

Stanisław Barańczak (1946-2014)

A Tribute

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In Remembrance of
Stanisław Barańczak



13 November 1946 - 26 December 2014

Mount Auburn Cemetery, Story Chapel
580 Mount Auburn Street
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138
Saturday, 3 January 2015, 11:30 a.m.

ORDER OF SERVICE

Prelude	Schubert <i>String Quartet no. 13 in A minor, D.804, op. 29 – Andante</i>
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Opening Words	Michael Flier
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Presentation	Ambassador Ryszard Schnepf
Commemoration	President Bronisław Komorowski <i>(read by Barbara Toruńczyk)</i>
Interlude	J. S. Bach <i>Suite no. 2 in D minor, BWV 1008 – Prelude</i>
Closing Words	Michael Flier
Postlude	J. S. Bach <i>Die Kunst der Fuge, BWV 1080 – Contrapunctus I</i>

Following the service, a graveside ceremony will be performed at Mount Auburn Cemetery near Willow Pond

Readings	Wojciech Wołyński Max Hirsh Ryszard Krynicki
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The Musicians are the Labyrinth String Quartet:
Yoonhee Lee – violin
MuChen Jessica Hsieh – violin
Hung-Tzu Rebecca Chu – viola
Jonah Ellsworth – cello

*The Ushers are George G. Grabowicz, Stephanie Sandler,
William Mills Todd III, and Justin Weir*

*Front page photo: Joanna Helander
Back page photo: Czesław Czapliński*

*Speeches delivered during the funeral ceremony of Stanisław Barańczak,
Mount Auburn Cemetery, Cambridge (MA), 31 2015*

MICHAEL FLIER

Opening words—funeral service for Stanisław Barańczak:

Nine days ago Stanisław Barańczak passed from our midst. He left behind an extraordinary legacy of poetry, translation, and cultural criticism that will continue to inspire us and those who follow. We have gathered here today—family, friends, colleagues—to celebrate the life and art of one of the great poetic voices of our time, and to remember the ways in which he occupies such a special place in our minds and in our hearts.

— Born in Poznań in 1946, Stanisław, by the mid-sixties had become one of the leading young poets of a protest movement that came to be known as the New Wave. The art produced had to be published underground to avoid official censorship. He notes in an early essay about how this poetry used what he called “contaminated language,” the stifling words of Newspeak, to expose the shallowness and lies of government ideology, undercutting the authority of the regime with its own forms of expression.

— After the food riots of June 1976, Stanisław helped to organize the Workers’ Defense Committee (KOR), the predecessor of Solidarity, and to found the underground journal *Zapis*, actions that resulted in his being fired from his teaching position at Adam Mickiewicz University in his hometown. He didn’t view this result as completely negative: it gave him more time to do what he loved most, to write.

— In the introduction to *The Weight of the Body*, he offers a characteristically ironic perspective on poetry itself:

Poetry has always been a desperate call for fair play, for sticking to the human/humane rules of the game. The fact that the game’s partner—nature, an oppressive regime, death, history, God himself—is not necessarily human, much less humane, does not really matter. The poet is a tenant who reluctantly admits that, yes, he should have read the fine print before signing the lease, but is also cocky enough to insist that, fine print or not, he does not deserve to be treated by his landlord like dirt. [...] Poetry is always some kind of protest. It does not really matter whether the pain is inflicted by a policeman’s truncheon or by a realization

of the inevitability of death. Whatever the world treats him with, the poet reacts the same way: he tries, against all odds and all logic, to defend his human birth [...].

— Invited to teach at Harvard in 1978—details to follow from Donald Fanger—Stanisław endured seven rejected requests to travel abroad by the Polish government before receiving permission to leave in March of 1981, prior to the imposition of martial law. The *Harvard Crimson* joyously announced his coming with the headline: “No, no, no, no, no, no, yes!”. An originally three-year commitment would become a commitment for life. In contemplating the range and depth of his artistry, we must remind ourselves that nearly half of his life was spent in America.

— Stanisław’s fascination with language, combined with poetic genius, led him happily to translation, through which he served as a cultural intermediary between English and Polish, translating *inter alia* George Herbert, John Donne, William Shakespeare, Emily Dickinson, John Keats, W. H. Auden, Seamus Heaney, and Doctor Seuss. Among his most notable Polish translations into English are the Jan Kochanowski cycle of elegies, *Laments*, with Seamus Heaney, and the poetry of Wisława Szymborska with Clare Cavanagh. My colleague Joanna Niżyńska has described his translations as “masterpieces of [...] craft and invention [...] immediately recognizable as Barańczakian for their matchless rhythm and rhyming. Never translate good poetry into bad poetry, was his motto—if you cannot translate Akhmatova’s measures, you’d better turn your attention to cultivating cacti.”

— Stanisław had an interesting conflicted response when an *Artful Dodge* interviewer asked which aspect of his poetry was most difficult to translate?

I write poems which contain puns or variations on puns [...]. I appreciate when a translator tries to cope with one, but I’m satisfied with perhaps 10 or 20 percent of such translations. I am tempted to say that it is virtually impossible to translate such a poem; although, to say that would be contradicting myself because, as a translator, I cannot accept that certain types of poems are untranslatable. Even the most ‘untranslatable’ poetry can be rendered into another language if the translator is imaginative enough.

— In his most admirable love of wordplay and punning, Stanisław, *nasz Staszek*, most certainly belongs to the philosophical tradition that includes Marx and Lennon . . . that's Groucho and John, not Karl and Vladimir Il'ich!

— With the love and support of Anna, Stanisław—playful, courageous, ironic, subtle, inventive, and razor-sharp—gave us, in all-too-short a lifetime, a prodigious outpouring of brilliant poetry, translations, and essays that will endure. His tenth volume of poetry, *Chirurgiczna precyzja* (*Surgical Precision*, 1998) earned him the Nike prize in 1999, Poland's most prestigious literary honor. In the fall of 2006, the rector of the Jagiellonian University came to Harvard to bestow an honorary degree on Stanisław at a ceremony with faculty in full academic regalia. Poland had fully embraced its son with highest honors.

— And now I turn the floor over to those who have known Stanisław best, to remember the life of this extraordinary artist, scholar, and human being who has so enriched our lives.

DONALD FANGER:

Stanisław Barańczak was truly a Renaissance man—poet, critic, translator (between cultures as well as languages). If he seemed to have read everything, I am convinced that was because in fact he had. (His muttered “Yes, of course,” was not unprecedented at Harvard, but in his case it was genuine, however arcane the artist or work being talked about.) He ranged freely and gleefully over poetic forms, poetic traditions, and historical eras, and this was because when engaged with the written word he was in his element. That written word could follow the rules of nonsense as easily as the rules of tragedy: in point of fact nothing verbal was alien to him. How could his students and colleagues not cherish the gifts of this astonishing young man who *was* a young man when he arrived at Harvard in 1981—he was 33!—and remained one throughout his active life? He was deeply serious (but never solemn). Rather, he was sly and mischievous. He was fun to be around.

— I could go on in this vein, but my time is limited and I am here primarily as a witness to history, having been actively involved, as Chairman of the Slavic Department, in the far from standard story of how Harvard secured his services. That story began in the academic year 1977–78, at the end of which Professor Wiktor Weintraub was due to retire as the first incumbent of the Jurzykowski Chair in Polish Language and Literature. When the Department set about surveying the field of potential replacements, Professor Weintraub was quick to single out Barańczak as an exceptionally promising candidate, and we duly invited him to come to Cambridge to explore the possibilities. Alas, despite his readiness to visit, he was repeatedly denied a passport, because of political non-conformism; that is, of anti-government activities.

— At length we decided that if he could not come to us in Cambridge to discuss the position, I as Chairman should go to him in Poznań—and so I did in early 1978, with a supply of Harvard stationery in my briefcase. Our meeting was cordial, and when he agreed on the spot to accept a three-year Associate Professorship (from May of 1978 to July of 1981), we formalized our offer and his acceptance on the blank Harvard letterheads I had brought, which were typed by Embassy clerks in Warsaw, and which I carried on my person back to Harvard. The official appointment went through that spring,

and Stanisław Barańczak's name appeared in Harvard's catalogue of courses for 1978–79.

— Unfortunately, he held the position *in absentia* from the summer of 1978 until the spring of 1981; he arrived, finally in March of 1981. For all of that time Harvard continued to write the Polish Embassy in Washington, to no avail. Harvard President Derek Bok waited a full year without any acknowledgment of his first urgent letter, and when in November of 1979 the Polish Foreign Ministry responded to his latest communication, it was only to say that the Ministry had "nothing to add to previous statements"—and to repeat that Barańczak was not a recognized scholar but only a troublemaker! They did, to be sure, offer President Bok a list of six "eminent and known scholars with rich experience as lecturers in foreign universities, including U.S. universities," along with assurances that "they also command good knowledge of English language," and a hope "that our offer of six outstanding Polish scholars in Polish literature and history for a post of Associate Professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures at Harvard University will make it possible for the University to choose the one whom it considers best suited for the job[!]."

— When the Polish government finally relented, Staszek's letter to me announcing the news ended with this remarkable and characteristic paragraph. Note particularly the shifts of subject and scale:

Over and above all that, I have a strong feeling that after all those grim years this is a start of something better—and that my people, who won it with their own hands, certainly deserve it. That is the main reason why for the first time I am writing to you in a really good mood and with a real hope. Forgive me once more all the grammar mistakes and too many commas; warmest regards from all of us.

— And then the microscopic signature, that final gesture of modesty from a man who had so little to be modest about, and who graced this Department and this University for nearly two decades thereafter.

HELEN VENDLER:

Stanisław Barańczak was a linguistic genius. I realized the extent of his powers when I saw, very early in our acquaintance, his translation of the poems of the exquisite George Herbert. Forgetting that the index would be at the back, I regretted not knowing which poems he had translated, but then, turning the pages, I realized that he had entirely preserved Herbert's frequently unique and complex stanza forms and rhyme schemes: I could recognize, by this means alone, most of the poems. I would not have thought this feat possible, and of course nobody but a notable poet would have dared to attempt it; that it actually succeeded in rendering a believable and beautiful version of Herbert I know from others.

— But what I was most touched by in my acquaintance with Stanisław as a member of the university was his sense that the world of poetry was one; that we “poetry people” were brothers and sisters under the sign of art. For instance, when he and I overlapped at Bellagio, one of his favorite teachers came to the literary conference convened there: Stanisław insisted on introducing us to each other, although I knew no Polish and his teacher no English; all we could do was shake hands with warmth under the sun of Stanisław’s welcoming countenance.

— As my sense grew of the sheer volume of Stanisław’s translations, as I came to know that he—for modern Poles—was Shakespeare on the stage, my wonder at his powers increased. But those powers were not self-regarding ones; he assumed responsibility for diffusing English poetry to Polish readers, and he equally wished to diffuse Polish poetry to English readers, bringing two poetic cultures together that had not known each other at all well. His anthology of Polish poetry under Communist rule introduced me to other poets beyond Miłosz, and gave me and many others a permanent interest in Polish poetry of the twentieth century. I was delighted to be present at the ceremony for which the rector of the Jagiellonian University himself travelled from Poland to Harvard to bestow on Stanisław an honorary degree: to see that ancient university pay homage to a marvelous poet and translator and critic in the person of a single man was to see the art of poetry itself honored. It was an unforgettable and happy day.

— Everyone who knew Stanisław was saddened by the onset and progress of his ravaging illness, and we were amazed by his courage as he, with

Anna's heroic help, continued to work and write when he could no longer teach. We felt grief not only for him but for all the future students whose lives he would have changed had they been able to know and be taught by this extraordinary person.

—— Seamus Heaney, who collaborated with Stanisław on Kochanowski's *Laments*, felt deep affection for him and Anna: not a year of Seamus's long visiting professorship went by without our conversing about Stanisław in admiring and grateful terms. He and Seamus found shared congeniality in the degree to which they both engaged in the same multiple roles; not many poets write inspiring criticism, very few poets engage so substantially in translation, and even fewer poets make lifelong attempts to spread knowledge of fellow poets abroad. Both he and Seamus had a gift for friendship and a natural simplicity of manner that made their formidable gifts available to the rest of us.

—— The shining example of Stanisław's life and work doubles the loss of his friends and admirers, while giving us a lasting memory of conspicuous excellence of mind joined to conspicuous generosity of spirit.

WILHELM DICHTER:

Staszek was the most interesting person I ever met in my life. We were introduced to each other by my friend Antek Libera, who came to the States on a visit from Poland. "He's a genius," said Antek, and he was right.

——— Staszek was like a boy who delights in his guest and runs to his shelves for his best toys: books, others' as well as his own, coming from all over the world but mostly from Poland. He handed them over and waited until the visitor said something. In the leather chair, his head sunk and eyes half-closed, he resembled a gray eagle. If he liked what the guest said, he smiled and his smile was beautiful. He did not insist on his views and answered questions briefly and precisely. It was clear that his knowledge was enormous.

——— If the subject was Poland, the house filled with hope that the people that suffered for so long would thrive under the new system. Guests from Poland came and went through the house. Someone was always there or about to arrive.

——— If the subject was anti-Semitism, he immediately said what he thought; as much as was needed, neither more nor less. He did not put anything off into the future. He was in a hurry.

——— If the subject was his own work, he brought out new books from a5 or Znak or printed out from his Apple writings that no one had seen before. He could no longer read them out loud. A great portion of English literature was created again in Polish on his Apple; also the poems of the great Russians. He was friends with Brodsky. Once he printed his translation of Dante for me. At 8 Brookdale Street in Newtonville, I felt like a Polish emigrant visiting Mickiewicz in Paris.

——— In what he said and wrote you could feel fear for human beings, not just here or there and now, but over all the Earth and always, in the depths of the universe. The uncertainty of existence in the cosmos, described by his intellect and expressed with a language equal to the language of the greatest Polish masters, carried his poems and translations to the apex of poetry. My hands shook when I read in the book dedicated to Ania:

„Wpadacie jak po ogień,”
wytyka nam od lat
z właściwym sobie chłodem
ten niewłaściwy świat.
„Po ogień” to przesada,
lecz wpadliśmy—to fakt. [...]
A wypaść—nie wypada:
okazać trzeba takt.

—— As his illness progressed, he could no longer walk and spoke more quietly until you could not grasp what he said. Ania understood him the longest, really until the end, but more often had to read his answers from the expression on his face. She fed him with a teaspoon and even thickened the water so he would not choke. Precisely to the minute, she put the numerous medications into his mouth. The poet's eyes shone almost until the end. I told jokes, to tell from his smile if he still understood us. There were dramatic trips to the hospital, operations and rehabilitations, each made more difficult by Parkinson's. Time flowed unknowably fast or slow and Ania gave him her life with a smile. Staszek did not complain. At least I never heard it; what their thoughts were as they lay together in their large wooden bed, I don't know.

—— Translated by Bronisław Dichter

CLARE CAVANAGH:

I'll be reading Stanisław's and my translation of "That Mozart Aria" in a moment. But I keep thinking about a different poem, an earlier one, "Wrzesień," which he wrote not too long after coming to the States. We never translated it—no matter what he said, Stanisław knew perfectly well that some poems can't be translated. But I still remember him rushing out of his little study in Newtonville to show it to me some time in the early eighties. He wanted me to see that I'd actually made my debut in Polish poetry: I'm the *kalifornijska Irlandka* who appears in line six. But that's not the reason I keep remembering it now—even though it's probably the last time I'll ever turn up in a Polish poem. It's because I know exactly where that poem was coming from. Stanisław was teaching us Mickiewicz in his little office in Boylston Hall; you could see the tower from Lowell House out the window, which couldn't be opened because of the air conditioning. The movement out the window to the tower—it's classic Barańczak, the projected line, the imagined geometry, he's setting up the radius that he'll come back to later in the poem.

— In any case, none of us did know what "*spólny łańcuch*" or "*ziemskie kolisko*" meant. I don't remember everyone there. But I'm the Irish Californian, as I said; the Jewish kid from New York, is Andrew Kahn, who teaches Slavic literatures at Oxford; the poor *Japonka* is actually a *Japończyk*, Mitsu Numano, who had to be changed into a girl for the sake of the meter. He teaches Russian and Polish literature at the University of Tokyo now. I thought about the poem and them when I was checking Facebook on December 26, and the days after, to see all the posts about Stanisław. I usually hate Facebook, but I didn't then, since so many former students, including Andrew and Mitsu, who wrote in both Japanese and English, took time to remember Stanisław. Mitsu from Tokyo, Andrew from Oxford, John Freedman from Moscow, Andreas Schonle from London, Beth Holmgren from North Carolina, Ben Paloff from Ann Arbor, many others: it's another lovely geometry, a constellation of dots linking people who would never have studied Polish literature without the beloved teacher who sat patiently explaining "*Oda do młodości*" in a little room full of baffled foreigners.

— I mentioned the radius that turns up later in the poem; no one else will know, the poet writes, what Mickiewicz's words mean “w promieniu / co najmniej mili (1609, 31 m).” Somehow it never occurred to me to wonder before: why a mile exactly? You'd expect him to be measuring the distance back to the lost homeland. What on earth is 1609, 31 meters away from Boylston Hall? And I finally understood: that was Ania, in the old apartment on Memorial Drive, before they moved to Newtonville. That was the other person who understood what the lines meant, and who understood what Stanisław meant, no matter what.

— He was a kind man, one student wrote. He was. He was the kindest, smartest, funniest, cutest genius you'd ever want to meet. And the best friend.

That Mozart Aria

That Mozart aria up there, which floor? Ten?
which window, sixteenth from the left? Empires
were tumbling down and rising up again.

That “Non so piu,” that lucid lion’s den
that frail fortress’s flight, that friendly fire,
that anapestic pulsing from Floor Ten

had to be heard precisely there and then,
claiming its makeshift right not to expire,
though empires were rising up again

and our consent had mixed with their cement,
one Mozart tape may still salve the entire
globe’s pain—if played in time on some Floor Ten.

As if that long-dead hand still tried to lend
us all its wealth—us, those cheats and rogues for hire,
rubble from whom empires rose again,

but who held, too, a prayer with no amen,
who hoped this aria will never tire
or err, the Mozart aria from Floor Ten.
Empires fell down and rose up again.

Translated by Stanisław Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh

KAROL BERGER:

I have no fears concerning his poems, they will manage, will remain, will be read, remembered. It is worse with the memory of the person, of who he was. A moment will come, after all, when there will no longer be anyone who knew him personally. Stanisław was not only a virtuoso of language, but also a master of a few of the most fundamental virtues—the unerring ability to distinguish what is right from what is wrong, courage, generosity. He was not naïve, had no illusions, was well aware of the sort of world in which it was his, and our, lot to live. But he also knew that there is something that can be opposed to entropy and indifference. He did not expect to win his game with the world, but he knew how one should lose—with dignity.

— The illness that attacked him was like a decades-long, protracted freezing over. (Perhaps this is why he reacted so creatively and with so much sensitivity to *Winterreise*. After all, Schubert's cycle tells precisely this story, the story of a slow freezing over of the world. I recall what he once told me: that Schubert fully spread his wings only when he realized that he was going to die.) Close to the end, Stanisław could neither move nor talk (not, in any case, so that anyone might understand him, anyone, that is, with the exception of his uncommonly brave, wonderful wife). All the same, this almost completely frozen planet still emitted light. Whoever saw him in this last period, whoever was met by his gaze and smile, must have noticed it: to the last moment, Staszek radiated warmth and this was a gift to us. Precisely: he was not only brave, but also generous.

— I would like to finish by reading a poem he published, in samizdat, in December 1976. It is not one of his best-known poems. I don't know if in writing it he had someone in particular in mind; probably not. But today, it sounds like something he might have written about himself:

"Sam sobie winien"

Po co mu to było,
to wszystko; czy musiał mieć
wszystko naraz; skoro już sobie pozwalał
na różne postępkie, to po co mu jeszcze

ten luksus
ich zgodności ze słowami, skoro mógł sobie
pozwalać i na słowa, to niby czemu chciał mówić
koniecznie to, co myślał, skoro wolno mu było myśleć
„myślę”, to po co mu na dokładkę
ten wniosek „więc
jestem”, skoro już nawet nikt mu nie bronił być,
to nie mógł po prostu być sobie?

— This is it: Staszek could not simply be.

BARBARA TORUŃCZYK:

Joseph Brodsky once remarked that remembering someone who has died presents an unmissable opportunity to talk about oneself.

—— I will do the same.

—— Stanisław, Staszek, Barańczak played a huge role in my life, and he actually shaped its course.

—— How did this happen?

—— March '68 shattered our Warsaw group, we who were called the ringleaders of the student rebellion. Our group was decimated by arrests, prison sentences, emigration, dismissals from the university and the draft. We now searched for hope of any kind, the sprouts of something new, refusing to yield to the mood of defeat. As it would turn out soon enough, the '70s saw an extremely dynamic young artistic life, which bloomed mostly outside Warsaw. Student theaters and clubs popped up, as did publications and musical groups, both unofficial and official. It was an era of rebellion against the established way of life. Even at the Catholic University of Lublin (KUL), where I was a student, hippies appeared, having been taken in after being expelled from various universities elsewhere.

—— This was around 1972. As I read a new publication, *Student*, poems by Stanisław Barańczak caught my eye. He quickly became the young generation's cult poet. One day he arrived at KUL for a reading. This young guy was so different from the rest of us with his luxuriant mop carefully combed down, in what was practically a dinner suit, a white shirt and tie! He had a wedding band on his finger. But his poems captivated us, and the packed room was brimming with enthusiasm.

—— This gathering had far-reaching consequences. Adam Michnik, who had been working in a factory for two years since being released from prison, had just been allowed to go back to university, but as an external student and outside Warsaw. "Go to Poznań," I said to him.

—— "Stanisław Barańczak is there, what a fascinating man." And this was what Adam did. He took the train to Poznań and went to Stanisław's reading straight from the station, queued up to see the poet who was signing copies of his book and introduced himself. And this was the beginning of a friendship that would bond them forever. Adam Michnik's son, who was born a year and a bit ago, is called Stanisław.

— The year is 1976. Jacek [Kuroń], Jan Józef Lipski, Staszek and I are strolling outside the Kurońs' building, to dodge the bugs inside. Jan Józef asks: "Staszek, will you join KOR [the Workers' Defense Committee]?" Now, for Staszek, an excellent teacher and an exceptionally popular young scholar of Polish literature in Poznań, to say yes would mean losing his job. This was his situation: a promising poet, recently awarded the prestigious Kościelski Prize, which had allowed him to travel to the West with his wife for the first time ever. In Poznań, they were living with his mother and their son, Michaś. Because of all this, I thought that it would be too soon for him to join KOR. It would inevitably mean losing his position: being removed from the university, being forbidden to publish, not being given a passport. It was enough already that he had signed the Letter of the 59 protesting the insertion of a new clause into the Constitution of the People's Republic of Poland about the Communist Party's leading role and Poland's eternal alliance with the USSR. But before I could protest, Staszek replied calmly: "Yes, of course, I will join KOR." This decision seemed absolutely evident to him, coming from his uniquely intact moral stance and, of course, his wife's, Ania's, earlier approval.

— As was to be expected, he did lose his university job, he was no longer allowed to publish in official publishing houses and he was even prevented from buying an apartment. He then joined the team editing "our" Soviet bloc's first independent literary journal, *Zapis*, and in the very same natural, unconditional reaction wrote its programmatic opening article. The quarterly's first issue appeared in January 1977, and Staszek was its most prolific author.

— It is May 1977. Workers who took part in the rebellions in Radom and Ursus a year earlier are being mistreated, thrashed in jail and sentenced to long prison terms. Young KOR members who are standing up for the harassed workers are being arrested. We, who are working closely with them, announce a hunger strike. We take shelter in Saint Martin's Church in Warsaw. The situation is dangerous because all the signs in heaven and on earth point to the fact that the authorities are in the process of deciding their policy vis-à-vis the increasingly dynamic democratic opposition, and one of the dangers is that they will return to what people call the "Stalinist course." Security Service helicopters are circling over the church, we are being openly photographed, and police functionaries, both uniformed and undercover, are dashing into the church in the midst of our supporters who

are streaming in from all over Poland. The police are threatening to beat them, card them, and so they cut us off from the world. Then, Staszek arrives, as inimitably discreet and natural as ever, carrying an enormous, heavy briefcase. He heard about our initiative on Radio Free Europe. He takes several dictionaries out of his briefcase and spends the next few days in the sacristy, not moving from a kneeler, translating. It was Anna, Ania, of course, who is expecting their second child, who packed his bag for the trip. Soon, Staszek joins the new Society for Academic Courses, the latest initiative of the democratic opposition. Staszek organizes all kinds of student lectures and meetings with workers coming to KOR for help, in the apartment he is renting for his family, as Little Ania plays in her playpen. Anna has begun to work, and is supporting the family.

— It is the winter of 1981/82. Martial law has been declared in Poland. In March 1982, Staszek leaves for the United States, having accepted the Alfred Jurzykowski Chair in the Slavic Languages and Literatures Department at Harvard. He arrives there after many years of being refused a passport and the great crusade waged by Czesław Miłosz, Professor Wiktor Weintraub and the Harvard President's Office to find the right Polish candidate for the position. I have just begun my doctoral studies at Yale University. I believe that in the current circumstances, Poland needs a literary journal. (While today this idea sounds insane, I was able to defend it then.) I go to see Staszek to talk about it, since I need to hear his opinion before I can decide what to do next. "Yes, of course, we need a journal of this kind very much," he tells me. "There is only one thing: it should come out somewhere closer to Poland." And so, Stanisław charts the next thirty-three years of my life: our conversation makes me pick up and move to Paris and start the *Zeszyty Literackie* quarterly. I then transfer it to Poland after 1989, with Staszek's passionate encouragement.

— From the start, Barańczak was the journal's pillar, its most tireless associate, its anchor, just as he was for all the projects he became involved in. Every single issue of *Zeszyty Literackie* until winter 2003, eighty-one in all, ran his poems, his translations, his "unserious" poems, his book reviews, lectures, essays and thoughts on the art of translation. They were all, without exception, new poems, which grew into volumes, from the poem "Grażynie" ("For Grażyna") and the cycle "Przywracanie porządku" ("Restoring Order") in 1983, all the way to the last book, *Chirurgiczna precyzja* (*Surgical Precision*).

He sent in the last poem he wrote, “Hemofilia” (“Hemophilia”), dedicated to Czesław Miłosz on his ninetieth birthday, for a special issue of *Zeszyty Literackie* (3/75, 2001). Worsening disease stopped the flow of his poetry, but Stanisław continued to keep company with the art of rhyme and rhythm and wrote abundant “unserious poetry” and translations; we published the last one of them, translations of poems by Mark Strand, on which he collaborated with Irena Grudzińska-Gross, in the autumn 2007 issue (3/99).

— The poems he translated, including those we commissioned, appeared in *Wybór wierszy i przekładów* (*Selected Poems and Translations*), which he prepared in 1997 for PIW publishers. They were later also included by Ryszard Krynicki in Stanisław Barańczak, *Wiersze zebrane* (*Collected Poems*), published by a5 in 2006.

— When we began to publish books, we put out the volume *Widokówka z tego świata* (*A Postcard from this World*) with a cover designed, at Staszek’s request, by Wojciech Wołyński. As his publisher, I ought to add that this author, who was extremely prolific and had an enormous amplitude of talent, was also a flawless editor of his own texts and an exceptionally meticulous and loyal collaborator, as well as a great, irreplaceable friend of the quarterly as a whole and of each member of its team.

— In 1986/87, I again spent a year close to the Barańczaks, breathing the purifying and cozy aura of their home, catching Staszek’s soothing glances, bright, watchful, warm and often cheery. An inner order and a concentrated “subtle force” emanated from him. From time to time, I felt an almost organic need to bathe in this atmosphere. Staszek’s disease was getting worse then, becoming increasingly visible. The Barańczaks lived as if they were paying it no mind. Stanisław continued to lecture, to write about Polish and East European literatures for important American publications, to translate English-language writers into Polish. He took on Shakespeare and became knowledgeable about this sphere of culture, and in the 1990s even learned Italian so that he could translate the inscription on the gate of Hell in Canto III of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. At that time he also translated the unmatched libretti by Lorenzo Da Ponte for *Don Giovanni* and Mozart’s *The Marriage of Figaro*; he had let his passion for music be known earlier in the masterful poems he wrote. *Podróż zimowa* (*Winter Journey*) is impossible to understand well without a knowledge of Schubert’s “Winterreise.” He continued to execute

the strenuous duties of the Polish democratic opposition's emissary in the United States and became its press spokesman, and also served as the editor of *The Polish Review* in the United States and co-editor of *Zeszyty Literackie* in Paris.

— In his last poem, Stanisław wrote, “The language of grievance, of wrongs? / He knew them not,” about someone: his double? his brother in misfortune? another? or about himself? His race against time speeded up. Parkinson’s disease left no hope. In this case, his voiceless tragedy—a personal tragedy, a family tragedy, a tragedy of American and Polish intellectual culture—took on an unexpected form. Stanisław and Ania did not mention this unannounced participant in their life. They declared a war on him. I have before me a photograph they sent to their friends, dated June 16, 1995, perhaps on the tenth anniversary of the diagnosis. It shows a couple, striding robustly, with their home as background. They are holding hands, smiling, their expressions almost defiant. On the back, in Staszek’s increasingly illegible handwriting, is the caption: “Radiating optimism, and generally a model couple, Stanisław and Ania.” He wrote on the back of the same picture, which he sent to the newlyweds Marek and Eliza Zagańczyk: “A living advertisement for the charms of the institution of marriage (still alive after 27 years).”

— To manage the tasks he planned meticulously, Staszek got up earlier and earlier. At one point he reported that he was finding it increasingly difficult to type on a keyboard, so he would get up at four or five, compose his rhymes (preferably under the shower, which Ania had ingeniously adjusted to fit his needs) and only write them down after planning out the sequence of the text in his mind. The volumes of poetry and anthologies he translated proliferated, and publishers in Poland couldn’t keep up. We know Jan Kott’s joke about his Saturday phone calls to Staszek. One time, Staszek’s son Michał answered and explained that his father could not come to the phone because he was immersed in translating Shakespeare. Jan Kott replied: “Then I’ll just wait by the phone till he’s all done.”

— Thus, like his earlier farewell to his own poetry, the Barańczaks’ response to Stanisław’s final “breaking of the nib of his pen,” imposed by his disease, was just as unusual.

— I would like to say a few words to Ania Barańczak:

— Ania, in the thirty years that you cared so attentively and tenderly for Staszek, guided by the feelings that united you, you

became a model of devotion. This unparalleled dedication puts you in the company of last century's great women, Nadezhda Mandelstam, Ola Wat, and also Katarzyna Herbert and Rita Gombrowicz.

— You were and still are Staszek's equal in another specialty of his: boundless courage.

— I don't know whether without Staszek's perceptive eye to guide us we will be able to understand what is taking place in our time. I think that for us, at least in Poland, one of the greatest threats is the push to forget the past, the unstoppable blind rush forward, the faster the better. The breaking of continuity, the continuity of culture and the continuity of memory, threatens us.

— Ania, knowing you and always endlessly admiring your dedication to Staszek and your union with him in every area of his multifaceted and enormous talent, I am convinced that much like the great women of the twentieth century I mention, you will find the energy to preserve his work. There are all kinds of notes of great literary and historic value in his archives. You are the one who knows them best. *Zeszyty Literackie* and I personally want to help you in any way we can. But in this work we need your strength, your determination and your commitment. You will be our model, our signpost, just like Stanisław used to be.

— The poem by Staszek that opens the volume *Widokówka z tego świata i inne rymy z lat 1986–1988* (*Postcard from this World and Other Rhymes, 1986–1988*) reads: "I believe that what I have to say will be said." Indeed, it has been said, it has been recorded. We interpret it anew each time we read it, because with every reading new meanings are revealed.

— Now that he has left us, I always keep Stanisław's poems close at hand. I am struck by his gift of clairvoyance, his sense of what he, and all of us, will encounter in life.

— He tells us in another poem in the collection *Widokówka z tego świata i inne rymy z lat 1986–1988* (*Postcard from this World and Other Rhymes, 1986–1988*) about himself as a six-year-old. He had an accident and passed out and, when he came to, he recognized himself as "transparently discrete, manifold, [...] when we got in the way of the splinters of the world, of steel / on the tracks of speeding trains, stars, fates, shards of steel. / 'I' was that which was not all that."

— He retained his ability to see himself in others and to identify with them in a shared human fate until the end. Struggling with the calamities inflicted by history, with the ploys of nature and

civilizations, the traps of social and political life, is to be expected, but it does not define the human being. Staszek talked about his deep sense of his own “discreteness,” but not in psychological terms. He meant that every human being is exceptional inside and that he himself formulates his I. The six-year-old Stanisław experienced being knocked out of his lifeline, and how “In half an instant, Later began,” –the conscious construction of his destiny. In another moving example, a poem he wrote in 1968, he tells us that he is like an arrow, which is suddenly knocked off its flight path.

—— Stanisław really was like an arrow in flight: he had integrity, he was determined, he aimed for a precisely chosen target, as if he were racing on a track suspended in the air, over all the obstacles that piled up in his path. The target was his own creative work, which came into being out of the “living black blood” that set under his pen on the whiteness of the paper. In later years, he would talk about how poetry occupies an important—perhaps the most important—place in the human universe, how this exceptionally condensed, multifaceted picture of reality is painted by people starved for its truth or—to put it in a more balanced way, in his words, “by intellectually honest people willing to look at the world realistically.” He wanted to describe the world as it was, with no illusions, “no little views of palm trees and seas,” which turned out to be “dishonest.” He had a gift for observing the world’s material membrane, its nature and its people, its animals and birds, its cities. He sensed symptomatic civilizational and social change, the impending horror of terrorism and our helplessness vis-à-vis the new plagues looming over the world.

—— To use Czesław Miłosz’s words about the calling of the twentieth-century poet, we can say that Stanisław wished to collect the most important data about human existence and to find the fitting poetic language for it. Yet we know that apart from the recognition of pain, of the destructive processes in the world and in humans, there was in him, before all else, a will to affirm, to sign off with the word YES to all, even the most penetrating and murky, manifestations of life, of existence, as well as a “tone of solidarity with the suffering world: the first reflex, here, being empathy for Others, and abstaining from whining about the lot of one’s own I.”

—— In his essay “Jakaś nadzieja (O liryce Thomasa Hardy’ego)” (“Some Kind of Hope [On Thomas Hardy’s Lyrics]) written in March 1992, Staszek discussed someone else’s poetry—but I believe that these words also apply

to him. Just like the closing quotation from the same essay, this one borrowed from Irving Howe: “The best of his poems embody a vision both hard and fraternal, which derives from brooding upon the most terrible facts of existence while refusing the sentimentalism of despair.” In the heart-wrenching poems of his last years, Staszek tested the apologetic word YES at low temperatures, tempering it in the ice, cold and snow of the world that was freezing up, as a model of the new courage, of which he served as an example.

— And yet we know, Ania, that nothing was as precious to him as your home, your family life together.

— Our great friend Grażyna Kuroń, Jacek’s wife, beloved and admired by all who knew her, died in the early days of *Zeszyty Literackie*. Towards the end of his life, when he was overcome by a sense of helplessness vis-à-vis the changes in our political life, Jacek would say, “With Grażyna, we could have moved mountains.” And she had faithfully kept him company in the most difficult of tests, which included prison terms that separated him from his family, and also, one may guess, life with a man of a preternatural energy, who was incessantly leaning forward, with maximalist expectations, chasing after ways to carry out his great visions, which she admired in him the most.

— Stanisław wrote a poem then. As I read it now, I think about these two exceptional women I have been fortunate to know, who found fulfillment in their lives through the gift of total devotion. In his poem “Grażynie” (“To Grażyna”) Stanisław uses the “direct language” he cared so much about to confess his feelings at witnessing this example of boundless sacrifice, as if once again, in someone else’s fortune, he could see a reflection of the most intimate feelings and thoughts:

To know by heart all the prison regulations about parcels and visits.
And how to force the facial muscles into a smile.

[...]

To write letters from a cell or a clinic, saying that everything’s OK.

So many abilities, such perfection. No, I mean it.

If only in order not to waste those gifts,
you should have been rewarded with immortality
or at least with its defective version, life.

Death. No, this can’t be serious, I can’t accept this.

There were many more difficult things that never brought you down.

If I ever admired anybody, it was you.
If anything was ever permanent, it was that admiration.
[...] No, I don't believe it.
It's only nothingness, isn't it. How could a nothing like that
possibly stand between us. [...]
All right, I know, you won't respond to the latest postcard I sent you.
But if I'm to blame anything for that, it will be something real,
the mail office, an air crash, the postal censor.
Not nonexistence, something that doesn't exist, does it.

Translated by Stanisław Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh

— *Miłość jest wszystkim, co istnieje* (*Love is All there Is*) was the title Staszek gave his anthology of the 300 best-known English and American love poems. He dedicated it to Ania, as he did all his books. This feeling kept him alive until the end. It was life-giving, literally.

— Translated by Maya Latynski

IRENA GRUDZIŃSKA-GROSS:

The first time I encountered the Barańczaks in person was when they arrived in the United States. A quickly sprouting friendship was one of the few advantages of being an émigré, and I felt lucky that I could be close to them and participate a little in their life. Staszek was very proud of his family, of his wife Ania and his children Michał and “little” Ania. They surrounded him with love and provided the conditions for the realization of his extraordinary talents.

— Extraordinary, because Stanisław was a Renaissance personality. One of the founders of the Workers’ Defense Committee, he was a mentor for several generations of scholars of Polish culture; but his attention was mainly devoted to literature. While in the United States, he tirelessly advocated for Polish culture in America and American culture in Poland. His own poetry he treated with (humorous) seriousness. He published ten rather slim volumes of poems, but their size was the opposite of their importance. His innumerable poetic translations from English, Russian, German or Italian are also part of his own opus, unmistakably marked by his voice. His books about Miron Białoszewski or Zbigniew Herbert are, for historians of literature, exemplary monographs. We should add here his literary criticism, essays on Central Europe, texts on translatology. This already extensive list does not exhaust the entirety of the work of Stanisław Barańczak. If we were to place all the books he authored on top of one another, they would form a tower taller than the one we see on the famous photograph of Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński with his books. It is a real record in Polish culture, a record of quantity and quality. Yesterday evening, when we chatted about his poems, Ania turned to Michał and said: “Please, bring Daddy’s book.” “Which one?”, asked Michał and we all laughed. It was a sad kind of laughter.

— Although Staszek’s talents, intelligence and industry were somewhat intimidating, those who were lucky enough to know him more intimately were enchanted by his pronouncements on literature, his wit, his modesty and kindness, which he would abandon only when (and these moments were terrible) he encountered a bad translation or a very stupid book. He was a great companion (when one was able to drag him away from his work) on the excursions, organized by Ania, to the Massachusetts beaches, historical

landmarks, and great open air restaurants. Indoors, it was a great pleasure to listen to the music he loved, to watch over and over the cult movies he and Ania knew by heart: "The Godfather," "White Sheik" or "Some Like it Hot."

— I will repeat, however, that it was literature he cared about most. Barańczak introduced new genres into Polish literature and kept finding a Polish form for several outstanding foreign poets. He had a similarly inspiring influence through his own poems. His extraordinary erotic poem "September 1967" is built on a tension between rhythm and syntax; it is full of repetitions and self-quotations, and is both funny and very moving. "History" is one of the best Polish poems on the topic; many other poems written in Poland or in emigration belong to the canon of Polish literature.

— His literary works accustomed us to expect the impossible:

— To laugh while reading pure nonsense poetry, for example his convolutedly funny translations of Ogden Nash and his own poems in this style;

— To admire Shakespeare performances where the actors speak in a language that is both old and contemporary;

— To listen to Polish translations of arias and songs by Mozart, Purcell or Schubert as if they were originally written in that language;

— To read, in Polish, the works of "untranslatable" poets, with all their rhymes, rhythms, enjambments and word plays;

— To understand the "incomprehensible" English metaphysical poetry, Beatles songs, fragments of the "Divine Comedy" and the most difficult poems by Mandelstam.

— This last achievement of Barańczak found a great corroboration in a fragment of conversation between Czesław Miłosz and Joseph Brodsky. Miłosz, who was himself a tireless translator, says that sometimes he has to read some poets in a Polish translation to have an emotional approach to their work. "For instance, Emily Dickinson [...] only when I read Barańczak's translations of Dickinson, which are fantastic, suddenly I felt [...] Dickinson."

— To which Brodsky replies: "The boy is a genius, Stasiek, ya?"

— "Fantastic," says Miłosz.

— A fantastic genius, indeed.*

* Czesław Miłosz, *Conversations*, ed. Cynthia Haven (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006), p. 11

**PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF POLAND
BRONISŁAW KOMOROWSKI:**

Warsaw, January 3, 2015

Participants of the Memorial Service
of Stanisław Barańczak

Ladies and Gentlemen,

— It is hard to bid farewell to a poet, it is hard to find appropriate words. The passing away of a poet is a moment of mourning, for the language in which he wrote, the language he co-created, enriching it with the powers of his imagination. Our language and literature are greatly indebted to Stanisław Barańczak. Not only was he a prominent artist; he was an extraordinary man, living here and now, reacting to the world with his word and his action. As he wrote: “All of that around you which encircles you so tight / without sharing your pain / is the so-called world.”

— Stanisław Barańczak was brave in his lifelong struggle. He was a man of the word, which became an action.

— To say about him that he was an outstanding translator would never do him justice. In this domain, he was a master, for he realized full well the gravity of the matter he had to measure up to. He knew there was nothing like a perfect translation but the realization did not prevent him from pursuing the ideal. His renditions of Shakespeare’s works made Hamlet sound like our contemporary, he addressed us in a language describing our own world. It was Stanisław Barańczak who made us familiar with the English metaphysical poets and many other authors of poetry. The poetry he wrote, so brilliant, imbued with erudition, arose out of a concrete fact, which was a pretext for a profound metaphysical reflection. There were but few others who could equally well develop the potential of their mother tongue: at times in a spirit of melancholy, at times with a unique sense of humor. At the same time, Stanisław Barańczak was an exquisite linguist, he knew how to play with the language, he could come up with complex puns, palindromes, anagrams, revealing the riches of the Polish language and a masterly skill in using words and in coining words before a bewitched audience.

— For a long time, he was struggling with a serious disease but he never let it interrupt his mission as a lecturer. In this capacity, he became the harbinger of Polish culture and literature on American soil. Without any false pretentiousness, with all his lightness and finesse, he captivated the hearts and minds of his students, showing them the very best of our culture.

— The passing away of Stanisław Barańczak comes as a dramatic accolade at the end of the quartercentennial of Polish freedom. The freedom he pursued, not only as an artist, but also as a citizen committed to the opposition movement in the days of the People's Republic of Poland. As a man, he could not stand falsehood, which overturned and ruined the sense of the most important words and notions. As a poet, he examined the word, its value, and reflected on its degradation in the totalitarian system. As he once bitterly observed: "It was but a narrow escape: I could have simply raised my hand as other people did, and simply let it down, as other people did." Together with other prominent colleagues, he co-founded the New Wave, a trend in Polish poetry, which drew on the events of March 1968 and sought to describe the experience of that generation. His poems, alluding to March and prophetically envisaging the workers' mutiny of December 1970, laid the foundation for the famous performance of the Theatre of the Eighth Day, "In One Breath," which charted out new directions for the Polish theatre.

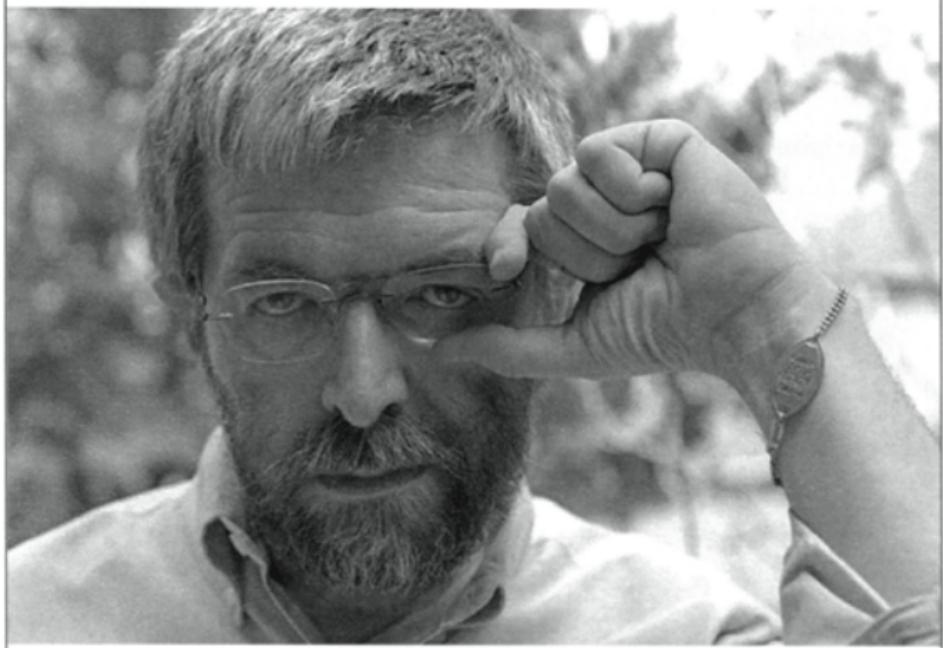
[...] in one
shaving of flame whittled off the lungs
to scorch the walls of prisons and to take that fire
behind the bony bars of the chest and into the tower
of the windpipe, in one breath, before you choke
on a gag of air thickened from
the last breath of the executed the breathing of hot
barrels and blood streaming on concrete,
the air, which carries your voice
or muffles it [...]

— He also pleaded for the victims of the Polish June protests of 1976, he cooperated with the Workers' Defense Committee. He also engaged in this struggle without any grandiloquence or bombast. He believed that by force of the word, this unique weapon,

which appeals to people's sensitivity, a poet may help to change the world for the better. And his poetry, combined with hard work, helped to bring about this change.

— As our country regained its independence twenty five years ago, Stanisław Barańczak, though choosing to remain abroad, ceased to be a refugee from Poland, emerging instead as the country's untiring ambassador. The Republic of Poland will never forget his services. In recognition of his merits, I decided to posthumously honor Stanisław Barańczak with the Grand Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland.

— “Peace be bliss, yet battle’s strife / ‘Tis our worldly run,” as Polish Baroque poet Mikołaj Sęp Szarzyński wrote. In this worldly run, Stanisław Barańczak emerged victorious as an artist and as a man. Peace to his memory!



Dido's Lament

*When I am laid, am laid in earth,
May my wrongs create
No trouble, no trouble in thy breast;
Remember me, remember me, but ah! forget my fate.
Remember me, but ah! forget my fate.*

*Gdy wchłonie mnie, gdy wchłonie grób,
Nie roń nad nim łez
I tylko, i tylko głowę skłóż;
Pamiętaj mnie, pamiętaj mnie! Lecz nie mój ciemny kres.
Pamiętaj mnie! Lecz nie mój ciemny kres.*

MAŁGORZATA OMILANOWSKA

A Farewell to Stanisław Barańczak*

The family, friends, students and admirers of Stanisław Barańczak and of his remarkable work are gathered here today in quiet reflection to bid farewell not only to an exceptional individual, but also to a great figure in Polish culture, who remained faithful to humanist virtues.

— Already his debut poems, original and creatively fresh, took our breath away. Recognized as a leading exponent of the New Wave, Stanisław Barańczak was interested in the relationships between literature and the reality outside it, the status of individual expression vis-à-vis the group's, and poetry's ability to contest Socialist Newspeak. We all read his outstanding *Sztuczne oddychanie* (*Artificial Respiration*) and *Tryptyk z betonu, zmęczenia i śniegu* (*Triptych with Concrete, Fatigue and Snow*).

— The subsequent evolution of Stanisław Barańczak's poems was increasingly inspired by English metaphysical poetry. This was seen especially in the collection *Chirurgiczna precyzja* (*Surgical Precision*), which appears to have been intended as a synopsis of his whole poetic work. He also wrote important essays and literary analyses, including ones on Miron Białoszewski and Zbigniew Herbert.

— Stanisław Barańczak was uniquely able to link the purposes of creative and political freedom, over time giving a universal dimension to the Polish fight for freedom. He was a courageous man: already as a signatory to the "Letter of the 59," he became engaged in the activities of the Workers' Defense Committee, risking painful harassment and repressions, prison and a publishing ban. He gave lectures at the Flying University and participated in the works of the Society for Academic Courses.

— Taking up the position of professor of Polish literature at Harvard University, in 1981, was a great honor, but it also meant an enormous amount of work. His emigration, which became permanent when martial law was instituted, did not in the least mean that Professor Barańczak was cut off from the culture of Poland. Instead, it fully revealed his outstanding

* Letter sent for Stanisław Barańczak's funeral at Mount Auburn Cemetery, Cambridge, Massachusetts, January 3, 2014.

talent as a translator and a theoretician of the art of translation, especially in his new canon of translations of Shakespeare.

— Stanisław Barańczak possessed an exceptional talent and an intimidating knowledge, but those close to him also remember him as a reserved, skeptical humanist with a great sense of humor.

— His final years were marked by suffering and illness, and we all acutely felt his silent presence in Polish culture and the absence of the poet's voice in Poland. The news of his death made very many people in Poland tremendously sad. Now, we can only seek consolation in the works he has left behind, which will continue to influence Polish culture for a long time.

— This is how we will remember him, with gratitude.

Minister of Culture and National Heritage
Małgorzata Omilanowska

— Translated by Maya Latynski

ADAM ZAGAJEWSKI

A Winter Journey

In the second volume of his conversations with Osvaldo Ferrari—conversations recorded in the final years of the author of *The South*, and by turns fascinating and somewhat boring—Jorge Luis Borges tells an anecdote, whose hero is Paul Verlaine. Verlaine, when asked what he thought about symbolism, is supposed to have said: “Symbolism? I’m sorry, but I don’t speak German”.

— I thought that Borges—who was the author of so many brilliant literary mystifications—invented this story; but no, I found, where else but on the internet, a record of the riposte of the great poet, one of the main representatives of symbolism in poetry: “Le symbolisme?... comprends pas... Ça doit être un mot allemand...”. [“Symbolism?... I don’t understand... That must be a German word...”].

— And yet, it is not of Borges that I wish to speak here, but of Stanisław Barańczak, of my, of our, recently deceased friend, a beautiful person and a great poet.

— I would like to recollect the figure of Staszek when he was still very young. It is almost always the case that young, indeed the youngest, poets—this generous gift of unknown powers to our, on the whole, little-talented societies, a gift repeating itself in each generation—always comprise a sizeable crowd, loud and colourful. However, gradually, slowly, over time, this crowd dwindles and thins out; many of its participants, deprived of gratification in the form of publication, acclaim, a first book, a first review, wearied by the loneliness of the work of writing, realize that there is no lack of far more practical occupations; thus, every now and then one of them discreetly returns to another life—a life that is private, domestic, ordinary, professional—to activity in some real occupation. A choice in which there is, in any case, nothing reprehensible, absolutely nothing.

— So many of these desertions occur over the years that, at the very end of this age group’s biological journey, the last few veterans of a poetic generation are able to meet in a single room, over a cup of pale tea, or a glass of wine, either red or white.

— Now, these statistico-philosophical observations would be of no use if one tried to relate them to Staszek. Whoever met

him back then—either as a reader of one of his early texts or also personally—realized, had to realize, that Stanisław was someone exceptional, someone full of an energy so great and of talents so numerous, with so much determination and diligence, that any desertion was here out of the question. They had to realise that if someone were to depart, become discouraged, abandon writing, it would certainly not be him. And truth be told—as I read now after many years—the poetic group “Próby,” which included Barańczak and Krynicki, programmatically opposed itself to “the fetishizing of so called spontaneous poetry, talent, inspiration”; nevertheless, we can—in hindsight—forget this rather doctrinaire objection, and not reject these old-fashioned categories.

— What was he like as a young man? Barbara Toruńczyk captured something of this wonderfully in a conversation on Radio Trójka. She described her first meeting with Stanisław in Lublin (where she studied). The public, present at the author’s evening—awaiting with interest the young poet, already recognized and possessed of a reputation and aura—experienced a certain surprise. For this was a time of dressing up, a time when many deemed that opposition to the world, including artistic opposition, could and should be expressed with the help of an army jacket, very long hair, appropriately ripped jeans and military boots. Sometimes there were even somewhat weaker talents, who were so preoccupied with picking appropriately expressive outfits that they lacked the strength or time to create another artistic manifesto, apart from a sartorial one.

— So, the surprise of the Lublin audience derived from the fact that the poet, who had travelled from Poznań, was dressed “like a clerk.” I can no longer recall if it was a matter of the suit or the unexceptional jacket (and the tie, a scandalous, bourgeois tie!). Someone will say that this is unimportant, that these are inessential minutiae. Why accord them any weight? Yet these minute details also show something significant, something which has to do not only with decorations and outfits, but reaches much deeper, telling us something about the nature of Stanisław’s literary work. Here, it was a matter of a determined and completely conscious rejection of theatricality, of poses, and a searching after authenticity, even ordinariness. Somewhere, in the background, lurked the conviction (not uncommon among poets) that there exists a certain tension, almost a contradiction, between poetic utterance—which in a certain artistic and

sometimes metaphorical way (different to that of journalists or philosophers, or even novelists) seeks the truth—and theatrical expression or, generally, the whole “atmosphere” of the theatrical world; although, many a poet will, in the end, admit that both directors and actors also search for the truth in their own imaginative way. For, in the end, one should not dig a chasm between poetry and the theatre.

— *À propos* ordinariness: I recall conversations with Józef Czapski, who valued Stanisław’s poetry highly, eagerly returned to it and said to me more than once: “Look, this is a poet of plain language, he writes like a man from Poznań!”.

— Such was the atmosphere surrounding the young Stanisław (though later also it changed little), an atmosphere of work and reliability. It was not a mystical cloud (in the style of *The Cloud of Unknowing*), but rather the transparent air of concrete responsibilities and plans, sometimes difficult or risky—as in the years of conspiracy—but even later, when they were no longer endangered by the police, still very demanding, like preparing for classes with students in Cambridge. The bohemian life—no, this was unthinkable. Yet, if the reader should think this was someone lacking a sense of humour, they would be making a fundamental mistake. For, one of the most important ingredients of his reliability, concreteness and anti-theatricality was precisely an excellent sense of humour, composed of irony, a talent for observation, and an ability to discern perfectly every artificiality, every pretentiousness.

— Now for some snapshots, some moments remembered from over the years:

— Firstly, a completely private meeting in Poznań, in Stanisław’s mother’s apartment on Kościuszki street (near her dental surgery) and there our first conversations, getting to know one another, the beginnings of my friendship with Staszek, but also with Anna, his wise wife and most loyal companion.

— Then Kraków. I admired his patience at gatherings—or, worse, formal meetings—of the so-called “Young Culture” (in other words the group of then young authors, who were united by a certain sense of community and published in the magazine “Student”). These formal meetings always lasted too long (which, in any case, is true of nearly all meetings, with the exception of the short and energetic sessions of my institute at the University of Chicago). Sometimes, the spring sun would rise outside the window

and pierce the cloud of cigarette smoke. This was during the first half of the seventies.

— Later, there were Stanisław's visits to Kraków in the second half of the seventies (by then, there remained only a memory of the "Young Culture" as an institution). Sometimes he stayed with us, in a flat on the top floor of an apartment building on Bolesław Chrobry street (Julian Kornhauser lived on the ground floor and Jerzy Radziwiłłowicz, the "Man of Marble," on the 9th). Stanisław came to Kraków in order to participate in academic conferences, or else at the invitation of the Flying University. Back then, Stanisław was not the only one to have two parallel existences, one completely legal, the second conspiratorial. It happened then that we held long night-time conversations. He was always friendly and open, but it was only during those late-night conversations that he truly opened up.

— It was by accident that I saw Stanisław and Anna in Cambridge, right at the beginning of their settlement there, still in their first and second apartments, before they found the house in Newtonville; this house was to be their fortress for many years, a place of great work and great sickness. I remember their problems and joys back then, though there was much more joy: the university, the library, a new life in New England, but also, for example, their first car, which Stanisław drove, with real pleasure (almost with pride), along the streets of Cambridge and Boston. It was a Japanese Subaru and, of course, Stanisław, being both a poet and a philologist, corrected those fellow Poles who did not know that in the Japanese word "Subaru" the accent falls on the first syllable, and not on the penultimate, as in Polish. This reminds me of Joseph Brodsky, who wrote, in one of his essays that, when he still lived in Russia and was just learning English, he was convinced that the word "Buick" (also a make of car) must have two syllables, and not one. For who would buy a one-syllable car? (After all, even "Fiat" is one-syllabled only in Poland).

— We met once in New York—this was when the period of Stanisław's feverish public activity was almost over. During the years of martial law he travelled tirelessly across North America (I think Canada was also included) and made appearances, sometimes together with stars like Susan Sontag, reading poems, and speaking about the situation in Poland. This must have been very burdensome for him, for he was not an entertainer and did not like these kinds of events—as we know, there was nothing theatrical in him. He believed, however, that he must do this as a citizen,

and as a member of the Worker's Defence Committee. His reliability, his courage and dedication meant that—although he was by nature a private, low-key, homely person, as well as an exceptionally hardworking one—he undertook “for the greater good” responsibilities which were difficult, and at odds with his substance. These qualities also meant that, in the eyes of hundreds of his countrymen who travelled to Boston, he was the unofficial representative of the “secret Poland” (it was the Germans who created, for their country, the concept *“das geheime Deutschland”*); they made him someone whom it was necessary to get to know and to visit. While this was an honour and a distinction for him, it must also, at times, have been something tiresome. I think that occasionally he longed for a peaceful evening—in the evenings he surely preferred to translate the poems of Elizabeth Bishop or to watch, on TV (already showing signs of a nascent local patriotism), the basketball matches of the Boston Celtics.

—— And then, later, there was our last meeting, when he was already marked by suffering, when his proud figure of a tall, strong man shrank, curled up, bent by inexorable illness. By then he could no longer say much, and needed Ania, reliable Ania, who translated his whispers. But he heard everything, understood everything. At moments he would nap; he was very tired both because of illness, and from his medications. His superb intelligence was not damaged; it was betrayed by the body, abandoned by the muscular apparatus.

—— Early on he became a substantial authority, both as a poet and as a penetrating and sometimes scathing critic—and yet, a short time later he risked everything, became one of the founding members of the Worker's Defence Committee, and suddenly something changed fundamentally in his life. The poet and theoretician, the hope of Poznań Polish Studies (someone who was soon to become a docent and professor, at a younger age than anyone else in his field), became, almost from one day to the next, a bold activist—returning to this word its original meaning, worn away by the servility of countless “Party activists,” whose activism was restricted to raising a hand at the moment when it was necessary to vote, unanimously, for a resolution at yet another congress.

—— One more thing about “conspiracy,” since here a certain theatricality, even a slight exaggeration, was not lacking: Poles, or some at least, like to conspire, to dress up, including mentally. Again, this was not how it was in the case of Stanisław, who was as

calm and reliable in his opposition work as in his other activities, and as ambitious; he was, of course, an ambitious person; it could not be otherwise with someone who did so much, who had so much energy.

— When one met Stanisław in Poznań, Warsaw or Kraków (or Lublin), one always had the impression that he had only a moment ago torn himself away from work, that just a minute earlier he had been busy at some new essay, or correcting student work (who was it that told the story of how Stanisław arrived at a many-day hunger strike, with a huge supply of things to do, student essays to mark, texts to translate...?).

— Stanisław made his debut early, and early on made himself known not only as a poet, but also as a critic and a creator of poetic programs. After all, one of the central texts of the critical tome *The Distrustful and the Over-Confident* (the title essay) appeared already in 1967, when its author was barely 21 years old and a student at Adam Mickiewicz University...

— Precisely this “distrust” was the intellectual core of Barańczak’s socially-engaged writing at the beginning of his journey, distrust, irony, criticism—connected, undoubtedly, to a utopian hope that these tools would burn out and destroy social evil and every injustice. I will not return here to the ideological discussions of those years, it is too late for that; in any case, one can find an analysis of those views, without difficulty, in countless articles or collections of essays by critics or poets of various generations.

— As a young man he coined the concept and term “dialectical romanticism.” Years later he undoubtedly did not give as much weight to this terminology; I think that he would have liked Verlaine’s reaction to the question about symbolism...

— The passing of someone as outstanding as Stanisław, calls one not to a detailed discussion of his ideas, but to something else—to a tribute (let us not be ashamed of this word), to a synthetic picture of the poet, translator, critic, and, simply put, human being.

— Death deprived us not of a theoretician, nor even of an author—but, above all, of an exceptional human being.

— Yes, a human being and a poet. On that day, when Stanisław’s funeral was being held in the American Cambridge, the Krakow Opera reopened its production of *Winter Journey* by Schubert and Barańczak (I like to look at the juxtaposition of these two names). Those, who could not fly to Boston, gathered together in the red chamber hall of the opera and listened to the songs of Franz

Schubert, to which Stanisław had written poems—poems that were exquisite, simultaneously mystical and cabaret-esque, tragic and funny. The baritone Andrzej Biegun sang beautifully. It seems to me that I was not the only one for whom this was an extraordinary experience, and not only because I knew, we knew, that in the same moment, at the Mount Auburn cemetery in Cambridge, a crowd of Stanisław's friends had gathered to farewell him.

— The juxtaposition of the great, immortal music of Schubert, with the poetry of Stanisław, was a demonstration of the unity of art. The music of the composer—a genius who died young, who did not get to know the baseness of the 20th Century, who could know nothing of Auschwitz, of Kolyma, of the emptiness of so many areas of modern life, of the boredom of a world of instant information (which moves no one), but who knew, of course, what life is, and what death is—united itself in an ideal way with the words written by our friend, written from inspiration, but also in the midst of his fight with illness, with time, with despair. It bound itself with the words created by Stanisław, who was not only a witness to totalitarianism, but also its energetic, courageous opponent.

— It was as if two completely different generations, one hundred and fifty years apart, embedded in different countries, in different eons and languages, condemned never to meet—Franz Schubert, an artist of the era of tailcoats and candles, of cannons and diplomatic lies, a witness to the Congress of Vienna, and Stanisław, living in the shadow of Yalta and Potsdam, in the shadow of lies even more monstrous, systematic and triumphant, in the shadow of an incurable illness—united themselves that afternoon in an ideal artistic form. They met in the great, sweet melancholy of art, in a sadness made mild by perfection of form and expression, by the bitter joy granted to us by wonder, however brief. A tragic wonder, which for a moment allows us, almost, to accept joyfully something which cannot be accepted—the fact that everything perishes in the cold fire of time, the most patient of killers.

— When we read Stanisław's most wonderful poems—like For “Grażyna”, like “From A Window On Some Floor That Mozart Aria”, like “She Cried That Night But Not For Him To Hear”, like *Winter Journey*, and others—it is hard not to pause a moment to consider who a great poet is, in point of fact. Stanisław wrote extraordinary poems almost from the beginning of his poetic journey, but it was precisely in these late works that he achieved a true

mastery; then, he no longer needed the scaffolding of a program, theory or manifesto.

—— I do not say this in the spirit of anti-intellectualism, which is, for me, something very foreign and distant. I only want to say that with a great poet the intellectual component fuses with the other elements of poetry in such a perfect manner that there is no longer any way either to distinguish or to separate them.

—— Paul Verlaine knew well what it was he did not understand.

Adam Zagajewski

—— Translated by Jakob Ziguras

ADAM MICHNIK

Farewell, Staszek

I can't say farewell to Staszek Barańczak—a wonderful man, writer, and friend, to whom I owe so much. There are no farewells—as Julia Hartwig says—one does not wave good-bye to someone who is dying.

I.

Death. No, this can't be serious, I can't accept this.

There were many more difficult things that never brought you down.

If I ever admired anybody, it was you.

If anything was ever permanent, it was that admiration.

How many times did I want to tell you. No way. I was too abashed by the gaps in my vocabulary and the microphone in your wall.

Now I hear it's too late. No, I don't believe it.

It's only nothingness, isn't it. How could a nothing like that possibly stand between us. I'll write down, word for word and forever,

that small streak in the iris of your eye, that wrinkle at the corner of your mouth.

Translated by Stanisław Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh

— This is what Staszek Barańczak wrote when he heard that Gajka Kuroń had died. Today I get choked up as I read these words.

II.

— He was a man and a poet who knew the sense of his work. At the very outset of his life as writer he wrote what poetry should be:

It should be mistrustful, for, today, only this can justify its existence. The wider the reach of a particular form of expression, the more earnestly it tries to dissuade us from the habit of thinking, to inculcate this or that set of absolute truths, to subject us to particular systems of values, to force us to this or that form of behavior. [...]

Hence, it should be mistrustful, a form of criticism, an unmasking. It should be all this until that moment when the last falsehood, the last demagoguery, and the last act of violence disappear from the earth. I don't think that poetry, specifically, should lead to this (if, in any case, anything is able to do so). But I believe that poetry can make a contribution: it can teach the human being to think about the world in categories of rational belief with respect to everything that endangers him, in the form of falsehood, demagoguery and violence. This will happen when the poetry, which I have in mind, will be mistrustful in full, consistently, when it will tear the masks of appearances not only from the external world, but also from itself. When it will bring to light, both in what surrounds it and what inheres within it, the discord, difference and polysemy lurking beneath the surface of harmony, accord and obviousness.

It must begin from this: from mistrust, which will clear the path for that which we all need. I have in mind—this is nothing new, granted, but we have almost forgotten what we should care about—I have in mind, of course, truth.

Translated by Jakob Ziguras

— That's how Staszek understood his feud with life.

— Many years later, he entered into a feud with death. He wrote:

there is something in the very nature of poetry, which provides an answer to the basic defect of life: its finitude. This is, it should be understood, an answer provided by someone who is himself inevitably subject to that finitude; an answer, therefore, which is unable to remove the defect, which comes down to putting on a brave face in a bad game. The game is bad because we stand, from the beginning, at a disadvantage; but it would be even worse, if we were to admit that—as a result of the certainty of failure—the game is not only bad, but completely senseless. Acting with dignity in this stupid situation, putting on a brave face, depends on finding some sense within it. We will not defeat our opponent in this way; but we will, at least, throw a stumbling block in his path. Nothingness is keenly

interested in propagating the feeling of meaninglessness, which paves the way for its progress and eases its task.

Translated by Jakob Ziguras

— Until the very end, Staszek kept erecting stumbling blocks before nothingness.

III.

— I met him in the early '70s, when—after prison and two years of working as a welder at a factory in Warsaw's Wola district—I went back to college by studying independently and commuting to take my exams at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. As I walked around town one day, I noticed that Staszek was signing a book of his poems at a bookstore. I went in and took my place in line. And that was the beginning of a lifelong friendship.

— I admired Staszek—his phenomenal versatility, masterly writing, beautiful and wise poems, his brilliant essays, venomous pamphlets, and ingenious translations of Russian, English, and American poets.

— He could do everything. He was a renaissance man, someone with extraordinary talent and equally extraordinary diligence. This taciturn bearded fellow with glasses, the star of Poznań's journalism, was also an extraordinary man—direct and humble, noble and friendly toward others. He was also a wonderful, brave, and irreverent spirit of his time; he was among the first to get involved in Poland's democratic opposition movement. He paid for it by getting a publishing ban issued against him, by getting thrown out of the university, and suffering all kinds of repressions. But even his open enemies dared not question his brilliance.

— He related to people with understanding, but he was steadfast when it came to principles. He had no tolerance for cowardice in the face of dictatorship. This is clear in his poems and essays—any one of them could have landed him in prison. This celebrity of Polish arts and letters signed all kinds of anti-government protests. Staszek participated in a hunger strike to defend political prisoners; he was a member of the Workers' Defense Committee (KOR), and many underground cultural initiatives. His name is among the editors of *Zapis*—the first underground literary journal.

— There is also no doubt that (together with Ryszard Krynicki and Adam Zagajewski) he was the most distinctive voice of the generation of 1968. His worldview is illustrated by his essays about irreverent Christians and brave secular humanists. He combined respect for evangelical values with the conviction that one must rationally examine the world: he found rhymes and affinities between Christianity and the Enlightenment.

— He also had a metaphysical conviction that there is good in people and evil in the world. During the years of dictatorship, some saw him as crazy and others as suspect. And then there were those who loved and respected him.

IV.

— I find it difficult to write about Staszek. I imbibed what he wrote and rejoiced at every meeting, even though I didn't see him all that often. I wasn't fortunate enough to witness the moment when he received an honorary doctorate from the Jagiellonian University—the ceremony took place at Harvard. He was already too ill to travel to Krakow. I thought then that if Polish culture has not become a mixture of new and not-so-new foolishness, it was in no small part thanks to Staszek Barańczak's painstaking work.

— The last time I visited him was in April 2014. He was already very seriously ill, and I owe this visit to Ania Barańczak's kindness. It was our last meeting. A cruel illness made it impossible for Staszek to work, but Ania's kind, wise, and loving presence made it possible for him to depart in dignity. To me, they were one: Staszek dedicated all his books to Ania.

— He wrote with gentle irony about himself:

Drobnomieszczańskie cnoty. Ja wiem, ja się ich wstydzę,
od lat poniżej poziomu: co za blamaż, nie mieć w biografii
ani jednego rozwodu, dewiacji, większego nałogu,
kuracji psychiatrycznej, burzliwego romansu na boku,
pełnowristego podcięcia żył; jakieś szare gafy
zamiast tęczowych skandali [...].

— And that's the way he was, this man who never bowed down—his entire self was a rainbow scandal struggling against all

stripes of totalitarianism, stupidity, intolerance, and talentless scribbling ubiquitous in our times and our culture.

V.

— In an essay about Auden, Staszek wrote that poetry “is not able to eradicate evil from us. But it allows us, at least, to bring this evil to consciousness. Precisely because we are condemned to the presence of evil within ourselves, we need, all the more, to become conscious of it.” Our dear Staszek—we will keep recalling your words.

Adam Michnik

— Translated by Agnieszka Marczyk

BETH HOLMGREN

Remembering Stanisław Barańczak

I know that much will be said today and for decades to come about Stanisław Barańczak's stunning poetry and virtuosic translation. The obituaries and remembrances, filling the Polish press since his death, struggle to determine his enduring place in the Polish-language pantheon of literature—whether this literature be his own work or foreign originals that he improved in his Polish versions.

For those of us who became Staszek's students when he came to Harvard, however, it is as important to appreciate what he was for us *in the moment*—as a teacher, an instant colleague, and a co-enthusiast. Staszek led a sizable cohort of graduate students in the 1980s and 1990s to fall in love with Polish literature as he had, without standing on ceremony. He arrived in Cambridge as a young man, perhaps just a decade older than the students he first taught, and he awed us in advance as a kind of intellectual rock star—a persecuted political activist *and* the co-founder of a poetic school. I had steeled myself for an arrogant demagogue with wild Paderewski hair, the sort of professor-celebrity who'd be on permanent leave touring the world rather than cooling his heels with us in the classroom.

Instead Stanisław Barańczak proved to be an altogether different kind of miracle, for he was the most approachable and generous of stars. He was a shy man who was enormously inventive and playful, a brilliant writer who modeled fearlessness. In our seminars, Staszek showed us how to relish everything in the texts we studied—from intricate linkages of meter, rhyme, and meaning to artful nonsense. He opened the big doors to Polish history and culture as well as to Polish literature. There was no text without context, no connection off-limits, no topic unworthy of analysis or beyond our non-native range. Staszek launched us into the profession with the conviction that we were equipped and entitled to tackle any subject in Polish culture. He let us know that he would be delighted to hear news of our forays and to swap news of his own recent achievements, as if we could ever be equals. More than any other Polish scholar in my experience, Staszek Barańczak taught me to cross national boundaries with impunity, convincing me that Polish culture could be my home turf no matter where I had been born.

——— I am deeply saddened by Staszek's long, terrible illness and early death—for his sake and the sake of Ania, Michał, and Ania first and foremost. I am very sorry for the loss of his future contributions to Polish literature. And I am also sorry for all the students who did not have the pleasure of working with Staszek and did not receive his mighty Barańczakian seal of approval for their escapades in Polish studies. I cannot tell you how many times I have invoked it over the past decades. Thank you, Staszek, for this great gift.

3 January, 2015

Beth Holmgren

Beth Holmgren

Stanisław Barańczak

Translations of Polish Poetry

JAN KOCHANOWSKI

Tren 18

My, nieposłuszne, Panie, dzieci Twoje,
W szczęśliwe czasy swoje
Rzadko Cię wspominamy,
Tylko rozkoszy zwykłych używamy.

Nie baczym, że to z Twej łaski nam płynie,
A także prędko minie,
Kiedy po nas wdzięczności
Nie uznasz, Panie, za Twe życzliwości.

Miej nas na wodzy, niech nas nie rozpycha
Doczesna rozkosz licha!
Niechaj na Cię pomniemy
Przynamniej w kaźni, gdy w łasce nie chcemy!

Ale ojcowskim nas karz obyczajem,
Boć przed Twym gniewem stajem
Tak, jako śnieg niszczeje,
Kiedy mu słońce niebieskie dogrzeję.

Zgubisz nas prędko, wiekuisty Panie,
Jeśli nad nami stanie
Twa ciężka boska ręka;
Sama niełaska jest nam sroga mąka.

Ale od wieku Twoja lutość słynie,
A pierwej świat zaginię,
Niż Ty wzgardzisz pokornym,
Chocia był długą przeciw Tobie spornym.

Wielkie przed Tobą są występy moje,
Lecz miłosierdzie Twoje
Przewyssza wszystki złości.
Użyj dziś, Panie, nade mną litości!

Lament 18

My Lord, each of us is your willful child:
By happiness beguiled,
Entranced by earthly joys,
He soon forgets you and heeds not your voice.

We fail to see how much your Grace attends
Our welfare; which soon ends
When your infinite Good
Is not repaid with infinite gratitude.

Rein us in, Lord, before vain pleasure blinds
Our supercilious minds!
Remind them of your cause
If not with blessings, then at least with blows!

Yet punish us as loving fathers do;
Your wrath would burn us through;
We'd vanish without trace
Like snow when pierced by the sun's warmer rays.

Oh, let your hand not crush those in discord
With you, Eternal Lord;
You hurt us to the core
With your mere frown: we could not withstand more.

Though fools claim you have never been man's friend,
Sooner the world may end
Than you shall ever scorn
A rebel soul, when broken and forlorn.

Great are my sins before you, Lord; yet still
Your mercy and goodwill
Would not let evil reign.
Have pity, Lord, on my despair and pain!

JAN ANDRZEJ MORSZTYN

Do tejże

Oczy twe nie są oczy, ale słońca jaśnie
Świecące, w których blasku każdy rozum gaśnie;
Usta twe nie są usta, lecz koral rumiany,
Których farbą każdy zmysł zostaje związany;
Piersi twe nie są piersi, lecz nieba surowy
Kształt, który Wolą naszę zabiera w okowy;
Tak oczy, piersi, usta – rozum, zmysł i wolą
Blaskiem, farbą i kształtem ćmią, więżą, niewolą.

To His Mistress

Your eyes are not eyes: they are suns whose rays
Blind reason in all who bask in their grace;
Your lips are not lips: they're coral whose hue
Stuns sense in those who dare but glance at you;
Your breasts are not breasts: they're heavenly spheres
Whose shape binds will with chains of hopes and fears.
Thus by eyes, lips, breasts – radiant, rosy, round –
Reason, sense, will are blinded, bludgeoned, bound.

———— Translated with Clare Cavanagh

ADAM MICKIEWICZ
Nad wodą wielką i czystą

Nad wodą wielką i czystą
Stał rzędami opoki,
I woda tonią przejrzystą
Odbiła twarze ich czarne;

Nad wodą wielką i czystą
Przebiegły czarne obłoki,
I woda tonią przejrzystą
Odbiła kształty ich marne;

Nad wodą wielką i czystą
Błysnęło wzdłuż i grom ryknął,
I woda tonią przejrzystą
Odbiła światło, głos zniknął.

A woda, jak dawniej czysta,
Stoi wielka i przejrzysta.

Tę wodę widzę dokoła
I wszystko wiernie odbijam,
I dumne opoki czoła,
I błyskawice – pomijam.

Skałom trzeba stać i grozić,
Obłokom deszcze przewozić,
Błyskawicom grzmieć i ginąć,
Mnie płynąć, płynąć i płynąć.

Above The Vast, Clear Depths

Above the vast, clear depths
Cliffs stood, erect and stark,
And the transparent depths
Reflected the rock's dark face;

Above the vast, clear depths
Clouds flew, transient and dark,
And the transparent depths
Reflected their futile chase;

Above the vast, clear depths
Lightning flashed, thunder rolled,
And the transparent depths
Reflected the silent bolt.

And still the vast, clear depths
Are transparent as of old.

I see these depths all round
As I reflect the sky,
The flash, the proud rock's frown –
Everything I pass by.

Cliffs must stand tall and reign,
Clouds must carry their rain,
Lightning must roar and be gone,
I must flow on, on, on.

———— Translated with Clare Cavanagh

CYPRIAN KAMIL NORWID
Do obywatela Johna Brown

Przez Oceanu ruchome płaszczyzny
Pieśń Ci, jak mewę, posyłam, o! Janie...

Ta lecieć długo będzie do ojczyzny
Wolnych – bo wątpi już: czy ją zastanie?...
– Czy też, jak promień Twej zacnej siwizny,
Biała – na puste zleci rusztowanie:
By kata Twego syn rączką dziecienną
Kamienie ciskał na mewę gościnną!

*

Więc niżli szyję Twoją obnażoną
Spróbuja sznury, jak jest nieugięta;

Więc, niżli ziemi szukać pocznesz piętą,
By precz odkopnąć planetę spodloną –
A ziemia spod stóp Twych, jak płaz złekniony,
Pierzchnie – –
więc, niżli rzekną: „Powieszony...”
Rzekną i pojrzą po sobie, czy kłamią? – –

Więc, nim kapelusz na twarz Ci załamią,
By Ameryka, odpoznawszy syna,
Nie zakrzyknęła na gwiazd swych dwanaście:
„Korony mojej sztuczne ognie zgaście,
Noc idzie – czarna noc z twarzą Murzyna!”

*

Więc, nim Kościuszki cień i Waszyngtona
Zadrzy – początek pieśni przyjm, o! Janie...

Bo pieśń nim dojrzy, człowiek nieraz skona,
A niżli skona pieśń, naród pierw wstanie.

To Citizen John Brown

Across the restless ocean plains, my hand
Sends this song's seagull off to you, o John!...

It will be soaring long toward the land
Of the free – fearing that land might be gone,
That in its stead a scaffold's left to stand
With no one near it, just your hangman's son
At play, who'll greet the bird, white as your hair,
With stones he hurls as it comes through the air!

*

Before the noose, then, drops down like a probe
To test your naked neck's unyielding worth;

Before your foot strains toward the absent Earth
To kick away the self-debasing globe,
Before the planet, like a cowardly
Reptile, escapes;
before they say, then: "He?
He's hanged" – – unsure themselves if that is true – –

Before they pull your hat's brim down, lest you
Be recognized on this your last of days,
And lest America should mourn her son:
"Die down, twelve stars, feigned fires of my crown!
Night comes – a night with a black Negro face!" – –

*

Before Kosciuszko's, Washington's dead eyes
Shed tears, then – let me lay this at your feet...

People may die before the song's complete,
Yet peoples may rise up before it dies.

KONSTANTY ILDEFONS GAŁCZYŃSKI

Dlaczego ogórek nie śpiewa

Pytanie to, w tytule
postawione tak śmiało,
choćby z największym bólem
rozwiązać by należało.

Jeśli ogórek nie śpiewa,
i to o żadnej porze,
to widać z woli nieba
prawdopodobnie nie może.

Lecz jeśli pragnie? Gorąco!
Jak dotąd nikt. Jak skowronek.
Jeżeli w słoju nocą
łzy przelewa zielone?

Mijają lata i zimy,
raz słoneczko, raz chmurka;
a my obojętnie przechodzimy
koło niejednego ogórka.

Why Does the Pickle Never Sing

The question that our title
has cast in deathless bronze
is painful, yet so vital,
we owe it a response.

If our little green friend
won't sing, croon, lilt or chant,
it's clear that, Heaven forfend,
it most probably can't.

But what if evil stars
trample its throat? if divine
airs die in air-tight jars,
engulfed by teary brine?

Meanwhile, time flies, alas,
first sunshine, then rains trickle,
and still we callously pass
by many a pained pickle.

———— Translated with Clare Cavanagh

WISŁAWA SZYMBORSKA

Koloratura

Stoi pod peruczką drzewa,
na wieczne rozsypanie śpiewa
zgłoski po włosku, po srebrzystym
i cienkim jak pajęcza wydzielina.

Człowieka przez wysokie C
kocha i zawsze kochać chce,
dla niego w gardle ma lusterka,
trzykrotnie słówek ćwiartki ćwierka
i drobiąc grzanki do śmietanki
karmi baranki z filiżanki
filutka z filigranu.

Ale czy dobrze słyszę? Biada!
Czarny się fagot do niej skrada.
Ciężka muzyka na kruczych brwiach
porywa, łamie ją wpół ach –
Basso Profondo, zmiłuj się,
doremi mane thekel fares!

Chcesz, żeby zmilkła? Uwieść ją
w zimne kulisy świata? W krainę
chronicznej chrypki? W Tartar kataru?
Gdzie wiekuiste pochrząkiwanie?
Gdzie poruszają się pyszczki rybie
dusz nieszczęśliwych? Tam?

O nie! O nie! W godzinie złej
nie trzeba spadać z miny swojej!
Na włosie przesłyszany w głos
tylko się chwilkę chwieje los,
tyle, by mogła oddech wziąć
i echem się pod sufit wsipiąć,
gdzie wraca w kryształ vox humana
i brzmi jak światłem zasiał.

Coloratura

Poised beneath a twig-wigged tree,
she spills her sparkling vocal powder:
slippery sound slivers, silvery
like spider's spittle, only louder.

Oh yes, she Cares (with a high C)
for Fellow Humans (you and me);
for us she'll twitter nothing bitter:
she'll knit her fitter, sweeter glitter;
her vocal chords mince words for us
and crumble croutons, with crisp crunch
(lunch for her little lambs to munch),
into a cream-filled demitasse.

But hark! It's dark! Oh doom too soon!
She's threatened by the black bassoon:
it's hoarse and coarse, it's grim and gruff,
it calls her dainty voice's bluff –
Basso Profondo, end this terror,
do-re-mi mene tekel etcetera!

You want to silence her, abduct her
to our chilly life behind the scenes?
To our Siberian steppes of stopped-up sinuses,
frogs in all throats, eternal hems and haws,
where we, poor souls, gape soundlessly
like fish? And this is what you wish?

O nay! O nay! Though doom be nigh,
she'll keep her chin and pitch up high!
Her fate is hanging by a hair
of voice so thin it sounds like *air*,
but that's enough for her to take
a breath and soar, without a break,
chandelier-wards; and while she's there,
her *vox humana* crystal-clears
the whole world up. And we're all ears.

— Translated with Clare Cavanagh

STANISŁAW BARAŃCZAK

Ustawienie głosu

Tak, takim może głosem, jakim pierwszy pilot
oświadcza przez głośniki, że wszystko w porządku
(tak jakby sto ton stali prującей na wylot
chmurę nie było gwałtem na zdrowym rozsądku) –
ciepłym, choć ochłodzonym i orzeźwiającym
napojem głosu, w którym musują bąbelki
wiary, że żaden ciężar nie będzie zbyt wielki,
gdy w garść wziąć dźwignię męskiej odpowiedzialności;

albo telewizyjnym głosem kaznodziei,
w którym pod reflektorem nie ma ani cienia
wątpliwości (że niby wyjściem z beznadziei
jest wpłacić czek na konto przyjścia Zbawiciela),
gdy grzmi z piętrowych estrad, w jaskrawo niebieskim
smokingu z poliestru – w tle chórek anielic
z sekcją rytmiczną – gotów cały się zamienić
w neon: „I Ty Się Znajdziesz W Królestwie Niebieskim”;

czy zwłaszcza głosem, jakim syntetyczny pieśniarz,
jakiś w jednej osobie Simon i Garfunkel
(tych dwóch zresztą naprawdę lubię), ucielesnia
przekonanie, że nie jest źle z naszym gatunkiem,
bo w gruncie rzeczy cóż jest nienawiść z pogardą:
to dysonans, co zmierza w tonikę durową
naszej dobrej natury (tu, jak za umową,
sprawny chwyt modulacji łapie nas za gardło) –

więc takim głosem gdyby mówić; ale gdzież tam.
Żaden promieniujący z przepony rezonans:
na drogach oddechowych chropawa nawierzchnia
chrypki, na rozpaczliwie skrzypliwych resorach
strun głosowych cichnący gdzieś w pustce wehikuł,
który im bardziej grozi na starość rozsypką,
tym częściej chce przekraczać dozwoloną szybkość.
Nie żebyś skąpił mi specjalnych wysłanników:

już tyle razy w szumie niewidzialnych skrzydeł
zsyłałeś ich, w nadziei, że któryś ustawi
mój głos. Stary łacinnik B. (sam zresztą skrzypiał):
„Dykcja, mój panie, dykcja! Poruszać ustami,
nie mamrotać pod nosem!” Lub takie zjawisko,
jak materializacja którejś z tych uroczych
starszych pań, kiedy tylko mój publiczny odczyt
przebrzmi w pustawej sali: „Ciekawe to wszystko,

z tym, że nie można było nic a nic zrozumieć;
czy pan nie może głośniej, żeby w tylnym rzędzie
też było słyszać?” Nie wiem, jakoś nigdy w sumie
nie umiałem się zdobyć na to, by powiedzieć
cokolwiek na głos z pełną i natychmiastową
wiarą – nie w prawdę własnych słów, ale w potrzebę
męczenia innych tym, co w mocę sam spostrzegę.
Tylko wiara ustawia głos. A Ty – jak z Tobą

jest, czy przypadkiem nie tak samo? Czemu
sam nic nie powiesz pełniej, pewniej? Posiekane
komunikaty, zgłoski tonące w milczeniu.
Dykcja, mój Panie, dykcja. Wszystko to ciekawe,
ale nic nie rozumiem w moim tylnym rzędzie.
Wybacz. Ja nie kpię. Jakoś rozumiem Cię w sumie,
jak jakała drugiego jakałę rozumie,
to znaczy, z nim się męcząc, gdy chce coś powiedzieć.

Voice Coaching

Yes, with the voice that, miles above O'Hare,
tunes in to tell you all is going well
(ten tons of metal hanging in mid-air
with you inside – how could that scare the hell
out of you) – with that warm (yet sparkling cold)
vocal soft drink, full of refreshing bubbles
of confidence, for no doubt ever troubles
the hand that holds what it's been told to hold;

or that of a TV evangelist
blaring: "Downtrodden? It's godless behavior:
Send a check and you'll make our special list
of guests for the next Coming of the Savior",
as he drowns out even his backup (seven
blond bouffant angels plus the drummer's racket)
with his electric-blue message and jacket:
"You Too Shall Enter the Kingdom of Heaven",

or, above all, the voice of a pop star,
Mary, say, as in "Peter, Paul and Mary"
(in their prime, that is), crooning that we are
all human, hence our lot is not so scary;
we soft-rock, after all, the same big boat,
and isn't hate just dissonance, forever
to be remixed as harmony? (a clever
harmonic shift here catches at our throat) –

if I could speak with such a voice; but no.
No radiant resonance of vocal chords,
no vibrant diaphragm; instead, a raw
respiratory tract, where the work horse
of hoarse voice drags its cart (or is it hearse),
its neighs and whinnies increasingly timid,
too hurried, though, to observe the speed limit.
Not that You spare me disguised messengers:

hosts of them have descended with their tips
and words of wisdom. B., our Latin teacher
(himself a lisper): “I say, move your lips,
my lad! Don’t whisper!” Or that constant feature
of any public talk I’m weak enough
or vain enough or fool enough to offer:
the frail old ladies who approach and proffer
backhanded compliments: “Marvellous stuff,

sir, but we didn’t catch a single word;
can’t you speak up, so that those in the farther
rows can hear too?” Oh lord. No, being heard
seems to me somehow – I don’t know – well, harder
than speaking; to be heard, you’ve got to utter
your words with the faith, not that they are true,
but that they matter. Otherwise, you mutter.
Faith is your voice coach. But what about You,

what about Your own speech impediment?
Why don’t You ever speak up, just to let
us hear You, if not fully comprehend?
Move your lips, my Lord. Marvellous stuff, yet
I, in my back row, cannot catch a squeak.
Forgive me. Seriously: I do try. Rather,
I understand, the way one stammerer does another:
by suffering with him as he tries to speak.



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