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The House You Are Leaving:

Selected Poems of Martin Vopěnka in English Translation

(diplomová práce)

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Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto diplomovou práci vypracovala samostatně a výhradně s použitím citovaných pramenů, literatury a dalších odborných zdrojů.

V Olomouci, dne   18.8.2021

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Kristýna Adámková

básníci básně neskládají

báseň je bez nás   někde za

a je tu dávno   je tu od pradávna

a básník báseň nalézá

          – Jan Skácel

Content

Introduction

From a literary point of view, poetry translation is a wonderful and praiseworthy effort. At the same time, it is a pain-striking and time-consuming task often performed with little or no financial reward. Those who apply themselves to it, are rarely interested in spending even more time and energy to elaborate on the nitty-gritty details of the translation process. This is understandable, for there are few readers of poetry and even fewer of those appreciate detailed translation discussion. Consequently, many prefaces and forewords to translated poetry collections focus mainly on introducing the author and his work while glossing over the translation spending not more than a few very general remarks on translation strategy as a whole.

The present work offers an in-depth study as a contribution to a general discussion of poetry translation from Czech to English. Its main goal is to showcase examples of compensation for sound likeness in the target text. The source text samples were chosen from the first poetry collection *Dům, který opouštíš* (Práh, 2016) of a contemporary Czech writer Martin Vopěnka. The translation (featured in chapter 3) is followed by the translator's commentary (chapter 4) explaining the decisions regarding the compensation for the euphonical nature of Vopěnka's free verse. The remaining chapters describe: a) theoretical framework, more specifically the *three stages of translator's work* by Jiří Levý; b) application of Levý's theory in the search of what he called *the ideo-aesthetical values of the work.*

Vopěnka has already attained a certain international recognition as a novelist. The Prague Literary Agency[1] features him as the author of children's literature but glancing at his profile one finds not only translations of his children's fiction but also modern fiction and travelogues. His poetic endeavor is, however, relatively unknown. Since I am convinced Vopěnka's poems deserve more attention, it is my hope that the translation will recommend Martin Vopěnka as a poet to English-speaking readers. As a theoretical guideline for the project, I chose to follow the three stages of the translator's work as formulated in *The Art*

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[1] Founded in 2015 by Maria Sileny to present selected contemporary Czech authors to an international an audience (see https://www.praglit.de).

of Translation[2] by Jiří Levý[3] , and thus the secondary contribution can be seen in enriching the reader's understanding of the Czech translation tradition.

To achieve its goals the study is divided into two parts. The theoretical part (chapters 1–2) consists of a summary of the applicable principles drawn from Jiří Levý as well as an introduction to Martin Vopěnka as a poet, a description of the poetry collection, and a brief analysis of the characteristic features found in the poems chosen for translation.

Since there is virtually no published material on Vopěnka's poetry, a great deal of the information in chapter two is based on an interview with the author and his own reflections on his writing. The main theoretical sources used in the analytical section include: *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry* (1993) by G. Leech, as well as some of the applicable principles from a sequel to this book *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose* (2007) by G. Leech and M. Short; *The Sounds of Poetry* (1999) by Robert Pinsky and the *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form* (1979) by Paul Fussell.

The practical part of the thesis (chapters 3-4) presents the translation of selected poems followed by the translator's commentary that focuses on the compensation of sound likeness in the translation process. Simply put, it seeks to answer the question as to how the translator dealt with the euphonical nature of the source text and how she made up for it in the target text.

Chapter 4 explores the reasoning behind specific choices and solutions. It explains how the theoretical knowledge summarized in chapter one was applied through the translation process that led to the English version of the poems in chapter three. It is a synthesis of knowledge acquired in the theoretical section and its application. The method and reasoning presented make no claims of being the only correct one, there are certainly many diverse approaches, and each may be valid if it is backed up by consistent application of a chosen theory.

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[2] Jiří Levý, Patrick Corness, and Zuzana Jettmarova, *The Art of Translation*. (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Pub. Co, 2011).
[3] Originaly published in Czech in 1963.

1   Theoretical Framework: The Three Stages of the Translator's Work by Levý

1.1   Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to describe the theoretical principles that guided the translation presented in chapter 4 of this thesis, mainly the three steps of the process of literary translation as formulated by Jiří Levý in his seminal work *The Art of Translation*.[4] This chapter contains a summary of these three steps as well as Levý's other remarks on translation of poetry, especially concerning the differences between Czech and English in respect to prosody.

The Art of Translation, first published in Czech in 1963, is a result of Levý's extensive academic effort and in the words of Zuzana Jettmarová (2011)[5] it rests on three main pillars. Namely: 1) Empirical research 2) Czech "functional" structuralism 3) Levý's up to date knowledge of the state of translation theory. This solid foundation allowed Levý to produce material that is relevant today. A succinct description of the major influences in Levý academic work is given by Jitka Zehnalová, who wrote:

> Levý's model formulated in the 1960s grew out of contextual considerations developed by the Prague school and offers a theoretically and methodologically advanced view of translation and translating. It is grounded in a forward-looking dynamic concept of function and in an equally forward-looking concept of meaning as an integration of form, content, and the human factor.[6]

Levý was deeply rooted in the Czech structuralist tradition. Structuralism in a general sense is defined by Leech and Short (2007) as seeing "the same structural principles of contrast and pattern as underlying varied forms of human activity, and so as equally manifested in language, art and other cultural forms."[7]

In a more specific sense, the Western literary tradition is well acquainted with its French structuralist tradition. However, structuralism followed a slightly different route in

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[4]Jiří Levý, Patrick Corness, and Zuzana Jettmarova, *The Art of Translation*. (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Pub. Co, 2011).

[5]Jiří Levý, *Umění překladu*: 4., Upravené vyd. (Praha: Apostrof, 2012), 8.

[6]Jitka Zehnalová, "The Czech structuralist tradition and translation-related semiotic text analysis". *Folia translatologica* no. 3 (2015): 151.

[7]Geoffrey N. Leech, and Michael Short, *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose*. (New York: Pearson Longman, 2007), 3.

different countries and as Zuzana Jettmarová points out in her article *Czech and Slovak Translation Theories: The Lesser-Known Tradition*, there is historically no continuity between French and Czech structuralism.[8]

Levý, following in the footsteps of the Prague Linguistic Circle and applying the findings of functional structuralism, published many articles on translation but articulated his ideas most completely in *The Art of Translation* a book, that is to this day an indispensable part of every literary translator's toolkit as Levý remains "a philosopher's stone of translation theory forged from the fortuitous alchemy of Czech structuralist method, his talents, diligence and historical coincidence."[9]

The book is divided into two parts. Before turning to Levý's thoughts on poetry translation in the second half of the book, let us first look at his general model of translation to see what principles can be drawn from there. Levý designed his model for all literary or artistic translation and therefor it is applicable to translation of poetry as well.

Thus, the following section summarizes Levý's thoughts on the genesis of a literary work and of its translation. Secondly, it briefly describes the three stages of the translator's work. It lastly considers Levý's thoughts on translation of poetry mainly concerning euphony and the differences between Czech and English as two distinct language systems.[10] Throughout chapter I, I occasionally reference other scholars. In the conclusion I provide an application to the present study.

1.2   The Genesis of a Literary Work

Before discussing the three phases or stages of the process of translation, Levý carefully describes the genesis of a literary work and its translation in detail as it serves to outline the path translators must take and highlights the decisions he or she will face. Levý was pioneering the idea that translation is really an act of communication.[11] Equally forward-looking is his emphasis on the role of the translator as a person (and his or her reading, thinking, interpreting, reasoning ability).

The following model is Levý's communication chain in translation:[12]

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[8]Zuzana Jettmarova, "Czech and Slovak Translation Theories: The Lesser-Known Tradition," (2009): 15–46.
[9]Zuzana Jettmarova's foreword to the English edition of The Art of Translation. See: Levý, *The Art of Translation*, xxv.
[10] These are found in chapters 2–4 (pages 23—128).
[11] Levý, *The Art of Translation*, 23.
[12] Ibid.

		Author			Translator			Reader	
Reality	→	Selection	Stylisation	Text in → Foreign Language	Reading	Translation	Text in → Translator's Language	Reading	Concretisation

Starting from the very beginning, there is a reality (in the ultimate metaphysical sense as a sphere of existence of all things) and there is the author as the inhabitant and observer of that reality. To create a literary text the author makes (whether consciously or subconsciously) *two* kinds of choices about that reality. First, he decides *what is it* that he wants to represent in his art. This decision is representedby "Selection" in the model. Secondly, the author decides *how* will the selected reality be presented. This decision corresponds to "Stylisation." Thus, Levý defines a literary text as:

> The reflection and subjective transformation of objective reality; the outcome
> of this creative process is an ideoaesthetic content realised in verbal material,
> but both components form a *dialectical unity*; the form usually has a specific
> semantic significance, whereas the content is always represented and arranged
> in some form. (emphasis added)[13]

Simply put, Levý's "ideoaesthetic content realised in verbal material"[14] means "beauty via language". As simple as the principle sounds, misunderstanding on the part of the translator may result in far-reaching consequences. Levý warns against two extremes, overemphasizing the objectivity of the reality on one hand or overemphasizing the subjectivity of the author on the other. Emphasizing objective reality over the subjective selection of the author leads to tendencies to "correct" the author or explain what he or she ment. On the other hand, favoring authors subjectivity while disregarding an existing real may hamper interpretation by omitting temporal and socio-cultural gap that to some extend always lies between the author and the reader.[15]

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[13] Ibid, 24.

[14] Ibid, 24.

[15] "Readers apprehend a work of art from the perspective of their own time, and those values which are ideologically or aesthetically close to them acquire particular intensity. Because translators' conceptions are historically conditioned, the translation is bound up with their entire national cultural context." Ibid, 27.

1.3   Three Stages of the Translator's Work

From understanding the origin and the process of literary translation stems the understanding of three stages of the translator's work. According to Levý, these are:[16]

1. Apprehension of the source
2. Interpretation of the source
3. Re-stylisation of the source

1.3.1.1   Apprehension

Levý stresses that translators must first of all be good readers. Moreover, they must be able to discern what features of the text are key in creating the desired poetic effect. In the same vein, Adler[17] speaks of the need of the reader to become a good critic. Based on Levý's model, to apprehend means to understand at least these four things:

First, Levý speaks of apprehension of the *source* not the source *text* and this seemingly minor detail is significant. In Levý's terms one aspect of apprehension is the understand that the source is way more than the source text. Second, that there is a reality independent from an author. Third, authors make subjective choices on what they want to highlight out of that reality. Fourth, authors make subjective choices on how to manipulate the linguistic code in order to represent and communicate that reality. Omitting one of those stages may cause the translator to fall into the trap of the language. In other words, one may make the mistake of only focusing on the linguistic code without paying attention to the author's selection of the reality it represents.

Apprehension according to Levý is sum of those things. Translators who apprehend are aware of the presence of these four aspects and of the way they shape the text. The author might have created the work of art more or less subconsciously, by using the means that "felt" right and a reader may perceive the work of art simply as beautiful without being able to point out the features that create that beauty. Translators, however, if they truly understand, see not only text and the beauty of it, but they are also able to point out specific features of which the beauty is the sum. Too many translators linger in the text but Levý says it is only one aspect albeit important: "The first dimension is apprehension of the text,

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[16] Ibid 31
[17] Mortimer Jerome Adler, and Charles Van Doren, *How to Read a Book* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), 199.

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i.e. understanding in linguistic and literary terms. Apprehension does not require any specific gift here; it is a matter of specialised training and experience in the craft."[18]

For a skilled translator it is imperative to move from "understanding in linguistic and literary terms" to recognizing "ideo-aesthetic values". The apprehension is complete at the third stage, in Levý's words that is: "Apprehension of the ideo-aesthetic values of individual verbal means and partial motifs facilitates apprehension of artistic wholes, i.e. of the realities depicted in the work, such as the characters, the relationships between them, the setting in which the action takes place and the author's ideological intention."[19] Levý admits the last step is the most demanding one and requires "considerable powers of imagination"[20] on the part of translator.

1.3.1.2   Interpretation

If *apprehension* is understanding *what* is the text about and answers the questions: "What do I find in the text?" and "What makes it the work of art?" The *interpretation* then, is understanding *why* and an interpreter seeks to answer the question: "Why the author chose to highlight these aspects of independent reality in particular?" and "Why did he or she chose these specific linguistic tools as artistic means?"

"Of the original artist we demand an appropriate interpretation of reality,"[21] says Levý. And of the translator we demand appropriate interpretation and aesthetically valuable re-stylization of the original work.[22] To achieve that, Levý suggests three steps: A) to "search for the objective idea of the work" B) to determine "translator's interpretative position" C) and lastly to interpret "the objective values of the work according to this position" Levý also stresses that the translator must not only keep in mind the author but also the reader and interpret the work with the reader in mind.[23]

Dagmar Knittlová[24] speaks of a similar concept that she calls a *strategy and strategic decisions.* Adhering to the *interpretative position* serves the translators as a measuring stick against which they can compare their solutions or as a safeguard keeping them from falling

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[18] Levý, *The Art of Translation,* 32.

[19] Ibid, 34.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid, 39.

[22] Ibid, 35.

[23] Ibid, 44. When Levý spoke of "a particular category of consumer." He was pioneering the idea of reader-focused approach to translation that emerged in TIS decades later.

[24]Dagmar Knittlová, Bronislava Grygová, and Jitka Zehnalová, *Překlad a překládání* (Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, Filozofická fakulta, 2010), 27.

into one of the greatest pitfalls of translation, which according to Levý is: "...succumbing to cheap personal sentimentality and self-projection when reading ... This brings the work into the realm of facts which are objectively quite unrelated to..."[25]

Levý warns against adopting a conception of translation that would foreground a motif that was perhaps secondary in the original work. [26] This would present the work in a completely different light. After deciding on a conception, the process of translation rests in carrying out that position. According to Levý, translators only have limited means at their disposal, these are nevertheless effective if the translator knows how to appropriately employ them.[27] First among them is stylistic choice. By this all translators inevitably leave traces of their own stylistic tone on the work (i.e.: give away their conception of it).[28]

1.3.1.3   Re-stylization

When Levý says: "from the translator we expect an artistic re-stylisation of the source."[29] He does not contradict Nabokov's classic exhortation to the translator "to reproduce with absolute exactitude the whole text, and nothing but the text."[30] These two guidelines do not go against each other if we understand the artistic value to be an inherent feature of a literary text and thus to reproduce it faithfully means to reproduce it with corresponding style in the target language.

Style is always a "ling-lit" problem, meaning it resides where linguistic and literary discussion overlaps. According to Levý, there are three main linguistic issues in translation:[31]

- inter-relationship between the two language systems
- traces of the language of the original in the stylisation of the translation,
- tension in the style of the translation (rendering of ideas in a language other than that in which they were conceived).

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[25] Levý, *The Art of Translation,* 40.
[26] Ibid, 41.
[27] Ibid, 44.
[28] Ibid, 47. Levý was again a pioneer of this notion, later in TIS coined as „translator's thumprint" by Mona Baker.
[29] Ibid, 47.
[30] Lawrence Venuti. *The Translation Studies Reader* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), 77.
[31] Levý, *The Art of Translation,* 48.

1.4 Seeking and Finding the Ideo-Aesthetics Values

With Levý's instructions in mind an inexperienced translator may ask: How do I actually look for aesthetic values in the original work? How do I identify them and see the way they make up artistic wholes? While seeking to answer these questions for myself I found Leech's and Short's book *Style in Fiction* extremely helpful. According to the authors' words in the introduction, it was "written with the aim of showing the student of English that examining the language of a literary text can be a means to a fuller understanding and appreciation of the writer's artistic achievement."[32]

Leech and Short encourage students to conduct an analysis of the source. They do agree with Levý, however, no matter how linguistically skilled the translator is if he or she has no interpretative skills and lacks the power of imagination and creativity, their translation is destined to come across as clumsy. Thus, it would be a mistake to think that a proper analysis is a substitute for artistic sense and creativity. Detailed analysis should not be seen as a negation of impression. According to Leech and Short analysis actually serves to "validate" reader's intuition and to "prompt, direct, and shape it into an understanding."[33]

The goal of style analysis according Leech and Short is "an attempt to find the artistic principles underlying a writer's choice of language."[34] These "artistic qualities" is what Levý calls "ideo-aesthetical values of individual verbal means" that bring about the understanding of "artistic wholes."[35] Leech and Short speak of "the artistic effect of the whole" and of "linguistic details" within the whole.[36]

Levý admits this is a challenging task and requires imagination.[37] However, the ability to perform it is the key to a literary translation and a mark of a capable literary translator. Unlike Levý, we live in a time where the ability to think creatively is what keeps the human translator from being replaced by a machine translator or a software that is nowadays increasingly more capable to render understandable target texts. Levý then concludes his remarks on re-stylisation by summarising the talent demands on literary translation:

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[32] Leech and Short, *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2007), 2.
[33] Ibid, 4.
[34] Ibid, 60.
[35] Levý, *The Art of Translation,* 34. Originally: "Ideově estetické hodnoty" a "umělecké celky"
[36] Leech and Short, *Style in Fiction,* 60. "linguistic details" here roughly corresponds to what Levý terms "filologické porozumění" which is the first level of the *apprehension* of the text. It is the "understanding in linguistic and literary terms" and "does not require any specific gift here; it is a matter of specialised training and experience in the craft." Levý, *The Art of Translation,* 32.
[37] Levý, *The Art of Translation,* 34.

"above all the gift of imagination and of stylistic creativity, as well as ability for objectivation."[38]

1.5 Thoughts on Translation of Poetry

1.5.1 Defining Poetry

A section on theory of poetry translation should naturally start by a definition of poetry and perhaps by drawing clear lines between poetry and prose. However, that is no easy task. "Poetry is notoriously hard to define,"[39] states Paul Fussell. It is equally hard to define a literary text in general. G. Leech suggests a piece of text is literary if both the author and reader treat it as such.[40]

Other scholars describe poetry by pointing out its most prevalent features. Derek Attridge in *Moving Words* defines poetry as "a form of language which heightens the reader's awareness of its own working—its movement, its sounds, its capacity to represent and convey sensations and feelings."[41] Josef Hrabák[42] maintains that the key component of any verse (free verse included) is the simple fact that it is presented as such.[43] In other words, taken out of context the difference between a line of prose and a line of poetry lies only in the way it is presented.

Levý laments the fact that discussion of poetry translation often shrinks to rhythm and rhyme.[44] A poetry translator, who is just learning the craft might easily be led into thinking that free verse poetry that does not include rhyme or rhythm may be treated as prose in lines and translated as such. This would obviously be a grave mistake. Levý gives a much broader palette of features that participate in "in the linguistic stylization of a work":[45]

- specific motifs expressed by images presented in looser form/syntactic relations/sentence structure (as opposed to prose that presents more complex ideas in more complex sentences)

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[38] Levý, *The Art of Translation,* 56.
[39] Paul Fussell, *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979), 4.
[40] Geoffrey Leech, *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry* (London New York: Longman, 1993), 10.
[41] Derek Attridge, *Moving Words: Forms of English Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 204.
[42] The late Czech literary scholar, whose *Úvod do teorie verše* is considered a classic to this day.
[43]Josef Hrabák, *Úvod do teorie verše* (Praha: Státní pedagogické nakladatelství, 1958), 8.

[44] Levý, *The Art of Translation,* 189.
[45] Ibid.

- higher occurrence asyndetic structures, appositional constructions and lower occurrence of subordinate syntactic constructions

- weakening of already loose syntactic relations by line breaks (enjambment) and caesuras

- strengthening of relations between words that would otherwise stay unrelated in prose (by using rhyme or parallelism, etc.)

- semantic density (in other words, there is a lot of meaning on in fewer words)[46]

These features of the text lead to a particular treatment in translation. Regardless of the language of the source and target text a translator of poetry (in contrast to the translator of prose) must pay attention to motifs and images, which are, according to Levý, building blocks of poetry.[47]

1.5.2   Czech and English as Two Language Systems in Respect to Prosody

Levy provides a great deal of information that allows for a comparison and contrast between many languages. He discussed French, Russian, German, and Czech (sometimes other languages, for example Italian and Polish). Most of the second half of the book discuses differences in meter, rhythm, and systems of prosody. There is no need, however, to go into detail about it here since the poems featured in this thesis are written in free verse. In what remains of this chapter, I want to focus on theory on Levý's thoughts on euphony and on the differences between Czech and English especially the view of rhyme in these languages.

1.5.2.1   Free verse

Theoreticians tent to agree that the label "free" is misleading. Levý starts his section of comparative morphology of free verse by reminding the readers: "Free verse is not an amorphous word sequence, and it cannot be translated into prose divided into separate lines, as is often the case."[48] Paul Fussel agrees that the free verse must not be understood as without any restrictions or limitations whatsoever.[49] Among contemporary poets, free verse is a mainstream form. It is no longer a rebellion against poetic tradition, language

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[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid, 289.
[49] Fussell, *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form,* 77.

rules and stylistic conventions. It just makes a different use of them. They still apply but they are "veiled" or "negated" to use Levý's terms.[50]

"To hear free verse, and to write it effectively, is a demanding skill."[51] declares Pinsky in his chapter on free verse and concludes by lamenting the careless use of free verse to express popular ideas in cliché phrases.[52] Sadly, this very fact might be singled out as the reason why many contemporary readers shun contemporary poetry and reach for time tested classics instead. For such is their experience shallow, pop-song-like text without a trace of the craftsmanship of a skilled poet. Fussell longs for "the art that makes the poems re-redable once we have fathomed what they 'say'."[53] Based on Fussel's statement, it is possible to deduce a definition of a good free verse: A good free verse manifests itself in the reader's desire for repeated reading once they understand what the poem "says". Thus, one might test every free verse poem by asking a simple question: Does this poem beg me to be read aloud? Does it urge me to be pronounced? Do I long to actually hear the flow of the words pronounced out loud as I read it silently? If the answer is three times yes, the poem is an example of a good free verse. Excellent free verse begs to be read out loud over and over again.

The key to translating free verse formulates Levý as "the identification of the stylistic principles underlying the author's poetics and then its transposition to a different versification system."[54] This is yet another warning against a shallow treatment of the source text.

1.5.2.2 Rhyme

Levý defines rhyme as "not merely some isolated feature of a poem, but rather a component in the complex interplay between the acoustic and the semantic values of a poem."[55] And it should be treated as such, not as a mere embellishment but rather a feature endowed with function. The function can be one of the following or a combination of them:[56] rhythmic, euphonic, semantic (or as Abrams states "one of its important functions, rhyme ties individual lines into the larger pattern of a stanza.")[57] However, no function can be entirely

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[50] Levý, *The Art of Translation,* 289.
[51] Robert Pinsky, *The Sounds of Poetry: A Brief Guide*. (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999), 87.
[52] Ibid, 88.
[53] Fussell, *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form,* 88.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid, 232.
[56] Ibid, 232.
[57] M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1999), 275.

divorced from "the creative manipulation of the linguistic code."[58] This fact highlights the need to pay close attention to the properties of a language that serves as a vehicle for given function.

There are obviously many differences between the way Slavonic and Anglo-Saxon languages work. Consequently, there are many systemic differences between English and Czech and in the way they go about creating rhymes and sound patterns. English, for example, has a wider arsenal of monosyllabic words and homophones, which makes it easy to form puns and play on words.[59] Czech on the other hand can play around with flection and different sounds of words created by different endings.[60]

To be more specific, Levý gives the example of the word "love." Czech has ten acoustically different forms of the noun láska (láska, lásky, lásce, lásku, lásko, láskou, lásek, láskám, láskách, láskami) whereas the English "love" can only appear in four forms (love, loves, loved, loving).[61] Love can thus only rhyme with words ending in –ove (*glove, dove, above*).[62] The same is true of verbs. Such a common Czech verb as mít (to have) exists in ten acoustically different forms (mít, mám, máš, má, máme, máte, mají, měl, měla, měli) whereas English only works with three (have, has, had).

Levý summarizes: "English poets therefore find themselves trapped in the vicious circle of a limited and restricted repertoire of rhymes"[63] and thus the "the proportion of unanticipated rhymes is almost nil."[64] Czech, on the other hand has a richer "rhyming vocabulary" and therefore "It is easier to avoid rhyme cliches than it is in English."[65] Perhaps this is the reason why English readers do not receive rhyme as well as Czech ones especially when it comes to rich rhymes. Due to the relatively small number of possible rich rhyme pairs their repetitive usage soon wears off, loses its freshness, and becomes a cliché. Levý concludes: "Repetitive rhymes are therefore considered a sign of aesthetic weakness in English poetry, rather than a sign of virtuosity."[66]

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[58] Leech, *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry,* 2. (emphasis added)
[59] Levý, *The Art of Translation,* 29.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid, 233.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid, 236.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Levý, *The Art of Translation,* 236.
[66] Ibid, 235.

Another key difference between the languages in respect to poetry is related to word order within the sentence (relatively fixed in English and relatively free in Czech). While altered word order is sometimes acceptable in English[67] it inevitably creates a marked expression. Czech poets by the nature of the language have a greater freedom to shovel words around the line without necessarily breaking the rules of grammar.

1.5.2.3   Rich rhyme

Rich rhyme sometimes called identical or is referred to by its French name rime riche is defined by Lennard as coincidence of sounds "between words whose sounds before and after the last stressed vowel are identical."[68] Used skillfully, it is viewed as aesthetically pleasing in Czech, whereas English always considers it is unacceptable.[69] This difference in perception is something every translator working with these languages must keep in mind. There should never be and attempt to "recreate" them when translating into English and there is not a reason to completely avoid them when translating into Czech.

1.6   Conclusion: Application to the Study

This chapter dealt with theoretical underpinnings for the translation presented in chapter 4. It attempted to show how helpful is Levý simple three step process to a translator and how going the process of *apprehension* and *interpretation* helps the translator to come up with a conception of the work, that serves the translator as a roadmap or a measuring stick against which they can always compare their solution in the final phase of *re-stylization*. The following chapter describes my search for the reality behind the source and for the *ideo-aesthetical values* within the source.

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[67] Levý gives the example of Dryden's: „We have the king of Mexico betrayed." Levý, *The Art of Translation,* 191.
[68] John Lennard, *The Poetry Handbook: A Guide to Reading Poetry for Pleasure and Practical Criticism*. (Oxford, England; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 221.
[69] Levý, *The Art of Translation,* 242.

2 Contextual Background: The Author and the Text in the Context of His Work

The first half of this chapter is the summary of my search for the reality behind the source. It introduces Martin Vopěnka and outlines the main characteristics of his work as an author. It shows how the poems were chosen for translation within the context of his work. The information included in the first section of the chapter is there to provide the reader with a knowledge of the author's most prevalent subjects and create a basis for understanding the themes featured in his poetry (discussed in the second half of the chapter).

Most of the information in this chapter comes from the author himself[70] and his novels. Autobiographical information is drawn from his books of memories *Nebarevné vzpomínky* (*Uncolored Memories*, 2013) and *Přežít civilizaci* (*To Survive the Civilization*, 2020). An interesting outlook on his view on the question of life, the universe, and everything is described in the essay *Physics, Black Holes, Thought and the Novelist* written by Vopěnka as an afterword for the English edition of *The Fifth Dimension*.[71] The information is occasionally drawn from other sources such as blogs and websites.

The second half of this chapter is the summary of the main ideo-aesthetical values within the text. Most of the information there was drawn from scholars and poets mainly Paul Fussell and his *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form*, Robert Pinsky's classic *The Sounds of Poetry* and John Lennard's *The Poetry Handbook*. As mentioned in chapter one Leech and Short's *Style and Fiction* were of much help as well. Occasionally, I reference other publications on prosody.

2.1 The Life Behind the Poems: About the Author

Martin Vopěnka (born 1963) is a Czech author, publisher, and traveler. He is the founder and head of Práh (The Threshold) publishing house. Among the general public, he is mainly known for his novels, children's literature, and his travelogues. His novels demonstrate the influence of his Jewish heritage, his childhood in Communist Czechoslovakia, his university degree in nuclear physics, and his travels around the world to name just a few.

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[70]Vopěnka, Unpublished personal conversation, May 20, 2021.
[71] Martin Vopěnka, "Physics, Black Holes, Thought and the Novelist," *Barbicanpress,* November 5, 2020, https://barbicanpress.com/physics-black-holes-thought-and-the-novelist-martin-vopenka/.

Vopěnka's prose is acknowledged internationally as several of his books have been translated into various world languages (including Polish, Italian, Romanian, and English). The most recent release in the English-speaking world is the novel *My Brother the Messiah* in the UK and *The Back of The Beyond (Travels with Benjamin)* in the United States.

Vopěnka is also an accomplished writer of children's literature. This branch of his work will not be discussed in detail here because it bears little significance for understanding his poems. As a father and advocate of children's literacy, however, he spends a great deal of his creative efforts in this field and has been recognized for it (the most notable is his trilogy *Sleeping City*, *Sleeping Secret,* and *Sleeping Justice* or the young adult novel *New Planet.)*[72]

Vopěnka currently divides his efforts between writing and publishing. He describes himself as an author, a novelist, and a publisher not really as a poet. He founded the Práh publishing house in the early 1990s shortly after the Velvet Revolution, because in his own words in such a small country as Czechia it is hard to live off writing alone[73]. He has also served as the president of the Czech Association of Booksellers and publishers since 2013.

2.1.1   Born a Writer: Vopěnka's Prose

"I was born a writer," says Vopěnka in his essay for Barbican press.[74] "I wrote my first story with the help of a letter drawing stencil when I was a little less than six years old." Although he later graduated from the prestigious Czech Technological Institute[75] he abandoned the field immediately for what he felt was his life calling – literature. The main bulk of Vopěnka's prose consists of novels and understanding them, understanding his style and the way he communicates with the reader as a prose writer is key to understanding and interpreting his poems suitably.

Vopěnka's earlier novels – the first one *Kameny z Hor (Rocks from the Mountains)* published in 1989 by Mladá fronta was followed by *Balada o sestupu* (1992); *Hotel uprostřed života* (1999); and *Moře smutku za tvým psem* (2002) just to name a few – have traveling and the inner life of the characters as a common denominator. A simple plotline is made extraordinarily interesting by the author's careful attention to the nuances of the

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[72] Golden Ribbon Award 2016 in Children's literature
[73] Vopěnka, Unpublished personal conversation, May 20, 2021.
[74] Vopěnka, "Physics, Black Holes, Thought and the Novelist."
[75] Faculty of Mathematics and Nuclear Physics. The circumstances leading to his enrolment at the age of 18 are also described in the above-mentioned essay.

character's thought process which offer insight into the complexity of seemingly simple decisions.

One of the most prevalent motifs in Vopěnka's novels is a journey. He portrays literal travels, from one place to another, hand in hand with the inner journey of a character, his or her path to a to a change, to a new life, or a decision. Writers often keep a journal while traveling and base their novels (partially or wholly) on their notes and memories. Vopěnka does not keep a journal and works the other way around.[76] He comes up with the idea for the novel first and only then travels to gain the material or "scene-setting" as he calls it.[77]

For example, when he came up with the idea for *The Fifth Dimension* (2015) he decided to set the main character into an Argentinian desert. Only then did he set on a journey into that desert to be able to write about it realistically. The same is true for the novel *Back to Beyond (Travels with Benjamin)*, 2021. When he came up with the idea of a four-month-long father-son journey, he took all his four children one by one and traveled with them to several different European countries as well as to Argentina and Greenland. Memories from those trips (that usually only lasted a week or two) consequently fueled his writing several years later.

Apart from the physical as well as internal journeys of characters, another typical feature of many of his recent novels is that they are set in the future. *Konec zákona (The End of the Law, 2003),* the first of Vopěnka's novels set in the future, describes a society that within a couple of decades turned utterly nihilistic and decadent. Although at the time of its release, it was considered off-limits, it is currently considered a sober depiction of swiftly approaching reality. His other novels set in the future are *My Brother the Messiah, 2020,* and *New Planet, 2015* for which he received the Golden Ribbon Award.

Although these more recent novels are sometimes labeled sci-fi, fans of the genre will inevitably be disappointed when picking up Vopěnka's book. Although it has the features of sci-fi (because Vopěnka adds to his imagination the understanding of physics and maths attained during his formal training) it is more of magical realism or mysticism and the main focus remains on the character's inner life, passions, and emotions.

Vopěnka is sometimes praised as the next Milan Kundera because his novels employ realistic depictions of the ordinary affairs of human life contrasted with deep reflections on

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[76] Vopěnka, Unpublished personal conversation, May 20, 2021.
[77] Vopěnka, Unpublished personal conversation, May 20, 2021.

the purpose of existence and other weighty topics. In contrast to Kundera, however, Vopěnka does not ever put his characters into situations that are so absurd they border on comedy as Kundera does. Vopěnka's characters only demonstrate what could be called a remote sense of humor. This is intentional not because the author does not have a sense of humor himself but because he believes in the words of Ecclesiastes sorrow is better than laughter is better for the human soul.[78]

The philosophical dimension is also very typical for all of Vopěnka's novels. It is as if he is always pondering transcendent, literally eternal questions, like those Gauguin famously painted in one of his large canvases: *Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?* The answer Vopěnka offers in all of his novels is characterized by a deep skepticism and very little faith in humanity.

Another common thread in all his works would be his treatment of deep ethical and moral issues. As a European, Vopěnka is clearly a descendant of Greco-Roman thinking and wisdom. He is firmly rooted in Judeo-Christian values, following the scholarly tradition of Renaissance and humanism. Although he is not affiliated with any Christian denomination, or a particular church or other religious organization, the influence of Judaism, Christianity, and the Bible on his work is evident.

His works always assume a theistic worldview and some of them draw direct inspiration from the Bible or other Christian classics. For instance, an attentive reader will see the story of Joseph of Egypt behind the main character of the *New Planet* and will be able to trace Comenius' magnum opus *Labyrinth of the World and Paradise of the Heart* behind the journey *Back to Beyond (Travels with Benjamin)*. A clear example of the influence of Judeo-Christian thinking are *My Brother the Messiah* and *Bible Stories for Unbelieving Children*.

Lastly, it is worth mentioning that one more theme that is growing in importance in Vopěnka's more recent works, is the importance of environmentalism and the dangers of globalization.[79] In his own words, this is something he is planning to follow up on and develop in the near future.[80]

In conclusion, the combination of the author's traditional upbringing together with his training in natural sciences creates a perfect blend of the physical and metaphysical

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[78] Ecclesiastes 7:3 (ESV)

[79] Especially in two of his most recently published books *Můj Bratr Mesiáš (My Brother the Mesiah)* and *Přežít civilizaci (Surviving Civlization)*.

[80] Vopěnka, Unpublished personal conversation, May 20, 2021.

understanding of the world. In other words, Vopěnka's favorite motifs and themes consist of ordinary material things as well as what lies beyond them. Themes repeating themselves are relationships (to oneself and others), traveling (both the literal journey and the metaphor of it), memories, passing of time, death and life after death, the purpose of human life, and the metaphysical side of material things. In the following section, I intend to show how Vopěnka's poetic work (which he considers to be a byproduct of his thinking) is filled with all of these themes developed more deeply in his novels.

2.1.2   *Not a Poet: Vopěnka's Poetry*[81]

The poems for translation in this thesis were chosen from Vopěnka's only poetry collection *Dům, který opouštíš* (2016). It contains poems from the years 2006-2015. Over these nine years, he wrote 46 poems out of which the editor chose 33 for the collection. According to the editor, Jan Šulc, they are an honest and genuine expression of the author's innermost feelings.[82] Indeed, they show the author as a vulnerable man, made of flesh and bone. They often start with a simple reflection of an ordinary experience or a childhood memory that serves as a gateway to deeper contemplation of an issue of eternal significance. The collection bears the name of one of the poems. According to Vopěnka,[83] it was named this way by the editor who thought it was fitting as an overarching name for poems that are united by the themes of passing, leaving, reflecting, remembering, pondering, and dying.

Dům, který opouštíš was published by the author's own publishing house Práh. Vopěnka's novels are always placed with other publishers because he believes it assures quality and is more trustworthy. Since a poetry collection rarely brings much profit to any publisher, Vopěnka did not want to bother his fellow publishers and decided to place it with his own publishing house. He admits it gave him the freedom to prepare the publication exactly as he wished and now it allows him to freely distribute it among his friends and fans. Whenever he does a public reading of poetry, he offers the book to the audience for a voluntary contribution.

From looking at Vopěnka's overall artistic endeavors one might safely say poetry is in the minority. His focus and true passion are clearly novels. It does not mean however, that he

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[81] Since the author is not widely recognized as a poet, his poems do not receive attention nor criticism, they are not featured in literary journals not even on websites. For this reason, the majority of the information included in this section comes from a personal interaction with Martin Vopěnka. Most of the background knowledge on the origin of the poems was acquired during an unpublished interview.
[82] Martin Vopěnka, *Dům, který opouštíš* (Praha: Práh, 2016), 61.
[83] Vopěnka, Unpublished personal conversation, May 20, 2021.

does not care for poetry, in fact, he considers a poem the highest form of literary expression and it brings him great joy whenever he writes a poem.[84]

Vopěnka thinks of himself as a prose writer. Most of his time is spent pondering and crafting his novels. This is partly the reason why Vopěnka does not care to publish his poetry in literary journals or anthologies – his focus is on writing and publishing his novels. Moreover, he believes in the exclusivity of poems. He does not give priority to publishing collections, because to him they feel like cemeteries. Once a poem makes it into a collection it is buried there. He says the reader will always fall truly in love with only one or two poems anyway. That is why he only publishes one poem per year in his publishing house and sends it to his family, friends, and coworkers as a Happy New Year's card.

2.1.3   On the Supernatural Origin of the Poems

There is a piece of wisdom attributed to John the Baptist, that seems to apply to poetry as well. He said: "a person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven."[85] Many poets attest to the fact that nobody can tell with precision how a truly good poem came about.

Vopěnka agrees, he compares himself as a poet to an antenna. If he tunes in with an open mind, sooner or later, he says, he hears it. In his understanding, a poem is conceived and delivered almost like offspring, and he goes on to compare the process of writing poetry to a pregnancy.

"There is no experimenting in my poetry," Vopěnka said when asked about the origin of his poems. "It is as if I got pregnant with a poetic idea, that is, an intense feeling of something inexpressible, what I desire to express, nevertheless." Such a feeling is in Vopěnka's case often triggered by an ordinary event of everyday life be it a sight, a common object, a passing thought, a childhood memory. "Then, it is only a matter of time, I am waiting for the form to come to me, so the poem could be delivered."[86] Despite this description of the creative process, reading his poetry does not feel like labor. The poems feel as natural and effortless as if they were breathed out.

"It excites me to be able to write a poem and when I do it brings me great joy," says Vopěnka. He takes several readings of a finished poem, but once he decides it is done, he does not

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84 Vopěnka, Unpublished personal conversation, May 20, 2021.
85 John 3:27 (ESV)
86 Vopěnka, Unpublished personal conversation, May 20, 2021.

come back to it. He never rewrites anything. "Whenever I finish a poem, I hope it was not my last one," shared the author, while admitting he has periods of silence when the poems do not come to him. There is one poem in the collection expressing this type of frustration of not being able to tune in and of being forever left "on the material side".[87]

Vopěnka admits that ideas for poems come mainly when he is not writing a novel because he has headspace to give it some thought. Poems originate as a byproduct of his thinking. "I do not really have a say in when the poems come to me." But when he feels the time approaching, he is ready to stop whatever he is doing or stays up late, trying to make the best use of the time when the form arrives for fear, he might not get a second chance if he missed it. That is why *Contemplation in McDonald's* was written on the D1 motorway.[88]

2.1.4　On Translation

Vopěnka has never attempted creative writing in another language than his mother tongue, although he himself speaks English well. When asked whether he has any preference regarding the translation, he admitted he does not give much thought to translation. "My poems come to me in Czech, I have never thought about rewriting them in another language,"[89] shared Vopěnka, while adding that for him writing poetry is so tied to the intense experience of the moment of inspiration, it does not even seem plausible to recall the same moment, the same feeling to such extent as to be able to produce another version of the poem. "I am very happy when someone offers to translate them, but I do believe it must be done by someone else, because I myself cannot keep enough distance from Czech."[90]

Concerning existing translations of Vopěnka poetry into other languages, there is a French collection of 30 poems published under the same name *La maison que tu quittes*. It was a volunteer project translated by one of his fans, but since Vopěnka does not speak French himself, he is not able to judge the quality of the translation. The translation is available on Amazon but did not receive much attention otherwise. Apart the French attempt, the collection has not been translated into any other language.

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87 Vopěnka, *Dům, který opouštíš*, 43.
88 Probably the most often used Czech motorway. Two hundred kilometers of asphalt and concrete, that allow Czechs to travel between two largest cities in the country in two hours if the traffic is good.
89 Vopěnka, Unpublished personal conversation, May 20, 2021.
90 Vopěnka, Unpublished personal conversation, May 20, 2021.

2.2 The Life within the Poems: About the Text

Jiří Levý recommends: "Formal entities carrying a semantic function should be preserved, whereas the preservation of linguistic form as such cannot be insisted upon."[91] To this end the following section is going to highlight features of Vopěnka's style and form that are key to transmitting semantic and aesthetic value and therefore their faithful rendering in the target text must be insisted upon. In other words, it spells out key features that must be kept in the translation.

The rest of this chapter describes important features that shape the text. It starts with the most obvious – the way individual poems are presented in the book. Secondly it notices reoccurring themes within the poems, ponders major influences of the author and finally zooms on to the form of the poems.

2.2.1 Layout

In the original collection, the poems are accompanied by a graphic design by David Balihar.[92] The graphics are used to divide the poems into five sections. The poems in the first section are mainly memories filled with sadness. The second section contains lighter memories. The third, fourth, and fifth sections shift the focus to poems based on philosophical ideas. The fifth section contains only one poem, it is the longest one in the collection and marks the shift toward environmentalism, a topic that has been very important to the author for some time now. He is also planning to deal with this topic more in the future. Perhaps it marks the future way of his work.

2.2.2 Place of origin

All of the poems in the collection have a date and place of origin. It gives the book a journal-like structure. However, that is unintentional. Vopěnka says he does not treat his collection as a journal or a keepsake of memories, the only reason he writes the date and place down is that he does not write so many of them and he does not want to get them mixed up or confused. The date and place help him to pair the poem to a specific time in his life or the poetic feeling that ignited the inspiration.

Judging by the times and places noted below the poems, most of them were written in 2015. According to Vopěnka,[93] this was not intentional rather it occurred as the result of the

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[91] Levý, *The Art of Translation*, 27.
[92] Czech artist, photographer and graphic designer.
[93] Vopěnka, Unpublished personal conversation, May 20, 2021.

editor's selection. The most common places of origin of the poems are a) Prague, Břevnov district where Vopěnka spent most of his adult life and b) Josefův Důl, a small town in Jizera Mountains, where his family owns a cabin.[94]

Since Vopěnka is known for his adventurous travels (including travels to such remote countries as Greenland or Tierra de Fuego) a reader might expect more poems to be written in foreign countries. Surprisingly there are not many of them. One comes from Crete and another one from Nepal. Vopěnka explained that backpacking and living in a tent gets so demanding, that he spends most of the time in survival mode and rarely has time to write anything down.

2.2.3   Reoccurring themes

Vopěnka's favorite themes are transcendent and universal to all. He often ponders the passing of time, human mortality and the futility of human endeavor. This makes the whole collection excellent translation material because the themes are not tied to an audience speaking a particular language, but rather to all people of all times. Out of the total number of thirty-three poems, sixteen of them are based on the authors' recollection of a memory, ten of them are philosophical reflections and six emerge out of momentary emotion.

Many poems in the collection are set in the context of Vopěnka's relationship with his closest family.[95] It is in this context that the author carefully observes the course of the world's affairs, meditates on the purpose of human life, time, passing and changing, or the lack of change, and expresses his frustration with the dull circular reoccurrence of meaningless events. It is here he contrasts the desire for eternity with the certain reality of his own finiteness.

Naturally then the tone of most of the poems is sober, slightly pessimistic, with a hint of grief and a touch of regret. There is only one memory that could genuinely be called happy[96] and only one poem that could perhaps make you smile.[97] This is something his novels and poems have in common. There is no humor in either of them. "It's not that I don't have a sense of humor," says Vopěnka smiling. "It's just that I don't write about it."[98]

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[94] An area north of Prague in the north of the Czech Republic.
[95] Examples include: 1968 – Máma a kluk, Stárnoucí táta, Vyznání zmaru, Zimní vzpomínka na léto, Věnováno tatínkovi, Pozůstalí, Loučení, etc.
[96] Ze strání mírných hor - Vopěnka, *Dům, který opouštíš*, 20.
[97] Benny - Vopěnka, *Dům, který opouštíš*, 47.
[98] Vopěnka, Unpublished personal conversation, May 20, 2021.

Vopěnka's major literary influence is the book of Ecclesiastes. Listed among the poetic books of the Bible, Ecclesiastes deals with many of the same topics Vopěnka's poetry does (e.g. the wearisome course of the world's affairs, the dull recurrence of meaningless events, the frustration caused by the human inability to fill the inner void and quench the desire for purpose in life). The correlation is not coincidental, Vopěnka admits the book of Ecclesiastes is his favorite and he identifies with much that he has read in there.

There are two words constantly reoccurring in the poems that give away the influence of Ecclesiastes. These are *věčnost* (*eternity*) and *zmar (futility).* According to Ecclesiastes[99], God has put eternity in people's hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.

In one of the poems a father is described as *a loving eternal dad;*[100] the writer's desk has an entrance, *into shavings of eternity;*[101] he finds himself *between eternity past and eternity future;*[102] or feels *destitute, deceased, for eternity.*[103]

The latter one ended up in the translation as *futility* although it was hard to find a precise equivalent since this particular word has many shades of meaning. In Czech, the word **zmar** shares the root with **mar**nost which happens to be the opening word of Ecclesiastes.[104] Different English Bible translations use the words meaningless, vanity, or futility, all of which could be used to translate zmar in Vopěnka's poems. Malls are called *Cathedrals of futility* [105] and being stuck in life feels as if *the black spider of futility*[106] has trapped you in its web.

Other frequently repeating themes include: a) time and passing of time: *Time strangely evil;*[107] *Time nearly stops;*[108] *Time grinds in your teeth*; elsewhere the author feels trapped, *wrapped in time;*[109] or as if stuck in a *cleft of time;*[110] he gets tired of the *addictive cycles of time.*[111]

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99 Ecclesiastes 3:11 (ESV)
100 Holocaust – Vopěnka, *Dům, který opouštíš*, 7.
101 Memory of Writing Poetry – Vopěnka, *Dům, který opouštíš*, 28.
102 Contemplation in McDonald's – Vopěnka, *Dům, který opouštíš*, 49.
103 Farewell – Vopěnka, *Dům, který opouštíš*, 27.
104 Ecclesiastes 1:2 (NKJV): "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity."
105 Transient Age Manifesto – Vopěnka, *Dům, který opouštíš*, 53.
106 Writer's Block – Vopěnka, *Dům, který opouštíš*, 43.
107 1968 – Mom and a Boy – Vopěnka, *Dům, který opouštíš*, 12.
108 Writer's Block – Vopěnka, *Dům, který opouštíš*, 43.
109 Writer's Block – Vopěnka, *Dům, který opouštíš*, 43.
110 Contemplation in McDonald's – Vopěnka, *Dům, který opouštíš*, 49.
111 Transient Age Manifesto – Vopěnka, *Dům, který opouštíš*, 53.

b) death and dying: *At least once every day I die my own death;*[112] each moment is the *beginning of dying;*[113] his dog is the one who knows *nothing of death;*[114]

c) life and passing: the poet speaks of the *miracle of life;* lives *one short life;* is *desperately in love with life;*[115] looses his belief in life;[116] Hopes in *your afterlife*[117]

d) consciousness: Often expressing the wonder of existence and of the consciousness of it, or awareness of one's self:

Conscious of my being –
as clearly
as of my elbows touching
the top of my writing desk[118]

conscious of myself;
I alone am conscious
of the saltiness of french fries
of the saltiness of tears.[119]

But for now,
I am quilty
of the burning sting of complete consciousness.[120]

That is: I –
the strait of ideas and feelings,
conscious matter,[121]

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112 Farewell – Vopěnka, *Dům, který opouštíš*, 27.
113 A Moment that is Fleeting from Me – Vopěnka, *Dům, který opouštíš*, 15.
114 Benny – Vopěnka, *Dům, který opouštíš*, 47
115 Transient Age Manifesto – Vopěnka, *Dům, který opouštíš*, 53.
116 Growing Sceptic – Vopěnka, *Dům, který opouštíš*, 53.
117 In your afterlife – Vopěnka, *Dům, který opouštíš*, 36.
118 Messenger Without a Message – Vopěnka, *Dům, který opouštíš*, 40.
119 Contemplation in McDonald's – Vopěnka, *Dům, který opouštíš*, 49.
120 Transient Age Manifesto – Vopěnka, *Dům, který opouštíš*, 53.
121 Messenger Without a Message – Vopěnka, *Dům, který opouštíš*, 40

e) matter: he feels left on the *material side;*[122] or considers himself *a piece of a material self;*[123] or a *conscious matter.*[124]

2.2.4 Major Influences

The most important influences that find way into Vopěnka's poetry could be summarized under three headings: religious influence, academic influence, poetic influence.

2.2.4.1 Religious influence

Vopěnka is sometimes referred to as a Jewish author and although there are traces of his Jewish ancestry in his poems, labelling him "Jewish" can be misleading.[125] His maternal grandparents were secular Jews who fled Czechoslovakia before World War II. They lived in London and returned to their home country after the Communist party gained power in 1948. They changed their last name from Lowidt to the Czech sounding "Levčík" as was the custom for secularized Jews back then and Vopěnka's grandfather went on to have a successful political career. Nevertheless, the family (that is Vopěnka's grandparents and their daughter Helena, who would become Vopěnka's mother) never really lost the stigma of "Jewishness." As Vopěnka recalls in the book of his memories, his paternal grandparents never truly accepted their daughter-in-law because she came from a family of "those Jews".[126]

After Helena married Vopěnka's father Petr, she was diagnosed with a hereditary mental illness. In the 1960s, such conditions were taboo and thus the family referred to Helena as having "insomnia" a term used as an unsuccessful attempt to protect her from gaining another stigma in society. At that time, patients with similar illnesses were routinely treated by isolation in asylums and thus Vopěnka was brought up by his father and his paternal grandmother, who was a devout Roman Catholic.

All this is to say that Martin Vopěnka is not the embodiment of a Jewish writer in the sense of being heavily influenced by Jewish culture or religion, nor does he predominantly deal with matters connected to Jewish people. This theme does come up in his poetry, as he refers to his ancestors. It would be more precise to say that Vopěnka's life as well as his writing was influenced by a theistic worldview.[127]

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[122] Writer's Block – Vopěnka, *Dům, který opouštíš*, 43.
[123] Messenger Without a Message – Vopěnka, *Dům, který opouštíš*, 40.
[124] Messenger Without a Message – Vopěnka, *Dům, který opouštíš*, 40.
[125] Namely the first two „Prayer For Mariana Alkalai Lowidt" and „Holocaust"
[126] Vopěnka, Martin. 2013. *Nebarevné vzpomínky: o rodině a dětství, ale hlavně o 60. letech*. Vyd. 1. Praha: Práh, 76.
[127] e.g. Messenger Without a Message – Vopěnka, *Dům, který opouštíš*, 40.

In number of his poems he refers to a higher power indirectly, by calling it for example *The sender of it all.*[128] Twice he refers to it directly as to God, as to the only one, who can keep a perfect balance in everything and who is always capable of experiencing anything to the fullest[129] and *God of the Jews, who is not with the Jews any longer.*[130]

2.2.4.2 Academic influence

Second major influence is his training in nuclear physics. The reasons leading Vopěnka to study math and physics at a university level are listed in the essay he wrote as an epilogue to *Fifth Dimension.*[131] Here it suffices to say, that in Communist Czechoslovakia, one could not study humanities unless his or her family publicly identified with the political regime of the day. Vopěnka was therefore persuaded by his father (a world-famous mathematician Petr Vopěnka) to enroll at Czech Technical University in Prague, from which Vopěnka later graduated with a degree in Nuclear Sciences and Physical Engineering. Recurring themes in the collection that give away this influence are time (čas), space (prostor), and matter (hmota) and there are also examples of other scientific words: *vmezeřit* (*intercalate*)[132] *neutron* (*neutron*) and *urychlovač částic* (*particle accelerator*).[133]

2.2.4.3 Poetic influence

It is hard to compare Vopěnka to other poets or find traces of influence of other poets or poetic schools. It is equally difficult to fit him into the context of contemporary Czech poets perhaps because he cares little to do so himself. "I do not have a good grasp of contemporary poetry, and I am not even trying."[134] When asked about his favorite poets he said poetry is the only thing he enjoys as a pleasure-reading and mentioned Jiří Orten and Paul Celan as sources of inspiration. He is a writer, he writes, and it matters little to him what others think or what they write be it prose or poetry. "Stories of others distract me from my own, so I am not a very good reader," Vopěnka admits.[135] All of his free time is devoted to writing prose, it is as simple as that.

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[128]Messenger Without a Message – Vopěnka, *Dům, který opouštíš*, 40.

[129] Rovnováha – Vopěnka, *Dům, který opouštíš*, 45.

[130] Prayer For Mariana Alkalai Lowidt – Vopěnka, *Dům, který opouštíš*, 5.

[131] Vopěnka, "Physics, black holes, thought and the novelist."

[132] The Contemplation in McDonald's – Vopěnka, *Dům, který opouštíš*, 49.

[133] Středa dopoledne – Vopěnka, *Dům, který opouštíš*, 38.

[134] Vopěnka, Unpublished email correspondence, June 2021.

[135] Vopěnka, Unpublished personal conversation, May 20, 2021.

Vopěnka does not have any goals regarding his poetry. It is something he does purely for the joy of it. That is partly the reason why he is so happy when someone offers to translate it, because such interest exceeds his expectation. If he was to give any advice to translators, he would aim at creating equal reader's experiences. He likes for his poetry to be a guided meditation of sorts.

2.2.5 Form

According to Paul Fussell[136] writing poetry is not so much about working with ideas and assertions but about working with the meter. "The real poet", says Fussell[137] "is more interested in the technique than in the themes and subject of the poem." This is generally true but since Vopěnka (by his self-admission) is not a typical poet it seems the exact opposite is true of him – he does not seem captivated by technique and form and his poetry relies heavily on arranging ideas and assertions.

In fact, Vopěnka himself pays very little intentional attention to form. He says he "just feels it."[138] "The poems come to me together with the form, it is as if a feeling begged me to be expressed this way."[139] His aim is to communicate a poetic idea, he wants to move the reader to feel what he feels, and the form serves this purpose. Vopěnka says "I want to express it beautifully, that's all I'm after."[140] This is not in a contradiction to theory. In chapter one, I have quoted Levý's definition of original work of art. He defines it as "as the reflection and subjective transformation of objective reality; the outcome of this creative process is an ideoaesthetic content realised in verbal material."[141] This definition allows for the reflection and transformation to be largely subconscious. Simply put, the author does not have to be aware of all the details that add up to the beauty of his work.

Vopěnka is not a poet who experiments with the form. Contrary to some contemporary poets, who write in free verse and omit to capitalization or punctuation, most of Vopěnka's poems use full sentences and adhere to the conventions of Czech language (including conventional capitalization, unmarked word order and punctuation). The only poem that serves as an exception to confirm the rule is *Vyznání zmaru* (where instead regular punctuation marks the author separates/ individual phrases/ by forward slashes/ like this).

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[136] Fussell, *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form,* 3.
[137] Ibid.
[138] Vopěnka, Unpublished personal conversation, May 20, 2021.
[139] Vopěnka, Unpublished personal conversation, May 20, 2021.
[140] Vopěnka, Unpublished personal conversation, May 20, 2021.
[141] Levý, *The Art of Translation,* 24.

When asked for the reason behind that, the author said that such a weighty topic called for extraordinary divisions in between the words.[142]

Vopěnka does not use difficult metaphors or incomprehensible allusions. Being eloquent does not prevent him from being very clear. The language he typically uses bends to formal on the formal-colloquial continuum. At times he opts for more literary and poetic expressions and there are poems using more casual even expressive language[143].

2.2.5.1   Free Verse

Abrams[144] defines free verse as differing from the traditional (metric) one by the fact that: "…its rhythmic pattern is not organized into a regular metrical form – that is, into feet, or recurrent units of weak- and strong-stressed syllables. Most free verse also has irregular line lengths, and either lacks rhyme or else uses it only sporadically." Likewise, Fussel[145] spells out the two most prominent features of free verse as being: 1) A lack of measurable meter (and in most cases rhyme as well) 2) abandonment of the traditional graphic conventions such as capitalizing at the beginning of the line or using conventional punctuation.

Only the first one of these applies to Vopěnka. His free verse lacks measurable meter but (as mentioned earlier) he does not abandon Czech conventions regarding grammar and punctuation. Contrary to many poets writing in free verse, Vopěnka doesn't abandon rhyme altogether. Occasionally, he makes use of the regular *ABAB* or *AABC* pattern.[146] Most often however he uses likeness of sound, repetition of a dominant vowel, assonance, consonance or pararhyme and saves the end rhyme for the final stanza or for the very last lines. He said it feels like it helps him to get the main point across in a memorable way.[147]

Fussell agrees that to use end-line rhyme at the end of the poem as a diversion from unrhymed lines may lead to rising an emotional impact.[148] He lists the mnemonic function among other functions of rhyme.[149] Similarly Pinsky states: "Rhymes and emphatic rhythms help us to memorize. Verse in this way is a technology for memory."[150] In accordance with observation of these poets and scholars Vopěnka saves rhymes for the end. Examples of

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[142] Vopěnka, Unpublished personal conversation, May 20, 2021.
[143] E.g.: Contemplation in McDonald's, Transient Age Manifesto
[144] Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 105.
[145] Fussell, *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form,* 77.
[146] E.g.: Growing Sceptic or Memory of Writting Poetry
[147] Vopěnka, Unpublished personal conversation, May 20, 2021.
[148] Fussell, *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form,* 12.
[149] Ibid, 14. See also Pinsky, *The Sounds of Poetry*, 10.
[150] Pinsky, *The Sounds of Poetry,* 115.

such poems are: Benny (*směje – naděje*); Writer's block (*plic – nic*); Messenger without a Message (*nebe – sebe*).[151]

Paul Fussel lists other stylistic devices used by the poets who write in free verse.[152] Many use the contrast of long and short lines for emphasis. Vopěnka uses enjambment as a way to isolate a word or a phrase and in doing so to emphasize them. In his own words he does not follow any specific rules, just his feel for poetry "it is as if the word begged me to be alone on the line"[153] said Vopěnka wondering what he would do if all the words begged to be alone on a line. As much at it seems strange to him, he is convinced he would follow that urge.

Another stylistic device of free verse according to Paul Fussell[154] is the gradual expanding or shrinking of the lines as the poem proceeds.[155] For Vopěnka it is more typical to keep the lines approximately the same size. In a symmetrical stanza of sorts. Example of such poems are *Holocaust, A Photo On My Desk, Memory of Writing poetry* or *Farewell* just to name a few.

2.2.5.2   Neologisms

A typical feature of Vopěnka's poetry is the use of neologisms. Leech[156] lists neologisms or the inventions of new linguistic unit among the types of lexical deviation poets use to employ language creatively and to foreground it (in other words to draw attention to it). It is important to point out that a new word is scarcely entirely new, that is completely made up (an example of such rare word would be Robert Pinsky's *thunketta* and *katunka*).[157]

"Most common processes of word formation," says Leech[158] "are affixation (the addition of a prefix or suffix to and item already in the language) and compounding (the joining together of two of more items to make a single compound one)." An example of this would be adding the prefix *un-* to an existing word to enhance with the notion of taking something away, or making it void of.[159]

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[151] For the way I treated them in translation see the following chapters.
[152] Fussell, *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form,* 86.
[153] Vopěnka, Unpublished personal conversation, May 20, 2021.
[154] Fussell, *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form,* 86.
[155] Ibid*,* 87. Here Fussell gives the example of Walt Whitman's Song of Myself. It starts with the opening line of 6 syllables and ends with the closing line of 19.
[156] Leech, *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry,* 42–43.
[157] Pinsky, *The Sounds of Poetry,* 54–55.
[158] Leech, *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry,* 43.
[159] Ibid.

In my translation, I have tried use the same process and create a new word by combining equivalent set of roots and affixes. Examples of the neologisms and their English counterparts include: *bezesnění –undreaming;*[160] *blahobytněl – prosperitizing;*[161] *bezkořeněnost – rootlessness;*[162] *bezsmrtnost – deathlessness*[163]

2.3   Conclusion: Application to the study

Translator's decision-making progress consists of great number of decisions. In this commentary I spend of the time describing the way one preliminary decision led me to solving many others. The preliminary decision was identifying the key features of Vopěnka's poems. It laid out Vopěnka's life and identified the main themes of his work.

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[160] A Moment that is Fleeting form Me – Vopěnka, *Dům, který opouštíš*, 15.
[161] Transient Age Manifesto – Vopěnka, *Dům, který opouštíš*, 53.
[162] Transient Age Manifesto – Vopěnka, *Dům, který opouštíš*, 53.
[163] Transient Age Manifesto – Vopěnka, *Dům, který opouštíš*, 53.

3 Translation

This chapter presents translation of selected poems from the collection *Dům, který opouštíš* (The House You Are Leaving) by Martin Vopěnka. The original poems (featured on the right side of their respective translation for immediate reference) are included here with the kind consent of the author.

Holocaust

Na fotce šedivé

ty jsi, kdo odchází.

V klobouku omšelém

laskavý táta věčný.

Poslední pohledy.

To se však ještě neví.

Dětství že skončilo

chlapeček nepochopí.

Ve zmatku poklidném

jdou muži, kam jim určí –

tatínci bezbranní –

bohové na zem padlí.

Jak bys ty selhal dnes?

Chrám světa lidského

v útrobách prudce se bortí.

Buď sbohem, dítě mé.

Vidím se ve tvých očích.

Praha, 18. 1. 2008

Holocaust

In this greyed photo

it is you, who leaves.

In that timeworn hat

a loving eternal dad.

Final glances.

Yet it has not been known then.

Childhood is now gone

a boy cannot comprehend.

In peaceful chaos

men walk to a place ordained –

defenseless fathers –

gods fallen to the earth.

How would you fail today?

A temple of a human world

fiercely crushing down inside.

Farewell, my child.

I see myself in your eyes.

Prague, January 18, 2008

1968 – Máma a kluk

Skleněný džbán plný sirupu.

Pít se však před jídlem nesmí.

Jen jednou jedenkrát

s nemocnou mámou

sám jsem byl na cestě v dětství.

Čas podivně zlý.

Je šedivo v srdcích.

Ta vila už vilou není.

Jalovčí husté, kde schovat se dá.

Splav horský,

koník a listí.

Tak to má být:

máma a kluk.

Já. Dítě, jež neví, že trpí.

Jen tolik mi zbylo.

Vzpomínek pár

se nutkavě odkudsi vrací.

Máma má žízeň.

Pít se však v životě nesmí.

Břevnov, 5.4. 2010

1968 – Mom and boy

A glass pitcher filled with flavored water.

But drinking before a meal is not allowed.

It was the only time

I was alone on a trip

with an unwell mom as a child.

Time strangely evil.

Hearts grayed within.

And the villa isn't a villa anymore.

Thick junipers used to hide me.

Mountain weir,

a horse and leaves.

All as it should be:

mom and boy.

Me. A child that didn't know it was suffering.

That's all there is left in me.

A couple of memories

urgently returning from who knows where.

Mom is thirsty.

But in this life drinking is not allowed.

Břevnov, April 5, 2010

34

Chvíle, jež prchá mi

Já a ty na lodi u břehů Kréty.

Hledíme na moře průzračné a čisté,

má ruka dotkla se tvé jemné kůže.

Čas téměř neběží a moře klidné je

u bílé skály.

Možná, že před smrtí budu chtít vrátit

právě tuhle chvíli.

Tu, jež teď probíhá;

já zdravý jsem a silný

a vůně bylin jde z rozpálených svahů.

Vedle mě spočíváš

jak bárka bez posádky,

i já se oddávám

tichému bezesnění.

Chvíle, jež prchá mi.

Začátek umírání.

Kréta, červenec 2006

A Moment that is Fleeting from Me

You and me, on a boat by the coast of Crete.

We behold the sea so pure and clear,

my hand touched your silky skin.

Time nearly stops and the sea is still

by the white cliff.

Maybe this is the moment I will long

to recall before death.

This one passing us by;

I am strong and alive

and the sunbaked hills smell of wildflowers.

You rest next to me

like a boat left without a crew,

and I also give in

to quiet undreaming.

A moment that is fleeting from me.

The beginning of dying.

Crete, July 2006

Dům, který opouštíš	**The House You Are Leaving**
Dům, který opouštíš.	The house you are leaving,
Tvá kniha vytržená,	a torn-out book of yours,
žár touhy podkrovní,	an attic's passion flame,
dech léta, v němž se strádá.	the breath of a summer filled with need.
Pomalu procházíš	Slowly you walk through
hluchotou k uzoufání.	this desperate deafness.
Prach dávno zvířený	Dust long dispersed
pod tvoje nohy padá.	falls under your feet.
A přece zas bys šel	Yet you would take again
Svou cestou prvních chtění.	your road of those first desires.
Jen jednou, poprvé,	For a man is allowed to fail
člověk se mýlit smí.	the first time – and only then.
Pak zbudou cesty pryč.	Now, all that's left are parting roads,
Přes dvorky zatuchlé;	over musty yards,
mech vrostlý do dláždění.	moss grown tiles.
Málo si odnést smíš.	You can't take much with you.
Za dveřmi dokořán	Behind doors opened wide
nechtěná prázdna zejí.	an unsought chasm lies.
Václavské náměstí, Vinohrady, říjen 2007	Wenceslas Square, Vinohrady, October 2007

Stárnoucí táta

Stárnoucí táta,

jenž býval tak silný,

teď k ramenům mysl svou chýlí.

U domovních dveří

polykáš tmu.

V ní bezradný stín se hrbí.

Jsi náhlý vítěz

a nevíš, co s tím.

Zemřelí blízcí,

než zemřeš i ty,

co dočasný příbytek

paměť tvou mají.

Kování svíráš a studený klíč.

Zášť je mrtva, láska se tají.

Břevnov, 9. 9. 2008

Ageing dad

An ageing dad,

that used to be so strong,

now lets his mind down to his shoulders.

At the front door

you swallow the dark.

A helpless shadow is slouching in there.

Suddenly you are the victor

and you don't know what to make of it.

Before you die

your dear deceased

use – as their temporal dwelling place –

your memory.

You clutch the handle and the cold key.

The grudge is dead, love kept secret.

Břevnov, September 9, 2008

Fotografie na mém stole

Nepřijdeš,

ani se nepřiblížíš,

sám v sobě prodlévám,

jsa vězněm tužeb svých,

zjitřený vzpomínkou,

jež v dobách studených

slunečným létem voní.

Je to všechno pryč? Pryč.

Na fotce zářivé

ve vlnách šťastna ležíš,

zlatavá kůže tvá

pěnou se hrdě zdobí.

To se zpět nevrátí –

slunce v dáli mizí.

Vede mne život můj,

kam nechci za ním jít.

V minutě půlnoční

vzpouzím se, doufám, prosím.

Ne, nechci říkat „smrt".

Ještě tě v srdci mám.

S sebou tě všude nosím.

Břevnov 19.–20.6. 2009

A Photo on My Desk

You will not come,

you will not draw near,

I linger in myself

as a prisoner of my dreams,

a wound reopened by a memory

that smells of the summer sun

in cold ages.

Is everything gone? Gone.

In the shiny photo

you lay content in the waves,

your bright golden skin

proudly adorned with foam.

None of this will return –

the sun is vanishing afar.

This life of mine leads me,

where I do not want to go.

In a midnight minute,

I am resisting, hoping, begging.

No, I don't want to say "death".

In my heart, I keep you still,

I carry you everywhere.

Břevnov, June 19–20, 2009

Jsi sobě podobná

Jsi sobě podobná,

jak jsi i bývala.

Slunečním světlem křtěná.

Po chodbě přicházíš:

Tvá tebe podoba.

Tvůj parfém ve vánku

a četné šaty vlají.

Až v tobě obejmu

tu, jež je tebou má,

tvé vrásky ze skrání

ochotně opadají.

Břevnov 13.10. 2010

You Resemble Yourself

You resemble yourself

just as you always did.

Christened by the rays of sun

you come through the hall:

The resemblance of yours.

Your perfume and black dress

both flutter in the breeze.

And when I hold in you

the one who does your likeness hold;

The wrinkles from your temples

obediently fall.

Břevnov October 13, 2010

Loučení

Každý den alespoň jednou umřu svou vlastní smrtí.

Každý den alespoň jednou se s tebou navěky loučím.

Každý den po kouscích, plíživě, tiše mizí tvé dětství.

A já mizím s ním. Marně se tebe držím.

Zůstanu sám. V nicotě, navždy, mrtvý.

A jako předehra, o hodně dřív, zemře tvé dětství.

Břevnov, leden–duben 2012

Farewell

At least once every day I die my own death.

At least once every day I give you my eternal farewell.

Every day – inch by inch – your childhood is silently slipping away, fading.

I follow it fading; holding onto you in vain.

Remaining alone. Destitute, deceased, for eternity.

Much sooner though – as if a prelude – your own childhood dies.

Břevnov, January – April 2012

Vzpomínka na básnění	**A Memory of Writing Poetry**
Kdysi se vcházelo	My desktop used to be
z desky mého stolu	an entrance into
do hoblin věčnosti	shavings of eternity
jež v prach se rozsypou.	that crumble down into dust.
Chodbami roztočů	Tunnels of mites
i jiných mikrotvorů	and other tiny creatures
k jezerům radosti	led to lakes of delight
s průzračnou hladinou.	with a translucent surface.
Od břehů z papíru	An underworldly raft
na zásvětním voru	sailed from paper shores
plulo se k jeskyním.	into caves. And under
Vzduch pukal ozvěnou.	the echo the air would burst.
Břevnov 30.4.,3.5.,7.5.,2013	Břevnov, April 30, May 3–5, 2013

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Začátek skepse

Nanečisto se nežije
a druhá šance není.
Občas bych něco vrátil snad,
či zvolil rozdvojení.

Tak, jak jsem věřil životu,
hrál fotbal s prvním synem
a připadal si bohatý
i s krabicovým vínem,

tak už v něj dnes nějak nevěřím.
Polykám vzácné doušky
posledních vlahých teplých dní
a oddaluji zkoušky

jež přicházejí s podzimem:
například ztrátu chuti
na nepoznanou budoucnost,
v níž stroze odmítnuti

konečně nohama na zemi
jdem do stejného bodu.
Lhostejno jestli prostředkem
anebo po obvodu.

Břevnov 4. 6. 2013

Growing Sceptic

There isn't a draft for living
nor a second chance.
Sometimes I'd rewind perhaps,
or choose to bifurcate.

The way I believed in life,
playing soccer with my firstborn son
and feeling rich,
even with boxed wine,

somehow today I don't believe.
I swallow precious mouthfuls
of last days mild and warm
and I postpone the trials

that come with the fall:
for instance, the loss of appetite
for the unknown future,
in which we all – coldly declined

feet finally on the ground –
walk to the same point.
Regardless whether we go through
or around.

Břevnov, June 4, 2013

Posel bez dopisu	A Messenger without a Message
Jsem hostem v tomhle těle.	I am a guest in this body.
Sedmdesát tři kilo	Seventy-three kilos
živé váhy.	of live weight.
Kus hmotného já,	A piece of a material self –
jímž vše vrcholí	the apex and the end
i končí.	of it all.
Vědom si svého bytí –	Conscious of my being –
tak jasně,	as clearly
jako že lokty spočívám	as of my elbows touching
na desce psacího stolu.	the top of my writing desk –
Jsem prostě zde:	I am simply here:
Posel bez dopisu	A messenger without a message.
Vyslanec bez poslání.	A legate without a legacy.
Zatímco on,	While he himself,
odesilatel toho všeho,	the sender of it all,
zůstává skrytý.	remains in secret.
Nevím o něm nic víc,	I know of him no more,
než co vím o sobě:	than I know of myself,
že totiž právě já,	That is: I –
hrdlo myšlenek a citů,	the strait of ideas and feelings,
vědoucí hmota,	conscious matter,
letmý záblesk z nebe,	fleeting flash from heaven –
mám svědčit o něm	should bear witness to him
skrze sebe.	and never waver.

Břevnov 1. 6. 2015   Břevnov, June 1, 2015

Tvůrčí krize	Writer's block
Zavřeno!	Closed!
Odepřený přístup.	Access denied.
Namísto zvěstování	Instead of proclamation
pozemskost.	earthliness.
Mlčíš.	You are muted.
Čas skřípe v zubech.	Time grinds in your teeth.
Písek.	Sand.
Ucpaná trubka,	Clogged pipe,
mobil bez signálu.	a cell phone without a signal.
Avšak	And yet
ta nefunkčnost	the non-functioning
poukazuje	points to
k funkci.	functioning.
Že totiž	That is
jsi jen prostředník	you're mere mediator
a cos kdy stvořil,	and nothing you created
se nezrodilo z tebe.	came from you.
Umíš jen přehrávat.	You can only replay.
Občas,	At times,
ve vzácných chvílích,	in those rare moments,
jsi schopný	you manage
naladit se.	to tune in.
A nemusí to stačit.	And it does not have to suffice.
Můžou tě jednou provždy	They may leave you

nechat
na hmotné straně.
Ústy v písku,
nohama v hlíně,
obaleného časem
jak pavučinou.
Budeš se v ní mlčky zmítat;
budeš mlčet z plných plic.
A zatím,
černý pavouk zmaru
rozvěsí svá lana
mezi tebe a nic.

Břevnov 13. 7. 2015

on the material side
for good.
Mouth in sand,
feet in mud,
wrapped in time
as in a spider web.
You'll be silently hurled around in it;
you'll keep quiet at the top of your voice.
And meanwhile,
the black spider of futility
hangs its ropes
between you and the void.

Břevnov, July 13, 2015

Benny

Úsměv našeho psa

prozařuje vesmír

absolutní oddaností.

Už jen prosťáčci a děti

umí být bezmezně šťastní.

Náš pes

je prosťáček

a trochu dítě.

Kroutí se na zádech,

stříhá ušima;

ze všech sil kotví

právě probíhající okamžik

v našich neklidných myslích.

Náš pes

je chundelatá myš;

klubíčko blaženosti.

Jeho oči

jsou plné radosti,

když nás vidí kolem sebe;

nechápe,

proč stále unikáme

do svých muset a chtít.

Náš pes

se jmenuje Benny

Benny

The smile of our dog

radiates absolute loyalty

across the universe.

These days only the unsophisticated and children

know the bliss of unbridled joy.

Our dog

is unsophisticated

and rather childlike.

Rolling on his back,

wiggling his ears,

he makes an effort to anchor

this present moment

in our restless minds.

Our dog

is a furry mouse;

a fluffy ball of gladness.

His eager eyes

always fill with joy

when we are with him;

he doesn't get,

why we always

escape into our musts and wants.

Our dog's

name is Benny

a neví nic o smrti.

Zvesela se staví

mezi nás a ji –

je to náš štít.

Panáčkuje a cení zuby,

nabízí se

místo všech strachů,

jež zdoláváme.

Ale my se přesto

dál bojíme

a dychtíme po naději,

která je absolutní

a neštěká,

když vcházíme do dveří.

Náš pes

je tajtrlík

a šťastně se směje

i bez naděje.

Josefův důl, 17.7. 2015

and of death he knows nothing.

Cheerfully stepping in

between us and him –

he is our shield.

Rearing up, baring his teeth,

offering himself

instead of all those fears

we're battling.

But we keep

fearing still,

we long for hope

that is absolute

and won't bark,

when we come home.

Our dog

is a goofball

and to keep his wide grin,

he needs no hope within.

Josefův důl, July 17, 2015

Kontemplace v McDonaldu	Contemplation in McDonald's
Dojídám hranolky	I am finishing my french fries
v dálničním McDonaldu.	in a highway McDonald's.
A nad červeným tácem	And over the red tray
mi nečekaně dojde,	it suddenly dawns on me,
že já, teď a tady	I -- right here right now --
jsem.	am.
Vmezeřená	Intercalated
puklina času	cleft of time
nad umaštěnými stoly.	over greasy tables.
Milost bolesti,	The grace of pain
intimní, tajná, trapná	intimate, secret, embarrassing
jak nechtěná erekce.	like an unwanted erection.
Nikdo nic neví.	Nobody knows anything.
A přece já:	And yet I:
vědom si sebe;	conscious of myself;
jen já si vědom	I alone am conscious
slanosti hranolků,	of the saltiness of french fries
slanosti slz.	of the saltiness of tears.
Tác s wrapem a kolou	The tray with wrap and coke
a tma tam venku	and the darkness out there
jen skrze mne.	just through me.
Jak se to mohlo udát:	How could it occur:
mezi věčností před	in between eternity past
a věčností po	and eternity future

já na D1

mezi Prahou a Brnem?

Cestou domů

pak svírám volant,

asfalt svistí;

auta, kamiony, auta.

Zírání před sebe,

slábnutí.

Palubní deska – rybí oko.

Samota –nechtěný spolujezdec.

Choulím se do ní

a všechno ve mně

pláče

suchým pláčem

potkávacích světel.

D1, 10. 10. 2015

me on D1 highway

between Brno and Prague?

On the way home

I am clutching the wheel;

asphalt is whizzing by;

cars, trucks, cars.

Staring in front,

weakening.

Dashboard – fisheye.

Solitude – an unwanted passenger.

I nestle against it

and everything in me

cries

dry tears

of low beams.

D1, October 10, 2015

Manifest přechodného věku	Transient Age Manifesto
Pozdě ale přece	Better late than never
přišel jsem na svět.	I came into this world.
Prezident Kennedy ještě žil	President Kennedy was still alive
a Beatles už vytrubovali	and the Beatles were already trumpeting
svou ódu na radost – heslo doby.	their ode to joy – the motto of the day.
Zněla i za ostnatým drátem,	It was heard behind the barbed wire,
kde právě svítalo	where it has just started to dawn
a z noční oblohy	and the night sky was flickering
blikal triumf prvních družic.	with the triumph of the first satellites.
A zatím svět	Meanwhile the world
vykročil k jiné zkáze	made the first step toward another ruin,
právě tehdy,	at exactly this time,
aniž si kdo všiml.	and nobody even noticed.
Blahobytněl,	It was prosperitizing,
na palubě se tančilo,	people were dancing on board,
celkem pochopitelně,	quite understandably
a tančí se tam dodnes.	and they are dancing there to this day.
Po dvaapadesáti letech	Fifty-two years later
pomýšlím na předčasný odchod.	I am considering a premature departure –
Protože teď už vím,	because now I know
že předčasný bude vždycky.	it will always be premature –
Nelze se s ním smířit,	there is no coming to terms with it,
leda zhloupnout	except maybe dotage
do prvotní nevinnosti.	to that first state of innocence.

Zatím však	But for now,
jsem vinen	I am guilty
pálivým vědomím všeho.	of the burning sting of complete consciousness.
Scéna se míhá	The scene flashes
jak za okny vlaku,	like the view from the window of a rushing train
střídají se zimy, léta, vlády –	winters, summers, governments change –
čím dál rychleji, čím dál fádněji;	ever faster and ever more dreary;
návykové cykly času.	addictive cycles of time.
A přitom planeta	And yet the planet
je pořád ještě živá;	is still alive;
zázrak života;	the miracle of life;
propast mezi žít a nežít	the chasm between to live and not to live
je nekonečná.	is endless.
Planeta: zahrada duší	The planet: a garden of souls
zvířecích i lidských.	of humans and beasts;
I zvířecky trpících	even of beastly suffering
duší.	souls.
A také lásky je víc	Also, there is more love
než kdy předtím –	than ever before –
teď – na sklonku věků.	now – at the end of times.
Planeta přehřátá,	The planet is all heated up
přetékající láskou.	by the outpouring of love.
Století dětí:	A century of children:
našich miláčků,	our sweet darlings
zbožňovaných a šťastných,	they are cheerful and adored,
až na nějaké ty usekané ruce,	except for some lost limbs,
otrocké práce a zneužití.	forced labor and abuse.

Ale to je jiný svět:

my žijeme tady,

v civilizaci

a milujeme je doopravdy.

Asfaltujeme jim cestu

do obchodních center.

Katedrály zmaru,

čas k nepotřebě; na překážku.

Přejemnělá civilizace

plná citu

stravující sama sebe

odcizením.

Jak stáda turistů

s mobily v rukách

spásáme odkaz starých časů.

Vykořeňujeme zakořeněnost

a zakořeňujeme bezkořeněnost.

Masovost:

mor, jímž jsme sami.

Sežraná Země:

rozkrájená a fušersky slátaná,

zaplastovaná a pokálená.

A přitom naše poznání

nezná hranic.

Bezhraničnost možností,

jež se nám otvírají;

jeden z důvodů,

But that's a different world,

we live here

in civilization

and we love them truly.

We asphalt the road

into malls for them.

Cathedrals of vanity,

useless time; an obstacle.

Overly sensitive civilization

so full of feelings

is devouring itself

in alienation.

Like herds of tourists,

clutching cell phones,

we are devouring the legacy of ancient times.

We are uprooting rootedness

and rooting in unrootedness.

Massness:

the plague we are ourselves.

Ravaged Earth:

sliced apart, haphazardly patched,

plasticated, and defecated.

While at the same time our knowledge

is limitless.

The borderlessness of possibilities

that are opening before us;

one of the reasons

proč se stále ještě tančí.	people are still dancing.
Bezesmrtnost na dosah:	Deathlessness within our reach:
neodžitá vyvolenost vyvolených.	unlived chosenness of the chosen ones.
A zásahy do stvoření –	And interventions into creation –
šém v našich buňkách.	code in our cells.
To všechno	All of this –
za jeden krátký život,	during one short life –
ještě není na úplném konci.	has not reached its end.
Přišel jsem na svět	I came into this world
pozdě ale brzy.	late but early.
Nedožiju se řešení ani zkázy.	I won't live to see the resolution nor the destruction.
Je mi souzená	I was destined for
přechodná doba	this transient age
překotného tance.	of hasty dancing.
Prasácky pohodlná,	Filthy comfortable age
plná vířivek a splachovacích hajzlů.	full of jacuzzies and flushing crappers.
Zvířili jsme planetu,	We unsettled the planet,
pokryli ji výkaly a dětmi	we covered it with excrement and children
a teď nevíme, co si počít.	and now we don't know what to do.
Ani já to nevím.	I don't know it either.
Myslím, že žiju	I think, somehow, I am
tak nějak osudově	fated to live,
na přelomu věků.	at the turn of the ages.
Už nelze trvat	It is not possible to remain
a není cesty zpátky.	and there is no way back.
Jsme v přechodové fázi:	This is a phase of transition:

překotné začínání bez konce.

Vše kolem nás se zběsile mění,

my sami trochu méně –

přece jen narození

v těch kterých letech.

Já v šedesátých.

A to se nedá změnit:

nějak v sobě trvám,

narozený tehdy,

sám sobě svědkem

přetrvávajících myšlenek a citů.

Zoufale milující život

a své blízké

a západ slunce nad krajinou;

někdy i nad mořem –

také turista, jeden z davu,

v něčem stejný

jako ti přede mnou,

jako všichni.

Zrozený z matky

ve světle zářivek

ledově chladných.

Ona bezradná a já slepý,

vydaní napospas

socialismu, doktorům a kleštím.

Přišel jsem na svět

v Praze Podolí

abrupt beginnings with no end.

Things around us rapidly change,

we change a bit less ourselves –

and yet we were born

each of us in whatever years.

I myself in the sixties.

And that cannot be changed:

somehow, I remain in myself,

born then,

a witness to myself

of remaining ideas and feelings.

I love life desperately,

and my dearest ones,

and sunset over land;

sometimes over the sea –

also, I am a tourist, one in the crowd,

in some ways, I am the same

as those who went before me,

as everyone.

Born of a mother,

into the ice-cold light

of fluorescent lamps.

She was helpless and I was blind,

we were left at the mercies

of socialism, doctors, and forceps.

I came into this world

in Podolí, Prague

8.9.1963.	September 8, 1963.
Pozdě ale přece,	Better late than never,
a přece příliš brzy.	and yet way too early.
Břevnov 17.–18. 2015	Břevnov, August 17–18, 2015

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4 Discussion: The Decision-Making Process in Detail

Anyone who has previously attempted to translate even a short piece of any text is very well aware of the fact that there are myriads of decisions that must be made by the translator. For the purposes of this paper, I chose to focus on decisions that affect the euphony of the verse. The goal of this chapter is to show the interested reader, how I went about recreating the "audible web of sound"[164] that I felt was so prominent in Vopěnka's poems.

This idea of "a sound web" comes from Robert Pinsky's *The Sounds of Poetry,* where he talks of a poem creating a pleasant sound not only by engaging a complete similarity of sounds (e.g. full-, end-rhymes) but also by "weaving" similar sounds into the whole fabric of its stanzas. In other words, it is as if the text was embroidered with a sound and revealed this pattern when read out loud. Levý discusses a similar principle in *The Art of Translation* and adds that it is not only a matter of frequency. In order for, the sound to be foregrounded the frequency must be higher than usual.[165]

Occasionally, a note on individual poem mentions how a word choice affects not only the sound of the line and (consequently) of the poem as a whole, but also what kind of an image it paints in the readers inner eyes. Simply put, words carry meaning not only within themselves, but they also bring up associations, either by their similarity to other semantically unrelated words (homophones and homonyms) or by the company of words they commonly keep (collocations). Examples that come to mind are buckwheat (pohanka) and chickpea (cizrna). If we disregard the etymology for a moment, an English speaker hears "buck" and "chick" whereas Czech hears a sound resembling "pohan" (pagan) and cizí (foreign/strange) or zrna (grains). An example of collocation could be "a bundle of…" common collocation is "a bundle of joy" most often describing "a baby". When using any word in translation of poetry, it is important to make sure that this associated meaning(s) do not or does not interfere with the picture the poet is trying to paint.

This chapter features both drafts and final target texts. The drafts provide a nice palette of clumsy solutions. They are included to demonstrate how an emphasis on the likeness of sound may go the wrong way and tip into overemphasizing or underemphasizing features of the original. Such translations could mislead readers into thinking the author is prone to use cheap prettiness of sound and cliché expressions. Levý warns saying that a translator

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164 Pinsky, *The Sounds of Poetry,* 80.
165 Levý, *The Art of Translation,* 271.

has the power "to inappropriately highlight material, that should be as inconspicuous as possible, in order to draw attention to himself rather than to render original author's style."[166] In the same way Pinsky urges poet's to keep the richness of sound from "being overdone"[167] which is an advice to be taken by translators as well. I hope the final solutions featured here offer a balanced approach that is faithful and does not stretch the original.

Overall, I was pleased to find that applying Levý's three step approach (discussed in chapter 1) gave me something to lean on, a guiding light of sorts and made many of the decisions easier. Resources and dictionaries that proved helpful in the process were: dictionary.com; thesaurus.com (for searching synonyms); merriam-webster.com; COCA and other corpora for searching collocations; youglish.com (searching for collocations and native pronunciation). Resources used to work with the source text: lingea.cz; prirucka.ujc.cas.cz; finally the key was reading the poems out loud and always seeking a native speaker's feedback and perspective.

Due to the scope of the material the following pages contain notes on most but not all of the poems featured in chapter 3. Some poems provide greater challenge to a translator than others and thus I left out material that seemed less interesting to readers. And finally, a note on color coding. The colors are there to help trace a thread of sounds within a single excerpt of a text.

4.1   Notes on Selected Poems

4.1.1   Holocaust

The first poem reflects the thoughts of the poet as he looks at black and white family photography. He does so from the vantage point of someone who knows what is coming, as someone who knows how the history unfolded for his Jewish ancestors in the picture.

There are no full or rich rhymes here, this poem abounds with assonance as most of the lines end with a vowel (mostly *í* /i:/but also *e – é* /ɛ/ or/ɛə/ and *o* pronounced /o/ or /ɔ/). A dominant vowel sound within the poem is definitely *í – ý* both pronounced as /i:/ in Czech. I tried to compensate for it by ending the lines with words containing /ɛ/ or /eɪ/ (*glance – then – comprehend – ordained – today*). As well as by keeping the sequence of /t/ and /d/ throughout the stanza.

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166 Levý, *The Art of Translation,* 81.
167 Pinsky, *The Sounds of Poetry,* 81.

I would like to point out the short fourth line, consisting of only two words (*Poslední pohledy*). These are an extraordinary match as they share a great deal of consonant as well as vowel sounds (cons.: /p/,/l/,/d/,/n/; vow.:/o/,/e/,/i/,/iː/,/ɪ/,/ɪː/). Here I managed to render it with two words sharing the consonants /l/ and /n/ – *Final glances*. Using two words that resemble each other in sounds and placing them in close proximity is quite typical for the author. Vopěnka does the same thing in *Benny*, *Transient Age Manifesto*, and *Contemplation in McDonald's* where I attempted the same solution but had to spread it over several lines and thus lost some of its compactness (for more details see the comments to the respective poems).

The final near rhyme (*bortí – očích*) shares the same two vowels (/ɔ/ – /iː/). In English I have only managed to keep /aɪ/ but there is also the shared consonant /s/ which works out nicely. Also, the final line of the poem is dominant with the /iː/ sound (*vidím, tvých, očích*). In translation this is compensated for by the /aɪ/ sound (*I, my-, eyes*).

Na fotce šedivé	In this greyed photo
ty jsi, kdo odchází.	it is you, who leaves.
V klobouku omšelém	In that timeworn hat
laskavý táta věčný.	a loving eternal dad.
Poslední pohledy.	Final glances.

4.1.2   1968 – Mom and a Boy

This poem is a good example of the need to understand the personal and cultural background of the author. Without it, some of its elements become incomprehensible. The year 1968 was the year of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and thus the times were *strangely evil* for most people. The author was only five years old, and this poem is a reflection of memories he keeps from the only trip he was ever on with his mother, who suffered from a mental illness ever since he could remember.

Children born in the 1950s and 60s were brought up by parents who experienced the WWII. as children. Especially in larger cities such as Prague and Brno that meant they grew up with food shortage and thus they learned (and later taught their children) to never waste food. Therefore, *to drink before meal is not allowed* does not call for any mystical interpretation but simply refers to a rule commonly set by parents in Communism Czechoslovakia (that suffered food shortage again in 1960s). Mothers wanted their children to have as much

room in their belly for the proper food as possible. Only after eating to the full the children were allowed to drink water.

Sirup is a false friend here. In English sirup or syrup most commonly refers to thick liquid sweetener used to complement certain meals (such as pancakes or oatmeal). In Czech sirup also refers to thick liquid sweetener that is however added to water to create light fruity flavor (as it is mostly made from fruits). A drink made this way is also referred to as a "sirup" although technically it is significantly diluted sirup (usually 1:10 ratio). Thus, literally the first line reads: "A glass pitcher filled with sirup." Since I believed "sirup" would paint quite a different picture in the reader's mind, I substituted it for flavored water instead.

Skleněný džbán plný sirupu.	A glass pitcher filled with flavored water.
Pít se však před jídlem nesmí.	But drinking before a meal is not allowed.
Jen jednou jedenkrát	It was the only time
s nemocnou mámou	I was alone on a trip
sám jsem byl na cestě v dětství.	with an unwell mom as a child.

4.1.3   A Moment that is Fleeting from Me

The presented theme of this poem is a serene moment, the discovered theme is passing, followed by the final (sobering) theme of dying. Set on a boat the poem is a short contemplation on the passing of time, not time as a general entity but this very *time passing us by*. With each passing moment the boat is closer to the shore and the human life (with each passing moment) is ever closer to its passing. The revelation of the last line is clear: Each moment of life is in a sense a beginning of dying.

As is typical for the author, this poem shows a great deal of cohesion of sound. Starting at the very beginning, an attentive reader notices an agreement of vowels within the first line (já a ty – Kréty) and realizes that this very repetition of *y* (in Czech pronounced /ɪ/) is the means by which the first and the last line of this stanza are tied together (Kréty – skály).

Moving on the reader recognizes firsthand that not only do all three middle lines end with *e* or *é* (*čisté–kůže–je*) but that /ɛ/-/ɛə/ is a dominant sound within the lines themselves. In fact, careful attention to the second line reveals that *all* the words (except for the conjunction *a* and the preposition *na*) end with /ɛ/. Last three words on the third and fourth line also end with /ɛ/ forming chains of *tvé–jemné–kůže* and *moře–klidné–je*. An unattentive

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reader would say Vopěnka works with assonance here, an attentative reader, however, notices full rhymes as well. They do not appear at the end of a line where one would expect them but rather on the position next to last. Notice *průzračné–jemné–klidné* share the final vowel as well as the preceding consonant.

Struggling to do justice to these carefully knitted patterns of sound, I at times dared to opt for synonyms that did not seem intuitive at first, at times even choosing to tilt the line into a point of view that allowed for such cohesion to be kept. After construing the first draft I realized, I took it too far and added extra content, that was not necessary. I did it for the beginner's fear: "I am losing so much elsewhere; I must compensate for it wherever I possibly can." The final rendering proves that is possible to keep the likeness of the sound while not diverging from the content. Below the middle column is my first draft and the very right column is the final translation.

Já a ty na lodi u břehů Kréty.	You sit close to me on a boat by the coast of Crete.	You and me, on a boat by the coast of Crete.
Hledíme na moře průzračné a čisté,	We behold the sea so pure and crystalline;	We behold the sea so pure and clear,
má ruka dotkla se tvé jemné kůže.	and my hand gently brushed against your silky skin.	my hand touched your silky skin.
Čas téměř neběží a moře klidné je	Life slows down, nearly stops; the sea is still,	Time nearly stops and the sea is still
u bílé skály.	there by the white cliff of white granite.	by the white cliff.

In the first line of the middle column, you might notice I added the notion of closeness because it allowed for an echo of sounds on the end of line *coast of Crete*. In the same vein, the words *behold* and *crystalline* on the second line were chosen from among the synonyms because they allowed for a sound chain of *we–be–sea–crystalline*. On the third line I used repeating sounds of /d/-/t/ *and–gently–brushed–against* that merged into an /s/ toward the end of the line *against–silky–skin*.

 U bílé skály is literally *by the white rock* or *a cliff* in this context. However, the first and last line of this stanza end with the same vowel (*Kréty–skály*), so I chose *white granite* in order for it to rhyme with *Crete*. I soon realized I am taking it too far and became content with the chain of sound created by the line-final words (*skin–still–cliff*) and the echo of the /aɪ/ in *by - white* on the last line.

Some might find *behold* on the second line as surprising word choice. I preferred it over "look at" or "watch" to recreate a string of /i/ - /ɪ/ sounds (*we–behold–see–clear*). *Behold,* as

I was told, might evoke a sudden appearance to some native speakers and thus create a different picture. It may indeed be used as an interjection to indicate a surprising or a sudden appearance.[168] In the translation, however, it is used as a verb[169] denoting a long contemplative look.

Another word choice worth mentioning is the author's neologism *bezesnění* (compound of *bez-* (without) and *-snění* (dreaming)). I played around with *quiet dreamlessness,* but it sounded too negative (evoking sleeplessness) when in Czech *bezesnění* does not necessarily sound negative. Also, it needs to rhyme with the last line (*bezesnění – umírání*). I thus chose *undreaming – dying*, although it is not perfect because both *bezesnění* and *umírání* have four syllables in Czech which makes them a particularly remarkable match. As Levý points out,[170] -ing is one of the few endings English and thus I was trying to be careful not to overuse it in poetry but seemed permissible here.

4.1.4   A Photo on My Desk

To be honest I was not impressed by this poem at first. I did not find the idea of a man looking at a picture of a women he once loved sufficiently intriguing. But after several readings (I read poems out loud) it grew on me. There are two dominant vowels a - á[171] and *í* - *ý*.[172] In translation I have tried to keep the dominant vowel sounds /ɔ/ /ɒ/ /oʊ/[173] throughout the whole poem. Also, reading out loud the English version reveals a thread of /eɪ/ - /aɪ/ sounds hidden in *shiny-lay-waves-bright.* See the following excerpt:

Je to všechno pryč? Pryč.	Is everything gone? Gone.
Na fotce zářivé	In the shiny photo
ve vlnách šťastna ležíš,	you lay content in the waves,
zlatavá kůže tvá	your bright golden skin
pěnou se hrdě zdobí.	proudly adorned with foam.

This is just an excerpt but, I believe, all of the examples of /ɔ/ are easy to trace starting with *not – not* on the first two lines all the way to the final *No, I don't …* Moreover, to enhance sound cohesion, it seemed fitting to use alliteration of **p**risoner of my **p**assion for *vězněm*

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[168] as in "Behold, the lamb of God, …" (John 1:29) Notice the use of *behold* as an interjection is indicated by a comma.
[169] as in: "To behold the beauty of the Lord…" (Psalm 27:4)
[170] Levý, *The Art of Translation,* 271.
[171] The difference in pronounciation is roughly that of English *come vs harm*
[172] Both pronounced as /i:/ in keep
[173] All possible variations of what usually appears on paper as *o.*

tužeb svých on the fourth line, but I eventually opted for *dreams* because it creates a near rhyme with *near* on the second line.

4.1.5 You Resemble Yourself

The following poem briefly captures the poet's impression of his wife. It makes an interesting distinction between the inner person and her actual appearance. The writer looks at his wife and sees her body and soul as two separate entities. Her soul is the real her and her body is just her "resemblance." Whenever he truly embraces her it is not the body he holds, but her soul, the real her. The original is quite melodic using /ɑ/ - /ɑː/ - /iː/ as dominant vowels.

Considering translation, this is yet another example when I went too far with my first draft. I wanted to render something melodic, and I desired the sound cohesion so badly that I created an assimilation of sounds way beyond the original (see the middle column).

As I said, I identified as the dominant vowel /ɑ/ - /ɑː/ - /iː/ as well as some supporting vowels /ɔ/,/ɒ/ and consonants /b/,/d/ (*sobě–podobná–bývala–chodba–podoba*). The middle column shows my solution where I primarily focused on compensation by repetition of /oʊ/, ʊ (*show–go–own*) and /ɔ/as well as consonants (mostly /l/ and /y/: *clearly – likeness – always – halo – hall*).

In the column on the right, I attempted the same thing except for now I gave higher priority to semantic accuracy. It did not prevent me from creating assonance of /ai/ and consonance with /s/ in: *yours–dress–breeze–does;* or /y/ *you–always–rays*.

Jsi sobě podobná	The Likeness of Yours	You Resemble Yourself
Jsi sobě podobná, jak jsi i bývala. Slunečním světlem křtěná. Po chodbě přicházíš: Tvá tebe podoba. Tvůj parfém ve vánku a černé šaty vlají.	Clearly, you show the likeness you've always owned. With a halo of a sun you go, approaching through the hall —or the likeness you own. Your black dress and perfume flutter in the breeze.	You resemble yourself just as you always did. Christened by the rays of sun you come through the hall: The resemblance of yours. Your perfume and black dress both flutter in the breeze.
Až v tobě obejmu tu, jež je tebou má, tvé vrásky ze skrání ochotně opadají.	And when I hold in you the one who does your likeness hold. The wrinkles from your temples then obediently fall.	And when I hold in you the one who does your likeness hold; The wrinkles from your temples obediently fall.

4.1.6 Farewell

This poem is a reflection of a parent, who whispers a goodbye to the childhood of his son as it silently slips away, day by day, as if it was slowly dying. The dominance of /i/ or /iː/ is so

subtle it might escape your attention in the first few readings. Nevertheless, it is there and never missing from a line-final word.

The examples below show two draft versions of this poem. I did not keep an assonance in the line-final words for the fear it would be too heavy on English. Nevertheless, I tried to make up for it when I could (e.g.: see the assonance that could be group into vowel /æ//ɛ/ and dipthong /aɪ/ (*I – die - my*) and /eɪ/ (as in in *fade–vain–remain*).

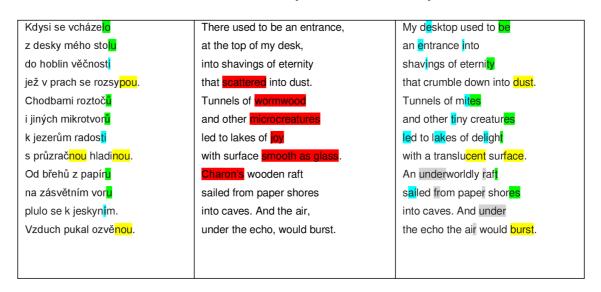|	
Každý den alespoň jednou umřu svou vlastní smrtí. Každý den alespoň jednou se s tebou navěky loučím. Každý den po kouscích, plíživě, tiše mizí tvé dětství. A já mizím s ním. Marně se tebe držím. Zůstanu sám. V nicotě, navždy, mrtvý. A jako předehra, o hodně dřív, zemře tvé dětství.	Each day at least once I die my own death. Each day at least once I part with you forever. Each day – inch by inch – your childhood is silently slipping away, fading. I follow it fading; holding onto you in vain. Alone – I will remain. Destitute, forever deceased. And much sooner – as a prelude – here comes the death of your childhood.
At least once every day I die my very own death. At least once every day I give you my eternal farewell. Each day, inch by inch, your childhood is silently slipping away fading. I follow it fading, holding onto you in vain. Remaining alone; Destitute, deceased, for eternity. Much sooner though – as if a prelude – dies your very own childhood.	At least once every day I die my own death. At least once every day I give you my eternal farewell. Every day – inch by inch – your childhood is silently slipping away, fading. I follow it fading; holding onto you in vain. Remaining alone. Destitute, deceased, for eternity. Much sooner though – as if a prelude – your own childhood dies.

4.1.7   A Memory of Writing Poetry

This poem is a slightly nostalgic reminiscence over the (now lost?) ability to write poetry. A short little lament over the joy it used to bring. Free verse is organized into a single (and relatively short) stanza, consisting of twelve lines. Every fourth line ends with the Czech

diphthong ou.[174] With other vowels supporting the cohesion of sound (see the lines marked in green and blue).

The first draft (middle column) was problematic because I chose expressions that either painted a different picture in the reader's mind, or they broke the cohesion of sound I wanted (or both). For instance, in the final version I opted out of *wormwood* (a worm) because of the association with *woodworm* (a plant) it evokes. Choosing the word *mite* set me on changing the words in the following lines in order to create a string of sounds containing /aɪ/ and /t/ (*mite – tiny – delight*). A *tiny creature* is *mikrotvor* in the original, which is a neologism, and thus using the more conventional word *tiny* I lost this value. In order to keep the similarity of sound, however, I considered it permissible.

The draft version also shows my unsuccessful attempt to create consonance (*dust – smooth as glass)* that led to a cliché. To eliminate that decided the surface should be ither transparent or translucent. Eventually it became clear that translucent trumps transparent because it shares more sounds with surface (t*ranslucen*t – *sur*face*).

Kdysi se vcházelo	There used to be an entrance,	My desktop used to be
z desky mého stolu	at the top of my desk,	an entrance into
do hoblin věčnosti	into shavings of eternity	shavings of eternity
jež v prach se rozsypou.	that scattered into dust.	that crumble down into dust.
Chodbami roztočů	Tunnels of wormwood	Tunnels of mites
i jiných mikrotvorů	and other microcreatures	and other tiny creatures
k jezerům radosti	led to lakes of joy	led to lakes of delight
s průzračnou hladinou.	with surface smooth as glass.	with a translucent surface.
Od břehů z papíru	Charon's wooden raft	An underworldly raft
na zásvětním voru	sailed from paper shores	sailed from paper shores
plulo se k jeskyním.	into caves. And the air,	into caves. And under
Vzduch pukal ozvěnou.	under the echo, would burst.	the echo the air would burst.

4.1.8   Writer's Block

Writer's block (literally "a creative crisis") simply expresses the frustration over the inability to *tune in* in those *rare moments* and bring to this world something from beyond. The challenge here lied in the final section of the poem. First, there is a full rhyme *plic–nic* (*lungs–nothing),* which is very subtle but important (for reasons I explain in previous chapter) and thus I was determined to keep it. Second, I was stuck on the phrase *pavouk*
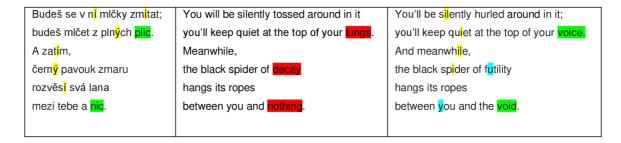
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174 pronounced as the English *o* in phone or broke /oʊ/

zmaru and wondered how to best express it in English since *zmar* is a key word of this poem it denotes meaninglessness of (any) endeavor and the futility and hopelessness of wasted potential (an overwhelming feeling present in any kind of creative crisis).

Zmar is really a multifaceted word but after considering all of the possible synonyms (doom, futility, waste, destruction, worthlessness, meaningless, vanity) I eventually settled on futility. Concerning the ending, I considered unfortunate in the draft version I kept playing around with: *silent at the top of your lungs screaming … between you and nothing*. But I did not want to always be working with the *-ing* ending, since there are virtually only four possible verb endings in English.[175]

Another idea was to restructure the sentence, so that *hangs* or *ropes* falls on the end of it. This would rhyme with lungs at least remotely. For instance: *You will be silently tossed around in it/you'll keep quiet at the top of your lungs./Meanwhile,/ the black spider of decay,/ hangs between you and nothing/ it's dreadful ropes*. Or *Meanwhile/ the black spider of decay,/ crawls between you and nothing,/ hanging it's ropes.*

Later however, I found the most satisfying solution to work with the *void* as synonym for *nothing*. Using the more British expression *at the top of your voice* allowed me to create a reverse rhyme with void and presented a solution that fulfilled all the parameters in place.

Budeš se v ní mlčky zmítat;	You will be silently tossed around in it	You'll be silently hurled around in it;
budeš mlčet z plných plic.	you'll keep quiet at the top of your lungs.	you'll keep quiet at the top of your voice.
A zatím,	Meanwhile,	And meanwhile,
černý pavouk zmaru	the black spider of decay	the black spider of futility
rozvěsí svá lana	hangs its ropes	hangs its ropes
mezi tebe a nic.	between you and nothing.	between you and the void.

4.1.9   Benny

The following poem is as a snapshot of a dog owners' day. In five sections divided by the words *náš pes* (*our dog*) Vopěnka paints a picture of his pet, describes its behavior and then puts it in a stark contrast with the reality of death. Benny is only filled with *unbridled joy* because he does not realize the finiteness his existence nor the futility of his endeavor. Such

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[175] Levý, *Art of Translation,* 234.

profound truth already recognized by ancient writers and poets[176] turns an ordinary sight into a extraordinary contemplation of death, hope and eternity.

Death is commonly personified as a female in Czech. In the translation, I personified it as him also because having *in – him* final nicely compensates for the final /i/ - /i:/ sounds of the original. *Neví nic o smrti* is literally *he knows nothing of death*. But having *nothing* on the end of the line matches *jumping in* on the next line and thus compensates for the /i/ - /i:/ of the original.

Náš pes	Our dog	Our dog's
se jmenuje Benny	is called Benny	name is Benny
a neví nic o smrti.	and knows nothing of death	and of death he knows nothing.
Zvesela se staví	Joyfully jumping in	Cheerfully stepping in
mezi nás a ji –	between us and her –	between us and him –
je to náš štít.	he is our shield.	he is our shield.
Panáčkuje a cení zuby,	Balancing on his hind legs, showing his teeth,	Rearing up, baring his teeth,
nabízí se	he offers himself	offering himself
místo všech strachů,	instead of all those fears	instead of all those fears
jež zdoláváme.	we're conquering.	we're battling.
Ale my se přesto	But we keep	But we keep
dál bojíme	fearing still,	fearing still,
a dychtíme po naději,	longing for an absolute	we long for hope
která je absolutní	hope that will not	that is absolute
a neštěká,	bark,	and won't bark,
když vcházíme do dveří.	when we enter the door.	when we come home.
Náš pes	Our dog	Our dog
je tajtrlík	is a goofball;	is a goofball
a šťastně se směje	joyfully grinning	and to keep his wide grin,
i bez naděje.	against all hoping.	he needs no hope within.

The word *still* in the sentence *But we keep fearing still* might seem as an unnecessary addition but this small word enhances the sound cohesion by both the /i/ and /l/ sound and thus I could not resist using it.

The word *battling* as translation of *zdoláváme* is yet another word choice that might rise some questions, since it literally means *conquering* but that sounds too victorious for the context. Moreover, *battling* enhances the similarity of sound by creating a string of /l/

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[176] cf. the book of Job, chapter 39 describes careless behavior of an ostrich, who "treats her young harshly, as if they were not hers; and cares not that her labor was in vain, for God did not endow her with wisdom or give her a share of good sense." Job 39:13-18 (NIV).

sounds in *all-battling-still-long-absolute*. This, at least partly, makes up for /i/ - /iː/ in *bojíme–dychtíme–naději–absolutní*.

Když vcházíme do dveří is literally *enter the door* but using *come home* instead nicely compliments the thread of *long–for–hope–won't–home*. It was also suggested to me by a native speaker to replace the pronoun *that* by *which* in the phrase *that is absolute*. I decided not to heed this advice since I was looking at the line-initial words and I liked the string of *that–and–when* better than *which–and–when*. Moreover, having *that* brings the /æ/ sound that gets repeated in *absolute* and thus makes *that* a fitting pronoun for this line.

For the final rhyme, one that first came to mind was *joyfully grinning against all hoping*. But I was afraid it would mislead the readers into thinking about Abraham who (according to Romans 4) "believed against hope" and also the expression did not seem simple and clear which is the case in the original.

5   Conclusion

In conclusion, it is helpful to summarize the objectives of this thesis and see whether they were achieved. This study attempted to make a contribution to a discussion of poetry translation. It set to provide a detailed description of a certain part of decision making, namely the compensation for the loss of euphony. To this end, it offered a translation of selected poems from Martin Vopěnka's only poetry collection up to date *Dům, který opouštíš* (*The House You Are Leaving,* 2016). The secondary contribution was to bring more attention to poems I consider unique.

The theory that guided the translation process was presented in chapter one. It explains Jiří Levý's three steps of a translation process. By this, it enhances the reader's knowledge of Czech TIS tradition. Levý's three steps thoroughly described in this chapter are: Apprehension of the source, Interpretation of the source, and Re-stylisation of the source. Using Levý as the main theoretical source, this chapter also points out the fact that there are significant differences between the perception of rhyme and rich rhyme in Czech and English poetry and every translator working with these languages should be mindful of them.

Chapter two was really the application of what Levý calls: "the search for the objective idea of the work."[177] Using the information from an interview I conducted with the author, as well as information gained from reading his more autobiographical books and articles, I presented essential information about the author as a person, as well as major academic, poetic, and religious influence on his work. It presents his successful (even international) career as a prose writer. It shows poetry as a small part of his creative efforts, a part Vopěnka cherishes, nevertheless.

This chapter also contains an analysis of the poetry collection. Together it provided all the necessary information for a thorough understanding of the source text. It traces the visible features of the text as well as the reoccurring themes and aspects of form. Last but not least it analyzes the way Vopěnka applies free verse.

Chapter three presented translations of selected poems alongside the source text for immediate reference. The target text is the result of the application of Levý's three-step process. It seeks to bring the Czech author as close to the English-speaking reader as

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[177] Levý, *The Art of Translation,* 44.

possible while still presenting him as a Czech author (i.e.: without editing out culture-specific references).

Chapter four is made up of notes on the translation process. Out of all the decisions I, as a translator, had to make I decided to include only notes dealing with the way I attempted to reproduce the sound likeness. Individual decisions are showcased on specific examples. Draft versions are contrasted with final translations in order to show how linguistically correct target text can nevertheless fail to convey aesthetic value.

There are many ways this topic could be studied further. A simple twist to the same project could be to focus on a different aspect of the decision-making process. For example, on the treatment of the culture-specific items. During my preparation for the project, I realized there are virtually no detailed studies of poetry translation from Czech to English. Most of what I was able to find were forewords, afterwords, and prefaces to translated collections. Those generally focused on introducing the author and spared only a few general sentences on their methodology.

Further research could focus on assessing the quality of the project carried out by a native speaker, non-native speaker, and a team consisting of both native and non-native speakers. This project could (at least I hope) serve as proof of the possibility of translating out of one's mother tongue. This would be another fruitful research area in the translation of poetry as a way of language learning and language training of future translators. Personally, I have grown very much in my understanding of how my work language really works.

Shrnutí

Překlad poezie je časově náročné duševní úsilí, kterému se zpravidla věnují básníci polygloti, kreativně založení překladatelé či jiní jazykoví nadšenci. Činí tak z čisté lásky k jazyku a literatuře bez ohledu na pramalý okruh potenciálních čtenářů a žalostné či dokonce žádné finanční ohodnocení. Je tedy pochopitelné, že málokdo je po vyhotovení takového překladu ochoten vynakládat další úsilí k vypracování podrobnějšího překladatelského komentáře pro ještě užší skupinu čtenářů, kteří jsou obeznámeni alespoň se základy translatologie. Důsledkem toho se většina těch, kteří překládají poezii z češtiny, soustředí v předmluvách na představení autora, a v otázce metodiky překladu se omezují pouze na několik stručných vět týkajících se obecné překladatelské strategie.

Předkládaná práce se hlouběji zabývá problematikou překladu poezie z češtiny do angličtiny. Jejím cílem je přispět do diskuse především překladatelčiným komentářem zaměřeným na postup při kompenzaci zvukomalebnosti verše. Jádrem praktické části je překlad vybraných básní z dosud jediné básnické sbírky současného českého spisovatele Martina Vopěnky (nar. 1963), autora celé řady románů, které byly přeloženy například do angličtiny, polštiny, italštiny nebo španělštiny, a dočkaly se mezinárodního ohlasu.[178]

Za hlavní přínos této práce považuji nejen překlad samotný (kapitola 3), ale také komentář (kapitola 4), který se soustřeďuje především na postupy při kompenzaci zvukomalebnosti Vopěnkova volného verše. Za další přínos považuji uvedení autora a jeho básní do povědomí anglicky mluvících čtenářů (kapitola 2 a 3) a také poměrně podrobný popis fází překladatelského procesu podle Jiřího Levého (kapitola 1).

Překlad vybraných básní ze sbírky *Dům, který opouštíš* (Práh, 2016) je tedy uveden ve třetí kapitole, a to vedle originálního znění básní, což dává bilingvním čtenářům možnost okamžitého srovnání. Ostatní kapitoly popisují a) teoretická východiska, tedy *tři fáze překladatelovy práce* tak, jak je formuloval v *Umění překladu* Jiří Levý; b) aplikaci těchto poznatků při hledání toho, co Levý nazývá *ideově estetické hodnoty díla*; c) zdůvodnění některých překladatelských řešení týkající se především kompenzace zvukomalebnosti. S ohledem na záměr práce byl její text připraven v anglickém jazyce.

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[178] Z titulů úspěšných v anglicky mluvících zemích lze jmenovat: *Pátý rozměr (The Fifth Dimension), Můj bratr mesiáš (My Brother The Messiah)* nebo *Cesta do ztracena (Back to Beyond).*

První kapitola popisuje *tři fáze překladatelovy práce*, které vedly k vypracování překladatelské koncepce, a nakonec sloužily jako opora při tvorbě překladu. Podrobně rozebírá, co podle Levého znamená *porozumění, interpretace* a *přestylizování předlohy.* Dále jsou zde zmíněny některé rozdíly ve vnímání rýmu a další odlišnosti vyplývající z nesourodosti mezi angličtinou a češtinou jako dvou nepříbuzných veršových systémů.

Druhá kapitola je aplikací poznatků o nezbytnosti překladatelské koncepce. Ta vznikla dvěma hlavními způsoby: a) syntézou informací získaných z rozhovoru s autorem a četbou jeho autobiografických knih a románů;[179] b) analýzou výchozího textu, přičemž jsem se opírala nejen o druhou polovinu *Umění překladu,* v němž se Levý versologii dopodrobna věnuje, ale také o klasický *Úvod do teorie verše* Josefa Hrabáka. Dalšími nepostradatelnými pomocníky byly publikace: *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry* (1993) Geoffreyho Leeche, *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form* Paula Fussella a některé části ze *Style and fiction* G. Leeche a M. Shorta. Druhá kapitola se tedy snaží uceleným způsobem prezentovat kontext nezbytný k *porozumění* a *interpretaci*, a to jak kontext bezprostřední (tedy samotnou básnickou sbírku), tak širší kontext autorova života a díla.

Třetí kapitola obsahuje překlad celkem sedmnácti básní. Čtvrtá kapitola pak detailněji rozebírá některá překladatelská řešení. Na konkrétních příkladech ukazuje jak řešení nepovedená, tak ta šťastnější, finální. Zařadit některé nepovedené ukázky prvních náčrtů jsem považovala za přínosné, neboť vhodně dokazují, jak jazykově správné řešení může být z hlediska uměleckého účinku řešením nevhodným.

Zde se ukázala nezbytná potřeba překladatelské koncepce, o níž hovoří Levý. V poznámkách k jednotlivým řešením se snažím poukázat na to, jak důkladné studium širšího i bezprostředního kontextu díla a příprava překladatelské koncepce v konečném důsledku práci překladatele nesmírně usnadňuje. Vzhledem k rozsahu práce se však zaměřuji pouze na jeden aspekt mnou sestavené koncepce, kterou je důraz na eufonii verše.

O Vopěnkově poezii totiž platí to, co Levý napsal o verši Čapkově, totiž že „samohlásky jsou silně zvukově exponovány" a jeho rým „není shoda izolovaných koncových slabik, ale přísněji organizovaný a kadencí podtržený konec samohláskové kostry", který „svými asonancemi souvisí s vnitřními zvukosledy … verše."[180] Tyto vnitřní zvukosledy stěžejních samohlásek považuji za jednu z klíčových hodnot Vopěnkovy poezie, která by měla být

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[179] mezi ně patří *Nebarevné vzpomínky* (Práh, 2013), *Přežít civilizaci* (Mladá fronta, 2020), nebo román s autobiografickými prvky *Moje cesta do ztracena* (Mladá fronta, 2005)

[180] Levý, Jiří. 2012. *Umění překladu*. 4., Upravené vyd. Praha: Apostrof, 286.

v překladu adekvátně zpracována. Protože ji však nelze mechanicky replikovat, čerpala jsem poznatky o zvukové stránce anglického verše například z klasického díla *The Sounds of Poetry,* jejímž autorem je básník a držitel Nobelovy ceny za literaturu Robert Pinsky. Ten hovoří o principu tzv. „zvukové výšivky"[181], která v konkrétních básních tvoří komplexní síť podobných hlásek.[182] Dalším užitečným zdrojem mi v této oblasti byl také *The Poetry Handbook* Johna Lennarda. V komentáři se snažím ukázat, jak jsem o zachování zvukomalebnosti v překladu usilovala.

Překlad uměleckého textu, jak tvrdí Levý, se pohybuje na pomezí vědy a umění.[183] Ve vědě lze pátrat po exaktním řešení, v umění to však možné není. Při překladu poezie lze tedy těžko považovat výsledek za definitivní, přesný, navždy platný. To také nebylo mým cílem, snažila jsem se pouze získat více čtenářů básním, které považuji za jedinečné a jedině čas a čtenáři sami mohou posoudit, zda se mi to povedlo.

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[181] doslova „sound embroidery" viz: Pinsky, Robert. 1999. *The Sounds of Poetry: A Brief Guide*. First paperback ed., [10.print]. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 81.
[182] Ibid, 82.
[183] Levý, Jiří. 2012. *Umění překladu*. 4., Upravené vyd. Praha: Apostrof, 78.

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Anotace/Annotation

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Abstrakt:

Předkládaná práce je příspěvkem do diskuse o překladu poezie z češtiny do angličtiny. Jádrem praktické části (kapitola 3) je překlad vybraných básní ze sbírky *Dům, který opouštíš*, jejímž autorem je současný český spisovatel, prozaik, Martin Vopěnka. Zbylé kapitoly popisují a) teoretická východiska, tedy tři fáze překladatelovy práce tak, jak je formuloval v *Umění překladu* Jiří Levý; b) aplikaci těchto poznatků při hledání toho, co Levý nazývá *ideově estetické hodnoty díla*; c) zdůvodnění některých překladatelských řešení týkajících se především postupů při kompenzaci zvukomalebnosti Vopěnkova volného verše. Za hlavní přínos této práce lze považovat nejen překlad samotný a následný komentář, ale také uvedení českého autora a jeho básní do povědomí anglicky mluvících čtenářů, nebo i poměrně podrobný popis fází překladatelského procesu podle Jiřího Levého. S ohledem na záměr práce byl její text připraven v anglickém jazyce.

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Title: The House You Are Leaving: Selected Poems of Martin Vopěnka in English Translation

Abstract: The present work offers an in-depth study as a contribution to a general discussion of poetry translation from Czech to English. Its main goal is to showcase examples of compensation for sound likeness in the target text. The practical part (chapter 3) consists of the translation of selected poems from the collection *Dům, který opouštíš* written by a contemporary Czech author Martin Vopěnka. The remaining chapters describe: a) theoretical framework, more specifically the *three stages of translator's work* by Jiří Levý; b) application of Levý's theory in the search of what he called *the ideo-aesthetical values of the work;* c) translator's commentary explaining the decisions regarding the compensation for the euphonical nature of Vopěnka's free verse.