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Cultural and Linguistic Challenges of Poetry Translation. Analysis of the English Translations of *Dwoje Ludzieńków* by Bolesław Leśmian

Abstract: The main aim of the present article is to demonstrate linguistic and cultural differences, based on a comparison of Bolesław Leśmian's poem *Dwoje ludzieńków*, with its English translations by Sandra Celt and Marian Polak-Chlabicz. The choice of poems was dictated by several criteria i.a. whether a given text depicts image of God and presents Leśmian's philosophy in the most visible way. In the theoretical part, James Holmes' strategies of poetry translation (mimetic, analogical, organic, deviant/extraneous) are presented and serve as a foundation for the practical part. Furthermore, Leśmian's literary style and the reception of his poetry in the context of translation may be found in the article. Translation analysis, which constitutes the practical part, encompasses several comparative surfaces, i.e. rhythm, stylistic devices, content, as well as selected cultural aspects. Moreover, the study demonstrates the linguistic difficulties which the translators had to face during the translation process. The translation strategies applied by Celt and Polak-Chlabicz present their influence on the final translation results as well as its reception in the target culture.

Keywords: Polish literature, Bolesław Leśmian, 20th Century, poetry.

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Introduction

Poetry has been written and translated since ancient times and till this day it may delight, astound and impress its readers. Nevertheless, there are poems which translation may be particularly difficult or even untranslatable and due to this, their authors remain unknown. Bolesław Leśmian and his poetry may serve as the best example. His works are mysterious, metaphysical and abound in diverse, original literary devices. In his texts, one may get the impression that the Polish language is magical, full of unusual features, thanks to which a skillful poet may conjure up an apparently non-existing word or world.

The author of the article attempts to verify the methods by which translators (Sandra Celt and Marian Polak-Chlabicz) transposed the original into the target language. Furthermore, cultural and linguistic differences may prevent faithful translations of such demanding texts as Leśmian's. The analysis of the translation has been made using the author's own methods and translation strategies by James Holmes.

I. Translatory Analysis

Linguistic and translation analyses represent indispensable tools necessary to gain a better insight into not only the structure and content of a poem but also the poet's literary style. Investigation of a text is rigidly connected with searching for both linguistic and cultural meaning of some terms, which are inscribed in a particular context. Translation analysis may serve as an invaluable source of knowledge, which may capture dilemmas and reasons for some translation choices. Linguistic analysis is of great importance for translators, as language plays a vital role in conveying the same message as the original. That is why translators should be aware of differences between diverse language systems and structures. Josep Roca-Pons¹ stresses the fact that

“a good translation consists of expressing, according to the requirements and use of a second language, what has been uttered or written in a source language”.

¹ J. Roca-Pons, *El lenguaje*, Barcelona 1982, pp. 404–405.

Snell-Hornby² was convinced that both linguistic and text analysis ought to precede translation if the text is perceived as “a complex and multidimensional structure which is more than just the sum of its parts”.

Moreover, even a small change may contribute to altering the message of the whole text. The linguist-translator should pay attention not only to syntax, which responds to structure, but also to lexis as the position of the given word may change the original meaning and author's initial intention. As far as lexical elements are concerned, translators should be conscious about semantic relations between the words in different languages. As Inchaurrealde and Vázquez³ state:

What matters are not the words or sentences to construct that text, but the translator's interpretation of that text and the foundations for that interpretation. It becomes obvious that a text hardly ever bears all the keys needed to be interpreted, but we add clues to its interpretation based on our knowledge.

Inasmuch as the process of translation analysis is frequently conducted, the theory concerning this matter in the case of poetry is hard to find. This phenomenon seems easily explainable. Until recently, the results of the translation process have been the main point of interest on the part of researchers. Analysis and investigation of poetry translation constitute a separate theme in terms of both translation studies and linguistics.

However, there is another explanation. Every poem may be called unique as it tells its own story and has its own structure. Furthermore, this genre often abounds in diverse linguistic devices characteristic for the given age; nonetheless, it is not the rule. The translation analysis represented in the present article is based on several pieces of research, which, however, represents an individual approach to Leśmian's original work *Dwoje ludzi*.

The author begins the analysis with an accurate study of the source text – linguistic analysis of the title and interpretation of the content. Undoubtedly, such measures require reaching for different sources which, e.g., clarify the presumed etymology of neologisms included in the title and analyze the text

² M. Snell-Hornby, *Estudios de traducción*, [tr. Ana Sofia Ramírez], Salamanca 1998, p. 86.

³ C. Inchaurrealde Carlos, I. Vázquez, *Una introducción cognitiva al lenguaje y la lingüística*, Barcelona 1998, p. 183.

usually in terms of Leśmian's poetical intention or his philosophies. As far as the two English translations are concerned: attention is given to rendering the titles which tell us a lot about the interpretation of the poem by means of the language. The titles aim to draw the reader's attention and reveal the content. Moreover, the titles may attract and appeal to the reader or discourage them from examining the concrete poem.

After the first step has been achieved, the most crucial and challenging part follows. At this stage, numerous factors are considered. In the case of Leśmian's works, particular attention ought to be paid to music⁴ which plays the main role in the text and is rigidly connected with rhythm, rhyme patterns, length of lines, and number of syllables. These elements decide whether iambic meter or couplet prevail throughout the text. It is frequently underlined that for Leśmian, melody, rhythm, and rhyme ought to have resembled ballads and folk songs. More importantly, they created the atmosphere of the plot and became the most recognized as well as inimitable elements in Leśmian's works.

Wieczorkiewicz⁵, before studying various translations, distinguished three different aspects of translation problems in Leśmian's texts. The researcher rhythm first, as the most essential mode in the poem. That is why a person analyzing translations should take a closer look at their musical aspect. For instance, Barańczak⁶, while analyzing the English translations, accused Celt of trivial and unfortunate rhymes as well as tautological repetitions which were applied only because of an attempt to preserve the original meter. Moreover, complicated syntax, lexis, semantics, and versification found in Leśmian's poetry loses the translators when it comes to the language usage due to these challenges.

Barańczak⁷ also pays special attention to the impact the translation has on the target culture. One cannot forget that, thanks to the translation, not only the image of a poet but also the meaning of the whole poetry into a foreign culture is transmitted. The translation determines the success and reception of the

4 H. Dastjerdi, H. Vahid, Z. Jannesaari, *Translation of Poetry: Towards a Practical Model for Translation Analysis and Assessment of Poetic Discourse*, "Journal of Language and Translation" 2008, no. 9–1, p. 8.

5 A. Wieczorkiewicz, *W obcej Leśmianii*, Poznań 2019.

6 S. Barańczak, *Ocalone w tłumaczeniu: szkice o warsztacie tłumacza poezji z dodatkiem Małej antologii przekładów-problemów*, Kraków 2004, p. 147.

7 Ibid., p. 148.

original text. In the case of Leśmian's poems, the process of translation seems unfeasible. According to Barańczak⁸, translators should make the readers aware of Leśmian's genius and craftsmanship. This poetry is not all about finding perfect equivalents but "the equivalent of its artistic value"⁹.

There are various tools and methods of translation analysis; however, the ones applied later on, have the intention of emphasizing the uniqueness of Leśmian's works as well as challenges faced by translators. That is why the main stress is put on the musical aspect of the texts, without forgetting the linguistic mode [literary devices, especially neologisms] and their message. The comparison of the source text with the target ones is not conducted line by line. Only the most interesting features from the viewpoint of translatory analysis are described and studied. The research aims to find the right balance between preserving the rhythm and conveying the meaning. Furthermore, translators-to-be may find the analysis informative, as the concrete strategies from the linguistic point of view are presented.

II. Strategies of Poetry Translation by James Holmes

The difficulty inscribed in poetry translation has forced many researchers, e.g., Jones, Newmark, and Venuti, to develop methods with the aim of achieving the most successful target text possible. One should remember that the quality of translation may be assessed only by means of analyzing the accuracy of the source text compared with the target one. Aware of this fact, James Holmes¹⁰ has also added his own comments on this matter and distinguished four different verse translation strategies:

1. Mimetic: retention of the original form, to which style, rhythm and flow belong, and dismissing other elements. "Form" according to Holmes¹¹ should be understood in the traditional sense, which does not imply any deep or surface structures.
2. Analogical: the culturally corresponding form is used in the TT. Translators should pay particular attention to the poem's function within the target poetic tradition.

⁸ Ibid., p. 149.

⁹ Ibid., p. 149.

¹⁰ J. Holmes, [ed.] *The Nature of Translation: The Essays on the Theories and Practice of Literary Translation*, The Hague and Paris 1970, pp. 94–99.

¹¹ P. Newmark, *A Textbook of Translation*. New York 1988, p. 31.

3. Organic: “the semantic material takes on its own unique poetic shape as the translation develops”. Form and content become inseparable elements of the poem.

4. Deviant/extraneous: the adapted form is not implicit in the form or the content of the ST. The translators render the poem freely, which may be even called an adaptation¹².

Holmes¹³ also defined the role of the translator, who should resemble a gifted poet or a critic. Due to a specific poem’s nature, which entails a wide range of artistic as well as linguistic traits, the translator ought to “be able to resolve the above-mentioned issues related to confrontation of norms and conventions across linguistic and cultural barriers¹⁴”.

Holmes’s approach to translation may become useful in practice and, thanks to his strategies, particular features of the target text may be found.

III. Leśmian’s Poetry and His Attitude to God

It is an impossible task to summarize Leśmian’s language and literary style in a sentence; however, as Jacek Trznadel proved one may distinguish characteristic features of the poet’s works. Leśmian is perceived a poet as a “bard” whose indispensable tools are versification, rhythm, and musicality. Their role comes down to perpetuating the poetry in the cultural awareness, revival of folklore, and simplifying communication¹⁵. Leśmian was a fully aware of his both stylistic and linguistic efforts poet, who enjoyed crossing barriers and norms. His poems often resembled songs or folk ballads thanks to rhymes, rhythm, and refrains which seemed for Leśmian a natural and effortless poetic procedure. Moreover, he often reached for dialectal terms, archaisms which served as an inspiration for his famous neologisms. Leśmian’s poems abounded in vivid and picturesque descriptions of nature which could be only gained by introducing unusual metaphors.

Edward Balcerzan¹⁶ calls Leśmian “a poet with no masters, a master with no followers”. Other remarkable translators such as Ryszard Krynicki, Czesław Miłosz,

¹² P. Newmark, *A Textbook of Translation*. New York 1988, pp. 45–47.

¹³ J. Holmes, *Translated! Papers on literary translation studies*, Amsterdam 1988, p. 11.

¹⁴ J. Veckrācis, *Linguistic and Translatological Aspects of an Integrated Model for Poetry Translation: Joseph Brodsky’s Texts in Russian, English and Latvian*, Ventspils 2017, p. 33.

¹⁵ J. Trznadel, *Twórczość Leśmiana: próba przekroju*, Warszawa 1964, p. 223.

¹⁶ E. Balcerzan, *Pełno rozwiśleń i udniesień. O Srebrniu Bolesława Leśmiana*, „Poezja” 1967, no. 12, pp. 55–65.

and Mieczysław Jastrun found the poetry of Leśmian untranslatable, which was one of the reasons why his works have not been recognised all over the world¹⁷. One could add to this list another well-known poet and translator, Stanisław Barańczak, whose opinion on the above-mentioned issue was as follows:

Leśmian is the translator's nightmare. If anyone looked for conclusive and overwhelming proof for the thesis of the untranslatability of poetry – or at least the untranslatability of certain poems into some languages, I would give, *contre coeur*, an example of Leśmian, especially Leśmian translated into English. It is a well-known fact that among the Polish poets of his time and Polish poets in general, the author of *Łąka* exceeded his grandest expectations in making idiosyncratic use of the specific system properties of the Polish language, and precisely in these spheres of language [I mean here especially word-formation], in which the English language has incomparably less possibilities.

One may find an abundance of mentions of God or apostrophes directed to him in Leśmian's poems. This fact did not escape researchers' interest who mainly noted disappointment, distance, and longing on the part of the persona in his poems¹⁸. Łopuszański, the biographer, often points out that Leśmian was well acquainted with the Bible, which explains numerous biblical motifs in his texts, for instance, in the poem *Eljasz*. It would be advisable to interpret the works of the Polish writer in terms of respective lines found in the Bible as Szymon Babuchowski, the author of the article *Poszukiwacz ukrytego Boga*, suggests¹⁹.

Every reader of Leśmian's poems should know that the religious and Christian matters raised therein have not only an intellectual and philosophical nature – they represent emotionality of the persona which throws questions into the void²⁰. Leśmian constantly attempts to verify the ontological existence of God, which usually ends in the feeling of hopelessness.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that Leśmian initiates a dialogue with the creator throughout his literary works. He does not praise God, on the contrary, he

¹⁷ A. Wieczorkiewicz, *Obce wcielenia Dusiołka. Leśmianowskie „Cudotwory słowotwórcze” w przekładach anglojęzycznych*, „Przekładaniec” 2016, no. 32.

¹⁸ Sz. Babuchowski, *Poszukiwacz ukrytego Boga*; [Kultura.wiara.pl](https://kultura.wiara.pl/doc/4285646.Poszukiwacz-ukrytego-Boga/2), available at URL: <https://kultura.wiara.pl/doc/4285646.Poszukiwacz-ukrytego-Boga/2> [access on April 19, 2021].

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ J. Trznadel, *Twórczość Leśmiana: próba przekroju*, p. 269.

blames him for suffering and the feeling of loneliness²¹ [Łopuszański 2016: 361]. Nonetheless, God is present in his poetry, and his portrayal may be not only controversial but also worth studying to gain insight into Leśmian's authentic nature.

IV. "Dwoje ludzieńków"

Dwoje ludzieńków comes from the second of Leśmian's published books of poetry, *Łąka*, which combines vitalism with Bergson's philosophy, which has a considerable impact on depicting God²². Sandauer²³ even claimed that Leśmian's ideology, admittedly, refers to the theses of a French philosopher; however, it may indicate the advent of existentialism. The persona in his poems acknowledges God as the creator of the world, which is, however, weak and imperfect. The dialogues of the main characters with God could be called ambiguous. Interpreters still struggle with revealing the message of Leśmian's works. The philosophical factor of his poetry makes the task even more challenging and demanding.

Before the whole text is examined, one should consider the title, which can play numerous roles regarding poems, including their interpretation as well as their impact on readers. *Dwoje ludzieńków* serves as an example of a title which may surprise the recipient with its unusual combination of words, in this case, one should particularly focus on the second constituent of the title. The origin of "ludzieńki" is not known, according to Papierkowski²⁴ "ludziany" meant "ludzki" and belonged to Polish dialectal forms at the beginning of the 20th century. Presumably, Leśmian borrowed the formative from a word inherited from one of the dialects and coined a new term which refers to folk tales. "Ludzieńki" is an archaic diminutive form, which presents Leśmian's relaxed and caring attitude to the characters of his poem. Moreover, the title suggests its folk character, as Szczerbowski²⁵ proved that the poet referred to a folk ballad which also mentioned "ludzieńków" however, Leśmian modified the content. The title reveals the situation of "ludzieńki", who lead an unhappy life and struggle with

²¹ P. Łopuszański, *Bolesław Leśmian: marzyciel nad przepaścią*, Warszawa 2006, p. 361.

²² Ibid., p. 282.

²³ A. Sandauer, *Poezja twórczych potęg natury*, [in:] *Studia o Leśmianie*, [eds] M. Głowiński, J. Sławiński, Warszawa 1971, p. 7.

²⁴ S. Papierkowski, *Bolesław Leśmian. Studium językowe*, Lublin 1964, p. 79.

²⁵ A. Szczerbowski, *Bolesław Leśmian*, Zamość 1938, p. 23.

a number of problems. Furthermore, the reader may already shape their view concerning the main characters, which would comprise of sympathy and mercy rather than contempt²⁶. “Ludzieńki” does not have any names or characteristic traits which make the message of the poem timeless. The Polish numeral “dwoje” informs the reader that the text concerns both men and women, while in the English language such a reference is impossible.

V. English Titles of *Dwoje ludzieńków*

Since the Polish title has been carefully analysed, it may be advisable to examine the titles applied by Celt and Polak-Chlabicz. The former translator decides to render *Dwoje ludzieńków* into *Two Humble Humans*. The phrase is devoid of the initial originality of the source text, which results from not using a neologism. Celt attempts to provide a clear and comprehensible message for the English-speaking audience, thanks to which they discover the content of the poem. The adjective “humble” reflects Leśmian’s conception of the image of characters; nonetheless, the lack of a diminutive suffix as well as a neologism, make Celt’s title poorer in terms of both language and meaning.

When it comes to Polak-Chlabicz’s title suggestion *Two Poor Wights*, the third word, namely “wights” puzzles the reader as it is not used frequently. Cambridge Dictionary provides the following meaning of this literary term: “a ghost, or a dead person who has come back to life²⁷. According to Lexico, “wight” is an archaic form of rendering “a person of a specific kind, especially one regarded as unfortunate²⁸”. This word may be associated with magical forces, nevertheless, only after analysing the original in terms of interpretation, can it be concluded as to whether the phrase conveys the message of the poem. The adjective “poor” seems right for this context, as it conveys several ambiguous meanings, e.g.: “not having enough money to have a comfortable life”, “used when you are showing sorry for someone²⁹”. Both definitions fulfil Leśmian’s expectations concerning the reception of “ludzieńki”. One may wonder which of these two presented titles

²⁶ C. Galilej, *Tytuł w twórczości poetyckiej Bolesława Leśmiana*, „Roczniki Humanistyczne” 2011, vol. 59, p. 122.

²⁷ IS1 Cambridge Dictionary <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/pl/dictionary/english/wight>

²⁸ IS2 Lexico <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/wight>

²⁹ “poor”, Oxford Wordpower, 2008, Oxford University Press, p. 575.

appeals more to the reader, has the same linguistic value as in the case of Leśmian's text and does not distort the meaning and characteristics of "ludzieńki".

VI. Structure and Interpretation of *Dwoje ludzieńków*

The text is an example of a couplet with a regular and parallel structure, which may be associated with a ballad. Each of the verses consists of fourteen syllables, with a regular caesura after the seventh syllable. The distortion of regularity in rhymes follows in the middle of the text, which denotes, in a symbolic manner, the border between life and death. In the poem, female rhymes aa prevail in each couplet. The reader may notice that the tone of *Dwoje ludzieńków* is rather pessimistic, because of a frequent usage of words suggesting some kind of lack. Such a feeling may also be accentuated through distorting the regularity of the poem by graphic couplet division into two separate verses which begin with an anaphor. The former represents life, and the latter symbolizes death.

To solve the above-mentioned dilemmas, one should carefully interpret the message of the source text. The poem wanted to show how vain human efforts may be, but he did not criticize the idea of pursuing to dreams and desires. The text consists of couplets which have a similar structure and number of syllables. Moreover, the poem may be an example of a miniature ballad, in which folk themes appear. It is made evident by the choice of poor, ordinary people for characters as well as symbolic elements, e.g., a sycamore, which often occurs in folk tales. The fate of "ludzieńki" seems tragic, as their every desire is ruined; love ends with a parting, the meeting changes into a disease, love brings death, and the prayer is ineffective as God and the world no longer exist³⁰. The motif of void and nothingness illustrates the punchline of the poem. Nature constitutes the relevant context to the situation of the characters. In addition to this, Leśmian creates a metaphysical atmosphere, thanks to unusual neologisms which build a picture of a folk tale. Polak-Chlabicz³¹, in one of the articles, describes the poem in such a manner: "*Dwoje ludzieńków* [*Two Poor Wights*], who seek their happiness, love, and God regardless of their existential status – often experiencing a kind of "near-nonexistence".

³⁰ J. Trznadel, *Twórczość Leśmiana*, p. 177.

³¹ M. Polak-Chlabicz, *Bolesław Leśmian's Life and His Poetic Oeuvre*. filmolesmianie.pl. available at URL: <http://filmolesmianie.pl/2017/09/25/boleslaw-lesmians-life-and-his-poetic-oeuvre> [access on February 21, 2021], 2017.

VII. Analysis of English Translations of *Dwoje ludzińków* – Rhythm and Rhymes

As was mentioned many times in the present thesis, rhythm and rhymes constitute an integral part of Leśmian's poetry. That is why the musical aspect of *Dwoje ludzińków* is considered the most crucial and is analyzed first.

The structure of Celt's translation (*Two Humble Humans*) resembles the original in terms of structure; however, minor differences may be recognized. Rhymes of the original with a scheme aabb were not conveyed in every couplet in the English version. Only the third, seventh, ninth and tenth verse reflect the original rhyme scheme ("reasons-seasons", "cold-told", "despair-prayer", "arrived-survived"). As a reminder, Leśmian introduced feminine rhymes, and Celt replaced them with masculine ones, which constitutes a conventional method in English literature. Furthermore, she did not manage to apply rhyme throughout the poem in an attempt to retain the original number of syllables, which also did not happen in every verse, as the range of syllables varies between thirteen and fifteen. Consequently, the caesura after the seventh syllable was not preserved in every strophe. Despite these slight modifications, the poem seems regular in its structure and to some extent resembles a folk ballad. When it comes to the general sound reception of the English version, it is much poorer compared with the original. A lack of rhymes in some verses and an irregular number of syllables make *Two Humble Humans* a poem devoid of Leśmian's remarkable sense of rhythm and melody.

Polak-Chlabicz's translation may amaze the reader, because it preserves both rhyme with its scheme aabb and fourteen syllables in every verse as in the original. The caesura was also preserved after the seventh syllable. Like Celt, Polak-Chlabicz replaced feminine rhymes with masculine ones; nonetheless, this difference does not interfere with the melody of the poem, which still seems pleasant and resembles a song with its structure. While reading the translation out loud, one may notice that the sound of some rhymes, for instance "lament-meant" or "grave-saved" is not convincing and successful. Nonetheless, it cannot be denied that the translator presented his craftsmanship while facing the challenge of rendering *Dwoje ludzińków*. Moreover, the word choice in the English version proves the translator's great awareness of rhythm's role in Leśmian's poetry. Polak-Chlabicz avidly reached for soft sounds in words, e.g.: "blissful", "gleeful", "hushed", "deathful" which have a huge impact on the poem's melody. While considering the melody of the translation, the reader may

get the impression that Polak-Chlabicz understood Leśmian's idea that rhythm and sound comes before the word.

VIII. Analysis of the English Translation of *Dwoje ludzi* by Sandra Celt

The differences concerning the word choice and literary devices are visible on the level of language, which may have an impact on the message of the poem. The first verse of the original attracts the reader's attention as it sounds peculiar. Celt starts the poem with the determiner "my", which reveals the persona and then defines their soul as "sobbing with a song of sorrow smothered". When compared with the original, such a combination of words makes the reception of this verse more pessimistic than it really is. "Sob" means "to cry noisily, taking in deep breaths"³² while "smother" is defined as "to prevent something from developing or growing freely"³³. The latter term may be treated as an addition to the original content, which strengthens the fatalistic tone and introduces an unhappy story of "two humble humans". Introducing the phrase "they pined alone" also modifies the message of the Polish version. This idiom conveys a state when someone becomes thin and weak because of sadness or loss³⁴ [IS5]. This cannot be found in the original text.

As far as the translation of neologisms is concerned, the English translation offers common words instead of newly coined ones. Presumably, Celt aimed to make her translation as comprehensible as possible. However, such a method impoverished the original linguistic richness characteristic in Leśmian's poems. In the English translation, "zachorzele" was rendered to "sickened", a word which maybe is not used on a daily basis; however, it is not a neologism either. A similar phenomenon appears in the ninth verse, namely "pokłękli", a colloquial version of "those who knelt down"³⁵ was translated as "knelt down", which does not only convey the same effect of informality but also a rural dialect specific to folk ballads.

Another interesting difference concerns the translator's decision to introduce anaphors ("And there beneath the maple", "Without") which do not

³² IS3 Cambridge Dictionary <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/pl/dictionary/english/sob>

³³ IS4 Cambridge Dictionary <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/pl/dictionary/english/smother>

³⁴ IS5 Merriam-Webster <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pine%20away>

³⁵ S. Papierkowski, *Bolesław Leśmian. Studium językowe*, p. 178

reflect the original idea. It is highly probable that Celt was urged to emphasize these fragments and make the message more expressive and emotional. Furthermore, the pronoun “they” appears four times at the beginning of the line, which obviously results from the differences between Polish and English. In the former, the implied subject is present, whereas in the latter, mentioning the pronoun is necessary.

The translator aims to compensate for the loss with regards to neologisms and eagerly uses poetic words such as “expired” as a synonym to “pomarli”. The phrase “u niedoli swej progą” was also modified in terms of both content and language. “Despair” replaced “niedola”, which could be the best possible choice in order to find a rhyme to “prayer”; nonetheless, the context was changed. “Despair” means “loss of hope³⁶” but “niedola” entails lack of fortune, bad fate³⁷ rather than hopelessness.

Introducing the first-person form in the seventh verse seems quite an interesting measure on the part of the translator because the reader of the source target forgets that a story is told but someone who in the first verse mentions their soul. If adding the phrase “I’m told” by Celt seems successful, the recipient should consider, however, that it does not look natural in the fourteenth line.

IX. Analysis of the English Translation of *Dwoje ludzińków* by Marian Polak-Chlabicz

It has already been mentioned that Polak-Chlabicz successfully reflected the original rhyme scheme and the melody of the poem. When it comes to the linguistic aspect of the target text, attentive recipients may notice some minor differences.

The first line particularly attracts one’s attention, as it seems very smooth and poetic. “The song re-sings in my soul” becomes a perfect example of rendering Leśmian’s creativity and mastery in playing with words. The translation aims to emphasize the fact that the reader deals with a text which, in its form and content, is supposed to resemble a song. Moreover, this fragment reveals the character of a persona which may be considered romantic. The story of “two poor wights” is supposed to be moving.

³⁶ IS6 Merriam-Webster <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/despair>

³⁷ IS7 SJP <https://sjp.pwn.pl/sjp/niedola;2488546.html>

Polak-Chlabicz like Celt gives up using some neologisms. “Zachorzeli” is translated or even explained in a whole line [“They fell as ill as no man had been ever ill before”] with the aim of stressing its meaning. However, in comparison with Celt’s rendering, which did not include the exclamation mark in this sentence, Polak-Chlabicz wanted to stay as close to the original as possible in terms of punctuation. Apparently, Leśmian was concerned with accentuating the miserable fate of the main characters. Also, the verb “poklękli” was not translated in a sophisticated manner, as the phrasal verb “knelt down” may be found in the ninth verse. Polak-Chlabicz also favored words with the suffix “-ful” (in “lustful”, “blissful”, “gleeful”) which, in most cases constitute additions to the original context. Nonetheless, their sound effect creates the illusion that this text is not a poem but a song or ballad. Generally, the translator translated faithfully the source text and applied both comprehensible and poetic linguistic solutions.

X. Cultural-specific Items and the Message of *Dwoje ludzi*

When it comes to details connected with the translation and reception of the poem in the target culture, two important things concerning Celt’s choices should be mentioned. Firstly, Leśmian was fascinated by folk tales; it is even a proven piece of information that *Dwoje ludzi* was inspired by a folk ballad about the life of two people. That is why this poem resembles a song thanks to its melody, rhythm, rhymes, and linguistic diversity.

Unfortunately, despite great efforts, Celt did not manage to agree the musical aspect of the text with its message, which does not mean that this translation is not without linguistic merit. She aimed to compensate for these losses by introducing some fancy or poetic words; nevertheless, it did not suffice to achieve the original effect.

Another cultural-specific aspect regards the meaning of “jawor” (Eng. “sycamore”) in Polish culture. The name of this tree symbolizes the meeting place of two lovers and is mainly associated with an idyll by Franciszek Karpiński *Laura i Filon*. Leśmian reverses the role of sycamore and makes it a symbol of unhappy love and death. One may only guess if Celt knew the text by Karpiński; however, she decided to apply the word “maple” instead of “sycamore”. Both names in English symbolize strength and power (sycamore is a species of maple); that is why they would not change the message of this fragment. This example illustrates how deeply the source text is immersed in Polish culture and an awareness of national literature.

One aspect concerning this poem remains unsolved; namely, whether it falls into the pattern of any contemporary literary trends. Undoubtedly, *Dwoje ludzińków* considers the meaning of life and its uncertainty, which could be easily associated with existentialism. However, the hopelessness and the vision of apocalypse which appear at the end does not deny the idea of seeking for happiness and God. As far as he is considered, the poem seems to declare that God, according to Nietzsche's philosophy, does not exist and remains powerless in the face of people's misery. However, Leśmian's ambiguity concerning the attitude to God is often mysterious and hidden discreetly.

When it comes to the peculiarities in Polak-Chlabicz's translation, a careful reader may find a few discrepancies. The first one was mentioned with respect to Celt's version. It regards "jawor", a tree which for many Poles may be associated with idyllic love; however, Leśmian changes its meaning. Polak-Chlabicz used the phrase "the sycamore tree", which is an example of a faithful translation. The question remains whether the English-speaking reader links this tree with its symbolic significance. Probably not, nevertheless, a footnote would not help a lot. In such a situation, the translator could use a domesticating strategy and find the plant which represents similar traits in English literature as "jawor" in Polish.

Preserving the original message of *Dwoje ludzińków* is another aspect worth considering. In the source text one can read: "Chcieli jeszcze się kochać poza własną mogiłą". The verb "kochać" is ambiguous in the Polish language. It may mean either "love" or "make love". Polak-Chlabicz, in the face of this dilemma, chose the second meaning and added emotional or even controversial value to this line. Obviously, there is no one correct interpretation; however, the verb "love" has a more metaphysical and romantic sense than "make love", which spoils the poem's atmosphere. Apart from that, the former alternative was a safer one.

The example of altering the original concerns the fragment about God, who was no longer present. In Polak-Chlabicz's translation, one may notice the following metaphor: "To pray God for everything, but there was no God in sight". Such an interpretation implies that God could not be seen by "poor wights", which is not tantamount to his non-existence. That is why the idea of recognizing existentialist influences in this poem become even less possible due to this translation. God in the English version could not help the main characters as he was not "in sight".

The last verse also forces us to ponder as the original message has been taken into account. From Leśmian's poem, one knows that the two lovers "held out till the spring [...] To come back to earth, but yon – was no world and was no reason". There is no doubt that the translation seems perfect until the last two words added by the translator. They are ambiguous and introduce incomprehensibility, due to which the message of the whole poem is disrupted. The reader may only guess whether "reason" should be understood as an explanation for the given situation or whether it concerns mind. Such ambiguity should not take place at the end of the text and simultaneously the most important part of it, which evokes concrete emotions.

Conclusions

To conclude, both translations constitute evidence of the great effort put in them by Celt and Polak-Chlabicz. The former translation had some defects in terms of rhythm and rhymes, and consequently it failed to resemble a song. Moreover, Celt made her text simple and comprehensible in terms of language, which means that she avoided introducing neologisms. When it comes to Polak-Chlabicz's translation, preserving both the original number of syllables and rhymes may be appreciated. Even so, the interventions in the message of the original seem inexplicable and unjustified because they violate Leśmian's initial conception and idea, and they fail to convey his beliefs and feelings. As far as translation strategies are considered, both Celt and Polak-Chlabicz applied analogical and organic translation strategies. The former was expressed through adjusting form to the target language and culture and replacing feminine rhymes with masculine ones which belongs to a poetry convention in the English literature. The latter could have been noted throughout the whole translation – retaining form and content were the translators' main concern. The translation analysis proved that the strategies described by Holmes are only general concepts which cannot be applied particularly while studying translations of Leśmian's poetry. Translation methods and techniques constitute an idealistic vision concerning an approach to the transfer of poems. One should remember that every text is original, and it depends on the translator as to which strategy would allow them to gain the desired effect. During the analysis, it has also turned out that some words were probably used accidentally or on purpose in rhymes and preserve a regular number of syllables in each line. The uniqueness of Leśmian's poems may be noted in their metaphysical character. The readers may have the

impression that every single word in this poem was deliberate and in the right place, but, at the same time, natural and unforced.

Thanks to the existence of Leśmian's poems, there is still a chance to master the translator's craft and try to find the most effective way to discover something new about the author and his works. Moreover, Leśmian managed to present the Polish language as an unusual one, by means of which one may create one's own literary style and language on an unprecedented scale.

Finally, it is worth quoting Aniela Korzeniowska's comment on translators' struggles while transposing Leśmian's poems into English: "No matter how hard we try to render Leśmian satisfactorily into English, we shall never "produce exactly the same effect". In this he is untranslatable³⁸".

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