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The Endless Story of Giving Voice to the Other: Translating Poets Cyprian Norwid and Barbara Sadowska

Sessizleştirilmiş Öteki'ne Ses Verme Çabası: Cyprian Norwid and Barbara
Sadowska Çevirisi Üzerine

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Abstract

Exploiting the findings of hermeneutics, particularly Paul Ricoeur's concept of "the domain of word," the present study aims to investigate the role of translating poetry, which constitutes a task as creative as writing poems in one's own language, though even more difficult, in understanding the Other. The author of this essay focuses her attention on just a few examples of poets and translators who either are eminent figures of Polish literature or have some connection with it, like Seamus Heaney, Sylvia Plath, Jakub Wujek, Jan Kochanowski, Czesław Miłosz, Cyprian Norwid and Barbara Sadowska. The author also shares some of her experience gained through struggling with difficulties she has encountered in her work on translations of poems by Cyprian Norwid, the nineteenth century Polish classic poet, and Barbara Sadowska, the poet who—like once neglected and forgotten Norwid who ultimately gained the strong posthumous recognition—should be saved from oblivion to which the communist censors consigned her as a writer. Thus, giving special attention to Barbara Sadowska, the great Polish poet who needs to be granted a place in the history of literature, the paper claims that translating Sadowska's poetry may significantly contribute to understanding the reasons for silencing the Other and to placing her poetry in the main corpse of the Polish and world's literary heritage by giving voice to her work.

Keywords: Poetry translation, silencing, the Other, Paul Ricoeur, Seamus Heaney, Cyprian Norwid, Barbara Sadowska.

Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı, hermenötiğin (yorumbilim) bulgularından, özellikle de Paul Ricoeur'ün "sözün etki alanı" kavramından yola çıkarak, anadilde şiir yazmaktan çok daha zor ancak aynı düzeyde yaratıcılık gerektiren bir iş olan şiir çevirisinin, Öteki'ni anlamamızda üstlendiği rolü araştırmaktır. Bu makalede yazar, yalnızca Seamus Heaney, Sylvia Plath, Jakub Wujek, Jan Kochanowski, Czesław Miłosz, Cyprian Norwid ve Barbara Sadowska gibi Polonya edebiyatının önde gelen veya Polonya edebiyatına bir şekilde katkıda bulunmuş şair ve çevirmenler üzerinde yoğunlaşmıştır. Bunun yanı sıra yazar, Cyprian Norwid ve Barbara Sadowska'nın şiirlerini çevirirken karşılaştığı zorlukların kendisine kazandırdığı tecrübeleri paylaşmaktadır. Ondokuzuncu yüzyıl klasik Polonya edebiyatı şairlerinden olan Cyprian Norwid ve bir dönemler hak ettiği ilgiyi göremeyip unutulmuş Norwid gibi hak ettiği ilgiyi ancak

ölümünün ardından görebilen Barbara Sadowska da benzer şekilde komünist dönemdeki sansürlerin karanlığından çekip çıkarılmalıdır. Bu nedenle makalede, edebiyat tarihinin el üstünde tutulması gereken kıymetli şairlerinden Barbara Sadowska'ye özel bir yer ayrılmıştır. Bu makale, Öteki'nin neden sessizleştirildiğini Sadowska çevirisi sayesinde anlayabileceğimizi ve çevirinin şaire ses vererek eserlerini Polonya ve Dünya edebiyatında ön plana çıkaracağını ileri sürmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Şiir çevirisi, sessizleştirme, Öteki, Paul Ricoeur, Seamus Heaney, Cyprian Norwid, Barbara Sadowska.

Introduction: Can Google Translator Cope with Translating Poetry?

We are witnessing the fading away of the profession which used to be very important; Google Translator step by step rules out people who were given the unique ability to transmit contents into other languages. But there is one single area where the humans can hardly be replaced with computers: it is the art of translating poetry.¹ One could argue that the well-designed computer software could not only translate, but write verses as well, but could we name such hypothetical productions real translation, real poetry? Or would it rather be the anti-Utopian world Erich Fromm had referred to while writing his *Afterword* for George Orwell's *1984*?² No software could convey the full meaning of a metaphor, a rhetorical figure, an archaism carefully incrusting in text or a symbol chosen by the poet to express what is inexpressible.

The very essence of poetry is to communicate what cannot be communicated with the "regular" speech. The poets want to convey the message of a very special nature, be it a record of some unique illumination, a moment of the most profound suffering or simply an encrypted confession of falling in forbidden love or experiencing unbearable solitude. The real meaning of a poem is hidden behind words, so a reader, and a translator, must find a method to understand it in its full complexity—and that method may be based on the findings of hermeneutics. Paul Ricoeur wrote:

Poetry makes it possible for man to dwell on earth. This occurs when the normal relationship to language is reversed, when language speaks. Thus, man responds to language by listening to what it says to him [...] poetry is

¹ Philosophy could also be mentioned in this context if it continues to be the reflection on the nature of things rather than the subject of pure logic considerations imposed by the Vienna School analysts of natural language and their successors who attempt to reduce the human language to the system of signs and constructions understandable for machines.

² Fromm wrote: "Negative utopias make it appear that it is possible to dehumanize man completely, and yet for life to go on [...] Orwell [...] is simply implying that the new form of managerial industrialism, in which man builds machines which act like men and develops men who act like machines, is conducive to an era of dehumanization and complete alienation, in which men are transformed into things, and become appendices to the process of production and consumption" (266-267).

what locates the art of dwelling between heaven and earth, under the sky, but on the earth, within the domain of word. (466)

Ricoeur further adds that “Poetry is more than the art of making poems. It is *poēsis*, or creation in the largest sense of the word. It is in this sense that poetry is equivalent to primordial dwelling: man dwells only when poets exist in the world” (467).

But is it only man who dwells thanks to the existence of poets? The vanishing forms of being can be saved in the word. That’s why poets give their voice to the Other who is or has been made silent for any reason—being a plant, a door nail, a person who died centuries ago or was murdered in the most recent past. Quite frequently in human history the poets spoke with the voice of the silent many. Why would a poet speak for those who are silent? As silent as a stone, a flower, a dead fish or a dying sun? And, slightly diverting the question, are the dead—and if so—the silent poets worth listening to in our *deconstructed* world of constantly changing images flooding out from the *augmented reality* of the social media? Or, to put it differently, can poetry teach us understand the voices of the silent, who have contributed to the heritage of the past immersed in Saint Augustin’s *eternal present*?

The positive answer is being given since the lines spoken or written by Homer and his successors, who had ears to listen to the voices of poets emerging from the depth of signs and meanings through the ages of human history. Poets are those who do translate the dumbness of the silent into the language of literature but they themselves want to be understood irrespective of language they speak. Symbols coined in poetry of all centuries and geographic areas continue to be used by those who have been trying to get to the heart of the sense of all the human existence, with its vanishing generations whose voice can be heard in the rare moments of poetic intuition. Saying that poetry can help us understand involves the enthymeme: it can help us to hear the voices of the silent, which lead to the understanding of the ties linking us with the components of our human identity, and with the Other—be it another human being, a red poppy, or a piece of art. Many poets of different cultures, languages and national traditions have tried to listen to the silent, or the unheard. This listening has also involved translating the others’ words.

The real poetry is immortal, and its completeness was profoundly understood by T. S. Eliot, who saw it manifest in all the human creativity. He wrote: “No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists” (16). Yet, to be heard and understood within the “living whole of all poetry that has ever been written” (17), the poets’ voices must be translated into the many languages of the human kind that emerged after the symbolic collapse of the Biblical tower of Babel. According to one of the most inspiring books in history which is the living

source of poetic metaphors and allusions, in the origin, “the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters” (Gen.I.1). And the same Spirit assumed the form of the Word, which was there in the very beginning. It would therefore not be a heresy to say that the Divine Spirit got translated into the Word, to be understood by and let us understand the Other. By mastering the word, the poets can get closer to understanding the very essence of being which is both material and spiritual. The work of poetry is endless, and the unity it strives at will never be attained otherwise than thanks to a poetic vision, as stated in Eliot’s lines:

We must be still and still moving
 Into another intensity
 For a further union, a deeper communion
 Through the dark cold and the empty desolation.
 The waves cry, the wind cry, the vast waters
 Of the petrel and the porpoise. In my end is my beginning. (202)

Eliot’s words echo the harsh statement of Alcmaeon of Croton, the ancient Greek physician, who harshly stated: “Men must die because they are unable to link their end to their beginning”. Hans Georg Gadamer explains the quotation in the simplest way, “life is always bound to death,” and draws conclusion that “man differs from all other living creatures which like him are subject to the natural law of life through death yet confer duration on life as such. Only man is so individual a creation that he does not lose his identity in the continuation of the species but is aware of his death. [...] Man does not therefore accept the eternally renewed alternation of life and death as the pattern for this own being” (36-37).

Faced with his inevitable end, man is not only rebellious but creative in his attempt to preserve the individual in the chain of beings. This aim, best reflected in poetry and philosophy, has been confined in a short epigram *Vates vivens post mortem* written by the Christian monk and theologian Alcuin in the eighth century:

Vivere post mortem vates vis nosse viator?
Quod legis esse loquor, vox tua nempe mea est. (237)
 [Oh, passer-by, want you to know whether poet lives after death? If you read aloud this, your voice is mine.]

One could extend the message contained in Alcuin’s *Carmen CCLXXI* by saying that the translator gives his or her voice to the Other, to a—sooner or later—dead poet as well as to the bits of ephemeral beings the poet has tried to save from oblivion.

Translating Poetry as the Act of Understanding and Interpretation

Translation is an act of the most profound effort to understand the text and it sometimes offers the possibility “to understand the author better than he could understand himself [...] to display the power of disclosure implied in his discourse beyond the limited horizon of his own existential situation” (Ricoeur 93). Paul Ricoeur made this observation on the link between disclosure and appropriation

which constitutes the cornerstone of hermeneutics, but it also perfectly well defines the task of a poetry translator, the act of translation which Hans Georg Gadamer could name “a fusion of horizons”. In such case it would mean the multi-layered fusion of perspectives: that of the speaking “I,” that of the poet and that of his translator as well as that of the translation’s reader.

There is a commonly encountered opinion that poetry is not translatable at all, but it is obviously not true; we can enjoy reading *Odyssey*, the old Chinese or Dante’s verses even though we do not necessarily know the languages of the originals. Moreover, we all can read the sacred texts which constitute the most profound roots of all the human culture, not only of religions. Some of those texts were written as poetry, like the *Psalms* or *Bhagavad Gita*. We owe a lot more to translators than we are willing to admit, considering translators’ efforts as less important or less creative than that of original writers. But the fact that poets are also poetry translators themselves is really meaningful. Jan Kochanowski, the sixteenth century translator of King David’s *Psalms*, is considered a founding father of Polish literature after the long lasting period of the Latin universalism which was ruling in Europe since Saint Jerome offered it his version of the *Bible* translation from the original languages into Latin.

Adam Czerniawski, poet, philosopher and translator of Polish poetry, has noticed that a poems’ translatability is “a strong indicator of merit,” but “in order to be able to translate one needs to discover in the original a kernel of meaning” (21). He further argues that “natural languages are all inherently polysemic and therefore the extraction of a single meaning is not equivalent to a construction of sentences of formal logic” (21). Moreover, we can claim he has managed to observe “these polysemic parameters are different in different languages and hence the familiar problems with synonyms, homonyms, puns, *double-entendres*, proverbs and idioms, never mind the deliberately engineered poetic ambiguities” (21). However, translating poetry is not a purely linguistic challenge of transmitting a set of sentences with all their formal restrictions stemming from specially chosen words, syllable constructions or rhymes into a foreign language. It requires a lot more. The one who translates a poem must also understand its author as a human living, his unique life in a specified time with all the circumstances thereof. To give his own voice to the Other, the poet of a foreign language, the translator must understand the ultimate sense, the idea expressed in words in order not to falsify it. In a way, translating poetry requires not only the highest professional mastery, the understanding and intuition, but also a highly ethical approach; the poet’s idea must never be compromised.

Poets and Their Translators: The Polish Context

In his famous essay,³ T. S. Eliot evoked many European poets, but he mentioned none of those from the part of Europe which soon after, in the middle of the twentieth century, became separated by the *iron curtain* for many decades, thus becoming silent—or rather unheard by the Western world. Beside the political circumstances, there was yet another difficulty, clearly indicated by Adam Czerniawski: “Another reason for the impenetrability by foreigners of those Polish works which have made the strongest impact on Polish consciousness is less to do with the formal difficulties of those works than with their hermetically Polish-centred content” (20). And so, the Polish poets’ voice was hardly heard in other languages until the most recent decades. It is changing now thanks to the talented translators like poet Adam Czerniawski and many others.

Translating Cyprian Norwid’s poetry: challenges and choices

Adam Czerniawski struggled with the problem of Norwid, the precursory author, and rhetorically asked: “How then can one introduce the work of a poet, who is simultaneously grounded in nineteenth century traditions and who at the same time shatter them?” (129). Cyprian Norwid, the great Polish writer and artist, is always compared by literary researchers with Gerard Manley Hopkins and Emily Dickinson who wrote in the same epoch, but his situation and struggle for recognition in the literary world was a lot more difficult. During Norwid’s lifetime, Poland was erased from the Europe’s maps as a state; after the third and last partition of 1795, it was occupied by the three neighbouring powers, Russia, Prussia and Austria, until 1918; and for more than a hundred and twenty years, it only existed in the domain of “word,” in its poetry and in the Poles’ hearts while many poets lived in exile. Norwid wrote, painted, carved, and translated poetry from Greek, Latin, French, English and Italian. He himself gave his Polish voice to ancient and contemporary poets. His translating efforts gave him the most profound awareness of the power of word, of what can be said and what must be left understated. Norwid discovered the power of silence long before Ludvig Wittgenstein. He invented new meanings by distorting or contextual reinterpreting words placed in carefully coined contexts; his voice deeply rooted in the Polish and European tradition was reaching both the past and the future. Showing the internal struggle between the literary tradition and the radically new voice in poetry is not the most difficult of poetry translator’s challenges. Also, it is very important to reflect the music of the lines, the rhymes and the rhythm. That is why it is a never-ending task and one poem is frequently translated by many; and that is why Norwid undertook translating Horace although by his time there

³ Eliot’s essay of 1919 has echoed in many books and papers, including Bate Walter Jackson’s *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet*. Cambridge [Harvard UP] 1970]. Eliot’s essay has been frequently referred to in literary research on the grounds of the English language poetry, but its statements are also of universal significance.

were many other translations of his *Carmina* into Polish. There are not too many translations of Norwid's poems so far, especially the long ones can be read in the Polish language only.

I was recently asked to translate a fragment of Norwid's *Promethidion* quoted in the essay written by a young and very talented author and sculptor Łukasz Krupski. His essay's translator refused translating poetry, so I decided to undertake the challenge, because Norwid, who himself was a sculptor and painter, expressed the sense of creative power artists experience while carving the stone as if making a living object.⁴ The fragment of Norwid's poem is vitally important in Krupski's text. Therefore, having agreed to give my voice to the great poet, quoted by the sculptor, Norwid's spiritual great grandson, I read again and again Norwid's writings in order to understand his ideas well. I recalled my stays in New York, Rome, London and Paris where the poet spent many years as a political emigrant. I spent a week in Saint Casimir's Home, the former alms-house for Polish veterans who lived in emigration in France, which was established at Ivry, now a suburb of Paris, a few years before Norwid's death, run by the nuns where Norwid died in oblivion. I studied his drawings and tried to understand him as an artist as well as a Christian philosopher. Living a difficult and humiliating life, the poet was convinced of eternal value of his thought and his art, and believed that his writings would be understood and appreciated posthumously, by the future heirs of his literature, his "grandsons".

In the fragment I was asked—and dared—to translate, a clear allusion is made to the Resurrection. In search for the most adequate translation of the Polish word "płótno" I studied both the Polish Bible translations available during Norwid's lifetime as well as its English text contemporary to Norwid, which was King James' amended version of 1611. I considered translating the word as "shroud," but then the sense of the verse would be quite different, meaning the linen cloth once covering the resurrected human body—not the body in opposition to the soul which gets released from the heavy matter. In the Bible versions, both Catholic and Protestant, which could have been known to Norwid, the word "prześcieradło" is used, the Polish equivalent of the English "bedsheet". I came to the conclusion that Norwid meant the flesh matter rather than the shroud or a linen cloth, and decided to use the word "canvas"—meaning the heaviest type of "płótno" of all its English equivalents. Norwid knew the classical Greek language, he himself translated Homer, and probably read the Gospel in the original, and his theological considerations were based on the solid ground; but in this case the "resurrection" definitely does not mean reviving the flesh and is Platonic rather than compliant with the Christian theology coined based on Aristotelian thought.

⁴ I appreciate a lot Norwid's bust carved by Krupski which I once discovered in the building of the Faculty of Polish Philology at the University of Warsaw, and I like so much his other sculptures placed in some other sites in Warsaw.

But was my choice right? It is just one example of word selection decisions I had to make. Precise poem's construction of hendecasyllabic verses with sequences of rhymes ababcc constitutes yet another level of difficulty. Did I translate Norwid's writing into English—not my mother tongue—without falsifying neither his art nor his thought? The attempt was not only to translate the poem but to understand the author and give her a voice through rendering his stanzas of *Promethidion* in English:

Though every man in him has beauty's shadow
 And each—each one of us is the beauty's dust
 Should he save it in his conscience, clean and pure
 And told the granite log: "live as my life's cast".
 The granite would have seen itself obscure
 And tried to finger-wipe its stony eyelids
 Like a far lands' man awakened from silence
 But that's what he would do to the granite block
 While another to the rainbow shed on wall
 And another might have inclined the trees' flock
 To make them clasp their hands into scaffold scroll
 And yet another one the voice's column
 Would throw to cords of psalms so wise and solemn
 Unwrapping like a resurrected matter
 Which gets ravished to heaven; the soul would fly
 There—there—and the canvas would be falling scattered
 Like an autumn leaf when the pear fruit is ripe.

Norwidian "shadow" refers to the Divine Beauty. Interestingly, the concept of shadow in reference to the poet-translator's relationship was used by Marjańska who told me that she learned and studied English to gain a better understanding of Emily Dickinson, the poet she admired so much. Then, she decided to translate poetry besides writing her own verses. In September 2003, Marjańska wrote me a dedication in her volume of translations from Dickinson, signing it: "Rose's Shadow".⁵ But I would put it differently. She was not Rose's but Dickinson's shadow; she was her Polish voice.

Poets and their translators in the Republic of Conscience

In order to show the intermingled horizons evoked by poetry and its translations in more recent time, the twentieth century, we can focus on just a few examples of the whole bright and dark stars' universe of European poets' constellation: Seamus Heaney, Sylvia Plath and Barbara Sadowska, who were born almost at the

⁵ Shortly before her death, Marjańska invited me to tea at her home, and gave me several volumes of her own poetry, and the one with Dickinson's poems, with the Polish title: "Jestem różą" (I am a Rose). She alluded to this title, signing the dedication for me "Translator—the Rose's shadow, Ludmiła Marjańska," and in my text, besides recalling the great translator, I want to challenge her concept of "being a shadow" of an author, for poetry translators are not shadows—they are real voices.

same time, and joined the universe of poets roughly at the same age. They all inherited the literary tradition accumulated in Europe by their birthdates, they all might know their predecessors, even if only theoretically, in the Hegelian sense of the *Zeitgeist* manifesting itself in human history. Barbara Sadowska knew Sylvia Plath, read her poems and explicitly mentioned Plath's name in one of her own poems. She could read first translations⁶ of Heaney's verses published in the Polish language as early as 1974. All the three *dead poets* tried to understand and overcome the burden of "the self" haunted by the past. All the three tried to get involved in an impossible dialogue with the non-living beings, dead parents, mummified bodies, flowers or elements of nature in order to understand the Other, to hear the silent, to understand who and why they are, and where they come from. All the three were also poetry translators—in case of Plath not because of her actual poetry translation work, but because of her ability to translate her feelings into images painted with words, as well as her ability to read poetry in French and German; Heaney translated not only from Polish, a language foreign to him, but also from old to modern English.

In Heaney's vision from the verse which gave name to one of European awards, a poet is an immigrant from *the Republic of Conscience* asked to *declare the words of our traditional cures and charms to heal dumbness*. Healing the dumbness is as important as listening to the silent and giving them voice. Inspired by the images of the bog mummies presented by the archaeologist, Seamus Heaney tried to cope with both the past and the present of his own self-produced by generations of ancestors and by the circumstances of difficult history of Northern Ireland. Thomas Cahill named the spirit of Heaney's poetry "the Christian druidism" which resulted in poems carved out so that they "might stop even Derdriu in her tracks" (134). The feeling of responsibility for his country, its dead heroes and myths, made Heaney experience difficulties with his self-definition as an Irish poet. In the whole history of Ireland poets played a very special role:

"The áes dána" or "men of art" constituted the most important element of early Irish society. They included the *filid*—a word very inadequately translated as "poets"—as well as the *brehons* and the historians and genealogists [...] They adapted the Latin alphabet to produce a native Irish literature, and in collaboration with the Christian monks tried to provide Ireland with a history as respectable and ancient as that of Babylon, Egypt, Greece and Rome". (59-60)

Having chosen English as the language of his poetry despite his profoundly Irish feelings and worries concerning the difficult history of his fatherland, especially the most recent Troubles in Northern Ireland, he anchored his poetical vision in the landscape of Derry, with its marshes, streams, rivers and farmyard wells, with

⁶ Piotr Sommer, poet and translator, was probably the first Heaney's translator into Polish; after the Nobel Prize awarded to the Irish poet, Stanisław Barańczak published a volume of his own translations, and others followed.

strong Christian tradition in which water had the magic ability of delivering from evil. He was also aware of the dual nature of poetry as such. He wrote: "On the one hand, poetry is secret and natural, on the other hand it must make its way in a world that is public and brutal [...] at one minute you are drawn towards the old vortex of racial and religious instinct, at another time you seek the mean of human love and reason" (34).

Heaney's connection with Poland is closely linked with the most prestigious literary prize. Czesław Miłosz was honoured with the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1980. His own creative work was noticed and heard by the literary world thanks to his translators into English. Miłosz decided to come back to Poland only after the collapse of the Soviet Union when the country of his mother tongue joined the free world again, and there he met Seamus Heaney, the Nobel Prize laureate of 1995, who visited Poland to see its poets, including yet another Nobel Prize laureate, Wisława Szymborska. Heaney became a great admirer and promoter of Polish poetry. He found it unique and great throughout its whole history, beginning with Jan Kochanowski, to whom he gave his English voice in collaboration with Stanisław Barańczak. Heaney chose to translate *Treny* [*Laments*, published in 1995], the sixteenth century masterpiece composed of nineteen elegies extremely valuable not only for the beauty of their language but also for references to ancient Roman and Greek symbols combined with the depth of the Christian theology. Czesław Miłosz highly appreciated Heaney's effort to understand the Other by translating his poetry not even knowing the language of the original. In reference to Kenneth Rexroth famous essay "The Poet as Translator," Miłosz praises the result of work of the two authors, the Irish and the Polish, commenting that even if "the question of whether the poet should know the language from which he translates has not been resolved," there are "impressive translations produced by writers with little knowledge of the original language" including "the rare accomplishment of Stanisław Barańczak and Seamus Heaney in translating Jan Kochanowski (1530-1584), a Polish poet of the Renaissance" (Feb 1996). Miłosz emphasizes that the two poets-translators "allow us to forget about differences in mentality and read *Laments* as a powerful work of literature" (Feb 1996).

The translators' success in giving the English voice to the great Polish poet who died centuries ago was possible because the art of translation has a lot more in common with understanding the Other as a person than with mastering his or her mother tongue. The suffering associated with the loss of one's own child translated to great poetry by Kochanowski and translated by Heaney, the poet who did not speak his language, can be felt in translation because the translator as intermediary between the poet and the ultimate reader really understood the message and was able to translate it adequately. No translation of any poem is perfect, as any act of communication is always distorted by one's own

experiences, perceptions and knowledge. That is why great literary works continuously attract translators' efforts; Heaney was followed by Adam Czerniawski, who understood—and translated—Kochanowski's *Treny* in a different manner and cannot be blamed for that. They both wanted to understand and give a more universally understood voice to the great Polish poet. Heaney was also a careful reader of Miłosz. A diligent literary researcher can easily find direct or indirect references to Czesław Miłosz in some of his verses and a kind of spiritual similarity between the two poets:

The dual mind of Miłosz, so evident in Heaney's poetry as well, lent itself to a sense of guilt and inadequacy when the actions of some politically zealous friends temporarily grasped the attention of the "blockheaded authority of the state. [...] Miłosz's words echo Heaney's account of his own shift in poetic expectations that occurred in 1969 when long time antagonisms violently moved from being simply a matter of achieving the satisfactory verbal icon to be a search for images and symbols adequate to our predicament. (145)

A translator willing to interpret the poems by Heaney and by Miłosz has got to understand not only their respective poetical idioms, but also the world they once lived in. The poet Heaney himself desired to understand most vividly was Sylvia Plath, whose poems proved too difficult even to Barańczak, the most recognized English language poetry translator into Polish who so wonderfully helped Heaney understand Kochanowski.

Heaney, a close friend of Ted Hughes, Plath's husband, also highly appreciated Sylvia's poetry and analysed it in his critical texts, like *Sylvia Plath's Indefatigable Hoof-Taps*. He tried to translate Sylvia's poetry into the language of common sense, although he did not have to translate it into any foreign language. But does such translation make any sense? Her poetry is dark and full of suffering, hiding a lot more than one can bear; and her originality may be compared with that of Charles Baudelaire, who introduced a dialogue with non-human objects; he talked to the flowers also, and such intimate relation echoes in Plath's "poppies". Like Baudelaire, Plath also was sensitive to the dark side of things. DeSales Harrison analysed the both realities, the one above the surface, and its "negative" in the water depths:

In *Watercolour*, employing the verbal equivalent of diluted, translucent washes, she sketches an idyll populated by small birds, lovers, cows, cygnets, owls and a vegetarian water rat—only to strip away this surface of pale benignities to reveal a shrieking underworld of predation and death. [...] In "Magnolia Shoals" the separation between the world of permanence and the world of destruction is mediated by water as well. The scene recalls "Mussel Hunter" but the realms of preservation and destruction are transposed: the water world is now the custodian of the imperishable image, while the upland is marked by fragmentation and collapse. (167)

In a way, translators are “custodians of imperishable images” of poetical visions transposed to another language, though an exact mirror reflection of a poem is hardly possible. The most important—the real understanding of the Other, the poet—is possible at a cost of painful attempt to find out the realm hidden behind words, sealed in metaphors and images—the “shrieking underworld of predation and death” so intimately connected with every human being. Not only literary researchers, but translators also must find out the most profound source of poetical imagery and the poet’s individual idiom not only to translate words, but to understand the essence.

Plath had to cope with her hurt feelings, with the burden of her past, with her “Nazi” origin bequeathed by the German father, blamed by her for all the cruelties of war. The Polish poet Barbara Sadowska had never met her father, she tried to reconstruct his image, to give him a face and a voice. Her father, drowned in the Baltic Sea near the Lubec Bay, transformed—in his daughter’s verses—into “every fish,” is as important silent speaker as Otto Plath assuming the form of a colossus drown in the ocean. And the father’s death is an important motif for both poets, but Sadowska’s voice has not been heard yet. Helen Vendler, however, thinks that “although the poet may have given her father’s death too great an explanatory role in her own subsequent suffering [...] it remains true that the bewildering death of Otto Plath perplexed his daughter’s cognitive powers and dominated her imaginative ones” (117).

The two poets from both sides of the border dividing the West and the East of Europe, Sylvia Plath and Barbara Sadowska, explored similar landscapes of confessional poetry and used the floral and aquatic motives as encrypting tools enabling the silent to tell us their stories. Sylvia Plath’s poems related to the sea are numerous and the aquatic motives play significant role in her imagery. The sea and water imagery are also important features in Barbara Sadowska’s writings, especially in the verses with autobiographical background.

Barbara Sadowska: the Polish poet whose voice must be heard

Literary hierarchies in Poland have been distorted because of the system imposed by the Yalta agreement. The poets who were in opposition to communists could not count on any recognition, and their works were hardly published, their books were crippled by vigilant censors who cut out all the “disloyal” or “suspicious” paragraphs, short sentences or whole pages, up to a ban on the writer’s name. Barbara Sadowska belonged to those *sui generis* Polish *poètes maudits*—though not because of their alleged “immorality” but for purely political reasons—because they struggled for freedom of individuals and of the nation oppressed by the communists in the post-war Poland. Banned and doomed by the totalitarian regime imposed on Poland by the Soviets despite the great value of her poetry, Sadowska remains among the silent, although her poetry belongs to the most important phenomena of the Polish literature and is comparable to the heritage of

the greatest poets of the twentieth century. It is sad that even today, decades after the break-through years 1980 and 1989, the years marked with the rise of the Solidarity movement involving 10 million Poles and the collapse of the Berlin wall, there are no courageous literary critics or university professors who would dare to challenge the order of memory and oblivion set in the past decades of the Polish literary research. The message encrypted by Sadowska must be finally heard and understood, as was Arcimboldo's rhetoric hidden behind his unusual paintings revealing "pas seulement de l'art, mais aussi du savoir" (138).

Barbara Sadowska, born in 1940 in Paris, was a daughter of the pre-war employees of the Polish Foreign Ministry. Her real father was not a painter Czesław Sadowski, but Franciszek Obrębski, the Polish diplomat representing the independent Poland's government in exile, member of the Resistance in France, prisoner of the German concentration camp in Neuengamme, killed in the bombing of the ship carrying the released prisoners by RAF in May 1945. The tragedy was also kept in silence—in the *free world* of the Western Europe—for many years as an awful mistake made after the camp's liberation. The sea absorbed Sadowska's father and made him silent although somehow present in the maritime creatures and the murmuring waves. The years of her early childhood, marked with reminiscences of France in the times of the World War II, are reflected in her poems published in 1959, soon after the Budapest and Poznan massacres of 1956. Barbara was a student of a secondary school of fine arts in Warsaw at that time. Her first volume of poems, *Zerwane druty*, was noticed in the press. The critics approved her style; vigilant censors had not found anything hostile or dangerous for the communist system. The poems, with themes and metaphors that seemed abstract enough to make their author a nice "ornament" of *modern* literature flourishing undisturbed under the communist rule in Poland. Soon after Barbara was invited to join the literary group of young poets and gained her name of a "female Rimbaud" of the Polish poetry. The most important developments in those years were the ones of a private and emotional nature. Her first love, immersion in the feminine joys and pains, rebellious relationship with her mother, quitting the school of fine arts paved her path as a poet who painted her inner world with words.

Very soon Sadowska realized that it is not enough to write poems or pain in the country which is not free. After the events of 1968, the massacre of the coal miners in December 1970, and the massacres of workers in Gdynia and Radom, Sadowska decided to sign a letter of 101 intellectuals protesting against significant changes in the Polish Constitution aimed at further subordination of Poland to the Soviet Union and she openly joined the opposition. After the night of the 13th of December 1981 when General Jaruzelski announced imposition of the martial law in Poland and many workers' leaders and intellectuals were imprisoned, Sadowska joined the Primate's Committee for Assistance to Persons

deprived of Freedom and their Families and started to actively help the victims of terror and their families; she then became subjected to intensified forms of invigilation and persecution by the security forces. Many facts of her life in those days have been recorded by the secret militia forces and can be found today in the archives taken over by the Institute for the National Remembrance. Hundreds of pages written by the “bezpieka” informers and militia officers contain many details of Sadowska’s social and private affairs, including her medical records. Many poems by Sadowska as well as her translations from French and Croatian, her books and letters were “arrested” and most probably destroyed during the searches carried out in her small flat by the *bezpieka*. She was imprisoned at the ill-famous Rakowiecka street jail, a Polish equivalent of the Lubianka in Moscow. The ultimate price Sadowska paid for her courage, her compassion and her longing for freedom was unbearable. Her only child, Grzegorz Przemysk, 18 years old gifted poet and musician, was arrested on the 12 of May 1983—the day he celebrated his secondary school graduation—near the Royal Castle in Warsaw. Heavily beaten by the Militia he died at the hospital in Warsaw on the 14th of May 1983. His funeral organized by Sadowska’s friend priest Jerzy Popiełuszko, who later, in 1984, was himself killed by the communist security men and became a blessed martyr of the Roman Catholic Church, gathered hundreds of thousands following the coffin in silence to the Powązki Cemetery in Warsaw. Barbara Sadowska died three years after her son, in 1986 at Otwock near Warsaw. The communist censors almost managed to annihilate her name as a writer. Even today, if she gets mentioned in public, it is only for the virtue of being a mother of one of the youngest victims of the communist regime.

The poets are never speechless. They may simply remain unheard for a long time. Sadowska deserves being valued as an exquisite poet, not only as a Polish *Pieta*, symbol of mothers suffering from the crimes of the totalitarian communist regime. Her voice constitutes an important part of not Polish only but of the whole both European and the world literature. That is why making Sadowska heard means also translating her poems into languages less hermetic than the original Polish language of her verses. Some of her poems were translated into French and published just before the poet’s death thanks to her French friends Lucienne Rey and Gerard Bayo, himself a recognized poet awarded in 2016 the important French literary Prix Mallarmé.

Translating Barbara Sadowska’s poems into the English language

The task of translating her poetry, which I undertook myself,⁷ means a never ending search for lexical and metaphorical equivalents of those she used in her

⁷ I published a book on the life and poetry of Barbara Sadowska available on line in the Polish language and currently work on my translations of Sadowska’s poems into the English language to be published in a bi-lingual volume in the hopefully not too distant future. I deem this poetry deserves a common recognition because of its universal literary value, so my task

fascinating poetry as well as reflecting in the English language all plays on words, metaphors sparkling with contradictory meanings and different shades of sense, the rhythms echoing voices from the past, beginning with the lines from the Bible translated into Polish in the sixteenth century by Jesuit Jakub Wujek, who gave the Polish poetry and the Polish common language so many phrases and metaphors we keep repeating not necessarily being aware of the sixteenth century translator's contribution to our most precious heritage, the national realm in the domain of word, through the Polish nursery rhymes, folk songs, jazz, pop and classical music, not to mention ekphrases and multiple allusions to the books she read in three languages, to theatre, film and art, both primitive and modern, with some artists or titles evoked by their names, like Calder or *Jaws*.

Sadowska's metaphors frequently refer to floral phenomena, to flowers, tree branches, thorns hiding the voice of the speechless. Deciphering the message of the silent in Sadowska's verses would lead us to the world she lived in—if we are able to hear and understand the message hidden in her personal code of symbols. The names of colours are also used to express or emphasise different areas of human, and especially feminine, experience. Symbolic values of colours constitute an important semantic field in the work of the poet who once had dreamt of being an artist and continued to paint throughout all her lifetime. The floral motives of Sadowska's juvenile verses were colourless and winter-like, greyish, filled with sadness. The *two cuddling naked trees* hugged by the hospital window invite to transgression:

I will go
to the day
into the blind frost
with my hands red
pieces of flesh [...]
they will fall down from the eye
to see farer
a bit farer
behind the white dead
curtains of snow
into the roots
like old wine [...]
and between the branches
I will squeeze my rolled hands
they will be red apples
for the sick

Sadowska was growing as a poet, expanding the scope of her themes, explored philosophical thoughts and ideas close to those expressed in the preserved texts of ancient Greek philosophers, Heraclitus, Democritus and Tales. But the essential

is like a task Seamus Heaney undertook when he tried to give a voice to a man of Tollund or a girl sentenced to death centuries ago by her contemporaries and found in a bog.

maturity she attained was paid with life. The suffering made her a poet whose words sound like those carved in stone, but more durable—like Horace’s or Dante’s. The crystal clear, piercing verses Sadowska wrote after her son had been murdered evoke the style recommended in the teaching known from the Bible, to which Sadowska made a direct allusion, quoting it one of her last poems: “Am I a man who fell among robbers?” (Luke 10.30).

Yes—yes; no—no. This is the language of the most important message which is the message of truth, love and courage. The words conveying this message are simple to the extent that it is so difficult to really understand them and to translate them. This is the poetry Norwid had in mind in his *Promethidion*. And it should be shared with the readers, also with those who cannot cope with the very first layer of difficulty in understanding—the poet’s mother tongue. So, the translator is faced with a kind of a moral duty to convey the sense even though the result may be far from perfection.

In one of her last untitled poems Sadowska wrote: “dzięki Co Boże że mi rozum odjęło a nie odebrało za piórko z nieba,” and I quote the original here because it proves how difficult it is to voice those first two lines in another language. There is a huge difference between losing one’s sense from suffering and letting one’s intellect to be taken by someone or something or given up in exchange for a false solace. Also, Sadowska played in those lines on commonly used sentences contrasting them in an unusual way which gives the whole set additional meanings to be grasped simultaneously, including the sense of strong resistance against the oppressors who have not been able to take away the essence, the eternal love, the courage, the experienced human dimension of life lived in its fullness from painful birth and birth-giving to the most cruel death—the death a mother cannot bear unless the senses are cut off. The draft version of the whole poem’s translation I have tried to coin in English sounds:

Thank you God that my right mind
got cut off
and not taken away
for a feather from heaven
thanks
for the ever green
juniper of memory
thank you for the corn-fields
of recollections
where I find my way like a mouse
with a small navel-string
in my teeth

Beside the first two lines, the translator is also faced with a difficulty concerning botanic, or rather symbolic nature of plants. The juniper is popular in Poland’s folk tradition and probably not so much in many other countries. Its leaves are as

sharp as thorns. The universally understood green colour of hope the juniper's leaves never lose is contrasted here with the understood redness of blood if one tries to get hold of the juniper bush. In the past in some regions of Poland juniper branches were placed around a dead body to prevent it from being taken by the evil forces, and it was also used during exorcisms, and for some magic purposes. Probably one could find an equivalent English word meaning another thorny plant given as much symbolic significance as the Polish "jałowiec" which would be more explicit than "juniper" which seems to be of less symbolic value in the English speaking countries. For the time being the question remains open, and I put the "juniper" in my translation. Those are just a few examples of difficulties the translator of Sadowska's poetry encounters in every verse. Hopefully, Sadowska's voice will soon be heard not only in the *Republic of Conscience*.

Conclusion

A poetry translator usually is a poet himself/herself, and if they decide to translate, to give their voice to the Other instead of expressing their own thoughts and feelings, it is because they profoundly believe in the spiritual community manifest in the universe which we may name, after Ricoeur, "the domain of word," or after Heaney, "a Republic of Conscience". The poet's words are important and must be understood not only through sophisticated hermeneutical examinations but also on the level of inter-personal communication which is possible only if the two, the Speaker and the Other understand the basics, the natural language of poetry, in the most common sense of the notion. Poetry readers must be able to understand the message anchored in words they know. They must hear the poet's voice in their own tongue, and only on that foundation they may construct their own interpretations depending on their life experiences and/or their willingness to understand the Other's world. The poetry translator's work is indeed a re-creation in the Norwidian sense, and it requires mastering both the source and the target languages as well as studying versification and gaining the vast knowledge of a myriad of texts constituting the backgrounds of culture, preferably in their original versions. The multifarious difficulties encountered during the translation process stem not only from the specific characteristics of the two language systems and the two literary traditions, that of the original and that of the translated, but also of individual traits of the two creative personalities trying to convey a very special message in the carefully structured sequences of words composing a verse. The research area is vast beyond any possibility to be presented in all its dimensions, in all the languages and forms the poetry is being continuously written and translated. That is why it is the never-ending story with its changing scenes and actors throughout the whole of human thoughts and feelings expressed by poets and their translators.

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