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The Blastulablob of (Reading) Experience – Semiophan in the Polish Translation of Gravity’s Rainbow by Thomas Pynchon

ABSTRACT

The article includes the analysis of Gravity’s Rainbow, a novel by Thomas Pynchon in Polish translation. The novel, written within the postmodern convention, has a complex structure which resists hasty interpretative appropriation thanks to the multiplicity of subplots and ambiguous literary devices, posing a serious challenge to the translator. The analysis utilizes concepts from contemporary literary theory and philosophy, e.g., Derrida’s dissemination and misreading, Eco’s open work and epiphany as an epistemological metaphor, to point out that the poetics of Pynchon’s novel requires a special approach to its translation, taking into account its inherent indeterminacy. In the interpretative process the open structure of Pynchon’s work gives rise to the phenomenon which might be called semiophan i.e., one instance of interpretative revelation that a part of the textual tissue can be seminal for the interpretation of the novel. The presentation will provide examples of this phenomenon including the prominent case of Pynchon’s neologism blastulablob, which escapes simple interpretation and can epitomise the experience of reading/translating Pynchon’s works laying bare the infinite productivity of the interpretative process. The study concludes by stating that the boundless process of interpretation has to be locked by the translator, who ultimately decides to follow one instance of semiophan, which becomes actualised in the final translation product.

KEY WORDS

Interpretation, literary translation, postmodernism, textual indeterminacy

1. Introduction

The aim of the article is to highlight the importance of interpretation in the translation process, pointing out, after Hans-Georg Gadamer, that “every translation is already interpretation” and no translation can proceed without an interpretative act. The statement,
inscribed in the larger project of hermenetutics of translation, has far-reaching implications: the translator not only has to keep the intention of the original and preserve it in the translation, but also to interpret its “meaning so as to be able to set it in a new context of the other language, to express it in a new language-world in such a way as to establish it as a valid meaning within that world and in the face of such circumstances every translation is like a betrayal (...), a kind of treason committed against the original text” (Gadamer cited in Schmidt, 2000, p.69). In consideration of the above, if the issue of interpretation is of utmost importance for reading and translation, inevitably leading to the betrayal of the source text, it seems justifiable to explore a wide range of attitudes of various scholars to this complicated matter.

2. **Structuralist and poststructuralist approaches to the issue of interpretation**

Algirdas Julien Greimas, taking the structuralist approach to interpretation, claims that sense is created by *textual isotopy* or by the reiteration of semes (basic units of meaning), whereas polysemy may be defined as the interaction of two or more *heterogenous isotopies*. Greimas accentuates the role of isotopy which allows readers to make a uniform reading and to overcome any possible ambivalence within a text. In the context of polysemy each seme (or a word) can be identified within a given isotopy. Griemas and Courtes stipulate that polysemy can be understood as “pluri-isotopy: the interaction of two or more heterogeneous isotopies” (1975, p. 236). For Greimas, isotopy has no radically ambiguous character since any shifts of sense can be isotopically located.

Jacques Derrida’s views stand in contrast to Algirdas Greimas’s hermeneutic concept as *isotopy* emphasises semantics, with regard to the repetition of *semes*. Derrida, taking the poststructuralist approach, advocates ambivalent character of meaning consisting in textual *aporias* and textual *undecidables* undermining the stability of sense production. He excoriates the tendency to separate a sign from a network of differences which is the only reason why it can exist since a linguistic element is not able to operate without reference to other absent elements. Consequently, each sign is formed by the non-presence of other elements and their *grammes* (traces). Every text is a transmutation of other texts, a textual tissue constituted on the basis of their traces. Meaning of a text, not the function of an author, is not transferred but produced through repetition and differentiation (Derrida, 1972, p. 38). Derrida applies the concept of *texte general* to describe the range of boundless
conceptualisations – every text creates only an illusion of a subject’s intentionality, unconscious of being inscribed in the general text. No meaning exists by itself, no meaning resides outside the context and signs function only within a network of references (1967, pp. 70-73). Derrida disposess of the term polysemy (presuming the existence of one ideal meaning) for the sake of dissemination understood as sense proliferation in the infinite network of differences in boundless contexts (1972, p. 257-316):

We are playing on the fortuitous resemblance ... of seme and semen. There is no communication of meaning between them. And yet, by this floating, purely exterior collusion, accident produces a kind of semantic mirage: the deviance of meaning, its reflection-effect in writing, sets something off... it is a question of remarking a nerve, a fold, an angle that interrupts totality: in a certain place, a place of well-determined form, no series of semantic valences can any longer be closed or reassembled... the lack and the surplus can never be stabilized in the plenitude of a form (Derrida, 1981, p. 45-46).

Sense becomes created in infinitely unfolding contexts. Reading can only be a misreading offering an interpretation which might be replaced by others. Dissemination destroys the central hegemony of the text and forms a plurality of filiations. This free play of meaning is called by Derrida the play of the world stressing the contingence of meaning, which questions the transcendental or the ontological (1967, p. 427).

The key issue for any interpretation is the relation of the signifier to the signified, which seems to be unstable according to many scholars: the above mentioned Jacques Derrida (the concept of free play), Jacques Lacan (the sliding signifier), Charles Sanders Peirce (the interpretant), Roland Barthes (connotation) and Umberto Eco (unlimited semiosis). The French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan describes a process of “the incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier” as no specific signifier can be anchored in a particular signified (1977, p. 154). Roland Barthes (1974, p. 9) concludes that “denotation is not the first meaning, but pretends to be so; under this illusion, it is ultimately no more than the last of the connotations (the one which seems both to establish and close the reading), the superior myth by which the text pretends to return to the nature of language, to language as nature.” For him connotation creates the illusion of denotation and the illusion of transparency of language and the identity of the signifier with the signified. Furthermore, Barthes declares that the author is dead and differentiates between writerly texts (open to
the infinite sense production, constituted by diversification, stratification and the conflict of elements of meaning from various linguistic layers leading to the readers’ *jouissance* and *readerly ones* (more conventional, not challenging the readers leading to only to the readers’ *plaisir*) (Barthes, 1975, p. 13-15). Charles Sanders Peirce notes that “a sign... addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. The sign which it creates I call the *interpretant* of the first sign.” For him the interpretant is of a different nature than the signified as it itself creates a sign in the interpreter’s mind (Peirce, 1931-58, p. 2.228). He also notices that Umberto Eco applies the expression *unlimited semiosis* to refer to the way in which a series of consecutive interpretants could infinitely proceed without ultimate resolution (Peirce, 1931-58, p. 1.339, 2.303). Eco describes as *closed texts* those which favour one particular interpretation in contrast to *open texts* which allow interpretative freedom, stressing the indeterminate character of literary works. (1981, p. 3-5). Also Eco, describing the poetics of *Finnegans Wake* by James Joyce (which he deems to be an apt example of an *open work*), utilizes the concept of *epiphany* (understood as a sudden revelation or realisation, a flash of recognition) hailing this novel an *epistemological metaphor* or the epiphany of cosmic structure in the sphere of language (1998, p. 155-164).

3. *Semiophany*

Drawing from the above considerations, and in an attempt to describe the complex phenomenon of interpretative indeterminacy, the article applies the concept of *semiophany* to denote a particular instance of the reader’s interpretative revelation, the recognition of the importance of any semiotic aspect of a literary work or a semiotic epiphany of meaning (not limited to semantics but including any means of sense production, e.g. graphic, phonetic or syntactic aspects and encompassing the textual matter in its entirety) which reveals a new disseminated configuration of sense within the semiotic undecidability of the textual tissue. Semiophany will be understood as an instance of the revelation of an interpretative act experienced by a reader who, faced with textual ambiguity, is unable to reach an ultimate hierarchy of meanings. The reader/translator has to become an Apophenic Reader\(^1\) – a reader with the compulsive tendency to perceive meaningful patterns between

\(^1\)Adjective *apophenic* is related to the psychological phenomenon of *apophany* or *apophenia* defined as seeking patterns in seemingly random information.
seemingly not related patterns or random things in order to derive maximum cognitive gain from the textual experience. The concepts might be particularly applicable in the analysis of Thomas Pynchon’s works, which because of their high experimentalism, seem to be the foolhardy gamble with the limits of fiction (McConnell, 1977, p. 176).

4. Gravity’s Rainbow by Thomas Pynchon

Thomas Ruggles Pynchon is one of the leading figures in the postmodern convention. Perceived as the James Joyce of postmodernism, his novels are representative of the whole literary era. His most famous novel, Gravity’s Rainbow, seems to be the embodiment of literary indeterminacy, including a wide range of linguistic experiments which undermine the traditional perception of literature. Even though it is possible to determine the protagonist, Tyrone Slothrop, and a vague plot related to WWII and the V-2 rocket, the novel’s world is extremely fragmented and thoroughly episodic, containing over 400 characters and countless shifts between narrators, digressions, dreamlike passages, flashbacks, encyclopaedic allusions, exploring multifarious literary devices and techniques.

5. The ontological dominant

It seems impossible to determine one dominant centripetal force within Pynchon’s works, the epitome of literary diversity. McHale endeavours to explain Pynchon’s fiction with the use of the term ontological dominant, which focuses on issues related to existence, subjectivity and identity. He states that “an ontology is a description of a universe, not of the universe” (2004, p. 27), and accentuates the indefinite article. According to McHale, Pynchon’s Gravity’s Rainbow appears to constitute a breakthrough in his oeuvre: it is an instance of fiction in which “anarchist miracle” can occur, leading to the “unconstrained projection of worlds in plural” (McHale, 2004, pp. 24-25). The epistemological crisis in Pynchon’s novels can only be overcome by comparing equally believable versions of truth and admitting the parallel existence of multiple universes. Sidney Stencil, a character in Pynchon’s early novel V., aptly summarises the puzzlement felt by Pynchon’s characters and readers: “Short of examining the entire history of each individual participating… short of anatomising each soul, what hope has anyone of understanding a Situation?” (Pynchon, 1963, p. 433). The ambiguity of a Situation, an ontological predicament where nothing can be taken for granted resulting from the glaring lack of any certainties in worlds described by
Pynchon seems to be the primary effect of his writing (Schaub, 1981, p. 3-5). Pynchon’s narratives present a profusion of possible worlds, i.e. “potential states of affairs, subjective realities, plans, expectations, dreams, fantasies” without a single centripetal world as their core, while his characters, “suffering systematized delusions and projecting hostile forces”, are prone to hallucinations, fantasy or paranoia (Siegel, 1976, p. 50). Apart from creating “subjective realities”, Pynchon also creates “multiply objective alternative worlds: ‘lost’ worlds, parallel worlds passages between worlds visitations form other worlds cameo visitations from historical figures” and watches them collide (McHale, 2012, p. 104-105).

Pynchon’s narrative departure from traditional narrative proceeds by not generating “clear suspense-inducing events” but rather letting the characters to sort out what is happening around them. Pynchon’s narrative lacks a reliable external perspective since it is focalised through the minds of his characters, which poses a serious challenge for readers who have difficulty in following even the basic plot (Nicol, 2009, p. 92). Pynchon’s characteristic feature is scepticism to the Western master narratives of scientific progress. Instead, he focuses on “little narratives”, i.e. “small scale separatist cultural enclaves”, e.g. the anarchic Counterforce in Gravity’s Rainbow and provides models of the whole postmodern condition, e.g. the Zone, “a space of anarchic freedom, multiplicity and social improvisation” (McHale, 2012, p. 98-99).

Furthermore, strange loops in the narrative reinforce the ambiguity of Pynchon’s works, i.e. the worlds of various ontological statuses can be compared, stacked and piled on one another. Such proliferation of textual worlds creates multifarious paradoxes that even further foreground the story’s ontology (“mise en abyme – an inset text or artwork mirrors the primary narrative” or “trompe l’œil – an inset level is mistaken for the primary level”) (McHale, 1992, p. 87-114). Gravity’s Rainbow starts with what can be assumed to be the real world, but later is revealed to be just one character’s nightmare and finishes with the revelation that the entire novel may actually be a movie watched by “old fans who’ve always been at the movies” i.e. the readers (Pynchon, 1973, p. 760).

6. Binary production of meaning

The concept of interface appears to be one of the main principles of Gravity’s Rainbow, which consists in the depiction of a frozen moment in space and time, approximating the moment of apocalyptic revelation. The suspended revelation manifests itself in verbal
obessions reflecting the opposition of outside/inside and its transient nature, i.e. the interface. The external/internal code chains of meaning, “polarised chains of symbols” (Fowler, 1980, p. 22), traceable in the textual matter, abound in Gravity’s Rainbow forming an endless network of references, simultaneously “denying the absolute validity of dichotomies: the domain between one and zero, the interface between dream and reality, between self and society” (Bloom, 1986, p. 88), life and death, the human body and the world, this and the Other Kingdom etc. Pynchon’s symbolic chaining applies two techniques - metaphor and metonymy, self-consciously making choices related to the textual tissue, a typical symptom of postmodern fiction. Lodge considers Pynchon to be one of the authors that have “deliberately taken metaphoric or metonymic devices to excess, tested them as it were, to destruction, parodied and burlesqued them in the process of using them, and thus sought to escape from their tyranny” (1977, p. 235). Undoubtedly,

the primary mental operations of Pynchon’s characters when dealing ‘with the welter of the outside world’ is to project binary patterns (...) and unable to endure the tensions of such a world, they attempt to ‘level’ it by repressing those terms in the oppositions which are considered obnoxious, thereby paving the way for a destructive dialectical process. (Hohmann 1986, p. 370)

Pynchon’s narrators avoid either/or perspectives, advocate both/and views and, by highlighting the paradoxes of binarisation, “draw attention to ‘interfaces’ created by the simultaneous perception of polarised terms (...) thereby mitigating the desire to focus on only one of the opposing terms” (Hohmann, 1986, p. 370). Each chain of coded messages can be linked to another symbolic sequence, which may be infinitely connected to others (for instance paper is related to the negative codes of bureaucracy, abstraction, white and language, which, in turn, have their own consecutive chains of signification throughout the whole Gravity’s Rainbow) as “the nervous system of Pynchon’s novel is (...) composed of webs of meaning interwoven into each other to create complex structures of suggestion, symbolism and coded value” (Fowler, 1980, pp. 23-25). Binary oppositions, never an end in themselves, always become interwoven in an endless mesh of signifiers. When one binary opposition is established, underlying patterns of signification become automatically activated, leading to “the onset, the leading edge of the discovery that everything is connected” (Pynchon, 1973, p. 703). However, it has to stated that any binary opposition in
Pynchon’s novel are provisional and any excessive attachment to them might be seen as brutalisation of his ambivalent message.

7. Examples of semiophany

The following analysis includes three prominent instances of the above mentioned phenomenon, i.e. semiophany from Gravity’s Rainbow by Thomas Pynchon related to the neologism blastulablob, the secret language (idiolalia) and ss letter cluster iconicity.

7.1 Neologism – blastulablob

Pynchon’s neologism is the combination of blastula, the early stage of embryonic development, and blob, shapeless mass. It appears in the context of one subplot within Pynchon’s novel, where Edward Pointsman, a Pavlovian researcher conditions Octopus Grigori to attack Katje Borgesius, a Dutch double agent, so that Tyron Slothrop, the protagonist, an agent and also a subject of conditioning, can gain her trust. The neologism seems to be located at the intersection of many textual threads, making it a true undecidable allowing of multiple interpretations.

Already, by itself, the answer is growing, one moment a featureless blastulablob, the next folding, beginning to differentiate... (Pynchon, 1973, p. 51)

Odpowiedź nasuwa się sama, w jednej chwili pozbawiona cech blastula, w następnej coraz wyraźniejszy, materializujący się kształt... (Pynchon, 2001, p. 40)

Taking Into consideration all the possible angles of interpretation, the signifier blastulablob can be interpreted as 1. linguistic novelty (blending) – an expressive way of picturing a giant octopus which is not clearly visible to metaphorically emphasize the inceptive and indeterminate aspect of formation of the answer related to the outcome of the experiment 2. architectural reference (blobitecture – a style in architecture) 3. iconicity related to the round shapes of letters (B B O B) signifying cyclicality 4. reference to liquidity (onomatopoeic sound of water) 5. reference to explosion (onomatopoeic blast) 6. reference to birth (blastula – an early stage of embryonic development) 7. reference to information technology/mathematics (blob – binary large object) 8. an enigmatic animal (octopus from a Gothic horror devilish movie); grotesque comism – pastiche of pulp adventure stories;
allusion to Japanese tradition of erotic tentacle art 9. symbol of destruction of innocent past (the pre-octopus stage): tasting the fruit from the tree of knowledge – a brutal departure from idyllic unity of signs 10. a sinister explosive force which tangles readers into a web of endlessly drifting signifiers; octopus as the gloomy apparatus of state or corporation; metaphor of power agglomeration 11. a symbol of Pavlovian conditioning 10. an epistemological metaphor – the epiphany of semiophany (of semiotic undecidability) revealed within one word in the texture; the metaphor of the situation of readers/translators; the metaphor of the need to structure human cognition in the face of indeterminate reality; the resultant finality of translators’ decisions following the inceptive blastulablob stage; blastulablob, the multi-layered undecidable, seen as metaphorical and iconic, simultaneously understood on many semiotic levels, can be read as an epitome of reading experience and the experience of human epistemological/ontological condition in general.

The neologism in the source text is linked with blob, the unshaped chaos of human experience, in another passage related to scientific experiments in Gravity’s Rainbow. The reference is lost in the target text as in the first case blob is omitted while in the second one rendered as porcja. Therefore, the epistemological situation of Pynchon’s characters (and his readers), interpreting a shapeless blob of experience based on their own preconceptions is limited and conventionalised in translation.

The basic theory, is that when given an unstructured stimulus, some shapeless blob of experience, the subject, will seek to impose, structure on it. How, he goes about structuring this blob, will reflect his needs, his hopes (…) (Pynchon, 1973, p. 81)

Sprowadza się to do tego, że osobnik, otrzymując nieustrukturowany bodziec, jakąś bez-kształtną porcję, porcję doświadczenia, będzie usiłował narzucić mu strukturę. To, jak zabierze się do, do narzucania struktury, będzie odzwierciedlało jego potrzeby, nadzieje (…) (Pynchon, 2001, pp. 71-72)

7.2 The idiolalia conundrum

Idiolalia means a secret language created for the purpose of private communication. Here, the language was devised by twins, Enzian and Blicero and takes the form of the indeterminate expression “medoschnicka bleelar medoometnozz in bergamot”. It may be assumed that the source text enigmatic idiolalia can be interpreted in an infinite number of
ways. It is impossible to impose one decoding system on the ambiguous message, additionally induced by a truth serum drum, sodium amytal, or to choose the right manner of decryption: whether the message should be read as an apophany of sounds including words from one or many languages twisted in the hallucinogenic vision, whether it should decrypted anagrammatically or by means of any other wordplay or whether it should be interpreted as pure sound symbolism or construed literally (e.g. bergamot is a variety of oranges). Weisenburger offers one interpretation, noticing words such as blicero, enzian, zero, kabbala, mammon and doomed in order to suggest one possibility of reading: “Mammon doomed Blicero; the black Enzian gets zero” (1988, p. 373). However, he comes to the conclusion that “any such efforts to discover malediction or benediction in the letters may of course be viewed as the imposition of system where none is invited” (1988, p. 373).

The target text version contains a less cryptic rendition of the conundrum, not based on letters but on syllables and thus less complicated: the rearranged syllables allow one inescapable solution to the idiolalia puzzle:

nectar/mam/ro/en/do/ze/mona/zian/sta/ro/sem/lo/blice

are rearranged as

Ma-mona lo-sem Blice-ro, En-zian do-sta-nie ze-ro.

Eco differentiates between two types of literary structures: the rhizomatic maze (a rhizomatic labyrinth with many alleys whichfurcate and branch out e.g., postmodern texts), and the mannerist maze (with one solution and only one established end, e.g., realist fiction) (1983, p. 57). The unresolved question is whether Pynchon’s original charade possesses only one solution and forms the mannerist maze or constitutes the rhizomatic maze of infinite possibilities of interpretation. However complicated the conundrum might prove to be in the target text, it still has only one solution, and, therefore, the ambiguous riddle in the source text becomes limited and rationalised.

No not for roguery until the monitors are there in Washing sheets of earth to mate and say medoshnicka blelar medoometnozz in bergamot and playful fantasy under the throne and nose of the least merciful king... (Pynchon, 1973, p. 746)
7.3 Iconicity of the ss cluster

The shape of the first letter in Gravity’s Rainbow i.e. A, seems to resemble a rocket waiting for the launch and a reversal of the V-2 missile, also known as A-4. The first letter represents the launch, whereas “—“, the last punctuation mark may be considered the consequence of the havoc wrought by the rocket, leaving nothing after the total annihilation. The iconicity is not recreated except for the alliteration: screaming↔comes↔across↔sky probably to imitate the sound of the coming rocket (the target text also applies sibilants: przeszywa↔wskroś). “Any object or event in Pynchon’s world, the peripheral as well as the central” (Cooper, 1983, p. 187-188), such as the double ss in across, “the sibilant weave” within the text (Pynchon, 1973, p. 152) may start the signifying sequence of associations: it can become double integral (a mathematical term), the SS emblem, the shape of lovers curled asleep (Pynchon, 1973, p. 302) or the ancient rune that stands for the yew tree (Pynchon, 1973, p. 301).

A screaming comes across the sky. (Pynchon, 1973, p. 3)

Wycie przeszywa niebo na wskroś. (Pynchon, 2001, p. 9)

Now everybody—(Pynchon, 1973, p. 760)

Wszyscy razem - (Pynchon, 2001, p. 598)

The abundance of double or more ss alliterations and references running throughout the whole Gravity’s Rainbow facilitates infinite sense production related to its possible symbolism of doubling and binarity.

7.3.1 In case of S’d against the S of himself rendered as esowata przy jego esowatości only the denotation of the letter (esowatość) and not its iconic shape is recreated in the target text, whereas in case of belonging Slothropless translated as nie-Slothrop należący, an attempt to recreate the neologism is made. However, the effort might be imprecise as nie-Slothrop depicts a state contrasted with his identity, while Slothropless implies the lack of him.
For a minute he lies coming awake, no hangover, still belonging Slothropless to some teeming cycle of departure and return. Katje lies, quick and warm, S'd against the S of himself, beginning to stir (Pynchon, 1973, p. 198)

Dłuższą chwilę dochodzi do siebie, ani śladu kaca, wciąż nie-Slothrop należący do rozkręconego cyklu odejść i powrotów. Katje leży obok, żywa i ciepła, esowata przy jego esowatości, już zaczyna się poruszać (Pynchon, 2001, p. 165)

7.3.2 In case of spokes are shaped like Ss rendered as szprychy w kształcie litery „S”, the iconic shape of the letter is recreated only as one “S” and not as double.

a moving wood scaffold open on all sides, hoisted by old tarry ropes and cast-iron pulleys whose spokes are shaped like Ss (Pynchon, 1973, pp. 3-4)

ruchome drewniane rusztowanie, otwarte ze wszystkich stron, wciąga-przez stare smołowane liny i żeliwne krążki o szprychach w kształcie litery „S” (Pynchon, 2001, p. 10)

7.3.3 The fragment "ei ssörrender." Is Webley's V here for victory, or ssörrender? translated as „pöd-daie ssie”. Czy V Webleya oznacza zwycięstwo czy kapitulację? precisely recreates the phonetic German version of the English “I surrender” with the double s: ei ssörrender is rendered as pöd-daie ssie (a phonetic German version of the Polish poddaję się).

One of PWD's classic propaganda leaflets these days urges the Volks-grenadier: SETZT V-2 EIN!, with a footnote, explaining that "V-2" means to raise both arms in "honorable surrender"—more gallows-humor—and telling how to say, phonetically, "ei ssörrender." Is Webley's V here for victory, or ssörrender? (Pynchon, 1973, p. 230)

7.3.4 In case of *goes curving through the ogival opening* rendered as *skręca pod ostrym łukiem portal*, iconicity is not recreated, even though the connection to ss chain of meaning is retained: *ogive*, a specialist term from the domain of architecture, can be defined as an S-shaped arch. The target text which renders *ogive* as *ostryłuk*, which seems sufficient to identify it architectonically as the equivalent specialist term for this type of structure in Polish is *ostrołuk*.

The road away *goes curving through the ogival opening*, out into the night meadows (Pynchon, 1973, p. 573)

Droga *skręca pod ostrym łukiem portalu* i niknie wśród łąk spowitych w noc (Pynchon, 2001, p. 452)

7.3.5 In case of *yess, yess* rendered as *sssgoda, sssgoda*, the iconic aspect is recreated thanks to the choice of *zgoda*, a word with a sibilant, and the triple multiplication of the voiceless s instead of the voiced z, which imitates the idiolect of the German entrepreneur Walther Rathenau.

"*Yess, yess,*" all staring at him, "but then why keep saying 'mind and body'? Why make that distinction?"

(Pynchon, 1973, p. 590)

- *Sssgoda, sssgoda* - wszyscy patrzą na niego - ale w takim razie dlaczego mówi pan o ciele i umyśle? Po co taka sprzeczność? (Pynchon, 2001, p. 465)

7.3.6 In case of *Put ssem back on, at vunce!* translated as *Naleszy je wlozyc natychmiazt!*, the iconicity of ss is not retained unlike the imitation of the Nazi speak through the distortion of particular sounds in the Polish language: *wlozyc* (l→l, ż→z, ć→c), *naleszy* (ż→sz), and *natychmiazt* (s→z).

"*Miss Müller-Hochleben,*" reading her nametag, "you look *beastly* without your glasses. *Put ssem back on, at vunce!*" this comic Nazi routine being inspired by her surname (Pynchon, 1973, p. 633).

- Droga panno Müller-Hochleben - czytając plakietkę przypiętą na piersi - bez bryli wygląda pani potwornie.

*Naleszy je wlozyc natychmiazt!* - Żartobliwa hitlerowska gadka, zainspirowana nazwiskiem dziewczyny (Pynchon, 2001, p. 500).
The proliferation of ss iconic clusters of letters might be seen as an example of semiophany by combining the ambivalent interpretations of the graphic and semantic level and multiplying possible interpretative combinations: mathematics (double integral) → esoteric runes → Nazi symbolism → German speech → shape of machinery → shape of lovers → architectural shapes → symbol of loss → the epistemological binarity or its transcendence.

8. Conclusion

In view of the above considerations related to the scope of interpretative indeterminacy in Pynchon’s work, the present study may draw the following conclusions related to translation theory and practice: 1. translation is inevitably related to interpretation 2. the interpretation of literary works (especially experimental, postmodern or highly defamiliarised) depends on the individual translator’s semiophany/semiophanies based on the awareness of the infinite sense productivity of the original 3. the boundless process of interpretation has to be locked at some point by the translator, who ultimately decides to follow one instance of semiophany, which becomes actualised in the final translation product 4. there might be many translations of a literary work (many translative dominants) depending on the semiophany/semiophanies of particular readings/misreadings 5. in the process of translation the translator’s task is to decide which semiophany/semiophanies will be recreated in the target text (one instance of misreading/mistranslation), which means that there will always be a certain loss of the original sense production but also a certain gain of new sense productive potential. The above conclusions can be applied especially to novels which are subject to the ontological dominant as defined by McHale. In case of such works, translators should be aware of the possible ambiguities in order to create target texts which preserve the original defamiliarisation and ontological uncertainty of the source text rather than putting the translation product into the over-rationalising straitjacket of conventional interpretation. In case of the analysed novel, Pynchon’s Gravity’s Rainbow, the interpretative ambiguity of the target text in comparison with the source text is seriously diminished: the ambivalent neologism blastulablob is omitted, the enigma of idiolalia becomes a mere one-solution riddle and the ss iconicity becomes limited in its extent.
The blastulablob of (reading) experience – semiophany in the Polish translation of Gravity’s Rainbow by Thomas Pynchon

References


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Japanese cover for Gravity's Rainbow. [Preface: Last year I developed a fascination with Timothy Leary's deep interest in author Thomas Pynchon & Gravity's Rainbow which led me to reach out to the highly knowledgable OG (Michael from Overweening Generalist) for his input on this topic. A lengthy e-mail discussion ensued and out of that grew a two-part crossover collaboration between "A Building Roam" and "Overweening Generalist". While my piece focuses on the intrigue of Gravity's Rainbow, the mystery of Pynchon, and Leary's role in all of this, 15 Jelinek translation of Gravity's Rainbow. 16 Inaccuracies in the Plot Summary. 17 Postmodernist? I own Mindful Pleasures: Essays on Thomas Pynchon that came out @ 1977. I've also read large chunks of both Douglas Fowler's and Steven Weisenberger's GR companions, as well as countless essays I pulled from the stacks at Rutgers 25 years ago as a student. I consider Edward Mendelson the man, and his essay (which famously defined GR as an encyclopedic narrative) the single best work on the book I have come across.