



BANK DOBRYCH PRAKTYK

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**Be First To Translate...
Five challenging contests
for young talented translators**

**IX LICEUM OGÓLNOKSZTAŁCĄCE
IM. C.K. NORWIDA W CZĘSTOCHOWIE**

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IX Liceum Ogólnokształcące im. C.K. Norwida w Częstochowie

Be First To Translate... Five challenging contests for young talented translators

It all started in 2020. With remote learning and limited opportunities to gather students for events, competitions needed a new formula. As a teacher of highly ambitious and very creative students, who constantly need to be challenged, simply not to get bored, I felt an urge to try different solutions to keep them motivated. Additionally, as a graduate of English Studies with a major in Literary Translation, I wanted to kindle their enthusiasm related to this fascinating and complex field.

Inspiration came from the Nobel Prize in Literature. The laureate in October 2020 was Louise Glück, an American poet, whose poetry written in English, had scarcely been translated into Polish before. Only three poems had been published in the translation by Julia Hartwig long before Glück was awarded the Nobel Prize. When I found out about it, it dawned on me that our students could face the challenge of translating the Nobel Prize laureate's poems, becoming the first ever to translate a chosen poem by the Nobel Prize Laureate, without being able to find existing translations on the Internet. Therefore, in cooperation with my great friend, also a teacher of English at Norwid Secondary School in Częstochowa, Ewa Konieczna, we worked out an online formula for the competition in which the most linguistically gifted students of Norwid Secondary School had an opportunity to become the first to translate a poem by Louise Glück, *Twilight*. In order to take part, they were supposed to scan a QR code available on the school corridors or online, directing them to the text by Louise Glück, and after having translated the text, they were to submit their translations in a Google Form, in which they were later marked

and sent feedback by the jury, namely myself and Ewa Konieczna. The criteria we used to select the best translations were: correctness, the use of vocabulary, conveying the message of the text, as well as its style and atmosphere. The deadline was quite short. Thus, after the verdict, the winning translator got a chance to improve any nuances that were necessary to publish the text on the school website and social media. The contest was a huge success. The winner was Cezary Czubala, who was awarded with a book and a top mark in English. All the participants of the competition got certificates and also excellent or very good marks in English (apart from one brave student who used Google Translate, which at that time was quite obvious and easy to recognise). All of them also got an in-depth review of their work, sent back to them in the Google Form. Due to the pandemic, no ceremony could be organised to sum up the contest, both in 2020 and in the following edition, which was also based on the Nobel Prize in Literature.

<p><i>TWILIGHT</i>ⁱ</p> <p>by Louise Glück</p> <p>from: A Village Life</p> <p>All day he works at his cousin's mill, so when he gets home at night, he always sits at this one window, sees one time of day, twilight.</p> <p>There should be more time like this, to sit and dream.</p>	<p><i>ZMIERZCH</i></p> <p>Autorka: Louise Glück</p> <p>Tłumaczenie: Cezary Czubala</p> <p>(IX LO im. C. K. Norwida, Częstochowa)</p> <p>Całymi dniami pracuje przy młynie kuzyna, więc gdy wkracza do swego domu nocą, zawsze zasiada przy tym jednym oknie, widzi jedną porę dnia, zmierzch.</p> <p>Więcej takich chwil powinno być, by usiąść i popuścić wodze fantazji.</p>
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<p>It's as his cousin says:</p> <p>Living – living takes you away from sitting.</p> <p>In the window, not the world but a squared-off landscape representing the world.</p> <p>The seasons change, each visible only a few hours a day.</p> <p>Green things followed by golden things followed by whiteness– abstractions from which come intense pleasures, like the figs on the table.</p> <p>At dusk, the sun goes down in a haze of red fire between two poplars.</p> <p>It goes down late in summer– sometimes it's hard to stay awake.</p> <p>Then everything falls away.</p>	<p>Mówił tak kuzyn jego:</p> <p>Życie – życie odciąga Cię od siedzenia.</p> <p>W oknie, nie świat, lecz skrawek krajobrazu przedstawiający świat.</p> <p>Pory roku mijają, widoczne jedynie parę godzin każdego dnia.</p> <p>Zieleń ślędzona przez złoto, ta ślędzona przez białość- abstrakcje z których wywodzą się intensywne rozkosze, jak te figi leżące na stole.</p> <p>Przy zmroku, słońce zachodzi w śrózodze czerwonego ognia między dwoma topolami.</p> <p>Zachodzi późno latem- czasem trudno nie zasnąć.</p> <p>Następnie wszystko odlatuje. Świat na chwilę dłużej</p>
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<p>The world for a little longer is something to see, then only something to hear, crickets, cicadas.</p> <p>Or to smell sometimes, aroma of lemon trees, of orange trees.</p> <p>Then sleep takes this away also.</p> <p>But it's easy to give things up like this, experimentally, for a matter of hours.</p> <p>I open my fingers— I let everything go.</p> <p>Visual world, language, rustling of leaves in the night, smell of high grass, of woodsmoke.</p> <p>I let it go, then I light the candle.</p>	<p>jest czymś do zobaczenia, potem tylko czymś do usłyszenia, świerszcze, cykady.</p> <p>Lub powąchać czasami, aromat drzew cytrynowych, drzew pomarańczowych.</p> <p>Potem sen odbiera i to.</p> <p>Lecz łatwo jest odpuścić rzeczy takie jak te, eksperymentalnie, przez kilka godzin.</p> <p>Otwieram swe dłonie- wszystko wypuszczam.</p> <p>Świat widzialny, język, szelest liści nocą, zapach wysokiej trawy, dymu drzewnego.</p> <p>Odpuszczam, i zapalam świecę.</p>
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In 2021 the Nobel Prize was awarded to Abdulrazak Gurnah, whose prose in English had not been translated into Polish prior to the Swedish Academy's verdict either. That was our next challenge. Due to the pandemic going on, we also decided

to go for an online formula, with a few minor alterations to improve the procedure. It turned out that translating prose was more difficult than some participants had expected. For example, the fragment we chose included an interesting idiom: *to call the shots* and as the text concerned Zanzibar, quite a few students translated it as *zamawiać drinki* (Eng.: *order drinks*), neglecting the topic of colonialism which made the meaning quite different from what Polish young people imagine nowadays, going to the beaches of Zanzibar as tourists. However, a few meticulously precise translations were also submitted, with Lena Kucharska, Norwid's 2024 Graduate of the Year, winning the contest.

<p>Abdulrazak Gurnah</p> <p><i>By the Sea</i>ⁱⁱ</p> <p>'I think we [the people of Zanzibar¹] also secretly admired the British, for their audacity in being there, such a long way from home, calling the shots with such an appearance of assurance, and for knowing so much about how to do things that mattered: curing diseases, flying aeroplanes, making movies. Perhaps admired is too uncomplicated a way of describing what I think we felt, for it was closer to</p>	<p>Abdulrazak Gurnah</p> <p>„Nad morzem”</p> <p>Przekład: Lena Kucharska</p> <p>(IX LO im. C. K. Norwida, Częstochowa)</p> <p>„Myślę, że my [mieszkańcy Zanzibaru]² także po kryjomu podziwialiśmy Brytyjczyków za ich śmiałość w przebywaniu tu, tak daleko od domu, za decydowanie i rządzenie z taką pewnością siebie, a także za wiedzę związaną z naprawdę ważnymi tematami: leczeniem, lataniem samolotami, kręceniem filmów. Być może podziw to zbyt banalne słowo, aby nazwać to, co wtedy czuliśmy. Było to bliższe przyznaniu się do ich władzy nad</p>
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1 contest organiser's note

2 przypis redakcyjny

<p>conceding to their command over our material lives, conceding in the mind as well as in the concrete, succumbing to their blazing self-assurance. In their books I read unflattering accounts of my history, and because they were unflattering, they seemed truer than the stories we told ourselves. I read about the diseases that tormented us, about the future that lay before us, about the world we lived in and our place in it. It was as if they had remade us, and in ways that we no longer had any recourse but to accept, so complete and well-fitting was the story they told about us. I don't suppose the story was told cynically, because I think they believed it too. It was how they understood us and they understood themselves, and there was little in the overwhelming reality we lived with that allowed us to argue, not while the story had novelty and went unchallenged'.</p>	<p>naszym życiem materialnym i władzy nad naszymi umysłami, do poddania się ich imponującej pewności siebie. Czytałem w ich książkach niepocholebne opinie o mojej historii, a ponieważ były one niepocholebne, wydawały się prawdziwsze od tych, które opowiadaliśmy sami sobie. Czytałem o zarazach, które nas dziesiątkowały, o czekającej nas przyszłości, o świecie, w którym żyliśmy i naszym miejscu w nim. Wyglądało to jakby stworzyli nas od nowa, i to w taki sposób, że nie mieliśmy już możliwości odrzucenia go, mogliśmy go tylko akceptować. Tak pełna i dopasowana była historia o nas, którą nam opowiedzieli. Nie uważam, żeby była ona przekazana w sposób cyniczny, myślę, że również oni w nią wierzyli. Rozumieli w ten sposób nas i siebie samych. Niewiele było w tej przytłaczającej rzeczywistości, w której żyliśmy, aspektów pozwalających nam na dyskusję, w czasach, gdy historia pisała się na nowo i była niekwestionowana”.</p>
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With time, our formula got modified due to a few factors, and shaped into what we have now. First and foremost, with the cooperation of Aneta Dawidowicz-Sieradzka from Sienkiewicz 4th Secondary School, we developed the competition into an interschool tournament and called it *The Tournament of One Translation; Be First To Translate...* Secondly, as the time when we were starting the interschool cooperation was just before the holidays, when we wanted to keep students motivated even though they were already thinking of their planned journeys and

relaxation, we decided to feature a local poet and focus on a topic related to our local tourist attractions. Therefore, in 2022 we asked a poet from Częstochowa, Łucja Szota, who had once also been a devoted long-serving teacher and headmaster, to allow us to use one of her poems describing the beauty of Jura Krakowsko-Częstochowska (Eng.: The Kraków-Częstochowa Upland), published in a book of poetry, *Jurajskie Impresje 2008*. Ms Szota kindly agreed and this time students from our two schools competed to become the first translators of her poem. This time, not to be anyhow biased, we asked a native speaker of English to become our language expert and take the final decision about the winner and distinctions. Glenn Standish, Director of Studies at International House Toruń, read the best translations in English and decided who would take the podium. He later recorded a short video in which he explained his verdict and congratulated the participants. The winner was Natalia Szota, surprisingly, not related by blood to the author. As the pandemic restrictions were not that strict anymore, finally we could organize a festive ceremony during which the Poet, Łucja Szota, was invited to our school. During the ceremony, Mr Standish announced the verdict of the jury in a video he had recorded for this occasion. Ms Szota awarded all the participants with diplomas, as well as English books, obtained thanks to our sponsor, Radosław Sankowski, who had become a supporter of our initiative after finding out about it on Facebook. Over tea, coffee and biscuits, we read Ms Szota's poems, the winning translation and the runners-up texts, with one of them, by Kamil Borkowski from Sienkiewicz Secondary School, being awarded a distinction as a creative adaptation of the poem. All the participants and guests could freely discuss poetry, talk about translations, as well as plan their Jurassic trips for the coming holidays, inspired by the atmospheric poems and photos displayed during the event, by award-winning photographer and traveller, Dariusz Gawroński, also a teacher at Norwid Secondary School.

Łucja Szotaⁱⁱⁱ

„Rozsypały się wapienne skały”

Rozsypały się

wapienne skały

zabieliły wśród zieleni

jak wyspy dziwaczne

Zachowały pamięć

wieków

pieczęcie istnienia

skamieniałe skarby

jurajskiego morza

Wyznaczyły wzniesieniami

szlak

jurajskich zamków

co jak orle gniazda

były niegdyś niedostępne

Wyróżniły swoim

pięknem

Łucja Szota

They scattered, limestone rocks

Przekład: Natalia Szota

(IX LO im. C.K. Norwida, Częstochowa)

They scattered

limestone rocks

whitened among greenery

like bizarre islands

They kept the memory

of centuries

seals of existence

fossilized treasures

of the Jurassic sea

They marked with hills

the route

of Jurassic castles

which, like eagles' nests

were once unreachable

They distinguished

with their beauty

część naszego kraju	part of our country
połączyły wyżynami	combined by their highlands
w malowniczą całość	into a picturesque whole
Ocaliły pamięć	They saved the memory
wieków	of the ages
pieczęcie istnienia	seals of existence

Since this successful event, our contest has maintained more or less the same formula till now. Nobel Prize winners in 2022 and 2023 were not English-speaking, and most importantly, everyone liked the idea of promoting local artists, as well as being able to meet them in person in our school to discuss and enjoy literature together, and possibly start future cooperation between poet and translator.

Thus, in 2023, with the idea of local patriotism in mind, we decided to honour the works of a renowned, long-serving Polish teacher at Norwid Secondary School, Janusz Strojec, who had just published his latest book of poetry, *Stygmaty*. This time we followed the motif of spring and chose a poem titled *Budowla*. It was really challenging for students, with its ambiguous meanings. A student from Sienkiewicz Secondary School, Mikołaj Borawski, was selected as the best translator in this edition by the jury, which was joined by one more teacher from Sienkiewicz Secondary School and traditionally, an independent language expert, and thus comprised: Ewa Konieczna and myself from Norwid Secondary School, Aneta Dawidowicz-Sieradzka and Aneta Walasek from Sienkiewicz Secondary School, as well as, most importantly, Sarah Guttridge from Alpha School, Malta. During the awards' ceremony, a video recorded for the participants with the verdict by Ms Guttridge was played, the poem and translations were read by students and by the

Author, Mr Strojec, who also gave us an interesting lecture on literature and poetry, and created a fantastic opportunity to discuss and celebrate the arts of writing and translating over delicious snacks.

Janusz Strojec^{iv}

Budowla

w tych kwiatach

na powiekach

jest ci

do twarzy

za górami

za Tatrami

zbudujemy dom

utkany z pajęczyny

pomieszanej z miodem

prosto od czarownicy

kawałek nieba

ukradnę

pod fundamenty

podczas burzy

sztaby gromów

tylko układać

w tych kwiatach

na powiekach

zapach jedliny

Janusz Strojec

Construction

Przekład: Mikołaj Borawski

(IV L.O. im. H. Sienkiewicza w
Częstochowie)

in these blooms

on your eyelids

you look

so delightful

beyond the hills

beyond the Tatra mountains

we'll build a home

woven from spiderwebs

mixed with honey

straight from a witch's brew

a slice of heaven

I'll steal

for the foundation

during a thunderstorm

rods of lightning

just to lay down

in these blooms

on your eyelids

the scent of fir trees

schronił się jakiś bąk	some lost beetle
zabłąkany	chased away a bee
co pszczołę przegonił	in the apiary
w pasiece	under the beech trees.
pod bukami	

The latest edition of our contest, organised in April 2024 by myself and Ewa Konieczna from Norwid Secondary School, in cooperation with Aneta Dawidowicz-Sieradzka and Agnieszka Sokołowska from Sienkiewicz Secondary School, was modified a little again. Having no more restrictions in organising events, we decided to gather students willing to become first to translate... Katarzyna Bodziachowska's text into English in both our schools on the same day and time and ask them to translate a fragment of prose, using only paper dictionaries, no electronic devices. This year the challenge was a fragment of biographical prose on Polish painter, Jacek Malczewski, written by a charismatic Polish teacher from Norwid and writer, Katarzyna Maria Bodziachowska, with beautiful, figurative language, creating rich, atmospheric imagery. Therefore, the theme of this year's edition was *Słowem Malowane* (Eng.: *Painted With Words*). The procedure was a bit different from the previous editions as the texts were not submitted by students in digital form, so after choosing six best translations, we digitalised them, obviously without

names of contestants, but coded with numbers (which was also the case in the previous editions), and forwarded to our language expert, Glenn Standish from International House Toruń, who agreed to be head of the jury for our competition again. The ceremony summing up the competition was very moving and solemn, with Norwid Secondary School's Auditorium full of students of both schools and teachers, eager to celebrate literature and listen to Ms Bodziachowska talking about her prose and to our young talented translator, reading his winning text. The winner was a Norwid Student, Mateusz Maciąg, an outstanding young person of many talents, who, just two days after our literary translation event, also became a laureate of a national-level competition in technical English at the Technical University of Łódź (Olimpiada Języka Angielskiego z Elementami Technicznymi Politechniki Łódzkiej). Traditionally, our sponsor offered English books, the Headmasters of both schools offered books in Polish and Ms Bodziachowska presented her latest book to the winner of the contest.

<p>Katarzyna Maria Bodziachowska^v <i>Jacek Malczewski „zaklęty u źródła..”</i></p> <p>„Przechodzili właśnie obok wiatraka. Był duży, drewniany i z prawdziwym wdziękiem kręcił się i kręcił, rytmicznie przecinając powietrze swoimi osobliwymi skrzydłami.</p> <p>Jaki piękny! – westchnął</p>	<p>Translated by: Mateusz Maciąg, (IX LO im. C. K. Norwida, Częstochowa)</p> <p>‘They were walking by a windmill. Large and wooden, it elegantly spun and spun, rhythmically slicing through the air with its peculiar blades.</p> <p>-How beautiful! Jack sighed, astounded.</p>
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oczarowany Jacek.

- Tak... – zawtórował mu ojciec z wyraźnie zażawionymi od słońca oczami.

- Oto symbol przymierza myśli ludzkiej z przyrodą. Młyn, rzeka lub jak w tym przypadku wiatr i mamy chleb – jasny i rumiany, miękki i chrupiący zarazem, pachnący latem. Czy wiesz, ile pieśni powstało przy żniwach... ?

- Nie.

- Ja też nie – odparł szybko. - Czy zdajesz sobie sprawę synu, jak wiele radości towarzyszyło przesiewaniu chlebowej mąki, jak wiele nagromadziło się przy tym nadziei...

Chłopiec już nic się nie odzywał, bo zrozumiał, że ojciec tak naprawdę nie pyta, nie oczekuje żadnej odpowiedzi, nie dba o jakąkolwiek ripostę, że tylko o czymś głośno rozmyśla. Niejeden raz ojciec żywo o czymś rozprawiał, używał przy tym trudnych i rozmaitych wyrazów, zapalał się, to znów smutniał i zawsze na koniec pytał: „Rozumiesz synu, czy ty to rozumiesz?”. Jacek najczęściej nie rozumiał, ale z powagą kiwał głową.”

-Yes... -his father agreed, his eyes made noticeably teary by the sun. -Here stands a symbol of alliance between human thought and nature. The mill and the river, or in this case wind, and we can have bread – bright and golden brown, soft yet crispy, with the scent of summer. Do you know how many songs came into being during the harvest?

-No.

-Neither do I – he replied quickly. - Do you realise, son, how much joy has accompanied the sifting of flour, how much hope has accumulated...

The boy didn't speak, because he understood that his father was not really asking to be answered, he didn't care for any response and was just sharing his thoughts. Many times before had he vigorously spoken about something at length, using difficult and diverse words, becoming excited, then gloomy again and every time he ended by asking „Do you understand, son, do you understand it?”. Most often, Jack did not understand, but he nodded seriously just the same.'

I strongly believe that challenges like our *Be First To Translate...* contest encourage the most ambitious students to discover new areas of literature as well as make them interested in local authors. Furthermore, translating literature is a demanding task, at which only the most creative people excel. Thus, students who successfully take part in our competitions may feel their self-esteem boost and have a unique experience they may take pride in.

The level of all the five editions was very high. Students proved to be extremely inventive and linguistically gifted. Some of them are ready to become writers in either Polish or English themselves, or even have already begun their adventure with creative writing. Some could make great translators of literature one day. Whether or not they use their talents in this field, I hope our initiative let them thrive with their English and cherish linguistic creativity. Last but not least, I would like to wish good luck to all the participants and thank all the teachers and language experts who have contributed to this project.

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