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ONIONS STRUNG ON THE SPIRE, OR WHAT YOU CAN SEE IN THE POLISH TRANSLATION OF ITALO CALVINO'S *INVISIBLE CITIES**

Abstract

Despite its title, *Invisible Cities* (1972) is the most visible book by Italo Calvino. Calvino included visibility in his literary testament, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, as one of the fundamental values of literary creation. He often emphasized the significance of visibility in his writings and pointed out its close connection with exactitude, another value that he felt important for the next millennium. Translated into Polish by Alina Kreisberg, the book was first published in 1975 and republished in 2005 and 2013. The translator, who considers the book a record of an inner journey “around one’s head”, openly admits to having modified various details of Calvino’s images, recognizing that certain terms would sound too exotic, encyclopaedic and elitist in Polish. Her translations of architectural and art historical terms are particularly noteworthy, leading sometimes to a change in the style of buildings evoked by Calvino’s text. The translator’s decisions make the images of *Invisible Cities* even more surrealistic and mythical.

Keywords: Italo Calvino, visibility, reception of Italian literature in Poland, image in translation

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One of Italo Calvino's famous American lectures was devoted to visibility (*visibilità*). In the Polish translation by Anna Wasilewska, the lecture is entitled *Przejrzystość*, or clarity (Calvino 2009: 91–111). Published in Italian in 1988, after the author's unexpected death in 1985, the volume comprises papers which Calvino meant to deliver in the academic year 1985/86 at Harvard University, as part of the Charles Eliot Norton Poetry Lectures series, thus joining the ranks of such eminent lecturers as T.S. Eliot, Erwin Panofsky, Jorge Luis Borges, Northrop Frye or Frank Stella. The idea for Calvino's Harvard lectures is said to have been born of his belief in the future of literature – a belief that remained unshaken despite contemporary cultural transformations, primarily resulting from the expansion of technology and mass media. Calvino decided to devote his lectures to those “values, qualities, or peculiarities of literature” which he saw as absolutely fundamental and worth recommending to the next millennium (Calvino 1988: author's prefatory note). These values include – together with the already mentioned clarity/visibility – Lightness (*Leggerezza*), Quickness (*Rapidità*), Exactitude (*Esattezza*), Multiplicity (*Molteplicità*) and Consistency (*Coerenza*).¹ They were composed into a personal *ars poetica* of sorts, frequently referring to the author's own reading, as well as his writing practice. The lectures are therefore an authorial guide to his own work, focused on its key questions (Asor Rosa 2007: 621).

The English title that Calvino himself chose for his lectures, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, served, according to the wish of his widow Esther, as subtitle to their Italian edition published as *American Lectures*, which is what Calvino called them in conversations with his friends (Calvino 2009: 6).² Two other tentative titles were found among Calvino's papers by Mario Barenghi: *Some Literary Values for Use in the Next Millennium* and *Six Literary Legacies for the Incoming Millennium* (Calvino 1995: II 2965). All three reflect a sense of mission. Calvino's readers, used to his light style and subtle irony, may find it surprising, but this author had a very serious approach to literature from the beginning of his career, perceiving it as a moral commitment and an important instrument of cognition (Asor Rosa 2007: 609–615; Belpoliti 2006: XIII). The *Memos*, then, are texts to

¹ As regards the last lecture, only the general idea survives. Calvino died on September 19, 1985, as a consequence of a stroke he suffered thirteen days earlier.

² The full Italian title of the book is *Lezioni americane. Sei proposte per il prossimo millennio* (Calvino 1995: I, 627–753).

be read not only in aesthetic, but also in ethical terms (Redaelli 2016), and as particularly significant in their author's *ars poetica* and his meta-literary reflection. What is arguably most striking in the *Memos* is the concern for the salvation and preservation in the future of the above-mentioned elements of "the literary legacy", which are also major civilizational achievements. Faced with today's ubiquitous overabundance of images, which litter the human imagination and make it more and more sterile, clarity of vision (*visibilità*) belongs to that what is endangered by modern life. Calvino gives a warning of "the danger we run in losing a basic human faculty: the power of bringing visions into focus with our eyes shut, of bringing forth forms and colors from the lines of black letters on a white page, and in fact of *thinking* in terms of images" (Calvino 1988: 92). According to him, the question of visibility in literature is closely linked with imagination, the "mental cinema" (Calvino 1988: 83) showing mental images, which are the seeds of literary creation, something spontaneous and prior to words which ultimately force their logic upon the images:

In devising a story, therefore, the first thing that comes to my mind is an image that for some reason strikes me as charged with meaning, even if I cannot formulate this meaning in discursive or conceptual terms. As soon as the image has become sufficiently clear in my mind, I set about developing it into a story; or better yet, it is the images themselves that develop their own implicit potentialities, the story they carry within them. Around each image others come into being, forming a field of analogies, symmetries, confrontations. Into the organization of this material, which is no longer purely visual but also conceptual, there now enters my deliberate intent to give order and sense to the development of the story, or rather, what I do is try to establish which meanings might be compatible with the overall design I wish to give the story and which meanings are not compatible, always leaving a certain margin of possible alternatives. At the same time, the writing, the verbal product acquires increasing importance. I would say that from the moment I start putting black on white, what really matters is the written word, first as a search for an equivalent of the visual image, then as a coherent development of the initial stylistic direction. Finally, the written word little by little comes to dominate the field. (Calvino 1988: 88–89)

There is a substantial body of literature on the obvious gravitation of Calvino's work towards visibility, on the role of vision and seeing in his fiction and essays, on his practice of ekphrasis, his passion for the fine arts, penchant for optical metaphors, and "cartographer's eye" (e.g. Ricci 2001;

Belpoliti 2006; Grundtvig, McLaughlin, Waage Petersen 2007; Modena 2011). Lene Waage Petersen, a Danish scholar and translator of Calvino's work, juxtaposes his largely intuitive understanding of image with W.J.T. Mitchell's classic definition, in which different types of image – graphic, optical, perceptual, mental and verbal (metaphors) – function in various fields, as five siblings (Mitchell 1986: 10). Calvino's approach, blurring Mitchell's category boundaries, blends the mental, verbal and perceptual image into one (Waage Petersen 2007: 89). After Mitchell and Christopher Collins, Waage Petersen notes, however, the "ekphrastic fear", or the "iconophobia" (Collins 1991) well-rooted in literary theory, that is, the relatively little theoretical interest in the questions of visibility in literary texts, the result of which is a lack of cohesive methodological procedures and precise terminology (Waage Petersen 2007: 92). Calvino attempts to compensate for this lack – far more acute in the 1980s than today, after the iconic turn in the humanities (Zeidler-Janiszewska 2006; Kwiatkowska 2015) and intensive progress in neuroscience – by turning to Jean Starobinsky's essay on the history of the concept of imagination, *L'empire de l'imaginaire*, and to the seminal, bestselling book by Douglas Hofstadter, *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* (Calvino 1988: 87–89). Above all, however, he lays the foundations for his own theory of image, which it would perhaps be worthwhile to test against the latest achievements in Image Studies and cognitive neuroscience (cf. Skov, Stjernfelt, Paulson 2007).

It is certain that Calvino conceives of visibility in literature in close conjunction with another value discussed in his American lectures, namely, exactitude. One of his definitions of the latter is – along with a carefully drafted plan of the work and linguistic precision of description – "an evocation of clear, incisive, memorable visual images" (Calvino 1988: 55), which refers directly to the Renaissance emblem theory formulated by Giordano Bruno (Waage Petersen 2007: 97). What the search for exactitude, obsessive in Calvino's work, means is therefore a search for memorable images which branches in two directions. In his own words, "on the one side, the reduction of secondary events to abstract patterns according to which one can carry out operations and demonstrate theorems; and on the other, the effort made by words to present the tangible aspect of things as precisely as possible" (Calvino 1988: 74). The most perfect embodiment of this dichotomous poetics of image, reflecting the dichotomy of the human way to knowledge, and at the same time the "oxymoronic" structure of Calvino's thought, is the book *Invisible Cities* (*Le città invisibili*, 1972), arguably "the most visible"

(chapter I and chapter XI, reflected by the acute angles of the geometrical figure reproduced above, contain ten tales each; the remaining chapters contain five tales each). The columns in the diagram represent the eleven categories. The schema does not include the framing micro-narratives, whose number (nine), added to the number of cities (fifty-five), makes sixty-four: the number of squares on the chessboard. And it is a chessboard that Kublai Khan, the embodiment of the analytical mind in Calvino's book, uses as a model of his empire. Where the emperor sees the abstract order of black and white, Marco Polo, a close observer, notices details: the pattern in the piece of ebony from which the black fields are made, a thicker pore in the wood where there was a larvum's nest, traces left by the wood carver's instrument (Calvino 1988: 73–74).

Marco Belpoliti compares Calvino's "oxymoronic" method of describing the world with 17th-century Dutch painting, as interpreted by the American scholar Svetlana Alpers (Belpoliti 2006: 55–59). In her famous study *The Art of Describing* (Alpers 1983), she emphasizes the desire to make the most exact image of the world, dominant in Dutch art of the golden age, which was connected with an intense progress in science, particularly optics, in the Protestant Netherlands, and with the introduction to education of illustrated primers (such as *Orbis sensualium pictus* by John Amos Comenius; Alpers 1983: 93–101). The desire is manifest both in a propensity for almost photographic recreation of fragments of reality in painting, and in passion for cartography, which realized the wish to transfer the world onto the surface of a piece of canvas or paper. According to Belpoliti, what Calvino and the 17th-century Dutch artists have in common is that liking for topology and cartography, for creating maps of reality, as well as extreme focus on the visual experience. Another common feature worth noting: the emblematic tradition, deeply rooted in the culture of the Renaissance Netherlands (Alpers 1983: 229–233), of which Calvino felt an heir, too (Waage Petersen 2007: 97). It is in fact on the fusion of image and word, characteristic of an emblem, that the communication between Marco Polo and Kublai Khan relies:

Newly arrived and totally ignorant of the Levantine languages, Marco Polo could express himself only with gestures, leaps, cries of wonder and of horror, animal barkings or hootings, or with objects he took from his knapsacks (...) Returning from the missions on which Kublai sent him, the ingenious foreigner improvised pantomimes that the sovereign had to interpret: one city was depicted by the leap of a fish escaping the cormorant's beak to fall into a net; another city by a naked man running through fire unscorched; a third

by a skull, its teeth green with mold, clenching a white, round pearl. (Calvino 1974: 21–22)

In the Polish reception of Calvino's work, *Invisible Cities* certainly is unique. This is arguably the book which has been the object of the most creative interpretations in Poland, which I discussed in depth elsewhere (Kłos 2017). *Invisible Cities*, first published in the Polish translation of Alina Kreisberg, as *Niewidzialne miasta*, in 1975, and subsequently in two more editions (Calvino 2005 and Calvino 2013), have achieved a classic, perhaps even cult status – a rare occurrence for a work of Italian contemporary literature. It is referenced by a number of acclaimed Polish writers, among others Magdalena Tulli (whose prose debut, *Sny i kamienie* (1996), is evidently influenced by Calvino's book; Tulli 1995 and Tulli 2006), Jacek Dehnel (2013) or Sylwia Chutnik (2014). *Invisible Cities* is referenced by Polish architects, urban planners and urbanists, as well as city activists. There have been theatre productions inspired by *Invisible Cities* [*Kłęski w dziejach miasta K. albo wspomnienie z miasta* (Disasters in the history of the city of K., or a memory of a city), staged by the Bogusławski Theatre in Kalisz, dramatized by Agnieszka Jakimiak, directed by Weronika Szczawińska.] What has been borrowed from Calvino is, first and foremost, the concept of the city as a place where the material and the non-material, the past and the present, fears and desires co-exist, forming palimpsests. This way of seeing and telling a city (inspired in Calvino by the 1963 classic monograph *The Idea of a Town* by Joseph Rykwert; 1988) proves surprisingly universal, providing means for the expression of complicated histories and present problems of Polish towns and cities.³

Since *Invisible Cities* has become a solid part of cultural and social debate in Poland, it seems worthwhile to have a close look at the Polish translation and to reflect how its particular shape has influenced the reception of the book in Poland. The most interesting perspective to adopt, and the most fitting one, would be to study the text in light of Calvino's own categories of visibility and exactitude. In her essay *Moje przygody z Calvinem* (My adventures with Kreisberg, 2007), Alina Kreisberg discusses the strategies

³ Translator's note: the Polish word *miasto* encompasses the senses of the English "city" and "town". If needed, distinctions in size are indicated either morphologically (as in *miasteczko*, where the suffix carries the meaning "small") or by the addition of an adjective (cf. *małe miasto*, "small town"; *duże miasto*, "big town", *wielkie miasto*, "big city", literally "great city").

she used as the translator of Calvino's books into Polish [apart from *Invisible Cities*, she published a translation of *Palomar* – Calvino 2002 and *Lasokorzeniolabirynt (La foresta-radice-labirinto)* – Calvino 2006]. She describes the author as a master of verbal precision, of prose “with a jeweller's cut”, closest in spirit to the work of the mannerist sculptor and goldsmith Benvenuto Cellini (Kreisberg 2007: 124). Regarding the eternal dilemma of the translator, who is forever navigating between the source and target cultures, Kreisberg states that in the case of *Invisible Cities* she decided to take the ethnocentric stance, favouring the target culture, since Marco Polo's journey is not so much one “around the world” as one “around one's skull”, traversing the domains of “dreams, fantasies, remembrances, desires and longings” (Kreisberg 2007: 128), in which the reader should recognize his/her own experience. The translator openly admits that she modified some of Calvino's vocabulary choices, deciding that some of his terminology would sound too exotic or too encyclopaedic in Polish:

Compared with the Polish culture, the Italian enjoys a longer tradition of overseas travel and, as a result of contact with foreign countries, its lexicon acquired names of exotic referents comparatively earlier. Moreover, in the Mediterranean some names are current in everyday speech, while in Poland, even if well-known, they always sound a bit exotic. Taking this into account, what should one do with such nouns as *cerbottana* and *bifora*, which do have similar-sounding equivalents in Polish, or with the banal case of *gineceo*, or even with *origano*? Without a moment's hesitation, in all such instances I ruthlessly chose words actually used in Polish, even though outraged architect friends told me again and again that *bifora* (a mullioned window) was by no means an ordinary *okno dwudzielne* (double window), and though I would be loath to substitute rosemary for oregano in a real-life tomato salad, even if that is precisely what I did, on purpose, in the translation. What I was aiming for was a Polish equivalent of the smells remembered from childhood, aromas from a world of dreams. (Kreisberg 2007: 128, trans. A.P.)

Faced with the translator's interpretive priorities as explicated above (incidentally, not always adhered to with absolute consistency: see e.g. the word *bordello*, familiar to the Polish ear because of the well-established loanword *burdel*, substituted in the translation with its sophisticated-sounding synonym *zamtuz*, Calvino 2013: 13), and her reading of Calvino's book not so much as an atlas of the world captured in all its diversity, but as an inner atlas of “desires or anxieties, or nostalgia” (Kreisberg 2007: 128), as well as the “potential of difference” (Hermans 2007: 59–61), which is inevitable,

or even necessary in a translation, it is fascinating to query the concept of visibility vis-a-vis the images in the target text. How does the Polish reader visualize the *Invisible Cities*? To what extent do they differ from those which the Italian reader of Calvino's saw in his/her "mental cinema"?

A review of the images in the translation should probably begin with Kublai Khan's overriding perspective, or the geometric composition of *Invisible Cities*: that world map which the Polish reader is unable to see as sharply as he should. What I mean is the layout of the pages of the book: in the original Italian edition the structure of the work, comprised of modules of parallel importance, is definitely enhanced by the layout. Every module – whether it be a fragment of the meta-narrative in cursive or a description of the city – starts on a new page, with the blank spaces creating the visual equivalent of physical distance between the cities of the Khan's empire that the reader must cover; incidentally, the author leaves the decision about the route to be taken entirely to the reader (Calvino 2007b: VI). This particular layout invites associations with an atlas of the Tatar empire (Calvino 2013: 102–103), but also with a volume of poetry, thus highlighting the experimental, syncretic nature of Calvino's prose and its lyrical provenance (Calvino 1972: 11). In the Polish editions, all the modules within the chapters are printed in an unbroken manner. Whereas in the case of the first, 1975 edition this might have been caused by factors extraneous to the book itself (in communist economy, publishing houses received limited paper rations for a given publication), in the two subsequent editions this cramped layout must be seen as clear evidence of underestimation of the visual aspect of the text. This is true even of the recent WAB edition, characterized by a sophisticated cover design by Przemek Dębowski, a Polish graphic artist with an almost unrivalled instinct for book design.

The next thing I would like to point out is the translator's interpretation of the ekphrases of particular cities, or the world as observed by Marco Polo, which seems a much more complex issue. Differences in imagery are the result of a number of causes which can be ordered into categories. One category would encompass structural differences between the grammar of Italian and Polish, and different ways of coding space and iconic elements in metaphors in both of these languages (cf. Jansen 2007). To deal with problems from this category, the translator introduces amplification or cuts to the source text; she also changes the word order and syntactic relations between elements of the utterance, not without consequences for the iconic components of the text. Let us take a look at some examples. (The numbers

in parentheses refer to pages in Calvino 2007a and Calvino 2013, respectively; verbatim translation of the source text is provided in brackets; the phrases under comparison are in bold print: in the case of examples from this category, these are prepositions, prepositional phrases and verbs expressing spatial relations):

Finalmente il viaggio conduce alla città di Tamara. Ci si addentra **per** vie fitte d'insegne che sporgono dai muri. (13)⁴

[W końcu podróż prowadzi do miasta Tamary. Zagłębiaamy się w nie **przez** [through, via] ulice gęste od szyldów, które wystają z murów].

U kresu tej podróży człowiek dociera do miasta Tamary. Zagłębia się **w** [into] ulice o ścianach gęsto najeżonych szyldami. (13)

In due modi si raggiunge Despina: **per** nave o **per** cammello. La città si presenta differente a chi viene **da terra** e a chi **dal mare**. (17)⁵

[Na dwa sposoby dociera się do Despiny: statkiem lub wielbłądem. Miasto przedstawia się odmiennie temu, kto przybywa **od lądu** [from the land], i temu, kto **od morza** [from the sea].

Do Despiny można dotrzeć na dwa sposoby: statkiem lub **na** wielbłądzie. Miasto jawi się odmiennie temu, kto **nadjeżdża od strony lądu** [arrives from the land], i temu, kto **wpływa do niego morzem** [enters it by sea]. (15)

In the first of the above examples, an excerpt from the description of Tamara, in the target text the subject is no longer abstract (journey), but a personal agent (man). Moreover, the word *najeżony* (“bristling”) carries different visual connotations than the word *sporgono* (“jut”) in the source text: the one highlights the density and spikiness of the signs, while the other merely states the fact of the signs’ jutting from the walls. In the latter example, from the description of Despina, there is a significant semantic extension of the utterance, necessitated by the use of the syntactic construct with the pronoun *chi*, functioning both as a demonstrative pronoun (“this”), and a relative pronoun (“which”). The Polish phrase *wpłynąć do niego morzem* (“enter it by sea”) modifies the original spatial relations: firstly, the narrating observer’s distance from Despina is no longer there, and secondly, it is implied that the harbour is located in the city centre.

⁴ Finally the journey leads to the city of Tamara. You penetrate it along streets thick with signboards jutting from the walls (Calvino 1974: 13).

⁵ Despina can be reached in two ways: by ship and by camel. The city displays one face to the traveler arriving overland and a different one to him who arrives by sea (Calvino 1974: 17).

Differences in the linguistic coding of space are also caused by different cultural perception of geographical relations. In one of the conversations of Marco Polo and Kublai Khan there is the following phrase (alluding to *The Travels of Marco Polo*, a work with which Calvino is involved in constant intertextual dialogue): *Di là l'uomo si parte e cavalca tre giornate tra greco e levante* (88). In the Polish translation, this is rendered as *Opuściwszy ten kraj, jedzie się przez trzy dni na południowy wschód* (“On leaving that country, one rides south-east for three days”) (68). The Italian *greco* and *levante* are names of winds: the north-easterly and easterly, respectively, as well as names of parts of the world where these winds originate. Etymologically, the names reflect the geographical position of Italy and its neighbours: *greco* blows from the direction of former Greece, or Byzantium, and *levante*, from the Levant (i.e. where the sun rises, from the Latin *levare*, “to rise”). According to the description in Italian, the horse rider moves toward the east, deviating slightly to the north. Obviously, it is not what the Polish translation says.

Visual connotations of idiomatic expressions, whenever translated into the natural idiom of Polish, cannot help being different in the source and target texts:

I compagni (...) giurano d'aver visto (...) una sola **donna-cannone** farsi vento sulla piattaforma d'un vagone. (19)⁶

Moi towarzysze podróży (...) zaklinają się, że widzieli (...) tylko jedną **zwalistą babę [big/heavy woman]**, wachlującą się na pomoście wagonu. (17)

Ogni mattina la popolazione (...) indossa vestaglie **nuove fiammanti** (...). (113)⁷

Co rano ludność (...) wkłada **nowiuteńkie [brand new]** szlafroki (...). (89)

Donna-cannone literally means “woman-cannon” and *nuovo fiammante*, when used to describe an object, means “flaming with newness”.

In his well-known study, Theo Hermans stresses the fact that “the text of a translation as we read it on a page represents a series of choices that in turn point up a large virtual reservoir in which all the unselected, excluded, but potential valid alternative choices” (Hermans 2007: 61) are present. Faced with words with a wide semantic field, the translator often has to decide on

⁶ My traveling companions (...) swear they saw only (...) one fat woman fanning herself on a train's platform (Calvino 1974: 19).

⁷ [E]very morning the people (...) wear brand new clothing (Calvino 1974: 114).

one of the senses, excluding the rest. In the translation of *Invisible Cities*, a major difficulty is the lack of real designates of the ekphrases, making it impossible to check the text against the image. Calvino's cities both do and do not exist, they are both real (the text includes, among others, ekphrases of the architecture of Venice, or the Great Mosque in the Iraqi city of Samarra) and fantastic. The Polish translator makes the decisions on the meaning, relying on her own knowledge and imagination. Her choices, apart from cases of arbitrary domestication, generally tend to fit within the semantic fields of the words from the source text; nevertheless, by dint of narrowing the meaning down in the translation to a single sense, they unavoidably modify the image evoked in the reader's mind by the Italian original. Let us look at three examples.

Gli dei della città, secondo alcuni, abitano nella profondità, nel lago nero che nutre le **vene** sotterranee. (20)⁸

Zdaniem jednych, bogowie miasta żyją w głębinach, w czarnym jeziorze, które zasila podziemne **nurty** [currents]. (18)

Forse l'impero (...) non è altro che uno zodiaco di **fantasmi** della mente. (22)⁹
Może cesarstwo (...) jest tylko zodiakiem **urojeń** [delusions] umysłu. (20)

Talvolta città diverse si succedono sopra lo stesso suolo e sotto lo stesso nome, (...) **incomunicabili tra loro**. (29)¹⁰

Czasem różne miasta następują po sobie w tym samym miejscu i pod tą samą nazwą, (...) **pozbawione punktów stycznych** [lacking points of contact]. (26)

In the first example, there is the word *vena*, "vein" – in the sense of a water vein, and in the sense of a blood vessel, and the double sense works perfectly for Calvino's approach to his cities as living organisms. The *fantasma* in the second example means "delusion", it is true, but it also denotes a ghost or spectre, and a fantasy. In the third example, *incomunicabile* suggests lack of contact in the visual and physical sense, but also lack of verbal communication or spiritual connection. Calvino's original *Maurilia* has a discontinuous

⁸ The city's gods, according to some people, live in the depths, in the black lake that feeds the underground streams (Calvino 1974: 20).

⁹ Perhaps (...) the empire is nothing but a zodiac of the mind's phantasms (Calvino 1974: 22).

¹⁰ (...) sometimes different cities follow one another on the same site and under the same name, (...) without communication among themselves (Calvino 1974: 30).

history of two cities unlike one another, therefore both kinds of incompatibility are relevant.

Sometimes the translator's choices result in quite the opposite effect. As an illustration, let us take the name of one of the city categories coined by Calvino, *Le città sottili*, rendered in Polish as *zwiewne miasta* ("airy/fleeting cities"). The cities in this category are inspired by the sculptures of Fausto Melotti, a classic of Italian abstract art (Barengi 2002): formed of thin elongated elements, they make for light, and yet solid openwork structures (as e.g. the city of Zenobia, built on tall stilts, or Isaura, "a city of a thousand wells"). The Polish word *zwiewne* widens of the semantic field of the Italian *sottile* (thin, slim, slender, fine, delicate, subtle, slight), adding new, visually potent meanings: "fleeting", "passing", "moving easily in the air" and "easily blown away by the wind".

An analysis of the translator's choices regarding the material elements of Calvino's fictional world also yields interesting results. In Translation Studies' theory and history, the "turn towards things" seems an obvious approach, even if evidently underappreciated to date. Human existence is inextricably bound up with things and objects "which are involved as (more or less) taken-for-granted and inherent aspects of our doing" (Olsen 2010: 8) and influenced by them. In literary texts, as Elaine Freedgood points out, in things, their possible metaphorical and symbolic meanings aside, entire "critical cultural archives have been preserved" (Freedgood 2010: 1). In the transfer of interlinguistic translation, things are either adjusted to the material resource pool of the target culture or, retaining their original shape, enhance the foreignisation of the translation. Observing the transformation of things in the process of translation amounts to observing the target culture, its changes in time and its openness to "the other".

To illustrate this point, let us take the case of oregano in the description of the city of Anastacia: in the Polish translation, the traveller should *zachwalać smak mięsa bażanta złocistego, piezonego tutaj na ogniu z suchych drzew czereśniowych i posypanego obficie rozmarynem [rosemary]* (Calvino 2013: 11–12); while the original text says that he should *lodare la carne del fagiano dorato che qui si cucina sulla fiamma di legno di ciliegio stagionato e si cosparge con molto origano* (Calvino 2007a: 12).¹¹ This short, powerfully sensual excerpt, does contain a whole archive of cultural knowledge. The

¹¹ I should praise the flesh of the golden pheasant cooked here over fires of seasoned cherry wood and sprinkled with much sweet marjoram (...) (Calvino 1974: 12).

Italian noun *ciliegio* means a cherry tree: unlike in Polish, the language does not record the differentiation between a cherry tree and a sour cherry tree (*czereśnia* and *wiśnia*, respectively). The golden pheasant, and incidentally also the common pheasant, are of Chinese origin. The species was successfully introduced to the ecosystems of some Western European countries (e.g. the south of Italy), but in Poland it remains exotic. And finally, the oregano: while in 1970s Poland, cut off from Italy by the Iron Curtain, it could have been seen as an exotic plant, today – owing to the huge popularity of Mediterranean cuisine with the Polish people and their holidaying in Italy on a mass scale – it has become one of the most well-known herbs. The domesticating decision to substitute oregano with rosemary, which may have seemed necessary in the Communist era, is no longer justifiable in the global consumer reality of the twenty-first century.

Similarly, from today's perspective, a Polish reader probably would find it puzzling that he is spared the exoticism of *hibiscus* (Italian *fiore dell'ibisco*, 13), and presented with *chińska róża* (literally “Chinese rose” a synonym of “hibiscus”, 12) instead. Certain cultural trends, however, remain unchanged: a *fiasco spagliato* (114) in Leonia, the city drowning in rubbish – an empty wine bottle in its straw holder (here broken or missing)—is rendered in the Polish translation as *nadtłuczona flaszka* (“chipped spirit/vodka bottle”, 91), which brings to mind the typically Slavic liking for strong alcohol and can still often be sighted these days, a leftover of open-air consumption of said alcohol.

What is particularly noteworthy in the translation of *Invisible Cities* is the question of the translator's interpretation of architectural and art historical terminology. As already mentioned, Alina Kreisberg's attitude towards them is marked by almost ruthless liberty, justified in her eyes by categorising them as technical terms increasing the difficulty in the reception of the text. What the translation of specialist terms freely entails, however, is modification of Calvino's images, e.g. the description of the city of Diomira (8) lacks the *vie lastricate in stagno*, in the English translation, “streets paved with lead” (7). Sometimes this even influences the meaning of entire passages: in the “text in cursive” closing the first chapter of the book, partially quoted above, where the source text has *emblemī*, “emblems”, the target text has symbols.

Ma, palese o oscuro che fosse, tutto quel che Marco mostrava aveva il potere degli **emblemī**, che una volta visti non si possono dimenticare né confondere. (...) Eppure ogni notizia su di un luogo richiamava alla mente dell'imperatore

quel primo gesto o oggetto con cui il luogo era stato designato da Marco. Il nuovo dato riceveva un senso da quell'**emblema** e insieme aggiungeva all'**emblema** un nuovo senso. (22)¹²

Ale wszystko, co pokazywał Marko, czy oczywiste, czy niezrozumiałe, miało moc **symboli**, które raz ujrzone, nie mogą ulec zapomnieniu czy przemieszaniu. (...) A jednak każda wiadomość o jakimś miejscu przywołała cesarzowi na myśl ów pierwszy gest czy przedmiot, jakim oznaczył je Marko. Nowe dane przejmowały znaczenie owego **symbolu**, a zarazem przydawały **symbolowi** nowego znaczenia. (19–20)

While the semantic field of the Italian word *emblema* does include the general concept of symbol, there are many hints, both in *Invisible Cities* itself and in the American Lectures, that here the word *emblema* should be read as an important intertextual reference to the modern tradition of emblems and emblem books.

Instances of changing or paraphrasing specialist terminology sometimes lead to a blurring or modification of stylistic features of the architecture described. Let us take, for example, the already mentioned city of Despina:

[Il marinaio] si vede in testa a una lunga carovana che lo porta via dal deserto del mare, verso oasi d'acqua dolce all'ombra seghettata delle palme, **verso palazzi dalle spesse mura di calce**, dai cortili di piastrelle su cui ballano scalze le danzatrici (...). (17–18)¹³

[Marynarz] już widzi siebie na czele długiej karawany, która unosi go z pustyni morza ku oazie ze słodką wodą w pierzastym cieniu palm, **ku palacom o grubych wapiennych murach** i dziedzińcach wykładanych mozaiką, po której tańczą bosonogie tancerki. (16)

The source text evokes “palaces with thick **whitewashed** walls”, i.e. smooth walls covered with plaster, such as are typical of oriental architecture, among others. In the Polish text, the palace’s walls are “thick limestone”: what the

¹² But, obscure or obvious as it might be, everything Marco displayed had the power of emblems which, once seen, cannot be forgotten or confused. (...) And yet each piece of information about a place recalled to the emperor’s mind that first gesture or object with which Marco had designated the place. The new fact received a new meaning from that emblem and also added to the emblem a new meaning (Calvino 1974: 22).

¹³ [The sailor] already sees himself at the head of a long caravan taking him away from the desert of the sea, toward oases of fresh water in the palm trees’ jagged shade, toward palaces of thick, whitewashed walls, tiled courts where girls are dancing barefoot (...) (Calvino 1974: 17–18).

informed reader will envisage is a wall made from blocks of limestone, a familiar image since such walls form part of the medieval architecture of the city of Krakow. Obviously, in *Invisible Cities* anything and everything is possible: after all, among the cities created by Calvino there is one which is a spider's web and one which consists exclusively of the canalization system. The "mental cinema" would have no difficulty in showing a wall made from blocks or rocks of solid limestone in the middle of the desert. The translator's choices determine, however, if what we see is a realistic or a fantastic architectural image. The *finestra a bifora* in the description of Phyllis refers back to medieval architecture, while the word used in the Polish translation, *okno dwudzielne* ("double window"), to contemporary architecture. In a stylistically coherent image of a city which brings Venice to mind, *okno dwudzielne* is like a single modern window in a historic building front (not an infrequent occurrence in Polish towns and cities), fitted in spite of the restorer's orders:

Giunto a Fillide, ti compiacci d'osservare quanti ponti diversi uno dall'altro attraversano i canali: **ponti a schiena d'asino**, coperti, su pilastri, su barche, sospesi, con i parapetti traforati; quante varietà di **finestre** s'affacciano sulle vie: **a bifora**, moresche, lanceolate, a sesto acuto, sormontate da lunette o da rosoni; quante specie di pavimenti coprano il suolo: a ciottoli, a lastroni, d'imbrecciata, **a piastrelle bianche e blu**. (91)¹⁴

Przybywszy do Filidy, z upodobaniem przyglądasz się, ile najprzeróżniejszych mostów łączy brzegi kanałów: mosty wsparte na filarach, ułożone na łodziach, mosty o ażurowych balustradach, **wygięte łukowato**, przykryte daszkiem, wiszące; jak różnorodne okna wychodzą na ulicę: **okna dwudzielne**, mauretańskie, lancetowate, ostrołukowe, zwieńczone lunetami lub rozetami; ile rodzajów nawierzchni pokrywa ziemię: z kamyków, płyt, żwiru, **kafelków białych lub niebieskich**. (70–71)

In the translation of the above description, the images appear in a changed order with their nature modified. The very concrete shape of the bridge like *a schiena d'asino*, "the back of the donkey", is merely *wygięty łukowato*, "bent in the shape of an arch". The Italian *piastrelle* are tiles of various materials, not necessarily ceramic, as the Polish translation has it – but they

¹⁴ When you have arrived in Phyllis, you rejoice in observing all the bridges over the canals, each different from the other: cambered, covered, on pillars, on barges, suspended, with tracery balustrades. And what a variety of windows looks down on the streets: mullioned, Moorish, lancet, pointed, surmounted by lunettes or stained-glass roses; how many kinds of pavement cover the ground: cobbles, slabs, gravel, blue and white tiles (Calvino 1974: 90).

are most definitely arranged differently in terms of colour pattern in the source and target texts: white and blue elements merge in the former, while the latter suggests that the two colours appear separately in the cityscape.

Another challenge the translator was faced with is Calvino's metaphorical virtuosity: the architectural terminology which, in Italian, stems from the everyday lexicon, serves as a springboard for wordplay:

In ogni suo punto la città offre sorprese alla vista: un cespo di capperi che sporge dalle mura della fortezza, le statue di tre regine su una mensola, **una cupola a cipolla con tre cipolline infilzate sulla guglia**. (91)¹⁵

W każdym punkcie miasto gotuje niespodzianki dla oczu: krzak kaparów, który wychyla się z murów fortecy, posągi trzech królowych na konsoli, **cebulasta kopuła z trzema mniejszymi cebulkami nawleczonymi na iglicę**. (71)

Alina Kreisberg proposes a word-for-word translation of this fragment, which lends an extra metaphorical layer to the description of the building, making it almost a fantastical structure. In fact, this is probably an ekphrasis of the three-level cupolas of the Venetian San Marco basilica. There is similar wordplay in Calvino's description of Isidora, where the technical term *scale a chiocciola* (literally, "stairs in the shape of a snail's shell), denoting a spiral staircase, is juxtaposed with its etymological source:

Finalmente giunge a Isidora, città dove i palazzi hanno **scale a chiocciola incrostate di chiocciole marine**, dove si fabbricano a regola d'arte cannocchiali e violini. (8)¹⁶

Wreszcie dociera do Izydory, miasta, gdzie pałace mają **kręte jak muszla ślimaka schody, wysadzone morskimi muszlami**, gdzie rzemieślnicy celują w wyrobienie lunet i skrzypiec. (9)

Thus, the *Invisible Cities* in the Polish translation inevitably differ from those in the original text. Sometimes they are more surreal and fairy tale-like, and sometimes more realistic and orderly. The visual quality (*visibilità*) and precision in rendering Calvino's images into her own language is not prioritised by the translator, for a number of reasons; neither does the reception of *Invisible Cities* in Poland focus on the text's visual aspects. Contrary to

¹⁵ At every point the city offers surprises to your view: a caper bush jutting from the fortress' walls, the statues of three queens on corbels, an onion dome with three smaller onions threaded on the spire (Calvino 1974: 90).

¹⁶ Finally he comes to Isidora, a city where the buildings have spiral staircases encrusted with spiral seashells, where perfect telescopes and violins are made (...) (Calvino 1974: 8).

the author's own practice, what the Polish interpretations invariably see as the key aspect is "the verbal result". The image becomes its subordinate – a dependent of grammar, and of cultural and aesthetic circumstance.

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