

# Intertexts in a cross-section: Leśmian's ballad and its translations

## Abstract

The paper surveys intertextual aspects of Bolesław Leśmian's ballad *Dziewczyna* across translations into English and Russian (translation series), as well as Czech and German (single renditions). Thematic intertextuality connected with the fairy-tale convention and specific references to philosophical concepts (Descartes, Kant) are discussed. Dialogic relations absent from the original but activated in translations are also indicated (e.g. a Biblical context). The following aspects influencing the rendition of dialogic signals are considered important: metrical restrictions, the unwieldiness of the canonic formulation of intertexts for poetic appropriation, the skill and worldviews of the translators. Thanks to the numerous translations of the ballad, we can ascertain whether awareness and prioritizing of referential qualities change with time, target culture and the translators' backgrounds.

## Keywords

poetry translation, intertextuality, Bolesław Leśmian, philosophy



## 1. Preliminaries

The aim of the present paper is to address both topics of the present issue, the poetry of Bolesław Leśmian and the dialogical qualities of Polish literature. I intend to survey intertextual aspects of Leśmian's ballad *Dziewczyna* across translations into English and Russian (translation series), as well as Czech and German (single renditions), with the view to disclosing possible tendencies and regularities in the translational treatment of intertextual markers. The trends could depend on factors ranging from the time of emergence of the rendition to the translators' professional background.

Intertextuality is an extremely expansive category and through its prism almost the whole reality can be viewed, since the world, history, society and human beings themselves may be treated as one, inexhaustible text<sup>1</sup>. A broad understanding of the concept was meant by Julia Kristeva who coined the term<sup>2</sup>. In this analysis I shall, however, limit myself to its purely literary and literature-specialist meaning. Intertextuality will be understood as "[t]he sum of relationships between and among writings, [...] the range of ways in which one 'text' may respond to, allude to, derive from, mimic, or adapt another"<sup>3</sup>. As a translation problem referentiality has been discussed e.g. by Olgierd Wojtasiewicz, who focused on "erudite allusions" (construed as broadly as today's notion of intertexts) from the point of the im/possibilities of transfer and predictions of theoretical gradable translatability<sup>4</sup>, by Riitva Leppihalme, who studies allusions in communicative perspective<sup>5</sup>, or Anna Majkiewicz, who explores how the level of translational difficulty may be connected to the level of openness of reference<sup>6</sup>. A multifaceted treatment was given to intertextuality as a translation issue in Brigitte Schultze's overview drawing on examples from Germanic and Slavic literatures in mutual renditions<sup>7</sup>.

As for the material of the present considerations, it is Bolesław Leśmian's ballad *Dziewczyna* (The Girl)<sup>8</sup>, first printed in the journal "Wiadomości Literackie" in

<sup>1</sup> Cf. I. P. Il'in, *Intertekstual'nost'*, in A. N. Nikoljukin (ed.), *Literaturnaja enciklopedija terminov i ponjatij*, NPK Intelvak, Moskva, 2003, pp. 307-309. In reference to translation, Terry Eagleton observes that the expansion of the notion of intertextuality poses a challenge to the very concept of the original (qtd. in R. Ellis, L. Oakley-Brown, *British Tradition*, in M. Baker, K. Malmkjær (eds.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, Routledge, London-New York 1998, p. 343).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. J. Kristeva, *Le mot, le dialogue et le roman*, in Ead., *Séméiôtiké. Recherches pour une sémanalyse*, Seuil, Paris 1969, pp. 143-173.

<sup>3</sup> *Intertextuality*, in M. Drabble (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, Oxford UP, Oxford 2000.

<sup>4</sup> O. Wojtasiewicz, *Wstęp do teorii tłumaczenia*, Ossolineum, Wrocław-Warszawa 1957, pp. 76-90.

<sup>5</sup> R. Leppihalme, *Culture Bumps. An Empirical Approach to the Translation of Allusions*, Multilingual Matters, Clevedon-Philadelphia-Toronto-Sydney-Johannesburg 1997.

<sup>6</sup> A. Majkiewicz, *Intertekstualność – implikacje dla teorii przekładu. Wczesna proza Elfriede Jelinek*, PWN, Warszawa 2008.

<sup>7</sup> B. Schulze, *Spielarten von Intertextualität in literarischen Übersetzungen*, in H. Kittel et al. (eds.), *Übersetzung – Translation – Traduction. An International Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, vol. 1, de Gruyter, Berlin-New York 2004, pp. 948-961.

<sup>8</sup> B. Leśmian, *Dziewczyna*, in Id., *Poezje zebrane*, Algo, Toruń 2000, pp. 349-351.

December 1933, and later included in the volume *Napój cienisty* (The Shadowy Potion)<sup>9</sup> published by the poet in 1936. It ranks among the most eminent of Leśmian's creations and all the peculiarities of his poetics distinctly manifest themselves in this poem. Masterly rhymed distiches bring the narrative of twelve brothers who, having heard a mysterious wailing voice, undertake to free a Maiden from behind a wall and whose effort to bring down the wall is extended beyond their own existence by their shadows and then the hammers, only to disclose her non-being. This has invited a range of interpretations, with the more traditional existential one (Kazimierz Wyka<sup>10</sup>, Jacek Trznadel, Tymoteusz Karpowicz) recently challenged by a psychoanalytic and a meta-literary reading by Paweł Dybel and Michał Paweł Markowski respectively<sup>11</sup>. The appeal of the ballad is enhanced by its unique, almost hypnotic metre, eight-foot hypercatalectic iambic with a constant caesura, 8+9 (as a rule recreated – or attempted – in the foreign renditions). As one of the author's signature works, despite Leśmian's notorious untranslatability, *Dziewczyzna* has been transposed into many languages, often in multiple versions: for instance, it has generated a series of at least four renditions into Hebrew<sup>12</sup>.

The corpus for the present study is composed of translations into Slavonic and Germanic languages. The Russian set encompasses texts by: Evgenij Vadimov, 1937<sup>13</sup>, one of the earliest foreign renditions of Leśmian in general; Boris Sluckij, 1971; Valerij Akopov, publ. 1998; Natal'ja Astaf'eva, 2000; and Gennadij Zel'dovič, 2004 – all of them professional and officially published translations. The first – to my knowledge – English variant appeared in the United States as two fragments in R. H. Stone's 1976 critical monograph of the poet, and comprises a purely philological translation, prepared for scholarly, exemplifying purposes. The second translation was completed by Sandra Celt in 1987, part of Leśmian's first English-language poetry edition, growing out of the translator's PhD dissertation. In 2000 Janek Langer privately published in London a volume devoted to two 20th-century poets of his country of origin, evidence of his fascination but not necessarily craft; his transposition will nonetheless be considered here, as part of the reception process. The English set is completed by a very recent apparently amateur (but good quality) rendition by Maria Gral made available on the Internet. The different composition of the two subsets of the corpus reflects the sociocultural parameter characteristic of the reception of Leśmian in the respective cultures: while there has been a steady interest in the poet among the professional literati and renowned translators in

<sup>9</sup> English version of the volume's title after: R. H. Stone, *Bolesław Leśmian. The Poet and His Poetry*, University of California Press, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London 1976, p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> K. Wyka, *Czytam Leśmiana*, in Id., *Łowy na kryteria*, Czytelnik, Warszawa 1965, pp. 234-281.

<sup>11</sup> P. Dybel, *Lacan i Leśmian – dwa zwierciadła*, in Id., *Urwane ścieżki. Przybyszewski – Freud – Lacan*, Universitas, Kraków 2000, pp. 243-262; M. P. Markowski, *Polska literatura nowoczesna. Leśmian, Schulz, Witkacy*, Universitas, Kraków 2007, pp. 148-149.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. R. Löw, *Z dziejów Bolesława Leśmiana w Izraelu*, in Id., *Rozpoznania. Szkice literackie*, Księgarnia Akademicka, Kraków 1998, pp. 103-108.

<sup>13</sup> Detailed bibliographic entries appear together with quotations further in the paper. In line with the journal's stylesheet, Russian names and titles of works are given in transliteration rather than in an English transcription, i.e. unlike in other publications on the subject by the present author.

the USSR and Russia, for Anglophone audiences he has been translated by academics rather than writers, and more often than not by persons of Polish descent, sometimes with no other literary experience (e.g. Langer is an engineer by profession). The material is supplemented by the German rendition by the acclaimed promoter of Polish poetry, Karl Dedecius (first published in 1964), as well as by a Czech text from the small but well balanced 1971 collection of *Leśmian* prepared by Jan Pilař. The composition of the corpus makes it possible to examine whether the same intertext is treated differently or similarly by professionals and amateurs, in different decades, depending on the direction of translation, etc. It is also worth testing whether by renouncing the constraints of rhythm and rhyme, as happens by definition in philological translations, the translator attains a greater freedom in recreating the intertextual signals.

## 2. Thematic intertextuality

Let us begin the overview of intertextual aspects of the poem with thematic links. First of all, the ballad is connected to folklore, for instance in its reliance on the magical significance of numbers<sup>14</sup>. The motif of twelve brothers undertaking a quest and working as one man doubtlessly has a folk character. In this context “twelve” means unity in the same fashion as twelve months comprise a full year<sup>15</sup> and twelve hours – a whole day or night. The same applies to the triple effort of the humans, shadows and hammers successively. Jacek Trznadel associates the principle of trichotomy in general with the Slavonic folklore<sup>16</sup>. According to Anna Czabanowska-Wróbel, *Dziewczyzna* is an “anti-fairytale” (*antybaśń*), since it “preserves the structure of a fairytale in order to fill it with unlike-fairytale content”<sup>17</sup>. Constructing the plot in accord with the principles characteristic of a fairytale only enhances the perverse effect of the *dénouement*, where the success of the third attempt (third time lucky!) instead of crowning the composition harmoniously, opens it on the void<sup>18</sup>.

Thematic intertextuality of the ballad is not restricted to the connections with folklore. Trznadel compares *Dziewczyzna* to the late medieval French allegorical long poem *Roman de la Rose*<sup>19</sup>. In the 13th-century romance by Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, a high wall separates the protagonist from a rose

<sup>14</sup> Cf. entries on individual numbers in W. Kopaliński, *Słownik mitów i tradycji kultury*, PIW, Kraków 1997. Another such feature is the very distichal form that cross-refers to folk balladry. This formal characteristic is preserved in by no means all translations, yet in view of space limitations this aspect cannot be discussed in the present contribution.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. A. Czabanowska-Wróbel, *Baśń jako światopogląd. Baśń i baśniowość w twórczości Leśmiana*, in Ead., *Baśń w literaturze Młodej Polski*, Kraków 1996, p. 206.

<sup>16</sup> J. Trznadel, *Twórczość Leśmiana. Próba przekroju*, PIW, Warszawa 1964, pp. 215-216. On fairytale motifs see also pp. 179-180.

<sup>17</sup> Czabanowska-Wróbel, op. cit., p. 206. Translations of quotes from the Polish criticism are by the author of the present paper.

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>19</sup> Trznadel, op. cit., p. 32.

which symbolises love and for which he strives. It should be noted, however, that Michał Głowiński challenges the interpretation that joins the two works<sup>20</sup>.

The above-mentioned connections between the ballad and other texts are localised on the level of plot. Consequently, preserving them in the process of translation does not depend on the choice of specific language units but on the consistent reproduction of the narrative of the ballad. In this respect, all complete renditions are successful and Stone, who only translated seventeen out of the forty lines of the source text, compensates for what is missing by a commentary in prose. The number twelve is conveyed in the target texts as a rule; Evgenij Vadimov even foregrounds it through his change of title to *Двенадцать братьев* (Twelve brothers). As for number three, even if phrases significantly repeated thrice by the author do not necessarily recur in the translations in the same form at all three occurrences (the same urge to continue the struggle, ll. 9, 19, 29, a parallel comment about "the blind night", witness to the effort, not being able to define the strugglers' mode of being, ll. 8, 18, 28), still, the endeavour repeated by the brothers, shadows and hammers remains triple in the translations. Consequently, the conceptual links with folklore and folkloric genres are preserved in foreign-language versions.

### 3. The Cartesian reference and its renditions

Translation-wise, it is more pertinent to investigate intertextual elements belonging to the expression plane. In the case of *Dziewczyna* they send back to philosophical contexts<sup>21</sup> and they are not marked typographically – in the first case, discussed in this section, the inverted commas indicate indirect discourse, not a quote (which is paraphrased anyway). To refer to Majkiewicz's typology, we are dealing with "covert" intertextual markers: the receiving text does not show in any way that there is some link; the reference remains potential<sup>22</sup>. This makes the translation more difficult, because the phase of recognition is not facilitated, and this factor may have influenced some of the renditions discussed below.

Thus, the fifth line of the ballad is obviously intertextual:

Mówili o niej: "Łka, więc jest!" – I nic innego nie mówili<sup>23</sup>  
 (They would say/were saying of her: "She sobs, therefore she is"  
 [– And nothing else would they say)<sup>24</sup>

<sup>20</sup> M. Głowiński, *Zaświat przedstawiony. Szkice o poezji Bolesława Leśmiana*, PIW, Warszawa 1981, p. 309.

<sup>21</sup> Eugeniusz Czaplejewicz justly observes that the ballad on the whole is written in a language proper to the genre of philosophical essay, cf. E. Czaplejewicz, *Adresat w poezji Leśmiana*, Ossolineum, Wrocław 1973, p. 17. Some elements of this discourse importantly contribute to the metatextual meanings of the poem.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 23-26.

<sup>23</sup> Leśmian, *Dziewczyna*, cit., p. 349.

<sup>24</sup> All English glosses by the author of the paper. An effort to signal in them the peculiarities of Leśmian's language (and of his translators' dictions) has been made. The word order, flexible in the Slavonic languages, was reproduced only as far as idiomatic English allows it.



The phrase “Łka, więc jest” travesties the philosophical proposition of Rene Descartes “Cogito, ergo sum”. The brothers replace the self-validation of the Cartesian claim, in Polish: “Myślę, więc jestem”, with the validity of conjecture and desire, and they relate this to the Maiden. The second part of the line is distinctly metatextual, a feature which will also be occasionally referred to in the analysis, as it often remains in an interlock with the translators’ decisions regarding the intertext.

The Russian recognised equivalent of “Cogito ergo sum” is “(Я) мыслю, следовательно (я) существую”<sup>25</sup>, with the first-person pronoun often elided, as made possible by the inflection in the Slavonic languages. While the formulation does not sound poetic at all, in the translation task in hand it is particularly unwieldy because of its prosodic features. As has been mentioned, the translators recreate the metre of the ballad, \_ \_ / \_ \_ / \_ \_ / \_ \_ / || \_ \_ / \_ \_ / \_ \_ / \_ \_ / \_ (8+9). However, the Russian canonical formulation of “Cogito” can by no means fit the iambic pattern, cf. ( ) \_ / \_ | \_ / \_ \_ \_ \_ ( ) \_ \_ \_ / \_ . Even if one chooses a reading with the pronouns, a pause, which is necessary, prevents iambic scansion. Then, the obligatory reduction of vowels in Russian precludes introducing secondary stresses in polysyllabic words. In fact, the two verb phrases and the conjunction must be read as separate intonation units and any attempt to impose additional stresses to “regularize” iambs would sound grotesque.

As a result, the Russian translators are forced to replace words pertaining to formal, scientific discourse – the conjunction *следовательно* (consequently), the verb *существовать* (to exist) with more neutral or casual lexemes, while preserving the structural similarity. Natal’ja Astaf’eva and Gennadij Zel’dovič apply this approach to a satisfying result:

Сказали: “Плачет, значит, есть!” – И больше ничего иного<sup>26</sup>.  
(They said: “She cries, then she is!” – and not a thing more).

Твердили: “Плачет – значит, есть!” – а про другое промолчали<sup>27</sup>.  
(They repeated/claimed: “She cries – then she is!” – and all else they  
[passed over in silence])

The two translators give the indirect speech the same wording but employ different framing verbs. Astaf’eva uses the most common Russian predicate of saying, *сказать*, perfective and denoting a single statement. Zel’dovich underscores the cited utterance through the imperfective verb *твердить* which signifies repeating and is additionally tinged by the semantics of the related word *утверждать* (to assert).

<sup>25</sup> E. A. Alekseeva, T. M. Tuzova, *Dekart, Rene*, in A. Gricanov (ed.), *Vsemirnaja enciklopedija. Filosofija*, AST – Xarvest – Sovremennij literator, Moskva-Minsk 2001, p. 276.

<sup>26</sup> B. Les’mjan, *Deva*, trans. by N. Astaf’eva, in N. Astaf’eva, V. Britanišskij (eds.), *Pol’skie poëty XX veka. Antologija*, vol. 1, Aleteja, Sankt-Peterburg 2000, p. 66.

<sup>27</sup> Id., *Devica*, trans. by G. Zel’dovič, in Id., *Zielony dzban / Zelenyj žban. Izbrannyje stixi v pol’skom originale i v russkom perevode Gennadija Zel’doviča*, Wydawnictwo UMK, Toruń 2004, p. 129.

In Boris Sluckij's rendition, the characters' speech is much more casual:

"Рыдает, – стало быть, жива!" Ни слова не сказали боле<sup>28</sup>.  
 ("She's weeping – so she's alive!" Not a word more did they speak)

The expression *стало быть* is an excessively colloquial replacement of *следовательно*, while the adjective *жива* (alive) triggers a shift in meaning: it implies a physical issue rather than an ontological doubt. A parallel with the Cartesian formula remains only on ideational plane, but hardly perceptible on the surface of the text.

The earliest Russian translator, Evgenij Vadimov (actual name Jurij Lisovskij), did not notice the intertextuality or disregarded it. While the original utterance is structured as a premise and a conclusion, Vadimov introduces a contrast clause (*но* being an adversative conjunction):

Сказали: "Стонет – но живет! Живет за камнем наша дева!"<sup>29</sup>  
 (They said: "She sighs – but she lives!" She lives behind the stone, our  
 [maiden])

Moreover, the laconism of the brothers' speech is lost in this variant. Not only is the metacomment to that effect ("I nic innego nie mówili") omitted, but also the utterance itself extended with translational padding that fills the latter hemistich.

The erasure of intertextuality does not remain, as one might stipulate, only characteristic of translation practice of the past. The link with Descartes has also been eliminated from Valerij Akopov's rendition (possibly dating back to the 1970s, no later than 1998). A longer fragment of the text cited below reveals that line five does not contain indirect discourse; at best, it can be read as free indirect speech (yet such a reading seems less probable in the case of recipients acquainted only with this version). Moreover, while the text does present a logical inference about the state of a weeping subject on basis of the lament, the conclusion is a qualitative, not an ontological one ("So may cry only someone who is desperate and in pain!"):

И полюбили этот плач, стнящий в горести и в муке,  
 И представляли форму губ, как им подсказывали звуки...  
 Так может плакать только тот, кому безвыходно и больно! –  
 И позабыли братья мир – и мир задумался невольно...(ll. 3-6)<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Id., *Devuška*, trans. by B. Sluckij, in Id., *Stixi*, introd. by A. Geleskul, ed. N. Bogomolova, Xudožestvennaja literatura, Moskva, p. 174.

<sup>29</sup> Id., *Dvenadcat' brat'ev*, trans. by E. Vadimov, in E. Vadimov, *Russkaja kul'tura i drugie izbranye stixotvorenija, 1932-1936*, Izd. Russkogo blagotvoritel'nogo obščestva v Pol'she, Varšava 1937. Reprinted in Id., *Bezljudnaja ballada ili Slova dlja pesni bez slov. Poezija. Teatr. Proza*, ed. and introd. by A. Bazilevskij, RIPOL klassik – Vaxazar – WSH w Pułtusku, Moskva 2006, p. 187.

<sup>30</sup> Id., *Devuška*, trans. by V. Akopov, in E. Vitkovskij (ed.), *Strofy veka 2. Antologija mirovj poezii v russkix perevodax XX veka*, Polifakt, Moskva 1998, p. 867.

(And they came to love this cry, moaning in unhappiness and torment,  
 And they imagined the form of lips as the sounds suggested to them...  
 So may cry only someone who is desperate and in pain! –  
 And the brothers forgot the world – and the world fell into a reverie  
 [unwittingly...])

The obliteration of the philosophical allusion appears even more striking if you consider that the adjacent lines both render the source text accurately and are poetically fine, testifying to the translator's high competence. The replacement was probably not triggered by searching for a rhyme – *НЕВОЛЬНО*, its pair within the rhyming couplet, itself does not derive from the original (cf. "i świat zadumał się w tej chwili" – "And the world fell into a reverie that moment"). It is also difficult to believe that Akopov did not recognise the marker, judging by his successful rendition of the other intertext (discussed below). If the shift cannot be convincingly explained as a tribute to the requirements of form or oversight, there remains the conjecture that it connects to the translator's ideational choices.

Let us move to the other translation series available. In the English language Descartes' statement is customarily quoted as "I think, therefore I am"<sup>31</sup>. However, the sentence structure that would resemble its pre-text as closely as Leśmian's formulation resembles "Cogito" is to be found only<sup>32</sup> in R.H. Stone's philological translation. This variant also captures the symmetrical composition of the line:

They said of her: "She weeps, therefore she is!" – And nothing else  
 [they said<sup>33</sup>.

Sandra Celt's poetic translation resembles Descartes' formulation much less:

Her voice was perishing with grief: "She's sobbing, therefore she  
 [exists!"<sup>34</sup>

Celt changes the tense ("She's sobbing") and the verb denoting being: "exists" rather than "is". The decision is probably motivated by an attempt to adapt the phrase to the iambic rhythm. In its original form, or in a travesty that substitutes another monosyllable for "think", the Cartesian formula falls into three disyllabic feet, but the middle one is trochaic since the stress in the conjunction "therefore" falls on the first syllable: \_ \_/ \_/ \_ \_ \_/.

<sup>31</sup> L. Newman, *Descartes' Epistemology*, in E. N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Stanford University, 2016, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/descartes-epistemology/> (accessed 30.05.2017).

<sup>32</sup> Gal's translation, equally close verbally, is lacking in punctuation – see below.

<sup>33</sup> Stone, *Bolesław Leśmian*, cit., p. 144.

<sup>34</sup> B. Leśmian, *The Girl*, trans. by S. Celt (Alexandra Chciuk-Celt), in Id., *Mythematics and Extropy. Selected Poems of Bolesław Leśmian*, trans. by and annot. by S. Celt, A.R. Poray Book Publ., Stevens Point, Wis. 1987, p. 71.



Using the present participle and a longer substitute for "to be" enables the translator to introduce additional weak syllables between the stresses. Now the boundaries of words and of feet do not overlap, so that, although varied by half-stresses (marked \_ ' in the scheme), the hemistich is basically iambic: \_ ' \_ / \_ \_ / \_ \_ ' \_ \_ /.

The deployment of the verb "to exist", apparently more philosophically charged than "to be", in fact lessens the formal correspondence with the underlying quotation. The present continuous tense, in turn, is used in English to express the activities or phenomena that last temporarily and are not constant (cf. "I think" = "I am capable of thinking", hence the present simple). The result of the modification is unconvincing because something provisional cannot be taken as a premise for a statement of finality. Moreover, the metrical scheme dictates the contraction of the verb "to be", an informal trait not customary to philosophical discourse. In the end, the only common element left is the conjunction "therefore". As a result, the connections of the discussed phrase with Descartes become undermined.

Besides, in Celt's translation, as in Akopov's, also the metatextual signal is lost. She eliminates the comment on the brothers' laconism, which is emphasised in the original second hemistich.

Janek Langer, on the contrary, changes namely the conjunction (and elides the comma): "She sobs then she is". The small change also to some extent obliterates the Cartesian link. It does not help the prosody, either. While Langer's translation as a whole shows no regular beat and even line-length varies, this particular line falls into two parts, the first of which consists of anapaests, the other of iambs:

They established "She sobs then she is!", || and not another thought  
[they formed<sup>35</sup>.  
\_ \_ \_ / \_ \_ \_ / \_ \_ \_ / || \_ \_ / \_ \_ / \_ \_ / \_ \_ /

In the most recent rendition Maria Gral actually managed to accommodate both the allusiveness and the rhythmical qualities of the line, with 8+9 divisions (a full distich is quoted to illustrate the metrical properties):

They said "she cries therefore she is" – and nothing else they said but  
[wondered,  
They blessed the world with sign of cross – and then the world grew  
[still and pondered<sup>36</sup>.

Her translation proves that maintaining the intertextual reference and subjecting the text to metrical requirements can be reconciled. Differences between Gral's poetic while semantically accurate version and Stone's programmatically almost word-to-word one are telling: e.g. the omission of the complement

<sup>35</sup> Id., *A Girl*, trans. by J. Langer, in *Magic and Glory of Twentieth Century Polish Poetry*, Vol. 1: *Leśmian and Tuwim*, trans. by J. Langer, [n.pub.], London 2000, p. 123.

<sup>36</sup> Id., *The Girl*, trans. by M. Gral, <http://abyjezykgietki.tumblr.com/post/150423920082/boles%C5%82aw-le%C5%9Bmian-the-girl> (accessed 30.05.2017).

– absolutely disposable – in “They said (of her)” is what accounts for the rhythmic adjustment of the first hemistich. The only defect, the absence of the comma, important both syntactically and intertextually, can probably be ascribed to the workshop character of blog publications.

Let us turn to Karl Dedecius’ translation of the ballad and probe its interrelation with *Ich denke, also bin ich*, the German version<sup>37</sup> of the pre-text.

Sie sagten: “Schluchzt, also sie ist!” Und lauschten weiter stumm  
[nach innen<sup>38</sup>.  
(They said: “[She] weeps, therefore she is!” And they listened on,  
[internally speechless).

The rendition of the intertext proves here under a strong pressure of the metrical scheme of the poem, which the translator recreates very accurately. Firstly, this pressure is manifest in the phrase-initial elision of the pronoun referring to the Maiden. Secondly, the SV order in the resultative clause, *sie ist*, is fixed by the metrical pattern, and without violating the rhythm it could not be reversed, as happens with the VS syntax of the pre-text (*bin ich*). Still, the connection with the Cartesian assertion remains, one might posit, legible for the German recipients of Leśmian.

Finally, the Czech translation by Jan Pilař, very close both to the source text and to the target-culture version of the pre-text (*Myslím, tedy jsem*):

Říkali: “Pláče, tedy jest!” – A nic jiného nepravili<sup>39</sup>.  
(They would say: “She cries, therefore she is” – And nothing else they  
[would say).

Before moving on to other intertexts, it must be stressed that the reduction of the resemblance to Descartes’ formula, as observed in some renditions, triggers serious consequences for the ideational content of the ballad. It obliterates one of the main characteristics of Leśmian’s philosophical outlook. Artur Sandauer points to the fact that “with Leśmian – unlike with Descartes – it is possible to think and not to be”<sup>40</sup>. As corroboration, the critic cites an example from the poem *Pan Błyszczczyński* (Mr. Błyszczczyński):

<sup>37</sup> Cf. *Descartes, Rene*, in *Brockhaus Enzyklopädie in 24 Bänden. Neunzehnte, völlig neu bearbeitete Auflage*, vol. 5: COT-DR, F.A. Brockhaus, Mannheim 1988, p. 270.

<sup>38</sup> B. Leśmian, *Mädchen*, in *100 wierszy polskich / 100 polnische Gedichte*, sel. and trans. by K Dedecius, Wyd. Literackie, Kraków 1997, p. 128. It should be remarked that Dedecius constantly reworked his translations, hence various editions may display slight (yet sometimes significant) textual changes. In this case three anthologies (dating to 1964, 1982 and 1997) containing his rendition of *Dziewczyzna* have been consulted; the texts do differ in some details – e.g. in the earlier use of the article in the title: *Das Mädchen* – but not in the lines discussed. In view of the translator’s striving for a “definitive version”, the latest available edition is cited.

<sup>39</sup> Id., *Děvče*, in Id., *Zelená hodina*, trans. by J. Pilař, Mladá Fronta, Praha 1972, p. 117.

<sup>40</sup> A. Sandauer, *Pośmiertny tryumf Młodej Polski (Rzecz o Bolesławie Leśmianie)*, in Id., *Pisma zebrane*, Czytelnik, Warszawa 1985, vol. 1, p. 60.



Although as a rule the translator heavily relies on hyphenating, in this case she does not resort to this technique which would facilitate the associations with the Kantian term. Remarkably, Celt compensates for the loss of intertextuality by amplifying metatextuality (as opposed to the reduction of both qualities indicated in the previous section). She intensifies the autothematicity of the ballad by introducing the word "refrain", suggestive of composing music or poetry. In this way, the hammers' work is likened to artistic creation.

The intertext has not been captured by Gral either. Her version, too, expresses the autonomous functioning of the implements:

And on their own they fought the wall, rumbling for naught but  
[the achievement!<sup>46</sup>

Langer, in turn, replaces the hidden quotation with contents not only absent from the original but also contrary to it:

They struck at the wall creating a victorious, new vertigo sound!<sup>47</sup>

The hammers have not yet succeeded in destroying the wall. Moreover, in the source text they will never be triumphant, as they are soon to face emptiness.

To compare, in Russian *вещь в себе*, the traditional formulation<sup>48</sup> for "Ding an sich", does not overlap with the expression indicating that something happens on its own, of its own accord: *сам(о) по себе*, which makes the translation task more complicated. It should be noted that the pretext sometimes appears also in the form *вещь по себе*, yet not in academic discourse.

Vadimov simply replaces the passage in question with a different formulation, emphasising that all twelve hammers, in a row, began banging in still the same wall: "И все двенадцать, ставши в ряд, забили дружно в ту же стену!"<sup>49</sup>. Sluckij and Astaf'eva underscore the extraordinariness of the autonomous action of the hammers, by repeating the plural pronoun *сами*, but they renounce any connection with the philosophical term:

И сами в стену мощно бьют, и сами громяют тоже<sup>50</sup>.  
(And on their own they powerfully beat the wall, on their own they  
[rumble as well).

И сами стали в стену бить, и сами бронзою звучали<sup>51</sup>.  
(And on their own they began to bang the wall, and on their own they  
[reverberated with bronze).

<sup>46</sup> Id., *The Girl*, cit.

<sup>47</sup> Id., *A Girl*, cit., p. 124. Punctuation as in the source.

<sup>48</sup> T. Rumjanceva, *Vešč' v sebe*, in *Vsemirnaja enciklopedija*, op. cit., p. 164.

<sup>49</sup> Les'mjan, *Dvenadcat' brat'ev*, cit., p. 189.

<sup>50</sup> Id., *Devuška*, cit., p. 176.

<sup>51</sup> Id., *Deva*, cit., p. 66.

Zel'dovič's version can, actually, evoke associations with the Kantian notion, if in its more casual phrasing (*по себе*):

Теперь и сами по себе в застенье ломаются со звоном!<sup>52</sup>  
 (Now even by themselves they are breaking with toll into  
 [the beyond-the-wall])

The apparent conflict between the linguistic and the intertextual has been resolved by Akopov:

Но каждый молот – Боже мой! – как прежде, в стену бил с разгона,  
 Взлетал и падал сам собой, звеня в себе железным звоном!<sup>53</sup>  
 (But each hammer – my God! – as before, would bang the wall with  
 [a swing,  
 Would rise and fall by itself, tolling in itself with an iron toll])

On the one hand, the translator employs the adverbial phrase *сам собой*, conveying the sense of something happening by itself, but also associating with *само собой*, an elliptic formulation for "obvious by itself". The second hemistich of line 26 brings a collocation of a verb with the prepositional phrase *в себе*, thus strongly reminiscent of the Kantian phrasing, *вещь в себе*. The translator closely imitates the original formulation, with the difference that Leśmian uses a finite verb, plural past tense form: "huczaty [...] same w sobie", while Akopov – an (imperfective) gerund: "звеня в себе". This solution is apt inasmuch as the preposition *в* (in), on which the allusiveness pivots, seems to combine with this verb well, in a way that does not breach logic, even as it stretches collocability.

It is particularly interesting to investigate the translation by Dedecius, for whom the Kantian intertext constitutes a target-culture reference. Nonetheless, his German text only conveys the independence of the hammers' combat, as manifest in the repeated use of the pronoun *selbst*:

Sie schlugen selbst den Mauernfels und dröhnten selbst mit ihrem  
 [Erze<sup>54</sup>.  
 (They banged on their own in the wall's rock and on their own  
 thundered with their red bronze)

The supposition that Dedecius was not aware of the presence of the allusion can be immediately excluded on basis of another of his translations, that of *Topielec* (The Drowned One). Leśmian's line "Zwiedzić duchem na przetaj zielen samą w sobie"<sup>55</sup> (To wander in spirit all across the greenness-in-itself) is rendered as "Das Grün an sich im Geist zu finden aufbekehrte"<sup>56</sup>. The nominal

<sup>52</sup> Id., *Devica*, cit., p. 130.

<sup>53</sup> Id., *Devuška*, cit., p. 868.

<sup>54</sup> Id., *Mädchen*, cit., p. 128.

<sup>55</sup> Id., *Topielec*, in Id., *Poezje zebrane*, cit., p. 165.

<sup>56</sup> Id., *Ertrunkener*, in *100 wierszy polskich*, cit. p. 68.



phrase “das Grün an sich” for “greenness-in-itself” is evidently parallel with respect to “Ding an sich”. The two renditions, *(Das) Mädchen* and *Ertrunkener*, are, to the best of my knowledge, contemporaneous, and are usually reprinted together in Dedecius’ selections from Leśmian’s or Polish poetry. This testifies to the reduction in the former case resulting not from neglect but from the necessity to choose between the layers of meaning – the one indispensable for the plot and the one pertaining to the philosophical subtext.

Jan Pilař’s output also offers the possibility of comparing the treatment of the same intertext in *Dziewczyna* and *Topielec*. In the ballad under discussion, as in most of the previously discussed versions, it is only the tools’ “own initiative” that is conveyed:

Sama od sebe bila v zed’ a sama v sobě bronzem hřměla<sup>57</sup>.  
 (Of their own accord they beat the wall and in themselves they rattled  
 [with bronze].)

Despite the fact that the expression *sam(a) v sobě* translates into English as “in itself”, it does not directly correspond to the Czech equivalent of Kant’s formulation for *noumenon*, i.e. *věc o sobě*<sup>58</sup>. Although some associative potential is perhaps retained, it does not equal that in Leśmian’s original. This time the translator’s awareness of the intertext cannot be defended on basis of *Topielec*, as in Pilař’s *Utopenec* the allusiveness is, again, weakened: “nedočkavě proniknout přímo v samu zeleň”<sup>59</sup>. The wanderer is here presented as having intended to penetrate “into the very greenness” (*v samu zeleň*).

The Kantian reminiscence has proved more difficult to translate in view of the fact that the author entrusted it with two functions: an intra- and an intertextual one. The form taken by the pre-text in the respective target culture turns out to be conducive or not to the translatability of Leśmian’s line. However, the objectively more opportune circumstances in English – the rhythmicity of “I think therefore I am” and the term “thing-in-itself” overlapping with the regular adverbial – have not resulted in successful renditions. In turn, the less favourable Russian context corresponds to at least one adequate translation.

## 5. Intertexts added by the translators

It is relevant as well to scrutinize the texts for intertextual potential activated only in the target context. Such interventions may, after all, be carried out by translators as part of compensating strategy in view of some implicitation of referentiality which, as has been shown, at times proves inevitable. Two examples of intertext additions can be observed in the material under discussion.

<sup>57</sup> Id., *Děvče*, cit., p. 118.

<sup>58</sup> I. Kant, *Prolegomena ke každé příští metafyzice, jež se bude moci stát vědou*, trans. by J. Kohout, J. Navrátil, Svoboda – Libertas, Praha 1992, §13.

<sup>59</sup> B. Leśmian, *Utopenec*, in Id., *Zelená hodina*, cit., p. 80.



Vadimov's translational move calls for inspecting his treatment of another line, one that indeed alludes to a religious context, yet by negation, as it challenges the theodicy:

Takiż to świat! Niedobry świat! Czemuż innego nie ma świata?<sup>65</sup>  
(So that is the world! A bad world! Why is there no other world?)

In Vadimov's rendition the rebellious overtone of line 36 is toned down:

Таков уж свет в удел нам дан – другого нет под солнцем света!<sup>66</sup>  
(That is what the world destined for us is like – there is no other world  
[under the sun!])

The other translation shift corroborates the hypothesis that the Russian text presents a purposeful ideational reinterpretation of the ballad, connected with an imposition of a Christian outlook and values like humility (when facing a mystery) or resigning oneself to God's will. Shifts in intertextuality importantly contribute to this<sup>67</sup>.

Such an intertextual recasting of the ballad is not limited to the 1930s translation practices. Langer's turn-of-the-21st-century rendition begins: "Twelve quixotic brothers tested the inner wall of fantasy dreams"<sup>68</sup>. The reference to Don Quixote cannot be treated as an instance of explicitation or overtranslation since both procedures denote bringing out something hidden or implied in the original<sup>69</sup>. Langer's interpolation, however, goes against the grain of the poem, as Leśmian never suggests that the quest is "absurdly chivalrous" and doomed to failure, or that it resembles tilting at windmills. Meanwhile, for the readers of this English version it is known in advance that the outcome must be catastrophic; the dramatic effect of the perverse ending is thus nullified. This intertextual hint at an enterprise doomed to failure is the more surprising in the light of Langer's other changes. By eliminating the notions of *nicość*<sup>70</sup> and *próżnia* ("nothingness" and "void") from the translated text he apparently censors the pessimistic and tragic message of the poem. Unlike in Vadimov's version, then, the intertextual shift is apparently not part of a conscious and consistent attempt at a translational reinterpretation of the ballad.

<sup>65</sup> Leśmian, *Dziewczyna*, cit., p. 350.

<sup>66</sup> Id., *Dvenadcat' brat'ev*, cit., p. 189.

<sup>67</sup> A certain inconsistency can be traced in the amplification in the opening line. The brothers undertake their effort "believing in dreams – and believing in phantoms and shadows" (веря в сны – и веря в призраки и тени), while superstitions are denounced by Christianity. In the source text, the protagonists just "believe in dreams", l.1.

<sup>68</sup> Leśmian, *A Girl*, cit., p. 123.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. M. Shuttleworth, M. Cowie, *Dictionary of Translation Studies*, St Jerome, Manchester 1999, pp. 55-56, 119-120.

<sup>70</sup> Especially frequent in Leśmian's poetic macrotext and crucial for his "philosophy of non-existence".

## 6. Conclusions

To begin summing up the findings, when recreating intertextuality in poetry translation, metrical restrictions and double functions of linguistic units in the semiosis may prove a serious impediment. While it is in general the English and German translators of Polish poetry who struggle more with the form, the Russian phrasing "(Я) мыслю, следовательно (я) существую" exemplifies unwieldiness of some canonic formulations of intertexts for a poetic appropriation.

The analysis has shown that the current expansion of the category of intertextuality in culture and its privileging by cultural theories by no means corresponds to a tendency towards a more attentive treatment in translation practice: inadequate renditions can be observed in earlier and in contemporary target texts. Likewise, there is no straightforward match between the attitude to intertextuality and the translator's background – while professionals may miss or underplay it (Sluckij, Akopov), some amateurs may give it a fully adequate treatment as long as they recognise the markers (Gral).

The translators' worldview can be a factor as important as their intertextual competence. Relinquishing some markers or substituting them with others may have a strategic character, when consistent with other shifts in ideational plane and may signify a polemic translation<sup>71</sup>, as in the case of Vadimov. When correlating with other weaknesses of a rendition, however, such defects do indicate insufficient skill. A comparative look at translators' other creations helps diagnosing properly whether a renunciation of a certain intertext pertains to a wider tendency (Pilař), or rather testifies to struggling with metrical restrictions or with the paramount requisites of the semantics (Dedecius).

As far as a little sample can show, prioritizing of referential qualities does not display "patterns" of changing with time, target culture or translators' background. The material studied rather challenges any preconceptions as to these aspects. It can be said that the treatment of intertextual markers remains most strongly defined by "the human factor" and other individual variables, operating in a given text and given context.

Finally, while the English renditions of *Dziewczyzna* have only been published as envisaged by their translators, the Russian cultural context offers an opportunity to inspect anthologising strategies and relate them to the aspects investigated in this study. Significantly, Akopov's *Девушка*, was included in *Строфы века* (Verses of the century), a prestigious anthology of milestones of world literature in modern translations. It was thus distinguished despite Leśmian's ontological probing being flattened by the erasure of the first intertext (regardless of many virtues of this target text). Vadimov's *Двенадцать братьев*, in turn, appears in the 2006 impressive volume of Leśmian's prose, poetry and drama edited by Andrej Bazilevskij. Reprinting Vadimov's only rendition from the Polish poet is of course a valid editorial decision. What is striking is that while this comprehensive publication usually presents alternative available

<sup>71</sup> About this concept see: A. Legeżyńska, *Tłumacz i jego kompetencje autorskie*, PWN, Warszawa 1999, 2nd ed., pp. 193-195.

renditions, in this case only this one, so peculiarly skewed in terms of allusiveness, is included – with the other four only listed in the notes section<sup>72</sup>. The two examples testify to the fact that an adequate treatment of referentiality is not a prioritized criterion in anthologising practices. This leads to the postulate of endorsing intertextuality as one of benchmark tools in the processes of canonization of translated literature.

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<sup>72</sup> Les'mjan, *Bezljyudnaja ballada*, cit., pp. 752-753.