

THE WAYS OF PRESENTING RUSSIAN LITERATURE IN THE 21ST-CENTURY BULGARIA

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Abstract: The article examines the translation of Russian literary works in 21st-century Bulgaria. The reasons for the decline of the process at the beginning of the century are discussed. Reference is made to the editions of new works by authors who are already popular among Bulgarian readers (V. Pelevin, S. Lukyanenko, B. Akunin, S. Minayev, A. Bushkov), as well as writers who are relatively new to the Bulgarian public (E. Vodolazkin, S. Lebedev, A. Salnikov, D. Rubina) and recent translations of the works of authors who started their literary activity back in the 20th century but who have not been published in Bulgaria until recently.

Although modern Bulgarian publishers and translators are mainly interested in Russian prose, we also mention some trends in the reception of poetry and drama and the presence of Russian literature on Bulgarian theatrical stage.

Bulgarian publishers, scholars and translators who popularize contemporary Russian prose are named, as well as the events (such as the annual national award of the Bulgarian Translators' Union), the main objective of which is cultural cooperation of the two countries.

Translations of Russian literary work in Bulgaria during the politically unstable situation (from February 2022 up to present) are considered, as well as the possibility of publishing such translations in our time.

Keywords: Russian prose, poetry, drama; translations into Bulgarian; reception of Russian literature; Bulgarian publishing houses; Union of Translators of Bulgaria

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ПУТИ РЕПРЕЗЕНТАЦИИ РУССКОЙ ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ В БОЛГАРИИ XXI ВЕКА

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Аннотация: В статье рассматривается рецепция переводов русской литературы в Болгарии XXI века. Обсуждаются причины, вызвавшие спад переводов российских писателей на болгарский язык в начале столетия. Упоминаются издания новых произведений авторов, которые уже пользуются популярностью у болгарского читателя (В. Пелевина, С. Лукьяненко, Б. Акунина, С. Минаева, А. Бушкова); писателей, чье творчество является относительно новым для болгарской публики (Е. Водолазкина, С. Лебедева, А. Сальникова, Д. Рубиной); недавние переводы произведений авторов, начавших свою литературную деятельность еще в XX веке, но до последнего времени не публиковавшихся в Болгарии, и переиздание некоторых произведений; рассматриваются тенденции развития переводной прозы, а также положительные рецензии на книги. Названы издательства Болгарии, популяризирующие современную русскую прозу, и имена переводчиков. Анализируются работы болгарских ученых, которые обращаются к «новейшей» русской прозе и выявляют ряд проблем ее рецепции в переводе. Рассматриваются переводы книг российских авторов в Болгарии в период политически нестабильной ситуации в мире (после февраля 2022 года), равно как и возможность издания таких переводов. Обсуждаются книги о поэзии и драматургии, которые вышли в переводе на болгарский в XXI веке, а также спектакли, поставленные по произведениям русской литературы и представленные в театрах по всей Болгарии. Речь заходит и о ежегодной национальной премии Союза переводчиков Болгарии и других мероприятиях, основной задачей которых становится обмен опытом и взаимодействие двух стран.

Ключевые слова: русская проза, поэзия, драматургия; переводы на болгарский язык; рецепция русской литературы; болгарские издательства; Союз переводчиков Болгарии

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For the Bulgarian people, Russian literature has always been a subject of discussion; the Bulgarian reader till now shows interest both in classical and modern Russian authors.

The beginning of our century is characterized by a decline in translations of fiction from Russian into Bulgarian. Some scholars note that, most likely, this is “due to the desire to get rid of the artificially maintained super-tradition of the influence of Russian literature <...> the laws of the book market and other literatures widely represented on it, which are ‘competitors’ of Russian literature” [Kirova 2009].

N.A. Lunkova agrees with that and states that “the main reason why Russian literature is not represented in Bulgaria as extensively as it was before 1989 is <...> the change in reader interests and the dynamics of the development of the book market as a whole”. At the same time, Lunkova points to a large number of new publications and demonstrates

that the situation with translations from Russian in Bulgaria is developing quite positively since the 2000s and later (up to 2015). Some works were published in Bulgarian almost immediately after publication in Russia, for instance, L. Ulitskaya's and M. Shishkin's novels (for obvious reasons, in contrast, the most important works of underground literature appeared in Bulgarian translations very late, only in the 21st century, i.e. decades after their creation). Lunkova also notes that new translations of classic novels, well-known to Bulgarian reader, appear (*Anna Karenina* (2006), *A Hero of Our Time* (2014), *The Master and Margarita* (2012) [Lunkova 2016: 91, 90, 94–95].

The very first translation of *The Master and Margarita*, made by L. Minkova, was published in Bulgarian back in 1968, has been reprinted several times and is still used by theaters when staging the novel (for example, by the Nikolai Binev Youth Theater in Sofia). The translation of Tatiana Balova presents the novel without censorship amendments; a few years after that another translator, Boyan Stankov, offers his version (published in 2020 by *Helicon*).

Discussing in 2019 the reception of “the most new” Russian prose, Bulgarian scholar A.N. Manchev states that special attention in modern Bulgaria is driven to a number of authors (novels published in Bulgarian translations before 2018 are named): “It is interesting that the most translated modern Russian author is A. Marinina: 38 novels have been translated and published. This is followed by B. Akunin — 32 novels, then S. Lukyanenko — 22 novels, V. Pelevin — 13 novels. The books of D. Glukhovskiy — 7, L. Ulitskaya — 6, S. Minaev — 6, D. Dontsova, T. Polyakova, T. Ustinova, V. Erofeev, L. Puchkova, M. Yudenich — 5–6. <...> The content of the curricula of the philological faculties of Bulgarian universities is a factor in the reception of the newest Russian prose in Bulgaria. <...> The authors studied by philology students are V. Pelevin, B. Akunin, L. Ulitskaya, O. Slavnikova, D. Gutsko, N. Sincere, E. Isaeva” [Manchev 2019: 350, 356].

In 2018–2022 primarily the ‘newest’ Russian authors who have already gained fame were translated, as well as some that were new to the Bulgarian book market. Many of the already mentioned authors of both ‘mass’ and ‘high’ prose continue to be actively published in Bulgaria even now. For example, B. Akunin, A. Marinina, S. Lukyanenko remain among the most translated Russian writers of our time. Widely known in Bulgaria is V. Pelevin.

Authors who are relatively new to the Bulgarian public are also actively published: for example, in 2019, a novel by writer and screenwriter Oleg Roy *Phantom Pain* was released; ‘women’s prose’ enjoys recognition: thus, in 2021, I. Totomanov translated D. Rubina’s novel *The White Dove of Cordoba*, and in 2022 — a thriller-dystopia by Ya. Wagner *To the Lake*, etc.

One of the trends in recent years has been the formation of a circle of translators and publishers who prefer a particular writer. “Russian detectives are mainly published in the publishing houses *Hermes* and *Trud*” [Lunkova 2016: 91]. The publishing house *List* works with Vodolazkin, *Krug* presents novels by S. Lebedev, *Gaia-Libris* publishes Pelevin, *Labyrinth* — Rubina, etc.

P. Totev, a well-known Bulgarian publisher, literary critic and journalist, founder of the *Perseus* publishing house specializing in fiction, notes that he often “opens up” to the Bulgarian audience the work of new writers, whose books are subsequently released in huge editions: “I prefer different literature, which may not be so popular in the book market. I enjoy discovering new authors. <...> This happened to the Russian writers Alexander Bushkov and Sergey Minaev” [Totev 2022]. *Perseus* publishing house played a big role in the promotion of these two. Minaev’s popularity is due to the demand for mass literature. Kirova notes: “The author with the loudest success at the beginning of the 21st century seems to be Sergey Minaev. <...> *The Heifers*, released in 2009, can also be considered a bestseller on the Bulgarian market with a circulation of 5,000 copies. With Sergey Minaev, we actually moved to a new thematic direction: Russian mass literature and its ability to conquer Bulgarian readers” [Kirova 2009].

Bulgarian translators and publishers did not immediately pay attention to significant authors writing complex prose. Thus, V. Sharov’s novel *Rehearsals* (published in Russia back in 1992) was published in Bulgarian (translated by Z. Petrova) at the year of the writer’s death. But it is necessary to highlight the success of E. Vodolazkin, one of the most discussed authors in Russia, who was translated into Bulgarian for the first time only in 2020 (the novel *Aviator* was published in translation by Z. Petrova, the novel *Laurus* was translated by A. Pencheva). It is important to note that, despite the difficult political situation, new translations from Russian still appear after February 2022. For example, Vodolazkin’s novel *Justification of the Island* was published in Bulgarian in March 2022. E. Krasteva, the editor of the book, on the air of radio *Sofia*, says: “Evgeniy Vodolazkin sends us to another era, he talks about the Middle Ages, but the book is published today, during the war and troubles, and it seems that it was written yesterday. <...> There are many references to the Bible in the book, this is a novel about the search for the righteous today and that the way to overcome crises, conflicts and extermination is ultimately love, forgiveness, the way to find what unites us” [Elena Krasteva 2022]. During this period, works by other writers are also translated into Bulgarian: in November 2022, A. Salnikov’s novel *Department* was published in translation by B. Darakchieva, and in July 2022, a novel of comparative novelty for both Russian and Bulgarian literature, *Debutant* by S. Lebedev.

Lebedev has made himself known in Russia in the last decade, but has already found his reader in Bulgaria. His debut novel *The Limit of Oblivion*, translated into different languages and presented in different categories of literary awards, was translated into Bulgarian in 2020 by the Russian translator D. Korobko. For the translation of the book, Korobko became the winner of the prestigious annual competition of the Bulgarian Translators' Union. The publishing house *Krug* presented an interview with Korobko, where he mentioned his plans to continue translating Lebedev into Bulgarian [Korobko 2020]. Lebedev's work has gathered numerous positive reviews; A. Apostolova notes: "Lebedev could write an action-packed, almost detective novel. Or a dramatically touching story that reveals in detail everyday life in the camps <...> Or create a Russian copy of one of the many recent novels with the tag "Auschwitz". But the writer chooses a different approach". Apostolova compares Lebedev with another Russian writer, M. Stepanova, who is also relatively new to the Bulgarian reader: "All the time reading the novel, I drew an inevitable parallel with the large-scale work *In Memory of Memory* by Maria Stepanova (publishing house *Janet 45*, 2019), in which, too, although from a different angle and in a different key, the problem of memory is considered" [Apostolova 2020]. Bulgarian writer Ya. Radeva states that *Limit of Oblivion* "is not a novel about the GULAG, but a novel about a person's place in the world, about the answer to the question of what we forget in the limit of oblivion, about the future, which cannot happen without the past" [Radeva 2021: 6].

One of the directions of the reception of the 21st-century Russian literature in Bulgaria is the search for the most suitable strategies for the translation of postmodernist authors. For example, A.I. Pencheva examines the difficult-to-translate episodes of Pelevin's novel *Love for the Three Zuckerbrins* and states that the intertextuality of the writer's prose requires additional knowledge from translators. Pencheva also examines a fragment of the text of the novel, where Pelevin refers to Yerofeyev's poem *Moscow-Petushki* (the translation was made by the famous translator B. Misirkov). As the researcher notes, the reference to this work is "recognizable" for the Russian reader, however, "according to the editor of the Bulgarian translation of the work, this culturally marked phenomenon may not be recognized by many Bulgarian readers" [Pencheva 2020: 75, 78].

If we turn to the reception of drama, it is worth noting that some works are published in Bulgaria for the first time only in the 21st century, for example, D.I. Kharmis, including his play *Circus Shardam*. In 2021, in the book *Drama. Aesthetics of Theater*, for the first time in Bulgarian, in new translations, all the texts of Pushkin devoted to theater and drama were collected: his plays, unfinished dramatic excerpts, as well as articles, notes

and letters. Bulgarian directors actively stage performances based on the works of Russian authors. Preference is given to classics, although adapted to the modern audience, but directors also turn to the works of the authors of the 21st century. Noteworthy is the modern reading of M. Gorky's *Summer Residents* by one of the most famous Bulgarian directors I. Panteleeva (National Theater *Ivan Vazov*, staged in 2018). Different theaters present performances based on the works of Bulgakov *The Master and Margarita* and *Morphine* (the Nikolai Binev Youth Theater in Sofia); A. Vampilov *Provincial Anecdotes* (Aleko Konstantinov National Satire Theater in Sofia), V.M. Shukshin *Energetic People* (Geo Milev Drama Theater in Staraya Zagora), etc. The works of modern Russian authors are also popular: the plays of A. Dyachenko *The Dream of an Idiot* (the Bulgarian Army Theater in Sofia) and P. Gladilin *Moth* are staged. Numerous reviews were collected by the production *The Peculiarity of Russian Love* based on the play by A. Galin *Siren and Victoria* (Drama Theater *Stefan Kirov* in Sliven).

As for poetry, the number of poetic translations is still decreasing: "Publishing houses that willingly print novels by Pelevin, Akunin, Marinina, prose by Yerofeyev, Yuz Aleshkovsky, Ev. Popov, hesitate in relation to the idea of printing modern Russian poets or anthology-like collections of poems <...>" [Kostova-Panayotova 2018: 598]. One of the main events in the world of translated Russian poetry in Bulgaria was the publication of *Anthology of Russian Classical Poetry of the 12–21st Centuries* (2012), composed by the famous poet and translator K. Kadiyski. Such a large-scale publication (poems by more than 150 authors are presented) appeared in Bulgaria for the first time in 1983. The Kadiyski anthology includes both poems that have already been translated into Bulgarian and new ones that have not been translated before. Of particular interest is the fact that the translator combines in the collection poems by authors who have received worldwide recognition and works by lesser-known poets, on large chronological scale, from *The Song of Igor's Campaign* up to Yu. Moritz and others.

Other lyrical collections are also appearing. For example, in 2015, Simonov's and Vysotsky's poems about Great Patriotic War translated by H. Bondokov were published in Bulgaria as a separate book *Tsenata na Pobedata* (*The Price of Victory*). These poets in the Soviet era were well known and loved by the Bulgarian public (Simonov visited Bulgaria in 1944 as a war correspondent, and Vysotsky in 1975 came as part of the Taganka Theater troupe).

Another collection, *Rekata na vremeto* (*River of Times*), was published in 2020 and contained work of M. Shandurkova, one of the most famous translators of Russian classical and modern poetry into Bulgarian. The title of the book, as noted by the author in the preface, is the first verse of

Derzhavin's last poem. The collection includes lyrics by Derzhavin, Pushkin, Lermontov; Lermontov is presented on the largest scale, with more than 40 short poems, as well as the poem *Demon*.

Various events related to the support of translation activities are held in Bulgaria and Russia. For example, in 2018, Moscow hosted the 5th International Congress of Translators of Fiction, which was attended by about 400 translators from around the world. In the category *Poetry*, the winner was Kadiysky for the translation of Tyutchev's lyrics.

Russian translator I. Totomanov, the author of numerous publications of postmodern Russian literature in Bulgarian, was awarded "for inspired translations of works of Russian and Russian-language prose of the 20th and 21st centuries, for the long and dedicated work of the editor, professionalism and enrichment of Bulgarian culture" at the annual National Award of the Union of Translators in Bulgaria in September 2022.

Various events were held in different cities of Bulgaria with the support of the Russian World Foundation. For example, in 2020, the Russian Center of the Plovdiv University named after Paisii Hilendarsky celebrated his tenth anniversary. The university has an international Academic and practical seminar on translation for Russian students, which is attended by students, teachers, and well-known Bulgarian and Russian translators.

In 2021, the Balkan Center of Russian Studies was opened in Varna, in the Kamchia wellness complex, with the support of the Ministries of Education of Russia and Bulgaria. Kamchia has become the largest educational center of the two peoples, as well as a place of interaction between the Russian language, literature and culture: literary meetings, exhibitions, and various cultural events are held here on a regular basis. International Literary Assemblies are held annually on the basis of the complex, where writers, translators and cultural figures of the two countries meet.

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