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Abstract

Osip Mandelstam and the new Russian translators of Dante's *Commedia*

Osip Mandelstam's 1933 *Conversation about Dante* was rejected by Soviet editors and the literary experts of the USSR's main publishing house Goslitizdat, who, however, enthusiastically accepted the new translation of the *Commedia* by Michail Lozinsky (1939-1945). At the same time the *Conversation* was criticized by writers such as Boris Zaytsev who had emigrated from the USSR after the October revolution of 1917. Indeed, Mandelstam's essay deconstructs the traditional Romantic image of Dante and his poetry that was popular in the Russian Silver Age and whose aesthetic aspect was borrowed from the Symbolists by Soviet literary criticism with some ideological modification and then cultivated in Lozinsky's translation. However, the *Conversation about Dante* – a unique attempt to go against the Dantean canon in the Russian tradition – exerted an important influence on the two recent translators of the *Commedia*, namely A.A. Ilyushin (1971-1995) and O. A. Sedakova (2017-2020), helping them to challenge the hegemony of Lozinsky's text in the second half of the twentieth and the first decades of the twenty-first century. The purpose of this paper is to show how the *Conversation*, which constitutes a kind of *auctoritas* for contemporary translators, provides them with a repertoire of images and ideas for a new interpretation of the poem. Rather than carrying out a comparative analysis of the source text and the target text in order to assess the degree of 'fidelity' of the translations to the 'original', the present paper will consider a selection of specific passages from Mandelstam's essay and Ilyushin's and Sedakova's translations as well as their metatexts (i.e. commentaries and articles) that reflect the translators' vision of the *Commedia*. In this way, I shall show how the traditional understanding of Dante evolved in the late Soviet and post-Soviet reception and how important Mandelstam and his ideas were in this evolution.

Keywords: Osip Mandelstam, *Conversation about Dante*, translations of Dante, *Divina Commedia*, Michail Lozinsky, Olga Sedakova, Aleksandr Ilyushin, foreignization.