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Memory, Communism, and Foreign Words in Julia Holewińska's *Foreign Bodies*: Balancing Foreignising and Domesticating Strategies in a Production by Polish Theatre Ireland

Kasia Lech

This article engages with selected translation strategies undertaken to transfer a Polish play by Julia Holewińska, *Ciała Obce* [Foreign Bodies], into the context of Irish theatre. We look at Polish Theatre Ireland's production of the play (directed by Lianne O'Shea and presented in Dublin's Project Arts Centre in 2013), focusing on linguistic and cultural aspects of the translation and, in particular, issues concerning the memories of communism in Poland.

The analysis is framed by Lawrence Venuti's theorisation of translation processes. Venuti defines two general types of translation strategies: 'foreignisation' and 'domestication'. The former "resists dominant target-language cultural values so as to signify the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text" (2008: 23). The latter, by avoiding foreign words and using vocabulary and ideas that the target audience are familiar with, makes for a comfortable encounter between target audience and translated text (2008: 21). Here we reflect on the negotiations and tensions between these strategies in the translating, staging, and presenting of *Foreign Bodies* in Ireland. We propose that by using both strategies to transfer memories of communism in Poland to the Irish stage, the production can facilitate an intercultural discussion on gender in the Polish and Irish contexts and allow multicultural audiences different levels of engagement.

This is important because Holewińska's play tells the story of Adam, a hero of the Solidarity movement who, after the fall of communism in 1989, undergoes sex reassignment surgery and becomes Ewa. Ewa is recognised neither by the Solidarity movement nor by her friends and family. Her own son (Adam was married and has a son) refuses to call her 'mother' and says that his father is dead. In short, Ewa is written out of history. Holewińska's play, set in Poland pre- and post-1989, alternates between both periods to explore issues of transgenderism, transsexualism and, in a broader sense, aspects of the performativity of gender and the imprisonment of an individual in two political systems, as well as within the rules imposed by society. The scenes involving Adam (in pre-1989 Poland) are indicated by the letter A, (1A, 2A, 3A etc.) while those with Ewa (post-1989) are indicated by E: (1E, 2E, etc.). Thus the play is structured in the following way: 1A, 1E, 2A, 2E, 3A, 3E, etc.

As well as alternating between two different eras, the play switches between two different styles. This is already evident in the *dramatis personae*. Some of the characters are named: Adam, Ewa, Maryjka (Adam's wife), Lech (Adam/Ewa's and Maryjka's son), and Adam's/Ewa's friends (Jadwiga, Zofia, Rysiek, etc.). However, other characters are presented according to their dress and the roles signified by their costumes: 'Pan w kitlu' [Man in smock], 'Pani w kitlu' [Woman in smock], 'Pan w mundurze' [Man in uniform], 'Pan w sutannie' [Man in cassock]. This distinction encourages the perception of the named characters as 'human beings', while the characters presented through their professions may be perceived as certain types, roles or even as stock characters, whose behaviour is pre-determined by the uniforms they wear. Their roles function as a form of mask.

This is linked to the way the scenes are written. The speeches of the named characters are quite mimetic in style and often carry a high level of emotion. For example, Adam's fight with Maryjka, after the latter finds out that Adam is transgender (6A), and the dying Ewa's conversation with Lech (6E) show the psychological complexity of the characters' relationships and their struggle to accept one another's point of view. In the scene with Lech ('Leszek' in the diminutive), Ewa asks:

Ewa: Do I make you sick? *Lech does not reply*. Leszek, I had to do it.

Lech: You had to get your tits done? Damn, it stinks in here!

Ewa: I wouldn't have been me otherwise.

Lech: So you're you now?

Ewa: Sometimes I don't know who I am anymore. This tumour. There's a tumour growing inside of me. Some kind of foreign body. Another foreign body. Get it? That body was like this tumour. My manhood was like a cancer. It was eating me up. A foreign body.

Lech: You shouldn't have got involved with Mother.

Ewa: But I loved your mother.

Lech: You lied to her for so many years. You slept with her. You got her pregnant. If you were a woman you should have been turned on by boys, right?

Ewa: It's not that simple.

[transl. Artur Zapałowski]

These 'mimetic' scenes alternate with clearly grotesque scenes involving Adam and Ewa and the masked characters. For example, the scene involving Adam and 'Woman in smock' (7A) presents Adam at a clinic to have sex reassignment surgery. The scene makes no attempt to seem real. Instead of a medical examination, the Woman in smock performs a free-association game:

Woman in smock: Tomato or cucumber?

Adam: Tomato.

Woman in smock: Shopping or reading?

[transl. Zapałowski]

Instead of a professional description of the procedure she delivers marketing babble: "Why does Belgium have the best chocolate? Every country excels at something. When it comes to tits, Thailand beats all the others hands down" [transl. Zapałowski]. On top of this, Holewińska employs the Chorus convention: dialogues and monologues involving Ewa and Adam are intertwined with comments from a Female and Male Chorus. The play on the one hand facilitates emotional engagement with the events during 'mimetic' scenes, while on the other hand it stresses its own theatricality during the formal, grotesque sections.

In performance this heightened theatricality has the potential to highlight the duality of the actor's identity as performer and character, as explained by Bert O. States (1985: 119). In other words, heightened theatricality can serve as a reminder that the actors are performing their roles; they are not their characters. In a hypothetical production of Holewińska's play, heightened theatricality can foreground the fact that the behaviour of the actors playing 'masked' characters is predetermined by the roles they are playing. By extension, the audience realises that the actors playing named characters are also performing. Consequently, it becomes clear that the behaviour of 'named' characters is also predetermined by the roles they play within society. In so doing, the production can facilitate a critical discussion about how much of the audience's behaviour (both as a collective group watching the show and as individuals in their everyday lives) is predetermined by the roles imposed on them by society and the social conventions of performing them. This is crucial because the play engages deeply with the performativity of gender, Judith Butler's idea that one is not simply a 'body', but one performs one's body. The gendered identity is created by the relationship between the performance of the body itself and the pre-existing conventions of how the body should act its gender and how it should be perceived (1990: 271-5).

However, for the audience to relate this to their own lives, the production of Holewińska's play must make the circumstances of the named characters believable. Because of the play's timeframe and its numerous cultural references, which will obviously be foreign to most Irish audiences, this is extremely hard. The reality of communist Poland may seem to non-Polish

audiences as grotesque as the stylised scenes of the play. In short, memories of communism in Poland are crucial in the encounter with the text. This might suggest a need for Venuti's domestication strategy in translation to allow easier audience engagement.

As noted earlier, the production that we are examining was presented by Polish Theatre Ireland (PTI). This company, founded in Dublin in 2008 by Anna Wolf, Helen McNulty, and the author of this article, aims to bring together Polish and non-Polish audiences in Ireland by challenging non-Polish audiences to "interact with the Polish diaspora in Ireland" while at the same time offering "an authentic experience that resonates in the lives of Polish people" (Polish Theatre Ireland, 2008). For that to happen in the production of Holewińska's play, the staged reality of communist Poland must be credible for both Polish and non-Polish audiences. This was repeatedly highlighted during rehearsals by the director, Lianne O'Shea. During a Q&A with Julia Holewińska after the opening night of the PTI production (Project Arts Centre, July 24th 2013) O'Shea also stressed her desire for the staging to resonate with Irish audiences while retaining its Polish roots (so that Polish audiences could still identify with the text and the production). Involving Polish audiences was difficult as the production was staged in English and the entire cast, except the author of this article, were Irish. The following discussion analyses the translation strategies undertaken by the translator, Artur Zapalowski, to transfer Holewińska's text to the Irish stage. It argues that a combination and interplay of foreignisation and domestication can become a performative tool to engage wider audiences and can facilitate an intercultural discussion and various levels of engagement.

In the present context, translation is understood as both a process and an end product that is not only linguistic, but also cultural. Translation can also be used to refer to the processes involved in the transfer of the written text to the performance. Polish and Irish artists were involved in this transfer: Artur Zapalowski (Polish) was commissioned by PTI to translate the play; the director was Lianne O'Shea (Irish); the dramaturge was Kasia Lech (Polish, the author of this article); the producer was Anna Wolf (Polish); the graphic designer was Beata Barylka (Polish); and the actors were all Irish (except for the author): Amy Therese Flood, Anthony Kinihan, Ciarán Coogan, Fiona Lucia McGarry, Kasia Lech, John Currivan, Paul Travers, Shane Connolly, and Sonya O'Donoghue. Although the process involved close collaboration as a team, all decisions regarding the translation made in the rehearsal room had to be accepted by the director Lianne O'Shea. This must be borne in mind since our analysis, written from the point of view of an actor and dramaturge involved in the production, rarely engages with direct directorial decisions. First, however, it is important to look at Zapalowski's translation.

The translation uses clearly domesticating strategies to bring the reality of communism closer to English-speaking audiences. Cultural references are usually accompanied by clarifications. For example, in the first scene the characters talk about their friend Gienek being in prison. One of the female characters, Zofia, says: "Wiecie, że Gienka wsadzili" [literally: "You do know that they locked up Gienek?"] (1A). Adam answers: "Gdzie jest? Na Białolece?" [literally: "Where is he? In Białoleka?"]. In Zapalowski's translation Adam replies to Zofia: "Where is he? Białoleka prison?" This one-word difference is extremely important. Białoleka prison in Warsaw is one of Poland's best known prisons and many people interned under martial law in 1981 ended up there. For someone who understands the connotations of 'Białoleka' the message is clear: Gienek is probably in prison for political reasons. The play opens with the characters talking conspiratorially about their hatred of communism, so their political stance is clear. That Białoleka is a prison, however, is key to understanding the situation.

Scene 1A ends with Bogumil, one of Adam's friends, saying: "Za Mury? Za kraty?" [literally: "For Walls? Behind bars?"]. The line refers to a song called 'Mury' ['Walls'], a 1970s adaptation by Jacek Kaczmarski of *L'Estaca* by the Catalan songwriter Lluís Llach that became an anthem of the Solidarity movement. Bogumil refers to the song and the trouble one could get into with the *Milicja* [communist police] for singing it. In his translation, Zapalowski clarifies that the word 'walls' refers to the song-title by translating Bogumil's line as "Behind bars for singing 'Walls?'"

This domesticating tendency is evident throughout the translation. In 2E the Female Chorus says of Ewa: “z krajem Rad walczyła, bo bicepsy miała”. A literal translation would be: “she fought *kraj rad*, because she had biceps”; *Kraj Rad* [The Land of Councils] was a pro-USSR propaganda magazine in Poland and also a propaganda nick-name for the USSR itself. Zapałowski translates it as “she fought the Reds because she had the muscles for it”. The connotations of ‘Reds’ and communists is accessible to a wider audience than is *Kraj Rad*, though the line arguably loses its subtle figurativeness.

Later on, in 7E, the Female Chorus says: “W trumnie z Baltony wyglądasz jak żywy” [literally: “In a coffin from Baltona, you will look alive”]. In communist Poland Baltona shops were among the very few places where one could legally buy Western products. However, the ‘privilege’ of shopping in Baltona was reserved for people working abroad and paid, at least partly, in Western currency (e.g. sailors). Baltona goods were unavailable to most Poles. This suits scene 7E, in which Ewa talks about not being able to afford the coffins she likes, which creates an ironic connection between communist and post-communist Polish reality. In communist Poland normal goods were not available for political reasons; in post-communist Poland one cannot buy them for economic reasons. However such a connotation may not be widely accessible to non-Poles, so Zapałowski translates it with general marketing language: “Our coffins make you look larger than life”. As in the case of *Kraj Rad* and ‘Reds’, this line becomes clearer even though some of its connotations are lost.

Zapałowski’s strategies are extremely helpful for the theatrical practitioner operating in an intercultural and multicultural environment, but they cannot address all the cultural references in HOLEWIŃSKA’s play. As the production’s dramaturge, the author of this article had to track all the domesticating elements and provide an explanation of all cultural references in the play. First of all I created a ‘Socio-Political and Cultural Guide to Julia HOLEWIŃSKA’s *Foreign Bodies*’, consisting of written explanations, images, and quotations from songs and plays relevant to the text. It was given to Lianne O’Shea a few weeks before rehearsals started and, later on, to Paul Travers, who performed Adam and Ewa. It was also made available to ~~all other any other~~ actors involved in the production. In addition, Anna Wolf, the producer, translated several articles concerning transsexualism in communist Poland for Lianne O’Shea. During the first rehearsals, when we were reading the play, I looked at both the Polish and English scripts in my hand, marked additional aspects that needed clarification, and highlighted all Zapałowski’s domesticating changes in the script.

This informed the director’s decisions in making changes to Zapałowski’s translation. First of all, HOLEWIŃSKA’s text has several mentions of ‘ubecja’ and ‘ubek’, colloquial names for the secret police in communist Poland. Zapałowski translated them as ‘yoob’. After a long discussion it was decided that ‘yoob’ sounds strange to both Poles and non-Poles. For that reason O’Shea decided to leave the word in the original Polish. In other words, the actors used Polish ‘ubecja’ and ‘ubek’.

Another issue concerned ‘Pewex’. Pewex, mentioned by the Male Chorus in 5A and by Adam in 6A, was a chain of shops that sold otherwise unobtainable Western goods in exchange for Western currency (most commonly US dollars). Prices were high, and obtaining Western currency practically illegal. Therefore shopping in Pewex, although theoretically available to all, was a rare luxury. Zapałowski had removed the name ‘Pewex’ in his translation. In 5A the Male Chorus’s line “kupić może wyłącznie za dewizy w Pewexie” [literally “buyable only for hard currency in Pewex”] became “it being available only for hard currency”. In 6A, Adam’s line when he talks about the baby’s powdered milk running out, “Do Peweksu trzeba będzie iść” [literally “We’ll have to go to Pewex”] was initially translated by Zapałowski as “It’s off to the dollar shop again”. However, for an Irish audience ‘the dollar shop’ might connote a cheap shop (a so-called ‘euro shop’) where very cheap items are sold, which is the opposite of what Pewex was. Therefore, for the sake of clarity and further foreignisation, the dollar shop in Adam’s line

was replaced by Pewex. ‘Pewex’, ‘ubek’, ‘ubecja’, and ‘Białoleka’ were explained in the glossary ‘Foreign Words in *Foreign Bodies*’ during the production of the programme (Lech 2013: 6).

During the initial readings O’Shea also stipulated that all the proper names should be pronounced in Polish to highlight the Polish roots of the play, which from the point of view of non-Polish audiences can be considered foreignisation. The Irish actors practiced Polish pronunciation so they could be clearly understood by Polish audiences, while at the same time foreignising for experience for non-Poles as a reminder that the story takes place in Poland.

The linguistic and cultural aspects of translating single words were only part of the process of translating Holewińska’s play. The other major issue was the transfer of broader cultural and social associations. This was particularly true of *Mury* [‘Walls’] by Kaczmarski, mentioned earlier. Holewińska’s text recalls Kaczmarski’s song in the first scene, when Adam is asked to sing it. However neither the characters nor the stage directions mention the song actually being sung. This makes no major difference for Polish audiences, who have heard ‘Mury’ and understand its solemn character and importance for the Solidarity movement. To attempt to replicate this effect for non-Polish audiences, O’Shea decided that ‘Mury’ would be sung when Adam is asked to sing it by the other actors. The idea was to present the importance of this song and how it is ingrained in the life of the characters. We aimed to show to the audience the characters’ emotional attachment to the song, rather than, at this stage, marking its Polish source (the Catalan source, because of the context, was not our concern). The song was translated into English by John Currivan and the author of this article. The aim here was to domesticate it into an English-language context as much as possible. Rhythmical conformity of the English version with the Polish lyrics was therefore crucial to avoid coming up with lyrics ‘foreign’ to the music.

Kaczmarski wrote the Polish lyrics in syllabic verse with a caesura and some approximate rhymes (the numbers at the end of the lines denote the numbers of syllables in the line and how they are broken up by the caesura):

On natchniony i młody był, ich nie policzyłby nikt (15 8/7)
On im dodawał pieśnią sił, śpiewał, że blisko już świt (15 8/7)
Świec tysiące palili mu, znad głów unosił się dym (15 8/7)
Śpiewał, że czas, by runął mur, oni śpiewali wraz z nim (15 8/7)
Wyrwij murom zęby krat (7)
Zerwij kajdany, połam bat (8)
A mury runą, runą, runą (9)
I pogrzebią stary świat! (7)

A literal translation of this text would be:

He was inspired and young; no one would be able to count them [the masses]
He gave them courage with his song, singing that dawn was near
Thousands of candles they lit for him, the smoke rose over their heads
He sang that it was time for the wall to fall and they sang together with him.
Pull out the bars – those teeth of the walls
Tear off the chains and break the whip
The walls will fall, will fall, will fall
And will bury the old world.

First of all we had to clarify the syntax and meanings of the first and the fifth line. In the case of the first line it was only a matter of syntax. However the fifth line, “Wyrwij murom zęby krat”, is both metaphorical and onomatopoeic. First of all it carries the idea of the bars being the walls’ teeth, which need to be pulled out. The metaphor is quite aggressive because the verb ‘wyrwij’ [pull out] has three voiced consonants (/v/, /r/, and /v/ again). Furthermore, ‘r’ is rolled in

Polish. The rolling ‘r’ appears in this particular line three times, which creates an onomatopoeic effect of falling walls, later reinforced by the repeated verb ‘runą’ [will fall]. The English ‘pull out’ does not convey the aggression of Polish ‘wyrwij’. Together with Currivan we agreed that since the song was a call to arms against communism, the aggression and the onomatopoeic effect took priority over the metaphor. The results were as follows:

He was inspired and young, in front of the countless mass (14 7/7)
He gave them strength with his song, singing that dawn was near (13 7/6)
They lit thousands of candles for him, and smoke rose over their heads (17 10/7)
He sang it was time for the wall to fall, and they sang together with him (18 10/7)
Rip the bars out of the walls (7)
Tear of the chain and break the whip (8)
The walls will crumble, crumble, crumble (9)
And will bury the old world (7)

One can notice that the first four lines in the English version oscillate between 13-syllables and 18-syllables. The same lines in the Polish version are 15-syllables long with a caesura after the eighth syllable. In the musical score each of these syllables has one note (mostly crotchets) assigned to. There is also a crotchet pause in a place of caesura. Due to differences between both languages (for a start, in contemporary Polish all vowels have the same length), we were not able to adhere completely to Polish syllabic verse. Nevertheless, we agreed it was important to keep the length of the lines as close as possible to 15. To work against the difference between the amount of syllables and musical notes, we agreed that certain syllables of key words will be sang over two notes (“young” in the first line and “strength” and “dawn” in the second line). In the openings of the third and fourth lines, we needed to change two crotchets into quavers, so each of the syllables would have a musical note. These were the second and the third crotchet in the third line and the first two crotchets in the fourth line. This worked well with the music and did not sound foreign, except for two lines where the musical stresses moved the synthetic stresses to a position unnatural in the English language (in bold):

He was inspired and young, in front of **the** countless mass (14 7/7)
He gave them strength with his song, singing **that** dawn was near (13 7/6)

Currivan and Fiona Lucia McGarry (who is musically trained) shifted the musical accents by moving part of the musical notes to the subsequent words. As a result the words ‘countless’ and ‘dawn’ were broken over two notes and, consequently, became stressed. By extension the words worked with the music in a way more natural for the English language.

O’Shea decided ‘Mury’ would be sung three times in the production. In the opening scene Adam and his friends sing a full English language version in the context of fighting for freedom, showing the importance of the song for these characters. Later on McGarry (Female Chorus) uses the melody of ‘Mury’ to sing her lines: “Behind bars for singing Walls. Behind bars for singing Walls. She’s reminiscing, her friends she’s missing. All alone, woe, woe, woe!” [Zapałowski’s translation] (1E). This worked to familiarise the non-Polish audiences with the melody of the song, which was crucial for the finale, when ‘Mury’, sung in Polish by the author of this article, accompanies the image of a lonely Adam/Ewa (Paul Travers). Because of the repetition of the melody and a gradual disconnection of the melody from the English lyrics of *Mury*, the melody (rather than particular words or language) was made important. This made it possible for the audience to read the finale of the show in the context of the opening and to contrast Adam in the opening scene, a hero surrounded by friends, with Adam/Ewa in the finale, dying alone.

At the same time, the fact that Polish was the last language heard in the production marked the importance of the play's Polish roots and offered Polish audiences the experience of their native language. This, together with the two earlier interjections of Polish, meant that only bilingual speakers could fully engage with the show, which could signal both the importance of the Polish context as well as that of the intercultural and multicultural interactions. The finale's 'detranslation' of 'Mury' into a Polish context can also be read as a metaphor for the production itself: it 'detranslates' itself into Polish, especially since earlier in the production the contexts of both languages are confronted when the Female Chorus's monologue is delivered at the same time as the author of this article delivers an extract from Adam Mickiewicz's *Forefather's Eve*, a Polish Romantic drama. In this sense the process of 'detranslation', as staged in the production, mirrors the process undertaken by the production team: from Zapalowski's domesticating translation through the negotiation between foreignisation and domestication, back to the Polish source.

Assessment of theatre audience experiences is always difficult and this article will do no more than to briefly present the results of an audience survey carried out by the producer, Anna Wolf. We can only conclude that the production facilitated the engagement of at least some non-Polish audiences. 57% of the respondents were from Ireland, 16% from Poland, 6% from Germany, 5% from the UK, 4% from the USA, 2% from Spain and around 1% each from Italy, Korea, Argentina, Colombia, Brazil, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, Hungary, the Netherlands, France, and South Africa. Respondents could evaluate their experience on a scale running from one to five (five being the highest). 30 % gave it 5; 42 % 4; 23 % 3; 4 % 2; and 1 % 1 (Wolf 2013).

There was also a discussion on transsexualism during a questions and answers session with Ewa Holuszko (whose story was an inspiration for the play) and Broden Giambrone (the director of Transgender Equality Network Ireland). Aspects concerning transsexualism were discussed in the context of a multicultural society, with many references to Irish society, rather than only to Poland (Project Arts Centre, July 1st 2013). Finally Jesse Weaver, the reviewer for *Irish Theatre Magazine* described the production thus: "Displacement is a primary theme of Polish Theatre Ireland's production of Julia Holewińska's *Foreign Bodies*, an unsettling contemplation of identity, politics during and after the fall of communism in Poland" (2013).

Irrespective of the production's 'success' and the definition of the 'success' itself, this article shows the potential for interplay between foreignisation and domestication in the context of multicultural theatre and – in particular – in the context of a live performance. It also suggests huge potential for interdisciplinary research on using performativity to explore the borders between foreignisation and domestication. The need for further exploration arises in the context of urgency with which Irish, Polish, and contemporary theatre in general must engage in inter-contextual and multi-contextual creative processes to facilitate its new audiences.

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