

TRANSLATING RUSSIAN LITERATURE IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

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Ireland

Alastar Sergedhebhít Púiscín, the Séacspír of Russia: On the Irish- Language Translations of Pushkin

Mark Ó Fionnáin

Introduction

In the early years of the Gaelic revival after the founding of *Conradh na Gaeilge* (The Gaelic League) in 1893, the Irish language was finding its feet again after centuries of neglect, despite the continuing fall in the number of native speakers and its ongoing retreat in the face of English. With this revival of interest, there also appeared the need to produce reading material in Irish for the newly literate Irish-speaker, whether they be native or second-language speakers, material which—apart from poetry and folk songs—had never been much cultivated in recent times. Translation was thus one of the easiest, and most obvious, ways to produce it quickly. As Pascale Casanova notes:

For an impoverished target language, which is to say a language on the periphery that looks to import major works of literature, translation is a way of gathering literary resources, of acquiring universal texts and thereby enriching an underfunded literature—in short, a way of diverting literary assets.¹

Whilst this was indeed true in the case of Irish, there was also the related issue of showing Irish speakers how to create those forms of literature that had not existed before in the language, due to its marginalised status and lack of literate

1 Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. by Malcolm DeBevoise (London and Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 134.

speakers and potential readership. This is a point also mentioned by Erich Prunč in the context of the Austro-Hungarian Empire for the same era; whilst 'non-serious' literature did exist in Slovenian and Croatian, it was only in the late nineteenth-century that 'serious' works began to be translated, and with a specific focus on "the representative function of language, not on the bi- or multilingual competence of the audience, and the aim was to provide translated scripts to help develop theatre as a national institution".² Whilst theatre might have been the goal in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in the Ireland of the British Empire, and the case of Irish, it was the aim of developing not only theatre, but also short stories, novels, and every other form of literature that had bypassed the language to date.³ Irish, indeed, at that time fulfilled all three of Itamar Even-Zohar's criteria for the centrality of translation to a given literature: Irish-language literature was young, weak and facing a vacuum, i.e. a lack of any established norms or practices. As Even-Zohar observes:

Through [...] foreign works, features (both principles and elements) are introduced into the home literature which did not exist there before. These include possibly not only new models of reality to replace the old and established ones that are no longer effective, but a whole range of other features as well, such as a new (poetic) language, or compositional patterns and techniques.⁴

And so, from those early decades of the revival, alongside first native attempts at producing plays, novels, and short stories, we also have extant translations into Irish of English-language material as varied as Charles Dickens, George Moore, and Daniel Defoe. Translators were not just concerned with bringing English works to an Irish-language audience; international authors also appeared in a Gaelic guise. Jules Verne, Hans Christian Andersen, Omar Khayyam, Thomas Mann, Plutarch, and others were all Gaelicised, but whilst some might have

2 Erich Prunč, 'Priests, Princes and Pariahs: Constructing the Professional Field of Translation', in *Constructing a Sociology of Translation*, ed. by Michaela Wolf and Alexandra Fukari (Amsterdam and Philadelphia, PA: Benjamins Translation Library, 2007), pp. 39–56 (p. 46).

3 For a more detailed look at the issue of translations into Irish, see the relevant chapters in Philip O'Leary's monographs, namely: *The Prose Literature of the Gaelic Revival, 1881–1921: Ideology and Innovation* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1994); *Gaelic Prose in the Irish Free State, 1922–1939* (Dublin: University College Dublin, 2004); *Writing Beyond the Revival: Facing the Future in Gaelic Prose, 1940–1951* (Dublin: University College Dublin, 2011).

4 Itamar Even-Zohar, 'The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem', in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. by Lawrence Venuti (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 192–97 (p. 193).

been rendered from the original German, French, or Latin, it is more likely that others from further afield were translated via the medium of English.⁵

Such a rapid growth in the field of translation into Irish also gave rise to the appearance of several Russian authors in a Gaelic milieu, although the same caveat needs to be applied regarding the original language of the work in question; it is unlikely that many would have known enough Russian—if any—in Ireland at the turn of that century to have translated from an original Cyrillic text. Thus, whilst Lev Tolstoy, Anton Chekhov, and others did appear in Irish from the original language, as rendered by Gearóid Ó Nualláin, Liam Ó Rinn, and Maighrhead Nic Mhaicín, for example, other translators most likely worked from an English text, although they were frequently coy when admitting to this. Such renditions tended to be ambiguously subtitled, for example, “*Sgeul on Ruisis: aistriú é seo ar Sgeul Rúisise do cheap Anton Tchekhov*” (A story from the Russian: this is a translation of a Russian story composed by Anton Chekhov),⁶ “[...] *do chuir Gaedhlig air*” (Translated into Irish by [...]) or “*Tolstoí na Rúise do scríobh*” (Tolstoy of Russia wrote it).⁷ Furthermore, whilst the initial numbers in those early heady days might look impressive—Tolstoy apparently had eleven stories and two plays translated—on closer examination the results lose some of their lustre. Two of the stories by Tolstoy were each translated three times, and one of these—‘What Men Live By’—was adapted into English for the stage by the English actor and dramatist Miles Malleson as *Michael* in 1917, and this was, in turn, translated into Irish as *Mícheál* in 1933. And it was into this *mélange* of various translations from varied sources, and with an equal variety of reasons behind them, that Aleksandr Pushkin made his appearances in Irish.

Whilst an in-depth analysis of the translations of Pushkin is beyond the scope of this short essay, the aim here is to present in brief those translations that were done of Pushkin into Irish, and to justify their production against the background of the growing cultural, linguistic, and political awareness of the time.⁸

5 For example, Tadhg Ó Donnchadha’s rendition of Khayyam explicitly states on the inside cover page that he translated it ‘from Edward FitzGerald’s English translation’ [‘ó aistriú Bhéarla Éadbhaird Mhic Gearailt’], *Rubáiiát Omár Caiiám Ó Náiseápúr* (Áth Cliath: Mártan Lester, Tta [Ltd], 1920).

6 All translations from the Irish are by the author of this chapter.

7 Mostly the English pivot text is not mentioned. One rare case is that of Chekhov’s *The Proposal* by Muiris Ó Catháin [Cúrsaí Cleamhnais, Baile Átha Cliath: Oifig Díolta Foillseacháin Rialtais, 1933], where it is stated that it has been rendered from “Mrs. Garnett’s translation of the original Russian”.

8 For a more detailed look at translations from Russian into Irish in general, see, for example, Mark Ó Fionnáin, ‘Na Ceithre Máistrí: Chekhov, Turgenev, Tolstoy and Pushkin and the Translation of Russian into Irish’, in *Representations and Interpretations in Celtic Studies*, ed. by Tomasz Czerniak, Maciej Czerniakowski and Krzysztof Jaskuła (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2015), pp. 267–82; ‘Opportunities Seized: From Tolstóigh to Pelévin’, *Studia Celto-Slavica*, 9 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.54586/JMAU5002>. See also Muireann Maguire, ‘From Dostoevsky to

Translations of Pushkin

‘The Snowstorm’ (‘Metel’)

Pushkin made his first appearance in Irish in Fr. Gearóid Ó Nualláin’s (1874–1942) book *God, Devils and People* (*Dia, Diabhail agus Daoine*),⁹ which came out in 1922 and where we find both Pushkin and Tolstoy amongst several of Ó Nualláin’s own original works. It is described as consisting of “Seven Short Stories, dealing with modern life. With Explanatory Notes”, and thus was clearly aimed not just at an Irish-language readership, but also at learners of the language. This book has been erroneously described as having been “*aistrithe ó shaothar Rúisise Leo Tolstoy*” (translated from Lev Tolstoy’s Russian work),¹⁰ with no mention of Pushkin or of Ó Nualláin’s own compositions, although on the inside cover we are told that the story by Pushkin is ‘The Snowstorm’ (titled in Irish ‘*Síon agus Sneachta*’, meaning ‘Bad Weather and Snow’), and Tolstoy’s contribution is ‘What Men Live By’ (‘The Visitation’ or *An Fiosrú*) (Ó Nualláin, *Dia*, vii). Unlike most of the aforementioned translators of works into Irish, Ó Nualláin did know the original language of the text. In his autobiography, Ó Nualláin relates how he was encouraged in his younger days to learn some Russian by Fr. Risteárd Ó Dálaigh, head at the time of the Irish-language college Coláiste na Mumhan, to which end he learnt an amusing story from a book. He was then persuaded to meet a young Russian to whom he related the story and who laughed upon hearing it, praising both the story and Ó Nualláin’s pronunciation. This simple recollection finishes with “*Is oth liom a rádh gur éirigheas as an Rúisis ó shoin*” (I regret to say that I have given up Russian since then).¹¹ Ó Nualláin thus knew

Yeltsin: Failed Translations and Russian Literary Landings in the Irish Language’, *RUS* 11:17 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.2317-4765.rus.2020.178520>.

- 9 Gearóid Ó Nualláin, *Dia, Diabhail agus Daoine* (Baile Átha Cliath: Comhlucht Oideachais na hÉireann, 1922).
- 10 It is thus described in the biography of Ó Nualláin by Diarmuid Breathnach and Máire Ní Mhurchú, *Ó Nualláin, Gearóid*, <http://ainm.ie/Bio.aspx?ID=217>.
- 11 Gearóid Ó Nualláin, *Beatha Dhuine a Thoil* (Baile Átha Cliath: Oifig an tSoláthair, 1950), p. 225. Unfortunately, this recollection appears in a chapter towards the end of the book titled ‘Other Occasional Memories’ [‘Cuimhíní Fánaicha Eile’], made up of such reminiscences, and as such are unaccompanied by any particular dates. Thus, it is unknown for how long Ó Nualláin’s relationship with Russian lasted; he merely says ‘ar feadh tamaill fadó’ [‘for a while, long ago’]. After his tale about the story, he goes on to mention the fact that if a person can speak Irish, then Russian sounds should not pose a problem, and mentions that the Cyrillic alphabet has thirty-six letters (it has thirty-three). Based on this, his knowledge of Russian would seem to have been pre-Revolutionary. Moreover, Ó Nualláin states that Ó Dálaigh (1865–1930) was Professor of Russian in University College, Cork, at that time, although no such chair existed, and it is more likely that Ó Dálaigh

(some) Russian, and it is likely that ‘Síon agus Sneachta’ (and the Tolstoy story) were both translated from the original Cyrillic text.

Ó Nualláin was well known in Irish-language circles for his four-volume *Studies in Modern Irish*, a series that analysed the grammar of Modern Irish in painstaking detail. Thus, he seized the opportunity offered to him to provide his Irish-language readership with copious endnotes containing a wealth of knowledge on the life and customs in Russia at that time, including food and drink, accommodation, units of measurement, clothing, and linguistics. Indeed, his translation of Pushkin takes up twenty pages and is accompanied by six pages of detailed notes on both Irish grammar and Russian culture, whilst his rendition of Tolstoy takes up thirty-four pages and also has six pages of detailed explanatory notes. Ó Nualláin’s multiple pages of notes and comments can somewhat distract from the joy of reading Pushkin in Irish, a feeling that is echoed in Muiris Ó Droighneáin’s later comment on other compositions of Ó Nualláin’s that there is “*mar a bheadh iarracht d’fhuairneamh fhuir an ghraiméir agus na laoi ghice ar mhéireanna an ughdair agus an aistrightheora*” (a trace of the coldness of the man of the grammar book and of logic on the fingers of the author and translator).¹²

‘The Coffin-Maker’ (‘Grobovshchik’)

Pushkin further appeared in the short story collection *The Mouth of the Grave and Other Stories* (*Béal na hUaighe agus Sgéalta Eile*)¹³ by León Ó Broin (1902–90), alongside some original works, several translations from French, and a rendition of ‘The Man Who Did Not Believe in Luck’ by Jerome K. Jerome. The story in question is ‘Grobovshchik’ (‘The Coffin-Maker’ or ‘The Undertaker’), and whilst it was not produced with a didactic goal in mind, but merely to provide reading material, there is a brief biographical note at the end of the volume (*Béal*, 145–46). This note lauds Pushkin’s talents as a writer of various genres, but it also encourages Irish speakers by suggesting that they should examine Pushkin’s writings carefully, since, in Pushkin’s era, Russian literature, music, and art were in a comparable state to that of contemporary Irish: “*faoi smacht ag meon iasachta agus ag cultúr iasachta*” (under the control of a foreign mentality and a foreign culture). Whilst not as overt as Ó Nualláin’s didactic goal, the subtle message here is clear; Pushkin absorbed the foreign literary conventions prevalent in Russia at that time and reinvented them in an authentically Russian

was employed part-time. For more on Ó Dálaigh, see Breathnach and Ní Mhurchú, *Ó Dálaigh, Risteard*, <https://www.ainm.ie/Bio.aspx?ID=200>.

12 Muiris Ó Droighneáin, *Taighde i gComhair Stair Litridheachta na Nua-Ghaedhilge ó 1882 anuas* (Baile Átha Cliath: An Gúm, 1936), p. 166.

13 León Ó Broin, *Béal na hUaighe agus Sgéalta Eile* (Baile Átha Cliath: Thom i gcomhar le hOifig an tSoláthair, 1927). For Ó Broin’s life, see Breathnach and Ní Mhurchú, *Ó Broin, Leon*, <https://www.ainm.ie/Bio.aspx?ID=1625>.

format, thus inventing modern Russian literature. Ó Broin is implying that this is what Irish-language authors should also aim to do, instead of mimicking foreign ways.

The importance of Pushkin to the development of Russian literature is also highlighted in Liam Ó Rinn's (1884–1943) translations from the Russian of Ivan Turgenev, titled *Prose Poems (Dánta Próis)*.¹⁴ This anthology is prefaced by a sixteen-page introduction in which Ó Rinn traces the development of Russian literature (*Dánta*, 9–25). Regarding Pushkin's role in this, Ó Rinn also notes (*Dánta*, 18–19):

Deirtear gurb é do bhunaigh litríocht nua-aimseartha na Rúise [...]. Do shaor sé litríocht na Rúise ó gach ní bhí á cosc ar labhairt amach ina guth féin [...]. Isé Pús[h]kin a thug an nós réalaitheach isteach i litríocht na Rúise (i gcuid dá úrscéalta) mar an gcéad uair, i bhfad sarar dhein Balzac amhlaidh sa bhFrainc agus innsteair dúinn gur do réir tréithe na n-úrscéal so dfás an úrscéalaitheacht sa Rúis ina dhiaidh sin.

(They say that it was he who established the modern literature of Russia [...]. He freed Russian literature from everything which was stopping it from speaking out in its own voice [...]. It was Pushkin who introduced realism into Russian literature (in some of his novels) for the first time, long before Balzac did so in France, and it is said that that it was according to the traits of these novels that the Russian novel developed afterwards).

As did Ó Broin, Ó Rinn indicates the importance of Pushkin to Russian literature in general, whilst urging that modern Irish-language literature should also take inspiration from Russian authors—Casanova's 'literary assets', as it were. Furthermore, in Ó Rinn's opinion, Irish authors should not be afraid of translating from other languages into Irish at the expense of trying to develop a native, natural literature. Ó Rinn felt that the Irish language had nothing to fear from translating, since translations into Russian had not diminished the essential 'Russianness' of Russian literature itself. Another issue at that time was the purity of the Irish lexicon after centuries of linguistic contact and influence from English and the widespread use of loan words. Ó Rinn, therefore, also takes the opportunity to express his opinion regarding those who felt that Irish should remain pure and unsullied by foreign influences, especially in relation to the coinage of new words and neologisms. He notes that Russian authors were not averse to borrowing words. If such practice was good enough for them, Irish-language writers therefore had nothing to fear. Thus, in the case of

14 Liam Ó Rinn, *Dánta Próis* (Baile Átha Cliath: Oifig Díolta Foillseacháin Rialtais, 1933). For Ó Rinn, see Breathnach and Ní Mhurchú, *Ó Rinn, Liam*, <https://www.ainm.ie/Bio.aspx?ID=106>.

Ó Broin and Ó Rinn, Pushkin was not only meant to be enjoyed as fiction, but also to guide budding Irish-language writers and revivalists in both literary and linguistic matters.

‘The Queen of Spades’ (‘Pikovaia dama’) and ‘The Stationmaster’ (‘Stantsionnyi smotritel’)

The first Irish attempt at ‘Pikovaia dama’ saw print in 1925 in an edition of the journal *An Branar*, by Domhnall Ó Mathghamhna.¹⁵ It is a very reduced version, even for a small journal, and one does not need to look far to find abridgements: as one brief example, Chapter II of the story—the conversation in the Countess’s bedchamber—is omitted altogether, and it takes only four lines for Lizaveta and Hermann to become friends after seeing each other for the first time:

Two days after the social evening in Naroumoff’s lodgings, Lisabéta saw the young officer Hermann out on the street looking up in her direction. It seems that he had decided to pretend that he was in love with the girl, and it was not long before the two were very friendly with each other.¹⁶

A further attempt at ‘Pikovaia dama’ made an appearance in 1932, this time serialised over two weeks in the newspaper *The Examiner*, in a version by Mícheál Ó Cionnfhaoilaidh.¹⁷ As might be expected from a version in print in a newspaper, it is also somewhat truncated, although not to the same extent as Ó Mathghamhna’s. But it does not take long to find abridgements here, either: for example, in Tomsii’s initial description of the Countess in Paris and her eventual financial salvation, references to Richelieu and Casanova are omitted, and the Countess’s husband just refuses to pay her debts point-blank—no timid mouse he, nor does he receive a box on the ears as a reward for his refusal.¹⁸

15 Domhnall Ó Mathghamhna, ‘An Bhainríoghan Spéarthaid’, *An Branar*, March 1925, 7–18. This was later reproduced with some slight changes in Ó Mathghamhna’s *Slabhra Nóiníní* (Baile Átha Cliath: Comhlucht Oideachais na hÉireann, 1934), a collection of Irish translations of some major European works.

16 ‘Dhá lá i ndiaidh na sgoruidheachta a bhí i lóisdín Naroumoff, do chonnaic Lisabéta amuich sa tsráid an t-oifigeach óg Hermann, agus é ag féachaint suas ‘n-a treo. Is amhlaidh a bhí beartuighthe aigesean a leogaint air go raibh sé i ngrádh leis an gcaíln. D’eirigh leis i ndiaidh ar ndiaidh, agus níor bh’fhada go raibh an bheirt ana-mhór le n-a chéile.’ (*An Branar*, p. 10).

17 Mícheál Ó Cionnfhaoilaidh, ‘Bainríoghain Speireat’, *The Examiner*, 30 July–6 August 1932.

18 The reasons for such abridgements are unknown. They might include the question of space, the opinion that Irish-language readers might be uninterested in long, descriptive passages, or other factors. The issue of censorship should not be ignored; see, for example, the refusal of Nic Mhaicín’s translation of Leskov by An Gúm in Máirtín Coilféir, ‘Tsechobh, Túrgénebh agus Púiscín na Gaeilge: Nótaí ar Mhaighréad Nic Mhaicín, Aistritheoir’, *Comhar*, 76:9 (2016), 18–19.

In both cases, a truncated ‘Queen’ might be better than no Queen at all, but it was only in 1955 that a full version of the text—and the first to be rendered from the original Russian—appeared, in a miscellaneous collection simply titled *Stories from the Russian* (*Scéalta ón Rúisis*).¹⁹ This contained two short stories by Pushkin, and one each by Tolstoy and Turgenev. Pushkin’s contribution was ‘Pikovaia dama’, translated by Maighréad Nic Mhaicín,²⁰ and ‘Stantsionnyi smotritel’ (“The Stationmaster”) by the by-now late Fr. Ó Nualláin. ‘The Queen of Spades’ is here given in its full glory, including Richelieu, Casanova, the box on the ears, and Hermann’s courtship of Lizaveta. Nic Mhaicín goes further than most of the previous translators, in that she Gaelicises the names as well; after all, if one of the points of a translation into Irish is to show that not everything needs to be conveyed via the medium of English, then why should names be an exception? Thus, the Irish-language reader is presented with the following variants, amongst others: Pushkin himself becomes *Puiscín*, Lizaveta Ivanovna *Lisabheta Ibhano bhna*, Chekalinsky *Tsecalínscaidh*, Tomsii *Tomscaidhe*, and so forth. In his ‘Stationmaster’, which is unaccompanied by any didactic footnotes, Ó Nualláin adheres more to the traditional English spelling (Vyazemsky, Minski) but also offers some somewhat schizophrenic versions: the stationmaster’s daughter Dunia is simply called *Dunia*, whilst her full formal form is *Avdotya Semeonobhna* (a combination of both Irish and English orthography),²¹ and Vanka, the young boy who shows the narrator where the stationmaster is buried, is fully Gaelicised in the rendition as *Seáinín* (Johnny). This issue of names helps illustrate—in a somewhat minor way—the nature of one of the questions Irish was facing at the time, and which had been addressed earlier by Ó Rinn: that of foreign borrowings and names in the language, and how to render them.²²

‘The Prisoner of the Caucasus’ (‘Kavkazskii plennik’)

The first Gaelicisation of Pushkin’s name had actually appeared earlier, when some of his poetry had finally seen the light of day in what is possibly the first rendition of original Russian poetry into Irish. In 1947, in the Irish-language cultural journal *Comhar*,²³ Seán Ó Maoilbhrighde (1919–83)²⁴ gave a brief

19 Maighréad Nic Mhaicín and Gearóid Ó Nualláin, *Scéalta ón Rúisis* (Baile Átha Cliath: Oifig an tSoláthair, 1955).

20 For more on Nic Mhaicín, see Breathnach and Ní Mhurchú, *Nic Mhaicín, Máighréad*, <https://www.ainm.ie/Bio.aspx?ID=0450>; Máirtín Coilféir, ‘Nótaí’; Alan Titley, ‘Eastward Ho! Aspects of Eastern European Writing Translated into Irish’, *VTU Review: Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 5:1 (2021), and Maguire ‘From Dostoevsky to Yeltsin’, 32–34.

21 The patronymic is an erroneous transliteration of ‘Samsonova’.

22 See Ó Fionnáin (*Opportunities*) for a closer analysis of such Gaelicisation of names.

23 Seán Ó Maoilbhrighde, ‘Puiscín: An Fear agus an File’, *Comhar*, 6:2 (1947), 1–2.

24 For Ó Maoilbhrighde (Ó Maolbhríde), see Breathnach and Ní Mhurchú, *Ó Maolbhríde, Seán*, <https://www.ainm.ie/Bio.aspx?ID=1915>.

biography of one ‘Alastar Sergedhebhí Púiscín’, who, he notes, is widely described as ‘*Séacspír na Rúise*’ (the Shakespeare of Russia), but who, he feels, is actually more akin to ‘*Bíoróin*’ (Byron) on account of the subjects he chose to write about. Ó Maoilbhrighde gives a brief list of Pushkin’s major works, both prose and poetry, and then offers *sleachta* (sections) of ‘Kavkazskii plennik’, rendered into quite successful rhyming verse. This might have been merely an unbiased attempt at introducing Russia’s major poet to an Irish-language audience, but Ó Maoilbhrighde was a fully paid-up member of the Communist Party of Ireland, and, after moving to Birmingham, he joined the British Communist Party. He resigned only after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. He was thus not averse to promoting the virtues of Russia and the Soviet Union—the following year, in the same journal, he wrote an article extolling the joys of Soviet literature, and lamenting the fact that it is not well-known outside of the USSR.²⁵ He also claimed, possibly correctly, to have been the first Irishman to visit East Germany officially in 1960, as part of a delegation of teachers from England to help run an international summer school for teachers in Erfurt, an event he also described in *Comhar*.²⁶

‘Yevgeny Onegin’ (‘Evgenii Onegin’)

As the enthusiasm and availability of state funding for translations into Irish diminished, the overall number of translations into Irish fell. It is only in more modern times that Pushkin has again appeared in Irish, in the collection *Stories from Russia* (*Scéalta ón Rúis*) by Risteárd Mac Annraoi.²⁷ This is part of Mac Annraoi’s single-handed attempt to produce major works of European literature in Irish; his *Scéalta* consists of excerpts from various Russian authors, for example Nikolai Gogol, Fedor Dostoevsky, Evgenii Zamiatin, etc. Mac Annraoi takes the opportunity to re-present Nic Mhaicín’s translation of ‘Pikovaia dama’ in a more standardised, rather than dialectal, version. He also includes Ó Rinn’s section on Pushkin from his history of Russian literature mentioned above, and Mac Annraoi’s own translation of sections of ‘Evgenii Onegin’: Part 1 of Canto 1 in verse, and a selection of other stanzas rendered in prose (*Scéalta*, 101–37). Like Nic Mhaicín and Ó Maoilbhrighde, Mac Annraoi eschews the use of traditional English spelling in Irish works, producing examples such as ‘Eivgéiní Oineigin’ and ‘Alacsandar Suirgéivits Púiscín’, in contrast to the earlier

²⁵ *Comhar*, 8:5 (1949), 6–7.

²⁶ *Comhar*, 20:2 (1961), 11–14.

²⁷ Risteárd Mac Annraoi, *Scéalta ón Rúis* (Baile Átha Cliath: FÁS, 2016). For more on Mac Annraoi, see Maguire, ‘From Dostoevsky to Yeltsin’. The linguistic wordplay (and honesty) should be noted here: Mac Annraoi’s translations are not rendered directly from Russian, hence the title ‘stories from Russia’, whilst Nic Mhaicín and Ó Nualláin’s 1955 collection is titled ‘stories from the Russian [language]’, hence implying they have been translated from the original Cyrillic text.

‘Puiscín’ and ‘Púiscín’, further illustrating the fact that there is still no standard way of presenting Russian names in a Gaelicised form.

Conclusion

In the general scheme of translation into Irish, six translations of Pushkin (including three of the same short story (‘Pikovaia dama’), two of which were heavily abridged) may not appear too impressive, although the scarcity of Pushkin’s output compared to that of authors such as Chekhov, as well as their suitability for inclusion in collections of short stories or newspapers, would have had some influence on the works chosen. However, despite the unorthodox approach to some of the renditions, it can only be said that Irish literature is better off for having had such works translated. The overall aim of the whole translation movement in general was both cultural and literary. It aimed to provide material for the newly literate Irish speaker, and also to show the aspiring Irish-language writer models and forms of short stories or novels which they could then draw on as inspiration for their own works, as evidenced by Ó Broin’s and Ó Rinn’s comments on Pushkin. However, those who translated Pushkin were also concerned with bringing to their audience a work from the original source language, and thus were making, consciously or not, a political and cultural statement that not everything foreign had to be received through the medium of English. This can be seen in Ó Nualláin’s endnotes, and in Nic Mhaicín’s, Ó Maoilbhrighde’s and Mac Anraoi’s attempts at Gaelicising names (and in the case of Ó Maoilbhrighde, English names too), moving a further step away from receiving everything through the filter of English—why have the text in Irish if the names themselves are in English? Further to this, there were Ó Nualláin’s didactic goals, Ó Maoilbhrighde’s pro-Communist sympathies and Ó Rinn’s outward-looking (for the time) approach to the issues of translation and borrowings in relation to Irish. As Casanova observes:

Because the linguistic battle involves the creation of a literature that itself is subject to political criteria and the judgment of political authorities, it is at once an essential moment in the affirmation of a national difference and the starting point for the constitution of an independent heritage.²⁸

Casanova wrote this in relation to the emergent English-language literature in Ireland at the turn of the 1900s, but it can equally be applied to the linguistic battle and motivations involved in producing a literature in Irish as one of the ways of establishing national differences and an independent heritage. As such, the renditions of Pushkin are not only translations, but also cultural and political statements of the era in which they appeared.

²⁸ Casanova, *Republic*, p. 139.