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Agnieszka Pantuchowicz

SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities
apantuchowicz@swps.edu.pl
ORCID: 0000-0003-3238-0864

Improving the Original. Stanisław Barańczak's Clown-World

> "[…] the text produces a language of its own, in itself,
> which, while continuing to work through translation,
> emerges at a given moment as a monster,
> a monstrous mutation without tradition
> or normative precedent".[1]

Improvement of original texts through translation is also a claim which Stanisław Barańczak, himself a distinguished Polish poet and translator, offers as a translatological possibility. Commenting on his translation of one of his favourite American poets, Emily Dickinson, he writes:

I would like, however, to venture an opinion here, which may sound downright blasphemous. Contrary to the widespread conviction that a translated poem is a pale and unsatisfactory imitation, I would claim that there are instances, sometimes, where the untraversable differences between the two systems may prompt the translator actually to "improve" the original.[2]

[1] J. Derrida, *Deconstruction and the Other*, [in:] R. Kearney (ed.), *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers*, Manchester 1984, p. 127–125, (p. 123).

[2] S. Barańczak, *Emily Dickinson's "Because I could not stop for Death" — Remarks of a Polish Translator*, "The Emily Dickinson Journal" 1997, vol. 6, no. 2, p. 120–126, (p. 122).

Such an improvement may, as he also claims, counterbalance the unavoidable losses in translation, thus as it were helping to retain the overall value of a poem. Hence, the translator is positioned as the author of a possibly better poem, of a better story in which he or she can legitimately say something of his or her own.

For Barńczak poetry is a translation of a tale told by an idiot into a normal text, or at least into a sound of normality. As he writes in the introduction to a volume of his poems (1989), reality's unpredictability

> Gives it a shade of inspired insanity, as if a comedian on the stage had gotten rid of any constraints and kept endlessly talking not only on all possible subjects, but also ... in many languages at the same time. Juxtaposed with this maniacal multivoiced, delirious talk a poet's expression may turn out to be shocking, exactly for the reason that it sounds normally.[3]

In 1989, at the beginning of the end of the communist rule in Poland, Barańczak replaces the oppression of the state with the oppression of the other, of the mad world around which the poet wants to somehow normalize: "Amongst the madness which is becoming a banality, it is the normal which may become a revelation".[4] The endlessly talking comedian who occupies the centre of the stage must be somehow restrained, and the task of poetry is to demand from him, that he should speak normally, 'to the point' (*do rzeczy*).[5] The poet is again besieged by the world, and 'poetry is nothing else than a challenge to the injustice inscribed with the rules of the universe'.[6] The poet, according to Barańczak, is a naive partner of the 'clown-world' and intervenes in its mad babble with the singularity of the poetic voice: "speaking in the first person singular is simply poetry's way to oppose the world whenever he/it wants to push the individual off the stage".[7]

Barańczak has translated all the plays of William Shakespeare into Polish. The Shakespearian world as theatrical stage where it is always possible that we play some role, repeating a script or a scenario, becomes in Barańczak a space of struggle with the main actor whose name is chaos,

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[3] S. Barańczak, *Poezje wybrane*, Warszawa 1990, p. 6. Unless marked otherwise, all translations from Polish are mine.

[4] Ibid., p. 6.

[5] Ibid., p. 8.

[6] Ibid., p. 8.

[7] Ibid., p. 10.

insanity, disorder. A poet, a lyrical one, translates this world into a better play in which he or she has at least a chance to say something rather than silently give up. This verbal struggle is hopeless, Barańczak admits, and the naive comedian will always fall prey to the world's mockery, yet it is "always more than the role of the speechless supernumerary".[8] Even where theatricality seems to be not there, Barańczak manages to introduce it to the translated text, thus also evidently improving the original. When Gonzalo in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* expresses his desire to possess and rule the island saying: 'Had I plantation of this isle, my Lords',[9] and then projects the possible improvements on it so as to 'excel the Golden Age', in the Polish translation by Barańczak we read: "Gdyby tak była tu do obsadzenia rola".[10] The statement is highly ambiguous in Polish. The verb 'obsadzać' means simultaneously to plant, and to cast an actor in a part. The noun "rola" means "a part" or "a role" in a play, but also clearly refers to "arable land". Gonzalo, in addition to saying: "If there was a land to be planted out", simultaneously says "If there was a part in which I could be cast". This improvement of the original is simultaneously a gesture of provocative mistranslation. It introduces one more stage to Shakespeare's play upon which political power becomes a theatrical role on the stage within the larger stage of Prospero's domain upon which the main role can be still played by the mad clown of the disorder of the world. Perhaps against the grain of Barańczak's declared will to normalize, the abnormal other is still embraced as a part of our, unimprovable, loss in translation.

What remains is thus to translate the enslaving outside into a text, to carve a space for individual normality in order to, at least momentarily, ward off the intrusive tale of Shakespeare's idiot. The task of this translation is to repress the madness by way of defending the poet's "innate right to human normality, to human norm which he incessantly imposes upon everything that surrounds him and which attempts to suppress him".[11] What speaks through these statements is not only Shakespeare, but also some sort of fear of the unconscious. The poet, through writing, and actually through translation, tries to repress the intrusive intimacies of the other. As Freud once noted, "[a] failure of translation – this is what is known clinically

[8] Ibid., p. 11.

[9] W. Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, London 1998, II.1.

[10] W. Shakespeare, *Burza*, transl. S. Barańczak, Kraków 2008, II.1.

[11] *Poezje wybrane*, p. 10.

as 'repression'".[12] What is repressed can thus be seen as untranslatable, something which remains as what Jean Laplanche calls 'afterwardsness' of translation, and cannot be elevated to the conscious which is the site of the norm. For Laplanche, who developed Freud's repression into a translation theory, a child treats the language of adults as some kind of incomprehensible, or enigmatic message. As Laplanche puts it:

> In reality, it must again be stressed that the enigmatic messages of adults undergo a reorganisation, a dislocation. Some aspects of them are translated, while some anamorphotic elements are excluded from the translation and become unconscious.[13]

Barańczak's poet as a naive partner of the clown-world does in fact the same. He or she translates the tale of the idiot into comprehensible texts and thus creates the sphere of the norm which is simultaneously the sphere of the human. This translation is in fact a kind of mistranslation, as the normalization which results from it is always already partial, incomplete. The oppressive incomprehensibility of the unconscious is not thus eliminated, but it promises a better translation, an improved text, which will extend the sphere of the normal and somehow silence the noise of the "enigmantic signifiers".[14] Laplanche uses in this context the term "provocative mistranslation",[15] a translation which provokes the unconscious to speak. The normative consciousness is thus bound to remain a mistranslation, a text which, on the other hand, will defend and secure its security and pretend that the repression of the unconscious has been successful. Barańczak's improved original signals that the previous original is never finished, that it speaks many tongues at the same time. The norm the poet/translator seeks for is always dangerously opened to the unrestrained sound and fury of the voice of the other, which voice Barńczak's strategy of writing brings close to the norm of the possibility of the linguistic expression.

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[12] S. Freud, *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess: 1887–1904,* ed. Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson, Cambridge 1985, p. 208. Quoted in J. Laplanche, *Essays on Otherness*, London 1999, p. 17.

[13] Ibid., p. 101.

[14] Ibid., p. 93.

[15] Ibid,, p. 92.

In the case of Wisława Szymborska's poem titled "Tortury" (*Tortures*), for instance, the improvement of the original goes exactly in the direction of a normative reduction. When Szymborska writes that

> Nic się nie zmieniło.
> Ciało jest bolesne ... [16]
> (*Nothing has changed.*
> *The body is painful*)

thus exposing the body as incessantly suffering pain, in Barańczak's version the pain is moved to the inside of the body as something which is only carried within it:

> Nothing has changed.
> The body is a reservoir of pain.

Barańczak's pain is thus only a potential pain kept as a reserve within the body, a kind of pain which is an object recognizable within the body and available to description, to language. Szymborska's 'painful body', on the other hand, posits pain on the verge of resistance to linguistic localization, which resistance, according to Elaine Scarry, is essential to what it is.[17] Pain in Szymborska is an enigmatic signifier of sorts, the most elementary sign which evades the norms of language, which is inexpressible. The normalization of pain in Barańczak's translation results from the hidden conviction that body without pain constitutes a norm. What he expresses in his translation of the phrase is in fact his doubt as to the painfulness of the body, the doubt which results from the impossibility of communicating the certainty of pain to others. Having pain and its expression are two distinct experiences, and, while Szymborska ascribes having pain to the whole body, Barańczak's translation in fact doubts it, reduces it to a tale of hearsay. "To have pain," Scarry writes, 'is to have *certainty;* to hear about pain is to have *doubt*'.[18] For Barańczak the very idea of painful body seems to be unwelcome. In his translation he neutralizes Szymborska's eschatological position of the finality of body in pain, and in a way de-falsifies it through an improvement which, as we have seen, need not be an improvement at all.

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[16] W. Szymborska, *Wiersze wybrane*, Kraków 2000, p. 264.
[17] Cf.E. Scarry, *The Body in Pain. The Making and Unmaking of the World*, New York and Oxford 1985, p. 5.
[18] Ibid., p. 13.

Eschatological questions are strongly present in Barańczak's poetry, and his fascination with John Donne and Emily Dickinson, whom he extensively translated, offers finalities as another subject of translatological improvements. In his translation of Dickinson's well known poem *Because I could not stop for Death*, some work of improvement, or enrichment, is done by the language itself:

> Because I could not stop for Death—
> He kindly stopped for me—
> The Carriage held but just Ourselves—
> And Immortality.[19]
>
> Nie mogłam stanąć i czekać na Śmierć –
> Ona sama mnie podwiozła – uprzejma –
> Bryczka mieściła nas dwie –
> I jeszcze – Nieśmiertelność –[20]

What is at stake is the relationship between the Polish words "śmierć" and "nieśmiertelność" on which Barańczak comments:

> The differences between the two languages can sometimes actually help the translator improve certain parts of the poem; improve, to be sure, only when the change underscores the poem's intrinsic stylistic qualities. The simple fact, for instance, that the Polish words *Śmierć* and Nieśmiertelność share etymology while their original counterparts, 'Death' and 'Immortality', do not (not within the English vocabulary, that is), enriches the Polish version without betraying the poet's presumed semantic strategy. The translator, however, can hardly be credited for this change: it has been forced upon him by the language itself (Nieśmiertelność is the only exact equivalent of 'Immortality).[21]

The enrichment in this case seems to consist in the etymological link between life and death, which connection is disabled by the original. Death and it opposite are verbally present in the translation, which seems

[19] All quotations from Emily Dickinson's poems come from: *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, Boston 1960.

[20] S. Barańczak, *Emily Dickinson's "Because I could not stop for Death" — Remarks of a Polish Translator*, "The Emily Dickinson Journal" 1997, vol. 6, no. 2, p. 120–126, p. 122.

[21] Ibid., p. 124.

to be strengthening Dickinson's precision of expression (which fascinates Barańczak, and which fascination he expresses elsewhere) and aptness of the words and phrases she selects, thus only adding to the poet's "presumed semantic strategy".

The translation of another fragment of the poem exemplifies its conscious enrichment by the translator:

> We paused before a House that seemed
> A Swelling of the Ground—
> The Roof was scarcely visible—
> The Cornice—in the Ground—
>
> Stanęłyśmy przed Domem – niskim
> Jak Gruntu Wybrzuszenie –
> Dach ledwie był widoczny –
> Gzymsy wrośnięte w Ziemię –[22]

The word which Barańczak chooses as the source of improvement is 'Swelling', whose sense he slightly broadens rendering it as 'Wybrzuszenie'. Thanks to this choice, he writes,

> a new dimension is added to the entire poem's imagery while staying squarely within the connotations that corroborate rather than complicate or contradict the poem's intrinsic meaning: one of the synonymous Polish equivalents of "a Swelling" is wybrzuszenie, a noun whose etymological source is brzuch, "the belly" (wybrzuszenie means, then, more precisely, "a swelling similar in shape to a bulging belly"). The image of a pregnant grave is, after all, in perfect accord with the final vision of Eternity—paradoxically, both the extreme of Death and its ultimate destination.[23]

What is potentially added to the possible interpretation of the poem is the pregnancy of the grave which, in turn, makes the grave a domestic space which promises an earthly kind of resurrection rather than a movement towards eternity which Dickinson evokes in the last stanza of the poem:

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[22] Ibid., p. 121.
[23] Ibid., p. 126.

Since then—'tis Centuries—and yet
Feels shorter than the Day
I first surmised the Horses Heads
Were toward Eternity—

The enrichment turns out to be literally misleading as it changes the direction of the poem's travel from endlessness to temporality, into a travel from eternity to a pregnant grave which promises a rebirth. The interpretative possibility added to the translation of the poem normalizes eternity and stops Dickinson's journey, exactly 'for death' in which the traveller finds a hope for life. The change seems to be slight, almost purely verbal, but it in fact makes the enrichment of the poem, say, incorrigible.

In another poem by Dickinson (*The Soul selects her own Society*) whose translation he also presents and simultaneously explains, Barańczak reaches to things which are not there, in this case to God. In the first stanza of the poem it is the soul which makes choices and which remains secluded without any attributes ascribed to it:

The Soul selects her own Society—
Then—shuts the door—
To her divine Majority—
Present no more—

In Barańczak's version of this stanza the soul is itself like God:

Dusza dobiera sobie Towarzystwo –
I – zatrzaskuje Drzwi –
Jak Bóg – ma w sobie prawie Wszystko –
A z Reszty sobie drwi –[24]

The last two lines, in literal translation, read:

Like God—it has within itself almost Everything—
And the Rest it mocks—

As can be clearly seen, Barańczak constructs the soul as Godlike, additionally endowing it with the spirit of mockery. Dickinson's withdrawal from the

[24] S. Barańczak, *Ocalone w tłumaczeniu. Szkice o warsztacie tłumacza poezji z dołączeniem małej antologii przekładów*, Poznań 1994, p. 55.

world, about which Barańczak informs the reader in his explanation, is not complete. The soul mocks the 'Rest' from some superior, divine position rather than remaining "Present no more" behind the closed door. What is thus also attributed to the soul is pride, to which Barańczak reaches explaining his rendition of the word "unmoved" in the beginning of the next stanza ("Unmoved—she notes the Chariots—pausing—") as "does not care" (*nie dba*). The features of Dickinson's style, he writes,

> are particularly well noticeable in [this] poem, in which the ascetic language and rough speech constitute, as it were in themselves, an illustration of what is explicitly expressed: withdrawal from the world behind the "shut door" of one's own "I" which proudly "does not care" ... about the world, as it is the world for itself.[25]

Dickinson's secluded soul becomes endowed with clearly anthropomorphic features thus evading Laplanche's enigmatic signifier which, again, loses its indeterminacy through repression and gains a degree of normality which is the already mentioned task of poetic endeavour. In a sense Barańczak's improved translations seem to be reflecting his poetic attempts at de-falsification of language by way of the already mentioned demystification of enigmatic signifiers, which, in the case of his immigrant life in America, constitute a significant part of the milieu of his poetic experience.

Perhaps what is at stake is also the fear of another language, of its strangeness in the ears, and the eyes, of an Eastern European in America, the fear whose repression triggers domestication, a desire to make things closer and warmer? In a short essay about an E.E., an Eastern European, compared to E.T., a creature from another planet, Barańczak claims that in the case of E.E. the most important aspect of language is that it is a foreign language. "A visitor or an immigrant", he writes,

> is naturally sensitive to the semantic traps which lie in wait. The necessity of everyday communication in not-one's-own language creates an unpleasant consciousness of constant threat: at any occasion there is a risk that he will not be understood. [...] Sometimes the blame can be put not on the imperfect command of language, but rather un the unpredictability built into the two language systems. Such cases force him to think with fear about

[25] Ibid., p. 56.

> all the potential and real misunderstandings which take place or may take place upon broader fields of communication – not between individuals, but between nations, cultures, or political camps.[26]

The declared normalizing function of poetry may well have its roots in fear which governs, or controls, the mood of the above quotation. One more source of fear for Barańczak is the possibility of losing control. The worst of possibilities is that "an immigrant irrevocably loses the natural control over the first language, and simultaneously does not manage to gain full control over the second one".[27]

To normalize is to gain control, also to censor and ward off the abnormal. And yet, there will always remain some of the incomprehensible clown-world against which Barańczak's pen is directed, and which it, paradoxically, constantly reproduces through the alleged improvements and enrichments of texts, through translations which avoid and evade finality. As we have seen, the nostalgia for normalization, for domestication and return to a determinacy of all language and expression does speak through his writings. In practice it remains, as it were, nostalgically and, perhaps inevitably, unfulfilled.

The clown figure is always an ambivalent one. The figure of the normalizer can always turn out to be a clownish figure of the functionary of order which Michel Foucault calls the "Ubu-esque" and finds to be inevitably present in the dictatorial discourses which wish and desire to control the norm through various projections of the abnormal: "Ubu-esque terror, grotesque sovereignty, or, in starker terms, the maximization of effects of power on the basis of the disqualification of the one who produces them".[28] The Ubu-esque, derived by Foucault from the title of Alfred Jarry's well known play *Ubu the King*, reflects the potential grotesqueness of the sites or the functionaries of normalizing power which can be embodied in as clownish a figure as Barańczak's clown-world he wants to normalize and bring back, as we have seen earlier, to what he calls "human normality". For Barańczak, the abnormal world surrounding the poet may be a construct of

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[26] S. Barańczak, *Tablica z Macondo. Osiemnaście prób wytłumaczenia, po co i dlaczego się pisze*, London 1990, p. 195–196.

[27] Ibid., p. 202.

[28] M. Foucault, *Abnormal. Lectures at the College de France 1974–1975*, transl. G. Burchell, London and New York 2003, p. 12.

various discourses of power, yet the figure of the wielders of power is not of main interest to him.

In Foucault, the functionaries of state, like Barańczak's poets, normalize the world. They are, in a way, experts of normalcy who can always be associated with buffoonery: "Buffoonery and the function of expert are one and the same: it is as a functionary that the expert is really a clown"[29]. In the eyes of Barańczak's poet it is the norms created by the state functionaries, especially in the case of totalitarian states, which are in fact abnormal, and it is through the abnormality of the politically constructed reality that the alternative normality of the poetic world is perceived. The poet normalizes, or re-normalizes, the abnormal norm. However, this newly projected kind of normality, though dictated by an ideological and political perspective or position, loses the sight of itself being ideological. In other words, it seems to be the possibility of conflating the figure of the normalizing poet and the figure of the normalizing functionary which blinds Barańczak to the potentially Ubu-esque character of the figure of the poet which emerges from his theorization. The Ubu-esqueness of the state functionaries, on the other hand, is essentially neutralized by way of their indirect treatment. It is achieved metonymically, through the rendition of the effects of their normalizing efforts as abnormal. For example, in his book of essays devoted to kitsch and graphomania in the literature of the communist Poland, Barańczak claims that totalitarian states encourage both kinds of writing (kitsch and graphomania) in order to avoid the threat of doubts and questions raised by "ambitious literature".[30] Kitsch and graphomania constitute something which he calls the 'state-constructing trash' (*państwotwórcza szmira*), thus positing "bad" literature not only as an effect of the cultural politics of the state, but also as its constitutive element. The Ubu-esque character of that literature is thus a fragment of a greater Ubu-esque of the totalitarian state whose abnormality is reflected in a lot of the literature produced in People's Poland. Interestingly, Barańczak admits that there was a lot of kitsch and graphomania in the Republic of Poland before the Second World War, but that constituted, as he puts it, the "necessary cost of the freedom of literary expression.[31] Kitsch and graphomania are in fact indispensable effects of what Barańczak sees as

[29] Ibid., p. 36.

[30] S. Barańczak, *Książki najgorsze i parę innych ekscesów krytycznoliterackich*, Poznań, 1990, p. 12.

[31] Ibid., p. 11.

"normally developing literature" and in the case of the pre-war Poland have "something idyllic about them" because the production of crap texts was at that time 'spontaneous', and not dictated by the demands and requirements of the communist "party bosses dealing with literature".[32] The literature of the communist system thus develops abnormally, and due to that fact its kitsch is worse than the kitsch of the previous Poland at which Barańczak nostalgically looks as if it itself functioned without any ideological and political constraints. One more aspect which made the pre-war Polish kitsch more normal than the kitsch produced under the communist rule is explained by the simple fact that it met the demands of the market and of the Polish readership of that time; it "fulfilled the tasks of entertainment" (spełniała zadania rozrywkowe) and not the "ideological ones".[33]

As in the case of the abnormal clown-world which, as we have seen, was to be normalized by poetry, the abnormally developing literature also has to be somehow improved and corrected, though this time not by a poet, but by a literary critic whose role Barańczak takes up in the book. The task of the literary critic is not only to return the abnormally developing literature to the proper furrows, but also to save its sense and existence. This task is a highly serious one, because it consists in 'stigmatizing the phenomena which threaten the very existence and sense of literature'[34]. What is thus posited is a vision of a state without ideology in which literature freely flourishes in the sphere of pure aesthetics whose products are eagerly purchased by the free market. It is only temporarily that Barańczak's critic has to struggle against the abnormal and Ubu-esque "graphomania with the seal of the state" (*grafomania z państwową pieczątką*)[35] in order that normal literature eventually returns along with its now freer, and thus normal, kitsch.

What Barańczak seems to be implicitly implying is that there exist two kinds of clown-world; a normal clown-world and an abnormal clown-world. However, given that the very idea of the clown-world verges on abnormality, the classification gets a little more convoluted since what the poet/critic faces is either a normal abnormality or an abnormal abnormality, the latter being read as a politically and ideologically imposed one. Both have to

[32] Ibid., p. 11.
[33] Ibid., p. 11.
[34] Ibid., p. 15.
[35] Ibid., p. 12.

be somehow normalized. The normalization of the normal abnormality constitutes, as we have seen earlier, the task of the poet. The normalization of the abnormal abnormality is the task of the critic who, in fact, acts not so much as its improver as its stigmatizer who perceives what he or she stigmatizes as a result of political or ideological repression. One important factor which is necessary for that normality is the liberty of expression which, simultaneously, is associated with the freedom of the market which, in Barańczak, seems to guarantee the spontaneity of literary creation, be that that of kitsch, or that of ambitious and authentic literature. The claim that something is normal or abnormal is in itself a value judgement, while Barańczak seems to be positing normality as a value which stands beyond any ideology.

"Value judgements", as Terry Eagleton writes in his *Literary Theory*, "themselves have a close relation to social ideologies. They refer in the end not simply to private taste, but to the assumptions by which certain social groups exercise and maintain power over others".[36] Positing norm outside ideology, and simultaneously positing capitalist market as a space in which this norm develops, Barańczak creates an idealized sphere of freedom and innocence, a space in which unconstrained Literature may enjoy its purely aesthetic existence. Yet literature and poetry are not innocent domains of purely artistic activity. They seem to be something which Eagleton calls an "alternative ideology": "Literature has become a whole alternative ideology, and the 'imagination' itself [...], becomes a political force. Its task is to transform society in the name of those energies and values which art embodies".[37] This ideological function of literature lurks in Barańczak's normative nostalgia, regardless of the more or less explicit statements which attempt to somehow de-ideologize and depoliticize the very idea of the norm.

One obvious way of hiding politicization is aesthetization, and Barńczak's penchant for nonsense literature, limericks, clerihews and palindromes shows that a joyful escape to the spheres in which the basic communicative function of language is, at least, suspended. Following this vein, he published a book of clerihews titled *Biografioły*,[38] a book of

[36] T. Eagleton, *Literary Theory. An Introduction*, Oxford 1983, p. 15.

[37] Ibid., p. 17.

[38] S. Barańczak, *Biografioły,* Poznań 1991.

nonsense poems on geographical places[39], a book of equally nonsense verses about animals[40], and a book of poetic-satirical games titled *Pegaz zdębiał*.[41] These excursions into nonsense cannot be easily explained in the context of the idea of the normalization of the clown-world because in this case, as it seems, it is the clown to whom Barańczak offers the liberty to express the nonsense of the world. Once nonsense becomes fully nonsensical, poetic expression gets deprived of the possibility of having any clear-cut references to social or political realities, and begins to function in the sphere of perhaps normal, but still quite abstractly distant domain of art for art's sake. However, Barańczak's tendency to normalize does not cease to function even in this context.

Let us take, for instance, his translation of the title of Hilaire Belloc's short poem titled *Henry King, Who chewed bits of string and was early cut off in dreadful agonies*. Though clearly an example of nonsense verse, the poem, given Belloc's well-known aversion to the politics of Henry VIII, may well allude to the figure of the monarch and smell of the figure's Ubu-esqueness. Barańczak translates the title into *Historia Henia Żurka, który żuł kawałki sznurka i wskutek tego wyzionął ducha w młodym wieku oraz w straszliwych męczarniach*, choosing for the proper name of the protagonist of the poem a noun which refers to a kind of Polish soup (*żurek*). What he thus achieves is the linguistic deprivation of the reference of the proper name of Henry King to a political institution, even though the Polish name 'Król' (*King*) is a fairly popular family name in Poland. Interestingly, the fascination with nonsense literature comes to Barańczak in the 1990s, after the absolute rule of the communist kitsch and graphomania which had conquered Poland after the Second World War. Now the time is ripe, as it seems, for the clown-world to speak loud, to expose itself in the ludic enjoyment which, though nonsensical, offers an alternative to the former world, an alternative which, in the light of the idea of the poetic normalization of the world, seems to be at least striking. Unless, of course, the fascination with nonsense is a result of the already mentioned blindness to the inevitable ideological impacts of literature whose freedom and liberty from the impositions of the political regimes of some sort is inevitably illusory. The epiphany of freedom may always easily become transformed into the programmatic

[39] S. Barańczak, *Gegrafioły*, Warszawa 1998.

[40] S. Barańczak, *Zwierzęca zajadłość. Z zapisków zniechęconego zoologa*, Poznań 1991.

[41] S. Barańczak, *Pegaz zdębiał*, London 1995.

rhetoric of conquest, which the ambivalence of modernist attitudes to the new potentials of literary creation have sufficiently revealed.[42]

Now, in 2021, when I am writing this text, more than thirty years after the abolition of the communist system in Poland, kitsch and graphomania still flourish, and quite a lot of it carries seals of various ideological and political powers. Moreover, the control over the published work, though not fully official, has become part and parcel of various self-control gestures on the part of the ones who publish. The idea of the norm, regardless of the liberation of the means of expression, still remains a highly questionable issue. The dream of living in a normal world, be it that of everyday life, or that of the life of poetry, with norm understood only as an escape from some repressive situation or other, translates abnormality into a convenient milieu against which, it seems, one can struggle — though without offering any actual alternative.

Agnieszka Pantuchowicz

Ulepszanie oryginału. Świat klaunów Stanisława Barańczaka

Artykuł omawia koncepcję Stanisława Barańczaka dotyczącą możliwości poprawiania oryginału w przekładzie jako istotnego aspektu jego programu poetyckiego zarówno przed zmianą ustroju w Polsce w 1989 roku, jak i po niej. Ten aspekt jego poetyki wiąże się z częstymi odwołaniami do normalizacji jako sposobu wyjścia z opresyjnego reżimu idiotycznej błazenady i chaosu otaczającej rzeczywistości, bez względu na jej rzeczywiste polityczne czy społeczne znaczenia. Stąd ambiwalencja w Barańczakowej wizji normalności, która paradoksalnie może być postrzegana albo jako negatywna, albo - litotycznie - jako nie-negatywna.

Keywords: Stanisław Barańczak, translation, normalization, improvement, clown-world

Słowa klucze: Stanisław Barańczak, przekład, normalizacja, ulepszenie, błazenada

[42] Cf.R. Griffin, *Modernism and Facsim. The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler*, Basingstoke, p. 61–64.