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## Lending an Ear to Mozart's Operas. Stanisław Barańczak's Poetic Translation Experiments\*

### 1. *Barańczak and His Reading of Music (Initial Arguments)*

In the creative work of Stanisław Barańczak music is an important art form and continually present – it can be found in poetry as well as in commentary of a meta-textual nature where the writer explains the meaning of poetry – the meaning of the world at large. When in the times of the socialist regime speech as we know it failed – becoming an instrument of propaganda manipulation – there remained ‘returning order anew’ beyond the framework of language itself. Music therefore, with its precise laws of harmony, rules of the Major-Minor Tonal System, allowed once again to return an order once lost. It was only by means of the art of sounds that the experience of opposites could lead to harmony, as in the poem *Kontrapunkt*<sup>1</sup>:

w tak gęstej muzyce  
jest miejsce na wszystko, z nim włącznie – że jedno nie przeciwdziała  
drugiemu, że nie on słucha ale muzyka używa  
mu słuchu, czasu, cierpienia, wszystkiego, co przewidziała.

(Barańczak 1997: 317)<sup>2</sup>

Many literary critics have pointed to the musical quality of Barańczak's poetry, mainly regarding ‘poems to music’, contrafacta, villanelles, musical genres and terms as titles of poems such as ‘unsung songs’, lullabies, arias as well as numerous musical recollections based on themes and motifs, or indeed those functioning as mottos from sheet music. Such references to musical forms in the textual deep structure have led scholars to the creation of new terms and formulae, be it “literary scores” (Hejmej 2003: 34-46) or “instrumental hy-

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<sup>1</sup> See interpretations of the poem *Kontrapunkt* (Dembińska-Pawelec *et al.* 2007: 43-73; Poprawa 1993: 44-53; Puchalska 2017: 194-208; Reimann 2013: 153-174).

<sup>2</sup> “in such dense music / there is room for everything, including him – that one does not act against / the other, that he doesn't listen but it is music that gives / him hearing, time, suffering, all that it foretold” (Barańczak 1997: 317. All cited works by Barańczak have been translated by Ryszard Reisner).

potyposis” (Dembińska-Pawelec 2000: 262), which help to identify the often experimental phenomena lying between one form and the other.

It is alas, not possible in one brief study to present the musical fascinations of Barańczak, which run the gamut from the experience of the ordinary right up to metaphysical reflections. Therefore the investigation shall focus on decidedly less researched areas of Barańczak’s creative output – his “vocal translations” (Gorlée 2005: 7).

In his practice of translation, Barańczak contends that listening to selected performances of musical compositions “is in effect [...] an impulse for translatory activity, turning to an unconventional translation mode, placing ‘language within sound’ – whereby the practice of intermediality is to arise *par excellence*” (Hejmej 2021: 719). Consequently it is possible to maintain that this particular research question undertaken in this brief study can be categorised as an intermedial phenomenon (Wolf 2002: 13-34). Further, according to McLuhan (1964: 1), “the medium is the message”. Therefore the medium in question becomes a message always present, having an impact on the final artistic result (*ibidem*).

Barańczak’s poetry-translation experiments are born from his aural perception<sup>3</sup> of both music and literature, in this particular case, that of opera and Italian. Presented analysis of chosen vocal parts from *Don Giovanni* (1787) and *The Marriage of Figaro* (1786) by Mozart in their Polish version shall be done by resorting to the device of *pars pro toto*.

In this context of particular note are the so-called phonic imitations present both in poetry and the vocal translations of Barańczak, where the most important reference points shall be phonets – Barańczak’s quasi-translations as mimicry of the original’s phonic structure.

## 2. *All Ears for the Opera Stage*

If one were to take a direct approach to the matter of listening to opera, it would then be necessary to refer to meta-textual reflection. One may ask what are the traits that characterise Barańczak’s musical style of reception. In what way therefore does the author of *Chirurgiczna precyzja* (‘Surgical Precision’, 1998) put his ear<sup>4</sup> to the greatest operas of all time – including the works of Mozart? Barańczak’s response can be treated as a singular provocation on the part of a poet and music lover, who in opera finds his own artistic niche:

At the end of the day, does someone listening to any opera in general attempt to understand the words sung by all the tenors and coloratura sopranos? They do not and rightly so, for the text is either in Italian – which the audience does not comprehend or translated in Polish so appallingly that it’s best not to listen carefully to it (Barańczak 2008: 102).

<sup>3</sup> This means that Barańczak is focused not only on the meaning, but also on the sound of the language. He is a reader and a music lover at the same time, who knows and understands the rules of classical music and often tries to apply them in his own work (and his reception of literature).

<sup>4</sup> For years, researchers have thought about ways to listen to music – mainly from the perception perspective (cfr. Wright 1992; Podlipniak 2018: 35-48; Pearce, Wiggins 2006: 377-405).

Nothing as a result, it can be seen, presents an obstacle to approach the translation of a text designated for vocal performance very freely, remembering at the same time the first and most important principle: 'the text needs to be translated so that it can be sung according to the notation in the sheet music'. A vocal translation therefore demands competencies of a multifaceted nature, among others adapting the literary text to the unchanging notation of the music. Barańczak justifiably treated the creation of libretti, song lyrics and arias in their Polish version as work of the most demanding nature. In conversation with the director, Weiss-Grześniński<sup>6</sup>, he admitted:

As long as I can remember, I have loved opera, have loved Mozart and love to show my erudition on what a good translation of poetry should be. [...] most of all, I like vocal texts for music – in the field of translation there is simply nothing more difficult [...].<sup>7</sup>

It comes as no surprise therefore that apart from the translations of libretti by Lorenzo Da Ponte from *The Marriage of Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*, Barańczak also translated *Dido and Aeneas* by Purcell (1689), Bach's *The Passion of St Matthew* (1727) and Song 5 of *Winterreise*<sup>8</sup> by Schubert (1828) and songs by The Beatles. This study, however, shall focus on the operas of Mozart in respect to semantic-phonetic dependencies between the Polish and Italian libretto for particular fragments of *Don Giovanni* and *The Marriage of Figaro*.

It shall be no mistake to claim that the vocal translations<sup>9</sup> by Barańczak attempt to preserve the specific 'melody' of Italian speech. In stylising Polish according to the source language of the opera, the translator often aims for a comic effect. A fragment of the trio *Susanna or via sortite!* from Act 2 of *The Marriage of Figaro* shall serve as an example:

THE COUNT

Aż taka z niej mimoza?

[E chi vietarlo or osa?]

Hę?

<sup>5</sup> "Ostatecznie, czy słuchacz jakiegokolwiek opery w ogóle próbuje zrozumieć słowa wyśpiewywane przez te wszystkie tenory i koloraturowe soprany? Nie próbuje i ma rację, bo i tak tekst jest albo po włosku, którego to języka słuchacz nie rozumie, albo przełożony na język polski tak okropnie, że lepiej się w to zanadto nie wsłuchiwać" (Barańczak 2004: 295).

<sup>6</sup> Marek Weiss-Grześniński was the first director who staged *The Marriage of Figaro in Polish* in the translation of Stanisław Barańczak – premiere at the "Teatr Wielki" in Poznań, 21.10.1995.

<sup>7</sup> "Odkąd pamiętam, uwielbiam operę, uwielbiam Mozarta i uwielbiam wymądrzać się na temat tego, jak powinien wyglądać dobry przekład poetycki. [...] najbardziej ze wszystkiego lubię teksty do muzyki wokalne; w dziedzinie przekładu po prostu nie ma niczego trudniejszego [...]" (Barańczak, Weiss-Grześniński 1995: 11).

<sup>8</sup> In Barańczak's book *Winter Journey* only Song 5 *Der Lindenbaum* is a translation. The rest of the texts are related only to the musical text (so that one could sing them) and have no semantic relationship with Müller's poems.

<sup>9</sup> See also Straburzyński 2015: 151-176.

THE COUNTESS<sup>10</sup>

Przymierza...	[Lo vieta],
przymierza...	[lo vieta]
ślubny strój	[L'onestà]
kobięcy strój – nie poza;	[un abito da sposa]
też mamy honor swój.	[provando ella si sta]

## THE COUNT

Uparta, dzika koza	[chiarissima è la cosa,]
chcesz broić – no to brój!	[l'amante qui sarà...]

## THE COUNTESS

Rozsądku mała doza –	[Bruttissima e la cosa]
a tryśnie prawdy zdrój.	[chi sa cosa sarà]

## ZUZANNA

Doprawdy bierze zgroza:	[capisco qualche cosa]
Mój pan to istny zbój!	[veggiamo come va]

## ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF ITALIAN LIBRETTO

## THE COUNT

And who dares forbid it?

## THE COUNTESS

Decency forbids it.  
She's in there  
Trying on her wedding dress.

## THE COUNT

It's all too plain:  
There's a lover in there.

## THE COUNTESS

It's all too horrible:  
Whatever will happen?

## SUSANNA

I think I understand:  
Let's see how things work out.

<sup>10</sup> All the translation fragments quoted from the libretti by S. Barańczak are from Krynicki 2016: 229-230.

BARAŃCZAK'S POLISH VERSION OF ITALIAN LIBRETTO  
LITERALLY TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH:

THE COUNT

And she, such a sensitive soul?  
You do say?

THE COUNTESS

She is trying on...<sup>11</sup>  
She is trying on...  
outfit for a wedding  
outfit for a woman – not a pose  
we have our honour too.

THE COUNT

Stubborn, wild doe  
Like to buck – then buck!

THE COUNTESS

A small dose of common sense –  
and a spring of truth shall gush.

SUSANNA

Forsooth a horror looms:  
My master is a real blackguard!

The above comparative overview, it can be said, demonstrates the very principle of Barańczak's vocal translations; faithfulness to the original is not the most important aim, but preserving the phonic structure (and sometimes even graphic too). In this fragment the poet does a splendid job of presenting the nature of the above scene – that is, the banter of the Count and Countess with the servant Zuzanna. In Da Ponte's libretto the respective protagonists communicate in a neutral fashion and it is the music that builds emotions. Barańczak (in line with Mozart's music) highlights the feelings of the characters of the drama, at the same time intensifying the comic nature of the situation. In this respect the translator chooses the appropriate stylistic means, in the main emotionally charged nouns such as *honor* 'honour', *zgroza* 'trepidation' and *zboj* 'robber' as well as epithets: *uparta* 'stubborn' and *dzika* 'wild'.

In the comparative analysis of the respective texts it is pleasing to find the poet making use of words and their multipronged meanings. The Countess has the following lines in the Polish version: "Przymierza... przymierza... ślubny strój". It might be proposed that the repetition of the key word *przymierza* has the effect of creating the impression of ambi-

<sup>11</sup> In Polish *przymierza* is also a noun: 'a union, an alliance'.

guity – it may well both denote a form of activity as a verb (to try on), third person present tense and, equally justified, a call for rapprochement or alliance (!). It would appear that in the song trio both semantic variants share equal rights. Further, the Italian for prohibition *lo vieta* in Barańczak's rendition has the corresponding *przymierza* – an ambiguous interpretation that provides further proof of the translator's predilection for arranging words that can be found on their respective semantic antipodes (FIGURE 1).

Upon putting a closer ear to the Polish-Italian dialogue, between the respective protagonists of Mozart opera, it is possible to opine it is not purely a matter of an ordinary quarrel, but indeed a duel of words. One is particularly struck by the arrangement of expressions of a kin-sounding nature, ones forming rhymes and phonic associations on the very edge betwixt both languages. In the translation, lexemes that are semantically distant share a similar or even the same sound, as in the case of: *cosa / koza / doza / zgroza*, as well as *sposa – poza*. The homophonic rhymes of Barańczak arise as if a consequence of mis-hearing – thus in this fashion tying words that are close phonically and at the same time distant in their semantic make up.

The so-called listener / reader shall appreciate the humorous effect only when during performance of the opera it is possible to resort to both the source and target language libretto. In the music score, where under the notes there are often several language versions, it is possible to follow both the music and the language texts in a vertical arrangement. This is important for a comprehensive understanding of Barańczak's translations, for it is only thanks to a vertical, as it were chord-like, reading that one discovers the semantic-sound play. It is argued therefore that Barańczak's translations of libretti are in need of a new performative means of reception, directed at the same time towards eye and ear.

The selection of lexical items, using the principle of choosing similar sounds, is no accident and testifies to, for example, the frequency by which aural associations are present also throughout the remaining works of the translator. In this context another example can be put forward (FIGURE 2) – the aria *Fin ch'han dal vino* from *Don Giovanni* (Mozart / Da Ponte). The so-called Champagne Aria begins with an 'invitation':

DA PONTE:	BARAŃCZAK:
Fin ch'han dal vino	Niech piją wino
Calda la testa	wioskowe chamy

#### A LITERAL TRANSLATION OF BARAŃCZAK'S POLISH TEXT:

Let them drink wine  
village rednecks

This time Barańczak again does not resort to a literal translation. Instead he preserves the word 'vino' in Italian, which sounds the same in Polish – 'wino'. In this respect, the use of sound of words on the very edge between the two languages is a device that is consistent-



FIGURE 1.

The interpreted fragment of trio *Susanna or via sortite!*  
The part performed by the Countess.

tly exploited. No doubt the Italian expression *ch'han* 'that have', which only graphically may be associated with the Polish word from a low register *cham* 'boor, redneck', found its reflection in the second line in Polish: *wioskowe chamy* 'village rednecks' – falling on the third and fourth bar of the music<sup>12</sup>. In Da Ponte's libretto however, in the very same place the score reads: *calda la testa* – literally 'a hothead', but as an expression *la testa calda* refers to a madman, someone impassioned or possibly someone highly excitable.

In a comparison of structure, the line of the text and notation of music respectively, it can be seen that the above translations of Barańczak despite the lack of semantic correspondence to the original do indeed fulfill all the conditions for a vocal translation. Thus the Polish translation has the same number of syllables in the line (pentasyllabic) as the Italian text and also preserves the original where the accent is placed (with one exception on the start of line two). Further, in the beginning part of the score of The Champagne Aria the most highlighted key Polish word is *wino*, which falls on the highest value (d<sup>1</sup>). The second bar therefore, is in semantic and phonetic agreement with the original. In the Polish translation, bar four, where the Italian *testa* 'head' appears, Barańczak places the Polish word 'chamy', which can be treated as a translation joke. A comparative overview of both the music notation and Italian translation, it may be claimed, shows that the translator provokes perceptual game. The task of the audience therefore is to follow closely by means of eye and ear and, at the same time, decode both the marriage of meaning and sounds (see FIGURE 2)

An example of homophonic translation is also given by Jolanta Kozak:

The main protagonist and lecher abducts the naïve village girl Zerlina at the altar, enticing her with the irresistible refrain: 'Vieni! Vieni!' – (Come! Come!) . The Polish Don Giovanni in the translation of Barańczak repeats as if in mocking echo: 'Wiemy! Wiemy!' (We know! We know!) [...]. One may ask whether this is still a translation and if it is not, then what is this text – the original, nonetheless presented by the name of the Ital-

<sup>12</sup> Graphical and phonetical associations are justified, as they resemble many phonets and libretti in which Barańczak does not avoid ribald associations, for example he translates a line "morte mi dà" from the aria *Dalla sua pace* as "w mordę mi da" (in English 'will punch me in the face').

ian author? If one were to accept that a translation is to faithfully present the idea of the original, in the closest possible form to it, the answer would have to be in the negative. After all, the Polish 'wiemy' in no way corresponds to the Italian 'vieni'. In disavowing the translation in this particular case the argument would be that the graphic and sound texture of the text is [...] only its unimportant 'surface' [...]. [...] – Apart from the fact that intuition prompts to accept 'Wiemy!' as a 'translation' of 'Vieni!' and an excellent one at that – it is necessary to recognize Barańczak's text as a form of translation. It is [...] a singular translation, one changing what might appear to be unchangeable in the original and in consequence, the image of the world presented.

Don Giovanni, who cries out: 'Vieni! Vieni!' is of course not the Don Giovanni crying out: 'Wiemy! Wiemy!'. The former is the voice of unadulterated and untamed desire, while the latter is a cynic, one with a cold distance exploiting the situation at hand. Is it not the case however, that the complete image of Don Giovanni [...] convinces us the main protagonist is both of these? (Kozak 2009: 132-133).

Barańczak translates the libretto freely and though not changing the course of the storyline, it is through various language devices that he enriches the comic situation – often drawing anew the portraits of the opera protagonists. The process of translation aims at a vocal performance and as such the Polish text is able to match the music score. The translator observes the specific number of syllables in the bar and attempts to preserve the correspondence of accents in both the music score and the text, in the main leaving the same arrangement of vowels. It is difficult, however, not to notice that the source of humour in this particular case is more easily grasped when at the same time the original opera is heard and it is possible to follow the Polish text projected for example, above stage. During the performance the iconic mimicry of the Italian language (into Polish) frequently evoked laughter from the Polish audience, which discovered the homophonic arrangements verging on the absurd.

It should be added that it is easier to accept Barańczak's translation proposition in the recitatives developing the action than arias, duets or trios – that is, in prime roles where the music takes precedence over the word. This is perhaps why there appear opinions among music critics that are doubtful as to the usefulness of the Polish version of the libretto by Barańczak. According to Dorota Szwarcman it is clear that:

this 'translation' is not a translation as such and was not meant for an opera performance, but one the poet created for his own amusement, or joke as was after all the case with 'Don Giovanni' (and the renowned lines of Ottavio's aria '*..w mordę mi da'* [give me one in the mush]). Here it is only the meter and to some extent the story that corresponds<sup>13</sup>.

The claim that the translations of libretti for *The Marriage of Figaro* and *Don Giovanni* were not written with the intention of being performed is unproven (the translator's

<sup>13</sup> Szwarcman: <<https://szwarcman.blog.polityka.pl/2019/04/28/wesele-figara-w-trzy-tygodnie/>> (latest access: 27.02 2021).





FIGURE 2

The first bars of the aria *Fin ch'han dal vino*  
 (original by L. Da Ponte and translation by S. Barańczak)

point of view in this particular issue is ambiguous). Ottavio's aria *Dalla sua pace*, which Szwarcman refers to, has two versions. The first, written *serio*, is a vocal translation, whereas the second, written in *buffo*, belongs to the genre of Barańczak's phonets<sup>14</sup>. A study of the translation experiments verging between music and words leads consequently to phonets – a personal genre created by the author of *Fioletowa krowa* (Milk Purple 2007).

### 3. Barańczak's Phonets Translations: In One Ear and Sprout the Other

In the context of his translation practice the particular literary form of phonets has a special place, ones belonging to his 'personal constellation of genres', collected and outlined in the work *Pegaz zdębiał* (Pegasus Fell Dumb 2008). Phonets can be said to be therefore at the same time a reflection and an expression of musical style of reception for a given literature / libretto – in this particular case the operas of Mozart. According to Barańczak, phonets can be understood as a genre from the borderline of poetry and music:

*Phonets* are created when into the first of our two pots we put someone else's literary work written in foreign language, whose unfamiliarity has the good fortune of freeing us from the slavish obligation of faithfulness to the original and faithfulness to the meanings that the original, one might say unlawfully, imposes. In the second pot in turn, we prepare a special type of translation for this original text – one written in the most immaculate Polish, coherent and in its own way meaningful. This has to sound precisely or almost precisely the same as the original (Barańczak 2008: 101)<sup>15</sup>.

The individual phonet (*fonet*) is a neologism. It can be said to belong to the family of hybrid genres that in their generic name contain a type of cross-pollination of media (cfr. Hejmej 2013: 125). Phonet therefore is a blending of two terms: phoneme and sonnet.

<sup>14</sup> More on Barańczak's phonets can be found in the chapter *Kiedy ucho robi oko, czyli o fonetach Stanisława Barańczaka wobec muzyki* (cfr. Reimann-Czajkowska 2018: 133-163).

<sup>15</sup> A comprehensive literary discussion of work collected in *Pegaz zdębiał* can be found in its latest edition (see Szczęsna 2017: 5-78).

Phoneme comes from the Greek word *phonema* – denoting voice, sound – and at the same time, the main unit of language’s sound system. Sonnet in turn should not be understood as a canonic poetry form, but rather an expression of artistry, which is necessary to create a sonnet and at the same time, of the difficulties with which the poet / translator has to struggle in adapting the poem to music.

The ‘recipe’ for the creation of *phonets* therefore is no easy task, as can be concluded from the above definition. Understanding a foreign text (in this case Italian) is not obligatory, in fact unnecessary, for comprehension is replaced by an intensified form of listening – to both language and music – which can be said to be no small challenge. Moreover, the phonet itself is a phenomenon that belongs to the category of nonsense where the poem becomes a mimicry of foreign speech, adopting (or inventing) similar sounding expressions without taking their meaning into account.

This particular type of formulated poetic diction can be examined through the example of the phonet created in respect to the duet *Là ci darem la mano* from the first act of the opera *Don Giovanni* by Mozart. Here, the exchange between Don Giovanni and Zerlina presents the well known convention of *buffò*. Mozart and Da Ponte – as in the earlier opera *The Marriage of Figaro* – mock class differences, ones which lose all meaning in the context of a stormy romance. A fragment of the beginning of the work in Italian shall be given, its Polish translation as well as Barańczak’s ‘phonetic variations’<sup>16</sup>:

DA PONTE’S ITALIAN VERSION	BARAŃCZAK’S TRANSLATIONS	BARAŃCZAK’S PHONET
Là ci darem la mano, là mi dirai di sì. Vedi, non è lontano, partiam, ben mio, da qui.	Daj mi tę dłoń kochaną, mój ziemski raj to ty. Niechaj się jawą staną miraże i złote sny!	Ja ci, daremna mamo, dam mity, bajdy, sny! Kiedy w nią mnie wplątano? Czart ją by wziął na kły!

The poet – as in earlier translations of libretti – with consummate precision reproduces the syllabic / accent construction of Da Ponte’s text. In the above comparative overview it is possible without difficulty to find the same (or very close) rhythmic scheme composed of trochees and amphibrachs (Ss Ss sSs). In singing the most important sounds are vowels and therefore Barańczak attempts to preserve the same accented vowels as in the original. Thus between the respective texts a certain stylistic connection

<sup>16</sup> A didactic translation of Barańczak translations sample: “Give me this loving hand / my earthly paradise is you / May there appear / mirages and golden dreams!” And that of his *Phonets*: “To you, futile mother / I’ll give myths, hokum, dreams! / When did I become enmeshed? / May Beelzebub take her with his fangs!” The original in English: “There our hands shall meet / There you’ll say yes / You see, it’s not far / Let’s go my dear from here”.

is formed, which in the main is based on phonetic anagrams<sup>17</sup>. In the first line of the phonet 'Ja ci, daremna mamó' there is a complete adaptation of the vowels: a i a e a o. Here, Barańczak applies the rules of anafonia in the phonet (according to Ferdinand de Saussure it does not replace assonance, which traditionally imitates the one word) where entire phrases are transformed. The phonet therefore is a formal translation that can be seen to be an aural miscue – where not only is semantic agreement with the Italian version not preserved, but also neither is it even a distant paraphrase.

Next, phonet and the original Da Ponte libretto shall be compared with the functional, that is written with the opera in mind, translation of Barańczak. In the Polish version Don Giovanni is a beau who seduces by way of words, compliments and testifies to his love, using the metaphor *mój ziemski raj to ty* (my earthly paradise is you). The exclamation: *Niechaj się jawą staną/ mirażę i złote sny!* (May gilded dreams and mirages come to light!), are lines by Barańczak not found in Da Ponte. In the original Don Giovanni persuades Zerlina using the verbs: *vedi* 'see' and *partiam* 'let's go', while in the Polish libretto epithets dominate (*dłoń kochaną* 'loving hand', *ziemski raj* 'earthly paradise', *złote sny* 'golden dreams'. At the same time, Barańczak preserves the rigour of vocal translation and without difficulty slots the Polish translation into the respective bars of the sheet music. The theme in *Don Giovanni* is a classical music period that consists of two sentences – the antecedent (dominant) and consequent (tonic). In this respect in the first bar, both in the original and in Barańczak's Polish version, one can observe an agreement of musical accents with that of the literary text (see FIGURE 3).

In the study of the mutually complimentary nature of music and text one should take note of the key words. In the fourth bar there appears the fundamental as it were, word in Italian *sì*, a crowning of attempts to win over Zerlina. The word *sì* is on the accented part of the bar, musically accented on one, then a pause follows – this is a specific musical response to the first two bars. Here the second bar finishes on an anti-cadence and bar four ends on a cadence – a quaver and the lowest note (e) in a music sentence. In this very place the phonet has the word *sny* 'dreams', which is the corresponding sound for the Italian *sì* 'yes'.

Barańczak in translating the libretto by Da Ponte, must have been guided by the literary aspect of Don Giovanni's declaration of love. The phrase *là mi dirai di sì* 'there you will say yes to me' is translated as *mój ziemski raj to ty* 'my paradise on earth is you' and although the translation is not faithful, it could be said the so-called logical connection between language and music is justified – for at the end of bar four the poet highlights in respect to Zerlina, the important personal preposition *ty* 'you'.

Respecting the music of Mozart is not the same as being faithful to the libretto of Da Ponte's translation. For Barańczak of greater importance therefore was the general nature of the work, which after all could be presented with the use of other words. Consequently,

<sup>17</sup> The concept of the phonetic anagram is understood, following Dziadek (2001: 112), who in referring to the nature of Saussure's anagrams, states: "de Saussure's [a]nagram is a phonetic one, not literary – one that usually is a graphic anagram".

two different versions of Don Giovanni were created – the Italian presenting a brash suitor, one stubbornly aiming to seduce Zerlina. In the Polish version in turn, Don Giovanni appears to be restrained and – though no doubt does not possess nobler intentions than in the original – is one undertaking a decidedly more subtle strategy. In Barańczak's phonet, where language is treated as a phonic material, the imposed, referential denotations of words are not at all respected. On the contrary, distant associations appear to be better and therefore bring the desired comic effect that can be found in a phonet.

#### 4. Conclusion

The above presented analysis of fragments from Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* and *Don Giovanni* interpreted by Barańczak can be said to be only the very beginning of research on his vocal translations. The author of *Chirurgiczna precyzja* 'lends both ears' as it were not only to the text of the libretto, but also to the very language layer of the original – more precisely to the poetic language that he interprets, in as far as he is able, to transpose the respective sounds of Italian into Polish. Barańczak thus is not afraid to undertake far-reaching changes in the semantic field in respect to Da Ponte's work. The libretti by Barańczak were written with the opera stage in mind and therefore it could be argued they create more complex protagonists than those in the original.

It should be added however, these Polish translations of Da Ponte's libretti function most often as texts for reading (among others, for projection of subtitles) and decidedly more rarely as a text dedicated to vocal performance. In phonet, however, one encounters a form of play *sensu stricto*, where of equal importance there is a particular linguistic fluency as well as an ability to 'hear' the music of Mozart. In his phonet, Barańczak listens carefully both in Polish and Italian, and at the same time explores the potential of new, not necessarily obvious associations, as well as purely nonsensical storylines. The 'poetical musicality' (Gmys 2021: 193) contained both in the translations and in the phonets takes form in the use of phonemic values ('phonemic assembly'), concordant sounds, alliterations, anagrams et cetera. In the vocal translations of Barańczak the same mechanism always operates. Thus the phonic layer of the respective Italian and Polish texts is joined and this in turn helps to preserve the so-called melody of the original language and secondly, demonstrates the mutual roots of respective words – where there await often surprising and new witty propositions.

The medial hybridity of Barańczak's poetic translation experiments determines their innovative nature. Thus one encounters an intermedial co-existence between music and literature. Moreover, the phonet and translations of libretti belong to the field of intermedial discourse, where both the respective music and linguistic texts function on equal terms (Vos 1997). Barańczak's translations therefore, both buffo and serio, do not merely refer to linguistic translation but rather, are treated as a particular intermedial situation – in which the literary text is adjusted to the (unchanging) text of music.

Là ci da-rem la ma-no, là mi di-rai di sì. Ve-di, non è lon-ta-no. Par-tiam, ben mio, da qui.  
 Ja ci, da-rem-na ma-mo, dam mi-ty, baj-dy, sny. Kie-dy w nią mnie wplą-ta-no? Czart ją by wziął na kły!  
 Daj mi tę dłoń ko-cha-ną, mój ziem-ski raj to ty. nie-chaj się ja-wą sta-ną mi-ra-że i zło-te sny!

FIGURE 3

The first bars from *Don Giovanni*'s part, the duet *Là ci darem la mano*  
 (W.A. Mozart, *Don Giovanni*, act I, libretto L. Da Ponte, translation and phonet S. Barańczak)

The sheer phenomenon of Barańczak's translatory interpretations takes stage in full dress upon reading libretti and at the same time listening to the singers, where the audience can simultaneously confront the Polish, Italian and the music. These experiments, having no precedent, can be said to be placed between a musical and a poetic communication, between a semantic field passed over in silence and a phonic allusion, between an idiomatic supra-organisation of language and the harmony of music in the works of Mozart. All of the above amounts to the fact that "His words begin to sing" (Nyczek 1999: 50-52).

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*Abstract*

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*Lending an Ear to Mozart's Operas. Stanisław Barańczak's Poetic Translation Experiments*

The paper *Lending an Ear to Mozart's Operas. Stanisław Barańczak's Poetic Translation Experiments* examines the issues of intermediality, in particular the relationships between music and literature in mixed creative genres fusing disparate media of expression. The brief study discusses the connections and inter-dependencies between the music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Italian libretti by Lorenzo Da Ponte, their translation by Stanisław Barańczak and his unique quasi-translation ('fonety'). The article presents interdisciplinary interpretations of selected vocal translations (excerpts from the libretti of 'Don Giovanni' and 'The Marriage of Figaro') and 'fonety' – Barańczak's own genre created at the boundary where linguistic witticisms and vocal translation meet. The Italian text by Da Ponte is often treated as *quasi una musica* – as a sound material free from the referential ballast of language (semantics). Barańczak offers the music lover a new means of aural reception in the *buffo* style, illuminating a path to discovering anew the artistic potential of musical masterpieces.

*Keywords*

Intermediality; Barańczak; Mozart; Libretto; Opera; Vocal Translation; Poetry.