

# Andrzej Tretiak as a translation critic

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Andrzej Tretiak (1886–1944) was the founder of the Warsaw school of English studies and literary translation (he was a translator of Shakespeare’s works); his broad scholarly interests also included the works of George Gordon Byron. In the history of the Polish reception of Byron, Tretiak went down not only thanks to his monographs published in the interwar period (*Literatura angielska okresu romantyzmu 1798–1831* [English Romantic Literature 1798–1831], *Lord Byron* [Lord Byron]), but also thank to his cooperation with Krakowska Spółka Wydawnicza [Krakow publishing company], which published two volumes of Byron’s works, edited by Tretiak, as part of the Polish National Library series. Tales in verse translated by Polish Romantic poets (1924) were published in the first volume, and the dramatic poem *Manfred* and the play *Cain* translated by Zofia Reutt-Witkowska were published in the second volume (1928). The collection of tales in verse is particularly important from the point of view of translation studies, as it contains Tretiak’s comments on the selected translations in the form of almost several hundred footnotes. Tretiak confronts selected fragments of the Polish translations with the originals, paying attention to the changes made by the translators (additions, omissions), commenting on their choices regarding the use of equivalents, or sharing his own translations of relevant lines.

Tretiak explains to the reader that he chose to discuss translations made by Romantic poets because those writers felt and experienced Byron’s poetry most deeply.<sup>1</sup> Apart from the general remarks about the quality of translations made in the introduction, the editor also openly names

<sup>1</sup> Andrzej Tretiak, “Wstęp” [Introduction], in: Jerzy Byron, *Powieści poetyckie* [Tales in verse], ed. Andrzej Tretiak (Kraków: Krakowska Spółka Wydawnicza, 1924), XLVII.

the best and the worst translators of Byron's works. These are, respectively, Julian Korsak and Antoni Edward Odyniec. Korsak, according to Tretiak, is the only translator who "truly conveys the nature of Byron's poetry" and "we find perfect equivalents in his translations; the rhythm and the poetics remind one of *Maria*; it is a masterpiece of Byronian influence in Poland."<sup>2</sup> Odyniec, on the other hand, "effectively misrepresents the Byronian spirit; numerous examples of such inaccuracies may be found in the footnotes to his translations."<sup>3</sup> It is worth noting that Tretiak's opinion is not corroborated by other scholars, be it in the nineteenth century or later. Marian Zdziechowski argued almost thirty years before Tretiak that Korsak translated Byron incompetently, and *Lara* was slightly better than the particularly weak *Prisoner of Chillon*, while Odyniec did not so much distort as, under the influence of his disposition, deprived Byron's lines of darkness.<sup>4</sup> In turn, Wanda Krajewska, a scholar active in the second half of the 20th century, considers Odyniec's translation to be the best Polish version of *The Corsair*, despite certain shortcomings that limit the character's psychological depth and despite the fact the poem was adapted to fit Polish political realities.<sup>5</sup> As for *Lara*, Krajewska writes that Korsak's translation lacks three essential features, namely a strong emphasis on the aristocratic theme, numerous Gothic elements, and emotionality. She concludes that Tretiak's opinion was too flattering.<sup>6</sup>

The aim of this article is to reconstruct the evaluation criteria adopted by Tretiak and to verify the claim that Korsak is a better translator than Odyniec. I shall look at Tretiak's footnotes to *The Corsair* and *Lara*, rooting my analysis in a comparative model of translation criticism. Due to the number of footnotes and comments, I shall focus on the comments which discuss key elements of the Byronic tale in verse: the protagonist and female characters, the poetics of mystery and the realities of the works set in Greece under Ottoman rule (*The Corsair*) and in medieval Spain (*Lara*).

## Demonic face

Analyzing Odyniec's translation of *The Corsair*, Tretiak notes that the translator left out the following passage after line 136 "(on the brand) / Not oft a resting stuff to that red hand?"<sup>7</sup> (C, 340) – and immediately adds – "Conrad's 'red hand' is mentioned several times (this detail is systematically omitted by Odyniec). – This probably refers to Conrad's red glove"<sup>8</sup> (K, 127). In the original, these lines end with a question pertaining to the identity of a man who is looking down at the waves

<sup>2</sup> Tretiak, " XLVIII.

<sup>3</sup> Tretiak, " XLVIII.

<sup>4</sup> Marian Zdziechowski, *Byron i jego wiek. Studya porównawczo-literackie* [Byron and his age. Comparative and literary studies]. Vol. 2: *Czechy, Rosya, Polska* [Czechia, Russia, Poland] (Kraków: Akademia Umiejętności, 1897), 540–541.

<sup>5</sup> Wanda Krajewska, "Polskie przekłady powieści poetyckich Byrona w okresie romantyzmu" [Polish translations of Byron's tales in verse in the Romantic period], *Pamiętnik Literacki* LXXI, 1 (1980): 156–160.

<sup>6</sup> Krajewska, "Polskie przekłady," 172.

<sup>7</sup> All quotes from Byron's *The Corsair* are from: George Byron, *The Corsair* in: *The poetical works of Byron. Cambridge Edition*, revised and with a new introduction by Robert F. Gleckner (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1975), 337–365; henceforth, I use the abbreviation C and provide page number in parenthesis.

<sup>8</sup> All Tretiak's comments on *The Corsair* and fragments of the Polish translation are from: Jerzy Byron, "Korsarz" [The Corsair], trans. Antoni Edward Odyniec, in: Jerzy Byron, *Powieści poetyckie* [Tales in verse], ed. Andrzej Tretiak (Kraków: Krakowska Spółka Wydawnicza, 1924), 119–197; henceforth, I use the abbreviation K and provide page number in parenthesis.

from a hill (waves and not walls, as Odyniec writes, and which Tretiak, amazingly enough, fails to notice). This man turns out to be the protagonist. The fact that the translator failed to notice the red hand is indeed puzzling, all the more so if we consider that this term may be associated with Milton's *Paradise Lost*. In Book 2, a council regarding further warfare takes place in Pandæmonium and Belial describes God's punishing hand as "his red right hand"<sup>9</sup> (PL, 30). The lack of this detail limits potential interpretations, all the more so considering the fact that the origin of Byronic heroes may be traced back to the figure of Satan in *Paradise Lost*. As Mario Praz points out, the Byronic hero is the same type of "rebel," and his characteristic features include, among others, loneliness, a bitter laugh, and a pale face which, at times, reveals suffering and strong passions.<sup>10</sup>

Conrad's face when he is left alone after Juan informs him that Seyd plans to attack him is a great example of such an expressive countenance. Let me quote a longer excerpt:

Then – with the hurried tread, the upward eye,  
 The clenched hand, the pause of agony,  
 That listens, starting, lest the step too near  
 Approach intrusive on that mood of fear:  
 Then – with each feature working from the heart,  
 With the feelings loosed to strengthen – not depart,  
 That rise – convulse – contend – that freeze or glow,  
 Flush in the cheek, or dump upon the brow;  
 Then – Stranger! if thou canst and tremblest not,  
 Behold his soul, the rest that soothest his lot!  
 Mark how that lone and blighted bosom sears  
 The seathing thought of execrated years!  
 Behold – but who hath seen, or e'er shall see,  
 Man as himself, the secret spirit free? (C, 341)

Odyniec translates the above as follows:

Patrz! gdy wódz w nocy, z rozognionem czołem,  
 Załamał ręce, szybkim chodzi kołem,  
 I nagle stanie, i zadrży – czy w ciszy  
 Śledzącej zdrady kroków nie dosłyszysz? –  
 Patrz, jak się dziko groźna brew nachmurza,  
 Gdy każdym nerwem wnętrza miota burza.  
 Patrz w jego wzroku na szaleństwo ducha!  
 Iskrzy, mgli, krzepnie, i znów ogniem bucha.  
 Patrz – jeśli zniesiesz widok tej katuszy, ---  
 Jaki los jego! jaki pokój duszy!  
 Jak, cel zawiści gminu, wśród ukrycia

<sup>9</sup> All quotes from *Paradise Lost* are from: John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (London: HarperCollins, 2013); henceforth, I use the abbreviation PL and provide page number in parenthesis.

<sup>10</sup>Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, trans. Angus Davidson (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1933), 59-60.

Pożywa owoc występnego życia!  
 Patrz! tam go poznasz; – lecz któż tak z badaczy  
 Przejrzy człowieka? – któż ducha obaczy? (K, 132).

A dynamic enumeration of nouns used to describe Conrad from the very beginning poses a challenge for the translator. Odyniec chooses verbs instead, which perfectly reflects the dynamics of the original; the difference is that while Byron puts individual elements of Conrad's face and figure into sharp focus, Odyniec presents it to the reader as a whole. The subsequent difficult lines describing the strength of the hero's feelings are very vivid – here, respectively, it is Odyniec who emphasizes the detail, focusing on the eye, which literally becomes a mirror of the tragic soul. Again, Milton's Satan comes to mind. Waking up in hell, "round he throws his baleful eyes" (PL, 2), while his face, although disfigured by lightning, did not lose its clarity when it comes to the eyes: "but under brows/ Of dauntless courage and considerate pride/ Waiting revenge, Cruel his eye" (PL, 18).

Conrad is tormented by his passions, which affects his body. According to the translator, he is in fear of betrayal and, moreover, cannot stop thinking about some old unnamed crime, its possible repercussions, and punishment for it, and such thoughts torture him. The original does not mention any crime at this point – Conrad struggles to breathe as he thinks about the cursed past and his transgressions. The mention of the curse strengthens the infernal connotations but does not directly point to an immoral act – it may just as well indicate misfortune or the actions of the antagonist and/or supernatural forces. This notwithstanding, the theme of guilt is often repeated throughout the poem (it is connected with Byron's Calvinist upbringing), which Odyniec (as well as the translators of Byron's other tales in verse, e.g., *Parisina*) often changed, writing about crime instead, which limited the spiritual reading of the text.<sup>11</sup> The translator chooses to add that the hero is in fear of betrayal and that he is the object of envy of outsiders, referred to as commoners (which is difficult to justify considering the theme of *The Corsair*; the poetics of secrecy is not a sufficient explanation); however, he does not translate the original "stranger," using an imperative instead ("Patrz" [Look]), urging the reader to pay attention.

Tretiak translates the above fragment very literally; in his version, Conrad is like a transparent container for feelings which "puszczone wolno, aby nabrały mocy, a nie aby uleciały, które podnoszą się, skręcają, walczą, które krzepną lub rozżarzają się, płoną w policzkach lub parują potem na czole" [run freely to gain strength, not to fly away, which rise, twist, fight, calm down and inflame, burn in the cheeks or steam from the forehead]. Tretiak's equivalent of "blighted bosom" is "wypalone łono" [a burnt womb]. The final lines are the most interesting: "Patrz, – lecz któż widział albo kiedykolwiek zobaczy człowieka jakim on jest naprawdę, – ducha tajemnego zupełnie wyzwolonego (z materji)" [Look, but who has ever seen or will ever see a man as he really is, a secret spirit completely freed (from matter)] (K, 132). Odyniec in his version points to the impotence of empirical science in unravelling the mysteries of human nature, the spiritual side of which eludes understanding. Tretiak seemingly concurs, but for him man himself is but a spirit. Byron does not condemn matter; he only points to the mysteries of the human soul, which no one and nothing may control.

<sup>11</sup>Krajewska, "Polskie przekłady," 157.

Indeed, Byron describes the titular character in a similar way in *Lara*. Tretiak comments on this rather long description, referring to the use of specific phrases. What is intriguing, however, is his own translation of one couplet. Julian Korsak translates it as follows:

Dusza, gardząc tem światem z myślami wszystkimi,  
Zamknęła się w świat własny, daleko od ziemi.  
Wszystko zimno przechodząc, co po ziemi chodzi,  
W nim krew coraz to więcej ziębi się i chłodzi<sup>12</sup> (L, 214).

This, at first glance, quite complicated fragment Tretiak translates as: “w oryg. «tak zimno przechodząc (do porządku) nad wszystkim, co przechodziło (stawało się) u jego stóp, krew jego zdawała się płynąć obecnie umiarkowanym strumieniem»” [in the original: passing so coldly over (acknowledging) all that passed at his feet, his blood seemed to flow with no haste] (L, 214), thus complicating it even more. And in the original, everything is much simpler: “Thus coldly passing all that pass’d below, / His blood in temperate seeming now would flow”<sup>13</sup> (LB, 317). Byron explains that Lara has distanced himself from the earthly world, emphasizing his coldness and detachment – his blood no longer boils at the sight of misgivings.

## Gothic horror

Tretiak also refers to another fragment of the original which describes Lara’s appearance. He points out that Korsak is guilty of a more serious technical shortcoming, namely misunderstanding the diction of the original. This error is closely related to the space in which the action takes place. On the walls of Lara’s castle hang, as befits an ancestral seat, portraits of his ancestors. The stained-glass windows depict saints. However, in the Polish version, these saints are somewhat demonic:

[...] tylko światłość blada  
Księżycą kratą okien na podłogę pada,  
Oświetlając gotyckie sklepienia i szyby,  
Na których święci klęczą i modlą się niby.  
Kształty ich w fantastyczne przechodzą postaci:  
Żyją, lecz każdy z twarzy barwę życia traci.  
Włos ich czarny, zjeżony, twarz ciemna, ponura,  
I szeroko rozwijane, migające pióra,  
Ich postać strojąc w całą okropność mogiły,  
Jako godła upiora straszliwie świeciły (L, 208-209).

<sup>12</sup>All Tretiak’s comments on *Lara* and fragments of the Polish translation are from: Jerzy Byron, *Lara*, trans. Julian Korsak, in: Jerzy Byron, *Powieści poetyckie*, ed. Andrzej Tretiak (Kraków: Krakowska Spółka Wydawnicza, 1924), 199–299; henceforth, I use the abbreviation L and provide page number in parenthesis.

<sup>13</sup>All quotes from Byron’s *Lara* are from: George Byron, *Lara*, in: *The poetical works of Byron. Cambridge Edition*, revised and with a new introduction by Robert F. Gleckner (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1975), 366–383; henceforth, I use the abbreviation LB and provide page number in parenthesis.

Even considering Byron's fascination with Gothic aesthetics, this fragment sounds simply bizarre. Tretiak briefly explains that Korsak, due to a misunderstanding of the text, attributes Lara's facial features to these images: "Wśród widmowych świętych z witraży, Lara też wygląda jak upiór «z nastroszonemi czarnemi lokami, z ponurem czołem, i z pływającym szeroko, potrząsanym [szybkim chodem] pióropuszem, które zdawały się być właściwościami upiора i nadawały jego wyglądowi całą tą grozę, jaką daje grób»" [Among the spectral saints in the stained-glass windows, Lara, too, looks like a ghost "with stray locks of black curly hair, a gloomy brow, and a wide plume (which moved as he walked); these features seemed to befit a ghost – he inspired terror, just as much as a grave"] (L, 209). Tretiak comments are neutral in tone, although Korsak's mistake is serious – Byron's diction is clear and precise at this point, leaving no room for any doubt:

Through the dim lattice o'er the floor of stone;  
And the high fretted roof, and saints that there  
O'er Gothic windows knelt in pictured prayer,  
Reflected in fantastic figures grew,  
Like life, but not like mortal life, to view: –  
His bristling locks of sable, brow of gloom,  
And the wide waving of his shaken plume,  
Glance like a spectre's attributes, and gave  
His aspects all that terror gives the grave (LB, 368–369).

The pronoun "his" must refer to Lara, who at the beginning of the stanza returns to the castle from a walk in the garden and is completely alone.

Korsak, having over-stylized the saints in the stained-glass windows as ghouls taken straight from Gothic novels, fails to convey Byron's sense of horror and ghostliness. When one night the servants are awakened by strange noises coming from Lara's chamber, the translator renders the scene as if a murder was about to take place: "Słyszysz! czy kto wybija drzwi z Lary mieszkania: / Łoskot, dźwięk, krzyk i za nim straszliwe wołania" [Hark! Is someone breaking the door of Lara's hall: / A sound, a noise, a shriek followed by terrible cries]. Tretiak's comment is very matter-of-fact in tone: "w oryg: «Słyszysz! jakieś pomruki słycać w sali Lary»" [in the original: "Hark! Some murmurs may be heard in Lara's hall"] (L, 209). He does not add that Byron showed much greater poetic skill than his translator: "Hark! There be murmurs heard in Lara's hall – / A sound – a voice – a shriek – a fearful call! / A long, loud shriek – and silence" (LB, 369). At the very beginning, the entire castle is dark and silent; there is only light in Lara's chamber; then, one may hear some disturbing sounds (whispers rather than murmurs), which gradually intensify. The silence is all the more so poignant after everything falls silent. Korsak fails to convey the growing tension, and completely ignores the fact that Byron uses monosyllables and alliterations to intensify the dynamics and drama. In the Polish version, a noise is heard immediately and for quite a long time, which implies a burglary or the presence of some uninvited guest, while the original does not rule out a supernatural interpretation – perhaps the ghost of one of Lara's ancestors, whose portraits hang on the walls, now stand before him; alternatively, perhaps Lara was talking to himself, grabbed his weapon in a frenzy before he fainted, and was revived by his servants? While Byron is subtle and rhythmically complex, Korsak, metaphorically speaking, does not beat around the bush – it may also be seen in the description of the castle, as pointed out by Tretiak.

“Dziki świst wiatru, łoskot spadającej cegły” [Howling wind, the noise of a falling brick], is in fact, according to Tretiak, “«uderzający miarowo skrzydłami nietoperz, nocny śpiew wiatru od morza»” [“a bat steadily beating its wings, the sound of the sea breeze at night”] (L, 211).

It is at night that Lara sets out with his faithful page to take part in his final battle. Korsak modifies the scene slightly: he adds “oczy łez nie ronią” [the eyes do not shed tears] when he writes about Lara taking his servant’s hand and he also emphasizes how pale Kaled is, writing about “strasznej białości, jak kość od cmentarza” [terrible whiteness, like a bone found in a graveyard]. Tretiak observes that the original only points to the effect of moonlight, insofar as “nie ma tych wszystkich «bładości»” [the original does not mention “terrible whiteness”] (L, 237). However, Tretiak appears to be too meticulous: in the original, “moon’s dim twilight” casts a shade on Kaled’s face (“unwonted hue / of mournful paleness”) (LB, 380). Korsak’s translation stays true to sepulchral connotations and does not violate Byron’s original.

## Innocence and crime

Conrad and Lara have women who love them. Conrad’s beloved is Medora; she is as mysterious as he is, and she is also highly respected by Conrad’s comrades. When they return without their leader, who has been imprisoned, Odyniec describes her reaction to the terrible news thus: “jednak nie blednie, nie drży, nie upadła / W dziewiczej piersi wielkie czucia żyły / Dotąd własnej nieświadome siły” [alas, she does not turn pale, she does not tremble, she does not faint / Her maiden breast heaves with passion / which she did not know existed]. Tretiak comments: “«w dziewiczej piersi» zupełnie niesotosowanie użyte w miejsce oryginalnego zwrotu: «pod tym łagodnym, pięknym wyglądem»” [“her maiden breast” has been used utterly inappropriately instead of the original “beneath that meek mild appearance”] (K, 172). Tretiak is so literal that his version becomes meaningless and makes sense only in the broader context of the entire passage. Byron describes Medora’s reaction as follows:

She saw at once, yet sunk not – trembled not;  
Beneath that grief, that loneliness a lot,  
Within that meek mild form, were feelings high  
That deem’d not till they found their energy (C, 357).

Evidently, Byron wishes to contrast Medora’s gentleness and subtlety with the unexpected power of her emotions (over which, it should be emphasized, the woman has control), and the poet refers to form not so much in the sense of appearance but in the sense of the frame, the silhouette. Odyniec’s translation may not be the best, but it conveys the main idea of the original. It is hard to say why it was deemed “inappropriate;” I do not think that Tretiak suggests that the translator implies something erotic, although when Odyniec uses the word “maiden” for the first time in *The Bride of Abydos*, he does so in the stanza where Byron emphasizes the physical beauty of Zuleika. Let us compare it with a scene in which Conrad saves Gulnare. His future savior is “najpiękniejsza” [the most beautiful], “postać niebianki, tronu godne lica” [she has the figure of a goddess, her face is worthy of a crown] (K, 154).

According to Tretiak, the first description of Gulnare, a Turkish slave from the pasha’s harem

whose life Conrad saved, is far from satisfactory as “odbiegający od oryginału i charakterystyczny dla sentymentalnego przekładu Odyńca” [it differs from the original; it exemplifies well Odyńec’s sentimental style] (K, 161). Tretiak does not justify this claim, neither does he point to other examples of sentimentality in Odyńec’s text (the term “sentimentality” does not appear in any other footnote to *The Corsair*). Instead, he provides his own translation, as usual, emphasizing that he conveys the poetics of the original:

Nie, to ziemską postać, z twarzą anielską! Jej białe ramię niosło w górze lampę, lecz delikatnie zasłaniało ją, by światło nie padło zbyt gwałtownie na powiekę tego zamkniętego oka, które otwiera się jedynie ku swej męce, a raz otwarte – raz tylko jeden może się zamknąć. [Sens tego zdania, że Konrada czeka jedno tylko wybudzenie, gdyż następny dzień przyniesie mu śmierć – i że myśl o tem nie pozwoliłaby mu zasnąć na nowo]. Ta postać z okiem tak ciemnym i licem tak świeżem i ciemno-kasztanowemi falami strojnych w kamienie drogic i zaplecionych włosów; z kształtami wiotkiej wróżki dobrej – bosą stopą, co świeci jak śnieg i jak on cicho pada na ziemię – jak ona przeszła...” [No, it is an earthly figure with a heavenly face! Her white arm raised a lamp, but gently shaded it so that the light would not fall too violently on the lid of the closed eye, the eye which opens only to witness its torment, and once opened, may close but once [The meaning of this sentence is that Conrad may only awaken once, because the next day will bring him death – and the thought of it would not let him fall asleep again]. That figure with an eye so dark and a face so fresh, and braided dark auburn wavy hair adorned with precious stones; like a fairy, with a bare foot that is white like snow, delicate like snow, she walks without making a sound...] (K, 161).

This translation, as was the case with Conrad’s description, is philological and adheres strictly to the original; Tretiak even explains the metaphor, although it is not very complicated. And there would be nothing particularly unusual about it if it were not for the fact that Odyńec translates this fragment thus:

Nie! – choć anielska w licu piękność świta,  
Ziemski to tylko jest anioł – kobieta!  
Wzniesioną lampę w jednej trzyma dłoni,  
Drugą jej światło przed uśpionym chroni,  
By blask niewczesny nie padał na oczy,  
Co z snu otwarte, wnet znów śmierć zamroczy.  
W powiewnej bieli, postać jej w milczeniu  
Jak duch wiejący posuwa się w cieniu.  
Lekka, wysoka – pierś tylko i lica  
Mdłe światło lampy zaledwie oświeca.  
Włos, rozpuszczony na białej odzieży  
Jak smug ciemności, wpół na piersiach leży,  
Wpół spływa z ramion; stopa jak śnieg biała  
I jak śnieg cicho na ziemię spadała (K, 161–162).<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Byron’s original reads: “is it some seraph sent to grant him grace?/ No, ‘tis an earthly form with heavenly face!/ Its white arm rais’d a lamp — yet gently hid, / Lest the ray flash abruptly on the lid/ Of that clos’d eye, which opens but to pain./ And once unclosed — but once may close again./ That form, with eye so dark, and cheek so fair./ And auburn waves of gemm’d and braided hair;/ With shape of fairy lightness — naked foot./ That shines like snow, and falls on earth as mute” [translator’s note].

The Polish translation does not differ too much from the English text, conveying all the original meaning, except when comparing Gulnare to a fairy, her hairstyle, and her outfit. Byron does not mention the latter. Odyniec writes that the woman wears white and that her hair is unbraided, and he has his reasons. White connotes purity and innocence, while unbraided hair may symbolically refer to an erotic undertone of the scene (as a sign of female desire). This perspective renders Gulnare, as a character, more complex – having fallen in love with Conrad, she decides to betray her husband. Odyniec's translation also points to the sensual nature of her infatuation, which would be at odds with the rules of sentimental poetics. By emphasizing the whiteness of the outfit and the darkness of the hair, Odyniec maintains the contrast created in the original by juxtaposing the woman's dark eye with her pale face. Tretiak's comments are thus unsubstantiated.

However, Gulnare's betrayal is not motivated by desire; the woman kills Seyd to save Conrad. Tretiak notices that Odyniec added two details to her description right after the murder: "[.....] dodane szczegóły ubrania Gulnary, że postać «»bielą otulona» i że «»szat krew nie plamiła»» (w. 1685 i 7)" [[.....] Odyniec added some details about Gulnare's clothes, writing that she was "wrapped in white" and that "blood did not stain the clothes" (verses 1685 and 7)] (K, 183). Tretiak does not seem to understand that Odyniec is thus consistent, because in his version the heroine wears white, and that he increases the contrast between the moral "purity" symbolized by the color white and the drop of blood on the woman's forehead, which points to the crime she committed; indeed, Conrad is initially misled by the whiteness of the clothes – he is relieved to find no traces of murder, and it takes him a while to realize his mistake. In the original text, Conrad looks at Gulnare's hands, but he does not notice any weapon or any other disturbing signs: "Nor poniard in that hand, nor sign of ill" (C, 361). Of course, Odyniec does not translate the original word for word, but he conveys the atmosphere of the entire scene.

In *Lara* (which, according to Tretiak, is the sequel to *The Corsair*), the Polish scholar argues that Gulnare appears as Kaled, Lara's page, who, as it is revealed after Lara's death, turns out to be a woman. Korsak had great problems with conveying the double identity of this character, which Tretiak simply explained thus: "Zaledwo więcej żywy, niż pan ukochany. / Kochany! nigdy w piersi ludzkiej nie spoczywa / Miłość podobnie szczerą, podobnie prawdziwą!" – „Korsak nie mógł tu wybrnąć z trudności podwójnego znaczenia *man*; mężczyzna i człowiek: w oryg: «niż ten, którego on kochał! O nigdy jeszcze w piersi męskiej nie żyła tak wielka miłość»" [Just more alive than the beloved./ Beloved! Never before has a love so sincere, so true/ been found in a man's breast! – Korsak could not resolve the difficulty of the double meaning of man; as a male and a human being: in the original "than that he loved so well./ Than that /he/ lov'd! Oh! never yet beneath/ The breast of man such trusty love may breathe!"] (L, 242-243). It should be noted that Odyniec also faced a similar problem. He had to find a way to translate the word *homicide* in reference to Gulnare. He chose the word "zbojczyni" [wrongdoer], and Tretiak criticized him for that. Tretiak wrote that calling a woman who murdered her husband, and who in the original was described by means of "the sublime word *the Homicide*, the matricide" a wrongdoer is "trivial" (K, 186). The translation, however, is by no means simple. The verb *homicide* refers to murder regardless of the gender of the victim, so Odyniec does not make a semantic mistake. In order to keep the rhythm of the poem, he turns "zabójczyni" [murderer] into "zbojczyni" [wrongdoer], which suggests breaking the law, but the question of the murder is thus displaced into the background (but the reader is aware of that). Tretiak

places emphasis on the double meaning of “mąż” [man] both as a male and as a husband, which from his perspective highlights both the horror and the singularity of the woman’s crime, but using the word he chose in a line of eleven syllables seems impossible.

This notwithstanding, Korsak had also other problems with Kaled. After Lara’s death, he/she does not want to leave his beloved’s body and descends into madness, the symptoms of which resemble Karusia’s insanity from Mickiewicz’s ballad *Romanticism*. Korsak writes that in the page’s eyes one can see “ogień rozpaczny” [the fire of despair] similar to despair seen “jaki w gniewie niesilnym gra w oczach tygrzycy” [in the eyes of the tigress helpless in her anger]. Tretiak explains that Korsak mixed up two concepts: he writes about “w gniewie niesilnym,” while the original reads “Her eye shot forth with all the living fire/ That haunts the tigress in her whelpless ire” (L, 246); Korsak thus confused “helpless” with “whelpless,” as in deprived of whelps, puppies. The tigress was whelpless, that is angry because it lost her cubs, Tretiak explains, and not, as Byron incorrectly puts it, puppies. Did the translator really make a mistake? The Polish equivalent of the word “whelpless” does not exist, so Korsak would be forced to use a neologism like “bezszczeny,” but perhaps he did not want to use it or perhaps he did not think of it. However, it cannot be denied that the rage of the tigress who lost her cubs is in a sense helpless – the tigress is not able to change what happened, so perhaps it was a deliberate choice on behalf of the translator. Still, at the same time, the entire line is difficult to understand, because the cause of the animal’s anger is not explained. Also, the original lines quoted by Tretiak are not “incorrect;” Byron simply used a metaphorical epithet.

## Turbans and djerids

Tretiak also pays close attention to the equivalents used to describe the realities of the represented world. He notices, among other things, that the names of weapons are used incorrectly. According to Korsak, during a battle described in *Lara*, “na łękach siodeł błyszczą tarcze i dziryty” [shields and djerids shine from the side of the saddle] – the translator made a mistake and referred to the djerid, a throwing spear used in Asia and North Africa; probably, he was under the influence of Byron’s other tales, in which Orientalism plays a very important role (L, 236). Korsak is also wrong when, in the description of the battle, he points to its center. “Tam, gdzie ogień najgęstszy nieprzyjaciół trzyma” [Where the enemy fire is the greatest], Tretiak writes, “u Byrona niema wzmianki o broni palnej, tylko o strzałach z łuku” [Byron does not mention firearms, only arrows and bows] (L, 238). Indeed, given the feudal social structure that actually triggered the conflict (Lara’s personal motives are not as important; he only used this opportunity to escalate a situation that was already very difficult), the mention of firearms is an anachronism (elsewhere, Tretiak draws attention to Korsak’s misunderstanding of the lines concerning the relationship between landowners and peasants).

According to Tretiak, Odyniec also makes a “military” mistake – he writes that Conard has to give his weapon to the armorer before the battle. Tretiak notes that “płatnerz – rzemieślnik wykonujący zbroje i części uzbrojenia służące do walki ręcznej; w owym czasie już pojęcie nieużywane i do pewnego stopnia psujące efekt wiersza, – W epoce romantyzmu o tyle znane, że często spotykano je w romansach historycznych Waltera Scotta” [the armorer was a craftsman who made armor and weapons used in hand-to-hand combat; at that time, the term was no longer in use and to

some extent ruined the effect of the poem; – In Romanticism the term was often found in Walter Scott's historical romances] (K, 128-129). This remark is surprising because Byron uses the word "armorer" (C, 340), which in Polish means the same as in English. It is disputable whether the tone of the poem is negatively affected, as the use of this equivalent in no way disturbs the meter.

According to Tretiak, Odyniec is also not able to convey the oriental aspects of the work, i.e., the presence of Turks. When Medora reproaches Conrad for abstaining from alcohol, in the Polish version she says: "Drżysz jak muzułman, gdy puchar obaczysz" [You tremble like a Muslim who sees a cup], and this, according to the Polish scholar, is "zanadto ostro oddane powiedzenie oryg.: «»jesteś więcej niż muzułmanin«»" [too literal a rendition of, in the original, "Thou more than Moslem when the cup appears!"] (C, 344). Medora, however, does not mean that Conrad is better than a Muslim (which is implied by Tretiak), but that her beloved is even more reluctant to drink alcohol than Muslims, and drinking alcohol is forbidden by Islam.

At Seyd's feast, Conrad is unmasked as a dervish and a fire breaks out. Seyd orders to capture the uninvited guest, but to no avail. "Próżno wre baszy wściekłość rozdąsana" [It is in vain that the Pacha pouts in anger," Odyniec writes. Tretiak adds: "Odyniec miał wyraźne upodobanie do słowa: dąsać się, rozdąsany itp. — tu użyte zupełnie niewłaściwie" [Odyniec must have liked the word "to pout, pouting" — it is used here completely inappropriately] (K, 152). However, Tretiak does not provide any additional examples from Odyniec's translation, and, we may conclude, is thus unable to justify the fact that he accused the translator of being fond of the word. Indeed, we do not find it anywhere else in Odyniec's translation of *The Corsair*, and the translator only uses it once in his version of *The Bride of Abydos*. Byron describes Seyd's "angry cry" (C, 349). Given that Gulnare says that her life depends on her master's whim, Odyniec's translation is not unfounded.

Shortly afterwards, the fight becomes more and more fierce. In the Polish translation, the corsair's enemies flee, and many people die: "Toczą się głowy po krwawej podłodze" [Heads are rolling on the bloody floor] (K, 152). Tretiak questions the intensity with which the battle is described: "w oryg.: «»po komnacie leżą porozcinane turbany«». Odyniec z zwykłym sobie brakiem umiaru artystycznego wprowadza pojęcie odcinanych głów, co wymagałoby nadludzkiej siły Konrada, a – jak wiemy z opisu jego osoby – nie był on herkulesowego wzrostu ani siły; – zasadniczym rysem jego była odwaga i dzielność, nie siła fizyczna" [in the original: „The cloven turbans o'er the chamber spread." Odyniec, with his characteristic lack of artistic moderation, introduces the concept of decapitated heads, which would require Conrad to possess superhuman strength, and – as we know from Conrad's description – he was not of Herculean height or strength; – he was courageous and brave, but he did not have superhuman strength] (K, 152). Indeed, Byron does not describe a massacre but people who run away in panic and lose their turbans. Still, Tretiak's comment about Odyniec's "characteristic lack of artistic moderation" remains a mystery – the Polish critic does not comment on it further in any other footnote, nor does he give any examples from Odyniec's other works or translations.

Byron portrays Conrad not only as a warrior, but also as a leader. Tretiak points out Odyniec's inaccuracies in how he portrays the relations between Conrad and the other pirates. Describing Conrad's overwhelming influence on the others, the translator writes: "Wszystko ma w mocy, by zgrają zaślepić" [He has everything in his power to blind the mob]. Tretiak critically notes: "zgrają

— w oryg. crowd, tłum. Nasi tłumacze i naśladowcy Byrona często przesadzali w oddawaniu uczucia pogardy dla ludzi [...], nadając w ten sposób niewłaściwą cechę antydemokratyczną jego utworom” [the mob – in the original: the crowd – Our translators and Byron’s followers have often exaggerated the feeling of contempt for the people [...], thus incorrectly presenting the English poet’s works as anti-democratic] (K, 143). Of course, Byron opposed all forms of tyranny, and he also advocated for the Luddites in the House of Lords, but there is hardly any reason to think that calling a group of robbers who hold their leader in the highest esteem misrepresents Byron’s original.

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This analysis clearly shows that Tretiak values fidelity in translation above other things; his understanding of fidelity involves striving for formal rather than dynamic equivalence. Tretiak comments on any and all violations to this rule, usually in the form of dynamic equivalents (adding single words, conveying the meaning of the original at the expense of philological differences). When the Polish critic shares with the reader his own translations of particularly “heretical” lines, he does not make any attempts to preserve the poetics of the text; he writes in prose, striving for the greatest possible degree of literalness – sometimes even at the expense of the meaning of individual sentences. Tretiak’s priority is, of course, to provide the reader with a version that is as close to the original as possible, which – if we take into account the fact that, with the exception of Mickiewicz, other Polish translators of Byron’s works were “minor” and less talented authors – is fully understandable. Overall, however, this approach is problematic for a number of reasons. Paradoxically, despite his scholarly emphasis on fidelity, Tretiak at times mistranslates Byron’s original text.

First of all, Tretiak’s philological translations in prose deprive Byron’s texts of their expressive force based on the relationship between metaphors, rhyme, and rhythm. Stanisław Barańczak would definitely say that Tretiak made two cardinal errors at the same time: not only did he turn poetry into prose, but he also turned this prose into bad poetry.<sup>15</sup> While we might defend Tretiak by saying that his study was meant to be a scholarly and not a poetic text, the Polish critic in fact did not include the relevant fragments in English (except for single words or epithets), despite the fact that his translations were marked with the note “in the original.” Had he indeed included them, his translations would have been purely utilitarian – helping people who had little or no knowledge of English understand the original (although everyone would have at least recognized the rhyme scheme used by Byron). And Tretiak’s translations and remarks are not always, despite his best efforts, an accurate representation of Byron’s poetics, which may be seen, for example, in the analyzed fragments concerning the emotions seen on Conrad’s face or the paleness of Kaled’s countenance. Tretiak openly mediates between the English author and the Polish reader; therefore, he is responsible for making the Polish reader understand Byron’s poetic genius.

Secondly, because Tretiak pays so much attention to the philological aspect of the analyzed translations, he only criticizes. He does not emphasize particularly successful or interesting

<sup>15</sup>Stanisław Barańczak, “Mały, lecz maksymalistyczny Manifest translologiczny albo: Tłumaczenie się z tego, że tłumaczy się wiersze również w celu wytłumaczenia innym tłumaczom, iż dla większości tłumaczeń wierszy nie ma wytłumaczenia” [A small yet maximalist translation manifesto or: I explain that I translate poems also in order to explain to other translators that there is no explanation for most translations of poems], *Teksty Drugie* no. 3 (1990): 32–33.

solutions used by the translators, and this does not allow him to fully assess their skills. What's more, because he focuses excessively on the details, the Polish scholar is unable to analyze larger parts of the text as thoroughly: his remarks about, for example, Odyniec's sentimentality are unsubstantiated. Indeed, Odyniec's translation is very often openly criticized, while Korsak's mistakes are discussed in a completely neutral tone. It seems, therefore, that his assessment of both translations is purely subjective and unsubstantiated.

In addition, Tretiak reads and judges both translations outside of their historical context, which does not allow for an objective review. While the Polish critic openly states at the beginning of his study that the translations made by Polish Romantic poets were chosen deliberately, he almost completely ignores the Romantic poets' approach to translation. And the Romantic theory of translation, on the one hand, stated the utilitarian nature of translations (i.e., simply allowing the reader to get to know the works of a foreign author), and, on the other hand, it clearly emphasized that the translator may be seen on an equal footing with the poet – as a genius who approaches foreign works on their own terms, thus enriching their respective national literatures.<sup>16</sup> Tretiak knew well that for the translators he selected, as practicing poets, philological fidelity was not the most important issue<sup>17</sup> and he still based his assessment solely on this aspect. Such an approach, almost by default, implies that the translators would be criticized – Tretiak had his own binding definition of a good translation, and he was blind and deaf to all other definitions that contradicted his.

What is even more astonishing is the fact that Tretiak attributes the extraordinary success of Byron's works among the European youth to his libertarian views and descriptions of passions, which he sees as innovative in Romantic literature,<sup>18</sup> but at the same time he seems to completely ignore the fact that Byron's works were so influential because the translations of his works resonated with readers as much as the originals. This, from today's perspective, obvious sign of a good translation and the translator's skills,<sup>19</sup> is of no importance to the early twentieth-century scholar.

In Tretiak's approach, a certain duality is evident – he consistently distinguishes between the historical-literary order and the translation order. Viewed from the perspective of the history of literature, a work that translated into Polish is always attributed to the author of the original, along with the entire, often complex, context related to the mediatory role of the translator (which, in such an approach, is naturally relegated to the background). On the other hand, when Tretiak analyzes the translated text as such, it becomes an ideal construct, intended to be a mirror image of the original. This mirror image may supposedly be created under any circumstances, regardless of the social and historical conditions. These perspectives are always parallel, never perpendicular, but they have one thing in common – they are hardly a mature reflection on the translator.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

<sup>16</sup>Susan Bassnett, *Translation studies* (London–New York: Routledge, 2002), 69.

<sup>17</sup>Tretiak, "Wstęp," XLVII.

<sup>18</sup>Tretiak, "Wstęp," VI–XII.

<sup>19</sup>Katharina Reiss, *Translation Criticism. The Potentials and Limitations. Categories and Criteria for Translation Quality*, trans. Erroll F. Rhodes (New York: Routledge, 2014), 33.

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# KEYWORDS

## a tale in verse

**Andrzej Tretiak**

*George Byron*

**ABSTRACT:**

In 1924, the Polish National Library published Andrzej Tretiak's edition of George Byron's tales in verse. In the introduction and numerous footnotes, Tretiak explained why specific translations were selected and ranked them in terms of quality, pointing out the mistakes and the changes made by the translators. Tretiak also evaluated the solutions chosen by the translators, at times comparing them with his own translations. The article presents a critical analysis of Tretiak's comments to two translations, "The Corsair" and "Lara," which allowed him to conclude that the best Polish translator of Byron was Julian Korsak, and the worst, Antoni Edward Odyniec.

## TRANSLATION CRITICISM

### the poetic novel

## ROMANTICISM

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