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On Inter-stylistic Dialogues in Translation. Igor Severyanin and Vladimir Mayakovsky at the Cradle of Polish Futurism

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Mogę tak pisać jak Siewierianin,
Mogę tak pisać jak Majakowski...
(JASIEŃSKI [1921] 1972: 47)¹

Mnie radził pisać Siewierianin
I w chorych wierszach swych Jasieński.
(BRZESKI 1925: 22)²

A Majakowski wraz z Burlukiem
Stanowią w wierszach mych pokusę...
(BRZESKI [1922] 2022: 231)³

Zu inter-stilistischen Dialogen in der Übersetzung. Igor Sewerjanin und Wladimir Majakowski an der Wiege des polnischen Futurismus. Der Beitrag untersucht die einzigartige innere Dynamik der Anfangsphase der polnischen Rezeption des russischen Kubofuturismus in den 1910er–1920er Jahren. Die Poetik von Igor Sewerjanin, dem dekadenten Anführer der russischen Ego-Futuristen, wird als Katalysator sowohl für die neu entstehende ursprüngliche polnische futuristische Poesie als auch für die ersten polnischen Übersetzungen der Kubo-Futuristen diskutiert. Die Rivalität zwischen Wladimir Majakowski, einem der Gründungsmitglieder der Hylaea-Gruppe, und Sewerjanin um den Titel „König der Dichter“ erstreckte sich auch auf den Bereich der literarischen Übersetzung, der zum Schlachtfeld für den Kampf verschiedener poetischer Stilrichtungen wurde. Der Artikel konzentriert sich auf inter-stilistische Dialoge, die in den ersten polnischen Übersetzungen der Gedichte Majakowskis und Sewerjanins geführt wurden.

Schlüsselwörter: literarische Übersetzung, inter-stilistischer Dialog, polnischer Futurismus, Kubofuturismus, Ego-Futurismus, Wladimir Majakowski, Igor Sewerjanin, Anatol Stern, Kazimierz Brzeski, Bruno Jasieński

¹ [I can write like Severyanin, / I can write like Mayakovsky]. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations of quotations from literary and literary studies texts are by the author.

² [In my writing I was advised by Severyanin / and Jasieński in his sick poems.]

³ [And Mayakovsky with Burluk / They are a temptation in my poems.]

The article explores the unique inner dynamics of the inaugural phase of the Polish reception of Russian Cubo-Futurism in the 1910s–1920s. The poetics of Igor Severyanin, the arch-decadent leader of the Russian Ego-Futurists, is discussed as a catalyst for both the newly emerging original Polish Futurist poetry and the first Polish translations of the Cubo-Futurists. The rivalry between Vladimir Mayakovsky, one of the founding members of the Hylaea group, and Severyanin for the title of the “king of poets” extended into the field of literary translation which became a battleground for the combat between diverse poetic manners. The article focuses on inter-stylistic dialogues conducted in the first Polish translations of Mayakovsky’s and Severyanin’s poems.

Key words: literary translation, inter-stylistic dialogue, Polish Futurism, Cubo-Futurism, Ego-Futurism, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Igor Severyanin, Anatol Stern, Kazimierz Brzeski, Bruno Jasieński

Translation as a Laboratory of Contradictory Poetics

The cross-cultural dynamics of “creolization” and “hybridization” of poetic structures as “the engines of modern and contemporary poetic development and innovation” (RAMAZANI 2009: 3) naturally exceeds a monolingual framework – a fact conspicuously absent from Jahan Ramazani’s “transnational poetics”. Paradoxically, Ramazani’s stirring attempt to account for the circuits of poetics across linguistic, cultural, and geographic borders did not engage the specificities of translation as a crucial instrument for the intercultural and interlingual dissemination of artistic ideas and as a potent catalyst in the historical-literary processes in target cultures. It was Ignacio Infante’s polemical *After Translation. The Transfer and Circulation of Modern Poetics across the Atlantic* (INFANTE 2013) that translation thoroughly and consistently re-entered the critical discussion concerning Modernism’s transnational poetics. As Polish literary theorist Stanisław Balbus argued, Modernism provides a unique opportunity to witness an unprecedented proliferation and expansion of stylistic strategies and “inter-stylistic dialogues” (BALBUS 1996: 97), both intra- and interlingual. Even more important is that the “evolution towards enhanced dialogicity” (BALBUS 1996: 7, 165–168) can be observed in both original literary works and translated literature. This increase in inter-stylistic dialogicity can be attributed to the asymmetry of the development of different regional literary Modernisms and the ongoing processes of Modernist globalization and hybridization of literature. To push the argument even further, the interweaving of styles can be considered a distinctive feature of Modernist literary translation in Central and Eastern Europe (see BRZOSTOWSKA-TERESZKIEWICZ 2016 and 2021).

The inaugural phase of the Polish reception of Russian Ego- and Cubo-Futurist poetry, which coincided with the birth of Polish Futurism, is an exceptionally vivid example of this interlingual and inter-stylistic dialogicity. The translation and literary scholar Edward Balcerzan has aptly described the phenomenon of “opening” translations onto various initiatives of foreign works of literature, which were often contradictory in their poetics. Although originally referring to the translated literature of Polish Romanticism, his words suitably apply to the interwar flourishing of the Polish Futurist movement: “The value of these translations became doubly dependent on the value of the ‘quoted’ non-Polish literature and on the innate concepts of the original ‘quoting’ literature...” (BALCERZAN 1998: 175). Thus, the inter-stylistic dialogues that occurred in translations intensified the dialogical nature of literature. These dialogues substantiated the vigorous, self-reflective, and participatory reaction of the Polish Futurist poets-translators to the Eastern European avant-garde.

Under the Sign of a Lily: Severyanian Poetics of Mayakovsky's Poems (in Polish translations)

For those who may be unfamiliar with the dynamics of the expansion of the Eastern European avant-garde, it may indeed come as a surprise that it was Igor Severyanin [Igor Lotarev], the arch-decadent leader of Ego-Futurists, who set the stage for both the earliest phase of the development of Polish Futurism and the inaugural phase of the Polish reception of Russian Cubo-Futurism. The formative impact of the Russian Ego-Futurist on the newly emerging current of the Polish avant-garde is strongly suggested by such well-known facts as Julian Tuwim's juvenile *Szampana do lilii!* [Champagne to a Lily] (1914), elaborating on the theme yielded by the incipit of Severyanin's 1912 *Shampanskii polonez* [Champagne Polonaise] and coinciding with Tuwim's much-disputed self-proclamation as the "first Polish Futurist" (ŁAZARCZYK 1979: 36–37), Bruno Jasieński's *But w butonierce* [A Boot in a Buttonhole] (1921), which is in considerable part a "latent translation" of Severyanin's 1913 *Gromokipiashchii kubok* [The Thunder-Seething Goblet] (BALCERZAN 1968b: 83), and the Severyanian lyricism of Stanisław Młodożeniec's poems (ŚNIECIKOWSKA 2023: 80–82, 197–198). Almost forgotten but no less vivid is Kazimierz Brzeski's 1925 *Poezja buduaru* [Boudoir's Poetry] experimenting with interlingual parodies, travesties (*Siewierezje* [Severyesies]),⁴ and imitations of Severyanin's poetics with its typical "indiscriminate mishmash of Franco-English 'smart' exotica" (HENRY 1992: 34). The collection is aptly introduced by the author as "a handful of perfumed excesses" (BRZESKI 1925: 2).

Whereas the stimuli of Severyanin's poetry in the original Polish Futurist poetry have been well recognized and widely discussed, the patronage of the Ego-Futurist over the early Polish reception of Cubo-Futurism is rather astonishing because the Cubo-Futurists themselves had opposed Severyanin since 1914. It is important to note that the Ego-Futurists only joined the Hylaeans for a short time at the end of 1913, contributing to two Cubo-Futurist miscellanies, *Moloko kobylits* [The Milk of Mares] and *Futuristy. Rykaiushchii Parnas* [The Futurists. Roaring Parnassus] and co-signing the manifesto *Idite k chertu!* [Go to Hell!], which announced the rejection of the "accidental labels Ego and Cubo" and uniting them "into the one and only literary company of the Futurists" (BURLIUK et al. 1988: 86). The joint month-long Crimean reading tour by Severyanin and the Hylaeans ended with their separation deepened by the rivalry of Mayakovsky and Severyanin for the title of the "king of poets" (KHARDZHIEV 2006: 285–286). The most interesting, at least from the point of view of the inner dynamics of the Eastern and Central European avant-garde, is the fact that this rivalry extended into literary translations, which provided yet another battleground for the combat between Mayakovsky's poetics and Severyanin's poetic manner. The context of the fierce poetic dispute between the Ego-Futurist and the Cubo-Futurist was more than evident in the inaugural phase of the Polish reception of Russian avant-garde poetry. As the first Polish translator of *Oblako v shtanakh* [A Cloud in Trousers], Jan Zarycz, ironically commented on the purportedly incomprehensible anthropological-linguistic grotesque of Mayakovsky, "[a]pparently, Mr Mayakovsky lies awake because of the fame of the Over-Futurist Igor Severyanin. Thus, he outdistances him" (ZARYCZ

⁴ On the Polish reception of Igor Severyanin's poetry, see BEDNARCZYK 2021b.

1919: 24). It is Severyanin's poetics that turned out to be a catalyst facilitating the reception of the then-lesser-known Mayakovsky's poetics in Poland.

The first of Mayakovsky's short poems chosen for Polish translations were a marine-industrial poem *Port* [The Seaport] (dated 1912) and a satirical ode *Sud'ia* [Judges]. The earliest edition of the former, originally entitled *Otplytie* [Sailing Off] and displaying considerably different poetic imagery in the first six lines than its subsequent version⁵, appeared in the Hylaea miscellany *Sadok sudei II* [A Trap for Judges II/ A Nurse Pond of Judges II], together with contributions by Benedict Livshits, Velimir Khlebnikov, David Burliuk, Aleksei Kruchenykh et al. (*Sadok sudei II* 1913: 62). The latter, *Sud'ia*, was first published in Saint Petersburg satirical magazine "Novyi Satirikon" [The New Satyricon] in 1915⁶. Remarkably, both Mayakovsky's poems chosen for Polish translations bore significant Ego-Futurist features, which did not pass unnoticed by contemporaries⁷. Most of the Ego-Futurist features of Mayakovsky's two poems were unmistakably recognized and either leveled (*Port*) or, on the contrary, enhanced (*Sud'ia*) for parodistic purposes – by the creative will of the translator Anatol Stern, one of the key poets of the then-emerging Polish Futurism. The Polish translations: *Port* and *Sędziowie* were published next to each other in the avant-garde magazine "Formiści" [Formists] in 1921.



Fig. 1: A flowered wallpaper cover of *Sadok Sudei II* [A Trap for Judges II], Saint-Petersburg: Zhuravl' 1913; the name of the author of the cover design has not been indicated. A reproduction, public domain.



Fig. 2: A cover of the magazine "Formiści" [The Formists] 1921, No. 6. A reproduction, public domain.

⁵ A comparative analysis of poetic imagery and stylistic devices in the earliest and subsequent editions of the poem would require a separate study. This study should consider the metrical, thematic, and metaphorical resemblances between Mayakovsky's *Otplytie* and David Burliuk's poem *Zarazheny cherty i steny...* from the miscellany *Futurists. Rykaiushchii Parnas* (1914). Such comparable features as the personification of the elements of urban space, juxtaposition of disparate phenomena, and the use of extended metaphors are discussed by BAROOSHIAN 2012: 75–76.

⁶ In subsequent editions under the changed title *Gimn sud'ie* [Hymn to the Judge].

⁷ Nikolai Gumilev wrote concisely about Mayakovsky's early poems published in *Sadok sudei II*. He noted that Mayakovsky shared many similarities with the Ego-Futurists (see KHARDZHIEV 2006: 257).

Mayakovsky's *Port* and Stern's translation read as follows:

Prostyni vod pod briukhom byli.
Ikh rval na volny belyi zub.
Byl voi truby – kak budto lili
Lubov' i pokhot' med'iu trub.

Prizhalis' lodki v liulkakh vkhodov
k sostsam zheleznykh materei.
V ushakh oglokhshikh parokhodov
goreli ser'gi iakorei.

(MAYAKOVSKY 1955: 36)⁸

Prześcieradło wód pod brzuchem rozesłano.
Rwał je na fale biały ząb.
Było trąby wycie, jak gdyby lano
Miłość i chuć poprzez miedź trąb.

Łódki w kołyskach doków, do ich kantów –
Żelaznych sutek, garnęły się z krzykiem.
Uszy ogłuchłych parostatków-gigantów
Żarzyły się kotwic kołczykiem.

(MAJAKOWSKI 1921: 13)⁹

What immediately attracts readers' attention is the astonishingly (at least for a Hylaeon) regular rhythm of the original poem: conventional iambic tetrameters, rhythmical-syntactic parallelisms, and the "infantile simplicity" (BROWN 2015: 77) of grammatical rhymes. This is all the more surprising if one takes into consideration the manifesto opening *Sadok sudei II*, which proclaimed the shattering of rhythms, departing from textbook meters, and introducing new types of rhymes (see *Sadok sudei II* 1913: 1). Indeed, it may come as a surprise that the genuinely Cubo-Futurist maritime-erotic-infantile metaphor of lust is carried by the metrical and rhythmical pattern strongly reminiscent of Lomonosov's, Pushkin's and Balmont's iambic tetrameter with a regular abab cdcd rhyme scheme. The choice of a metrical scheme can be, however, easily explained in the context of the poetic rivalry between the Cubo-Futurists and the Ego-Futurists. The iambic tetrameter with a feminine or dactylic caesura, rhythmical-syntactic parallelisms, alternating grammatical rhymes, and strong alliterations were widely used by Severyanin, particularly around 1912–13 (AIZLEWOOD 1989: 36; KHardzhiev 2006: 258–259, 273–274). One of the main Ego-Futurist postulates was "poiski novogo bez otvergania starogo" [searchings for the new without rejecting the old] (SEVERYANIN 1996: 36). As Nikolai Khardzhiev wrote, "Mayakovsky consciously renounced Severyanin's rhythmical system, adopting its elements and at the same time parodying it" (KHardzhiev 2006: 270).

However, the metrical allusion¹⁰ is not the only reference to Severyanin's poetics. The thematic allusion is also clearly part of a dialogue between the Ego-Futurist and the Cubo-Futurist. The word 'lili', declaimed as part of a simile "voi truby – kak budto lili" and not as part of an enjambment "lili / Lubov' i pokhot' med'iu trub", might be considered a reference to Severyanin's recurrent motif of a lily: "lilia likerov" [a lily of liqueurs] from

⁸ See Jack Hirschman's and Victor Erlich's English translation: "Bed sheets of water beneath a belly. / A white tooth ripped them into waves. / The howl of funnels – as if were pouring / love and lust through funnels' copper. – // In the cradles of inlets boats nestled / against the breasts of their iron mothers. / In the ears of deaf steamships / burned the earrings of anchors" (MAYAKOVSKY 1971: 1852).

⁹ Stern's translation was not based on the first edition of the poem in the collection *Sadok sudei II*. The Polish poet-translator did not indicate which later edition of the poem he was using.

¹⁰ On interesting analogies between Mayakovsky's early poems and Severyanin's meter see KHardzhiev 2006: 269–270.

Fioletovyi trans or “Shampanskogo v liliu!” [Champagne into a Lily] from the Bacchic *Shampanskii polonez* [Champagne Polonez] (1913) (SEVERYANIN 1999: 96). It might be argued that the use of homophony (‘lili’ meaning ‘lillies’ and ‘lil’ as ‘poured’) is not accidental considering parallel images in the Cubo-Futurist’s and the Ego-Futurist’s poems: a lily-shaped champagne glass – a lily-shaped funnel, champagne poured into a lily – love, and lust poured through the funnels. As one of the Russian critics pointed out, in Severyanin’s poetry, “feelings are often conveyed by a metaphor with a meaning of ‘flow’, ‘water’, which emphasizes completeness, the universality of the flow of sensations” (AKHMEDOVA 2008: 155). In the first edition of Mayakovsky’s poem (*Otplytie*) reference to Severyanin’s motif was even more visible in a synaesthetic simile: “Byl voi truby kak zapakh lilii / Lubov’ krichavshikh mediu trub”¹¹. It is also worth recalling that “the first Severyaninesque ‘brochure’ was *Ruchy v liliyakh* [Brooks Full of Lilies]” (1911) (MARKOV 2006: 63) and that the lily was an inherent attribute of Severyanin the poet. As historians of the Russian avant-garde wrote: He “captured the popular imagination and reached stardom with his slick pomaded hair parted in the middle; his melancholy, darkly circled eyes; his impeccable tails; and an ever-present lily in his hands” (LAWTON 1988: 22). In Severyanin’s *Shampanskii polonez* the lily motif is combined with the sea motif: “V shampanskoe liliu! Shampanskogo v liliu! / V moriakh Disgarmonii – maiak Unison!”¹² (SEVERYANIN 1999: 96). The plural ‘moria’ [seas] and the capitalization of the word: ‘Disgarmonia’ [Disharmony] create an aura of universal significance. Severyanin uplifts these notions into the realm of



Fig. 3: A caricature of Igor Severyanin from a newspaper “Vechernaia Moskva” (12th November 1932) (*Risunki i sharzhi na Igoria Severyanina*: online).

¹¹ [There was the howl of a funnel like the smell of lilies / shouting love through the funnels’ copper.]

¹² [Lily in champagne and champagne in a lily – / The lighthouse of oneness in a sea of Discord!] (Severyanin: online). See also Severyanin’s poem *Lilia v more* [A Lily in the Sea].

allegorical, metaphysical meanings. Mayakovsky literalizes Severyanin's lofty abstraction and makes the metaphor concrete, reversing its terms. It is the concept of maritime disharmony that is played out in Mayakovsky's *Port*, starting from the contrast of the regular rhythm conveying the waves' recurrent crashing on the shore and ending with the disharmonious combinations of images. Discord becomes the basic principle of the poem's theme. The aural maritime disharmony is slightly soothed by alliterations (the repeated "b" sound makes the words sound like the beating of boats against the current). Instead of the "poezokontsert" [poetry concert] of iambic tetrameters – the deafening sounds of copper funnels ("voi truby", "med'u trub", "oglokhshikh parokhodov"). As Anatolii Karpov observed, in Mayakovsky's poem "objects are compared not by similarity, but by contrast" (KARPOV 1960: 29). What could be further away than iron ships moored at docks and breastfed infants, lust and the deafening sound of ship horn? And yet dissimilarities intertwine into a vibrant and integrated image. The poem is an extended metaphor of lust, weaving together the semantics of the infantile (cradles, mothers' nipples), erotic (bedclothes, lust, nipples, glowing earrings, belly, ears), somatic (belly, ears, unendurable, deafening scream of the ships' sirens), industrial (steamboats, docks, anchors' chains, mooring posts, brass, funnels, the steamships' engines) and aquatic (waters, waves) (see BROWN 2015: 77; STAPANIAN 1986: 58). Elements of the maritime scenery are personified, animated, taking on a life of their own. Metaphors and instrumentation create a thrilling and overwhelming polisensory experience, conveying a sense of the dynamism of industrial modernity, which both intrigued and startled the avant-gardists.

It was precisely Severyanian features (iambic tetrameter with alternating grammatical rhymes and strong alliterations as well as thematic allusions) that were cleansed from Mayakovsky's poem by its Polish Futurist translator, Anatol Stern, as "Symbolist-Decadent adiposities" and "extravagant technical virtuosity" to achieve a "pure" version of Mayakovsky the Futurist (BALCERZAN 1971: 272–273). The irregular rhythm pattern of Stern's *Port* enhanced the original's sense of disharmony. What resulted after the withdrawal of Severyanin's metrical scheme can be described as an interlingual pastiche of Mayakovsky's Cubo-Futurist poetics, in which, as Julian Przyboś was later to point out, "a deafening scream is unleashed, the gigantomania of images tumbles down" (PRZYBOŚ 1963: 375). Stern, like Przyboś in his later Mayakovsky translations¹³, resorted to the rhetoric of hyperbole and considerably intensified Mayakovsky's "gigantophony", introducing amplifications: "łódki (...) garnęły się z krzykiem" [the boats **screamed** towards their docks], "parostatki-giganty" [steamboats-**giants**], the singular and thus monstrous glowing "kotwic kolczyk" [an earring of anchors] instead of the plural "earrings of anchors". The strategy of augmenting the imagery and emotional impact of the original was, however, unwittingly weakened by the disambiguating and thus trivializing explanation of the original metaphor of the "docks' nipples": "Łódki w kołyskach doków, do ich kantów –/ Żelaznych sutek garnęły się..." [Boats in their cradles of docks, **to their edges** –/ **iron nipples** were clinging...].

¹³ Julian Przyboś's translations of Mayakovsky's poems were insightfully analyzed by BALCERZAN 1998: 99–103.

In contrast to these de-Severyanizing and Cubo-Futurizing operations in *Port*, Stern's *Sędziowie* precisely reinforced the Ego-Futurist features to support the parodistic character of Mayakovsky's poem mocking the censorship in tsarist Russia.

Po Krasnomu moriu plyvut katorzhane,
trudom vygrebaia galeru,
rykom pokryv kandal'noie rzhan'ie,
orut o rodine Peru.
O raie Peru orut peruantsy,
gde pritsy, tantsy, baby
i gde nad ventsami tsetov pomerantsa
byli do nebes baobaby.
Banan, ananasy! Radostei gruda!
Vino v zapechatannoi posude...
No vot neizvestno zachem i otkuda
na Peru naperli sud'i!
I pritsy, i tantsy, i ikh peruankok
krugom oblozhili star'iami.
Glaza u sud'i – para zhestianok
mertsaiet v pomoinoi iame.
Popal pavlin oranzhevo-sinii
pod glaz iego strogii, kak post, –
i vylinia momental'no pavlinii
velikolepnyi khvost!
A vozle Peru letali po prerii
ptichki takie – kolibri;
sud'ia poimal i pukh i per'ia
bednoi kolibri vybril.
I net ni v odnoi doline nyne
gor, vulkanom goriashchikh.
Sud'ia napisal na kazhdoi doline:
"Dolina dlia nekuriashchikh".
V bednom Peru stikhi moi dazhe
v zaprete pod strakhom pytok.
Sud'ia skazal: "Te, chto v prodazhe,
tozhe spirtnoi napitok".
Ekvator drozhit ot kandal'nykh zvonov.
A v Peru besptich'ie, bezlyud'ie...
Lish', zlobno zabivshis' pod svody zakonov,
zhivut unlye sud'i.
A znaete, vse-taki zhal' peruantsa.
Zrya emu dali galeru.

Płynie po morzu Czerwonem więzienie,
Z trudem pchają więźniowie galerę
I zagłuszając wrzaskiem łańcuchów rzenie
Ryczą o kraju swym Peru.
O raju Peru ryczą opętańczo
Gdzie ptaki, gdzie tańczą, gdzie baby.
Gdzie nad uwieńczoną kwieciami pomarańczą
Pod błękit wzniosły się baobaby.
Banany! Ananasy! Radości stosy!
Wino w szczelnie zamkniętych naczyniach!
Aż wtem nie wiadomo skąd i po co, złe losy
Sędziów na Peru nasłały w złej godzinie.
I ptaki, i tańce, i nawet Peruanki,
Otoczyli kraj cały paragrafami,
Oczy sędziego są jak dwie blaszanki
Migocące w jamie z pomyjami.
Na pawie oranżowy, ogon lazurowy
Spojrzał z twarzą tępą i srogą,
I natychmiast wyblakł pawiowy
Przepyszny ogon!
A przy Peru w prerii, nie większe od much,
Ptaszki takie, kolibry, fruwały dowoli,
Sędzia je złapał, – i pierze i puch
Na biednych kolibrach wygoił.
I nie ma już w żadnej dolinie ninie
Gór wulkanem płonących.
Dolina dla niepalących.
Z biednego Peru wiersze me każe
Wyrzucić grożąc torturą.
Sędzia orzekł:
„Te, com widział w sprzedaży –
To alkohol pod kartek skórą”.
Równik drży w zgrzyty kajdanów spowity,
A w Peru wyludnienie, wyptaszenie, pustkowie.
Tylko, ze złością strzegąc zbiorów praw obfitych
Żyją przygnębieni sędziowie.
A wiecie? szkoda, że Peruńczykom,
Że im dano galerę, miast skwarów eteru!
Toć przeszkadzają sędziowie tańcom i krzykom,

Sud'i meshaiut i pritse, i tantsu,
i mne, i vam, i Peru.

(MAYAKOVSKY 1915: 1)¹⁴

I mnice, i wam, i Peru!
Transl. Anatol Stern

(MAJAKOWSKI 1921: 13)¹⁵

What distinguishes *Sud'ia* from Mayakovsky's other satirical poems from the period of his collaboration with the "Novyi Satirikon" is "an artful disguise of an exotic grotesque" (KHARDZHIEV 2006: 196). The original stichic poem is written in amphibrachic meter with a stable abab rhyme scheme and strong alliterations. The opening verses of the poem feature repeated sounds of "r", "ts", and "b". The steady, methodical rhythm of the poem imitates the relentless and monotonous movement of galley slaves' oars. It is not without reason that Khlebnikov gave Severyanin the nickname "Igor' Usyplanin" [Igor Soporificus] (HENRY 1992: 34). The use of rhythmic and syntactic parallelisms and lexical repetitions (e.g., "orut o rodine Peru. / O rae Peru orut peruantsy") highlights the semantic contrast between two segments of the poem. Whereas one segment describes the paradisiacal, colourful, and carefree life in the fictional country of Peru before the arrival of the judges, the other segment portrays the enslavement of the Peruvians after the arrival of the censors. Enumerations („ptitsy, tantsy, baby / (...) baobaby. / Banan, ananasy! (...) vino..."; "I ptits, i tantsy, i ikh peruanok...", "i pitse, i tantsu, / i mne, i wam, i Peru") express grief over the loss of the Peruvian paradise. The most striking feature of the poem is the Severyanin-esque poetic style used to describe the lost Peruvian paradise. This style is characterized by not only metrical features, such as the regular meter, symmetrical rhythm, syntactic parallelisms, grammatical rhymes, and strong alliterations, but also by the overall exotic entourage, including gastronomic, dance, botanic, and zoological motives. The poem features dances, wine, glassware, bananas, pineapples, baobabs, blossoming bitter orange trees, peacocks, and hummingbirds.

¹⁴ ["Convicts row their galley along/ over the sea in a sweltering crew/ covering the chain-clang with a snarling song/about their home – Peru.// About Peru, the flower of the planet/full of dances, birds, and love,/ where blossoms crown the green pomegranate/ and baobabs reach the sky above.// Bananas! Pineapples! Joy galore!/ Wine in sealed bottles shining through.../ But then, God knows where from and what for,/ judges overran poor Peru.// They came along and imposed their bans/ on birds, dances, and Peruvians' sweethearts;/ the judges' eyes glinted like old tin cans/ picked up by pavement sweepers.// A peacock painted orange and blue/ was caught by their eye, as strict as Lent;/ a moment, and off through its native Peru/ with his tail bleached white, the peacock went.// It's said in the prairies there once had been/ wee little birds — colibri they're called./ Well, the judges caught them and shaved them clean,/ down, feathers and all.// In none of the valleys today will you find/ live volcanoes, those wheezy croakers;/ the judges choked them by putting up signs:/ "VALLEY FOR NON-SMOKERS".// Even my poems, by the law's letter/ are banned in Peru. What for, do you think?/ The judges, you see, declared them "no better/ than alcoholic drink".// Shaking the equator, chain-gangs trudge.../ Poor people-less, birdless Peru!/ Only, scowling under the penal code, a judge/ survives, hearty and well-to-do.// Those galleys, — things could scarcely be worse!/ I pity Peruvians! don't you?/ Judges are a bane for dances and birds,/ for me, for you, for Peru." (MAYAKOVSKY 1972: 30–31)].

¹⁵ The translation annotated with the translator's ironic commentary: „This is a poem about Russian censors. The translator dedicates this translation to the Polish censors as an expression of his gratitude for their careful and tender care over him" (transl. T.B.-T.).



Fig. 4: The front page of "Novyi Satirikon" 1915, No. 9. A reproduction, public domain.

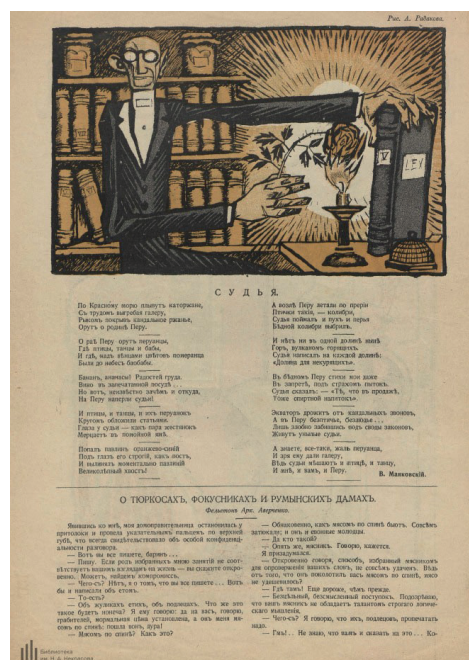


Fig. 5: Vladimir Mayakovsky's *Sud'ya* accompanied by an illustration by Aleksei Radakov ("Novyi Satirikon" 1915, No. 9, p. 1). A reproduction, public domain.

Stern's translation is composed of various metric feet that repeat themselves in changing order. The poem starts with a dactylic tetrameter catalectic in the first line, followed by trochees and amphibrachs. Sometimes, Stern introduces a different accent pattern in the half-lines before and after the caesura (in line 2, trochees and amphibrachs are used). The Polish Futurist poet-translator preserves the original alliterations (e.g., repetitions of "r": "Ryczą o kraju swym Peru. / O raju Peru ryczą opętańczo"), compound adjectives ("pavlin oranzhevo-sinii" – "pawi oranżowy, ogon lazurowy", "pavlinii velikolepnyi khvost" – "pawiony przepyszny ogon"), metaphors ("ventsy tsvetov pomerantsa" – "uwieńczona kwieciami pomarańcza") and enumerations describing the exoticism and elegance of the entourage: 'baobaby' [baobabs], 'banany' [bananas], 'ananasy' [pineapples], 'paw' [peacock]. The use of foreign words evokes additional associations, which may be related to food and exoticism. For instance, the Polish word 'oranżowy' (derived from the French word 'orange') means 'having the color of an orange,' but it is also associated with 'oranżada' (a sweet, carbonated drink) and 'oranzeria' (a greenhouse for exotic plants). Similarly, the word 'lazurowy,' meaning 'blue,' has its roots in the Latin word 'lazar' and is associated with the colour of exotic seas. The word 'przepyszny' means both 'beautiful,' 'ornate,' 'sophisticated,' and 'most delicious' and is often used to describe intricate and tasty dishes. Stern amplified the original exotic and mundane neologisms referring to the process of depopulation, desertion, and wilderness. 'Besptich'ie and 'bezlyud'ie were replaced by 'wyludnienie,' 'wypytaszenie,' 'pustkowicie,' emphasizing the concept of wilderness and desolation.

The description of the lost “Peruvian paradise” seems quite ordinary and stereotypical. The lyrical subject’s language is simple and childlike, using diminutives and colloquialisms (“A vozle Peru letali po prerii / ptichki takie – kolibri”, “A znaete, vse-taki zhal...”, “zrya”). The Polish translation captures the satirical nature of Mayakovsky’s poem accurately. The colloquial language contrasts sharply with the elegance of the exotic entourage. For parodistic purposes, Stern infused the translation with early Modernist poetic phrases. The Futurist catachresis “radości gruda” [the pile of joy] was transformed into “radość wiecznych wiosen” [the joy of eternal springs]. Similarly, the original classicizing phrase “Ekvator drozhit ot kandal’nykh zvonov”, attributed to the Decembrists (young Pushkin) paradigm, was replaced with “Kraj cały w zgrzyty kajdan spowity” [The whole country is shrouded in shackles’ grind], which is more characteristic of the paradigm of native Romanticism and Neo-Romanticisms (see BALCERZAN 1968a: 56).

While incorporating early Modernist elements in his translation, Stern also included some “purely” Cubo-Futurist innovations. A metabole “stikhi – spirtnoi napitok” [poems – an alcoholic drink] turned into a catachresis: “alkohol pod kartek skóry” [alcohol under the skin of pages]. The Polish Futurist poet-translator also intensified the emotional appeal of Mayakovsky’s imagery by replacing the original ‘orat’ [to bawl] with ‘ryczą opętańczo’ [to bawl insanely], which was consistent with the trend of intensifying Mayakovsky’s “gigantophony” (see BALCERZAN 1998: 99–103).

In the Light of the Electric Sun: Severyanin in the Style of Polish and Italian Futurists

Whereas the “older” Polish Futurist enhanced the characteristic features of Severyanin’s poetics in Mayakovsky’s *Sud’ia* for parodistic purposes, the “Youngest Warsaw Futurists”¹⁶ shifted the vectors and substantially “futurized” Severyanin’s poetics – this time in the manner of the Futurist Katarynka [The Barrel-organ] with its characteristic praise of technology and urban vitalism. The Polish version of *Eto bylo u moria. Poema-min’onet* [And It Passed by the Sea-Shore. Poem-mignonette]¹⁷ was published in *Fioletowe płuca. 7-ma jednodniówka futurystów warszawskich* [Violet Lungs. The Seventh One-Time Issue of the Warsaw Futurists] (1922) by Kazimierz Brzeski, the founder of the Futurist youth organization “Gong”, renamed to “The Warsaw Katarynka”. The translation was reprinted in Brzeski’s collection of poetry *Poezja buduaru* (1925) with an annotation: “A free translation from Igor Severyanin” (BRZESKI 1925: 17). Interestingly, Severyanin’s poem-mignonette had as many as five competitive Polish translations, including two Futurist ones¹⁸. The original *Eto bylo u moria. Poema-min’onet* and its two Futurist translations: Kazimierz Brzeski’s *Rzecz się działa nad morzem...* and Bruno Jasieński’s *To się stało nad morzem...* read as follows:

¹⁶ See JAWORSKI 2022: 7.

¹⁷ An English title proposed by DEUTSCH / YARMOLINSKY 1921: 156. It was the second Severyanin’s poem chosen by the Polish translators, after *Shampanskii polonez* mentioned earlier in this study.

¹⁸ The non-Futurist translations of Severyanin’s poem: by Andrzej Nullus (1915), Józef Czechowicz (1st edition: 1963) and Witold Dąbrowski (1971) are discussed in BEDNARCZYK 2021a.

Eto bylo u moria, gde azhurnaia pena,
Gde vstrechaetsia redko gorodskoi ekipazh...
Koroleva igrala – v bashne zamka – Shopena,
I, vnimaia Shopenu, polubil ieio pazh.

Bylo vse ochen' prosto, bylo vse ochen' miło:
Koroleva prosila pererezat' granat,
I dala polovinu, i pazha istomila,
I pazha polubila, vsia v motivakh sonat.

A potom otdavala', otdavala' grozovo,
Do voskhoda rabinei prospala gospozha...
Eto bylo u moria, gde volna biriuzova,
Gde azhurnaia pena i sonata pazha.
(SEVERYANIN 1999: 31)¹⁹

Rzecz się działa nad morzem gdzie z bałwanów arena
Żądna karet śródmiejskich rozrzuciła swą jaśń;
Wewnątrz zamku królowa grała smętnie Chopina,
I słuchając Chopina wnet pokochał ją paż.

Było wszystko tak prosto, było wszystko tak miło,
Poprosiła królowa przerznąć granat bez słów
I oddała połowę, aż mu serce zabiło,
I go wnet pokochała w trakcie sonat i snów;

Potem się oddawała, jakby w ręce indusów
Póki blask słońca rzucił elektryczną swą jaśń,
Rzecz się działa nad morzem gdzie bałwany z turkusów
Gdzie z azurów są piany, gdzie zakochał się paż.
transl. Kazimierz Brzeski
(SIEWIERIANIN [1922] 2022: 241)

To się stało nad morzem, tam gdzie kobalt i sjenna,
Gdzie nie widać przechodniów i pojazdów jest mniej,
Nocą grała królowa w baszcie zamku Szopena
I przy dźwiękach Szopena paż zakochał się w niej.

Wszystko było tak prosto, wszystko było tak miło.
Pani dała paziowi obrać jabłko u nóg
I kazała mu nadgryźć i do łez zamęczyła
I do łez zapragnęła w spazmach sonat i fug.

¹⁹ ["And it passed by the sea-shore, where the foam-laces flower, / Where the city barouches only rarely are seen. / There the queen played her Chopin in the high palace tower, / And there, listening to Chopin, the young page loved the queen. // And what passed there was simple, and what passed there was charming: / The fair page cut the pomegranate as red as her dreams, / Then the queen gave him half thereof, with graces disarming. / She outwearied and loved him in sonata-sweet themes. // Then she gave herself stormily, till night shut her lashes. / Till the sunset the queen lay, there she slept as a slave... / And it passed by the sea-shore where the turquoise wave washes, / Where sonatas are singing and where foam frets the wave. //"] (DEUTSCH / YARMOLINSKY 1921: 156)].

Całą noc oddawała się, oddawała furioso
 Niewolnicą królowę zastał w łożu jej świt...
 To się stało nad morzem, tam gdzie piana, jak ozon,
 Gdzie paziową sonatą grają fale o szczyt.
 transl. Bruno Jasiński
 (SIEWIERIANIN 1925: 27)

The original poem was published in Severyanin's *Gromokipiashchii kubok. Poezy* [The Thunder-Seething Goblet. Poesas] (1913) and fell into the “closed circle of boudoir-gastro-nomic topics” (KHARDZHIEV 2006: 291) typical of the Ego-Futurist. Its subtitle suggests a hybrid genre. A ‘mignonette’ (a French seasoning traditionally served with raw oysters or a pattern of tiny flowers in 18th French printed fabrics) is a variation of the Old French triolet, an original verse form with a fixed structure, created by Severyanin. In a strophic arrangement with eight lines, the first and second lines are repeated with slight modifications as the seventh and eighth lines and the entire poem is connected by two or three rhymes. In the poem *Eto bylo u moria...*, the genre form is a hybrid of a ‘mignonette’ and a “poezokon-tsert”. The poem consists of three four-line stanzas with an abab rhyme scheme and female rhymes in the odd-numbered lines and male rhymes in the even-numbered lines. The first

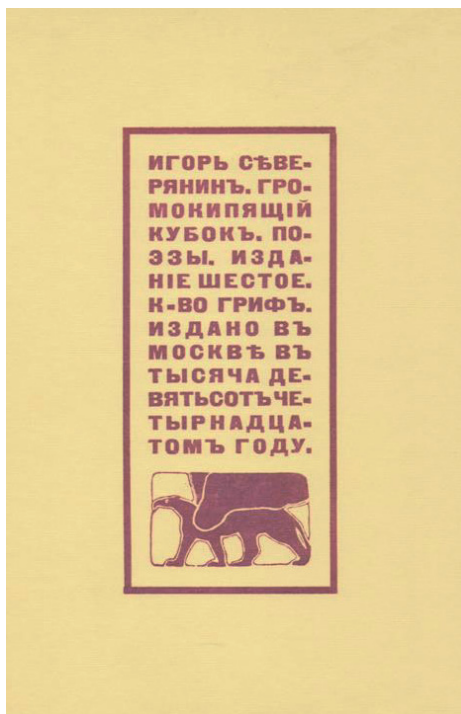


Fig. 6: Cover of Igor Severyanin's *Gromokipiashchii kubok. Poezy*, Moskva: Grif 1913. A reproduction, public domain.

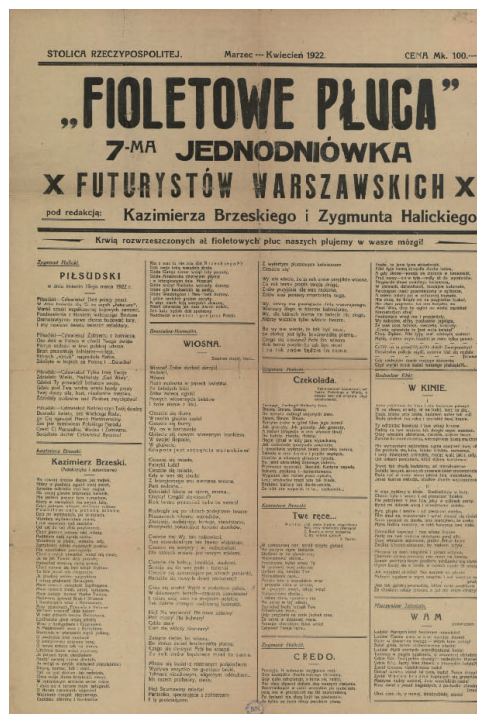


Fig. 7: *Fioletowe płuca. 7-ma jednodniówka futurystów warszawskich* [Violet Lungs. The Seventh One-Time Issue of the Warsaw Futurists] ed. by Kazimierz Brzeski and Zygmunt Halicki (1922). A reproduction, public domain.

verse is partially repeated as the eleventh, and the second as the twelfth (see BEDNARCZYK 2021a: 73). The poem is an example of a four-foot anapest with a hypercatalexis before the caesura and in the clausula of odd verses. It should be noted that the waltz rhythm, with the characteristic “speeding up” before the actual accent, is preserved in both Polish Futurist translations. Severyanin’s poem is distinctive for its syntactic parallelisms and lexical repetitions (e.g., “Było vse ochen’ prosto, bylo vse ochen’ milo”; “A potom otdavalas’, otdavalas’ grozovo”). The syntactic structure of the right hemistich is repeated in the left hemistich of the next line (lines 1 and 2, 7 and 8, 11 and 12) (see BEDNARCZYK 2021a: 73).

Kazimierz Brzeski removed the subtitle that revealed Severyanin’s penchant for sophisticated, synesthetic lyrical genres such as nocturnes, sinfoniettas, berceuse, romances, intermezzo, grandiozas, overtures, habanera, rondo, rondolettos, fantasy, and serenade (see AKHMEDOVA 2008: 156). He changed the stanzaic arrangement to a stichic one while preserving the melodious rhythm of the anapestic metrical pattern of the poem.

The Ego-Futurist’s secluded sea beach, where urban carriages are rarely seen, is transformed into an intensely lit circus / amphitheatre arena which casts its glow (“arena (...) rozrzuciła swą jaśń”) and the sun’s radiance spreads its electric light (“blask słońca rozrzucił elektryczną swą jaśń”). Brzeski “estranged” the witty fairy tale about a queen falling in love with her page and came up with the image of an extravagant Futurist circus spectacle waiting for a wide city audience. The arena in blinding electric light before a show resembles Stanisław Młodożeniec’s “w cyrku” [in the circus] from the *Kreski i futureski* [Marks and Futuresques] poetic collection (1921):

jasno... ślepiście...
tyle lamp...
(...)
pośrodku wielkie puste koło...

(MŁODOŻENIEC 1973: 54)

The seashore thus becomes a place of a spectacular show of electric lighting. The image of an industrialized celestial body: “blask słońca rzucił elektryczną swą jaśń” [the light of the sun cast its electric glow] is reminiscent of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti’s Futurist postulate: “we will sing of the vibrant nightly fervor of arsenals and shipyards blazing with violent electric moons” (MARINETTI [1909] 1973: 22), Libero Altomare’s poetic vision of an “electric sun” of “Proezioni” (ALTOMARE et al. 1912: 84) and Tytus Czyżewski’s exclamation: “Niech żyje (...) instynkt elektryczny wszechświata” [Long live the electrical instinct of the universe] (CZYŻEWSKI [1921] 2017: 133). At the same time the lexical choice of “jaśń” may be regarded as a nod to the Polish Decadence. “Jaśń” belonged to the favourite poetic vocabulary of Young Poland’s writers: Zenon Przesmycki’s translations of French, Belgian and Italian poets (e.g. “złota szczęścia jaśń”, “jaśń daleka, złota”²⁰, MIRIAM 1921: 226), Kazimierz Przerwa-Tetmajer (e.g., “jaśń świetlana”²¹ – see KĘSIKOWA 1988: 162), Stanisław Przybyszewski (e.g., “srebrna jaśń, cicha

²⁰ [golden glow of happiness, distant golden glow]

²¹ [luminous glow]

jaśń światła drącego ciężkie opony mgły”²² – PRZYBYSZEWSKI 1900: 68), and Jan Lemański’s translation of Joseph Conrad’s *chiaroscuro* description of the sea (“słoneczna jaśń połyskiwała zimno w białem ugrzywieniu czarnych bałwanów”²³ – CONRAD 1923: 68) and clouds (“cienie tułacznych chmur sunęły przez słoneczne równiny, (...) a w pogoni gnała za nimi jaśń słoneczna, sypiąc lotnemi płatkami blasku”²⁴ – CONRAD 1923: 200). Brzeski’s image of the arena of curly waves casting their glow (“z bałwanów arena (...) rozrzuciła swą jaśń”) corresponds to Lemański’s image of a sunshine gleaming on the curls of waves.

Back in the Boudoir: Enhancing Severyanin’s Style according to... Mayakovsky’s Taste

While Brzeski incorporated elements of Polish and Italian Futurisms in his translation of the Ego-Futurist’s poem, Bruno Jasieński’s translation of the anapaestic *poeza-mignonette* focused on reintroducing and reinforcing barbarisms and exoticisms characteristic of Severyanin’s poetics. Interestingly, it was precisely these features of Severyanin’s poetics that had been previously praised by Mayakovsky as akin to Cubo-Futurist transrational sound experiments (KHARDZHIEV 2006: 244). Jasieński’s 1925 *To się stało nad morzem...* was published in the illustrated magazine “Winnica” which was dedicated to women in life, art, and anecdote.

Jasieński’s *To się stało nad morzem...* draws attention to Severyanin’s “predilection for ephemerally elegant, modish ‘western’ words” (Henry 1992: 34). The poem is adorned with foreign lexemes such as ‘sienna’, ‘kobalt’ [cobalt], ‘ażur’ [openwork], ‘spazmy’ [spasms], ‘sonaty’ [sonatas], ‘fugi’ [fugues], ‘ozon’ [ozone], ‘furioso’. Although the Polish poet-translator did not preserve the poem’s subtitle with genre definition, he highlighted Severyanin’s fondness for musical genres. The original phrase “motivy sonat” [motives of sonatas] was amplified and enhanced by a synaesthetic (somatic-aural) metaphor “spasms of sonatas and fugues”. The neological adverb ‘grozovo’ based on the root ‘groza’ [thunderstorm] was replaced with ‘furioso’, an Italian musical term that refers to a wild, furious, frantically rushing manner of performing a composition. It can be said that Jasieński’s translation is emotionally and stylistically richer than the original. The Polish Futurist intensified lexical expressions, as exemplified by the verses: “i pazha istomila, / I pazha polubila” [She outwearied and loved the page] which became “do łez zamęczyła / I do łez zapragnęła w spazmach...” [she tortured the page to tears / And she desired to tears in spasms...] and adopted a pastiche approach to the original. It is worth noting that Bruno Jasieński and the Cracov avant-garde poet Julian Przyboś will soon be translating Mayakovsky in a similar “expressionist” style (see BALCERZAN 1998: 99–103; BRZOSTOWSKA-TERESZKIEWICZ 2016: 185–191). However, that is a story for another time and place.

²² [a silver glow, a silent glow of light shaking the heavy tires of fog]

²³ “The sunshine gleamed cold on the white curls of black waves” (CONRAD 1928: 76).

²⁴ “shadows of homeless clouds ran along the sunny plains, (...) and the sunshine pursued them with patches of running brightness” (CONRAD 1928: 245).

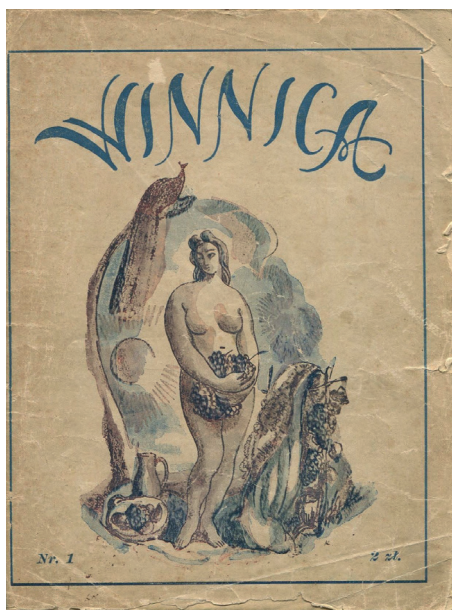


Fig. 8: „Winnica”’s cover designed by Feliks Kowarski (Lwów–Warszawa: Towarzystwo Wydawnicze „Ateneum” 1925, No. 1) (own archive).



*To się stało nad morzem, tam gdzie kobalt i sjenna,
Gdzie nie widać przechodniów i pojazdów jest mniej,
Nocą grała królowa w baszcie zamku Szopena
I przy dźwiękach Szopena paż zakochał się w niej.*

*Wszystko było tak prosto, wszystko było tak miło.
Pani dała pażowi obrać jabłko u nóg
I kazała mu nadgryźć i do łez zamęrzyła
I do łez zapragnęła w szpasmach sonat i fug.*

*Całą noc oddawała się, oddawała furioso,
Niewolnicę królowej zastał w łóżu jej świt...
To się stało nad morzem, tam gdzie piana, jak ozon,
Gdzie pażową sonatą grają fale o szczyt.*

przełożył

B. J.



Fig. 9: Bruno Jasieński's translation of Igor Severyanin's poem (the name of the author of the illustration has not been indicated) (own archive).

Intertwined Styles of the Avant-Garde

During the initial phase of Cubo-Futurism's introduction in Poland, there were inter-stylistic dialogues that mainly extended the rivalry between the poetic styles of Severyanin and Mayakovsky. Later, it became a struggle between the poetic features of the Russian Ego- and Cubo-Futurists and the creative personalities of the Polish poets-translators who co-created Polish Futurism. Furthermore, the translations allowed for the inclusion of styles of other Polish and Italian Futurists, such as Marinetti, Młodożeniec, and Czyżewski. The translations conveyed the ideas of the Eastern European avant-garde, which encouraged and strengthened indigenous poetics while absorbing the constantly changing target styles and poetic fashions. The inter-stylistic dialogues blurred the distinction between original and translational modes of literary activity, demonstrating an increased degree of self-reflexivity characteristic of Modernist literary translation. They also showed the superimposition of creative subjectivities of the original and the target poets. The translations were usually mixed with original poems in art oriented magazines and ephemeral publications, such as *Fioletowe pluca*. In a very significant way for modernist practitioners of literary translation, Brzeski's version of Severyanin's *Eto było u moria...* was nonchalantly dropped in the magazine among the "original" poems of the "Youngest Warsaw Futurists". Translations played an important role in catalyzing and stimulating change in the target historical-literary processes. They were a highly sensitive gauge for assessing the evolution of indigenous poetic styles.

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