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Centenarian *Weird Fiction* from Providence in Contemporary Poland. Translational Models and the Reception of Short Stories by Howard Phillips Lovecraft – the Case Study of *Dagon*

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Abstract: The article discusses the conventional models and translation techniques, which are most common among the Polish translators of the *weird fiction* by Howard Phillips Lovecraft. The proposed classification of such models, aimed at either “popularisation,” “stereotypisation” or “revision” of Lovecraft’s short stories, presents the impact of extra-textual factors (vision of the writer, target group of readers, cultural and political influences) on the content, language and style of translated works by the American author. The comparative analysis takes into consideration one of the early short stories by Lovecraft, *Dagon* (1917), and its Polish versions by Arnold Mostowicz (1973), Robert Lipski (1994) and Maciej Płaza (2012).

Keywords: translational convention, translational reception, *weird fiction*, horror novel

The history of the reception of fiction by Howard Phillips Lovecraft, who died in 1937, could be just another example of the fate of an artist ignored when alive and recognized several decades after death, if it had not been for the blatant dissonance between the ways in which critics and literary researchers reacted to his works on the one hand, and writers and pop-culture creators on the other. Now commonly described with the fashionable name of “cult writer” and “a master of horror,”¹ Lovecraft until recently, in Marek Wydmuch’s view, enjoyed “publicity of a particular kind”:

¹ “H. P. Lovecraft, a master of horror, [...] has become a victim of a cult which originated after his death. He was completely ignored by the mainstream literature when he was alive, although the popularity he gained was equal to the popularity of the most famous journalists or pulp fiction writers. Currently, 60 years after his death, his books are translated into more than a dozen languages, while stories are adapted for the radio, TV, comic books, computer games” (an opinion by S.T. Joshi in: H. P. Lovecraft, *Coś na progu*, translated by R. Lipski, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Zysk i S-ka, 1999, back cover). The quotations from the Polish sources have been translated by Łukasz Barciński, unless stated otherwise.

the fame of a writer who makes an impact on readers all over the world but whose name for a long time was almost non-existent in “encyclopaedias and compendiums.”²

Such a state of affairs was, to a large extent, perpetuated by blindly duplicated run-of-the-mill statements by American literary scholars, who still in the 1950s and 1960s frequently agreed with the judgment made by an influential literary critic Edmund Wilson in 1945: “the only genuine horror in this fiction is the horror of bad taste and bad art.”³ Lovecraft’s oeuvre waited almost three decades to question this verdict and to receive an impulse to analyse his works in depth.⁴ Admittedly, Victoria Nelson dates the beginning of the “wave of increased critical interest”⁵ in the writer’s works back to the 1970s but only ten years later clearly and “systematically the interest in his prose increased in the academic circles.” This fact, noticed by Anna Krawczyk-Łaskarzewska, gives sound “proof to state that Lovecraft became part of the canon through the back door, through pulp magazines and fan culture, desiring cult writers, not following the rules of the literary mainstream.”⁶

Interpreters successively revealed the secrets of the New England writer, which allowed his works to be read not only as a model representative of *weird fiction* – a subgenre of fantasy literature created through the combination of horror and science fiction⁷ – but also as an innovative reorganiser of conventions, persisting in horror literature since Edgar Allan Poe,⁸ and

² M. Wydmuch, “Cień z Providence,” in: H.P. Lovecraft, *Zew Cthulhu*, translated by R. Grzybowska, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Czytelnik, 1983, p. 5.

³ Cited after: V. Nelson, *Sekretne życie lalek*, translated by A. Kowalcze-Pawlik, Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, 2009, p. 117.

⁴ Although in the biography, driven by the explicit idea of demythologising the figure of the author, Sunand Tryambak Joshi writes that “it is difficult to evaluate the extent of Wilson’s attack on the subsequent reputation of Lovecraft among critics,” still noticing the fact that after its publication “in the next years, there were fewer and fewer articles and reviews,” and in the 1960s there were no “literary analyses and critical works” (S.T. Joshi, *H. P. Lovecraft. Biografia*, translated by M. Kopacz, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Zysk i S-ka, 2010, p. 1070, 1083).

⁵ Ibidem, p. 117.

⁶ A. Krawczyk-Łaskarzewska, “Pomiędzy wiedzą a grozą – Hawthorne, Gilman, Bierce, Lovecraft,” in: *Wkanonie prozy amerykańskiej*, edited by L. Aleksandrowicz-Pędich, Vol. 2: *Z placu Waszyngtona do Domu z liści*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Szkoły Wyższej Psychologii Społecznej “Academica,” 2009, p. 41.

⁷ “*Weird fiction* is literature which by subterfuge introduces confusion in the world known to us by ‘smuggling’ a clearly exposed irrational element into it – its intention is to scare the reader (‘weird’ means ‘uncanny,’ evoking horror, terrifying, scary; ‘fiction’ means a work of belles lettres)” (M. Wydmuch, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Czytelnik, 1975, p. 39).

⁸ The relation between the work of the two writers is described by Sunand Tryambak Joshi still with caution, however firmly stating that: “Lovecraft extended the scope of *weird fiction* like nobody else, even Poe” (S.T. Joshi, “Wywiad z okazji premiery książki ‘H.P. Lovecraft: biografia,’” interviewed by M. Kopacz, *Biuletyn Carpe Noctem* 2010, No. 1, p. 5). Michel Houellebecq takes a step further in his evaluation of Lovecraft: “we start to place him in the right place, equal to Edgar Poe or even higher, in any rate, in a special place” (M. Houellebecq, *H. P. Lovecraft – Przeciw światu, przeciw życiu*, translated by J. Giszczak, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo W.A.B., 2007, p. 125).

an inspiring deconstructor of numerous myths, underlying culture at first in the US,⁹ later in the whole Western civilisation.¹⁰ Under the influence of the increasing number of students researching Lovecraft and the intensified insight of scholars into the discursive potential of his writing, there was a shift, imperceptibly but definitely, in the labels pinned on the writer, from the narrow formula of "a horror classic writer," already applied in the second half of the 20th century, through the status of "a classic writer of American literature" to the wider, ennobling and now often repeated label: "a classic writer of world literature."¹¹ No wonder that nowadays Stephen King's or Michel Houellebecq's opinions are quoted with approval as symptomatically evaluating the writer's oeuvre, not through the prism of its artistic qualities but through the scale of cultural impact. "Howard Phillips Lovecraft is of immense importance even in the 21st century"¹² – states King in his representative opinion. Especially the reflection of the above mentioned French essayist over the substantial impact of the writer on the contemporary literature, music, film, comic books and games (not only computer or video ones) expresses the popular position among critics and literary scholars: "In an age that exalts originality as a supreme value in the arts, this phenomenon is surely cause for surprise. [...] Nothing like it has been recorded since Homer and medieval epic poetry. We must humbly acknowledge that we are dealing here with what is known as a 'founding mythology.'¹³

American and Western European literary trends concerning Lovecraft – here only briefly outlined – reached the People's Republic of Poland (PRL) fragmentarily at best, at worst with more or less twenty years' delay.¹⁴ It

⁹ For example, Wojciech Orliński states that "Lovecraft is key for understanding the Puritan myth of New England," a writer who as the first "performed a pop-culture deconstruction of Founding Fathers" (W. Orliński, *Ameryka nie istnieje*, Bielsko-Biała: Wydawnictwo Pascal, 2010, pp. 45, 46).

¹⁰ This issue is raised by e.g. Victoria Nelson, writing about Lovecraft exploring and contesting "places where the entirety of philosophy, religion and psychology is divided into three regions with boundaries delineated and strongly guarded by the Western intellectual culture" (op. cit., p. 115).

¹¹ "The statement [...] that Lovecraft is one of the biggest American writers of the 20th century, although not unarguable, is more and more difficult to question as with every decade his books are still renewed and his works become more and more frequently the subject of university lectures in the US and all over the world" (S. King, "Poduszka Lovecrafta," in: M. Houellebecq, op. cit., p. 9, 14). Among others, S.T. Joshi writes about Lovecraft, already as "a world literature classic" (*H. P. Lovecraft. Biografia*, translated by M. Kopacz, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Zysk i S-ka, 2010, p. 1100).

¹² S. King, op. cit., p. 9.

¹³ M. Houellebecq, op. cit., p. 36.

¹⁴ Among other things, the majority of works authored by domestic researchers can be dated back to the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century, although a number of exceptions to this pattern of categorisation can be mentioned. The pioneer in describing Lovecraft's works to Polish readers was Zygmunt Kałużyński, who already in the 1950s argued that "contrary to the amusing trash typical of millions of copies of science fiction

is important to mention them, though, as they had some impact on the writer's image and reading of his works available in Poland mainly thanks to translators' activity, entangled, on the one hand, in a series of cultural contexts, occasionally social-political, new even for the American *weird fiction*. On the other, the activity was, to a large extent, shaped by the translators' knowledge about "the enigmatic author," according to Harold Bloom's opinion:¹⁵ his biography, life and artistic philosophy and his oeuvre. This double entanglement of a translator's practice in many cases bore fruit in the form of a variety of modifications introduced into Lovecraft's prose in the successive Polish variants. Modifications inspired by extratextual and extralinguistic sources which frequently influenced the shape of particular works (themes, motifs, style, etc.) thus having an impact on the portrayal of Lovecraft, popularised in this way.

The pioneer translations of the writer's stories were presented in Poland at the turn of the 1960s¹⁶ in widely-read magazines. Successive stages of Lovecraft's prose in the awareness of Polish readers are adequately summarised by Jakub Mikulski's periodisation. He proposes a division into three stages according to the number of publications and the type of distributing publishing houses:

The first one covers the years 1955-1989, the second one is the period from 1990 until the contemporary times. In the times of the People's Republic of Poland, there are two sub-periods: 1) years 1955-1981, when the works in question appeared relatively rarely, usually in the form of individual works in magazines, among others in "Przekrój"; 2) years 1981-1990, when Lovecraft's stories were published more often in the press, first of all – the first book publications were issued on the market.¹⁷

literature, Lovecraft's book gives food for thought" (Z. Kałużyński, *Listy zza trzech granic*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Czytelnik, 1957, p. 10).

¹⁵ "Enigmatic author" – an opinion expressed by H. Bloom in his review of the writer's biography: "H.P. Lovecraft: A Life" (cited after: <http://www.hplovecraft.com/study/bios/iap.aspx>, accessed on 20.11.2017).

¹⁶ Still the unconfirmed information is the reports about previously available Polish translations of Lovecraft's prose, functioning by way of "a literary rumour." It is repeated most frequently by popular sources, e.g. *Wikipedia*: "some stories by Lovecraft were allegedly translated into Polish already in 1930s by an unknown author signing himself as Żalny. Antoni Słonimski mentions that fact in his columns" (entry *H. P. Lovecraft* on wikipedia.org, accessed on 20. 11. 2017). But they are also referred to in strictly academic and scientific publications: "according to Karol Irzykowski, a critic of Grabiński's fantastic literature, when the first translations of Lovecraft's fiction allegedly appeared in Poland in the 1930s, the translator used a pseudonym 'Żalny' which is the name Grabiński adopted when he first published his works" (K. Gadomska, A. Loska, "Preface," in: *Poe, Grabiński, Ray, Lovecraft. Visions, Correspondences, Transitions*, edited by K. Gadomska, A. Loska, Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2017, p. 7).

¹⁷ J. Mikulski, "Howard Phillips Lovecraft: autor, dzieło i jego recepcja wydawnicza w Polsce. Zarys problematyki," *Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis. Studia o Książce i Informacji* 2013, No. 32, pp. 37–38. As Mikulski further summarises: "for over 50 years of the creative presence of Howard Phillips Lovecraft on the Polish publishing market, i.e. since the end of 1955 till the end of 2012, his 101 works appeared 70 times in total, including 40 book publications and 30 works in issues of various journals" (p. 39).

The form and the frequency of publications of translations as well as the period in which they enter the Polish literary circulation, are factors which in case of Lovecraft’s writing have an impact on the dominant translational conventions and the related translation techniques, not determining them without exception and not limiting their occurrence temporally. The most common conventions include three, which can be problematised with the labels of “popularising”, “stereotyping” and “revisional.”

The “popularising” convention shapes translations oriented towards dissemination of Lovecraft’s canonical works among the throng of Polish readers in a broader sense – during the People’s Republic of Poland, when the name of the author was not yet recognisable or, later, among a narrow group of recipients, whom the writer’s text did not manage to reach despite the presence of his works, sometimes for many years, on the local publishing market. A good example of the latter type is the translation, directed towards children and youth, of the story *The Outsider*, rendered in 2008 by Ewa Morycińska-Dzius based on the Spanish adaptation of Lovecraft’s prose.¹⁸ Regardless of how precisely the group of the text recipients can be delineated, in case of “popularising” translations, a given literary work usually undergoes far-reaching modifications with regard to the original. Their types depend on the anticipated interpretative possibilities, readers’ preferences and the specificity of the very publishing house. In translations published in magazines during the People’s Republic of Poland, the norm was, for instance, a reduction of the plot and semantic condensations, simplifications of fragments strongly rooted in foreign cultural contexts or limitation of content censored by the existing governmental institutions, which also depend on the requirements of the size of the volume of a magazine.

The convention usually defined as the “stereotyping” one occurs when the figure and works of Lovecraft have already become popular in the Anglo-Saxon culture, whereas beyond, also in Poland, they have been at least recognisable. Translations shaped by this convention do not serve any longer the initial familiarisation of the readers with the overseas literary novelty, but, first of all, their function is to strengthen the fame of an already-known author. What is particularly important this strengthening is based on the foundation of a cultural stereotype, the promulgation of which led to the international success of Lovecraft’s prose publishers with the simultaneous cementation of the incomplete or false image of the writer’s image and his work.¹⁹ The popular opinions about the author of *The Call of Cthulhu*

¹⁸ See H. P. Lovecraft, “Obcy,” in: *Wielka księga strachu*, edited by X. Valls, translated by E. Morycińska-Dzius, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Media Rodzina, 2008.

¹⁹ As stated by Mikołaj Kołyszko in 2014, “hundreds of publications about Lovecraft’s mythology appeared on the market, however, not one should be considered to be competent. Both the division referred to by Paweł Jaskanis in *Mitologia wg Lovecrafta*, Daniel Misterek in *Tam gdzie czyja Cthulhu*, Sandy Petersen and Lynn Willis in *Zew Cthulhu*, and even the

as a mystic alienated from society, writing down his apocalyptic visions inspired by nightmares, the main artistic goal of which is to construct plots of a new religion-mythology, with a tinge of the occult, in horror stories full of terror – it seems to be a popularised image,²⁰ created to a large extent to ensure posthumous popularity for the writer. The typical and frequently repeated judgements include the comments of the American publisher of *weird fiction*, April Derleth, who writes in a symptomatic way about Lovecraft in 1974: “sad and pathetic was the life led by the peculiar, eccentric and prolific author. He was introvert, preferred to live in the land of his own fantasy than in the real world.”²¹ Biographical notes of this type, imported from the US, are quoted by Polish critics and translators: for instance, by Wanda Błońska-Wolfarth, presenting the figure of Lovecraft to the readers as a writer fascinated by “magic, folklore, mythology ... living in a world of imagination full of terror.”²² Translations inspired by this idea of the genesis of the text of Lovecraft were significantly influenced by the tendency to exploit the popular stereotype. Especially in the first book publications of Lovecraft’s collections of stories from the 1980s, it can be clearly seen that Polish translators tend to accentuate more strongly than in the original texts the mystical-religious threads, stylistically amplifying

false *Necronomicon Simona* are *de facto* descriptions and classifications created by August Derleth, who did not hesitate to falsify Lovecraft’s stories and letters, only to make his own vision of mythology become accepted by the readers” (M. Kołyszko, *Groza jest święta*, [e-book, no publishing venue, 2014, p. 48]. The promotional strategy of Lovecraft’s heirs turned out to be successful and far-reaching since still at the beginning of the 21st century Mateusz Kopacz notes: “it is surprising how much the advocates of the so-called “mythology of Cthulhu” avoid fathoming the truth about its author” and “you can be often surprised how distorted or incomplete is the image of Howard Phillips Lovecraft among his admirers” (M. Kopacz, “O biografii Lovecrafta od tłumacza słów kilka,” *Biuletyn Carpe Noctem* 2010, No. 1, pp. 8, 9). Miłosz Wiśniewski indicates the negative results of the functioning of Lovecraft’s stereotype as he notices that the American writer’s works “radically exceed the illusion of regular terrifying the reader with monsters, tentacles and cheap macabre. But only this has survived from his works in the contemporary pop-culture” (M. Wiśniewski, “Świat Howarda Philipa Lovecrafta w ujęciu religioznawczym,” *Humaniora. Czasopismo Internetowe* 2013, No. 1, p. 119).

²⁰ More on this subject can be found in S.T. Joshi in the last chapter, *Thou Art Not Gone*, pp. 1061-1101), of Lovecraft’s biography, quoting the critics’ reviews, the most extreme of which is Colin Wilson’s opinion about the writer as a “sick” and “terrifying” figure, waging “war on rationality”, “completely self-contained” and “rejecting the reality.” As concluded by Wilson: Lovecraft “lost any sense of normality, which would halfway turn an ordinary person back” (cited after: S.T. Joshi, *H. P. Lovecraft. Biografia*, p. 1082).

²¹ A. Derleth, “Przedmowa,” in: H. P. Lovecraft, A. Derleth, *Obserwatorzy spoza czasu*, translated by R. Lipski, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Zysk i S-ka, 2000, p. 5.

²² “The short life of Lovecraft (1890–1937) was a stroke of bad luck. Poverty, poor health, a failed marriage contributed to the creation of a terror-stricken imaginary world where the American writer lived. Half-scientific fantasies were combined with the old tradition of fantasy literature as he was interested in magic, folklore, mythology” (W. Błońska-Wolfarth, under the pseudonym F. Welczar, “Fascynujący autor Howard Philips Lovecraft,” *Przekrój* 1967, No. 12–13, p. 31).

the elements of horror present in the narratives and the attributes of terror in the depicted world. The translator's interferences of this type rarely modify the main plot of the stories, however they significantly alter their linguistic shape,²³ which results in the confirmation of the validity of the stereotype and maintaining it in the readers' reception.

It has to be mentioned here that both in case of translations that could be categorised as "popularising" and those in which the deviations from the original could be explained by the impact of the "stereotyping" convention, the crucial role was played by the limited access of translators to the comprehensive knowledge about Lovecraft's oeuvre and incomplete familiarisation with his works – in the People's Republic of Poland, the main reason being the political conditions of the Polish culture. It can be proven by easily found mistakes and imprecisions in the Polish renditions of the depicted world in the writer's works. A symptomatic example could be a fragment of the story *The Dunwich Horror*, in which the narrator reveals the mysteries of ancient powers threatening humanity: "They bend the forest and crush the city, yet may not forest or city behold the hand that smites. Kadath in the cold waste hath known Them, and what man knows Kadath?"²⁴ A "popularising" translation by Wanda Błońska-Wolfarth, was published under the pseudonym of Franciszek Welczar in 1967 in "Przekrój." The second sentence of the quoted fragment is as follows: "w lodowatych pustyniach dostrzegł ich Kadath, a czyż człowiek kiedykolwiek znał Kadatha?"²⁵ A similar solution is applied by Ryszarda Grzybowska in a collection of Lovecraft's prose in 1983. Her variant, closer to the "stereotyping" convention, frames this part of the story within the following formula: "Kadath poznał je na mroźnych, leżących odłogiem przestrzeniach, ale kto spośród ludzi zna Kadatha?"²⁶ The grammatical forms utilised in both translations clearly

²³ This is shown by only few comparative analyses made by Polish translation scholars. Karolina Kwaśna, for instance, juxtaposed equivalents of the single English lexeme "horror", used by the first translators of Lovecraft's prose (Wanda Błońska-Wolfarth and Ryszarda Grzybowska). The diversity of Polish variants of "horror", not always recommended by dictionaries (e.g. "okropność", "ohyda", "okropne wydarzenie", "odrażające wydarzenie", "cyklopowa okropność", "katastrofa", "tragedia", "koszmar", "straszny koszmar", "potwórność" etc.), has a significant impact on the vision of the world depicted in the works and the atmosphere of terror shaped by means of translators' lexical choices (see: K. Kwaśna, "The Concept of Equivalent Effect in Translation of Howard Phillips Lovecraft's Works," in: *Poe, Grubiński, Ray, Lovecraft...*, p. 109). Similar comments about linguistic variety and accumulation of epithets evoking terror in Robert Lipski's translations are recorded by Mateusz Kopacz ("'Odrażający, bluźnierczy Necronomicon', czyli o polskich przekładach Lovecrafta," *Czas Fantastyki* 2010, No. 2(23), p. 25-29).

²⁴ H.P. Lovecraft, *The Dunwich Horror* (quoted from the online service *The H. P. Lovecraft Archive* making available the writer's works in the digital form: <http://www.hplovecraft.com/writings/texts/fiction/dh.aspx>, accessed on 20.11.2017).

²⁵ H.P. Lovecraft, "Okropność w Dunwich," translated by F. Welczar, *Przekrój* 1967, No. 12-13(1145-1146), p. 32.

²⁶ H.P. Lovecraft, "Koszmar w Dunwich," in: *Zew Cthulhu*, translated by R. Grzybowska, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Czytelnik, 1983, pp. 274-275.

signal that the undefined lexeme “Kadath” is a name of a person, while in Lovecraft’s fictional universe it is a name of a place. However, the mistake is not the result of misunderstanding the English of the source text, nor is it a modification dictated by the *licentia poetica* or a literary fashion. It does not influence the reader’s interpretation of the story in which it can be found since “Kadath” does not play any significant role, not being referred to again. Still it is important to notice that the correct translation of the sentence from *The Dunwich Horror* requires from the translator the knowledge of other texts by the writer, where the meaning is specified (e.g. stories *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath* or *At the Mountains of Madness*), or the lexicons of Lovecraft’s mythology unavailable in Poland until the late 1990s. Characteristically, Grzybowska’s version published already in 2008 is revised; “widziało ich Kadath na mroźnym pustkowiu, ale kto spośród ludzi zna Kadath?”²⁷ Robert Lipski, in turn, in his translation from 2000 chooses an even clearer possibility of equivalence: “zna je Kadath na Lodowej Równinie, a czyż jest choć jeden człowiek znający owo miasto?”²⁸ (“owo miasto” means “that city”).

The two latter versions of *The Dunwich Horror* could be good examples of translations representing the third convention (“revisional”), which prevail mainly in translations since the late 1990s. On the one hand, free access to comprehensive online sources about the American writer, on the other – in-depth studies of his oeuvre and biography at the end of the 20th century, inspire Polonisations, the reason for existence of which is forcibly expressed by the declaration of Maciej Płaza:

In the work on the translation I had a simple and basic intention: to show the Polish reader the true face of Lovecraft’s prose for the first time, to translate it in a way it deserves to be translated. Basically, it is not nice to mock the accomplishments of predecessors but I cannot not comment on the existing translations of Lovecraft. To put it shortly and in a Lovecraftian manner: it is blasphemous filth from the darkest abyss of ignorance and bad taste.²⁹

A “revisional” dimension of translation means that in case of the Providence writer not only new or corrected variants of his stories will be introduced to the Polish literature, but as a result, also that there will be an attempt to verify stereotypes concerning the writer, according to Sunand Tryambak Joshi’s opinions:

Popularity is accompanied by the aura of myth, legend but also pure fiction related to his life, work and philosophy. Lovecraft as an “eccentric recluse,” occultist, racist, mystic, secret homosexual, creator of the “Cthulhu mythology” – labels of this type and many others circulate among fans of horror fiction. [...] If we consider Lovecraft as a man, also it does not

²⁷ H.P. Lovecraft, “*Koszmar w Dunwich*,” translated by R. Grzybowska, in: idem, *Najlepsze opowiadania*, edited by S. T. Joshi, t. 1, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Zysk i S-ka, 2008, p. 147.

²⁸ A. Derleth, “*Czyhający w progu*,” in: H.P. Lovecraft, A. Derleth, *Obserwatorzy czasu*, translated by R. Lipski, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Zysk i S-ka, 2000, p. 103.

²⁹ M. Płaza, “*W przeddzień potwornego zmartwychwstania*,” in: H.P. Lovecraft, *Zgroza w Dunwich i inne przerażające opowieści*, translated by M. Płaza, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Vesper, 2012, p. 788.

really matter that he was accused of being an "eccentric," recluse, occultist or anybody else created by overinterpretation and imprecise, superficial and incomplete research into his life.³⁰

Joshi postulates to perceive Lovecraft in a different way: as a sceptic and an avid fan of technological advance, rationalist-philosopher for whom *weird fiction* constitutes a priority but not the only area of writing. Quite the contrary: his literary works are clearly consonant with his social-cultural journalistic writings, his sketches concerning literary studies and theory, sociological-philosophical dissertations and scientific articles (mainly in the scope of astronomy and physics, rarely chemistry).³¹ The youngest generation of Polish translators is inspired, first of all, by the findings of Lovecraft's literary scholars and biographers who describe him as having a high awareness of the standards of his technique of a literary reformer, while the "mythopoeic" genre of "horror" that he cultivated was only an efficient artistic means applied to show the readers a deeply philosophical reflection. As Joshi argues:

Lovecraft was one of the first who resisted the domination of the literary deviation which could be called humanocentrism. What Lovecraft wanted to convey is as follows: are human being such important entities that we should focus our attention on them? If literature is really supposed to deal with "important issues," can the everyday life of human beings (or the whole history of the human race) constitute any "important issue"? These questions were answered by Lovecraft with a resounding "no." [...] Even if we do not share his view of the world, we have to admit that Lovecraft portrayed it with highest artistry, expressively and convincingly. By doing that, he showed that *weird fiction* has at least the potential to rise to the level of great art, even if literature of this type rejects the "humanocentric attitude." Nobody denies that Lovecraft dealt with "important issues," even "the most important" of them all, namely the question: what are we doing in the Universe?³²

Textual effects of applying translational conventions and the influence of previously dominant models of translational reception on the plot and language of Lovecraft's prose can be shown by a comparative analysis of any of the writer's stories which has more than one Polish version. *Dagon* is a very appropriate work to meet the research goal formulated above. Firstly,

³⁰ S.T. Joshi, "Wstęp," translated by M. Kopacz, in: H.P. Lovecraft, *Najlepsze opowiadania*, pp. 8, 26.

³¹ "I myself, writing the biography, appreciated again how rational Lovecraft was in this general worldview (unfortunately, except for racism). He had very rational foundations for almost all his convictions, while the additional elasticity of mind necessary to change views in case of occurrence of new testimonies or evidence" (S. T. Joshi, "Wywiad z okazji premiery...", p. 4). As noticed also by Łukasz Radecki, "experiments, scientists, incredible discoveries and inventions appear almost in Lovecraft's every story. If no prominent chemists, astronomers or physicists are present, we will find there philologists, professors of literature or history. The author as a man of very wide horizons, having comprehensive knowledge of interesting areas, did not omit to make it evident in his works" (Ł. Radecki, "Ojcowie horroru: Howard Phillips Lovecraft," part 2, *Czachopismo* 2007, No. 3, p. 47).

³² S.T. Joshi, "Six Views of Lovecraft," *Lovecraft Studies* 1990, No. 22–23, pp. 49, 50 (quoted in translation by Mateusz Kopacz on the website: *H. P. Lovecraft. Polski serwis*, <http://www.hplovecraft.pl/hplovecraft/artykuly/lovecraft-i-powazny-problem> (accessed on 20.11. 2017).

although it does not belong to “great texts” of the author³³ and therefore it is more rarely the subject of attention of Polish literary scholars, it is one of the most published texts in Poland (so far it has been published nine times). Secondly, it functions in three different Polish variants published by different translators in similar intervals and consecutive periods of presence of Lovecraft’s prose on the Polish market. The “popularising” version was prepared by Arnold Mostowicz in 1973 for the “Ty i ja” magazine, the “stereotyping” one – by Robert Lipski (for the first time in the volume of the same title in 1994), the “revisional” one – by Maciej Płaza in the collection *Zgroza w Dunwich i inne przerażające opowieści* in 2012. Thirdly, *Dagon* written in 1917 and published in 1919, was considered by the author himself to be his “first story.”³⁴ Critics saw it as the first text in which he was innovative in performing stylistic and plot devices,³⁵ the continuation of which in his mature prose was decisive for the vector of his development and rank of his writing – symbolically confirmed in 2017 by the latest translation of the most popular and the most marginalised works collected in the volume *Nienazwane* which appeared to be very popular among readers.³⁶

It is worth presenting the main narrative axis of *Dagon*, indicating the elements which are especially important or characteristic of the writer’s technique. The story is opened by the confession of a narrator-protagonist about the readiness to commit suicide and to justify this dramatic decision by exhausting the financial means to buy morphine, the addiction to which helps to forget about traumatic experiences from a sea travel. The limitation of the narrator’s credibility through the addiction and the pre-suicidal mental tension is significant for Lovecraft’s works as they validate double interpretation. It allows the reader to assume the thesis about the authenticity of related events but also to reject it by the presumption that the story written down by the protagonist is merely a narcotic hallucination. The story is based on a relatively simple pattern: as a supervisor of a cargo on an American postal ship sailing through the Pacific, the narrator becomes a German prisoner during WWI. Escape from captivity begins uncontrolled and lonely drift for many days in a lifeboat. The desperate sailor (“I began to

³³ This group also includes, according to Houellebecq, such stories as *The Call of Cthulhu*, *The Colour out of Space*, *The Dunwich Horror*, *The Whisperer in Darkness*, *At the Mountains of Madness*, *The Dreams in the Witch House*, *The Shadow over Innsmouth* and *The Shadow out of Time* (M. Houellebecq, op. cit., pp. 41–42). It is worth noting that also in *Dagon* critics notice elements of literary innovation, describing this text as “protoscience fiction” (S.T. Joshi, *H. P. Lovecraft. Biografia...*, p. 273).

³⁴ The writer treated with reserve his earlier prose juvenilia from 1897-1908 (see: H.P. Lovecraft, “W obronie Dagona,” in: idem, *Koszmary i fantazje. Listy i eseje*, translated by M. Kopacz, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Sine Qua Non, 2013, p. 272).

³⁵ See: S.T. Joshi, *A Subtler Magic: The Writings and Philosophy of H. P. Lovecraft*, Berkeley: Wildside Press, 1999.

³⁶ H.P. Lovecraft, *Nienazwane*, translated by K. Maciejczyk, Toruń: Wydawnictwo C&T, 2017.

despair in my solitude [...] my slumber, though troubled and dream-infested, was continuous"³⁷) becomes roused from his delirious state by the observation that his boat ran aground on a land unmarked in the maps – most probably the oceanic bottom which was unexpectedly elevated because of tectonic activity. However, the land does not constitute a safe place for man, quite the contrary, the innovative aspect of Lovecraft's stories is making the island of mysterious origin and with disgusting aura, a source of an overwhelming, though unexplained,³⁸ feeling of horror in the protagonist ("I was in reality more horrified than astonished; for there was in the air and in the rotting soil a sinister quality which chilled me to the very core"). As noticed by Daniel Misterek, "the imagination of *weird fiction* classics was not so vivid to make the space of sea a place of a particular danger. Only in Lovecraft's prose it has become an area evoking true fear of the Unknown. (...) Escape from the sinister sea should be an island (...), which turns out to be a trap."³⁹ The protagonist starts his exhausting journey through a desolate desert and laborious ascent to the towering hill – this motif, as stated by Anna Gemra, can be inscribed into one of the basic indicators of "the fictional geography of *weird tales*" by Lovecraft, where "the mountainous landscape evokes feelings of both fear and fascination," playing the role of "the perfect asylum for the Evil."⁴⁰ Indeed, the traveller reaches the summit of the hill to discover the bottomless precipice of a canyon on the other side ("I gained the summit of the mound and looked down the other side into an immeasurable pit") and an ancient rock monolith covered with bas-reliefs illustrating the cult of gigantic hybrids of people and fish. In the climax of the story, the protagonist, studying the reliefs, is taken aback by a being of this kind emerging majestically from the depths, then he loses his senses in a panicked escape to his boat left on the shore. He regains his sanity a long time later in a hospital in San Francisco after being saved by a ship. However, he does not recover his mental balance: consultations with scientists regarding the encounter with the entity, even attempts to determine whether it was real or just a delusion of an exhausted castaway, are pointless while the continuous visions of the annihilation of

³⁷ H. P. Lovecraft, *Dagon*, cited after: *The H. P. Lovecraft Archive*: <http://www.hplovecraft.com/writings/texts/fiction/d.aspx>, accessed on 20.11.2017). All the English fragments of the original *Dagon* are derived from this edition, unless indicated otherwise.

³⁸ According to the observation by Łukasz Łyp, it is a permanent element in Lovecraft's horror stories: "the author stresses the irrational nature of human psyche and describes the fear of the main character virtually coming from a void [...]. The narrator is afraid, even though there is no immediate threat" (Ł. Łyp, *Main Characters of the Cthulhu Mythos in Howard Phillips Lovecraft Stories*, Rzeszów–Kraków: Wydawnictwo Mitel, 1999, p. 33).

³⁹ D. Misterek, "Typy przestrzeni w prozie Howarda Philipa Lovecrafta," in: *Literatura i kultura popularna*, edited by T. Żabski, Vol. VII, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1998, p. 127.

⁴⁰ A. Gemra, "Góry w horrorze i fantasy. Rekonesans," in: *Góry, literatura, kultura*, Vol. 4, edited by J. Kobuszewski, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2001, pp. 223, 228.

humanity by the monstrous entities – uncontrollable. The passage ending the story shows a relapse into this type of phantasmagoria and the hysterical reaction of the narrator, who is convinced that the oceanic deity came to slay him. From the point of view of structural function, such an ending provides a framework for the text: it refers to the monomania and addiction to morphine mentioned in the introduction, not limiting thus the possible interpretations of the epilogue. As noticed by the interpreters of the English original: “some critics have believed that the monster actually appears at the end of the story; but the notion of a hideous creature shambling down the streets of San Francisco is preposterous, and we are surely to believe that the narrator’s growing mania has induced a hallucination.”⁴¹

Arnold Mostowicz’s translation reduces to the minimum the bidirectionality of interpretation. Translation was produced for a multi-thematic journal – dedicated to astronomy, fashion, gastronomy, and film and musical reviews – and probably due to censorship limits the thread of the drug addiction of the narrator, marginalising suicidal thoughts and, most pertinently, omits fragments explicitly questioning the sanity of the protagonist and the credibility of his account:⁴²

Original by H. P. Lovecraft (1917):

I am writing this under an appreciable mental strain, since by tonight I shall be no more. Penniless, and at the end of my supply of the drug which alone makes life endurable, I can bear the torture no longer; and shall cast myself from this garret window into the squalid street below. Do not think from my slavery to morphine that I am a weakling or a degenerate.

Translation by R. Lipski (1994):

Piszę te słowa pod bardzo silnym naciskiem psychicznym, gdyż przed północą już mnie nie będzie. Bez grosza przy duszy i z kończącym się zapasem narkotyków, które czyniły moje życie lżejszym, nie jestem w stanie znosić dłużej tych cierpień; rzucę się z okna mego staroświeckiego domu na wąską, ciągnącą się w dole ulicę. Nie sądźcie, iż poprzez swe uzależnienie od morfiny stałem się słabeuszem czy degeneratem.

Translation by A. Mostowicz (1973):

Tego wieczoru pożegnám się ze światem. Nie mam już ani kropli narkotyku, który mnie podtrzymywał. Więcej już nie mogę. Prześliznę się przez okno mansardy i roztrzaskam się o bruk ulicy. Tak, jestem niewolnikiem morfiny, aczkolwiek nie jestem narkomanem ani degeneratem.

Translation by M. Płaza (2012):

Piszę te słowa w stanie niemałego napięcia zmysłów, bo nim nastanie wieczór, nie będzie mnie wśród żywych. Nie mam grosza przy duszy i kończy mi się narkotyk, ostatnia rzecz, która jeszcze trzyma mnie przy życiu; nie zniosę już dłużej dręczących mnie katuszy, wkrótce otworzę okno mego stryżuku i rzucę się na plugawy uliczny bruk. Nie sądźcie, że skoro dałem się zniewolić morfinie, jestem słabeuszem czy zwyrodnialcem.

⁴¹ S.T. Joshi, D. Schultz, *An H. P. Lovecraft Encyclopedia*, Westport: Hippocampus Press, 2001, p. 58.

⁴² The quoted fragments of translations are derived from the following sources: H.P. Lovecraft, “W otchłani,” translated by A. Mostowicz, *Ty i ja* 1973, No. 7, pp. 3–4; H.P. Lovecraft, *Dagon*, translated by R. Lipski, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo S.R., 1994, pp. 13–20; H. P. Lovecraft, *Zgroza w Dunwich i inne przerażające opowieści*, translated by M. Płaza, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Vesper, 2012, pp. 8–15.

Mostowicz's removal of the reservations concerning the credibility of the depicted story already in the initial sentences ("I am writing this under an appreciable mental strain"), mitigating the lexical choices used in the description of physical and mental "torture" accompanying involuntary narcotic intoxication ("I can bear the torture no longer") to only a general comment ("więcej już nie mogę"), first of all the introduction of the resolute declaration, absent in the original: "nie jestem narkomanem" (i.e. "I'm not an addict") – amplify in the reader's reception the image of the narrator as a person able to provide a credible account. According to a similar strategy, the translator modifies the final part of the text:

Original by H. P. Lovecraft (1917):

It is at night, especially when the moon is gibbous and waning, that I see the thing. I tried morphine; but the drug has given only transient surcease, and has drawn me into its clutches as a hopeless slave. So now I am to end it all, having written a full account for the information or the contemptuous amusement of my fellow-men. Often I ask myself if it could not all have been a pure phantasm – a mere freak of fever as I lay sun-stricken and raving in the open boat [...]

Translation by R. Lipski (1994):

Teraz zaś, zwłaszcza kiedy na niebie świeci blade sierp księżycy, zdarza mi się widzieć ową upiorną Istotę. Próbowałem morfiny – narkotyki dawał mi jednak tylko krótkotrwałe zapomnienie i uczynił swym bezwolnym niewolnikiem. Zamierzam to wreszcie skończyć, uczynię to teraz, kiedy spisałem wszystko, gwoździ wiadomości lub pogardliwego rozbawienia moich rodaków. Często zapytuję sam siebie, czy to wszystko nie było li tylko czystą iluzją, fatamorganą, mającym wywołanym gorączką, kiedy trawiony porażeniem słonecznym i delirium leżałem na dnie małej łódeczki [...]

Translation by A. Mostowicz (1973):

Nocami oświeblonymi poświata księżycy, które od tego czasu nie przestały wzbudzać we mnie uczucia ohydy – widzę „to” znowu. Morfina to dobra rzecz, ale daje tylko krótkotrwałą ulgę.

Translation by M. Piłża (2012):

Nocami, zwłaszcza gdy rozświetla je nikańcy, garbaty księżyc, zdarza mi się widzieć tamtą istotę. Ratowałem się morfiną, lecz narkotyki przyniósł mi tylko przejściową ulgę, a w dodatku spętał mnie i uzależnił bez reszty. Oto spisałem więc wszystko, co przeżyłem – kto chce, niech wierzy, albo zbędnie to pogardliwym rozbawieniem – i zamierzam ze wszystkim skończyć. Często zadaję sobie pytanie, czy nie mógł to być wytwór czystej fantazji – gorączkowy majak zrodzony w malignie, kiedy leżałem w otwartej łodzi [...]

The interpretative keyword "morphine" is, admittedly, included in Mostowicz's rendition, but there is no source text information about the advanced stage of addiction ("the drug [...] has drawn me into its clutches as a hopeless slave"), leading the narrator to suicide ("I am to end it all"). In a similar vein, in the "popularising" Polish version there are no speculations about the thought of falsity of recorded visions, potentially evoked by fever and exhaustion ("often I ask myself if it could not all have been a pure phantasm – a mere freak of fever"). In the quoted versions by Robert Lipski, one detail seems to be of particular importance, typical of the

“stereotyping” convention of Lovecraft’s translations – the manner in which the sea creature met by the protagonist is described. The English original uses an underspecification “the thing” (in Mostowicz’s translation: “to”, in Płaza’s: “tamta istota”), Lipski introduces “upiorna Istota” (i.e. “fearsome” or “gruesome Being”), additionally evoking a feeling of terror, highlighting the scary atmosphere with an adjective.

Not only were fragments about addiction and the narrator’s sanity modified in the 1970s translation. The standards in the People’s Republic of Poland, regarding the “political correctness” of those times, imposed by the Polish Main Office of Control of Press, Publications and Public Performances probably also had some influence on the Polonisation of the original fragment, showing the German army in a peculiarly positive light: as displaying excessive compliance with *ius in bello*, the law of military conflict and international treaties concerning humanitarian treatment of POWs:

Original by H. P. Lovecraft (1917):

The great war was then at its very beginning, and the ocean forces of the Hun had not completely sunk to their later degradation; so that our vessel was made a legitimate prize, whilst we of her crew were treated with all the fairness and consideration due us as naval prisoners. So liberal, indeed, was the discipline of our captors, that five days after we were taken I managed to escape alone in a small boat with water and provisions for a good length of time.

Translation by R. Lipski (1994):

Był to zaledwie początek wielkiej wojny, a siły morskie Hunów dopiero w późniejszym okresie osiągnęły poziom bezlitosnej, brutalnej degradacji, tak że okręt handlowy był dla nich słusznym celem, nas zaś, czyli jego załogę, traktowano zgodnie z prawami należnymi jeńcom wojennym. Prawdę powiedziawszy, mieliśmy taką swobodę, iż w pięć dni po schwytaniu zdołałem uciec samotnie łodzią, z zapasem wody i prowiantu na dość długi okres czasu.

Translation by A. Mostowicz (1973):

Był to dopiero początek wojny 1914 roku i marynarka niemiecka respektowała jeszcze jako tako prawa wojenne. Nasz okręt został regularnie pochwycony, a załoga wzięta do niewoli. Pięć dni później udało mi się uciec na zwykłej szalupie zaopatrzonej w żywność i wodę.

Translation by M. Płaza (2012):

Wielka wojna dopiero się rozpętywała i siły morskie Hunów nie pogrążyły się jeszcze bez reszty w zwyrodnieniu, które stało się ich udziałem w latach następnych, toteż jednostkę naszą wzięto jako należny przyz, nas zaś, jej załogę, traktowano z wszelkim szacunkiem i bezstronnością należną morskim jeńcom. Doprawdy, tak wielką swobodą cieszyliśmy się w rękach naszych pogromców, że pięć dni po naszym pojmaniu udało mi się zbiec samotnie w niewielkiej szalupie, z zapasem wody i żywności na wiele dni żeglugi.

Mostowicz’s variant first deprecates the ethicality of German navy subtly expressed by the doubts (“respektowała jeszcze jako tako prawa wojenne” – “respected the war laws after a fashion”). Subsequently, it explicitly questions the legality of its operation by non-equivalent rendition of the expression “legitimate prize” (“prawowita zdobycz”) as “regularne pochwylenie” (i.e. “regular seizure”) and the condensed sentences describing “liberal” and “fair” treatment of prisoners (“crew were treated with all

the fairness and consideration") to the general phrase stating only the fact of the Americans being captured: "załoga [została] wzięta do niewoli" (i.e. "the crew members have been taken prisoners"). Lipski's version, in turn, according to the strategy of amplifying elements of horror in Lovecraft's story, introduces epithets accentuating horror, hostility and soulless violence of the world depicted in the text. A concise mention of the later moral "degradation" of the German soldiers is disambiguated by the addition of adjectives "brutalna" (i.e. "brutal") and "bezlitosna" (i.e. "merciless").

It is worth focusing on another solution typical of the "popularising" convention: reduction or transformation of culturally foreign content, requiring the reader to possess an extended knowledge about extra-textual realia. In the quoted fragment, Mostowicz modifies the historical term "Wielka Wojna" ("The Great War"), common in the West European and American awareness to one which is closer to the Polish recipient: "wojna 1914 roku", as well as removes the pejorative description of the German aggressors as "the Hun," established by Rudyard Kipling's poem *For All We Have and Are*. According to the explicative strategy, Mostowicz transforms also the remaining expressions, which potentially could be perceived as enigmatic by the broadly defined group of recipients. "Stygian deeps," for instance, become simply "głębokość" (i.e. "deeps"), while the comparison of the size of the sea deity to the Homeric Polyphemus ("Polyphemus-like") replaces the reference of a more popular hero form the Greek-Roman mythology ("wielki jak Herkules" – "as huge as Hercules"). The description of the mysterious monolith, requiring from the reader the knowledge about the graphic art of Gustave Doré ("bas-reliefs whose subjects would have excited the envy of a Doré") is rendered as the less specific description of the reliefs "fascinating for any artist" ("każdy artysta obejrzałby z przyjemnością"), while Lovecraft's references to Edgar Allan Poe and Edward Bulwer-Lytton ("grotesque beyond the imagination of a Poe or a Bulwer") or the anthropological knowledge about the Piltown Man and *Homo neanderthalensis* are completely omitted in the Polish variant.

It is worth mentioning that the very decision of the translator to replace the original title *Dagon* – the name of the ancient deity worshipped by the Philistine people – with the expression *W otchłani* (i.e. "in the abyss") also serves the purpose of limiting interpretative vagueness. It plays also additional roles: firstly, according to the precepts of the "popularising" convention, it is a variant encouraging enthusiasts of "uncanny stories", suggesting a mysterious atmosphere similar to that found in Gothic thrillers. In this way, it is related to the advertisements directed at the readers of the "Ty i ja" magazine, which announces on the cover that in the July issue there will be "a pinch of horror for vacation."⁴³ Secondly, the title chosen by Mostowicz is justified not only in the plot of the story

⁴³ See *Ty i ja* 1973, No. 7 (front cover).

(“otchłań”/”abyss” as the protagonist’s discovery and the hotbed of monstrosity) but also by the popular image of Lovecraft, presented to the readers along with the translated text. In the translator’s opinion Lovecraft “suffered so many humiliation in his life, so many defeats, that the works he dedicated himself to, are the result of his own experiences from the abyss of everyday life.”⁴⁴

It is not the only case in the story in which the perception of the author’s biography is reflected in the translator’s textual modifications. The interrelation between the plot of *Dagon* and the persona of the writer from Providence motivates the translator first to read the work as “expressing to some extent his own phobias and allergies: for instance Lovecraft could not stand anything what was connected with the sea,”⁴⁵ then, to leave no interpretative dilemmas to the readers and disambiguates the short punch line of the story with a relevant addition. Mostowicz’s version not only introduces direct exclamations to the addressees but also particularises sensory experiences of the events in the narrator’s reality by means of references to negative auditory and olfactory sensations (not present in the original) – it is worth noting that it is not a matter of chance that they express the explicit repugnance at the sea breeze and its smell which precedes the expected invasion of the monster into the protagonist’s flat:

Original by H. P. Lovecraft (1917):

The end is near. I hear a noise at the door, as of some immense slippery body lumbering against it. It shall not find me. God, *that hand!* The window! The window!

Translation by R. Lipski (1994):

Koniec jest bliski. Słyszę hałas u drzwi, jakby napierało na nie jakieś ogromne, śliskie cielsko. Ale TO mnie nie znajdzie. Boże, TA RĘKA! Okno! Okno!

Translation by A. Mostowicz (1973):

Słyszycie?! Ktoś dobija się do moich drzwi. Ktoś naciska klamkę... Czujecie ten zapach? To fetor morza przedostaje się do mego pokoju. Nie odnajdzie mnie!!! Mój Boże, Boże, ta ręka! Okno! Okno!!!

Translation by M. Piąza (2012):

Koniec jest bliski. Za drzwiami słyszę hałas, jak gdyby napierało na nie jakieś ogromne, śliskie cielsko. Nie znajdzie mnie. Boże, ta ręka! Okno! Okno!

⁴⁴ The translator’s comment on: H.P. Lovecraft, “W otchłani,” translated by A. Mostowicz, *Ty i ja* 1973, No. 7, p. 3. Mostowicz’s version was later printed two more times. First, without changes in the volume *Weird Fiction – Nie budź drzemiących demonów* (Warszawa: SFAN-Club, 1981, pp. 62–64). Then in the second volume of James Gunn’s anthology *Droga do science fiction* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo “Alfa”, 1986, pp. 132–134) – here with a few stylistic corrections and the symptomatic addition: the title given by the translator *W otchłani* is supplemented by the addition in parenthesis *W otchłani (Dagon)*. Moreover, the original sentence: “once I sought out a celebrated ethnologist, and amused him with peculiar questions regarding the ancient Philistine legend of Dagon, the Fish-God,” in the version from 1973, was rendered as “raz zadałem kilka pytań pewnemu wielkiemu etnologowi na temat mitów związanych z rybą-bogiem”, in Gunn’s anthology is modified: “raz zadałem kilka pytań pewnemu wielkiemu etnologowi na temat mitów związanych z Dagonem, rybą-bogiem” (p. 134).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

Finally, what the 1970s translation omits with particular scrupulousness is the mystical and religious motifs from the original. One example might be the fragment mentioning the figure of Satan and the scene from *Paradise Lost* by John Milton:

I felt myself on the edge of the world; peering over the rim into a fathomless chaos of eternal night. Through my terror ran curious reminiscences of *Paradise Lost*, and of Satan's hideous climb through the unfashioned realms of darkness.

Mostowicz's translation transforms it into a series of questions and doubts:

Pode mną roztaczała się teraz otchłań, a w każdym razie dolina tak głęboka, że światło księżycy nie było w stanie w pełni jej oświetlić. Co się kryło w tych głębokościach? Chaos? Tajemnicze szczeliny? Wieczna noc? Prapoczątek?⁴⁶

Analogically, fragments mentioning the existence of ancient religious cults, the possibility of their secret survival and, first and foremost, their validity (sanctified and worshipped entities actually exist) are marginalised or completely omitted by the translator. "Monolith whose massive bulk had known the workmanship and perhaps the worship of living and thinking creatures" becomes "kamień wyciosany czyjąś ręką" (i.e. "a stone carved by someone"). The sailor's prediction that the human-fish beings were worshipped as gods ("they were merely the imaginary gods of some primitive fishing or seafaring tribe") becomes removed in the translation. Furthermore, the apocalyptic vision of the narrator preceding the dramatic final not only is not presented as a subjective fantasy ("I dream of a day..."), but even shows religiousness, according to the politically motivated recommendations for socialist art, in a very negative light by means of a subtle semantic transposition: instead of the trivial "faith in monsters," he focuses the "monstrosity of faith," leading humanity to annihilation, brought about by the faithful monsters (i.e. "wierzące potwory"):

Original H. P. Lovecraft (1917):

I cannot think of the deep sea without shuddering at the nameless things that may at this very moment be crawling and floundering on its slimy bed, worshipping their ancient stone idols and carving their own detestable likenesses on submarine obelisks of water-soaked granite. I dream of a day when they may rise above the billows to drag down in their reeking talons the remnants of puny, war-exhausted mankind – of a day when the land shall sink, and the dark ocean floor shall ascend amidst universal pandemonium.

Translation by A. Mostowicz (1973):

Jeśli rozmyślam o dalekich morzach, nie mogę pozbyć się obrazu ludzi-olbrzymów, pięknych i groźnych, którzy pływają w głębinach, otaczają wciąż swoje kamienne idole i ryją swoje wizerunki na zatopionych obeliskach. Pewnego dnia wyłonią się z fal, pewnego dnia kontynenty zatoną i pewnego dnia otchłanie – czarne i wilgotne, potężne i ciche, pokryte szkieletami i zamieszkanе przez wierzące potwory, ujrzą światło dzienne...

⁴⁶ Those can be rendered into English as: "I stood at the verge of an abyss, or at least a valley so deep that moonlight was unable to illuminate it. What was hiding in these depths? Chaos? Mysterious fissures? Eternal night? Preorigin?"

Translation by R. Lipski (1994):

Nie potrafię myśleć o otwartym morzu, nie czując na plecach lodowatych ciarek wywołanych świadomością, że właśnie w tej chwili bezimienne, nienazwane istoty mogą wpełzać i wczłogiwać się na pokryty szlamem podest oddając część prastarym, kamiennym bożkom i rzeźbiąc swe ohydne podobizny na podwodnych obeliskach z nadżartego przez wodę granitu. Śnię o dniu, kiedy mogą wynurzyć się z otchłani spienionych fal, aby zatopić swe cuchnące szpony w niedobitkach zdziesiątkowanej przez wojnę ludzkości – o dniu, kiedy lądy pogrążą się w głębinach a mroczne dno oceanów wzniesie się pośród uniwersalnego pandemonium.

Translation by M. Płaza (2012):

Ilekróć pomyślę o morskich głębiach, przejmuję mnie dreszcz: wyobrażam sobie, że właśnie teraz te nieopisane stwory wiją się i roją w swojej śluzowatej macierzy, oddając część pradawnym kamiennym bożkom i rzeźbiąc ich wstrętne podobizny na podwodnych obeliskach z wyszlifowanego przez wodę granitu. Roi mi się w snach, że pewnego dnia mogą powstać z morskich głębin i wyciągnąć swe cuchnące szpony po niedobitków zmierzniącej, wyczerpanej wojną ludzkości – że pewnego dnia ziemia pogrąży się w odmętach, a mroczne dno oceanu wynurzy się wśród powszechnego pandemonium.

Contrary to Mostowicz's version, Lipski's translation underlines elements of mystery, mysticism and religion. In the above fragment the extraordinariness and strangeness of the inhabitants of sea depths is intensified by doubling adjectives "bezimienne" (i.e. "nameless") and "nienazwane" (i.e. "unnamed") in the rendition of the expression "nameless things". This type of transformations is well illustrated by the comparison of the fragment describing ancient hieroglyphs found by the protagonist:

Original by H. P. Lovecraft (1917):

I think that these things were supposed to depict men – at least, a certain sort of men; though the creatures were shewn disporting like fishes in the waters of some marine grotto, or paying homage at some monolithic shrine which appeared to be under the waves as well. Of their faces and forms I dare not speak in detail; for the mere remembrance makes me grow faint.

Translation by R. Lipski (1994):

Sądzę, iż miały obrazować ludzi, choć przedstawione były jako istoty bądź baraszkujące, niczym ryby w wodzie, wewnątrz jakiejś ogromnej, morskiej groty bądź składające część jakiejś monolitycznej świątyni, która również zdawała się znajdować w morskiej głębinie. O ich twarzach i kształtach nie odważę się opowiedzieć szczegółowo – samo bowiem wspomnienie sprawia, iż tracę świadomość.

Translation by A. Mostowicz (1973):

Były to sylwetki ludzi. Ludzi podobnych do ryb igrających w grotach podmorskich, zbierających się wokół jakiegoś ołtarza z kamieni i alg. Dzisiaj nie śmiem po prostu ich opisywać. I w jakim celu właściwie?

Translation by M. Płaza (2012):

Wyobrażały, jak mi się zdaje, ludzi – a przynajmniej pewien rodzaj ludzi; byli oni wszakże przedstawieni w trakcie rybich figli w morskiej grocie lub składania holdów w skalnej świątyni najwyraźniej również znajdującej się pod wodą. Ich twarzy i cieleśnych kształtów nie śmiem opisać w szczegółach – na samo ich wspomnienie robi mi się słabo.

While Mostowicz's rendition only generally describes "ludzie podobni do ryb (...) zbierający się wokół jakiegoś ołtarza" (i.e. "people resembling fish

(...) gathered around some kind of an altar”), Lipski’s variant accentuates the strangeness but also the undoubted subjectivity of figures shown in the obelisk, calling them “istoty” (i.e. “beings”), which “składają cześć jakiejś monolitycznej świątyni” (i.e. “pay homage at some monolithic temple”) not just being located underneath the waves (“under the waves”), but intensifying the associations with the religious *limbus* “morskiej głębinie” (i.e. “sea abyss”). The terror of the situation of the narrator, is underlined by Lipski’s translation by the confession of “brak odwagi” (“I dare not”) and “utrata świadomości” (“fainting”) out of fear, so by means of expressions for which Maciej Płaza’s later “revisionist” version finds subdued equivalents: “nie śmiem opisać [ich] w szczegółach – na samo ich wspomnienie robi mi się słabo.” The elements of horror, amplified by the “stereotyping” convention, are especially stressed by Lipski in the climax of the story – the moment of revealing the monstrous entity to the narrator:

Original by H. P. Lovecraft (1917):

Then suddenly I saw it. With only a slight churning to mark its rise to the surface, the thing slid into view above the dark waters. Vast, Polyphemus-like, and loathsome, it darted like a stupendous monster of nightmares to the monolith, about which it flung its gigantic scaly arms, the while it bowed its hideous head and gave vent to certain measured sounds. I think I went mad then.

Translation by R. Lipski (1994):

I nagle To zobaczyłem. Jej pojawienie się oznajmiło jedynie kilka łagodnych kregów na powierzchni wody, po czym Istota wyłoniła się majestatycznie z mrocznych odmętów. Ogromne, niczym Polifem i odrażające istne monstrum z najgorszego nocnego koszmaru podpłynęło żwawo do Monolitu, objęło go gigantycznymi, pokrytymi łuską ramionami, pochyliło ohydny łeb, po czym wydało kilka miarowych dźwięków. Wydaje mi się, że właśnie wtedy straciłem zmysły.

Translation by A. Mostowicz (1973):

Nagle go zobaczyłem! Powierzchnia wody wokół kamienia gwałtownie się rozdarła i „to” pojawiło się. Był wielki, jak Herkules. Rzucił się na kamień, chwycił go w swe pokryte łuskami ramiona, położył na kamieniu swoją ohydną głowę i belkotał jakieś słowa, których nie potrafiłbym powtórzyć... I wtedy właśnie zwariowałem.

Translation by M. Płaza (2012):

I nagle to ujrzałem. Leciutką tylko kipiela zdradzając, że wzbija się z głębin, wyśliznęło się nad ciemną wodę; potężne, obmierzłe jak Polifem, zdumiewające niczym potwór z koszmarnych snów śmignęło w stronę obelisku, zarzuciło nań gigantyczne łuskowate ramiona, po czym skłoniło swój ohydny łeb i wydało kilka miarowych dźwięków. Wydaje mi się, że wtedy postradałem zmysły.

The pronoun “it” (“to”) manifesting the narrator’s doubts as to the nature and reality of the encountered phenomenon, in the 1994 version is not only expressed with capitals, usually reserved for people (“To”), but again is replaced with the subjectivity-vesting word “Istota”. The terror of the whole scene is intensified by the Polonisation of “dark waters” (“ciemna woda”) with the equivalent “mroczne odmęty” (i.e. “murky maelstrom”) and the extension of a single lexeme “koszmar” (“nightmare”) to the form of a whole phrase: “najgorszy nocny koszmar” (i.e. “the worst nocturnal nightmare”).

This type of stylistic-lexical “horrorisations” of Lovecraft’s work can be obviously found many times in the “stereotyping” translation. When the original summarises the landscape of the oceanic island to the English reader in the expression “rolling desert” (in Płaza’s version: “dookolna pustynia”) – Lipski’s rendition draws the landscape of “odrażające pustkowienie” (i.e. “abhorrent desolation”). “Niespokojny” and “przerywany snami” dream of the protagonist (“troubled and dream-infested slumber”), the “stereotyping” convention, by means of its keyword, renders as “sen dręczony przez koszmary” (i.e. “sleep tormented by nightmares”). “Unutterable hideousness,” connoting repugnance, but not necessarily fear, in the “revisional” convention in the variant from 2012 is rendered as “nieopisana ohyda,” in Lipski’s translation – as “niewiarygodna wręcz zgroza” (i.e. “unbelievable horror indeed”). In a similar vein, “hideous climb” – rendered by Płaza as “ohydna wędrówka” – in Lipski’s version becomes “upiorna wspinaczka” (i.e. “dreadful climb”), while “a hideously vivid vision” (in the latest version: “widok szkaradnie wyrazisty”) finds its equivalent in the expression: “upiorny, odrażający kształt” (i.e. “dreadful, repulsive shape”). One more detail proves the priority of the intensification of the atmosphere of terror and mystery in the “stereotyping” convention, for the purpose of reflecting the precision of description and elements of realism in the source text. In the passages where the source text shows the narrator returning to civilisation with the words: “when I came out of the shadows I was in a San Francisco hospital,” Lipski’s translation states: “kiedy wyłoniłem się z mroków niepamięci okazało się, iż znajduję się w szpitalu w Santa Fe” – so in a city (no matter whether understood as the capital of the state New Mexico, or the Argentinian Santa Fe de la Vera Cruz) located inland, inaccessible to the rescue ship transporting the unconscious narrator.

The “revisional” convention in case of *Dagon* represented by Maciej Płaza’s translation, as the already quoted fragments explicitly demonstrate, breaks away with the techniques of stereotyping translation of Lovecraft’s prose for the sake of equivalence maximally approximated to the stylistic colouring of the original. As a result, the significant deviations from the letter of the original are rarely introduced by the translator as he is reserved in applying expression evoking fear, which can be demonstrated by the illustrative example of Polonising “source of vague horror” – in Lipski’s rendition: “źródło nieokreślonej grozy” – by means of a more subtly descriptive phrase concerning the narrator’s feelings: “mgliste poczucie trwogi” (i.e. “vague feeling of anxiety”). However, what distinguished Płaza’s version from both previous translations is the portrayal of the protagonist not as a half-deranged castaway (cf. Mostowicz’s version) or a man paralysed by incomprehensible fear (as in Lipski’s version), but a person who in unfavourable circumstances tries to retain mental sobriety based on rational thinking and even scientific judgement of the uncanny situation. This effect is obtained by the translator thanks to the application of language and style

characteristic of the scientific register, yet not completely a specialist one. For instance, in the scene when the drifting runaway attempts to explain the provenance of the new found island:

Original by H. P. Lovecrafta (1917):

I realised that only one theory could explain my position. Through some unprecedented volcanic upheaval, a portion of the ocean floor must have been thrown to the surface, exposing regions which for innumerable millions of years had lain hidden under unfathomable watery depths.

Translation by R. Lipski (1994):

Uświadomiłem sobie, że tylko jedna teoria mogła wyjaśnić moje obecne położenie. Wskutek jakiejś niewiarygodnej aktywności wulkanu część oceanicznego dna musiała zostać wypchnięta na powierzchnię, odsłaniając obszary, które przez niezliczone miliony lat spoczywały ukryte w niezgłębionej morskiej otchłani.

Translation by A. Mostowicz (1973):

Zastanawiałem się, czym to wszystko wytłumaczyć? Prawdopodobnie w rezultacie jakichś wstrząsów wulkanicznych, część dna morskiego pojawiła się na powierzchni oceanu ukazując otchłanie pokryte od milionów lat wodą.

Translation by M. Płaza (2012):

Doszedłem do przekonania, że moje położenie można wyjaśnić tylko jedną teorią: niespotykana w swej gwałtowności erupcja wulkanu musiała wyrzucić na powierzchnię część oceanicznego dna, odsłaniając obszary, które przez niezliczone milionlecia spoczywały w niezmiernych głębinach.

While Lipski's translation accentuates the uncanniness and terror of the phenomenon with several synonyms of the Polish lexical item "inconceivable" ("niewiarygodna aktywność wulkanu," "niezgłębiona morska otchłań"), Płaza's variant uses terms such as "erupcja" or "milionlecie," showing also the commonsensical "teoria"/"theory" (not present in the "popularising" version by Mostowicz) of the protagonist as a result of reflection and analytical consideration ("doszedłem do przekonania" – "I have reached a conclusion"). It is possible to mention more examples of this type. Lovecraft characterises the emotions of the narrator, examining the bas-reliefs with the phrase: "a certain thrill of the scientist's or archaeologist's delight." This fragment, rendered by a vivid metaphor by Mostowicz ("popychany demonem ciekawości" – "driven by a demon of curiosity") or the generalisation by Lipski ("nie pozbawiony typowego dla naukowca podniecenia" – "not lacking a thrill typical for any scientist") – the "revisional" translations renders without simplifications and reductions concerning the scientific inclinations of the protagonist by means of the expression: "nie bez rozkosznego dreszczu naukowej czy archeologicznej ekscytacji" (i.e. "not without a delightful thrill of scientific or archeological excitement"). Similarly Płaza deals with the terminology within the scope of arts and linguistics, used by the narrator in the description of an ancient monolith. "Pictorial carvings" in his version become literally transferred into Polish as "reliefy obrazkowe" (Mostowicz: "jakieś znaki i płaskorzeźby" – "some kind of signs and reliefs", Lipski: "płaskorzeźby"/"reliefs"), while in the description of the accompanying alphabet (the source text: "the writing was in a system of hieroglyphics unknown to me") only the latest translation refers to the

notions of “inscriptions” and “linguistic systems”: “inskrypcje wykonane były pismem hieroglifowym, nieznanym mi i niepodobnym do żadnych systemów, jakie zdarzyło mi się widzieć” (cf.: Lipski’s variant deals in this passage with “pismo należące do rodzaju hieroglificznego, którego kompletnie nie znałem” – “a kind of hieroglyphic writings I didn’t know”).

The mere juxtaposition of the most prominent features of different Polonisations of *Dagon* allows one to notice how dissimilar reading impressions are made by each of them. Textual reductions and interpretative uniformisations result in the fact that in the 1970s the recipient had to do with a fantastic tale about a mad sailor and his persecutor, a fish-monster – the manifestation of private phobias of Lovecraft, personifying his fear of the sea. The 1990s rendition establishes the image of the author as a “master of horror” immersed in apocalyptic fantasies, which was caused by conferring on the story the mystical form of horror about awakening the ancient deity to wreak the annihilation of humanity. In the version from the second decade of the 21st century, by placing the narrator between the clashing forces of scepticism and fantasy, reason and madness, the third Polish *Dagon* is a story about a traumatic human experience, challenging the rational mind, and about the clash between human science and the mysteries of the world. From this perspective, it “is one of many stories where the knowledge itself is able to cause mental disorder,” since “although there is a potential threat of attack by the alien race, still it is knowledge about its existence is the main element which throws the narrator off balance.”⁴⁷

* * *

Undoubtedly the limitation of translational conventions, seen in the practice of the translators of fiction by Howard Phillips Lovecraft, to only three does not exhaust the present nor any future possibilities of classifications or typologies. The boundaries between them are a subject matter for further discussions since rarely a comparative analysis is able to show their effects in a clinical form. In the “popularising” variant by Arnold Mostowicz, it is possible to discern the germs of a “stereotyping” convention, while Polonisation by Robert Lipski – from the contemporary perspective clearly inspired by the popular vision of an American author – it is undoubtedly a reevaluation of the translational accomplishments of the predecessor. “Revisionism” of Maciej Płaza’s translation constitutes its foregrounded feature until new, other approaches to the writer from Providence become announced. However, what makes the working classification a useful tool for the purpose of interpretation, is not its universal character but the usability in the description – even if a schematic and framework one – of multifarious determinants affecting translators’ practice, in case of *weird*

⁴⁷ S. T. Joshi, *H.P. Lovecraft. Biografia...*, p. 271.

fiction by Lovecraft, first of all, the genesis of the diversity of Polish versions, and the still evolving image of their American author in the minds of translators and readers.

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