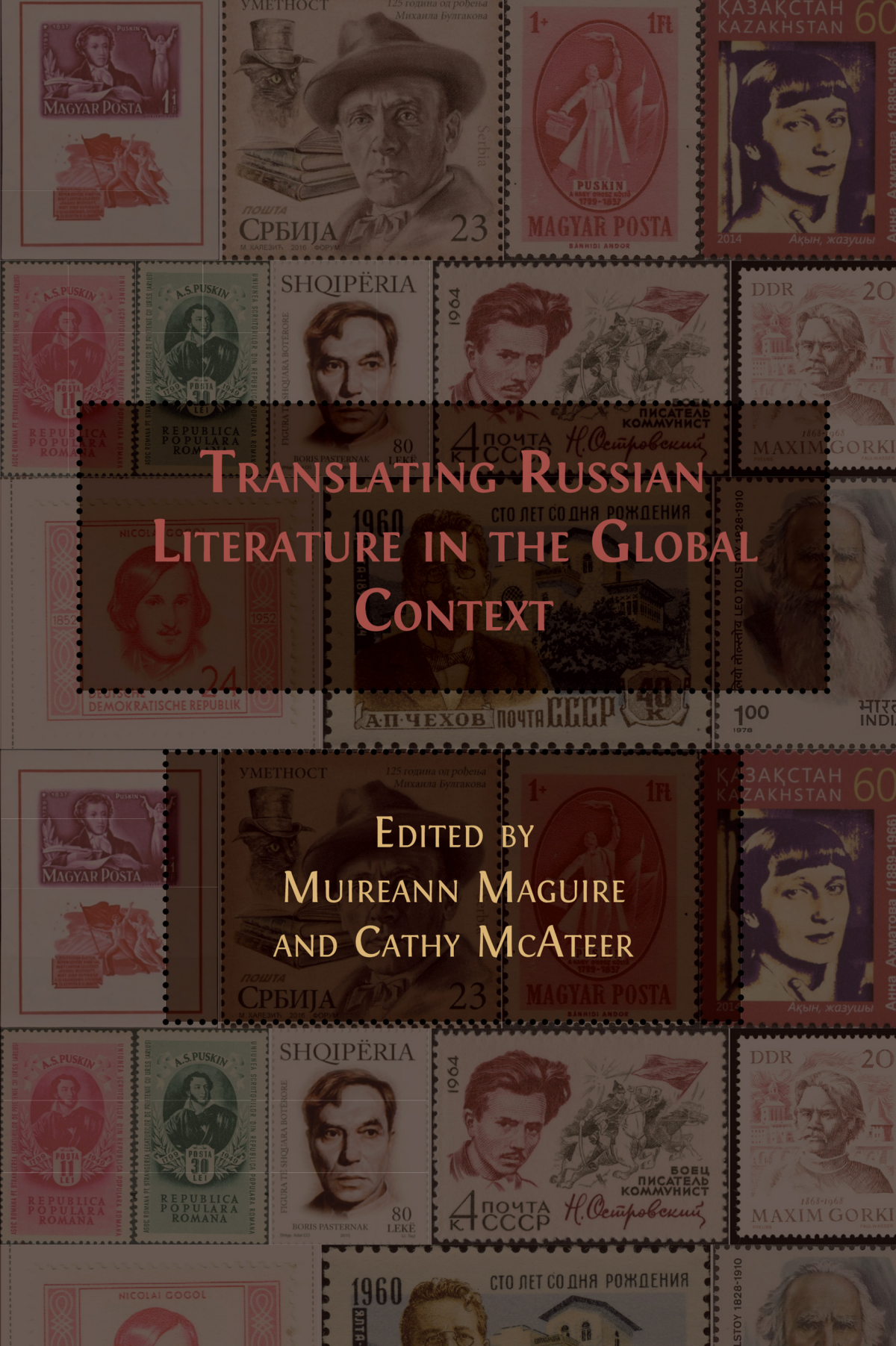

Translating Russian Literature in the Global Context

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Italy

Russian Literature in Italy: The Twentieth Century

Claudia Scandura

Between 1905 and 1945

This paper aims to map the history of Russian literary translation in Italy in the twentieth century and to reflect on how politics influenced publishers' and translators' choices. Literary exchange is an important vehicle for intercultural knowledge and understanding. Through this lens, translation, as the interpretation of verbal signs in one language by means of verbal signs in another, represents a particularly complex and sophisticated process of communication involving different recipients, both in terms of individual people and of specific social contexts.[1] According to Giovanni Maver's speech at the First Congress of Slavonic Studies held in Prague in 1929, translation highlights the relationships between different languages, cultures, and peoples.[2] If we understand, with Maver, translation as a "linguistic and literary tool" that starts from a precise model and transfers it into a different culture, there are many investigative angles for study. By comparing the original with its translated version, we find many valuable elements through which to study the evolution of literary language. The translation enables communication between cultures or individuals while being open to analysis and comparison, because it lacks the sacral quality that

1 George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 18–50.

2 Giovanni Maver, 'Lo studio delle traduzioni come mezzo d'indagine linguistica e letteraria' ['Linguistic and Literary Research through the Study of Translations'], in *Recueil des travaux du 1er Congrès des philologues slaves à Praha en 1929*, ed. by J. Horak, M. Murko and M. Weingart (Prague: Orbis, 1932), pp. 177–83 (p. 177).

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distinguishes the original. The concept of 'restitution', of the restoration of equilibrium between the original text and its translation, an equilibrium made vulnerable by translation itself, raises ethical questions of extreme complexity. The transcendence of a merely inter-textual problematic that is centred on the relation between an original and its translation leads to a series of specifically sociological questions about the stakes and functions of translations, the space in which they are situated, and the constraints, both political and economic, that circumscribe them.

In the twentieth century, the growth in technology and the development of communications produced a sharp increase of translations. The *Index Translationum*, created in 1932 as an initiative of the League of Nations International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, is an international bibliography of translations. Founded as a quarterly catalogue of books translated in fifteen countries, it was taken over by UNESCO after World War II. Throughout recent decades, the Index has progressively transformed itself into a large database capable of producing statistics on the flow of global translation, providing figures on the most-translated books and authors, as well as the languages from which and into which literature is translated. In the period from 1948 to 1970, the total number of translations increased four and a half times, while Russian was the second most widely translated literature.

To understand the reason for this centrality of Russian culture, we must consider several aspects of the conditions of transnational circulation of cultural goods: firstly, the structure of the field of international cultural exchanges; secondly, the types of constraint—political and economic—that influence these exchanges.[3] The prestige and power gained by the USSR had implications for the status of the Russian language and related translation activity. The increase of Russian literary translation into Italian is linked to the strong interest Italians have maintained for Russia since the eighteenth century, and to a reception process unique among European literatures.[4] The rise of the overall cultural level and the politics of the publishing industry in the twentieth century in Italy have had important consequences. Multi-volume editions of the works of major Russian authors were published, demonstrating the lively interest Italians took in the culture of this country. A bibliography of Italian translations of Russian literature gives interesting and objective information on the choices made by Italian cultural circles, on the contribution of intellectuals to the development of publishing, and on the progressive transformation of the critical-literary world. Moreover, it sheds light on the important but often under-examined role

3 Johan Heilbron and Gisèle Sapiro, 'Outline for a Sociology of Translation: Current Issues and Future Prospects', in *Constructing a Sociology of Translation*, ed. by Michaela Wolf and Alexandra Fukari (Amsterdam and Philadelphia, PA: Benjamins Translation Library, 2007), pp. 93–107.

4 For more on this subject, see Claudia Scandura, *Letteratura russa in Italia. Un secolo di traduzioni* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2002).

of the translator, especially their understanding and sensibility, details which ultimately ensure the success or failure of a work. Unscrupulous exploitation of translators' work was, however, not infrequent. It suffices to mention the relationship between a prominent writer, critic, and editor such as Elio Vittorini (1908–66) and Lucia Rodocanachi (1901–78), the wife of the painter Paolo Rodocanachi, who conducted a literary and artistic salon in Arenzano, near Genova. A writer herself and a polyglot (she spoke English, French, Spanish, and German), Rodocanachi effectively became a ghostwriter for Vittorini, who sold her translations (from English) as his own work.[5] Vittorini's silence about Rodocanachi's contribution to his literary translations from English is unfortunately a common form of misconduct, encoded in literary practice: the translator traditionally occupies a marginalised position.

In the twentieth century, Russian literature became increasingly familiar to Italian readers, for various reasons. The failed Russian Revolution of 1905 brought various exiles to Italy, most famously Maksim Gorky, who arrived in Naples in October 1906 from the United States aboard the steamship *Princess Irene*. The Neapolitans welcomed him warmly. Tommaso Ventura, a journalist from the newspaper *Roma*, greeted him in Russian; the entire Italian press announced his arrival. The Socialist newspaper *Avanti!* wrote:

> We warmly welcome our Gorky. He symbolizes the revolution, its intellectual principle. He represents fidelity to ideas and now the fraternal souls of proletarian and socialist Italy are looking at him. Long life to Maksim Gorky! Long live the Revolution![6]

In the streets of Naples, a joyful crowd cheered Gorky's arrival; a party in his honour was organised at the Labour Union. As a writer and as a revolutionary, Gorky was lionised in Italy. Following his arrest in Riga two days after the 'Bloody Sunday' incident in St Petersburg in 1905, protests were voiced in the Italian Chamber of Deputies, and both the media and the general public expressed support for Gorky. His fame as a great writer owed much to Italian translations of his works, largely printed by Neapolitan publishers. Among these were the Società Editrice Partenopea, a company that, in the years immediately before World War I, published popular Socialist literature; and Bideri, established in 1876 in Naples by Ferdinando Bideri (1850–1930), which mainly published Modernist literature. The principal translators at this time were the young Socialist, Cesare Castelli (1871–1940), and the writer and journalist Federico Verdinois (1844–1927), who taught Russian language and

5 Elio Vittorini, *Si diverte tanto a tradurre? Lettere a Lucia Rodocanachi 1933–1943* [*Do You Enjoy Translation So Much? Letters to Lucia Rodocanachi*] (Milan: Archinto, 2016).

6 Angelo Tamborra, *Esuli russi in Italia dal 1905 al 1917* (Bari: Laterza, 1977), p. 16. All translations, unless otherwise indicated, are my own.

literature at the Oriental Institute in Naples and authored many translations of works by Dostoevsky, Gogol, Gorky, Pushkin, and Tolstoy. Castelli was the Milan representative of the Ladyzhnikov publishing house, based between Russia and Berlin. It held the rights for translations of Leonid Andreev's works, among other Russian writers; it collaborated with Mondadori, a Milanese publishing house established in 1907 by Arnoldo Mondadori (1889–1971). However, according to the scholar Ettore Lo Gatto, Castelli did not know Russian and therefore translated from German versions. Nevertheless, his contract with Mondadori lasted ten years (1922–32). However, from 1927 his translations were co-signed with Raissa Olkienizkaia Naldi (1886–1978), who sometimes appears under the pseudonym Raissa Folkes, or with Ossip Felyne (1882–1970), both Russian emigrants who settled in Italy after the October Revolution. Later, Mondadori's chief translator from Russian would be Erme Cadei, former employee of the publishers Treves and Bietti.

Titles for Italian translations can be quite arbitrary, and barely related to the original title. For example, Gorky's novel *Foma Gordeev* (1899) was translated by Nino De Sanctis as *Life Is a Foolishness* (*La vita è una sciocchezza!*, 1904), and one can deduce the Russian title only by back-translating the characters' Italianised names ('Ignazio Gordeieff' is the protagonist). This characterised many pre-Second World War Italian translations. Gorky lived in Capri until 1913, returning to Italy several years after the October Revolution, officially for health reasons. He stayed in a beautiful Sorrento villa, 'Il Sorito', from 1922 to 1928 (departing permanently for Moscow in 1932). This period played an important role in the development of Russian-Italian relations, thanks to Gorky's cultural heft, and to the large number of writers and artists who visited him and enjoyed his generous 'Russian' hospitality.

After the October Revolution, other Russian exiles, including Evgenii Anagnine (1888–1965), Mikhail Osorgin (1878–1942), and Olga Resnevich (1883–1973), chose Italy as their second home. There they tried to propagate their culture and values, binding their lives to the history of Italian culture. The most important of these was the poet Viacheslav Ivanov (1866–1949), who lived in Rome from 1924 until his death, aloof and disengaged from émigré life and politics. However, he played an important role in the translation of Russian poetry in Italy. Thanks to his encouragement, the first rhymed Italian translation of Aleksandr Pushkin's *Evgenii Onegin* appeared (as *Eugenio Oneghin*, 1937). The translator was the celebrated scholar Ettore Lo Gatto (1890–1983), who rendered Russian verse (nine-syllable lines) in Italian hendecasyllable, which Ivanov praised in his introduction as "faithful, artistic, straightforward Italian".[7] Thanks to Lo Gatto, known as the 'father' of Slavic Studies in Italy, Italian culture

7 Venceslao Ivanov, 'Introduzione' (1937), in Aleksandr Pushkin, *Lirica*, ed. by Ettore Lo Gatto (Florence: Sansoni, 1968), pp. 681–87 (p. 687).

was actively involved in the debate between Russia and Western Europe.[8] He was the first to grasp and satisfy Italian social demands for better knowledge of Russia. Friendly with the many Russian and Slavic intellectuals circulating in Europe after the October Revolution, Lo Gatto, with his wife Zoia Voronkova (1892–1963), was a very active translator of Russian literature of all genres.

Russian literature appealed to Italian intellectuals commensurately with their enthusiasm for social transformation. In 1936, the poet Giuseppe Ungaretti (1888–1970), knowing no Russian, translated two poems by Sergei Esenin, 'Requiem' ('Sorokoust', 1920; as 'Requiem') and 'The Ships of the Mare' ('Kobyl'i korabli', 1919; as 'Le navi delle cavalle') to "understand why Russian rural masses opposed the Soviet regime".[9] If this was his reason, Esenin was not the most appropriate poet to choose; his poems, written under the influence of Imaginism, one of many poetic movements that flourished in Russia after the Revolution, could not be read as historical documents. Esenin's poetry relies on arresting and unusual images that privilege hyperboles and metaphors. Ungaretti's translation, probably made via a French bridge text, is also powerfully expressive; he became the first translator to circulate Esenin's poetry in Italy.

Another poet, Clemente Rebora (1885–1957), deeply concerned with moral and ethical problems, produced his own versions of Gogol's 'The Overcoat', Leonid Andreev's *Lazarus* (*Eleazar*, 1906) and Tolstoy's *Family Happiness* (*Semeinoe schast'e*, 1859). Rebora empathised with these predominantly pessimistic works, characterised by passive acceptance of life. His translation of Gogol's short story, one of the most popular texts chosen by Italian translators, merits some discussion. Formalist critics such as Boris Eichenbaum have identified Gogol's narrative technique here, with its alternating grotesque and pathetic declamations, as "skaz", which reproduces the forms of oral communication, including grammatical mistakes, pauses, repetitions, and dialectal variations.[10] Gogol's use of long, complex sentences, rare or invented character names, comical puns, and bizarre sound combinations both challenge and attract translators. His texts are insidious in their apparent simplicity. Rebora's version of 'The Overcoat' (as 'Il Cappotto', 1922), masters Gogol's subject and accentuates the text's capacity for nonsense, while Tommaso Landolfi's later translation of the same story

8 Lo Gatto was Secretary of the Institute for Eastern Europe from 1921, and in 1922 he was appointed Professor of Russian Literature at the Universities of Naples, Padua and Rome. He authored many works on Russian culture, still fundamental, such as *A History of Russian Literature* [*Storia della letteratura russa*, 1942], *A History of the Russian Theatre* [*Storia del teatro russo*, 1952], *The Myth of Petersburg* [*Il mito di Pietroburgo*, 1960], *Pushkin: The Story of a Poet and His Hero* [*Pushkin: storia di un poeta e del suo eroe*, 1954].

9 Iginio De Luca, *Tre poeti traduttori. Monti-Nievo-Ungaretti* (Florence: Olschki editore, 1988), p. 229.

10 Boris Eichenbaum, 'The Structure of Gogol's "The Overcoat"', *Russian Review*, 22:4 (Oct. 1963), 377–99.

as 'Il Mantello' (1941) aims to reproduce as faithfully as possible the original text, not only its appearance but also its inconsistencies, vexing constructions, redundancies, and punctuation. Landolfi (1908–79) was a translator and writer whose aesthetic sensibility resembled Gogol's. As each translator found his own equivalent of 'The Overcoat', multiple Italian versions appeared under titles such as 'The Uniform', 'The Cloak', or simply 'The Coat'. Recently (in 2018), a new version of Gogol's so-called 'Petersburg Tales' appeared, translated by the writer Paolo Nori (1963). Nori, who has also translated Venedikt Erofeev's 1973 samizdat novel *Moskva-Petushki* with the title *Mosca-Petuski: Poema ferroviario* (*Moscow-Petushki: A Railway Poem*, 2014) and Daniil Kharms' 1933 short-story cycle *Sluchai* (*Disastri*, 2003), privileges the surreal and grotesque elements of these stories. His translations of Gogol's *Dead Souls* as *Anime morte* (2013) and of the short story 'Diary of a Madman' ('Zapiski sumasshedshego', 1835; 'Memorie di un pazzo'), included in his 2014 anthology *Gogol, Dostoevskij, Tolstoj: tre matti* (*Three Madmen*, 2014), together with his translations of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, show his love of Russian literature. In his lively version of Gogol's short stories, which include dialectal terms from his regional idiom (*emiliano*), Nori captures both the innovative and disruptive character of the Russian writer's prose and the ambiguity that enhances Gogol's relevance today.[11]

From the early 1920s until the mid-1930s, publishing activity flourished in Italy. In 1933, in Turin, a group of friends who shared a belief in the values of cultural freedom and civil commitment, founded the publishing house Einaudi, wishing to create an Italian class of intellectual readers. Their company soon became "a wellspring of fine literature, intellectual thought and political theory".[12] Giulio Einaudi (1912–99), son of Luigi Einaudi (1874–1961), the future second president of the Italian Republic, was the entrepreneurial soul of the group, but Leone Ginzburg (1909–44), of Russian-Jewish origin, was the first editorial director. Thanks to Ginzburg's work as a critic and translator, Italy received the first complete editions of many Russian masterpieces, including Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (1878) and major works by Gogol, Turgenev, Pushkin, and others. During the later 1930s, when Italy allied itself with Nazi Germany, Russian titles for translation were carefully curated by publishing houses. Works by White émigrés and other critics of the Soviet Union were preferred.[13] There are always vested interests involved in choosing texts for publication; care and prudence in the selection of reading materials for the masses were considered crucial for social control. To fulfil the political functions of Italian Fascist culture, selections were based on the positions of both translated authors and translators.[14]

11 For more on Paolo Nori's active translation work, including his use of *Emiliano*, see his regularly updated blog: https://www.paolonori.it/.

12 Luisa Mangoni, *Pensare i libri. La casa editrice Einaudi dagli anni Trenta agli anni Sessanta* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1999), p. 403.

13 Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999), p. 222.

14 Pascale Casanova, 'From Internationalism to Globalization', in *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. by M. B. De Bevoise (London and Cambridge, MA: Harvard

After World War II

Following World War II, Italians identified Russian literature with the Soviet Union and thus the reading public and literary critics preferred texts with a socio-political focus. Interest in Soviet-Russian culture, which had been banned in Italy in the final years of fascism, grew under the Government of National Unity (established in 1946). The Italian Communist Party (PCI), founded and led by Palmiro Togliatti (1893–1964), who had returned to Italy in 1944, after almost twenty years of exile spent mainly in Moscow, participated in that government. This political situation, even more than editorial or cultural considerations, produced a real flowering of pro-Soviet publications. Desire for social control and moral education were the building blocks of the editorial system in the second half of the twentieth century.[15] Moreover, the ideological and symbolic value that Soviet culture has traditionally held in Italy should be emphasised. For this reason, from the postwar period until at least the late 1970s, the choice of topics for public discussion in both the Italian press and in PCI cells was almost exclusively dependent on the editorial and cultural institutions of the left. This monopoly may have been pragmatically justified, since obtaining a copy of a Soviet book was extremely difficult, almost impossible, if not achieved through institutional channels such as the PCI and its organs.

Editori Riuniti

Until the early 1950s, the Einaudi publishing house dominated this sector uncontested, as the sole firm with both the political support and the economic means necessary to tackle a programme of translations and the widespread dissemination of Soviet-Russian work. However, Einaudi's owners manifested little interest in the ideological discourse that these publications inevitably entailed. Other firms with stronger political views lacked the funds to support their own imprint in the nascent Italian publishing market. There was therefore no serious competition for Einaudi until the appearance of two other publishing houses: Editori Riuniti in 1953 and Feltrinelli in 1955 (both discussed below). Editorial competition in a politically strategic sector, such as Soviet literature, was a genuinely new feature of the Italian cultural landscape. In addition, Khrushchev's Thaw had brought relative freedom for Italian intellectuals to enter Russia and engage in cultural exchanges with their Soviet counterparts or with Soviet editorial offices and publishing houses. This meant publishers could potentially obtain manuscripts which had not been filtered through the

University Press, 1999; repr. 2007), pp. 164–70.

15 See Gian Carlo Ferretti, *Il mercato delle lettere* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1994), pp. 69–86 and pp. 209–52.

Soviet Embassy or the PCI. In the postwar period, publishing rights for Soviet works had to be granted by the Embassy of the USSR. This posed a practical problem with significant political and economic implications. The question of rights alone certainly explains little. Yet it helps to understand that in Einaudi's business plan, their alliance with the PCI, which was known to be indispensable, but not binding, assumed strategic importance. Similarly, the Communist Party, still lacking their own printing press, had focused on an external cultural agency, a publishing bookshop (Libreria editrice del Partito comunista d'Italia) established in 1921. Through such subtle social alliances, the publishing industry appeared to bend to the will of the Party.

But other smaller publishers also took an interest in Soviet literature. Macchia (in Rome) edited (from 1947 to 1950) a book series called 'The Stalin Prizes' (Premi Stalin), which included novels by Aleksandr Fadeev, Aleksandr Grin, Il'ia Ehrenburg, and Aleksei Tolstoy, to mention only the most important names, as not all Stalin Prize-winners were included. In 1948, two small publishing firms, Rinascita and the Edizioni di cultura sociale, appeared: the first favoured works by Marxist theorists, the second leant towards current affairs. Their publishing business was impractical when it came to distribution and marketing. Edizioni di cultura sociale did all of its editing, proofreading, and advertising in a room in Via delle Botteghe Oscure (Rome), which was also the headquarters of the PCI. In March 1953, Rinascita and Edizioni di cultura sociale combined to form a new publishing house, Editori Riuniti, thus allowing the PCI a market outlet. Editori Riuniti was a modern publisher, with a very wide-ranging catalogue, attentive to political and trending texts and rich in foreign literature series, of which many were Soviet-Russian titles. Hence Editori Riuniti soon became one of Einaudi's main competitors, even forcing the latter to abandon important plans, such as the projected publication of Vladimir Maiakovskii's *Letters* (1958) (*Perepiska*), or Il'ia Ehrenburg's *Uomini Anni Vita* (published in Italy 1960–65) (*Liudi, gody i zhizn'*, 1956–60). It was Editori Riuniti who, between 1956 and 1960, published Gorky's *Collected Works* (*Sobranie sochinenii*) in Italian in twenty volumes, and also Maiakovskii's eight-volume *Works* (*sochinenii*) in 1958. Its series 'Le opere e i giorni' (Works and Days) and 'Scrittori del realismo' (Realist Writers) were devoted exclusively to Soviet-Russian literature. Italian readers discovered Soviet authors through these cheaply produced editions, which were sold everywhere from bookshops to newspaper kiosks, often with primitive graphics and at low prices.

1956 marked a turning point, when Khrushchev's cultural Thaw transformed the intellectual environment in the Soviet Union. A period of détente in international diplomatic relations and revisions to internal policies followed. The important process of rehabilitating victims of Stalin's repression in the Soviet Union led to the publication there of previously banned works; persecuted and censored authors could now be discussed. The world followed Thaw literature attentively, and Editori Riuniti published a series titled 'Scrittori

sovietici' ('Soviet Writers' (1961–65)), which set works by contemporary authors alongside newly rehabilitated 1920s writers. Ehrenburg's memoirs, so controversial at home, were published by Editori Riuniti in six volumes; so, too, were poems by Evgenii Evtushenko (*Babii Iar,* 1961) and Andrei Voznesenskii (*Antimiry*, 1961). Prose translations included Isaak Babel's *Red Cavalry* (*Konarmiia*, 1926), Nikolai Zabolotskii's 'Columns' (*Stolbtsy*, 1929), Aleksandr Grin's *Scarlet Sails* (*Alye parusa*, 1923), Vsevolod Ivanov's *Armoured Train 14–69* (*Bronepoezd 14–69*, 1927), Bulat Okudzhava's *Good-bye, Schoolboy!* (*Bud' zdorov, shkoliar!*, 1961), and the epic novel by the 1965 Nobel Prize laureate, Mikhail Sholokhov, *And Quiet Flows the Don* (*Tikhii Don*, 1928–32).

The 1960s saw Editori Riuniti gradually gain autonomy from the Communist Party as it became increasingly professionally structured and economically viable. In the 1970s, two new series appeared, the 'David', which showcased contemporary fiction (including emerging talents Valentin Rasputin, Vasilii Aksenov, Vasilii Shukshin and Iurii Trifonov), and the 'Universale', which consisted of paperback reprints. The mid-1980s marked the onset of a crisis for Editori Reuniti, which had traditionally focused on social issues, with economic problems forcing it to reduce its fiction output. The collapse of old ideologies and the dissolution of the Soviet Union changed the traditional market; Editori Riuniti underwent many changes in ownership. It seems reasonable to say that the Communist Party had established the publishing house Editori Riuniti because of its failure to ally itself politically with Einaudi. This project, so attractive on Liberation Day (25 April 1945), collapsed during the Cold War. Soviet and Russian writing (not confined to literary fiction) had represented both a strategic node and a weak point in that internal pact that the Italian Left made with the publishing industry. Italy's left-leaning publishers had conferred value and legitimacy on the Soviet Union in its incessant struggle for international power.[16]

Einaudi and Feltrinelli

Russian literature played a fundamental role in Einaudi's later development, as well as that of the ill-fated Riuniti. After World War II, the publishing house had welcomed twentieth-century Russian writers, thanks to Ettore Lo Gatto, Tommaso Landolfi and Angelo Maria Ripellino (1923–78), whose high-quality translations had revealed to Italian audiences the existence and aesthetic value of Russian poetry and prose. Pietro Zveteremich (1922–92), a translator and literary critic, played a significant role in liaising between the Communist Party and Einaudi. In 1945, he was summoned to Turin by the publishing house as their main consultant for Soviet writing. From this point onwards, his editorial

16 Pascale Casanova, 'The Small Literatures', in *The World Republic of Letters*, pp. 175–90.

decisions were politically informed, aimed at a convergence between Party goals and publishing activity. A member of the Communist Party, Zveteremich was also editor-in-chief of *Cultura sovietic*a, the journal of the Italian Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR. He immediately prepared a rich programme of translations, which included little-known modern Russian and Soviet literature, such as Konstantin Simonov's novel *Days and Nights* (*Dni i nochi*, 1944).[17] However, many of the proposed books were not translated: Zveteremich's list was sharply criticised by Elio Vittorini, who had helped to connect him with Einaudi. Vittorini felt that Zveteremich's choice of authors was influenced by the latter's links with the Soviet Embassy.[18]

The need to contain the influence of the Communist Party led Einaudi to supplement Party loyalists with his own 'internal' intellectuals. Zveteremich's work was overseen by writers such as Giovanni Nicosia, the translator of Il'f and Petrov's novel *One-Storied America* (*Odnoetazhnaia Amerika*, 1936) as *The Country of God* (*Il paese di Dio*, 1947), and Cesare Pavese (1908–50), the poet, novelist, and literary critic, who was employed by Einaudi as an editor and translator (from English). The publishing house also worked with freelance literary agents and translators, as with Franco Venturi (1914–94), the historian and author of the important monograph *Il populismo russo* (*History of Russian Populism*, 1952), and resident in Moscow since 1947. From Moscow, Venturi reported on intellectual debates and literary developments to Felice Balbo (1914–64), manager of Einaudi's philosophy series, Giuseppe Berti (1901–79), Secretary of the Italy-USSR Association, and Emilio Sereni (1907–77), a writer and PCI member. Venturi's insider input allowed Einaudi to bypass the PCI's advocacy for the publication of specific Soviet works. In fact, difficult relations with the Party pushed Einaudi to distance the press from the former's influence, especially in strategic, politically sensitive sectors. This is the context of the affair surrounding *The Flower of Russian Verse* (*Il fiore del verso russo*),[19] a 1949 poetry anthology edited by Renato Poggioli (1907–63). This publication aroused the ire of PCI leaders because of the editor's decision to include 'decadent' poets, such as Blok, Akhmatova, and Mandel'shtam, and his critical approach to Soviet poetry. The anthology was problematic on both a cultural and political level; it was assessed on a political basis as defiant of the Soviet Union. Poggioli, a Florentine scholar of Russian studies, also a Jew with strong anti-Fascist views, had in 1938 emigrated to the USA, where he became a professor at Brown University (and later at Harvard). Italian critics, insisting on interpreting the anthology in terms of Soviet and anti-Soviet opposition, accused him of choosing

17 Konstantin Simonov, *I giorni e le notti* [*Days and Nights*] (Turin: Einaudi, 1946).

18 Luisa Mangoni, *Pensare i libri: la casa editrice Einaudi dagli anni trenta agli anni sessanta* [*Thinking about Books, Einaudi Publishing House from the Thirties to the Sixties*] (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1999), pp. 214–18, pp. 328–29.

19 *Il fiore del verso russo: Da Pushkin a Pasternak un secolo di poesia*, ed. by Renato Poggioli (Turin: Einaudi, 1949).

yesterday's poetry. The furore over this anthology caused a crisis within the Einaudi publishing house, exposing its relationship with the Communist Party. The Party's Secretary, Palmiro Togliatti, Minister of Justice from 1945 to 1946 and a member of the Constituent Assembly of Italy, decided to withdraw his own collected works from Einaudi as a result of the controversy. Poggioli's anthology had exposed the failure of Einaudi's agreement with the Communist Party regarding the publication of Soviet works, and the Party's control over left-leaning cultural production was seriously challenged.

Zveteremich, who would later harshly criticise *The Flower of Russian Verse* (he even referred to Akhmatova as "a limited parlour poetess"), left Einaudi two years after its publication. In 1953, the year of Stalin's death, Vittorio Strada (1929–2018) joined Einaudi's editorial staff in Milan. Keenly observant of cultural changes in the USSR, he soon proposed the translation of a novel which had provoked intense controversy in the Soviet press. Its title would christen the entire era: *The Thaw* (*Ottepel'*) by Il'ia Ehrenburg. This novel had been published in 1954 in Moscow and by January 1955, *The Thaw* was already available in Italian translation from Einaudi.[20] After its appearance, Strada's work became more complex and structured. Thanks to his private contacts, he could suggest other titles related to the new Soviet cultural atmosphere. In 1958 he moved to Moscow, where he began the ultimately unsuccessful project of translating Evgenii Zamiatin's dystopian novel *We* (*My*, 1924), which the Soviet government had refused to publish in 1921. *We* had been published in 1955 (translated by Ettore Lo Gatto) by a small publishing house (Minerva Italica), but only in 1963 would the novel enjoy wide circulation, thanks to Feltrinelli's reprint of this edition. New translations appeared only as recently as 2013 (by Alessandro Niero, for Voland) and 2021 (by Alessandro Cifariello, for Fanucci).

However, while increased competition enhanced readers' access to literary texts, it did not guarantee publishers exclusive rights. The USSR was not a signatory to the Berne Convention, which regulated the transfer of rights within Europe. This created tempting opportunities for economic profit, since the first publishing house to publish any Soviet work within thirty days of its release in the USSR gained exclusive European rights to that publication. On the other hand, the potential for commercial gain from Soviet fiction provoked ruthless competition that was resolved more than once with the publication of duplicate translations. For example, Viktor Nekrasov's novel, *In the Hometown* (*V rodnom gorode*, 1955), which criticised the Soviet bureaucratic system, was translated in the same year as its release under two different titles by both Strada (*Nella città natale*) and Zveteremich (*Nella sua città*), which had been commissioned by Einaudi and Feltrinelli respectively.

20 Ilja Ehrenburg, *Il disgelo*, trans. by C. C. (Torino: Einaudi, 1955). Clara Coisson (1896–1981), the translator, started working for Einaudi in 1949.

For both Feltrinelli and Einaudi, Soviet literature was a key element of their 'editorial strategy'; Zveteremich's appointment to the latter was a factor in their competing ambitions. The Nekrasov affair and the need to outdo Einaudi induced Feltrinelli to hire Sergio D'Angelo (1923–2023), a journalist from Radio Moscow, as a literary talent scout in Russia. Famously, D'Angelo received the manuscript of Boris Pasternak's novel *Doctor Zhivago*, published for the first time in any language by Feltrinelli in 1957 in Zveteremich's translation. Competition for this book even extended beyond the border, forcing the translator to deliver the Italian version within a few weeks, in order to snatch the rights from Gallimard. This fortunate and even unscrupulous negotiation that allowed Giangiacomo Feltrinelli (1926–72), a small Milanese publisher specialising in political works, to secure the world rights to a famous novel, has been reconstructed thanks to numerous archival materials recently published in Russia.[21] The uproar resulting from its publication, followed by the award of the Nobel Prize to Pasternak in 1958, was a huge success for Feltrinelli, and *Doctor Zhivago* is still a significant part of the firm's cultural capital. Pasternak's novel, censored in the USSR, stimulated very heated debate in Italy, where the Left-leaning 'intelligentsia' vented still-unresolved issues from the discussions of 1956, when the Soviet invasion of Budapest had caused deep internal rifts in the international Communist bloc. The leadership of the PCI was called upon to intervene by Khrushchev himself—in vain. The publisher and the translator defended *Zhivago* against any censorship attack. Later, Zveteremich was marginalised by the Party, but continued to work as an editor and translator and, from 1972 until his death, he taught Russian literature at the University of Messina. In 1957, in addition to *Zhivago*, he translated Chekhov's notebooks (*Zapisnye knizhki doktora Chekhova*, 1899)[22] and planned (but never completed) an anthology of contemporary Russian poets (his riposte to *The Flower of Russian Verse*). Feltrinelli, however, secured another world première in 1958 with the publication of Boris Pasternak's *Autobiography* (*Biograficheskii ocherk*, 1956; *Autobiografia e nuovi versi*) along with the poet's last poems, translated by Sergio D'Angelo.

It was probably the competitive pressure exerted by Feltrinelli that pushed Einaudi to appoint a scholar to manage its Russian literature titles. On the advice of Renato Solmi (1927–2015), a Marxist historian who had worked from 1951 to 1963 as an editor for Einaudi, Angelo Maria Ripellino (1923–78), a university professor and a fine connoisseur of classical and early twentieth-century Russian literature, joined the editorial staff. Called upon to judge Strada's proposals, he might have helped the latter to continue translating Thaw literature, but their

21 *Doktor Zhivago: Pasternak, 1958, Italia, Antologia* [*Anthology*], ed. by Stefano Garzonio and Alessandra Reccia (Moscow: Reka vremen, 2012).

22 Anton Chekhov, *I quaderni del dottor Cechov. Appunti di vita e letteratura di A. P. Cechov* [*Dr. Chekhov's Notebooks. Notes on Life and Literature*] (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1957).

interests diverged sharply. Whereas Einaudi already had plans for translating Soviet-Russian publications of both literature and theoretical criticism, Ripellino was heavily invested in the dissemination of classical authors and works, such as the then almost unknown Nikolai Leskov or Pushkin's narrative poems and *Little Tragedies* (*Malenkie tragedii*, 1830), as opposed to those by Modernist and avant-garde poets. Although, due to the USSR's political heft in Italy at the time, Soviet-Russian works were generally very successful, the public showed little interest in Pasternak's poems (edited by Ripellino) just weeks before *Zhivago* appeared.[23] The most complete collection of Pasternak's poetry in Italian was thus lost in the raucous debate over his novel. As an esteemed author of critical essays about the Russian avant-garde, Ripellino was intellectually close to the 'Einaudian school', distinguished by the rigour and care he put into his work and the erudition and aptitude with which he pursued his project of popularising Russian literature. But Strada's and Ripellino's roles in the diffusion of Soviet-Russian culture were very different. Strada, like Zveteremich before him, helped to connect Soviet literature to Europe's moments of complex political transition between 1956 and 1989. Ripellino, however, can without exaggeration be said to have determined the public and academic image that we still have today of classical and modern Russian literature.

Italy's special bond with Russia was once again evident in 1964 when Anna Akhmatova obtained permission to travel abroad for the first time since the 1917 Revolution. Her first trip was to Italy, including Rome and Sicily. In the latter, she was awarded the Etna-Taormina Literary Prize. During this trip the poetess met Carlo Riccio (1932–2011), a scholar of Russian literature, to whom she gave the complete typescript of her poems *Requiem* (*Rekviem*, 1935–40) and *Poem Without a Hero* (*Poema bez geroiia*, 1940–60). Based on these manuscripts and notes, Riccio drafted a translation which Akhmatova read and approved. Thus, these poems were released for the first time, together with the Russian text of her final draft, by the publisher Einaudi in 1966.[24]

The failure of left-wing intellectuals' post-1945 cultural plan was already clear by the late 1950s, with cultural issues relegated to the publishing industry and political policies entrusted to the Party. This polarisation increasingly pushed discourse on Russian and Soviet literature into academia or drowned it with the "background noise" of political debate.[25] In Italy, many publishing houses helped to popularise Russian literature. Eridano Bazzarelli (1921–2013), a professor of Russian literature at the State University in Milan, edited a new 'Scrittori sovietici' series for Mursia, between 1972 and 1988. This series introduced Italian readers to more contemporary authors, such as Chinghiz Aitmatov, Valentin Rasputin, Vasilii Belov, Iurii Trifonov, and Bulat Okudzhava.

23 Boris Pasternak, *Poesie* [Poems], ed. by A. M. Ripellino (Turin: Einaudi, 1957).
24 Anna Akhmatova, *Poema senza eroe e altre poesie*, ed. by Carlo Riccio (Turin: Einaudi, 1966).
25 Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, pp. 180–212.

An ideologically distinct approach, critical of official Soviet culture, was formulated by the 'Russian Gateways' (Propilei russi) series edited from the late 1970s onwards by the publishing cooperative La Casa di Matriona (Matriona's Place), the editorial branch of a Catholic organisation named after Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's novella (*Matrionin dvor*, 1963).

From the mid-1980s onwards, Russian literature gradually lost its centrality to Italian translation publishing, which was overwhelmed by the collapse of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, in 1994 the small publishing house Voland appeared in Rome; its name derives from the Satanic villain of Bulgakov's novel, *The Master and Margarita* (*Master i Margarita*, 1928–40). Voland intended to publish authors from Eastern European countries exclusively, but the publisher was soon forced to acknowledge market demand and to include other authors in its catalogue. Thanks to the success of its translations of novels by the Belgian writer Amélie Nothomb, Voland avoided bankruptcy and has continued to publish Slavic authors (including Evgenii Zamiatin, Valerii Briusov, Konstantin Vaginov, Aleksandr Kuprin, Aleksandr Sharov, Vladislav Otroshenko, Zakhar Prilepin, Marina Stepnova, the Bulgarian Georgi Gospodinov and many others).

Translating Eugene Onegin

The history of Italian translations of Pushkin's novel in verse *Evgenii Onegin* stretches back to a version created in 1856, by an Italo-French poet, Luigi Delâtre (1815–93), with the aid of Pushkin's friend Petr Viazemskii (1792–1878). The most recent translation (Milan: Oscar Mondadori, 2021) is by Giuseppe Ghini (b. 1957), a professor at the University of Urbino, who has tried to restore the rhythm and linguistic density of the original. Delâtre insisted upon the translator's right to diverge from the original text in order to clarify obscure points, remove unnecessary details, and so on (a not untypical view for his era). Delâtre's version occasionally eliminates epithets, explicates the author's ideas (!), deletes descriptions which he felt impeded the narration, and even shifts the chapter order when it violates his notion of logic. We can only imagine how readers responded to this revised *Evgenii Onegin,* as there are no reviews. Luckily, many other translations followed, including the first in verse format (non-rhyming hendecasyllable) in 1906, by Giuseppe Cassone. The hendecasyllable, the classic metre of Italian poetry, was also selected by Ettore Lo Gatto for his 1937 verse translation of Pushkin's poem, as mentioned above. Lo Gatto's translation was praised by Viacheslav Ivanov, Mikhail Osorgin (1878–1942), and numerous scholars. Republished in 1950 by Einaudi, this version is considered definitive and was often reprinted. Despite the flattering reviews, Lo Gatto, evidently wishing to make *Onegin* more appealing to Italian readers, published a prose version of Pushkin's poem (Milan: Mursia, 1959), which was lexically not very different from the verse one. Critics failed to show much interest in his *Onegin* dialectics. Other translations have appeared over the years,

but none was more controversial than the 1975 version by the poet Giovanni Giudici (1924–2011). During his first visit to Russia in 1966, Giudici decided to translate Pushkin's poem into Italian verse. He did not know the language very well, so he worked with Giovanna Spendel, a professor of Russian literature at Milan's State University, to co-produce an edition of Pushkin's poems with the publisher Mondadori.[26] His first translation of *Evgenii Onegin* appeared in 1975 (Milan: Garzanti). Keen to reproduce the original iambic tetrameter, Giudici preferred lines of nine rather than eleven syllables since he considered the former metrically equivalent to the Russian form. Scholarly reception was harsh. Many Slavists soon pointed out mistakes, oversights, and various imperfections in Giudici's translation. This criticism did tend to unfairly ignore the positives of the translation, as noted by outstanding specialists in Italian culture, such as Gianfranco Folena (1920–92) and Gianfranco Contini (1912–90), and poets like Franco Fortini (1917–94) and Giovanni Raboni (1932–2004). Despite the critical response, Giudici continued to revise his translation for several years, and new editions appeared in 1983 and in 1984 (Milan: Garzanti), which he then re-published in a new version in 1990 and reviewed once again in 1999.[27]

Conclusion

When we analyse the flows of translations in the light of power relations between languages, we facilitate better understanding of historical change. A country's loss of prestige or power, and the resulting diminution of its language's status, has consequences for the level of translation activity. After the collapse of Soviet Communism, the international position of the Russian language underwent this kind of abrupt change: the number of translations from Russian in Italy dropped very sharply, and this drop was accompanied by a sharp rise in the number of foreign translations published in Russia.[28] In 1991, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the transformation of the Italian Communist Party into a social-democratic 'Democratic Party of the Left' had, among many other consequences, the effect of stripping Russian literature of its protected status. There were no longer any special channels or funds for translating Soviet authors, and Russophone writers had to compete for their place in the book market just like everyone

26 Aleksandr Pushkin, *Viaggio d'inverno e altre poesie*, ed. by Giovanni Giudici and Giovanna Spendel (Milan: Mondadori, 1985).

27 Giovanni Giudici, *Eugenio Onieghin di Aleksandr S. Pushkin in versi italiani* (Turin: Fogola Editore, 1990; Milan: Garzanti, 1999). Gianfranco Folena contributed the Introduction.

28 Johan Helbron and Gisèle Sapiro, 'Translation: Economic and Sociological Perspectives', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Economics and Language*, ed. by Victor Ginsburgh and Shlomo Weber (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2007), pp. 373–402, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-32505-1_14.

else. Canonical writers such as Tolstoy kept their consolidated place while new authors had to fight for the chance to be read.

Dostoevsky's bicentenary in 2021 and the many new translations which appeared to mark it, including his *Letters* (the most complete edition published outside Russia),[29] show how, thirty years after the end of Communist ideological influence, and despite Russia's increasing isolation from the European cultural space, Russian authors can still inspire readers today with their talent for psychological revelation and original insights on the meaning of human existence. The success of Paolo Nori's autofictional *It's Still Bleeding* (*Sanguina ancora*, Milan: Oscar Mondadori, 2021), winner of the Campiello literature prize (Premio Campiello 2021), a biography of Dostoevsky that also describes Paolo Nori's own life, exemplifies this inspiration. Russian authors continue to symbolise both the anguish of being human, and the courage of survival.

Poetry, which traditionally has a narrower market than prose, has maintained its prestigious position within the Italian publishing tradition. However, the texts proposed for translation have changed: for example, after a period of obscurity, Maiakovskii's love lyrics (but not his political poems) have re-appeared in bookshops. In recent years there have been new editions of authors previously regarded as of elite interest only, such as Marina Tsvetaeva, whose poems of the 1920s, 'Tsar Girl' ('Tsar' devitsa') and 'The Demesne of the Swans' ('Lebedinyi stan'), were translated, as well as her final lyrics (1938–41);[30] or Osip Mandel'shtam, a great connoisseur of Italian culture and language, whose essay, 'Conversation about Dante' ('Razgovor o Dante', 1967) was published in a joint edition by three different publishing firms as *Discorso su Dante* in 2021 to celebrate 130 years since the poet's birth; or Boris Pasternak, whose entire poetic oeuvre has now been commissioned by the publishing house Passigli. Other poets such as Velimir Khlebnikov, Nikolai Zabolotskii, Daniil Kharms, and Boris Slutskii, who avoided "Aesopian language" in their depictions of Soviet Communism, are now accessible to Italian readers, as are the latest generation of Russophone poets, among them Maria Stepanova, Sergei Stratanovskii, Timur Kibirov, Elena Schwartz, Mikhail Aizenberg, Dmitrii Prigov, Sergei Gandlevskii and many others. Thus, poetic currents that formed in Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century—such as Symbolism, Acmeism, and Futurism—have unexpectedly re-emerged in the twenty-first century as a new poetic triad: Metarealism, Presentism, and Conceptualism. Without Russian literature, Italy's literary heritage would be irredeemably impoverished.

29 Fedor Dostoevskij, *Lettere,* ed. by Alice Farina, trans. by Giulia De Florio, Alice Farina and Elena Freda Piredda (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2020).

30 Marina Cvetaeva, *La principessa guerriera*, ed. by Marilena Rea (Rome: Sandro Teti editore 2020); *Il campo dei cigni*, ed. by Caterina Graziadei (Milan: Nottetempo, 2016); and *Ultimi versi 1938–1941*, ed. by Pina Napolitano (Rome: Voland, 2020).