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On the Circulation of Feminist Discourse via Translation (V.Woolf, S.de Beauvoir, J.Butler)

The focus of my reflection will be the circulation and reception of canonical texts of twentieth-century feminist thought in translations. Making use of the concept of a *travelling theory* put forth by Edward Said (1982: 226-247) and its extension in feminist and translatological studies (Sebnem 2006), I would like to analyse the history of translations of three works which are unquestionable components of the canon of contemporary feminist and gender studies. These are as follows: Virginia Woolf's *A Room of Her Own* of 1929, Simone de Beauvoir's *Le Deuxième Sexe* of 1949 and Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* of 1989. I am largely inspired by the works of Susan Gal, who dedicated much time and attention to tracing back the routes of feminist ideas, notions, concepts, and practices, especially in Central and Eastern Europe; how they circulate, become re-contextualised and what local impact they have (Gal 2003; Gal Klingman 2000). I am not going to embark on an in-depth comparative study related to the reception of the above texts. This would call for extensive research abroad and for considering not only the history of the relevant translations, but also the definition and analysis of other vehicles they disseminated beyond their original discursive contexts, i.e. commentaries, summaries, references, citations, etc. I prefer to make it clear from the start that I will address my task in a quasi-amateur fashion, having at my disposal only results of random research abroad and a rather thorough, first-hand knowledge about the reception of these works in Poland. I will be interested in particular in their reception – through translations – in post-communist countries, with occasional references to their reception in the West.

1. A Room of One's Own

Virginia Woolf's essay, which is commonly known to be a rewriting of lectures delivered by her in 1928 in colleges for women in Cambridge, was first published in October 1929. It came out in Hogarth Press, the publishing house owned by the writer and her husband Leonard Woolf, and simultaneously in Harcourt Brace & Co. in the United States. In England the public grew immediately interested in the text and were by and large of a high opinion of it, as its sales in the first five months reached a print-run of over 10,000 copies. V. Woolf's journal entry of October 23, 1929 reads as follows:

> I will here sum up my impressions before publishing a *Room of One's Own*. It is a little ominous that Morgan won't review it*. It makes me suspect that there is a shrill feminine tone in it which my intimate friends will dislike. I forecast, then, that I shall get no criticism, except of the evasive jocular kind, from Lytton, Roger & Morgan; that the press will be kind & talk of its charm, & sprightiness; also I shall be attacked for a feminist & hinted at for sapphist; Silbyl will ask me to luncheon; I shall get a good many letters from young women. I am afraid it will not be taken seriously. Mrs Woolf is so accomplished a writer that all she says makes easy reading... this very feminine logic... a book to be put in the hand of girls. I doubt that I mind very much. The Moths; but think it is to be waves, is trudging along; & I have that to refer to, if I am damped by the other. It is a trifle, I shall say; so it is, but I wrote it with ardour & conviction. (Woolf 1983: 262)

Called a trifle by the author herself, the essay was first translated into a foreign language (Spanish) by J.L. Borges and published in 1936 by Victoria Ocampo, renowned for her feminist views, in a magazine she owned entitled *Sur* (Caws Luckhurst 2002). Still, it was the author's novels that were mainly translated during her lifetime. The earliest translation was that of *The Years* into French (1926) and *Jacob's Room* into Swedish (1927). It may come as a surprise that *Orlando* was first translated in Czechoslovakia in 1929, even if Slavic literatures long resisted Woolf's prose, seen back then as extremely difficult and avant-garde. (Incidentally, the writer herself made a clear-cut distinction between her 'serious' work and the said 'trifles', including e.g. *Orlando* and *Flush* into the latter category. It so happened that a few decades later it was those 'trifles' that were to become her trademark for the wider readership).

In Poland, according to Urszula Terentowicz-Fatyga, Woolf's reception proceeded along three stages (Terentowicz-Fatyga 2002). Until the late 1950s it was meagre and no full translation of the author's text was produced. Excerpts of *To the Lighthouse* were translated by Aniela Gruszecka, who used the text in her own article on innovation in the novels of the 1930s (Gruszecka 1933). The reception gained momentum in the subsequent three decades, with the first Polish translations of *The Years* (Lata,1958), *Mrs Dalloway* (*Pani Dalloway*, 1961), *To the Lighthouse* (*Do latarni morskiej,* 1962), literary essays (*The Leaning Tower*; [*Pochyła wieża*, 1977]), and *The Waves* (*Fale*, 1983). Still, the author was mainly read within a historical perspective, as a representative of high Modernism of the period between the world wars, which had little to do with the literary life of the late 20th century. Finally, the publication in 1994 of two different translations of *Orlando* (by Tomasz Bieroń and Władysław Wójcik) and of *A Room of One's Own* in 1997 by Agnieszka Graff with an introduction by Izabela Filipiak, and the essay's translation by Ewa Krasińska in 2002, made Virginia Woolf a canonical author in Poland. Moreover, the phrase of the essay's title as well as such expressions as 'Shakespeare's sister', 'a woman's sentence' or 'an androgynous mind' have become firmly established in contemporary Polish feminist discourse. Before we finally received the Polish version of *A Room of One's Own*, the essay had already been substantially if somewhat belatedly renowned thanks to references to it of Polish representatives of feminist criticism, e.g. Maria Janion and Grażyna Borkowska. The second wave of feminist critics in the West had recognised it as its canonical text far earlier, in the 1970s. It was then that the stereotypical perception of Woolf changed dramatically. Earlier she had been regarded as a sublime, a-political and easily irritable aesthete who wrote prose about 'nothing in particular'. After this watershed she was recognised as one of the first politically engaged feminist women writers. The same scenario was repeated in all European countries. Interestingly, according to Ida Klitgård who researched the history of Woolf's reception in Denmark, until the 1980s her works had mainly been discussed by men: reviewers, scholars and writers. In turn, after the 1973 translation of *A Room of One's Own* by Elsa Grees it was mainly women who wrote about her texts (Klitgård 2002: 174). My intuition of an academic tells me that a similar phenomenon could be observed in other countries, too. For instance, the only original Polish book about V. Woolf's output is Wiesław Juszczak's groundbreaking study *Zasłona w rajskie ptaki albo O granicach 'okresu powieści'* [A curtain with birds-of-paradise or about the limits of the 'era of the novel'] (1981). The two stages of reception of Woolf's oeuvre map out the geo-poetics of this reception. The modernist and apolitical Woolf is primarily encapsulated within domestic literature, seen as a strictly English writer and it is those aspects of her writing and worldview that become highlighted (studies of the phenomenon of British society with its unique culture code, the aestheticism of the Bloomsbury Group, etc.). In turn, the feminist and politically committed Woolf (involved in particular in the pacifist movement) becomes an internationalised figure, taken over by feminist discourses, irrespective of the contexts determined by her own cultural universe (Friedman 1998: 114-130).

In post-communist Europe, *A Room of One's Own* has to date not been translated into Russian and Byelorussian. In the 1980s it came out in Hungarian (1986) and in German in the GDR (1989; it had been available earlier in West Germany in its 1978 edition). In the 1990s it was extremely successful in nearly all other countries in transition and was especially popular in the Balkans. First and foremost, however, it achieved an unquestionable position in the universally

shared European literary canon of the 21st century. It is still debatable whether it was the text that contributed to the dissemination of the feminist discourse or, conversely, the power of feminism restored the position of Woolf's essay in the Western canon. My experience as a researcher and in particular as an academic lecturer indicates that it is willingly read, equally willingly quoted and, most importantly, inspiring for successive generations of scholars. No doubt part of this popularity derives from its outstanding literary value, which made it a veritable reservoir of maxims and a model of elegant feminist rhetoric.

2. The Second Sex

The reception history of the translation of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* took a completely different trajectory. This writer, since the onset of her presence on the Western literary scene, operated within a greatly politicised leftist and existential context, which greatly affected the reception of her output. *Le deuxième sexe* was written in the period 1946-48, its excerpts published first as essays in *Temps Modernes*. At that time Sartre and de Beauvoir were fascinated by Marxism and Communism the Soviet and Chinese way, even if they did not have good working relations with the French Communist Party. On the other hand, they slowly became aware of the reality of Stalinist labour camps, even if they were in denial of the news. Nevertheless, they continued to regard the Soviet Union as the chief suppressor of Nazi Germany, and the support offered to Stalin by the Russian people during World War II was seen by them as sufficiently legitimising the Stalinist system. De Beauvoir was nearing forty, sensed the imminent advent of old age and had just started a serious affair with the US writer Nelson Algren, whom she had met during her first visit to the United States in 1947.

In 1999 various feminist circles worldwide feted the 50th anniversary of *Le deuxième sexe*. The main event was an international seminar held under the auspices of UNESCO in January that year in Paris. It gathered participants from 36 countries (Delphy Chaperon 2002). This gave rise to another heated debate about the well-known problems with the American edition of the work, i.e. its 1953 translation by the zoology professor Howard Parshley. It is fraught with many mistranslations, errors and simplifications that completely warp the message of some excerpts. It also contained a host of unmarked deletions, but until recently, on account of the exclusive copyright for the book owned by the US publisher Alfred Knopf, it had no rival on the English-language market (Simons 1999: 61-72; Moi 2004: 37-68). Only in 2006 was a new translation commissioned by Jonathan Cape, the British buyer of the book's copyrights. The new translation was entrusted to Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier, two professional American translators residing in Paris. It is unabridged, pays particular attention to the philosophical, existentialist terms which appear in the original texts, and has come out in the spring of 2010.

While *The Second Sex* came out in Poland in 1972, according to the translator herself, Gabriela Mycielska (Czachowska Szałagan 1997: 514) the translation of the first volume of the work had actually been ready by the 1950s, soon after the publication of the original. Both J.P.Sartre and de Beauvoir, on account of their leftist views and pro-Soviet inclinations, began to be translated in Poland immediately after the October 1956 breakthrough, which led to an existential fad in Poland. The two were ideal for this purpose. On the one hand, from the point of view of communist censorship they were politically correct (in the then sense of the term), and on the other hand, as members of the philosophic and aesthetic avant-garde, they were a radical antidote to the defunct socialist realism. At that time, as we know, Poland was an unquestionable leader among the Soviet Bloc in the reception of Western literature and reflection and many Russian intellectuals learned about the new developments in European culture precisely via Polish translations. Such was the case of Josif Brodski, who learned good Polish in this way. Sartre's trilogy *The Road to Freedom* (orig. 1945-49) was published by the PIW publishing house in the 'Novels of the 20th Century' series in the period 1957-58. By the mid-1970s, virtually all of his main prose works, dramas and philosophical texts had been available in Polish translation. In 1957 PIW issued *The Mandarins* (orig. 1954), de Beauvoir's largely acclaimed *roman à clef* about a circle of French intellectuals gathered around Sartre and Camus. In the 1960s, PIW published the author's other autobiographical texts: *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* (1960), *The*

Coming of Age (1964), *Force of Circumstances* (1967), (Bębenek 1977). This last book included fragments related to the writing and publication of *The Second Sex*.

"Wanting to talk about myself, I became aware that to do so I should first describe the condition of woman in general", says de Beauvoir about what made her write her best-known work. Indeed, it was her immediate environment that provided input for her novels. Usually these were intellectual and emotional situations taking place in Sartre's circle, and the autobiographical element is ubiquitous in her writing. The treatise of the 'coming of age of a woman', especially fragments of the second volume, dominated by sexual and physiological matters, was vividly received by readers.

> The first volume was well received: twenty two thousand copied were sold in the first week. The second one also sold well, but it shocked people. I was completely taken aback by the fuss it provoked when the extracts from the book were published in Les Temps Modernes. [...] I was accussed of so many things: everything! First of all, indecency. [...] What a festival of obscenity on the pretext of flogging me for mine! That good old esprit gaulois flowed in torrents. I received – some signed, some anonymous – epigrams, epistles, satires, admonitions, and exhortations addressed to me by, for example, 'some very active members of the First Sex'. Unsatisfied, frigid, priapic, nymphomaniac, lesbian, a hundred times aborted, I was everything, even an unmarried mother (de Beauvoir 1976: 195-197).

When *The Second Sex* came out in 1972 in Polish, the reaction was not that overwhelming yet the book did generate some excitement. In the 1990s the reception of this translation was thoroughly researched by Elżbieta Pakszys, who correctly observed that:

> At that time, a book could not possibly have a target reader. The feminist movement in Poland was nonexistent. Its official ersatzs […] could not be taken into account. What kind of client and target reader was at stake? I believe that the target here was a rather large group of snobbish readers, ready to pay virtually any price (books being relatively cheap in communist times) for possessing something inaccessible to the general public. The print-run was 5,000 copies and it seems all the books sold in a flash (Pakszys 2000: 177).

The snobbery of reading Western literature, to which we owe many translations, was typical of Polish literary culture of the 1960s and the 1970s. Texts deemed as scandalous, especially with pornographic overtones, could count on an especially enthusiastic reception. In this respect, however, no other book could rival Joyce's *Ulysses* translated by Maciej Słomczyński, published in 1969 by Wydawnictwo Literackie in 40,000 copies, a print-run unimaginable today. Naturally, the majority of readers only bothered to read one excerpt of the novel that most still found unintelligible, i.e. Molly Bloom's obscene concluding monologue. Years later the translator recalled, exaggerating jokingly:

> […] Unbelievable things happened when the book was placed on the market. 40,000 copies sold like hot cakes and the country literally shook at its foundations. Never since the invention of print had a book issued in Polish been so often reviewed and seriously commented on within such a short time. […] The black market price of the book was exorbitant. The book was the talk of town; people would discuss it in cafes, universities, offices, and private homes. Bombarded by requests from those I knew and did not know, pestered by journalists, and receiving telephone calls of half-mad autograph-hunters, I fled home to Zakopane to the peace and quiet of the writers' home… (Słomczyński 1997: 591).

Within the five decades preceding the anniversary year 1999, *The Second Sex* had been translated into 121 languages. In 'our' part of Europe it was published in Czechoslovakia in 1966, earlier than in Poland; the following year it had its second edition there. In Poland the second edition did not come out until close to three decades later (Wydawnictwo Jacek Santorski, 2003). During this time the book was slowly forgotten and then, in the 1990s, became a sought-after item, in great

demand by Polish feminists. In the 1980s it was translated e.g. in Yugoslavia (into Serb, Macedonian and Slovenian). A Russian translation, commenced in 1989 on the initiative of Прогресс publishing office, came out in early 1998; its print-run of 5,000 copies was sold within one year. The author of the preface, the political analyst Svetlana Ajvazova, saw this as a success that proved the relevance of de Beauvoir's work in Russia and indicated its root causes. According to her, for one thing, Sartre's atheistic existentialism, whose Russian reception began for good in the mid-1980s, is in today's Russia a viable alternative both to the 'faith' in socialism and to Christian Orthodoxy and various forms of the esoteric. In this context the reader's gender is of no significance. However, the other reason, i.e. the current radical 'perestroika' of gender roles and relations in a post-Soviet society, is of greater importance. In this respect *Второй пол* could become the ideological and theoretical support of Russia's nascent feminist movements that stressed the status of the woman. Finally, the importance ascribed to feminine corporeality and sexuality in de Beauvoir's treatise allows, according to Ajvazova, to depart from traditional Russian stereotypes connected with femininity. These stereotypes, which in spite of the transformation still persist in Russian society, are largely due to the typical communist prudery regarding these matters (Ajvazova 2000).

If Ajvazova is right, this means that the Russian translation of *The Second Sex* came out at a moment when it could play a significant role in the dynamic development of feminist discourse in the country, which cannot be said about the Polish translation. Neither its original publication nor the re-edition had impact on feminist debates in and outside Academia in Poland. The reception of this text proceeded mainly, so to speak, in allegation mode: through references, comments, quotations, etc. A good yet rather paradoxical case in point is the title of the famous anthology edited by Teresa Hołówka *Nikt nie rodzi się kobietą* [No one is born a woman] of 1982, commonly seen as the first harbinger of interest in contemporary Western feminist discourse in Poland. The eponymous phrase is, naturally, a simplified quotation of the famous sentence (which has become a maxim really today) starting off the second volume of *The Second Sex*: *On ne naît pas femme: on le devient*. Translated by Maria Leśniewska it reads: *Nie rodzimy się kobietami – stajemy się nimi* [We are not born women – we become ones]. Paradoxically, neither Teresa Hołówka in the introduction to the anthology, nor Aleksandra Jasińska in a postface to it, explain the origin of the statement. Moreover, *The Second Sex* appears in this volume only as a reference in Sherry B. Ortner's article, without the key quotation at that (Hołówka 1982: 120-124). Given that the (exclusively English) texts that make up the anthology represent primarily culturalist gender theories, it may seem from today's perspective that Simone de Beauvoir is significantly absent from it. To the best of my knowledge, at present her ground-breaking treatise about the construction of femininity is regarded in Poland as part of the canon of feminist and gender texts rather than an actively read text, a source of inspiration for research.

3. Gender Trouble

The third of the texts I chose as representative for the present world-recognised canon of feminist and gender texts was published originally in 1990, and its Polish translation came out in 2008. The book's full title was: *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* and was later to cause much trouble to the future translators of both sexes. The author of a very good Polish translation, Karolina Krasuska, chose as the equivalent of the original title a controversial phrase *Uwikłani w płeć* [*Caught in a Sex*]. The German translator, Kathrina Menke, was even more creative in her approach to the problem and proposed an intertextual game with Freud; her version of the title reads *Das Unbehagen der Geschlechter* and is a clear reference to *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur or Civilisation and Its Discontents* of 1939. Krasuska (2008: 269) admits that it was thanks to the German translation, which came out as early as 1991, that she first read Butler's work and it may be safely assumed that Menke's audacity as a translator, which some call into question, had some impact on her own translation choices.

Gender Trouble was Judith Butler's second book, after *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (Columbia University Press, 1987). After its publication the thirty-six year old scholar rose to fame immediately. Within a short time over 100,000 copies of the original were sold worldwide and in principle it might seem that at a time when the knowledge of English among Academia has become a norm, there will be no need for translating Butler. Still, in Germany for example this translation triggered a heated debate. This case was discussed by Bożena

Chołuj in a yet unpublished text titled *Przekład jako medium w komunikacji naukowej: od 'Uwikłania w płeć' po 'Bodies that Matter' Judith Butler* [Translation as a medium in scientific communication: from *Gender Trouble: Feminism and The Subversion of Identity* to *Bodies that Matter* by Judith Butler]; I am indebted to her observations and conclusions. Chołuj writes, for instance:

> The translation of Butler's scientific text ushered in a debate on the subject of gender, but also directed this debate to issues that seemed to be brought up by a reading of the fissures and inadequacies of feminist discourse in the German language. […] It appeared that the text touches on some sensitive point, a gap in discourse which had suddenly become evident. […] Something important happened, then: Not only was Butler's new concept rejected but an inside critical debate began over the question of the feminist subject and the feminist perception of the body. The questioned significance of the subject evidently triggered a fear of losing ground, as Germany and Austria had only just developed women's self-consciousness and their due status for the sake of the feminist movement. Butler in turn described in her book the uselessness of the category of the feminist subject and pointed out the attendant risks[1].

The reception and recontextualisation of Butler's texts developed totally differently in the states of former Yugoslavia, where her texts began to be translated relatively early (Croatia – 2000; Slovenia – 2001) and her ideas applied fast. However, it must be borne in mind that in this area academic feminism developed far earlier than in the other countries of the Socialist Bloc. Among the European countries of this Bloc, Yugoslavia was the most open to the West. This led, among others, to an easier absorption of new cultural, artistic and philosophical trends, especially in the 1980s, when after the death of Josip Broz Tito the country underwent a political and intellectual 'thaw'. As Svetlana Slapšak, one of the leading representatives of the local feminist movement recalls (2005: 140): 'World congresses of women writers and feminist seminars in Dubrovnik were the trademark of the decade. Anyone of importance in feminism of that time came to Dubrovnik sooner or later, and the Yugoslav feminist thought, oriented mainly towards French theories, made a substantial impression on the participants of those conferences'. As far as I know, Butler (b. 1956) did not attend those meetings but instead came as a heroine to the 2000 three-day seminar in Ohrid (Macedonia) titled 'Crisis of the Subject', where her speech and assumptions met with great interest and approval. The ideas of performativeness and nomadism were received especially warmly in the Balkan states, where these models of being could be observed in daily practice, partly forced by political circumstances, partly spontaneous, rooted in the cultural uniqueness of the area. From this perspective and in light of such experience, it really may have seem to Svetlana Slapšak (2005: 144) that 'Judith Butler is unquestionably the most often translated author in feminist circles of former socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans'. However, when she announced this bold statement in the early 2000s, we in Poland had at our disposal only one translation of a text by the American theoretician, a fragment of the book that followed *Gender Trouble*, titled *Bodies That Matter. On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (1993). It came out in a periodical with little readership, *Furia Pierwsza. Zeszyty Gender Studies* focusing on lesbian issues, and did not reach a wider audience. Butler's ideas were usually mediated to us through books by Ewa Hyży: *Kobieta, ciało, tożsamość. Teorie podmiotu w filozofii feministycznej końca XX wieku* [Woman, body, identity. Theories of the subject in feminist philosophy of the late 20th century] (2003) and Joanna Mizielińska *(De)Konstrukcje kobiecości: podmiot feminizmu a problem wykluczenia* [(De)Constructions of femininity: the subject of feminism and the problem of exclusion] (2004) and *Płeć, ciało, seksualność. Od feminizmu do teorii queer* [Gender, body, sexuality. From feminism to queer] (2006). Moreover, it appears that for Polish readers the 'queer' element of Judith Butler's work is of secondary importance, while its post-modern left-wing character takes pride of place; it is very telling that *Gender Trouble* was published by *Krytyka Polityczna*, a periodical whose radical left-wing inclination is inextricably linked with activities for the sake of emancipation of sexual minorities.

[1] Bożena Chołuj *Przekład jako medium w komunikacji naukowej: od „Uwikłania w płeć" po „Bodies that Matter" Judith Butler*. A paper read at the 37th Polish Conference for the Theory of Literature: 'Culture in the state of translation: translation, comparative and transcultural studies', Słubice, 19-21 September 2009. I am thankful to the Author for making the text available as a Microsoft Word file.

Butler herself, when writing an introduction to the second edition of *Gender Trouble* ten years after the book originally came out, admitted that she sees that text as an example of 'cultural translation'. The notion of cultural translation, or translation of culture, appeared in social, especially British, anthropology, as early as the 1950s. It was later on appropriated by contemporary post-colonial studies and is connected with a perception of culture in textual categories (Asad 1986: 141-164). In brief, cultural translation is based on the assumption that the other culture is a kind of source discourse, with its own rules of coherence, which discourse must be reproduced in the language of terms and notions characteristic of target discourse, limiting interpretation to a minimum and reorganising this discourse whenever necessary. Butler takes over this category to refer it to theoretical discourses, which she treats precisely as disparate culture systems which enter into relations with each other in a variety of ways. In fact she is more after the mechanisms connected with the reception, circulation and re-contextualisation of theory, while the translatological idiom appears here as a methodological metaphor. While *Gender Trouble* draws on theoretical inspirations of French Post-Structuralism, for instance Butler's approach to the performative quality of the sex was influenced by Jacques Derrida's interpretation of Kafka's *Before the Law* (Butler 1999: xv). It transfers these theories onto American soil, applying to them a cultural perspective and 'mixing' it with other theories, including feminist ones.

> Only in the United States are so many disparate theories joined together as if they formed some kind of unity. Although the book has been translated into several languages and has had especially strong impact on discussions of gender and politics in Germany, it will emerge in France, if it finally does, much later than in other countries. I mention this to underscore that the apparent Francocentrism of the text is at significant distance from France and from the life of theory in France. *Gender Trouble* tends to read together, in a syncretic vein, various French intellectuals (Lévi-Strauss, Foucault, Lacan, Kristeva, Wittig) who had few alliances with one another and whose readers in France rarely, if ever, read one another. Indeed, the intellectual promiscuity of the text marks it precisely as American and makes it foreign to French context. So does its emphasis on the Anglo-American sociological and anthropological tradition of 'gender' studies, which is distinct from the discourse of 'sexual difference' derived from structuralist inquiry. If the text runs the risk of Eurocentrism in the U.S., it has threatened an 'Americanization' of theory in France for those few French publishers who have considered it. (Butler 1999: x)

Gender Trouble was finally published in France in 2005, when its existence could no longer be ignored, but the above quote sheds light on factors that influence publishing policies and translators' choices when it comes to the circulation of scientific texts. Naturally, chance plays its role here and the decisions on *what* should be translated and published and *when* are often contingent simply on the fascinations of the particular persons taking part in academic communication or on the degree of resistance of the original text. Actually, today the translation of some theoretical discourse calls for as much dexterity as the translation of sophisticated linguistic poetry. Other factors include theoretical and political fads, since knowledge is power. The three case studies related to the circulation of feminist theories and the role of translation in this respect are a small but representative sample if we take into account the importance of the texts considered. We can thus risk certain generalisations on the basis of the above examples. They, in turn, might be applied to mechanisms of academic communication as such. It seems, then, first of all that translation as such is not the most important medium thanks to which an original (here – feminist) thought gets disseminated. This dissemination takes place primarily due to rapidly multiplying secondary discourses, generated within Academia and related fields (e.g. in academically-oriented journalism, literary, art or film criticism, etc.) in such characteristic areas of science as state of research, theoretical syntheses, commentaries, glosses, polemical discourse, and other records of reading scholarly texts. The original, then, reaches the target language when it is already well-recognised, and its appearance is but a redundant act of fulfilling an obligation of an academic and translator. It may also happen, even if less and less often now, that a translation of a text that is important from the perspective of the development of a particular discourse reaches the target language zone prematurely (the case of *The Second Sex* in Polish), entering a discursive void, so to speak. In such a case it either passes unnoticed, or its

reception takes place within a different, currently prevalent context. In such a case one can speak about unfortunate acts of scientific communication via translation.

Luckily, there are also fortunate acts, when the appearance of a translation significantly stimulates scholarly discussion and/or debates on world views in the target language. What is necessary for that is a conjunction of such factors as innovativeness of the original and particular intellectual needs of the target culture, which not infrequently is undergoing a mental reconstruction at a particular time (the case of *Gender Trouble* in Germany or of *The Second Sex* in Russia). The debate generated on such occasions by a translation reflects identity problems of the community that receives a particular work. Therefore, a study of the reception of academic translations may in reality transform into a study of the state of consciousness of an academic community in a given place and at a specific time.

Translated by Marcin Turski

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