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“A FAVOUR TO POLISH LITERATURE”. KATHERINE MANSFIELD’S LINKS WITH POLAND*

Abstract

The paper presents the Polish circulation of Katherine Mansfield’s poem “To Stanisław Wyspiański” – her only piece of poetry translated into Polish thus far. Written in 1910, the poem was translated three times: by Floryan Sobieniowski in 1910, by Beata Obertyńska in 1958 and by Zbigniew Lisowski in 1968. The analysis of contexts in which the Polish translations were created, published and republished, along with the interpretation of their paratexts, demonstrates that Polish readers and translators were more interested in Wyspiański – the figure presented in the poem – than in Mansfield herself. Throughout decades, very little attention has been paid to the interpretation of the poem. Polish scholars and literary critics rather investigated the circumstances in which Mansfield encountered Polish culture in general and, in particular, learnt about Wyspiański, the great artist from Kraków. Their convictions and beliefs can fruitfully be interpreted by the Translation History scholar as a sign of changes in the cultural and political situation in Poland. Moreover, the translators’ attitude – especially the one presented by Sobieniowski – can successfully be analyzed from the perspective of Translator Studies.

Keywords: Katherine Mansfield, Floryan Sobieniowski, Stanisław Wyspiański, reception, translation history

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Although today it seems forgotten by Polish publishers, critics and readers alike, only five decades ago Katherine Mansfield's work sparked discussions and polemics at all levels of reception. Not only her fiction and diaries aroused emotions, but above all the poem "To Stanislaw Wyspianski", the first point of literary contact between the "author from the Antipodes", as she was called (Toporowski 1972: 5), and Poland. The circumstances in which this piece, Mansfield's only text translated into Polish in her lifetime, was originally written, and the history of its presentation and reception, excited researchers and critics especially in the second half of the 20th century, from the late 1950s to the 1980s.

Written in Whitmanian free verse, the ode was built around the contrast between the young New Zealand on the one hand, and Poland, burdened with a long and painful history, on the other hand. Stanisław Wyspiański became a symbol here, representing a superhuman, messianic triumph over death:

Oh, Master (...)
 how alive you leapt into the grave and wrestled with Death
 and raised Death up in your arms and showed him to all the people.
 Yours a more personal labour than the Nazarene's miracles;
 Yours a more forceful encounter than the Nazarene's gentle commands
 (Mansfield 1972: 221).

The poem was written during Mansfield's 1909–1910 stay in Bad Wörishofen in Bavaria, that is in the period of her life least described and least known today. The author was very determined to have all her writings from that painful time destroyed, and indeed she was quite successful in her endeavour (Kimber 2015: 59–83). Dated by Mansfield in 1910¹, the poem was first published only in 1938, fifteen years after her death, in a bibliophile edition of a hundred copies printed by The Favil Press Ltd, commissioned by Bertram Rota, owner of the then popular Bodley House Publishing (Lisowski 1972: 222). Until 2014, "To Stanislaw Wyspianski" had not been included in any popular edition of Mansfield's collected works; thus, in the UK it has remained a largely marginal piece to this day. However, it was discussed by Katherine Mansfield's most famous biographer, the British journalist Antony Alpers, author of the canonical books *Katherine Mansfield: A Biography* (1954) and *The Life of Katherine Mansfield* (1980). His work was a recurrent

¹ As noticed by Wiktor Weintraub (1958: 2), the publisher read the opening lines quite literally, suggesting that the poem was written when Mansfield was still in New Zealand.

source of reference in studies by Polish detective-critics tracing the mysterious origins of the poem; excited by its evasive genesis more than by the text itself, they embarked on research that resembled criminal investigations.

The first, unsuccessful attempt at solving the mystery of "To Stanislaw Wyspianski" has to do with translation. The reception of the translated poem in Poland and its rank in comparison to Mansfield's other works available in Polish make it an interesting case; the fact that there are as many as three translations, reprinted a number of times in newspapers and magazines, is rather unusual in itself. What seems most remarkable, however, is that the first translation was published already in the year that the poem was written: on 26 December 1910. On that day the literary supplement to the weekly *Gazeta Poniedziałkowa* published Floryan Sobieniowski's article "Kathleen Mansfield: Stanisław Wyspiański in memoriam", which contained the first two stanzas of the original, his translation of the whole poem, and a commentary suggesting the circumstances in which Mansfield became interested in Wyspiański the man and in his work. It should be noted that as he presents "the young English author" (Sobieniowski 1910: 1) to Polish readers, Sobieniowski fabricates certain aspects of Mansfield's biography: he attributes Irish roots to her, mentions her alleged long stay in America, and claims that she learned about Polish culture thanks to a book of history by Professor William R. Morfill of Oxford University, which was to inspire her to learn Polish. According to the author of the article, Mansfield was most impressed with the works of Norwid and Wyspiański, and the latter became particularly close to her thanks to the stories she heard from Sobieniowski himself. It was the emotions, enthusiasm and "empathizing with the tragic life of the author of *The Wedding*" (Sobieniowski 1910: 1) that mainly motivated the sensitive writer to dedicate a poem to him.

Explaining why he decided to publish the translation, Sobieniowski expresses his conviction that although the poem "To Stanislaw Wyspianski" constitutes "the voice of an individual, who does not yet have a 'representative' significance", "in the future [she] may give more than one favour to Polish literature" (Sobieniowski 1910: 1). He enhances the importance of the yet-unknown author with cosmopolitan interludes about her French name, numerous travels and international contacts. The note, which is the first mention of Mansfield in the history of Polish culture, in fact tells more about the translator than the author of the poem, revealing Sobieniowski's views and beliefs. He refers to "wild" Maoris and New Zealand's unbridled nature in stereotypical colonial terms, and also puts forth his own interpretation of the

poem, conditioned by the political situation of the time, namely that revolution is universal, featuring in all societies: “there is one language common to all humanity, understood in every corner of the world – the language of the Deed” (Sobieniowski 1910: 1). The following year, the translation was reprinted twice, again accompanied by a similar commentary, according to which Mansfield got to know “Polish history and literature by a strange coincidence” (Terlecki 1971: 171).

Sobieniowski’s vague and largely fallacious remarks did not directly contribute to explaining the circumstances in which the poem had been written. What his translation did achieve was to make Mansfield sound odd in the Polish language. Sobieniowski’s rendering contains some cardinal linguistic errors, clumsy calques and phrases, which are probably the result of his attempted translation of passages that were not entirely clear to him in the original. Not only does Mansfield’s poem in this version strike the reader as inept and incoherent; it also sounds pompous. This is best illustrated by the middle part of the piece, in which Sobieniowski augments the stately tone of the original even with his affected punctuation:

Lecz Twoje czyny! Twoje czyny, Mistrzu! W nich my do Ciebie należym!
Mistrzu: myśmy tam jako dzieci – i bojaźń święta nas ogarnia przed walką
Olbrzymia!

[But your deeds! Your deeds, oh Master! In them we to you belong!
Oh Master: we are there like children – and overwhelmed by holy awe before
the Giant’s battle!]²

But the dead – the old – Oh Master, we belong to you there
Oh Master, there we are children and awed by the strength of a giant

(...)
Trud Twojego żywota – to niemal jako cuda Nazarejczyka!
Potęga walki Twojej wyższa nad Nazarejskie władztwo pokoju!

[The toils of your life – it is almost like the Nazarene’s miracles!
The power of your struggle is higher than the Nazarene’s governance of peace!]

Yours a more personal labour than the Nazarene’s miracles
Yours a more forceful encounter than the Nazarene’s gentle commands.

² All quotations from the original are from Mansfield 1972; the English back translation of Sobieniowski’s Polish, here in square brackets, is by Magda Heydel.

In the Polish translation, the poem, which is in fact referred to as an "address"/"appeal" [*orędzie*] in one of the final lines, resembles a litany. Sobieniowski strikes a lofty tone, generally associated with religious worship, and achieved at the most basic level by means of inversion. Towards the middle of the poem, the speaker describes Wyspiański using the expression "mroczne, smutkiem zasnutę światło duszy Twojej" [the dark light of your soul, with sadness overcast], which the original has as "[t]he sad, pale light of your soul". It seems that the translator not only got Mansfield interested in Wyspiański, but also, in the act of translation, expressed his own affected romantic sentiments about national liberation, which are all the more striking as they were almost absent in the original. By putting into the poet's mouth stereotypes so distant from the way in which Wyspiański was actually perceived by his contemporaries³, Sobieniowski canonized the artist on the altar of his homeland. He upheld his ungrounded legend of "Stanisław Wyspiański – Martyr and Master", probably created for the sake of Mansfield, and contributed to the mythologization of the artist. In Sobieniowski's interpretation, it is thanks to Wyspiański that Poland is to rise from the dead, be reborn and triumph. In the English original, however, the poem is Mansfield's historiosophical reflection on her own homeland, as well as on her personal situation (a single young woman with literary ambitions, struggling with the loss of her child, she may have been looking for a paragon of perseverance). It seems that this "tribute to Wyspiański" (Toporowski 1972: 5), as the poem was hailed by Polish researchers, only became one in the act of translation. Sobieniowski twice elevated Wyspiański to the status of a (semi-)god in the eyes of Mansfield: in the act of familiarising her with the Polish bard's life and in the process of translation.

Another attempt at finding out why and in what circumstances Mansfield became interested in the Polish artist took place with the publication of the second translation, on 9 November 1958 in the London-based Polish émigré weekly *Wiadomości*. In Beata Obertyńska's translation, created in a different historical moment, Mansfield no longer relies to such an extent on Sobieniowski's ideology of national liberation. The first translator's Young Poland solemnity is replaced with a subtler and more contemporary interpretation. Obertyńska's retranslation is accompanied by Wiktor Weintraub's

³ As Wyspiański's biographer Monika Śliwińska observes, his contemporaries saw the artist as struggling financially, underappreciated, increasingly irritable with the progression of his illness, getting meaner and more embittered with age (Śliwińska 2017: 268–269).

tellingly titled article, “Katherine Mansfield, Wyspiański and F–”, suggesting a revision of emphasis in the juxtaposition of author, the hero and the translator of the poem.

The critic describes the context of the first publication of the original and expresses his surprise at the fact that John Middleton Murry never included this work in any collection of his wife’s works. Weintraub refers to the current research, especially to the 1954 biography by Alpers, according to whom Mansfield went to Bavaria to take hydrotherapy treatment, supposedly as a pretext to avoid a scandal related to her first, short and unsuccessful, marriage to George Bowden. As Weintraub repeats after Alpers, Mansfield’s mother came to England only to take her daughter to Bavaria; there, Katherine met Polish writers, who introduced her to the works of Chekhov, a fact which, according to many critics, later had a crucial influence on her work (Weintraub 1958: 2). The part of Alpers’s account that most intrigued Weintraub and later Polish critics was a reference to three Poles staying at the time at Wörishofen, a 19th-century spa town founded by a Catholic priest, father Sebastian Kneipp. At this point, Weintraub brings into his deliberations Murry’s autobiography *Between Two Worlds*: from this account, in which only one of these Poles is named (Yelski), emerges a compelling image of a particularly intriguing and mysterious figure. The third of the Poles described, who appears as “V.” in Murry’s autobiography and “F–” in Alpers’s works, drew the attention of all subsequent Polish researchers interested in the origins of “To Stanislaw Wyspiański.” This mysterious man owes his fame especially to Murry, who calls him a “temperamental Slav,” “a burden to our purse as well as our spirit” (Murry 1935: 233–235), to conclude that he could serve as a model for the Polish characters in Dostoyevsky (Weintraub 1958: 2). He also mentions the man’s strong fascination with Wyspiański. Weintraub also suggests that Katherine, infected by the mysterious Pole’s enthusiasm, was to translate one of Wyspiański’s plays (about which she could have learnt earlier from Leon Schiller’s extensive article “The New Theatre in Poland. Stanisław Wyspiański”, published in *The Mask* magazine in 1909 and 1910).

Putting together facts from both his sources, Weintraub claims that, in 1912, this nameless intriguing figure showed up penniless at the doorstep of Mansfield’s and Murry’s place, and stayed with them for a longer time, living at their expense. Weintraub rightly points out that this incident, “bringing to mind Grushenka and her Polish fiancé” (Weintraub 1958: 2), sheds light on the time in Bavaria when Katherine wrote a poem about Wyspiański. As

Weintraub notes, F–'s relationship with Mansfield must have been "rather close" back then (Weintraub 1958: 2), if the mysterious acquaintance later had the audacity to intrude into her private life like that. Weintraub also mentions the first publication of the poem in Polish translation, but admits that he did not manage to consult this version. He puts forth the theory that Katherine gave the poem to F– as a memory of their "shared enthusiasms" (Weintraub 1958: 2), and he, having published the translation in one of Young Poland's magazines, sold the manuscript to "an English collector" (Weintraub 1958: 2). This is also how the critic explains the absence of the poem from the works published by Murry in 1923. Weintraub speculates as to which of Wyspiański's plays Mansfield might have translated and who the mysterious F– was. However, this part of his deliberations does not lead to any specific clues or conclusions.

A year later, in 1959, in a section devoted to foreign cultural news in the weekly *Nowa Kultura*, the poem "To Stanislaw Wyspianski" was published again, this time in Sobieniowski's already known, pre-war translation, accompanied by a commentary. Although there is no direct proof that Sobieniowski also authored the note, all other material suggests that it was he who, provoked or perhaps affronted by the creation and publication of a new version of Mansfield's poem, decided to remind the readers of his translation, thus trying to appropriate the author, seeking to monopolize her image. This hypothesis, put forward by Tymon Terlecki (Terlecki 1971: 171), and developed here, is supported by the pretentious, conceited tone of the commentary. The emphasis on elements that are supposed to legitimize Sobieniowski's authority and expertise is much stronger here than in the 1910 note: "translated from the poet's manuscript by Floryan Sobieniowski" (Mansfield 1959: 8), "from Floryan Sobieniowski's direct accounts" (Mansfield 1959: 8). The commentary also reveals details that not only suggest the identity of the mysterious man, but also, interestingly, in a sense constitute a direct response to Weintraub's speculations: Sobieniowski publishes the same translation that appeared in *Gazeta Poniedziałkowa*, and again mentions Wyspiański's particular plays that Mansfield allegedly read. It is also worth juxtaposing the conclusion of the 1910 note with the one from 1959. The fight for an independent Polish state smoothly turns into a praise for the power of the Polish People's Republic – a different context, but the only acceptable one after the war. For the first and last time, there is also a reference (an enigmatic one at that) to Wyspiański's stained glass design *Polonia*. Sobieniowski emphasizes different aspects, withdrawing from the potentially unwelcome cosmopolitan overtone of the 1910 biographical note.

Since then, critics have paid diminishing attention to the interpretation of the poem, focusing primarily on Katherine Mansfield's mysterious relationship with Poland (and with the ever less mysterious Pole). A particularly keen advocate of this approach was Jan Koprowski, a writer, critic and translator from German. In 1962, he published an article in *Twórczość* entitled "Katherine Mansfield (on the 40th anniversary of her death)", reprinted a year later in the collection of essays *Z południa i z północy. Odwiedziny u pisarzy* [From the South and the North: Visits with Writers]. The same text, with minor revisions, served as the preface to the only Polish post-war edition of Katherine Mansfield's letters, from 1978. Koprowski offered a brief historical overview of the reception of the author's work in Poland, and points out that both this history and the Polish references in Mansfield's work "are yet to find their chronicler" (Koprowski 1978: 12). Based on a biographical novel from 1942, Nelia Gardner White's *Daughter of Time: The Life of Katherine Mansfield in Novel Form*, Koprowski constructs an ungrounded fairy-tale story. While in Bavaria (he does not reflect on why she found herself there), Mansfield met a certain Mr. Stropiński and his son,

who would talk about Polish art and literature. She listened to one of their conversations, in which two names were mentioned: Paderewski and Wyspiański. She became interested in the latter. She felt strangely close to that this Polish writer, who was in fact incomprehensible to her. As a result, she wrote "To Stanislaw Wyspiański", undoubtedly the most beautiful of the poems ever written about him (Koprowski 1962: 96).

What is striking here is not only that this scene, not supported by any biographical evidence, is vivid like an anecdote, but also the authoritative tone suggesting that Koprowski penetrated into Mansfield's feelings and emotions. Confident that he is right, Koprowski, with his categorical value judgements, proclaims himself an expert not only on Mansfield, but also on the reception of Wyspiański. Towards the end of his deliberations, the critic mentions two existing translations and quotes Obertyńska's version, because "it seems better" to him (Koprowski 1962: 96). The article ends with the conclusion that Mansfield's social interests, already suggested in this poem, would later develop and become the centre of her writing, constituting her artistic truth (Koprowski 1962: 97). Reprinting the same article in the span of sixteen years, the critic missed the emergence of the third translation and many new, reliable reports on Katherine Mansfield's relationship with Poland, about which he was so vague.

In 1968, Zbigniew Lisowski, literary critic, poet and translator, published his version of Mansfield's poem, accompanied by a commentary, in the Rzeszów-based quarterly *Profile*.

Discussing the text, Lisowski offers a partial analysis, and explains his reasons for a retranslation. He evokes the origins of both previous translations, pointing out that Obertyńska's is "by far better than Sobieniowski's" (Lisowski 1972: 224), but it does contain several mistakes. Indeed, Obertyńska changed the meaning of one crucial phrase, so that the original sense is lost in Polish. However, Lisowski is very tactful when he "corrects" Obertyńska in two crucial spots. Her version:

Człowieku! Jakże wspaniałe było twe zwycięstwo
choć nie zmoğeś śmierci cudem jak Syn Człowieczy

[Oh man! How glorious was your victory
even though you did not miraculously defeat death like the Son of Man]

as an interpretation of Mansfield's:

Yours a more personal labour than the Nazarene's miracles
Yours a more forceful encounter than the Nazarene's gentle commands

and regains the original idiomatic meaning in Lisowski's:

Twój własny trud cenniejszy niż cuda Nazareńczyka
Walka twa bardziej skuteczna niż Jego łagodne nakazy!

The author of the new translation openly states that his aim is to contribute to the understanding of Wyspiański's reception (Lisowski 1972: 226). Comparing only a few lines of Obertyńska's text:

ja – kobieta o piętnie pionierskiej w żyłach krwi,
pełna młodzięcej, z sobą wojującej siły, która nie zna prawa –
opiewam cię – wojowniku wspaniały – i głoszę twe zwycięstwo!

[I – a woman with the mark of pioneers' blood in my veins,
full of youthful strength, warring with itself, which knows no law –
sing your praise – magnificent warrior – and I proclaim your victory!]

with Lisowski's translation:

Ja – kobieta z bakcylem pionierstwa w swej krwi,
Pełna młodości, anarchicznej siły, co walczy nawet sama z sobą –
Śpiewam hymn pochwalny na twoją cześć, wojownikowi wspaniały,
I triumf twój światu ogłaszam.

[I – a woman with a germ of pioneering in my blood,
full of youthful anarchistic strength that fights even with itself –
sing a hymn of praise in your honour, magnificent warrior,
and I proclaim your triumph to the world.]

one can see his predilection for a more colloquial or modern language: the elevated *piętno* turns into an old-fashioned but colloquial *bakcyl*, and *wojująca siła* into *anarchia*. Lisowski's Mansfield speaks a variety of Polish that is more contemporary, though still somewhat affected. At the same time, it appears that Lisowski repeats Sobieniowski's interpretation, uncritical about Mansfield's enchantment with Wyspiański; like the first translator, he prophesies the triumph of "Poland Resurrected".

At this point in the history of the poem's reception, reflections on the text itself come to an end; what continues, however, are deliberations on the mysterious circumstances of its creation. The most extensive and insightful such discussion was presented in 1971 by the aforementioned Tymon Terlecki in *Ruch Literacki*. He analyses the poem and investigates the relationship between Katherine Mansfield and Floryan Sobieniowski, who is eventually exposed as her "inspirer". In a footnote, Terlecki informs that he came across Weintraub's 1958 text only after writing his article, firmly stating that his research was carried out independently, taking into account some previously unknown material.

The crucial source here, partly translated by Terlecki for the purposes of his article, was Mansfield's biography by Ruth Elvish Mantz and Murry from 1933, and the latter's 1935 autobiography, already mentioned above. On this basis, Terlecki tries to reconstruct the circumstances in which Katherine, only entering adulthood, found herself at the time: her failed marriage, her unplanned pregnancy, her trip to Bavaria, where she met several Poles, as well as the subsequent relations between Mansfield, Murry, and F. An important "piece of evidence", confirming the inspirer's identity, was provided by Katherine's letters from 1913–1915, which feature the following reference to the mysterious acquaintance: "F., a rather dangerous fraud" (Terlecki 1971: 170). Terlecki points out that in *Katherine Mansfield's Letters to John*

Middleton Murry 1913–1922, edited by Murry in 1951, this expression is accompanied by a footnote that reads "A Polish 'friend'".

The passage that turned out to be decisive for the identification of Sobieniowski is found in Katherine's letter to John from Paris, dated 1915: "I am glad about the curtains and glad Kot came. Floryan is rather a hateful idea" (Mansfield 1951: 30). As Terlecki notes, the editor forgot to abbreviate the name ("the kind of oversight that would interest Freud" [Terlecki 1971: 170–171]), thus unmasking Sobieniowski. According to Lisowski, this was probably done unwittingly (Lisowski 1972: 223–224). Further in his article, Terlecki offers previously unknown information on Floryan Sobieniowski, trying to glean as much as possible about who he was, and, more importantly, who he was for Katherine Mansfield.

Terlecki and the subsequent generations of researchers managed to establish that Floryan Sobieniowski was born in 1881 in south-eastern Poland in a family of impoverished nobility from Podolia. He was an amateur singer of Russian and Ukrainian songs; he knew Russian from childhood (Terlecki 1971: 176). He studied at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków (Terlecki 1971: 174), and, from 1909 to 1911, he read aesthetics and art history in Paris and Munich. His stay in Bavaria, during which he met Katherine Mansfield, was connected with his poor health. According to Ida Baker, Mansfield's most faithful friend, Floryan was the model for Casimir in her short story written around that time, "The Swing of the Pendulum" (Jones 2010: 1886). From 1913 to 1929, Sobieniowski lived in London, where he translated a total of sixty-nine works by George Bernard Shaw. He died in Krakow in 1964. Analysing Sobieniowski's auto-biographical note in the *Dictionary of Polish Writers*, quoted by Terlecki, one can see that Floryan fabricates facts again: he moves the meeting with Mansfield from Wörishofen to Munich, and describes his subsequent pestering of Katherine and John in rather euphemistic terms: "in 1912, in the autumn, he left for England, where he did research at the British Museum and continued to work as a translator" (Terlecki 1971: 171). Terlecki rightly points out that Sobieniowski mentions his alleged cooperation with the journal *Rhythm* more than a year after its bankruptcy (Terlecki 1971: 171).

Connected with this small literary and art magazine, founded by Murry in his student days, is a certain ultimately aborted project: the publication of a special issue entirely devoted to Stanisław Wyspiański. The idea is mentioned by Leon Schiller in one of his essays and in his letters. According to Terlecki, it was Sobieniowski, as the only Polish correspondent of

Rhythm, who could convince Mansfield and Murry to pursue this project. Terlecki claims that detailed information in the letters written by Schiller, who knew Sobieniowski personally (Terlecki 1971: 174), proves that the translator maintained contact with Mansfield around 1912, noting that their correspondence has not survived or has not been found (Terlecki 1971: 174).

At the beginning of 1913, the publisher of *Rhythm* went bankrupt (Terlecki 1971: 174), and the project never came to fruition. Terlecki blames primarily Sobieniowski for this failure, arguing that the Pole lastingly discouraged several critics from having anything to do with himself, and consequently also with Wyspiański: “From what we know for sure, it seems that the Polish inspirer spoiled the happy effects of his own inspiration with his clumsiness, off-handedness, and lack of psychological musicality” (Terlecki 1971: 175). Following this incident, Floryan Sobieniowski did not wish to continue the acquaintance with Mansfield and Murry either: “he managed to reach Shaw and impose himself on the author as his principal and exclusive translator” (Terlecki 1971: 175). At the time, it was drama translation that was Sobieniowski’s main source of income. In her study of Katherine Mansfield’s relationships with men, when mentioning Sobieniowski, Agnieszka Baranowska points out that his collaboration with Shaw was going worse and worse, to the extent that in the end the author drove the translator away, saying that he did not want to see him ever again. In his farewell letter to Sobieniowski, he wrote: “Goodbye, Floryan. May God safely take you back to Poland and keep you there” (qtd in Baranowska 1992: 33). Referring to the biography *Katherine Mansfield. A Secret Life*, by the English journalist and author Claire Tomalin, Baranowska mentions that Sobieniowski’s and Murry’s paths crossed at least two more times after Katherine’s death: in 1927 and 1946 Murry allegedly wrote letters of recommendation for Sobieniowski to the Royal Literary Fund (Baranowska 1992: 33). After the war, in the weekly *Życie Literackie*, Sobieniowski gave an interview about translating Shaw (Baranowska 1992: 33), but he never reminisced in writing about Katherine Mansfield. According to Terlecki, never again was he to try his “heavy hand, which often harmed Shaw, on her delicate, frail works, even when she gained international fame after her premature death, becoming the heroine of a tragic personal drama, an object of a literary hagiography” (Terlecki 1971: 175).

However, I have found evidence that Sobieniowski did not completely abandon his interest in the work of Katherine Mansfield. A kind of an epilogue to the above story is the fact, not mentioned in any article exploring

the links between Katherine Mansfield and Floryan Sobieniowski, that in 1959 (the year he decided to reprint his version of the Wyspiański ode), he published his translation of Mansfield's short story "The Baron" in the weekly *Nowa Kultura*. The piece is one of her early sketches, included in the first volume of her short stories, *In a German Pension*, published in 1911.⁴ It is worth mentioning that it was one of the miniature stories written during Mansfield's stay in Bavaria, so it is quite probable that Sobieniowski witnessed its creation and/or knew on whom the figure of the eponymous baron was modelled. "Pan Baron" [Mr Baron], which remains the only published Polish translation of this short story, is hardly a very fortunate rendering: even the title alone may sound controversial, and the compact, bitter story, written in a colloquial, "spoken" convention, in Sobieniowski's translation loses its lightness and subtle yet striking irony. The translator also rendered German quotations appearing in the English into Polish, and did not manage to avoid calques (translating "wise idea" as *mądra idea*, using a lexical "false friend," instead of *mądry pomysł*). The publisher, in turn, upset the graphic layout of the story.

Terlecki points out that "fortunate and promising, yet having less fortune in its effects and bearing little fruit, the intersection of Katherine Mansfield's and Sobieniowski's paths" (Terlecki 1971: 175) was not a one-sided inspiration, nor was it limited to Stanisław Wyspiański. Sobieniowski might have been influenced by Mansfield in translating some of Walt Whitman's output into Polish. Marta Skwara, devotes considerable attention to Sobieniowski in her extensive study of Whitman's reception in Poland, noting that he translated fourteen poems by the American author, mostly for Lviv- and Krakow-based press titles. According to Skwara, the translator's forewords and afterwords suggest that he was rather well read in English-language studies on the poet's works (Skwara 2010: 274). She also identifies a certain paradox: although Sobieniowski initiated the series of Polish translations of Whitman and was remembered as the poet's translator, his renderings did not play any role in the poet's reception in Poland, and he never returned to translating the author of *Leaves of Grass*. Speculating about the reasons why Sobieniowski took up Whitman's poetry and soon lost interest in it, Skwara never mentions Katherine Mansfield (Skwara 2010: 274). I believe that Terlecki's suggestion that Sobieniowski directed his attention to Whitman

⁴ Further research, possibly investigating Sobieniowski's potentially broader collaboration with *Nowa Kultura*, might reveal his translations of Mansfield's other works.

thanks to Mansfield could justify the fleetingness of his literary attraction to the American poet.

In his article, Terlecki tries to understand why Mansfield's strong fascination with Wyspiański is not reflected in her extant diaries or letters, and also how it is possible that John Middleton Murry, who with "masochistic exhibitionism offered to the public eye" (Terlecki 1971: 173) almost everything that his wife had left behind, did not undertake to publish the poem "To Stanislaw Wyspiański", which long remained practically unknown in England (Terlecki 1971: 172). Terlecki also wonders whether any traces of Mansfield's translations of Wyspiański's *Sędziowie* [The Judges] or *Klątwa* [The Curse] can be found, and suggests that her interest in these works had to do with the fact that they featured the motif of illegitimate children. At the same time, he is aware of the potential existence of notes that were still unknown at that time.⁵

Also in 1972, *Ruch Literacki* reprinted Lisowski's article from 1968, with the author's added conclusions inspired by Terlecki's research. Lisowski confesses that he came across the poem "To Stanislaw Wyspiański" when translating New Zealand poetry. Based on the findings of Allen Curnow from the English Department at the University of Auckland, the publisher and editor of an anthology of New Zealand poetry,⁶ and on Alpers's biography of Mansfield, he speculates on the poem's origin and the identity of the mysterious Pole. He also evokes Jan Koprowski's imprecise deliberations, as well as the much more thorough, insightful biographical investigation by Terlecki. Lisowski not only summarizes the latter's revelatory findings, but also asks his own questions: Why did the poem wait so long to be published in English, and why was it included in a popular edition only in 1960 (thanks to Curnow) (Lisowski 1972: 224)? Why did Mansfield's lively fascination with Wyspiański leave no traces in her letters or diaries, and why were the translations (at least partial⁷) of Wyspiański's *Klątwa* and *Sędziowie* never published, given that these were the only two of his dramas that existed in German at the time (Lisowski 1972: 224)? Lisowski speculates that

⁵ A year after publishing his discoveries in *Ruch Literacki*, Terlecki had another article in *Wiadomości*: an abridged version of the previous one, now tellingly titled "Katherine and Florian". Interestingly, this new text was accompanied by a reprint of Beata Obertyńska's translation of "To Stanislaw Wyspiański".

⁶ Lisowski probably means *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse* from 1960.

⁷ Substantial excerpts from the translation of *Sędziowie* were transcribed by Mirosława Kubasiewicz (cf. Mansfield 2014: 182–196).

Mansfield lost interest in drama, as she was already clearly developing as a novelist. He juxtaposes Terlecki's intuition with Koprowski's views, and, following the latter, he attempts to identify "Yelski" (Lisowski 1972: 223). Interestingly, Lisowski refers to Weintraub's "excellent, comprehensively and richly documented" (Lisowski 1972: 224) article: "for obvious reasons, the author did not reveal the name and surname of the main protagonist of this somewhat mysterious episode in the life of the writer, whose story has undergone a process of mythologization, fascinating to many researchers today" (Lisowski 1972: 224). It is doubtful that Weintraub should have really known the identity of that protagonist, especially considering the fact that Lisowski adds with disarming candour that he was unable to access Weintraub's text directly (Lisowski 1972: 224).⁸

The latest biographical study addressing the mysterious period of 1909–1910 in Mansfield's life, and an important contribution to the reflection on Polish references in her work, is an article by Gerri Kimber, published in 2015. The author counters the claims, put forth by Polish researchers, that Sobieniowski's plan to take Katherine on a trip to Poland "failed, because the lovers had a fight" (Petrajtis 1979: 161). Kimber brings in previously unresearched material: Mansfield's letters from George Bowden's archive and the full version of the short story "A Little Episode," written at the end of 1909, whose plot, inaccessible to Alpers in 1980, sheds light on Mansfield's situation during that turbulent period. Kimber argues that, contrary to the common belief, Katherine's failed marriage was not the immediate reason for her trip to Bavaria in 1909. The relationship with George Bowden was itself a desperate attempt to cover up the literally pregnant affair with Garnet Trowell at the end of 1908 (Kimber 2015: 60).

In the context of the present considerations, the most relevant aspect of Kimber's article is the claim that Katherine Mansfield visited Kraków. The researcher argues that this trip, which included a visit to St. Francis Basilica, was indeed possible in November 1909: Katherine, who saved some of the money her mother had sent her, and was accustomed to traveling, could afford to go to Poland; she also had reasons to conceal this fact from Baker. According to Kimber, it was this personal visit to Wyspiański's hometown,

⁸ Also in 1972, *Wiadomości* published a short and very unreliable article (ignoring the existence of Lisowski's translation and Terlecki's findings) by Wiesław Toporowski, "Wyspiański and an author from the Antipodes". In 1979, a short review of *Letters*, reprinted a year earlier, appeared in *Twórczość*, accompanied by the poem "To Stanisław Wyspiański" in Obertyńska's translation, with a commentary by Elżbieta Petrajtis.

permeated with the presence of his works, and especially Mansfield's admiration for his stained glass window *God the Father – Arise!*, that inspired her to write the poem "To God the Father," which, together with "To Stanislaw Wyspianski" and "Floryan Nachdenklich"⁹, two pieces written earlier clearly at the inspiration of Sobieniowski, which manifested itself in diverse ways, constitutes a cycle of works connected with Poland. Kimber claims that during the visit Katherine realized that too close a relationship with Sobieniowski was risky (Kimber 2015: 67), and she returned to Bavaria on her own; however, she made Sobieniowski promises for the future. His three surviving letters to Mansfield from December 1909 irrefutably prove the nature and intensity of their relationship. Extant from this period is also a letter from Vera French, the Beauchamps' family friend, which must be a response to Katherine's reflections on her involvement with Sobieniowski, warning her against a relationship. As Kimber ironically observes, French's response to Mansfield's quandary came too late: Katherine discovered that she was pregnant again (Kimber 2015: 67). She wrote to Ida Baker asking for help with the abortion. Thus, instead of going to Paris with Sobieniowski, Mansfield returned to England, moved in with Bowden again, and lied to Sobieniowski, writing that she cannot come to him due to illness. The Polish lover sends her a desperate letter from Paris, calling her his "wife" (Kimber 2015: 71). According to Kimber, in 1910, Katherine went to Sussex to recover from an infection, which was most likely caused by complications during pregnancy. A kind of an epilogue to the relationship with Sobieniowski may be the fact that, in 1920, Mansfield paid him a significant amount of money in exchange for her letters from 1910, which, on her behalf, were to be taken over and destroyed by Murry.¹⁰

In Poland, the poem "To Stanislaw Wyspianski" inspired not so much discussions on the translations of a literary work, as investigations into Mansfield's links with Poland (perhaps because of our national narcissistic curiosity), and with a certain Pole in particular. Polish researchers portray Sobieniowski as a strong personality, and at times as a brazen manipulator.

⁹ Misspelled in Kimber's text (I would like to thank Barbara Bruks for pointing this out to me).

¹⁰ An interesting interoperation of this fact was proposed by Claire Tomalin: the letters bought out by Mansfield and destroyed probably contained something potentially compromising for her as the author of the early short story "The-Child-Who-Was-Tired", which bears a very strong resemblance to Chekhov's "Sleepy" (*Спать хочется*) (Tomalin 1987: 207–208).

Only Gerri Kimber describes him with empathy, taking into consideration the fact that he might have felt hurt by Mansfield, and that he was not aware of her actual reasons for severing contact.

In all the contexts presented above, the poem seems to accompany the critics' deliberations on Mansfield's fascinating, mysterious and dark biography, and any comments on the poetics of the work are very superficial. From Koprowski's fairy-tale unverified speculations (not to mention Sobieniowski's fabrication) to Terlecki's thorough biographical investigation, we learn little about Mansfield's poetry as such. It is worth noting that to this day, not a single selection of Mansfield's poetry has been published in Poland, even though she had been writing it all her life; nor is there any commentary available on her poetry or literary criticism.

On the other hand, translation was the driving force behind the movement within literary circles – among critics and translators – and the publication of important findings and opinion pieces was centred around the successive translations and critical commentaries. It seems that the most insightful considerations of the text itself were undertaken by the translators. This is evidenced by Lisowski's article; after reading his translation, and especially the accompanying commentary, one gets the impression that the third translator of "To Stanislaw Wyspianski" published his retranslation (his own interpretation) because he wanted to get closer to "the truth of the text."

Katherine Mansfield's poem is also an intriguing example of a situation in which, thanks to translation, a particular work of literature finds its way into the circulation of the target culture much faster, and makes there a much stronger impact, than in the culture of the original. The poem that, for "easily understandable reasons, could not be printed in English magazines" (Sobieniowski 1910: 1), in Poland resonated with the changing political situation; as time passed, it did not so much communicate Mansfield's vision of Wyspiański, as expressed the attitude of successive generations of Polish translators, who contributed to a re-mythologization of the artist. In Polish literary criticism, the question about Mansfield becomes a question about Wyspianski's place in European culture, about Sobieniowski, and, by extension, about the role of Poles in the cultural life of Europe.

Translated by Zofia Ziemann

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