

TRANSLATION OF FICTION AS A SPECIFIC FORM OF BULGARIAN-SLOVAK INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Maria Dobrikova

Comenius University in Bratislava (Slovakia)

Abstract. The introductory part of the study presents brief characteristics of *Slovník slovenských prekladateľov umeleckej literatúry. 20. storočie* (Dictionary of Slovak literary translators. 20th century) and basic information on the translators of Bulgarian literature who are included into it. Presented in the second part are the literary works and translations of Maria Topolska, the most productive translator of Bulgarian literature in Slovakia whose personal life and professional career were inseparably connected with Bulgaria.

Keywords: *The Dictionary of Slovak literary translators. 20th century*; Bulgarian literature translated into Slovak; writer and translator Maria Topolska

The most recent work of the Slovak Translation School, the publication *Slovník slovenských prekladateľov umeleckej literatúry. 20. storočie* (Dictionary of Slovak literary translators. 20th century; *A – K*, 2015; *L – Ž*, 2017) is a result of nearly ten years of work of a team of authors from the Institute of World Literature of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, extended by faculty members of the Faculty of Arts of Comenius University in Bratislava and of University of Matej Bel in Banská Bystrica. By means of the portraits of nearly four hundred translators and their selected bibliographies it provides an overall picture about literary works from the whole world that were translated and published in Slovakia in the 20th century. The basic criterion for selecting the translators for the entries was the number of literary translations published in book form, and an important criterion was the quality of the translation of the books. The representative two-volume publication contains not only the personal and professional data about the prominent personalities active in the area of Slovak literary translation, with the characteristics of their dominant specialization, but within its complexity it actually reflects the history of the reception of world literature in Slovakia in the 20th century (Kovachichova-Kusa: 7). Together with further supplements (registers of names, a list of translators from the particular languages, etc.) it also enables the reconstruction of this history with

regard to all the national literatures which in the given period became objects of interest of the translators.

Katarina Bednarova, the author of the extensive introductory study entitled *Contexts of the 20th century Slovak literary translation*, maps the translation production on the territory of Slovakia from the oldest times until the present. She states that since its beginnings the Slovak culture and the translation activities stand on the pillar of translation thanks to the missionaries Constantine and Methodius who in the 9th century, for the needs of the Great Moravian Empire, created a system of writing and translated the *Gospel*. Although the changing geopolitical situation caused that with regard to the question of language the Slovak society became united only in the second half of the 19th century, at the dawn of its cultural history there was the word, and at the beginning of understanding the word there was the translation (Bednarova, 2015: 15). Later, during numerous centuries, the territory of contemporary Slovakia developed within a linguistically non-homogeneous space. No adequate conditions were created for translation activities, hence it was only of fragmentary character and lacking continuity. Literary translation got into the foreground only as late as towards the end of the 19th century when Slovak literature tried to become part of the European literary context.

At the turn of the 19th and the 20th centuries it was above all the writer and literary critic Svetozar Hurban Vayanski and the publicist, translator and organizer of socio-cultural activities Samuel Jaroslav Zahey¹⁾. For example, Vayanski was the author of the first Slovak translation of the poem by Ivan Vazov *Пред гроба на Царя-Освободителя* "In front of the tomb of Tzar-Liberator" (*Pred hrobom cára Osloboditeľa*, 1895). Zahey's translations of Vazov's short stories and novelles started to be published from the year 1890, and he translated his novel *Под узомо* "Under the yoke" (*Pod jarmom*, 1902), as well as part of the work by Alek Konstantinov et al. (Koshka, 2003: 104). A principal change of the conditions for the development and the direction of further development of Slovak translation activities came about after the disintegration of Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the formation of Czechoslovakia in the year 1918, while the largest boom of translation activities in the area of literary works took place in the second half of the previous century (Bednarova, 2015: 26). At that time top translation activities marked the work of the older generation of translators from Bulgarian (Gusta Baritsova²⁾, Yulia Staykova, Maria Topolska), as well as of the younger generation of translators (Yan Koshka, Emil Kudlichka, Yaroslav Marushiak, Vladimir Zhabkay, later Viera Prokeshova etc.). A special group of popularisers of Bulgarian literature is represented by poets, e.g. by Pavol Horov³⁾ or Milan Ferko⁴⁾, who carried out their translation within cooperation with linguists. The above quoted authors were included into the *Dictionary of Slovak Literary Translators* on the basis of the required criteria of selection. However, not all of them devoted themselves to translating exclusively only from Bulgarian, e.g. G. Baritsova translated also from

Czech and French, Y. Marushiak also from Russian, Czech, Polish and Croatian, V. Prokeshova from English, Czech, Macedonian, and within linguistic cooperation also from several other Slavic as well as non-Slavic languages, etc. All the translated books were of importance for Bulgarian-Slovak cultural relations, as well as the literary journals that published translations of poetry and prose, or reviews of Bulgarian literature and recent literary events. The *Dictionary* has documented above all the fact that in the second half of the previous century in the Slovak translation environment much attention was devoted to the popularization of Bulgarian literature. It has also brought a convincing testimony that from both the quantitative and the qualitative points of view four exceptionally creative translators, i.e. Maria Topolska, Olga Staykova, Yan Koshka and Emil Kudlichka contributed the most to translation from Bulgarian, having devoted their whole lives to these translation activities and to developing the Bulgarian-Slovak cultural relationships.

The University lecturer and translator Emil Kudlichka in his article *Bulgarian drama and we* states that “the first translators from Bulgarian were people who had been born in Bulgaria (Slovak Bulgarians) or people who had lived there for a longer time” (Kudlichka, 1996: 250). At the turn of the 19th and 20th century one of them was the already mentioned Samuel Y. Zahey. In the first half of the 20th century he was followed by Yan Mihalko⁵⁾, but above all by Maria Topolska (1909 – 2005), so-far the most productive Slovak translator of Bulgarian poetry, prose, drama and literature for children and youth.

Maria Topolska, née Kucherova, was born on November 10, 1909 in Prague. After World War I her family moved to Romania because of work, and later to Bulgaria. She spent the years of adolescence in the environment of the socially and culturally active minority in Sofia where she completed her studies at the Czech Secondary School. In 1925 she passed the entrance examinations to the National Teacher-Training Institute in Preshov in Eastern Slovakia. At the end of the school year she always returned to Sofia and after graduating from the Institute she decided to teach in Bulgaria. In 1929 she took a teaching job at the T. G. Masaryk Czechoslovak Elementary School in Gorna Mitropoliya, where among the Slovak immigrants⁶⁾ she worked until August 1940. There she met the teacher Tomash Topolski⁷⁾ who became her husband and later co-translator of a number of Bulgarian literary works.

When after the declaration of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia and after the establishment of the independent Slovak state (1939) military tension started to escalate in the whole of Europe, the Topolskis, above all because of fear for their children, decided to leave Bulgaria. Since 1940 Maria Topolska taught in Eastern Slovakia in Hazhlin near Bardeyov. In the same year, as a teacher of Czech nationality, she was released from educational services. Till 1944 she lived in Mihalovce and after World War II she moved to Bratislava with her family. Within the years 1947 – 1974 they alternatively lived in Bratislava and in Sofia where her husband worked in the Czechoslovak diplomatic corps (Dobrikova, 2013).

After the political circumstances forced her to stop teaching, she started to devote herself to literary activities. She first published her works in magazines. Her first book was a collection of novelettes from the environment of the Slovaks living in Bulgaria *V putách zeme* "In the chains of the land" (1944, 2014) which is the only belletristic work on this theme in both the Slovak and the Bulgarian literature. At present, the attractiveness of the collection, which contains six short stories about the lives of ordinary people, is enhanced by the fact that at present the Slovaks in Bulgaria constitute only a historical episode⁸⁾. Hence, these stories, as presented by M. Topolska, represent an important segment of their historical and cultural memory. The particular characters are depicted by the author with a considerable share of psychological detail. She describes the dramatic situations in which they find themselves. She aims at depicting the spiritual processes, and with their help reveals the motifs of their deeds.

In her second volume of novelettes, in *Jedovaté roky* "Poisonous years" (1949, 1966, 1981), M. Topolska concentrated on the theme of the events and consequences of World War II in the Slovak environment. By the tragic fates of the heroes she provides a suggestive perspective of the complicated times full of danger. She follows the traumatizing stories of the Jews, the partisans or of widowed women. Her characters are always confronted with the question of life and death, and exposed to tests of their moral character.

In the 1950s M. Topolska started to publish verses for children. On the whole there were six of them, some of them having been issued in several editions, and some were published in the writing system for the blind. These collections of poetry for children were very successful among the readers. In addition to the books, her own literary works, as well as translations, were regularly published on the pages of magazines devoted to children.

Already while teaching in Eastern Slovakia, M. Topolska cooperated on the translations of Bulgarian poetry with the poet P. Horov who was then her colleague. She was predestined for translation by her excellent knowledge of the Bulgarian language, including the realia and the specific features of the Bulgarian culture. Although she was of Czech origin, thanks to the dozens of years spent in Slovakia, and thanks to her systematic work with literary texts, she was able to master thoroughly all the styles and registers of Slovak. Gradually, she made numerous classical works of Bulgarian literature accessible to the Slovak readers, e.g. the repeatedly re-published prose work *Тютюн* "Tobacco" (*Tabak*, 1954, 1964, 1980) by Dimitar Dimov, in which, inter alia, she convincingly mastered the special terminology of the tobacco industry. In the volume of the three novelettes by Bogumil Raynov *Нощни булеварди* "Boulevards at Night" (*Nočné bulváre*, 1966) she, in an excellent manner, caught the atmosphere of the capital and the communication style of outcasts from the society and of wrecked human existences. In the selection of novelettes *Горещо пладне* "Hot noon" (*Horičie poludnie*, 1968) she

gives a genuine representation of the poetical images, of the captivating dialogues, gentle irony and kind humour of Yordan Radichkov, the most prominent personality of Bulgarian literature of the 20th century. In the translation of the novelettes *Старопланински легенди* "Legends from the Old Mountain Range" (*Staroplanské povesti*, 1968) by Yordan Yovkov she, by adequate linguistic means, mediated to the Slovak readers the romantic world of stories about highwaymen and of the folk songs connected with the mountain range called the Old Mountain Plain. With her son she translated the best known Bulgarian novel *Под игото* "Under the yoke" (*Pod jarmom*, 1960) by Ivan Vazov. It provides an impressive picture of life in Bulgaria at the eve of liberation from Turkish oppression. They also translated the novel *Снаха* "Bride" (*Nevesta*, 1954) by Georgi Karaslavov in which, by modern substitution means, they transposed the author's presentation of a Bulgarian village at the time between World War I and World War II.

M. Topolska also translated Bulgarian dramatic texts. Several ones from them were successfully staged in Slovak theatres, e.g. the comedy *Камък в блатото* "A stone in a puddle" (*Kameň v barine*, 1960) by Georgi Karaslav, the play *Когато розите танцуват* "When roses dance" (*Ked' ruže tancujú*, 1960) by Valeri Petrov, but above all the satirical comedy *Жени с минало* "Women with a past" (*Ženy s minulosťou*, 1960) by Dimitar Dimov.

A special chapter of the work of M. Topolska is represented by her translations of literature for children in which, respecting the varied age of the readers, she managed to find appropriate means of expression to convey the emotional and mental attitudes of children to the world. Unique creative invention marks the translations of the books *Ние, врабчетата* "We, little sparrows" (*My vrabčatá*, 1973) by Yordan Radichkov, *Цариградски чехлички* "Slippers from Constantinople" (*Carihradské papučky*, 1974) by Liana Daskalova, and *Меко казано* "Tenderly said" (*Jemne povedané* (1987) by Valeri Petrov.

On the whole, Maria Topolska herself has translated forty works of prose, poetry and drama, and in co-authorship with her husband Tomash, son Milan and daughter Dana Shoutsova, née Topolska, also twenty other works. She understood translation as a creative process, always respecting the historical context and the local specific cultural and geo-political characteristics within which the original texts were created, as well as the different correlations or relationships with the receiving culture. By the extent of her translations of books or works published in magazines, she ranks in the number of most productive translators of Bulgarian literature in Slovakia. Her translations are marked by the reliability of interpretation in spite of the fact that she was translating in the times when in Slovakia and in Bulgaria there existed no Bulgarian-Slovak or Slovak-Bulgarian translation dictionaries as lexicographical works that would be available to the translators.

In 1966, for her work in the sphere of translation and for her contribution to strengthening the Slovak-Bulgarian literary relationships, the writer and translator

Maria Topolska received the Bulgarian national award The Order of Constantine and Methodius of the 1st degree. In 1968, for her life-long translation activities and her prominent share in building the Slovak-Bulgarian literary relationships she was in Slovakia awarded the title Merited Artist. On the eve of the 10th anniversary of the death of this exceptionally productive translator and populariser of Bulgarian literature, in the publishing house Хайни (Hayni) in Sofia there was published a selection of her verses for children entitled *Слънчо, зрей!* “Sun, shine” (2014) which was compiled and translated by Dimitar Stefanov. Until now, her by now grey-haired former pupils from Gorna Mitropoliya, now living in Slovakia, who, when speaking about her, keep calling her “our lady teacher”, marked the anniversary of her death by a re-edition of her collection of novelettes *V putách zeme* “In the chains of the land” (2014).

Slovník slovenských prekladateľov umeleckej literatúry. 20. storočie (Dictionary of Slovak literary translators. 20th century) presents biographical and bibliographical profiles of the translators who in the course of the previous century presented to the Slovak readers literary works from 134 national literatures. Thanks to the systematic and numerous translation activities of Maria Topolska⁹⁾, Bulgarian literature is represented in the dictionary in a dignified way.

NOTES

1. Samuel Y. Zahey (Samuel J. Zachej), the founder of Slovak-Bulgarian relations, was an entrepreneur and official representative in Sofia where he died in February 1918.
2. G. Baritsova also published under the name Augusta (Gusta) Dochevska.
3. P. Horov, National Artist, poet and translator, was the first one to translate Bulgarian poetry. In cooperation with M. Topolska, he first popularized it in magazines by translating H. Botev, I. Vazov, P. Yavorov, E. Bagriyana, etc. Later, together with M. Ferko, he presented a selection of poetry by N. Vaptsarov (*Piesne o človeku* “Songs about man”, 1962), in linguistic cooperation with M. Topolska, he published the collection of poems by E. Bagriyana *Horiaci strom* “Burning tree” (1966). For developing the Bulgarian-Slovak literary relations the Bulgarian Republic awarded him with the Order of Cyril in Methodius of the 1st degree (1966).
4. Familiarity in Slovakia with Bulgarian poetry was enriched above all by Ferko’s translation of the selection of Bulgarian poetry that was published in 1960 under the title *Nech svitne deň. Antológia bulharskej poézie 20. storočia* “May the day come. An anthology of Bulgarian poetry of the 20th century”. Together with G. Dochevska he translated the novel written by S. Ts. Daskalov *Девојката от прохода* “Girl from the mountain pass” (1951), with P. Horov he translated a selection of poetry by N. Vaptsarov

- Piesne o človeku "Songs about man" (1962) and in linguistic cooperation with J. Marushiak he published in book form a selection from the poetry of H. Smirnenski under the title *Navždy tu ostanem* "I will stay here forever" (1983). For his contribution to the development of Slovak-Bulgarian relations the writer and translator M. Ferko was awarded the Order of Constantine and Methodius of the 2nd degree.
5. In 1930 the Ministry of Education and Enlightenment sent Y. Mihalko (1907 – 1982) to Bulgaria where in the Slovak community he taught at the Slovak national school in Gorna Mitropoliya (1930 – 1932) and in Brashlyanitsa (1932 – 1940). He got to know their everyday life, as well as their life during traditional holidays, and he summed up his observations in the book *Naši v Bulharsku. Päťdesiat rokov ich života, práce, piesní a zvykov* "Our Slovak people in Bulgaria. Fifty years of their lives, work, songs and traditions" (1936). In addition, he also collected and prepared for publication their folk songs. The collection was eventually published in Bulgaria under the title *Ej, Bugári, Bugári. Piesne bulharských Slovákov zozbierané Jánom Michalkom* "Oh, Bugari, Bugari. Songs of Bulgarian Slovaks collected by Yan Mihalko" (2008).
 6. Slovaks started to settle in Bulgaria after its liberation from the Osman domination and after the issuance of the Act on Settling Scarcely Populated Parts of Bulgaria (1880). The Slovaks from southern lowlands of the Monarchy were attracted by the convenient material conditions. Their first group moved to Bulgaria in 1884 and within two decades it grew into a viable community. The Slovaks built their settlements in the villages of Mrtvica (at present Podem), Gorna Mitropoliya, Brashlyanitsa and Voyvodovo near the city of Pleven (Botik, 2011: 292). Within the years 1929 – 1937 in all these settlements there were constructed representative buildings of Slovak schools to which teachers from Slovakia were being sent (Botik, 1994: 40 – 41).
 7. Tomash Topolski (1909 – 1985) was born in Gorna Mitropoliya, but his parents and grandparents came from Stara Pazova in Serbian Voyvodina.
 8. After the year 1945 the Slovak minority in Bulgaria spontaneously reacted to the call of the Czechoslovak authorities "Your mother is calling you" concerning the possibility of returning to their homeland, which resulted in massive repatriation of Slovaks to the Czechoslovak Republic. In the second half of the 1940s and in the 1950s, from among the overall number of about 2000 Slovaks, approximately 95 % re-emigrated. Mostly only mixed-nationality families stayed in Bulgaria (Botik, 2011: 237).
 9. The entry *TOPOĽSKÁ Mária* (2014: 287 – 289) for *Slovník slovenských prekladateľov umeleckej literatúry. 20. storočie* (Dictionary of Slovak literary translators. 20th century) was written by the author of this article.

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✉ **Dr. Maria Dobrikova, Assoc. Prof.**

Department of Slavic Studies
Faculty of Arts
Comenius University in Bratislava
2, Gondova St.
814 99 Bratislava 1, Slovakia
E-mail: maria.dobrikova@uniba.sk