

Agapova, Anna

Editorial

Opera Slavica. 2024, vol. 34, iss. 2, pp. 9-10

ISSN 1211-7676 (print); ISSN 2336-4459 (online)

Stable URL (DOI): <https://doi.org/10.5817/OS2024-2-2>

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/digilib.81652>

License: [CC BY-SA 4.0 International](#)

Access Date: 25. 02. 2025

Version: 20250223

Terms of use: Digital Library of the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University provides access to digitized documents strictly for personal use, unless otherwise specified.

<https://doi.org/10.5817/OS2024-2-2>

Editorial

For Czech culture, 2024 was the year of Franz Kafka. Various events were dedicated to the life and work of this Prague writer, including lectures, exhibitions, plays, performances, and guided city tours. Kafka was also the central topic of this year's Book World Prague literary festival and Brno's Štetl Fest, a festival of Jewish culture. Czechia thus celebrated the anniversary of Kafka's death in truly grand style.

It seems though that in other Slavic countries this anniversary did not attract such attention, even though Kafka is, more than just a German-language writer, a major figure in world literature (this fact was reflected at a colloquium titled "Kafka and World Literature", organized in late 2023 by the journal *World of Literature (Svět literatury)*, the Department of Czech and Comparative Literature of Charles University, and the Department of Slavonic Studies at the University of Vienna). We had this context in mind when we announced the thematic focus of the current issue of our journal. Our initial plan was to present studies exploring Kafka's influence on the literatures and cultures of the countries of Eastern, Central, and Southeastern Europe. The resulting thematic block is titled *Franz Kafka: (Eastern) Slavonic Echoes*, as it contains papers focused on the reception of Kafka's work in the Soviet Union and Russia.

If we do not count the "apocryphal" Russian edition of Kafka's short stories pre-dating World War II, which translator and German-studies scholar Alexander Filippov-Chekhov mentions in the introductory text in the volume *Franz Kafka in Russian Culture (Франц Кафка в русской культуре)*, then Kafka started being translated into Russian in the mid-1960s. He was primarily viewed as a representative of modernism, alongside Marcel Proust and James Joyce. Georgii Sherstnev opens the thematic block with a paper demonstrating that the reception of Kafka's work in Soviet literary criticism of the 1960s and 1970s was connected with efforts to establish borders between literary currents, specifically between realism and modernism. Even though Soviet literary critics rejected calling Kafka a realist, they recognized his works as saying something about the time and world in which they were created. Sherstnev demonstrates that this interpretation was related to the significant role of Kafka's diaries, which in the Soviet Union were viewed more as a psychological document than the journals of a writer. A similar reading was applied to Kafka's other texts.

The next article in this block concentrates on a specific case of reading Kafka in the late 1960s. Alexander Agapov, an expert on Venedikt Erofeev, author of the novel *Moscow–Petushki*, states that Erofeev first encountered Kafka's writings in 1967.

Although Erofeev’s preferences as a reader would suggest a fondness for Kafka’s work, that was not the case. Agapov demonstrates that the reason for this was Kafka’s popularity among Soviet intellectuals rather than the nature of the works themselves.

The final study in the thematic block deals with the reception of Kafka’s work in the Soviet Union and Russia from the perspective of translation studies. In an expansive article, Irina Alexeeva focuses on Russian translations of Franz Kafka’s works that were produced from the mid-1960s until today (the most recent are from 2020 and 2021). She examines translations of the novels *The Castle*, *The Trial*, and *Amerika*, and of several short stories. Alexeeva shows that the most frequently published translations of Kafka’s works deviate stylistically from the source texts and are closer to Russian realistic prose. The article not only provides valuable material for studying the translation norms of the late Soviet period but also highlights some other factors influencing Kafka’s popularity among Soviet intellectuals and beyond. These translations of Kafka conformed to the expectations of readers, who were used to the realistic works of the twentieth century. This conclusion brings us back to the issue studied by Georgii Sherstnev: although Kafka was viewed in the Soviet Union as a modernist, his literary works were not denied their realist potential. Was this related to the reading of his works as a testament to his era or to the nature of the translations, which perhaps brought him closer to Soviet, and later Russian, readers?

The Materials section contains another paper closely related to the main “Kafkaesque” theme. In it, Ievgeniia (Yevhenia) Voloshchuk provides basic information about Dmitrii Zatonskii (Dmytro Zatonskyi), a Ukrainian literary scholar who was a major proponent of Kafka’s work in the Soviet Union. This article includes the author’s recollections about her personal meetings with Zatonskii.

It is remarkable to note that although in the Czech Republic Kafka is constantly being reinterpreted (for example, Michal Ajvaz offers an interesting perspective on Kafka, whom he considers the polar opposite of Marcel Proust, writing that they represent “two ways of writing, two answers to the question of what it means to be modern”), Kafka has a completely different legacy in Russia. Alexander Filippov-Chekhov writes in his article that in Russia, Kafka became an icon whose texts in Russian were no longer alive. The thematic block contained in this issue attempts to understand how Kafka has been understood and translated in Russia. The final article in this thematic block also offers a vision for a new approach to translating the works of this famous writer.

Anna Agapova



This work can be used in accordance with the Creative Commons BY-SA 4.0 International license terms and conditions (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/legalcode>). This does not apply to works or elements (such as images or photographs) that are used in the work under a contractual license or exception or limitation to relevant rights.