

Agata Stankowska (Poland)

Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań
Faculty of Polish and Classical Philology
Institute of Polish Literature
stankowska.a@gmail.com

WHY DID TADEUSZ RÓŻEWICZ TRANSLATE DRAGUTIN TADIJANOVIĆ'S "RING"?

(ON THE AUTHOR OF NIEPOKÓJ AS A TRANSLATOR OF SERBIAN AND CROATIAN POETRY)

Abstract

Tadeusz Różewicz's work as a translator is limited to a mere half-dozen or dozen-odd more or less successful efforts. He translated individual poems by the Czech poet Jan Pilař, the Serbian poets Vasko Popa and Miodrag Pavlović, the Hungarian writer Sándor Petőfi, and Dragutin Tadijanović. Translated poems of once-called Yugoslavian authors were invested in the poetry of culture, poems focused on "the bright side", though not devoid of references to the darker side of existence, poems that are trusting in the sense that they turn toward the future with hope, poems "reconciled" "to the wound." Tadijanović's *Prsten* offered him an opportunity to express some convictions which, despite the magnitude of his own doubts, he considered worth upholding or at least giving some consideration. His translation of *Prsten* can and should be read as a purposefully borrowed quotation.

Key words: Tadeusz Różewicz, Dragutin Tadijanović, "Ring", translation
Croatian Poetry, Polish Poetry

Introduction

The question raised in the title may be considered manifestly probabilistic and seemingly irrelevant. It is worth asking, however, as a kind of synecdoche for a much larger problem, in which a micrological study can provide a useful characterization of one of the greatest Polish poets of the twentieth century in his role as translator of poetry in a foreign tongue, here Serbian and Croatian poetry in particular.

Tadeusz Różewicz's work as a translator, hitherto largely overlooked by Polish scholars, who have treated it as marginal and insignificant in the context of his original work, is limited to a mere half-dozen or dozen-odd more or less successful efforts. To correctly assess their exact number, one must make a thorough study of the Polish literary magazines and journals of the 1940s, '50s and '60s. These translations first appeared in the pages of periodicals and were never collected or catalogued afterward. Most people no doubt are aware that towards the end of the 1940s and over the subsequent two decades, Różewicz translated individual poems by the Czech poet Jan Pilař,¹ the Serbian poets Vasko Popa² and Miodrag Pavlović,³ the Hungarian writer Sándor Petőfi,⁴ and, finally, the hero of this topic – sometimes respectfully called the Croatian equivalent of Leopold Staff by Polish Slavicists – Dragutin Tadijanović.⁵ All of these translations were doubtless the result of meetings, and possibly even the formation of friendly ties,⁶ between poets that took place during Różewicz's scholarships spent in the people's democracies, reading inspired by his travels, his encounters and enthusiasms as a reader.

Discussion

Różewicz, like many other Polish poets, traveled a great deal in those years. He spent considerable time in Prague and in various parts of Hungary, taking

1 The PBL (Polska Bibliografia Literacka) entry from 1949 records a translation by Różewicz of a Pilař poem entitled *Pozdrowienie Polsce* [Greetings Poland] in Polish.

2 In an anthology of poetry of the former Yugoslavia we find two translations of Popa poems, Sopoćani and Czarny Dziordzie. (Stoberski, 1960: 201-203)

3 Różewicz translated *Requiem* by Miodrag Pavlović. (Stoberski, 1960: 195)

4 In the March 1973 issue of *Twórczość* magazine (no. 3, pp. 51-52) Różewicz published his translation of *Ja będę drzewem* by Sándor Petőfi. (Różewicz, 2017)

5 Fascinated by the poetry of Ernst Jandl – an Austrian experimental poet and linguist – Różewicz intended to translate his humoristic works as well.

6 Różewicz translated Pilař into Polish at the same time as the latter was translating *Niepokój* into Czech.

part in international poetry festivals and symposia organized in, for example, the town of Rijeka, which occupies an important place on the literary map of Central Europe and the Balkans. It was there, in 1958, at the Third Festival of Yugoslavian Poetry, that Różewicz delivered one of his most important poetic manifestoes. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of that essay, a polemic against the tradition of the Kraków Avant-garde entitled *Sound and Image in Poetry*, in presenting the prescriptive poetics of the author of *Kartoteka* [*The Card Index*]. In it, Różewicz expressed in emphatic terms his opposition, crucial for anti-art, to the continued practice of the traditional “dance of poetry”, speaking in the “language of the Muses”, ignoring the wounds that the war and Holocaust had inflicted, which he believed had radically undermined the relevance of any poetics reliant on beauty and goodness.

The manifesto Różewicz read at Rijeka was later included by him in the book cold *Przygotowanie do wieczoru autorskiego* [*Preparation for an Author's Evening*], the book in which his earlier prose texts were collected, such as “reportages” and notes from his travels and reading. It should be remembered that Różewicz chose to conclude the second, expanded edition of that book, released in 1977 (the first had come out six years earlier) with a reprint of *Vršacka elegia* [Vršac Elegy] – a poem dedicated to Vasko Popa, written in Wrocław in 1975. In that work, which takes the form of a report on a conversation with the Serbian poet about the purposefulness of the new era in poetry, there recur familiar Różewiczean phrases about the need to overturn traditional aesthetic hierarchies to keep up with the overturned world; a reality in which women are no longer women, goodness is no longer goodness, and beauty, like all cultural artefacts, deserves not admiration, but suspicion. Popa, in this work, is only a silent listener to rhetorical questions posed by the author of *Twarz trzecia* [*The Third Face*]. Questions that evoke a belief in resignation, forced by the condition of the world, from old forms of artistic enunciation. New forms are prompted by Różewicz – they are necessary in order for a New Poetry to be born (though dropping the capital letters would be more fitting here, and the author in fact does so in the course of his monologue) – poetry stripped of belief in the continued functionality of the sublime, negating the enduring status of deep meanings and aesthetic values, and in exchange for those painful reductions, brought closer to the experience of the encroaching diminution of the world, bareness, emptiness, death.

Idziemy aleją parku
ubywa nas z każdym słowem
krokiem liściem
umierając rozmawiamy pogodnie
o przeszłości o poezji
[...]
uśmiechasz się
nudzi Cię moja pusta
kostyczna retoryka
[...]
Kobieta która nie jest już kobietą
mija nas uśmiecha się
bezkrwistymi wargami do siebie...

(We are walking down the lane in the park / we are diminished with every word / step leaf / dying we converse serenely / about the past about poetry / [...] / you smile / you are bored by my empty / caustic rhetoric / [...] / A woman who is no longer a woman / passes by us smiling / with bloodless lips at herself...) (Różewicz, 1977: 365-366)

We are perfectly familiar with other similar images and phrases from Różewicz's postwar books. They are, we might say, distinguishing features of his poetry, which doubts its own continued future. Popa's Stoicism and silence, in which he "corresponds" to the feverish anxiety of Różewicz (deliberately revealed by the Polish poet), nevertheless require us to take into consideration the validity of a position opposite to Różewicz's despair as well. In fact they unambiguously suggest a form of trust not only in the possibility but in the necessity of the further continuance of a poetry of culture, a poetry that contemplates reality, delights in the poet's native landscape, ponders tenderly over things and phenomena inscribed in those landscapes of rich history and the human existence, in order to call forth the great themes of poetry collected in the Polish-language anthology of *Yugoslav Poems*.⁷ We do not, of course, find, in

⁷ This is, in any case, the images that presents itself to me in an attentive reading of the anthology *Liryka jugosłowiańska* and the books of Popa, and especially Tadijanović, that have been translated into Polish. I am naturally aware of the generalization that I am, perhaps unfairly, using here as a reader lacking more profound knowledge of the poetry of the former Yugoslavia. It should here be added that the Polish reader now has access to an increasing number of translations of poetry from the Balkan countries. The Institute of Slavic Philology at Adam

the poem just quoted, an explicit assertion of the paradoxical (from Różewicz's point of view) vitality of such a traditional understanding, foreign to Różewicz, of the function of poetry. It has been invoked here only contrariwise, as a kind of horizon accessible to Różewicz only with great difficulty and perhaps not at all. **We can, however, find that kind of trust, or, it would be better to say, such exemplary embodiments of faith in the future possibilities of poetry and, more broadly, art – and perhaps that is the answer we sought to the question of why Różewicz undertook his translation of foreign poets – in his translations of poems by Popa, Pavlović, and Tadijanović.** It might seem that Różewicz, in a sense, chooses the objects of his translatorial activities as if in defiance of his own beliefs. He translates poems that spring from a faith which is inaccessible to him. Is it an accident that from the widely varied poetry of what was then still called Yugoslavia, with its many contrasting tones, Różewicz decides to translate only those poems that with greater or lesser degrees of distinctness exalt trust in the cultural meaning of poetry and art? All of the Popa, Pavlović and Tadijanović poems chosen by the Polish poet place the poetic image in tradition, engaging in conversation with the symbolic universe of Serbian or Croatian culture. Can this be merely a coincidence, the work of sheer chance? I do not think so. Let us first, however, verify the accuracy of my thesis that Różewicz translated poems invested in the poetry of culture, poems focused on “the bright side”, though not devoid of references to the darker side of existence, poems that are trusting in the sense that they turn toward the future with hope, poems “reconciled” “to the wound.”

From the works of Vasko Popa, now best-known in Poland for the recent volume of translations by Grzegorz Łatuszyński, *Źródło żywego słowa* [Source of the Living Word, 2011], Różewicz chose two texts to translate: *Sopocani* and *Karadjordje*. The first of these deals with one of the oldest Serbian monasteries, founded in 1260 by King Stefan Uroš I. Popa's description of this cultic place, an architectural masterwork known for its beautiful 13th century frescoes, constituting one of the most highly valued monuments of Serbian mural painting, emanates a sense of durability, „dojrzałego spokoju” [mature calm], harmony reigning between existence and transcendence. “Czas gryzł malowane dzieje/ I zęby połamał”⁸ [Time has bitten painted history / and broken its teeth] (Stoberski, 1960: 201), Różewicz translates Popa, “ a [dzwoni wiecznej wiosny/ i

Mickiewicz University in Poznań published a monumental anthology a decade ago, over 700 pages in length, containing a representative selection of Croatian poetry, fiction, essays and nonfiction prose on cultural topics, depicting the period of 1990-2005.

8 Vasko Popa, *Sopocani* (trans. T. Różewicz), in: *Liryka jugosłowska* (Stoberski, 1960: 201).

jasna broń szczęścia” [and (...) the door of eternal spring / and the bright armor of happiness] (Stoberski, 1960: 201) are only waiting for a signal to... further defend what is simultaneously earthly and heavenly, a signal of... a life trusting in the meaning of human existence, of – keeping in mind the cultural and historical function of the Sopoćani monastery – ... care for what builds the Orthodox tradition of Serbia and memory of the struggle against the Ottoman Empire.

The second poem by Popa that Różewicz translated, *Karadjordje*, is based on a historical subject: it is devoted to Black George, the leader of the first Serbian uprising against the Turks, which took place in the years 1803-1813 – the insurrection that laid the groundwork for future struggles for self-determination by the area’s indigenous inhabitants, leading to the eventual establishment of the autonomous Principality of Serbia. The Serbian warrior referred to in the title tells of his cruel death, and of the future that will be denied the Turks, but also, perhaps most importantly, of the questions he would like to ask them, pondering the formula of his own identity. The dialogue with the past is here turned toward the subject’s actual condition. The sense of history appears – as in the poetry of T.S. Eliot (Eliot, 1945) – as an organ of experience in the present; it serves to describe the contemporary condition, and simultaneously to define the desired model for the future.

Różewicz, in translating these two poems by Popa, thus consistently directs our attention toward cultural currents, upholding rather than undermining their durability. On the basis of this “borrowing”, he engages momentarily in a trusting, rather than radically critical, form of the “old” poetry rather than the new.

Similarly, amid the richness of Miodrag Pavlović’s work the Polish poet chose a poem whose theme is treated as much existentially as culturally: the motif of death. In it, Różewicz confronts the image of a funeral rite with that of life enduring all the same. The impression of incongruity that can be aroused in the reader when the poet enjoins him to look simultaneously at a funeral procession and a barefooted boy who, when women are walking behind the dead body, surrounded by a “przyjemną poobiednią ciszą” [pleasant, after-lunch silence], sits at the gate and calmly eats grapes, nonetheless eventually dissolves. That which is final and that which is accidental, life and death, appear in the images presented by Pavlović to complete rather than mutually accuse each other. The simultaneity of the juxtaposed pictures gives rise in the end to a sense of Stoic agreement to a fate that is alike for all, in which death, despite its finality, is a

figure of life, becoming a fulfillment of human fate, something at the same time natural and ordinarily human.

And finally, the text toward which I have been leading, Tadijanović's *Prsten* [Ring], published in the eponymous book by the Croatian poet in 1963⁹, which won the Matica Srpska Zmaj award as well as an award from the city of Zagreb, where Tadijanović lived and wrote, though he returned repeatedly in his memory and imagination to his native region of Slavonia. Did Różewicz know Tadijanović personally? Did he meet the Croatian poet during the Rijeka festival in 1958? Did he have a thorough knowledge of Tadijanović's work, suffused with landscapes of his "little fatherland", poetry that, for a Polish reader, may evoke the memory of certain depictions of scenery by Leopold Staff or, in my view, to an even greater degree, the images of mythologized Lithuania, the "land of childhood", in the work of Czesław Miłosz? (There is no way to avoid mentioning that Tadijanović is above all the rhapsodist of his ancestral region.) These questions, impossible to answer now that both Różewicz and Tadijanović are dead, can serve to lead us into an attempt to read Tadijanović's poem as a part, not wholly his own, of course, but included via citation, of Różewicz's examination of the human condition in the twentieth century. It makes sense, then, to consider whether Tadijanović's vision expressed in *Prsten* corresponds in some measure to the way Różewicz grappled with the experience of bearing witness to death and historical catastrophe.

The poem by Tadijanović that Różewicz translated speaks in the language of parabola. It tells a story in which the events presented resonate equally on the individual level and the universal one. The history of a ring inherited by successive persons, told by the current owner of the jewelry, are figures for history in the long term, spreading from the Middle Ages to the contemporary world and – crucially – open to what is to come.

Gdy mnie pytają, jaki jest
Mój pierścień i skąd go mam, odpowiadam:
Pierścień jest srebrny, nie widzicie – A kamień to kropla

9 The poem itself was written in 1955. This unusual poem awakened a great deal of interest among readers and was frequently mentioned in works on the poetry of Tadijanović. It was written about by, among others, Pavao Pavličić in his essay *Kako čitati Tadijanovićevu poeziju*, Ljerka Car Matutinović in his text *Interpretativni zapisi o nekim Tadijanovićevim pjesmama*, and Tomislav Sabljak in the article *Magijski čin pjesme*. All of these were published in a volume entitled *Zbornik radova o Dragutinu Tadijanoviću*. 1991.-2007. Priredio i uredio D. Jelčić. Suradnici S. Jukić, A. Zrnić. Zagreb, Školska knjiga 2007.

Ciemnej krwi, która się zwie krwawnikiem,
Przed wyruszeniem na wyprawę krzyżową
Nosił go rycerz nieznany,
Później, wiele lat później,
Złotnik norymberski kamień ten oprawił
W srebro [...] ¹⁰

(When I am asked what my / Ring is like and where I got it, I answer: / The ring is silver, can't you see—and the stone is a drop / Of dark blood, which is called cornelian. / Before setting out on one of the Crusades / An unknown knight wore it, / Later, many years later, / A Nuremberg goldsmith set this stone / In silver [...])

The speaking subject of this monologue knows perfectly well how the rest of the story he is telling plays out. He lays bare its repeatable, universal rhythm. It is precisely that unchanging, even, in a sense, monotonous, chain of transmission from one generation to the next of this sign of majesty, value, an expectation of valor, that is the real theme of the parable presented in Tadijanović's poem. In it, the poet reminds his reader of a universal truth about life, which is simultaneously a gift and a vanity. "Czerwony pierścień Jaworowy" [The red Sycamore ring]¹¹ is here, after all, a sign of the bestowal and durability of tradition, connecting the medieval knight participating in the Crusades, the Nuremberg goldsmith who set the precious stone in silver, successive owners of the ring, and finally – for a time – the poet looking at the stone and writing the poem. Yet it is also, because of its transitivity, a sign of inevitable change: life, concluded by death and the body's transformation into dust.

[...] I pierścień w ciągu wieków
Przechodził z ręki na rękę. O rękach tych żyjące usta
mówią, że są popiołem.
I tak oto pewnego dnia znalazł się on na mojej ręce
I moja ręka napisała o nim kiedyś wiersz:

10 Dragustin Tadijanović, *Pierścień*, (Różewicz, 1960: 256) the original version is:

Kad me pitaju kakav je
Prsten moj, i odakle je, odgovaram:
Srebrni prsten, zar ne vidite. A kamen, kap
Tamne krvi koju zovu karneol,
Nosio je, u davno doba, na polasku
U križarski rat, vitez neki (tko zna išta
O njemu?). Kasnije, mnogo kasnije,
Nuernberški zlatar kamen je okovao
U srebro.[...]

11 Tamże.

„Na ręce mam czerwony pierścień Jaworowy”
Myśleli, że tylko w wierszu
W mej wyobraźni na ręce mojej
Mam czerwony pierścień Jaworowy.
Pytano mnie:
Ile on kosztuje,
I zaraz potem dodawano: Pewnie tysiące, grube tysiące.
[...]
Czy będzie razem ze mną złożony
W ziemi, czy będzie na nieznaną rękę, wtedy,
Gdy moja ręka będzie już prochem [...].¹²

([...] And the ring over the course of centuries / Changed from hand to hand. Of those hands living mouths / say that they are ashes. / And so one day it found itself here on my hand / And my hand once wrote a poem about it: / “On my hand I have the red Sycamore ring.” / They thought that only in the poem / In my imagination on my hand / I have the red Sycamore ring. / I was asked: / How much does it cost, / And immediately afterward added: No doubt thousands, A heap of thousands. / [...] / Will it be laid with me together / In the earth, will it be on an unknown hand then, / When my hand will be nothing but ashes [...].)

Tadijanović, and with him Różewicz, consistently juxtapose in the poem the theme of the costly gift and the motif of *vanitas*. I would even go so far as to say that the Polish poet, due to seemingly minor translation decisions, underscores their inseparable interconnectedness. Tadijanović, in defining the type of stone that adorns the ring, uses the term “karneol”. Różewicz, on the other hand,

12 (Różewicz, 1960: 256-257) The original version is:

[...] I prsten, u malom nizu stoljeća,
Prelazaše s ruke na ruku. (Te su ruke prah
I pepeo, mogla bi za njih reći živa usta.)
Pa je došao, jednoga dana, i na moju ruku;
Ona je o njemu (godine, godine!) napisala stih:
“Na ruci mojoj žalosnoj crveni prsten Javorov.”
A nitko nije pomišljao da je doista
Na ruci mojoj žalosnoj
Crveni prsten Javorov.
Nego me ispitivahu: Koliko bi on stajao,
I odmah dodavali: Hiljade, teške hiljade.
[...]
Hoće li on sa mnom leći
U zemlju ili će biti na nepoznatoj ruci
Kad moja bude pepeo i prah.[...]

chooses the corporeally marked word “krwawnik”, containing the Polish (as well as Slavic) root meaning “blood”, intensifying and rendering corporeal the comparison drawn by Tadijanović of the stone to a drop of blood. By means of this small change, the Polish translation underscores still more distinctly the inescapability of death for all those who wear the ring, the combination of gift and vanity.¹³ (The “bloody” stone on the finger of the unknown knight also anticipates the bleeding of his body on the field of battle.) Similarly, in the third line from the last of his translation, Różewicz translates “karneol” using the Polish dialectal form “karniol”, used interchangeably with the word “krwawnik.”

A reader of the Polish translation, in comparing it with the original, will also note the Polish poet’s omission of the word “pepeo” [popiół/ash] when he translates the phrase “pepeo i prah”, repeatedly used by Tadijanović, which brings biblical contexts to mind in both the Croatian and the Polish languages. Does the reason lie purely in the desire to preserve greater fluidity and coherence of expression in the Polish line? That seems out of the question. It is my belief that Różewicz is aiming rather – as in the previous case – at intensifying the image’s corporeality, a process aided by the muting of the phraseological associations which are blocked when the word “ash” [pepeo/popiół] is removed. The poetic image is intended more to resonate with the reader’s visual imagination than to stir cultural memory in him, which would undoubtedly occur if the reader were to draw the association between dust and ashes and the vanity-themed liturgical ritual of Ash Wednesday, delving into the Christian tradition of Lent. This minor change also eliminates possible associations with the Croatian phrase “uskrsnuti iz praha i popela”, referring to the Resurrection. Różewicz is careful to ensure that the reader more or less literally (i.e., visually) perceives the ash falling from the dead hand. All of these very subtle “interpolations” in Tadijanović’s text intensify and, one might say, render more realistic the motif of *vanitas*, while at the same time maintaining the parabolic nature of the tale as a whole.¹⁴ They bring into relief the symmetry, ingeniously constructed by the Croatian poet, between stone and person, as well as between gift and vanity. Here I must stress that Różewicz, too, was no stranger to parabolic language. On the contrary, he

13 [Translator’s Note: This effect is arguably reproduced to some extent in my English version by the “carn-“ in “carnelion” which can suggest “carnage” as well as a (red?) “carnation.” My knowledge of Serbian is insufficient to determine whether a similar reference to the same Latin root is present in Tadijanović’s original. T.W.]

14 Kazimierz Wyka once observed with typical aptness that Różewicz reduces the human being to a thing, to a body. Wyka proposed to call Różewicz’s poetic philosophy “somatism en route to the coffin”: “This somatism has only one purpose – to bear us en route to the coffin”, he wrote... (Wyka, 1977: 337)

delighted in using the idiom of parabola and did so frequently. He does so, to name but on example, in *Róża* [Rose], a poem based on a parallelism akin to the one in *Prsten*, between human fate and a part of nature. He also does so in the poem *Bursztynowy ptaszek* [The Little Bird of Amber], using symbolic figures to tell about transience and approaching death. In the self-reflexive poems *Trzy profile poety* [Three Profiles of the Poet], and in *Wieża z kości słoniowej* [The Ivory Tower], as well as – to cite an example linked to Tadijanović's poem by the motif of the ring as well – in *Marzyciel* [The Dreamer]. Reading that last poem allows us to grasp clearly the quite dissimilar timbre and mood that mark the Serbian and Polish poets' meditations on the human fate. Tadijanović, despite his frequently painful diagnoses, maintains a tone of serenity. Różewicz's vision is full of pessimism, and notable for its sense of powerlessness; his imagination, as he himself states, remains "kamienna" [set "in stone"] (Różewicz, 1976, 57-58).

Ogrodnik pochylony
nad ślepym ziarnem
wywiódł z światła
gorejący krzew
i umieścił go w źrenicy
jak w pierścieniu

ogrodnik w ciemnych okularach
pochylony tak nisko
nie widział żarłocznej
chmury ptaków
każdy z rubinowym okiem
unosił w dziobie ziarno
nim wzeszło

ogrodnik śmieszny ogrodnik
czuwa nad swym marzeniem
bezowocnym.¹⁵

(The gardener bent / over the blind seed / drew out of light / the burning bush / and placed it in the pupil / as in a ring // the gardener in dark glasses / bent so low / did not see the voracious / cloud of birds / each with a ruby gem / carried away a seed in its beak

15 Tadeusz Różewicz, *Marzyciel*, *ibid.*, p. 15. Różewicz published this poem in *Niepokój* (1947), the book in which he collected works written during the war and immediately afterward. It thus was written almost three decades before Tadijanović wrote *Prsten*.

/ before it rose // the gardener silly gardener / stands vigil over his dream / a fruitless one.)

The differences here are too obvious to need much elaboration. In Różewicz's poem, in contrast to Tadijanović's *Prsten*, life ends before it has really had a chance to begin. The seed in the poem is blind and helpless. The ruby gem in the ring, begotten as much by the burning bush as by the ravages of war, is revealed to be the empty, hostile eye of a ravenous bird who snatches the seed, depriving it of the chance to sprout and yield its living fruit. Tadijanović, on the contrary, trusts in the possibility of passing on the gift. He finds in the story of the ring a figure for the endurance of a community's persistence. It is not an accident that his carnelian set in silver belongs exclusively to none of its temporary owners. It is a common good, which is what endows it with meaning and salvific permanence – „moim czy twoim pierścieniem” [my ring or your ring]. Its story has and will have its continuation among people.

Thus perhaps – as in the case of the poems by Popa and Pavlović cited earlier – this translation by Różewicza should also be interpreted rather as the result of a meeting of the poet with the idiom that is (despite the similarities discovered above) fundamentally not his own, allowing him merely to uphold a way of thinking about the world that is in fact inaccessible to him. Read that way, the attempt to translate Tadijanović would resemble the relationship that linked Różewicz with Staff. He not only published Staff's poetry (in 1964, and thus shortly after Tadijanović published the book *Prsten*, an anthology of Staff's poetry, selected, ordered and with an afterword by Różewicz, entitled *Kto jest ten dziwny nieznajomy* [Who Is That Peculiar Stranger], was released),¹⁶ not only

16 It was in the afterword to this anthology that Różewicz made his declaration that after the war poetry could not be invented. „Taniec poezji zakończył swój żywot w okresie drugiej wojny światowej, w obozach koncentracyjnych stworzonych przez systemy totalitarne. [...] nawroty różnego rodzaju „tańców poetyckich” nie wytrzymały próby czasu. Słowo przestało dziwić się słowu. Metafora przestała rozkwitać. [...] Jaką drogę przeszedł Leopold Staff w ciągu długiej, trwającej pół wieku wędrówki? Odpowiedź na to daje wybór poezji, który przedstawiam czytelnikowi w roku 1963. Od *Snów o potędze* do *Wikliny*, od nieskazitelnego, doskonałego sonetu *Kowal* do utworu *Przebudzenie*, który nie jest wierszem, ale jest określeniem sytuacji, w jakiej znalazł się poeta, jest informacją przekazaną przez poetę innym ludziom, jest utworem, który można nazwać również utworem poetyckim. Wybór ten jest próbą przedstawienia dramatu współczesnego, dramatu aktualnego. Dramatu, któremu na imię Leopold Staff”. [The dance of poetry ended its life in the period of the Second World War in the concentration camps created by totalitarian systems. [...] the return of various kinds of “poetic dances” would not withstand the test of time. Words ceased to feel wonder at words. Metaphors ceased to bloom. [...] What was the road traveled by Leopold Staff during these long wanderings over half a century? The answer to that is provided by the selection of poetry I am presenting to the reader in 1963. From *Sny o potędze* [Dreams of Power to *Wiklina* [Wicker], from the

became friends with him and valued him tremendously, but also envied his faith in the possibility of setting the postwar world in order, a world that Różewicz found to be devoid of any kind of harmony or teleological framework. The news of Staff's death, on 31 May 1957, reached Różewicz while he was working on a poem whose title was not yet fixed, *Związany... Przywiązany...* [Connected ... Attached...].

Kiedy zacząłem pisać ten wiersz na początku myślałem [...], aby opisać pewien stan tęsknoty do światła, do czystej, abstrakcyjnej idei, oczyszczonej z pyłu ziemi, z krwi naszych pożądań, ze splątanej sieci uczuć, ludzkich zobowiązań.¹⁷

(When I began writing that poem first I thought [...] I would describe a certain state of longing for light, for a pure, abstract idea, purged of earthly dust, from the blood of our desires, from the tangled web of feelings, of human obligations)

That turned out, however, to be too difficult a task in the end. The "stony imagination" ["wyobraźnia kamienna"] would not allow the poet to complete the task he set himself. It prompts the same phrases as before, typical ones for the Różewiczean idiom.

I

patrzcie przywiązali mnie
do starych krajobrazów
do pojęć do zabobonów
do ojców naszych

[...]

Udawał że nie czuje
skrępowania mógł zerwać
każdy włoszek każdą nitkę
mógł odejść – mógł iść dalej
zostawił te powiązania

immaculate, perfect sonnet *Kowal* [The Smith] to the work *Przebudzenie* [Awakening], which is not a poem but the definition of a situation in which the poet found himself, information conveyed by the poet to other people, a work that could also be called a poetic work. This selection is an attempt to present the contemporary drama, the current drama. A drama named Leopold Staff.] (Różewicz, 1964: 195-196)

17 T. Różewicz, *Zostanie po mnie pusty pokój*. (Różewicz, 1977: 9)

odszedł do swojego domu
do nicości

II

Przychodzi wielkie światło
zimne i okrutne
i odcina go i połyka
wypluwa I ginie

(look they have tied me / to old landscapes / to concepts to superstitions / to our fathers // [...] // He pretended not to feel / discomfort he could tear / each hair each thread / could leave— could go further / he left those attachments / he left and went home / to nothingness // A great light comes / cold and cruel / and cuts him off and swallows / spits him out and vanishes)

In the evening, when the news of his friend's death reached Różewicz, he attempted to "purify and finish up" ["oczyścić, wykończyć"] the poem and to have it printed with the dedication "In Memory of Leopold Staff". That refashioning was also found wanting, however: "wiersz był nierówny, ciemny, coraz bardziej zagmatwany" [the poem was uneven, dark, increasingly muddled] (Różewicz, 1977: 10).

II

Przychodzi wielkie światło
w nieznannej godzinie
przychodzi wielkie światło
zimne i okrutne
odcina go połyka
wypluwa I ginie

on który wyzywał i czekał
boi się światła wielkiego
które się zbliża
które chce go odciąć
połknąć i wyrzucić

[...]

więc mam zostać sam
a gdzież te miłe
drobiazgi drobnostki
które przywiązują do życia
żyłem w ciemnym mule
lecz byli tam ludzie
były zwierzęta rośliny
krajobrazy gwiazdy

[...]

Wysnułem ze siebie
żałobę i okryłem
nią drzewa ptaki i wodę

Wszystko tonęło
w moim bezbarwnym smutku
dźwięki które do mnie dotarły
zapadały szamotały się rozpaczliwie
bo nie było echa

(A great light comes / at an unknown hour / a great light comes / cold and cruel / cuts him off swallows / spits him out And vanishes // [...] // so i am to remain alone / and where are those sweet / trifles trinkets / that bind to life / i lived in a dark mud / but there were people there / there were animals plants / landscapes stars // [...] // I wove out of myself / mourning and covered / with it trees birds and water / Everything drowned / in my colorless sadness / the sounds that reached me / fell flounced despairingly / for there was no echo) (Różewicz, 1977: 10-12).

Quoting successive fragments of the poem in *Zostanie po mnie pusty pokój* [An Empty Room Will Remain After Me], Różewicz describes further, unsuccessful attempts to brighten the work, which in subsequent stanzas becomes a story of the impossibility which is as strong as desire. About desire and impossibility that mutually support and simultaneously negate each other. The poet "mówi niejasno" [speaks obscurely], weaving images of his own with phrases that might have been spoken by Staff. He tries to join his own idiom with that of his close friend, which only makes him more aware of the fundamental dissimilarity that sets the two of them apart. "In that poem", Różewicz reminisced,

Chciałem w tym wierszu wyrazić powiązanie między poetą i światem. Stary Poeta świat przyjmował, nie odrzucał i nie szamotał się. Nie rozbijał świata. Łączył, wiązał, nasyczał harmonią, której ten świat w sobie nie miał. Jestem w poezji – mówi o sobie Różewicz – przeciwieństwem Starego Poety. W poemacie, który piszę, jest dużo mojej ciemności i mało harmonii. Jest tęsknota do światła. To znaczy do wyjaśnienia. To jest wiersz o nim i o mnie. Piszę piętrząc sprzeczności” Różewicz, 1977: 10-11)

(I wanted to express the connection between the poet and the world. The Old Poet accepted the world, did not reject it and did not tussle with it. He did not smash the world. He joined together, tied together, imbued things with a harmony that this world did not possess in itself. In poetry”, Różewicz adds about himself, “I am the opposite of the Old Poet. In the epic poem I write, there is a lot of my darkness and little harmony. There is a longing for light. Meaning, a longing for clarification. It’s a poem about him and about me. I write by stacking contradictions on each other.)

The poem bears eloquent witness to Różewicz’s longing for the kind of poetic diction that Staff had at his disposal. To the light that Staff, author of *Przebudzenie* [Awakening], carried within himself almost to the very end.¹⁸ I am convinced that these ventures by Różewicz into translation from Croatian and Serbian poetry have a kindred meaning and function. Tadijanović’s poem corresponds to the hidden desire on Różewicz’s part, as stubborn as it is unachievable, for brighter tones in poetry – in poetry that nevertheless does not desire to be and cannot be torn away from painful experience. Does this longing, connected with the need to distance himself from excessively airy poetry¹⁹, not take voice at the moment when the Polish poet “unfaithfully” translates the words of Tadijanović, highlighting (and simultaneously undermining) the imaginative status of the ring, which outside observers determine to be merely a phantasm of the poet? That is what happens in lines 15, 16 and 17 of the poem. Różewicz translates Tadijanović’s phrase „A nitko nije pomišljao da je doista/ Na ruci mojoj žalosnoj/ Crveni prsten Javorov” [Nobody thought (assumed/imagined), that in truth (in reality) / On my pathetic hand there was / the red ring of the Sycamore] as “Myśleli, że tylko w wierszu/ W mej wyobraźni na ręce mojej /

18 I deliberately mention here the title of one of Staff’s last poems. It was written in a poetic mode that recalls the idiom of Różewicz. “People say that late Staff became rejuvenated under Różewicz’s influence,” Zbigniew Bieńkowski writes. “I would say that Różewicz is Staff’s natural grandson. Standing in opposition to condensation, the whole mechanics of imagination and the word formed by the poetics of the avant-garde, he, its rebellious son, took from his distant grandfather the posture of a simpleton. Staff’s lyrical persona is a simpleton astonished at the world, while Różewicz’s is a simpleton astonished at his presence in it.” (Bieńkowski, 1963: 85)

19 This is one of the critical terms that Różewicz employs in his manifesto *Dźwięk i obraz w poezji współczesnej* [Sound and Image in Contemporary Poetry] (Różewicz, 1958: 3).

Mam czerwony pierścień Jaworowy” [They thought that only in the poem / In my imagination on my hand / I had the red ring of the Sycamore]. The easily noticeable change of subjectivity performed here by Różewicz serves to shift the accent from the outside observers to the monologue-speaking owner of the ring. This also enables him, equally importantly, to expose the inaccuracy of their assessment, which is contradicted by the knowledge of the lyrical persona about the actual, real existence of the jewel. This subsequent, subtle “intervention” in the text of the Croatian poet can be read, I believe, as a signal of a kind of (momentary) identification of the translator with the persona of the translated monologue. The signal is all the more important in that – let us note once more – it points, following Tadijanović, toward the true, real, rather than imaginative, existence of cultural values and enduring tradition. The suggestion of such a reading is reinforced by the choice that Różewicz makes from the group of possible, synonymous Polish equivalents to the phrase “a nitko nije pomišljao”: “nikt nie pomyślał, nie zakładał, nie wyobrażał sobie” [nobody thought / assumed / imagined]. In his translation, he chooses the last of these possible variants, probably the least expected choice. The word that comes, “wyobraźnia” [imagination], enables the activation, impossible for the Polish reader to overlook, of a series of associations that are important in the polemic mentioned above that Różewicz as anti-poet is engaged in with the representatives of the Kraków Avant-garde who believed in “master-poetry”, as well as with the exponents of surrealist poetry, whose influence in Polish literary culture was growing at the time when Różewicz translated *Prsten*. The Polish audience for this translation, discovering the translational “intervention” by Różewicz which I have described in the Croatian poet’s work, would no doubt recall the discussion that took place in the late 1950s and early ‘60s around the problem of the “liberated imagination”. Leaving that topic for another occasion,²⁰ I will now bend my steps toward a conclusion, wherein it behooves me finally to give an answer to the question posed in the title of this essay.

²⁰ I have written extensively on the subject of this polemic in two monographs: *Kształt wyobraźni. Z dziejów sporu o „wizję” i „równanie”* [The Shape of Imagination. From the History of the Debate on “Vision” and “Equalization”] (Poznań 1998) and *Wizja przeciw równaniu. Wokół popaździernikowego sporu o wyobraźnię twórczą* [“Vision Versus Equalization”. On the Post-1956 Debate on the Creative Imagination] (Poznań 2013). The second work contains an anthology of texts which include the Różewicz essay mentioned here.

Conclusion

Różewicz translated Tadijanović's *Prsten* because the Croatian poet's poem offered him an opportunity to express some convictions which, despite the magnitude of his own doubts, he considered worth upholding or at least giving some consideration. His translation of *Prsten* can and should be read as a purposefully borrowed quotation. As a poem that names the longing that Różewicz was unable to voice in his own idiom, but that he concealed, contrary to widely held opinion, deep inside himself. That is precisely why the Croatian poet's words resonated with him. In translating his moving poem, Różewicz could repeat after Tadijanović:

Gdy moja ręka będzie już prochem. Ona nie będzie wiedzieć,
Że i mnie – i tamtym przede mną się zdawało,
Że ręka moja ze srebrnym pierścieniem
Nigdy się nie rozstanie. Z kamieniem ciemnym jak krew.
Ci, którzy znają drogie kamienie, nazywają go karniolem.
Oto i cały wiersz o pierścieniu.
O moim czy o twoim pierścieniu?²¹

(When my hand will be ashes. It will not know / That it seemed—to me as to those others before me, / That my hand from its silver ring / Would never part. With the stone dark like blood. / Those who know precious stones call it carnelion. / This was an entire poem about a ring. About my ring or your ring?)

Translated by Timothy Williams

21 D. Tadijanović, *Pierścień*, (Różewicz, 1960: 267) the original version is:

Kad	moja	bude	pepeo	i	prah.	Ona	neće	znati
Da	se	i	meni	činilo,	kao	i	onima	
Pređa	mnom,	da	se	ruka	moja	neće	nikada	
Rastati	od	prstena,	od	prstena	od	od	srebra,	
S	kamenom	tamnim	kao	krv,	a	zovu	ga	karneol
Oni	koji	poznaju	drago	kamenje.	Gotova	je	pjesma	
O	prstenu.	O	mojem	ili	tvojem	prstenu?		

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Agata Stankowska (Poljska)

Sveučilište Adam Mickiewicz u Poznańu

Fakultet poljske i klasične filologije

Institut poljske literature

stankowska.a@gmail.com

ZAŠTO JE TADEUSZ RÓŻEWICZ PREVEO „PRSTEN“ DRAGUTINA TADIJANOVIĆA?

(O AUTORU NIEPOKÓJ KAO PREVODITELJU SRPSKE I HRVATSKE POEZIJE)

Sažetak

Rad Tadeusza Różewicza kao prevoditelja ograničen je na tek nekolicinu uspješnih pokušaja. Prevodio je pojedinačne pjesme češkoga pjesnika Jana Pilařa, srpskih pjesnika Vaska Pope i Miodraga Pavlovića, mađarskoga pisca Sándora Petőfija i Dragutina Tadijanovića. Prevedene pjesme nekadašnjih jugoslavenskih autora bile su uronjene u poeziju kulture, pjesme fokusirane na „svjetlu stranu“, ali ne bez referenci na mračniju stranu postojanja, pjesme koje su pune povjerenja u smislu da se okreću prema budućnosti s nadom, pjesme „pomirene s ranom“. Tadijanovićev *Prsten* ponudio mu je priliku izraziti neke stavove koje je, unatoč veličini njegovih vlastitih sumnji, smatrao vrijednima izražavanja ili barem razmatranja. Njegov prijevod pjesme *Prsten* može se i treba čitati kao namjerno posuđeni citat.

Ključne riječi: Tadeusz Różewicz, Dragutin Tadijanović, „Prsten“, prijevod, hrvatska poezija, poljska poezija