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## LITERARY TRANSLATION AS A MEDIUM OF TRAVELLING MEMORY\*

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### Abstract

Memory has been one of the main topics of universal literature, and nowadays postmemorial prose is an important trend in Polish literature. This leads to the question whether the specific character of this literature poses a distinctive challenge for translators, and consequently, whether its translations should be treated as a separate issue within the field of translation studies. In turn, the latest research on memory shows that contemporary societies are built of numerous social groups, which time and again have conflicting interests and consequently, cultivate different memory practices regarding the same past events. Memory is treated as a dynamic phenomenon, undergoing transformations through time and space, and hence is constantly actualised. There are five factors which determine the movement of memory: carriers, media, contents, practices and forms. Memory can "travel" thanks to various kinds of media, e.g. monuments. Another specific medium of memory is translation: it allows the contents of memory included in the source work to travel to another cultural space. This has allowed us to approach literary translation from a fresh perspective and developed a set of new research directions, which have been listed in this paper.

**Key words:** travelling memory, literary translation, postmemorial novel

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## Introductory remarks

Memory as a literary motive is not new, as it has always been an object of writers' interest in different epochs.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, in modern times, i.e. at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, the interest in memory and the past, not only in the field of literature and art, but also in theoretical reflection, took on dimensions probably unheard of before. This phenomenon has been called the "memory turn" in the humanities and social sciences, while memory has become the hallmark of today's artistic texts.

The present fascination with memory and the past is most frequently associated with the traumatic history of the twentieth century, which has marked entire societies with drastic memories on an unprecedented scale. As it turns out, the painful reminiscences of the past affect not only direct participants of those events, determining their further lives, but also become part of the experiences of the "generation after" (Hirsch 2008). In Poland, this is reflected, for example, in actions aimed at restoring, years later, the memory of the inhabitants of Jewish districts, which the occupying forces transformed into ghettos during World War II<sup>2</sup>, or at searching for traces of fellow citizens of Jewish origin, who became victims of the so-called final solution of the Jewish question.<sup>3</sup>

Interest in the past, especially in familial history, is at the same time related to the specificity of society in the era of postmodernism and the necessity for the individual to shape his or her own identity. Not so long ago, the social role of the individual was defined in advance, at birth. The social and material status of particular families, their prestige and place in

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<sup>1</sup> B. Neumann (2008: 333) even claims that memory has been the dominant topic in all literary works over the centuries, but in my opinion, such a generalisation would be difficult to prove, and thus unjustified.

<sup>2</sup> An example of this is the memorial "Bezdomne meble" [Homeless furniture] located in Plac Bohaterów Getta (Ghetto Heroes Square) in Kraków, where there was a selection of the Ghetto inhabitants. After the war, a bus depot and taxi stand were located in the square. Today, there are 33 chairs-monuments and 37 ordinary chairs that remind us of the tragedy of the former Jewish residents of Kraków.

<sup>3</sup> For instance, the educational project "Miejsca i ludzie – ślady społeczności żydowskiej w Częstochowie" [Places and people – traces of the Jewish community in Częstochowa], realised by pupils of the Mikołaj Kopernik Grammar School No. 7 and the Vehicle-Construction School Complex in Częstochowa in the 2009/2010 school year, [www.womkat.edu.pl/files/wom/miejsca\\_i\\_ludzie.doc](http://www.womkat.edu.pl/files/wom/miejsca_i_ludzie.doc) (access: 15.04.2018).

the social class hierarchy determined citizens' fates, and someone's crossing social boundaries was a rare departure from the rule. People inherited from their ancestors not only estates (or their lack), but also occupations. On the other hand, nowadays individuals face the choice of numerous social roles that the world can offer. They must therefore define their places in an increasingly more complex environment. To do that, they need to construct their self-identity, because knowing who they are creates a foundation for their sense of security, self-identity, self-acceptance and self-confidence (Giddens 1991: 81). In turn, it is impossible to construct self-identity without knowing your family history: the fate of your parents, grandparents and perhaps other relatives. This is also where I would see the reasons for the growing interest in the past: in the second half of the twentieth century, the fate of individuals was inextricably linked to the world history and war disasters which mankind was doomed to experience.

Thanks to translations, the literature referring in a more or less obvious way to the traumatic events of the twentieth century – that is: warfare, life under occupation or, later, life under totalitarian rule (which happened to the countries of Eastern and Central Europe as well as to Spain) – was published and read in different countries. The scale of this phenomenon makes those who examine translations ask a number of questions: first of all, whether memorial or postmemorial literature poses a special challenge for the translator and, consequently, whether translations of this literature should be considered, from a scholarly perspective, as creating a special translational problem.

At first glance, it seems that the simplest solution would be to use the abundant translational literature under the label of the so-called cultural turn. However, such a solution would have significant drawbacks. Firstly, I am not convinced that we should identify memory with culture, as occurs in theoretical works devoted to memory.<sup>4</sup> Secondly, publications on translation studies representing this trend tend to concentrate on the so-called cultural elements found in lexical resources of a given language<sup>5</sup> and, at the same time, they rarely mention the achievements of ethnolinguists who examine

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<sup>4</sup> See the critical study concerning this issue: Peter Carrier and Kobi Kabalek *Cultural Memory and Transcultural Memory – A Conceptual Analysis* (2014).

<sup>5</sup> For example, Hejwowski in *Iluzja przekładu* [The Illusion of Translation] (2015) dedicates a large chapter to the translation of the so-called cultural elements. Although following Wojtasiewicz, he mentions the systemic differences between languages as one of the “obstacles” in the translator’s work; he completely ignores the question of the probable

categories and grammatical structures in terms of their cultural character.<sup>6</sup> As for works of fiction, one should also remember that narrative techniques can be independent vehicles of memory (Neumann 2008: 333). Thus, the tools that modern translation studies offer may turn out to be insufficient, hence the need to search for other theoretical inspirations, for example on the basis of memory studies.

## Postmemory

Since my theoretical reflection is to be the basis for research on translations of the prose created after the Second World War, I would like to clarify what type of literature is meant. In all of the countries that experienced the tragedy of World War II, there originated a rich literature on this subject, which in the first post-war period was written by participants of the tragic events, predominantly including the victims and witnesses, less frequently the perpetrators. Works belonging to this trend found expression in all kinds of literary genres. As far as prose was concerned, it was not only literature having the character of recollections, but also literary fiction and genres located on the borderline of artistic creation and factual literature. However, the Second World War did not disappear from literary works along with the inevitable departure of the generation that experienced it directly. In the last decades of the 20th century, a generation of writers born after the War came to the fore; while, at the threshold of the 21st century, in Poland and other countries of the former communist bloc – another generation arose, whose youngest representatives do not even remember the times of real socialism. Many of them more or less explicitly referred to the subjects and experiences as direct consequences of World War II; these references were quite common in their works. This type of writing is referred to as postmemorial literature.

At this point, I intend to briefly explain my understanding of the term “postmemory”, since it has been perceived and used differently. Yet, I would not like to give it up, as it has already been rooted in the humanities, becoming

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cultural character of grammatical structures. His analyses focus only on the translation of lexical units.

<sup>6</sup> An example is the second part of *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Culture* (2015), entitled “Ethnolinguistics,” dedicated to the issue of relationships between culture and grammar.

catchy and recognisable.<sup>7</sup> It was Marianne Hirsch (1992–93) who introduced “postmemory” to modern scholarship, thus referring to inherited memories. It means the memories of the second or next generation, i.e. descendants of those who experienced a collective trauma. The term was created to describe the specific experience of the children of Holocaust survivors who, although they did not experience the War directly, have not ceased to live in its shadow. However, the author herself suggests that we widen its use and apply it to describe the experiences of all those who are descendants of the generational victims of trauma, so those whom the War affected in some way. In addition, she considers it legitimate to use “postmemory” in relation to the situation of people whose ancestors experienced totalitarianism.

Traumatic events and experiences remain in the consciousness of representatives of subsequent generations, even though they have not personally gone through them. However, the trauma is transmitted through the ancestors’ stories and objects, as well as in less obvious ways: through behaviours, allusions and understatements that are difficult to explain. The monstrosity of these recollections makes them impossible to remove from one’s thoughts; nor can they be understood or rationalised. They grow into the consciousness of the next generation and turn out to be ineradicable; consequently, people begin to treat them as their own memories. Therefore,

<sup>7</sup> However, it should be mentioned that today there are many terms to determine this phenomenon. For example, Nadine Fresco called it “absent memory” (*mémoire absente*), describing the experience of those whose parents did not want or were unable to talk about the trauma of the past, and the information about it was necessarily selective and incomplete. Similarly, Henri Raczymov wrote about “broken memory” (*mémoire trouée*). James E. Young preferred to use the term *vicarious past*. It may be worth noting that poets always perceive things earlier and better: already in 1967, many years before discussions about inherited memory began in scientific works, Ewa Lipska wrote in her famous poem “My” [(We), the English translation of the poem found in Rutkowski, Kalinowska 2014]:

(...) *W bramach kobiety rodziły dzieci:*

*nas. Jakże odświętnych. Powołanych  
jeszcze przed świtem.*

*Odpornych na ciało. Otrząśniętych  
z chrzęstu broni.*

*Oddano narodzeniem naszym cześć  
– zabitym.*

*A pamięć przestrzeloną dźwigamy już my.*

[...] *In the gates, women were giving birth  
to children:*

*Us. How festive. Called before dawn.*

*Immune to the body. Recovered from the  
clanging of weapons.*

*With our birth honour was given to the  
dead.*

*And we are to carry the memory that was  
shot through.*

what characterises postmemory is the experiences of those who grew up (or are growing up) in a world dominated by the previous generation's narrative referring to the time before they were born. As a consequence, the personal narrative of the next generation inevitably arises under the influence of someone else's memory. Growing up surrounded by inherited memories may turn out to be dangerous and lead to the situation that people are shaped by events that overwhelm their understanding and make it impossible for them to create their own stories. Accordingly, personal experiences and narratives are distorted and re-evaluated, and the rather distant past becomes a basic reference for constructing one's self-identity. This causes a kind of blockade, a feeling that you are not able to grow, build your own life until you somehow manage to deal with other people's recollections and sort out your attitude towards the inherited trauma.

In view of that, postmemory is essentially subjective, unlike history, which strives to make knowledge about the past objective. However, it can be in competition with history, especially when testimonies – concerning events that are, for various reasons, effaced from public discourse – are passed on thanks to intergenerational, familial transmission. It is art “assuming the tasks of historians, politicians and sociologists which they neither want to undertake nor even see” (Tokarska-Bakir 2009) that calls for threads that are marginalised in the official discourse. Throughout the entire period of the Polish People's Republic, one of the taboo topics was the past of the territories that, before World War II, belonged to Germany and were inhabited mainly by a German population. The complicated fate of these lands and their former inhabitants returned only in the works of writers debuting in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, like Paweł Huelle or Stefan Chwin (Struczyński 1996: 17). Another expression of interest in pre-war history and self-identification with one's “little homeland” was evident, for example, in the attempts of the inhabitants of Lower Silesia, made at the beginning of the 21st century, to regain paintings of the Silesian Baroque masters from Warsaw's museums and churches (e.g. the Church of St Francis, the Pauline Fathers' Church and the Church of St Stanislaus Kostka) that had been transported there after the fall of the Third Reich (Polak 2000: 12).

The thesis about the existence of postmemory initiated a lively discussion and provoked criticism. First of all, it was doubted whether it would be possible to convincingly justify an intergenerational transmission that would command anyone to treat someone else's experiences as their own. It was also pointed out that distinguishing between the version of history acquired,

for example, from textbooks, and inherited experiences may not be feasible in practice, since, ultimately, all memory procedures depend on recalling, consciously or unconsciously, past events and on attempting to face them (Weissman 2004; Crownshaw 2010). Furthermore, indicating fundamental differences between various forms of historical reconstruction seemed unrealistic, regardless of whether such reconstructions were undertaken by a direct, “non-professional” heir of the trauma or by a professional historian; in each case, the experience of history is mediated and subject to transformations, resulting from both external factors and individual conditions (Sarlo 2005: 130).<sup>8</sup> The above-mentioned works omit psychiatrists’ findings, according to which postmemory can be described as a specific disorder manifested in a series of dysfunctions that could significantly impede the individual’s functioning in society (Szwajca 2004). In this context, Bilczewski (2013: 58) also refers to research in the field of epigenetics, which shows that even trivial experiences of ancestors are recorded in cellular memory, affecting subsequent generations. In the light of the results of empirical research, one can hardly deny the existence of postmemory, and if so, one cannot doubt that it is expressed in various spheres of human activity, including artistic creativity.

## Transcultural and dynamic nature of memory

Studies on collective memory, today recognised as classic, including the works by Pierre Nora, Maurice Halbwachs or Jan Assmann, associated memory with cultural community, predominantly ethnic or even national, seeing it as potentially unifying its members (Erl1 2011: 7). Inevitably, this approach implies an image of memory as being closed up within certain boundaries, many a time overlapping with political borders.

Yet, no society is monolithic; it consists of social groups of a diversified character: class, generational, ethnic, denominational, etc. Dominant memory patterns are sometimes imposed by power elites aiming at achieving specific ideological goals. Thus, collective memory becomes a tool of symbolic power and even of violence. However, every now and then particular

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<sup>8</sup> I have written about it in my extensive article “Dzieci *desaparecidos* we współczesnej prozie argentyńskiej na tle dyskusji o pamięci” [The children of *desaparecidos* in Argentinian contemporary prose against the background of discussions on memory] (Gaszyńska-Magiera 2015).

social groups preserve another vision of past events that can transform into one of the foundations of their separate collective consciousness. It forms the basis for pursuing self-interests, not necessarily coinciding with the worldview proclaimed by the ruling party or with the interests of other groups which are sometimes perceived as in competition with the group in question. That is why marginal (or marginalised) memory schemas can become subversive, complementing the official memory or challenging it.

As a result, memory, which is rarely limited to a particular place or remains within the reach of only one specific group, has been cultivated not so much within the monolithic cultural model, but in a way “across” this model. In today’s globalising world, it easily transcends local, ethnic and even national boundaries.<sup>9</sup> This produces consequences because, on the basis of different approaches to remembering the same facts, the existing social groups undergo reconstruction and new communities emerge, as it were, “across” the groups that existed earlier (Mageo 2001).

In addition, in the changing social, temporal and spatial contexts, the forms of memory and their contents are filled with new substance and assume new meanings. This makes us perceive collective memory as a dynamic phenomenon, subject to transformations through time and not necessarily related to a specific place.

## Travelling memory

In order to describe the dynamic character of memory, the fact that its existence is inextricably connected with movement (and not assigned to a specific place and time), Astrid Erll (2011) used the term *travelling memory*. This inevitably leads us to associate it with the term *travelling concepts* (Bal 2009).<sup>10</sup> This is the way to describe the process of the transferring of concepts and research categories from one discipline to another. Many names and terms, forged in a given field of knowledge, defined in its framework and used by specialists, have been taken over by investigators representing other

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<sup>9</sup> In the globalised world, one can also observe the phenomenon of constructing trans-cultural memory associated with, for example, religion, sport (soccer), culture of consumption, etc.

<sup>10</sup> The term *travelling theory* appeared in the title of Edward Said’s essay (1983); the author analyses how theories created to describe phenomena occurring in specific historical and cultural contexts can be read and used in completely different conditions.

disciplines. However, such a shift produces consequences: an “appropriated” concept is unavoidably transformed and adapted to the requirements of another field. Its meaning evolves, taking on new shades. Thus, it becomes richer and more capacious, but irrevocably loses its unambiguity.

Evidently, memory is a travelling concept in the sense defined by Mieke Bal. Originally, this concept was used primarily in psychology; while, its career in other social sciences and the humanities factually began in the last decades of the 20th century. Today, the issues of memory are an area of inquiry that involves such disciplines as history, sociology, history of art, cultural studies, literary studies and many others; though there are many voices calling for a separate discipline of memory studies.<sup>11</sup> However, the appropriation of this concept by various branches of learning has caused it to lose its clarity, and scholars began talking about different types of memory.<sup>12</sup> Still, Erll proposing the term *travelling memory* did not only mean some abstract travel of memory through research fields. She primarily meant the physical transfer of memory through time and space as well as through the circumstances of its reception, the groups that cultivate it, its media, etc.

The movement of collective memory can take place on a larger or smaller scale: from everyday interaction between members of social groups to media communication of a supranational character. It can also take place in various historical and economic contexts: from trade, migration and their consequences, to war and colonialism (Erll 2011: 11). Moreover, inter-group and intercultural contacts exert influence on the transmitted contents, inexorably modifying the forms and modes of remembering.

Astrid Erll (2011: 12–14) enumerates five dimensions determining the movement of memory. These are:

- Carriers, i.e. the individuals who share in collective images and narratives of the past, who practice the same mnemonic rituals, inherit the same habitus and draw on the same repertoires of explicit and implicit knowledge; travels as well as voluntary or forced migrations contributing to the diffusion and spread of various forms of memory across the globe.

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<sup>11</sup> See e.g., Roediger, Wertsch 2008.

<sup>12</sup> The dictionary *Modi memorandi* lists 14 kinds of memory: false, functional, global, historical, individual, communicative, cultural, local, accumulative, performative, popular, prosthetic, collective and postmemory; however, note the astonishing lack of the entry “Memory”, *tout court*.

- Media constitute a key factor of memory’s “travel”.<sup>13</sup> Since memory cannot move by itself, it needs a vehicle; hence its “travel” always has a material dimension (Tomsky 2011). The remembered contents “travel” through time, using various media, more or less technologically advanced, from orality to writing, film message, the Internet, etc. Modern media technologies are global and often localised as technologies of memory. Mass media, such as books, movies, television, the Internet, disseminate various versions of memory, causing its deterritorialisation in the contemporary world.
- Contents are images and narratives shared by a given social group. As long as they do not assume any materiality, they exist only in the awareness of individuals. In order to exist, they must be kept in motion – between the human mind and media of memory, and thus they are constantly actualised.
- Practices, i.e. ways of remembering developed by a specific community, such as rituals, forms of museum exhibitions, ceremonies, anniversary celebrations, etc. In today’s world, they can spread quickly and be replicated by other social groups in new contexts, serving to commemorate other events and, thus, assuming new meanings.
- Forms, in other words, figures of memory as symbols, icons or schemata, having the ability to condense the contents. They facilitate the repeatability of collective behaviours, which thus become media of memory. The transcultural memory’s travel can be accomplished thanks to such simplified figures, that function as convenient mental shortcuts in public awareness.<sup>14</sup> They can adopt new meanings associated with subsequent experiences, as a result of their transfers, and being isolated from the original context, they can be simplified in relation to their original meaning.

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<sup>13</sup> In Polish scientific literature, media of memory were described by M. Kula (2002). He distinguished three types of these media: material, such as monuments, tools, photographs, elements of animated nature (trees) and inanimate nature (boulders); ideal, e.g. names of events, artefacts, first names and surnames of different figures; and those related to events, e.g. gatherings, processions, happenings.

<sup>14</sup> In the Polish context, such figures are the terms *Targowica* [the Targowica Confederation of 1792] or *rozbiór Polski* [the partition of Poland], which, on the one hand, preserve the memory of concrete historical events and, on the other hand, serve as convenient labels defining behaviour, e.g. the behaviour of the actors of the political scene.

The artefacts, as media of memory and originally associated with the memory of a specific event, may assume new meanings in a different temporal and spatial context; their significance is gradually modified. A good example of travelling memory are monuments; obviously, they have been erected after the events the memories of which they were to perpetuate, and they were not always located in places where the events took place. An illustration of transformed memory in connection with the fate of historical monuments is the Babi Yar Park in Denver (Bond, Rapson 2014: 3–4). This almost 11-hectare park complex was established in the 1970s to commemorate the mass executions whose victims were mainly the inhabitants of the Kiev ghetto murdered by the Germans in the Babi Jar ravine in 1941–43. The location of the monument was related to the existence of a large Ukrainian community in Denver and the alleged similarities between the landscape of the American State of Colorado and the vicinity of Kiev. However, the original significance of this monument was quickly transformed by another element. The context of the ongoing Cold War imposed a new perception of the monument: a place of protest against the Soviet regime and against the crimes committed in its name in Ukraine. But this is not the end of the story. After the attack on the World Trade Center, in September 2001, it was decided to transport some steel elements from the place of the terrorist attack to the Babi Yar Park. The intention of the initiators of this action was to create empathic relations between the traumatised communities of Denver and New York, to highlight potential links between sufferings of various ethnic and national groups and to evoke a sense of supra-national solidarity in the face of senseless large-scale violence. However, this interference in the memory space has aroused mixed feelings. Some perceive it as an attempt, by the initiators of this action, to impose their own narrative, expressing American exceptionalism, also manifested in suffering, and as a lack of respect for the feelings of members of other cultures.

A less distant example, geographically and emotionally, is the Katyń Cross located in the Adam Studziński Square next to St Giles' Church, at the foot of the Wawel Castle in Kraków. It commemorates the victims of the Katyń massacre. It was blessed on 19 May 1990.

The Cross was set up there shortly after the great political breakthrough that definitively closed the period of real socialism in Poland, ten years before the opening of the cemetery in Katyń, the resting ground for the Polish soldiers executed by the NKVD. After the Kraków Cross had been unveiled, it witnessed ceremonies commemorating the victims of the Katyń massacre. Yet, from the very beginning it was clear that the Cross was also to preserve

the memory of all Polish victims of communism, which was evidenced by the 60 cm by 80 cm granite plaque at its bottom, bearing the following names: Kozielsk, Ostaszów, Starobielsk, Workuta, Donbas, Siberia, Łubianka, Wronki, Rawicz, Mokotów, Montelupich, Poznań, Gdańsk, Gdynia, Szczecin, KWK Wujek, Lubin, Nowa Huta, NN. In April 2010, after the crash of the presidential plane with the Polish delegation that was to participate in the 70th anniversary of the Katyń massacre, the inhabitants of Kraków began gathering spontaneously at the Katyń Cross, lighting candles and laying flowers. Consequently, the square next to St Giles' Church also became a place commemorating the victims of that tragic crash. Its rank was raised during a ceremony which took place on 18 April 2010. Just after the funeral of Lech and Maria Kaczyński, the US ambassador to Poland, Lee A. Feinstein, on behalf of President Barack Obama and the American nation, laid a wreath there. Later on, the so-called Smoleńsk monthlies – cyclical gatherings aiming at honouring the victims of the crash – were organised at the Cross. They gradually began to take on a political character and were transformed into support rallies of the Law and Justice Party. For many citizens, this form of commemorating the victims of the presidential plane crash was controversial because not all people, having maintained respect for the victims, accepted the politicisation of the tragedy and its use to carry out ad hoc propaganda purposes. Others questioned this use of the Adam Studziński Square, referring to its location in the immediate vicinity of the Wawel Hill, which should not be appropriated by one political option. As a result, the group of people that had been formed to perpetuate the memory of the Katyń massacre and the victims of communism was reconfigured. Divisions based on different viewpoints emerged within the group, while the imposition of new meanings on the original symbolism of the Katyń Cross proved to be a catalyst that disclosed them. Consequently, new groups were created, being connected by the recently developed ways of remembering and modes of commemoration that found their expression in new, specific rituals and practices of memory.

## Translation as a medium of memory

Obviously, the book is not a monument, and one cannot directly transfer methods that effectively describe memory's "travels" associated with various monuments onto the field of literary studies. However, it is worth asking whether, in our modern world, books about a certain traumatic past can

penetrate public awareness deeply enough to reconfigure social groups. In my opinion, a conspicuous example of such books is the treatise by Jan Gross entitled *Sąsiedzi: historia zagłady żydowskiego miasteczka* (2000) [*Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (2001)]. In Poland, it triggered unprecedented discussions about the scale of the guilt of Poles towards their fellow citizens of Jewish background and led to transformations of collective memory (Nowicka 2014: 254). According to Gross (2014), the fact that Poles murdered Jews during the Second World War was “a truth that was absorbed well”. Magdalena Nowicka (2014: 254) called this attitude “the elites’ complacency”, because the research carried out after the publication of *Neighbors* and the authors’ next books showed that “most Polish people heard about Poles’ crimes against Jews, but they either considered them unlikely or had no opinions on this matter”. The effect of the debate on Gross’s book was not so much the modification of contemporary attitudes towards the Holocaust and of the social groups that were formed to express these attitudes, but rather the polarisation of the hitherto taken stances (Czyżewski 2008: 125–132). Gross’s work has been translated into several languages (English, German, Hungarian, Italian and French) and published in several European countries as well as in the United States. It can be assumed that interesting results would be obtained by examining the reception of these translations in different countries, and on this basis, one could try to answer the question whether and to what extent the publication of this book has modified the memory of the Holocaust and attitudes towards Poles. Could it have strengthened the existing stereotypes? Could it have influenced the image of the War recorded in the memory of the participants of the target culture of the translation? Or could it have told its recipients to raise uncomfortable questions about their attitudes towards Jews and their consequences? What could have been the effects of the published translations on the relationships within the Polish immigrant communities in particular countries? Should it have contributed to their cementing or rather have sharpened the existing divisions within them? We could multiply such questions, and answers to them might allow us to verify and broaden our knowledge about how we, Poles, are perceived by foreign eyes.

I am concerned that nowadays artistic prose of the greatest value<sup>15</sup> does not influence audiences so strongly as historical journalism. However, despite

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<sup>15</sup> A separate issue is the impact of genres belonging to popular literature, such as the adventure novel, the detective story and the graphic story or cartoon. However, it must be

the constantly shrinking group of recipients, the contemporary novel, like other fictional media, still has the power to shape the collective imagination of the past. For this reason, one can hardly ignore its “potential to generate and mould images of the past, which will be retained by whole generations” (Erll 2008: 389). Even if we assume that reading fiction is an occupation of an increasingly limited group of recipients (as indicated by readership research in recent years)<sup>16</sup>, the intellectual elites, constituting a majority of the reading public, are still able to influence other members of society, imposing on them certain interpretive schemes of events and phenomena.

Following this path, we should rather consider which elements of artistic texts make us see them as media of memory, and determine which features allow them to perform this function. The example of monuments clearly shows how important the immanent properties of a given medium are, as are its history and the interactions which it can evoke among recipients, and their further consequences. As for translation studies, this means the need to pay attention to the broadly understood circumstances of the reception of translations of works that are in the scope of our interest.

In some sense, each literary work can be treated as a medium of memory. Since it is always a record of a certain state of awareness, both of the writer and of potential recipients, proper to the “here and now”. A work, read years later, even in its local context but in changed temporal circumstances, takes on new senses.

Yet, narratives that focus on memory have a special character. Their distinguishing feature is an attempt to reflect on how individuals or communities try to face the past and how they use memories to build their identity – individual or collective. In these narratives, the relationship between the past and the present is in the foreground, and above all – the potential or actual impact of the memory of past events on the current reality (Neumann 2008: 333–334). Some works explicitly reflect on the functioning of memory and the mechanisms of remembering (Neumann 2008: 337). In works that meet these criteria, one can see literary forms and techniques specialised to penetrate the essence of the relationships between memory

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remembered that today many writers whose work is rated as outstanding use conventions typical of popular literature, such as the sensational novel, in order to win a wide audience and cause recipients to be partners in public discourse (e.g. Eduard Mondoza’s crime novels belong to the canon of school reading in contemporary Spain).

<sup>16</sup> See <https://www.bn.org.pl/aktualnosci/3497-stan-czytelnictwa-w-polsce---pelny-raport-do-pobrania.html> (access: 5.11.2018).

and the present, and to show the influence of memories of the traumatic past on individual and collective identity. As a result, some narrative techniques become separate, independent media of meaning. This means that literature possesses its separate, appropriate means to not only describe but also create worlds of memory. Neumann (2008: 340) distinguishes three elements that, in her opinion, will allow us to recognise the “memorial” character of a given narrative text. They are: the specific “time structure” in which different temporal planes coexist, “narrative mediation” or the building of a narrative of the past from the contemporary perspective, and “perspective structure” – a multi-layered narrative in which no point of view is privileged. The literary models of remembering, created in the space of the depicted world, refer to real experiences, allowing us to reach what is related to the past, both near and distant, and facilitating the work of memory in the area of imagination, thus giving a multi-perspective overview of past events. In practice, it turns out that this model has been implemented differently within the framework of national literatures. For example, Spanish contemporary postmemorial prose is characterised by an explicit coverage of the workings of memory (Liikanen 2012), while subversiveness is shown as one of the features of the Polish prose of this trend (Bojarska 2008: 99).

Translating works of this kind into a foreign language and publishing them abroad causes the memory that has been thematised in them, succumbing to temporal and spatial displacement, to appear in a completely new and alien cultural and social context. From this point of view, literary translation can be seen as a medium enabling memory to make a transcultural travel.

An example of such a translation is Marek Bieńczyk’s novel *Tworki* (1999), published in Spain in 2010 as *Tworki (El manicomio)*. This book addresses the topic of the Holocaust over sixty years after the end of World War II, and its author, born in 1956, represents a generation that did not experience the War personally, but inherited the war memories. Therefore, *Tworki* can be regarded as an example of postmemorial prose (Bojarska 2008). Thanks to the translation and its publication, certain elements of the Polish memory about the Holocaust and the echoes of the debate on it have entered a foreign cultural space. Yet, Spain does not seem to be an area that is very friendly to Polish contemporary prose taking up the subject of the War. There are a number of reasons for this situation. Firstly, in Spain, due to the short tradition of translations of Polish literature and, consequently, a relatively small number of published works of Polish authors, there is practically no canon of Polish literature to which the receiver could refer. Secondly, the average Spaniard

derives their knowledge of World War II chiefly from school textbooks, and his knowledge is necessarily stereotyped to a large extent. Thirdly, the topic of the Holocaust occurred in the Spanish public discourse only at the turn of the 21st century, and obviously, the knowledge about it has been neither widespread nor profound.<sup>17</sup> Fourthly, in Spain, Poles are not associated with World War II.<sup>18</sup> A circumstance favouring the reception of Bieńczyk's novel might have been the multitude of publications concerning the Holocaust, having been observed since the last decade of the 20th century. In this way, Spain has been bridging the gaps that emerged during the dictatorship of General Franco, as well as in the two subsequent decades, when, in the first place, attempts were made to deal with its own painful past. However, what has simultaneously been published are books (both testimonies and fiction) originating in different periods, those created just after the War and those written in subsequent years, up to the present day. In this situation, the Spanish reader finds it extremely difficult to figure out the chronology of the development of Holocaust discourse, let alone the specificity of the realities in the occupied countries. Polish works (e.g. by Nałkowska, Borowski, Edelman and Tuszyńska) are perceived as examples of the global trend of Holocaust literature. Another factor that would possibly facilitate the reception of *Tworki* in Spain could have been the existence of the strong trend of postmemorial prose. However, both its themes and dominant narrative patterns are fundamentally different from what Bieńczyk's book is about and how its content is conveyed. Since Spanish contemporary prose is struggling with its difficult heritage of the 1936–39 Civil War, which has also been reflected in the recent debate, considered as the most important debate taking place in public space. The protagonists of novels regarded as part of this postmemorial trend, struggling with memories of traumatic events in which representatives of their fathers or grandparents' generations participated, generally overtly take up the issue of memory. Familiarised with the local model of a postmemorial novel, Spanish readers are not even able to recognise the main subject of *Tworki*. They could hardly perceive that the plot of the novel took place during the Second World War. In turn, what the reviewers saw in

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<sup>17</sup> I have written about this extensively in "Przekład literacki jako pamięć w podróży. O warunkach recepcji polskich powieści o tematyce postpamięciowej w Hiszpanii" [Literary translation as travelling memory. Concerning the conditions of the reception of Polish postmemorial novels in Spain] (2017).

<sup>18</sup> This has been shown by the wide-ranging research on the image of Poles in contemporary Spain conducted by M. Nalewajko (2012).

the novel was above all a beautifully told love story<sup>19</sup>, for which the reality of the War was an insignificant background.

The issues that arise while studying the reception of translations of such books as *Tworki* make us look at translations of postmemorial prose from a fresh perspective and pose new research problems. It seems that here we should not avoid questions of a general nature, concerning not so much the work itself but the context of its origin (historical, social, cultural) as well as the context of the reception of its translation. Therefore, our starting point should be an attempt to determine what kind of memory has been reflected in the source text and at which stage the community has constructed it. Bieńczyk's novel was not created in a vacuum; it has been an important voice in the ongoing discussion in Poland concerning the importance of the memory of the Holocaust for present and future generations. In addition, the novel has been an attempt to revive the language of the literary discourse on the Holocaust, a specific challenge to the existing canon of war prose (Marecki 2012: 132–133). Investigating the reception of translations of such works, it seems necessary to take into account these aspects as factors co-creating the meaning of these works.

Subsequently, it may be essential to determine the characteristics of the group that the type of memory appearing in the analysed work consolidates. Is the group representative of the whole community? Does it constitute a part of the community? Is its attitude confrontational, and consequently, does the group strongly or even aggressively demand its voice to be considered while negotiating the shape of collective memory? Answers to these questions may prove helpful in reconstructing the context of the source work, and more specifically, in determining the ideological factors it reflects. This in turn will allow us to anticipate the features of potential recipients of its translation. In Spain, the Polish contemporary narrative about the Holocaust will probably be perceived differently by the extreme right-wing circles and differently by the more moderate ones. This can have a significant impact on the editors' decisions in constructing their publishing policies or on the translators choosing a particular publishing house (or, in the case of a shorter form, a periodical), to which they intend to propose their translations.

Moreover, the relations between the community of the source culture and the target culture might prove interesting. Here I mean bilateral relations,

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<sup>19</sup> I have presented a detailed analysis of the reception of the translation of *Tworki* in Spain in "Una novela posmemorial polaca en España. El caso de *Tworki* de Marek Bieńczyk" (2016).

also at the institutional level because the activities of various organisations and agencies can significantly expand and shape knowledge about the past shared by both cultures; historical policy is not only implemented in the home country. What can play a major role at the unofficial level is the existing stereotypes determining the degree of the openness of a given community to the Other, which is important because of the level of acceptance of otherness in translation.

To sum up, reflecting on the source community, in terms of the memory that it stores – and that consolidates it and the target community in terms of both its formalised and common knowledge – should give us a preliminary description of a certain status quo of the memory of the participants of the source culture and their openness to a new culture. Against this background, we can attempt to outline possible changes in these communities taking place under the influence of travelling memory.

While undertaking textual analysis, we must remember that language itself preserves and perpetuates memory (through formulas, stylistic means: rhyme, rhythm, and narrative schemata) (Wójcicka 2018: 72). Therefore, we should determine how postmemory has been manifested in the original text, i.e. which narrative techniques as well as stylistic and rhetorical means have been used to express specific contents referring to the culturally conditioned ways of remembering and transmitting the work of memory. The next step would be to describe the strategies used by the translator to convey the textual peculiarities of the type of prose under discussion. However, we need to consider the scale of the difficulties that the translator faces. For example, the author of *Tworki* does not inform the reader directly that the plot of his novel takes place during the War. One of the first signals that would allow the reader to place the book in its right historical context is the information that the protagonist gave up his seat on the tram for an elderly lady carrying chopped meat (in Polish: *rqbanka*). Obviously, in Spanish there is no equivalent to *rqbanka*. The translator of *Tworki* rendered this fragment in descriptive terms: an elderly lady, laden with poor quality meat. Needless to say, for the Spanish reader, the image of an elderly lady carrying scraps of meat on a tram does not evoke any vision of the occupation, but rather makes him think of something quite surrealistic. Further, in *Tworki*, a novel about the Holocaust, the word “Jew” is not mentioned ... Translating this prose into Spanish in a way that would be understood by the recipient, for whom the Holocaust has been a relatively recent subject, not rooted in direct intergenerational transmission, poses a special challenge. From the

scholar's perspective, it should be necessary to analyse to what extent the subversiveness, which is seemingly the semantic dominant of Bieńczyk's book, has been preserved in the translation.

The last group of problems relates to the reflection on the place of "foreign memory", transferred through translation, in the target culture. For we can ask the question of what is happening when the memory belonging to the source culture encounters the local memory in the new cultural space. Is the memory changed? Is it transformed? If so, what kind of transformation? What factors affect it? Does the memory become a subject of negotiations? If so, what are their effects? Or perhaps, the memory of the source culture modifies the memory of the target culture to some extent. If so, in what ways? To what extent? Can it strengthen the existing beliefs? Do the potential changes lead to any minimal modifications of social groups? The sources of answers to these questions are generally of a non-literary character. The answers can be formulated, for example, by observing readers' behaviours. Although, until recently this research has been very difficult to conduct, nowadays, thanks to the emergence of various forms of electronic communication, like discussion forums and literary blogs, it has been facilitated. Reviews and other critical texts are still valuable sources of information. Important hints are also provided by other types of texts dedicated to culture, for example: press articles, scientific works (historical, sociological, culture-oriented, etc.), as well as popular culture texts.

## Summary

Reflecting on the specificity of translations of works having a postmemorial character has allowed us to predetermine the scope and directions of research on them, drawing the following conclusions:

- The necessity to analyse the source context, considering the state of collective memory of the events to which a given literary work refers, in order to determine its place in this context, find out whether it is, for instance, one of the voices in the discussion about a certain area of memory or a record of the spiritual condition of the community or its part, or perhaps an expression of its expectations, etc.
- The necessity to take into account the postmemorial character of a given work, both when the translator evaluates his strategy and when the effects of his decision are evaluated.

- The necessity to examine various aspects of the target context, such as:
  - the place of translations of the source literature in the polysystem of the receiving literature – and the probable existence of a canon of this literature in the target country – in order to find out potential literary references available to the reader of the translation;
  - the level of knowledge about the history, facts and phenomena to which a given work refers. This is necessary because, as a rule, postmemorial literature refers to the reader's specific state of knowledge; in the case of deficiencies in factual knowledge, decoding some of the conceptual layers of the work may prove impossible. In other words, we need to reconstruct the status of the “foreign memory” in the target culture to verify on what the translator and publisher can count;
  - the existence of conceivable parallel narrative schemata in the target culture. Put differently: it is worth examining whether the target literature has developed its own literary models that will serve to express memory, what they relate to and to what extent they are similar to or different from the schemata of the source culture.

This list of conclusions is by no means complete. In fact, it was never intended to be; I attempted to approach the postmemorial trend of contemporary prose from a perspective that would allow me to focus on its characteristics, considered essential in conducting multi-layered analyses of its translations. I think that inspirations drawn from memory studies may give translato­logists a slightly different perspective than they had, a perspective going beyond the existing research framework, one that would allow them to capture the specificity of translations of such literary texts.

Translated by Maria Kantor

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