

ANGLICA

An International Journal of English Studies

Special Issue: Scotland

29/3 2020

GUEST EDITORS

Aniela Korzeniowska [a.korzeniowska@uw.edu.pl]

Izabela Szymańska [i.szymanska@uw.edu.pl]

EDITOR

Grażyna Bystydzińska [g.bystydzienska@uw.edu.pl]

ASSOCIATE EDITORS

Martin Löschnigg [martin.loeschnigg@uni-graz.at]

Jerzy Nykiel [jerzy.nykiel@uib.no]

Marzena Sokołowska-Paryż [m.a.sokolowska-paryz@uw.edu.pl]

Anna Wojtyś [a.wojtys@uw.edu.pl]

ASSISTANT EDITORS

Magdalena Kizeweter [m.kizeweter@uw.edu.pl]

Dominika Lewandowska-Rodak [dominika.lewandowska@o2.pl]

Bartosz Lutostański [b.lutostanski@uw.edu.pl]

Przemysław Uściński [przemek.u@hotmail.com]

ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDITOR

Aniela Korzeniowska [a.korzeniowska@uw.edu.pl]

ADVISORY BOARD

Michael Bilynsky, University of Lviv

Andrzej Bogusławski, University of Warsaw

Mirosława Buchholtz, Nicolaus Copernicus University, Toruń

Jan Čermák, Charles University, Prague

Edwin Duncan, Towson University

Jacek Fabiszak, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań

Elżbieta Foeller-Pituch, Northwestern University, Evanston-Chicago

Piotr Gąsiorowski, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań

Keith Hanley, Lancaster University

Andrea Herrera, University of Colorado

Christopher Knight, University of Montana

Marcin Krygier, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań

Krystyna Kujawińska-Courtney, University of Łódź

Brian Lowrey, Université de Picardie Jules Verne, Amiens

Zbigniew Mazur, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin

Rafał Molencki, University of Silesia, Sosnowiec

John G. Newman, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Jerzy Rubach, University of Iowa

Piotr Ruszkiewicz, Pedagogical University, Cracow

Hans Sauer, University of Munich

Krystyna Stamirowska, Jagiellonian University, Cracow

Merja Stenroos, University of Stavanger

Jeremy Tambling, University of Manchester

Peter de Voogd, University of Utrecht

Anna Walczuk, Jagiellonian University, Cracow

Jean Ward, University of Gdańsk

Jerzy Welna, University of Warsaw

Florian Zappe, University of Göttingen

GUEST REVIEWERS

Marion Amblard, Université Grenoble Alpes

Dorota Babilas, University of Warsaw

Ewa Kujawska-Lis, University of Warmia and Mazury, Olsztyn

David Malcolm, SWPS University of Social Sciences

and Humanities, Warsaw

Glenda Norquay, Liverpool John Moores University

Dominika Oramus, University of Warsaw

Paweł Rutkowski, University of Warsaw

Agnieszka Solska, University of Silesia, Katowice

Piotr Stalmaszczyk, University of Łódź

Silke Stroh, University of Münster



UNIVERSITY
OF WARSAW

Elżbieta Niewiadoma

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4634-1594>

University of Warsaw

An Analysis of the Polish Translation of Grant Morrison's *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth*

Abstract

Grant Morrison's work has greatly added to the Scottish graphic novel tradition. In this regard, this paper will look at the recent Polish translation of the 25th anniversary edition of one of his iconic and groundbreaking Batman graphic novels, *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth*. A brief description and publishing history of the graphic novel will be provided, followed by an analysis of the quality, style and publishing history of the translation in order to produce a final commentary on how Morrison's work has been rendered into the Polish language. It is concluded the translation is largely faithful to its original although it is marred with a number of careless and confusing errors which ultimately have an impact on the reading experience.

Keywords: graphic novel, Scottish graphic novel, comic translation, literal translation, Grant Morrison, English-Polish translation

1. Introduction

The 1980s saw an interesting development in the American comics industry, specifically for the publishing house Detective Comics, now known widely by their abbreviation, DC. At that time, DC was looking for new writers for their graphic novels, and was turning their attention to Great Britain in the hope of finding a new talent. One of these newly discovered talents happened to be Grant Morrison, a young comic-book writer from Scotland working then for *2000 AD*, the renowned English science fiction comic-book anthology. Born in Glasgow in 1960, Morrison was heavily influenced by mystery and detective stories, as well as fantasy, science fiction and even the occult; he personally cites such individuals as Enid Blyton, Michael Moorcock, J.G. Ballard, J.R.R. Tolkien, Alfred Hitchcock and the renowned occultist Aleister Crowley as having played an important part in his life (Hasted 55). These influences bled into his work, and as such successfully aroused the curiosity of Karen Berger, one of DC's editors at the time.

As described in the biographical documentary *Talking with Gods*, Morrison was invited to London for a meeting, during which he pitched what would become an iconic Batman graphic novel work: *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth*. This cemented Morrison's role in the so-called British invasion of American mainstream comics, being among the first wave of successful writers and artists from Great Britain (Mazur and Danner 175).

Arkham Asylum came out in 1989, and even though it was first published as a 48-page book, its length ended up nearly tripling, largely due to the surrealist and abstract artwork done for the graphic novel by Dave McKean (Halm 67). Morrison created a plot that focused both on Batman and on Amadeus Arkham, the founder of Arkham Asylum. The stories of the two characters intertwine; the plot centred on Batman is directed towards his arrival at the asylum and his subsequent escape from it, while Amadeus Arkham's plot sheds light on how the infamous asylum itself came to be. Amadeus Arkham's story is demonstrated through his diary logs, which provide a literary flashback device that contrasts with the present-day plot within the comic. Both plots have their own villains as well; Batman's features the Joker, along with such villains as Two-Face, Crock, the Mad Hatter, Scarecrow, Clayface, and Maxie Zeus. Amadeus Arkham's plot features the serial killer Martin "Mad Dog" Hawkins, the first patient of Arkham Asylum.

Surrealist and expressionist in its nature, *Arkham Asylum* deals with layers of symbolism allowing for various interpretations of panels and scenes. McKean's artwork provides many visual clues, while Morrison's script contains many references to both popular culture and high literature, as well as the occult. Hence, the graphic novel often becomes vague with its minimal dialogue and surreal illustrations; McKean took care to use photography combined with a blurred, traditional comic style in his illustrations, resulting in: "a simultaneously lifelike and surreal depiction of the asylum, its inhabitants, and the events of the story" (Halm 69). Morrison himself acknowledges how heavily symbolic the short work is, stating that: "because I was doing stuff that was so symbolic, and Dave [McKean] was doing his own stuff that was symbolic, we eventually had two symbol systems merrily fighting each other, with the reader trying to make sense of it all" (Hasted 66).

Arkham Asylum also distinguishes itself through its unusual lettering done by Gaspar Saladino; aside from minor characters whose speech bubbles are lettered in standard comic font, every other character "talks" in a way that reflects their character and personality. For instance, the Joker's words are written in a jagged, red font without a speech balloon, while Batman's words are written in white on a black balloon. Such use of lettering was unusual and unique for comics at the time; often, the lettering did not diverge from the classic black-on-white structure. Therefore, *Arkham Asylum* pushed forward the idea that the graphic design of the words themselves could serve as an aid in character creation.

However, despite *Arkham Asylum*'s ingenuity, intellectual depth and impressive sales, its reception was fairly lukewarm. It was met with harsh criticism that even Morrison did not expect, and which he cites as a rather big disappointment to him (Hasted 67). This was mostly ascribed to the nature of the graphic novel; its confusing panel placement, unusual lettering and overwhelming amount of obscure symbolism alienated many readers (Singer n.p.) and caused misunderstanding: "the unusual narrative structure and style of *Arkham Asylum* caused it to be dismissed as either pretentious or confusing, particularly by an audience expecting a more traditional Batman story" (Halm 69).

Nevertheless, *Arkham Asylum* is still considered to be a classic and one of the most important Batman graphic novels ever published. It was released twice as a special edition in 2004 and 2014, to celebrate its 25th anniversary. Both editions included additional content, such as afterwords, author notes, the author's and illustrator's biographies, photographs of Morrison's original storyboard sketches, as well as Morrison's original script for the comic. Due to its importance and influence, it comes as no surprise that both *Arkham Asylum*'s regular issue and subsequent special editions were translated and published into many languages, including Polish.

2. The Polish Publication of *Arkham Asylum*

The regular edition of *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth*, was translated into Polish under the title *Azyl Arkham: Poważny dom na poważnej ziemi* and published in 2005 by the publishing house Egmont. The first Polish edition was very limited,¹ but was followed by a release of the special edition in greater quantity in 2015, ten years later. The translation of the graphic novel was done by Jarosław Grzędowicz, the lettering by Marzanna Giersz. In 2015, in the Polish 25th anniversary special edition, the translation of Morrison's script was credited to Tomasz Sidorkiewicz. However, it has not been specified who translated Karen Berger's afterword, or the brief descriptions to additional illustrations included in this special edition. Fragments from literature, such as Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and Philip Larkin's "Church Going" have been reprinted from previously published Polish translations of the two works.

The following sections will analyse the translation of the special edition, taking into account the translation of the graphic novel itself, as well as the additional content, particularly Morrison's script. Furthermore, select publishing choices regarding the Polish translation will be addressed. *Arkham Asylum* does not have page numeration, therefore given page numbers have been established independently for purposes of clarity and singling out specific translation examples. As such, the first page is counted as the one which first features dialogue.

3. The Translation of the Title

A translation query that is perhaps immediately noticeable is the Polish translation of the title itself. It could be rightly argued that the translation of *asylum* as *azyl* is erroneous; after all, in Polish, *azyl* is a noun used in phrases that mean to seek shelter or refuge, such as “szukanie azylu” [‘seeking asylum’]. These phrases are often mentioned in the context of political asylum.² However, Arkham Asylum has been known to Polish fans as *Azyl Arkham* ever since the first translations of the location began to appear. Previous Polish translations opted for a more literal translation whilst disregarding semantics but staying true to the alliterative ring of the phrase. Even though a more correct translation would be “Szpital Arkham” [‘Arkham hospital’], it simply does not have the mysterious connotation *Azyl Arkham* has. Therefore, the publisher’s choice could be deemed as proper; translating Arkham Asylum as anything else but *Azyl Arkham* would most likely dissatisfy its readers. The translation of titles often requires consideration beyond the scope of equivalence. In a paper on film-title translation, Santaemilia-Ruiz and Soler Pardo discuss how important it is to consider the translation of titles outside of the realm of translation studies, and to look at it within the context of continuity, entertainment and advertising (212). Therefore, much like in the translation of *Arkham Asylum*, the matter of keeping the strict dictionary meaning of words when translating is pushed aside by publishers, editors or people in charge of marketing; this becomes irrelevant when promoting a certain work that is to be sold to a chosen audience. Rather, consistency and recognition is key, and becomes a very important factor when dealing with a work that is known by a certain title, and no other, to the general public or to fans.

The translation of the subtitle, *A Serious House on Serious Earth*, is interesting to note as well. On the cover of the Polish edition it is translated quite literally: *Poważny dom na poważnej ziemi*. However, on the first page the reader comes across a fragment of the Polish translation of Larkin’s poem by Jacek Dehnel, which is supposed to include the subtitle but is clearly dissimilar from that encountered on the cover: *Dom to poważny, stoi na ziemi poważnej* [‘A serious house it is, standing on a serious earth’]. It can be inferred that the Polish translation of the subtitle for the cover was done differently in order to preserve the style of the original title itself. However, the translated fragment included at the beginning of the comic is preserved in its original form, effectively informing the reader where the subtitle comes from while not interfering with Dehnel’s reprinted translation fragment.

4. The Translation of Proper Names

Another important aspect to look at within the Polish translation of *Arkham Asylum* are proper names, specifically character names which are featured in abundance.

Most of them were not translated, and rightfully so; non-English speaking fans familiar with Batman and its main recurring characters know them primarily by their English names. Furthermore, it is important to consider the identity of the superhero or villain which is closely connected to their name. As Anna Mehren argues in her paper dedicated to the translation of names in superhero comics: "The hero is empty without his name; it is his identifier, what makes him admired by common people and feared by villains. This is why it is so important to bring the meaning of the alias as closely as possible to the target language" (171). The Polish translation of *Arkham Asylum* follows this notion to a certain extent, as some names are translated: "Mad Hatter" is translated as "Szalony Kapelusznik," "Black Mask" as "Czarna Maska" and "Scarecrow" as "Strach na Wróble." It may seem puzzling as to why these names have been translated and not others. In the context of a similar example, Mehren rightfully notes that: "decision making about those matters is in most cases a task for the publisher [...] without direct insight into a publishing house's policy [...] any attempt at determining what strategies are followed when dealing with these matters would be reduced to a mere exercise of guessing based on reasoning" (164). As such, it is hard to determine what the motivation and whether it was the publisher's or translator's initiative to translate these three specific names. In the case of the Mad Hatter, it is very possible that a translation was implemented due to the connection with Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*; the most popular Polish translation of the classic children's book gives Mad Hatter's name as "Szalony Kapelusznik." Similarly, the translation of Scarecrow was most likely implemented due to the association of the name with *The Wizard of Oz*. Regardless, these name translations do not harm the integrity of the characters, as the Polish versions refer to the characteristics of the villains, just like the English counterparts.

Another interesting name translation appears in the case of the character of Martin "Mad Dog" Hawkins. The name is translated in the graphic novel as follows:

- (1) His name is Martin Hawkins. "Mad Dog" Hawkins.
 Nazywał się Martin "Mad Dog" Hawkins. Prawdziwy "Wściekły Pies."
 [lit. 'He was called Martin "Mad Dog" Hawkins. A true "Mad Dog."']

It can be seen that Grzędowicz did not translate the original name and surname, but transferred the nickname, and then included its translation, along with an implicit explanation as to the reason for the English nickname with the use of the emphasising word *prawdziwy* 'true.' This was most likely done in an effort to avoid explanatory footnotes. After all, an explanation of sorts would be necessary, as Hawkins is a very minor villain within the Batman universe. Aside from occasional references in other Batman works, *Arkham Asylum* is the only graphic novel in which he is actually present in the narrative. Thus, Polish readers would most likely not be familiar with him at all.

However, most names are transferred, not translated in the Polish edition of *Arkham Asylum*, and thus rely on the reader's prior knowledge of the characters and the meaning of their names. For example, the Joker remains in Polish as "Joker," similarly to Batman, Two-Face, Clayface, Killer Croc and so on. Realistic English anthroponyms, e.g. of the psychiatrists in *Arkham Asylum*, are kept in English and not translated or given Polish equivalents. The only minor adaptations in the case of proper names have to do with adjustments regarding the rich inflection structure of the Polish language, examples being *Amadeusza Arkhama* ['Amadeus Arkham's'] or *Drogi Batmanie* ['Dear Batman' (voc.)]. Such changes are more than justified, as they are needed in order to preserve grammatical structure and meaning.

5. The Translation of Dialogue

Given the confusing nature of *Arkham Asylum* due to its abstract art and intertwining double plot, it is not surprising that mistakes have been made during the process of translation. The translation of dialogue in *Arkham Asylum* features many minor mistakes which can be attributed to a number of reasons. In some instances, it appears the translation was done in a rush or without properly referencing the source material, possibly because the translator did not closely look at the illustrations. Other times, it seems that the translator was at a loss or confused as to the dialogue and either overtranslated or mistranslated altogether. Instances of fairly literal translation can be observed too; naturally, Grzędowicz did not disregard Polish grammar structure, at the same time remaining as close to the source text (ST) as possible, compromising little in way of structure and vocabulary.

The following are examples of close and partial adherence to the ST that can be found throughout the dialogue:

- (2) I ask him why he chose to destroy only the faces and sexual organs of his victims.
Zapytałem, dlaczego masakrował jedynie twarze i organy płciowe swych ofiar.
[lit. 'I asked why he massacred only the faces and sexual organs of his victims']
- (3) You're going to hit me with all the local folklore now, right?
A teraz wyjedziesz z tym całym lokalnym folklorem, tak?
[lit. 'And now you'll come out with all that local folklore, right?']
- (4) It's salt. Why don't you sprinkle some on me, honey?
To sól. Może mnie trochę posypiesz, skarbie?
[lit. 'It's salt. Maybe you will sprinkle a little, darling?']

Examples (2) and (3) show a certain consistency on the part of the translator to translate syntagmatically, which consequently results in mistakes. In (2) it can be seen that “sexual organs” has been translated as “organy płciowe,” while in (3) “local folklore” has been rendered as “lokalny folklor.” The term “sexual organs” should have been translated as “narządy płciowe,” and while “lokalny folklor” is not entirely wrong, the speaker in question is not referring to art as the Polish word *folklor* tends to denote, but local legends or stories. Therefore, a more adequate solution would be to translate the phrase as “lokalne legendy” [‘local legends’]. It is important to note that the second example features a rather semantically disparate translation of the word *destroy*, which has been translated as *masakrować* ‘massacre.’ It is interesting how instances of phrasing that is too literal are intertwined with such semantic overreaches or, for instance, clever solutions for idiomatic phrasing, as can be seen in the third example; the translation of the phrase “You’re going to hit me with” [‘A teraz wyjedziesz z tym’] captures its casualness very well.

Example (4) shows just how awkward the phrase sounds in Polish. Due to Polish inflection as well as the copied punctuation, it is not clear what exactly Batman is supposed to sprinkle on the Joker, despite salt being mentioned in the first sentence. An alternative solution would be to simply use *przyprawisz* ‘to season’ instead of *posypiesz* ‘to sprinkle.’ While a word change would help the original meaning come across more smoothly, the fragment is still awkward in its phrasing; Grzędowicz does a near word-for-word translation, preserving English punctuation and syntax. As such, an ideal correction of this translation would involve changing not only the syntax, but the punctuation as well: *To sól. Przypraw mnie nią, skarbie* [‘It’s salt. Season me with it, darling’]. The proposed translation captures Joker’s tone and keeps the phrase free of awkwardness.

It is worth noting that in comic translation, a literal approach may sometimes be inescapable due to space constraints: “comic books represent not only the typical constraints of language [idiolect, double meanings, idioms, et al.] but also space limitations [...] comics provide information not only through words but they are also linked to an image and the translator should confine translation to the space they have” (Scott J. n.p.). However, due to available contemporary technology, image manipulation and retouching is much easier and less expensive today than it used to be. Granted, publisher costs have to be taken into account, but, for instance, if there is a need to reshape speech balloons so that the target text (TT) can be included comfortably, it is usually done so (Zanettin n.p.). In the case of *Arkham Asylum*, this task is simpler in the case of the Joker’s dialogue, which is not contained within any speech bubbles. It can be seen that in some instances, the Polish translation of the Joker’s dialogue is slightly longer than the original (Grzędowicz and Sidorkiewicz 46). This seems to have benefited the translation greatly, as Grzędowicz translates the Joker in a way faithful to his character, instilling Polish diminutives, colourful phrasings and quips that make

up the Joker's grotesque and humorous speech, without having to be concerned about space constraints. For example, when in the ST the Joker calls Batman *sweetheart* and *honey pie*, we have in the Polish TT *kwiatuszku* 'flower (dim.)' and *pysiaczku* 'sweetie pie,' which are true adaptations to the faux fond tone the Joker expresses towards Batman.

However, the aforementioned way of translating rarely occurs, especially for other characters which have their speech graphically confined to word balloons. An example of this is as follows:

- (5) You okay? You know you don't have to go in there. Let me organize a swat team or something.
 Co jest? Słuchaj, nie musisz tam iść. Mogę wziąć antyterrorystów i....
 [lit. 'What's going on? Listen, you don't have to go there. I can take the counter-terrorists and...']

As can be noticed, Commissioner Gordon's words have been shortened, ultimately projecting a more terse exchange. The use of the blunt "Co jest?" contrasts with the concerned "You okay?." Likewise, the last sentence has been significantly simplified, the translator opting to even change Commissioner Gordon's full sentence into an unfinished one. This shortening is understandable due to how small both the panel and speech balloon are in both cases. *Arkham Asylum* varies between large, spacious illustrative panels and small, claustrophobic ones, which in turn are specifically designed to play off each other visually, enhancing the notion of simultaneously feeling trapped and overwhelmed. Therefore, despite the technological possibility of manipulating speech balloon sizes and even illustrations, doing so in excess would severely hinder the intended visual reception.

Another example of such an issue are the panels depicting fragments of Amadeus Arkham's diary. Amadeus Arkham's speech bubbles are small and featured on the backdrop of elongated and narrow panels, creating a clear Gothic impression; as a result, the words appear in small font. Therefore, it is most likely the reason why, for instance, Amadeus Arkham's words are often translated in a literal manner, in turn creating an awkward effect:

- (6) I returned to the family home on a cool Spring morning in 1920, shortly after mother's funeral.
 Do rodzinnego domu powróciłem zimnego, wiosennego dnia w 1920 roku. Zaraz po pogrzebie matki.
 [lit. 'To the family home I returned on a cold, Spring day in the year 1920. Right after my mother's funeral.']
- (7) And outside, far off, a dog barks, on and on through the whole restless night.
 A gdzieś daleko szczekały psy. Bez końca, przez całą długą bezsenłą noc.

[lit. 'And somewhere far away the dogs barked. Without stopping, throughout the entire sleepless night.']

- (8) She opened her own throat with a pearl-handed razor.

Poderżnęła sobie gardło brzytwą o rączce wyłożonej macicą perłową.

[lit. 'She cut her throat with a razor with a handle inlaid with mother-of-pearl.']

In examples (6) and (7) the ST is rendered literally into the TT, and the sentences are awkwardly broken up; this creates a rather clumsy, isolated sentence when a comma would have sufficed, as in the original. There is also a change in word order and tense in example (6), while in example (7), instances of omission and grammatical number can be observed. Example (8) shows a clumsy translation of the compound noun, *pearl-handed*, which is translated as “brzytwa o rączce wyłożonej macicą perłową [lit. 'A razor with a handle inlaid with mother-of-pearl']”. It is clear Grzędowicz opted for a descriptive translation of the razor in question, even though it would have been enough to write, for example, “o perłowej rączce” ‘pearl-handled.’ Such an adaptation would have been simpler to read and also would have saved space. These clumsy translations influence the impression the reader forms of Amadeus Arkham, who as a character is a learned, eloquent man, something that is reflected in the writing style of his diary entries in the ST. The Polish translation significantly changes that style, one that is more compact and awkward instead of lofty and poetic, subsequently altering character portrayal.

Unfortunately, there are also mistranslations that can be found in the Polish TT, and while some are less significant than others, they still have a certain impact on the reading experience. The following examples illustrate common mistakes throughout the translation:

- (9) Problems out of town.

Kłopoty w mieście. [lit. 'Problems in town.']

- (10) You heard him folks! Hit the trail!

Słyszeliście chłopaki! Puścić ich! [lit. 'You heard it folks! Let them go!']

- (11) Not even a cute, long-legged boy in swimming trunks?

Jak to, nawet ślicznego, długonogiego chłopca w obcisłych kalesonach? [lit. 'How come, not even a lovely long-legged boy in tight long-johns?']

- (12) Time to begin the evening entertainment, I think.

Czas na popołudniowe zajęcia. [lit. 'Time to begin the afternoon entertainment.']

- (13) Doors open and close, applauding my flight.

Drzwi otwierają się i zamykają, oklaskując mój upadek. [lit. 'Doors open and close, applauding my fall.']

The error in (9) is easy to notice; Batman, who utters the words, clearly says he was having trouble outside of Gotham, not in it as the translation implies. Example (10) is more inconspicuous, but indeed constitutes a mistake. In the context of the sentence, the Joker is talking to the hostages, which is indicated by the idiom “hit the trail,” meaning ‘to leave.’ Therefore, Grzędowicz most likely misunderstood the idiom, thinking the Joker was referring to his underlings. The mistake may have been brought about by the accompanying illustration, which depicts two ambiguous looking men that could be either hostages or other asylum prisoners.

Example (11) features an overtranslation and a mistake; the Joker is referring to swimming trunks, not long-johns. It can be assumed that the translator misunderstood *swimming trunks*, as a clear solution would have been to translate the term into its Polish equivalent *kąpielówki*, something Grzędowicz did not do. Example (12) is more apparent in its error; the Joker is talking about evening entertainment, not afternoon entertainment as the Polish translation says; after all, the plot of *Arkham Asylum* takes place during the late evening and nighttime. Example (13) shows that Grzędowicz misunderstood the meaning of the word *flight*. In this part of the graphic novel, a panic-stricken Amadeus Arkham runs through the asylum, opening and slamming doors shut behind him. Thus, *flight* is used here in the context of fleeing. Grzędowicz’s erroneous translation is confusing, as it gives the reader the impression that Amadeus fell, and that the doors were slamming shut and opening of their own accord, which is not the case.

Aside from the exemplified mistranslations, there also occur a number of curious translation decisions within the TT, some more questionable than others. An example of this would be a seeming oversight where the word *clocks* (Morrison 23) was substituted with the word *przekładnia* ‘transmission’ (Grzędowicz and Sidorkiewicz 23), even though the illustration features clocks. Another example is the decision to translate a rhetorical question as a statement:

- (14) Aren’t I good enough to eat?
 Jestem tak dobry, że można by mnie schrupać.
 [lit. ‘I am so good, that I could be munched on.’]

Such a decision was most likely taken due to the fact that the Polish phrasing, which carries a similar meaning to the rhetorical question, is more idiomatic and natural. A similar choice can be observed with the translation of the culture-specific phrase *funhouse* (Morrison 16), which is translated as a more generalized term, *wesołe miasteczko* ‘amusement park’ (Grzędowicz and Sidorkiewicz 16). The choice is not surprising, as there is no exact translation for the term *funhouse*, which is more culture specific to the USA, and the general term does not have an impact on the reception of the dialogue. Another interesting translation of a culture-specific phrase can be seen in the following example:

- (15) At home to Mr. Tetchy, aren't we?
 Bzdyczymy się dzisiaj, tak? [lit. 'Huffing about today, yes?']

The phrase “at home to Mr. Tetchy” refers to an imaginary person we are not happy to have at our place (Paul Q. n.p.). Furthermore, “to be tetchy” means to be irritable or moody, which is essentially what the Polish translation is implying; the phrase *bzdyczymy się* ‘to huff about’ was taken from the adjective *nabzdyczony* ‘huffy.’ While Grzędowicz latched onto the meaning of the word ‘tetchy’ itself, the outcome is fairly positive, as the translation of the entire phrase is similar semantically to the source.

6. Lettering

What is particularly noteworthy regarding the Polish edition of *Arkham Asylum* is the outstanding lettering done by Marzanna Giersz throughout the graphic novel. As already mentioned, it plays a crucial role within the work, as it is both an important visual and narrative element. Therefore, a skilled letterer for a translation is of great importance; translation scholar Federico Zanettin rightfully points out that a letterer can even act as a translator, as comics often have a “tendency to treat words as visual elements” (n.p.). Giersz’s lettering clearly adheres to this notion, as not only have respective character dialogues, signs and inscriptions been lettered nearly identically as in the original, but also, for instance, almost all onomatopoeic sounds have been translated into their Polish equivalents and manipulated graphically so as to look the same. This is especially commendable since translating sound effects is not easy: “onomatopoeia is particularly difficult to translate because even if a particular sound is heard similarly by people of different cultures, it is often expressed using different consonant strings in different languages” (Salor and Marasligil 8). The only issue that appears with the lettering is that, as a Polish reviewer claims, some of it makes the text challenging to read (Wronka n.p.). This is largely due to the fact that Polish spelling involves letters with diacritics, which become hard to notice in the style of Saladino’s unorthodox lettering.

7. The Translation of *Arkham Asylum*’s Script and Additional Content

As mentioned above, the special edition of *Arkham Asylum* features much additional content, and the Polish edition includes its translations. Noteworthy are the translations of “patient cards,” which are self-written blurbs by each patient in *Arkham Asylum*, including Batman himself. The text font as well as the style and tone of each blurb is preserved in the Polish translation, showcasing the personality

of each villain as intended in the original. Likewise, the biographical notes about McKean and Morrison have been translated without any noticeable concerns, as have Karen Berger's afterword and Grant Morrison's introduction to his script.

However, Morrison's *Arkham Asylum* script is the highlight of the additional content. The script contains the dialogue as well as directives, commentaries and footnotes meant for the artist to follow when creating illustrations. In the Polish special edition, this script is translated in a way that could be called two-fold; the commentary, footnotes and directives by Morrison are translated by Tomasz Sidorkiewicz, but the dialogue in the script itself is Grzędowicz's translation. The only exceptions are the additional translations of cut dialogue which were probably done by Sidorkiewicz. Therefore, while Sidorkiewicz is the one credited, it is clear that it was Grzędowicz's dialogue translation that was reprinted in the script itself, as the aforementioned translation issues are all present. Although no comment on this has been provided by the translator or publisher, it can be deduced that this was done for the sake of continuity; if the dialogue found in *Arkham Asylum*'s script were re-translated in its entirety by Sidorkiewicz, or even simply corrected, but the translation by Grzędowicz were kept as it was in the graphic novel itself, it would be very confusing for the Polish reader. It would create a false impression of the dialogue in Morrison's *Arkham Asylum* script being drastically different from the one in the finished and illustrated graphic novel, which is not the case. Aside from a few cut scenes, Morrison's dialogue proposition in his original *Arkham Asylum* script was largely kept as it was in the published version with illustrations. Furthermore, it is important to note that Morrison's *Arkham Asylum* script provides a panel-by-panel guideline as to how the graphic novel was envisioned; changing the dialogue would make it harder for the reader to navigate the script and find parts of interest.

Even though Grzędowicz's translation is included, Sidorkiewicz's translation of Morrison's directives and footnotes within the script are done conscientiously. Few typos and mistakes can be found; a notable one is the translation of the word *nurse* into *zakonnica* 'nun.' Sidorkiewicz keeps the casual tone of Morrison's script, which is for example seen through the translation of Morrison's endearing way of referring to the occultist Crowley; "Uncle Aleister Crowley" is translated faithfully into *Wujek Aleister Crowley*, pointing to Morrison's fascination and knowledge of the occult figure. Furthermore, Sidorkiewicz preserves all references to literature, architecture and pop culture, not omitting anything. Names and titles are mostly left in English for ease of reference, save for some instances of architecture (e.g. "Chartres Cathedral" has been translated as "Katedra w Chartres"). The original formatting is kept as well, including Morrison's notes on the margins of the script, which are also translated and lettered in such a way so as to mimic his hand-writing. Crossed out or blotted out words are also carried on to the Polish version of the script; in some instances, even the spacing is mimicked, such as on page twelve of the script where a large open space is kept as in the

original. Therefore, substantial effort was put into the translation of Morrison's script, especially from a visual point of view, excluding the actual dialogue which was preserved, together with its mistakes.

Further additional content is kept as it is in the original; photographs of Morrison's original plot synopsis and character cast are included, as well as his hand-written and hand-drawn storyboards, thumbnails and notes. However, save for the descriptive blurbs, this content is not translated, and understandably so; Morrison's handwriting is mostly illegible. Therefore an attempt at translating the content into Polish would be futile and unnecessary. The content was not meant to be read, but simply showcased.

The last pages of the special edition include illustrations from McKean and other artists, and are reprinted in the Polish version just as in the original, with one exception. On the last page, an afterword by Polish journalist Kamil Śmiałkowski is printed over an illustration of the Joker. While the one-page afterword is valuable in how it emphasises the importance of Morrison and other British Invasion writers in the graphic novel industry, one cannot help but wonder as to why it was simply not printed on an additional page at the end. It is likely that there was a strictly set number of pages that could be published, and the afterword, which could have been added at the very end of the publishing process, was deemed important enough to be printed over the illustration. This is what the editor-in-chief of the Egmont publishing subsidiary, "Klub Świata Komiksu" ['Comic World Club'] Tomasz Kołodziejczak implies. Kołodziejczak explained in a Q&A that it was decided a Polish afterword would be vital for new readers ("Egmont odpowiada" n.p.). However, it is important to note that much information about the British invasion, the circumstances of Morrison's hiring, and Morrison's own interests and context for the creation of *Arkham Asylum* can be found in Karen Berger's afterword and in his biographical note and introduction, all of which have been translated. Therefore, the decision to include a rather redundant afterword seems odd.

8. Conclusion

Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth is an iconic work regarded as one of the most important Batman graphic novels published to date. It influenced not only the American comic industry, but greatly contributed to the Scottish graphic novel tradition and its canon. As such, the Polish translation of the 25th anniversary special edition of this important work deserves both criticism and praise. While there are a number of translation issues, as well as certain questionable publishing choices, the core of the translated work is largely intact. Panel arrangement, illustrations, lettering as well as most additional content are faithful to the original, having been translated and graphically manipulated

accordingly. While not perfect, the dialogue is translated fairly well; proper names are not translated for the most part, and a certain number of attempts to translate wordplay occur.³ However, the overall dialogue translation shows a literal tendency. As a result, along with a significant number of overtranslations and mistranslations, a stylistic clumsiness emerges which ultimately has an impact on the reading experience. *Arkham Asylum* is known for its reading difficulty, but with the additional translation and publication mishaps, the translation only seems to create greater difficulty for the Polish readership.

These issues have not gone unnoticed by Polish readers, who in fact have pointed out that despite the release of the new edition, there has been no effort to correct previous mistakes. In the Q&A with Kołodziejczak, an anonymous user points out the mistakes in the Polish special edition of *Arkham Asylum*, and asks about the possibility of a corrected reprint in the future, noting that for such a masterpiece, one would like to have a perfect copy (“Egmont odpowiada” n.p.). However, Kołodziejczak’s response is dismissive, calling the “documented” (sic) mistakes subjective, and consequently stating that another Polish version of *Arkham Asylum* will not be released, nor will additional copies be printed (“Egmont odpowiada” n.p.). The response is not as surprising as one might think; even if the translation errors had been noticed after the first regular printing, any additional corrections in the subsequent editions would have resulted in additional costs.

On the other hand, the graphic novel’s additional content is clearly translated better; the highlight of it is Morrison’s script, which is translated and adapted into Polish with care, excluding Grzędowicz’s reprinted translation. As was deduced, the graphic novel translation was probably reprinted in *Arkham Asylum*’s script without corrections so as to avoid reader confusion. Therefore, we can presume it was not altered to any significant degree, even if Sidorkiewicz were up to the task.

Regardless of its problems, *Azyl Arkham: Poważny dom na poważnej ziemi* is a welcome rarity in its own right, as special editions of comic books are not often published in Poland. The state of comic book translation and its availability here today is significantly better than a few years ago; publishers take on work eagerly, and translations of both popular and niche titles are more readily available for fans, who now have the option of simply walking into bookstores and buying comic books, or even signing up for a monthly subscription (Smoter n.p.). However, availability does not equal quality, something that Polish fans regularly notice in the translations of their favorite titles. As was evidenced by the Q&A with Kołodziejczak, readers are indeed grateful for the publishing (or republishing) of iconic works, but also express a need for translations that are more careful and meticulous. It is also important to note that research on comic book and graphic novel translation is still a largely underdeveloped area (Zanettin n.p.), and is lacking in information, proper studies and available statistics. As Zanettin points out, “comics translation [...] encompasses all different aspects of the transfer of comics and their publication in a foreign country, and is concerned with the

practices of graphic artists, letterers and editors as well as those of the ‘translator proper’” (n.p.). Therefore, a study of comic book translation is not simply a matter of looking at the text; it is a matter of looking at the visual elements and publication history as well. Hopefully in the future, coherent graphic-novel translation criteria will emerge, criteria that will encompass to a certain degree all the elements included in the creation of graphic novels.

Notes

- 1 Egmont has not released information on the number of copies published in 2005, but Polish fans have commented on online forums on how limited in quantity the original translation was, estimating the number to be no more than a 1000 copies.
- 2 While the main connotation of asylum is to seek refuge, official dictionaries do recognise it as possibly referring to an asylum, but often in a historical, outdated context (*Wielki słownik angielsko-polski PWN Oxford*).
- 3 In a few instances, Grzędowicz translates rhyme and alliteration in a clever way, for example in the translation of Mad Hatter’s limericks (Grzędowicz and Sidorkiewicz 58–59) or the Joker’s word play (Grzędowicz and Sidorkiewicz 23).

References

- “azyl.” *Wielki słownik angielsko-polski PWN Oxford*.
<https://oxford.pwn.pl/szukaj/azyl.html>
- “Egmont odpowiada: KSK.” 2015.
<http://alejakomiksu.com/nawosci/22243/Egmont-odpowiada-KSK-listopad-2015/>.
- Grzędowicz, Jarosław, and Tomasz Sidorkiewicz, ed. 2015. *Azyl Arkham: Poważny dom na poważnej ziemi*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Egmont Polska.
- Halm, Matthew. 2012. “Batman: Arkham Asylum A Serious House on Serious Earth.” *Critical Survey of Graphic Novels: Heroes & Superheroes*. Ed. Bart H. Beaty and Stephen Weiner. New York: Salem Press. 67–70.
- Hasted, Nick. 1995. “Interview with Grant Morrison.” *The Comics Journal* 176: 52–82.
- Mazur, Dan, and Alexander Danner. 2014. *Comics: A Global History, 1968 to the Present*. London: Thames & Hudson Ltd.
- Mehren, Anna. 2011. “Peculiarities in the Language of Superhero Comics: The Names of the Characters and Their Translation into Spanish.” *New Approaches to Specialized English Lexicology and Lexicography*. Ed. Isabel Balteiro. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 153–174.

- Morrison, Grant, ed. 2014. *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth*. New York: DC Comics.
- PaulQ. 2016. "At Home to Mr. Tetchy." <https://forum.wordreference.com/threads/at-home-to-mr-tetchy.3179648/>
- Salor, Erineç, and Canan Marasligil. 2013. "Translating Comics: It's not Just in the Bubble." *Norwich Papers* 21: 1–10.
- Santaemilia-Ruiz, José, and Betlem Soler Pardo. 2014. "Translating Film Titles. Quentin Tarantino, on Difference and Globalization." *Babel* 60.2: 193–215.
- Scott J. 2010. "The Translation of Comic Books." <http://translation-blog.trustedtranslations.com/difficulties-translating-comics-2017-04-21.html>
- Singer, Marc. 2005. "A Serious House on Serious Earth." http://notthebeastmaster.typepad.com/weblog/2005/10/a_serious_house.html
- Smoter, Mateusz. 2018. "Kolekcji u nas dostatek – o wydawanych w Polsce kolekcjach komiksowych." <https://nietylkogry.pl/post/o-wydawanych-w-polsce-kolekcjach-komiksowych>
- Wronka, Tymoteusz. 2015. "'Batman. Azyl Arkham:' Dzieło sztuki – recenzja." <https://naekranie.pl/recenzje/batman-azyl-arkham-dzielo-sztuki-recenzja>.
- Zanettin, Frederic. 2018. "Translating Comics and Graphic Novels." https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324497649_Translating_comics_and_graphic_novels.

Filmography

- Grant Morrison: Talking with Gods*. 2010. Dir. Patrick Meaney. Prod. Sequart Organization.