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A ‘Small’ Literature, that is: Literature with Limited Translational Opportunities, of Structural Undercapacity and Voluntary Self-diminishment

One possible definition of a small literature would be of a literature depending on indirect translation. For translations from a number of literatures it would rely on the mediation of a literature perceived as more important than both the source and the target literatures. In some kind of cases, possibly rare, this dependence on mediation, in general hardly avoidable due to lack of qualified translators, may turn out to be voluntary. Such a case is demonstrated by Bulgarian literature, when it translates from the Georgian. In my article I analyse a translation of Valerian Gaprindashvili’s ‘Sea’ by Nikolaj Künchev, which translation seems to be far more dependent on Pasternak’s translation of that poem into Russian than on the original, despite translator’s published declaration that he has relied on an interlinear translation from the Georgian. The case enables us to view ‘smallness’ not only as ‘objective’ property/distinctive feature but as horizon of self-identification, as self-inscription.

Keywords: small literatures; Valerian Gaprindashvili; Nikolaj Künchev; Boris Pasternak; “interreflexive translation studies”

Introduction

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In some kind of cases, possibly rare, this dependence on mediation, in general hardly avoidable due to lack of qualified translators (structural limitation), may turn out to be voluntary. Such a case demonstrates Bulgarian literature, when it translates from the Georgian.

In what follows I will analyse a translation of Valerian Gaprindashvili’s ‘Sea’ by Nikolaj Künchev, which translation seems to be far more dependent on Pasternak’s translation of that poem into Russian than on the original, despite translator’s published declaration (*Dŭh na bitie* 1985: 7, footnote) that he relied on an interlinear translation from the Georgian.

Nikolaj Künchev is one of the nine important poets in the alternative canon of the communist era Bulgarian poetry, constructed by Mikhail Nedelchev and Plamen Dojnov (see, for example, Dojnov 2012). In 1985, a Bulgarian “anthology of Georgian poetry”, “selected and translated from Russian” by Künchev, appeared, titled ‘A breath of being’. By then, Künchev had been already at home within both the official and unofficial currents of Georgian literary life. In his book of poems *Prisŭstviya* (‘Presences’), published in 1965, he had included a chapter ‘Georgia, 1964’ (Künchev, 1965, 59-73): ten poems out of thirty-five in all. In the same year, a selection of forty-one poems by Georgi Leonidze in book form was published, in “translation from Russian” by Künchev (Leonidze, 1965, p. 3). By 1983, the Georgian side had succeeded in mirroring the gesture of friendship, with returns: publishing house *Nakaduli*, or the “publisher of literature

for children and youth of the Georgian SSR”, issued ‘Poems’ by Künchev, one-hundred-and-two. The translator is indicated, but it remains unclear whether he translated directly from Bulgarian or not. The short Preface to Künchev’s second book of poems in Georgian stated had been twice on long creative vacations in Georgia (Kinchevi, 1983, p. 4). In 1978, *Merani*, the publishing house of the Union of (Soviet) Georgian Writers, had already published a selection of fifty poems by Künchev.

The case enables us to view ‘smallness’ not only as ‘objective’ property/distinctive feature but as a horizon of self-identification (in particular, of voluntary self-limitation) and as self-inscription (into a lingual-literary ‘imperium’).

The original in its 1922 version written in Batumi lacks graphic partition into stanzas (Gaprindashvili, 1990, pp. 125-126)¹, while the translation presents six quatrains, just as the Georgian 1964 edition. It is noteworthy that the Russian translation published in 1935 already presents a poem in quatrains, while indicating another year of creation, 1924, without specifying the place.²

Punctuation of the translation diverts from that of the original versions (at times of the one, at times of the other, at times of both) several times. I will not comment these issues, focussing so far on the line-by-line reading on lexical, syntactic and stylistic levels.

In parallel, I will be comparing Künchev’s translation (*Dŭh na bitie*, 1983, p. 9) to a Russian one, by Boris Pasternak (*Poety Gruzii* 1935: 14), put in „quotation marks“, against the background of a literal translation by me, put in ‘semantic quotes’.³

The analysis addresses not only Georgian and other post-/ex-Soviet readers, but also Bulgarian.

First stanza (according to the 1964 Georgian edition and the translations)

ზღვას ენატრება იცოს პატარა, [literal translation: ‘Sea craves to have been small / Sea misses its non-being small’, Кънчев: ‘Wants the sea so small to become’, „Иска морето тъй малко да стане“. – „Иска“, ‘wants’, stays for ენატრება = ‘копнее; мъчно му е, че не е’⁴ – It is a simplification which can be explained with a hypothetic preference of the translator for a less pathetic and less psychologically elaborating discourse. Pasternak: ‘Sea dreams of something tiny’, „Море мечтает о чем-нибудь махоньком“ – „мечтает“ stays for ენატრება and makes the ambivalent temporality of the original, split between past and future, a forward-looking one. Besides, the quality of smallness is transferred from the sea (dreaming/wanting agent) to the dream itself. Bulgarian translation stays somewhere in between the literal translation and the Russian one.]

/ ვით უნაზესი ჩიტო კოლიბრი,⁵ [lit.: ‘as the most gentle bird colibri (as the most gentle among the birds, the colibri)’; Кънчев: ‘in order to look like almost as a colibri’ „че да прилича почти на колибри“. – ‘Look like almost’, „Прилича почти“, stays for ვით, ‘as’, ‘като’, which is space consuming but correct. While უნაზესი ჩიტო, ‘the most gentle bird’, ‘най-нежното птиче’, is missed – a simplification which can be explained with translator’s preconception that readers in Bulgaria of the 1980s, unlike Georgian ones of the 1920s, knew what colibri was. But such a hypothesis implies that the translator undervalued aesthetic function of poetry and overvalued the cognitive one, which is a hardly convincing hypothesis. Pasternak: ‘For example as to become a birdlet colibri’ „Вроде как сделаться б птичкой колибри“. Russian and

¹ The poem is not present in the 1926 and 1937 editions of Gaprindashvili’s poetry, but it occupies prominent place in the 1944 one.

² The 1944 Georgian ed. presents the poems in quatrains but indicates “1922, Batumi”.

³ In preparing the literal translations, I consulted the following dictionaries: Čubinašvili 1884/1984, *Ganmartebiti online* 2006-, and Rayfield et al 2006.

⁴ I will be introducing literal translations of passages not only into English but also into Bulgarian, while refraining from ones into Russian.

⁵ 1964: (full stop)

Bulgarian translations are grammatically and lexically closer to each other than any of them to the original. They both drop ‘the most gentle’ and both add a verb.]

/ თავისი თავი ვარსკლავს ადარა, [lit. ‘its head (or its own self) to a star to equalise, to make itself equal to a star’ is slightly spatialised by Кънчев: ‘[I]n the [sky-]vault like a star to position oneself „В свода подобно звезда да застане“, but is more or less punctual. Pasternak has gone further: „Или звездою на небе заяхонтить“ – ‘Or as a star on the sky to start-shining-as-a-sapphir/ruby’. He affords himself extravagance through introducing neologism, ‘beautifying’ of the original though introducing colour and exoticisation of the original through introducing a trope based on a precious stone (such tropes are associated with Oriental wording). To summarise, it looks like as if Künchev followed Pasternak in making the sea not only change its size but also its place, but removed his extravagance.]

/ ცაზე რომ ბრწყინავს დაუბრკოლებრივ. [lit. ‘On the sky to glitter unhindered’, ‘на небето за да заблести безтрепетно’, is translated by Кънчев as: „стига да влезне то в тези калибри“, ‘provided that it can enter these calibres’. Thus he changed the syntax of the long sentence that occupies the first four lines through introducing a concessive clause instead of just keeping on the optative¹. No less important, he changed the inexact rhyme *kolibri – daubrkolebriv* which does not change the even stylistic and emotional discourse with the exact and a pun-like (wordplay) rhyme *kolibri – kalibri* which introduces a stylistic contrast (*kalibri* belongs to a scientific-technical discourse and when introduced into the poetic has definite comical overtones). Slight emotional and descriptive simplification over the previous lines helps this last semantic shift overall change the image of sea – from strange into comic. The jokey tenderness of a coeval poem, Nikolaj Gumilev’s „Слоненок“ (‘The elephant calf’), is maybe present in the Georgian text albeit a bit mutedly, while the Bulgarian translation magnifies it, and the emotional balance is lost in favour of comism. Pasternak: ‘It would suffice (to succeed) to shrink in calibre’, „Только бы как-нибудь сжаться в калибре“. Russian and Bulgarian translations are lexically, grammatically and poetologically identic. From this point on, I cannot consider the Bulgarian one as based on a *podstrochnik* from the original. Nevertheless I will continue citing this translation first.]

Second stanza

/ ზღვას მოეწყინა თავის სიმძიმე, [‘Sea is bothered by its own heaviness’, ‘На морето му е омръзнала собствената тежест’ is translated by Künchev as „Обременява го страшно тайфуна“, ‘Burdens it[obj.] awfully the typhoon [subj.].’ Translation once again simplifies the ‘psychology’ or the protagonist (the sea). This happens through alienation of the source of burdensomeness/boredom and implicit or partial ‘physicalisation’ or the feeling: the sea in the translation is uneasy not about itself, but about a *typhoon* that might be conditioned by sea and might be not, but anyway is a separate thing. At the same time, the translation hurries up to introduce a semantic element from the subsequent line, which element, as we shall see, is simplified too. Pasternak: „Обременительны грозы, тайфуны“, ‘Burdensome are storms, typhoons’. Translations are much closer to each other than any of them to the original.]

/ ბუმბერაზობა, გრიგალი, მეხი,² [‘Enormousness, tempest(ousness), thunder(ness)’ is re-imagined as ‘[W]ith this infinity at times dark, at times blue’, „С тази безкрайност ту тъмна, ту синя“. While the original shapes a haptic-kinetic-acoustic image of the sea, the translation introduces (invents) visuality and even colorism (present nowhere in the original!), and the non-present wherever in the original ‘infinite-ness’ (as we shall see, the enormousness of *this* sea is of another kind). Pasternak: ‘Their non-encompassibility, their uninhabitedness’, „Их необъятность, их необитаемость“. He is less daring about visuality, but

¹ Briefly on moods in Georgian: <https://www.kartuliena.eu/moods/>.

² 1964: (full stop)

continues the fancy in another direction. Both translators annihilate the kinetic and acoustic aspects of sea's perceptibility.]

/ ნახა სიზმარში ტბა მოციმციმე [‘Saw in a dream a lake twinkling’ (lit.) is changed to ‘How much different it is in a calm/silent lagoon’, „Колко по-друго е в тиха лагуна“ (К.). Neutral narration (‘saw’) is changed to hypothesised and simulated inner speech of the sea (‘How much better is...’). Dream is changed to an alternative reality of unclear origin, most probably originating from a deliberation, a whim or daydreaming. Lake is changed to a lagoon. And a specific property of the surface of the object (‘blinking, shimmering’) – to a general and redundant property of the object’s ‘temper’ (‘calm’). Russian translation performs three of the four transformations just mentioned and thus bears a trace of the original: ‘Is it the same as in the *twinkling* of a calm/silent lagoon’, „То ли в мерцании тихой лагуны“].

/ და ჩინელ ქალის მტკივანი ფეხი. [‘and of a Chinese woman the aching/hurting leg’, ‘и на китайска жена болезнения/болящия крак’ (lit.), is changed to „да е краче на китайка-плувкия“, ‘[it] to be a [small/tempting] leg of a Chinese woman-swimmer’, which almost coincides with Pasternak’s [‘The small/tempting] leg of a bathing Chinese woman’. A protagonist capable of empathy is transformed into an implicit author-voyeur and a protagonist wishing to become an intriguing female body’s part. And a movement of attention from the whole human being towards its body part is reversed]. Translations coincide in their deviation. Having followed the Russian translation in making the female image ‘carnal’ and in submitting it to a discourse of sexual desire, the Bulgarian one however refuses to retain its vulnerability (a bathing woman is basically more dependant on male gaze and will to control than a female swimmer).

Third stanza

ზღვას აღარ უნდა თავის სისრულე, [‘The sea does not want anymore its completeness/round(ed)ness’, ‘Морето не иска вече своята пълнота’, is echoed by „Колко пълноводието му омръзна“, ‘How much bored/annoyed/fed up it is by its [state of] high [lit. full] water’, which strictly reproduces the Russian changing only the word-order „Как надоело ему полноводье!“. It is here, at the beginning of the second third of the poem’s length where the author has put the simple volitive verb ‘want/wish’, and not in the first line of the poem. However, the translation offers a pseudo-equivalent substitution and has one verb of each kind (simple volitive and of perception implying volition) up to the present point but damages the poetics of the original in one more aspect. The gradation ‘longs for – is bored by – wants [a change]’ (1st line, 5th line, 9th line) is substituted by the sequence ‘wants – is burdened – is bored by’. And a condition of self-uneasiness which seeks a solution is transformed into an image of a whimsical predetermined wish. A wish which produces, or strongly stimulates, self-uneasiness and discontent that is growingly alienated from the ‘self’ and ascribed to its attributes which the reader is encouraged to perceive as separate objects]. Here, in the beginning of second third, the Georgian text articulates the specific way *this* sea is pertinent to infinity (and finiteness): it does not want anymore its completeness, roundedness (and, by implication, it wants someone else, the Other, to whom to devote itself). The translation, having ascribed to *this* sea *infinity*, now reduces its *completeness* to ‘abundance with water’ and rules out the Christian – and whatsoever – anthropo-theological perspective. / |

თითქო წურბელი გულზე მოება;¹ [‘As if a leech sucks its [the sea] dirtily’, “Сякаш пиявица смуче го мръсно”, stays in the Bulgarian for ‘As if a leech (bloodsucker) its heart sucks’ ‘сякаш пиявица сърцето му смуче’: the translation further de-humanises the humanised sea of the original and, having removed ‘heart’, introduces an adjective loaded with trivial expressivity. Russian translation, on its turn, „Сердце сосущей пиявкой ужалено“, ‘Heart by a sucking leech is stung’, overstates the (emotional) impact of the

¹ 1964: : (column)

parasite on the sea. The diverging semantic transformations in the translations reintroduce the hypothesis that the Bulgarian translator may have consulted Georgian-Russian or Georgian-Bulgarian interlinears.] /

უღონო ტრფობით ის¹ დაისრულა -- / სურს ბეჭდის თვალში განმარტობა;² [“Ето, ще стане то кръгче, ще дръзне / да се (sic) повмести сред някакъв пръстен.”, ‘See, it will become a small circle, will dare / to place itself within a certain ring’ (K.), stays for: ‘With powerless beauty it [the leech] filled it [the sea] – / wishes [the sea] in a ring’s eye to seclude itself’ (lit.), ‘с безсилна красота то/сега се е изпълнило – / желае в окоето на пръстен да се уедини’. Prediction substitutes narration, sea’s psychological condition is changed from a craving to contribute to and participate in someone other’s beauty into a daring with unclear motive, and that someone, the ring, its desired/future habitat, is deprived of its anthropomorphism. Russian translation, its author probably discontent with Symbolist indeterminacy, has added a detail, has specified the kind of ring and has used an anthropomorphic metaphor, thus driving the imagery from symbolism to allegorism but partly preserving the sea’s psychological condition detectable in the original. Cf.: „Взять и вместиться б, целуя ободья, / В узком глазу кольца обручального!“, ‘It comes to it to place itself, *kissing the boards*, / In the narrow eye of an *engagement ring*’ (emphasis added).]

Fourth stanza

/ რომ ქობისთავის იგრძნოს სინაზე³ [‘In order to feel the tenderness of the pin’, ‘за да почувства нежността на карфица(та)⁴’, is rethought into ‘In order to captivate it/him with its nearness a pinlet’, “Да го плени с близостта си карфичка”. Thus the sensual tension based on the near-oxymoron ‘gentleness of the pin’ and reminiscent of the traditional literary image of a nightingale and a rose thorn is reduced to almost non-visibility, while the phrase ‘to be captivated with its nearness a pinlet’ induces an air of cocketerie or of play between toys. The Russian „Чтобы плениться булавкой колкой“, ‘In order to fall in captivity with a needle spiky/prickly’, induces the same air. But in both translations the original is felt, in some general sense.]

/ და გაჰყვეს სმენით მცირე ნაკადულს,⁵ [‘and to follow/catch with [the faculty of] hearing a small stream’, ‘да последва/долови/грабне със слух малък поток’. is translated as “или пък [да го плени] бързейче в ниска горица”, ‘or [to captivate it=the sea] a stream in a low woodlet’. A micro-landscape detail is added at dispense of the acoustic sensuality, which further erases the non-visual intermediality of the poem. Russian „[Чтобы плениться] речки журчанием, шелестом рожицы“, ‘[And to fall in captivity with] a riverlet’s babble, a woodlet’s rustle’, preserves the acoustic dimension of the original but adds a ‘wood’, just as the Bulgarian adds it. Apparently, Russian translation preceded the Bulgarian one, with the latter simplifying the former and thus further deviating from the original.] /

რომ საქანელას მსუბუქ სინაზე⁶ / ჩამოევიდოს, როგორც კაკადუ.⁷ [‘(in order) on the swing’s light wire/brass / to hang/get hanged, like a cockatoo’, ‘(че) на люлката на лекия бронз/тел⁸ / да се захване (без да пуска)/да увисне(=да се обеси), като какаду’, is translated as “В нечий таван да трепти

¹ 1964: აწ. (The parasite is apparently the inducer of the ‘forceless beauty’ of the sea or of sea’s heart in the later, 1964, version of the Georgian text).

² 1964: , (comma)

³ 1964: , (comma)

⁴ In the original word order: ‘на карфица(та) нежността за да почувства’. The word for ‘pin’ means literally ‘coriander’s head’.

⁵ 1964: და თავის სმენით გაჰყვეს ნაკადულს, (‘с със своя слух да долови малък поток’, ‘with its faculty of hearing to follow/capture a brook’).

⁶ 1944, 1964: რკინაზე

⁷ 1964: | გვ. 144

⁸ 1964: бронята

като птичка / и се разчорли, ударено в жица”, ‘In someone’s attic to quiver like a bird / and get ruffled, struck on a wire’. Thus Künchev’s translation retains the air of possibility of accidental suicide, adds an ‘attic’ and de-concretises the *cockatoo* of the original into a small bird. Pasternak’s translation, „Иль, с потолка облетая светелку, / Попкой на проволоке вз’ерошиться“, ‘Or, from the ceiling flying around the (luminous) garret, / like a parrot to get ruffled on a wire’, seems to have been the prototype for Künčev who, however, skipped a detail invented by Pasternak (светелку¹) and the stylistically frivolous word (попкой). But both add a word for interior space, both add an image of the bird’s feathers and both transform the *cockatoo* into something different: simply a small bird or simply any kind of parrot (but conversational word; not present in the co-temporal Dictionary by Ushakov), a birdlet.] /

Fifth stanza

უცხო ამალით მოვიდა ქალი,² [“Но се задава жена посред войнство” (‘But appears a woman amidst (a group of) warriors’) stays for ‘С чужд(естранн)а свита дойде жена’ (‘with foreign entourage came a woman’). The translation introduces a hardly existing in the original antithesis, starting with ‘But...’, misinterprets alienness as militancy, and through the present tense adds some solemnity or pomp. Pasternak has offered: „Но появляется женщина с воинством“ (‘But appears a woman with (host of) warriors’). Once again Bulgarian translator has had the Russian translation as a reference point.] /

თავის სახელი წყალზე დაწერა,³ [“с маска от мълнии, в дим от мимикрии” (‘with a masque of lightnings, in a smoke of mimicries’) stays for ‘името си написа върху водата’ (‘her name ’): this line is completely unrecognisable in translation, and it concides verbatim with the Russian one: „В маске из молний и в дыме мимикрий“. It is obvious for me now that someone in the Union of Georgian Writers cheated or misled the Bulgarian translator that provides him with *podstrochniki*, giving him the translation of Pasternak instead. But is it possible that a poet and translator with an interest in Georgia that had apparently lasted almost twenty years (or more), and a poet and translator from the Russophone zone of the world, did not stumble on the anthology within which Pasternak’s translation had been published? So that he simply gave preference to the authoritative publication over the privately acquired piece of typewriting or manuscript? The Georgian text looked too simple, too plain either to the Russian translator or to both of them.]⁴ /

ხილბიანი, როგორც გრიგალი⁵ [“и обсадила водата, с достоинство” (‘and having besieged the water, with dignity/decorum’) stays for ‘маскирана, като ураган/буря/вихър’ (‘under masque, as a hurricane’). Thus this line is made unrecognisable too; yet the combination of this and the previous one conveys some of the meanings of the original, missing, most notably, the act of writing one’s name in the water, and fancying a ‘smoke’. Pasternak: „И на воде расписавшись разгонисто“ (‘And on water having put her signature with acceleration’), – reproduces the previous line of the original, adding the epithet ‘with acceleration’] /

ოღმებოდა ის აღმაცერად. [“му се надсмива над гъстите вихри” (‘mocks it [the sea] over the thick whirlwinds’) stays for ‘усмихна се накриво’ (‘smiled askance’): ‘mocks’ substitutes ‘smiled askance’, and ‘through thick swirls’ is brought to existence, apparently to fill the line. Pasternak has been a bit closer to the original, delivering both an appearance (facial expression) and an inner (psychological) state: „Прячет усмешку в прорезях вихря“. Translations share the direction of divergence from the original, but

¹ “(устар.). Светлая небольшая комната, обычно в верхней части жилья.” (Толковый словарь Ушакова, 1940).

² 1964: მაგრამ მოვიდა ამალით ქალი,

³ 1964: . (full stop)

⁴ ‘Her name on the water wrote’ (or.). ‘In a masque of lightnings and mimicries’ (K., P.).

⁵ 1964: , (comma)

the Bulgarian goes further. It is noteworthy that the present psychologisation of the female character by the translators comes after their subtle de-psychologisation of sea in the previous stanzas.] /

Sixth (and last) stanza

ტალღა ავარდა მჩქეფარე სვეტად, / ტალღა -- აფთარი და ეიფელი: / თავისი თავი ზღვად გაი-
მეტა, / გაჰყვა ამორძალს¹, როგორც შლიეფი [“Кули, развихрени кули от пяна! / Вдига издъно то тиг-
рово тяло / и след надменната литва в закана, / както се вее в турнир наметало” (“Towers, whirlwinded
towers of foam! / Raises from the bottom it a tiger’s body / and after the haughty one propels in a threat², /
as³ flies in a tourney a cloak”) (K.) stays for ‘Вълна дотече като кипящ стълп, / вълна – хиена и Айфел: /
своята глава в морето пожертва⁴, / последва⁵ амазонката, като шлейф’. Thus the word ‘wave’, the name
of the emblematic piece of modern construction, the *Eifel* tower, and the species of the woman, *Amazon*,
are eliminated in the Bulgarian translation. The estranging designation of sea, through the synecdoche
‘wave’, is de-estranged in the translation through the reiteration (with a distant antecedent) ‘rises it from
[its] bottom a tiger’s body’. The sea element is psychologically simplified, for its animal symbol is changed
from hyena to tiger. Mainly due to the de-psychologisation of sea at previous passages of the translation,
now the implicit change of standpoint (from one focused on the ‘inner life’ to one observing a physical or
optical phenomenon), is missed. The strange or un-ordained meeting between the waves and the chimeric
woman is culturally pseudo⁶-domesticised, being re-presented as a knightly tourney clash between the sea
and a woman. The meeting is pseudo-domesticified a second time, though the twofold introduction of the
word ‘foam’ which cannot but allude to Aphrodite born by the sea (an allusion the original achieves in
another way – by placing the word and concept ‘Amazon’ within a description of a surf).

To compare now the two translations. Pasternak wrote: „Эйфель за Эйфелем, башни из пены! /
Всем ураганом своим тигрошкурим / Море вприпрыжку ползет за надменной, / Все изгибаясь, как
шлейф за тюрнюр“ (‘Eifel after Eifel, towers of foam! / With its whole hurricane tiger-furred / The sea
in a jumping manner⁷ crawls after the haughty one [female], / Constantly twisting, like train⁸ after a
bustle⁹). The translations are closer to each other than any of them to the original. As at an earlier occasion
in translating this poem, Pasternak seems unsatisfied with symbolism and, having modified the text towards
allegory, now modifies it towards emblematicism bordering kitsch: ‘Eifel after Eifel’, ‘tiger-furred’. According
to the logic of discourse bordering kitsch, a Georgian poem of whatever poetics, ideology and epoch cannot
but refer to an/the emblematic work of Georgian literature (*Vep’xistqaosani*), in order to make the poem
recognisable by national property beyond the name of the author (a certain “-shvili”). This logic supports
the Soviet strategy of mutual cultural acknowledgement between the Soviet (sub)nations and, due to the
unavoidable limits of anyone’s common culture and reading experience, their artistic elites. Pasternak and

¹ 1964: დედოფალს, [This is the most important difference]

² ‘Expressing threat’.

³ ‘In the way’.

⁴ Семантично по-точно: да хвърли/пусне своята глава в морето не ѝ досвидя.

⁵ грабна; долови

⁶ Pseudo-, because a reference to a knightly tourney evoked a realm which was not ‘home’ to Bulgarian recipients, being a layer of secondary/second-hand heritage adopted during the self-colonising Europeanisation of the 19th and 20th centuries.

⁷ ‘Jumpingly’, ‘skippingly’ or ‘hoppingly’.

⁸ See below the meaning of this word.

⁹ The same.

his implicit reader needed a secure literary-historical and cultural-mythological anchor.¹ In this particular case, Gaprindashvili's 'Sea' is made represent in the densest way, bordering a grotesque, one more emblematic: the emblematic of cultural synthesis expressed by Titsian Tabidze in his 'From the book "Cities of Khaldea": L'art poetique' ('[...] In Besiki's garden I rooted Baudelaire's / evil flowers'). I guess it was well known among the Russian poets visiting Georgia and the well-informed readers already in the 1930s, so it could contribute to making 'Sea' memorable and attributable among the elite... The oxymoronic "вприпрыжку ползет" enhances the comic overtone in the Russian-Bulgarian image of Gaprindashvili's sea.

The Bulgarian translation looks like a free translation from the Russian. And the Bulgarian one contains an anecdotic inexactness: *тюрнюр*, which means a bustle (a part of late 19th c. female dress – undergarment or wire frame to support from within the part of the dress which falls to form the *schleif* (train)) – is translated as *турнир*. The use of this word – whether by misunderstanding or (far likelier) by witty whim – shows that the Bulgarian translator had the Russian translation in mind while translating: neither the original, nor a *podstrochnik* from it.²

ბათუმო, 1922 წ. [The anthology *Дъх на битие*, 'A sigh of being', does not indicate dates after the poems and does not contain any bibliographical information.]

Conclusion

To summarise, the Bulgarian translation of Gaprindašvili's 'Sea' weakens the anthropomorphism of sea that is conveyed in the original, simplifies its psychologism, almost wipes out the haptic-kinetic-acoustic presence of the image while overplaying its visuality. It simplifies the mythographical subtext and the ornithological vocabulary of the original, brings comic overtones and ignores the inner compositional shift (the change of focus of the narration/depiction) after the fourth stanza. I cannot assess what, in terms of aesthetic value, it adds. But it is my conviction that a translation should neither beautify nor correct an original, hence I find any discussion of possible adding of aesthetic value as pointless here.

Within a more general cadre of assessment, I would say that the Bulgarian translation de-exoticises the Georgian original. I would add that – literary-sociological aspects notwithstanding – this translation does not contribute to creating cross-pontic inter-poetic, or interliterary, field as one which would include marine topics as an important part of its topological repertoire. A remarkable image of sea is remarkably flattened. The flattening is achieved through unannounced reliance on a published Russian translation that may have had hegemonic symbolical value for the Bulgarian translator and his Georgian partners, for three reasons: that translation was to the Russian language; that it had been performed by a great poet (Pasternak); that the poet had the reputation of a non-conformist writer. Russian symbolic hegemony, as interiorised by either the Bulgarian translator or his Georgian partners or by both sides, assigned to both source and target literatures (the Georgian and the Bulgarian) the status of 'small', or 'peripheral', ones.

Whom is to blame? I would speculate that it is, at least partly, the Georgian side, for I have reasons to think that the Union of Georgian (Soviet) Writers did not really provide Künchev with literal translations into Russian. I would try to substantiate this suspicion in another publication. Of course, there are some impersonal or structural reasons for this 'loss of meaning in translation', which I will mention elsewhere. Here I would say that discerning such reasons does not mean that I recognise that loss inevitable. The loss could have been avoided; or at least confessed, by the translator – in case he knew he had not been provided an interlinear from Georgian of this particular poem.

¹ This seems the securest way to preclude the criticism against translations that make Georgian, Armenian and Azerbaijani poems mutually indistinguishable in Russian – a criticism expressed by Akaki Bakradze in 1978, as shown and commented in (Beridze 2023: 366-368).

² 1964: Divided into quatrains.

My close reading added empiric material to and re-contextualised, both empirically-historically and theoretically, erstwhile observations by Donald Rayfield (1990: 370, 376, 379) and recent by Harsha Ram (2007, pp. 75-79, 83-85). Technically/methodologically inscribes itself in a practice called by Khatuna Beridze “inter-reflexive translation studies” (Beridze, 2023, p. 358) and practiced by her in (Beridze, 2023, pp. 390-407) and elsewhere.

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