

JULIE HANSEN: Reading Novels Translingually: Twenty-First-Century Case Studies

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Translingual writing has gained increasing attention from both readers and literary scholars in recent years. In the summer of 2024, the *New York Times* released its list of the best novels of the 21st century, and several of these novels, like Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko* (2017) and Junot Diaz's *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), were by translingual authors. In Russian writing, the past century of revolution and upheaval forced writers like Vladimir Nabokov and Joseph Brodsky into voluntary or involuntary exile, and caused them to choose between their mother tongue or their audience. Partially because of his bilingualism, Nabokov switched to English for his creative output, and in the novel *Pnin* (1957), he portrays a Russian émigré professor who has his teeth removed, symbolizing not just Russian dentistry but also his linguistic identity. Unlike Nabokov, Brodsky continued to write mainly in Russian in the US, where, as he writes in the poem "1972", he was "losing gradually / hair, teeth, consonants, verbs, and suffixes". Elsewhere in the poem he discusses the great sacrifices made for "the sake of his native tongue and letters". Despite their different choices, both are predecessors of the current generation of translingual Russian-language writers.

Julie Hansen's *Reading Novels Translingually* is an essential and significant contribution to scholarship on translingual literature by Russian-speaking writers, but it also goes beyond this cohort. Hansen's work can be considered a continuation of Adrian Wanner's *Out of Russia: Fictions of a New*

Translingual Diaspora, in which Wanner identified the concept of translingualism as paramount to the creative output of "hybrid writers". While Wanner had also looked at Andrei Makine and Olga Grushin in his work, Hansen goes far beyond these writers in her analysis. Most of the writers Hansen addresses are bilingual Russian-speaking authors, some of whom are writing in the language of the countries they had immigrated to: English, French, German, and Swedish. Two of the writers whose work she examines exhibit translingualism in their native Russian: Lev Tolstoy included long passages of untranslated French in his novels, while Eugene Vodolazkin in his novel *Laurus* (2012) switches between modern language and archaic medieval language. Yet, there are some unexpected outliers in her work, including a novel by Rabih Alameddine, a French and Arabic-speaking Lebanese-American writing in English, and a Swedish thriller by Andreas Norman. *Reading Novels Translingually* discusses multiple literary devices such as transmesis, code-switching, code-mixing, and heterographics, and focuses on some of the important questions and themes of translingual literature, particularly focusing on characters who are translators or interpreters.

Following the theoretical overview of translingual reading in the first chapter, Hansen's second chapter discusses Olga Grushin's novel *The Dream Life of Sukhanov* (2005), which is written in English, but is about Grushin's city of origin, Moscow. Grushin uses various Russian expressions, greetings, and food names and retains the original Rus-

sian casting these words or phrases in italics while using the Latin alphabet. Hansen probes the possible audience for Grushin's text: one is a bilingual reader and a second an Anglophone reader for whom the Russian phrases create an effect of *ostranennie*. In this chapter Hansen focuses on wordplay in the novel, specifically translingual wordplay – playing with Russian in English, she also focuses on Grushin's use of proper names and diminutives in the novel, and looks at cultural allusions, puns, and other idioms. She also analyzes the translation of *The Dream Life of Sukhanov* into Russian by Elena Petrova, and how those idioms that were clarified for English language readers are turned back into Russian where they no longer need elucidation.

The third chapter of Hansen's work examines three works by Russian-speaking writers: Andrei Makine's *Le testament français* (1995), Michael Idov's *Ground Up* (2009), and Olga Grjasnowa's *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt* (2012). The focus of this chapter is an examination of the theme of translation and interpretation in multiple translingual novels by Russian-speaking authors in French, English, and German, which often refer to translation as a form of trickery. Mirroring Makine's own experience of publishing in French, Makine's protagonist Alyosha M. originally writes a novel in French but it elicits no interest from publishers until he creates a story that has been translated from Russian. Idov's protagonist Mark, a Russian speaker, masquerades as a speaker of Slovenian to interpret for a client in court. Grjasnowa's heroine Maria Kogan is also an interpreter, and translation is important to her identity.

The fourth chapter focuses on the Russian writer Zinaida Lindén's Swedish-language novel *För många länder sedan* (Many countries ago, 2013). Hansen examines the fact that Lindén chose to write in a language that has a significantly smaller readership than that of her native language. This would seem to go against the logic dictated by the great émigré writers like Brodsky and

Nabokov who chose to either sacrifice for their native language even if they no longer lived in their country of origin or abandon it in favor of a language that had an even greater readership.

Hansen's next two chapters move away from the translingual context of Russian émigré writers, placing a greater focus on languages such as French and Arabic. The fifth chapter deals with Rabih Alameddine's novel *An Unnecessary Woman* (2014) about an unpublished translator. Alameddine's narrator uses references and allusions to various literary works of high modernism, but she is also strongly influenced by a French translation of Dostoevsky, which she compares favorably to Constance Garnett's famous English version. In the next chapter, Hansen moves on to look at translingualism in the popular genre of Nordic fiction through an analysis of the Swedish writer Andreas Norman's thriller *En rasande eld* (2013; Eng. trans. *Into a Raging Blaze*, 2014), in which the protagonist becomes suspected of involvement in a terrorist network. In her final chapter, Hansen returns to contemporary Russian writing in her discussion of Eugene Vodolazkin's *Laurus* and its inclusion of poli-linguistic heritage in ancient Slavic.

In addition to its seven chapters, *Reading Novels Translingually* contains a comprehensive introduction and a conclusion, as well as thorough footnotes and a useful bibliography. Some chapters are much longer than others; a few of the chapters are continuations of articles the author has previously published. Hansen has written an important study examining a major trend in world literature, and she identifies the terms of translingual literature, paving the way for future scholars to approach the subject critically.

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