

DIVINE CASIMIR AND HIS ENGLISH COSTUME

Krzysztof FORDOŃSKI, Piotr URBAŃSKI (eds.), *Casimir Britannicus. English Translations, Paraphrases and Emulations of the Poetry of Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski*, London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2008 (MHRA Critical Texts, vol. 11), 288 pp., ISBN 98-0-947623-73-9*.

“Great works of literature conceal their origins”¹. This is the first sentence of Marshall BROWN’s essay on Coleridge as translator of Sarbiewski’s ode *Ad suam testudinem*. The scholar asserts that it was just Coleridge’s English imitation that “made the ode speak”, which demanded from the poet-translator an immense labour of re-writing the poem in such a language that “would not be as dead as Sarbiewski’s Latin”². The odes of the “Sarmatian Horace”, in BROWN’s opinion, are “wooden and without music”, “extremely derivative”, and as such “virtually a Horatian cento”. Moreover, as composed in the foreign language, they are mechanical, their Latin being “learned and written”, that is, artificial and lifeless³.

However, if one takes into consideration the presence of Sarbiewski’s œuvre in English-language literary tradition, BROWN’s point of view may seem amazing. First of all, Coleridge himself did not try to hide his model nor inspiration⁴. Then, it is difficult to believe that Coleridge’s enthusiastic admiration of Sarbiewski’s ode is to be understood as irony, while his modest apologies for being no match for the original author must be considered as the translator’s coquetry concealing deliberate efforts to relive a rusty poem. Finally, there are numerous authors who dealt with Sarbiewski’s poetry translating it into English verse or, largely, imitating. They labelled their works with Casimir etiquettes, but very often their poems diverge into many directions from the Latin original. Their work testifies to Sarbiewski’s *opus* being something more than a learned exercise; at least a vivid inspiration, which was able to excite imagination of many before and after Coleridge.

A collection of such poems is now available to readers. In 2008 Krzysztof FORDOŃSKI [= F.] and Piotr URBAŃSKI [= U.] edited their anthology of Sarbiewski’s poetry translated into English verse (or largely imitated). U. is a Neo-Latin scholar who worked on Sarbiewski, including his popularity in England, for many years, while F., as English philologist, has discovered there his new area of research. The editors gathered almost 150 poems known as *English Translations, Paraphrases and Emulations of the Poetry of Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski* and put them (more or less chronologically) before the reader’s eyes in one volume. “This makes it”, as the editors themselves point out, “the largest collection of Sarbiewski’s poetry in English translation published since the first ever publication of his translations in 1646” (p. 25). We find there about fifty odes and epodes (from

* [After the present review had been submitted to “Eos”, a new, revised and expanded edition of *Casimir Britannicus* was published in October 2010 as vol. 25 of the MHRA Critical Texts (ISBN 978-1-907322-12-9, pb. £ 12.99) – the editors].

¹ M. BROWN, *Toward an Archaeology of English Romanticism. Coleridge and Sarbiewski*, in: idem, *Essays in the History of Cultural Expression*, Stanford 1997, p. 173.

² Ibidem, p. 178.

³ See ibidem, p. 177.

⁴ I mean the translation of Sarbiewski’s *Lyr. II 3 (Ad suam testudinem)*, known as *Ad Lyram*; the second poem imitated from Casimire (*Lyr. I 2*) was unacknowledged. It was *To a Friend in Answer to a Melancholy Letter*.

among the one hundred and thirty-three original works) and twenty-three epigrams, imitated by different persons (thirty-four marked with the author's name, and seventeen anonymous).

The poems presented to us date from 1646 (when the first collection of translations, by G. Hills, had been published), to the 19th century. This signifies more than two centuries of Sarbiewski's popularity in Great Britain. To tell the truth, Casimir in England seems to be more inspiring than Sarbiewski in Poland. As F. and U. emphasize, "[t]he Romantic and early Victorian poets were the last to show an interest in Sarbiewski's poetry" (p. 24), which was connected both with the change of literary taste and with educational reforms, resulting in the Neo-Latin poetical tradition falling into oblivion. As we can notice, in Sarbiewski's homeland the milestone of the poet's Polish imitations was Tadeusz Karyłowski's complete translation of *Lyrical*, finished before World War II, although the printed edition appeared as late as 1980. An interest in Sarbiewski in his native Poland is rather limited, and the latest collection of his poems translated by various authors, since the time of the 18th-century edition, was the very thin volume published in honour of the 400th anniversary of Sarbiewski's birth⁵.

Apart from the manifold *Introduction* (containing a short biographical note, the reflections on *Sarbiewski in England* and on editing the texts), *Acknowledgements*, collection of the poems and *Bibliography*, we are provided with a very useful *Index*, namely the list of original Sarbiewski's *Odes*, *Epodes* and *Epigrams* imitated by English authors, with immediate references to those authors who translated or paraphrased each poem (the only thing that seems to be missing are the incipits of the Latin odes). By virtue of this evidence, readers receive a singular "map" of Sarbiewski's poetry; that allows them to see clearly, which regions of this "land" were visited more or less often by English-language poets, and which were scarcely, or never, inspected. Thus, observing the absence of several of Sarbiewski's poems we can speculate on the reasons why those texts were omitted (as, perhaps, manifesting strong Catholic sentiment, having rather a local importance, or related to a private microcosm of the lyrical "I"). Yet, we are not able to fix an ironclad rule in this matter. For example, the opening ode of the first book, a gratulatory poem in honour of Pope Urban the Eighth, has been translated four times. Or, although nobody was, in fact, inspired by *Lyr.* II 4 (*Ad Stanislaum Sarbievium*), addressed to the poet's brother, the similarly "local" and "private" Ode 15 of the second book (*Ad Narviam*) had found its imitator⁶ in whose work, however, *Narvia* was changed into the River Thames, and the main idea of the poem was largely modified. We can also easily identify the most popular odes, which were translated most often. The unquestionable leadership belongs to *Lyr.* II 3 (*Ad suam testudinem*), imitated by eleven poets, including the individualities of such fame as Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Robert Burns. In the second position, paraphrased as many as ten times (i. a., by Abraham Cowley and Isaac Watts), is *Lyr.* II 5 (*E rebus humanis excessus*), inspiring poems entitled often *Ecstasy* or *Elevation*. Among the poets inspired by Sarbiewski's Muse we can also count some anonymous talents, or, even if the translation is somehow signed, we can merely suppose who the imitator was. Among the translators or emulators we can find also some poets knowing little or no Latin, imitating Sarbiewski's odes on the basis of already existing translations. This seems to confirm the vitality of some mental threads of Sarbiewski's poetry, even if the emulators did not deal with the Latin original and if they, like Caroline de Crespigny, were not fully aware of Sarbiewski's personality, confusing the poet with another famous Pole, John III Sobieski. This vitality emerges clearly also from works of poets who, like Isaac Watts, were able to appreciate the virtues of Sarbiewski's Latin. The most characteristic example may be the imitation of *Lyr.* IV 4, translated "with large additions". It seems very interesting to see how Sarbiewski's imagination fertilizes Watts', and how the latter sets his own imagination upon the former's idea. The subject matter of the ode (the battle of Chocim of 1621)

⁵ M.K. SARBIEWSKI, *Wybór wierszy*, oprac. J.Z. LICHAŃSKI, P. URBAŃSKI, Kraków 1995.

⁶ In the present collection we find only the initials T.G., but the authors have already managed to identify the imitator as Thomas Gibbons.

was not closely related to Watts' immediate horizon. But the fiction that the Polish Horace had created was transporting the reader some generations after the famous Polish victory. Somewhere in Danubian regions, a peasant named Galesus, ploughing deeply in the ground, quarries heaps of bones, or rusty helmets and shields. Inspired by his discovery, he becomes a bard, improvising a song with historical narration:

Dives Galesus, fertilis accola
 Galesus Istri, dum sua Dacicis
 Fatigat in campis aratra
 Et galeas clypeosque passim, ac

Magnorum acervos eruit ossium;
 Vergente serum sole sub hesperum
 Fessus resedissee, et solutos
 Non solito tenuisse cantu [...]

Sarbiewski's imagination feeds exclusively on literary clichés. The narration of the battle is Vergilian and Horatian, Galesus himself borrows his name from the *Aeneid*, while the situation is copied directly from the *Georgics* (I 490–497), where an *agricola* near Philippi finds some relics of the battle with his plough. This artificial construction, however, became a vivid image for Watts, allowing him to extend his imagination further:

Here an old Thracian lies,
 Deformed with years and scars, and groans aloud.
 Torn with fresh wounds; but inward vitals firm
 Forbid the soul's remove, and chain it down
 By the hard laws of nature, to sustain
 Long torment; his wild eye-balls roll; his teeth,
 Gnashing with anguish, chide his ling'ring fate [...]

...and further:

I mov'd not far, and lo, at manly length,
 Two beauteous youths, of richest Ott'man blood,
 Extended on the field; in friendship joined,
 Nor fate divides them; hardy warriors both.
 Both faithful: drowned in show'rs of darts they fell.
 Each with his shield spread o'er his lover's heart,—
 In vain: for on those orbs of friendly brass
 Stood groves of javelins; some, alas!, too deep
 Were planted there, and through their lovely bosoms
 Made painful avenues for cruel death.

This poem, however, has another English version, composed by the Irish humorist Francis Mahony (whose *nom de plume* was Father Prout). It is rather a close translation in which the imitator tries to display the represented world of the poem in its entirety.

As slow the plough the oxen plied,
 Close by the Danube's rolling tide,
 With old Galeski [sic!] for their guide,
 The Dacian farmer.

His eye amid the furrows spied
Men's bones and armour⁷...

The editors gathered many poems through which Sarbiewski “speaks English”, and tend towards giving the reader a complete British *opus Sarbievianum*. This enterprise, the fruit of diligent labour as it is, remains in certain points of view an “open work”. First, as the present collection includes three female authors dealing with Sarbiewski’s poetry (Mary Masters, Caroline de Crespigny and Anne Steel-“Theodosia”), it might be augmented with Lucy Hutchinson, because there is evidence that “Mrs. Lucy Hutchinson, after grappling with Lucretius and his ‘foppish casual dance of atoms’, Puritan though she was, tried her hand at translating the fashionable Polish Jesuit”⁸. Second, in Watts’ *Miscellanies* we can find the juvenile poem (*Twas an unclouded sky...*), acknowledged to be an “Imitation of an ode of Casimir”⁹. It is, in fact, an imitation of *Lyr. II 15 (Ad Narviam)*¹⁰. If this poem had been included in this collection, it would have provided another variant of this ode’s imitation, apart from the anonymous one from 1745, which appears in the volume as the only version of Sarbiewski’s poem. Finally, the list of the authors may also vary or/and grow, because some of the published poems, e.g. some translations of Casimir from Joseph Hucks’ volume, should in fact be attributed to William Heald; this is the case of at least *Lyr. II 3*. As I am told, the authors of the present collection have already prepared the second edition, in which the list of authors will be extended up to forty-two, and the list of “anonyms” – to twenty-five [see note * above]. Keeping in mind the possibility of new discoveries, one may suppose that Sarbiewski has not yet uttered his last word in English. Yet the collection in its present shape may be useful to both the readers who know, and who do not know Sarbiewski’s poetry, giving an inspiration for the comparative studies to the former, and outlining his poetical personality to the latter.

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⁷ *The Reliques of Father Prout*, London 1860, p. 539. The publication (p. 537) contains also the translation of *Lyr. I 15 (Ad Apes Barberinas)*, both poems worth being included into *Casimir Britannicus*, if a new volume like *Casimir Hibernicus* is not needed.

⁸ F.E. HUTCHINSON, *Henry Vaughan: A Life and Interpretation*. Oxford 1947, p. 86. The author means the manuscript inherited by himself. The commonplace book of Lucy Hutchinson contains the translation of *Epigram 34 (Fortis est ut mors dilectio)*; see S. WISEMAN, *Conspiracy and Virtue: Women, Writing, and Politics in Seventeenth Century England*, New York 2006, p. 215.

⁹ *The British Poets Including Translations, in One Hundred Volumes*, vol. XLVI, Chiswick 1822, p. 146.

¹⁰ See M.M. COLEMAN, *The Polish Land: A Journey through Poland from the Vistula to the Poet's Land of the Eastern Border: The Polish Land, its Legends, Historic Personalities, Poetry: An Anthology*, Cheshire, Conn., 1974, p. 36.