

Some Remarks on a Sentence in *Piece of Monologue*

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The sentence:

“Parts lips and thrusts tongue forward. Birth.”

This sentence describes the action employed by the organs of speech in articulating the word “birth.” Parting the lips is both a condition for and a result of pronouncing the plosive consonant “b”; thrusting the tongue forward, more precisely, pushing it out through the parted lips and teeth, describes in turn the action involved in pronouncing the sound “th.” The translation of this sentence therefore depends on the pronunciation of the word “birth” in the given language. In my Polish translation the word “birth” for various reasons is rendered in the verbal form as “urodzil sie” (he was born). The form “urodzil sie” consists of eight sounds: u, r, o, j, e, w, sh, e. Thus either the articulation of all these sounds should be described, or, following the author’s example, that of only a few, namely those most characteristic for pronouncing the form “urodzil sie”. Unfortunately neither the complete version nor the simplified one provides an adequate solution. On the one hand such a description would be too long and so disturb the rhythm of the text; on the other hand it would say too little, since articulation of the form “urodzil sie” is not as distinctive as that of the word “birth.” Above all it would not fulfill the function of the original, i. e., it would not reveal the specific connection between the word “birth” and its articulation, since the same connection does not exist in the case of “urodzil sie.” This connection links the parting of lips and thrusting forward of the tongue, necessary for the articulation of the word “birth,” with the actual act of birth. In other words, the pronunciation of this word is simultaneously the image or symbol of that which it signifies. Using still other words, in a certain sense this word *is* that which it signifies. By placing the description of this word’s articulation in the text, and thus revealing this connection, the author intends to evoke associations with the myth of creative power of the word, so deeply rooted in European culture. The word “birth” presents a phenomenon in which the abstract mystery of the transformation of the Word into a Thing, moreover the dependence of the Thing on the Word, appears quite directly, as something concrete and tangible. In the case of the word “birth,” meaning mixes with object, the signifier with the signified. This provides a natural model or prototype of the mythical “orality” (verbality) of the flesh (body), the idea that the world is something spoken, that all reality is form and function of speech, that all being is Logos fulfilling itself (making itself real). Apart from being primal and possessing the power of creation, the Word as, indirectly, the source of the light: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not” (St. John I, 1-5). In the fragment under consideration the author also takes this aspect of the myth into account. He does this by making use of the verb “to part” in reference to lips as well as darkness: “Parts lips.”, “Parts the dark.”, “Dark parts.” In this way he poses a condition or rather an equivalence between opening the lips to utter a word and scattering darkness. Uttering the Word-Life is equal to scattering darkness.

The fact that the author omitted the fragment here discussed in the French version (and consequently the entire “birth” motif) indicates that he did not find any analogous substitute. Probably none of the words then at his disposal could fulfill the conditions set by the English “birth” and “to part.” The question thus arises, whether this fragment should be translated into Polish, which similarly lacks a word which completely corresponds to “birth.” If I have decided to include the fragment, it was with the conviction that such a peculiar and interesting linguistic and poetic phenomenon is worth reproducing even if only halfway (with a full explanation in the form of commentary) rather than ignoring it altogether.

The solution I have chosen: “Wysuwa wargi i tworzy między nimi niewielki otwor” (he rounds his lips and opens them slightly) presents a description of the articulation of the first sound only (u) of the Polish phrase “urodzil sie.” This suggests that the turning-point, as well as the most difficult and most dramatic moment, is found in the movement of the mouth as it prepares to utter the first syllable. The uttered sound “u” may also be associated with the screams of a woman in labor. I have translated “Parts the dark” with the phrase “i juz sie cos jawi” (and right then something came to light) with recognition, that given its immediate adjacency to the phrase “urodzil sie” these words express the fundamental idea.