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## The Reception of Alfred Tennyson in Russia

Dr Olga Sobolev

It is difficult to imagine a serious conversation on the formation of the Russian poetic canon without mentioning its connections with the British literary school. Highly influential for the development of the European romantic tradition, such authors as Lord Byron,<sup>1</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and John Keats have always remained firm favourites in the Russian cultural arena, stimulating the imagination of numerous men of letters and evoking copious responses to their works. Tennyson somehow never enjoyed the same volume of attention from the country's literary circles. The serene tranquillity of his writings did not inspire the generation of Romantic poets, and it was not until 1859 that the first translation of one of his poems ('Godiva' by Mikhail Mikhailov) appeared in the pages of a Russian literary magazine (Tennison 1859, 5–8). Curiously, the English poet laureate, who throughout his life remained a die-hard gradualist and a firm supporter of the existing order, happened to be published by *Sovremennik* (The Contemporary) – the most radical socialist periodical, run by Nikolai Nekrasov and the group of revolutionary populists, who in the atmosphere of ferocious censorship used every opportunity, including foreign translations, to put forward their political views. Perhaps not without reason, this first Russian version of 'Godiva' was tendentiously one-sided: it placed emphasis on the social commentary of the poem and used it largely as a platform for the allegorical treatment of domestic concerns. A

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<sup>1</sup> For an extensive account of the reception of Byron in Russia, see Diakonova and Vatsuro, 'Byron and Russia: Byron and Nineteenth-Century Russian Literature' (1981, 143–59), "'No Great Mind Could Avoid Byronism": Russia and Byron' (2004); and Lansdown and Reichardt, "'Almost as Far as Petersburg": Byron and the Russians' (2007).

completely different facet of Tennyson's writing was presented to the audience by the *fin-de-siècle* decadent poets. The intricate symbolism of his works, their colourful imagery and brocade texture were revealed in Konstantin Bal'mont's translations of 'The Lotos-Eaters', 'The Lady of Shalott' and 'The Kraken',<sup>2</sup> while Ivan Bunin published his masterfully crafted and aesthetically refined reading of 'Godiva' (1906). This spark of interest, however, was regrettably short-lived. The Bolshevik revolution (1917) did not have time for the imaginative lyricism of the English poet laureate; yet again, Tennyson's writings were completely erased from the literary palette, to be revived only in the 1990s, when the general collapse of the Soviet system opened some new perspectives for Russian critical thought.

How can one account for the fact that a major poet of his time, who had experienced almost unprecedented glory and success among the generations of his contemporaries, had a very modest presence on the Russian literary scene? How can one rationalize the decades of indifference in the country that had always been responsive to the idea of progressive Englishness and which in Tennyson's lifetime was undergoing a real boom in Anglo-Russian relations, cultural affairs and trade? Reasonable explanations cannot be easily presented; and one would even think of the irony of fate, or, perhaps, of a mystifying vindictiveness on the part of a nation for which Tennyson himself had nothing but a lifelong feeling of antipathy and distrust: 'I have hated Russia ever since I was born', he used to say on various occasions, 'and I'll hate her till I die' (Allingham 1907, 265).

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<sup>2</sup> Translations from Tennyson became a prominent feature in Bal'mont's 1908 collection *Iz chuzhezemnykh poetov* (From the foreign poets), though 'The Lady of Shalott' was released earlier in 1899.

As a convinced liberal and reformist, Tennyson was indeed never at ease with what he considered the barbaric authoritarianism of the tsarist regime; and in this context, one can mention his condemnation – poetic, as well as practical – of Russian political influence in the Balkans and his enthusiasm for the cause of Greece, Poland and, later on, Montenegro (Sypher 1976; De Mott 1962; Goldsworthy 1997). This general perspective, however, also had some distinctly personal undertones, for the poet's long, sufficiently prosperous and tempered life happened to be fringed at both ends by two somewhat piquant incidents, associated with no lesser authority than the Russian Imperial Court.

The first involved Tennyson's father, George Clayton Tennyson, who in 1801 found himself in Russia, accompanying the British emissary, Lord St Helens, to the coronation ceremony of Alexander I. At a reception graced with Russian dignitaries, George Tennyson, having drunk a lot of vodka and fine wine, announced that everybody in England knew that the late Emperor – the young tsar's father – had been brutally murdered in Mikhailovsky Castle and was well aware that Prince Platon Zuboff had knocked him down, while the generals, Count Bennigsen and Count Pahlen, strangled him in his room. 'An appalling hush fell for a moment upon the table, and then Lord St Helens at once rushed into some subject discreetly foreign to the sixth commandment' (McCabe 1902, 734). As soon as the guests moved away to take tea, St Helens waylaid the poet's father and explained that as those whom he had just casually accused of parricide were actually among the guests, he must flee for his life this very instant, to escape the emperor's fate.

George Tennyson dashed through the frosty streets of Moscow and the vast spaces of the Russian countryside to the southern port of Odessa. Shivering with fever and

delirium, he hovered for weeks between life and death, hallucinating about missing St Helens's messenger, who had been instructed to alert him by blowing the horn three times. When at last he heard the third signal, frozen stiff with fear, he saw through the window the long-awaited courier standing on his doorstep, ready to escort him to the safety of the British ship. The fact that the poet's father had indeed travelled to Russia is confirmed in various documents; the rest was recorded from his narrative, with a slightly different touch each time the story was publicly revealed.<sup>3</sup> George Tennyson recited it on various occasions and repeated it to his sons so many times that it became family legend, apparently making a strong impression on the young poet's imagination; he did seem to believe in his father's Russian adventure, reading into it all the excitement and danger of dealing with this precarious land.

The second story – undoubtedly true to life – happened much later in Tennyson's life, when the 74-year-old poet laureate was sailing through the North Sea on the *Pembroke Castle* in September 1883. His party included William Gladstone, the then British prime minister, who received a welcoming visit from the royal court of the Danish king on arrival in the harbour of Copenhagen. After lunch, their party, among whom were royal relatives from Greece, Russia and Britain, moved to a parlour, where Tennyson was invited to read from his poems. The room was fairly small, and he found himself squeezed between the Princess of Wales (the daughter of the Danish king) and her sister Dagmar, wife of the Russian tsar Alexander III, who was standing right in front of the laureate. Tennyson had never seen the tsarina. The short-sighted poet mistook the Russian

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<sup>3</sup> Different versions of this account can be found in Tennyson, H. (1897, 2: 147–48); Tennyson, C. (1949, 8–9) or *Echoes of the Eighties: Leaves from the diary of a Victorian Lady* (1921, 66); they are analysed and extensively discussed in Waddington (1967, 1–4), the pioneering study of the poet's Russian reception.

empress for one of the royal maids of honour, and as he read an extract from *The Princess* – ‘The splendour falls on castle walls’ – he lightly tapped the rhythm on his neighbour’s knee. When he finished, the tsarina politely thanked him for the pleasure, at which Tennyson softly patted her on the shoulder, maintaining affectionately: ‘My dear girl, that is very kind of you, very kind.’ They say that the tsarina could not refrain from a little smile, although the tsar was completely taken aback.<sup>4</sup> An alternative account of the event presents a more awkward moment for the poet. Tennyson, according to certain records, had not been reading for two minutes before one of the small Russian princes exclaimed in a loud voice: ‘Now I have heard him, Mama, may I go?’ (Hallam Tennyson 1897, 1: 487; *Echoes of the Eighties* 1921, 65–66). Not all the cheering and triumphant accolades of the Russian Imperial Navy received by the poet laureate in Denmark the following day could obliterate a little comment like that.

This is not, of course, to say that throughout his lifetime Tennyson chose to disengage himself deliberately from everything related to the Russian tradition. After all, his Siberian wolfhound (a gift of the Russian Imperial Court), described by his friends as a ‘beautiful and picturesque creature’, ‘the constant companion of her master in his last walks over the Freshwater downs’ (Tennyson, H. 1911, 256; O’Connor 1897), bore the name of Karenina.<sup>5</sup> The picture of the poet with his dog became available to Russian

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<sup>4</sup> For the alternative versions of the events see Tennyson, H. (1897, 2: 282–84); Tennyson, C. (1949, 470); McCabe (1902, 736); Grant Duff (1904, 246); *Graphic* (1883). Quoted and discussed in Waddington (1967, 39).

<sup>5</sup> There are two pictures of Karenina in *Tennyson in Lincoln. A Catalogue of the Collections in the Research Centre* (1971–72), entry 6056 and 6057 (8). The date of the latter ‘Lord Tennyson in his study at Aldworth’ is given as 1885; this picture also appeared in *Harper’s Weekly* (15 October 1892) where the inscription said ‘Lord Tennyson in His Study as He Appeared at the Age of Seventy-Four’, which refers to 1883–84.

readers as early as 1886, when the famous sketch ‘Lord Tennyson at his desk at Aldworth’ by C. Roberts (later engraved by S. Hollyer) was reproduced by the journal *Nov’ (Novelty*, 1886, 449).<sup>6</sup>

Despite all his personal antipathy and reservations, Tennyson, in fact, was not uninterested in Russian literature and folk-culture. In his memoirs of his father, Hallam Tennyson points out that the poet read (or had read to him) Matthew Arnold’s study of *Anna Karenina* and was in total agreement with Tolstoy’s views on the social importance of fiction, especially the fact that it was men of letters, rather than diplomats, who facilitated the rapprochement between nations (Hallam Tennyson 1897, 2: 348–49).<sup>7</sup> He also met Ivan Turgenev, the Russian writer, who arrived in London in November 1870 and was brought seven months later by the well-known Russian scholar and translator William Ralston to spend a couple of days at Aldworth, the Tennysons’ new house on Black Down near Haslemere in Surrey: ‘A most interesting man,’ wrote Emily Tennyson in her diary, ‘who told us stories of Russian life with a great graphic power and vivacity’ (*Lady Tennyson’s Journal* 1981, 324–25; Tennyson, H. 1897, 2: 106–07).<sup>8</sup> Emily observed that at that time her husband displayed a genuine interest in the subject: he read about the old Russian ‘statues on the Steppes from China to the Crimea’; and he was enthralled by what she described as ‘the strange sects among the Russians, and the

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Karenina is also the dog in the statue by Watts outside the cathedral in Lincoln; the plaster cast is at the Watts Gallery (Compton, Surrey).

<sup>6</sup>Also quoted in Girivenko, ‘Alfred Tennyson v Rossii: k istorii voprosa’ (1993, 24), a seminal article that attracted scholarly attention to Tennyson in the 1990s.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew Arnold’s essay on Tolstoy appeared in the second series of his *Essays in Criticism* (1888, 253–99).

<sup>8</sup> Emily Tennyson noted that her husband was fond of Turgenev’s novels *Lisa* and *Pères et Enfants* (Fathers and Sons). For a more detailed account see Waddington (1967, 29).

character of the Russian peasant and the strong feeling of unity in the nation' (*Lady Tennyson's Journal* 1981, 330–31; Tennyson, H. 1897, 2: 109). Later on, he was quite willing to compose and publish in *The Times* (Tennyson, 1874) a welcoming panegyric to the Russian princess ('A Welcome to Her Royal Highness Marie Alexandrovna, Duchess of Edinburgh'), written at Queen Victoria's request and upon the return to England of the newly wedded daughter of Alexander II and Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh:

The son of him with whom we strove for power –  
 Whose will is lord thro' all his world-domain –  
 Who made the serf a man, and burst his chain –  
 Has given our Prince his own Imperial Flower,  
Alexandrovna.
 And welcome, Russian flower, a people's pride,  
 To Britain, when her flowers begin to blow!  
 From love to love, from home to home you go,  
 From mother unto mother, stately bride,  
Marie-Alexandrovna!

It would, of course, be sheer speculation to make a strong connection between the poet's immediate enthusiasm for Russia and his brief encounter with Turgenev; all of this could have been entirely coincidental – a result of a long-term friendship with Ralston, who had never ceased sending the signed copies of his Russian essays to the Tennysons, or a mere consequence of a relatively animated period in Anglo-Russian relations.

As regards the second, purely political, consideration, it is worth bearing in mind that the general state of events in the Victorian era actually placed Russia under constant attention on the European international scene. Since the brief spark of mutual attraction



between 19-year-old Queen Victoria and the then tsarevich, Alexander II, who visited Britain in 1838, there had been a tide of animation in practically all aspects of Anglo-Russian affairs. Those who were culturally engaged avidly seized any book that could throw light on the life and customs of the northern country; and for somebody belonging to intellectual and cultural circles it was rather difficult to stand aside. The Crimean War of 1853–56, as well as the Great Eastern Crisis in central Asia (1887–88), only enhanced the appreciable interest in Russian culture; and the closer the Russian troops came to British India – by spring 1885 the situation was descending into a serious threat of a military conflict – the more attention was given to the study of this far-away land. The same evidently applied to ‘the other part of the equation’; and one can say that Tennyson’s ascent to the honours of the laureateship coincided with the most vibrant cult of Englishness on the Russian side. In this context, the fact that Tennyson did not draw the immediate attention of the Russian literati looks like an aberration rather than the norm; and it is worth looking into this aspect in a bit more detail.

By this time the English colony in St Petersburg was considerable in numbers,<sup>9</sup> which was reflected in the name of its prime location, the English Embankment. The area featured a number of elegant buildings that belonged to well-known merchants and industrialists, an English hotel, an English church and a very popular English club: founded in 1770 under the motto *Concordia et laetitia* (Harmony and happiness), it was

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<sup>9</sup> A substantial number of British (mainly Scottish) professionals settled in St Petersburg during the reign of Catherine the Great; to give but a few examples one can mention John Samuel Rogerson, the private physician to the Empress; Sir Samuel Greig, an admiral of the Russian Navy; Charles Cameron, who made an illustrious career as an architect at the court of Catherine the Great; and Charles Gascoigne and Charles Baird, the founders of the metallurgical industry in Russia, as well as its first suppliers of steam-driven machinery. See also Johnstone (1898, 56–67).

expanded to more than 350 members by 1835. Robert Harrison (1855, 41–42), who visited Russia at the end of the 1840s, left an exciting testimony of the English presence in the capital:

The liveliest part of the town is the neighbourhood of the Mole, or mercantile harbour, where you seem to meet none but Englishmen, and to hear only our native language, a very delightful change to one who has been long among strange people. English inscriptions over shop doors abound, ‘Groggs’, and “Porter sold here’, being of frequent occurrence. The English Vice-Consul is one of the most important personages in the place, and the English church one of the handsomest edifices.

From the beginning of the 1820s, the streets of the major Russian cities were inundated with English travellers. The word ‘tourist’ was scarcely used in the Russian language of the time and referred specifically to visitors from England, so that in 1831 *Literaturnaia gazeta* (Literary newspaper) published the following definition of the term: ‘This is what Englishmen call their compatriots, who wander through Europe out of idleness or boredom’ (1831, 190).<sup>10</sup> By the end of the 1830s these English voyagers had become frequent guests at and a characteristic feature of any reputable aristocratic salon. Mikhail Lermontov (2009, 210) reflects this in his late novel *Princess Ligovskaia* (1837), where he outlines a typical portrait of a Russian high-society soir e:

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<sup>10</sup> In 1839, *The Pocket Book for Fans of Russian Books, Newspapers and Journals* also associated the word ‘tourists’ exclusively with England, defining it as ‘an Englishman, travelling around the world’ (R-f-ts 1837, 258).

Apart from the instances where a standard English version exists, all translations from Russian sources are my own.

The cream of Petersburg was present: there were two ambassadors, with their foreign entourages consisting of people who spoke very good French (which, however, is not at all surprising), and thereby exciting considerable attention from our young beauties; several generals and state officials; and one English lord, travelling on the cheap and thus not considering it at all necessary either to speak to or to look at anyone. To make up for that, his spouse, a noblewoman of the bluestocking persuasion and a one-time severe persecutor of Byron, talked enough for four people and looked all around through her four eyes – if we count the lenses of her double lorgnette, which were no less expressive than her actual eyes.<sup>11</sup>

Responding to the growing interest in Russian affairs,<sup>12</sup> English publishers increased the print run of the guidebooks and road atlases, which, according to the *Athenaeum* ('Cabinet Cyclopaedia – History of Russia' 1836, 617), 'attracted more and more public attention' day by day.<sup>13</sup> The market was flooded by a great variety of travelogues and diaries; and it seemed that everyone who had ever happened to visit the country was now eager to publish a substantial volume of their impressions, letters, or simply memoirs of

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<sup>11</sup>For more detailed analysis of the representation of Englishmen in Russian literature of the time see Alekseev (1982, 574–80).

<sup>12</sup>Apart from numerous tourists who came to the capital cities, there were those who, in the excitement of adventure, managed to cross the vast spaces of the country from north to south and from west to east. For instance, in the 1820s attention was drawn to the ventures of Captain John Cochrane, who travelled across the European and Asian territories of Russia and having reached Kamchatka, crossed the whole of Siberia on foot. His book *Narrative of a pedestrian journey through Russia and Siberian Tartary, from the frontiers of China to the Frozen Sea and Kamtschatka* (London, 1824) attracted close attention in Pushkin's literary circles and Prince Kochubei, the Russian Minister of Internal Affairs, wittily called him 'an honorary vagrant' (Alekseev 1982, 639).

<sup>13</sup>One of the most popular editions at the time was Coghlan's *A Guide to St. Petersburg and Moscow* (1836), but the first atlases appeared about two decades earlier: *Post-guide through Russia*, trans. into English from the last Imperial Ukase (1812).

the event. To give but a few examples, one can point to Leitch Ritchie's *A Journey to St. Petersburg and Moscow* (1836), published with twenty-five etchings of the sights of Moscow and St Petersburg; Peter Dobell's *Russia as It Is and not as It Is Being Represented* (1833); as well as the memoirs of Rayford Ramble (1836), who, having been to Russia back in 1819, still had an urge to reveal his impressions seventeen years after the trip (*Travelling Opinions and Sketches in Russia and Poland*).<sup>14</sup> Most of the time these accounts were intriguing, but positive in tone; for instance, an English traveller, Captain Charles Colville Frankland, who stayed in Russia in 1830–31, claimed that the Russians had a great knowledge of English culture and always spoke of Britain respectfully and with a high esteem:

Where ever I go among the Russian noblesse, I find the great desire on their part to show me how much they value the good opinion of my country, and how much they strive to equal us in their progress towards perfection in the arts and sciences. They mostly speak English, and love English customs and literature, and admire our national character, although they do not seem to copy it. (Frankland 1832, 162–63)

In this context, one has to say that Captain Frankland's statement should be regarded as neither flattery nor sheer exaggeration; Britain's imperial and industrial strength lent considerable international weight to its intellectual achievement, politics, education and way of life (as well as to the English language itself). As a consequence, for instance,

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<sup>14</sup> The list can be continued: the bibliography on the Russian travelogues in Britain can be found in Nerhood (1968) – this account is, unfortunately, incomplete; Professor Anthony Cross (University of Cambridge) has completed a major bibliographical project *In the Lands of the Romanovs: An Annotated Bibliography of English-Language First-Hand Accounts of Russia from 1613 to 1917* (OpenBook Publishers 2015).

British governesses were much in demand outside the country for the wealthy families, who wanted to give their children a thorough understanding of ‘what was still the world’s most prestigious culture’ (Hughes 1993, xv; Broughton and Symes 1997, 154). The presence of an English governess in the Russian households became such a norm that it was depicted in Alexander Pushkin’s novella *The Lady Peasant* (1831) as a quintessential feature of the proper upbringing. The tradition was led by the emperor himself. The Russian tsar Nicholas I was brought up by a Scottish nanny, Jane Lyon, who was appointed by Catherine II to care for the infant and stayed permanently with the young tsarevich during the first seven years of his life. It was from Jane Lyon that he learned his first Russian alphabet, his first Russian prayers and, perhaps, his hatred of the Poles, which he would later trace back to his nanny’s stories about her painful experience in Warsaw back in 1794 (Nicholas I 2014). The Russian version of her name was Evgeniia Vasil’evna; but little Nicholas always used to call her my ‘nanny-lioness’ (Shcherbakova 2013, 26).<sup>15</sup>

Needless to say, Nicholas I was brought up as an Anglophile. His close friendship with the Duke of Devonshire, their visits to the medieval Scottish castles (during Nicholas’s stay in Britain in 1816), as well as his memorable poetic encounter with Robert Burns, shaped his long-term love and interest in the British tradition. Some years later it became an inherent feature of the Imperial Court. A Scottish architect, Adam Menelaws, was established as the leading designer of the Empire (Kuznetsov 1998, 226), as well as such artists as Sir William Allan and George Dawe, who painted 329 portraits of distinguished Russian generals for the Military Gallery of the Winter Palace.

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<sup>15</sup> Throughout his life Nicholas cared warmly for Jane Lyon’s family and supported her daughter Evgeniia Burtseva (née Vecheslova) and later her granddaughter Zinaida financially.

Following the family tradition, the emperor's children were brought up exclusively by English nannies, about which Baroness Bloomfield (1883, 152) made the following note during her stay in St Petersburg in 1845:

We saw the Czarewitch's children, a nice little boy of about two years old, and his sisters. They were attended by English nurses. These are greatly preferred in Russia, and are generally bribed by the Russians to enter their service.<sup>16</sup>

Enthralled by the general fascination with Romanticism, which had in many ways originated from Britain, the Russian nobility, in their faithful imitation of the taste and preferences of the Imperial Court, was quick to follow the newly emerging trend *à-la-anglaise*. During the 1830s and 1840s, this was raised to an almost unparalleled vogue and was reflected in architecture, fashion and interior design. Britain was perceived as the land of social progress, where a liberal political system and a flexible economy allowed arts and sciences to flourish freely and without constraints. It became a model for those who aspired for liberal transformations; and the landlords, who some two decades earlier had marked their progressiveness by setting up an English garden, were now looking at the system of agriculture and irrigation. In line with the trend, they established English farmhouses in their manors, invited English governesses to teach their children, had Richardson and Byron on their shelves – as immortalized by Pushkin in *Eugene Onegin*, first published in 1825 – and ordered their portraits from Christina

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<sup>16</sup> Baroness Bloomfield (1883, 153) offers the following example: 'A lady told me that a nurse who lived with her three years left to go to Princess B----, who gave her 70*l.* per annum, besides quantities of presents; and one day when my informant was calling on the Princess, the nurse sent in to say she wished to have the carriage and four to take the child [for] an airing! This request was immediately acceded to, and she was met walking down the great staircase attended by a footman!'

Robertson and George Dawe. Pushkin was apparently acquainted with the latter; and when the English artist made a sketch of his portrait he responded with a little verse dedicated to George Dawe, Esq. (the English translation, bearing the initials 'J.H.', was found in Pushkin's archive [Krol' 1937]):

Why does thy magic pencil trace  
 My black unseemly Arab face?  
 E'en sent by thee to future ages  
 T'will be the laughingstock of sages.

Thou shouldst O-s face portray  
 Fair as morn and bright as day  
 Transcendent talent, like to thine  
 Should bow alone at beauty's shrine.

As regards Russian cultural and literary circles, Byron's poetry had been unceasingly in vogue since the beginning of the 1820s. Byron was one of the first contemporary British authors known to the Russians (the other major one being Sir Walter Scott), and the fascination with him lay not in the poet's works alone, but in the interrelationship between life and art as the *sine qua non* of an authentic Romantic legend. Moreover, as an English aristocrat and a politically important figure, he projected the aura of authority and strength. The Russian nobility, acutely conscious of the fact that they did not enjoy the same rights and status as their European counterparts, found an ideal of personhood in Byron's sovereignty of conscience, expressed in the confidence of his poetic style and the assertive power of his rebellious verse. As Diakonova and Vatsuro claim in their study (2004, 344):

Byron was an embodiment of the idea of civic and intellectual liberty, of contempt for political, moral and aesthetic categories. In their search for truthful and courageous art, Russian writers found inspiration in him who recognized no limitations to his mind and will.

A poetic summary of the Russian fascination with Byron was expressed in numerous works commemorating the untimely death of the English poet:<sup>17</sup> ‘In Byron’, Alexander Bestuzhev wrote to his friend and fellow poet Prince Petr Viazemsky, ‘we lost a brother, humanity – a fighter, literature – a Homer of thoughts [...] He died, but what an enviable death [...] it is for the sake of mankind that he strived’ (Bestuzhev 1991). Byron passed into legend as a poet of the past whose works, life, fame and death had been shaped by readers into a mythological whole. He became emblematic of the human condition, but the truth of his personality itself seemed every bit as enigmatic as the human existence it symbolized. It was at this point that young Russian men, such as, for instance, Lermontov, began to adopt the ‘Byronic pose’ in public, marking their alienation from Nicholas’s increasingly repressive regime, and implying their suffering beneath the burden of their visionary mission. As Viazemsky put it in his article of 1827, it was ‘impossible in our time not to sound Byronic [...] he set to music the song of the whole generation’ (Viazemsky 1991, 161).

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<sup>17</sup> To name but a few examples, one can mention Küchelbäcker’s, *Smert’ Bairona* (Byron’s Death) (1824), Venevitinov’s *Smert’ Bairona* (1825), Bestuzhev’s *Smerty Bairon* (The Dying Byron) (1927) and Viazemsky’s *Byron* (1827). In May 1824, Pushkin ordered a funeral service for ‘Georgii’ (George), followed by his famous poem *K moriu* (To the Sea) (1824), in which the latter serves as an allegory of the great English poet, who was just as powerful and deep, gloomy and indomitable: ‘Thine echoes in his voice resounded, / Thy gloom upon his brow was shed, / Like thee, his soul was deep, unbounded, / Like thee ‘twas mighty, dark, and dread’ (Pushkin 2000, 2: 119).



This tide of all-embracing Englishness in Russia did not bring Tennyson under the spotlight of the literary vogue. Unlike Byron, he was not admired by the generations of young progressive liberals, and unlike Robert Southey, Coleridge or Walter Scott, he remained relatively unknown in the artistic and cultural milieu. In the personal dealings of Tennyson with Russia there was obviously very little to deter the Russian public from his works, and it is in the country's cultural tradition that one can, perhaps, find an answer to the question of such a persistent and baffling neglect.

Within the framework of the Russian cultural mentality, the figure of a 'great artist' has always been moulded along the lines of a rather rigid and straightforward canonical scheme. According to the tenet, this is a man whose lifetime is consumed by struggle, partly against material circumstances, partly against incomprehension, partly against himself. He has always been perceived in the likeness of Jacob, wrestling passionately with an Angel, numerous examples of which extended from Michelangelo to Rembrandt and Van Gogh. Considering this type of extraordinary magnetic hero, Tennyson was strictly speaking out of bounds. His life did not burn out as had those of Keats or Shelley; he did not rebel against bourgeois respectability like Algernon Swinburne, or die gloriously in exile like Byron. There was nothing sensational in his serene and moral life, mellowing to ripe old age in the peacefulness of Farringford and Aldworth. Even Turgenev, who was a great connoisseur and promoter of Western literature, saw Tennyson purely as an expression of the mundane mind of a Victorian gentleman. He did not understand the unparalleled popularity of the poet and attributed it to an absence in

contemporary England of more commanding or inspiring creators (Boyesen 1883).<sup>18</sup> For foreigners his personality remained largely aloof, and his work rested entirely on its own merits.

Tennyson's name first surfaced in Russia in 1847, when *Literaturnaia gazeta* and *Finskii vestnik* (Finnish news) published review articles dedicated to his writings. These anonymous essays presented a clear and intelligent account of Tennyson's art and expressed their regrets on the complete absence of Russian translations (the first one was to appear only in 1859). *Literaturnaia gazeta* saw it as a serious cultural shortcoming that prevented one from grasping the overall palette of contemporary British literary thought, but at the same time highlighted some noticeable problems in providing an adequate rendition of the originals, so different in their diction, style and prosody from the accepted framework of the Russian poetic school. 'The works of English literature, created in the last twenty years,' maintained the essay, 'are difficult to translate into another language, since nearly all are remarkable in the originality of their style and form' (*Literaturnaia gazeta* 1847). *Finskii vestnik* was somewhat more specific in its comments on translational problems, trying to relate them to the non-transferable expressivity of Tennyson's poems, their nuanced musicality, as well the psychologically charged complexity, presented in the most laconic and sensitive mode:

It is impossible to convey the extraordinary tenderness of colour, the mysterious character, and ineffable grace of many of his poems and ballads. At times he simply depicts 'a fly buzzing at the window', but it makes the overall picture so delightful,

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<sup>18</sup> Waddington (1967, 27) notes that soon after reaching London, Turgenev affirmed to Carlyle 'how disappointed he was not only by Tennyson, but by all of what he called Britain's *recentiores*'.

so full of some inexplicable inner meaning, that a translator cannot help but despair. Sometimes Tennyson is dense and concise, but then you feel as if you are being embraced by some powerfully tempestuous music. (*Finskii vestnik* 1847, 26)

The fact that Tennyson defies interpretation has been acknowledged by a number of his most faithful European translators ('Tennyson in Germany' 1899, 278; Bowden 1930, 4–5). In Russia, however, this aspect could have hardly made a strong impact on the public reception of the poet, for the art of poetic translation, in its most literal and rigorous sense, did not thrive and was strictly unnecessary until the beginning of the 1850s. The rise of this genre coincided largely with the proliferation of the so-called educated middle class, who at that time started gaining their position in the country's consumer market and whose command of European languages was much less impressive than that of the aristocratic intellectual elite. The nobility of the 1830–40s, who used to play a major role in the cultural arena, perceived Russian very much as their second language, and had no difficulties in reading foreign originals, widely available for them in the Russian press. Pushkin comments on this quintessential feature of his time in *Eugene Onegin* (1977, 77), highlighting the obsession of Madame Larina (a fairly undistinguished provincial lady) with Richardson's novels ('His wife, just like Tatiana, had / on Richardson gone raving mad') and pointing out that Tatiana's famous letter to Onegin was written entirely in French – the most appropriate mode of expression for a well-brought-up young lady:

I see another problem looming:  
to save the honour of our land  
I *must* translate – there's no presuming –  
the letter from Tatyana's hand:

her Russian was as thin as vapour,  
 she never read a Russian paper,  
 our native speech had never sprung  
 unhesitating from her tongue,  
 she wrote in French. (Pushkin 1977, 97)

This does not mean that the Russian Romantic poets never turned their attention to the art of poetic transposition. In this context it is sufficient to mention Pushkin's response to Southey's *Roderick*, Lermontov's rendition of *Don Juan* and Fedor Tiutchev's cycles from Heinrich Heine. The source texts, however, were more likely to be treated as a stimulus – a challenge, a call for an Orphic dialogue on the suggested motif – rather than a true and accurate rendition of the author's verse. It is in this vein that Pushkin produced his translations from Byron and Wordsworth, and Vasilii Zhukovsky became famous for his elaborations on the theme of Friedrich Schiller and Goethe.

Infused by the spirit of elegiac tranquillity, Tennyson's writings have never inspired this kind of Orphic competition; and even as regards his early, exceedingly passionate, emotionally charged patriotic poems (which Swinburne [1886, 252–53] infamously labelled as 'beardless bluster', reminiscent of 'a provincial schoolboy'), they also happened to be on a very different wavelength from that accepted in the Russian literary milieu. This time the reason lay in purely political matters. In the 1830s, Tennyson published a series of sonnets condemning the Russian authorities for their ferocious defeat of the Polish revolt (Tennyson 1987, I: 499). Joining the ostentatious protests of the European liberals, the 21-year-old poet appealed to God's thunder to be sent upon the despotic nation and called the Russian oppressors 'the last and the least of men':

How long, O God, shall men be ridden down,  
 And trampled under by the last and least  
 Of men? The heart of Poland hath not ceased  
 To quiver, though her sacred blood doth drown  
 The fields, and out of every smouldering town  
 Cries to Thee, lest brute Power be increased,  
 Till that o'ergrown Barbarian in the East  
 Transgress his ample bound to some new crown: –  
 Cries to Thee, 'Lord, how long shall these things be?  
 How long this icy-hearted Muscovite  
 Oppress the region?' Us, O Just and Good,  
 Forgive, who smiled when she was torn in three;  
 Us, who stand now, when we should aid the right –  
 A matter to be wept with tears of blood!

Curiously enough, the Russian literary giants did not take this attitude to the situation. Such major figures as Pushkin and Tiutchev (who cannot be remotely associated with the defenders of the tsarist regime) expressed their open hostility to the demands of the Polish rebels, raising their voices, firmly and unreservedly, against all instances of the European support. As Pushkin put it in his poem '*Klevetnikam Rossii*' (To the Slanderers of Russia) (2 August 1831):

Come, challenge us with deeds, not ringing quarrels!  
 Is the old hero, resting on his laurels,  
 Unfit to mount the Ismail Bayonet?  
 Has then the Russian Tsar's word lost its omen?  
 Are we unused to Western foremen,  
 With Russian triumphs sated yet? (Pushkin 2000, 3:156–57).

On closer consideration, one sees that their appeal was not, in fact, fundamentally imperialistic: it was largely directed against the nationalists' ambitions, widespread among certain magnates of the Polish Szlachta; but the overall political division was still incontestable – which meant that yet again Tennyson's writings were to be positioned in the remote camp.

A new spark of interest in the British poet was ignited in Russia only in 1851, when, after Wordsworth's death in 1850 and Samuel Rogers's refusal, Tennyson was appointed to the position of the poet laureate. The event was extensively covered by the major European journals and Russia, evidently, could not stay aside. A long apology by Joseph Milsand, initially published by the *Revue des deux Mondes* (Revue of the two worlds) (1851.1), was reprinted by the St Petersburg *Biblioteka dlia chteniia* (Library for reading), and Tennyson was presented to the audience as what was newest and most characteristic of the English literary school. According to the author, the English poets (namely Tennyson and Robert Browning) were in the absolute avant-garde of modern thinking. Having left behind the idea of Byronic revolt, they raised the art of poetry to the heights of meditative reflection, retaining at the same time all its spontaneity, freshness and evocative force. This was particularly true for Tennyson, in whose writing one would find poetic maturity and imaginative power, combined with exquisite airiness and the refinement of form:

Tennyson tries to use everything in good measure, and has a great sense of taste. He alters his colours in accordance with the scene he is depicting; the texture of his verse and the pace of his phrasing naturally follow the disparate ebbs and flows of

the feelings he describes. He takes all the best from the Greek poets, while having a higher degree of complexity than the latter. He is harmonious and even tempered. (Milsand 1851.2, 95)

Affirming its high regard for British *belles lettres*, the *Biblioteka dlia chteniia* soon released another review article on the subject, where Tennyson received a special mention for the elaborate style and inherent harmony of his verse. Among others, the anonymous author, signed ‘A.G.’ (1855, 491–92), highlighted the lyricism and beauty of his ballad ‘Godiva’, on which it is worth dwelling a while longer, for it was to become an important landmark in the reception of the laureate’s oeuvre. Based on a medieval folklore Anglo-Saxon legend, the text attracted the attention of Mikhail Mikhailov, who in 1859 produced the first Russian translation of Tennyson’s work.

Mikhailov was a thorough and talented translator, who sought to work meticulously on the source text, maintaining the originality of form and remaining true to its content. He was the first who introduced the Russian audience to the poetry of Heinrich Heine and Schiller, whom he thought to be the greatest humanists among his contemporary poets. As regards British and American authors, it was he who in the pages of *Sovremennik* published the first rigorous translations of Burns, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Thomas Hood. In terms of his social platform, Mikhailov was an active member of the revolutionary underground, and in this sense his close collaboration with *Sovremennik* was not remotely coincidental.<sup>19</sup> In the late 1850s, led by Nikolai Chernyshevsky and Nekrasov, *Sovremennik* entered into radical polemics with the Russian conservative press.

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<sup>19</sup> In 1861 Mikhailov was arrested and exiled to Siberia for anti-government propaganda and his populist views; four years later he died in a small village near the gold mine where he served the sentence.

Gradually it became a conspicuous platform for and an ideological centre of populist democracy, turning into a defiant political propaganda unit.<sup>20</sup> It is from this platform that Mikhailov tried to popularize the writers of the democratic and liberal trend. He analysed the realist works of Charles Dickens and William Makepeace Thackeray, and commented on the lyrics of Eugène Pottier, who would go on to write the workers' anthem, *The Internationale* (1871). He promoted the novels of George Eliot and the poems of such libertarians as Longfellow and Victor Hugo. All his translations, fairly unsurprisingly, had a distinct political connotation and were used largely for advancing the author's position (not always successfully), notwithstanding the barriers of the official tsarist censors. To give but a few examples: one can mention his version of Hood's 'Song of the Shirt' (1843), exposing the hardships of the deprived classes, or Moritz Hartmann's *Der weiße Schleier* (The White Veil, 1845), praising the courage of the revolutionists in the face of death.

Mikhailov's rendition of 'Godiva' also had a noticeable ideological slant. Filtered through the prism of the author's populist outlook, it manifested Lady Godiva's moral force and compassion for the poor and praised the notion of self-sacrifice as the only way to fulfil one's humanistic and social task. Stylistically, the poetics of an old orally transmitted legend were deliberately accentuated; this framed the text within the canon of the folk tradition, thus referring to its connection with and its value for the populist cause.

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<sup>20</sup> Taken up by Nikolai Nekrasov in 1847, *Sovremennik* published works by the best Russian authors of the day: Leo Tolstoy, Turgenev and Nekrasov; Timofei Granovsky, Sergei Solov'ev and other leading historians also made frequent contributions. In 1861, the journal published materials dedicated to the emancipation of the serfs and advocated the interests of serfs in the strongest terms possible. Such a radical stance eventually alienated those writers (Tolstoy, Turgenev and Dmitrii Grigorovich) who were indifferent to politics or simply disagreed with such a radical doctrine.



Moreover, the heroic example of a woman, who did not hesitate to put her concerns into action, came across as an allegorical challenge to those who, in the view of the revolutionaries of the 1860s, were drowning the democratic movement in procrastination, theoretical discussions and demagogical talks. As Nekrasov (1863, 214), expressed it in his programmatic poetic appeal, *Rytsar' na chas* (The Knight for an Hour) published by *Sovremennik* in 1863:

Zakhvatilo vas trudnoe vremia,	You are captured in a difficult time,
Negotovymi k trudnoi bor'be.	Unprepared for a difficult fight.
Vy eshche ne v mogile, vy zhivy,	You are not in the grave, you are alive,
No dlia dela vy mertvy davno,	But for action you have been dead for a long time,
Suzhdeny vam blagie poryvy,	You are prone to good intentions,
Da svershit' nichego ne dano.	But you are bound to fulfil nothing.

The same tones of frustration with ineptitude, inertia and the lack of action resonated in Mikhailov's version of Tennyson's ballad. He placed his message straight into the opening stanza of the poem, where the bitter affirmation 'not like us' was emphatically repeated twice in the first consecutive lines (the tone of Tennyson's original – 'not only we' (Tennyson 1987, 2: 172) is distinctly different in this respect):

<u>Ne tak, kak my</u> (tomu teper' desiatyi)	<u>Not like us</u> (from now, it would be about ten
Minuet vek), <u>ne tak, kak my</u> , narodu	centuries ago), <u>not like us</u> , Godiva helped her
Ne slovom – delom pomogla Godiva.	own people not with words, but with action.

(Tennyson 1859, 5, Mikhailov [trans.])

The fact that it was a woman, rather than a man, who happened to be an agent of the good cause, strongly contributed to the point. On the one hand, it enhanced the bitterness of the lesson; on the other, it positioned the narrative straight into the meta-space of the contemporary discourse, which by this time had already been defined by a long gallery of strong heroines and superfluous men.<sup>21</sup>

Regarding the form, Mikhailov's translation was beautiful in its simplicity. It masterfully conveyed the passionate spirit of the poem, and only once or twice did it fail to give full value to the graphic imagery of Tennyson's verse. One can only regret that these colourful patterns were largely used as an ornamental vignette to attract attention to the didactic plot. The translator's heart, as it happened, remained indifferent to Tennyson's notes. Mikhailov found the whole idea of 'the singer to the Queen' obtrusively off-putting. Only two years later, in 1861, in the pages of the same *Sovremennik*, he published a critical review of Tennyson's work, claiming that the laureate's social milieu would be suffocating for the very notion of poetic spirit. Seeing in Tennyson nothing but a true servant to the throne and an epigone of the obsolete Romantic tradition, he condemned Tennyson as an icon of the stagnation and decadence of the modern English literary school ('X' [M. Mikhailov] 1861).

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<sup>21</sup> The concept does not acquire its official literary designation until 1850, with the publication of Turgenev's *Diary of a Superfluous Man* and its protagonist Chulkaturin. The term became widespread in literature through the articles of Alexander Herzen 'Ochen' opasno' (Very dangerous) (1859) and 'Lishnie liudi i zhelcheviki' (Superfluous people and the venomous men) (1860), where he introduces the paradigmatic series of the superfluous men that formed the literary canon: Onegin, Pechorin, Oblomov. The notion was developed by N. A. Dobroliubov and D. I. Pisarev who, though without using the term, extended the series by incorporating into it Alexander Herzen's Bel'tov (*Who Is to Blame?* 1846) and Turgenev's Rudin (*Rudin*, 1856).

The authoritative stance of *Sovremennik*, as well as the general political climate of the age, shaped the reception of Tennyson's oeuvre all through the decades of the 1860s to 1880s. Troubled by the lack of social stability and the controversial consequences of the major political reform – the emancipation of the serfs in 1861 – the country yet again did not seem to be in tune with the pensive tranquillity and mellow lyricism of his poems. Tennyson's writings were not forgotten, but there appeared some patently reductive tendencies in their interpretation, enhanced by the notoriously one-sided reading and a fairly restrictive range of texts chosen by the translators.

Against the background of the general decline in the quality of translated literature in the 1870s (caused by the increasing demand for this type of reading by the proliferating middle class population), there surfaced numerous adaptations of Tennyson, produced by second-rate, often anonymous, authors. They were marked by noticeable lapses in content, limited lexicon and a strong leaning to russification, which, perhaps, was not entirely unexpected, given the dominance of the populist trend. In this context, one can mention, for instance, the works of the well-known Russian folklorist Dmitrii Sadovnikov and his versions of 'The Beggar Maid' (1888) and 'The Lord of Burleigh' (1888). Both were highly stylized along the lines of Russian traditional folk songs and deprived Tennyson's poems of their specific colour of an English legend.

Generally speaking, the originality of Tennyson's writings – his graphic imagery, the vivacity of rhymes and the melody of rhythms – was hardly in focus for the majority of his contemporary Russian interpreters, who used his verse largely as a matrix, a neutral mouthpiece of their own voice. The selection of texts was also characteristically biased, and those poems where social motifs could be easily highlighted remained firm favourites

on the literary scene. To give but a few examples, it is worth mentioning both translations of ‘Godiva’ (the second one released by Dmitrii Minaev in 1869),<sup>22</sup> as well as Tennyson’s poem ‘Lady Clara Vere de Vere’ (1842), which was favoured by quite a few Russian translators. In the mid-1870s, the Russian populists launched their largest campaign encouraging the intelligentsia to leave the cities for the villages, to ‘go to the people’, to educate and enlighten the peasantry, thus rationalizing their moral imperative to revolt. Given the populists’ generally middle- and upper-middle-class social background, they often found difficulty in relating to the impoverished peasants and their culture, and as a big rapprochement gesture spent much time learning peasant customs, such as clothing, dancing and traditional folk songs. It goes without saying that the didactic message of Tennyson’s story, which talked of an aristocrat who is encouraged to reject the idleness of her existence and spend her time helping the poor, teaching them literacy and other useful domestic skills (‘teach the orphan-boy to read, / Or teach the orphan-girl to sew’) (Tennyson 1987, 2: 64) resonated in the hearts of everyone sharing the spirit of the populist campaign. It was considerably amplified (though to a different degree) in all three contemporary translations of the poem, produced, respectively, by Aleksei Pleshcheev in 1864, Dmitrii Min at the end of the 1870s (but published posthumously in 1893) and Olga Chiumina (Mikhailova) in 1892.<sup>23</sup> Needless to say, their text displayed a manifest drift to russification, thus giving it more urgency and more grounding in the country’s socio-political trend: the English aristocratic titles, perfectly familiar to the

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<sup>22</sup> For the analysis, see Baltina (1979).

<sup>23</sup> Alfred Tennyson (1864) ‘Ledi Klara Vir-de-Vir’, Pleshcheev (trans.); Min (trans.) (1893.1); Chiumina (trans.) (1892.1). For the analysis of this translation, see Chernin and Zhatkin (trans.) (2009.3) ‘Stikhotvorenii Alfreda Tennisona “Ledi Klara Vir de Vir” v russkikh perevodakh XIX veka’.

readers, were replaced by their specific Russian equivalents; and Lady Clara herself was related to the Tsarina – ‘I bud'te vy tsaritsei mira’ (For were you tsarina of the world) (Tennison 1864, 159) – rather than, as in the original, retaining a Western epithet of a queen: ‘For were you queen of all that is’ (Tennyson 1987, 2: 63).

The repercussions of the populist trend were still strong in the late 1880s, and it was in this vein that Anna Barykova produced her moralistic version of *Enoch Arden* (1864) – a novella in verse, entitled *Spasennyi* (The Saved). The work was released in 1888 by Tolstoy’s publishing house ‘Posrednik’ (Facilitator), for which Barykova worked actively in the 1880s–90s. During these years Barykova was under the strong influence of the Tolstoyan doctrine. She never had a chance to meet the great writer in person, but Tolstoy praised her talent and her writings in his letters (30 November 1890 and 21 May 1893, respectively) to Vladimir Chertkov, his personal secretary and most dedicated disciple:

Maupassant’s articles are not suited for publication in big journals or newspapers. I have made some changes. Barykova’s translation [François Coppée, *Le pater*] is wonderful, and the whole work is a delight. (Chertkov 1937, 55)

or

Please tell Barykova, whom I know from both sides – yours and Junge’s, our mutual cousin – that she has always shown me great kindness, support, and encouragement. (Chertkov 1937, 197)

Given her ethical stance and religious convictions, Barykova (1888) offered her own, heavily didactic, adaptation of Tennyson’s poem. The poet’s picture of his countrymen, his honest realism that entails no ugliness, but portrays ordinary life in all its natural

mode and casual simplicity, were completely effaced from Barykova's work. Permeated with moralistic judgement and sentimentality and very much in line with Tolstoy's non-resistance stance, it praised Enoch's altruism, self-sacrifice and resignation (for instance, in rejecting his marital rights and allowing his former wife to live in happiness with another man). She idealized the character and posed him becomingly as a righteous and 'saved' person, capable of finding his knotty path through love, Christian forgiveness, helping the poor and caring for the deprived:

On schastliv byl,	He was happy,
Kogda miril podravshikhsia matrosov,	When he appeased the quarrelling sailors,
Pobitykh, slabykh – grud'iu zaslonial,	Shielded those who were weak and were beaten,
Na pristani rabotal za bol'nykh	Worked in the dock in place of the sick
I otdaval svoi skudnyi zarabotok. Ili	And gave them the earnings,
Soval poslednii mednyi grosh	Or when he put his last little coin
V kholodnuiu protianutuiu ruku.	Into one's stretched hand.

To give more weight to the projected message, the translation was also impregnated by some instances of barefaced preaching (absent from the original), turning it into a mere propaganda for Tolstoy's teaching and his concepts of salvation through conformity, non-resistance and humility in life:

Uzh vidno Bogu	It is already clear,
Ty nuzhen, brat, eshche na etom svete.	That God needs you in this world, my fellow.
On, nash Otets, tebia zdes' ubereg,	He, Our Lord, saved you here,
I nas siuda privel tebe na pomoshch'.	And brought us here to help you.
Ego sviataia volia!	This is his holy will.

Despite the boldness of its statements, the work, nonetheless, was well received by the readers, and was reprinted by Posrednik in 1889 and 1897 – which, in a way, was hardly surprising, considering the tide of Tolstoy's fame among the Russian intelligentsia and the middle class.

Speaking of the critical response to Tennyson's oeuvre all the way through the late 1880s, one has to say that this period was not marked by any degree of noticeable animation, and no significant effort has been made to sway public opinion away from the framework of the existing view. As stated by an article in the journal *Nov'*, which in 1886 tried to summarize three decades of Tennyson's reception (or more precisely the lack of the latter):

two or three of his little poems were, in fact, translated and published in some old magazines, but they went unnoticed. He has never been discussed by our critics, his works have never appeared in translation, and have never attracted any considerable interest, even when it was directed at such second-rate poets as Baudelaire, or even such third-rate authors as Richepin. (*Nov'* 1886, 447)

The anonymous author observed that the purified grace of Tennyson's poems remained largely unknown to the majority of Russian readers, who were rarely moved by the delicacy of a talent in which 'there is nothing tempestuous, passionate and imprudent' ('*Chto novago. Alfred Tennison'* 1886, 447). Indeed, throughout these years the domain of scholarly critique was exemplified by a couple of review articles, reprinted from European journals, which appeared sporadically in the pages of the Russian press (Kery 1862; Re-r 1876); and a chapter in Hippolyte Taine's monograph on *The History of*

*English Literature*, originally published in 1864 and translated into Russian by D. S. Ivashnitsov in 1876 (Ten 1876, 285–318). The latter contained a thorough examination of Tennyson's writing, but presented a fairly reserved opinion of the laureate's work. While admiring the elegance and grace of Tennyson's style, Taine describes his poetry as wonderfully complacent, suited to the uninspired spirit of his passionless age:

Such is this elegant and commonsense society [...] refined in comfort, regular in conduct, whose dilettante tastes and moral principles confine it within a sort of flowery border, and prevent it from having its attention diverted. Does any poet suit such a society better than Tennyson? (Taine 1876, 412)<sup>24</sup>

Without any hesitation Taine's answer is affirmative. After the storm and stress of his Romantic predecessors, Tennyson's poetry has emerged at the correct time – it has all the qualities of a quiet evening: purified, charming and exquisite, and reflects with tempered tranquillity everything that only recently has been stirred with passion and ignited with revolt:

He has gleaned from all nature and all history what was most lofty and amiable. He has chosen his ideas, chiselled his words, equalled by his artifices, successes, and versatility of style, the pleasantness and perfection of social elegance in the midst of which we read him. His poetry is like one of those gilt and painted stands in which flowers of the country and exotics mingle in artful harmony their stalks and foliage, their clusters and cups, their scents and hues. It seems made expressly for these wealthy, cultivated, free business men, heirs of the ancient nobility, new leaders of a new England. It is part of their luxury as well as of their morality; it is an eloquent

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<sup>24</sup>For further interpretations of Tennyson by Taine, see Ann Kennedy Smith (Ch. 1, this volume).



confirmation of their principles, and a precious article of their drawing-room furniture. (Taine 1876, 413)

Not unlike Taine's equivocal consideration, the London correspondent of the *Vestnik Evropy* (European messenger) remained unconvinced by the evocative power of Tennyson's talent; and his extensive article on the laureate's poetry and drama could hardly be considered stimulating for those who had ever been inclined to look further into Tennyson's works (Re-r 1876).<sup>25</sup> Although the critic seemed to be well aware of the poet's exceptional fame in his own country, he placed Tennyson and Swinburne in the second echelon of the English authors, who were glowing modestly on the literary horizon 'in the absence of a more potent lot of modern Shakespeares and Byrons' (Re-r 1876, 260). 'Old British legends', the critic claimed, 'have provided the best possible material for this poet, who is endowed with some featureless, mediocre and tempered talent, and is not easily inspirable' (Re-r 1876, 262).<sup>26</sup>

Tennyson's drama, *Queen Mary*, received an even harsher mention. The play was described as a real weariness to the spirit and was relegated to the position of a poorly designed second-rate work (especially in comparison to Swinburne's *Bothwell: A Tragedy*). The critic labelled *Queen Mary* 'colourless' and 'monotonously pale', more suitable for a private reading than for mounting on stage; he remarked on the lack of intrigue and dynamism of action; and concluded his *Letters from England* by advising the

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<sup>25</sup> Girivenko (1993, 28) notes that the actual name of this critic was A. Ren'iar.

<sup>26</sup> The review was looking at *The Princess*, *Maud*, *Enoch Arden* and *Idylls of the King*; and the comment was also backed up by similar observations by Emile Montégut (1866) in his article 'Enoch Arden et les poèmes populaires d'Alfred Tennyson' (see Ann Kennedy Smith, Ch. 1, this volume).

laureate to focus on something more akin to his indolent vocation, something more whimsically romantic, such as, for instance, these ‘delightfully English’ legends:

There is no passion, and one’s heart is scarcely moved upon reading. As regards its lyrical pathos, as well as purely dramatic aspects of the work, the palm of glory goes unreservedly to Swinburne’s *Bothwell*. Tennyson need not grieve: there are other roads to Corinth! He has already been there once, and will return again, when through the morning mist he sets off on his venture in the company of some kind of a Vivien’s sister or the Maid of Astolat. (Re-r 1876, 268)

As one can see, Tennyson’s writing was not easy work, even for the reported connoisseurs of English letters, who seemed to be put off by the slow sculpture of his verse, and for whom he was only at ease when in his own gracious realm of fantasy and chivalric legend. Was there an element of national prejudice that marked such an impatient and disconcerted response? The answer is yes and no. Yes, largely because of the defiant inability to move beyond the national cliché of poetic expression, marked either by the ravings of a poignant melodrama or by the eternal struggle with the alien world; and no, because of some endemic features of Tennyson’s talent. Tinted by the aura of elegiac complacency, his works do not belong among those easily appreciated by the foreign eye: they are indeed permeated by the spirit of England, but of that England which very few in Russia could have known or understood. For those born outside the native tradition, he was largely associated with everything that became an iconic Victorian England in their own minds – a young maiden, a gentlemen’s conversation, proper manners and a sweet home.

The real shift in the Russian reception of Tennyson occurred at the beginning of the 1890s. Due to a combination of some literary and extra-literary factors, this period was marked by a genuine flash of interest (perhaps the most prominent in the Russian context) in the poet's writings, his life, his style and his contribution to the general development of British literary thought.

The death of Tennyson in 1892 had a strong resonance in Western countries, and its far-reaching repercussions were immediately echoed in the Russian cultural milieu. The obituaries were published in several major literary journals. *Zhivopisnoe obozrenie* (The picturesque review) (1892), stated:

One of the greatest poets of his time has recently passed away. As regards his vocation, Tennyson largely belonged to the Romantic tradition; he was a poet of refined sensitivity, which was masterfully rendered in his verse, full of harmony and music. Religious and moral motifs in his oeuvre contributed strongly to his fame. Many of his poems have been translated into European languages.

*Niva* (1892) maintained that: 'One can say with some certainty that few poets have ever enjoyed the favours of the Muse as Tennyson did, and fewer still were able to use this fortune in quite the same way.'

A few days later, *Zhivopisnoe obozrenie* (1892.2, 256) published an extensive bibliographical note on the laureate with an impressive picture of the poet, and *Sever* (*The North*, 1892) produced a detailed account of the memorial ceremony in Westminster Abbey:

England has lost one of its greatest poets – Alfred Tennyson [...] Within his country, Tennyson’s glory and success would grow up until the day of his death. The funeral took place in Westminster Abbey on 30 September [12 October]. People crowded into this grandiose building; prominent political and literary figures, as well as the Royal family, sent a mass of wreaths, which were laid on the tomb in Poets’ Corner. Lords Salisbury, Rosebery, and the Marquess of Dufferin were all in attendance, and the Queen’s representatives, together with the members of the Royal Family and other dignitaries, escorted the coffin from the entrance of the Abbey to the tomb. A large crowd of people gathered outside the Abbey.

In the article that appeared in *Knizhki nedeli* (Books of the week), a well-known contemporary critic, Platon Krasnov maintained that Tennyson had proved himself as the first and the best of the English poets: a herald of grace, a ‘troubadour of beauty’, in the words of Krasnov, he was comparable to no lesser classic than Zhukovsky, the great founder of the Russian lyrical school:

Paradoxes aside, one can say that had Zhukovsky not been writing in the 20s and 30s, but had instead surfaced in the 60s, he would have been a Tennyson. The English poet has the same purity of mind and sense of spiritual beauty as his Russian counterpart – all, but without this mystical fog that plagued the Romantics, including Zhukovsky. This, of course, makes Tennyson’s poetry even more viable. (Krasnov 1892, 189).

In response to such a veering round of public favour, Tennyson’s works proliferated rapidly through the Russian book market; quite often these volumes were accompanied by a biographical foreword or an extensive critical account of the poet’s texts. Though largely favourable in tone, these first examples of a systematic approach still bore witness

to a somewhat disconcerted position among the Russian literati, for those who were now writing on the wave of Tennyson's fame had to find explanations for the years of profound indifference and neglect. In this context, one can point, for instance, to the 1895 Russian edition of *Maud*, translated by A. M. Fedorov as *Magdalena* (Tennison 1895.2) and introduced by a critical essay of Ivan Ivanov. While emphasizing the moral power of the poet's writings that, according to the critic, would 'affirm his glory among all future generations', the essay made a special issue of the fact that nobody, though they had never said as much explicitly hitherto, 'had ever had any doubts in the artistic merits of Tennyson's works' (Ivanov 1895, xiii).

The critic Vladimir Chuiko – himself a prolific translator of Balzac, Stendhal and Heinrich Heine – commented on the role of Tennyson within the British canon. Neither too generous, nor particularly well-informed, the critic had no time in his albeit lengthy essay to go deeply into the centuries-old poetic tradition; in a few strokes he presented Tennyson as an abstracter of the quintessence, an icon of the English myth, and an epitome of the long-established social order – a notion that was completely alien to the turbulent Russian conditions, but something which is definitely worthwhile and to be considered by the more forward-looking progressive minds. 'There has never been such a poet in Russian literature,' wrote Chuiko,

that social equilibrium into which every Englishman is born, and which surrounds him while he grows, seems almost a distant myth to us. This equilibrium does not exist for us, and appears to us to be something bleak and pale, something that is about to disappear or has disappeared already. The Russians do not have the same solid historical and social pillars that uphold English society. Russian society is not yet organized; it is only now becoming ordered, and that is why the internal

spiritual makeup of a Russian person lacks this inward balance, which shines so vividly in every Englishman, and which is reflected accordingly in such a poet as Tennyson. (Chuiko 1892, 230)

In a slightly less straightforward manner, the anonymous article ‘Alfred Tennyson – the creator of the “Idylls of the King”’, published as a foreword to the first part of the Russian version of *Idylls of the King* (translated by Chiumina, it was printed in 1903 as a handsome folio volume with the original illustrations of Gustave Doré, which made a strong impression on the readers),<sup>27</sup> also tried to find its way round the issues of a non-committed reception. The apparent ‘contemporariness’ of the poet he claimed to be a cause of the most typical misjudgement, perpetrated by those lacking the benefit of a panoramic view, by those who are still too engaged and, consequently, too short-sighted to form an objective opinion even on the matters of their professional field:

Tennyson’s name is not widely known among Russian readers. On a rare occasion, one might stumble across a little poem, often poorly translated, containing the subtitle ‘from Tennyson’. Such poems give only the remotest of impressions of their original author; while Alfred Tennyson, poet-laureate to the English Queen Victoria, deserves the attention of Russian readers no less than Byron and Shelley. In our opinion, the reason for Tennyson’s relative obscurity in the eyes of the Russian audience is, first and foremost, his contemporariness – Lord Tennyson only died in 1892. (Tennison A. 1903–04, iii)

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<sup>27</sup> Gustave Doré collaborated on the 1868 English edition of Tennyson’s poem (London, Edward Moxon). For more details see Gilles Soubigou (Ch. 2, this volume).

These notes of a somewhat repentant hesitation disappeared rapidly with the tide of Tennyson's recognition. For instance, they were completely effaced in the preface to the second part of the aforementioned translation, published just a year later, in 1904. 'The Knights of the Round Table', it consisted of a detailed summary of King Arthur's legends, intertwined with the laudatory comments on Tennyson's narrative merits and poetic craft. Charmed by the simplicity and grandeur of his style, the essay saw the poet as the greatest master of the age, who had cast new light on the ancient epic and had revived with admirable vivacity the spirit and the language of the old legend:

Tennyson is the author of a masterful adaptation of the most ancient British legends of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table. Apart from some revisions, the poet has made few additions of his own; his work, however, is more valuable as a result, and has drawn more interest in this genre of his writing. The 'Idylls of the King' are infused with the delightful spirit of the past, and at the same time they are profoundly real; and whatever is set there by the figments of the author's imagination does not conflict with historical truth. (Tennyson A. 1903–04, i)

*Zavet voli* (A Testament of the Will), Konstantin Bal'mont's most comprehensive study, crowned the accolades of contemporary critique. It was published in the year of Tennyson's centenary, 1909, and should be considered a major landmark in the Russian critical reception of the poet's work. Bal'mont named Tennyson and Shelley as two pillars of the modern literary process; while acknowledging the latter as an unparalleled master of 'the universal and the cosmic', he granted all the laurels to the sublime elegance of Tennyson's verse. With much sympathy and understanding he described his talent as free from the prejudice of a wild passion; and he claimed that it would be this

loftiness of the moral emotion that people would always gain from contact with Tennyson's work. Outlining some characteristic features of his style, which he saw primarily in the 'clarity of a lyrically transposed feeling', Bal'mont carried out a penetrating analysis of the poet's work, in which he gave preference, rather unsurprisingly, to the poems he had selected for his own translations: 'The Voyage of Maeldune', 'The Lotos-Eaters' and 'The Lady of Shalott' (Bal'mont 1990, 535).

In this context, it is worth pointing out that by the time of this publication, the range of available translations from Tennyson had already become sufficiently large. The turn of the century saw a real climax in the history of Russian Tennysonianism. Numerous versions of his poems were released by literary amateurs and professional translators, who now moved away from the formerly attractive folklore motifs; and Tennyson's poetry was appreciated as sheer poetry. Against this tide of interest, there were even attempts to offer his works to theatre-lovers. For instance, in 1895, the artistic journal *Teatral* (The Theatre-goer) published a Russian translation of *The Cup*,<sup>28</sup> and in 1909 it was followed by a liberal variation on 'Lancelot and Elaine' – one of the poems from the *Idylls of the King* cycle, which was transformed into a four-act fairy-tale drama (Burenin 1909), entitled, in a rather melodramatic fashion, *Pesn' liubvi i smerti* (The Song of Love and Death). Speaking of these enticing explorations of Tennyson's poems, one should also mention a remarkable endeavour to adapt his verse for the children's audience. In 1904 Alexandra Miloradovich<sup>29</sup> published a volume of fairy tales, which contained her interpretations of 'Sir Galahad' (1842) and 'The Eagle. Fragment' (1851), a wonderfully

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<sup>28</sup> Alfred Tennyson (1895.1) 'Kubok', Mirovich N. (pen-name of Z. S. Ivanova) (trans.).

<sup>29</sup> Alexandra Miloradovich was a daughter of Alexander Vasil'chikov, the director of the Hermitage Museum, who published under her husband's name.



illustrated collection addressed specifically to the members of the Imperial Family; the text was saturated with graphic, boldly delineated images, which in their colourful mosaic were to make a strong impression on the young readers:

Utes skhvativ v krivykh kogtiakh,	Having seized the rock in his crooked claws,
On blizok solntsu na gorakh,	He is akin to the sun upon the mountains,
Gde lish' efir tsarit; v nogakh,	Where only the ether rules; at his foot
V morshchinakh okean polzet,	The wrinkled ocean is crawling,
A on sledit s svoikh vysot	And he is watching from his height
I molnienosno nispadet.	And will fall down as lightning.

(Miloradovich 1904, 95)

Considering the variety of poems available to the general readership at the time, those most favoured by Russian translators were ‘Lady Godiva’, ‘The Dying Swan’, ‘Lady Clara Vere de Vere’, ‘The Lady of Shalott’ and the cycle *In Memoriam*. All these works, different in their content and poetic style, inspired memorable interpretations from the Russian writers and translators, who saw Tennyson as a master of allegories, a poet of social significance and of psychological depth, a poet of great abstract ideas, which, in one way or another, they found concordant with their own aesthetic views. In February 1897 Bal'mont wrote to G. G. Bakhman from Paris: ‘I have translated from Tennyson “The Voyage of Maeldune”, “The Lotos-Eaters” and “The Lady of Shalott”. I am in full admiration of these three works’ (Bal'mont 1990, 591). Bal'mont was enthralled with the purity of Tennyson’s style, with his gracious realm of fantasy and his exquisite literary taste. Captivated by the evocative power of Tennyson’s symbols, he responded with a nostalgically mournful elegy ‘The Swan’ (1895) – a liberal variation on the laureate’s

early poem, ‘The Dying Swan’ (1830). Instilled by the moral grandeur of Tennyson’s feeling, his poem conjured a sombrely moving image of a dying bird – a transfigured recollection of the decadence and grandeur of *la belle époque*, and a poignant epitaph to the heralds of its legendary spirit.

These very notes were picked up and elaborated in Ivan Bunin’s (1906) translation of ‘Godiva’. As a follower of the Golden Age – Pushkin tradition, coloured, perhaps, by some darker decadent notes – Bunin was primarily interested in the archetypal aspect of the legend. Thus, for instance, in his opening of the poem he deliberately tried to blur the time/place reference of the story, giving it the universal quality of a myth, uprooted from the concreteness of its historical setting: to name but a few details, the time span of the narrative is vaguely delineated as ‘approximately a thousand years ago’; and the location is only identifiable through the title of the protagonist – the spouse of the Duke of Coventry – instead of Tennyson’s (1837, 173) somewhat more specific affiliation ‘who ruled in Coventry’:

Godiva [...]	Godiva [...]
Supruga grafa Koventri, chto pravil	The spouse of Count Coventry, who ruled
Nazad tomu pochti tysiachelet'e,	Almost thousand years ago,
Liubila svoi narod i preterpela	Loved her people and suffered
Ne men'she nas. (Bunin 1967, 380)	Not less than us.

In his image of Lady Godiva, Bunin saw the archetypal representation of human love, dignifying loyalty and the sense of justice, all edifying qualities of the human race that at that time were firmly associated with – and lamented as – the twilight of time-honoured tradition, crushed ruthlessly by the industrialism of the new age. The poem,

however, projected something more than Bunin's personal emotional fervour and was read as an overall response to those who accused Tennyson of mannerism and banality of thought. He managed to put across all the reflective power of Tennyson's ballad, turning it into a mouthpiece for generational anxieties and concerns.

Some twenty-five years later this indicative reading of the poem resonated in the poetry of Osip Mandelstam – a major Russian modernist author and the voice of another 'threshold' generation, who lived to see the bold advance of the Soviet regime. Trapped in the shrewdness of the socialist-realist culture, Mandelstam juxtaposed it with the bygone world of old masters, which in his poem 'With this magnificent world I was only connected as a child' (1931) was incarnated in the golden-haired figure of Lady Godiva:

Ne potomu l', chto ia videl na detskoj kartinke  
 Ledi Godivu s raspushchennoi ryzheiu grivoi,  
 Ia povtoriaiushche pro sebia pod surdinku:  
 Ledi Godiva, proshchai [...] Ia ne pomniu, Godiva.

It may be because in a children's picture I saw  
 Lady Godiva, draped in a flowing red-haired mane,  
 I repeat to myself furtively  
 Farewell Lady Godiva [...] Godiva, I do not  
 remember.

(Mandelstam 1990, 168)

The exact source of Mandelstam's image is uncertain. It may be related to the famous painting of Lady Godiva by John Collier (c. 1897) or to that by Marshall Claxton

(1850), or indeed to the picture by Edwin Landseer (1865)<sup>30</sup> – all of them depicting a beautiful red-haired woman, riding gracefully on a white horse. However, among these highly evocative portrayals of the legend, one should not rule out the import of Bunin’s poem. Writing during the terror of Stalin’s Russia, when Bunin’s works were banned due to his active anti-Soviet campaign – hence, ‘I repeat to myself furtively’, in fear of being heard and denounced – Mandelstam turned the motif of Godiva into a cultural symbol of the pre-revolutionary world, cut off and destroyed by the Bolshevik upheaval. For somebody uprooted from the tradition, it acquired all the undertones of ghostly recollections of the past, of a last farewell to lost ideals, and the forbidden memories dissolved in a whisper.<sup>31</sup> Forty years later, in the 1970s, Josef Brodsky yet again returned to what has now become a canonical reading of the icon. Isolated and exiled from his native country, and in the moment of utmost desperation, nostalgia and distress, he called his ‘lost motherland’ Lady Godiva, thus continuing a dialogue set long before his time in the evocative lines of Bunin’s verse:

V polnoch' vsiakaia rech'  
Obretaet ukhvatki sleptsa;

At midnight any kind of talk  
acquires the habits of a blind,

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<sup>30</sup> All three pictures are in the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum collection in Coventry.

<sup>31</sup> In an article from 1991, dedicated to Mandelstam’s poem, Brodsky claims that the prototype of the poet’s Godiva was Vera Sudeikina (later, Vera Stravinsky); an actress and a painter, one of the most remarkable women of the age, she was the wife of the Russian avant-garde painter and stage designer Sergei Sudeikin and afterwards, of the composer Igor Stravinsky. Mandelstam was a frequent guest at the Sudeikins’ house in 1917, in Koktebel, a small Crimean town on the Black Sea: ‘There is an old photograph of a woman’, he maintains, ‘portrayed in semi-profile and with the flowing chestnut-bronze hair, she looks at you and at the same time through you; and this hair was to become first the golden fleece [Sergei Sudeikin was one of the designers of the artistic journal the *Golden Fleece*] and then a “flowing red-haired mane” in Mandelstam’s poem’ (quoted in O. I. Glazunova 2005, 48).

Tak chto dazhe 'otchizna' na oshchup'- So that even 'motherland', when probed  
 kak Ledi Godiva.<sup>32</sup> by touch, feels like Lady Godiva.

To gain a deeper understanding of the Russian *fin-de-siècle* interest in Tennyson's oeuvre, one should dwell a while longer on the aesthetic platform of the Russian Symbolist school. Far from accepting the ready-made judgements of their predecessors, the cohort of these artists took pains to scrutinize the poet's writings from a fresh viewpoint; they need not grieve for the divorce of poetry from the reality of being, and saw in Tennyson's writing a fine reflection of their own philosophical stance. Born as a reaction to the pragmatism of the industrial revolution, Russian Symbolism was led by the artists who, in the words of Avril Pyman (1994, 1), "felt in their bones" that the veneer of the humanist Enlightenment was paper thin, and seemed to probe beyond the bounds of reason, to "open windows" and to move freely in the sphere of "the unbound". The search for these mysteries of the unknown, the poets' feeling of *l'au delà* was one of the major characteristics of symbolist aesthetics. Playing with the notion that reality cannot be absolute, they cultivated in themselves a feeling that, beyond the appearances of this world, there was another inexplicable, but yet essential, reality.

Baudelaire's sonnet *Correspondances* (1857), especially the lines where he speaks of the poet's intuition for 'higher realities':

Ayant l'expansion des choses infinies,  
 Comme l'ambre, le musc, le benjoin et l'encens  
 Qui chantent les transports de l'esprit et des sens. (Baudelaire 1959, 13)

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<sup>32</sup> Josef Brodsky's *Litovskii noktiurn* (Lithuanian nocturne) (1974) was written two years after the poet was expelled from the Soviet Union (Brodsky 1990, 327).

Have all the expansion of things infinite:  
 As amber, incense, musk, and benzoin,  
 Which sing the sense's and the soul's delight. (Baudelaire 1919, 149)

was immensely popular in Russia; and this acute and profound feeling, which Baudelaire called *le goût de l'infini*, was characteristic of all Russian artists. They all saw themselves as a group of the chosen ones – of those, who, endowed with a special feel for ultimate truth, were meant to reveal the universal voices to the world, to go beyond appearances and to bring together things apparently distinct, but intimately united.

One of the best examples of such a reflection on the mission of an artist can be found in the Russian adaptations of 'The Lady of Shalott' (1832) – a firm favourite among contemporary readers due to Bal'mont's renowned translation: first released in 1899 (Tennison 1899.2) under the title 'Volsheb'nitsa Shalot' (The Fairy of Shalott), it also featured in his 1908 collection *Iz chuzhezemnyh poetov* (From the foreign poets).<sup>33</sup>

Bal'mont's version of Tennyson's verse was written in the style of an enchanting fairy tale, full of poeticized mysticism in the setting and suggestive undertones in the plot. He also altered the title of the poem. By calling it 'The Fairy' rather than 'The Lady of Shalott', he drew attention to the magic power of the heroine (quintessential, for his reading of the story); and through outlining this eerie aura made her less subservient to the threat of the arcane curse:

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<sup>33</sup> The very first translation of the poem was produced by Olga Chiumina [Mikhailova] in 1892; entitled *Vladelitsa Shellota* (The Mistress of Shalott), it was nonetheless published some years later in her collection of poems *Stikhotvoreniia* (1897, 108–13). Both translations are now published in Alfred Tennison 2007, 357–62 and 52–62. For a detailed comparison of both translations see Chernin and Zhatkin (2009.1).

There she weaves by night and day  
 A magic web with colours gay.  
 She has heard a whisper say,  
 A curse is on her [...] (Tennyson 1987, 1: 390)

Such an interpretation was, generally speaking, not at odds with Tennyson's story, which alluded to the mysterious power of the Lady through the reference to the 'magic web' that she 'weaveth steadily' (Tennyson 1987, I: 390), as well as through the night-time whisper of the reaper, who explicitly addressed his Lady as a 'fairy' ('Tis the fairy / Lady of Shalott' (Tennyson 1987, I: 390)). The accents, however, were completely different in Bal'mont's interpretation. In his rendition of the verse, he played down the magic qualities of the web, calling it simply 'tkan`' ('a fabric'), but at the same time placed extra emphasis on the mystic skills and mastery of its maker:

Pred neiu tkan' gorit, skvozia,	A fabric is burning in front of her; slipping
Ona priadet, rukoi skol'zia,	through it, she weaves, gliding along it her hand.
Ostanovit'sia ei nel'zia,	She must not stop,
Chtob glianut' vniz na Kamelot.	To look down at Camelot.
Prokliat'e zhdet ee togda,	For she is cursed,
Grozit bezvestnaia beda,	And threatened with a mysterious danger.
I vot ona priadet vseгда,	So that she always weaves,
Volshebnitsa Shalot.	The Fairy of Shalott.

(Tennison 2007, 358)

Behind the mesmerizing plotline of Tennyson's legend, Bal'mont saw deep meditations on the creative process; while the Lady, weaving her tissue, epitomized an

artist crafting his verse. Within the framework of his reading, an artist was paralleled to a powerful enchanter, whose magic gift will perish from the direct encounter with the crudeness of the world ('A curse is on her if she stay / To look down to Camelot' [Tennyson 1987, 1: 390]) and who should only work his way through the mirror of symbols – an intricate allegory of poetic imagination. In his critical study of the poem, he elaborated further on the subject, describing it as a 'twofold path in the dual nature of creativity' (Bal'mont 1990, 538). A true artist, in Bal'mont's words, is always presented with a double dilemma: he can either fabricate the magic tissue of his art, staying in the Platonic world of symbols and illusions, or gaze directly into the dazzling reality of being, which may indeed transform the nature of his oeuvre, but will lead to the death of the blinded creator:

An artist can remain eternally in a remote dream, beyond any live contact with the fluidity of life, and find himself in the guise of an enchanter – the fairy of Shalott. An artist can drink a full chalice of the flowing, revitalising wine of existence and have his art entirely transformed; but in this case he must inevitably face the suffering of death – must die in his enchantingly enclosed self and emerge from this crystal kingdom of reflections, a place untroubled by passing shadows that are merely reflected off in the artistically woven fabric. (Bal'mont 1990, 538)

Bal'mont's reading of the poem was undoubtedly keen, original and deeply reflective, but, perhaps, slightly overwhelming as regards the doctrine of the Symbolist school: the divine mission of an artist that eludes the understanding of the vulgar; his ability to redress reality by tuning into the fugitive voices from *l'au delà* – it was this allegorical, not to say mystical, dimension of Tennyson's verse (whether or not present in the



original) which appealed to Bal'mont in his creative dialogue with the poet and which came out very prominently, for instance, in his interpretation of 'Locksley Hall':

Zdes' u bukhty prokhodil ia i pital svoi iunyi son  
Zacharovannost'iu znan'ia, dolgoi svodkoiu Vremen. (Bal'mont 1990, 536)

Here, near the bay, I passed by and nourished my juvenile reverie  
with the enchantment of knowledge, and the long chronicle of Times.

For all his goodwill, Bal'mont took considerable liberties with the original, altering and amplifying as he saw fit ('Here about the beach I wandered, nourishing a youth sublime / With the fairy tales of science, and the long result of Time' [Tennyson 1987, 2: 121]). He not only spoke of the concreteness of the old castle and the delightful memories of the bygone youth, but instilled Tennyson's lines with the existential wisdom of a distant observer, endowed with the power of connecting the present and the past through the universality of eternal values.<sup>34</sup> He spoke about the deceptiveness of knowledge and the Gnostic limits of reflective thought, thus projecting an overarching conceptual dimension on the entire volume of Tennyson's oeuvre, which perhaps would be a bit premature, knowing what one reads into the work of a 30-year-old poet. 'There is great sadness in great knowledge,' wrote Bal'mont,

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<sup>34</sup> These metaphysical notes were completely absent from the first translation of the poem produced by Chiumina in 1893 (Tennyson 1893.3): 'Zdes' zhe, s iunoshei guliaia u pribrezhnykh skal, / Uvlechenie naukoj v nem ia pobuzhdal' (Here, while walking with a young man at the seaside rocks, / I inspired his love for science). Shelgunov's later version (1899) was much more exact in terms of both, the content and the philosophical undertones of the text: 'Zdes' u voln morskikh pitali dukh i razum iunyi moi / Skazki chudnye nauki, plod raboty vekovoi' (Here at the sea waves, my young spirit and mind were nourished / by the marvellous tales of science – the result of centuries of labour) (Tennyson 1899.1).

and the longsome passage of time [...] infused his [Tennyson's] soul with this beautiful sadness, which fills us when we sit and listen to the repetitive voice of the Ocean, and gaze out into its blue vastness, and see its new distances, and yet greater new distances together with its ever remote unattainability. (Bal'mont 1990, 536)

To justify this kind of imposing and somewhat overbearing approach, one can only say that the notion of time, the meditations on the temporality of being and the role of memory in the existential experience of human life had a very special significance for the generation of the *fin-de-siècle* Russian authors; and for many it was indeed prevalent in their overall attitude to the world. They had an acute feeling of crossing the threshold, of being trapped in the Orphic plea for 'the moment to return' and in the desire to turn the corner and to transcend this moment, immortalizing it in their poetry and their art. In search for a mouthpiece for the full complexity of these emotions, their specific interest in Tennyson's cycle *In Memoriam A.H.H.* (1833–49) was not entirely coincidental.

In the 1880s Dmitrii Mikhailovsky (Tennison 1883, 1886) translated two poems of the cycle 'I envy not in any moods' (XXVII) and 'When on my bed the moonlight falls' (LXVII)<sup>35</sup> – both infused with the aura of deep pessimism and inescapable sorrow, with the gloomy thoughts on the futility of human life condemned to accept the loss of the dear. True to the original, there were no convulsions of grief, no heartrending cries, but a stoic conviction that the torture of this loss is still preferred to the emptiness of the deaf-to-love soul:

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<sup>35</sup> For a detailed analysis of the Russian translations of *In Memoriam* see Chernin and Zhatkin (2009.2).

Nam tiazhko milykh khoronit',	I hold it true, whate'er befall;
No eta gor'kaia poteria	I feel it, when I sorrow most;
Gorazdo luchshe, chem prozhit',	'Tis better to have loved and lost
Liubvi ne znav, liubvi ne veria.	Than never to have loved at all.
(Tennison 1883, Mikhailovsky [trans.])	(Tennyson 1987, 2: 345)

It is difficult for us to bury our dearest,  
 But this bitter loss  
 Is much better, than living  
 Without knowing and believing in love

Very much in the same vein, and in an attempt to highlight the ontological aspects of the verse, Fedor Chervinsky in his version of the seventh poem of the cycle 'Dark house, by which once more I stand' (published in 1892 in the journal *Vsemirnaia illiustratsiia* [World-wide illustration]) only cursorily mentioned the details of the setting – for instance, Tennyson's outline of the house – but placed full emphasis on the spectrum of emotions associated with the fugitive recollection of the happy days – the warmth and pleasure of a loyal smile, for a quiet talk or a cheering gesture of the dear friend:

O, kak chasto, smushchen'em tomim,	Dark house, by which once more I stand
Ia, schastlivyi i robkii, stoial pered nim,	Here in the long unlovely street,
Ozhidaia ulybki i tikhikh rechei,	Doors, where my heart was used to beat
I pozhat'ia ruki trepetavshei tvoei.	So quickly, waiting for a hand.
(Tennison 1892.2, Chervinsky [trans.])	(Tennyson 1987, 2: 325–26)

Oh, how often, swayed with bewilderment,

I stood in front of it, happy and timid,  
 Waiting for a smile and for a quiet word,  
 And for a grasp of your trembling hand.

One of the most insightful interpretations of *In Memoriam*, however, was presented by Olga Chiumina (Tennison, 1901). She was a dedicated translator of Tennyson's writings, and it was through her efforts that a vast volume of the poet's work became available to the Russian public.<sup>36</sup> Chiumina turned her attention to four poems from the cycle, all of which were marked by a fine sense of form and precision in conveying the content. In 'I sometimes hold it half a sin' (V), for instance, she masterfully captured the author's distinction between the rational memory of facts and thoughts (embodied in language) and a much more powerful remembrance, ingrained in one's feelings. With a remarkable directness, she casts light on the inaptitude of verbal expression (which in her translation is even more pronounced than in Tennyson, as the overarching comparison with Nature is missing), contrasting it with the involuntary memory of emotions, sealed forever in the deep vibrations of the heart:

Vozmozhno vyrazit' stikhom	For words, like Nature, half reveal
Pechal' dushi lish' v polovinu.	And half conceal the Soul within
Kak plashch tiazhelyi v kholoda,	In words, like weeds, I'll wrap me o'er,
Slova – ot skorbi mne zashchita,	Like coarsest clothes against the cold:

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<sup>36</sup> Her other translations from Tennyson included: 'Two Voices' (Tennison 1889); 'Mariana' and 'Mariana in the South' ('Mariana' in Chiumina 1897, 114-18); 'Vladelitsa Shellota' (The Lady of Shalott) in Chiumina 1897, 108-13); 'Lady Clara Vere de Vere' (Tennison 1892.1); 'Locksley Hall' (Tennison 1893.2), 'The Dying Swan' (Tennison 1893.2); *Idylls of the King* (Tennison 1903-04). For a close analysis of Chiumina's translations see Chernin and Zhatkin (2010).

No tu pechal', chto v serdtse skryta –  
Ne peredam ia nikogda.

(Tennison 1901, Chiumina [trans.])

The sorrow of the soul  
can be only partially expressed in verse.  
Like a heavy cloak in cold days,  
The words are my shield from grief.  
But the sorrow that is concealed in my  
heart – I fail to render.

But that large grief which these enfold  
Is given in outline and no more.

(Tennyson 1987, 2: 322)

As regards other poems from the cycle, she also translated ‘I sing to him that rests below’ (XXI), ‘Be near me when my light is low’ (L) and ‘Do we indeed desire the dead’ (LI), in which she managed to convey not only all the nuances of the emotionally charged meaning, but also their uniform stylistic measure, poignant and monotonous as the grief itself.

Speaking of the metaphysical motifs of Tennyson’s writings and their specific appeal for the Russian Symbolist authors, one should certainly mention Vladimir Solov’ev, a poet, translator and one of the major pillars of the movement, whose theoretical postulations shaped the philosophical outlook of the entire generation of the younger Symbolist school (Alexander Blok, Andrei Belyi, Viacheslav Ivanov and others). Solov’ev (1893) released only one translation from Tennyson’s poems, ‘The Silent Voices’ (1892), the poet laureate’s last work, published on the eve of his interment in Westminster Abbey. The poem, largely known in Russian by its first line ‘When all black and dumb [...]’ (Kogda, ves' chernyi i nemoi [...]), was released in 1893 under the title *Predsmertnoe stikhotvorenje Tennisona* (A valedictory poem of Tennyson) while its autograph contained a somewhat ironical comment: ‘A valedictory poem of Tennyson

(but not mine)' (Solov'ev 1974, 329).<sup>37</sup> On the one hand, the choice of a poem with such an ominous provenance was hardly surprising for Solov'ev, who was prone to big gestures and dramatic poses; on the other, its text happens to be uncannily representative of all theories and postulations of the grand master and did, in fact, appear as a true and concise sublimation of his metaphysical views: his idea of two realities – heaven and earth – between which the human soul was bound to wander in its eternal search for universal correspondences:

<p>Kogda ves' chernyi i nemoi,          Niskhodit chas zhelannykh snov,          Ty ne zovi menia domoi,          Bezmolvnyi golos mertvetsov!          O, ne zovi menia tuda,          Gde svet dnevnoi tak odinok.          Von za zvezdoi zazhglas' zvezda,          Ikh put' bezbrezhen i vysok:          Tuda – v sverkaiushchii potok,          V zavetnyi chas poslednikh snov          Vleki menia, bezmolvnyi zov.</p>	<p>When the dumb Hour, clothed in black,          Brings the Dreams about my bed,          Call me not so often back,          Silent Voices of the dead,          Toward the lowland ways behind me,          And the sunlight that is gone!          Call me rather, silent voices,          Forward to the starry track          Glimmering up the heights beyond me          On, and always on!</p>
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(Solov'ev 1974, 198)

(Tennyson 1987, 3: 251)

When, all black and dumb,  
 the hour of the cherished dreams falls upon me,  
 Don't call me back, you,

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<sup>37</sup> The autograph with the inscription was in the album of S. M. Martynova (private collection of F. A. Petrovsky). The poem was dedicated to Olga Ivanovna Smirnova – a friend of Vladimir Solov'ev and a woman of considerable literary talent, she was a daughter of Alexandra Osipovna Smirnova-Rosset, who was a friend of Pushkin, Lermontov and Gogol (Solov'ev 1974, 329).

The silent voice of the dead!  
 Oh, do not call me there,  
 Where the daylight is so lonely.  
 Look, one after another the stars appeared in the sky  
 Their track is limitless and high.  
 There – into this glittering flow,  
 In this cherished hour of the last dreams,  
 Keep calling me, the silent plea.

Unfortunately, at the end of the 1900s, not entirely unconnected with the radical revision of Tennyson's legacy and reputation in Britain, the interest in his poetry in Russia was fading away. The Bolshevik revolution put a final and firm ban on the queen's poet; and up until the 1990s any mention of his works was exceedingly sparse.<sup>38</sup> The new wave of attention to Tennyson's writings emerged only in post-perestroika times and was largely stimulated by the seminal review article of A. N. Girivenko (1993), who was the first to highlight the lack of modern critical examination of the poet and to provide a very useful bibliography of up-to-date Russian translations (with some major additions and corrections to the original list compiled by N. N. Bakhtin back in 1892 [Bakhtin 1892]). Among significant contributions to the contemporary Russian Tennysonianana, one should mention two relatively recent articles by Pavshok (2007, 2008); a series of meticulous works by Chernin and Zhatkin,<sup>39</sup> focused on the nuanced comparative analysis of the early Russian translations of Tennyson's poems; and a

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<sup>38</sup> In his major review article A.N. Girivenko (1993, 27) traces precisely four publications related to Tennyson in Soviet Russia: M.I. Gordyshevskaja (1972) in *Kratkaia literaturnaia entsiklopediia* (Concise Literary Encyclopaedia); L. M. Arinshtein (1963); S.P. Baltina (1979); and S.M. Buianovskaia (1987).

<sup>39</sup> The series includes articles on the Russian translations from Tennyson consolidated in Chernin (2009) and Zhatkin (2014).

revealing review article of Grigorii Kruzhkov, ‘I hear a voice that’s speaking in the wind!’ (2006). The latter not only traced the detailed biography of the poet, but established some perceptive links with the classic tradition of Keats and Shelley, examined Tennyson’s influence on the development of English poetry in general and outlined its repercussions in the Russian cultural field. Speaking of the recent editions of Tennyson’s poems, one should point in the direction of a completely new translation of *Idylls of the King*, made by Victor Lunin (Moscow, Grant, 2001) and supplemented by Denis Gordeev’s exquisite illustrations; as well as a comprehensive edition of the earlier translations of Tennyson’s poems, edited by Grigorii Kruzhkov, *The Lady of Shalott and Other Poems* (Moscow, Tekst, 2007), in which English originals are displayed alongside their best Russian interpretations produced by Bunin, Bal'mont, Aleksei Pleshcheev, Samuil Marshak, Chiumina and others. Both volumes made a strong contribution to promoting Tennyson’s works among contemporary Russian readers, covering the gap of almost eighty years of silence and neglect.

As regards the Soviet generations, they seemed to be cut off from the larger part of Tennyson’s oeuvre, for a royalist poet was not favoured by the communist regime.<sup>40</sup> His poems were not translated, the old translations were not reprinted, and his legacy was of a very marginal importance on the Soviet cultural scene. But was it entirely so?

*Dva Kapitana* (The Two Captains) by Benjamin Kaverin (written 1938–44) was a cult novel among the post-World War II Soviet readers. Considered one of the most popular works of its time, *Dva Kapitana* won the USSR State Prize in 1946 and was

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<sup>40</sup> The situation was different regarding, for instance, the reception of Byron in Soviet times: he ‘was held up as a revolutionary poet, persecuted by a reactionary government, an exile and a militant in the war for freedom’ (Diakonova and Vatsuro 2004, 347).



reissued forty-two times in twenty-five years. The novel tells the story of a Russian youth, Alexander Grigor'ev, as he grows up through tsarist Russia, to the October Revolution and World War II. At the centre of the story is Grigor'ev's search for the lost Arctic expedition of Captain Ivan Tatarinov and the discovery of Severnaia Zemlia (Northern Land – an archipelago in the Russian high Arctic). The novel had a motto, or more precisely a punchline, that also made up an eye-catching ending for the entire book. This was a very powerful line, which somehow managed to capture the keynotes in the spirit of the post-war age, when the country, having come victorious out of the great battle, still believed that nothing was impossible in this regenerating world. There were many in the country who knew the motto; and there were many who could probably recite it by heart; but among them there were hardly any who were even remotely aware that throughout all these years they were inspired by Lord Tennyson's words: Borot'sia i iskat', naiti i ne sdavat'sia ('To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield').<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Tennyson, *Ulysses* (1987, 1: 620); also quoted in Kruzhkov (2006, 167). This last line from Tennyson's *Ulysses* was inscribed on the wooden cross, erected (January 1913) as a permanent memorial to the Antarctic expedition of Robert Scott on the Observer Hill – the final camp of the expedition that also became their tomb. Most recently, this line was on the wall at the entrance to the London Olympics stadium (2012).