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BOOK OF TRANSLATIONS AS A SELF-COMMENTARY.
ON *BRUCHSÜNDEN UND TODSTÜCKE*
BY WITOLD WIRPSZA

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Introduction

It was in 1967 in Stuttgart that the book *bruchsünden und todstücke* was published as the 31st number of the series 'rot'¹. This choice of poems by Witold Wirpsza was translated by Maria Kurecka and composed of selected texts that had been earlier released in Poland in the volumes *Drugi opór* and *Przesądy*, in the years 1965 and 1966 respectively².

The German translation and the foreign-language edition were no exception for Wirpsza³. The poet frequently crossed the borders of contemporaneous Polish literary world⁴. Present-day critics speak even of Wirpsza's attempts at restoring the place of Polish poetry in the mainstream of global literature⁵. Yet, in many

¹ W. Wirpsza, *bruchsünden und todstücke*, tr. M. Kurecka, ed. M. Bense and E. Walther, rot, no. 31, Stuttgart 1967. The book has unnumbered pages. All references are to this (and the only) edition.

² W. Wirpsza, *Drugi opór. Wiersze 1960-1964*, Warszawa 1965; W. Wirpsza, *Przesądy*, Warszawa 1966.

³ Among Wirpsza's books published in Germany one can find, e.g., *Orangen im Stacheldraht* (1967), *Der Mörder: Erzählungen* (1971), *Drei Berliner Gedichte* (1976).

⁴ In a literal sense Wirpsza crossed Polish borders in 1971, when he decided to emigrate and began to live in West Berlin. The year 1971 was the time when the Polish press attacked the poet after the release of his collection of essays *Pole, wer bist du?* Previously Wirpsza had also received travel scholarships for the stays i.a. in Austria. See, e.g., J. Grądział-Wójcik, *Poezja jako teoria poezji. Na przykładzie twórczości Witolda Wirpszy*, Poznań 2001, p. 8.

⁵ Adam Wiedemann compared Wirpsza's poetry to Ashbery's and considered it to be the first Polish example of postmodern poetry. Anna Kałuża found similarities between Wirpsza's works

respects, the book *bruchsünden und todstücke* is also idiosyncratic. The volume has been translated by the poet's wife and published with the poet's consent. At that time both authors had a long-term common experience in translating and writing own texts, while the problems of translation as such were an important subject of their essays. Wirpsza's articles and theories as well as the books translated by him together with Kurecka are now often included in the studies of Wirpsza's works. This gesture is additionally supported by the specificity of Wirpsza's poetry, which is usually called an intertextual discourse about itself and which has been frequently supplied with authorial footnotes and commentaries⁶. In the light of theoretical convictions of Kurecka and Wirpsza as well as the mentioned tendency to incorporate various types of texts into Wirpsza's *œuvre*, the status of the German translation by Kurecka turns out to be equivocal. The book *bruchsünden und todstücke* may even be treated as a supplement of Wirpsza's works, as a borderline element of his *œuvre* and an additional play with the readers, whose aim would be to modify once more the senses of the author's Polish poems⁷.

The singularity of the German volume is highlighted by the translated texts themselves. They often seem to clarify the more obscure fragments and to uncover the less overt senses of the original versions of the poems. A significant element of both the poems and their translations is the use of unconventional spacing. The book of translations displays its precise role in the creation of meanings and teaches us how to read the space of the poem, an aspect so often explored in the contemporaneous German concrete poetry.

The particularity of the book is also determined by its design, which results, among others, from the fact that the volume belongs to the series 'rot', one of the publishing enterprises strictly connected with the concretist movement and the Stuttgarter Schule. The semantics of the graphic design of 'rot' series and the links between Wirpsza and concretism deserve however to be a subject of

and Polish postmodern poetry, defined as the poetry freed from the strong interdependences between linguistic innovations and metaphysics. Zbigniew Chojnowski treated Wirpsza's texts as the first transgression of the conservative character of Polish avant-gardes. See: A. Wiedemann, *Witold Wirpsza – poeta trzydziestoletni*, „FA-art” 1998, no 1-2, p. 5-6; A. Kałuza, *Wola odróżnienia. O modernistycznej poezji Jarosława Marka Rymkiewicza, Julii Hartwig, Witolda Wirpszy i Krystyny Miłobędzkiej*, Kraków 2008, p. 34-48; Z. Chojnowski, *Wizja człowieka, wizja kultury. O poezji Witolda Wirpszy w latach sześćdziesiątych*, „Integracje. Kultura – sztuka – literatura – życie artystyczne” 1992, no 28, p. 20.

⁶ See, e.g., J. Grądział-Wójcik, op. cit., p. 21-132.

⁷ Therefore the question is what constitutes the corpus of Wirpsza's texts. The German book has not been mentioned (to the best of my knowledge) in any works devoted to Wirpsza's poetry (including the works broadest in scope, such as: J. Grądział-Wójcik, op. cit.; J. Gutorow, *Urwany ślad. O wierszach Wirpszy, Karpowicza, Różewicza i Sosnowskiego*, Wrocław 2007; A. Kałuza, op. cit.).

a separate article. Yet, in this text I will respect concretists' views of notation and preserve a consequent lower-case writing of all quotations from the German book⁸. I am however forced to change the font type. In the analysis I will also omit these aspects of the typography of translations which are directly determined by the visual features of 'rot' series⁹. Instead, I will concentrate on the spectrum of textual devices that were typical of Wirpsza himself, and on the methods of their translation. In this way certain less obvious aspects of the author's poetics from the sixties shall be highlighted.

The pair of translators

The concepts of translation exposed in the texts of Maria Kurecka and Witold Wirpsza are worth, to my mind, being considered together. Both authors' convictions were based on their practice of collective translation of books. Until 1967 the most important texts translated by the pair had been Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus* and Johan Huizinga's *Homo ludens*. In the book *Diabelne tarapaty* Kurecka describes a few-year long collective work on the translation of Mann's novel. The pair shared the fragments of the text, then read each other's preliminary translations, commented on them, and finally checked each other's corrected versions¹⁰. Both translators were equally engaged in the work and they both presented the reflections based on that shared effort in the texts devoted to translation. These experiences were referred to by Kurecka in *Diabelne tarapaty* and also by Wirpsza in the interview *Rzetelność znaczy dosłowność*. In effect, in her book Kurecka quoted Wirpsza's words¹¹, while Wirpsza spoke in the plural¹². Kurecka's participation in the collective translations may however be treated as special, since she was a bilingual person, raised in the pre-war Danzig¹³.

It seems that also in the case of *bruchsünden und todstücke* one can find the traces of the collective reflection of both authors on the issues concerning the

⁸ Writing in a lower case was strictly associated with Swiss style in typography and modernist graphic design, as well as with concretists' ideas of poetry.

⁹ In the German book the texts of the poems are printed in bold Helvetica, and their titles in the non-bold one. The book has an asymmetric grid layout, flush left, square format and red cover. The features of the whole series can be (at least partially) distinguished from the individual characteristics of Wirpsza's publication thanks to a comparison of that book with other numbers of 'rot' series, e.g., no 32.

¹⁰ M. Kurecka, *Diabelne tarapaty*, Poznań 1970. See also the fragments in: *Pisarze polscy o sztuce przekładu 1440-2005. Antologia*, ed. E. Balcerzan and E. Rajewska, Poznań 2007, p. 240-242.

¹¹ M. Kurecka, *Diabelne tarapaty*, p. 79.

¹² W. Wirpsza, *Rzetelność znaczy dosłowność*, „Nowa Kultura” 1962, no 11, p. 3.

¹³ M. Kurecka, *Diabelne tarapaty*, p. 59.

volume. For instance, in an article by Wirpsza published in 1967 there appears a consideration of a particular translation problem. The poet deliberates upon the possible German translation of the fragment of his own poem: ‘śmierć gwiazdy śmierdzą’ and suggests his own solution¹⁴. The author does not however mention the fact that the excerpt comes from the book *Przesądy*, from the poem *Temat z wariacjami i sonetem*. That poem, in Kurecka’s translation, was printed in 1967 in *bruchsünden und todstücke*. The verse quoted above was translated by Kurecka in a way different from what the poet proposed, but the translation conformed to Wirpsza’s general postulates that were presented in the essay¹⁵.

An interesting issue is also another kind of a dialogue of both authors, the poetic dialogue on the problems of selected texts from *Przesądy* which were later included in the German volume. I mean here the poetry of Kurecka herself. In her poems from that time Kurecka uses the motives and quotations very similar to Wirpsza¹⁶. For example, in 1965 she writes the poem *Polowanie na lwy*, which begins with a motto ‘Białe miejsca oznaczające na starych mapach obszary dotąd nie odkryte opatrywano napisem: »ubi leones«’¹⁷. Meanwhile, in Wirpsza’s poem *Granice*, published in 1966, we can read: ‘Niewidoczne kłębowisko potworów. / –: Ubi leones? –: Tak / Pisano na mapach’¹⁸. Moreover, in the ‘60s and ‘70s the poetics of Kurecka’s texts is congruent with Wirpsza’s: one could describe both of them as linguistically innovative¹⁹.

Finally, it should be highlighted that the vision of translation presented in Kurecka’s essays highly resembles the concept of poetry by Wirpsza. Both authors root their ideas in the collectively translated *Homo ludens*. Consequently, Kurecka describes the process of translation as a disinterested play, which is however limited by certain rules: the rules of artistic translation, which ought to be communicative and insightful. Kurecka notices certain tension which appears during the play, that is the tension in which a player displays his or her abilities and aims at

¹⁴ W. Wirpsza, *Parę aktualnych czynników współczesnego przekładu poetyckiego*, „Poezja” 1967, no 6, p. 32-33.

¹⁵ See: W. Wirpsza, *Przesądy*, p. 57 and the last poem from: W. Wirpsza, *bruchsünden und todstücke*.

¹⁶ In 1987 in *Oficyna Literacka* a chronological survey of Kurecka’s poetry was published. It covered the poems written between the time of war and the 1980s. See: M. Kurecka, *Trzydzieści wierszy*, Kraków 1987.

¹⁷ ‘White places which used to mean on old maps the territories yet not discovered were supplied with the note “ubi leones”’ (All translations into English are mine – A.K.).

¹⁸ ‘An invisible whirl of monsters. / –: Ubi leones? –: So / They used to write on the maps’. See: M. Kurecka, *Trzydzieści wierszy*, p. 15; W. Wirpsza, *Przesądy*, p. 15. In *Przesądy* by Wirpsza there is also *Temat z wariacjami i sonetem* (p. 56-58), and in Kurecka’s book: *Oczy / Temat z wariacjami* (p. 17).

¹⁹ As a proof one could use a fragment of the poem *Stalość stawidel*: ‘Bezsensowne zestawy słów / stawidla zastawiają senne / sensom wysuszonym. Stąd też / przyssawki nie-ssaków wydrążą / wszystkie polaci łąk, pokosy...’ (M. Kurecka, *Trzydzieści wierszy*, p. 18).

a victory. That victory is of course a perfect translation. The tension results from the necessity of overcoming linguistic habits and verbosity, and at the same time from the constant feeling of insufficiency²⁰. In his translational essays Wirpsza similarly speaks of the brutality towards the target language and the inevitability of looking for the solutions closest to the source text, which may, in effect, result in freshness and freedom²¹. However, first and foremost it is poetry that is viewed by the author as a play of meanings²².

Wirpsza underlines the difference between the work of poetic translation and the poetic creation itself. Translation is a specific type of creation: interpretative and critical, while the interpretation itself is called by Wirpsza a 'critical co-creation'. Interpretation interferes with a given work and strengthens its intensity and equivocality. The complete work, as Wirpsza claims in 1967, is both the literary text and its criticism, or, as one would like to say: the text and its translation²³.

Obviously the claim that translation is a kind of a commentary is long well-known²⁴. However, in the context of the volume *bruchsünden und todstücke* it gains particular overtones. In its light the German book may be read as a type of the commentary to Polish poems which has been planned by the poet. The book becomes a significant supplement of Polish texts, a metatext no less important than authorial footnotes situated below some poems. The German translation appears to be a logical continuation of Wirpsza's work, not groundlessly named autotelic and juxtaposed with the discourses of literary studies²⁵.

In this place it seems worth mentioning also a short commentary by Kurecka, published at the end of the book *bruchsünden und todstücke*. In the note Kurecka underlines the fact that her translation is not poetic, but philological. Yet, the analysis of translations suggests that their 'philological' character ought rather to be interpreted as a kind of un-readiness and roughness of the volume²⁶, as

²⁰ Translation was compared to a game also by other theoreticians, who, like Jiří Levý in 1967, applied game theory to the analyses of translator's decisions. Such an understanding of the game is not however fully congruent with Kurecka's. See, e.g., *Współczesne teorie przekładu. Antologia*, ed. P. Bukowski and M. Heydel, Kraków 2009, p. 72-85. On the ideas of Kurecka: *Pisarze polscy o sztuce przekładu...*, p. 240-246.

²¹ W. Wirpsza, *Rzetelność znaczy dosłowność*, p 3.

²² W. Wirpsza, *Gra znaczeń. Szkice literackie*, Warszawa 1965.

²³ W. Wirpsza, *Parę aktualnych czynników współczesnego przekładu poetyckiego*, p. 31, 35.

²⁴ That conviction is close to the tradition of hermeneutics. For example Hans-Georg Gadamer noticed that for the person who knows the original text the translation may often be really helpful for the understanding of the text. See *Współczesne teorie przekładu. Antologia*, p. 322 (the text is significantly titled: *Reading as translation*).

²⁵ On the poetry of Wirpsza as a theory of poetry see J. Grądział-Wójcik, op. cit.; as a literature with some competences of literary studies see D. Ulicka, *Literaturoznawcze dyskursy możliwe. Studia z dziejów nowoczesnej teorii literatury w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej*, Kraków 2007, p. 26.

²⁶ Philological translations are rarely published as separate works, usually they serve other aims or belong to an intermediary stage of translation process. In Wirpsza's book there appear

well as its closeness to the hermeneutical tasks of translation as a commentary. Many texts from the German book do not fulfill the criteria traditionally ascribed to philological translation²⁷, not to mention the fact that in the 1960s Wirpsza himself considered a faithful translation to be impossible. As he provocatively observed, the most honest translation is the one conducted word after word, and word for word²⁸.

Translating the title

The question remains if the book indeed gives us grounds to treat it as a commentary to the Polish poems. The volume *bruchsünden und todstücke* consists of seventeen texts, out of which the first seven are the translation of the cycle *Siedem ułomków głównych* that comes from the book *Drugi opór*. Other poems include the heterogeneous examples of works from both *Drugi opór* and *Przesady*. One can find some briefer texts with a relatively simple syntax, certain longer poems divided into shorter parts, as well as poetic works supplied with numerous footnotes. Despite this, in the book it is the cycle *Siedem ułomków głównych* that dominates. It covers seven out of seventeen texts and is located in the opening of the book. In this way the volume highlights the poems quite particular in the context of Wirpsza's poetry from that time: the most fragmentary, visual and incoherent.

The title *bruchsünden und todstücke* is a condensation of two German compound nouns used in the plural. The word *Bruchstück*, that is 'fragment, scrap, piece left over', consists of *Bruch*: 'break, crack, split, fracture' and *Stück*, that is 'piece, bit, item'. That compound noun has been mixed with the word *Todsünde*, that is 'mortal sin' (as *Tod* means 'death' and *Sünde* 'sin'). The juxtaposition of both semantic fields and both German words could be transferred into Polish as *ułamane grzechy i śmiertelne fragmenty* (and into English as *broken sins and*

omissions and print errors, while the typography intensifies an impression of the working or 'raw' character of translations.

²⁷ In her note Kurecka refers to an example of the structure of one sonnet which has not been fully transferred to the German version. Yet, the translation mentioned still partially follows the original construction of rhymes. In the traditional nomenclature it would thus be closer to an imperfect poetic translation rather than the philological one. Such a traditional division of the types of translation cannot be applied to other poems by Wirpsza, especially to the ones which seem to lack coherence and are based on the cohesion that is arbitrarily evoked by the recurrence of the same word or morpheme in a few following sentences which describe many different spheres of life. (So it is in the poem *Bloto / schlamm*). A literal translation of such texts, which involves a repetition of the recurrent morphemes and no clear 'meaning', seems to be the only possibility of translating these poems (allowed thanks to the similarity of the German lexicon).

²⁸ W. Wirpsza, *Rzetelność znaczy dosłowność*, p. 3.

mortal pieces). Such a structure may be displayed as: (a + b) + (b + a), where *a* refers to *Bruch* and *Stück*, and *b* to *Tod* and *Sünde*²⁹.

The Polish title is also based on the blending of words. In the phrase *siedem grzechów głównych* (*seven capital sins*) the middle word (*sins*) has been exchanged for *ułomki* (that is ‘fragments’). Thus similarly two topics have been superimposed: that of sins and that of fragments. The structure could now be presented as: b + a + b. The title could not be literally translated, with the use of the German *Sieben Hauptsünden* (*seven capital sins*). In the German phrase an exchange of *sins* (*Sünden*) for *fragments* (*Bruchstücke*) would blur the clear allusion to sin, since the resultant phrase would sound like *seven main fragments*³⁰. Additionally, it would lack the symmetry of the Polish title (in which it is the middle word, in Polish standing for ‘sins’, that is exchanged). Moreover, the use of that German phrase in the place of the title of the whole book would make it difficult to refer the name to all seventeen poems. In the Polish volume the countable *seven* refers to the seven texts of the cycle. In the German book no cycle is delineated. Hence, for the German title another theological term has been chosen, commonly confused with the former, that is *mortal sins*, in German *Todsünden*.

The mentioned wish to refer the words *ułomki* or *Bruchstücke* to Wirpsza’s poems seems justified, as in both language versions the titles precede the literary texts which are visually ragged and full of cut-up sentences. The German word *Bruchstücke* is indeed popularly used in the descriptions of literature and art (similarly to Polish words *fragmenty* and *urywki*). Yet, calling the fragmentary poems *ułomki* must be treated as archaism³¹. Thus the German title encourages us to take a critical stance and ask why in the Polish title we do not have for example *siedem urywków głównych*.

According to dictionaries *ułomek* means simply ‘a broken off piece’³². Nevertheless, the vowel ‘o’ brings to mind the possibility of associating this noun not only with the verb *ułamać* (*break*), but also with the adjective *ułomny* (*defective*). The adjective *ułomny* and the noun *ułomność* mean ‘disability’, ‘defect’ or ‘lameness’, but also the less literally understood ‘weakness’, ‘imperfection’ and

²⁹ For my analyses I used i.a. the dictionary: J. Chodera, S. Kubica, A. Bzdęga, *Podręczny słownik niemiecko-polski*, Warszawa 2003.

³⁰ In German and in Polish the seven capital sins cannot be called, similarly as in English, *the seven deadly sins*. Were it possible, of course the allusion of the phrase *seven deadly fragments* would remain clear. One should also notice that all other English names for that category of sins: *cardinal* or *capital* still bring to mind theological and legal contexts, while the Polish and German names (*główny* and *Haupt*) are popular words used in colloquial speech and thus unburdened with any clear references to specific terms. (Other names possible in German would not help either: these are *Wurzelsünden* and *Hauptlaster*).

³¹ This meaning, described as archaic, can be found in: *Słownik języka polskiego*, v. 9, ed. W. Doroszewski, Warszawa 1967, p. 558.

³² Ibidem.

‘fault’, or even ‘sinfulness’. *Ułomek* raises doubts, it resembles the person of *Znikomek* from Bolesław Leśmian’s poetry and the whole project of Leśmian’s cycle titled *Pieśni kalekujące*.

Thus we can see that the Polish title does not highlight the ragged character of poetic texts as much as the German one does, additionally reflecting their cut-up nature by the very structure of the contaminated compound nouns. The Polish title is more ambiguous than metaphorical, the phrase seems to be full of understanding and sympathy, as the *sins* change into *weaknesses* and *faults*.

Finally, the Polish title, differently from the German one, reminds us of biblical seven baskets of broken pieces that were collected after the miraculous multiplication of bread. The word usually used for these pieces in Polish translations of the Bible is just *ułomki*, while in German these are *Brocken* rather than *Bruchstücke*³³. In this light one can see that in Polish the ‘broken pieces of texts’, that is Wirpsza’s poems, are presented to us with humbleness, but also with hope. In Polish the biblical context and archaism seem to ennoble the poems, while in German the name remains rather a metalinguistic and metaliterary play.

As we can see, in the German book the very choice of the title and its translation are a kind of critical and interpretative work. On the one hand, the title points at the semantics of the cycle, sketched above. That semantics seems rarely highlighted in the interpretations of Wirpsza’s poems, whose meanings are often limited to the problems of contemporary philosophy of language, and whose subject is described as an indifferent observer³⁴. On the other hand, the title of the translation may also support the common reading of that poetry as a discourse about itself, yet it clearly emphasises the fragility and materiality of every text from the volume³⁵.

The transfer of spaces

The broken texts of Wirpsza’s cycle are difficult not only to interpret, but also to read. The reader of Polish poems needs to decide which of the scattered fragments can be joined into sentences. Frequently under the same word a few homonymic inflected forms are hidden. Yet, in the case of trans-

³³ See in various translations: Matthew 15:37 and Mark 8:8. Biblical overtones of *ułomki* have been indicated to me by Rozalia Słodczyk.

³⁴ On the lyrical subject as emotionally distanced and independent see J. Grądziel-Wójcik, op. cit., p. 22; on the subject as a machine – A. Kałuza, op. cit.

³⁵ The fragility (mortality) of texts is reflected by the printing errors and all possible mistakes of the readers. It is not clear, to what extent the unconventional textual devices are burdened with meanings, and to what extent they are accidental. Thus there appears the question how to recognise the constitutive elements of Wirpsza’s texts.

lation such decisions had to be made already when the German equivalents were chosen.

For example, in the poem *sięga głęboko* we can see the text scattered into the fragments which are flushed either to the left, or to the right, and broken or cancelled in the centre³⁶. That is a fragment from the middle part of the text:

	stan wewnętrznego skażenia
Potrafi nadać	postać
Tak czystą	
	rtęć muzyki absolutnej

A few of the fragments above seem to be linked. Yet, one cannot be sure if ‘Tak czystą’ should be joined with ‘postać’ or ‘rtęć’, we do not know if the complement of the verb ‘nadać’ is ‘postać’, or ‘rtęć’, or maybe ‘stan wewnętrznego skażenia’. The text consists of numerous individual fragments freely dispersed on the page. Meanwhile, in the German translation the links between analogous fragments are more obvious:

	der zustand der inneren verseuchung
ist imstande	so reine
gestalt zu verleihen	
	quecksilber der absoluten musik

First of all, we can see that the poem is based not on the location of a given word in the space of the poem, but on the way in which certain longer phrases have been dispersed. In the place where in Polish there is ‘postać’, in German we find ‘so reine’ (an equivalent of ‘Tak czystą’), where in Polish we have ‘Potrafi nadać’, in German we have only ‘potrafi’, expressed by ‘ist imstande’. Such changes result from the fact that German syntax is respected and grammar joins longer phrases above the spaces. In this poem the gaps turn out to function just as the breaks of the text, the cuts of notation, and not as the signs of some hidden meanings.

The situation looks different in the poem *szuler*, where the broken off sentence:

A gdy zabrakło³⁷

in the next iteration within the text becomes completed to ‘A gdy zabrakło śniegu’³⁸. In the German version of that poem (*der falschspieler*) it is obvious from the very beginning that the space is located in the place of a particular word (*śnieg* / *Schnee*):

als an	mangelte
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³⁶ W. Wirpsza, *Drugi opór*, p. 75.

³⁷ ‘When it lacked’.

³⁸ ‘When it lacked snow’. Ibidem, p. 74.

In this way the order of the German sentence is preserved: the word ‘mangelte’ (‘lacked’) appears at the end, as it is supposed to. But at the same time it is highlighted that the space does not only cut off the text, but that it also substitutes a singular element of the sentence. Moreover, in this case the gap signifies that which *lacked*. As we can see, there is no single meaning that could be ascribed to an empty space in Wirpsza’s poetry, but its unconventional use is often a crucial element of the construction of his texts.

That knowledge proves to be most useful in the case of the poem that finishes the cycle *ułomki*. The text is enigmatically titled *formalna traktatu*³⁹:

formalna traktatu

Trzeba koniecznie
 Wobec słów języka ludzkiego
 określenia biegunowe:
 a także
 Ograniczenie i całkowite jego przeciwieństwo
 a także
 Nieporadność ciała wobec nieporadności wyobraźni
 bo to jest sprytna waga, równoważąca
 Ciężary nierówne
 i koń na biegunach,
 Niepowtarzalność nawet trzepotu . Nienazywalność
 Przerażenia wobec oporu
 Myśli. Rosnąca góra niecierpliwości
 nieustannie.
 I fotel na biegunach . Czemu?
 , bo to poza pojęciami
 Sprawiedliwości i niesprawiedliwości:
 Niszczycielska tęsknoty.

The title seems to suggest that ‘formalna’ (‘formal’) is the superior word which has a function of the noun, while ‘traktatu’ (‘of a treatise’) is just an adjunct. The word *formalna* may bring to mind the noun *formalina*, but primarily it seems to be treated as a new term, based on an adjective and coined analogically to such terms from mathematics and physics as *wypadkowa* and *stała* (*resultant* and *constant*)⁴⁰. Yet, in the German translation between the words *formalna traktatu* there appears a clear gap:

³⁹ Ibidem, p. 79. J. Grądział-Wójcik speaks of the ‘untypical’ title of the poem, but she does not further comment on it (p. 187).

⁴⁰ That hypothesis could be supported by Wirpsza’s habit of creating various pseudo-scientific neologisms (J. Grądział-Wójcik, op. cit., p. 41). Numerous examples of the terms based on adjectives were pointed to me by Dr Magdalena Sikorska. In Polish *krzywa* and *prosta* (*curve* and *straight line*) are also based on the adjectival forms.

formale

eines traktats

Thus, the translation suggests that the German words do not form a coherent item, but that they need a completion, just as certain gaps from the previous poems required a supplement. The adjuncts need a feminine noun⁴¹. Among the words of the German poem it is however hard to find an obvious candidate for that place (contrary to the case of the text analysed before).

The German translations of all other poems from *ulomki* seem not to consist of any spaces that would not be required by the Polish versions of the texts. Therefore, one may conclude that the Polish title *formalna traktatu* is also a broken off fragment that needs to be supplemented. The lack of space inside the Polish phrase does not mean that it is not there, but rather that the unknown supplement should appear before the words *formalna traktatu*. The location of the title in the middle of the line (consequent in the whole volume *Drugi opór*) in this case turns out not to be a result of the conventional, symmetrical typography. Instead, it signals a purposeful indentation, aimed at leaving a free place before the title⁴². The unknown noun should thus appear before the adjective *formalna*, which is allowed in Polish if the adjective plays the role of a category. Consequently, one of the possible supplements of the phrase could be [*dyscyplina*] *formalna traktatu* ([*the*] *formal* [*discipline*] *of a treatise*).

However, even more accurate candidates can be found in the context of the very poem, in which such issues are raised as the ‘polar descriptions’ of human language, ‘restriction and its exact opposite’, ‘justice and injustice’, ‘the awkwardness of the body versus the awkwardness of imagination’⁴³. Numerous oppositions and images of oscillation, polarity and instability seem to demand a counterbalance, in spite of the fact that they often are unequal or incomparable. In order to reach the equilibrium one would need ‘a clever scale which balances / unequal burdens’. But where to find such a scale? What comes to mind is the human language and the treatise itself. It is in this linguistic treaty, in the following clauses linked with ‘and’, that the unequal phrases are indeed treated as equal.

But even language cannot always cope with disequilibrium. ‘The unrepeatability of a flatter’, ‘the unspeakability of the horror’ and next wide spaces signify the broad territories that will always remain beyond words. They remind of the lack of the balance or symmetry that must always emerge between experience

⁴¹ In German there is also a gap before ‘formale’ which may be supplemented with an article.

⁴² In other Polish poems in *ulomki* cycle the titles also have an unclear status. They are emphasised thanks to the spacing out, but contrary to other titles in *Drugi opór* they are written in lower case, and not in capital letters. Thus, they often seem to be a part of the text of the poem rather than its name. The titles appear to be the phrases of the poem moved along the line just as other parts of *ulomki* are.

⁴³ These and next quoted phrases are my translations of the fragments of *formalna traktatu*.

and its notation. Negations intensify that impression: ‘impatience’, ‘unceasingly’, ‘beyond notions’. The spaces have therefore an additional function – they are the traces of the unwritten, of all that cannot be expressed in notions. Only thanks to such a ‘negative poetics’ can Wirpsza aim at the equilibrium of his treatise, at the equilibrium of what can be expressed and cannot, what is written and is not. An empty space must also substitute the word which was supposed to be a part of the title, it must replace *equilibrium*. *The formal equilibrium of a treatise*, *równowaga formalna traktatu*, or, finally, *die formale gleichheit eines traktats* require one of the words to disappear. The gap in the title emphasises the weaknesses and limitations of language even better than the directly named *formal disequilibrium*, *nierównowaga formalna* or *formale Ungleichheit*. But while the demonstrated unbalance of notions and experiences, of the written and unwritten, cannot be avoided, the treatise as such seems counterbalanced, thanks to the fact that it goes beyond words. The reading of the poem can be concluded, owing to the spaces and their German translation⁴⁴.

Now it is clear that the translation explains certain issues hidden in Wirpsza’s poems, that it indeed is a commentary. Moreover, it seems to be based on the knowledge which has not been openly revealed in the Polish texts. This observation would support the possibility of reading *bruchsünden und todstücke* as an authorial supplement. At the same time the analysed poems are an example of writing and translating strictly connected with the spaces of page and line. The German translations transfer the senses both preserved in print and purposefully hidden in the whiteness of the page. Kurecka’s translation teaches us how to read the space of the poems and highlights its possibilities.

Conclusion

The book *bruchsünden und todstücke* seems to suggest new categories for the description of Wirpsza’s views of language and text. These would be: imperfection, fragility, fault. The author is interested in the senses which can be expressed neither in notions, nor in a linear, coherent argumentation. His poems are, as we remember, *mortal fragments*, for which every rewriting means a risk of the damage, for example due to the loss of an important space, which may appear to be

⁴⁴ Wirpsza often referred to Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*. In this poem especially clear is the allusion to the construction of Wittgenstein’s book and to the sentence which is in a way a description of the second part of *Tractatus*: ‘Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent’ (See, e.g., L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, tr. C.K. Ogden, introd. B. Russell, London 1958). As a context of the poem one could treat also other poetic treatises by Wirpsza (*Traktat sklamany* from 1968 and the early *Traktat polemiczny* from 1949).

accidental. In this light one cannot be surprised by Wirpsza's distrust of scientific and technical languages, and of discourses of literary criticism, of all the texts that claim to have rights to truth and assessment. These languages are ridiculed and transformed by Wirpsza, not only indirectly in *formalna traktatu*, but also openly in other poems from *bruchsünden und todstücke*, such as *Bloto (schlamm)* and *Składanka (legespiel)*. But the more the poems become obscure and mumbling, as it happens in the case of *ulomki*, the further they are from irony and play with quotations. In these rare examples the author seems to be sympathetic to the defects of language and its notation.

Wirpsza's poetry intensifies an impression of the multitude and incongruity of experiences, of the world divided and chaotic. Yet, as I have briefly shown on the example of *formalna traktatu*, the poet's texts allow for a temporary arrangement, for a momentary creation of unity. In fact, the more difficult the task is, the bigger is the pleasure of finding the hidden order of a given poem. Active readers may find the underlying concepts that escape logical explanation even in the texts which on the surface seem incoherent. The idea of poetry as a game and the mosaic poetics of Wirpsza's texts are close to the theories of postmodern literature and philosophy. However, building the hidden structure of the poems, whose aim is to strengthen the subject of cognition, is an idea rooted in strikingly different convictions. For Wirpsza, the poetry is rather a Kantian play of cognitive powers⁴⁵, and it seems that certain rules of that play are revealed to us in translations. Such a way of commenting one's works is of course perfectly fitted to Wirpsza's concept of poetry as a self-commentary and to his unwillingness to distinguish any privileged discourse of 'knowledge'.

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⁴⁵ W. Wirpsza, *Gra znaczeń. Przerób*, Mikołów 2008, p. 211. A hidden coherence and a concept that may explain the spectrum of textual devices and motives of a poem can be found even in the case of such a citational and mosaic text as *Składanka* (W. Wirpsza, *Przesądy*, p. 49-51).

**Book of translations as a self-commentary. On *bruchsünden und todstücke*
by Witold Wirpsza**

Keywords: Witold Wirpsza, Maria Kurecka, book of translations, self-commentary

S u m m a r y

This paper examines *bruchsünden und todstücke*, a 1967 book of translations of selected poems by Witold Wirpsza. The texts come from the volumes *Drugi opór* (1965) and *Przesądy* (1966) and have been translated by the poet's wife, Maria Kurecka. Both Kurecka's and Wirpsza's concepts of translation, as well as the translated poems themselves, allow us to consider the German book as a kind of self-commentary to Wirpsza's oeuvre. Especially the way in which Wirpsza's unconventional spacing has been transferred to the German volume may be treated as a guide for reading and understanding the more obscure Polish poems.

**Książka przekładowa jako autokomentarz. O *bruchsünden und todstücke*
Witolda Wirpszy**

Słowa kluczowe: Witold Wirpsza, Maria Kurecka, książka przekładowa, autokomentarz

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Artykuł stanowi analizę książki przekładowej *bruchsünden und todstücke*, opublikowanej w 1967 roku i złożonej z wybranych utworów Witolda Wirpszy pochodzących z *Drugiego oporu* (1965) oraz *Przesądów* (1966). Teksty zostały przetłumaczone na język niemiecki przez żonę poety, Marię Kurecką. Koncepcje przekładu Kureckiej i Wirpszy oraz same tłumaczenia wierszy pozwalają na potraktowanie tej publikacji jako rodzaju autokomentarza do twórczości Wirpszy. Zwłaszcza sposób, w jaki przeniesiono do niemieckiego tomiku niekonwencjonalny sposób operowania spacjami, można potraktować jako wskazówkę, jak czytać i interpretować mniej przejrzyste polskie utwory.