

**“The Vegan Bar and Gaming Lounge” by Vivienne Plumb  
and “Wiersz Vivienne” by Adam Wiedemann,**

**with translation and notes by Murray Edmond and Joanna Forsberg**

Adam Wiedemann wrote a poem, “Wiersz Vivienne” (“Vivienne’s Poem”), while in Iowa City with Vivienne Plumb at a writers’ gathering at the University of Iowa. His poem was about the experience of translating a poem by Vivienne Plumb, “The Vegan Bar and Gaming Lounge,” into Polish, and thus it is a poem about the act of translation. With kind permissions of the authors, we have reproduced here both Vivienne Plumb’s poem “The Vegan Bar and Gaming Lounge” and Adam Wiedemann’s “Wiersz Vivienne.” “Wiersz Vivienne” was originally published in a selected volume of Wiedemann’s poetry, *Czyste Czyny* (Poznan, 2009). “The Vegan Bar and Gaming Lounge” was published in *Nefarious: poems and parables* (Wellington: Headworx, 2004), and that volume featured a cover drawing by Adam Wiedemann of a cow with human feet. To finish the story of this translating interaction between poets, Joanna Forsberg and I have translated “Wiersz Vivienne” into English, and provided notes about our translation. Our translation does not try to smooth out the bumps, and we have retained, but noted, “errors” and “oddities.”

–Murray Edmond

## **The Vegan Bar and Gaming Lounge.**

–Vivienne Plumb

I hate places with names  
like *Cafe Bleu*.  
I thought I saw a  
*Vegan Bar and Gaming Lounge*,  
my mistake, it was *Vegas*.  
Clubs with names like *Hot Chilli*  
are trying to tell us  
that we will have a good time.  
The birds were singing  
as I crossed the dusky bridge,  
in the park the damp leaves  
were as big as my hands,  
they had fallen into corpse  
shaped piles, the carriage  
lamps were lit.

I hate places with names  
like *The Olde Taverne*,  
or *Aunty Val-Mae's Country Kitchen*,  
there's generally a hair  
in the scones, or the drink  
is poured with little generosity.  
When I rose to depart  
there were leaves like hands  
all around me.  
In the hotel I woke in the  
obsequious dark, not knowing  
where I am, where I was,  
not knowing.

## Wiersz Vivienne

–Adam Wiedemann

Vivienne pisze w tym wierszu, że nie lubi lokali, które się nazywają np. Cafe Bleu. Myślała, że widzi Vegan Bar and Gaming Lounge, a to był oczywiście Vegas Bar. Kluby o nazwie Hot Chili sugerują, że nieźle będziemy się w nich bawili. Ptaki śpiewały, gdy Vivienne szła przez zapylony most.

Wilgotne liście w parku były tak wielkie jak jej dłonie (trzeba dodać, że dłonie Vivienne nie są jakoś nadzwyczajnie wielkie), sterty liści, o rany!, leżały na kształt trupów, jest tu też coś o zaświeconych reflektorach.

Ale wracając do barów, teraz już można przetłumaczyć, Stara Tawerna albo Kuchnia Domowa Cioci Walerii (lepiej byłoby Babcia Malina po prostu), to włosy chyba na wałkach, niestety nie wiem, co to *scones*; może też włosy w zupie, tak mi się najpierw pomyślało, choć u Babci Maliny nie ma włosów w zupach. Znów liście.

Vivienne rusza z powrotem, już jest w hotelu, ciemności są *obsequious*, tego słowa też nie znam, ale brzmi dobrze, ponownie wprowadza element grozy, bo Vivienne czuje się zagubiona, „nie wie, gdzie jest” i „nie wie, gdzie była”.

Tłumaczyłbym ten wiersz dalej, ale mi się skończył.  
Mimo że leci Prokofiew, słyszę teraz  
Elę Mielczarek z jej „Hotelem Grand”, *ciisza*  
*wśród hotelowych ścian*, mieszkam tutaj w hotelu  
i widok mam na Binks. Cześć Binks, jak się masz? Binks  
w odpowiedzi się włącza, wyrzuca ciepłe fale  
sztucznego wiatru z kuchni, czuję wyraźnie obierki, jak na wsi,  
kiedy babcia siekała żarcie dla świń. Miałem zamiar dodać,  
że wszystko mi jedno, gdzie jestem, ale wiersz Vivienne  
wpędził mnie w melancholię, mogłem go dzisiaj nie czytać.

*Iowa City, 24.9.04*

## Vivienne's Poem

–Adam Wiedemann

Vivienne writes in this poem that she does not like places which are named e.g. Café Bleu. She thought that she saw a Vegan Bar and Gaming Lounge but it was Vegas Bar really. Clubs with names like Hot Chilli want to suggest that we will have a good time. Birds were singing when Vivienne was walking across the dusty (1) bridge. Damp leaves in the park were as big as her hands (we must add that Vivienne's hands are not extraordinarily big), piles of leaves, my god! they were lying like corpses, there is also something about switched-on reflectors (2).

But coming back to bars, now it is possible to translate The Olde Taverne or Aunt Valery's Home Kitchen (it would really be better simply Granny Malina's) that hair perhaps in rollers, unfortunately I don't know what *scones* are; maybe there is also hair in the soup, this was my first thought, but at Granny Malina's there is no hair in the soup. Again leaves. Vivienne commences her return, then she is in the hotel, the darkness is *obsequious*, this word also I don't know, but it sounds good, again she introduces the element of horror, because Vivienne feels lost, she "doesn't know where she is" and "she doesn't know where she was."

I would like to carry on translating this poem, but it surprised me with its end. Though Prokofiev can be heard, I hear now Ela Mielczarek with her "Grand Hotel", *si-i-i-i-lence among hotel walls*, I am living here in a hotel and I have a view of Binks (3). Hullo, Binks, how are you? Binks in answer switches on, throws a warm wave of artificial wind from the kitchen, I clearly smell potato peelings, as in the countryside, when granny used to chop scrapes for the pigs. I had the intention to add that it's all one to me, where I am, but Vivienne's poem drives me to melancholy, I could not read it today.

Translated by Murray Edmond and Joanna Forsberg

Notes: Murray Edmond

1. “Dusty” is a mis-reading of the original poem’s “dusky.” In other parts of the poem Wiedemann puzzles over unfamiliar words such as “scones” (potentially unfamiliar to some English readers too, but heartland English for Antipodeans) and “obsequious.” Once the bridge becomes “dusty” then the “damp leaves” that follow create an unlikely landscape, but one not unsuited to the lurking horror and haunting strangeness Plumb’s poem evokes. Iowa is arguably equally foreign for Plumb and Wiedemann, despite Plumb’s stronger claim to access the English spoken there. Plumb brings her scones to Iowa, and Wiedemann brings his Polish blues singer Elzbieta Mielczarek even though the hotel provides him with Prokofiev.

2. Carriage lamps become something like “switched-on reflectors,” pretty clearly the result of a dictionary trail making a false turning and leading into the wrong technological vocabulary. My guess is that Plumb’s “carriage lamps” refers to the use of “ye olde” style lamps in modern parks for illuminating pathways. This would connect with “*The Olde Tavern*” that appears two lines later and concurs with a distaste the poem expresses for a certain kind of foreignness-cum-antiquated stylization used in the contemporary world to give objects and surroundings a patina of class that is actually indicative of the cheap-and-kitsch-and-nasty. *Café Bleu* has been an earlier example of this. To this point Wiedemann’s poem has been “tracking” Plumb’s, so both poems come to the end of their first stanzas “simultaneously,” so to speak. “Switched-on reflectors,” if thought about for a moment, could constitute an image for the job that translators do—translators are “switched-on reflectors.” There is something to be grateful for in this odd phrase.

3. Binks must be the name on the hotel air-conditioning unit. It sounds like it could be a curse or a cry of delight or an instruction in a game in a number of languages, but it is a language-less word, which can’t be said of all proper names. Nevertheless Binks manages to stand for something of the horror (and the comedy) of writers at writers’ retreats or academics at conferences or important people gathering for meaningful intercourse: sooner or later all these junketeers will meet their Binks.

The context of the translator’s world has erupted into the poem in this third stanza, which up until then has been faithfully tracking Plumb’s poem (Plumb’s poem doesn’t have a third stanza, part of the disappointment Wiedemann expresses in the opening of his third stanza). Disappointment is accompanied by distress (Plumb’s poem drives the translator to melancholy). The contingent situation of the translator enters the world of the translation, betraying that sense of timeless transference that translations want to convey (and how their language world decays, just as rapidly, if not more so, than the original). Staring at Binks is what translators do. Talking to

Binks is what translators do. And like it or not, some of that background chatter sneaks into the translation. The decay has set in as Binks wafts up the smell of those old potato peelings.

#### Works Cited

Plumb, Vivienne. *Nefarious: poems and parables*. Wellington: Headworx, 2004. Print.

Wiedemann, Adam. *Czyste Czyny*. Poznan: 2009. Print.