

Is It Possible for All People to Speak the Same Language? The Story of Ludwik Zamenhof and Esperanto

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Abstract

First, we will see the pillars of Zamenhof's thinking and why his linguistic project attracted the Esperanto pioneers. Then, we will move on the contemporary days, looking to the motivations of today's speakers and their aspirations for the present and future of Esperanto.

About the lecturer

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About the lecture

Lecture delivered in English with simultaneous translation into Polish.

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The casual tourist in Warsaw can encounter traces of Zamenhof and his main creation, the Esperanto language, wandering throughout the city. Coming here to the POLIN Museum, you come across *ulica Zamenhofa*. In the city there is also an Esperanto Street, and a city bus shows 'Esperanto' on its display as that street is its last stop. But there are many Esperanto and Zamenhof streets in the world, so this is not what makes Warsaw unique. Following our imaginary tourist, who is fond of street art, we can take a tour to discover Warsaw's murals: one of them portrays Zamenhof with an extensive bilingual Esperanto–Polish text, which can be found just outside here, around the corner, in the *Muranów* metro station. Let's suppose that our imaginary tourist is fond of languages too, and she loves biking. She will certainly ask herself the following question: Why does Warsaw's public bike system have such a strange non-Polish name, *Veturilo*? You can now guess the answer: it is a word in Esperanto, meaning 'vehicle'. If our imaginary tourist happens to read Polish or Esperanto, she could satisfy her legitimate curiosity about the topic by consulting a book that is a source of reliable information about the relation between Zamenhof and this city. In fact, the book entitled *Zamenhof in Warsaw*, published earlier this year, appeared in two editions, the first in Polish and the second in Esperanto. The book guides one through the city in search of the many traces left by the Zamenhof family. Its author is Roman Dobrzyński, a Polish journalist and Esperantist, who some years ago interviewed Louis-Christophe Zaleski-Zamenhof, the grandson of the inventor of Esperanto, whose life story is really remarkable. That interview, originally in Polish, was translated in several languages, including Esperanto.

Even if Ludwik Lejzer was born in Białystok, he spent most of his life here in Warsaw, where he published the *unua libro* ('first book') on July 1887. So, Warsaw can be considered the adopted home of Ludwik Lejzer Zamenhof and, of course, the cradle of Esperanto. UNESCO declared 2017 Zamenhof Year, being the 100th anniversary of his death, which transpired here in Warsaw, where Zamenhof's grave is also located. The UNESCO decision was made after a proposal by Poland with the support of Germany and Slovakia. It is worth reading an extract of the original document motivating this important symbolic decision:

In 1887 he [Zamenhof] published a textbook in Russian: “The international tongue – Preface and complete method”, under the pseudonym Doktoro Esperanto. The pseudonym means “The Doctor who hopes” and has caught on as the name of the language. In the same year the textbook was published in Polish, French, German and English. The first Esperanto clubs started to come into being, and the advantages of the language were recognized by linguists too. In 1905 in Boulogne-sur-Mer, France, the first World Congress of Esperanto took place. While staying in France, Zamenhof was decorated with the National Order of the Legion of Honour. In 1906 Zamenhof published *humanitism* (homaranismo), which is the idea of the union of all the nations communicating in a common language.

Zamenhof himself was the first to ask if it were possible for all people to speak the same language. For him, this was not a utopian dream, as it was for philosophers like René Descartes and Leibniz, but a concrete possibility. But Zamenhof was well aware that simply having a common language was not enough to make this idea a reality. This is an aspect seldom discussed in presentations on the Esperanto language. Nonetheless, it is extremely important in order to understand the whole phenomenon. Let me briefly explain this point in detail.

Every language is a vehicle for a set of values held by the people who use it—in this case, the collection of the Esperanto-speakers—and even an invented language like Esperanto is no exception in this sense. In other words, Esperanto is not only a language, but a culture represented by its artifacts, created by the Esperantists, the people who believe that using that language for one purpose or another is worth the time spent learning it. We are used to talking about a single Esperanto language ideology, but the variety of political and social ideas connected to this language justify the use of the word ‘Esperantisms’ in the plural.

According to Mark Fettes, a scholar who is currently the president of the most important association supporting the language, the Universal Esperanto Association, the way Esperanto speakers perceive their language es a dilemma between two contrasting aspects: on one side, there is the *Gemeinschaft*, linked to tradition, kinship, rurality; while on the other side,

there is the *Gesellschaft*, linked to modernity, individualism, and urbanness. The Esperanto *Gemeinschaft* aspect nurtures original poetry and prose, prepares theatrical pieces for performance at Esperanto conferences, and takes care of the concert performed by the latest Esperanto rock band. The Esperanto *Gesellschaft* aspect is more concerned with recognition of the language and its value by external institutions, such as the UNESCO declaration we saw above (which is only the last of a rather long list) or the Polish Parliament resolution in memory of Zamenhof, adopted on (the 7th of April 2017) 7 April 2017.

If we consider the fact that Esperanto is spoken by a minority scattered around the world and that at a same time it has an international character by definition, the Esperanto culture has almost literally created a cosmopolitan global village. Esperanto-speakers form a special bond as if they belonged to the same little village; while on the other hand, they also belong to the society where they normally live. There is no stable proper monolingual Esperanto territory such as possessed by the great culture languages of Europe, such as Polish in Poland or Italian in Italy; Ticino, Switzerland; San Marino; and the Vatican. Although Esperanto cities and microstates exist or existed in the history of this unique human phenomenon, Esperanto-land mainly lives in the hearts of the Esperanto-speakers.

Gemeinschaft and *Gesellschaft* are two aspects found in any living language used by a community of speakers: the *Gemeinschaft* aspect represents the language as a barrier, allowing speakers to identify themselves as a group, excluding non-speakers; in contrast, the *Gesellschaft* represents the language as a bridge, so that outsiders can learn it as a second language, following the advice that learning a language means gaining access to a new way to look at the world through new lens. This paradox is unavoidable, and Esperanto is no exception in this sense.

In the case of Esperanto, Zamenhof was concerned with both of these aspects since its launch, and this fact is one of the main factors that enabled Esperanto to survive two World Wars and the challenges faced by the numerous rival projects proposed for playing the role of the international auxiliary language, such as Ido or Interlingua, which are now nothing more than curiosities for specialists and aficionados. Almost all proponents of Esperanto's rivals—a nice expression by the Spanish sociologist Roberto Garvía—were concerned only with the *Gemeinschaft* aspect. They proposed language projects only for purely

utilitarian purposes, which users could not easily identify themselves with. In contrast, Zamenhof imbued his *lingvo internacia*, 'international language' in Esperanto, with his own character, coming from his life experience of being an Ashkenazi Jew living in a ghetto. Esther Schor once expressed the relation between Zamenhof's Jewishness and his language with a wonderful metaphor, which I would now like to quote: "The history of Esperanto is a series of Chinese boxes with a Jewish ghost inside."

In a very famous private letter written in Russian to a friend of his, Nikolaj Borovko, he recalls his early years in Białystok, where there were four distinct communities sharing the city: the Jews, the Roman Catholic Poles, the Orthodox Russians, and the Lutheran Germans. These four peoples were divided by languages and religions that defined their national identities. The life project of the young Lejzer was to build two bridges: a linguistic one, which would eventually be the Esperanto language, and a monotheistic religion. This second project, for him more important than the first one, was first called Hillelism, and later *Homaranismo*, an Esperanto word already seen above in the UNESCO document. The basic idea of *Homaranismo* was to build a bridge between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam on the basis of their common roots. The first people to profit from that bridge, in Zamenhof's mind, should have been the Jewish people. The word *Homaranismo* is difficult to translate in any language, being so specifically linked with Zamenhof's *Weltanschauung*, his vision of the world, so I have decided not to translate it.

While Esperanto enjoyed a relative success, after its successful launch in France in 1905, the destiny of Zamenhof's religious project was already clear. Only once, Zamenhof was convinced to give an interview in English, to the Reverend Isidore Harris, for the journal *The Jewish Chronicle*. Let us look at an extract of that interview, published in 1907, where Zamenhof clarifies his project and why it was no longer his main concern:

Inasmuch as all Jews have a history in common, and the peoples will have nothing to do with us, we ought to beware of calling ourselves 'Russians,' 'Germans,' etc., and we should call ourselves 'Jews' by nationality ; always remembering that, unlike other nationalities, ours is neither local nor ethnological, but only ideal. It stands to reason that we cannot reform the whole Jewish people at one step. So we ought to create in Judaism a normal sect, and strive to bring it about that that sect may come, in course of time—say, after 100 or 150 years—to include the whole Jewish people. We should then become a powerful group. Nay, more, we should be in a position to conquer the civilised world with our ideas, as the Christians have hitherto succeeded in doing, though they only commenced by being a small Jewish body. Instead of being absorbed by the Christian world, we shall absorb them; [but the Russian Jews] had not the courage to help me in organising such a sect as I contemplated. There is a Russian proverb that [says] 'One man in a camp does not make a soldier.' So I have long since abandoned my scheme as unworkable, and my efforts are now devoted to the cognate object of furthering the movement which I have called Esperantism.

In truth, Zamenhof never forgot Homaranismo, but after 1900 he devoted more time and energy to Esperanto, as he wanted to guarantee the language a secure life even without his charismatic presence. His concerns were well placed, because the accidents of history brought Esperanto into a cultural milieu where his religious proposal was completely unacceptable. In fact, whereas before the year 1900 the majority of Esperantists came from Tsarist Russia (and Jewish Esperantists had a considerable presence), in the early days of the past century it was the French-speaking world that would take the lead of the Esperanto Movement, with Catholics strongly represented. Moreover, in 1905, public opinion in France was divided because of the *affaire Dreyfus*, which fueled antisemitism, just when the Esperantists were organising their first World Esperanto Congress, which took place in Boulogne-sur-Mer, a small French town facing the Channel. This is why Zamenhof allowed himself to be referred to as a "Polish oculist" in the press of his time – in modern terms, "ophtalmologist", without mentioning his Jewishness. Nowadays, we are free to say that Ludwik Lejzer Zamenhof was a son of Polish soil, but not Polish.

Once he identified himself as a *rusujano*, an Esperanto word meaning “Russian citizen”, implying that he was not Russian, which in Esperanto would have simply been *ruso*. Having said that, it is not surprising what he said in that first World Esperanto Congress in 1905. Please allow me to read an extract in the Esperanto original; then I will read the English translation, while the Polish interpreter will translate into Polish.

En nia kunveno ne ekzistas nacioj fortaj kaj malfortaj, privilegiitaj kaj sen privilegiaj, neniu humiliĝas, neniu sin ĝenas ; ni ĉiuj staras sur fundamento neŭtrala, ni ĉiuj estas plene egalrajtaj ; neniu humiliĝas, neniu sin ĝenas ; ni ĉiuj sentas nin kiel membroj de unu nacio, kiel membroj de unu familio, kaj la unuan fojon en la homa historio ni membroj de la plej malsamaj popoloj staras unu apud alia ne kiel fremduloj, ne kiel konkurantoj, sed kiel fratoj, kiuj ne altrudante unu la alia sian lingvon, komprenas sin reciproke, ne suspektas unu la alian pro mallumo ilin dividanta, amas sin reciproke kaj premas al si reciproke la manojn ne hipokrite, kiel alinaciano al alinaciano, sed sincere homo al homo. Ni konsciu bone la tutan gravecon de la hodiaŭa tago, ĉar hodiaŭ inter la gastamaj muroj de Bulonjo-sur-Marco kunvenis ne francoj kun angloj, ne rusoj kun poloj, sed homoj kun homoj. Benata estu la tago, kaj grandaj kaj gloraj estu ĝiaj sekvoj !

In our meeting there are no strong and weak nations, privileged and disadvantaged, nobody is forced to humiliate himself, nobody has to worry; we all stand on a neutral ground, we all are fully equal in rights; nobody is forced to humiliate himself, nobody has to worry; we all feel as if we are members of a single nation, as members of one family, and for the first time in human history we, members of the most different peoples stand aside one another not as strangers, not as rivals, but as brothers, who are not pushing their language onto one another, and so they understand each other, are not suspicious of one another because of the darkness that divides them, but love each other and shake hands not hypocritically, as members of different nations do, but sincerely, human beings with human beings. We know well the great importance of today, because today within the hospitable walls of Boulogne-sur-Mer it is not Frenchmen who have convened with with Englishmen, nor Russians with Poles, but human beings with human beings. Blessed should be this day, and full of glory its consequences!

The importance of that moment cannot be overestimated: Esperanto proved to be a workable language for everyday oral communication, but also suitable for formal contexts, both oral and written. After that moment, we can finally answer ‘yes’ to our general question. Yes, it is possible for all people to speak the same *neutral* language, ‘neutral’ meaning respecting each other’s diversities without imposing one’s own language onto others.

Spirituality always played a major role in Zamenhof’s thinking. He closed his speech reading a poem, entitled *Preĝo sub la verda standardo*, Prayer beneath the Green Banner. This poem is generally considered a good summary of the inner spirituality inherent to Esperanto, the so-called *interna ideo*, internal idea of Esperanto. I will first read it in Esperanto, and then read a poetic translation in English by Majorie Boulton, one of the most beloved Esperanto poets ever.

Al Vi, ho potenca senkorpa mistero,
fortego, la mondon reganta,
al Vi, granda fonto de l'amo kaj vero
kaj fonto de vivo konstanta,
al Vi, kiun ĉiuj malsame prezentas,
sed ĉiuj egale en koro Vin sentas,
al Vi, kiu kreas, al Vi, kiu reĝas,
hodiaŭ ni preĝas.

Al Vi ni ne venas kun kredo nacia,
kun dogmoj de blinda fervoro:
silentas nun ĉiu disput' religia
kaj regas nun kredo de koro.
Kun ĝi, kiu estas ĉe ĉiuj egala,
kun ĝi, la plej vera, sen trudo batala,
ni staras nun, filoj de l'tuta homaro
ĉe Via altaro.

Homaron Vi kreis perfekte kaj bele,
sed ĝi sin dividis batale;
popolo popolon atakas kruele,
frat' fraton atakas ŝakale.

Ho, kiu ajn estas Vi, forto mistera,
aŭskultu la voĉon de l' preĝo sincera,
redonu la pacon al la infanaro
de l' granda homaro!

Ni ĵuris labori, ni ĵuris batali,
por reunuigi l' homaron.
Subtenu nin Forto, ne lasu nin fali,
sed lasu nin venki la baron;
donacu Vi benon al nia laboro,
donacu Vi forton al nia fervoro,
ke ĉiam ni kontraŭ atakoj sovaĝaj
nin tenu kuraĝaj.

La verdan standardon tre alte ni tenos;
ĝi signas la bonon kaj belon.
La Forto mistera de l' mondo nin benos,
kaj nian atingos ni celon.
Ni inter popoloj la murojn detruos,
kaj ili ekkrakos kaj ili ekbruos
kaj falos por ĉiam, kaj amo kaj vero
ekregos sur tero.

* * *

To Thee, O mysterious, bodiless Force,
O Power of the World, all-controlling,
To Thee, source of Love and of Truth, and the source,
Of Life in its endless unrolling,
Whom each may conceive in his way in his mind,
But the same in his heart, in his feelings, shall find,
To Thee, the Creator, to Thee, holding sway,
To Thee, now, we pray.

We turn to Thee now with no creed of a state,
With no dogmas to keep us apart;
Blind zeal now is hushed, and fanatical hate;
Now our faith is the faith of the heart.

With this truest faith, this unforced faith and free,
Which all feel alike, we are turning to Thee,
We stand now, the sons of the whole human race,
In Thy holy place.

Thy creation was perfect and lovely, but men,
Are divided, and war on each other;
Now peoples rend peoples like beasts in a den,
Now brother makes war on his brother;
Mysterious Power, whatever Thou art,
O hear now our prayer, our true prayer from the heart:
O grant us Thy peace, O give peace once again
To the children of men!

We are sworn to strive on, we are sworn to the fight
Till mankind is as one; O sustain us;
O let us not fall, but be with us, O Might,
Let no walls of division restrain us.
Mysterious Power, now bless our endeavour,
Now strengthen our ardour, and let us, for ever,
Whoever attacks us, however they rave,
Be steadfast and brave.

We will hold our green banner on high now, unfurled,
A symbol of goodness, and, blessed
In our task by the Mystery ruling the world,
We shall come to the end of our quest.
The walls that divide shall divide us no more;
They shall crack, they shall crash, they shall fall with a roar,
And love then and truth shall, all walls overthrown,
Come into their own.

That moment in 1905 was the establishment of ‘miracle’ of Esperanto. That miracle still holds today. In fact, such a miracle is repeated every time two Esperanto speakers belonging to different nationalities, and even religions, meet. In 2015 *la centa Universala Kongreso*, the 100th World Esperanto Congress, was held in Lille, near Boulogne-sur-Mer, with almost 2,700 (two thousand seven hundred) participants.

But let us come back to the period of Esperanto pioneers, who defined the evolutionary lines of Esperanto and its ideology, sometimes in contrast with Zamenhof's view. In fact, the last stanza of the Prayer was not recited by Zamenhof, for reasons that will become clear in the following. The English translation is by Paul Gubbins, the late writer (in Esperanto and English) and member of the Academy of Esperanto.

Kuniĝu la fratoj, plektiĝu la manoj,
antaŭen kun pacaj armiloj!
Kristanoj, hebreoj aŭ mahometanoj
ni ĉiuj de Di' estas filoj.
Ni ĉiam memoru pri bon' de l' homaro,
kaj malgraŭ malhelpoj, sen halto kaj staro
al frata la celo ni iru obstine
antaŭen, senfine.

Now onwards, all people, linked for e'er hand in hand,
Your weapons of peace burnished brightly!
From Islamite, Hebrew or from Christian land,
Each born of the Father Almighty.
We must never forget we serve man's highest cause,
Whatever besets us, without let, without pause,
Together, as brothers, to our goal we must press
To certain success.

Since the success of the First Congress in 1905 until World War I broke out in 1914, a consistent international community was forming around the two centres of the Esperanto Movement: Geneva in Switzerland and Paris in France. The Swiss elite, led by Hector Hodler, Edmond Privat, and René de Saussure—the youngest brother of the more famous Ferdinand—stressed the importance of the Esperanto Movement's political neutrality and its application in scientific and technological research, and they envisaged a worldwide network of delegates to offer services to the Esperanto-speakers, initially on an individual basis and later on the basis of cultural centres, in a way similar to what happens nowadays with the British Council for the English language or the *Alliance française* for French.

For them, Esperanto should be a spiritual refuge for individuals who did not let themselves be guided nationality for their own life choices, Esperanto being a sort of Red Cross of the Soul.

On the other hand, the French leaders of the Esperanto Movement, in particular Louis de Beaufront, “the second father of Esperanto”—as Zamenhof’s biographer Aleksandr Korzhenkov once called him—stressed the utility of the language in commerce, diplomatic relations, and tourism. For them, the Esperanto Movement should be structured along nationalities: his *Société Pour la Propagation de l’Espéranto* in France, Society for the Propagation of Esperanto, became the model of what later became the national societies, such as the modern *Esperanto Nederland* in the Netherlands or the *Pola Esperanto-Asocio* (in Polish: *Polski Związek Esperantystów*) here in Poland. It is clear that Zamenhof’s Homaranismo was closer to the Swiss view of Esperanto than to the French one. But in the end it was the French view that won the ideological competition, and the mainstream Esperanto Movement was eventually structured along national lines, in direct opposition of Zamenhof’s Homaranismo. We have a clear proof of that in the following episode.

In his time as university student in Moscow, Zamenhof was a Proto-Zionist. The establishment of the new state of Israel was a matter of intellectual discussion, though still not a political programme. Zamenhof proposed establishing the future Israel not in Palestine but on the borders of the Mississippi River, still uninhabited then, with Yiddish as the official state language. His model was the Mormons, who had already founded their state, Utah, within the United States of America, maintaining their religion and culture. As we all know, the path to the foundation of Israel took a different direction. In 1914, just before the beginning of the World War I, the Jewish Esperantists were about to found a World Jewish Esperanto Association (in Esperanto *Tutmonda Esperantista Hebrea Asocio*). They asked Zamenhof’s advice and offered him the honorary presidency. He refused the offer, and suggested that they adopt Esperanto and Yiddish as working languages—notably, not Hebrew, whose revival was well established, after more than a generation of use. It was not an easy journey for Zamenhof to distance himself from the Jewish people in this way. His motivation behind turning down the honorary position rightly remained famous. Let me first read the original quotation in Esperanto, followed by the translation in English, as I did before:

laŭ miaj konvinkoj, mi estas “homarano”, kaj mi ne povas ligi kun la celado kaj idealoj de speciala gento aŭ religio. [...] Estas vero, ke la nacionalismo de la gentoj premataj—kiel natura sindefenda reago—estas multe pli pardoninda, ol la nacionalismo de gentoj premantaj; sed, se la nacionalismo de la fortuloj estas nenobla, la nacionalismo de la malfortuloj estas neprudenta; ambaŭ naskas kaj subtenas unu la alian, kaj prezentas eraran rondon de malfeliĉoj, el kiuj la homaro neniam eliros, se ĉiu el ni ne oferos sian grupan memamon kaj ne penos stariĝi sur grundo tute neŭtrala.

According to my beliefs, I am a “homaranist”, and I cannot bind myself to the purposes and ideals of a particular people or religion. [...] It is true that the nationalism of a repressed people—as a natural defensive reaction—is much more forgivable than the nationalism of oppressing peoples; but if the nationalism of the strong is ignoble, the nationalism of the weak is unwise; the two give birth to and nurture each other, and present an erring cycle of unhappiness, from which humanity will never escape, unless all of us sacrifice our own group pride and struggle to stand on completely neutral ground.

In spite of the *Zeitgeist*, the spirit of his time, Zamenhof did not believe in defining people using the Romantic idea of “one nation, one land, one blood, one religion”, taking for granted the Westphalian Model assumption that nation-states are naturally monolingual and linguistically homogeneous. This assumption is obviously wrong, even if we tend to forget it: in 2017, there are 193 countries in the world that are member states of the United Nations, plus two countries which are non-member states: the Vatican and the State of Palestine. According to Ethnologue, there are 7,099 living languages today—a third of them being severely endangered. A one-to-one language–country mapping would require 7,099 countries, which is absurd. It is clear that the Westphalian Model is factually wrong: normally, in every country of the world, there is more than one language community. Zamenhof was aware of this reality. According to him, there was only one way to prevent war due to linguistic and religious differences. His last public statement was published bilingually in Esperanto and English in *The British Esperantist*, in 1915. That statement as an open letter to diplomats, who should reconstruct Europe after the end of the the First World War. Do take note of the year: 1915! I want to read a short extract from the English translation published at the time:

Will you begin simply to remake and patch up the map of Europe? Will you simply decide that the territory A must belong to the nation X and territory B to the nation Y? True, such work you will have to do, but it must be only an insignificant *portion* of your work ; take care that the readjustment of the map does not become the whole *substance* of your work, for then your labours would remain valueless, and the huge blood sacrifices offered up by mankind would remain of no avail. [...] It would be best if, instead of various large and small European states, we should some day have proportionally and geographically arranged “United States of Europe.”

Zamenhof would die two years later. His legacy and heritage lives through the Esperanto community of practice, made by Jewish and non-Jewish people alike, not only in Europe but in many other parts of the world, notably the Far East—especially China, Japan, and South Korea—and the Americas—in particular Brazil, Canada, and the United States.

Esperanto speakers have developed the Esperanto language through the production of original cultural artifacts, and they continue to develop it today. The long poem *La infana raso*, *The Infant Race*, authored by William Auld and published in 1956, is generally considered its most important and influential result. Born in Scotland, William Auld, who passed away in 2006, decided to write his poems in Esperanto after his experience in World War II as Spitfire airplane pilot. His sentiments towards humanity are not unlike Zamenhof’s, but he expresses them with another poetic language, European modernism. Every trace of fresh hope still found in Zamenhof’s Prayer vanishes, so the question is why writing in Esperanto? Was Zamenhof right or wrong in his hopes? I won’t answer these questions; I prefer to let Auld’s voice talk through his poetry. The English translation is by Girvan McKay, an Esperantist also involved into the maintenance of the Gaelic language in Scotland.

XVIII

Ne estas fido nur. Subtenas faktoj.
Lingvo estas socia fenomeno,
kreaĵo de sociaj intertraktoj,
kaj ĝin modifas la ŝanĝiĝa sceno.

L' epoko ne maturas. Sed bezonon
jam sentas kelkaj, kaj bezono trovas
sian rimedon, la precizan konon
alprenas. Kiu volas, tiu povas.

Kaj dum ekzistos la bezon', ekzistos
la esprimilo («ne por la futuro» —
ne, tamen eble ankaŭ mi asistos).
Ĝi estis revo pela. Kaj aŭguro.

Li sciis, kompreneble: «post centjaroj» —
ars longa... ho, sed vita estas brevis;
ĝi daŭras tikon de la okulharoj,
kaj ĝi ekzistas nur se oni revis.

La revo estas ĉio. Kaj kuraĝo:
ĉar revas nur la kuraĝul' unika.
Perdiĝas mil kaj mil pro la ĉantaĝo
de l' ĉiutaga, mora, hermetika.

Li sciis. Kompreneble. Kaj li fidis,
kaj per la fido fakte movis monton.
Miraklo? Ne; faktoroj koincidis,
kaj frua nuno naskis la estonton.

«...post ĝi ne estis plu la sama», sorto
kompensa de l' pelatoj kaj stranguloj,
la sola, lasta spito kontraŭ morto
(la malproksima grako de klanguloj).

Nur tion li ne sciis, en mallumaj
tagoj de Varsovio dummilita;

sed tro malfrue estas, en krucumaj
horoj, bedaŭri pri la kub' ĵetita.

Faktoroj koincidis; nu, ekzemple,
la Proverbaro. La hazardo trafis
detale, certe, kaj, finfine, simple,
kaj dek ses permesaĵojn paragrafis.

Kaj rigor vitae ĉiam ĝin minacas? —
sed ne dum ĝin bezonas societo.
Kio kontenton al postul' donacas
ne estas ludo por la kabineto.

Kio naskiĝis en la familioj,
en milionaj tribaj komunumoj,
kaj kunfandiĝas trans periferioj
kreskantaj pro produktoj kaj konsumoj,

atingos unuecon. Malaperos
neniam nia orfa idiomo
(ĉu jes aŭ ne la mondon ĝi konkeros)
dum volas kompreniĝi hom' kun homo.

Preskaŭ timige... senutilaj konoj...
la homnatura estas origine...
Alea iacta, pasis fanfaronoj,
nepras la vojon iri jam, obstine.

XVIII

It is not only faith: facts bear this out.
Language an interchange machine,
by social contact brought about,
is altered by the changing scene.

Our age is not mature. But need
is felt by some who find a plan
or answer, and adopt with speed
apt knowledge: he who wishes can,

And while the need exists, the way
("not for the future") by design
also exists, (perhaps I'll play
a part). A driving dream. And sign.

He knew "after five score of years"
ars longa...yes, but vita's brevis
it lasts as long as fleeting tears
and dreamless life's like snow on Nevis.

The dream is everything, and boldness,
for only valiant hearts have dreams.
Many are lost: blackmail, life's coldness
And every day's hermetic schemes.

He knew, of course. A faithful mind,
and by his faith he moved the mountains.
A miracle? Factors combined
To make a trickle future's fountains.

"...nothing remained the same", and faith unbending
that can console obsessive minds and cranks,
the only final challenge to life's ending
(the distant quack of ducks on river banks).

And in the hard dark days in wartime Warsaw,
he did not know this, neither what would last;

it is too late to curse one's cross, and more so
to have regrets when once the die is cast.

The factors coincided; for example
the Proverbaro, And by happy chance,
concise and certain. And above all simple,
the sixteen rules permitting free advance.

And rigor vitae, did it threaten ever? —
not while required by society
whatever meets demand, and such endeavour
is not a game played out in privacy.

Whatever comes to be within the family,
within a million tribes and groups that function,
consolidating, crossing tribal limits,
increasing by production and consumption

brings unity. And this our orphan tongue
will never disappear, 'spite bar or ban,
(whether or not it conquer the world over)
while man seeks understanding still with man.

Almost frightening...useless knowledge
human nature found innately
alea iacta, boasting's over
we must go on obstinately.

Before leaving the floor, there are some people I would like to thank.

First, all the people working here at POLIN, and in particular: our Polish interpreters, the two Joanna's, Joanna Wójcicka-Warda and Joanna Andrysiak who did a wonderful job at organising the workshop and this special public event.

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Thank you for your attention.

Dankon pro via atento.

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Appendix for the Polish interpreters

Public part of the *Preĝo sub la verda standardo*, translator unknown.

Modlitwa pod zielonym sztandarem
Do Ciebie, Potęgo, bez kształtów, nieznana,
Dzierżąca ten świat Tajemnico,
Miłości i prawdy Krynico świetlana
I życia ciągłego Krynico...
Do Ciebie przez wszystkich widziana odmiennie,
Lecz w sercach odczuta jednako płomiennie
Do Ciebie, coś dla nas twórczości wyrazem,
Modlimy się razem.

Nie wążki szowinizm do Ciebie tu woła,
Nie ślepych dogmatów moc głucha...
Spór ludów, religij ucichnął tu zgoła,
Tu serce płomieniem wybucha...
Z tą wiarą w moc serca u wszystkich jednaka,
Z tą prawdą jedynej najwyższej oznaką
My, syny ludzkości, zwracamy dziś twarze
Przed Twoje ołtarze.

Toć ludzkość powstała jak braci gromada...
Cóż węzły w niej bratnie rozplata?!
Przez naród na naród okrutnie napada?
Brat staje się wilkiem dla brata?
Kimkolwiek więc jesteś, Potęgo przemożna,
Niech wzruszy Cię szczerą modlitwą pobożną,
I dzieciom skłóconym tej wielkiej ludzkości
Zwróć pokój miłości!...

My walki i pracy się wiążem przysięgą,
My ludzkość pragniemy zjednoczyć...
Nie dozwól nam upaść, Tajemna Potęgo,
Dopomóż zawady przekroczyć...
Nasz trud pobłogosław, podeprzyj staranie
I serca zapałom daj moc i wytrwanie,
Ażebyśmy czoła napaściom w złej chwili
Odważnie stawili.

Nasz sztandar zielony podniosiem wysoko,
Przed piękna i dobra ołtarze ...
I świata tajemne dostrzeże nas oko
I drogę nam blaskiem pokaże...
I wstrząsną się mury wśród ludów wiekowe
Od huku ich pójda odgłosy cechowe
I miłość i prawda, gdy one upadną,
Na ziemi zawładną!...

Last stanza of the *Preĝo*.

Poetic translations by the Jewish Esperantist Przemysław Wierzbowski.

Niech zbiorą się bracia, niech splecą się dłonie,
z orężem pokoju do przodu!
wyznawcy Chrystusa, żydzi, muzułmanie
od jednego Boga są rodu.
Niech wiedzie nas pamięć o dobru ludzkości,
Bez przerwy, nie bacząc na losu wrogości,
To cel nasz jest, bracia, ruszajmy doń, zwanie,
Do końca, uparcie!

XVIII

Nie tylko wiara jest. Wspierają ją fakty.
Język jest zjawiskiem społecznym,
tworem społecznych zależności,
a modyfikuje go zmienna scena.
Epoka nie dojrzała. Lecz potrzebę
czuje już kilku, i potrzeba znajduje
swój środek, dokładną wiedzę
przyjmuje. Kto chce, ten może.
A kiedy istnieje potrzeba, istnieje
środek wyrazu („nie dla przyszłości” –
nie, jednak może i ja posłużę pomocą).
Było to marzenie gnające. I proroctwo.
Wiedział, oczywiście: „za setki lat” –
ars longa... och, lecz życie jest brevis;
trwa ono tyle co skurcz rzęsy,
i istnieje tylko jeśli się marzyło.
Marzenie jest wszystkim. I odwaga:
bo marzyć umie tylko śmiałek rzadki.
Gubią się tysiące i tysiące przez szantaż
codzienny, zwyczajowy, hermetyczny.
Wiedział. Oczywiście. I ufał,
a ufnością faktycznie poruszył górę.
Cud? Nie; zbiegły się okoliczności,
a wczesna terażniejszość naodziła przyszłość.
„...po tym nie był taki sam”, los
wetujący ściganych i dziwaków,
jedyny, ostatni przekór przeciw śmierci
(dalekie gdakanie gągołów).
Tego tylko nie wiedział, w ciemne
dni Warszawy w czasie wojny;
ale za późno już jest, w godzinę
ukrzyżowania żałować rzuconej kości.
Okoliczności się zbiegły: no, na przykład
Zbiór Przysłów. Przypadek trafił
dokładnie, pewnie, i, nareszcie, po prostu,

i szesnaście pozwoleń zaparagrafował.
A rigor vitae zawsze mu zagraża? —
nie wtedy, gdy go potrzebuje społeczeństwo.
Co zadowolenie żądaniu daruje
nie jest gabinetową zabawą.
Co się zrodziło w rodzinach,

w milionowych plemiennych wspólnotach,
i scaliło się za peryferiami
rosnącymi z powodu produktów i konsumpcji,
osiągnęło jedność. Nie zniknie
nigdy nasza sieroca mowa
(czy podbije ona świat, czy też nie)
dopóki porozumieć się chce człowiek z człowiekiem.
Niemał strasznie... beużyteczna wiedza...
natura ludzka jest pierwotnie...
Alea iacta, minęły przechwałki,
trzeba w drogę ruszyć już, uparcie.