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The Comedy of Madness. On a Polish translation of *The Comedy of Errors*

The shortest and one of the earliest comedies¹ of William Shakespeare *The Comedy of Errors* is also one of the less celebrated Shakespearian works.² It was translated into Polish by both respected writers (Jan Kasprowicz, Maciej Słomczyński, Stanisław Barańczak), and nearly forgotten ones, like Apollo Nałęcz Korzeniowski. The respected Polish scholars, Stanisław Tarnowski (1898) and Władysław Tarnawski (1914), did not even reference the translation in their classic works on Polish translations of Shakespeare. Later articles do cite this translation (Helsztyński 91), but there is still very little known about it. Thanks to Roman Taborski's book *Korzeniowski, the last Romantic dramatist* [Korzeniowski, ostatni dramaturg romantyczny] we are taught more about Korzeniowski's translations of foreign literature (73-83). Taborski concentrates on the translations of French dramatists (Victor Hugo, Alfred de Vigny), but devotes only three pages to Korzeniowski's translations of *The Comedy of Errors* and Charles Dickens' *Hard Times*. This paper aims to add to Taborski's findings using a comparative analysis of the translations done by Korzeniowski and his contemporaries. This method will allow us to detect, describe and analyze the personal characteristics of the writer's style, as well as to identify trends of the era, and the differences and similarities between translations. Korzeniowski almost certainly translated two other Shakespearian comedies: *Much Ado About Nothing* (according to the findings of Polish literary scholars like Zdzisław Najder, the manuscript of this translation was lost³) and *Two Gentlemen of Verona* (Joseph Conrad, the son of A. Korzeniowski, mentions this translation in his journal⁴). Korzeniowski's only surviving translation of Shakespeare is *Komedia obłądów*.

¹ Harold Bloom, a well-known scholar, expressed his doubts about this text being among the very first Shakespearian comedies. He believes it shows such mastery that it outshines some later dramas. See Bloom 21.

² *The Comedy of Errors* was written in the late 80s or at the beginning of the 90s in the sixteenth century. It was staged for the first time in 1594, and published in 1623. *The Arden Shakespeare Complete Works* edited by Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson, David Scott Kastan, London 2001, pp. 191-211 is the source of all of the quotations found in this article. All underlined passages represent my own emphasis.

³ See Najder 138, esp. a footnote to a letter from Korzeniowski to K. Kaszewski, dated 10/22.11.1866.

⁴ See Conrad 95-96.

Komedia obłądów was published in instalments in 1866 by a very popular Polish weekly magazine “Kłosy” (numbers 36-41).⁵ Korzeniowski mentions this publication in his letter to his friend Kazimierz Kaszewski: “I have sent three translations of V. Hugo’s dramas, and I am going to send *The Comedy of Errors* and Dickens’ *Hard Times*. Could you please have a look at *The Comedy of Errors* – evaluate it, and if it is poor, take the text back and do not let them publish it” (1996: 116).⁶ Korzeniowski must have relied on his opinion: a few months later (in a letter dated 6/18.09.1865) he asked Kaszewski once again to read the translation critically. The most interesting fragment of this letter is the section where Korzeniowski offers insight into his personal approach to the poetics of literary translation:

I tried to preserve not only the main idea of the text, but also its literalness and the shape of verse. When Shakespeare writes a serious or solemn dialogue, he uses blank verse, and saves rhymes only for the great passages of a play. I translated these rhymes using 13 syllabic verse. Humorous, sharp Shakespearian discourse is usually rendered in prose – so happens in my translation: 13 syllabic rhymed prose. Love scenes in Shakespeare contain mixed rhymes – so do love scenes in my translation (I used 8 and 11 syllabic verses).⁷ (Najder 119)

As we see, Korzeniowski realized how pivotal the verse issue was for a translator of drama. He was not alone in this. Many of his contemporaries also acknowledged an awareness of the kinds and forms of verse. What they focused on the most was the responsibility of translating a prominent writer. The translators felt obliged to preserve both the form and sense of every single word of Shakespeare. Korzeniowski held Shakespeare in the highest regard, something that can be seen in his critique on dramatic qualities in Shakespeare.⁸ Korzeniowski uses terms like: “genius”, “masterpiece”, “bard”, “poetic reverence which is a mystical knot linking a poet with the external world”. He calls Shakespeare “a lighthouse shining through the air of nocturnal space” (1868: 8). His critique is broken into three parts, the last of which discusses Shakespearian comedies and the issue of translating them into a foreign language. Korzeniowski recognizes Shakespeare’s “dramatic quality” as following three different paths:

⁵ All quotations of Korzeniowski’s translation were taken from this source. I have marked them in the main body of this paper, giving the number of the issue and the page. All quotations of Korzeniowski were translated by the author of this paper.

⁶ The letter is dated 29.05/10.06.1865.

⁷ The letter is dated 6/18.09.1865.

⁸ See Apollo Nałęcz Korzeniowski, *Studia nad dramatycznością w utworach Szekspira* (“Biblioteka Warszawska” 1868), v. 2, pp. 1-29, 219-232.

1. Tragedies (“individual human reality”),
2. Historical dramas (“the outline of human reality”),
3. Comedies (“man in his delusions”). (1868: 11)

What I would like to do is to highlight Korzeniowski’s idea of presenting people’s delusions, “untruths” as central to the comedies. He also talks about translating foreign literature calling a translator “the one who inspires the souls of the readers”, “prepares people to receive and respect literary works” (1868: 230-232). Korzeniowski said that it was necessary for Poland to assimilate great foreign literature; however, that only the “great or canonized” writers should be translated into Polish literature, since the readers will not benefit from lesser works. Therefore, translations of Shakespeare are an essential find for Polish literature. What is more, translations of mediocre literature could harm readers by distorting/twisting their good taste and the notion of beauty and truth in a work of art.

Korzeniowski also pays attention to the quality of translations: “even in the best translation something has to be missing”, “not to lose too much of the spirit of the work, the content and form of the original”. When he was translating Victor Hugo into Polish, Korzeniowski described the process using the metaphor of the translator as a tailor. The tailor was given a cloth and a pattern to make a copy of a dress. He did make a new dress which looked so similar that it even had two flaws the original version had. Korzeniowski sees himself as the tailor who creates an exact “copy”. What may be seen as flawed in the original, are necessarily taken as part of the perfection of the original design by the copier.¹⁰

To sum up: Korzeniowski felt that only popular and respected writers deserve to be translated, and that this would serve two purposes: it would add to the body of literature within the translator’s language, and would serve as a cultural guide of good taste. Even though a translated text should preserve the spirit and the form of the original work, the translator needs to realize that despite even the best efforts something will unavoidably be lost during the process of translation. If a text contains poor scenes or verses, they should be preserved, in order to remain as faithful to the text as possible.

Reflections like that were popular among the nineteenth century writers. Józef Ignacy Kraszewski ambiguously claimed that translations should be faithful, but not literal; “the translators must translate the whole Shakespeare, but not all” (94). Stanisław Egbert Koźmian, a poet, diplomat, but more importantly

⁹ Some other contemporary writers also shared Korzeniowski’s opinion. One of them was Ludwik Osiński. See L. Osiński, *O tłumaczeniach z języków obcych*, w: *Pisarze polscy o sztuce przekładu 1440-1974. Antologia*, selected and edited by Edward Balcerzan (Poznań 1977), p. 114.

¹⁰ Korzeniowski had in mind Victor Hugo, but it seems that his statements can be also related to other nineteenth century writers. See Stefan Buszczyński, *Mało znany poeta [Apollo Korzeniowski], stanowisko jego przed ostatnim powstaniem, wygnanie i śmierć. Ustęp z dziejów społecznych południowej Polski* (Kraków 1870), p. 43.

one of the most popular nineteenth century Polish Shakespeare's translators, explained in his preface to Shakespeare's *Dzieła dramatyczne* (1866), that he avoided any latitude in the name of faithfulness (vii-ix).¹¹

What then was Korzeniowski's method of translating Shakespeare? Let us have a close look at his translation of *The Comedy of Errors* as well as some other Polish translations of this comedy written in the same time by Józef Komierowski¹² and Leon Ulrich.¹³ *The Comedy of Errors* and *Komedia obłądów* are both comedies of action and energy: full of vitality, mobility and fast dialogues. The humour of this slapstick comedy results from a motif of mistaken identities: two sets of twins who had been unintentionally switched. This causes many misunderstandings and comical situations. Almost each page of the text presents the "errors", when a character either takes the other one as someone else, or accuses the others of lying. Puns and wordplays are also frequent. As a result, some characters believe that either the world is full of magic, mysterious situations, or that someone or the world must have gone mad. This belief is dominant in Korzeniowski's translation.

As far as form/structure is concerned, Korzeniowski's text preserves the same amount and length of verses as Shakespeare's. What is different is versification: all the Polish text contains rhymes, whereas Shakespeare mixes prose and verse structure. Evidently Korzeniowski's call for *literalness and the shape of verse* could not be easily performed. At this point I would like to make a digression on this method of translating drama. Andrzej Edward Koźmian, a Polish poet, translated *Macbeth* (1857) in similar way. He used thirteen-syllable verse and caesura in the whole text, which created a very strong rhythmical tone.¹⁴ Koźmian was a follower of Neoclassicism, seeking formal and restrained elements in a literary work. Consequently, he tried to preserve formal coherence and elements of rhetoric.

The rhymes in the text do vary, depending on the tone of the scenes. In the beginning, Korzeniowski uses paired rhymes:

Kupcze Syrakuzański! Przegrana twa sprawa. –
Stronność mię nie uwodzi; nie naginam prawa.

¹¹ For further information on Koźmian's translations of Shakespeare. For further information on Koźmian's translations of Shakespeare, see A. Budrewicz-Beratan, *Stanisław Egbert Koźmian – tłumacz Szekspira* (Kraków 2009).

¹² [Józef Komierowski], *Dramata Willjama Shakespeare'a*, v. II, Warszawa 1858. Further I mark the quotations from this translation as JK.

¹³ W. Szekspir, *Komedia omyłek*, translated by Leon Ulrich, in: W. Szekspir, *Dzieła dramatyczne. Tom I. Komedie*, edited by S. Helsztyński, R. Jabłkowska, A. Staniewska, (Warszawa 1964), v. 1-6. Further I mark the quotations from this translation as LU.

¹⁴ See A. Budrewicz, "Makbet Williama Szekspira w tłumaczeniu Andrzeja i Stanisława Koźmianów – analiza porównawcza," in *Z problemów przekładu i stosunków międzyjęzykowych. III*, eds. M. Piotrowska and T. Szczerbowski (Kraków 2006), pp. 6-17.

Rozterka i nieprzyjaźń są gwałtu skutkami,
Gwałtu twojego księcia, nad moimi ziomkami. (K 36: 426)

A dialogue of Antipholus and Dromio (act 2) in the translation contains elements of rhymed prose:

Dromio Syrakuzański: *A! Pan to zwiesz olejem? – olej jest rzecz płynna; ja czułem – suche razy – choć ciekawość – gminna; jednak spytam: - czemu to pan mię bił przed chwilką?*
(K 37: 438)

The language of the female characters – Adriana and Luciana – is poetic and lexically diversified. Their serious tone is in contrast to the means of expression of other characters. Let us analyze an example (2, 2): Adriana takes Antipholus of Syracuse as her husband and complains that he has been neglecting her. She also suspects he has been cheating on her and calls:

<p><i>Ay, ay, Antipholus, look strange and frown:</i></p> <p><i>Some other mistress hath thy sweet aspects;</i></p> <p><i>I am not Adriana, nor thy wife.</i></p> <p><i>The time was once when thou unurg'd wouldst vow</i></p> <p><i>That never words were music to thine ear,</i></p> <p><i>That never object pleasing in thine eye,</i></p> <p><i>That never touch well welcome to thy hand,</i> <i>That never meat sweet-savour'd in thy taste,</i></p> <p><i>Unless I spake, or look'd, or touch'd, or carved to thee. (197)</i></p>	<p><i>Antyfolusie – mężu! Czoło twe zachmurzone!</i></p> <p><i>Inna pewno posiada twą czułość w tej dobie;</i></p> <p><i>Jam ci nie Adryana? Ja – nie żona tobie?! –</i></p> <p><i>A niegdyś – przysięgałeś, niewzruszony przecie,-</i></p> <p><i>Że ci harmonią nie jest żaden głos na świecie;</i></p> <p><i>Że ci nic cudownego nie rozjaśnia wzroku;</i></p> <p><i>Że ci żadne dotknięcie nie sprawia uroku;</i></p> <p><i>Że ci każdy posiłek smak wszelaki traci:</i></p> <p><i>Gdy nie słyszysz mej mowy, nie widzisz postaci. (K 37: 439)</i></p>
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Korzeniowski's translation has the same amount of syllables (9), while other Polish translations are much longer. Also, Korzeniowski was the only one who preserved anaphora (in Shakespeare there are four sentences beginning with the pronoun *that*, in Korzeniowski – three sentences begin with the Polish equivalent: *że*). As we see, there are no rhymes in the original text, but Korzeniowski unwaveringly uses rhymes AABB.

The distinctive feature of the analysed translation is the title: *Komedia obłądów* is a loose translation of *The Comedy of Errors* and no other Polish translation makes use of the word *obłąd* (madness, lunacy). A part of that word, *obłądów*, can also be used individually, as a declined form of a noun *obłąd* (meaning error or mistake). Korzeniowski did not explain the reasons for this decision. Nevertheless, as we have mentioned, he did elaborate on Shakespearean comedies as texts showing delusional and ridiculous men (1868: 10-11). Korzeniowski believes that when Shakespeare was writing comedies, he “would run away from the reality of man's fortune to the world of delusions (...) the tired bard tried to seclude himself from the truth of man's fate, offered in tragedies and historical dramas” (1868: 220, 227). Comedy had to be the antithesis of tragedy; therefore it must show “delusional truth, objects which daringly break free from reality (...) and then add up to create funny impossibilities and as a result a performance is made; the performance makes us laugh, entertains us but does not involve reasonable thinking or judgment (1868: 224). Thus, Korzeniowski's attitude turns comedy into farce, as Shakespeare deliberately mixed illogical and impossible elements aimed at making readers laugh. Korzeniowski's translation and a critique on Shakespeare, like no other Polish translation of *The Comedy of Errors*, contains numerous words like *delusion* and *madness*. Having these statements in mind, we are now able to understand and appreciate the title of the Polish translation. Korzeniowski emphasized the element of delusion in man's life rather than the possible mistakes and errors he may make in his life.

The following three examples taken from the translation offer evidence for this statement. The first one (2, 1) shows Luciana commenting on her sister's behavior: *Self-harming jealousy! fie! beat it hence*. Korzeniowski translates the word *jealousy* into *szaleństwo* (madness) (AK, K35: 429). Other translators preserved the same tone: *podejrzliwość* (suspicion; JK 531) and *szalona zazdrość* (crazy jealousy; LU 688). The second comes when Antipholus who sees Dromio running shouts (3, 2): *Why, how now, Dromio! where runn'st thou so fast?* The translation reads: *Gdzie lecisz, jak szalony? (...) Opętany? (Where are you rushing like crazy? (...) In a frenzy?; AK K38, 453)*. And the third example: when many mistakes have been made by the play's characters already, one of the twins, Dromio of Syracuse, states:

*This is the fairy land,
We talk with goblins, elves and sprites. (198)*

The Korzeniowski's Dromio says:

*A! to kraj – opętany! A! to istne czary,
Widma, duchy i elfy i utudne mary! (AK 439)*

The fairy-tale elements come to play in this part of Korzeniowski's translation. The expressions *opętanie*, *opętany* have certain associations for Polish readers. We think of 1) possession, either by the devil or sin; 2) a fanatic. These words are frequent in Korzeniowski's translation. The ellipsis *A! to istne czary* [Ah! This is pure magic] puts emphasis on the element of witchcraft; the Polish expression *rzucić czar na kogoś* [to cast a spell on somebody] is still used. Similarly, in Antipholus' monologue (4, 6) we read:

*Sure these are but imaginary wiles,
And Lapland sorcerers inhabit here.*

*Lub ja opętany,
Lub czarnoksiężnikami ten gród jest zalany. (AK, K39: 465)*

In the Elizabethan era, Lapland was believed to be the homeland of sorcerers. Korzeniowski leaves out this image, possibly assuming that Poles would not recognize it. Unquestionably, a present-day Polish reader thinks of Lapland as the home country of Santa Claus. Employing the expression *gród* Korzeniowski takes us back to old Polish culture and history: *gród* used to describe a fortified town or a castle. Currently this word is hardly used. The metaphor of the sorcerers sweeping through a town evokes associations of an enslaved place, captured by unknown powers. Consequently, the calm fairy-tale tone changes into an anxious expectation of some impending doom which climaxes at the end of this scene, when Antipholus shouts: *And here we wander in illusions*. Korzeniowski writes: *Kroczy my tutaj, w czarów i obłądów nocy* (K39: 466) emphasizing a mysterious and magical tone. In the place of *illusions* the Polish translation shows *a night full of magic and*

madness intensifying a sense of fear. It is later compounded by expressions that were quite fashionable in Romanticism: *devil, Satan, succubus, ghost, ghost of darkness (diabeł, szatan, szatanica, duch, duch ciemności)*. Korzeniowski uses metaphors of heaven and hell more than other translations. As the story's climax approaches, Korzeniowski's use of the language of madness increases. The "errors" are explained, the mysteries are resolved, and everything becomes clear at last.

Korzeniowski's translation is distinctive also because of the polonized words such as proper names and names of professions. The characters' names are written phonologically (Andżelo, Baltazar) or entirely changed into popular or diminutive Polish equivalents (Marysia, Hesja, Julka, Róża). Also, the exclamation *hey! (Hej!)* is given frequently when the names are enumerated: the verse "*Maud, Bridget, Marian, Cicely, Gillian, Jen!*" is "*Brygito! Hej! Marysiu! Cesi! Julko! Różo!*" in the translation. This has the effect of creating a strong repeatable rhythm. Also, typical Polish names introduce a Polish cultural context, easily recognized by the readers. Male proper names were not changed in the same way, which may be representative of the gender inequality of the time. Male characters representing higher social stature may not have had their names polonized out of a patriarchal respect for social hierarchies.

Conclusion

Events happen very quickly in *The Comedy of Errors*. Misunderstandings, mistakes, quick dialogues, rushing and general chaos cause an unpleasant feeling of irrational madness or depersonalization. The word *obłąd* does emerge frequently in the whole translation, which is why it should not be rejected or corrected.¹⁵ It is a story about a mistake which triggered so many serious "errors" that the characters start to perceive the world as an unfounded madness. The characters wonder at themselves, at others, and at the world which is neither familiar nor well-ordered anymore. Identities are mistaken. Chaos replaces order.

Korzeniowski's characters interpret these events as the title *obłąd*. His translation is probably not the best Polish translation of *The Comedy of Errors*, as some of its verses are not clear or misread the original. However, Korzeniowski interpreted Shakespeare's work in an original and complex way, adding to it a new path of interpretation. *Komedia obłądów* is not just a crowd-pleaser, because Polish readers also receive extensive imagery of men's distracted states. The recurrent key-word *obłąd* invokes visions of a troubled and

¹⁵ Sometimes the title is changed by editors into *The Comedy of Errors (Komedia pomyłek)*, as in *Szekspir. Leksykon*, eds. M. Gibińska, M. Kapera, J. Fabiszak (Kraków 2003), p. 259.

distorted world. Although the broken families of the play are reunited in the end, a disturbing feeling of a world “out of joint” still remains.

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