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VIENNA IN 1900 AS THE FOCUS OF BULGARIAN LITERARY HISTORY

(Mladen Vlashki, Materialien zur Rezeption der Wiener Moderne in Bulgarien bis 1944. Hermann Bahr, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Atrhur Schnitzler. Berlin: Peter Lang, 2022. ISBN 9783631830666)

Mladen Vlashki's monograph, *Materialien zur Rezeption der Wiener Moderne in Bulgarien bis 1944*, is an extremely valuable study, both for its thematic focus on the perception of the Viennese Modernism in 1900 in the newly formed national milieu, and for its contribution to two broader Humanitarian areas: the understanding of the internal development dynamics of Bulgarian literature and experience in the field of comparative literature. The first main chapter – “The Bulgarian literary field as a target area of transfer and as a frame of reception” – connects these three main perspectives and mutually stabilizes them within the narrative traces of the national context in which the new Bulgarian culture develops. Densely and objectively, Mladen Vlashki unfolds a complex idea of Bulgarian culture – with the revival of the 19th-century traditions, with the system of artistic culture after the independence of the new state (1878) and its political and receptive orientation, with the system of professional journals, with the special importance of theater in Bulgarian culture, but also with the ideas of a “little literature” (cf. 15 ff.).

In addition, the researcher creates a bizarre – mostly negative – image of the Austria-Hungary Empire in the Bulgarian cultural stereotypes, which dates from the Renaissance period (19th century), when the dual monarchy supported the Ottoman Empire (30 ff.). For a certain time, this image stood in contrast to the active search for appropriation of the foreign culture, which was pursued by various mediators studying and living in Vienna. From this dual image of the monarchy and its culture emerges an ambivalent Bulgarian image of Viennese Modernism. A clear concretization of this duality is the

historical experience of “[the] linking of French and German tendencies in Viennese Modernism” (34) and the general understanding of the Viennese complex around 1900 as a specific “intersection” of the new European culture. The wide-ranging perspective which Mladen Vlashki develops about the literary mediation is depicted in the report on the figure of Prince Ferdinand I, in comparison to cultural mediators such as the poet Teodor Trajanov or the philologist Ivan Schischmanov.

Hermann Bahr's reception portrait (Chapter 3) is characterized by an informative density in which the researcher distinguishes and develops different modes of reception. These different reception images first manifest themselves in the focal points of activity over time, but at the same time also in connection with the diverse activities of the writer: the perception of his critical texts and in particular his mediation to the understanding of modernity; the presence of his plays, fiction, etc. In other words, the author distinguishes and constructs Hermann Bahr's reception image of different segments: the image through the prism of Ivan Schischmanov, the image designed through the mediation of Pentcho Slavejkov, Bahr's reception images through the contact reception of Yavorov, Liliev, etc.

The two focal points of the artistic perception represent characteristic cases which are almost four decades apart: The case with the staging of “The Master” from 1905 (finally translated into Bulgarian as “The Professor”) and the preparation of the staging of the comedy “The Concert” (1943), with a characteristic change in the final scene (see p. 51).

The density of the depiction and its research relevance is enhanced by the formulation of a question that is particularly important for Vlashki's work: “What creates the differences in the reception? The staging itself, i.e. the result of the stage, or above all the influence of the socio-cultural context?” (46).

By carefully tracing the vectors that act in the literary field for the appropriation of Hermann Barhr's character, the researcher not only shows what actually happened, but he also designs possible scenarios that are reflected in the tension between the poles within the literary field which occur virtually: between the zones of autonomy and heterogeneity. The plasticity of these potentially possible scenarios becomes specific and precise in a wittily expanded expression: “Irony of receptive destiny” (53).

In the reception of Hugo von Hofmannsthal (Chapter 4), Vlashki investigates the reasons for the more difficult perception of his work in Bulgaria compared to other authors of Viennese Modernism. The researcher found the reason for this in the complex of aestheticism and universalism of his literary messages (cf. p. 69). Apart from that, this section is characterized

by the fact that Vlashki traces numerous stories and substantially corrects theses that have not been confirmed to this day. A characteristic example of this is the correction of Simeon Hadjikosev's thesis about Nikolay Liliev's late encounter with Hofmannsthal's work (87 ff.). In addition, it is not a matter of shifting specific dates (around 1922 or earlier), but of thinking in a general way about the entire process of reception, which includes the contacts and connections between different personalities such as Sirak Skitnik, Boyan Penev, Vladimir Vasilev, between specialist periodicals and cultural institutions. In a way, it is about a certain networking of the literary field (cf. p. 89) and not just about the contacts.

Among the independent storylines of Hofmannsthal's reception, the perceptual case of the drama "Elektra" is impressive – a receptive junction that represents as an independent abbreviated monograph within the book: between the failed avant-garde attempt at staging the play by Geo Milev from 1923 and Massalitinov's performance of the drama in 1930, but without much success (despite the acclaimed excellent translation by Nikolai Liliev). The basis of this independent, but at the same time representative case (intended as a "touchstone of Bulgarian modern culture" – p. 96 ff.) is the emphasis on the hybridity between material and performance, but also the idea of an interaction between the perspectives of classical, modern and Avant-garde (p. 101).

Another important (and independent) narrative that can be traced in the reception of Hofmannsthal in our country is the problem of the aesthetic embedding of his work through the prism of the native ballad tradition (pp. 94 – 95).

Based on these problem areas, the researcher speaks of "a kind of processing reception" (77).

The third personal focus is the perception of Schnitzler in Bulgaria. In this case, Vlashki starts from the investigation of the characteristic asymmetry between the extremely intense perception of the writer through translations and book publications and Schnitzler's difficult and unproductive access to the Bulgarian theater stage (128 ff.). The author interprets this problem by creating a detailed cross-section of the book market and observing different market, genre and style niches. In addition, there are also the corresponding strategies, which are reflected in the general attitude of the translation, but later also in the domestic fiction.

Together with all information fields explained in detail, including the complex classification of Arthur Schnitzler in the Bulgarian dramaturgy and fiction tradition, with the direct archival work and with the tracking of the reproductive reception (e.g. with the overview of

professional articles about the presence of the author in Bulgarian Periodicals), this chapter clearly outlines the characteristics and boundaries between the literary field as an autonomous space and the field of theatrical arts, which in its initial synthesis and collectivity is manifested in both performance and perception. – In this way, Vlashki convincingly proves that Bulgarian culture around 1900 acquired deep and accurate general ideas about the Vienna around 1900 complex, but did not penetrate into the interweaving of independent languages and sociolects in this complex (e.g. in the symptomatic case of “Reigen”) - a problem with which the Austrian artists of the following generations (Broch, Musil) deal. You describe the colorful mixture of languages of this period as a kind of “operetta democracy” that underlies a “happy apocalypse” of the double empire.

In summary, it should be noted that Mladen Vlashki's contribution to the study of the relationship between Viennese modernism and Bulgarian culture is in the extremely high perceptual reactivity of his research. Vlashki is also the author of articles and books on the same topic, aimed at the Bulgarian environment of transfer and reception (in Bulgarian, *Reflections on Viennese Modernism in Bulgarian Literature of the late 19th and early 20th centuries*. Plovdiv, 2018 and “Young Vienna” in *Young Bulgaria: Dramaturgy of “Young Vienna” and its Theatrical and Literary Projections in Bulgaria up to 1944*. Plovdiv, edited 2017). However, the present study is compositionally and structurally different. It is very precisely geared towards the German-speaking world – with the information that those who perceive it are looking for in this area, with the specific perspective from which an almost complete history of Bulgarian literature is written, with the characteristic interpretational accents that convey the idea of Viennese Modernism add to. In this sense, Mladen Vlashki's book “Materialien zur Rezeption der Wiener Moderne in Bulgarien bis 1944. Hermann Bahr, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Arthur Schnitzler” represents a contribution to an enriched view of Austrian modern culture, but also to an alternative Bulgarian literary history.

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