

REFLECTION STATEMENT

According to Shukla & Shukla (2006), “the word ‘translation’ comes, etymologically, from the Latin for ‘bearing across’”. This critical response explores the central role of the translator and looks at the question as to whether the translation of poetry is an art or science, whether it is a creative or a technical procedure or a combination of both? I eventually settled on the term ‘craft’ to describe the process. Growing up as a bilingual individual, I have developed a growing technical awareness of my role as a ‘translator’ for my parents and grandparents by what I ‘bear’ back and forth between Polish and English. My ongoing studies of the Polish language, Polish literature and the written translations I have attempted between these languages, has enabled me think more critically and systematically about the process of translation. My Extension 2 Major Work on translating poetry from Polish has allowed me to refine, much more acutely, my role as a translator.

In looking at different approaches to the process of translation, both historic and contemporary, I came to the realisation that each translator must come to an informed definition of what exactly their role as a translator is and what the process of translating entails. Furthermore, they must decide on the artistic status of the finished composition. As a result of my translation of Polish poetry and my research on the larger ongoing academic debate about the act of translation, I have come to the primary conclusion that the translator of poetry is ultimately a poet in their own right and that the translated poem stands alone to be judged, on its own merits, as an independent work of literature.

As part of my preparation as a translator I looked at the work of the Sydney based translator Marianna Łacek who has translated a collection of Peter Skrzynecki’s poetry into Polish. As a starting point I looked at one stanza of *10 Mary Street* which appears quite straightforward

in English. I soon began to realise that Łacek faced significant contextual and linguistic challenges and that for her translation to be a poem in its own right, she had to make significant lexical choices. I later interviewed Marianna at length and she argued that one must try to find a balance between ‘remaining true to the original text’ but also making the changes necessary to ensure the translation is an ‘aesthetic’ composition in its own right. Furthermore she stressed the importance of considering the context from which the poem emerged which later led me to explore the functional linguistic model of language as developed by Michael Halliday. This model, which emphasises the importance of context, purpose and audience in any text, underpinned my approach to translation (Halliday & Webster, 2009).

When I attempted my first translation of a simple Polish poem *Atrament/Ink* by Jan Brzechwa for this project, I began to realise just how ineffective a literal approach was in conveying the meaning of the poem. I had to make certain decisions to ensure I captured both the semantics and aesthetics of the original verse. As the Slavic syntax of Polish differs from the Germanic syntax of English, I had to consider rearranging the word order without distorting “*the beauty of the original poem*” (Kaminsky & Kirsch, 2010). As a result of these preliminary translations, I could now begin to formulate what my role as a translator would be. In my critical response therefore, I explored different approaches to the process of translation in developing my role as a translator.

Meanwhile, I continued to search for a suitable poet to translate. I briefly considered Wisława Szymborska’s a Cold War poet but I found the enigmatic cryptic nature of her verse and the impenetrable ironic mood too difficult to recapture. I contacted the Professor of Slavic studies Andrew Siedlecki at Macquarie University who suggested the Romantic poet Adam Asnyk. He described his poetry as lyrical, sophisticated but “*very accessible*” (Siedlecki, 2012).

Having read and translated different stanzas from Asnyk's body of work, I eventually settled on the *Ranek w Górach/Morning in the Mountains*. In choosing a 19th century Polish poet, I was able to draw on my knowledge of English Romanticism, which we compared to Modernism in our Preliminary Extension English Course. In my chosen poem I focused on stanzas that I felt resonated with stanzas from Coleridge, Wordsworth, Tennyson and others. In my translation I attempted to echo particular fragments of some of their poems. My study of the poetry of Emily Dickinson in the Belonging Area of Study in English Advanced, complemented my understanding of Romanticism and in particular, how the individual finds a sense of existential belonging in nature. I originally planned to translate a number of Asnyk's poems, but as I came to grips with the magnitude of the task I scaled back my original plan and eventually narrowed it down to 6 particular stanzas from one of his poems, *Morning in the Mountains*.

Despite my tentative findings, in my aforementioned preliminary translation work, I was still intrigued as to whether it was possible to retain the aesthetic integrity of the original poem in a literal translation. Other issues I had to come to terms with included; translating figurative language and the challenge of retaining the prosodic and melodic features of the original verse.

In defining my role of a translator, my approach was twofold. I was actively involved in the creative process of translating and also drawing on the critical discourse underpinning the act of translation. In order to accommodate these two different forms of writing, I drew on aspects of Ficto-Criticism in my project. Ficto-criticism is a form of writing which first appeared in France and Canada in the 1970s and then in Australia during the early 1980s (Hancox & Muller, 2011). This traditional academic discourse is not very clearly defined but in a typical post-modern fashion, it blurs the lines between fiction and critical non-fiction.

The French philosopher Derrida (Derrida, 1992, p52) identified the pastiche nature of this type of writing, saying, “*We must invent a name for those ‘critical’ inventions which belong to literature while deforming its limits*”. Hancox & Muller’s (2011) description resonates with my purpose when they describe this type of writing as being “*rich in its synthesis of reflection on cultural theories and theorists, personal journey and storytelling*.” My process contains a ‘synthesis’ of; research, my personal journey as a bilingual individual and the creative process. Ficto-Criticism therefore allowed me to include both critical and creative writing in this study of translation and to engage in two different “*spheres of writing*” at once (Naismith, 2009, p12). I also adopted the Ficto-Critical characteristic use of the first person in my ongoing evaluation and explanation of this translation project.

My ultimate goal was to preserve the aesthetic qualities of the original poem and to retain some of its cultural resonance and ‘flavour’. My Major Work emphasises the idea that the translated poem is a work of literature in its own right, “*a creative product of the translator*” (Gearing, 2009). In my response I have included my own translations of the Polish poet Adam Asnyk’s poem, *Morning in the Mountains*, relevant critical analysis and discussion of historical and contemporary translation theories.

I envisage my critical response being published in a journal like the Melbourne based *Overland*, which is quite an exciting idiosyncratic publication. It prides itself on the “*advancement of new and marginal writers as part of its charter*” (Overland, 2013). From looking at recent editions of the journal online it is clear their target audience enjoys an eclectic array of critical essays, articles, reviews, poetry and so forth. The editors of this journal might be tempted to take a risk with this particular ‘marginal’ writer, sensing that their audience might be attracted to novelty of my critical study.

For my project, I initially choose the rather hackneyed title of ‘The Art of Translation’.

However, having spent considerable time over the last 10 months wrestling with the process, I now find the term ‘Art’ somewhat pretentious and grandiose especially for someone of my inexperience. “Art” suggests effortless genius. The word ‘craft’ is a more suitable. It is an honest and reputable noun. It points to process and a development of skills. In the field of translation it suggests finding the right word, looking to improve a particular syntax and taking pride in whatever modest achievements have been attained in grasping some of the elusive beauty and excellence of the original verse.

BIBLIOGRAPHY – REFLECTION STATEMENT

- Derrida, J. (1992) *Acts of Literature*, Reprint edn, Routledge.
- Gearing, J. (2009) 'Can Poetry be Translated?', Blog post, 6 July, accessed 25 April 2013, <<http://www.altalang.com/beyond-words/2009/07/06/can-poetry-be-translated/>>.
- Halliday, M. & Webster, J. (2009) *Continuum Companion to Systematic Functional Linguistics*, Pdf, accessed 18 July 2013, <http://www.academia.edu/1080426/SYSTEMIC_FUNCTIONAL_LINGUISTICS_edited_by_M._A._K._Halliday_and_Jonathan_J._Webster>
- Hancox, D. & Muller, V. (2011) 'Excursions into New Territory: Fictocriticism and Undergraduate Writing', *New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing*, vol. 8, no. 2, 6 July 2011, pp. 147-158.
- Kaminsky, I. & Kirsch, A. (2010) 'Various Tongues: An Exchange', *Poetry Magazine*, 1 March, accessed 27 April 2013, Poetry Foundation, <<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/article/238872#article>>
- Naismith, E. (2009) 'Emily Coughs: A fictocritical exploration of the self via social media', October 2009, accessed 29 April 2013, <labsome.rmit.edu.au/files/emilycoughs.pdf>.
- Overland, (2013) *Overland Literary Journal*, Australian Government, Melbourne, accessed 16 June 2013, <<http://overland.org.au/>>.
- Shukla, S. & Shukla, S. (2006) *Migrant Voices in Literatures in English*, Sarup & Sons.
- Siedlecki, A. (2012) *Adam Asnyk*. Interviewed by 24630048 [in person] New South Wales, 4 November 2012.