Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies Vol. 39 No. 2 (2015) 266–285

Cavafy in Poland

Joanna Kruczkowska
University of Lodz / University of Athens

Despite the diversity of Modern Greek poetry available in Polish translation, Cavafy's work has eclipsed the achievements of other poets, just as the shadow of his lifelong translator, Zygmunt Kubiak, has inhibited other attempts only starting to surface in the twenty-first century. While external factors have determined Modern Greek anthologies in Poland, Cavafy translation has been mostly driven by personal passion. Apart from translation, this article reflects on various reasons why the Alexandrian's work should be so attractive to the Polish literary scene. Cavafy's seminal place within Polish literature stimulates further reflection on rewriting Cavafy in Poland.

Modern Greek poetry has marked over fifty years of its presence in Poland, encompassing five big anthologies, a number of smaller thematic selections, individual authors' collections, publications of poems in literary journals, a history of Modern Greek literature and a dictionary of its writers. It amounts to quite an impressive body of translation and research for a country with limited cultural exchange with Greece.[1] The diversity of names exhibited in these publications (one of the translators, Nikos Chadzinikolau, claimed to have rendered over five hundred Greek authors into Polish) does not, however, entail a wider knowledge of the area of Modern Greek poetry among the Polish readership, with one notable exception: C. P. Cavafy.

Modern Greek poetry translation in Poland starts with Cavafy (1960) and ends, for the time being, with Cavafy (2013).[2] Even George Seferis, promoted by Cavafy's most

1 The exception to this historical perspective is closely related to politics: the Greek diaspora in Poland consists of Greek Civil War refugees (now mainly their descendants) who arrived in Poland in 1949–51. At that time, about 13,000 adults and children were admitted to the country, including the translator Nikos Chadzinikolau. Many went back to Greece in the 1980s. The diaspora has constantly contributed to Polish cultural life.

2 Cavafy was preceded, for comprehensible political reasons, by Yannis Ritsos, whose *Moonlight Sonata* appeared in the press in 1957 (trans. Jan Zych, *Zebra* 4, 8–9). The first translations of Cavafy's single poems by Janusz Strasburger, Zygmunt Kubiak and Czesław Miłosz appeared in journals: 'Che fece…', 'Voices' and 'On Board Ship', trans. J. Strasburger (1960); 'A Byzantine nobleman in exile composing verses', 'The god abandons Antony', 'The first step' and 'In a township of Asia Minor', trans. Kubiak (1961); 'Ithaca', 'Dareios', 'Myris' and 'Waiting for the Barbarians', trans. Miłosz (Paris 1961). See bibliography in A. Fiut, 'Dwa spojrzenia na antyk', in *Być (albo nie być) Środkowoeuropejczykiem* (Krakow 1999) 112. Other

© 2015 Centre for Byzantine, Ottoman and Modern Greek Studies, University of Birmingham
DOI: 10.1179/0307013115Z.00000000065

https://doi.org/10.1179/0307013115Z.00000000065 Published online by Cambridge University Press

steadfast translator, Zygmunt Kubiak, in his anthology and his monograph on Cavafy,[3] had always been overshadowed by the Alexandrian, serving the purpose of a juxtaposition or mirror for the older colleague. Establishing a personal canon of Modern Greek poetry, Kubiak's anthology consists of essentially two poets, Cavafy and Seferis, each represented by the same number of poems, while a large part of the monograph addresses Seferis' struggle to liberate himself from Cavafy's influence. Seven editions of Kubiak's Cavafy spanning over thirty-five years of the translator's monastic work (1967–2001), and two new versions from other translators, Antoni Libera (2011) and Ireneusz Kania (2013), as if emancipated from the imposing shadow of Kubiak's monument after his death in 2004, complete the image of Cavafy's domination in the Modern Greek poetry scene in Poland.

The choice of Cavafy over other Greek poets in Poland is by no means a coincidence.[4] In contrast to Cavafy, Angelos Sikelianos and Kostis Palamas, for instance (published in 1985 and 1987 in translations by Janusz Strasburger), with their profuse metrical patterns and emotional diction did not match the prevailing ascetic tone of post-war Polish literature. The long series of Cavafy translations – a case without precedent in Poland – contributed to his sweeping success, together with numerous issues discussed in the course of this article. Just as the anthologies of Modern Greek poetry in Poland have been determined by external factors (mainly of a socio-political nature under the Communist regime), the voluminous domain of Cavafy translation reveals largely personal determinants, such as the passion, or even obsession, of the translator, an impulse overlooked in the long list of motivations enumerated by André Lefevere in his influential book on translation as rewriting.[5] Some of Cavafy's Polish translators invested several years in exploring biographical, textual and contextual issues, polishing and expanding subsequent versions (Kubiak, 1967–2001), maintaining a dialogue with the Greek master (Zbigniew Herbert, 1950s–90s), or haunted by his poetry in memorable or mysterious circumstances (Kania, 1967 until now). Critics and poets have pondered the Cavafy phenomenon in publications spanning a considerable period of time (Czesław Miłosz, 1960–1990s; Piotr Sommer and Krzysztof Lisowski, 1990s until now). As ardent as professionals, Cavafy's lay readers penetrate new translations and cherish their favourite poems in favourite renditions.

Continued

Modern Greek poets appeared in Polish translation in three anthologies of 1970-2 and one of 2004, and in individual volumes.

3 Respectively Z. Kubiak, *Antologia poezji nowogreckiej* (Warsaw 1970); Z. Kubiak, *Kawafis Aleksandryjczyk* (Warsaw 1995): a two-volume publication with Cavafy's *Collected Poems*.

4 Throughout this article, if not marked otherwise by references to sources, I am basing my remarks on my own observations as a reader of Polish literature over a period of 30 years, with the benefit of knowledge of both political systems, including the time of transition.

5 A. Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* (London and New York 1992).

https://doi.org/10.1179/0307013115Z.00000000065 Published online by Cambridge University Press

In this article, the poetry of Cavafy in Poland will be addressed in relation to two literary domains within which it operates: one being Cavafy translation and the other Polish literature. Another domain, of world translation, will be mentioned only to the extent to which it defines, for Polish translators and poets, the language of first contact with Cavafy or even the source language of their renditions. The part devoted to Cavafy in Polish literature precedes the one concerning translation; this structure is based on a presumption that the reception of Cavafy's work is the most intriguing phenomenon for Western readers, given social and political differences. One has to bear in mind, however, that for Polish poets, critics and translators younger than Herbert and Miłosz, Kubiak's first rendition (1967) has become a legendary introduction to the work of Cavafy. Without translators and their highly individual approach to Cavafy's work he would not occupy such a prominent place on the Polish literary scene.

*

In terms of general knowledge, the average Polish reader, apart from Cavafy's name, would probably recall 'Waiting for the Barbarians'; if keen on poetry, they may also remember the 1990s discussion in the press revolving around Kubiak's publication of Cavafy's *Collected Poems* and the monograph. Why Cavafy, why 'Waiting for the Barbarians', and why the 1990s? The phenomenon cannot be explained simply by the fact that Cavafy is the most recognized Modern Greek poet across the world, and his 'Barbarians' an 'allégorique et *presque trop célèbre* ... démonstration de la politique du pire'.[6] It would also be easy to say that Cavafy enjoyed a renaissance in the 1990s mainly for two reasons: because of Kubiak's publication and because of the Polish political transformation from Communism to democracy after spring 1989 which entailed, as one of its consequences, an eruption of publishing activity after over forty years of censorship. Yet it was Herbert via his poetry and Miłosz via his translation of four poems, including the 'Barbarians', who introduced respectively the Cavafian feeling (1950s) and Cavafy himself (1961) into Polish poetry before Kubiak.[7] The 1990s appear only as a culmination of the Alexandrian's popularity, ceaselessly kindled by his devoted translator.

Throughout those thirty years, 'Waiting for the Barbarians', with its restrained diction and historical allusion so much valued in Polish poetry, may have attained such popularity in line with the rules of irony it exercises: either because of the tradition of Polish resistance to sheer force, the resistance frequently voiced in an ironic way by Herbert and Miłosz among others; or, in the 1990s, because of the contrary fact that,

6 M. Yourcenar, 'Présentation critique de Constantin Cavafy', in *Sous bénéfice d'inventaire* (Paris 1978) 232. Emphasis added.

7 Miłosz's translations of Cavafy's single poems (1961), more influential than Kubiak's or Strasburger's (1960–1) because of his own noted position in Polish literature, may have formed a horizon of expectations for Cavafy; to a certain extent, however, these expectations were satisfied by Herbert's poetry from the 1950s onwards, before Miłosz published his translations.

https://doi.org/10.1179/0307013115Z.00000000065 Published online by Cambridge University Press

when resistance was no longer needed, Polish poetry faced a void. A similar void following the decline of a long historical era was diagnosed by Cavafy in the 'Barbarians.' Polish poetry, so far dominated by ethics combined with aesthetics, by anti-utopian humanism or even heroism, by irony and historical allusion, or by linguistic experiment, had to respond to the new reality with no defined enemy: the reality of freedom. It did so through a complete change of course by young poets, who turned to describing their material surroundings in a quasi-existential manner, while older generations started to be examined from new critical perspectives. In his 1994 anthology of translations including the 'Barbarians', Miłosz writes that he consciously constructs a new canon by including poems which are 'clear and realistic, that is, loyal to the reality which they describe as concisely as possible... I wish to remind readers that poetry can be really useful nowadays for various reasons. These reasons are linked to our spiritual problems at this particular stage of civilization.'[8]

Obviously, many of the factors specified above transgress the domain of translation and overlap with a wider socio-political context which Lefevere refers to, in general terms, as power, ideology, and economy conditioning the world of translation; basically however, they overlap with the domain of Polish literature. The intriguing case of Cavafy's success in Poland deserves a separate study. Even though his 'Barbarians' were written at the end of the nineteenth century, Cavafy has been recognized as one of the most modern voices of post-war Europe. 'Cavafy seems to belong in the second half of this century,' Miłosz observes, 'but this is an illusion resulting from his late arrival in world poetry, through translations'.[9] This is only partly true if we consider Cavafy's place in post-war Polish poetry, which is not only determined by his late international debut. His discipline and withdrawn view of history has been a perfect match for post-war Polish poets who *independently* took a similar course. Although some contemporary poets and critics such as Sommer or Lisowski regard these features as a Cavafian heritage, it seems rather a coincidence: such an approach to history in Polish poetry resulted from the shock of the Second World War, while the sober style had already been in operation in the pre-war avant-garde, when Poles had little, if any, contact with the work of the Alexandrian. Miłosz also acknowledges these parallel paths of Cavafy and Polish poets: 'In Cavafy's decision to exploit his own Hellenic history, his Polish reader recognizes the idea he had *already* discovered when reading poets of his own tongue: that we apprehend the human condition with pity and terror not in the abstract but always in relation to a given place and time'.[10] As for the genre of parable, another feature linking Cavafy with Polish poetry, Polish literature had earlier

8 C. Miłosz, *Wypisy z ksiąg użytecznych* (Krakow 1994) 6–7. Passages from Polish criticism in this article are provided in my own translation, except for *The Witness of Poetry*.

9 C. Milosz, *The Witness of Poetry* (Cambridge, MA 1983) 111.

10 Milosz, *The Witness*, 112. Emphasis added.

https://doi.org/10.1179/0307013115Z.00000000065 Published online by Cambridge University Press

produced a native model of the genre and of historiosophy comparable to Cavafy's: the work of the great Romantic poet Cyprian Kamil Norwid.[11]

Cavafy found fertile ground in Poland also because both Alexandria and Poland were marginalized in the course of history. This conjunction of space and time may have contributed to Cavafy's and Herbert's focus on marginal historical figures. Cavafy on the one hand, and Miłosz and Herbert on the other, originated from historical, political and cultural borderlands with diverse influences (Alexandria, Wilno and Lwów respectively[12]) which were once in history's forefront. Miłosz 'was born and grew up on the very borderline between Rome and Byzantium', the two empires whose frontiers are omnipresent in Cavafy's poetry; Herbert, born in Lwów, mourned the loss of his city where he never returned after the war. As Miłosz observes when discussing Cavafy's 'Dareios', 'the true home of the Polish poet is history, and though Polish history is much shorter than that of Greece, it is no less rich in defeats and lost illusions'.[13] The decline of democratic and totalitarian states (Roman, Byzantine, Polish, Soviet) together with exile and loss circulate in the orbit of the Cavafy-Poland axis.

Another reason for Cavafy's popularity in Poland, as in other countries, is his deceptively prosaic style, and consequently, its translatability into many languages. This prose-like aspect was observed over fifty years ago by Miłosz revealing that he had translated Cavafy from English, which was his frequent practice with less known languages: 'The translation of Cavafy's poems was carried out from English, unfortunately. Given the linguistic features of this poetry, it may turn out to be less harmful than in the case of poets more immersed in the matter of language.'[14] This singular aspect of Cavafy's poetry exists within a larger context of international translation; mapping Polish recent attempts to restore prosody to Cavafy's poetry (Libera 2011 and Kania 2013) in this framework, one can notice that they may run counter to a general tendency exemplified, for instance, in the English-speaking world to neglect Cavafy's metre after John Mavrogordato's rendition. Contrary to the tradition of prose translation established by Marguerite Yourcenar ('la prosodie n'est pas, en somme, ce qui importe le plus chez Cavafy'[15]), convergent with the opinions of such poetic authorities as Iosif Brodsky ('Every poet loses in translation, and Cavafy is not an exception. What is exceptional is that Cavafy also gains'[16]), Seamus Heaney ('Cavafy's poems survive translation better than most' and 'would probably hold up well enough if translated into prose'[17]), or Czesław Miłosz quoted above,

11 C. Miłosz, *Prywatne obowiązki* (Paris 1972) 41; Skibiński in Z. Kubiak, *Zwierciadło Śródziemnomorza* (Warsaw 2002) 97.

12 I provide the last two names (now Vilnius and Lviv) in the Polish pre-war spelling; parts of Lithuania and Ukraine remained within Polish borders until 1939.

13 Milosz, *The Witness*, 4, 111–12.

14 Miłosz, *Prywatne*, 41–2.

15 M. Yourcenar, 'L'art de traduire', in *Les yeux ouverts. Entretiens avec Matthieu Galey* (Paris 1980) 205.

16 I. Brodsky, 'On Cavafy's side', *The New York Review of Books*, 17 Feb. 1977.

17 S. Heaney, 'Foreword', in C. P. Cavafy, *The Canon*, trans. S. Haviaras (Athens 2004) vi.

https://doi.org/10.1179/0307013115Z.00000000065 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Cavafy's poetry does not strike the reader of Greek as much akin to prose. This issue was perhaps most accurately diagnosed by Seferis:

> Very often in Cavafy's work, while the language itself is neutral and unemotional, the movement of the persons and the succession of the events involved is so closely packed, so airtight, one might almost say, that one has the impression that his poems *attract emotion by means of a vacuum*. This vacuum created by Cavafy is the element which differentiates his phrases from the mere prosaicness which his critics have fancied that they saw in his work.[18]

Wrestling with the metre, Libera's and Kania's endeavours in Polish, or, in Heaney's opinion, Stratis Haviaras' in English,[19] attest to this lack of 'mere prosaicness' in Cavafy's poetry.

Cavafy and Polish literature

From the contemporary standpoint, Miłosz's translation of Cavafy's four poems seems the most influential before Kubiak's, being quoted by translators and critics.[20] The imposed and self-imposed status of Miłosz as a poet and translator 'anointing' young writers and acting as a periscope for foreign poetry should not be disregarded as the reason for his being a point of Cavafian reference. Whereas the relationship between Herbert's and Cavafy's poetry offers a different vantage point, Herbert was allegedly translating Cavafy for himself.[21] Interestingly, Miłosz, Herbert and Kubiak familiarized themselves with the Alexandrian's work through the medium of other languages. Although the reader can hardly detect traces of these complexities, all of them advanced Cavafy's work in Poland.

Situating Cavafy in Polish literature is a daunting task if we are to consider not only the amplitude, but also the specificity of the Cavafian influence or convergence, as well as the status of the poets and critics included in this comparative frame. Figures of such rank as Czesław Miłosz, Wisława Szymborska, Aleksander Fiut, Arendt Van Nieukerken, Piotr Sommer or Krzysztof Lisowski have been trying to assess Cavafy's oeuvre or its impact. Lisowski encapsulates it as follows:

> After a short reflection one comes to the conclusion that the most momentous influence upon the development of contemporary Polish poetry [after 1956], apart from

18 G. Seferis, *On the Greek Style: Selected Essays in Poetry and Hellenism*, trans. Rex Warner (London 1966) 146. Emphasis added. Warner translated the phrase in italics as 'breathe emotion through a vacuum'; the original, however, reads 'τραβούν τη συγκίνηση διά του κενού' (G. Seferis, *Δοκιμές*, I (Athens 1974) 348). This passage in Peter Mackridge's English translation is provided in italics.

19 Heaney, 'Foreword', vi. Out of thirteen existing English versions of Cavafy's canon, a recent one by Daniel Mendelsohn (2009) seems more representative of the prosodic trend.

20 A. Libera, 'Od tłumacza', in K. Kawafis, *Jeżeli do Itaki...* (Krakow 2011) 5–10. P. Matywiecki, T. Burek and I. Smolka in L. Mastalerz, 'Tłumaczenie ma znaczenie', Polish Radio 2, 29 March 2011.

21 Libera 'Od tłumacza'.

https://doi.org/10.1179/0307013115Z.00000000065 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> indigenous writers, was exerted by a handful of twentieth-century poets…: certainly Apollinaire, T. S. Eliot, and eventually, Cavafy.[22]

Both Lisowski and Sommer make up a list of poets influenced by or akin to Cavafy; at the top of the list is always Zbigniew Herbert. Lisowski further enumerates Miłosz, J. M. Rymkiewicz, Aleksander Wat and Adam Zagajewski, whom he ranks as representatives of the 'Classicizing' movement,[23] and focuses on the Cavafian diction, miniature epic, the use of persona, 'objective' tone, and an ironic view of history.[24] He frequently cites two '*immortal* poems,' the 'Barbarians' and 'Ithaca,' devoting an article to the popularity of the former, where he astutely notes that Cavafian irony, conceit and linguistic economy anticipates modern poetics by almost a century: 'The "Barbarians" could have been … written, for instance, by Miłosz, Herbert, or Brodsky.'[25] 'Was it because Miłosz made the poem popular,' he continues elsewhere, 'or because it offered a more attractive version of poetic parable than the Polish ones?'[26]

While Miłosz indeed believed that he 'actively cultivated the estate of Polish poetry,'[27] the reputation of those poems resides in their unspecified character: parable was frequent in Polish post-war poetry, abundant in the work of Szymborska or Herbert. Incorporating the 'Barbarians' in three of his publications spanning over thirty years,[28] Miłosz eventually argued that the poem encapsulated the whole century together with the concept of 'metahistory' with its 'recurrent patterns'.[29] This opinion had in fact been voiced by Rymkiewicz in 1967 with reference to Herbert: the 'Barbarians,' in his opinion, was parallel to Herbert's notion of history as a recurrent cultural cycle.[30] The poem has also been notably used in the political context: e.g., the interview with Libera entitled 'Cavafy translates reality', instead of the translation itself, tackles Polish and international politics of which the 'Barbarians' is supposedly evocative.[31]

22 K. Lisowski, 'Aleksandryjczyk i jego tłumacz', *Nowe Książki* 10 (1995) 53.

23 Op. cit., 54; 'Noty o Kawafisie', in *Greckie lustro* (Sejny 2011) 102. I am grateful to one of the referees of this article, Prof. Irena Grudzinska-Gross, for the following observation: 'A very important side of Cavafy's influence is the use of Classical culture in a "quotidian" style'.

24 'Polish culture is based on Catholicism, with elements of martyr worship; the poets who were influenced by Cavafy looked for ways of distancing themselves from history without abandoning it' (Irena Grudzinska-Gross, ibid.). Alhough the first sentence holds true about a limited number of post-war poets, this opinion insightfully situates Cavafy as a counterbalance to moralist-patriotic interpretations of Herbert's poetry.

25 K. Lisowski, 'O najsłynniejszym wierszu Konstandinosa Kawafisa', *Kwartalnik Artystyczny* 78 (2013) 23–4.

26 Lisowski, 'Noty', 92.

27 Miłosz, *Wypisy*, 3.

28 C. Miłosz, 'Przygody poezji nowoczesnej', *Kultura* 7–8 (1961), reprinted in *Prywatne obowiązki*, 37–45; *Wypisy*, 324–6.

29 Miłosz, *Wypisy*, 324.

30 J. M. Rymkiewicz, *Czym jest klasycyzm. Manifesty poetyckie* (Warsaw 1967) 65.

31 J. Lichocka, 'Libera tłumaczy Kawafisa, Kawafis tłumaczy rzeczywistość', interview with A. Libera, Polish Radio 2, 15 Sep 2010.

https://doi.org/10.1179/0307013115Z.00000000065 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Apart from wit, anecdote, understatement, and the amalgam of lyric and narrative,[32] another critic and poet, Piotr Sommer, focuses mainly on Polish parable (Herbert, Szymborska, Krynicki) as influenced by Cavafy.[33] He also declares Cavafy and Brecht 'the patrons of the last two generations of Polish poets before the *bruLion* generation [of the early 1990s]'.[34] Evoking Cavafy in many of his analyses, Sommer places him in the translation network where the Cavafian filter makes Polish renditions of *other* foreign poets sound familiar.[35] These interconnections are manifest for instance in the Polish translation of Seamus Heaney's poetry influenced by Herbert influenced by Cavafy. Pondering on the fact that Heaney did not exert a substantial influence on Polish poets, Sommer concludes:

> Another import – via Heaney – of the parable into Polish, at the exact moment when the Polish language has just liberated itself after a long struggle from the omnipotent collar of that parable [the 1990s], would not seem desirable ... Just as [Heaney's] 'Hercules and Antaeus' could not have been written without Herbert, so Herbert may have experienced some difficulties in writing this or that ('The return of the proconsul,' for instance) if he hadn't come across Cavafy at the right moment.[36]

This route of sequential translations and inspirations seems perplexing, but a closer look only confirms Miłosz's view of Cavafy's work as impure poetry, or Lefevere's notion of rewriting in the practice of translation.

Master of the parable, Szymborska did not pay attention to this specific aspect of Cavafy's art but to the cross-generic character of his poetry with an emphasis on epic:

> Cavafy acted as, and actually was, a veritable epic poet, in the modern sense of the word of course. The epic spirit ... having been chased out of the front door of the palace of poetry, sneaks back through the window. It does not take the shape of long poems any more, not at all. Rather, it dwells in short forms familiar to us from lyric poetry.[37]

Terse as usual, Szymborska does not elaborate on this any further. The passage undeniably spotlights the divergence between lyric and epic poetry, the latter of which was also dear to Szymborska's own style: avoiding emotional statements but full of acute observation of people and events. Characteristically, instead of the outdated heroic epos, Szymborska appreciates Cavafy's short form (which she also excelled in), pointing to

32 P. Sommer, *Po stykach* (Gdansk 2005) 169.

33 Op. cit., 73, 155; 'Tkać i pruć', interview by B. N. Łopieńska, *Tygodnik Powszechny* 16 (21 Apr. 2002). Web.

34 Sommer, *Po stykach*, 169; *Smak detalu* (Lublin 1995) 116.

35 Sommer's train of thought revolving around Cavafy reveals a paradoxical itinerary: as a translator of Brecht and Anglophone poets including D. J. Enright, Derek Mahon and Seamus Heaney, and a poet of the cited pre-*bruLion* generations influenced by Cavafy, Sommer makes all these translations intertwine around Cavafy.

36 Sommer, *Po stykach*, 155.

37 W. Szymborska, *Lektury nadobowiązkowe*, I (Krakow 1973) 147.

https://doi.org/10.1179/0307013115Z.00000000065 Published online by Cambridge University Press

his skilful adaptation of the epic story-telling tradition to the form of expression once reserved for lyrics. Epic qualities of Cavafy's poetry also attracted the attention of Kubiak[38] and Miłosz, who calls Cavafy's poems 'micronovels or microdramas' but connects all three genres:

> It is hence 'impure' poetry, vulnerable to accusations of being prose, since the immersion in the matter of language, ... i.e., all that ritual torture of the avant-garde, is alien to it. [In Cavafy's poetry] language is used to outline a situation, not to become engaged in a semantic struggle, and is subject to the same laws as the colloquial speech of a soliloquy, which has to be uttered, after all, by an actor.[39]

In Miłosz's view, Cavafy was able to outline these situations because of his refinement or decadence which acted as an 'emotional radar'.[40] Despite this documented interest, Miłosz – author of thirteen volumes of poetry and five of prose before translating Cavafy – cannot really be said to write similarly to Cavafy. It is true, though, that he aligned himself with the poets of the periphery (Cavafy, Oscar Milosz),[41] while the international community of poets (Heaney, Tomas Venclova) ranked him in one breath, together with Cavafy, among the most significant names of the twentieth century.[42] After Miłosz' death, Venclova wrote:

> Now as never before we realize that he is the peer of the best poets of the twentieth century. Apart from Miłosz, they are Eliot, Cavafy, Mandelstam. All of them were writing in wretched times but managed to condense the tragic experience of their era up to an invisible point where hope begins.[43]

With these words Andrzej Franaszek opens his recent monumental biography of Miłosz, quoting further Cavafy himself in an imaginary dialogue between young and old Miłosz.[44] In the epigraph to the last chapter entitled 'The Old Poet', Franaszek cites the editor of *Tygodnik Powszechny*, where Miłosz often published:

> In our editorial office we called him (after Durrell who used this name for Cavafy) 'the old poet of the city'. Not quite, he was never old. The witness of the past century, he was speaking out, asking questions and searching for answers, the way these times demand. He was always really present.[45]

38 Kubiak observed such qualities also in Seferis' work (*Zwierciadło*, 46), contrary to Szymborska, who believed that Seferis 'remains a lyrical poet drawing on the native tradition with changeable luck. In his poetry, literary allusion does not always succeed in intensifying expression; sometimes it makes it weaker and banal' (Szymborska, *Lektury* 147–8).

39 Miłosz, *Prywatne*, 41.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 Heaney summons Miłosz also in his 'Homage to Seferis'.

43 T. Venclova, 'Dwa księstwa', *Tygodnik Powszechny* 34 (2004).

44 A. Franaszek, *Miłosz. Biografia* (Krakow 2011) 260.

45 A. Boniecki, 'To nic, że czasem nie wie', in Franaszek, op. cit., 723.

https://doi.org/10.1179/0307013115Z.00000000065 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The correspondence between Miłosz and Cavafy lies exactly in that *presence* in the face of history, preserving their intense sense of observation, the feature which Polish and foreign critics and poets frequently underline in reference to both poets, and which Miłosz accentuated when discussing Cavafy.

Simultaneously, Miłosz as a translator was deliberately satisfying the demand for novelty, influencing the choices of young Polish poetry.[46] Perspicacious of the function of translation in the literary system, he was followed by Sommer who – citing Cavafy as an example – raised the same point: 'the quality of translation exercises an impact on what is going to happen in Polish literature ... especially if provided at the moment when the language needs it most.'[47]

Herbert

The affinity between Herbert and Cavafy (the term 'influence'[48] can barely match the complexity of this relationship) is much too extensive a topic to be discussed here in a more detailed manner.[49] Aleksander Fiut and Arendt Van Nieukerken[50] ventured a comparison of selected texts and motifs. Remarkably, Fiut does not analyse the most discernible trace of Cavafian presence in Herbert's oeuvre: the poem 'Journey' quoting from 'Ithaca'. The critic notes that analogies can be discerned already in Herbert's first collection, *Struna światła* [Chord of light] of 1956, before Polish translations of Cavafy had appeared. 'Briefly speaking, the following comparison can concern only analogies, not influences or a conscious dialogue',[51] he concludes in harmony with Miłosz's hypothesis.[52] The translator Antoni Libera has attempted to reproduce the circumstances of that dialogue:

> I associate [Cavafy's biography] with that of Zbigniew Herbert, a recluse in the 'waste land' of social realism and an employee of the memorable Moors Department, who wrote elegant poems about the golden age of bygone civilizations and cultures.
>
> My association with Herbert is so strong because their parallel biographies are coupled with aesthetic and thematic similarities. I did not realize ... the scope of Herbert's esteem for Cavafy until the publication of his famous 'Journey' of 1975, openly alluding to 'Ithaca.' Later, when I got to know Herbert personally, I heard

46 Miłosz, *Wypisy*, 5.

47 Sommer, 'Tkać'.

48 Detected e.g. by S. Barańczak, 'Ironie', in *Poznawanie Herberta* (Krakow 1998) 393.

49 I explore this relationship in detail in a separate article in progress.

50 Fiut, 'Dwa spojrzenia'; A. Van Nieukerken, *Ironiczny konceptyzm. Nowoczesna polska poezja metafizyczna* (Krakow 1998).

51 Fiut, 'Dwa spojrzenia', 271.

52 C. Miłosz, *Czesława Miłosza autoportret przekorny. Rozmowy przeprowadził Aleksander Fiut* (Krakow 1994) 410.

https://doi.org/10.1179/0307013115Z.00000000065 Published online by Cambridge University Press

much about that 'elective affinity'. It turned out that he had been reading Cavafy mainly in English and German translation long before Kubiak introduced it to the Polish reader.[53]

Before Polish translations of Cavafy appeared in the 1960s, Mavrogordato's rendition (1951) might have been Herbert's English source, though the only English version of Cavafy he had at home was Rae Dalven's (1961). Herbert learnt better English only at the end of the 1960s, while he already spoke very good German (Helmut von den Steinen's translation appeared in 1953) and fluent French before his first stay in France in 1958–60,[54] the time when Yourcenar's translations appeared in book form (1958). Of Polish translations, in Herbert's home library one can find Kubiak's late edition of 1992. Fiut recalls Herbert saying that he 'may have read the Alexandrian's poems in English and Polish translation'.[55] Taking into account Herbert's command of languages, as well as Fiut's attribution of Herbert's poem 'Arion' (written in 1952[56]) published in *Struna światła* (1956) to Cavafian influence, Cavafy's single poems published in Yourcenar's translation in literary journals (1940 including 'En attendant les barbares'; 1944) seem the most probable source of Herbert's, apart from (if at all) Mavrogordato's rendition.[57] Unless a pure analogy, the opening of 'Arion' indeed presents a very suggestive case of Cavafian imagery and of the way he introduced protagonists of his historical poems:

> This is he – Arion –
> the Grecian Caruso
> concertmaster of the ancient world
> expensive as a necklace
> or rather as a constellation
> singing
> to the ocean billows and traders in silks
> to the tyrants and mule herders
> the crowns blacken on the tyrants' heads
> and the sellers of onion cakes
> for the first time err in their figures to their own disadvantage ...[58]

53 Libera, 'Od tłumacza', 6.

54 I express my gratitude to Henryk Citko, the Director of the Manuscript Section at the National Library in Warsaw, in charge of the Herbert Archive, for the information on Herbert's languages and his home library. Herbert's library also included an Italian rendition by F. M. Pontani (1972) acquired in 1980.

55 Fiut, 'Dwa spojrzenia', 112.

56 Z. Herbert, Notatniki [Notebooks], 17955, vol. 33, Inventory of the Herbert Archive, National Library in Warsaw 2008. All subsequent dates of the creation of Herbert's poems come from the Inventory.

57 In the 1950s Herbert spent much time at university libraries, striving to obtain French publications on art and literature (Henryk Citko, after Herbert's unpublished correspondence). I have no idea whether Herbert knew Valassopoulo's translations, published in the 1920-30s in literary journals.

58 Z. Herbert, 'Arion', trans. C. Milosz and P. D. Scott, in Z. Herbert, *Collected Poems 1956–1998* (London 2007) 55.

https://doi.org/10.1179/0307013115Z.00000000065 Published online by Cambridge University Press

An even more suggestive evocation of the Cavafian spirit, the poem 'Curatia Dionisia' was written in 1960 after Herbert's visit to France, which again may point to Yourcenar as the possible source. 'Curatia' exemplifies such Cavafian traits as the factual reconstruction of events from the borders of the Roman empire; the trivial biography of a marginal ancient figure set against a major historical background; lapidary diction; an ancient inscription deciphered from a tombstone:

> The stone is well preserved An inscription (bad Latin)
> declares Curatia Dionisia lived forty-something years
> and raised this modest monument at her own expense
> her solitary banquet continues The cup held in midair
> The face without a smile The doves too heavyset
> She spent the last years of her life in Brittany
> near the wall which brought the barbarians to a halt
> in a *castrum* whose foundations and cellars survive
>
> She was engaged in the most ancient female practice
> Briefly but sincerely mourned by Third Legion soldiers
> as well as a certain elderly officer ...[59]

The shadow of Cavafy looms large over the title of the volume quoted from this poem (*Napis* [Inscription] 1969). The pervasion of barbarians in Herbert's poetry, beside its being a glaring allusion to the twentieth-century history of which the poet had a first-hand experience, may be yet another indication of Cavafy's importance: not only in 'Curatia', but also in the title of his most famous collection of essays, *Barbarzyńca w ogrodzie* (*Barbarian in the Garden*), or in a sequence of poems – containing the key word 'barbarians' – which Fiut examines in reference to history.[60]

Among aspects of Herbert's poetics analogous to Cavafy's, Fiut enumerates the significance of detail, the universal view, the use of the Classics, and concise and arid imagery.[61] The critic highlights, however, a major difference in their didacticism and treatment of history: where Cavafy stays objective, shuttling between centuries and cultures, Herbert imposes the twentieth-century perspective and moral judgement on history, which Fiut deems negative. One has to bear in mind, however, that Cavafy never experienced a coalition of totalitarian systems. 'The return of the proconsul', identified by Rymkiewicz in 1967 as an instance of the Cavafian affinity,[62] can illustrate Fiut's claim about Herbert's stoicism only to an extent: radically ironic, Herbert's protagonist

59 Herbert, 'Curatia Dionisia', trans. A. Valles, in *Collected Poems*, 254. I have corrected capital letters and removed 'are' from line 5. Also, Polish 'proceder' in line 9, translated as 'practice', should rather read 'dealings'.

60 Because of the two poets' prominence in Polish and world poetry, the affinities between Cavafy and Herbert merit a separate article. Here I refer only to these two poems which can elucidate the issue of Herbert's acquaintance with Cavafy and are not discussed by critics.

61 Fiut, 'Dwa spojrzenia', 113–14.

62 Rymkiewicz, *Czym jest klasycyzm*, 62.

https://doi.org/10.1179/0307013115Z.00000000065 Published online by Cambridge University Press

decides to return home from exile and survive at the emperor's court hoping 'that things will work out somehow'.[63] To Fiut's astute record of differences, including ethics, sympathy and pain as some of Herbert's dominants, one should add Herbert's different meaning of home as lost roots and foundations, and the function of irony as a weapon of the subdued.

Although the imperative of 'the defence of the besieged city' in Herbert's *Raport z oblężonego miasta* [Report from the besieged city] is believed to be 'an (evident) polemic against Cavafy's "Waiting for the Barbarians",'[64] the monolith of Herbert's moralistic engagement cracks, nonetheless, on closer inspection. At the end of his analysis, Fiut concedes that some of Herbert's 'classicist' poems incline the reader to unveil an existentialist psychologist under the ethical mask.[65] One can also wonder why Herbert's panoramic synthetic perspective should be considered cruder than Cavafy's study of a historical moment and the workings of chance, or why Herbert's perception of history as an irreversible past should be inferior to Cavafy's open ending.[66]

The most conspicuous case of the Cavafian spirit in Herbert's poetry, 'Journey,' becomes the pivot of Libera's and Van Nieukerken's comments. Its first line echoes the opening of 'Ithaca':

> If you set out on a journey pray that the road is long
> a wandering without apparent aim a blind groping
> so you come to know earth's harshness not just by sight but by touch
> so that you measure yourself against the world with your whole skin.[67]

In his comparative analysis of both poems, Van Nieukerken reaches the conclusion that

> contrary to ... Cavafy's poems, the aim of Herbert's journey is not to reach ... a horizon of transcendence. Its purpose is first and foremost to situate the place of birth in a proper perspective. By setting out on a long journey we gain distance from our homeland.[68]

63 Herbert, 'The return of the proconsul', trans. C. Miłosz and P. D. Scott, in *Collected Poems*, 184–5. Written between 1950 and 1961, published in *Studium przedmiotu* [Study of an Object] 1961. Fiut omits to analyse it in the context of stoicism. In *Studium* the proconsul's soliloquy precedes 'Elegy of Fortinbras', Herbert's most famous dramatic monologue, the genre also favoured by Cavafy. 'The Return' is the only Polish poem included by Nasos Vayenas in his *Synomilontas me ton Kavafi* (Thessaloniki 2000); however, the reference to the source of the Greek translation (p. 372) sends us to *The Faber Book of Modern European Poetry*, ed. A. Alvarez (London 1992), illustrating the labyrinthine ways of translation and reception of European poetry.

64 Van Nieukerken, *Ironiczny*, 202.

65 Fiut, 'Dwa spojrzenia', 136.

66 Op. cit., 116–17.

67 Herbert, 'Journey', trans. A. Valles, in *Collected Poems*, 437. The poem was written between 1954 and 1956, published in the press in 1975 and eventually in *Elegia na odejście* [Elegy for the departure] (1990).

68 Van Nieukerken, *Ironiczny*, 222.

https://doi.org/10.1179/0307013115Z.00000000065 Published online by Cambridge University Press

This statement could just as well be applied to Cavafy, who also situates his homeland in a proper perspective at a distance. Another reflection, that 'what for Cavafy is the horizon of transcendence, for Herbert seems the boundary of the lack of meaning, the abyss of nothingness',[69] is disputable in the context of the whole poem, which relies on the senses and on the order of nature rather than abstract ideas.[70] To Libera, 'Journey' granted a moment of illumination into Herbert's 'elective affinity' which the translator could vaguely sense before. That exact moment gave him an incentive to enquire into the hidden bond between the two poets (who hardly ever disclosed their inspirations) and undertake a new translation of Cavafy *infused with* Herbert. His attempts, however, were preceded by Kubiak's enduring tribute to the Alexandrian, and I turn now to the Cavafy translations by him and others.

Cavafy translations

Kubiak

Zygmunt Kubiak, believed to have a passive knowledge of Modern Greek, discovered Cavafy via Mavrogordato's translation.[71] He dedicated thirty-five years of his life to his magnum opus: seven editions of Cavafy's poems and the monograph.[72] In this impassioned pursuit, he stood apart from translators such as Janusz Strasburger who claimed: 'I translate what I want, between other interesting activities, cautious not to sell my soul to anyone.'[73] Kubiak definitely sold his soul to Cavafy. The remarkable range of his publishers of various affiliations under Communism and in democracy asserted both the never-fading interest in Cavafy's poetry irrespective of the line of power, and the perpetual endeavour of his translator hunting for the patronage which would enable him to preserve a measure of independence.[74] The 1979 edition designed for school libraries was another of Kubiak's indisputable accomplishments as an advocate of the Greek poet in Poland.

Enjoying a monopoly of Cavafy for the rest of his life, Kubiak took certain liberties in presenting Cavafy's biography and work. Although all his introductions begin with the information that Cavafy was born in Alexandria, the monograph opens with the sentence: 'The greatest Modern Greek poet was born in Asia Minor.'[75] Challenged by

69 Kubiak, 'O tłumaczeniu wierszy Kawafisa', *Literatura na Świecie* 1–2 (1996) 391.

70 Another task exceeding the scope of this article is the critical discussion of 'Journey' from the perspective of Herbert's other poems and in dialogue with Van Nieukerken's reading.

71 Z. Kubiak, 'O tłumaczeniu', 391.

72 1967, 1978, 1979, 1981, 1992, 1995 (with the monograph), 2001. After the first two editions of *Selected Poems*, Kubiak follows the order of Greek publications of Cavafy's poems.

73 J. Strasburger, 'Z warsztatu tłumacza', *Literatura na Świecie* 1 (1971) 149.

74 E.g., the PIW [Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy] publishing house, an off-Communist-mainstream though not independent publisher, 'while "luring the despot" [i.e., seemingly satisfying censorship demands], provided a protective umbrella for those who could not publish anywhere else' (Kubiak, *Zwierciadło*, 94).

75 Kubiak, *Kawafis Aleksandryjczyk*, 5. Cavafy's family came from Constantinople.

https://doi.org/10.1179/0307013115Z.00000000065 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Borowska on this point,[76] Kubiak responds that Cavafy was 'born [there] as a poet' and 'everything concerning his family and himself originates from Asia Minor.'[77] The fact that Seferis occupies a notable place in Kubiak's monograph provides a further key to the analogy between both poets' Asia Minor origins. This insouciance is not only characteristic of Kubiak's work, but also indicative of his cosmopolitanism, manifest in the opinions that Greeks and Poles are 'brothers in the East European predicament' and that he is both a Pole and a Greek as an heir to ancient Greek culture.[78]

Kubiak's Classical background and his work from other languages cannot be omitted as auxiliary determinants of Cavafy translation. Kubiak's introductions have been written with great emphasis on antiquity regarding linguistic and historical issues. The language and style of his translations are more stilted than those of his follower, Antoni Libera. In some poems, his background as a translator from Latin and Ancient Greek takes over the original,[79] which is a conscious practice: 'I have always felt a Classicist, and a masquerade would be contrary to Cavafy's attitude to language'.[80]

'Cavafy's attitude to language' as well as the memorable prose aspect of his poetry provide another bone of contention between Kubiak and his critics. Borowska sets the linguistic hybridity of Cavafy's poems[81] at the top of her list of factors contributing to Cavafy's untranslatability; cultural difference appears in second place; and in the third, 'an illusory facility of translating Cavafy connected with the seemingly prosaic character of his poems'.[82] Kubiak as a conscious rewriter does not consider Cavafy's πολυγλωσσία an 'element constituting the Cavafian poetic substance', concluding that Cavafy is 'an author of course very difficult to translate, but to a great extent, when set against the background of the world's best poetry, translatable.'[83]

Kubiak can be easily situated in the context of Polish translation, an active field where his output lives on in the work of his successors: both Libera and Kania remember their initiation into Cavafy's world via Kubiak's legendary 1967 edition. While one translation spawns another, curiously enough the order of this process is not simply chronological. Libera and Kania felt they had to confront Kubiak's opus; Libera's

76 M. Borowska, 'Kawafis Kubiaka, czyli pochwała niemożliwości', *Literatura na Świecie* 10 (1995) 318–36.

77 Kubiak, 'O tłumaczeniu', 387.

78 Z. Kubiak, *Nowy brewiarz Europejczyka* (Warsaw 2001) 75–6.

79 E.g., in 'In the Month of Athyr' Kubiak strips the text of square brackets which in the original denote the hypothetical deciphering of an ancient inscription. The translator observes those brackets with horror in foreign renditions and opts for a *full and certain* version of the Classical inscription (Kubiak, 'O tłumaczeniu', 390).

80 Ibid.

81 She enumerates koine, Byzantine Greek, katharevousa, demotic, dialectal forms, quotations from various periods, and the influence of foreign languages, all constituting Cavafy's 'private koine', called by Kubiak πολυγλωσσία in response to her review ('O tłumaczeniu', 388).

82 Borowska, 'Kawafis Kubiaka', 325–9.

83 Z. Kubiak, 'O tłumaczeniu', 388.

https://doi.org/10.1179/0307013115Z.00000000065 Published online by Cambridge University Press

version,[84] however, does not appear to have influenced Kania's[85] in the slightest; in fact, neither Kania himself nor his interviewers mention Libera as his predecessor. It is difficult to determine whether the reason for this discontinuity in the chain of translation lay in the temporal proximity of the two publications, in personal or literary reserve, or in something completely different.

Libera

Libera's approach to translating Cavafy and his description of Herbert's method demonstrate Lefevere's concept of translation as rewriting. In Libera's recollection, Herbert perceived translation as a perfect way to gain a true insight into a foreign poem and thus engaged in a 'rough translation' of Cavafy, the outcome of which, however, has been lost. 'Its only trace is a slightly paraphrased first line of "Ithaca" used as an opening for [Herbert's] "Journey"', Libera continues in a Lefeverian vein.

> What has gone missing in the 'rough translation' survived nonetheless in Herbert's original work. Herbert can be said to have embedded Cavafy on Polish soil by means of his own poetry. In any case, he created a stylistic and rhetorical idiom which seems ideally matched to render the Cavafian diction.[86]

It is exactly on that 'idiom' that Libera bases his own version: 'I have decided to follow that line: to translate Cavafy into Polish via Herbert'.[87] Otherwise known as a Beckett specialist and a prose writer himself, Libera declares the need to restore Cavafy's rhythm and lineation – the latter rightly so, as Cavafy's graphically caesured lines were cut in half by Kubiak, who ended up with poems double the length of the originals.

The language Libera translated from, however, remains a mystery. Some critics suggest English,[88] which would make Libera's declaration about Cavafian metre dubious; the translator himself asserts that he used bilingual editions featuring English, French and Italian, avowing that the abundance of Cavafy translations abroad, 'an instructive point of reference', has encouraged him to proceed with his own work.[89] Libera seems to follow the path of the Polish master into Cavafy's work via foreign translations. More astonishing is the reversal of the creative process: Libera translates Cavafy under the influence of a Herbert who is inspired by Cavafy. His symbolic act of closing this circle could perfectly illustrate Lefevere's idea of rewriting.

If we confront the cryptic issue of the source language, it transpires that neither of the Polish translators of Cavafy reveals this detail. Not that such a statement is necessary;

84 K. Kawafis, *Jeżeli do Itaki wybierasz się w podróż...*, trans. A. Libera (Krakow 2011).

85 K. Kawafis, *Czekając na barbarzyńców i inne wiersze. Περιμένοντας τους βαρβάρους και άλλα ποιήματα*, transl. I. Kania (Krakow and Budapest 2013).

86 Libera, 'Od tłumacza', 10.

87 Ibid.

88 Tomasz Burek, in Mastalerz, 'Tłumaczenie'.

89 Libera, 'Od tłumacza', 9–10; 'O Kawafisie, antyku i chrześcijaństwie', interview by M. Matyszkowicz, *Teologia Polityczna*, 15 Sep 2010. Web.

https://doi.org/10.1179/0307013115Z.00000000065 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the reader automatically assumes that the original has been used as the source text. Ares Chadzinikolau speculates that Kubiak translated from other languages than Modern Greek, claiming that e.g., the choice of folk songs in his anthology reflects the French selection by Claude Fauriel.[90] Both Kubiak and Libera translated profusely from English, which is also visible in their translation: some critics identify 'English-language' economy in Libera's translation and believe that precisely this type of economy is lacking in that of Kubiak,[91] whose elevated style was, paradoxically, nourished not only by the Classics but also by English Romantic poets.[92] Libera declares elsewhere that he has 'translated a few poems only because they had already been translated (sometimes from English into English) by Seamus Heaney and James Merrill'.[93] A convoluted chain of translation indeed.

What is the place and function of Libera's translation in the world of Polish translations of Cavafy and potentially, of Polish literature? The translator and his critics[94] emphasize the fact that his work satisfies the purpose of providing a comparison with Kubiak: his translation has been appraised as more lively, concise, and colloquial than his predecessor's.[95] Both versions complement each other: where Libera is lacking in dramatic or passionate tone, especially in the erotic poems, Kubiak lacks logical persuasion in philosophical and historical ones. None of them, however, tackles Cavafy's mixed language; Borowska's argument holds even more about Libera than Kubiak, whose archaized translation, despite his declared unconcern for Cavafy's linguistic register, gives the impression of an attempt at rendering it.

Libera depicts his twofold motivation as follows:

> I had been learning Cavafy via Kubiak's translations. The other source was of course Zbigniew Herbert ... with whom I often conversed about Cavafy, ... his style and idiom... These conversations made me realize how much Herbert owed to Cavafy, not only in terms of ideas but also of a certain diction... Through my own translation of Cavafy ... I was trying to pay Herbert's debt to Cavafy by stylizing the translation in Herbert's language.[96]

Libera acts as a posthumous executor of Herbert's – will? oeuvre? Throughout Herbert's life his affinity with Cavafy had not been discussed; Fiut's study appeared shortly before his death. Libera's translation is clearly an instance of rewriting Herbert as well as Cavafy. The bold claim to be translating Cavafy via Herbert makes the rendition method and its results ('recycling' Herbert and juxtaposing the two poetic dictions)

90 A. Chadzinikolau, *Literatura nowogrecka w przekładach polskich* (Poznań 2003) 109.

91 Mastalerz, 'Tłumaczenie'.

92 Kubiak also translated English Romantics and opens his Modern Greek anthology with John Keats' 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'.

93 Libera, 'O Kawafisie, antyku'.

94 Ibid., and Mastalerz, 'Tłumaczenie'.

95 Mastalerz, 'Tłumaczenie'; J. Dehnel, 'Kawafis – Reaktywacja', *Znak* 674 (Jul–Aug 2011). Web.

96 Lichocka, 'Libera tłumaczy'.

https://doi.org/10.1179/0307013115Z.00000000065 Published online by Cambridge University Press

potentially interesting for Polish literary circles as a linguistic experiment of sorts.[97] The utopian idea of an objective translation has been further subverted by a conscious reference to a third party, another iconic poet. It is as if we wanted to translate, for instance, Baudelaire by making use of Eliot. Has Libera succeeded? Critics maintain that Herbert's genius cannot be rendered or imitated,[98] just like Cavafy's, in point of fact. Both poets seem to share 'simple' diction, too simple to be simplified – their art dwells in the choice of words, the tone, the rhythm. They may indeed both hold well in English translation, as Edward Hirsch observed, because of their 'sardonic wit and a startling intellectual clarity that come through linguistic barriers exceptionally well'.[99] Yet despite points of convergence, their voices are unmistakably distinct. Discussing translation as a form of rewriting, Bassnett and Lefevere conclude that it 'constructs the image of writers and/or their works' where 'one image [of the writer] dislodges another.'[100] We may develop this statement here by adding that Herbert's image potentially dislodges Cavafy's in Libera's translation.

Kania

Ireneusz Kania, a polyglot translator famous for his renditions of ancient, Renaissance, and Romantic poets as well as prose,[101] has recently published a new version of Cavafy (2013) in a bibliophile, bilingual (for the first time in Poland) edition with a facsimile of 'Waiting for the Barbarians' from the Sengopoulos notebook. When juxtaposed with his predecessors, Kania seems to pursue a similar aim to Libera's: to restore rhythm and, additionally, rhyme,[102] rightly pinpointing the analogy between Greek and Polish as highly inflected languages and the translating potential of his native tongue. Kania definitely succeeds in his endeavour: his translations are of the highest prosodic quality, keeping to rhythm, ceasura and rhyme in most cases very successfully, striving to match the original where Kubiak fails to do so because of his wordiness, and Libera because of his plain phrasing and lack of rhyme.[103]

Both Kania and Libera make a free choice of poems (62 and 101 respectively) in a chronological order. Historical, erotic[104] and philosophical poems have been included in comparable proportions. Kania's selection follows an 'aleatory' method dependent on utterly private impulses such as mood, recollections, music, and the opening of the Cavafy volume at random, leaving poems too difficult to translate or not sufficiently

97 Critics in Mastalerz, 'Tłumaczenie'.

98 Matywiecki, in Mastalerz, 'Tłumaczenie'.

99 E. Hirsch, 'Zbigniew Herbert: the fidelity of things', in *Responsive Reading* (Ann Arbor 1999) 75.

100 S. Bassnett and A. Lefevere, *Constructing Cultures: Essays on Literary Translation* (Clevedon 1998) 10.

101 From Romance, Germanic, and Slavic languages, Sanskrit, Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Tibetan, and Pali.

102 Kania, in D. Gacek, 'Z dalekiego czasu. Kania tłumaczy Kawafisa', interview with I. Kania, Polish Radio 2, 29 Aug 2013, 17–19.

103 Compare e.g., 'Tomb of the grammarian Lysias' in Kania 138; Libera 52; Kubiak (K. Kawafis, *Wiersze zebrane* Warsaw 1981) 104.

104 All three translators provide an ample selection of openly homoerotic poems (Polish is a gender-specific language).

https://doi.org/10.1179/0307013115Z.00000000065 Published online by Cambridge University Press

interesting for further consideration.[105] This liberty of choice may divulge at least two motives: either a premise that Kubiak's has already published Cavafy's complete oeuvre and what is lacking is the possibility of comparison; or a highly individual approach to sources. One may also wonder about the aim of publishing a bilingual version of the introduction as well as the poems. Will the niche publisher distribute the book in the Greek market? Does the decision follow a publishing convention, or a personal or aesthetic preference? Does it constitute an instance of positive 'manipulation', in Lefereve's words, which confirms the authenticity of Kania's translation as taken from the original, in reaction, perhaps, to Libera's enigmatic sources? (Interestingly, although at ease with Modern Greek, Kania acknowledges Michał Bzinkowski's 'φιλολογική επιμέλεια των ελληνικών κειμένων'). While the number of Polish readers of Modern Greek is extremely limited, the translator argues[106] that Modern Greek is no longer exotic because it is taught at universities (basically, in two small programmes in Poland, we should add) and because Poles massively visit Greece (on all-inclusive tours at huge hotels on a handful of islands).

Having read Cavafy in Kubiak's first edition, Kania describes himself as being haunted by the Alexandrian who kept 'stretching out his hands to reach him' by providing him with surprises on Greek islands.[107] One such surprise was an unexpected gift of a Sengopoulos reprint in a god-forsaken bookshop on Kefalonia. The translator's enthusiasm for Cavafy's work is evident in his care for detail both in the text and in the publication of this rare art book,[108] whose hand-made paper may recall the legendary notebook. As for the outstanding quality of the Polish language and its music, Kania's translation should ensure him a lasting position in the world of Cavafy translation. With a niche publisher, numbered copies, and a narrow selection of poems, however, will he eventually be able to overcome Kubiak's towering shadow?

*

It transpires that all Polish translators of Cavafy made their first contact with the Alexandrian's world by way of other translations, either into foreign languages or into Polish. Cavafy marks a fascinating course from the domain of world translation (Miłosz, Herbert, Kubiak) through the one of Polish translation (Libera, Kania) to the realm of Polish literature (Herbert, Libera). Previously, in the Communist Utopia – enclosed, and, after the Second World War, ethnically almost homogeneous – translation was a mode of mental travel for the author and the reader, which may have endowed translators with an exceptional role in society, performed perhaps most effectively by the 'unpublished translator' of Cavafy, Zbigniew Herbert. The translators' long-term

105 Gacek, 'Z dalekiego', 15–17.

106 Kania, 'Εισαγωγή του μεταφραστή', in *Czekając*, 26–7.

107 Ibid.

108 A worthy match for Kubiak's edition of Cavafy's *Collected Poems* and the monograph (1995), books of sophisticated design from a private publisher.

https://doi.org/10.1179/0307013115Z.00000000065 Published online by Cambridge University Press

devotion to Cavafy, as well as the air of conspiracy surrounding their work on the one hand and Herbert's 'elective affinity' on the other, has made readers await subsequent versions with a mixture of fever and anxiety, while critics hail them as sensations also because of the still politicized reading of some of Cavafy's poems. Even though Polish poetry arrived at many solutions similar to Cavafy's independently, the Old Poet has not only ensured himself a permanent place in Polish literature, but remains – as 'an ultra-modern poet of the future generations'[109] – a perpetual promise for readers and writers in this country.

109 C. P. Cavafy, *Selected Prose Works*, trans. Peter Jeffreys (Ann Arbor 2010).

https://doi.org/10.1179/0307013115Z.00000000065 Published online by Cambridge University Press