

POLISH TRANSLATIONS OF PLATO'S DIALOGUES FROM THE BEGINNINGS TO THE MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY*

ABSTRACT

The paper aims to present the main points in the history of Polish translations of Plato's dialogues, which were closely bound up with Polish history and the revival of academic life in the interwar period. The focus is on translatory works by F.A. Kozłowski, A. Bronikowski, S. Lisiecki and W. Witwicki, who represented diverse approaches and applied different methods in rendering Plato's texts into Polish. The development of this collection of dialogues available for Polish audiences in various translations stimulated discussions on the very methods of rendering Plato. Each new dialogue was discussed and reviewed by classics scholars, teachers, literature specialists, even theologians, and only incidentally by philosophers. Although new translations of Plato are increasingly beginning to appear, the older productions, esp. those by Witwicki, are still popular and widely read.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article vise à présenter les principales étapes de l'histoire des traductions polonaises des dialogues de Platon, qui sont intimement liées

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à l'histoire de la Pologne et à la renaissance de la vie académique dans l'entre-deux-guerres. L'attention se porte en particulier sur les travaux de traductions de F.A. Kozłowski, A. Bronikowski, S. Lisiecki et W. Witwicki, qui représentaient diverses approches et appliquaient des méthodes différentes pour rendre les textes de Platon en polonais. Le développement de cette série de dialogues accessibles au public polonais dans différentes traductions a suscité des discussions sur les méthodes mêmes pour rendre Platon. Chaque nouveau dialogue était discuté et examiné par les philologues classiques, les enseignants, les spécialistes de littérature, et même les théologiens, et seulement accessoirement par les philosophes. Bien que de nouvelles traductions de Platon commencent de plus en plus à apparaître, les productions anciennes, en particulier celles de Witwicki, restent populaires et sont encore largement lues.

The history of Plato translations constitutes an autonomous research branch in Plato reception studies. Translations do not necessarily reflect philosophical interest in Plato's doctrines, but were produced for various reasons. Some scholars were induced to translate Plato for his literary style, others – for his moral teachings, still others were keenly interested in elucidating his philosophy for their compatriots, and there were also some for whom Plato was no more than an author who had preserved Socrates' legacy for subsequent generations.

The history of translation cannot be said to be equivalent to the history of philosophical reception, for those who have a true interest in Plato's philosophy prefer to use original Greek texts. This was true in the case of the two most important Polish Plato scholars at the turn of the 20th century, Stefan Pawlicki (1839-1916) and Wincenty Lutosławski (1863-1954), neither of whom took time to translate any of the dialogues, with the exception of brief excerpts. Both researched the dialogues and contributed to the then topical questions in studies on Plato, yet they shared the view that every admirer of Plato should learn Greek rather than demand that Plato speak in vernacular languages.

The case of Polish translations of Plato's dialogues, as this paper demonstrates, reflects a variety of approaches to the very problem of

translating Greek philosophers into modern languages, where translators are faced with the necessity of choosing between faithfulness to the original language and the demands of their native tongues, between literality and clarity, or their devotion to the authors under translation and the needs of their contemporary reading public. Some translators indeed preferred to adhere to one of the extremities, while others displayed a wide range of approaches between the two.

Translating philosophical works was an activity that was as highly valued by the Polish reading public as original writing. Of significance in this regard are the words of a Hegelian philosopher, Bronisław Trentowski (1808-1869), who believed that national philosophical traditions could be created by 'feeding the spirit' with Greek food for thought and by producing historical studies in philosophy: "Anyone who translates foreign philosophy into Polish is making that philosophy national. Even if we can read Greek, Latin, French and German without difficulty, nonetheless we think and feel in Polish only. Foreign thoughts clothed in Polish robes find their way more easily to the Polish soul, and they are available to the entire nation, bringing about a disconcerting reaction which unleashes our native thoughts"¹.

The history of the translation of Plato's dialogues in Poland starts in the mid-nineteenth century and has had many interesting developments. Sometimes one may get the impression that it was a history of unfulfilled projects and almost insurmountable impediments, for the dramatic biographies of the translators in difficult historical conditions had an enormous influence on their literary production.

Below we will focus on the most important points in the history of Polish translations of Plato's dialogues. A list of names and translated dialogues will be provided, with remarks explaining the translators' aims, achievements, and the reception of their works. We will not

¹ B.F. Trentowski, "Czy można uczyć się filozofii narodowej od ludu i jakie cechy mieć powinna też filozofia" (first printed in 1845), in A. Walicki (ed.), *Filozofia i myśl społeczna w latach 1831-1864*, Warszawa, PWN, 1977, p. 279.

undertake more insightful analyses of the philological details or the translators' vocabulary choices, for these issues are of more interest to Polish language scholars. Nor shall we discuss in any detail the philosophical introductions or comments that were added to some translations by more philosophically-oriented translators or those with philosophical ambitions who aimed to explain Plato's thoughts or develop their own deliberations.

The first translator: Felicjan Antoni Kozłowski (1805-1870)

The opening publication in the history of Polish translations of Plato was Kozłowski's book containing the *Apology*, *Crito* and the *Phaedo*, preceded by a general introduction to Plato and forewords to the particular dialogues². Kozłowski received his academic education in Warsaw, where he then taught ancient languages in schools at various levels of the education system. His volume of translations appeared in Warsaw in 1845 and for decades was the reference point for subsequent Plato translators. As for the method of translation, Kozłowski remarked: "Especially in philosophical works, it is the thoughts that should be translated, not the words"³. For Kozłowski, the translations of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) were too literal, and he himself preferred the French translations of Victor Cousin (1792-1867), who succeeded in avoiding the errors of the German scholar.

In justifying his choice of dialogues, Kozłowski underlined the importance of the *Phaedo* as the real beginning of Plato's philosophy. In the *Apology* and the *Crito*, two dialogues which constitute an introduction to the most important work, the *Phaedo*, it is the original thoughts of Socrates that mostly come to the fore. Moreover, these dialogues were useful from a didactic point of view, as a historical source

² Plato, *Dzieła*, transl. F. A. Kozłowski, Warszawa, S. Orgelbrand, 1845.

³ F. A. Kozłowski, "O przekładzie Platona", in Plato, *Dzieła*, p. 2.

of knowledge about Socrates. Kozłowski realised the difficulties in translating ancient Greek into Polish, on account of the natural differences between the two languages, including differences in syntax and the smaller number of participles and particles in Polish. Above all, however, in comparison with Greek, there was a dearth of philosophical terms in the Polish language at that time.

Kozłowski's general introduction to the dialogues was, at that time, the most comprehensive Polish presentation of Plato's philosophy. Kozłowski based it on German scholarly literature, taking advantage, in particular, of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's (1770-1831) *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*; other influences, such as Kantianism, were also included in his argument, and as a result, he was unable to avoid certain inconsistencies (such as the status of the immortality of the soul, considered to be a hypothesis at one moment and a certainty at another). It is quite likely that he failed to notice such inconsistencies, for he was a classics scholar and not a philosopher. It might appear, then, that Kozłowski did not have a single well-thought out image of Plato's philosophy, but he did attempt to structure Plato's philosophy into certain systematic frames. In his later years Kozłowski did not lose interest in the Greek classics, yet, having won a considerable amount of money on a lottery, which allowed him to buy an estate in the vicinity of Warsaw, he did not feel the need to strive for publishing his productions.

Kozłowski's contemporaries spared no words of praise for his translation of the three dialogues and counted it among "the best in our language, with its fluent and clear style, faithfully rendering not only the words, but reproducing all the shades of Plato's thought"⁴. It was justly evaluated as a pioneering undertaking, and the translator was regarded as deserving great credit for at last making available to Polish readers works of classical literature that had long been present in the cultures and languages of Western Europe. The translation itself stood

⁴ K. W. Wójcicki, "Kozłowski Felicyan Antoni (Dokończenie)", *Kłasy*, 13, 329, p. 250.

the test of time until the end of the 19th century when it was still commented upon as “a serious work, with a smooth style, providing a good image of the Greek original”⁵. In later decades, when Plato came to be studied more intensively in Poland, the work of Kozłowski was barely mentioned, and today it has been largely forgotten.

The productive and indefatigable translator: Antoni Bronikowski (1817-1884)

While Kozłowski spent his life in the part of Poland that was then under the rule of the Russian Empire, Bronikowski worked most of his life in Prussian Gymnasia. He received his degree in Breslau (today: Wrocław) and was then employed in a gymnasium in Poznań, only to be transferred to a provincial school in Ostrów Wielkopolski a few years later. He was moved to Ostrów for political reasons, having refused to follow official Prussian orders to go through the rooms of Polish schoolboys in Poznań in search of weapons in order to prevent the outbreak of a national uprising; yet it was thanks to his subsequent efforts in his new post that the gymnasium in Ostrów came to be acclaimed as “Ostrów’s Athens”.

Bronikowski started his long series of translations of the dialogues with the *Menexenus*⁶. This choice may have been influenced by the content of this work which dovetailed with his own patriotic feelings. Then came the *Ion*⁷, and this dialogue was the first to fall victim to the rivalry between Polish intellectuals living under Russian and Prussian rule. The reviewers in Warsaw assessed the *Ion* as more faithful than readable, “hence, the output turned out to be strange, jarring, incorrect

⁵ S. Pawlicki, *Historia filozofii greckiej*, vol. II, Kraków, AU, 1903-1917, p. 280, footnote.

⁶ Plato, “Menexenus”, transl. A. Bronikowski, in *Pokłosie. Zbieranka literacka* (1856), vol. V, Poznań, L. Merzbach, 1957, p. 129-158.

⁷ Plato, “Jon czyli Rhapsodika”, transl. A. Bronikowski, *Czas. Dodatek Miesięczny*, 6, 2, 1857, p. 337-353.

in our language, hence frequent difficulties in grasping the clear thought of Plato”⁸. They admitted that Bronikowski’s translations would be of benefit to students who were able to compare it with the Greek original, but the work failed to reach its most general aim. One Warsaw literary journal admonished Bronikowski for failing to learn his own native tongue to the same degree as he had mastered Greek. In this regard they set Kozłowski as an example for Bronikowski. Although the latter in a preface to his translation of Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus* declared: “it is impossible to translate in a rigorously faithful way without risking being as incomprehensible as the original and foreign to the reader; it is even more hazardous to use free translation, with the method of the so-called periphrasis, for fear of not rendering the original, but something completely different, most likely worse, and never that which was intended. There is only an intermediary path left, though this path is a hundredfold more difficult: it is narrow and between two precipices! – nevertheless it is the only one, and thus I had to follow it”⁹. Bronikowski later goes on to explain that this method, the intermediary way, could not, unfortunately, be applied to translating Plato’s dialogues: “there is not the slightest doubt that philosophical works with purely argumentative content should not only be rendered verbatim but as literally as possible on account of their matter, which could be distorted or aggravated, or at any rate transformed with the method of more free translation”¹⁰. Having read these declarations, the audience should not have expected anything resembling the artistry of Plato’s dialogues. And indeed, Bronikowski’s contemporaries reproached him for verging on incomprehensibility in his attempts to stay faithful to the source texts.

Bronikowski had eminent supporters, for example, Józef Ignacy Kraszewski (1812-1887), an authority for Poles who was probably the

⁸ “Czas: dodatek miesięczny, zeszyt za miesiąc maj r. b. (Tom VI, zeszyt 17)”, *Biblioteka Warszawska*, 3, 1857, p. 515

⁹ A. Bronikowski, “Przedmowa”, in Xenophon, *Ekonomik*, transl. A. Bronikowski, Poznań, J.K. Żupański, 1857, p. VII.

¹⁰ A. Bronikowski, “Przedmowa”, in Xenophon, *Ekonomik*, s. VIII.

most productive Polish writer ever, and also a scholar and an artist. An even more important advocate of Bronikowski was Karol Libelt (1807-1875), his compatriot from Poznań, a politician and a philosopher, and a former student of Hegel. Bronikowski's supporters argued that Plato himself was not sufficiently clear, and therefore translation of his dialogues should retain the original ambiguities and it should be the reader's task to explicate them. It was Libelt, in particular, who in subsequent years engaged himself in justifying Bronikowski's style and interpreting his linguistic efforts as an attempt to renew the Polish language in accordance with its Renaissance sources. Moreover, Libelt felt that the weight of criticism from the Warsaw intellectual milieu could be harmful, especially when it was assessed against the wider cultural background. He was afraid that negative reviews would cause Polish reading audiences to turn their backs on Greek-Roman sources of European culture and thus Poles would join the only two European nations, Russia and Turkey, that had not developed their culture on classical roots¹¹.

On his part, Bronikowski was certain that his work would please the experts, namely classical scholars; yet he must have forgotten that the translations were not intended for professionals, who could easily read the originals, but for more general audiences who wished to read great philosophers in their native language. Unfortunately, Bronikowski's chosen value criterion in translating Plato continued to be fidelity to the original.

Criticism of Bronikowski's translation had, in fact, started even before the complete volumes of the dialogues were published. Volume I of Plato's *Works* was not published until 1858 and it included the *Phaedrus*, *Symposium*, *Hippias minor*, *Lysis*, *Charmides*, *Euthyphro*, and the two previously published dialogues, the *Ion* and the *Menexenus*¹². In addition to this, in the same year his *Theaetetus* saw the light

¹¹ K. Libelt, "Przekłady dzieł klasycznych greckich przez Antoniego Bronikowskiego", *Mrówka*, 1, 4, 1869, p. 53-55.

¹² Plato, *Dzieła*, vol. I, transl. A. Bronikowski, Poznań, L. Merzbach, 1858.

of day as a separate book¹³. Bronikowski deliberately avoided the dialogues that had already been included in Kozłowski's volume as he believed that the Warsaw critics' attacks on his work were motivated by purely commercial interests, *i.e.* they wanted to increase the sales figures of Kozłowski's translation. Despite continued criticism, however, Bronikowski behaved as if nothing had happened and continued his work without changing his methods or attempting to satisfy those he believed to be superficial and ignorant critics, who – in his words – wanted “Plato to stop being Plato”¹⁴. In the preface to this volume Bronikowski, unlike Kozłowski, praised Polish as a language that was, after the ancient languages, one of the most expansive and free, “easily succumbing to all the beautiful currents and meanderings as long as it is wielded by skilful and fluent thought”¹⁵. It is clear that Bronikowski did not share Kozłowski's preference for what he called the French paradigm in translation, with its more free approach to the original text, verging on peri- and paraphrasis. The only concession Bronikowski seems to have made to his readers was in his choice of dialogues, for those selected by the translator had one common feature – they were not considered by him to be deeply philosophical so as not to discourage potential readers.

One of the most serious critics of Bronikowski's works was Kornel Kozłowski (1838-1904), son of F. A. Kozłowski, the first translator of Plato into Polish. He wrote an extensive review of Plato's *Works I* and explicitly stated: “a literal, verbatim rendering will only be a dead copy, devoid of spirit and vigour”¹⁶ and consequently such a translation, rather than rendering the thoughts of the original accessible to the reader, would make it more obscure and incomprehensible. And this was the case with Bronikowski, whereas Kozłowski junior believed

¹³ Plato, *Theaetetos czyli Co jest Wiedza (ἐπιστήμη)*, [transl. A. Bronikowski,] Ostrowo, 1858.

¹⁴ A. Bronikowski, “Przedmowa”, in Plato, *Dzieła*, vol. I, p. XV.

¹⁵ A. Bronikowski, “Przedmowa”, in Plato, *Dzieła*, vol. I, p. IX.

¹⁶ K. Kozłowski, “Przekład dzieł Platona przez An. Bronikowskiego”, *Biblioteka Warszawska*, 1, 1861, p. 133.

that “the thoughts of the Greek philosopher can be rendered in our robust, pure, and flexible tongue”¹⁷. Another disadvantage of Plato’s *Works* vol. I was the absence of a philosophical introduction, and in this regard Kozłowski referred to German editions of the dialogues, which generally included such introductions even though, in his opinion, Germans had a better general acquaintance with Greek philosophy than Poles.

These general criticisms were followed by more detailed remarks. Kozłowski focused on the *Euthyphro*, being one of the easiest dialogues. He indicated *loci* where meanings had been distorted by Bronikowski or overcomplicated in terms of style, which caused difficulties in understanding them. He also drew attention to unnecessary neologisms. Kozłowski concluded: “such a translation of an ancient author will not be of benefit to Polish literature, for it will not be read by scholars, who, finding mistranslations, will prefer to read the original text, deriving greater pleasure from a pure source than from muddy waters; nor will it help those who do not know ancient languages to become better acquainted with Plato, for the obscure, incomprehensible and coarse style of the translation will deter them from reading”¹⁸.

In spite of this well-substantiated criticism, Bronikowski ploughed on with his translation regardless. Between 1860 and 1866 the translations of the *Crito* and the three first books of the *Republic* were all published in the annual reports of his gymnasium¹⁹. Subsequently, in 1871 vol. II of Plato’s *Works* appeared in print, containing four books of the *Laws*²⁰. Once again, Bronikowski’s compatriots from the Prussian-annexed Polish territory defended his work. In 1879, the next volume appeared in print, again numbered II, which was somewhat

¹⁷ K. Kozłowski, “Przekład dzieł Platona...”, p. 134.

¹⁸ K. Kozłowski, “Przekład dzieł Platona...”, p. 145.

¹⁹ *Jahresbericht Königlichen Katholischen Gymnasiums zu Ostrowo*, 15 (1860), 17 (1862), 19 (1864), 21 (1866).

²⁰ Plato, *Dzieła*, vol. II, part I, transl. A. Bronikowski, Poznań, W. Decker i Spółka, 1871.

confusing for readers. It included the *Alcibiades I*, *Gorgias*, *Meno*, *Laches*, *Euthydemus*, and the *Protagoras*²¹. An important review of the latter volume was written by Marian Morawski (1845-1901), a philosopher, theologian and an early representative of the neo-Scholastic movement in Poland. He was particularly interested in the historical role of Platonism in the development of Christian philosophy and the ideological benefits of referring to Plato in modern times, for he believed that the Greek philosopher was more insightful than the superficial philosophies of the Enlightenment and Positivism. In this regard, as Morawski stated, "we would prefer, in the interests of philosophy, that the translator sacrificed some accuracy and the literality, so to speak, of his translation, and took into consideration the requirements of our language and smoothness of speech"²². His conclusions were similar to those of previous reviewers: only specialists in antiquity might benefit from such a translation, whereas philosophers, for whom specific problems are of prime interest, would have to wait for Plato's dialogues to be translated using a different method.

The Warsaw journal, "Biblioteka Warszawska", continued to promote Kozłowski's volume of the dialogues and remained critical towards Bronikowski's works, yet the tone of subsequent reviews was more moderate. Feliks Jezierski (1817-1901), an experienced teacher, well-informed about foreign editions and studies on Plato, appreciated Bronikowski's consistency and the suitability of his translations as an aid to reading the original text. He was aware of how challenging it was to render ancient Greek into modern languages, yet he listed a few *loci* where the translator failed to provide a clear and accurate Polish version. He concluded his review with a piece of advice for the translator: "Mr Bronikowski, with his comprehensive proficiency and his great sensitivity to the rhythms of Hellenic beauty, would be well-advi-

²¹ Plato, *Dzieła*, vol. II, transl. A. Bronikowski, Poznań, J.K. Żupański, 1879.

²² M. M[orawski], "Przekład dzieł Platona", *Przegląd Lwowski*, 9, 6, 1879, p. 335-336.

sed to take greater account of the importance of locality and contemporaneity in his translations”²³.

Volume III of Plato’s *Works* in Bronikowski’s rendering appeared in print posthumously, in 1884, being finalised by his son²⁴. The whole volume consisted of the *Republic*. Bronikowski’s *Republic* was generally considered to be a failure. One subsequent translator of the *Republic*, S. Lisiecki, while appreciating the enormous effort of his predecessor, referred to his work as an example of and warning against literal translation. One of the most eminent Polish Plato scholars of the turn of the 20th century, S. Pawlicki, listed the drawbacks of Bronikowski’s translations as follows: “1. there are no introductions explaining the dialogues; 2. there is an insufficient number of footnotes; 3. the translations adhere to the original texts so slavishly that they cannot be understood without them. All his vast work and effort is virtually wasted on wider audiences and could only be beneficial to philologists who want to produce new translations”²⁵.

Bronikowski’s work, then, could only be regarded as a resource for students learning Greek and reading Plato, with his translation being used in parallel with the original text. His rendering of Plato ultimately failed to gain success among the wider public and even among professionals. His translations of Xenophon or Herodotus fared better, though today they are regarded as little more than an antiquarian relic.

The translator who failed: Stanisław Lisiecki (1872-1960)

At the turn of the 20th century some of the dialogues, mostly from the early phase of Plato’s literary and philosophical production, were translated into Polish by gymnasium teachers, who primarily wanted

²³ F. Jeziński, “Dzieła Platona. Przekładał z greckiego Antoni Bronikowski”, *Biblioteka Warszawska*, 4, 1879, p. 487.

²⁴ Plato, *Dzieła*, vol. 3, transl. A. Bronikowski, Poznań, August Czartorski, 1884.

²⁵ S. Pawlicki, *Historia filozofii greckiej*, t. II, p. 279, footnote.

to acquaint their students with Socrates. Although their effort did not go unnoticed, their output was too meagre to change significantly the availability of Plato's works in Polish.

S. Lisiecki, himself a teacher of classical languages, managed to publish only one, though admittedly one of the longer dialogues. He had far-reaching ambitions to translate all of Plato's dialogues, but the history of his life and work provides an example of how personal choices and unfavourable conditions can play havoc with a promising career. Lisiecki was a compatriot of Bronikowski, born in Poznań, where he received his gymnasial education (*nota bene* in a prestigious school in which Bronikowski had taught decades earlier). He then took academic degrees in Breslau (today: Wrocław), and started publishing in theology and its history, specialising in Ambrose of Milan. His education and devotion to academic work seemed to predispose him to a splendid career in theology and in the church, for he had entered the priesthood and started teaching classical languages in various schools and a Catholic seminary. In 1921, however with the death of his mother, who may have induced him to enter the clergy, he decided to become a layman and got married. At the dawn of Polish independence he moved with his wife to Warsaw, where he taught classical and modern languages and worked on Plato. They remained there until the final days of World War II, when they were forced to leave the city, never to return.

This brief biographical sketch may help to explain why Lisiecki, despite his qualifications and devotion to academic work and translation, failed to pursue an academic career or to publish his translations of classical Greek philosophical texts, including Plato's dialogues. The idea of translating Plato may have originated in his meeting with Tadeusz Zieliński (1859-1944) and in his admiration for this recognised and well-known scholar, who at that time worked at the University of Warsaw. Whatever the reasons for his taking up this work, though, there is no doubt that Lisiecki fervently threw himself into the task of translating Plato and published minor works on his philosophy in Polish and Latin. His ultimate failure to achieve his aims and potential can be put down to two factors: his renunciation of the priesthood,

which was frowned upon by many representatives of the academia of that time, and his intensifying inferiority complex, which was the result of his inability to adjust his Prussian-style teaching methods, based on discipline and rote learning, to the more modern ways of teaching and the Warsaw mentality in general.

In spite of the circumstances Lisiecki managed to publish a translation of the *Republic* in 1928²⁶. All the other dialogues, unfortunately, remained in manuscript form. Although Lisiecki did all he could to change this situation, it was difficult for someone on the margins of academia to find the resources necessary for publishing. Moreover, the reception of Plato's *opus* in Lisiecki's rendering was not undivided. On the one hand, its language was considered as great progress in comparison with Bronikowski's productions, while on the other – his translations could not compete with the increasing number of published dialogues in W. Witwicki's translation. Lisiecki had learned from Bronikowski's errors and his *Republic* is still not only readable, but also supplemented with a good introduction and footnotes.

The list of the dialogues translated by Lisiecki, yet unpublished, includes: the *Timaeus*, *Critias*, *Laws*, *Parmenides*, *Statesman*, *Sophist*, *Theaetetus*, *Cratylus*, *Euthydemus*, *Meno*, *Laches*, *Menexenus*, *Charmides*, *Philebus*, *Lysis* and the *Alcibiades I & II* and other works of doubtful authenticity. In selecting the dialogues, Lisiecki's fundamental intention was to translate those that had not previously been accessible to Polish audiences in their native tongue. Had they been published in Lisiecki's rendering, the *Parmenides*, *Cratylus*, *Laws*, *Sophist* and *Timaeus* would have been available for the first time in Polish. Only recently has justice been done to Lisiecki's works and the most essential parts of his unpublished introductions to the dialogues have been transcribed and prepared for publication²⁷. Reception of Lisiecki's translations was, naturally, very limited, for reading audiences in

²⁶ Plato, *Rzeczpospolita*, transl. S. Lisiecki, Kraków, PAU, 1928.

²⁷ S. Lisiecki, *O Platonie, Arystotelesie i o sobie samym*, ed. T. Mróz, Kęty, Marek Derewiecki, 2021.

Poland knew only his *Republic*, while even some foreign researchers were aware of the amount of work that remained in manuscript²⁸.

Although Lisiecki's plan of translating the dialogues was impressive, his style being readable and regarded as a step forward in the history of Polish reception of the dialogues, the majority of his translations of the dialogues nevertheless remained unpublished. The reason for this was partly related to his personality, his sense of isolation from academia, in part because of his position as an apostate, and his feeling of desperation when all the efforts taken to publish this or that dialogue turned out to be ineffective. At the same time, however, a serious translation rival had appeared on the horizon who quickly monopolised the Polish Plato translation industry. The translator in question was, of course, Witwicki, whom Lisiecki believed had thrown a spanner into his work. Who, then, was Witwicki?

The most successful translator: W. Witwicki (1878-1948)

It was during his gymnasium education that Witwicki became familiar with the dialogues, and he even used the *Euthyphro* to discuss issues concerning the nature of faith with his religious instruction teacher. Witwicki belonged to the first generation of students of Kazimierz Twardowski (1866-1938), the founder of the Lvov and, consequently, Lvov-Warsaw school of philosophy. It should be stressed, however, that his works on Plato can hardly be regarded as a philosophical outcome of the Lvov-Warsaw school, where the history of philosophy was not a priority in academic work and research into history of philosophy was not even considered to be a philosophical pursuit, though it should be added that Twardowski played a positive role in

²⁸ F. Novotný, *The Posthumous Life of Plato*, Prague, Academia, 1977, p. 593; cf. T. Mróz, "Polish Studies on Plato under the Oppression of Censorship: Lutosławski – Lisiecki – Witwicki", in M. Maciejewska, W. Owczarski (eds), *Censorship, Politics and Oppression*, Gdańsk, UG, 2018, pp. 141-143.

encouraging Witwicki to continue his translations. In brief, the development of Witwicki's work on the dialogues can be presented in the following sequence of events: his ideological fascination with Plato resulting from his deepening religious crisis as a young gymnasium student – his reading of Plato during his scholarly stay in Germany – the positive response from his associates in Lvov to his rendering of fragments of the *Symposium* – his cooperation with Leopold Staff (1878-1957), a poet, translator, and the then editor of the "Symposion" book series – Twardowski's encouragement for Witwicki to continue his work and to aim at translating all the dialogues – the success of his productions with a wide range of readers.

In all his translations Witwicki followed a similar scheme. Each text was preceded by an introduction presenting the situation, *personae*, character or chronological position of the dialogue. In the case of the first dialogue he translated, the *Symposium*, the introduction even included an outline of the development of pre-Platonic philosophy²⁹. After the introduction, the text of the dialogue appeared, followed by Witwicki's summaries of each chapter, explanations, comments, philosophical deliberations, including his ridicule of popular morality and anticlerical remarks. Only incidentally did he refer to philological difficulties. The translator insisted that the reader should get acquainted with the dialogue in this particular order: introduction, Plato's text in Polish rendering, and finally, the translator's comments; he also recommended reading the text of the dialogue aloud. It was in the *Phaedrus*, the second published dialogue, that Witwicki's drawings started to appear in the text, for he was also a talented artist³⁰. And though in the first edition of the *Symposium* the reader could find only some reproductions of pieces of Greek sculpture, subsequent publications of this dialogue were enriched with the translator's own sketches. Usually these pieces of art depicted Plato's myths, metaphors or the

²⁹ Plato, *Uczta. Dyalog o miłości*, transl. W. Witwicki, Lwów, Księgarnia Polska B. Połonieckiego, 1909.

³⁰ Plato, *Fajdros*, transl. W. Witwicki, Lwów, Książnica Polska, 1918.

interlocutors of the dialogues, and these drawings have already become the subject of autonomous studies.

The *Symposium* was the inaugural work both in the long series of Plato's dialogues translated and published by Witwicki, and in the "Symposion" series. It appeared in print for the first time in 1909, was immediately sold out, and even an almost instant reprint did not help to satisfy the demand for this book. Like many other of Witwicki's renderings of Plato's dialogues, it subsequently had numerous reprints and re-editions. Witwicki was ironically self-deprecating about the success, suggesting that it was the sub-title, *Dialogue about Love*, that was responsible for the dialogue's success as it raised certain expectations in the minds of his wide audiences. Nevertheless, a more objective, professional and positive assessment came in a review in the form of an essay, titled *Platonic Love*, by Bolesław Leśmian (1877-1937), a poet and a writer, whose hallmark was his experimental use of the Polish language. He expressed his appreciation of Witwicki's style as follows: "in his perfect translation he preserved all the pure gold of the original and even managed to reflect the magic simplicity and naiveté of the Greek syntax"³¹.

World War I caused some delay in completing and publishing the second dialogue, the *Phaedrus*, which was most probably intended for inclusion in the same series as the *Symposium*, but was ultimately published elsewhere. In the *Phaedrus* the structure of the translator's comments was perfected. Witwicki sent out the copies of the dialogues to his teachers, for example to Twardowski, and also to former students, like Jan Parandowski (1895-1978), a writer, translator and a classics scholar, who was enthusiastic about all Witwicki's productions. Of Witwicki's style Paradowski wrote: "Plato is alive today and he speaks to us in a language that is intelligible, full of strength, flexibility and vital fluid"³².

³¹ B. Leśmian, "Miłość Platońska (Platon: Uczta)" [first printed in 1910], in B. Leśmian, *Szkice literackie*, Warszawa, PIW, 1959, p. 431.

³² J. Parandowski, "Marmur, który duszę w sobie chowa" [first published in 1919], in J. Parandowski, *Juvenilia*, Warszawa, PIW, 1960, p. 118.

In 1920, a volume containing three of the most frequently read dialogues was published, these were the *Euthyphro*, *Apology* and the *Crito*³³. The translator praised the first two dialogues for their realism and as the products of a gifted artist, while all the dialogues in this volume had one thing in common – their moral message had not lost its relevance. The reactions of the reading public to this collection was positive, the more so because reading Witwicki's Socrates was a far cry from the torment they had experienced learning ancient Greek at school. His Plato was worth recommending as intellectual stimulus for young people. Even critical philologists had a high regard for his translations, with only minor reservations of a philological nature.

The next dialogues translated by Witwicki were devoted to the disputes between Socrates and the Sophists. Those were the *Hippias minor*, *Hippias major* and the *Ion*, which all appeared as one volume in 1921³⁴. The book, as usual, received a very warm reception with Parandowski, but it was Artur Rapaport (1889-1937), a philologist, teacher and editor of original Greek texts intended as teaching aids, who wrote an extensive and critical review of this and previous volumes in Witwicki's translation. Rapaport considered the success of his translations as well-deserved, yet he was not an uncritical admirer, and among their disadvantages he listed the lack of Stephani pagination and the absence of information concerning the original edition that had been used by the translator. He assessed Witwicki's introductions and comments as being more of a popular than academic nature since they lacked references to scholarly discussions, but he concluded: "Witwicki works on the assumption that it is possible to preserve the Greek atmosphere and the character of Plato's literary talent without violating the Polish language [...]. Moreover, the translator [...] provides us with the opportunity to experience feelings that

³³ Plato, *Eutyfron, Obrona Sokratesa, Kriton*, transl. W. Witwicki, Lwów-Warszawa, Książnica Polska, 1920.

³⁴ Plato, *Hippjusz mniejszy, Hippjusz większy, Ijon*, transl. W. Witwicki, Lwów-Warszawa, Książnica Polska, 1921.

have hitherto been reserved exclusively for those who read Greek”³⁵.

The *Gorgias* appeared in the following year, in 1922³⁶, and, not surprisingly, the translation found favour with Parandowski. He concluded his review as follows: “when I spoke of Plato, did I not mean the translator as well? After all, everything I quoted was in his rendering and not even once did I feel the need to consult the original. Could there be any greater praise for a translator?”³⁷. In the subsequent year the *Protagoras* was published³⁸. This work provoked an extensive and detailed review by Stanisław Pilch (1882-1945), a classics scholar. Having at his disposal a significant corpus of dialogues rendered by one translator, he articulated several critical observations. He noted the absence of bibliographies in all volumes, and bluntly reproached Witwicki for not using the secondary literature. He also remarked on the absence of Stephani pagination, but absolved Witwicki for this, arguing that other translations did not have it either. Although he successfully demonstrated that Witwicki's translations occasionally lacked philological accuracy, he saw in Witwicki and his translations an ally in the struggle of classics scholars to maintain classical culture and languages as the basis for school education, to promote knowledge of antiquity, and to encourage readers to get to know and deepen their knowledge of classical languages³⁹.

The *Phaedo* was published in 1925⁴⁰ and it was again classics scholars, and not philosophers, who directed their attention to this

³⁵ A. Rapaport, “Platona pisma”, *Muzeum*, 37, 2, 1922, p. 227.

³⁶ Plato, *Gorgiasz*, transl. W. Witwicki, Lwów-Warszawa, Książnica Polska, 1922.

³⁷ J. Parandowski, “Dusza złota i kamień probierczy” [first printed in 1922], in: J. Parandowski, *Juvenilia*, p. 138.

³⁸ Plato, *Protagoras*, transl. W. Witwicki, Lwów-Warszawa, Książnica Polska, 1923.

³⁹ S. Pilch, “Nowsze przekłady Platona”, *Przegląd Humanistyczny*, 2, 1-2, 1923, p. 113-121.

⁴⁰ Plato, *Fedon*, transl. W. Witwicki, Lwów-Warszawa, Książnica-Atlas, 1925.

book. They were Karol Chodaczek (1884-1944) and Ignacy Wieniewski (1896-1986) who in general agreed on the high value of Witwicki's work, and indicated only minor mistranslations⁴¹.

By that time Witwicki's reputation as a Plato translator was already well established, having published eleven dialogues, some of which had even run to several editions. The most popular of them, the *Symposium*, reached its fourth edition in 1924. There was therefore a demand for presenting the translator himself, together with his translation techniques, to his ever increasing reading public. To satisfy this demand, an interview with Witwicki appeared on the first page of one of the issues of *Wiadomości Literackie* (*Literary News*) in 1926. Witwicki declared there that his work could be seen more as literary than philosophical or academic, and this, in turn, resulted from the particular character of Plato's writing. Witwicki revealed his work techniques: "while reading, I can see the figures in the dialogue and hear them talking, in Polish of course; otherwise I would not understand them"⁴², and this was not difficult, because, as he added, "in Plato [...] it is people of today who are speaking, only they are dressed in different costumes"⁴³.

University duties and work on psychology kept Witwicki from his translation, and it was not until a decade after the publication of the 1926 interview, in the mid thirties, that subsequent translations of the dialogues began to appear, with the *Meno* as the first in 1935⁴⁴. It was Izydora Dąmbska (1904-1983) who was the first philosopher and prospective historian of Greek philosophy to write a review of a dialogue in Witwicki's rendering. She had no hesitation in describing Witwicki's translations of Plato as an act of divine providence, attributing to

⁴¹ I. Wieniewski, "U klasyków", *Wiadomości Literackie*, 18, 1925, p. 4; W. Chodaczek, "Platona Fedon", *Muzeum*, 41, 1-2, 1926, p. 77-82.

⁴² "U polskiego tłumacza Platona", *Wiadomości Literackie*, 3, 14, 1926, p. 1.

⁴³ "U polskiego tłumacza Platona".

⁴⁴ Plato, *Menon*, transl. W. Witwicki, Warszawa, Warszawskie Towarzystwo Filozoficzne, 1935.

them a beauty that was fourfold: "the beauty of their educational character, the beauty of the perfect harmony between the translation and the original, the beauty of the academic and practical values of the commentaries, and finally, the beauty of the classical language and the editing of the volumes"⁴⁵.

The *Meno* opened a new series, for in the subsequent year, 1936, the *Theaetetus* appeared⁴⁶. This work attracted the attention of T. Zieliński, who was delighted to see a subsequent work of Plato made accessible to Polish audiences, this time an esoteric work and one of the most challenging of the dialogues. As many before him, Zieliński pointed to the lack of Stephani pagination, which meant that readers were prevented from quickly comparing the translation with the original text. Nevertheless, he assessed the whole translation very positively⁴⁷.

In the following year, 1937, two subsequent dialogues, the *Charmides* and the *Lysis*, appeared in print⁴⁸. This edition was reviewed by Tadeusz Sinko (1877-1966), a classics scholar, who indicated certain misuses of vocabulary, but concluded that "the translator's 'polonisms' never change the meaning of the original, and even enhance it, enlivening the conversation to such an extent that it becomes a philosophical drama that would be suitable for staging even today, or at any rate as a recitation, especially in the form of a radio drama"⁴⁹.

Sinko's attention was also drawn by the next dialogue, the *Laches*, which being devoted to the problem of bravery, was published in 1937 as an inaugural volume of the Psychological Section of the Military

⁴⁵ I. Dąmbska, "Platon: Menon", *Gimnazjum*, 3, 8-9, 1936, p. 334.

⁴⁶ Plato, *Teajtet*, transl. W. Witwicki, Warszawa, Warszawskie Towarzystwo Filozoficzne, 1936.

⁴⁷ T. Zieliński, "Platon: Teajtet", *Nowa Książka*, 4, 3, 1936, p. 179-181.

⁴⁸ Plato, *Charmides. Lizys*, transl. W. Witwicki, Warszawa, Warszawskie Towarzystwo Filozoficzne, 1937.

⁴⁹ T. Sinko, "Platon: Charmides. Lizys", *Nowa Książka*, 4, 8, 1937, p. 451. Indeed, Polish Radio used Witwicki's translations of the *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito* and dramatical parts of the *Phaedo* and broadcast their adaptations played by leading actors of the time.

Knowledge Society's series⁵⁰. On the basis of this work, Sinko unambiguously assessed Witwicki as "the best Polish translator of Plato"⁵¹.

In 1938 the *Philebus* saw the light of day⁵² and in evaluating it, Sinko could not praise the translation highly enough, describing it as excellent. He described Witwicki's productions as 'synthetic,' which probably appertained to the fact that they contrasted sharply with the meticulous philological renderings⁵³. The *Philebus* was the last dialogue to be published by Witwicki before the outbreak of World War II.

One short anecdote may be useful in summing up the effect of Witwicki's work. When Witwicki's shoemaker once asked him to sign a whole set of his Platos, Witwicki quite rightly saw this as a mark of his success. The popularity of his translations among wider audiences was guaranteed by a number of features of his work: his language and literary style, his sense of irony and humour, his frequent use of colloquialisms which preserved the dynamic character of Plato's dialogues, and his avoidance of direct copying of Greek syntax into Polish. Classics scholars did not conceal their enthusiasm for his work either, praising his linguistic talents and techniques. What was surprising was the fact that there was an almost complete silence on the part of philosophers, including those of the Lvov-Warsaw school, Witwicki's companions, students of Twardowski in Lvov. A short review by Dąbska was the only small exception in this regard. The only possible explanation is that they considered Witwicki's production to have more of an affinity with literary genres than with philosophical works, and therefore they felt relieved of their professional duty to give it their attention. Thus Witwicki achieved in Poland what Plato had failed to do in Athens. The 'wide circles,' the many, οἱ πολλοί, became acquainted with philosophy thanks to Witwicki's accessible language.

⁵⁰ Plato, *Laches*, transl. W. Witwicki, Warszawa, Sekcja Psychologiczna przy Zarządzie Głównym Towarzystwa Wiedzy Wojskowej 1937.

⁵¹ T. Sinko, "Platona: Laches", *Nowa Książka*, 4, 8, 1937, p. 451.

⁵² Plato, *Fileb*, transl. W. Witwicki, Warszawa, Warszawskie Towarzystwo Filozoficzne, 1938.

⁵³ T. Sinko, "Platona: Fileb", *Nowa Książka*, 5, 3, 1938, p. 137.

Witwicki lived to see the end of World War II, and despite the systematic destruction of Warsaw by the Germans after the Warsaw Uprising, his translation of the *Republic* in manuscript form survived hidden in a cellar. The dialogue in two volumes was published posthumously in 1948⁵⁴ and soon ended up on the censor's desk, with some of the copies presumably confiscated and banned from circulation due to some of the translator's disloyal comments⁵⁵. In subsequent years more dialogues from Witwicki's legacy were published for the first time, some of which contained editorial interferences. They were: the *Timaeus & Critias* (1951)⁵⁶, the *Sophist & Statesman* (1956)⁵⁷, the *Euthydemus* (1957)⁵⁸ seven books of the *Laws* (1958)⁵⁹, and the *Parmenides* (1961)⁶⁰. Subsequent researchers have expressed the greatest reservations about the dialectical dialogues, that is, the *Sophist* and the *Parmenides*. All Witwicki's works have continued to have numerous re-editions, they are still widely available and it is most probable that every Pole who has ever started to read Plato must have first had a volume in Witwicki's rendering in their hands, before perhaps later tur-

⁵⁴ Plato, *Państwo*, transl. W. Witwicki, vols. I-II, Warszawa, Wiedza, 1948.

⁵⁵ T. Mróz, *Polish Studies on Plato under the Oppression...*, pp. 144-146.

⁵⁶ Plato, *Timaios. Kritias*, transl. W. Witwicki, Warszawa, Biblioteka Meandra, 1951.

⁵⁷ Plato, *Sofista. Polityk*, transl. W. Witwicki, Warszawa, PWN, 1956.

⁵⁸ Plato, *Eutydem*, transl. W. Witwicki, Warszawa, PWN, 1957.

⁵⁹ Plato, *Państwo. Prawa (I-VII)*, transl. W. Witwicki, vol. II, Warszawa, PWN, 1958.

⁶⁰ Plato, *Parmenides*, transl. W. Witwicki, Warszawa, PWN, 1961. This dialogue, with the *Laws* translated by Maria Maykowska (Warsaw, PWN, 1960), almost completed the whole set of Plato's dialogues available for Polish audiences, for they had to wait until 1990 to see the *Cratylus* for the first time in print in Polish and, surprisingly, in two translations at once, by Zofia Brzostowska (Lublin, KUL, 1990) and by Wiktor Stefański (Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich / PAN, 1990). It has to be remarked, however, that the three dialogues (*Parmenides*, *Laws*, *Cratylus*) in Lisiecki's manuscript renderings still awaited publication.

ning to more contemporary translators. Thus, his language has to some extent formed and become part of Polish discourse on Plato.

Conclusion

The four translators discussed above represent diverse styles and various degrees of faithfulness to Plato's original texts. In the 19th century, when Poland experienced tripartition, Kozłowski in Warsaw, under Russian rule, preferred a looser ways of translating, verging on paraphrase, with the aim of satisfying the needs of the reading public. Bronikowski, in Ostrów Wielkopolski in the Grand Duchy of Posen, under Prussian rule, was an adherent of literary translation, which turned out to be too faithful to be comprehended by readers unacquainted with the Greek language. At their best, his works could be helpful to students attempting to read original Greek texts, yet as autonomous pieces, they failed to gain wider appreciation, though they were defended by his compatriots, philosophers and writers. The controversy between these two methods of rendering Greek text into Polish was identified as the dichotomy between the "French" method, less faithful and more reader-oriented, and the "German" method, more faithful and more oriented towards the original, or, to present it more personally, as an opposition between V. Cousin's and F. Schleiermacher's translating methods.

A separate position is occupied by Lisiecki, whose intention was to avoid Bronikowski's errors. The *Republic* in his rendering, not to mention a large number of his unpublished dialogues, provided, or could have provided, the reading audience with a readable text, equipped with commentaries and notes. His work was assessed as significant progress in the history of making Plato available to Polish readers, but it could not compete with the prolific translatory production of Witwicki.

Witwicki, passionately devoted to his work as a translator, started his publishing series with the *Symposium* in 1909, and his previously unknown translations continued to be published after his death. Today, with only some exceptions, Witwicki can be considered as a monopop-

list on the market of Plato translations. As a philosopher and psychologist, with considerable artistic talent and acting skills, he attempted to identify with Socrates and to enter into the spirit of Plato's dialogues. He emphasised the topicality of their deliberations and was thus able to render them into an accessible and colloquial Polish. Thanks to his style he almost immediately earned recognition and the Polish reading public ceased to show interest in other translations.

As many reviewers of his works before World War II remarked, Witwicki failed to equip his translations with Stephani pagination, because they were not basically intended for academic users. After the war, when teaching of classical languages was to a large extent removed from schools, the situation changed, and re-editions of Plato's dialogues in Witwicki's rendering were furnished with Stephani pagination to facilitate their academic use. Now, more than a century after Witwicki's translations were first published, scholars have had time to analyse his renderings more carefully and have gradually discovered more errors, personal biases and stylistic peculiarities, not to mention the charge that Witwicki had not really understood Plato's late dialogues.

There is no doubt that his work is a monument to the Polish language and an exceptional contribution to Plato reception by a single author, easily comparable to that of Schleiermacher or František Novotný (1881-1964). Yet there is a great need in Poland for new translations of Plato and new attempts in this regard are being undertaken. It will, however, take decades to break the monopoly of Witwicki and produce a whole new set of the translations of Plato's dialogues. The situation has not changed significantly yet, but it has to be remarked that new translations of single dialogues are beginning to appear in print and entering into circulation, although it is difficult to compete with the widely available works by Witwicki. The history of translating Plato in Poland is still being written.

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