

## Canon Disputed. Polish Religious Poetry in English Translations by Adam Czerniawski

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**Abstract:** The aim of the article is to analyse and discuss Polish religious poems represented and promoted in Anglo-Saxon culture by the anthology *Moved by the Spirit* by Adam Czerniawski. This émigré poet and translator not only composed his anthologies guided by a set of unique criteria and individual literary standards but also – following his idea of translation developed in essays and theoretical manifestos – chose texts and introduced semantic shifts according to the philosophy of poetry he discussed in numerous journal articles. Thus, the volume by Czerniawski provides the anglophone reader with an image of Polish religious verses significantly influenced by the anthologist's individuality and, as a result, considerably different from the pattern most popular in Poland and traditionally copied by the majority of Polish editors of such publications.

**Key words:** literary translation, poetry anthology, semantic shift, religious poetry, Adam Czerniawski

### Kwestionowanie kanonu. Polska poezja religijna w angielskich przekładach Adama Czerniawskiego

**Abstrakt:** Artykuł omawia sposób reprezentowania i promowania polskiej liryki religijnej w anglosaskim kręgu kulturowym przez kolekcję wierszy zebranych w antologii *Moved by the Spirit* Adama Czerniawskiego. Ten emigracyjny poeta i tłumacz nie tylko opracował antologię, opierając się na zestawie nietypowych kryteriów literackich i artystycznych, ale również – stosując się do autorskiej idei przekładu ujętej w esejach politycznych i manifestach teoretycznych – dokonał wyboru tekstów i wprowadził w nich przesunięcia semantyczne wiedziony prywatną filozofią poezji religijnej wyłożoną na łamach publicystyki krytycznoliterackiej. Zredagowany przez Czerniawskiego tom przedstawia zatem czytelnikom anglojęzycznym wizję polskiej poezji religijnej silnie ukształtowaną przez indywidualność tłumacza-antologisty, a w rezultacie – wyraźnie odmienną od tej, która dominuje w polskiej tradycji tego typu zbiorów poetyckich i jest najbardziej popularna na polskim rynku wydawniczym.

**Słowa kluczowe:** przekład literacki, antologia poezji, przesunięcie semantyczne, poezja religijna, Adam Czerniawski

## I

Adam Czerniawski (born in 1934, died in 2024) left Poland in 1941 and finally arrived in London in 1947 as a relatively young man (at age 13). He adapted naturally to the Anglo-Saxon lifestyle and culture, attended British schools and universities, and quickly developed full bilingual proficiency. Able to write with similar quality in both Polish and English, familiar with Western traditions and literature, but at the same time interested in the cultural situation of his native country, he and several Polish colleagues of his associated with the “Kontynenty” group decided – despite opposing tendencies predominant among other Polish writers in the United Kingdom – to publish in both languages and become, as Bogdan Czaykowski puts it, “mediators between the two cultures”<sup>1</sup>.

Czerniawski considered the practice of literary translation to be vital not only for artistic, but also for political reasons ever since he came to believe that the fate of Poland, “underestimated and systematically destroyed by its neighbours, wouldn’t be so grim if we were perceived by other European nations as a culturally important state, rather than a barbaric nation whose eradication wouldn’t be a significant loss for mankind”<sup>2</sup>. This idea, emphasized by Czerniawski throughout his literary career on numerous occasions, inspired his translational works as early as his schooldays. His debut in 1952 with the poem *Eastern Legend* (in fact: a self-translation from an already existing Polish original, written a few months earlier) followed the publication of a free translation of Cyprian Kamil Norwid’s *W Weronie* (“Ranelagh School Magazine” 1951, vol. 30). As Czerniawski noted, “the problem of Polish culture’s presence in the anglophone world started to bother me already at school in England when – to my dismay – I realized that my literature teachers had never heard of either Mickiewicz, or Słowacki and Norwid. That’s why I decided to undertake my translational work”<sup>3</sup>. Soon after this experience Czerniawski developed and formulated a motto: “a country without political significance cannot afford to wait patiently for its literature to be discovered by the world on its own. No, such a country must get down to systematic and methodical work. Translating something just from time to time in hope there’s a chance it will luckily succeed is not enough”<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> B. Czaykowski, A. Czerniawski, *O poezji, nostalgii, krytykach i kryteriach*, ed. M. Rabizo-Birek, Rzeszów 2006, p. 180.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 185.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 184.

<sup>4</sup> A. Czerniawski, *Niedźwiedzie poszły w las*, „Kontynenty – Nowy Merkuriusz” 1960, vol. 11–12 (23–24), p. 24. Czerniawski applies this general rule directly to Polish literature, claiming: “it is also not enough to solemnise Mickiewicz’s anniversaries exclusively, since they strengthen the belief that Polish literature is represented by merely one monumental poet, a lonely genius. From it there’s just one step to the opinion that Poland is just some kind of a Balkan tin-pot Ruritania with only ‘national’ holidays and a single ‘national’ bard of folk origin” (p. 24).

Indeed, Czerniawski's impressive oeuvre proves he took his own principles seriously, as he used to systematically publish not only his own writings (poetry, prose, essays and diaries) but also numerous Polish-English translations and self-translations. Among the works that established his renown as a diligent translator to the greatest extent, it is important to mention selections of poems by prominent Polish authors like the innovator of Romanticism Cyprian Kamil Norwid, (*Poezje/Poems* published in 1986 and *Selected Poems*, 2004), the Nobel Prize in Literature laureate Wisława Szymborska (*People on a Bridge*, 1990), the Renaissance genius Jan Kochanowski (*Treny*, 1996, 2001), and the post-avant-garde poet and playwright Tadeusz Różewicz (*They Came to See a Poet*, first published 1982).

Czerniawski's involvement in the promotion of Polish literature in the United Kingdom also resulted in several multi-author anthologies he co-translated in both journals (*Modern Poetry in Translation* 1975, with the double issue 23-24 dedicated to Polish poetry exclusively) and books, with *The Burning Forest: An Anthology of Modern Polish Poetry* (1988) being of special significance. This anthology demonstrably illustrates Czerniawski's editing strategy and translational philosophy<sup>5</sup>. According to its reviewers, Czerniawski "refrained from the idea of producing a »representative« anthology of 20th century Polish poetry". Instead, his choice was "strictly personal. The poets he decided to include have been his favorites for years; the poems he selected were those he valued, liked, and wanted to share with his English readers. (...) He believes that it is precisely good poetry which translates well, because as such, it has a kernel of meaning to translate. Thus, he looked for good poems, as he says, with »paraphrasable meanings«"<sup>6</sup>. However, even from such a strictly personal selection a pattern emerges which Czerniawski habitually follows in his other anthologies. As noticed by Piotr Kuhiwczak, the collection

begins with the works of Cyprian Kamil Norwid (1821-1883) and Leopold Staff (1878-1957) who, according to Czerniawski, are the strongest influences on the development of Polish poetry since the Second World War. Then there is a group of the "wartime resistance" poets, like Leon Zdzisław Stroiński (1921-1944) and Tadeusz Różewicz (born 1921), and then the poets who emerged in the late 1950s: Zbigniew Herbert (born 1924), Tymoteusz Karpowicz (born 1921), Wiktor Woroszyński (born 1927), Wisława Szymborska (born 1923), and Andrzej Bursa (1932-

<sup>5</sup> As far as his translation theory is concerned, Czerniawski, as summarized by Marian Kisiel, follows the idea that "the translated text must be evaluated according to linguistic categories: the content of the original should correspond to the content of the translation, and the mode of expression should refer the reader to another language system that differs from the language of the original. The adequacy of translation always coincides with the criterion of semantic accuracy and fidelity, complemented by stylistic equivalence (the text of the translation should be adapted to the functional and stylistic standards of the target language). (...) Such a translation approach allows one to protect "good poetry" from distortion, because an attempt to reproduce the full semantic diversity of the original is futile and unproductive" (M. Kisiel, *Notes about Czerniawski*, „Tematy i Konteksty. Special Issue in English” 2020, no. 1, p. 543).

<sup>6</sup> P. Kuhiwczak, *Before and After The Burning Forest: Modern Polish Poetry in Britain*, "The Polish Review" 1989, vol. XXXIV, no. 1, p. 65.

1957). Finally, there are the “exiles”, Jan Darowski (born 1926), Bogdan Czaykowski (born 1932), and Adam Czerniawski (born 1934); and representatives of the new wave, Ryszard Krynicki (born 1934), Stanisław Barańczak (born 1946), Anka Kowalska (born 1932), and Bronisław Maj (born 1953). (...) Czerniawski decided to exclude the poetry of Czesław Miłosz. (...) Neither this carefully structured pattern, nor the long historical introduction, tells us much about the history of Polish poetry. It is the reader’s task to find this out, as Czerniawski says in one of his essays published recently in Poland. Instead, we can learn a lot about the value of this poetry, the ideas which have shaped it, and about the editor’s preferences<sup>7</sup>.

With the exception of a chapter dedicated to the poets of the New Wave, Czerniawski applied almost exactly the same pattern in one of his last and most unusual anthologies, published 22 years later: *Moved by the Spirit: An Anthology of Polish Religious Poetry* (2010).

## II

*Moved by the Spirit* is a collection of poems by Norwid (6 texts), Staff (4), Różewicz (13), Stroiński (1), Karpowicz (1), Szymborska (3), Herbert (7), Darowski (1), Czaykowski (4), Bursa (1) and Czerniawski (7). Due to the fact that in 1996 Czerniawski had published his translations of *Laments* by Kochanowski (under the original Polish title *Treny*), eight of them were also included in the first part of the collection. None of these texts were rendered in English versions specially for the anthology – Czerniawski simply selected them from already published translations, sometimes produced as early as the 1960s or 1970s (a few poems by Stroiński and Różewicz).

Since the title of the anthology does not impose any chronological limitations on the editor’s selection, its readers are justified in expecting that Czerniawski provides a broad collection of verses representative for the whole history of Polish literature and his only constraints are the form (poetry) and topic (religion). Yet, there are culturally significant and commonly distinguished literary periods left without any representation in the anthology (the Baroque and the Age of Enlightenment among others). Moreover, some of the sub-periods of modernism traditionally distinguished in Polish literary history are represented quite disproportionately by a single poet (Leopold Staff). As a result, the image of Polish religious poetry that emerges from Czerniawski’s collection is very different from the one that editors in Poland regard as most typical and classic. This distinction becomes even more apparent if the choice of not only authors but also their particular texts is taken into consideration.

According to Stefan Sawicki, “Polish literature provides an exceptionally wide range of possibilities”<sup>8</sup> for the study of religious poetry. Indeed, it is

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 66.

<sup>8</sup> S. Sawicki, *Wstęp* [in:] *Polska liryka religijna*, ed. S. Sawicki, P. Nowaczyński, Lublin 1983, p. 7.

safe to assume that a variety of religious poetry anthologies are among the most popular and therefore most frequently published multi-author poetry volumes in Poland. ‘General’ anthologies, presenting religious verse of each literary period in the history of Polish literature, are easily available in both comprehensive editions – as, for instance, the three-volume collection *Każdej nocy, każdego dnia. Antologia polskiej liryki religijnej* (edited by Bogdan Ostromecki in 1988) or the 670 pages of *Intencje serca. Antologia poezji religijnej* (edited by Bożysław Walczak, 1985) – but also in more abridged releases (e.g. *Poezja religijna. Antologia*, edited by Bogusław Skowron, 2010) with no lack of pocket editions (e.g. *Krzak gorejący. Antologia polskiej poezji religijnej*, edited by Zdzisław Peszkowski, 1999). Collections of poems focused on particular historical periods include sets of texts by authors of the medieval era (*Średniowieczna pieśń religijna polska*, edited by Mirosław Korolko, 1980), up to the interwar (e.g. *Poezja religijna 1918-1939*, edited by Tadeusz Kłak, 2004), wartime (*Suplikacje czasu wojny. Antologia polskiej poezji religijnej 1939-1945*, edited by Józef Szczypka, 1986) and post-war periods (*Spalony raj. Antologia młodej poezji religijnej*, edited by Jan Sochoń, 1986). One can mention motif-oriented anthologies, for example ‘poetry of the cross’ (*Krzyż – drzewo kwitnące. Antologia poezji o Krzyżu*, edited by Magdalena Koperska and Jerzy Koperski, 2002) or ‘folk religiousness’ (see: *Pogłosy ziemi. Antologia współczesnej ludowej poezji religijnej*, edited by Stefan Jończyk, 1972), but also collections dedicated to readers of specific ages – like poetry for children (*Promyki dobroci i radości. Antologia poezji religijnej dla dzieci*, edited by Halina Mastalska, 2005) – or aimed at the presentation of works by less-known, usually debuting, regional authors (*A Duch wieje kędy chce... Almanach poezji religijnej*, edited by Marian Hermaszewski, 2002).

Even though this framework list of anthologies available today is far from exhaustive, analysing their content leads to an interesting conclusion. On one hand, there are only two poems in Czerniawski’s volume that can be found at least once in popular collections edited and published in Poland. First, Kochanowski’s *Lament XVIII* – rendered by Czerniawski as *Tren XVIII* – is commonly considered canonical and is customarily reprinted. The second poem is *Zmierzch (Dusk)* by Leopold Staff. However, Staff’s other texts translated by Czerniawski (*Flet / Flute, Zły pejzaż / A Bad Landscape* and *Portret / Portrait*) are missing in the majority of anthologies published in Poland, including those focused solely on this particular author and specifically on his religious poems (cf. L. Staff, *Znalazłem Boga. Wiersze religijne*, 2007). Moreover, some of the poets represented in *Moved by the Spirit* can hardly be found in any of them (Karpowicz, Stroiński, Szyborska). On the other hand, texts commonly perceived by many editors as the most profound and representative Polish religious poems – for instance, *Songs* and translations of biblical *Psalms* by Kochanowski, *Resurrection (Zmartwychwstanie)* and *Dead Weather (Martwa pogoda)* by Staff

or *My Song (Moja piosnka)* and *The Cross and a Child (Krzyż i dziecko)* by Norwid – were not included in Czerniawski’s anthology at all, even though he provides several works by these poets and describes them with explicit admiration, respectively, as a “pre-eminent Renaissance poet”, a writer who “achieved the seemingly impossible: general and critical acclaim and the respect and admiration of fellow-poets” and an author “ahead of his time” who successfully managed to “baffle his contemporaries”<sup>9</sup>. Thus, the assumption that Czerniawski’s main goal is to familiarize English readers with the ‘big picture’ of Polish religious poetry canon is misleading. Both the selection of authors and their texts proves that an émigré translator’s understanding of what religious poetry really is and which works deserve promotion in Western countries significantly differs from the perspective of editors and translators in Poland.

### III

The criteria of selection discussed in the editor’s note and the foreword written by Rowan Williams, the then Archbishop of Canterbury, provide the essential introduction to the anthology and reveal, at least to some extent, some of the factors that influenced the translator’s work. As Czerniawski admits, he “did not start with the idea that it would be good to have an anthology of Polish religious poetry – and then embark on the translation task”. Instead, out of a variety of texts already translated he “decided to select the ones which would be appropriate to such an anthology”<sup>10</sup>. This approach, however, inspires the translator – rarely interested in standard religious literature in the past – to apply further benchmarks justifying his selection.

According to Zenon Ożóg, the very term ‘religious poetry’ should be defined broadly as “poetry related directly to *sanctum*, (...) poetry resulting from the experience of reality perceived through dogmas of a particular religion and inspired by the personal faith” of its author – in other words: the poetry of an “encounter between a human »Me« and the divine »You«”<sup>11</sup>. Czerniawski, for his part, calls for additional classification, distinguishing three types of religious poetry. Firstly, prayers – which in fact he considers

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<sup>9</sup> A. Czerniawski (ed.) *Moved by the Spirit. An Anthology of Polish Religious Poetry*, transl. A. Czerniawski, I. Higgins, Belfast 2010, pp. 13, 31.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* p. viii-ix.

<sup>11</sup> Z. Ożóg, *Modlitwa w poezji współczesnej*, Rzeszów 2007, pp. 37-38. Other definitions used in literary studies are similar. For instance, according to Maria Jasińska-Wojtkowska, “in a broad sense any poem whose subject speaks as *homo religiosus* is religious, while in a narrow sense – when the predominant theme of a poem is the relation between its subject and *sacrum*” (M. Jasińska-Wojtkowska, *Sytuacja poezji religijnej* [in:] *To co Boskie, to co ludzkie*, ed. R. Pyzałka, Wrocław 1996, p. 11).

simply orisons merely “couched in a poetic mode”. The translator is aware that for “an intensely and deeply Catholic country like Poland” poems of the second type are particularly characteristic: poems “written by the faithful”, usually “clergy from Pope John Paul II down”. Czerniawski neglects and rejects both these types, however, the first one due to the fact that lyrical prayer frequently “serves [a] purely instrumental purpose”, seldom aiming at creating poetry *per se*. The second one because it is “doctrinally correct”, since Polish clerics – unlike Gerard Manley Hopkins in England – humbly “obey the rules” and “tend not to be so bold”<sup>12</sup>. Such boldness is a distinctive feature of a third category, and the majority of works translated and selected by the anthologist belong to it. As Czerniawski explains, these are not only all the poems “written by lay people with Christian upbringing”, but – most importantly – by authors who draw “themes, imagery and symbolism from the Judeo-Christian tradition” although they “have strayed from the faith of their youth, and consequently have poems that are questioning (...) eschatological reflections”<sup>13</sup>.

From this standpoint, the unusual selection of Kochanowski’s works becomes justified with the opinion that being “a truly Renaissance man, he is as much at home in the pagan world as he is in the Christian”. In order to validate this thesis one must provide some of the poet’s texts that unarguably “create a tension between the two”. Similarly, a set of poems by Zbigniew Herbert is supposed to prove that he “draws on the two religious cultures and deftly applies a light touch to them”, while Różewicz’s texts were chosen with an emphasis on displaying “an extraordinary ability to mould the Gospels material anew”. Poems by Szymborska, likewise, hardly known as religious among Polish readers and critics, are transferred into English and included in the anthology on the grounds that her *On the Tower of Babel* and *Lot’s Wife* refer to Old Testament stories – even though Czerniawski is aware that they are “interpreted in a wholly secular way”<sup>14</sup>.

Generally speaking, Czerniawski favours authors and poems challenging traditional religious views and disputing the canonical ‘church’ approach to faith. His anthology teems with works based on references to religious concepts or motifs rooted in originally religious texts, sometimes as ancient as Greek mythology or the Hebrew Bible, but at the same time questioning their conventional interpretation and most widespread understanding – especially in Catholic doctrine. He is not interested in translating poems that praise God or poetically rephrase priestly teachings and theological axioms. Instead, he is eager to render verses describing a confrontation of rebellious poet with pious society and its image of God in English, often intriguing readers with punchlines like Norwid’s subtle protest “sing in

<sup>12</sup> A. Czerniawski (ed.) *Moved by the Spirit...*, p. ix.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* p. ix.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* p. ix.

triumphant chorus / your praises unto God – / I? – could spoil your song: / I have seen blood!” Kochanowski’s mourning of his dead daughter: “the Lord’s hand touched me, / all joy’s gone”, Staff’s vision of the world being created by “old painter God” who “seeing the full poverty and misery of colours, / bored, / wiped his brush on canvas of the sky / and threw away the unfinished picture” or Różewicz’s travesty of religious creeds: “I don’t believe / I don’t believe from morning / till night”<sup>15</sup>.

The most characteristic application of this theme, however, can be found in translations of Czerniawski’s own poems included in the anthology. For instance, his *Incident in Heaven* discusses the question of whether a single act of penance in old age is sufficient to receive absolution after a long life full of cruelty and evil (here: most likely the atrocities committed by a Nazi officer). Czerniawski clearly refers to the passage from the Gospel (Luke 15, 7: “there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent”) and the Roman Catholic liturgy especially popular in Poland (“Midnight Mass”), yet his elaborate use of irony hidden behind the seemingly factual and documentary, almost enumerative form of a chronicle indicates the poet’s critical approach to both sources of inspiration and the very idea that ritual atonement and symbolical contrition grants God’s pardon for all sins and justly guarantees salvation:

as a child he was beaten at home  
his father an able book-keeper played the flute in the evening  
his elder sister roamed the pubs  
his mother’s hazel eyes often brimmed with tears  
then he joined the party  
then was issued a uniform  
then was placed in charge of a fenced compound  
then marriage to a neurologist’s daughter  
then the transports began to flow  
then a child was born  
then further transports arriving regularly  
in December the first snow fell  
honoured for his efficiency and diligence  
he bought his son a rattle and a red locomotive  
confessed his sins took his wife to Midnight Mass  
in Heaven 99 innocents rejoiced<sup>16</sup>.

Such contestation of religious principles or traditional interpretations of holy texts is typical for many poems included in the anthology. Some of them may even be perceived as ‘non-religious’ or ‘anti-religious’ as their authors more or less openly call for alternative ways of understanding and explaining human nature and fate. Usually, however, the poets either contemplate the

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. pp. 41, 25, 51, 67.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p. 149. Czerniawski’s verses included in *Moved by the Spirit* were translated into English by Iain Higgins who – according to the anthologist – “collaborated closely with me on my poems” (p. VIII).



feeling of being abandoned by God, or discuss the capability of human beings and their socio-cultural religious systems to put into practice the role model impersonated by God and his earthly incarnations – asking in varied styles and modes a question articulated most directly by Różewicz in his paraphrase of Christ's cry: "father our Father / why / like a bad father / at night / without a sign without a trace / without a word / why did you forsake me / why did I forsake / You"<sup>17</sup>. "Something of this is echoed many times in these poems" – Rowan Williams wrote in his foreword to Czerniawski's translations – this is "essentially a poetry of loss. It is as if articulating what 'spirit' might mean is bound to be the exploring different kinds of absence" and the texts collected in the anthology are "not easily conscripted in the cause either of conventional faith or conventional unbelief"<sup>18</sup>.

#### IV

The stark contrast between "conventional faith" and the approach to religion of the poets included in *Moved by the Spirit* is emphasized further through semantic shifts introduced by the translator. In some cases, Czerniawski simply adds lexemes stressing references to Christian teachings and mythology, sometimes in order to make a poem more explicitly 'religious' than it is in its Polish original (thus justifying more compellingly its presence in the anthology). The least sophisticated example of this strategy can be noticed in the translation of *Modlitwa Pana Cogito – podróżnika* (*Prayer of Pan Cogito – Traveller*) by Zbigniew Herbert. The original stanza

a także Miss Helen z mglistej wysepki Mull na Hebrydach za  
to że przyjęła mnie po grecku i prosiła żeby w nocy zostawić  
w oknie wychodzącym na Holy Iona zapaloną lampę aby  
światła ziemi pozdrowiały się

in Czerniawski's version is complemented with the literal mention of the Christian religion ("Greek or Christian") absent in the Polish source text<sup>19</sup>:

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p. 71.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p. vii.

<sup>19</sup> This passage of the English version clearly suggests that Czerniawski not only studied Herbert's writings thoroughly before translation, but also that he did not hesitate to look for the variants of Polish originals he considered most useful for his translational projects. The case of *Modlitwa Pana Cogito – podróżnika* provides a relevant example. Although its Polish version has been printed and reprinted with the phrase „przyjęła mnie po grecku” – including its very first publication by the Literary Institute in Paris (cf. Z. Herbert, *Raport z obłązonego miasta*, Paryż 1983, p. 18) – the handwritten manuscript of the poem's prototype indeed mentioned Christianity in the line „przyjęła mnie po grecku albo po chrześcijańsku” (see: Z. Herbert, *Wiersze zebrane*, ed. R. Krynicki, Kraków 2011, p. 715). Even though Czerniawski in his anthology quotes the authorized final Polish version of Herbert's poem, his English translation seems to be based on this draft variant, ignoring the author's corrections and further changes introduced by Herbert in the text before its 'official' release.

and also the teacher Miss Helen on the Isle of Mull  
whose hospitality was Greek or Christian and who ordered light  
to be placed in the window facing Holy Iona so that  
human lights might greet one another.<sup>20</sup>

More interesting, however, is the method of selecting English lexemes with obvious religious connotations as equivalents of Polish words with implicit or hardly detectable religious meanings. For example, Wisława Szymborska's poem *Jarmark cudów* is usually interpreted by Polish readers in a way summarized by Wojciech Ligęza: "the surrounding unusualness is perceivable. (...) Szymborska's poetry of metaphysical amazement expresses the praise of what is unnameable and inconceivable"<sup>21</sup>. That is because the Polish word "cud" – opening almost each stanza of the poem – can be understood in either a secular sense as something amazing and astonishing ("wonder" or "marvel" in English), as an incredible and usually lucky coincidence (similar to English "good fortune") or, with religious reference, as a phenomenon caused by supernatural force: a divine intervention (i.e. "miracle"). Czerniawski chooses the third meaning of the word and translates the whole text (*Miracle Mart*) replacing each instance of "cud" with "miracle", thus inscribing religiousness in the very language of Szymborska's poem which opens with the statement: "common miracle: the happening of many common miracles"<sup>22</sup>.

Similarly, in the final line of *Modlitwa Pana Cogito – podróżnika*, Herbert mentions "uwiedzenie" (or "uwodzenie") twice in a row: "jeśli to Twoje uwodzenie jestem uwiedziony na zawsze i bez wybaczenia". The lexical item "uwiedzenie" conveys the meaning of misleading the mind or judgment ("delude"). It can also be used as an archaic equivalent of "fascination" or "allurement", but usually it is understood – with noticeable erotic and sexual connotations – as something that attracts or charms (i.e. "seduction"). Czerniawski, however, renders its meaning as "temptation" ("if this is Your temptation I am tempted for ever / and without forgiveness"<sup>23</sup>) – a lexeme with obvious references to religion, not only due to the fact that the phrase "lead us not into temptation" is a well-known passage from the Christian Lord's Prayer, but also because of its definition and etymology: enticement to sin or evil.

There are many more such cases in translations collected in the anthology. When Norwid mentions "łono dziewicy" ("maiden's womb") in the lines of *Do Emira Abdel-Kadera w Damaszku* (*To Emir Abd El Kader in Damascus*) – "sercem dobrą przyjąć wieść – / to jakby duch – łonem dziewicy" – Czerniawski demonstrably indicates the Christian source of the concept

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p. 118-119.

<sup>21</sup> W. Ligęza, *Życie nie do pojęcia. O poezji Wisławy Szymborskiej* [w:] W. Szymborska, *Wiersze wszystkie*, Kraków 2023, pp. 748-749.

<sup>22</sup> A. Czerniawski (ed.) *Moved by the Spirit...*, p. 97, 99.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. p. 118-119.

and the inspiration the poet drew from the story of the Annunciation, since the English version of the phrase clearly refers to the Virgin Mary: “and good news received with love / is like the Ghost in Mary’s womb”<sup>24</sup>. Kochanowski’s question “czyli się w czyścicu czyścisz, jeśli z strony ciała / jakakolwiek zmazeczka na tobie została?”, in the Polish original applies the tongue-twisting alliteration „w czyścicu czyścić” (i.e. “to be cleansed in purgatory”). In the English version it refers to the Catholic vision of afterlife in purgatory involving the punishment of sinners in fire<sup>25</sup>: “are you being cleansed in purgatorial flames / Lest you carry still the marks of tainted flesh?”<sup>26</sup>. In his other poem (*Tren XI*) one can find mention of “nieznajomy wróg jakiś” (i.e. “some unknown enemy”) in the line “nieznajomy wróg jakiś miesza ludzkie rzeczy”. Czerniawski aptly identifies this enemy as the biblical Satan and skilfully introduces in translation a byname of the Devil – “lurking foe” (“a lurking foe entangles men’s affairs”)<sup>27</sup>. When Stroiński in his catastrophic poem *Warszawa (Warsaw)* uses the Polish word “przekleństwo” (“ci, co przyjdą kiedyś-kiedyś (...) / wybuchną modlitwą czy przekleństwem”), it can be interpreted as “curse”, “dirty word”, “obscenity” or simply “vulgarity”. Czerniawski, however, replaces this lexeme with the noun “blasphemy” (in Polish: “błźnierstwo”, “świętokradztwo”) carrying the meaning of irreverence toward something sacred or an act of insulting or showing lack of reverence for God: “those who will come in the far, far future (...) will burst into prayer or blasphemy”<sup>28</sup>.

Such semantic shifts in Czerniawski’s variants are neither accidental nor unconscious. As a meticulous translator he is fully aware of the lexical choices made in the process of interlinguistic transfer and the differences between the denotations or connotations of Polish words and their English equivalents. For example, the fact that the replacement of the ambiguous and mysterious “unknown enemy” from Kochanowski’s poem with the clearly biblical “lurking foe” is an intentional introduction of explicitly religious reference is confirmed by Czerniawski in his commentaries to *Treny / Laments* published elsewhere. In their standalone edition, the Polish phrase “nieznajomy wróg” is explained in a footnote that emphasizes several meanings of these words: “evil force, fate, fatum, perhaps even Satan himself”. The English equivalent, however, is interpreted in much more unambiguous and precise way: “a lurking foe – in this line foe may mean devil”<sup>29</sup>. Similarly, Czerniawski knows full well that the “czyściec” mentioned in Kochanowski’s poem is often interpreted as a reference to an ancient, pre-Christian notion discussed already in Roman mythology.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. p. 32-33.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. J. Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, transl. A. Goldhammer, Chicago 1986, pp. 133-153.

<sup>26</sup> A. Czerniawski (ed.) *Moved by the Spirit...*, pp. 18, 19.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p. 20-21.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p. 84-85.

<sup>29</sup> J. Kochanowski, *Treny*, transl. A. Czerniawski, Katowice 1996, pp. 64, 65.

Thus, the translator explains in a footnote that scholars “see here an allusion to the pagan purgatory described in Vergil’s *Aeneid*”, but at the same time justifies his choice of a much more ‘religious’ and ‘Catholic’ English equivalent assuming that “these words probably refer to the Christian purgatory”<sup>30</sup>. Other translators of Kochanowski’s poems usually refrain from using such explicit simplifications. Seamus Heaney and Stanisław Barańczak, for instance, render the phrase “nieznajomy wróg jakiś” without unequivocal reference to Satan as “some enemy, indifferent to all / our mortal fault or merit”, while the question “czyli się w czyśćcu czyścisz?” is expressed in their version as “must you still remain / in Purgatory?”<sup>31</sup>.

The semantic shifts introduced by Czerniawski – his crafty replacements of relatively ‘secular’ Polish words with more ‘religious’ English substitutions – do not only make the presence of some of the poems in the anthology rather self-explanatory and thus validate the translators’ selection. They also inscribe these texts into the religious literary discourse more straightforwardly and establish a set of easily detectable links between the poets’ ideas and the Christian (often Catholic) concepts they refer, or may be referred, to. While Polish readers would be justified in arguing against classifying the originals as undeniably religious poems, the readers of Czerniawski’s translations can hardly dispute such categorization: lexical items with obvious religious meanings or connotations are much more frequently found in English renditions than in their source variants.

## V

The comparative analysis of the *Moved by the Spirit* anthology in the context of volumes of religious poetry typically published in Poland, and the differences between its English translations and Polish source texts, allow four main conclusions to be drawn.

First, Czerniawski’s collection was obviously not designed to make contemporary English-language readers acquainted with what Poles commonly consider ‘religious poems’ or what they perceive as their most important achievements in this particular sub-field of poetry. On the one hand, very few of the texts often reprinted in Poland as masterpieces of top-notch Polish authors are included in the anthology. On the other, Czerniawski still chooses several canonical and pre-eminent poets but their texts he finds worthy of translation are among those considered untypical for Polish religious literature. Thus, *Moved by the Spirit* should be regarded as an attempt to challenge traditional patterns and standards consensually repeated and indisputably followed by the majority of editors and translators in Poland

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p. 63.

<sup>31</sup> J. Kochanowski, *Laments*, transl. S. Heaney, S. Barańczak, London 1995, pp. 23, 21.

or, as Piotr Wilczek puts it, as an endeavor to “force its readers to ponder what the canon really is and what religious poetry is”<sup>32</sup>.

Second, guided by his idea of promoting Polish literature in Anglo-Saxon countries in order to prove that Poland is a “culturally important state” and Poles are not “a barbaric nation”, Czerniawski translates texts he finds simultaneously valuable from an artistic point of view and most appealing to anglophone readers. Indeed, in times of the undeniable secularization of politics, society and culture, traditional poetical prayers, sermons and confessions of faith, despite their aesthetical value, are among the less popular or in-demanded publications in the Western book market. The ‘postmodern’ culture, so widespread in the 20th century in the West, is more likely to embrace poetry expressing disappointment with traditional religious beliefs, institutionally approved forms of faith, folk images of God and the approach to spirituality recommended by the Catholic Church which is currently undergoing deep crisis. Norwid, Różewicz, Szymborska and other poets included in Czerniawski’s anthology are innovative enough to both know and respect the religious roots of their culture, and reinterpret, reassess and re-evaluate them in a critical rather than affirmative way. They are Christian, but at the same challenging Christianity – and that is exactly what the reviewers of the anthology consentaneously appraise as the sign of its progressiveness, commenting on “modern, quixotic in fact, conceptualization of poems’ meanings”<sup>33</sup> and eagerly quoting the passage “life without god is possible / life without god is impossible” from Różewicz’s *Without* as “a fundamental statement for contemporary human beings and poetry interpreted from the modern perspective”<sup>34</sup>.

Third, Czerniawski’s selection of poets mediating between the domains of tradition and novelty, standardized religion and individual beliefs, generally accepted patterns and alternative approaches is yet another justification for not only including him and his émigré colleagues (Czaykowski, Darowski) in the anthology, but also for dedicating almost a quarter of the volume to their texts. Although single poems by authors associated with the “Kontynenty” group can be found in the collections of religious poetry published in Poland (cf. *Każdej nocy, każdego dnia*, vol. 2), they are rarely considered significant or representative for Polish literature. In *Moved by the Spirit*, Czerniawski includes seven of his own poems, a number surpassed only by Różewicz and Kochanowski and parallel to Herbert or Norwid. Thus, the anthology also promotes writings by Polish émigré poets and (self)fashions them, according to their own opinion, as “mediators between the two cultures” – not only Polish and English, but also traditional and reformative, imitative and critical, and, last but not least, insular or parochial and broad-minded or simply ‘Western’.

<sup>32</sup> P. Wilczek, *Angielsko-polskie związki literackie. Szkice o przekładzie artystycznym*, Katowice 2011, p. 86.

<sup>33</sup> Ł. Janowski, *Polska poezja religijna w Anglii*, „Odra” 2012, vol. 7–8, p. 149.

<sup>34</sup> J. Drzewucki, *Życie z bogiem i bez boga*, „Twórczość” 2012, vol. 12, p. 152.

Fourth, the content of the anthology is also a result of the practical application of Czerniawski's translator code<sup>35</sup>. "Poetry must not be translated on demand" – claims Czerniawski – "A poet has to restrict himself to translating only texts he finds inspiring". According to the editor, even anthologies "should not reflect the commonly approved canons"<sup>36</sup> if these canons include works insufficiently motivating and too different from his own poetry. No wonder that Czerniawski in his autobiographic poems, according to Magdalena Rabizo-Birek, often "associates himself with Thomas the Apostle, (...) an unofficial patron of authors walking towards God on entangled paths of heresy, carrying testimonies of doubts and errors rejected by the Church"<sup>37</sup> while many of his other writings are also, as noted by Marian Kisiel, "aimed against traditional sanctities, such as the incorrigible 'Polishness', glorifying old symbols and seeing divine influence in them"<sup>38</sup>. As a result, the Archbishop of Canterbury is right to claim that *Moved by the Spirit* "will introduce to English-language readers a counterpoint of poetic voices whose quality is extraordinary, both in emotional range and in freshness and boldness of metaphor"<sup>39</sup>. For readers accustomed to the more standard repertoire of Polish religious poetry, however, these voices may sound odd and unfamiliar: like a rebellious choir disputing the clichéd shape of the literary canon rather than affirming its orthodox, fossilized status.

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<sup>35</sup> Not to mention his own (hyper)critical approach to organized religion – especially the Catholic Church, often described by Czerniawski as “a sadistic organization” lasting persistently over the centuries mainly due to its faithfuls’ ignorance and lack of knowledge (cf. A. Czerniawski, *Moje pierwotne grzechy* [in:] *Wyspy szczęśliwe. Eseje o poezji*, Toronto-Rzeszów 2007, p. 255, 256).

<sup>36</sup> A. Czerniawski, *Kłopoty tłumacza*, „Fraza” 2002, vol. 1–2, p. 256.

<sup>37</sup> M. Rabizo-Birek, *Kilka uwag o poetyckim dialogu Tadeusza Różewicza i Adama Czerniawskiego*, “Teksty Drugie” 2007, no. 3, p. 216.

<sup>38</sup> M. Kisiel, *Notes about Czerniawski...*, p. 552.

<sup>39</sup> A. Czerniawski (ed.) *Moved by the Spirit...*, p. vii.

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