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Stanisławska, Anna. Orphan Girl: A Transaction, or an Account of the Entire Life of an Orphan Girl by Way of Plaintful Threnodies in the Year 1685: The Aesop Episode. Verse trans., intro., and commentary by Barry Keane

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picturale du texte” (143)—but she neither provides quotations from the poetry nor compares the techniques to specific examples of Denisot’s artwork.

Although this reader anticipated more of an emphasis on the inextricability of the visual and verbal arts that was so central to the Renaissance and would have liked to have seen comparisons to the emblem tradition and an elaboration of the Horatian credo of *exegi monumentum*, it must be said that Speziari made much of limited resources, both primary and secondary, and ultimately made significant contributions not only to Denisot studies but also to the broader field of French literature by providing insight into the origins of what is arguably its most significant group of poets.

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Stanisławska, Anna.

Orphan Girl: A Transaction, or an Account of the Entire Life of an Orphan Girl by Way of Plaintful Threnodies in the Year 1685: The Aesop Episode.
Verse trans., intro., and commentary by Barry Keane.

The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: The Toronto Series 45; Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 492. Toronto: Iter Academic Press / Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2016. Pp. xiii, 128. ISBN 978-0-86698-547-5 (paperback) US\$31.95.

The translation of a late seventeenth-century Polish poetic text into English is no easy task, and Barry Keane must be congratulated for making Anna Stanisławska’s work available for the first time to a non-Polish-speaking audience. This remarkable autobiographical narrative poem, which has attracted the interest in recent years of Polish and non-Polish scholars of the history of women’s writing, remained unknown until 1890, when the manuscript was discovered in a library in Saint Petersburg by Aleksander Brückner. It was first published in Warsaw in 1935, edited by Ida Kott, and this is the edition used for the current translation. Much of the background information contained in Kott’s introduction is included in Keane’s own, to which he adds further contextualization drawing on the research of recent scholars. The poem consists of seventy-seven “threnodies”—strictly correct as the translation

of *treny*, derived from the Greek, as opposed to the more common Latin-derived “laments”—and thus preserving the author’s probable reference to the *Threnodies* (1584) by Polish Renaissance poet Jan Kochanowski, inspired by the poet’s grief on the death of his infant daughter. Married off against her will to a monster at the age of sixteen, divorced and then married to two further husbands, both of whom died in military service, Stanisławska portrays her own life as a saga of woe, though not without irony and humour. Possibly written as a form of private catharsis, the opening and closing poems addressed to the reader suggest that the author also intended it for publication. *Orphan Girl* may now be included in comparative study programs and in European-wide research projects devoted to aspects of early Polish literature, autobiographical writing, or the history of social customs and women’s everyday lives. For this reason, and in recognition of the challenges involved, I would not wish my further comments to be taken in the wrong spirit: however, this is a review of a translation, and particular aspects have prompted my concern without *nota bene* undermining my sense of the more general success of the whole.

Great was my disappointment in discovering that only a third of the work is included (entitled *The Aesop Episode* by the translator), covering the author’s first marriage to the hideous deviant, whom she nicknames Aesop, and her eventual release from it. The final words of the translator’s introduction indicate that the two remaining episodes “await translation,” but give no indication as to whether this will be done by Keane or another translator. It is strange, at least to me, that the series editors decided to publish only part of the work without waiting for the full translation. Also disappointing is the fact that Keane does not develop his commentary on his own translation strategies; this would have provided insight into certain controversial, if well-considered, decisions. Very little is said on the crucial matter of transferring a text out of late seventeenth-century Polish into English—what sort of English being the issue here. All we learn of the translator’s strategy is the following:

“Given that the power of the account is predicated on the poetic form in which it was conceived, I looked to emulate the metrical and rhyming scheme of the poem and also to accentuate its rhetorical and performative potential. The poem presented here is a verse translation and has strived to serve what I regard as the narrational imperative.” (15)

Given the length of the poem and its dramatic aspects, to give priority to the “narrational imperative” is arguably justifiable. The translator preserves, correctly, the author’s original margin notes (he states that he abandoned the strong temptation “to do away with margin notes altogether” in the “interests of preserving the entirety of the text”; 15), but also adds—in order to “support the reading of what is a lengthy poem” (15)—his own section titles to separate “episodes” within the larger narrative framework. The detailed *Commentary* giving historical explanations and information on individual characters is likewise a welcome addition for any student of the work (107–20).

The “power” of the storytelling, however, depends on the language of expression—on the “poetic form in which it was conceived” (15)—as we are rightly told. Fundamental problems arise with conveying this “poetic form” from Polish into English. As in any dramatic poem, the rhythm of the language is essential to maintaining the engagement of readers, and to satisfying their aesthetic sensibilities. Keane chooses to “emulate” the metrical and rhyming scheme of the original poem. Thus, he retains the original structure of octosyllabic octaves; most of his English lines consist of eight syllables. But whereas Polish is a syllabic language, in which most words have one main stress (the penultimate) and others are more or less equally stressed, English in contrast is a stressed language, with a much greater range of heavier and lighter stresses, upon which the metrical patterns of English verse are based. To make a poem work in English, it may therefore be better adapted to an English stress pattern and corresponding metrical form, as such experienced poets and translators as Jerzy Peterkiewicz and Burns Singer suggest (*Five Centuries of Polish Poetry*. London: Oxford University Press, 1970, p. xxvii). To follow a Polish pattern, based on the syllabic nature of Polish, may be regarded as “faithful” to the form of the original, but it does not necessarily result in a comfortable read in English. The current translation is adequate as far as it goes—the development of the narrative is clear, and it is certainly readable—but the text lacks sufficient natural rhythm and energy to make it an entirely convincing experience.

Meanwhile, most of Keane’s octaves do not in fact rhyme; at least, they do not recreate the full rhymes of the original *aabbccdd* octave pattern. Here again, the translator is faced by a fundamental difference in the languages, Polish being an inflected language with vastly greater rhyming possibilities. Most of Keane’s rhymes are pararhymes—half or quarter rhymes—and sometimes there are

no rhymes at all; so even when a full rhyme is sometimes achieved, it strikes the reader as out of place. Given these differences, one cannot help wondering whether the translation might have been more satisfactory as a poem in English if the translator had chosen instead heroic couplets or even blank verse.

Concerning the choice of English style and vocabulary, it would have been interesting to learn the translator's reasoning. When there is a gap of several hundred years between the language of the original and that of the translation and its readers, no strategy will be perfect: an attempt may be made to echo the archaic English contemporary to the text, or the text will be rendered in modern English, or in a kind of "timeless" language accessible to the modern reader yet not intruded by too many modern anachronisms. The current translation contains many modern formulations that struck the present reader as anachronistic and even culturally out of place: "swipe the legs from under us" (18), "mixed bag of highs and lows" (18), "some sick joke" (24). And this alongside the occasional and seemingly inconsistent insertion of the *olde worlde* "ye," even in places where "you" appears in the next line (see for example page 40, stanza 62, lines 3–4, or page 47, stanza 84, lines 5–8). This also applies to several expansions, presumably introduced in order to satisfy the chosen verse form; see for instance page 32, stanza 38 ("The blushing groom and red-faced bride" is not in the original Polish) or page 90, stanza 220 ("His voice is reassured but his eyes, / Reveal ten panic-filled stories" bears little resemblance to the original).

For non-Polish-speaking readers, Barry Keane's translation successfully conveys the content and historical context of Stanisławska's poem in an acceptable form, and is to be welcomed for the reasons stated above. Regarding the translation process, I have felt bound to point out the more controversial aspects, but this is in full recognition of the near impossibility of the task. Any other translator would be equally challenged.

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