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# CZESŁAW MIŁOSZ AS A TRANSLATOR OF THE POETICS OF GRAMMAR AND LANGUAGE ASYMMETRIES IN THE POEMS OF HERBERT, RÓŻEWICZ AND SZYMBORSKA

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**Abstract:** This article discusses Czesław Miłosz as a poet-translator of the poetry of his younger colleagues: Herbert, Różewicz and Szymborska. The comparative analysis focuses on features largely neglected in translation studies, such as Polish-English linguistic asymmetries and the poetics of grammar, that is, the functions of definite, indefinite and zero articles, verbs and their aspects, personal pronouns as well as the auxiliary verb *jest/is*. Whereas some of these items cannot be translated adequately because they cause aesthetic loss in any translation, others allow for adequate, sometimes even “optimal” translation.

**Key words:** Miłosz, poetics of grammar, language asymmetries, translation of Różewicz, Herbert, Szymborska into English.

## Introduction

German-language Slavists see language asymmetries as a particularly fascinating phenomenon that occurs “half-way between texts,” i.e. between a literary text and its translation into another language. The asymmetries mainly concern grammatical categories, usually when one of the languages, be it source or target, allows the selection of certain grammatical elements which are absent in the other language (Schultze, Matuschek 2005; c.f. Schultze, Matuschek 2006). For instance, there are two forms of addressing a person by name in Polish, the nominative and the vocative; nei-

ther English nor German offer this choice, their nominatives and vocatives being identical. This is particularly significant in poetic texts, where the translator has no way of rendering the semantic nuances that stem from the possibility of selecting either the nominative or the vocative. Conversely, while Polish has no morphological representation of the article, both English and German allow the choice between the indefinite, definite and zero article.

Polish presents more occasions for making grammatical choices than English, the chief language of interest in this paper. Obviously, Polish poets make use of this repertoire of facultative elements – at times consciously, at times somewhat intuitively. It seems that this artistic device is particularly evident in the Polish poetry of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Of the poets discussed here,<sup>1</sup> Tadeusz Różewicz is possibly the one who uses the greatest variety of alternate forms in drama and prose, as well as in poetry (c.f. Schultze, Matuschek 2006: 221–223, 229–230). In Szyborska's poetry, facultative grammatical elements are not the most frequent or the most typical features of her individual aesthetics (Schultze 2008: 28–34); and yet, in some of her texts, the facultative elements do have a major impact on this aspect of the text. Herbert seems to work less and less with facultative forms, but some highly expressive examples can still be found in his poetry (c.f. Schultze, Matuschek 2005: 209–210; Schultze 2008: 23–27).

It is interesting that all poetics of grammar (c.f. e.g. Schultze, Matuschek 2006: 214, especially note 3) are usually ignored in analyses of the poetry of Różewicz, Herbert and Szyborska and its translations. This is less of a surprise in translations of Polish literature into Slavic languages, such as Czech (e.g. Kardyni-Pelikánová 2010: 138–139), which are somewhat akin to Polish in this respect. Yet this lack of interest in the poetics of grammar can also be seen in translations of Polish poetry into English, in which poetic actualisation of alternative forms encounters numerous language asymmetries.

This is why we shall be mainly interested in instances of poetics of grammar in selected poems by Różewicz, Herbert and Szyborska, and in

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<sup>1</sup> The choice of Tadeusz Różewicz, Zbigniew Herbert and Wisława Szymborska reflects the German reception of Polish poetry: Różewicz, Herbert and Szymborska are, alongside Czesław Miłosz, the post-war Polish poets of the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century who have been received with the greatest enthusiasm in Germany (cf. Jekutsch 2002: 173). A similar perspective is voiced in English-language literature by Ursula Philipps when she describes the predilection of translators for Różewicz, Herbert and Szymborska, reflecting “the real importance of these poets” (Philipps 2000b: 1095).

their translations by Miłosz. Obviously, we must bear in mind that Miłosz approached the poetry of his colleagues not as a specialist in comparative linguistics but as poet-translator for whom English was a foreign language, not a native one. At times the competencies of a poet translator and a philologist translator do happen to coincide. This was the case with Miłosz's collaborator, Peter Dale Scott, a native speaker of English, philologist, professor of English Studies and poet.<sup>2</sup> The primary context of Miłosz's translations should be mentioned here. Since Miłosz used his translations in class with American students (Miłosz 1980: 112), it is not inconceivable that he might have targeted this particular audience in his work. As is well known, he would "consult native speakers about his English translations" quite early on (Baran 1981: 56). Given what Miłosz had to say about the poetry of Różewicz, Szymborska and Herbert (see below), we might suppose that his translation work was mostly independent of any research context, from analyses of the poetics of individual Polish poets performed by literary scholars. This position is often a manifestation of the inner independence that marks many poets who also deal in translation. Obviously, we shall not be able to explain the possible contexts in which the Miłosz translations under discussion came to be.

Before we proceed with a discussion of examples of the poetics of grammar in his translation, it is worth pointing out the forms of Polish-English asymmetries that will be of the greatest interest here.

## Polish-English language asymmetries

The following grammatical asymmetries can be indicated here from the vantage point of the Polish language: the article (1), the adjectival attribute (2), *jest* in its functions as copula and as verb (3), the personal pronoun (4), the grammatical sense and the meaningful content of verb aspects (5), the vocative as a form of address (6) and double negation (7).

These details are of some significance in translating the poetics of grammar. While replacement functions and meaningful contexts usually allow an unambiguous choice of the definite, indefinite and zero article (Tabakowska 1993: 788; Schultze, Matuschek 2005: 204–205), sometimes, and

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<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.peterdalescott.net>; [http://www.de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter\\_Dale\\_Scott](http://www.de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Dale_Scott). Accessed on 17 Feb 2012.

especially in poetry, problems arise with rendering the “universals” and “abstract nouns,” which usually require the zero article (Quirk et al. 2008: 276–303 etc.). Translational problems with the adjectival attribute appear when the poet uses the full potential of this component, e.g. placing the adjective sometimes before the noun as characterisation and then putting it in a posterior position as classification. Since the adjectival attribute always precedes the noun in English, this wordplay cannot be reproduced in translation. Finally, while Polish uses the copula *jest* in a facultative way, it is well-nigh impossible to omit the copula in English (Quirk et al. 2008: 41–42, 46–47, 54, 81, 129, 149 etc.). As a result, recreating the poetics of grammar based on this facultative element requires a great deal of inventiveness from the translator. What is more, in poetic texts, *jest* as a copula frequently appears (or might have appeared, yet was omitted) alongside *jest* functioning as a verb.<sup>3</sup> Equally optional is the use of the personal pronoun in Polish, while it is almost mandatory in English (Quirk et al. 2008: 333–361). This grammatical asymmetry (obviously, again at the level of *parole*) can cause significant problems in translation, e.g. when the speaker identifies him or herself – rarely but consistently – as *I*. Among others, the “grammatical sense” of verb aspects<sup>4</sup> might cause translational problems when the poet uses aspect in a way contrary to the readers’ experience, and hence contrary to their expectations: when, for instance, the imperfective is used in a context usually calling for the perfective. The Polish language allows people to be addressed by their first names in either the nominative or the vocative (c.f. Schultze, Matuschek 2005: 228–230). The use of the vocative might at times indicate personal intimacy, at times ironic distance. The poetics of grammar might consist in applying nominative forms alongside those in the vocative. Personification, so typical for poetry, makes the speaker use the vocative to address plants, animals, objects and abstract nouns. Finally, double negation, while not facultative, might be a challenge in English translation.

Further on, we analyse the poetics of grammar in a single canonical poem of each of the three selected authors: in Różewicz’s “W środku życia” (1955), translated by Miłosz as “In the Middle of Life;” Szymbor-

<sup>3</sup> The same is true of German translations of Polish poetry (c.f. Schultze, Matuschek 2006: 220).

<sup>4</sup> Hans-Jörg Schwenk devotes his monograph *Die Semantik der Imperfektiv-Perfektiv-Opposition im Polnischen und ihr Niederschlag in polnisch-deutschen Wörterbüchern* (2009) to the issues of aspect opposition in Polish and German.

ska's "Radość pisanía" (1967), or "The Joy of Writing," and Herbert's "Kamyk" (1961), or "The Pebble." Several other poems in Miłosz's translation will also be used to broaden the spectrum of typical examples of grammatical asymmetries and forms of poetics of grammar. We shall be mainly interested in clear examples of the poetics of grammar, but also in ordinary Polish-English asymmetries and in ways Miłosz dealt with them as translator.

## Tadeusz Różewicz

We shall begin with the poems by Różewicz. It is well known (Majchrowski 2002: 107) that Miłosz was the "first" to "translate the budding poet into English."<sup>5</sup> The title of the example discussed here, "In the Middle of Life" (Różewicz 1999: 152–154) is probably an allusion to the opening of Dante's *Divine Comedy*: *Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita/ mi ritrovai per una selva obscura* ("Midway upon the journey of our life/ I found myself within a forest dark", trans. H. Longfellow; c.f. Lagercrantz 1997: 16). Różewicz, like the Pilgrim (i.e. Dante; Lagercrantz 1997: 15, 167), was almost thirty-five when he wrote the poem. Yet while Dante's Pilgrim travels through the spheres that "await man after death" (Lagercrantz 1997: 15) – thus a purely imaginary journey – Różewicz's speaker is placed in a real life's path and feels like a man "after death." In this case, the real experience of World War Two causes "the middle of life" to be perceived as "after death." The poem's first lines that correspond to the introduction to *Divine Comedy* run as follows:

Po końcu świata  
po śmierci  
znalazłem się w środku życia

After the end of the world  
after my death  
I found myself in the middle of life

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<sup>5</sup> It is also known (Majchrowski 2002: 108) that, as early as in the 1940s, Różewicz responded "to Miłosz's volume of poetry, *Ocalenie* (Rescue)" with his own "volume, *Niepokój* (Anxiety)".

The contrast principle is also visible here in that Dante's poem presents the Pilgrim's encounter with the entirety of European culture, from Antiquity up to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, while Różewicz's, presenting the reality after the wartime destruction of that culture, speaks of man's attempts to regain his orientation in the world, first through the "certainty" of his own body and objects of everyday life, and then through early childhood reminiscences. This trial reality carries some analogies to Dante's *Comedy*: the Pilgrim, too, continues to inquire into the "reality" of his body and the state of the dead he meets in the beyond (Lagercrantz 1997: 20, 23). Several forms of poetics of grammar appear in the poem by the Polish poet, especially at its meaningful core. These include the possible choices of the personal pronoun, the various ways of presenting the copula *jest*, the grammatical sense of verb aspects and the dual method of expressing the vocative. Apart from these clearly conscious artistic techniques, the translator must bear in mind the grammatical asymmetries associated with the article in English. For instance, since the noun *życie* (life) in the poem's title carries a universal meaning, Miłosz's translation, "In the Middle of Life" (Miłosz 1965: 62; 1983: 86) correctly uses the zero form. Yet in the case of the personal pronoun, the translator is unable to render the poetics of grammar in a similar fashion. In the source text, the speaker first eschews the use of the personal pronoun *ja* in his quest for orientation: "*znalazłem się (...) stwarzałem siebie (...) budowałem*" etc., and eventually articulates the pronoun only once, after this series of tests on reality: "*to ja jestem*." Thus the gesture of identifying a person seems different from that of identifying things. Were the text to follow the description of things (*to jest stół, to jest okno*), it should have run: "*to jestem ja*." Instead of a neutral expression, the text offers a choice between two interpretative options.

The speaker thus identifies himself in relation to water: "*dobra wodo/ to ja jestem*." Without the assistance of punctuation marks, this statement can be interpreted as the speaker merely addressing water, either in the sense of "*to ja jestem*" = "it is I" or in the sense of "*to ja, jestem*" = "I exist." In the latter case, *jestem* would function as a noun. Of course, English has no capacity to reproduce the transition from a seemingly invisible pronoun: "*znalazłem się*" = "[I] have found myself," to a visible one "*ja jestem*" = "I am." The personal pronouns appear several times at the beginning of a line: "I found myself (...) I created myself." The speaker's uncertainty as to his situation in the universe reduces somewhat. Still, Miłosz has succeeded in reproducing the peculiar form of the speaker's address to water.

Instead of the neutral and colloquial “this is me” (= it’s me), which would correspond to the neutral “*to jestem ja*,” the speaker states “this is I,” and seems to gain legitimacy as an individual. In the target text, there is a possible optical counterpart of the poetics of the grammar: “I was stroking the waves (...) / (...) water I said / (...) / this is I.” This seems to be an optimal decision on the part of the translator.

In view of the problematic nature of reality, the copula has a singular status in Różewicz’s poem. Instead of the usual forms, such as “*to stół*,” “*to okno*,” where the pronoun *to* (it, this) replaces the copula (Schultze, Matuschek 2006: 220), phrases like “*to jest stół*, *to jest okno*” appear with the assurance that the status of things cannot be cast into doubt. The identification of the father is a different story: “*ten człowiek który zrywa jabłko / to mój ojciec*.” Here the pronoun replaces the copula. The identity of the father, a person, sounds somewhat less assured than that of the everyday objects. Here, too, Różewicz’s poetics of grammar has its counterpart in Miłosz’s translation: “this is the table (...) this is the window (...) is my father” (Miłosz 1965: 62). In later editions, the translator goes for the indefinite article: “this is a table” (Miłosz 1983: 86). As a result, orientation within the universe of things takes place on a different level, independent of the original childhood experience. Either due to his own considerations or to his colleagues’ advice, Miłosz strove to amend his translation.<sup>6</sup> Obviously, English-language readers will remain ignorant of the poetics of grammar in the poem by Różewicz, but they might obtain a good idea of the Polish author’s range of aesthetic techniques.

However, the limits of translatability can be seen in the vocative and the grammatical meanings of the verbs’ aspects. The speaker addresses water in the vocative: “*wodo mówilem / dobra wodo*.” The English language cannot reproduce the personal closeness indicated by the double vocative: “*wodo (...) wodo* – “water I said / good water” and the sole trace of intimacy is manifested in the lexical element of “good.”

The entire spectrum of meaning of the imperfective aspect is captured at the beginning of the poem:

znalazłem się w środku życia  
stwarzałem siebie  
budowałem życie

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<sup>6</sup> Bogdan Baran (1981: 56) remarks that Miłosz usually solicited advice from native speakers of English.

Following the intertextual reference to Dante's *Comedy* – “*mi ritrovai*,” “I found myself” – in the imperfective aspect, the imperfective is used twice more. The speaker marks the process of creating himself and of constructing life, while supplying no information as to its completion or results. The imperfective aspect also contains the additional clue that the speaker is attempting to create himself and to build a new life. Miłosz's translation runs as follows:

I found myself in the middle of life  
I created myself  
constructed life

The omission of the personal pronoun (a very rare device in Polish-English translations) in the formula “constructed life” indicates that Miłosz was perfectly aware of Polish-English asymmetries. Of tantamount significance here is the fact that neither “created” nor “constructed” suggest an incomplete attempt or action. The translation does not reproduce the existential uncertainty of the speaker, expressed, in the source text, by the imperfective aspect.

Apparently, Miłosz as translator handled the poetics of grammar in the poem “In the Middle of Life” with particular care. Whenever possible, he tried to give the reader of the target text at least an idea of the aesthetic techniques employed by Różewicz. Still, it goes without saying that some facultative elements of the Polish grammar remain untranslatable. The omission of the personal pronoun (“constructed life”) and the powerful statement “this is I” are clear evidence of the poet-translator's attempts to search for solutions to his translational problems across the entire spectrum of the target language's potential.

When Bogdan Baran (1981: 57) claimed that “Różewicz is fairly easy to translate, which obviously comes from the premises of his poetics,” he must have ignored the poetics of grammar.<sup>7</sup> It is true that there are poems by Różewicz that are “easy” to translate in terms of their lexicon and clarity. From the perspective of English, these might include poems containing ordinary language asymmetries associated with articles, the personal pronoun, nominal flexion (N.B. translation of the sense of Polish flexive suffixes requires a variety of English prepositions) etc. In our opinion,

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<sup>7</sup> Moreover, Baran cannot have considered an entire host of ambiguous words and phrases, intertextual allusions, wordings of extreme content density and other aesthetic devices in some of Różewicz's poems.

translational competence manifests itself in some translators' consistent reaction to such systemic differences between languages: the use of creative translation.

Miłosz was an obvious exponent of this approach. His translation of Różewicz's short poem "Głos" (1999: 30) is a good example of this systemic (yet transparent) translation technique. In "Głos," the anonymous speaker cautions mankind: in view of life's shortness, interpersonal relationships are proof of extreme folly and narrow-mindedness. The translation of the title allows the choice between the definite and the indefinite article. Miłosz was right in choosing the latter. "A Voice" (Miłosz 1965: 67; 1983: 91) that cautions man and mankind (seemingly a voice in the wilderness) must remain anonymous to the end. The translation of the initial lines requires the use of a personal pronoun and a preposition. The original begins with:

Kaleczą się i dręczą  
milczeniem i słowami

In Miłosz's translation:

They mutilate they torment each other  
With silences with words

A less creative translation was also possible with the preservation of the conjunction *i*: "They mutilate and torment each other/ with silences and words." Deciding to omit "and" (*i*), Miłosz repeats the personal pronoun "They (...) they" that combines into a dense network of personal pronouns, "they do so/ as if they had forgotten/ (...) they are," which does not exist in the original. The result is an indicative gesture, also absent from the source text.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, in the second line, the translator omits the conjunction and repeats the preposition "with," thus emphasising instrumentation (Quirk 2008: 700–701): "with (...) with" – silences and words are used to torment others. This systemic use of Polish-English language asymmetries is a feature of creative translation.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> I have learned from my conversations with Różewicz that the poet is very much in favour of such an amplification of aesthetic sense in translations of his poems.

<sup>9</sup> For instance, Karl Dedecius's German translation (Stimme, Różewicz 1999: 31) does not use a similar systemic use of Polish/German language asymmetries. Its first lines run: *Sie verletzen und quälen sich/ durch schweigen und worte.*

Much like “with,” the preposition “by” is repeated in the final lines of Miłosz’s translation. In Różewicz’s original:

Może ich zabić słowo  
uśmiech spojrzanie

The translation:  
they can be killed by a word  
by a smile by a look

Here, the repetition of the preposition “by” compensates for the loss of syllables in English. This language’s high incidence of single-phone syllables (Gačečiladze 1988: 93) is balanced by a series of pronouns, of which only one is truly necessary. In view of the other possibility, “by a word a smile a look”, Miłosz’s use of Polish-English language asymmetries must have been conscious. Readers who understand both Polish and English are bound to notice the traces of this pair of languages in Miłosz’s translation. In a sense, Miłosz emerges here with his own type of translational poetics.

## Wisława Szymborska

It seems that Miłosz set a precedent for many other translators or teams of translators with linguistic competence in both languages in his own work on poems by Szymborska into English (Phillips 2000c: 1364). While he translated only eight of her poems, he assiduously followed the development of her poetry and her essays; he continued to comment on her position in Polish and European letters (Miłosz 1996: 32–34; 2002: 2–4) and he emphasised certain features of her poetics (Miłosz 1996; Phillips 2000c: 1364).

Miłosz’s remark on “existential meditation” (Miłosz 1996: 34) is of interest in the context of our comparative analysis, because existential (ontological) meditation calls, at times, for using *jest* as a verb. Even more pregnant are Miłosz’s conclusions as to the personal pronoun *ja* in Szymborska: “Szymborska says *ja*, but it is an ascetic *ja*, cleansed of all desire for confession and cleansed of individual features; instead, it is united with other *jas* in the one and only human condition, now an object of compassion and sympathy” (Miłosz 1996: 32). This remark, undoubtedly touching upon Szymborska’s “ethics of writing” (Görner 2010: 3), also strikes the

core of the poetics of grammar. It turns out that the speaker in Szymborska's poetry utters *ja* relatively infrequently, possibly out of personal and cognitive modesty; this pronoun is usually embedded in verbs and modals (*jestem, mam*). It is quite visible that the poet uses functional facultative systems of this kind (Schultze 2002: 201, 227). Here, the poetics of grammar manifests itself in personal pronouns, in thinking in terms of the article, which do not exist in Polish, and in the facultative use of the copula *jest*. Szymborska's individual poetics also includes various forms of negation, including the Polish (i.e. Slavic) double negation. Since double negation usually appears in English in non-standard usage (Quirk 2008: 787) or within a highly limited scope of standard language (Quirk 2008: 798–799), this creates another instance of Polish-English asymmetry. Double negation, often associated with Szymborska's cognitive scepticism, belongs to the greater structure of how she creates aesthetic meaning: various interrogative sentences, a great many interrogative particles,<sup>10</sup> negative particles (Schultze 2002: 200, especially note 12), the *nie-* (“non-”) prefix etc. According to Miłosz's observation, despite these linguistic structures, Szymborska “offers a world where one can breathe,” “a world where a game is played that gives us an intuition of human existence” (Miłosz 1996: 34). It is particularly in her autobiographical poem “Radość pisania” (Szymborska 1997: 10–13) that Szymborska plays with negation markers (*nie/nie-*), and this, together with articles or article functions, the personal pronoun *ja*, the adjectival attribute and the copula *jest*, presents a challenge for translators who aim for precision in rendering her work in English.

“Radość pisania” has achieved classic status, so we can dispense with an analysis and interpretation.<sup>11</sup> It should suffice to recall that in this autobiographical poem the speaker reflects upon the conditions, the joy and even the triumphs of creating an autonomous poetic universe, with all the limitations and risks in this world built of letters. It also has a theme indispensable to Szymborska's verse: of the ethics of writing. Unlike his translations of Różewicz, Miłosz's translatorial decisions might be questioned here.<sup>12</sup> Sometimes errors in translation appear, at other times solutions that

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<sup>10</sup> A monograph on Szymborska by Germanist Gerhard Bauer (2004) bears the title *Frage-Kunst* or “the art of questioning.”

<sup>11</sup> An extensive analysis can be found in a monograph by Dörte Lütvoigt (1998: 25–47); see also the analysis by Brigitte Schultze (2002: 202–207).

<sup>12</sup> It is possible that this is what Ursula Phillips (2000c: 1394) has in mind when she writes, “in the collections by Miłosz (...) though they vary in tone and precision.”

prompt discussion. Among other things, the choice of articles might be considered dubious. Although the title of the poem has been correctly rendered as “The Joy of Writing” (Miłosz 1983: 112–113), it is the indefinite article rather than the more accurate definite article that appears throughout the poem itself. Phrases in the source text: “*napisany las*,” “*jak kalka*,” “*nad białą kartką*,” “*w kropli atramentu*,” result in a repetition of indefinite articles: “a written forest,” “like a carbon,” “a white page,” “in a drop of ink.” In the first line, even the demonstrative pronoun *ta* in “*ta napisana sarna*” (the/that written doe/deer) has been rendered as “a written deer,” suggesting a single instance of creating the forest, the deer etc. on paper.

The expected article would be the definite one. With striking consistency, Miłosz prefers the indefinite article even in clear instances of the combination of the object-language level (*objektsprachliche Ebene*) with that of meta-language (*metasprachliche Ebene*; Lütvoigt 1998: 30–38; Schultze 2002: 204, 209, 213): “*pod kropką kopyta*” is translated as “under a dot of a hoof.” There is no punctuation (graphic) mark of a hoof. The speaker only imagines the analogy of a hoof-print and a dot on paper. The rendering “under the dot of the hoof” would probably be more correct.<sup>13</sup> In the final lines, the indefinite article imposes a limitation on the certainty of the autothematic manifestation. Szymborska’s version of this last and shortest stanza is:

Radość pisania.  
Możliwość utrwalania.  
Zemsta ręki śmiertelnej.

The translation:  
The joy of writing.  
A chance to make things stay.  
A revenge of a mortal hand.<sup>14</sup>

As a consequence of these translatorial decisions, the entire autobiographical message becomes less decisive than in the source text.

Language asymmetry tied to the personal pronoun does not facilitate translatorial interpretation similar to that of the functions of the article.

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<sup>13</sup> Other translators invariably use the definite article. For instance, the translation by Magnus J. Krynski and Robert A. Maguire runs: “under the full stop,” and that by Karl Deciejus: “*unter dem Punkt*” (Schultze 2002: 213).

<sup>14</sup> In order to stress this show of autobiography, other translators, such as Krynski and Maguire, choose the definite article, and the final lines begin in a more decisive tone: “The joy (...)/ The power (...)/ The revenge” (Schultze 2002: 213, 216).

It is interesting that in Szymborska's poem the speaker never uses a morphological expression of the personal pronoun *ja* even in autobiographical meditation. The poetics of grammar is not in evidence. The pronoun is consistently embedded in the flexion of the verbs: *jak zechcę, jeśli każe* etc. The presence of the speaker is also visible in possessive pronouns: *bez mojej woli, na mój rozkaz*. In this case, Miłosz's translation more than fulfils the conditions of language asymmetry: "I desire," "I command" etc. The translator, it is true, cannot fully eschew the loss of aesthetic sense that stems from the facultative use of the personal pronoun.

While the personal pronoun seems to precondition certain translatorial decisions, the copula *jest* presents yet another challenge for the translators. It appears three times in the latter half of Szymborska's poem, twice in a very visible place at the beginning of a line and in the highly expressive form of inversion, which itself is difficult to translate due to the limited usage of inversion in English (Quirk 2008: 1379–1383). The text containing the copula goes as follows:

Jest w kropli atramentu (...)  
 Zapominają, że tu nie jest życie.  
 (...)  
 Jest więc taki świat.  
 (...)

In the first two lines, the facultative copula alone is emphasised: a drop of ink truly does contain a large assortment of hunters ("*zapas/myśliwych*"); life on paper (*tu*, "here") is not real empirical life. *Jest* in the third line functions as a verb with ontological meaning (Schultze 2002: 209).

In Miłosz's translation, this texture of content loses its expressiveness in part through language asymmetry. The triple *jest* disappears when one of the copulas is modified into its plural form: "In a drop of ink there are." The second copula is used in a way highly reminiscent of the source text: "They forget that this is not life here." Conversely, *jest* as a verb with ontological significance is much less powerful in the translation than in the original: "And so there is such a world/ on which I impose an autonomous Fate?" The ontological *jest* could even be placed at the beginning of the line: "Is there then."<sup>15</sup> This would enhance the difference between *jest* as copula and *jest* functioning as verb.

<sup>15</sup> As other translators (Schultze 2002: 216) have proposed.

We do not know why Miłosz opted against emphasising the ontological sense and the poetics of grammar. As with the indefinite article, the speaker's utterance is less decisive in the target text. Miłosz's speaker also uses a narrative tonality that is absent in the original. This (hardly perceptible) tendency of the translator seems to foreshadow Miłosz's reading of Szymborska's poetry that brings out its essayistic features.

Another language asymmetry, the post-nominal adjectival attribute, can be found at the close of the poem: "*ręki śmiertelnej*." The translator has no way of rendering the fact that the hand in the source text represents a certain type of hand. This results in a much weaker climax than in the original: "a mortal hand" (Schultze 2002: 207).

The final type of language asymmetry, double negation, and several further connotations of negation, forces the translator to find replacements for linguistic resources unavailable in English. The double negation, which manifests the speaker's omnipotence in the sphere of poetry, runs: "*nic się tu nie stanie*," with an optical-acoustic repetition of the *nie* element in the future tense, *stanie*. Other verbs: *nie spadnie*, *nie ugnie*, and two adjectives and a noun, *niezależny*, *istnienie*, *nieustanne*, complete this underlying *nie* network. Some of these elements highlight Szymborska's cognitive scepticism, some her tendency to play, much admired by Miłosz. He seems to have tried to amplify both negations in his translation: "**nothing** here will happen **ever**, **Not even**," and the repetition effect: "**will** happen, **will** fall." This wordplay cannot be reproduced in the target text.

An analysis of Miłosz's other translations of Szymborska shows that, at times, he even enhances the negation element. In "*Wielka liczba*" (Szymborska 1977: 185; "A Great Number") the source text contains a negative enumeration: "*reszta w prześlepienie idzie, / w niepomysłenie, w nieodżalowanie*." This Miłosz translates as: "the rest stay **un**heeded, / **un**thought of, **un**lamented" (Miłosz 1983: 111). Such translatorial inventiveness can serve as a substitute for the inescapable loss of poetic material in other parts of the poem; in any case, this is an instance of a deliberate translatorial strategy.

## Zbigniew Herbert

For many reasons, translating Herbert into English differs from Różewicz and Szymborska. While the number of translations of works by the latter poets is hardly considerable, Miłosz has translated many poems by

Herbert,<sup>16</sup> some on his own, some in collaboration with Peter Dale Scott. While we know that both translators made a number of translations individually (Philipps 2002: 633), there is no certainty which of these were “originally” authored by Miłosz and which by Scott. It is a particular feature of this translating process that we possess a great deal of information on the challenges Herbert’s poetry presents his translators (Miłosz, Scott 1985: 16–18). Furthermore, due to the intensity of Herbert’s and Miłosz’s “creative dialogue” (c.f. Fiut 2003: 225–247), it is reasonable to assume that Herbert’s poetry was particularly accessible to Miłosz.

Herbert’s poetry is an atypical case in this comparative study, as the role played by the facultative forms of the Polish language is much less significant than in the work of Różewicz and Szymborska. The poetics of grammar in Herbert focuses around the adjectival attribute and the function of the article. Small wonder, then, that its traces are usually ignored by students of Herbert’s poetry and of its translations into other languages. Miłosz and Scott, for instance, thus conclude on their translatorial effort:

Herbert is easier to translate than those poets who experiment with syntax and metre (...). We are aware of how much is lost from his careful handling of Polish idioms. (...) We also think of the wit of Herbert’s word order, whenever a surprise was held back **for the end of the passage** (Miłosz, Scott 1985: 17; emphasis B.S., B.W.).

The location of the aesthetic signal – the beginning of a stanza or of a line – must evidently play a part in Herbert’s poetics (Schultze 2010). In the examples below, adjectival attributes appear at the ends of lines.

Apart from various English versions of “Kamyk” (Herbert 1998: 280) – with minor changes that are nevertheless significant for the poem’s aesthetic sense – we will be interested in “Miasto nagie” from the same collection, *Studium przedmiotu* (Herbert 1998: 267–268).<sup>17</sup> As the first translation of “Kamyk” and of “Miasto nagie” appeared in the *Postwar Polish Poetry* anthology (Miłosz 1965: 100, 109), there is reason to believe that they were rendered by Miłosz alone.

In the case of “Kamyk,” interpretation is quite redundant (see e.g. Nasiłowska 1991: 69, 72, 73, 77–78). The function of the article is interest-

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<sup>16</sup> A selection of translations compiled by Alissa Valles (Herbert 2007) contains 143 texts by Miłosz or by the Czesław Miłosz and Peter Dale Scott team, yet both Miłosz and the team have translated even more.

<sup>17</sup> “Kamyk” features in the collection assembled by Alissa Valles, while “Miasto nagie” does not.

ing in the consecutive translations of the title of the poem. The first English version was entitled “The Stone” (Miłosz 1965: 100). While “Stone” carries its “stony sense,” it lacks certain features of *kamyk*: its smoothness and roundness. The later versions have been renamed “The Pebble” (Miłosz 1983: 131), which seems the correct translatorial decision. Yet there is food for thought in the case of the last translation: the poem included in the Alissa Valles collection omits the article in the title: *Pebble* (Miłosz 2007: 197).<sup>18</sup> To cite Randolph Quirk’s grammar handbook, “pebble” in the final translatorial version is defined as representative of a class “considered as an *undifferentiated whole*” (Quirk 2008: 282; emphasis by Quirk, B.S., B.W.); Quirk emphasises the special usage of the noun man (with zero article) = mankind: “When it has the meaning of the ‘human race’ (...) man and its synonym mankind are used generically without the article (...): Man is a social animal” (Quirk 2008: 282). Herbert’s poem contains its own definition: “The pebble/ is a perfect creature.” It seems that the last form the title, that with the zero form of the article, perfectly fits the aesthetic sense of Herbert’s work. The application of Quirk’s grammar book to the interpretation of “Kamyk” brings us to the conclusion that, unlike man the social animal, “pebble” is an asocial creature and, as such, entirely independent. Obviously, Quirk could not have anticipated a common usage of the zero article in reference to “pebble” (although he does apply it to “rabbit”).<sup>19</sup> Our attempts might serve to illustrate the hermeneutic benefit of comparative analyses of Polish-English translations. English grammar allows us to comprehend with greater clarity what exactly Herbert achieves in “Kamyk”: a rejection of traditional anthropocentrism. The third and final English version of “Pebble” seems to test the grammar of the English language and touches upon the essence of aesthetic and philosophical meaning. This is an indication that we are dealing with an optimal translation.

While the final version of the English title testifies to the feasibility of a translation that is successful from any point of view, the above-mentioned adjectival attribute in the first and second lines once again illustrates the limits of Polish-English translation: “*stworzeniem/ doskonałym*” (“a perfect creature,” with no line boundary in-between). This highlights the status of the relational adjective, since *doskonałym stworzeniem* could also

<sup>18</sup> We do not know who insisted on the modification; the German translation by Karl Dedecius also applies the zero article: “Kiesel” (Schultze, Matuschek 2006: 218).

<sup>19</sup> Quirk’s grammar sets the limits for comparing man to animal: “The following is unacceptable except in technical, scientific use: \*Rabbit displays similar features to man.”

have been possible. The poetics of grammar are even more visible when, in less highlighted places, the poet uses qualifying adjectives, “*kamiennym sensem*” [pebbly meaning] and “*falszywe ciepło*” [false warmth], and yet another variant of the relational attribute, “*ciało jego szlachetne*” [its noble body].

In all of Miłosz’s translations of “Kamyk,” the content element “*stworzeniem/ doskonałym*” has been rendered as “a perfect creature” (Miłosz 1965: 100; 1983: 131, 2007: 197). In this translation, the relational attribute cannot avoid being transformed into a qualifying attribute, somewhat sapping the strength of the aesthetics of the target text.<sup>20</sup>

A similar loss in aesthetic puissance occurs in “Miasto nagie,” where the implications of the meaning of the entire poem seem even more significant. Apart from a number of adjectival attributes of the qualifying type – “*żółtej fali*” [a yellow wave], “*na rudej trawie*” [on rusty grass], “*z białą ścianą*” [with a white wall], etc. – “Miasto nagie” contains relational adjectival attributes. Of particular import here is the title itself, “Miasto nagie,” and the phrase “*poeci milczący*,” highlighted with anadiplosis and with parentheses: “(...) *Czy są tam poeci (poeci milczący)*.”

While the title of the poem seems to introduce the very category of “naked towns,” the phrase “*poeci milczący*” indicates a type of poet who – for instance, for political reasons – has been silenced or has no courage to speak (or write). In both cases, the nuanced meaning of the relational adjectival attribute has been lost in Miłosz’s translation. It runs: *A Naked Town* (1),<sup>21</sup> and “*Are there poets there (silent poets)*” (2, Miłosz 1983: 138–139). It can be surmised, of course, that both the title and the phrase “silent poets” can produce any number of associations in readers of the target text.

The quoted line, much like the translation of Różewicz’s “Głos,” testifies to a quality of Miłosz as translator: his tendency to create rhythmical structures with lexical material that does not appear at all or that appears with a different frequency in the source text. In this case, the rhythm is achieved by the repetition of the adverb:

(...) Are there poets there (silent poets)  
 there are troops (...)  
 (...)  
 there are as well (...)

<sup>20</sup> It seems that translations of “Kamyk” into Spanish render the poetics of grammar (Potok 2005: 156).

<sup>21</sup> The title was “A Naked Town” in the first edition of the anthology (Miłosz 1965: 109).

(...)  
 there are also dogs (...)  
 (...)  
 and who lives there (...).

The adverb “there” partially – and quite correctly – replaces the Polish modals (*sq* – there are) and the adverb *tam*; partially, it is the translator’s addition.

As we can see, when Miłosz translates Herbert – or Różewicz, or Szymborska – he is incapable of preserving nuances of meaning associated with the facultative system of adverbial attributes, while the function of the article allows optimal translation. The translational process ends with the best choice.<sup>22</sup>

## Conclusion

Since this is a relatively limited study of Miłosz’s achievements in translation, our assessment of the results will be tentative and very cautious.

Comparative analyses of Polish-English and Polish-German translations show that poet translators, as opposed to philologist translators, have a tendency to either ignore language asymmetries and the associated poetics of grammar, or to favour other features of meaning and aesthetics of the source texts.<sup>23</sup> Obviously, these rough differences in approach to translations between poets and philologists do not suffice to state that one or the other approach is better. As a rule, translations produced with diverse competencies complement each other. What matters is the basic attitude to translation: if the translator is more interested in adequate translation, or in adaptation.<sup>24</sup> There is no reason to doubt that Miłosz’s aim was translation, not adaptation. As many poet-translators prefer various types of adaptation,

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<sup>22</sup> Other scholars point out other optimal decisions by Miłosz or the Miłosz/Scott team (Potok 2005: 157, 159).

<sup>23</sup> I know from my conversations with Henryk Bereska, who wrote poetry in German and Polish, translated between the two languages and was a philologist (he took a degree in Slavic Studies and in Theatre Studies), that his Polish-German translations were made “mostly from the perspective of a poet rather than a philologist” (B.S.).

<sup>24</sup> For instance, the philologist translator Jutta Janke, while perfectly aware of language asymmetries, has produced an adaptation (*Nachdichtung*) of “Radość pisanía” that ignores Szymborska’s individual poetics to a startling degree (Schultze 2002: 210–213).

it can be said that Miłosz's treatment of his colleagues poems was altruistic and "modest."

His own statements on the work of Różewicz and Szymborska show that, on the one hand, Miłosz sought shared intentions and ethical positions in the main representatives of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Polish poetry;<sup>25</sup> on the other, he observed each of his colleagues' individual poetics. Our results of the analysis of translations of Szymborska show that Miłosz was not entirely successful in capturing the decisiveness of the poet's speaker.<sup>26</sup>

The study of Polish-English asymmetries and the associated poetics of grammar leads to the conclusion that the nuances of meaning in the forms of the vocative, the adjectival attribute and the grammatical sense of verbal aspects are lost in Miłosz's translations, much as they are by other translators. On the other hand, functions of the article are clearly used with cognitive goals. From the perspective of Quirk's grammar, in the final version of "Kamyk" [Pebble], Miłosz seems to test, or indeed to transcend, the norms of the English language. The impact of asymmetry in translations of poetry is obviously dependent on the degree to which the asymmetries concern the aesthetic sense of the entire poem.

Some other features of Miłosz's translations have been noted in our analysis. These include the art of creating rhythmical structures with lexical material. Many more purely poetic qualities of his translation can be named (Schultze 2002: 214–215) – these obviously deserve separate studies. One of the main questions before us is whether there is a connection between Miłosz's own poetics<sup>27</sup> and his translatorial devices (or predilections).<sup>28</sup>

**trans. Jan Rybicki**

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<sup>25</sup> In 1996, Miłosz thus commented on the poetry of Różewicz: "Meanwhile, his poetry has accompanied my own reflections on the calling of the poet, who (...) will always be 'the shepherd of being'" (Majchrowski 2002: 251).

<sup>26</sup> When Miłosz (1996: 35) writes: "Szymborska is (...) a poet who writes almost in the form of an essay," it must be taken into consideration that some of her poems translated by Miłosz, e.g. "Wielka liczba," are indeed somewhat akin to an essayist's mode of argumentation. Nonetheless, the poetics of the essay does not include the economy of language so characteristic for Szymborska's poetry.

<sup>27</sup> Due to the high frequency of *jest* used in its existential sense in Miłosz's poetry (Rybka 2002: 80–81), one can assume that Miłosz as translator would identify such forms of the poetics of grammar; our analysis seems to confirm this supposition.

<sup>28</sup> For the predilections and the motivation in Miłosz's choice of texts as translator, see Skubalanka 2007: 21, 31–32 (c.f. note 25 in this study).

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