

# From Euphemisms to Vulgarisms: Translating King Lear's Misogynistic Monologue (Act IV, Scene 6) into Polish

**Grzegorz Antoni Cebrat**

Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Zawodowa w Tarnowie, Poland

gcebrat@poczta.okay.pl

## Abstract

*The paper investigates the issue how Polish translators of William Shakespeare's King Lear dealt with rendering Lear's monologue (Act IV, Scene 6, ll. 107-132), being a misogynistic tirade of the mad king against adultery, sexuality, and women in general. The play was translated into Polish at least fifteen times in the 19th and 20th centuries, beginning with the oldest published rendition by Ignacy Hołowiński (1841) and concluding with the most recent one by Jerzy S. Sito (2001). The paper analyses seven selected fragments taking into consideration lexical and stylistic choices made by the translators of the monologue in order to show how changing attitudes to sexual taboo and Shakespearean obscenities affected the translations in question. The analysis reveals the evolution of translators' attitudes to those issues (also affected by contemporary Shakespearean research): from euphemistic treatment of the topic in the 19th century, through philological translations of Tarnawski and Chwalewik, to unrestricted modern renditions of Słomczyński and Barańczak, and the extreme case of straightforward obscene translation of Jerzy S. Sito.*

*Keywords: Shakespeare, King Lear, Polish translations, obscenity*

## Streszczenie

Od eufemizmów do wulgaryzmów – tłumaczenia na język polski mizoginistycznego monologu Króla Leara (Akt IV, Scena 6)

*Artykuł jest próbą analizy technik i metod zastosowanych przez tłumaczy w trakcie przekładu wyrazów i wyrażeń obscenicznych występujących w tragedii Williama Shakespeare'a Król Lear na język polski. Analiza skupia się na tłumaczeniach monologu szalonego króla (Akt IV, scena 6, wersy 107-132), który jawi się jako mizoginistyczny atak na kobiety, seksualność, oraz cudzołóstwo. Materiał tekstowy stanowi 15 przekładów sztuki, począwszy od najstarszego tłumaczenia, dokonanego przez Ignacego Hołowińskiego i opublikowanego w 1841 roku, a skończywszy na wersji Jerzego S. Sity z roku 2001. Artykuł analizuje wybrane zdania i jednostki leksykalne, pochodzące z siedmiu fragmentów monologu, pod kątem technik i strategii*

*tłumaczeniowych zastosowanych przez poszczególnych tłumaczy przy przekładaniu pojęć uważanych za nieprzyzwoite, a dotyczących kobiecego ciała, seksu, rozpusty, cudzołóstwa, itp. Przeprowadzona analiza wykazuje ewolucję sposobów przekładu, związanych z epoką w której polski tekst powstał i jej uwarunkowaniami kulturowo-społecznymi, a także z rozwojem badań nad twórczością i językiem Shakespeare'a, i pozwala śledzić zmiany, począwszy od eufemistycznego stylu tłumaczeń powstałych w XIX. wieku, poprzez filologiczne tłumaczenia Tarnawskiego i Chwalewika, a skończywszy na współczesnych, miejscami 'niecenzuralnych,' tekstach Słomczyńskiego, Barańczaka, a zwłaszcza Sity, który nie zawahał się użyć wulgaryzmów.*

*Słowa kluczowe: Szekspir, Król Lear, tłumaczenia, obsceniczność*

## 1. Introduction. King Lear's monologue and its interpretations

While browsing through a library catalogue of Shakespeare's translations, a diligent reader may discover that, with its fifteen renditions into Polish, *The Tragedy of King Lear* seems to be one of those works of the Bard that have been most popular with Polish translators for almost two hundred years, with a new translation published almost every decade. The earliest translation of the play, by Ignacy Hołowiński, was published in 1841<sup>1</sup>; he was followed by six other Shakespearean translators flourishing in the 19th century: Jan Komierowski (1858), Stanisław Koźmian (1866), Adam Pług (*nom de plume* of Antoni Pietkiewicz, 1870), Józef Paszkowski (1875), Leon Urlich (1895) and Wojciech Dziędużycki (1904). The list of the 20th-century translators includes Jan Kasproicz (1922), Andrzej Tretiak (1923), Zofia Siwicka (1951), Witold Tarnawski (1957), Witold Chwalewik (1964), Maciej Słomczyński (1979), Stanisław Barańczak (1991), and Jerzy S. Sito (2001).

Shakespeare's bawdy language and his use of obscenities, vulgarities and sexual puns have been researched in detail: the major comprehensive studies and dictionaries include Colman (1974), Partridge (1990), Rubenstein (1989), Williams (1994, 1997), Carroll (2001), Kiernan (2006); additionally, there are in-depth commentaries on usage of individual terms and phrases, for instance *soiled horse* (Blythe 1980) or *forks* (Dorfman 1994), which propose alternative interpretations of the play (and its translations, see the Analysis below).

Translating obscenities and sex-related language poses a major problem. Since taboo topics, such as sex, sexual organs and activities, prostitution, adultery and other related terms are stigmatized as bad or foul language<sup>2</sup>, they have been banned in polite conversation, in writing,

<sup>1</sup> Under his penname, Ignacy Kefaliński.

<sup>2</sup> See Dąbrowska (1994: 71-72) and Lewinson (1999: VI) for complete lists.

and especially in print; thus, a few techniques are used to avoid offending a reader or listener<sup>3</sup>. Similarly, a translator may apply a number of strategies: the most radical approach is ignoring or omitting the term or a fragment of the text, which results in censoring and ‘bowdlerizing’ it. Alternatively, a text may be paraphrased, which means substituting a taboo with an inoffensive term or phrase; however, that may lead to distorting the meaning of the text and confusing the audience. Finally, there are two commonest ways of solving the riddle: either applying the taboo for taboo technique – yet the taboo in the target language is likely to be regarded as equally offensive or embarrassing to some, or replacing the taboo term with its euphemism in the target language. The last option seems to be the best but the key question remains: to what extent the translator has succeeded in conveying original ideas, thoughts, and style of the author<sup>4</sup>.

The issue of obscenity in translations of Shakespeare’s plays into Polish has not been thoroughly investigated so far; the only exception appears to be Anna Bielska (2013)<sup>5</sup>, whose paper discusses vulgarities in three Polish translations of *Romeo and Juliet*. The aim of the present article is to investigate intractable problems the abovementioned translators had to cope with while rendering King Lear’s monologue (IV. vi. 107-132) as well as the methods and techniques they employed. It is necessary to emphasize the fact that the text poses a number of difficulties related to both its contents and language: on the one hand, it is an apparently incohesive misogynistic tirade of the mad king; on the other, it contains a number of words and collocations that might be regarded as improper, unacceptable or obscene by a reader or spectator, and that is why it was expurgated and shortened to a couple of lines in the infamous edition of *The Family Shakespeare* by Thomas Bowdler<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> They include truncation (replacing some letters with dash or asterisks, e.g. *f\*\*k* for *fuck*), adaptation (adapting spelling or pronunciation to soften the term, e.g. *Gee* for *Jesus*) or substitution with a euphemism, which may still be socially awkward if the topic itself is taboo (*have a sexual intercourse* for *shag*) (McArthur 2005: 599).

<sup>4</sup> The major work on the topic is Robinson (1996). See also Varney (2007) and Ramos (2015). Unfortunately, not much research has been done in Poland; for example, *Język a Kultura 21*, devoted entirely to the issues of cultural and language taboo in Poland, contains only one article analyzing taboo in translation (Panasiuk 2009).

<sup>5</sup> By Paszkowski, Barańczak, and, in particular, Słomczyński.

<sup>6</sup> In the 8th edition of *The Family Shakespeare* (1843: 809) the text in question contains only its initial lines:  
Ay, every inch a king.

When I do stare, see how the subject quakes?  
I pardon that man's life. What was thy cause? –  
Adultery? –  
Thou shalt not die: for Gloucester's bastard son  
Was kinder to his father, than my daughters  
Born in the lawful bed.

Thomas Bowdler was by no means unique. Williams (1997: 9), commenting on another edition, entitled *The College Shakespeare* in which “the words and expressions are omitted which cannot with propriety be read before young students with English explanatory notes by Dr. O. Fiebig” (Leipzig, 1857), claims that such editorial practices

In Act 4, Scene 6, the mad king, deprived of his army and court, rails and rages on Dover plains, where he encounters Edgar and Gloucester. He recognizes the latter and hints at his adultery as the sin and source of shame. In his monologue, Lear pardons Gloucester for that crime, but then, his thoughts begin to follow a chain of associations: starting from the sin of adultery, he refers to copulation, which leads him to express his disgust in womankind and sexuality in general, culminating in the image of hell. It should be observed that, in the final five lines, furious Lear deserts iambic pentameter:

Ay, every inch a king.  
When I do stare, see how the subject quakes?  
I pardon that man's life. What was thy cause?  
Adultery? Thou shalt not die. Die for adultery?  
No, the wren goes to't, and the small gilded fly  
Does lecher in my sight. Let copulation thrive,  
For Gloucester's bastard son was kinder to his father  
Than my daughters got 'tween the lawful sheets.  
To't luxury, pell-mell, for I lack soldiers.  
Behold yond simp'ring dame,  
Whose face between her forks presages snow,  
That minces virtue, and does shake the head  
To hear of pleasure's name. The fitchew, nor  
The soiled horse goes to't with a more riotous  
Appetite. Down from the waist they are centaurs,  
Though women all above. But to the girdle  
Do the gods inherit; beneath is all the fiend's.  
There's hell, there's darkness, there is the sulphurous  
pit; burning, scalding, stench, consumption. Fie, fie,  
fie, pah, pah. Give me an ounce of civet; good apothecary,  
sweeten my imagination. There's money  
for thee.

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were to be continued for decades: "expurgated texts were the norm during the first half of this [20th] century, to foster children belief in the purity of the eminent."

Numerous literary critics have commented upon the issues of sex, women and misogyny present in the text in question as well as in the entire play<sup>7</sup>. Robert H. West (1960: 56), claims that “Lear seems in his madness to imply that sex is an insult to mankind and mercilessly alien – or that man is a beast” and that his madness results from his daughters’ ill-treatment of him. His views are shared by Kay Stockholder (1989–1990: 41-43), who emphasizes the radical Manichean presentation of the women and womanhood in the play: Cordelia is a symbolic representation of universal good, whereas Goneril and Regan, who “add corrupt sexuality to their mocking cruelty, their vengeance, and their capacity to manipulate, corrupt, humiliate, and emasculate men (41)” represent “a cosmic principle of evil” (42). Arpad Pauncz (1952), in his medical analysis of Lear’s case, argues that adultery, incest and fantastic erotic images seem to dominate his mental state.

In Lear’s perception of world, it is a place full of lust and lechery. In the King’s monologue, the presentation of Nature permeated with omnipresent ‘luxury,’ as Shakespeare says, is graded: the initial image depicts tiny, minor creatures – insects and birds – represented by the “small gilded fly” and the wren; two bigger animals, the fitchew and the “soiled horse,” exemplary species associated with promiscuity, conjure up the next image. Yet, it is the series of pictures of the woman as a genuine epitome of corrupted sexuality (“simp’ring dame,” female centaur and the ‘split’ female body) that constitute the climax of the monologue. David Everett Blyth (1980: 87) argues that in “rising from lesser to greater creatures those bestial images also move from natural promiscuity in the wren and fly to the artificial provocation of the soiled horse and dame.”

The image of the “simp’ring dame,” who conceals her sexual appetite, may be interpreted as referring to Goneril, who is Edmund’s lover (Wistanley 1922: 156), or to Cordelia, who despite looking modest and pure (“Whose face between her forks presages snow”), yearns for fornication (West 1960: 58). Claudette Hoover (1989: 349) claims that the half-female centaur is a “radical distortion of the myth of the centaurs, who were traditionally male<sup>8</sup> and violently lustful ‘down from the waist’” and Lear transforms that classical image and connects it with the

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<sup>7</sup> Readers interested in feminist approaches to Shakespeare should read a brief introduction to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century feminist critics of Shakespeare (2001: 65-67), followed by a recent collection of articles by feminist scholars (Callaghan, 2016) and, in particular, the article on his language by Kay Stanton. For the issues of editing and commenting his works (taking into account the instances of misogyny and bawdy language, in particular) in view of feminist criticism, see Laurie Maguire (in Callaghan, 2016). Treatment of female characters and misogyny in *King Lear* have been researched by Ann Thompson (1991) and Kathleen McLuskie (1994).

<sup>8</sup> There were very few female centaurs, called *centaurides*, in Greek mythology, the most famous of whom was Hylonome, mentioned by Ovid (*Metamorphoses* 12.210).

anti-feministic arguments of biblical<sup>9</sup> and Christian writers<sup>10</sup>, who believed that all women are Eves in their sexuality, and their genitals are the gate the devil enters while copulating (“beneath is all the fiend’s”)<sup>11</sup>. In another article, she points out that in Lear’s mind, sexual insatiability of all women and their lustfulness mean the downfall of man, symbolized with the transformed image of the centaur: “Lear’s compulsive and violent transformation of the classical centaur myth from males to females and his combining of it with the Christian view of women as satanic suggests his desperate need to believe his own imaginings and to project his self-hatred onto woman” (Hoover 1985: 89). Peter R. Rudnytzky (1999: 300-301) argues that splitting the female body into the upper, that is human or divine part, and the lower, bestial or demonic one, follows the idea of “polarization of women into angels or demons, madonnas or whores,” which pervades patriarchal culture; it is supposed to account for Cordelia idealization on the one hand, and Goneril’s and Regan’s demonization on the other<sup>12</sup>. Furthermore, the author interprets Lear’s reference to the vagina (“sulphurous pit”) as the place endangering the male organ.

## 2. The analysis of the translations

The academic research into Polish translations of Shakespeare’s plays begins with critical evaluation of the output of 19th century translators by Władysław Tarnawski (1914), followed by Stanisław Helsztyński (1964), who also analyzed the translations done in the first half of the 20th century. The most recent and comprehensive study presenting the biographies of 19th-century translators, their works, reception and critical appreciation (including the updated bibliography) was carried out by Anna Cetera-Włodarczyk and Alicja Kosim (2019a). Their project, *Shakespeare in Polish* by UW (2019b), gives online access to the complete corpus of

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<sup>9</sup> See *Proverbs* 7, verses 26–27, in particular:

For shee hath cast downe many wounded: yea many strong men haue bene slaine by her.  
Her house is the way to hell, going downe to the chambers of death.

<sup>10</sup> E.g. St John Chrysostom (A.D. 347-407): “Take her skin from her face and thou shalt see all loathsomeness under it, that beauty is a superficial skin ... within she is full of phlegm, stinking, putrid excremental stuff,” (cited by Shakespeare’s contemporary, Robert Burton (1621) in his *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Part 3, Sec. 2, Mem.5. Sub.3). Medieval clerical misogyny is discussed in detail in Klapisch-Zuber (1994: 15–24). See also Noddings (1989) on the association of the female with evil, and denigration of female body and its functions in the history of human thought (pages 36-39, in particular).

<sup>11</sup> See Gilmore (2001: 37–38), who claims that the phrase “beneath is all the fiend’s” is “associated with the belief that woman’s genital orifice was the portal of the fiend himself, the devil.”

<sup>12</sup> See Albany’s rage at Goneril (IV. ii. 59–61), in which he compares women to devil:  
See thyself, devil!  
Proper deformity shows not in the fiend  
So horrid as in woman.

19th-century published translations; those resources, supplemented with the extracts of the 20th-century publications, provide the textual material for our analysis.

In the textual comparative analysis that follows, the emphasis has been put on selected words, phrases and sentences of the text (marked in bold font), and the ways the translators render them. Their Early Modern English meaning and use is based on the most recent guide to Shakespeare's language by David and Ben Crystal (Crystal, Crystal 2002), as well as the abovementioned dictionaries of Shakespeare's sexual terms by Partridge (1990), Rubenstein (1989) and Williams (1997). The analysis of usage of Polish obscenities and euphemisms in translations has been supported with the dictionaries compiled by Lewinson (1999) and Dąbrowska (2012).

**Adultery?** Thou shalt not die. Die for **adultery?**

All the translators render *adultery* with its contemporary Polish equivalent, *cudzołóstwo*; with the exception of Komierowski, who uses the archaism *porubstwo*. Additionally, Dzeduszycki replaces the latter *adultery* with *głupstwo*, which results in internal rhyme: *Czy cudzołóstwo? Nie umrzesz? Cóż to? ginąć za to głupstwo?*

No, the **wren** goes to't, and the small gilded **fly**

Does **lecher** in my sight.

Lear claims that adultery is part of Nature and mentions two animals, the wren and the fly, which symbolize it. The latter is rendered as *muszka* by all the translators; however, none translated *wren* correctly as *strzyżyk*, although in the three most recent translations (Słomczyński, Barańczak and Sito) it is rendered as its closely naturally (and phonetically) related species of *czyżyk* 'siskin.' The 19<sup>th</sup>-century translators prefer other species, such as *wróbel* 'sparrow' (Hołowiński) or *wróblik* 'little sparrow' (Koźmian) *pokrzywniczek*<sup>13</sup> 'dunnock' (Paszowski), *gil* 'finch' (Koźmian), or the diminutive hypernym, *ptaszyna* 'birdie' (Pług), whereas most of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century translators (Kasprowicz, Tretiak, Siwicka, Tarnawski and Chwalewik) go for *mysikrólik* 'goldcrest.' The most innovative rendition, *królik* 'rabbit', can be found in Koźmian, who follows a popular tradition associating that species with promiscuity.

The verb *lecher*, used commonly as a noun in Present-Day English, was an Early Modern English synonym of 'copulate, play the part of a lecher' (Crystal, Crystal 2002: 259; Williams 1997: 184), and so was its euphemistic equivalent, the phrase *go to it* (Williams 1997: 144). The early translators tend to render them not only euphemistically but also poetically; thus, either or both animals spend days on lechery, *pędzą... Na rozpuście dnia* (Hołowiński), continue lustful

<sup>13</sup> In modern Polish, it is called *pokrzywnica*.

love games *wciąż się w lubieżne gonią zalecanki* (Komierowski), or chase each other in love, *ścigają się miłośnie* (Pług). In Koźmian, the fly is in heat, *gzi się*. Paszkowski and Dzieduszycki generalize that the creature commits the sin, *grzeszy* (Paszkowski). Urlich uses both *cudzołóży* ‘commits adultery,’ referring to the rabbit, as well as its archaic synonym *wszeteczni* as regards the fly. Tretiak and Słomczyński choose *rozpuszę czyni/pełni* ‘does lechery’; however, the majority of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century translators (Kasprowicz, Siwicka, Tarnawski, Chwalewik) prefer the verb of biological connotations *parzy/parzą się* ‘mate.’ In the two most recent translations (Barańczak and Sito), the reader encounters the most euphemistic phrase *także to robią* ‘they do it, too’<sup>14</sup>.

### Let **copulation** thrive

In most texts, the sentence is translated with the imperative structure *Niech ... kwitnie/żyje!*; however, the term *copulation*<sup>15</sup> is evaded by the majority of translators, who tend to substitute it with milder synonyms: *lubieżność* ‘lust’ (Hołowiński), *sprosność* ‘obcenity’ (Koźmian), *parzenie* ‘mating’ (Urlich), *oblapienie* ‘hugging’ (Słomczyński), and, most euphemistically, *miłość* ‘love’ (Kasprowicz, Siwicka), or omit the entire sentence (Pług). Komierowski’s translation, *Puść świat na rozród!* ‘Let the world breed’ seems awkward; Tarnawski uses a different structure, a combination of colloquialism and archaism: *Górq porubstwo!* ‘Adultery rules!’ It should be stated that translations by Paszkowski *niech się ludek mnoży!* ‘Let the folk proliferate!’ and by Tretiak *Niech się szczęśliwie ludzie łączą!* ‘Let people unite in happiness!’ suggest positive or even joyful connotation. The first to employ the exact equivalent, *kopulacja* (spelled *kopulacyja* then) was Dzieduszycki, followed by Chwalewik, Barańczak and Sito.

To't **luxury, pell-mell**, for I lack soldiers.

The word *luxury*, borrowed from Old French (*luxurie*) about 1300, where it meant ‘debauchery, dissoluteness, lust,’ lost its pejorative meaning only in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (*Online Etymology Dictionary*)<sup>16</sup>. It is translated as *rozpusta* ‘lechery’ in most texts; three exceptions include: *roskosz* [sic] ‘sexual pleasure’ (Pług), *nierząd* ‘debauchery’ (Chwalewik), and *ządza* ‘lust’ (Słomczyński). Most translators personify it: it is encouraged to breed soldiers, hence they use either an imperative, for instance, *hulaj* ‘revel’ (Koźmian), *pleń się* ‘proliferate’ (Kasprowicz), *plódź* ‘breed’ (Barańczak), or an interjection expressing encouragement, for instance, *dalej* (Pług, Dzieduszycki, Tretiak, Tarnawski), *nuże* (Siwicka, Sito), *śmiało* (Urlich), *hejże*

<sup>14</sup> Kuchowicz (1982: 420) quotes King John III Sobieski, who used to employ a similar euphemistic phrase: *czynić tę rzecz*.

<sup>15</sup> The Polish equivalent *kopulacja* is a formal term, with predominantly medical connotations.

<sup>16</sup> Shakespeare always uses *luxury* as an antonym of *chastity* (Williams 1997: 197).

(Komierowski). Sito employs both the interjection and a taboo verbal phrase, *ciupciaj sobie*, repeated for emphasis: *Nuże, rozpusto! Ciupciaj sobie, ciupciaj!* ‘Go on, lechery, keep fucking.’ It is worth observing that almost all translators omit the adverb *pell-mell*, which in Early Modern English meant ‘in headlong confusion, in disordered haste’ (Crystal, Crystal 2002: 323)<sup>17</sup>; only Pług renders it with the noun phrase *wszyscy bez różnicy* ‘everyone, no selection,’ and Tarnawski with the verb phrase *nie przebieraj* ‘don’t pick and choose.’

Behold yond **simp’ring dame**,

Whose **face between her forks presages snow**,

The translators had numerous difficulties with interpreting the image of the sanctimonious lady with a coy and affected smile. The attribute *simp’ring* may be rendered by means of an adjective, ranging from those of positive connotations: *ładna* ‘nice’ (Hołowiński), *skromna* ‘modest’ (Pług), *piękna* ‘beautiful’ (Paszkowski) or, archaic, *cacana* ‘kind/nice’ (Kasprowicz), to negative ones: *sztwna* ‘stiff’ (Chwalewik) or *wykręcona* ‘twisted’ (Tretiak). Alternatively, the verb *mizdrzy się* ‘simper’ (Barańczak), or its gerund, *mizdrząca się* ‘simpering’ (Komierowski, Koźmian, Urlich), may be used. Other translators opt for other verbs: *wdzięczy się* ‘flirts’ (Siwicka, Słomczyński), *szepleni ładnie* ‘lisps nicely’ (Dzieduszycki), or as Sito puts it colloquially, *kręci tyłeczkiem* ‘shakes her bum.’ It should be observed that three translators (Tretiak, Barańczak and Sito) render the noun *dame* with a colloquial pejorative term *damulka* ‘stuck-up woman.’

The other difficulty concerns the interpretation of the phrase *between her forks*. According to Crystal and Crystal (2002: 184) and Williams (1997: 132), the plural *forks* is the synonym of legs or thighs, whereas Rubenstein (1989: 104) regards the phrase as a sexual pun and the action of copulating. Partridge’s (1990: 109) interpretation is by far the most complex: *forks* is the synonym of “buttocks and upper thighs, along with the gap between them”; the *face* means the “*mons Veneris* and the pubic hair.” Thus, *presages snow* should be understood: “she is growing old; the pubic hair whitens last on the human body.” The first to translate the term literally is Tarnawski: *Jej lico zapowiada śnieg pomiędzy Nogami*; followed by Słomczyński, Barańczak and Sito (Słomczyński replaces snow with frost, and Sito with ice, though). The early translators try to omit that difficulty; thus, the lady’s assumed frigidity can be generalized with the image of snow present in her body, *śnieg w ukrytem ciele* (Hołowiński), or by claiming that her body is made up of snow, *z śniegu ma ciało* (Urlich); however, in the majority of translations

<sup>17</sup> *Mell* (as a verb) means ‘copulate’ (Williams 1997: 205).

snow is associated with her womb or bosom<sup>18</sup>; hence: *ma śnieżne łono* (Komierowski), *sam śnieg w jej łonie* (Koźmian), or alternatively, ice in Paszkowski *lód jest w jej łonie*; in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that interpretation is present in Siwicka, *śnieg ma, nie łono*, and in Kasproicz, who uses a rare archaism, *Śnieg w międzykroczu*. However, the syntax of the sentence<sup>19</sup> may propose a completely different interpretation, in which snow is related to her face; therefore she hides her snow-white face in her hands, *śnieżne lica kryje w dłonie* (Pług)<sup>20</sup> or, more awkwardly, her face between brows (i.e. ‘forks’ ?) reminds us of snow: *Jej twarz, pomiędzy brwiami, śnieg nam przypomina* (Dzieduszycki). That reading was continued in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by Tretiak, who interprets forks as a lace ruff: her face looks like snow from within her lace ruff, *twarz z pomiędzy krezy jak śnieg się zdaje* (Tretiak), or by Chwalewik, associating forks with curls of hair: the face framed with curls emits cold: *Lico oprawne w loczki chłodem zionie* (Chwalewik).

That **minces virtue**, and does shake the head

To hear of **pleasure’s name**.

That sentence presents a number of problems concerning its interpretation: the collocation *minces virtue* suggests the manner of walking pretentiously with delicate short steps (Crystal, Crystal 2002: 281); however, all the translators generalize or disregard her body language, stating only that the lady pretends to be virtuous, *udaje cnotę* (Hołowiński, Tretiak, Siwicka, Barańczak, Sito) or, more colloquially, *ciaćka się z cnotą* (Kasproicz). Alternatively, she may display her virtue, *ze swą cnotą się obnosi* (Tarnawski), appear as an ideal of virtue *jawi wzór cnoty* (Paszkowski) or play the goody-goody, *gra też świętoszkę* (Urlich). If they refer to her body, it is her blushing face they focus on: she blushes chagrined *w srom się barwi* (Komierowski), keeps her lips tight and blushes *sznuruje swą buzię, i rumieńcem płonie* (Pług), makes a virtuous face *ku cnotie buzię stroi* (Dzieduszycki). However, does the lady really disdain sex? All the 19<sup>th</sup>-century translators and the majority of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century ones, claim that she does, since she shakes her head *głową potrząsa* (Koźmian), *trzęsie główką swoją* (Dzieduszycki), throws it back *odrzuca główkę* (Chwalewik), bows it *schyla głowę* (Hołowiński), turns it away *odwraca głowę* (Kasproicz), or shudders with dismay *wzdryga się ze zgrozą* (Pług). Yet, three translators interpret the lady’s behaviour in the opposite way: she

<sup>18</sup> The problem arises since the old Polish term *łono* might refer to either (Linde 1808: 1289).

<sup>19</sup> The ambiguity of the sentence is the result of the word order; hence two possible interpretations: either the standard Present-Day English SVO pattern [face between her forks]<sub>SUBJECT</sub> [presages]<sub>VERB</sub> [snow]<sub>OBJECT</sub>, or the structure common in Early Modern English, [face]<sub>SUBJECT</sub> [between her forks]<sub>ADVERBIAL of PLACE</sub> [presages]<sub>VERB</sub> [snow]<sub>OBJECT</sub>.

<sup>20</sup> It follows a 19<sup>th</sup> century interpretation: “her hand held before her face in sign of modesty, with the fingers spread out, forky” (quoted in Dorfman 1994: 31).

turns her head to hear about sex *odwraca głowę*, *By wyraz „rozkosz” usłyszeć* (Siwicka), listens carefully when she hears about it *nadstawia ucha*, *Gdy o rozkoszy usłyszysz* (Słomczyński), or, pricks up her ears like a dog to catch the word ‘sex’ *uszami strzyże by złowić słowo „rozkosz”* (Sito). The expression *pleasure’s name* can be regarded as an euphemistic synonym of sexual pleasure, translated by the majority as *rozkosz*; only Dziędużycki renders it as *uciecha* ‘delight,’ and Barańczak paraphrases it with a sentence, *gdy ktoś o łóżku wspomni* ‘when someone mentions a bed.’

The **fitchew**, nor

The **soiled horse goes to’t** with a more **riotous**

**Appetite.**

Once again, Shakespeare mentions two animals that may symbolize promiscuity: the fitchew, which is an obsolete synonym of the polecat, and the soiled horse, which means that it is fully fed with the fresh fodder (Crystal, Crystal 2002: 407). However, only Tarnawski provides the Polish equivalent of the former: *tchórz*, other translators opt for *lasica* ‘weasel’ (Komierowski, Paszkowski, Ulrich, Kasprowicz, Tretiak, Siwicka), or other creatures: *kot* ‘cat’ (Hołowiński, Pług), *źbik* ‘wild cat’ (Kozmian), or *locha* ‘sow’ (Dziędużycki). It is only in the four most recent translations that a reader will encounter the other, Elizabethan slang meaning, of the word, which refers to prostitute (Crystal, Crystal 2002: 177; Williams 1997: 127)<sup>21</sup>. It is rendered into Polish as *dziwka* ‘tart’ (Chwalewik, Barańczak), *kurwa* ‘whore’ (Słomczyński), or the most obscene colloquialism, *kurwison* ‘slut’ (Sito). Shakespeare’s choice of the latter animal, the horse, does not suggest its sex, and it is rendered as *koń* only by Tretiak; two translators propose *ogier* ‘stud’ (Hołowiński, Chwalewik) since it is related to breeding and sexual prowess; Pług uses *zrzebiec* (an archaism denoting a colt or foal); the majority, though, translate it as either *klacz* ‘mare’ (Komierowski, Kozmian, Paszkowski, Ulrich, Kasprowicz, Siwicka, Słomczyński, Barańczak) or *kobyła* (Dziędużycki, Tarnawski, Sito), a word carrying negative connotations in Polish as usually referring to an old mare, or colloquially, to a prostitute (Lewinson 1999: 94). That choice of a feminine gender seems to aim at equaling wantonness of both the woman and the mare. The participle *soiled* is omitted by the majority of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century translators, rendered as *spasiony/a* or *upasiony* ‘fattened’ by three 20<sup>th</sup>-century ones (Chwalewik, Barańczak, Sito), or translated literally with a lengthy phrase or clause: *koń świeżo puszczony na trawę* ‘a horse just let out into a meadow’ (Tretiak) and *gdy zielona pasza Rozpiera ją* ‘when

<sup>21</sup> The same meaning can be found in *Othello* (IV.i.146), where Cassio refers to Bianca as a perfumed fitchew:

“Tis such another fitchew. Marry, a perfumed one.”

she is bursting with green feed' (Tarnawski). Alternatively, some critics interpret *soiled* as a term of sexual connotations<sup>22</sup>, therefore some translators use adjectives or verbs denoting the mare's reproductive and mating behaviour: *rozparzona* (Kozmian), *grzeje się* (Dzieduszycki), or *rozbuchana* (Słomczyński)<sup>23</sup>.

King Lear has already said *goes to 't* in reference to the wren's promiscuity (line 112), and he does it again describing the mare's (and woman's) sexual desire. Some translators omit the verb, focusing on the phrase *riotous Appetite*, which characterizes her trait best; thus, she is ready to mate and full of unrestrained lustfulness or lecherousness (*chuć, żądza* or *lubieżność*): *gotowe Na chuć rozpasaną* (Hołowiński), *pełna jest chuci rozpustnej* (Komierowski), *w swej żądzy tak nieposkromioną* (Paszkowski), *w swej chuci tak niepowstrzymana* (Kasprowicz) or *jest tak w żądzy gwałtowna* (Siwicka). The others use the verb of motion, which allows for a more literal translation, so she throws herself into lechery: *Z wścieklejszą żądzą nie rzuca w uciechę* (Kozmian), pushes through: *Nie pcha się z apetytem bardziej rozhukanym* (Dzieduszycki), gets down to it: *nie bierze się do rzeczy Z taką żarłoczną lubieżnością* (Tarnawski) and *Zapamiętały się do rzeczy nie biorą* (Chwalewik), or just does it: *Nie czyni tego z jurniejszą radością* (Słomczyński). Finally, the translators may emphasize the fact that she has appetite or desire, either as Barańczak says mildly – for it: *ma na to apetyt*, or as Sito states bluntly – for fucking: *nie ma ochoty większej do ciupciania!*

### 3. Conclusions

The history of translations of the play and the monologue, in particular, displays problems that the translators had to solve while rendering Shakespearean bawdy and obscenities into Polish, especially in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. There seem to be three interconnected reasons: cultural, social and linguistic. It should be pointed out that obscenities enriched Polish Renaissance and Baroque erotic literature, which contained vivid imagery, explicit symbols, witty metaphors, and did not avoid direct references to sex in general, sexual organs and behaviour (Kuchowicz 1982: 60–70, 419–422). However, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, changing social norms began to regard *te rzeczy* 'those things,' as they were euphemistically called then, as taboo and, consequently, to limit the use of bawdy language to certain social groups (e.g. exclusively male groups like soldiers or hunters; see erotic or even pornographic poetry of

<sup>22</sup> For example, Blythe (1980: 87), who refers to the practice described in Virgil's *Georgics*, and claims that "being 'soiled' brings a horse to an unmanageable sensual excitement," which leads to aroused sexuality.

<sup>23</sup> It is plausible that those terms come from horse breeder jargon. *Grzać się* is also recorded as vulgarism ('to screw around') in Lewinson (1999: 67).

Aleksander Fredro)<sup>24</sup>. Simultaneously, words denoting sexual organs, many of which coming from Proto-Slavic, underwent the process of pejoration, and, as vulgarisms, are now regarded as a feature of sociolect of lower classes and slang (Dubisz 1999: V–VI; Broszko 2017). Therefore that cultural and linguistic taboo gradually led to the impoverishment of sexual language in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>25</sup>. It is only in recent decades that the social norms have become less rigid, and topics and terms treated as taboo are more commonly tolerated or accepted, which explains their usage in contemporary literature, including translations<sup>26</sup>.

It can be concluded that, in their texts, the Polish translators seem to have succeeded in conveying Lear's emotions and his dominant misogyny. Fortunately, no Polish translator decided to use the bowdlerized version of the play to avoid issues and language "incurring the danger of being hurt with any indelicacy of expression"<sup>27</sup>, and did not apply the most radical, censoring approach to its text, which would mean omitting all those words which cannot "with propriety be read aloud in a Family." However, due to the sensitivity and prudishness of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century audience, most translators of that epoch, especially Komierowski and Pług, tend to create euphemistic collocations to avoid sexual references; additionally, Pług's decision to use rhyming verse leads to verbosity, partial loss of equivalency, and in result, diminishes the tragedy of the mad king. The case of Pług's translation appears to exemplify clearly the second strategy presented in my Introduction: text paraphrase resulting in the loss of the original style and, partially, contents as well. The first translators to convey the proper meaning and render the taboo terms more directly are Dzeduszycki and Kasprowicz, the latter successfully uses colloquialisms (e.g. *cacana*, *ciačka się*, and ingenious *w międzykroczu*). Most translators (Sito, with his modern colloquialisms, being the most radical exception) use archaisms denoting sexual activities that were already used in Polish erotic poetry of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century (Wacław Potocki, Jan Andrzej Morsztyn, or Stanisław Trembecki), for example: *chuć*, *oblapianki*, *gzić się*, *parzyć się*, which no longer look offensive to modern readers<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> Kuchowicz (1982: 419) argues that it reflected sexual segregation, where women were a commodity to be used and taken advantage of, but they were not supposed to hear the terms describing that activity.

<sup>25</sup> It is no wonder that in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a special dictionary was published to facilitate conversations between women and obstetricians (Kurkiewicz 1913).

<sup>26</sup> Present-day Polish sex-related euphemisms are discussed in Dąbrowska (1999: 241-258). Maciej Słomczyński not only used a number of Polish obscenities and vulgarisms in his translation of Joyce's *Ulysses*, but also created a collection of bawdy limericks *Limeryki plugawe*.

<sup>27</sup> From an advert for the 1819 edition of *The Family Shakespeare*, published in *The Times* [Source: <https://www.nosweatshakespeare.com/blog/thomas-bowdler-bowdlerizing-shakespeare/>. Date: 23 July 2020].

<sup>28</sup> It is worth noticing that Koźmian and Dzeduszycki were upper-class landowners and must have had broad knowledge of animal behaviour; hence *gzić się* and *klacz rozparzona* (Koźmian), or the vivid image of sexually aroused animals: *Ni locha, ni kobyła, jak się kiedy grzeje, Nie pcha się z apetytem bardziej rozhukanym* (Dzeduszycki).

The original text itself poses a number of questions and difficulties, which may confuse many a translator, even English literature professors, like Tretiak, Tarnawski and Chwalewik (*vide* problems with proper rendering of the word *forks* in the sentence “Whose face between her forks presages snow”). Similarly, following the contemporary Shakespearean research, the word *fitchew* is not to be rendered with its primary equivalent (*tchórz*), but following its slang usage, with an appropriate Polish slang term denoting a whore. However, the earlier translators are not to be blamed for incorrect or inappropriate rendition of confusable expressions, for their understanding of the text corresponded with the state of Shakespearean research in their times.

Two of the most recent translations (by Słomczyński and Barańczak) display the closest affinity to the original text, its lexicon and style; therefore a prevailing tendency to employ language deprived of euphemisms can be observed. Sito’s choice for using informal Polish is the most radical. It allows him to find a wide range of colloquialisms (*uszami strzyże tą damulkę, kręci tyłeczkiem*) and vulgarisms (*pieprzą się, ciupciaj sobie, nie ma ochoty większej do ciupciania*). The question remains, though, whether such a stylistic choice is appropriate for the character of the King, even the mad one. Another question may also be asked here: to what extent the present-day colloquialisms and vulgarisms used by Sito, which can horrify and offend a more traditional audience, will be perceived likewise in the future in a highly probable process of their amelioration.

The King’s monologue has been said to express his (and Shakespeare’s) misogyny. Yet, don’t Polish renderings display another, more concealed, misogyny – that of its translators?<sup>29</sup> It can be observed in the lexical choices made while translating the names of two promiscuous species: the horse and the fitchew, both of which have neuter grammatical gender in English<sup>30</sup>. In fact, only one translator (Tretiak) renders the former literally as *koń*, referring to the species’ name, and two others (Hołowiński and Chwalewik) opt for the male horse, *ogier*<sup>31</sup>; all the others (excluding Pług’s weird *zrzebiec*) decide to emphasize female promiscuity by choosing female *klacz* or, its derogative synonym, *kobyła*. Similarly, only Tarnawski’s *tchórz* corresponds to the fitchew in its primary meaning; six translators choose *lasica*, which is a noun of feminine gender in Polish. However, it can be argued that it is Dzeduszycki, with his choices of *locha* ‘female pig,’ and *kobyła* ‘old mare,’ who may be accused of exposing his misogyny. Surprising as it

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<sup>29</sup> That point would require further investigation of the entire play in the view of the feminist translation theory and its non-traditional approach to translation, and in particular, text editing (prefacing and footnoting; see Von Flotow 1991: 76–78).

<sup>30</sup> Precisely, like many animals they are common gender nouns; in the case of domesticated animals like *horse*, there are usually specific names for the male (*stallion*) and the female (*mare*).

<sup>31</sup> In Polish *ogier* denotes uncastrated horse, and also, connotatively, a man showing off his sexuality.

may seem, the male-dominated set of Polish translators of *King Lear* includes only one woman, Zofia Siwicka<sup>32</sup>; yet her translation displays neither linguistic nor stylistic choices that might be affected by her being a woman translator.

The final question that should be asked is whether we should have a new translation of the play. Perhaps not; however, since 1957, when Tarnawski's translation was published in Biblioteka Narodowa series of foreign classics<sup>33</sup>, there has been no well-annotated edition, which would include updated introduction, commentaries presenting new approaches and achievements of modern Shakespearean criticism, footnotes and bibliography.

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<sup>32</sup> Statistically, it means that almost 95% of Polish translators of *King Lear* are men.

<sup>33</sup> Biblioteka Narodowa also published Tretiak's translation in 1928.

<sup>34</sup> Unfortunately, in the case of most 19th-century translators as well as many 20th-century ones, it is impossible to trace which edition(s) of Shakespeare's plays they used (see Cetera-Włodarczyk, Kosim 2019a: 396-7), since that information was customarily not provided by their publishers. However, all scholarly editions rely on *First Quarto* (1608) and *First Folio* (1623). It should be emphasized that neither of them displays any major differences in the text of the analyzed monologue apart from minor changes in spelling, punctuation and versification.

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