Translating Polish Jewishness: Bruno Schulz in English

ABSTRACT

My point of departure in this paper is J.M. Coetzee’s critique of Celina Wieniewska’s English translation of Bruno Schulz’s fiction, namely the claim that the Polish translator universalized Schulz’s Jewish allusions. In an attempt at verifying this criticism, contextual information on the issue of Jewishness in critical studies on Schulz is presented, followed by an analysis of Wieniewska’s translation of Jewish motifs, which is juxtaposed with a recent retranslation. Finally, biographical information on the translator is brought in to shed light on her choices. It is argued that Wieniewska did not universalize the shtetl realities present in Schulz’s writing, but she did generalize the religious/philosophical allusions to a limited extent. In doing so, in a sense, she followed Schulz’s own strategy, aimed at securing his work a wide readership. Working in the 1960s and 1970s, long before Schulz’s critics turned their attention to Jewish motifs in Schulz’s writing, Wieniewska was arguably right to assume that kabbalistic theological allusions would not been recognized by the general reader, to whom her translation was addressed.

KEY WORDS

Bruno Schulz, Jewishness, English translation, scholarly reception, translation criticism, retranslation

1. Introduction

In his essay on Bruno Schulz, J.M. Coetzee (2008) included some remarks on the quality of Celina Wieniewska’s 1963/1978\(^1\) English translation of short stories by the Polish-Jewish modernist author. Although in the end he praises the translation for its “rare richness, grace,

\(^1\) The English translation of Schulz’s first collection of stories, Sklepy cynamonowe (originally published in 1934), complemented by “The Comet” (Kometa), a story originally published in Polish in a literary magazine, appeared in 1963 as Cinnamon Shops and Other Stories in the UK and The Street of Crocodiles in the US, but ever since it has been reprinted under the American title on both sides of the Atlantic. The second volume of Schulz’s stories, Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass (Sanatorium pod Klepsydrą, 1937), was first published in English in 1978.
and unity of style” (2008, p. 70), first he raises a number of critical points. The list of the translator’s faults is concluded as follows: “most seriously, there are numerous instances where Wieniewska cuts Schulz’s prose to make it less florid, or universalises specifically Jewish allusions” (2008, p. 69). The former charge, albeit serious, seems rather plausible and uncontroversial; indeed, readers familiar with the Polish original will not be surprised to find that the ‘floridness’ of Schulz’s meandering prose did not survive the process of translation intact. More striking – for some readers perhaps even alarming – is the latter accusation; although Coetzee does not use the word censorship, this is what comes to mind when one learns that the Polish translator tampered with the Jewishness of Schulz’s writing. Why would she? How exactly does this manifest itself in the text? Did the retranslations of Schulz’s stories improve on Wieniewska in this respect?

Taking the critique of Wieniewska’s translation as a point of departure, the present paper addresses these questions by investigating and contextualizing the translator’s treatment of Jewishness in Schulz’s writing. First, it places critical remarks in the historical context of the reception of Schulz’s work in Poland and abroad, and briefly discusses Schulz’s own approach to Jewish motifs. Based on a working definition of Jewishness in his writing, a comparative analysis follows, in which Wieniewska’s translation is juxtaposed with the Polish original and a 21st-century retranslation by John Curran Davis. In response to the call to “humanize translation history” (Pym, 2009), Wieniewska’s translation is subsequently set in the context of the life and work of the translator herself, in order to shed light on her translation choices by reconstructing her attitude (Hermans, 2016) or positioning (Hermans, 2014). Using the English translations of Schulz as an example, the paper traces the mechanisms of translation reception to emphasize its historicity, i.e. contingency on scholarly interpretations dominant at a given time, and to reveal the limitations of decontextualized translation criticism.

2. Schulz’s Jewishness in Translation Reception

The above-quoted essay by Coetzee was first published in 2003 in *The New York Review of Books* as a review of Jerzy Ficowski’s seminal biography of Schulz, *Regions of the Great*
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Heresy, translated into English and edited by Theodosia Robertson.² It was subsequently reprinted in the Nobel Prize winner’s volume of essays Inner Workings in 2007 (2nd ed. 2008). In a sense, Coetzee’s remarks on Wieniewska’s version themselves constitute a gist translation of Robertson’s judgments expressed in her introduction to Ficowski’s book. Having no access to the Polish text, when it comes to translation assessment Coetzee had to rely on the American translator and “other US-based scholars of Polish literature” (Coetzee, 2008, p. 69), not mentioned by name. As far as “universalising specifically Jewish allusions” goes, the original criticism put forth by Robertson (2003, p. 18) is phrased as follows: “It is time for a more precise translation, one that does not simplify Schulz’s imagery or universalize his references. . . . His stylistic arsenal is richly international, replete with oxymorons, Latin terms and Jewish and Biblical allusions” [my emphasis]. As can be seen, while Robertson does not explicitly state that Wieniewska universalized Jewish references, Coetzee makes the criticism sound unambiguous. It is worth noting that neither gives any examples of the translator’s treatment of Jewishness. Nevertheless, due to the Nobel Prize winner’s authority and international impact, his statement on Wieniewska’s translation of Schulz has quickly spread, becoming an oft-quoted (and never questioned) reference in both scholarly works and lay readers’ blogs (cf. Ziemann, 2014).

Coetzee’s criticism has been the most pronounced and influential but it was not the first to have been voiced. In fact, as early as in 1965, Harry M. Geduld of Indiana University noted in his review of The Street of Crocodiles in Studies in Short Fiction:

> In general, Miss Wieniewska’s translation succeeds in suggesting the burning colors, the richly sensuous ‘tactile’ evocations of a painter’s prose, though a translator saturated in The Song of Solomon and Revelations might also have found ways of conveying Schultz’s [sic] fundamental Hebraism (1965, p. 380).

Geduld proposed a rather one-sided interpretation of Schulz’s writing, and made a very strong case for the author’s Jewishness: “Schulz was not really a Polish writer but a Jew who chose to write in Polish” (1965, p. 379; elsewhere in the text, he puts the adjective “Polish” in inverted commas). According to the critic, Schulz wrote “semitically exotic” prose, and his

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² The book was originally published in 2000 by London’s Newman Hemisphere but it gained publicity only with the 2003 W.W. Norton edition (reissued 2004).

Geduld concluded his review with a striking interpretation of the figure of Jacob, the narrator’s father: “The old man, a symbol of ivory-tower existence within the ghetto, crumbles to dust, but his spirit, his mysteries and his religion endure” (1965, p. 381). It is rather unlikely that the critic had access to the Polish original\(^3\), so it seems that, paradoxically, he managed to construct his Jewishness-oriented reading based on Wieniewska’s translation, despite its alleged shortcomings with respect to Schulz’s “fundamental Hebraism.”

Geduld’s remained a solitary voice until the 1990s, when a more informed and balanced critique of some of the translator’s choices was offered by David A. Goldfarb. He proposed a Talmudic reading of the story “Noc wielkiego sezonu” [The Night of the Great Season] in two essays: the shorter version was published in 1993 in Polish translation, and the expanded text appeared in English in 1994. For example, Goldfarb challenges Wieniewska’s rendering of the very title of the story, suggesting “A Night of the Holy Season” instead, to support his interpretation of the eponymous period as alluding to Jewish High Holidays (1994, p. 34). Consequently, he objects to her translation of “falszywy miesiąc” as “a freak month”, arguing that “a defective month” would be a better choice, since it would refer the reader to the Hebrew lunar calendar (1994, p. 34–35). He also disagrees with Wieniewska’s rendering of “traktat” in the title of the story cycle on mannequins as “treatise”, “as opposed to ‘tractate’, which suggests a much more likely reference to the Talmud” (1994, p. 46). The critic does not reveal blatant mistranslations,\(^4\) but rather concentrates on minute differences between the translator’s choices and his own preferences, the latter worked out in the course of a particular interpretation. In order to appreciate to what extent Goldfarb’s fine-

\(^3\) If he did, he would have seen that apart from adding “The Comet” at the end, *The Street of Crocodiles* follows the arrangement of *Sklepy cynamonowe*, and he would not have despaired that in the American edition: “An intended thematic continuity . . . has been broken up – presumably for the sake of variety and contrast. The effect is as distracting as reading a novel in which extraneous material has been inserted between consecutive chapters” (Geduld, 1965, p. 380).

\(^4\) One exception is the rendering of “nowa okolica” as “new era” instead of “new neighbourhood/area/surrounding” (p. 35). However, this is, arguably, a simple translation mistake, and does not imply any specific take on Schulz’s Jewishness on the part of Wieniewska.
tuned, if at times perhaps far-fetched, reading depends on lexical particulars, let us look at the following paragraph, which is quite representative of his method:

The motif of the new moon enters most significantly in the episode where darkness sets in.... There are fragments of several myths here. The first is the plague of darkness from Exodus, here a “plague of dusk”.... The second is the “darkness before the storm” of colors that is about to “engulf” the town, and a third is the darkness of the new moon.... In even one phrase we can layer all three levels: faldzista noc jesienna (“undulating autumn night”). Faldzista can suggest “a night of waves”, perhaps the myth of Noah or the crossing of the Red Sea. Alternately, we could read “hilly autumn night” fitting into the image of the pleats of fabric that become the hills of the Sinai. Schulz could also be engaging in a wordplay, deriving new roots from the resonance of a cluster of superficially similar terms, faldzista/fala/falszywa, connecting the ideas of “folded, wavelike and defective”, relating to the new moon, as well as the idea that this “Night of the Holy Season” is part of a cycle, a cycle of stories that fit together and have their own wavelike rhythm, while this is the defective part that does not seem fit (1994, p. 37).

Despite his objections towards Wieniewska’s version, nowhere in his papers does Goldfarb dismiss it as a whole or imply, as Coetzee will a decade later, that she systematically and/or deliberately downplayed the Judaist provenance of Schulz’s text. His criticisms concern exclusively minutiae, usually single words, which do not fully conform to his interpretation. Indeed, Goldfarb accepts the fact that much like his own reading, Wieniewska’s translation itself constitutes an interpretation of Schulz’s original. This commendable understanding of the way translation works is evident from an endnote to the Polish version of his paper, in which the critic explains why he makes references to the English translation in his discussion of the Polish author, meant for Polish readers:

The Polish reader will certainly wonder why he should compare the text with the English translation of Schulz. I often use this translation to open a discussion, since I believe that translation is a certain intimate form of criticism, reflecting the translator/critic’s way of reading, interpretation, choices and engagement. (Goldfarb, 1993, p. 21, n. 9; my translation)

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5 Some of the critic’s pronouncements concerning the Polish language are debatable, e.g. his claim that in the passage where Adela’s fluttering eyes are mentioned, the “permissible [sic!] but older form . . . ‘oczyna’ [as opposed to ‘oczami’; – Z.Z.] gives the text a medieval flavor” (1994, p. 41; my emphasis).
That every translation is an interpretation, and thus bears affinity to other forms of criticism, is a point raised and explored by many scholars of literary translation. André Lefevere (1992), for example, proposed the term ‘rewriting’ as a category encompassing both translation and criticism (as well as some other forms of introducing a work into a new culture, such as anthologization). Lawrence Venuti, in turn, pointed out that translation critics often commit a logical fallacy: accusing the translator of “distorting the text to fit in with the translator’s own individual interpretation,” critics think that they themselves are comparing the translation with the original text as it is, while in fact they are comparing the translator’s interpretation with their “own individual interpretation” of the source text (Venuti, 2013, p. 244). One implication of this theoretical perspective is that both translation and translation criticism are influenced by the interpretive paradigms dominant at a given time in literary criticism.

3. Jewishness in Schulz Studies

Shortly prior to the publication of Goldfarb’s essay, two important volumes of proceedings from conferences celebrating the centennial of Schulz’s birth were published in Poland: *Bruno Schulz. In Memoriam 1982-1992* (Kitowska-Łysiak, 1992) and *Czytanie Schulza* [Reading Schulz] (Jarzębski, 1992). To the best of my knowledge, they mark the beginning of the academic interest in the Jewishness in Schulz’s writing. The former contains Władysław Panas’s article “‘Mesjasz rośnie pomału...’ O pewnym wątku kabalistycznym w prozie Brunona Schulza” [“The Messiah grows slowly...”: On a certain kabbalistic motif in Bruno Schulz’s prose], the latter – four pieces addressing Jewish motifs. Ever since then, scholarly interest in this hitherto unexplored area has been steadily rising. In 1997, Panas published his highly influential book *Księga blasku: traktat o kabale w prozie Brunona Schulza* [The book of splendor: A tractate on the Kabbalah in Bruno Schulz’s fiction]. In 2003, he co-edited a volume of conference proceedings tellingly entitled *W ułamkach zwierciadła* [In the fragments of a mirror] (Kitowska-Łysiak & Panas, 2003) – a reference to the kabbalistic representation of the motif of tikkun olam, present in Schulz’s story “The Book.” This trend is also represented for example in the English-language volume of essays *(Un)masking Bruno Schulz* (De Bruyn & Van Heuckelom, 2009). Neither the inclusion of a full list of secondary

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6 As mentioned earlier, Geduld’s reading of Schulz did not have followers in its time.

7 The motif is discussed in Section 5 of the present paper.
literature on Schulz’s Jewishness nor their discussion are possible within the confines of the present paper; I have mentioned some major critical works here to indicate the chronology and dynamics of the development of this paradigm of Schulz scholarship.\(^8\)

It should be noted that the Judaist interpretive paradigm, albeit very popular, is not unanimously accepted as the only valid way of reading Schulz. In fact, it is not shared by some of the most prominent Schulz scholars. Jerzy Jarzębski, for example, was mildly admonished by Goldfarb (1994, p. 33) for “failing to recognize the connection to the ancient Jewish texts” in his reading of the Schulzian chronotope, and Jerzy Ficowski was repeatedly criticized, especially by Jewish-American commentators, for classifying Schulz as a predominantly Polish rather than Jewish writer (cf. Moszczyński, 2006).\(^9\) Michał Paweł Markowski, who took issue with the ‘kabbalistic key’ on a number of occasions, argued with reference to Panas’s interpretation that, although highly persuasive, as any strong reading, it is one-sided and blind to other readings. Above all, it is based on one fundamental assumption, drawn from the Lurianic Kabbalah: that matter is evil and everything should be done to redeem it. . . . Just as a tzadik dematerializes matter, the reader should dematerialize Schulz’s text, i.e. deprive it of any disturbing, resistant places, which do not lend themselves to getting elevated. . . . Panas constructs his explication based on mere several passages, leaving aside all those which would clearly counter his interpretation or be irrelevant; for example those that concern the flesh, matter, jesting, irony, parody, ludicrousness or desire . . . (Markowski, 2012, p. 89; my translation).

Engaging in the dispute between the proponents and opponents of the Judaist (in the broadest sense of the word) reading of Schulz would be irrelevant here; as always in literary criticism, some interpretations are more convincing than others, and their merit ultimately depends on the particular author rather than the school he or she represents. That said, I stand with Markowski (2012, p. 89 n. 7) when he points out that all too often the ‘discoveries’ of kabbalistically-oriented scholars are presented as facts rather than interpretations.

\(^8\) For a concise synthesis of the diverse approaches within it, see Underhill, 2009, pp. 29-30.

\(^9\) It is ironic indeed that Robertson’s mention of the Jewish references that sparked off a wave of criticism of Wieniewska prefaces Ficowski’s Regions... – a book in which Schulz’s Jewishness features as a biographical background but not as an interpretive motif shedding light on his work. Furthermore, according to the index, words such as “Kabbalah,” “Zohar,” or “Talmud” are not even mentioned once.
To sum up, before the 1990s, the interpretive practice of identifying/creating references to the Kabbalah, the Zohar, Hasidic mysticism, or Judaism in general was absent from Schulz scholarship, whether in Poland or abroad, and even today it constitutes only one of the competing approaches. In this context, the criticism of Wieniewska’s treatment of Jewish allusions seems less serious a charge; after all, there is no consensus among scholars that the allusions are there in the first place, or that they constitute an essential feature of Schulz’s writing.

4. Schulz’s Approach to Jewishness

In the opening paper of (Un)masking Bruno Schulz (De Bruyn & Van Heuckelom, 2009), Karen Underhill makes an interesting observation on Schulz’s own approach to his Jewish heritage: while many studies (including the ones listed in the previous section of this paper) “successfully tease out the multitude of allusions to Jewish tradition and culture in Schulz’s work,” she argues, “he can also be seen as a writer who goes to some length to de-ethnicize and de-contextualize his writing, seeking his entry into a non-marked community of European letters” (p. 30). After all, even though Polish was his mother tongue, Schulz still could have chosen to learn Yiddish and become a self-proclaimed Jewish writer, as did his close friend Debora Vogel, for whom writing in Yiddish was a deliberate political decision rather than the natural course of events (Underhill, 2009, p. 31; cf. Kaszuba-Dębska, 2006, p. 197); yet, he chose otherwise. Elsewhere, Underhill developes the idea of Schulz’s ‘self-universalizing’ as follows:

a defining feature of his works of prose writing and literal criticism is the extent to which he has gone to universalize clearly Jewish content, changing the vocabulary that he uses in the Polish language, as well as the imagery he employs in the majority of his graphic works, to create hybrid figures that refer to Jewish and to non-Jewish traditions and myth systems simultaneously. . . . Schulz sought . . . to develop a distinctly Jewish modernist aesthetic, shaped by and drawing upon the world of east European Jewish literary, hermeneutic and narrative tradition, while at the same time choosing to actively encrypt, downplay or universalize that Jewish content, producing a layered or slashed narrative space that was both Jewish and transnational: not so much a “Polish-Jewish” as a “Jewish/World literature”, in and through the Polish
While Underhill argues that despite “universalizing clearly Jewish content,” Schulz still aimed for “a distinctly Jewish modernist aesthetic,” Stefan Chwin, taking as a point of departure the same phenomenon, i.e. the author’s reluctance to foreground Jewish motifs in his fiction, reaches different conclusions. In his 2014 paper “Dlaczego Bruno Schulz nie chciał być pisarzem żydowskim (o „wymazywaniu” żydowskości w Sanatorium pod Klepsydrą i Sklepach cyramonowych)” [Why Bruno Schulz did not want to be a Jewish writer (on ‘erasing’ Jewishness in *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* and *The Street of Crocodiles*)], he counters the myth of Schulz’s locality, so widespread in Schulz Studies. According to Chwin, in spite of setting all his stories in a town so strongly reminiscent of his native Drohobycz, Schulz deliberately rejected ‘local color’ in the narrow sense, be it Jewish or Ukrainian, or even, to a lesser extent, Polish. As far as avoiding Jewishness is concerned, most background characters in Schulz’s fiction bear Polish-sounding names; the same holds true for toponyms. The Great Synagogue of Drohobych is not mentioned in any of the multiple descriptions of the town (unlike other recognizable buildings); the word “Shabbat” appears only once; references to stories and characters from the Hebrew Bible are fewer than those to Greek mythology or contemporary popular culture in the Austro-Hungarian Empire; and so on and so forth. Writing before the Shoah, Chwin (2014) argues, the author did not feel the urge to document the realities of the world of Eastern-European Jewry, which seems to have been destined for destruction only from post-Holocaust hindsight. Schulz was more concerned with becoming recognized abroad – an aim which he was to achieve only posthumously. But if Schulz had deliberately erased Jewishness from his writing to make it more universal, what fate befell the few Jewish motifs that survived this process when the

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10 Originally presented as a lecture at the Jagiellonian University in June 2016, this text will be published in Polish translation in the next issue of *Ruch Literacki*. I would like to thank the author for sharing excerpts of the English version in personal correspondence.

11 One particularly striking example of ‘erasing’ Jewishness is offered by the publication history of the story “Spring.” While the original version, published in 1935 in a journal, mentions “the great theatre of the Pesach” and “Pesach night,” these references are gone from the final version in the volume *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*. An editorial intervention is possible, of course, but it is more likely that Schulz chose to remove these references himself (Chwin, 2014, p. 10).

12 Schulz’s extant correspondence testifies to his repeated (though ultimately futile) efforts to get his works translated (Schulz, 2008, p. 92, 118, 125, 148, 291). Today, they can be read in some three dozen languages, in eight alphabets.
stories were subsequently translated into English, i.e. taken yet further away from the Galician shtetl?

5. Schulz’s Jewishness in English Translation

For the purposes of the following analysis, I am adopting a fairly inclusive definition of Jewishness, comprising two aspects of the Schulzian text discussed in secondary literature: the realities of Jewish life openly manifested at the level of the plot (the focus of Chwin’s research), as well as the motifs which have been interpreted as alluding to Jewish sacred texts (as in the works by Goldfarb and Panas). With respect to the first category, I will follow Jarzębski’s annotated edition of Schulz’s collected works (Schulz, 1998), examining all cases marked in footnotes as referring to Jewish cultural markers. Since this edition contains explanations of some very basic words – anything that might exceed the knowledge of a lay reader – it may be safely assumed that it takes into account all Jewish references appearing in the text. As far as the second category is concerned, a comprehensive analysis would not be possible within the confines of the present paper, so I will focus on the selected motifs discussed by commentators of four stories “written under the sign of the Book” (Błoński, 1993, p. 54), which are most popular with scholars of the Judaist paradigm: “Tailor’s Dummies,” “The Night of the Great Season,” “The Book,” and “Spring.” Wienielska’s translation choices will be juxtaposed with Davis’s 21st-century retranslation.

When it comes to the first category, it transpires that Chwin was right to point out that there are surprisingly few strictly Jewish motifs in Schulz’s fiction; half of them come from one story, The Night of the Great Season. N.B., the table below does not include Judeo-Christian references, i.e. those common to the Old Testament and the Hebrew Bible (e.g. proper names: Noah, Moses). Since their English equivalents in both Wienielska and Davis beg no questions, these examples were omitted for the sake of brevity.

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13 Schulz scholars usually treat as one whole the cycle of four texts comprising “Manekiny,” “Traktakt o manekinach albo wtóra Księga Rodzaju,” “Traktat o manekinach – ciąg dalszy” and “Traktat o manekinach – dokończenie” (“Tailors’ Dummies,” “Treatise on Tailors’ Dummies, or The Second Book of Genesis,” “Treatise on Tailors’ Dummies, continuation,” “Treatise on Tailors’ Dummies, conclusion”).

14 Around 2005, Davis, a British fan translator, created the website schulzian.net, where he gradually uploaded his retranslations of all Schulz’s stories. In 2016, he self-published the first volume (The Cinnamon Shops) as a printed book (cf. Ziemann, 2016).
Table 1 Jewish motifs in Schulz and their English translations\textsuperscript{15}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schulz</th>
<th>Wieniewska 1963/1978</th>
<th>Davis ca. 2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pachnące szabasem piętro (5; August)</td>
<td>floor above redolent of the Sabbath (16)</td>
<td>storey whence drifted the aromas of a Sabbath meal (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>moloch (31)</td>
<td>moloch (36)</td>
<td>moloch (43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>golemys (41) (Tailor’s Dummies)</td>
<td>golems (45)</td>
<td>golems (56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>puzon z rogu/trąba (105)</td>
<td>shofar/shofar (92)</td>
<td>shofar/trumpet (139)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jedwabne bekiesze (107)</td>
<td>silk caftans (93)</td>
<td>silk frogged coats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chalaty (107)</td>
<td>gaberdines (93)</td>
<td>gabardines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wielkie futrzane kołpaki (107)</td>
<td>tall fur hats (93)</td>
<td>huge fur kalpaks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wielkie Zgromadzenie (108)</td>
<td>Great Congregation (93)</td>
<td>High Council (142)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wielki Synhedron (109) (Night)</td>
<td>Great Synhedron (94)</td>
<td>Great Sanhedrin (143)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aniółowie Oblicza (127, Book)</td>
<td>angels of the Presence (137)</td>
<td>angels of the Countenance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Even based only on the few examples listed in Table 1, it is clear that Wieniewska does not exhibit an overall tendency to universalize Jewish references, e.g. by using hypernyms. When she does so in the case of “tall fur hats,” the generalization arguably does not change the reader’s picture, since this expression appears in a description of traditionally clad Jews in one sentence with other, more specific vocabulary. Davis, who in this case opted for the more specialized “kalpak,” in fact did Schulz a disservice: spelled in this way, the name refers to traditional headgear worn by Turks and Central-Asian peoples, while the hats of Hassidim are called “kolpiks” (the words are obviously related but distinct nevertheless).

Interestingly, in one instance Wieniewska did take liberty with Schulz’s text; not in universalizing a Jewish reference, however, but on the contrary, in making unmistakably Jewish something that Schulz left general: in a description of the angry father, stylized to resemble a biblical prophet, she rendered both “puzon z rogu” (literally ‘horn trombone’) and “trąba” (‘trumpet’; in Schulz, both words refer to the same instrument) as “shofar.”\textsuperscript{16} Perhaps she did so to avoid a semantic error; after all, a trombone cannot be made of horn. Whatever her reasons, and whether we classify this instance as a mistranslation or not, the fact remains that it is the opposite of universalizing a Jewish motif.

\textsuperscript{15} Numbers in parentheses refer to pagination in Schulz 1998, 2012, and 2016, respectively, and are followed by shortened English titles of the stories. Where no number is given, the reference is to Davis’s *The Sanatorium at the Sign of the Hourglass*, available online.

\textsuperscript{16} N.B., the expression “puzon z rogu” is the only item in Table 1 which was not glossed by Jarzębski.
It is quite clear from the above examples that Davis tried to avoid repeating Wieniewska’s choices at all costs. Wherever alternative spelling is possible, as in “gaberdines/gabardines” or “Synhedrion/Sanhedrin,” he takes the opportunity to distinguish himself from his predecessor. “Sanhedrin” is a much more common spelling, so here Davis’s choice is justified. The retranslator is not consistent, however: Wieniewska’s “angels of the Presence” is the more common lexicalized way of referring in English to the angels from the Book of Enoch. What is interesting in the context of this paper is that Davis did not take the chance to foreignize (or ethnicize, to recall Underhill’s term) Wieniewska’s “silk caftans”\(^\text{17}\) by using the word “bekishe” (“beketshe”), which, with its own entry in Wikipedia, is a Yiddishism acceptable in English. Instead, the retranslator opted for “frogged coat,” which is a surprising choice; perhaps he intended to write “frock coat,” but as it is, in his translation the Hassidim wear coats fitted with ornamental frogs (“a spindle-shaped button and a loop,” as the OED has it), bringing to mind a military style – an image most readers will probably not stop to think about, but those familiar with Jewish traditional dress of the period may find it mildly disturbing.

Moving on to the interpretive level, let us begin by recalling Goldfarb’s critique of Wieniewska quoted in Section 2 above. His observation that in the title of “Treatise on Tailors’ Dummies,” “tractate” would be a more accurate reference to the Talmud is of course correct; however, it is not so clear whether it would be a better rendering of Schulz’s “traktat,” which indeed is the Polish name of Talmudic scriptures, but also, and perhaps above all, it means ‘treatise’ in the general legal/philosophical sense and does not sound so specialized as “tractate” in English. Moreover, although “tractate” is undoubtedly the default way of referring to sections of the Talmud, some sources, both older (Herford, 1903) and modern (Heller, 1992) do mention Talmudic treatises. In favor of Wieniewska’s choice it must be said that neither Davis nor Madeline Levine\(^\text{18}\) decided to change the more general, natural-sounding “treatise” in their retranslations, foregrounding the Talmudic reference.

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\(^{17}\) Her choice is legitimate; the same translation is preferred by the author of \textit{A Cultural History of Jewish Dress}: “The Sabbath and festivals warrant special finery, such as a black caftan (bekishe), usually woven from satin, polyester or silk” (Silverman, 2003, p. 115).

\(^{18}\) American translator and scholar of Slavic literature who was commissioned to retranslate Schulz’s complete fiction under the auspices of the Polish Book Institute. Although submitted in 2014, her translation is forthcoming in March 2018, with Northwestern University Press; however, “A Treatise on Mannequins, or, The Second Book of Genesis” (including “A Treatise on Mannequins Continued”) was published in a book by the Polish artist Joanna Rajkowska (Schulz, 2013).
Not only that: both retranslators precede it in their titles by the indefinite article (“A Treatise...”), thus in fact making it sound more like a common noun than in Wieniewska’s version with zero article. Wieniewska’s choice does not explicitly invite kabbalistic interpretation, but neither does it foreclose or even resist such a reading.

The same conclusion holds true for the title “The Night of the Great Season” ("A Night of the High Season" in Davis’s version) and the use of “freak” (Davis has “spurious”). In the original, Schulz’s “wielki sezon” (great/grand season) is not even capitalized in the title (it is capitalized further in the text), and it does not immediately define itself as a religious holiday, as Goldfarb’s preferred “Holy Season” would have. As to the epithet used to describe the additional month, it is said explicitly further in the story, in the original and both translations, that this is the thirteenth, supernumerary month, so the kabbalistic reading does not depend on the single instance where it is described as “freak” as opposed to Goldfarb’s desired “defective.” To compare: if the commentator is able to associate Schulz’s “plague of dusk” ("plaga zmierzchu") with the plague of darkness from Exodus, a similar operation can certainly be performed with reference to other synonyms used in translation. Arguably, the identification of Jewish allusions depends not so much on the translator’s lexical choices as on the reader’s background knowledge.

Another such example is the reference to the motif of tikkun olam, the repairing of the world. In Lurianic Kabbalah, it is conceptualized as putting together broken pieces of shattered vessels containing divine sparks. In the conclusion of Schulz’s The Book, we read “Tak tedy będziemy zbierali te aluzje, te ziemskie przybliżenia, te stacje i etapy po drogach naszego życia, jak ułamki potłuczonego zwierciadła” (1998, p. 128). Wieniewska translates this sentence as “Thus we shall collect these allusions, these earthly approximations, these stations and stages on the paths of our life, like the fragments of a broken mirror” (Schulz, 2012, p. 138), while Davis has “And so we shall gather up those allusions those earthly approximations, the stations and stages along our life, like shards of a shattered mirror” (Schulz, n.d.). Again, a reader familiar with this motif will recognize it regardless of the exact vocabulary used.

Speaking of The Book, let us look at one of the central kabbalistic motifs recurring across several stories, namely references to the Zohar, known in English as the Book of Splendor or the Book of Radiance, in Polish as Księga Blasku. The problem with the linguistic
manifestation of this allusion is that whereas the words “splendor” and “radiance” have a rather sophisticated, slightly elevated tinge to them, in Polish “blask” is closer to the English “brightness”; it does not stand out so much and it also collocates with everyday vocabulary; one can speak, for example, of “blask słońca,” i.e. the brightness of the sun or simply sunlight, without alluding to the mythical or sacred sphere, as in the case of “splendor of the sun.”

In Schulz, “blask” appears in connection with a book already in the opening of the first story in the first volume, “August,” where the narrator and his brother are left “a pray to the blinding white heat of the summer days. Dizzy with light, we dipped into that enormous book of holidays, its pages blazing with sunshine” in Wieniewska’s translation (Schulz, 2012, p. 15; my emphasis) or, in Davis’s version, “at the mercy of the summer days, white from the heat and stunning. Stupefied by the light, we leafed through that great book of the holiday, in which the pages were ablaze with splendour” (Schulz, 2016, p. 7; my emphasis). As can be seen, Wieniewska simplifies Schulz and makes this passage sound more realistic, while Davis settles for the kabbalistic interpretation to the extent that he changes Schulz’s plural in “wakacyj” (holidays), which in Polish is not synonymous with religious holidays but refers to school holidays or summer period in general, into “the holiday,” so that the religious interpretation becomes the only one possible.

In The Book, Schulz does not use the actual expression Book of Splendor or Radiance; rather than being located in any particular metaphor, the allusion to the Zohar is dispersed throughout the narrative. The story is replete with vocabulary from the semantic field of LIGHT: not only “blask,” but also its Polish cognates and synonyms. In Wieniewska’s translation, we will find the following: “brilliance,” “brightness,” “bright”, “brightened,” “glow”/”glowing,” “flame” (twice), “aflame, burning”/ “burned,” “fire” and “radiant.” Davis’s choices are similar, except that in one instance he translates “blask as “splendour.”19

Due to the accumulation of light-related vocabulary, the kabbalistic reference is recognizable to readers aware of the Zohar whether the word “splendor” is used or not; conversely, those unfamiliar with the Kabbalah would not have noticed it even on seeing the exact lexical cue.

19 In “inwazja blasku,” which is rendered as “invasion of brightness” in Wieniewska. Somewhat arbitrarily, it is this particular instance that is marked in the Polish text by Jarzębski with a footnote explaining the reference to the Zohar (Schulz, 1998, p. 114 n.2). By introducing this reference no sooner than in the opening piece of Schulz’s second collection, the commentator seems to suggest that it is not so significant in the first volume.
Interestingly, it seems that writing three decades before Schulz scholars even began to point out Judaist allusions, and working with a Polish 1957 non-annotated edition, Wieniewska did notice the reference to the Zohar. In “Spring,” she rendered “blask” in this vein where it refers to the book: “it was the book of truth and splendour” (Schulz, 2012, p. 160), though at the same time, surprisingly, she changed the wording of Schulz’s “true book of splendor” (“prawdziwa księga blasku”; 1998, p. 156). Davis, on the other hand, capitalized the expression: “the true Book of Splendour,” giving the reader a hint that is absent in Schulz.

To sum up the analysis, with regard to the first category of Jewish motifs, i.e. the references which can be recognized without an expert knowledge of Jewish sacred texts, the hypothesis that Wieniewska downplayed their Jewishness cannot be confirmed. On the whole, her translation is acceptable, whereas Davis’s self-published retranslation is not free from mistakes, whether resulting from carelessness or incompetence, or lack of editorial support. As far as theological allusions are concerned, when examined in isolation some of Wieniewska’s translation choices indeed do not lend themselves to Judaist interpretations easily, but neither do they resist or foreclose them. If any strategy is discernible here, it is the desire to preserve the interpretive openness of Schulz’s text. Wherever the translator had to choose between a narrowing translation, which would exclude readers unfamiliar with Jewish religious thought, and a more general option, she chose the latter, even if it meant simplifying the complexities of Schulz’s text. She did not do so in order to erase Jewishness from Schulz’s text, however, but rather to secure him wide readership. In a sense, then, she followed the author’s own strategy.

6. Wieniewska’s Jewishness: Translating with Attitude

Goldfarb’s intuitive remarks about translation constituting an ‘intimate’ form of criticism and reflecting the translator’s ‘engagement’ tie in with Theo Hermans’s (2016) concept of ‘translating with attitude’, and, more generally, with the recent developments in Translator Studies (Chesterman, 2009; Pym, 2009), where attention is paid to the human agents behind the translated texts. Following up on the ideas contained in his paper “Positioning

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20 And she did: to date, her translation has had ca. two dozen book-length editions (including Picador Classics series in 1988 and Penguin Classics in 2008), and individual stories have been published in more than a dozen anthologies and in The New Yorker (in 1977 and 1978).
Translators: Voices, Views and Values in Translation,” where he argued that “all translating can be seen to have the translator’s subject position inscribed in it, and . . . the recognition of this state of affairs has ethical and other consequences,” stressing the reader’s role in discerning the translator’s positioning (Hermans, 2014, p. 286), Hermans (2016) recently distinguished three ways in which translators approach the texts they work on: associative, indifferent, and dissociative (discordant). Although Hermans is primarily interested in the textual and paratextual (framing) manifestations and traces of the translator’s attitude towards specific views or values represented by the original author in his or her text, it is also possible to speak of the translator’s general attitude to the author, and to infer it from a wider context, including the translator’s biography. In the final section of this paper, I would like to bring in the results of my biographical research on Wieniewska, which has revealed some facts relevant to the present paper. In line with Hermans’s emphasis of the role of the recipient, here the researcher’s or critic’s own approach and background knowledge play a crucial role in interpreting the translator’s attitude: while some of the above-quoted critics seem to have assumed that Wieniewska’s attitude to Schulz’s Jewishness was of the indifferent (if not dissociative) kind, I would like to argue that a case can be made for her associative approach.

Born in Warsaw to a Jewish family in 1909, Wieniewska graduated in French Studies, but became a translator of English. In the 1930s, she reviewed foreign fiction for the Polish press (incidentally, so did Schulz), and published several translations of American and British novels, including Margaret Mitchell’s Gone with the Wind, which is still in print. Shortly before the war, she was living in London. She returned to Warsaw in 1939 to be with her parents; ultimately, however, they convinced her to escape on her own. Both her mother and father later perished in the Holocaust. After a tortuous odyssey via Germany, Italy, Turkey, Iraq, and India, Wieniewska disembarked from a convoy ship in Liverpool in 1941 and settled in London, where she worked for the Polish democratic government in exile, the BBC, and, after the war, briefly for the embassy of the Communist government of the People’s Republic of Poland. In 1957, she married Peter Janson-Smith, a literary agent. Apart from translating Polish fiction into English, she also worked as a UK representative for foreign publishing companies.
Wieniewska’s biography is relevant here for one reason: raised in a Jewish family in prewar Poland and professionally active in Warsaw at the time of Schulz’s debut, she was closer to his world than any of the critics or retranslators mentioned in this paper. Although her background does not automatically make her a good translator of texts addressing Jewishness, it does support the argument that her treatment of Jewish motifs in Schulz did not stem from ignorance, let alone from a negative attitude. If I were to venture to reconstruct her attitude in translating Schulz’s Jewishness, I would say that it was one of affinity and involvement, or, in Hermans’s terms, the associative one. This is confirmed by her other translation work: between the two volumes of Schulz’s stories, within the span of three years, Wieniewska also translated Henryk Grynberg’s 1965 novel Żydowska wojna (literally “Jewish war”; English title: *Child of the Shadows*, 1969) and Julian Stryjkowski’s 1966 *Austeria* (*The Inn*, 1971), which is perhaps the most Jewish of books ever written in the Polish language. It seems that much like Schulz himself, Wieniewska sought to find balance between her Jewish heritage and the desire to belong to and be acknowledged by a mainstream literary culture. The scarce biographical information at our disposal suggests that she succeeded. Upon her death in 1985, two papers published obituaries: the bulletin of London’s Association of Jewish Refugees and *The Times*.
7. Conclusions

As I hope to have demonstrated, Wieniewska did not deserve to be remembered as the incompetent or careless translator who downplayed Schulz’s Jewishness. As for the few shtetl realities present in the stories, in fact she rendered them more accurately than Davis did decades later. Nor does her translation foreclose Judaist interpretations of Schulz’s stories. The author’s strategy of constructing allusions to Jewish sacred texts by using certain lexical cues recurring throughout larger parts of the narrative ensured the survival of the references in English despite the occasional generalization in Wieniewska’s version. Wherever it occurs, universalization of Jewish allusions is not an end in itself, but a side effect of the translator’s overall policy. Unlike Davis, who sometimes foregrounds the Judaist reading at the cost of the more general one, Wieniewska opts for solutions which would not seem obscure to a reader unfamiliar with Jewish theology. If one takes into account the fact that Wieniewska was working decades before scholars’ attention shifted to Judaist readings, it seems that her intuition, undoubtedly backed by her insider’s knowledge of the publishing market, was correct. The publishing record of her translation confirms that the translator was successful in making Schulz recognized in the Anglophone world.

This is not to say that a contemporary retranslation of Schulz’s works, reflecting present-day developments in Schulz Studies, is not needed; on the contrary. Hopefully, Levine’s version will be more accurate than Wieniewska’s, yet at the same time free from blunders like the ones committed by Davis. When judging the older translation, however, one should remember that in a sense Wieniewska was translating a different author than Davis and Levine – one who did not yet enjoy the status he has at present or inspire insightful interpretations from a host of devoted scholars both in Poland and abroad. If translation criticism is to be an informed interpretive practice, it needs to contextualize translation choices, remembering that translations are created at a particular historical moment under particular circumstances, and perhaps also looking at the figure behind the translated text.

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