

Rewriting *Othello* for the Stalinist Stage: The Case of Sergei and Anna Radlov

JILL WARREN

University of Nottingham

Abstract. Anna Radlova was one of the first to undertake the translation of Shakespeare into Russian in the Stalinist period, whilst *Othello* was the most popular of Shakespeare's plays in the Soviet Union in the 1930s–40s. Radlova's translation of *Othello* was used by her director husband, Sergei Radlov in two highly successful productions in 1935, at his studio-theatre in Leningrad, and the Malyi Theatre in Moscow. For Radlova, the translator was first and foremost a communicator, a mouthpiece through which the greats of foreign literature and drama could speak to the Soviet people. She argued the need for new Russian-language versions of Shakespeare, which could be truly understood and appreciated by Soviet audiences. Radlov, meanwhile, contended that as a soldier embodying all the best qualities of the Renaissance period, Othello was the ideal hero for the Soviet stage. This article uses translation theory in order to investigate the ways in which the play was shaped by the boundaries of socialist realism, and explores the tactics adopted by a translator and director in order to ensure that Shakespeare's play remained on stage under the increasingly repressive political regime.

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In December 1935, the respected producer and director Sergei Radlov was invited to stage a production of *Othello* at the Malyi Theatre in Moscow. He chose to direct the play using the translation undertaken by his wife, Anna Radlova. Published in 1929, this translation was the first version of *Othello* to be completed in the newly Soviet Russia. The pamphlet produced by the theatre to accompany the production hailed it as a 'resurrection' of *Othello*, and promoted the fact that Radlova's new translation was an essential part of this innovative interpretation: 'Отказ от традиционных переводов *Отелло* позволяет во многом по-новому понять основные положения трагедии и по-новому осветить отдельные её образы'.¹ The production's première on 10 December 1935 generated considerable discussion in the press, much of which centred on the translation, and was highly critical of Radlova's work. In contrast, public reaction to the production was extremely positive, with leading actor Aleksandr

¹ 'Otello' v Malom teatre — postanovka 1935 g. (Moscow: Publishing House of the Museum of the State Academic Malyi Theatre, 1935), p. 11. [Rejection of the traditional translations of Shakespeare allows the fundamental aspects of the tragedy to be understood in many new ways, and throws new light on individual characters].

Ostuzhev receiving thirty-seven curtain calls on the first night.² There was huge demand for tickets, and consequently *Othello* became an essential part of the Malyi Theatre's repertoire in the 1930s.

Using modern translation theory, this article examines the reasons behind this divided reaction, and how this particular translator and director shaped their 'rewriting' of *Othello* for the new political climate of the Stalinist 1930s. In spite of the eminence of her translation in the 1930s, little critical work on Radlova, her life, her poetry or her translations now exists. The most likely reason for this lack is that like many of their generation, Radlova and her husband suffered arrest and imprisonment at the hands of the Stalinist regime, leading to a ban on the publication or discussion of their work which lasted many years.³ While the work of Sergei Radlov has been more fully explored,⁴ their work has rarely been considered together; the working relationship between this translator and director of Shakespeare has never been fully investigated, and this article hopes to go some way to addressing this lacuna.

The Radlovs and their work

Born in 1891 in St Petersburg, Anna Radlova began her creative working life as a poet. Between 1918 and 1923, she published three volumes of poetry and a play.⁵ Replete with biblical motifs and references to classical literature and mythology, Radlova's verse exhibited a high degree of religious intensity as well as a strongly pacifist stance, which did not find favour with those in power. Commenting on Russian women writers, Olga Muller Cooke notes a change of theme over Radlova's three collections of poetry: 'Whereas *Honeycomb* [1918] has an obviously personal feminine voice, the second and third volumes read as universal denunciation of the Bolshevik revolution'.⁶ For example, if the Angel of Rebellion in the following lines from the poem 'Petersburg' (1920) is seen as a metaphor for the spirit of Revolution sweeping the city, bringing about civil war, it is not difficult to identify why Radlova's writing might have

² David Zolotnitsky, *The Shakespearean Fate of a Soviet Director* (Luxembourg: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1995), p. 131.

³ In March 1942, the Radlovs and their theatre company were evacuated to Piatigorsk. The Nazis invaded the city five months later, and the Radlovs were caught behind enemy lines. Their theatre company performed in enemy prisoner-of-war camps across Europe for the remainder of hostilities. When war ended, they willingly chose to return to the USSR, but rumours about their true loyalties were beginning to circulate. They were arrested and taken to the Lubyanka, and sentenced to nine years in a labour camp. Radlova died after 3 and a half years of imprisonment. Radlov survived his term and was released in 1953, and rehabilitated a year later. He chose to relocate to Latvia, where he continued to stage productions of Shakespeare. He died on 27 October 1958.

⁴ Most notably by David Zolotnitsky, whose work includes a complete study of Radlov's directorial career. See n. 2.

⁵ The volumes of poetry were entitled *Soty* (*Honeycomb*, 1918); *Korabli* (*Ships*, 1920); and *Krylatyi gost'* (*The Winged Guest*, 1922). Radlova's play, *Bogoroditsyn korabl'* (*The Ship of the Virgin Mother*), was published in 1923. Her final work in prose, *Povesti o Tatarinovo* (*Tales of Tatarinova*), was written in 1931, but not published until 1996.

⁶ Olga Muller Cooke, 'Anna Radlova', in *Russian Women Writers*, ed. by Christine Tomei, 2 vols (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999), II, pp. 753–61, (p. 754).

raised questions with the authorities: 'Как пролетал над городом, вселенской тревогой дыша, | Огнекрылил, огнеликий Ангел Мятажа, | Как слепил он глаза испуганным и раненым, | Как побеждали, как падали под крылатым знаменем'.⁷

Although her style of writing was praised by some prominent literary figures, such as Mikhail Kuz'min and Prince D. S. Mirsky, Radlova came in for sharp criticism from other commentators. Amongst them was Osip Mandelstam, who made a scathing reference to the 'dubious solemnity' of her work in his essay, 'Literary Moscow'.⁸ By the end of the 1920s, Radlova sought refuge in translation. Many writers of her generation who were viewed as 'politically questionable' by the authorities and so unable to publish were forced to turn to translation in this way.⁹ While it provided them with a suitable profession, those in power could still heavily censor their output. The mass production of re-writings of foreign literature, however, provided the USSR with the welcome benefit of appearing international.¹⁰

As translation theorists Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere have identified, every translation is a rewriting of an original text, shaped by the environment in which the rewriting process takes place: 'All rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way'.¹¹ In order to understand a translator's decisions, therefore, it is important to appreciate the context in which they were working. Between 1929 and 1938, Radlova translated five of Shakespeare's tragedies: *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *Richard III*, and *Hamlet*. Her translations were performed throughout the 1930s, the period which saw the introduction of socialist realism as the only acceptable method for creative output. From its announcement at the first congress of the Union of Soviet Writers in 1934, all forms of art officially had a sole purpose: 'the ideological remoulding and education of the working people in the spirit of socialism'.¹² In order to preserve their membership of the Union, and therefore

⁷ Anna Radlova, *Korabli* (St Petersburg: Alkonost, 1920), p. 20. Cooke provides the following literal translation of these lines: 'How the goldenwinged, goldenfaced Angel of Rebellion, | Flew over the city, breathing universal alarm, | How he blinded the eyes of the wounded and frightened, | How they conquered, how they fell under the winged banner'; see Cooke, 'Anna Radlova', pp. 757–58.

⁸ Osip Mandelstam, 'Literary Moscow', in *Osip Mandelstam: Selected Essays*, trans. by Sidney Monas (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977), p. 134.

⁹ Boris Pasternak, Anna Akhmatova, Osip Mandelstam, and Mikhail Zoshchenko were some of the most prominent writers who translated out of necessity.

¹⁰ One example of a venture which recruited hundreds of writers and translators in the 1920s was the ambitious *Vsemirnaia Literatura* (World Literature) project, which was launched with Lenin's full support. Overseen by the Commissar of Education, Anatolii Lunacharskii, and the writer Maksim Gor'kii, the project involved hundreds of writers and translators, whose task it was to assess all existing translations of foreign literature, and then re-translate anything felt to be substandard.

¹¹ Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere, 'Preface' in *Translation, History and Culture*, ed. by Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere (London: Cassell, 1990), p. ix.

¹² Andrei Zhdanov, 'Soviet Literature — The Richest in Ideas, The Most Advanced Literature', in *Soviet Writers' Congress, 1934: The Debate on Socialist Realism and Modernism in the Soviet Union* (London: Lawrence & Wishart Ltd, 1977), pp. 15–24 (p. 21).

their right to publish, all writers and translators had to adopt this new credo. Shakespeare was posited by those in authority as an ideal dramatic model for Soviet writers to emulate,¹³ but in re-translating his plays, Radlova would still have had to ensure that her interpretations fitted in with the new ideology.

Radlova was married to Sergei Radlov, a producer and director who had trained under Vsevolod Meierkhol'd at his Borodinskaia studio. Radlov had begun his career working for TEO (Teatral'nyi otdel'), the Theatre Department attached to the People's Commissariat for Education, staging mass propagandist pageants. In 1919, he formed his own comic troupe of actors and performers known as the 'Theatre of Popular Comedy' (Teatr narodnoi komedii). Here he experimented with improvisation and circus elements, inviting professional artistes such as the celebrated clown, Georges Delvari, and the acrobat Serge (Sergei Diaghilev), into his troupe.¹⁴ When, for financial reasons, the Popular Comedy closed in 1922, Radlov founded his own studio-theatre in St Petersburg, becoming one of the most prominent directors of the 1920s-30s. Shakespeare was central to Radlov's directorial oeuvre, and his wife's translations formed the cornerstone of his repertoire. He seems to have had a particular preference for *Othello*: 'Постановка этой пьесы была моей заветной мечтой'.¹⁵ Before accepting the Malyi Theatre's invitation to direct, he had already staged three productions of the play, at the Aleksandrinskii Theatre in St Petersburg in 1927, at his Molodoi (Young) Theatre in 1932, and again at his renamed Studio-Theatre in April 1935.¹⁶

Radlov's preference for *Othello* may have been influenced by the fact that though Soviet writers were encouraged to learn from Shakespeare, not all of his plays fitted with the new political model. It was widely known that Stalin detested *Hamlet*, finding the protagonist far too hesitant and far too philosophical for the socialist realist doctrine, and so, tacitly, the play had been removed from most theatres' repertoires.¹⁷ *Macbeth*, which also contains a regicide, was similarly unpopular with the authorities. In contrast, *Othello* was by far the most popular of Shakespeare's plays in the 1930s, with over one

¹³ Most notably by the writer Maksim Gor'kii who, in a speech on dramaturgy in 1932, called on all Soviet writers to learn from Shakespeare.

¹⁴ Konstantin Rudnitsky, *Russian and Soviet Theatre: tradition and the avant-garde*, trans. by Roxane Permar, ed. by Lesley Milne (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988), pp. 57–58.

¹⁵ Sergei Radlov, 'Kak ia stavliu Shekspira', in *Nasha rabota nad klassikami*, ed. by A. A. Gvozdev (Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1936), pp. 11–70 (p. 18). [A production of this play was my cherished dream].

¹⁶ Radlov did not look back favourably on his Aleksandrinskii production. He attributed much of his dissatisfaction to fact that the theatre refused to commission a new translation, and so he was forced to use Petr Veinberg's translation from 1864. By 1932, he was able to use his wife's new translation, and consequently was much happier with the results; see Radlov, 'Kak ia stavliu Shekspira', p. 18.

¹⁷ Eleanor Rowe, *Hamlet: A Window on Russia* (New York: New York University Press, 1976), p. 134. Rowe explains that in 1941, a remark from Stalin put an end to rehearsals for an impending production of *Hamlet*, and that subsequently, the staging of the play was implicitly banned.

hundred more productions of the play staged than its nearest rival, *Romeo and Juliet*.¹⁸

There are several reasons why *Othello* fitted easily into the new political boundaries for theatre. Discussing the Soviet novel, Katerina Clark notes that '[t]he "positive hero" was a defining feature of Soviet socialist realism. The hero was expected to be an emblem of Bolshevik virtue, someone the reading public might be inspired to emulate'.¹⁹ On stage, Othello, the soldier, who fights for his adopted country and the woman he loves, was therefore a more suitable hero than Hamlet the philosopher. As Inna Solovyova notes, during the 1930s there was a new emphasis in the theatre on clarity, and truth to life.²⁰ The nature of tragedy had to be very specific. In his article on Shakespeare and socialist realism, Arkady Ostrovsky describes how, in the 1930s, the source of tragedy could be an accident, a misunderstanding, or a mistake as in *Othello* or *Romeo and Juliet*, but not the conflict or guilt of the protagonist in *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*.²¹ Evil had to come from elsewhere, not from within. Othello emerges as the most fitting hero — he is manipulated by Iago rather than being innately capable of wrongdoing himself. Much of the play's plot hinges on untruthful reports of events and the need for evidence, inevitably striking chords with audience members living through the purges of the 1930s.

With each production of *Othello* that he directed, Radlov developed and re-shaped his interpretation. He argued that understanding the time from which the plays originated was essential for ensuring that their true spirit could be portrayed on the Soviet stage.²² He wanted his productions to reflect what he saw as the 'original' Shakespeare, and for his plays to be accessible for working people.²³ Using his wife's translation in 1932 he had stated that this new version of the play enabled him to produce a truly realistic Shakespeare: 'у меня в руках имелся новый ревосходный перевод Анны Радловой, в сущности, всем своим живым мастерством предопределивший переход к реалистической трактовке Шекспира'.²⁴

¹⁸ Arkady Ostrovsky, 'Shakespeare as a Founding Father of Socialist Realism: The Soviet Affair with Shakespeare', in *Shakespeare in the Worlds of Communism and Socialism*, ed. by Irena Makaryk and Joseph G. Price (Toronto: University Press, 2006), pp. 56–83 (p. 61).

¹⁹ Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, 3rd edn (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), p. 46.

²⁰ Inna Solovyova, 'The theatre and Socialist Realism, 1929–1953', trans. by Jean Benedetti, in *A History of Russian Theatre*, ed. by Robert Leach and Victor Borovsky (Cambridge: University Press, 1999), pp. 325–57 (p. 338).

²¹ Ostrovsky, 'Shakespeare as a Founding Father of Socialist Realism', p. 62.

²² Radlov, 'Kak ia stavliu Shekspira', p. 18.

²³ Moscow, Bakhrushin Theatre Museum Library, S.E. Radlov, 'Shekspir i sovremennost', speech given to the *Tea-klub* (Theatre Club), 10 October 1933, p. 2.

²⁴ Radlov, 'Kak ia stavliu Shekspira', p. 20. [I had in hand the excellent new translation by Anna Radlova, which in essence, with all its vivid mastery, predetermined the transition to a realistic interpretation of Shakespeare].

Anna Radlova's translation of *Othello*

A much discussed topic amongst theatre translation theorists is the contrast in demands made of a translation when it is intended for performance, as opposed to reading. As Bassnett comments, '[p]lays, we are informed, must be transformed, must be translated in order to be "performable"'.²⁵ This question is also raised in studies of Shakespeare in translation. In his work on the history of *Hamlet* in Russia, Alexei Semenenko posits that there are two parallel canons of the play in Russian: 'there were simultaneously two canonical translations in each period which co-existed more or less peacefully due to the fact that they occupied different media: literature and the theater'.²⁶ Semenenko's research does not include assessment of *Othello*, as yet a neglected element of the Russian Shakespeare tradition. However, his work highlights the importance of analysing the influence of existing translations on those which follow, as well as how different trends in translation style prove popular with readers and audiences over time. Given more space than the current article allows, it would be interesting to draw comparisons between Radlova's work and other translations of *Othello*, in order to illuminate the different tactics used. Of particular importance for appreciating the reception given to Radlova's work are the translations of Petr Veinberg, whose version of *Othello* was first published in 1864, but remained a popular choice onstage and in anthologies until the time Radlova was working,²⁷ and the translations of two of Radlova's contemporaries, Boris Pasternak (whose translation was published in 1945) and Mikhail Lozinskii (licensed for performance in 1948). The translations of Pasternak and Lozinskii fall on opposing sides of Semenenko's twentieth-century canon of *Hamlet*. An advocate of literalism, Lozinskii was an eminent translator of verse who was awarded the Order of Stalin for his translations of Dante in 1946. He argued that a translation should be like a transparent window, allowing a clear and undistorted view of the original.²⁸ In contrast, Boris Pasternak took a free approach to translation, believing that each should be appreciated as a work of art in its own right.²⁹ His translations

²⁵ Susan Bassnett, *Reflections on Translation* (Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2011), p. 100.

²⁶ Alexei Semenenko, 'No text is an island: Translating *Hamlet* in twenty-first-century Russia', in *Contexts, Subtexts and Pretexts: Literary translation in Eastern Europe and Russia*, ed. by Brian James Baer (Amsterdam: John Benjamin's Publishing Company, 2011), pp. 249–63 (p. 250).

²⁷ For example, Stanislavskii chose to use Veinberg's translation in his Moscow Art Theatre production in 1930. He subsequently published Veinberg's text alongside his unfinished production plan for *Othello* in 1945, further strengthening the canonisation of Veinberg's translation in the minds of audiences and critics alike. See K. S. Stanislavskii, *Rezhisserskii plan Otello* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1945).

²⁸ Iuri Chekalov, 'Perevody "Gamleta" M. Lozinskim, A. Radlovoi i B. Pasternakom v otsenke sovetskoe kritiki 30-kh godov', in *Shekspirovskie chteniia*, ed. by A. Anikst (Moscow: Nauka, 1990), pp. 177–200 (p. 177).

²⁹ Boris Pasternak, 'Zametki perevodchika', in *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, 5 vols, ed. by A. A. Vosnenskii (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1989–1992), VI, pp. 392–95 (p. 393).

of Shakespeare, among the most popular and most frequently performed in Russia, have been criticised for their lack of faithfulness to their source texts. The fact that Radlova was married to a theatre director who went on to stage her translations may have influenced her approach to Shakespeare, and enabled her to use translation tactics more suitable for the stage. Comparisons with those translations which preceded and followed her work allow an assessment as to how far this was the case.

'Rude am I in my speech': the language of Radlova's translation

In their speeches and articles on Shakespeare, both husband and wife had similar principles. They both believed that the Soviet era called for a fresh approach to Shakespeare, and were extremely critical of existing translations. Shakespeare had first entered the Russian cultural sphere through adaptations drawn from French and German versions of his plays. The traditions of Neoclassicism and Romanticism had therefore shaped the earliest Russian rewritings of his works. These previous translators had elevated Shakespeare's language, and romanticised the earthier nature of his imagery. As Radlova termed it, these translators were guilty of 'затягивая шекспировскую «варварскую» музу в железный корсет расиновской жеманницы' (lacing Shakespeare's barbarian muse into the iron corset of a Racinian prude).³⁰ She wanted a return to a 'realistic' Shakespeare, a return to the richness of everyday speech: 'Мы будем драться за нефальсифицированного, за подлинного, нежного и грубого реалистического Шекспира.'³¹

In keeping with the educational requirements for culture in the 1920s-30s, Radlova felt that the target audience should be the prime consideration. She aimed to make Soviet actors able to perform Shakespeare's language and for audiences not to need dictionaries and commentaries to appreciate his plays.³² It is perhaps this element of her translation 'policy' that is most evident in her work, as she frequently includes simpler language and explanations than are present in Shakespeare's text. For example, Desdemona's insistence that she does not want to return to live at her father's house following her marriage, 'Nor would I there reside' becomes the simpler 'Я не хочу там жить' (I don't want to live there),³³ while a description of 'distemp'ering draughts' becomes the more transparent 'крепких вин' (strong wines).³⁴

Reviewers of Radlova's translation also noted her concern for the actors. As theatre translation theorists such as Patrice Pavis have observed, the text is only one element of a theatrical performance, and an actor will supplement their role

³⁰ Anna Radlova, 'Kipiachennyi dukh', *Sovietskoe Iskysstvo*, 26 February 1933, p. 3.

³¹ Moscow, Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i isskustv (RGALI), f. 614, op. 1, d. 264, l. 1-8. (1.8). [We will fight for the unfalsified, the original, tender and coarse, realistic Shakespeare].

³² Anna Radlova, 'Perevody Shekspira', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 4 December 1935, p. 4.

³³ Vil'iam Shekspir, *Otello*, trans. by Anna Radlova (Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1939), <<http://www.lib.ru/SHAKESPEARE/>> [accessed 01 October 2016], l. 3.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, l. 1.

'with all sorts of aural, gestural, mimic and postural means'.³⁵ Commenting on the production's use of Radlova's translation, the critic Iosif Iuzovskii asserted that the language Radlova uses is often very condensed, giving the actors space to perform: 'Она приглашает актера к творческой инициативе'.³⁶ In other words, the concise nature of Radlova's text allows the actors to have maximum input, employing many of the 'supplementary means' to which Pavis refers in order to exemplify meaning, rather than the verbal text driving the action. Similarly, S. Ignatov praised Radlova for the succinct yet expressive nature of her language: 'переводчица удалось найти язык очень сжатый выразительный несомненно помогающий актеру не декламировать, а лепить словесную ткань роли'.³⁷ However, Iuzovskii also implored Radlova to consider her audience as well as her actors. He stated that her lines are sometimes too compact, so that one has to return to an older translation in order to understand their meaning, and that he would rather sacrifice this density so as not to have the audience left guessing at riddles.³⁸

It was the coarseness of Radlova's translation, however, which caused most discomfort amongst critics, as she was certainly not afraid to reflect the bawdier side of Shakespeare's language. As an example, the word 'whore' appears thirteen times in Shakespeare's text, once used by Emilia as a verb, to 'bewhore' (to call someone a whore).

OTHELLO Villain, be sure thou prove my love a whore!³⁹
 ОТЕЛЛО Подлец, ты должен доказать, что **шлюха**
 Моя любовь⁴⁰

In the above example, Radlova translates the word 'whore' literally, using the word 'шлюха' throughout her translation. This may have been seen as shocking by some audience members, since previous translators had chosen not to render this word literally. Petr Veinberg, whose 1864 version of *Othello* had remained the most performed before Radlova's, removed all incidences of this word from his text, using alternatives (in this case, 'разврат', meaning debauchery) which were described by one 1930s editor as 'decently biblical'.⁴¹

ОТЕЛЛО Мерзавец, ты обязан
 Мне доказать **разврат** моей жены⁴²

³⁵ Patrice Pavis, *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*, trans. by Loren Kruger (London and New York, 1992), p. 144.

³⁶ I. Iuzovskii, 'Na spektakle v Malom teatre', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 69, 15 December 1935, p. 3. [She invites the actor to have creative initiative].

³⁷ S. Ignatov, 'Torzhestvo aktera *Otello* v Malom teatre', *Teatr i dramaturgiia*, 2 (1935), 63–69 (p. 63). [the translator has been successful in finding very succinct and expressive language, undoubtedly helping the actor not to recite but sculpt the oral fabric of the role].

³⁸ Ibid. [We would immediately sacrifice this compactness because of the loss of clarity of meaning].

³⁹ William Shakespeare, *Othello*, ed. by Michael Neill (Oxford: University Press, 2006), III. 3. 361.

⁴⁰ Shekspir, *Otello*, trans. by Radlova, III. 3. 167–68.

⁴¹ A. A. Smirnov, 'O russkikh perevodakh Shekspira', *Zvezda*, 4 (1934), 165–72 (p. 169).

⁴² Vil'iam Shekspir, *Otello, venetsianskii mavr*, trans. by Pëtr Veinberg, <www.lib.ru/SHAKESPEARE> [accessed: 1 October 2016], III. 3.

Some critics welcomed the fact that Radlova had brought Shakespeare down from the heights to which Romanticism had elevated him, although others felt she had gone too far.⁴³ Pasternak and Lozinskii do use the word 'шлюха', but also some of the softer alternatives favoured by Veinberg, arguably making Radlova's the strongest language used. Nevertheless, Radlov defended his wife's translation choices vehemently, arguing that these 'harsh' words had been used by Shakespeare because they brought his art closer to real life: 'А для чего они нужны Шекспиру? Потому что он ими приближает искусство к реальной жизни, к реальным людям.'⁴⁴

'*Valiant Othello*': the ideal hero?

Translation theorist Lawrence Venuti argues that translations 'position readers in domestic intelligibilities that are also ideological positions, ensembles of values, beliefs, and representations that further the interests of certain social groups over others'.⁴⁵ Given the precarious nature of Radlova's position as a translator, it seems likely that there would be evidence within the text that the new policies of the regime were having an effect on the translation.

Radlova's 'rewriting' of Othello's description of how he and Desdemona fell in love with one another is one which generated many columns of discussion in the press. One of the reasons for this was because it was strikingly different from Veinberg's translation (1864), which was best known at the time. Shakespeare's original lines are as follows:

OTHELLO She loved me for the dangers I had passed,
And I loved her that she did pity them.⁴⁶

Veinberg had translated this as:

ОТЕЛЛО Она меня за муки полюбила,
А я ее — за состраданье к ним.⁴⁷

Here, Veinberg gives 'dangers' as 'муки', which literally means 'torments'. According to the writer and critic Kornei Chukovskii, Veinberg's translation of these lines was so popular that it had become a saying in its own right, and, along with other critics, he wrote of his surprise that Radlova had deviated from this 'gem' of translation.⁴⁸ It should be noted, however, that Radlova was

⁴³ Ignatov praised Radlova for removing the 'сладость' (saccharine aspects) of Veinberg's nineteenth-century re-writing of the play, while Iuzovskii argued that Radlova had re-instated the physicality of Shakespeare's language to such an extent that it was too graphic to be used on stage. See Ignatov, 'Torzhestvo aktera *Otello* v Malom teatre', p. 63; Iuzovskii, 'Na spektakle v Malom teatre', p. 3.

⁴⁴ Radlov, 'Vstupitel'noe slovo S. E. Radlova k p'ese Shekspira *Otello*', RNB, f. 625, d. 127. [And why were they necessary for Shakespeare? Because with them he brings art closer to real life, to real people].

⁴⁵ Lawrence Venuti, *The Scandals of Translation* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 78.

⁴⁶ Shakespeare, *Othello*, I. 3. 1.

⁴⁷ Shekspir, *Otello*, trans. by Pëtr Veinberg, I. 3.

⁴⁸ Kornei Chukovskii, 'Astma u Dezdemony', *Teatr*, 2 (1940), 98–109 (p. 103).

not the only twentieth-century translator who chose to do so. Boris Pasternak's Desdemona fell in love with Othello for his 'тревожн[ая] жизн[ь]' (troubled life),⁴⁹ whereas Lozinskii's Othello attributes his wife's feelings to the fact that he has 'жил в тревогах' (lived in anxiety).⁵⁰ The militaristic nature of Radlova's departure from Shakespeare's original wording made her translation conspicuously different:

ОТЕЛЛО Она за бранный труд мой полюбила,
 А я за жалость полюбил ее.⁵¹

'Бранный труд' translates literally as 'martial labour'. Both Radlova and her husband defended her translation by stating that Othello was first and foremost a soldier. In Elizabethan times, soldiers and adventurers were looked up to in much the same way that aviators were in the 1930s, so it was natural that Desdemona found this element of his character attractive. Radlova's choice of wording certainly emphasises the militaristic nature of her hero. The phrase 'бранный труд' appears in patriotic war songs and poems, such as those written later about the Leningrad Blockade during the Second World War.⁵² Whilst perhaps not overtly socialist realist then, it does seem to be part of the kind of patriotic and heroic discourse with which Radlova and her director would want their new type of hero to be associated.

Radlov was keen to emphasise the fact that he did not see Othello as an overtly jealous character. Instead, he stated that he interpreted *Othello* 'как пьесу не о ревности, а о большой любви' (as a play not about jealousy, but about great love).⁵³ As far as Radlov was concerned, the key was not how quickly Othello becomes jealous, but rather how ingenious Iago has to be to destroy the trusting relationship between Othello and Desdemona. He dismissed previous portrayals of Othello as a savage as simply pre-revolutionary prejudice.⁵⁴ Here, Radlov was drawing on an idea already in existence within the Russian tradition. The poet Aleksandr Pushkin, who played a significant role in the assimilation of Shakespeare into Russian culture, had interpreted Othello as a character who was 'not jealous, but trusting'.⁵⁵

For Radlov, Othello clearly embodied all the best qualities of Renaissance man, from an era to which, as Ostrovsky argues, Soviet culture saw itself a direct heir.⁵⁶ In the 1930s, drawing parallels between the two periods was common.

⁴⁹ Vil'iam Shekspir, *Otello*, trans. by Boris Pasternak, in *Tragedii* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2010) I. 3.

⁵⁰ Vil'iam Shekspir, *Otello*, trans. by Mikhail Lozinskii, <<http://www.lib.ru/SHAKESPEARE/>> [accessed 1 October 2016], I. 3.

⁵¹ Shekspir, *Otello*, trans. by Radlova, I. 3.

⁵² For example, the term appears in Ol'ga Berggol'ts, 'Pesnia o Leningradskoi materi', <<http://blokada.otrok.ru/poetry.php?t=6>> [accessed 1 October 2016].

⁵³ E. P., 'Otello v Malom teatre', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 9 December 1935, p. 5.

⁵⁴ Radlov, 'Kak ia stavliu Shekspira', p. 51.

⁵⁵ Aleksandr Pushkin, quoted in Catherine O'Neil, *With Shakespeare's Eyes: Pushkin's Creative Appropriation of Shakespeare* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003), p. 135.

⁵⁶ Ostrovsky, 'Shakespeare as a Founding Father of Socialist Realism', p. 61.

As Jerry Brotton describes, for many, the Renaissance represented the birth of modern man: 'a break from the Middle Ages, creating a modern understanding of humanity and its place in the world'.⁵⁷ It was a time of great advances in education, philosophy, exploration, and scientific discovery. Likewise, in Russia in the 1930s, Stalin's brand of socialism was promoted as the only way forward to a better life, whilst the principles of socialist realism ensured a programme of mass education through the arts.⁵⁸

'Your son in law is far more fair than black': translation of racial references

Many of the racial references within Shakespeare's play rely on wordplay and double entendres, creating problems for any translator. In Act II, Scene 1, for example, an exchange between Iago, Desdemona and Emilia contains a lot of play on the word 'fair' meaning 'fair-skinned' as well as 'pretty', and black meaning 'ugly'. The fact that the Russian language does not provide quite so many opportunities for double meanings on this subject inevitably means that some translation loss is incurred. However, in addition to incidences of loss throughout her translation, Radlova also alters some of the key expressions in the play which refer to race. In doing so, she creates a different effect, providing a further example of how the Radlovs were able to ensure that their rewriting of *Othello* was politically relevant.

Returning to Iago's description of the consummation of Othello and Desdemona's marriage, arguably one of the key black/white images in the play, Radlova removed the word 'white' completely.

IAGO Even now, very now, an old black ram
 Is tugging your white ewe.⁵⁹

ЯГО Сейчас, сию минуту, старый черный
 Баран овечку вашу кроет [...].⁶⁰

Radlova's choice here could be determined by the rhythm of the lines, as there are four stresses in each. As stated earlier, Radlova, like Lozinskii, paid great attention to reproducing the structure of Shakespeare's text, and strove to achieve equilinearity (the same number of lines in the target text as in the source).⁶¹ However, other racial references later in the play are also altered in her

⁵⁷ Jerry Brotton, *The Renaissance Bazaar* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 21–22.

⁵⁸ Radlov's greater emphasis on the scheming skills of Iago is a further example of his accentuation of elements of the play's plot which best suited the ideology of the new Soviet epoch. As Lois Potter notes, 'Iago's obsession with money and his ruthless individualism made him an obvious representative of the rising capitalist culture of the Renaissance', and therefore he was an ideal villain in the new Communist world. See Lois Potter, *Othello: Shakespeare in Performance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 100.

⁵⁹ Shakespeare, *Othello*, I. 1. 88–89.

⁶⁰ Shekspir, *Otello*, trans. by Radlova, I. 1. [Now, this minute, an old black | ram is covering your ewe].

⁶¹ Radlova was heavily criticised for her devotion to equilinearity by Kornei Chukovskii. In defence of her work, Radlova later claimed that it had been the commissioning publishing house which had

As Zdeněk Stříbrný describes, this idealised vision of Soviet society can now be read with 'a sense of colossal discrepancy between utopian illusion and cruel reality'.⁶⁷ However, it is a further example of how crucial it was for a 1930s' production to project the politically desired image of Soviet society. *Othello's* noble and heroic qualities were promoted as being far more important to the Soviet people than his race.

Conclusion

The fact that both Radlov and the management of the Malyi Theatre chose to emphasise that their *Othello* was being staged in Radlova's new translation demonstrates that it formed an essential part of the director's interpretation. Radlova's translation choices therefore must, in some part at least, underlie the production's success. Working closely with a translator who shared such similar aims enabled Radlov to amplify the elements of the play most relevant to Soviet audiences. As Pavis has argued, a translation for the theatre needs to be 'clearly and immediately understood' by spectators, and therefore must be 'adapted and fitted to [the] present situation'.⁶⁸ This statement corresponds neatly with Radlova's own arguments for the need to re-translate Shakespeare to suit the new Soviet audiences. This adaptation was all the more crucial in the dangerous political climate of Stalin's Russia. A combination of tradition, modernity, and political acclimatisation therefore ensured that the Radlovs' 'rewriting' of *Othello* became a talking point of Russian Shakespeare production in the 1930s.

through all its policies the realisation of a society which will care for man, for people, and teach the love of man'; see Tizengauzen, 'Alexander Ostuzhev on *Othello*', p. 163.

⁶⁷ Zdeněk Stříbrný, *Shakespeare in Eastern Europe* (Oxford: University Press, 2000), p. 83.

⁶⁸ Pavis, *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*, p. 162.