

George Lathrop's Short Story 'Left Out' and its Unknown Translations

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Abstract

The journalism boom in the nineteenth century facilitated not only development of a new literary genre, the short story, but also its exchange among various cultures. Magazine editors in different countries were searching for new interesting short stories to translate and publish. In most cases, these translations were carried out in a very short time. As a result, the renditions were not exact and the quality was not particularly high, but they still provided an opportunity for readers to become aware of the lifestyles and literary modes of other nations. This article examines one such American short story – George Parsons Lathrop's 'Left Out' – and the consecutive chain of its translations (French, Russian and Georgian), each of which was based on the previous rendition in the chain. We will provide a short survey of how we established the date of composition of the various versions, and describe how the original American text and its French translation were found. That translation served as the basis for the Russian intermediate text, which in turn served as the basis for the Georgian version. We will conclude with an analysis of the entire series of variants.

Keywords: short story, culture, translate, American, French, Russian, Georgian

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Introduction

Our interest in Lathrop's 'Left Out' started with the manuscript of its Georgian translation. The translation was done by a well-known nineteenth-century writer Ilia Chavchavadze, but the text was published under a different title from the original. The published Georgian version contained neither information about the author nor the name of the translator himself. Georgia has a significant tradition of translational practice. The first recorded translations into Georgian were made more than 1500 years ago, but the methods of translation differed significantly in various epochs. In the nineteenth century, the period when this American short story was translated, the strategies were diverse. On the one hand literary translations were done by professional translators (they were very few though) who knew the languages of the originals perfectly well and had been mastering their professional skills over time. They worked to create adequate versions of foreign texts in their own language. On the other hand writers and journalists also served as translators in the magazines. Their main aim was to comply with the interests of their readers. Many of the translators in the latter group did not know the languages of the originals and translated from intermediate sources. They generally used Russian translations for this purpose, as it served as the primary educational language at universities throughout the Russian Empire. As a result, Georgians knew Russian better than any other foreign language.

Ilia Chavchavadze was a major supporter of professional literary translation in Georgia. Together with Vano Machabeli, he translated Shakespeare's 'King Lear', which is still considered one of the best Georgian translations of the tragedy. On the other hand, being an editor of *The Iveria* ('Iveria' or 'Iberia' is the ancient name of the contemporary Georgia), he was in need of interesting materials for each issue of the magazine and encouraged rapid translations of literary works as well. Georgian periodicals did not have enough funding and staff to ensure professional translations of literature consistently. In addition, the month-long interval (between two issues of the magazine) was not long enough to complete such translations in any case. It took Chavchavadze and Machabeli more than half a year to translate only one tragedy by Shakespeare but, in general, journalists could not spend that much time on translation for each issue. Therefore, it became an accepted practice to translate loosely and with an orientation toward the target culture. But even those translators who used intermediate Russian sources and made several changes in the texts, tried to grasp the main idea, retain the style, and be faithful to the spirit of the source. They used to omit specific ethno-cultural details of the foreign texts, not familiar to their readers (or gave their explanations), generalize particular events, replace phrases and proverbs with their Georgian equivalents etc. but they did not change characters, ideas and plot resolution. Due to this fact, such secondary translations often preserved some charm and aesthetic value of the originals.

Translational practice was considered so important by Ilia Chavchavadze that his first article was dedicated to its principles and strategies (Chavchavadze 1861, 154-170). In his analysis of Revaz Eristavi's translation of Kozlov's poem *A Mad Girl*, he stated that a translator should first of all consider what to translate (e.g., is the literary piece worth of translating or not) and then he must decide how to translate, so that the text of the translation was coherent, natural and impressive.

Content

In 1987 textual critics at Shota Rustaveli Institute of Georgian Literature in Tbilisi began to prepare a complete academic edition of Ilia Chavchavadze's works. As the writer used to publish anonymously, it was the important to compile a complete bibliography of his works at the outset. It was during this process that Georgian academicians discovered the interesting collection of manuscripts (National Centre of Manuscripts, Ilia Chavchavadze's private archive, U #215), including copies of translations and reviews from different newspapers and magazines. One part of this collection contained material clearly identified as Ilia Chavchavadze's writings (the author himself published them in the collection of his works), but the other portion was made up of anonymous texts. It was soon confirmed that the anonymous texts were composed by the great writer as well (Chrelashvili, 1881) and were prepared for the edition of his full works which was begun in 1892 when Chavchavadze was still participating in the editorial work. Though only four volumes of that edition were issued, the notebooks containing copies of his anonymous publications survived and helped us to establish a complete list of his writings.

Among the original and translated texts found in these manuscripts was a short story 'A homeless beggar in New York', copied from an anonymous Georgian translation published in *The Iveria* ('A Homeless Beggar in New York', *The Iveria* 1878, # 3,4,5). In the nineteenth century the Georgian literary language was in the process of transformation and unified grammatical and orthographical rules had not yet been established; as a result, there existed a great variety of alternative forms. Therefore, personal styles of various writers differed greatly, and this fact has assisted specialists in identifying authors of anonymous works. Analysis of the translated text 'A Homeless Beggar in New York' contains many of Ilia Chavchavadze's linguistic peculiarities. There are a lot of words, phrases, and grammatical forms characteristic of his style.

Therefore, the decision to attribute this translation to Chavchavadze was based on three points of fact: the linguistic features of the translated text; that the writer used to publish anonymously in his magazine; and the text was included in the manuscript collection containing known examples of Chavchavadze's writings. As a result, the editorial board of the academic edition included this anonymous text in the volume of Ilia Chavchavadze's translations (Chavchavadze 1988, 78-108). Thus the translator was identified, but the author of the story and its source remained unknown.

The story 'A Homeless Beggar in New York' is about a young man who meets a homeless beggar and tries to arrange a charity shelter to provide daily meals for him, but he encounters some obstacles along the way and gets disillusioned. The beggar notices this change, leaves and disappears forever. The man understands that has made an error and regrets his decision. He looks for the vagabond everywhere, but is not able to find him. The plot may seem a bit trivial, but the characters are well-developed. The style is rich with realistic dialogues, psychological observations and vivid descriptions of human emotions. The main issue of the story is not social misery (though its treatment is also very dramatic), but the lack of sympathy and compassion. Though at this stage of research studies we did not have the original text of the story, some of its merits were quite vivid even then.

Ilia Chavchavadze never made rash choices about the materials he chose to render into Georgian for his magazine. He translated: Walter Scott, Thomas Moore, Alfons Dode, Shiller, Byron, Pushkin, Lermontov and other classics of the world literature. His original fiction, journalistic articles, translational practice and civic activity were in close connection with each other e. g. He created several original epic works ‘Kako the Robber’, ‘The story of a beggar’ etc. about social injustice, disclosed negative consequences of unrestrained rights of the nobility in his magazine articles, translated Nekrasov’s untitled poem ‘Что ни год - уменьшаются силы...’ (the poet’s dream of the future without peasants’ woes, blood and tears) and took part in the preparation of the law abolishing serfdom and giving land plots to peasants. Ilia Chavchavadze wrote a story ‘Around the Gallows’ to show the cruelty of the death penalty, wrote several articles in his magazine about the subject, translated Jules CLaretie’s novel ‘Noël Rambert’ (in which an absolutely guiltless man is found guilty and is beheaded) and made a speech in the State Council of the Russian Empire against the death penalty.

Ilia Chavchavadze chose material for translation not only according to the problems that were relevant to his experience but according to their artistic value as well. This habit suggests that before deciding to translate the anonymous story he must have realized its value. It should be noted that the problem of an "amateur benefactor" (which is what the author of the anonymous short story calls his character) is rather similar to the one described in Ilia Chavchavadze’s story ‘Around the Gallows’, in which an old man attempts to take care of two unknown boys in trouble, but at the end of the story joins the crowd entertaining themselves by watching as one of the boys is hung on the gallows.

Because Ilia Chavchavadze was considered a great writer and was a renowned public figure in Georgia during his life, there is a myriad of research, books and articles dedicated to different aspects of his life and work. As a result, contemporary Georgian readers are eager to discover every detail connected with his life and work. Naturally, as soon as it was claimed that he had done the translation of this story, specialists began to search for the name of the unknown author to trace the history of the translation itself. In 1987 while preparing texts, comments and notes for the academic edition discussed above, theorists examined nineteenth-century Russian periodicals and uncovered nearly all the intermediate texts used by Ilia Chavchavadze as the sources for his translations. The Russian version of this anonymous story was found in the magazine *Otechestvennie Zapiski* [*Native Notes*] in 1877. The title of the text – ‘*N’iu-iorskii brodiaga*’ [‘New York Vagrant’] was actually the same as that of the Georgian translation, but it was also published anonymously. There were only cryptic initials of the Russian translator Alexey Pleshcheev, ‘A. П.’, at the end of the text. Thus, the Russian source did not give us any additional information about the author. Given that Pleshcheev had translated a number of short stories written by Bret Harte, it was proposed that this story might also be his (Chitauri 1985, 154-157). However, Ninidze argued that the style and the spirit of the story had more resemblance with Herman Melville's works (Ninidze 2002, 273-283), but no one could find such a text among either author’s published works.

To discover the actual writer, it was necessary to search for the title among the literary works of American writers. We examined various bibliographies but could not find any American story with a similar title and plot. In one of the index books we found

the title of Dr. S. A. Raborg's text 'The Homeless Poor in New-York City' published in 'The New York Times' in 1870, but it was a lecture and not the story we were looking for.

In order to narrow our search we tried to determine the date when the story was written. For this purpose we established historical realities in the text associated with definite dates. For example, the story mentions the 'Cooper Institute Reading-Room', which was founded in 1859. In addition, the author mentions 'the war' and 'the rebels', which likely refer to the Civil War period of 1861-65. We also established another fact connected with a later event, namely the Thomas symphony concert held in Steinway Hall. 'Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians' states that the famous violinist and Director Theodore Tomas held regular symphony concerts in Steinway Hall beginning in 1872 (Jenks... 1952). As one of the concerts is mentioned in the story we assumed that, it could not be written before 1872 and as the Russian translation was published in December 1877, the latest possible date of composition should be 1877. Thus we confirmed that the story must have been between 1872 and 1877 (Ninidze 2003, 639).

Having established this fact, we excluded from the possible list of authors a number of American writers who died before 1872: Irving (died in 1859), Poe (died in 1849), Hawthorne (died in 1864), Crockett (died in 1836), Ward (died in 1867). We were also able to eliminate another group who had not begun their literary careers by 1877: Garland (born in 1860), Crane (born in 1871), O. Henry (born in 1862). However, the number of those writers who were active in the interval was still very large. It included: Twain (1835-1916), Harris (1848-1908), James (1843-1916), Beirce (1842-1914) and many others. Searches of the title in their bibliographies did not produce any results.

As the titles of the literary works are often translated loosely, we decided that the searches on the basis of the title might be in vain. Thus we determined that the only way to find the original text was to look through literary periodicals published between 1872-1877, searching not for the title but for a similar plot. Unfortunately, American magazines of the period were not available to us in Georgia. However, one member of the team (Nino Sozashvili) was able to gain access to the Spencer Research Library at the University of Kansas in 2011. With the help of librarian Karen Severud Cook, she examined all American journals issued from the dates of 1872 until 1877 and discovered George Lathrop's short story 'Left Out' in *The Atlantic Monthly*. The text had exactly the same plot and characters (Lathrop 1877, 43-60). Lathrop was an associate editor of the magazine at that time and often published his works therein. There were only a few differences between the Lathrop's text and the translations - mainly omissions (such as geographical names, detailed description of the places unfamiliar to Russian and Georgian readers etc.), but none that challenged our conclusion that this story served as the original of both the Russian and the Georgian versions.

It is known that Aleksey Pleshcheev, the Russian translator, did not know English and translated American literature either from French or from German. Therefore, in order to obtain a full picture of the history of this text (from the original to the Georgian translation) we had to locate one more intermediate source. As both the American original and the Russian translation were published in 1877, the intermediate source

had to be printed in the same year. The problem was that we could not know whether the source was German or French. As a result, we (in particular, Nino Sozashvili) searched both German and French magazines issued during that year. In the University of Kentucky library she discovered a French translation of the story called 'Un Vagabond A New-York'. (Lathrop 1877, 149-177). The name of the American author and initials of the French translator, A. V., were cited at the bottom of the text.

Thus, it turned out that the title was first changed in the French translation, but as for the author's name, it had disappeared in the Russian publication. Armed with all the three consecutive translations and the original text by an identified author, we were able to compare and analyze them. The first step was to gather information about the story's author. George Parsons Lathrop's literary heritage is largely unknown, not only to the majority of foreign readers, but to many of his countrymen as well. He is definitely an interesting writer but American literature of the nineteenth century was so rich in talented authors that only few of them gained popularity. Still it should be noted that Lathrop's contribution to American culture is rather varied and voluminous. He is an author of the novels *Afterglow*, *An Echo of Passion*, *In The Distance*, and *Newport* as well as the books of poetry *Rose and Roof Tree*, *A Masque of Poets*, and *Dreams and Days*. He also wrote a number of stories, documentary prose and critical articles including 'A Study of Hawthorne', 'The Literary Movement In New York', 'Literary and Social Boston', 'The Progress of Art in New York', 'Talks with Edison', 'Coleridge as Poet and Man', and 'John Boyle O'Reilly as a Poet of Humanity'. While he may not have been the most popular author of his day, nevertheless, one of his short stories – 'Left Out' – was translated into three different languages soon after its publication and was enjoyed by the readers of diverse cultural backgrounds.

It is enough to examine the comparisons and metaphors referring to one of the characters of the story – Philip Erne – to understand what the writer meant by the title 'Left Out'. The man is variously described as: 'the beggar', 'the pauper', 'dingy wanderer', 'shabby loiterer', 'poor outcast', 'dirty beast', 'bloke', 'little dodge', 'the victim', 'loose human being', 'vagrant stranger', 'nameless fellow', 'the ragged veteran', 'luckless man', 'shelterless being', 'houseless Philip', 'mature street-waif', 'strange semihallucination', 'a man... utterly without a place, part, or lot in the world', a man with a 'gray past' and 'equally cheerless future', and 'the vagabond... left behind like a drowning man in the wake of a ship'. When a policeman in the library told Tetlow that the beggar's place was outside', in the street, he thought: 'The next move, then, is to put him outside of them outside of everything'. When Tetlow was told that charity institutions could not help Erne because he was neither a cripple nor a 'reforming drunkard', he despondently replied: 'I suppose he d better be out of the world'. Tetlow thought of Erne as a 'man who had lost his place in life, who had once shared the gentlest human ties, and then, when they were loosed, had drifted away into the circle of sorrowing semighosts'.

Clues to writers' creative methods are often disclosed in their theoretical articles. From this point of view it is interesting to discover what Lathrop (1874) writes about realistic fiction in his review 'The Novel and its Future': Realism sets itself at work to consider characters and events which are apparently the most ordinary and uninteresting, in order to extract from these their full value and true meaning. It would apprehend in all particulars the connection between the familiar and the extraordinary,

and the seen and unseen of human nature. Beneath the deceptive cloak of outwardly uneventful days, it detects and endeavors to trace the outlines of the spirits that are hidden there; to measure the changes in their growth, to watch the symptoms of moral decay or regeneration, to fathom their histories of passionate or intellectual problems. In short, realism reveals. Where we thought nothing worth of notice, it shows everything to be rife with significance.

The short story 'Left Out' is a practical realization of the creative approach he describes in this quotation. The author discloses unseen spirits of the characters in the smallest details and stylistic nuances, thus helping readers to understand better their own hidden inclinations as well as the enigma of the people surrounding them. The main problem of the story is the oppressive power of big cities and loss of human compassion - themes so familiar and important for Lathrop and briefly formulated in the rhetorical question of his poem *Night In New York*: 'Places of life and of death, / Numbered and named as streets, / What, through your channels of stone, / Is the tide that unweariedly beats?'

The language and the style of the story are particularly beautiful. The author uses various stylistic devices and interesting psychological models, which make it attractive to the reader. Lathrop is well aware of social psychology. Therefore, his characters are very realistic. He manages to show great personal dignity and nobility of a man dressed in 'grievously poor garments', neglected and excluded from society. Erne was reasonable enough to realize his position and evaluate the situation. He did not go to church because he had not had a bath for a long time and did not want to bother others with his shabby appearance or offensive smell. He knew that Tetlow might have his own problems and might be tired of taking care of him. He did not blame anybody, did not feel envy or hatred towards others. He was sensitive, delicate and kindhearted. When Tetlow gave him 50 cents, his emotions came out in hidden tears and the words: 'You have made an eepoe in my life...' His voice sounded as 'an echo of itself returning from some dim inner chamber of despair'. Rudeness of the policeman in the library which frightened even Tetlow, did not scare Erne. He was just insulted by his words because a worthy attitude was more important for him than a shelter. The kindness of the minister's wife made him so thankful that he could not hide his gratitude and expressed it several times. When Erne told Tetlow about the terrible starvation and unbearable conditions during his imprisonment, he added that the Rebs, who captured him, 'had not much of anything themselves', and thus tried to excuse them. Even when he spoke about his native town, which met its unfortunate soldier with utter neglect, he expressed only surprise: 'Why, right here in New York I've had to go through just the same thing again. People don't think nothing about it here'. With the words: 'And how can you expect 'em to? We ain't fighting for 'em now', he tried to excuse even these people. The calm with which he speaks about his misfortune and about the indifference of the society towards his tragedy make a greater impression on the reader than many more words of condemnation and blame could make.

The author discloses characteristic features of the other protagonist, advertising agent Philip Tetlow, even more skillfully. After the exciting symphony concert he reacted in a sensitive way and helped the begging pauper, but there were some hidden passions in his nature, which he had not realized and discovered only after his relationship with Erne began. To hear that the vagabond shared his first name made him feel uneasy:

‘To have his own name come from such a source was like suddenly seeing his face in a mirror that should reflect it pale, sick, and wretched. Somehow he revolted at telling the beggar that their first names were the same. He merely said, my name is Tetlow’. After having taken some responsibility for the beggar and attempting to help him, a queer sensation stole over Tetlow, ‘like that of someone who has plunged into a stream to save a drowning person, and finds the weight more than he can carry to shore’. After several days of absence he recalled the date of the beggar’s reappearance ‘with some disgust’ and had a feeling that Erne was clinging to him.

During their last meeting Tetlow noticed that he was speaking to Erne austerely and was not sincere. He said that did not expect to see Erne so soon, though he had appointed the date himself and he remembered that fact quite well. As Erne felt uncomfortable after these words, Tetlow changed his tone. He said: ‘yes. I told you to; I remember, of course,’ but as soon as he pronounced this utterance, he wished that ‘he had used the word asked, in place of told’, but his ‘words and the manner had lost their cunning; their wouldbe cheer was simply freezing’. Tetlow realized his harshness but the comprehension was in vain as he persisted in the same behavior. It was an epoch when emotions gave way to a practical turn of mind and people began to make decisions that were advantageous and comfortable for them first and foremost, not for others. As an advertising agent Tetlow ‘resolved to announce his own marriage’ not when he found out that he and Miss Sporling loved each other and wished to get married but ‘in an interval when other forms of advertising were dull’. The passage about the announcement of Tetlow’s marriage in the beginning seems simply odd, but, if we go deeper, it reveals that in his personality the reason prevails on the emotion and feelings.

Though the two protagonists – Erne and Tetlow – actually have very little in common, the author tries to show a close connection between them. Perhaps he wants to indicate that it is their different fortunes that have made the characters different and that they might be more similar in equal situations. The intention is suggested not only by means of the fact that these characters share the same name – Philip – but with the help of a number of other hints as well, e.g., it seemed to Tetlow ‘as if that wan face floating there before him in the mingled light and darkness [author’s note: referring to Erne] was almost more familiar to him than any in the world, except his own’. In addition, he has the feeling ‘as if the beggar had been brought hither by some presiding power, to make record of his, Tetlow’s, unworthy motives.’ As for the opposition between the characters, its basis is clearly demonstrated in the phrase: ‘the houseless Philip came, in the morning, to the benevolent and sheltered one.’

Skilful use of the grotesque in the story strips bare some social problems and vices of our society. When asked if he could receive a pension, Erne answers that he had only a flesh-wound and then adds bitterly: ‘Of course if I had been killed there d have been a pension if any one could have drawn it.’ The grotesque is also used in reference to the vagabonds who come to the Cooper Institute Reading-Room and take newspapers. The author remarks that ‘...These vagrants have been led hither by a delirious hope of finding their own deaths announced in the papers, and the enigma of their starved lives solved by a line or two of print.’

Lathrop demonstrates the unreasonable and inflexible management of charity organizations, which are absolutely helpless for the scores of the homeless and poor.

They “swallow camels mostly, and strain at the hungry gnats.” The writer realizes that our sincere intentions are often discouraged by people ‘of average scientific morality’ who remind us of the ‘maxims of society,’ and says that if there were such people near Erne and his wife when they decided to give money to the beggar, ‘they could have been at once convicted of a gross offense against the maxims.’ When Erne disappeared and Tetlow said sadly that he would never see the man again, one of his friends answered: ‘Why in the name of reason should you want to?’ and another one ‘preached to him the heinousness of giving promiscuous relief to the poor and thereby encouraging intemperance and crime.’ Weariness related to his championing Erne crept over Tetlow because the apathy of society ‘became alluring to him, and tempted him to drop the whole troublesome business.’

Lathrop was a religious man. He believed that even though people often neglect each other The Lord never leaves alone any of them. In the poem *Famine and Harvest* he writes: ‘Fear not! Though thou starvest, / Provision is made: / God gathers His harvest / When our hopes fade!’ It was the odd and ‘almost comical’ for Tetlow to see that a member of a Christian Church should be found in such a ‘miserable, neglected plight upon the streets’ as Erne was. In outlining the nature of his characters, the author focusses on their spiritual sensations. Tetlow felt his greatest regret when he recollected a passage from The Holy Scripture: ‘could ye not watch with me one hour’ (Matthew 26:33). The words helped him to admit to his unworthy behavior. The most important part of the story, its end, where the author sums up his main ideas, tells us about Tetlow’s recollections and dreams about Erne: ‘always when his image comes it is like the form of some lost duty, some exiled power of loving - kindness, banished from the world when this same fellow - creature was cast out into misery.’ We consider that this message regarding Christian love and compassion, which was equally important for the nineteenth-century Americans and Europeans and which became the basis of the democratic values they held, might be the primary stimulus for the French, Russian and Georgian journalists to translate the story for their readers.

Conclusion

All the three translations are nevertheless oriented toward their target cultures. They address the interests of their particular readers. Therefore, the authors omitted some specific names of streets, squares, institutions and the like that might be unknown outside of the United States. Thus the names Union Square, Jefferson Market, the Hudson River, Chatham Street, Fifty-Ninth Street, Sixth Avenue, Canal and Center Streets. Andson-yule, Brooklyn Navy-Yard, Pearl Street, Battery, Bowery and detailed descriptions of some of these locales are all missing from the Georgian translation of the story, while the Cooper Institute Reading-Room is referred to simply as a ‘library’. The French translator, as we have already mentioned, even transformed the title of the story. However, in spite of such changes, all the translations are faithful to the spirit of the original, awaken the same human feelings and give similar aesthetic pleasure to the readers of different cultural backgrounds as George Lethrop’s original text did.

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