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THE RHETORIC OF INDIRECT TRANSLATION: OUT FROM THE SHADOWS

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"'That's a terrible translation,' Ramy waved his arms. 'Throw it away. For one thing, it's not even a direct translation — it went into French first, and then English — and for another, it's not remotely like the original.'" R.F. Kuang, *Babel: An Arcane History* (2022: 52).

Abstract: This paper explores the phenomenon of translation through an intermediary language, also known as relay or indirect translation, in the context of twentieth and twenty-first-century Russian-English translation flows as a reflection of transnational networks and cultural (and linguistic) asymmetries. The first part of the paper investigates the cultural politics of relay translation in reference to two case studies: the one involving the first English translation of Dmitrii Merezhkovskii's Voskresshie bogi [Resurrected Gods], published in the early twentieth century, with Russian as the source language, and the other concerns the first English translation of Georgian dissident Levan Berzenishvili's Gulag memoir Sacred Darkness, with Russian as the intermediary language, published in the early twenty-first century. Both case studies raise the question of the relationship between relay translation and textual integrity while underscoring the persistence of the phenomenon. The second part of the paper explores the symbolics of relay translation, shaped by Romantic notions of authenticity and unmediated experience, by focusing on works of Soviet "trans-fiction" that is, fictional works featuring translators and translation. In the works analyzed, the interlinear trot comes to represent the increasing hollowness and insincerity of late Soviet rhetoric of socialist internationalism and friendship of peoples.

Keywords: indirect translation; transfiction; mediation; Dmitry Merezhkovsky; Levan Berdzenishvili

1. Introduction

Armin Paul Frank one of scholars of the Göttingen School, referred to translation as a "Schattenkultur" or "shadow culture" in modern Europe (1989: 1). If that is so, then indirect translation — or translation of a translation, to use Yves Gambier's (1994: 413) pithy formulation — is a shadow culture within that shadow culture. Often

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unacknowledged by publishers, and at times repudiated by translators themselves, indirect translation has only become an object of scholarly interest in the last fifteen years.[1] As a kind of double mediation, indirect translation stands at the margins of modern Occidental culture, the dominant epistemology of which is grounded in visibility (lux et veritas) and full presence, theorized by Derrida in *Of Grammataology* (1997) as logocentrism. Hence the Renaissance depiction of the Medieval period as the Dark Ages and Dylan Thomas's injunction to "rage against the dimming of the light."

This epistemology, and the directness claims associated with it was reformulated in the Romantic Age with its twin cults of originality and sincerity. At this time, literary works were laying new claims to directness, as reflected in the realm of poetry in the privileging of the personal lyric and elegy over odes and epics and in the realm of prose in the privileging of first-person narratives, ranging from epistolary novels to confessions and memoirs, which promised unmediated access to the internal life of the hero or heroine, often contrasted with the superficial theatricality of social life.

This Romantic epistemology gave new life to the many hoary descriptions of translation as a "dull reflection" or a "pale copy" of an original. Even Herbert Giles, the English diplomat turned professor, who opens his anthology *Gems of Chinese Literature* with the following epigraph from Thomas Carlyle, "What nobler work than transplanting foreign thought?" ends his introduction with an apology for his translations, stating that "translations may be moonlight and water while the originals are sunlight and wine" (1884, v). Over the course of the nineteenth century, however, as the emergent field of vernacular literary studies was producing nation-based histories that typically omitted translations, a parallel translation discourse was emerging in which claims to directness were put forward in order to define a new, modern approach to translation, often pitting "direct" translation against "indirect" translation on a cline of mediation. So, rather than study the phenomenon of indirect translation *en soi*, I will attempt to trace the emergence of what Gideon Toury referred to as the preliminary norm of directness:

> Considerations concerning directness of translation involve the threshold of tolerance for translating from languages other than the ultimate source language: is indirect translation permitted at all? In translating from what source languages/text-types/periods (etc.) is it permitted/prohibited/tolerated/preferred? What are the permitted/prohibited/tolerated/-preferred mediating languages? Is there a tendency/obligation to mark a translated work as having been mediated, or is this fact ignored/camouflaged/denied? If it is mentioned, is the identity of the mediating language supplied as well? And so on. (Toury 1995: 202)

At the same time, I will not restrict the norm of directness, as Toury does, to whether a text will be translated directly from the original or from an intermediate

[1] György Radó's 1975 article, "Indirect Translation" (*Babel* 21(2): 51-59) appears today as a voice in the desert as the sustained study of indirect translation only begins in the mid aughts with such publications as: Gambier (2003); Ringmar (2007); Boulogne (2009); and Boulogne (2011). About ten years later, we see a marked acceleration: Assis Rosa, Pięta, and Bueno Maia (2017); Pieta, Ivaska, and Gambier (2022); Ivaska, Pieta, and Gambier (2023). There have also been several monographs dedicated to the topic: Cho (2017); Pieta, Bueno Maia, and Torres-Simón (2022); Prado-Fonts (2022).

source. Whether a translation is done directly or indirectly is, I will argue, only one aspect of directness, understood as the goal of decreasing mediation, seen in modern translation practice as necessarily distorting or deforming. To that end, I will consider directness not as an empirical fact but rather as a set of historically shifting claims, often entangled or mutually-reinforcing, which in the modern era are typically leveled to assert the quality and professionalism of translation practice. The importance of separating the fact of indirect translation from claims of directness is further underscored by the fact that such claims may be false, as discussed below. In other words, alongside the phenomenon of pseudo-translation, there is the phenomenon of pseudo-direct translation. Therefore, the norm of directness may lead not only to more direct translations but also to more claims of directness, whether true or not.

2. Historicizing Directness Claims

The emergence of "direct" translation as a best practice is a byproduct of German historicism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. As a reaction to Enlightenment's universalizing approach to knowledge, German Romantic nationalists, such as Johann Gottfried von Herder and Friedrich Schleiermacher, and Alexander von Humboldt, stressed the specificity of cultures in time and space, predicated on an intimate connection between language and culture. Schleiermacher criticized the Prussian king Frederick the Great for writing poetry in French. German historicists, such as Barthold Georg Nieburh and Leopold von Ranke, influenced by the Romantics' focus on linguistic and cultural specificity, urged historians to see other cultures "as they were," and promoted new standards for the treatment of historical and other texts to reduce or eliminate presentist biases on the part of the historian. They also stressed the importance of primary sources, which made indirect translation an increasingly dubious practice. In some places, such as Italy and German-speaking lands, the promotion of direct translation also had political significance as a rejection of French cultural and political domination, as French was a major if not the major source of indirect translations in eighteenth-century Europe (see Nigri 2019).

This is not to say that directness claims played no part in pre-modern translations, but they were of a different nature.[2] Consider, for example, James MacPherson's decision to present his *Poems of Ossian* (1760), one of the most popular and translated works of the eighteenth century, as a translation. In so doing, he was making a claim to greater immediacy (and authenticity) than if he had correctly labeled them according to the genre classifications of his time as imitations. Here is a case where a pseudo-translation is making a directness claim based on the premise that direct translations of Ossian's poems are less mediated than a modern author's creative rewritings.

Directness claims in pre-modern times were deployed for a variety of reasons, even to justify editorial inventions. Consider the directness claims put forward in the French translation of the Dutch work *Open-deure tot het verborgen heydendom* [Open Door to

[2] We see the emergence of the norm of completeness (which I see as a subnorm of directness) in Tytler's essay on translation of 1791, which was revised in 1797 and 1813: "That the Translation should give a complete transcript of the ideas of the original work" (1907: 7).

the Secrets of Heathendom], by the missionary Abraham Rogerius (1609-49).[3] The work was translated into French 1670 by Thomas La Grue. La Grue's translation was then extracted by Bernard Picart for his seven-volume *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde* (1723-37), in a section titled *Dissertation sur les moeurs et les religions des Bramines, dressée sur les mémoires du Sieur Roger Hollandois* [Dissertation on the customs and religions of the Brahmins based on the memoirs of Mr. Roger the Dutchman]. While acknowledging the importance of the work as an extensively researched first-person account, Picart admits to rather extensive editorial intervention, justified both by the style of the original and by the poor quality of the translation:

> C'est dommage qu'elle soit écrite d'une manière rebutante, surchargée de quantité de remarques inutiles et pour comble d'ennui si mal traduite en Français, qu'elle ne peut guerres être lue en cette langue que par ceux qui ont un intérêt particulier de s'instruire dans cette matière. (20)
> [It is a shame that it is written in such an off-putting manner, overloaded with a number of useless remarks and to heighten the boredom so poorly translated into French that it can be hardly read in that language except by those with a particular interest in instructing themselves in this matter.]

One might say that Picart seeks with his editorial intervention to enhance the directness claim of Roger's eye-witness account by extracting what is essential from Roger's writing.

This is not to say that the pre-modern world was entirely comfortable with indirect translation, as suggested by the English translation of Picart's *Dissertation,* which appeared under the title *A Dissertation on the Religion and Manners of the Bramins Extracted from the Memoirs of the Rev. Abraham Rogers, a Hollander* (1734). It, too, stresses the importance of Roger's eye-witness account but presents Picart's editorial intervention as directed solely at Roger's writing, omitting any mention of Picart's criticism of the French translation:

> Tho' his [Roger's] manner of writing is harsh and uncouth, and encumber'd with a great number of useless remarks, I yet hope that the reader will not be unsatisfied with the extracts I have made from him [Roger], since I have transcrib'd the most essential particulars from his work, and endeavour'd to give it in tolerable language; and whenever I borrow any particulars from other authors who have written on Bramins, I shall take care to quote their names. (346)

This effectively obscures the status of the English text as an indirect translation, which carries over into the footnotes. Picart's original French edition provides a footnote referencing the French translation of Roger's work: "Son livre est intitulé dan

[3] I was introduced to this work by Theo Hermans in his keynote lecture at the conference on indirect translation held at the University of Yerevan in September of 2023. Dr. Hermans generously shared the cover pages and introductions with me. Published in Leiden in 1651, Rogier's "original," based on 200 sayings by Bhartṛhari (5th c. CE), translated from Sanskrit via Portuguese, is itself highly mediated.

la traduction *La Porte ouverte* […] et publié à Amsterdam par Jean Schipper 1670." This is indeed the publishing information for La Grue's French translation, and La Grue is mentioned in the next footnote. In the English rendering of the footnote, however, it is unclear what is being cited, the Dutch original or an English translation: "The Title of this work in the translation is, *A door open'd to the knowledge of occult paganism* […], by Abraham Roger, &c. Printed at Amsterdam by John Schipper, 1670." Because any mention of the French translation has been omitted from the body of the English text, the reference to "the translation" could mean "to the English translation," as the title provided is in English. Moreover, the domestication of La Grue's credentials, Maître es Arts et Docteur en Medecine, as A.M. and M.D. serve to obscure his origins. The frontispiece does indicate that Picart's work was written originally in French. One might attribute this to lax standards for referencing, but the omission of Picart's criticism of the French translation is curious. Incidentally, the English translator is not named, although he is given academic credentials: "Faithfully Translated in English, by a Gentleman, some Time since of St. John's College in Oxford."

All this is to say that the phenomenon of indirect translation, or at least the rhetoric surrounding it, must be understood among various and competing directness claims. I experienced this first-hand when Ellen Vayner and I were commissioned to translate the Gulag memoir of the Georgian dissident Levan Berdzenishvili from the Russian translation. As we neared the end of the project, the publisher sent me the proofs of the Italian translation, which had been done directly from the Georgian by a specialist in Georgian language and literature. The publisher asked me to look at the many footnotes the scholar-translator had included and to consider adding more to my translation. Upon examining the footnoted passages, however, I became aware that the Russian translators had in many cases omitted the difficult passages the Italian translator had chosen to annotate. I brought this to the attention of the publisher, asking whether she wanted me to restore the omitted passages, forgetting that I could have done that only from the Italian as I do not know Georgian. In any case, the publisher told me not to bother but that the author had asked the epigraph included in the original be restored. It was an excerpt of a poem by the Georgian modernist poet Galaktion Tabidze—I agreed, confidant that I could find a Russian translation of the poem, as several collections of Tabidze's poetry had been published in Soviet Russia. Unfortunately, that poem was not among them, which is probably why the Russian translators had decided to omit the epigraph. In the end, with the help of an Italian colleague, I translated the Georgian verse into English from the Italian. In the end, this translation involved at least four languages: Georgian, Russian, English and Italian, although the note in the English edition—Translated from the Russian—obscures the complex reality.

3. Pseudo Direct Translation

To the extent that modern directness claims, inspired by Romantic historicism, involve a denial of mediation, they may be directed not only at indirect translation, but also at

abridgement and censorship. And so, historicism led to more direct translations as well as to more non-bowdlerized translations. For example, it was in the early nineteenth century that the first uncensored versions of Plato appeared in English. Later in the century, Edward Carpenter would criticize the Oxford scholar Max Müller for obscuring the meaning of key terms in a Sanskrit text by refusing to translate them:

> Such is the pass we have come to that actually Max Muller in his translation of the Sacred Books of the East appear to have been unable to persuade himself to render these and a few other quite similar passages into English, but gives them in the original Sanskrit! One might have thought that as Professor in the University of Oxford, presumably *sans peur* and *sans reproche*, and professedly engaged in making a translation of these book for students, it was his duty and it might have been his delight to make intelligible just such passages as these, which give the pure and pious sentiment of the early world in so perfect a form; unless indeed he thought the sentiment impure and impious — in which case we have indeed a measure of the degradation of the public opinion which must have swayed his mind. As to the only German translation of the Upanishad which I can find, it balks at the same passages in the same feeble way — repeating nicht wiederzugeben, nicht wiederzugeben, over and over again, till at last one can but conclude that the translator is right, and the simplicity and sacredness of the feeling is in this our time indeed "not to be reproduced." (1912: 22)

The shaming tone of Carpenter's gives clear indication that we are in the presence of a norm. One could argue, however, that there is no stronger evidence of the ascendency of the directness norm than the phenomenon of pseudo direct translation, or false directness claims, as it suggests that the value of directness has risen to such an extent that one would risk lying about it. Consider, for example, the initial English translation of Russian author Dmitry Merezhkovsky's novel *Voskresshie bogi: Roman Leonardo da Vinci*, done by the Irish poet Herbert Trench. The preface contains a cluster of overt directness claims. First, there is the statement in English: "The present story of the Italian Renaissance has been published in Russia as *The Resurrection of the Gods*; in France under the title, *The Romance of Leonardo da Vinci*. This translation is direct from the Russian, and is the only one in the English language which is or will be authorized by the Author" (1902, n.p.). Here we have two mutually reinforcing directness claims, namely, that the translation was done directly from the Russian and that it is the only English translation authorized by Merezhkovsky himself. As proof of that second claim, the actual authorization by Merezhkovsky, in French, is provided: "À Monsieur Herbert Trench j'accord l'autorisation *exclusive* de traduire du Russe en Anglais mon livre *La Résurrection des Dieux*" (n.p.). The non-translation of the authorization, one might argue, reinforces the second directness claim, although why the authorization and the title of the original was provided in French and not Russian and why the French authorization respects English rules of capitalization for nationalities and book titles, rather than the French, is perhaps the first indication that there is something amiss.

A cursory look at the opening pages of the translation, which includes three epigraphs present in the French translation but not in the Russian original, not to mention a title that reflects the French inversion of the Russian title and subtitle lends further support to the contention that this is an indirect translation from the French.

Moreover, Trench, who was an Oxford-educated Irish poet, was living in France when he undertook the translation of Merezhkovsky's work and cites only French critical essays in his preface. There is in fact no indication that Trench knew Russian.

The status of Trench's version as an indirect translation was not exposed, however, until the 1920s when a second English translation of the novel appeared done by Bernard Gilbert Guerney, who was the owner of Blue Fawn bookstore in New York City and translated extensively from the Russian. In the preface to his translation, Guerney writes:

> A word as to the translation: whatever its merits, — or possible defects, — the purchaser will find it more complete that any other in English,--this translation has, moreover, the distinct advantage of being absolutely unbowdlerized — and the only version in English, I firmly believe, done directly from the original Russian, and not re-translated from the French… (1928: xi-xii)

Nonetheless, despite claiming his translation to be more complete and accurate, Guerney preserves Trench's title: *The Romance of Leonardo da Vinci*, while doing away with the epigraphs.

The full extent and nature of Trench's abridgement is made clear only in 1963, during the Cold War, when interest in "Russian psychology" was at its peak. As Helen Gourin and Morris S. Gurin note in the close of their preface to that edition in the preface to a revised and unabridged edition of Trench's translation:

> The authorized English version of the *The Romance of Leonardo da Vinci* by Herbert Trench, published in 1902, shortened the novel by approximately one-fifth of the Russian original. In the present edition this omitted material has been translated and added to the graceful Trench version. Many of these new pages reflect Merezhkovsky's prophetic belief in the importance of Russian influence on a resurrected Europe. In the experiences of a young Russian icon painter in Italy and France he hints at some sort of reconciliation between the worshipers of Apollo and the worshipers of Dionysius. It will scarcely escape the reader of these pages that sixty years after they were written we are witnessing another contest in the same arena, affording interesting opportunities to the analogists among us. (1963: ix)

Only in 2014 is the original Russian title restored but now as the subtitle to Ignat Avsey's retranslation: *Leonardo da Vinci: The Resurrection of the Gods,* which was, by the way, the title of the original French translation.

There is a historical irony in Trench's treatment of a novel that aspired to repair the breach between the East and West and to integrate Russia more fully into a pan-European cultural sphere insofar as the excision of Evtikhii's plotline makes impossible any merging of East and West as the representative of Byzantine Art had been removed. Moreover, it was Evtikhii's re-discovery of ancient Greek figures and motifs in his Uglich psalter, following his exposure to Italian Renaissance art that is reflected in Merezhkovsky's title *The Resurrection of the Gods*, as evident in the following passage. The recasting of the French and English titles to align with the omission of Evtikhii's plotline fronted da Vinci, reflecting the Western fascination with the Italian Renaissance in general and with da Vinci in particular — there was in fact a

boom in da Vinci scholarship in the fin-de-siècle and the first two decades of the twentieth century, culminating in Sigmund Freud's 1912 psychobiography of the artist, which cites the German translation of Merezhkovsky's novel several times in support of his contention that the artist was a latent homosexual.

4. Situating Directness Claims

Attempts to establish Soviet translation practice as superior to pre-Soviet and Western practice involved a variety of directness claims. For example, Fyodor Batishkov in the introduction to the 1920 edition of *Principles of Literary Translation*, which was created as an in-house guide for translators at the World Literature Publishing House, founded 1918 by Maxim Gorky and Anatoly Lunacharsky, proposed three approaches to translation, which he situated historically. The first, practiced in France in the 17th and 18th centuries, involved the radical domestication of source texts to meet the conventions of the target culture, which privileged content over form. This was an effect, Batiushkov argued, of the sense of superiority the French felt toward the source culture. The second approach, practiced in Russia in the 18th century involved the unsystematic borrowing of elements from the source text, privileging form over content. This was an effect of Russia's sense of inferiority vis a vis the source culture. The third approach is characterized by the attempt to render both the content and the form of the source text, an approach that is possible, Batiushkov alleges, only when the level of cultural development is more of less equal between the source and target cultures. This third, most recent approach, is, one could say, more direct, insofar as the reception of the source text is not mediated, and therefore distorted, by either a sense of cultural inferiority or superiority.[4]

This line of reasoning would be further developed in Soviet translation theory of the 1930s to argue that the translator's sociological or class background should align with that of the source text author in order to avoid ideological/stylistic distortions. In the late 1920s and early 30s, during what Sheila Fitzpatrick referred to as the Soviet Union's "cultural revolution," the translators were encouraged to "diminish themselves" so as not to allow their individual stylistic and other preferences to bias their rendering of the original author's style — a phenomenon referred to as *otsebiatina*, or "from oneself,' representing the arbitrary intrusion into the target text of the translator's individual stylistic or thematic preferences. Compare Kornei Chukovsky's description of the translator as a "a co-participant in the creative work of that author whom he is translating" (1919: 7) from his 1919 *Principles of Literary Translation* to his admonishment to translators from his 1930 *Art of Translation*: "The

[4] It is interesting to compare Batiushkov's typology with the one proposed by Jacques Peletier du Mans in his *Art poétique* of 1545. Toward the end, "he conjures up the chimera of a 'total' translation of Virgil, which would render the Latin word for word and sentence for sentence while preserving all the grace and elegance of the original text, only to conclude that 'it cannot be done'" (Hermans 1995: 104).

translator must strive toward the diminishing [*umalenie*] of his talent, the reduction of his creative personality [*lichnost'*]" (1930: 24).[5]

Over the course of the 1920s direct translation came to play an increasingly visible role among Soviet directness claims. Consider, for example, this blurb from the Soviet translation of *The Thousand and One Nights* into Russian published by Academic publishing house in 1929. As stated on the frontispiece:

> V otlichie ot prezhnikh russkikh izdannii predstavliaiushchikh sokrashchenyi perevod s frantsuzskogo ili angliiskogo, *Tysycha i odna noch' v izdanii Academia vykhodit vpervye tselikom, bez vsiakikh sokrazhchenii, v nauchnom perevode neposredstvenno s arabskogo podlinnika.* Perevod vspolniaetsia arabistom M. Sal'e pod redaktsiei akademika I. Iu. Krachkovskii. (n.p.)
> [Unlike the previous Russian editions representing abridged translations from the French or English, *One Hundred and One Nights* in the Academia edition appears for the first time in its entirety, without any abridgements, in a scholarly translation directly from the Arabic original. The translation was done by the Arabist M. Sal'e under the editorship of Academician I. Iu. Krachkovskii.]

We see here a concatenation of directness claims. Not only was the translation done directly from the Arabic "original," it was unabridged, and both the translator and the editor were Soviet specialists in Arabic language and literature: the translator, Mikhail Sal'e, was a noted Arabist, while the editor, Ignatii Iul'ianovich Krachkovskii, was not only an Arabist but also a member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences.

The triumphant discourse surrounding Soviet translation practice was challenged, however, by intra-Union translation, that is, translation between the various peoples of the Soviet Union. The promotion of intra-Union translation emerged in the early 1930s as a key component of the policy that would later be called "Druzhba narodov," or friendship of peoples. That call was institutionalized at the first congress of the Soviet Writers Union in 1934, where Gorky declared:

> I deem it necessary to point out that Soviet literature is not merely a literature of the Russian language. It is an all-Union literature. Since the literatures of our fraternal republics, distinguished from ours only by language, live and work in the light and under wholesome influence of the same ideas which unite the whole world of the working people that capitalism has torn asunder, we obviously have no right to ignore the literary creation of the national minorities simply because there are more of us than of them. (qtd. in Khotimsky 2011: 76)

While Gorky would express the desire that all the literatures of the peoples of the Soviet Union be translated into all the other languages of the Soviet Union, that utopian

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[5] His position would change again in the first post-Stalinist edition of his work, where he praises the translations of those writers who were forced to translate when they could no longer publisher their original writing: "Even the most original of our poets – those with a strongly expressed, distinct style, with pronounced features of creative individuality – are giving their energy to the art of translation (Chukovskii 1964: 3). For more on the shifts in Chukovsky's positions regarding the translator's creative personality, or *lichnost'* (Baer 2022).

wish very soon confronted the reality that there were not sufficient cadres of translators in the various republics to carry out the task, at least not at the scale imagined. That fact, coupled with the increasing Russian chauvinism of the Soviet state, would lead Aleksandr Fadeev to state two decades later that it was through translation into Russian that the various literatures of the Soviet Union could enter Soviet culture, or what he referred to as the "fond sovetskoi kul'tury." As a result, much of the literature from the Soviet republics was translated indirectly, through the use of interlinear trots, or *podstrochniki*.

While celebrated by some in the early Stalinist period as an advancement, testifying to the "victory of Lenin's and Stalin's nationality policy" (Tarlovskii 1940: 266), in late Soviet society the translation of works of *intranational,* or intra-Union literature, was often contrasted unfavorably to the translation of great works of *international,* or world literature.[6] There are a number of reasons for the emergence of this opposition. First, intranational translation was closely associated with the centralization of cultural practices under state control that took place in the early thirties and was manifested in the establishment of the Soviet Writers Union and of Socialist Realism as the official aesthetic program of the Soviet Union. Before that time, Soviet writings on translation referred almost exclusively to works of Western European literature (see, for example, the 1919 and 1920 editions of the booklet *Principles of Literary Translation* done for the World Literature Publishing House). And while Soviet publishers, such as World Literature and Academia, expanded their lists over the course of the nineteen twenties to include works from East Asia, the Middle East, and South America, works of Western European literature remained by far the most commonly translated.

Second, the translation of Soviet intranational literature was commonly done from interlinear trots, which were repeatedly criticized as mediated, inauthentic, and of poor quality. In this way, the trot became a symbol of "an impersonal 'industrialized' approach to translation," and to Soviet cultural production in general (Khotimsky (2011: 75). As Susanna Witt argues:

> As the podstrochnik often consisted of only a crude rendering of original source text "content" in the target language, the issue was bound up with serious epistomological problems. There was seldom any form of communication or interaction between the producer of this intermediary text, called podstrochnikist, and the nominal translator. The podstrochnik was more often than not anonymous and always unpublished. (Witt 2013: 157-158)

When translating from an interlinear trot, the final translations were often carried out by individuals having little or no knowledge of the source language, let alone its literature, culture and history, and so such translations were especially vulnerable to distortion and radical domestication. Consider the comments of the writer and translator Nikolai Zabolotskii from 1954: "An interlinear translation is similar to the ruins of the Colosseum. Only those who know the history of Rome, its everyday life, its traditions, its art, and the development of its architecture are capable of achieving

[6] For a more detailed discussion of this phenomenon, see Baer 2023.

good results in its restoration. An occasional passer-by cannot do it" (Zabolotsky 2013: 110). Or, as the translator and critic Sergei Osherov expressed it, "I don't know how to work from interlinear translations. This approach may produce positive results only in the case of a permanent collaboration between the poet-translator and the author of the interlinear version" (2013: 129).

And so, while the translation of international literature had the emancipatory potential of generating what Aleksei Yurchak refers to as "imaginary elsewheres," the translation of intranational literature came to represent for intellectuals of the post-Stalin period the banal realities of Soviet life and the worst aspects of Stalinist official culture. In an anecdote of the time, Stalin says to the writer Maxim Gorky: "You have written an excellent novel *Mother*. Now I would like you to write a novel *Father*." Gorky is taken aback and tries to explain: "Iosif Vissarionovich, I cannot write like that, on command (*po prikazu*)," to which Stalin replies: "It doesn't hurt to try" (a more direct translation of the Russian saying, *popytka ne pytka*, is 'an attempt is not torture,' a dark allusion to the purges of the intelligentsia that took place in the late 1930s across the Soviet Republics).

Critiques of the use of interlinear trots were also deployed to expose the hypocrisy of the Soviet Union's policy of "friendship of peoples." For example, in an essay titled "The Tenth Muse," poet and translator Nikolai Chukovsky, son of the translator and theorist Kornei Chukovsky, condemned the practice of using interlinear trots, which he points out are mainly used for the translation of Central Asian literatures, not for the translation of Western European literatures: "Perhaps, the greatest evil which the delegates at the conference unanimously discussed was the established habit of doing interlinear translation" (2013: 117). He goes on to describe the practice:

> If the translation of an Uzbek novel into Russian is required, the procedure is as follows: Someone called an interlinearist [*podstrochnikist*], a person who knows Uzbek but doesn't have a good command of literary Russian, hastily translates the novel into very bad Russian. He does it horribly, without even following the rules of Russian grammar. The only reason for such a translation is to somehow let the reader figure out the general idea on his own. This bad translation is called an interlinear translation. As it is impossible to publish such a work, it is submitted to a person who knows literary Russian but doesn't know Uzbek and who can refine the translation. This person is called the translator of the Uzbek novel, which doesn't make any sense, since refining a low-quality Russian text is what we call editing, not translation. (117)

Chukovsky then calls for an end to the practice, concluding: "the tradition of interlinear translation is a vestige, a holdover from the time when the intelligentsia in our republics was weak and insignificant in number, and there was a dearth of individuals capable of raising translation to an adequate level. This time has passed" (117).

So central was the condemnation of indirect translation through the use of interlinear trots that it became a motif in Post-Stalinist works of poetry and prose. For example, in the 1960 poem "The Translator," by the poet and translator Arseny Tarkovsky, every verse ends with the refrain: "Ach, you Eastern translations, / How you make my head ache" (Tarkovskii 2013: 143). Or as the poet-translator Boris

Slutskii puts it in the 1961 poem "I Translate from Mongolian and Polish": "And you, heralds of perverse ideas, / Phrasemen and liars of any land, / Please don't shove at me your interlinear cribs – / For you won't be translated" (Slutskii 2013: 146). This categorical refusal to participate in practice perceived as inauthentic and false aligns with the ethical code of the late Soviet intelligentsia, as outlined by Alexander Solzhenitsyn: Live not by lies (1974).

While the interlinear trot appears in several works of late Soviet prose, such as Felix Roziner's *A Certain Finkelmeyer* (1980) and Gennady Trifonov's novella *Taking Stock* (1970), I will focus on Semen Lipkin's *Dekada* (1983), as he offers the most nuanced treatment of the motif, suggesting that one might overcome the confining strictures of Soviet cultural production through intensive study of the language, literature, culture, and history of the source text and through meaningful and respectful collaboration. Lipkin's approach to the practice was informed by the fact that, unlike Roziner and Trifonov, he worked for many years as a literary translator, first hired by Georgii Shengeli when it became impossible for him to publish his original writing. Unlike Trifonov's hero, who resigns himself to a life of creative mediocrity, Lipkin developed a deep and abiding interest in the poets and languages he was translating. For example, an assignment to translate a Kalmyk epic opened up a new world to him, which he then began very actively to explore: "I didn't know the Kalmyk language. I had only a vague idea of Kalmyk history and customs. In the face of such ignorance, it was impossible to limit myself to an interlinear trot. I began to study the work of historians and traverllers — Pal'mov, Grumm-Grzhimailo, Iakinfa Bichurin, Pallas, and others; I acquainted myself with V. Ia. Vladimirstov's *Comparative Grammar of the Written Mongol Language*," and so on (2008, 101).[7] He also notes the friendships that arose in the process with his fellow translators and with the Central Asian authors he was translating: "We worked hard and lovingly, feeling a sense of responsibility for their developing national self-consciousness. We met and became friends with the poets, scholars and experts of their East" (Lipkin 1990a: 8).

Unlike Lipkin, his fictional translator, Stanislav Bodorskii, is not compelled to undertake translation; he becomes interested in the Turkic literatures of Central Asia and the Northern Caucasus on his own while a student at the university. Bodorskii ends up rooming with a Gushan student, Daniial Parvizov, and they exchange lessons, with Bodorskii teaching Parvizov Russian, and Parvizov teaching Bodorskii the Gushan language. Eventually, they translate an epic tale from Gushan into Russian, and when it gets published in a Soviet thick journal, Bodorskii shares the credit for the translation with Parvizov: "Daniial Parvizov was beaming: Stanislav had mentioned him as the author of the interlinear trot in his short note 'From the Translator.' The names of the two friends appeared simultaneously and for the first time in print" (47). In fact, the first time Bodorskii is mentioned in the novel is in a conversation among Tavlar writers, who speak of him in positive terms, describing his translations as "high

[7] As Yvonne Green puts it, "Lipkin preserved cultures that Sovietisation undermined by translating their poetry into Russian. These included versions of the Kalmyk epic *Dzhangar* (1940), the Kirghiz epic *Mana* (1941), the Kabardian epic *Narty* (1951), the Buriat epic *Geser* (1968), and the classic works of the classical Tadzhik, Uzbek, Kirghiz, Balkar and Kalmyk poets" (2011: vii).

quality" and the man himself as "good-natured and kind" (22, 23) — note here the entanglement of personal and professional ethics.

5. Conclusion

I hope to have demonstrated that the rhetoric or discourse of indirect translation is as worthy of study as the phenomenon itself. Given the often relational nature of the phenomenon — (in)directness as a cline—and the various uses to which directness claims can be put, not to mention the fact that directness claims may be false, (in)directness should be viewed not as an ahistorical, self-evident phenomenon but rather as a set of mobile claims made for translations, claims that are deployed in specific socio-cultural and socio-political contexts. As such, those claims are often entangled with broader concepts such as sincerity and authenticity, not to mention diversity, equity and inclusion.

While the ubiquity of interlinear translation made it a subject of discussion and debate since the 1930s in the Soviet Union, a similar interest in Western Translation Studies has emerged only recently. And so, I would like to end by citing a conspicuous mention of indirect translation, referred to as bridge translation, that appears in the recently published "Manifesto for Literary Translation" by Pen America:

> Translators, writers, and publishers have a responsibility to consider the implications of using a bridge translation, a practice in which a "literal" translation is prepared by a source-language expert and generally "polished" by a writer or translator with little or no knowledge of the source language. We need to interrogate the notions of difference between "literary" and "bridge" translators, which are often predicated on problematic and harmful ideas of literariness and language expertise that are inextricable from race, since bridge translations occur more frequently for translations from non-white-majority cultures where the source-language expert is treated as a "native informant" who cannot "master" English themselves. We understand "bridge" translations to be co-translations, which should be credited as such.

While Lipkin's Borodsky provided a precedent for the practice when he credited Parvizov in his introduction, where "the names of the two friends appeared simultaneously and for the first time in print" (47), the PEN Manifesto makes explicit the racialization of the practice, which in the context of the Soviet Union, could only be alluded to. For example, in Lipkin's poem "Soiuz" or "Union," he uses Aesopian language to draw attention to the Soviet Union's ethnic minorities, drawing a connection between Ingushetiia and Israel in his reference to "the little tribe known as I." (The letter "I" in Russian also means 'and,' underscoring the theme of union.) This underscores the necessity of historicizing directness claims by situating them in specific socio-cultural and political contexts in order to generate new comparative histories of the phenomenon, as both discourse and practice.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

Ethical Standards

The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.