

■ MARTA ANNA ZABŁOCKA

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1380-7922>

Jagiellonian University in Kraków

m.zablocka@uj.edu.pl

KIPLING IN POLISH. THE IRONIC FACE OF THE POET OF THE EMPIRE*

Abstract

This article looks at Polish translations of three short stories by Rudyard Kipling in order to examine how translation affects the ironic tropes found in those texts. Mateo's typology of techniques for handling irony in translation (1995) is used to show how this rhetorical device works within the broader cultural and historical context. It appears that the way Polish translators in the early 1900s interpreted irony in contemporary colonial fiction depended on their ability to recognize social problems in the British Empire, to identify the distinctive British sense of humour, and to understand the realities of colonial life. The short stories under discussion are "Georgie Porgie," 1888 (translated by Feliks Chwalibóg, 1909), "The Limitations of Pambe Serang," 1889 (Feliks Chwalibóg, 1910) and "The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes," 1885 (unknown translator, 1900).

Keywords: Rudyard Kipling, translation studies, irony, colonial fiction

Written in the 1880s and early 1890s, primarily for newspapers in British India, Kipling's early stories evince a certain sense of sympathy for the white man, expressed as irony aimed at Anglo-Indian society,¹ the native

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¹ From today's perspective "Anglo-Indian" has become a highly ambiguous term. I use it to refer to the white colonial community from the British Isles living in the British India.

population, and the institutions of colonial administration.² Collected in book form as *Plain Tales from the Hills* (1888) and *Life's Handicap* (1891), the stories were soon translated into Polish. Several collections of Kipling's stories came out in Poland (including *Spod nieba Indii* [1905]; *Zemsta Dun-gary* [1909]; *Zaczarowany dom* [1910] and others), and some stories were published separately in journals. However, the selection seems to have been rather haphazard,³ meaning that Polish readers in the early 20th century did not have access to Kipling's complete early works.

In those stories, Kipling's pre-war Polish translators (Jerzy Bandrowski, Józef Birkenmajer, Feliks Chwalibóg and others) faced the difficult task of conveying to a Polish readership an exotic Indian world, viewed through the eyes of a young writer with inconsistent views, who was often scathingly critical of the workings of colonial society. Kipling had emerged as the best-known representative of Anglo-Indian literature: a literary grouping distinct from colonial literature written in Britain and on the continent (such as the books of Henry Rider Haggard, who enjoyed considerable popularity in Poland) because it portrayed, from within, a hermetic social and cultural group that often baffled people in Europe.⁴ The portrayal of British India in Kipling's stories, as filtered through Polish translations, was accordingly a complex product, shaped variously by the translators' cultural competence, their understanding of British imperial policy, their ideological fascinations, and their ear for Kipling's irony, which British researchers today interpret as a manifestation of imperial fears and Kipling's own ambivalence towards the colonial administration.

Kipling shows India through the eyes of a British colonial civil servant: as a land with an inhospitable climate that whites struggle to get used to;

This meaning reflects historical usage: "Anglo-Indian" originally referred to white people in the colonial administration in India, and their families.

² This problem has been discussed by a number of researchers including J.A. McClure (1981), B.J. Moore-Gilbert (1986), H. Pike Bauer (1994), J. McBratney (2002).

³ For instance, the collection *Zaczarowany dom* (1910) puts together translations of stories as different as "The Limitations of Pambe Serang" (first published by Kipling in *Life's Handicap* [1891]), "In the House of Suddhoo" (from *Plain Tales from the Hills* [1888]), and "Habitation Enforced" (from *Actions and Reactions* [1909]): stories on topics as different as Eastern ship crews, Indian superstitions and quack healers, and a nostalgic vision of British values as viewed by a rich American couple.

⁴ For an extensive discussion of the differences between the so-called metropolitan orientalisation and Anglo-Indian orientalisation, and the differences in the reception of colonial literature in British culture generally, see, e.g., B.J. Moore-Gilbert (1986).

a land of many cultures, which the white Westerners find intriguing⁵ but also tiresome in their absorbing intensity; a prison continent where overwork and nostalgia for families in Britain pushes colonists to act in pathological ways.⁶ With a reporter's unsparing precision, Kipling paints a picture of daily life in British India in order to highlight the absurdities and moral failings of the Anglo-Indian community. A keen observer of life, he often breaks taboos, by relying on irony to draw attention to social abuses and to articulate his misgivings about the way imperial law worked in Britain's eastern colonies.

The aim of this article is to identify and describe the strategies and outcomes of Polish translators dealing with irony in Kipling's early stories set in British India. I will be looking at "The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes" (translated as "Dziwna przygoda Morrowbie Jukesa", published anonymously in 1900 in the Polish journal *Czas*), "Georgie Porgie" (1909), and "The Limitations of Pambe Serang" (ca. 1910);⁷ the latter two were translated by Feliks Chwalibóg and appeared in Lwów in book-length supplements to *Słowo Polskie*, a National Democrat journal aimed at the intelligentsia.

Translatability and the indescribable: irony in translation

Though he viewed himself primarily as an Anglo-Indian, Kipling was ambivalent about the inhabitants of British India (both the native population and the colonists). This ambivalence influenced the characteristic construction of his stories (such as the distinctive use of the narrator) and the ironic tone of his fiction. His early texts were aimed at Anglo-Indian readers; outside of that context, their reception would have been in some ways incomplete even to English-speaking readers unfamiliar with Indian life – let alone to readers of translations.

⁵ I treat terms such as "East" and "eastern", or "West" and "western" as conceptual call signs in full recognition that what they evoke are constructs produced by the colonial and postcolonial discourses, and thus necessarily involve numerous generalisations. Kipling's travel writing in *From Sea to Sea* (1899) offers the most interesting source of information on the qualities he attributed to the East and its inhabitants, as well as on his stereotypes about different Asian nations.

⁶ Kipling's letters from Lahore and Allahabad (Kipling 1990) provide an interesting background for contextualizing the way his early stories can be read and interpreted.

⁷ In this article the titles of the stories will be abbreviated to PS and GP.

In discussing irony in Kipling's stories, we should bear in mind two cultural areas in which he operated as an Anglo-Indian writer. The first was British culture (along with its tradition of understatement), which went hand in hand with a distinctive, often self-ironic sense of humour. Many of Kipling's characters and narrators take a detachedly reserved stance; combined with the problems facing British colonists in India, this often produces bizarre effects, inviting ironic interpretations. On the one hand, irony becomes a characteristic trope in Kipling's stories. On the other, it becomes a linguistic marker for a certain culturally conditioned attitude towards the world. The ironic detachment of his characters, which would have been instantly recognisable to British readers, often comes across as unconvincing in Polish translation, and things that are meant to sound ironic in the original may get replaced by humour in translation (as is the case in some passages in "Pambe Serang").

The second cultural area in which Kipling and his early readers operated was India: a land with a native population that had its own distinctive customs and considerations. Anglo-Indian protagonists in Kipling's stories often misapply Western standards to Eastern life; efforts to make sense of the colonial experience in terms of familiar Western norms and categories are thus doomed to fail and tend to end in mockery ("The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes"). The ironic effects in the stories are produced when Kipling's characters fail to realise how wrongly they act, in the new context, and when they stubbornly persist in believing themselves to be infallible and incisive in their judgements. Those ironies are deeply rooted in the cultural contexts in which the author, his readers, and his narrator-characters operated.

The same cultural contexts also influenced the formal aspects of Kipling's works, particularly the attitude of his Anglo-Indian narrators towards the world of the story. His narrators withhold comment and offer, instead, a reporter's perspective on life in the colonies,⁸ feigning naivety⁹ as they show the world from the colonist perspective. This is recounted to the reader in terms of conventional imperialist ideology, even where the latter is impossible to square with the events of the story ("Georgie Porgie").

⁸ Early reviewers criticized the journalistic tone and detailed descriptions in Kipling's fiction (Green 1971: 88–97).

⁹ I will expand on this observation later in the article when discussing the textual indicators of irony.

As a result, ironic fracture lines appear in the text. However, those ironies require external knowledge in order to be recognized as such; though readily available to Kipling's readers and to critics today, that knowledge may not always have been available to his early readers and translators. The colonial context, which generates the ironies in Kipling's India stories, remains largely untranslatable. But there are also certain ironies to be identified in the textual clues present in the original texts which, to a greater or lesser extent, remain recognizable in those early 20th-century Polish translations.

My attempt to characterize the strategies of Polish translators, in relation to Kipling's early stories, opens with an overview of various definitions of irony in the context of translatability. The further analysis, which will develop from this starting point, will be primarily linguistic in nature.

Irony entails interpretive ambiguity. As Marta Mateo points out (following D.C. Muecke), it is difficult to identify a fixed set of linguistic indicators of irony since the trope is not moored to some specific "tone" or "style". Instead, irony involves a process that unfolds on the semantic and syntactic levels: it "depends on context since it springs from the relationships of a word, expression or action with the whole text or situation. Irony is a pragmatic category". Mateo also emphasizes that another inalienable characteristic of irony is the internal tension between the ironic simulation of reality, on the one hand, and reality itself, on the other. The fundamental purpose of irony is to maintain the illusion of plausibility for different possible interpretations:

[Irony] misrepresents the real content of the message so that the contradiction must be assumed as normal (...) it presents two opposed realities as true (...) [I]rony is meant to be understood, and the recognition of the real meaning, or rather, of the fact that there *is* a real meaning different from what is being proposed, is essential for the full realisation of irony. (Mateo 1995: 172)

In outlining the theoretical context of irony in translation, Mateo uses Muecke's three-part construction of the trope to illustrate the ambivalent role it plays in texts. Firstly, irony operates at two levels simultaneously: at the basic level it appeals to the "victim's" perspective or, alternatively, shows the victim from the ironist's perspective; at the higher level, irony appeals to the way the ironic situation is viewed by an observer (or by the ironist). The second element of irony, as discussed by Muecke, involves the contradictions between the construction of the ironic subject and object, mainly stemming from their mutual contrast; the third is the related assumption that the person

at the receiving end of an ironic treatment fails to understand his or her own situation, or that the ironist feigns such incomprehension (Mateo 1995: 172).

Because irony is heavily dependent on context, as Marta Mateo and Raymond Chakhachiro point out, it may easily go unnoticed when the reader is distracted or unqualified. The risk that ironic utterances in the source text may become elided or overlooked in the process of interpretation, affects the translator (who may fail to pick up on the cultural, political or social context of irony in the text), but also the reader (who may lack the required cultural competence to pick up on irony). In order for it to be understood, participants in a communicative situation must have a certain sensitivity to the linguistic signalling of irony in a text (Mateo 1995: 172).

Another factor in whether or not irony gets picked up on (in the source text or in the target text) is discourse outside of the text itself. This is directly related to the way readers are culturally conditioned to recognize irony, political allusion, cutting remarks or other social references (Chakhachiro 2009: 40–41).

As a result, it takes special cultural knowledge to develop a sensitivity to the way language is involved in the world outside of the text, and to identify the stylistic manipulations that may support irony. In his analysis of translated irony in political journalism, Chakhachiro, notes, in common with Mateo, that “the writer’s (...) stylistic choices and the reader’s [potential] responses ought to be negotiated in the process and each militates against the other”, which in practical terms amounts to paying special attention to the reader’s sensitivity and interpretive skills. Irony should be embedded in a context that makes sense to the reader, and the textual clues of irony in the source language text must be faithfully reproduced in translation by means, say, of equivalent linguistic structures (Chakhachiro 2009: 32–33).

Chakhachiro references Linda Hutcheon’s theory, to emphasize that the text becomes a space for interaction between the ironist and the interpreter of irony. The role of that interpreter is to reconstruct the meanings, regardless of possible interpretive challenges posed by internal contradictions that are inherent to irony as a trope. The interpreter should be capable of decoding certain contextual signals and linguistic markers that make an expression ironic (such markers “signal and indeed (...) structure the more specific context in which the said can brush up against some unsaid in such a way that irony and its edge come into being” (Hutcheon in Chakhachiro 2009: 34–35). Chakhachiro suggests that translation should be treated as “a contrastive stylistic exercise, in which a source text is (ought to be) contrasted,

at all its structural and textural levels, with a (...) target text” (Chakhachiro 2009: 38). The translator’s aim is to preserve the stylistic characteristics of the source text, in translation, in such a way as to make irony work in the equivalent linguistic environment. Despite the fact (mentioned before) that no internal textual tropes or devices can be said to produce irony directly, style plays an important role in alerting readers to its presence (sudden changes of register, certain rhetorical mechanisms, etc.).

In *The Translation of Irony* (1995), Mateo outlines a functionalist classification of strategies available to translators dealing with irony in the source text. Her typology comprises thirteen solutions; a complete (abridged) list follows, though not all will apply to the translations of Kipling’s stories under discussion:

1. ST irony becomes TT irony with literal translation [e.g. internal contradictions or fallacious reasoning].
2. ST irony becomes TT irony with “equivalent effect” translation [e.g. innuendo].
3. ST irony becomes TT irony through means different from those used in the ST [e.g. an ironic utterance becomes replaced with ironic intonation].
4. ST irony is enhanced in TT with some word/expression.
5. ST ironic innuendo becomes more restricted and explicit in TT.
6. ST irony becomes TT sarcasm.
7. The hidden meaning of ST irony comes to the surface in TT. No irony in TT therefore.
8. ST ironic ambiguity has only one of the two meanings translated in TT. No double entendre or ambiguity in TT therefore.
9. ST irony replaced by a “synonym” in TT with no two possible meanings.
10. ST irony explained in footnote in TT.
11. ST irony has literal translation with no irony in TT.
12. Ironic ST completely deleted in TT.
13. No irony in ST becomes irony in TT. (Mateo 1995: 176–177)

Some of the translation strategies listed by Mateo are discussed in more depth in Galia Hirsch’s theoretical study “Explicitations and Other Types of Shifts in the Translation of Irony and Humor” (2011). Hirsch looks at the role of translation shifts, in translating irony, and argues that explicitation is the basic strategy for translating ironic utterances, “since the implied criticism is not eliminated” from the target text (Hirsch 2011: 178). Unlike humour, she notes, irony plays a quasi-didactic function in texts: its role is to draw the reader’s attention to problems or conflicts that may unfold in the text or,

by reference, in the outside world. Hirsch points out that translators have at their disposal a range of techniques for enhancing irony in the target text, such as “adding explanatory phrases, spelling out implicatures or inserting connectives” (Hirsch 2011: 178) to supply the missing interpretive context (cf. strategies 7 and 10 in Mateo’s classification). Unlike in translating humour, where the basic strategy involves non-explicitating shifts, translating irony primarily entails explicitating shifts. In common with other researchers cited in this article, Hirsch nonetheless believes that the workings of irony always hinge on the alertness of its interpreters and their ability to “identify (...) the target of the criticism implied by the utterance” (Hirsch 2011: 183). Not without reason, she argues that explicitation in translation is conditioned by historical circumstance, including the status of the translated text in the target culture and its compatibility with the norms of acceptability that obtain in the target culture, so that it can be picked up on in translation (Hirsch 2011: 187).

Those theoretical observations invite a closer look at two equally important aspects of research into irony in translation. On the one hand, the translator interprets the author’s ironic intent present in the text and uses strategies to retain that irony in their translation (or, alternatively, to explicitate the same, or to omit it). As a general rule, the translator is aware of the ironic potential of the translated text and conveys the irony in one way or another. To that end, translators look for linguistic and semantic equivalents of those structures and expressions that generate irony in the source language. However, the implicit assumption that such equivalents can be identified is itself based on the optimistic notion that meaning is transferable across languages and cultures. On the other hand, knowledge of the world outside of the text, which plays a key role in preserving the ironic intent of Kipling’s stories in translation, refuses to yield fully to translation, and remains inaccessible to those readers who may not be familiar with the workings of Anglo-Indian society. As a result, the reader will not always be able to get the ironic point.

The strategies for dealing with irony in translation outlined above are useful in describing the Polish versions of Kipling’s stories; however, they inherently fall short of characterising the cultural nuances Kipling used to create irony.

Politically incorrect irony

Feliks Chwalibóg translated “The Limitations of Pambe Serang” into Polish in the late 1900s. The reference to the hero’s “limitations” in the original title, which is left out of the Polish translation (“Pambe Serang”), is connected with the satirical tone of the story, where irony and humour rely mainly on racist stereotypes attributed by whites to native populations in Asian and African colonies. Kipling comes up with a preposterous story that portrays Asians as people guided by irrational motivations and primitive instincts, Africans as being kind-hearted but not too clever, and British people as naive idealists who fail to comprehend the multicultural world they have helped to create through their own vigorous colonization efforts. The coloured characters from the colonies (an African and an Asian), as well as the Englishman in the story, become anchoring points for irony and find themselves at the receiving end of the ironic narrator’s ambiguous game (cf. Mateo 1995: 172).

The narrator’s function in the story is highly interesting. It shows characters of different ethnicities in action, viewed from the perspective of a white colonist, in an attempt to universalise their different social conduct. The characters are ostensibly shown in an emotionally neutral way, but derision lurks under the story’s surface and becomes apparent, to the reader, at the level of cultural context. The narrator takes the stance of an ironic observer, and his irony is a double-edged sword pointed at the “Easterners” and the “Westerners” alike.

What the narrator is trying to accomplish is give the reader an encapsulation of clashing cultures and incompatible mentalities represented by a European, an Asian, and an African. The aim is to demonstrate that the uniformity that the colonial world imposes, by means of shared laws and institutions, is only apparently effective in handling problems arising in multicultural contexts. At the same time, it is a story of the white man’s fear of the Other (possibly also a fear of recolonization, represented in the story by the cosmopolitan character of Nurkeed), latent under a mask of satire based on stereotypes that discredit otherness. The narrator understands those problems in essence, but feigns obliviousness and naivety in order to create irony.

The story has a somewhat absurd premise. A Malay sailor named Pambe comes to breakfast, only to discover a drunk stoker from Zanzibar named Nurkeed helping himself to his food. To add insult to injury, Nurkeed hurls

verbal abuse at Pambe, who decides to seek his revenge. After surviving a knife attack, the dismayed Nurkeed flees and gets a job on board another ship. Pambe decides to lie in wait, and he sets up an ambush in the London docks. There, a British philanthropist takes him under his wing, and instructs him about Christianity. Religious instruction notwithstanding, Pambe is burning for revenge over the insult. After a wait of many months, the paths of the characters cross again, and Pambe kills his former crewmate, only to be hanged by the British judicial authorities.

The beginning of the story clearly indicates its ironic and comedic tone:

If you consider the circumstances of the case, it was the only thing that he could do. But Pambe Serang has been hanged by the neck till he is dead, and Nurkeed is dead also. (LPS, p. 343)

Jeżeli rozważymy okoliczności, wśród których się to działo, musimy przyznać, że nie mógł inaczej postąpić. Ale mimo to Pambe Serang zawisł na szubienicy i wisiał na niej aż do śmierci. – Nurkeed umarł także. (PG, p. 64)¹⁰

From the beginning, the narrator is unmistakably ambivalent about the world of the story. Notwithstanding the ostensible endorsement of Pambe's motivations, the passage accentuates the all-powerful nature of British law and of the colonial order the narrator represents, approves and conforms to.

According to the "civilized" social norms sanctioned by Western culture, Pambe obviously could and should have acted differently. The opening passage references the cruel revenge Pambe will exact on Nurkeed for a minor transgression: to Polish or British readers familiar with Western social norms, Pambe's behaviour seems bizarre,¹¹ and the actions of the charitable British man must seem risibly misplaced. The second sentence implies that "Eastern ways" are incompatible with rigorous application of Western law.

In the Polish translation, the English set phrase *has been hanged by the neck till he is dead* is rendered literally as "wisiał na szubienicy aż do śmierci". This gives the sentence a comically pleonastic tone, drawing the

¹⁰ The passages in the English original are based on Kipling 1952b; the Polish translations follow Kipling 1909 with its original spelling and punctuation.

¹¹ It bears pointing out that Kipling's fiction had reached many Polish readers as early as the 1900s through periodicals and book supplements in the popular press. Kipling's specific language, which was based heavily on stereotypes, arguably exerted a major influence on the way British colonies in Asia and their native populations were viewed and discussed in Poland.

Polish reader's attention away from the problem raised in the opening of the story, namely the open clash between the institutional dimension of Western law and the different notions of justice espoused by other cultures. In a later passage Pambe, who is suffering from a serious and potentially mortal illness, is shown as being nursed to health by a charitable British man who personifies Western culture. Paradoxically, the Malay loses his life "for the Law wanted him", the law being one of the pillars of Western culture.¹² Through this ironic portrayal the narrator compellingly demonstrates the disharmony that marks the world of the story.

The Polish translation of the passage also differs from the original in terms of punctuation (the original contains no dashes). One of the strategies for translating irony, on Mateo's list, is "ST irony becomes TT irony through means different from those used in the ST" (as in irony being replaced by ironic intonation). This is the technique used in this particular passage, where the utterance is broken up by typographic means (dashes) to impose a certain intonation, even where the passage is read silently. The translation also contains an instance of significant grammatical shift to a first person plural narrative, not found in the original and arguably more engaging for readers.

Even this basic exposition of the characters indicates the satirical nature of the text; Chwalibóg renders this satirical tone into Polish, though not without some significant shifts:

Nurkeed, the big fat Zanzibar stoker who fed the second right furnace thirty feet down in the hold (...) sat on the fore-hatch grating, eating salt fish and onions, and singing the songs of a far country. (LPS, p. 343)

Nurkeed, wielki i gruby palacz z Zanzibaru, podtrzymujący drugie ognisko, po prawej stronie, na samym dnie okrętu, 30 stóp pod pokładem (...) usiadł na krawędzi poziomego powietrza na przodzie okrętu i zaczął zajadać suszoną rybę z cebulą, śpiewając **na całe gardło** różne pieśni z odległych krain (PS, p. 64; emphasis added).

With his ironic incomprehension, the simple-minded, drunk Nurkeed is an ideal butt of irony (cf. Mateo 1995: 172). His bizarre situation is further elaborated on, in the Polish translation, by means of expanded descriptions

¹² Pambe's Christian education is a similar paradox in that the character persists in his murderous quest for revenge despite the Christian teaching.

that supply extra details not found in the original. The translator adds descriptive touches: his Nurkeed sings “lustily” or “at the top of his lungs” (*na cale gardło*). Such extra details dovetail closely with the stoker’s caricatured description. This strategy for boosting the text’s ironic and comedic potential works by adding a phrase not found in the original (Mateo 1995: 176); Chwalibóg uses this technique on several occasions:

Nurkeed (...) właśnie plamił krwią swoją **nieposzlakowanie białą** kładkę. (PS, p. 65)

Nurkeed (...) [spat through the grating at Pambe], who was staining the clean [Polish translation: “immaculately white”] fore-deck with his blood. (LPS, p. 344)

or:

Pambe was a good husband when he happened to remember the existence of a wife (LPS, p. 145)

which is translated into Polish as:

Pambe stawał się wzorowym małżonkiem, **ile razy dobil do tego lub owego portu** i przypominał sobie, że i tu także ma żonę. (PS, p. 65)

[literally: Pambe became an exemplary husband every time he came to one port or another, and was reminded of the fact that he actually had a wife there as well].

Clearly, Pambe cuts a comparably preposterous figure in the Polish translation. An ostensibly objective portrayal notwithstanding, the narrator describes Pambe by referencing those of his actions that fall foul of Western moral sensibilities. This produces ironic incongruity between the narrator’s actual intention (which is to deride the Asian character) and the textual enactment of that description (feigned objectivity):

A serang is a person of importance, far above a stoker, though the stoker draws better pay. (...) [W]hen all the ship is lazy, he puts on his whitest muslin and a big red sash, and plays with the passengers’ children on the quarter-deck. Then the passengers give him money, and he saves it all up [Polish translation: “saves it all up diligently, down to the last penny”] for an orgie at Bombay or Calcutta, or Pulu Penang. (LPS, pp. 343–344)

This is translated into Polish as:

Serang jest to nie byle jaka osobistość. W hierarchii stoi o wiele wyżej od palacza, chociaż palacz pobiera wyższą płacę. (...) [K]iedy nie ma nic do roboty, przywdziewa najbielszy muślinowy kitel, okręca się czerwonym pasem i bawi się z dziećmi pasażerów na tylnym pokładzie. Rodzice rzucają mu za to drobne pieniądze, które *serang* **składa skrzętnie aż do ostatniego penny**, rozmyślając o sutej orgji, jaką sobie za to sprawi w Bombaju, Kalkucie albo w Pulu-Penang. (PS, p. 64)

The irony in this passage is again “enhanced” or amplified through paraphrase. In the Polish text, the *serang* saves it up “diligently, down to the last penny”. The passage has the appearance of veracity – the narrator provides drily factual information about the character’s position within the ship hierarchy, explains how he intends to spend his savings (and notes that stokers receive better wages) – but the passage leaves hairline cracks of irony across the seemingly consistent and unambiguous facade of the text. The juxtaposition of children and orgies similarly introduces a worryingly dissonant note. Given the comedic tone of Pambe’s characterization, the way his actions are presented in the text (factual account, moral judgement withheld) takes on an ironic quality stemming from the contradiction between the literal meaning of the text and the implicit material that comes to the surface in interpretation. With this kind of characterisation, the narrator creates a sense of ironic detachment that highlights his ambiguous attitude. The Polish translator heightens this effect further by using explicitations.

In other instances Chwalibóg uses literal translation to come down on the side of one interpretation in potentially ambiguous phrases (cf. Mateo 1995: 176). This technique is used on at least two occasions, and it is particularly apparent in passages anchored in two similar contexts. In one instance the translator ignores the ambiguity of the word “hot”:

He was no longer Sultan of Zanzibar, but a **very hot stoker**. (LPS, p. 345).

[Sober again, Nurkeed] stracił godność sułtana Zanzibaru i został znowu palaczem okrętowym, któremu **ogromnie dokuczalo gorąco** [„a stoker suffering badly from heat”]. (PS, pp. 65–66)

Unlike in the original description, where the word “hot” has a double meaning (“suffering from heat” and “hot-tempered, violent”), the Polish stoker only “suffers badly from heat”. Nonetheless, the Polish translator

successfully comes up with a comical conceit that combines the nature of a stoker's work with continual heat. Interestingly, and not at all obviously in the light of the source text, the Polish translation of this passage ties in with a different passage where the same technique is even more apparent (and effectively removes irony from the text):

Nurkeed suffered considerably from lack of fresh air during the run to Bombay. He only came on deck to breathe when all the world was about; and even then a heavy block once dropped from a derrick within a foot of his head. (LPS, p. 346)

Nurkeedowi **djabelnie dokuczyciło gorąco** [„suffered like hell from heat”] podczas przeprawy do Bombayu. Wychodził na pomost tylko w obecności całej załogi. Lecz i wtedy zdarzyło się, że winda zerwała się z elewatora i spadła tuż obok niego. (PS, p. 66)

Again, all ambiguity is stripped from the passage appearing in bold in the Polish translation. In the English original, the stoker “suffers considerably from lack of fresh air” because he keeps below deck for fear of his life. In the translation, the restated piece of information that has Nurkeed “suffering from heat” moves the reader away from the humorous interpretation implied in the original text.

What makes this an ironic story is the incongruity between the preposterous story and the humorous characterizations on the one hand, and the serious subject and implicit message of the story on the other. This is a story about cultural conflict, about the deleterious effects of transculturation, and about the omnipotence of Western institutions that regulate social life in multicultural environments. This ironic presentation of the world of the story is handled by a narrator who relies on stereotypes and deprecating language that deliberately caricatures the relations between the characters. Removed from its social interpretive context, this story as received by Polish readers amounts to little more than a humorous short story that strongly highlights cultural stereotypes and exotic detail.

Additions and omissions

“Georgie Porgie” should never have been published: this is how critics in Kipling's own day reacted to the short story about an unfeeling egotist who arrives in Burma with early British colonists (cf. Green 1971: 93). In

stark contrast to the idea of the perfect colonist – a brave and resourceful figure who brings civilisation to the “savages” in Asia’s jungles – Kipling’s eponymous white English character is as unheroic as can be. Georgie is an egotist who abuses his power; impulsive, reckless and not too clever, the protagonist is described with ironic detachment. Similar to the dynamic between the narrator and the characters in “The Limitations of Pambe Serang”, the narrator feigns objectivity in offering an account of Porgie’s actions.

That was emphatically not the kind of short story late 19th-century British critics were expecting.¹³ In writing it Kipling was violating a taboo. The myth of the white colonist is undermined: Georgie’s actions are being ridiculed, and the legitimacy of his power over colonised lands and native populations is brought into question. “Georgie Porgie” is at bottom a piece of satire aimed at the British civil service in the colonies, criticizing the hypocrisy of the colonists and their moral transgressions in dealing with the natives. Kipling speaks truth to the reader, and veils his critique in an ironic endorsement of Georgie’s choices.

In the story, a bored antihero colonist in Burma,¹⁴ a man who goes by the nickname of Georgie Porgie, decides to buy a local native girl for companionship. He lives contentedly in an informal relationship with the frugal and physically attractive young woman – until he resolves to go and find himself an English wife as good as a perfect Burmese woman. Kipling narrates that simple, depressing story with ironic nonchalance, using a narrator who is a distant acquaintance of Georgie’s. The narrator conceals his irony under feigned earnestness as he mocks Georgie and his life choices (cf. Mateo 1995: 172). The story is told in the spirit of an objective account, and all judgement is again withheld.

A four-line English nursery rhyme, slightly modified by Kipling, opens the story:

Georgie Porgie, pudding and pie,
Kissed the girls and made them cry.

¹³ That was the opinion of Lionel Johnson writing in 1891. Johnson was not a Kipling apologist. His reviews drew attention to the overly detailed and journalistic style of Kipling’s short stories, and criticized his political allusions, which Johnson thought diminished the artistic value of the stories. Cited by Green, Johnson’s criticism contained negative comments about pieces with the most evident topical allusions.

¹⁴ In *From Sea to Sea* (1899) Kipling enthuses about Burma, which he portrays as a colonist’s paradise: a land flowing with milk and honey where beautiful people live free of all cares.

When the girls came out to play
Georgie Porgie ran away.¹⁵ (GP, p. 381)

Although this invites comparisons between the characters in the story and the craven boy in the nursery rhyme, Kipling provides a different explanation for his character's nickname:

(...) his friends called him Georgie Porgie because of the singularly Burmese-like manner in which he sang a song whose first line is something like the words "Georgie Porgie". Most men who have been in Burma will know the song. It means: "Puff, puff, puff, puff, great steamboat!". Georgie sang it to his banjo, and his friends shouted with delight, so that you could hear them far away in the teak-forest. (GP, p. 382)

That nickname is meaningless to Polish readers: both the nursery rhyme that serves as the story's motto, and the longer passage quoted above, are both left out in Feliks Chwalibóg's 1909 translation. Later in the article I will revisit the effects of, and the possible reasons for, that decision.

In keeping with the ironic narrator's ambivalent role, much of the story ostensibly serves to explain and justify the character's immoral actions. In the explicit, literal layer of the text, he is presented as a typical representative of the conquering class: a safe pair of hands in the colonial system, he is a man intent on taking full advantage of his privileged position. However, the opening passage in the story, before the character of Porgie is properly introduced, takes on a palpably ironic tone:

(...) civilised people (...) have no right to apply their standard of right and wrong to an unsettled land. When the place is made fit for their reception, by those men who are told off to work, they can come up, bringing in their trunks their own society and the Decalogue, and all the other apparatus. Where the Queen's Law does not carry, it is irrational to expect an observance of other and weaker rules. The men who run ahead of the cars of Decency and Propriety, and make the jungle ways straight, cannot be judged in the same manner as the stay-at-home folk of the ranks of the regular Tchín. (...) There was no very strong Public Opinion up to that limit, but it existed to keep men in order. (...) some men whose desire was to be ever a little in advance of the rush of

¹⁵ Most variants have the third line in that nursery rhyme as "When the boys came out to play". Kipling's alteration moors the rhyme more firmly to the facts of the story in an allusion to Georgie's shameful treatment of his Burmese companion. The quotations from the original story are from Kipling 1952a.

Respectability flocked forward with the troops. These were the men who could never pass examinations, and would have been too pronounced in their ideas for the administration of bureau-worked Provinces. The Supreme Government stepped in as soon as might be, (...) reduced New Burma to the dead Indian level. (GP, pp. 381–382)

(...) ludzie cywilizowani (...) nie mają prawa sądzić kraju niecywilizowanego według swoich pojęć o złym i dobrym. **Co innego**, kiedy kraj już jest przygotowany na ich przyjęcie, przez tych, których przeznaczono do tej roboty. Wtedy mogą sobie zjechać i przywieść **w tłumokach swoją warstwę społeczną, dekalog i cały kram**. Lecz tam dokąd nie sięga Prawo Królowej, trudno wymagać, aby przestrzegano innych **mniej ważnych** przepisów. Ludzi, którzy bieżą w pierwszych szeregach na rydwanach Przyzwoitości i Dobrego Tonu, aby **prostować ścieżki** dżungli, nie można mierzyć tą samą miarą co piecuchów, którzy całe życie spędzili w rodzinnym kacie. (...) [W Birmie] Opinia Publiczna bardzo traciła na wadze; chociaż zachowała się w dostatecznej dozie, żeby ludzi utrzymać w karchach obowiązku. (...) ludzie którym zależało, aby przybyć trochę wcześniej niż Przyzwoitość, pośpieszyli naprzód z wojskiem. Ta straż przednia składała się z ludzi, którzy nie mogli zdać żadnego egzaminu i których podejrzewano o zbyt niezależne poglądy dla administracji prowincji, którymi rządzi szlafmyca biurowa. Najwyższy rząd wdał się od razu w tę sprawę (...), aby czym prędzej sprowadzić Nową Birmę do **banalnego** poziomu Indii.¹⁶ (GP, p. 41; emphasis added)

How can we take seriously a character who is introduced – seemingly with a straight face – with that kind of preamble? The voice is given here to an ironic narrator who feigns impartiality and naivety to present the butt of the irony – Georgie – from a subjective perspective, coming into covert conflict with the victim of the ironic treatment (Mateo 1995: 172).

The irony apparent in the story's structure and plotting is further supplemented with irony born out of the potential ambiguity of certain expressions. In the context of the story as a whole, the vague reference to the “weaker” (Polish: *mniej ważne*, “less important”) rules that apply in the colonies becomes a reference to the toleration of informal relationships with local women: though sanctioned by tradition, such unions have no legal consequences under British law. The “dead Indian level” (Polish: *banalny poziom Indii*, “banal Indian level”) is quite simply a reference to a multicultural society having to live under the dispensations of a colonial

¹⁶ All the quotations in Polish are from Kipling 2006c (Feliks Chwalibóg, 1909). The original spelling and punctuation is preserved.

administration, which is predictably legalistic and compliant with Western customs and morality.

The deprecating effect produced by conflating “the Decalogue” with “trunks” and “all the other apparatus” is actually heightened even further in the Polish translation, where coarser synonyms are used (*thumoki* or “bundles” and *kram* or “stuff”, respectively). This way elements that belong in the sphere of the sacred (the Decalogue) or inspire general respect (society as a sociological construct, here translated into Polish as *warstwa społeczna*, “social class”) suffer from heavy depreciation. The translator makes no effort to explicate the irony, but instead tries to bring it closer to Polish readers by seeking linguistic equivalence, ignoring to some extent the cultural context of the potentially ironic expressions (cf. Mateo 1995: 176). Those expressions retain their ironic tone, though possibly in a slightly attenuated form. All this notwithstanding, it is the non-textual aspects that appear to play a crucial role in generating irony in the original story.

Another technique Chwalibóg resorts to, in order to retain irony, is literal translation, where he renders into Polish a biblical allusion embedded firmly in the European cultural context: “to make the jungle ways straight” / *prostować ścieżki dżungli*.¹⁷ Indirectly, this textual allusion undermines one of the pillars of European culture (Christianity, as symbolised by the gospel), and damages any potential religious arguments in favour of white people’s colonising efforts.

In the original, the long description quoted above is flanked by the nursery rhyme motto (left out in the Polish translation) and the anecdotal explanation of the origins of Georgie’s untypical nickname (quoted above). This approach, whereby ironic passages are simply left out of the translation, is likewise part of Mateo’s list of strategies for irony in translation. Both passages left out of the Polish translation have the same narrative function: they relate to the interpretation of the character’s name, and are therefore part of his ironic characterisation. The Polish translator’s decision to leave those two passages out may have been influenced by the fact that both are deeply rooted in different aspects of British tradition. Taken together, the popular 19th-century nursery rhyme and the linguistic joke that references technological progress (symbolised by the steamship) on the one hand, and

¹⁷ Matthew 3:3: “For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight” (KJV).

the hermetic world of white colonists in Burma on the other, offer a framework for interpreting the childish irresponsibility of Georgie, who relies on imperial law to legitimize his moral missteps.

However, Chwalibóg may have decided to leave those ironic fragments out for reasons other than a wariness of obscure cultural references, since he does not shrink from translating references to contemporary British policy in other instances. “For instance, Georgie is characterized by his “venturing out into the field” (Polish: *wyprawy w pole*) in order to “dress (...) down dacoits on his own account; for the country was still smouldering and would blaze when least expected” (GP, p. 383).

The nursery rhyme works as a piece of paratext for the story proper, and the second passage, omitted from the Polish translation, contains an explanation of the origins of Georgie’s nickname (an explanation, incidentally, that many native speakers of English find puzzling).¹⁸ Chwalibóg may also have decided to leave that passage out because of it contains cryptic cultural references, especially given that neither passage is strictly necessary for the story to work: both amplify, rather than create, irony in the text. Absent the passages referring to his name, the main character, as he appears in the Polish translation, is still a travesty of a civilised man and deserves nothing but scorn. Taken out of its cultural context, the nursery rhyme motto may have been incomprehensible to Polish readers, possibly to the translator as well. Chwalibóg may also have skipped that passage to avoid the formal and cultural challenges involved in translating nursery rhymes. Based on an interplay of sound and loose associations (researchers have come up with a range of possible historical allusions, but there is no consensus on its origins), the nursery rhyme is a translation challenge on a par with nonsense poetry or Lewis Carroll’s verses in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*.

Even though Chwalibóg resorts to the technique of omission (on Mateo’s list) to leave certain ironic passages out of his translation, he as it were reconciles the account: the balance of irony remains unchanged because the translation contains certain expressions not found in the source text, such as the following:

He found his rough-and-tumble house put straight and made comfortable.
(SP, p. 384)

¹⁸ The obscurity of this passage is raised on the Kipling Society website (McGivering 2006).

Kawalerskie mieszkanie Porgiego, w którym panował nieład nie do opisania, **zamieniło się niebawem na małe *home***, urządzone wygodnie i wykwintnie. (GP, 42)

[Literal back-translation from the Polish: “Once messy beyond description, Porgie’s bachelor pad was soon turned into a small home, comfortably and tastefully appointed.”]

Chwalibóg uses here a different translation strategy described by Mateo (“No irony in ST becomes irony in TT”). He interjects the innocent phrase “małe *home*” (“a small *home*”), a calque from English not found in the original story, to serve as a hidden clue of cultural oppression in Burma, and as an oblique reference to British cultural and social domination. Underneath the appearance of plausible description, Polish readers can sense the ironic potential of ambiguity concealed in the phrase, since the adjective *małe* (small) can be interpreted as being deprecating to the important symbol that is home.

Although Chwalibóg arguably manages to convey the story’s patent irony in his Polish translation, the exact colonial context in which the original text operated may not have been fully recognisable to readers in Poland. This makes it likely that the story was straightforwardly interpreted by readers as a credible portrayal of life in the British colony of Burma.

The strange narrative ride

The anonymous translator of “The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes”¹⁹ was dealing with a story where irony resides in the syntactic rather than the semantic layer of the text. The ironic potential becomes apparent in how the story is put together. Kipling creates two narrators, one being a supernarrator who recounts the story of the other narrator (a participant in the events), and impersonates him in the narrative. The text thus conflates three separate but overlapping narrative agents (writer – supernarrator – narrator). The three-pronged structure produces detachment and invites readers to question the narrator’s claims. The ambiguity is thus thrown into sharp relief – that is to say, an ironic situation is produced.

¹⁹ The story appeared in Polish as “Dziwna przygoda Morrowbie Jukesa”, meaning “The strange adventure of Morrowbie Jukes”.

In one of his studies, Muecke distinguishes between the object and the victim of irony. In that view, an object of irony is “what one is ironical about”: a person (this may include the ironist), a custom, an institution, etc. that receives the ironic treatment; a victim, by contrast, has “confident unawareness”, that is to say becomes entangled in the ironic situation and accepts its rules. Those two related concepts, Muecke notes, cannot be easily told apart in literature, because it is not always easy to tell whether the writer treats characters as objects or victims of irony (cf. Muecke 1969: 34–35).

It is difficult to determine whether Morrowbie Jukes, the story’s protagonist and narrator, is the object of the irony or its victim. Granted, he treats his experiences earnestly, and recounts them with an affectation that must stir doubt in the reader’s mind. In order to view Jukes as a victim of the irony, one would have to assume that he fails to realize his own ridiculousness. Through his many understatements and attempts to distance himself from what he regards as an embarrassing story, Jukes projects a certain self-image to the implicit listener/reader, in an effort to protect his reputation as a serious engineer in the colonial administration. He achieves the opposite effect, which increases the ironic distance between Jukes and the supernarrator who recounts his story, especially given that the supernarrator peppers his prologue with a series of appeasing phrases that paradoxically alert the reader to potential mendacity: it “is well known, is perfectly true, [Jukes] certainly would not take the trouble to invent imaginary traps”. The supernarrator also tells us that Jukes “could earn more by doing his legitimate work” (Polish: *zarobilby więcej, pracując w swoim właściwym fachu*), supposedly an argument in support of the story’s veracity, similar to the fact that the character becomes emotional with every retelling of his story, which the supernarrator insists cannot suggest deceit. Another indication that the story is purportedly correct is the fact that Jukes “touches it up”, in later retellings, with “Moral Reflections” and a detailed description of the setting. In other words, the reader receives a series of alarming signals that serve to open the text up to a possible double interpretation: one taken at face value, and one ironic.

The supernarrator keeps the appearance of earnestness and insists that the story leaves no room for ambiguity, though he adds the following reflection:

And, since it is perfectly true that in the same Desert is a wonderful city where all the rich money lenders retreat after they have made their fortunes (fortunes so vast that the owners cannot trust even the strong hand of the Government

to protect them, but take refuge in the waterless sands), and drive sumptuous C-spring barouches, and buy beautiful girls and decorate their palaces with gold and ivory and Minton tiles and mother-n'-pearl, I do not see why Jukes's tale should not be true.²⁰ (SRMJ, p. 311)

Ponieważ zaś jest rzeczą dowiedzioną, że w tej samej pustyni znajduje się wspaniałe miasto, gdzie się udają wszyscy lichwiarze po zrobieniu majątku (fortuny te są takie, że ich właściciele nie mogą zaufać nawet rządowej opiece), uciekając do tych piasków jałowych, aby tam jeździć pięknymi pojazdami, kupować piękne dziewczęta i zdobić swoje złocone pałace kością słoniową, porcelaną i masą perłową – to nie wiem dlaczego przygoda Jukes'a nie miałaby być prawdziwą. (DPMJ, p. 5)

In this instance, the supernarrator uses affirmation to contradict his own story, and appears to be actually saying that, since there are no wonderful cities in the desert, Jukes's ride must therefore also be a lie.

Obviously, the existence of hidden cities in the desert is not a proven fact – the idea is as preposterous as the character's escape from a village of the dead in a sand crater in the desert, where he supposedly found himself trapped. Whether or not we give credence to the story, the supernarrator opens it with a knowing wink to the reader (listener) to mark irony – and to leave both alternatives open. Like Jukes, the supernarrator belongs to the world of the story, which he recounts to the reader within the terms of colonial life, withholding any kind of judgement. However, the language of the narrative which describes Jukes and his exploits is full of English understatement which, combined with the irrational details of the story, puts the character's credibility very much in doubt.

Chakhachiro cites Muecke's idea that irony involves, among other possibilities, "pretended agreement with the victim (of irony)" (Chakhachiro 2009: 37), a device Kipling clearly uses in the passage above. Hirsch cites another marker of irony, namely "a pretence [on the narrator's part] to be an injudicious person speaking to an uninitiated audience" (Hirsch 2011: 182), which arguably applies to "The Strange Ride" as well. In this case the role of the "uninitiated audience" falls to the narrator's implied readers/listeners within the story.

Hirsch also draws attention to the fact that irony in the narrative layer of a text may become apparent when the narrator-character misappraises

²⁰ All English quotations from the story are based on Kipling 1994.

and misevaluates his or her own actions. This is what happens in Kipling's story – the narrator misinterprets reality, and fails to realise the incongruity of his own reaction. The role of the ironic supernarrator is to bring this home to the reader.

The anonymous translator of the story preserves the irony by using the strategy of literal translation. In interpreting the text, English and Polish readers find themselves in a similar position. No cultural context is required, in this case, to recognise the text's ironic potential: all it takes is to note the supernarrator's dubious claims. It takes no special cultural knowledge on the reader's part to identify and interpret the irony – in this instance Kipling's ironic narrative structure bears the hallmark of universality.

The translations of Kipling's stories, discussed in this article, are examples of colonial British literature reaching Polish readers in the early 20th century. The stories use a range of techniques to inject the texts with ironic ambiguity, an early stylistic trademark in the writings of the future Nobel Prize winner (cf. Kurowska 1987: 163–164). Kipling uses irony at the syntactic and the semantic levels of his stories, introducing it with a range of intratextual, contextual and structural techniques. By opening the texts up to ambiguous interpretation, irony communicates the ambivalent attitude of Anglo-Indians towards their colonial life in the late 19th century. To the young writer, irony was an instrument for articulating his reservations about the workings of the British Empire, and a shield behind which he could take cover. After all, irony is always ambiguous, and facilitates the emergence of humour in a text, the understated British humour being no exception.

This brief overview of the strategies used, more than a century ago, by Feliks Chwalibóg and one other anonymous translator to translate irony maps onto the typology of techniques that Maria Mateo developed with the resources of modern scholarship. Given the high number of formal indicators of irony in the texts, the translators were mostly able to preserve the ironic dimension of the texts, even where some of the ambiguous passages were left out in their translations. In Kipling's stories, most of the objects of irony are distinctive characters who embody qualities typically found in representatives of colonial society, such as colonial civil servants (Morrowbie Jukes), itinerant ship crew members (Pambe, Nurkeed), or the temperamental and somewhat obtuse early colonists (Georgie Porgie). However, this is just one textual face of Kipling's irony.

Kipling's ironic stories must have been attractive to Polish readers hungry for stories taking place in an oriental setting. Published with no explanatory

commentary, the stories were above all colourful portrayals of the lives of white people in the colonies. The ironic situation in those stories is coded into the Anglo-Indian narrator's ambivalent attitude towards life in the colonies and his distinctive narrative technique – meaning that Polish readers may have easily missed the ironic point. Removed from their original cultural context, and haphazardly slapped together into new collections, the stories could be easily misinterpreted by readers unfamiliar with the life of white people in India or the problems of Anglo-Indian society. For instance, they could be mistaken for straightforward praise of the immoral conduct of British people in new colonies (“Georgie Porgie”), especially given the fact that Kipling's prose tackles a variety of topics and shows no ideological consistency. Without the aid of critical commentary, readers dealing with Polish-language collections of Kipling's stories, such as *Zaczarowany dom* or *Zemsta Dugary*, would have had no access to the contextual clues required to recognize his authorial intention, an important consideration in any ironic text. This disruption of the communicative situation between the writer/translator and the reader may have affected interpretations, on the part of the readers, of irony in translation.

Translated from Polish by Piotr Szymczak

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