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Review Of "Russian Repertory In The Croatian National Theatre, 1874-1914" By Ž. B. Juričić

Sibelan E.S. Forrester

Swarthmore College, sforres1@swarthmore.edu

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Review

Author(s): Sibelan Forrester

Review by: Sibelan Forrester

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Czerwinski translates “poezja nie zawsze / przybiera formę wiersza” as “poetry does not always / take on the form / of a poem,” he doesn’t get any of the individual words wrong, but shows little sense for the whole, since he includes a *figura etymologica* (poetry-poem) avoided by Różewicz. At the same time, Sokolowski’s “at times / a poem needn’t have / a verse form” solves the problem “poezja-wiersz” better, but includes an interpretation (“needn’t”) which is not necessarily contained in the original text. The same tendencies can be found in Czerwinski’s and Sokolowski’s renderings of “pozbawiona formy i treści” as “freed of form of content” and “unformed / meaningless,” respectively. Czerwinski’s desire to translate every word leads him to use the far too positive “freed” (one says in Polish “pozbawiony wolności”: “deprived of freedom”—perhaps “deprived” would have been better in this case as well). Sokolowski has the proper tone, but jumps too quickly from “form” to “formed” (Czerwinski’s “formless” is better) and “contents” to “meaning”—differences which are significant for Różewicz’s linguistic poetry.

Czerwinski is often even freer than Sokolowski, sometimes adding words and lines which can’t be found in the original, as well as switching the positions of stanzas. At the same time, as Piotr Wilczek points out in an article on Czerniawski’s translations (“Adam Czerniawski jako tłumacz poezji Różewicza,” *Świat literacki*, 1991, No. 2, 79–83), quoting Różewicz’s Hungarian translator Andreas Fodor: “it’s more difficult to find the proper tone than it is to discover lexical equivalents.” Sometimes an English translation with an altered structure can be closer to the Polish original, since, as Wilczek points out, “even the most literal translation produces a completely new semantic structure.” A purely literal translation gives the impression of helplessness on the part of the translator. Wilczek rightly calls for more systematic thought on general difficulties of translations from Polish to English.

One could view these problems as symptoms of the dilemma of translating lyric in general, but, when in doubt, one should at least produce a grammatically and stylistically readable text, which Czerwinski sometimes fails to do. Both Sokolowski’s and Czerwinski’s books contain a number of typos, and all the umlauts are missing in the German quotes in Czerwinski’s book; this is especially irritating in “Eine Fliege im Zimmer,” which contains long German passages.

Despite these difficulties, it is gratifying that the occasion of the poet’s seventieth birthday, which Czerwinski expressly commemorates in his dedication, gave rise to such a large quantity of translations of this great poet. Not only is Różewicz’s most recent work now accessible to the English-speaking readership, but the reader can also, if he or she so chooses, compare two or three different translations, thus getting a good concept of the multifaceted work of Tadeusz Różewicz and of general issues in Polish-English translation. In the world of translation, the more the merrier!

Holt Meyer, Universität Potsdam

Želimir B. Juričić. *Russian Repertory in the Croatian National Theatre, 1874–1914*. Nottingham: Astra Press, 1994. 148 pp., £18.00 (paper).

Želimir Juričić approaches his topic through a wealth of factual material. His slim book traces the role of Russian plays in the Croatian theater from recognition of their theoretical desirability among members of the Illyrian Movement up to the First World War, with frequent references to later performances as well. Juričić argues that Russian drama played a crucial role in the Croatian theater’s shift from histrionic romanticism to a realistic acting style, citing the influence of visits by the Moscow Art Theater and other leading troupes of Russian and Soviet actors along with reception of the works presented in translation at the Croatian National Theater in Zagreb.

The book's structure is primarily chronological, beginning with a survey of plays that were translated from Russian but never performed. Later chapters examine the contributions of major authors such as Tolstoy, Griboedov, Ostrovskii, Chekhov, Gor'kii and Andreev, along with works by minor playwrights or stage adaptations of Dostoevsky's novels. Some of the background provided in the various sections, such as the discussion of censorship exerted by the Austro-Hungarian government in the case of Ostrovskii (57–58), can cast a useful light on other sections of the volume. Russian dramatic works often arrived in Zagreb by way of Parisian or Viennese adaptations, although some Croatian performances took place only a few months after the Russian premières, and a few were even the first performances outside Russia itself. Along the way Juričić also outlines the historical development of the Croatian National Theater through the tenures of its various directors and the careers of its most famous actors.

Juričić cites copiously from journalism and critical reviews of the period as well as from modern literary and theatrical histories; a great deal of information from archives and libraries becomes available here in English. Juričić's translates with verve: " 'How could Mandrović be so irresponsible as to grant a visa to such a mediocre playwright? He is like a foreign body within the theatrical organism,' wrote *Narodne Novine*" (122). Thus, in addition to everything else his book gives something of a survey of theater criticism in Croatia before World War I, and in some cases later as well. Unfortunately, it is not always clear where the author is paraphrasing or summarizing the words of a critic, and where he is offering his own opinion or analysis of a play or its performance. Extensive reliance on citations and paraphrase reproduces pedestrian and theoretically primitive opinion—in particular, truisms of nineteenth-century Russian literary criticism. "[T]he partisans of realist art had to wage a bitter fight against numerous foes before realist tendencies fully triumphed" (12): unlike the verbatim quotes from 1903 newspapers, this sort of vocabulary gives the book a needlessly old-fashioned tone. Such characterizations as "the restive South Slav temperament and mentality" (68) or "the passive whimpering and neurotic introspection of Chekhov's characters" (93–94) would gain from placement in their original context. At times, citations accumulate into unacknowledged contradictions, as when Gogol's plays are described as both "grotesque caricature portraits" and "realistic rendering of life" (8). In other places Juričić writes with incisive humor, though without tapping into the vast and sophisticated scholarly literature on the major Russian authors whose dramatic works he discusses. Some terms whose use might vary between the fields of literature and drama should be clarified, especially the term "realism," which for the scholar of Russian literature has a heavily predetermined significance.

A few factual inconsistencies, such as the misdating of a picture of Olga Knipper-Chekhova to 1877 rather than 1922 (?) and confusion over the original title of the minor Russian playwright Potapenko's play "Slepets" (113) or "Zhulik" (122), do not interfere with the book's clear presentation of its rich material, gleaned from extensive research. Juričić's study is likely to appeal to a limited, scholarly audience, but it is very informative and within its own limitations it casts further light on the interrelations of these two Slavic literatures.

Sibelan Forrester, Swarthmore College

G. Brogi Bercoff, G. Dell'Agata, P. Marchesani, and R. Picchio, eds. *La Slavistica in Italia: Cinquant'anni di studi (1940–1990)*. Rome: Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, Divisione Editoria, 1994. 487 pp. (cloth).

This volume contains the proceedings of the first general congress of Italian Slavists held in Seiano in Spring, 1991. It is, as suggested by the title, a review of the last fifty years of research conducted by Italian scholars in this field. As a general introduction, Riccardo Picchio draws a