

The Pleasure of the Intertext (in Translation): The case of Barthes and Lewańska*

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The relation between intertextuality and translation is most often considered from two perspectives.¹ In the first perspective, intertextuality is treated as a model for the relationship between the original and the translation. In the second perspective, we study how intertextual references present in the original text are translated. In the present article, I will not discuss either of them. I will deal with a different and much more unusual phenomenon that demands critical attention; namely, intertextuality in translation, which is not motivated by the intertextuality of the original. How do you justify the presence of such unusual references? What do they say about the attitude of the translator to her task? What reactions do they cause in the reader?

¹ "Intertekstualność" [Intertextuality] in: *Mała encyklopedia przekładoznawstwa*, ed. Urszula Dąbska-Prokop (Częstochowa: Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Języków Obcych i Ekonomii Edukator, 2000); Ewa Kraskowska, "Intertekstualność a przekład", in: *Między tekstami: Intertekstualność jako problem poetyki historycznej*, ed. Jerzy Ziomek, Janusz Sławiński, Włodzimierz Bolecki (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1992), 129-145; Marta Kaźmierczak, *Przekład w kręgu intertekstualności: Na materiale tłumaczeń poezji Bolesława Leśmiana* (Warszawa: Instytut Lingwistyki Stosowanej Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2012), 23-31.

The unusual intertextual references whose origin, status and potential impact I wish to discuss are just two small fragments of the Polish translation of Roland Barthes's *The pleasure of the text* (1973). The text was translated into Polish by Ariadna Lewańska.² The theme and the poetics of the text exemplify Barthes's poststructuralist era. Skeptical of coherence and uniformity, Barthes explores the issue of textual pleasure and bliss.³ By exploiting the poetics of the fragment, which does not preclude compositional sophistication,⁴ he analyzes the variables that affect the experience of pleasure and bliss by writers and readers. Barthes's book is crucial to my argument, because I believe it sheds light on Lewańska's unusual translation choices and the reactions these choices cause in readers. Barthes's reflections should inspire us to analyze the texts we read, thus making us more sensitive to novel ways of thinking about translation.

I cannot discuss the quality and poetics of Lewańska's entire translation in detail, but I would like to point out that stylistic expressiveness is important for the translator: she often uses colorful, sophisticated, and "non-neutral" words in places, where, from the point of view of correctness or grammar, a stylistically "flat" and "transparent" alternative would be better. It seems that the unusual use of intertexts may be part of such a broader tendency on behalf of the translator. The first fragment that interests me comes from the *Bords / Brzegi* chapter. Barthes describes here the mechanisms of readerly pleasure, referring to old and modern texts:

Czytajcie powoli, detalicznie, powieść Zoli, a książka wypadnie wam z ręki; czytajcie szybko, po trosze, tekst współczesny, a tekst pozostanie niejasny, nie przysporzy wam żadnej przyjemności; chcecie, by się coś działo, a tu nic się nie dzieje, gdyż to, co się dzieje z językiem, nie dzieje się w dyskursie; to, co „się dzieje”, to, co „się zdarza” – zerwanie między brzegami, szpara rozkoszy – powstaje w obrębie języków, w akcie wypowiedzenia, a nie w następstwie wypowiedzi. Pora przestać połykać i pożerać, a zacząć skubać i drobiazgowo przeżuwać, powrócić przy czytaniu dzisiejszych autorów do **niepróżnującego próżnowania**⁵ dawniejszych lektur – wstąpić do klanu arystokratycznych czytelników. [pp. 20-21]

Lisez lentement, lisez tout, d'un roman de Zola, le livre vous tombera des mains ; lisez vite, par bribes, un texte moderne, ce texte devient opaque, forclos à votre plaisir : vous voulez qu'il arrive quelque chose, et il n'arrive rien ; car ce qui arrive au langage n'arrive pas au discours : ce qui «arrive», ce qui «s'en va», la faille des deux bords, l'interstice de la jouissance, se produit dans le

² Roland Barthes, *Przyjemność tekstu*, translated by Ariadna Lewańska (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo KR, 1997).

³ Rafaella Di Ambra, *Plaisirs d'écriture. Une lecture thématique de l'oeuvre de Roland Barthes* (Paris: Arts Éditions de Paris, 1997), 206-216; Annette Lavers, *Roland Barthes. Structuralism and After* (London: Methuen & Co, 1982), 204-205; Patrizia Lombardo, "Against Language" in: *The Three Paradoxes of Roland Barthes* (Athens-London: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 45-86; Anna Turczyn, "Na styku przyjemności i rozkoszy. Psychoanalityczna wykładnia *Przyjemności tekstu* Rolanda Barthes'a", in: *Imperium Rolanda Barthes'a*, ed. Anna Grzegorzczak, Agnieszka Kaczmarek, Katarzyna Machtyl, 63-70 (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM 2016); George R. Wasserman, "An Erotics of Literature", in: *Roland Barthes* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981), 100-105; Andrew Brown, *Roland Barthes: The Figures of Writing* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992) 86-87.

⁴ The respective fragments of the text are not numbered or titled. The table of contents shows, however, that each fragment has a title and that the chapters are arranged in a chronological and an alphabetical order. This turned out to be troublesome in translation, because not every French title could be translated into Polish without changing the first letter of the word. There had to be some give and take. To maintain the chronological and alphabetical order of the table of contents, the translator or the publisher decided to change the order of the chapters in the main text. The Polish text and the French text are therefore ordered differently.

⁵ All emphases are mine, W.Sz.

volume des langages, dans l'énonciation, non dans la suite des énoncés : ne pas dévorer, ne pas avaler, mais brouter, tondre avec minutie, retrouver, pour lire ces auteurs d'aujourd'hui, **le loisir** des anciennes lectures : être des lecteurs aristocratiques. [pp. 23-24]⁶

I will not analyze the translation of this fragment in detail, but will focus instead on the procedure that interests me. The last sentence of the Polish translation, in which the postulated way of reading is discussed, alludes to the collection of works by Wespazjan Kochowski published in 1674 entitled *Niepróżnujące próżnowanie* [Non-idle idleness]. This allusion appears in the place of the French word *le loisir*, which means entertainment, leisure, and free time. Kochowski's oxymoronic and conceptual title refers to the concept of *otium negotiosum* and its ancient tradition. *Otium* means free time or leisure, which also includes intellectual and literary activities, while *negotium* means work. As Maria Eustachiewicz notes, the title indicates that the author is a poet and a landowner, who celebrates country life and creates and reads literature favored by his class.⁷ How does such a reference relate to Barthes's argument? At the level of the most general associations, it actually conveys the main message of the original text. It evokes the feeling of pleasure that is inspired by reading, which requires active participation, but cannot be rushed. It even points to the associations between such "enjoyable" reading and the lifestyle of the higher classes. Upon a closer look, however, we notice some differences. The title of Kochowski's collection refers primarily to the tasks of the writer (the inscription under the engraving found in the collection reads: "Wespazjana Kochowskiego Liryka polskie w niepróżnującym próżnowaniu napisane" [Wespazjan Kochowski's Polish poems written during *otium negotiosum*]),⁸ while Barthes's comments relate to the activity of the reader. In addition, the reading habits of the aristocratic French reader,⁹ regardless of the metaphorical nature of this term, differ from those which are characteristic for the Polish nobility from the Baroque era. Historical, geographical, cultural, and class issues all play a role here. Before we consider why the translator made such a choice and whether it was a good strategy, let us look at the second example of an unusual use of intertext.

The second fragment that interests me comes from the chapter *Droite / Prawica*, in which Barthes considers stereotypes which surround the political classification of pleasure. In short, he claims that the political right monopolizes pleasure by contrasting it with boring intellectual abstraction, while the political left disregards it. Barthes thus writes about the symptoms of this tendency:

Na prawicy rewindkuje się przyjemność przeciwko intelektualizmowi i znowie klerków: to stary reakcyjny mit serca przeciwstawianego głowie, **czucia i wiary – szkiełku i oku**, życia (na gorąco) – (zimnej) abstrakcji; czyż artysta nie powinien, wedle nieszczęsnej recepty Debussy'ego, „z całą pokorą przysparzać przyjemności”? [pp. 83-84]

⁶ The same fragment in English reads: "Read slowly, read all of a novel by Zola, and the book will drop from your hands; read fast, in snatches, some modern text, and it becomes opaque, inaccessible to your pleasure: you want something to happen and nothing does, for what happens to the language does not happen to the discourse: what "happens," what "goes away," the seam of the two edges, the interstice of bliss, occurs in the volume of the languages, in the uttering, not in the sequence of utterances: not to devour, to gobble, but to graze, to browse scrupulously, to rediscover in order to read today's writers-the leisure of bygone readings: to be aristocratic readers", R. Barthes, *The pleasure of the text*, translated by Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), pp. 12-13 (translator's note).

⁷ Wespazjan Kochowski, *Utwory poetyckie. Wybór*, edited by Maria Eustachiewicz, 2nd revised edition (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1991), XIII-XVIII.

⁸ Kochowski, XVII.

⁹ More on how Barthes uses the word *aristocratic*; see: Brown, 68.

A droite, le plaisir est revendiqué contre l'intellectualité, la cléricature : c'est le vieux mythe réactionnaire du coeur contre la tête, **de la sensation contre le raisonnement**, de la «vie» (chaude) contre «l'abstraction» (froide) : l'artiste de doit-il pas, selon le précepte sinistre de Debussy, «chercher humblement à faire plaisir» ? [pp. 38-39]¹⁰

We are dealing here with a similar translation procedure as in the previous passage. Barthes writes about feeling and reasoning, emotions and logic. Ariadna Lewańska, however, was not satisfied with such ordinary counterparts, and made an allusion to Adam Mickiewicz's *Romantyczność* [Romanticism]. How does this quote influence the interpretation of Barthes's text? How does it influence Barthes's argument? At the level of the most important associations, this quote, similarly to the previous one, works well, because it refers to the opposition introduced by Barthes and its most important features. However, a closer look at the French and Polish versions demonstrates significant differences. The French word *sensation* means both "feeling" and "experience." It refers to pleasure in a more coherent and obvious way than the Polish word *wiara* [faith] used by Lewańska. Moreover, even the very etymology of the French word *raisonnement* refers to reason and French Rationalism, while the Polish phrase *szkiełko i oko* [glass and eye] refers to Empiricism. The allusion to *Romantyczność* may also seem anachronistic, disrupting Barthes's logic and argumentation. The final fragment of Mickiewicz's ballad, from which this quote comes, may indeed be read as the "manifesto" of Romanticism directed against the Enlightenment.¹¹ While the Polish phrase also refers to two opposite stances and the tensions between them, it does not mean that they are identical to those introduced by Barthes.

Do the described differences mean that Lewańska's propositions should be considered inadequate? Not necessarily. Given the assumptions about the likely reactions of readers and the nature of the translated text, let us consider what motivations, either explicit or implicit, could be hidden behind such translation choices. Although canons change, we can assume that the reader of Barthes's text is familiar with Polish literature and culture; she is able to identify intertexts or at least notice their unique status and acknowledge their importance in Polish culture. Such assumptions were particularly reasonable in the mid-1990s, when the Polish translation of *The pleasure of the text* was published. Nevertheless, we should not take it for granted that the reader will be able to identify all the contexts I have named above; such intertexts allow us to see (not necessarily) desirable ideological shifts. Respectively, we should not assume that the adopted reading mode will be conducive to such observations. Interpretative decisions may be inhibited or overshadowed by two reading responses that are likely to be evoked in such a context: surprise and pleasure.

Surprise may result from a sense of, paradoxically, both strangeness and familiarity. The conscious reader who wants to reflect on her own reading habits and knows the genesis of the book she is reading knows that it was written by the French theoretician. As long as nothing disturbs the reading process, she may even forget that she is dealing with a translation, disregarding its role, possibilities and conditions. However, when she notices intertextual references to Polish

¹⁰This fragment in English reads: "On the right, pleasure is championed against intellectuality, the clerisy: the old reactionary myth of heart against head, sensation against reasoning, (warm) "life" against (cold) "abstraction": must not the artist, according to Debussy's sinister precept, "humbly seek to give pleasure"?" [p. 22] (translator's note).

¹¹Adam Mickiewicz, *Wybór poezji. Vol. 1*, edited by Cz. Zgorzelski (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1997), XLIII; Bogusław Dopart, "Romantyczność Adama Mickiewicza jako utwór programowy", *Ruch Literacki* no. 3 (1988).

literature (and even when she fails to identify a specific reference and treats it only as a “buzz-word”), she realizes that she is reading a text written in Polish. The intertexts which may be found in the Polish translation are “focal places” of the linguistic energy of the Polish language. Their outright “Polishness” destroys the illusion of reading an unproblematic and transparent text, one governed only by the conventions that are equivalent to those found in the source language. Doubt and curiosity follow. What did it sound like in the original? Why was it translated like that? What was gained and what was lost in translation?

This mechanism of disillusion demonstrates how complicated the processes of alienation and domestication are. Although Lawrence Venuti, who popularized these categories in translation studies,¹² takes into account the nuances, one can get the impression that alienation and domestication are often treated as an extension of Schleiermacher’s opposition, bringing the reader closer to the author and bringing the author closer to the reader.¹³ In addition, especially in the context of the influential theories of the ethics of translation, which draw attention to power relations and postulate openness to otherness, domestication is sometimes treated as a procedure which creates a “safe” yet simplified vision of the world, solidifying the *status quo*, supporting the men in power, and perpetuating the myth. Alienation, on the other hand, is a procedure that requires cognitive effort from the reader, opening her to otherness. Such a binary approach results in a simplified classification of formal procedures. Domestication involves choosing “safe” alternatives and replacing the elements of the source text which may seem strange to the target reader with transparent equivalents in the target language. Alienation, in turn, is based on inserting “untamed” linguistic or cultural elements from the source language into the target text.

It seems that coming into contact with Lewańska’s intertexts may have a more complex effect on the reader. Factors that have a “disillusioning” or an alienating effect, which remind the reader of the existence of the source text, may in fact be regarded as, formally speaking, domesticating elements, due to their strong relationship with the target culture. However, they do not read as “transparent,” obvious, or unproblematic. Quite the opposite, although the reader is reading the Polish translation, these fragments are too Polish not to remind her that the original text was written in another language. This leads to the paradoxical situation of alienation by domestication.

Readers who are capable of such reflection may experience one more feeling, namely pleasure. The pleasure may be caused by the feeling of surprise caused by finding a typical Polish wording in a text written by a Frenchman, especially when the reader is aware of the tradition and background of the text. The language “excess” of the intertexts used by Lewańska is also pleasant – they are, after all, quotes from poetry and thus have an aesthetic impact. “Niepróżnujące próżnowanie,” “czucie i wiara” and “szkiełko i oko” attract attention; they are expressive, elegant and smart, even if we do not compare them with more standard and “flat” variants that

¹²Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator’s Invisibility: A History of Translation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995); Lawrence Venuti, *Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998).

¹³Kaisa Koskinen agrees with such an approach. See: K. Koskinen, “Domestication, Foreignization and the Modulation of Affect” in *Domestication and Foreignization in Translation Studies*, ed. Hannu Kemppanen, Marja Jänis, Alexandra Belikova, (Berlin: Frank & Timme GmbH, 2012). [https://www.academia.edu/7872551/_2012_Domestication_Foreignization_and_the_Modulation_of_Affect_pre-print_] [date of access 30 June 2019].

could be used instead. Pleasure may also result from the fact that the translator is having fun; she is playing a game inspired by the text she translates, and it gives her pleasure.

The pleasure of the text makes us aware of the subtle mechanisms of writerly and readerly satisfaction. It can be assumed that the informed reader of this book pays attention to both its content (theoretical reflection) and style (practical, textual manifestations of Barthes's logic). It is indeed possible that the nature of Barthes's text could have inspired the translator to adopt non-standard solutions that go beyond classic translation practices and generally accepted rules. Let us thus analyse *The pleasure of the text* as a translation theory. Although Barthes does not explicitly comment on translation, in the light of his theory we may assume that when it comes to pleasure, translations are governed by the same laws as other texts.

Before we focus exclusively on the questions of pleasure as discussed by Barthes and how they help problematize Lewańska's intertextual games, it is worth noting that according to Barthes, the relation between pleasure [*plaisir*] and bliss [*jouissance*] is complicated:

Pleasure of the text, text of pleasure: these expressions are ambiguous because French has no word that simultaneously covers pleasure (contentment) and bliss (rapture). Therefore, "pleasure" here (and without our being able to anticipate) sometimes extends to bliss, sometimes is opposed to it. But I must accommodate myself to this ambiguity; for on the one hand I need a general "pleasure" whenever I must refer to an excess of the text, to what in it exceeds any (social) function and any (structural) functioning; and on the other hand I need a particular "pleasure," a simple part of Pleasure as a whole, whenever I need to distinguish euphoria, fulfilment, comfort (...) from shock, disturbance, even loss, which are proper to ecstasy, to bliss. I cannot avoid this ambiguity because I cannot cleanse the word "pleasure" of meanings I occasionally do not want: I cannot avoid the fact that in French "pleasure" refers both to a generality ("pleasure principle") and to a miniaturization (...). Thus I must allow the utterance of my text to proceed in contradiction. [pp. 19-20]

The quotation shows that pleasure may have many different meanings and that the relationship between pleasure and bliss is complicated. At the same time, Barthes also demonstrates that he is able to come to terms with the contradictions in his argumentation. It is indeed an inspiring text; the reader realizes that she may accept the "indecisiveness" of the theory. Where can we locate Lewańska's translation on this scale of pleasure? If we focus only on the quoted passage, Lewańska's translation games should be considered manifestations of "general pleasure," which is associated with excess and breaking the rules, but they do not exemplify "particular pleasure" that is associated with "euphoria." I should add, however, that *The pleasure of the text* also contains passages in which the characteristics of bliss, rather than pleasure, better describe the strategy of the Polish translator.¹⁴ Let us focus, however, on the questions of excess, which Barthes discusses in the context of pleasure.

¹⁴"The text you write must prove that it desires me" [p. 6]; "[...]the text of bliss always rises out of it like a scandal (an irregularity), that it is always the trace of a cut, of an assertion (and not of a flowering)" [p. 20]; "Whence the present configuration of forces: on the one hand, a mass banalization (linked to the repetition of language)-a banalization outside bliss but not necessarily outside pleasure-and on the other, a (marginal, eccentric) impulse toward the New-a desperate impulse that can reach the point of destroying discourse: an attempt to reproduce in historical terms the bliss repressed beneath the stereotype" [p. 41].

From the point of view of translation conventions, for which the basic point of reference would be equivalence, Lewańska's intertextual games are redundant; they result in a stylistic "excess" that is not justified by the text of the original. The poetic quotes that she inserts into the text draw attention to and stand out from the surrounding sentences, but they are not motivated by the poetics of the original; the fragments of the source text that Lewańska translated so colourfully are stylistically rather "neutral." The presence of the intertext in the translated text is neither justified by the presence of the intertext in the source text nor connected with the critical or ideological aspects that would emphasize the meaning of the original text in a way that cannot be achieved through more standard means. Lewańska's translation strategies may only be justified if we assume that they are motivated by the pleasure of writing (the Polish text) and the pleasure of reading.

The result of concentrating on textual pleasure is excess. Let me quote two more fragments from Barthes's text that will highlight that question:

[...] Pleasure, however, is not an element of the text, it is not a naive residue; it does not depend on a logic of understanding and on sensation; it is a drift, something both revolutionary and asocial, and it cannot be taken over by any collectivity, any mentality, any idelect. [p. 23]

Neither culture nor its destruction is erotic; it is the seam between them, the fault, the flaw, which becomes so. [p. 7]

Pleasure is an uncontrolled impulse that may not be justified by external factors, norms or conventions. Such an approach corresponds well with Lewańska's intertextual play, which goes beyond the translation model based on equivalence and disregards its rules. The insertion of an intertext for which there is no justification (also critical or ideological justification) in the original text defies all rules that are not governed by the order of pleasure. Breaking the rules, regulations and justifications that define contemporary translation theory at its core does not, however, lead Lewańska to destroying it completely. Discourse does not disintegrate; communication is not compromised; the rules governing translation are not completely questioned. We are only subtly reminded that translation theory is not universal; it may defy rational and practical justification. For a brief moment, it is the principle of textual pleasure that is the most important and it does not have to be rooted in the original text.¹⁵

Regardless of whether Barthes's comments have really influenced Lewańska's translation strategies, they allow us to capture and highlight the specificity of the procedures she used. Intertextual games that should be considered a manifestation of excess, if the notion of equivalence were the basic reference point, are justified by the pleasure of reading the text.

translated by Agnieszka Kocznur

¹⁵This punctual, unobtrusive, discontinuous presence of pleasure does not weaken its impact. Considering Barthes's other observations from the book we are interested in, it should be assumed that the opposite is true: "A text on pleasure cannot be anything but short" [p. 18]; "[...] the word can be erotic on two opposing conditions, both excessive: if it is extravagantly repeated, or on the contrary, if it is unexpected, succulent in its newness (in certain texts, words glisten, they are distracting, incongruous apparitions [...])" [p. 42].

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KEYWORDS

ROLAND BARTHES

THE PLEASURE OF THE TRANSLATION

intertextuality in translation

ABSTRACT:

In this article, I interpret two unusual intertextual references present in the Polish translation of Barthes's *The pleasure of the text* by Ariadna Lewańska. Such intertexts are unusual because they are not rooted in the intertextuality of the original: allusions to the classic works of Polish literature are inserted by the translator in the seemingly neutral and "transparent" fragments of the French text. I comment on the motivations behind them, their status, and potential impact on the reader. My analysis was inspired by observations, theses, and postulates derived from *The pleasure of the text*, which was treated as a theory of translation.

the pleasure of the text

TRANSLATING THEORY

Aridana Lewańska

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:

Weronika Szwebs - PhD student at the Faculty of Polish and Classical Philology at AMU. She is writing a doctoral dissertation entitled *Tłumaczenie dyskursów teoretycznych w humanistyce polskiej przełomu XX i XXI wieku* [Translation of theoretical discourses in Polish humanities at the turn of the 20th and the 21st century]. She has been awarded the Preludium and Etiuda grants by the Polish National Science Center (NCN). She has published original and translated articles in *Przekładaniec*, *Między Oryginałem a Przekładem*, *Przestrzenie Teorii* and *Teksty Drugie*. |