

GRADATIONING GOMBROWICZ.
REMARKS ON SECOND-HAND TRANSLATIONS

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Witold Gombrowicz's language along with his literary and dramatic style is a distinct phenomenon.¹ Among the major difficulties in translating this author's last drama, *Operetta* (1966) is its unique purely 'gombrowiczean' character. *Operetta* is a parodic and grotesque stylization of the eponymous music-theatrical genre. It is an intertextual, self-referential and chaotic dialogue, not only with literary and dramatic conventions, but also with cultural and social ones. Gombrowicz brings to the grotesque distortion all signs of form domination both in life and art. The ironic, grotesque and absurd language, bizarre onomatopoeias (some melodious and operetta in style, other pure nonsense and imitating mumbling-like noises), stage directions seemingly originated from the theatre of the absurd and parodical sung lines mean that the Polish reader or spectator of *Operetta* has an opportunity to experience the singular surreal and operetta-like (meta)theatre of Gombrowicz.² Usually, whilst researchers point out the immersion of Gombrowicz's works in the Polish historical and cultural context as translators' main causes of concern,³ it should be stressed that in *Operetta* the "Polishness" is not as conspicuous as in other works by Gombrowicz. In *Operetta* the prime source

¹ For a general overview of Gombrowicz's dramatic works, cf.: J. Błoński, *Dlaczego Gombrowicz pisał sztuki teatralne?*, in Id., *Forma, śmiech i rzeczy ostateczne. Studia o Gombrowiczu*, Kraków, Universitas, 2003, pp. 251-259; J. Franczak, *Trzy i pół dramatu*, in W. Gombrowicz, *Dramaty. Iwona księżniczka Burgunda; Ślub; Operetka; Historia*, Kraków, Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1997, pp. 460-471; J. Jarzębski, *Gombrowicz teatralny*, in Id., *Natura i teatr. 16 tekstów o Gombrowiczu*, Kraków, Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2007, pp. 88-100.

² Regarding the metatheatricity of Gombrowicz's dramatic works (*Princess Ivona, The marriage, Operetta*), see: B. Schultze, J. Conrad, *Metateatr Witolda Gombrowicza*, in M. Zabuza (Ed.), *Patagończyk w Berlinie. Witold Gombrowicz w oczach krytyki niemieckiej*, Kraków, Universitas, 2004, pp. 421-451.

³ Cf. E. Skibińska, *Wstęp*, in Ead. (Ed.), *Gombrowicz i tłumacze*, Łask, Leksem, 2004, pp. 7-12.

of absurdity, metatheatricality and deconstruction of all forms and masks, that is stylistic, thematic and structural dominants of the work, is Gombrowicz's "mug".⁴ In the translations this character is subjected to inevitable changes; interestingly these include not only reductions and substitutions, but sometimes also considerable amplifications.

The large number of translations⁵ and world performances⁶ of *Operetta* definitely testify to the great international interest in the works of Gombrowicz.⁷ As for the key aspects of *Operetta*'s translations, not all translations

⁴ "Mug" (Pol. "gęba") is a term originating from Witold Gombrowicz's 1937 novel entitled *Ferdydurke*. "Gęba" along with "pupa" (Eng. "buttocks") and "łydka" (Eng. calf) "being containers of a multitude of connotations both within and outside the novel, [...] function in the language as typical Gombrowiczian elements" (M. Koltun, *Signed: Gombrowicz. "Pupa", the Western Canon, and the English Translation of Ferdydurke*, "Między Oryginałem a Przekładem", 24 (2018): 4, p. 97). In Gombrowicz's language the "mug" symbolises the pressure of form or its absence and "to give a mug" means to define, to classify, to organize (v. K. Pawlikowska, *Gombrowicz and Woolf: The Face as Culture*, in Ead., *Anti-Portraits: Poetics of the Face in Modern English, Polish and Russian Literature (1835-1965)*, Leiden, Brill Rodopi, 2015, pp.136-197). In the present article the term "mug" refers to Gombrowicz's original artistic style, form and voice.

⁵ *Operetta*'s translations, besides the ones that are discussed in the present article: Swedish (1968), German (1970, 1983, 1998, 2006), Spanish (from French, 1973; from Polish, 2018), Dutch (partly from German and partly French, 1974), Hungarian (1984, 1998), Romanian (1988), Bulgarian (1997), Croatian (2005). *Operetta*'s translations for theatre: Finnish (1971), Danish (1973), Greek (1972/1973), Serbian (from French, 1977), Swedish (from French, 1971), Slovenian (1973), Ukrainian (1990), Czech (1980). Cf.: R. Gombrowicz, *Wybór przekładów utworów Witolda Gombrowicza*, in J. Jarzębski (Ed.), *Witold Gombrowicz nasz współczesny*, Kraków, Universitas, 2010, pp. 805-835; A. Kuharski (n.d.), Bibliography of *Operetta*'s translations for theatre from <https://witoldgombrowicz.eu/OPERETTE-traductions.html> (last accessed on 30 August 2018).

⁶ Cf. A. Kuharski (n.d.), *Bibliography of Operetta's stage adaptations* from <https://witoldgombrowicz.eu/OPERETTE-mises-en-scene.html> (last accessed on 30 August 2018).

⁷ Cf. selected critical texts on Witold Gombrowicz's reception outside of Poland and on translations of his works into English and Italian: E. Skibińska (Ed.), *Gombrowicz i tłumacze*, cit.; M. Miecznicka, *Sprawa Gombrowicza (za granicą)*, "Pamiętnik Literacki", 95/4 (2004), pp. 111-135; M. Cataluccio, *Gombrowicz in Italia*, in P. Marchesani (Ed.), *La letteratura polacca in Italia. Itinerari di una presenza. Studi in memoria di Marina Bersano Begey*, Roma, La Fenice Edizioni, 1994, pp. 87-103; A.M. Raffo, *Qualche considerazione sulla presenza della letteratura drammatica polacca in Italia nei tempi recenti*, in *La letteratura polacca in Italia. Itinerari di una presenza. Studi in memoria di Marina Bersano Begey*, cit., pp. 73-86; A. Ceccherelli, *C'è "Ferdydurke" e "Ferdydurke". Peripezie autotraduttive gombrowicziane*, in *La lingua spaesata. Multilinguismo oggi*, Bologna, Bononia University Press, 2014, pp. 77-85; P. Marchesani, *D'una edizione critica di Gombrowicz (e d'altro)*, "Europa Orientalis", 11

were based on the Polish original. For instance, the Italian translation was based on the French text, whilst the English translation was based partly on Polish and partly on French text. In some cases the translation process was controlled by the author himself.⁸ The article discusses the Italian and English translations of the drama and their relationship with the French translation⁹ in terms of *Operetta*'s principle dominants, such as the theatre of the absurd attributes, stylization for the operetta form and its parody of the aristocracy.

(1992): 2, pp. 233-294; B. Schultze, E. Tabakowska, *The Polish discourse marker TO in Gombrowicz's "Ślub" ("The marriage") and in its English, German, French and Czech translations: cognitive linguistics and poetics of the theatre text*, Mainz 1992.

⁸ The knowledge on the author's involvement in the French translation is provided by the letters of Gombrowicz and his translators, as well as by the biographical literature, cf.: W. Gombrowicz, *Testament. Rozmowy z Dominique de Roux*, Kraków, Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1996; Id., *Dziennik 1961-69*, Kraków, Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1997; Id., *Kronos*, Kraków, Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2013; J. Jarzębski (Ed.), *Gombrowicz – walka o sławę: korespondencja*, Part 2: *Witold Gombrowicz, Konstanty A. Jeleński, François Bondy, Dominique de Roux*, Kraków, Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1998. NB: discussing the complexities of either indirect or theatrical translation, noteworthy is Andrea Ceccherelli's case study on Dacia Maraini's translation into Italian of *Matka* by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz. Ceccherelli examines three key aspects of Maraini's translation, i.e. indirectness, authoriality and theatrical specificity, revealing that, contrary to what was believed so far, Maraini did not base her translation on the English text, but on the French adaptation of the play (v. A. Ceccherelli, *Quando Zamoycki diventò Bourdelle. Witkiewicz "tradotto" da Dacia Maraini*, in "Europa Orientalis", 21 (2010), pp. 189-208).

⁹ In this article the following *Operetta*'s (orig. *Operetka*, first edition: 1966) translations are examined: Italian – translated from French by Jole and Gian Renzo Morteo (*Operetta*, first edition: 1968); French – translated from Polish by Aleksander Konstanty Jeleński and Geneviève Serreau (*Opérette*, first edition: 1969); English – translated from Polish (and – as revealed in the present article – from French) by Louis Iribarne (*Operetta*, first edition: 1971). NB: even though the publication date of the Italian translation (1968) is prior to the date of the French edition's release (1969), the information stated by Gombrowicz in his biographical writings demonstrates that the Italian translators had access to the French translation before it was printed by Parisian publishing house Denoël. The first Polish edition of *Operetta* was released in November 1966 (v. W. Gombrowicz, *Kronos*, cit., p. 357). In still the same year, in December, Jeleński had already translated into French the first act of the play (and immediately sent it to be read by Gombrowicz). When in August 1968 Gombrowicz received the proposal to publish *Operetta* in Italian (v. Id., *Kronos*, cit., p. 379), the French text was already finished, as in *Kronos* we read that in June 1967 the corrections of the French *Operetta* were taking place (v. Id., *Kronos*, cit., p. 367) and that in the beginning of 1968, in February, Gombrowicz signed the contract with the French publishing house (v. Id., *Kronos*, cit., p. 377).

Theatre of the absurd and grotesque

Differences, especially quantitative, between the texts considered, can be very clearly observed within stage directions. French translators, Konstanty Jeleński and Geneviève Serreau, introduced a number of significant amplifications of the Polish original to the stage directions. These were not only then adopted in the Italian translation by Jole and Gian Renzo Morteo, but some of them also appear in the English translation. These include simple indications of whether the characters shall sing or dance (present only in French and Italian translations), as well as more extensive explanations of the characters' stage expressions. All of these additions considerably intensify the absurd and grotesque aura and they all originate from the French translation:

Pol.	Fr.	It.	Eng.
–	<i>Bis. Il chante</i> ¹⁰	<i>Bis. Canta</i> ¹⁴	–
–	<i>Chanté</i> ¹¹	<i>Canta</i> ¹⁵	–
–	<i>Scène chantée</i> ¹²	<i>Scena cantata</i> ¹⁶	–
–	<i>Silence. Fin de la scène chantée</i> ¹³	<i>Silenzio. Fine della scena cantata</i> ¹⁷	–
–	<i>Il attrape le Chapeur et le met en laisse</i> ¹⁸	<i>Acchiappa il mariuolo e gli mette il guinzaglio</i> ¹⁹	–
–	<i>Parlé tout en simulant le galop</i> ²⁰	<i>Parla facendo finta di cavalcare</i> ²¹	–

¹⁰ W. Gombrowicz, *Opérette*, trans. K.A. Jeleński, G. Serreau, Paris, Editions Denoël, 1969, p. 23.

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 81 [Fr.].

¹² Ibidem, p. 100 [Fr.].

¹³ Ibidem, p. 102 [Fr.].

¹⁴ W. Gombrowicz, *Operetta*, trans. J. & G.R. Morteo, Torino, Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1980, p. 19 [It.].

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 54 [It.].

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 64 [It.].

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 66 [It.].

¹⁸ Id., *Opérette*, cit., p. 45 [Fr.].

¹⁹ Id., *Operetta*, cit., p. 50 [It.].

²⁰ Id., *Opérette*, cit., p. 62 [Fr.].

<i>Les Chapeurs, au cours de cet acte, se tiennent comme des chiens, qui reniflent, tirent sur leur laisse, montrent les dents, tout excités par le bal²²</i>	<i>I mariuoli, durante quest'atto, si comportano come cani, annusano, tirano il guinzaglio, mostrano i denti, tutti eccitati dal ballo²³</i>	<i>Throughout this act the PICKPOCKETS behave like dogs which, greatly excited by the ball, sniff around, pull at their leashes and bore their teeth²⁴</i>
<i>Elle se redresse lentement gardant la nappe qui la recouvre²⁵</i>	<i>Si rialza lentamente, senza lasciar cadere la tovaglia che la ricopre²⁶</i>	<i>She slowly raises herself up, still draped with the tapestry²⁷</i>

Notably, in the second act we are provided with a visual and grotesque scene depiction which is not present in the Polish original: “Throughout this act the PICKPOCKETS behave like dogs which, greatly excited by the ball, sniff around, pull at their leashes and bare their teeth”.²⁸ In the third act, in the total overturning of any order and logic, we read that the Princess transformed into a table “slowly raises herself up, still draped with the tapestry”.²⁹ Neither of the two explications are present in the Polish text, but they appear in all three of the translations considered. There are other additions of similar nature, such as: the protagonist “grabs the Pickpocket and puts him on the leash” and “while speaking he pretends to be horse riding”. These appear in French and Italian texts, but they were not introduced by Iribarne, who in this case remained faithful to the Polish original. The presence of enriched stage directions in the English text is surprising, inasmuch as – according to the translator’s declarations – it was based on the Polish original. This shows that the English translator, Louis Iribarne, whilst translating the *Operetta* also took the French text into consideration.

²¹ Id., *Operetta*, cit., p. 42 [It.].

²² Id., *Opérette*, cit., p. 75 [Fr.].

²³ Id., *Operetta*, cit. p. 50 [It.].

²⁴ Id., *Operetta*, in Id., *Three plays. Princess Ivona, The marriage, Operetta*, trans. K. Griffith-Jones & C. Robins (*Princess Ivona*), L. Iribarne (*The Marriage, Operetta*), London-New York, Marion Boyars, 1998, p. 243 [Eng.].

²⁵ Id., *Opérette*, cit., p. 119 [Fr.].

²⁶ Id., *Operetta*, cit. p. 76 [It.].

²⁷ Ibidem, p. 272 [Eng.].

²⁸ Ibidem, p. 243 [Eng.].

²⁹ Ibidem, p. 272 [Eng.].

As well as within stage directions, within characters' speech it can also be seen how Gombrowicz's specific grotesque and absurd "mug" is being reinforced in the translations. In the Polish text, one of the characters, the Professor, who throughout the play suffers from "chronical vomiting", to express his longing for freeing himself from the imposed form of being, says "if only I could drop myself":

Pol.	Fr.	It.	Eng.
Żebym mógł siebie zrzucić ³⁰	Si seulement... je pouvais... me vomir... ³¹	Se almeno... potessi... vomitarmi... ³²	If I could only... puke up myself... ³³

In all three translations examined, this particular line of the Professor's has been additionally permeated with stylistic features of the original, giving the impression that the additions had been made by the author himself. "If I could only... puke up myself..."³⁴ says the Professor in the French, Italian and English texts. This 'overdetermination' seems to be actually coherent with the stylistic line of the original, as if the author's virtual concept of the work had been made more explicit in the translation. This is an amplification à la Gombrowicz and à la *Operetta*, as it perfectly fits in the stylistics of the play, emphasizing some of its most characteristic elements. The examples presented reveal that not only the Italian but also the English translator followed in the footsteps of Jeleński and Serreau by adopting some of their additions. It is worth noting that the Morteos, not knowing Polish, had basically no other choice but to follow the French text. Iribarne, on the other hand, having access to both Polish and French text, was presumably choosing to take from the French translation just the solutions which he considered particularly apt and felicitous.

Parody of operetta's paradigm

The Italian and English translators, under Jeleński's and Serreau's guidance, considerably outperformed Gombrowicz in their rhyming inventiveness. All three translations are much more rhythmic, melodious, one might say – more

³⁰ Id., *Operetka*, in Id. *Dziennik (1961-1966): Operetka*, Paryż, Instytut Literacki, 1966, p. 231 [Pol. – *editio princeps*].

³¹ Id., *Opérette*, cit., p. 94 [Fr.].

³² Id., *Operetta*, cit., p. 61 [It.].

³³ Id., *Operetta*, cit., p. 255 [Eng.].

³⁴ Ibidem, p. 255 [Eng.].

operetta-like, thus their parodic and comic potential is intensified. In the Polish text, in most cases, we are looking at subtle assonances, inaccurate rhymes or simple homonymic rhymes, which – being irregular and sporadic – do not contribute to any far-reaching rhythmizing effect, e.g. “bahon” – “bahon”, “Szahm” – “Szahm”, “Szahm” – “dam”, “dogahessy” – “phinessy” – “kontessy”:

- 1 SZARM
- 2 (*śpiewa*)
- 3 Och, co mi bahon!
- 4 ha, ha, ha, bahon!
- 5 Jam hhabia Szahm
- 6 Zdobywca dam!
- 7 Jam bihbant Szahm
- 8 I lampaht Szahm
- 9 Enfant gâté salonów, heu, heu, wąsik, monokl,
- 10 laseczka ma, szapoklak mój, maniehy me (*ziewa*)
- 11 A dogahessy
- 12 I phinessy
- 13 Kontessy, mieszczeni, szwaczki i Murzynki
- 14 Och, och, dhogi, ach, nieodpahty, ach, sznytowy,
- 15 ach, czahujący, ah, quel chic, quel chahme et
- 16 quelles manièhes!³⁵

In the translations examined, on the other hand, the metric structure has been clarified and strengthened, leading to a well-defined musical rhythm:

Fr.	It.	Eng.
1 AGÈNOR	1 AGENORE	1 CHARMANT
2 <i>Il chante</i>	2 (<i>canta</i>)	2 <i>Sings.</i>
3 Au diable le baron!	3 Al diavolo il barone!	3 Oh, what is a baron
4 Haro sur le baron!	4 Abbasso il barone!	to me!
5 Je suis le comte Agénor,	5 Io sono il conte Agenore,	4 Ha, ha, ha, a baron,
6 De ces dames le trésor!	6 Unico nel suo genere!	indeed!
7 Dandy et mirliflore,	7 Prediletto da Venere,	5 I am Count Charmant
8 Agénor est un lion,	8 Leone e zerbinotto,	6 To the ladies a true
9 Le darling des salons,	9 Son re d'ogni salotto,	gallant!
10 Séducteur à monocle,	10 Monocolo e bombetta,	7 I am the rake Charmant
11 A canne et chapeau	11 Coppale con la ghetta,	8 A blade and an élégant!
claque,	12 Baffetti e bastoncino,	9 Enfant gate of every
12 Moustache en coupe-fil,	13 Che stile, il signorino!	café
13 Mon Dieu qu'il a du	14 (<i>Sbadiglia. Parla</i>	10 With top hat and cane
style!	<i>Passeggiando</i>) Il cocco	11 Monocle and moustache

³⁵ Id., *Operetka*, cit., p. 200 [Pol.].

14 <i>Il bâille.</i>	d'ogni salotto,	12 And manners none can
15 <i>Parlé en se promenant,</i>	15 ah, ah, il cocco, ah, ah,	match!
16 <i>faisant un commentaire</i>	da coccolare, monocolo e	13 <i>Yawns.</i>
<i>discret et mondain. –</i>	panciotto,	14 Countesses and
17 L'entant chéri des salons,	16 che scicchieria, che	princesses
ah, ah, chéri, ah,	scicchieria! (<i>Bis. Canta</i>)	15 Seamstresses and
18 ah, charmant, moustache	17 Borghesi e principesse,	Negresses
et monocle, mon stick	18 Negrette e contesse,	16 And daughters of the
19 et mon chic, ah, ce chic!	19 Sartine e dogaresse,	middle-class –
(<i>bis</i>)	20 Ah! tutte mi adorano!	17 Oh I'm the idol of every
20 <i>Il chante.</i>	21 Evvia il nostro Agenore,	lass!
21 Dogaresses et princesses,	22 Unico nel suo genere!	18 So suave and debonair
22 Bourgeoises et	23 Mio Dio, se è seducente,	19 A man of fashion and of
comtesses,	24 Mondano, elegante,	flair
23 Lingères et négresses,	25 D'un charme	20 Ah, quell chic, quell
24 Ah! toutes les m'adorent!	entusiasmane!	charme et quelles
25 Voici notre Agénor,	26 So smart, il seduttore.	manières! ³⁸
26 Le trésor de ces dames,	27 Che stile rubacuore!	
27 Ah, Dieu, qu'il a du	28 (<i>Parla passeggiando</i>)	
charme!	Che tipo chic, che tipo	
28 Voici notre élégant,	smart, e	
29 Si mondain, si charmant!	29 Il suo charme! la sua	
30 So smart, le séducteur	grazia, le sue maniere	
31 Et du style à faire peur!	squisite!... (<i>bis</i>) ³⁷	
32 <i>Parlé en se promenant.</i>		
33 Du chic et du smart, oh		
quel charme! oh		
34 quelle grâce, et ces		
manières exquises!... (<i>bis</i>) ³⁶		

The French translators enriched the Polish original with melodic rhymes, e.g. “Agénor” – “trésor”, “stick” – “chic”, “dames” – “charme”, “élégant” – “charmant”, “séducteur” – “faire peur”. Likewise, in the Italian translation, there are a number of additional verses and the whole text is distinctly rhythmical, with a regular external rhyme scheme, e.g. “zerbinotto” – “salotto”, “bombetta” – “ghetta”, “bastoncino” – “signorino”. Yet, the Morteos were not the only ones who followed the French translators’ footsteps in terms of the diversity of rhymes and verses. Interestingly enough, also the English translation shows a greater tendency to rhymes than the Polish original. The

³⁶ Id., *Opérette*, cit., pp. 22-23 [Fr.].

³⁷ Id., *Operetta*, cit., pp. 18-19 [It.].

³⁸ Id., *Operetta*, cit., pp. 210-211 [Eng.].

English text is enriched lexically (e.g. “indeed” or “élégant”) and additionally divided into verses (see: Pol. vv. 9-10; Eng. vv. 9-12), as a result the rhymes are being enhanced and diversified, even if they are not always perfect, e.g. “me” – “indeed”, “charmant” – “élégant”, “café” – “cane”, “moustache” – “match”.³⁹ It can be easily noticed that while some of the adopted rhyming and versing solutions were originally invented by Iribarne (e.g. added words and verses), some originate from the Polish text (see Pol. vv. 3-6; Eng. vv. 3-6), but others were without any doubt inspired by the French translation (see Fr. vv. 21-24; Eng. vv. 14-17).

Parody of aristocratic modes

Another characteristic element of Gombrowicz’s drama is the stylization of the language, so that on one hand it aligns the work with the theatre of the absurd conventions and on the other hand it distinctly reflects the characters’ social affiliations, contributing to the acute parody of aristocratic modes. In the Polish text there is a variety of French-like words and phrases, such as interjections or single words used only to generate a sense of sophistication attributed in Polish culture to French language and culture:

Pol.	Fr.	It.	Eng.
saphisti! ⁴⁰	damn it! ⁴¹	damn it! ⁴²	sapristi! ⁴³
que sais-je ⁴⁴	who knows ⁴⁵	who knows ⁴⁶	que sais-je ⁴⁷
Mes hommages! ⁴⁸	Delighted! ⁴⁹	Delighted! ⁵⁰	Mes hommages! ⁵¹

³⁹ In *The Oxford Guide to Literature in English Translation*, in the chapter dedicated to Polish drama, edited, nota bene, by Iribarne himself, we read that “Iribarne freely augmented, through rhyme and pastiche, the already libretto-like text on behalf of its operatic stylization, of what is essentially parody of a parody (the operetta form)” (L. Iribarne, *Polish drama*, in P. France (Ed.), *The Oxford Guide to Literature in English Translation*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 211-214). It should be, however, stressed that this statement is only partially true, as the comparative analysis of Polish, English and French texts proves that Iribarne drew inspiration also from the French translation.

⁴⁰ W. Gombrowicz, *Operetka*, cit., p. 202 [Pol.].

⁴¹ Id., *Opérette*, cit., p. 26 [Fr.].

⁴² Id., *Operetta*, cit., p. 21 [It.].

⁴³ Id., *Operetta*, cit., p. 213 [Eng.].

⁴⁴ Id., *Operetka*, cit., p. 227 [Pol.].

⁴⁵ Id., *Opérette*, cit., p. 35 [Fr.].

⁴⁶ Id., *Operetta*, cit., p. 56 [It.].

⁴⁷ Id., *Operetta*, cit., p. 250 [Eng.].

Ce n'est pas mon genre, uważa Władysław ⁵²	It's not done, Ladislav ⁵³	It's not done, Ladislao! ⁵⁴	Mind you, Ladislaus, ce n'est pas mon genre ⁵⁵
pończoszki z mgiełki paryskiej ⁵⁶	bas vapeur de Londres ajourés ⁵⁷	calze fumo di Londra traforate ⁵⁸	stockings made of Parisian mist ⁵⁹
flirt à la papillon ⁶⁰	un flirt à la butterfly ⁶¹	un flirt alla butterfly ⁶²	little flirt à la papillon ⁶³
Co phawda les femmes, to jak sauce Belmontò! Lepiej nie nadużywać. Ciężko sthawne ⁶⁴	Les femmes, voyez-vous, ah, les femmes, c'est comme le navarin, sauce Belmonta. Préférable de ne pas en abuser. Indigeste ⁶⁵	Le donne, vede, ah, le donne, sono come cozze in salsa piccante. Preferibile non eccedere. Indigesto ⁶⁶	Yes, indeed, les femmes, they're like sauce Belmonto! One shouldn't overdo them. Hard to digest ⁶⁷

⁴⁸ Id., *Operetka*, cit., p. 221 [Pol.].

⁴⁹ Id., *Opérette*, cit., p. 69 [Fr.].

⁵⁰ Id., *Operetta*, cit., p. 47 [It.].

⁵¹ Id., *Operetta*, cit., p. 240 [Eng.].

⁵² Id., *Operetka*, cit., p. 208 [Pol.].

⁵³ Id., *Opérette*, cit., p. 42 [Fr.].

⁵⁴ Id., *Operetta*, cit., p. 30 [It.].

⁵⁵ Id., *Operetta*, cit., p. 222 [Eng.].

⁵⁶ Id., *Operetka*, cit., pp. 212 [Pol.].

⁵⁷ Id., *Opérette*, cit., p. 50 [Fr.].

⁵⁸ Id., *Operetta*, cit., p. 34 [It.].

⁵⁹ Id., *Operetta*, cit., p. 226 [Eng.].

⁶⁰ Id., *Operetka*, cit., p. 211 [Pol.].

⁶¹ Id., *Opérette*, cit., p. 48 [Fr.].

⁶² Id., *Operetta*, cit., p. 33 [It.].

⁶³ Id., *Operetta*, cit., p. 225 [Eng.].

⁶⁴ Id., *Operetka*, cit., p. 211 [Pol.].

⁶⁵ Id., *Opérette*, cit., p. 48 [Fr.].

⁶⁶ Id., *Operetta*, cit., p. 33 [It.].

⁶⁷ Id., *Operetta*, cit., pp. 225-226 [Eng.].

The French translators, followed by the Italian ones, replaced all French elements with their English equivalents, while in the English translation, as in the Polish original, we can find French language and culture references, e.g. Pol. “saphisti!”⁶⁸ Fr. “damn it!”⁶⁹ It. “damn it!”⁷⁰ Eng. “saprismi!”⁷¹ or Pol. “Mes hommages!”⁷² Fr. “Delighted!”⁷³ It. “Delighted!”⁷⁴ Eng. “Mes hommages!”⁷⁵ Such a translation choice was probably made due to the fact that while the Polish and English speaking readers or spectators would associate French language with the aristocracy, in a context of Romance cultures a similar effect is related to English language.

In addition, the upper-class protagonists pronounce the letter “r” as “h” (in both Polish and French words), thereby their lines gain a pseudo-aristocratic and snobbish tone.⁷⁶ Although “r” to “h” alternation has not been kept in any of the translations considered, one can notice a very interesting, though not systematically applied, technique. In both the French and Italian translations, a specific stylistic marker is preserved by the introduction of English expressions, for example: Pol. “phoszę”⁷⁷ (spelled with an “h” instead of an “r”; the Polish word “proszę” means “please”), Fr. “If you please”,⁷⁸ It. “If you please”.⁷⁹ In the English translation, an analogous technique was not applied, that is the unusual almost French-sounding “phoszę” was not replaced by its French equivalent in order to preserve the original refined tone of expression.⁸⁰ In

⁶⁸ Id., *Operetka*, cit., p. 202 [Pol.].

⁶⁹ Id., *Opérette*, cit., p. 26 [Fr.].

⁷⁰ Id., *Operetta*, cit., p. 21 [It.].

⁷¹ Id., *Operetta*, cit., p. 226 [Eng.].

⁷² Id., *Operetka*, cit., p. 221 [Pol.].

⁷³ Id., *Opérette*, cit., p. 69 [Fr.].

⁷⁴ Id., *Operetta*, cit., p. 47 [It.].

⁷⁵ Id., *Operetta*, cit., p. 240 [Eng.].

⁷⁶ Cf. Olgierd Wojtasiewicz points out a particular “r” pronunciation (almost silent, as “r” loses its rhotic quality – N.B.) as a specific speech feature of some Polish aristocracy circles and briefly discusses difficulties in conveying it the translation (O. Wojtasiewicz, *Wstęp do teorii tłumaczenia*, Warszawa, Wydawnictwo Translegis, 2007, pp. 49–50).

⁷⁷ W. Gombrowicz, *Operetka*, cit., p. 208 [Pol.].

⁷⁸ Id., *Opérette*, cit., p. 42 [Fr.].

⁷⁹ Id., *Operetta*, cit., p. 30 [It.].

⁸⁰ Louis Iribarne acknowledges in a short *Translator’s note*: “In the original Count Charmant, Baron Firulet, and Prince and Princess Himalay pronounce their ‘r’s’ in an affected manner characteristic of the aristocracy; hence ‘deah Masteh Fioh’, instead of ‘dear Master Fior’, ‘chahmee’ instead of ‘charmee’, etc. It has been left to the discretion of directors and

the translations, due to the lack of the peculiar “r” pronunciation, the parodic tone is less emphatic.⁸¹

Another important component of the Polish text, which parodically emphasizes the characters’ aristocratic origin is the use of French names for fancy dishes and drinks:

Pol.	Fr.	It.	Eng.
hohs d’œuvhes et sauce Belmontó	hors-d’œuvre variés et sauce Belmonta	antipasti misti e salsa tartara	hors d’œuvres et sauce Belmanto
jaja strusie à la cocotte	œufs d’autruche cardinal	uova di struzzo alla cardinale	ostrich eggs à la cocotte
fleuh de saumon mayonnaise	fleur de saumon -	fiore di salmone -	fleur de saumon hollandaise
kwiczolý	fricassée de bécassine	fricassea di beccaccino	pheasant
kapelutko z panaché de	toque farcie empanachée de	tocco farcito decorato con	a bonnet with panade de
légumes chème soubise	crevettes crème soubise	gamberetti crerma besciamella	légumes crème soubise

Particularly interesting is the case of “sauce Belmontò”,⁸² which seems to be a culinary invention of Gombrowicz. The French sound of its name was simply supposed to evoke a sense of refinement. “Sauce Belmontò” has been preserved in both the French (Fr. “sauce Belmonta”⁸³) and the English (Eng. “sauce Belmanto”)⁸⁴ translations. Apparently, both translators assumed that

actors to adopt a similar style of speech for these roles and to apply it consistently throughout the play” (W. Gombrowicz, *Operetta*, cit., p. 217 [Eng.]).

⁸¹ A possible way to render “r” to “h” alternation in the Italian language could be the use of so-called “erre moscia” (“rhoticism”), that is a soft pronunciation of “r”. In Italian a sound change of this kind seems to be an imitation of Parisian, elite-like pronunciation and sounds snobbish, which is why it is often being used as an instrument of stylization for the aristocratic mode of expression (see *Vocabolario Treccani* <http://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/erre> – last accessed on 14 October 2018). In the Italian linguistic and cultural context “erre moscia” is considered to be an attribute of the upper classes. Naturally, Jole and Gian Renzo Morteo, having based their translation on the French text, could not have known about the specific pronunciation of the aristocrats in the original, nor could have attempted to reproduce it in their translation.

⁸² Id., *Operetka*, cit., p. 201 [Pol.].

⁸³ Id., *Opérette*, cit., p. 26 [Fr.].

⁸⁴ Id., *Operetta*, cit., p. 212 [Eng.].

such name would give an impression of luxuriousness also to the French and English readers or spectators. The Italian translators, on the other hand, turned out to be gourmards, as they replaced the French-sounding sauce with a dish well known to the Italian audience as “salsa tartara”⁸⁵ (tartar sauce). Curiously enough, in a different passage of the Italian translation, Gombrowicz’s imaginary sauce becomes “cozze in salsa piccante”⁸⁶ (mussels in spicy sauce). A possible reason why the Morteos decided not to translate “sauce Belmonto”⁸⁷ neither as “salsa Belmonto” nor as “salsa Belmonte” but to substitute it with two completely different dishes, could be that in Italian – unlike in French and English – the original name of the sauce due to its Italian origin, even if pronounced with a French accent, would not give a sense of something exotic or refined. Also, in the case of “crème soubise”⁸⁸ (present in Polish, French and English text), the Morteos surpassed other translators in culinary taste and inventiveness, replacing it with “crema besciamella”⁸⁹ (béchamel crème). Another example worth mentioning is the Polish “kwiczol”⁹⁰ (fieldfare), which both in the French and the Italian translation becomes a bit more sophisticated “snipe delicacy” (Fr. “fricassée di bécassine”⁹¹ and It. “fricassea di beccaccino”⁹²), while in the English text there is no more “fieldfare” nor “snipe”, as the bird transforms into a “pheasant”.⁹³ In this case, both the French translators (then followed by the Morteos) and the English are creative in terms of culinary references.

As far as the elements contributing to the sharp parody of aristocracy are concerned, rhythmical and melodious onomatopoeias, numerous present in the Polish original, are worth noticing:

Pol.	Fr.	It.	Eng.
Gniam hantu kupotu lu! ⁹⁴	Gniam haoutou koupotou lou! ⁹⁵	Gnam hantù kupotù lù! ⁹⁶	Gneeam Hantoo Koopotoo loo! ⁹⁷

⁸⁵ Id., *Operetta*, cit., p. 21 [It.].

⁸⁶ Ibidem, p. 33 [It.].

⁸⁷ Id., *Opérette*, cit., p. 26 [Fr.].

⁸⁸ Id., *Operetka*, cit., p. 224 [Pol.]; Id., *Opérette*, cit., p. 87 [Fr.]; Id., *Operetta*, cit., p. 55 [Eng.].

⁸⁹ Id., *Operetta*, cit., p. 55 [It.].

⁹⁰ Id., *Operetka*, cit., p. 211 [Pol.].

⁹¹ Id., *Opérette*, cit., p. 49 [Fr.].

⁹² Id., *Operetta*, cit., p. 34 [It.].

⁹³ Id., *Operetta*, cit., p. 226 [Eng.].

⁹⁴ Id., *Operetka*, cit., p. 221 [Pol.].

Mniutubabunemm uuuu... ⁹⁸	Mioutoubaboune mmou-ou-ou... ⁹⁹	Miutubabunemmu-u- u... ¹⁰⁰	Mneeootoobaboo neemmo... ¹⁰¹
Plup plap plup plap plup plap ¹⁰²	Pluop plap ploup plap pluop plap ¹⁰³	Plup plap plup plap plup plap ¹⁰⁴	Ploop plap ploop plap ploplap ¹⁰⁵
FIRULET	FIRULET	FIRULET	FIRULET
Fiu, fiu, fiu,	Tiou, tiou, tiou,	Agenore, pio-pio-pio!	Phew, phew,
Szarm, tiu, tiu, tiu,	Agénor!	Agenore, co-co-co!	phew, Charmant!
Szarm	Cote, cote, cote,	Ai galletti cocciuti	Pooh, pooh,
Jam baron jest	Agénor!	Far far coccodè	pooh, Charmant!
Firulet!	Aux caqueteurs	Il baron Firulet! ¹⁰⁸	I am Baron
Po nosie dają ja,	caquers caquetant		Firulet!
gdy kto zadziera	Il rabat le caquet		And if anyone
nosa ¹⁰⁶	Le baron Firulet ¹⁰⁷		turns up his nose
			I'll put it out of joint ¹⁰⁹

In the majority of cases the English translator decided to maintain the original sound of onomatopoeias and he simply rewrote them in a way that their pronunciation in English corresponds to their sound in the Polish text (e.g. Pol. “fiu fiu fiu”¹¹⁰ as Eng. “phew phew phew”).¹¹¹ The French and Italian translators introduced a number of changes in order to clarify and dis-

⁹⁵ Id., *Opérette*, cit., p. 71 [Fr.].

⁹⁶ Id., *Operetta*, cit., p. 48 [It.].

⁹⁷ Id., *Operetta*, cit., p. 240 [Eng.].

⁹⁸ Id., *Operetka*, cit., p. 221 [Pol.].

⁹⁹ Id., *Opérette*, cit., p. 71 [Fr.].

¹⁰⁰ Id., *Operetta*, cit., p. 48 [It.].

¹⁰¹ Id., *Operetta*, cit., p. 241 [Eng.].

¹⁰² Id., *Operetka*, cit., p. 221 [Pol.].

¹⁰³ Id., *Opérette*, cit., p. 72 [Fr.].

¹⁰⁴ Id., *Operetta*, cit., p. 48 [It.].

¹⁰⁵ Id., *Operetta*, cit., p. 241 [Eng.].

¹⁰⁶ Id., *Operetka*, cit., p. 201 [Pol.].

¹⁰⁷ Id., *Opérette*, cit., p. 25 [Fr.].

¹⁰⁸ Id., *Operetta*, cit., p. 20 [It.].

¹⁰⁹ Id., *Operetta*, cit., p. 212 [Eng.].

¹¹⁰ Id., *Operetka*, cit., p. 201 [Pol.].

¹¹¹ Id., *Operetta*, cit., p. 212 [Eng.].

ambiguous sound references, leading to more explicit deconstruction of the operetta paradigm and of the aristocratic mode of behavior. For instance, the French translators highlight certain hen house sounds, replacing the Polish onomatopoeia “tiu tiu tiu”,¹¹² meaning simpering and – only secondly and less obviously – being an interjection used for calling the chickens,¹¹³ with an unambiguous “cote cote cote”,¹¹⁴ in France this is a classical onomatopoeia used for calling chickens. Similarly, the Italian translators emphasize the cackling of chickens and choose the hen house imagery. Instead of the expression “turning up one’s nose” (present both in the Polish and the English version), in the Italian text this appears as “stubborn cockerels” (It. “galletti cocciuti”).¹¹⁵ In the Italian translation onomatopoeia is unequivocal – there is no doubt that the aristocratic protagonist is cackling like a chicken, since “co-co-co”¹¹⁶ and “far far coccodè”¹¹⁷ introduced by the Morteos are Italian sounds that emulate chickens.

Conclusions

This comparative analysis of Polish, French, Italian and English version of Gombrowicz’s *Operetta* shows marked differences when the theater of the absurd attributes, operetta stylization, as well as parodic and comical characteristics of the drama are considered. The French translation reveals exceptional, added in translation, values which were later adopted by the Italian and – to a more limited extent – also by the English translator. These “over-determined places”¹¹⁸ give the impression of consistency with the stylistic

¹¹² Id., *Operetka*, cit., p. 201 [Pol.].

¹¹³ W. Doroszewski (Ed.), *Słownik języka polskiego*, from <https://sjp.pwn.pl/doroszewski/tiu;5507646.html> (last accessed on 5 October 2018).

¹¹⁴ W. Gombrowicz, *Opérette*, cit., p. 25 [Fr.].

¹¹⁵ Id., *Operetta*, cit., p. 20 [It.].

¹¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 20 [It.].

¹¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 20 [It.].

¹¹⁸ Cf. remarks on “scenic overdetermination” in theatrical translation – S. Bassnett-McGuire, *La traduzione del teatro*, in Ead., *La traduzione. Teorie e pratica*, Milano, Bompiani strumenti, 1993, pp. 148–163; P. Ciccolella, *Traduzione tra comunicazione e interpretazione. Il caso del testo drammatico*, “Il traduttore nuovo”, 1 (1994), pp. 47–54; A. Serpieri, *Tradurre teatro (Shakespeare): la resa linguistica e la trasmissione dell’energia*, in G. Calabrò (Ed.), *Teoria, didattica e prassi della traduzione*, Napoli, Liguori editore, 2001, pp. 159–172; L. Marinelli, *Thumacz jako medium (rzecz o literackości tłumaczenia teatralnego i teatralności tłumaczenia literackiego): przywołanie duchów Kantora*, “Przekładaniec”, 31 (2015), pp. 140–153.

and ideological orientation of the Polish original, as if they came directly from the author himself. One can get the impression that Gombrowicz, simultaneously to Jeleński's and Serreau's translational work, was performing a kind of *chuchotage*, explaining his drama to them. In the French translation of *Operetta*, the author's whisper can be heard continuously. Yet, this is not an ordinary echo of the original. Also in the French translation, Gombrowicz's drama resounds with a fuller voice than in the original, as its constitutive features are emphasized and extended. The author's participation of any kind or measure in the translational process of his own work gives him an opportunity to rethink the previous affirmation of his vision and encourages him to look for new and better ways to express his intention, as it often happens in case of self-translations.¹¹⁹

Every second-hand translation, resulting from two texts and from a double interpretation of meanings and means of expression, is bound to suffer changes from the original and could be destined to be at variance to the original text and context. On the other hand, as revealed by the comparative analysis of selected translations of *Operetta*, the indirectness does not necessarily imply a lower artistic value, nor being too far detached from the author's intention and vision. In *Operetta*'s case the French translation served as a bridge between the other two translations, Italian (indirect translation from French) and English (direct translation from Polish, occasionally inspired by the French text), and the original authorial intention and vision, which might not have been fully expressed or interpreted in the Polish original.

Abstract

Gradationing Gombrowicz. Remarks on Second-Hand Translations

This article demonstrates the dependency on the French translation of the Italian and English translations of Witold Gombrowicz's 1966 drama entitled *Operetta* and discusses the relationship between these three translations and

¹¹⁹ Cf. Remarks on self-translation of Gombrowicz's novel *Ferdydurke*: A. Ceccherelli, *C'è "Ferdydurke" e "Ferdydurke"*. *Peripezie autotraduttive gombrowicziane*, cit., pp. 77-85; overview of self-translation practice in Polish 20th century literature: Id., *Autotraduttori polacchi del Novecento: un saggio di ricognizione*, in: *Autotraduzione e riscrittura*, Bologna, Bononia University Press, 2013, pp. 169-182. Apart from the Gombrowicz's case, the article traces an outline of many other Polish self-translators, such as Stanisław Przybyszewski, Tadeusz Rittner, Waclaw Sieroszewski, Bruno Jasioński, Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, Debora Vogel, Stanisław Kubicki, Stefan Themerson, Maria Kuncewiczowa, Stanisław Barańczak and Czesław Miłosz.

the Polish original. This has been conducted in terms of the author's literary and dramatic style peculiarities, as well as his ideological and artistic orientation. It proves that, paradoxically, a translation – even a second-hand one – does not always imply major detachment from the author's intention and vision. The comparative study of the four linguistic versions of the drama reveals that most of the original Polish text's dominants were significantly extended and enhanced in the French translation. These amplifications were subsequently adopted by both Italian and English translators, even though the English translator does not acknowledge the use of French text in any of his notes. The article focuses on two main aspects of *Operetta's* translations: indirectness (in the case of the Italian and partly of the English translation) and authorial control over the translation process (in the case of the French translation), in order to determine their influence on Gombrowicz's individual voice.

Keywords: Gombrowicz, *Operetta*, Polish literature, translation, second-hand translation, comparative study.