

# **The Hermeneutic Method of Translating and Reading Translations: Rendering Cultural References in Sue Townsend's *The Queen and I* into Polish**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Even though George Steiner's hermeneutic motion is often criticised, some scholars see its validity as a proposition that successfully outlines an ethics of translation. Starting from those readings of Steiner's work, this article aims to show how the hermeneutic motion could be combined with Antoine Berman's text-deforming tendencies, a typology grounded in hermeneutics and psychoanalysis, to examine the possibility of a more detailed approach to the hermeneutic consideration of translation. Moreover, this combination could help in recognising and limiting unconscious biases in producing translations, which this article also attempts to demonstrate. The proposed framework is then used to analyse translations of selected cultural references in Sue Townsend's novel *The Queen and I* as they appeared in its only Polish version. The analysis confirms that combining the hermeneutic motion with the system of textual deformation results in a model which is useful in both producing and discussing translated texts.

**KEYWORDS:** cultural references in translation, cultural translation, hermeneutics, the hermeneutic motion, George Steiner, system of textual deformation, Antoine Berman

## **Introduction**

Literary studies may provide a framework for discussing translation. One of the most influential works on translation from the literary and philosophical perspective is George Steiner's 1975 book *After Babel* (1998). Steiner bases his argument on Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and argues that the translator must strive to understand a text to the best of their abilities, being aware of the impossibility of being fully successful.

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Moreover, the ST author and the TT reader receive the work in the context of their own spatial and temporal realities. Steiner criticizes linguistic approaches which aim to provide models and systems as answers to questions of translation, stating that “[n]o true understanding can arise from synchronic abstraction” (1998:114). He argues that translation is not and never will be science (1998:309); translation is art (1998:311) and cannot be scientifically systematized.

In *After Babel*, Steiner described the idea of a hermeneutic motion, a mode of thinking about translation based on philosophy and literary studies. Upon publication, the work was often strongly criticized or ignored, as Steiner mentions in the preface to the second edition (1998:xi-xii). Nowadays, his concepts remain contentious. Marco Agnetta and Larisa Cercel (2019:366) point out that Steiner is criticised in the fields of literary hermeneutics of translation and translational hermeneutics. His style is often considered to conceal the weakness of his argument (O’Keeffe 2021) or it is interpreted as sexist (Chamberlain 2012; Kharmandar 2018). As Agnetta and Cercel (2019:366) indicate, some critics state that Steiner lists problems without providing solutions. Arguing the incompleteness or shallowness of his theory is another common criticism (Bex 2006; Kharmandar 2018).

These evaluations miss the fact that Steiner’s hermeneutic motion is, to an extent, based on Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics; the similarities between their takes on hermeneutics are outlined clearly by Beata Piecychna (2021). This entails, for example, the inability to produce whatever a “perfect” translation might be and, as a consequence, the impossibility of providing a set of translation rules or a translation theory. Steiner himself states clearly that such a theory might not exist (1998:xvi). It is a call for humility and acceptance of one’s limitations, the subjectivity of translators being one of these.

It seems that the critics tend to miss the core of Steiner’s thought, focusing on the debatable flaws of his argument. The answer to their remarks, albeit necessary, is not the aim of this article. I would like to examine modern positive readings of Steiner and how the hermeneutic motion is shown to be applicable in thinking about and producing translations; I will refer to Sarah Maitland’s (2017) and Phil Goodwin’s (2010) works. Moreover, I want to propose that Antoine Berman’s system of textual deformation (2012) may be an adequate addition to the hermeneutic motion, as it explains the translator’s unconscious bias and offers ways to limit

its impact on translated texts. In light of that discussion, extracts with culture-bound notions from the Polish translation of Sue Townsend's 1992 novel *The Queen and I* will be analysed to evaluate the usefulness of the presented approach.

Arguably, culture-bound notions are exceptionally challenging to translate due to their idiosyncrasy, which also makes them a good illustration of any translation approach. This is why this article focuses on those elements. Townsend's book is rich in references to the British culture of the 1990s, which may be difficult to understand, let alone relate to, for contemporary Polish readers, as the differences between the British and Polish contexts are exceptionally broad. This expected difficulty is the reason behind the choice of the ST and the language of the TT in this article.

### **Formulating a Method (or a Mode of Thinking)**

#### *Distanciation, hermeneutic humbling and an ethics of translation*

Steiner indicates two dimensions as fundamental challenges of understanding texts: “[o]ne must master the temporal and local setting of one’s text” (1998:26). He argues that even within a single language comprehension may be hindered by the evolution of language use. One must study the text carefully in the historical context. He claims that

One thing is clear: every language-act has a temporal determinant. No semantic form is timeless. When using a word we wake into resonance, as it were, its entire previous history. A text is embedded in specific historical time; it has what linguists call a diachronic structure. To read fully is to restore all that one can of the immediacies of value and intent in which speech actually occurs. (Steiner 1998:24)

Difficulties of understanding caused by temporal distance between the production and reception of a text may be accompanied by problems stemming from geography. Even within a similar time frame, cultures that emerged in various locations may differ significantly. However, sometimes these differences may be inconspicuous to representatives of different cultures or, specifically, to translators. Steiner argues that if the translator does not notice the historical distance of a dated text, its temporal semantic foreignness must be well-hidden, but, unarguably, it is there (Steiner 1998:29). It is the translator's task to expand one's knowledge and sharpen focus to try to recognize these differences.

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Maitland defined translation as “the purposeful means by which a text written originally in one language is made meaningful in a new time and place to an audience that speaks another” (2017:18). One of the core points of her argument is, as in Steiner’s perspective, the gap between the ST culture and TT reader in terms of time and space, which she calls *distanciation* (Maitland 2017:55-81). The difficulties it poses (among other limitations) inspire “hermeneutic humbling” (Maitland 2017:29). *Distanciation* indicates the translator’s awareness of their inability to fully understand the text and to convey it in its complex entirety (Maitland 2017:77). Moreover, Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutics, the philosophical basis of Maitland’s argument, dictates that texts cannot be received with disregard to the reality in which they exist (Maitland 2017:46). The text is not an independent entity (Maitland 2017:79). Even though the interpretative possibilities are endless, they are not of equal value (Maitland 2017:151-152). Understanding a text should be based “on solid detective work” (Maitland 2017:152); interpretative attempts should be supported by evidence that they are more valid than others, “[t]hey should stand up to scrutiny” (ibid.). Going back to Maitland’s definition of translation cited above, a translator’s task is to make a powerful case for one’s retelling of a text in a foreign language so that it is meaningful.

Maitland’s hermeneutic humbling implies that a translator begins as a reader and cannot overcome *distanciation*. Its extent and, consequently, influence on translation vary depending on national cultural distance, i.e., the level to which cultural norms vary between countries (see Rafieyan 2016), but, following Steiner, it is always present.

This unavoidable distance implies that the hermeneutic motion concerns an ethical element. Goodwin makes this observation stating that “the hermeneutical model of translation [...] contains within itself an ethics of translation” (Goodwin 2010:20). He writes that the process of translation is sometimes oversimplified by describing it as solving merely technical problems (Goodwin 2010:23-24). Even if ethical matters are taken into consideration, solutions suggested by theorists, such as being responsible to the author of the ST (Goodwin 2010:38), being responsible to the reader of the TT (ibid.), or adopting a single ethical approach for translation of all texts (Goodwin 2010:29)<sup>1</sup>, are often insufficient. Goodwin

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<sup>1</sup> Venuti’s strong opposition towards domestication as he considers it an appropriative approach is a notable example (see Venuti 2008).

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claims that Steiner's hermeneutic motion escapes superficiality as it recognises the interests of ST authors and TT readers, acknowledges the translator's power and calls for striving to achieve balance to the best of the translator's limited ability.

Steiner's idea of the hermeneutic motion is a framework for approaching both the act of translation and evaluation of its products (1998:312-317). It consists of four stages. Trust appears before and in the process of reading: the translator believes that they find substance in the text they approach, and that they are able to understand it (Steiner 1998:312-313), which is also expressed in Maitland's hermeneutic humbling. The second stage is aggression, the translator's invasion and breaking into someone else's work (Steiner 1998:313-314). The text is taken apart by someone controlled virtually by oneself. Aggression is followed by another violent act, incorporation, when the broken elements are remodelled and replaced (Steiner 1998:314-316). A new text is being constructed on the skeleton of the original work. One may say that this is the end, as the new text emerges, but Steiner argues that at this stage "the hermeneutic motion is dangerously incomplete" (Steiner 1998:316). The prevalence of violence which may or may not be limited by the very violator's courtesy contradicts the requirement of self-limitation and humility dictated by the hermeneutic approach; initial trust is not enough. The final element, reciprocity, performed consciously and carefully, is necessary in an attempt to restore balance between the ST and TT (Steiner 1998:316). This is a fundamentally ethical proposition (*ibid.*). An act of translation validates the original; arguably, no-one reads more carefully than a translator (Steiner 1998:316-317). Moreover, a translated text is always a new voice in the discussion on the original work and a contribution to the search for meaning. As Steiner puts it, "there can be no doubt that echo enriches, that it is more than shadow and inert simulacrum" (1998:317). Every translation is a new interpretation of its source which adds to the discourse on it. The translator's work significantly influences the original. Steiner implores that it is done consciously and with the good of the original in mind. It is necessary to notice that a "perfect" or "definitive" translation of a literary work is, by definition, impossible; on the other hand, it also does not mean that any translation is of value. Achieving a potential ideal is impossible, but striving for perfection is essential. In this case, perfection could be identified as "exchange without loss" (Steiner 1998:319). Thus, from the hermeneutic perspective, the translator's task is to keep the balance between the ST and TT: to use the former to attempt to construct the latter with trust and reciprocity.

Goodwin argues that Steiner merely observed that “translation always involves a certain violence” (Goodwin 2010:27); in fact, any act of communication carries a risk of aggression (Goodwin 2010:29). Every interpretative act – listening to the other in a conversation, looking at a work of art, translating a text – is, to an extent, violent. The receiver takes someone’s creation or utterance and tries to make sense of it using their own views, experiences, opinions and biases. Any comment or reply could be considered penetrative: the receiver takes the “original text”, comprehends it subjectively and formulates a reaction. From a hermeneutic perspective, this makes communication, including translation, an ethical issue (2010:27). Thus, in Goodwin’s view, Steiner’s proposition balances this aggression in translation by trust and reciprocity. He argues that “the point [of the hermeneutic motion] is to honour the presence of an Other by attending carefully to what he or she says, and re-creating it for a third” (2010:40). Steiner equips us not with a theory or instruction, but with a guide which implores the translators to communicate the meanings of the ST to the TT readers and to acknowledge the translators’ own limitations while attempting that task.

### *Unconscious tendencies deforming translations*

However, acknowledgment of those limitations does not suffice. Venturing to create a translation which tries to be an exchange without loss, the translator should try to overcome them. Filling any gaps in linguistic or cultural knowledge is obvious and straightforward advice; avoiding imperfections resulting from subjective understanding fuelled by the translator’s sensitivity and experiences is more challenging. Subjectivity influences the translation process and may not be disregarded. A psychoanalytical approach is called for.

Berman’s analytic of translation seems adequate to the discussion as it presents a hermeneutic framework of analysis combined with a psychoanalytical perspective (Venuti 2012:189) which does not become rigidly systematic or exclusionary. His proposition becomes an attempt to identify and categorise translation acts which are, in Steiner’s terms, too violent and insufficiently reciprocative.

Berman claims that translation is “the trial of the foreign” (Berman 2012:240) and the sense of that notion is twofold. Firstly, translation aims at presenting the foreign work to the new audience “in its utter foreignness” (ibid.). Secondly, by removing a text from its original

“language-ground” (ibid.) – or, indeed, its culture-ground – translation may “reveal the foreign work’s most original kernel” (ibid.). This may be understood as exposing the meaning of a work which was not consciously interwoven into it by the author. Berman states that translators tend to deform texts during their work, often unintentionally (Berman 2012:242). This is why he calls his system not only Cartesian in its logical analysis of observed tendencies but also psychoanalytic, as it outlines deformations that are made unconsciously (ibid.). The psychoanalytic aspect of his typology also pertains to the idea of translation as a process which may, to an extent, disclose the abovementioned “original kernel” of a text.

Berman lists twelve unconscious text-deforming translator tendencies and explains them in detail (Berman 2012:244-253). Rationalization makes the text more fluent, it defuses the author’s artistic licence mainly on the structural level (Berman 2012:244-245). Clarification is similar in terms of ensuring fluency, but it mainly concerns the meaning of words (Berman 2012:245). Expansion has a similar goal, but it manifests itself in translation by resulting in producing longer texts (Berman 2012:246). Ennoblement assures elegance of conformity by moulding the text into the norms of the target language (Berman 2012:246-247). Qualitative impoverishment “refers to the replacement of terms, expressions and figures of the original with terms, expressions and figures that lack their sonorous richness” (Berman 2012:247). A quote was necessary here to show that Berman’s typology is possibly more psychoanalytic than Cartesian, as at the core of this definition lies the “sonorous richness” of a given portion of a text, which is, to an extent, subjective; its discovery is possible through sensitivity and erudition rather than systematic analysis of components of a work. Quantitative impoverishment is “lexical loss” (Berman 2012:247). The destruction of rhythms is self-explanatory; Berman underlines that it occurs in prose just as it does in poetry (Berman 2012: 248). The destruction of underlying networks of signification is just as challenging to grasp as qualitative impoverishment. Berman writes about “a hidden dimension” (ibid.) of every text which may be concealed in recurring words which have something in common (ibid.). This is another manifestation of the author’s unconscious and its influence on the translation process. The destruction of linguistic patternings, a partial result of some of the initial tendencies, removes the author’s idiosyncrasies, conscious or otherwise (Berman 2012:249). Similarly, the destruction of vernacular networks or their exoticization impoverishes the author’s style (Berman 2012:250). This often happens through bastardising exoticization which exploits stereotypes of a given vernacular or replaces a particular vernacular with a local one (ibid.).

The destruction of expressions and idioms often takes the form of replacing those expressions and idioms with their equivalents in the source language (Berman 2012:250-251), which creates new networks of signification. Finally, the effacement of the superimposition of languages occurs when the ST includes a clash between various vernaculars or idiolects and the translator fails to recreate that collision (Berman 2012:251).

These tendencies are often interconnected and occur simultaneously; one may be a result of the other. All of them conceal the foreignness of the work and hinder attempts at uncovering its meaning. However, they do not seem to be a simple advocacy of domestication; as mentioned above, the second sense of the “trial of the foreign” makes it clear that every translator’s decision should be a step towards uncovering the truth of the work – or, as Berman puts it, “the foreign work’s most original kernel” (2012:240).

It is necessary to examine whether using this more systematic approach enriches the hermeneutic motion as a method of translating. The following analysis illustrates how this perspective could facilitate reading and producing translations.

### *The material: The Queen and I by Sue Townsend*

Sue Townsend’s novel *The Queen and I* is a novel abundant in cultural references. The novel was published in 1992; the plot is set in the same year. It tells a fictitious story of the abolition of the British monarchy by a newly elected Republican government. The Royal Family is relocated from Buckingham Palace to a working-class council estate, an area where social housing is provided by the authorities. The text revolves around the Royals’ struggle with new circumstances, a new environment and new neighbours; it exposes social, financial and psychological differences between the wealthiest and the poorest. The reader also follows Jack Barker, the new Prime Minister, as he leads the country to the verge of bankruptcy with his communist policies. Finally, the United Kingdom becomes subject to the empire of Japan. At the end, it turns out that it was all the Queen’s nightmare.

*The Queen and I* is full of humour based on British social and political reality in the early 1990s, which is why it poses a considerable translation challenge in terms of cultural displacement – an aspect of distanciation. The following is the analysis of how this issue manifests itself in selected scenes from the only existing Polish translation of the novel,

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produced by Hanna Pawlikowska-Gannon and published in 1994. The hermeneutic motion and Berman's tendencies will serve as a theoretical framework of the analysis. Alternative translations will be provided to supplement any critiques and evaluations of Pawlikowska-Gannon's solutions. Those alternatives are not supposed to be superior but potentially more reflective of the hermeneutic approach outlined above. They will enable constructive comparison that will help in assessing whether the system of textual deformation supplements the hermeneutic motion in a way that makes it possible to control the translator's unconscious bias during their work.

## **Analysing Polish Translations of Selected Cultural References from *The Queen and I***

### *Proper names*

Particular names of characters or titles that may be foreign to the TT reader are a clear example of the problem of cultural references. On one hand, strong links with real-life objects may be used to make the world depicted in the text more believable or to embed it firmly in the reality known to the reader. Sometimes, however, they may be introduced as the basis of a joke that plays on cultural differences. It is not the items themselves and whether they are (un)familiar to the TT readership – it is the referential function they play in the text. The following fragment exemplifies this well. One of the characters in the book, the Japanese Princess, is ordered by her father, the Emperor of Japan, to read British literature to “improve her English” and help “to understand the English psyche” (Townsend 2002:197). A part of her reading list is disclosed to the reader in the following extract:

She has already ploughed through *The Wind in the Willows*, *Alice in Wonderland* and most of *Jemima Puddleduck* but she has found these books very difficult, full of talking animals dressed in the clothes of human beings. The strangest of all had been *The House at Pooh Corner*, about the retarded bear who was befriended by a boy called Christopher Robin. (Townsend 2002:197)

These two sentences will be analysed separately, but first let us see the published Polish translation of this extract:

Przebrnęła już przez „O czym szumią wierzby”, „Alicję w krainie czarów” i większą część „Kaczki Tekli Kałużyńskiej”, ale te książki wydały jej się bardzo trudne, pełno w nich było zwierząt mówiących ludzkim głosem, ubranych w ludzkie stroje. Najdziwniejsza ze wszystkich była „Chatka Puchatka”: o Misiu o Bardzo Małym Rozumku, który zaprzyjaźnił się z chłopcem o imionach Stefan Krzysztof. (Townsend 1994:142)

She already ploughed through “What the willows whisper about”, “Alicja in the realm of wonders” and [the] bigger part of “Duck Tekla Kałużyńska”, but these books seemed to her very difficult, there were in them lots of animals speaking with human voices, dressed in human clothes. The strangest of them was “A Cabin of Puchatek”: about a Teddy Bear with a Teeny Tiny Brain, who befriended a boy named Stefan Krzysztof.<sup>2</sup>

The first cultural connotations that appear in the extract are the titles of three children’s books. As the books are a part of the Polish canon, the translator used the well-known renditions established in the TT polysystem. However, these equivalents only seem adequate if taken out of context or in the context of the very texts they represent. Let us analyse *Kaczka Tekla Kałużyńska*, an eponymous character from a 1908 children’s book by Beatrix Potter. “Puddleduck” resembles an actual surname as it reflects names built with two words such as “Goodman” or “Wilson”. This effect is reflected by adding *-ńska* in the Polish version, a typical suffix for feminine surnames, to the noun *kałuża*, which means “puddle”, hence *Kałużyńska*. The missing component, “duck”, in Polish *kaczka*, is placed before the first name. In Berman’s terms, this is expansion. The name “Tekla” does not seem to have clear semantic links with “Jemima”, but was probably chosen with the text’s read-aloud potential in mind, which is crucial in terms of writing and translating for illiterate children (see Lathey 2016:93-111). This is a good example of Berman’s avoiding the destruction of rhythms: the function of the duck’s first name is to sound well with its other parts; to quote Riitta Oittinen, “the translator is responsible for contributing to the aloud-reader’s enjoyment of the story in every way possible” (Oittinen 2006:93). The aural effects of the name are preserved in the translation. This translation, in Berman’s terms, does not seem heavily textually deformed. However, the context surrounding “Jemima Puddleduck” in the Beatrix Potter series is very different to the context provided in *The Queen and I*. In Potter’s work, the name is an aurally

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<sup>2</sup> All quotes from the Polish translation of *The Queen and I* are followed by back translations made by the author of this article so that they reflect the structure of the text and, most importantly, the treatment of cultural references.

pleasant wordplay which children may find attractive, in Townsend's novel, it refers to the culturally significant text which is emblematic of British literary canon for young readers. From the hermeneutic perspective, this difference changes the function and meaning of the same notion.

This example shows that the titles used in the quoted extract of *The Queen and I* do not represent themselves as such; they are supposed to represent characteristically British texts; they are the tokens of Britishness. Thus, replacing those titles with its heavily domesticated Polish versions is an instance of the destruction of underlying networks of signification possibly by means of clarification, as the Polish titles are potentially more familiar to an average TT reader than the originals. An attempt to provide a translation without this deformation might read as follows:

Przebrnęła przez *The Wind in the Willows*, *Alice in Wonderland* i przez większość *Jemima Puddleduck*, ale jej zdaniem książki te były bardzo trudne, pełne gadających zwierząt poubieranych w ludzkie stroje.

She ploughed through *The Wind in the Willows*, *Alice in Wonderland* and most of *Jemima Puddleduck*, but in her opinion these books were very difficult, full of talking animals dressed in human clothing.<sup>3</sup>

This version attempts to keep the function of cultural references from the original described above. However, another function of those titles (and the one that follows in the rest of the extract) which should not go unnoticed is humour. The Princess is ordered to study British culture for important political reasons. The fact that the text chosen for her to read are books for small children is an example of surreal comedy, which is lost in translation. By following Berman's typology strictly, one risks incoherence and confusion of the reader. To try to preserve the meaning and role of the passage, one could use Polish titles of the first two stories, as in the published version, due to the fact that they are known as British texts, while *Jemima Puddleduck* could be kept as it sounds English, as opposed to an aggressively, using Steiner's terms, Polish sounding *Kaczka Tekla Kałużyńska*. It seems that violence is balanced with reciprocity.

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<sup>3</sup> All alternative translations and their English back translations are made by the author of this article.

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The second sentence refers to Winnie the Pooh, a character possibly as well-known in Poland as in Britain. It is supposed to be humorous to refer to the innocent, cuddly and adorably soft-headed character as “retarded”. This highly offensive expression reflects Pooh’s famous depiction as “a bear of very little brain”. This crude augmentation is at the core of the comedic value of the passage. Christopher Robin is also mentioned, probably to underline the strangeness of a person befriending anthropomorphic toys.

“The retarded bear”, a phrase that might be translated literally as *niedorozwinięty niedźwiedź*, is replaced by the aforementioned “a bear of very little brain” as it appears in Irena Tuwim’s canonical 1938 translation (Milne 1995): *Miś o Bardzo Małym Rozumku* (back-translation: “Teddy Bear with a Teeny Tiny Brain”). The phrase is rationalised and clarified; as a result it is qualitatively impoverished as it is stripped of its humorous value. The translation of “Christopher Robin” also requires commentary. *Stefan Krzysztof* is debatable, as it appears in neither of the two existing Polish translations of the Winnie the Pooh books and thus bears no links with the stories that readers remember from their childhood. Moreover, this solution is inconsistent with prior references to Tuwim’s version (where the name was translated as *Krzyś*). This may be an instance of the destruction of vernacular networks or their exoticization. It seems that the translator tried to exoticize the name, as if the name *Stefan Krzysztof* is supposed to be reflective of British culture (like the book titles in the previous sentence). As argued above, it is not. Let us examine the following alternative:

Jak dotąd najdziwniejsza była *Chatka Puchatka*, o niedorozwiniętym miśku będącym w zażyłych stosunkach z jakimś Krzysiem.

So far the strangest was *The Cabin of Puchatek* about a retarded teddy bear being in close relations with a Krzyś.

Placing the canonical *Krzyś* (a diminutive version of the name *Krzysztof*, which in English is “Christopher”) next to, for example, *niedorozwinięty misiek* (back-translation: “retarded teddy bear”); *misiek* is an augmentative form of *miś*, which means in Polish both “teddy bear” and “bear” – in the latter meaning the words *miś* or *misiek* are usually used by children or in

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children's books and stories) would potentially keep the humour of the original based on the contrast of the offensive description of Pooh and his friend's diminutive name known to the Polish readership.

However, some proper names are left unchanged in the translation of *The Queen and I*. Consider the following extract from a scene describing the first meeting between Princess Diana and Fitzroy Toussaint, a successful and handsome son of one of Diana's new neighbours:

He saw that the black suit was Caroline Charles and the suede shoes with the pointed toes were Emma Hope. (Townsend 1992:217)

Luxurious clothing is something they have in common: a few lines later Diana notices his Paul Smith clothes and Gieves and Hawkes shoes. Fitzroy's precision in naming the brands of British fashion designers is a specific detail, which is undoubtedly a cultural reference, as all the brands are British. The translation from the Polish translation reads as follows:

Zauważył, że czarny kostium pochodził z firmy Caroline Charles, a zamszowe pantofle ze szpicami od Emmy Hope. (Townsend 1994:155)

He noticed that the black suit came from the company Caroline Charles and suede shoes with pointy toes from Emma Hope.

The brand names represent the social status of Diana and Fitzroy in opposition to the rest of the Royal Family's new environment. Fitzroy used to be a part of it, but he has managed to climb the social ladder. Diana's new circumstance was a significant downgrade which she cannot stand, so Fitzroy's success symbolizes the possibility of winning one's position back. His achievement and his other traits such as kindness, decisiveness, and romanticism are presented in blatant opposition to Prince Charles's passive acceptance of the situation (represented by his newfound love of keeping a garden) and his utter lack of control over his own fate (represented by his imprisonment for a crime he did not commit). This also draws Diana closer to Fitzroy. The quoted passage is one of the hints that indicate the possible bond between them, which is the reason why it is important to keep the role of those brand names in translation. Unlike in the example with the reading list, the proper names were kept. Arguably, not all British readers would necessarily be familiar with the names of designers mentioned in the text, but a careful reader is able to infer from the context that those are

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expensive brands. It is also possible in the Polish translation. Nonetheless, in Berman's terms, the translation is expanded as a consequence of clarification: in the Polish narrative it is stated that Caroline Charles is a company. Whether that expansion is necessary remains debatable; it can be argued that the Polish reader may understand as much as the British reader as in both ST and TT the cultural references serve the same function. In the context of the hermeneutic motion, clarification as such is not an issue. The unique context of the passage explained above is a part of a hermeneutic investigation. It becomes clear what the function of the proper names is; ways to preserve that function in the translation are addressed. Even though there are issues according to Berman, both ST and TT readers are likely to comprehend and interpret this passage in a similar if not the same way.

### *Class differences*

Humour based on class differences is another formidable translation challenge, as such a rigid class divide does not occur in Poland as in Britain. It becomes especially difficult if knowledge of the culture is necessary to make sense of such a joke. A good example of this comes from a conversation between the Queen Mother and Spiggy, who visits her to adjust her enormous carpets to the size of her new council house:

She engaged him in conversation, enquiring about his wife. 'Run off,' said Spiggy.  
'Children?'  
'She took 'em wiv 'er.'  
'So you're a gay bachelor?' tinkled the Queen Mother.  
Spiggy's brow darkened. 'Who's been sayin' I'm gay?' (Townsend 2002:62)

In the Polish translation, this extract is translated as follows:

Nawiązała z nim rozmowę, pytając o żonę.  
— Dała dyla — wyjaśnił Spiggy.  
— A dzieci?  
— Zabrała.  
— A więc znów jest pan kawalerem śmiałym? — zaszcebiotała Królowa Matka.  
Spiggy groźnie zmarszczył brwi.  
— Kto mówi, że jestem pedałem? (Townsend 1994:49)

She engaged him in conversation asking about the wife.  
— She did a bunk — explained Spiggy.  
— And the children?  
— She took them.  
— And so again you are a daring bachelor? — tinkled the Queen Mother.  
Spiggy frowned dangerously.  
— Who says that I'm a faggot?

The translation challenge here is posed by the humorous effect of Spiggy's reaction to the Queen Mother calling him "a gay bachelor" caused by his misunderstanding her intention. "A gay bachelor" is translated as *kawaler śmiały* which means "daring bachelor" or "brave bachelor". The adjective "gay" means either "cheerful" or "homosexual". The word is not widely used in the first sense anymore; it is conceivable that Spiggy does not know about it, hence the mistake. The pun is supposed to illustrate a cultural distance between representatives of different classes. There is no word in Polish that carries both those meanings. The solution from the Polish translation takes only the former meaning, rendering the extract incoherent, as the word "gay" from Spiggy's line was translated as *pedał*, which is an offensive noun to describe a gay male that bears no connection with *kawaler śmiały* in any sense. This solution is an example of significant qualitative impoverishment.

Consider the following alternative and its translation into English of the final part of the extract:

— A więc zapewne zmieniła się pana orientacja życiowa — zaszczebotała Królowa Matka.  
— A kto mówi, że zmieniłem orientację? — Spiggy zmarszczył brwi.  
  
— So probably your life orientation has changed — tinkled Queen Mother.  
— Who says I changed my orientation? — Spiggy frowned.

In Polish, the collocation *zmienić orientację* – "to change orientation" – refers implicitly though clearly to sexual orientation. *Orientacja życiowa* is a less common, more scientific

phrase. Nevertheless, it is understandable and does not contain any allusion to sexual preference; it encompasses the values one carries, their life goals and means by which they want to meet them. Spiggy's misunderstanding of this scientific term and consequently interpreting it as questioning his heterosexual masculinity is, arguably, more believable and reflects the class differences between the characters together with the intended humour of that scene in the original text.

Another cultural reference present in the extract is the lofty lingo of the Queen Mother (the word *kawaler* is old-fashioned) contrasted with Spiggy's retort, which is cruder than in the original. This was probably supposed to highlight the class differences between those two characters, which shows that the translator identified the source of comedy in this scene. Thus, the translation, to an extent, avoids the effacement of superimposition of languages. It does not do it fully as the distinctive difference in pronunciation marked by spelling is not rendered (for a more extensive discussion of this translation issue in the Polish translation of *The Queen and I* see Skwarzyński 2019).

In the fragment discussed above, the joke was based on Spiggy's misunderstanding. In some other cases, culture-based humour may be much more concealed and thus go unnoticed. In the following extract, Prince Charles talks to Mrs Strickland, the headmistress of Prince Harry's new primary school:

[...] Charles said, 'So, you're short of books, are you?'  
'And paper and pencils and glue and paint and gym equipment and cutlery for the dining room and *staff*,' said Mrs Strickland. 'But apart from all that we're a very well-equipped school.' She added, 'Our parents are very supportive, but they haven't any money. There is a limit to how many raffle tickets they can buy and car boot sales they can attend. These are not the leafy suburbs, Mr Teck.'  
Charles agreed; leaves were very thin on the ground on the Flowers Estate – even in autumn, he suspected. (Townsend 2002:136)

"Leafy suburbs" is a phrase which describes a neighbourhood with a significant number of gardens and parks associated with a considerable wealth of the inhabitants, as opposed to more industrial council housing of the working classes. This double meaning eludes Prince Charles; he believes that Mrs Strickland referred to the horticulture of the area. His lack of

reaction to what, in his understanding, was an incoherent statement, is also comical. The unexplained miscommunication is only a part of the humour and meaning conveyed in the scene. Mrs Strickland wants to mildly indicate that her community is not wealthy – perhaps in a slightly provocative manner. Prince Charles’s reaction shows how the wealthy do not understand the problems of the working classes. Even though they speak the same language, they are unable to communicate due to a deep cultural divide between them.

Below is the Polish version of that extract:

Karol [...] zapytał:

— A więc brakuje wam książek?

— I papieru, ołówków, kleju, farb, wyposażenia sali gimnastycznej, i nakryć w jadalni, i *personelu* — odparła pani Strickland. — Poza tym jesteśmy doskonale wyposażoną szkołą. Rodzice są bardzo pomocni, ale nie mają pieniędzy. Mogą zakupić ograniczoną liczbę biletów na loterię i wziąć udział w ograniczonej liczbie dobroczynnych wyprzedaży. To nie są zadrzewione przedmieścia, panie Teck.

Karol przyznał jej rację, w Osiedlu Kwiatowym nie było szczególnej obfitości drzew, podejrzewał, że nawet jesienią nie rzucają się w oczy. (Townsend 1994:101)

Karol [...] asked:

— And so you don’t have enough books?

— And paper, pencils, glue, paints, gym room equipment, and cutlery for the cafeteria, and *staff* — replied Ms Strickland. — Apart from that we are an excellently equipped school. Parents are very helpful, but they don’t have money. They may buy a limited number of lottery tickets and take part in a limited number of charity sales. These are not treed suburbs, Mr Teck.

Karol admitted she was right, in Flower Estate there wasn’t a significant abundance of trees, he suspected, that even in autumn they are not conspicuous.

*Zadrzewione przedmieścia* (“treed suburbs”) simply describes a suburban area with many trees in it; the phrase does not have a metaphorical meaning in Polish. The text implies the connection between people being not well-off and the lack of trees in the neighbourhood, but it seems manufactured. This loss of double meaning resulting in incoherence is another example of qualitative impoverishment.

Arguably, the link could be derived from the context, but it would demand a significant inference on the reader's part. Polish cities are filled with communist-era communal architecture. High blocks of flats next to long, cubical buildings tightly packed with small flats are a typical element of a Polish urban landscape. They were usually built on large blocks with limited vehicle access, and are brimming with playgrounds, small basketball or football fields, parks, trees and flowerbeds. The connection between cheap housing and lack of greenery is by no means obvious to Poles. On the contrary, it is new housing estates that are often criticised for their lack of plants.

It is the lack of coherence of the rendered version that may make the readers refer to their own experience; it seems a natural step if the text leaves them confused. Distanciation may be overcome, at least in part, if the translated version remains close to the meaning of the source. Consider this alternative translation of the final part of the extract:

— Nasi rodzice wspierają nas jak mogą, ale nie mają pieniędzy. Mogą kupić ograniczoną ilość losów na loterię i wziąć udział w ograniczonej liczbie dobroczynnych wyprzedaży. Życie w tej okolicy nie jest usłane różami, panie Teck.  
Książę Charles zgodził się – w dzielnicy Flowers Estate próżno szukać na ulicy róż, prędzej liści, i to raczej jesienią.

— Our parents do all they can to support us, but they don't have money. They may buy a limited number of lottery tickets and take part in a limited number of charity sales. Life in this neighbourhood is not lined with roses, Mr Teck.  
Prince Charles admitted she was right – it would be a pointless occupation to look for roses on the streets of Flowers Estate, searching for leaves would be more sensible, and rather in autumn, for that matter.

*Życie usłane różami* means an easy and luxurious life, one that is “a bed of roses”. When we describe something as *usłane* with roses, it literally means that it is thickly covered with roses. This enables the TT reader to react to the scene in a way that is similar to a potential reaction of the ST reader to the original. Firstly, Ms Strickland uses an idiomatic expression to point out that the life in the neighbourhood is not easy. Secondly, the phrase refers to the presence of plants – leaves in the original, roses in the suggested translation. This marks the first significant discrepancy between the original and the translation and dictates the second, which

is a link between the roses from the used idiom and leaves at the centre of Prince Charles's observation.

This may seem like two deformations: destruction of expressions and idioms and expansion respectively. However, I would argue that the alternative translation is not deformed. Berman warns against using parallel idioms of similar meaning to merely make the translated text equivalent and easier to understand (Berman 2012:250-251). The solution suggested in the alternative translation is not dictated by this. It is not a result of a generally unconscious influence on translation decisions, but of considering the meaning of the phraseology used in the narration and dialogues, the characters' intentions, the genre of the book, the comedic point of the scene and the TT readers' potential knowledge of the presented world. Further, the expansion was not "an *unfolding* of what, in the original, is 'folded'" (Berman 2012:246), but an addition necessary to ensure the coherence of the translation solution explained above in the context of the scene.

In this version, the meaning of the scene is close to that of the original, the style and register are similar, the humour is conveyed and the interaction is comprehensible. From trust to aggression to incorporation and finally to reciprocity, all stages of the hermeneutic motion have been consciously considered in the production of the alternative translation. This analysis shows that employing Berman's system of textual deformation is helpful in formulating the alternative translation in keeping with the hermeneutic approach.

## **Conclusion**

Goodwin characterises Steiner's hermeneutic motion as an approach that considers translation an ethical problem. Steiner does not attempt to provide a definitive instruction, but an outline of the translation process with two corrective principles at its core: the translators' awareness of their own limitations and the translations' awareness of a web of interests of different parties involved in the production and reception of any text. On the basis of the above discussion and analysis, I argue that Berman's system of textual deformations is a useful addition to the hermeneutic motion, as it helps translators recognise their own biases and avoid them as much as they can; it also facilitates critical reading of published translated texts. Moreover, this analysis prompts further research concerning a potential relationship between Steiner's hermeneutics and other translation-studies schools and models.

Undoubtedly, more analytical and especially empirical studies with readers are needed to further examine practical applications of the proposed approach. Nevertheless, it seems that constructive readings of Steiner, combined with psychoanalytical approaches, may shed new light on the intellectual validity and practical usefulness of the hermeneutic motion.

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