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World Literature in Aliaksei Kulakoŭski's *Maladosć* (1953–1958)

Literatura światowa w czasopiśmie „Maładosć” pod redakcją Aliaksieja Kułakouskiego (1953–1958)

Сусветная літаратура на старонках “Маладосці” пад рэдакцыяй Аляксея Кулакоўскага (1953–1958 гг.)

ABSTRACT: This article considers the literary journal *Maladosć* under its first editor, Aliaksei Kulakoŭski (1953–1958), and its engagement with world literatures and cultures. *Maladosć* in the 1950s provides a case study of cultural transfer between Belarusophone and foreign cultures at a time when literary and cultural Russification was quickly intensifying. The article makes use of the full archive of *Maladosć* from 1953–1958 to characterize the journal's literary translation activity and its discussion of world cultures, and draws on the theoretical approaches of Iryna Šabloŭskaja and other scholars to contextualize *Maladosć's* engagement with world literature in Belarusian cultural history of the Thaw era. The article concludes that *Maladosć* contributed to the revitalization of Belarus's international cultural ties, especially with European literatures, after the cultural isolation of late Stalinism.

KEYWORDS: *Maladosć*, Aliaksiej Kulakoŭski, Thaw, world literature, Soviet internationalism, translation, cultural transfer.

In the second half of the twentieth century, the Soviet regime limited not only the usage and development of the Belarusian language, but also cultural contact between Belarusian and world literatures and cultures. Liberalization that took place in the Soviet Union after 1953 did little to address these specific issues. Thus, writing in the 1990s, Belarusian scholar of comparative literature Iryna Šabloŭskaja noted that both translations of world literature into Belarusian, and translators themselves, were sorely lacking in Belarus. Soviet cultural policy, which had paid lip service to the preservation

of “national culture,” had not protected, but inhibited the natural development of Belarusian-language culture by isolating it from surrounding cultures [Šabloŭskaja 1994–5]. In turn, the availability of works of world literature in Russian translation “firmly inscribed [such works] into the Russian cultural space,” as if world literature were more at home in Russian translation than in other languages [Šabloŭskaja 1995].

Decades earlier, Belarusian cultural figures had already called attention to the need for increased translation activity between Belarusian and world languages. In his review of Vasil’ Siomukha’s translation of *Faust*, Uladzimir Karatkievič noted the importance of translation for the development not just of the receiving literary language, but also for wider cultural development: “every new translation is a new study of *Faust*” [“kožny novy pieraklad – heta novaje dasliedavannie ‘Faŭsta’”] [Karatkievič 1991: 417]. This sentiment echoes Yuri Lotman’s later observation that literary works have “a capacity for memory”: “[n]owadays *Hamlet* is not just a play by Shakespeare, but it is also the memory of all its interpretations” [Lotman 1990: 18]. It also calls to mind the more recent observations of Western scholars such as David Damrosch, who has described works belonging to world literature as those that “gain in translation” [Damrosch 2018: 289]. Unfortunately, noted Karatkievič in the late 1970s (as well as others like Nil Hilievič and Janka Sipakoŭ), many such works were lacking in Belarusian [cf. Karatkievič 1991; Chernyshova 2023: 567, Šabloŭskaja 1995: 38]. “A literature cannot live its fullest life [*paŭnakroŭna žyć*] without Shakespeare, Dante and Goethe in its language. We have the first. The second is still lacking. The third just appeared” [Karatkievič 1991: 407].

At least in part, the problem was institutional. In the 1950s and 1960s, there were no dedicated outlets for literary translation in the BSSR, such as journals or book series, to support new translation activity. In fact, the Belarusian-language series *Školnaja biblijateka*, which had published dozens of translations of world classics into Belarusian since its inception in 1934, after the mid-50s stopped publishing world literature in Belarusian translation. There was no Belarusian equivalent of the Russian journal *Inostrannaia literatura* or the Ukrainian *Vsesvit*, both of which resumed their activity in the mid-1950s after Stalin-era repression. The situation of literary translation in Belarus did improve in the 1970s with the founding of the *Mastatskaia litaratura* publishing house for “the explicit purpose of producing original and translated works in Belarusian” [Chernyshova 2023: 576], as well as the launch of the Belarusian-language literary translation almanac *Daliahliady* in 1975. The launch of the series *Bibliiateka zamezhnai prozy* in 1983 and *Skarby susvetnai litaratury* in 1989 also helped matters. These efforts, however, came after decades where not only world literature, but, often, even

Belarusian literature, was most readily available in the BSSR in Russian [Chernyshova 2023: 567].

In the preceding decades, the Belarusian-language journal *Maladosć*, published from 1953, had provided one additional forum for interaction between Belarusian and world cultures. Under its first editor, Aliaksiej Kulakoŭski (1953–1958), *Maladosć* transformed from a general-interest (and fairly agitational) Kamsamol publication into a serious literary journal. The journal published numerous authors who would go on to become classics of Belarusian literature, such as Uladzimir Karatkievič, Nil Hilievič and Jeŭdakija Loś. *Maladosć* was by no means a journal of translations, but data from the *Lietapis belaruskaha druku* demonstrates that, during the 1950s, *Maladosć* was one of the most frequent publishers of foreign literature in Belarusian translation after *Polymia* and *Litaratura i mastatstva*.

This article analyzes the discussions of world literatures and cultures in *Maladosć* under Kulakoŭski (1953–1958). These materials take various forms: first and foremost, translations from various literatures into Belarusian, but also reviews of translations, articles about cultural heritage and current cultural developments in foreign countries from Spain to India to North Korea, discussions of the impressions of foreign visitors to the BSSR, and more. These materials were cherry-picked for ideological correctness and largely served to further official Thaw-era narratives of internationalism and “friendship” amongst socialist countries. Nonetheless, they also contributed to the re-integration of Belarusian culture into European and world cultural activity after the isolation of late Stalinism.

Belarusian cultural contacts before and after 1953

As Terry Martin has observed, any Western influences in the Soviet Union’s European borderlands – in particular Belarus and Ukraine – were viewed with particular suspicion under Stalin [Martin 2001: 204–5]. In the late Stalin years, which were culturally stifling throughout the USSR, Belarus faced a cultural “double burden”: the all-Soviet campaigns against “cosmopolitanism” and “kowtowing before the West” were, in Belarus, combined with an official struggle against “nationalist idealization of the past” [Kosmylev et al. 2005]. Thus, while Soviet Russia was meant to discard Western culture and embrace its own (i. e. Russian) culture, in Belarus, the national culture was itself often seen as overly Westernized and dangerous.

Translation activity between Belarusian and any languages other than Russian, and indeed the publication of translations in Belarus at all, came to a virtual halt during the final years of postwar Stalinism. In 1952, according to the *Lietapis belaruskaha druku*, the only books published in translation

into Belarusian from literatures other than Russian were Estonian author Hans Leberecht's *Light in Koordi* (Est. *Valgus Koordis*, Bel. *Sviatlo i Kaordzi*, translated via Russian), Shevchenko's *Kabzar*, three editions of Soviet-era Ukrainian literature, and a handful of children's works, such as a collection of Chinese folk tales (translated via Russian). There were similarly few translations in periodicals, only a couple dozen each from Soviet and world literatures for the entire year.

After 1953, Belarusian cultural contacts with the West were no longer politically circumscribed to the extent that they were under Stalin. However, the increase in translation activity in the BSSR, especially translation into Belarusian, was not so large as one might expect. The *Lietapis belaruskaha druku* indicates that, in the late 1950s, one or two dozen books and several dozen shorter translations in periodicals were published yearly in translation to Belarusian or Russian – not dramatically different than the pre-1953 numbers, although the range of source literatures expanded somewhat. In the immediate post-1953 period, translations from Soviet literatures were likely to be done into Belarusian, while Western literatures were still most often printed in Russian translation. In addition, as noted above, there was no Belarusian-language outlet for translations equivalent to the Ukrainian *Vsesvit*, so opportunities for translation in the BSSR, particularly into the Belarusian language in particular, remained limited. Literary journals and newspapers such as *Polymia* and *Litaratura i Mastatstva*, as well as *Maladosć*, published a modest number of translations a year. Translations into Belarusian could also be found in periodicals such as *Chyrvonaia zmena*, *Belarus'* and *Rabonitsa i sialianka*, while translations into Russian were featured in BSSR Russian-language periodicals such as *Sovetskaia otchizna* (later *Nioman*) and *Stalinskaia molodiozh'* (from 1956 *Znamia iunosti*).

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the ratio of all books produced in the BSSR in Belarusian vs. Russian began to shift dramatically in favor of Russian. By 1960, Russian had overtaken Belarusian both in number of titles and in total print run [*Druk* 1967: 27–29]. From the late 1950s, translations from world languages into Russian also overtook translations into Belarusian.

Indeed, the era of the “Thaw,” despite reductions in censorship [Hužaloŭski 2012] and other liberalizations, was also a period of intense Russification on various levels [Woolhiser 2013: 6]. Russification resulted from both practical factors like rural-to-urban migration and from policies implemented by Moscow, such as the 1958 education reform that “allowed” children to be taught in a non-native language, i.e. Russian. On a visit to Minsk, Khrushchev famously stated that “[t]he sooner we all switch to Russian, the sooner we'll build communism” [Chernyshova 2023: 552]. The 1962 Program of the KPSS codified the role of the Russian language not only in cultural life within the

Soviet Union, but also as a means of access to world culture: the “voluntary” study of Russian, the program noted, “contributes to the <...> familiarization of each nation and nationality with the cultural achievements of all other nations of the USSR and with world culture” [*sodeystvuyet <...> priobshcheniyu kazhdoy natsii i narodnosti k kul’turnym dostizheniyam vsekh drugikh narodov SSSR i k mirovoy kul’ture*] [“Programma” 1961]. In this way, the possibility of cultural openness and contacts with world culture was linked explicitly with increased cultural Russification.

The Thaw era thus presented a contradictory situation where cultural contacts between Belarus and foreign countries (particularly the West) were no longer explicitly circumscribed, but limited by a lack of institutional capabilities and by the growing tide of Russification. The rapid Russification of the printing industry in Belarus overall, along with the stagnancy of translation activity and other cultural contacts, remained unresolved throughout the Thaw era and after. Practical problems like paper shortages (or, rather, a lack of central paper allocations) compounded the situation [Chernyshova 2023: 576]. In this situation, it is not insignificant that the journal *Maladosć*, the first issue of which was prepared and published in March–April 1953, provided a new outlet for a modest number of translations into Belarusian and general discussion of world cultures in the Belarusian language.

The creation and “literaturization” of *Maladosć* under Kulakoŭski

Maladosć was conceived just before the major changes that began in March 1953. As Adam Małdzis remembers, the news of Stalin’s death was at first alarming, as far as the journal was concerned. It appeared likely that plans for the newly-conceived journal would not be possible to realize in the uncertain political situation following Stalin’s death [“Skroż “*Maladosć*”]. However, *Maladosć* survived the turbulence and proved its loyalty with its first two issues, which consisted largely of panegyrics to Stalin. By the third issue (May/June 1953), invocations of Stalin’s name became far less frequent. The visual aspect of the journal also changed. Instead of a young man and woman looking forward under a banner of Lenin and Stalin and clutching their collected works (*Maladosć* 2/1953), the cover of the third issue features a young woman, alone, against a backdrop of flowers. Only a tiny red pin on her white blouse demonstrates any political affiliation. The back cover, too, features a tranquil nature scene (*Maladosć* 3/1953) versus the busy march forward under red flags on the back cover of the previous issue.

Over the course of its first years, between 1953 and 1957, *Maladosć* gradually began to take on increasingly literary traits. In its first years, the

journal remained quite agitational: its 1953 run paid a great deal of attention to newly-created collective farms, and in 1954 it discussed the virgin lands [*tsalina*] campaign at length. However, by 1955 and, especially, 1956, literary genres like poems and short stories were increasingly dominant and began to displace articles about collectivization, political developments and other agitational materials. From its 53rd issue (7/1957), the journal became an organ of the Writers' Union of Belarus as well as the Belarusian Kamsamol¹. At this time, *Maladosć* expanded dramatically in length, from under 30 to about 150 pages. Visually, too, it underwent dramatic change. Its first and last several pages were no longer devoted to full-page photo-reportage. Photographs were in part replaced by illustrations and other visual aids throughout the pages of the journal, and visual materials became more obviously secondary to text. The journal began to represent a different range of genres: along with poems and short stories of a couple pages, *Maladosć* began to feature longer stories, novels in installments and even plays.

Under Kulakoŭski, *Maladosć* began to gain a reputation as a liberal journal. "What always set *Maladosć* apart was its boldness," remembered Kazimir Kameisha ["Skroź "Maladosć"]. Kulakoŭski took advantage of the reduction in censorial powers that took place in the 1950s, especially after the 20th Party Congress in 1956 [Hužaloŭski 2012]. Kulakoŭski set the tone for the journal in particular with his own story "Dabrasel'tsy" (*Maladosć* 5/1958). However, decreased censorial powers meant that responsibility for the political reliability of the journal rested on Kulakoŭski himself. He was removed as editor in late 1958 after "Dabrasel'tsy" was deemed to be an overly critical take on postwar reconstruction that deviated from socialist realism ["Skroź "Maladosć"]. However, its following editor, Pimen Pachanka, continued the liberal tradition and would go on to publish controversial works such as Vasil' Bykau's *The Dead Feel No Pain* (*Mertvym ne balits'*, 1965).

***Maladosć* as a forum for translation and cultural connections**

From its inception, *Maladosć* featured works of world literature in translation into Belarusian in nearly every issue. The most frequent genre was short poems, followed by short stories. As the journal became increasingly "literaturized," it began to feature longer translations: longer prose and even novels. In its first years (1953–54), *Maladosć* featured primarily translations between Belarusian and Russian (and discussions of such translations in book reviews), along with a smaller number of translations from the languages of other Soviet republics and aligned countries (Ukrainian, Lithuanian, Armenian;

¹ Earlier, it had been run only by the Kamsamol, which founded it ["Skroź "Maladosć"].

Czech, Romanian, Hungarian, Chinese, etc.). This selection of languages would remain typical throughout the 1950s, although translations from Russian decreased dramatically – a tendency that may testify to the increasing permissibility of contacts between Belarusian and non-Russian cultures, but also to increasing Belarusian-Russian bilingualism among Belarusians that made such translations largely unnecessary. In *Maladosć*, other languages began to take the place of Russian as frequent source languages for translation, particularly Polish, German and Lithuanian². Romanian, Bulgarian, Estonian and Latvian could also be encountered frequently. Translations from the languages of more distant countries, such as Asian or even Caucasian languages, were not nonexistent, but fairly rare. The most frequent source languages for translation were thus the languages of geographically close Eastern Bloc countries or Soviet republics.

At the same time, over the first years of *Maladosć* under Kulakoŭski, translations from Western languages increased notably. These were consistently translations of works by “politically reliable” authors who were openly Communist or otherwise expressed opposition to Western politics, such as H  l  ne Parmelin (“*Pad adkrytym nebam*” from French, 3/1954), Lawrence Gellert (better known as a music collector than a writer; “*Maja bavoŭna pierŝ za ŭsio*” from English, 7/1957), and Marina Sereni (born Xenia Pamphilova; “*Dni naŝaha ŷyccia*” from Italian, 12/1957). After the journal’s expansion in 1957, long prose translations from Western languages were published more frequently, but continued to be accompanied by blurbs describing the author’s political “qualifications.” 1958 saw the publication in three parts of South African writer Peter Abrahams’ novel *Africa on Fire* (*Afrika u ahni*), translated by Siamion Dorski. Political affiliation generally appears to have been a more important criteria than literary reputation: many of the works published were not particularly well-known in the origin countries, and some have been challenging to even track down in their original languages. Sereni’s *I giorni della nostra vita*, which was popular in Italy, is a notable exception.

While translation from languages of Soviet and socialist republics (especially short poems) were frequent and scattered throughout most issues of *Maladosć*, translations from the languages of capitalist countries were not only rarer, but also tended to be on the longer side of the materials published in *Maladosć*. Thus, despite the political affiliations of their authors, these translations stood out among the other materials in the journal.

As was typical of Soviet official culture, cultural transfer, including literary translation, was often “planned” by the observation of jubilees and “weeks”

² Translations between Ukrainian and Belarusian remained frequent, as they had been even during late Stalinism (see: *Lietapis bielaruskaha druku*).

(*tydni* or *dekady*) that celebrated a certain culture. “Weeks” enacted bilateral cultural transfer between Belarus and other Soviet republics or socialist country, such as the “Week of Ukrainian Soviet literature” in June 1957 or the “Week of Lithuanian literature in the BSSR” in May 1958. “Weeks” featured in *Maladosć* also celebrated the cultures of Eastern Bloc countries such as Romania or Bulgaria, but not Western cultures. In issues featuring a cultural “week,” *Maladosć* would typically include a range of contemporary works (poems and short prose) translated from the given language.

Meanwhile, articles dedicated to the jubilees of cultural figures honored the cultural heritage of socialist and Western countries alike. *Maladosć* featured materials related to the 480th anniversary of Michelangelo’s birth (3/1955), the 50th anniversary of Jules Verne’s death (3/1955), the 150th anniversary of Hans Christian Andersen’s birth (4/1955) and the 150th anniversary of Friedrich Schiller’s death (5/1955) along with the 50th anniversary of the death of Czech composer Dvořák (5/1954), the 150th anniversary of the birth of Russian composer Glinka (6/1954), the 10th anniversary of the death of Kuz’ma Chorny, the 50th birthday of Piotr Glebka (then still alive) and numerous others. Articles dedicated to the jubilees of historical cultural figures tended to focus on the positive, “progressive” role of the authors themselves in the world’s historical progression according to Marx, as well as the role of these great figures in later uniting “all of progressive mankind.” Jubilee materials tended to take a celebratory tone and fit the biography of the cultural figure at hand into a hagiographic model: their struggle with poverty and early creative failures, eventual success, the quest for freedom visible in their works, their stumbles due to the class nature of society at the time they were working, justification for their lack of political consciousness if relevant, and reasons why they were nonetheless “progressive for their time.” These materials thus replicated the examples of Russian-language Soviet journalism both in rhetoric (down to the phrase *use prahresiunae chalavetstva*, a cliched calque from Russian) and in the choice of figures being celebrated, except for the occasional Belarusian honoree.

The presence of world literatures and cultures in *Maladosć* was thus not limited to literary translation. Besides translations, jubilees and cultural “weeks,” the journal featured articles dedicated to major cultural figures of the past (sometimes authored by academic authorities like David Faktorovich). More generally, it provided a forum for discussion of the role of world culture in the life of the BSSR. Thus, the December 1954 issue reviewed a production of *King Lear* at Minsk’s State Russian Theater, Summer 1955 issues discussed the visit of a Chinese delegation to Minsk and October 1955 – an article about Chinese workers at a Minsk factory. *Maladosć* also provided various general-interest information about foreign cultures: the February

1957 issue featured an article on Spanish and Italian dances, for instance, and the July 1958 issue featured an article on the musical culture of North Korea. Relations between Belarus and other Soviet republics and socialist countries were depicted in light of their socialist “friendship” (*družhba*), while the journal often took a satirical tone when depicting the West. The column *Tak iani zhyvuts’*, which appeared once in every few issues, provided a condescendingly satirical view of life in various Western countries. The August 1957 column, for instance, informs readers that a certain Mr. Bradley, a meat-packing oligarch in Chicago, has a passion for collecting pig tails, and goes on to describe the endeavor of a Spanish entrepreneur to sell tickets to heaven [*Maladosć* 8/1957].

In its discussions of foreign cultures, *Maladosć* remained in line with official Thaw-era rhetoric of internationalism, socialist “friendship” and condescending suspicion towards the West, and it translated the works of foreign authors whose ideological correctness was unequivocal. Nonetheless, the journal made a worthy contribution to the development of Belarusian culture by providing a modest additional forum for the publication of literary translations from a wide range of languages into Belarusian.

Conclusion

During its first years, *Maladosć* featured literary translations from the literatures of nearby Soviet republics and European socialist countries in virtually every issue. It regularly published translations from Western literatures as well, albeit only the works of politically reliable authors. Meanwhile, cultural contact with Eastern countries, even Communist ones, was less direct, and was usually mediated through overview articles rather than direct translation of literary works. Today we might call this angle “Eurocentric” and less than progressive, but in the context of the 1950s – when, in Western comparative literature, Eurocentrism was hardly questioned [cf. Damrosch 2018: 122–30] – it evidenced a healthy resumption of the traditional cultural ties between Belarus and neighboring European cultures, which, under Stalin, had been under particular suspicion.

In recent years, scholars have begun to call attention to the fact that theorists of “world literature” such as Pascale Casanova, despite their post-colonial approach, have often neglected the “second world” — yet even these discussions frequently do not consider the position of Belarus or other non-Russian Soviet republics [cf. Tihanov et al. 2023]. Indeed, in the second half of the 20th century, the position of Belarus was doubly peripheral: Belarusophone culture was structurally disadvantaged within Soviet economic and cultural life, even within the BSSR, while the USSR and socialist bloc altogether, even

the Moscow center, remained largely on the periphery of the world literary scene. Thus, in the situation of rapid cultural and linguistic Russification in the Thaw era and after, it was not insignificant that *Maladosć*, along with a limited number of other BSSR literary journals like *Polymia* and *Litaratura i mastatstva*, provided an outlet for literary translation and discussion of world cultures in Belarusian. It also provided an opportunity to publish translations into Belarusian, which was important especially for beginning translators [“Skroż “Maladosć”]. These efforts contributed to the (re-)establishment of direct literary ties between Belarusian and world literatures, particularly the nearby European literatures alongside which Belarusian culture had historically developed.

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STRESZCZENIE: Artykuł poświęcony jest czasopismu „Maładosć” pod kierownictwem jego pierwszego redaktora, Alaksieja Kułakouskiego (1953–1958), oraz powiązaniom czasopisma z literaturą i kulturą światową. Działalność czasopisma w latach 50. stanowi przykład wymiany międzykulturowej w okresie intensywnej rusyfikacji kultury białoruskiej. Analizę działalności przekładowej czasopisma oraz jego roli w budowaniu więzi międzykulturowych przeprowadzono na podstawie archiwalnych numerów z lat 1953–1958. Wykorzystano także teorie Iryny Szablouskiej oraz innych badaczy do skontekstualizowania związków „Maładosci” z literaturą światową w okresie odwilży. Z analizy wynika, że już w pierwszych latach swojego istnienia czasopismo przyczyniło się do ożywienia związków między kulturą białoruską a światową, zwłaszcza europejską, po okresie izolacji kulturowej charakteryzującej późny stalinizm.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: „Maładosć”, Alaksiej Kułakouski, odwilż, literatura światowa, radziecki internacjonalizm, przekład literacki, transfer kulturowy.

АНАТАЦЫЯ: У артыкуле разглядаецца часопіс “Маладосць” пад кіраўніцтвам яго першага рэдактара Аляксея Кулакоўскага (1953–1958) і ўзаемадзеянне часопіса з сусветнымі літаратурамі і культурамі ў гэты перыяд. “Маладосць” у 1950-х гг. уяўляе сабой прыклад культурнага абмену паміж беларускамоўнай і замежнымі культурамі ў перыяд хуткага ўзмацнення літаратурнай і культурнай русіфікацыі. Абапіраючыся на поўны архіў “Маладосці” за 1953–1958 гады, аўтарка характарызуе дзейнасць часопіса па літаратурным перакладзе і наладжванні сусветных культурных сувязяў. У артыкуле выкарыстоўваюцца тэарэтычныя падыходы Ірыны Шаблоўскай і іншых навукоўцаў, каб кантэкстуалізаваць узаемадзеянне “Маладосці” з сусветнай літаратурай у гісторыі беларускай культуры перыяду “адлігі”, калі беларускамоўная культура была пад асаблівай пагрозай русіфікацыі. Робіцца выснова аб тым, што “Маладосць” ужо ў першыя гады свайго існавання ўнесла ўклад у ажыўленне міжнародных культурных сувязяў Беларусі, асабліва з еўрапейскімі літаратурамі, пасля культурнай ізаляцыі позняга сталінізму.

КЛЮЧАВЫЯ СЛОВЫ: “Малодось”, Аляксей Кулакоўскі, адліга, сусветная літаратура, савецкі інтэрнацыяналізм, пераклад, культурны трансфер.

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