

Miron Białoszewski's *Pamiętnik z powstania warszawskiego* in Italy¹

Abstract

This paper aims to reconstruct the history, characterised by several attempts, of the publication of an Italian translation of the book *Pamiętnik z powstania warszawskiego* (1970) by Miron Białoszewski. I shall present, for the first time, unpublished communication material (1995) produced by the publishing house Voland (Rome), which provides evidence that Barbara Adamska Verdiani, who is curiously one of the book's main characters, tried to translate the work. This article discusses several translation and editing issues concerning the Italian edition of Białoszewski's text, such as the challenge of transposing the writer's register, defined by Barańczak's (1976) as "childish" and "colloquial", and which came to be somehow obscured by editing conventions. Also, this research contrasts the choices made in the Italian translation to several relevant textual sources that range from George Orwell's (1946) quest for non-verbal formulation of ideas, Roland Barthes' (1973) concept of a "text de jouissance" and Lawrence Venuti's (1995) theory of "foreignising translation" as opposed to a "fluent" one.

Keywords

Miron Białoszewski, *Pamiętnik z powstania warszawskiego*, translation, Italy

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1. Miron Białoszewski's *Pamiętnik* in Italy: a chronology

In 2005, in an essay published in the journal "Comparatistica", the author of this article (Bernardini 2005) pointed out how the figure and work of Miron Białoszewski in Italy were practically unknown, despite the relative popularity of authors such as Tadeusz Różewicz, Czesław Miłosz, Wisława Szymborska. Today we can add to this roster Adam Zagajewski, who recently passed away. In fact, as of 2001, only thirty-eight poems by Miron Białoszewski had been translated into Italian and appeared in anthologies or journals. Since then, the situation – as far as Białoszewski's poetic production is concerned – has not changed significantly, since in 2007 Krystyna Jaworska translated and published four more poems (one of which had already been translated)¹, while Paolo Statuti (2012) – another five titles (two of which had already been translated), while "several poems", which appeared in the Italian translation by Lorenzo Pompeo on the "Imperfettaellisse" website, today, unfortunately, do not seem to be available anymore (Zola 2010)².

In the above-mentioned article, the author also mentioned that the lack of a translation of the *Pamiętnik z powstania warszawskiego* had contributed to a relatively poor reception of Miron Białoszewski's work in Italy. Little did he know, however, that the first attempt to initiate an Italian translation had already been made a few years earlier by Luigi Marinelli, then a researcher at the University of Rome "Tor Vergata". Marinelli had proposed the *Pamiętnik* to the small but courageous Roman publishing house Voland, where in 1997 he would publish his translation of Ignacy Krasicki's *Mikołaja Doświadczynskiego przypadku*. Marinelli, in February 1995, had contacted Leszek Soliński through PIW to purchase the translation rights. On June 12, 1995, Soliński wrote to Marinelli that: "the publishing house Wolan [sic!] did not contact me either by mail or through PIW. I telephoned PIW even if just to make sure"³. Soliński expressed concern that "perhaps the matter about which you wrote to me in February is no longer open"⁴.

On October 30, probably following reassurances in a letter sent by Marinelli on September 21 of that year, Soliński reported that "in principle, I am willing to allow an Italian edition of *Pamiętnik z powstania warszawskiego*". He added

¹ These are *Szare eminencje zachwytu*, *O obrotach rzeczy*, *Do N.N. ***** and *Ach, gdyby, gdyby nawet piec zabrali... Moja niewyczerpana oda do radości* (Jaworska 2007: 296-299). The last verse had already been translated by the author of this paper for the anthology *Cose di Polonia* (Bernardini 2001: 117).

² Information regarding these translations can be found at: <https://old.imperfettaellisse.it/archives/142-Poeti-dallEst-3-Miron-Bialoszewski.html#extended> [last accessed: 09.10.2021], but the link to the translated texts does not work. Their author himself, recently approached, was unable to provide the texts in question.

³ "wydawnictwo Wolan [sic!] ze mną nie skontaktowało się, ani listownie ani przez PIW. Do PIW-u zadzwoniłem, nawet żeby się o to zapytać". Letter of L. Soliński to L. Marinelli dated "Warszawa 12 czerwca 1995 r.", in possession of the addressee. The author of this paper would like here to thank Luigi Marinelli for having let him publish his correspondence with Leszek Soliński.

⁴ *Ibidem*. "może sprawa, o której Pan pisał w lutym, już nie jest aktualna".

that, as long as feasible, he wished that “you translate *Pamiętnik* into Italian”⁵. Since “[the book] will surely have a miniature afterword”⁶, Leszek Soliński announced that he already had the text ready for translation into Italian. At this point, things get somewhat confusing. In a recent conversation, Luigi Marinelli disclosed that he was supposed to meet with Leszek Soliński at Dom Literaturny in Warsaw on November 11, 1996. However, Soliński would not show up since Luigi had mentioned Barbara Adamska Verdiani during a telephone conversation. Indeed, further research into Marinelli’s correspondence led to the discovery of a letter sent by Leszek Soliński on November 9, 1996, which begins with the words, “I curse the day I signed a contract with the Voland publishing house”⁷. Soliński explained the reasons for his dissatisfaction: “not only does it appear that the person in whose regard I had great reservations will be translating, but the payment of the fee is late and has not been carried out in the manner I had indicated in the letter accompanying the signed contract”⁸. In all likelihood the person for whom Soliński was expressing “great reserves” was Barbara Adamska Verdiani, but it was the financial issues that concerned the holder of the publishing rights the most. The promised bank transfer had not occurred, yet, and Soliński seemed to assume this was no accident: “I do not understand in any way why the publishing house did not adhere either to the three-month deadline or to the payment method”⁹. Soliński could not help but conclude that “as a result of the failure to comply with the terms of payment of the fee, the contract is now to be considered no longer valid”¹⁰. He added with some bitterness, “I put an end to this whole imbroglio caused by the contact between two unserious countries”¹¹.

If the non-payment of translation rights was the reason for not granting them, less understandable is the allusion to “that person” whom Henk Proeme – at the time of signing the contract for the Italian translation with the Milan publishing house Adelphi – confirmed to be Barbara Adamska. Interestingly, Barbara Adamska revealed that at one time, she had begun translating the *Pamiętnik*. However, she does not remember exactly in what year and whether she had done so due to a possible request from Luigi Marinelli. Considering that the copy of the *Pamiętnik* used by Barbara Adamska for the translation was published in 1994, and Leszek Soliński’s correspondence with Luigi Marinelli dates

⁵ “[...] w zasadzie jestem skłonny zgodzić się na wydanie *Pamiętnika* z powstania warszawskiego po włosku”; “bardzo serdecznie proszę, o ile to możliwe, aby Pan tłumaczył *Pamiętnik* Mirona na język włoski”. Letter of L. Soliński to L. Marinelli, dated “Oegstgeest dnia 30 października 1995 r.”.

⁶ *Ibidem*. “[książka] zapewne [sic!] będzie wydana z miniaturowym postowiem”.

⁷ “Przeklinam dzień, w którym podpisałem umowę z wydawnictwem Voland”. Letter of L. Soliński to L. Marinelli, dated “Warszawa dnia 9. listopada 1996 r.”.

⁸ *Ibidem*. “nie tylko okazuje się, że tłumaczem ma być akurat ta osoba, do której miałem grube zastrzeżenia, ale wypłata honorarium jest spóźniona [sic!] i nie zrobiona tak, jak kazałem w moim liście towarzyszącym podpisaną umowę”.

⁹ *Ibidem*. “Absolutnie nie rozumiem, dlaczego wydawnictwo nie trzymało się terminu trzech miesięcy, ani sposobu wypłacenia”.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*. “[w]obec niedotrzymania [sic!] terminu wypłacenia honorarium, można już uważać umowę za nieważną”.

¹¹ *Ibidem*. “Ucinam dalszą szarpaninę spowodowaną stykiem dwóch niepoważnych krajów”.

from 1995-1996, it is possible that this translation attempt occurred in 1995 or a year later¹². The only certainty we have is that Mrs. Verdiani began translating *Pamiętnik* on September 9 (but we do not know what year!) and stopped doing so, "rather discouraged" ("raczej podupadła na duchu"), on November 8, having reached page 67. The issue is interesting because Barbara Adamska is depicted in *Pamiętnik* as one of the characters that most arouse curiosity and empathy in the reader, if only because she appears there as a two-year-old girl at the mercy of the whirlwind of war. She probably appears in the narrative even when there is no direct mention of her: in the course of our conversation, she disclosed that the potty, over which the women in the shelter under Rybaki 14/16 had had a heated argument, was hers and that the issue was no small one because little Basia wanted to do her business exclusively in that artifact and her parents would not be able to move about the besieged town unless they took it with them. After the family left the shelter in the Old City (*Stare Miasto*), the child was hit in the face by a German with a pot of quicklime, so her face remained swollen for the next few weeks.

On the other hand, a "good German" saved Basia and her mother, Róża, bringing them out of the ranks of hostages captured in a raid and allowing them to get away. Her father – the engineer Adamski – was last seen on August 25 or 26 on the Vistula escarpment after escaping from the Rybaki shelter as he "was racing over the ruins" with his pants rolled up "[...] over the grass. Which was littered with bricks. Plaster" (Białoszewski 1977: 104). Thus he disappears not only from Miron Białoszewski's account but also from the lives of Róża and Barbara Adamska. "Mr. Ad.", although he managed to quit *Starówka* through the sewers, was successively captured by the Germans and deported to Dachau: after liberation, he never returned to his family.

It remains unclear why Lech Soliński would have placed a ban on a translation of the *Memoirs* by Barbara Adamska¹³, with whom Miron Białoszewski had nevertheless always formed an "intimate friendship" ("bliska znajomość", Białoszewski 2021: 43). It could have been caused by some rift between the two friends of the poet. However, Mrs. Verdiani decidedly ruled out such a possibility. On the other hand, it is always desirable for a text to be translated into (rather than from) one's native language. The difficulties Barbara Adamska encountered during her attempt at a translation would be further evidence of that. It is worth adding that Luigi Marinelli, when Voland's publishing project still seemed feasible, had offered Barbara Adamska to include her translation as a philological appendix or in the form of a literary "cameo" (as a "testimonial") in the edition he would edit, to show the different translation potentials of such a complex text. The roster of the vicissitudes of the translation of the *Pamiętnik* in Italy also includes at least one MA thesis promoted by Luigi Marinelli at the University of Rome "la Sapienza", about which, unfortunately, no further details seem to be available.

On March 14 and 15, 2002, at the University Paris IV-Sorbonne, was held the "Miron Białoszewski (1922-1983) International Colloquium". The organizer, Hanna

¹² The author of this text is indebted to Mrs. Barbara Adamska Verdiani for all these details she disclosed in a private conversation.

¹³ Such a circumstance has been confirmed to me by Henk Proeme in an email.

Konicka invited the author of this essay to read a paper on the reception of the poet's works in Italy. A month earlier, on February 7, the author mentioned above had asked the editor for Slavic literature at Adelphi if the publishing house would be interested in publishing an Italian translation of the *Pamiętnik*, a text he had come across while writing his MA dissertation and of which he had already translated some passages. I wrote a concise and enthusiastic reading opinion after obtaining a positive response. Anna Raffetto showed great interest, but unfortunately, the working methods of the publishing house prevented her from taking immediate steps. The point was that the owner of the publishing house, the late Dr. Roberto Calasso, personally followed up on each new publication proposal, either reading the text in vehicular language or having it read by a trusted person. So the author of this paper hurried to take his copy of Erik Veaux's French translation to Via San Giovanni sul Muro hoping this would speed up the decision-making process. However, the opinion of the reader assigned by Calasso was negative. It was and still is very difficult for a new author to enter the Adelphi catalog; unfortunately, this rejection confirmed that.

After several years of mutually beneficial collaboration, resulting in Italian editions of works by Adam Zagajewski, Wisława Szymborska, and Jan Karski, in 2014, the would-be translator felt that the time had come for a new attempt to publish the *Pamiętnik* at Adelphi. Thanks to the remarkable Italian public and media success of Jan Karski's *La mia testimonianza davanti al mondo. Storia di uno stato clandestino* (Milan, Adelphi 2013), I could return to the editorial office a year later, hoping that – if reading the French translation of the *Pamiętnik* had not yielded the hoped-for results – perhaps reading the American translation by Madeline Levine (1977) might yield better ones, if only because Adelphi's internal reader would be different. The ruse worked: after more than twelve years at the publishing house no one remembered the negative opinion given earlier, and the new response was positive¹⁴. Since the only condition set by Henk Proeme for granting the rights to the work was that it was not translated by Barbara Verdiani, the author mentioned above could immediately start working on the text. And he worked on it for the very next three years, because of the well-known stylistic and linguistic difficulties of the *Pamiętnik*. Unfortunately, at Adelphi, translations not purposely commissioned by the publisher may be shelved, despite the regular and timely payment of publication and translation rights. The same fate would probably have befallen the *Pamiętnik*, as for the next two years, I received no further sign of an imminent publication of the text. Not even an email sent in January 2020 to Roberto Calasso's private address had had any effect. Suddenly something changed because of the news announced in October 2019 that Olga Tokarczuk had been awarded the 2018 Nobel Prize for Literature. In all evidence, this reawakened in Italian publishing houses a dormant interest in Polish writers. Probably someone in Adelphi had remembered the translation of the *Pamiętnik*, which in the summer of 2020 was entrusted to the reading of an internal editor. Here began the second part of the text's publishing adventures.

¹⁴ Throughout the intervening years, the project of an Italian translation of the *Pamiętnik* has always been very actively supported by Anna Raffetto, with whom "mironology" has contracted a debt of gratitude to which the author of this text wants to bear witness.

2. Translating *Pamiętnik z powstania warszawskiego* into Italian: yes, but how?

Even though the author of the translation had repeatedly pointed out to the publishing house the stylistic, syntactical, and lexical peculiarities of the original text, and likewise how he had tried to render them as faithfully as possible, on September 15, 2020, he learned that the translation had problems of “linguistic and stylistic plausibility”, as attested by the opinion of unspecified “consultants”. Having received no information regarding whether these consultants knew Polish and could access the original text, the author of the translation asked Henk Proeme to explain to the Adelphi editorial staff the true literary nature of the *Pamiętnik*, which was by no means to be considered a historiographical registration of facts. Despite Adelphi's stubborn silence in the face of the request for the expert in charge of revising the translation to be a good connoisseur of the Polish language but also and, above all, the figure and work of Miron Białoszewski, common sense eventually prevailed. Adelphi entrusted the task of verifying the translation's accuracy to an academic polonist of established reputation, who could only attest to the essential correspondence of the translation to the source text. After all, being a Florentine like the author of the translation, he fully shared all those jargon solutions drawn from the (same) linguistic water where Alessandro Manzoni had rinsed his literary cloths: that of the river Arno. It came full circle: the *Pamiętnik*, proposed for Italian translation a first time by the then Florentine Luigi Marinelli, translated in part by the acquired Florentine Barbara Adamska Verdiani, later translated in its entirety by a Florentine, had been submitted for revision by another Florentine. Exerting the last and most stubborn resistance to its final appearance on the Italian literary scene, however, would have been the publishing industry, Florentine if only in a small part: one would say, if anything, with marked “padane” characteristics, both cultural and linguistic. A resistance opposed in the name of what Lawrence Venuti (1995) in *The Translator's Invisibility* defined as the fluency (i.e. “fluent discourse”) of the text rendered in the target language thanks to the “transparency” or “invisibility” of the translator. One could easily apply Venuti's remarks on U.S. publishing policy in 1994 to a “mainstream” language with the (imaginary) claim to be culturally hegemonic, such as Italian. Indeed, for an Italian translation of a foreign literary text to be accepted by a publisher, it must necessarily be considered “fluent”, that is, understandable and familiar. On the other hand, it is questionable whether there is any sense in requiring a text that did not exhibit these characteristics in the source language to be fluent and understandable in the target one. As early as 1970, PIW editor Janusz Wilhelmi (1970: 5), in the introduction to the first edition of the *Pamiętnik*, wrote that the first few pages of the text have something irritating about them due to the syntax, which employs almost exclusively implicit propositions, “artificially broken sentences, artificially truncated, artificially strained in their supposed colloquiality”¹⁵. Wilhelmi (1970: 5)

¹⁵ “sztucznie poszarpanymi, sztucznie kalekimi, sztucznie wysilonymi w swej założonej kolokwialności”.

also feared that another aspect of the text would not appeal to the reader, i.e., its heavily emphasized infantilization, since the protagonist of the *Memoirs* is infantile, just as infantile are his observations, his knowledge base, his visual horizon, and his cognitive modes. In one famous essay, Stanisław Barańczak (1976: 292-293) distinguished three specific language registers operating in the *Memoirs*: the first is that of child language seen as incompatible with adult language. The second is spoken language as opposed to written language, while colloquial language would be at the opposite end of the spectrum from using "high" language. A well aware translator cannot ignore these points of departure, as he cannot neglect the circumstance that sees Białoszewski (1977: 106) recreating – through language and in language – the process of Warsaw's destruction: "The remains of the main hall. I think they were still there¹⁶. The façade of Benon. From above. Boards. A pile of ruins. Pieces of debris. Whitewash. Plaster. Wooden laths. Splinters. Bricks. Eaves. Everything. Whatever there was".¹⁷ Architectures lose their syntax and are reduced to their original elements: bricks, stones, lime, and reeds. Even the structure of language amounts to nominal sentences. It brings to mind the early Wittgenstein, for whom the world consists of "atomic facts", simple objects, just as language consists of elementary sentences composed of nouns. For Białoszewski, the issue lies precisely in the non-existence of a language capable of conveying the meaning of an unprecedented experience in recent human history: the destruction of the entire city as seen from within. At first, Ludwig Wittgenstein (1921) concluded that what cannot be said must be kept silent. As a writer, Białoszewski chose instead the "gadanina", that "chattering" that could and should ensure that the writing did not "swallow the speech". As Eugeniusz Kloc (1974: 274) noted, it would not have been possible to narrate "rationally" (i.e., "objectively") the experiences of the insurrection because the enormity of the experience excluded any rational order, any "objectivity". The only "natural" way would have consisted in a recording (or other kinds of annotation) faithful to the spoken narrative, to a colloquial and every day (i.e., urban, Varsavian) language that conveyed a collective experience and managed to eliminate the temporal distance between the moment of narration and the moment of the experience of the events, transferring its excitement (in Białoszewski's words: the "fashion of haste") into the syntax of "today's" speech.

Moreover, since that experience was unprecedented, the words suitable for conveying it had to be invented: hence the obsessive recourse to neologisms, often onomatopoeic, generated by a nostalgic memory ("the most important event of my life") operating through all the senses: sight, hearing but also touch, taste and smell. Using a known, normative, institutionalized, rational language to narrate violence unprecedented in human history would have meant normalizing, institutionalizing, and rationalizing this violence, making it acceptable. One could convey the moral unacceptability of the destruction of a city and its

¹⁶ The author of this essay had to correct Madeline Levine's translation of "Chyba jeszcze były": "I think there were others" (1977: 106). It looks like Levine did not correct this mistake in the revised translation published in 2015.

¹⁷ "Resztki sali. Chyba jeszcze były. Front Benona. Od góry. Dechy. Kupa gruzu. Gruziku. Wapna. Tynku. Trzciny. Drzazg. Cegieł. Gzymsów. W ogóle. Co tyłko".

inhabitants only through the communicative unacceptability of the language employed to narrate it. Making violence comprehensible through language is tantamount to an attempt to rationalize it and, therefore, make it ethically acceptable¹⁸. Every organization of discourse through syntax conceals a covert ideological direction aimed at justifying violence. Białoszewski seems to have listened to some extent to the warnings George Orwell – still mindful of the scandal caused by the Allies' failure to support the Warsaw insurrection (Orwell 1944) – had dispensed in the immediate postwar period. In a 1946 article, Orwell (1998: 430) denounced the dangers hidden in prose composed less and less of carefully chosen words and more and more of pre-constituted phrases. The author of *Homage to Catalonia* advocated an a-verbal form of communication: "Probably it is better to put off using words as long as possible and get one's meaning as clear as one can through pictures or sensations". If words were to be, let them be short. In his poetry, Białoszewski revives the belief that it is possible to substitute objects for their verbal formulations, turning the word into an object liable to shattering, deconstruction, and recomposition. The reduction of verbal material to its minimal degree would depower the ideological bearing of montage and denounce the arbitrariness of all syntax¹⁹. In essence, it would prevent language from becoming the bearer of violence. Białoszewski's memoirs constitute one of the best examples of what Jean Starobinski (1979) considered to be the most crucial stylistic principle operating within autobiographical texts, whereby the spontaneity of writing, which "copies" the spontaneity of real feelings, is indispensable in order to guarantee the authenticity of the narrative. In Białoszewski, there is an entirely "Orwellian" effort to restore to words the ethical reliability, the moral authenticity of objects. His rejection of montage is a sign of respect for the fragmentation of the real and, simultaneously, a tribute to the destruction of a city that one cannot reconstruct except through memory²⁰.

3. Translation: theory and practice of negotiation

It was not easy, therefore, to convince the editor of an Italian publisher that the "fakciki" that lie at the heart of Miron Białoszewski's memoiristic vision are not "piccoli fatti" ("little facts") but seemingly insignificant "fatterelli", that for Miron angels "piszczą", i.e., "pigolano" ("chirp"), that a "popielata" woman is not "coperta di ceneri" ("covered with ashes") but precisely "cinerea", that "korytarzyki" are not "piccoli corridoi" ("little corridors") but "corridoini", exactly like a child would say, that "anielice" are not "cherubims", but "angiolette", that

¹⁸ Consider, in this respect, Claude Lanzmann's renunciation of a narrative "in the third person" in his documentary film *Shoah*, where the text corresponds exclusively to the characters' speech.

¹⁹ Barthes (1990: 50) quotes Julia Kristeva: "Every ideological activity is presented in the form of compositionally completed utterances".

²⁰ Some of the considerations contained in this paragraph have been already expressed by the author of this paper in his afterword to Białoszewski 2021 (302-304).

the "sprawy jedzeniowe, leżeniowe, ubranowie" are not "le questioni del mangiare, del dormire, del vestire" ("the daily chores of eating, sleeping, dressing") but much more Białoszewskian "faccende quotidiane, le più diverse, man-gerecce, dormirecce, vestirecce". Moreover, that in the *Pamiętnik*, the German planes do not "volteggiano" ("twirl") over the rooftops, but "si accucciano" ("crouch", since in Polish they "kucają") like birds wanting to lay eggs (bombs), and from above they do not "devastano" o "distruggono" ("ravage" or "destroy") but precisely "insozzano" ("paskudzą": "foul", "make a mess") with their lethal droppings. The key of linguistic irony to describe the drama of aerial bombardment is not immediately understood, and not only within the publishing houses. Unfortunately, however, some battles could not be won. Although the author of the translation managed to explain to the editor that the equivalent of the Polish phraseology "z deszczu pod rynnę" in Italian is "dalla padella alla brace" ("from the frying pan into the fire"), he could not convince her of the need to preserve the adverbial "rynnowo" form intact: in Italian it would have sounded like "dallapadellamente", but it was not possible to derogate from a noun form: "dalla padella..." On the other hand, it was not necessarily a happy choice: it was only in a second instance that the translator decided that the frame of reference chosen by Miron Białoszewski was that of phraseology and not onomatopoeia. Initially, he had thought that "rynnowo" might refer to the sonic effect of rubble collapsing with a sound of rain down the gutter. In a conversation following the publication of the *Memorie dell'insurrezione di Varsavia*, Professor Adam Poprawa expressed his belief that "rynnowo" has a bearing on the sound and not on the idiom, so that the disclaimer of the initial translation may have proved erroneous.

Again: the Polish verb "tentegować" has its Italian equivalent in the colloquial expression "cosare", used when one cannot remember the most appropriate verb for a given action or does not want to specify it. It is a verb that has to do with the mechanisms of memory, removal, and taboos, but which apparently would not seem acceptable to those who think that a translation should be "domesticated" by conforming it to an unspecified "literary standard". The verb "ryczeć" is not a melodramatic "singhiozzare" ("sobbing") but rather a simple, childish "frignare" ("whining") "Klucha", about shrapnel, is not an "iron fragment", ("un frammento di ferro"). Miron Białoszewski creates neologisms by resorting to augmentatives that replace the much more common – in Slavic languages – hypocoristics. The augmentative of "kluski" ("pasta, macaroni") in this particular case also experienced a gender change, from masculine to feminine (who knows if not as a result of an early sensitivity to gender issues) so that the "macchero" that the editor eventually had to swallow actually should have rather been a "macchera"²¹. Unfortunately, nothing was to be done in the case of the two nouns "popiołochód" and "popiołpodryw", which in a first version sounded like "ceneracompagnamento" and "cenersollewamento" (possibly "cenersolving" and "ash-lifting"?), so that in the event they have both been periphrastically normalized: "con accompagnamento e sollevamento di cenere"

²¹ On the other hand, Białoszewski could have even possibly employed the much rarer, more recent and less attested feminine form of the noun, "kluska". Who knows?

("with accompanying and lifting of ashes"²²). Then there are some technical aspects related to lexical register choices. One had to do with the nickname given in Warsaw city center, *Śródmieście* (not in the Old City, *Starówka*), to the German rocket launcher Nebelwerfer: "krowa". Now, in Italian, there are two different words for "cow", "vacca" and "mucca". The Italian translator proposed translating the term "krowa" as "vacca". However, the editor preferred the synonym "mucca". The noun "vacca" has a rather explicit derogatory nuance when the term "mucca" resonates good-naturedly, familiarly. In short: under a rain of explosive rockets, one would probably come to think of a "vacca", or "quella vacca", rather than an essentially inoffensive "mucca". More difficult was to find the Italian equivalent for the nickname used for the Nebelwerfer in the Old City (*Starówka*). Such a task proved complex because the term "szafa" – despite appearances – is not semantically transparent in this case. At first, the translator had opted for the choice made in the first English ("nickelodeon"), French ("orgues"), and the first German translation ("orgeln"), mainly because of a possible analogy with the Soviet *Katjuše*, renamed "Stalin's organs". However, thanks to the help of Henk Proeme and Tadeusz Sobolewski, in the event the author of the translation transposed the etymological solution "armadio" (also employed in the second German translation: "Shrank", and second English version "wardrobe"). Still, translation is not only the result of negotiation and compromise but also of adaptation.

Complicating the translator's task is not only the register of the spoken, everyday language that Miron Białoszewski uses in his prose, but also certain semantic subtleties of Polish. The Polish verb "przeżywać / przeżyć" has a double semantic valence, in Italian: it can be translated as "sopravvivere" ("to survive") but also as "fare l'esperienza di", "sperimentare", "provare" ("to experience", "to experiment", "to be tested"). There is a passage from the *Pamiętnik* that attests to this semantic ambiguity: "[...] jakbym uciekł [...] tobym znów żałował, że nie przeżyłem tego, co miałem przeżyć. Dlatego mi tak szkoda tych umarłych zbombardowanych. Że minęła ich ta frajda przeżycia. Że taka przygoda i wszystko na nic. Inna rzecz, że to na tym właśnie polega. Że można nie przeżyć" (Białoszewski 2014: 37). It would be necessary to translate "można nie przeżyć" simultaneously as "one may not survive" and "one may not experience, not live through". Obviously, this is not possible. Erik Veaux (Białoszewski 2002: 46) translated "Że minęła ich ta frajda" as "privées de la joie de survivre", while the author of the Italian translation rendered the locution as "che si sono persi la goduria di aver vissuto. Tante avventure per nulla" ("[those] who missed the enjoyment of having lived. So many adventures for nothing"). "Że można nie przeżyć" (Białoszewski 2014: 49) however, has been translated by both authors in exact in the same way: "Qu'on puisse ne pas survivre" (Białoszewski 2002: 46), "Cioè, che si possa non sopravvivere" ("That is, that one might not survive" [Białoszewski 2021: 49]).

Very often, Białoszewski's phrases sound (intentionally?) ambiguous or opaque. For example, we read on p. 209 of the *Pamiętnik*: "Niepotrzebnie mędrkuję. Dawno inni zrobili już i historię, i wnioski z tego, i ogłosili. I rzecz jest

²² Madeline Levine (Białoszewski 1977: 120) has translated the two nouns as "ash-step" and "ash-shudder".

znana. Tak mówię od siebie – laika. I od innych. Też laików. O tyle nam wolno mówić, że tam byliśmy" (Białoszewski 2014). For the first part, there is no problem: "È inutile che sputi sentenze. Altri, da tempo, hanno fatto la storia, tirato le conclusioni e le hanno rese pubbliche. E la cosa è nota. Ne parlo così per me – da profano. E per gli altri. Profani pure loro" (Białoszewski 2021: 252)²³. Nevertheless, what exactly does "O tyle nam wolno mówić, że tam byliśmy" mean? Some translations have rendered the phrase as meaning "we are allowed to say that we were there". For example, in the French translation, we find, "Nous avons que le droit de dire que nous y étions" (Białoszewski 2002: 248). In my opinion, the phrase instead should be interpreted to mean "we are allowed to say as much since we were there", that is, "we [civilians] are allowed to speak since we were there". One could be reasonably sure this version is closer to Miron Białoszewski's original text. The English version (Białoszewski 1977: 206) sounds, "To the extent, that we can speak, because we were there", the Spanish translation, "I podemos hablar porque estuvimos allí" (Białoszewski 2011: 270), in the German version (Białoszewski 2019: 288), "Falls es uns gestattet ist etwas zu sagen, denn wir sind auch dort gewesen". The first version of this sentence the author of the translation had thought of for the Italian rendering was: "Nella misura in cui ci è concesso di dire che c'eravamo" ("Insofar as we are allowed to say that we were there"). But in this case, the author would have employed the perfective of the verb "to say", "powiedzieć", when he used the imperfective "mówić". Thus, if one were to translate "mówić" as "parlare" ("to speak,") the sentence would sound "Nella misura in cui ci è concesso di parlare, dato che c'eravamo" ("Insofar as we are allowed to speak since we were there"). Such a formulation sounds convincing enough though overly bureaucratic, and in the end, the author of the translation opted for "Ci è dato di parlarne per il semplice motivo che c'eravamo" ("We are allowed to speak for the simple reason that we were there" [Białoszewski 2021: 252]).

In translating the *Pamiętnik*, one should try never to lose sight that Białoszewski was primarily a lyric poet attentive to the prosodic and mythopoetic potential of language. The role of alliteration, assonance, and consonance in the prose of the *Pamiętnik* is far from minor, and at times the author of the translation thinks he has managed to find acceptable equivalents. "Attendo atterrito" ("I wait, appalled" [Białoszewski 2021: 71]) traces the rhythm of the syllables "czekam zaszokowany" (Białoszewski 2014: 56). Still, it is not sure he was able to best render "snuliśmy się w szumie" with "scorrevamo nel fruscio" ("we flowed in the rustle"), given the lack of affricates in Italian. Unfortunately, certain of Białoszewski's calembours are lost in translation. "Potokiem" in Polish means "in a chain", but it sounds very close to "pokotem", "in a row, lined up", and in Italian one could not preserve the homophony. Easier was to render certain assonance-consonances, albeit changing them in vowel timbre: "Przed nami, w nieskończoność, ogon" (Białoszewski 2014: 224) became "davanti a noi una fila, fino all'infinito" ("in front of us a row, to infinity" [Białoszewski 2021: 26g]). Much

²³ So Madeline Levine (Białoszewski 1977: 206): "I'm playing the sage unnecessarily. Long ago others created history out of this, made deductions from it and proclaimed them. And the thing is known. Yes, I'm speaking for myself – a layman. And for others. Also laymen".

more difficult, not to say impossible, to render certain personal “mythologies” arising from homophony. Białoszewski writes that the mortars employed by the Germans reminded him of something massive, heavy, like brass: “Szczególnie te wielkie moździerze, które mi się kojarzyły z czymś solidnym, jako metal, może mosiądz, ale ten moździerzowy od moździerzy na tłuczenie pieprzu i cynamonu” (Białoszewski 2014: 164-165). In Polish, “moździerz”, mortar (an artillery weapon and kitchen or laboratory furnishings) and “mosiądz” (brass) sound almost the same. The translator tried to resolve this with “mortai da ottanta” (“eighty-millimeter mortars”) hoping that the Italian reader would relate the word “ottanta” – the caliber of mortars – to the word “ottone” (“brass”). If the homophony of “ottanta” and “ottone” was still rather opaque, surely eighty-millimeter mortars cannot be considered heavy weapons, so that in agreement with the editor the author of the translation eliminated the caliber specification and, with that, the possibility of preserving an element that brought mortars and brass together.

At one point in the narrative, Miron sees a group of statues gathered inside the Cathedral. He writes about a “Zbiór. Czy obiór” (Białoszewski 2014: 79): literally a “gathering” and an “election”. To maintain minimal consonance, as well as the semantic link, the Italian translation sounds: “Una collezione. Magari un conclave” (“A collection. Maybe a conclave” [Białoszewski 2021: 99]). Consonance in a vocalic language like Italian does not have the same impact as assonance. Therefore, “obiór” should have been translated as “election” (“elezione”), but the reference to the solemnity of the ecclesiastical setting would have been lost²⁴. Since “collezione” and “conclave” present a lesser degree of homophony than “zbiór” and “obiór”, it can be said that the choice was motivated by having wanted to privilege the semantic over the prosodic sphere, as is often the case even in poetic translation, but this is not necessarily the only choice a translator could make.

4. Conclusions

The translation of the *Pamiętnik z powstania warszawskiego* published by Adelphi in 2021 intended to offer the Italian reader Białoszewski's text by placing it at the intersection of two concepts: that of “foreignizing translation” developed by Lawrence Venuti (1999: 44) and that of “text of bliss” (“texte de jouissance”) conceived by Roland Barthes (1990). Venuti contrasts domestication, the ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to the cultural values of the target language, with foreignisation, an ethnodeviant pressure exerted on those same values to emphasize the cultural – even before linguistic – diversity of the foreign text²⁵. To use the words of Philip Lewis, the inventor of the term “abusive

²⁴ Madeline Levine (Białoszewski 1977: 86) has opted for another meaning of the word “zbiór”, “assembly”, whereas she has translated “obiór” as “election”. Such a choice dismisses any homophonic consideration as irrelevant.

²⁵ “Foreignizing translation signifies the difference of the foreign text, yet only by disrupting the cultural codes that prevail in the target language” (Venuti 1995: 20).

“fidelity”, the author mentioned above has tried to reproduce in translation those features of a “foreign” text that “[...] abuse or resist dominant cultural values” in the target language (see: Venuti 1995: 24). For his part, Roland Barthes (1975: 14), in *The Pleasure of the Text*, defines a text of bliss the text “that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts (perhaps to the point of a certain state of boredom), unsettles the reader’s historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language”. Barthes (1975: 30-31) emphasizes how the text can “‘get itself out’ of the war of fictions, of sociolects”, i.e., by eliminating all metalanguage (no voice: Science, Cause, Institution), by destroying “utterly, to the point of contradiction, its own discursive category, its sociolinguistic reference (its ‘genre’”, by attacking the canonical structures of the language itself: lexicon, with “exuberant neologisms, portmanteau words, transliterations”, and syntax, which renounces to logical cells, to sentences. There seems to be no text more appropriate to these formulations than the *Pamiętnik z powstania warszawskiego*. It is not sure whether the Italian translation met these methodological requirements or even whether this will facilitate the Italian reception of Miron Białoszewski’s works. However, at the heart of this enterprise lies the persuasion that only a “foreignizing” translation can challenge the forms of cultural domination operating in the target language and culture and that few other texts in the world fall within the definition of “text of bliss” conceived by Roland Barthes as much as Miron Białoszewski’s *Pamiętnik*.

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