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# Byron's *Don Juan* in Russian and the 'Soviet school of translation'

Susanna Witt

Acknowledging the significance of context and of translators as agents, this article is concerned with the establishment of 'translational facts' (Toury 1995) and its relation to canon formation in Russian culture of the Soviet period. The translational facts examined are the two complete renditions of Byron's *Don Juan* to appear during the Soviet era: Georgii Shengeli's version from 1947 and Tatiana Gnedich's from 1959. The context in which they are considered is the development of the so-called Soviet school of translation as a concept, a process which roughly coincided with the intervening period. Drawing on Russian archival sources, the study offers a reconsideration of the 'Soviet school of translation' from perspectives beyond its own self-understanding and official status and looks at it as a construct with a complex history of its own. The analysis shows how translational facts may become signs in the target culture and how this, in the case of Byron, affected the formation of the Soviet translational canon.

**Keywords:** translation history, Russia, Soviet school of translation, translational fact, Byron, Shengeli, Gnedich, canon formation

History can only take things in the gross;  
But could we know them in detail, perchance  
In balancing the profit and the loss,  
War's merit it by no means might enhance,  
[...]  
(Byron, *Don Juan*, VIII: 3)

## Introduction

This article takes as its point of departure the axiomatic claim that translations should be studied as "facts of the target culture" (Toury 1995). A decisive statement in the development of translation studies as a discipline, it has been

problematized and debated further within the framework of a growing awareness of the significance of the social, cultural, and historical contexts in which translations are produced, and also of translators as agents, sometimes referred to as the 'social turn' (e.g., Merkle 2008). There are, indeed, reasons to ask how a specific translation becomes 'a fact' of the target culture and what we mean by referring to it as such. These questions will be discussed in the present article with reference to the context of Russian culture during the Soviet period.<sup>1</sup> The general aim here is to elucidate the interplay between 'translational facts' and context in the creation of a translational canon in Soviet culture. The translations I will focus on are the two complete renditions of Byron's *Don Juan* to appear during the Soviet era: Georgii Shengeli's version from 1947 and Tatiana Gnedich's from 1959, both issued by the State Publishing House for Literature (GIKhL). The context in which I will consider them is the development of the so-called Soviet school of translation as a concept, involving translation scholarship as well as translation critique. The 'Soviet school of translation' became an official object of pride which has retained its high status into post-Soviet times, much in the same way as the Soviet space program is still commonly regarded as a major achievement of the Soviet system. Unlike the ideological fetish of Soviet cosmonautics, however, which has been the subject of several studies (see Gerovitch 2011), the 'Soviet school of translation' is a piece of Soviet heritage which lives on largely unquestioned and unconceptualized. It has been characterized as a more or less fixed entity by researchers drawing on writings originating from within Soviet translation scholarship of the 1950s–1970s (e.g., Leighton 1991). It has generally been overlooked, however, that the concept as such has a history which needs to be studied not only by surveying printed (and often later revised) contributions to Soviet translation theory (as in Balliu 2005) but also by looking into archival material. Drawing on such sources, mainly from files pertaining to the Soviet Writers' Union, I will provide a reconsideration of the Soviet school of translation from perspectives beyond its own self-understanding and official status and look at it as a construct with a complex history of its own. In what follows, I will deal with one aspect of its early development, attempting to shed light on what could be called a battle over the concept, which was intimately linked to questions of power and ideology in post-war Soviet culture. In this context, the two translations of *Don Juan* took on specific significance.

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1. Toury's 'translational fact' was coined in analogy with the Russian formalist Iurii Tynianov's concept of 'literary fact' (Tynianov [1924] 2000).

## Shengeli's Byron

Byron is an iconic foreign author in Russian culture, on a par with Dante, Shakespeare, and Goethe. Widely translated beginning in the early 1820s, his impact on Russian original literature, especially on Pushkin and Lermontov, is a vast and often studied topic, a major contribution to which was Viktor Zhirmunskii's 1924 book *Byron and Pushkin*. Official Soviet views held Byron, along with Victor Hugo and Percy Bysshe Shelley, to be a "progressive romantic" (Terras 1991: 175). In the second half of the 1930s, which witnessed a return to the classics, Byron, Pushkin, and Lermontov "emerged as emblematic figures for the new times" (Clark 2011: 324). A Byron cult flourished in the Soviet press and several editions of Byron's work appeared around the 150th anniversary of the poet's birth in 1938. Among these was a two-volume edition of his poems translated by Georgii Shengeli (Bairon 1940), who himself took part in the celebrations of Byron within the Translator's Section of the Soviet Writer's Union, which he headed at the time.<sup>2</sup>

Having previously authored 15 collections of verse, Shengeli published no new poetry of his own after 1935. As was the case with many other poets-turned-translators, his classically oriented, unpolitical verse was considered incompatible with official literary dogma after the First Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934 (see Perel'muter 1997). Shengeli had to rely for a living on his other activities as a translator, literary scholar, teacher, and editor at the Department of Literature of the Peoples of the USSR within the structure of the State Publishing House for Literature. The translation of *Don Juan* was probably begun in 1941, judging by the fact that Shengeli notes in his diary entry for 21 June of that year that, when he received a phone call telling him of the first German bombings of Soviet towns, he had just translated the following words from the first Canto (Octave 133): "Few mortals know what end they could be at" (translated as *Nikto ne vedaet, kak on pokonchit zhizn'* [Nobody knows how he will end his life], cited in Perel'muter 2011: 119). Shengeli spent the war years (1942–1944) in evacuation in Central Asia, where he completed work on the translation in 1943. In the afterword, dated January 1945, Shengeli explains his translation philosophy and translation principles (Bairon 1947: 522–535). He takes as his critical point of departure the most widespread translation of *Don Juan* at the time: Pavel Kozlov's version from 1888/1889, which he deems "extremely inexact (*netochen*) in the narrow sense of the word" and, at the same time, "altogether false from the artistic point of view." Shengeli illustrates his notions of inexactitude (*netochnost'*) and "artistic inferiority" (*khudozhestvennaia nepolnotsennost'*) with several examples from Kozlov, who did not reproduce the original's octave form and purportedly "conveyed only 60 %

2. Russian State Archive for Literature and Art (henceforth: RGALI). F. 631. Op. 21. D. 22. L.1.

of its content.” This proves fatal for the Russian image of Byron who, according to Shengeli, was very concerned about the details in his work. He describes Byron as not painting with “broad brush strokes,” but rather “engraving on a copper plate,” concluding: “He is as exact as if he were following a protocol” (*On protokol’no tochen*, Bairon 1947:525).<sup>3</sup>

Shengeli demonstrates distortions in Kozlov’s version also in relation to action and psychology and criticizes its poor vocabulary, banality of phrases, and “poeticisms.” As for its form, Shengeli points out the weaknesses of Kozlov’s translation in relation to the Russian tradition of octaves as developed by Pushkin, Lermontov, and Fet. Shengeli was an expert in the field, having authored several books on verse theory, notably *Treatise on Russian Verse* (Shengeli 1923), to which he explicitly refers here. Byron’s octave form, he argues in the afterword, is the single most important trait to preserve in translation. Its three pairs of rhymed lines with a concluding, contrasting pair (abababcc) creates the psychological effect of cheated expectation (*obmanutoe ozhidanie*), which is especially suited to ironic works such as *Don Juan*, and it sets a tone of “relaxed chatter” and “lighthearted conversation with the reader” (Bairon 1947:530).

At the basis of Shengeli’s professed method and translation philosophy is a concern for the effect a translation produces in the target culture, put forward here as a ‘theory of functional similarity’ (*teoriia funktsional’nogo podobiia*). Shengeli rejects the prevailing principle that a work be translated in the meter of the original (*razmerom podlinnika*), arguing that systems of versification are often very different in different languages, as are properties of the languages themselves, such as the most frequent word length. For example, attempts at copying the syllabic meter of French and Polish resulted in Russian renditions that were paradoxically *not* similar (due to differences in intonation and stress), and they were perceived as strange in Russian. Even when the systems of versification are basically the same and the translation uses the original meter, the real rhythm may not coincide with the original one due to its dependence on metrical structure and expressive intonation. Moreover, Shengeli argues, the meter in itself is not an element of a particular style. One and the same meter may be applied in “diametrically opposed” works, as demonstrated by Pushkin (Bairon 1947:532). In these considerations, Shengeli clearly draws upon his own research as presented in his *Technique of Versification*, published shortly before (Shengeli 1940).

3. Here, Shengeli depicts Byron almost as a representative of the Soviet literary grouping LEF, which in the 1920s propagated a ‘factographical’ literature. Byron, he points out, incorporates in his verse whole phrases from authentic documents, for example in the passages about the shipwreck: “literally all details he borrows from real accounts of various sea catastrophes given by captains” (Bairon 1947:525).

The principle of 'functional similarity' means that it is necessary first to identify the character of the original verse — "slow or fast, smooth or jerky, solemn or impassioned" — then to relate this verse to a particular genre, and finally to "detect the degree to which it is traditional" in the given genre. The choice of meter in the target language should then be guided by a concern that it be functionally approximate to the original meter in these terms, being at the same time perceived as "*our own* meter, easy and natural" (Bairon 1947: 532). For the iambic pentameter of Byron's *Don Juan*, Shengeli chooses iambic hexameter, as in his translations of the same author's *Beppo* and *The Vision of Judgement*. These works, he explains, are very different from *The Corsair* and *Lara*, the "heroic verses" of which he had rendered correspondingly in Russian iambic pentameter in order to retain their "heavy progression" (Bairon 1947: 533). By contrast, the iambic pentameter of *Beppo* and *Don Juan* is light, conversational, and seemingly careless, with flexible phrasing, often interrupted by bracketed insertions and occasional six-foot lines "ironically stretching out in a dactylic ending" (Bairon 1947: 533). Every word "is playful" (*igraet*) and this characteristic should, according to Shengeli, be reflected in the translation. Russian iambic pentameter, Shengeli argues, is not able to accommodate all of this while retaining the lightness of character. Iambic hexameter, however, is well-suited for this, and "it would be sheer pedantry and treason to the tasks of translation to burden the verse, to make the intonation crude and lower the degree of exactness in order to satisfy a scheme [of iambic pentameter]!" (Bairon 1947: 533). To bolster his argument, Shengeli cites Pushkin's statement on hexameter, stressing its "serpentine quality" (*izvivistost*), "swiftness" (*provorstvo*), and "the sting of the rhyme" (*zhalo rifmy*) — all highly suitable for conveying Byron's sharp and bitter irony. As his own model, Shengeli mentions Pushkin's poem "Autumn" ("*Osen*") written in six-foot octaves. *Eugene Onegin* serves as a general model for recreating Byron's extremely heterogeneous and rich vocabulary. Shengeli estimates that *Onegin* contains 6,000 lexemes (compared to 10,000–12,000 lexemes in *Don Juan*).

Finally, Shengeli expounds on the possibilities of conveying Byron's wordplay. Contrary to "common views that wordplay is untranslatable," Shengeli declares that it is translatable or at least allows for equivalent substitution (*ravnotsennyi substitut*). For example, in order to recreate Byron's evocative names, he proposes using Russian word roots with an "English ring" which are, at the same time, semantically approximate to the original. Examples of Shengeli's application of this strategy include his rendering of Byron's Rackrhyme as "*Ritmderi*" ('tear the rhythm'), Duke of Dash as *gertsog of Nagl* ('Duke of impudent'), and Miss Tabby as "*Miss O'Spletni*" ('slander'). (Bairon 1947: 535). It is noteworthy that Shengeli, formulating his approach to translation in 1947, significantly predates Western developments such as the various functionalisms of Nida, Reiss and Vermeer, and others.

## The formation of the Soviet school of translation as a concept

Shengeli's translation of *Don Juan* appeared in 1947 in a print run of 55,000 copies and thus practically coincided with the reanimation of the Translators' Section of the Soviet Writers' Union, which had been 'frozen' during the war.<sup>4</sup> An active member of its board since its foundation in 1934, Shengeli had headed this section from 1938 to 1942. The resumed activities of the section prompted professional self-scrutiny, as evidenced by translation scholar Andrei Fedorov's report at one of its first meetings, on 2 February 1948.<sup>5</sup> Fedorov pinpointed what had been achieved to date in "our Soviet theory of translation" and posited it in antonymic relationship to the "pessimistic view" on translation which he maintained was rooted in the ideas of Humboldt and Schleiermacher and which, he argued, led to a "denial of the possibilities of a full-valued translation" (*polnotsennyi perevod*) and to a "formalistic, mechanistic approach to translation." As examples of such "pessimistic" views, he cites representatives of Russian modernism of the 1910s, such as the Symbolists and the Acmeists. Fedorov's statement emphasized the "Russian, Soviet theory of translation" as a completely new phenomenon in the "philological discipline worldwide."<sup>6</sup> Its characteristic traits were, according to Fedorov, a recognition of the principle of translatability; evaluation of a translation from the point of view of its "functional and semantic correspondence (*sootvetstvie*)" with the original; "a systematic use of facts from the history of literature and language and other humanistic scholarship."<sup>7</sup> As for future tasks, Fedorov called upon translation critics in the first place to denounce "every kind of kowtowing (*nizkopoklonstvo*) before foreign scholarship and literature" and [excessive] "reverence for other languages" (*blagogovenie pered inoiazychnym*). Here, translation discourse is clearly informed by the general shift in Soviet cultural politics toward the end of the 1940s known as the *zhdanovshchina*. This austere turn, named after Central Committee secretary Andrei Zhdanov, entailed a tightening of Party control over

4. A Soviet edition of the English original of Byron's *Don Juan* was issued in 1948 by the Foreign Languages Publishing House in Moscow.

5. RGALI. F. 2854. Op. 1. D. 114. L. 1–37. The Leningrad philologist and translation scholar Andrei Fedorov had co-authored the book *The Art of Translation* (*Iskusstvo perevoda*, 1930) with Kornei Chukovskii; the book was later developed into the latter's classical *The High Art* (*Vysokoe iskusstvo*, eds. 1941, 1964, 1968), while Fedorov was to author several works on translation theory with a linguistic focus (1941, 1953, 1958, 1968, 1983).

6. RGALI. F. 2854. Op. 1. D. 114. L. 32.

7. RGALI. F. 2854. Op. 1. D. 114. L. 26–28.

cultural production involving xenophobic and anti-modernist ('anti-formalist') campaigns.<sup>8</sup>

A month later, on 11 March 1948, the Translators' Section held a discussion of Shengeli's new rendition of *Don Juan*. It was introduced by a highly appreciative talk given by translator Ezra Levontin (later published as a review article, Levontin 1948). Among the overall positive responses to the translation and to Levontin's introduction, some critical remarks were made by Ivan Kashkin (1899–1963), translator of American and English literature and head of the Translators' Section at the time. Introducing his points, Kashkin firmly anchored the discussion in the contemporary context:

Let us not forget that we are gathering for comradely matter-of-fact discussions of our translation work after a break of almost seven years, after a number of resolutions concerning literature and art, after the philosophical discussion, and under the circumstances of the present day, which are clear for all of us.<sup>9</sup>

Kashkin first criticized Shengeli's edition for the absence of a foreword that would provide "a general understanding of Byron" and determine the respective degrees of his "progressiveness" and "conservatism," recalling that Karl Marx had said that if Byron had lived longer than his thirty-six years, he would have become a "reactionary bourgeois."<sup>10</sup> Kashkin also criticized Levontin's statement that the figure of Field Marshal Suvorov in Byron's work came through to the Russian reader "in all his humble and wise greatness," featuring an "indissoluble relation between the genius commander and his troops, the people."<sup>11</sup> This claim was, according to Kashkin, based on one felicitous phrase ("He made no answer, but he took the

8. Compare, for example, Zhirmunskii's 1937 piece "Pushkin and Western Literature" (*Pushkin i zapadnaia literatura*) published in *Pushkin. Vremennik Pushkinskoi Komissii* 3, released in connection with the centenary of Pushkin's death, with the spirit of the Pushkin celebrations of 1949 (Pushkin's 150th anniversary), when there was a call for research that focused on "Pushkin's historical unicity and his independence from foreign influences" (N. F. Belchikov at the opening session of the celebrations; cited in Levitt 1989: 167).

9. RGALI. F. 2854. Op. 1. D. 115. L. 3; reference is implicitly made here to milestones of the *zhdanovshchina*: the party resolution against the journals *Zvezda* and *Leningrad* of August 1946 and the 'philosophy discussion' of June 1947 (see Clark and Dobrenko 2007: 350ff).

10. RGALI. F. 2854. Op. 1. D. 115. L. 6. There was a general view that forewords were important, as well as an awareness of problems related to them: "In our country every translated book appears with a foreword that constitutes a visa of sorts for this book to enter the USSR, but nobody is doing them [the forewords], the critics of foreign literature don't bother. Even if books live long and will be read for years, if not decades, all the same, nobody takes care of these forewords." (P. M. Toper, 27 May 1953. RGALI. F. 2854. Op. 1. D. 122. L. 14).

11. RGALI. F. 2854. Op. 1. D. 115. L. 5.

city”), while there were several other lines pertaining to Suvorov which were “significantly less felicitous, particularly in translation.” According to Kashkin, a major mistake on the part of Levontin was his attempt in the talk to “canonize” Shengeli’s translation philosophy as “the principle for the Soviet school of translation”; he writes, “the posing of the problem should not be declared its solution.” However, Kashkin found the search for “radical devices” (*ostrye priemy*), which in the end led to wordplay in need of commentary, to be most unacceptable. The main cause of all the shortcomings in Shengeli’s translation was, according to Kashkin, the urge for “exactness” (*tochnost’*):

Everything is exact — the rhymes have to be maintained down to translanguistic (*raznoiazychnye*) ones, in spite of the known incommensurability of their sounds — and even imaginary, purely visual rhymes [...]. Everything is seemingly in place. But in many stanzas this “in place” is reminiscent of how, in numerous Moscow apartments, the gas heater is “in place,” but for a long time there is no heating fuel.<sup>12</sup>

The functional approach advocated by Shengeli in his afterword, which was in fact quite consonant with Fedorov’s abovementioned precepts for Soviet translation, was not discussed at all by Kashkin.

An important event in the further development of the discourse on the ‘Soviet school’ was a conference held in October–November 1950 and dedicated to “The tasks of the Soviet translation of world classics.” Here, the keynote speaker Nikolai Vil’iam-Vil’mont, a Germanist and translator, attempted to connect the sphere of Soviet translation to Stalin’s recent statements about language in the article “Marxism and Problems of Linguistics,” which had been published in *Pravda* 20 June 1950. This step had broad implications for the field. Echoing Stalin’s Marxist terminology, Vil’mont argued that “since language is different from the superstructure” and does not automatically change along with the base, there are no “sudden language revolutions” and hence “our language is principally the same as Pushkin’s,” admittedly with an enlarged vocabulary.<sup>13</sup> In light of Stalin’s foregrounding of the continuity of language, the earlier Russian translation tradition, and the new Soviet one were “indissolubly linked.” This implicitly created a possibility for Vil’mont to include *old* translations in the Soviet canon. Soviet translators, Vil’mont declared, followed the old traditions. Earlier poetry translations by

12. RGALI. F. 2854. Op. 1. D. 115. L. 12 (the word “Moscow” is crossed over in the typescript). For an overview of the controversies over the question of *tochnost’* in translation during the 1930s, in which Kashkin also took an active part, see Witt 2013.

13. RGALI. F. 2854. Op. 1. D. 120. L. 1. (The speech is preserved in the form of a detailed abstract, erroneously attributed to Kashkin.)

Pushkin, Lermontov, Zhukovskii, Kurochkin, and A. K. Tolstoi, as well as prose translations by Dostoevskii and Turgenev, were claimed as predecessors of the 'Soviet school.'

This re-evaluation of nineteenth-century Russian translations was not advantageous for Shengeli, who, as noted above, based his afterword to *Don Juan* on an elaborated critique of Pavel Kozlov's 1888/1889 translation. Although Shengeli was not mentioned here, he was implicitly targeted; Vil'mont denounced "abstract equivalence (lexical, syntactical, grammatical)" in favor of "concrete artistic equivalence (semantic and plastic)." Shengeli was in effect excluded from the canon as defined by Vil'mont; as achievements of Soviet translation he mentions Samuil Marshak's translations, Mikhail Lozinskii's *Divine Comedy*, Kashkin's Chaucer, Natalia Nemchinova's *La Chartreuse de Parme*, Natalia Volzhina's *The Old Curiosity Shop*, and Nina Daruzes' *The Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit*. In contrast he points out the "faulty interpretation" of Dickens produced by Evgenii Lann and Aleksandra Krivtsova, and "deficiencies in the work on Maupassant and Stendhal."<sup>14</sup>

Although it was not mentioned in the keynote speech, Shengeli's *Don Juan* became a central issue of the conference, much to the surprise of the translator himself, as the topic had not been brought up since the first discussion almost three years earlier. It was now virulently attacked by Kashkin and a certain Egorova, who claimed that Shengeli had distorted the picture of Field Marshal Suvorov and the Russian soldiers in Byron's work. The criticism concerned, for example, the characterization of Suvorov, in the depiction of the taking of the fortress of Izmail, as 'a little wit' (*ostriachok*) and 'a little old man' (*starikashka*); the qualification of the action of the Russian troops as 'looting' (*grabez*); and designation of the troops as crude, loudmouthed soldiers (*soldafon*).<sup>15</sup> In his defense, Shengeli argued that the "negative intonations" for which he was criticized were not only present in Byron's original text; they were also found in the now-revered earlier translation by Kozlov, which had not prompted any indignation on the part of Kashkin.<sup>16</sup>

In his speech, Kashkin also somewhat contradictorily denounced the method by which "factographical exactness" blurred the "ideological and artistic significance" of the work, resulting in "verse translation without poetry, prose translation without emotional coloring, without sincere and deep feeling, in short: without artistic charm."<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, he targeted the shortcomings of contemporary criti-

14. Ibid. L. 4. Kashkin's Chaucer was co-translated with Osip Rumer (with Shengeli as editor).

15. RGALI. F. 2854. Op. 1. D. 116. L. 2.

16. RGALI. F. 2854. Op. 1. D. 118. L. 16.

17. RGALI. F. 2854. D. Op. 1. D. 116. L. 9.

cism, exemplified by Levontin's "excessive praise," which allowed for translations such as Shengeli's to appear in the first place. Therefore, he held, even if at this point "the principles of the Soviet school had been consolidated in hard struggle against alien and hostile positions inherited from decadence and formalism and the hackwork attitudes of the NEP period," and the enemy — in the form of "careless Balmontovism" (*bal'montovshchina*) and "scholastic Shpetovism" (*shpetovchshina*) — had been defeated, the fight for "the concept of the Soviet school" had to be continued:

it is necessary to resist all attempts to vulgarize, banalize, and falsify the very concept of the 'principles of Soviet translation,' and the 'school of Soviet translation,' attempts at passing off as its own achievements works which are alien to the very essence of this concept.<sup>18</sup>

The general characteristics of Shengeli's translation as defined by Kashkin at the conference in the autumn of 1950 (un-Soviet, unpoetic, and unpatriotic in its treatment of the Suvorov theme) now became a *fact*, repeated from one context to another. The annual report of the Translators' Section for the year 1950 mentions Shengeli's Byron as a "relapse of formalism," in which "a preoccupation with outward virtuosity and exotica" had led to "a number of distortions of the original's imagery," in particular resulting in a "lowering of the image of Suvorov and his soldiers in comparison with the English text."<sup>19</sup>

Over the next years, Kashkin contributed to the consolidation of this fact in discussions at the Translators' Section by attacking 'formalism' in translation, focusing on Shengeli's poetry translations and Evgenii Lann's prose translations. Occasionally, the discourse showed traces of the ongoing campaign against 'cosmopolitanism,' as in a discussion of Lann's Dickens translations, in which Kashkin made the following argument: "The struggle against formalism and cosmopolitanism is complicated enough, there is no need to complicate it even further."<sup>20</sup> The

18. Ibid. L. 10. 'Balmontovism' and 'Shpetovism' are pejorative designations derived from the names of the Symbolist poet and translator Konstantin Bal'mont, known for his free handling of the original texts, and the philosopher Gustav Shpet (executed in 1937), who as editor and translator during the late 1920s and early 1930s gravitated toward literalist principles and foreignizing translation.

19. RGALI . F. 631, Op. 14. D. 91. L. 35–36.

20. RGALI, f. 2854. The word *kosmopolitizm* is added by hand to the typescript. Lann had been a particular target of Kashkin's critique since 1934 (see Witt 2013). The campaign against 'cosmopolitanism' launched in 1948 (a part of the *zhdanovshchina*) soon took on anti-semitic notes (Kostyrchenko 2009), so this addition was clearly intended as a criticism of Lann, who was of Jewish origin and whose original name was Lozman.

same rhetoric, by which Soviet translation was defined in contrast to 'unpatriotic' tendencies in Shengeli's and Lann's translation practice, was applied in press articles by Kashkin from 1951 and 1952 (Kashkin 1951, 1952a, 1952b, 1952c). The most widely read of these statements were to be found in the article "On the Language of Translation," published in *Literaturnaia gazeta* on 1 December 1951. Here, both Shengeli and Lann were singled out as representing a "stronghold of literalism and linguistic foreignness" (*zasil'e bukvalizma i chuzheiazychiia*). Their translations reflected "bourgeois-decadent disintegration (*raspad*), manifested in the corruption of the national language in favor of foreign languages and linguistic acrobatics" (Kashkin 1951:2). Kashkin's own principles for "realist translation," his preferred method for the 'Soviet school' as laid out in this and other articles, were obviously designed to echo the formulas of socialist realism as the method for the production of original literature:

The best Soviet translators are aware of the great significance of artistic translation as one of the forms of Soviet literary production and of their great responsibility toward the reader. They do not deny the benefits of preliminary analysis of the text, but they have a different understanding of the method and goal of it. They strive to clarify for themselves and for the readers the ideological and artistic essence (*ideino-khudozhestvennaia sushchnost'*) of the work being translated in order to determine the principal and important elements which are interesting and important in our times too, that which is progressive and ought to be translated in the first place. (Kashkin 1951:2).

According to Kashkin, the translator had to convey not the text of the original literary work, but the *reality* which, according to Leninist aesthetics, was mirrored in this work — the typical traits of reality as seen by the original author and rendered in forms accessible to the Soviet reader (Kashkin 1954: 26–27; Kashkin 1955: 126; see also Friedberg 1997: 33; Azov 2013: 96–104).

In 1953, Kashkin lectured to the Translators' Section on the theme of "Remnants of formalism in literary translation." The speech was discussed at two meetings, held on 11 February and 4 March; the latter took place in the tense atmosphere that arose in the wake of the news about "comrade Stalin's disease" (he was in fact to die the following day). The nature and various expressions of 'formalism' were commented upon by a number of members. Here, Shengeli and Lann, neither of whom were present, were attacked again as the main exponents of the objectionable practice. This was the apogee of antiformalist rhetoric within the Translators' Section. Kashkin declared: "Formalism in the theory and practice of translation is an anti-party, anti-realist, anti-democratic, reactionary 'translation for the sake of translation,' rooted in an idealistic outlook and detached from life, from the

current reality and from the people and its demands.”<sup>21</sup> The general picture of the ‘formalists’ constructed by Kahskin in this and other speeches, as well as articles at the time, implying the practices of Shengeli and Lann in particular, resonates with several topics within the ‘anti-cosmopolitanism’ discourse: something alien (*chuzheiazychie, chuzhdye, vrazhdebnye idei*) is secretly (*pod shumok, pod maskoi*) penetrating (*proniknovenie*) the pure Russian language (*chistota russkogo iazyka, narodnyi iazyk*), polluting (*zasoriaet*) it and killing (*mertvit, umershchvliet*) the living content (*zhivoe sodержanie*) of the original works (Witt 2010).<sup>22</sup>

At the Second Congress of Soviet Writers in December 1954, the speech on translation, assigned collectively to the Russian poet-translator Pavel Antokol’skii, Ukrainian author and translator Maksym Ryl’skyi, and the Kazakh writer Mukhtar Auezov, focused on translations from the languages of the peoples of the USSR. Here, the speech also warned against “becoming hypnotized by the foreign language.” The requirements placed on Soviet translators, however, were more moderately stated than in the preceding period: “The translator should know the language of the original and struggle for his mother tongue, in the practice of translation he should struggle for the purity and richness of his mother tongue and for socialist realism.” (Antokol’skii, Auezov, and Ryl’skii 1955: 41).

## Gnedich’s Byron

In 1956, changes occurred in the Soviet political climate that would affect the atmosphere over the next eight years, commonly referred to as the Thaw. It was also the year Georgii Shengeli died in Moscow.<sup>23</sup> In 1957, a reading of a new translation of Byron’s *Don Juan* took place at the Writers’ Union in Leningrad. Its author was Tatiana Gnedich and, as was later revealed, it had been produced almost simultaneously with Shengeli’s, but in a quite different place — not in the ‘large zone’ of Soviet society, but in the ‘small zone’ of prisons and camps.<sup>24</sup> Gnedich,

21. RGALI. F. 2854. Op. 1. D. 389. L. 35; the word “anti-party” has been changed by hand in the shorthand report to “anti-people” (*antinarodnyi*).

22. Shengeli’s detailed refutation of Kashkin’s critique, never published at the time, is included in Azov 2013.

23. The obituary published in *Literaturnaia gazeta* on 20 November 1956 (no. 138), p. 4, makes reference to Shengeli’s “great merits as a translator,” though it does not mention *Don Juan*, but only “13 poems by Byron” (that is, the 1940 edition).

24. Kashkin was present at Gnedich’s reading and responded to it positively: “Not only the initiative and boldness shown by the translator, but also the results she has achieved, should be celebrated.” (Kashkin 1977: 555; the year of the reading is erroneously given here as 1956).

a teacher and translator of English literature in Leningrad, had been mobilized during World War II for work in the intelligence agency of the Baltic naval fleet (*Razvedupravlenie Baltflota*). She had been arrested on 27 December 1944 for reasons still unclear and variously explained. According to her own version, as related to Efim Etkind (2011), she had denounced herself to the authorities for considering the possibility of going to England; an English officer, impressed by her translation of Vera Inber's poem "Pulkovskii meridian" into English octaves, had purportedly given her the idea. Gnedich was sentenced to ten years in correction camps. While held in the KGB internal prison on Shpalernaia Street waiting for further transport, she told her investigator that she was translating Byron's *Don Juan* from memory (as she knew the fifth and ninth cantos by heart). He arranged solitary confinement for her and provided her with Byron's original text, dictionaries, and paper, after which she was given two years to complete the translation and proofread a typewritten copy. Upon finishing it, she was sent to Vorkuta, where she spent the remaining eight years. Her *Don Juan* was published in 1959 with a print run of 75,000 copies.

This new translation received scholarly attention in Efim Etkind's 1963 study *Poetry and Translation*. Here it is favorably compared to both Kozlov's and Shengeli's renditions and presented as the definitive Russian version of Byron's poem (Etkind 1963: 214–223). Kornei Chukovskii, the long-standing authority on questions pertaining to translation, devoted a subchapter to Gnedich's *Don Juan* in the 1964 edition of his classical book *The High Art*, thus including her version in the Soviet canon: "If I were to name one translation which once and for all put the harmful theory of literalism to shame, I would, of course, mention the translation of *Don Juan*, carried out by Tatiana Gnedich" (Chukovskii 1964: 233). Chukovskii calls Shengeli a "conscientious toiler" (*dobrosovestnyi truzhenik*) whose translation failed because it was based on "unproper principles." Chukovskii's text is structured as an argument with some projected 'literalist' interlocutors. He compares Gnedich's version with his own crude word-for-word translation of Byron, which he describes as allegedly preferred by "the literalists," but actually advocated by no one. Gnedich, according to Chukovskii, succeeds in her ambition to render the "crystal clearness" of the original and recreates the "living conversational

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Concerning the notions of the 'large' and 'small' zones, see Adler 1999. Prisons and camps may in fact be regarded as a specific 'translation zone' parallel to the production of original literature under conditions of confinement. There is one difference, however, concerning the role of memory: if original literature was often memorized for later fixation (as in the case of Solzhenitsyn), the process of translation involved the double mnemonic load of both source and target text. Other notable instances of 'confinement translation' are the cases of Ivan Likhachev (who translated Charles Baudelaire) and Sergei Petrov (who translated French and Polish poets, as well as the Swedish eighteenth-century bard Carl Michael Bellman).

intonations” in spite of the “obvious sacrifices” of largely insignificant details: “of course we do not at all regret the numerous sacrifices she made to this end. These sacrifices are insignificant compared to the benefits gained” (Chukovskii 1964: 237).<sup>25</sup>

Chukovskii’s characterization of Gnedich’s translation may be disputed. Gnedich *combines* elisions and additions, often of an explanatory character, sometimes importing into the poetic text part of Byron’s own commentary. This pedagogical thrust, together with paraphrasing and normalization, contributes to a domesticating tendency in Gnedich’s work that is in agreement with some of the principles of the established ‘realist translation’ of the Soviet school. Some of these traits are apparent in the following passage, that also exhibits another characteristic feature of Gnedich’s translation, namely the reduction of voice inherent in the omission of parenthetical insertions (or, as elsewhere, in the removal of quotation marks):

Canto XVI

43

Now this (but we will whisper it aside)  
Was (pardon the pedantic illustration)  
Trampling on Plato’s pride with greater pride  
As did the Cynic on some like occasion,  
Deeming the sage would be much mortified  
Or thrown into a philosophic passion  
For a spoilt carpet, but the Attic Bee  
Was much consoled by his own repartee.  
(Byron 1982, 534)

Tak v detskoi knizhke ia ne raz chital,  
Chto kinik Diogen v domu Platona  
Platona gordost’ s gordost’iu toptal,  
Ego kover porvav bestseremonno.  
Na ssoru on sobrata vzyval,  
No tot khranil dovol’no nepreklonno  
V dushe filosoficheskii pokoi  
I byl ves’ma dovolen sam soboi.  
(Bairon 1959, 499)

25. As Chukovskii admits, another sacrifice was Byron’s idiosyncratic rhyme system (Chukovskii 1964, 238–239).

Back translation:

So I have read in a children's book more than once  
 That the cynic Diogenes in Plato's house  
 Trampled on Plato's pride with pride,  
 Having torn his carpet in an unceremonious way.  
 He challenged his colleague to a quarrel,  
 But the man preserved quite adamant  
 A philosophical peace in his soul  
 And was highly content with himself.

The name of "the Cynic" (*Diogen*) is added by Gnedich, despite the fact that it is clarified in Byron's commentary, which is included in the edition (Bairon 1959:536). The pedagogical stance itself is thematized by the mentioning of the source of the knowledge: 'as I have read in a children's book.' In the voluminous foreword to the translation, the editor Nina D'iakonova ascribes a similar pedagogical concern to Byron himself: "The most important of them [the ideas Byron bore with him all his life] was the idea of the high duty of the poet, the teacher of mankind, and of the educational vocation of all true poetry." The foreword is itself a domesticating factor, placing Byron in a Soviet critical context related to socialist realism: "As distinct from the rebellious heroes of the 'Eastern poems,' located outside the real world, Juan is depicted in socially concrete conditions" (Bairon 1959:xiii).<sup>26</sup>

Chukovskii's positive evaluation of Gnedich was in the vein of earlier translation critiques. But the author also introduces a new theme: he alerts readers to the circumstances under which Gnedich's translation came into being. Referring to recent information in the press about her arrest and work in confinement, he calls her translation a "creative feat" (*tvorcheskii podvig*), praising her memory, which had "so heroically overcome such insurmountable obstacles" (Chukovskii 1964:239; the reference is to Satyr 1964). From this point on, Gnedich's translation of *Don Juan* was a topic within two different discourses. It continued to be promoted as an example of the 'Soviet school.'<sup>27</sup> It also entered into intelligentsia discourse as an example of how translation of Western classical works could be an

26. On the significance of forewords and other paratexts to translations, see Ambrosiani's article in the current issue.

27. For example, it is included by Andrei Fedorov in the 1968 edition of his book *Osnovy obshchei teorii perevoda* [Foundations of a general theory of translation] as one of the translations that should be mentioned as contributions to Soviet Russian literature of the last decades. His list includes the names of Lozinskii, Marshak, Sergei Shervinskii, Vil'gel'm Levik, Kashkin, Rumer, Boris Pasternak, Gnedich, Nikolai Liubimov, Maria Lor'e, Evgeniia Kalashnikova, Natalia Volzhina, and Sergei Petrov (Fedorov 1968:121–122).

act of resistance. As explored by Brian James Baer (2010), this notion accorded literary translation the power to resist official Soviet culture by providing readers with eternal esthetic and moral values presumably embodied in these works. The translator came to the fore as an example of individual genius and thus as an alternative to the collective heroism of socialist realism. As Baer points out, the notion of translation as a sacrifice was a constitutive element. Within the discourse on Gnedich, this is resonant not only in texts of the time such as Chukovskii's. In later reminiscences, we find the theme of sacrifice in, for example, Efim Etkind's "Victory of the Spirit" ("Pobeda dukha," 2011), which was originally entitled "The Voluntary Cross" ("Dobrovol'nyi krest"), and in Galina Usova's "The Feat" ("Podvig," 1993). The volume *Pages of Captivity, Pages of Fame* (*Stranitsy plena i stranitsy slavy*, Gnedich 2008), which includes Gnedich's own texts as well as biographical material and recollections, also provides ample evidence of this.

## Concluding discussion

The two Soviet translations of Byron's *Don Juan* came to represent something more than their distant source text. These translational facts acquired additional significance in the target culture. As shown above, Shengeli's translation and translation philosophy came to represent the Other in the establishment of the concept of the 'Soviet school of translation' beginning in the late 1940s. Gnedich's translation, which came to be viewed as a part of the Soviet canon of translations, was an exponent of the 'Soviet school.' It also came to represent the notion of 'translation as sacrifice' and subsequently became an object of identification and mythologization for the Thaw generation. Apart from its own merits as a translation, the double canonization of Gnedich's version — as both a Soviet translation par excellence and a creative sacrifice — may have contributed to its dominant position not only in Soviet but also in post-Soviet culture. While Shengeli's translation appeared only once, Gnedich's has seen six Soviet editions (1959, 1964, 1972, two editions in 1974, 1988) and at least seven post-Soviet ones to date (2006, 2009, 2010, two editions in 2011, 2013, 2014). A token of its consecration was its publication in 2011 as the second volume in the new series "Giants of Literary Translation: The Petersburg School" (*Korifei khudozhestvennogo perevoda. Peterburgskaia shkola*) by the Petropolis publishing house in Saint Petersburg (Gnedich 2011).<sup>28</sup>

The question remains as to why Shengeli's Byron acquired such a symbolic function. Some clues may be found in the archival material. The reasons were

28. For an analysis of the two *Don Juan* translations as works of literature, with a focus on the problem of target text intertextuality, see Witt (2016).

obviously complex and concerned questions of personal power, professional impact, and pecuniary interests. The documentation of the re-establishment of the Translators' Section beginning in 1947 reveals how Shengeli, the former head of the Section, was gradually ousted from influence. He tried in vain to oppose the redefinition of the Section as one of "foreign literature" (which excluded translators working on the literatures of the USSR, many of whom were Shengeli's associates).<sup>29</sup> Having been on the list of "desirable candidates" for the new board of the Translators' Section in February 1947, Shengeli was not elected at the organizational meeting in June of that same year.<sup>30</sup> Ivan Kashkin was appointed as the new head of the Section, and his disciple Evgeniia Kalashnikova was appointed secretary.<sup>31</sup>

As a teacher of English and American literature, Kashkin had been involved in the Section's pedagogical activities from its inception,<sup>32</sup> and had, even earlier, initiated the work of a joint translation enterprise, referred to as the "First translation collective led by Ivan Kashkin," of which Evgeniia Kalashnikova was an original member.<sup>33</sup> During the 1930s, this group had produced a number of translations of contemporary American literature (notably of John Steinbeck and Erskine Caldwell), and Kashkin himself had been publishing articles on American authors since the mid-1920s (see Kashkin 1977: 551–552). However, in the atmosphere of the emerging Cold War and official anti-American rhetoric, the status of this source literature had changed dramatically. Kashkin now presented a draft article at the Section on the topic of "decadence in American poetry." Kashkin explained the main difficulty of writing such an article in the following way: "How to charac-

29. RGALI. F. 2854. Op. 1. D. 283. L. 4.

30. RGALI. F. 2854. Op. 1. D. 283. L. 5 ob.

31. RGALI. F. 2854. Op. 1. D. 283. L. 6.

32. RGALI. F. 631. Op. 21. D. 1. L. 11; L. 20.

33. The application for registration of the group, dated 18 January 1935, states: "The First Translation collective, which during recent years has continually worked under the leadership of I. A. Kashkin within the system of the Translators' Section of the Organizational Bureau and has now entered the Translators' Section of the Soviet Writers' Union, asks the Board [of the Section] to approve the collective under the name "The First Translation Collective Under the Leadership of I. A. Kashkin at the Translators' Section of the Soviet Writers' Union" (shortened: *Pervyi perevodcheskii kollektiv SSP p/r. I.A. Kashkina*) which has already been established in the press. The Collective currently comprises the following members: A. N. Volzhina, N. K. Georgievskaia, N. L. Daruzes, A. N. Eleonskaia, E. D. Kalashnikova, L. D. Kislova, E. S. Romanova, I. K. Romanovich, V. M. Topor, O. P. Kholmskaia." (RGALI. F. 631. Op. 21. D. 7. L. 1).

terize material which is alien to us and not liable to popularization? It is inadmissible to give a platform to Pound, Hemingway, and the like.”<sup>34</sup>

Translators of American literature now had to look for other source material, for example the ‘safe’ British classics on which Shengeli and Lann had already been working. Kashkin’s targeting of Shengeli and Lann in his denunciatory articles of the early 1950s is characterized by Vadim Perel’muter (2011) as a struggle for market shares for himself and his disciples.<sup>35</sup> Economic incentives were undoubtedly of some significance here. However, if we take into account the prehistory of Kashkin’s critique of Lann in particular, dating back to 1934, struggle for professional dominance seems a more important factor. In the final analysis, this struggle proved successful: the development of the ‘Soviet school of translation’ as a concept was so intertwined with the notion of the ‘Kashkin school’ that they became nearly synonymous.<sup>36</sup> The wave of translations of American literature during the Thaw period, many of them carried out by talented former members of the Kashkin group, and particularly the canonization of Hemingway, brought new status to Kashkin’s name.<sup>37</sup> His fame has been sustained to this day. The Belgian scholar Christian Balliu recounts that at a translation conference at the Moscow State Linguistic University in 2002, Professor Maria Litvinova (well-known today as one of the translators of Harry Potter) told him, “Nous sommes tous des Kachkiniens” (Balliu 2005:939).

The fate of *Don Juan* in Russian provides a clear illustration of the need to take into account contextual factors in order to achieve a deeper understanding of translation history. Such a factor is the agency of translators. In the case of Byron, this agency was expressed in the construction, through discourse, of the changeable concept of the ‘Soviet school of translation.’

34. 21 April 1948. RGALI. F. 2854. Op. 1. D. 283. L. 40. The re-evaluation of Hemingway after 1940 (due to the unorthodox portrayal of communists and Comintern figures in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*) was especially uncomfortable for Kashkin, who was known as a specialist on Hemingway and had authored appreciative articles on the writer (e.g., Kashkin 1934).

35. Perel’muter’s article (partly inaccurate and without references) does not pay attention to the situation within the Translators’ Section during the period 1947–1950. Therefore, he claims that the Suvorov theme appeared in Kashkin’s rhetoric only in 1951 (see also Perel’muter 1997:31).

36. For example, in the documentation (1947), Nina Leonidovna Daruzes, member of the Kashkin group, is characterized as one of the “outstanding representatives of the Soviet school of translation.” RGALI. F. 2854. Op. 1. D. 283. L. 18.

37. See Semenenko’s article in this issue.

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*Author's address*

Uppsala Centre for Russian and Eurasian Studies  
Uppsala University  
Box 514, SE-751 20  
Uppsala, Sweden  
susanna.witt@ucrs.uu.se