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Olga Tokarczuk is IN

A Dialogue between James W. Underhill and Adam Głaz on Filtering Olga Tokarczuk's "Tender Worldview" into English during her Nobel Lecture

> I also owe a great deal to my translators. They will continue to be the most attentive readers of everything I write. They catch every little inconsistency, and they'll kick up a fuss, about every mistake I make.[1]

1. Whence the dialogue?

When Olga Tokarczuk received the Nobel Prize in Literature for 2018, and especially when she gave her memorable Nobel lecture on the tender narrator, one of us (Adam Głaz[2]) was understandably jubilant, the other

[1] "Olga Tokarczuk: Nobel Prize banquet speech", [online] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YXV85kILiu8, visited 1 November 2020.

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(James W. Underhill[3]) was intrigued and began to discover what this Polish author had to say, as well as why what she said may be relevant to the world at large. Then, Adam's enthusiasm somewhat waned when he read the English translation of Tokarczuk's speech, which raised a number of questions. This provided ground for the two of us, translators, translation scholars, and translation teachers, to engage in a dialogue about Olga's writing and the way she is translated, but also about translation, literature, and many related issues. We now gladly share some of the thoughts we have exchanged, as we believe it is through dialogue that ideas are born and forged – especially as James's external perspective does not quite coincide with Adam's insider view. But in and out are always complex notions.

After James's views on Olga's position in her native Poland in this day and age (Section 2) and his synthesis of her Nobel lecture (Section 3), we invite the readers, in Section 4, to listen to our conversation on that lecture and on its English translation. If some of the readers choose to join us in that ongoing dialogue, nothing would make us happier.

2. Poland's Olga and Olga's Poland (James W. Underhill)

Poland is undergoing a vital and fundamental revision of its identity as a sovereign nation and as a Member State of the European Union. As a frontier state with Ukraine, which is being treated as a buffer state by both Western Europe and by the vast Russian Federation, Poland's fate is a major European concern. Ultimately, Poland's identity, as well as its contribution to Europe and to the world, is of crucial importance for Europeans and world citizens alike.

In many respects, however, the political situation has come to look bleak from both within and from without Poland. After a generation-long period of nearly unanimous Eurocentrism, many Poles have taken a step back and are now taking stock of their culture, their political standing, and their influence in geopolitics and European politics. One thing Europeans

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[3] James W. Underhill is Director of the Rouen Ethnolinguistics Project in France. He is also the organizer of a series of conversations with Anna Wierzbicka. See "Rouen Ethnolinguistics Project", [online] https://rep.univ-rouen.fr, visited 1 November 2020; "In Conversation with Anna Wierzbicka – Living in Languages", [online] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v7-suGuCc5o, visited 1 November 2020.

forgot when the Eastern Bloc opened up was that the transformation came about largely thanks to the sustained mobilization of the *Solidarność* movement, augmented by Pope John Paul II's tenacious negotiation with Communist leadership, at a time when around 93% of the Polish community identified themselves as Catholic.

At this crucial moment, when the Poles are reappraising their identity, it is of monumental historical import that Olga Tokarczuk was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. It is not insignificant that it was Sweden, Poland's Baltic neighbour and a one-time major European power-broker, that honoured Olga and Poland. She was welcomed in Swedish, Polish and English.[4] The choice is important for Poland's status within Europe: after two relatively recent laureates (the poets Czesław Miłosz in 1980 and Wisława Szymborska in 1996), Tokarczuk was ushering in a new era of cultural and intellectual influence, which she did by taking an ethical stance. In her Nobel lecture [Tokarczuk 2019a[5]], Olga stood up for human values and the creative force of the imagination. Sweden listened and invited the world to listen with them. In this sense, it was a great encounter between self-respecting, open-minded Europeans, who were coming together to imagine what they can share when they leave ignorance and prejudice behind. This is the spirit of Ryszard Kapuściński, the Polish journalist who argues that Others must be regarded as partners in dialogue and discussion [see Kapuściński 2006/2009].

It must be recognized, nonetheless, that Olga Tokarczuk is not universally admired; she has her detractors. The English Wikipedia extols her for her merits but by the third paragraph it is already stressing the contentious nature of her work:

> Tokarczuk is a leftist, a vegetarian, an atheist, and a feminist. She has been criticized by some groups in Poland as unpatriotic, anti-Christian and a promoter of eco-terrorism. She has denied the allegations, has described herself

[4] "Olga Tokarczuk: Nobel Prize banquet speech", *op. cit*.

[5] Hereinafter: NLP, short for Nobel Lecture in Polish. The Polish version is now available in print in a collection of essays [Tokarczuk 2020a] but we will be referring to the generally available online version. It is interesting that the French translation of this collection [*eadem* 2020b] appeared before the Polish one. As this was being written (March 2021), the English version was still not available (apart from the translation of the Nobel speech, online).

as a "true patriot" and has said that groups criticizing her are xenophobic and damage Poland's international reputation.[6]

Western European press are unlikely to find Tokarczuk's stance objectionable, but many in the 93%-strong club of "Polish patriots" are not altogether convinced that Olga is one of theirs. In the more traditional sectors of society, she kindles local resentments, including in her home village of Krajanów and the nearby town of Nowa Ruda on the Czech-Polish border. The Nowa Ruda Patriot's Association, for example, demanded that the Town Council revoke her honorary citizenship, because it claimed she had "tarnished the good name of the Polish Nation".[7]

In this sense, Olga Tokarczuk must be understood as an Outsider in her home town. Her admirers and advocates would probably argue that she has a unique Outsider perspective, her own voice, and a very personal vision of what it means to be human. And now, thanks to Sweden and the Nobel Prize, she had the opportunity to share her vision of humanity and literature. Olga the outsider is in. Inside. At the very centre of the literary academy. Poland and its contradictions were about to be put on stage and played out by this unique person in a strategically political moment in literary history. For that reason, it is crucial to understand exactly what she said, what words and expressions she used, and the very tone and timbre of her voice. Olga Tokarczuk would be speaking of tenderness, caring, and writing about people to make us care for each other.

3. Olga Tokarczuk's Nobel lecture (James's perspective)

Inevitably, translation comes to the fore here, as the medium by which the foreign can be grasped and assimilated. How we respond to Olga Tokarczuk depends not only on nations and convictions, patriotism and literary power; it depends on whether we understand Polish and how Tokarczuk invents her Polish in a unique and gifted way.

In her speech, eight main principles are outlined and briefly explored:

1. "The world is made of words", she affirms [Tokarczuk 2019b: 2[8]]. However, to Olga's mind: "Today our problem lies – it seems – in the

[6] "Olga Tokarczuk", [online] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olga_Tokarczuk, visited 20 March 2021.

[7] *Ibidem*.

[8] Hereinafter: NLE, short for Nobel Lecture in English.

fact that we do not yet have ready narratives not only for the future, but even for a concrete now, for the ultra-rapid transformations of today's world. We lack the language, we lack the points of view, the metaphors, the myths, and new fables" [NLE: 3].

2. She celebrates our age, a democratic age in which there have never been so many polyphonic first person narratives.
3. She is open to contemporary art forms and she critically appraises the way TV series explore new narratives more relevant for our lives, our new shared reality.
4. But Olga Tokarczuk insists that we need to be able to bind together the fragments of our world with empathy and, as she puts in, with tenderness. Storytelling and novel writing are fundamental for exploring this human ability.
5. Writers give form and meaning to experience by organizing incidents into chains of events. And that means that ultimately, as Aristotle argued: "Fiction is always a kind of truth" [NLE: 11].
6. Olga Tokarczuk is not pessimistic but she does recognize that "there is something wrong with our world […] The world is dying, and we are failing to notice. We fail to see that the world is becoming a collection of things and incidents, a lifeless expanse in which we move around lost and lonely" [NLE: 16].
7. Olga dreams of a "fourth-person narrator" capable of encompassing each character's perspective. Her ideal form of prose would assimilate and internalize experience with a tenderness that transforms the world from a mass of fragments into a living reality we can respond to. As she puts it: "When I write, I have to feel everything inside myself. I have to let all the living beings and objects that appear in the book go through me, everything that is human and beyond human, everything that is living and not endowed with life" [NLE: 23-24].
8. Tenderness, she argues, is the art of personifying, bringing people, things, and the world as a whole back to life for others.

The text was translated by two highly renowned and successful translators, Jennifer Croft and Antonia Lloyd-Jones. That's where the problems begin, however. When Adam expressed his misgivings over the translation, I listened. Adam does not make idle criticisms. And when he has misgivings, you know they are not going to be of the usual kind we expect from pedantic native speakers who feel that all the truth and the charm, all the

depth and the meaningful associations of the mother tongue are being betrayed by the translation. As a translator and teacher of translation, Adam was reacting to something far more fundamental, far more meaningful.

4. James W. Underhill and Adam Głaz in conversation about Olga Tokarczuk

JWU: What were your misgivings, Adam? How much of Olga is "lost in translation"? Do you feel that the loss was inevitable?
AG: I'm afraid quite a lot is lost. Olga Tokarczuk has a message that she feels is vital for her audience and the world at large. But she's above all a writer, a master of words, so her message and her form are one: she's talking about the tender narrator but she actually is one herself. This is palpable in every phrase of the original Polish lecture – much of it is lost in the English. But there are also good things about the translation so whatever was lost in other places could probably have been avoided too.

JWU: But as I understand it, the Swedish Academy took the pains to ensure it was Olga Tokarczuk's translators who translated her speech. Thanks to them, her novels are known to English speakers and to those who read in English. Antonia Lloyd-Jones is one of the translators of Poland's most famous reporter-journalist, Ryszard Kapuściński. Without her translations, I must point out, I would not be able to read Kapuściński.
AG: The Academy's choice was not only perfect, it was in fact the only one that made sense. But here comes the disappointment: one has the right to expect top quality from top translators, especially on such an important occasion and involving a top author. As I say, there are many fine fragments in the translation but there are enough shortcomings to make us regret that so much of the finesse in the original simply fades away.

JWU: We'll come back to those shortcomings in a moment but we need to have some background first. You stress the importance of this acceptance speech. To quote one author, it provides "an opportunity for the laureate to perform as a public intellectual, a 'philosopher' of sorts" [Salazar 2009: 373].
AG: Yes. As Salazar points out, the Nobel lecture of laureates in literature has been compared to the inaugural lecture of a professor assuming a chair. It teaches, marks out directions, and shows the way. It is assumed that the

message in the speech should be consistent with the laureate's worldview as she (or he) presents it in their work – and it is crucial that this message is conveyed in the translation.

JWU: But what do you mean by worldview? And why does that make things tricky when it comes to expounding Olga Tokarczuk's worldview?
AG: Because Tokarczuk herself considers the novel to be a process. Writing changes the writer: the same author of two novels ten years apart is *not* the same. And the reader, too, has a say in what the novel means: "The novel is […] that place where the author and the reader jointly try to agree on the world" [Tokarczuk 2001: 15, trans. A.G.].

JWU: In the nineteenth century novel, the author has a voice, a moral position, a stance, a worldview. In Balzac's novels, Dickens' novels, Tolstoy's novels, there is always a clear-cut authorial position. And so, many readers expect a definitive personality, a firm political stance, a stable narrator, and a coherent worldview in Olga's work. What do they actually find?
AG: Another tricky point. Bakhtin [1929/1984] showed that novels are inherently polyphonic. Authors also try out ideas, they want to see "what they look like" when written. They pique, provoke, and pretend – in that sense they are often unreliable [Sosnowski 2020]. And yet, "sentences from specific books […] overlap and rhyme with those from the others" [*ibidem*: 161, trans. A.G.]. This also seems to be the case with Tokarczuk.

JWU: For example?
AG: Take the environment and animal rights, mentioned in the lecture but explored in depth in *Drive Your Plough Over the Bones of the Dead* [Tokarczuk 2009/2018]. On the other hand, her lecture is mostly about narration: after all, this is a literary prize. Tokarczuk appreciates first-person narration but ultimately finds it limiting. And we have this protagonist in *The Books of Jacob* who laments: "I blow into my own flames and kindle the embers of my own self […]. And what do I get? Me, me, me: a deplorable situation of a prisoner locked by mistake in a house of mirrors" [*eadem* 2014: 325, trans. A.G.]. Instead, Olga longs for a tender fourth-person narrator, who would embrace and control both the singularity of the narrative and the universality of its message. Jenta, the-one-who-sees-all from the same novel, comes close to that. Or take the depersonalized "pure sight" from the beginning of *House of Day, House of Night* [*eadem* 1998/2002].

JWU: You claim that storytelling for Olga Tokarczuk is something of world importance. How so?
AG: It's the telling of the story that "upholds the world in existence" [NLE: 17]. "Whatever happens but is not told, ceases to exist and dies" [NLE: 3]. Again, in *The Books of Jacob*, Tokarczuk makes one of her protagonists proclaim: "That which is not talked about, no longer exists. […] Such is the power of the word: if there is no word, the world disappears too" [Tokarczuk 2014: 444, trans. A.G.]. Maybe this isn't terribly original but it impinges on human existence when the writer asks: "Why is it that I am, to begin with?" [*eadem* 2001: 48, trans. A.G.]. Is it because someone is telling my story, or is telling me as a story? Or is it because I'm telling it, a story of myself?

JWU: Ok, Adam, remember, I'm Scottish, I am making an effort here. When you speak of Olga Tokarczuk's relation to being, you claim it's an "I am here" stance. Can you elaborate on that?
AG: Yes. Take "here I am" (in the original Polish: *jestem*), which Tokarczuk calls, in my rendering, "the most important and astonishing expression of all" [NLP: 2, trans. A.G.]. Indeed, as cosmologists ask, why is there anything at all, rather than nothing? With *jestem*, not only do I exist, I actually know I do – *je pense, donc je suis*. In the Bible, this is the name of God: "I am who I am" (Exodus 3:14). It is from God's "I am" that the existence of everything and everyone else comes forth.

JWU: But where does this *jestem–I-am-here* experience manifest itself in her novels?
AG: In *Flights* [Tokarczuk 2007/2017], or in fact in its Polish original *Bieguni*, *jestem* is pivotal. It's used as the title of the first and one of the last episodes, almost like the alpha and the omega; it's the opening word in the book. First, it comes from a very young girl, discovering her own existence, somewhat to her own surprise, in a still and solitary setting, the peculiar beginning of a life in flight. In that other, near-final episode, *jestem* marks the irrelevance of a traveller's or the flight's actual location; what matters is that I *exist here* (wherever *here* actually is) and everything else springs forth from this fact.

JWU: This leads us to Olga Tokarczuk's keyword, tenderness.

AG: The tender narrator seeks universal truth and can track down "the incredible connections between things that seem to be far apart" [NLE: 17]. Tokarczuk practises what she preaches: *House of Day, House of Night* [Tokarczuk 1998/2002] consists of stories of homes, houses, their histories, the histories of the people that have lived in them; *Flights* [*eadem* 2007/2017] is a collection of apparently unconnected stories of very different lives – and yet both inquire into general truths about homes and a life on the move. Or *Ostatnie historie* [*eadem* 2004], as yet untranslated into English – this one deals with the nature of dying through three apparently unconnected stories of connected people.

JWU: That's an ambitious concept. How did she introduce that to her speech?
AG: Tokarczuk looks at the world and links the conquest of America with later developments in Europe, including Swedish-Polish relations. She proposes captivating analogies between the macro- and micro-worlds: "our cardiovascular system is like the system of a river basin, the structure of a leaf is like a human transport system, the motion of the galaxies is like the whirl of water flowing down our washbasins. Societies develop in a similar way to colonies of bacteria" [NLE: 21] – even if these analogies can be questioned, it's the inquiry that counts, and the ability to see a larger picture. All of this requires tenderness.

JWU: And now let's get down to what interests both of us as translators. You praise the translators but you have objections to their work. Isn't that a bit paradoxical?
AG: As I say, the choice of the translators, Jennifer Croft and Antonia Lloyd-Jones, was perfect: they had translated Tokarczuk before, they know her "message to the world", and can be assumed to have good rapport with the author. This is important. Piotr Blumczynski [2016: 133] asks: "What if translation were, in the first place, an interpersonal relation?". In other words, we translate the author, rather than their texts.

JWU: Do we? I tend to believe we always translate a poem, not poetry. The poem speaks, and if you can make your translation speak too, people will be able to hear it. You cannot do this by simply translating "poetry".
AG: I know that that's your message in the book you wrote on verse and versification [Underhill 2016]. But I think there's no contradiction here.

Blumczynski's point is that the author has a message, and they make it known through texts. And so, when we translate, we're always responding to someone expressing themselves, not through abstract "poetry" or "literature", but always via the text – and therefore by dealing with the text we inevitably deal with the author.

JWU: What do you think the translators convey successfully into English in Olga's speech?
AG: There are many good points. Let's take what I'd call "alternating alliterative effects":

(1) the vegetation consumed vast quantities of carbon dioxide [NLE: 18]
[v] (*vegetation*) – [k] (*consumed*) – [v] (*vast*) – [k] (*quantities*) – [k] (*carbon*) – [k] (*dioxide*)
(2) So Sweden turned its greedy gaze southward [NLE: 19]
[s] (*so*) – [s] (*Sweden*) – [g] (*greedy*) – [g] (*gaze*) – [s] (*southward*)

This foregrounding effect has been added, it isn't there in the Polish. What is it for? As Elżbieta Tabakowska has suggested to me in an e-mail, perhaps we have here the iconicity principle of "more form–more meaning": attention is drawn to the volume of carbon dioxide or to the intensity of Sweden's greed.

Another example involves agency. Here's the same fragment again, now in Polish and English:

(3a) *Szwecja* ***zwróciła*** *więc łakomy wzrok na południe, wdając się w wojny z Polską (zwłaszcza że zamarzł Bałtyk, przez co łatwo było się przezeń przeprawić armii)* […] [NLP: 19]

(3b) So Sweden **turned** its greedy gaze southward, embarking on war against Poland (especially as the Baltic Sea had frozen, **making it easy to march an army across it**) […] [NLE: 19]

In Polish, Sweden is first an agent (*zwróciła* 'turned') but then it is not, because *łatwo było się przezeń przeprawić armii* is an impersonal construction with only a shade of agency attributed to the army: "it was easy for the army to march across it". In English, Sweden is an agent all along: it both turns its greedy gaze towards Poland and marches its army across the Baltic Sea. This acquires special significance in a speech given in Stockholm. Tokarczuk's message seems to have been augmented by her

translators. They seem to be affirming: we aren't afraid of facing difficult and sensitive aspects in history.

JWU: You quote our dear friend Elżbieta Tabakowska, the UNESCO Scholar for Translation in Kraków. How does she apprehend Olga Tokarczuk's stance, and what does she value in her perspective? What qualities does she suggest the translator needs to be able to convey her perspective?
AG: These are examples of what Tabakowska [2020] calls the "tender translator", by analogy to Tokarczuk's tender narrator. But the tenderness isn't always to be found there in the English version.

JWU: Let's look at some concrete examples.
AG: One will directly relate to *jestem*, which we've already mentioned. In the Polish original of *Flights*, there's a repetition of *jestem* in these salient first and near-final episodes; in English, we have constructions that produce a syntactic near-mirror-image effect: *Here I am – I'm here*. The English usage is more than existential: it's also locative, spatial, as in Italian *c'è* and *ci sono*, German *dasein*, or Ancient Greek *einai* [see Kahn 2004]. In fact, according to *The Oxford English Dictionary* [1991: 3], the primary sense of *be* was 'to occupy a place', then the existential sense was abstracted away from it: 'to be somewhere, no matter where […], to have a place among existing things'. In short, "[t]o be is to be located" [Lakoff 1987: 518].

So in the English *Flights*, *here* in the first instance (*Here I am*) is a partly grammaticalized locative deictic, implicitly locative and more explicitly existential; in the second instance (*I'm here*), *here* is an adverbial of place, more strongly locative, even if "egocentrically" locative: I am here and so this is the very centre of the universe. No doubt the rendering of *jestem* in the lecture should take into account *Flights*, Olga's only novel that she mentions by title in her speech. But the translators render it as *I am*, which does no justice to *Flights*. Instead, how about *Here I am*?

JWU: Tokarczuk is a mastermind at inventing other worlds peopled by characters that we can empathise with. But she also explores absence, the people we miss and the ways our feelings of missing them take form and take hold of us. How does she handle this?
AG: There's an intricate web of senses in the talk of the Polish *tęsknić* (verb) and *tęsknota* (noun), apparently untranslatable Polish cultural keywords [see Wierzbicka 1986: 587-588]. Two meanings are involved here:

missing someone (*tęsknić*/*tęsknota* ***za***) and longing for someone (*tęsknić*/*tęsknota* ***do***). They are distinguished by means of a different preposition; in English, these are different words.

JWU: Am I right in understanding that there is a distinction here between missing someone lost and longing for someone who can still be found or contacted?
AG: Precisely. Tokarczuk maintains this distinction very consistently. True, the translators do use both *miss* or *long for* but without the same consistency. In a conversation that Tokarczuk recalls between herself as a little girl and her mother, the mother says: "Jeżeli się ***do*** *kogoś tęskni*, to on już jest" [NLP: 2]. This could be rendered as "If you *long for* someone, they are already here" because it's a feeling for someone who is "somewhere there" in the future, although not yet here – by *longing for* them we make them be. Unfortunately, the translators use *miss*: "*Missing* a person means they're there" [NLE: 2].
Later in the talk Tokarczuk recalls when, as a child, she listened to fairy tales being read to her. This opened for her a world of conscious, feeling, talking objects, such as the old teapot from a Hans Christian Andersen story…

JWU: I believe for her fairy tales are a main doorway to the imagination, a formative experience for young readers and writers.
AG: Right. In her talk she says: *tęsknię* ***do*** *tamtego świata od imbryka* [NLP: 17] – this is rendered just fine: "I *long for* that other world, the world of the teapot" [NLE: 17]. Notice that Olga is very careful, or tender, here: in both places (the mother-daughter conversation and the teapot) she uses *tęsknić* ***do***, so that the person (that is, Tokarczuk herself) or the item (teapot) can be actualized through longing and imagination. But because of the mistranslation in the first instance (*miss* instead of *long for*) the English audience cannot make this connection: the web of associations so tenderly woven in Polish doesn't arise.

JWU: Tenderness is a universal question. But there is also a gender question here, and as a feminist, Tokarczuk is addressing specifically women's questions.
AG: Yes, but it's also a question of grammar and grammatical gender, specifically the use of pronouns. Unfortunately, the English audience don't

get that. If you look at the first few pages of the lecture, there's a lot of confusion. On p. 3 we have "the self of a teller who more or less directly just writes about **herself** and through **herself**" [NLE: 3] but then the translators switch to masculine forms: "**He** who has and weaves the story is in charge", "Here **man** is the lead actor", and later: "the narrator, who asks **his** listener to put **himself** in **his** unique position" [NLE: 4]. This may be intentional, something like saying it's a man's world, or maybe an analogy to the proverb *He who laughs last laughs longest*? But it's clearly overkill.

JWU: So are we considering humankind, man, or men, when Tokarczuk speaks of first-person narration?
AG: Definitely humankind. Tokarczuk doesn't mean man but people/humans; it's about first-person narration, not male first-person narration, which this rendering suggests. Is the use of "his" and "himself" on p. 4 meant to re-balance "herself" on p. 3? And then there's the feminine pronoun again on p. 8: "renders the viewer dependent, hypnotizes **her**". If there is a pattern here, it's hard to find.

JWU: Ok, so pronouns and agency are not simple questions of grammar. They involve meaningful choices.
AG: They do. Plus, there are a few other trivia. It may seem like I'm playing the pedantic Translation Studies teacher here, but details do matter: if you don't get them right, they stand out and draw too much attention to themselves. For example, why use "purview", a clearly visual metaphor, when referring to the radio picking up different stations [NLE: 3]? Also, recall the story of *jestem* 'here I am' that we've discussed. When Tokarczuk says it's "najważniejsze i najdziwniejsze słowo świata" [NLP: 2], it's rather poorly translated as "the most important and the strangest set of words in the world" [NLE: 2]. *Strange* usually connotes oddness or unfamiliarity, while the Polish *dziwny* may be more positive, as in *dziwić się* 'be surprised' or *dziw nad dziwy* 'wonder of wonders' – so how about: "the most important and astonishing expression of all"?

JWU: In other words, one could do with a little more tenderness here. Is that what you are suggesting?
AG: Exactly. This is not about "faithfulness" to the text, or even to the author. This is about "translating the author", giving voice to the author who deserves to have one. It's about amplifying the voice that belongs to

the author, as an accomplished writer and a Nobel laureate, at the moment when she's being listened to so attentively.

JWU: So let's imagine… What would Jenta – this invented panoptical persona – see if she could read the English translation but also have access to Olga's thoughts and those of her English-speaking audience?
AG: I'm afraid she might see a flaw, a bit of fracture perhaps. Did Olga use her air time well? Definitely: she gave a speech that was powerful, profound, and penetrating, with many motifs and inspirations, a starting point for countless discussions and debates. Did the translators help her connect with the English-speaking audience? It's hard to tell. I don't know what the reception of the talk is in the Anglo world. But it's likely that in some profound sense, a great opportunity has been missed. If, as Olga says, "he who weaves the story is in charge", who weaves her story here? Who has agency? She herself *should* have it, but regarding some essential points, more tenderness on the translators' part would have boosted that agency.

JWU: Thank you, Adam, for your reflections, your constructive criticisms and your enthusiasm for Olga Tokarczuk. Perhaps our discussion will stimulate further discussion, and cultivate a greater appreciation for her work and the voices that speak through her novels. Perhaps Polish readers will see her differently, or see more deeply into the soul of her novels, if they understand how much foreign readers have to strain themselves to enter into her worldview. Whether or not she is an outsider in her hometown, and in her homeland, is debatable. But Olga Tokarczuk is certainly inventing a Poland that is creating curiosity and confusion, perhaps even love, perhaps even tenderness, for her world and the worlds she invents. Even if the translators don't altogether succeed in the great challenge that translating faces us with.
AG: Well, let's say, her translators enable Olga Tokarczuk to shine, shine brightly throughout the world. We have to thank the Swedes and these translators for that, for recognizing her talent and her convictions, and for introducing Olga to readers in English. We are translators too, and our criticisms should always be about trying to help each other improve on imperfections. So my comments on the translation of the Nobel speech merely highlight a small tarnish on the overall positive picture. It's clear from Olga's video interviews in English on YouTube that they have succeeded as the translators of her books. Olga is in. Her Poland is now on

the Inside of World Literature. She will continue to inspire. And she will be read and listened to more and more in English. Perhaps that will help people listen more tenderly and more attentively to the way languages and cultures and worldviews filter through form one sphere to another, enveloping us, cradling us in new forms of embrace. And of course, James, I appreciate your kind and positively critical interest in Olga's work.

5. Coda

We both feel we've benefited greatly from the many conversations we've had about Olga Tokarczuk's literature, her Nobel lecture, and the translations of her work. It's only when someone questions your perspective or points out what you don't notice that you begin to feel stronger and see deeper. Olga is in constant dialogue with both her characters and her readers; she is a person *of* dialogue – so dialogue we did.

But because she also is, and must be, in dialogue with her readers in other languages, translation matters; it is not a mere technicality but part and parcel of communication. We cannot resist the temptation to finish on a high note: all of us translators, readers, writers, and people of words have a mission. If "the world is made of words" [NLE: 2], we need to cherish the words also in and through translation. Olga Tokarczuk is certainly there to recognize and acknowledge this: as she says in one of her essays [Tokarczuk 2020a], "translators save the world every day".

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Abstract

In December 2019, Olga Tokarczuk, the Nobel Prize laureate in literature for 2018, delivered the Nobel lecture in her native Polish. It was therefore up to her English translators, Jennifer Croft and Antonia Lloyd-Jones, to relay the laureate's message to the wider audience. Two linguists and translators, James W. Underhill and Adam Głaz, discuss this Nobel lecture in its broader historical, political, and social context, recognizing Olga Tokarczuk's position on topical issues, the role she plays in contemporary Poland, as well as the controversies she arouses. But Tokarczuk is predominantly a writer: her lecture is concerned with literature and it *is* literature. In a masterly fashion, the lauretate champions the creative power of storytelling, explores her notion of the tender narrator, and constructs intriguing analogies. She weaves nuanced semantic networks around the Polish words *tęsknić*/*tęsknota* ('miss/missing' or 'long/longing for') and *jestem* ('here I am'). Underhill and Głaz discuss the meanders of the English translation of the lecture, pointing out the challenges that the translators had to face and suggesting alternative ways of coping with them. Through dialogue, they inquire into the nature of translation as an endeavour that is profoundly communicative and interpersonal. They emphasize that Olga Tokarczuk is an important voice; the role of her translators is to make this voice heard worldwide.

Keywords: Olga Tokarczuk, Nobel lecture, narration, tender narrator, *tęsknić*/*tęsknota*, *jestem*

Streszczenie

Olga Tokarczuk – insiderka. Rozmowa między Jamesem W. Underhillem a Adamem Głazem o filtrowaniu na język angielski „czułej wizji świata" z wykładu noblowskiego Olgi Tokarczuk

Wykład noblowski Olgi Tokarczuk z grudnia 2019 roku oraz jego angielskie tłumaczenie autorstwa Jennifer Croft i Antonii Lloyd-Jones stały się przedmiotem dyskusji między Jamesem W. Underhillem i Adamem

Głazem, którzy zwracają uwagę na szerszy historyczny, polityczny i społeczny kontekst tego wydarzenia, odnoszą się do poglądów Tokarczuk na temat niektórych aktualnych problemów oraz do roli, jaką odgrywa we współczesnej Polsce, a także do kontrowersji, jakie wzbudza. Wykład Tokarczuk nie tylko dotyczy literatury, lecz także sam w sobie jest literaturą. Noblistka w mistrzowski sposób zwraca uwagę na kreatywną moc opowiadania historii, rozważa zaproponowaną przez siebie kategorię czułego narratora, konstruuje intrygujące analogie, buduje delikatne sieci znaczeniowe wokół słów „tęsknić/tęsknota" oraz „jestem". Śledząc zawiłości angielskiego tłumaczenia wykładu, Underhill i Głaz wskazują na wyzwania, przed którymi stanęły Croft i Lloyd-Jones, a także proponują alternatywne sposoby zmierzenia się z tymi wyzwaniami. Ponadto rozważają naturę procesu tłumaczenia jako takiego oraz uznają go za akt o głębokim wymiarze komunikacyjnym i interpersonalnym. Podkreślają również, iż głos Tokarczuk jest ważny dla współczesnego człowieka, a rolą tłumaczy jej tekstów jest sprawić, by został usłyszany na całym świecie.

Słowa kluczowe: Olga Tokarczuk, wykład noblowski, narracja, czuły narrator, „tęsknić/tęsknota", „jestem"