

The Lady with the Dog by Anton Chekhov in translations by C. Garnett and I. Litvinov

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Anton Chekhov has a canonical translator of his works into English who still enjoys a status of an acknowledged mediator of Russian literature. To cite Conrad, “Chekhov, for us, is Mrs. Garnett, and Mrs. Garnett is Chekhov – for better or for worse” [May 1994: 36]. On the one hand, Chekhov is well known to the English-speaking reader due to Constance Garnett’s translations. On the other hand, psychological issues of Chekhov’s well-structured prose whose selection of words contributes to precise conceptualizations that unite meaning and form remain undermined in her translation efforts. Although Garnett’s monographic translations of Chekhov are marked by consistencies of tone and manner [Gupta, Johnson 2005: 15], as a single translator her translation faults could have undermined Chekhov’s innovations in short fiction. It is worth noting that many decades later it was realized that Chekhov’s “simplicity <...> belies the intricacy of his craft” [Stanion 1993]. For example, no English translation was able to cope with Chekhov’s synecdoche in *Говорили, что на набережной появилось новое лицо: дама с собачкой*; Constance Garnett selected *a new person*, Hingley and Magarshak resorted to *a new arrival*, and Ivy Litvinov’s choice was *a newcomer*. But Chekhov uses the synecdoche in repetition, first in the singular and then in the plural. Similar repetitions, which are characteristic of James Joyce and Ernest Hemingway among other renowned English-speaking short story writers, are lost in translation, as if Joyce’s *Dubliners* had not already been published when Constance Garnett translated Chekhov’s short fiction. The seeming simplicity of Chekhov’s short fiction may be traced in the variants of the title of the story under analysis: Is it “a lady” (Hingley’s new Oxford Chekhov), “the lady” (C. Garnett and I. Litvinov) or simply “lady” (R.E. Matlaw’s 1964 edition)? Or: Is it “the dog”, “the pet dog”, “lapdog” or, in Hingley’s translation, “a dog”? There is a shift from the person who is unique, namely, “the lady with the dog” and someone who is one of many others, that is, “a lady with a dog”.

The purpose of the present article is to compare two translations of *The Lady with the Dog* by A.P. Chekhov conducted by Constance Garnett and Ivy Litvinov. The short story under analysis is viewed as “a supreme example of Chekhov’s conciseness” [Calder 1976: 262]. The story’s meaning is identified as “a craving for dignity” that binds together a man and a woman in unhappiness [Calder 1976: 251]. Keeping in mind Calder’s conceptualization of UNHAPPINESS, I am going to interpret the story as representatives of the source language culture and then investigate the shifts that may be attributable to assuming culture.

First, I will model Chekhov’s story and identify its conceptualizations and individual-authorial concepts. Second, I will find out how their meaning is transferred in both translations. Third, I will analyze how loyal both translators are to Chekhov’s individual-authorial style. Finally, I will evaluate both translations in regard to what is expected from the cognitive model of translation.

1. Modeling macrostructure and following it through translation

Like other short story writers in the 20th century, Chekhov minimized the plot by paying attention to “other kinds of shift or movement – of mood and insight” [Disher 2001: 145]. In doing this, Chekhov pioneered what is known to be plotless short fiction. Stephens rightly claims that “our greatest insights about plot came from Chekhov” [Stephens 1986: 267]. However, this story is not without a plot: a man who is unhappily married meets at the resort a young woman with a dog who is, apparently, in the same situation; unlike him who attracts women and does not feel alone in such surroundings, she is by herself, without husband or acquaintances. Like a hunter, he decides on winning her in a usual way of a fling that is habitual to him. She takes the affair for a fall and they part without intention of seeing each other again. The typical story would have been over but not in this case because it appeared to be true love. Gurov goes to Anna’s native town to see her. They have changed under the influence of love. They continue living a double life, not knowing what to do in order to be happy. There are some conceptualizations that are crucial to the story’s macrostructure.

The first macrostructural ring corresponds to Chekhov’s part 1. The first problem area for translation is repetitions of the Russian verb *говорили* that opens the text of this story. From the narrator’s remarks it is clear that Gurov could have hardly talked about the woman with the men at Yalta; he must have received all information available about her from the women who were there and with whom the lady did not contact. From this, it may be inferred that the woman’s loneliness is something peculiar that interests Gurov. Later, when they walk round Yalta, they talk about many things, for Gurov loves talking with women. The verb *говорили* is repeated. Garnett translates this verb by two different verbs: *It was said* and *talked*. By this, the link is broken, for the story in Part 1 is led by this verb:

Говорили, что на набережной появилось новое лицо: дама с собачкой / It was said that a new person had appeared on the sea-front: a lady with a little dog (Garnett) / People were telling one another that a newcomer had been seen on the promenade--a lady with a dog (Litvinov).

Litvinov’s translation is faulty for such reasons: first, the translator decided on changing Chekhov’s punctuation, which distorts the message transferred; second, the promenade may be not a sea-front although the sea-front functions in Yalta as a promenade; third, the translator replaces holiday-makers by *people*. Garnett’s translation is more adequate, although the message that brings together an unknown woman and an interesting woman is missing. Gurov must have heard about this woman from his female acquaintances, so it is important to identify those holiday-makers who were mentioned under “it was said”.

*... но когда он находился среди женщин, то чувствовал себя свободно и знал, о чем говорить с ними.../ ... but when he was in **the company** of women he felt free, and knew what **to say** to them ... (Garnett) /...but felt **quite** at home among women, and knew **exactly** what **to say** to them... (Litvinov).*

Both translators add words to Chekhov’s text. “The company of women” is inferred from “among women” but the word “company” is in the implicit on Chekhov’s text. Litvinov disorients the reader by saying that Gurov felt “quite” free with women; on the contrary, he excelled at communicating with them through his talk with them. Garnett’s translation more responds to Chekhov’s text, since she avoids “exactly” that is inserted by Litvinov. Continuity of the repetition of the lexeme with the root *говорить* is retained by Garnett.

Это только принято говорить, что здесь скучно.../ That's only the fashion to say it is dull here (Garnett)/ It's the thing to say it's boring here (Litvinov).

The verb “to say” is retained in both translations, whereas Litvinov misses the repetition of the lexeme “bored”. The translation should be like this” They only say that it is boring here. It should be remembered that Gurov has a degree in philology, so he knows how to use words to his advantage. He hints that the secret life of holiday makers is hidden from the public. Both Anna and Gurov acknowledge that they are bored, and this is the background for a short romance.

... и начался шутливый, легкий разговор людей свободных, довольных, которым все равно, куда бы ни идти, о чем ни говорить. Они гуляли и говорили о том, как странно освещено море ... Говорили о том, как душно после жаркого дня /... and there sprang up between them the light jesting conversation of people who are free and satisfied, to whom it does not matter where they go or what they talk about. They walked and talked of the strange light on the sea... They talked of how sultry it was after a hot day (Garnett)/... and embarked upon the light, jesting talk of people free and contented, for whom it is all the same where they go, or what they talk about. They strolled along, remarking on the strange light over the sea ... They said how close it was, after the hot day (Litvinov).

Neither translator retains Chekhov’s repetitions: Garnett uses two different verbs, leaving three repetitions of “talk” and Litvinov uses three different lexemes instead of Chekhov’s repetitions. The choice of a noun “talk” would be perfect if the translator began her translation of the story with “They talked that...” because “talk” has an additional meaning of rumor that is implied in the first word of the story. “Conversation” is free from this meaning. The participle “remarking” is interpretive because the love affair began with the talk and developed through it. However, the change of linguistic form through “conversation” sounds good, since *разговор* and *говорить* look slightly different, although share the root of the word. On the one hand, Gurov uses his art of talk to seduce a young woman in his habitual manner. On the other hand, they talked and talked because it was interesting to them to be involved in this talk, which they had been missing with their spouses.

The same verb will be repeated at the story’s denouement: - *Перестань, моя хорошая, - говорил он ... Теперь давай поговорим... Потом они долго советовались, говорили о том, как избавиться от необходимости прятаться.../ Don't cry, my darling," he said ... Let us talk now ... Then they spent a long while taking counsel together, talked of how to avoid the necessity for secrecy... (Garnett) / "Stop crying, my dearest," he said. ...Now let us have a talk ... Then they discussed their situation for a long time, trying to think how they could get rid of the necessity for hiding (Litvinov).*

Again, Litvinov replaces translation by interpretation: “discussed” is the right word but it should be inferred by the reader from the repetition of “talk”, which is retained by Garnett. The fact that the lovers were talking over the situation gives the reader at least a slight hope that they will be able to ignore rumors of any kind and live in love, which is condemned by the public as the fall.

In our conception, short fiction is built on a macrostructure that consists of three interwoven rings. The first ring is a narrative of something that ends in an event that is conventional under given circumstances. The second ring is conflict of choice as the conventional event leads to a new encounter with something related to the conventional event but is not like that before. The third ring is an interpretive perspective in which self meets itself. This is an epiphanic focus that illumines the character, the narrator or the reader and reveals the truth about what has been told.

In the story, the first ring of Choice is formulated by the narrator: the man became acquainted with a woman, tied her up by intimacy, and parted with her. So, the conventional event was a love affair that was doomed to be over.

The second ring of Conflict of Choice builds on the narrated “became acquainted, had intimacy, and parted”. Unlike his conventional fading memories about an acquaintance, he continued thinking about her and dreamed of her. He felt as if they had never parted, and that was something he had never experienced in life. He was unable to follow his usual scheme (met – had intimacy – parted). He felt the woman’s presence everywhere. He became filled with the woman and love for her was growing deeper and deeper in his heart. A new encounter inside himself with a representative of “a lower race” whom he had treated, for the first time in his life, as a human being, his equal, led to new encounters with his beloved face-to-face. In Chekhov’s words, *Для него теперь на всем свете нет ближе, дороже и важнее человека / ... for him there was in the whole world no creature so near, so precious, and so important to him... (Garnett) / ... and he knew in a flash that the whole world contained no one nearer or dearer to him, no one more important to his happiness (Litvinov)*. The man thinks about the woman as “a human being”, so **no one** would be a good choice if this indefinite pronoun were not freely repeated. Litvinov is more precise in following Chekhov’s comparative adjectives, for Garnett’s *so* reduces what the man really feels. At the same time, Litvinov voluntarily puts **or** while Chekhov enumerates three constituents of Gurov’s love: she is the closest person to him, the most precious one, and the most important. Litvinov’s addition of **his happiness** is a complete failure because he is not thinking of HAPPINESS, he is thinking of the meaning of true love between a man and a woman, that is, she becomes all to him without which life is incomplete and meaningless.

The third ring may be inferred as a state of never like that, namely, being unable to live without her but taking no action (despite his going to her town) to be openly together. She says three times “never” she would be happy. He enquires himself three times how to change the situation, how to be free from the trap. The woman and the man are tuned to decision making and may be she is right that no end would be a happy love, since love and freedom are inseparable. They are pushed towards change by making a decision and even if they do not find it their victory over themselves is in this attempt at being together:

... теперь же ему было не до рассуждений, он чувствовал глубокое сострадание, хотелось быть искренним, нежным .../ but now he no longer cared for arguments; he felt profound compassion, he wanted to be sincere and tender. . . .(Garnett) / ... but now arguments were nothing to him, he felt profound pity, desired to be sincere, tender (Litvinov).

Chekhov signals the presence of the epiphanic moment by three stops, which Litvinov decides on not retaining. However, Litvinov retains the authorial punctuation in homogeneous “sincere, tender”, whereas Garnett adds a conjunction “and”. Hence, in the sentence with three stops both translators have losses in punctuation, which changes the meaning: Was the man sincere, tender, in other words, did he want to calm her down because he did not intend to break their relationship? Or couldn’t he be sincere because he was tortured by “How to be really together?” and no answer was found? His tenderness is in his words: *Что-нибудь придумаем /... let us think of some plan (Garnett)/ ...let us try and think what we are to do (Litvinov)*. In the original, the man says two words with deep compassion but there is no pragmatism in his words: his only plan is to see the woman once in two or three months secretly, anything else may even complicate things. It is specifically Russian to talk everything over again and again; this is a specifically Russian movement of the soul that is

essential to meaningful inner life. They are in love and they know HAPPINESS because they have done something to be together, and under their circumstances they cannot do more. The story ends with three stops – it is the reader’s pity that this couple’s barriers to LOVE and HAPPINESS are so strong:

*И казалось, что еще немного – и решение будет найдено ...до конца еще далеко-далеко и что самое сложное и трудное только еще начинается / And it seemed as though in a little while the solution would be found <...> they had still a long, long road before them, and that **the most complicated and difficult part of it** was only just beginning (Garnett)/ And it seemed to them that they were **within an inch of arriving at a decision**, the end was still **far, far away**, and that **the hardest, the most complicated part** was only just beginning (Litvinov).*

Again, both translators omit Chekhov’s punctuation, this time they avoid using a dash, which points to the repetition of “and”. Garnett’s “as though” is fatal to the decision, which it interprets it as unreal. This semantic load is on the verb “seem”. I would suggest it should be translated like that: And it seemed that they were almost there – and the solution would be found. Litvinov uses “decision” instead of “solution”, but the period of decision making is over because they are in love and they decided to love each other. They cannot leave their spouses because the church allows no divorce. They must leave their families and become outcasts: this is the decision, all the rest is the solution. But the end of their relationship was too, too long away, they have enough time to be radical if they outgrow their social belongings, stereotypes, and prejudices. The main solution deals with “how” to keep their love untouched by outside influences. Garnett’s “road” is too sentimental because it is clear that this couple’s love is their cross that they must carry as long as they can. But her **the most complicated and difficult part of it** is precise because it is one movement, linked by “and”, whereas Litvinov’s comma is more characteristic of assuming culture than with what is said by Chekhov.

So, at the macrostructural level the following features of two translations may be revealed:

- Repetitions of words that are crucial throughout the story are not sincerely followed, which distorts nuances of meaning that these repetitions carry.
- Both translators feel free to change Chekhov’s individual-authorial punctuation, which fails to show to the English reader the epiphanic moment (as shown above, the dash and three stops are significant to the focus of epiphany). To illustrate the point: *и тотчас же он пугливо огляделся: не видел ли кто?* is translated by Garnett without a colon and a question mark: *and he immediately looked round him, anxiously wondering whether any one had seen them*. The English participial construction, a favorite by V. Woolf, for example, is not suitable here because no continuity of movement is presupposed; neither is suitable the change of sentence type into an affirmative sentence. Also, when the man suggests he should go with the woman to her hotel, three stops make his proposal clear, as well as the woman’s consent to be with him – yet, Garnett avoids this important signal, which also shows that the talking time was over and they were silent preparing for this inevitable step. Without Chekhov’s punctuation, the delicate character of the situation is lost.
- Associative networks are not built by translators who translate the text linearly without checking its horizontal structure.

Geoffrey Borny rightly claims, “Chekhov refused to write about areas of experience outside his understanding” [Borny 2006: 36]. The discussed story is about tortures towards change, in which a talker at least once in his life turns into a doer when he comes to the provincial town to talk to his love about their unforgettable encounter and his true love.

2. Language conceptualization, consciousness, and culture in the target text

The translators cannot cope with Chekhov’s repetition of the title whose direct repetitions in the text are missing. Although both translators have inverted commas *the lady with the dog*, which should repeat the title, Garnett introduces such changes as *a lady with a little dog* that corresponds to Chekhov’s mentioning the breed of a dog, a white Pomeranian dog, omitting Chekhov’s repetitions of the breed (Garnett translates *с белым шпицем* as *the same white dog*). Unlike Garnett, Litvinov is less consistent, since her title of the story is *Lady with Lapdog*; however, in the text “lapdog” is not used. This distorts the meaning attributable to the Pomeranian whose name, standing at the grey fence that surrounds Anna’s house, Gurov suddenly forgets. Similarly, Litvinov changes Anna’s headwear of a married woman into a toque. Both translators have difficulty translating *в городском саду*: Garnett’s translation is *in the public gardens* and Litvinov’s translation is *municipal park*.

The story conceptualizes the concept of ACQUAINTANCE (ЗНАКОМСТВО), which in English culture is verbalized as “intimacy”. In the story, the woman in a beret (only married ladies in Russia were wearing such headwear) is walking alone with her pet dog. She notices nobody and remains an enigmatic little lady (she is not tall) with a little dog. Her only companion is her little dog. For an unknown reason, she forgets to change headwear at a fashionable sea resort (warning signs of some inner tumult). She is new to Yalta’s society but prefers to stay away from other holiday makers.

Yet, her presence is visible due to her beret and her dog. The female hunter is ready to seduce her by sympathizing with her dog. He knew his art of attracting women well: ... *манило их...* / ... *was something attractive and elusive which allured women* (Garnett) / *attracted women and caught their sympathies* (Litvinov). *Сближение*, or every *intimacy* in Garnett’s translation and *манило* are constituents of the man’s design of *a light and charming adventure* (Garnett) that he realized *at every fresh meeting with an interesting woman* (Garnett) classifying his adventures as *a swift, fleeting love affair, a romance with an unknown woman* (Garnett).

Hence, ACQUAINTANCE-ADVENTURE is the basic conceptualization at the beginning of the story. It may be ESCAPE from UNHAPPINESS on the woman’s side, which is emphasized by the root repetition of the Russian verb that corresponds to the English verb “talk” which both translators replace by “speak” (in Russian culture in such situations people talk rather than speak, otherwise no response is expected): ...*и говорят с ней только с одною тайною целью, о которой она не может не догадываться* / *and spoken to merely from a secret motive which she could hardly fail to guess* (Garnett) / *and speak to her, all the time with a secret aim she could not fail to divine* (Litvinov).

This basic concept of ACQUAINTANCE is linked with another concept of HAPPINESS that is fundamental to Russian culture. The man speaks about his victories over women and female attitudes to him as short-lived happiness: *благодарных ему за счастье, хотя бы очень короткое* / *and were grateful to him for the happiness he gave them, however brief it might be* (Garnett) / *and grateful to him for the happiness he gave them, however short-lived* (Litvinov). But although the word “happiness” is used, it is not HAPPINESS in Anna’s case:

но было видно, что у нее нехорошо на душе / yet it was clear that she was very unhappy (Garnett)/ but it was obvious that her heart was heavy (Litvinov).

Both translators are reluctant to use Chekhov's word that designates the Russian cultural concept SOUL. Garnett distorts the meaning by referring to the thematic layer of the concept HAPPINESS, whereas Litvinov replaces SOUL by HEART. However, in Russian consciousness SOUL and HEART are not the same: Anna's heart is heavy because her soul is not in harmony with what has happened: ...это сладкое забытье, это безумие/ this sweet delirium, that madness (Garnett) – again, this is not compared to that, what is felt is this and this: this sweet delirium, this madness. Because later “this” should be replaced by “that”, distanced from the experience: ...покроется в памяти туманом / would be **shrouded in a mist** in his memory (Garnett) / would **be nothing but a vague** memory (Litvinov).

Chekhov verbalizes ACQUAINTANCE through LONELINESS: two lonely people whose life is hopeless and boring find a new meaning in their relationship. They are attracted by their ESCAPE from loneliness and boredom. This is a new state of TOGETHERNESS when people are NOT ALONE and NOT BORED. In this state, however, they remain ALONE: he thinks about love as passion that brings short-lived state of happiness; she is alone in her tumult of the soul. They are together and separate simultaneously. Their state, on behalf of the woman, is identified by her:

Простые люди говорят: нечистый попутал. И я могу теперь про себя сказать, что меня попутал нечистый / Simple people say: “The Evil One has beguiled me.” And I may say of myself now that **the Evil One has beguiled me**” (Garnett) / The common people say they are snared by the Devil. And now I can say that **I have been snared by the Devil, too** (Litvinov).

Garnett's *the Evil One* does not correspond to “demon”, “devil” or “fiend”, whereas “beguiled” is suitable. It is important to retain the verb *говорят* because for the first time in her life the woman must be saying her thought to the man, evaluating her attitude and explaining why she is not happy despite his happiness, which is madness and sweet delirium.

In Russian, the saying *нечистый попутал* designates an unbelievable, unexplainable act. This is a state when a person is interested, involved, tied up to what has happened. The woman feels it because she was the first to recognize symptoms of her SOUL's AWAKENING for LOVE. Anna uses inversion while paraphrasing the saying, whereas this movement of the soul is not revealed by Garnett. Anna will have to live with this sin, as she has no intention to continue the affair after she leaves Yalta.

Back to the state of LONELINESS, the lovers remain tied up to each other by the memory of what was between them. Through his memories, he thinks of her and his memory shapes SOMETHING NEVER LIKE THAT BEFORE, which is DREAM, LANGUOR, and ANXIETY:

воспоминания переходили в мечты <...> И уже томило сильное желание поделиться с кем-то своими воспоминаниями <...> Ему хотелось повидаться с Анной Сергеевной и поговорить / and in his fancy the past was mingled with **what was to come** <...> He was **tormented by an intense desire to confide his memories to some one** <...> He wanted to see Anna Sergeyevna and **to talk with her** (Garnett) / and then memory turned into **dreaming** <...> He began to feel **an overwhelming desire to share his memories with someone** <...> He only knew that he must see Anna Sergeyevna, **must speak to her** (Litvinov).

Both translations are not free of faults. Garnett omits DREAM, which is different from what is to come because dreams may be realized or not. Chekhov uses a noun, so it is not a process of dreaming – it is a decision that is being shaped, a talker turns into a doer who will go and see the object of his love. The verb “talk” is present in Garnett’s translation with the retained conjunction, whereas Litvinov’s “must” in repetition, with a comma instead of the conjunction, sounds unlike a Muscovite who is slow to take action. He is going to talk to her because he must know whether she feels like him.

The concept of HEART is integrated into LOVE that is FILLED with HAPPINESS and DREAMS about the ONLY ONE: ... **наполняла** теперь всю его жизнь, **была его горем, радостью, единственным счастьем** /*filled his whole life now, was his sorrow and his joy, the one happiness that he now desired for himself* (Garnett)/ *now filled his whole life, was his grief, his joy, all that he desired* (Litvinov)

Litvinov fails to translate that Anna was from now on his happiness; instead she paraphrases this state but HAPPINESS in Russian culture is more than everything desired. Chekhov’s individual-authorial concept is HIS SOLE (HIS ONLY) HAPPINESS: she became his universe, he and she alone together, nobody else but them in their intimate world. “Grief” is also not a suitable word, for the oath at the wedding ceremony states, “in sorrow and in joy”. Both translators lose the triad of his FILLED LOVE whose constituents are sorrow (married), joy (seeing her from time to time), and his only happiness (she all to him, he is heart and soul integrated into her being). There is no place for desire, for FILLED LOVE is not moved by desires. All is achieved, and nothing else but this FILLED LOVE is true life or the grain of life. This FILLED LOVE is grounded on strong, ever growing attachment that transforms people in love through their secret of being so much faithful to love.

3. Faults and merits of analyzed translations

As shown above, it is not enough to translate Chekhov through consistency of mood and tone. His language conceptualizations are precise, his structure is perfect because almost all is verbalized, and what is said, what is talked about, gives birth to new shades of meaning. It would be better to follow Chekhov’s individual-authorial punctuation, so that the reader would have a signal of what is not translated. Chekhov’s story is similar to the movement of waves, for his repetitions of key words build new meanings. The verb “talk” is crucial to the world described in the story because the talker acts and continues talking about his state of FILLED LOVE. This is hidden by omitted repetitions. From these translations, it may be inferred that the translator’s sincerity is in a true understanding of what is translated. Chekhov’s elements of creating epiphanic moments are recognizable in “Dubliners” by Joyce. It may be true that Joyce had not read Chekhov in translation. What is more, Garnett’s translation leaves no proper comprehension of Chekhov’s innovation in short fiction. But there are similarities between Chekhov and Joyce, and they are remarkable features of titanic efforts in regard to make a leap in short fiction creation. Why is it so that translators of Joyce are reluctant to follow his repetitions of conceptualized networks or his individual-authorial punctuation when such a brilliant example of Chekhov is available to us? Likewise, Joyce’s short fiction may have helped select translation correspondences based on his innovative short fiction. By all means, the cognitive turn in translation is necessary, as well as knowledge of what is shared by world literature and what is innovative and should not be changed even it seems inadequate to assuming culture.

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Аннотация

Анализ чеховского текста показал, что повторы и авторская пунктуация связывают Чехова с англоязычными мастерами короткого рассказа, прежде всего с «Дублинцами» Джойса, что остается незамеченным переводчиками. В обоих переводах нет попытки разглядеть новаторство чеховского текста, которое имеет сходные проявления в англоязычной малой форме, с одной стороны, и в то же время несет исконно русские черты, которые с пониманием следует бережно сохранять в переводе.