

SOME AMERICAN INFLUENCES IN 19th- AND 20th-CENTURY BULGARIAN LITERATURE

Roberto Adinolfi
Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv

In this paper I will talk about the reception of America and American literature in Bulgaria from the 19th century through till the mid 20th century. My paper does not aim at providing an exhaustive analysis of the subject; I will rather explore the way some American works were received, adapted and in some cases significantly altered by Bulgarian translators. The image of America in Bulgarian works will also be a focus.

Key words: America, American literature, Bulgarian literature, Bulgarian schoolbooks, translations, remakes

In this paper I will focus on some American influences in Bulgarian literature. The works I will focus on were written from the 19th to the first half of the 20th century. They include: Bulgarian translations of American works; works influenced by American literature; works that talk about America. The reason I have chosen to focus on such different periods is that in both epochs remakes of American works, which in my opinion are significant and worth to be mentioned, can be found. I do not aim at providing an exhaustive analysis. First of all, I will limit myself to the reception of North American literature and culture in Bulgarian; I do not aim at exploring either the relationships between Bulgaria and South American literatures¹ or the image of America in the works by contemporary writers.

The first translations of American literature date back to the Bulgarian National Revival (Vazrazhdane); as is well-known, translated literature played an essential role at that time. Most translations of

¹ Two conferences were held at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in 2012 and in 2014 respectively; attention was paid to the Bulgarian cultural relationships with both Northern and Southern America. See the websites <http://kulturni-novini.info/news.php?page=news_show&nid=15934&sid=5> (last visited on 15.01.2016) and <<http://ilit.bas.bg/bg/events/828-amerikanski-literaturni-otrazheniya.html>> (last visited on 15.01.2016).

American books are about religious themes and didactic topics such as grammar, geography, natural science (Stoyanov 1957, 428 – 430; Filipov 2004: 22 – 25; Raichevsky 2003: 45 – 49). Some of the most translated authors include: the methodist missionary Albert Long (1832 – 1901)²; Charles Morse, who was the author of a grammar of the Bulgarian language. Narrative works are less common³; they include: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe, translated from English by Dimitar Mutev and published as an appendix to the journal “Balgarski knizhici” in 1858 (another translation of the same book, which is today lost, was made by T. Shishkov in 1873: Raichevsky 2003: 44; Grinberg 2001: 33); the short story by James Fenimore Cooper's *Forest man*, translated by Y. Gruev and published in “Balgarski knizhici” in January and February 1859 (Raichevsky 2003: 44); *Poor Richard's Almanack* by Benjamin Franklin. In the period between the last decade of the 19th century and the first decade of the 20th century authors such as Mark Twain, Henry Longfellow, Edgar Poe, Thomas Mayne Reid were translated for the first time (Filipov 1981: 185 – 186). It is not possible to dwell upon all these translated texts; therefore I will limit myself by only focusing on some of the most translated texts such as *Poor Richard's Almanack* by Franklin⁴; as is well-known, Franklin's original work is an Almanac for the years from 1732 to 1758. Only a part of the almanac is translated into Bulgarian, i.e. *The Way to Wealth* (1758). In this section an old man, called Father Abraham, talks to “a great number of people” who “were collected at an auction of merchants' goods”. He advises them not to squander their money, “as Poor Richard says”: Richard Saunders is a pseudonym for Franklin himself.

The first Bulgarian translation was made from French by Gavril Krastevich; it was published in 1837. As Krastevich states in the prologue,

² Stoyanov stated that protestant missionaries spread culture and progress in Bulgaria, although they did not achieve significant success from a merely religious point of view. The first Bulgarians who moved to America came from the Protestant milieu; the participation of Bulgaria in the World's Columbian Exposition (1893), described by Aleko Konstantinov in his book *To Chicago & Back* was organized by Valko Shopov, whose father was a Protestant (Stoyanov 1964: 63 – 64, 65).

³ Even the only book by Edgar Allan Poe mentioned by Stoyanov is about magnetism.

⁴ *Poor Richard's Almanack* was not the only work by Franklin translated into Bulgarian. A Bulgarian translation of “The Whistle”, a parable written in the form of letter to Madame Brillon, was included in a book by D. T. Dushanov from 1869 (Aretov 1990: 81); another translation of the same work appeared in the magazine *Chitalishte* in 1871. Besides, a fragment of a work by Franklin was published by T. Shishkov in 1860, under the title *Nravstveniy kodeks Franklina* (Aretov 1990: 79; Filipov 2004: 18 – 19).

this edition was financed by Rayno Popovich. The text by Krastevich is quite close to Franklin's original; no remarkable alterations are found in it (Aretov 1983: 157).

Translations of the same segment were made by other Bulgarian authors; as is very common during the Vazrazhdane, they are not made from the original but from other translations. All translators except Krastevich add some information about Franklin.

The second oldest translation was made from German by Nikola Parvanov; it was published in 1868 in the newspaper *Makedonia*, No. 21 – 22. Parvanov's version is less accurate; it lacks the incipit and other parts. Richard is mentioned just once.

An anonymous translation of *The Way to Wealth* was made in 1869. According to Stoyanov, the translator may be Petko Slaveykov (Stoyanov 1957: 329). No mention is found in the text about the language it was translated from; it is believed that the prototype is the Greek version *O trópos tou ploutisai tou Veniamín Fragklínou*, published in Trieste in 1831 (Aleksieva 1987: 207). The names of the characters are changed; Father Abraham is called “Дядо Иван”, Richard is called “Богдан” („Θεόδωρος” in the Greek text). Instead of Richard/Bogdan, one of the proverbs mentions the Bulgarian legendary character Hitar Petar⁵ (cf. Aretov 1983: 159).

This translation was published in 1869 in the newspaper *Makedonia* No. 28 – 29, under the title *Sposob za obogatyavane*; in the same year it was published separately, under the title *Siromah Bogdan, ili sposob za obogatyavane*. It is a concise version, with several omissions; however, *Siromah Bogdan* contains an interpolation entitled *Saveti kam mlad targovets*.

Other anonymous translations and remakes were published in 1871 and 1872. The former was published in the magazine *Letostruy*. This version lacks the frame; only the proverbs are narrated. The text begins with a very concise biographical note on Franklin.

The version from 1872 was printed in the magazine *Chitalishte*. The translator was probably Lazar Yovchev, who was at that time the editor-in-chief of the magazine (Aretov 1983: 160). In his biographical note on Franklin, the author states: “Мисля, че то е превождено на българский но ний не сме го виждали на языка си”. However, according to Aretov it cannot be true (Aretov 1983: 160).

During the 19th century attention was paid in Bulgaria to the biographies of outstanding people from America, such as Benjamin

⁵ I will quote the passage: “от хубаво са осиромашава а от ефтино са задлъжнява Хитър Петър”.

Franklin, George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, as well as notable people from other North American territories, such as the Haitian revolutionary Toussaint L'Ouverture (Kostadinova 2001: 15 – 17, Raichevsky 2003: 50 – 72). A biography of Franklin was published in the issues 7 – 13 of the newspaper *Nezavisimost* between December 1, 1873 and January 12, 1874; in the latter year S. S. Bobchev translated in Bulgarian the *Life of Franklin* by the French author M. Mignet. Another essay about Franklin appeared in the newspaper *Zornitsa*, No. 36, September 3, 1876. A biographical essay on Washington's life and works was published in the issues 1 – 6 of *Nezavisimost*, from October 20 to November 24, 1873; it is not signed, but according to Raichevsky it may have been written by Hristo Botev (Raichevsky 2003: 50). An essay on Lincoln appeared in the issues 9 and 10 of the newspaper *Svoboda* (February 27 – March 6, 1871); Lyuben Karavelov wrote about Toussaint L'Ouverture in the issues 48, 49, 50, 51 of *Nezavisimost*, from August 18 to September 8, 1873.

Apart from focusing on literary works, I would like to mention the descriptions of America in some Bulgarian schoolbooks from the same period. Several books were published at that time; the topics they deal with include: history, geography, natural science. These books are mainly translated from Greek⁶, and later from Russian (Russian sources are in turn translations from German and other languages). Attention is paid to exotic lands such as Australia, Polynesia, the Malay Archipelago and the Americas; local people, flora and fauna are described.

The Bulgarian translation of the *Weltgeschichte* by August Ludwig von Schlözer was made from Russian by Atanas Cholakov in 1851. Some of the anecdotes found in it which concern America sound weird; for instance, the reason of the German presence in Pennsylvania is as follows: Germans

⁶ It is worth mentioning some faunistic descriptions found in Greek sources such as the *Encyclopedia* by Dimitrios Darvaris (1829); animals from the New World are focused on, including the opossum, which is described in its anatomical details such as the pouch (Darvaris 1829: 69 – 70). On the other hand, the same sources provide rather inaccurate descriptions of other animals, based on popular beliefs dating back to ancient and medieval bestiaries (see for instance the description of the salamander in Darvaris 1829: 94). As is well known, another work by Darvaris (*Eklogarion graikikon*) served as a model for Petar Beron's Fish Primer (*Riben bukvar*). However, Beron does not seem to pay much attention to the Americas, simply mentioning them as one of the territories where some plants and animals such as sugarcane, tobacco, crocodiles, monkeys, beavers are found. Other authors such as Bozveli and Bogoev mention animals such as hummingbirds, crocodiles, snakes.

moved to Pennsylvania to escape the wolves and wild boars, found in their country due to the landlords' passion for hunting (Cholakov 1851: 36)!

Another book worth mentioning is *Kratkoe politicheskoe zemleopisanie* by Neofit Bozveli (1835). The provided information is sometimes inaccurate; for instance, the Spitsbergen is included among North American territories (despite the fact that it is actually part of North-Eastern Europe). The author gives information about United States cities such as New York, Baltimore, Providence, with regard to their population and some of their characteristics (industrial production, culture, universities, book markets). Some inaccuracies can be found: for instance, Wilmington is regarded as the capital of Delaware (Bozveli 1835: 85); since 1777 the capital is actually Dover.

I will also mention *Vseobshta geografiya za detsata* by Ivan Bogoev [Bogorov] (1843), translated from a Russian source; part of it deals with geography, history, ethnic divisions in the New World. As for North America and the United States, cities such as Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, New Orleans are focused on (Bogoev 1843: 298 – 299); information is given about their economy, culture, schools and universities. It is interesting to note that both in this book and in Bozveli's work, Philadelphia is regarded as the best city in the United States.

Interesting remakes of American books were made at times. This is the case of the Bulgarian version of the utopian romance *Looking Backward* by Edward Bellamy (1888); I would like to focus briefly on the significant differences between the Bulgarian version and its prototype.

The main character of Bellamy's work is the young Julian West. He suffers from insomnia, therefore he consults a hypnotist; he falls asleep in the evening of May 30, 1887 and wakes up 113 years later, in September 2000! He wakes up in the house of Doctor Leete, built over the ruins of his burned house. Doctor Leete explains to Julian the impressive social and technological achievements that occurred during his sleep. Later Julian gets engaged to the doctor's daughter Edith, who reveals to be the great-granddaughter of his former fiancée, whose name was also Edith. The Bulgarian version, *Nastoyashteto, razgledano ot potomstvoto ni*, was made by Iliya Yovchev; it was published in 1900. The setting and the names of the protagonists are wholly changed. While the book by Bellamy is set in Boston, the characters of this book are Bulgarian and the story takes place in Sofia. The name of Julian West's counterpart is Hadzhi Zlatko Hadzhi Srebrov Boyarov, born in the city of Bolhrad, in Bessarabia; his fiancée is called Lyuba Mirska. The doctor who practises hypnosis is renamed

Vazhenov, and the doctor in whose house Zlatko wakes up is called Svetlozar. While Julian falls asleep in the evening of Decoration Day (May 30, 1887) “about ten o’clock”, Zlatko does so on November 15, 1900. Both wake up in September. Therefore Zlatko sleeps one hundred years minus thirty-five days, unlike Julian, who sleeps “exactly one hundred and thirteen years, three months, and eleven days”. Some passages of Yovchev’s book are very close to Bellamy’s work; other passages contain details and episodes that are not found in *Looking Backward*. References to Bulgaria and Bulgarian history are often found; some of these interpolation are quite long. There are also some references to religion which are not present in Bellamy’s book.

Apart from translations and remakes of American literary works, we can also find mentions of American literature in the works by Bulgarian authors. I will refer to just one case: the mention of Longfellow’s poem *The Song of Hiawatha*⁷ by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in the autobiographical novel *Gradat na nasheto stradanie* by Kamen Kalchev (1980). In this passage we can find some interpretations that are in fact fully foreign to Longfellow’s work and, in my opinion, make it interesting and noteworthy. Before talking about it, I would like to say a few words about Longfellow’s book and its Bulgarian translations.

The Song of Hiawatha was published in 1855. Like the Finnish saga *Kalevala* (compiled by Elias Lönnrot and published in 1835), it is written in trochaic tetrameter; the *Kalevala* was an inspiration to Longfellow as concerns the measure, “and may well have reminded him also of the Indian legends, which have that likeness to the Finnish” (Longfellow 1901: 5). The similarities between the two poems even led Thomas Conrad Porter⁸

⁷ The poem's character is unrelated to the historical personage Hiawatha, the co-founder of the League of the Iroquois; Longfellow's Hiawatha is modeled after Manabozho, a legendary figure found in the Ojibwa mythology. Longfellow originally meant to call his hero Manabozho, but he was misled by Schoolcraft who “had asserted that Manabozho, the demigod of the Ojibwa and their Algonquian kinsmen, is identical with the Iroquois Hiawatha, although in fact, as Mr. Hewitt points out in his study of the Iroquois Hiawatha, there is not a point of resemblance between them” (Thompson 1922: 129; see also Hamilton 1903: 232 – 233). In his journal for June 28, 1854, Longfellow wrote “Work at 'Manabozho;' or, as I think I shall call it, 'Hiawatha' – that being another name for the same personage” (Longfellow 1886: 248). According to the testimony of his daughter Alice Mary, “feeling the need of some expression of the finer and nobler side of the Indian nature, he blended the supernatural deeds of the crafty sprite with wise, noble spirit of the Iroquois national hero, and formed the character of Hiawatha” (Longfellow 1901: V).

⁸ Porter was professor of botany, geology, and zoology at Lafayette College

to accuse Longfellow “of having plagiarized the *Kalevala* for *Hiawatha*” (Schoolfield 1989: 29; cf. Moynes 1963). Other sources of the poem include: *Algic Researches* (1839) and other works by Henry Rowe Schoolcraft; *Narratives* by John Heckewelder (1820); and oral accounts by native American chiefs and leaders (Longfellow 1901: 11 – 12; Longfellow 2000: 831). Many remakes and parodies⁹ of Longfellow’s poem were made; it became an inspiration for music and, later, cinema¹⁰.

The first Bulgarian translation of the poem was made by Panayot K. Chinkov (Filipov 1981: 226; Katsarska 2014: 39). Chinkov was the first commentator of *Radio Sofia*; he was also the editor of the weekly publication *Literaturen Chas*, printed from 1935 to 1940. Besides, he was a prolific translator; he translated over sixty books from four languages. His memoirs were published posthumously in 2001. His translation of *Hiawatha* was published in 1920. In the introduction, the translator states:

В това старо предание аз съм вплел други куриозни индиански легенди, извлечени главно из разните ценни съчинения на г-н Schoolcraft (sic!) (един от източниците на Лонгфеллоу).

It is quite curious to note that his quotes in English are in fact full of mistakes.

Another translation of the same book was made by the outstanding translation theorist Sider Florin¹¹, who is also the translator of other authors such as Henry Longfellow, Jack London, Benjamin Franklin.

One of the poem’s characters, the rabbit Wabasso, is mentioned in the novel by Kalchev. The novel takes place during the Second World War. Petar, the protagonist, is arrested; during his detention, his girlfriend sends him letters in which she calls him “Wabasso”, to his cellmate’s astonishment. Petar regards the rabbit as a metaphor for defenseless people:

(Pennsylvania) from 1866–1896. Further information is available on the site <<http://socialarchive.iath.virginia.edu/ark:/99166/w6g16b9z>> (last visited on 15.01.2016).

⁹ On February 18, 1977 Longfellow wrote in his journal: “Hiawatha parodies come in from all quarters, even from California” (Longfellow 1886: 274).

¹⁰ In this regard, I will mention Walt Disney’s 1937 animated cartoon “Little Hiawatha”, belonging to the series *Silly Symphony*; it is a parody of the hero’s childhood.

¹¹ Florin is the author, together with Sergey Vlahov, of the book *Neperevedimoe v perevode* (published in Russian for the first time in 1980 and translated in Bulgarian 10 years later), which is famous for its classification of Realia.

Допадна му и алегорията с ловците. В нея той [the cellmate] нагледно виждаше, че става дума за стражари и агенти, които преследват революционерите. Само едно не можеше да възприеме: защо все пак революционерът е оприличен на заек. Не е ли това обидно и неправдоподобно? Защо да не бъде например вълк или мечка... или елен, в края на крайщата. Но заек? Нима ние всички сме зайци? – Да, разбира се – отговорих аз, – може да се прибегне и до някое друго животно, макар че вълкът и мечката да са доста компрометирани от многобройните басни. В случая заекът символизира народът [...] който е беззащитен. Бай Стоян остана недоволен от обяснението ми. Вабасо не му допаднаше. Искаше да бъде сменено името му. Обидно е и за народа, и за революцията. Тя се прави не от зайци.

Part of the production of some Bulgarian writers was devoted to the image of America; I will limit myself by mentioning two the most famous authors: Aleko Konstantinov and Svetoslav Minkov. In his book *Do Chicago i nazad*, Aleko describes his journey to the United States, focuses on the technology and the impressive, huge buildings of American cities. Attention is also paid to natural beauty (for instance, Niagara Falls). On the other hand, people are described as selfish and unsocial.

America is also mentioned in several stories by Svetoslav Minkov. I will mention *Kolet ot Amerika*, in which the scientific achievements of the New World are parodied in a grotesque and macabre way; in this case, America is not a synonym for the United States but for Canada.

I would like to conclude talking about a far less famous Bulgarian author, Yordan Slivopolski, a close friend of the writer Elin Pelin, whose pen name was Pilgrim. He is the author of several stories about the two comic characters *Krachun i Malcho*, who closely resemble the Danish comic duo *Pat & Patachon* (the actors Carl Schenstrøm and Harald Madsen); the two characters appear also in works by other Bulgarian writers, such as Dimitar Podvarzachov, who was a close friend of Pilgrim and worked together with him in the magazine *Pateka* (Konstantinova 1982: 96–99). In the story *Krachun i Malcho pri negrite* by Pilgrim (1943), the duo visits the American post in Liberia. The description of the Americans is stereotyped: they play baseball, chasing the ball “like dogs”; they are always “greedy for shows”. However, the most interesting thing is the speech of the American sergeant, who gives a rather racist interpretation of the origin of Liberia. I quote:

Господа, сега когато сме само бели, можем да си кажем истината. Ние сме в една наша стара колония. За да се отървем от робите негри, който купувахме някога и доста се почернихме, нашата страна реши да образува тука една негърска република. Само чрез нея можехме да се очистим, като изпращаме нашите негри в нея. И ето, че тази република ни потрѣбва.

Дойдохме да я разширим и приберем в нея всички американски негри, чрез които да завоюваме целия черен материк. Дали ще успеем, това знаят нашите велики дипломати и пълководци.

The subject is far from being exhausted; it remains open for further investigation. However, from the examples given above we can see that the reception of American culture and literature in Bulgaria from the 19th and first half of the 20th century leads to interesting results. The descriptions of America in the schoolbooks from the 19th century witness the growing interest towards disciplines such as geography, economy, history during the Vazrazhdane; on the other hand, the translations, remakes and interpretations of American sources in Bulgarian literature are sometimes quite peculiar.

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τοῦ Δαρβάρεως ἐκδοθὲν εἰς χρῆσιν τῶν σπουδαζόντων Νέων τοῦ Γένους φιλοπόνῳ ἐπιστάσιᾳ τοῦ ἐλλογίμου αὐτοῦ ἀδελφοῦ Πέτρου Νικολάου τοῦ Δαρβάρεως τοῦ καὶ Πεντάδου. Ἐν Βιέννῃ τῆς Αὐστρίας. Ἐν τῷ Τυπογραφείῳ τοῦ Ἰ. Β. Σβηκίου, 1829.

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