

Rendering polyphony in the Polish translation of Ali Smith's "The Accidental"

Polifonia w polskim przekładzie powieści Ali Smith „Przypadkowa”

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Keywords

literary translation, Ali Smith, contemporary British novel, intertextuality, polyphony

Słowa kluczowe

przekład literacki, Ali Smith, współczesna powieść brytyjska, intertekstualność, polifonia

Abstract

As her Norwegian translator has put it, Ali Smith is the novelist who can really listen “to the ways in which language is actually being used by the people to whom it belongs”. Smith’s 2005 Whitbread Award winning novel, *The Accidental*, is a tour de force of polyphonic narration: it combines the voices of five disparate speakers, which intersperse in a somehow symmetrical, but ultimately collapsing structure. The main diegetic axis of the story is the intrusion of an enigmatic stranger, Amber, into the holiday house of the Smart family, an invasion which results in the transformation of four differently perplexed lives. Due to the book’s framework, the translators of *The Accidental* must grapple with five distinct narrative voices, each displaying its own idiosyncrasies. But they must also cope with other linguistic challenges, including the excessive use of puns, syntactic deadlocks and over-abundant intertextuality present on many levels in the novel. This paper attempts to review the strategies pursued by the Polish translator of Smith’s work, Agnieszka Andrzejewska, with the view of analysing the extent to which the translation preserves the polyphonic qualities of the original text.

Abstrakt

Norweska tłumaczka Ali Smith zauważa, że pisarka potrafi wsłuchiwać się „w to, jak używają języka osoby, do których on należy”. Uonorowana w 2005 r. nagrodą Whitebread Award powieść Smith *Przypadkowa* doskonale demonstruje zjawisko polifonii narracyjnej: w utworze słyszymy przenikające się głosy pięciu różnych osób, które odpowiadają za swego rodzaju symetrię struktury fabularnej. Wydarzenia skupiają się wokół postaci Amber, tajemniczej, nikomu nie znanej kobiety, która nieoczekiwanie zjawia się w domku wynajętym na okres wakacji przez czteroosobową rodzinę Smartów. Każde z tej czwórki zmaga się z odmiennymi problemami, które na pewien sposób rozwiązuje interwencja Amber. Zapropozowana przez Smith struktura narracyjna wymaga użycia w przekładzie *Przypadkowej* pięciu różnych, odmiennie nacechowanych stylów. Podjęcie się tłumaczenia tej powieści oznacza także konieczność zmierzenia się z wieloma innymi problemami natury językowej: przykładem gry słów, wieloznaczności, zawiłości składniowych oraz intertekstualności obecnej tu na wielu poziomach. Niniejszy artykuł dokonuje przeglądu strategii zastosowanych przez polską tłumaczkę tekstu, Agnieszkę Andrzejewską, koncentrując się głównie na ocenie, do jakiego stopnia polski przekład zachowuje językową polifoniczność oryginału.

Rendering polyphony in the Polish translation of Ali Smith's *The Accidental*

In the view of her Norwegian translator, Ali Smith is a novelist who can really listen “to the ways in which language is actually being used by the people to whom it belongs”¹. She is a writer particularly sensitive to narrative style and voice, and, as Breitbach notes, she devotes “meticulous attention to how language is a constitutive force, rather than a transparent medium, in the building and shaping of contemporary realities and identities”². Smith's 2005 Whitbread Award winning novel, *The Accidental*, also shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize and the Orange Prize, is a tour de force of polyphonic narration: it combines the voices of five disparate speakers which intersperse in a somehow symmetrical, but ultimately collapsing structure. The main diegetic axis of the story is the intrusion of an enigmatic stranger, Amber, into the holiday house of the Smart family, an invasion which results in the transformation of four differently perplexed lives.

Due to the book's framework, the translators of *The Accidental* must grapple with five distinct narrative voices, each displaying its own idiosyncrasies. At the same time, they must also cope with other linguistic challenges, including the excessive use of puns, syntactic deadlocks and over-abundant intertextuality present on many levels in the novel. This presentation attempts to review the strategies pursued by the Polish translator of Smith's work, Agnieszka Andrzejewska, with a view to analysing the extent to which the translation preserves the polyphonic qualities of the original text.

The term ‘polyphony’ was introduced to the literary study by Mikhail Bakhtin with his analysis of Dostoevsky's prose, and has been since considered an efficient tool in the critical discussions of the novel genre. Bakhtin interprets Dostoevsky's *oeuvre* through the lens of his dialogic theory of language and sees his texts as opportune exemplification of dialogism in literature, pointing out that they embrace “a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses and the genuine polyphony of full-valued voices”³. In a dialogic literary text, most typically a dialogic novel, various stances can coexist simultaneously, their mutual interaction being funda-

¹ M. Alfsen, “Sidekick Doubling the Tune”: Writing Ali Smith in Norwegian, [in] *Ali Smith* (ed.) M. Germanà, and E. Horton, London: Bloomsbury 2013, p. 130-131.

² J. Breitbach, *Analog Fictions For The Digital Age: Literary Realism and Photographical Discourses in Novels after 2000*, Rochester: Camden House, 2012, p. 115.

³ M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*, trans. R. W. Rotsel, Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1973, p. 4.

mental in the structuring of the personal identity/identities of the narrative subject/subjects involved.

The structural framework and the narrative technique utilized in *The Accidental* allow Smith's text to function as a polyphonic novel. Following an ironically metafictional narrative scheme, the story is presented in the form of three parts, "The Beginning", "The Middle" and "The End". Each part is divided into four chapters, and each chapter is told from the point of view of one of the four Smarts in turn. All sections are interspersed with brief narrative intrusions by Amber, aka Alhambra. The woman, who is for Boxall "the central character of the novel – central but absent"⁴, provides a connecting, but not unifying, factor for the narrative. As Boxall further argues, *The Accidental* does not offer an overarching controlling voice or consciousness; in fact, "Smith's novel works in the opposite direction, finding the ruptures that open between moments, across which the narrative cannot pass"⁵.

The analysis of the novel's translation will certainly investigate the "plurality of voices" speaking in the text rather than "the plurality of consciousnesses" represented by it. Although the narrative is split into five voices, those of four members of the Smart family and that of Amber, the voice of the uncanny intruder is the least distinct. In fact, it amounts to mere ten pages of what Tancke calls "a floating narrative presence"⁶; furthermore it is quite transparent stylistically, devoid of any specific markers of its individuality, and hence its translation does not provide a valuable object of analysis. Consequently, the examination undertaken below will focus on the Polish rendition of the voices representing four members of the Smart family: two strong female voices, of Astrid and her mother Eve, as well as two weaker male voices, of Astrid's brother Magnus, and of their stepfather, Michael. The four respective parts are narrated in the third person, but each section focalizes on one protagonist and employs the technique of free indirect discourse, which allows it to reflect the linguistic idiosyncrasy of the character central to it. The differences between female and male voices also exhibit the novel's underlying theme of feminine power. Both male characters are portrayed as significantly flawed: Michael is a morally crippled lecher and Magnus is burdened with overpowering sense of well-deserved guilt. Amber acts as a proto-feminine life force, renewing the troubled lives of the Smarts (through her sexual encounters with Magnus, for instance).

⁴ P. Boxall, *Twenty-First-Century Fiction: A Critical Introduction*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 63.

⁵ Ibidem, p. 63.

⁶ U. Tancke, *Deceptive Storytelling and Frustrated Desires in The Accidental and There but for the, [in] Ali Smith* (ed.) M. Germanà, and E. Horton, London: Bloomsbury 2013, p. 96.

Astrid is a 12-year-old girl, timid and weak, lacking self-confidence, troubled by conflicts with her schoolmates, going through a phase of adolescent anxiety. She is obsessed with filming the world around her with a video-camera, documenting what she considers the meagreness of her existence. Her language is a good rendition of a young teenager's manner of speech: vivid, humorous, but often grammatically simplified. For instance:

It is all everywhere all the time, it is serious, animals with ribcages and children in hospitals on the news with people somewhere or other screaming because of a suicide bomber or American soldiers who have been shot or something...⁷

To się dzieje na świecie bez przerwy i to są poważne sprawy, w dzienniku telewizyjnym zwierzęta z wystającymi żebrami, dzieci w szpitalach, twarze krzyczących ludzi, zamachowcy samobójcy, zabici amerykańscy żołnierze...⁸

[It happens around the world all the time and it is serious, the news show animals with ribcages, children in hospitals, faces of shouting people, suicide bombers, American soldiers killed...]

The Polish translation does not use substandard grammar; it unifies sentence structure and loses the uncertainty and hesitation peculiar to the original. In the fragment below, the overly schematic syntax of the English version becomes 'improved' and adorned:

She looks at the way the sun comes through the leaves above her head i.e. the story of Icarus who had the wings this father made which the sun melted when he flew too close. (25)

Obserwuje jak słońce przedziera się przez liście nad jej głową, i.e. mit o Ikarze, którego mu stopiły się skrzydła, bo poszybował za blisko słońca. (29)

[She looks at the way the sun comes through the leaves above her head i.e. the myth of Icarus, whose wings melted because he flew too close to the sun.]

As a result, the Polish translation does not truly render the idiosyncrasies of Astrid's style. It appears that the translator is tempted by what Antoine Berman in *Translation as the Trial of the Foreign* calls the distorting tendencies of rationalization and ennoblement. As Berman argues, "Rationalization recomposes sentences and the sequence of sentences, rearranging them according to a certain idea of discursive *order*", and, as a result, "makes the orig-

⁷ A. Smith, *The Accidental*, London: Penguin Books, 2005, p. 128, ellipsis original. All subsequent references are to this edition.

⁸ A. Smith, *Przypadkowa*, trans. A. Andrzejewska, Warszawa: Warszawskie Wydawnictwo Literackie MUZA, 2007. All subsequent references are to this edition.

inal pass from concrete to abstract”⁹. Ennoblement, in turn, “produces texts that are ‘readable’, ‘brilliant’, rid of their original clumsiness and complexity so as to enhance the ‘meaning’”¹⁰. Sadly, adopting such a narrative strategy leads to the loss of Astrid’s voice. A further example is provided below:

It was insane. It was jelly or something similar. It was his daughters who did it or his sons. It was one of Michael’s tragedies. It was quite good though. (9)

Oblęd. To była galaretką albo coś w tym rodzaju. Zrobiły mu to jego dzieci, córki czy synowie. To Michael polecał tę tragedię. Była nawet niezła. (14-15)
[Madness. It was jelly or something similar. His children did it to him, daughters or sons. It was Michael who recommended this tragedy. (It) was actually quite good.]

It is clear at first glance that the translation does not preserve the original parallelism which strongly dominates this passage. Although the demands of Polish syntax are different (e.g. it is most natural to drop the subject in the last sentence), a translator conscious of the fact that ennoblement means distortion could have easily produced a passage which, being stylistically awkward, more faithfully renders Astrid’s voice:

To oblęd. To była galaretką albo coś w tym rodzaju. To zrobiły mu jego dzieci, córki czy synowie. To Michael polecał tę tragedię. To była nawet niezła tragedia.

The Polish translation also frequently yields to the tendency of rationalization in its rendition of original punctuation. In the fragment below, Smith attempts to reconstruct the flow of consciousness by means of, among others, the reductive used of punctuation:

And then maybe there will be vital evidence on her mini dv tape when she gets home and at some point in the investigation into the vandalism someone in authority will remember and say oh that twelve-year-old girl was there with a camera, maybe she recorded something really what is the word crucial to our enquiries, and they will come and knock on the door, but what if they aren’t still here for the summer, what if they’ve already gone home, some investigations take quite a long time, well then the authorities will trace her back home with their computers by looking up Michael’s name or by asking the people who own this substandard house and, because of her, things will

⁹ A. Berman, *Translation and the Trials of the Foreign* trans. L. Venuti, [in] *The Translation Studies Reader*, (ed.) L. Venuti, London: Routledge, 2000, p. 288-289.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 291.

finally be put right and a mystery like who is responsible for the vandalism at the Curry Palace will actually be solved. (10-11)

The Polish version of this passage uses standard punctuation, and the discourse becomes normalized. This, however, results in losing the immediacy of Astrid's voice, which is flattened and deprived of its dynamic penetrating urgency.

Another idiosyncrasy of Astrid's manner of speaking is her frequent intrusive use of "i.e.," which has a rather ambivalent character: because the narrator's free indirect speech represents the girls voice, and it reproduces multiple colloquial expressions, it emulates the spoken, not the written form of language. Thus, the intrusive "i.e." becomes a substandard use of an abbreviation instead of a full form in speech. Moreover, the abbreviation is often used out of its usual context (see last sentence below):

Sixty-one minus nine, i.e. still at least fifty-two more to go. (13)

Sześćdziesiąt jeden minus dziewięć, i.e. jeszcze co najmniej pięćdziesiąt dwa. (18)

She has a way of talking i.e. Irish sounding, or maybe a kind of American. (31)

Ma taki akcent, i.e. jakby irlandzki, albo któryś z amerykańskich. (34)

Something has definitely i.e. begun. (35)

Coś się zdecydowanie i.e. zaczęło. (38)

For some reason, the Polish translation decides to retain the original English abbreviation, despite the fact that it is not used in Polish, and has a good Polish equivalent, "tj.:". Adopting such a strategy, which generates a misleading foreignisation of the text, appears ungrounded at this point.

Magnus is Astrid's five-year-older brother. Formerly a diligent and well-behaved secondary school student, his life has been changed by what he thought was going to be a harmless prank on his classmate: when he and two other boys photoshopped the girl's head on a pornographic picture and circulated it by email, the sensitive girl was driven to suicide. Depressed and gnawed by overwhelming guilt, Magnus is now a case of "genuine clinical trauma"¹¹ on the verge of suicide himself, and it is only Amber's intervention that brings him back to life, allowing him to look for reprieve in confession to Astrid.

The first of the sections focalized on Magnus show him in the state of absolute shock. As MacDonald contends, he "has lost the ability to function

¹¹ E. Horton, "Everything You Ever Dreamed": Post-9/11 Trauma and Fantasy in Ali Smith's *The Accidental*, "Modern Fiction Studies", vol. 58, no. 3, 2012, p. 642.

in the outside world or to interact with those around him”¹². His language represents his state of mind: it is radically simplified, stylistically unadorned, often consisting of choppy sentences:

Magnus gets up. He feels dizzy from standing. He walks across to the door. Then he notices his bare arm above his hand. He notices his chest. He looks down. He isn't wearing anything. He turns back into the room. He pulls on his shirt. He takes a button, lines it up against a buttonhole in the shirt's other side. But he can't get the button to go through the buttonhole. He can't get his hand to do it. He pulls on the jeans. He tucks himself in. He takes the zip, finger there, thumb there. He makes an effort. The zip goes up. (46)

Despite grammatical incorrespondences between English and Polish, this iterative syntactic monotony renders in translation rather easily. In the passage above, the Polish grammar dictates to drop the subject, but the parallelism of syntax is still clearly discernible. Magnus's manner of expression, reminding the reader of an emotionless automaton, is adequately preserved in the Polish version.

In subsequent sections narrated from Magnus's point of view, the language reflects his gradual withdrawal from the realm of “traumatic numbness”¹³, the syntax evolving towards more diversity. It is a typical language of an older adolescent, still rather plain and uncomplicated, but occasionally influenced by the boy's framing perspective of science, especially maths:

Amber = genius, Magnus thinks. Amber = genius squared for thinking to find a man who has a key to the church in the middle of the village. The next time she goes to London she gets a copy of the key made. This is genius to the power of three. (143).

Both the mathematical references of Magnus's idiom and the mathematical precision of his tone are aptly rendered in the Polish translation.

The siblings' stepfather, Michael, teaches English literature at a university in London. Horton describes him as “caught in an evidently self-destructive male chauvinism, which conceives fulfilment through sexual imperialism”¹⁴ materialized through the notorious habit of sleeping with his students. His language is heavily influenced by the idiom of humanities, permeated by numerous allusions to literary terms, names of writers and notable quotations. This amalgamating quality of his discourse represents what MacDonald

¹² Q. MacDonald, *The War at Home: Representing the Iraq War in Ali Smith's The Accidental*, “The Albatross”, vol. 1, no. 1, 2013, p. 58.

¹³ Horton, op. cit., p. 642.

¹⁴ Ibidem, 649.

names his “fragmented subjectivity”; that Michael “relates his experiences via literary figures and situations”¹⁵ is not merely the effect of his erudition and boastfulness, but results from lack of individual voice of his own. This is a sample of his discourse from the early part of the novel:

But here was a new truth for Dr Michael Smart—because who in the world gave a damn, when he was really alive, like this, about ‘epiphany’, in other words about what things were called, about devices and conceits and rules and the boundaries of genres, the learned chronologies, the sorted and given definitions of things? Now he had finally understood, now he knew for the first time, exactly what it meant, what the Joyce and the droney old bore of a Woolf and the Yeats and the Roth and the Larkin, the Hemingway, the authentic post-war working-class voices, the Browning, the Eliot, the Dickens and the who else, William Thackeray, Monsieur Apollinaire, Thomas Mann, old Will Shakescene, Dylan Thomas drunk and dead and forever young and easy under the appleboughs, and all of them, all the others, and every page he had ever read, every exegesis he had ever exegesed (was that even a word? who cared? it was a word now, wasn’t it?) had been about. (76)

Ale to była nowa prawda dla doktora Michaela Smarta, który pojął, że w takim momencie, gdy człowiek czuje, że żyje, przestaje dbać o „objawienie”, inaczej mówiąc, o nazewnictwo, środki stylistyczne, koncepty i zasady, granice gatunków, uczone chronologie, ustalone definicje. Teraz nareszcie zrozumiał, po raz pierwszy dokładnie pojął, o czym pisali Joyce i ta stara nudziara Woolf, Yeats i Roth, Larkin i Hemingway, autentyczne powojenne głosy klasy robotniczej, Browning, Eliot, Dickens i kto tam jeszcze, William Thackeray, monsieur Apollinaire, Tomasz Mann, stary Will Szekzibir, Dylan Thomas pijany, martwy i wiecznie młody, i swobodny pod gałęźmi jabłoni, ci wszyscy oraz inni, i pojął, o co chodziło na każdej stronie, którą kiedykolwiek przeczytał, w każdej egzegezie, jaką kiedykolwiek egzegezował (nie ma takiego słowa? a co za różnica? no to już jest). (75-76)

The general tone of Michael’s style is accurately preserved by the Polish translator: most of the jargon of literary studies is in place (with the exception of “epiphany”, which loses its Joycean reference). The line from Dylan Thomas’s “Fern Hill” (“young and easy under the appleboughs”) interwoven into the narrative is reproduced through the Polish translation of the poem¹⁶.

The second section focalized on Michael follows his psychological collapse, which is paralleled by the collapse of the narrative language. For Levin,

¹⁵ MacDonald, op. cit., p. 57.

¹⁶ D. Thomas, *Wiersze wybrane*, trans. S. Barańczak, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1974, p. 165.

the protagonist's selfhood "is figured literally as the devolution of language into shards of verse, which are then reconstituted in a sonnet sequence"¹⁷. As a result of gradual disintegration of his personality, his voice dissipates as well and descends into the borrowed artifice of poetry: starting from free verse, developing into a sonnet form and ending up in concrete poetry. Lack of authenticity in his voice is also manifested by substantial intertextual groundings of the text. They are situated even on the most basic level of character formation: Michael's "sexual imperialism" and his dismissal from a university position after a complaint from a student he seduced allude to J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*. The language itself heavily draws on a number of references to English poetry, including the works of Shakespeare, Philip Larkin or e.e. cummings, by means of direct quotations, paraphrases, stylisation or even text layout. Generally, the "poetic" quality of Michael's discourse has been rendered into Polish accurately, especially in the aspect of its form: sonnets are reproduced as sonnets, the rhyming pattern is preserved, a concrete poem retains its shape. The more problematic aspect is the translation of intertextual references resounding in Michael's voice; this issue is discussed in a separate section below.

The last of the four voices of the family quartet belongs to Eve, the siblings' mother. She is a commercially successful writer of the series of "autobiotrue-fictinterviews"¹⁸, pseudo-biographies of resurrected World War II casualties, re-imagining their alternative fates as if they had survived the war. The status of the narratives is uncertain, locating them between blatant fiction, which they obviously are, and "the genuine article"¹⁹, as they are marketed. The status corresponds to the dilemmas and uncertainties which Eve faces herself; she is, as Breitbach puts it, "mired in her own lies and fictions"²⁰, unable to separate authenticity and artificiality from her emotional life.

Compared to the sections focalizing on other family members, Eve's discourse is the least stylistically marked. Some passages follow the interview layout of her books, being framed in the form of questions and answers, which reflects her anxiety and perplexed nature. Those fragments are easily and smoothly rendered into Polish. Otherwise, her style is more refined than the voices of her children, but it does not approximate the artificiality represented by Michael. Some features of journalistic discourse are discernible:

¹⁷ S.M. Levin, *Narrating Reminders: Spectral Presences in Ali Smith's Fictions*, [in] *Ali Smith*, (ed.) M. Germanà and E. Horton, London: Bloomsbury, 2013, p. 41.

¹⁸ A. Smith, *Accidental*, op. cit., p. 81.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, 81.

²⁰ Breitbach, op. cit., p. 143.

Here was a summer 2003 holiday snapshot of Eve Smart (42) working hard on her latest book all summer in the idyllic summerhouse of the holiday home of Eve and her husband, Dr Michael Smart, and look how the light caught the wet fountain-pen ink on the page as she wrote line after steady line, and how she paused for a moment to think, and how the photograph caught the moment of it, and caught that unidentifiable wraith of smoke or dusty air in a shaft of sunlight, and the way this marked the accidental fall of the light through the summerhouse window that day. (183)

All of the idiosyncrasies characterizing Eve's style are aptly retained in the Polish translation, allowing this character to speak in a clearly discernible individual voice.

Michał Głowiński observes that most studies on intertextuality assume the existence of the ideal reader, and claims that the task of decoding intertextual allusions demands from the reader the literary competence entirely different than any other part of the hermeneutic process does. It is only natural that the act of translation, involving a transfer of meaning from one linguistic and cultural context to another, necessarily runs a risk of losing some intertextual references present in the source text²¹. The translator's task entails the use of strategies which will minimise this risk and allow the target text to retain as many intertextual allusions as possible. As Głowiński further notes, the possibility to render the references to other literary texts relies largely on the previous presence of those texts in the target culture. He also emphasizes that while the understanding of a literary work might depend on interpreting certain "major" intertextual references, the awareness of other, "minor", allusions does not disqualify the reading process and remains optional²².

As Majkiewicz points out, translation studies have not yet provided any uniform description of strategies and tools available for rendering intertextual references in the target text²³. She suggests that the impossibility of specifying translation solutions stems from the multiplicity of contexts in which "pre-texts" are evoked by literary works; this includes such important factors as the dependence of "pre-texts" on the specific culture and literary history, the degree of their familiarity in target culture, as well as the level of openness of intertextual allusions. In her distinguished study, Majkiewicz offers a detailed and comprehensive typology of intertextual references, categorized on the basis of the degree of their explicitness.

²¹ M. Głowiński, *O intertekstualności*, „Pamiętnik Literacki”, vol. LXXVII, no. 4, 1986, p. 93.

²² Ibidem, p. 95-96.

²³ A. Majkiewicz, *Intertekstualność – implikacje dla teorii przekładu*, Warszawa: PWN, 2008, p. 11.

Intertextuality in *The Accidental* is mostly of an implicit character. Literary and cultural differences evoked by Smith's text are not directly identified and their recognition is left to the reader's competence (the names of Shakespeare and e.e. cummings are mentioned, but not connected directly to particular passages in the text). For instance, one of the sonnets in the second section focalized on Michael begins with an easily recognizable reference to a widely known opening line of Shakespeare's "Sonnet 130":

Were Amber's eyes anything like the sun?
Listen, they overexposed him like a Lee
Miller / Man Ray solarization.
He glowed the moment he was looked at. He
glitized like one firefly in the dark, then like
a whole architecture of fireworks
spelling her name and the words I love. Michael
sputtered out his crescendo in jerks
and flares she didn't notice, being quite
so bright herself she eclipsed everything
that shone back at her with a lesser light.
Because she was light itself. Amber, walking
through the world, lit the world, took the world, made it,
and after her everything in it faded. (165)

Czy słońcem jest ten promień, co z Amber oczu pada?
Nim, jak u Lee Miller Michael prześwietlony
i u Man Raya w ciemni; nieszczęsnemu biada!
Tli się pod jej spojrzeniem, świetlik rozjarzony,
I jak raca rozświetla głuchą ciemność nocy,
Wołając w głos jej imię i miłości słowa,
Aż wreszcie eksplodował. Spazmami rozkoszy
Wstrząsany w drżącym crescendo coraz to od nowa:
Przyczyna jego cierpień nie dba o nie zgoła,
Sama bowiem swym światłem w krąg przyćmiewa srodze
Wszystko, co blaskiem słabszym żarzy się dokoła.
Będąc czystą światłością, Amber na swej drodze
Świat oświeca, do piersi przygarnia i stwarza,
A gdy przejdzie i zniknie, nic już się nie zdarza. (157)

The Polish translator accurately reproduces the first line with Barańczak's translation of this sonnet²⁴, which is arguably the most familiar Polish version of the poem. However, in the remaining lines of the poem the translation seems to yield to the tendency of ennoblement, like in the case of Astrid's discourse discussed above. The language of the target text is noticeably loftier

²⁴ W. Shakespeare, *Sonety*, trans. S. Barańczak, Kraków: a5, 2013, p. 167.

than the original version, both in the choice of epithets and the use of metaphor. The Polish version is poeticized by means of employing emphatic inversion (“miłości słowa”, “blaskiem słabszym żarzy się”) or synaesthesia (“głucha ciemność nocy” – “silent darkness of the night”) absent in the original. The reader of the Polish version, encountering phrases such as “nieszczęsnemu biada!” (“woe is the unfortunate one!”), or “spazmy rozkoszy” (“the spasms of bliss”) is inclined to think that Michael begins the sonnet with a close paraphrase of Shakespeare and then plummets into tasteless pomposity. But this is not the case in Smith’s text: Michael’s sonnet lacks the markers of high poetic style; its tone recalls the “unpoetic” quality of Philip Larkin’s poetry. This is more visible in the next sonnet:

But sonnets shouldn't be so d a m n e d one-sided.
 They implied, at least, dialogue. He found that
 no one spoke back. No one. Michael persuaded,
 argued with, n o o n e b u t h i m s e l f, looked round at
 a family that wasn't his and saw
 a lot of faded colour, t h e n h e s a t
 in his car, stared at an empty field, raw,
 stony, bleached, like he was; sat in the heat
 watching it dry up. He was such a sucker.
 He knew her turn of head, her hands, her laughter.
 He realized that he would never f u c k h e r.
 He realized that he would never have her.
 He was a v e r y o r d i n a r y b l o k e.
 He turned from sand to glass and then he broke. (167)

Problem w tym, c h o l e r a, że tak jednostronny
 Nie powinien być sonet. Odkrył nie od razu
 Michael, że choć wielce do dialogu skłonny,
 Prosi, grozi, przemawia – jak dziad do obrazu.
 Przyjrząwszy się rodzinie, co nie była jego,
 Obraz ujrzał w tonacji żałości nie spłowiałej.
 Usiadł w aucie, zagapił się na szmat pustego
 Pola, jak on, ugoru... Zmęczony upałem,
 Patrzył, jak schnie i więdnie. Ale z niego kretyn.
 Znał jej dłonie, jej gesty, słyszał, jak się śmieje;
 Zrozumiał, że nie będzie jej p i e p r z y ć, niestety,
 I że ją kiedyś mieć będzie, utracił nadzieję.
 Pojął, że z niego facet przyziemny i mialki;
 Z piasku w szkło się przemienił i rozbił w kawałki. (159)

To the English reader, Larkin’s poetry is immediately invoked by several stylistic markers: limited application of metaphor in favour of meton-

ymy, distinct prosaic diction accompanied by rhymes, flagrant examples of enjambment, the use of colloquialisms and swearwords. Michael's sonnet evokes rather directly two well-known Larkin's poems: the repeated negative forms ("no one but himself", "a family that wasn't his") relate to "I remember, I remember", while phrases such as "a very ordinary bloke" and "then he sat / in his car, stared at an empty field, raw, / stony, bleached" correspond to "Mr Bleaney" and its presentation of the meagreness of human existence ("Flowered curtains, thin and frayed, / Fall to within five inches of the sill, / Whose window shows a strip of building land, / Tussocky, littered"²⁵).

Just as in the previous example, the ennobling tendency results in a significant change in tone: the original plainness is exchanged for grandiloquence of such phrases as "choć wielce do dialogu skłonny" or "obraz ujrzał w tonacji żałościwie spłowiej", which are marked with old-fashioned flowery words and unnatural word order. The Polish rendition follows what Jarniewicz calls a stereotype of poetic voice, referring to which is, in his view, overused in Polish translations of foreign poetry²⁶. Jarniewicz finds the roots of this stereotypical notion of poetic voice in the 19th and early 20th century Polish poetry and points out that contemporary Polish poetic convention is significantly different (and, in fact, much more resembling Larkin's style).

Admittedly, rendering the intertextual allusions to Larkin was a highly challenging task for the translator, since Larkin's poetic style is relatively unfamiliar to the Polish reader. Even though his poetry was published in Poland in two different translations, by Stanisław Barańczak²⁷ and by Jacek Dehnel²⁸, it cannot be assumed that the idiosyncrasies of his voice are easily recognized in the Polish cultural context. Nonetheless, the Polish translation of *The Accidental*, which, instead of retaining the stylistic simplicity, overly poeticizes Michael's sonnets, appears to succumb to the tendency of employing the stereotype of poetic voice, pinpointed by Jarniewicz. Curiously, the Norwegian translator of Smith's novel, discussing the difficult issues that she had to face in her work, never mentions that intertextuality was a problem: "To my astonishment, however, when I got down to it, the lines and rhymes just poured out of me. The poems were done in no time, and I think it unlikely that I'll ever have the opportunity to make such naughty rhymes ever again"²⁹. It is

²⁵ P. Larkin, *Mr Bleaney*, [in] Idem, *Collected Poems*, London: Faber & Faber, 2003, p. 118.

²⁶ J. Jarniewicz, *Kto tak pięknie gra? Stereotyp poetyckości w polskich przekładach poezji współczesnej*, [in] Idem, *Gościnność słowa: Szkice o przekładzie literackim*, Kraków: Znak, 2012, p. 34-39.

²⁷ P. Larkin, *44 wiersze*, trans. S. Barańczak, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Arka, 1991.

²⁸ P. Larkin, *Zebrane*, trans. J. Dehnel, Wrocław: Biuro Literackie, 2008.

²⁹ Alfsen, op. cit., p. 134.

hard to believe that inserting intertextual references was possible if such an approach was used in translation.

The Accidental also contains multiple intertextual allusions to the body of culture, especially from the field of cinema. These references, even if not entirely explicit in character, are, naturally, easier to render in translation, since they invoke either specific characters or elements of the plot. For instance, when Eve ruminates on a Bergman film “meant to be an allegory about post-nuclear paranoia” in which “death was following the medieval knight and the plague was making everyone go mad”³⁰, the reference to *The Seventh Seal* is automatic and preserving it does not demand the use of any specific translation strategy. Similarly, an ironical self-description of Amber, who, for Boxall is “a composite character, made ... out of snippets of film and scraps of cultural debris”³¹ is an amalgam of filmic quotations which send the reader to the late 1960s, the time when the girl was born:

But my father was Alfie, my mother was Isadora. I was unnaturally psychic in my teens, I made a boy fall off his bike and I burned down a whole school. My mother was crazy; she was in love with God. There I was at the altar about to marry someone else when my boyfriend hammered on the church glass at the back and we eloped together on a bus. My mother was furious. She'd slept with him too. The devil got me pregnant and a satanic sect made me go through with it. (104)

Here again, the translation only needs to be accurate and the Polish reader can follow all the hints towards cinematic pre-texts: *Alfie*, a 1966 comedy starring Michael Caine, *Isadora* a 1968 biography of Isadora Duncan, *Carrie* a 1976 Brian de Palma adaptation of Stephen King's story, Mike Nichols's 1967 classic *The Graduate* and Roman Polański's 1968 horror *Rosemary's Baby*.

Rendering polyphony in the Polish translation of *The Accidental* requires preserving contrast between four separate voices and as such is an arduous task for the translator. The analysis undertaken in this paper proves that the desired effect has been generally accomplished: the Polish reader of Smith's novel is able to discern differences between the stylistic manner of four protagonists. It has to be noted, though, that the contrast is not as sharp as in the original English version, due to substantial standardization and ennoblement in the target text. Adopting such a translation strategy also contributes to a significant loss of defamiliarisation with which Smith's narrative surprises its reader.

³⁰ Smith, *The Accidental*, op. cit., p. 178.

³¹ Boxall, op. cit., p. 63.