

# Poets, Affects and Common Places:

*In Memory of My Feelings* Frank O'Hara  
and *Cover* Andrzej Sosnowski  
from the Perspective of *Mise en Abyme*\*

\* This research project is financed within the programme "Diamentowy Grant" No DI2017/008947: "Nowy automatyzm? Metarefleksja w poezji polskiej po roku 1989", 2018-2022.

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Andrzej Sosnowski is one of the most important and influential modern Polish poets. His work has inspired numerous polemics in the field of literary criticism, focusing first on such topics as postmodernism, the death of an author, or exhausting lyric poetry, and later noticing such issues as subjectivity, postsecularism, politicalness and engagement. Sosnowski was born in 1959. He published his first book of poetry, *Życie na Korei*, in 1992; he has published over a dozen books of poetry, collections of essays and poetic prose, as well as numerous translations (he has translated the work of such authors as Elizabeth Bishop, Roland Firbank, John Ashbery and Arthur Rimbaud) ever since. The translation context is important for interpreting his original works: he often refers to foreign literature, which goes beyond the postmodern textual playfulness.

Much has been written about *Cover* by Sosnowski and its relations with *In Memory Of My Feelings* by Frank O'Hara; the two texts have been analyzed and compared by Tadeusz Pióro,

Ryszard Chłopek, Jacek Gutorow, and Ewa Rajewska<sup>1</sup>. The researchers have indicated various characteristics, determinants and conditionings of the cover, highlighting – among other things – the “translation-likeness”, the necessary “borderlandness” (i.e. existing at the intersection of two languages and two poetics), the significant context of postmodernism of this *quasi*-genre, which places the works in question in the context of popular culture and allows for considerations regarding their intertextuality, possible paradoxicality or (deconstructed) category of novelty, replaced by understanding the difference<sup>2</sup>; as Gutorow puts it, a cover is “work in a new version, a repetition, which is by no means the same”<sup>3</sup>.

Although the two poems are neither unknown nor absent from literary criticism, it seems that the last word about them has not been said yet. Hence, first of all, one can consider the *mise en abyme* context, essential in the case of works classified as postmodern. From the perspective of metareflection, Sosnowski’s and O’Hara’s poems form an extremely interesting relationship with each other. This relationship is somewhat contrasting – or, to the contrary, paradoxically combining – the permanently discussed construction of a modern subject as an entity to whom one would like to ascribe the supreme function of bonding experiences together, as well as constantly expressing doubts regarding its chances, with postmodern immersion in a text and negating the existence of reality other than the semiotic one. The two poems in question can also be considered from the perspective of their poetics, asking about the eponymous “interpresence” – i.e. how a relationship forms between them. However, this relationship is not based on a dialogue or answers, but rather on a peculiar cooperation. Possible answers to the latter question would stem from the former one: autothematic motifs in *Cover* and *In Memory Of My Feelings* can offer interesting interpretative ideas regarding especially the “derived” text (as long as the old-fashioned translation studies – and not only – rhetoric of original and imitative works, the source and the copy, is present).

The volume and level of complexity of the two poems, each several pages long (and multilayered), and full of cultural and symbolic references obviously exclude the possibility of a thorough analysis over the course of one paper, especially if the study in question were to remain as close to the texts as possible – given that both poems are rather hermetic, and moreover they open up numerous contextual interpretations. Thus, the present paper is limited to a handful of introductory comments, which may inspire another reflection on the two poems and the essential role of autothematic motifs that they include.

<sup>1</sup> See: Tadeusz Pióro, “Czas to biurokracja, którą tworzą wszyscy,” in *Lekcja żywego języka: o poezji Andrzeja Sosnowskiego*, ed. Grzegorz Jankowicz (Kraków: Zielona Sowa : Studium Literacko-Artystyczne przy Instytucie Polonistyki Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2003); Ryszard Chłopek, “Kogo śmieszy „Cover”?”, in *Lekcja żywego języka: o poezji Andrzeja Sosnowskiego*, ed. Grzegorz Jankowicz (Kraków: Zielona Sowa : Studium Literacko-Artystyczne przy Instytucie Polonistyki Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2003); Jacek Gutorow, “Kilwater,” in *Urwany ślad: o wierszach Wirpszy, Karpowicza, Różewicza i Sosnowskiego* (Wrocław: Biuro Literackie, 2007); Ewa Rajewska, “Kariera coveru,” in *Kultura w stanie przekładu: translatołogia - komparatystyka - transkulturowość*, ed. Włodzimierz Bolecki and Ewa Kraskowska (Warszawa: Fundacja Akademia Humanistyczna : Instytut Badań Literackich PAN. Wydawnictwo, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Rajewska, “Kariera coveru,” 328–29.

<sup>3</sup> Gutorow, “Kilwater,” 190.

What would the initial interpretative thesis regarding the general tone of both texts be (assuming that Sosnowski's *Cover* is the cover of O'Hara's *In Memory Of My Feelings*, and so they form a broad relationship of intertextual and inter-linguistic dialogue<sup>4</sup>)? Most likely, the following differentiation would be one of the most obvious proposals: generally speaking, *In Memory Of My Feelings* is devoted to experiencing and subjectivity, as indicated by various subparts of the poem, such as the multiple "naked selves" of the protagonist, out of which each "self" owns its own adventures. The figure of a "serpent" seems especially important here, as the description of its perception and experiences at some point replaces the human perspective (or the perspective of a personified figure described in the lines "my quietness has a man in it, he is transparent"<sup>5</sup>), numerous mentions of specific emotions and states ("Manfred climbs to my nape,/ speaks, but I can't hear him,/ I'm too blue") and a multisensory approach (a description of feelings explained as a sensual reception of warmth and coldness, as well as the structure and materiality of specific objects, like in the verses "though in winter/ they are warm as roses, in the desert/ taste of chilled anisette"). This way of reading O'Hara also stems from the knowledge of his other works, characterized by their immersion in everyday reality, privacy and the specificity of personal experience. Actually, the very title shapes the interpretation of the poem: there is a significant reference to "my feelings" next to the subjective (private or collective) memory. This not only attracts attention to the emotional character of the poem, but also highlights the role of their affiliation with a given figure (man? serpent? the subject of an undefined identity, prone to transformations?). It is worthwhile to also pay attention to the dedication: Grace Hartigan was a famous expressionist painter; this not only supports the "emotional" interpretation of the poem, but also introduces the intersemiotic context, so important for the author<sup>6</sup>.

The initial interpretation of *Cover* looks completely different: the title is enigmatic (unlike in O'Hara's poem, it does not directly refer to the contents of the poem, nor does it suggest whose cover it is, which is highly unusual, both in the popular culture, in which the cover enjoys great popularity, especially in music, and in literature, as evidenced by Gutorow's list of titles which comprises a peculiar corpus of examples of this *quasi-genre*<sup>7</sup>), and it refers only to genealogical, theoretical and semiotic categories. The title of Sosnowski's poem gives no information regarding what it is about (and what it refers to), but rather what it is, shifting the balance point of the analysis from the contents and issues to genre questions, and, as such, textual questions. An explanation regarding the question of what *Cover* covers is provided only towards the end of the poem, which is also rather unusual.

However, the poem reveals the mechanism of its own creation in its tissue, which, aided by its contents, especially by the explicitly metareflective part two, makes it highly autothematic, problematizing both its own existence and the existence of its textual inspiration, its source or reference. In the most general and simplifying understanding, *In Memory of My Feelings* is thus a poem about its subject and his experience, whereas *Cover* is a text

<sup>4</sup> Rajewska, "Kariera coveru," 328–29.

<sup>5</sup> All the quotations from O'Hara come from: Frank O'Hara, "In Memory of My Feelings," in *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, ed. Donald Allen (Berkeley, Calif.: Univ. of California Press, 1995), 252–57.

<sup>6</sup> See Marjorie Perloff, *Frank O'Hara: Poet among Painters* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> See Rajewska, "Kariera coveru," 324. Rajewska lists examples that Gutorow gave during literary workshops.

about another text; a text about textuality. This would *par excellence* inspire a dialogue: Sosnowski, a semiotics-centered poet argues with O'Hara, the emotional modernist<sup>8</sup>; thus, Sosnowski remains a "typical" Sosnowski, and O'Hara, a "typical" O'Hara. Therefore, both poems are evidently autothematic – we get not only a perfect confirmation of analytical labels regarding the works of both poets (debunked long ago), but also a clean-cut division of metareflection into one focused on the (creative) subject, and one focused on the (created) product.

The matter is complicated further by the fact that the stereotypical convictions regarding authors have been deconstructed numerous times (among others, Karolina Felberg and Alina Świeściak<sup>9</sup> have written about Sosnowski as a melancholiac, as well as about subjective and experiential aspects of his work, whereas Pióro's interpretation<sup>10</sup> strongly denies one-sided reading of O'Hara's poem). Although *Cover* is indeed full of references to various literary (and not only literary) texts, most of them are characterized by a rather high level of emotionality. "Chodzę i pytam./ Już trzydzieści lat temu bawiłem, przejazdem w Małkini (...)", and "Chodzę i pytam, brnę/ po uszy w bagnie, żeby odzyskać kotwicę"<sup>11,12</sup>, are references to the famous phrase by Rafał Wojaczek ("chodzę i pytam: gdzie jest moja szubienica")<sup>13</sup>. This may refer to the poet's suicidal tendencies, as well as to the question about destiny and the meaning of life in general. Excerpts from *Sen o Warszawie* by Czesław Niemen place the issue of attachment to a place (in Sosnowski's version – perhaps the issue of ousting, searching for his "own way"), as well as emotions related to a specific space.

A new, significant picture appears in the fourth part of the poem: the heap of letters of the long poem is compared to a landing operation of potato beetles on a Polish beach ("stonka z miejsca przechodzi do ataku jak wiersze Franka O'Hary./ Co to za poemat, długi jak przemarsz dywizji?/ Patrząc/ i naturalnie w dłoni wyrasta mi butelka z naftą, kiedy ten desant przenika/ faszynowe płotki, włazi na wydmy i niknie w głębi łądu za ochronną kosówką/

<sup>8</sup> Pióro writes about O'Hara's work in the context of modernism, see: Tadeusz Pióro, *Frank O'Hara and the Ends of Modernism* (Warsaw: University of Warsaw. Institute of English Studies, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> Karolina Felberg, *"Melancholia i ekstaza": projekt totalny w twórczości Andrzeja Sosnowskiego* (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2010); Alina Świeściak, "Melancholia ponowoczesna. Andrzej Sosnowski," in *Melancholia w poezji polskiej po 1989 roku* (Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, 2010). Although the complex, heavily criticized issue of subjectivity in this poetry is beyond the scope of the present paper, it should be stressed that this seemingly "postmodernist" work is not free from the intriguing manifestations of "self". I shall focus only on those aspects that can be found on the level of the text in question. Due to the limitations of space, the issue of Sosnowski's modernism and a closer examination of the *mimesis* category are also beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>10</sup>The researcher observes that O'Hara's writing method is employing the style "I am this, I am that", that "some of the historical events that O'Hara refers to are associated with camp, although most of them – related to politics and military conflicts – occur in the context of various transformations in the history of art and taste", continuing that "in his analysis of the poem Lytle Shaw indicates the preference for copies, characteristic for camp – the original ceases to matter", Tadeusz Pióro, "Czytanie poematów O'Hary," *Literatura na Świecie.*, no. 9–10 (2015): 85. This cools down the frequently "emotional", "barbaric" analyses (or rather – testaments of reception) of O'Hara's poetry, pointing out to its strongly self-conscious (both "subjective" and "literary") tones.

<sup>11</sup>All the quotations of *Cover* come from Andrzej Sosnowski, "Cover," in *Dożynki 1987-2003* (Wrocław: Biuro Literackie, 2006), 117–22.

<sup>12</sup>"I have been walking and asking./ I was in Małkinia on my way somewhere else already thirty years ago (...)", and "I am walking and asking, wading/ up to my ears in a swamp, in order to find the anchor" [translation mine, PZ]

<sup>13</sup>"I am walking and asking: where are my gallows?" [translation mine, PZ]

mrowiem wersów «In Memory of My Feelings!»<sup>14</sup>). Therefore, the marine motif, already introduced with the ship (with which Sosnowski replaces O'Hara's snake), receives an interesting colonial-Americanization context: the United States, with which Sosnowski is fascinated so much, are the homeland of poets, whereas the swarm of verses is parallel to a swarm of insects – an imported element (dropped on the beach by the marines), invading the Polish land. First of all, this makes us understand the ship only if we refer to the cultural symbolism and individual, authorial “topos” (it should be enough to mention Sosnowski's fascination with Rimbaud and the whole book of poetry *Travers*, which moreover collects reprints of earlier editions), and also a peculiar metaphor of a medium between two different spaces, such as two languages. The first part of *Cover* may be some reference to this “mediating” figure: “Kapitan Nemo staje obok mnie/ i coś tłumaczy, ale ja nie słyszę,/ jestem niewytłumaczalny”<sup>15</sup> (which is an exact formal reflection of the already quoted excerpt from O'Hara: “Manfred climbs to my nape (...)”).

Such categories as inexplicability, extirpation, confinement (rendered in *Cover* also with such scenes as the one in which the subject says “czasami bez tlenu/ schodzę w lazurowy odmęt/ i patrzę na świat przez panoramiczne owadzie okno”<sup>16</sup>) are placed next to completely different issues: the swarm of the poem's verses refers not only to the invaded home space (or, simply, the overwhelmed subject) with a heap of letters, in which the subject cannot find himself (which is why he keeps losing track, and the poem never comes home), but also to the activity of living creatures. The characters associated with lively insects not only place the issue of unfinished semiosis, but they are also an association with the animal kingdom. Thereby the poem loses its purely textual tone, becoming a peculiar mixture of the centrality of symbols often ascribed to Sosnowski, and affectiveness – characteristic to, among others, O'Hara.

This is also the case with the second part of the poem, in which Sosnowski writes: “Moje dziecko, moje «ja», zdeklasowani klasycyści i klasycy. Mój/ «smutek tropików» beztroski jak wiatr,/ zanim jeszcze wylądowałem na Korei/ pajęczka arabeska pleśni na końcu języka/ pękająca jak siateczka naczyń nośnych/ dla krwi uciekającej na wszystkie strony/ zapisane nieodpowiedzialnymi znakami”<sup>17</sup>. The direct reference to the writing process does not immerse the metareflection completely in textual questions (for example, by diluting it to the point when it becomes a string of intertextual references and games), but it places it in the context of “self” – and “my (his) child”, “my sadness of tropics”. Subordinating many elements of the poem (highlighting their belongingness to “me”, even when the “sadness of tropics” refers not to Andrzej Sosnowski, but rather to Claude Lévi-Strauss) empowers

<sup>14</sup>“Potato beetles immediately launch an attack, like Frank O'Hara's poems./ What is this poem, long like a division march?/ I am looking/ and a bottle of oil appears in my hand, when this landing operation penetrates/ fascine fences, climbs the sand dunes and disappears deeper into the land behind the alpine zone/ the swarm of the verses of «In Memory of My Feelings!» [translation mine, PZ]

<sup>15</sup>“Captain Nemo climbs to my nape/ speaks, but I do not hear him,/ I am inexplicable” [translation mine, PZ]

<sup>16</sup>“Sometimes without oxygen/ I step down into an azure abyss/ and I am watching the world through a panoramic insect window” [translation mine, PZ]

<sup>17</sup>“My child, my «self», outclassed classicists and classics. My/ «sadness of tropics» carefree like the wind, /before I landed in Korea/ spider-like arabesque of mold on the tip of my tongue/ fracturing like a network of carrying vessels/ for the blood running in all directions/ recorded in irresponsible letters” [translation mine, PZ]

the poem, making it affective again. The value of the concrete, so significant in O'Hara (perhaps not necessarily in the poem in question, but in a number of other texts, often addressed to the poet's friends, discussing their private relations), brings about the beginning of part five, where we read: "nie chciałbyś tego zrobić, Piotrze?/ Jeszcze tylko kwadrans szkunera./ On płynie tak bardzo daleko./ Sens,/ serce/ arktycznego konwoju, jeśli *to move is to love* (...)"<sup>18</sup>. Of course those lines refer to Piotr Sommer, a translator of American poetry, who published the famous book of translated poems by Frank O'Hara (and he published a translation of *In Memory of My Feelings*<sup>19</sup> a dozen or so years later). The quoted verses are characterized by an interesting sentimentality ("it sails so very far"), whereas Piotr's peculiar wish to do "something" is not only an interesting example of thematizing literary life (or the whole literary infrastructure) in the poetic space, but it may also occur as a peculiar "self-explanation".

The previous verses – the ending of part four – go as follows: "Wyglądają na roboli wyobraźni, te chrząszcze,/ i przynoszą mi szum fal, w których zakochałem się jako wisielec"<sup>20</sup>. The confession that the subject who is searching for his destiny fell in love with the sound of waves (the same waves which are washing onto the beach where marines launched the potato beetle-letters assault), is thus another moment in which the effect is revealed; perhaps it is also a rather simple confession that the subject felt this effect towards the swarm of the verses of the poem *In Memory of My Feelings*, but he himself cannot (does not want to? is unable to? does not do such things?) translate it into Polish. Thus, he needs to ask Piotr to do it for him. This interpretation – obviously simplifying, reducing the unrooted Sosnowski to the level of simple interpretative recognitions – would explain why Sosnowski covered the poem: because he asked Piotr to translate it, whereas he himself surrendered – to falling in love?, translating only the first verses of the second part of the poem, and what is significant – put in brackets in *Cover* ("the dead haunting/ and the alive, hunted").

The subject's confession that he is emotional towards the text – a slightly ironic confession, since O'Hara's text is compared to an advancing army of potato beetles – peculiarly argues with the dialogicality of the relation between *Cover* and *In Memory of My Feelings* highlighted by scholars. This dialogicality is supposed to be provided by the many changes and replacements, which Sosnowski introduced into the text. First of all, there is the presence of a schooner instead of the original serpent<sup>21</sup>; although Sosnowski – at least initially – remains faithful to the structure of *In Memory of My Feelings*, precisely copying the length of verses and accents, he introduces a number of significant modifications. They start already in the first words of the poem, in which the original "my quietness has a man in it, he's transparent/ and he carries me quietly, like a gondola, through the streets" is replaced by "mój niepokój ma przy

<sup>18</sup>"Wouldn't you like to do it, Piotr?/ There is only a quarter of a schooner left./ It sails so very far/ Sense/ heart/ of an arctic convoy, if *to move is to love*" [translation mine, PZ]

<sup>19</sup>Frank O'Hara, "Pamięci moich uczuć," trans. Piotr Sommer, *Literatura na Świecie.*, no. 9–10 (2015): 75–82.

<sup>20</sup>"They look like workers of imagination, those beetles,/ and they bring me the sound of waves, which I fell in love with as a hangman" [translation mine, PZ]

<sup>21</sup>Among others, Piórko indicates the polemic elements. See *op. cit.*, pp. 107–108.

sobie broń, ona nie jest biała/ i towarzyszy mi w spokojne dni jak lotniskowiec”<sup>22</sup>. The original “he” is replaced with the Polish “she”<sup>23</sup> – a gun. Later on in the same verse, Sosnowski also writes that “ona jest funkcjonalna, jak eskadra i eskorta, jako desant”<sup>24</sup> (in the place of “he has several likenesses, like stars and years, like numerals”).

Abandoning the “man” (and “me”, “selves”, etc.) for the originally depersonalized “gun”, “ship” or “convoy” is significant. The question of subjectivity in both poems is far more complicated, which can be commented upon here only visually. The subject-protagonist of *In Memory...* is thus obviously still immersed in modernist constructs, he hesitates between the cohesive, essential identity of the relational “self”, and the labile multitude of alternating avatars. However, we should notice that thanks to the autothematic turn towards self, revealed already in the first stanza of the poem, the subject takes a step towards non-modernist concepts of “self”.

Renata Sendyka, whose research interests include self-reflection in modern literature, observes that the very idea of “self” is in a way off the mark: it can only be replaced by the meta-reflective “self”, which will not only be some step towards the deconstruction of the anthropocentric definition of the subject (the pronoun “-self”, although not in its character form, is applied to other beings – driven by the imperative to “protect oneself”, “take care of oneself”, etc.). It is this supreme-self produced in the process of self-reflection (the one that thinks “of itself” – it thinks “itself”, and it distances itself from its temporal and special, concrete and changeable “selves”) is the instantiation bonding together the subject’s experiences<sup>25</sup>. The matter is a bit more complicated in O’Hara, yet when he writes “my quietness has a man in it, he’s transparent/ and he carries me quietly, like a gondola, through the streets”, he draws quite a similar situation: he talks about a former, direct experience or feeling “my quietness”, which “has a man in it” – some medium for multiple, feeling “selves”, which carry it through the world. The fragile identities of this “self” require protection provided by the “supreme-self”, which also embodies the physical figure of the protagonist (the one that carries like a gondola), which along the way strengthens also the material-spiritual dualism of existence.

Sosnowski’s poem is somewhat different, as it does not contain any emotional evocations of “self”; however, this does not mean that it is absent whatsoever<sup>26</sup>. *Cover* certainly describes an adventure of the subject (which is evidenced by highlighting the first person “narration”: “I am descending”, “I am looking”, etc.), as well as perhaps – an adventure of some community (the “convoy” which appears a few times refers to a group). Instead of a peculiarly “safe”, emotional account present in O’Hara’s poem (at least initially), Sosnowski

<sup>22</sup>“my anxiety has a gun, which is not white/ and it accompanies me on calm days like an aircraft carrier” [translation mine, PZ]

<sup>23</sup>“Gun” is a feminine noun in Polish [PZ]

<sup>24</sup>“She is functional, like a squadron and an escort, as a landing operation” [translation mine, PZ]

<sup>25</sup>See Roma Sendyka, *Od kultury ja do kultury siebie: o zwrotnych formach w projektach tożsamościowych*, 2015.

<sup>26</sup>Pióro mentions the emotionality of the whole book of poems *Konwój*: “the «opera-ness» of *Opery* is about pushing a large dosage of pathos into everyday, banal, and at the same time final situations, i.e. always touching upon death (...), Pióro, “Czas to biurokracja, którą tworzą wszyscy,” 114.

consistently describes anxiety, a lack of anchor (“niekonwencjonalny teatr wojny”, “twierdza wysadzona w platynowe powietrze”, “wymowny wrak sterzczący u wejścia do portu”<sup>27</sup> itd.). One may even claim that the protagonist of *Cover* – as opposed to the protagonist of *In Memory of My Feelings* – lacks a “gondola”: a medium which could bond its existence together. He is only left with a schooner (a wreck, a ship without an anchor), a reference to many cultural texts, out of which one of the most important ones is perhaps *The Drunken Boat* by Arthur Rimbaud.

The motto, taken from August Strindberg, “painted on the wooden square over the shop are my initials A.S floating on a silver white cloud and hooped over with a rainbow”, also influences the interpretation in an interesting way. The analogy between Sosnowski’s and Strindberg’s initials problematizes the issue of authorship, as well as the very existence of “self” as such: does Strindberg really look at *his* initials if those are also Sosnowski’s initials? Does the name – or rather, its abbreviation – really identify the subject, if other subjects share the same name? Do the signs tell us the truth about reality if, first of all, other things can be signified by them, and secondly, there is a world behind them, which is difficult to reduce to words only (a cloud, a rainbow)? Can anything be reduced to a text – the subject to its name or initials, phenomena to their names, an experience to a poem – or maybe everything is text, and the problem is the question of interpretation: if A.S. is not only August Strindberg, but also Andrzej Sosnowski, does it really matter who the “self” is if there is no equivalence? Basically, both poems describe some problems with their own subjectivity and its relationship with the world<sup>28</sup>, but each does this differently; however, it is worth observing that the simple ascertainment of O’Hara’s modernism and Sosnowski’s postmodernism would face a lot of complications, with the ambiguity of O’Hara’s subject among them.

A full description of all the changes that *Cover* introduces to *In Memory of My Feelings* would require a separate paper. Sosnowski is consistent in the use of marine metaphors (symbols, staffage) – not only the ship, but also the sea, the anchor, fish, etc. On the other hand, in *In Memory of My Feelings*, the counterpoint between the curling serpent (immediately evoking associations with being bonded with the ground – according to the Bible, Satan was sentenced to crawling for an eternity for his deeds) and aerial, mountainous, or even cosmic spaces (“I rise into cool skies/ and gaze at the imponderable world with the simple identification/ of my colleagues, mountains”, “one of me/ flutters up from the center of the track amidst the pink flamingoes”, the moon figure in the verse “a flaking moon drifting across the muddied teeth”). However, significantly, the final verse of the first part of the poem (“and presently the aquiline serpent comes to resemble the Medusa”) brings the figure of one of the Gorgons’ heads; it should be mentioned that it is the head of the only mortal monstrous goddess, Medusa.

Medusa is a sea goddess. For the serpent from O’Hara’s poem, the water space is the scariest; the earth, although full of dangers as well (and dirt, placed there through associations with

<sup>27</sup>“An unconventional theater of war, a fortress blown up into the platinum air, a meaningful wreck jutting at the entry into a port” [translation mine, PZ]

<sup>28</sup>Gutorow has also reflected upon the issues of authorship and subjectivity in *Cover* – or rather expressed his doubts regarding the possibility of such a reflection. Gutorow, “Kilwater,” 189–90.



mud), is its kingdom, and the dream space is the sky. Sosnowski focuses precisely on what is mentioned in a negative context in *In Memory of My Feelings*; thus, *Cover* becomes a reversal which, in a way, completes the original poem. The matter is similar in the case of other mentioned elements: the one who keeps walking and asking where he can drop his anchor feels restless (the ambiguous “quietness” can be associated with silence, gentleness, or withdrawal). The gun from *Cover* also appears in O’Hara’s poem, in the line “my quietness has a number of naked selves,/ so many pistols I have borrowed to protect myself/ from creatures who too readily recognize my weapons/ and have murder in their heart!”<sup>29</sup>.

The “self” produced in *In Memory of My Feelings*, the self-reflective instantiation bonding together the subject of many figures. It is aware of the fragility and defenselessness of those bustling “selves”, hence the borrowed guns – quiet and calm, transparent “supreme-self” – which carries the “self” of the subject and all of its multiplications like a gondola. It does not show any signs of natural aggression: he is a stranger to violence. However, in *Cover*, there is a need for a squadron and an escort, for the poem is based on anxiety; it should be observed that Sosnowski opens his poem with strong affect, whereas the emotional O’Hara opens with calm.

The gondola to which the “quietness” of the subject is compared becomes parallel to Sosnowski’s schooner, a ship which is not associated with a pleasure cruise. Essentially Sosnowski does not really converse with *In Memory of My Feelings*, but, in a way, he remixes the elements used in the poem, and thereby affects their recontextualization. However, he does not change the most general categories of visualization; images such as the earth and the mountains, although replaced by the sea, are still just definitions of space. However, the ship – although significantly different from the serpent – is, just like the animal, chained to a specific surface, across which it moves. Such analogies are obviously remote; however, similar relations can be found across the whole poem, and so O’Hara’s “my father, my uncle,/ my grand-uncle and the several aunts. My/ grand-aunt dying for me, like a talisman, in the war (...)” is rendered as “moje dziecko, moje «ja»,/ zdeklasowani klasycyści i klasycy. Mój/ «smutek tropików», beztroski jak wiatr”<sup>30</sup>. Both lines employ “family” expressions; in O’Hara, these are literal (father, uncle, aunts), and in Sosnowski, they suggest literary ancestry (it is telling that in further parts of *Cover*, “his child” is portrayed as a jury member in a recitation contest).

Although this would again place this clear division into “subjective” (clear in O’Hara) and “textual” or “literary” (evident in Sosnowski) *mise en abyme*, it should be observed that this textuality of *Cover* – and Sosnowski’s work in general – is peculiarly smashed exactly by taking over the subjectifying elements, or rather by interpreting the subjectivity through textual

<sup>29</sup>Chłopek expressed similar intuition, yet with some perversity, in terms of polemicality as well as connectivity of both poems, and the similarities between them in terms of visualizing. See Chłopek, “Kogo śmiesz „Cover”?” 169. However, it would seem that it is possible to argue with the thesis that “the differences are non-uniform and they become significant only where the subject himself or his “self” is discussed, i.e. personal topics, which are the most difficult to talk about”. Perhaps a “lesson in affective poetry” allows for some opening here for creating common places rather than leading to contradictions.

<sup>30</sup>“My child, my «self», outclassed classicists and classics. My/ «sadness of tropics» carefree like the wind” [translation mine, PZ]

categories – or a text through subjective categories. This allows us to hypothesize that the poetry used (or produced) by Sosnowski through *Cover* is essentially inter-poetry – due to several equally important reasons.

First of all, the linguistic difference is significant: *In Memory of My Feelings* (which at the time had not been translated into Polish) is written in English, whereas *Cover* (whose title is, importantly, English) is written in Polish. The use of the formal layout structure of O'Hara's poem (the division into verses and stanzas, the length of individual lines, accents, and symbols, or the collection of the most significant requisites and motifs), which is not a translation *sensu stricto* (it only resembles one), highlights the appearance of certain inter-poetics – combining both the indicated characteristics of O'Hara and the idiomatic elements of Sosnowski's poetry. *Cover* would be connected with Sosnowski's overall artistic project (if this is the right name for his creative work) through not only the marine style, but also the reoccurring convoy, which is also a part of the title of the book of poems in which *Cover* was published (also, preceding the poem *Convoy*)<sup>31</sup>.

Obviously the meaning of translation is arguable; some scholars even claim that translating poetry means creating it from scratch, that the translator becomes the author, that a full equivalence does not exist, and that the target poem always contains a certain surplus (or, according to less favorable scholars, a certain deficiency) of values and meanings as opposed to the source text. However, the translation practice shows that the translator's autonomy is, in many cases, only aspirational, and such categories as the original and the copy or *mi-mesis* continue to define the functioning of translated texts. It would thus seem that *Cover* cannot be classified as a translation, and, as has been shown, the poem does not claim to be one. Perhaps it is just a testament of a fascination (interest, liking, anxiety, curiosity, attachment) of the poet in reference to O'Hara's poem. The quoted researchers have also shown that it would be difficult to classify covers as "regular" intertexts of their source texts; they clearly draw some creative potential from specific poems (poetics, styles, phrases, languages) and they implant it in their native tongue (and native poetics)<sup>32</sup>. However, it is not a parodical or reproductive reference (just like translation is less and less commonly defined as imitation); thus, we will not define covers as parodies or pastiches. On the other hand, it is possible to talk about absorption of some important characteristics of poetics (style, visualization, atmosphere, etc.) and incorporating them to the native poetics, which creates some interpoetics (O'Hara-Sosnowski, but also John Ashbery-Sosnowski. As observed by Anna Kałuża, his poetry "which Sosnowski translated and introduced to the Polish literature constituted a field full of explanations and authentications for the poetic strategies and tools used by Sosnowski"<sup>33</sup>).

<sup>31</sup>See Pióro, op. cit., p. 108.

<sup>32</sup>Ewa Kraskowska wrote about the issue of intertextuality in translation, see Ewa Kraskowska, "Intertekstualność a przekład," in *Między tekstami: intertekstualność jako problem poetyki historycznej*, ed. Jerzy Ziomek, Janusz Sławiński, and Włodzimierz Bolecki (Warszawa: Wydawn. Nauk. PWN, 1992).

<sup>33</sup>See Anna Kałuża, "Andrzej Sosnowski," *Polska Poezja Współczesna. Przewodnik encyklopedyczny*, accessed October 19, 2019, <http://przewodnikpoetycki.amu.edu.pl/encyklopedia/andrzej-sosnowski/>.

The existence of this “interpoetics” occurring between two languages (studying it obviously goes beyond the scope of one paper, although it would be interesting, especially in the context of the issue of translation universals<sup>34</sup>), or the potential existence of the “translationese” language, characterized by specific linguistic choices observable in numerous translators or the diffusion of calques (or, generally speaking, linguistic models) from one language into another. In Sosnowski, this copying of the English syntax (which is obviously a conscious artistic device rather than an error) occurs in the poem several times. “My anxiety has a gun, which is not white” is an exact copy of the word order of the following phrase: “my quietness has a man in it, he’s transparent” (and later: “She is functional, like a squadron and an escort, as a landing operation” in the place of “he has several likenesses, like stars and years, like numerals”), together with the repetition of the personal pronoun “she” which is perhaps not unnatural, but rare – we would change it to the more neutral “which” in the first quoted verse, and leave it out in the second one. Likewise, in the already quoted beginning of part two, where the subject lists: “My child, my «self», outclassed classicists and classics. My/ «sadness of tropics» carefree like the wind”. Although the repetitions of the possessive pronoun stand out here, it should be noted that it is not characteristic for the Polish language (i.e. we would rather say “take my hand” than “take me by my hand”).

Secondly, it would seem that this inter-poetics refers not only to the textual level, i.e. it reveals itself on the level of form, in terms of stylistic devices, construction, symbolic staffage, etc. This inter-creativity can also be considered through the deep structure. Of course, this does not mean that Sosnowski becomes a non-post-modernist, non-semiotics-central poet (if he ever has been one) because he read O’Hara’s poem (or any other text). It should be observed how taking over many elements of *In Memory of My Feelings* influences the tone of the whole poem. The clear attachment to textual issues, visible among other things in the autothematic parts, is enriched not just by the background or attitude of the emotional, experiential poem by O’Hara, but also through introducing untypical solutions across the cover (i.e. the existential questions “I am walking and asking”, the picture of the subject locked in a submarine, and searching for the place to drop the anchor, etc.), which are not simply copied, but (exactly in Sosnowski’s style) reduced to the role of affective tropes (“self” tropes, as Ryszard Nycz would argue) scattered across the “swarm of verses”, mixed with various other traces, broken down with irony and jokes, making it impossible to create one interpretation of *Cover* – just as it is impossible to create one interpretation of *In Memory of My Feelings*. The common places created in *Cover* includes common places for two languages, which, however, are not translations. They show an intriguing (post)modernist discussion with subjectivity and textuality, which originates at the intersection of influences and trends, becoming important voices in literary metareflection.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

<sup>34</sup>Ewa Kraskowska, “Universals of Translation,” *Forum Poetyki*, no. 14 (2018): 74–77.

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# KEYWORDS

*mise en abyme*

*Frank O'Hara*

COVER

INTERPOETICS

*intertextuality*

**ABSTRACT:**

This paper is an attempt at another interpretation of the poems *In Memory of My Feelings* by Frank O'Hara and *Cover* by Andrzej Sosnowski, in the light of their autothematic motifs. The paper focuses first on a close examination of the relationship between the two poems, looking at both differences (language, emblems, symbols, contexts) and similarities, trying to assess how O'Hara influenced Sosnowski. Later, the focus shifts to the relationship between the two poems and a discussion of a possible interpretation of Sosnowski's poem in terms of interpoetics.

metareflection

Andrzej Sosnowski

LITERARY TRANSLATION

TRANSLATION STUDIES

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