


Andrzej Wierciński
University of Warsaw

 0000-0001-9096-6535

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A New Beginning: On the Power and Powerlessness (*Macht und Ohnmacht*) of Thinking and Believing

Thinking Incarnation as a New Beginning (*ein neuer Anfang*) is a challenging hermeneutic task. The power of God's self-manifestation *in* and *through* the divine Word calls for considering Logos as the principle of life. In the task of understanding, what is most difficult is to bring together the beginning (*ἀρχή*) and the end (*ἔσχατον*): Protology and eschatology belong together (*zueinandergehören*). This task of thinking together is addressed not only to dogmatic theologians but to every human being encountered by the mystery of the Incarnation. As with every mystery, our human responsibility is to face divine self-epiphany not as a problem to be answered and solved in formal statements but as a genuine call for thinking (*Denkauftrag*).

Key words: incarnation, new beginning, *locus revelations*, hermeneutics, revelation, hermeneutics of hospitality.

God leads his people to himself through his self-revelation and self-manifestation and forms and transforms human history into the history of salvation (*salutis historia*). Divine care was remarkably pronounced in the prophets' complex life stories and destinies. The culmination of the prophecies was the proclamation of the promised Messiah within whom all the promises are fulfilled: "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ," ὅσα γὰρ ἐπαγγελία Θεοῦ, ἐν αὐτῷ τὸ Ναί (2 Cor 1:20). John the Baptist, the greatest of the prophets, experiences the actual fulfilment of the promise. However, even he has to undertake the task of discernment, and only in faith recognizes the long-expected Savior of the world. Human outlooks and expectations prove to be constantly challenged by God's unique

engagements. John risks everything to identify and accept the Messiah. The most demanding aspect is to understand and experience that in meeting the Messiah, he meets God. God lets him discover himself most intimately through a personal encounter. Thus, God confirms in a new way that the history of salvation as the history of humanity walking humbly with him (Mic 6:8).

Incarnation is a genuinely new beginning. The newness of this beginning reminds us of the event of creation. It brings us back to the primordial horizon of a paradise-like relationship between God and human beings. This newness proclaims the possibility of returning to this original covenant, the first love, by turning to God. The prophetic voices come now together and join the voice of the Incarnated Logos: Repent and believe in the Gospel: μετανοείτε καὶ πιστεύετε ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ (Mk 1:12). As a pivotal point in history, Incarnation is a permanent invitation to conversion and communion with God. In this respect, it marks a new beginning and transforms the meaning of newness. Each time a human being meets God, it is a new beginning since it expresses the human answer to God's continual invitation to live with him.

The Prophets remind us that we always learn anew and always from the beginning. If education is self-education as a genuine care for the self, then there is no other way of learning to discern the permanent presence of the Divine in our life. The wise person (φρόνιμος) is able to listen carefully and responsibly to the disclosure of the Divine. The phronimos always answers differently since it requires the wisdom of the whole life to respond to the call that each time comes in a particular personal calling (vocation is God's calling) and can be discerned by the concrete human being in the specificity of their individual historical situatedness.

We do not discover God step by step, but rather always anew, and learn to be with him anew and from the very beginning. Only in such a way can we trust that our relationship will always be fresh, full of initial enthusiasm and fascination, like falling in love for the first time. Here, falling in love is not a matter of being overwhelmed by powerful feelings and fleeting attraction but as the art of love, the way of being with the Other in the life-giving and life-receiving relationship. One of the most crucial experiences is the ability to wonder (θαυμάζω), which inspires us in the true sense of filling us with the spirit of amazement and admiration. This new beginning of our love with God is the deepest desire of the human heart, which does not calculate and decide what serves specific purposes. To begin afresh means to work out many new and always different possibilities to develop as a human being every

time in this unique relationship. Discovering God is an experience of life and love, and thus cannot be reduced to any stagnated formula. The openness to the mystery is a condition *sine qua non* of faith. As such, it situates us in the horizon of infinite uncertainty, even the dark night of the soul (*la noche oscura del alma*). But it is also incomparable and everlasting fascination. It is, in itself, the journey toward union with God, when the experience of awakening and rejoicing in the presence of the Lord is the way (μέθοδος) toward and with God, and thus, the art of love.

The birth of Jesus brings the experience of the new into the world. A newborn child turns our vision to the beginning. Therefore, this beginning is a return to the very beginning: Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ Λόγος (J 1:1). This return is also a turn (*Kehre*) that cannot exclude the previous history. As such, it is a new turn to the ἀρχῇ happening in the life of the concrete human being. This turn is a matter of renewing the human mind, moreover, the whole human being, which is, in essence, the work of God and can be equated with the “regeneration by the Holy Spirit.” (ἔσωσεν ἡμᾶς διὰ λουτροῦ παλινγενεσίας καὶ ἀνακαινώσεως Πνεύματος Ἁγίου, Tit 3:5).

The new beginning brings joy to the world. Its source is the experience of closeness to the Lord, fulfilling the prophetic foretelling. In the historical darkness, God does not abandon his people. But his people need to want to listen, see, and understand. The Prophets, and now the Incarnated Word (*verbum caro*, ὁ Λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο, J 1:14) proclaim God News that God is with his people (Ἐμμανουήλ= Μεθ’ ἡμῶν ὁ Θεός, Mt 1:23). We can trust that God’s promises are fulfilled in our very eyes. They are truly being fulfilled. God speaks to us and tells us that he is always faithful to his promises. He calls us to understand that experiencing the fulfilment of the promise does not end the history with God but always opens it up and marks a new beginning. It is an opening toward God, an opening that prepares for meeting God and constantly accompanies it. After all, this is the meaning of life with God and the fulfilment of the most important of God’s promises that He, as “I am who I am” (אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה Ex 3:14) is not only with us sometimes, but is with us always, even, and maybe especially when we do not realize it. An engagement with the living God opens up possibilities for action and understanding that promote human development not only as an individual but as a member of the community.

The Good News is a salvific message to individuals in their incomunicability, irreplaceability, and uniqueness. However, it embraces its universal call to salvation in its singularity. Incarnation is a culmination of divine self-manifestation as Love that calls for love as

an act of human freedom to a new beginning. This new beginning is the *communio*, an ἐκκλησία of people loving each other because God loved us first (1 J 4:19: Ἡμεῖς ἀγαπῶμεν, ὅτι αὐτὸς πρῶτος ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς). Therefore, the human response is summarized as letting God love us (*Liebenlassen*). It is a dynamic and creative fusion of passivity and activity requiring the highest concentration of attention to allow love to happen. Thus, love is an event of encountering God, in which the divine presence does not only come to our consciousness (that is more *Sein* than *Bewusstsein*) but effectively inspires (*in-spiro*) us in our being human beings.

The Incarnated God is *locus revelationis*. In Jesus, God discloses the mystery of his trinitarian life and love. Becoming a human being, Jesus is fully in God, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, and they share their love in the dynamic conversation. This new proximity of God and human beings finds its perfect image in the Incarnated. With the Incarnation, the meaning of home has essentially changed. Jesus's true home is God (heaven) and earth. By being a gift that gives himself, Jesus is the Son of Man (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου), whose closeness to human beings does not diminish the depth of his active participation in the divine love. Thus, the Son of Man is the fulfilment of divine revelation. Becoming the Incarnated Word of God, Logos, Jesus is the fullest disclosure of God. He has the ultimate authority (ἐξουσία) to unfold the mystery of God and the divine plan of salvation despite the horrific refusal of his revelation culminated in the Crucifixion: "His own people did not accept him. But to those who did accept him, he gave the power to become children of God" (J 1:11-12). The Incarnated Logos is the revelation of Revelation, which, as empowered by the divine grace, we can hear (*gnadengewirkte Hörenkönnen der Offenbarung der Offenbarung*). As *locus revelationis*, he is one with God (ὁ Λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν Θεόν, καὶ Θεὸς ἦν ὁ Λόγος, J 1:1-2). He is also indeed a human being, born of Mary, who dwells among us (ὁ Λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν, J 1:14). The first chapter of John's Gospel is a congenial narration on Jesus's revelation that makes God visible. John's poetic creation represents a privileged place for the revelation of the truth. It makes God visible in the dialectics of divine invisibility and the emanation of divinity in the Incarnated Logos. Only in Jesus is this dialectic fully transparent and receives its extreme dramaturgy.

Since the Incarnated is God and remains in loving union with God, he is empowered to disclose the Divine to us. "In the days of his flesh" (Heb 5:7), this authority was given to him by the Father (καθὼς ἔδωκας αὐτῷ ἐξουσίαν, J 17:2). In the Incarnated, God's presence is among us.

This is the most profound meaning of Divine Revelation: Not to tell us about God, but to disclose his mystery by bringing him into our lives. As *locus revelationis*, the Incarnated unveils what God does in and through him for us and, thus, for our salvation. The unveiling is the self-emptying (κένωσις) of Jesus, which is also his glorification (*Herlichkeit des Verherrlichen*), in which God is glorified. The Incarnated glorifies God by having a clear image of God and sharing this image with us. In this sense, the Greek word for glorifying, δοξάζω, translated by Vulgate as *clarifico*, unearths the educational aspect of the Incarnation by making God renowned and prominent for us.

Thinking of Incarnation as the Divine Word becoming Flesh (*Fleischwerdung des Wortes*) as a human being (*Menschwerdung des Geistes*) makes us aware of the mystery of language. We meet the Incarnated in person and his speaking (*Wortlaut*). The Word of God (אֱלֹהִים Gen 15:1, *Wort und Ereignis*) does not only communicate something, however essential about God. It speaks himself (*Mitteilung*). God's self-disclosure is mediation through the Word, in which God shares with a human being his own mystery of life that is love as the dynamically lived reality. This sharing has a lingual character: It happens (*ereignet sich*) in the Word and through the Word. *Verbum Dei* is the very beginning of every language that allows human beings, after the confusion of languages at the Tower of Babel, to find their own expression in the plurivocity of meaning and variety of languages. Since the experience of the Pentecost leads to the understanding of different languages, we can see that the divine plan does not lead to the return to only one language from the time before the human attempt to dominate and control the world and be self-sufficient. God builds up on the variety of languages and blesses people with the ability to understand each other in the richness of the diverse languages. *Verbum Dei* came into our common world to encourage us to live together in our being different.

The mystery of the Incarnation discloses the essential aspect of understanding language. *Verbum Dei*, as the second person of the Trinity, is the unspoken word, λόγος ἐνδιάθετος, *verbum interius*, the word of the actual creative power that can put something into existence. *Verbum Dei* is also λόγος προφορικός, the spoken word, which is expressed in a variety of human languages. This spoken word of God is identical with the Incarnated Word, i.e., a historical Jesus. A dynamic living word that sounds outwardly is the sign of the word that gives light inwardly: "*verbum quod foris sonat signum est verbi quod intus lucet*" (Augustinus, *De Trinitate* 15, 11, 20). The significance of προφορά, as the manner of pronouncing the sounds, expresses the possibility of exploring the

meaning of thinking that constitutes internal speech (*verbum cordis*). Therefore, understanding something means being attuned to the voice that speaks to us. What we hear is language that calls us to be ready to give an answer (*Antwort*) to the word addressed to us (*Wort, Ruf*). In this being addressed, we are called by our own name (*Rufname*). This familiar name allows us to recognize unambiguously that we are called (*Angesprochensein*). To participate actively and creatively in the dynamics of being addressed and giving an answer, we need to be always attentive (*Wachsein*) to the voices we hear and keep ourselves responsive (*Wachhalten*) to being in the world in the concretization of the way of being in the world (*das Da des Seins*).

Verbum Dei discloses the nature of language that shows itself in the conversation between divine persons. Language belongs to this divine conversation happening while being together in a permanently different constellation (*περιχώρησις*). It finds its concrete expression in speaking to each other. Incarnation opens up a new possibility to discover the world that is a human world. *Verbum Dei* is unapologetic about the reason for the Incarnation: To seek and to save that which was lost, ἦλθεν γὰρ ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ζητῆσαι καὶ σῶσαι τὸ ἀπολωλός (Lk 19:10). Language and the world are the horizons of human beings' being in the world with Others. Our task is to understand ourselves in language and in the world. This language and this world are always ours. The existential challenge is to understand ourselves in our language and in our world, not against Others but with them. The call to solidarity comes from an understanding that the Other has the right to be understood in their language and in their world. It will remain the task of our whole life to find a way to the Other by translating our language and our world into the language and the world that will make our conversation possible. *Verbum Dei* translates the mystery of divine life and love in a way that it speaks to us and becomes a word that forms and transforms us. This word challenges us to see ourselves in Divine Revelation.

Incarnation renews (*re-novo*) the world and us *in* the world and *with* the world. It empowers understanding ourselves anew in this new world. The encounter with God always happens in the uniqueness of the conversation. Coming together within diversity means an art of listening to the Other, having a new ear, and an open heart for the needs of the Other. It challenges us to let the Other say something to us (*Sagenlassen*). Since God revealed himself to us as the Incarnated Word, we can take this as the indication that the "how" of this disclosure tells us something essential about God: He is a conversation of

the divine persons with each other. In and through the Incarnated Word, we can hear God's voice. We are invited to this never-ending conversation to participate in the dynamics of speaking and responding. Incarnation makes us aware of the importance of listening as the art of preparing ourselves for God's speaking to us. Since *Verbum Dei* discloses the conversational nature of God, our task is to learn the conversation with ourselves, with each other, and with God. This is the primary meaning of education. *Bildung* as self-education is the fundamental care for the self while living in the world with Others.

In Mt 24:42 Jesus invites his followers to be always ready to meet him when he comes, especially when he comes again at the end of time: "Keep awake, therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming": γρηγορεῖτε οὖν, ὅτι οὐκ οἴδατε ποία ἡμέρα ὁ κύριος ὑμῶν ἔρχεται. The verb γρηγορέω describes the state of being awake, watchful, vigilant, and on alert. It is the state of mind of people awaiting the coming of the Lord (παρουσία). This mode of being in the world with Others is characterized by living in the constant presence of God while awaiting his final visible appearance. It is about living the Advent (*ad-venio*) in the concentration of attention on the arrival of him, who always was, is now, and forever be. Being vigilant is not about neurotic derangement and panic fear but a humble (*humilis*, χθαμαλός) and, therefore, prudent (σώφρων, *prudens-providens*, foreseeing) discernment on the way to self-knowledge. Listening to each other and understanding each other is a difficult task. It requires focused awareness of what the Other is conveying to us. *Mitteilen* also means *teilen*, sharing our lifeworld and inviting us into the otherwise inaccessible horizons. The willingness to listen to each other and understand each other expresses the most profound meaning of human solidarity that is so much needed in our world, sparked and ravaged by wars, natural disasters, famines, epidemics, and other crises.

St. Augustine worried, "*Timeo enim Iesum transeuntem et manentem: et ideo tacere non possum*" (*Sermo* 88): "I fear God's passing by and remain forever; therefore, I cannot keep silent." He expresses his worries (*timor filialis*) about not being attentive enough in his life. It is not a matter of the paralyzing anxiety but the dedication to the moment of grace, an insight into the true self that can be experienced in the presence of the Divine, an opportune time, καιρός (*Augenblick* is a moment of vision). Augustine wishes not to miss any opportunity to be touched by the hand of the Lord and listen to his voice that forms and transforms his life. In listening to this voice, we recognize that the voice perishes. Still, the word carried by the voice reaches the

heart of the Other and remains in the heart of the speaker: “*verbum autem quod ad te sonus perduxit, iam est in corde tuo, nec recessit a meo*” (Augustinus, *Sermo* 293). Following Augustine, we cannot only keep worrying about the atomic bomb or other mass destruction. We should rather be concerned with our ability to think (*Besinnung*) and live together in solidarity, justice, and recognition of each other. The primary task of education is to awaken and encourage people to think. The power of thought consists of permanently rediscovering the need for reflection and contemplation. The crucial mission of thinking is to gain a new meaning than that of the natural sciences by reflecting on the Tradition of Western thinking. The main feature of humankind’s history can only be discovered in a radical openness to the beginning and a confident orientation toward the apocalyptic end. In the dramatically creative tension between this no longer of the past and not yet of the future (*iam and nondum*, the already and the not-yet, something that has always been here and something that is not yet), we can recognize the historical necessity of the atomic age with its entanglement in technocracy. The responsibility for our future is our responsibility. Walking together (σύν-όδός), we will discover the pathways to the genuinely human future. The event of Incarnation is an invitation and an opportunity to embrace a new beginning by rethinking the oldest of the old (ἀρχή, ἀλήθεια) if we do not wish to perish or live in a world of palliative care. The attempts to overcome the pain with our technocratic motions and potions do not remove it but bring it back to abiding. A new modesty and decency are required, something to see and behold that is bigger than us.

We can expect something that goes beyond us. Thus, this expectation is a rejection of human decisionism. The saving comes to us to explain the meaning of our life. The significance of human fellowship with God is experienced with and in the Incarnated Logos. In this encounter, we continue to await the visionary contemplative greatness of the promised eternal future. Reflecting on the future and listening to the unheard of (*das Unerhörte*), i.e., what can be heard (*das zu Hörende*), helps us to understand people insofar as they stand in the openness to God. Human thinking moves in an original relation to God, which can only happen in Tradition and be understood as Tradition. Language is the way of such understanding and judging (*Urteilen*), which involves sharing (*Teilen*). The thinker must submit to the word that leads to the new of what has already been (*das Neue des Gewesenen*). The Word of Revelation in its history of effects (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) gives meaning to the Incarnation from the end of history.

In St. John's Gospel, Jesus says that he came that we might have life and have it abundantly (ἐγὼ ἦλθον ἵνα ζωὴν ἔχωσιν καὶ περισσὸν ἔχωσιν, J 10:10). Here, *περισσός* means beyond what is anticipated, exceeding expectation; more than enough, having continuously all-around. Renewed love reminds us that trust breeds fidelity. Since God, as supreme Love, became a human being and entered this world, it is worth living in such a world. The sound passes, the Word endures forever (τὸ δὲ ῥῆμα Κυρίου μένει εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, 1 Pet 1:25).

On (Not) Welcoming God into the World: Porous Borders and Hardened Hearts

In John 1:11, we read: Εἰς τὰ ἴδια ἦλθεν, καὶ οἱ ἴδιοι αὐτὸν οὐ παρέλαβον. The King James Bible renders it as “He came unto his own, and his own received him not.” It is noteworthy (*denkwürdig*) that in the first instance, “his own” is neuter (τὰ ἴδια), which indicates the place where the Messianic hope was expected to be fulfilled. In the second instance, “his own” is masculine (οἱ ἴδιοι) and refers to the dwellers waiting for the Messiah. The Vulgata translation makes the distinction between τὰ ἴδια and οἱ ἴδιοι very perceptive: “In propria venit, et sui eum non receperunt.” It indicates strongly that Jesus came into the world that is his, and his are also people to whom he came. The final “received him not” (αὐτὸν οὐ παρέλαβον), literally not took him in, is an unapologetic complaint about being rejected by those who were especially loved and cared for as the people of the covenant. The failing reception will distinctly intensify the Theo-dramatic: The divine offer can only be received by the free act of will of the human being. By coming into the world, God chooses to participate in the drama happening between heaven and earth. He takes this drama upon himself. A human being becomes God's drama.

The powerful complaint of being rejected by his own people severely overshadows the joy of the first verses of the Good News that the Redeemer has been born and saturates it with an unparalleled sadness. The bigger the love and devotion, the more severe the pain of rejection. However, pain, darkness, and sorrow cannot outshine the absolute novelty in the history of humankind: The mystery of the Incarnation. The Incarnation changed the understanding of the familiar and foreign forever. Did we learn anything from God becoming man (*in carne*, which is a Latin translation of J 1:14: ὁ Λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο) in the 2000 years that separate us from this salvific event? The expression, καὶ ἐγένετο (from γίγνομαι) refers to something that happened. And

here, something unimaginable became visible, something impossible possible. God becomes a human being in the flesh, like us. And he dwells among us (J 1:14 καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν, et habitavit in nobis). This dwelling determines not only being in the world but also an intimate communion with the human being. The verb σκηνώω, inhabited, suggests an architectural form (tent, tabernacle) that guarantees safety under the watchful eye of God.

Thinking the Incarnation encourages us to stand on firm ground (*Bodenständigkeit*) because the foundation of the world can be seen in the Incarnated Logos. *Verbum Dei* finds its home among human beings and communicates with us the harshness of human destiny. Incarnation teaches us to live and dwell in the world, which is our world, the world of our culture, built with the power of our minds and hands. When Jesus says that in him, the reigning of God came close to us (Ἠγγικεν ἐφ' ὑμᾶς ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ, Lk 10:9, here ἡ βασιλεία means a dynamic divine reality), then he emphasizes that the common task of humanity is to take responsibility for the human beings being together in the shared world (*polis, res publica*). It is truly a task to live together and learn from each other in an open space that is transformed by the divine spirit into a space of salvation. In that space, everyone is called to search for the right word to participate in the conversation, leading us toward the passion for the Other.

Home is where we are. And nobody can absolve us from the care of our own home. We need to build this home, always remembering nonetheless what we read in the King James's translation, "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it" (Psalm 127:1). The futility of toil is perfectly reflected in the *Vulgatae* translation: "Nisi Dominus aedificaverit domum, in vanum laboraverunt, qui aedificant eam." Any effort to build up becomes nothing but vanity and futility, a deceptive attempt by useless servants. Building and caring for a house is, above all, caring for ourselves. Having a home, we must learn to dwell in it and host and accept ourselves in it. To be ourselves with ourselves in our own home. Otherwise, we will be like migrants searching desperately for a physical place to rest or homeless people who have consciously given up the struggle for their own homes. The Christmas message will leave us untouched.

The Word of God became flesh and chose to be among us as his dwelling place. God has found a way to translate his ineffability into the human language of love and care. The joy of hearing this divine rendering prompts us to translate our belonging to this new κοινή, a new language that we can share with Others. Just as Mary shared with

Elizabeth the joy that things that are happening transgress human capacity, so too can we share what we recognize on the level of faith as the time (καιρός) of witnessing to the fulfilment of God's promises. Instead, we can seal the boundaries to prevent what is most important: a personal encounter with the newborn Jesus. He will be born, but the meeting with him will not occur. As always in life, some people cannot cross borders. Others will never enter what is ours uninvited and unwelcome. Some will inspect for any leaks so that no one enters the territory they consider their own. Regrettably, they forget, "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein," as the King James's edition brilliantly renders the original. "Domini est terra et plenitudo eius orbis et habitatores eius," says the *Vulgatae* translation of Psalm 24:1.

Eine undichte Grenze, une frontière perméable, una frontiera permeabile, nieszczelna granica, a porous border! It is not a matter of learning more languages to express the desire to (not)cross the borders, nor about learning techniques and providing the means to build fences to separate or, worse still, tear people apart. It is about awakening our minds and hearts to understand the Christmas event (*Ereignis*) as a call to radical hospitality toward the unknown, the stranger, but also the familiar and one's own. God comes as the one who wants to reconcile us with himself (2 Cor 5:18-19; Col 1:20-22; Gal 2:20) caring as a father for everyone (*omnes*) and everything (*omnia*): "And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation" (Acts 17:26). Developing this land into an inhospitable space is, in itself, a perverse crossing of the boundaries of indifference and insensitivity.

<p>Wisława Szymborska, <i>Psalm</i> (1976)</p> <p>O, jakże są nieszczelne granice ludzkich państw! Ile to chmur nad nimi bezkarnie przepływa, ile piasków pustynnych przesypuje się z kraju do kraju, ile górskich kamyków stacza się w cudze włości w wyzywających podskokach!</p>	<p>Wisława Szymborska, <i>Psalm</i> (1976)</p> <p>How porous are the borders of countries and states! Incalculable clouds float liberally over them, how much desert dust travels across the frontiers, and countless mountain pebbles plunge into the foreign land in provocative springs!</p>
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<p>Czy muszę tu wymieniać ptaka za ptakiem jak leci, albo jak właśnie przysiada na opuszczonym szlabanie? Niechby to nawet był wróbel – a już ma ogon ościenny, choć dzióbek jeszcze tutejszy. W dodatku – ależ się wierci!</p>	<p>Do I need to specify every single bird that is flying, or takes rest on the lowered barrier? It might be just a robin – with his tail out in the strange and his beak in familiar quarters. Moreover, tossing and wriggling like crazy!</p>
<p>Z nieprzeliczonych owadów poprzestanę na mrówce, która pomiędzy lewym a prawym butem strażnika na pytanie: skąd dokąd – nie poczuwa się do odpowiedzi.</p>	<p>Out of the innumerable insects, I will single out only the ant between the soldier's left and the right boot she cannot be bothered being asked for the destination.</p>
<p>Och, zobaczyć dokładnie cały ten nieład naraz, na wszystkich kontynentach! Bo czy to nie liguster z przeciwnego brzegu przemycą poprzez rzekę stutysięczny listek? Bo kto, jeśli nie mątwą zuchwale długoramienna, narusza świętą strefę wód terytorialnych?</p>	<p>To see all the chaos at once, on every continent! Is it not a privet on the far bank smuggling the hundred-thousandth leaf across the river? And who but the octopus, with audaciously long arms muddles the sacred zone of provincial waters?</p>
<p>Czy można w ogóle mówić o jakim takim porządku, jeżeli nawet gwiazd nie da się porozsuwać, żeby było wiadomo, która komu świeci?</p>	<p>How to talk of any kind of order when we cannot even rearrange the stars to be sure which one shines for whom?</p>
<p>I jeszcze to naganne rozpościeranie się mgły! I pylenie się stepu na całej przestrzeni, jak gdyby nie był wcale wpół przecięty!</p>	<p>Not to speak of the fog's shameful drifting! And dust blowing all over the steppes as if they hadn't been cut in two halves!</p>
<p>I rozlegnie się głosów na usłużnych falach powietrza: przywoływawczych pisków i znaczących bulgotów!</p>	<p>And the voices sailing on attentive airwaves: startling squeals and weighty bubbles!</p>

<p>Tylko co ludzkie potrafi być prawdziwie obce. Reszta to lasy mieszane, krecia robota i wiatr.</p>	<p>Only what is human can indeed be foreign. The rest is mixed forests, trickery, and the wind.</p>
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How much do I learn from bumping into what I probably wouldn't have read, at least at this specific point in my life, by different unexpected engagements? I read and write with dedication, passion, and the necessary patience. Here, I will only mention Charles Bukowski, a poet born in Germany with a Slavic surname, almost unpronounceable to Americans, whose turbulent life in Los Angeles is poetry in itself. Seemingly, his writing is not the best choice for thinking Incarnation. How much did Charles Bukowski and Henryk Chinaski, the poet's alter ego, have to struggle to understand anything about homelessness, looking for a home, and coming home? Living always at the edge, always in-between, deceived and seducing, perpetually drunk, in the fumes of cigarette smoke, but never in the service of mediocrity. Only God's elect can write like Buk. Everything is so simple and light that after reading it, you cannot help but read it again, and again, and never enough.

<p>Charles Bukowski, <i>Christmas Poem to a Man in Jail</i></p> <p>hello Bill Abbott: I appreciate your passing around my books in jail there, my poems and stories. if I can lighten the load for some of those guys with my books, fine. but literature, you know, is difficult for the average man to assimilate (and for the unaverage man too); I don't like most poetry, for example, so I write mine the way I like to read it.</p>	<p>Charles Bukowski, <i>Wiersz bożonarodzeniowy do mężczyzny w więzieniu</i></p> <p>cześć Billu Abbocie: Dzięki, że dzielisz się w więzieniu moimi książkami, wierszami i opowiadaniem. jeśli mogę odciążyć niektórych z tych facetów poprzez moje książki, w porządku. ale literatura, wiesz, jest trudna dla przeciętnego człowieka do zrozumienia (i nieprzeciętnego także); Nie lubię większości poezji, na przykład, więc piszę swoją tak, jak lubię ją czytać.</p>
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<p>poetry does seem to be getting better, more human, the clearing up of the language has something to do with it (w. c. williams came along and asked everybody to clear up the language) then I came along. but writing's one thing, life's another, we seem to have improved the writing a bit but life (ours and theirs) doesn't seem to be improving very much. maybe if we write well enough and live a little better life will improve a bit just out of shame. maybe the artist haven't been powerful enough, maybe the politicians, the generals, the judges, the priests, the police, the pimps, the businessmen have been too strong? I don't like that thought but when I look at our pale and precious artists, past and present, it does seem possible. (people don't like it when I talk this way. Chinaski, get off it, they say, you're not that great. but hell, I'm not talking about being great.)</p>	<p>poezja wydaje się być coraz lepsza, bardziej ludzka, oczyszczenie języka ma z tym coś wspólnego (pojawił się w. c. williams i błagał wszystkich, by oczyścili język) następnie pojawilem się ja. ale pisanie to jedno, życie to co innego, wydaje się, że poprawiliśmy nieco pisanie ale życie (nasze i ich) chyba nie stało się dużo lepsze. może jeśli będziemy pisali wystarczająco dobrze i żyli trochę lepiej życie nieco się poprawi choćby tylko ze wstydu. może artysta nie był wystarczająco genialny, a może politycy, generałowie, sędziowie, księża, policja, sutenerzy, biznesmeni byli za mocni? Nie sądzę tak ale kiedy patrzę na naszych bledych i drogich artystów, dawnych i dzisiejszych, wydaje się to prawdopodobne. (ludzie nie lubią, kiedy mówię w ten sposób. Chinaski, przestań, proszę, nie jesteś tak wielki. ale do diabła, nie mówię o byciu wielkim.)</p>
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what I'm saying is
 that art hasn't improved life like it
 should, maybe because it has been too
 private? and despite the fact that the
 old poets
 and the new poets and myself
 all seem to have had the same or
 similar troubles
 with:
 women
 government
 God
 love
 hate
 penury
 slavery
 insomnia
 transportation
 weather
 wives, and so
 forth.
 you write me now
 that the man in the cell next to yours
 didn't like my punctuation
 the placement of my commas
 (especially)
 and also the way I digress
 in order to say something precisely.
 ah, he doesn't realize the intent
 which is
 to loosen up, humanize, relax
 and still make as real as possible
 the word on the page. the word should
 be like
 butter or avocados or
 steak or hot biscuits, or onion rings or
 whatever is really
 needed. it should be almost
 as if you could pick up the words and
 eat them.

to co mówię to
 że sztuka nie polepszyła życia
 w taki sposób
 jak powinna, może dlatego, że była
 zbyt
 prywatna? i pomimo tego, że dawni
 poeci
 nowi poeci i ja
 wydaje się, że wszyscy mieli takie
 same lub podobne problemy
 z:
 kobietami
 rządem
 Panem Bogiem
 miłością
 nienawiścią
 nędzą
 niewolnictwem
 bezsennością
 transportem
 pogodą
 żonami, i tym
 podobnie.
 piesz do mnie teraz
 że mężczyźnie w celi obok
 nie podoba się moja interpunkcja
 stawianie przecinków (zwłaszcza)
 a także sposób w jaki robię dygresje
 żeby coś dokładnie powiedzieć.
 ach, on nie zdaje sobie sprawy
 z zamysłu
 by
 rozluźnić, uczłowieczyć,
 relaksować
 i nadal robić to tak prawdziwie, jak
 tylko możliwe
 słowo na stronie. słowo powinno
 być jak
 masło lub awokado albo
 stek czy gorące herbatniki lub
 cebulowe obwarzanki lub
 cokolwiek co jest naprawdę
 potrzebne. powinno być prawie
 tak, żebyś mógł brać słowa i
 jeść.

(there is some wise-ass somewhere out there who will say if he ever reads this: "Chinaski, if I want dinner I'll go out and order it!") however an artist can wander and still maintain essential form. Dostoevsky did it. he usually told 3 or 4 stories on the side while telling the one in the center (in his novels, that is). Bach taught us how to lay one melody down on top of another and another melody on top of that and Mahler wandered more than anybody I know and I find great meaning in his so-called formlessness. don't let the form-and-rule boys like that guy in the cell next to you put one over on you. just hand him a copy of Time or Newsweek and he'll be happy. but I'm not defending my work (to you or to him) I'm defending my right to do it in the way that makes me feel best. I always figure if a writer is bored with his work the reader is going to be bored too.

(pewnie gdzieś jest jakiś dupek który powie jeśli kiedykolwiek to przeczyta: „Chinaski, jeśli zechcę zjeść to wyjdę i sobie kupię”) Jednakże artysta może wędrować i nadal utrzymać świętą formę. Dostojewski to robił. zwykle opowiadał 3 lub 4 historie na boku podczas rozwijania jednej fabuły w centrum (to dotyczy jego powieści). Bach uczył nas jak budować jedną melodię nad inną i kolejną melodię nad jeszcze inną i Mahler poruszał się swobodnie bardziej niż ktokolwiek, kogo znam i widzę wielki sens w jego tak zwanym braku formy. nie pozwól chłopcom od formy i władzy jak temu facetowi w celi obok ciebie nałożyć formę na ciebie. tylko daj mu egzemplarz Timesa lub Newsweeka i będzie szczęśliwy. ale nie bronię się (ani przed tobą ani przed nim) Bronię swojego prawa do robienia tego co robię by mi z tym było jak najlepiej. Zawsze wiem, że kiedy pisarz jest znudzony swoją pracą Czytelnik też będzie znudzony.

and I don't believe in
 perfection, I believe in keeping the
 bowels loose
 so I've got to agree with my critics
 when they say I write a lot of shit.
 you're doing 19 and 1/2 years
 I've been writing about 40.
 we all go on with our things.
 we all go on with our lives.
 we all write badly at times
 or live badly at times.
 we all have bad days
 and nights.
 I ought to send the guy in the cell next
 to yours
 The Collected Works of Robert
 Browning for Christmas,
 that'd give him the form he's looking for
 but I need the money for the track,
 Santa Anita is opening on the
 26th, so give him a copy of Newsweek
 (the dead have no future, no past, no
 present,
 they just worry about commas)
 and have I placed the commas here
 properly,
 Abbott?

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i nie wierzę w
 doskonałość, wierzę w niespinanie
 się
 więc muszę się zgodzić z moimi
 krytykami
 kiedy mówią, że piszę dużo gówna.
 Odsiadujesz 19 i 1/2 roku
 Ja piszę około 40 lat.
 wszyscy zajmujemy się własnymi
 sprawami.
 wszyscy żyjemy dalej.
 wszyscy czasami piszemy źle
 albo czasami źle żyjemy.
 wszyscy mamy złe dni
 i noce.
 Powinienem wysłać dla faceta
 w celi obok twojej
 Dzieła zebrane Roberta Browninga
 na Boże Narodzenie,
 to dałoby mu formę, której szuka
 ale potrzebuję pieniędzy na
 samochód,
 Santa Anita rusza
 26go, daj mu więc egzemplarz
 Newsweeka
 (umarli nie mają przyszłości,
 przeszłości, teraźniejszości,
 martwią się tylko przecinkami)
 Umieściłem tu przecinki
 odpowiednio,
 Abbocie?

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I have translated, with considerable satisfaction, Wisława Szymborska into English and Charles Bukowski into Polish. Two different languages, two different locations, Kraków and Los Angeles, two genders, two different kinds of *ars poetica*. Translating helps us see

that understanding is a patient journey from one shore to the other, an attempt to perceive what is known and familiar and the strange and alien from different sides. This movement back and forth, and again from the beginning, is a hermeneutic event of understanding. Translating is a human being's way of living with oneself (*soliloquium*) and the Other. By living, we translate, and by translating, we live. Therefore, each translation affects our self-understanding and is education in its most profound sense. It is also decisive for our relationships with ourselves and with Others. Hence, it is an ethical eventing in the most profound sense of understanding ethics. The paradigm of translation discloses what happens to us and in us when we translate. Linguistic hospitality is not a matter of saying a few nice words in another language. Rather, it is an openness to what this language can contribute to my self-understanding. And how it can enrich others' understanding of themselves. Translation cannot be reduced to the question of perfect word matching or formal linguistic correctness. The question is whether we can exist in different languages and communicate in our essential incommunicability.

Some people may be happy to receive practically anything for Christmas. Perhaps it might be impossible to reach them. Police, soldiers, and border guards can block access to isolated (confined) Others. The Christmas message is not a memorandum of compliance with applicable terms and conditions. It is the message of the Angels who announce great joy. It is a message that God is with us. It is up to us to accept him, rejoice in him, and celebrate with him. Maybe he does come, as he came into the world when there was no political peace and a young girl gave birth wherever she could lay down her head. Today, they may be the river Bug marshes or the Białowieża National Park forests. They may be the borders of Mexico and the USA, both Koreas, Calais, and Dover, Israel and Palestine, and thousands of other sensitive and irritable points on the world map, which for some of us, often for reasons known only to ourselves, are a paradise we would like to reach on our earthly pilgrimage.

Let us not "the boys" who assume to possess power impose their mindsets on us. It is a matter of taste, as Zbigniew Herbert would say. Indeed, taste and decency. "Those boys" might worry about everything leaky, deceive each other, seduce each other, barricade as they believe they must. Christmas reminds us that God enters the world as it is. He does not scream for a majestic bed. He can show his own needs in different ways. And the need for hospitality, too. There is plenty we can learn from him. Isn't it brilliant that the one Christmas event can

reveal so much to us (φαίνεσθαι)? And teach us how to live as guests and hosts, insiders and strangers, friends and foes. What we really need is a hermeneutic eye and a hermeneutic ear. “Only what is human can indeed be foreign. The rest is mixed forests, trickery, and the wind.”