

Whatever Happened to Ewa Felińska? Politics, Gender, and Translation

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Abstract

The diary that Ewa Felińska published in 1850 of her Siberian exile, which was translated into English by a Polish exile, was one of the first pieces of Siberian exile travel literature in existence. Offering geographic and ethnographic details that are still cited today, the work nevertheless fell into obscurity despite evidence of its popularity, particularly of the English version. This article argues that one reason for its disappearance is the political purpose for which it was translated: to build up British support for Polish independence. To accomplish this goal, the translator made significant changes to Felińska's work, camouflaging her representation of herself as resourceful, courageous, and strong in order to shape her into the melodramatic heroine that might elicit more sympathy from a Victorian audience. The alterations also masked her writing style and changed the work's structure. Had not the translation been so tailored for a specific purpose, the work might not have been forgotten.

Whatever Happened to Ewa Felińska? Politics, Gender, and Translation

Polish literature, like other literatures, has been enriched by women writers for centuries; as in other literatures, the texts of many of these Polish authors have been lost or have fallen into near-oblivion. Such is the case of a work by a nineteenth century Polish woman writer that straddles the genres of diary writing, travel writing, and Siberian exile literature. Ironically, the fact that it was translated into English within two years of its original publication – a rarity for Polish literature written by women before the twenty-first century – may be partly responsible for its having fallen into obscurity relatively soon after its publication.

The work in question is *Wspomnienia z podróży do Syberji i pobytu w Berezowie*, the travel diary in which Ewa Wendorffów Felińska (1793–1859), one of the first women from the former Polish/Lithuanian Commonwealth to be sentenced to Siberia for revolutionary activities, kept a record of her travel and exile. Her book offers the narration of personal experiences, along with the geographic and ethnographic descriptions and analyses, that are conventions of travel writing. Published in 1850, the book was translated into English by Krystyn Lach Szyrma (1790–1866) and first published in London in 1852 under the title of *Revelations of Siberia by a Banished Lady*¹.

Given the punitive nature of her travels and their location, her book helped create a new travel subgenre: the Siberian exile travelogue. Although voluntary explorers of Siberia had already published accounts of their experiences, and such fictionalized treatment of Siberian exile as Sophie Ristaud Cottin's 1806 novel *Élisabeth ou les exilés de Sibérie* had gained popularity, there were fewer than a handful of factual accounts before Felińska's book (e.g., Benyowsky, von Kotzebue, Kobyłecki)². After the publication of her *Wspomnienia*, the number of books in this new sub-genre of Siberian exile literature exploded, particularly in Polish literature ("Zasoby cyfrowe").

¹ In the same year that the English translation was first published, Felińska expanded her travel diary to include the final part of her exile in Saratov, in a milder climate than Siberia; the expanded version, however, does not seem to have been translated.

² „Z powstaniem listopadowym łączy się pośrednio książka o Syberji Józefa Kobyłeckiego. Autor jej nie był ściśle biorąc, zesłańcem, ale powstanie wypłynęło na jego losy” (Janik 170).

“A book about Siberia by Józef Kobyłecki is loosely related to the November [1830] Uprising. Its author wasn't, strictly speaking, an exile, but the uprising was connected to his fate.” My trans.

The significant increase in the number of Siberian exile accounts can help explain the quick oblivion into which Felińska's book sank in Polish literature, since hers became just one in a sea of many; given that it was one of the few translated into English, though, its relatively rapid disappearance from the English marketplace cannot be explained by competition from other Polish language accounts.

It did not disappear for lack of publicity. Numerous advertisements for the book can be found in mid-century English, Irish, and American newspapers, as can several highly favorable book reviews. In addition, it was synopsisized or excerpted in a number of periodicals of the time: for example, in 1853 Charles Dickens published a retelling of the book titled *Frozen up in Siberia* in his *Household Words*, while a periodical from Buffalo, New York (*Western Literary Messenger*) published some extracts from Lach Szyrma's translation that same year. Even thirteen years later, in 1866, *La Vuelta al Mundo*, a Spanish yearly publication featuring travel writing from around the world, published a paraphrase of the first year of Felińska's exile for its readers, complete with what appear to be commissioned illustrations. Finally, a Danish translation of the book, *Siberien, skildret af en forviist polsk Dame*, based on Lach Szyrma's third English edition, appeared in 1855.

Yet, disappear it did. While today the work, in any of its variations – the original 1850 version, the expanded version that included Felińska's time in Saratov, the English translations, and the Danish translation – can be found in 109 libraries around the world, most of these are national and academic libraries to which the general public might not have easy, or any, access. Although the public now does have access to free digitized images via such sources as archive.org, GoogleBooks, HathiTrust.org, and polona.pl, many people are not aware of these websites, do not have adequate web access, or may wish to read books in print format. For the latter readers, there are now a number of publishing houses that use the copyright-free digital images usually made by Google and, sometimes with editorial intervention to ensure that the images are clear and error-free, convert them into facsimile book format for profit.

Małgorzata Cwenk, a Polish literary critic who has done extensive scholarship on Felińska, noted that:

Współcześnie znane są niemal wyłącznie badaczom-fachowcom. Aby powróciły do szerszego obiegu czytelniczego, potrzebne są krytyczne edycje dzieł. (92)

Today her works are known almost solely to scholars. To return to a wider circulation, her books need to be published in critical editions. (My trans.)

Cwenk is one of the few literary scholars who have written about Felińska: an extensive search of international article and book databases yielded a list of only thirteen works from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that focus on her or include her in larger discussions.

What might have caused *Wspomnienia* to disappear for the non-Polish reading public? At least one cause seems to be rooted in the political reason for which it was translated into English in the first place. And for a while, politics no doubt was the reason that the translation enjoyed three editions in three consecutive years³. Politics also helps explain the significant changes that Lach Szyrma, who was identified as the editor rather than the translator of Felińska's book, made to her account.

Before delving into the politics of the translation, it is necessary to examine the political reason for Felińska's exile. For that, a brief review of east-central European history might be helpful. Readers are no doubt aware of the partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the late eighteenth century, in which – in three successive moves – the Prussian, Russian, and Austrian empires wiped the Commonwealth off the map. The Commonwealth, which had been established in the sixteenth century and included Lithuanian, Polish and what are now Belarusian and Ukrainian lands, was dominated by the Poles and the Polish language; therefore, it is often referred to simply as Poland. Felińska, though, while speaking and writing in Polish, referred to her homeland as Lithuania, as did Adam Mickiewicz, who is Poland's national poet.

There were many attempts made in the former Commonwealth at the end of the eighteenth and throughout the greater part of the nineteenth centuries to win freedom, especially in the Russian-controlled partition where Felińska lived. One of these was the 30 November uprising of 1830, which the czar punished harshly. While Felińska does not seem to have participated in that revolt, she did become politically active after her husband died in 1833. A member of the aristocratic class, she had long sympathized with the serfs on her property, reportedly getting to know every one of them and learning medicine in order to help provide care for them. Her democratic beliefs led her to participate in a revolutionary conspiracy in the mid-1830s led by Szymon Konarski (1808-1839). After the conspiracy was discovered, Konarski and other leaders were executed while Felińska, who seems to have served mainly as a corresponding secretary, was one of those exiled to Siberia.

³ As noted above, the publication of Lach Szyrma's translation occurred in 1852, within two years of its 1850 publication. In 1853 and 1854 two further editions quickly followed. This article uses the third (1854) edition of the translation, as well as Felińska's original 1850 Polish text.

Six years after the end of her exile, she published her account of her travels to and her time in northern Siberia. Before her death in 1859, she also published fiction, as well as the expanded version of her exile account and a memoir of her life.

Why did Lach Szyrma, whose work on her Siberian travel diary was not his first translation, choose that particular book to translate at the start of the 1850s? And why did he take such liberties with it, making significant changes to its structure and content?

In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to become acquainted with the translator. Krystyn Lach Szyrma was a philosophy professor at the University of Warsaw in the 1820s who, earlier than that, had served as a tutor for Prince Adam Jerzy Czartoryski's family in Poland, as well as in England and Scotland. An Anglophile, Lach Szyrma chose England when he himself had to go into exile after his participation in the 1830 November Uprising. While in exile, he ardently worked for the freedom of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, both as secretary for the Association of the Literary Friends of Poland – a British organization of which, for example, Charles Dickens was a member – and in concert with Prince Czartoryski's efforts from Paris.

Soon after his arrival in England in the early 1830s, public opinion in the British Isles was strongly sympathetic to Polish-Lithuanian independence, the suffering of the people under the czar's harsh reprisals, and the plight of emigrés; however, exiled Poles found support for their cause withering in Parliament and among the middle and upper classes over the next 20 years.

In addition to the priority given to the English Reform Bill of 1832 (Grzebieniowski 81), the work of Richard Cobden may have played a strong role in this change. In his 1836 pamphlet *Russia. By a Manchester Manufacturer: A Cure for the Russo-phobia*, he advocated for non-interference in others' affairs, arguing that it was hypocritical to condemn Russia for its imperialism of its southern and western neighbors when England was guilty of the same imperialism. Further, specifically in the case of Poland, he maintained that:

The 'Republic of Poland' (we quote the words of [Konrad] Malte-Brun) 'had been chiefly composed of provinces wrested from Russia...' The division of Poland was, on the part of Russia, not so much a lawless invasion as an act of reprisal on former invaders. (158)

In a later chapter devoted to Poland, though, he did condemn the "undissembled and unmitigated wickedness" of the three partitioning powers (165). Yet, he forcefully argued that the Polish serfs were far better off under Russia than they had been under their own government (159), painting an

ugly picture of warlike rapaciousness on the part of the Commonwealth's nobility, whose aggressive campaigns, he maintained, had devastated the peasants (168). Regarding the attempts to gain British support for Polish independence, Cobden "condemned the efforts of the emigrés and their English friends together" (Brock 144).

Although support from the English working class and Ireland increased in the 1840s, thanks largely to the work of Polish radical democrats in England as well as the attractiveness of the democratic principles underlying the 1846 Kraków Uprising against Austria, that from other classes and Parliament continued to decline. By the mid-1840s, the British left-wing had become disillusioned by the 1830 Uprising (Weisser et al. 8), and *The Times* had consistently maintained an anti-Polish stance, accusing the Poles of being economic migrants rather than refugees (Załoski and Załoski 230). While the immensely popular Dickens was a strong supporter of Poland, his influence was cancelled out by the negativity of Thomas Carlyle, who "was no friend of Poland, a country which he deemed deservingly dead" (Kutolowski 971).

In the face of this alarming decline of support, starting in the mid-1840s the Literary Friends of Poland, who were allied with the more conservative Czartoryski-supporting exiles like Lach Szyrma, took a more public approach to eliciting support from Parliament and the non-working classes. For example, in addition to opening its meetings to the public, in 1846 it published a pamphlet titled *Address of the Literary Association of the Friends of Poland to the People of Great Britain and Ireland*. Such sensationalistic language as "the blows of the knout, the clank of chains, the groans of captives, the cries of children torn from their mothers' arms, and the wailing of mothers for their ravished offspring" (3) was designed to grab the hearts of a British public enamored of Dickens and melodrama; this example also is, it will soon be seen, the kind of extreme language that Lach Szyrma implanted in his translation of Felińska, leading to the possibility that he may have been responsible for at least some of the writing of the association's pamphlet.

That he would have written some or all of the pamphlet would be likely, given his extensive work with the Friends of Poland, including serving as its Secretary. In addition, during his exile he penned numerous articles for British periodicals on Polish culture and on the condition of his compatriots in the former Commonwealth in order to convince the British to provide material assistance to Polish refugees and to support independence.

In addition to his writing, he worked as a translator. Like his writing, his translations in exile seem intended to help Poland win freedom. For example, in 1833, one year after its publication in Polish, he produced an English translation of Mickiewicz's messianic *Księgi narodu i pielgrzymstwa polskiego*

(*The Books and Pilgrimage of the Polish Nation*). Lach Szyrma's preface to his translation exhibits the same melodramatic language that would later appear in the Friends of Poland pamphlet:

Nations, who profess to be brethren, horror-struck at the exquisite cruelties of kinds, have abandoned them [the Polish people]. What else, then, can the BLOOD [sic] of the victim – the blood of fathers and of millions of innocent children – reeking up from all regions of the globe do... (iv-v)

In 1853, the year in which he published the second edition of his Felińska translation, he created a Polish translation of *Robinson Crusoe* (from a German translation, for some reason). His choice of a fictional travelogue by a man marooned far from his homeland would have resonated with and potentially heartened Polish readers, both those at home and the many in exile. The next year, in which he produced the third edition of the Felińska translation, he translated Gogol's *Dead Souls* into English, giving it the title of *Home Life in Russia*; his choice to make Russia part of the title was no doubt to ensure that his English readers never forgot that the corruption of manners and government that the book sharply satirizes were Russian. He drilled this point home in the first words of his preface:

a Work, of which the scene is exclusively laid in Russia, and which, it is confidently anticipated, will be recognized as furnishing a most interesting and graphic account of the manners and customs of a very extraordinary nation. (vii)

His description of the book, by the way, was a fairly typical one for travel writing; in addition, as a picaresque novel, Gogol's book was largely a travel narrative.

A year later, in 1855, Lach Szyrma published an English translation of a Polish work, *Kirdżali*, which he titled *The Moslem and the Christian; or, Adventures in the East*; this book is a partly fictionalized account of the exotic military experiences in the Ottoman Empire of Michał Czajkowski (who changed his name to Sadyk Pasha). In contrast to his translations of Felińska's and Gogol's works, this work identifies the author of the original and credits Colonel Lach Szyrma with both translating and editing it. It is noteworthy that in both of the translations that followed Felińska's, he is identified as the editor of "Revelations of Siberia", which is evidence of the book's popularity in England at the time. Further, in the translations of Czajkowski and Felińska – works written by natives of the former Commonwealth who both worked for Polish independence – he is identified as Colonel, which was his

rank in the 1830 Uprising; this is another hint at his motivation for these translations.

That the English translations Lach Szyrma published in the 1850s all were or contained elements of travel writing might not be surprising when we consider that he was living in exile, far from his beloved homeland, and working for the independence of that homeland; he himself had also published a piece of travel literature in 1828, *Anglia i Szkocja: Przypomnienia z podróży roku 1823-1824*⁴. His English translations were intended for a Victorian audience for whom travel writing had become very popular; this was the same audience from which he was trying to elicit strong sympathy and support for the Polish cause, at a time when such support was weak.

But before these other translations, came his work with Felińska's travelogue. Things no doubt looked bleak to Lach Szyrma in 1850 in terms of British support for Polish independence. And then Felińska's book appeared, presenting the sad story of a proper but highly patriotic Polish lady condemned to exile in Siberia, her fatherless children now virtually orphaned – a situation reminiscent of “the cries of children torn from their mothers' arms” in the Friends of Poland's 1846 pamphlet. This lady was forced to travel to “that desolate wilderness” (I: vi) “among a barbarous population” (I: vii), as he stated in the introduction to the 1854 translation. What better way to convince Victorian fans of Dickens's *Oliver Twist*, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, and *A Christmas Carol* of the despicable cruelty of the czar and the desperate need for Polish independence? The fact that Felińska easily could be seen as a victim might account for why he chose to translate her Siberian diary before Czajkowski's semi-fictional adventure tale, even though the latter was published in 1839. In addition, the fact that Lach Szyrma's translation of Czajkowski came out in 1855, well into the Crimean War, suggests less of a desire to drum up support for Polish independence through melodrama and perhaps more of a desire to do so by capitalizing on the popularity of the war in Britain.

But melodrama seems to be what he had in mind when translating Felińska. In the introduction, he took pains to make clear that she had more than a respectable background. This “lady by birth and position in society” had married into a name that was both “noble” and “honourably distinguished in Polish literature”, being the sister-in-law of the famous Polish playwright, Alojzy Feliński (I: vi). This “gentlewoman of a cultivated mind” (I: vi), after suffering a trial conducted with “the barbarity peculiar to Russian courts” (I:

⁴ This work was translated into English only in the twenty-first century, made into two books: *From Charlotte Square to Fingal's Cave: Reminiscences of a Journey through Scotland* and *London Observed: A Philosopher at Large, 1822-24*.

ix), was imprisoned in a convent in Kiev and forced to undergo “the most rigorous discipline that a fanatical sisterhood, especially if authorized by the Government, can inflict” (I: ix). Torn from “her domestic hearth” and from “the bosom of civilized society”, she was “carried off to the wilds of Siberia” among “a barbarous population” (I: vii). It is important to note that Felińska herself seldom used the terms barbarous and barbarian in her descriptions of Siberian people and places.

This sympathetic, heart-wrenching description of a damsel in distress would certainly have appealed to his English readers. However, there was one problem: Ewa Felińska was a strong woman. Forty-six years old when she went into exile, she was able to survive the physically demanding ride to Siberia that involved sleep deprivation, irregular meals, rough terrain, uncomfortable sledges and horse carts, and exposure to the elements. It was a ride that made her physically ill, but about which she stoically said “wszakże człowiek łatwo przywyka do wszystkiego, ze wszystkim się zżyje” (5)⁵, which was translated by Lach Szyrma as “Yet there is nothing to which man may not, in the end, be accustomed; nothing which he may not be brought to endure” (I: 5). The travel was also sometimes dangerous, as she made clear in her descriptions of the treacherousness of snowy terrain (32; I: 64) and violent storms on the river over which she had to travel the last leg of her trek (56-57; I: 110 and 63; I: 122).

For two years she then had to endure the climatic extremes of Berezov, which is located at about the northern limit of mid-nineteenth century Russian colonization in Siberia – just two degrees of latitude south of the Arctic Circle. According to Felińska, the winter temperature could be as low as -50° Reaumur, or -62.5° C (239; II: 173); she also noted the existence of permafrost even in the summer heat (79; I: 151). And that summer heat, accompanied by hordes of “krwiożerczym” (“bloodthirsty”) mosquitoes (82; I: 158), she described quite powerfully with emphatic parallelism in her 12 June 1839 entry:

Upały nieznośne trzymają nas ciągle w domu, jak w więzieniu. Nie ma rosy, nie ma świeżego powietrza, wiatru wieczornego, nie ma chłodu poranka. Słońce ciągle świeci i piecze, jeszcze jakby ogniem piekielnym bez przerwy, bez ochłody...

Nie można oddychać, nie można siedzieć na krześle, nie można zająć się żadną robotą; jakaś niedołość ugniata, uciska, wskazuj na gnuśność, ogłupia prawie. (85)

⁵ In citations for both books, the citation for Felińska’s original Polish text is listed first, followed by that for Lach Szyrma’s translation.

The heat now grew insupportable, and kept us imprisoned in-doors. There was no dew at night, no cooling breeze of sunset, no fresh air of morning; but ever and ever incessant sunshine burning and scorching unremittingly... It was impossible to breathe—impossible to sit in a chair—impossible to do any work. (I: 163–64)

It is true that, because of her higher class, Felińska was able to afford the rent for rooms in a decently heated house; she was able to procure adequate food and even buy a cow to provide milk for her tea; she was able to enjoy a social life with other exiles and inhabitants, many of whom were descendants of earlier exiles; and her time was her own, since she was not forced to work in a mine or a factory. She was also treated less harshly because of her sex and age (4; I: 4) and was provided better accommodations on the boat to Berezov than others (52; I: 103). However, because the severity of her offense was deemed worse than that of Paulina Wilczopolska and Józefa Rzączewska, the other two female exiles with whom she traveled from Kiev and who had also been involved in the Konarski intrigue, she was being taken to Berezov, whereas they had been sentenced to exile in Tara, in southern Siberia⁶.

In spite of the fact that her age, sex, and possibly social standing caused some of the restrictions on her to be eased, she still felt the punishment of the extreme discomfort of Siberia, which was exacerbated by her age, by her forced separation from her children, and by her exile from her homeland.

Her diary describes her privations and her emotional suffering, with her own account of these being generally much milder than Lach Szyrma's translation. One of the few instances in which his translation actually tones down her original occurs in her characterization of the summer heat, quoted above: whereas she described the intensity of the sun with alliterative imagery – as “jeszcze jakby ogniem piekielnym”, or “just like hellfire” – he wrote “ever and ever incessant sunshine burning and scorching unremittingly”, which neither evokes the ferocity of the heat nor achieves the lyricism of her syntax.

While, clearly, she did experience physical suffering on the road, she did not describe it as “indescribable torture” (I: 3), which is the sensationalizing phrase he added to her narrative. Neither did she portray her emotions during her trek to Berezov as the “agony of the mind” (I, 4) that he painted it as, but as disquiet, restlessness, or anxiety (“niespokojnością”, 4), and numbness or lethargy (“otrętwienie”, 4). If anything, it was mainly a torpor, an emptiness, that she experienced, rather than the powerfully raging emotions that he attributed to her: the powerfully raging emotions that would be attractive to Victorian readers who had been brought up on the exaggerations of gothic

⁶ Rzączewska asked for permission to accompany Felińska to Berezov instead, which was granted.

fiction and on the melodramatic extremities of Dickens, the powerfully raging emotions that would create a portrait of her that was closer to a helpless victim of czarist cruelty – one that would be much more effective in generating a swell of sympathy for her, and for all Poles.

Understandably, throughout her ordeal she did experience some strong emotions, which ranged from joy to near-despair. However, she usually used ejaculatory syntax to convey her emotions rather than overt statements that she was happy or mournful. She experienced a lot of negative emotions, some of which were the irritations and sorrows that daily life would ordinarily generate. However, only once did she use any word with the denotation and intensity of the English “agony” to refer to what she was feeling, in contrast to Lach Szyrma’s multiple uses of the word⁷; she did write that at one point in her journey to Berezov she was terrified (“przerażała”) by the specter of the boundless, deep darkness (“głębokiej ciemności”, 47) that she imagined would be her lonely solitude in a hostile place, far from her children and homeland. Not surprisingly, Lach Szyrma amplified his translation of her terror by his addition of “appalling”, “horror”, and “despair”, creating a gothic element for his English readers, even though her own description of her emotion was quite compelling.

It was the forced separation from her children and her homeland, the two centers of her life, that caused her the greatest grief. Several pages of her diary are filled with her powerfully-expressed worries about and deep longing for her virtually orphaned children, especially her eldest child, Paulina. Often, though, as poignant as these expressions are, Lach Szyrma’s English translation almost always further intensifies them. For example, after stating that she had prayed that God allow her to see her children, even if in a dream, and then lamenting that the dream was nevertheless an inadequate substitute for the reality, she noted that:

Czasem mimo bólów, które serce ugniatają, czuję w duszy pewną siłę oddziaływającą, która zrównoważa cierpienia i napędza mię jeżeli nie pokojem, to przynajmniej gotowością dźwigania silnemi ramiony ciężar stęsknionego bytu; ale gdy mię ta siła opuszcza, upadam pod brzemieniem życia. (175)

A rough translation of this would be:

Sometimes, despite the pain that kneads my heart, I feel in my soul a certain strength that has the power to compensate for my suffering and fills me, if not with peace, then at least with the readiness to carry the burden of longing

⁷ No instances of “męczarnia”, “udręki”, “tortura”, “męka”, or “agonia” that would match his uses of “agony” were found in her diary. Felińska did use “cierpienie” six times, but only once to express what she was feeling.

with all the strength of my being; but when this force leaves me, I fall under the weight of life. (My trans.)

Lach Szyrma translated the passage in this manner:

Often in the midst of the greatest anguish, sufficient to overwhelm the stoutest heart, I have experienced a power of re-action which made me, as it were, equal to my weight of suffering; and if it did not impart complete resignation, at least reconciled me to existence. When that aid has been wanting, I have felt an insupportable weakness, and been ready to sink under the load of hardship. (II: 47)

While “the pain that kneads my heart” is a powerful expression, it does not seem to have been strong enough for Lach Szyrma, who translated it as “the greatest anguish, sufficient to overwhelm the stoutest heart”. At the end of the passage, he also amplified the simple clause with which Felińska conveyed what happened when her strength left her, translating “I fall under the weight of life” as “I have felt an insupportable weakness, and been ready to sink under the load of hardship” (II: 47).

These examples illustrate one of the intensifying rhetorical techniques Lach Szyrma frequently used. Aptly characterized by Lakoff and Johnson as a “more of form is more of content’ metaphor, in which syntax creates “metaphorical spatialization” (127), it involves the creation of longer sentences by means of longer words, repetition, and syntactic structures that require extra words. In the same manner that long, formal speeches composed of long words and sentences are usually considered necessary to reflect the gravity of solemn rites, so Lach Szyrma’s metaphorical spatializations emphasize the seriousness of what Felińska was suffering at the hands of the czar. In addition to this rhetorical technique, Lach Szyrma did not grant her the peace that her word “pokój” denotes, but translated her word as “complete resignation”, an expression whose connotation is both less positive and less comforting than her word, but more consistent with the role he gave her as a melodramatic heroine.

Even though his translation inflates Felińska’s original, her style throughout her work is relatively eloquent. Some of her most eloquent passages are the emotional sections that focus on her children, although those about her homeland are almost as powerful and poignant. While in some cases her use of “u nas” (“with us”; “in Lithuania”) simply clarifies the differences that she observed between Siberia and her home, many times her explanations of these contrasts generated or were accompanied by a powerful homesickness: “O wiosno mego kraju, wiecznie będę tęsknić za tobą!” (“Oh, lovely spring of my country! [H]ow I shall ever remember, and ever long for thee!” 74; I: 141).

This feeling seems to have beset her most frequently when she was explaining or enjoying the beauty that she found in the natural environment of Siberia.

However, while her encounters with Nature were often tinged with homesickness, they were also most often the causes of the uplifting emotions that she experienced. When possible, she went for walks – sometimes with Józefa Rzączewska, the young exile who had asked to be sent to Berezov with Felińska – but preferably alone: “...szukałam natury, szukałam samotności” (112; my trans: “I was searching for Nature, searching for solitude”). Lach Szyrma’s translation, once again, exaggerates her emotion: “I was panting for a more extended view of nature and longed for solitude” (I: 224). Again, it may have been his understanding of his audience that led to him sacrificing the lyrical parallelism of Felińska’s original for a heightened presentation of her desire or need for Nature and solitude. Although Nature definitely played a role in Polish Romanticism, it was a far more prominent element of the British Romanticism with which his readers were familiar, and by the mid-century, Nature had acquired a powerful sentimentalism for the Victorians.

Consistent with Romanticism, while some of her expressions of delight about Nature approach the rhapsodic, they often quickly transform into metaphysical meditations that reveal her deep religious beliefs (for example, 179–81; II: 55–57 and 244–45; II: 197–199). Her expressions of sorrow are also often reined in either by statements about reliance on God or by reminders to herself that her situation was not as bad as it could have been. Perhaps it is her refusal to let herself be controlled by her emotions that Agata Roćko is thinking of when she states that Felińska’s diaries seldom reveal “intimate experiences and sensations” (186), because in her Siberian diary Felińska did, indeed, share quite a few of her deepest emotions.

One of these emotions was her occasional experience of fear, which is certainly understandable and, indeed, wise, given the dangers latent in the climate, the terrain, and her interactions with the indigenous Siberian peoples who had far different customs and languages. Lach Szyrma’s translation often exaggerates her fear, because a woman who would bravely stand up to strange men as she did on a couple of occasions was hardly the melodramatic heroine who would tug at the heartstrings of his British audience. In one incident, for example, she was walking in the woods alone (as usual) and encountered some indigenous Ostiaks; while she did acknowledge experiencing some fear, she certainly did not characterize herself as “trembling with fear”, as Lach-Szyrma portrayed her in his translation (137; I: 271). He also changed her use of the word “courage” in her description of the face that she put on in front of the Ostiaks to the weaker “utter unconcern”.

Her walks in the woods were intended, as she noted, to allow her to be alone, as well as to help her find solace in Nature. In addition, more than once she chafed at being kept within the four walls of the house by the weather or mosquitoes. Still another reason for roaming through the wild was her desire to learn new things. Except during her depressed listlessness in the earliest part of her journey, whenever possible she eagerly explored the new places in which she found herself and shared the details of her discoveries with her readers. Perhaps this also explains Roćko's perception that Felińska revealed little emotion, because her descriptions and explanations of the flora, fauna, climate, people, and customs that she encountered take up far more room in her diary than the emotional elements. As Małgorzata Marcinowicz notes, "in spite of her personal drama, the author focuses the reader's attention on the world around her... proposing a look at Siberian reality other than through the prism of shackles and exhausting work" (70).

Directing the audience's attention away from herself and toward her discoveries about her environment is consistent with her transformation of her emotional expressions into metaphysical reflections: both actions put a primacy on reason. As she said about herself when narrating her eventually successful attempts to explain and debunk a local Christmastide belief that one could use mirrors to see anybody one wished to see, she was "[a]ccustomed... to subject everything to the scrutiny of reason" ("Przywykłszy poddawać wszystko pod krytykę rozumu..." 226; II:148). Of course, she may also have been aware that the geographical and ethnographic descriptions and analyses she included were conventions of travel writing. Indeed, her Siberian travel diary is rich in such elements, from an explanation of the local trading traditions (102-104; I: 202-06), to an analysis of the tides in the river (133-34; I: 265), to a speculation about ancient communication between the Ostiaks and American Indians because of their tattooing conventions (161; II: 16-17). In fact, even though her book seems to have disappeared from the minds of the general public relatively soon after publication, ethnographers and anthropologists even to this day have cited her observations⁸.

The respect her book received from social scientists may be due, in part, to the objectivity with which she seems to have tried to present many if not most of her observations. This objectivity is, of course, sometimes masked in Lach Szyrma's translation by his use of more negatively connoted

⁸ For example, Figuier's 1872 *The Human Race* refers to her description of Ostiak huts (129), and three illustrations of indigenous transports and habitation based on her descriptions appear in du Cleuziou's 1887 *La creazione dell'uomo e I primi tempi dell'umanità* (228, 248). More recently, the 1999 *The Tenacity of Ethnicity* (Balzer 287) and *The Shaman's Coat* (Reid 2002, 216) cite the English translation of her book.

words that are in the original. For example, in discussing childbirth procedures that resulted in maternal mortality, Felińska referred to women as “ofiary przesądów i zabójczych lekarstw”: “victims of superstition and deadly medicine” (168). Lach Szyrma chose to translate “zabójczy” as “murderous” (II: 32), a word with a far more judgmental meaning than Felińska may very well have intended.

While Felińska passed judgment on some of the behavior and customs she observed, she seemed to try to avoid Eurocentrism. She noted, for instance, that her landlady was far more hospitable than landladies at home (73; I: 139–40) and that the Berezovians, unlike “u nas”, did not enslave themselves to the idea of owning land, which would provide no reward for the man who devoted his life to acquiring and improving it other than, after his death, guaranteeing his children a livelihood without the necessity of working themselves (107; I: 212–13). Felińska also revealed her democratic beliefs in her positive characterization of the absence both of servants and of rigid class distinctions in Berezov (105; I: 207 and 109; I: 217), even though she herself had a servant in exile (89; I: 174).

Notwithstanding this lapse in her ideals, her egalitarianism was generally evident, even if at times clouded by Lach Szyrma’s more conservative, aristocratic leanings and his apparent attempt to make her more sympathetic by painting her environment as more hostile. When discussing the absence of dueling in Berezov, she called it a savage (“dziki”) custom of a different, or other European civilization (“innemi cywilizacja europejska”, 251). This statement follows on the heels of her observation that quarrels and discord in Berezov had a very different character from those behaviors in our civilization (“Kłotnie, niezgody mają tu charakter zupełnie inny niż w naszej cywilizacji”, 251). Her implication that the civilization in “dalekiego świata zakąta” (in Berezov’s distant corner of the world) was indeed a civilization, merely one different from her civilization, is lost in Lach Szyrma’s translation. He converted “innemi cywilizacja europejska” to “Europe, the centre of civilization” (II: 188) and caused her comment about quarrels in different civilizations to read as: “...the quarrels and disagreements which prevail here, differ as much in character from those arising among civilized communities...” (II: 187). In each instance his translation denies Berezov the label of civilized.

In contrast, in her diary Felińska spoke respectfully about the primitive or simple character of both the indigenous Siberians and the European residents of Berezov; she did not, for example, label the Ostiaks’ shamanic beliefs as idolatrous, as Lach Szyrma’s translation does (162; II: 23). In fact, her diary offers an explanation for the superstitions of all of the inhabitants of the area, one whose respectful tone Lach Szyrma did leave intact: “Not knowing

the boundaries between what is real, probable, or possible, imagination takes unbounded flights, predisposing the mind to believe what is marvelous” (165; II: 26). Another time when discussing the Berezovians’ religious beliefs, in this case the custom at the beginning of Lent to visit one’s neighbors and beg forgiveness for any transgressions, she said that she was moved by this rite that was practiced with meaning and not as an empty tradition, and noted that it reminded her of early or primitive Christianity (250; II: 186). In addition, although the custom of both the indigenous people and Berezovians of eating raw fish disgusted her, she nevertheless made herself try to eat it because she concluded that her disgust was the product of her cultural conditioning (254; II: 193). She failed, but she sincerely tried to move beyond what she called her prejudice (“przesąd”, which also denotes a misconception, or a superstition).

The fact that Felińska had respect for the people of Siberia and their customs, and did not necessarily assume that her more western European culture was superior to theirs, was relatively unusual in the travel literature of the nineteenth century. Given that her sojourn was a harsh punishment exacted by the empire that ruled her formerly free land, she was a traveler in an area under colonization by that same empire: unlike most travelers into colonized areas, she was thus hardly an imperial agent, official or otherwise. Like the indigenous peoples of Siberia, and the exiles and descendants of exiles in Berezov, she was also a colonial subject. While her respect was quite likely a mark of her character, the fact that it extended to her references to the Russian government was at least partly due to the harsh censorship practiced by the empire. For example, she explained that in the winter the government provided flour to the store in Berezow that the indigenous people could buy “at moderate prices” (“po cenie umiarkowanej”) in an effort to prevent starvation – although, as she stated further, only those few who lived near the town could access it, and the indigenous people had neither ovens nor knowledge of baking to be able to make use of it (247; II: 202-03).

Here can be seen the other, and perhaps the real, reason for her occasional and apparently positive references to the empire. Such passages are just some of her many uses of subversive Aesopian language to create anti-imperial statements that her Polish-language readers would both recognize and relish. Her Polish public was already skilled in decoding the patriotic emotions and forbidden ideas that were conveyed through a variety of rhetorical techniques that evaded the censor, including irony, puns, subtle symbols, and historical or literary allusions.

Many of these subversive statements are, like her reference to the government’s useless provision of flour, veiled criticisms or ridicule of the Russian

empire; unlike the above, most of these criticisms are made through her depiction of the ineptness of government officials. One example is her account of a ridiculous delay in being allowed to leave a stop for the next leg of the journey toward Berezov; the scene is Gogolian in its frustratingly comedic absurdity, especially because a lot of the delay was caused by the Director of Police, who needed to sign papers but who slept well into the day and refused to be disturbed (19-20; I: 37-40).

Prior to that, she and the other two women exiles, desperate for sleep, had first been required to wait outside in the cold and then had been moved from one accommodation to another in the middle of the night; the house in which they had ended up was musty and filled with cockroaches (12-15; I: 21-28). In her description of the disgusting conditions, she did not use the Polish word for cockroach - *karaluch*. Rather, first she provided the Russian word, *tarakan*, which in Russian folklore has been associated with “a representative of an alien and hostile power” (Loseff 201). Then also noting that the bugs were called “*prusaki*” in Lithuania, she described them as running among the other bugs “*jak oficeriowe między szeregowemi*”, or “as officers among soldiers [enlisted men]” (13; I: 24). Not only did she ridicule the Russian empire by expressing contempt at its officers, but she also mocked the Prussian empire, which had also eaten up the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth during the partitions. Perhaps her reference to the Prussians was also intended to misdirect the censors, since Russians used “*prusaki*” to refer to a certain kind of cockroach.

About a year later she once again had occasion to speak of cockroaches but this time, even though she once again referred to them as “*tarakan*” and “*prusaki*”, she omitted the specific analogy to officers because she was not experiencing maltreatment by incompetent Russian officials. Yet the fact that she was writing in Polish and did not use the Polish word for the creature makes this still another veiled reference to the destruction of her homeland (256; II: 207).

Many of her subversive allusions are about her homeland. For example, while traversing the Murom Forest in the early stage of her trek to Berezov, she was deriving comfort from the beautiful surroundings. Suddenly a flock of birds appeared:

Na widok tych pięknych ptaków, i w takiej obfitości, zakipiała we mnie krew litewska, krew starodawnych myśliwców Litwy. (9)

The sight of those beautiful birds, which were very numerous, made the blood of my Lithuanian heart glow with earlier feelings—and mine was the blood of the ancient hunstmen of Lithuania. (I: 14-15)

These were grouse, and the “earlier feelings” that Lach Szyrma’s translation refers to were no doubt memories she would have had of grouse hunting at home. However, his choice of “glow” to translate “zakipiała” is strange, because its denotation is closer to “boil” or “simmer”, implying heat and its metaphorical associations. The conclusion of Felińska’s original sentence describes her suddenly jumping up in the sledge but not knowing why she did so; this kind of response is more likely with a strong emotion rather than the gentle one that “glow” implies. In any case, the sight of the birds evoked not just nostalgia for a pleasant pastime, but pride: twice she referred to her Lithuanian blood in phrases creating a strong rhythm – a rhythm suggesting pride, and quite likely a rhythm suggesting resistance and defiance.

And she was defiant at times: in fact, it could be argued that by focusing so much of her account on ethnographic, geographic, meteorological, and socio-economic observations, she effectively turned the prison that Siberia was intended to be into an object of her study and thereby subverted her punishment.

In addition, her accounts of some of her actions reveal her resistance. For instance, she characterized herself as “koń znarowiony”, or a disobedient horse when, at a resting place, she was ordered by her guard to go out to the sledge earlier than she knew that the party was supposed to have departed. Yet, Lach Szyrma did not include a translation of that phrase in his depiction of the scene; rather, he expanded her next clause (“nie chciałam, czy też nie mogłam ruszyć się z miejsca”, which roughly translated says “I did not want to or could not move from the spot”) to make her appear less strong than she really was. His translation is: “I refused to obey, and, indeed, from my extreme debility, I could not instantly rise from the place, where I hoped I should be enabled to get a moment’s rest”. Although his translation depicts her will to be as defiant as she portrayed it, his version characterizes her as suffering from “extreme debility”, suggesting that her disobedience of the guard was more the result of physical impairment. Yet, nothing in her text even hints at physical impairment (4; I: 4). Once again, it appears that it was more important that she be made to play the role of the helpless damsel in distress for his Victorian audience to cry over than to be seen as a strong patriot whose resistance they could admire.

Perhaps another motivation in this instance was a desire to protect her from the wrath of the Russian government because of her admission of her defiant mindset, on top of her use of Aesopian language throughout her travelogue, of which he was clearly aware. Although he did not refer to the technique by that name, because the phrase was not coined until at least the 1860s by Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin (Loseff 1), Lach Szyrma commented on it in

his introduction: “All compositions written under constraint are worded with caution and reservation, and necessarily contain many phrases capable of a double meaning” (xiv). He noted that, because his English readers were not likely to understand these references, some footnote annotations were necessary (xiv-xv).

However, he did not mention how much he had changed her original text, which included interpolations into her text of his own overtly critical, sarcastic statements, which are far from mere “annotations”. Therefore, perhaps the following statement is not the standard boilerplate apology offered by translators and editors, but one that reveals his recognition that his additions to her text could create trouble for her and possibly cause her to be exiled again: “We should, indeed, be extremely grieved, if our publication of her book in England should interfere in any way with her peace and comfort” (xv). One example of his overt sarcasm is his characterization of Berezov as a “Necropolis of Russian greatness” (I: 153), a characterization that does not appear in Felińska’s original (30); he inserted this statement at the end of her discussion about the grave of Alexander Danilovich Menshikov, who had been exiled to Siberia for corruption after having attempted to take over the Russian throne.

There are a number of other times when he presented his own comments as Felińska’s. Perhaps he believed that listing himself as editor of her diary allowed him to make such additions, as well as to insert other details that had not been in her original, such as the “extreme debility” discussed above. He also omitted details, such as the fact that a house in Tobolsk was decorated with phallic symbols, a detail that certainly would have offended the Victorian sensibility (44; I: 87-88). However, a detail here and there are not the only things that he cut from her original diary. Rather, he eliminated entire paragraphs and, indeed, whole sections of her book, and restructured her book from basically a diary format into a chapter book.

It is true that her book has an inconsistent structure. The first part is a thirty-page section titled “Podróż z Kijowa do Tobolska” (“Journey from Kiev to Tobolsk”); this is followed by a sixteen-page section labeled “Pobyty w Tobolsku” (“Stay in Tobolsk”), which covers the extended period during which travel from Tobolsk to Berezov was made impossible by the spring thaw. A third section, “Podróż z Tobolska do Berezowa” (“Journey from Tobolsk to Berezov”) is an eighteen-page account of the final leg of her voyage. There is also a fourth section of only two paragraphs, which Lach Szyrma completely omitted; titled “Pobyty w Berezowie” (“Stay in Berezov”), it is a transition between the account of her journey and the story of her residence in Berezov that constitutes the remainder of the book. The book’s last section,

“Dziennik spisany w Berezowie” (“Diary written at Berezov”), consists of the chronological series of dated entries that conforms to diary convention.

Why the inconsistency? Why did she not use dated entries throughout? In the first section of the book, having just described some women’s clothing, Felińska offered an explanation:

Nie skończyłabym, gdybym chciała wyliczać rozmaite ubiory, które mię uderzyły oryginalnością, a którym to opisom, brakłoby zawsze na dokładności; bowiem wrażenia schwycone w przelocie, notowałam tylko w pamięci, nie mając pod ręką ani papieru, ani pióra dla zatrzymania odebranych wrażeń. (22)

I should not end were I to describe all the costumes which struck me as exceedingly original and remarkable; and, indeed, all description would fall short of correctness. My impressions, though gathered on the spot, were but momentary, and I noted them only in memory, having neither paper nor ink to make memoranda. (I: 42)

Apparently, she was able to acquire paper and writing equipment in Tobolsk, because the section following her stay in that town (“Podróż z Tobolska do Berezowa”) consists of 6 dated entries, from 19 May 1839 to 31 May. In addition, during this final phase of her journey she traveled by boat, remaining in her cabin most of the time; she was no longer riding over rough roads in a postal-cart or over snowy and icy terrain in a sledge, exposed to the weather. Thus, she now had more opportunity and ability to chronicle her impressions and experiences immediately after they occurred.

Recognizing that her readers might be confused by the change in format, Felińska created the two-paragraph transitional section that Lach Szyrma omitted to explain why she would now be writing dated entries. In the first paragraph she stated that she would be writing in diary format to provide details that would be as fresh as possible, so that her readers could feel as though they were sharing her experiences as they happened – as though they were her confidant (“powiernik”). Her second paragraph offers an apology for the lack of exciting detail due to her circumscribed life as a woman, but promises to reward her readers with complete veracity, with neither exaggeration nor inaccuracy (“Będę się starała nagrodzić wiernością opowiadań, nie pozwalając sobie żadnej przesady, żadnych faktów podrobionych”, 68). By making clear which observations and thoughts were freshly written down in diary format and which (earlier details) had been put into words only after some period of time, she let her readers know which details they could trust and which details might have been dulled or made less accurate by lapses of

memory. No part of this section – not even her promise of truthfulness to her readers – found its way into Lach Szyrma's translation.

While the other changes that he made to her text can be understood in the context of his attempt to persuade the British audience to support Polish independence, it is not clear what persuasive purpose he may have had for the structural changes, if any. Perhaps he preferred the chapter format because he had formatted his own travelogue by chapter rather than by dated entry. In any case, his manner of combining some entries into a single chapter but breaking up other entries to place into separate chapters, compounded by some problems with transitions, creates the strong risk of causing a reader to have a negative impression of Felińska's skill as a writer.

It is true that the function of an editor is to make content and format changes to a work for greater readability (or for greater sales). It is also true that, in addition to the fact that word-for-word transliteration of works can create very bad translations, it has often been recognized and is certainly seen by most translation theorists today that a translation is a work of art in its own right; it is not simply the original work in a different language. As Maria Tymoczko and Edwin Gentzler maintain:

Translation thus is not simply an act of faithful reproduction but, rather, a deliberate and conscious act of selection, assemblage, structuration, and fabrication—and even, in some cases, of falsification, refusal of information, counterfeiting, and the creation of secret codes. In these ways translators, as much as creative writers and politicians, participate in the powerful acts that create knowledge and shape culture. (xxi)

This view of translation is very much the product of colonial and post-colonial thinking, as well as of feminist translation theories. However, the works being translated in most scenarios are usually those produced by the agent of power (e.g., the empire, men) and the translators are often the subalterns (the colonized, women).

In the case of Lach Szyrma's translation and editing of Felińska's book, while he certainly was not an agent of the Russian empire, nor of the British empire, he was a male who was substantially altering the work of a woman. As Valerie Henitiuk notes:

While translators by definition deal with a foreign text on levels of language, culture, and time, the male translator of a woman's text may well encounter a foreignness comprised of sexual difference that he ends up compounding. The language of the male translator is superimposed on the woman's narrative, creating inevitable gender-bending distortions. (475)

Thus, the scope of the changes that he made to Felińska's Siberian diary are disturbing. These changes camouflage aspects of her own representation of herself as resourceful, courageous, and strong in her involuntary travel to and experience of Siberia: a self-representation that, along with her skillful use of Aesopian techniques to bypass the czar's censors, created subversive anti-imperial statements that are, unfortunately, weakened in the translation. They also altered her relationship with her readers. Yes, she no doubt assumed that her readers were other Polish-speaking citizens of a nation that no longer existed. And it is true that the translator and editor of her work belonged to that readership, and that the likely reason for his modifications was to help secure the liberty of those nationless citizens. Yet, "[w]riting another person's life can become an act of power and control", especially when the editor or translator is male, because "[o]rdering impulses that reside at the root of male autobiography and that are allied with individualism and colonial or patriarchal authority often remain intact" (Boyce Davies 13).

By making such significant changes to Felińska's diary, Lach Szyrma may very well have been ahead of his time in terms of translation, given Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere's statement that current views of translation allow translators to be "free to opt for the kind of faithfulness that will ensure, in their opinion, that a given text is received by the target audience in optimal conditions" (3). However, by tailoring his translation to the task of persuading a specific audience (the mid-nineteenth century British) for a specific purpose (supporting Polish independence), he may have greatly limited the work's appeal. Sadly, his effort did not succeed, since Poland and Lithuania gained independence only in 1918, almost 70 years later.

And the work of a Polish woman author ended up sliding into the twilight.

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