

Leon Burnett and Emily Lygo (eds)

The Art of Accommodation

Literary Translation in Russia

This collection of essays is a seminal contribution to the establishment of translation theory within the field of Russian literature and culture. It brings together the work of established academics and younger scholars from the United Kingdom, Russia, the United States, Sweden and France in an area of academic study that has been largely neglected in the Anglophone world. The essays in the volume are linked by the conviction that the introduction of any new text into a host culture should always be considered in conjunction with adjustments to prevailing conventions within that culture. The case studies in the collection, which cover literary translation in Russia from the eighteenth century to the twentieth century, demonstrate how Russian culture has interpreted and accommodated translated texts, and how translators and publishers have used translation as a means of responding to the literary, social and political conditions of their times. In integrating research in the area of translated works more closely into the study of Russian literature and culture generally, this publication represents an important development in current research.

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The Art of Accommodation

Russian Transformations: Literature, Thought, Culture

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PETER LANG

Oxford · Bern · Berlin · Bruxelles · Frankfurt am Main · New York · Wien

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Note on Transliteration

The transliteration of Cyrillic characters has followed the Library of Congress system, without the use of diacritics. Russian surnames established in English usage, where they differ significantly from the transliterated form, have been preserved, e.g. Herzen, instead of Gertsen. The names of tsars are given in their customary English form, e.g. Alexander, instead of Aleksandr.

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The Art of Accommodation: Introduction

Literary translation refers to a process by which a work of foreign origin is accommodated within a host culture. As such, it is part, but always only part, of the process of cultural assimilation. Translation does not occur in a vacuum. In all countries and cultures and, indeed, in all literary periods within cultures, there are local variations in the ways that the process of literary translation and consequently its product may be regarded. Russia is no exception to the rule. The assimilation of the literary works of other nations has been, and continues to be, an essential element in the establishment of its national identity, politically, socially and culturally. In Russia, works of foreign literature have, at times, been taken as models and, at other times, been used as a foil to demonstrate the undesirable, but however viewed, the act of receiving and responding to foreign texts has been integral to the literary process. No comprehensive study of Russia can afford to ignore the contribution made by translators and translation in the development of its literature, and concomitantly in the evolution of its cultural and social identity.

The volume does not present a chronological account of literary translation in Russia: this has already been established. Iurii Levin's *Istoriia russkoi perevodnoi khudozhestvennoi literatury* and *Russkie perevodchiki XIX veka i razvitie khudozhestvennogo perevoda* cover the period up to the end of the nineteenth century, and Maurice Friedberg's *Literary Translation in Russia* provides an historical introduction to translation in the eighteenth and nineteenth century as background to his study of literary translation in the nineteenth century and especially the Soviet period.¹ Friedberg's study

1 Iurii Levin, ed., *Istoriia russkoi perevodnoi khudozhestvennoi literatury. Drevniaia Rus'. XVIII vek. Tom I: Proza. Tom II. Dramaturgiia. Poeziia*. (St Petersburg:

addresses not only the development and chronology of literary translation, but also the theoretical perspectives on translation and the practicalities of being a translator, in general and specifically in Russia and the Soviet Union. At the close of his study, he touches upon the mutual interdependence of translations into Russian and the status of Russian literature and culture:² this is the departure point for the present study.

The essays in this volume are linked by the central underlying assumptions they share: that literary translation is a process that entails the accommodation of a new text by a host culture, and that this involves an accompanying adjustment to prevailing conventions within the culture. The idea of accommodation, then, resonates with two primary implications: on the one hand, it acknowledges the fact that a foreign text is housed by a new culture, and, on the other hand, it asserts that the text is manipulated in the process of translation to accommodate the particular conditions of that culture – Russian culture in the current study – at any given moment.

Literary translations, whether they reinforce the cultural norms that obtain within the society at the time of their publication or serve as vehicles to engender new and radical expectations, are subject to a process of accommodation. This process necessarily involves both *adaptation* – the adjustment that has to be made to the text to render its existence meaningful in a second language – and *reception* – the provision of a place for it to reside. These are the two fundamental senses in which the concept of accommodation is applied in this volume, but the dictionary furnishes further nuances that are equally applicable. Thus, we find in the *Oxford*

Russian Academy of Sciences Institute of Russian Literature, 1995); Iurii Levin, *Russkie perevodchiki XIX veka i razvitie khudozhestvennogo perevoda* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1985); Maurice Friedberg, *Literary Translation in Russia: A Cultural History* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997). Other works on the history (as opposed to the theory) of literary translation in Russian include Andrei N. Girivenko, ed., *Iz istorii russkogo khudozhestvennogo perevoda pervoi poloviny XIX veka: Epokha romantizma* (Moscow: Nauka, 2002); Iurii Levin, ed., *Na rubezhe XIX i XX vekov: iz istorii mezhdunarodnykh svyazei russkoi literatury. Sbornik nauchnykh trudov* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1991).

2 Friedberg, *Literary Translation in Russia*, 207–10.

English Dictionary ascriptions such as ‘assimilation’, ‘conformity to circumstance’, ‘compromise’, ‘anything which supplies a want, or affords aid’, and, interestingly, ‘the action or power of adapting the eyes to view objects at various distances’; this reminds us that the proximity, or otherwise, of translation to text – geographically, historically, linguistically, or culturally – is an important factor. The translator always works with the material at hand, but the way in which this material is put to use is sometimes at a far remove from its function in another culture. Thus, accommodation can also conform to the *OED* sense of the ‘adaptation of a word, expression, or system to something different from its original purpose’.

In the field of Translation Studies, a preoccupation with the concepts of ‘source text’ and ‘target text’ has become ingrained, and the abbreviations ‘ST’ and ‘TT’ are adopted without interrogation in critical articles. Aleksei Semenenko observes in his contribution to this volume that ‘in the field of literary translation the most common practice of a reviewer or a critic is to compare a translator’s work with the source text and indicate “right” and “wrong” renditions of the original’. As he points out,

this seemingly natural approach does not take into account the actual process of reception and adaptation of a foreign text to the national culture, and demonizes the original as the source of imaginary truth.

The metaphor of accommodation proposes that a translation may be regarded more as an arrival than a departure: the emphasis is not so much upon its ‘source’ in the donor language as in the *resources* of the recipient culture – and the resourcefulness of the translator.

The study of translation has evolved towards an understanding of it as an activity integrated into broader literary and social processes, which enable us to conceive of translation as far more than a linguistic exercise. Since Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere’s assertion that the unit of translation studies is culture,³ the field has broadened to encompass the examination of not only the process of translating, but also the effects of

3 Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere, eds, *Translation, History and Culture* (London: Pinter, 1990), 8.

a translation. Emphasis has shifted towards the receiving culture, which is to say towards the processes of assimilation, the ripples caused by a literary text that is plunged – via translation – into a new cultural setting. Theorists of culture have approached the process of translation from various angles, but largely concur that the focus for the study of translation should lie at the endpoint of the process: the culture that receives a new text.

Iurii Lotman has sketched out five stages in the process of translation from the perspective of the recipient culture. After an initial phase in which foreign works of literature are highly valued and considered superior to anything that has been achieved in the native language, there follow phases of transplantation and assimilation. It is during these two phases that the imported text and the home culture restructure each other as the latter proceeds to appropriate the ideas and ideology expressed in the former. Thereafter, in the final two phases, the host culture becomes increasingly equipped to take on the role of a transmitter itself.⁴

In his understanding of the process of translation, Wolfgang Iser points to the interaction of the two cultures involved in the process. In his conception, translation is not a linear process, but one which involves mutuality, which brings about change for both cultures involved:

a foreign culture is not simply subsumed under one's own frame of reference; instead, the very frame is subjected to alterations in order to accommodate what does not fit. Such a transposition runs counter to the idea of the hegemony of one culture over the other, and hence the notion of translatability emerges as a counter-concept to a mutual superimposing of cultures.⁵

He sees the experience of another culture that is gained through translation as the introduction of one culture to the 'otherness' of one alien to it;

4 Yuri M. Lotman, *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*; trans. Ann Shukman (London: Tauris, 1990), 146–7.

5 Wolfgang Iser, 'On Translatability', *Surfaces*, IV (1994). *Surfaces* is an Electronic Review published by Les Presses de l'Université de Montreal and is available at <<http://www.pum.umontreal.ca/revues/surfaces/index.html>>. The essay was published as 'On Translatability: Variables of Interpretation' in *The European English Messenger* 4 (1): 30–8 (1995).

though he argues that ‘otherness’ is a quality that ‘becomes tangible only in individual manifestations’, he nevertheless illustrates the point with examples of what this encounter might involve: a duality which results in an experience of difference; an exploration of difference that raises the question of why there are such disparities; assimilation, which leads to a politics of cultural relationships; appropriation; and heightened self-awareness, which leads to self-confrontation.⁶ The confrontation of otherness, for Iser, is a productive and transforming encounter for both sides.

Russia’s geographical and historical position at the edge of Europe and on the border of Asia means that both East and West have been perceived, at various times in its history, as close relation and alien other. In this exploration of affinities – whether Slavophile or Westernizing – translation has played a key role, and thus contributed to the evolution of Russian identity. Lawrence Venuti has referred perceptively to this identity-forming power of translation in the life of a culture. In *The Scandals of Translation*, he writes:

A calculated choice of foreign text and translation strategy can change or consolidate literary canons, conceptual paradigms, research methodologies, clinical techniques, and commercial practices in the domestic culture. Whether the effects of a translation prove to be conservative or transgressive depends fundamentally on the discursive strategies developed by the translator, but also on the various factors in their reception [...] and the uses made of the translation in cultural and social institutions, how it is read and taught.⁷

The privileged place of literature in Russian culture, and in particular its well-established, central role in political and social debate, has meant that literary translation has played a leading role in the processes of identity negotiation. From the theatre of Catherine’s court to post-Soviet publishing, the accommodation of foreign literature has sometimes strengthened, sometimes weakened Russia’s sense of its distinctive path of development, its Eastern affinities, or its congruence with the West.

6 Ibid.

7 Lawrence Venuti, *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference* (London: Routledge, 1998), 68.

The metaphor of accommodation, then, challenges the traditional evaluation of the success of a translation on the basis of a comparison of a translator's work with the source text. Translation is seen as an activity which applies to texts but also to cultures. Translations are cultural events with prehistories and consequences; they influence the history of the text translated, but also produce profound changes in the course of a culture's development. The question arises, then, whether or not we can speak of a successful or unsuccessful translation in this broadened sense of the word. David Damrosch has discussed what makes a bad translation, with reference to translation strategy and accommodation within the receiving culture. He acknowledges Lefevere's point that translations are "good" only with respect to a certain place and a certain time, in certain circumstances,⁸ but he maintains that sometimes a translation 'can produce potentially unreadable texts, and [...] can create a separatist mode of translation that undermines the reader's sense of connection to a common human experience' while at other times it 'gets us to no common ground beyond our own local cultural position'.⁹ Damrosch is arguing, then, for a balanced accommodation of a text that manages conflicting pulls upon the text's potential meanings and status. He suggests that, for a translation to be successful, it must contribute to the identity of the receiving culture, neither losing its distinctiveness nor remaining too foreign to have relevance. John Johnston's study of 'Translation as Simulacrum' points to Ezra Pound as having achieved such an accommodation within English poetry by producing accessible versions of unfamiliar poems, which nevertheless breathed new life into the English literary language: 'Pound never translated "into" something already existing in English ... [his] translations are really reconstructions or re-inscriptions intended to expand the expressive possibilities of the English language'.¹⁰ To be successful, the translator needs to have mastered the challenge of adapting the existing idiom to accommodate works that

8 David Damrosch, quoting Lefevere, in *What is World Literature?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 167.

9 Damrosch, *What is World Literature?*, 168.

10 John Johnston, 'Translation as Simulacrum' in Lawrence Venuti, ed., *Rethinking Translation: Discourse, Subjectivity, Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1992), 42–56 (45).

are being introduced into the language to such an extent that the readership comes to consider itself as a partner in the enterprise.

To see translation as an event that happens to texts and cultures, to identify the translator as the agent of accommodation who masters the adaptation of a text, is to envisage a trajectory of movement from origin to new culture, to see the literary work impelled *from* a source outside into the receiving culture. But translation can often also be a return *to* a different source, a gravitational pull that draws it in to the recipient culture at a particular historical period. Lefevere has discussed how the degree to which a foreign writer is accepted in a recipient culture, and therefore how successful a translation is, is determined by that native system's need for such a text.¹¹ The arrival of a text in the host language may seem like the end of a journey, but it can also partake of the nature of a homecoming in response to a philological imperative that restores to the nation something it had temporarily lost. In an essay on 'Word and Culture', in which he remarked famously that poetry is the plough that turns up time, Osip Mandel'shtam, poet and translator, referred metaphorically to that imperative:

The silver trumpet of Catullus – *Ad claras Asiae volumus urbes* – alarms and excites us more forcefully than any Futurist riddle. Such poetry does not exist in Russian. Yet it *must* exist in Russian. I chose a Latin line because it is clearly perceived by the Russian reader as a category of obligation: the imperative rings more vividly in it.¹²

At its most accomplished, and that is what Mandel'shtam is interested in, a poetic translation may serve as plough or trumpet, in the temporally instrumental and existential sense he intends, when an additional resource is perceived at the same time as both a recovery and a restoration: it *must*

11 André Lefevere, 'Mother Courage's Cucumbers: Text, System and Refraction in a Theory of Literature' in Lawrence Venuti, ed., *The Translation Studies Reader* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), 239–55 (243).

12 Osip Mandelstam, *The Complete Critical Prose and Letters*; ed. Jane Gary Harris (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1979), 114.

exist in Russian. Otherwise, as he writes in another essay, 'translation is merely interpolation'.¹³

Mandel'shtam's sense of the imperative for a text to enter a language and a culture is intimately bound up with the timeliness of a translation: that a text or writer is needed at a given cultural moment, contributing foreign ideas, forms or traditions that stimulate the evolution of the native system. Other texts, however, are received successfully into a culture not just at one pivotal moment, but repeatedly, in the different guises of multiple translations. Such texts, commonly referred to as classics, are not timely but timeless: their appeal and relevance seem inexhaustible. With each re-translation, new elements of the classics are revealed that are successfully accommodated within the recipient culture. As Frank Kermode has remarked, '[t]he books we call classics possess [...] an openness to accommodation which keeps them alive under endlessly varying dispositions'.¹⁴ Venuti sees this as true not only for classics within their own language and culture, but also for translated classics accommodated within other systems. The acts of translation and of re-translation serve to refresh and re-cast the text, uncovering and creating new meanings:

[I]n contributing to the canonicity of a foreign text, the translation leaves neither that text nor the receiving situation unaltered. The foreign text undergoes a radical transformation in which it comes to support a range of meanings and values that may have little or nothing to do with those it supported in the foreign culture. And the linguistic choices, literary traditions and cultural values that comprise the translator's interpretation may reinforce or revise the understanding and evaluation of the foreign text that currently prevail in the receiving situation, consolidating readerships or forming new ones in the process.¹⁵

13 See Leon Burnett, 'The Survival of Myth: Mandel'shtam's "Word" and Translation' in Theo Hermans, ed., *The Manipulation of Literature: Studies in Literary Translation* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), 164–97 (175).

14 Quoted in Lawrence Venuti, 'Translation, Interpretation, Canon Formation' in Alexandra Lianeri and Vanda Zajko, eds, *Translation and the Classic: Identity as Change in the History of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 27.

15 Ibid.

To see translation as the art of accommodation means to understand that the significance of any act of translation is found in the interplay of text, time and place. Gabriel Rockhill asserts that '[t]he conceptual network defining the basic elements and modalities of what is generally understood as translation is necessarily dependent on a historical situation',¹⁶ and that '[i]n order for a translation to be recognized as such and considered worthy of the name, it has to abide by the broad parameters operative in a particular community'.¹⁷ Thus, two essential, and inter-related, criteria, central to the idea of accommodation, provide a framework for thinking about translation: the historical situation and the social context.

Communities do, of course, come into conflict – both with themselves and with other communities –, but the basic point remains unchanged: just as the translator never works in a historical vacuum, *translation is never an isolated soliloquy uninformed by a community*.¹⁸

From the eighteenth century to the twentieth the engagement of the literary community in Russia with questions of translation formed and changed, reflecting historical and social concerns that contributed to the shaping of Russian culture at large. It was not always a case of 'reflection', however, for some of the most significant translation projects of the last two and a half centuries may be regarded as salient interventions in the nation's literature affecting its historical development. The following survey of literary translation in Russia is seen through the prism of translation as accommodation, and seeks to foreground the interactions and interdependencies that exist between literary translation in Russia and Russian literature and culture. The chapters in this collection develop in detail case studies which belong to this history.

Aleksandr Pushkin once remarked that 'we have no ancient literature': 'Our literature appeared suddenly in the eighteenth century, like

16 From the 'Translator's Preface', in Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*; translated with an introduction by Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004), vii.

17 Ibid., viii.

18 Ibid., italics added.

the Russian nobility without ancestors or a pedigree.¹⁹ In the absence of any national pedigree, letters patent (to extend Pushkin's metaphor) were granted in what Pushkin dubbed the 'Age of Encouragement' to books of foreign provenance, especially works emanating from France. In conjunction with the import of foreign ideas, came the translation of literary and philosophical texts into Russian. In this way, translation acquired in the second half of the eighteenth century a strategic importance for the first time in Russia, when Catherine the Great indicated the appropriateness of accommodating major works of the Enlightenment within the purview of the Russian court.²⁰ The establishment of the Society for the Translation of Foreign Books in 1768, under her patronage, was symptomatic both of an engagement with Western thought and of an ambition to expedite the development of an indigenous literature. Within four years, the Society had published more than forty titles. The success of the enterprise was so great that, as has been wryly noted, 'Moscow reported an epidemic as deadly as the recent outbreak of plague – the spurning of Russian scholars, artists and artisans in favour of foreigners'.²¹

The initial phase of translation during Russia's Enlightenment prepared the ground for a Golden Age of translation that ran in parallel, in the first half of the nineteenth century, with the Golden Age of literature when the emergence of a succession of authors marked the arrival of Russian literature on the world stage. Recognition of the achievements of Pushkin, Lermontov and Gogol' in the West, however, was slow in coming. In 1840, Thomas Carlyle, concluding his third lecture 'On Heroes and Hero-Worship', lamented the fact that, unlike Italy which had 'produced its Dante', Russia lacked a 'voice of genius, to be heard of all men and times'.²²

19 Tatiana Wolff, ed., *Pushkin on Literature* (London: Methuen, 1971), 272. Pushkin made an exception of *The Lay of Igor's Campaign*.

20 Catherine also promoted the development of Russian drama through the introduction of foreign models; see the chapter by Aleksei Evstratov in this volume.

21 W. Gareth Jones, *Nikolay Novikov: Enlightener of Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 82.

22 Thomas Carlyle, *Works (The Ashburton Edition) in Seventeen Volumes. Volume III, On Heroes, Hero-Worship and The Heroic in History* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1889), 94.

In this assertion, he was, of course, mistaken. With the benefit of hindsight, the explanation as to why the voice of Russia had not at that time been heard in England is obvious: if Russian literature did indeed lack a voice, as Carlyle asserted, it was the voice of a translator equal to the occasion. The absence of a translator 'of genius', rather than of a poet-hero, rendered the nation 'dumb'. In contrast, Russia possessed one of the most able and assiduous translators of the period, Vasilii Zhukovskii, who stands out in the history of its literature for his work as a creative translator. His translations were considered to be on a par with their foreign models and, in their sheer range, they answered the need for the kind of cultural enlargement that the assimilation of foreign works brings and which paves the way to the establishment of a national literature.

Zhukovskii regarded the translator's task as one demanding creativity equal to, but not identical with, that of the original poet.²³ He justified his own practice by reference to the re-creative power of the imagination. In this he had the approbation of Pushkin, who referred to imitation as 'a hope of finding new worlds, following in the steps of genius, or the experiencing, even more lofty in its humility, of a desire to study one's model and thus give it a second lease of life.'²⁴ Zhukovskii endorsed a view of the *poetic* translator as a rival, rather than a slave.²⁵ In his choice of Western models, he reacted against French poetry, which he regarded as having had a debilitating effect on Russian literature. His first translation from the literature of Western Europe, completed in 1802, was of Thomas Gray's 'Elegy, written in a Country Churchyard',²⁶ but it was to the poetry of

23 V. A. Zhukovskii, *Sobranie sochinenii v chetyrekh tomakh* (Moscow, 1960), IV, 410.

24 Wolff, ed., *Pushkin on Literature*, 401.

25 'Without fear of contradiction, we allow ourselves to insist that it is possible for the verse-imitator to be an *original* author, even though he has written nothing of his own. The translator *in prose* is a slave; the translator *in verse* – a rival.' V. A. Zhukovskii 'O basne i basniakh Krylova', *Vestnik Evropy* (1809), No. 9. See V. A. Zhukovskii, *Sobranie sochinenii v chetyrekh tomakh: tom chetvertyi* (Moscow and Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1960), 402–18 (410).

26 Zhukovskii made a second translation of the elegy in 1839. All his translations of English poetry are printed, with the originals on facing pages, in V. A. Zhukovskii, *Angliiskaia poeziia v perevodakh V. A. Zhukovskogo: Sbornik*; sostavl. K. N. Atarovoii

German Romanticism that he devoted his main attention. His first translated ballad was 'Liudmila' (1808), a free version of Bürger's 'Lenore', in which the heroine's eventual fate is to accompany her dead lover on a final ride, not to a blissful life together, but to the burial chamber. The ballad's narrator asks rhetorically: 'Where is your bridal crown? A grave – your house, a corpse – your groom'. Liudmila's fate, as the conclusion to the ballad makes clear, is recompense for a life in which she refused to accept in her heart that love is immortal. The change of title and the change of narrative location from medieval Germany to medieval Russia gave notice of an incipient nationalism that was to play a significant part in the development of Russian Romanticism. Zhukovskii returned to the theme of Bürger's 'Lenore' in his third ballad translation in 1812.²⁷ On this occasion he gave the heroine the name Svetlana and the ballad the happy ending that the first version (and the original) lacked. In 'Svetlana', the heroine achieves a victory over the dream-death that is Liudmila's. Zhukovskii set out the moral of the tale in a postscript: 'Here unhappiness is a false dream; happiness – an awakening'.²⁸

The absence of a strongly developed national literature at the end of the eighteenth century explains to a large extent Zhukovskii's life-long engagement as a translator of foreign poetry, an occupation that extended from the early translations of works of contemporary or near-contemporary German and English poets to the late translations, in the 1840s, of epic works from Ancient Greece and the Orient.²⁹ His translation of the

and A. A. Gugnina (Moscow: Izd. Rudomino/ OAO Izd. Raduga, 2000). For an examination of Zhukovskii's translations of English romantic poets and his accommodation of their politics, see Brian James Baer's chapter in this volume.

27 Zhukovskii had translated Schiller's 'Kassandra' in the interval.

28 Pavel Katenin produced a version of the same ballad. His renaming of the heroine as Ol'ga was motivated by a preference similar to Zhukovskii's for a euphonious Russian name. Pushkin preferred Katenin's 'remarkable' translation to Zhukovskii's 'inaccurate but charming imitation, which changed it in the way that Byron changed *Faust* in *Manfred*, weakening the spirit and form of its original'. Quoted from Wolff, ed., *Pushkin on Literature*, 335.

29 Between 1809 and 1833 Zhukovskii translated all of Schiller's ballads. During this period he also translated ballads by Goethe, Uhland and Bürger. From 1834 to 1852,

Odyssey, however, was not the first, nor necessarily the most esteemed, version of a Homeric epic to appear in Russia in the first half of the nineteenth century. Nikolai Gnedich's version of the *Iliad*, 'the *magnum opus* which established his reputation as a literary figure',³⁰ was a landmark translation of the romantic period. When Gnedich's translation, on which he had first embarked in 1807, was finally published in 1829, Pushkin wrote a short notice, printed in the second issue of *Literaturnaia gazeta* for 1830, in which he referred to it as a 'book which is bound to exercise [...] an important influence on our native literature'.³¹ At the same time, Pushkin wrote to Gnedich praising the work as 'good for Russia', but apologising for his lack of knowledge of the Greek language that 'prevents me from undertaking a full-scale analysis of your *Iliad*'.³² Nevertheless, this reservation did not stop him from penning a tribute in verse in which, employing an unusual analogy for the translation process, he likened the translator to Moses on Mount Sinai and thus, by implication, Homer to God. 'To Gnedich' commences with the line 'With Homer long you conversed alone'³³ and proceeds to express the fear that Gnedich would

he showed greater interest in the composition of large narrative works – *poemy* and tales in verse – than in shorter, lyrical forms. In this period, he adapted the Indian tale 'Nala and Damayanti' (1841) and 'Rustam and Sohrab' (1847) – both from German versions – and he translated the *Odyssey* (1842–8) from a German interlinear text.

30 Alessandra Tosi, 'At the Origins of the Russian Gothic Novel: Nikolai Gnedich's *Don Corrado de Gerra* (1803)', in Neil Cornwell, ed., *The Gothic-Fantastic in Nineteenth-Century Russian Literature* (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1999), 59–82 (59). Tosi lists excerpts from Thomson's *The Seasons*, Young's *Night Thoughts*, and an incomplete translation of Gray's 'Elegy, written in a Country Churchyard' as being among his translations. For a fuller account, see I. I. Tolstoi, 'Gnedich kak perevodchik *Iliady*', in Gomer, *Iliada*, perevod N. I. Gnedich (Moscow and Leningrad, 1935), 101–12 and A. N. Egunov, *Gomer v russkikh perevodakh XVIII–XIX vekov* (Moscow and Leningrad, 1964), 147–295.

31 Wolff, ed., *Pushkin on Literature*, 232.

32 Letter to Gnedich, 6 January 1830. *Ibid.*, 278.

33 Compare Exodus 24:18: 'And Moses went into the midst of the cloud, and gat him up into the mount: and Moses was in the mount forty days and forty nights.' As Michael Wachtel points out, the opening is reminiscent of Gnedich's own poem, 'To my Foreign Guests', which includes the line: 'I conversed with Homer and Nature'.

smash his 'tablets' in frustration at the sight of the frivolous behaviour of his 'senseless children', that is to say, of the reading public. It concludes by reassuring the reader that the peaceful, nature-loving poet did not, in fact, repeat Moses' angry act of destruction.

Pushkin, as is well known, took a lively interest in all aspects of literary production, from the source of the poet's creativity to the business of the bookseller's trade. A significant part of his deliberations on the current state of literature was concerned with the reception of foreign works, especially the translation and imitation of influential models. Although his most-quoted remark on the topic of translation is the aphoristic statement that translators are 'the post-horses of enlightenment',³⁴ his letters and jottings afford manifold examples of the close attention he gave to a critical – and often polemical – analysis of individual authors and literary works, particularly in the 1830s, when, as one biographer has commented, he 'was minded, while not abandoning literature, to refashion himself as a historian'.³⁵ Typical was his rounding on Samuel Johnson ('an exceedingly rude man') for his vituperations against the author of *The Poems of Ossian*. Ahead of his time, Pushkin recognized that quibbling over whether Macpherson's work was 'a translation, an imitation, or his own composition' was an issue of secondary importance to a consideration of the work's accommodation right across Europe, where 'everybody read and re-read [the poem] with delight'. Nevertheless, despite his rebuke of Johnson, Pushkin concluded his remarks on the literary controversy with a call for the emergence in Russia of critics of the stature of a Johnson or an Addison.³⁶

Pushkin's most remarkable venture into translation criticism, however, was an article on which he had been working at the time of his death and

See Michael Wachtel, *A Commentary to Pushkin's Lyric Poetry, 1826–1836* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012), 242. Pushkin was less kind in an unpublished epigram where he contrasted Gnedich, who had had only the use of his left eye since his youth, with blind Homer, and his 'one-eyed' translation with the original epic.

34 Wolff, ed., *Pushkin on Literature*, 277.

35 T. J. Binyon, *Pushkin: A Biography* (London: Harper Collins, 2002), 365–6.

36 Pushkin's comments were published anonymously in *Literaturnaia gazeta*, No. 5 (1830). See Wolff, ed., *Pushkin on Literature*, 276–7.

which, edited by Zhukovskii, was published posthumously in *Sovremennik* in 1837. In 'On Milton and on Chateaubriand's translation of *Paradise Lost*', Pushkin displayed a familiarity with current theoretical debates about literary translation as well as an awareness of the practice of *les belles infidèles* in France, as the following extract demonstrates:

Now (an unheard-of precedent) the leading writer in France translates Milton *word for word* and announces that line-by-line translation would have been the consummation of his art, had he been able to achieve it! Such humility in a French writer, the prime master of his trade, must have greatly astonished the champions of *improved translations* and will probably have an important influence on literature.³⁷

His favourable critique of Chateaubriand's translation, a work which, it is to be noted, had appeared in print only in 1836, had an assurance and authority to it that came from a well-informed reading of contemporary French literature which enabled him to contrast the latest interpretation of Milton with earlier attempts.³⁸

Concerned that 'of late its influence has been slight [...] confined only to translations and some imitations', Pushkin did much, in a series of critical pieces that he wrote in the 1830s, to reinstate French literature as a model worthy of emulation.³⁹ There were dissenting voices to this view, Gogol' and Belinskii in particular, who, from different perspectives and for different motives, took pride in a home-grown nationalism and resented what they regarded as interference from the outside. Nevertheless, the tide was turning: the influence of Byron and Scott was on the ebb, while the

37 Ibid., 453.

38 'Of all great foreign authors Milton was the most unfortunate as far as France was concerned. [...] What was done to him by Alfred de Vigny, unceremoniously placed by French critics on a level with W. Scott? How was he presented by Victor Hugo, another favourite of the Parisian public? Maybe readers have forgotten both *Cinq-Mars* and *Cromwell* and are therefore unable to judge of the absurdity of Victor Hugo's pictures.' Ibid., 453-4.

39 Ibid., 397. His critical observations on foreign works were not, however, limited to French literature. He wrote, for *Sovremennik*, a review of a new translation of a book by Silvio Pellico and a lengthy account of John Tanner's narrative, based on the French translation (Paris, 1835).

reception of Eugene Sue and George Sand could be said by the 1840s to be in full flood. The works in translation of the latter pair would retain their popular appeal for the remainder of the nineteenth century. Turgenev's love affair with French literature (as well as with one of its most famous opera singers) ensured that translations and imitations from that source, especially given the increasing respect accorded to the genre of realism, would enjoy the recommendation of one of the most prominent novelists of the age.⁴⁰ It is hardly surprising, in this context, to learn that Théophile Gautier, when he attended a ball in Moscow in the late 1850s, had his own verse quoted to him by a masked lady. As Gautier reminded himself, in resisting the charms of the mysterious figure, 'the Russians read a great deal, and [...] the least French authors have a larger circle of readers in St. Petersburg and Moscow than in Paris itself'.⁴¹

Dostoevskii's debut on the literary scene came with his translation of Balzac's *Eugenie Grandet* in 1844, two years before his own *Poor Folk* and *The Double* were published, and, despite (or, perhaps, because of) a strong inclination to Slavophile ideology, he continued to the end of his days to entertain a conviction that Russia would benefit from works of foreign provenance. In his last public pronouncement on Russian literature, he praised Pushkin for his universal sympathy, which 'makes him a national poet'. His 'Pushkin speech', delivered on 8 June 1880 at a meeting of the Society of Lovers of Russian Literature, offered an indirect riposte to Carlyle's accusation that Russia was a nation of 'dumb greatness': its 'genius', as evidenced in its hero-poet, lay in a capacity, unparalleled even by 'creative geniuses of immense magnitude', such as Shakespeare, Cervantes and Schiller, for accommodating the creations of other nations:

40 On Turgenev's importance for literary translation in Russia, see the chapters by Leon Burnett and Natalia Olshanskaya in this volume.

41 Théophile Gautier, *Voyage en Russie*, 2 vols (Paris: Charpentier, 1867). The English translation is from vol. 7 (*Travels in Russia. Belgium and Holland: A Day in London*) of *The Complete Works*; trans. and ed. S. C. de Sumichrast (London: Athenaeum Press, 1900–3, 12 v.), II, 83.

The very greatest of these European poets could never exemplify as intensely as Pushkin the genius of another people – even a people that might be near at hand – the spirit of the people, all the hidden depths of that spirit and all its longing to fulfill its destiny. On the contrary, when the European poets deal with other nationalities they most often instilled in them their own nationality and interpreted them from their own national standpoint. Even Shakespeare's Italians, for instance, are almost to a man the same as Englishmen. Pushkin alone, of all the poets of the world, possesses the quality of embodying himself fully within another nationality.⁴²

Elsewhere, Dostoevskii proposed a model for translation that was consistent with the central idea expressed in the 'Pushkin speech,' namely that 'the capacity to respond to the whole world' – or the art of accommodation – was 'the principal capacity of our nationality'.⁴³ His view of translation was based on a fundamental asymmetry in which '[o]n the one hand, Russia displayed an ability to *absorb* (or assimilate) the genius of other languages; but, on the other, the material of Russian literature was *resistant* to any accommodation in other languages'.⁴⁴

If the literary history of Russia (as indeed of many other European countries) is notable, in the first half of the nineteenth century, for the enthusiastic accommodation of two British authors with titles of nobility to their names – Lord Byron and Sir Walter Scott, then the second half of the century is marked by a comparable phenomenon involving a professional writer from further afield whose credentials were democratic in the extreme. The coming of Edgar Allan Poe helped to prepare the way for the transition from an era steeped in compendious works of heart-rending realism to one susceptible to the more recondite nuances of symbolism, decadence and degeneration. The first substantial attempt to introduce the American author to the Russian reading public was made by Dostoevskii, who, in 1861, published three of Poe's tales in a translation by Mikhailovskii,

42 Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *A Writer's Diary*; trans. Kenneth Lantz (London: Quartet Books, 1995), 1292.

43 Ibid., 1291.

44 See Leon Burnett, 'Dostoevsky's "New Word": A Short and Curious Note on Language Acquisition,' *New Comparison*, 29 (2000), 81–6 (82).