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PERFORMANCE OF EXILE: POET-TRANSLATORS IN THE LENINGRAD UNDERGROUND[1]

Abstract

Literary translation during the Soviet period has been mostly analysed in terms of conforming to or resisting the dominant ideology. However, there were spaces where translation practices were to a certain extent free from this dichotomy, though excluded from the official literary field. The focus of the article is the particular condition of displacement or exile experienced by the underground poets who lived in Leningrad during the 1980s. The samizdat poet-translator plays the role of an exile, living on the fringes of the society and creating a network in the underground. The outcomes of this "performance of exile" are the translated texts, which show the handprints of the translator's conditions. The article responds to Anthony Pym's call for humanizing Translation History, and, using the sociological tools developed in Translation Studies by Daniel Simeoni and Moira Inghilleri, it investigates the role of context, agent and text in the poetry translation practice of late samizdat.

Keywords: poetry translation, samizdat, Leningrad, translation sociology, exile

Anna Akhmatova once claimed that nothing can destroy one's own poetic ability more than translating the work of another poet (Chukovskaya 1990: 131). Indeed, in the Soviet Union such translation practice is usually

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synonymous with constraint, escape or expressing oneself through someone else's words; this has certainly been the case of several disgraced authors such as Boris Pasternak and Akhmatova herself. For this reason, numerous scholars have focused on the use of translation as an ideological tool and a form of resistance by author-translators, who disguise certain rebellious elements within their official translations (Kay France 1987; Loseff 1984; Witt 2011; Baer 2016). However, the act of translation has also retained its potential as a creative practice – even as a means of self-expression – in certain contexts within the Soviet world. This is especially true for the translation of poetry, "given the potential of poetry both to evade censorship and foster solidarity" (Baer 2016: 21). Thus, my research focuses on the area where translation activities seem to occur independently, not only from the ideological pressure of the Soviet authorities, but also from an urgent need to resist that same ideology.

More specifically, this article investigates poetry translation within the circulation of *samizdat*, a clandestine system set up to share uncensored texts, which characterised the Leningrad underground from the end of the 1950s until the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Russian term *samizdat* is a compound of *sam* and *izdat* which literally means "self-publish". It was created in the 1940s by the Soviet poet Nikolaj Glazkov, who termed his own work as *samsebjaizdat*, which means "publications of my own, published on my own" (Catalano, Guagnelli 2011: 5).[2]

In this article I adopt a socio-cultural approach towards poetry translation, as advocated especially by Jacob Blakesley (2019: 7–8), using the tools and terminology developed by Translation Studies scholars (Simeoni 1998; Inghilleri 2005, 2014; Wolf, Fukari 2007, Milton, Bandia 2009) based on Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of literature. Especially important are the concepts of translation "agent", "field", and "capital". Thus, the focus of this investigation concerns: 1) the context of *samizdat* during the 1980s; 2) the agents of translation involved, specifically two poet-translators; and 3) the texts, namely the poems translated by them during the last decade of the USSR.

Although the literary circulation within *samizdat* was a separate field from official literary production, an accurate investigation needs to avoid

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[2] Initially, Glazkov's intention was to establish a readership of his own. His practice of typing and distributing his poems to friends thus became a private and intimate dynamic. However, over time Glazkov's term gained a connotation of resistance and dissent, ultimately coming to symbolise the clandestine circulation of texts developed in Russia, Poland, former Czechoslovakia, Estonia and Lithuania during the Soviet period.

a binary approach, and instead attempt to understand the relationship and influences between the official and the unofficial spheres. Such interrelations are particularly important from the point of view of the 1980s, when *samizdat* was characterised by a paradoxical tension between autonomy and co-optation. On the one hand a strive for independence was perceivable, expressed through the creation of new independent editorial projects, and through the institution of the underground literary prize named after Andrey Bely (1880–1934) established in 1978. On the other hand, a desire for recognition and participation emerged, as exemplified by the foundation of the semi-official literary group Klub-81 (1981). Such a contrast exemplifies the condition of in-between-ness experienced by the agents of *samizdat* and the blurring of borders between official and unofficial spaces in the last decade of the Soviet Union.

During the same period some *samizdat* agents moved beyond this dichotomy and even beyond Soviet borders themselves. Although translations, especially on political, philosophical and social issues, had been circulating within *samizdat* from its inception, the 1980s witnessed an explosion of poetry translation, to the extent that the journal *Predlog* (1984–1989) was founded, devoted to literary translation. Consequently, translators became far more prominent in the Leningrad *samizdat*, playing key roles in the clandestine publishing systems: most of the translators were actually poets themselves, when not also editors and publishers as in the case of *Predlog*. There were also other journals which consistently published poetry translations during the 1980s, such as *Chasy* (1976–1990), *Obvodnyi Kanal* (1981–1993) and *Severnaia Pochta* (1979–1981). Their production was not halted by the onset of *perestroika*, proving that the need for *samizdat* was not over until the very end of the decade.

These preliminary considerations concerning the complex relationship between context, agent and text leads to the following research question. If, officially, authors had been forced to play the role of translators, **why** did the poets who could publish their own poems in *samizdat* still translate poetry from other languages and publish such translations next to their own poetry?

In order to answer this question, this article will firstly explore the relationship between context and agents; secondly, two specific cases will be considered, as examples of displaced translating practices, with a focus on both the selection of texts and the resulting translations. I aim to investigate the reasons behind these examples of such translations, and consider the context in which the translators themselves were constrained, as well

as the cultural traditions and influences that affected their practices, with a particular focus on the role of **displacement**. Indeed, the co-existence of dependence and independence, the relationship between unofficial and official spaces and the number of roles undertaken by *samizdat* poet-translators are consequences of the fact that *samizdat* agents and texts were actually displaced, since they were forced to exist outside of the official literary field (Baer 2016: 116; Burt 1998: 17).[3]

1. The context and the agent

The era of *samizdat* poet-translators occurs during "late socialism", which, for Aleksei Yurchak (2005: 4) began during the mid-1950s and ended with the beginning of *perestroika* in the mid-1980s; in this article I also apply this term to the second half of the 1980s until the actual collapse of the USSR in 1991. This is due to the fact that although the policies of *perestroika* undoubtedly influenced the second half of the 1980s (Zalambani 2009: 171), they did not become consolidated practices until the end of the USSR. Interestingly, despite the official editorial boom which took place in the second half of the decade (Yurchak 2005: 128), during the very last years of the USSR the censorial institutions maintained obsolete positions simply in order to save their own roles (Zalambani 2009: 217). Moreover, the *spetskhrany*[4] were opened in 1989 and it was only at this point that a considerable number of Russian and foreign authors were rehabilitated. In 1990 a new Law concerning the press and mass media declared the freedom of the press, and in 1991 the censorial institution of Glavlit was dismantled. From this point, many innovations which started during *perestroika* were gradually put into practice, marking the end of the Soviet era.

Thus, the generation under consideration here is what Yurchak (2005) defines as the "last Soviet generation", whose approach towards resistance and dissent differs markedly from its predecessors': in fact, the *shestidesiatniki* (literally the "sixties" i.e., the 1960s generation), were engaged in an even more active and overt resistance against the government. The forms

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[3] Brian J. Baer discusses the concept of *displacement* as opposed to *replacement*, elaborating on Robert Burt's suggestions.

[4] Special sections for books – both Russian and foreign – which were not considered aligned with Soviet ideology.

of dissent, or simply disinterest, which the last Soviet generation tended to adopt instead favoured self-exclusion and alienation. The majority of the late-Soviet underground authors worked as night watchmen, boiler-room technicians and in other menial jobs. As Marco Sabbatini (2011: 341) explains, such positions afforded them the opportunity of living on the borders of a society they despised.

These professions also gave them a considerable amount of time to devote to their own writing, which for them represented an escape from Soviet reality. This was especially true during the 1970s in the case of the underground poets Sergey Stratanovsky, Viktor Krivulin and Elena Shvarts, whose verses shared a search for the divine in the quotidian life of Leningrad. The spirituality expressed in their poems was not necessarily orthodox or traditional, though it retained traces of Christian theology (Sabbatini 2011; Von Zitzewitz 2015) which manifested as a distorted, almost grotesque, vision of human life and of God. Due to this mystical nature, their poetics differed substantially from politically engaged poetry.

The interest in theology and philosophy pervaded the Leningrad underground, as exemplified by the frequent seminars and informal meetings concerning such themes which took place during those years. Sergei Stratanovskii, who published his own poems as well as translations from French in *samizdat* literary journals, and who co-founded *Obvodny Kanal*[5] (Bypassing Channel 1981–1986), remembers "the religious-philosophical group that gathered at my home (permanent members: Kirill Butyrin, Aleksander Zhidkov, Nikolay I'lin and myself)" (cf. Lygo 2010: 115). The most famous of these theologico-philosophical seminars in Leningrad were the ones run by Tatiana Goricheva and Viktor Krivulin, from 1974 to 1980. They were also attended by the young poets Aleksander Zhidkov and Grigorij Benevich, who at the time were active in publishing their poems and translation in the *samizdat* journals *Chasy*, *Obvodny Kanal* and *Predlog*: together with several other *samizdat* poet-translators,[6] in publishing their translations alongside their own poems, they continued a longstanding Russian tradition of poet-translators (Khotimsky 2018: 220).

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[5] The Obvodny canal exists today in St Petersburg.

[6] Alongside Zhidkov and Benevich, various other poet-translators were active in the Leningrad *samizdat*. Arkady Dragomoshchenko, Mikhail Iossel, Sergey Khrenov, Vladimir Kucheriavkin, Mikhail Khazin and Sergey Magid were the most prolific. They were well known *samizdat* figures, especially because of their own poetry, but also as the founders and main editors of *Predlog* (Lazzarin 2011: 215).

The practice of poetry translation is a clear legacy left by the poet-translators of Russian literary history: Vladimir Solovev even declared that Zhukovsky's translation of Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" "can be considered the beginning of truly *human* poetry in Russia after the rhetorical triumph of the Derzhavin period" (cf. Baer 2016: 2–3). Many of the great Russian poets were also translators, thus enriching their own poetics and refreshing their process of writing (Lazzarin 2011: 209; Baer 2016).

However, one should not forget that the practice of poetry translation in *samizdat* was a displaced one, since the agency of the poet-translators was not exercised overtly in the literary field, but covertly as part of the underground movement. Such displacement can be compared to the exile experienced by many Russian intellectuals, in particular poets during the 19th and 20th centuries, who had to leave their country, mainly for political reasons. Exile – either physical, spiritual or imaginary – from one's motherland and mother tongue is closely bound with the activity of *translation* in both senses of the word: the Latin word *translatio*, contains both the image of physical transportation from one place to another, as well as the literary translation from one language to another. The experience of exile thus implies a duality of space and language: as Svetlana Boym (2001: 254) states, it includes a "double-ness" of conscience, time and space.

Exiled writers usually experienced a strong feeling of solidarity towards their companions in exile (Said 2000: 141) and considered their own poetry as an authentic extension of the literature of their homeland. *Samizdat* poet-translators also experienced such feelings of solidarity and continuity (Parisi 2013: 85–87), which reinforced their connection with exiled Russian authors of the past, who in fact ended up forming the mainstream canon of Russian literature that we know today (Bethea, Frank 2011: 195). *Samizdat* poet-translators and exiles had two other features in common: they were not appreciated by their motherland and they worked with other languages. However, their approaches differed meaningfully, both in relation to the motherland and to foreign languages. The Leningrad *samizdat* circle developed a certain detachment from – even a disinterest in – the society in which they found themselves; instead, many Russian intellectuals who emigrated during the Soviet period were far more interested in the fate of their own country and frequently engaged with the politics of dissent. In the *samizdat* environment, foreign languages had a positive value, and were not perceived as an obstacle for the development of original Russian poetry, as

happened in exile; *samizdat* circles saw foreign language literary sources and the practice of translating as an opportunity for dialogue with poets from different contexts, affording fruitful contacts with different existences.

The *samizdat* circle of translators were generally self-taught and saw their translation work as a means of including foreign poets within their own underground circle. The belief that thanks to their wide reading and translation practice the underground circumstances and everyday life of late-Soviet Leningrad had acquired an international dimension is particularly visible in Benevich's poem "Obraz" (Image):

> Кухня – вот наша Сорбонна,
> И котельная – наш Оксфорд;
> В Гейдельберге коридоров
> Коммунальных, на картошке
>
> Гарварда овощебазе, –
> Вот где мы образованье
> Получили.
> Это разве
> Можно заглушить сознаньем?[7]
>
>   (2015)

The methods of the Leningrad poet-translators served a double objective: first of all to create a new literary environment which could include foreign authors, and also to metaphorically experience what physical exile was like through poetic immersion in another world. As Boym explains (2001: 165): "a foreign language is – like art – an alternative reality, a potential world. Once discovered, one can no longer go back to a monolinguistic existence."

Therefore, the practice of poetry translation is a bridge which connects present and past, the Leningrad of the 1980s with the Petrograd of the past from which Russian poets emigrated, with anti-Soviet and anti-Tsarist feelings embedded in a longer and more complex cultural tradition. The context of *samizdat* led the practitioners to deal with displacement through the medium of translation. For them, translating foreign poets was not a constraint as it was for other authors, but rather a choice, which allowed

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[7] "The kitchen was our Sorbonne / and the boiler room our Oxford / In the Heidelberg of the communal corridors, / at the Harvardian potato and vegetable store / that is where we received our education. / ………… Can it / in all conscience be silenced? (my translation).

them to experience other languages, other literatures and other worlds. They were acting as if they were in exile and through this metaphorical exile into the *samizdat* they were able to write and share both their poems and translations.

2. The agent and the text

After analysing the relationship between context and practitioners, let us now explore how the agency of *samizdat* poet-translators was affected by this relationship, from a translating perspective. According to Anthony Pym, translation studies must be able to "objectivize the subjective" (Pym 2009: 25); in other words, the translators' agency should be traceable in the text selection and in the translations themselves. Following the humanization of translation studies advocated by Pym, in the following analysis I will look at the traces of the performance of exile in the work of two poet-translators: Benevich and Zhidkov.

Aleksander Zhidkov (1947–) graduated in English studies from the Filologicheskaia Fakultet of Leningrad and worked as an English teacher. Grigory Benevich (1956–) was an engineer by education and a poet-translator by vocation. Due to his political beliefs he was excluded from the Soviet youth association Komsomol and had to work as a teacher of physics rather than as an engineer; later he worked as a gas boiler technician (1983–1993) while actively participating in the editing and publishing of *samizdat* journals.

2.1. Selection of texts

Below I present the work of both poets published in *samizdat* journals. Given that *samizdat* is a precarious medium due to its clandestine nature, not all issues of *samizdat* journals are available. However, the table of contents of most issues have been assembled, which helps to reconstruct the content of the publications, even if they are not always precise. For instance, sometimes the titles of the poems are not specified, as can be seen in the table with six poems by W. B. Yeats and the collection of American Literature.

Table 1. Grigory Benevich's samizdat translations (source: author's own elaboration)

Grigory Benevich				
Journal	**Year**	**Translated author**	**Translated text(s)**	**Available**
Predlog № 3	1984	W. B. Yeats	– 6 poems – "An Irish Airman foresees his Death" – "The Phases of the Moon"	no yes no
Predlog № 7	1985–1986	American Literature of XX Century		no
Chasy № 59	1986	W. B. Yeats	– "The Phases of the Moon" – "An Irish Airman foresees his Death" – "All Souls' Night" – "The Second Coming" – "Ribh at the Tomb of Baile and Aillinn"	yes
Predlog №13	1987	W. H. Auden	– "August 1968"	yes
		Roald Hoffmann	– "Svoloch"	

Table 2. Aleksandr Zhidkov's samizdat translations (source: author's own elaboration)

Aleksandr Zhidkov				
Journal	**Year**	**Author**	**Text(s)**	**Available**
Chasy № 39	1982	W. B. Yeats	"Sailing to Byzantium" "Leda and the Swan"	yes
Obvodny Kanal № 1	1981	John Donne	"The Apparition"	yes
Obvodny Kanal № 5	1984	John Donne	"Witchcraft by a Picture"[8] "The Apparition"	yes

What is clear from the tables is that in spite of all the differences, both Zhidkov and Benevich share a similar passion for Yeats. In what follows I shall offer some reflections on the possible reasons behind their choices, relat-

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[8] Translated as "Chernaya Magia" (Black Magic)

ing to both the context of *samizdat* during the 1980s and to the connection with pre-revolutionary Russian literature and culture. I shall concentrate on the criteria for selection, and discuss a poem translated by Zhidkov, which reveals the translator's influence in the text.

Benevich claimed that he chose to translate Yeats for two reasons: the uniqueness of Yeats's poetry vis à vis the Russian tradition, and the absence of translations of Yeats into Russian.[9] He was particularly attracted to the mystical elements in Yeats's work, stemming from his passion for philosophy and theology (hence his translation of "Phases of the Moon", one of Yeats's most mystical and philosophical works). This poem presents Yeats's system of thought: every phase of the moon coincides with a character, usually literary, who represents a particular human trait or appearance. Thus, through this poem Yeats combines the metaphysical with the physical, the literary with the human, the social with the personal.

Benevich translated several poems by Yeats, but only one by W. H. Auden: "August 1968". The theme of the poem is very much connected to the Soviet world, because it was written as a reaction to the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia. The USSR is represented in this poem as an ogre, who can fight and win but who does not possess the gift of words, and only "[…] drivel gushes from its lips" (Auden 1979: 291). In translating this poem about – and against – the invasion, Benevich propagated Auden's opinion, positioning the Anglo-American author on the side of dissent.

However, one should not forget the existing connection between Yeats, Auden and the Russian poet Joseph Brodsky. In 1939 Auden wrote the poem "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," which Brodsky fortuitously read in a book of English poetry borrowed from a friend almost two decades later. Brodsky was so touched by the elegy that when T. S. Eliot died (in January 1965) he wrote "Verses on the Death of T. S. Eliot", following the structure of Auden's poem. Auden and Brodsky later became very close when Brodsky emigrated: Auden not only helped him in practical terms but was also an important source of inspiration and learning for the Russian poet (Bethea 2009: 363–380), who described his admiration for the Anglo-American poet in the essay "To Please a Shadow" (1986). When Brodsky died prematurely – on exactly the same day as W. B. Yeats – the Irish poet Seamus Heaney wrote the elegy "Audenesque", referring to the connection between Brodsky, Auden and Yeats. Therefore, Benevich's choice of Yeats and Auden

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[9] He discussed the theme when I interviewed him via email in 2016.

may also be a gesture of inscribing his translation practice into the tradition marked by the name of Brodsky, who was an important point of reference for *samizdat* circles. A poet-translator himself, he became a symbol of the unaligned intelligentsia after his trial for parasitism[10] (Pavan 2009: 24). Moreover, he grew in stature and importance following his emigration and his career as a poet in the US. His talent and devotion to poetry were fully recognized and rewarded when he won the Nobel prize in literature in 1987.

The third poet translated by Benevich was his contemporary, Roald Hoffman, a Polish chemist who emigrated to the US. He started writing poetry in English in the late 1980s, mainly about his scientific research, but also on other topics. The poem Benevich translated was first published in 1987, and in the same year his translation was published in issue № 13 of *Predlog*.

Benevich's choice of poem was almost certainly dependent on its content. In "Svoloch" (Bastard), Hoffman (1987: 98) describes an official at Sheremetevo airport (Moscow), who confiscated books of poetry by Tsvetaeva and Brodsky from him: "But to you, the expert in a gray suit, / authority, it was left to take Tsvetaeva, two slim volumes of Joseph Brodsky (…)". In translating this poem, Benevich explicitly affirms the legacy of Russian poetry such as Tvetaeva's, which had been forbidden in the USSR, and where Brodsky is again a protagonist. This poem presents two key figures in Russian poetry who were undesirable in the USSR: Tsvetaeva, who represents prerevolutionary Russia, and Brodksy, who was forced to emigrate.

Benevich chose poets and poems according to his literary interests, as well as the symbolic capital they carried. The selected poets were either connected to Brodsky and/or they expressly referred to the issues of the Soviet world, as Auden's poem "August 1968" and Hoffman's "Svoloch" clearly illustrate.

Zhidkov also translated Yeats's poems, but additionally focused on John Donne. This choice may be linked to his education in English literature but also, once again, thanks to Brodsky's work. Brodsky started reading John Donne's poetry during his imprisonment in a labour camp in the region of

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[10] The trial against Brodsky in 1964, and against the translators Daniel and Siniavsky in 1965, confirmed that the Soviet system had barely changed. The accusation of parasitism against Brodsky and the two intellectuals' persecution for their literary activities were seen as an irremediable return to Stalinism. The record of these trials circulated in *samizdat*, revealing the fictitious nature of the legal procedures undertaken by the authorities. Brodsky's trial symbolises a *porog* (threshold) for Leningrad cultural life; Anna Achmatova even defined it "a Universal Judgement" in a letter to the poet.

Arkhangelsk; whilst there he received a book of Donne's poems as a gift from Lydia Chukovskaya. He already knew about Donne thanks to an epigraph in Hemingway's novel *For Whom The Bell Tolls*, but now could explore Donne's style and themes, and translate some of his verses. Brodsky was so influenced by this reading and translating process that he defined himself as Donne's pupil in his use of stanzas, and subsequently wrote his "Great Elegy to John Donne," a poem which had been circulated in *samizdat* since the mid-1960s (Pomerantsev 2010).[11] Once more, a connection with Brodsky conferred on Donne particularly high symbolic capital within the unofficial field of literature, which probably contributed to Zhidkov's selection of material for his *samizdat* translations.

2.2. Translation choices

In the following section of the article I will discuss Zhidkov's translation of Yeats's famous poem, "Sailing to Byzantium". I have chosen to display in my analysis two samples of the typewritten text, in order to illustrate the textual appearance of *samizdat* journals.

Just from the title alone, this translation reveals the feeling of exile permeating the Leningrad underground group. Zhidkov's creative version of Yeats's title is "Irlandets v Bizantii" (An Irishman in Byzantium). In this way he stresses Yeats's national identity and his status as a foreigner, in a place to which he does not belong. The translator uses a high degree of freedom of interpretation in preserving the rhyming structure of the original; this may be one of the reasons for the multiple changes of meaning and images in his translation.

The following translating strategies reveal the addition of some elements absent from the original. The line by Yeats "That is no country for old men (…)" is expanded by Zhidkov as "Starost' v chuzhikh derevakh malolet'ia (…)" - "Old age in foreign/alien/other's trees is short (…)".

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[11] Interview with Igor Pomerantsev, dated 1981 but published in 2010, translated by Frank Williams.

Старость в чужих деревах малолетья...

Figure 1 The opening line of "Sailing to Byzantium" in Zhidkov's translation. Source: Andrey Bely Centre online samizdat archive, http://samizdat.

wiki/images/2/2a/ЧАСЫ39-12-Жидков.pdf (accessed 30. Dec. 2020)

The translator added the term "chuzhoj" and the unusual image of a life spent in foreign trees. It is quite difficult to interpret the translation of this line because it appears not to be linked to anything in the original. However, it stresses the theme of the exile, with the struggle to live in another place, and proves how the translating techniques may result in a creative and individual interpretation of the original text.

Zhidkov's translation also includes the city of Ravenna, whereas in the original no city apart from Byzantium is mentioned. Yeats's line "O sages standing in God's holy fire / As in the gold mosaic of a wall" (Yeats 1994: 163) is translated as: "Ravennskaia mozaika-teplitsa / sviatykh misterij, svetlyj vodoem" ("Mosaic work of Ravenna, greenhouse/ of holy mysteries, luminous pond").

Равеннская мозаика-теплица ,,
Святых мистерий, светлый водоем,

Figure 2 An excerpt from "Sailing to Byzantium" in Zhidkov's translation. Source: Andrey Bely Centre online samizdat archive: http://samizdat.

wiki/images/2/2a/ЧАСЫ39-12-Жидков.pdf

The city of Ravenna is not simply a geographical reference, but also conceals symbolic values. It has been described and admired by many Russian poets, especially by symbolists such as Blok, who devoted a poem to Ravenna (Blok 1981: 93; Kopper 1994: 39; Presto 2008: 75, 83–87), and it can be even considered a topos in Russian literature. Therefore, mentioning Ravenna stresses the continuity of a cultural tradition, while also implying a reference to one of the most famous exiles of all: Dante Alighieri. References to Dante as an exile in Russian poetry are abundant: Blok closes his poem "Ravenna" by mentioning Dante's shadow; Anna Akhmatova recalls

his relationship with Florence, the object of both his love and his hate (1992: 395); Ivan Elagin (1918-1987) in his poem "Nevozvrashchenets" (The Defector), directly addresses Dante as a poor emigrant ("bednyj emigrant" 1998: 325) in a foreign land, i.e. Ravenna.

The decision to include Ravenna in his translation reveals Zhidkov's continuation of the topos and underlines the motif of exile only vaguely referred to in the original. Interpreting Yeats's poem through the lens of displacement, Zhidkov transcends the source text and gives the target audience a particular reading key befitting the conditions of the Leningrad underground.

This analysis reveals how the agent's personal preferences and cultural affiliation affect the selection and translation of texts. As a matter of fact, both the selection of the texts and the translation process are meaningfully influenced by the translators' personal empathy or passion for a foreign poet, as well as by their involvement in the Leningrad *samizdat*. Their participation in the underground culture is central to their translation agency, since it either led them to translate foreign poets who were connected to Brodsky, committed them to take sides against Soviet crimes or censorial practices, or enabled them to discuss themes of exile or estrangement. Moreover, the analysed translation shows the enhancement of the theme of exile and estrangement crucial to the *samizdat* discourse.

3. Conclusions

The activity of translation in the late-Soviet-period Leningrad *samizdat* saw a re-appropriation of the translating practice by Russian poets. What had been seen as an imposed or vicarious activity in official contexts, in fact represented a free creative choice in the underground movement. In this sense the *samizdat* ended the process of de-authorization observed by Monticelli (2016: 420), since the authors were allowed to publish their own verses next to their translations. Whereas Pasternak translated to accomplish a "cultural project" from above (Witt 2013: 154), and his translations are considered one of the best achievements within the Soviet era art of translation, the translations published in the Leningrad *samizdat* stemmed from independent choices of foreign language authors and texts. In context, the *samizdat* appeared as a land of exiled poets who ignored the Soviet reality in order to reconnect with Russian tradition.

The *samizdat* poet-translators' practice originated in a wish to explore literary worlds outside the Soviet bloc, and it consciously underlined their condition as exiles. The translation choices, and above all the selection process, were meaningfully influenced by the most prominent figure of the poet-translator in exile: Brodsky. The symbolic capital linked to his name is visible in the choice of authors and texts he had already translated or admired.

The *samizdat* was a space where the condition of exile was performed: both the cultural practices of publishing journals and translating foreign poetry mirror the past émigré model of cultural activities, but also the inner solidarity among the members of this circle and the feeling of loneliness that united them. However, this pattern of cultural practice does not reflect the supposed binary behaviour which, according to some authors, was achieved by the last Soviet generation: instead of living a life of pretence in public and an "authentic" life in private, the *samizdat* poet-translators moved back to the domain of the private for their performances. Within their circle of friends it became possible for them to invent new worlds. Acting according to the model of exiled Russians, they performed the interpretative mission of translation.

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