

Vsemirnaia Literatura:

Intersections between Translating and Original Literary Writing

Abstract

In this article, the early Soviet translation project *Vsemirnaia Literatura* (1918–1924) will be analyzed from the point of view of the sociology of professions as applied to translation studies. The *Vsemirnaia Literatura* project was initiated as a measure to secure one interest group's control over literary translation in Soviet Russia. The group was structured and then acted in such a fashion that means it can be considered as an important step in developing translation as a profession. Although literary translation was closely related to original literary writing, it was beginning to break free of the latter, and this project was instrumental in securing a niche for it as a social activity. A governing structure (an editorial board and administrators), which made sure that a high professional standard in literary translation was observed, was formed. The group also took charge of raising new generations of literary translators. In short, *Vsemirnaia Literatura* made a significant contribution to laying the foundation for the Soviet school of literary translation.

Keywords: Russia, *Vsemirnaia Literatura*, literary translation, profession

I. *Vsemirnaia Literatura* as a Professional Project

The ambitious early Soviet translation project *Vsemirnaia Literatura* (VL) has been viewed as either a political enterprise or a phenomenon of early Soviet cultural life

(Khlebnikov 1971). It has also been seen as having contributed to laying the foundation of the so-called Soviet school of translation (Saidasheva 2014).

Yet the project was not only an interesting case in its political and aesthetic aspects, but also in a sociological sense. *VL* lends itself to an analysis from the point of view of the sociology of professions and this approach sheds new and more specific light on the project.

In what follows, the sociological aspect of the *VL* project will be examined from the viewpoint of the sociology of professions, which arguably has a suitable conceptual apparatus for singling out precise aspects of *VL*'s contribution to the evolution of professional translation in the early Soviet period of Russian translation history. It will be noted that *VL* is not viewed as a fully realized professional project. Rather, the claim is that it had specific features which made it a significant step towards distinguishing literary translation from other types of literary work. By the end of the twentieth century, the translator and poet Evgenii Vitkovskii would argue that literary translation should be celebrated as a literary engagement in its own right (see *Vek perevoda*).

The work started with *VL* should be seen as a cornerstone of professional (especially literary) translation in the Soviet Union, on the one hand, and as a link between the latter and the history of translation as a social activity as practiced and theorized before the 1917 revolution.

The initiators of *VL*—an administrative and editorial board led by Maksim Gorky—had very ambitious plans for publishing not only translated and domestic literary works, but also specialized scientific and educational material. These grand plans were never realized in full. The board's most successful achievement was the publication of many classics of world literature in translations performed by Russia's

literary élite of that period. Indeed, *VL* is still remembered primarily for these publications, and the project is credited with establishing a high standard in the practice of literary translation, and with assuring that this standard was passed down to new generations of practitioners.

II. Professional Project

Societies may be considered as environments in which actors performing various activities vie for the exclusive provision of the services they offer. This type of rivalry may be quite competitive (see e.g., Halpern 1992 concerning the domain of health services). This struggle presupposes control of esoteric knowledge, which is applied to tackling particular public needs. Those activities that succeed in securing a socially-sanctioned niche, allowing them exclusivity in providing their services, are usually referred to as *professions*; activities that are less successful in this regard are usually called *occupations*.

Professions and occupations may be studied individually in terms of their structure and/or evolution. Yet perhaps all occupational-professional domains manifest a dynamic of interrelations with various adjacent activities and try to relegate some of their neighbors to the periphery while forming alliances with others. It is thus more productive to study professions/occupations from the point of view of their dynamics with other professions/occupations, and it has been argued that it is crucial to understand these dynamics if one wishes to understand how professions/occupations are established and practiced (Abbott 1988).

Another important dimension to take into account when describing professions/occupations is the fact that they are country-specific. Professions and

occupations are practiced not only in their particular domain (say, medicine, religion, the arts) but also in the context of the overarching social system, such as nation-states in the majority of modern societies. Indeed, extraneous social institutions, especially political and governmental structures, may play an important role in ‘promoting’ the status of a profession and in cooperating with professionals to bar access to the activity from all those who are found to be unsuited (by these professionals).

III. Translation and Original Literary Writing

Translation and original literary writing can be seen as either professions or occupations depending on the degree of socially/politically secured legitimacy—the exclusive right to deliver a particular type of social service. Elsewhere I have discussed to what extent, and according to what criteria, translation can be seen as an occupation on its way to professionalization (see Tyulenev 2015). The main rivalry for the status of profession, within the subfield of translation, occurs among translators/interpreters, some of whom are considered professionals and others not. Translators and interpreters who claim to be professionals (based on their education or experience) tend to draw a boundary between themselves and ‘amateurs’ (Knapp-Pothof and Knapp 1987; Sela-Sheffy and Shlesinger 2011; Susam-Sarajeva and Pérez-González 2012).

Original literary writing (OLW) can be seen as a sphere within which it has always been hard to draw a clear boundary between the two categories—professional and amateur. In many professions (including translation, especially non-literary), to draw a line between a professional and an amateur it is sufficient to impose some formal criterion, such as a specialized education, or a test (an examination of some

sort), or both, for entrance into the established professional association, membership of which alone guarantees the right to ply a particular trade. In the case of OLW, the problem is that the principal criterion is believed to be the claimant's natural talent, which can only be honed but never be seen as fully and entirely developed by education. Poets/writers are born, not made, is the operating axiom.

Since literary translation is also believed to be a kind of art, the tug-of-war between professionalism and amateurism is similarly intense, and the field does not lend itself easily to formalization. It is commonly believed that only a poet can translate a poem, for instance. For that very reason, there are quite a few examples in literary history of writers being entrusted with, or taking upon themselves, the task of translation.

The difference is that non-literary translation as a professional domain claims to have its own esoteric knowledge—the knowledge of how translation should be practiced, while literary translation, precisely because it is seen as a variety of literary activity, is viewed as requiring a professional knowledge that is subordinate to the genius of literary writing, although it is akin to it and, therefore, controlled by it.

Although it may seem too early to give an example from the *VL* project at this point, my selection clearly illustrates the point under discussion here. Kornei Chukovsky and Nikolai Gumilev, both members of the editorial board of *VL*, and both writers and translators, once argued about whether any rules should be formulated for how literary translations were to be done and assessed. Chukovsky wrote in his diary:

In the meeting [of the *VL* board, on November 12, 1918], I had a heated dispute with Gumilev. This gifted craftsman [darovityi remeslennik] imagined he could produce *rules for translators*. I don't think such rules exist at all.

What rules could there be in literature? One translator *composes* [sochiniaet] [in his translation] and his work turns out perfect, while another will give you rhythm and everything else, yet it doesn't move you a bit. What rules, indeed! (1991, 109; emphases in the original; all translations are mine).

For Chukovsky, literary translation was tantamount to literary writing, and this is the reason why no rules could be formulated. According to many Soviet 'theoretical' works on literary translation, the elusive *chut'e* (flair, or feel, or intuition) is the defining element of the successful literary translator.

Therefore, on the one hand, an affinity between OLW and literary translation is seen as natural. On the other hand, not every writer wants to, or is able to, translate. The relationship between OLW and translation is thus at times that of a more or less willing, or even forced, companionship. This complex relationship is the one that predominates in early Soviet literary history in general and in the VL project in particular.

IV. A Historical Perspective

The practitioners of translation, whether oral or written, hardly ever begin as full-time professionals. Usually they start by doing translation 'on the side', as it were. For instance, in the pre-modern period, merchants, since they traveled and learned the languages of the foreign peoples with whom they traded, functioned as translators whenever translation was needed. For example, in the fourteenth century, Dmitry Donskoi invited merchants who traded in southern markets to the battle of Kulikovo in case there would be a need for translation in diplomatic negotiations (Loshchits

1983, 300–302). Translation of religious texts was habitually done by monks and clergy as was the case with Stefan of Perm' (1340/1345–1396). The monk translated books from Greek into “the language of Perm'” (the Komi-Zyrian language) (PSRL 25, 226). Stefan was not a professional translator; he was a monk-missionary who needed texts to evangelize the people of the Perm' region. Starting from the eighteenth century, new categories of professionals who spoke foreign languages, such as diplomats and state administrators, also became involved in translation work. Peter the Great, for example, commissioned translation work by a number of his state officials, such as Iakov Brius, Andrei Vinus and Petr Shafirov. Scholars of the Saint-Petersburg Academy of Sciences, such as Vasili Trediakovskii, Mikhail Lomonosov and many others, also translated. What is of interest here is that both Trediakovskii and Lomonosov were also creative writers, and thus they furnish the earliest examples of writer-translators in Russian literary history; many more writers, as is well known, would follow suit in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the tradition continued into the twentieth century.

Still, since at least the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries, translation in Russia was gradually developing into an occupation in its own right. It was increasingly practiced by people who were called *perevodchiki* and *tolmachi*, with the former referring to those who did written translation, and the latter to those who interpreted (orally) (Tyulenev 2012: 56–61). The situation with literary translation was more complex. It remained different from non-literary translation, however: as mentioned above, literary translation was perceived as akin to original literary writing, requiring similar skills (and talent). By and large literary translation is still perceived thus today. A considerable number of those who translate are also known as original writers or poets and vice versa—a considerable number of those who write original literature

also translate literary works.

In the eighteenth-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, writers translated of their own free will and as much, and as often, as they wished. Translation work was usually seen as a source of inspiration for original work or as a learning activity, through which the prose writer or poet, by translating, familiarized him/herself with new literary forms and genres.

This situation changed radically after the 1917 revolution. As a result of social conditions (the collapse of the economy and the book market) and, later, owing to the establishment of the Soviet state ideological machine which eventually took control of printing, many writers lost their ability to publish. Moreover, the inability to publish meant not only imposed silence but also the inability to earn a living through literary work.

V. Vsemirnaia Literatura

It is at this juncture that the project known as *Vsemirnaia Literatura* (*VL, World Literature*) was launched. In 1918, the name of this project became the name of a new publishing house.

VL was a project initiated by Maksim Gorky in August 1917. The editorial board included A. N. Tikhonov, I. P. Ladyzhnikov, and Z. I. Grzhebin. On September 14, 1918, Gorky, as a representative of the editorial board, signed an agreement with the head of Narkompros [Narodny Komissariat Prosveshcheniia, People's Commissariat of Education], A. V. Lunacharsky, to establish the publishing house *VL* under the aegis of Narkompros. After *Gosizdat* (the State Publishing House) was set up on May 21, 1919, *VL* was included within it, while retaining its full independence.

Gorky was the head of the *VL* project. On some occasions, Gorky appealed directly to Lenin to help resolve problems faced by *VL* in its dealings with other governmental structures and organizations. For instance, in Gorky's archives a telegram dated March 6, 1919, survives in which Gorky asks for Lenin's help in resolving the problem of the lack of paper for printing. In other cases, when Grzhebin, one of the key figures in the administration of *VL*, came under attack for alleged embezzlement of funds, Gorky defended him to Lenin.

In 1924, *VL* was eliminated as part of Gosizdat, although the project continued (until 1937) to function within the Academia publishing house. Chukovsky wrote in this context: "The lists [of books for translation] we had made under the leadership of Gorky [in *VL*], constituted the basis of all the publishing work in Academia, which eventually to a considerable extent fulfilled Gorky's program" (1967, 136). Two years later, Gorky joined Academia, again in the capacity of Chair of the Editorial Board (Krylov and Kichatova 2004, 41).

In his report to Gosizdat (on April 19, 1923), Tikhonov, Director of *VL*, stated:

In the first two years, the Publishing House worked on a grand scale: 350 translators and editors; yearly up to 2500–3000 printing sheets [more than 100 million characters—XX.] were accepted. Such an impressive enterprise was necessary on the one hand because it had to fulfil its obligations to the People's Commissariat of Education: according to the agreement, 300 volumes had to be published every year; on the other hand, the Soviet state wanted to help the writers with financial difficulties by providing them with translation work. The second reason, the purely philanthropic goal, was a corollary of the special function of the publishing house in the political life of

the country: the founders of the *VL* project intended it to be a link between the Soviet authorities and the literary intelligentsia. (*AG X, I, 20*)

In reality, apparently because of the lack of paper, only a small fraction of manuscripts actually made their way to press. This caused an avalanche of attacks and criticism, including accusations that Grzhebin had intentionally postponed the publication of some works. This dissatisfaction with the rate at which books were published is described in detail in Khlebnikov (1971).

VI. Securing a Closure: Requesting a Political Sanction

In what follows, the activities of the *VL* are analyzed along the lines suggested in the theory of the sociology of professions, because, although *VL* does not represent a profession but was rather a project, the methodology of the sociology of professions is entirely relevant. It draws our attention to certain features that define *VL* as an example of a cross-professional project in which the translators had to deal with all the pros and cons of involving another sort of professional (i.e., writers) in a type of work that was close to, yet different from, their own.

This angle also allows us to see *VL* as part of a foundational process in establishing literary translation as a professional activity in the USSR. As stated above, professional projects are territory-bound. Literary translation in pre-revolutionary Russia was practiced under a different political regime that saw the interrelations between literary relations and OWL in terms of ‘sister activities’. In the new political climate, the interrelations between the two realms changed to a forced

union. Formerly, writers translated if they wanted to; now they—at least a considerable number of them—had to translate in order to survive.

In short, *VL* can be seen as a result of the interplay between three social domains: its cross-professionalism existed at the intersection of *OLW* and its interaction with literary translation to the degree sanctioned by the political regime. The mass translation project was the goal to be reached; the government (Narkompos and Lunacharsky and Lenin personally) was the collective patron, while *OLW*, represented by writers and poets, offered the means to achieve the grand goal.

Gorky took pains to impress the political authorities with the importance of the project for both domestic and external ends. He considered the work of Gosizdat, including the work within the *VL* project, as “a source of cultural strength” (“istochnik kul’turnoi sily,” *AG X*, 1, 5). This reflected the internal need to educate a new, Soviet, readership. Therefore, what were considered to be masterpieces of world literature from the viewpoint of the new state had to be translated or retranslated and made available to a broad readership.

On the other hand, as Gorky wrote in a letter to Vatslav Vorovsky, Director of Gosizdat, *VL* was a daunting task which, however, once realized, would help present the Soviet state in a good light to the West. Therefore, in his opinion, “[t]he government should help this cause energetically, for so far this is the largest in scale and truly cultural enterprise that it can accomplish” (April 26, 1919; *AG X*, 1, 8–9).

Aleksandr Tikhonov, the *VL* Director, also pointed out in his report to Gosizdat (April 19, 1923):

The existence of such a publishing house with such [...] an impressive group of translators, which included almost all significant representatives of Russian

literature, was also projected abroad as an example of the cultural achievements of the Soviet state. (*AG X, I, 20*)

In order to showcase *VL* abroad, its catalogues were printed with great care (“tshchatel’no izdannye”) in foreign languages, with a foreword written by Gorky and “sent to leading cultural figures abroad” (*ibid.*).

Once the political authorities were convinced that Gorky had a valid plan, they granted the newly created group, ready to take control over the effort to fulfill the social need for education in foreign literatures, the exclusive right to do so (although over the course of the project’s duration numerous attempts were made to defame it, to slow it down or even stop it; see Khlebnikov 1971). An interest group attempted to impose its control or power over the targeted clients by offering to resolve the public’s socially constructed problems, which could be real or imagined. The *VL* team alerted the Soviet government to the need to create a new, Soviet, readership by offering it what was deemed the best of world literature. On October 15, 1918, Chukovsky wrote that Lunacharsky at Narkompros had informed him of Gorky’s complaint that there was a lack of coordination in printing translations: “[...] in Moscow books are published by Poliansky, in Piter [Saint-Petersburg] by Ionov—God knows what books, without any system” (1991, 106). It is clear here that Gorky was addressing a representative of the government; thus his complaint was originally an expression of a professional interest, not yet political. As a professional figure in the literary domain who addressed the political authority with a request to grant him and his cohorts the right to introduce order into what he saw as chaos, he appealed to this commission by referring to the political needs of the time. The project became a political one when Lunacharsky consented to the demand that “all that had to be

concentrated in one pair of hands—in Gorky’s” (ibid.). Gorky’s *VL* became the group interest control, and a closure was achieved: now the publishing of translated works (but not other types of literary production) had to be coordinated by Gorky’s group. According to the agreement between the government and *VL*, “Peshkov [Gorky’s real name] is free [...] to hire translators” (*AG X, I*, 17–18). As is true with all professions, the achieved closure was not hermetic: there were translated works that were published elsewhere (for instance, in the period of the new economic policy (NEP); see Malikova 2010); yet *VL*, especially in the early years of Soviet Russia, claimed a privilege of exclusivity sanctioned by the government.

VII. Structure of *VL*

Once the group was recognized politically, which, in an increasingly highly ideological society such as Soviet Russia, meant that it had to be acknowledged socially, it had to structure itself in accordance with political demands. The structure of a profession includes a regulatory body to ensure a standard of professional performance; a code of conduct; management of professional knowledge, and the “production of producers” (Larson 1977, 40).

The *VL* regulatory body is described in Chukovsky’s memoirs as follows:

A learned group of experts (“*uchenaia kollegiia ekspertov*”) governed the activities of the *VL*. Originally, it consisted of nine people: the Indians were represented by Academician Ol’denburg, the Arabs—by Academician Krachkovskii, the Chinese—by Academician Alekseev, the Mongols—by Academician Vladimirtsev. Together with two professors of Germanic

Studies, Aleksandr Blok was responsible for the literature in the Germanic languages. Nikolai Gumilev and Andrei Levinson were responsible for literature in French. Evgenii Zamiatin and I [Chukovsky] coordinated translations of British and American literatures. Akim Volynskii was given Italian literature. The Director of the Publishing House was Aleksandr Nikolaevich Tikhonov (Serebrov), Gorky's co-worker and his close friend for many years. (Chukovsky 1967, 126)

The list is not exhaustive. For instance, Vladislav Khodasevich was also invited to participate: "In the autumn of 1918, when Gorky established his famous publishing house *VL*, I was invited to Petersburg and was offered the position of Director of the Moscow branch of this enterprise," Khodasevich wrote (1976, 229).

The regulatory body defined the repertoire of books to be translated; it also commissioned translations and ensured a standard of professional performance. As Chukovsky remembers, it was far from easy. The *VL* board of editors selected a repertoire consisting of several thousand books in different languages. The editors had to find skillful translators. They had to evaluate prosaic and poetic translations of the past in a detailed fashion and based on rigorous criteria (Chukovsky 1991, 130).

Recruiting and selecting translators turned out to be a challenge:

In Petersburg, suddenly, many people appeared who imagined themselves as translators: former princes and princesses, former ladies in waiting at the royal court, pages, lyceum students, Kammerherren, senators—all former Petersburg nobility... These people besieged us day after day, trying to assure us that they were the right people to whom we should entrust translations of

Molière, Voltaire, Stendhal, Balzac, Anatole France, Victor Hugo, because thanks to their governesses and nannies, they could chat fluently in French (svobodno boltat' po-frantsuzski). Gorky patiently explained to them that only an excellent stylist can translate writers of genius, for literary translation is a great art that only experts in the use of their own (primarily their own) language can master, but the would-be translators insisted and, eventually, he would give in and offer them several pages of some French author as a test, and always the result was deplorable. (Chukovsky 1967, 137)

By contrast, those who were more qualified to do the work were not always willing. Gorky tried to involve some 'outsiders,' such as Koni, Amfiteatrov, Potapenko, Remizov, but his attempts were not successful. In Chukovsky's own words, "the majority of such masters of translation were 'leaving the stage' at that time, moreover they were 'soloists,' not ready to work in a team" (1967, 136).

In Lidiia Chukovskaia's memoirs of Anna Akhmatova, we read how once Akhmatova complained that she felt forced to translate (Chukovskaia 1976, 18). Later, Arseny Tarkovsky would famously write a poem with the following refrain:

Akh, vostochnye perevody, kak bolit ot vas golova!

[Ah Oriental translations, what a headache you cause!]

Of course, Akhmatova and Tarkovsky did translate a great deal, but translating was, for them as well as for many other more and less prominent writers and poets, an offer 'they could not refuse'. Indeed, if they had not agreed to translate foreign poetry, they would not have been able to publish at all.

Thus, initially, in its attempt to secure a high professional standard of translations, the *VL* project started off relying mainly on those who had had literary experience before the 1917 revolution. Yet it was understood that in order to sustain the project, a new generation of translators had to be created. In the sociology of professions this process is referred to as production of producers. In the case of *VL*, this process was reported to unfold as follows:

Besides the editing and publishing activities, *VL* initiated several ancillary cultural processes, among which its Studio of literary translations is especially remarkable. In the Studio, the theory of literary translation was taught and workshops were organized by such experts as Blok, Gumilev, Chukovsky, Gorky, Zamiatin, Lozinskii and others. The theoretical findings of the Studio have been recorded in the book *Principles of Literary Translation* published within the *VL* project (in two editions); the practical result was a considerable number of experienced translators who graduated from the Studio and who became a great help to the *VL* publishing house. (Tikhonov, *AG X, I*, 20–1)

VIII. What Did *VL* Do?

In order to appreciate the specificity of the *VL* project, it is useful to compare the profiles of those social actors from previous periods of Russian history who were partially involved in translation with those of the *VL* writers-translators.

Merchants, monks and clergy, diplomats and state figures, and finally scholars were commissioned or took upon themselves the work of translation, because they had the knowledge of source and target languages and cultures that was considered a

prerequisite. They were, for the most part, willing to take part in translation work. Their primary goal was to render a source text into the target language of Russian, and were not concerned about readers' awareness of their names, not pursuing personal ambitions but rather acting out of economic/political/social necessity.

With writers who were involved in translation work, the situation was different. Once again, in performing literary translation, for the majority of them, or for those who, like Gorky and other members of the *VL* editorial board, commissioned the translations, name recognition was considered as important as original authorship. A prime example from the nineteenth century is Vasily Zhukovsky, who famously considered the translator of poetry to be a rival of the original writer. The same attitude can be seen, *mutatis mutandis*, in the case of Pasternak. Even when writers were compelled by their economic circumstances to undertake translation, they were conscious of the fact that their reputation was at stake: translations had to be of a high enough quality if writers were to sign them and if they were unwilling to imperil their literary reputation, above all in their own eyes. Tsvetaeva wrote in her diary that she would not let her translation work compromise her literary standing:

Why do I work so hard on... today, on... yesterday, on... tomorrow and both on the weak, non-existent poets and on the real, both on Knapheis and on Baudelaire? First of all, because of the impossibility to work in any different way. This is my life-long habit. (Cited by Evgenii Vitkovsky, *Vek perevoda*, <http://www.vekperevoda.com/index1.htm>)

The main requirement was, as with OLW, the ability to write well in Russian. Gorky insisted that literary translation is a great art which only masters of their own language could achieve.

Virtually all reputable literary figures were involved in the *VL* project precisely because they were masters of belles-lettres. Tikhonov wrote that the *VL* project was carried out by “an impressive group of translators, which included almost all significant representatives of Russian literature” (*AG X, I, 20–1*).

IX. The Goals of *VL*

Finally, the goals of the *VL* project were unique in the history of world literature. Let us compare the purpose of translating for non-writers, Russian writers (before 1917), and Soviet writers.

The first group, non-writers, translated foreign non-literary texts primarily to introduce the contents of their source texts into the target language and culture of Russian. The focus was on the information to be conveyed, as is almost always the case with non-literary texts. The purport was to help the target audience acquire knowledge from the translated (source) text. This attitude precluded rivalry between the source and target cultures and texts.

In the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, writers who engaged in translation translated foreign texts in order to introduce new themes, devices, genres etc. Translation was a very important source of inspiration for Russia’s young and developing literature. This is one of the situations in the literary polysystem, in which, according to Itamar Even-Zohar (1990, 47), translation assumes the center stage position. As soon as some writer-translators feel their own

strength, they immediately start seeing the source texts they render as ‘raw’ material, and the relationship between the source and target cultures develops into a competition (Tyulenev 2014, 38–9).

The situation with literary translation in Soviet Russia (later in the Soviet Union) in general and in the *VL* project in particular was quite different from the two cases described above. Perhaps the closest analogue would be the role of translation in Germany’s Romantic project of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the aim of which was to render the treasures of world literature into German, thus making them available to their own people while also making German a European lingua franca that would introduce non-Germans to these masterpieces. Gorky’s idea of rendering the best of all world literature into Russian so as to make it available to the new Soviet readership echoes this German idea. (The idea of ‘world literature’, if briefly and in the world dominated by bourgeoisie, appeared in Marx’ and Engel’s *Manifesto of the Communist Party*.)

Thus, translation introduced foreign works into Russian with the purpose of creating a world repository of the best (i.e., in this case, Bolshevism-compatible) works of literary art. The purpose would, in the case of *VL*, not have been limited to learning from source texts and the cultures they represented insofar as the form of communism that was being built in Soviet Russia was, according to its version of Marxism and Leninism, ideologically far more advanced than the ideology of any other nation or culture in the world. The repository was to demonstrate the endless progress of Soviet literature and its superior achievements at all stages of its stupendous development when compared to the “good”, but limited, accomplishments of the past (and of the West).

On a practical level, the goals of Academia (based on Krylov and Kichatova (2004, 62, 64)), included the following:

- 1) Production of books of a high publishing quality
- 2) Export of published books (to sell in Europe for foreign currency [sozdat' 'valiutnuiu' knigu dlia Evropy])
- 3) Create a systematic library of outstanding books of world and Russian literature.

X. Conclusion

VL was a first important step in legitimizing literary translation as a profession in twentieth-century Russia. It demonstrated the most salient features of an important stage in a professional project. It developed not on its own but in close connection with original literary writing.

The dynamic of the emancipation of literary translation from other types of literary activity, notably OLW, was far from straightforward, yet the application of the conceptual apparatus of the sociology of professions has allowed us to identify the following features. *VL* secured its closure, i.e., a sphere into which competing providers of the same or similar services could have no access, by ensuring control over the service it provided. Gorky and his colleagues within the project convinced the leadership of Soviet Russia that *VL* represented an effective way of sorting out what they presented to the powers that be as chaos in the printing business, and that only they could guarantee high quality in literary translational output. The *VL* group

also emphasized the fact that the young Soviet government would gain important kudos on the international scene as a promoter of such a unique cultural venture.

VL was also crucial in establishing a school of Soviet translation. On the one hand it connected it to the previous Russian translational tradition. In practical terms, the participation in *VL* saved many lives. Viktor Shklovsky famously said: “Gorky... was Noah for the Russian intelligentsia of the 1920s. On the arks of *VL* ... and Academia, many were saved during the flood” (Krylov and Kichatova 2004, 53). These writers, poets and translators of the pre-revolutionary period saved from the consequences of the economic and social collapse laid the foundation of the new translation school. Based on their works, a new generation was raised. Moreover, based on the experience of translating within the *VL* project, foundational works on translation theory, such as Chukovsky’s *Vysokoe iskusstvo* (A High Art) and Andrei Federov’s *Vvedenie v obshchuiu teoriiu perevoda* (Introduction into a General Theory of Translation), were produced.

As an additional benefit for future generations of translators and writer-poets, *VL* created a niche that in the future would save original poets’ and writers’ voices. One famous example is this: Vladimir Lifshits (1913–78) ‘created’ a British poet James Clifford. James Clifford never existed. Vladimir Lifshits invented this British poet, who was allegedly born in the same year as Lifshits himself, in 1913, and who played the role of Lifshits’ alter ego as a way to overcome censorship as well as impose stylistic limitations (<http://www.vekperevoda.com/index1.htm>; Losev 1984, 2001: 77–80). Miron Levin, Aleksandr Brodskii, Aleksandr Gitovich, Iurii Riashentsev, Gleb Semenov and others invented foreign poets in order to publish their own poetry or ascribed their own poems to real poets (ibid.). But this is a different

story and a further stage in the overall professional project of Russian translation in general and literary translation in particular.

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