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Hopkins in Translation

Starting from 1976 when his first renditions of Hopkins's poems began to appear in „Tygodnik Powszechny”, „Znak”, „Przewodnik Katolicki” and „Więź”, translating Hopkins has become Stanisław Barańczak's almost exclusive domain. After the years of practically unchallenged dominance, in 1999 he is still the unquestionable number one, his accomplishment evident in the bulk of Hopkins's poems available in translation and in his invaluable criticism.

Though often constructively critical towards other translators of Hopkins, Barańczak has rarely, if ever, been evaluated for his work on the English poet. Hence, in an attempt to bridge this gap, the article will compare Barańczak's and four other renderings of Hopkins's *God's Grandeur* authored by Jerzy Pietkiewicz, Jerzy S. Sio, Zofia Ilińska and Tadeusz Ross (see Appendix I and Appendix II). As the scope of this essay does not allow for an extensive discussion of the texts, I shall limit myself to but a handful of observations concerning a) the use the translators make of the communicative situation inherent in Hopkins's sonnet and b/ their rendering of such central images as nature, the Holy Ghost and the world the Divine broods over.

One of the most famous of Hopkins's „nature sonnets”, *God's Grandeur* (1877) is a contemplation of the solitary speaker on how the divine presence in the natural world – so easily recognizable for himself, a true believer – goes generally unnoticed by other men, carelessly destroying God's precious gifts. These sad thoughts are followed by the poet, revealing another aspect of God's grandeur: the divine mercy and forgiveness for the „bent”, sinful world, as well as power to revitalize nature and give man new spiritual life. Watching the sunrise, the man sees with his heart's eye the dawn sky which becomes one with the Holy

Ghost, the symphony of colours the final sign of the greatness of the Divine revealed to those spiritually ripe to perceive it.

Written before his ordination, when the poet's sense of God's closeness was at its most intense, *God's Grandeur* exemplifies Hopkins's preference for solitude, as if other men could be a disturbance in his direct encounters with God. Thus, though the octave treats of man, it does so, depicting him as but a representative of mankind, a type of sinner, one of many generations of men „not recking the rod". The only individualized man is the speaker himself and even he emerges as a rather inconspicuous presence. His „I" – identity veiled by his utterance, he is characterized first and foremost by the language he uses and through his unique perception of God. Excluding even the general presence of man, indicative of the development of the speaker's relationship with the Divine, the sestet constitutes the poet's private space, the shelter in which not even the world can interfere with his communion with God.

Thus, for Barańczak, for instance, to introduce, while translating the piece, some unspeaking presence, a potential listener to whom the speaker would communicate his experience, is an obvious disregard for the original text. Perhaps not so striking in other renditions of the sestet, this transgression is rather surprising in Barańczak's, the more so that he often stressed the importance of a thorough analysis of the poem's communicative strategy. Nevertheless, resorting to the imperative „look", suggestive of some audience with whom the speaker is made to share the preciousness of the moment, Barańczak violates the speaker's solitary contemplation, which merely weakens the force of the experienced epiphany. What is more, used, it appears, as the equivalent for Hopkins's initial „Oh", „look" / („spójrz") gives a very different flavouring to the meaning conveyed by the interjection. Barańczak's turning it into a command („spójrz" / look), destroys many other meanings it is so pregnant with: the speaker's surprise, his fascination with and admiration for what he sees, his recognition of the Divine as well as his own humility; also his awareness of the battle between good and evil ended in the victory of light.

Introducing the plural speaker Ross goes even further in the direction

of modifying the communicative situation of the original text. The literal translation of the line at issue reads „Oh, morning at the brown West like a spring shoots over us-" („O, ranek na brunatnym Wschodzie jak źródło strzela nad nami"). Unlike Barańczak, Ross replaces one interjection with another, forgetting, however, despite his emphasis on philological correctness, that there also exists in Polish an even better (more faithful, too) variant of „O", „Oh", retaining the same meaning. What is more, Ross's resignation from the imperative results in his explicating Hopkins's meaning (typical also of Ilińska) rather than creating it through the syntax, sound and word choice. Sito remains closest to the original with his „ah", yet the interjection he uses is placed not initially, but towards the end of the line.

Among those translators who render „Oh" through the imperative mood (Barańczak, Pietkiewicz and Ilińska) Barańczak is the only one whose choice of words „spójrz" versus more frequently used „patrz", emphasizes not the processual character of the event but the drama of the moment at which the significance of the spectacle of light is understood. Also, it must be admitted that Barańczak best renders the sound pattern of the sestet, managing successfully to preserve the original rhyme scheme of the sestet, to convey the tensions between words, and at the same time to communicate the concordia discors principle by which they are bound (Ilińska and Sito violate the rhyme scheme, suggesting respectively abcbeda and ababcc).

Let us now examine the renderings of the sestet's central images. Among the five translators only Sito used the Polish „przyroda" for „nature", rejecting thus the possibility of using its more exact synonym, „natura", definitely closer to the original. Interestingly, however, though Barańczak, Pietkiewicz, Ilińska and Ross all employ „natura", each of them ascribes to it different meanings, often not consistent with those of Hopkins.

For instance, distancing himself from „the dearest freshness", Pietkiewicz transforms Hopkins's nature which, represented in his version by „świeżość soczysta" (juicy freshness), loses its metaphysical dimension. What is more, the resignation from the passive construction gives nature the independence it can never really have in Hopkins's

poetic universe. Ross also relies on the active voice in his rendering of nature, and although he is the only one out of the five who preserves „the dearest freshness” („najdroższa świeżość”) in his translation, he locates it „pomiędzy rzeczami” (between things), which completely violates Hopkins's notion of „in-scape”.

Other translators differ as to the degree of depth the „freshness” inhabits. Ilińska who cares least about the syntax [her rendition of line 9 reads: „A jednak niewyczerpana natura żyje” (And yet, never-spent nature lives on)] uses the most neutral adverb „deeply” („głęboko”). Pietkiewicz places it „under surface” („pod powierzchnią”); Sito's wondrous („cudowna”) freshness lives in the deepest strata of things („W najgłębszych warstwach rzeczy”) whereas Barańczak, transforming Hopkins's „dearest freshness” into „fresh adazzle” makes it „sleep” in the dead deeps of all things („W głuchych głębiach wszechrzeczy”) – he who so often warns against modifying the original meaning is here caught red-handed. It's only that in spite of the change the metaphorical aspect of nature is still intact. No longer rendered by the cost-evoking „dearest”, it is conveyed by the image of light, neatly linked to the concept of the sun rising. Also in this case Barańczak's alliteration patterns are almost exemplary.

The treatment of the light-versus-darkness opposition can serve as another illustration of the translators' disregard for poetic correctness. Pietkiewicz speaks of dewy twilight („rośny zmierzch”), somewhat archaic and dialectal in the use of „rośny”. Ilińska deprives light of its power to go off by itself, depicting it as the victim of the black night, its kidnapper. In this way the sacred symbolism of light is almost ruined, not to mention that the night's victory over light can by no means be in agreement with the religious beliefs of the poet. At least, in Ilińska's translation, the sound level conveys some idea of the struggle between light and darkness, something completely neglected by Ross, carefully eliminating the blackness of the West, as if afraid that it could actually threaten the light. Thus, he also ignores the abysmal quality of the world after the sunset – and in this neglect he is joined by Pietkiewicz and Sito, more concerned with exposing the romantic, idyllic aspect of the presentation rather than its drama.

The „ah!” of the final line is a repetition of a similar experience from merely two lines earlier. Made thus more forceful, it becomes a spiritual finale, a revelation in capsule form of the Holy Ghost who epiphanized into the moment of sunrise is becoming one with the dawn, in fact becoming literally the dawn of the world which he creates and sustains. Hence the importance of the light and brightness, unfortunately belittled by Pietkiewicz. In his version the lovely dawn that is whirling („Krasny świt się kłębi”) is separated from the Paraclete with a dot, and the brightness of the sky does not resurface in the description of the wings. For Sito the „bright wings” of the Holy Ghost, unnecessarily archaized („skrzydły jasne”), will in some unspecified future cover the nakedness of the earth. This is by no means the only evocation of light in Sito's rendition. Adding from himself, he states that the Paraclete will breathe light into the earth („technie światło ziemi”), which, of course, is a significant violation of the original. The least poetic/dramatic, and consequently most literal/flat is Ilińska's translation. Equally clumsy is Ross's whose final line has the Holy Ghost brood over the „leaning/sloping” world. The adjective „pochyły” which would normally be used in describing trees or walls is here an example of bad Polish, the choice hardly suitable for the context in which it is placed. More satisfying is Pietkiewicz's rendering of the Paraclete, hen-like brooding over the chicks, and it is with this translation that Barańczak's shows most affinity. Changing the contents of the lines, but preserving the meaning fundamental for the original, he comes up with „Jasnoskrzydły Duch Święty ogrzewa, okrywa / „Piskle-świat pierśią switu i ah światła pierzeń” (The bright-winged Holy Ghost warms, envelops / The chick-of-the world with breast of dawn and ah feathers of light).

The image of the world also changes from one translator to another. Pietkiewicz describes it as „skulony” („huddled”) stressing the vulnerability of the world, its exposure to cold, or fear. Sito, his usual self again, presents his rather than Hopkins's standpoint when apart from the whole („cay”) world covered by the Spirit's breast, his interpretation introduces the earth („technie światło ziemi... osłoni jej nagość”) with its implied paradox of nakedness/innocence and darkness. Ilińska uses the hunched („zgarbiony”) world, thus laying her emphasis on its deformity,

suffering and ancientness. The least satisfying qualifier is Ross's – the clumsiness of the „pochyły” already commented upon.

Barańczak the poet disregards Hopkins's syntax and line structure. Instead of the past participle and noun construction, he creates a compound of two nouns, 'the chick-of-the world', stressing the creational aspect of the Holy Ghost's activities, and additionally, the world's innocence, vulnerability, and hunger. However, this time the concern with the poetic brings about the loss of the most vital characteristic Hopkins invested his world with – that of sinfulness. As if the octave with its enumeration of men's crimes of destruction did not belong to the same poem. Lost, too, are the meanings suggested by other translators: deformity or ancientness.

Summing up. Though referring specifically to but a fragment of Hopkins's poem, the above remarks, indicative as they are of Barańczak's class as translator, point to certain tendencies characteristic of his work in general. In comparison with the four opponents: Sito, Pietrkiewicz, Ilińska and Ross, none of whom is the real match for Barańczak, he doubtless, emerges as the best. However, this superiority is to a large extent the impression one gets evaluating Barańczak's capability of imitating Hopkins's 'tricks of the trade'. Now, this is truly Barańczak's forte. Thinking with an ear for Hopkins's alliterative patterns, he comes up with clever solutions in constructing word compounds or recreating the inner drammas of specific stanzas and lines. As a result, Barańczak's rendition sounds and reads like a Hopkins poem, yet, this faithfulness to sound and structure is often achieved at the cost of significant violations of meaning – a grave crime in a poem aimed to be both the poet's/reader's encounter with the Divine and one in which every word is a representation, manifestation too, of the Logos; hence, even the slightest change must eventually lead to the destruction of the truth of the original experience.

Going through Barańczak's renditions I have been thinking what Hopkins himself – a translator into and from the Latin and Greek – would say when invited for a comment on them. Perhaps the priest poet would only pray in silence. Perhaps he who experienced the pain of anonymity would thank Barańczak for making him popular in Poland.

But would he really appreciate the technical solutions if the price to pay is the mutilation, another crucifixion, one is tempted to say, of his beloved Christ?

Appendix I

Sample Analysis of Hopkins's God's Grandeur – the Sestet By J.S.Sito, Z.Ilińska, T.Ross, J.Pietrkiewicz, and St. Barańczak – Stanza By Stanza Comparison

And for all this nature is never spent
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs –
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings

P/Pietrkiewicz (1958)

Natura siebie jednak nigdy nie roztrwoni.
Żyje świeżość soczysta pod powierzchnią, w głębi.
Choć ostatni blask Zachodu w zmiernym rośnym romi,
Patrz! na krawędziach Wschodu krasny świt się kłębi.
Oto Duch Święty skrzydłem świat skulony chroni,
Nim się wykluje; grzeje pierś, ach! puch gołębi.

S/Sito (1965)

Mimo to przyroda jest niewyczerpana,
W najgłębszych warstwach rzeczy cudowna świeżość żyje;
I choć ostatnie światła zachodu zagasły, zaranna
Jutrznia strzela na Wschodzie brązowym, ach, okryje
Duch Święty ciepłą pierśią świat cały, technie światło ziemi;
I ach, ostoni jej nagość skrzydły jasne!

I/Ilińska (1969)

A jednak niewyczerpana natura żyje
Jakaś cudowna świeżość głęboko się kryje
I choć ostatnie światło czarna noc potrywa,
Patrz, już od brzegów wschodnich ranek się odrywa,
Bo nad zgarbionym światem, ach, Duch Święty czuwa
I ciepłą pierśią, grzejąc jasnym skrzydłem bije.

R/Ross (1975)

I mimo to naturze nigdy nie brak siły;

Żyje najdroższa świeżość pomiędzy rzeczami
 I choć ostatnie światła Zachód opuściły,
 O, ranek na brunatnym Wschodzie jak źródło strzela nad nami —
 Ponieważ Duch Święty nad pochyłym
 Światem dumna z ciepłą pierśią i, ach!, z jasnymi skrzydłami.
 B/Barańczak (1977)
 A mimo to natura jest niewyczerpana:
 W głuchych głębiach wszechrzeczy śpi olśnienie świeże;
 I choć glob na zachodzie czarna czeluść wchłania,
 Spójrz, brzask bryzga nad wschodu rumiane rubieże—
 Jasnoskrzydły Duch Święty ogrzewa, osłania
 Pisklę—świat pierśią świtu i ach! światła pierzem.

Appendix II

Verse By Verse Comparison

I
 P Natura siebie jednak nigdy nie roztrwoni.
 S Mimo to przyroda jest niewyczerpana;
 I A jednak niewyczerpana natura żyje;
 R I mimo to naturze nigdy nie brak siły;
 B A mimo to natura jest niewyczerpana;

II
 P Żyje świeżość soczysta pod powierzchnią, w głębi.
 S W najgłębszych warstwach rzeczy cudowna świeżość żyje;
 I Jakaś cudowna świeżość głęboko się kryje
 R Żyje najdroższa świeżość pomiędzy rzeczami
 B W głuchych głębiach wszechrzeczy śpi olśnienie świeże;

III
 P Choć ostatni blask Zachodu w zmiernym rośnym roni,
 S I choć ostatnie światła zachodu zagaśły, zaranna
 II choć ostatnie światło czarna noc porzywa
 R I choć ostatnie światła Zachód opuściły,
 B I choć glob na zachodzie czarna czeluść wchłania,

IV
 P Patrz! na krawędzich Wschodu krasny świt się klebi.
 S Jutrznia strzela na Wschodzie brązowym, ach, okryje
 I Patrz, już od brzegów wschodnich ranek się odrywa,
 R O, ranek na brunatnym Wschodzie jak źródło strzela nad nami —
 B Spójrz, brzask bryzga nad wschodu rumiane rubieże—
 V
 P Oto Duch Święty skrzydłem świat skulony chroni,
 S Duch Święty ciepłą pierśią świat cały, kćmie światło ziemi;
 I Bo nad zgarbionym światem, ach, Duch Święty czuwa
 R Ponieważ Duch Święty nad pochyłym
 B Jasnoskrzydły Duch Święty ogrzewa, osłania

VI
 P Nim się wykluje, grzeje pierś, ach! puch gołębi.
 S I ach, osłoni jej nagość skrzydły jasneni.
 II ciepłą pierśią grzejąc jasnym skrzydłem bije.
 R Światem dumna z ciepłą pierśią i, ach!, z jasnymi skrzydłami.
 B Pisklę—świat pierśią świtu i ach! światła pierzem.