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“THAT HIVE OF SUBTLETY”: RETRANSLATION AS CRITICISM, OR A NEW POLISH *BENITO CERENO*¹

Abstract

The article focuses on my translation of Herman Melville’s novella *Benito Cereno*, published recently in a volume entitled *Nowele i opowiadania* (PIW, 2020), the work of eight translators into Polish. The volume contains new attempts at texts translated forty years earlier by Krystyna Korwin-Mikke; also featured is her own, newly revised translation of Melville’s classic – *Bartleby, the Scrivener*. Finding myself authoring a retranslation for the first time, I became intrigued by the affect accompanying such a ‘belated’ arrival at the text – not within a long, eminent ‘series’ (in Edward Balcerzan’s understanding of the term), but where only one previous, more or less canonical translation exists. Taking as my starting point Balcerzan’s terminology as well as Anna Legeżyńska’s notion of the ‘shared word’, I employ the concept of the translators’ agon, developed from Harold Bloom’s ideas by Kaisa Koskinen and Outi Paloposki (2015). On the basis of several examples from the field of Polish translations, and concentrating on the rhetorics of paratextual material, I briefly examine the positions that a second translator – fated to participate in an agonistic relation – may take with regard to his precursor; my examples here are three renowned practitioners: Michał Kłobukowski, Krystyna Rodowska and Maciej Świerkocki. Because my own experience is bound up with translation practice to a considerably larger degree than with its theoretical aspects, the heart of the article is an analysis of particular strategies in both of the Polish translations of *Benito Cereno*. I focus on issues such as nomenclature, narrative perspective, grammatical gender, as well as conventional and idiosyncratic metaphors. Exploring my own agonistic relation

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with Krystyna Korwin-Mikke, I attempt to determine the extent to which I have managed to avoid getting caught up in the affect produced by the uncomfortable yet inspiring consciousness of the first translator's voice. The article is an extension of the critical gesture which I consider my retranslation, in itself, to be. Emphasizing the differences in our approach, I also try to embrace what is shared, and to acknowledge my indebtedness to the precursor.

Keywords: translation series, retranslation, anxiety of influence, agon, Herman Melville, American literature, Krystyna Korwin-Mikke

1. Retranslation and its environs

Recently I have had the pleasure of participating in a project to retranslate Herman Melville's collected short fiction.² Among other works, the volume contains new Polish renditions of pieces translated forty years earlier by Krystyna Korwin-Mikke. While the basis for that 1980 book was *Piazza Tales*, a collection published in the US in 1856, during Melville's lifetime, the more recent Polish version has no equivalent in the American market. Alongside more extensive, classic stories such as *Bartleby, the Scrivener* or *The Encantadas*, the volume contains texts little known even to the American reader, such as "The Two Temples" or "Jimmy Rose".

My own contribution to the project involved two works: apart from the idiosyncratic story titled "I and My Chimney", previously unavailable in Polish, I translated a longer text, considered part of the strict Melvillian canon, namely *Benito Cereno*. Finding myself authoring a retranslation for the first time, I became intrigued by the affect engendered by such a 'belated' arrival – not part of a long, eminent 'series', as is the case, for instance, with the Polish translations of *Heart of Darkness* or *Alice in Wonderland*, but where only one previous, and thus inevitably canonical translation exists. What made the situation all the more remarkable was the fact that my predecessor, Krystyna Korwin-Mikke, was also to be featured in the volume with her own, newly revised translation of *Bartleby*. Although while preparing the draft of my version of *Benito Cereno* I avoided Korwin-Mikke's translation as much

² The volume in question, entitled *Nowele i opowiadania [Novellas and Short Stories]*, was published by Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy in 2020. The eight translators involved, besides myself, were Tomasz S. Gałązka, Barbara Kopeć-Umiastowska, Krystyna Korwin-Mikke, Adam Lipszyc, Marcin Rychter, Marcin Szuster, Mikołaj Wiśniewski and myself.

as possible, during the various stages of revision I studied it meticulously. Below I will attempt to analyze some of the reflections and emotions which accompanied this process, placing them within the theoretical context of the so-called translation series.

As early as 1967, Polish theorist Edward Balcerzan argued in his essay titled “Poetyka przekładu artystycznego” [The poetics of translation as an art form] that the key aspects of the process are “multiplicity and recurrence”, and that for literary translation the ‘series’ is “a fundamental mode of existence” (1998: 17–18). Thus, even a singular translated text may be regarded as initiating a potential series, i.e. “a virtually infinite sequence, an open-ended progression”. However, we should bear in mind that, for Balcerzan, this openness is also fraught with risk, because a translated text

opens itself up, so to speak, in two directions at once: towards the foreign-language original and towards the rival elements in the series. This ‘opening up’ of the translated text is also where it becomes vulnerable. The original may call into question both the meanings and the poetics of this particular translation. The rival elements in the series may do so as well, even to the point of eliminating it from the literary circuit altogether. (Balcerzan 1998: 18)

Balcerzan went even further in his 2011 book *Tłumaczenie jako “wojna światów”* [Translation as a ‘war of worlds’]. The central metaphor – disturbingly “confrontational”, according to Magda Heydel (2011: 338) – describes the inevitability of conflict within such a series. The most profound differences, or even “semantic chasms”, result from a conflict between “substituted worlds”³, i.e. the various translators’ individual, usually auto-communicative hypotheses, designed to rationalize “the poetic vision of the original”. According to Balcerzan, it is the “constitutions” of such ‘worlds’ that form the essential cause of translation wars (2011: 189–190). Reviewing the book, Heydel posed a legitimate question about the consequences of the ‘war of worlds’ metaphor: do successive translators of the same work really act with an intention to destroy? Is it their goal to irrevocably replace other elements in the series with their own propositions? (2011: 338)

Like Magda Heydel, I would prefer to believe that retranslations arise, at least in part, from a need to join in “a dialogue and creative exchange” (2011: 338), and that one consequence of such disputes is the broadening

³ In Polish, Balcerzan’s term “świat podstawiony” [the substituted / replaced world] is also a play on the commonly used term “świat przedstawiony” [the represented world].

of the original's semantic field. Thus, I believe that, in undertaking a new translation, we construct, element by element, an impossible whole described by Jerzy Jarniewicz in his essay "Syzyf zwycięzca" [Sisyphus the triumphant]: "after all, each translated text constitutes a translation that is merely partial, part of a whole which we will never attain, and it makes no claim to exclusivity" (2018: 146). I thus welcome a range of concepts which present the process of translation as – at least to some extent – collective in nature. And while I do not agree with Robert Stiller's avowal that a given translation "belongs to no one" and that any translator able to assert themselves by means of their own successful work has a "moral right" to it (1977: 334), I can see the appeal of Anna Legeżyńska's notion of the "shared word" ["słowo wspólne"]. What this would entail, in the context of a translation series, are "certain phrases, expressions, even longer fragments (entire sentences, a poem) originating in a previous translation, which are considered particularly apt or which have taken root in the host culture" (1999: 194–195).

If we assume – uncontroversially, I hope, in this day and age – that the essence of translation is multiplicity and variability, and that the elements of a series enter into various intertextual relations⁴, then we may also agree that, very often, a subsequent translation functions as criticism – or, to invoke Balcerzan yet again, as a corrective. Describing both the tasks and the scope of translation criticism, Balcerzan observes that a reviewer may at times move beyond descriptive practices, and, "encouraged by the variable, indefinite and problematic character of the translation process, boldly offer their own versions" (2011: 181–182). Given the issues discussed in the present article, the following passage seems particularly relevant:

Quite simply, the height of such corrective activity is reached when the reviewer of the translation progresses from the paradigmatic axis to the syntagmatic, and offers their own, umpteenth translation of a given fragment, **or even, at times, the entirety** of the analyzed source text. (2011: 184, emphasis mine)

Thus, any complete translation of a text, effectively constituting the next element in the series, could still be regarded as (also) belonging to the realm

⁴ Importantly, the very term 'series' may be defined in a number of ways. For instance, Marta Skwara differentiates, for the purposes of precision, between the translation series, the textualization series, and the reception series (2014: 99–101). In this article I employ the concise definition offered by Agnieszka Adamowicz-Pośpiech, i.e. that a series is "a set of at least two translations of a given literary work" (2013: 21).

of translation criticism. In fact, it may not need to be accompanied by more traditional forms of critical declaration, such as a review, but may replace them. Such was the case, in the Polish context, with Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*. More than half a century after Witold Pospieszala's translation (*W kleszczach lęku*), within less than a year – between August 2015 and June 2016 – two competing Polish versions were published: Jacek Dehnel's *Dokręcanie śruby* and Barbara Kopeć-Umiastowska's *Obrót śruby*. The latter, in particular – published first as part of the 'Jamesian' issue of the journal "Literatura na Świecie" (James 2016) – seems to have appeared instead of a review, or perhaps as its most perfect actualization.

I suspect that, as far as retranslation is concerned, conflict and its attendant tensions are deep-seated. This is the view taken, for instance, by Finnish scholars Kaisa Koskinen and Outi Paloposki, who transplant the 'anxiety of influence' theory onto the field of translation studies. Relations between subsequent translators of the same work are here seen in terms of the agon, or, as Harold Bloom put it with regard to poetry, "the contest for aesthetic supremacy" (1997: xxiv). In Bloom's fully masculinized schema, a "young citizen of poetry, or ephebe" (52) was doomed to contend for his poetic self with his predecessor(s). Left at the later poet's disposal were "six revisionary movements" (10), such as clinamen (misprision / swerve), kenosis (breaking away), or askesis (self-purgation) (14–15).

Because retranslation is, by its very nature, a polemical act, Koskinen and Paloposki maintain that every subsequent translator is always embroiled in an agon with their predecessor, and therefore must assume a certain stance towards him/her (2015: 25–26).⁵ One should not overlook, in this context, the importance of the publishing (i.e. commercial) discourse that accompanies retranslations. The author of the previous rendition, the Finnish scholars assert, is given a depressing role: frequently, s/he is "to be outsmarted or improved on" because his/her language is deemed "'dusty' or 'outdated'". Reviewers are usually enthusiastic in welcoming the new translation and praise it "as more 'fluent', 'accurate', 'faithful' or simply more pleasurable to read" (27). Koskinen and Paloposki even go so far as to say that

the first translator is the 'bad' guy, who is, however, often generously regarded as having tried his best but who was unable to produce anything with lasting

⁵ It is worth pointing out that, while the Finnish scholars' transfer of Bloom's terms onto the field of translation studies is of a rather preliminary character, the gesture itself is highly inspirational and convincingly illustrated with examples.

value. The retranslator, in turn, is the hero: the modern, well-read, balanced and cultured translator who 'finally' gives the readers the unbiased, faultless, faithful rendering of the original. And so everyone lives happily ever after until 50 years later when a new translator enters the scene and the story begins anew. (29)

Nevertheless, as the Finnish scholars argue, the "figure" of the first translator makes his/her presence felt in the subsequent translation and in its reception. The predecessor – be it an actual person, "a mental image" or merely "a textual construction" – inevitably haunts the retranslated text, exerting their influence even (especially?) when the successor does their best to thwart it (25–26). The argument is illustrated with case studies of two classic texts, *The Catcher in the Rye* and *Ulysses*, both rendered into Finnish by the legendary translator, poet and prose writer Pentti Saarikoski, as *Sieppari ruispellossa* (1961) and *Odyseus* (1964), and then retranslated, respectively, by Arto Schroderus (2004) and Leevi Lehto (2012); in the latter case, the title was changed to *Ulysses*. Schroderus's statement concerning the former book is symptomatic: "When I was asked whether I would be interested in translating (...) *The Catcher in the Rye*, my first thought was not Salinger but Saarikoski." (quoted in: Koskinen, Paloposki 2015: 31) Lehto, in turn, admitted that, working on chapter after chapter, he would begin by reviewing his predecessor's version, which he then determinedly "destroy[ed]" (35). Thus, the Finnish scholars claim, Theo Hermans's famous question ought to be phrased differently: "whose voice comes to us when we read a retranslated novel"? (Koskinen and Paloposki 2015: 26, emphasis in the original).

Let us then, in the spirit suggested by Koskinen and Paloposki, consider a few examples from the Polish translation milieu, demonstrating, as I shall argue, the complex affect which could be classified as anxiety of influence in a two-element series. I have selected three retranslations of canonical works, namely *Lolita* as rendered by Michał Kłobukowski, *Du côté de chez Swann* as translated by Krystyna Rodowska (*W stronę Swanna*) and Maciej Świerkocki's version of *Ulysses*. I hasten to add that it is not my ambition to evaluate these translations, even in the most cursory manner. I would not undertake a critique of a text translated from French; moreover, when this article was being prepared, the last of the three translations was still to be published in its entirety.⁶ Rather, what I intend to focus on is the language

⁶ Preliminary versions of the first five chapters of Maciej Świerkocki's translation of *Ulysses* appeared in "Literatura na Świecie" (11–12/2018). Parts of the text were also published serially in the "Odra" monthly (Świerkocki 2020).

used by the translators in various paratexts to describe their relationship – their agon – with their predecessor.

Noteworthy metaphors describing the presence of the predecessor in the new text can be found in Zofia Zaleska's conversation with Michał Kłobukowski, author of several retranslations, for instance of Conrad (*Lord Jim*, 2001), and particularly of Nabokov, e.g. *Lolita* (1997), *Blady ogień* (*Pale Fire*, 1998), and *Nieprawe godło* (*Bend Sinister*, 2006). Interestingly, the new translations of Nabokov's novels appeared soon after the first versions; for instance, only six years elapsed between Robert Stiller's and Michał Kłobukowski's *Lolitas*, while Kłobukowski's collaboration with Stanisław Barańczak on the new Polish *Pale Fire* was published a mere four years after Stiller's version. The polemical nature of the counter-translations is all the more pronounced because Stiller's version has had a varied reception, including some weighty criticism (cf. Dasko 2009). I am less interested here in the accusations of the ever-abrasive Stiller, who claimed that his successor "pored over [the first translation] and altered it one word after another", so as to deny any influence (1997: 6).⁷ Kłobukowski himself had this to say about retranslations, including those of Nabokov:

I didn't like Stiller's translation, but working on *Lolita* wasn't a dream of mine, nor was this my favorite novel by Nabokov (...) Since then, I've retranslated several other books, including *Lord Jim*. A second or third translation is usually commissioned when the text in question is a major one. On the one hand it is a source of undeniable satisfaction, but on the other it is restrictive. From the earliest moments I feel that someone is keeping an eye on me, and even if the book affords me a very personal experience, the conversation with the author is not as private as in the case of less celebrated texts. (Kłobukowski 2015: 75–77)

Thus, the predecessor in the series appears to be an intruder, disrupting a private, perhaps even an intimate arrangement, made possible by the interaction with the original, which to a certain extent embodies the author of the text. The predecessor's presence is restrictive (I shall return to this aspect), since **s/he keeps an eye on** the retranslator's work. What I find interesting here is the limitation of possible moves, originating, I suppose, as much from an unwillingness to repeat the predecessor's ideas as from a compulsion to employ alternative solutions in order to secure the nature

⁷ In my reflections on this two-element translation series I am indebted, among others, to the findings of Agnieszka Adamowicz-Pośpiech (2013: 31–32).

of the new text as an individual, autonomous proposition. In fact, I am reminded of Stiller's own provocative question, prompted by his musings on translating Heine: "Will it never then be possible to translate these poems properly because someone has called dibs on this bit, and someone else on another?" (1977: 333).

A very different agon, and a much more public one, is fought by Krystyna Rodowska, author of the new translation of *Du côté de chez Swann*.⁸ Rodowska's version appeared almost eighty years after Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński's. In conversation with Adam Pluszka for the magazine "Dwutygodnik", the retranslator eagerly admits that her version is polemical in nature: "I had to and I wanted to constantly confront [Boy-Żeleński]" (Rodowska 2018a). This is perhaps also a way of justifying the necessity of the whole enterprise, in response, among others, to Marek Bieńczyk, who – in the spirit of more general skepticism towards retranslation – asked teasingly whether "it was a worthwhile pursuit to cross swords over this or that difference (...), to trudge up the same mountain all over again" (2018: 23).

Although Rodowska is aware that in the circles of the predecessor's "sworn devotees" (2018b: 465) her counter-translation may be seen as sacrilege – "How dare I assault the holy of holies? And sully the reputation of the great translator of Balzac, Stendhal, and Montaigne?" (2018a) – she points to the fact that Boy-Żeleński was also sometimes reprimanded for various translatorial misdeeds. Her afterword to the first volume of the Proustian cycle is for the most part a long list of charges against her predecessor – a fact emphasized, for instance, by Tomasz Swoboda (2020: 388). "To try one's hand at improving his blunders, his distortions, and not to follow his false trails", writes Rodowska, "also built up my own subjectivity as the second translator" (2018b: 467). Boy-Żeleński is here accused, among other things, of "negative redundancy", i.e. exaggerating pejorative expressions (469–470), of "mincing" Proust's endless, flowing sentences (474), as well as of various smaller transgressions which, in Rodowska's opinion, resulted from haste (471).

⁸ The new Polish version of Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, initiated by the Officyna publishing house in 2018, is a multi-translator affair, where each volume is the work of a different translator. Rodowska is also responsible for retitling the entire cycle *W poszukiwaniu utraczonego czasu*, a deceptively minor change with regard to Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński's *W poszukiwaniu straconego czasu* (emphases mine); whereas the earlier title may have been suggestive of time wasted, the new proposition more strongly connotes loss.

Nor does the retranslator refrain from criticizing Boy-Żeleński in her interviews, pointing out – quite aside from “the patina of age”, inevitable after nearly a century – her predecessor’s “linguistic quirks”, his “warping of (...) the characters’ psychological truth” and of the “principal intention”, as well as of “misunderstanding Proust’s distinctive epistemology”. Although Rodowska acknowledges that she did admire “one *trouvaille* of his, or another”, it is difficult to imagine more serious charges against a predecessor. Indeed, despite a playful tone, the retranslator’s discourse is entrenched in moral categories: there is talk of “falsification”, and even of “interpretive sin” (Rodowska 2018a). Thus, the predecessor is no longer – as in the image used by Kłobukowski – an intruder whose presence hampers movement, shattering the intimacy of a conversation with the author. He is now evidently the antagonist, Proust’s “deliberate torturer” (Rodowska 2018b: 475), with whom the retranslator must engage in “combat” (Swoboda 2019: 312).

Yet another tone can be heard in Maciej Świerkocki’s self-commentary with regard to the retranslation of *Ulysses*, a result of seven years’ worth of labors. The previous translation – by his namesake, Maciej Słomczyński – had appeared over half a century earlier, and the new one was planned by the publishing house, Officyna, to coincide with the centenary of the English-language original. It was accompanied by the publication of Świerkocki’s own book, devoted to Joyce’s novel and the process of translation; its title, *Łódź Ulissesa*, references Ulysses’s boat, while at the same time playfully alluding to the Polish city of Łódź, home to both the translator and the publisher (Świerkocki 2020).

The first translation, which came out in 1969, drew comprehensive criticism, e.g. by Grzegorz Sinko (1970), Elżbieta Tabakowska (Muskat-Tabakowska 1972), and Tadeusz Pióro (2016). Although the critics appreciated Słomczyński’s linguistic imagination, he was mostly accused – as Katarzyna Bazarnik, ever kindly disposed towards the translator, reminds us – of “undue literalness, excess of anglicisms and (...) literalizing certain idiomatic expressions” (2004: 218). Even Jolanta Wawrzycka, in her tribute to Słomczyński’s genius, queried his assertions that *Ulysses* is not, in fact, a difficult or even a polysemic text, and conceded that he did, on occasion, work hurriedly, falsifying the original (Wawrzycka 2004: 143). Pióro scolded Słomczyński’s “odd, non-idiomatic Polish”, factual errors resulting from “the tyranny of an unfortunate method” (2016: 333), and occasionally a “slavish” literalness (337); he admitted, however, that Joyce’s work constitutes “a catalogue of impossibilities; points at which

the translator is bound to fail" (340). Similarly, for Bazarnik, who views Słomczyński's solutions as geared towards a methodical marking of foreignness, *Ulysses* is in fact "such a multitude of paths and pathways that they are easily confused, and such a multitude of roadless tracts that even a very experienced translator may lose his way" (Bazarnik 2004: 227).

Although after Słomczyński, fragments of *Ulysses* were rendered into Polish by the retranslator of *Dubliners*, Zbigniew Batko (episodes 1 and 2, in the 'Joycean' issue of "Literatura na Świecie", 7–8/2004), Maciej Świerkocki's is the first complete retranslation of the novel. Although Świerkocki himself agrees that in this case retranslation was necessary (2018: 117), he remarks also that today, after many repeat readings, he values Słomczyński's *Ulysses* much more than he did almost forty years earlier (Świerkocki 2020). He is aware of the "odium of eccentricity" that hangs over the novel and he has apparently made attempts to "diminish its artificiality somewhat"; his own proposition is designed to be "an easier read" (Świerkocki 2017). His manner of describing the lot of the retranslator is at times similar to Kłobukowski's: "[a]part from being bound, to a certain extent, by the author, we are restricted by the previous translation" (Świerkocki 2019b). It may also happen that the predecessor will "lead us astray or impose erroneous interpretations". S/he is then, I believe, not merely an intruder, as noted by Kłobukowski, but rather an intruder with a devious agenda, or at least someone not wholly to be trusted. On the other hand, however, Świerkocki observes that the predecessor's presence may be inspirational; thanks to them, one need not "clear the forest alone" (Świerkocki 2019b).

Although Świerkocki's confessions sound a few notes similar to those heard in Kłobukowski's self-commentary (e.g. restriction) and, less so, in Rodowska's remarks (e.g. eccentricity), the overall meaning is more optimistic. The presence of the predecessor in the new text is of an inconsistent, indefinite nature: "Even if it is helpful, it is, to the same degree, restrictive" (Świerkocki 2019b). While uncomfortable, it is also exciting, and the relation need not be founded on antipathy or open conflict. Undeniably, it increases self-consciousness, but even that – the second Polish translator of *Ulysses* claims – can be overcome: "I feel no need to distinguish myself from my predecessor only for the sake of distinction, and I never play such games consciously, that is without some other justification" (Świerkocki 2019a). Rather than dismiss the predecessor as an intruder or engage them as an antagonist in total war, Świerkocki has apparently decided to accept the translatorial inheritance as is. This attitude strikes me as refreshing. Given

that, as Piotr Paziński argues, a subsequent translation of a masterpiece, even if more accurate, will always also be “at least somewhat palimpsestuous” (2019: 339), perhaps it is after all worthwhile to enter into a notion of truce and dialogue, accepting, to a greater or smaller extent, Legeżyńska’s concept of the ‘shared word’ in translation.

It is to such a relationship that I have aspired in my own agon with Krystyna Korwin-Mikke, the first Polish translator of *Benito Cereno*. Although later in this article I focus on the differences between our renditions of Melville, I try not to lose track of what is, or what could have been, shared. Naturally, I realize that my own position in the translation series is a privileged one. First of all, I was fortunate enough to translate Melville in an era of universally available information. Secondly, I was able to consult numerous critical sources on *Benito Cereno*, especially those written during the last few decades, when the text was reinterpreted from a number of perspectives, especially the postcolonial. Thirdly and perhaps most importantly, I have followed in the wake of a translator who navigated these waters before me.

2. “Mined into honeycombs”: the agon with Krystyna Korwin-Mikke

A few words about the text itself: this literary work of over a hundred pages, initially published in 1855 in “Putnam’s Monthly”, can be classified as a long short story, a short novel, or – perhaps most usefully – as a novella.⁹ Melville based his text on an authentic account of a rebellion which took place in 1805 on a Spanish slave ship. The writer retained, among other details, the name of its captain, albeit with an altered spelling – in fact it was most likely “Benito Cerreño” (Lipszyc, Wiśniewski 2020: 631). What remained unchanged, however, was the name of the American captain who came to his rescue, that is to say, Amasa Delano. The novella’s final section, containing the deposition of Cereno, the main witness in the trial of the mutineers, owes much to official documents contained in Delano’s book, *A Narrative of Voyages and Travels in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres* (1817). However, Melville did change the names of the two ships. Cereno’s slave ship is no longer the Tryal, but the San Dominick, which alteration is interpreted by critics as alluding to the Haitian Revolution and Saint-Domingue,

⁹ John Barth once jokingly defined the novella as something that is “too long to sell as a short story and too short to sell as a book” (1984: 169).

while the fact that the freighter under Delano's command is not *Perseverance*, but *Bachelor's Delight*, can be read as a commentary on the American captain's jovial yet supremely naïve disposition. Melville also shifts the time of action from 1805 to 1799, presumably to accentuate the Haitian connection (Lipszyc, Wiśniewski 2020: 631; Robertson-Lorant 1996: 381).

However, Melville's plot revolves not around the mutiny itself, but rather a singular performance, almost theatrical in nature, that takes place on board the Spanish ship for the sake of the American captain, to prevent the latter from divining the true circumstances on the *San Dominick*. All this is occasioned by a visit which Delano decides to pay the captain of the other ship when the two vessels lie at anchor side by side, near the island of Santa María, off the southern coast of Chile. From the Spanish captain, marked by a frail appearance and a bizarre aura – the eponymous Cereno – Delano learns that almost all of the crew members have died as a result of scurvy and 'fever.' The blacks, although also afflicted, apparently endured the illness better, which is why they currently constitute the majority on board. Cereno's narrative is peculiar, interrupted again and again by bouts of faintness, during which the captain is upheld by his trusty, ubiquitous servant Babo. Despite the many hints offered to the cheerful American by the handful of surviving sailors, he does not comprehend the actual situation until nearly the end of the narrative. He fails to see that Don Benito Cereno, in fact the mutineers' captive, has merely been playing the role of the captain, while the *de facto* leader of the ship, as well as the mastermind of the entire operation, is the supposedly obsequious Babo.

Although the atmosphere on board the slave ship intrigues Delano, none of the scenarios which he considers as possible eventually prove true. He will sooner believe that the traitor is Cereno, or else an impostor claiming his identity, than grasp with his imagination (the imagination of an enlightened Republican from Massachusetts, the cradle of the abolitionist movement), the possibility that an African slave may have designed, and then staged with an enormous cast, such a complex performance. Not even when the action accelerates, with Cereno jumping into the whaleboat after Delano, will the American fully understand the essence or the scope of Babo's stratagem. Only incontrovertible visual evidence – mutinous slaves climbing the gunwale – will force him to act accordingly. However, not even the conversation with Cereno, a broken man, during the journey back to Lima, will compel him to abandon his conviction that the world is generally in his favor, man is noble by nature, and what happened on board the *San*

Dominick is merely a grim curiosity. It is in such scenes that *Benito Cereno* reveals itself as, among other things, a bitter polemic against Ralph Waldo Emerson's 'cosmic optimism'.

Whereas on the eve of the American Civil War the novella was variously interpreted – in the spirit of abolitionism, but also as an apology for slavery – nowadays it reads much more distinctly as an incisive critique of colonialist aspirations and a condemnation of good-natured racism (Robertson-Lorant 1996: 379). Warren D'Azevedo has even described *Benito Cereno* as “one of the sharpest indictments against slavery and concepts of white superiority in American fiction” (1956: 129). Taken more broadly, as Adam Lipszyc and Mikołaj Wiśniewski argue, the novella offers a reflection on the fragile nature of the self, and, in consequence, all authority and power (2020: 641-643). From this perspective, a more fitting context for Melville's writing would be afforded not so much by, say, the contemporaneous works of his friend and mentor Nathaniel Hawthorne, but by Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, published half a century later. Emerging from the adventure fiction of his early novels such as *Typee*, restricted neither by Emerson's Transcendentalist corset, nor by Hawthorne's gothic, religion-soaked pessimism, Melville comes across as a forerunner of modernity.

Benito Cereno is a truly devious work, and its translation requires constant vigilance. This has much to do with Melville's experiments with free indirect speech and unreliable narration. To what degree do the descriptions and appraisals of events belong to an external, objective narration, and how much is filtered through Delano's personal sensibility? In which moments does the perspective adhere to the protagonist and when does it deviate? Which of Melville's metaphors are conventional, and which are authorial in origin? Such, among others, were the questions that accompanied my work on the new Polish version of the text, especially when, upon completing the first draft, I began a thorough study of Krystyna Korwin-Mikke's translation. Below I will try to answer these questions at least in part, indicating in what ways my answers differ from those which I imagine my predecessor to have provided for her own sake – i.e., invoking Balcerzan's concept once more, I shall compare our 'substituted worlds'. Mindful of the space allotted to this article, however, I will limit myself to several key issues.¹⁰

¹⁰ At this point, I wish to express my deep gratitude to Adam Lipszyc, Maciej Płaza, and Paulina Ambroży for their careful reading of my translation of *Benito Cereno* and for their valuable commentary.

I shall begin with strategies concerning nomenclature, namely the two aforementioned ships, as well as the whaleboat of which Captain Delano is particularly fond. Korwin-Mikke decided to retain the name "San Dominick". Initially, I was prepared to follow suit; however, it struck me that in the source text the name is a linguistic hybrid. Since it is neither the Spanish version of the patron saint's name ("Santo Domingo"), nor the English ("Saint Dominic"), I concluded that it might be an anglicized notation of the Spanish variant. This would not be the only such instance; towards the end of Cereno's testimony there is mention of a sailor, presumably of Spanish origin, by the name of "Bartholomew Barlo", whose name, I suppose, has also been anglicized. Hence my decision to name the ship "Święty Dominik" – especially since the saint's name is woven by Melville into a web of historical allusions.¹¹

Both Korwin-Mikke and I polonized the name "Bachelor's Delight", but we did so differently. My predecessor offered a noun phrase that is more faithful to the original, i.e. "Rozkosz kawalera". I like the optimism of "rozkosz" [bliss, delight]; what is more, the name is formed in keeping with the rules that govern Polish sailing nomenclature. And yet I wondered if the connotations of carnal pleasures are not too strong in "rozkosz", especially in the context of a bachelor ["kawaler"]. As regards Melville's original phrasing, Delano is almost permanently in a state which may be called "delight". His cheerful disposition is often described by means of allusions to a sun which is only sometimes, momentarily even, overcast (e.g. "the mild sun of Captain Delano's good nature regained its meridian", Melville 2002: 52). Thus, going against the printed word, as it were, and following the less easily perceptible "spirit" of the text¹², I chose to translate "delight", for my own benefit, as "radość" [cheer, joy, happiness]. Then, to strengthen the metonymic connection between the captain and his ship, I rendered the name of the latter as "Radosny kawaler" [the cheerful

¹¹ As regards the name of Bartholomew Barlo (a character appearing only in one marginal scene), my precursor reproduced the logic of its anglicization by polonizing it as "Bartłomiej Barlo" (Melville 1980: 156). I, in turn, decided to restore the supposed Spanish form, i.e. "Bartholomeo Barlo" (Melville 2020: 422); this is also what Richard Kraushaar did in his German translation (Melville 1938).

¹² I am purposefully using a figure ridiculed by Robert Stiller (1977: 323–324): "this formula is the refuge of many a lousy translator, unable to comprehend precisely or transfer anything (...) from any language to any other language (...) and thus seeking solace in the illusive depth of such platitudes."

bachelor]. This enabled me to integrate the name more easily in Polish sentences, and also enabled the retention of one further semantic game, the details of which I shall divulge later. What I lost, however – and what Korwin-Mikke was able to salvage – was the intertextual dimension, i.e. the strong supposition that Bachelor's Delight echoes the names of two ships encountered by Captain Ahab's Pequod in *Moby-Dick*, written only a few years before *Benito Cereno*. Indeed, the names "Bachelor" and "Delight" were rendered by Bronisław Zieliński – in what is still the only Polish translation of *Moby-Dick* – as "Kawaler" and "Rozkosz", respectively (Melville 2018: 300, 359). As always, when something is lost, something is gained; I will shortly explain how I profited from that loss.

Meanwhile, let us consider the old whaleboat, so beloved by Captain Delano because it reminds him of a faithful dog. Melville dubbed the whaleboat "Rover" (2002: 64–66), an almost proverbial dog's name. Simultaneously, it holds its own within a nautical context, since the word denotes a wanderer or drifter. In archaic English it could also signify a pirate, corsair, or even a pirate ship, which meaning seems to resonate in Melville's text (e.g. Delano briefly suspects that Cereno is a pirate who has usurped the captaincy of the ship). In Polish, it is also easy to imagine a dog called "Pirat". Nevertheless, such a translation perhaps overemphasizes this one aspect, to the detriment of the (overarching?) aspect of vagrancy. Perhaps with this in mind, Korwin-Mikke named the whaleboat "Włóczęga", which denotes a tramp or vagrant, whilst also signifying the act of roaming or roving itself (Melville 1980: 109–112). As a name for a dog, it strikes me as somewhat lengthy and cumbersome; also, since its grammatical gender does not accord with the masculine noun "wielobot" [whaleboat], my predecessor is forced to use the feminine synonyms "łódź wielorybnicza" and "szalupa wielorybnicza". Preferring to retain the shorter and more easily maneuvered masculine noun, I opted for the two-syllable "Tułacz", i.e. wanderer, vagabond (Melville 2020: 363–366).

Whilst in the sphere of terminology, I would like to comment on how Korwin-Mikke and I each dealt with the nickname that Captain Delano earned himself as a child who was always drawn to water, i.e. "Jack of the Beach" (Melville 2002: 64). Because I have not been able to trace any other occurrences of this exact phrase, I assume that it is Melville's invention. The standalone "Jack", a variant of "Jack Tar", is naturally the colloquial, slightly archaic designation for a sailor, and it is on the basis of this root that both my predecessor and I sought a Polish equivalent. In Korwin-Mikke's version it becomes "Łądowy Marynarzyk", i.e. something along the lines of

'land sailor boy', presented in quotation marks. Although charming in itself, with its seven syllables it also struck me as too long to generate an effect of authenticity. I am very grateful to writer / translator Maciej Płaza, who suggested to me, in four deft syllables, the appellation "Wilczek Morski", roughly corresponding to 'sea pup' (Melville 2020: 363).

Let us proceed to matters more important to the reception of the entire text, namely to the narrative perspective. In this regard the differences between my version and my predecessor's are fundamental. In my translation – taking the original as my lead – I adhered to the rule of avoiding the first-person pronoun, both singular and plural. In *Benito Cereno* the Melvillian narrator conceals himself behind impersonal formulae and the passive voice, skillfully masking his presence in the text; I was determined to retain this quality in the Polish version. Below is an example of a fragment where I found this to be indispensable. After the original excerpt I quote Korwin-Mikke's translation, and this in turn is followed by my own (emphasis in all three fragments mine):

Perhaps it was some such influence, **as above is attempted to be described**, which, in Captain Delano's mind, heightened whatever, upon a staid scrutiny, might have seemed unusual (...). (Melville 2002: 38)

Być może pod wpływem zjawiska, **które powyżej usiłowałem opisać**, i po dokładniejszym rozejrzeniu się wokół wrażenie niezwykłości jeszcze się spogłędowało w umyśle kapitana Delano (...). (Melville 1980: 73)

Być może wpływ wrażeń **podobnych opisanemu niezdarnie powyżej** wyostrzył w percepcji kapitana wszystko to, co przy trzeźwych oględzinach mogło się wydać niezwykle (...). (Melville 2020: 319)

Here and at a few other junctures my predecessor introduces elements of first-person narration ("usiłowałem", i.e. 'I attempted'), rendering the voice more accessible. Yet Melville's original diction in the corresponding fragment is suspiciously artificial, strained, perhaps – even anticipating the bureaucratic rigor of the final portion of the text, stylized as a legal document. "As above is attempted to be described" sounds to my ears like a painstaking effort to avoid saying "I", which in Polish could be mirrored by using the passive voice, an impersonal expression with the particle "się", or a participle; I chose the last of the three variants. In this labyrinthine, and thus typically Melvillian sentence, of which I have only quoted a snippet, I also tried to imitate the syntax of the original more closely.

I adopted a similar strategy with regard to a few other fragments. When, for example, towards the end of the English-language text, Melville writes: **“Omitting the incidents** and arrangements ensuing, suffice it that, after two days (...)” (2002: 88), my predecessor’s solution is: **“Pomiędzy wydarzenia**, jakie potem nastąpiły, dość że po dwóch dniach (...)” (Melville 1980: 142). Although the first-person plural pronoun in Korwin-Mikke’s sentence has a predominantly rhetorical function, and suggests the presence of a dramatized narrator to a far smaller degree than the first-person singular, it nevertheless establishes a certain rapport with the reader. I decided that employing the present participle in this fragment as well would allow the narrator to hide behind a façade of neutrality: **“Pomijając późniejsze incydenty** i ustalenia, wystarczy odnotować, iż po dwóch dniach (...)” (Melville 2020: 404, all emphases mine).¹³

These narrative ruses have yet another consequence: although the English-language narrator never refers to himself as “I” or “we”, for the most part (i.e. until the chase of the hijacked ship, when for a few pages the perspective ‘abandons’ Captain Delano) he avoids declarations on anything beyond the realm of the American protagonist’s sensations and impressions. The suspense, masterfully built up by Melville over a span of nearly a hundred pages, is chiefly produced by the absence of any certainty as to the facts pertaining to the San Dominick or the figure of Benito Cereno himself. Therefore, when the original text reads: “Not that such precisely was the impression made by the Spaniard on the mind of his visitor” (Melville 2002: 41), I consider it a misstep on the part of my predecessor when she translates this as: „Wrażenie, jakie Hiszpan wywarł na swym gościu, nie całkiem odpowiadało rzeczywistości” (Melville 1980: 76). My argument is that we discover nothing whatsoever concerning the relationship between the impression and an objectively verifiable reality (“rzeczywistość”); the fragment conveys merely an impression which, as we eventually learn, is somewhat different from that described in the preceding sentence. As a matter of fact, this is typical of Delano, who constantly arrives at conclusions only to suddenly abandon them, and the narration follows him step by step, feigning objectivity. I would go so far as to claim that the phrase

¹³ Cf. also an excerpt from one of the last paragraphs. The original: “Pass over the worst, and, only to elucidate let an item or two of these be cited” (Melville 2002: 101); Korwin-Mikke: “Pomiędzy najgorsze i jedynie gwoli wyjaśnienia powiedzmy tu jeszcze o jednej czy dwu rzeczach” (Melville 1980: 159); Majer: “Pomijając to, co najstraszliwsze, należy, gwoli wyjaśnienia załedwie, wspomnieć jedną czy dwie kwestie” (Melville 2020: 426).

“the impression made by the Spaniard on the mind of his visitor” describes the bulk of the so-called reality which we encounter in this text. In keeping with this conviction, I translated this sentence differently: “Choć prawdę mówiąc, wrażenie, jakie wywarł Hiszpan na swym gościu, było cośkolwiek inne” (Melville 2020: 323).

My predecessor and I also had different approaches to the grammatical gender in the descriptions of Don Benito’s ship. I shall illustrate this issue with a fragment from an early scene, when Captain Delano is puzzled at the maneuvers of the foreign vessel:

It might have been but a deception of the vapors, but, the longer the stranger was watched, the more singular appeared her manoeuvres. Ere long it seemed hard to decide whether she meant to come in or no, what she wanted or what she was about (...) Surmising, at last, that it might be a ship in distress, Captain Delano ordered his whale-boat to be dropped, and, much to the wary opposition of his mate, prepared to board her, and, at the least, pilot her in (Melville 2002: 36).

It is common knowledge that English words such as “ship” or “boat” are feminine nouns; in the context of translation into Polish, this is usually a fact of minor importance, since ours is a language with its own system of gendered inanimate objects. Thus, my predecessor was certainly within her rights when she translated the passage as follows:

Mogło to być li tylko złudne wrażenie wywołane mgłą; lecz im dłużej obserwowano nieznaną statek, tym osobliwsze manewry zdawał się on wykonywać. Niebawem trudno było nieomal rozstrzygnąć, czy zamierzał wejść do portu, czy też nie – co chciał lub co robił. (...) Domyśliwszy się wreszcie, że żaglowiec ów potrzebuje pomocy, kapitan Delano rozkazał spuścić na wodę szalupę wielorybniczą, by – czemu przez ostrożność sprzeciwił się pierwszy oficer – pod płynąć do statku i wejść na jego pokład, a w każdym razie pilotować go do przystani. (Melville 1980: 69)

I believe, however, that Melville purposefully reinforces feminine pronouns in this fragment, and in fact deliberately uses them to excess. The pronoun’s antecedent is not so much the noun “ship”, but rather the still unspecified “stranger”. “Her manoeuvres” might perhaps still be disregarded as unexceptional, but the end part of the next sentence should give one pause for thought: “whether she meant to come in or no, what she wanted or what she was about”. Here, anthropomorphizing the ship goes beyond the grammatical

– she is seen as having intentions and desires. As argued by Brenna Casey, among others, both Don Benito’s ship and the Spanish captain himself are subject to consistent feminization in this text: from the vapors enveloping the hull of the San Dominick like the Liman *saya-y-manto*, through Benito Cereno’s bouts of fainting and fickle humor, to the artificially hardened, and in fact empty scabbard where the captain’s sword should be (Casey 2018: 2, 19). Captain Delano may thus come to the rescue, as if this were not just a ship in distress, but rather a damsel straight out of a Gothic romance. Consequently, in my translation I made an effort to use feminine nouns and pronouns conspicuously:

Być może działo się tak jedynie z racji podstępnych mgieł, lecz im dłużej przyglądał się niezna­jomej, tym osobliwsze zdawały się jej manewry. Niebawem trudno było nawet stwierdzić, czy faktycznie zamierza wpłynąć do zatoki – dociec, jakie są jej zamiary, jaki sens jej dążeń (...) Domyślając się w końcu, że łajba może być w potrzebie, kapitan Delano nakazał spuścić welbot i wbrew nieufnym obiekcjom pierwszego oficera sposobił się już, by wejść na jej pokład, po to przynajmniej, by ją pilotować do przystani. (Melville 2020: 314–315)

This operation required the use of the word “łajba”, slightly more contemporary and informal than the most obvious one, “statek”, which I employed elsewhere. Nevertheless, as a result, in combination with the noun “nieznajoma” [female stranger], I was able to create an impression that the end part of the sentence quoted above concerns a woman’s intentions and designs. It was in order to salvage the romantic aspect of the aid provided by Captain Delano (associated metonymically with his ship, as Benito is associated with his) that I named the former ship “Radosny Kawaler” [the cheerful bachelor], sacrificing a possible intertextual connection to *Moby-Dick*.

I also wish to draw the reader’s attention to two contrasting examples of translating the original text’s metaphors. The first one concerns a metaphor that is conventional yet archaic. Delano, once again belaboring in his mind the mystery of Don Benito, determines that “the young captain had not got into command at the hawsehole, but the cabin window” (Melville 2002: 46). “Hawsehole” is self-explanatory as the opening in the bow through which a cable or hawser is passed, but, according to the 19th-century *Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, the idiomatic expression “to come in at the hawsehole” was a naval phrase meaning that someone rose through the ranks of the service (Brewer 1898: 1351). Melville extends the metaphor,

contrasting the hawsehole with the window of the captain's cabin, and thus suggesting that in the American's eyes the young captain has not fully earned his place in the ship's hierarchy. Korwin-Mikke – perhaps unable to determine the meaning of this rare phrase – apparently regarded the metaphor as the author's own because she translated this fragment by sticking close to the original phrasing: "Młody kapitan nie doszedł do dowództwa przy kluzie kotwicznej, lecz przy iluminatorze kabiny" (Melville 1980: 84). The locative preposition "przy" [near, next to], a mistaken choice for this particular, directional instance of "at", is further evidence of Korwin-Mikke's confusion as to the meaning of the phrase. More importantly, however, stripped of the power of the original figure (we should bear in mind that to Melville's contemporaries half of the quoted metaphor was recognizable, and the other half easily deciphered as a logical extension), the phrase is less than clear, even if it communicates, at least in part, the meaning of the original sentence. Because *Benito Cereno* is already a text riddled with difficulties, both of the linguistic and interpretive variety, I decided to abandon the original phrasing for the sake of a more familiar figuration, denoting an experienced sailor: "(...) młody dowódca to nie żaden wilk morski, tylko ktoś, kto od razu umościł się w kajucie kapitańskiej" (Melville 2020: 332).

Interestingly, my predecessor and I responded in exactly opposite ways when faced with one authorial, non-conventional metaphor – an image which appears very late in the text, yet which, I believe, strongly influences the interpretation of its entirety. The head of Babo, the chief strategist of the game played on board the *San Dominick*, is represented as a hive. Here is a longer fragment from the very last paragraph, describing the fate of the mutineers' leader:

Some months after, dragged to the gibbet at the tail of a mule, the black met his voiceless end. The body was burned to ashes; but for many days, the head, that hive of subtlety, fixed on a pole in the Plaza, met, unabashed, the gaze of the whites; and across the Plaza looked towards St. Bartholomew's church, in whose vaults slept then, as now, the recovered bones of Aranda: and across the Rimac bridge looked towards the monastery, on Mount Agonia without; where, three months after being dismissed by the court, Benito Cereno, borne on the bier, did, indeed, follow his leader. (Melville 2002: 102)

Apart from a shocking series of humiliations to which the body of the slave is subjected on orders from the judiciary of an apparently civilized state (dragging by mule, hanging, decapitation, fixing the head on a pole – in

Lima's main square! – and finally, burning), this paragraph also refers to the Other's silence. From the moment of his capture, Babo never speaks again, yet even after his death, his mute accusatory gaze proudly confronts his white antagonists. Nevertheless, the key image here, I believe, is "that hive of subtlety". Not even for a moment do we gain access to Babo's mind; it is he – not the titular Benito Cereno – who constitutes the text's true enigma, its rhizome. If D'Azevedo considers the leader of the mutinous slaves on the San Dominick one of the most perfectly constructed black characters by a white writer in American fiction, it is because Melville claims no knowledge of Babo's psyche (D'Azevedo 1956: 139). This also highlights the importance of the remark quoted above. Certainly the thought, conveyed by the narrator, does not originate with the kind-hearted Captain Delano, who has grasped nothing beyond the very surface of the story's events. After all, the image used in the text doubly valorizes the mind of Babo, whom the American first considered a faithful (because mentally limited) minion, and whom he now regards as a spawn of the devil.¹⁴ This double valorization is a result not only of the positively charged term "subtlety", but also of the figure of the hive itself, connoting hard work and the concerted effort of many individuals. Babo – intransigent, bloodthirsty, and cruel – is at once a genius of strategy. His is a mind that Delano's cognitive apparatus is incapable of comprehending.

Importantly, Melville lays the groundwork for the image several pages earlier, during the conversation between the two captains. Cereno tells the American that while the latter roamed the shipboard freely, "every inch of ground was mined into honeycombs under you" (Melville 2002: 100). This complex figure suggests infiltration, permeation by a hostile element, e.g. espionage. Simultaneously, it is more than a metonym, anticipating the image of Babo's head as a hive; one could almost say that the board of San Dominick and the mind of the slaves' leader are one and the same. The entire ship has, after all, been converted into a theatre, where Babo is the director – it is his vision that is realized, even if under a murderous compulsion. This is why I consider retaining this image in translation crucial, so that, alongside

¹⁴ Although Delano believes that "slavery breeds ugly passions in man" (Melville 2002: 75), in his own mind the blacks are repeatedly associated with animals: at first gentler ones (e.g. a Newfoundland dog, a doe), and later – once the plot is discovered – with those traditionally connoting fiendishness (e.g. a wolf, a crow). A large catalogue of these epithets can be found in Emery (2002: 313).

the horror felt at Babo's deeds, a note of admiration for his strategic discernment may also be sounded.¹⁵

In Krystyna Korwin-Mikke's translation the corresponding fragment of the last paragraph reads as follows: "Ciało spalono na popiół, lecz przez wiele dni głowa, owo **siedlisko przebiegłości**, zatknięta na pal w rynku, wytrzymała bez zmieszania wzrok białych i spoglądała poprzez plac w kierunku kościoła Św. Bartłomieja" (Melville 1980: 159, emphasis mine). Although in itself the phrase, which could be back-translated as "hot-bed of deviousness", is compelling, the description has been entirely stripped of the positive qualities noted above. Both "siedlisko" and "przebiegłość" are unambiguously negative terms; moreover, the unusual, intriguingly concrete metaphor (head = hive) has been supplanted by a conventional, abstract figure (the Polish "siedlisko" is visually less evocative than "hot-bed"). A similar fate befalls the previous, metonymically related image, namely "mined into honeycombs". In my predecessor's text, Cereno tells the American: "każdy cal pod pańskimi stopami usiany był prochem niczym rzeszoto dziurami" (Melville 1980: 157). Unlike the elegant *if*, in my opinion, misguided "siedlisko przebiegłości", here, instead of a central image, we find an excess of figuration. The metaphor is supplanted by a simile ("niczym rzeszoto dziurami"), leading to the suggestion that the deck is literally "strewn (...) with gunpowder" ("usiany (...) prochem"), and is in this way similar to a sieve ("rzeszoto"). Since nothing whatsoever in the text suggests that the ship was actually riddled with mines, Korwin-Mikke's extrapolation of "mined" to the presence of gunpowder is either a mistake or a risky deployment of another, intrusive figure. Thus, as a result, in my predecessor's version the significant hive/head metaphor disappears from both fragments, giving way to the visually neutral "siedlisko" and two other rhetorical figures ("rzeszoto", "proch"), the correlation of which is unclear.

In my own version, once more closely following the original, I translated the pivotal phrase from the last paragraph as "ów ul subtelnosci" (Melville 2020: 429), and the fragment from the two captains' conversation as "każdy cal pod twymi stopami był kruchy niczym plaster w upiornym ulu" (424). In keeping with the interpretation offered above, I emphasized the brittle, fragile nature of the deck's surface ("kruchy"), likening it to a honeycomb, and thus retaining the central image. As for the surplus adjective "upiorny"

¹⁵ These aspects in the construction of the antagonist in *Benito Cereno* are emphasized, for instance, by Richard E. Ray (2002: 329-340).

[ghostly, eerie] which qualifies the noun “ul” [hive] – intended in my translation to correlate with the original’s participle “mined”, which I understand differently from my predecessor – it was drawn from the text’s persistently Gothic imagery, e.g. “ghostly” (2002: 55, 61), “ghost” (88, 102), “haunted”, (62, 64), “phantoms” (55, 83), “goblins” (49), “hobgoblin” (57), or “cadaverous” (81). My aim was thus to highlight the connection between the two occurrences of the hive image in the English-language original.

I would also like to draw the reader’s attention to one fragment which I decided to translate, not just differently from the previous Polish version, but also in defiance of the original. On several occasions, the survivors of the San Dominick’s crew attempt to signal to the American the true nature of their plight: in one of those scenes a Spanish sailor tries to communicate with Captain Delano by means of a complex knot, incorporating several simpler ones. Melville’s narrator names them one by one, giving the reader to understand that Delano has recognized them all: “The knot seemed a combination of double-bowline-knot, treble-crown-knot, back-handed-well-knot, knot-in-and-out-knot, and jamming-knot” (Melville 2002: 63). However, in his characteristic short-sightedness the American captain fails to comprehend the sum of the signs, the combination of which produces a different meaning. Meanwhile the names of the knots (some of them apparently invented by the author) almost buzz with sense. The words “double” and “treble” already suggest the complexity of the situation: the master and the servant have in fact switched roles, but now, for the sake of the visitor, they are again playing themselves.¹⁶ Moreover, the names of the knots contain words such as “crown”, “back-handed”, or “jamming”, which arrange themselves into a concise synopsis of the palace intrigue which has occurred on board the slave ship.

Krystyna Korwin-Mikke translated the sentence as follows: “Węzeł ten zdawał się być kombinacją podwójnego węzła cumowego, potrójnego węzła ósemkowego, mocnego węzła refowego, węzła przeplatane go i węzła zaciskowego” (Melville 1980: 107–108). I admit that I am no expert in nautical jargon, and for the purposes of the translation I had to consult a range of publications and seek the help of others more knowledgeable than myself. Even so, I do not believe that the knot sequence in my predecessor’s translation fulfils the requirement of additional, hidden meaning: indeed,

¹⁶ On how the conventional master and servant roles in *Benito Cereno* are deconstructed through theatrics, see e.g. Michael Rogin (2002: 323–325).

with the exception of the last word ("zaciskowy" connotes a clamp), they sound rather technical and ordinary. Thus, so as to draw the reader's attention to the figurative aspect – whilst avoiding the obvious – I decided that the knots must be substituted with different ones. Inspired by an anecdote told by Michał Kłobukowski, who, in translating *The New York Trilogy* had Auster's protagonist take a different route through the city so that it matched the Polish word which the character had to 'produce' with his footsteps (Kłobukowski 2015: 81–82), I resolved to change the names of at least some knots. Of course, I was careful to remain within the bounds of naval terminology. Hence, in my translation the corresponding fragment reads as follows: "Splot zaś zdawał się kombinacją podwójnego węzła ratowniczego, węzła flagowego, węzła manewrowego, węzła korony i węzła ósemki" (Melville 2020: 361). In this way I was able to retain the "crown", supplement the catalogue with a flag (in the famous shaving scene the bewildered Delano discovers that the Spanish flag serves as a bib under Don Benito's chin), while names such as "węzeł ratowniczy" [the bowline; its Polish name could be translated as "rescue knot"] are popular enough so that they can function successfully, one hopes, both as a convincing element of naval reality, as well as a desperate signal.

Furthermore, Korwin-Mikke and I found different solutions when it came to rendering in Polish the recurrent, ambiguous injunction to "follow your leader". Interestingly, its first appearance in the original text is a translation from Spanish. Mentioned in the early sections as an inscription on the San Dominick's bulwark – "*Seguid vuestro jefe*" (Melville 2002: 37) – it acquires ever newer meanings as the narrative progresses: after all, one of the text's chief concerns is problematizing the figure of the leader. The meaning of the commandment is inverted by Babo, who promises the few survivors that failure to obey him means they will 'follow their leader', Don Alexandro Aranda, to a gruesome death; later, the same injunction is used by an American officer when he sends his men to chase the now openly mutinous San Dominick. It also appears in the novella's final sentence, where the death of the titular character is described ("Benito Cereno, borne on the bier, did, indeed, follow his leader"). Because the addressee of some of these commands is collective, it is difficult in Polish, with its inflection, to maintain consistent phraseology for all occurrences. Korwin-Mikke used the variants "podążaj(cie) za swym wodzem" (Melville 1980: 72, 138, 141, 148, 159), and I opted for "idź(cie) za swoim / swym przywódcą" (Melville 2020: 317, 399, 403, 412, 427). I suppose that my predecessor's solutions

work better as dictum and epilogue, while mine perhaps function more easily as threat and commandment.

I could list many other differences, such as our differing choices with regard to “oakum-pickers”: Korwin-Mikke emphasized the notion of picking apart old ropes for loose fibre, and offered the sensible “rozplatacze powrozów” (Melville 1980: e.g. 79), while I decided to foreground the allusion to cotton plantations and the action of “picking” by employing a less obvious choice, “zbieracze targanu” (Melville 2020: np. 319).¹⁷ Another point of dissimilarity concerns “the deponent”, for which my predecessor chose the perfectly legitimate equivalent “świadek” [witness] (Melville 1980: e.g. 143). I used the agent noun “zeznający” (Melville 2020: e.g. 405), related to “zeznanie” [deposition, the word used by Melville in the final part of the text] – also to accentuate the fundamental role that the act of speaking plays in the text. However, at this stage of the discussion it seems more fruitful to underscore what our versions have in common, and particularly what I owe to my predecessor.

Erik Andersson, author of the second translation of *Ulysses* into Swedish, has described the work of his predecessor, Thomas Warburton, as a safety net (“säkerhetsnät”, quoted in Bladh 2019: 2) – the first translation apparently served as additional protection against possible erroneous interpretations of the text. I readily accept this metaphor, different from Rodowska’s, when she describes Boy-Żeleński’s translation of Proust as “a trampoline towards [her] own interpretations” (Rodowska 2018b: 467). Despite the differences between our respective ‘substituted worlds’, Krystyna Korwin-Mikke’s translation has certainly functioned as a safety net, preserving me from several hazards. For instance, it was thanks to my predecessor’s version that I was able to recognize the puzzling “water-pipes”, mentioned several times in the context of the alleged epidemic (Melville 2002: 43–44), as water containers, “zbiorniki z wodą” (Melville 1980: 80–81). In my final revision of the Polish text I translated “pipe” as “beczka” [barrel] (Melville 2020: 328–329); indeed, this is the fourteenth meaning of that word according to the *Kościuszko Foundation Dictionary*, although neither the *PWN–Oxford*, nor any of my naval / maritime dictionaries records it.

I am even prepared to extend the metaphor of the safety net, so that it encompasses handy target-language terminology developed by the predecessor,

¹⁷ An analysis of *Benito Cereno* as scathing satire on race relations in plantation life was conducted e.g. by Jean Fagan Yellin (1970: 683).

yet remains well within the limits of Legeżyńska's notion of the 'shared word'. It is to Krystyna Korwin-Mikke that I owe the beautiful word "sztil" as the equivalent of the English noun "calm" in a nautical sense; in an earlier version I had only used the terms "cisza morska" and "flauta" interchangeably. It is also thanks to the predecessor that my final version features the specialist expression "wybić szklanki" (Melville 2020: 371; cf. Melville 1980: 115), instead of a longer description following the original, with its talk of "carrying the last expired half hour forward to the forecabin, from the cabin time-piece, to have it struck at the ship's large bell" (Melville 2002: 68).

My translation also contains isolated borrowings from Korwin-Mikke, which fit the Polish text so well that it would have been pointless to seek an alternative solution for its own sake. Thus, for example, when Melville writes in the third paragraph that "[t]he sky seemed a gray **surtout**" (Melville 2002: 35, emphasis mine), English-Polish dictionaries suggest words like "surdut" [frock coat] or "płaszcz" [coat]. Yet Korwin-Mikke rendered the sentence as: "Niebo przesłoniła szara opończa" (Melville 1980: 68). The word "opończa" [mantle, cloak], while not within the range of the original noun's equivalents, is perfectly at home in a text so full of allusions to monastic, especially Dominican, habits. Because I did not want to forfeit one of the numerous markers of uncertainty (the ubiquitous instances of "seem" and "appear"), my version of the sentence is less assured: "Niebo zdało się obleczone w szarą opończę" (Melville 2020: 313). Nevertheless, the cloak image was not Melville's, but Krystyna Korwin-Mikke's.

In my predecessor's translation I occasionally came across passages of great beauty. For example, translating the fragment "like mourning weeds, dark festoons of sea-grass slimily swept to and fro over the name" (Melville 2002: 37) as "szerniały girlandy wodorostów, niczym żałobny welon, prześlizgiwały się po tym imieniu" (Melville 2020: 317), I sensed that my solution was no match for Korwin-Mikke's "cały napis przesłaniały raz po raz niczym wdowim czepcem szerniały festony oślizgłych wodorostów" (Melville 1980: 72).

In conclusion, in retranslating Herman Melville's *Benito Cereno*, I inevitably entered into a polemical relationship with the existing Polish version. Above I have discussed what I believe was crucial to me during the process; this article is thus intended as an expansion of the translatorial gesture, which in itself, I believe, constitutes a critique of the version published forty years earlier by Krystyna Korwin-Mikke. I believe that Kaisa Koskinen and Outi Paloposki's concept of the anxiety of (the previous translator's) influence,

borrowed from Harold Bloom's vocabulary, is particularly well-suited to the discussion of such two-element series. Gauging the affect of paratextual rhetoric produced by three eminent Polish translators who found themselves in a similar situation – Michał Kłobukowski, Krystyna Rodowska and Maciej Świerkocki – I have interrogated the 'revisionary' tactics into which they were forced by the predecessor's uncomfortable, spectral presence. In the light of their experiences, and mindful also of Balcerzan's model of translation as a 'war of the substituted worlds', I have tried to recognize the nature of my own agon with Krystyna Korwin-Mikke. Although I do share the opinion that some degree of conflict in such an arrangement is inevitable, I am also partial to Matthew Reynolds's concept of translation as prismatic, where the light of the original becomes dispersed, revealing the inescapably dialogic and multiplicitous nature of the process, as well as of language itself (Reynolds et al. 2020: 132–133). I trust that my translatorial agon with my predecessor leaves a space for the 'shared word' and for communication across difference.

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