Burns of the Soviet Era

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Abstract

This article for the first time completely characterizes the features of development of the creative heritage of Robert Burns done by Russian translators of Soviet time - from E. G. Bagritsky and T. L. Shchepkina-Kupernik up to S. Y. Marshak and S. V. Petrov. It refers to the impact of literary critics, who were under the influence of ideological notions of the epoch, on the works of translators that led to distortion of the correlation of the life of the poet and the life of peasants and connected his works exclusively with folk songs, with class hatred and his contempt for kings and nobles. The motifs alien to this significantly simplified understanding of creativity of the Scottish author - they were pushed into the background and even omitted; it can be regarded to the erotic theme expressed in some works and to the sympathy to prosperous peasantry, etc. The literary activity of S. Y. Marshak, owing to which the Scottish poet became known in Russia not only to intellectuals, lovers of English literature and culture, but also to simple townsfolk, became the real epoch in the life of Russian Burns. Burns by Marshak was accessible to their understanding; he was interesting to them, his works were published for such a wide audience in unprecedented number of copies, fantastic both for previous, and for subsequent time. Although the ideological condition imposed a significant imprint and you could only argue allegorically on many things, the «hour of triumph» for the Russian Burns has yet come and his works owing to huge circulations reached the minds and hearts of millions. The author notes the importance of the work of K. I. Tchukovsky to form public opinion concerning the perception of high advantages of translations done by S. Y. Marshak and poor quality of translations by V. M. Fedotov, who dared in 1963, during the period of absolute domination of Marshak's interpretations, to present his own vision of many works of Burns. In the context of «ideologization» of representations about Burns combined with polarization of national literary environment, V. M. Fedotov played the «Russophile» card. He transferred his collection of translations of Burns to «Soviet Russia» publishing house, which had a great-power patriotic orientation and published the book as opposed to S. Y. Marshak, who cooperated with «New World» and other «westerners». Special attention is paid to the fate of the executed by S. V. Petrov translation of Burns cantata «The Jolly Beggars», in which the masterful use of the vernacular facilitated the amazingly accurate translation of rich colors and images of the English original. Translation did not conform to the Soviet idea about Burns; its creator was forced to compromise with editors and publishers to make significant adjustments to the text and even create the second, acceptable edition of the text, however he didn't see its complete publication in the Soviet time, it became possible only afterward.

Keywords: An Art Detail, Art Translation, Comparative Analyses, Continuity, Poetry, Reception, Robert Burns, Russian-English Literary and Historical and Cultural Ties, The Intercultural Communications, The Literary Criticism, Tradition

1. Introduction

Russian Burns is similar to the infinite Universe. At first it seems that so much has been written about him that it is hardly possible to add something new. But if you look more thoroughly, your eyes will notice that still there is a lot of incomprehensible, unclear that needs new translation readability and literary interpretations. And if in earlier years S. Marshak’s translations for long monopolized the «right» to Russian Burns, since the beginning of the 1990s this monopoly has become disrupted with the collapse of the Soviet system. There appeared new translations and among the translators there were not only those who turned to the interpretation of individual works by the poet, but also those whose translations have made voluminous collections of Burns, – they are
The translations of S. Y. Marshak made an epoch in the understanding and perception of Robert Burns's creativity. It is undeniable that S. Marshak made an epoch in the life of Russian Burns. Owing to S. Y. Marshak this remarkable Scottish poet became known not only to lovers of poetry, admirers of the English literature, but also to simple inhabitants in the remote villages, stanitsas and auls. Burns by Marshak was accessible to their understanding, he was interesting to them, his works were published for such a wide audience in unprecedented number of copies, fantastic both for previous, and for subsequent time: For example, the book «Verses» by R. Burns came out in 1976 in circulation of 500 000 copies. And though the ideological condition imposed a significant imprint and though you could only argue allegorically on many things, the «hour of triumph» for the Russian Burns has yet come and his works owing to huge circulations reached the minds and hearts of millions.

2. Literature Review

Until present days there is no study that with the greatest possible completeness would represent all the diversity of the facts of Russian reception of Robert Burns, including literary criticism and literary interpretation of his works in Russia, the tradition of creativity of Burns in texts of Russian writers, the history of Russian translations of the works of the Scottish poet. Separate aspects of this scientific problem have been developed by whose works can be of a great help for future research, as well as the study of foreign scientists about Burns himself. In 1994 there was published the first part of the bibliographic index «English Literature in Russian Criticism» compiled by, in which, among other diverse data, there contained relatively complete reference information about the facts of Russian literary and critical reception of Burns's legacy. In previous years the available materials were comprehended either in fragments or in terms of the accumulation of evidence or at a certain ideological deviation, which is not in conformity to positions of today; and this allows us to speak about the need for more fundamental research that will be equal to a doctoral thesis. At the same time it is necessary to note that it was about three decades ago in 1980s, when the latest significant works about the Russian Burns, connected with Y. D. Levin's activity, appeared. Global changes in subsequent years actualize the emergence of new work on the perception and understanding of creativity of the Scottish poet in Russia.

3. Materials and Methods

Material for the analysis was taken from the translations of works of R. Burns into Russian, from literary and critical responses to their occurrence, poems by Russian poets dedicated to Scottish predecessor. The chosen material has a chronological restriction - from the beginning of 1920 until the end of the 1980s. Facts of the preceding and succeeding time have been involved exclusively for
comparison of methods. Theoretical and methodological foundation of the research is based on the literary works of the following Russian classics of literary criticism: In11–35, as well as on works on the problems of Russian-British literary and historical and cultural interaction. Numerous works of foreign researchers of creativity of Burns have been used19–26.

4. Results

The period of understanding of creative works of Burns by Soviet translators can be arbitrarily divided into two periods: The early one associated with the activities of E. G. Bagritsky, A. P. Globa, T. L. Shchepkina-Kupernik and that of Marshak, when his translations noticeably dominated, but when some other writers also did their translations, for example in36–48.

By the 1920s refer the free translations of «John Barleycorn» by49 and «The Jolly Beggars»50 created not as a result of acquaintance with British originals but as a result of reconsideration of the famous translation by M. L. Mikhailov and P. I. Vinberg. Years later, recalling E. G. Bagritsky in «The Book of Wandering» (first published in No 10 and 11 of the magazine «New World» in 1963 in his sixth and final book of «The Stories of Life»), K. Paustovsky wrote about him as of an inborn romanticist, in which creative works the boundary between «mine» and «theirs» turned out to be conditional: «It even seemed to me that, for example, the verses about the Commander by A. Blok or «The Jolly Beggars» by Burns, or legend about Till Eulenspiegel by De Coster – all these were written not only by Blok, Burns and De Coster, but also by Bagritsky himself. All these belonged to him for that reason that he was able to disclose some unnoticed wealth of sounds, images, colors and charm. Somebody else’s verses seemed to put the «daring rhythms of the Scottish poet <...>» by viscous pentameter, for arbitrary increase of the number of feet in a line and, eventually, for a desire to put the «daring rhythms of the Scottish poet <...>» on the Procrustean bed of traditional meters, typical of Russian poetry of the middle of the XIX century.51

The successful combination of social and lyrical motifs characterizes free translations of «McPherson’s Farewell» and «Memoirs» («As coast can blossom...») by52, entered in his collection the «West» published in 1936, where in the first of them was published without the indication on Burns. The most important were achievements of T. L. Shchepkina-Kupernik, who prepared and published in 1936 the collection of «Selected Lyrics» by R. Burns, which included 74 poems54. In her humorous poem «So, you have the collective farm “Alarm”…» T. L. Shchepkina-Kupernik mentioned her work on the translation of Burns (on August, 5th 1935), it is kept in the Russian State Atchive of Literature and Art (fund 571, inventory 1, unit of storage 98, p. 61); it was first published by D. Rayfield in 2008: «Since morning all the garden is in a gray-haired veil./As though I am in a cloud/And to crown it all/Electric light have gone!/And cursing the darkness of the night/At ten I turned in./My Burns suffered from it/But my dream did not get uneasy»55.

It was the appearance of translations by T. L. Shchepkina-Kupernik that prompted S. A. Orlov, later a famous scientist, and while the author of Phd thesis named «The social question in the poetry of Robert Burns» (1940), to express confidence that «The name of Burns in the very near future will become in our country as popular and loved as for example the famous name of Beranger»56. In 1974 in the fifth edition of the interuniversity collection «Literary relations and traditions» there was published an article by S.A. Orlov «T.L. Shchepkina-Kupernik – translator of Burns» where he analyzed creative manner of the translator, systematized the responses to the released collection of her works, marked the merits and demerits of the work done57. The basic reproach stated by A. I. Startsev in the review «Burns in new translation» in «Literary Newspaper» dd. November, 11th, 1936, was that «too often the artless lively responsiveness of Burns, representing the great beauty of his poetry», was perceived and transmitted by her as a «conditional poetic sensitivity»58. M. N. Gutner criticized T. L. Shchepkina-Kupernik for «disregard for the accurate reproduction of the rhythmic structure of the original», resulting in a loss of rhythm of the song, replacing «perky and cheerful chorea <...>» by viscous pentameter, for arbitrary increase of the number of feet in a line and, eventually, for a desire to put the «daring rhythms of the Scottish poet <...>» on the Procrustean bed of traditional meters, typical of Russian poetry of the middle of the XIX century.59

S. A. Orlov, who realized merits of T. L. Shchepkina-Kupernik in disclosing the features of democracy and national character of Burns, his «affinity to ideas and human rights» of Thomas Paine, to ideas of French revolution»,57 did not directly compare her translations with those of S. Y. Marshak and didn’t show his preference of the latter. But E. S. Belashova made up the concept based on the comparison of the results of work of two interpreters, designed to emphasize the uniqueness of the merits of S. Marshak. In particular in her article
«Robert Burns in translation by S. Marshak» (1958) she took as an example the translation by T. L. Shchepkina-Kupernik of a poem «O my Luve's like a red, red rose ...», published under the title «The love of mine...»54 and she noted that «following the literal proximity to the original, the translator ignored one of the basic parts of a song - her musical rhythm»17. The author concluded that the verses by S. Marshak sound «earnestly and sincere like Burns's, which is not true of translations by T. L. Shchepkina-Kupernik, whose grandiloquent exclamations create only a conditional, superficial poetry»17. Reasoning about the translation of a jocular song by Burns «The Joyful Widower» (« Cheersful Widower» by T. L. Shchepkina-Kupernik, and «Happy Widower» by S. Y. Marshak), E. S. Belashova stated that «Marshak has merged with Burns himself», his Russian poetry is «closer in spirit to the original than [...] the outwardly accurate but bulky lines by T. L. Shchepkina-Kupernik »17. Comparing the translations of a song «For a’That and a’That» («Honest Poverty»), E. S. Belashova says that T. L. Shchepkina-Kupernik «imposes alien sentiments to Burns»,17 keeping only external conformity to the original.

Y. D. Levin appreciated more the skill of T. L. Shchepkina-Kupernik; he recognized the ability of a Russian translator to appraise «democratism of Burns and his love for life and the folk-song structure of his lyrics»18. The undoubted success in translation of satires, political poems and individual songs was combined with a failure to interpret the love lyrics that didn't maintain its naiveté. However Yu. D. Levin did not consider the latter as an error by but as a qualitative difference between her poetic temperament and that of Burns's.

The separate period of Russian understanding of creativity of Burns is connected with the name of S. Y. Marshak, who translated 215 works by him in the late 1930s– early 1960s59. In the next decades (up to the early 1990s), despite of the death of the translator and occurrence of some new translations, the period of Marshak continued with the total domination of reissues of his works. In the Soviet period invariable high estimation of Marshak's translations was going together with their ideological adjustedness. Soviet understanding of Burns was opposed to the bourgeois, which was aimed to be little the talent of poet, to declare him «incomprehensible», «having only narrow and limited, "regional" value» within the boundaries of the South of Scotland17. Belashova pointed out that S. Marshak's translations played a great role in refutation of the allegations of pre-Revolutionary and early Soviet criticism (V.D. Kostomarov, S.R. Babukh, etc.) that Burns is untranslatable; but at the same time she acknowledged that «it is much more difficult to translate Burns than any other poets»17. Critique traditionally noted that despite of lack of literal proximity to the original, translations by S. Marshak were characterized by exceptional poetic fidelity. Yu. D. Levin noticed some deviation from Burns in Marshak's translation in almost every line, at the same time emphasized his skill to faithfully recreate, according to laws of Russian speech, «poetic integrity, and not just its verbal content, but its style, imagery, emotional mood, simplicity and dramatic nature, verse movement, musicality - in short, the features that give the translation some charm of the original work»18. Among the features of translations by S. Marshak the critics marked the «lightening» of Burns's images and emotions that became clearer and precise, mitigation, «ennobling» of the sharpness and roughness of the Scottish poet18.

S. V. Petrov's translation of Burns Cantata «The Jolly Beggars», which is characterized by a masterful use of the vernacular, allowing the amazingly accurate convey of rich colors and images of the English original, was of a doubtless success. Only in recent years the scale of talent of S. V. Petrov has been revealed in full force to the Russian readers and the great value of his heritage for the development of a domestic translational idea. For a long time S. V. Petrov could not publish his translations and was forced to compromise with editors and publishers to make significant adjustments to the text; as a result there appeared another acceptable edition, which was significantly worse than the fist. However it did not help – during his lifetime only some fragments from the second edition, entitled «The Idle Beggars» were published. In recent times, thanks to the efforts of E. V. Vitkovsky, at first there was published the second edition60, and then the draft copies were found and the corrections, which the translator did for the sake of publication of his work; the clean variant free from censorship was released in 200761–63. It should be noted that later there was published another translation of Burns by S.V. Petrov – ballad «John Barleycorn»62.

Creative works of Burns also attracted attention of some representatives of Russian Abroad. For example in 1974 in London there was published the book by Y. I. Berger titled «English and other poets», in which there appeared two translations of Burns – «Paraphrase of Psalm 1» («What a large sum here on the ground...») and «Ballad» («Once gathered three tsars...»)64. There are some known facts referring to the works of G. E. Ben
emigrated from the Soviet Union in 1973, who translated epigram «To a critic threatening me with a devastating review»; «Epitaph on James Grieve»; «The Inscription on a tomb of old woman Grizzel Grimm».

5. Discussion

Burns was in the sphere of constant literary interests of K. I. Tchukovsky that can be proved by his quite often mentioning «by the way» of the name of the poet in different contexts. And still the basic part of materials about Burns in works and epistolary by K. I. Tchukovsky was connected with the activities of Russian poets-translators, primarily by S. Marshak. K. I. Tchukovsky informed S. Y. Marshak in his letter dd. June, 24, 1957 about his intention to make a comparative analysis of interpretations of Burns done by S. Y. Marshak and some translations executed by O. N. Chyumina and other interpreters in earlier period; he also pointed out that the results of the study were planned to be published both as a separate article and in the book. However as a result there was only a small paragraph in the named book in which the merits of pre-revolutionary interpreters were practically denied («Burns, shielded from the interpreters by a very strong armor, for more than a hundred years he did not allow them to be caught, as though teasing them with his imaginary availability – “here I am! Take me!” – and then threw them all away») and he emphasized the «close grip» of S. Marshak, who «has won a victory over this invincible genius and made him sing his songs in the language of Derzhavin and Blok».

S. Y. Marshak was first mentioned as a translator of Burns as far back as in the pre-war epistolary of the Tchukovskies. So in the letter to his daughter L. K. Tchukovskaya, dated late of November, 1939, he wrote «3 days ago ... we had dinner with Marshak and he was reading the translations of Burns to mum <wife of K. I. Tchukovsky M. B. Tchukovskaya>». Somewhat earlier, in April 8, 1939, in her letter to L. Panteleev L. K. Tchukovskaya, who was interested in the possibility of a meeting of the addressee with S. Marshak to hear his reading some new translations of Burns, characterized them as «dazzlings»; in the end she gave a couplet from a translation of the poem «McPherson before his execution», first published in 1939 in no. 4 of «Young Guard», that struck her most:

- So cheerful
- And desperate he was
- Walking to the gallows – and made a remark – «these lines make me shiver».

Some years later K. I. Tchukovsky at some moment felt that the creativity of S. Y. Marshak got withered caused by aging and disease. In his diary dated February 21, 1957, he admitted that the poet-translator had «neither inspiration nor talent, only dry and dead virtuosity»: «Poems of Burns that have been translated recently differ like heaven and earth from those translated 20 years ago: they can have 4 rhymes in a stanza, the pattern is quite clear, but that is all». However, the pessimistic outlook of K. I. Tchukovsky on late S. Marshak did not last long.

By the end of 1957 (see: A diary entry dated December 3, 1957), K. I. Tchukovsky accepted with interest the proposal to make a report together with Tvardovsky at the anniversary party of S. Marshak, and studied the sonnets of Shakespeare, Burns and Blake for two weeks. In his record of December 31, 1958 K. I. Tchukovsky told how the day before, on an improvised literary evening at S. Marshak, he, together with A. K. Knorre was reading the translations of Burns – «it was excellent, at the highest level».

In the letter to S. Marshak of 15 July 1963 K. I. Tchukovsky spoke about his new article «In Defense of Burns», in which he sharply condemned the book of translations of Burns by V. M. Fedotov «Songs and Verses», published by «Soviet Russia» in 1963. The attempt of V.M. Fedotov do a translation of the works of Burns, which S. Marshak had already translated, was assumed by K. I. Tchukovsky as a complete failure, and his book was evaluated as «shameful» and as a «slipshod work of a dilettante» on the background of the high level of development of art translation («As though among magnificent singers there appeared a voiceless stutterer»). He spoke of his method of translation as of a vulgar Russification and noticed a lot of textual errors in his works. Sharing with S. Marshak his impressions of V. M. Fedotov's translation K. I. Tchukovsky asked him to advise, in what periodical which is not «in collusion with the publishers of this cheesy book» it would be possible to place his review, and informed about his intension to place it into his book «Great Art». K.I. Tchukovsky admitted that he had been writing the article «In defense of Burns» «for about two weeks without stopping, because it is difficult to prove the vulgar person that he is vulgar and the villain - that he is a scoundrel».

In his telegram dated July 23, 1963 and in his letter dated 26 July 1963 wrote in the House of Creativity of
Littfund in Yalta. S. Marshak characterized the article by K. I. Tchukovsky as «excellent – smart, convincing and young»\textsuperscript{70}, and only offered to replace the word fierce/violent when describing the winter in southern Scotland with an epithet severe and forgive V. M. Fedotov the use of a lexeme verst because miles are not known to everybody. «I am not at all afraid of rivalry of incompetent interpreter - S. Marshak wrote to K. I. Tchukovsky, – though his book has appeared on the eve of the new edition of my of Burns (this time in two books). But I’m sad to see unscrupulous publishers, and readers – though not all of them»\textsuperscript{70}. The support given to «incompetent» V. M. Fedotov by a number of influential writers of the time, in particular by S. A. Vasiliev, who wrote the foreword to his book, caused both K. I. Tchukovsky, and S. Marshak a special aversion.

S. Y. Marshak considered «Literary Newspaper» and «News» as the best place for the publication of his article. However in reality the situation was much more complicated. According to the critic V. A. Kozarovetsky, who actively supported the issue of the collection of V. M. Fedotov, the great-power patriotic publishing house «Soviet Russia» «ventured to publish it more likely in defiance of the hated «New world» than for love of Burns or Fedotov»\textsuperscript{71}. This event was preceded also by another episode: By the words of V. M. Fedotov transferred by V. A. Kozarovetsky, «after releasing of his first booklet of translations of Burns in Archangelsk in 1959 Marshak has achieved the decision of board of the Ministry of Culture of the RSFSR to forbid regional publishing houses to publish translations of foreign classics without the coordination with the Ministry (under the pretext of quality control)»\textsuperscript{71}; so V. M. Fedotov had no choice but to apply to «Soviet Russia» that did not accept the liberal values of «New World» by A. T. Tvardovsky and S. Marshak who were close to this.

In view of the above it is clear why both «Literary Newspaper» and «News», not wishing to get involved in the ideological strife, refused to publish the article by K. I. Tchukovsky; he informed S.Y.Marshak about it on July, 26\textsuperscript{th}, 1963: «…> I sent the article to «News». Adzhubei was absent, he left for Cuba. His deputy said: “I am afraid that it is too special for our newspaper”. <…> It <the article> was also in «Literary Newspaper» but they returned it. “We prefer your theoretical articles about the translation”\textsuperscript{67}. K. I. Tchukovsky’s «clumsy attempts» to publish the article resulted in the fact that «Fedotov’s party already knows about the existence of such an article and can take the countermeasures»\textsuperscript{67}. However, the publication did take place soon - on the pages of the September issue of the «New World» of 1963\textsuperscript{72}.

Nowadays when the sharpness of the discussions of previous years has significantly smoothed, it is necessary to admit that K. I. Tchukovsky was not always objective: some of V. M. Fedotov’s translations among those included into two of his collections of Burns are not bad and deserve not only to be benevolently mentioned but to be republished as well. Significant steps towards rehabilitation of V. M. Fedotov as of a translator were made by B. I. Kolesnikov, who prepared the publication of «Selected» Burns in the publishing house «Moscow Worker» in 1982 and included both S. Y. Marshak’s translations and 90 translations by V. M. Fedotov; among them there were such volumetric works as «The Christmas Night», «Vision» (first and second duans), «Holy Bazaar»\textsuperscript{73}. In 1987 translations by V. M. Fedotov were reprinted in another book prepared by B. I. Kolesnikov\textsuperscript{74}; his separate translations are being republished nowadays\textsuperscript{65,74}.

6. Conclusions

As you can see in the Soviet era Burns was seen in the mainstream of ideological notions as a singer of simple people, the spokesman of the people’s aspirations. His works significantly transformed for the Soviet reader have actualized the theme of social justice, contempt for wealth and nobility, respect for peasant labor, etc. The home reader had a complete image of Robert Burns, one-sided and refracted to contemporary reality, but it was always attractive, it embodied the best qualities of ordinary people - talent, sincerity, diligence, ability to come to the aid of each other.

A bright feature of the Soviet period was the emergence of many original works of Russian poets dedicated to Burns and written «to the tune of Burns», containing mentions of his name, and so on. Among these authors are – Samuel Marshak\textsuperscript{76}, Nikolai Aseev\textsuperscript{77}, Tatiana Gnedich\textsuperscript{78}, Novella Matveeva….\textsuperscript{79}

This variety of names (among those who paid their attention to Burns were not only these well-known poets but some minor authors too) testified to the enormous popularity of the great Scot, the one that S. A. Orlov did foresee on the boundary of the 1930 – 1940 on the eve of the Great Patriotic War.
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