

The publication of the bilingual *Images While Drowning / Obrazy w oczach tonącego* (1995) and *Mirrors of Memory / Zwierciadła pamięci* (2000), followed by a series of readings in Poland and elsewhere, proved that Nancy Burke – one of the pioneers of Canadian Studies in Poland – is not only a respected scholar but also a gifted poet. While the former book included a three-page commentary by Dorota Filipczak, the latter volume contains no foreword or afterword, a circumstance which encouraged the present attempt to share a reader's observations. Nancy Burke's poems do not need a champion to explain and promote them. They speak for themselves and do so evocatively, offering a variety of moods and ideas. The present essay seeks to comment on some of them, pondering also on the "mirror" reflections in their Polish translations.

The most recent volume of Nancy Burke's poetry is constructed around the image of the mirror (which suggests doubling of identities and difference in spite of identification). The poems hold up a mirror to memory, but the experience mirrored this way often amounts to predicting the future. Thus poetry, instead of remaining a mere recollection, turns into divination. The two concepts "mirror" and "memory" open up the space of experience, but the sound and the graphic form of the title embody the paradox of minimalism which nevertheless leads to endlessness. The evocative alliterative title consists of only eight repeated letters. The "mirror" of the title does not figure as an attribute of feminine vanity any more than it does in the case of Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*. The motto from First Corinthians ("For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known") defines the project as a quest for ultimate knowledge about oneself and others. The progress toward wisdom is interrupted and disrupted, divided in graphic terms into thirty-one pieces – call them steps or poems.

Unlike the readers of novels who swoop down on the text, and devour it rapaciously, the readers of poetry books are never in a hurry. Before they begin to read, they study the cover, touch the pages, and watch the movement of black signs across the page. *Mirrors of Memory / Zwierciadła pamięci* is not a super-expensive edition and yet there is much to gratify the senses and feed thought. The black-and-white photograph by the author on the cover of the book only seems to be grey. In fact, it is suffused with the light of a sunny day. It depicts a park with the bank of a river or a lake, with trees and grass reflected in the mirror of the rippled water. No human being is in sight and yet there is an intimation of a lurking human presence in the solitary white bench in the centre of the picture. Wild enough and yet no wilderness, the landscape is a set stage like the settings in the frontispieces to the New York Edition of James's works, which the critic Ralph Bogardus has claimed serve as "optical symbols" of the texts they were designed to accompany. The same could be said about the cover of Nancy Burke's book. The four drawings inside the book, all of them by Mikołaj Dawidziuk, represent a different technique and genre. All four are outlines of human faces; at least the first three are female faces, oval with the curved lines of voluptuous lips and long bowed lines of hair that resembles spaghetti. The faces are striking in their meaningful

minimalism (one-eyed on pages 7 and 75, with many lines that imitate the trembling of the lips on page 7).

The volume begins, significantly, with "The pause," a short poem about the moment of absence of colour, movement and sound. It is the moment of poetic truth, the moment of insight, inevitably interrupted. Thus in the first poem Nancy Burke defines the conditions of poetic work and its quality of offering experience in snatches. The moment of stillness in which the receptive faculties are sharpened mirrors the moment of death, and Nancy Burke's poem mirrors Emily Dickinson's "I heard a fly buzz." Yet in Burke's poem diminished life and demeaning reality win out against the glory of the knowing death. The opening line of the first poem "There is a stillness" (10) is echoed in the first line of the poem "In summer" ("There is silence", 50). The latter poem likewise captures a moment of repose ("studied harmony"), interrupted this time by an attack of mosquitoes. The anti-heroism of Burke's world surfaces in the second poem of the volume, in which the speaker utters commands: "move into the wall / and wait while the lightning rages" (12). Moving into the wall amounts to becoming a mirror to the others who live and suffer in the centre. The question in W.B. Yeats's poem, "Who'll go with Fergus now?" belongs to the distant heroic past from which the "you" of Burke's poem has been banished.

The following poems, "The shadow" and "Voyagers," expose the habits of self-fashioning and self-delusion in those who seem to know their identity. In "The shadow," the speaker confesses an inability to recall a (loved?) person, and defiantly announces in the final stanza: "you have left no imprint / on my memory" until the last line of the poem gives her secret away: "or so I tell myself" (14). A similar motif of telling oneself what to think and becoming aware of self-deception appears in "Voyagers." Watched by people patiently waiting, the voyagers realize that they merely "think" they are moving on (17). Thus the two poems pay homage to the shadows left behind, apparently forgotten and excluded, and yet still present in the recesses of the speaker's mind.

The liminal moment of crossing the boundary of the day (and of the looking glass) appears in "Destiny," which is again Dickinsonian in the sense of equating desire and death. The promise of encounter is unfulfilled, one of the lovers "disappear[s] into the fog", and the other can only turn into a statue of salt or stone (24). In the context of "Expatriate dreams" (26) the reader becomes aware, however, that the tender love poems are much more than that, and can also be read as poems of self-searching. The poem with the deceptively suave title "For you, my dear" proves that Burke's persona is capable of rage as intense as love. The loving wife, reminiscent of Anne Bradstreet, seeks to celebrate her "dear" in a marble effigy, but her sphere is the kitchen, her tools are kitchen utensils, and the material she can use is chocolate (34).

The poems that literally refer to the "mirror" of the title give the volume its semantic backbone, but the truth is that mirrors and reflections in one form or another appear in every poem of the book. The scenario of the poems built around the image of the mirror is similar, but the perspective of the female subject changes. Beginning in *medias res*, the poem "Mirrors" captures the anxiety of a woman who "checks her image" in the mirrors "to be sure / she still exists" (30). "Images" is a warning: "You never see your true face" (32). The short poem without a title again confronts the reader with the puzzle of the missing reflection (46), whereas "Morning mirror" threatens the "you" of the poem with the vision of a mirror reflection which, seen in

the morning, remains hauntingly the same throughout the day (54). In the poem inspired by a Spanish legend, "The 'Media naranja,'" the speaker expresses the unfulfilled desire to find "my other half" (44). In Nancy Burke's poetry, the "you" is often the reflection of the "I", just as dream life reflects real life. Two poems, "Connection of generations" and "Daughters", employ the image of mirroring to explore the relationships between mothers and children.

In a few poems, Nancy Burke creates – with the utmost skill of wise economy – vignettes of places that at the same time reveal the map of the speaker's mind. "Moscow snow" is a carefully constructed diptych in which the realistic (and surrealistic in its chromatic minimalism) picture of stanza 1 is reflected in the interior landscape of the mind in stanza 2.

The picture of Ronda, a real place name and at the same time a symbolic name that suggests circular movement (the suggestion is enhanced by the image of a bullring), leads to the following thought expressed in the final sentence: "Time travel is a curse" (38). The white night in "Helsinki" is the setting in which the irrepressible desire "to disappear as well [as the single sail] / into a universe / of white light" is voiced (41).

With the exception of longer (two-page) pieces, the majority of Nancy Burke's poems in this edition face their Polish translations. This apparent mirroring of the source and the target texts deserves closer attention. The similarity of the object and its "mirror" reflection again proves to be an illusion. For one thing, some of the poet's turns of phrase are too strongly tied to the cultural and literary tradition of the English language to be translated into Polish. For another, each of the four translators whose work is published in the volume has a different idea of cultural and linguistic equivalence.

Ludmiła Marjańska, a renowned poet and translator, is probably closest to Nancy Burke's poetic imagination and sensitivity. Her translations read like original poems, while retaining the idea and atmosphere of their sources. And yet there are moments when her decisions may puzzle the reader, for example her decision not to repeat "the end" ("koniec") in her translation of the poem "It's all the same". If she simplifies, however, it is only because there is no way of conveying Burke's artistic economy, as in the following sentence referring to evil spirits: "She hoped to dim their power so they'd fade / and shuffle into structures of the room" (60). In comparison with these evocative lines, the translation, though close, appears reductive: "Ufała, że ich moc przygaśnie / i rozproszą się po pokoju" (61).

Dorota Filipczak's and Elżbieta Pachnik's translations at least in some cases illustrate the thesis that a translation product is also a product of literary interpretation. For example, in "The pause", Nancy Burke uses the present tense to suggest the repeated experience of the poetic moment. By contrast, in the first sentence of Filipczak's poem, the verb is omitted, and in the subsequent lines the translator employs the future tense, which suggests expectation. There is nothing wrong in such a decision, but the experience conveyed in the target text is different from the one described in the source text. A significant divergence from the original form and content can also be found in Elżbieta Pachnik's translation of "After the performance". "Each molecule, each embryo / is meant to come to life," reads the original poem, but Pachnik stresses the molecule's and the embryo's desire to exist: "Każda cząsteczka i embrion / pragnie istnieć" (52-53). The poet repeats "The light, the light," whereas the translator uses two

different words which evoke different connotations: "To światło, ta światłość." While the former word is semantically neutral, the latter connotes mystic experience.

Among the four translators of Nancy Burke's poems, Tomasz Basiuk is the one least concerned with faithfulness. At least some lines and phrases he introduces are examples of free translation or even adaptation. This is true of the second stanza in his translation of "For you, my dear". The precision of the irony is gone in the Polish text, and replaced with a misleading biblical allusion to the creation of man in the likeness of God.

I would like to make an effigy
Of you, a true likeness –
Not only capturing
The noble features
Or pleasing presence (34)

Chciałabym to zrobić dobrze
Na obraz i podobieństwo –
Studium postaci, której nie kreśla
Twoje zmyślne rysy. (35)

In "Helsinki", Basiuk again offers an adaptation, replacing "illuminated by the light" (40) with "pochłonięty światłem" (42), and the reference to freedom ("You long to be so free..." 41) with a reference to slowness ("Chciałbyś tak powoli..." 43). In his version of "In summer", Basiuk changes the order of presentation in the opening lines for no apparent reason, and chooses words that produce connotations different from those evoked in the source text (e.g. "parasols" versus "markiza" or "lime trees" versus "wiekowych drzew" or "serene" versus "ciche"). In "The stranger," Basiuk interprets Burke's poem freely, adding a sentence ("Nie ma ciebie" 69) and changing the agents (in the source text the speaker feels left alone on the pavement, whereas in the target text she decides to stand back).

Like all genuine poetry, Nancy Burke's work poses a challenge to translators, who need to know the text but also the context and the intertext. The affinities of Nancy Burke's imagination with the tensions characteristic of Bradstreet's and Dickinson's poetry have already been mentioned. Surprisingly, in spite of its anti-heroism, her poetry seems to look back to some of W.B. Yeats's innovations and obsessions, for example the use of dialogue ("The pilot" 56), and especially the image of the dance in "After the performance", whose final lines ("One being, one identity / Through time and space / In the circle of the dancers – / We become the dance" 52) echo the concluding lines of Yeats's famous poem "Among School Children". None of Nancy Burke's poems is devoted explicitly to the task of translating, but the omnipresent image of the "mirror", which helps to grasp many human interactions and transactions, is also applicable to the bilingualism of this edition.