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THE PATHWAYS OF EZRA POUND'S POETRY IN SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO

Abstract

The paper aims to provide an introduction to the study of the reception of Ezra Pound's poetry in Serbia, and Montenegro. It also aims to examine the possible influences of his poetry on some Serbian and Montenegrin authors. I believe that his poetry is still alive and continues to evolve into new works and shapes – therein lies much of its challenge and fascination. An overview of the changing contexts for publishing Ezra Pound's poetry and reactions to it highlights a strong response from Serbian scholars but the modest reception of his poetry in Montenegro. This provides a vital contextual setting for discussing the reception not only of his poetry, but also of American literature in Serbia and Montenegro.

Key words: Ezra Pound, poetry, reception, Serbia, Montenegro

My preliminary idea was to explore the enduring appeal of Pound's poetry in Serbia and Montenegro, two countries which have until recently (and to some extent even now) been impacted by the epic tradition quite considerably. I wanted to investigate to what extent the idea of creating Pound's modern epic could influence such societies and their writers in modern times. What I discovered was great interest in Pound's poetry and

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especially his *The Cantos* with a possible influence on Serbian poetry, but not the slightest interest in the modern epic as a form to be followed. Therefore, my research had to be narrowed to the pathways of the reception of Pound's poetry in Serbia and Montenegro from the fifties to the present day.

As can be seen from the research of distinguished Pound scholars such as Milovan Danojlić, Vera Savić, Mirko Magarašević, and Zoran Skrobanović, the pathway of his reception kept changing: it was very wide in some periods, but narrowed in others. In an extremely comprehensive study *Ezra Pound's Poetry in Serbo-Croatian Translations (Poezija Ezre Paunda u srpskohrvatskim prevodima, 2010)*, Vera Savić informs readers about Pound's translations into Serbo-Croatian published in ex-Yugoslavia in the second half of the 20th century. Her research shows that translations of Pound's poetry (modest in number) appeared rather late with the first only being published in the fifties (1952, Ivan Slaming and Antun Šoljan *Američka lirika*, Zagreb). Since then, to date, four books of his poetry, one book of critical essays, and eleven anthologies have been published in about thirty issues of literary magazines. In the fifties, the result was 10 poems from Pound's early period, translated by Šoljan, Slaming and Andrić, being published in anthologies (*Američka lirika*, 1952, *Antologija svjetske lirike*, 1956, Serbia; *Antologija savremene engleske poezije*, 1957). In this decade, seven more of his representative poems including *Canto LXXXI* (translators: Tišma and Miletić) were also published in Serbia in two literary journals (*Književne novine*, 1958 and *Letopis Matice srpske*, 1959).

In the sixties, according to Savić, greater interest in variety and number was shown. Consequently, two special editions of Pound's poems were published (*Poezija*, 1967 and *Cantos*, 1969), he was included in two collections of poetry (*Antologija svjetske lirike*, 1965 and *Antologija svjetske ljubavne poezije*, 1968), his poems were published in periodicals on eleven occasions (50 in translation), and "Hugh Selwin Mauberley" was also published. In this decade, Ladan, Šoljan and Sabljak stood out as extraordinary translators. The translations of Pound's poetry could be read in journals from all over former Yugoslavia (*Književne novine*, *Kolo*, *Bagdala*, *Razlog*, *Polja*, *Perspektive*, *Telegram*, *Forum*, and *Hrvatski književni glasnik*).

However, the seventies marked the peak in terms of the translations and variety of editions of Pound's poetry (*Sub Mare*; *Canto XII, XXXVI*; *Alba*, *Envoi*, etc.). This decade also resulted in some of the most successful translations

of Pound's most famous and best works in the first comprehensive book of his poetry (*Ezra Pound: Poezija*, 1975) and two anthologies (*Antologija moderne američke poezije* and *Antologija savremene engleske poezije*, 1975). There were also 10 appearances in periodicals with 40 poems translated by six translators. Some of them, who belonged to a new generation of translators (such as Branka and Ivan Lalić, Danojlić, Demirović, and Pavlović), produced some of the most successful translations, which are unrivalled to this day. Periodicals continued publishing translations of his poetry from both his early and later periods. These translations met with very strong and positive critical reception. Janićijević published the first Bibliography of Pound's reception, which illustrated just how extensive Serbian interest in his work was (Savić 2010: 131).

This flourish of translations and critical response in the seventies did not continue into the eighties, when there was much less interest in Modernism generally, and accordingly in Pound's poetics. Still, the new generation of translators appeared to maintain their interest in his works (From *Cantos*; *Libretto*; *Contemporaines*). Thus, seventeen of Pound's poems were included in two books of poetry (*Moderno svetsko pesništvo*, 1983, and *Zlatna knjiga američke poezije*, 1980), which also featured a very comprehensive analysis of his poetry by Sonja Bašić (Kuljanin 2008: *Poezija Ezre Paunda u srpskohrvatskim prevodima*).

During this decade, a more comprehensive book of his poetry was not published. Instead, there was also a decrease in the number of published poems in periodicals. Still, Pound's poetry appeared for the first time in six journals in Serbia (*Mladost*, *Gradac*, *Problemi*, *Život*, *Književne novine* and *Delfin*). The situation would not change dramatically in the nineties, which will be remembered for a comprehensive book of his early poetry (*Ezra Paund: Rane pesme*) and a special edition of Pound's *How to Read* (*Kako da čitamo*, 1999, translated by Danojlić). Vera Savić evaluates the translations from this period and concludes that there is a disparity between their number and their quality. Thus, the sixties saw some very successful translations while the seventies offered great variety in terms of number and editions, but also high quality translations produced by some distinguished poet-translators. However, as Savić notes, the eighties marked a disparity between the quantity and quality of some translations, which was most probably the result of the work of some inexperienced translators who could not cope with the complexity of Pound's poetry. As has been pointed out previously, the following decade was not much

different. It brought war and the disintegration of Yugoslavia and a weaker reception to many world authors, including Pound.

Savić points out that Ezra Pound's poetry echoes in the poetry of Serbian Modernism and she adds that his "hermetic expression, Biblical statements, mythological themes and characters, the presence of the past as an element of the present, an active presence of the poet together with impersonality, the change of the nature of traditional symbols – are elements of Pound's poetry, as well as of the poetry of Miodrag Pavlović, Ivan V. Lalić and Milovan Danojlić, the distinguished poet-translators of Anglo-American Modern poetry" (Savić 2010: 129–130).

It is difficult to disagree with Vera Savić's final conclusion on the translations of Pound's works into Serbo-Croatian: in most cases both the structure and quality of translations were satisfactory, as well as his presence in books of poetry and periodicals. However, it would be good, she believes, if a more comprehensive book of translations of his early poetry and some more poems from *The Cantos* appeared in the future. I would also agree with Savić's high praise for the translations of Pound's poetry by some poet-translators (Danojlić, Lalić, Demirović), whose translations are unequalled and should be, as she says, reprinted, not re-done, for the audience of the 21st century.

The audience of the 21st century in Serbia has continued not only to enjoy these translations but also to read new ones. Vera Savić's wishes have finally been fulfilled. In the second decade of this century, two significant books appeared by two of Pound's most distinguished translators and critics: *Pesme: Ezra Paund (Poems: Ezra Pound, 2011)* in translation and with a preface written by Milovan Danojlović, and *Ezra Pound's KITAJ (CATHAY, 2013)*, translated and annotated by Zoran Skrobanović. In addition, different aspects of Pound's poetry (ideology, Modernism, authority, language, Postmodernism) are discussed in Dubravka Đuric's outstanding book *Language, Poetry, Postmodernism: Language Poetry in the Context of Modern and Postmodern Poetry (Jezik, poezija, postmodernizam: Jezička poezija u kontekstu moderne i postmoderne američke poezije, 2001)*.

Twenty-one poems have been translated by a new generation of translators (Beljanski, Đorđević, Živanović, Jagličić, Belić) and three extracts have been reprinted from *How to Read (Kako da čitamo, translated in 1974 by Milovan Danojlić)*. Most of Pound's poems have been published in literary journals (*Polja, Poezija, Književni magazin, Gradina, Lipar, Bagdala, and Braničevo*), while some ("Na stanici metroa," "Pismo Henrijeti

Monro”) were published in *Antologija imажinističke poezije (An Anthology of Imagistic Poetry)*, compiled by Nikola Živanović in 2009.

Literary criticism follows these translations: prefaces, critical texts, and books by poets and scholars who have made a strong contribution to the reception of Pound in recent times. One of the outstanding critics today is Mirko Magarašević, who devotes a lot of space to Pound in his study *European Poets (Evropski pesnici, 2010)* and his latest most comprehensive study *The Poetic World of Ezra Pound (Pesnički svet Ezre Paunda, 2019)*. Poet-critics (Milovan Danojlić and Borislav Radović) have contributed greatly with translations and critical texts. They are joined by one of the most outstanding scholars, Zoran Skrobanović, who in this period has made the greatest contribution to Pound, not only by translating *CATHAY*, but by publishing some highly illuminating articles, such as “Reinventing China in London: Laurence Binyon and Ezra Pound’s *CATHAY*” (Preosmišljavajući Kinu u Londonu: Lorens Binjon i *KITAJ Ezre Paunda*”, 2016) and “Reinventing China: Early Translations od Ezra Pound Stirring up a Controversy”, 2011. His greatest contribution to the reception of Pound in Serbia comes from his study of European literatures in the context of the Chinese letter: *In Modernistic Teahouse: the experience of the Chinese letter in European Modernism (U modernističkoj čajdžinici: doživljaj kineskog pisma u evropskom modernizmu, 2014)*. In this highly illuminating study, Skrobanović explores the influence of Pound on certain Chinese authors on several levels: ideas, cultural exchange, strategies of translation, etc., to conclude that “just as Pound was inspired by Li Baj and Fenelosa’s interpretations of the Chinese letter and found proof for imaginistic ideas, Chinese Modernists discovered in Pound an inspiration for their own poetic imperatives and aims” (2014: 228). Skrobanović concludes that Pound’s interpretation of the Chinese letter is present in all his works and points out that Pound also created a new theory of literature, criticism and poetics. Pound “played with his own fragmentary understanding of Chinese characters, and then he created a very inspiring translational and literary poetics which he later applied to all segments of his own literary expression” (2014: 210). Finally, he adds that *The Cantos* is Pound’s most ambitious ideogrammatic enterprise in the last century.

The wide pathway of the reception of Ezra Pound’s poetry in Serbia can hardly be compared with the very narrow pathway of its reception in Montenegro. Only three essays and 3 translations of Pound’s criticism have been published so far. It is possible to find out most of these references

from Ana Kuljanin's master's thesis "The Reception of American Literature in Montenegrin Periodicals from the Beginnings Until 2000" („Recepcija američke književnosti u crnogorskoj periodici od početaka do 2000“, 2008). She concludes her research by pointing out that the reception of Pound's works is characterised more by translated criticism of some authors from abroad than by those written by authors from Montenegro.

Some of them include M. L. Rosenthal's "Ezra Pound – The Poet as Hero" („M. L. Rozental „Ezra Paund – pjesnik kao heroj“), published in *MA Poetry*, translated by Slavica Vukšić and published in *Prosvjetni rad* in 1972. Rosenthal describes Pound's image of a poet devoted to poetry before his coming to Europe with his belief in the beauty and power of poetry. However, he does not rate Pound's translations highly because of his alterations to the texts (v. Kuljanin 2008: 1–247).

Pound's essay on Walt Whitman "What I Feel About Walt Whitman" („Šta mislim o Voltu Vitmanu“) was published in 1995, translated by an outstanding scholar Tihomir Vučković. Vučković points out that Pound has contradictory feelings for Whitman: he appreciates and despises him at the same time, but still rates him as the only poet worth reading. Pound feels Whitman's rhythms and recognises him as his literary ancestor while experiencing the pain of reading his verses.

Ana Gorobinski and Dubravka Đurić translated a text by Charles Bernstein "Pounding Fascism: Appropriating Ideologies, Mystification, Aestheticization, and Authority in Pound's Poetic Practice" („Obuzdavanje fašizma – ideologija prisvajanja – mistifikacija, estetizacija i autoritet u Paundovoj pjesničkoj praksi“) (*Ovdje*, XXXVII/1995, 319–320–321, 69), in which he discusses Pounds's political ideas and his poetics. Ana Kuljanin in her text "The Reception of American Literature in Montenegrin Periodicals from the Beginnings Until 2000" (*Ovdje*, XXXVII/1995, 319–320–321, 91) focuses on Bernstein's final conclusion, which says that *The Cantos* represent "a specific testimony of the struggle between arts and politics" (Kuljanin 2008: 151).

It was only in 2000 that a chapter from Ronald Bush's biography of Pound was published in *Vijesti*, translated by a poet-translator, Aleksandar Bečanović (Kuljanin 2008: 151). It came out in ten parts. In her research on the reception of Ezra Pound in Montenegro, Ana Kuljanin highlights Bush's research as exploring the relationship between Modernism, Fascism and Pound as a poet and supporter of Mussolini's regime. Aleksandar Bečanović also gives his own contribution to Pound in the essay "What You

Really Like is Your Heritage" („Samo ono što doista voliš trajno je tvoje naslijeđe“), published the same year in *Vijesti* (Kuljanin 2008: 155). Here he ranks Pound top out of ten American modern poets.

The same year Boris Jovanović Kastelo published his essay “A Pagan in front of the Wheels of History” („Paganin pred točkovima istorije“) in *Pobjeda* (Kuljanin 2008: 153). Ana Kuljanin rightly singles out his conclusion on Pound, his insistence on erasing the borders between history, the present and the past: they do not exist as a subject but as a part of an integrated whole.

One more text, “Pound – the mystery of syntagma” („Paund – misterija sintagme“) by Goran Vujović, focuses on analysing some of Pound's verses from *Canto LXXIV*. It was published in the journal *Plima Plus*, also in 2000 (Kuljanin 2008: 154). It is a comparative analysis of a few translations of the chosen verses with special emphasis on the vocabulary and allusions.

In conclusion, Pound arguably holds a special place in both Serbia and Montenegro in spite of the changeable reception of criticism of his works and his translations. Although there was a delay of a few decades when it came to the first translations and studies appearing, translators of his poetry have compiled four books of poetry, one book of critical essays, and eleven anthologies in outstanding literary magazines. Previous studies of his translations cover his most outstanding poems by a few poet-translators who were able to give “afterlife” to his unique poetry. These translations not only kept his work alive, but maintained its strong influence on some poets from Serbia and Montenegro as well. Let us hope that future generations of poets, translators, and poet-translators will keep exploring the complexities of his poetry with even greater fervour and passion, wherever they come from.

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