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# POLISH WOMEN TRANSLATORS OUTSIDE THE CANON: ON A FORGOTTEN TRANSLATION OF DOSTOEVSKY'S *THE DEVILS*

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**Abstract:** In 1928, two translations of Dostoevsky's *The Devils* were published: one by Tadeusz Zagórski, another by an unknown woman signed as J.B. This article analyses both translations to understand why Zagórski's version has become canonical. It seems that the main reasons for the privileged status of Zagórski's translation are, on the one hand, its publisher's strong position, and on the other – the visual aspect of the J.B. version. The J.B. edition was illustrated: the drawings depict the female characters of the novel. The illustrated plates present also excerpts selected from the novel, which are frequently amorous in tone. Most probably because of its distinctly feminine look, the J.B. translation of *The Devils* was superseded by Zagórski's version.

**Keywords:** canon, translation series, reception, Dostoevsky

## 1.

Considering Fyodor Dostoevsky's reception beyond Russia, in other languages and cultures, it is hard to avoid banal eulogies of the writer's genius. This article also stems from an obvious conclusion: there must be something special about a book that has attracted the attention of so many translators. There are seven Polish translations of *The Devils*, Dostoevsky's novel from 1872.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The first translation, signed with the initials T.K. (Tadeusz Kotarbiński), was published in 1908 by the Warsaw "Biblioteka Dzieł Wyborowych" (Library of Exquisite

When alternative translations of the same text are available, one of them usually prevails: frequent re-editions and citations turn it into “the authoritative” version, treated on equal terms with the original. In the case of *The Devils*, Tadeusz Zagórski’s 1928 translation has reached such a status, and has appeared in numerous revised and updated editions. However, the year 1928 saw a publication of another version of *The Devils*. It was prepared by a woman translator signed only with her initials: J.B. This translation was acknowledged only in the bibliographical note to the PIW 1972 and 1977 editions, which was modeled on the Soviet edition from 1957.

The first Polish translation of *The Devils* (1908) had probably come too early to become authoritative.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, it seems quite puzzling that Zagórski’s translation entered the canon and J.B.’s work was forgotten. In my analysis of the two translations I am not looking for the reasons why Zagórski’s version prevailed. On the contrary, I would like to find out why J.B.’s translation has fallen out of favor. In this short article, I am not able to discuss complex Polish-Russian relations. However, in my opinion, the reception of Dostoevsky’s work in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was predicated upon an intellectual exchange between the two nations. I adopt the terminology proposed by Bazyli Białokozowicz (1990), who sees Polish-Russian relations at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries as “intellectual borderland.”

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Works). The next one, also signed only with the initials (J.B.), was published by “Biblioteka Rodzinna” (Family Library) in 1928. Also in 1928, the “Rój” publishing house headed by Melchior Wańkowicz brought out Tadeusz Zagórski’s translation, later reprinted several times. In 1977, Zbigniew Podgórzec based his Polish version of *The Devils*, published by Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, on Zagórski’s translation. A revised edition of Zagórski’s and Podgórzec’s version was published in London by Puls in 1992. The next translation, signed only by Podgórzec, was published in the “Biblioteka Klasyki” (Classics Library) by Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie in 2002. The most recent version was prepared by Adam Pomorski and published by Znak (Krakow) in 2004. During my research I came across yet another, the seventh, translation. However, I was not able to verify the surprising note from the publisher: “The text compiled on the basis of an anonymous 19<sup>th</sup>-century translation” (Zielona Sowa, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> That is, in a “pre-translation” era. This period is typical of cultures bound by a specific interdependence. Such a relationship can be described in different ways: a big culture – a small culture, an influential culture – a culture subjected to influences; a colonizing culture – a colonized culture; a giving culture – a receiving culture. Whichever the label, what characterizes this interdependence is the mastery of language: representatives of one country (culture) master the language of the other country (a different culture). This relationship was much more prominent in the imperialistic and colonial times. Today egalitarian international communication prevails and translation is its major medium.

This territory is not subjected to politics, history and ideology; therefore, it should be considered in a broader European context:

[This concept] challenges the antinomy between Polish and Russian cultures. It also challenges the outdated ideas of Polish Messianism, of Poland's role as the *Antemurale Christianitatis* and the "gateway of the Occident." It also questions the hallowing of national calamities, as well as Polish elite's tendency to exaggerate the differences and contradictions between the Latin and the Byzantine heritage (Białokozowicz 1990: 10; trans. A.A.)

Beyond the historiosophical approach, there is something less clearly outlined – the intellectual allure, which has inspired the dialogue between Polish culture and "the text – Dostoevsky".<sup>3</sup>

## 2.

I was first puzzled by the urgent "need" for a new interpretation of Dostoevsky's novel, manifested in an almost simultaneous publication of two translations. As the news circulated differently then and no documents recording the process are available, it may be assumed that the translators – Tadeusz Zagórski and J.B. – were unaware of each other's work. However, it turns out that one of the publishers knew about the two competing translations. In *Wspomnienia wydawcy* (A Publisher's Memoirs), Melchior Wańkowicz acknowledged that "the sport of rivalry" was his favorite at the time:

<sup>3</sup> Otherwise, Dostoevsky's reception would have been dominated by the political context: Russia's part in the partitions of Poland, Poland's long struggle for independence, with military insurrections, most of them against Russia. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, even the wisest Russian intellectuals considered the Polish struggle for independence as aggression and hatred towards Russia. For the Poles, Russia was the aggressor; in partitioned Poland, Russians were stereotypically presented as cruel thugs. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Poles witnessed a revolution that strengthened the image of their barbaric neighbors. "The Russian nation is historically and physiologically related to the nations of the Orient," argued Antoni Ferdynand Ossendowski in the 1920s, "however, it adopted their darkest and most gruesome qualities. The bright sides of the oriental people's psychology and morality are foreign to the Russians, because they require fortitude and a sublime spirit" (trans. A.A.). Similar examples can be multiplied. But might the stereotypes based on historical and political relations have influenced the translations and the reception of *The Devils* in Poland? If that was the case, Dostoevsky's approach to the "doomed Polish question" must have also influenced the reception of his novel.

When Winawer Publishers (not to be confused with Winawer the writer) launched a series of cheap books for 95 grosz, Rój decided to compete with them. Also, when Wagner Publishers in Poznan started a series of “Nobel Prize Winners,” we did the same to a great success. Another time, some makeshift publishers announced incredibly cheap subscriptions for selected works by Dostoevsky. Only a few days later, we started a similar project, on even more attractive terms, and we have survived (1968: 16; trans. A.A.)

Although the translation scholar might prefer to see a new version as a result of a need for a new interpretation, in this case, two parallel translations may have been a consequence of a specific situation on the book market. It is possible that the translators’ fascination with the novel motivated their endeavor. However, it is also possible that they simply responded to publishers’ demand. By comparing the two translations, we might be able to understand why Zagórski’s version has prevailed in the Polish reception of *The Devils*.

As this paper is neither comparative nor critical, I have decided to analyse two randomly selected excerpts of the novel. Following the hermeneutic approach, I assume that the text is the basis for all translatory activity. Translation takes the text as its departure point and through reading/interpretation it returns to another text. I believe that the juxtaposition of the original and its final version can reveal much more than just the most obvious contrasts between the two language systems. As Fritz Paepcke, the leading figure in the German hermeneutical school of translation studies emphasizes, “Text is not the sum of its elements, but a network of their complex relations” (quoted in Bukowski and Heydel 2009: 338; trans. A.A.). In my analysis I proceed according to the rules of the hermeneutic circle, considering an excerpt as an independent and significant unit, which remains, however, in a close relationship with the entire novel.

The first excerpt comes from the narrator’s conversation with Shatov. Shatov is a fanatical follower of “the idea” (he will commit suicide in its name). The subject of the conversation are Salvophiles:

– Ненависть тоже тут есть, – произнес он, помолчав с минуту, – они первые были бы страшно несчастливы, если бы Россия как-нибудь вдруг перестроилась, хотя бы даже на их лад, и как-нибудь вдруг стала безмерно богата и счастлива. Некого было бы им тогда ненавидеть, не на кого плевать, не над чем издеваться! Тут одна только животная, безконечная ненависть к России, в организм ввевшаяся... И никаких невидимых миру слез из-под видимого смеха тут нету! Никогда еще не было сказано на

Руси более фалшывого слова, как про эти незримые слезы! – вскричал он почти с яростью (2003: 128).

In J.B.'s translation Shatov's words are rendered as follows:

– Pełni są też nienawiści – powiedział po chwili – oni pierwsi byliby nieszczęśliwi, gdyby się w Rosji coś zmieniło, nawet w myśl ich pragnień i gdyby nagle Rosja stała się bogata i szczęśliwa. Nie mieliby wtedy kogo nienawidzić i nad kim się znęcać. Tkwi w nich zwierzęca, organiczna nienawiść ku Rosji. I nie ma tu żadnego śmiechu przez niewidoczne łzy. Nigdy jeszcze nie powiedziano nic bardziej niesłusznego, jak o tych niewidocznych łzach! – krzyknął prawie z wściekłością (1928a: 129).

“They are also full of hatred,” he said after a pause, “they would be the first to feel unhappy, had something changed in Russia, even if it fulfilled their desires and if, all of a sudden, Russia became rich and happy. Then they wouldn't have anybody to hate and torment. They are full of an animal, organic hatred for Russia. And there is no laughter through invisible tears. Nothing more false has ever been uttered than this statement about those invisible tears!” he almost cried out in fury (trans. A.A.).

In the original, in the passage where the protagonist enumerates specific facts or visions that intensify the impression of anger: *Некого было бы им тогда ненавидеть, не на кого плевать, не над чем издеваться! Тут одна только животная, безконечная ненависть к России, в организм вьевшаяся...*, the translator edits the text, thus significantly changing the rhythm: *Nie mieliby wtedy kogo nienawidzić i nad kim się znęcać. Tkwi w nich zwierzęca, organiczna nienawiść ku Rosji* (Then they wouldn't have anybody to hate and torment. They are full of an animal, organic hatred for Russia). While Dostoevsky's Shatov raises his voice (three exclamations), in J.B.'s translation he shouts only at the end. In Russian, the protagonist holds his breath in the middle of the argument. In Polish, his argument goes without interruption. Shatov's monologue has been further abridged by dropping the epithets: *безмерно богата и счастлива; страшно нещастливы*, as well as a few other words: *еще не было сказано на Руси более фалшывого слова*. Nevertheless, J.B.'s text is not far from the original, and the rhythm has been changed also in the other translation.

In Tadeusz Zagórski's version the same fragment is rendered as follows:

– I nienawidzą, – wymówił po chwili milczenia. – Byliby najnieszczęśliwi, gdyby Rosja przekształciła się podług ich formułki, i gdyby nagle stała się szczęśliwa i bogata. Kogóż mieliby nienawidzić wtedy? Kogo zapluwać?

Kogo spotwarzać? Tam tylko zwierzęca, nieskończona nienawiść do Rosji, przenikająca całą duszę... I nie ma tu żadnych „leż niewidzialnych dla świata poza zewnętrznym śmiechem.” Nigdy jeszcze nie wypowiedział nikt w Rosji tak kłamliwych słów, jak te o niewidzialnych łzach! – wykrzyknął ze złością (1928b: 140).

“And they hate,” he uttered after a brief silence. “They would have been most unhappy, had Russia transformed itself according to their formula, and had it suddenly become happy and rich. Whom would they hate then? Whom would they spit upon? Whom would they besmirch? There’s only animal, boundless hatred of Russia, penetrating the entire soul... And there are no ‘tears invisible to the world behind an outer smile.’ Never in Russia has anybody said words more untrue than those about the invisible tears!” he cried out with anger (trans. A.A.).

Here Shatov’s monologue has been strongly abridged. The sentences have been shortened, thus changing not only their rhythm, but also their tone. Where in the original there is just one long sentence: *Ненависть тоже тут есть, – произнес он, помолчал с минуту, – они первые были бы страшно несчастливы, если бы Россия как-нибудь вдруг перестроилась, хотя бы даже на их лад, и как-нибудь вдруг стала безмерно богата и счастлива albo Некого было бы им тогда ненавидеть, не на кого плевать, не над чем издеваться!*, the translator has introduced a few shorter phrases with different punctuation: – *I nienawidzą, – wymówił po chwili milczenia. – Byliby najniezwyklejsi, gdyby Rosja przekształciła się podług ich formułki, i gdyby nagle stała się szczęśliwa i bogata. Kogóż mieliby nienawidzić wtedy? Kogo zapluwać? Kogo spotwarzać?* (“And they hate,” he uttered after a brief silence. “They would have been most unhappy, had Russia transformed itself according to their formula, and had it suddenly become happy and rich. Whom would they hate then? Whom would they spit upon? Whom would they besmirch?). Instead of three exclamations, in Zagórski’s version there is one exclamation, three questions and one phrase in quotation marks. Some inaccuracies of the translation also change the tone of the fragment: the phrase *почти с яростью* is rendered in the Polish version as *ze złością* (with anger) and *как-нибудь вдруг перестроилась, хотя бы даже на их лад* has been translated as *przekształciła się podług ich formułki* (transformed itself according to their formula).

Before drawing the conclusions, let us consider another excerpt. This is again Shatov speaking, this time making a desperate confession to Stav-

rogin. Shatov has been strongly influenced by Stavrogin and his ideas. When they meet after a longer while, Stavrogin turns out to be a cynical man, who seems to have nothing in common with Shatov's former friend, leader and role-model.

Ставрогин, для чего я осужден в вас верить во веки веков? Разве мог бы я так говорить с другим? Я целомудрие имею, но я не побоялся моего нагиша, потому что со Ставрогиным говорил. Я не боялся окарикатурить великую мысль прикосновением моим, потому что Ставрогин слушал меня... Разве я не буду целовать следов ваших ног, когда вы уйдете? Я не могу вас вырвать из моего сердца, Николай Ставрогин! (2003: 236)

J.B. has translated the fragment as follows:

Stawrogin, dlaczego sądzonem mi jest wierzyć w pana na wieki wieków? Czyżbym mógł mówić tak z kim innym? Czysty jestem i niewinny, lecz nie wstydzilem się swej nagości, gdyż mówiłem ze Stawroginem. Nie obawiałem się przedstawić swej myśli w karykaturalnej postaci, gdyż słuchał mnie Stawrogin... Czy nie będę całował śladów stóp pana, jak pan odejdzie? Nie mogę wyrwać pana ze swego serca, Mikołaju Stawroginie! (1928a: 243)

Stavrogin, why am I destined to believe in you for ever and ever? Would I be able to speak that way to anyone else? I am pure and innocent, but I was not ashamed of my nakedness because I was talking to Stavrogin. I was not afraid of presenting my idea in a caricatured form, because Stavrogin was listening to me... Shall I not be kissing your footprints when you are gone? I cannot tear you from my heart, Nikolay Stavrogin! (trans. A.A.)

In Tadeusz Zagórski's version:

Ech, Stawrogin! Dlaczego skazany jestem na to, aby wierzyć w pana na wieki wieczne? Czyż mógłbym tak mówić z kim innym? Mam poczucie wstydu, lecz nie wstydzilem się nagości własnej, gdyż słuchał mnie Stawrogin... Nie bałem się dotknięciem swoim zniekształcić wielkiej myśli, gdyż słuchał mnie Stawrogin! Czyż nie będę całował śladów pańskich stóp, gdy pan wyjdzie?... Stawrogin! Nie mogę pana wyrwać z serca mego... (1928b: 262)

Oh, Stavrogin! Why am I condemned to believe in you for eternity? Could I speak that way with anybody else? I feel shame, but I was not ashamed of my own nakedness because Stavrogin was listening to me... I was not afraid that my touch might distort the great thought because Stavrogin was listening to me! Shall I not be kissing your footprints when you leave?... Stavrogin! I cannot tear you from my heart... (trans. A.A.)

In this excerpt the differences between the two translations are even more evident. J.B.'s translation is closer to the original; this time the rhythm is almost unchanged. In Zagórski's version the rhythm has been strongly modified. In the very first sentence Zagórski has introduced an exclamation, *Eh, Stawrogin!*, not present in the original. In his version, Shatov's commanding tone sounds almost hysterical – the sentences alternate between suspension and exclamation. In the original, the protagonist holds his voice only once: *Я не боялся окарикатурить великую мысль прикосновением моим, потому что Ставрогин слушал меня...*, in order to pose a rhetorical question: *Разве я не буду целовать следов ваших ног, когда вы уйдете?*, after which he confesses/cries out his love: *Я не могу вас вырвать из моего сердца, Николай Ставрогин!* In the translation, the final exclamation has been moved before the key sentence. The confession itself is deprived of its willfulness, it sounds muffled, uncertain and incomplete: *Stawrogin! Nie mogę pana wyrwać z serca mego... (Stavrogin! I cannot tear you from my heart...)*.

Another significant modification of the text occurs when the Russian expression *во веки веков* is rendered as *na wieki wieczne* (for eternity). *Во веки веков* means *for ever and ever* (as J.B. has translated it) and it obviously alludes to the ending of Christian (both Catholic and Orthodox) prayers. The religious association is important, since Shatov's words are a *credo* of sorts. It is worth mentioning that he has utterly subjected his life to the idea, which, to him, Stavrogin personifies. His conviction is confirmed not only by the association of the devotional formula with the verb *to believe*, but also by the entire monologue, structured in imitation of a prayer. In a larger context, we should not forget the role of faith in *The Devils* and in Dostoevsky's work in general.

J.B.'s translation is not faultless: the sentence *Nie obawiałem się przedstawić swej myśli w karykaturalnej postaci* (I was not afraid of presenting my idea in a caricatured form) deforms the meaning of the original. But in general, the whole is close to Dostoevsky's "word." In my opinion, the difference between the two translations consists exactly in their different treatment of the "word" (in Bakhtin's sense<sup>4</sup>). In such a polyphonic novel as *The Devils*, each character speaks in his or her own voice. The

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<sup>4</sup> I refer to Bakhtin's three types of discourse: the unmediated word addressing its object directly, expressing the speaker's final position; the objectified word – the word of a represented person, and the double-voiced word, aimed at someone else's word (see Bakhtin 1970: 301–302).



personality of Dostoevsky's characters is built upon a peculiar manner of speech, *skaz*. The author does not lend them his voice, he does not objectify them. Their liberty is, of course, relative, but it is a deliberate move – the dominant. Their voices are therefore independent; they sound next to the author's voice. The character is not an object; he or she is yet another legitimate subject. The author does not present his characters – they present themselves, while the author reveals their self-knowledge. Dostoevsky's characters hold a predominant position among other elements of the represented world. The reality of the novel participates in the process of their self-discovery or even self-presentation. The self-presentation is mediated through the word, through speech, with its own melody and rhythm.

My close reading of the two 1928 translations confirms that the quoted excerpts are representative of the entire texts. The analysis has proven, therefore, that it was not the quality that decided which translation should be selected for a second edition (PIW 1958).

The choice of Zagórski's version might have been dictated also by the publisher's strategy. This aspect seems interesting, if we consider the boom on the Polish book market of the 1920s and 30s. Let us have a look at the publishing houses and the editions themselves.

### 3.

It was extremely difficult to find any information about J.B. Her initials have not been deciphered. It was also difficult to find any information about the publisher (which could have helped us to learn more about the translator, her motivations and the date of the translation). The "Biblioteka Rodzinna" (Family Library) publishing house is documented in several statistical publications (see Czamowska 1967), but its existence is acknowledged only in the context of the number of publishers in the inter-war era. The publisher is not mentioned in *Encyklopedia wiedzy o książce* (Books: Encyclopedia); neither is it mentioned in Stefan Dippl's memoir about the book market of the period. All this suggests that it was not an important publishing company.<sup>5</sup> We also know that it was started after

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<sup>5</sup> Wańkowicz calls Family Library "some makeshift publishers." In Janusz Dunin's book, Family Library is confused with the "Family Library. A Selection of Best Novels of All Nations," which was published as early as 1890 by Bode in Vienna (Dunin 1982: 251).

1918.<sup>6</sup> Most probably the initiative was a result of the post-WWI revival of the book market.<sup>7</sup> This is also suggested by the name of the company, which alludes to the then fashionable book “series” (Dunin 1992: 160). The habit of publishing books in a series<sup>8</sup> was a mechanism that allowed publishers to target specific clients. In that spirit, in the interwar years such series as the “One Penny Library,” “Library of Crime Novels,” “Library of the Youngest Woman Writers,” “Library of Theater Fans” and “Library of Pink Books” were published. Curiously enough, Family Library based in Warsaw is not listed in the literature on Polish book series (Jędrych 1991; Dunin, Knorowski 1984). However, books published in that series are still in use and they can be found not only on the antiquarian book market. Family Library was definitely active in the years 1927–1930,<sup>9</sup> and in that period it published mainly three authors. In 1927–1929, it brought out seven novels by Alexandre Dumas (the father) and in 1929–30, six novels by Eugene Süe. The third author was Dostoevsky. Apart from *The Devils*, in 1928 Family Library issued *Crime and Punishment* and *The Idiot*, in 1929 – *Brothers Karamazov*, *The House of the Dead*, *Humiliated and Insulted*, *The Gambler* and *The Adolescent*.

A different atmosphere accompanied the publication of Dostoevsky’s novel in the “Rój” publishing house. Rój was initiated by the writer Melchior Wańkiewicz (Marian Kister joined in later), who headed the Press Department in the Ministry of the Interior and knew the book market very well. The Publishing Society “Rój,” located at Kredytowa Street, was officially registered in Warsaw on July 30, 1925 (Birkenmajer et al. 1971: 2547). The company started off with a brochure series “Library of History and Geography.” With the innocent slogan “To entertain without lying. To teach without boring,” it published books by such eminent writers as Ju-

<sup>6</sup> It is not listed in the directory of Warsaw companies before 1918 (see Mlekicka 1987: 256–261).

<sup>7</sup> According to Jan Wnęk, more than 80 publishing companies were active on the market in the interwar period (2006: 29). Also Stefan Dippel writes about a *boom* on the book market in those years (1976: 85). Antonia Kłoskowska sees the activity on the book market in the 1920s and 30s as the “first stage of Polish culture becoming mass culture” (1962: 417).

<sup>8</sup> Books were published in a series by a specific publisher (for example, Rój), but there were also publishers who specialized in book series.

<sup>9</sup> These dates have been established on the basis of the information provided in the books published by Family Library, available at the Jagiellonian Library in Krakow, Public Library in Krakow, National Library in Warsaw and Warsaw University Library. Family Library might also have been active earlier or later, but their books from those years are not in the library collections.

lian Tuwim, Zofia Kossak, Maria Kuncewiczowa and Ferdynand Antoni Ossendowski.<sup>10</sup> After a while, Rój started to publish novels, for example, the “20th Century Works” series included books by Nikolai Alexandrovich Berdyaev, Maxim Gorky, Jaroslav Hašek, Franz Kafka, Thomas Mann, François Mauriac, Marcel Proust, André Gide, Erich Maria Remarque and Bertrand Russell.

The translation of *The Devils* was one of the 137 titles announced for 1928 and was part of Dostoevsky’s *Collected Works*.<sup>11</sup> The reason for this publishing campaign is quite clear – Dostoevsky’s works in Zagórski’s translation were published as a result of the publisher’s competitiveness. It would be interesting to find out how soon the project was carried out. As Wańkowicz reminisced, “some (...) publishers announced (...) subscriptions for selected works by Dostoevsky. Only a few days later, we started a similar project (...)” Both series came out virtually at the same time. Family Library might have advertised their series long before they published the first of Dostoevsky’s novels. This would have allowed Rój to commission the translation just a little later. However, it is also possible that Dostoevsky’s works had been translated beforehand and were just made available to the publisher.

The “20th Century Works” series was edited by Wańkowicz. The first book series was prefaced by an essay by Andrzej Strug (1928), who thus argued for the need to publish Dostoevsky’s collected works:

Dostoevsky is not well known in Poland, certainly not as well as in other civilized European countries. The generations of readers from the Congress Kingdom, who were brought up in Russian schools, read Dostoevsky in original and they learned from his works about the depths and mysteries of the Russian and human soul. On the other hand, under the Austrian and Prussian occupa-

<sup>10</sup> Ferdynand Antoni Ossendowski (1876–1945) was a Polish writer, journalist and traveler. His memoir of his escape from revolutionary Russia, *Beasts, Men and Gods* (1923) was translated into nineteen languages (translator’s note).

<sup>11</sup> In the years 1928–1929, eight series of the *Collected Works* were published: series no. 1 – *Crime and Punishment*, vols. I–IV, translated by J.P. Zajączkowski; series no. 2 – *The Idiot*, vols. I–IV, translated by H. Grotowska; series no. 3 – *The Devils*, vols. I–IV, translated by T. Zagórski; series no. 4 – *Brothers Karamazov*, vols. I–IV, translated by A. Wat; series no. 5 – *Humiliated and Insulted*, vols. I–IV, translated by W. Broniewski; series no. 6 – *The Adolescent*, vols. I–IV, translated by M. Bogdaniowa and K. Błęszyński; series no. 7 – *Poor Folk*, translated by A. Stawar; *The Crocodile*, translated by W. Broniewski; *White Nights*, translated by W. Broniewski; *Prima Aprilis*, translated by J.S., *Stavrogin’s Confession*, translated by T. Zagórski; series no. 8 – *Tales*, a collective translation, vols. I–IV.

tion, thanks to the foreign schooling, Dostoevsky was sometimes read in German translations. Nevertheless, in Poland in general, Dostoevsky was probably known only by his famous name, which towards the end of the previous century, through France and Germany, ascended to the pantheon of the immortal heroes of world literature (trans. A.A.).

Further on, the author comments on the extant translations:

For a long time we had no translations of Dostoevsky's works. After that, once in a while, some fragmentary, careless or even inept translations appeared. They failed to stir an interest and went into oblivion. Today the generation who learned Russian at school and was able to read the great writer in original is slowly dying out. Therefore, there is a new, urgent need to publish all of his works in modern versions, in correct, but also masterful translations. We have to do this work for the sake of the young generation in independent Poland (trans. A.A.).

In spite of this declaration, Zagórski's translation of *The Devils* compared with J.B.'s version (and also with the first Polish translation of the novel) looks rather pale. The language is often artificial. The sentence structure does not convey the "lightness" of the original text. In Zagórski's rendering, Dostoevsky's characteristic phrasing is almost lost.

It is also necessary to remember that Zagórski's translation came out in a poor quality print. In an effort to cut down the price of Dostoevsky's *Collected Works*, the publishers also reduced the quality of the edition. This is why today only two copies of two out of four volumes of the 1928 edition of *The Devils* are available.<sup>12</sup> J.B.'s version and Kotarbiński's 1908 translation are much easier to find.

How can we therefore account for the popularity of Zagórski's translation? It seems that the publisher played a key role. Rój had a much stronger position than Family Library. It is quite possible that J.B.'s translation was underrated just because it was published by an unimportant publisher. This might have been the reason why Zagórski's translation was selected for the PIW 1958 edition. However, yet another factor sheds a light on the fate of J.B.'s translation: its publication style.

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<sup>12</sup> Both at the National Library in Warsaw.

## 4.

Family Library published books in high quality print,<sup>13</sup> with elegant canvas binding and gold lettering. This was quite unusual for this type of publication.<sup>14</sup> Family Library books were not pocket editions. On the contrary, they were rather luxurious. The publisher's name suggests that their selection aimed at meeting the needs of an average family.<sup>15</sup> Which family member was the target of Dostoevsky's prophetic novel? We cannot know for certain, but a lot suggests it was addressed to a woman.

Dostoevsky's novels differ from other Family Library publications;<sup>16</sup> they are the only illustrated books. What is more, all the illustrations in *The Devils*<sup>17</sup> focus on the female characters. Each drawing has a brief caption which explains the scene, but it is out of context. We can see Maria Timofeyevna and read the explanation: *przyglądała się gościom ruchliwemi, latającemi oczkami* (she was observing the visitors with busy, restless little eyes). Daria Pavlovna is presented in conversation with Barbara Petrovna: *Dasza odpowiedziała długiem pytającym spojrzeniem* (Daria replied with a long, questioning look). We can notice Lizaveta Nicolaievna: *na serio zemdliała, co do tego nie może być żadnych wątpliwości* (she fainted for real, there is not a hint of doubt about this). Barbara Petrovna is presented shouting: *Ja wam tego nigdy nie daruję!* (I will never forgive you this!), and later in a scene where *z oburzeniem i sarkastycznym uśmiechem na ustach zmuszoną była wysłuchać jego* [Stiepana Trofimowicza] *wynurzeń* (indignant and with a sarcastic smile, she was forced to listen to his [Stepan Trofimovich's] confessions). The two remaining pictures illustrate the scenes that I was not able to align with the text. The first picture shows a woman, sitting at the table. This is probably Maria Lebiadkin. In front of her, at

<sup>13</sup> Almost all books in the series were printed at the Włodzimierz Łazarski Press, famous for high quality printing (see Birkenmajer et al. 1971: 1434).

<sup>14</sup> In those years, paperback editions were the most popular. In the interwar period, colorful dust jackets were introduced; sometimes they were pasted upon a cardboard binding (Dunin 1982: 133–135).

<sup>15</sup> The economic and social situation in Poland after World War I changed the traditional family model from a large family to a family with one or two children (see J. Żarnowski 2005: 40).

<sup>16</sup> A. Dumas's *The Queen's Necklace* is an exception (Wende i S-ka, eds., translator unknown, Warsaw 1925).

<sup>17</sup> There are seven illustrations in the novel, four in the first and three in the second volume.

the door, two men are standing. The caption reads: *siedziała sobie cicho i spokojnie w drugim pokoju w kącie* (she was sitting quietly and calmly in the corner of the other room). The caption of the second scene says: *Ona uniosła się trochę na łóżku* (She rose a little on the bed), and the picture presents a young woman reclining on a metal bed and smiling seductively, while a man seated on the floor is admiring her.<sup>18</sup> The illustrations are placed at equal, 100-page intervals and they are not related to the accompanying text. Outside the context of Dostoevsky's novel, they could illustrate one of the books in the "Library of New and Best Romance." Women play an important part in *The Devils*, but – in contrast with the illustrations – they do not introduce an erotic subtext into the book.

Leafing through the book, it is hard to resist the impression that the publisher or the editor had no idea of the content of the novel. The fact that the translator was a woman might have suggested that this was a novel for women. It is also possible that for the reasons of publicity the publisher or the editor decided to emphasize the romantic aspects of the novel. The quality of the translation (including the vocabulary and the cultural context) proves the translator's competence. It is hard to believe that such an intelligent reader of Dostoevsky could have been responsible for the final product that appeared on the book market in 1928.

## 5.

Under different circumstances, would J.B.'s translation enter the canon? Probably not. The position of Wańkiewicz, the publisher of Zagórski's translation, seems to have played a crucial role. Family Library, who did not stand ground to the competitors, can also be blamed for the failure. Nevertheless, it seems strange that J.B.'s translation has been overlooked by Dostoevsky specialists in Poland. The style of the publication has certainly mattered as well. In a "women's edition," *The Devils* was condemned to oblivion.

**trans. Anna Arno**

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<sup>18</sup> Actually this excerpt fits only one place in the novel: the moment when Shatov's wife comes back home three years after their separation. In the book, however, this is not an erotic scene: Mrs Shatov is down with a high fever as she announces that she is about to give birth to a baby.

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