

'Horae Amoris': The Collected Poems of Rosa Newmarch, ed. by John Holmes and Natasha Distiller

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The title *Horae Amoris* refers to a sonnet sequence of 1903, which is indeed largely concerned with love. But 'The Collected Poems of Rosa Newmarch' contain a far broader generic range than does the eponymous sequence, largely because of the translations of Russian poetry which they also include. This review will concentrate on the latter, as befits its location in this journal – but towards the end it will also make some reflections on their relation to the original poems. Four years Constance Garnett's senior, Newmarch translated some of the poetry which Garnett – primarily a translator of prose - declined to. Newmarch was and is most famed for her writing on music, and for her mediation of Russian music to the English public. Her poems were never collected during her lifetime, and it is highly unlikely that she imagined, when she died in 1940, that her poems would ever be collected – or if at all, as many as sixty years later. But there is a strong case for doing so: both in order to enhance our understanding of the reception of Russian literature in England in the early twentieth century, and because the best of her original and translated poems deserve to be read alongside those of the Edwardian and Georgian poets who are better remembered: Ernest Dowson, Arthur Symons, John Masefield, Isaac Rosenberg. The current volume serves both interests. The editors' thirty-five page introduction explores her relationship to Russia, and what it describes as her 'queer' poetics (apparent most of all in those poems in which the speaker is of indeterminate gender). But the physical nature of the volume suggests that it is not solely being produced for historicist or scholarly reasons. It is a handsome puce hardback containing high quality pages. Each of the original poems, and each of the translated authors, starts a new page. The twenty-eight pages of notes are endnotes, so do not compete with the poems for attention. They assume no prior knowledge on the reader's part of the Russian language or any area of literature: the name of Fyodor Dostoevsky is glossed by a two-line summary just as are the lesser-known names of Ivan Kozlov and Semyon Nadson. Rather than following a biographical layout according to date of publication, the original poems are separated from the translations, and only the latter arranged

according to the dates of their authors. The translations originally appeared in a wide variety of formats: as parallel texts for songs in Newmarch's *The Art Songs of Russia* (1900), as illustrations for critical arguments in books about Russian culture, as brief anthologies of poems in such books, and as free-standing poems in journals. The present volume, although meticulously edited, presents all of its poems as poems rather than as cultural documents. In this respect it belongs to the same genre as the anthologies by C.T. Wilson (*Russian Lyrics in English Verse*, 1887) and John Pollen (*Rhymes from the Russian*, 1891), which were directed at the general reader, and with which the editors of the current volume favourably compare Newmarch's own translations. That said, the absence of the Russian source texts will be felt as a limitation by that part of her contemporary potential readership as is able to read Russian.

Newmarch, like George Eliot, began her writing career with cultural journalism, and by translating a foreign biography. Through her work on a French life of Borodin Newmarch met the critic Vladimir Stasov, who encouraged her to learn Russian, and between 1897 and 1915 she visited Russia four times. Her translations of Russian poetry both pre- and post-date her original poetry, and constitute two-fifths of her poems and over half of her poetic output. This indicates that the average length of her translated poems is longer than that of her own poems, and that they are likely to range into genres beyond the lyric which dominates her own poetry. The latter is far from avant-garde, and the command of rhyme and metre which is apparent therein is helpful also to her translations of what is mainly rhyming poetry. For example, her translation of Pushkin's 'Пропок' ['The Prophet'] reproduces not only the original's iambic tetrameter, but its alternating cross-rhymes and rhyming couplets. At times, indeed, her metre is smoother than the original's: compare 'В пустыне мрачной я влачился, —' with 'I wandered through the desert grim'. The congested consonants and hyphen of the Russian impede the reader's progress rather as the speaker 'drags himself' ['влачился', not 'wandered'] across the desert. On the other hand, Pushkin introduces the terrifying six-winged Seraphim without disturbance to the tetrameter: 'И шестикрылый серафим/ На перепутье мне явился', at which point Newmarch boldly introduces a caesura: 'And at the crossways, as I went,/ One of the six-winged Seraphim/ Stood:'. That is, although she is fully able to reproduce metrical and rhyme schemes when she chooses, she is also concerned to produce an independently

valuable English poem, and favours freedom over literalism and cultural transplantation over exoticism.

The volume's editors find her translations to be freer than those of John Pollen (though less self-consciously and superficially poetic than those of C.T. Wilson), and point to several ways in which she transplants her source poems into the English tradition of which she herself was independently part. In her translation of Ivan Kozlov's 'Разбитый корабль' ['The Wreck'], her choice of 'shattered' to translate 'разбитый', rather than the more literal 'broken' or 'broken-up', recalls the 'shattered visage' of Shelley's Ozymandias. The latter is ridiculed by the poem in which he appears, and in Newmarch's 'The Wreck' 'the evening sunlight mocks/Th' abandoned hulk with gleams of gold', whereas for Kozlov the evening sun merely plays on it. Idiomatic English demanded that the ship be feminine, otherwise the 'корабль' might have retained the connection of gender to the highly masculine fallen tyrant. Newmarch's cultural transplantation is both subtle and successful, and it is perhaps not irrelevant to this that Kozlov had himself transplanted English poetry into the Russian poetic tradition, turning for example Thomas Moore's 'Evening Bells' into a popular Russian song. She did not translate his poem into (Shelley's) iambic pentameter, as Wilson did at the expense of the original's tetrameter. In the case of the satirical fabulist Ivan Krylov's 'Квартет' ['The Quartet'], on the other hand, she introduced precisely that metre. Krylov's opening is:

Проказница-Мартышка,
Осел,
Козел,
Да косолапый Мишка
Затеяли сыграть Квартет.

Newmarch gives:

A grinning ape, an ass of stubborn air,
A long-horned goat, a bow-legged, grizzly bear,
Met one fine day, and soon their minds were set
To end the party with a fine quartet.

As the editors note, Newmarch chose a form ‘recognizable to English readers’ as ‘the dominant form of eighteenth-century satiric poetry typified by Alexander Pope’ [p. 43]. This is, of course, to stress the urbane, satiric tendency of the poem at the expense of its faster, freer, fabular qualities, for which Newmarch might have found an English model in Christina Rossetti’s ‘Goblin Market’: ‘The cat-faced purr’d./ The rat-faced spoke a word/ Of welcome, and the snail-paced even was heard’. The Heroic couplet imposes the decorousness of metrical control on what are precisely uncultured animals: ‘Стой, братцы, стой!’ [‘Stop, guys, stop!’] becomes ‘One moment, pause, I pray you, not so fast’. Newmarch’s quartet is sufficiently deferential to the nightingale to put to him the open question of what do to play better; Krylov’s rustics, more comically, ask for another modification of their seating plan. Newmarch’s nightingale speaks portentously and at length: ‘each must be possess’d/ Of gifts with which coarse natures are not blest [...] Not one of you, my worthy friends, I fear [...] Will find his name inscribed upon Art’s lists,/ Or e’er may hope an artist’s crown to wear’. Krylov’s simply says: ‘Чтоб музыкантом быть, так надобно уметь/ И уши ваших понежней [...] А вы, друзья, как ни садитесь,/ Всѣ в музыканты не годитесь’ [roughly, ‘To be musicians you need the right ability/ And a more delicate ear [...] Whereas you, friends, however you sit/ Can’t be proud of being musicians’]. Both nightingales have greater verbal dexterity than the would-be musicians, but Newmarch’s is not only able to state what is necessary to being a musician, but to grandly characterize the ‘lists’ of ‘Art’ in general. One senses that this inflation of importance is not entirely due to the inducements of the Heroic couplet, and still less to those of satire, but comes in part from Newmarch’s keen sense of the importance of music as an art form. Her interest in Russian poetry of any kind had grown out of her interest in Russian song, and Krylov’s poem, for all its metrical irregularity, had been set to music by Anton Rubinstein. Several of her original poems testify to music’s power: ‘The Prelude to Day’, for example, is also in iambic pentameter, and in the lines ‘Until the blast of trumpets came to break/ And splinter darkness into saffron bars’ the poetry is as successful as the music. More so, perhaps, than in her translation of a fable which revels in a failure of musicianship.

Newmarch also changes the metre of Mikhail Lermontov’s poem ‘Сон’ [‘The

Dream’], a complex recollection on the part of the speaker of dying alone in Dagestan of a gunshot wound whilst dreaming of a party at home at which one young woman is oppressed by a dream, the contents of which the speaker is at first unsure of, but then describes as a vision of a man dying alone in Dagestan of a gunshot wound. Newmarch replaces Lermontov’s iambic pentameter by an anapaestic tetrameter which might have been better suited to the activity of the battle which preceded the poem than to a dying man’s dream of his reflection in a woman isolated from the festivity which surrounds her. The pathetic sense and buoyant rhythm of ‘While drop by drop, slowly, the red life-blood ran’ or ‘Alone I lay there on the bare sandy ground’ are not ideally suited. More profoundly, Newmarch changes the sense of the ending. Pollen’s more literal version captures Lermontov’s strange reversal with regard to nescience of the maiden’s dream:

And oh! – the mystery knows God alone -
This was the dream her young soul sadly dreamed.

Newmarch resolves this contradiction by presenting the final stanza’s exposition of her dream as a hypothetical question: ‘Does she see in her vision [...]?’ The editors argue that this intensifies ‘the tragic irony that her “sinister fancies” are true, unbeknownst to her’ [p. 42], but perhaps this also works to undermine the ontological complexity of the whole by distinguishing different levels of facticity. According to Newmarch the dying man speculates rather than dreams, and we are less sure of her dream than of his. But the whole poem is necessarily a dream - one cannot otherwise recall dying. Poetry and dreams are all that the poem is made of, and yet their limits are precisely what it leaves open to question.

Newmarch’s translation also introduces archaisms (‘cressets’, ‘chaplets of roses’, ‘revels’) without equivalents in the original, as though reinforcing the cultural shift from the English drawing room in which the poem is being read to a battle ground in central Asia by a temporal shift to the past. A similar move is apparent in her translation of Aleksei Khomiakov’s poem ‘Kiev’, which she characterized as an ‘embodiment’ of the ‘Panslavonic idea’. Her use of the Catholic term ‘angelus’ to translate ‘вечерний звон’ [‘evening peal’] not only, within Protestant England, suggests foreignness, but the past. At times she reaches for archaic syntax: ‘Слава’

becomes 'Hail to thee', and 'Возрожденные тобой' becomes 'Regenerated by thee'. Yet in part this strangeness is the inevitable result of translation from the Russian. 'Слава' is more domesticated a term than any English phrase of equivalent power. 'Возрожденные' is a native Slavic word, whereas 'regenerated' is persistently estranged from common English, as Latinate. The 'БОГОМОЛЬЦЫ' [literally, 'those who pray to God'] become more foreign when translated into English as 'pilgrims', largely because England no longer had pilgrims in 1839 when Khomiakov wrote the poem, let alone in the early twentieth-century when Newmarch translated it - whereas Russia at both periods was traversed by plenty. Such difficulties of translation are amplified in a poem which ventriloquises an internal conversation between Slavs; more than most Russian poems, this one does not ask to be translated. In particular, the variant phrases for 'home' are untranslatable: 'Край мой' becomes 'My home'; 'страна моя родная!' becomes 'birthplace'; 'Мне отчизна' becomes 'My home is in'; none of the English phrases have equivalent power, because of the different relationship of the English with locality (in this respect the poem could more easily be translated into German). The poem's rhetorical question 'Братцы, где ж сыны Волыни?' ['Brothers, where are the sons of Volhynia?'] is far more easily answerable by Khomiakov's Russian 'brothers' than by most English readers without the benefit of the editors' note (which tells us that those misguided Polish nationalists are dead). 'Пробудися, Киев' ['Awake, O Kiev'] is not addressed to us, as it is to the poem's Russian readers. Newmarch does, however, make a bold and successful attempt at cultural transplantation by converting the original's cross-rhymed quatrains of iambic tetrameter to long, free-verse lines. The editors point out that by so doing 'Newmarch ventriloquises him as a Russian countertype to Walt Whitman: an enthusiastic, solipsistic nationalist who at the same time speaks on behalf of and indeed as different people from across a vast geographical range.' [p. 44] After all, Newmarch would not have troubled to translate the poem had she not considered the Slavophil ideal to have relevance beyond the Slavs themselves. As it was, 'Russia is for Newmarch an imaginative realm into which she can escape [...] from the restrictions and expectations of modern British society' [p. 45]. That is, it is an Orientalist vision of nature, freedom, and passion.

Certainly, that is the role which it plays in Sonnet XIV of *Horae Amoris*, of which the speaker, in 'a rebel mood', claims that 'Tatar blood/Flows in my veins'. In the sestet

‘hir’ [the editors’ gender-indeterminate personal and possessive pronoun] longs ‘o’er some vast steppe to ride’ and to forget ‘even my thoughts of you/ There would I race the breeze, and opening wide/ My wearied heart, let in the universe.’ In the following sonnet Russia provides an opposite form of relief from thwarted love, as hir imagines holding hir beloved ‘warm and fast’ on their way to ‘The City of Hope’ which is Moscow. In these sonnets we see a conflation between Newmarch’s love of Russia and the queer love recognised by the editors in much of her original poetry. The speaker of both enacts the protective role of a male to hir beloved - but the emphasis on rebellion, and the leaving of ‘My tangled present and your bitter past’ at the gates of an idealized city of freedom, hints at heterodoxy in the nature of the love itself. In the poem ‘Doushá Moyá’ the very language spoken to the beloved is Russian, although the beloved (as in many of the sonnets) does not comprehend the speaker, and therefore cannot understand hir responsibility as the speaker’s very soul. Newmarch also draws on Petrarchan and Shakespearean conventions in her love song ‘To Russia’ itself, ‘land of my heart’. Here the beloved is characterized by self-sacrifice (Russia was fighting the War), but the lover too is self-sacrificial, predicting a glorious future to the younger beloved, and claiming but the honour of having loved hir when hir was ‘poor, assoil’d, reviled’.

Given this readiness on Newmarch’s part to associate love with Russia, it is striking that she translated almost no Russian love poetry. One exception is Semyon Nadson’s ‘За что?’ [‘Wherefore?’], in which a lover tells his beloved’s husband that his love for her was not as great as his own, and that he should have allowed him to be her chief mourner. It is one of the great advantages of the English language, for Newmarch’s purposes, that it does not force her to reveal the gender of the speaker, as the past tense verb forms of the Russian inevitably do. It is also perhaps one reason why she was less interested in Russian love poetry. Overall, the best of her original love poems in this volume may be found to be more distinguished than the best of her translations – but the former give her a strong claim to ‘an artist’s crown’, and her poetic strengths are far from wasted on the translations. The latter’s limitations merely underline the difficulties of translating any poetry, and particularly when the poems are selected with reference to an idealizing proxy nationalism. This volume makes a strong case for Newmarch’s importance as a mediator of Russian poetry, which can now stand alongside her known importance as a mediator of Russian music. When her

unfinished autobiography is published – as there is now still more reason that it should be – her place in the English (and Russian) cultural memory will doubtless be shifted again.