Abstract: Maria Konopnicka’s translation of Ada Negri’s two early poetry volumes, Fatalità and Tempeste, was published in Warsaw in 1901. The article examines Konopnicka’s translation in its historical and comparative context and presents her principal translation strategies. Since her début in 1890s, Negri’s originals and Konopnicka’s writings have been considered similar because of their social engagement and sensibility. Konopnicka’s decision to translate Fatalità and Tempeste is usually seen as a result of her social interests. On the basis of Konopnicka’s and Negri’s letters and metaliterary enunciations, it can be assumed that Negri’s vision of creative act as a sudden and unstoppable inspiration of the inner spirit was also highly appreciated by the Polish poet. In her translation Konopnicka tends to naturalize the Italian originals on all the levels of expression, deploying her own favourite rhythmic patterns and figures of speech.

Keywords: Ada Negri, Maria Konopnicka, history of translation, reception of the Italian literature in Poland

In the history of literature there are instances of writers whose lives, outputs and reception have been almost twin-like. Ada Negri (1870–1945) and Maria Konopnicka (1842–1910) constitute one such case. Apart from the obvious biographical differences and the dissimilar literary traditions they stemmed from, everything seems to connect them: their artistic interests, social sensitivity, engagement in the emancipation movement, and, last but not least, the history of their reception. Both are appreciated by contemporary readers; both have been viewed as old-fashioned, dull, sentimental, un inventive and uncreative, notoriously didactic (Arslan 1998: 211). The remarks directed by critics at Negri could well be applied to Konopnicka, and vice versa. “Ignota, ammuffita e arcaica per i lettori di oggi, che di
lei non conoscono che il nome, e forse una di quelle poesie per bambini” (Alien, fallen into oblivion and archaic for the contemporary readers, who love only her name and maybe some of her poems for children) – this opinion about the Italian poet was expressed by Antonia Arslan (1998: 209) and matches the general reception of the Polish author. In the last two years we have witnessed a similar change in the reception of both writers – their works have been investigated in new contexts: biography (Tomasik 2008, Magnone 2009), methodology as well as literary history (among others, Folli 2000, Magnone 2008).

In view of these analogies, it is hardly surprising that Konopnicka and Negri had contact in real life (though only episodically) – they exchanged letters in connection with the protest against the policy of the Prussian authorities after the famous Września incident – the protest initiated by Konopnicka in 1902 during her stay in Italy. (Negri is said to have been the first to sign the appeal to authorities drafted by Polish women; Konopnicka 1975: 202–207). On this occasion, in her letter to Negri, Konopnicka mentions that she had translated her first two poetic volumes Fatalià (Fate, 1982) and Tempeste (Tempests, 1894) with the “utmost zeal.” This translation, Niedola. Burze, published by the Warsaw-based Natanson in 1901, was to bind the two authors in the history of literature forever.

Maria Konopnicka (1842–1910) was raised by her father (her mother died prematurely) in a patriotic and religious atmosphere, later reflected in her writing. Her husband, twelve years her senior, did not approve of his wife’s literary career, which she tried to combine with attending to their eight children. When in 1876 Henryk Sienkiewicz, a future Nobel Prize winner, praised her poetic sequence W górach (In the Mountains), Konopnicka decided to leave her husband and devote herself entirely to writing. Very little of her turbulent life (extramarital romances; her relationship with Maria Dulembianka, painter and politician, which lasted almost twenty years; the premature death of her first-born son, Tadeusz; the mental disease of her daughter, Helena) is reflected in her works. The poet felt comfortable with the roles of the nightingale, national seer, defender of the oppressed, which were imposed upon her and which she partly imposed upon herself. Her “strategy of mimicry” may be one of the reasons why

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1 All the quotations from the Italian primary and secondary sources are translated into English by Michał Choiński on the basis of their Polish versions prepared by Anita Klos.
her image became so strongly rooted in her work. She is remembered as the author of genuinely patriotic, deeply lyrical poems (she wrote “Rota,” used as a Polish national anthem) often stylised in the “folk manner”; of novellas describing life of the poor living in villages and towns; and of children’s literature, most famously the book entitled *O krasnoludkach i sierotce Marysi* (Little Orphan Mary and the Gnomes, 1863). In her later years, Konopnicka spent most of her time travelling Europe with Dulembianka – her works of that period are permeated with the “worldly” spirit, full of serious reflections on human existence, richly endowed with Mediterranean motifs and inspirations: *Linie i dzwięki* (Lines and Sounds, 1897), *Italia* (1901), *Głosy ciszy* (Sounds of Silence, 1901).

Also a few basic facts of Negri’s life ought to be mentioned. She was born in Lodi, in Lombardy. She was raised by her mother, a worker in a cotton mill, alone after the death of her father. Due to her persistence and determination, Ada managed to graduate and obtain a teaching diploma. She entered the poetry scene as a voice of people; her biography, authenticated by the evocative, lyrical account of the life of the poor, certainly contributed to her success. After her poetry debut, Negri settled in Milan, where she became engaged in the budding socialist and emancipation movements. Her next volume of poetry, *Tempeste*, published in 1895, maintained the course set by *Fatalità*; however, among the accusatory images of poverty, more and more space was dedicated to intimate confessions. In 1896 Negri married Giovanni Garlando, an industrialist, who apparently fell in love with her having read her poems (Jabłonowski, 1899: 207). The marriage was not successful and ended in separation in 1913, but the experience she gained from it, especially that of motherhood, determined the themes of her next poetic volumes: *Dal profondo* (From the Depths, 1910), *Esilio* (Exile, 1914), *Il libro di Mara* (The Book of Mara, 1919). Interestingly, Negri’s poems, investigating the mother’s relationship with her child, inspired the mysticism of motherhood which was devised by Fascist propaganda (Ghidetti and Luti, 1997: 536) and Mussolini’s Italy paid her the greatest tribute – in 1940, as a first woman, she became a member of Accademia d’Italia. In Negri’s later volumes, *I canti dell’isola* (The Song of the Island, 1925),

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2 The overlooking of Konopnicka’s biography, downplayed by the poet herself because it did not accommodate her own ideas about artistic and social roles, returns in Grażyna Borkowska’s study (1996), where it is labelled as the “strategy of mimicry.” The concept was widely embraced by Polish literary scholars as well as Lena Magnone (2011), who investigates Konopnicka’s work through psychoanalytical and feminist perspective.
ing – Snowstorm). Konopnicka retains the imagery typical of the Mediterranean landscape: rice fields in “Pieśń pługa” (The Song of the Plough), fields of myrtus in “Largo!” (Make Way). Frequently, however, she seeks to replace cognitively neutral designators with equivalents peculiar to the Polish landscape: for instance, in the translation of “Strana” (Strange) the word bosco transforms into bór, a large forest.

Personifications and animalizations are characteristic of Konopnicka’s style: Z roli, co dyszy rodząca (From the soil, which gasps in childbirth), whereas in the original: Dal fecondata suol (From fertilised ground) – Largo; Czy widzisz włosy moje? – Po kolana / liśniąca kaskada ich płynie (Can you see my hair? – To my knees, their glittery cascade flows), whereas in the original: Come lucida e nera e come folta / La mia chioma fluenta!... – Autopsia (How glittering and dark and thick / My floating mane!... – Autopsy). Negri also eagerly employs such tropes, but Konopnicka’s figures are almost ubiquitous, intensely plastic, endowing the reality with magic. The Italian poet embellishes the world of common people rooted in the experience of nature. Konopnicka endows this world with secret life, lending it a fairytale quality.

Ada Negri’s Fatalià and Tempeste rendered into Polish by Maria Konopnicka are so strongly filtered through the translator’s formal and aesthetic inclinations, so pervaded with a song-like musicality, that they almost merge with Konopnicka’s original works. In her reading of Negri’s poetry, Konopnicka sees herself, albeit more courageous in forming her social postulates. Can we then agree with Alina Brodzka, who claims that through her translations of Fatalià and Tempeste, Konopnicka intended to mislead the censors and popularize radical thought (1961: 100)? Let us hope that this study proves it was not the only motivation.

trans. Michał Choiński

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Anita Klos has written a Ph.D. dissertation on the Italian writer Sibilla Aleramo (1876–1960) and her connections with Polish literary culture. Author of *Pogrzebana poezja. O recepcji twórczości Giuseppe Ungarettiego w Polsce* (Buried Poetry: On the Polish Reception of Giuseppe Ungaretti, 2009), she concentrates in her research on Polish-Italian relations in 20th-century literature as well as on translation studies and reception of women’s literature.