

# TRANSLATING RUSSIAN LITERATURE IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

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Muireann Maguire and Cathy McAteer (eds), *Translating Russian Literature in the Global Context*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0340>

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Version 1.1

ISBN Paperback: 978-1-80064-983-5

ISBN Hardback: 978-1-80064-984-2

ISBN Digital (PDF): 978-1-80064-985-9

ISBN Digital ebook (EPUB): 978-1-80064-986-6

ISBN DIGITAL ebook (HTML): 978-1-80064-989-7

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0340

Cover Design: Jeevanjot Kaur Nagpal

This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme as part of the RUSTRANS academic project, 'The Dark Side of Translation: 20th and 21st Century Translation from Russian as a Political Phenomenon in the UK, Ireland, and the USA' (grant agreement no. 802437).



European Research Council  
Established by the European Commission

# Turkey

## Pushkin's Journey through Turkish Translations

*Sabri Gürses*

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The translator from Russian has long been a rarity and an outsider in Turkey; the same applies for academic study of Russian literature and philology. The most plausible explanation for this is the lengthy wars between Russia and the Ottoman Empire between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries (twelve wars in total), and during the second half of the twentieth century, Turkey's generally anti-Soviet political position. This also explains why there were few literary translators from Russian in Turkey until after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and why Lawrence Venuti's concept of the translator's invisibility hardly applies in the Turkish context: as outsiders, translators were almost painfully visible.<sup>1</sup>

Aleksandr Pushkin was the first Russian writer to visit Turkey, during his first and last foreign journey, long before he achieved canonical status. In 1829, during the Russo-Turkish War, he crossed the border with the Russian Caucasus Army and visited the occupied Turkish cities of Kars and Erzurum. He recorded his impressions and published them under the title *A Journey to Erzurum During the 1829 Campaign* (*Puteshestvie v Arzum vo vremia pohoda 1829 goda*, 1836). At this time, both Russian literature and Pushkin were unheard-of in Turkey, despite gaining ground in Europe. The Russian army drove Napoleon back across Europe in 1814 and its march into Paris symbolically opened the way for Russian literature: within ten years, through French translators such as Serge Poltoratzky, Xavier Marmier, and Prosper Mérimée, Pushkin's name appeared in the Western press.<sup>2</sup> Pushkin's *A Captive in the Caucasus* (*Kavkazskii*

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1 Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (London: Routledge, 1995).

2 Yuri Druzhnikov, *Prisoner of Russia: Alexander Pushkin and the Political Uses of Nationalism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018).

*plennik*, 1822) and other poems on liberty were translated and received attention from both the French police and the readers. Pushkin's 'The Gypsies' ('Tsygany', 1824) directly inspired Prosper Mérimée's novel *Carmen* (1845); Mérimée had previously made a prose translation of the Russian poem. The most enthusiastic European advocate for Russian literature, the diplomat and critic Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé, praised Pushkin as "Pierre le Grand des Lettres"; he considered his poetry so good as to be untranslatable.<sup>3</sup> This French admiration for Russian literature and for Pushkin, in particular, is especially important because, for nineteenth-century Ottoman Turkish society, French was the main language of transmission of European literary fashions.

When Pushkin travelled to Turkey, Turkish literature was experiencing a late and troubled Westernisation; it was still too early for the Ottoman Turkish literary community to understand Russian literature. Interestingly, Pushkin appeared aware of the problematic Ottoman reception of Western culture, which he compared with the analogous Russian experience. In the fifth section of *Journey to Erzurum*, he compared the conflict between Moscow and Kazan with the conflict between Erzurum and Constantinople (Stambul, in Russian; modern Istanbul). In his poem 'Infidels are Praising Stambul Nowadays' ('Stambul gıaury nynche slaviat', 1830), he portrayed the Turkish capital and its pro-Western ruler, the *padishah*, as out of sync with their largely conservative nation. If he had observed it, he could have said the same for the Ottoman Turkish literary society based in Istanbul, which was trying to adapt Western literary forms and become a part of Western literature.<sup>4</sup> Their still-limited audience was also not ready to encounter Russian literature, much less prior to the emergence of Gogol, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy.

## Pushkin in Turkey

In 1878, the year that Dostoevsky began working on *The Brothers Karamazov*, the Ottoman-Turkish author Ahmet Mithat (1844–1912) founded a pro-Western periodical, *Translator of Truth* (*Tercüman-ı Hakikat*). This journal would publish both Russian and European literature in translation, and it was the first Turkish forum to mention Pushkin: his short story 'The Snowstorm' ('Metel', 1831) was serialised in the journal in early October 1880, translated via German by a certain Mehmet Tahir. Pushkin did not reappear until 1889, when in his *Universal*

3 David Baguley, 'Pushkin and Mérimée, the French Connection: On Hoaxes and Impostors' in *Two Hundred Years of Pushkin*, Vol. 3, *Pushkin's Legacy*, ed. by Robert Reid and Joe Andrew (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2004), pp. 171–91. For more on De Vogüé's legacy, see Elizabeth Geballe's chapter in this collection.

4 Özlem Berk, 'Translation and Westernisation in Turkey (From the 1840s to the 1980s)' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Warwick, 1999), [http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/4362/1/WRAP\\_THESIS\\_Berk\\_1999.pdf](http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/4362/1/WRAP_THESIS_Berk_1999.pdf).

*Dictionary of Important People and Places (Kamus-ül alâm)*, the Albanian-Ottoman writer, Şemseddin Sâmî (also known as Sami bey Frashëri; 1850–1904) mentioned him briefly: “Pushkin—a famous Russian poet; born in 1799 in Petersburg and died in 1837, he wrote several theatrical pieces, and also poems; his works have been widely translated into European languages”.<sup>5</sup> Sami’s dictionary is thought to be a free translation from the celebrated French lexicographer Marie Nicolas Bouillet’s *Dictionnaire universel des sciences, des lettres et des arts* (1854); if so, it indicates that Turkish critics accepted French evaluations of Pushkin’s status uncritically.

In 1889, at the Eighth International Congress of Orientalists in Stockholm, Ahmet Mithat met Ol’ga Sergeevna Lebedeva (1854–??), a Russian orientalist and translator trained at Kazan University.<sup>6</sup> During a previous visit to Istanbul, probably in 1881, Lebedeva had tried to publish her own Turkish translations of Pushkin, but, as memories of the recent war with Russia in 1877–78 were still bitter, government officials had unfortunately refused her permission to do so.<sup>7</sup> Mithat invited her back to Istanbul again and, in his journal, he published her translations of ‘The Snowstorm’, ‘The Queen of Spades’ (‘Pikovaia dama’, 1834), and her own short biography of Pushkin (1890). For the next several years, she translated Pushkin, Tolstoy, Lermontov, and others under the pseudonym of Madam Gülnar. As part of Istanbul’s intellectual community, in 1892 she even encouraged the daughter of the Hungarian consul (pen name Madam Nigar), to translate some pieces of Russian literature from German and publish the first poem by Pushkin to appear in Turkish. In 1895, Lebedeva published a short *History of Russian Literature*, which included her Pushkin biography. Ahmet Mithat, in an accompanying note, commented that Pushkin was “the reformer

5 Quoted by Vladimir Aleksandrovich Gordlevskii, *Izbrannnye sochineniia. Iazyk i literatura II* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo vostochnoi literatury, 1961), p. 514. I cite Russian specialists on Turkish literature in this essay because Ottoman literature in the unreformed script has not yet been thoroughly researched by modern Turkish historians of Russian literature. All translations from Russian or Turkish are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

6 Olga Lebedeva’s biography after 1909 is blurry. For more information on Lebedeva, see Hülya Arslan, ‘Kültürlerarası İletişimde Örnek Bir Çevirmen Kimliği: Olga Lebedeva’, *Littera*, 16 (2006), 133–35; Altan Aykut, ‘Türkiye’de Rus Dili ve Edebiyatı Çalışmaları Rus Edebiyatından Çeviriler (1884–1940) ve Rusça Öğrenimi (1883–2006)’, *Journal of Ankara University DTCF*, 46:2 (2006), 1–27. These two articles give no death date for Lebedeva, but another source states: “The last residential archive to list her address is found in St Petersburg dated 1913. Unfortunately, from that date information about Olga Sergeevna Lebedeva ceased to exist. What became of her fate thereafter is unknown”. See Türkan Olcay, ‘Olga Lebedeva (Madame Gülnar): A Russian Orientalist and Translator Enchants the Ottomans’, *Slovo*, 29:2 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.0954-6839.065>.

7 Aleksandr Iosofovich Shifman, *Leo Tolstoi i Vostok* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Nauka, 1971).

of Russian language and thought; he has found his way among the immortals of world culture and has been widely translated into French and English".<sup>8</sup>

In 1891, Sultan Abdul Hamid II had awarded Lebedeva a medal for her services to culture; during her last years in Istanbul, she concentrated on translating Tolstoy. She returned to Russia in 1896. Her translations of Pushkin were for a long period the only ones available in Turkish, apart from one small stanza translated from French in 1894 by the author Abdullah Cevdet (1869–1932) and two poems translated or paraphrased directly from Russian by an army officer, Celal Enisi (or Ünsî) in 1896.<sup>9</sup> By 1899, the journalist Ali Kemal (1867–1922), great-grandfather of former English Prime Minister Boris Johnson, was living in Paris where he wrote an article titled 'Poem and the Poet: Who is Pushkin?' in which he reiterated the European view of the poet: "[i]n Europe, they say that Pushkin is the Byron and Goethe of Russia". This article also contained an abridged prose translation of *The Bronze Horseman* (*Mednyi vsadnik*, 1833), but without a title.<sup>10</sup> Until the First World War, translations from Pushkin paused again; several novels such as Ivan Turgenev's *Smoke* (*Dym*, 1905), Maksim Gorky's *Mother* (*Mat'*, 1911), Lev Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* were translated (usually via French) and serialised in newspapers. But in 1917, another journalist, Ahmed Ağaoğlu (1869–1939), "wrote an article about Russian literature, in which he gave much space to Pushkin".<sup>11</sup> Ağaoğlu, born in Azerbaijan, was educated in France, later working as a journalist and teacher in Russia, before emigrating to Istanbul in 1909. He taught Russian and Turkish history at the Darülfünun (the former name for Istanbul University) in 1912. Turkish Modernist and nationalist authors from different social backgrounds were now beginning to manifest particular interest in Russian literature and the Revolutions of 1905 and 1917. During the postwar occupation of Turkey by the British, French, Italian, and Greek armies, nationalists were among the leading groups of intellectuals to support republicanism and Westernisation. Later, most of these intellectuals would ally with the national independence movement led by Mustapha Kemal Atatürk (1881–1938), future president of Turkey. Mutual support between Kemal's loyalists and the Bolsheviks resulted in a continuing friendship between Soviet Russia and the Turkish Republic. The mildly

8 Ol'ga Lebedeva (Madame Gülnar), *Rus Edebiyatı* (Russian Literature) (İstanbul: Adadoryan Publishing, 1895). The book was transcribed into the Latin alphabet by Enis Mutlu Atak in 2013; my citations are from this unpublished transcription.

9 It is hard to determine the original Russian titles of these prose translations because they are paraphrased in old Turkish script without additional information. Even the translators' biographies are obscure.

10 For further discussion of Lebedeva, Celal Enisi, Ali Kemal, and other translators from Russian to Turkish active in this period, see Ali İhsan Kolcu, "XIX Asır Türk Edebiyatında Puşkin", *Türk Edebiyatı*, No: 269, March 1996, pp. 44–46; and also Türkan Olcay, "Cumhuriyet Dönemi Öncesi Rus Edebiyatından Türkçeye Yapılan Çeviriler Üzerine", *Litera: Journal of Western Literature* 18 (2005) ISSN 1304-0057, pp. 41–55 (esp. 51) <https://ceviribilim.com/2006/05/06/cumhuriyet-donemi-onesinde-rus-edebiyatindan-turkceye-yapilan-ceviriler/>

11 Gordlevskii, *Izbrannyye sochineniia*, p. 515.

Westernised Russian literary canon with its Socialist Realist themes was seen as a model for Turkish modernisation. One such supporter of modernisation, and a future member of parliament, the author Celal Nuri İleri (1881–1938), commented during a visit to Soviet Russia: “[a]h, how I wish that we Turks had just one Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol, Tolstoy or Turgenev!”<sup>12</sup>

But such feelings were not reflected in actual translation activity. Not until 1925 was there a new translation of Pushkin; an individual writing under the pen name ‘Necmettin’ produced a partial prose translation of his narrative poem ‘The Gypsies’. In 1930, two stories from *The Belkin Tales* (*Povesti Belkina*, 1830)—‘The Station Master’ (‘Stantsionnyi smotritel’’) and ‘The Undertaker’ (‘Grobvshchik’)—were translated by a certain Hasan Şükrü. And in 1932, another future parliamentary deputy, Hasan Ali Yücel (1897–1961), the future Minister of National Education, compared Russian literature (specifically, Pushkin’s writing) with Turkish in a textbook. Much as Pushkin had attempted, through Mikhail Lomonosov, to align Russian culture with a classical cultural identity, Turkish intellectuals of the interwar period were eager to connect with their nation’s Ancient Greek heritage.<sup>13</sup> Pushkin’s keenest promoter at that time was the translator and diplomat Samizade Süreyya (1898–1968), who collected his own newspaper articles about the writer into a monograph, *Alexander Pushkin: The Great Poet and His Works* (*Aleksandr Puşkin: Büyük Şair ve Eserleri*).<sup>14</sup> He may be considered the first Pushkin scholar in Turkey. In 1933, he published the first Turkish translation of *The Captain’s Daughter* (*Kapitanskaia dochka*, 1836), followed a year later by translations, probably made via English, of ‘The Snowstorm’ (‘Metel’), ‘The Shot’ (‘Vystrel’), and ‘The Squire’s Daughter’ (‘Baryshnia-Krest’ianka’).<sup>15</sup> Samizade Süreyya was the first to publicly advance the idea that translating Russian literature would help to regenerate Turkish literature:

We Turks don’t know Pushkin. [...] We know little about Russian literature, Russian culture, Russian art [...] from a literary point of view, I don’t believe that we are on the same creative level. We have a great need

12 Ibid.

13 Monika Greenleaf mentions that Pushkin admired Lomonosov’s comments on the Greek heritage of Russian (*Pushkin and Romantic Fashion* [Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994], pp. 62–63). See also Saliha Pakar’s ‘Changing Norms of the Target System: Turkish Translations of Greek Classics in Historical Perspective’, *Studies on Greek Linguistics: Proceedings of the 7th Linguistics Conference* (Thessaloniki: The Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki, 1986), 411–26, which focuses on the period between 1866–1970. Gürçağlar comments on Ottoman-Turkish writers’ eagerness to integrate with Greek culture and Hellenism (p.52). The poet Yahya Kemal (1884–1958), who introduced the trend of neo-Hellenism in Turkish, may have had common ground with Pushkin.

14 Samizade Süreyya, *Aleksandr Puşkin: Büyük Şair ve Eserleri* (Ankara: Akba Publishing, 1937).

15 Kar Fırtnası (Istanbul: Hilmi Publishing, 1934).

for translation and transfer. Why shouldn't we use Russian literature for our needs? This literature is closer to our soul and taste in an artistic perspective, and superior to Western literature.<sup>16</sup>

At that time, Pushkin was not yet a part of the Soviet revolutionary iconography. The celebrated poet Nazım Hikmet (1902–63), who visited Soviet Russia in 1922, returned a convinced Communist with an affection for Vladimir Maiakovskii and the Futurists (who famously dismissed Pushkin and other canonical authors). Hikmet's writings do not mention Pushkin specifically. But by the 1930s, Pushkin was frequently referenced by openly anti-Soviet Turkish poets, like Behçet Kemal Çağlar (1908–69) and Mehmet Emin Yurdakul (1869–1944), who both compared themselves to the Russian poet.<sup>17</sup>

In 1937, the centenary of Pushkin's death, when he was already a Soviet icon, Turkish newspapers published enthusiastic articles and news about the celebrations in Soviet Russia. Cultural figures such as the critic Nurullah Ataç (1898–1957), the author Sadri Ertem (1898–1943), the teacher and politician Kazım Nami Duru (1875–1967), and the author and translator Yaşar Nabi (1908–81) all published articles and books about Pushkin. Sadri Ertem, a Socialist Republican, had recently visited Soviet Russia. His article, 'My Tovarishch Pushkin', reflected his impressions.<sup>18</sup> Duru's monograph, *Pushkin*, provided a detailed biography of the author and translations of his poems as well as extracts from articles published in Russia, England and France.<sup>19</sup> The biography of Pushkin published in the same year by Samizade Süreya was named *Aleksandr Puşkin*;<sup>20</sup> a third, by Hasan Ali Ediz (1905–72), was concisely named *Puşkin*.<sup>21</sup> Ediz was the leader of the (banned) Turkish Communist Party; he also published translations of 'The Queen of Spades', *Dubrovskii* (1832) and *Egyptian Nights* (*Egipetskie nochi*, 1835). But the critics were not satisfied with these publications; Ataç commented harshly about the lack of Turkish translations of Pushkin in a 1937 article:

Thank God, the newspaper *Les Nouvelles littéraires* reached Istanbul on 8 February and our newspapers could write about Pushkin on 10 February. People who don't know the background will say, 'How good that we have many people that have read works of this Russian poet!' [...] Reds,

16 Samizade Süreyya, *Yüzbaşının Kızı* (Ankara: Akba Publishing, 1933) p. 4.

17 Çağlar asserted that the new generation of writers were as talented as Pushkin, Dostoevsky and Baudelaire, but the critics were unable to see their own skills as equal. See 'Behçet Kemal Çağlar cevap veriyor', *Kurun*, 30 March 1936, p. 6.

18 Ertem's impressions of Russia had to wait a long time—until 1989—to be printed: *Sovyet Rusya Hatıralarım* (*My Memories of Soviet Russia*) (Istanbul: Tarih ve Toplum Publishing, 1989).

19 Kazım Nami Duru, *Puşkin* (Ankara: Ulus Publishing, 1937).

20 Samizade Süreya, *Aleksandr Puşkin* (Ankara: Akba Library, 1937).

21 Hasan Ali Ediz, *Puşkin* (Istanbul: Resimli Ay Publishing, 1937).

Whites, everybody says 'You have to read Pushkin', good, but how will we find him to read? Please go to the bookstores and ask for Pushkin translations, if you find any, please buy two copies and send me one of them [...] Even in French, it is hard to find Pushkin.<sup>22</sup>

This criticism, from a critic who was himself a translator from French, effectively showed the continuing neglect of Pushkin translations and scholarship in 1930s Turkey. But at least during the centenary year, Turkish audiences were informed about the importance of Pushkin in world literature and especially in the Soviet Union. Yaşar Nabi, writing a few days before Atatürk, argued that Pushkin's foundation of the modern Russian language had opened the way for Dostoevsky and Tolstoy; he included his own translations of 'Exegi monumentum' (1836) and 'Echo' (1831) in the same article.<sup>23</sup>

The interwar period witnessed radical changes for the publishing sector in Turkey. This industry was not well modernised or even organised during the early twentieth century. The reading public and the number of printed books were still very limited. Publishers had quickly adapted to the reformed alphabet (introduced in 1928) and the government's literacy drive, but as they were few and confined to the big cities (İstanbul, Ankara, and İzmir), their effectiveness was limited. Then, in 1939, the government intervened and organised the First Turkish Publishing Congress, and the Ministry of National Education under Hasan Ali Yücel decided to establish a dedicated imprint for translated world classics. The process of symbolic and actual capital accumulation of national culture via translations was in force. These books, published and sold in special bookstores, and also distributed by the government to all the schools in the country, would help to create a reading public and also support the Westernisation of national literature.<sup>24</sup> The government acted as a specialised publisher until the 1960s. In 1939, the ministry issued a list of projected translations, including Russian classics.<sup>25</sup> Besides Denis Fonvizin, Mikhail Lermontov, Dostoevsky, Anton Chekhov, and Tolstoy, the Ministry of Education published eight books by Pushkin during the next fifteen years: *Boris Godunov* (1943, originally published 1831), *The Captain's Daughter* (1944), 'The Queen of Spades' (1944), *Belkin Tales* (1945), *Dubrovsky* (1945), *Little Tragedies* (1946; *Malen'kie tragedii*, 1830), *The History of Pugachev* (1949; *Istoriia Pugacheva*, 1834),

22 Atatürk, Nurullah, 'Puşkin', *Son Posta*, 12 February 1937, p. 12.

23 Yaşar Nabi, 'Puşkin'in edebi hüviyeti', *Ulus*, 10 February 1937, p. 6.

24 Şehnaz Tahir Gürçağlar, *The Politics and Poetics of Translation, 1923–1960* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2008). Gürçağlar's work and Berk's work are the best available studies of Turkish literary modernisation through translations; this period has not yet been studied from the perspective of sociology of translation, but Kader Konuk's *East West Mimesis: Auerbach in Turkey* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010) also provides a general background of the time.

25 For more on Hasan Ali Yücel and his Translation Bureau, see Hülya Arslan's essay in the present volume.

and *Selected Articles* (1953). Also in 1951, Henri Troyat's 1946 *Pushkin* biography was published. But no poetry anthologies were included in the programme. Oğuz Peltek, who translated both books by Pushkin and Troyat's biography, commented that Pushkin's poetry was not available in French:

As for the translation of his poems, it has been often said that Pushkin is untranslatable. He is the founder of both the Russian language and poetry. [...] Troyat wishes that one day a poet will appear to introduce Pushkin into French.<sup>26</sup>

The idea of the untranslatability of poetry, and of Pushkin's poetry especially, was then widespread. But successful translations of French poetry did exist; so the real reason for the absence of Russian poetry may be that Russian literature, in general, was internationally received as a prose literature. The newspapers praised Pushkin as a poet, but they published his prose without translating his poetry.

Fedor Dostoevsky	Year	Aleksandr Pushkin
	1943	<i>Boris Godunov</i>
'Another Man's Wife and a Husband Under the Bed' 'An Honest Thief'	1944	<i>The Captain's Daughter</i> 'The Queen of Spades'
'A Gentle Creature'	1945	<i>The Tales of Belkin</i> <i>Dubrovskii</i>
'A Little Hero' <i>The Adolescent</i> 'A Weak Heart' 'A Christmas Tree and a Wedding'	1946	<i>Little Tragedies</i>
<i>Crime and Punishment</i> 'The Village of Stepanchikovo'	1948	
	1949	<i>The History of Pugachev</i>

26 Henri Troyat, *Puşkin*, trans. by Oğuz Peltek, 2 vols (Ankara: Ministry of Education Publishing, 1951–54), I (1951), p. 4.

Fedor Dostoevsky	Year	Aleksandr Pushkin
<i>Stories</i>	1950	
	1953	<i>Selected Articles</i>
<i>Notes from the Underground</i>	1955	
<i>Demons</i>	1958	
<i>The Brothers Karamazov</i>	1963	

Table 1: A comparison of Dostoevsky and Pushkin translations commissioned and published by the Turkish Ministry of Education.

These books were reprinted several times before 2000 by the ministry.<sup>27</sup> A lost opportunity and a very tragic event related to Pushkin's poetry was the murder of Sabahattin Ali (1907–48), a poet, novelist, and translator from German into Turkish. A friend of the Socialist poet Nazım Hikmet, in 1946 he co-translated Pushkin's *The Captain's Daughter* with the Jewish-Russian émigré translator Erol Güney (1914–2009) for the Ministry of Education. Then, in 1949, at a time when the Turkish government was repressing Socialist opinions, he tried to escape to Soviet Russia through Bulgaria. He was killed at the Bulgarian border. The motive for this murder remains unclear; it is possible that his polemical articles had irked a powerful government figure. Movingly, Ali's suitcase was found to contain only two books: a volume of Goethe, and a German translation of *Eugene Onegin*.<sup>28</sup> Ali may have planned to translate the latter into Turkish. In a commemorative poem by the poet Sabri Soran, Ali's image is linked with Pushkin's:

Your glasses are broken  
 On one side lies a murderous stick  
 On the other Pushkin,  
 Now that book can't talk with you,  
 That wind will never blow again  
 And your grey hair is covered in blood...

Stars are in another world  
 And Pushkin lies in his blood.<sup>29</sup>

27 This table is adapted from Sabri Gürses and Mehmet Şahin, 'Dostoevsky in Translation: Past, Present and Future Prospects', in *Zur Geschichte der Übersetzung in der Türkei. Themen und Perspektiven*, ed. by Faruk Yücel and Mehmet Tahir Öncü (Berlin: Logos Verlag Berlin, 2021), pp. 47–66.

28 From the police photo of the contents of Ali's last travel bag, the book cover resembles Ullstein Verlag's 1946 Vienna edition of Friedrich von Bodenstedt's 1854 German translation of *Onegin*.

29 "Gözlüğün kırık / Bir tarafta katil bir sopa / Bir tarafta Puşkin, / Artık o kitap bir şey söylemez sana, / O rüzgâr esmez artık / Ve kan içinde bembeyaz saçların...

Sabahattin Ali's death served as a warning for the poet Nazım Hikmet. Two years later, when the latter suspected that his life was in danger, he escaped Turkey for Russia. The 1950s continued to be marked by censure and repression in Turkish publishing. The 1960 military coup created a relatively democratic atmosphere, which lasted until the military memorandum in 1971.<sup>30</sup> During this decade, publishers felt more able to introduce Soviet Russian prose and poetry. Although the translator (and leader of the Turkish Communist Party Zeki Başımar (1905–74)) translated *A Journey to Erzurum* in 1961, Pushkin did not receive much attention. In 1972, the Socialist poet and translator Ataol Behramoğlu (b. 1942) published an anthology of retranslations of all Pushkin's novels and stories as *Complete Works (Bütün Eserleri)*.<sup>31</sup> *The Captain's Daughter* was republished as *Great Rebellion* in 1978, a title change indicative of Pushkin's rebellious image in Turkish culture at that time.<sup>32</sup> Like their peers in some Latin American and other underdeveloped countries, leftist Turkish intellectuals hoped to resolve all their society's conflicts and problems with a Soviet-style Socialist revolution. The next military coup in 1980 ended these political fantasies and again, as after the previous change of government, many books were proscribed and the publishing sector stopped producing them.

Behramoğlu exemplifies the outsider status of literary translators from Russian in Turkish society at this time. A radical leftist like his friend, the poet Azer Yaran (1949–2005), he had chosen to study Russian at university. He belonged to the Workers' Party of Turkey (TİP) and the literary magazine which he produced referred directly in its title to the nineteenth-century Russian activists known as 'narodniki', which he translated as *Friends of the People (Halkın Dostları)*. After the Military Memorandum of 1971, he was forced to live abroad, in London and then Paris; in 1972, invited by the Soviet Writers' Union, he moved to Moscow for two years. In 1974 an amnesty was declared; he returned to Turkey and started publishing the literary magazine *The Militant (Militan)*. After the 1980 coup, Behramoğlu returned to Paris again. Finally

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/ Yıldızlar başka bir dünyada / Ve kan içinde Puşkin.' Sabri Soran, 'Sabahattin Ali'ye', *Başdan*, 26 (28 January 1949), p. 4.

30 The Turkish history of military coups is legendary: between 1950–2000 every decade experienced some form of military intervention in the nation's life. During the first coup in 1960, the army actually took control, and tried and hanged the prime minister. Turkey's Social Democrats regard this first coup as democratic or secular, defending the republican ideals; subsequent coups are regarded as reactionary. The so-called 1971 Military Memorandum was a coup, but rather than force change on the streets, the military forced the government to resign. Then, in 1980, the military took the government down by force. When, in 1990, there was no coup, people were surprised.

31 Ataol Behramoğlu, *Bütün Eserleri*, 2 vols (İstanbul: Cem Publishing, 1972).

32 By Oda Publishing, 1978. The translator's name, Şefika Şükrüoğlu, is probably assumed; Oda Publishing has since the 1990s produced many plagiarised versions of foreign classics ascribed to non-existent translators. See footnote 46 below.

resettling in Turkey in 1992, he started working as an academic at the Russian Studies department of Istanbul University. During this last period, he published collections of his translations from Russian poetry (including Pushkin), and a master's thesis on Pushkin's realism. In 2007, the Russian Federation awarded him its Pushkin Medal for his contribution to the dissemination and study of the Russian language and culture.<sup>33</sup> His original, politically motivated interest in Russian literature had shaped his career. The long title of his first collection of Pushkin poems in 1996 reflects this realisation: *'I have erected a monument not made by human hands'*—the first line of Pushkin's famous poem *'Exegi monumentum'*. In some ways, Behramoğlu, like Ahmet Mithat before him, used his work as a translator of Russian to define his own literary self-image.<sup>34</sup>

Besides Behramoğlu, other translators now showed an interest in Pushkin's poetry. In 1987, author Tomris Uyar (1941–2003) translated *Mozart and Salieri* (*Motsart i Sal'eri*, 1832) and the *Little Tragedies* from English.<sup>35</sup> An anthology of Pushkin's poetry, translated by Mustafa Öztürk (b. 1964), was brought out under the title *'The Gypsies'* (*Çingeneler*) in 1990.<sup>36</sup> In the following years, several more Pushkin anthologies appeared. The first Pushkin biography to be translated from Russian (in 2000) was authored by Vasilii Kuleshov, a scholar at Moscow State University.<sup>37</sup> The year 2003 marked a turning point for Pushkin's poetry in Turkish, with two translations of *Evgenii Onegin* published simultaneously. Azer Yaran's translation avoids rhyme, while the co-translation by Bashkir translator Kanşaubiy Miziev and Turkish poet Ahmet Necdet is both rhymed and metrical.<sup>38</sup> Yaran specialised in Russian poetry, having translated Sergei Esenin, Aleksandr Blok, Marina Tsvetaeva, and Boris Pasternak among others. His *Onegin* culminated his professional dedication to Pushkin, following his versions of *The Bronze Horseman*, *'The Fountain of Bakhchisarai'*,

33 In fact, a reporter and a historian from Turkey were also awarded the medal. See Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 29.11.2007 г. № 1599, <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/26560>.

34 See also Cemal Demircioğlu's article, 'Translating Europe: The Case of Ahmed Midhat as an Ottoman Agent of Translation', in *Agents of Translation*, ed. by John Milton and Paul Bandia (Amsterdam and Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins, 2009), pp. 131–59. What Midhat achieved for the Turkish reception of pre-Communist Russian literature, Behramoğlu continued for Soviet Russia and the Russian Federation; it is interesting that the Soviet and post-Soviet notions of the Russian literary canon are continuous.

35 Aleksandr Pushkin, *Mozart ve Salieri*, trans. by Tomris Uyar (Istanbul: De Publishing, 1987).

36 Aleksandr Pushkin, *Çingeneler*, trans. by Mustafa Öztürk (Istanbul: Damar Publishing, 1990).

37 Vasilii Ivanovich Kuleshov, *Пушкин*, trans. by Birsan Karaca (Istanbul: Multilingual Publishing, 2000). Karaca happened to be Kuleshov's student at MGU.

38 Aleksandr Pushkin, *Yevgeni Onegin*, trans. by Azer Yaran (Istanbul: YKY Publishing, 2003); *Yevgeniy Onegin*, trans. by Kanşaubiy Miziev and Ahmet Necdet (Istanbul: Everest Publishing, 2003).

and 'The Gypsies' in 1995. In that same year, the poet and editor Enis Batur had complained (like Nurullah Ataç before him) that translations of foreign poetry into Turkish were too few and that Turkish poetry could not expect to be globally recognised until it contained works of world literature such as *Evgenii Onegin*:

We still haven't been able to host *Paradise Lost*, Góngora, Petrarch, Goethe, Leopardi, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, *Eugene Onegin*, or Mallarmé in our language. We still do not know the great living poets of our time such as Ashbery, Zanzotto, Eich, Jaccottet, Thom Gunn, or Deguy. Which works from this century have we translated that have left a deep effect on poetry: Do we know Valéry, Auden, Hesse, Hofmannsthal, Jakobson, Paulhan in the context of *ars poetica*?<sup>39</sup>

Batur's tone may have been exaggerated, but for the first time in Turkey, Pushkin's place in the international literary hierarchy was fully acknowledged.

Unfortunately, both translations of *Onegin* proved problematic: Yaran's translation was linguistically over-stylised and the Miziev-Necdet translation had oversimplified the poem for the sake of rhyme; their translations betrayed critical misunderstandings. I have previously analysed these issues in 2006, suggesting that Nabokov's strategy for translating *Onegin* without rhyme is preferable for transferring the precise meaning of the Russian original;<sup>40</sup> I used Iurii Lotman's and Vladimir Nabokov's commentaries for a renewed perspective upon Pushkin, tested in my own non-rhyming translation.<sup>41</sup> Batur's complaint, therefore, sparked three new translations within an eleven-year period (had Sabahattin Ali lived to attempt his *Onegin*, there could have been four within a half-century).

Overall, the history of Pushkin translations in Turkey reveals that, despite moments of enthusiasm, Pushkin's Turkish reception is conflicted. He has been hailed as Russia's greatest poet, and her first modern prose writer. But his image is mostly perceived through the prism of accounts by other Russian prose writers such as Gogol, Tolstoy, or Dostoevsky; even the popular *The Captain's Daughter* is not praised as a masterpiece like *White Nights* (*Belye nochi*, 1848). Dostoevsky's 1880 'Pushkin Speech' has been translated several times into Turkish since 1964; and in 1973 it was even retranslated with the title 'The Dead End of the West' ('Batı Çıkmazı') because Dostoevsky's praise of the uniquely Russian quality in

39 Enis Batur, 'Şiir ve Konvertibilite', in *e/babil Yazıları* (Istanbul: Yapı ve Kredi Publishing, 1995).

40 Sabri Gürses, 'Çevirmeni çevirmek: Nabokov'un Eugene Onegin çevirisi ve Türkçe Onegin çevirileri' ('Translating the Translator: Nabokov's Translation of Eugene Onegin and Turkish Translations of Onegin') (unpublished master's thesis, Istanbul University, 2006).

41 Aleksandr Pushkin, *Yevgeni Onegin*, trans. by Sabri Gürses (Istanbul: Çeviribilim Publishing, 2015); 2nd edn (Istanbul: Alfa Yayıncılık, 2016). This translation was shortlisted in 2018 for an award from the Russian Institute of Translation.

Pushkin chimed with the anti-Western, anti-imperialist, or anti-capitalist aura of that decade.<sup>42</sup> Gogol's and Tolstoy's praise for Pushkin as the father of Russian literature became gospel. But even this praise is understood to refer to Pushkin's prose; his poetry remains barely known in Turkish.

The peak of Pushkin's reception in Turkey was his centenary year, 1937. Press coverage then primarily focused on his image in European literature, his romantic biography, and his reception in Soviet culture. This was when diplomatic relations between the Turkish Republic and Soviet Russia were still positive. Radio Moscow even made a live Turkish-language broadcast, featuring musical compositions based on Pushkin's works.<sup>43</sup> Soviet Pushkin, the poet who had anticipated the birth of the USSR as a democratic, free state, seemed also to be accepted and promoted in Turkey by the Turkish press.<sup>44</sup> This may explain why Pushkin was less popular in Turkey than Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, who appeared more religious and conservative. The promotion of this 'Soviet' Pushkin faltered when Soviet-Turkish relationships deteriorated after Kemal Atatürk's death in 1938. Subsequently, as the new generation of translators from Russian, such as Ataoğlu Behramoğlu, continued to promote this Socialist-leaning Soviet avatar of Pushkin, the poet's image in Turkey became still more secular and revolutionary.

Besides the books published by the Ministry of Education up to 1954, Pushkin was commercially available only through retranslations of *The Captain's Daughter*, which appeared to favour political dissidents. The most prestigious literary translator from Russian of the time, Nihal Yalaza Taluy (1900–68), retranslated *The Captain's Daughter* (*Yüzbaşının kızı*) in 1960. As we have seen, younger translators (of Behramoğlu's generation) perceived Pushkin through Soviet eyes; they focused on the image of Pushkin as a revolutionary poet, a perception fed by his clashes with Tsar Nikolai II. While not necessarily a distortion of Pushkin's real identity, this impression was imbued with the Cold War's political aura. Meanwhile in the USA, Vladimir Nabokov was trying to isolate and refute the Soviet image of Pushkin and Russian culture. In his own 1964 version of *Eugene Onegin*, he aimed to create a free-spirited, European, cosmopolitan, non-prudish image of Pushkin. But, Enis Batur aside, Turkish translators and commentators on Pushkin seem to have accepted the Soviet image almost uncritically—a reception legacy that lingers today.

42 Fedor Dostoevsky, 'Pushkin Speech', translated from English by Ülker Bilgin (Istanbul: Dergah Publishing, 1975).

43 'Moskova Radyosunun Türkiye için konseri' ('Radio Moscow is giving a concert for Turkey'), *Türk dili*, 11 February 1937, no 10163, p. 1. The programme was listed in the newspaper *Ulus* and it included pieces from *Ruslan and Ludmila*, *Boris Godunov*, *The Prisoner of Caucasus*, etc. 'Bu akşam Sovyet radyoları Türkçe neşriyat yapacaktır' ('Tonight Soviet Radios Will Be Broadcasting in Turkish'), *Ulus*, 11 February 1937, p. 4.

44 See Jonathan Brooks Platt, *Greetings, Pushkin! Stalinist Cultural Politics and the Russian National Bard* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016).

This is probably one of the reasons why, when a Turkish translation of *Pushkin's Secret Journal 1836–1837* appeared in 2000, it aroused conflicting opinions.<sup>45</sup> This journal was published in English by Mikhail Armalinsky while he was an immigrant in Minneapolis; he asserted that it was given to him by someone in Russia and it included Pushkin's meditations on his sexual history.<sup>46</sup> How this book found its way from Minneapolis to Istanbul to be translated is another mystery, but while the Turkish media welcomed the book's obscenities, Behramoğlu harshly criticised it, contesting its originality. Whether this was because the book was a fake—which it was, and which therefore, as a specialist, he had to reject—or because he found the depiction of Pushkin as a happy author of erotica unacceptable, it is hard to say: the answer is probably a combination of the two. Prior to this book's publication, Pushkin was seen as an unlucky, cuckolded husband-poet; in 1937, an anonymous article called 'Pushkin and his Wife' encouraged women to spit in Pushkin's wife's face, suggesting: "O women! You should clean up the dismal memory of Pushkin's wife".<sup>47</sup> But an article from the same year by Ataç mentioned that Pushkin had had one hundred and thirteen lovers; this was intended as a compliment.<sup>48</sup> Solomon Volkov mentions that in the Soviet period, Pushkin's authorship of erotic poems was officially forgotten.<sup>49</sup> Thus we may say that *The Secret Diary*, even if fake, inaugurated a humanisation of Pushkin's image.

As we have seen, the translation history of Pushkin in Turkish reveals dedicated, highly visible translators anxious to transfer Pushkin's style and language into Turkish. This is the bright side of the story. Unfortunately, alongside this history of original translations from Pushkin, there is also a dark side: today, fake and plagiarised versions of Pushkin's prose abound in the Turkish literary market. Plagiarism is a timeless issue, but these mass plagiarisms started in 2005 when the Ministry of National Education made one hundred canonical literary texts mandatory reading on school curricula. This list included several works by Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Gogol, and Pushkin, and mercenary publishers seized their opportunity to publish fake, plagiarised 'translations' of these classics.<sup>50</sup> Up to

45 Aleksandr Pushkin, *Secret Journal 1836–1837*, trans. by Mikhail Armalinsky (Minneapolis: M.I.P. Company, 1986); *Gizli Günce*, trans. by Cansel Rozzena/Munire Yılmaer (Istanbul: Çiviyazıları Publishing, 2000).

46 Richard A. Gregg, 'Secret Journal 1836–1837 by A. S. Pushkin', *Slavic Review*, 46:3–4 (1987), 642–43, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2498154>.

47 'Puşkin ve karısı,' *Anadolu*, 14 February 1937, p. 5. Signed anonymously as Çimdik.

48 'Amerika'da Puşkin hakkında çıkan bir kitap', *Ulus*, 3 April 1937, p. 4. Signed as N.A., aka Nurullah Ataç.

49 Solomon Volkov, *Romanov Riches: Russian Writers and Artists Under the Tsars* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2011).

50 There is considerable literature on this topic, including Mehmet Şahin, Derya Duman, and Sabri Gürses, 'Big Business of Plagiarism under the Guise of (Re) Translation: The Case of Turkey', *Babel*, 61.2 (2015), 193–218; Mehmet Şahin, Derya Duman, Sabri Gürses, Damla Kaleş and David Woolls, 'Toward an Empirical

forty different editions of *The Captain's Daughter* are now for sale, few of which are based on the original text. These artefacts litter the translational ecology; readers must carefully check the origins of any translation. Actual translators are faced with fewer readers and fewer sales, and readers are usually left without guidance especially in bookstores, online or not. Hopefully, this will not prevent prestigious publishers from commissioning and printing original retranslations. A complete translation of Pushkin's oeuvre is currently in progress.<sup>51</sup>

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the millennium witnessed an unexpected improvement of Pushkin's image in Turkey. In 2002, Nobel laureate Orhan Pamuk wrote a novel about the city of Kars (the only foreign city that Pushkin ever saw). The main character is also a poet and the narrator depicts the Russian occupation during the nineteenth century and at one point mentions that "thanks to the new occupants the house in which Pushkin stayed during his visit to Kars [...] had been saved from demolition".<sup>52</sup> Surprisingly, this novel, which develops like a Turkish version of Dostoevsky's *Demons* and which parodies political conflicts in Turkey, has since inspired literary tourism to the city. Today people visit Kars to see the preserved Russian buildings and urban layout. The house where Pushkin stayed there has been turned into a museum; since 2016, the construction of another museum in Erzurum is in progress with the official support of the Russian consulate. A small Pushkin Museum opened in 2019 in the Southern seaside city of Antalya, a favourite holiday destination amongst Russians. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the translator of Russian literature is less of an outsider in Turkish society. And as the number of Russian citizens living and working in Turkey has reached almost a hundred thousand, today, more than two hundred years after he journeyed to Erzurum, Pushkin has become an enduring symbol of Russian presence in Turkish culture. At least, it seemed so until the Russian occupation of Ukraine. Since then, the Russian cultural image may not have been cancelled as in the West, but it has certainly lost its glamour.

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Methodology for Identifying Plagiarism In Retranslation', in *Retranslation Perspectives on Retranslation: Ideology, Paratexts, Methods*, ed. by Özlem Berk Albachten and Şehnaz Tahir Gürçağlar (New York and London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 166–91; and Sabri Gürses and Mehmet Şahin, 'The Shifting Value of Retranslations and the Devaluing Effect of Plagiarism: The Complex History of Dostoevsky (Re)Translations in Turkish', *Paralleles*, 35:1 (April 2023), <https://www.paralleles.unige.ch/en/tous-les-numeros/numero-35-1/gurses-sahin>.

- 51 This project includes my translations. A complete anthology of Pushkin's literary prose was published by Alfa Publishing in 2022; the volumes containing Pushkin's poetry are currently in preparation.
- 52 Orhan Pamuk, *Snow*, trans. by Maureen Freely (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), p. 318.

Those Russian citizens already living in Turkey have now been joined by Russian deserters and Ukrainian refugees, and it has become hard to praise Pushkin or any other writer on social media or in public without a reference to the war. In March 2022, poet Ataol Behramoğlu made a gentle attempt to criticise Russia's actions with a reference to his Pushkin Medal. He asked President Putin to end the invasion and stop two brother-countries from killing each other: "I see and understand that NATO and the whole Western block has targeted the Russian Federation... and I am sad about the cancelling of Russian culture [...] but no one can understand and accept the invasion," he said.<sup>53</sup> This call was of course met with silence; in March 2023, when Behramoğlu was invited to the Pushkin jubilee of the Russian Consulate in Ankara, he made no reference to his appeal, nor did he repeat it. The celebration was attended by eight Russian scholars, who had travelled expressly from Russia for the occasion, yet the Turkish press did not cover it. Sadly, the liberalisation of Russian literature has stopped, and the image of the translator from Russian will, in Turkey as elsewhere, be determined by the disposition of future Great Powers.

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53 'An Open Letter from Ataol Behramoglu to Putin', 15 March 2022, <https://turkiyenews.com/an-open-letter-from-the-author-ataol-behramoglu-to-putin/>. The original text is here (there is no official Russian or English version of the text): 'Ataol Behramoğlu'ndan Putin'e açık mektup', Cumhuriyet, 14 March 2022, <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/turkiye/ataol-behramoglundan-putine-acik-mektup-1915678>.