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Inferno and *Los Caprichos* of a Translator. Translation of Intertextual References in Andrzej Bursa's Poems

Intertextuality and translation

The concept of intertextuality, understood as the relationship between texts or other works of art, has been widely discussed by literature and translation researchers ever since Julia Kristevá (1967), inspired by Mikhail Bakhtin's works on dialogism, introduced the term. Roland Barthes (1967) links intertextuality to his own concept of the death of the author. For him, there is no singular, final meaning of a literary text, but instead each work is in itself a plurality of other texts, while the author is but a compiler thereof. What is interesting, he emphasizes that discovering and deciphering intertextual references should serve the reader's pleasure. Similarly, Edward Balcerzan (1998: 96) points out that quotations and paraphrases of literary texts are actually often what determines the basic senses of the work as well as its beauty. Gérard Genette (1982) understands intertextuality less widely, namely as the actual presence of one text within another. Therefore, intertextuality would be typical of quotations, allusions, and plagiarism¹.

For translation scholars, intertextuality is a very peculiar instance of an erudition allusion (in Olgierd Wojtasiewicz's terms – 1957: 125). Michał Głowiński claims its essence is that such references: “attract the reader's attention, direct it in

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¹ However, he also lists four other types of interrelations between texts: paratextuality (the relationship between the text and paratexts, e.g. prefaces), metatextuality (the relationship between the texts and commentaries on it), architextuality (the relationship between the text and a whole literary genre or whole genres), and hypertextuality (when one text becomes the basis for another, which is the case of parodies or pastiches).

a specific way, not towards the next segment of the text, but towards other texts” (Głowiński 2000: 24, my own translation). Therefore, the interpretation of intertextual references relies on the knowledge of other works or whole genres, traditions or conventions. Sometimes noticing and understanding an intertextual reference is essential for the comprehension of the work as such, whereas in some cases it only adds new senses, but missing it does not blight the interpretation, only impoverishes it (so-called primary versus secondary intertextuality – see Majkiewicz 2008).

Głowiński further claims the role of intertextuality is not only implementing somebody else’s words into the structure of a new work; the author decontextualizes an element (uproots it from the original text, group of texts or tradition) and recontextualizes it in a new setting, where it is supposed to function in a new way, nonetheless still showing a bind with its origins. The borrowed element needs not fulfil the same function as in the text it was taken from; quite the opposite, it may be interpreted in a completely reverse way (Głowiński 2000: 17–18). This might serve, among other things, achieving a satirical or grotesque tone.

Therefore, in order to translate a literary work abounding in intertextual references, it is necessary to track its role in the text as well as analyse its impact on the course of reading, see what the reader needs to do in order to interpret it (e.g. see the connection between the situation presented in the given work and the fate of the character alluded to), find the perspective in which the element referred to ought to be perceived (Głowiński 2000: 19; Budzińska 2008: 19). Only then can such a work be rendered in another language – ideally, the target text ought to evoke very similar associations (according to the classical thesis by Wojtasiewicz 1957), invite the reader to take similar actions (e.g. guess the connection between the elements which are alluded to) and so on.

Additionally, as Anna Majkiewicz (2008) stresses, the translator ought to act not only as a detective, but also as a literary critic, grasping the poetics of the reference, the mechanism thereof and its semantic layer, as well as the so-called “intertextuality markers”. They also need to take account of the reception process in order to remain faithful to the original. This is why finding the recognized equivalent, if it exists, appears only the tip of the iceberg, a decent departure point for the translator’s further reflection.

Balcerzan (1998: 96) indicates two basic ways of dealing with intertextuality: calque and substitution (in other words a cultural equivalent), the former being foreignizing, the latter – domesticating. The choice proves especially vital when the quotation used in the original text is well-known in the source culture, but not in the target one. What Balcerzan stresses is the popularity and the recognisability of the existing translation. There are cases when the translated fragment, even if it recalls the same literary work (e.g. alludes to the same character or recreates a similar story), does not connote in the same way as the original text does. In other words, its place in culture (its importance, its interrelations with other works etc.) is substan-

tially different. Calques allow to preserve the allusion, but weaken its impact. They can work best when the audience knows the given source culture element.

The polar opposite is substitution, which requires seeking a similar, relevant reference in the target literature. In translation into Polish, the result of this procedure is, as Balcerzan puts it, “forcible polonization of non-Polish literature” (Balcerzan 1998: 96, my own translation). Indeed, since in the translated work all the references are taken from the target culture, it does not enrich the target literature in new elements. This solution has all the drawbacks typical of domestication: it prevents the target audience from learning new things, protects their ignorance and infantilizes them, and results in producing a denaturalized, pedagogized work (see e.g. Balcerzan 1998: 133; Oittinen 2000: 74–75 or Stanaszek 2005: 47).

Grzegorz Moroz (2005: 89) provides a case study of the way Bogdan Baran tackled quotations from Shakespeare in his translation of Huxley’s *Brave New World*. The translator presented his own translation, while he could have used one of the “canonical” ones by Paszkowski, Ulrich or Koźmian, which had vital consequences for the impact of the whole novel. It became virtually impossible to recognize the references; the intertextuality and the polyphony of the source text were destroyed. Thus, Moroz insists that when possible, all quotations be replaced with their recognized translations that already exist in the polysystem of the translated literature in the target culture (to put it in Itamar Even-Zohar’s terms).

It is also worthwhile quoting Ritva Leppihalme’s (1997) findings on the ways translators may deal with allusions to other works of art. Her classification was selected for it is very detailed and quite comprehensive. First of all, allusions are divided into proper names allusions and key-phrase allusions. Proper names may be retained in the original form or replaced with their conventional equivalent in the target language (sometimes with some guidance or with explanation, e.g. a note), replaced with other names or omitted (then, the translator may convey the allusion using different means, e.g. a common name, or not).

For key phrases there are more possible solutions: use of a standard translation, literal translation (then, the connotations and the contextual meaning are lost); signaling the allusion in other ways, e.g. with typographical means or mentioning the source; explicit information in the paratext; linguistic features that signal the allusion (marked wording or syntax); replacement with a well recognized target language item; presenting the allusion in an overt way, explicitly; re-creation with a combination of techniques; or else omission of the allusion. It can be noticed that some of the solutions are more subtle than others, and some of them are not always possible to apply. However, Leppihalme’s list of techniques reminds that even if the allusion cannot be rendered in a simple way (e.g. because the literary work referred to is not sufficiently known in the target culture for the reader to recognize the given quotation), omission is not the only solution.

Andrzej Bursa and his work

Although Andrzej Bursa is considered a rebel who rather attacked the literary tradition than built on it, it cannot be denied he was perfectly apt at benefitting from the work of other writers. He would often use intertextual references in the service of a dialogue, even a dispute. Most often, the poet alludes to – and challenges – Polish Romanticism (see Sztorc 2015), but a number of international references can be found as well. It could seem that those latter are easier to render in English because the works quoted are known outside Poland (for example, the name of “referent P.”, alluding to Franz Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis*, was easy to replace with the recognized equivalent “clerk P.” – a complex network of associations constructed in the poem *Noc długich noży/Night of the Long Knives* did not make this task any more difficult). The purpose of the present paper will be to verify this common-sense assumption by examining the role of intertextual references and seeing what kind of translation problems they pose, as well as in what ways they were tackled by Kevin Christianson and Halina Ablańowicz in their bilingual collection of translations of a wide selection of Bursa’s poems (Bursa 2008).

The present analysis does not aim at presenting all intertextual references in the poems. Those which were chosen appear to be quite diverse (from the point of view of the works alluded to and the function of the reference in the given poem) and intriguing (from the perspective of translation difficulties and translation solutions applied).

Two basic ways of introducing quotations and other allusions may be distinguished in the collected material: first, an “overt” quotation provided with the author’s name (generally deprived of the source work title) – they are most often introduced as mottos above several poems. In Majkiewicz’s (2008) terms these are elementary references. Second, “covert” allusions are not explicitly introduced by the speaking person – their discovery depends to a larger degree on the reader’s skills and erudition. Because these references involve such markers as proper names or specific vocabulary, they fall into Majkiewicz’s (2008) category of explicit references.

Case studies

Amongst the works included in *Selected Poems* there are five instances of opening a poem with a quotation. Bursa employed fragments of works by Roger Vailland, Rainer Maria Rilke, Berthold Brecht, Adam Mickiewicz, and, what is peculiar, Francisco Goya.

Besides the quotation from Mickiewicz, Bursa had to make use of some already existing translation into English or put forward his own ones. Unfortunately, the sources of the translations are unknown. The quotation from Goya (in *Wizja druga/ The Second Vision*) is atypical in that it does not have its origins in any literary

work, but in a caption under one of the painter's aquatint prints from the cycle *Los Caprichos*, a kind of a satire on the 18th century Spanish society. The biggest problem with Goya's ironic inscription from the 63rd print, *Miren que graves!* (literally: 'Look how serious!'), is that it does not appear to have any specific recognized equivalent – it was only translated for the sake of exhibition catalogues, both into Polish and English. In Poland, it is most often rendered as *Niech wiedzą jacyśmy dostojni* (see Woźniak and Rissmann 1998), although it is difficult to establish whether any Polish version of this caption was released in Bursa's lifetime. The poet did not choose this equivalent and either made use of some other version he found or heard, or else translated the sentence from Spanish by himself: in his motto, the title is *Patrzcie jacy oni dostojni*. In comparison with the formerly mentioned Polish version, there is a modulation of perspective, from the first person plural into the third person plural (in this respect the original is ambiguous).

Amongst the most popular English versions there are at least two, very similar to each other: *See how serious they are* (see Auburn and Frazer 1960) or *Look how solemn they are!* (see National Gallery of Canada 2012). They are both very close to Bursa's interpretation (third person plural). Christianson and Abłamowicz's version, however, appears disconcertingly far from them both. What is worth emphasizing is that it appears highly doubtful that they chose any existing translation because their proposition is not only rather loosely bound with what Goya wrote, but also awkward sounding in English; it is not even an adequate translation of Bursa's version: *Behold the guests how honorable they look*. Such a choice does not seem justifiable, but it should be admitted that it does not make the reference indecipherable – fortunately enough, the poet decided to provide the source of the quotation, which the translators did as well. Therefore, the allusion is identifiable only thanks to the explicit meta-text data – this is one of the techniques presented by Leppihalme, but it is a pity that the translators rely on such extra information, while they could have made it possible to recognize the quotation as such, too.

An easier task was to translate the explicit reference to Rembrandt's painting *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp*, appearing in the text *** *Inaczej wyobrażałem sobie śmierć* (***) *I had imagined death differently*). The speaking person bitterly compares life and the hardships it offers to the anatomy lesson of Dr. Tulp (thus providing an onomastic marker of intertextuality). The masterpiece is popular both in the source and in the target culture; also the titles are very similar – both versions include the doctor's name. Thus, sufficed it to translate the abbreviation *dr* into the English *Dr*. This procedure might be classified as finding a recognized equivalent of the whole name.

A borderline case (between "overt" quotations provided with information on their sources and "covert" ones) appears the fragment from Alexander Pushkin cited in *Tęsknota Michaiła Lermontowa* (*The Yearning of Mikhail Lermontov*). The line, introduced by the verse: "Powtórzy słowa nie swojego wiersza" ("Then will he recite a poem not his own") is given in a transcription from Russian. In the poem re-printed in *Se-*

lected Poems, the quotation was additionally marked with italics, even if this was not the case in the original Polish edition (Bursa 1958). Bursa did not include any information on the real source of the line, which originates from a very famous poem without a title, generally referred to as (*Я вас любил*) ('I loved you').

Now, there are at least two major aspects to the translator's task. First of all, the quotation ought to be correctly identified. Second of all, it should be decided whether to use the English-style transcription of the Russian original (a foreignizing solution) or to give the English translation with or without additional explanation. There could possibly be no reasonable motivation for quoting the poem in Russian (in the Cyrillic alphabet) – Bursa himself did not do it, he slightly moved Pushkin closer to the Polish readership. What Christianson and Abłamowicz did was domesticate this fragment, which seems fully justified because the English transcription of Russian is not equally easy to understand to the English-speaking audience as the Polish transcription is to the Polish-speaking readership, thus such a pair of texts would not evoke the same set of associations in both audiences. Russian and Polish belong to the same, Slavic, language family, so the degree of similarity between them is substantially larger than that between Russian and English.

Moreover, the full text in English was provided in a footnote, but with no bibliographical data like the title or the translator's name. It should be probably assumed that the translation was prepared by Christianson and Abłamowicz themselves, which appears quite surprising because there exist well-known and quite accurate English versions of this famous work – suffice it to mention Walter W. Arndt's or Daniel Feeback's ones. Moreover, the wording in the full translation differs from the excerpt quoted in the poem, which shows the inconsistency of the authors. It thus became significantly more difficult to correctly identify, in the whole poem, the fragment chosen by Bursa – and if so, the point of providing the full text seems vague.

In another footnote the translators included information about Pushkin and his friendship with Lermontov. A question should be asked whether such exhausting extra information was indeed required in this case. Coming back to the definition of equivalence by Wojtasiewicz (1957: 20), the target text ought to evoke in its reader a very similar set of associations to the one the original text does in its audience. However, the Polish readership is not provided with any sort of clues as for where the quotation comes from. Its identification depends on the reader's education, their literary preferences and many other factors. Thus, it might be ascertained that the English text audience was given surplus information in the sense that the content of the footnotes does not only compensate for the natural differences between the source text and the target text readership. In other words, to give such vast explanation on Lermontov to the target text audience is to implicitly state that all this information is self-evident to an average Polish reader. It perhaps used to be indeed when Bursa created the work, due to the radically different schooling program. Anna Bednarczyk (2002: 38) draws attention to the fact that several decades ago the number of the Poles

that spoke Russian and knew Russian literature (she mentions, amongst other poets, Lermontov and Pushkin) was significantly bigger due to the obligatory Russian course at school and the interest in sung poetry. Therefore, the function of the footnotes is, in this particular case, to make up for the discrepancies between the knowledge of the source text reader who saw the work not long after its publication and the 21st century target text reader.

There are more footnotes in the edition whose relevance might be challenged, for instance the one about Jack London. Already the very decision to add a footnote to his name seems awkward given that London is even better known in America than in Poland. What seems striking about this additional piece of information is that it does not reveal anything about his life or art, but focuses on London's reception in Poland, which, according to the translator duo, was particularly enthusiastic in the 20th century. This is probably supposed to explain whence the reference to this very author. Strangely enough, this does not appear to be a kind of information necessary to the understanding of the text. The justifiability of this note and the relevance of its content are rather doubtful.

In the poem *Dno piekła* (*The Depths of Hell*), the speaking person depicts a vision of inferno, strangely close to the world surrounding Bursa and his contemporary. The description is built upon the tension between a set of very universal ideas about the abyss and very realistic imagery. One of the classical visions of hell which is clearly played on is that by Dante Alighieri in his *Divine Comedy* (i.e. its first part, *Inferno*). An unquestionable value of *Dno piekła* consists in that the speaking person attempts at a reconstruction of the infernal regions – its sections are listed and the people mentioned live in the specific part of the abyss – in which it resembles Dante's masterpiece.

The very juxtaposition of the great Italian work with the contemporary reality can be interpreted as a sign that this pitiful image is the modern version (or a caricature) of the classical vision. Great ideas have been reduced to very prosaic, even fleshly problems. Actually, it might be argued that the lyrical I mocks the described characters who, occupied with their mundane duties and troubles, do not seem to be able to think about classical poetry and philosophy.

This contrast was blurred in translation first of all because *dno* ('bottom') was rendered as *depths*, therefore it is not clear that the hell is divided into sections situated lower and lower, and that the very lowest point can be clearly indicated. In order to speak about a section of the abyss, Bursa chooses the word *krag* ('circle'), the same that was used in Polish translations of *Inferno*. In English, the same Italian word was rendered as *circle*, also the most immediate equivalent of *krag*. Therefore, the translators' decision to use a less obvious word *boundary* is rather difficult to understand, especially that there does not seem to exist any formal obstacle to choosing *circle*, which would certainly help retain the allusion to Dante and also make it substantially easier to grasp.

Of course, regardless of this apparent oversight, Bursa's hell in its English version still stands in strong opposition to the universal visions, suffice it to mention the Bible contrasted with such Polish 1950s realia as cooked cabbage or a musty smelling staircase. Notwithstanding, it was stripped of the very specific references, which undoubtedly contributed to the impoverishment of its symbolic layer.

The last but not least example of a literary allusion to be discussed here appears in the poem *Trzynastoletnia* (*Thirteen-Year-Old*): the courtyard, next to which the main heroine lives, is compared to donkey skin ("jak skóra ośła"). It is a reference to Charles Perrault's tale *Peau d'Âne* about princess Donkeyskin who hid her beauty, dressing in donkey hide. The common point is that also the courtyard depicted in the poem smothers the girl's good and beautiful nature. Moreover, in the original tale, the poor girl finally married a prince who discerned her charm; in Bursa's version, the little heroine is observed by a boy and, as the speaking person claims, she is about to experience the bloody hell of deliveries and miscarriages – a strikingly different ending to the story. The similarity of the girl's and the princess's fates and the contrast between their future is to be discovered by the reader because the speaking person does not elaborate on it, all they do is just mention the literary motif.

The fragment was translated as "a donkey's hide". One of the best known English versions of the story is that by Andrew Lang, who chose the title *Donkey Skin* (Lang 2009), but indeed the most common way the symbol is referred to is "donkey's hide" (other possible wordings include "donkey-hide" or the already mentioned "donkey skin", which was used as the title of Jacques Demy's film inspired by the story). Therefore, it is difficult to guess on the basis of the wording appearing in the target text whether the translators took this allusion into consideration. On the other hand, it seems that the definite article would be more justified in this place because it would make it clear that the speaking person alludes to a specific story. This could be associated with Lepihalme's technique of using "marked wording or syntax" to suggest that there is some element in the sentence that the reader might recognize (1997: 118) Working as an implicit marker of intertextuality, the article would help the readership realize there might be more to the poem than just the thirteen-year-old girl's miserable fate.

Conclusion

Translation of intertextual references to internationally known works of art cannot be neglected. What is important, new studies devoted to intertextual references in particular poets' oeuvre continue to be published – this proves that even though the subject as such has been present in translation studies for decades, it is still interesting to examine the character and the functions of such allusions, as well as consider the ways they can be – or they have been – translated in practice. One example of a comprehensive study devoted to intertextuality in a chosen Polish

poet would be that by Marta Kaźmierczak (2012) on Bolesław Leśmian's poems and their interrelationship with various texts and traditions.

The translator's task is far more complicated than just to identify the reference and find the recognized equivalent. The whole context and network of associations is vital. For instance, it is crucial whether the work alluded to is more or less equally popular in both cultures – if not, additional information may be required (the case of *Tęsknota Michaiła Lermontowa*). An interesting issue is the time that has passed since the publication of the literary work – how much information should be included in the paratext? Should it make up for the gap between the contemporary target text audience and the original or the contemporary readership? Also, there are additional choices to make when the original work is written in a different alphabet (Christianson and Abłamowicz decided to provide their own translation, but an alternative option would consist in transcribing the quotation to give the idea of how it sounds and add the English translation in a note). The allusions to Dante and Perrault seem to be less obvious; what appears vital is probably to notice the importance of the reference. This would involve considering in what way they can possibly enrich the interpretation of the given work (in Bursa's poems, they often add contrast). Omitting the allusion (like in *Dno piekła*) might suggest that the translators underestimated the power of the reference.

In the case of Bursa's oeuvre, translators certainly did well in several cases, for instance when they replaced the fragment of Rembrandt's painting title with its recognized equivalent or when they used the already existing phrase *donkey's hide* to render the allusion to Perrault. Nonetheless, there were a number of decisions that can hamper the understanding of particular fragments, among them: providing a new translation instead of an already existing (and recognizable) one, using non-standard equivalents of key words or providing too detailed and irrelevant footnotes which do not complement the content of the poetic work and distract the reader. Even such details as the choice of article (definite or indefinite) may influence the probability of correct identification of the intertextual reference.

In the already quoted study by Moroz, the failure to use already existing translations of Shakespearean works made the quotations virtually unrecognizable, which impoverished the impact of the whole novel (especially since Shakespeare's texts are explicitly mentioned in the novel and the knowledge of his poetry is one of the things that distinguishes the "savage" from the "civilized"). Christianson and Abłamowicz do the same thing – translate the famous poem by Lermontov on their own instead of using an already existing English version – but they make sure the quotation is recognized by adding a footnote with extra information. The intertextual reference remained in the text, but its introduction became less subtle.

In the case of Bursa's poems, any instances of blurring the recognizability of the allusions not only make the sense more shallow. The literary texts of the Polish poet who is little known abroad, when partly deprived of its connection with uni-

versally recognized works of art and concepts, might appear less worth discovering. Furthermore, let us bear in mind that Bursa is generally perceived as a rather crude poet, speaking straightforwardly, using very mundane imagery². Revealing his sensitivity to classical works of art can possibly help reveal show another face of the poet who, living in Communist Poland, yearns for beauty and other values associated with Dante's or Rembrandt's masterpieces. From this point of view, the additional information in paratexts could be evaluated positively because it emphasizes that the Polish poet is well rooted in the European tradition.

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² What is meaningful is that two first English collections of Polish poetry (the collection by Celina Wieniewska 1967 and the issue of *Modern Poetry in Translation* entitled Poland, 1975) included such poems by Bursa as *Pantofelek*, *Dyskurs z poetą* or *Sylogizm prostacki*, famous for their physiological motifs and vulgar vocabulary.

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***Inferno* and *Los Caprichos* of a Translator Translation of Intertextual References in Andrzej Bursa's Poems**

Summary

In his poetic output, Andrzej Bursa alluded to a variety of Polish and foreign artistic works: mostly poetry and prose, but not only (e.g. Goya's *Los Caprichos* and Dante's *Divine Comedy*). The paper discusses the intertextual allusions in Bursa's poems and analyzes the translation techniques applied Kevin Christianson and Halina Abłamowicz (*Utwory zebrane. Selected Poems*, 2008). In the first part, a brief introduction of the issue of intertextuality and its translation is presented.

The analysis concerns the function of those allusions and it leads to seeing what was preserved and what was lost in translation, and in what way it influences the final form of the English versions. As in a number of cases the translators did not use the already existing (and published) English translations of the quoted works, a question are asked whether the references remained recognizable.

Keywords: Andrzej Bursa; intertextuality; literary translation; recognized equivalent.

***Piekło i Kaprysy* tłumacza. Przekład aluzji intertekstualnych w wierszach Andrzeja Bursy**

Streszczenie

W swej twórczości poetyckiej Andrzej Bursa przywoływał rozmaite utwory: polskie i obce, literackie i nie tylko (m.in. *Kaprysy* Goi czy *Boską komedię* Dantego). Celem artykułu jest prześledzenie aluzji intertekstualnych w jego twórczości i analiza technik tłumaczeniowych zastosowanych przy ich przekładzie na język angielski przez Kevina Christiansona i Halinę Abłamowicz (*Utwory zebrane. Selected Poems*, 2008). Pierwszą część stanowi krótkie wprowadzenie w problematykę związaną z przekładem nawiązań intertekstualnych. W analizie konkretnych przykładów z tekstów poetyckich i ich tłumaczeń pod uwagę wzięta została funkcja aluzji w utworach oraz to, co w zostało zachowane, a co zginęło, i w jaki sposób wpływa to na ostateczny kształt przekładu. Ponieważ w wielu przypadkach tłumacze nie skorzystali z istniejących już przekładów przywoływanych dzieł, zadane zostało również pytanie o to, czy nawiązania pozostają rozpoznawalne.

Słowa kluczowe: Andrzej Bursa; intertekstualność; przekład literacki; uznany ekwiwalent.