically, this feature could make him interesting to Paul Engle. Różewicz appears ambivalently in Międzyrzecki's letters—sometimes as a favorite candidate of Engle's (62) and sometimes just as the "Warsaw Embassy" candidate (which should be read as a more or less officially endorsed candidate, 73). Characteristically, there is an ironic note in everything that Międzyrzecki writes about Różewicz, also when he is writing about Różewicz's literary work (444, 568).

that Tadeusz Różewicz has been regarded as one of the Polish major modern poets ever since late 1950s.

On the other hand, Ernest Bryll, so harshly criticized by Miłosz⁵ for murky political connections (something of which, we should remember, Miłosz himself was accused because of having left his diplomatic service for People's Poland only in 1951) with time became one of the leading persons behind the opposition weekly *Tygodnik Solidarność* in the 1980s. Bryll's work for this trade union magazine was awarded a high rank medal (*Krzyż Komandorski Orderu Odrodzenia Polski*) granted by President Lech Kaczyński in 2006. His poems have also developed interestingly over time, and, judging by the anthologies of Polish poetry, been considered to be valuable and representative of Polish verse. Since any hierarchy of poets is disputable, I would like to cite some examples of how these poets have been anthologized. In the three-volume anthology of Polish poetry published in 2002 and edited by poet and critic Aleksander Nawrocki one can find nine poems by Artur Międzyrzecki and ten by Ernest Bryll, while Tadeusz Różewicz is distinguished with a separate essay illustrated with his poems. In the anthology prepared (and published in Poland in 2001) by Karl Dedecius, a German lover and translator of Polish poetry, Różewicz is represented by 22 poems, Międzyrzecki by 12, Bryll by 11. In the anthology compiled by Piotr Matywiecki, a poet, literary critic and essayist, one can find 28 poems by Różewicz and 8 by Międzyrzecki, but none by Bryll. In the *Golden Book of Polish Lyrics* edited in 2007 by Jacek Łukasiewicz, a poet, literary critic and professor of Polish literature, five poems by Różewicz were included, and none by either Międzyrzecki or Bryll. Unsurprisingly, in all the anthologies mentioned it is Miłosz who occupies the unquestionably leading position. In his own handbook of Polish literature Miłosz devotes a long essay to Różewicz presented as a "writer in the process of evolving" whose "boldness

⁵ Only negative opinions on Bryll and his attitude can be found in the letters sent by Międzyrzecki to Miłosz from Iowa City. Still, in one of his letters to Międzyrzecki Miłosz could not help admiring the poems by Bryll published in 1971, that is, after the change of government in People's Poland. (Hartwig, Międzyrzecki, Miłosz, 2012: 220). It should be noted that the harsh criticism against Bryll and the alleged servility of his poetry was openly shared by others both at the time in question and later. For instance, Stanisław Barańczak, first a dissident writer then a literary émigré, used to scold Bryll using offensively paraphrased quotes from the Polish literature (cf. Barańczak 1977).

compensates for his faults, the chief of which is crudeness" (Miłosz, 1969: 470) whereas Międzyrzecki is given only a short passage. It is worth observing that Międzyrzecki is regarded as an exponent of the "poetry of culture" (Miłosz, 1969: 487) while Różewicz—when compared to a "poet of civilization," Zbigniew Herbert—is called a "rebel decrying the 'nothing in Prospero's cloak'" (Miłosz, 1969: 470). The metaphor of the nothingness of modern humanity is taken from the title of a poem by Różewicz that Miłosz quotes in the same handbook.

What I find really interesting in the letters written to Paul Engle is not so much Miłosz's *ad hoc*, emotional opinions—like every human being he was sometimes mistaken or biased (but sometimes also quite objectively informative, e.g. in the passage on Michał Chmielowiec from the letter written to Engle on the 2 December 1969)—but rather the question of "poets' integrity," of great importance not only for the letters quoted above but, far more importantly, for Miłosz's views on human beings, poets, and poetry as such. It was probably this sense of integrity that stimulated Miłosz's both friendly and consistent lifelong correspondence with Międzyrzecki⁶ and his always rather problematic and inconsistent lifelong literary relationships with Różewicz. In both cases, the question concerned more than just Polish poetry and Polish poets. As he explained in the letters to Engle, Miłosz believed in an international "community of writers as a sort of brotherhood" necessary in order to "oppose the pressures of the authorities" (11 Nov. 1969). For that reason, we should not be surprised by the almost anecdotic tone which Miłosz often adopted when referring to American poets' invented sufferings. For instance, in his letter to Międzyrzecki we find an ironic remark on the "air-conditioned despair" experienced by American poets in their country where, as Theodore Roethke used to say, "it is easier to publish a book on poetry than a book of poems . . ." (Miłosz, 2007: 28). The same annoyance can be seen in Miłosz's impulsive reaction to Robert Lowell's "provincialism", which he describes in a letter

⁶ See for instance a letter dated March 23, 1974 written by Międzyrzecki to Miłosz congratulating him on his newly published *Ogród nauk* which Międzyrzecki found "great, clear, and bracing" (Międzyrzecki, 2007: 38). See also the newly published volume of correspondence (Hartwig, Międzyrzecki, Miłosz, 2012) where Międzyrzecki's numerous praises of Miłosz's achievements can be found. Miłosz, on his part, sometimes praised Międzyrzecki's poems, though often in short formulas, e.g. *beaux mais tragiques* (Hartwig, Międzyrzecki, Miłosz, 2012: 308).

to the Polish poet Zbigniew Herbert (Franaszek 645). Many years later he composed a poetic pardon to the American poet, apologizing for mocking the poet's "long depressions, weeks of terror, / Presumed vacations in the safety of the wards" which "a refugee on this continent / Where so many newcomers vanished without a trace" (Miłosz, 2003: 722) could not allow himself. A different historical training, as Miłosz put it, prevented him from making such a mess of himself. That training should bring him closer to Różewicz, and in some ways it did, yet in some ways—it clearly did not.

3. Miłosz and Różewicz

What obviously attracted Miłosz to Różewicz (contrary to what he wrote in the letters to Engle, it was Różewicz, who was the Poet to Miłosz, the one who became the hero of his own poems and essays) and, at the same time, pushed him away was his anti-aestheticism, grounded on a deep dejection in human civilization in general, and in culture in particular. With his traumatic war experiences (service in the guerilla Home Army) Różewicz, "hated art as an offence to human suffering," as Miłosz expressed it in an introductory sketch placed in his 1965 anthology of Polish poetry. Being a "nihilistic humanitarian," "Różewicz is constantly searching for a way out of his negation which is mitigated only by pity; his tenderness bursts out only when he writes on little things of everyday life," Miłosz thinks. According to him, Różewicz's "tragedy is to deny the values which are affirmed by his revolt" (Miłosz, 1965: 61).⁷

⁷ The rapacity of Różewicz's poetry can be illustrated by one of the poems entitled "To the Heart" that Miłosz selected for the anthology:

I saw
a cook a specialist
he would put his hand
into the mouth
and through the trachea
push it to the inside
of a sheep
and there in the quick
would grasp the heart
tighten his grip
on the heart
rip out the heart
in one jerk

Both the denial and the revolt seem to have attracted Miłosz, the poet who is always "on the side of man," even if sometimes "for a lack of anything better," to quote the title of the famous chapter in *Visions at San Francisco Bay*. Not only Różewicz's merciless and often ironical portrayal of the atrocities of the so-called civilization disturb Miłosz;⁸ his ascribing all the evil to human beings, with the whole culture being merely a helpless cover, disturb Miłosz even more. The two poets' dialogue via poems—Różewicz's poem "Unde malum?" and Miłosz's response to it—should be evoked here. Miłosz begins his poem with a quotation from his predecessor's in order to give his own answer to the classical theological question:

*Skąd się bierze zło?
jak to skąd*

*z człowieka
zawsze z człowieka
i tylko z człowieka*

Where does evil come from?
It comes⁹

from man
always from man
only from man
(Miłosz, 2003: 726)

Not only evil but also goodness come from human beings, Miłosz replies in the last line of his poem, belittling Różewicz's arguments. While Różewicz insists on the necessity of the radical change of human race, Miłosz speaks sarcastically

yes
that was a specialist. (Miłosz, 1965: 72)

⁸ Particularly when they take the shape of "nihilistic jokes" already overrepresented in Western literature (Międzyrzecki, Hartwig, Miłosz, 2012: 508). A more critical remark on Różewicz, the nihilist, was jotted down in the quoted letter to Międzyrzecki yet it was omitted by the editors of the volume whose general policy was "not to publish expressions or phrases which could be offensive to third parties" (632).

⁹ Miłosz's translation is not accurate here, Różewicz uses a kind of an ironic question: "then from where, / from man . . ."

of the goodness of the Earth deprived of human beings. Yet, such a conclusion does not really follow from Różewicz's poem in which the Earth will regain its shine and charm "if humans brush themselves out of fauna and flora with their own hands" *jeśli rodzaj ludzki / wyczesze się / własnoręcznie / z fauny i flory* (Różewicz 66). Thus the two poets talk about different issues: Różewicz about a possibly good Earth with better human beings, Miłosz about only seemingly good Earth without human beings who annihilated themselves. It is Miłosz who assumes the tone of moral superiority, once again making Różewicz a nihilistic, somehow naïve ("Alas dear Tadeusz, / good nature and wicked man / are romantic inventions") and barbarian poet ("so let man exterminate / his own species / the innocent sunrise will illuminate / a liberated flora and fauna"), a poet who despises human beings. Miłosz's interpretation of Różewicz's poem, however, is far from being unquestionable.

The core of the two poets' dispute concerned metaphysics, which is best illustrated in Różewicz's poem on his reflections on reading Swedenborg, so important to Miłosz. In the poem Różewicz denies the value of any metaphysics and emphasizes his "poor" need of protecting the reason.¹⁰ Różewicz "atheist" attitude was often criticized by Miłosz, also in his essay entitled "Różewicz in the year 1996" in which the latter poet is accused of giving little support to anybody with his "helpless philosophy" (Miłosz, 1997: 292). One could hardly imagine more crushing an accusation. Still, Różewicz is described by Miłosz as a poet of contradictions who distrusts European culture with its splendor merely covering "violence and murder" but who also constantly uses culture and language which differ us from animals to cry over our similitude to beasts (Miłosz, 1997: 292-293). Here, one of the two poems which Miłosz picked up for his anthology of the "luminous books" could be evoked, even if Różewicz is called a "nihilist" once again in the introductory remarks (in a more serious

¹⁰ Tadeusz Różewicz, "Zaćmienie światła" ("The Eclipse of the Light") [Swedenborg czytany przez Miłosza] *ani mnie ziębi ani grzeje / z trudem brnę przez jego sny / księgę o niebie i piekle / rzucam na ziemię / (...) wystawiam sobie świadectwo ubóstwa / ale nie mogę / gasić światła rozumu / tak obelżywie traktowanego / pod koniec naszego wieku.* (Różewicz 25-26) [Swedenborg read by Miłosz] is all the same to me / I wade through his dreams with difficulty / I throw the book of heaven and hell / Onto the ground / . . . I give myself a certificate of poverty / But I cannot / Turn off the light of mind / Abused so much / At the end of our century. (Trans. Katarzyna Bielawna)

tone in the English version of the anthology than in the Polish one¹¹). In both, however, also Różewicz's compassion for human condition is emphasized. Indeed, Różewicz's "Voice" in Miłosz's own translation says more about his sensitivity than his nihilism which Miłosz cannot have overlooked.¹²

Różewicz's last answer given in the form of a poem written after Miłosz's death is more ironic than nihilistic or despairing. In his "Elegia" dedicated to the Memory of Cz. M. Różewicz presents himself as a mole who cannot even utter the word "heaven" without shame, but who still asks about friendly disputes with the poet who died (and who undoubtedly writes an elegy on the bread and wine "in heaven"). Różewicz's persona declares that he, on his part, will probably turn from Orpheus (in this manner Miłosz portrayed Różewicz in the 1948 poem, according to his own 1996 interpretation) into a . . . spade (Różewicz 381-382), a tool more appropriate for a barbarian poet, or a poet of the barbarian times, his readers might think. Yet, first of all, the spade is an allusion to Miłosz's poem "Różewicz" in which the poet is a "serious mortal / he does not dance . . . he digs in black soil / is both the spade and the mole /

¹¹ The English version reads: "Tadeusz Różewicz was marked in his early youth by the cruelties of war, in which he fought against the Nazis as a soldier of a guerilla unit. That experience influenced his poetry, in which he is a desperate nihilist, but also a compassionate interpreter of the human condition" (Miłosz, 1996: 207). The Polish version says "Certainly a nihilist. But crying, sore, sensitive, as if being skinned . . . whose total despair, also about poetry, seems unnecessary to me." (Miłosz, 2000: 242)

¹² A Voice

They mutilate they torment each other
with silences with words
as if they had another
life to live

they do so
as if they had forgotten
that their bodies
are inclined to death
that the insides of men
easily break down

ruthless with each other
they are weaker
than plants and animals
they can be killed by a word
by a smile by a look (Miłosz, 1965: 67)

cut in two by the spade” (Miłosz, 2003: 727).¹³ Certainly, it is not an image of the poet’s integrity.

4. Miłosz and other poets

In order to see the significance of the Miłosz-Różewicz dispute we have to take a look at Miłosz’s attitude towards other poets and their poetry. If we remain in the circle of the heroes of the quoted correspondence, Międzyrzecki’s poetry—with which, by the way, Miłosz never conducted any dialogue—can be evoked as an example of a more civilized or humane attitude. Międzyrzecki can certainly be regarded as a poet who supports humanity with his poetry (even if, with time, his poetry became more ironic). The message he conveys is often similar to Miłosz’s own views. One could juxtapose Miłosz’s oft-quoted sentence *W chwili dziejowej, gdy nic nie zależy od człowieka, wszystko zależy od człowieka* (“In a historic moment when nothing depends on man, everything depends on man”) with Międzyrzecki’s early poem “Rachunek” (“Account”) so as to see a similar attitude which is so different both in tone and in its message from Różewicz’s perspective. The ending of Międzyrzecki’s “Account” reads: “Who committed wildest crimes and wicked deeds? Man / In whom rescue, hope, a good start? In him, in man.”¹⁴

One could also juxtapose Miłosz’s famous poem “Który skrzywdził człowieka prostego” (“You Who Wronged [a Simple Man]”)—and its moralistic point addressed to the title figure: “Do not feel safe. The poet remembers. / You can kill one, but another is born. / The words are written down, the deed, the date” in particular—with the poem “Ten który” (“The One Who”) by Ernest Bryll in order to see that not only the nihilistic poets driven by contradictions such as Różewicz doubt eternal values conveyed by poets. This is not necessarily an evidence of their cynicism but, perhaps, of their realism: “The one who wronged a simple person—Bryll says in his poem—will find versifiers who will

¹³ For more on Miłosz’s and Różewicz’s relationships see Fiut, 2011; Hobot-Marcinek, 2012; on the symbolism of Orpheus and a mole employed by both poets see Pytlewska, 2010.

¹⁴ “W kim ratunek, nadzieja, gwiazda pomyślna? / W nim. W człowieku.” (Międzyrzecki, 1957: 142)

erase everything.”¹⁵ I will not go deeper into these two poets' verses, since I believe that some other poet, to whom a meaningful passage in another letter was devoted, offers a deeper insight into the questions which really bothered Miłosz: poets, civilization, and the integrity needed for writing human poetry.

In a letter to the Polish scholar and literary critic Jan Błoński, written only a few years earlier than the letters analyzed above, Miłosz wrote:

Gdybym umiał napisaćbym zasadniczą książkę o poezji współczesnej, głównie polskiej i amerykańskiej, a właściwie nie tyle o poezji, ile o różnych aspektach ateistycznej rozpacz. Z tego punktu widzenia fascynuje mnie zarówno Robinson Jeffers, jak Różewicz – ten to jest dopiero kawałek dla krytyka czy historyka literatury, bo ma taki plebejski zamach i takie wspaniałe błędy logiczne (Czesław Miłosz's letter to Jan Błoński, dated 19 January 1965, qtd. in Franaszek 884)

If I could I would write a fundamental book on modern poetry, mostly Polish and American, actually not a book on the poetry itself but on different aspects of the atheist despair. From this point of view, both Robinson Jeffers, and Różewicz fascinate me—the latter is quite a bit for a critic or historian of literature since he has such a plebeian bravado and so magnificent logical mistakes.

Neither the American nor the Polish example of “atheist despair” became the subject of any book written by Miłosz. However, as we have seen, he wrote much on Różewicz—happily, more on his “magnificent logical mistakes” than on his “plebeian bravado” (one more feature making Różewicz more a “barbarian” than a “civilized” poet?)—and much on Jeffers: an important essay as well as a poem devoted to the author of the “inhuman” poetry some of which was also translated into Polish by Miłosz.

Miłosz's reservations towards Jeffers seem to be similar to his reservations towards Różewicz, they are of “theological nature” as Miłosz put it during the poets' meeting in California.¹⁶ Both poets, the Polish and the American, reject all metaphysics, and they both emphasize the evil created by human beings. Human evil is perhaps more demonized by Jeffers than it is by Różewicz, yet, just like in the case of Różewicz, wars—the First and the Second World War—were

¹⁵ “Ten, który skrzywdził człowieka prostego / Wynajdzie rymopisów, co wszystko wymażą . . .” (Bryll 274)

¹⁶ “Poets Sing the Prices of Robinson Jeffers”, http://articles.latimes.com/1987-01-14/news/vw-3344_1_robinson-jeffers (Access 10.01.2013).

substantial factors in forming the negative attitude towards humanity (Miłosz, 1982: 88). In his *Visions* Miłosz presents Jeffers as the creator of *inhumanism*, who might still have seen himself as one of his “own barbarian ancestors on the cliffs of Scotland or Ireland,” taking refuge from history “by communing with the body of a material God” (Miłosz, 1982: 90) since nature was the only God he could worship. By granting himself the superior position at the summit, in his Carmel tower, Jeffers was, as Miłosz formulated it, a “vulture, and eagle, the witness and judge of mortal men deserving of pity” (Miłosz, 1982: 92). Although Jeffers’ pity was not the same as Różewicz’s, it must have played a role in Miłosz’s involvement with the poet he conducted a dialogue with, almost against himself (Miłosz, 1982: 93). Alan Soldofsky even thinks that “No two poets of this century could have hold more firmly opposed positions concerning each other’s valuations, particularly about nature and divinity” (Soldofsky 179). In the introduction to Jeffers’ “Carmel Point” placed in his *Book of Luminous Things*, Miłosz sees Jeffers as advising:

inhumanization, that is getting rid of human measurements, which deceive us because everything then refers to man, without whom the universe can perfectly exist. According to his philosophy, the human species, that destructive plasm on the surface of the globe, will disappear, and then everything will once again be perfectly beautiful (Miłosz, 1996: 34).

This could not be left unanswered from a poet who admired “Human labyrinth” (Miłosz, 1982: 197), and the response was given via the poem “To Robinson Jeffers.” Miłosz’s poem characteristically begins with establishing a cultural difference:

If you have not read the Slavic poets,
So much the better. There’s nothing there
For a Scotch-Irish wanderer to seek
.....

and ends with the valorizing of the difference

Better to carve suns and moons on the joints of crosses
As was done in my district
.....
To implore protection

Against the mute and treacherous might
Than to proclaim, as you did, an inhuman thing. (Miłosz, 1982: 95-96)

Just like Różewicz's nihilistic poems, Jeffers' inhuman poetry was a challenge to Miłosz, something to mentally and poetically wrestle with despite—once again as in Różewicz's case—the poet's "naiveté and his errors" (Miłosz, 1982, 94).¹⁷ Does nature deserve more love and admiration than culture and civilization which are only worthy of deep distrust and condemnation, as both Różewicz and Jeffers are willing to think and express in their poetry? Or do human beings deserve compassion and love together with all the culture they created, and despite all the faults of their civilization, as Miłosz is willing to think and express in his writings? Some of Miłosz's late poems convince us that in fact he himself was not so distant from the first attitude. In his late poem "Sarajevo" Miłosz writes about Europe which "listens with indifference to the cries of those who perish because they are after all just barbarians killing each other," and he portrays such a Europe as "a deception, for its faith and its foundation is nothingness." Those who comfortably but blindly live there, thinking "We at least are safe" will be struck by what "ripens in themselves." (Miłosz, 2003: 610) Both Jeffers' "morbid plasm," and Różewicz's "nothing in Proseper's cloak" as metaphors of humanity echo in these formulations.

Thus I believe that the two attitudes represent the basic duality important for Miłosz's views and, sometimes, even present in his own writings. The metaphorical "two poets" vividly present in the letters, essays and poems by Miłosz cannot be simply called "civilized" and "barbarian," but certainly the attitude to civilization created by so-called human beings in the 20th and 21st centuries is the key factor in Miłosz's literary and human judgments. More examples could be given: Różewicz's and Jeffers' side could be supplemented by the even more horrible Larkin, "reducing human condition to naked bones" (Fraszcek 641), as Miłosz put it in a letter to a Polish poet and translator Stanisław Barańczak (and not only there; see p. 114 above). Międzyrzecki's side could be enriched, *toutes proportions gardées*, by Seamus Heaney, or Josif Brodski. Brodski could even serve as a figure of metamorphosis since he transformed in Miłosz's plain

¹⁷ As Soldofsky puts it, Jeffers' error, according to Miłosz, was his privileging "nature over civilization." (187)

view from an “arrogant barbarian” into a “warm, humane man of culture” (Franaszek 713) as Miłosz reported to Giedroyć, the chief editor of Polish emigrant literary magazine *Kultura*. Joking aside, it is almost self-evident that those who are able to balance goodness and evil, also within themselves, who have enough integrity to support human beings both by their writing and by their personal attitude and virtues are always given priority by Miłosz. In this light it may become clearer why Miłosz once valued Międzyrzecki more than Różewicz. Even though the choice seems to have been so subjective and biased at first, there might have been some deeper conviction behind it.

Różewicz and Jeffers may be called barbarian poets in the sense that they are not civilized enough to come to terms with civilization. If poetry is a “leap of a barbarian who felt God,” as Julian Tuwim famously expressed it, both Różewicz and Jeffers are barbarians who manage to perform their leaps despite God, into fine pure Nature. Such poets enable us to see the other (“material,” “inhuman,” “nihilistic”) side of poetry. It also seems that they enabled Miłosz to see another side of his own poetry, which was never really free from harsh bitterness, profound anger or tricky irony as *Two Poems* set together by the poet himself demonstrate. In his own introduction to “Conversation with Jeanne” and “A Poem for the End of the Century” Miłosz writes:

I alone know that the assent to the world in the first poem masks much bitterness and that its serenity is perhaps more ironic than it seems. And the disagreement with the world in the second results from anger which is a stronger stimulus than an invitation to a philosophical dispute. But let it be, the two poems taken together testify to contradictions, since the opinions voiced in one and the other are equally mine. (Miłosz, 2003: 542)

The ending of the first poem could belong to Jeffers (“The sea, as today, will breathe from its depths / Growing small, I disappear in the immense, more and more free”); the language that is “not for people” from the second—to Różewicz (see Miłosz, 2003: 543-547).

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Summary

Miłosz's recently discovered letters to Paul Engle, the director of The Iowa Writing Program at the University of Iowa, give an impulse to a more comprehensive discussion on Miłosz's literary tastes and literary opinions expressed both in his private and public writings. Having analyzed the content of the letters, in particular those promoting Artur Międzyrzecki's candidature for the IWP and thus favoring him above other Polish poets, including Tadeusz Różewicz, the authoress discusses Miłosz's literary relationships with Różewicz and his attitude to Robinson Jeffers, mentioned together with Różewicz as examples of "atheist despair" in a recently published letter to Jan Błoński. It seems clear that Miłosz preferred poets of culture to those who were "nihilistic" or "barbarian," even if, as the authoress emphasizes, they were precisely the poets with whom he conducted a lifelong literary dialogue. Although favoring Międzyrzecki seems to have been simply biased, and even if it was most of all motivated by a wish to help a friend

in need, it might have also been generated by strong opinions of what poetry is and what it should be according to the author of *The Captive Mind*.

Key words: Polish and world poetry, Iowa Writing Program, Czesław Miłosz, Artur Międzyrzecki, Ernest Bryll, Tadeusz Różewicz, Robinson Jeffers

„Dwaj poeci” w nieznanach listach i innych dziełach Czesława Miłosza

Streszczenie

Ostatnio odnalezione listy Miłosza do Paula Engle’a, dyrektora Iowa Writing Program przy uniwersytecie w Iowa, są punktem wyjścia szerszej dyskusji na temat gustów literackich Miłosza i jego opinii wyrażonych zarówno w pismach prywatnych, jak i dziełach publicznych. Przeanalizowawszy zawartość listów – szczególnie promowanie kandydatury Artura Międzyrzeckiego do udziału w IWP, co oznaczało faworyzowanie go ponad innych polskich poetów, w tym Tadeusza Różewicza – autorka omawia literackie związki Miłosza i Różewicza oraz postawę Miłosza wobec Robinsona Jeffersa, wymienionego wraz z Różewiczem jako przykład „ateistycznej rozpacz” w ostatnio opublikowanym liście do Jana Błońskiego. Wydaje się oczywiste, że Miłosz cenił poetów kultury bardziej niż tych zwanych „nihilistami” czy „barbarzyńcami”, nawet jeśli, co podkreśla autorka, byli to ci poeci, z którymi toczył trwający całe życie dialog. Chociaż na pierwszy rzut oka faworyzowanie Międzyrzeckiego wydaje się po prostu stronnicze, i nawet jeśli było ono przede wszystkim motywowane chęcią pomocy przyjacielowi w potrzebie, mogło być także spowodowane zdecydowanymi opiniami o tym, czym jest i czym powinna być poezja według autora *Zniewolonego umysłu*.

Słowa kluczowe: Polska i światowa poezja, program pisarski w Iowa, Czesław Miłosz, Artur Międzyrzecki, Ernest Bryll, Tadeusz Różewicz, Robinson Jeffers

III

Translation Studies:
The “Barbaric” and the “Civilized” across Cultures

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**Recording an Oral Message.
Jerzy Ficowski and Papusza's Poetic Project
in the Postcolonial Perspective**

Gypsiness, the romance of the forest wanderers' lifestyle, has been made familiar to us from beautiful, but often misleading, works of poetry from around the world. Now for the first time it speaks for itself and about itself with its own voice. Jerzy Ficowski (Papusza, 1956: 23)

I

Jerzy Ficowski arrived in a Polish Roma (Gypsy) camp of 16 families in the area of Stargard Szczeciński in August 1949. One of these families was that of Dionizy Dyśko Wajs and his wife, Bronisława Wajs, known as “Papusza” within the Roma community. Upon his arrival, Ficowski did not expect that his Romani adventure would lead to discovering Papusza, a poet, whose story and works were to move the hearts and minds of literature lovers. He also did not expect that his discovery would bear tragic consequences for the poet and would reveal a prominent disparity between the two cultures. This disparity stemmed from the Roma requirement of secrecy and mystery, which, when disregarded, was sanctioned by exclusion from the community. Finally, Ficowski did not presume that his translation work would be carefully examined by cultural studies seeking hidden traces of oral messages in the texts he recorded. The poetic project which involved the works of Bronisława Wajs-Papusza, ac-

ording to Jerzy Ficowski, revealed culturally untranslatable elements. Therefore, this analysis is inspired by postcolonial translation strategies. The purpose of these reflections is—apart from indicating major translation aporia in Papusza’s poetry—to elucidate the cultural conditioning of the meeting of the two poets which influenced the shape of the texts and continues to stir up controversy and curiosity.

Jerzy Ficowski, a literary scholar, writer and artist, claimed that he became interested in the fate of Gypsies “out of necessity”—while looking for a refuge from the Security Office which was chasing him in the late 1940s. In 1949, an old friend Edward Czarnecki (also known as “Poruczniko” during his time as a Polish Army officer) wrote to him with an anthropological challenge to join the camp and Ficowski accepted his proposal. Poruczniko allowed the Wajs family to set up a camp on his property, and later on, during the occupation wandered with them around Wołyń. After the war, he found them in Western Pomerania¹ and introduced Ficowski to them as his nephew, a poet from Warsaw, collecting records about the life of Roma people during. “The moment of arrival,” commotion and confusion in the camp connected with the arrival of the “gentleman from Warsaw” was described by Edward Dębicki, a nephew of Papusza:

The rumour that a Great Master [sic!—EK] from Warsaw, a poet and a writer, arrived, caused immense agitation in the camp. Dionizy Wajs (in Romani called Dysko)—being the oldest of the kin—held a council meeting with his compatriots warning them against “saying any foolish things!” (qtd. in Sommer 549)

There is no definite record as to who introduced the 39- or 41-year wife of Dionizy Wajs, Papusza to Jerzy Ficowski. According to Dębicki it was Dionizy’s brother, Toniu Wajs:

“Great Master”—Toniu addressed the Guest—“we also have a poet in our camp. She is the wife of my brother Dysiek. Mister! She composes songs so beautifully from the top of her head that the world seems too small for them!” (qtd. in Sommer 551)

¹ I am basing on the record of Edward Dębicki, an artistic manager of “Terno” group with whom Ficowski was friends (Ficowski 550-552).

² Mary Luise Pratt emphasizes that in a travel novel this is a crucial foothold of the post-colonial deconstruction of a text (Pratt 118).

Magdalena Machowska, the author of the first monograph devoted to Papusza, quotes a fragment of the report by Elżbieta Dziwisz, in which a Roma boy tells Jerzy Ficowski about the poet:

Ficowski was sitting in front of his tent and talking to a teenage boy: “My aunt Papusza writes songs”—the boy said. “It is sirens that compose songs and people hear them and sing”—Papusza said. (qtd. in Machowska 51)

Throughout the acquaintance between Ficowski and Papusza, the author of Romani songs had some reservations about calling them “poetry” and herself being dubbed a “poet.” Although she finally relented and agreed to write them down and send them to the address of the “gentleman from Warsaw,” she emphasized many times that she sang for herself (Ficowski 228) and that her texts were unsuitable for the record. In one of the letters to Ficowski, recalled by the writer in *Demony cudzego strachu*, she convinced:

I sing a song like a tale to a child, and you make me an errant poet like I was a Don Quixote; although Don Quixote was insane he struggled within and now they write books about him. And You admit that I am proud, I don't know why. Indeed I appreciate poetry, even very much appreciate it, but not my own, someone else's. I appreciate my own poetry like a soap bubble. . . . And You will write to Mister Tuwim truth that I am a fairy not a poet. **And I will write that You told me how to write poems.** Please, leave these silly poems of mine, because it is ridiculous [highlighted by EK]. (qtd. in Ficowski 247)

Although neglected by the first commentators of Papusza's poetry, namely: Julian Tuwim, Wisława Szymborska and Julian Przyboś, these circumstances rivet the attention of today's readers. “The first aware Gypsy poet” (Ficowski 209)—as her “discoverer” calls her—was actually interested in education and learning to read and write, despite her parents' protests. She asked “children returning from school,”³ and a Jewish woman living in the neighbourhood to help her. Although she honed her literacy skills reading newspapers and books borrowed from the library, she never mastered writing. She vividly remembered meeting a non-Roma who praised a little Gypsy for being able to read and tell fortunes. Magdalena Machowska indicated this story as an important

³ I am basing of fragments of Papusza's dairy deposited in Ethnographic Museum in Tarnow, and published firstly in the book by Magdalena Machowska (Machowska 34).

element of the autobiographic legend, in which Papusza strengthened herself in the conviction that she followed the right path. However, Papusza was not able to record her poetry herself in the form in which it later appeared in print. Her translator, editor and co-author was the “gentleman from Warsaw” (Machowska 34).

Jerzy Ficowski translated and published several dozen of Papusza’s poems, most of which were written after 1950. This year was a breakthrough for the Wajs camp and for other Romani families in Poland. The state’s action of settling the Roma people and making them a productive part of society was about to be launched. This program would eventually lead to the removal of the last Roma camp in the 1980s. Following the orders of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration of the Republic of Poland, the Wajs family started looking for a place to settle down. In December of the same year, the monthly *Problemy* published an interview of Julian Tuwim by Jerzy Ficowski. Tuwim had exchanged a few letters with Papusza and sympathized with her. He encouraged her to write poems and supported her in difficult moments. In turn, Papusza dedicated the poetic autobiography entitled: “Cygańska pieśń z głowy Papuszy ułożona” to Tuwim and suffered a nervous breakdown when she found out about his death. Because Tuwim was interested in Romani themes, he helped Ficowski to collect materials for his monograph and decided to address the issue of Gypsy camps in the paper edited by Ficowski. The interview’s publishing marked the beginning of the conflict between Papusza and the Romani community which accused her of breaking the Romani code of conduct and led to her wandering together with her old husband and step-son in search of care and support. The situation was made worse by the publication of Jerzy Ficowski’s monograph entitled *Cyganie polscy* in 1953, which contained a detailed description of Romani customs and a Romani-Polish dictionary. Machowska wrote that Papusza was supposed to be brought to the Romani court for breaking the code but her “constantly deteriorating health condition protected her” (Machowska 200).

Those “mysteries” about which Ficowski supposedly questioned Papusza and other Roma people about refer mostly to the code of honor, or *romanipen*, which defines the cultural sphere of defilements. Many books have been written on the subject since the research conducted by Ficowski. These subsequent books have usually been accepted with reluctance by the orthodox part of the

Roma community. The biggest offences against *romanipen* are actions such as killing or betrayal of another Rom, a marriage with a non-Rom and publicising Romani language (Mróz and Mirga; Kowarska; Bartosz). Papusza was accused of the last of those offences, and of the betrayal of rules and rituals related to them. The loyalty conflict of Papusza may have been one of the reasons for her later mental breakdown.⁴

After many years, Ficowski emphasized that pressing the charges of betrayal against Papusza was unjust. He quoted as evidence the answer, which the poet gave to his question about those “mysterious issues,” recorded by him. She was to say as follows:

This is wonderful that You are interested in Romani Codes. And me, a genuine Gypsy, flesh and blood, I do not get into it and I am not interested in it. Mister, [sic!] on one hand it is wrong that I am so indifferent to it. To tell the truth, this whole Szero Rom and Jonkaro, are all Romani Academy, the University. It makes me laugh, but I have to admit that the life of Roma people would be much worse without it. (qtd. in Ficowski 230)

The translator sketched a portrait of a woman who did not match her cultural surroundings and had thus been unhappy for many years and was thereby destined for the infamy awaiting her: “Her distinction and exceptionality were so significant that she had to arouse almost instinctive anxiety among her compatriots, and their natural suspiciousness led to unstoppable accusative fantasizing” (Ficowski 209). Then, it was the violation of rules by the ethnologist (his right and duty towards the majority group is to lead possibly exact observation and publicizing its effects), but the individual character of the poet and inherent cultural model of the Romani community that led to her exclusion. Ficowski emphasized the confession made by the poet at one time: “If I had not learned to write and read, I silly, would be happy now” (Ficowski 213). It was her will to learn writing and her oversensitivity, typical for a poet, that led her to disaster. Papusza in his narration is not so much a poet but *signum temporis*: her example shows that Romani community was not ready for openness and

⁴ Magdalena Machowska writes: “Paradoxically, it seems that this culture exceeded European one as regards isolation of the insane, which considered insanity as part of human personality and a natural phenomenon . . .” (184).

changes yet. He looks for confirmation of his theory about “inherent Gypsy features” in the words of Papusza:

She said—“I never deny my own kin neither my being wild because I will never shake it off, because it must be like that till I die, for if I lost my wildness I think I would not be a Gypsy anymore, and I would not tell the fortune, but for our wildness.” So—wildness, as an inborn and indispensable feature. (Ficowski 222)

After many years, Ficowski apologized to Papusza and accepted the responsibility for her tragedy. In her letter from 1979, Papusza forgave him the consequences which she had to bear after he published the above mentioned interview and *Cyganów polskich*:

. . . myśmy pana Bardzo lubieli i mężem i dzis widze pana i wszystkich jasnych panuw w Warszawie i ja niegdy pana niezapomnię proszę wieżec mi choc pan duzo czegoś [sentence crossed out] dla mnie z działań dobrego i niedobrego Bożeś pan wszystko zmiszał zło i dobro pot moj Adres wszystkie teksty pan pozbiarał otroznnych warstw i wlepił pan wmoją książeczkę. ilie ja ucierpiałam ot niemodrech cyganów. . . . Bardziej pan niech się pan niepszejmoje to wszystko pszeszło proszę pana . . . ⁵ (qtd. in Machowska 216-217)

II

Considering the situation of Ficowski as an ethnologist in comparison with other researchers of “primeval communities,” we notice that his narration is not rich in drama and full of the frustrating twists and turns of culture shock which can be seen in the work of Bronisław Malinowski when he described his adventures in the Trobriand Islands (cf. Tokarska-Bakir). The writer is composed—sometimes amused sometimes surprised—but he does not allow himself violent emotions. However, these adventures with “barbarians” seem

⁵ Papusza uses non-standard Polish. The following translation seeks to be accurate, but it does not fully express her language: “We liked you very much and husband and I see you and all light men in Warsaw and I will never forget you believe me although you have done many good and evil things for me. Because you have mixed the good and the evil under my address you have collected all my texts from many levels and put in my little book. I’ve suffered so much from silly gypsies . . . do not mind it any more it is all gone, sir . . .”

to be quite similar. Maria Tymoczko, a researcher of postcolonial translations, advises caution about the metaphors used by translators in the context of literary texts which were created among “peoples that experienced colonialism” (Tymoczko 20). Ficowski succumbs to colonial metaphor, casting himself as an explorer-observer and pioneer in the Romani *terra incognita*. In this role, he still wants very much to present the Roma in a possibly intact manner, undisturbed by subjectivism. I assume this intention includes the whole poetic project by Papusza, involving not only the poetry by Bronisława Wajs, but also the legend of the “first Romani poet” which surrounds her and the observations that Ficowski makes when meeting the Wajs. The “stranger” in the camp notices, for instance, that learning about the Romani culture was for him like “exploring unknown tribes from South American jungle” (Ficowski 8). He uses a metaphor of a “noble barbarian” when writing about the “childlike manner” of Papusza (Papusza, 1956: 21), he mentions her “emotional inclinations.” The picture of a poet who crafts her texts, makes corrections and deletes some parts of the text is on the opposite end. Papusza is not capable of crafting her poetry in this way because she is the first (with the help of the translator but perhaps against her will) to overcome the oral paradigm of the Romani songs.

Ficowski is familiar with the temptation described in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* to take power over the community whose rules and language he learned. Despite this awareness, Ficowski does not write about it (like Marlowe) in the perspective of the struggle that he experiences with himself. He feels proud of the honours which he received from the Roma and feels the responsibility which rests on him.⁶ For some time, he thinks about choosing a form which he could use to record his discoveries although finally he acknowledges that ethical issues leave him no choice. In his conversation with Malwina Wapińska he remarks that, despite his poetic passion, he would like to create a documentary:

I was gathering materials, putting them in order and interpreting them and so the books were created which have nothing to do with literary texts. I considered it my duty to convey the knowledge about Roma people in this very form. A genre which would balance between literary fiction and documentary would always

⁶ “I boast myself about being acclaimed a Gypsy king by my people, romano thagar. . . . It obliges.” (Ficowski 22-23)

raise doubts as regards which of it is true and which was glamorized and added. (qtd. in Sommer 755)

Following Maria Tymoczko's typology, one may assume that Ficowski had a choice between a postcolonial text and a translation. He chose the latter. The first three chapters of the novel entitled *Wygaste ogniska* will always remain an unfinished fragment (they appeared in a fragment of the German anthology *Zigeunergeschichte*). The writer commented his decision as follows:

I had to give it up. Since it turned out that there was an empty spot in Polish ethnography records and there was an opportunity to fill it in. In the 1950s in the middle of Europe I discovered nooks and crannies of realms, customs, beliefs and exotic language which none of my compatriots had looked into for five hundred years—since swarthy newcomers from India arrived in our land, since Romani Ganges has flown through Mazowsze! (Ficowski 11)

Ficowski realised that by recording the Romani customs he would break the Romani taboo. However, he took on the role of the ethnographer whose aim was to collect as much information about Roma life as possible and publicize it—even at the expense of betrayal and profanation. Recalling the emotions which he experienced during his first encounter with the Wajs camp, he writes:

I already knew a lot about their customs and laws of other Roma people, I was to find out much more from others later on. It required endeavours and evasions on my side, but most of all intimacy without which one cannot see anything and find out anything. Anyway, being endowed so kindly with the privileges of a visitor I could not and I did not want to be too inquisitive. (Ficowski 230)

“I preferred not to go deeper into the secrets of writing—he records, reminiscing the conversation in which the Roma asked him about the details of his profession—being afraid that nothing good will result for them from it” (Ficowski 18). And earlier: “Gypsies do not tolerate being described, they assume it may lead to betraying their secrets” (ibid.).

III

But did Ficowski remain loyal not only as an ethnologist, but also as a translator? Already in the 1960s, the commentators indicated that this is questionable (cf. Waśkiewicz). Jerzy Ficowski considered himself as a diligent translator, aware of the limitations of his activity and inclined to reflect on himself. In his interview with Magdalena Lebecka he spoke about the dilemmas of translation, but he also claimed that he did not need to know the language very well to do the translation and also (in a postmodern manner) that the translation is not subsidiary to the original text:

When I translate poetry I always have an impression of missing out on something, so I am obliged to provide certain equivalents—such as putting a flower in an empty place because I had to delete one in another. Basically, poetry is impossible to translate. And if someone creates the work which is better than the original . . . let him be blessed. And I see such aberration as rightful. However, usually something is lost. Basing on my own experience, I claim that it is not necessary to know the language you are translating from, but it is necessary to have someone next to you who knows this language thoroughly. (qtd. in Sommer 709)

The author would probably disagree with the thesis by Gayatri Spivak that the measure of translation quality is the ability to speak “of intimate matters in the language of the original” (Spivak 404). However, the philological conscientiousness of the author cannot be denied. The evidence for this conscientiousness may be found in the edition of *Pieśni Papuszy* from 1956 including “poetic translations,” literary translations and original texts, preceded by an introduction and supplemented with an extensive cultural and fact-collecting commentary. However, the translator was convinced that he translates relatively easy poetry, additionally treating it as a “flagship” of Romani artistic creation, although, according to the author, it was dominated by an individual and almost intimate character. Paradoxically, this “simplicity” is often, as we will see below, the effect of covering intercultural incompatibilities, papering over and simplifying figurativeness of the Roma idioms and metaphors. Lending a hand to Papusza and other translated subalterns, Gayatri Spivak argues that an interesting literary text does not have to follow the voice of majority, even if this is an excluded majority (Spivak 405). Ficowski and the reality of the

epoch decided otherwise. It is not the point to reproach Ficowski nowadays for negligence and translatory nonchalance. The model of poetry which the author wanted to apply to present Papisza's writing to non-Roma readers was very different from the native context of its creation. Unfortunate *falorykta* (folk issues) which brought the poet infamy in the Roma community were a direct result of this "misreading" (Ficowski 208). Accusing Ficowski of a lack of postcolonial sensitivity would be anachronistic. However, it is worth pointing out the basic "flaws" that his translations reveal when compared with original texts. This was conducted, to a large extent, by Magdalena Machowska.⁷ In this paper, I will try to particularize certain issues and illustrate them with examples.

Enumerating the differences between postcolonial novel and translation, Maria Tymoczko emphasizes that the author has a wider choice, "it is easier to keep the text balanced, to manage the information load, and to avoid mystifying or repelling elements of the receiving audience with a different cultural framework" (Tymoczko 21). The features of oral creation were important qualities of Papisza's poetry. As a literary translator, Jerzy Ficowski made it a point to put it in a "written" form, "devoid of music." In order to settle a classic dispute between the cultural content, foreign for the public, and overburdening the text with an excessive number of commentaries, Ficowski chose the third option. He blurred many distinctive qualities of oral Romani works that could be difficult to receive and created a collage of incompatible cultural orders based on stereotypes with a metatextual commentary. Had the Romani culture enjoyed higher esteem, probably its mentor (Tymoczko writes about "patrons") could have allowed the text to be less transparent.

Contemporary translation schools appreciate coarseness and lack of transparency of intercultural translation, and warn the translator against the practice of making the text more culturally "familiar" (Jarniewicz 34). Thus, the author's idiom of a translator should be examined in terms of interpretation. The rhetorical character of speech is called translation aporia (Spivak 398).

⁷ As Machowska writes: "Papisza's works should be situated in between the oral and the written. The oral character is supported by many distinctive features such as realism of this poetry, using rhetorical questions which are a great way to achieve the effect of rhythm using exclamation marks, imperatives and listing which make the work more dynamic, which leads to the impression of redundancy" (Machowska 227).

This postmodernist voice in defence of the rights of translation is limited by the particular conditioning of postcolonial literature. In this case, the relations of incompatibility between the discourses and the responsibility of the dominating (colonizer) for the voice of the dominated (colonized, subordinated, excluded) become crucially important. In *Demony cudzego strachu* we find a fragment in which Ficowski may seem very close to contemporary theories of translation, enunciating the very essence of understanding someone else's text in a conversation with a Romani inhabitant of the forest:

He said—"Can you hear Mister writer? This is music. Romani women went to the village, instruments hidden in the cabs and there is music, still . . . Did You write down the lyrics of our songs? . . ."

—"Yes, a bit but I do not quite understand it."

—"You do not have to understand. Do You understand these birds? You take such music, both Romani and bird's, within yourself and You do not need to understand it fully. I am telling You the truth." (Ficowski 15)

The work of Jerzy Ficowski cannot be assessed in the categories of modernist translation, not solely because of the incompatibility of the two discourses: Romani and Polish, caused by the prolonged social exclusion of the Roma. An equally important factor is the relation between the oral character of the Romani culture and the "dictatorship of writing," together with the visual character of European poetry since the times of Mallarmé. Finally, there is also the problem of reception modes.

Why did the writer ignore the advice of a Rom and blurred the idiom of Papisza in her texts, simultaneously leaving the traces of Papisza-emancipationist, which led to her personal tragedy? To answer this question, we must first examine the issue of the incompatibility of the reception modes. The poet had only one answer to the question: Who did Papisza create for?—for herself. Jerzy Ficowski reminisces the beginning of his acquaintance with the poet as follows:

[Papisza] said . . . later on . . . that she is singing to herself and she does not write down these poetic songs. I started to convince her to try to record them on paper and send to me by post. (Ficowski 228)

This is not a case of a post-romantic "outsider," so characteristic for literary bohemians, *nomen omen*, but rather a conviction about the incompatibility of

reception modes of her poetry in Polish and Romani community, which was so many times uttered by the poet. Making her debut on the publishing market, becoming a member of the Polish Writers' Union, taking part in a complex literary life at the onset of the Republic of Poland, Papusza began to create for a recipient educated in the culture of a written word, familiar with written poetry and enthusiasts of seemingly exotic folk culture.⁸ The reception modes relevant to this poetry seem to differ substantially in the original, postcolonial context of its functioning. In the "natural" Romani environment, songs had expressive and aesthetic style, whereas the new non-Romani reception was paradoxically dominated by an instrumental mode. Thus, the translation by Ficowski requires an analysis which would take into consideration the discourse incompatibility between cultural circles in which the text functions. Such a "suspicious" perspective allows indicating what was "lost in translation" and why it had to happen this way.

Another problem concerns the oral character of Papusza's poetry. Despite being aware of this quality, Ficowski wrote in the introduction to *Lesie, ojczyzna mój* in 1990 in the spirit of "modernisation discourse" (cf. Chakrabarty, 2007):

The possibility to write them down had its drawbacks, it caused that the first version of the poem was at the same time the last one, because Papusza does not use any corrections or deletions in her manuscripts. Hence the tedious parts, erroneous repetitions, verbosity, places which are "empty" as regards the content or artistic value . . . So the translator took on the responsibility for the selection of verses. He omitted in the translation what he considered an irrelevant burden and made his own choices. (qtd. in Papusza, 1990: 19)

The translator shook off this "unnecessary burden" by applying a characteristic range of measures which gave the text qualities of a "poem" or metrical language which were called by Jerzy Jarniewicz a stereotype of poetry (Jarniewicz 34-51). In some instances, the translator changed the order of a noun and a modifier defining it. In the translation of the poem "Na stepie zabyty," Ficowski has written "the wind sways grass green" although in original

⁸ Such evidence of a reception mode can be found in the opinions of Wisława Szymborska and Julian Przyboś (cf. Machowska 222, Sommer 383-390), J. Ficowski, *Wstęp* (in Papusza, 1990: 19).

we can read: “the wind sways green grass” (85).⁹ Using archaic and dialectal forms is a measure applied by the translator: in “Pieśń cygańska z Papuszy głowy ułożona.” In this instance, Ficowski translates “and sliver moon, / father of fathers from Indyja” (50) instead of “father of fathers from India.” This is also an example of the Romani mimicry. In the commentary to *Pieśni Papuszy* we read that Papusza found out about the presumed genealogy of the Roma not from her companions but from non-Roma people (Papusza, 1956: 151). In yet another work, Ficowski uses dialectal forms in the title “Jest zima bielutka” (“White winter is here”) we read “Przyszła zima bieluska” (“White winter has come”; 39).

Jarniewicz notices that the most essential thing for poeticizing in translation is to establish a distance between poetic language and everyday language. Ficowski seems to be particularly reluctant about Papusza’s “prose diction” which he is trying to make less colloquial and more elevated. For instance, he translates the title of her poem, “My nie chcemy żadnych bogactw” (“We do not want any riches”) as “Nie pragniemy żadnych bogactw” (“We do not crave any riches”). However, the assumption that the style of the Romani language is similar to Polish (the artistic language *versus* everyday language) is off the mark. Linguistic research demonstrates that the Roma language does not have stylistic variations, which leads to an array of intercultural communicative clashes.¹⁰ A similar intention to “poeticize” lies behind using the shortened forms of possessive pronouns (*me, swel* “my,” “her”): instead of *do mojego ojca staruszka* (“for the old father of mine”), Ficowski writes *do mego ojca staruszka*—“for my old father” (“Na stepie zabity,” 42).

The translator’s interventions go as far as to create new metaphors and semantic shifts. In the literary version of the poem quoted above, “Przyszła zima bieluska,” we find the following tetrastich:

The forest stands like a wise man
And it does not sing songs with winds.

⁹ All the examples come from *Pieśni Papuszy* by Papusza, 1956 and were translated into English by Katarzyna Turska, unless specified otherwise.

¹⁰ According to Eliza Grzelak and Joanna Grzelak-Piaskowska, these clashes arise particularly in connection with the so called “language politeness” demonstrated in the official, or high, variety of Polish language (cf. Grzelak and Grzelak-Piaskowska).

Small fires like stars of the frost
Are reflected in the eyes. (81)

This was poeticized by Jerzy Ficowski by means of an ocularcentric metaphor, one of the key figures of the west European discourse (Kledzik, 2012):

The forest stands like a wise man
And it does not sing songs with winds.
Small fires like tiny stars of frost around
Are reflected in your eye by the forest.

In light of these changes, the fragment from the introduction to the volume *Pieśni Papuszy*, in which the translator asserts that the value of this poetry lies in its freshness “devoid of any imitation” (Papusza, 1956: 15), seems rather paradoxical.

The above mentioned “verbosity,” “tediousness” (Papusza, 1956: 18) and “cliches,”¹¹ stemming from an oral character of this poetry can be found often in invocations to Papusza’s works, such as the poem “Moja noga nie postanie, gdzie niegdys jeździli Cyganie.” In the literary translation we read: *Ja wiem, że temu wy nie wierzycie, / ale proszę was tę pieśń zrozumcie / i wiezcie, że śpiewam prawdziwą pieśń cygańską* (“I know you do not believe it / but I ask you to understand this song / and remember I sing a truly Gypsy song”; 107), whereas in the poetic translation: *Ja wiem, że nie uwierzycie, / ale was proszę – wysłuchajcie tej pieśni / i wiezcie, żem w tej piosence słowa nie skłamała* (“I know you will not believe it / but I ask you—listen to this song / and remember I have not lied a word in this song”; 57). Another example of removing a tautology from the same poem: *mała wieś, nie duża* (“a small village, not big”) Ficowski translates as “tam jest wioska, chodźmy do wsi” (“there is a village over there, let us go to the village”). An additional typical stylistic measure used by the translator is also the “completion” of simple sentences by imposing a syntactic continuity on them so that they seem more complex on paper. Jarniewicz looks for the grounds of such translation measures in a peculiar *horror vacui*. Afraid to leave empty space or use less-than-elaborate phrases, translators face this fear

¹¹ In the introduction to *Pieśni Papuszy* Ficowski wrote about the “drawn-out and empty parts” abandoned by him in translation (Papusza, 1956: 5).

by deciding to opt for the “poetics of excess” (Jarniewicz 52). For example, in the original version of a poem entitled “Piosenka,” we find two verbs “you will recall and think” which Ficowski develops into “You are recalling and starting to think about me” (41). Further on, he translates the original phrase “a fairy tale or truth?” into “was it a fairy tale or truth?” This intriguing “semantic void” of the original verses stems also from the oral qualities of language that is dominated by the informative function.¹² A similar example of “poetics of excess” is a fragment of the work entitled “Patrzę tu, patrzę tam” devoted to the Milky Way. The literary translation is as follows: *ta droga szczęśliwa / prowadzi ludzi / do dobrego życia* (“this happy road / leads people / to good life”; 89), whereas Ficowski expands a poetic image changing the meaning of the original: *oto droga szczęśliwa, bezpieczna, / ona, ta droga daleka, / do szczęścia prowadzi człowieka* (“here is a happy, safe road / this road, distant road / leads people to happiness”; 45).

Metaphors which cannot be rendered by the translator without any detriment to their semantic interaction are particularly interesting from the point of view of intercultural translation. Apart from a descriptive strategy, a method of equivalence is used in translating such metaphors. This usually happens at the expense of their cultural content, as in the fragment of “Pieśń cygańska z Papuszy głowy ułożona” quoted below:

Literary translation:

W lesie wyrosłam jak złoty krzak,
w namiocie cygańskim jak prawdziwy grzyb

Poetic translation:

W lesie jak złoty krzak wyrosłam
w namiocie cygańskim, co miał prawdziwka postać (48)

¹² “Lack of a written form of language causes that the Roma do not have normative of their language, the users of oral language do not feel need of its formalization, also in the case of using a foreign language. Basic informative function assumes that the message must be clear and sufficient. Pragmatism limits not only an artistic function but also simplifies and limits communication techniques of the Roma.” (Grzelak and Grzelak-Piaskowska, 2012)

Ficowski seems to have wanted to hide the negative connotations which might be evoked in non-Roma readers by a vision of “a mushroom growing in a tent,” therefore he replaced it with “a king bolete” calling up the associations with nobility. Simultaneously, he changed the topic of the metaphor from a lyrical “I” to a “Gypsy tent,” destroying its initial meaning. A similar instance in reverse cultural order can be found in the poem “Na stepie zabity.” In the poetic translation, there is a metaphor of “a wandering heart,” a metaphor deeply-rooted in the history of Polish literature, whereas in the original text we find only the phrase: “young heart dies quickly.” Blurring idioms which would give the readers a chance to taste a peculiar figurative manner of the Roma language is observable in the poem “Piosenka”:

Literary translation:

twe ręce podniosą me pieśni
[your hands will elevate my songs]

Poetic translation:

twe ręce moją pieśń odnajdą (41)
[your hands will discover my song]

As we can also see—“elevating songs,” projected by Papusza (or their promotion—as we would say nowadays), was replaced by the translator with “discovering”—this also illustrates how Ficowski perceived his own work with Papusza’s texts. On the other hand, in the poem “Krwawe łązy. Co za Niemców przeszliśmy na Wołyniu 43 i 44 roku,” the metaphor *na ludziach ciało drży, trzęsie się* (“body on people shakes and trembles”; 127) was translated with the use of transmission, which is simpler in reception and almost transparent in terms of poetic means: “people shake and tremble with anxiety.”

Additionally, the beginning of the poem entitled “Ziemio moja, jestem córką twoją,” raises doubts as regards its translation. *Phív miri i vešéngri* means literary *ziemio moja i lasów* (“the land of mine and of forests,” not as Ficowski translates *ziemio moja i leśna* (“my and forest land”; 60). This apostrophe hides a metaphor crucial for the Romani outlook on the world about sharing the land with the element of nature. As it is commonly known, the Roma do not construct their identity *vis-à-vis* a category of “place” as in the perception of

settled people (sociology calls them “service nomads” [Mróz and Mirga 29ff.]). They cherish a belief that the world is governed by natural forces which are responsible for measuring out justice. Therefore, the “land” belongs simultaneously to Papusza (lyrical subject) and to the forest as an embodiment of this natural realm of reality.

Another measure associated with the translation of figurative words is deleting repetitions, which also results in deleting the oral character of the poetry. For example, in a fragment of “Leśna pieśń” the word “stone” (rom. *barâ*), repeated several times, was removed.

Literary translation:

A moje góry kamienne
i koło wody kamienie
droższe niż drogie kamienie,
które robią światła

Poetic translation:

A moje kamienne góry
i głazy nad strumieniem
droższe są, gdy w blasku stoją,
niż drogie kamienie (37)

In the same poem, Ficowski also omits other consonances, including internal rhymes:

Original:

čy trošalé čy bokhałé
chtén i khełén, po veš lén
[czy spragnione, czy głodne
skaczą i tańczą, bo las je]

Translation:

choć spragnione i o głodzie
skaczą i tańczą pięknie
las je tego uczył co dzień. (38)

Often, we find in Papisza's poetry four or five grammatical rhymes at the end of consecutive verses. Ficowski usually limits them to two verses, uses even rhymes, whereas in original texts there are often enclosing rhymes. To explain this measure he writes: ". . . each kind of prose in this language, i.e. Gypsy everyday language, is inadvertently rhymed, dotted with consonances which do not stem from any decorative poetry design" (qtd. in Papisza, 1990: 17).

The translator cannot also preserve euphonic effects, such as in the work "Przyszła zima bieluška":

Original:

Jaf ki mé, me ki tú
[Chodź do mnie, ja do ciebie]

Translation:

Wyjdę do ciebie, przyjdź do mojej ręki. (40)

Sometimes he seems to resign from rhyme in the translated text for the sake of "visual" measures, as in "Patrzę tu, patrzę tam":

Original:

Dikháv dáj, dikháv dój –
saró zdrál, svéto sál.
[Patrzę tu, patrzę tam –
wszystko drży, świat śmieje się]

Translation:

Patrzę tu, patrzę tam –
wszystko się chwieje. (45)

Interestingly, the translator often makes his translations rhythmical by introducing a prosodic metre, as if succumbing to a stereotype of folk poetry. The example of the imposed trochaic tetrameter in the translation of "Nie pragniemy żadnych bogactw," a poem with original intonation-syntactic construction, is shown below:

Literary translation:

My nie chcemy żadnych bogactw
my chcemy żyć
deszcz wiatr i łzy –
to są cygańskie szczęścia
Bo w tym się urodziła,
serce krwią zaszło,
prawdziwa cygańszczyzna.

Poetic translation:

Nie pragniemy żadnych bogactw,
chcemy żyć na naszych drogach
deszcze, wichry i płkanie –
oto są szczęścia nasze, Cyganie
Bo w tym wszystkim się zrodziła
i krwią serce napełniła
cygańszczyzna nasza szczerą
co łzami i śmiechem wzbiera. (46)

In the ethnological narrations included in the work *Demony cudzego strachu*, the author also allows himself to introduce some stylistic measures. When recollecting events that happened several decades earlier, he quotes the Roma conversations, he preserves the convention of a dialogue and adapts the text to a folk tale style, using archaic language and inversion:

“Oj, to, to, to!” – przytaknęli brodacze z entuzjazmem – “trzeba umieć, nie kaźden by potrafił! Bo i dobrze się składa, żeśmy na pana pisarza trafili, od razu coś nas tknęło, jak kum nam powiedział, że pan pisze książki . . .”¹³ (Ficowski 19)

Sometimes he incorporates a Romani phrase into text, which gives the story a more exotic undertone. Sometimes he also feigns literary translation in order to achieve the effect of imitation of the Romani language that sounds “incorrect” for a Polish reader. Indeed limited knowledge of the Polish language

¹³ The following translation does not fully express the folk style of the quotation: “Yes, yes, yes—nodded all the bearded men with enthusiasm.—One has to be able [to do it] and not everyone is! It’s just as well, that we came across you, something has touched us at once, when you told us, you were writing books . . .”

is regarded as a main component of the Romani stereotype: *Przepraszam, że się tak wciekawiam we wszystko* (“I apologize for being so **inquisitive** about everything” [highlighted—EK]; Ficowski 19)—says his Romani interlocutor.

After publishing the above-mentioned interview with Tuwim, Ficowski tried to defend himself from the attacks of Gypsies, “who never met him” (Ficowski 24). Although Ficowski resorts to arguments of civilization superiority: “travelling, unwritten fame attributed a lot of hostile intentions to me, but it also enriched my life with threads I had not dreamt of” (Ficowski 24-25), he, too, balances on the edge of irony; “How a treacherous perpetrator could have committed such deeds, he sneaked into Gypsy’s favor, what hostile purpose lies behind his actions?” (Ficowski 25). The construction of the quoted chapter of *Demony* . . . is a peculiar manipulation: although Ficowski realizes what rules of the Romani code he violated, he explains them to more confused readers (for these people even publishing a dictionary of their language must be perceived as a collective threat, as an assault on their most vested interest (cf. Ficowski 26), but he emphasizes that “he feels honored” to be promoted to be included in the catalogue of “villains” of the Romani mythology. He calls the tales about the “Golden King,” created to heal the trauma after betraying the Romani secrets, “not-quite-legends.” This is a part of an ethnological experiment which lasts even when the studied group ceases to evoke sympathy and respect. Even Ficowski’s “excommunication” from the Roma is subject to observation and is explained by him scientifically: “being a visitor from outside I am not touched by moral sanctions” (Ficowski 31); “the not-quite-legends’ tell a lot of truth about Gypsies” (Ficowski 32). Sometimes Jerzy Ficowski very much resembles Bronisław Malinowski, the founder of the premier department of anthropology could also have issued the following warning:

If you research customs of nations that are considered exotic, be patient, do not reveal your trophies too early; show them somewhere far away, in the other hemisphere, and do it at the end of the last adventure, after walking the last path. Then, even if you are followed by sinister tales, they will not be able to deprive you of anything, and will not disturb you in any way: you will have gathered your yield. (Ficowski 33)

IV

Jerzy Ficowski did not manage to escape from the political reality of his time in a Gypsy camp. Ficowski's presence also made a significant impact on the poetic legend of Papusza and left its stamp on her poetry. The beginning of the career of Bronisława Wajs overlaps with the beginning of the changes during which "democracy [was] imposed on the Gypsy people." The Romani poetess became their advocate and hostage—unaware of what the consequences would be and seemingly against her will. Applying postcolonial categories to this situation, we acknowledge that Papusza's poems, maintained in the poetics of social realism, are evidence of the mimicry which makes the colonized use the language of the colonizer/dominating discourse. The colonized twist it and takes it in the brackets of an ironic quotation, thereby deconstructing the model of subordination. Let us take a closer look at the two poems that were recognized by Magdalena Machowska as an example of propaganda lyrics:

Moja pieśń

Dźwięczy dziś żelazo z wielkich hal fabrycznych
Plan musimy wykonać do końca.
Już zbierają zboże z pola kółchoźnicy
W dniu upalnym i jasnym od słońca.

Dłoń od pracy płonie. A serce rozkwita:
Robotniczy kraj rośnie i żyje.
A w innych krainach czarny dziś kapitał

Dusi życie jak śmiertelna żmija.
Ojczyzna jest wielka, bogatą się staje.
Jakże rośnie pośród fabryk jasnych!
Moją pieśń o młodym robotniczym kraju,
Moją pieśń oświetlają jej gwiazdy.¹⁴
(qtd in. Machowska 347)

¹⁴ "My song // Iron clings in huge factory halls / We need to meet our targets / Kolkhozniks gather crops from fields / On a hot day, bright from the sun. // Hand strives for work. And heart grows / Worker's land develops and lives / And in other countries we have capital / It strangles life like a deadly viper. // Fatherland is becoming big and rich. / Oh, how it grows

Na dobrej drodze

Na dobrej jesteśmy drodze,
wielkim panom składamy dzięki,
a największe – Złotej Głowie
naszemu Jerzemu Ficowskiemu,
ojcu cygańskiemu!
On do stolicy nas przywołał.
I ludziom przedstawił dokoła.
Na dobrej jesteśmy drodze,
jak nam rzekli, tak czynimy.
Niech dzieci uczą się w szkołach,
kiedy się już osiedlimy.

Opadnie z nas ciemność
i nieczystość serc.
I żyć będziemy pięknie
jak ludzie.
Ale zapłaczą Cyganie starzy
i dawny czas im się zamarzy –
i lasy, i rzeki,
i góry, i ognie.

Ich stare serca jak kamienie
w lesie wyrosły
i skamieniały.

To niegdysiejsi panowie
do tego ich przyuczyli
i daleko od siebie, daleko
biednych Cyganów moich
do lasów wypędzili.

Aż się cygańskie serca
obróciły w kamień,

among bright factories! / My song about a young workers' country, / My song is brightened
by its stars."

aż nas ludzie nazwali
 złodziejami i psami.¹⁵
 (Papusza, 1990: 46)

The above poems, next to an array of others (e.g. “Aj, Cyganie, co robicie”), could be a proof of Papusza’s personal involvement in the action of enforcing “settlement and productivity,” and her acceptance of the rules of the socialist realism poetics which made surprisingly a good collage with the traditional imagery of Romani songs. The early 1950s, the trying period of the new state’s policy towards the Roma, coincided in the Polish artistic life with a proclamation of socialist realism, which assumed involvement of artists into propaganda for the development of the new state. As a self-taught person from a community of mostly illiterate people—which was expected to oppose the settlement action planned by the authorities of the People’s Poland¹⁶—Papusza was a precious acquisition for the public sphere. Her works (or at least the examples quoted above) justified the oppressive attitude towards the Roma. It cannot be forgotten that this “discovery” also definitely helped Jerzy Ficowski who had been considered politically suspect. As the translator of Papusza’s poetry, the writer realized the rules set by the utilitarian doctrine. After many years, he wrote in the introduction to the volume *Lesie, ojczyzna moja*: “Those were, at least in their declarative parts, her weakest poems . . . the representative of nomads wrote them against herself in order to win favours of the authorities deciding about the fate of Gypsy community in Poland” (Papusza, 1990: 7). And so in both works quoted above there is a collective lyrical subject, which rarely occurs in the other texts by Papusza. In “Moja pieśń” there are few references to the “Gypsy”

¹⁵ “**On a good road** // We are on a good road / we thank great masters / most of all—the Golden Head / our Jerzy Ficowski / Gypsy father! / He called us to the capital city / And introduced to people around / We are on a good road / we do as we have been told / May children learn in schools / when we settle down. // We will shake off the darkness / and impurity of hearts / We will live beautifully / like people / But old Gypsies will cry / and dream about old days / and forests and rivers / and mountains and fires. / Their old hearts like stones / grew in the forest / and turned into stone. // The by-gone masters / taught them to do so / and they banished my poor Gypsies / far far away from them / To the forests. // Until Gypsy hearts / turned into stone. / until people called us / thieves and dogs.”

¹⁶ The action was finally fulfilled by the Act of the Government Presidium no 452/52 from 24 May 1952.

life, only the “stars” indicate the Romani origin of the author, although they are also included in the classic repertoire of socialist realism imagery. The lyrical subject is perfectly integrated with the mono-ethnic work surroundings. In the work “Na dobrej drodze” on the other hand, we find a variety of the elements of propaganda and traditional Romani culture. The “good road” in the title may be considered a metaphor in the context of the nomadic way of life that the Roma led so far. At the beginning of the 1950s, they found themselves, in the opinion of the lyrical subject, on the right road towards settlement. Jerzy Ficowski, their Gypsy father, was supposed to convince the Roma to make this decision, as—according to him—it was only the right thing to do. However, there are two reservations about the planned future idyll of the settled life. First, a longing for wandering (European literary topos *ubi sunt* sounds in the verses referring to it, certainly strengthened by an adverb *niegdysiejsi* “by-gone ones” imposed by the translator—a quote calls up associations with “by-gone snows” from a famous explication of the topos written by François Villon entitled “Ballad of the Ladies of Times Past”) expressed by the beautiful metaphor of stone hearts growing in the woods. Secondly, the aversion of the social majority towards the Roma experienced by Papusza many times, including during her unsuccessful attempt to settle down near Elbląg.

Although based on the rules of the “new art” introduced by the new socialist state, the poem below contains one more important ideological element, which could allow Papusza to appear on the map of Polish poetry as a rightful and declared member of the community:

Ziemia moja, jestem córką twoją

Ziemia moja i leśna,
jestem córką twoją.
Lasy śpiewają, ziemia śpiewa pięknie.
Śpiewanie rzeka i ja składamy
w jedną cygańską piosenkę.

Pójdę ja w góry,
góry wysokie,
włożę spódnicę piękną, bogatą,
uszytą z kwiatów
i zawołam, co sił będę miała –

ziemio polska, czerwona i biała.

.....

Ziemio, twoje pola zżęte
w słońcu złotem się stają
ziemio, gdzie grzmoty
walczą z wichurą
jak pieśń w moim sercu,
gdzie młot uderza w kamień
i ogień wielki się staje.¹⁷
(Papusza, 1990: 62-63)

This poem quickly became one of the most recognizable works by Papusza and has been presented as a political declaration of a poet-representative from the Romani community in Polish school literature coursebooks (cf. Garsztka, Grabowska and Olszowska). It was “the price” that Papusza (and other Roma) had to pay to become a spokeswoman of the reforming Roma people. Contrary to the two poems quoted above, the poem is recounted by a prominent lyrical “I.” The femininity of this “I,” as marked by her classical Romani attributes: a skirt, joyful character and singing, is very important. These are the elements of a stereotypical perception of the Romani women by the mainstream society so as such do not evoke a dissonance but rather prevent the lyrical subject from arousing any cultural controversy among non-Roma people.

V

The work of a translator-ethnologist whose passion and diligence resulted in the first monographs about the Roma living in Poland deserves admiration, reminiscence and repeated reflection. By providing critical commentary on the Romani texts and the translations of Papusza’s songs, I do not intend to depreciate their value. However, this commentary may provoke readers to con-

¹⁷ “Oh, my land I am your daughter / Oh, my and forest land / I am your daughter / Forests sing and the land sings beautifully / The river and me make the singing / one Gypsy song // I will go to the mountains / high mountains / I will put on a beautiful, rich skirt / made of flowers / and call from all my heart / Polish land, red and white / . . . / Oh land, your fields reaped / become gold in the sun / Oh land, where thunders / fight with gale / like the song in my heart / where a hammer hits a stone / and big fire appears.”

sider the reasons of failure of the project which was supposed to “reform” the Roma in the mid-20th century. The biography of Papusza created by Ficowski became an exemplum aiming at changing the traditional Romani lifestyle by emphasizing the heroic and pioneering strive for education, the struggle between “the old” and “the new” reflected in Papusza’s poetry. Further, in the biography, Ficowski expresses the conviction that a settled lifestyle will bring a change for the “better”—a better life for Papusza and her stepson, as well as the social promotion of the Roma. Today, we know that the action of enforcing “settlement” and “productivity” did not bring the desired effects but quite the contrary: it led to the pauperization and accumulation of mechanisms of social seclusion of the Roma. The postcolonial awareness gained in the 21st century by the representatives of mainstream societies should be an inspiration for renewing efforts to open a dialogue with the community of the Romani, who often fear that the integrative projects addressed at them are supposed to lead to their assimilation. Preserving their individuality, although it is a utopian idea to a large extent, is indispensable to fostering future interaction and cooperation with this community. Jerzy Ficowski, with his sensitive insight into Papusza’s works and fate, understood this very well. To my mind, Papusza will become a lonely idiom of the Polish “aware Gypsy poet.”

Trans. Katarzyna Turska

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Summary

The article analyzes Jerzy Ficowski's translations of poems by Papusza—a Romani poet who was "discovered" by the author of *Demons of Somebody Else's Fears* for the non-Romani reading audience in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The comparison of literal and poetical translations leads to the following conclusions: Ficowski's translation consistently blurred the oral characteristics of this poetry, gave it a more dialectal character and eliminated some of its content linked to the Romani culture. The research methodology is based on the latest translation theories and postcolonial studies, which allows the author to extend the reflection to comprise other types of contexts, namely: biographical (Papusza's and Ficowski's meeting and its memory), social (the communist

program of: “productiveness” and its impact on Papusza’s career), and anthropological (the consequences of the alleged “betrayal the secrets of Roma” by Papusza, and Ficowski’s ethical responsibility as anthropologist).

Key words: Romani culture, Polish Roma, translation studies, postcolonial studies, Papusza, Jerzy Ficowski

Zapisać oralność.

Jerzy Ficowski i poetycki projekt Papuszy w optyce postkolonialnej

Streszczenie

Celem tekstu jest analiza translatorskiej pracy Jerzego Ficowskiego na wierszach romskiej poetki, Papuszy, którą autor *Demonów cudzego strachu* „odkrył” dla nieromskiej publiczności na przełomie lat czterdziestych i pięćdziesiątych XX wieku. Porównanie przekładów literalnych i poetyckich prowadzi do wniosków o konsekwentnym zacieraniu oralnego charakteru tej poezji, jej dialektyzowaniu i wymazywaniu treści związanych z kulturą romską. Instrumentarium metodologicznego dostarczają autorce najnowsze teorie przekładu oraz studia postkolonialne, które pozwalają na poszerzenie rozważań o kontekst biograficzny (spotkanie Papuszy z Ficowskim i jego obraz we wspomnieniach obojga poetów), społeczny (komunistyczna akcja „produktywizacji” Romów i jej wpływ na karierę Papuszy) oraz antropologiczny (konsekwencje domniemanej „zdrady tajemnic romskich” przez Papuszę i etyczna odpowiedzialność Ficowskiego-etnologa).

Słowa kluczowe: kultura romska, Polska Roma, studia przekładoznawcze, studia postkolonialne, Papusza, Jerzy Ficowski

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Poems by Frank O'Hara and Allen Ginsberg

Translated by Polish Poets.

The Conflict between “Classicists” and “Barbarians”?

The 1950s and 1960s in the United States were a time when rebellious poetry flourished. The Beat Generation and the New York School, with Allen Ginsberg and Frank O'Hara as their leaders, came to prominence. Boundless creative freedom and iconoclastic visions of the poets who rebelled against literary tradition caused both fractions to be seen as “barbarian” (Cieślak and Pietrych). The long-lasting conflict between the lawmakers of cultural policies and the “barbarians” resulted in the fact that their poems did not reach Europe until the 1970s. In Poland, the poems of the Beat Generation and the New York School were published even later as they were initially prohibited by the communist censorship. Therefore, translators could not translate the works of the “barbarians” as a whole but had to translate individual pieces only.

The breakthrough came as late as 1986 when issue 7 (180) of *Literatura na Świecie*, the so-called “blue issue,” was published. This volume was wholly edited by Piotr Sommer and comprised of two parts. The first one included an extensive selection of Frank O'Hara's poems, his friends' memories, exquisite critical essays on O'Hara's works and also the interview O'Hara gave to Edward Lucie-Smith. The second part was prefaced by the reproductions of paintings by Willem de Koonig, Fairfield Porter and Larry Rivers, and comprised of poems by John Ashbery, whose interpretations were introduced by three critical essays. Quite unexpectedly, the “blue issue” received a warm welcome and

almost instantaneously became a cult issue. Not only did it arouse enthusiasm and delight of the readers but it also became an important inspiration for the authors of the so-called generation of 30-year-olds (the name stems from the fact that the majority of these poets were born in the 1960s; they were also known as the “bruLion generation”) who were the founders of a new poetic trend.

There were a few factors which contributed to the extraordinarily positive response to the publication of the “blue issue,” amongst others the exhaustion with politicization and the realization that the conflict between society and authority will remain unresolved (Cieślak 175). Polish poetry in the 1980s was mainly focused on describing the “solemn tragedy of History”¹ and on “lifting spirits” under the threat of repressions of the communist system. In comparison with this, the poems of American “barbarians” (mainly from the New York School) must have seemed an incredibly refreshing novelty to Polish authors. Dariusz Foks, one of the *bruLion* generation poets, in the interview given to Mariusz Grzebalski, said the following:

It turned out that you could speak differently, more naturally, less solemnly, and not necessarily about all those terribly serious and important matters but about ordinary, down-to-earth stories. It turned out that poetry can be—and is—fulfilled in such matters. (Grzebalski and Foks 1994)

Moreover, in the same year (1986) two volumes of verse which were inspired by the New York School poetry were published: *Czynnik liryczny* (*The Lyrical Factor*) by Piotr Sommer and *Starzy znajomi* (*Old Friends*) by Bohdan Zadura; both authors were also the translators who promoted the New York School poets in Polish culture. These “proto-bruLionists”—or “pre-bruLionists”²—proposed a “new diction” which emphasized the importance of language and consisted in defying the community duties which are required of the individual in socialism. This new diction was very well received by young authors who soon decided to join it (Cieślak 181-182). And hereby, despite the great time lapse (it was 20 years after O’Hara had died), in the mid-1980s

¹ Polish: *wzniosły dramat historii*. A term coined by Anna Legeżyńska and Piotr Śliwiński. (See Legeżyńska and Śliwiński *Poezja polska po 1968 roku. Książka dla nauczycieli, studentów i uczniów*. Warszawa: WSiP, 2000. 77).

² The original Polish version: “proto(pre?)bruLionowcy.”

new “barbarians” were born in Polish poetry. Among them were the poets who published their works in *bruLion* (which was founded by Robert Tekieli also in 1986), for instance: Marcin Baran, Marcin Świetlicki, Miłosz Biedrzycki, Krzysztof Jaworski and Jacek Podsiadło. This “generation of 30-year-olds” decided to take the stand opposing the authors of metaphysical and intellectual poetry.

The *bruLion* authors were first called “barbarians” in 1992 in the title of the anthology of their poetry, *Przyszli barbarzyńcy* (Tryksha 127). This title has a double meaning and can be rendered in English either as *The Barbarians Have Come* or *The Future Barbarians*. Three years later Karol Maliszewski decided to develop this idea of “barbarian” poets by creating an opposition between the “barbarian option” and the “classicistic option” and by naming the main characteristics of both of them.³ The publication of this division raised a heated discussion in magazines such as *Nowy Nurt*, *Kresy* or *Tygodnik Powszechny*. The critics attacked Maliszewski for expressing opinions which were too generalized and which simplified an otherwise complex poetic phenomenon. But in fact, the dispute was about the primacy of one of the options. In response to the abundance of new yet not satisfactory classifications and descriptions of “new” poetry, Krzysztof Varga and Paweł Dunin-Wąsowicz (who preferred the works of “barbarians”) decided to make a dictionary, named *Parnas Bis*, containing their own definitions of issues that intrigued them. But *Parnas Bis* prepared by them turned out to be more of a provocation. The foreword included information that the quotations were chosen tendentiously due to the lack of liking toward certain people described in the dictionary (Dunin-Wąsowicz and Varga 3-5). The definition of “neo-classicists” was full of malicious remarks and statements like “the new classicists are obsession-genic” or “the neo-classicist poetry is characterized by an overuse of surnames like Hölderlin or Vermeer” (Dunin-Wąsowicz and Varga 137).

The conflict between the “classicists” and the “barbarians” was not limited to the dispute about the poetics of both groups. Along with the birth of Polish “late barbarians,” some of the classicists who had already gained fame and respect in the literary circles, felt that their position may be threatened. In order not to let the 30-year-olds into the literary Parnassus, they were determined to

³ See K. Maliszewski, “Nasi klasycyści, nasi barbarzyńcy,” *Nowy Nurt* 19 (1995): 1.

discredit the works of American poets which were their main source of inspiration. It was most visible in Czesław Miłosz's critical declarations. Piotr Sommer in the interview given to Joanna Orska quotes Miłosz's words (first published in the first issue of *NaGłos*):

[American poets] have nothing to write about . . . And to have nothing to write about is the main problem of global poetry . . . The main subject of American poetry is family, mother and father. And usually it is an unhappy family as mother was a monster or father was a monster . . . (Orska 54)

Furthermore, Sommer recalls an interview with Miłosz published in *Literatura na Świecie* around the end of 1980s wherein Miłosz when asked about the popularity of the New York School said that they were not very popular in the USA and he had not heard much about them anyway. Sommer summarizes both statements by saying:

Miłosz—despite his 40-year-long stay in the US—has a relatively modest understanding of what was happening in the American poetry in the second half of the century (ibid.).

At the same time, however, he admits that Miłosz's comments were in that period treated with great respect. Especially since the New York School poets were criticized also by other well-known classicists: Adam Zagajewski (who repeatedly warned Polish poets against the “trivially low caliber” of Frank O'Hara) or Krzysztof Koehler (who was worried that Polish poetry may adapt matters that would contaminate Polish poetic “homeliness” [Orska 54]). In the meantime, the “barbarians” attacked the “classicists” by dedicating harsh, provocative texts to them. Two of the most important ones among them would be two poems by Marcin Świetlicki: “Dla Jana Polkowskiego” (“For Jan Polkowski”) and “Wiersz dla Zbigniewa Herberta (dedykowany Wisławie Szymborskiej)” (“A Poem for Zbigniew Herbert [Dedicated to Wisława Szymborska]”). As Anna Tryksza noted, these poems were not aimed at criticizing individual poets but at poetry which was subjected to discussing national ideas and patriotic myths (Tryksza 124). The following quotations may serve as evidence: *Żyliśmy w cza-*

sach / w których Adam Michnik⁴ / wybornie znał się na poezji (“We lived in the times / when Adam Michnik / perfectly knew poetry” [Świetlicki, 1998: 15]) or *Poezja niewolników żywi się ideą / Idee to wodniste substytuty krwi* (“The poetry of slaves feeds on the idea / Ideas are thin substitutes of blood” [Świetlicki, 2002: 54]). The fact that the new poets were ostentatiously putting the names of classicists and iconic literary characters in an often offensive context (which can be seen for instance in Darek Foks’s poem title “Kopniak w dupę dla Maćka Chełmickiego”—“A Kick in the Butt for Maciek Chełmicki”⁵) only exacerbated the conflict between the groups.

The “late barbarians,” inspired by the poems of the Beat Generation and the New York School, tried to imitate their characteristic poetics. They often used a figure of enumeration, defined by the critics as “I’m doing this and I’m doing that” (Skwara 69). They meticulously described the platitudinous details of their lives, filled their texts with irony and vulgarisms. According to Marta Skwara, who examines the intertextuality in modern Polish poetry, the works of *bruLion* poets can hardly be called an “art of intercultural dialogue.” She says:

Behind the gestures . . . of Polish “barbarians” who made references to O’Hara, there usually was a slightly provocative naivety (so what that I am like him) or a joke that disguised an unhappy consciousness, a virtually tragic mockery (ibid.).

Skwara analyzes “young” modern poetry by authors that did not belong to the *bruLion* generation, from the point of view of intertextuality. She points out that true intertextuality was often made impossible by the impassable language barrier. The dialogue undertaken by these “young” modern authors is in fact a dialogue only with the national tradition—the tradition of translators who adopted and adapted the poems to Polish culture. I decided to refer this no-

⁴ Adam Michnik was one of the main figures of anti-communist opposition in Poland in the years 1968-1989. Many anti-communist poems were dedicated to him at that time, e.g. Zbigniew Herbert’s “Msza za uwięzionych.” (“A mass for the imprisoned”).

⁵ Maciek Chełmicki is the main character in Jerzy Andrzejewski’s novel *Popiół i diament* (*Asbes and Diamonds*). He represents the so-called “generation of Columbuses”: he is a sensitive 24-year-old man who is a member of Armia Krajowa (Home Army). After the end of the war, he fights the communists and is killed by them. This figure, referred to by Foks, is a symbol of a character who lives according to the ideology of classicist poems.

tion of “second-degree intertextuality” (Skwara 81-82) to the works of Polish “barbarians” who, while looking for inspiration, had to refer to texts “marked by translation.” However, the translations were made not only by other “barbarians” but also by “classicists.” I hereby aim at analyzing Polish translations of poems by the Beatniks and poets of the New York School by looking at the works of two of the most prominent representatives of both groups: Allen Ginsberg and Frank O’Hara. The element that binds all the examples together is the person of a “barbarian” translator, Piotr Sommer. It is worth noting that there was yet another variant of Polish o’harism inspired by the works of John Ashbery, whose main representative was Andrzej Sosnowski. However, as Marta Skwara wrote in the aforementioned paper (Skwara 78), Sosnowski—a poet, translator and philologist, who also belonged to an older generation than the other o’harists—can by no means be accepted among the “barbarians” (he is usually assigned to the “neo-avant-garde” circles) and therefore I decided not to include his works in this paper and instead concentrate solely on the first variant.

Chinese whispers

I consider Grzegorz Musiał, Piotr Sommer, Julia Hartwig and Artur Międzyrzecki to be of special interest among the multiple Polish translators of Allen Ginsberg’s poetry. All of them were the participants of the International Writing Program in Iowa City and hence had the opportunity to directly embrace American literature and culture. While they were staying in the USA during their scholarships, they took part in multiple translation sessions during which they had a chance to work with poets from all over the world in order to translate English-language poems into other languages and *vice versa*. That certainly gave them an advantage over other interpreters of American poetry. Also, I have found most interesting the fact that Międzyrzecki, Hartwig as well as Sommer decided to prepare a volume called *Znajomi z tego świata (Friends from this World)*. Whereas Grzegorz Musiał was famous for his fascination with the works of leader of the Beatniks,⁶ the “barbarian” writing style of Ginsberg

⁶ Grzegorz Musiał openly admitted his fascination with Ginsberg’s poetry. The two poets corresponded for years and while Musiał was in the USA, he met Ginsberg in person.

could not have been of much admiration of classicists such as Międzyrzecki or Hartwig. Sommer has mentioned multiple times that he did not think of Ginsberg's poetry as highly as he did of the New York School poetry. In the interview given to the editor of *Świat Literacki* he said:

I do not think that everything in Ginsberg's poetry is bad but there are many things that are exaggerated or failed. Especially in the moments when we see his raw views and opinions. (Basiuk, Piasecki and Szwed-Platerek 70)

However, in the same interview Sommer admitted that he had decided to see to Ginsberg's poetry in order to show the poet's meditative and lyrical side (ibid.).

Even if we accept Sommer's explanation as true (we must not forget that translator's choices are often dictated simply by his/her contract), it would be a true challenge to find a justification of Hartwig's and Międzyrzecki's choices. Both had the chance to get to know Ginsberg personally and also a chance to dislike him: after a fortnight's stay in their residence, the American poet quite unexpectedly insulted his hosts with an impertinent monologue.⁷ The fact that both translators were unconvinced by Ginsberg's writing style and their disappointment in Ginsberg himself may have influenced the way they translated his poems.

While analyzing Julia Hartwig's translations, one could get an impression that she is trying to tame the chaos for which Ginsberg's poems were famous—just as she tried to tame the poet himself.⁸ She eliminates some adjectives, shortens the lines and even interferes with the chronology of events. All these steps can be observed in her translation of "A Strange New Cottage in Berkeley," called "Niezwykły domek w Berkeley." A fragment of the second line in the original version is: ". . . with its rotten old apricots miscellaneous under the leaves" (C). Hartwig translated it as . . . *z ukrytymi w liściach zgniętymi*

He also dedicated his poem "Biesy" ("Demons") to Ginsberg and its first line is a reference to Ginsberg's "Howl."

⁷ This event was described in detail by Julia Hartwig (See Hartwig, *Dziennik amerykański*. Warszawa: PIW, 1980. 95).

⁸ In her *Dziennik amerykański* Hartwig points to the fact that Ginsberg would frequently behave in an immature way. She reminisces for instance that Ginsberg used to mock and laugh at various people while she would try to appease the situation.

morelami (“... with rotten apricots hidden under the leaves” [Z, 31]), leaving out the adjectives “old” and “miscellaneous.” If we take into account the fact that the process of rotting is a direct consequence of the fruits getting old, we can accept that she wanted to eliminate the repetition which she thought was not necessary to maintain the meaning of the verse. The third adjective, “miscellaneous,” which emphasizes the natural diversity of the fruits could have been disposed of due to its obviousness. Hartwig’s care about the form of the poem did, however, perturb the “talkativeness” characteristic to Ginsberg’s poetry but the “minor” changes made by her turned out only to be a prelude to much more radical alterations. In the fifth line, Hartwig omitted the adjective “godly” and translated the phrase “godly extra drops” as *dodatkowa porcja [wody]* (“extra portion [of water]”). This omission distinctly simplified the presented image and limited the possible interpretations: the adjective “godly” certainly adds a more profound, or sacred even, meaning to what the lyrical I is doing. In this line Hartwig also changed the chronology of events. The original line employs two present participles which make it impossible to determine the exact sequence of events: “wet the flowers, playing the sunlit water each to each, returning for extra drops.” Hartwig decided to change the second participle into a personal verb form thus arranging the text chronologically: *podlałem kwiaty nawilżając każdy z osobna nagrzaną w słońcu wodą, wróciłem po dodatkową porcję* (“I wet the flowers, moistening each one individually and returned for extra portion”). This manipulation allowed her to extract some order out of the chaotic descriptions of the lyrical I’s tasks and to build a logical, cause-and-effect sequence. Unfortunately, Ginsberg’s poem, devoid of most of its “coarseness” lost its spontaneous character. The Polish translation of *A Strange New Cottage in Berkeley* was not reminiscent of a poem written in the spirit of unlimited creative freedom, characteristic of the Beat Generation poets.

Hartwig did similar modifications to the poem “221 Syllables at Rocky Mountain Dharma Center.” Her translation is entitled “269 sylab z ośrodka Dharmy w Górach Skalistych” (“269 Syllables at Rocky Mountain Dharma Center”). The change in the number seems unavoidable due to the varying lengths of the poem in various language versions but the extraordinary ease with which the translator removes or replaces words seems rather surprising. The original third stanza, “Moonless thunder—yellow dandelions flash in

fields of rainy grass” (W, 41), was rendered by Hartwig as *Grzmot w ciemną noc—błyskają złotem mlecze wśród mokrej od deszczu trawy* (“A thunder in the dark night—dandelions flash with gold in the grass wet from rain” [Z, 76]). There are three major changes in one stanza. “Moonless thunder” has become a more rhythmic *grzmot w ciemną noc*, dandelions have become gold (perhaps the epithet “yellow” seemed too banal?) and the noun has disappeared altogether thereby changing the image created by Ginsberg. The following stanzas are full of similar changes—in the sixth one, Hartwig changes “dandelion seeds” into *źdźbła dmuchawca* (“dandelion blades”), apparently oblivious to the fact that the blades cannot float over the marsh grass as it was presented in the poem. In the seventh stanza, the translator replaces “a plane roar” with *warkot motoru* (“an engine whirr”). During the analysis of Hartwig’s translation, one cannot help but notice that she intended to “improve” Ginsberg’s poem by modifying the most predictable epithets (like the color of dandelions or the sound of a plane). While making these changes, she probably did not pay attention to the author’s fascination with Buddhist philosophy (which is indicated by the title; Rocky Mountain Dharma Center is a Buddhist centre and a place where the lyrical I speaks from) and the fact that the poem is filled with Buddhist symbolism. If one takes this philosophical context into account, it transpires that the image of a moonless thunder may be associated with the thunder of Dharmata—a loud noise accompanying the Radian Light which appears during the transgression of a dying person into bardo i.e. the intermediate state (*Tybetańska księga umarłych*). This interpretation is supported by the fact that the thunder strikes, according to the lyrical I, in the vicinity of yellow dandelions, making some of their seeds fly away. It is in accordance with the Buddhist philosophy which assumes that every dying being leaves its karma seeds which allow for its rebirth in the next incarnation (ibid.). Dandelion seeds, torn from the rest of the flower, may therefore show the transformation of the lyrical I and his transition (probably only a spiritual one) to a new form. Taking this context into consideration, Hartwig’s interventions such as changing “seeds” into “blades” or removing the word “fields” (in Buddhism, the transformation into the most wanted form is connected with finding appropriate ground) seem to considerably limit the interpretational possibilities. Moreover, by taking care of rhythmization of the text—nonexistent in Ginsberg’s poems—and by

neglecting the stray rhymes occurring in the original stanzas, Hartwig formalized the piece.

Inconsequent form, the abundance of epithets, talkativeness, and obsessive descriptiveness—these are just a few elements of Ginsberg’s poems that Hartwig fought with. Was the poet’s attitude similarly “valiant” towards the poetics of the American author? In order to answer this question I would like to compare her translation of “Transcription of Organ Music” with the translation by Grzegorz Musiał. The difference, in my opinion, is best seen in the second half of the ninth stanza which depicts the lyrical I’s memories of the throes of love. Here are three versions of this reminiscence:

Allen Ginsberg “Transcription of Organ Music”	Trans. Grzegorz Musiał “Transkrypcja organowa” (“Organ Transcription”)	Trans. Julia Hartwig “Transkrypcja muzyki organowej” (“Transcription of Organ Music”)
<p>I remember when I first got laid, H.P. graciously took my cherry, I sat on the docks of Provincetown, age 23, joyful, elevated in hope with the Father, the door to the womb was open to admit me if I wished to enter (S, 44).</p>	<p><i>Pamiętam, gdy puściłem się po raz pierwszy, H.P. wspaniałomyślnie zabrała mą cnotę, siedziałem na nabrzeżu w Provincetown, miałem 23 lata, byłem radosny, uniesiony nadzieją ku Ojcu, wrota macicy otwarte by przyjąć mnie gdybym zechciał wejść (S, 45).</i></p> <p>I remember when I got laid for the first time, H.P. generously took my virginity, I sat on the shore in Provincetown, I was 23, I was joyful, elevated in hope with the Father, the gates of the uterus open to admit me if I wanted to enter.</p>	<p><i>Pamiętam mój pierwszy seks, H.P. odebrał mi z wdziękiem mój wiśniak, siedziałem w dokach Provincetown, miałem 23 lata, byłem pełen radości, uniesiony nadzieją jaką pokładałem w Ojcu, tono było gotowe mnie przyjąć, gdybym chciał wejść (Z, 35).</i></p> <p>I remember my first sex, H.P. graciously took my kirsch, I sat in the docks of Provincetown, I was 23 years old, I was full of joy, elevated in the hope I had with the Father, the womb was ready to admit me if I wanted to enter.</p>

The above juxtaposition of translations clearly shows that Hartwig altered the original by giving it a more subtle tone. “Cherry,” which is a slang word for virginity, was rendered as *wiśniak* which—although sounds almost the same as the literal translation of “cherry” (*wiśnia*), has altogether different connotations (it is a type of alcohol). Thereby Hartwig completely changes the meaning of the original verse. The colloquial expression “get laid” was replaced with the word *sex*. One must note, however, that for Hartwig even the seem-

ingly neutral word “sex” is a very strong expression and would never make way into her own poetry. What is more, a thorough analysis of the quoted excerpt shows that Hartwig decided to make an even more courageous move. The verb “took” which refers to a person described by the initials H.P. was rendered by her in a masculine form, clearly indicating the homosexual orientation of the lyrical I. By doing so, she turned out to be more “barbaric” than Musiał who (despite having presented quite uninhibitedly his homosexual relationship with a popular sportsman in his *Dziennik z Iowa—Iowa Diary* [Musiał 291]) decided to transform the controversial confession of the lyrical I into an ordinary (and bordering on boring) story of a heterosexual man recalling his first sexual encounters. This translational retreat could not be compensated by the fact that Musiał decided to employ crude language and to use the anatomic term *macica* (“uterus”) instead of *łono* (“womb”) in order to emphasize the unique stylistic of the American poet.

The difference between the two translations can be seen once again in the way they both rendered the deliric metaphor “mental open eye” (S, 42). Hartwig decided again to take on the role of a classicist poet whereas Musiał managed to maintain a “mental understanding” with the author. It is necessary to remember that the Beatniks believed in the existence of the so-called “third eye” which can be opened up when stimulated by narcotics and which allows one to see the ultimate truth. Musiał replaced this metaphor with *czujne oko mózgu* (“watchful eye of the brain” [S, 43]), which means that he took this context into account, whereas Hartwig ignored it and interpreted “mental open eye” as *otwarte okno . . . umysłu* (“the open window . . . of the mind” [Z, 34]). It is not the only time when both translators approached Ginsberg’s metaphors in completely different ways. In the poem “In The Baggage Room At Greyhound” the lyrical I speaks about a huge metal horse, standing among wooden trunks, barrels and suitcases. This vision seems to refer to surrealist paintings which the Beatniks found most inspiring. A strange platform which is a combination of an object and a living creature, appearing among ordinary things, brings to mind, for example, a mystery creature from Salvador Dali’s painting “Invisible Sleeping Woman, Horse, Lion” (1930), in which one can see a woman, a horse, a lion and even a part of a boat. Just like this creature, Ginsberg’s unusual horse is a non-specified, thought-provoking object; perhaps

its aim was to suggest that the viewer was under the influence of hallucinogenic substances? Musiał decided to keep this intriguing vision in his translation. In his rendition, the equivalent of Ginsberg's "huge tin horse" (S, 62) is *wielki metalowy rumak* ("great metal steed" [S, 63]). Hartwig, on the other hand, decided to replace the hallucinatory hybrid with a simple word *platforma* ("platform" [Z, 40]) which may indicate that the poet did not take Ginsberg's fascination with surrealism into account.

Scholars who engage into translation studies have created multiple definitions of adequate translation. They are varied and more often than not take different issues into consideration. For instance, Vladimir Procházka claims that a translator [who wants to create a good translation] has to: 1) "understand the original in respect of subject and style"; 2) "overcome the differences between the two language structures"; 3) "recreate in the rendition the original stylistic structures of the original" (Garvin 111). Oliver Edwards emphasises that "we expect from the translation . . . the atmosphere being as close to the original as possible. Characters, situations, thoughts must appear the same as they were in the mind and the heart of the author" (Edwards 13). Matthew Arnold states that: "The translation should affect us the way the original affected its first listeners" (1861, qtd in Nida 61). If one were to relate Hartwig's translations of Ginsberg's poem to any of the definitions above, it would be exceedingly difficult to find them as fully rendering the content and style of the originals. Hartwig's translation of "A Strange New Cottage in Berkeley" shows that she did not try to recreate the stylistic structures of the original; some fragments of the "221 Syllables at Rocky Mountain Dharma Center" translation, are devoid of their original meaning which is rooted in Buddhist topics (blurred by Hartwig). For instance, "In The Baggage Room At Greyhound" and "Transcription of Organ Music" are bereft of surrealist images and erotic connotations and therefore seem but an echo of memories and ideas that were once present in the author's mind. In this case, it seems simply impossible to trigger the same (or a similar) reaction in the readers—significant in the context of intercultural dialogue—of the original works and the translation.

With the exception of Musiał's abovementioned translational "sidestepping," his translations seem to render the meaning of the originals quite faithfully, mainly because of the stylistic similarities. A thorough analysis of his

translations reveals, however, that in some fragments he decided to change Ginsberg's words instead of translating them. It is visible in "Transcription of Organ Music:" In the second stanza he translated "the night" (S, 42-46) as *ciemność* ("darkness" [S, 43-47]), in the fifth—"qualities" as *substancje* ("substances"), and in the sixth—"sunset" as *wieczór* ("evening"). Perhaps the ease with which the translator changed the words connected to very specific natural phenomena ("sunset," "night") into more ambiguous phrases ("evening," "darkness") was a result of thinking that the lyrical I was under the influence of hallucinogenic substances (which is indicated by the way he described reality) and, therefore, his surreal vision need not to be set in a particular time and space. The changes are even more pronounced in Musiał's translation of "A Supermarket in California." A confession which opens the original poem—"What thoughts I have of you tonight" (S, 40)—he translated into *Ileż myślę o tobie w ten wieczór* ("How much I think of you this evening" [S, 41]). Ginsberg's imaginative and ambiguous phrase "shopping for images" was translated as *chodzenie po sklepach w poszukiwaniu wrażeń* ("walking around the shops, looking for thrills"). But despite these alterations, Musiał tried not to interfere with the barbarian poetics of Ginsberg the way Hartwig did. He accepted the chaos of the poems, trying even to maintain the original word order which, taking into account Ginsberg's clusters of participles, was a true challenge. He did not eliminate epithets or metaphors, and where he could, he tried to save Ginsberg's individual, distant rhymes. It can be seen in the following fragment of "A Supermarket in California:" "I walked down the sidestreets under the trees" which Musiał translated into *pod drzewami idę w dół bocznymi uliczkami*.

What is characteristic about Musiał's translations is the lack of euphemisms and even a certain amount of crudeness. These features cannot be seen in the translations by Artur Międzyrzecki. The changes he proposed in the translation of "At Apollinaire's Grave" look like genuine censorship. The "clean-up" of inappropriate elements begins in the seventh line. The original line "Peter Orlovsky and I . . . held temporary hands tenderly" (U, 120-126) Międzyrzecki shortens by the adverb "tenderly" thereby depriving the poem of the allusions of homosexual love between the characters. Next, Międzyrzecki changed the content of the lyrical I's declaration in the third stanza: "Guillame, how I envy your . . . Zone with its long crazy line of bullshit about death" by eliminating

the vulgar noun “bullshit” and by that means taking the irony out of this fragment. In the third part of the poem, Międzyrzecki replaced a simile “a piece of thin granite like an unfinished phallus” with a more subtle description: *cienki granit o fallicznym kształcie* (“thin granite of a phallic shape” [Z, 43-47]). The biggest change the translator made to the text is the part where Ginsberg describes Christ: “Christ hangs big chested and sexy”—Międzyrzecki decided to censor the word “sexy” and render the relief description as *żarliwy Chrystus z obnażoną piersią* (“passionate Christ with a bare chest”).

As we can see, Międzyrzecki’s version of “At Apollinaire’s Grave,” devoid of irony characteristic of the poetry of American barbarians, iconoclastic visions and homosexual tones, is but a bare skeleton of the original poem. Once taken out of its primary context (which allows for the assumption that Ginsberg, as a Buddhist, perceived Christ only as a physical being), the image distorts the contents of the original poem and significantly changes the possible interpretations. Such an interference with the “barbarian” poetics drew the attention of Piotr Sommer who amusedly noted in the afterword to *Znajomi z tego świata*:

even the crucified Christ seems to Ginsberg an attractive man . . . even if the Polish translation does not want to become too attached to this idea. (Sommer 94)

Bożena Tokarz, who examined the personal aspects of artistic translations, noted that the relation between the original and the translation often consists in preserving the contradiction which constitutes different models of reality in different languages. According to her, “before a translation in a specific sign system can be achieved, a translation from culture to language occurs” (Tokarz 272). This contradiction between separate models of reality is apparent in the juxtaposition of the original poem with Międzyrzecki’s translation. The Polish rendition of Ginsberg’s poem, deprived of iconoclastic epithets, whose usage in the religious context was thought of as inadmissible by the Catholic translator, may serve as an example of a translation from “barbaric” culture to “classicist” language. Similarly to some of Hartwig’s translations, this rendition also does not convey the atmosphere of the original (as said by Edwards) and thus cannot affect the recipients in the way Arnold wanted.

“Mental understanding” between the original and the translation can be seen in the translations by Piotr Sommer. Despite the fact that he explicitly

criticized some of Ginsberg's views and opinions, he does share some aspects of "barbarian" poetics and the translations of Ginsberg poems prepared by him reveal virtually no modifications when juxtaposed with the originals. Apart from slight interferences with the word order (such as the repositioning of the adjective *siwobrody* ("graybeard") in the description of the "father" in "A Supermarket in California" [Ginsberg, 1993: 33]), there are only insignificant alterations to the titles (the biggest of which is in translating "The Bricklayer's Lunch Hour" into "Przerwa na obiad" — "Lunch Break" [Z, 7]).

A similar observation can be made while analyzing Sommer's translations of Frank O'Hara's poems. The alterations found in Sommer's renditions are merely nuances. One of such modifications can be seen in the poem "Why I am not a painter" ("Dlaczego nie jestem malarzem"); the original confession "it was too much" (P, 60) was rendered as a much more colloquial phrase *przeholowałem z tym* ("I overshot the mark" [T, 50]). In O'Hara's "Personal Poem" ("Wiersz osobisty") Sommer translates "lounger" (P, 43) as *obibok* (T, 76) thereby changing the word's meaning—*obibok* means "lazybones;" and in "For Grace, After A Party" ("Dla Grace, po prywatce") Sommer deprives the scene of giving a speech its original expression by translating "I was blazing my tirade" (P, 27) as *wygląszałem tyradę* ("I was saying my tirade" [T, 29]). It turns out, however, that even minor changes (even restricted only to the titles) may hinder the intercultural dialogue. Proof of this is visible in the translation of Frank O'Hara's "The Day Lady Died." In an interview for *Świat Literacki*, Sommer talked about his fascination with O'Hara's poem and confessed that translations of his poems took him as much as ten years (Basiuk, Piasecki and Szwed-Platerek 61). In the interview given to Joanna Orska, he admitted that despite his attempts, he is still unsure of the way he rendered the poem's title:

"The Day Lady Died" [is a phrase] which I translated more than twenty years ago into "Dzień, w którym zmarła Lady Day" ("The Day When Lady Day Died") is not as well as I would have liked. I still do not know what to do with this pun. (Orska 56)

⁹ These observations can also be referred to a significantly larger number of Polish inspirations with the poetry of American "barbarians." However, the harsh limitations of a conference paper do not allow to elaborate on all of them.

At the same time Sommer noted that this single phrase inspired so many poets that it was decided to publish an anthology gathering all “twin poems.” Such titles as “Dzień, w którym umarł Czesław Miłosz” (“The Day When Czesław Miłosz Died”) by Liliana Abraham-Zubińska, clearly show that the attempts to engage in an intercultural dialogue with O’Hara’s text have been futile. “The Day When” pattern used by the poets is in fact a calque of the Polish translation and does not convey the original linguistic puzzle. It is important to remember that in the title of O’Hara’s poem, the noun “Day” can both mean the artistic pseudonym of Billy Holiday and point to the “day” when she died. Polish titles referring to it remind the reader of a text written down during a game of Chinese whispers. This remains, however, a situation which leaves the translator helpless. As Edward Balcerzan notes:

[it happens that] in the repertoire of artistic devices in the original, the translator recognises a combination of system elements of the foreign language; . . . he or she cannot make them present in the rendition . . . as the target language lacks at least one—analogue element constituting the material of a particular combination . . . Untranslatability wins. (Balcerzan 90-91)

Such untranslatability of a linguistic device can be seen in this particular poem title.

The publication of translations of individual Allen Ginsberg poems and then the cult “blue issue” of *Literatura na Świecie* dedicated to the works of the New York School, led to the birth of “the late barbarians” in Poland. A considerable time delay, limited access to poetry due to the communist censorship and last but not least the lack of familiarity with English language, made it impossible for young Polish “o’harists” to engage in a real intercultural dialogue. As they could not learn the naturalness of expression directly from the American poets, they had to rely on their imitations present in Polish translations. Some of the translations, however, differed a lot from the original versions. The classicists who did not acknowledge the free model of poetry created their own versions of “barbaric” works, often adapting them to familiar patterns and to some extent, modifying the original character of the translated works. Some of Ginsberg’s poems, inspired by Buddhism or surrealism, had been taken out of their context and, therefore, lost their original overtone. Ginsberg’s poems “smoothed” and

“ordered” by Hartwig, for instance “A Strange New Cottage in Berkeley,” lost their spontaneity. Moreover, the controversial poem “At Apollinaire’s Grave,” translated by Międzyrzecki, became a battlefield after the fight between the conservative, Catholic translator and the rebellious Buddhist author. While working on some translations (e.g. “Transcription of Organ Music”) Hartwig abandoned the classicist poem form and conveyed the “barbaric” content in the poem’s key parts but these moments were few and far between. At the same time, the efforts of Polish barbaric poets to build a bridge enabling the intercultural dialogue with the Americans were not always successful. Musiał’s translations, despite maintaining the stylistics of the original works, were often free paraphrases and Sommer’s translations were not always capable of overcoming the untranslatability of elaborate wordplays employed by Ginsberg and O’Hara. As a result, Polish novice barbarians, who depended on various translations, did not employ the “American voice” but rather imitated it in their own intertextual, yet hardly ever intercultural, plays.

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Summary

This article is about the emerge of "late barbarians" centered around *bruLion* and their dispute with the classicists. The main thesis is that Polish "barbarians" were unable to engage in a real intercultural dialogue with the Beat Generation and New York School poets who inspired them. The author refers to this phenomenon as "second-degree intertextuality" and states that it was caused mostly by the limited knowledge of the English language. The writers often had to base on translations which were distant from the original texts. The author analyzes and compares the tendencies in translations made by Polish authors, both "barbarians" (Musiał, Sommer) and civilized (Hartwig, Międzyrzecki), proving that the classicists often adapted "barbaric" works to familiar patterns, and the translations made by "barbarians" sometimes resembled free paraphrases of the original texts.

Key words: comparative literature, translation studies, Polish poetry, Julia Hartwig, Artur Międzyrzecki, Piotr Sommer, Grzegorz Musiał

Wiersze Franka O'Hary i Allena Ginsberga tłumaczone przez polskich poetów. Konflikt pomiędzy „klasycystami” a „barbarzyńcami”?

Streszczenie

Artykuł przedstawia okoliczności narodzin polskich „spóźnionych barbarzyńców”, skupionych wokół „bruLionu”, i opisuje ich spór z klasycystami. Autorka stawia tezę, iż polscy „barbarzyńcy” nie byli w stanie nawiązać prawdziwego interkulturowego dialogu z poetami Beat Generation oraz New York School (reprezentowanymi tu przez Allena Ginsberga i Franka O'Hare), od których czerpali inspirację. Zaistniałe zjawisko

określa mianem „intertekstualności drugiego stopnia” i stwierdza, że było ono spowodowane przede wszystkim ograniczoną znajomością języka angielskiego, która zmusiła „trzydziestolatków” do korzystania z, bardzo odbiegających od oryginałów, rodzimych przekładów wierszy Amerykanów. Autorka analizuje i porównuje tendencje w translacjach wykonywanych przez polskich „poetów-barbarzyńców” (Musiał, Sommer) oraz poetów-klasycystów (Hartwig, Międzyrzecki), dowodząc, iż klasycyści nierzadko dopasowywali tłumaczone wiersze do bliskich sobie wzorców, a translacje „barbarzyńców” przypominały czasem bardzo swobodne parafrazy oryginalnych utworów.

Słowa kluczowe: komparatystryka literacka, studia przekładoznawcze, poezja polska, Julia Hartwig, Artur Międzyrzecki, Piotr Sommer, Grzegorz Musiał

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Translating Walt Whitman's "Barbaric Yawp." Introduction

Walt Whitman concludes his greatest poem, "Song of Myself," with a section that begins with an image of "the spotted hawk" swooping by him and complaining "of my gab and my loitering." This hawk is probably a red-shouldered hawk, common in the New York area, with distinctive "spotted" patterns on its wings and mottled breast, and with a very distinctive piercing call that it sounds as it swoops in for the kill. Whitman mentions the "redshouldered-hawk" in the short catalog of birds with distinctive "screams" in his Preface to the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass* (LG, 711). This hawk is always on the hunt, always searching, sweeping through the air to gain a heightened perspective on the world below. The hawk's loud, clear and simple sound and the energy of its movement shame the poet, who loiters and gabs, who lounges around and engages in empty talk. *Gab* means not only to "chatter" but also to "mock" or to accuse. There is a sense here, then, that humans waste their time with idle talk, mocking and accusing others, while the hawk soars above us, making the ultimate mockery and accusation by squawking a nonverbal complaint about how humans waste their time instead of living untamed. Then the poet compares himself to the hawk, and, in doing so, creates two lines that seem to taunt every translator who has tried to render them in another language:

I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable,
I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world.

Whitman often sought to translate the sounds of animals—especially birds—into human speech. Some of his greatest poems—“Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking” and “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d”—are built on attempts to translate into words what the “untranslatable” sounds of birds are indicating. But at this moment near the end of “Song of Myself,” Whitman reverses things and, instead of trying to translate the bird’s song into human language, claims his own chant as every bit as “untranslatable” as the hawk’s cry, and he “sound[s] my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world.” (*LG*, 89) Thomas C. Gannon has noted how this yawp “is an early instance of a characteristic gesture in Whitman’s poetics, his identification with a bird, through which the poet feels himself empowered to transcend the semiotics of human discourse, to better express the ambiguities inherent in the obsessive themes of life and death, of spirit and matter, of time and eternity” (Gannon 142). Gannon sees the spotted hawk as Whitman’s “emblem of the wild and raw and physical,” and he offers a paraphrase of Whitman’s lines: “I, too, am as untamed as a wild bird . . . ; I, too, am as untranslatable as a wild bird . . . ; in fact, now I have no need for [the bird] since I have incorporated [its] inarticulate ‘barbaric yawp’ into my own poetic” (Gannon 153, 167).

That phrase—“barbaric yawp”—has been a challenge for every translator of Whitman’s poem. Whitman combines two words that both have echoic roots. *Barbaric* goes back to Latin, Greek, and ultimately Indo-European roots that are themselves echoic, imitative syllables of what rude and uncivilized and primitive peoples (those who spoke neither Latin nor Greek) sounded like to “civilized” ears: *barbarbarbar*. The *OED* offers this explanation: “The Greek word had probably a primary reference to speech, and is compared with the Latin *balbus*, stammering. The sense-development in ancient times was (with the Greeks) ‘foreign, non-Hellenic,’ later ‘outlandish, rude, brutal’; (with the Romans) ‘not Latin nor Greek,’ then ‘pertaining to those outside the Roman empire’; hence ‘uncivilized, uncultured,’ and later ‘non-Christian,’ whence ‘Saracen, heathen’; and generally ‘savage, rude, savagely cruel, inhuman.’” And the *Online Etymology Dictionary* notes that *barbar* is “echoic of unintelligible speech of foreigners (cf. Sanskrit *Barbara*-“stammering,” also “non-Aryan,” Latin *balbus* “stammering,” Czech *blblati* “to stammer”). So the sense of “barbaric” as “uncultured, wild, savage” derives from an ancient crude mockery of the

sounds of those people who spoke a different language. It is a word mocking the incomprehensible sounds of the Other.

Whitman then combines this word with a slippery slang term, "yawp," a word that quickly became associated with him. Numerous parodies of Whitman focused on the word: "Yourn and Mine, and Any-Day: A Yawp, after Walt Whitman," appeared in the *Saturday Press* in 1860, not long after a scathing review of Whitman's "A Child's Reminiscence" called "Walt Whitman's Yawp." H. L. Mencken, in his monumental *American Language*, argued that, although Whitman is celebrated for his love of vernacular speech, very few examples of the vernacular actually got into his poetry: "He is remembered for a few, *e.g.*, *yawp and gawk*, but for a few only" (Mencken 125-126). Many commentators have assumed that "yawp" is one of Whitman's coinages, since it does not appear in the 1844 *Webster's Dictionary*. Even Whitman's disciple Richard Maurice Bucke assumed it was a Whitman coinage that would someday appear in dictionaries (*WWWC* 243). But Whitman would in fact have been familiar with the word, since it often appeared in newspapers of the time and must have been a frequently used slang term. The *Semi-Weekly Eagle* of Brattleboro, Vermont, for example, printed a dialogue heard on the street in 1852, in which one character tells another to "Shut up your yawp." The *OED* tracks the word back into the 1400s, finding its etymology to be echoic, and associating the word with *yap* and *yelp*. It seems to have been spelled in various ways—*yaup*, *yop*, *yalp*, *yolp*, *yaap*, as well as *yawp*. Just as *barbarbar* seems to have been a very early attempt to characterize the speech of humans who spoke a language incomprehensible to the listener, so *yapy-appyap* or *yawpyawpyawp* seems to have been an ancient attempt to echo in language the incomprehensible sounds of animals, particularly dogs and birds. The *OED* defines it as "to yelp, as a dog" or "to cry harshly or querulously, as a bird." *Yawp* also means, when applied to the human voice, "to shout or exclaim hoarsely." As a noun, it came to mean "open mouth" (just as, in today's American slang, people still say "shut your yap" or "shut your trap"). Whitman uses the word as a noun, but not as a synonym for "mouth" but rather in the sense of "yawping," turning the word into one of the verbal nouns he loved so much.

The closest word in the 1844 *Webster's* is *yap*, which is defined as “to bark” and is summarily dismissed as “not a legitimate word.” This illegitimacy is part of the word’s power, of course, and Whitman’s use of such a slangy word in a poem struck many as outlandish. George Santayana, writing a dialogue about Whitman in the 1890 *Harvard Monthly*, has one speaker assert: “You may like to hear Whitman’s ‘barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world,’ but you must confess it is a whim of yours, and that a yawp is one thing and a poem another.” Early reviewers of *Leaves of Grass* often latched onto the word as symptomatic of Whitman’s unpoetic style and diction. *The New Eclectic* in 1868 opined that Whitman “certainly declares himself to be a poet, but at the same time he describes the offspring of his muse as a ‘barbaric yawp.’ We have no very definite idea as to the precise nature of a yawp, but, whatever it may be, it can scarcely be poetry.” Such criticism began soon after the 1855 *Leaves* appeared. *The Critic*, for example, in 1856 excoriated the poet by focusing on the phrase:

Or rather perhaps, this Walt Whitman reminds us of Caliban flinging down his logs, and setting himself to write a poem. In fact Caliban, and not Walt Whitman, might have written this: “I too am not a bit tamed—I too am untranslatable. / I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world.” Is this man with the “barbaric yawp” to push Longfellow into the shade, and he meanwhile to stand and “make mouths” at the sun? The chance of this might be formidable were it not ridiculous.

Even those early reviewers that were more sympathetic to Whitman’s work still highlighted the controversial term, as did the reviewer in the 1856 *Literary Examiner*: “No illusion truly is Walt Whitman, the new American prodigy, who, as he is himself candid enough to intimate, sounds his barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world” (180). Similarly, Whitman’s friend James Redpath saluted the poet in 1863 with an image of the yawp as a victorious march, a harbinger of a new era of poetry: “I love you, Walt! A conquering Brigade will ere long march to the music of your barbaric yawp.”

It is important to note that *yawp* has always been a word outside the mainstream of language, often omitted from dictionaries or included only grudgingly as dialect or slang. American students today are usually unfamiliar with the word and encounter it for the first time when they read “Song of

Myself." If we track the word's usage in large databases of books, we can see that it appeared sporadically in the early nineteenth century but only took hold in print after Whitman's poem appeared in 1855; its usage peaked in the mid-1920s, and by that time most of the examples were in fact quotations of Whitman. The word had had a substantial pre-Whitmanian life in dialect, however. Nineteenth-century etymological guides, like John Jamieson's supplement to the *Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language* (1825), defined the word as "the cry of a sickly bird, or of one in distress" and also recorded an adjectival definition of "hungry." Other nineteenth-century guides confirm the word's origins in British dialect: Richard Oliver Heslop's *Northumberland Words* (1894) claims that *yawp* is dialect (often spelled *yaap*) for "to shout, scream, or talk in a boisterous manner," as well as the sound a chicken makes when crying for its hen-mother (801), and John Drummond Robertson's *Glossary of Dialect & Archaic Words used in the County of Gloucester* (1890) defines it as a variant pronunciation of *gape*, meaning to "yawn audibly" and also "to talk boisterously" ("Molly, my dear, don't *yawp* so") (Robertson 294).

This association of *yawp* with its close orthographic cousin *yawn* is something that Sally Ann Batchelor mentions in her 1972 article, "Whitman's Yawp and How He Yawped It":

Whitman studied words and word lists from the dictionary. Perhaps he searched for a word meaning "to open the mouth with deep inspiration." If he located such a word in a dictionary, it is "yawn." And the inspiration for it is drowsiness, fatigue, or boredom. But listed after "yawn" is "yawp." Here Whitman made his selection. (Batchelor 100)

The problem with Batchelor's speculation is that, as we have seen, "yawp" did not appear in the 1844 or 1851 *Webster's* dictionaries that Whitman used when he wrote the 1855 *Leaves* (the word did make an appearance in later editions of *Webster's*, where it is defined as a variant of *yaup* or *yelp*, "to cry out like a child," and where it is traced to Scottish dialect [see Webster, 1876]). Still, the association of the word with an open mouth is strong (American expressions like "Shut your yap" conflate the verb and the noun, the open mouth identified with the loud sounds coming out of it). So *yawp* has that added association of a gaping or open mouth, like a hawk's open beak when crying out.

Batchelor offers a helpful summary of the connotations of “barbaric yawp”:

The phrase denotes an untranslatable and untamed loud, harsh cry. Its meaning absorbs and reflects words from the preceding line: “I too am not a bit tamed, / I too am untranslatable.” Again Whitman provides three associated terms—untamed, untranslatable, and barbaric. By definition, a barbarian cannot translate Greek, a classical language. Barbaric also denotes wild or untamed, man’s primitive naturalness as opposed to his civilized gentility. Were Whitman a civilized hawk he would translate his poetry into classical or accepted usage. But he is no trained hawk, blinded, jessed, and belled, moving only at the consent of his genteel trainer; he is an adult wild bird, a haggard, sounding his ineffable, noetic yawp free of social and poetical corsets. (Batchelor 99-100)

The challenge for translators, then, is to translate what Whitman names as “untranslatable.” The two words he sounds—“barbaric yawp”—are both words that have no easy or stable definition, because they are echoic in origin, imitating sounds that are outside of meaningful language. Because they are echoic, the temptation might be to translate the words simply by carrying them over into the new language and allowing them to sound their original echoic sounds. But echoic sounds vary significantly from language to language: what one language hears as an echo of a bird’s sound, another may hear as something entirely different. Thus animal-sound words like “meow” or “bow-wow” or “cluck” or “gobble” always pose special challenges for the translator (see “Animal Sounds”). M. Wynn Thomas translated “Song of Myself” into Welsh, and, in his review of Thomas’s translation, Joseph P. Clancy noted the peculiar difficulty that “yawp” presented: “‘Yawp’ creates special difficulties in a number of languages: *crochlais* does not really convey Whitman’s ‘yawp,’ but I can’t think of any Welsh word that would, and Welsh orthography doesn’t permit simply taking the word over into the language while retaining its sound.”

Even if my American English-speaking students have never heard the word “yawp” before encountering it in Whitman’s poem, they still have immediate associations with “yap” and “yelp” and even “yawn,” and so they intuit the word in a kind of native way, quickly fitting it into sound patterns and denotative patterns with which they are familiar. The ways that readers in other languages will hear the phrase, though, is less certain, and that uncertainty

makes "barbaric yawp" a particularly rich phrase for a detailed study of its multiple translations.

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Summary

The introduction examines the origins and history of the word "yawp," offers an overview of how Whitman's "barbaric yawp" has been interpreted in criticism about "Song of Myself" and suggests some of the challenges in translating the phrase.

Key words: comparative literature, translation studies, Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself"

Tłumacząc „barbaric yawp” Wálta Whitmana. Wprowadzenie

Streszczenie

Autor artykułu przedstawia etymologię słowa “yawp”, a także odnosi się do różnych interpretacji „barbarzyńskiego yawp” zawartych w pracach krytycznych poświęconych „Song of Myself” Wálta Whitmana. Artykuł wskazuje także na wyzwania, z którymi muszą się zmierzyć tłumacze analizowanego wyrażenia.

Słowa kluczowe: komparatystyka literacka, studia przekładoznawcze, Walt Whitman, „Pieśń o mnie”

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“Barbaric Yawp” in Swedish

I am aware of three Swedish translations of Whitman’s “Song of Myself.” In 1935, Karl Afred Svensson (1891-1978), a journalist, author, and translator, published a substantial volume of translations from *Leaves of Grass* with a biographical introduction to Whitman and an afterword about Emerson and Whitman. The shadows cast by the contemporary political situation in Europe are obvious in Svensson’s afterword—Svensson’s sympathies lie with traditional Western humanism and he deeply deplores the surge of antidemocratic forces. Svensson actually expresses an ambivalent view of Whitman in his afterword: Svensson’s heroes are rather Emerson and Goethe, and Whitman’s boundlessness and assertiveness seem to make Svensson uneasy. Svensson’s translations of Whitman are a bit cumbersome and written in a conservative, in places even old-fashioned, Swedish. The volume contains a complete translation of the “Song of Myself” (“Sång om mig själv”).

The next Swedish translation dates to 1946. The translator, Erik Lindegren (1910-1968), one of the most brilliant Swedish poets of the twentieth century, had just made himself known as a leading exponent of the new indigenous modernism: he had published, a few years earlier, an extensive cycle of “exploded sonnets” consisting of a flow of dramatic metaphors, untranslatable but evocative, presented in free verse and expressing loss of direction and intense despair; a diffuse war was being made visible in the background. Lindegren’s translation of the “Song of Myself” (“Ur Sången om mig själv”; “From The Song of Myself”) is extensive but not complete. The translation was published as one

in a large collection of self-portraits in words, edited by a well-known Swedish novelist, Sigfrid Siwertz, for Sweden's leading publishing house, Bonniers. The chronologically arranged series of self-portraits begins with Socrates, Cicero, and Marcus Aurelius and ends with Paul Valéry, Eric Linklater, and Richard Hillary (a young British fighter pilot who authored an autobiographical book, *The Last Enemy*, before losing his life). The sympathy for the Western humanistic tradition and the Western democracies is obvious already in the choice of authors, and Goethe is the only German included in the anthology. Whitman has a natural place in the group. The link between Whitman and Lindegren, in its turn, must no doubt be sought in the free verse. Lindegren's translation of Whitman may in fact have been commissioned by the editor. Lindegren's comparatively free translation uses a poetic register and is a fine piece of literature in its own right but, considered as a translation of Whitman's cycle, is a bit abstract and faintly sacral; the poetic voice that Lindegren was to develop in the late 1940s and the 1950s can be sensed in the text.

Finally, Whitman's "Song of Myself" was translated in its entirety in 1983 by the poet and translator Rolf Aggestam (born 1941). Aggestam's translation was published, together with an afterword by the translator, in a separate volume under the title *Sången om mig själv* ("The Song of Myself"—Lindegren and Aggestam, but not Svensson, "normalize" Whitman's title by adding a definite article). Unlike Svensson and Lindegren, Aggestam translates from the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, distancing himself from the Whitman of the late editions who seems to Aggestam too much to act the role of a father of his people (Aggestam 74). Apparently, Aggestam has had a long-standing relationship with Whitman's poetry—Dylan Thomas and Walt Whitman are mentioned as early, deeply important, sources of poetic inspiration for him—but his attitude to Whitman may also have been influenced to some extent by the prevalent left-wing political atmosphere in Swedish literature from the mid-1960s to the early 1980s. Without being colloquial, the style of Aggestam's translation is less elevated, and no doubt more Whitmanesque, than the diction employed by Svensson and Lindegren.

All the three Swedish translators take certain liberties with the passage in which the yawp occurs. Surprisingly, Svensson turns the spotted hawk into a falcon (*Den fläckiga falken*), and Lindegren follows him in this. Aggestam,

however, reinstates the hawk (*Den spräckliga höken*). The Swedish translators also choose different adjectives to characterize the bird, which is less important but not wholly insignificant. "Spotted" can mean both "stained" and "as if marked with spots"; in this context, the latter sense is no doubt the primary one. The Swedish word *fläckig*—Svensson's and Lindegren's choice—preserves the discreet ambiguity, which is probably a good thing, while Aggestam's *spräcklig* only reflects the meaning "as if marked with spots."

Whitman's hawk "swoops by," meaning that he passes by probably also via a downward plunge. The expression "swoops by" is difficult to render in Swedish, and Svensson simply lets the bird swoop (Svensson's falcon *slår ner*). Lindegren and Aggestam, however, make the bird dive towards the speaker as if swooping on *him* (*störtar ner mot mig; stört dyker mot mig*). These details are of some interest for the impression of the yawp, since the yawping speaker is being compared to the bird: not tamed, untranslatable.

Despite the rather considerable differences in style and literary preferences among the three translators, their translations of precisely the two words "barbaric yawp" are very similar. Svensson offers *barbariska rovfågelskri*, meaning "barbaric cry of a bird of prey." Lindegren differs only in orthography, translating *barbariska rovfågelskri*. (Lindegren's spelling is considered to be the more correct one.) Aggestam, for his part, gives the formulation *barbariska rovfågelsjut*, "barbaric howl of a bird of prey." The noun *skri*, pronounced approximately "scree," means "cry" or "scream." The word *skri* is not archaic or strange, but it has a poetic tinge. The everyday word would be *skrik* ("scream"), but *skrik* probably has slightly stronger associations with humans than *skri*. Aggestam's *tjut* (pronounced, very approximately, "choot") is neutral with respect to higher and lower styles, but the word is somewhat surprising in connection with a bird. A *tjut* would be a high-pitched, monotone, penetrating sound of some duration. A person in acute pain could emit the right kind of sound, or a siren, or a wolf, but hardly a bird of prey or any other bird. Aggestam may or may not have consciously intended to achieve a special effect by introducing an incongruous word, but, either way, I believe it is fair to say that *rovfågelsjut* is unremarkable in its context in Aggestam's translation. Only those people studying this particular line in his translation, or people with a strong interest in birds, would be likely to notice the unusual nature of his lexical choice.

The three translations of the “yawp” are thus nearly identical: “cry/howl of a bird of prey.” Since that alternative is far from necessary, I strongly suspect that Svensson’s translation has influenced both Lindegren and Aggestam (and Svensson himself may possibly have been inspired by the analogous German translations by Schölermann and Reisiger; cf. below p. 272). Aggestam, who is conscious of both his predecessors (Aggestam 75), has kept the explicit reference to a bird of prey but changed a more high-register expression to a neutral one—a shift which, in itself, must be said to be altogether motivated.

The translation “cry/howl of a bird of prey” fulfills some of the reasonable expectations on a good translation of “yawp,” but certainly not all of them. The translation refers to a vocalization, one of a kind ascribable not only to humans but also to other animals, and one that is not readily comprehensible. In addition, both *skri* and *tjut* have something of an onomatopoeic touch, just like “yawp.” To my mind, however, the explanation of the nature of the cry removes its brutal immediacy and the explicit mention of a bird of prey gives too much emphasis to the predatory nature of the vocalizer. There are also a number of reasonable expectations that remain unfulfilled. We know from Ed Folsom’s analysis that the word “yawp” is colloquial and that it has an etymological association, perhaps still felt, with the mouth of a human or an animal. Last but not least, “yawp” is a short word (one syllable), while the Swedish translations are importantly longer (four syllables). The translations do have a certain compactness, for Swedish has the capacity of forming quite complex words with ease and relative naturalness, so my circumstantial translation back into English, “cry/howl of a bird of prey,” gives a slightly wrong impression in that respect. But the translations must still be said to be on the long side.

Other possible translations into Swedish are not difficult to find. First of all, I would prefer to get rid of the explicit reference to a bird of prey and every other explicitness of that kind. It is true that Whitman mentions a “spotted hawk” who “swoops by” and then draws an analogy between the hawk and himself, but Whitman cannot be said to picture himself specifically as a bird of prey. If you leave the explicit reference to a bird of prey out of the picture, an English-Swedish dictionary offers various options for the translation of “yawp” by a single word. The words *skri* and *skrik* are among these, but two other possible translations strike me as more felicitous.

It seems to me that "yawp" could very well be rendered as *skrän* (pronounced, very approximately, "screin"): *mitt barbariska skrän*. The noun *skrän*—an ordinary word, not high, not low—stands for a kind of scream, and it can be used, for example, about the sound made by seagulls. The noun *skrän* is derived from the verb *skräna*. The most comprehensive Swedish dictionary, the *Ordbok över svenska språket* (Dictionary of the Swedish Language) describes the main meaning of the verb as "to cry or scream or sing loudly and in an unlovely manner and often more or less inarticulately (particularly as an expression of excitement or discontent or suchlike)" and supposes that the word *skräna* has an onomatopoeic background (*Ordbok*, s.v. *skräna*). *Skrän* is what you produce by acting in this fashion. I would prefer *skrän* to *skrik* or *tjut* because I believe that *skrän*, in this context, sounds more assertive and aggressive (rather than plagued, which *skrik* and *tjut* might more easily do).

There is also a Swedish noun *gap*, pronounced approximately "gaap," and closely etymologically connected with the English noun "gap" (*Ordbok*, s.v. *gap*). *Gap* is used, among other things, about the open mouth of an animal (and more colloquially about the open mouth of a human). The corresponding verb *gapa*, meaning to open one's mouth or to open it widely, can be used quite normally and straightforwardly about humans and animals alike. In a transferred, slightly vulgar sense, the verb *gapa* may mean to speak loudly and insubstantially and a bit aggressively. (Used in that sense, *gapa* is more or less synonymous with *skräna*, but I believe that *gapa* makes you more conscious of the fact that the sound has a semantic content, while *skräna* draws more attention to the sound itself.) The expression "my barbaric yawp" could conceivably be translated into Swedish as *mitt barbariska gapande* (*gapande* pronounced something like "gaapande," with the stress on the first syllable, is the present participle of *gapa*). That would preserve the provocative character of Whitman's "yawp" (and, less importantly perhaps, its direct etymological connection with the mouth). It would even preserve some of the noun/verb ambiguity that Folsom points out in "yawp," for *gapande* may also be taken in its basic sense of keeping one's mouth (wide) open. As one might expect, however, *gapande* also has drawbacks as a translation of "yawp." Unlike the other words considered, *gapande* is not onomatopoeic, and therefore does not suggest the sound of

the yawp. Furthermore, *gapande* in the vulgar sense cannot be performed by animals, since it implies speaking.

So how should the words “barbaric yawp” best be rendered in Swedish? Before giving my preferred answer, I would like to take a small step back and look at the whole line containing the yawp. In Whitman’s text, the line reads:

I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world.

Svensson translates:

Jag skriar mitt barbariska rovfågelskri över världens tak.

The closest Swedish correspondence to the verb “sound” is *ljuda*. *Ljuda*, however, is an intransitive verb and cannot take an object, so the word “sound” represents a minor problem for the Swedish translator. Svensson’s solution is to let the speaker *cry* his *cry* (*skriar* mitt . . . *skrik*). One could in fact see this move as part of Svensson’s translation of the “yawp”: Svensson achieves an intensification of the cry by letting it be cried. In my view, it would be easy and natural to use the Swedish word *ljuda* instead, building it into a transitive construction: *låta ljuda* (“let sound”). That would represent the speaker as *letting his yawp sound* instead of *sounding his yawp*, but would still depart less from the original. Lindegren takes Svensson’s strategy one step further, letting the speaker *cry out* his *cry*:

Jag skriar ut mitt barbariska rovfågelsskri över världens tak.

Aggestam follows Svensson with respect to the crying of the cry, but in addition he changes Whitman’s text slightly in two other respects. Aggestam alters Whitman’s syntax, binding the line closer to the preceding one by beginning with an *Och* (“And”) instead of Whitman’s “I.” Aggestam also transforms the roofs of the world to the roofs of all the world, “all världens tak”:

Och skriar mitt barbariska rovfågelstjut över all världens tak.

Several of the changes introduced by the various Swedish translators—the bird’s swooping on the speaker, the crying of the cry, the roofs of *all* the

world—appear calculated to make the text even more dynamic and intensify the impression of it.

If I were to translate this specific line, I would avoid the crying of the cry and the explicit reference to a bird of prey. My suggestion would be:

Jag låter mitt barbariska skrån ljuda över världens tak.

The word *gapande* could no doubt be used: *mitt barbariska gapande* instead of *mitt barbariska skrån*. The impression would probably be more vulgar, but that might not necessarily be a bad thing. One could also consider the present participle of the verb *skråna*: *mitt barbariska skrånande*. To me, that expression sounds slightly unnatural, but I cannot explain why.

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Summary

The article discusses the pros and cons of the three Swedish translations of the “yawp” and comments on their historical context and general character. The three Swedish versions differ in background and tone but are very similar in their treatment of the yawp itself. In his complete Swedish version of the poem (“Sång om mig själv”) 1935, Karl Afred Svensson translated “barbaric yawp” as *barbariska rovfågelskri*; “barbaric cry of a bird of prey.” Erik Lindegren followed Svensson except in spelling in his partial translation (“Ur Sängen om mig själv”) from 1946, while Rolf Aggestam merely changed the cry to a howl—*barbariska rovfågelstjut*—when he offered a complete translation of Whitman’s first edition of the poem in 1983 (“Sängen om mig själv”).

Key words: comparative literature, translation studies, Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself,” Swedish literature

„Barbarzyńskie yawp” po szwedzku

Streszczenie

Autor artykułu przedstawia wady i zalety trzech szwedzkich tłumaczeń „yawp” oraz komentuje ich historyczny kontekst i ogólny charakter. Trzy szwedzkie wersje różnią się tłem i tonem, ale są bardzo zbliżone w tłumaczeniu samego „yawp”. W swojej kompletnej wersji „Song of Myself” (“Sång om mig själv”, 1935) Karl Afred Svensson przetłumaczył „barbaric yawp” jako *barbariska rovfågelskri* – „barbarzyński krzyk drapieżnego ptaka”. Erik Lindegren podążył za Svenssonem, zmieniając jedynie pisownię w swoim częściowym tłumaczeniu pieśni (“Ur Sängen om mig själv”) z 1946 roku; natomiast Rolf Aggestam, w kompletnym przekładzie pierwszego wydania poematu Whitmana opublikowanym w 1983 roku, zamienił tylko „krzyk” na „skowyt” – *barbariska rovfågelstjut*.

Słowa kluczowe: komparatystyka literacka, studia przekładoznawcze, Walt Whitman, „Pieśń o mnie”, literatura szwedzka

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“Barbaric Yawp” in German

Given the famously untranslatable nature of Walt Whitman’s “barbaric yawp,” it is perhaps unsurprising that the first documented reference to the phrase in a German-language publication did not even attempt a translation. In his foreword to a co-authored translation of selected Whitman poems published in 1889, Karl Knortz simply used the original English phrase, even though the translation of “Song of Myself” included in the same volume did present a German translation of the phrase. Drawn to the resonant imagery of the phrase but probably reluctant to offer a necessarily imperfect translation, Knortz effectively suggested that Whitman at his most original and powerful was indeed “untranslatable.” As a brief survey of the phrase’s occurrence in published German translations, biographical essays, and prefaces shows, however, many later translators in the German-speaking countries did offer up their versions of Whitman’s phrase in German, often struggling to maintain the allusions and connotations of the original.

The seven German full translations of the poem “Song of Myself” consulted for this study render Whitman’s phrase and the line in which it occurs as follows:

Karl Knortz and Thomas Rolleston, <i>Grashalme</i> (1889)	Ich lasse mein barbarisch Geschrei erschallen über die Dächer der Welt.
Wilhelm Schölermann, <i>Grashalme</i> (1904)	Und lasse meinen barbarischen Raubvogelschrei ertönen über die Dächer der Welt!
Johannes Schlaf, <i>Grashalme</i> (1907)	Ich lasse mein barbarisches Geschrei erschallen über die Dächer der Welt.
Max Hayek, Walt Whitman. "Gesang Von Mir Selbst" (1920)	Ich lasse mein barbarisches Geschrei hinschallen über die Dächer der Welt!
Hans Reisiger, <i>Walt Whitmans Werk</i> (1922)	Ich rufe meinen barbarischen Raubvogelschrei über die Dächer der Welt.
Erich Arendt, <i>Grashalme</i> (1969)	[I]ch lasse mein barbarisches Schreien über die Dächer der Welt erschallen.
Jürgen Brôcan, <i>Grasblätter</i> (2009)	Ich schmettere mein barbarisches Gekreisch über die Dächer der Welt.

All seven translators chose the adjective *barbarisch* to render “barbaric” into German, thereby retaining the same associations with savagery, wildness, fierceness, and a rejection of civilization’s norms and rules reflected in Whitman’s original and in the poet’s assertion that he is “untamed.” We find greater variation, however, among the different translations of the word “yawp.” Three of the German translations (Knort/Rolleston, Schlaf, and Hayek) feature *Geschrei*, a noun that denotes repeated yelling or shouting, but that is also used derogatorily to describe the constant screaming of a child or an individual’s continuous complaining. It is not typically associated with bird or animal sounds. One translator (Arendt) used the nominalized form of the verb *schreien*, which simply means “to shout” or “to cry” (in the sense of “to call loudly”) and does not carry the same derogatory associations as *Geschrei*. Two of the translators (Schölermann and Reisiger) chose the compound word *Raubvogelschrei*, composed of the nouns *Raubvogel* (“bird of prey”) and *Schrei* (“scream” or “cry”). Clearly recognizing that in this line Whitman compares himself to the hawk (German: *Habicht* or *Falke*) described at the beginning of this section of “Song of Myself,” Schölermann and Reisiger here opted for a more narrow term than “scream” or “screaming” and made the comparison between the poet and a bird of prey as explicit as possible. A similar motive probably underlies Brôcan’s odd use of the term *Gekreisch*, which can be translated as “screeching” and has clear avian associations. The German verb *kreischen*, from which the noun is derived, describes the high-pitched, jarring sounds made by agitated, screaming birds.

Although Brôcan, thus, also retains the implied comparison between poet and hawk from the original, the image of Whitman's speaker "screeching" his message across the roofs of the world adds an involuntarily ludicrous note. Finally, it is also worth noting that the translators differ in their approach to Whitman's verb "sound," which has no immediate equivalent among German verbs. As we can see, the majority of translators chose the construction *lassen* ("let") + verb, which places the agency more with the scream or cry of the poet than with the poet himself, who simply "lets" it ring out. Again, Brôcan's version stands out, featuring the verb *schmettern* that most Germans would associate with the act of belting out or blaring a song (*ein Lied schmettern*), an especially odd word in combination with the translation of "yawp" as "screeching."

German translations of the phrase "barbaric yawp" not only appeared in German versions of "Song of Myself," but also featured prominently in the prefaces, introductions, and essays about Whitman and his work that were written by many of his German translators and early critics, just as early reviewers of Whitman's work in English often highlighted the phrase. In fact, it is surprising to see how often these writers singled out the phrase as an apt metaphor for describing a particular aspect or quality of Whitman's poetic style.

As noted, Karl Knortz used the untranslated English phrase in the very first paragraph of his foreword to *Grashalme* (1889), the first book-length translation of poetry by Whitman into German ever published, to introduce the poet as an untamed and unapologetic eschewer of conventions. While his co-translator, Thomas Rolleston, and he did translate the phrase later on in the book (see table above), Knortz let the original phrase stand in his preface without explanation, undoubtedly puzzling many of his German readers. He wrote, "the singer of the much vilified 'Leaves of Grass' not only holds a special place in American literature, but also in the literature of all peoples around the globe. He arbitrarily sets aside our conventional metrics and sings his 'barbaric yawp' just as he pleases" (Knortz/Rolleston v). Knortz then proceeded to liken Whitman's poetic style to "the wild American primeval forest, the beauties of which must not exclusively be enjoyed through the eye of the professional landscape gardener" (v). Thus associating the poet and his barbaric yawp with the vast forests and untamed landscapes of the United States—images commonly tied to America in the minds of many Germans at the time—from the very beginning of his

book, Knortz constructed Whitman and his poetic style as fitting symbols of America: beautiful, inspiring, and liberating on the one hand, but also wild and threatening the stability of established poetic conventions. The “barbaric” quality invoked here by Knortz is set up as a positive contrast to rules and regulations governing European society and poetry, and the link between barbarism and wild nature that is an integral part of Whitman’s original poem is maintained in Knortz’ use of the phrase in this foreword.

In an 1892 essay simply titled “Walt Whitman,” Johannes Schlaf also latched onto the phrase to illustrate the unconventionality and force of Whitman’s poetic style and message. As he wrote, “like mighty dithyrambs of new life and new power his ‘barbaric chants (*barbarischen Gesänge*) sound across the roofs of the world,’ straight into the midst of the many death songs of the old world, proclaiming a new religion, new art, and new value for life. Whitman is neither an optimist nor a pessimist: he is power” (Schlaf, 1892: 978). Schlaf, a Naturalist writer who did much to popularize Whitman’s poetry in German translation, was very influential in creating an image of the poet as a prophet or messiah for the modern age, whose message led the way toward cultural rebirth and rejuvenation. Just as he did in his essay, Schlaf also portrayed Whitman as a prophetic figure in the introduction to *Grashalme* (1907), his own book-length translation of poems by Whitman, and again the phrase “barbaric yawp” played a key role. Emphasizing that one of Whitman’s main topics was “a new, freely recognized equality between man and woman and a new, changed and liberated attitude of each sex toward the other,” Schlaf first explained in this introduction that it was this sentiment, which he called “pure” and “healthy” that first scandalized the “prudish” Yankees (Schlaf, 1907: 8). Then, invoking Whitman’s famous phrase both in translation and in the original, he commented: “Barbaric chants’ (barbaric yawps) Walt Whitman calls these poetic compositions; ‘barbaric chants,’ whose great, wild, free, dithyrambic rhythms he sounds ‘across the roofs of the world’ with the high, venerable, synthetic pathos of old prophecy” (Schlaf, 1907: 8-9). The “barbaric” quality of Whitman’s chants, then, to Schlaf was a positive one that consisted both in the poet’s unique and highly original style and in his willingness to embrace controversial ideas and shatter taboos of the time.

Schlaf’s hope that Whitman’s yawp would disrupt or end the “death songs” of the old order was echoed by another translator, Max Hayek, who similarly

invoked Whitman's "barbaric yawp" in the introduction to his translation of "Song of Myself" from 1920. At the end of this introduction, Hayek wrote: "The barbaric screams (*das barbarische Geschrei*) that this poet sounds across the roofs of the world—may they remind us in the pale wasteland of our cities and streets that somewhere in the world there is an untrodden wilderness, primeval deities, things free from rules and coercion, oceans, cataracts, wild currents, eagles and falcons, buffaloes and prairies, unbroken and athletic humanity and manhood, harmonious in body, spirit, and soul!" (Hayek 17). Writing in the aftermath of World War I, Hayek thus combined Schlaf's hopeful reading of Whitman's "barbaric" force as an antidote to the ills and failings of modern society with a nostalgic longing for untouched and wild nature, with which, like Knortz, he associated Whitman.

Hans Reisiger, author of the two-volume translation *Walt Whitmans Werk* (1922), also highlighted Whitman's phrase in his lengthy introduction, in which he included the following passage:

Whitman himself, at the end of his "Song of Myself," speaks of his "barbaric yawp" (*barbarischen Raubvogelschrei*) sounding over the roofs of the world, and uses this poetic picture as the finale of this powerful rhapsody. At the very climax of his perception of life and death, he falls short of breath; he stands, his voice faltering, at the edge of the sunset in which the physical and the spiritual, the finite and infinite seem to dissolve in the flaky and fiery shreds of cloud. Then, in the very depth of his soul a cry rings out, lonely, sad, and yet rapturous, similar to that of the nocturnal cry of a falcon. (It reminds me of the last line of Gottfried Keller's wonderful poem: "Far off, wild and sad the falcons' voices sounded.")

(Grünzweig 167, trans. Horst Frenz and Walter Grünzweig)

Creating a mythic scene in which he imagined Whitman suspended in time and space, Reisiger here emphasized the primacy of the poet's "yawp" or cry, explicitly compared to that of a powerful bird of prey, and its creative power. It is, thus, to him at the core of Whitman's entire poetic project. By then comparing the Whitmanian phrase to a line from the poem "Von Kindern" ("Of Children") by the Swiss writer and poet Gottfried Keller's ("Fern, wild und weh der Falken Stimmen klangen"), Reisiger invited his German readers to connect the idea of Whitman's yawp or primal scream to the cries of falcons and similar tropes with a long tradition in German-language poetry, thereby illustrating the phrase's resonance across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

As this brief survey has shown, Whitman's "barbaric yawp" fascinated Whitman's early translators and critics alike, many of whom viewed his "barbaric" qualities as a positive model to applaud and perhaps emulate. Perhaps no text makes the criticism of modern society or "civilization" implied by the positive valuation of "barbarism" clearer than an essay titled "Barbaren" ("barbarians") that Hermann Bahr, an Austrian dramatist, critic, and leading figure in the avantgarde group "Young Vienna," published in *Die neue Rundschau*, one of Germany's leading literary magazines, in 1908. In this essay, as Walter Grünzweig explains, "he welcomed a new 'barbarianism' in literature which was, in his view, the only adequate answer to the challenges brought about by emerging technological realities" (Grünzweig 167). Ostensibly a commentary on essay collections by George Bernard Shaw and Johannes Jensen, it was really a celebration of a new type of artist and human being, a *neuer Mensch* who actively embraced the label "barbarian" that the more conservative parts of society placed on him. As Bahr declared, "we are now in the process, it seems, of turning into barbarians," a development that he welcomed unequivocally (Bahr 1774). Criticizing the preoccupation with *Kultur* ("culture") and *Zivilisation* ("civilization"), that past generations exhibited, Bahr explained that to modern man, these concepts have become "questionable" (1774). Though he did not invoke Whitman's famous phrase directly, Bahr explicitly attributed this spiritual, artistic, and cultural rebirth to Whitman, going so far as to coin the term "the Whitman race" (*die Rasse Whitman*). "With Whitman," he explained, "a new human race has begun, one that knows no ghosts, but rather owns only that which is alive" (1779). Self-identifying as one of these new "barbarians," Bahr confidently announced: "we barbarians are the founders of a new order" (1776). Bahr did not see this new order or humankind as being in conflict with the machine age, nor did he advocate for a return to an idealized natural state of the past. Instead, he saw in the writings of Jensen and Whitman signs of an inner rebirth, a modern aesthetic, and a new, modern human being equally at home in untouched nature and in sprawling cities, but rejecting all conventional thought and mores of the past. To Bahr as to many of Whitman's other German critics and translators, the American poet's "barbaric yawp" heralded a new poetic style as well as a new, modern age unencumbered by old conventions, ideologies, and prejudices. To be "barbaric" meant to be critical of civilization

and its perceived defects, and Whitman's phrase more than any other seemed to express, in their view, this affirmation of a new attitude toward the world, humanity, and art.

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Summary

This essay presents an overview and analysis of German-language translations of Walt Whitman's phrase "barbaric yawp" in seven full versions of the poem "Song of Myself" and in key biographical essays and prefaces by critics and translators in the German-speaking countries.

Although the first documented mention of the phrase in the foreword to the Knortz/Rolleston translation (1889) left it untranslated in the English original, many later translators did offer up their versions of Whitman's phrase in German, often struggling to maintain the allusions and connotations of the original. As this essay shows, Whitman's "barbaric yawp" fascinated many of his translators and critics alike in the German-speaking countries, whether because they saw in his "barbaric" qualities a positive model to applaud and perhaps emulate or because they regarded the phrase as an apt metaphor for his unique and provocative poetic style.

Key words: comparative literature, translation studies, Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," German literature

„Barbarzyńskie yawp” po niemiecku

Streszczenie

Artykuł analizuje tłumaczenia „barbaric yawp” Whitmana zawarte w siedmiu pełnych wersjach „Song of Myself”, a także w najważniejszych esejach biograficznych oraz w przedmowach autorstwa badaczy i tłumaczy twórczości Whitmana w krajach niemieckojęzycznych. Pierwsze udokumentowane przywołanie omawianego wyrażenia pojawiło się w przedmowie autorstwa Knortza i Rollestona (1889), nie zostało jednak przetłumaczone. Mimo to późniejsi tłumacze nie ustali w poszukiwaniach odpowiedniego wyrażenia w języku niemieckim, które zachowałoby bliskie związki z oryginałem. Jak pokazuje artykuł, „barbaric yawp” Whitmana fascynowało zarówno tłumaczy, jak i badaczy jego twórczości w krajach niemieckojęzycznych. Być może dlatego, że w „barbarzyńskich” właściwościach jego poezji dostrzegali oni model do podziwiania, czy naśladowania, a także rozpoznawali w „barbaric yawp” trafną metaforę poetyckiego stylu Whitmana – zarazem unikalnego i prowokacyjnego.

Słowa kluczowe: komparatystyka literacka, studia przekładowe, Walt Whitman, „Pieśń o mnie”, literatura niemieckojęzyczna

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“Barbaric Yawp” in Dutch

Until 2007 Whitman’s “barbaric yawp” had long stood out only in two different Dutch translations, as the title of Rob van de Schoor’s article—“Walt Whitman twice translated” (2007)—suggests. The first one is a selection of poems that Maurits Wagenvoort (1859-1944) translated into Dutch at the end of the 19th century; the second one is the first complete edition of *Leaves of Grass* in Dutch, which came out in Amsterdam in 2005 on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the first American edition. A whole century separates these two translations, which are naturally very different not only in terms of style and language, but also in terms of meaning and interpretation. Interestingly, the “barbaric yawp” sounds different in the two versions, which is the reason why I will focus on both of them and examine the semantic echo of the “barbaric yawp” in relation to the historical and cultural context.

When Maurits Wagenvoort published *Natuurleven* (“Natural life”) in 1898, there was no Dutch translation of Whitman’s poetry, even though the American poet had already been known in the Netherlands for more than two decades. His name appeared for the first time in 1871 in an article about American literature in *Wetenschappelijke Bladen* (van de Schoor, 1986: 79), but he became really famous only in the 1890s when Willem Gerard van Nouhuys devoted a whole study to his work (*Walt Whitman*, 1895). Nevertheless, when Wagenvoort discovered Whitman’s poetry, reading and re-reading the masterpiece during his journey across the United States, he could be familiar only with a short biography that Willem G.C. Byvanck published in *Poëzie*

en leven in de 19de eeuw (1889). And yet, while Byvanck and later van Nouhuys trusted the spiritual portrait that Richard M. Bucke had created in his Whitman biography, both believing that Whitman's optimism could sweep away European "fin de siècle" darkness, Wagenvoort focused on a very different aspect of Whitman's poetry:

He chooses free love and unnatural love as themes of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and [insists that] the Old World must get to know them in order to be able to follow the direction modern life took on that side of the ocean. (van de Schoor, 1986: 79)

It is by no means a coincidence that Wagenvoort—"the reader Whitman dreamt of" (van de Schoor, 2007: 2)—longed to translate a selection of Whitman's poems, giving priority to *Calamus*. He himself was a homosexual and therefore he was very sensitive to Whitman's vision of love. He summed it up in 1894 in *De Kunstwereld* as follows:

His affection can concern woman or man; the magnetism of desire always flows through his feelings. He speaks about human body—male or female—with the freedom and admiring love of a sculptor; and seeing it is not enough—he wants to touch it. (qtd. in: van de Schoor, 1986: 79)

In *Natuurleven* Wagenvoort sought to translate above all Whitman's ideas, or even Whitman himself, but not his poetry itself, which is the reason why he decided not to translate the whole *Leaves of Grass*: "This is not the whole *Leaves of Grass*, but it is the whole Whitman, as he revealed himself in the *Leaves*." (Wagenvoort III) Besides, Wagenvoort did not consider Whitman's works as poems—"his songs are not poems; they are visions, statements, laws, poetry if you want, but poetry as ore" (Wagenvoort VII). On the one hand, the translator describes Whitman's songs as prophetic, they are believed to be the words of a divine self which function as objective laws; on the other, he connects them with natural elements and more generally with nature by comparing Whitman's poetry to ore. According to Wagenvoort, Whitman's writing belongs to nature, and Whitman himself is also "always human, always natural" (Wagenvoort IV). By relating Whitman to nature, Wagenvoort suggests, that the "unnatural" love that he describes is in fact a "natural" part of the "natural life."

The title *Natuurleven*, which means "nature's life" or "natural life", is thus the interpretative key to the whole book that Wagenvoort published in 1898. Realizing this helps to understand the way he translated the "barbaric yawp" line. Instead of "barbaric," he preferred the word "wild," which apparently refers to human savageness and animality, to instincts that bring human beings closer to nature.

Ik doe mijne wilde kreten galmen over de dakken der wereld. (Whitman, 1898: 73)	I am making my wild cries peeling over the roofs of the world.
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When rendering the "yawp" Wagenvoort chose the plural form of *kreet*, denoting "a sudden utter and powerful sound of the (human) voice (whether or not articulated)" (van Dale 648). Interestingly, he transformed a singular form into plural, which gives a new meaning to the line, as the Dutch idiom *wilde kreten* means also "empty words."

This ambiguity disappears in the 2005 translation, as the translators get back to the singular form of *kreet*.

Ik slaak mijn barbareese kreet over de daken van de wereld. (Whitman, 2005: 101)	I let my barbaric cry out over the roofs of the world.
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As we can see, they also remain more conservative while translating "barbaric" – they simply chose the Dutch equivalent *barbareese*. If we focus on the "barbaric yawp" line, the specific features of *Grasbladen* (*Leaves of Grass*) may pass unnoticed, since the line does not reflect the postmodern aspects of the whole project (Ligtvoet) in which twenty-two contemporary Dutch poets were brought together under the direction of Jacob Groot and Kees't Hart.

In their introduction to the bilingual edition of *Grasbladen*, Groot and Hart explain that only a collective translation may suit the polyphony of Whitman's poetry:

The altruistic need of passion in *Leaves of Grass* creates a choir of voices, a tissue of snippets. Hence the translation of this inner song needed to be the work of a collective, a small community of poets. (Groot and Hart 8)

Although the two poets do not admit it directly, they present Whitman as a postmodern poet, who “convinces, because he contradicts himself, makes grotesque moves and bluffs” (Groot and Hart 7). Thus only a choir of poets who are able to distance themselves from Whitman’s myth may translate this “sublime model of poetic collage or montage” (Groot and Hart 7). Although not every poet-translator of *Leaves of Grass* practices postmodern poetry, we easily find among them those who are experienced in postmodern writing and use this experience to create a postmodern translation of the 1855 edition: Ilja Leonard Pfeijffer, Astrid Lampe, Maria van Daalen, Geert Buelens, Anneke Brassinga, Anne Vegter and Peter Verhelst.

Despite the fact that it was high time to publish a complete edition of *Leaves of Grass* in Dutch and to replace Wagenvoort’s outdated version, *Grasbladen* was met with a great deal of criticism in the Netherlands, and it was precisely because of its heterogeneity. Indeed, some poets totally remade Whitman’s verses, while others stuck too close to the original, as in the very literal translation of the barbaric line mentioned above. For this reason, Jakib Veenbaas prepared a new selection of poems from the Deathbed-edition that he published in 2007 under the title *Grashalmen* (“Blades of grass”). As we can see in the “barbaric yawp” line, Veenbaas is artistically more audacious and tries to be innovative in the translation:

Ik laat mijn barbaars gekrijs over de daken der wereld snerpen. (Whitman, 2007)	I let my barbaric scream skirling over the roofs of the world.
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In Dutch Whitman’s “barbaric yawp” sounds obviously more melodious than a barbaric shrill/ scream piercing and skirling over the roofs of the world...

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Summary

The article presents two most important translations of Whitman's line in Dutch. The first one comes from *Natuurleven* ("Natural life"), the selection of poems that Maurits Wagenvoort translated into Dutch in 1898; the second one was taken from the first complete edition of *Leaves of Grass* in Dutch which came out in 2005 under the title *Grasbladen* ("Leaves of Grass"). Both of them present very different interpretations of Whitman's poetry: while the too literal and too vague translation in the collective project of *Grasbladen* presents a "postmodern attitude" to Whitman's work, Wagenvoort's translation is a subtle attempt of expressing the natural character of homosexuality

and Whitman's vision of love. The essay ends up with the new translation that Jakib Veenbaas published in 2007.

Key words: comparative literature, translation studies, Walt Whitman, "Song of Mysel," Dutch literature

„Barbarzyńskie yawp” po niderlandzku

Streszczenie

Artykuł przedstawia dwa najważniejsze tłumaczenia wersu Whitmana na język niderlandzki. Pierwsze pochodzi z *Natuurleven* („Naturalne życie”) – wyboru wierszy, które Maurits Wagenvoort przetłumaczył w 1898 roku; drugie – z pierwszego kompletnego wydania *Leaves of Grass* w języku niderlandzkim, opublikowanym w 2005 roku pod tytułem *Grasbladen*. Oba tłumaczenia prezentują bardzo różne interpretacje poezji Whitmana: zbyt dosłowne i niejasne tłumaczenie zawarte w *Grasbladen* prezentuje „postmodernistyczne” odczytanie poezji Whitmana; natomiast tłumaczenie Wagenvoorta to próba subtelnej wyrażenia naturalności homoseksualizmu oraz Whitmanowskiej wizji miłości. Artykuł kończy przywołanie najnowszego przekładu, dokonanego przez Jakiba Veenbaas'a w 2007 roku.

Słowa kluczowe: komparatystyka literacka, studia przekładoznawcze, Walt Whitman, „Pieśń o mnie”, literatura niderlandzka

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To Yawp, Or Not To Yawp: French Translators and Whitman's Distinctive Idiom

In July 1886 the short-lived symbolist weekly *La Vogue*¹ published Laforgue's famed Whitman translations—a handful of the “Inscriptions,” as well as “A Woman Waits for Me,” and “O Star of France!”—two months after bringing out the first instalment of the first-ever complete printing of Arthur Rimbaud's *Les Illuminations*. The review included no extract from “Song of Myself,” and Laforgue's untimely death the following year robbed French Whitmaniacs of a version that would probably have set very high standards for translators to come. The line under consideration in these pages was not translated by Laforgue, but a Rimbaud poem published by *La Vogue*—«Barbare» (“Barbaric”)—offers an ironic counterpoint to Whitman's signature hyperbole,² with its

¹ The review ran on and off from April 1886 to January 1899. Its first editor-in-chief was Léo d'Orfer (1859-1924) soon replaced by Gustave Kahn (1859-1936), who spent most of his writing life fighting long and hard for the paternity of *vers libre*.

² As regards Whitman's barbaric yawp, it is highly unlikely that Rimbaud knew about it at all. If, as is thought by some, he possibly heard about Whitman during his English exile, in 1872, the poems with which he is most likely to have come into contact were those selected and published in 1868 by William Michael Rossetti, who omitted “Song of Myself,” and, consequently, the yawping line. When one looks at *Les Illuminations* from the perspective of its possible relationship to the Rossetti selection, one will be struck by the presence of multiple echoes expressing a note more of sarcasm than respect about their Whitman counterparts (cf. « Démocratie » — “Democracy” — and its eerily gruesome mock-Whitmanian overtones: “Let us go to dusty and exhausted countries—put ourselves at the service of monstrous industrial or military exploitations”; Rimbaud, 1932: 100). (*Aux pays poivrés et détrempés!*)

“woman’s voice reaching to the depths of arctic caves and volcanoes (Rimbaud, 1932: 55)” (*la voix féminine arrivée au fond des volcans et des grottes arctiques*, Rimbaud, 2009: 309).

A history of the French translations of “I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world” spans a century of dissemination, confrontation, appropriation, and sometimes rewriting (not necessarily in that order). In the same way that Whitman kept revising and rearranging the poems of *Leaves of Grass*, the continuous translation of this line over a century—from 1909 to 2011—offers insight into what it is to try and accommodate a foreign poetic statement into one’s mother tongue, through what Antoine Berman called “the experience of the foreign” (Berman 1984). To the author of these lines, who has been studying, teaching and translating Whitman for the past fifteen years, the interest of this particular line—arguably the most beautiful in Whitman’s greatest poem—is that it offers in the course of eleven words what his tough-skinned mastodon of a preface fails to do over nine pages, i.e., a memorable punchy *ars poetica* combining the persona’s epic-lyric stance, his somatic bravado and a spatial sweep probably unparalleled in English-language poetry.

A consideration of the French translations of the line brings together translators from all walks of life, who approached the task of the translator from very different angles. They can be grouped into the following categories: one political intellectual-cum-man of letters (Léon Bazalgette³), one journalist-cum-writer, (Rosaire Dion-Lévesque⁴), one full-time poet (Joël Bosquet), one professional translator (Gilles Mourier), and four academics (Roger Asselineau, Éric Athenot, Jacques Darras, and Pierre Messiaen⁵). One notable

– *Au service. Des plus monstrueuses exploitations industrielles ou militaires*; Rimbaud, 2009: 314).

³ It is impossible to overestimate the role played by Léon Bazalgette (1873-1928) in disseminating Whitman’s poetry around Europe. His translation of *Leaves of Grass* often served as a linguistic prop to translators more comfortable with French than with American English.

⁴ Of French-American origins, Dion-Lévesque (1900-1974) was mostly active in the French-speaking Canadian press and his few books were published in Quebec.

⁵ A Professor of American literature at the Université d’Amiens until 1995, Darras (born 1939) is also a published poet and essayist, claiming particular affinities with Apollinaire, Cendrars, and Claudel (cf. <http://www.jacquesdarras.com/>), Asselineau (1915-2002), author of the seminal *The Evolution of Walt Whitman* (reissued in 2000 by the University

absence has to be deplored—that of any of writers taking part in the NRF project launched in 1918 by Gide and Larbaud, who only included Section 6 of “Song of Myself.”

The nature of the volumes featuring the line in translation has to be taken into consideration if one is to understand the impact this particular line is likely have on the reader. The latter is perhaps less likely to be impressed by it when it is first read at the end of the whole “Song of Myself,” while being extracted from the whole poem in a study of a short cluster of lines might cause it to make a deeper impression. The sample presents two translations of the complete Deathbed edition (Bazalgette and Darras), and two of the 1855 (Athenot—complete—and Mourier, without the preface), with the four other volumes reproducing more or less substantial selections from the Deathbed edition (with only Asselineau including the whole of “Song of Myself”). The yawping line condenses Whitman’s theory of poetic language in dramatic fashion and offers an illustration of the poet’s going with a flourish from theory to practice, while somehow turning his poetic idiom into an animal cry, the yawp. The very movement mentioned in the line (“above the roofs of the world”) will be more or less reproduced by the translators. It might therefore be necessary to consider alongside the various versions of the line what statements we have by each translator about Whitman’s language and poetic project as a whole as being expressive of their own approach to rendering the language of *Leaves of Grass* into French. Let’s start with the two complete Deathbed editions in French.

They can, in many ways, be regarded as the alpha and omega of the French Whitman translations as they span one century. Bazalgette’s *Feuilles d’herbe* was first published in 1909 and reprinted in 1914, 1922 and 1955.⁶ Bazalgette is well-known for his ecumenical, quasi-religious reading of Whitman, a poet he enrolled in his pan-European internationalist crusade. In the companion

of Iowa Press), who taught at the Sorbonne, also published poems of his own (www.cairn.info/revue-etudes-anglaises-2002-3-page-383.htm) Messiaen (1883-1957), a Shakespeare scholar and translator, is a well-known figure to musicologists, as one of his sons, Olivier, was to become France’s premier composer of the second half of the twentieth century.

⁶ The author of this study has had access to the 1909, 1922 and 1955 editions. The 1914 reprint has eluded him to this day.

piece to the 1909 edition—the two-volume study *Walt Whitman: l'homme et son œuvre*—Bazalgette describes Whitman as essentially a lyric poet. “If you listen to him,” he writes in the preface, “you might take him for some huge and rough rhapsodist who has come unnoticed from classical times to settle on American soil in order to confess the longings, the wonders and the faith of Modern Man.”⁷ In the hagiographic 1921 study *Le Poème-Évangile de Walt Whitman (Walt Whitman's Évangile-Poem)*, written as an answer to Gide's attacks on his translation (see Erkkilä 115-118), Bazalgette turns Whitman into an ancient Greek, one living before the classical period (Bazalgette, 1921: 287). Bazalgette carried out two translations of the line. The 1909 version is: *Je fais retentir mon jappement barbare par-dessus les toits du monde* (Whitman, 1909: 128) (I sound my barbaric yelp over the roofs of the world). The second, to be found at least from the 1922 edition on, reads as follows: *Je hurle mon cri de barbare sur les toits du monde* (Whitman, 1922: 126) (I yell my barbarian's shout on the roofs of the world). The change from the earlier to the later version is quite striking and not so felicitous as one might think. The first is a literal rendering of the original, with *jappement* feebly translating the untranslatable *yawp* and *fais retentir* a forceful rendering of the more neutral *sound*. All in all a balance of sorts is struck between the various words forming the line in the target language. The earlier version, however, has been overshadowed by the later one, even in selections made by writers quoting Whitman's poems in Bazalgette's rendering (see, in particular, Jamati 151; Whitman, 1964: 38). It is surprisingly less successful as it strives—in response to Gide's ferocious attack?—to make Whitman sound louder, wilder and well-nigh hysterical. The verb *hurler* (scream, howl, or yell) stands out of the line in a way *sound* does not in the original. To make matters more perplexing, Bazalgette deprives *yawp* of its original animal overtones. The replacement of *par-dessus* (*over*) with *sur* (*on*) ushers in the central question of the line's spatial strategy. In the second Bazalgette version, the *yawp* is static in contradistinction to the more dynamic preposition used in the original. In other words, the persona is louder, he has

⁷ “En l'écoutant, vous croiriez entendre quelque rhapsode, énorme et rude, qui de l'antiquité aurait invisiblement passé sur le sol américain, pour confesser les désirs, les émerveillements et la foi de l'Homme Moderne.” (Bazalgette, 1908 : vi)

put on a barbarian's costume, but his shout is less barbaric, not animal any more and more static.⁸

With Darras, things get even muddier. He has, as a matter of fact, published three different versions of the whole poem, one in his 1989 selection for Grasset, one in his complete *Deathbed* with Gallimard, and one for the 2009 reprinting of his Grasset selection. One individual translator for three different projects—in chronological order, the Grasset volumes (volume 1 in 1989, volume 2 in 1991), next, the complete Gallimard *Deathbed* (in 2002), and, finally, the Grasset volumes brought out as a single volume in 2009—is a rare enough occurrence. Equally striking is the way the translations reverberate down the years or not, from one volume, and one publisher to the next. Although Darras's language is very different from Bazalgette's—more flamboyant and more narcissistic—similar questions arise around the nature of the yawp, its spatial trajectory and its somatic origin... with Darras adding quirks of his own, as we will now see.

The chronological sequence shows a translator rewriting, reordering and revising, very much in the Whitman vein. The original translation reads: *Éructe ma clameur de barbare, youpi! plus haut que le toit du monde* (Whitman, 1989: 101) ("Belch my barbarian's clamour—*whoopee!*—above the roof of the world"). Many things are to be said about this translation. The I (*je* in French) is absent, as Darras chooses to link the verb—*éructe*—to the pronoun used in the preceding line. The words chosen make the line exceedingly dramatic. The persona doesn't sound his yawp, he *belches* it.⁹ *Yawp* is echoed through the somewhat old-fashioned onomatopoeia *youpi!* (*whoopee!*), which French people use somewhat ironically to express a sudden influx of joy. It is actually more childish than savage or wild. The persona does not so much sound his

⁸ French has only one word—*barbare*—to render both *barbaric* and *barbarian*. English distinguishes between a more cultural, ethnocentric meaning, *barbarian*, whose various definitions by the OED show, from the Greeks to the Chinese, to have been used throughout history to refer to someone outside one's own culture, and a merely descriptive one, *barbaric*, which, according to the selfsame OED refers to what "pertain[s] or [is] proper to barbarians or their art; in the characteristic style of barbarians, as opposed to that of civilized countries or ages."

⁹ This is an obvious throwback to the famous line of the poem's second section: "The sound of the belch'd words of my voice loos'd to the eddies of the wind."

yawp as emit a *clameur*, a word connoting sounds of protest made by a crowd. The persona, as is well known, does indeed contain multitudes, but are they really audible in the present line? Finally, the “roof-of-the-world” option is problematic, at least to this reader, as the phrase (albeit with a capital T at *toit*) is a periphrasis referring to the highest range of the Himalayas. This changes the scene quite drastically and makes Whitman’s barbaric yawp a threat to Chinese authorities! *Plus haut* (higher) finally changes the clamour’s trajectory and makes it more vertical than the original. If Darras’s choice of words is to be regarded as faithful to the original at all, fidelity, obviously, does not entail a careful adherence to the words or to the images used in the source language. The line remains unchanged in the 2002 complete *Deathbed*, while the 2009 Grasset reprinting offers one variant: *Éructe ma clameur de barbare, mon yawp plus haut que le toit du monde* (Whitman, 2009: 126) (“Belch my barbarian’s clamour—my yawp—above the roof of the world”). The spatial trajectory of the barbarian’s clamour remains unchanged, with only the *whoopie* giving way to the yawp in the target language. The problem is that, in much the same way as the poem’s persona declares himself to be “untranslatable,” the word *yawp* will prove unpronounceable to quite a few French speakers. Reading will entail individual, differing renderings. This might be seen as a democratic stroke on Darras’s part, an empowerment of the reader by a translator humbly leaving the last word to the original. And why not? The preface to the 2002 translation paints a picture of Whitman as a liberator . . . and an ancestor to generations of jazz players, with his free verse opening the way for bebop (Whitman, 2002: 25).

The 1855 renderings show Mourier and the present writer moving in starkly opposite directions. The Athenot translation of the line is: *Je lance mon abolement barbare par-dessus les toits du monde* (Whitman, 2008: 171) (“I give out my barbaric bark over the roofs of the world”) while Mourier’s is *Je corne mon glapir barbare au-dessus des toits du monde* (Whitman, 2011: 78) (“I blare out my barbaric squeal over the roofs of the world”). The scope of these translations is obviously very different. They agree on the second half of the line but clash on the opening words. The first tries to foreshadow the spatial hyperbole held in the latter words by using a verb expressive both of the act of giving out a sound and of throwing, launching, with a view to forming an arc from the

opening to the closing words of the line. The act of yawping, in this instance, is part of a trajectory that starts in the persona's lungs and is concluded out of sight, "beyond the roofs of the world." The yawp, in the Athenot translation, becomes a mere dog's bark (*aboisement*), made out somewhat louder by the consonantal echoes in the epithet, creating a phrase—« *aboisement barbare* »—which was actually singled out by two reviewers of the book, with one using the whole line as the title of his review.¹⁰ Mourier uses an obsolete verb (*corner*) implying breaking out a piece of news in an unpleasant voice, as through a horn. The persona therefore no longer gives out an unarticulated sound—which may be wordless or outside the genteel reader's ken—but bellows a boring or unwelcome message out loud. It might be deemed a perfectly relevant reading of the line—even though we move from pure animal sound to some intimation of language—but the fact remains that *corner* is an extremely old-fashioned term, a verb which, to the present writer, seems almost too erudite to render the provocative bragging of the line. As for *glapir*, Whitman might not have been happy to see his yawp relegated to the level of "shrill sounds made by small dogs, foxes and cranes," as the Larousse dictionary has it. What we have here is a more oxymoronic persona than Whitman may have anticipated, a barbaric lapdog. He sounded famously more like "a sentimental donkey"¹¹ to one of his reviewers, but again why not? On the dust jacket, Mourier writes that *Leaves of Grass* is "devoid of any reading agenda" (*dépourvu d'un programme de lecture*) and "of a stable language and rhetoric" (*d'une langue et d'une rhétorique stables*). After scouring Mourier's website, the present writer found an arresting statement as to the French language's "ever weakening resources," which Mourier allegedly strove to overcome in his online translation of the poems of Wallace Stevens.¹² The same must certainly hold for his 1855 Whitman.

The final comments will be devoted to the four translations of the line featured in selections from *Leaves of Grass*, not all of which give "Song of My-

¹⁰ See <<http://passouline.blog.lemonde.fr/2008/02/06/un-aboissement-barbare-par-dessus-les-toits-du-monde/>>, and <<http://www.liberation.fr/livres/010175162-et-walt-whitman-roula-ses-feuilles-d-herbe>>.

¹¹ Cf. <<http://whitmanarchive.org/criticism/reviews/leaves1855/anc.00016.html>>.

¹² "[J]e n'ai jamais hésité à faire appel à toutes les ressources envisageables – malheureusement de plus en plus chétives – du français" (<<http://mapage.noo.fr/gmurer0001/ws.htm>>).

self” in its entirety.¹³ The first, Rosaire Dion-Lévesque’s, reads *Je fais retentir les toits du monde de mes cris barbares* (Whitman, 1933: 100) (“I make the roofs of the world echo with my barbaric shouts”). Gone is the animal cry of the persona in favour of a generic, unspecified cry—in the plural form and at the end of the line, which acquires a somewhat static dimension. If the author of the preface—Louis Dantin, who quotes this particular line in full—is to be believed, Dion-Lévesque was less sensitive to Whitman’s barbaric poetics than to the poems’ Homeric scope. Once again, Whitman becomes a Greek (which, if correct, makes the persona’s barbaric yawp culturally antiphrastic¹⁴).

Pierre Messiaen’s rendering: *Je fais retentir mon hurlement de barbare sur les toits du monde* (Whitman, 1951: 212) (“I sound my barbarian’s howl on the roofs of the word”) once again chooses to overlook the animal nature of Whitman’s cry. Again, like Bazalgette before him and Darras after him, he chooses the substantive—*de barbare*, i.e. *a barbarian’s*—over the adjective. And, as with Dion-Lévesque, the scene is static, as *sur* (*on*) implies no movement while underlining the spatial reverberations of the howl.

For Messiaen, as explained in the preface to the volume, Whitman’s language is “brutal, brutally expressive” (*[b]rutale, brutalement expressive*) and derives not so much from the ancient Greeks as from the King James Bible (Whitman, 1951: 47).

With Asselineau—France’s undisputed Whitman specialist in the second half of the 20th century—something very odd occurs, which was corrected in none of the several editions of his volume. The line in Asselineau’s rendering is *Je fais retentir mon cri sur les toits du monde* (Whitman, 1989 a: 23) (“I sound

¹³ In fact, only Asselineau gives the full translation of the poem—in the 1882 version but strangely dated 1855 . . .

¹⁴ “He is like the primitives and is reminiscent of Homer, and Job. [Line quoted in Dion-Lévesque’s translation]. It matters little that his shouts are barbaric as long as they proclaim his mission . . . While Larbaud and Gide publish a Whitman whose features are essentially abnormal, [Viélé-Griffin and Bazalgette] a democratic and socialist Whitman, Dion-Lévesque, with no patience for side issues, offers the inspired and profound bard.” (*[I]l rejoint les primitifs, et fait songer à Homère, à Job. « Je fais retentir, dit-il, les toits du monde de mes cris barbares ». Peu importe qu’ils soient barbares pourvu qu’ils clament sa mission. (...) [A]lors que Larbaud et Gide projettent surtout un Whitman aux traits anormaux, [Viélé Griffin et Bazalgette] un Whitman démocrate et socialiste, M. Dion-Lévesque, sans souci d’à-côté, présente l’aède inspiré et profond; Whitman, 1933:15).*

my shout on the roofs of the world”). While his translation as a whole does not strive to shine through the original, it is a surprise that his yawping line should present a poet with no barbaric and animal feature at all. *Yawp* is rendered as *cri*, or *shout*, while *barbaric* is left untranslated altogether. As Asselineau never corrected this in any of the editions published between 1956 and 1989, omitting the epithet signals a conscious translating choice and is not to be deplored as an omission. Strangely enough, in the Asselineau’s discussion of the line in the preface, the translation is not quite identical—the static *sur* (*on*) actually gives way there to the more dynamic *par-dessus* (over). It remains a mystery why Asselineau the translator did not choose to follow the more reliable flair of Asselineau the scholar. About Whitman’s yawp, Asselineau has this to say: “Even if he sounded his ‘yawp’ over the roofs of the world, Whitman’s feet remained nonetheless firmly on the ground” (*Whitman avait beau lancer son « yawp » par-dessus les toits du monde, ses pieds n’en demeuraient pas moins bien plantés sur le sol*; Whitman, 1989 a: 177). Asselineau’s rendering is no-nonsense and yet strangely devoid of what the present writer regards as the three key characteristics of the line—the animal cry, the barbaric nature of the persona and the dynamic thrust of the whole line.

The last example of the yawping line in French is that by the poet Alain Bosquet, from his book on Whitman, an essay interspersed with short poems or extracts from the longer pieces: *Je clame mon cri barbare sur les toits du monde* (Bosquet 182) (“I shout out my barbaric cry on the roofs of the world”). The verb *clamer* means both *shout out* and *proclaim*, as if the persona was shouting loudly but also boasting about this shout. The verb redoubles the shout while possibly hinting at a verbal element in it. And again two aspects of the line seem missing—the animal nature of the cry—the yawp—and its spatial movement (*sur* having again been preferred to *par-dessus*). Bosquet, who also published studies on Dickinson, and Sandburg, hears in Whitman’s yawp “an emancipating shout,” and sees in Whitman “the greatest illiterate poet of modern times” (Bosquet 147).

An illiterate poet who lashed on to *litterati* with such frequency and vehemence could only have relished Bosquet’s comment, which should not be taken as derogatory or patronising. What all the versions of the line demonstrate is not only the vexed and antiquated notion of an illusory or even unwished-for

“faithfulness” to the original but the various routes that one language takes to accommodate realities—the yawp in particular—that do not exist in it. All the routes, some of which individual readers may find more agreeable to their tastes than others, point towards the constitution by the translators of, to echo Antoine Berman again, an American poem in French, a text not originating from their own language but always already in the process of waiting to be appropriated by it.

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Summary

The French editions of Whitman's "Song of Myself" have had from the start to contend with two difficulties—the "yawp" and the choice between a static or a more dynamic rendering of the poet's cry. From the trail-blazing Bazalgette text (1909) to the latest Darras volume (2002), the history of Whitman's signature line in France maps the route travelled by the various translators on the way to appropriate a poetic idiom that turns out to be not so "untranslatable" after all.

Key words: comparative literature, translation studies, Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," French literature

Tłumacze francuscy i charakterystyczny idiom Whitmana

Streszczenie

Francuskie wydania „Song of Myself” od samego początku musiały zmierzyć się z dwoma wyzwaniem – przekładem samego „yawp” oraz wyborem pomiędzy statycznym i dynamicznym oddaniem „krzyku” poety. Od pionierskiego przekładu Bazalgette’a (1909) aż do najnowszego tomu Darras’a (2002) tłumaczenia wersu Whitmana we Francji wyznaczają drogę przyswajania poetyckiego idiomu, który ostatecznie okazuje się nie być zupełnie „nieprzetłumaczalny”.

Słowa kluczowe: komparatystyka literacka, studia przekładoznawcze, Walt Whitman, „Pieśń o mnie”, literatura francuska

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Italian Yawps

Untranslatable he claimed to be but translated he was, indeed. In the different Italian versions of the second stanza of section 52 of “Song of Myself,” there is in fact no untranslatable *yawp*: the expression is *translated* by using more common screams, cries, shrieks, shouts. The only recurrence of the original term can be found in Mario Corona’s footnote number 76 on page 410 of his translation of the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, and this confirms how Corona’s translation is certainly the most accurate one ever produced in Italy, from a philological and scholarly point of view.

In the historical overview that follows, I present the different versions followed by short comments. The Italian words correspondent to “I sound” and “yawp” are underlined.

1) Lugi Gamberale, trans. 1923 (Deathbed edition)

E fo risonare il mio barbarico strillo su per i tetti del mondo. (Whitman, 1923: 94)

Gamberale goes for literalness with the verb *risonare* (to make something sound) for “to sound.” Even the original “over” is kept, with the Italian *su per*. The choice of *strillo* for “yawp” is not optimal, though, because *strillo* (shriek) indicates a shrill vocalization more than an energetic, visceral one. Gamberale adds the conjunction *e* at the beginning of the second line for rhythmical reasons. His work is characterized by an attempt to soften and add a solemn flavour to

Whitman's accumulative rhythm, at a time in which the American poet's work was more appreciated for its contents than for its formal innovations.

2) Enzo Giachino, trans. 1950 (Deathbed edition)

E lancio il mio grido barbarico sopra i tetti del mondo (Whitman, 1950: 112)

Giachino's more modern version, produced in a season of great innovation of Italian poetry, is characterized by a colloquial and intimate tone, as is evident in these lines: the Italian *grido* (cry, scream) for "yawp" is better than Gamberale's *strillo*, and the euphonic *lancio* (to throw) is less literal and solemn than *risonare*, but perfectly effective in conveying the sense of spatial appropriation. The choice of leaving the conjunction *e* introduced by Gamberale is rather disappointing: it is not needed here, and it clashes with Giachino's overall style. This is not the only instance in which Giachino shows a particular reverence toward the work of his predecessor.

3) Ariodante Marianni, trans. 1988 (Deathbed edition)

Emetto il mio grido barbarico sopra i tetti del mondo (Whitman, 1988: 277)

Overall, Marianni's translation is an excellent achievement that combines poetic beauty with a faithful rendering of the original's experimentalism, multilingualism and modernity. And yet, it does not shine in this instance. The line is practically identical to Giachino's one, except for the use of the impersonal, biology-manual sounding *emettere* (to emit).

4) Mario Corona, trans. 1996 (1855 edition)

E sopra i tetti del mondo gracchio il mio urlo barbarico (Whitman, 1996: 410)

In his footnote, Corona explains the hazardous choice of the rather ugly verb *gracchiare* (to caw, to croak) for the original "to sound": because there is nothing similar, both phonetically and semantically, to "yawp" in Italian, Corona relies (just as J.L. Borges, with his *graznido*) upon this onomatopoeic verb in an attempt to suggest a shrieking sound similar to that of the hawk, but also to the *ya-honk* of the wild gander of section 14 (which, differently from the "yawp," and disappointingly enough, has been kept untouched and italicized

in all the Italian versions). The term, which corresponds directly to “yawp,” is a rather loud *urlo* (shout), which is certainly better than any of the previous alternatives. Corona’s choice is also aiming to evoke Allen Ginsberg’s Whitmanian *Howl*, whose famous Italian translation is *Urlo*. The translator, who is currently preparing an unabridged translation of the Deathbed edition of the *Leaves*, has decided to modify the choice he made in 1996 and to leave “yawp” intact. Of course his is still a draft which will have to make it through that interminable and convoluted process of decision-(re)making typical of literary translation.

5) Igina Tattoni, trans. 2007 (1856 edition)

Emetto il mio barbarico urlo sopra i tetti del mondo (Whitman, 2007: 137)

Tattoni’s translation seems often to be modeled on Marianni’s and Corona’s versions. With the only difference that hers is often clumsy and unpoetic: let us think of the line that precedes the one considered here, translated by Tattoni as *Neanche io sono domato, neanche un pò – anche io sono intraducibile*, which literally corresponds to the heavy sounding “Neither I am domesticated, not even a little bit—I am untranslatable too.”

6) Alessandro Ceni, trans. 2012 (1855 edition)

Io risono il mio barbarico graculio sopra i tetti del mondo (Whitman, 2012: 179)

In Ceni’s recent translation of the first edition, the line here considered is characterized by an archaic tone, which sounds completely detached not only from contemporary Italian, but also from Whitman’s English. The choice of *graculio* (a self-invented word, probably from the same verb used by Corona, *gracchiare*) is far from reproducing the effect of “yawp,” and astonishingly inappropriate.

I would argue that Whitman’s “yawp” should be left untranslated, but that it could be made more readable by choosing an equivalent sounding made-up word in Italian such as *ioop*, so that readers who do not know English could still get a sense of the sound and experience the estrangement effect that comes from finding such an unexpected, bizarre word. (A translator’s footnote could provide them with information about the history and recurrence of the original,

English *yawp*.) My translation would therefore be: “Io lancio il mio barbarico *iioop* sopra i tetti del mondo,” where I would try to convey the expansive sense of the verb “to sound” with *lancio* and to stun the readers with the barbaric *iioop* which I hope they would read aloud.

To conclude, the line seems to have sounded over the roofs of Italy, notwithstanding the curious translations it has received. Among many possible examples, let us remember Giosuè Carducci, who had read and orally translated *Leaves of Grass* with his English teacher at least three times.¹ In 1873 he had called his collection of poems *Odi Barbare* (*Barbaric Odes*) because thus, barbaric, is how he was convinced that his attempt to reconstruct quantitative metrics would have sounded to Greeks and Latins. The poet laureate was not fully aware of how this recuperation of the classic metrics would have actually corresponded to one of the first pushes toward the liberation and modernization of Italian verse. And the poets Gabriele D’Annunzio and Dino Campana made extensive use of the adjective barbaric, perhaps literally following the advice of the iconoclast critic Giovanni Papini, who, in a 1908 article about Whitman, had written: “We must become barbarians again—maybe even a bit boorish—if we want to rediscover poetry. If Whitman did not teach us at least this, then all the translations and all the talking that has been made about him were completely useless”(711).²

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¹ See Carducci’s letter (June 26, 1881) to Enrico Nencioni as quoted in Rea Mc Cain, “Walt Whitman in Italy.” *Italica* 20.1 (March 1943): 7. See also Giuseppe Lesca, “Carducci lettore di Walt Whitman,” *L’Archiginnasio* 32. 1-3 (1937).

² Translation mine.

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Summary

The article is a brief historical overview of the different Italian translations of Whitman's line "I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world." Each translation is followed by short comments. An alternative solution is proposed by the author.

Key words: comparative literature, translation studies, Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," Italian literature

Włoskie „yawp”

Streszczenie

Artykuł jest historycznym przeglądem różnych włoskich tłumaczeń wersu „I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world”. Każdy przywołany przekład został krótko skomentowany. Autorka szkicu przedstawia także własną propozycję przekładu.

Słowa kluczowe: komparatystyka literacka, studia przekładoznawcze, Walt Whitman, „Pieśń o mnie”, literatura włoska

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Brazilian “Barbaric Yawps”

When Walt Whitman and his “barbaric yawp” became well known and influential among Brazilian intellectuals in the early 1920s, important cultural, social and political changes were taking place in the country. In 1922 Brazilians were getting ready to celebrate the first centenary of their political independence and many of them, with nationalistic pride, were eager to begin a new era and to substitute traditional attitudes and colonial subservience with freedom and innovation. Political, artistic and literary renovation were key words at that time, and Whitman, brought by the international avant-garde movements, became instrumental in many ways. He was considered a model as man, artist and citizen.

For a group of young revolutionary writers who were dissatisfied with the outmoded artistic principles of neo-naturalists, neo-Parnassians and neo-symbolists the time was ripe to hurl a bomb of rebellion against the artificiality of Brazilian art and make a clean break with the past. “We are, in fact, the primitives of a new era” (Andrade 29) said Mário de Andrade (1893-1945), a leading figure of the most important artistic movement of the first half of the twentieth century that came to be known as Modernism. Poet Manuel Bandeira (1886-1968) in “Poética” summarizes the general feeling of this new generation of writers who were engaged in revising the conservative and conformist spirit that had thrived in literature:

I am sick of limited lyricism
Of well-behaved lyricism

.....
I want all the words
Chiefly the universal barbarisms
I want all the constructions
Chiefly the syntactical ones of exception
I want all the rhythms
Chiefly the unnumbered.
(qtd. in Nist 40)

Critic José Cândido Andrade Murici (1895-1984), in a 1922 article titled “Idealismo Yankee,” expressed deep regret that Whitman was almost unknown in Brazil, because there was no greater name than his on the continent (Murici 41). He praises Whitman as the Homeric bard of the New World, and a primitive and barbaric singer (Murici 47).

These quotations reveal that the adjective of the phrase “barbaric yawp” was highly regarded by the first Brazilian readers of Whitman, who linked it to notions of origin, of freedom from restraint, of purity or authenticity. As for the noun “yawp,” it is hard to know how it was understood at that time because, in my research in periodicals and books published in Brazil in the first quarter of the twentieth century, I have never come across a Portuguese translation of section 52 of “Song of Myself.” Although the 1920s can be considered the period of the first Brazilian wave of Whitman enthusiasm with abundant references to his life and work in literary periodicals, no book-length Portuguese translation of *Leaves of Grass* was published in Brazil. Nevertheless, French, Spanish and Italian translations were easily available. In the first decades of the twentieth century Brazil was culturally linked to France, and many educated people could speak French. To many Brazilians of that time Whitman came to be known by means of Léon Bazalgette’s *Feuilles d’herbe* (1922). Translations into two other Romance languages were also available and accessible: Armando Vasseur’s *Poemas* (1912), and Luigi Gamberale’s *Foglie d’erba* (1923). Therefore, in order to discuss the different ways Whitman’s barbaric yawp was translated into Portuguese, one has to start by analyzing how this phrase was rendered in those three translations.

But before moving forward, it is worth mentioning some relevant aspects of the production and reception of literary translations. First of all the production of a translation does not involve a simple lexical choice but is closely

dependent on the translator's beliefs and motifs, and on social and historical contexts. The same dependency is also true when it comes to the reception of a translated text. As for reception, it is also important to note that when a poet becomes known nationwide through a specific translation, there is a sort of symbiosis between the original text and the translated one or, to use a different metaphor, some stem cells of the translation are transplanted into the original text, and as time goes by it becomes difficult to distinguish them. We will see that it can be exemplified with several Brazilian translations that took Bazalgette's translation as a model.

Generally speaking and despite several minor divergences, two basic differences can be pointed out in the Brazilian translations of the line where Whitman used the phrase "barbaric yawp": translations that emphasize the human nature of the sound, and other translations that follow the original text and choose words that make reference to sounds produced by humans as well as animals.

In Bazalgette's translation of "Song of Myself," section 52, line 3: *Je hurle mon cri de barbare sur les toits du monde* (Whitman, 1922: 126), the translation of the echoic slang word "yawp" as *cri* (cry, scream, shout), a current vocabulary that basically indicates loud sounds, eliminated the oddity of Whitman's line and emphasized the human source of the sound. It was the translation of the opening words "I sound" as *Je hurle* ("scream," "howl," "roar") that suggested the animal connotations of the original line. Unlike Bazalgette's lexical choices in Vasseur's translation *Hago repercutir mis salvajes ladridos por encima de los tejados del mundo* (Whitman, 1912: 100)—it is not the verb *repercutir* ("reverberate") that makes reference to animal sounds but the noun *ladridos* ("barks"). The same thing happens in Gamberale's translation that renders the same line as *e fo risonare il mio barbarico strillo su per i tetti del mondo* (Whitman, 1923: 94). The verb *sound* is translated as *risonare* ("resonate"), and it is the noun *strillo* ("scream," "shriek," "howl") that allows for an interpretation of the sound as something that can be produced by humans as well as by animals.

Bazalgette's seminal translation of the echoic slang word "yawp" as *cri*, which back translates into Portuguese as *grito*, has had many followers in Brazil and in Portugal and has influenced translators till today. But unlike Bazalgette, who used the verb *hurler* to maintain an association with sounds produced by

animals, Portuguese-speaking translators have moved even further towards a humanization of the action by preferring to remain closer to Whitman's use of the verb "sound" to introduce the line. Consider the following translations and back-translations. The first translator is Portuguese and the other two are Brazilian.

José Agostinho Batista: *Lanço o meu grito bárbaro sobre os telhados do mundo* ("I project my barbaric shout over the roofs of the world"; Whitman, 1992: 145).

André Cardoso: *Também faço soar meu grito bárbaro sobre os telhados do mundo* ("I also sound my barbaric shout over the roofs of the world"; Whitman, 2000: 110).

Rodrigo Garcia Lopes: *Solto meu grito bárbaro sobre os telhados do mundo* ("I release my barbaric shout over the roofs of the world"; Whitman, 2005: 129).

The softening and "humanization" of Whitman's phrase in Portuguese translations is also due to Geir Campos (1924-1999), whose influential book-length translation of *Leaves of Grass*, titled *Folhas de relva*, was published in 1964 and reprinted twice in 1983, and once in 1984, 1989, 1990, 1993, 1995, 1998 and 2002. The volume of 1964 was clearly connected to the turbulent social-political context of its publication. In 1964 there was a military *coup d'état* in Brazil that culminated with the overthrow of the president and with the end of his leftist policies. The military dictatorship that ensued and that would remain in power till 1985 would govern the country with censorship and persecution forcing people to choose their place on the political spectrum. Geir Campos, and probably the editors of the book, clearly tried to avoid being accused of using the book as political propaganda for the right and tried to make clear that the word democracy used by Whitman in his book of poems did not refer to the political system of his country but to a social regime based on comradeship, something still to be constructed. The dark illustrations, the somber book-cover and the politicized presentation of the book did not appeal to the public and the book did not sell well.

Surprisingly enough, in 1983 Campos managed to turn an editorial fiasco into a successful book that would be reprinted nine times, as we have seen. In order to achieve it he made the book congenial to the young generation of

Brazilians who were about to enter a new historical period of political freedom and economic growth. He gave the book a new name—*Folhas das folhas de relva* ("Leaves of Leaves of Grass"), simplified and altered some of his lexical choices, made some odd changes in Whitman's long lines, and smartly invited a young and popular Brazilian poet, Paulo Leminski (1944-1989) to write a presentation in which Whitman was described in such a way as to make young readers establish a strong identification with the American poet. It worked very well, and for almost twenty years this book would pave the way for Whitman's literary reception in Brazil.

In his 1964 translation of the third line of section 52 of "Song of Myself," Campos, would surprise his audience. Like Bazalgette, he kept the epithet "barbaric" and avoided using the echoic "yawp." He rendered the line as *faço soar meu bárbaro dialeto sobre os telhados do mundo* (Whitman, 1964: 36), which translates back into English as "I sound my barbaric dialect over the roofs of the world." By translating "yawp" as "dialect" Campos eliminated any animal trace from the line or any indication of an uncontrolled outburst of emotion. In his version, the subject of the poem is truly interested in communicating with his audience. It is hard to know the reasons why Campos made his vocabulary choice when he translated "yawp," but I am bound to believe that one of the reasons is the influence of the domestic social instability when endless political confrontations required the mind to be in control at all times. Campos probably thought that Brazilians had had enough outbursts and acts of bravado.

Almost twenty years later, in the nine reprints of his book that span from 1982 to 2002, Geir Campos would keep his translation of the phrase but would make an astonishing and totally unexpected translation of the main verb. Here is his translation: *Faço tinir meu dialeto bárbaro / sobre os telhados do mundo* (Whitman, 1983: 42), which translates back into English as "I tinkle my barbaric dialect / over the roofs of the world." How could this happen? Whitman's harsh barbaric yawp turned into the gentle sounds of a bell! Probably we will never know why Campos made such an awkward translation, but the fact is that his book-length translation remained the sole Portuguese translation of Whitman's poems to gain nationwide notoriety for more than twenty years. Now Brazilians can count on three complete translations of *Leaves of Grass*, and on one complete rendering of the 1855 edition.

In opposition to translators who have tried to humanize or to tame Whitman's barbaric yawp, there are others who have chosen words that stress the animal feature of the source language, as is the tendency in Hispanophone countries. Among the Brazilian translators who belong to this second group are:

Péricles Eugenio da Silva Ramos: *Solto o meu ladrido bárbaro sobre os telhados do mundo* ("I release my barbaric barking over the roofs of the world"; Whitman, 1965: 160).

Luciano Alves Meira: *Lanço no ar o meu urro bárbaro sobre os telhados do mundo* ("I project in air my barbaric roaring over the roofs of the world"; Whitman, 2005: 107).

Bruno Gambarotto: *É meu berro cheio de fúria o que lanço pelos telhados do mundo* ("It is my bellow full of fury that I project by the roofs of the world"; Whitman, 2011: 89).

In my view, the most problematic of these three translations is Gambarotto's. There is no gain in the substitution of "barbaric" with the phrase "full of fury", and worse of all the translation has destroyed an expression that has become emblematic of Whitman's poetry as all the essays here indicate. On the other hand my favorite translation of this line is the one made by the Portuguese translator, Maria de Lourdes Guimarães, who published a bilingual translation of *Leaves of Grass (Folhas de erva)* in two volumes, in 2002. In her translation she makes use of the word *uivo* ("howl") to translate the complex lexical item "yawp." Besides making sense in the context of the poem, this word evokes *Howl*, the famous book by Allen Ginsberg, another revolutionary American poet. She renders the line as *Faço soar o meu uivo bárbaro sobre os telhados do mundo* (Whitman, 2002: 169), which translates back into English as "I sound my barbaric howl over the roofs of the world."

Either through shouts, howls, barks or tinkles, what is clear is that Whitman's voice continues echoing over Brazilian roofs.

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Summary

This essay examines the different ways Walt Whitman's "barbaric yawp" was translated into Portuguese and in so doing it offers information about Whitman's literary reception in Brazil. Although it has taken almost 150 years for Brazilians to be able to read a complete version of *Leaves of Grass* in their own language, Whitman was very much alive in the country throughout the 20th century by means of translations into other Romance languages and in collections of poems translated into Portuguese. Besides analyzing the famous expression in those collections, the essay also explores the way the expression was rendered in the four complete Portuguese translations now available.

Key words: comparative studies, translation studies, Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," Brazilian literature

Brazylijskie „barbarzyńskie yawp”

Streszczenie

Artykuł przedstawia różne tłumaczenia „barbaric yawp” na język portugalski, a także recepcję poezji Whitmana w Brazylii. Mimo iż czytelnicy brazylijscy musieli czekać aż 150 lat na pełne wydanie *Leaves of Grass*, poezja Whitmana pozostała żywa w Brazylii w XX wieku dzięki tłumaczeniom na inne języki romańskie oraz dzięki zbiorom poezji wydawanym w języku portugalskim. Artykuł analizuje tłumaczenia zawarte w tych właśnie zbiorach, a także w dostępnych obecnie czterech pełnych tłumaczeniach „Song of Myself” na język portugalski.

Słowa kluczowe: komparatystyka literacka, studia przekładoznawcze, Walt Whitman, „Pieśń o mnie”, literatura brazylijska

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Whitman's "Barbaric Yawp" Sounded in Serbian*

On the occasion of the centennial of Whitman's birth, in 1919, the future Yugoslav Nobel laureate, Ivo Andrić, published an essay on Whitman celebrating his personality and his poetry as something that cannot be valued by European or any other known standards but should be studied in its totality, not dissected, and as "a poetry of the highest raptures and of a consciousness most awake" (*poezija najviših zanosa i najbudnije svesti*; Andrić 109). As an illustration of this introductory statement, the author translates two lines from the final section of Whitman's "Song of Myself":

I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable, I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world.	Pa ja i nisam nimalo pitom; neprevodiv sam; Odjekuje moj barbarski vrisak iznad krovova sveta.
----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Although Andrić himself previously produced several translations of individual Whitman poems, including parts of "Song of Myself," according to the existing lists of Whitman translations into Serbian, he did not attempt to translate that final section in its entirety.¹ Interestingly, though, the "barbaric yawp" made

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¹ The mentioned lists of translations and critical works are those provided by Ivan V. Lalić and Dragan Purešić in their editions of Whitman's poetry.

its way into a very important critical piece on Whitman at the beginning of the 20th century.

A general keen interest in the American poet shown by the Serbian literary public at the time is evident from the translations of individual poems and from the critical reviews that quite frequently appeared in various periodicals. The first translations of parts of “Song of Myself” were published in a literary magazine in 1911, and ever since it has been one of the most-translated among Whitman’s poems. It appears, however, that the translators have invariably used the Deathbed edition as the source text, apparently assuming that it is Whitman’s final and most authoritative version of *Leaves of Grass*.

In 1951 the first book-length Serbo-Croatian translation of Whitman’s poetry appeared in Zagreb owing to the poet and translator Tin Ujević. Ujević’s translations were included in the first Belgrade book-length edition of Whitman’s poetry, in 1969, together with the translations by Ivo Andrić and Tihomir Vučković. Unlike the previous magazine contributions, this edition contains the whole final section of “Song of Myself,” and thus the poet’s “barbaric yawp.” The subsequent Belgrade editions of Whitman’s poetry, translated by Ivan V. Lalić, a renowned Serbian poet, and Dragan Purešić, an award-winning translator, contain the “Song” in its entirety.

The line “I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world” obviously was quite intriguing and inspiring for the translators, and we can spot significant differences in all of the four renditions examined here:

Odjekuje moj barbarski vrisak iznad krovova sveta. (Andrić, 1994: 109)

Ja dižem svoju barbarsku viku nad krovovima svijeta. (Vitmen, 1969: 26)

Glasim se varvarskim svojim štektanjem preko krovova sveta. (Vitmen, 1985: 125)

Puštam svoj varvarski krik preko krovova sveta. (Vitmen, 2008: 145)

One of the critical points in rendering this line into Serbian (Serbo-Croatian) has been translating the verb “sound.” Having in mind the onomatopoeic character of the whole phrase, the translator would certainly wish to retain the sense of “making a sound from one’s own throat,” and Ivan V. Lalić attempted precisely that, using a not-so-frequent verb, *glasiti se* (derived from the noun

glas—"voice"). While retaining the aural character of the word "sound" itself, Andrić here changes the whole sentence construction by changing the subject of the line. The subject in Andrić's fairly poetic rendition is no longer the "I," but "my barbaric yawp" (or rather "scream," as will be discussed further) and the yawp here "echoes," *odjekuje*. The other two translators, however, opted for the verbs which commonly collocate with the nouns denoting the "yawp," but have little to do with "producing a sound" on their own—*dizati* (*viku*), literally meaning "to raise (a cry)," and *puštati* (*krik*), literally "to let out (a cry)." When it comes to the first part of the line, it is also interesting to note that only Ujević retains the Whitmanic "I," i. e. *ja*, whereas Lalić and Purešić omit the pronoun, which is possible in most Slavic languages and thus poses a common dilemma in translating Whitman.

The adjective "barbaric," with its Latin root, is a common word in most European languages and therefore does not usually create much of a problem for translators. Nevertheless, the examined translations show the difference pointing towards the historical changes of the Serbian language, represented in the two variants—*barbarski*, used earlier and mostly by the Serbian and Serbo-Croatian speakers in the west of the Balkans and still retained in Croatian, and *varvarski*, influenced by the Eastern, Byzantine pronunciation and transliteration, and today accepted as the standard Serbian variant. The two are obviously derived from the same root, although *barbarski* more clearly illustrates the possible etymological connection with the Serbian verb *brbljati* ("to babble"), in correspondence with Ed Folsom's finding regarding the Czech verb *blblati*.

But surely, the greatest trouble here is translating Whitman's, if not "un-translatable," then certainly difficult-to-translate, "yawp." Keeping both the onomatopoeic character of a word, as well as possible associations in the source language, is generally very rarely achievable. All four translations here refer to the sound itself, and not to the open mouth making it, which is another possible meaning of the English word, and none of the translators attempted to make a suggestive coinage of their own, as was one of the assumptions about Whitman's "yawp." Whereas the English "yawp" is not so commonly used, the Serbian translators chose the nouns that are quite established in literary and even everyday language, and would hardly be described as outlandish even by non-intellectuals. In fact, given the frequency of the English and the Serbian

words in question, it is not certain that any translator would back-translate these nouns as “yawp.” As mentioned above, Andrić renders this word as *vrisak*, which more closely corresponds to “a scream,” i.e. a piercing sound made by humans, perhaps resembling the sound a swooping hawk too. Lalić’s slightly surprising choice of *štektanje*, a verbal noun in Serbian denoting “yelping,” reveals the translator’s relying on the etymological relations of the English word, also mentioned in Ed Folsom’s Introduction. However, taking into consideration the possibility that some Serbian literature teacher will want to inspire his/her students in the style of Prof. John Keating, it would be perhaps more advisable to go with a word that is short and easier to “yawp.” Hence, Ujević and Purešić use the nouns *vika* and *krik* respectively, and the difference here is that the first one is almost exclusively associated with humans, whereas the second can denote the sounds made both by humans and animals (a hawk, for instance).

A minor difference in rendering this phrase into Serbian is the position of the possessive adjective *svoj* (“my”), usually placed at the beginning of the noun phrase, but not uncommonly, as in Lalić’s translation, interpolated between the adjective (*varvarsko*) and the noun (*štektanje*). This middle position is not only possible in Serbian, but also quite typical of poetic language, bringing about a change in rhythm, especially when the surrounding words are longer. Furthermore, the use of different prepositions in the last part of the line creates interesting variations in the meaning. While Lalić’s and Purešić’s translations of “over the roofs of the world” indicate that the yawp will travel or fly over the world just like the aforementioned hawk, Ujević’s use of a different preposition (*nad* instead of *preko*) brings to mind a more static image of a poet standing above the world and sounding his yawp.

The names of the authors who showed interest in Whitman by translating his poetry pose the inevitable question whether and to what extent we can speak of Whitman’s influence on the poetics of Andrić, Ujević and Lalić. However, it is interesting to note that another Serbian writer, Mihajlo Pantić, warns against readily accepting the claims about such influences when the great poets are concerned, by comparing precisely the presently considered Whitman line to the lines from Tin Ujević’s poem “Daily Lament” (“Svakidašnja jadikovka”). In his article “One Magical Analogy” (“Jedna magična analogija”), Pantić quotes Ujević’s lines:

Pa nek sam kres na brdima,
pa nek sam dah u plamenu,
kad nisam krik sa krovova! (Pantić 809)

May I be the fire on the hills,
May I be the breath in flames,
If I am not a yawp from the roofs!

and he goes on to stress that neither Ujević, nor Whitman, nor any other poet of greatness should be read through somebody else's poetry. As Pantić points out:

Vitmenov stih je finale jedne uskomešane, slikovne, asocijativne i retoričke avanture u kojoj se lirsko Ja varljivo postovećuje sa svim predmetima vlastitog haotičnog kataloga, da bi se, na kraju, nesmireno, objavilo u vidu 'varvarskog,' praiskonskog glasa i otplovalo u visinu, u ravnodušni, neizvesni prostor. (Pantić 809)

Whitman's line is the finale of an agitated, pictorial, associative and rhetorical adventure in which the lyrical I is illusively identified with all the objects of one's own chaotic catalogue, to be eventually, restlessly sounded in the form of a 'barbaric', primeval voice, and to sail away in the heights, in the indifferent, uncertain space.

In Whitman's, as well as in Ujević's yawp, he sees a Munchian scream of an abandoned and horrified modern man.

Much less pessimistic readings of the "barbaric yawp" have been offered by some other Serbian authors. What is undeniable and often repeated in the reviews of Whitman's poetry is his influence on the poetics of Dada, Futurism, Expressionism, and the related movements of the beginning of the 20th century. Especially interested in Whitman were the activists of the Yugoslav avant-garde movement Zenitism, as can be seen from the works of its founders, Boško Tokin and Ljubomir Micić. Tokin regarded Whitman as "barbaro-kosmos," also noting that "to be a barbarian means: the beginning, the possibility, the creation" (*Biti barbar znači: početak, mogućnost, stvaranje*; Tokin 73). Similar ideas are present in Micić's poem "Barbarogenius" ("Barbarogenije"), which truly echoes the Whitmanic yawp in the line *Ah divlje bi da riknem u planine balkanskog kontinenta* ("Ah I would roar wildly into the mountains of the Balkan continent"; Micić, n. pag.).

The overall idea of Micić's poetics indicates that the anguish of the time after the Great War could be relieved only through the character of *barbarogenius*, and that the whole Europe needed to return to the primeval, "barbaric" values. In other words, it needed to sound Whitman's "barbaric yawp," uncivilized and natural, thus bringing vigor and freshness to a world which had become a bit stale.

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Summary

The paper analyzes four Serbian (Serbo-Croatian) translations of the line "I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world" that were made by Ivo Andrić, Tin Ujević, Ivan V. Lalić, and Dragan Purešić. The author is also interested in Whitman's influence on the poetics of the authors who read and translated him. Such influence, especially in relation to the "barbaric" quality of Whitman's singing, can be noted, for instance, in the ideas of the Yugoslav avant-garde movement Zenitism and its activists.

Key words: comparative literature, translation studies, Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," Serbian literature

„Barbarzyńskie yawp” Whitmana po serbsku

Streszczenie

Artykuł analizuje cztery serbskie (serbsko-chorwackie) tłumaczenia wiersza „I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world”, których autorami są Ivo Andrić, Tin Ujević, Ivan V. Lalić oraz Dragan Purešić. Autorkę artykułu interesuje także wpływ, jaki poezja Whitmana wywarła na twórczość poetów, którzy ją tłumaczyli. Można go dostrzec, zwłaszcza w odniesieniu do „barbarzyńskich” właściwości śpiewu Whitmana, na przykład w twórczości jugosłowiańskiego ruchu awangardowego Zenitizam (*Зенитизам*).

Słowa kluczowe: komparatystyka literacka, studia przekładowe, Walt Whitman, „Pieśń o mnie”, literatura serbska

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“Barbaric Yawp” in Russian

Whitman’s poetry was translated into Russian by a number of translators, most notably by Kornei Chukovsky, who began writing on Whitman and translating his poetry in the first decade of the 20th century. His first translations of Whitman appeared alongside the translations by Konstantin Balmont, a prominent figure of the Silver Age of Russian Poetry, and incited a rather heated polemic on whose renditions were better. In 1920 Balmont emigrated from the Soviet Russia, while Chukovsky stayed, and was gradually elevated in the literary ranks, steadily becoming one of the leading authorities on translation.¹ In 1936 he published the first complete translation of “Song of Myself.” As far as I could ascertain, there have been no other published translations of this poem into Russian. This may be explained both by the enormity of the task and, quite possibly, by the general reverence for Chukovsky’s translations.²

As for the *yawp* in “Song of Myself,” the final Chukovsky’s rendition is rather puzzling. Here is what he does (Whitman, 1982: 100):

¹ He is celebrated, for instance, for his book on literary translation *Высокое искусство* (*A High Art*), which was immensely popular in Russia. It was translated into English by Lauren Leighton under the title *The Art of Translation: Kornei Chukovsky’s A High Art*.

² Vladimir Britanishsky, in the foreword to a collection of his translations of American poetry, recalls that when in 1982 (over a decade after Chukovsky’s death) a definitive Russian edition of *Leaves of Grass* was being prepared, he was asked to re-translate several of Whitman’s poems previously translated by Chukovsky. He refused.

- Whitman:* The spotted hawk swoops by and accuses me, he complains of my gab and my loitering.
I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable,
I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world.
- Chukovsky:* *Пестрый ястреб проносится мимо и упрекает меня, зачем я болтаю и мешкаю.*
Я такой же непостижимый и дикий,
Я выпускаю мой варварский визг над крышами мира.
- Back-translated:* A spotted hawk swoops by and accuses me of babbling and loitering.
I too am unintelligible³ and wild,
I emit my barbaric squeal over the roofs of the world.

The word choice for the yawp—*визг*, pronounced as \vɪsk\ and denoting a shrill, high-pitched scream—seems rather odd. Phonetically, it is very different from “yawp”: there are literally no common sounds between the two words, and the open-mouthed “yawp,” no doubt onomatopoeitic, with its broad ɔː\, sounds absolutely unlike *visk* chosen for translation. Besides, no less importantly, a “yawp,” as the Oxford English Dictionary explains, used to mean “a harsh, hoarse, or querulous cry, esp. of a bird”; thus, in the poem, it seems to allude back to the spotted hawk two lines above. Consider how Whitman compares himself to the hawk in the line immediately preceding the “yawp” (“I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable”)—it is only natural to suppose that with the “yawp” he continues this comparison and likens his wild voice to the cry of the hawk. The Russian *visk*, on the other hand, does not bear this association; if there is any animal typically thought of as producing a *visk*, it is a pig, not a hawk.

Curiously, it appears that *visk* was Chukovsky’s later correction; his initial variant was *вопль* pronounced \vopl\ and meaning a single deafening cry. That translation (Whitman, 1922: 141) ran as follows:

³ Chukovsky produced several versions of this line struggling with the word *untranslatable*: it seems he did not want the reader to realize that he or she was reading a translation of the author who declared himself untranslatable. So most of the times he avoided literal translation of this word and rendered it as *непостижимый* (unintelligible, or unfathomable), *невнятный* (incoherent), *непонятный* (incomprehensible). There exists, however, at least one version where this word is translated directly—*непереводимый* (Whitman, 1935: 220).

Chukovsky (1922): *Пестрый ястреб пронесится мимо и упрекает меня,
Он жалуется, что я болтаю и мешкаю.
Я такой же дикий, как он, я такой же непонятный, как он.
Я выпускаю мой варварский вопль над крышами мира.*

Back-translated: A spotted hawk swoops by and reproaches me,
He complains that I am babbling and loitering.
I am as wild as he, I am as incomprehensible as he,
I emit my barbaric cry [*vopl*] over the roofs of the world.

So the puzzle is, *why* did Chukovsky, after having come up with *vopl*, which phonetically is so much closer to “yawp” (even though it certainly is a human cry, unsuitable for comparison with the hawk⁴) later on change it for *visk*? One can only guess, of course, but I will hazard a suggestion. Perhaps it has to do with the word *barbaric* that precedes the yawp.

As Ed Folsom points out (see above, p. 254), the word *barbaric* goes back to Latin and Greek; in short, to Classical Antiquity. A stereotypic barbarian, as we tend to picture him when we imagine Ancient Rome, is a Gaul. Russians, on the other hand, were for centuries plagued by other kinds of barbarians, namely Tatars and Mongols. A stereotypic Tatar rider, to the Russian ear, does indeed squeal; the sounds they produce were quite frequently described in the Russian fiction as *visk*. Could that possibly be the reason? Could Chukovsky have possibly been influenced by this Eastern concept of a barbarian when he changed the noun in his translation from *vopl* to *visk*?

Anyhow, the *visk* stuck. When in 1998 Vladimir Britanishsky was translating Zbigniew Herbert's “Raport z obleżonego miasta” (“Report from the Besieged City”) from Polish into Russian, he recognized Herbert's *ślucham hałas u bębnow barbarzyńskich wrzasków* as a reference to Whitman, and translated *barbarzyńskich wrzasków* with Chukovsky's version of the barbaric yawp—*варварский визг* (Herbert 89).

⁴ A possible translation *клекот* (squawk), while preserving the comparison with the hawk, would not go well with the word *barbaric*, which is too human for that kind of sound.

The yawp that appears in *Dead Poets Society* poses another translation problem. There the English teacher (played by Robin Williams) quotes Whitman's line with the barbaric yawp and urges his student Todd Anderson (played by Ethan Hawke) to, literally, sound a yawp. The student says "yawp," first quietly, then louder, then screams it. Chukovsky's *visk* would not work here: first, a yawp is an obscure word that the English teacher comments on, while *visk* is a common Russian word not requiring a comment; second, you would not say *visk* or cry *visk*, whereas *yawp*, being an echoic word, easily allows it; and finally, *visk* is a squeal in Russian, and the student in the film certainly does not squeal. So, since Chukovsky's translation was unsuitable, the translator of *Dead Poets Society* had to come up with another version of this line. The adapted version goes like this:

English teacher: "I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world" . . . Now, for those of you who don't know, a yawp is a loud cry or yell.

In Russian: "Я обрушил свой громовой клич 'Яп' на крыши мира" . . . Кстати, поясню: клич "Яп" — это громовой вопль, это рев.

Back-translated: "I threw my thundering cry 'Yawp' on the roofs of the world" . . . By the way, for those of you who don't know, the cry "Yawp" is a thundering scream [*vopl*], a roar.

Here the translation introduces a non-existing cry, "yawp" (similar to other cries, like "Hooray"), which the student then reproduces. This translation is functional, and does the work, but makes those who know the original text smile. And yet, I cannot think of any word that will function equally well as a noun in the line of Whitman's poetry, and as a cry (an interjection) in the movie. Perhaps Whitman's yawp is indeed untranslatable. If so, it certainly will not be the first such word.

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Summary

The essay traces the history of Kornei Chukovsky's translation of Whitman's "yawp" into Russian, points out the oddities of the translation and suggests a tentative explanation of Chukovsky's word choice. It also examines the "yawp" in the Russian translation of the film *Dead Poets Society*.

Key words: comparative literature, translation studies, Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," Russian literature

„Barbarzyńskie yawp” po rosyjsku

Streszczenie

W artykule przedstawiona została historia przekładów „yawp” Whitmana na język rosyjski dokonanych przez Kornieja Czukowskiego. Autor artykułu wskazuje na osobliwości dostrzeżone w przekładach i sugeruje możliwe wyjaśnienia wyborów translatorskich. Analizie poddany został także przekład „yawp” w rosyjskiej wersji filmu *Stowarzyszenie Umarłych Poetów*.

Słowa kluczowe: komparatystyka literacka, studia przekładoznawcze, Walt Whitman, „Pieśń o mnie”, literatura rosyjska

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“Barbaric Yawp” in Polish*

Whitman’s “barbaric yawp” entered Polish culture long before the last section of “Song of Myself” was translated, which happened surprisingly late (1966). At first, it was vaguely alluded to in the literary criticism that denied any poetic value to Whitman’s “rough” or “uncivilized” lines (Skwara, 2004: 101-110); then it began to be referred to more clearly and favorably. Modernistic critics who appreciated Whitman’s challenge to the established literary conventions of the time would write about a “certain great breath of barbaric lyricism” (*jakieś wielkie tchnienie liryzmu barbarzyńskiego*, Winiarski 102), or about a “kind of pagan admiration for every impulse of the universe” (*rodzaj pogańskiego uwielbienia dla każdego impulsu wszechświata*, Nekanda-Trepka 106) as being characteristic of Whitman. However, the most interesting pre-translational reference can be found in the poetry of Julian Tuwim (1894-1953), one of the most influential figures in Polish modern poetry.

As a young poet Tuwim showed a lot of enthusiasm for Whitman, whom he called a “poet of pan-love” in his youthful essay (first given as a speech during meetings of young Polish poets and then published in 1917). The essay was based on Russian critic Kornei Chukovski’s opinions and, to a great extent, on his translations of Whitman poems. Nevertheless, Tuwim also voiced in-

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dependent opinions, among which his keen admiration for Whitman's open expressions of sexuality is the most personal. In the Polish poet's reading it is a heterosexuality that goes along very well with the tone of Tuwim's erotic juvenilia. The young poet's panegyric remarks on Whitman's daring departure from social and literary conventions are often supported by his translations and paraphrases of Whitman lines; also, many passages from "Song of Myself" appear in different forms throughout the essay. There is no literal translation of the "barbaric yawp" line—unlike the *Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son* line—but the expression, perhaps in a version in some other language (not Russian in this case, see the above essay), must have sunk into Tuwim's memory. While writing his literary manifesto almost at the same time—a poem "Poezja" (Poetry; 1917, published in 1918)—he defines poetry as a "leap," the "leap of a barbarian who felt God":

— <i>Poezja</i> — jest to, proszę panów, skok, <i>Skok barbarzyńcy, który poczuł Boga!</i>	— <i>Poetry</i> —this is, Gentlemen, a leap <i>The leap of a barbarian who felt God!</i>
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Then the young poet goes on defining poetry:

Jest to pierwotny, czipewajski krzyk I chutna miłość do rodzącej ziemi, Zadowolony barbarzyńcy ryk, Gdy ujrzał Ogień oczy zdumionymi. (Tuwim, 1986: 281)	This is a primeval, Chippewaian cry And lusty love for the life-giving earth A satisfied roar of a barbarian When he saw Fire with his astonished eyes.
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The expression *barbarzyńcy ryk* ("roar of a barbarian") clearly evokes Whitman's "barbaric yawp" and might even be read as the first Polish translation of the phrase. The "primeval" and "Chippewaian" cry from the line above directs the reader's imagination both to a natural and to a native American world, perhaps significant in the context of Tuwim's readings of Whitman and the imagination that he shared with other Europeans of the time. Exotic Indian life used to be associated with both rough closeness to uncivilized nature and with freedom from restraining cultural norms—of which the "barbaric yawp" might be a symbol. Such references (see Skwara, 2010: 206-209) allow us to

see that Whitman's "barbaric yawp" did not pass unnoticed in Polish culture, even if it was not "properly" translated.

Stanisław Helsztyński, in 1934, engaged the phrase in his foreword to the second Polish book-length selection of translations from Whitman, though it too falls short of a "proper translation." He offers a narrative of Whitman himself that is constructed out of translations and paraphrases of his poems. Among many quotations from "Song of Myself," we find these two:

On, Walt Whitman, kosmos, syn Manhattanu, bujny, dorodny, zmysłowy, pije, nasyca się, chłonie (...) Głos swój, swoje barbarzyńskie ujadanie, rzuca ponad dachy świata (...) (Helsztyński 11-16)

("He, Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son, exuberant, robust, sensual, [he] drinks, satiates himself, absorbs . . . His voice, his barbarian yapping [he] throws over the roofs of the world").

The first of the quoted sentences is almost an exact translation of the opening line of the 24th section, the second one (in the original many other lines are inserted between the two cited here) is a paraphrase of the "barbaric yawp" line with some inventive alterations. By rendering the "yawp" with the Polish equivalent of a yap, Helsztyński makes the sound that Whitman's poetic persona utters unrestrained, wild and animalistic, which corresponds to the untranslatability pointed out by Whitman in the previous line ("I too am untranslatable . . ."). The Polish verb *ujadać* (to yap) denotes any sound-making activity which can be performed by animals (especially dogs), wild hordes (certainly by the hordes of barbarians) or any group of people, as well as by individuals who utter repetitive, unrestrained yelling and demanding sounds in which particular words can hardly be discriminated. *Ujadanie* does not seem a bad rendering of Whitman's yawp, especially since an *ujadanie* is always loud, persistent, and can be heard from a long distance.

In comparison to Helsztyński's rendering of the "yawp," the proper translations of the last section of "Song of Myself" existing in Polish show surprising unanimity, which may result from dependence on modern English-Polish dictionaries' most popular synonym for the word "yawp." In all three translations it becomes *wrzask* (yawp, scream), despite the fact that the translators and translations differ much from one another. The first translation was produced

by Ludmiła Marjańska, who, as a budding poet and translator, participated in compiling the first Polish post-war collection of Whitman poems; the second was created by Andrzej Szuba, a university lecturer of English, a poet, and the most prolific Polish Whitman translator (who may eventually produce the first complete Polish version of *Leaves of Grass*); the third was done by Krzysztof Boczkowski, a physician by profession and a translator by choice. All the translators appreciate—to a different extent though—Whitman’s poetry, emphasizing its liberating values. Still, when translating the line in question, Ludmiła Marjańska (1966), Andrzej Szuba (1992), and Krzysztof Boczkowski (2003) render it respectively as:

Głoszę mój wrzask barbarzyński ponad dachami świata. (Whitman, 1966: 63)
Niosę mój barbarzyński wrzask ponad dachami świata. (Whitman, 1992: 42)
Rozbrzmiewa mój barbarzyński wrzask ponad dachami świata. (Whitman, 2003: 65)

As we can easily observe, there are only two differences between the three translations: the position of the epithet (*wrzask barbarzyński* or *barbarzyński wrzask*), which does not matter much, and the form and meaning of the opening words, which is of some importance. Before discussing the latter, I must remark that Polish *wrzask* does not seem to be an unproblematic equivalent of the yawp (and references, in some dictionaries, to Whitman as an example of the usage of the word seem merely tautological). First and foremost, *wrzask* is a sound produced by people and only by people (an angry child, for example, or angry children, or one or more human beings demanding something or suffering severely from something), except perhaps for human-like animals (monkeys), or birds producing human-like sounds (parrots). *Wrzask* is not only wild and piercing but also uncontrollable since it always denotes intense, overwhelming emotions and states such as fear, pain, animal satisfaction, or shock (SJP, 3: 761).¹ While *ujadanie* may be deliberate, *wrzask* can hardly be, as it is above all uncontrollable. The same can be said about the other popular dictionary equivalent for the yawp: *krzyk* (scream). Moreover, its usage is more restricted

¹ Thus it suits the line in Herbert’s poem *Raport z obłożonego miasta* quite well—see the above essay (p. 321)—but does not go well with Whitman’s line, with which Herbert’s poem really has nothing in common.

to a sound made by an individual human being, and, only exceptionally, to a sound made by specific birds (for instance, sea-gulls) (SJP, 1: 1068-69). The third, very rare equivalent for the yawp (I found it only in one dictionary)—*jazgot*—is a strongly derogatory noun, used to denote a group irksome sound deprived of any meaning (SJP, 1: 829). Thus, it seems all the translators simply chose the least problematic dictionary equivalent, the two subsequent ones being perhaps influenced by the first one.

More problems arise when we look closer at the verbs opening the Polish lines. Since *wrzask* is wild and sharp, one can hardly imagine it being pronounced like a word of God; still, such a baffling solution was chosen by Ludmiła Marjańska. She employs the verb *głosić* (to proclaim, announce, preach), even if *głoszę* ([I] proclaim) should be followed by something sublime, which *wrzask barbarzyński* certainly is not. While Marjańska's choice goes against Polish phraseology without producing much of a new poetic effect, Szuba's choice, *Niosę* ([I] carry), opposes the logic of the Polish language. One cannot "carry" any sounds in Polish but one can raise them, an activity which is usually rendered by the similar verb: *wznosić* (to raise). It is difficult to say why Szuba chose the somewhat illogical *niosę* (repeated in every edition of his translation) instead of the much more suitable *wznoszę*. It seems that Krzysztof Boczkowski found the best solution for the problematic opening of the line. He changed the subject of the line (from "I sound my barbaric yawp" to "my barbaric yawp sounds"), which made it possible to express in Polish the resounding effect of the poet's "barbaric yawp." Such a choice seems both natural and suggestive to me—the voice which *rozbrzmiewa* (resounds) must resonate. And all of the above mentioned evocations and translations, each in its own way, confirm the power of evoking the resonance that Whitman's line possesses.

If I were to combine the solutions that I liked most, I would produce the line *Moje barbarzyńskie ujadanie rozbrzmiewa nad dachami świata*, in which the original initial "I"—alien to the logics of the Polish language, which avoids using "I" at all—is replaced by "my," while the following barbaric repetitive sound (*barbarzyńskie ujadanie*) proudly resonates (*rozbrzmiewa*) over the roofs of the world (*nad dachami świata*). Although *ujadanie* is not a perfect equivalent for Whitman's yawp—being far too long (4-syllable), mostly derogatory when applied to human beings, and merely vaguely onomatopoeic—it seems to me

a much better solution than *wrzask*, *krzyk* or *jazgot*, because it gives the whole phrase an interesting idiomatic tinge. *Skowyt*, the Polish equivalent of a “howl,” would not produce such an effect; one might also think that if Whitman had wanted to have a “howl” in his line, he would simply have used it. Since the Polish language is not rich in nouns denoting sounds which can be produced both by humans and animals, one does not have much of a choice when translating the yawp. On the other hand, inventing a new suitable noun—due to vast differences between the Polish and English languages, both in semantics and phonetics—does not seem to be an easy task. Having tried for some time now, I have come up with merely bizarre or hilarious words.

A different solution has crossed my mind, though: the problematic American noun (yawp) could be replaced by a Polish noun that denotes a big mouth in a modern slang language. What makes it a tempting solution is the fact that the noun in question happens to be *japa* (pronounced yaapaa), and together with a common verb: *rozdzierać* (to tear) forms a phrase which denotes opening one’s mouth wide while producing bold sounds. Then we would get the line: *Rozdzieram moją barbarzyńską japę nad dachami świata* (in back translation: “[I] open wide my barbaric mouth over the roofs of the world”). Such a solution would denote both shouting something in a daring manner, with one’s mouth wide open, and would preserve some of an animalistic effect, since a *japa* is not entirely human. Still, the final effect is mostly funny.

It could be natural, even if all too idealistic, to expect that someone who prepares a Polish version of the American movie *Dead Poets Society*, in which a literary quotation appears (especially as written on a blackboard by a teacher), will consult existing translations and perhaps create the best possible solution after having gained some knowledge of the subject. Unfortunately, movie translators must work fast and sacrifice creativity to efficiency, which was perhaps the reason for their producing a rather literal and awkward version of the “yawp.” In the Polish version of the movie it is simply translated as *dziki ryk* (wild roar) which is a possible but problematic and clumsy solution, especially when deprived of the proper epithet—for unknown reasons “barbaric” was replaced by “wild/fierce.” In a book version of the movie script, the translator chose an even simpler solution: the original “barbaric yawp” becomes a “barbarzyńskie jup” (Kleinbaum 71), whatever “jup” might mean in Polish apart from alluding

to a certain childish play on words; there is no such a word, and it can hardly be regarded as the phonic equivalent of the "yawp" since it must be read as *yooop* in Polish.

Although pop culture is often distant from literary culture, it nonetheless may make literature resonate even more. The Hollywood version of the "yawp" has probably reached more cultures than its literary version: there is, for instance, a Turkish version of *Dead Poets Society*.

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Summary

The text examines the Polish reception of Whitman's "barbaric yawp," beginning with pre-translational intertextual references made by the influential Polish poet Julian Tuwim ("Poezja," 1921). Subsequently, the version of the "barbaric yawp" line from the introduction to the selection of Whitman's poetry (1934) as well as three "proper" translations of the line done much later are analyzed. Problems which the "yawp" causes in the Polish language are discussed against the comprehensive cultural and linguistic background, including the Polish version of the film *Dead Poets Society*.

Key words: comparative literature, translation studies, Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," Polish literature

„Barbarzyńskie yawp” po polsku

Streszczenie

Autorka artykułu bada polską recepcję „barbaric yawp” Whitmana, począwszy od intertekstualnych odwołań Juliana Tuwima, dokonanych jeszcze przed polskim tłumaczeniem tego wyrażenia („Poezja”, 1921). Następnie analizie poddane zostaje tłumaczenie „barbaric yawp” zamieszczone we wstępie do wyboru poezji Whitmana (1934), a także trzy „właściwe” tłumaczenia, opublikowane znacznie później. Trudności, jakie niesie za sobą tłumaczenie „yawp” na język polski, zostają szczegółowo omówione w kontekście lingwistycznym i kulturowym, włączając w to także odwołania do polskiej wersji filmu *Stowarzyszenie Umarłych Poetów*.

Słowa kluczowe: komparatystyka literacka, studia przekładoznawcze, Walt Whitman, „Pieśń o mnie”, literatura polska

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“Barbaric Yawp” in Turkish

The first selection of Whitman’s poetry ever to be translated into Turkish comprised the first four stanzas of “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d.” This translation came out in 1937 and was published in one of the most prominent monthly literary magazines of the time, *Yücel Aylık Sanat ve Fikir Mecmuası*. It is perhaps not surprising that the Turkish Walt Whitman would make his first appearance in a republican and pro-Atatürk literary magazine, given Atatürk’s efforts on behalf of cultural Westernization. The translator was an eminent scholar-critic named Orhan Burian, then a young man of twenty-three, who had just returned to Istanbul with a degree in English literature from the University of Cambridge.

Later, in 1951, a partial nineteen-page translation of *Leaves of Grass* was published in Turkey. The translator was Suat Taşer, a socialist poet. Through the translator’s introductory essay, the poems chosen for translation and even the inscriptions in this slim volume, Whitman is presented as a non-dogmatic proponent of democracy, whose distinguishing characteristic is his ability to establish intimacy with crowds. The second book-length translation of Whitman, undertaken by Memet Fuat, appeared just three years later and featured six more poets, who had undertaken translations of Whitman poems. Later on, three more editions of Whitman translations, all undertaken by Memet Fuat, were published in Turkey, in 1985, 1992, and 2003 respectively. None of these versions, however, includes the famous “barbaric yawp.” In fact, a complete translation of *Leaves of Grass* has yet to be done in Turkish. It seems as if

Turkish translators took Whitman at his word, treating his barbaric yawp as untranslatable.

The only instance in which we actually encounter the “barbaric yawp” in Turkish is in the subtitles for Peter Weir’s *Dead Poets Society*. In a famous scene, John Keating (Robin Williams) writes “I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world” in an effort to get one of his students to open up to poetry. The subtitlers translated this line as *İçimdeki barbarca çığlığı dünyanın çatısından haykırıyorum!* (Literally: “I am shouting the barbaric cry, which is within me, from the world’s rooftop.”)

Interestingly, *barbarca*—the Turkish word for barbaric—is not Turkish at all, but a mid-nineteenth century loanword from the French *barbare*, used to refer to those speaking an incomprehensible language. This period in Ottoman history was marked by a decided Francophilia. It is ironic, perhaps, that the Ottomans, seeking desperately to emulate the French, would borrow that culture’s word for barbarian.

Perhaps the translators were also thinking onomatopoeically. A homonym of the word “barbar” (Turkish for barbarian) is the phrase *bar bar*, which was used in 17th-century Turkish to mean “howling like a bear,” according to the *Turkish Etymological Dictionary*. It is also used in contemporary Turkish in the idiomatic phrase: *bar bar bağırarak* to mean “to shout intensely.” “Bar” is repeated twice to emphasize the intensity of the shouting. This brings us closer to Whitman’s “yawp.” Variations of “barbaric” and “barbarian” were also used in translating Theodor W. Adorno’s famous dictum (*Nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch; Auschwitz’den sonra şiir yazmak da barbarlıktır*), and C. P. Cavafy’s poem “Waiting for the Barbarians” (“Barbarları Beklerken”; *Çapan, Kavafis’ten Kırk Şiir*).

The Turkish word the translators chose for “yawp,” on the other hand, is *çığlık* (scream, cry, shriek). It is the noun form of *çığırarak*, which is an early (pre-1400) variant of *çağırarak* (to call someone or make a sound). *Çığlık* is a very onomatopoeic word and captures the aura of Whitman’s poetry. Until the Turkish language reforms of the 1930s, Arabic and Farsi loanwords tended to dominate the elevated diction of Turkish poetry. Here, however,

we have an ordinary Turkish word, but one with strong phonic value. This choice is in keeping with Whitman's plain-spoken diction and democratic sensibilities.

The verb the translators chose for "I sound" (*haykirmek*) is also an appropriate accompaniment to "yawp." *Haykirmek* is an example of onomatopoeia. It is composed of the sound of shouting and comes from Old English. It is a word with deep roots in the Turkish language.

One wonders why a complete Turkish translation of *Leaves of Grass* has not yet been undertaken. All five of the Turkish translations of Whitman, including the most recent 2003 edition, are currently out of print. Only one thousand copies of the first 1951 translation were printed. This situation did not change with the 1954 edition; the publisher again printed one thousand copies. Compared to the circulation of Whitman in translation in other European countries, these are very minimal numbers. Along with the absence of any scholarly articles on Whitman, it suggests that *Leaves of Grass* has had a small influence in Turkey. Whitman's influence could have reached an apex in the 1970s, when modernism and translation from other languages became prevalent in modern Turkish literature. However, increasing anti-American sentiment might have prevented such an influence.

It was a group of young socialist and realist poets who introduced Whitman to a Muslim, Turkish audience. Unlike his influence on French symbolists, Whitman's reception did not generate innovations in Turkish literature. Moreover, by the time Whitman was translated into Turkish, there was already poetry in free verse by authors such as Nazım Hikmet. We can conclude that *Leaves of Grass* primarily had a sociopolitical influence in Turkey, not a linguistic one.

Though we have yet to know what future translators will make of Whitman's famous "barbaric yawp," it does seem probable that this line has reached some Turkish audiences indirectly through the popularity of *Dead Poets Society*. Subtitles, both formal and informal, have been a major medium of cultural communication since the rise of the internet. Though perhaps not being heard from the "roofs of the world," Whitman's howl continues to be heard.

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Summary

The article provides an analysis of Turkish translations of Walt Whitman, in particular of the famous line “I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world.” The article further examines how Whitman was re-appropriated and refashioned in a novel cultural context and speculates why a complete translation of *Leaves of Grass* was never made.

Key words: comparative literature, translation studies, Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself,” Turkish literature

„Barbarzyńskie yawp” po turecku

Streszczenie

Artykuł przedstawia analizę tureckich tłumaczeń poezji Włta Whitmana, w szczególności wersu „I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world”. Następnie autorka bada, w jaki sposób poezja Whitmana została przyswojona i przekształcona w nowym kontekście kulturowym, a także rozważa możliwe przyczyny braku pełnej wersji *Żdźbeł trawy* w języku tureckim.

Słowa kluczowe: komparatystyka literacka, studia przekładoznawcze, Walt Whitman, „Pieśń o mnie”, literatura turecka

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The Barbaric Soul: Lost in Translation. A Comment on the Hindi Translation

Swami Vivekananda's appellation of Walt Whitman as "the sanyasi of America," seems to be indicative of certain innate qualities in the latter's writing that are Hindu in spirit. Indeed, Whitman was a favourite of not only the charismatic yogi but also of leading Indian poets such as Rabindranath Tagore, the Nobel Laureate from India. T.R. Rajasekharaiah, in his *The Roots of Whitman's Grass* (1970), had pointed out that even as early as 1881, commentaries in newspapers had seen parallelisms between Whitman's thoughts and "Asiatic" themes (Rajasekharaiah 35). Critic after critic has spent a great deal of time trying to figure out the extent or the limits of the influence of the East on Whitman's writing (cf. Preston). It is strange that despite this evident innate tilt towards the Orient, it was not till 2011 that a Hindi translation of *Leaves of Grass* was published as *Ghaas ki Pattiyan* by Chandrabali Singh. Whether this translation of Whitman's predilection towards oriental mysticism is able to re-translate the mysticism is a moot question. Whatever the overall level of spirituality in his poetry, I am going to attempt a reading of the "spirit" in the controversial "barbaric yawp" lines in the context of the Hindi version.

Indeed, at first reading, the approximation of the translation of the poetry to the original certainly seems to indicate a natural proclivity to the east. I am going to focus on the three lines:

English:

The spotted hawk swoops by and accuses me, he complains of my gab
and my loitering.

I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable,
I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world.

Hindi (in Devanagari script):

चितकब्रा बाज़ पार्श्व में नीचे टूट कर चला आता है और मुझ पर यह आरोप लगाता है,
मेरी वाचलता और यायावरी की शिकायत करता है
में भी तनिक-सा पाल्तु नहीं हो पाया, मेरा भी अनुवाद करना असम्भव है,
में अपनी बर्बर टैं टैं दुनिया की छतों पर सुनाता हूँ.

Phonetic pronunciation:

*Chitkabraa baaz paarshva mein neeché toot kar chala aata hai aur mujh par yeh
aarop lagaata hai,*

Meri vaachaltaa aur yaayaavari kee shikaayat kartaa hai.

*Main bhee tanik-sa paaltu nabin ho paayaa, meraa bhee anuvaad karnaa asambhav
hai,*

Main apni berber tain tain duniyaa ki chhaton ké upar sunaata hoon.

The fact that strikes one immediately is how close this translation is, with every word finding almost an exact equivalent, almost as if the translator had sat with a dictionary and picked what he thought were the most suitable options. This does not, necessarily, make for a *good* translation. In his yearning to remain close to the text, the translator has unnecessarily ended up trying to find exact lexical equivalents. Moreover, the poetry, the rhythm is somehow lost in this word-to-word equivalence.

But there are departures from these exact word meanings too, all of which do not do anything for the poetry; rather, they quite often detract from the original: *Toot kar*: means “on being broken.” The word for “swoops” is *toot padna*. This not only makes for an entirely different meaning but actually demeans the action of the grand bird. “By”: in line 1 is given an expanded translation as *parshav mein neeche* or “down in the neighbourhood/vicinity.” The line is thereby lengthened and nothing gained. *Neeche* alone (down here) may have worked better. *Yeh* in the Hindi is redundant which re-translated

reads “accuses me of this.” The re-translation of the Hindi for “I too am not a bit tamed” reads: “I too could not become tamed.” The change in tense limits the continuing “is-ness” of the quality, emphasizing an abiding attribute. This is asserted with certainty and a positive sense of triumph since the testing is also implied as ongoing. The translation, on the other hand, implies “the effort to tame me was made and I could not be tamed.” In this, the face-off has happened, the poet has been tested. In the original, the testing is continuous, and, correspondingly, the withstanding of the “taming” act is either continuous or to come. It is obvious that the sense that the poet wants to communicate is one of indomitability.

The re-translation of “I too am untranslatable” reads “Of me too, to make a translation is impossible.” Here too, the exactness of the word “translation” limits the meaning to the act whereas in the original it is an abiding quality of the unfathomable in the poet. The last line submits an interesting eye-opener to the relationship between Indo-European languages: the similarity between barbaric and बर्बर (*ber-ber*) speaks of common origins and roots. Furthermore, the meaning in both the languages is exactly the same: savage, lacking polish, refinement, culture, etc.

The next word equivalent for “yawp” is even more interesting. The reduplication, a linguistic feature common to Hindi and other Indian languages, *Tain tain* (तै) has some of the same slangy, everyday dismissal of what can only be called prating but also incorporates the sense of nagging. The poet is certainly not engaged in this demeaning activity. The word *badbad* (pronounce *budbud*) is closer to the yawp.

Ultimately, a confident sense of self makes Whitman able to turn the “barbaric” into a positive quality—in fact, a tongue-in-cheek inversion to mean something quite the opposite, superior, with the added implication that anything regular, anything normal is neither acceptable nor laudable. The Hindi use of *tain tain* (to approximate the French pronunciation of Tintin) unfortunately, is not able to capture the notion of the simultaneous maintenance of superiority and the exact irreverent sense of turning cockily against civilizing “taming” efforts which are evident in the original “yawp.” Moreover, *tain tain* with its other meaning of the chattering of parrots hardly comes close to the majesty of the hawk.

The great hawk sees the limitations in the human being, the limited poet. When the poet counters that he “too,” like the hawk, is untamed (a free spirit), and he too is unfathomable (has unplumbed depths), he is simultaneously separating himself from the run-of-the-mill humans, and setting the hawk up as an ideal. The accusation, the complaint of the hawk comes because it has missed seeing this quality in him. Whitman’s lines then, raise the enunciation of the “barbaric yawp” to the level of an assertion of the eastern ideal of submersion of the consciousness in the universe, to become one with it. Because of this yawp then, the poet is one with the hawk, with nature, and as such, achieves a romantic superiority to the unawakened, tamed, “translated” of the world. To me, this translation fails to achieve the grandness of the original spiritual enterprise.

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Summary

Walt Whitman’s poetry displays a marked inclination towards oriental mysticism. It is this connection that I seek to examine in the latter day Hindi translation of *Leaves of Grass* by Chandrabali Singh.

Key words: comparative literature, translation studies, Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself,” Hindi literature

**Zagubione w tłumaczeniu: barbarzyńska dusza.
Komentarz do przekładu na język hinduski**

Streszczenie

W poezji Walta Whitmana dostrzec można wyraźne inspiracje orientalnym mistycyzmem. Artykuł stanowi analizę tego właśnie zagadnienia w kontekście najnowszego tłumaczenia *Leaves of Grass* autorstwa Chandrabali Singh.

Słowa kluczowe: komparatystyka literacka, studia przekładoznawcze, Walt Whitman, „Pieśń o mnie”, literatura hinduska

IV

Coverages

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The Fifth International Whitman Week
(28 May 2012–2 June 2012, Pobierowo, Poland)

Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, though written over two centuries ago, is still a landmark of modern poetry and world literature. Year by year, Whitman's works blossom as new editions are published in a variety of languages. New generations of poets carry the seeds of Whitman's meaning into their own poems, or "leaves," as Whitman might say, as the poets attempt to emulate Whitman, transfer his lines and ideas into their own poetry and thus enter their own dialogue with the poet. Passages of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* continue to be referred to and quoted in films, and made into songs. His name arises in discussions of sexuality and gender and it continues to be present in the curricula of colleges and universities worldwide. It is these responses that make the poetry of Walt Whitman a living, breathing organism that continues to thrive youthfully and give rise to fruitful discourse despite its venerable age.

The Transatlantic Walt Whitman Association (TWWA), founded in Paris in 2007, considers it its mission to respond to the international phenomenon of Walt Whitman and perhaps his best-known work—*Leaves of Grass*—which remains a major influence on world literature and culture. Therefore, each year since 2008, the TWWA sponsors an International Whitman Week to celebrate the international significance of Walt Whitman's poetry. Each Whitman Week consists of a series of International Whitman Seminars, where students from different countries meet to take part in intensive workshops taught by an international team of Whitman specialists. Afterwards, a Symposium is organized in

which papers on Whitman-related topics are presented, followed by a discussion of the papers and an exchange of opinions and ideas.

The first Whitman Week was held in Dortmund, Germany, in June 2008, the second took place in Tours, France, in June 2009, the third in Macerata, Italy, in June 2010 and the fourth in Araraquara, São Paulo, Brazil, in July, 2011. The fifth and most recent Annual International Whitman Week was held in Pobierowo, Poland at the end of May and the beginning of June 2012, at a villa belonging to the University of Szczecin. The event brought together students, scholars, researchers, professors and Whitman enthusiasts from Serbia, Belgium, France, Italy, Brazil, the USA, Germany and Poland.

The Seminar Morning Sessions

The Fifth Whitman Week in Pobierowo officially began on 28 May with the five-day seminar, titled *Walt Whitman International: Reading His Work, Translating His Poetry*, attracting thirty students and a dozen Whitman specialists from the above-mentioned countries. Each day of the seminar was scheduled to comprise of a morning session, a group session and an afternoon translation workshop—except on the first and last day.

The first day of the Seminar and of Whitman Week unfolded with a ceremonial opening of the event, was followed by a welcome lunch and came to a close with an afternoon of sightseeing in Szczecin and a long walk along the beach from Pobierowo to Trzęszacz). On the first morning of the Whitman Week Seminar, all the participants and instructors gathered in the conference room of the villa to hear the inauguration speeches of Professor Andrzej Witkowski, the Vice-Rector of the University of Szczecin, and the Whitman Week organizers. As it has become the tradition of Whitman Weeks, the agenda of the first meeting also included the viewing of the Walt Whitman film, showing the life and work of the poet. The second half of the last day of the seminar, on the other hand, was cut shorter due to the Symposium which was to begin that afternoon. Not counting these two exceptions, the Seminar proceeded in a similar fashion each day, consisting of morning sessions, group sessions and translation workshops.

The morning classes were led by renowned Whitman specialists: Ed Folsom (University of Iowa), co-founder and editor of the *Walt Whitman Archive*, and author or editor of ten books on Whitman; Walter Grünzweig (Technical University of Dortmund), author of *Walt Whitman* and *Constructing the German Walt Whitman*; Kenneth M. Price (University of Nebraska, Lincoln), co-founder and editor of the *Walt Whitman Archive* and author or editor of six books on Whitman, and Agnieszka Salska (University of Łódź), author of *Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson: Poetry of the Central Consciousness*. Each morning session was assigned a different topic, thus each morning the instructors would give a talk, mini-lecture or presentation that would serve as an introduction to the topic of the day's group sessions and/or afternoon workshops.

For instance, on 31 May, as the topic of the morning session touched upon Whitman and the Civil War, to give a broader view of the subject, the instructors each discussed Whitman in the war context, from a different perspective: Kenneth M. Price talked about Whitman and the Civil War legend discussing, for example, Whitman's attitude towards the emancipation of blacks; Agnieszka Salska compared Whitman's Civil war poetry to Longfellow's poetry of this period, showing how differently the poets depicted war despite sharing a similar war experience; Walter Grünzweig discussed Whitman's nursing of wounded soldiers during the war and the eroticism of the nurse figure, which is frequently commented on in Whitman's poetry of this period; while Ed Folsom discussed the toll of war—death—in passages of *Specimen Days* and the poem "This Compost," showing Whitman's invention of a new syntax of mass death.

After the morning session, the students were divided into four smaller groups and spent an hour with one of the instructors for a group session, during which students had the opportunity to engage in discussions with the instructor and each other, exchanging their cultural perspectives on the subject discussed, share their readings of key poems and clusters, focus on fragments of particular interest to them, or continue a thread started during the morning session. Afterwards, following a lunch break, the students attended afternoon translation sessions on the reception of Whitman in various countries and languages, as well as on the translation of his poems into German, French, Italian, Portuguese and Polish.

The Seminar Translation Workshops

The introduction of translation workshops to Whitman Week was implemented for the first time during the fifth Whitman Week and it proved to be a great success. The poem that was chosen for analysis and translation was “When I heard the Learn’d Astronomer.” The workshops were led by Marina Camboni (University of Macerata), Mario Corona (Bergamo University), Eric Áthenot (University of Tours), Betsy Erkkilä (Northwestern University), Maria Lúcia Milléo Martins (Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Brazil), Vanessa Steinroetter (Washburn University) and Marta Skwara (University of Szczecin)—all of whom also are acknowledged Whitman specialists, and some of whom are additionally translators of Whitman’s poetry themselves.

During the first translation workshop, the students were given translations of the poem in the native languages of the participants and instructors. Each language had at least three different translations of the same poem, each done by a different translator. The task of the first meeting was for the students to analyze the differences in the translations, comparing them with the original English version. Therefore each student’s role was to analyze the translations in the language that they knew in order to explain to the rest of the students what differences arose in them, compared to the original version, and to comment on what difficulties arose in the translations of particular lines.

The second workshop was meant to shed light onto the reception of “When I Heard the Learn’d Astronomer” in different countries, and also to discuss and assess the translators’ choices and the translator’s bane in problematic areas of the poem in Italian, German, Portuguese, Polish and French. However, due to the fact that the organization of the workshop in the form of talks on the instructors’ behalf met with some protests from some of the participants, the length of the debate on the future organization of such workshops that followed, unfortunately, did not enable all the languages to be covered in equal depth.

Finally, during the last workshop sessions, the students were placed in smaller groups and asked to produce their own translation of “When I Heard the Learn’d Astronomer” into the native language of each student. If the student’s native language was English, then the student was asked to translate into a language that that student had learnt and knew well enough to translate into.

Next the students were asked to produce back-translations of the poem into English and then present the results before the other groups and share their observations. The task met with zealous effort from the students and resulted in productive discussion and enthusiastic debate. The results of the translation endeavor revealed that, surprisingly, the syntax and lexis of many of the languages in question shared the same problems in the attempt to translate particular passages e.g. as in the case of the *unaccountable I*, or the first person *I* in general (the first person *I*, as it turned out, is usually omitted in translations to avoid awkwardness, despite the significance of the *I* in Whitman's poetry).

In sum, the participants of the workshops found the new project to be an enjoyable and enriching learning experience and welcomed the prospect of including similar translation sessions in the programs of Whitman Weeks to come.

The Symposium

The seminar participants also had the opportunity to attend the fifth Whitman Week Symposium, titled "*Voluptuous Cool-Breath'd Earth*": *Whitman, the Earth, and Ecology*, which took place immediately after the workshops. The two-day symposium started on the afternoon of 1 June and included papers and presentations of Whitman scholars from various countries (as well as of some of the seminar participants) on topics ranging from Whitman's attitude towards nature, Whitman's landscapes, his style, his nature imagery in erotic passages of his poetry, to urban ecology and analyses of Whitman in relation to writers and philosophers.

During the symposium the participants learned why in 1876 a number of Victorian devotees in Britain, including George Eliot, George H. Lewes, M.D. Conway and the poet and critic Robert Buchanan, renounced Whitman and his earthly sensuality. How the Chilean avant-garde poet Vicente Huidobro is connected to Walt Whitman through his 1918 poem *Equatorial* (*Equatorial*). How Whitman was received by some nineteenth-century critics to be a follower of Spinoza. What Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* have in common with M. Schele de Vere's *Stray Leaves from the Book of Nature*. Why the Polish Nobel-Prize laureate and translator of Whitman's poetry, Czesław Miłosz,

chose to translate and publish in his *Unattainable Earth* sections of a Whitman poem in which nature is painted in an overall uncharacteristic of Whitman dark tone. As well as how the Brazilian poet Hilda Hilst and Walt Whitman use eroticism in depictions of nature. The participants of the symposium also discovered what significance a New York barroom called Pfaff's beer cellar had to Whitman's experience of what the author of the paper describes (paraphrasing the eco-critic Lawrence Buell) to be an urban ecological process of "rehabitation," or "a relearn[ing] of what it means to be 'native'" to the city of New York. Other nature-oriented papers explored, for instance, Whitman in light of modern ecological awareness showing Whitman's dialog with the environmental discourses of his day and Whitman's local poetics in the context of mid-nineteenth century environmental debates.

Each of the four symposium sessions concluded with question time and animated discussion.

After Hours

The Fifth International Whitman Week, as a few Whitman Week "regulars" observed, seemed to spur discussion concerning Whitman even long after the sessions and workshops came to a close. There seemed to be something rather "mystical" in the "moist night air" to paraphrase a passage of "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer"—and it was definitely not just the rain (which we had plenty of that week). There appeared to be quite a few other factors at work to create such a stir.

For instance, the exceptionally favorable and quite coincidental circumstances under which the Fifth Whitman Week took place. The tranquil, picturesque seaside town of Pobierowo, a place abounding in greenery and sandy beaches, situated approximately 65 km east from the German border and directly by the Baltic Sea, proved to be situated in an excellent location for the event, considering the international subject matter of the seminar (*Walt Whitman International: Reading his work, translating his poetry*), and the ecology-related symposium ("*Voluptuous Cool-Breath'd Earth*": *Whitman, the Earth, and Ecology*). Apart from the fact that the topics of nature, ecology and intercultural dialogue fit in perfectly with the Whitman Week venue, the Fifth Whitman

Week also happened to span over 31May—a very significant date to all true Whitman enthusiasts. It just so happens that exactly on 31 May 1819, Walt Whitman was born and by mere coincidence the fifth Whitman Week took place during the one hundred and ninety-third anniversary of Walt Whitman’s birth which, I might add, has happened for the first time since Whitman Weeks have come into being.

If you add to that the multicultural diversity, late night strolls along the beach, the Whitman movie night (held 31 May to celebrate Whitman’s birthday) premiere of the new Whitman movie, the Polish movie nights at the villa, the “Goodbye Evening” with Polish cuisine (earnestly prepared by the Polish organizers and their families) the charisma of the instructors and their contagious enthusiasm of everything Whitman—it was not hard to become inspired. Towards the end of the seminar, all the students participating in Whitman week received credit-bearing certificates and if you were to look closely at the hand-written names on each one, you would notice the winding ornate letters that make up the “spermatoid” font of Whitman’s 1855 *Leaves of Grass* cover—an after-effect of Ed Folsom’s inspiring lecture on the student responsible for printing the names on the certificates.

The Sixth International Whitman Week

The 6th Whitman Week is to be held 24 June–29 June 2013. On the last day of Whitman Week during the TWWA business meeting, it was decided that the Sixth International Whitman Week would be organized by Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, USA, and the theme of the forthcoming event would be *Whitman North and South*.

Summary

The coverage summarizes the fifth annual meeting of scholars and enthusiasts of the nineteenth century American poet, Walt Whitman. It contains information concerning the background of the event: the overall aim of International Whitman Week, the role of its founders, a description of its structure and a summary of the event held in Pobierowo, Poland. The review draws to a close with an account of some of the highlights

of the Fifth International Whitman Week concludes with a reference to the following Whitman Week which is scheduled to take place in June 2013, in the USA.

Key words: Transatlantic Walt Whitman Association, The Fifth International Whitman Week in Pobierowo, University of Szczecin

Piąty Międzynarodowy Tydzień Whitmanowski w Pobierowie (28 maja 2012–2 czerwca 2012)

Streszczenie

Sprawozdanie podsumowuje piąte coroczne spotkanie miłośników dziewiętnastowiecznego amerykańskiego poety, Wálta Whitmana. Zawiera informacje dotyczące: celów organizowania Tygodni Whitmanowskich, pomysłodawców wydarzenia, poprzednich Tygodni Whitmanowskich, oraz struktury Piątego Tygodnia Whitmanowskiego w Pobierowie. W podsumowaniu sprawozdania, autorka przedstawia zalety Tygodnia Whitmanowskiego i organizacji tego wydarzenia w Pobierowie oraz zapowiada Szósty Tydzień Whitmanowski, który ma odbyć się w 2013 roku w Stanach Zjednoczonych.

Słowa kluczowe: Transatlantyckie Stowarzyszenie Badaczy Wálta Whitmana, Piąty Międzynarodowy Tydzień Whitmanowski w Pobierowie, Uniwersytet Szczeciński

V

Reviews

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Around the World in 33 Articles?

Faces of Worldliness (Literatura polska w świecie. Vol. IV. Oblicza światowości.
Ed. Romuald Cudak. Katowice: Uniwersytet Śląski, Wydawnictwo Gnome,
2012)

Scholars of the University of Silesia in Katowice have taken to seek the answer to the question of how exactly Polish literature functions in the world on a professional level by establishing a series of conference meetings devoted to examining the place of Polish literature in the world. The fourth international conference on this subject, entitled *Oblicza światowości (Faces of Worldliness)*, took place in Katowice on 5 to 7 May 2011. The volume, the fourth one in the series, *Oblicza światowości*, published in 2012 collects a selection of papers presented at the conference. The publication consists of 33 peer-reviewed articles which were first presented during the symposium.

In the foreword, the editor of the volume, Romuald Cudak, states that the volume's main purpose is to look at Polish literature through the lens of "worldliness" by which he understands any forms of presence of Polish literature among foreign audiences. In his view, worldliness has three separate meanings which allow for three different interpretative perspectives. The first dimension of worldliness is the presence of Polish literature in foreign contexts; this allows for researching both simple acts of translating Polish works into other languages as well as their more intricate interpretations and signs of their reception on various levels. The second understanding of worldliness revolves around issues of how Polish literature constitutes a part of the world's literature and what it

contributes to the global community of ideas and motifs. Lastly, the worldliness of Polish literature may mean works created outside the country, which ask vital questions about the identity of both the whole nation/country and its individual representatives. According to what the editor has established, the book is divided into three main parts: Polish literature in the world, the world in Polish literature (that is literary contexts and comparative studies) and Polish literature written in the world, i.e. by Polish authors who reside outside the country. It seems then that worldliness has been shown in a very broad spectrum of meanings thus allowing the editors and authors of individual papers to present multiple aspects of the existence of Polish literature in external contexts. As the three parts of the volume correspond with three meanings of “worldliness,” as outlined in the foreword, I would like to present this triple understanding of the volume’s key issue.

Worldliness as presence in the world

The first part, focusing on the presence of Polish literature in the world, is by far the most extensive one and therefore divided further into four sub-parts, namely: the reception of works of individual writers; anthologies; inspirations and influences; and institutionalised circulation of Polish literature. Each of these comprises of several articles presenting views and interpretations from various parts of the world.

I need to state that the analyses of reception of various Polish works and authors throughout the world are probably the most intellectually pleasing part of the whole volume. The authors’ painstaking scrutiny under which they have taken individual authors or particular works and their influences is truly impressive: not only in the sense of how much work it cost—but mainly for the reason that the authors have managed to discover relationships one would never suspect existed. If I was to ask who is expected to be the great Polish writers present on the worldly Parnassus, there is little doubt that the following names constituting our literary canon would be recited: Jan Kochanowski, Ignacy Krasicki, Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki, Henryk Sienkiewicz, Stanisław Wyspiański, Stefan Żeromski—plus our Nobel Prize laureates: Władysław Reymont, Czesław Miłosz, Wisława Szymborska. And then this

list would have to be reconsidered: maybe our more contemporary writers? Stanisław Lem, Witold Gombrowicz, Sławomir Mrożek? . . . And it would still at least partly be wrong for the world has an altogether different view of Polish literature and its value.

Articles by scholars from various countries and also by Polish academics working in those countries give not only a truly worldly overview of how Polish literature is present in various countries but also provide first-hand information. The subject of how widely “the world” is represented in the volume will also be brought up later in this review. Of course, the name of Czesław Miłosz is present in this part of the volume but one article only is devoted especially to him; moreover, its Bulgarian author, Kalina Bahneva, notes at the very beginning that the spur of translations of Miłosz’s poetry into Bulgarian was a result of the centennial anniversary of the poet’s birth and not his Nobel Prize. And of course, Henryk Sienkiewicz has also got a separate article about his reception (more precisely, of his novel *Quo vadis*)—but in Japan (an eye-opening piece by Koichi Kuyama who describes in detail the history of translations of *Quo vadis* and also how the title phrase became a cliché in the Japanese language).¹ Other than that, we encounter writers such as Bruno Schulz, Witold Gombrowicz, Tadeusz Różewicz, Andrzej Bursa and Jerzy Pietrkiewicz/Peterkiewicz. And while the first trio is not really shocking to the Polish reader, the latter two authors may raise a few eyebrows, albeit for different reasons. Andrzej Bursa—without wishing here to evaluate his poetry in any way—remains a rather unknown poet although he is frequently mentioned in various anthologies of 20th-century poetry; if we were to point out the most influential poets of the last century we would not point to Bursa. Therefore his sole presence in a volume dedicated to the worldliness of Polish literature may come as a surprise as he has never been thought its typical representative. Jerzy Pietrkiewicz (to whom Katarzyna Cieplińska devoted her paper and who also appears as the author of an anthology of Polish poetry in Marta Kaźmierczak’s article), on the other hand, constitutes an even more complicated case as he wrote both in Polish (when he was living in Poland) and English (after his move to London at the outbreak of WWII)

¹ It is an eye-opener as it not only presents the reader with issues involving Sienkiewicz but also provides information on certain traits of Japanese history without which their reception of *Quo vadis* would not be possible.

and whereas his Polish works are available in Poland, not all his English novels have even been translated into Polish yet. And I dare say that Pietrkiewicz is not a part of what we would call the Polish canon.

The ten articles on the reception of various Polish writers and their works reveal also the laborious effort of translators and promoters of Polish culture whose aim is to make it better-known in other countries. One example can be Tymon Terlecki's continuous battle to make Stanisław Wyspiański's theatrical works appreciated in English-speaking countries (a paper written by Andrzej Karcz). The articles also manage to reveal "the true story" behind presenting certain authors to foreign audiences—for example Beata Tarnowska writes about how the poems of the tragically departed Andrzej Bursa made their way into English-speaking literary magazines and anthologies. And because the papers focus mainly on the present day, they are able to show how Polish literature is currently entering other national literatures (see Olesia Nachlik's article on the presence of Polish literary works in Ukrainian culture in the 20th century; the author refers also to 21st-century pieces such as Michał Witkowski's *Lubiewo* and Dorota Masłowska's *Wojna polsko-ruska pod flagą biało-czerwoną* thereby stressing the role of Polish literature in discussing current Ukrainian issues).

There can be, however, one objection to this otherwise really well-prepared part of the volume. The detailed study of translations and the reception of Polish literary works does not provide us with the full picture of how our literature is present in the world. It seems that what we are looking at is a giant map, mainly blank, with but a few spots representing these countries and authors about which we have learnt. And this may leave us with a rather daunting feeling that we know so little—or with an optimistic one: that we are on the verge of finally getting the full picture one day.

Shaping Poland

The following three articles of the first part of the volume present anthologies of Polish literature issued in Great Britain, Bulgaria and Hungary and all of the papers, independently, face—and try to resolve—the same issue: how to anthologise any given literature? What might be of importance in Polish culture and what will appeal to foreign audiences? Or, to ask the same question the

other way round: what do other nations consider significant in Polish literature? Marta Kaźmierczak shows this issue in its acuity when she clashes two volumes of anthologies prepared by two (Polish) authors and two different concepts behind them. The author, by comparing anthologies *Five Centuries of Polish Poetry* prepared by Jerzy Pietrkiewicz/Peterkiewicz and *Selected Masterpieces* translated and edited by Jarek Zawadzki, shows how each and every decision made by the authors—whether it be the selection of texts or the choice of translations—affects the final outcome and the purpose the anthologies may serve. By doing so, Kaźmierczak also questions the validity and accuracy of any attempt of anthologising a national literature.

The first part of the volume also concentrates on the typically comparative studies of the inspirations and influences of Polish writers on foreign authors and these articles present probably the widest spectrum of interests as they allow a glance into the history of Polish literature and show how older works sparked interest in contemporary authors—as Maria Janoszka shows on the example of intertextual relations between Herbert Rosendorfer's *The Architect of Ruins* and Jan Potocki's *The Manuscript Found in Saragossa*. Not only is the time span wider than in other articles, we are also shown a much broader area as one of the papers (by Natalia Gendaj) presents how Witold Gombrowicz has been perceived in Argentina—both as a writer and as a potential literary character.

The remaining two papers from the first part of the volume concentrate on the study and teaching of Polish literature in Croatia and Japan. The authors of the articles—as was the case with texts devoted to anthologising Polish literature—independently ask the very same question of how Polish literature should be presented in other countries in order to raise interest and awareness among readers. Đurđica Čilić Škeljo's and Filip Kozina's answer is that Polish literature should be taught traditionally, from the point of view of the history of literature and through linking literary works with political and historical issues, for in their opinion, only such courses, albeit slightly anachronistic, let the students truly experience and appreciate Polish literature. Piotr Horbatowski's answer is somewhat different; although he by no means denies the necessity to teach Polish literature and acknowledges that such a course is demanding for the students, he also points out that contemporary students are no longer interested in typically “academic” pursuits and in order to attract their atten-

tion to Polish literature courses, lecturers must not only provide candidates with knowledge but also make the courses attractive enough for students to be willing to participate in them.

What the multiple authors of this part have certainly managed to convey is that Polish literature indeed is present and recognised throughout the world (which should still those sceptics who deny Polish literature its due place in the world) although possibly not in the way we think it should. The names that appear in the compilation only in part seem obvious to the Polish reader; more often they surprise and astonish us. But all in all, the first part of the volume ends on a rather optimistic note: yes, Polish literature is acknowledged around the world and in multiple ways, sometimes quite unexpectedly.

How the world leaks into Polish literature

The second part of the volume, expressly shorter than the first, focuses on how the issues and phenomena significant for other national literatures also penetrate Polish works. It may actually come as a surprise that the editor of the volume chose to begin it with a vast chapter devoted to the reception of Polish literature and not to start with the influences of “the world” and national literatures on Poland for it is quite obvious that the contacts of Polish literature with the world are not just one-sided. What such distributional choice suggests—given the definition(s) of what worldliness is—is that the primary interest of the editor and individual authors is how Polish literature functions in the world—but since the relationship between the two is mutual, one cannot overlook it and has to give the other part its due place. I consider the decision to resolve the composition of the volume in this way a rather daring one—in a positive sense—as it clearly indicates the academic turn of the whole book.

This fragment of the volume deals with the issue of “the world in Polish literature” and presents two main approaches to the subject. The first one, more pronounced, shows themes and motives common to both Polish literature and other national literatures and aims at their comparative study. And hence there are studies of feminism and women’s literature in contemporary Poland juxtaposed with notions such as *chick lit* in the English-speaking world (the paper by Małgorzata Anna Packalén Parkman), the *topos* of the sea as presented by

Joseph Conrad (by Margreta Grigorova) or the person of St. Francis of Assisi interpreted by G. K. Chesterton and Józef Wittlin (by Katarzyna Szewczyk-Haake). One of the articles proposes a broader view by using photography as a *tertium comparationis* (an article by Martyna Markowska on Henryk Waniek's *Finis Silesiae* and Kjell Westö's *Där vi en gått*). The second approach of the authors shows how "worldliness" becomes a meta-issue in the works of Polish writers, how they created themselves in relation to the world. Beata Nowacka describes this on the example of Melchior Wańkowicz's travel-writing by pointing out his self-creation and the creation of what he experiences. Wańkowicz's name is important not only because of these elements but also as he had become a pioneer of modern Polish travel-writing and to him virtually all contemporary travel writers owe a lot. Nowacka presents therefore how Wańkowicz's worldliness—the experience of the world—has shaped and altered Polish literature.

But again, the same objection as with the first part of the volume can be raised here: we see just a few dots on literature's vast horizon. This part features the only paper that could be defined as "general," giving an overview of the reception of Polish literature (a study of "worldliness" of Polish Nobel Prize laureates and the issue of the Western literary canon written by Michał Kisiel). But what is the clearly striking about this particular piece is the fact that it is placed somewhere in the middle of the whole volume and thus it is not highlighted in any way. And what may be found at least slightly striking, is that the author of this piece is a student (which is underscored in his biographical note) and therefore may hardly seem an appropriate authority to generalise on such a subject. The paper certainly lacks adequate bibliography, mainly to articles that have already dealt with the worldliness of Polish Nobel Prize laureates (for instance a 2006 paper by Bolesław Faron²).

Also—for the lack of generalisation—none of the papers provides an answer to how "the world" is present in Polish literature. The inverted commas are no mistake here: the second part of the volume begins to challenge the reader with the question of what we really mean when we say "the world." The first

² Bolesław Faron. "Wokół polskich Nobli literackich." *Literatura, kultura i język polski w kontekstach i kontaktach światowych. III Kongres Polonistyki Zagranicznej. Poznań 8-11 czerwca 2006 roku*. Ed. Małgorzata Czermińska, Katarzyna Meller and Piotr Fliciński. Poznań: Wyd. Naukowe UAM, 2007.

part seems to have swiftly avoided the issue or to have at least left it as a hidden premise that by “the world” we mean “other national literatures” (or more precisely, the creators thereof) which are synonymous with “other countries.” This synonymy was somehow strengthened by the fact that the organisers of the conference wanted the countries to be represented by people coming from them. The articles in the second part tear this identity apart by putting another piece to the worldly puzzle: Polish literature is shown here against the background of other national literatures but also against the background of the world as a physical, geographical even, experience. It is most clearly visible in the paper on Melchior Wańkiewicz that “the world” becomes disrupted. And it seems that this process of disruption has gone unnoticed so far.

The Polish voice from afar

This issue of what “the world” is comes back again in the third, shortest part of the volume. Six papers that aim at showing literary forms and subjects are taken up by authors of Polish origin living outside Poland. And also, I cannot help but notice, there is yet another purpose in this chapter and it is to familiarise Polish readers with the works (or maybe even names) of these writers—which is not to be diminished. The issue of “the world” comes back here again: this time mainly as a physical place, a geographical feature, a stand from which the authors are speaking.

The position from which writers speak their words is by no means neutral or innocent. Katarzyna Karwowska, whose primary interest is the way in which Polish writers function and are received in Germany, states that the sole presence of a particular writer remains a deeply political issue. She studies this on the example of post-war Germany where the reception of Polish literature has heavily depended on the current political layout between East Germany, West Germany and Poland and later between Poland and united Germany. According to the author, the political setup has so affected the cultural situation that Polish writers in Germany remain virtually invisible and therefore speechless.

There is yet another vital issue tackled by the authors of this part of the volume: collective memory and how it can be altered depending on where the

author stands. Elwira Grossman's paper dedicated to novels written by Ewa/Eva Stachniak³ and Lisa Appignanesi concentrates on the question of a nation's identity and the collective memory of a nation (especially of people of Jewish origin). One might want to ask if this sharpness with which the authors of the analysed novels see the problem of transculturalism is just the effect of their foreign experience. Grossman tries to prove that this is the case by quoting an interview with Ewa Stachniak in which she states that the main stimulant of her writing is the question of where she is from and what world she is coming from. In her article, Grossman confronts collective memory with individual memory and thereby reveals how conventional, irrelevant and incongruous—and probably untrue—the collectiveness of memory really is. There is a faint echo of Douwe Draaisma's ideas in Grossman's paper and the same question: how our memory shapes our identity and to what extent our identity is falsified due to the distortions of our memory.

So where exactly is “the world”?

The main purpose of the volume was to present—and possibly try to evaluate and judge—the place of Polish literature in other national literatures. This was done through the key category of “worldliness”; but as I have pointed out above, this notion is not necessarily innocent and transparent. The editor in the foreword presents the reader with three methods of understanding “worldliness” but alas gives no information which will be applied where. As the composition of the volume complies with the division into three types of “worldliness,” the reader is bound to assume the parts will correspond with the definitions. And if this premise is taken for granted, the whole volume “works.” But the three different aspects of “worldliness” may make the reader question the second key concept: Polish literature. For if we have three “worldlinesses,” should we not also have three “Polish literatures” to correspond with? Neither the editor nor any of the authors provides a definition of “Polish literature” and there is no general conclusion of what “Polish literature” really is, how we should perceive

³ As the author of the paper notes, Stachniak uses two different versions of her name according to the language in which her novels are published.

it and who can be considered a “Polish author”—and this seems an essential finding to a volume that is centred around the notion of Polish literature. There are no distinctive characteristics of a “Polish author” given and membership in this circle does not depend either on the language in which a particular writer produces his/her works (Joseph Conrad and Jerzy Pietrkiewicz/Peterkiewicz may be the most pronounced cases) or on the country he/she writes from (the third part of the volume—not to mention the case of Witold Gombrowicz). And if these are not sufficient discriminants, then which? Most probably the author’s own opinion about his/her affiliation but this seems too vague and oblique and somewhat not scientific enough. Hence the volume also challenges the reader with the question of what we really mean by “Polish literature” and what we mean by “in the world”—or even, what we mean by the “presence” of a national literature in the world. For if we cannot discriminate Polish literature and Polish authors from the rest, how do we then present them against “the world”?

Having that considered, one must return to the vital category used throughout the volume and think it through once more. Since we are not really sure, for the authors do not provide us with an explanation of where the borderline between “Polish literature” and “the world” lies, the issue of “worldliness” may slip through our fingers as well. As informative and well-prepared as the volume is, there are still some questions that arise while reading it, especially whether to treat it as a whole, as one planned entirety. The subjects of “Polish literature” and “worldliness” and its definitions have already been tackled in this review (and the latter also by the editor of the volume in the foreword) but there is yet another, not less important, problem with defining key issues and namely: what is “the world” in which Polish literature exists. I have already outlined the issue when discussing “worldliness” but this time I would like to limit the observations to pure geography.

It is pointless to deny that I had approached the volume with certain expectations about what I might find in there, which countries to visit and which names to encounter. And in this respect each paper was an astonishment—and sometimes a revelation. But it is important then to take a step back and see which countries and which national literatures have been considered as “the world”—the background against which we see Polish literature—by the editor and the authors. The main idea of this international conference was

that authors from particular countries would speak of the reception of Polish literature in their national literatures and therefore their representatives of such countries as Bulgaria, Ukraine, Lithuania, Romania, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, Finland, Japan. Authors coming from Poland also researched such countries as Argentina, Norway, Great Britain and the USA. It is not difficult to notice that the list of countries hardly covers “the world,” i.e. the globe. Central Europe is mostly represented with but a few trips to Western Europe (e.g. articles by Katarzyna Cieplińska, Andrzej Karcz, Michał Mikoś), and even fewer to other continents. South America is represented by just one article (a paper on the reception of Witold Gombrowicz in Argentina by Natalia Gendaj) and Asia by one as well (a frequently referred to paper on Sienkiewicz’s *Quo vadis* in Japan by Koichi Kuyama.⁴) And while we learn about the works of Teresa Podemska-Abt, a Polish poet living in Australia (in the paper by Magdalena Bąk), we get no information on how Polish literature is perceived there.

Moreover, it is necessary to note that the volume suffers from a common, inherent disease of a lack of post-conference publication: that they never manage to show the reader the panoramic view of any given issue; that they merely suggest and feign a full view while pointing out only a few spots on the horizon. But can it really constitute an objection if it is an innate vice of any such volume? What the whole volume also lacks—and again this seems a flaw of all such compilations—is the lack of bibliography or an index at the end. What also makes it difficult if one wanted to search the quotations or to refer to papers mentioned in the articles, is the lack of references at the end of each piece. To summarise the whole volume, I have to admit that it certainly is really well-prepared and well-edited. The individual papers provide the reader with valuable and reliable information. Surely many of the published articles will be of help to scholars and be an inspiration for further research on given subjects. As for being one cohesive and coherent volume, possessive of a consistent theme and research methods, I am not so sure.

But I would like to end on a laudatory note. There is a tendency to see the “worldliness” of any given literature—for instance Polish literature—as a positive feature, something that the literature and its authors should be striving for.

⁴ I am consciously excluding here the paper by Piotr Horbatowski as it is mainly a proposition how to teach Polish literature in Japan.

Personally, the word “worldly” evokes in me an image of a 19th century English aristocrat who is telling his peers of the many adventures he has encountered in foreign lands, sipping champagne and enjoying the admiration of other old chaps who have not been abroad. “Worldly” may mean a smug, self-satisfied smile of a person who has somewhat unjustified claims to know better. It seems that the authors of the volume have not succumbed to the idea that worldliness, the presence in the wide world, the reverence with which the names of Polish authors are mentioned is something to long for and endeavour. It is but a fact that our literature is present in other cultures and that some Polish works—not necessarily those which we would consider our greatest—have sparked interest among foreign authors. And if it is a fact, it needs to be researched and described. While we may be happy and even slightly proud that our literature is recognized and acclaimed in the world, we still need to look at this recognition in the cold light of the day and be able to analyse it calmly, without going to any extremes. And this volume serves this purpose ideally.

Summary

The aim of this paper is to review the volume on *Faces of Worldliness (Literatura polska w świecie. Tom IV. Oblicza światowości)*. The volume defines the worldliness of Polish in three ways: firstly, as the presence of Polish literature in foreign context; secondly, as the way in which Polish literature constitutes a part of world literature; and thirdly, as works by Polish authors created outside the country. The whole book is composed according to this division into three main parts. The paper shows the main topics and approaches taken up by the authors of the articles and aims at evaluating their concurrence with the chapter’s main ideas. However, although in general the volume should be evaluated as highly informative and well-composed, it certainly lacks a binding idea that would allow to see *Faces of Worldliness* as one cohesive structure. Also, the author points to the fact that some key issues (“the world,” “Polish literature”) remain undefined in the volume.

Key words: comparative literature, world literature, national literature, Polish literature in the world

Dookoła świata w 33 artykułach

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest zrecenzowanie tomu *Literatura polska w świecie*. Tom IV. *Oblicza światowości*. Tom ten definiuje światowość na trzy sposoby: po pierwsze, jest ona rozumiana jako obecność polskiej literatury w zagranicznych kontekstach; po drugie, jako sposób, w jaki polska literatura tworzy część literatury światowej; po trzecie wreszcie, jako utwory polskich autorów pisane za granicą. Artykuł przedstawia główne tematy i koncepcje poszczególnych autorów i stara się ocenić ich zbieżność z ideami poszczególnych części książki. Jednakże – mimo że tom zostaje oceniony jako bogaty w informacje i dobrze skomponowany – zdecydowanie brakuje mu jednej idei wiążącej całość. Autorka zauważa ponadto, że pewne kluczowe pojęcia (np. „świat”, „literatura polska”) nie zostają w tomie zdefiniowane.

Słowa kluczowe: komparatystyka, literatura światowa, literatura narodowa, literatura polska w świecie

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Life after Postmodernism

Reconsidering the Postmodern. European Literature Beyond Relativism
(ed. Thomas Vaessens, Yra van Dijk), Amsterdam University Press, 2011

While I was visiting my Italian friend, a young poet and a person who seems very postmodern in his behavior, I was just about to finish reading *Reconsidering the Postmodern*. On the front cover of the book one word catches the reader's eye—"Postmodern"—while the other part of the title is almost invisible. When my friend glanced at what I was reading—he is always curious about that—he asked with some concern: "*Post mortem?*" It had never occurred to me that there was any similarity between these two phrases, just as it had never occurred to my friend that someone might read eschatologically oriented literature on their vacation.

In fact, there is something more to this spontaneous association: postmodernism seems to have found itself with one foot in its grave. Is it still here or has it already gone? Can we consider our times as postmodern? And if not, what literary period are we living in now? The answer is not as simple for the authors of the compilation as it might seem. Although the title of the introduction—"European Writers Reconsidering the Postmodern Heritage"—suggests that we have already dealt with this period (evaluating the "heritage" means that a new generation has come), there is no evident proof that we have really closed this era. The authors, along with some other critics, regard the 9/11 terrorist attacks as the logical end of postmodernism as there is no place for relativistic thinking in public discourse or in literature any more. In further chapters of

the book we can see that this date serves as a kind of lighthouse that guides us through the public discourse and helps us organize the numerous groups of authors by dividing them into “before 9/11” and “after 9/11.” Still, it is difficult to include some of them in only one of these groups for their literary activity started just before the WTC attacks and has continued afterwards (as is the case of Philip Roth). As it is shown in the discussed book and as I will try to explain later, the postmodern is not really dead or at least there has been no dramatic end of it.

Reconsidering the Postmodern is structurally very ordered. Every chapter—which means every description of a national literature—begins with a short introduction giving brief insight into how postmodernism (both literature and criticism) fits into the national context. What follows is a presentation of one significant postmodern writer whose works can be considered highly postmodern, in order to show later how more contemporary authors (usually three of them) argue with their “maestro” or discuss his ideas. Van Dijk and Vaessens write:

Two different attitudes are possible in this criticism that stem from postmodernism itself. It may be self-criticism from within on the one hand, or a criticism so fundamental as to take us outside of postmodern discourse on the other. In the first case, we are dealing with late-postmodern concerns about some offshoots of postmodernism such as rampant irony turning into cynicism; in the second, we could speak of a post-postmodernism. (14)

It is the individual decision of the authors of each chapter to point out whether it is the first option or the second; nevertheless, we usually do not get an unambiguous answer. The purpose of the chapters is rather to show how contemporary authors deal with some postmodern problems, which I will name in the later part of this presentation. Before that I would like to focus on the compositional aspects of this book.

Two centers and tight borders

One of the most problematic issues is the way the chapters are organized. Synthetic works seem always to suffer from this affliction: the decision of what

to include and what to leave out and how to distribute the material can never be absolutely satisfying. Every chapter presents one national literature and there are Russian, British, Dutch, Italian, French, Post-Yugoslav, Norwegian, Flemish, Polish, and German literatures. Then there are two chapters that show the transatlantic impact of American literature (these two constitute a separate part): the influence of Latin American authors on Spanish literature and the influence of the authors from the United States on European postmodernism in general.

It is easy to notice that certain European literatures have been omitted, for example Portuguese, Greek or Czech (with an influential postmodern writer Milan Kundera). Evidently it is impossible to embrace all the literatures but still, there is no clear explanation why exactly those particular countries and their literatures were chosen (beside the obvious reason of the authors' interests) to represent European literature in general. It does not seem to be obvious—nor is it justified in any way—that the isolated Norwegian literature or the quite unknown Flemish literature are more adequate than others.

Yra van Dijk and Thomas Vaessens in their "Introduction" assure that there is no such thing as one European postmodernism—there are only its numerous variations. Some of these variations (like Polish, Russian or Spanish) are more politically compromised than others (for instance French). Some of them have—as the authors continue—a more critical and philosophical background (like Italian or Flemish). In other countries one can detect the constant rejection of postmodern philosophy and theory with its peculiar jargon but meanwhile they do have great postmodern literature (for example British). That is why the aim of the book is not to attempt at finding one simple pattern of how postmodernism in European literature looks but to show the many paths it has followed. As van Dijk and Vaessens write:

We are not in the first instance interested in "kernel" of postmodernism (if one could find such a thing), but rather in the borders of a large and varied territory that we could call postmodern. (9)

In another passage the authors express their fear of being accused of conservatism because they criticize some postmodern features. Which shows very clearly that they themselves are deeply submerged in postmodern thinking. The serious

doubt, suggested by the parenthesis, that there is really no such thing as a seed or “kernel” of postmodernism (or any other concept), makes it obvious that we will not get any synthesis, but only the enumeration of several possibilities.

What is outstanding, is the concern to examine the peripheries and not the center. This perfectly embodies the idea of reconstructing the map of European postmodernism(s): we are looking for the borders just as if we were cartographers. Although the authors want to mark the differences between various European postmodernisms, it seems that these borders do not allow for any mutual influences: they are absolutely tight. Thus we will not find any signs of interaction between German and Polish literature or Italian and Spanish. Besides the last two chapters, which show a very different strategy, the only referential point for the rest of the chapters are the American literature in the 9/11 context and—quite obviously—French avant-garde. We could ask what is more important for the national literature of a small European country: the 9/11 or what is happening just around the corner? Although it is obvious that the immediate period that followed the terrorist attacks might have had a substantial impact on the social atmosphere, could it be still so influential 10 years later?

The late coming of late-postmodernism

What is extremely interesting is the question of the calendar of postmodernism. As successive chapters show, it is difficult to give an opening or a closing date. Only German critics pinpoint the exact year of the end of postmodernism which is 1998 and the proclamation of the influential literary magazine *Merkur*. The order-loving Germans have even—also as the only country—introduced the precise date of the beginning of postmodernism into the national literature: 1968. We should consider this case as exceptional: in other chapters (countries) we can find only decades that are considered postmodern. At any rate, it is clear that postmodernism did not come everywhere at the same time.

France is without a doubt the leader. The first postmodern tendencies in narratives, like minimalistic approach to depicting reality and characters as well as the lack of psychologizing, appeared at the beginning of the 1960s. What in other countries, for example in Poland, was still considered French *nouveau*

roman (with its culmination in the 1950s), was already postmodernism, and some postmodern authors (like Alain Robbe-Grillet, Nathalie Sarraute or Margarite Duras) were well-known to be postmodern.

Postmodernism in Germany started quite early as well—in 1968—with the Parisian revolution, whereas it was introduced into Flemish literature in the 1980s, when the new tendencies in France could already be found in the narrative. The further from center (which was still Paris at that time), the later postmodernism set in. In consequence, in some countries postmodernism appeared at the same time as the critique of postmodernism and both had simultaneous impact on country's national literature. That is what happened in Russia. Postmodernism reached Russian literature in the early 1990s, just after *perestroika*. However, Lyotard and Derrida, the two founding fathers of the postmodern philosophy, were barely known in Russia; also, in such a strongly politicized environment there could be no real critique of postmodernism's lack of both ideology and sincerity. We can assume that postmodernism never came to Russian literature, or that it did come but only in its late, self-conscious state.

The delayed arrival of postmodernism was noted also in Post-Yugoslav literature. This case is special for many reasons. The best representative of Yugoslav postmodernism, Danilo Kiš, was also the last one. Not because he did not have any successors—he did in some way—but because his country was no more. Can national postmodern literature last without its physical ground or is there some post-postmodernism in the Post-Yugoslav territory? Not only was the later existence of postmodernism in the Balkans quite unclear, the beginnings of it had been complicated as well. Danilo Kiš's masterpiece *The Tomb of Boris Davidovič* (*Grobnica za Borisa Davidoviča*) published in 1975 (when postmodernism in France was already well developed) caused a scandal. The critics accused him of plagiarism as the major part of his book was copied, but with the source indicated and some subtle changes made (which the angry critics did not even notice). It was obvious that the accusations were more political than critical, but it also meant that the postmodern theory had not even been heard of at that time. Kiš's trial lasted several years and inspired him to write a critical essay on postmodernism, prolonging its life in this part of Europe, while in other parts it was already becoming obsolete.

Is it then possible to find a definition of postmodern heritage in European literature when we take into consideration not only that it was complex but also that it was happening in different periods? In spite of all doubts whether postmodern times are over or not, the authors of the compilation need to consider postmodernism as past (even if only some of its variations). This rhetorical move allows them to show the attitude of contemporary—mostly young—writers towards their postmodern ancestors, postmodern criticism and postmodernism in general.

Postmodern side effects

Whether it is only self-conscious criticism of late postmodernism or total rejection brought by the post-postmodernism, the problems remain the same; Thomas Vaessens, the editor and the author of the chapter about Dutch literature, calls them “unpleasant side effects” of postmodernism. What had primarily been treated as a medicine to the liberal humanist concept proved to be more of a mixed blessing. There are a few constant allegations made against postmodern literature (or more generally—postmodern way of thinking) which appear in various chapters: omnipresent irony, relativism, playfulness, lack of engagement, and too complicated critical jargon.

The last issue is probably the least important. Widely accepted in France, almost unknown in Russia, postmodern language of philosophy was adopted with varying degrees of enthusiasm. A significant example is Great Britain. According to Sebastian Groes, an Anglo-Saxon critic, Great Britain was never fond of the “great tradition” of philosophy and hence immune to the French import: “British intellectuals are equally distrustful of cleverly clever philosophers” (43). The post-structural theory settled in the British territory, but in fact it was familiar only to a small group of scholars and was never well-known outside the academic ground. Therefore, when Derrida visited the University of Cambridge in the 1980s, he was booed by the audience (*ibid.*). But was it the jargon the real problem for the “after-high-postmodern” (without deciding whether we refer to post-postmodernism or late-postmodernism) writers and critics?

Still, there were far more serious charges against postmodernism: the playfulness and the lack of engagement. But was it after all really the case of European literature? Monica Jansen, summarizing the Italian postmodern literature, notes:

... [W]here contemporary American literature has been able to reach the depth of truly critical postmodernism, after a phase of “anything goes,” Italian writers—playing around with horror, SF and pulp—are stuck on the surface of comic, of auto-irony at best, and unable to interpret the tragic dimension of existence. (82)

Despite the great contribution of Italian intellectuals (Umberto Eco, Ganni Vattimo) to postmodern criticism and philosophy, literature did not gain any depth. Maybe that is why Vattimo’s concept of “weak thought” was much more appreciated outside the country. But Italian televised culture is shown in this book as almost the only country that had really suffered from this kind of side effects. As was said before, Eastern block countries and Spain had never produced typically postmodern, purely playful and non-political literature. Moreover, it seems that postmodern thinking helped over-politicized nations to find the required balance. Andrei Pleșu (quoted by Guido Snel) writes:

During communism there was no such a thing as an innocent reading . . . When Hamlet said: “Something is rotten in Denmark” the audience would applaud. After 1989, I hoped that the possibility of an innocent reading would return. To enjoy reading for reading’s sake, without political agendas. (116)

The most representative postmodern Yugoslavian writer, Danilo Kiš, shared the same concept of reality as garbage (*đubrište*) or storehouse (*skladište*) as many postmodern writers, but he never totally agreed with Borges’s and *nouveau roman’s* lack of engagement. To Kiš the task of a 20th-century’s writer was the constant re-telling of the past.

But not only politically oppressed writers under non-democratic regimes rejected the superficial narratives. In the 1970s, before the introduction of postmodernism to its national literature, Norwegian writing was dominated by socio-politically oriented realism and when postmodernism finally arrived there—in its late phase—it could not erase the natural engagement of literature. What occurred was a departure from grand narratives in favor of small narratives focused on individual stories.

The next problem, closely related to the political and social engagement, is the postmodern specialty: omnipresent irony. The ironical attitude was a “reaction to authoritarian certainties from the past” but to the authors of the introduction it went as far as becoming an imperative. “Irony becomes our environment,” says the British writer David Foster Wallace quoted by van Dijk and Vaessens (15). For the authors of the compilation, the omnipresent irony inevitably led to relativism and it is exactly what cannot be accepted anymore after the 9/11 attacks. Relativism as the gravest side effect of postmodernism is also the major concern of the book. It is expressed in the full version of the title: *Reconsidering the Postmodern. European Literature Beyond Relativism*. It is also some kind of a self-disruptive gene of postmodern literature. As van Dijk and Vaessens say: “relativism makes postmodernist theory practically incapable of furnishing either an ethics or a politics” (18). So this particular quality would be then the final argument that there is no possibility to prolong postmodernism in the contemporary post-9/11 narrative.

Nevertheless, we do not get many examples of real relativism in European literatures. It has not developed in German literature. According to Ewout van der Knaap:

This review outlines the expectations of many German literature readers: novels should contribute to morality with a bearable lightness . . . The ethical turn in German literature has had a clear impact on discussions related to matters of representation. (186)

Nor in the Flemish one, presented by Sven Vitse:

Postmodern fiction in Flanders has never been an ultra-relativist, nihilistic affair, weighed down by the crushing load irony. (150)

British literature not only did not accept the jargon but also rejected postmodern ideas in general: Baudrillard “was dismissed as an amoral relativist,” as Sebastian Groes claims (43). Moral thought was always present in British narratives:

Especially the Leaviste tradition of English fiction, with rootedness in liberal humanist values and its staunch convictions about reality and morality, pre-empted the unalloyed success of postmodernist fiction in Britain (ibid.).

According to the author of the “British” chapter, Sebastian Groes, great writers, such as Joseph Conrad, Henry James and Jane Austen set a moralist outlook in British literature and planted protective skepticism towards European thought. So the successors of these great novelists, educated on the highly moral narratives, did not forget their heritage and therefore rejected the postmodern “weak thought.” It seems that they repudiate the theory of Harold Bloom and they are indifferent to the anxiety of influence. Although the idea to tear down the statues of the good and the great usually seems tempting, this time it was not the case.

To provide an example, Zadie Smith and Tom McCarthy assure that they keep their distance to postmodern philosophy, but in spite of their constant struggle with postmodern literary tendencies (both in narrative techniques and themes) they cannot be considered post-postmodern authors. Their work is under the influence of high-postmodern Salman Rushdie¹ and Julian Barnes—but it also corresponds with the tradition of Joseph Conrad and the rest of the “strong thought” writers.

Post-postmodern opposition

As I have already said, because of the political situation in some countries, postmodernism could not have significantly influenced their literature. Despite this, there are many examples of post-postmodern writers who opposed post-modern ideas in very radical ways.

Post-Soviet literature was quite politically engaged; there was no place for playfulness and relativism: “After all we need ideology,” said one of contemporary Russian authors, quoted by Ellen Rutten (35). The society that had suffered such a big change of their national identity needed common values, needed to defend itself not only against the trauma of Soviet experience but also against the trauma of the radical change of socio-political context. The post-postmodern writer Dmitrii Prigov postulated New Sincerity as the new demand for Russian literature, thus totally rejecting postmodern irony. This new tendency has been

¹ Salman Rushdie introduced the concept of a nomad to the postmodern thinking, which has inspired many of the writers and philosophers.

adopted by Prigov's successors who have changed the intimate and somewhat private discourse into a more public and political one. Kirill Medvedev (quoted by Rutten)—who also translated very sincere and naive novels by Charles Bukowski—wrote about New Sincerity:

It is President Putin and contemporary poetry and the broadcasters on television. It is Alexander Lukashenko admitting that his party falsified the elections—lowered Lukashenko's number from 93 percent to 80 percent—because, Lukashenko very sincerely confessed, “the European Union wouldn't have accepted the result otherwise.” This is simultaneously unbelievable and symptomatic. The new sincerity is the blogosphere, with its absolutely sincere poets in one corner and its equally sincere Nazis in the other. (37)

As one may notice, there is a wide spectrum of what can be considered “sincere.” The lack of any strict definition provokes creating multiple examples of new sincere representations. New Sincerity started to be the main slogan of Russian bloggers, which led to unexpected “side effects” on the other side of the Atlantic. Californian writer Alexander Blagg posted on his blog his own list of New Sincerity examples and invited his blog readers to continue the enumeration and to submit new proposals. It would be impossible to find any key to this selection among the new-sincere things we can find: best friends, lemonade stands, camping trips and high-fives. What primarily was a reaction to and dismissal of irony, games and playfulness, became a parody, a postmodern author-reader interaction. Although this time the direction of the influence was opposite: from Russia to the United States.

Another peculiar post-postmodern reaction can be noticed in Polish literature. According to Arent Van Nieuwerkerken, the author of the “Polish” chapter, some of the writers reacted strongly to postmodern tendencies by rejecting irony. Nieuwerkerken presents the works of Zbigniew Herbert as an example of the simplification of poetics. Herbert's lyrical persona, Mister Cogito, can be seen—to some extent—as the alter ego of the author, which reduces the unnecessary complications between the author and the reader: Herbert wanted to speak clearly, sincerely and directly. Created in the 1970s and developed in the complicated decade of the 1980s, Mister Cogito was supposed to be an “accomplice” to the nation. The authenticity and the direct form—admired by Western critics—were only partly accepted in Poland. Some critics expected

that after the democratic transition Herbert would return to irony but that never happened; the astonished Polish critics noticed that Herbert even started to rhyme! To the author of the chapter this is a post-postmodern attitude and it expresses the need for New Sincerity in poetry after the sociopolitical reconstruction. Nevertheless, Herbert's radical reaction could not have been caused by the superficiality of Polish postmodern literature as it had never played an important role in Poland. The non-ironic poetry would be in this case a slightly unnecessary prevention.

The most interesting issue in these two examples is that a strong post-postmodern attitude was present only in the countries that had never really experienced postmodern vogue—Herbert's and Prigov's work were more of a response to what could have happened than to what had really occurred.

Postmodernism—a soft critique

If there had been no real menace of postmodern “side effects” and there had only been a few writers who had felt a strong need to oppose common values and to commit to postmodern “weak thought” and omnipresent irony, how would one describe recent mainstream literature? The authors of the compilation have identified some common qualities that are shared by the latest novels, among them: in-depth irony, turning towards reality, commitment, return to conventional forms, self-reflexivity and reconciliation with the reader. None of the writers of the last generation presented in the book rejects the postmodern heritage. Zadie Smith does not turn away from Salman Rushdie's narratives and the Bosnian Semezdin Mehmedinovic (quoted by Snel) continues the work of rewriting history started by Kiš, although he rectifies Kiš's concept of borders:

Right now for instance, east and west
Invented so a body could orient itself
By the stars in the desolate expanse
Mean more than maps
Where Mecca's on the east side and
Los Angeles on the west. (126-127)

The Bosnian poet stands on the border between two worlds: West (Roman Catholic) and East (Orthodox Catholic, or even Islam) which implies the existence of a deeper meaning of his narratives and multiplies the perspective by combining stories from different times and places, which Kiš, who was more concentrated on his ground, had never done.

In fact, late-postmodernism is just as varied as postmodernism was. If there had been many postmodernisms (or many variations of it), there would also be many late-postmodernisms: every country has its own particular incarnation.

One can notice a big return to the story and the *sujet* in French literature. But New Realism—as this movement is called—is not a return to the 19th-century narrative. The French writer Michel Houellebecq, considered a late-postmodern novelist, has been frequently compared to Emil Zola and his theories to Zola's social determinism. He has also been called a modern Balzac, yet his description of society is much more detailed. Although he still uses some of the postmodern tools and techniques, like quotations from real and invented books, the postmodern erudition is not necessary anymore. His narration, traditional in its form, is combined with postmodern thoughts and topics. Michel Houellebecq's characters are anti-heroes, they do not suffer from the lack of identity—they aim at losing it. One of the *Plateforme* protagonists (quoted by Sabine van Wesemael) says:

It is wrong to pretend that human beings are unique, that they carry within them an irreplaceable individuality; as far as I was concerned, at any rate, I could not distinguish any trace of such an individuality. (98)

The character loses his sense of reality and plays in his own fiction, but the reader still gets the principles of the traditional novel: the narrated story.

Italian post-realism has gone an altogether different way. Roberto Saviano, the author of non-fiction about Neapolitan mafia, is in favor of minimalist narration. There is no trace of emotional or moralistic discourse—one could say that it has been written in cold blood. This phrase is also the title of one of the first non-fiction stories written by Truman Capote. In spite of this clear connection between those two writers (which is not mentioned in the chapter), the minimalism of *Gomorra* is different to *In Cold Blood*. It can be said that the non-fiction stories have gone the full circle: what had been at first a way to

shock the reader, to cross the limits of literature, in the end became the only mode to write engaged literature.

Other example of the new *vogue* in literature is Tomek Tryzna's novel *Panna Nikt* (*Miss Nobody*) which—as the Nobel Prize laureate Czesław Miłosz claims—is the first novel of the postmodernism *alla polacca* (that can be called late-postmodernism). The narration of the novel is sincere and quite naïve—the distance between the reader and the main character, a girl called Marysia, is minimized: there is no irony. Nevertheless, it cannot be compared with the non-ironical and sincere writing of the post-postmodern (or anti-postmodern) Zbigniew Herbert. The realistic description of the last phase of communism in Poland has no theoretical or philosophical background—as the author of the chapter, Arent van Nieukerken, says (recalling Rorty's words) there are some books that just help us be less cruel (181). In spite of that, Tomek Tryzna—criticized for the lack of intellectual ambitions—managed to include almost all late-postmodern features in his book: turning towards reality, commitment, return to conventional forms and reconciliation with the reader.

Conclusions

The reading of *Reconsidering the Postmodern* brings positive conclusions: there is life after postmodernism. Despite the self-disruptive gene in postmodern literature one can see that postmodern tendencies have not disappeared from contemporary narratives—they have been dissolved in the newest narratives or even partly washed out, but there was no radical departure from them.

Although in the “Introduction” the authors assure that there was a radical change after 9/11 attacks in the world literature, it is not really visible in the successive chapters. Some authors of the compilation still have in mind this date and show how writers use it in its literature—like the Bosnian novelist, Semezdin Mehmedinovic, who compares ethnic conflicts of the Yugoslav war with xenophobia that flared in the United States after the WTC attacks. Some authors only mention this date in the introductory part (the chapter on Italian literature), in the conclusions (Polish), or in both of them (Russian). A lot of them do not even refer to it (Flemish, British, French).

The main concern of the authors of *Reconsidering . . .*—relativism in the postmodern literature and its consequences—transpired not to be so crucial to the post-9/11 literature, especially in Europe. It seems then that the authors of the chapters have not satisfied the assumptions set in the “Introduction.” This different perspective can be only read as an advantage.

What the book certainly does is present the overview of European literatures (not literature) of the last few decades. Not only does it show the recent works and narrative tendencies in Europe—on which the book is mainly focused—but it also shows them in a wider context. The parallel structure gives always the same background: the political situation of the country, social ambient, the well known writers and their ancestors. All in all, the book is a perfect guide to contemporary European literatures, tendencies, writers and movements. But only if one has 3 bookmarks.²

Summary

The article presents the book *Reconsidering Postmodern. European Writers Reconsidering the Postmodern Heritage* published by Amsterdam University Press in 2011. The presented work is a collection of many voices discussing new tendencies in European literatures (and not a single literature) after the 9/11 attacks; every chapter is dedicated to one European nation (among them: French, Belgian, German, Italian and Polish).

For the editors of the book, this date has significant impact on the European writers and readers, who could not longer accept such postmodern qualities as: relativism, playfulness, omnipresent irony, the lack of commitment and specific jargon. The word “heritage” suggests that there is something after postmodern times and in the introduction two options are presented: late postmodern and post-postmodern. But has the postmodern really ended? After all it seems that the tragedy of 9/11 did not have such an influence on the European literatures. The local socio-political context seems to be more relevant.

Key words: comparative literature, European literature, postmodernism, literature after 9/11

² The big inconvenience of this book is the references arrangement. Notes do not appear at the bottom of the page but at the end of the book. To make things worse, to read the note entirely we must refer to the next part of the book which is the “Bibliography.” It requires not only three bookmarks but also constant page turning.

Życie po postmodernizmie.

Recenzja książki *Reconsidering the Postmodern. European Literature Beyond Relativism*, red. Thomas Vaessens, Yra van Dijk,
Amsterdam University Press, 2011

Streszczenie

Prezentowana książka *Reconsidering Postmodern. European Writers Reconsidering the Postmodern Heritage* to wielogłosowa dyskusja na temat współczesnych tendencji w literaturze europejskiej. Redaktorzy tomu stawiają pytanie, co się stało z postmodernizmem po ataku na World Trade Center 11 września 2001 roku. Czy dotychczasowe kategorie, charakteryzujące literaturę poszczególnych europejskich krajów – ironia, brak zaangażowania, relatywizm, niezrozumiały język – mają rację bytu wobec traumy i poczucia niepewności, będących skutkiem zamachów terrorystycznych?

Zawarte w tytule „dziedzictwo” (*heritage*) nasuwa myśl, że postmodernizm rzeczywiście musiał się skończyć. A jednak wstęp dostarcza nam dwóch możliwości, z których tylko jedna może oznaczać rzeczywisty koniec literackiej epoki. Według redaktorów tomu współczesna literatura może być postrzegana albo jako późny postmodernizm, albo, zdecydowanie bardziej krytyczny wobec poprzednika, post-postmodernizm. Autorzy poszczególnych rozdziałów składających się na mapę literatur europejskich (angielskiej, niemieckiej, francuskiej, włoskiej, polskiej i wielu innych) prezentują różne podejścia współczesnych twórców do zagadnienia postmodernizmu. W większości przypadków, nie przełomowa data – a lokalna sytuacja społeczno-polityczna – miała zdecydowanie większy wpływ na twórczość literacką.

Słowa kluczowe: komparatystyka literacka, literatura europejska, postmodernizm, literatura po 9/11

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Odkąd antyczni Grecy stworzyli pojęcie barbarzyństwa, powstałe z dźwięków mowy innych ludów brzmiących dziwnie w ich „cywilizowanych” uszach (*barbarbar*), opozycja pomiędzy „cywilizowanymi” i „barbarzyńskimi” istnieje do dziś w rozmaitych formach. Barbarzyńskim zwane jest zarówno to, co obce i pozbawione kultury, jak i to, co dzikie, okrutne i nieludzkie. Larry Wolff pokazał, jak zachodnioeuropejskie Oświecenie wynalazło i przypisało sobie pojęcie „cywilizacji” – osiemnastowieczny neologizm – i jak narzucało swoje rozumienie „barbarzyństwa” innym kulturom. W tym wydaniu „Rocznika Komparatystycznego” prezentujemy, jak poeci i pisarze różnych kultur odnosili się do długowiecznej, zmiennej opozycji pomiędzy „cywilizowanym” i „barbarzyńskim”.

W dziale „Interpretacje” prezentowane są różne formy ustanawiania i podważania tej opozycji – począwszy od dzieł Adama Mickiewicza, nie tylko w roli poety, ale i profesora literatur słowiańskich w Collège de France, poprzez dziewiętnasto- i dwudziestowiecznych twórców francuskich, rosyjskich, polskich, czeskich, brytyjskich, belgijskich i hinduskich, aż do najmłodszej generacji europejskich poetów XXI wieku. Prezentowane w dziale drugim („Analiza źródeł”) niedawno odnalezione listy Czesława Miłozza i inne jego wypowiedzi wprowadzają jeszcze jeden aspekt współczesnego rozumienia barbaryzmu (nihilizm, „nieludzkość”) jako buntowniczej siły, która nie zawsze okazuje się jedynie negatywna wobec „szlachetnej” cywilizacji i kultury.

W dziale poświęconym przekładom analizowane są wyzwania, które tekst „barbarzyńcy” (np. tradycyjna pieśń cygańska, ale i współczesna poezja amerykańska) stawia przed tłumaczem. Szczególna uwaga została poświęcona słynnemu *barbaric yawp*, które Walt Whitman wznosił nad dachami świata w swej „Song of Myself”. Autorzy z dwunastu krajów wnikliwie badają rezonans, jaki to słynne wywołanie wywołało w ich kulturach narodowych.

Numer uzupełniają sprawozdanie z Piątego Międzynarodowego Tygodnia Whitmanowskiego, który odbył się w Polsce w 2012 roku, oraz recenzje dwóch książek poświęconych postmodernizmowi w literaturach europejskich i losom literatury polskiej w świecie.

Redakcja