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LADY MACBETH'S SECOND SOLILOQUY IN POLISH TRANSLATIONS

I Introduction

The role of Lady Macbeth in the play is very significant – had it not been for [...] *the valour of her tongue* [...] Macbeth would not have dared to kill the king. In her first soliloquy (I, 5, l. 15–30) Lady Macbeth, who has learned about the witches' prophecies from Macbeth's letter, realizes that Macbeth's kind nature, [...] *the milk of human kindness* [...], might prevent him from achieving the crown by foul means. It is now her duty, as she perceives it, to persuade Macbeth [...] *to do the deed* [...], but it is only possible after she has invoked the powers of darkness to gain possession of her in the second soliloquy (I, 7, l. 37–54). Then, again, when her husband wavered, she shamed him into action by questioning his manliness, and asserting that if she had promised to kill her own child she would have done it (I, 7, 56–59).

It seems that after the deed the role of Lady Macbeth diminishes. She puts in another impressive appearance during the banquet scene (III, 4) when she pretends to stay calm and undisturbed by Macbeth's temporary fit of madness. Eventually, remorse and compunction result in her insanity; the evidence of which one may find in (V, 1) – the sleep-walking scene.

The second soliloquy is thus a breakthrough in the course of the play; without it Lady Macbeth would not have hardened herself against her nature, and Macbeth would not have committed regicide. The soliloquy, a representation of Lady Macbeth's callous cruelty, is also a truly poetic achievement. Given the ambiguity of Shakespeare's language, as well as its poetic imagery, the speech poses a real challenge for the translators.

It is the aim of this paper to locate potential translation problems within the soliloquy, and to analyse them both with regard to the implied original meaning, and the resulting Polish renderings. In the course of the study I will refer to five Polish translations of the tragedy by: Józef Paszkowski (1970), Zofia Siwicka (1950), Krystyna Berwińska (1959), Maciej Słomczyński (1980), and Stanisław Barańczak (1992)¹². Let me state here that I shall not always quote from all translations, but I will select a sample of those passages which will illustrate and prove the point for the analysis.

II Presentation of the soliloquy

The raven

*himself is hoarse,
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
40 Under my battlements. Come, you Spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full
Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood,
Stop up th'access and passage to remorse;
45 That no compunctious visitings of Nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
Th'effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,
And take my milk for gall, you murth'ring ministers,
Wherever in your sightless substances
50 You wait on Nature's mischief! Come, thick Night,
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of Hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
Nor Heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
To cry, 'Hold, hold'!*¹³

In her second soliloquy (I, 5), Lady Macbeth invokes the powers of darkness to take possession of her body and mind. Her triple invocation (to the “Spirits”, “murth’ring ministers” and “thick Night”) takes on a form of a fierce prayer, a verbal charm that conjures up the deed she desires. She violates her body by the wish of being unsexed, and thereby she defies all traces of womanhood – both external (appearance) and internal (“remorse”, “compunctious visitings of Nature”) – that could have dissuaded her from doing the deed. Janet Adelman states that [...] *she imagines an attack on the*

¹² The dates in brackets are the dates of the editions used for this analysis, and not the dates of the first editions (mine).

¹³ The text taken from W. Shakespeare (1999) *Macbeth*. K. Muir (ed.). The Arden Shakespeare.

reproductive passages of her own body, on what makes her specifically female [...] ¹⁴, her woman's breasts, milk, blood (possibly menstrual blood).

In the last part of the soliloquy (l. 50–54) Lady Macbeth makes an urgent and fervent appeal to the Night whose wished-for impenetrability reflects her darkest, murderous intentions. Thick Night is to conceal the deed from the eye of the heaven, as well as from a hesitant doer¹⁵. The imagery of these lines is centred around “iterative” cloaking images¹⁶; the meaningfulness of which is one of the principal routes by which the play may be explored.

II *The raven himself is hoarse That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan Under my battlements. (l. 37–40)*

The soliloquy starts with the image of the raven that announces the killing of Duncan by Macbeth. It is significant that in the whole play the sense of hearing is given prominence over other senses. The characters' anxiety, uneasiness or fear is triggered by unpleasant voices or sounds, which are frequently imaginary, and reflect the characters' tortured state of mind. In the same vein, the croaking raven is hardly a literal appearance, but functions in a more figurative sense. Symbolically associated with death, the bird constitutes a representation of Lady Macbeth's intentions and state of mind. It creates her [...] *psychological now, puts the character right into the centre of the action taking place on stage in this very moment*¹⁷. This dramatic effect is due to the use of the present tense and foregrounding the hoarseness of the usually harsh quality¹⁸ of the raven's voice (“double hoarsenes”)¹⁹.

The first sentence of Lady Macbeth's soliloquy has been translated into Polish as follows:

Kruk, który

¹⁴ J. Adelman (1996) “Born of Woman”, *Fantasies of Maternal Power in Macbeth in Shakespearean Tragedy and Gender*. Shirley Nelson Garner and Madelon Sprengnether (eds.), p. 111.

¹⁵ *For night must not only screen the deed from the eye of the heaven – conceal it at least until it is too late for heaven to call out to Macbeth “Hold, Hold!”* – see C. Brooks (1947) *The Well-Wrought Urn*, p. 36.

¹⁶ C. Brooks, *op. cit.*

¹⁷ M. Gibińska (1998) *Images of Cruelty in Macbeth and Their Polish Translations* in “Przekładaniec”, p. 220.

¹⁸ [...] *even the raven has more than its usual harshness [...]*; see the notes to lines 37–38 in W. Shakespeare's (1999) *Macbeth*, *op. cit.*

¹⁹ M. Gibińska, *op. cit.*

*Wykrakał przyjazd fatalny Dunkana
Pod mój dach, ochrypł.*

(K. Berwińska)²⁰

*I kruk sam
Ochrypnął kracząc o fatalnym wejściu
Dunkana w dom mój.*

(Z. Siwicka)²¹

*Kruk by ochrypł,
Kracząc o wejściu nieszczęsnym Duncana
W okrąg mych murów.*

(M. Słomczyński)²²

*Raczej schrypły kruk
Winien zakrakać znad zamkowej bramy,
Że los złowieszczy przywiódł pod nią króla!*

(S. Barańczak)²³

In K. Berwińska's and Z. Siwicka's translations, both rendered in the past tense, the raven's croaking cannot be heard any longer, let alone in Lady Macbeth's mind. K. Berwińska, by using preterite verb forms, underlined [...] *a sequence of action rather than its simultaneity: first the raven croaks, then it gets hoarse*²⁴. Z. Siwicka also moved the raven back in time although the bird became hoarse in the course of croaking, not after it. M. Słomczyński transported the raven into the future by means of a subjunctive mode ([...] *kruk by ochrypł* [...]), but still such a solution does not bring out the real meaning. By contrast, S. Barańczak's Lady Macbeth seems most authoritative of all Ladies with her commanding voice declaring *winien* – *should*. *Rather than to say what is, Barańczak's Lady Macbeth states what should be so that the blending of the raven's and her own voice is impossible*²⁵. Moreover, the sound of the raven's croaking may be both sinister and mocking, similarly as Lady Macbeth's reaction at the news may seem – one can imagine her laughing aside at Duncan's fate.

It may be concluded that in all renderings, the purpose of the whole invocation is not complete; the internal strife between the determination to kill

²⁰ W. Shakespeare (1959) *Makbet*, trans. K. Berwińska.

²¹ W. Shakespeare (1950) *Makbet*, trans. Z. Siwicka.

²² W. Shakespeare (1980) *Tragedia Macbetha*, trans. M. Słomczyński.

²³ W. Shakespeare (1992) *Makbet*, trans. S. Barańczak.

²⁴ M. Gibińska, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

and remorse for the deed, happening “now and here” is lost. Similarly, the raven is pushed aside from “the psychological now” and constitutes a factual existence.

III [...] *unsex me here* [...] (I. 41)

Lady Macbeth's first invocation is directed at the [...] *Spirits// That tend on mortal thoughts* [...] (I. 40–41). She commands them to unsex her; that is, to deprive her of her sex (in a biological sense) and her gender (a socially acquired role). The verb *unsex*, a strongly evocative and compact embodiment of Lady Macbeth's wish strikes the reader with an unusual and uncommon form. Namely, it consists of a prefix *un-* (expressing negation or the opposite) and the word *sex*, which typically functions as a noun (here used as a verb). The real obstacle for the translators lies in language rules; unlike English, Polish language does not allow for a free exchange of a word between categories (such as noun and verb). Therefore, Polish translators had to resort to circumlocution:

- a) *Sprawcie, by we mnie umarła kobieta, [...]* (K. Berwińska)
- b) *Wyzujcie// Mnie z płci mej, [...]* (Z. Siwicka)
- c) *[...], z płci mej mię wyzujcie; [...]* (J. Paszkowski)
- d) *Płeć mi odbierzcie [...]* (M. Słomczyński)
- e) *Weźcie precz// Moją kobietą naturę, [...]* (S. Barańczak)

It appears that the translators adopt one of two possible strategies: they emphasise either the object of the activity (*płeć*) or the activity itself (*odbierzcie, wyzujcie, weźcie precz*). J. Paszkowski and M. Słomczyński placed *płeć* in a strong initial position; after the caesura (Paszkowski) and at the beginning of the line (Słomczyński). Moreover, the morphology of Słomczyński's *odbierzcie* resembles the original *unsex*: *od-* in Polish functions as a negative prefix attached to verbs. Also, from the point of view of the performing actress, Paszkowski's equivalent which consists of five words is harder to pronounce than Słomczyński's three-word rendering because of the awkward sequence of consonants *z, p, ł, c*. Słomczyński's version, the shortest of all and not so tongue-twisting, is so far the best attempt at conveying the original meaning.

Two other translators (Berwińska and Barańczak) employed the word *kobieta* instead of *płeć*. As a result, they unnecessarily foreground Lady

Macbeth's womanhood in the context where it is not really targeted. Moreover, *kobieca natura* (Barańczak) does not comprise the whole idea of "unsexing", which relies both on external and internal gender characteristics. Also, Berwińska's and Barańczak's renderings are much longer and definitely less evocative than the original verb *unsex*.

One could conclude by saying that the effectiveness of the image lies not in a number of words, and that the same image evoked in the source language by one word, must have a more expanded equivalent in the target language.

IV *And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full* *Of direst cruelty! (l. 42–43)*

The ritual of "unsexing" is followed by the flow of cruelty to which Lady Macbeth easily submits herself. She is very meticulous of this act – every tiny cell and tissue of her body must give way to utmost ferociousness. The image is constructed in three stages; the first command *fill me*, supposedly not persuasive enough in Lady Macbeth's mouth, is expanded by the next order – [...] *from the crown to the toe* [...] – and enhanced once more with the words *top-full* ("full to the top"). Cruelty itself, shifted to the next line is preceded by the superlative *direst*; the superlative form once again underlines Lady Macbeth insatiable, utmost, and unscrupulous determination.

Yet a more detailed look at the image may reveal the way in which cruelty is gaining possession of Lady Macbeth's body and soul. The verb *fill* suggests a movement from the outside to the inside, or from a small spot branching off into a number of routes and paths. Through this poetic effect we are granted a three-dimensional picture by which the reader gains perspective into Lady Macbeth's body. The next addition ([...] *from the crown to the toe* [...]) places the Lady on a vertical axis bounded by two closing points: the head and the feet. Eventually, the third expansion (*top-full*) presents the result of the whole act – she is full to the top.

It is also remarkable that *fill* and *full* create the effect of consonance, significant even more when we consider a close relation of meaning between the two words. Also, it must be noticed that the words *fill* and *full* separated by the second command ([...] *from the crown to the toe* [...]) constitute a frame on which the image is constructed.

The Polish renderings of the extract are the following:

*I napełnijcie mię od stóp do głowy,
Nieubłaganem okrucieństwem!*

(J. Paszkowski)

*Niech mnie napelni od stóp mych
Do głowy najsroźsze, złe okrucieństwo!*

(Z. Siwicka)

*I wypełnijcie mnie od stóp do głowy
Najsroźszym okrucieństwem!*

(K. Berwińska)

*Płeć mi odbierzcie i od stóp do głowy
Niech cała będę okrucieństwem!*

(M. Słomczyński)

*Niechaj wypełni mnie od stóp do głów
Najzjadlejsze okrucieństwo!*

(S. Barańczak)

For all translations except M. Słomczyński's one can observe similar tendencies: the graduality of the image becomes disrupted after the second command; hence, the symmetry of the image is not preserved. Also, the translators chose two verbs to render *fill* – *wypełnić* and *nappełnić*. The prefixes *wy-* and *na-* emphasise the direction of the activity²⁶. Thus, *wypełnić* suggests the movement from the bottom upwards whereas *nappełnić* illustrates the reverse (from the top downwards). The original sequence, first the head, then the feet, is different in Polish renderings; namely the feet are the starting point and the head the final border of the movement. Granted that, it seems logical to use the verb *wypełnić* in order to maintain the unity of the image.

Słomczyński strikes the reader with a slightly different solution; he resorts to rendering the middle and the last stage of the image (the word *cała* being a truly emphatic and thorough equivalent of *top-full*), but unlike others, he abjures the initial stage. Eventually, the effect of consonance and symmetrical composition of the image is lost in all translations.

**V [...] make thick my blood,
Stop up th' access and passage to remorse [...] (l. 44–47)**

Having invoked the Spirits to *unsex* her, Lady Macbeth specifies her next orders (l. 42–48), all of which expand on the concept of “unsexing”. Remorse

²⁶ P. Bąk (1993) in *Gramatyka Języka Polskiego*, p. 261, writes that prefixes added to verbs complete their meanings in respect to the direction of the activity and the prefix *na-* may signify the movement towards the top surface of the object.

and pricks of conscience must be eradicated altogether so that they do not [...] *act as a mediator between the purpose and the achievement of it*²⁷. One may ponder what is the relation between thickening blood and remorse. It may be conceded that circulating blood, a main revitalising power and a nourisher for the organism, transports also humane virtues and feelings. With the current of blood they flow into the heart, which is symbolically and metaphorically the seat of goodness and kindness. Such appears to be the interpretation of S. Barańczak, who makes the understatement explicit:

*Niechaj
Krew skrzepnie w mych żyłach i współczuciu
Nie da dopłynąć do serca; niech drgnienie
Zwykłej litości nie waży się zachwiać
Moim straszliwym zamiarem, przeszkodzić
W jego spełnieniu!*

(S. Barańczak)

A similar solution was suggested by K. Berwińska:

*Niech mi krew
Zgęstnieje, aby współczucie nie mogło
Dotrzeć serca.*

(K. Berwińska)

Both renderings reflect the translators' interpretation and contain noticeable additions to the text. One may question the validity of such practices, and argue that any guesses of the implied meaning ought to be removed from the translator's work.

VI [...], *you murth'ring ministers*, [...] (l. 49–51)

Apart from having the power to desecrate the images of goodness ([...] *take my milk for gall* [...] – l. 48), the “murth'ring ministers” are able to reconstitute the world in the image of Lady Macbeth's own will. They *wait on Nature's mischief* (l.50), which is either [...] *the violation of Nature's order; or injury engendered in human nature and done to it*²⁸. Neither of the suggested interpretations brings forth the notion of Doomsday, which may be inferred from J. Paszkowski's or Z. Siwicka's rendering of the lines:

[...], o, wy, śmierć niosące

²⁷ See the notes to the lines 46–47 in W. Shakespeare (1999) *Macbeth*, op. cit.

²⁸ Johnson and Elwin cited in the notes to l. 50 in the Arden edition of *Macbeth*, p. 30.

*potęgi, które niewidzialnie krążąc,
na szkodę świata czatujecie!*

(J. Paszkowski)

*Sługi mordu,
Które czyhacie w niewidnej postaci
Na zgubę świata!*

(Z. Siwicka)

Although the phrase *szkoda świata* is less powerful in its expression than *zguba świata*, both translations present a threatening vision of the Last Judgement. Furthermore, J. Paszkowski introduces a completely new image of “the murth’ring ministers”, which seem to behave like vultures wheeling back and forth in the sky (*krążąc*) and desiring an easy prey. Eventually, the picture we are presented with, is an apocalyptic one and at the same time more horrifying than the original text.

K. Berwińska resorts to [...] *zbrodnicze instynkty natury* [...] in place of [...] *Nature’s mischief* [...], M. Słomczyński to [...] *czyny przeciwne Naturze* [...] (which seems to be in compliance with the theme of the play – Evil as opposed to Nature²⁹) whereas S. Barańczak places himself at the other end of the spectrum and diminishes the role of the ministers to that of wicked creatures, goblins or elves, which cause minor harm to Nature or humans.

*[...] – wy, pomniejsi studzy
Zła, niewidzialne demony, Naturę
Wspomagające w tym, co w niej złośliwe!*

It appears, then, that the cited translators’ interpretation of the “ministers” ranged from the ominously apocalyptic figures (Siwicka, Paszkowski) to the wicked goblins (Barańczak). The first solution might be put down to the fact that the image of Doomsday is deeply-rooted in the Catholic tradition of the receiving culture; whereas Barańczak’s version might have been an attempt to undermine the gravity of the “ministers’” evil doings.

VII The invocation to the thick Night (l. 50–54)

The last part of the soliloquy contains the third invocation, this time to the thick Night. The lines strike the reader with a number of elaborate metaphors clustering around the concept of darkness or rather “thickness of darkness” – [...] *the night is not thick enough and needs to dress itself in the dunnest smoke,*

²⁹ See the Introduction to the Arden edition of *Macbeth*, pp. XIII–LXV.

and the smoke is not thick enough if it is not the smoke of hell³⁰. One should also remember that it is the cloaking imagery that makes the passage so significant. Both the verb *pall* and the noun *blanket* may represent items of clothing; the latter is the clothing of sleep, and the former is the clothing of death³¹. As such, they are additionally [...] *appropriate garments of night [...]*³², and they contribute to the general effect of the suggested “thickness of darkness” by bringing the association of spreading the layers of material over the doer and his deed.

The extract has thus been rendered in Polish:

*Przyjdź, mroczna nocy! w najczarniejsze dymy
Piekła się spowij! żeby mój nóż ostry
Nie mógł zobaczyć rany, którą zadał,
Aby Bóg wypatrując przez ciemności
Nie zdołał krzyknąć: „stój! stój!”*

(K. Berwińska)

*Spuść się,
Ponura nocy, oblecz się w najgęstszy
Dym piekiel, aby mój sztylet nie ujrzał
Rany przez siebie zadanej, i niebo
Przez niedość ciemny kir mroku przejrzawszy,
Nie zawołało: „Stój”.*

(J. Paszkowski)

*Nieprzenikniona Nocy, najczarniejszy
Dym piekiel niech cię spowije, tak aby
Mój nóż nie widział zadawanej rany
I aby niebo przez osłonę mroku
Nie mogło dostrzec dłoni i zawołać:
„Wstrzymaj cios!”*

(S. Barańczak)

In all cited translations, one can observe shifts from the original meaning; one of them being a simplification in the rendering of “the darkness-thickness chain of metaphors”³³. K. Berwińska presents a part of the complex image (*W najczarniejsze dymy// Piekła się spowij!*) the verb *spowij* being the only attempt at rendering the concept of the night’s layers. J. Paszkowski included the “thickness of darkness” in the superlative *najgęstszy*, and tried to render the idea

³⁰ M. Gibińska, *op. cit.*, p. 220.

³¹ C. Brooks, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ M. Gibińska, *op. cit.*

of the *pall*, which in *kir mroku* seems to apply more adequately to the intensity of the darkness, and not its thickness. None of S. Barańczak's solutions (*nieprzenikniona, najczarniejszy, spowije, osłona mroku*) conveys the original image.

As regards cloaking imagery, all three translators simplified the extended metaphor and failed to render the images of *pall* and *blanket*. Granted that, Słomczyński's translation commands respect for the preservation and unity of meaning:

*Przybądź tutaj, gęsta Nocy,
Spowita płaszczem mrocznych dymów Piekła,
By nóż nie ujrzał rany, którą zada,
I nie przebiło Niebo kołdry mroków,
By "Stój, stój" krzyknąć.*

(M. Słomczyński)

Cloaking images are rendered here by the words *płaszcz* and *kołdra*. Although we may question the adequacy of the first noun, which is not definitely the clothing of death, the second choice nicely combines the original intention. Such rendering may be even more justified in another respect. Namely, if we take a closer look at the original we can see that it contains two categories of the metaphors: one being a poetic category (*thick Night, pall, dunnest smoke of Hell*), and the other, mundane (*blanket*). Provided that Shakespeare used this word purposefully³⁴, the translators should preserve the clash the author aimed at. As we can see, Słomczyński chose the word *kołdra*, which marks the disparity between the poetic metaphors and the word *blanket*. Although the word *kołdra* is not a direct equivalent of the word *blanket* the effect of the clash between two categories of words has been achieved in Słomczyński's translation.

Conclusions

The aim of this paper was to compare selected fragments of Lady Macbeth's second soliloquy in English and Polish. I have tried to describe some of the translators' techniques in rendering the soliloquy, focusing more on the final effect and its resemblance to or distortion of the original meaning.

To sum up, the examples I have discussed point to shifts in meaning and translation losses. The inadequacies in rendering the original into another

³⁴ According to Coleridge, S. T. (1968) "Marginalia on Macbeth" in *Shakespeare: Macbeth*. J. Wain (ed.), Shakespeare might have written; *Nor Heaven peep thro' the blank height [...], height* being spelled in older manuscripts *het*.

language frequently result from the translator's inability to meet the criteria such as: faithfulness to the original, and the compliance with the source language rules, or at the other extreme, total appropriateness of the target text in the target language and culture (Piotrowska 1997:36). Faithfulness to the original does not only consist in an exact transcription of the text itself but also in an equally adequate reproduction of the mood of the original and artistic experiences that the original text is likely to evoke. On the other hand, the target text ought to achieve the freedom of an original composition. These two conditions are frequently irreconcilable; therefore, various simplifications and misinterpretations of the source text are likely to occur.

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