



TRANSLATING RUSSIAN
LITERATURE IN THE GLOBAL
CONTEXT

EDITED BY
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Pale Fire of the Revolution: Notes on the Reception of Russian Literature in Colombia

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Introduction¹

It is well known that Russian literature has a considerable presence in Latin America: Maria Nadyarynykh once evoked a “Latin American cult of Russian literature”.² Nevertheless, Russian-Colombian cultural relations can be

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- 1 The authors express their sincere gratitude to Rubén Darío Flórez, Anastassia Espinel Soares, and Irina Luna for sharing with us their memories and impressions. Our research was supported by a Russian Science Foundation Grant held by V. S. Polilova at Moscow State University, ‘Svoe i/ili chuzhoe: problema metro-ritmicheskikh zaimstvovaniy v istorii i razvitiy russkogo stikha’ (grant no. 19-78-10132), <https://rscf.ru/project/19-78-10132/>.
 - 2 Mariia Nad’iarynykh, ‘Kul’t russkoi literatury v Latinskoi Amerike’, in *Russkaia literatura v zerkalakh mirovoi kul’tury: retseptsii, perevody, interpretatsii: Kollektivnaia monografiia*, ed. by M. F. Nad’iarynykh, V. V. Polonskii and A. B. Kudelin (Moscow: IMLI RAN, 2015), pp. 897–942. See also George O. Schanzer, ‘La literatura rusa en Uruguay’, *Revista hispanoamericana*, 17 (1952), 361–91; George O. Schanzer, *Russian Literature in the Hispanic World: A Bibliography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972); Iuliia Obolenskaia, *Dialog kul’tur i dialektika perevoda: Sud’by proizvedenii russkikh pisatelei XIX veka v Ispanii i Latinskoi Amerike* (Moscow: MSU, 1998); Bruno Gomide Barretto, *Da Estepe à Caatinga: O romance russo no Brasil (1887–1936)* (São Paulo: Editora de Universidade de São Paulo, 2011); Dina Odnopozova, ‘Russian-Argentine Literary Exchanges’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, Yale University, 2012); Adel Ramilevna Fauzetdinova, ‘Translation as Cultural Contraband: Translating and Writing Russian Literature in Argentina’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, Boston University, 2017); Alfredo Gorrochotegui

characterised as unsuccessful in the broader context of Russian presence in Latin American cultures. Through a case study of this failed intercultural dialogue, this chapter aims at identifying the factors that have contributed to its failure. The relationship between the two cultures began in the nineteenth century, when Soledad Acosta de Samper, then one of the most important figures in Colombian literature, responded to the works of Nikolai Gogol in her polemic against Realism *à la* Zola.³ José Asunción Silva, the leading representative of Colombian Modernism, dedicated an enthusiastic review to Lev Tolstoy (1893).⁴ In the twentieth century, however, literary relations between the two cultures did not progress as much as one might have expected: Russian literature did not seem to arouse much interest among Colombian translators and writers. The situation began to change only in the last decades of the twentieth century thanks to the efforts of translators, both Colombians and the representatives of the diaspora: Henry Luque Muñoz (Bogotá, 1944–2005), Marina Kuzmina (Moscow, 1937–Bogotá, 2018), Jorge Bustamante (b. Zipaquirá, 1951), Rubén Darío Flórez (b. Pijao, 1961), Irina Luna (b. Moscow, 1953), among others.

The role of institutions, both formal and informal, and of diasporas in intercultural exchange is central to the contemporary humanities, particularly Translation Studies. The latter carefully describes the social aspects of literary interactions (translators, editors, critics, and other institutions).⁵ The genealogy of this approach can also be traced back to Russian formalism. An example is the recent book by Giuseppina Larocca on “Russian traces” in early twentieth-century Florence, in which the researcher draws on Boris Eikhenbaum’s ideas about the social environment of literature (‘literaturnyi byt’) and transfers them to the comparative context.⁶ As we will demonstrate below, the relatively

Martell, ‘Gabriela Mistral y la literatura rusa. Una aproximación a la influencia de Lev Tolstói, Máximo Gorki y Leonid Andreiev en su vida y obra (1904–1936)’, *Escritos*, 25 (2017), 135–63; Jordi Morillas, ‘La recepción de F. M. Dostoievski en el continente iberoamericano. Una visión panorámica’, *Estudios Dostoievski*, 2 (2019), 23–37.

- 3 Alfredo Hermosillo, ‘Gógol en *El Historiador palmense*, *Revista de España, La Iberia y El Imparcial*’, in *Traducción y cultura. La literatura traducida en la prensa hispánica (1868–98)*, ed. by Marta Giné i Solange Hibbs (Bern: Peter Verlag, 2010), pp. 335–40 (p. 339).
- 4 José Asunción Silva, *Obra completa*, ed. by Eduardo Camacho Guizado and Gustavo Mejía (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1977), pp. 273–75; Rubén Darío Flórez, ‘Lev Tolstói v latinoamerikanskoi literaturnoi traditsii. Kolumbiiskii poet Khose Asuns’ón Sil’va o tvorchestve L’va Nikolaevicha Tolstogo’, in *Dukhovnoe nasledie L. N. Tolstogo v sovremennykh kul’turnykh diskursakh: Materialy XXXV Mezhdunarodnykh Tolstovskikh chtenii* (Tula: TGPU, 2016), pp. 5–11.
- 5 Susan Bassnett, ‘The Translation Turn in Culture Studies’, in *Constructing Cultures: Essays on Literary Translation*, ed. by Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1998), pp. 123–24.
- 6 Giuseppina Larocca, *L’aquila bicipite e il tenero iris: Tracce russe a Firenze nel primo Novecento (1899–1939)* (Pisa: Pisa University Press, 2018).

superficial character of the reception and translation of Russian literature in Colombia was determined by the lack of an adequate social environment (institutions and diaspora) resulting both from the specificity of the Colombian cultural situation and from the country's unique relationship with Russia during the Cold War. At the same time, we argue, the Soviet international educational project (epitomised by the Peoples' Friendship University, founded in 1960) and generalised processes of globalisation have gradually increased direct engagement with Russian literature, in particular the number of translations.

Thus, the fate of Russian literature in twentieth-century Colombia was not determined by any intrinsic aspect of the literary works themselves, for, as David Damrosch has shown, the processes of reception and appropriation of a text by another culture are intricate: "[these processes] do not reflect the unfolding of some internal logic of the work in itself but come about through often complex dynamics of cultural change and contestation".⁷ Similarly, in Pascale Casanova's "world republic of letters", literary and artistic processes are closely linked to international politics (through the formation of national states, imperial expansion and colonialism), while also representing a field in which specific literary mechanisms can be discerned:

This world republic of letters has its own mode of operation: its own economy, which produces hierarchies and various forms of violence; and, above all, its own history, which, long obscured by the quasi-systematic national (and therefore political) appropriation of literary stature, has never really been chronicled. Its geography is based on the opposition between a capital, on the one hand, and peripheral dependencies whose relationship to this center is defined by their aesthetic distance from it.⁸

Looking at the difference between the rise of Russian literature in the second half of the nineteenth century and the still-precarious state of Colombian culture in the same period, we will try to illuminate the consequences of this encounter between two literatures at different stages of evolution and with very different relations to artistic centres in the West. Their failed dialogue will not only reveal the differences in the development of both literatures, but also encourage more general discussion on the dynamics of reception and adaptation in that "world republic of letters".

Thus, this chapter offers a first outline of the history of translation and reception of Russian literature in Colombia—a history which is unique and interesting precisely because of its limitations compared to other Latin American countries. The first section of our chapter reviews the cultural

7 David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 6.

8 Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. by M.B. DeBevoise (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2004), pp. 11–12.

situation in Colombia and analyses examples of Russian literature's reception in the twentieth century (Ramón Vinyes, the Los Nuevos group, Luis Tejada, León de Greiff, and Gabriel García Márquez); the second part summarises the history of the Colombian-Soviet Cultural Institute, its publications and related cultural activities; while the third and final part examines the work of Colombian translators of Russian literature.

The Colombian Cultural Situation and the Reception of Russian Literature

Carlos Rincón's View on Colombian Cultural Idiosyncrasy

National literatures have their own timescale. The reception of a foreign literature within a national literature depends on the maturity of the latter and its willingness to accept external influence. The maturity of a literature can be estimated through an economic metaphor: the solidity of its internal literary market. Casanova argued that a necessary process for the consolidation of a nation's literary market, and for its integration into the world republic of letters, was the prior accumulation of "literary capital"⁹ (mirroring the Marxist idea of the "primitive accumulation of capital"). In the following sections, we will outline the conditions that made Colombian literature less receptive to the influence of Russian literature, that is, with less "literary capital" than other nations whose relations with Russian culture were more fertile. Carlos Rincón suggests where to find answers to this problem. He follows the history of the country's cultural institutions—including its literature—in relation to the nation's own history. Rincón attributes the difficulties faced by grammarians, poets and journalists in consolidating a national literary canon to Colombia's failure as a modern nation-state.¹⁰ In his understanding of the relationship between the construction of a nation-state and the emergence of its cultural institutions, Rincón follows Doris Sommer, who has devoted a famous study to the narratives she calls "foundational fictions".¹¹ These narratives portray romances between characters from different social strata (for example, between a *criollo* and an indigenous woman), whose union symbolises the social pact necessary for state consolidation and the promise of national fecundity. Thus,

9 Casanova, *World Republic*, p. 37.

10 Carlos Rincón, *Avatares de la memoria cultural en Colombia. Formas simbólicas del Estado, museos y canon literario* (Bogotá: Editorial Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, 2010), p. 52.

11 Doris Sommer, *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991).

the evolution of Colombian literature, from the nineteenth century onwards, could be seen as a series of attempts to consolidate their nation.

The Colombian cultural scene of the second part of the nineteenth century was dominated by the notion that their capital, Santa Fe de Bogotá, was the “South American Athens”.¹² This surprising revival of classicism in the late nineteenth century was accompanied by a conservative defence of Catholicism and Hispanism, which, at the same time, contrasted with the country’s precarious cultural situation. Illiteracy levels were very high; consequently, the reading public was sparse. The fact that literature and other cultural expressions were so dependent on formal political institutions indicates, from the outset, that Colombia was not a modern state. One of the preconditions for the emergence of Symbolism in France was the relative autonomy of French literature in relation to political institutions. This was not the case in Colombia. David Jiménez points out that the nineteenth-century literary journals were inevitably associated with one of the two parties vying for power: the Liberal and the Conservative.¹³ Thus, literary critics—if we can speak of literary critics in that context—were political partisans before they were readers.

Literary historians are less unanimous in their assessment of what happened to Colombian literature and literary criticism at the turn of the century. According to Jiménez, the emergence of Baldomero Sanín Cano (1861–1957), the Modernist literary critic, friend of the great Modernist poet José Asunción Silva, and believer in “the autonomy of art and literary criticism”, indicates real progress.¹⁴ Rincón, however, held the view that “[the] central phenomenon of the history of Colombian literature at the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century is its absolute deprivation of any aptitude, of any power to establish literary or aesthetic standards”.¹⁵ Although he details how first in the 1930s, with the Liberal Republic (a period of liberal political and social reformism, which began with the presidency of Enrique Olaya Herrera, in 1930),¹⁶ and later in the 1950s, with the emergence of the Barranquilla Group (a literary association organised around Ramón Vinyes, including Gabriel García Márquez, the writer Álvaro Cepeda Samudio, the painter Alejandro Obregón, and others), writers began to deplore the impoverishment of the country’s intellectual and literary scene, Rincón insists that the fault lies with Colombian cultural institutions and actors who not only deny this precariousness, but refuse to address it.¹⁷

12 Rincón, *Avatares de la memoria cultural*, p. 55.

13 David Jiménez, *Historia de la crítica literaria en Colombia, 1850–1950* (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2009), p. 22.

14 Jiménez, *Historia de la crítica literaria*, pp. 24–25.

15 Rincón, *Avatares de la memoria cultural*, p. 87. All translations from Russian and Spanish are our own unless otherwise indicated.

16 Antonio Caballero, *Historia de Colombia y sus oligarquías* (Bogotá: Crítica, 2018), pp. 313–16.

17 Rincón, *Avatares de la memoria cultural*, pp. 86–87.

Rincón stresses that Colombia has also been partially isolated from the cultural dynamics of the region. While in the 1930s the dominance of the two great classics of Colombian literature (*María* (1867) by Jorge Isaacs, and *The Vortex* (*La vorágine*, 1924) by José Eustasio Rivera) was just beginning to be doubted, there was no concerted challenge to Realist literature. Meanwhile, the rest of Latin America (Cuba, with Alejo Carpentier; and Argentina, with Jorge Luis Borges) was forging a radical new poetics, leaving behind not only local movements and localised Realism, but even Anglo-American Modernism.¹⁸ The reception of Russian literature developed analogously. While Santiago, Buenos Aires, Mexico City, Lima, and Havana formed foci of Russian culture during the twentieth century, Bogotá was not included. Besides those Colombian cultural idiosyncrasies identified by Rincon, immigration was an important factor in this difference. Colombia has historically been a rather closed country, resistant to immigration, including by Russian-speaking Jews, causing Russian literature to flourish elsewhere in Latin America. When the racist and philoFascist politician Luis López de Mesa was Colombia's Foreign Minister (1938–42), he banned Jews from entering the country.¹⁹ While some major Colombian authors praised Russian literature,²⁰ in most cases their response was rather superficial. They reveal a lingering fascination with the Russian Revolution and with nineteenth-century Russian literature, which was understood through the lens of the Revolution. But this reflected light of revolution, or its 'pale fire' (to borrow a Nabokovian phrase), failed to develop into a genuine reception. This failure can be attributed to the political twists and turns of the twentieth century.

Some Episodes in Reception

One of the most interesting and profound examples of the reception of Russian literature in Colombia is the case of Los Nuevos. This association emerged in 1925, when it began publishing its eponymous journal. Its members were young intellectuals who welcomed the 'red flood' of the Russian Revolution and embraced Socialist ideas. Among them were the journalist, writer, and future president Alberto Lleras (1906–90), the historian and politician Germán Arciniegas (1900–99), the writer Jorge Zalamea (1905–69), and the poets León de Greiff (1895–1976) and Luis Vidales (1904–90). Their movement combined a left-leaning desire for political change with demand for avant-garde literary renewal, leading its members to fantasise about distant Russia. As Lleras wrote:

18 Ibid., p. 84.

19 Azriel Bibliowicz, 'Intermitencia, ambivalencia y discrepancia: historia de la presencia judía en Colombia', *Les Cahiers ALHIM*, 3 (2001), <https://doi.org/10.4000/alhim.535> (para. 13 of 20).

20 See, for instance, Jorge Zalamea's comments on Russian literature discussed below.

The Russian Revolution, the triumph of Socialism that had been judged implausible, for the first time constituted in a strong government [...] exerted an almost irresistible attraction [...]. The first declarations of Los Nuevos in their journal reflected the anxiety, uneasiness, and vital anguish of a generation that did not see the way but thousands and thousands of kilometres away, in Russia, where everything seemed possible.²¹

And:

[...] we saw appearing a red dawn over the destruction of the war, which pointed to the golden onion domes of the Kremlin and, like Luis Tejada, we thought that Lenin was going to decide our destinies and those of the universe, vertiginously.²²

Los Nuevos played an important role in Colombian history as the cradle and the intellectual centre of liberal modernisation during Colombia's Liberal Republic period (1930–46). Some of its members frequented the Marxist circle organised by Silvestre Savitsky (1894–1954) in 1923.²³ Born in Cali, southwest Colombia, to Slavic émigré parents, Savitsky returned to Latin America in 1920 after spending some time in Russia where he participated in the Civil War. In Bogotá he set up a dyeworks where young intellectuals who wanted to learn news about Soviet Russia gathered. In 1925 he was arrested, accused of conspiracy, and deported to Mexico. After Savitsky's deportation, Lleras published his article 'Memories of a Conspirator', which began: "The Russian Bolshevik, Sawinsky [sic], arrested yesterday by the police, was found to have a list of Colombian communists [...]. The police believe they have discovered a wide-ranging conspiracy".²⁴ The episode allowed Lleras to describe his own encounter with Russian literature, since it is Russian literature, as he ironically asserts, that really turns one into a Nihilist:

At that time I learned that beyond the seas, initiated by a series of patriarchs whose books are in my library and who can be taken to court, Russia, an old and nebulous country, full of cold and sweet and good men, had a revolution. Also, if I remember correctly, there had been a group similar no doubt to the one that today has just burst among us, of more or less fateful characters, who went to purge their torturing obsessions of regicide in the ergastula [in Roman times, a sort of slave

21 Alberto Lleras, *Memorias* (Bogotá: Tauris, 2006), p. 215.

22 Alberto Lleras, *Antología*, ed. by Otto Morales Benítez (Bogotá: Villegas, 2007), pp. 38–39.

23 Lazar JEIFETS and Víctor JEIFETS, *América Latina en la Internacional Comunista. 1919–1943: Diccionario biográfico* (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2017), pp. 632–33.

24 Lleras, *Antología*, p. 98.

prison] of Siberia. Its name, nihilism, caught my spirit. And it was only natural that after all those years, a rabid desire to be a nihilist arose in my mind from that exotic and pernicious influence.²⁵

The real conspirators are not characters like Savitsky, he argues, but Russian writers: "One of them was called Tolstoy, and he was crazy. Another one was called Gorky, and he had consumption. The third one was called Andreev, there was also Gogol... and the one after him..."²⁶

Los Nuevos' fascination with Russian culture, which they read and interpreted from the standpoint of the Revolution, is evident in texts published in the groups' journal.²⁷ The most quoted Russian authors are Fedor Dostoevsky,²⁸ Maksim Gorky and Leonid Andreev. Jorge Zalamea's article 'Figures of Russia'²⁹ ('Figuras de Rusia') (signed 'J. Z.'), a kind of commentary on Andreev's novel *Sashka Zhegulev* (1911), describes the connection between Andreev's characters and the Revolution thus: "Russia is full of them [Andreev's heroes]. Yesterday's Russia, Tsarist Russia, which cries out now and then from the light and shadows but cries out desperately, tragically. Today their victory seems to be approaching".³⁰ In his essay 'The Mystical Spirit'³¹ ('El espíritu místico'), Lleras explores the mysterious Russian soul, quoting Gorky and Dmitrii Merezhkovskii:

The literary country of snow and of melancholic and stupid mujiks is, in the end, the one that possesses the most mystical sense. The Russian peasant that Gorky tells us about, kneeling before a Jewish icon or before one of the schism that opens the Catholic Bible or who reads the Lutheran pages, is nevertheless the one who carries more in his soul the oppressive anguish of any religiosity. He is a mystical peasant, essentially mystical, like the Indians of the Khali temples. Besides, the Russian people have a feeling of fatality, oppressive, hard, that floats around in the pages of any writer. And piety, piety that can become criminal in the paradox

25 Ibid., p. 99.

26 Ibid., p. 101.

27 A total of five issues of this journal appeared between June and August 1925. In this chapter, we cite the facsimile reproduction of all issues, published as an annex to Enrique Gaviria Liévano, *Los Nuevos' en la historia de Colombia: una generación militante (1925-1999)* (Bogotá: Academia Colombiana de Historia, 2010), pp. 199-418. We refer to this edition as '*Los Nuevos*'.

28 For example, Víctor Manuel García Herreros published in *Los Nuevos* excerpts entitled 'The Comic in Dostoevsky' ('Lo cómico en Dostoievsky') and 'Porphyre Petrovich Speaks' ('Dice Porphyre Petrovich') (pp. 284-86, pp. 288-89). These excerpts are presented as diary entries and parts of a novel in progress 'Diary of the Poet Tulio Ernesto' ('Diario del poeta Tulio Ernesto'), pp. 280-89.

29 *Los Nuevos*, p. 333-35.

30 Ibid., p. 335.

31 Ibid., pp. 293-94.

of Russian sentiment, is among the factors that would make it easy to propagate a religious revival.

Russia exercises over Europe a sure dominance in literature and music, the two arts which, with architecture, are the basis of the mystical sense.³²

The only translated Russian text we find in *Los Nuevos* is the short story 'The Laugh'³³ ('Smekh', 1901) by Andreev. The fifth and final issue of the magazine announced the publication of work by major new writers, barely known to the general public.³⁴ They included Aleksandr Blok, Vladimir Maiakovskii, and Vladimir Korolenko, but as the journal was suspended, these translations never appeared.

The most artistically interesting Russia-related publication in *Los Nuevos* is probably 'Diary in Zigzag'³⁵ ('Dietario en zig-zag') by Ramón Vinyes (1882–1952). Vinyes was a Catalan poet, writer, playwright, and bookseller who arrived in Colombia in 1913 and spent most of his life in the Northern port city of Barranquilla. He became one of the major members of the mid-century circle of journalists and writers known as the Barranquilla Group, including Gabriel García Márquez (1927–2014), who pays tribute to him in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (*Cien años de soledad*, 1967). Here Vinyes appears as "the wise Catalan", "the man who had read everything". In short articles for *Los Nuevos*, Vinyes imagines Russia in Dostoevskian terms: "In all the sordid taverns of the world you will find a Russian consumptive prone to relapse".³⁶ He shows Russia as a land of shadows and sorrow.³⁷

Vinyes was undoubtedly the only person in Colombia of his time who knew both nineteenth-century and contemporary Russian literature in such depth. In Barranquilla in 1917, he founded the journal *Voces*³⁸ (1917–20), one issue of which published translations of several Russian poets³⁹ with an explanatory essay by Vinyes entitled 'Russian poets' ('Poetas rusos').⁴⁰ In the essay, a Russian friend, "Nikolas Voynich" (we have not yet been able to establish his identity), offers the narrator a brief overview of Russian poetry and prose (mentioning Merezhkovskii, Skitalets, Nadson, Shchepkina-Kupernik, Ostrovskii, Miatlev,

32 Ibid., p. 294.

33 Ibid., pp. 374–77.

34 Ibid., p. 399.

35 Ibid., pp. 232–33.

36 Ibid., p. 232.

37 Ibid., p. 233.

38 In this chapter we cite the reproduction of all issues, published as *Voces, 1917:1920: edición íntegra*, ed. by Ramón Illán Bacca, 3 vols (Barranquilla: Universidad del Norte, 2003). We refer to this edition as *Voces*.

39 Number 18, 1918.

40 *Voces*, I, pp. 482–86.

Goncharov, Grigorovich, and others). The connection between Russian literature and the Revolution is again emphasised. Vinyes argues:

Everything is revolutionary in Russia. When we recall Tolstoy's theatre [...]: it is revolutionary. 'The Power of Darkness' hallucinates. When we recall Gorky's theatre: it is revolutionary. 'The Lower Depths' gives chills. Pisemsky's theatre is revolutionary. 'Baal' is a violent satire against the upper classes. Ostrovskii's theatre is disturbing: 'The Storm' is revolutionary. Her poets, her musicians are revolutionary; her novelists are revolutionary [...] Her philosophers are revolutionary. [...] All writers of Holy Russia are revolutionaries. The restlessness of their life gives to their works this rough and dark stamp that characterises them, that shows them men without peace, homeless, neurasthenic and possessed like this poor priest in Andreev's novel, in whom faith has died for excess of faith, and who has to seek death to free himself from the oppressive adversarial darkness that envelops him.⁴¹

The fifth issue of *Voces* from September 1917 contained Vinyes' review of Grigorii Aleksinskiĭ's book *Russia and Europe* (probably referring to the French edition published in Paris in 1917).⁴² Vinyes comments: "Gloomy kings, wrathful princes, murderous popes. A sombre procession parades through the book. The figure of Tsar Nicholas I gives shivers. Russia appears to us once again deeply red, as its novelists and poets tell us".⁴³ A note on Dostoevsky was published in the October issue of the magazine.⁴⁴ In 1922, Vinyes also published an essay on 'Russian Theatre During the Revolution'.⁴⁵ It is likely that Vinyes, rather than Savitsky, determined the perception of Russian literature by *Los Nuevos*. After the closure of *Los Nuevos*, Russian literature continued to appear in *El Gráfico*, which brought out between 1925 and 1941 twelve short stories by Anton Chekhov and Arkadiĭ Averchenko.⁴⁶ Felipe Lleras Camargo, director of *Los Nuevos*, continued the line of Socialist criticism in the newspaper *Ruy Blas* (1927–28).⁴⁷ Effects of their exposure to Russian literature and culture on the aesthetic projects of each of the members of *Los Nuevos* proved diverse, as shown by the example of two writers, Luis Tejada (1898–1924) and León de Greiff.

41 Ibid., p. 486.

42 Ibid., pp. 141–42.

43 Ibid., p. 142.

44 Ibid., p. 226.

45 Ramón Vinyes, *Selección de textos*, ed. by Jacques Gilard, 2 vols (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Cultura, 1982), I (1982), pp. 136–37.

46 Paula Andrea Marín Colorado, 'Cuento, traducción y transferencias culturales en la revista colombiana ilustrada *El Gráfico* (1925–1941)', *Íkala* 23:3 (2018), pp. 521–34 (p. 524).

47 On 1920s magazines and journals, see Jineth Ardila Ariza, *Vanguardia y ant Vanguardia en la crítica y en las publicaciones culturales colombianas de los años veinte* (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2013).

For Tejada, perhaps the most original and important journalist in the country's history, aesthetic-literary relationships were interdependent with political ones. Tejada, like Maiakovskii, saw the integration of Futurism and Communism as a way to create a radical new world, abandoning the old social order and stale aesthetic conventions. In his essays from *El Espectador* (a newspaper founded by one of his maternal relatives), some passages are reminiscent of the Russian Futurists' motivations, tropes, and language:

Simple movement, speed alone, is already the starting point of the road towards madness: those who rapidly go by automobile feel a certain frantic joy, a certain hilarious, vocal spiritual incoherence bordering on madness; and if the automobile did not, as it happens, maintain a relatively continuous, orderly, graduated, harmonious march, which, in a certain way, aligns itself to the uniform rhythm of the stars; if the automobile could, within its speed, jump, go backwards, march suddenly in a lateral direction, or suddenly fall to the ground to stand up again; if the automobile could dance without abandoning its speed, all those who were inside it would definitely go mad.⁴⁸

Tejada believed that the proletarian revolution must entail an artistic revolution. He challenges both grammarians and oligarchs, whom he felt were essentially one and the same:

[...] every unforeseen conjunction of words, outside of the grammatical moulds, implies the existence of a new idea, or at least, it indicates an original perception of life, of things. That is why in times of intense spiritual upheaval, in times of revolution, when everything is subverted or destroyed, grammar jumps to pieces, along with millenary institutions. Every profound social change has repercussions on grammar, subverting and renewing it as well [...]. Aleksandr Blok, Sergei Esseim [sic], Andrei Belyi, Maiakovskii, all the extraordinary poets of present-day Russia, who have determined the course of what is already called 'The Russian Renaissance', had to invent a language in order to express their ideas and sensations, full of penetrating originality.⁴⁹

Tejada accompanied his poetic reflections on the surprising beauty of the locomotive or the bullet with explicit political agitation: some of his best writings aim to glorify Soviet political leaders. 'Prayer For Lenin Not To Die' ('Oración para que no muera Lenin', 1924) is a text that in its fusion of Christian theology and revolutionary frenzy suggests Aleksandr Blok's poem 'The Twelve' ('Dvenadsat', 1918). In Tejada's poem, global revolution appears as a cosmic

48 Luis Tejada, *Gotas de tinta*, ed. by Hernando Mejía Arias (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Cultura, 1977), pp. 150–51.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 323.

cataclysm creating a new world. Tejada calls Lenin—whom he had already described elsewhere as “[an apostle] of the futurist credo of equality”⁵⁰, “the sublime hyperborean Christ of slanting eyes, of sloe-coloured beard, of simple and enigmatic step”.⁵¹ We do not know how Tejada’s later career would have developed, since his premature death at twenty-six occurred in 1924, the same year when his prayer for Lenin appeared. However, his friend and disciple Luis Vidales became arguably Colombia’s best (and practically only) avant-garde poet. Vidales and his Soviet sympathies will be discussed below. Conversely, Tejada’s contemporary, the poet De Greiff, understood Russian literature in weak, superficial terms. De Greiff, associated with *Los Nuevos*, was famous for creating his own literary *alter egos*, rather like the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa. One such, Sergio Stepansky, wrote several poems, including ‘The Tale of Sergio Stepansky’ (‘El relato de Sergio Stepansky’, 1931) and ‘The Song of Sergio Stepansky’ (‘La canción de Sergio Stepansky’, 1931). The first opens with an epigraph attributed to Erik Fjordson, another of De Greiff’s poetic pseudonyms: “I bet my life, I barter my life” (“Juego mi vida, cambio mi vida”), which becomes a leitmotif in the text.⁵² The main character of the poem is vaguely reminiscent of the Russian ‘superfluous man’ type, a brilliant but idle young individual whose talents and abilities are underemployed by society. The poem has little to do with Russia and its literature, besides its title, the somewhat Onegin- or Pechorin-esque *ennui* of the main character, and the Dostoevskian lines “I am exchanging my life for a frank halo/of an idiot and a saint”.⁵³ ‘The Song of Sergio Stepansky’, written in 1931, shows even more superficial Russian influence (referring to vodka!).⁵⁴ A slightly later example of Russian influence appears in a 1946 article by the journalist and novelist José Antonio Osorio Lizarazo (1900–64), ‘A New Anniversary for Maxim Gorky’.⁵⁵ The affinity between Gorky’s sentimentally inflicted Socialist Realism and the aesthetic project of Osorio Lizarazo, who was interested in creating a Colombian version of the Socialist Realist novel, is evident in Osorio Lizarazo’s expressed belief that Gorkian narrative, which focuses on the suffering of the impoverished and disadvantaged, is pertinent to the Colombian reader who sees his or her own problems reflected in it. We can assume that Osorio’s literary works, and in particular his magnum opus, the novel *El día del odio* (*The Day of Hatred*), published in 1952, had a very similar

50 Ibid., p. 187.

51 Ibid., p. 280.

52 León de Greiff, *Obra poética. Variaciones alrededor de nada y poesía escrita entre 1930 y 1936, Fárrago y poesía escrita entre 1937 y 1954*, ed. by Hjalmar de Greiff, 3 vols (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2004), II (2004), pp. 303–06.

53 De Greiff, ‘El relato de Sergio Stepansky’, *Obra poética* (II), p. 305.

54 De Greiff, ‘Canción de Sergio Stepansky’, in *Obra poética* (II), pp. 135–37.

55 José Antonio Osorio Lizarazo, ‘Un nuevo aniversario de Máximo Gorki’, in Gorky, *Novelas y crónicas*, ed. by Santiago Mutis (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Cultura, 1978), pp. 546–55. This essay was originally published in 1946.

objective: to shock readers into political awakening, through empathy with the written experience of pain.⁵⁶

Also relevant here is a curious passage from Gabriel García Márquez's memoir, *Living To Tell The Tale* (*Vivir para contarla*, 2002). García Márquez recounts a journey to Bogotá he made aged fourteen. During the trip, the young Gabriel meets a passenger whom he calls 'an inveterate reader' because he always sees him reading.⁵⁷ Investigating the passenger's belongings, he is overwhelmed by one book in particular: Dostoevsky's *The Double* (*Dvoinik*, 1846). In the end, the inveterate reader—whom we later learn was the national director of scholarships at the Ministry of Education—gives García Márquez the book as a gift.⁵⁸ The passage has an interesting textual precursor: earlier in his memoir, García Márquez tells an anecdote about a dead senator's overcoat possessing supernatural powers—an anecdote that could well have come from the pen of Dostoevsky or Gogol.⁵⁹ García Márquez owed his acquaintance with Russian classical literature to his friendship with Ramón Vinyes. However, this story provides an alternative origin.

Clearly, in the late 1910s and 1920s Colombian intellectuals were fascinated by Russia. Nevertheless, their interest rarely transcended cultural stereotypes of the previous century, thus failing to produce original interpretations (the prematurely deceased Luis Tejada excepted). Even if change had been possible in the 1940s, shifting political conditions made it unfeasible. Here we turn to what may be the most important milestone in the history of Colombian-Russian literary relations: the creation and development of the Colombian-Soviet Institute.

The Colombian-Soviet Institute (1944–48; 1960–)

In 1944, at the end of World War II, the Colombian-Soviet Cultural Exchange Institute (Instituto de intercambio cultural colombo-soviético)⁶⁰ was founded in Bogotá. Although officially presented as an initiative of Colombian intellectuals and artists, promoted by the Soviet Embassy, it was probably the result of a coordinated Soviet cultural policy. The Institute for Russian-Mexican Cultural

56 The authors would like to thank Miguel Alejandro Acosta, who introduced them to this relationship between Osorio Lizarazo and Gorky through his unpublished research for the National University of Colombia's Research Seminar in European Literatures.

57 Gabriel García Márquez, *Vivir para contarla* (Barcelona: Random House, 2002), p. 212.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 219.

59 *Ibid.*, p. 211.

60 In the documents we have consulted, the Institute is referred to by several names: Instituto colombo-soviético (Colombian-Soviet Institute), Instituto de Intercambio Cultural (Cultural Exchange Institute), etc. In the following pages, we use various names, according to context.

Exchange, the Chilean Institute for Cultural Relations with the Soviet Union, as well as the Italian 'Associazione per i rapporti culturali con l'Unione Sovietica' were founded in the same year, which is difficult to interpret as mere coincidence. The Colombian Institute's founders included important representatives of politics and culture: the poet De Greiff; his brother, the musicologist, poet and translator Otto de Greiff (1903–95); the historian, journalist and Minister of Education, Germán Arciniegas (1900–99); the future President of Colombia Alfonso López Michelsen (1913–2007), who was also the son of the current President; the writer, politician, and newly appointed rector of the National University of Colombia Gerardo Molina (1906–91); literary critic and essayist Baldomero Sanín Cano (1861–1957); writer, journalist, and Minister for Education Jorge Zalamea Borda; his cousin, the writer and journalist Eduardo Zalamea Borda (1907–63), who was also Gabriel García Márquez's first editor; and poet and essayist Luis Vidales, one of the founders of the country's Communist Party. The project was welcomed by President Alfonso López Pumarejo (1886–1959), who represented the Liberal Party. During his first presidential term (1934–38), López Pumarejo established diplomatic relations with the USSR. During his second term, in 1943, there was an exchange of ambassadors. Thus, the establishment of the Institute continued the rapprochement between the two countries during the Liberal Republic (1930–46). Many of the founders of the Institute had belonged to the Los Nuevos group in the 1920s and had Russophile and Sovietophile interests. In the next part of this section, we will consider the biographies of Miguel Adler (1904–70) and Lisa Noemí Milstein (1910–76), who played an important role in the Institute's operations after its establishment.

Miguel (Misha) Adler worked at the Institute until 1945.⁶¹ Of Jewish family from Nova Sulitza, Bessarabia, he studied in Odesa and spoke perfect Russian. Adler arrived in Peru in 1924, where he studied philosophy and collaborated on editorial projects with the outstanding Marxist philosopher José Carlos Mariátegui (1894–1930). He married Noemí Milstein, who was born in Mogilev (now part of Belarus) and settled in Peru around 1928. She was also part of Mariátegui's circle; with Adler, she translated from German and Russian in *Amauta* (a Quechua word for 'master', 'instructor'), a journal with avant-garde and Socialist themes and sympathies. Mariátegui founded the journal in 1926. Three years later, Adler and Milstein co-founded their own journal, *Repertorio Hebreo (The Jewish Catalogue)*, which ceased after a few issues. Only months after Mariátegui's death in 1930, the couple were expelled from Peru as suspected communists, moving first to Cali, Colombia, and later to France. There Adler studied anthropology with Paul Rivet. In 1936, Adler and Milstein arrived in Tuluá, Colombia. After living in several Colombian cities, where they founded

61 Lazar Jeifets and Víctor Jeifets, *América Latina en la Internacional Comunista*, p. 39. On Adler and Milstein, see the book their grandson wrote about them: Claudio Lomnitz, *Nuestra América. Utopía y persistencia de una familia judía* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2018).

Jewish schools as well as the anti-Fascist Hebrew journal *Nuevo Mundo*, they eventually became the central figures of the Colombian-Soviet Institute in Bogotá. As Claudio Lomnitz recounts:

[...At] the institute Russian classes were offered, taught by Miguel and Noemí, and both also translated from Russian into Spanish and vice versa [...]. For his work teaching Russian, translating and other tasks, Misha [Miguel Adler] received a salary from the [Soviet] embassy.⁶²

Between 1945 and 1946, Adler left the Embassy and the Institute and in 1947 founded a new journal, *Grancolombia*: “a genuine advocate of the country’s Hebrew community”.⁶³ Among its contributors were Sanín Cano, Vidales, and Arciniegas, the same intellectuals who had belonged to *Los Nuevos* and who later re-appeared among the founders of the Colombian-Soviet Institute.⁶⁴

In 1945, the Institute published a translation of Nikolai Mikhailov’s book *El país de las grandes realizaciones* (*The Country of Great Achievements*; the original Russian title: *Nasha strana*, 1945; no translator named). Eduardo Zalamea Borda wrote in his prologue:

Mikhailov’s work is a book that is clearly necessary. Even more: I would dare to affirm that today it is indispensable. Perhaps yesterday it was not so markedly the case, but in 1945 there is no country in the world that can afford the foolish luxury of ignoring the USSR and its position among the nations and its future and potential.⁶⁵

Mikhailov’s book was a form of Soviet propaganda, showcasing the natural beauty and achievements of the USSR in various domains: its territory, mineral resources, industry, agriculture, transport, population, and the friendship between Soviet nations. It contained numerous photographs as well as the text of the USSR’s Constitution and of its national anthem. Also in 1945, the Institute published Nina Potapova’s *Elemental Russian Language Manual for Spanish Speakers* (*Manual elemental de lengua rusa para españoles*; no translator named). The Institute’s own *Colombian-Soviet Journal* launched in 1946.⁶⁶ In its first issue, Sanín Cano published an article entitled ‘Soviet Russia Is Not a Totalitarian Country’.⁶⁷

62 Ibid., p. 226.

63 Ibid., p. 241.

64 Ibid., p. 242.

65 Eduardo Zalamea Borda, ‘Prólogo’, in N. N. Mijailov, *El país de las grandes realizaciones* (Bogotá: Instituto de Intercambio Cultural Colombo-Soviético, 1945), pp. 5–8 (p. 7).

66 A very similar project was launched the same year in Mexico: Ángel Chávez Mancilla, ‘La revista *Cultura Soviética* en el marco de la Guerra Fría cultural en México (1944–1954)’, *Signos históricos*, 24:48 (2022), 428–59.

67 Baldomero Sanín Cano, ‘La Rusia soviética no es país totalitario’, *Revista Colombo-Soviética: órgano del Instituto Cultural Colombo-Soviético*, 1 (1946), 3–7.

Yet the Institute's vigorous activity, aimed at establishing cultural relations (extending to exhibitions, lectures, and chess competitions), and which was supported by prominent intellectuals, was interrupted. The Bogotazo riots, in which up to three thousand people were killed, began in 1948, after the assassination of the Liberal politician Jorge Eliécer Gaitán (1903–48). The riots were initially blamed on the Communists, and therefore diplomatic relations with the USSR were severed and all cultural ties were suspended. Nevertheless, during the 1950s, relations between the two countries were not completely stagnant. For example, Jorge Zalamea played an active role in the World Peace Council, one of the main means of cultural exchange between Latin America and the East during the Cold War. In 1954, Sanín Cano received the International Stalin Prize for Strengthening Peace Among Peoples, which was awarded to him during a ceremony in the Colombian city of Popayán.

Although Colombian diplomatic relations with the USSR were not restored until 1968, the work of the Colombo-Soviet Institute resumed in the 1960s. This resumption belonged within a broader process: following the success of the Cuban Revolution (1959), Soviet authorities seized the opportunity to establish the Soviet Association for Friendship and Cultural Relations with Latin America (SADIKS) in 1959. Its chairman was the famous Soviet composer Aram Khachaturian (1903–78), who visited Colombia in August 1960. SADIKS actively promoted cultural exchanges with Latin America. In March 1960, Jorge Zalamea, who would receive the Lenin Peace Prize in 1968, announced in the national press the relaunch of the Institute. In May of the same year, its new headquarters opened in the historic centre of Bogotá. The Communist-oriented newspaper *Voz de la Democracia* described it thus:

The Institute thus initiates its activities in the capital of the Republic announcing, among its work, language classes, music services, cinema, conferences, round tables, literature and the issue of monthly printed bulletins. [... It] is a clear demonstration of the broad interest existing within the most diverse social strata for knowing and approaching the great cultural, economic, artistic and scientific achievements of the people of the USSR.⁶⁸

According to Daniel Llano Parra, between 1963 and 1970, Jorge Zalamea, Jaime Mejía Duque, Hernando Salcedo, and José Ariza, among others, gave lectures on Russian literature and Cuban cultural policy at the Colombian-Soviet Institute.⁶⁹

68 'Inaugurada Sede del Instituto de Intercambio Cultural Colombo-Soviético en Bogotá', *Voz de la Democracia*, 7 May 1960, p. 2.

69 Daniel Llano Parra, *Enemigos públicos: contexto intelectual y sociabilidad literaria del movimiento nadaísta, 1958–1971* (Medellín: Universidad de Antioquia, 2015), p. 75.

In 1968, the writer Germán Espinosa (1938–2007) gave a long speech about Pushkin's poetry, later published in *El Siglo*.⁷⁰

Another activity of the Institute was the distribution of scholarships for studying in Russia, typically at the newly founded Peoples' Friendship University (Universitet druzhby narodov, Moscow). These scholarships and study visits to the USSR partially increased cultural exchange and resulted in some new translations of Russian literature during the following decades. From 1960 until the early 1990s, the president of the Colombian-Soviet Institute was the Communist politician, Rafael Baquero (recipient of the Soviet Order of Friendship of the Peoples in 1982). The poet Luis Vidales was the vice-president of the Institute and, like his predecessor Jorge Zalamea, received the Lenin Peace Prize in 1983. Other prominent collaborators of the Institute in the 20th century included the poet José Luis Díaz-Granados (b. 1946), and the academic Alfonso Cuéllar Torres (1940–2004). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Institute was renamed the León Tolstoi Institute. Its current president, the writer, translator and university professor Rubén Darío Flórez (b. 1961), was awarded the Russian government's Druzhba Order (Order of Friendship) in 2010. Despite the Institute's decades of work, dating back to the 1940s, and although Russian is currently taught at both the León Tolstoi Institute and the National University of Colombia, these institutions, lacking influence or political clout, have not been able to produce significant cultural change. Most Colombian translators of Russian literature trained outside Colombia.

Translators of Russian Literature in Colombia

Since we have already discussed the writers and, in part, the readers, we will now present brief biographical information about the translators thanks to whom Russian culture appeared on the cultural and artistic scene in Colombia. Henry Luque Muñoz (1944–2005), born in Bogotá, lived in Moscow with his wife Sara González Hernández (1950–2021) from 1978 to 1988. They both worked at the Soviet publishing house Progress, which published Russian books in translation into several languages. On his own or in collaboration with Sara Hernández, Luque published several anthologies of essays on classical Russian literature: *Following the Russian Classics: Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol, Chekhov* (*Tras los clásicos rusos: Pushkin, Lérmontov, Gógol, Chejov*, Progress, 1986), *Two Russian Classics: Turgenev, Saltykov-Shchedrin* (*Dos clásicos rusos: Turguéniev, Saltikov-Schedrín*, Progress, 1989), a translation of Gogol's Petersburg Tales (*Cuentos petersburgueses*, Norma, 1994) and a monograph, *Heaven's Eroticism: An Introduction to the Social History of Modern Russian Literature* (*El erotismo del cielo*.

70 Germán Espinosa, *Ensayos Completos. 1968–1988* (Medellín: Universidad EAFIT, 2002), pp. 106–21 (p. 106, fn. 1).

Una introducción a la historia social de la literatura rusa moderna, Manigraf, 1999).⁷¹ The theme of Russia is abundantly present in Luque's own poetry.

Jorge Bustamante García was born in Zipaquirá, a small town near Bogotá, in 1951. He is a translator, poet and essayist, although in Russia he studied geology at the Institute of Mining and Petroleum in Moscow and then at the Patricio Lumumba Peoples' Friendship University.⁷² Even though he has lived in Mexico for a long time, he has published many translations of Russian poetry of the twentieth century in Colombia: *Five Russian Poets: Blok, Sologub, Gumilev, Akhmatova, Mandel'shtam* (*Cinco poetas rusos: Blok, Sologub, Gumiliov, Ajmátova, Mandelstam*; Norma, 1995); *Selected Poems* (*Poemas escogidos*; Norma, 1998), by Anna Akhmatova, a selection of which he had already published in Mexico in 1992; *Ten Twentieth-Century Russian Poets: Sologub, Maiakovskii, Esenin, Blok, Pasternak, Akhmatova, Mandel'shtam, Tsvetaeva, Brodsky, Tarkovskii* (*Diez poetas rusos del siglo XX: Sologub, Maiakovski, Esenin, Blok, Pasternak, Ajmátova, Mandelstam, Tsvietaeva, Brodsky, Tarkovski*; Trilce, 2002). He has also published an essay *Russian Literature at the End of the Millennium* (*Literatura rusa de fin de milenio*; Ediciones sin nombre, 1996) in Mexico.⁷³ Jorge Bustamante García is mainly interested in translating and anthologising the poetry of the so-called 'Silver Age', particularly the work of Anna Akhmatova.

Rubén Darío Flórez was born in Quindío in 1961. A philologist, he graduated from the Peoples' Friendship University and received a degree in philological studies from the State Moscow University. He is a poet, translator, and university lecturer. He has published an anthology of Pushkin's poetry⁷⁴ and has also translated an autobiographical prison novel by Nikolai Bukharin, *How It All Began* (*Vremena*, 1994; *Cómo empezó todo*, 2007). He has translated other twentieth-century and contemporary poets. Flórez has worked for the Colombian Embassy in Russia. Until 2023 he was a professor in the Department of Linguistics at the National University of Colombia, and Editorial Director of the Faculty of Humanities at the same university. Currently he is President of the León Tolstoi Institute.

Eduardo Rosero Pantoja studied philology at the Peoples' Friendship University in the 1970s.⁷⁵ Upon returning to Colombia, he joined the Linguistics Department of the National University of Colombia, where he has taught Russian ever since. He has translated and interpreted many Russian folk songs

71 'Henry Luque Muñoz', *Enciclopedia de la Red cultural del Banco de la República*, https://enciclopedia.banrepcultural.org/index.php/Henry_Luque_Mu%C3%B1oz.

72 Jorge Bustamante García, *Enciclopedia de la literatura en México*, <http://www.elem.mx/autor/datos/4563>.

73 'Jorge Bustamante García', *Silaba*, https://silaba.com.co/perfil_autor/jorge-bustamante-garcia/.

74 Alexander Pushkin, *El habitante del otoño*, trans. by Rubén Darío Flórez (Bogotá: Casa de Poesía Silva, 1999). It was published in Spain by Pre-textos in 2000.

75 Eduardo Rosero Pantoja, 'La traducción de canciones rusas', *Revista Universidad de Antioquia* 340 (2020), 90–93 (p. 91).

and, in addition to publishing his own works, he has published several translated poems by Pushkin, Mikhail Lermontov, Evgenii Evtushenko, and others on his personal blog.⁷⁶

Alejandro González Puche was born in Bogotá in 1961. He studied at the Russian Theatre Academy in Moscow (GITIS) in the late 1980s and worked as a theatre director in Russia.⁷⁷ He is presently a professor in the Department of Performing Arts at the Universidad del Valle (Cali, Colombia), having previously been the head of that department between 2011 and 2015. Together with Chinese Ma Zhenghong, also a theatre director (and an alumna of the Russian Institute of Theatre Arts (GITIS)), he has published a new translation of Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* and *Uncle Vanya* in "Colombian Spanish" (Universidad del Valle, 2021).⁷⁸ Previously, they had translated and published the volume *Sixteen Unpublished Lectures of Mikhail Chekhov (Dieciséis lecciones inéditas de Mijail Chejov, 2017)*.

Most of those profiled above undertook study trips to Russia in Soviet times and, upon their return, decided to bring Russian culture to the Colombian context. As we pointed out above, those who focused on the humanities were sparse. Notably, their main focus was on classic Russian literature and its smaller forms (poetry, short stories, drama). They aimed to translate the Russian cultural canon rather than seeking texts that might appeal to a specifically Colombian context. The next group of translators includes Russian women who settled in Colombia after marrying Colombian visitors to the Soviet Union and who decided, once settled in Colombia, to use their academic background to strengthen Russian-Colombian cultural ties.

Marina Valentinovna Kuzmina de Cuéllar (1937–2018) was born in Moscow. She studied at the First State Pedagogical University of Foreign Languages and continued her postgraduate studies in philosophy, Latin American literature, and English at Peoples' Friendship University. After coming to Colombia, she taught Russian literature.⁷⁹ She offered courses on literary theory and Russian literature at the National University of Colombia. There, together with a group of undergraduate students, she founded the research group 'Yasnaia Poliana' and a journal with the same name. Kuzmina has always focused on the relationship

76 Eduardo Rosero Pantoja, *No me lo estás preguntando....*, <https://eduardoroseropantoja.blogspot.com/>.

77 'González Puche, Alejandro', *Universidad del Valle, Departamento de Artes Escénicas*, <http://escenicas.univalle.edu.co/docentes/nombrados/item/8-gonzalez-puche-alejandro>.

78 'La gaviota y el tío Vania de Anton Pavlovich Chejov', *libreriasiglo.com*, <https://libreriasiglo.com/artes/81067-la-gaviota-y-el-tio-vania-de-anton-pavlovich-chejov.html#.X8eDLGQzarc>.

79 *Variaciones: seis ensayos de literatura comparada*, ed. by Patricia Simonson (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2011), p. 235.

between literature and socio-political phenomena.⁸⁰ She has translated the philosopher Aleksei Losev's monograph *The Dialectics of Myth* (*Dialektika mifa*, 1930; *Dialéctica del mito*, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2002); published an original study on the relationship between French and Russian Symbolists,⁸¹ and co-edited a volume on Tolstoy.⁸² She has also translated a short anthology of poems by Lermontov⁸³ and has written articles on Pushkin, Nikolai Gogol, Chekhov and others.⁸⁴

Anastassia Espinel Souares was born in Cherepovets, USSR, in 1970. She holds a PhD in history from the Institute of Latin America of the Russian Academy of Sciences. She came to Colombia in 1998 and, since then, has taught history at the Universidad Industrial de Santander and the University of Santander. In 2005, she completed a biography of Catherine the Great in the popular series 'One Hundred Personalities/One Hundred Authors' for the publishing house Panamericana. Espinel Souares mostly translates short stories from the Silver Age by, for example, Bunin, and Valerii Briusov. She also writes historical novels and children's books.

Another translator and publisher is Irina Luna. She graduated from the Moscow Pedagogical University with a degree in Spanish and English. In Colombia, where she settled in 1979, she studied Spanish linguistics at the Caro y Cuervo Institute. In 2014, with Santiago Pinzón, she founded the publishing house Poklonka, the only one of its kind in Colombia, which aims to publish contemporary Russian literature.⁸⁵ Poklonka has published an anthology of contemporary Russian women's prose (2014), as well as novels by Boris Akunin, Andrey Kurkov, Viktoriia Tokareva, Tat'iana Tolstaia and others. Most of the translators who work with the publishing house are not Colombian (for example, the Cuban Marcia Gasca and the Argentinian Alejandro Ariel González). As an independent publishing house, Poklonka has received financial support for at least two projects from Russia's Institute for Literary Translation (Institut Perevoda).

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- 80 Fabio Jurado Valencia, 'Entre la estética y la semiótica: los trabajos de Jarmila Jandova y Marina Kuzmina', *Literatura: teoría, historia, crítica* 22:1 (2020), 309–19 (p. 316).
- 81 Marina Kuzmina, 'Simbolistas franceses en Rusia', *Variaciones: seis ensayos de literatura comparada*, ed. by Patricia Simonson (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2011), pp. 153–80.
- 82 *León Tolstói: La dialéctica del alma*, ed. by Marina Kuzmina and others (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2011).
- 83 Marina Kuzmina, 'Mijail Lermontov: el astro nocturno de la poesía rusa (antología poética)', *Mijail Lermontov: el genio rebelde*, ed. by Marina Kuzmina (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2012), pp. 83–122.
- 84 Marina Kuzmina, 'Nikolai Gógol: su risa, sus lágrimas', *Yasnaia poliana. Revista de literatura rusa* 1 (2010), pp. 7–18; Kuzmina, 'Antología', *Yasnaia poliana. Revista de literatura rusa*, 2 (2012), pp. 73–75; Kuzmina and Clara Galindo, 'Editorial', *Yasnaia poliana. Revista de literatura rusa* 3 (2013), pp. 4–6; and so on.
- 85 'Poklonka Editores', <https://www.poklonka.co/>.

Our brief summary of notable Colombian translators from Russian reveals several important aspects. On the one hand, it includes former Colombian university students who returned from the Soviet Union imbued with a literary outlook typical of the Soviet cultural environment, which they later reproduced in Colombia too. Contrastingly, it also lists several female translators with academic degrees in humanities, whose education is similar to that received by the first group during their sojourn as foreign students in the Soviet Union at much the same time. Finally, a new trend is set by the publishing house Poklonka, which expands its focus from classical Russian literature to include contemporary Russian culture.

Conclusion

Our analysis of the reception of Russian literature in Colombia reveals an interesting correlation. Firstly, we find evidence that superficial influence from Russian literature, as in the work of León de Greiff's pseudonymous Sergio Stepansky, produces schematic and stereotyped interpretations of the Russian theme. Even a knowledgeable writer such as Ramón Vinyes is not immune to this influence. Secondly, however, for those who eschew common stereotypes, like the members of *Los Nuevos* or the writer Osorio Lizarazo, 'Russianness' appears strongly linked to ideology. These writers fantasised about Russia, or rather the USSR, as the birthplace of the people's revolution. Thus, literature became subordinated to political aspirations.

Several factors might explain why Russian literature failed to take root in Colombian cultural life. First, the absence of a Russian diaspora hindered the advent of Russian literature and the dissemination of Russian culture. Crucially, Russian-speaking Jewish émigrés were not represented in the country due to the anti-immigration policy pursued by Colombia's government during World War II. Furthermore, the political environment was not conducive to Eastern European cultural influence; the persecution of Communist militants and the overall anti-Soviet spirit caused suspicion of any pro-Russian element. Finally, most Colombians who attended Soviet universities studied medicine and engineering rather than the humanities. After returning to Colombia, they were neither qualified nor likely to promote Russian culture and literature among their compatriots.

However, occasionally Russian literature did interest the cultural elite. Firstly, there are the extraordinary examples of Luque Muñoz, Bustamante and Flórez, who visited Russia and discovered its literary heritage, inspiring them to engage in translation and teaching activities upon their return to Colombia. There were also native speakers of Russian, such as Anastassia Espinel Soares, Irina Luna and Marina Kuzmina, who, after settling in Colombia for family reasons, established stronger literary connections between the two cultures. Unlike countries such as Mexico or Argentina that have professional translators

such as Selma Ancira, Alejandro Ariel González or Fulvio Franchi, in Colombia Russian literature has mainly been translated by poets.⁸⁶ Only recently, with the establishment of the publishing house Poklonka, has the situation improved. As this chapter has demonstrated, the contrast between Colombia's approach to Russian literature and that of other Latin American countries not only illustrates different stages and strategies of reception of Russian culture. It also allows us to define cultural boundaries between Spanish-speaking countries. Importantly, it highlights the diversity of cultural situations in the Ibero-American countries, where multiple connections with external cultures (French, English, etc.) are often more intense and important than the interlinguistic links within the same language. This confirms Damrosch's suggestion that the reception of a literary work or a literary tradition within a particular nation depends not primarily on the inherent characteristics of the work, but rather on the historical and cultural settings of the destination culture.⁸⁷

86 For more on Selma Ancira, see Rodrigo García Bonillas's essay on Mexico in this volume.

87 Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?*, p. 6.