FOUND IN TRANSLATION: DORA GABE, SLAVA SHTIPLIEVA AND ANASTASIA GANCHEVA IN THE EDITORIAL OFFICE OF THE POLISH-BULGARIAN REVIEW.

Adriana Kovacheva

ABSTRACT

Despite the growing interest in women’s writing, women translators and their achievements are rarely discussed. The article focuses on mechanisms behind the exclusion of women’s writing from literary history. It examines the social status of three women translators and demonstrates how their social position contributed to their invisibility. Dora Gabe, Slava Shtiplieva and Anastasia Gancheva were co-workers at The Polish-Bulgarian Review. Each developed a different strategy to cope with the unfavourable intellectual climate of interwar Bulgaria. Their biographies show an interdependence between the marital and social status of a woman writer and the esteem of her literary output. They also confirm the claim that translating was thought to be a more appropriate artistic occupation for women because of its lower status than that of writing.

Keywords: Bulgarian interwar literature, gender in translation, translator’s social status, women translators.
Abstract: Despite the growing interest in women’s writing, women translators and their achievements are rarely discussed. The article focuses on mechanisms behind the exclusion of women’s writing from literary history. It examines the social status of three women translators and demonstrates how their social position contributed to their invisibility. Dora Gabe, Slava Shtiplieva and Anastasia Gancheva were co-workers at *The Polish-Bulgarian Review*. Each developed a different strategy to cope with the unfavourable intellectual climate of interwar Bulgaria. Their biographies show an interdependence between the marital and social status of a woman writer and the esteem of her literary output. They also confirm the claim that translating was thought to be a more appropriate artistic occupation for women because of its lower status than that of writing.

Keywords: Bulgarian interwar literature, gender in translation, translator’s social status, women translators.

We have to devote our life to one highest purpose. If a man carries this purpose within him, a woman should undoubtedly (...) submit to it. To her, serving this purpose means serving the highest aspirations of her husband. A man must not descend to a woman’s level! A woman, in turn, should not love a husband who in whatever respect is below her. A man must be much stronger, much deeper. Let him elevate the woman to his level, let him persuade her that every wife has a duty to herself and that this duty compels her to elevate herself to his ideals by understanding him (...), to inspire his spirituality, courage and self-confidence (Kraleva 1987: 77; trans. I.Ś.).
This description of a woman’s role can be found in a diary of Boyan Penev, a literary historian, critic and one of the founding fathers of the Slavic Faculty at the University of Sofia. As a polonophile, Penev devoted his entire life to the propagation of Polish culture in Bulgaria. He was the editor of *The Polish-Bulgarian Review* (“Полско-български преглед”) and the husband of the poet and translator Dora Gabe.

Research on translation activities of *The Polish-Bulgarian Review* (which helped to establish closer relations between Bulgaria and Poland in the interwar period and greatly influenced members of the Polish-Bulgarian Association in Sofia1) rarely considers the work of its female contributors and editors. Moreover, it relegates to marginal comments on Dora Gabe the discussion of relationships between renowned male and female authors – a vital aspect of Bulgarian literary history that deserves scholarly attention (cf. Dąbek 1969; Georgieva 1997). Therefore, I propose to discuss not only the largely forgotten prose translations of Dora Gabe, but also those by Slava Shtiplieva and Anastasia Gancheva, her two contemporaries. The three women worked for *The Polish-Bulgarian Review*; Gancheva was even its editor in the 1930s, thus fulfilling her student dreams. The biweekly published articles devoted to women’s issues. It celebrated Anna Karima, one of the most controversial Bulgarian suffragists; it featured translations of Zofia Daszyńska-Gołyńska and Irena Kosmowska.2 Its editors and contributors were interested in gender issues not only because there were so many educated women writers in the Polish-Bulgarian As-

---

1 The members of the Polish-Bulgarian Association were the intellectual elite: politicians, male and female writers, university professors, lawyers, doctors, male and female teachers. Among others were: Mikhail Madjarov, Stefan Mladenov, Alexander Todorov-Balan, Hermenegild Škorpil, Anna Karima, Venelin Ganev and Sabka Koneva. See *The Polish-Bulgarian Review* 5 (1919), 3 (1920), 8 (1920), 32 (1920), 4 (1921), 5 (1921), 1 (1923), 7 (1923), 22 (1923), 22 (1923), 1 (1924). It is also worth quoting Vladimir Svintila’s comment on the impact of the translation series published by the Polish-Bulgarian Association from 1919–1925, which produced eleven volumes of Polish classics: “The representatives of the older generation remember the significance of Biblioteka Polska (The Polish Library) as well as works by Przybyszewski and Tetmajer for the Bulgarian intellectuals. (...) Such views were also shaped by *The Anthology of Polish Poets* by Dora Gabe, a book which I still see in my mind’s eye on my gymnasium desk” (Nichev 1981: 138; trans. I.Ś.).

sociation, but also because in the interwar period the debate about emancipation intensified.

The story of suffragists

Articles on equal rights for women began to appear more frequently outside committed female press, that is, outside Female Voice, Equal Right or Women’s Magazine (Daskalova 2004; Dimitrova 2009) due to the increased political activity of the National Social Movement (Народно социално движение) as well as the fascist and national propaganda, which subordinated the social role of women to the interests of the party. Although women had already made their debut on the political stage, this fact did not strengthen emancipation movements in Bulgaria, which suffered a series of defeats. For example, up to 1901 only men were allowed to study at the University of Sofia, established in 1888. Regulations that already limited female teachers’ career (for instance, their salary was ten per cent lower than that of men) were changed for others, equally repressive (for example, married women were forced to give up teaching). The right to vote was granted only to married women, widows or divorcees, as late as 1937 (Daskalova 2004: 182).

In this atmosphere discussions of women’s creativity were conducted. The Bulgarian debate was entangled in two great narratives: evolutionist-biological and nationalist. Its participants, who resorted to medicine and biology in order to explain the absence of women in high culture, science and public life as well as women’s “natural” lack of imagination and talent, expressed surprisingly similar opinions on the subject of female self-fulfilment. Some of them declared that women’s destiny had been shaped by the specificity of their biological make-up, thus the only truly female occupation was giving birth and bringing up children. Women, as a rule, remained closer to nature, closer to instincts; unlike men, they were incapable of abstract thinking and of climbing spiritual heights. As Ivan Ivanov concisely put it in an article entitled “A Man and a Woman in Art, Science and Philosophy”: “A man employs logical thinking and creates in sciences and philosophy, a woman does not apply the rules of logic and thus cannot create” (Dimitrova 2009; trans. I.Ś.).

Others saw a woman in the traditional roles of a mother and a wife. Her status defined in relation to the specific conceptual centre – a man