

INTRODUCTION

Whereas over the recent decades translation studies has managed to establish solid theoretical bases, literary translation has evaded rigid norms. Hardly any uncontested rules of literary translation can be identified that do not depend on the varying tastes and ways of understanding literary texts as well as on the changing interrelations between linguistic and cultural systems. Similarly, few rules remain unaffected by the specific approach each complex text imposes on its translator. The need to define a hierarchy of valid translation strategies turns out necessary particularly when translating poetry, often bringing a “painful” experience of loss and the paradox of “saving the savable” (to quote one paper title in this volume). However, defining strategies for a successful translation at all levels (style, form, content, ideology) seems impossible without truly in-depth knowledge of the original text. Many papers within the present volume highlight the need for the translator to acquire a full critical, aesthetic and cultural awareness of the creative process that has brought to life the poetic text now about to be translated.

Neither can one ignore the metre since poetry is primarily about an original form, as Laura Salmon has demonstrated in her paper devoted to Igor Guberman, a Russian Jewish poet best-known as the author (and inventor) of the *gariki*, short and seemingly light-hearted pieces of aphoristic poetry. From a comparative perspective she has studied their complex structure as a part of a project aiming to translate them into Italian, stressing the need to reflect – as a translator – on the contrasts between “high” and “low” poetry as these two categories are perceived by readers coming from two different linguistic and cultural traditions. A key problem in translating poetry, according to Salmon, is to face the semiotic and formal contrasts present at all levels of versification and affecting the metre, the aesthetic judgment and the potential for the reader to identify with the work. Salmon’s contrastive reflections on the Russian and Italian metrical-accentual systems could be extended in part also to the Polish-Italian analysis: although the Polish fixed accent, on the one hand, can support the statistics of dominant paroxytone Italian words, on the other hand, it constitutes a further metric constraint, in addition to the syllable-tonic asymmetry of their respective traditions.

The unbreakable dialectical link between form and content, at the very basis of any poetic text (suffice it to think of James Holmes), is the point of departure for Jadwiga Miszalska in her study of a translation of two famous works by Eugenio Montale. While analysing the Polish versions of the Ligurian poet’s texts, she emphasises not only the importance of the complex metrical, rhythmical and sonic

aspects but also the lexical choices (at times somewhat neglected by his Polish translators). In reference to the concept of “objective correlative” as developed by Thomas S. Eliot, she demonstrates the need for the translators of Montale’s work to take into consideration the specific poetic and contextual meaning of certain elements typical of the Ligurian cultural context, which need to be rendered well in a foreign language in order to “recreate” his poetic and emotional universe. Miszalska also offers a practical solution to this problem through her own original translation of these poems.

The need to apply a holistic view, to understand the text at all its levels before undertaking its translation, is also proved by Ewa Nicewicz-Staszowska in her paper dealing with translating children’s literature, largely ignored by scholars until the 1970s. Translating for the youth, she argues, requires a particular approach – taking into consideration specific functions and uses of such texts – allowing for far more liberty and creativity than when translating poetry meant for the adult reader. In line with some remarks made by Barańczak, she underlines the need to identify the so-called “stylistic dominant” of a given poetic work to be rendered in the target text. This approach has not been adopted by the Polish translator of Gianni Rodari, far more eager to expand the text’s “ideological dominant”.

The wish of Leonardo Masi – academically trained in both music and Polish studies – is for poetry translators to attribute the right importance to the often neglected performative aspect. A piece of poetry should perhaps be “executed” just like a musical score, he argues. One can hardly disagree when he claims that the desire to hold to the semantic level may lead to the paradox of being wrong without actually making any errors. Essentially, even if from a standpoint slightly different from Salmon’s, Masi stresses the idea of aesthetic response in the reader: translators should first and foremost consider the “effects” they provoke in those who read; thus poetry translation ought to sense the need for the right rhythm and sound.

This problem – similarly to that of creativity – seems more than evident especially when translating works by poets who engage in experiments and exploration of the language’s possibilities of expression as their key characteristic. Lucia Pascale has decided to analyse the poetry by Miron Białoszewski, an author certainly valuing the performative and theatrical elements, through a comparison of his lines in their Italian, French and Russian versions. The conclusion she reaches, alongside Białoszewski’s Italian translator Luca Bernardini, is that an attempt to approach his poetry requires a more profound treatment, getting as deep as to partly “re-write” the text in order to render the multiple linguistic tricks – neologisms, purposeful errors and slips, instances of semantic ambivalence – so essential to this Polish poet’s work.

Therefore, poetry compiles translators to test the limits of the language, challenging its formal structures and rules, expanding its semantic horizons, in order to reach for the “beyond” which constitutes its elusive and yet exclusive

domain. For upon careful reflection poetry is all about overcoming the limitations, this tiny little bit towards what is inexplicable and immaterial. Moving beyond the limits of space assigned by the verse, shortening to the point of non-existence the distance between the poet and the reader, crossing the boundaries of time and language, seizing terrain from death in order to stress one's own existence: is this not the poet's ultimate and intimate ambition? "The dialect is close to extinction and sooner or later I will have to give up", a Sicilian writer Nino De Vita declares bitterly while facing an extreme paradox of poetry with no readers left. Through her analysis of the Polish and Italian translations of his work, Paulina Malicka demonstrates the limits of translation, the truly painful experience of loss, in order to gain a new life for poetry in another language. This is Nino De Vita's first-hand sensation of writing his first lines in his native Marsala dialect and subsequently re-inventing them in the Italian language. The experience was lived again by the author-translator not only because of the double barrier between Sicilian and Italian, Italian and Polish, but also as a result of the cordial relationship between the poet and the translator in the midst of the lengthy effort, never completely satisfied with the rendering of one's own language in another.

Poetry translation thus seems an opportunity to go beyond, to convert what is ineffable, unspeakable or "spiritual" into the material form of another language. One case presented by Mikołaj Sokołowski is that of the Polish translation of Giosuè Carducci's "Barbarian Odes", carried out by the poet, Julia Dickstein-Wieleżyńska in 1923. He convincingly demonstrates the impact of Juliusz Słowacki's "King-Spirit" on the translator. The act of translation thus resulted in a blend of Carducci and Słowacki's own models of moral historicism, with the latter one's faith in the spiritual progress of the nation which grows and improves morally on its path to perfection. Sokołowski's paper touches upon important questions such as intertextuality, the historical context of any translation (always shaped by the tastes and tendencies of its own time) as well as the process of appropriation or cultural dominance that can be, with or without such awareness, supported by the translator.

In the essay by Rosario Portale, it can be seen that the same era – Romanticism – produced two extraordinary poetic personalities: Giacomo Leopardi and John Keats, whose striking poetic and stylistic affinities would reveal a direct influence of the English writer on the Italian one. Undoubtedly, Giacomo Leopardi "translated" into his works the same suggestions, the same atmosphere and the Nordic sensibility that Keats' poetics generated. The latter, for his part, absorbed in his work classicism, which was a natural source of inspiration for Leopardi.

The problem of literary translation as an act that realizes a form of ideological and cultural dominance, returns in the article of Ewa Róża Janion based on translations of the Greek poet, Costantino Kavafis. His homosexuality was censored by one of his first Italian translators, even through the change of grammatical genre. Grammar was therefore used as a censorial tool by the translator. This study shows how

translators representing a heteronormative culture, beginning from the earliest Italian versions of Kavafis, resorted to various methods to put the homoeroticism of the author under taboo. The interesting approach of the scholar is part of a hermeneutic trend where more and more frequently the research of translation scholars focuses on relations between language, power, and ideologies.

Specific issues of genre translation, understood both as a grammatical category and as a sociocultural construct, are addressed in a stimulating contribution given to this volume by Alessandro Amenta. The author analyzes his translations of the poems by contemporary Polish writer Izabela Filipiak, to show grammatical asymmetries between Polish and Italian can be circumvented by developing specific translation strategies. In this way it was possible to reproduce in Italian the writer's "poetic project", based on the deconstruction of heteronormative discourse and the refusal of dogmatisms and ideologies, as well as critical of the language as a male domain where the heterogeneity is not respected.

Also Novella di Nunzio in her brilliant study hints at how difficulties in translation can arise when the source language and the target language claim the same meaning of signifiers of different grammatical gender. The scholar analyzes the poor reception of traditional Lithuanian songs (*Lietuvių liaudies dainos*) in Italy and then – considering the specificity, or even uniqueness, of the Lithuanian language – presents some translating problems encountered by Italian translators.

Many are the values that these contributions bring to this issue of "Kwartalnik Neofilologiczny". First of all, the complex problems of poetical translation have been addressed from the point of view of different disciplines. A majority of the scholars who published their papers in this issue are also literary translators or in any case base their theoretical reflection on their own specific works. A further enrichment of the volume derives from a wide variety of poems analysed ranging from popular to apparently popular (the refined aphorisms of Guberman), from romantic to postmodern, from children's poetry to dialectical one.

The authors have presented some of the many difficulties that poetry translators face due to structural and morphological asymmetries and differences between languages, as well as to metric traditions that are sometimes incompatible. They also wanted to highlight the processes of poetic translation, the indispensability of professional philological approach, which allows the translator to "recreate" the poetry. This is only possible by elaborating valid strategies that can be challenged from time to time, and taking into account the specificity of the text, of the author's poetics, as well as of the dynamic transformations of languages over the time.

Dario Prola