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Milorad Pavić and translations

Who is Pavić?

On the map of the most translated books in the world, Serbia is represented by Milorad Pavić's *Dictionary of the Khazars*. Undoubtedly, with 40 translations into various languages so far, this 'novel-lexicon in 100,000 words' is unprecedented in Serbian literature. Moreover, so far, the total number of all Pavić's translated works around the globe is 409.

And who, in fact, is Pavić? Golden clod of kindness, exception and literary talent, writer, poet, 17th-19th Serbian literature historian, an expert on symbolism, a university professor, an academic? He is all that and much more - a stellar collection of all the experiences of readers and admirers on all meridians, because his works are interactive.

Pavić as a translator

Milorad Pavić completed his studies of Yugoslav literature at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade. His first official literary engagements were translations. *Nopok* published Pavić's translation of Pushkin's poem 'Poltava' in 1952, and in 1955 he became an associate of the literary section of Radio Belgrade, where he also translated poetry. *NIN* published his translations of French and Burmese literature. *Narodna knjiga* published his translation of Pushkin's 'Eugene Onegin' in 1957. Those were youthful and fluttering works. Besides from Russian (Pushkin, Lermontov), he translated from French (Vijon, Ronsard, Molière,, Mistral, troubadours and trouvères) and English (Byron, Shelley, Scottish folk ballads). He translated slowly and "with difficulty" (he also wrote like that, as he later testified), 3-4 verses a day, giving his blood for the liveliness of the text.

His translations of the works of Mun Bim, Léon Damas, La Bruyère, Paul Nizer and Charles Simic should also be mentioned.

The first translations of Pavić's works

Milorad Pavić has come a long way since 1965, when he published his first poems in *Letopis Matice srpske* and *Savremenik*, through 1967 and 1971, when his first collections of poems 'Palimpsests' and 'Moonstone' were published (they were soon translated into English language and included in the anthology 'Contemporary Yugoslav Poems') until 1979, when, writing 'Dictionary of Khazars' on the manuscript he added a remark that he decided not to be engaged in the science of literature but, instead, to be exclusively a prose writer. In the meantime, he also wrote stories that were published in collections (the first collection, 'Iron Curtain', was published in 1973, followed by 'St. Mark's Horses' and 'Russian Greyhound').

When his 'Dictionary of Khazars' won the *NIN* award in 1984, everything changed in the life of 'only' a writer who, because of the fact that his ancestors who occupied themselves in literature, rightly claimed to 'have been a writer for 200 years'.

As early as 1985, some translators began translating the laureate novel, even though they did not have a publisher or a signed contract. The year 1988 was crucial because 'Dictionary of Khazars' was then translated into French (in two editions) and English (*Knopf*). Namely, the novel caught the eye of the editor and founder of *Éditions Belfond*, Pierre Belfond who enthusiastically, bought the copyright for the translations of the 'Dictionary' and all his books published so far. He also promised him translations in 24 languages.

In 1989, translations of the 'Dictionary' were published in Portuguese, Danish, Dutch, Spanish and Catalan, while the publisher of the English translation was *Hamish Hamilton* in 1989.

Knopf published books with the emblem of the Russian Greyhound. They obtained the rights at the *Belfond* auction. The Italian publisher of the novel was *Garzanti Linguistica*. The translation into Hungarian was published by *Forum* and *Europa*, and the Slovak version followed - the first was translated by Jarmila Samcova, and the paper entitled 'How to read the Dictionary of Khazars of Milorad Pavić' was written by Jan Stevcev.

Until 1992, the 'Dictionary of Khazars' had five more editions in English, as well as two more in Italian, one in German and Portuguese, and further translations into Russian, Finnish, Czech, Bulgarian and Greek followed, as well as Hebrew.

Reception of the 'Dictionary' was colourful and the wave could not be stopped (nor will it ever happen).

Pavić first gained fans in Ukraine among Slavists who read his books in the original. The 'Dictionary of Khazars' entered the Ukrainian literary scene in the early 1990s, when it appeared in Russian on the pages of the prestigious Moscow magazine *Foreign Literature*. Many prominent Ukrainian writers gave their attention to the novel.

According to the testimony of Igor Kuznetsov, he heard about Pavić's works for the first time thanks to the writer Oleg Shishkin, who gave him the magazine *Yugoslavia*, which was then published in Russian. It contained excerpts from the 'Dictionary of Khazars'. By the way, Pavić's first official publisher in Russia was *Azbuka* from St. Petersburg in 1991. The connection between Pavić and the Russian audience is very strong. When a person is visiting that country, one of the obligatory gifts is one of Pavić's books. All of Pavić's titles have been published in Russia several times, of which about thirty are 'Dictionary of Khazars'. Larisa Saveleva translated almost all of Pavić's books. By the way, everything Pavić has ever written was published in Russian.

Translator Dubravka Sužnjević wrote that she, leaving for Mexico in early 1991 with the intention of translating and publishing Serbian writers there, brought with her two books: *Nolit's* edition of Vasko Popa's collected poems and a collection of 13 Pavić's stories, borrowed from friends. She knew that the Spanish publisher *Angrama* had started distributing 'Dictionary' in Mexico two years earlier. A translation of the novel 'Landscape Painted with Tea' appeared the same year. Less than six months had passed and the cultural newspaper supplement *Lectura* published Dubravka's translation of the story 'A Bed for Three People'. That was only the beginning.

'Middle' and current situation

The fame of Pavić's works had a crooked path, passing from the West to the East. In the mid-1990s, his works have not been often translated and searched for in Europe and the United States, but Asian countries became interested in (very passionately).

In 2011, a special edition of the 'Dictionary of Khazars' in Azerbaijani arrived from Azerbaijan during the setting of the monument to Milorad Pavić, which was erected on Tasmajdan.

In his home country, Pavic was for a while tendentiously forgotten by publishers and some literary critics (not in the hearts of readers) so much that in 2012, *Politika* wrote that he was 'translated in the world, forgotten in Serbia.'

In 2021, on the writer's birthday, October 15, the novel 'Unique Item' appeared for the first time in French. The translator was Marija Bezanovska and the publisher was *Monts Metalliferes* from Lyon. By the way, this novel is a challenge for publishers because they can choose whether to print it in one or two volumes - they can print the novel separately from all the 'united' endings. The Lyon publisher decided to publish 'Unique Item' in a box on one side of which the reader can find the novel and, on the other, 100 ends (they are printed on separate sheets).

'Dictionary of Khazars' was also fortunate enough to be translated into the Tamil (Buddha's) language. This endeavor was carried out by the Indian publishing house *Ethir Veliyedu, Pollachi*.

The latest translations from 2022 are a selection of twenty-five stories entitled 'Poison Mirrors' by Spanish-Mexican publisher *SextoPiso* (foreword by Goran Petrovic) and a selection of Pavic's stories entitled 'Sixteen Dream Stories' by Japanese publisher *Shoraish*.

The list of languages in which Pavic's works have been translated so far is as follows: Russian, English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Catalan, Swedish, Danish, Norwegian, Finnish, Dutch, Lithuanian, Estonian, Latvian, Slovenian, Slovak, Polish, , Czech, Hungarian, Romanian, Bulgarian, Ukrainian, Macedonian, Greek, Turkish, Albanian, Chinese, Mongolian, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Indonesian, Hebrew, Armenian, Azerbaijani, Georgian, Persian and Tamil.