

RUSSIAN CLASSICS IN SOVIET ESTONIA: JAAN KROSS'S TRANSLATION OF GRIBOEDOV'S COMEDY

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The two Estonian translations of Alexander Griboedov's comedy in verse "The Misfortune of Being Clever" ("Gore ot uma", 1824)¹ appeared in 1945 and 1964. Separated by 19 years, the two versions not only reflect the differing styles of the poet-translators of two different generations — Jaan Kärner (1891–1958) and Jaan Kross (1920–2007) — but also the characteristic features of the reception of Russian literature in two different periods in post-war Estonia.

This article is first and foremost concerned with Jaan Kross's interpretation of Griboedov's comedy, in the context of the 1960s. However, in order to reconstruct the translator's strategy and the reception of his text by his contemporaries, the preceding history of the reception of "Misfortune" in Stalinist-era Soviet Estonia must be addressed.

The simultaneous or shortly separated appearance of several translations of a single classical text is a fairly frequent occurrence in the process of familiarizing examples of foreign literature [Левый: 107]. Through the natural course of literary evolution, translations may dominate over the original compositions; however, the situation in post-war Estonia cannot be called "natural". During this period, all spheres of national culture were subject to the powerful influence of Soviet cultural politics, aimed at the full Sovietization of the new republics².

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¹ In the following discussion, the play's title will be abbreviated as "Misfortune".

² "Michael Lemke defines 'Sovietization' as a number of structural, institutional, and cultural processes of transfer and adoption of the Soviet model with the goal of the adjustment of non-Soviet societies to the social and political circumstances prevailing in the USSR" [Mertelsmann: 10].

One of the manifestations of this process was the massive expansion of specifically Russian literature in the annexed territories of the USSR. The predominance of the “Russian” over the “Soviet” is explained by the “Russocentric” character of Soviet ideology beginning at the end of the 1930s. The concepts of Russian as the Soviet lingua franca, Russian literature as the most “progressive” among the national literatures of the USSR, and the Russian people as “the first among equals”, were used by Soviet ideologues as “cementing forces” to strengthen the authority and legitimacy of the Soviet government [Brandenberger: 246]. And although in the consciousness of the masses “Soviet” meant “Russian”, Sovietization was not the same process as the Russification that occurred in the 19th century, as noted by Olaf Mertelsmann [Mertelsmann: 14]. In this context, translation into local languages and the mass popularization of works of 19th century Russian classics were an important part of the process of bringing the “young republics” into the pan-Soviet cultural denominator.

1. Griboedov's 150th

The appearance of the first Estonian translation of Griboedov's “Misfortune” in 1945 was undoubtedly a product of a direct order from the state. Griboedov's play had never been translated into Estonian previously (see: [Issakov: 24–28, 134; ERB]). Likely this is due first and foremost to the fact that for the older generation of Estonian readers, the comedy was familiar in its original language from the curriculum of the imperial schools³, while for the new generation Griboedov was not relevant. Not a single paper on his biography or comedy appeared in Estonian from 1913 to 1945 [ERB].

The occasion for the translation was the celebration of Griboedov's 150th birthday, conducted centrally and on a massive scale⁴ in the USSR on January 15, 1945. The All-Union Committee for the Celebration of Anniversaries had been formed in December, 1944, and on its heels, analogous committees in each of the national republics. These committees were responsible for developing programs and coordinating commemorative events at the local level [ΛΓ: 1944, 24 дек.: 1].

³ “Misfortune” was published in textbook anthologies of Russian literature during the period of Russification. Estonian schoolchildren were required to know the play and write essays about it [Pärl: 171, 174]. See also the testimony of O. Luts [Luts].

⁴ A total of 74 articles in the central newspapers were devoted to the commemoration [ΛΓC: 1944. № 50–52; 1945. № 1–4].

In the context of the “Russocentric” cultural politics of the Stalinist period, commemorations of the classics of Russian literature “became a part of the symbolism of friendship between nations”, while translations of their works into the national languages of the USSR became a translation of the achievements of “progressive Russian culture” [Мартин: 626]. This discourse certainly was reproduced in the reviews of commemoration preparation. As stated in the Estonian Komsomol newspaper “Noorte Hääl”: “The 150th anniversary of Griboedov’s birth is being celebrated by all in the large family of Soviet peoples. In our country [USSR], where the cultural achievements of one people [here, Russians] are valued equally by all the other peoples, Griboedov is renowned and beloved by the masses of all nations” [Purre]. The new translations were intended to confirm these declarations, and were an indispensable part of such cultural practices in the USSR⁵. “Literaturnaya gazeta” reported that for the 1945 commemoration, “Misfortune” would be translated into Armenian, Estonian, Ossetian, Uzbek, and Kyrgyz [ЛГ: 1945, 6 янв.: 1; 1945, 15 янв.: 4].

The translation of “Misfortune” into Estonian was emphasized in every possible way in the press of the ESSR. On January 6, the newspaper “Sirp ja vasar” announced that in summer of 1945, the comedy “will be released in a new Estonian translation” [SV 1945: 6. jaan.: 1]. The special celebratory edition of “Sovetskaya Estoniya” included an interview with Kärner: “The fiction section of the State Publisher of the ESSR included in its plan for 1945 a publication in Estonian of A. S. Griboedov’s timeless comedy ‘The Misfortune of Being Clever’. This important task <...> was entrusted to the famous Estonian poet Jaan Kärner”. According to the contract, the translation was to have been turned in by April 1 [Линев]. In “Postimees”, Oskar Luts devoted a large part of his article to the discussion of how to translate the comedy’s title into Estonian and whether or not Kärner had gotten it right [Luts]. At the ceremonial concert on January 15, Olev Eskola, an actor of Theater “Estonia”, read a monologue by Chatsky translated by Kärner [SV 1945: 20. jaan.: 3]. The February issue of “Looming” magazine contained the first excerpt of the comedy in Estonian — Famusov’s story about the fall of Maxim Petrovich (Act II, Scene II) [Looming: 230–231]⁶. Thus, Kärner’s work on “Misfortune” held important political significance: the translation was intended to demonstrate the cultural unity

⁵ Regarding commemorations of other classical authors in the USSR, see: [Friedberg; Moeller-Sally; Levitt; Костин]. The cultural elite of Estonia began mastering these forms of Soviet celebration in 1940–41 [Пономарева].

⁶ Note that the Russian text of the same excerpt was published among the commemorative pieces in “Sovetskaya Estoniya” (№ 11).

of the Estonian people with the “family of nations” of the USSR via the celebration of Griboedov's 150th.

Kärner, clearly, was the appropriate candidate to fulfill such an ideologically significant requisition. During the period of independence, he had been famous as a poet, editor, and experienced translator from German and Russian, having translated J. Goethe, H. Heine, Fr. Schiller, A. Chekhov, and K. Chukovsky [ERB]. In 1940 he “welcomed” the overturn, along with J. Vares-Barbarus and J. Sütiste [Kalda: 134] and began actively cooperating with the Soviet authorities — he was appointed editor-in-chief of the publishing house “Ilukirjandus ja kunst”, wrote pro-Soviet poems, and translated Mayakovsky [Muru: 5]. At the beginning of the war Kärner was evacuated to the rear, where he constantly affirmed his loyalty by releasing patriotic verses, agitating Estonians on the radio, and translating the lyrics of the national anthem of the USSR. Upon returning to Estonia, he occupied the post of editor-in-chief of “Looming” magazine and continued his poetic and translation activities [Ibid: 6–7]. As a sign of the authorities' gratitude toward Kärner, he was awarded the title of National Author of the ESSR in 1946 [Olesk: 96].

Despite the time constraints, the author fulfilled his obligation, and “Misfortune” in Estonian was submitted to the press on June 29, 1945 [Kärner: 156]. From that moment, Griboedov's comedy was firmly embedded in Estonia's “official anthology” of literature (Robert Escarpit's term, [Добренко: 131]), and above all, in the school curriculum.

2. Curriculum and Translations

In the research dedicated to Estonian schools of the Soviet period, their educational and propagandistic functions have been investigated either as a whole [Sirk; Nagel] or through analysis of specific teaching materials for the subject of history [Kreegipuu; Raudsepp]. However, in addition to history, party ideologists gave literature an important role in “communist education” — above all, the requirement to master the Soviet canon, the core of which was made up of the classics of Russian literature [Пономарев; Pilve: 8]. As declared in the 1946 literature curriculum for Estonian schools: “They <classics> will help us create a new man, instilling in our youth socialist humanism, ideology, love and devotion to the motherland and the people, and selflessness in the conservation and protection of the motherland” [Õppekavad 1946: 33].

It is important to note that in the few Russian-language schools in the ESSR in the 1940s and 50s, students mastered “their own” anthology in literature

lessons, reading Russian classics of the past or present, and giving minimal study time to foreign-language authors⁷. In the national schools, classics of Estonian literature were studied on the same level as “foreign” literatures — Russian and European⁸. Despite these great curricular differences, there was one very important similarity: **students of both types of school in the ESSR read the works of Russian classics each in his own native language**. As far as language is concerned, no Russification took place during Literature lessons: the official canon was translated into the language of each specific national school — beginning in the 1940s, Sh. Rustaveli, W. Shakespeare, M. Lomonosov, A. Radischev, A. Pushkin, T. Shevchenko, M. Gorky, A. Fadeev, etc. were read by Estonian schoolchildren in Estonian.

This feature of Soviet educational policy naturally required a large quantity of translations of the authors in the Soviet anthology into the languages of the national republics of the USSR. Thus it is unsurprising that after 1944, the volume of translation into Estonian also increased significantly. According to Danielle Monticelli, while the decade preceding the war (1929–1939) saw translations comprising only 15% of the belle-lettres published in Estonia, the analogous post-war decade (1944–1954) saw translations comprise 48.5% of local literary works. Of these, translations of foreign classics (Goethe, Balzac, Cervantes, Dickens, etc.) made up only a small portion, from 2% to 18% in different years [Monticelli: 188–189]. Monticelli noted: “The absolutely preponderant share... of post-war literary translations into Estonian was restricted to the classics of 19th century Russian literature (A. Pushkin, M. Lermontov, A. Chekhov, L. Tolstoy, etc.) and mostly contemporary Russian authors (primarily M. Gorky, but also M. Sholokhov, D. Furmanov, A. Fadeev, etc.)” [Ibid: 191]. These findings distinctly correlate with the school curricula, pointing to translations’ direct reliance on educational policy in the ESSR. Those classics included in the Literature curriculum for Estonian schools were translated first and foremost.

Significantly, as soon as the translation of Griboedov’s comedy came off the press, it was immediately included in the updated curriculum of 1946 [Öppe-

⁷ Per the 1949 curriculum for Russian-language schools in the ESSR, in grades 8–11, from the total of 462 hours devoted to the subject of Literature: “works of the peoples of the USSR” were allotted 18 hours (3.9%), western European classics were allotted 29 hours (6.3%), and the rest of the time was devoted to Russian authors [Программы 1949]. Foreign-language literature was completely excluded from the Literature curriculum in 1951 [Пономарев]. The study of Estonian authors in these schools was never intended from the beginning.

⁸ In 1946, Estonian-language schools devoted 340 hours to the subject of “Literature” in grades 8–11, of which 157 hours were devoted to national authors and themes (46%), 129 hours to Russian authors (38%), and 54 hours to European authors (15%).

kavad 1946: 68] and in reading textbooks [Lugemik 1946: 71–102]⁹. Kärner's translation received mass distribution specifically through this channel. The relatively small run of the only edition of "Misfortune" — 7,200 copies — is not comparable to the general circulations of textbooks and anthologies for Estonian schools (7,000–12,000 copies of each edition), in which large excerpts from the comedy were reproduced. Altogether, from 1946 to 1956, Kärner's translation was included in four editions of Russian Literature textbooks for the 8th grade [Lugemik 1946: 71–102; Lugemik 1948: 106–142; Lugemik 1949¹⁰: 147–179], and as often again in the Estonian translation of the textbook "Selections of Russian Literature for the 8th Grade" by A. Zhertchaninov and N. Porfiridov [Vene kirjandus 1949: 276–297], which underwent five editions by 1954 [ERB]. Selected quotes and excerpts from Kärner's translation of "Misfortune" illustrated a short essay about Griboedov and his comedy in H. Reinop's and H. Tobias's textbook of Russian Literature for the 8th grade, and after the reforms of 1963–64, for the 9th grade of Estonian schools¹¹ [Vene kirjandus 1961: 15–16; Vene kirjandus 1964: 17, 141–145]. In total, over the course of more than 20 years, Estonian readers became acquainted en masse with "Misfortune" and the biography of its author through these publications, reading excerpts selected by the books' compilers from Kärner's translation and perceiving the interpretational patterns suggested by the educational program.

From the beginning of The Thaw (1956–1968), the national republics of the USSR underwent gradual de-Stalinization and decentralization. By the end of the 1950s, this process also reached the educational system, reforming its structure [Sirk], but, more importantly, granting it greater freedom to teach national history and literature. In 1957–58, Estonian History was introduced as a separate subject [Pilve: 13], and the volume of Russian authors studied in Literature classes began to decrease noticeably.

This had a direct impact on Griboedov's relevance. The peak of his study in Estonian schools came in the mid-1950s. While in 1946 the study of his biography and comedy received three hours of class time [Öppekavad 1946: 68], by 1955–56, it was six hours [Programm 1955/56: 15]. Thereafter, the time devoted to Griboedov was sharply reduced. Starting in 1957, Griboedov and his comedy were no longer studied as an independent unit. Now he received

⁹ Griboedov was not yet included in either "Selections of Russian Literature for the 8th Grade", compiled before 12/30/1944 by B. Sööt [Sööt 1945], or in the 1944–45 curriculum [Öppekava 44/45: 8–9].

¹⁰ Reprinted three times in 1953, 1954, and 1956; see: [ERB].

¹¹ The 8th grade textbook was published from 1959 to 1961, and the 9th grade textbook from 1963 to 1966 (a total of six editions); see: [ERB].

attention only as part of the overview of “Literature of the first period of the Russian liberation movement”, where all representatives of early 19th century literature together received a total of three class hours [Programmid 1957/58: 17]. After 1963, his study in the 9th grade of Estonian schools was permanently reduced. According to the new curriculum, all of “Russian literature through Pushkin” received two hours, at the end of which followed a brief overview of “the most notable representatives of the first period of the Russian liberation movement: K. Ryleev, A. Griboedov, and I. Krylov” [Programmid 1963/64: 72]. Ultimately, by the beginning of the 1960s Estonian schools no longer needed new translations of “Misfortune”, from which one may conclude that Kross’s 1964 translation fulfilled a principally different function than Kärner’s prior translation. However, Kross undoubtedly took into account the interpretational patterns of the preceding period in his translation work.

3. Chatsky in a Soviet Jacket

Griboedov, like all Russian classics in the Stalinist era without exception [Пономарев], was described by a series of established formulas: “great Russian writer”, “world-class writer”, “writer-patriot”, “writer-realist”, and “Russian language master” [ЛГ 1945, 15 янв.: 1; ЛГС: 1945, № 2: 36–37]. These elements of official discourse of the era later went out of use; however, the official interpretation of Griboedov’s biography and comedy turned out to be considerably more enduring.

First, in order to legitimize the nobility-class author, it was necessary to include him among the “progressive” classics via Lenin’s periodization of the revolutionary movement as applied to the foundation of Russian literary history [Пономарев]. As a result, Griboedov was officially included among the Decembrists who “awakened Herzen” [Орлов 1946: 11, 33]. Scientific justification of this ideological construction was provided by M. Nechkina’s work “Griboedov and the Decembrists” [Нечкина 1946; Нечкина 1951]¹². The familiar extension of this logic was the assertion that the comedy’s hero, Chatsky, is also a Decembrist [ЛГ 1945, 15 янв.: 2; Мартынова; Urgart: 234].

¹² This interpretation was repeated in educational materials. After familiarization with the content of “Misfortune”, pupils were to parse the topic of “Griboedov and the Decembrists and the latter’s stance toward Griboedov’s comedy”, knowledge of which was required on final exams [Õrpekavad 1946: 68; Piletid 1946/47: 6]. See: [Программы 1949: 26; Programmid 1954/55: 11; Programmid 1955/56: 15; Programmid 1957/58: 17; Programmid 1963/64: 72; Vene kirjandus 1957: 10; Vene kirjandus 1961: 14–15; Vene kirjandus 1977: 23; Vene kirjandus 1982: 29].

Second, such an interpretation automatically defined the comedy's matrix of perception as an act of struggle between its author and the czarist regime, and between the Decembrist Chatsky and Moscow society. "Chatsky's heated and angry monologues, arousing hatred toward the autocratic and serf-owning class, are filled with scathing criticism of the representatives of this class, of all noble-bureaucratic society. The deadly force of Griboedov's irony unveiled the true essence of the Famusovs, the Molchalins, the Skalozubs" [ЛГ 1945, 15 янв.: 1]. Note that within the Soviet discourse, the pluralized use of the personal names of specific characters in the comedy made them generalized nouns for "enemies". Soviet ideologues suggested using examples of similar negative typecasting in classical comedies (above all: Fonvizin's "The Minor", Gogol's "The Inspector General" and Griboedov's "Misfortune") as "talented agitations" for the ridicule and neutralization of modern "class enemies" [Луначарский: 334; Lujemik 1949: 183]. This, in turn, necessitated ignoring the love story and concentrating on the dialogue that revealed, on the one hand, the characteristic features of the main representatives of the enemy camp, and on the other hand, the progressiveness of the protagonist — an emphasis reflected in the excerpts selected for school anthologies¹³. Special attention was paid to the dialogue at the ball about the dangers of science (Act III, Scene 21), or, at a minimum, to the quote from Famusov, "I'd take all the books and burn them!" — the line that became a kind of motto for the character¹⁴. As O. Urgart wrote in 1945: "If we find today more such Famusovs who believe that ruination comes from books, and who would burn all books with great pleasure, then we should also have Chatskys who would, with their ideology, attack this with increasing fury" [Urgart: 234].

Third, the relevance and significance of Griboedov's comedy were reinforced by, among other things, its references to the authority of V. Lenin. "No other work of Russian or western European literature", wrote literary scholar A. Tseitlin, "was quoted as often by Lenin as 'The Misfortune of Being Clever'. Over the course of almost 30 years, Lenin referenced the ingenious Russian comedy 88 times" [Цейтлин: 265]. Examples of Lenin's use of quotes and images from "Misfortune" in the battle against "enemies" comprised a large part of any article about Griboedov written in the 1940s and 50s. Characteristically,

¹³ Anthologies included the following excerpts: Act II: Scenes: 1 (Famusov), 2–6 (Famusov, Skalozub vs. Chatsky); Act III: Scene 3 (Molchalin vs. Chatsky); Act IV: Scenes: 10–15 (Sofia, Molchalin, Famusov, Liza vs. Chatsky) [Lujemik 1946: 71–102; Lujemik 1948: 106–142; Lujemik 1949: 147–179]. The Reinop / Tobias textbook included the excerpt from Act II, Scene 2 (Famusov vs. Chatsky) [Vene kirjandus 1964: 141–145].

¹⁴ [Vene kirjandus 1961: 15–16; Vene kirjandus 1977: 21–22].

special works dedicated to the “Leninist” method of quoting Griboedov’s plays provided a list of “aphorisms” [Цейтлин: 276] to which Soviet citizens were to pay special attention. This list was repeated in its entirety in general volumes of Russian “aphorisms” [Ашукин: 12–13, 28, 88, 159, 182, 380, 439, 471, 557, 567, 608, 613]. As a result, quotes from “Misfortune” that had long been in Russian language usage began to be imbued with Lenin’s authority, and the memorization of these aphorisms became one of the central practical methods of working with its text in Soviet schools up to the 1980s, regardless of the language of instruction [Хрестоматия 1950: 219–220, 246–247; Vene kirjandus 1977: 19].

4. A New Epoch — A New Translation

As noted above, Kärner’s translation appeared in 1945 in response to a government order: on the one hand, as an essential cultural achievement of a “young” republic for the celebration of Griboedov’s sesquicentennial, and on the other, as an important element of the Sovietized literature curriculum.

Now, in the new era of “thawing”, and in a fundamentally different context, Kross’s translation appeared. The new edition of “Misfortune” in Estonian was published by “Eesti Riiklik Kirjastus” (“Estonian State Publishing” — ESP) at the beginning of 1964 in a circulation of 6,000 copies [Kross 1964: 136]. ESP’s activity in this period was marked by constant delays in the release of books and failure to complete translation plans. This happened, for example, with another of Kross’s translations, E. Rostand’s comedy in verse “Cyrano de Bergerac”, which was published not in 1961, as stated in the initial, August 7, 1959 contract with the translator [Kirjastusportfellid: 105], but only in December of 1963 [Rostand: 4]. The history of the release of the translation of “Misfortune” was different. No preliminary agreements regarding the translation of Griboedov’s comedy are to be found in ESP’s archive¹⁵. Only the editorial manuscript showing Kross’s edits, approved on August 26, 1963, has been preserved [Kross 1963: 1]. Five days later, on August 31, the text went to the typesetter [Kross 1964: 136], after which the prepared translation was not sent to press until January 22, 1964 [Ibid]. Presumably, this delay could have been connected with the lack of paper resources allocated according to “plan”, since the book had not been accounted for in the publishing plan of 1963. In such a situation, publication could occur only in the next calendar year; that is,

¹⁵ ERA. Fond-1965. Nim. 1. Nr 153, 190, 193, 296, 340.

in January 1964. According to what follows, Kross, apparently, submitted to ESP an already-complete translation he had prepared for a different client.

It is important to note that in comparison to translations of the Stalinist era, this translation was a product of a different model of literary production. Kross, who had been repressed in 1946, worked as a freelance translator after his return from the labor camp in 1954 [Olesk: 104]. From that moment on he worked simultaneously on translating a large amount of literature for different Estonian journals and publications from German, French, and Russian: Heine, Beranger, B. Brecht, Gorky, S. Yesenin, Shakespeare, E. Rostand [Talviste]. Kross began working with ESP on April 21, 1956, when they signed a contract regarding the translation of J. Beranger's songs [Kirjastusportfellid: 18]. Katre Talviste has suggested that the reason for Kross's intensive translation activity was that "in the post-Stalinist Estonia it was <...> the only way left open for non-conformist writers and intellectuals to support themselves financially" [Talviste: 372]. It is worth noting here that this was not only a means of supporting himself, but to earn very good money. According to the publishing contract, for Beranger's songs Kross was to receive 21,000 rubles¹⁶ [Kirjastusportfellid: 18]; for his next job, a translation of Rostan's comedy, the translator was offered an honorarium of 22,000 rubles [Ibid: 105]. This aspect of literary production cannot be ignored in researching Kross's translation activities of the 1950s–70s in general, and in particular regarding "Misfortune". If the translation of Griboedov's comedy was truly ready at the moment the manuscript was submitted to ESP, then from the translator's point of view, it was an additional opportunity to earn money, and from the publisher's point of view, it was an opportunity to release without delay an edition of a reliable, canonical classic. This last reason, undoubtedly, must have contributed to the acceptance of the comedy for publication outside of the annual plan. These suppositions, however, do not answer the question of why Kross completed this translation in the first place.

As noted above, the literature curriculum in Estonian schools had undergone serious changes by the beginning of the 1960s — Griboedov was no longer given much attention — and in this context new translations were clearly not in demand. The same can be said regarding a potential commemoration. The fact that 1964–65 would mark Griboedov's 170th birthday was noted in the USSR only in "Literaturnaya Armeniya" ("Literary Armenia") magazine [Саакян]. No other print media in 1964–65 contained a single article

¹⁶ Compare to the earned incomes of others at the same publishing house on December 4, 1959: head accountant, 1,000 rubles; cost accountant, 600 rubles; typist, 410 rubles [Revideerimisakt: 58].

about the anniversary [Указатели ЛЖС; Указатели ЛГС; Artiklite kroonika 1964–65]. The approaching 175th birthday of the comic author was celebrated later, in 1969–70 [Фомичев: 4].

Kross received his commission from the theater. In contrast to Kärner, whose “Misfortune” was very rarely performed in Estonian theaters¹⁷, the new translation was commissioned directly by the Vanemuine Theater specifically for the young director Heikki Haravee (1924–2003), who was preparing a performance of Griboedov’s comedy as his thesis work to graduate from his “Advanced Directing Courses” (at GITIS — the State Institute for Theatre Art) in Moscow [Tormis; Tonts: 87]. The play was approved for production on June 28, 1962 [Tonts: 283], and premiered on January 20, 1963 [Kask: 546]. Obviously, Kross’s translation of “Misfortune” should be dated specifically to this time¹⁸. From this, two conclusions can be drawn: first, that the text submitted to the publisher was truly already completed, and second, that the text was not originally intended for publication as a book (like Kärner), but for the text to be spoken from the stage, which must undoubtedly be reflected in the poet’s manner of translation.

It is significant that the only detailed review of Vanemuine’s performance of “Misfortune” contrasted Kärner’s “schoolbook” translation with Kross’s “theatrical” translation. Lea Tormis wrote:

The translation composed in a hurry by Jaan Kärner, through which the Estonian reader-viewer knows this work, did not accurately represent the significant values in Griboedov’s play and did not facilitate its popularization. And if a classic work is already speckled with undeserved museum dust, when it becomes an ordinary image of the history of literature, just another required reading in school, then bringing it to life on stage is no easy task. Vanemuine’s production is far from ideal. But there is no scent of the museum about it. Griboedov’s keen sense here finds a way into the hearts and minds of our contemporaries. The new translation, commissioned by the theater from Jaan Kross, has value as an independent work. Griboedov’s terseness, mordacity, wit, and sparkling verse generally find adequate expression. And this was served, of course, by the great support of the production team [Tormis].

This article was published on July 19, 1963 and expressed the opinion of the reviewer, who understood the text only based on what she heard from the stage and without the chance to read the as-yet unpublished translation. From this

¹⁷ Of the professional theaters, only the Tallinn Dramatic Theater attempted to put on “Misfortune” in 1946 and 1948; however, both attempts received poor reviews from critics [Kask: 148, 169].

¹⁸ Immediately before and, apparently, during his work on “Misfortune”, Kross translated Rostan’s comedy in verse, which indicates the necessity of future research into possible connections between the two translations.

perspective, Tormis's evaluation is particularly important, since it demonstrates Kross's success in creating a "stage" version of "Misfortune" in Estonian. In essence, a situation arose that is characteristic of European and Russian translations of classics: the two translations of Griboedov's comedy "occupied different mediums: one in literature [and curriculum], another in the theater;" a "dual canon" arose characteristic for, say, translations of Shakespeare [Semenenko: 64–65].

It should be noted that Tormis evaluated the new translation and its production as "adequate" and oriented toward a modern audiences. She wrote that Haravee's "Chatsky no longer stands on the marble pedestal of a classical hero, but approaches close to us with his human pain, love, and suffering" [Tormis]. The reviewer underscored the director's rejection of authoritative theatrical traditions and the presence of an independent concept, the most important features of which were the "deheroization" of Chatsky and a deep development of the love triangle among Chatsky, Sophia, and Molchalin. "Sophia", Tormis believed, "was conceived by the director as a kindred soul to Chatsky, who, due to stubbornness arising from injured feelings, temporarily sees in Chatsky only an evil and cruel mocker, who loves not the real but an imagined Molchalin, and who understands with horror in the end how wrong she had been about both of them. With such a Sophia, Chatsky's love and disappointment have the great strength and weight of tragedy, since he receives a blow from the place from which, more than from anywhere, he could have expected understanding and support" [Ibid]. The actor chosen for Chatsky's role, the young actor Evald Hermaküla, also, in the reviewer's opinion, agreed with the director's desire to avoid "the traditional cold quibbling, heroic posing and false pathos". Vanemuine's Chatsky suddenly became understandable, like a real, living person in particular circumstances, "young and lyrical", and "very deeply and painfully experiencing unhappiness in love and loneliness in a false and duplicitous society" [Ibid].

One cannot but notice that the tendency towards the deheroization of Chatsky and the increased intimacy of his relationship with Sophia gives Haravee's production at Vanemuine a distinct typological similarity to the production of "Misfortune" put on by G. Tovstonogov at the Bolshoy Dramaticheskoy Teatr (BDT — the Grand Dramatic Theater) in Leningrad, whose premiere took place on October 20, 1962, three months before the premiere in Tartu. The Leningrad production elicited from critics of the older generation, such as B. Alpers (1894–1974), sharp polemics and accusations of a misrepresentation of the "ideological" conception of the source and of "destruction of its foundational social conflicts" [Свидетельства: 315, 320]. The claims referred to Тов-

stonogov's reconceptualization of the portrayals of the negative characters, which supposedly endowed them either with positive characteristics (Famusov, Skalozub, Molchalin), or made enemies of those close to Chatsky (Sophia). Chatsky himself, as played by S. Yursky, transformed, in Alpers's opinion, into an "insignificant young man", good, but "weak-spirited", who sobbed his way through the play and fell into a swoon at the finale [СВИДЕТЕЛЬСТВА: 317–319]. However, young contemporaries gave exclusively high marks to the BDT's production, noting Chatsky's conflict with Muscovite society, his passion toward Sophia, and the compellingly "live" characters [Ibid: 308]. For the majority of viewers, the comedy had an ultramodern, almost journalistic ring: "Famusov is presented as a man who we know well from the recent past, a man hiding egoism, avarice, and moral unscrupulousness behind magnificent and loud words", wrote one critic, hinting at Stalinist functionaries [Ibid: 380].

In contrast to Tovstonogov's production, on the stage of the Maly Teatr (the Small Theater) in Moscow (on January 21, 1963, the day after the premiere at Vanemuine) a different interpretation of "Misfortune" was presented, with the heroic Chatsky the Decembrist at the center. The Decembrists in this production even received physical incarnation, appearing as silent figures in the prologue and epilogue, and in the finale, Chatsky stood among their ranks [Ibid: 314]. The interpretations of the remaining characters were reduced exclusively to negative features, emphasizing the protagonist's separation from them.

It should be noted that the production staged in the Small Theater is mentioned by Tormis in her review as she emphasized that the finale at Vanemuine was "more traditional" [Tormis]. Only in this reference does the Estonian reviewer mention the Decembrists, thereby not decisively contrasting the official interpretation with the production put on by the Tartu theater. In one way or another, the production of "Misfortune" in Kross's translation and as interpreted by Haravee reflected an attempt to reject Soviet ideological patterns and reinterpret Griboedov's comedy from the point of view of personal values (the relationship between men and women, growing up, conflict with the older generation). In this regard, the Estonian producers took the same tack as Tovstonogov¹⁹.

But to what degree did this new theatrical interpretation of Griboedov influence Kross's translation? At first glance, it seems that there is no basis for supposing that the translator shared these views. The afterword in the published comedy reproduces the central ideologies of the official interpretation of

¹⁹ The question of possible contacts between Vanemuine and BDT requires special attention. Significantly, at the end of the 1960s even representatives of the official sciences in the USSR began to note the "extraordinary inconsistency in interpretation" and the necessity of reevaluating official views of Griboedov [Фомичев: 4].

“Misfortune”: its “historical and political significance” is noted, as is “Griboedov’s close association with the Decembrists” and their use of the comedy for “propaganda”, etc.; it is worth noting the traditional (in the Estonian context) reference to the first edition of the German translation of the comedy in Tallinn²⁰ [Kross 1964: 134–135]. Nevertheless, the afterword must not be looked upon as an expression of the translator’s position. First, the text in question is a compilation of theses from the forewords and commentaries of V. Orlov [Орлов 1959: V–VIII; Грибоедов: 662], whose edition of Griboedov’s “Essays” Kross mentioned as a source for his translation [Kross 1964: 4]. Second, Kross later admitted how easy it had been for him to fabricate Soviet discourse for publications of classics [Kross 2003: 210]. In sum, the only reliable source remains the text of the comedy itself.

Note that the afterword lacks one of the most important of the Soviet lines of argument regarding Griboedov: the reference to Lenin. As expressed by Orlov: “The Great Lenin highly valued the crushing strength of Griboedov’s word. He often referred to sayings by Griboedov and to the images he created when exposing and destroying the enemies of the people and the revolution” [Орлов 1959: XXIV]. As noted above, it was particularly those “aphorisms” consecrated by Lenin’s use of them that held the most ideological weight in the text of the comedy. And if the entire comedy were to be adequately translated, then these elements should have received particular attention. Regarding this, the next section will attempt to reconstruct Kross’s attitude toward “Misfortune” and his translation strategy by comparatively analyzing such aphoristic moments in each Estonian translation.

5. Kross vs. Kärner

Soviet policy regarding translation into national languages in the Stalinist era was controlled by a special Commission on the literatures of the peoples of the USSR at the Union of Soviet Writers in Moscow. Its instructions were carried out by local Unions, which were responsible for training translation personnel [Tõlkeküsimused: 4], and for monitoring translation quality and reviewing publications to see how closely this or that translation “in its artistic level” “attained” or “did not attain” the level of the next “great master of the Russian word” [Ibid: 1, 10]. The obvious subjectivity of such reviews did not add clarity to translators’ tasks. How, in practice, to maintain the required level and find a balance between the linguistic material of the original and the particularities

²⁰ Compare: [Urgart: 235; Vene kirjandus 1974: 23]

of national traditions had to be decided by each translator to his own success or detriment.

In such a situation, clearly, the safest route was to attempt a “precise translation” (in the terms of I. Levý [Левый: 120]). This tendency is reflected in Kärner’s translation of “Misfortune”.

Kärner admitted in an interview with “Sovetskaya Estoniya”: “The translation of Griboedov’s timeless comedy is no easy task. It is very difficult to attain in translation the precise shades of Griboedov’s brilliant, lyrical dialogue. Griboedov’s flawless rhyme further compounds the difficulties of translation” [Линев]. From this, one may conclude that Kärner paid particular attention to rhyme, verse, and accuracy in conveying meaning.

In 1960, when Kross was working on his translation, varied-footed iambs, rich rhyme, and the aphoristic character of the poetry continued to be seen as properties of Griboedov’s text independent of the mitigation of monitoring and changes in interpretations of “Misfortune” [Kross 1964: 134]. Rhyme in “Misfortune”, as noted by Boris Tomashevsky, fulfilled a constructive function in free iambic, separating “verse from verse” [Томашевский: 78], making it and its very size indispensable.

Both Kärner and Kross attempt to meet these conditions. Each varies the volume of the verses, like in the original, from six- to single-footed iambs; however, it is the rhyme that appears to be the deciding factor in their construction of phrases. Thus, in the rare case of Griboedov’s use of monosyllabic verse, so-called “verses in echo”, “repetition of the rhyme of the preceding verse” [Ibid: 91], both translators convey these with significantly longer phrases, though preserving the rhyme:

Нет-с, свой талант у всех... — У **вас?** / **Два-с** [Грибоедов: 55]

No, everyone has a talent... And you? / Two

Ja **teid?** / Mul kaks on **neid** [Kärner: 81]

And you? / I have two

Ja teil — kui küsitaks? / Mul? **Kaks** [Kross 1964: 71]

And you, if they asked? / Me? Two

In another, similar case, Kärner attempts to preserve the monosyllabic verse, translating word-for-word, but he loses the rhyme:

На завтрашний спектакль имеете билет? / **Нет...** /

<...> напрасно бы кто взялся [Грибоедов: 66]

To tomorrow’s play do you have a ticket? / No... /

... it is a vain undertaking

Kas on teil pilet homseks etenduseks või? / **Ei.** /
 <...> korda läinud [Kärner: 97]

Do you have a ticket to tomorrow's performance? / No. / ...he left

Kas homseks teatrisse teil pilet on? / Ei **veel.** / <...> miskil **teel** [Kross 1964: 84]
 To tomorrow's theater do you have a ticket? / Not yet. / ... another way.

Kross finds a solution by transferring the rhyme to the next line, thereby lengthening it, but preserving the overall rhyme structure of the original.

To these two main structural characteristics of Griboedov's text, which both translators attempt to convey, an ideological burden is added. The following moments are particularly telling regarding the translation strategies of Kärner and Kross.

1. The couplet by Famusov, quoted in every schoolbook:

Сергей Сергеевич, нет! Уж коли зло пресечь:
 Забрать все книги бы, да **сжечь** [Грибоедов: 79]

Sergey Sergeevich, no! Oh, but to suppress evil:
 I'd take all the books and burn them.

Sergei Sergeitš, ei! Kui kurja **juurida**:
 kõik võtta raamatud ja panna põlema [Kärner: 116]

Sergey Sergeevich, no! To uproot evil:
 I'd take all books and set them afire.

Ei, ei! Et pahed kaoks, te võtke, **isake**,
 Kõik raamatud ja tulle **visake!** [Kross: 100]

No, no! That vices would vanish, take, Father,
 All the books and throw them to the flame!

Here, Kärner translates word-for-word, down to Skalozub's name and patronymic, and thereby loses the rhyme, while Kross preserves the rich paired rhyme by changing the words and foot-length (instead of 6–4, he uses 5–5).

2. The most oft-quoted beginning of Chatsky's monologue "And who are the judges?" [Цейтлин: 276; Ашукин: 13, 100]

А судьи кто? — За древностию **лет**
 К свободной жизни их вражда непримирима,
 Сужденья черпают из забытых **газет**
 Времен очаковских и покоренья **Крыма**; [Грибоедов: 37]

And who are the judges? As they age
 Their hostility toward the life of liberty becomes implacable,

Judgments derived from forgotten newspapers
From the time of Ochakov and the conquest of Crimea;

Kärner reproduces this word-for-word:

Ent kohtunikud kes? — Nad raukluse**st**
on vaba elu vastu leppimatus vim**mas**
ja vaateid ammutavad unund lehted**est**
me võiduaegadelt Otšakovis ja Krim**mis**; [Kärner: 55]

But who are the judges? They from decrepitude
are irreconcilable hostility to the free life
And with judgements derived from forgotten newspapers
from the time of our victory at Ochakov and Crimea

Kross conveys these lines differently. First, he notes the internal, word-root rhyme in the phrase that Chatsky takes up: «Не я один все также **осужда-**ют» — «А **судь**и кто?» (“‘Anyone would judge you in my place’. ‘And who are the judges?’”) in translation becomes “‘Kõik teised **laidavad**, ‘Kes on need **laitjad**?’” (defame, defamers).

Kes on need laitjad? Ah, ränk vabaduse**vaen**
on kõik, mis tunnevad need vaname**hed**.
Ja nende vaated? Naeruväärne **laen**!
Sest laenajaks on koltund ajale**hed** [Kross 1964: 48].

Who are these defamers? Ah, fierce hatred of freedom
That is all that those greybeards feel.
And their views? A funny debt!
Since they rent out yellowed newspapers.

Additionally, the translator drops the specific, but irrelevant for his contemporaries, Ochakov and Crimea, which opens the possibility of more easily projecting these descriptions on the older generation of viewers (see above regarding such a reading at the production of the BDT); that is, the translation is modernized, unlike its predecessor.

3. The most patriotic moment, interpreted in Soviet discourse as Chatsky/Griboedov’s confession of love to the homeland:

Опять увидеть их мне суждено судь**бой**!
Жить с ними надоест, и в ком не сыщешь **пяте**?
Когда ж постранствуешь, воротисься **домой**,
И дым Отечества нам сладок и **приятен** [Грибоедов: 20].

To see them again I’m fated by destiny!
Life with them will grow tiresome, and who is found spotless?

After travel here and there, returning home
the smoke of the Fatherland is sweet and pleasant.

Kärner preserves both the length and the rhyme, and at the same time strives to precisely translate every lexeme of the original:

Neid jälle näha mulle antud saatuse**st**!
See tüütab, kel ei leiduks täppi teos või sõn**us**?
Kui aga tuled koju, väsind reisid**est**,
ka Isamaa suits meile magus on ja mõn**us**! [Kärner: 30]

I'm fated again to see them by destiny!
This will grow tiresome, who has no spots in deeds or words?
But when you come home after gruelling travel
and the Fatherlands smoke is sweet and lively!

Nüüd näha saatus taas neid kõiki laseb **mul**!
Meil arukate arv küll pole kuigi **jagus**,
kuid hellaks läheb rind ju võõrsilt tule**kul**
ja kodu suitski on me meelest hea ja **magus**! [Kross 1964: 27]

Now destiny grants me to see them all.
Our number of intellectuals is never in abundance,
But when on the way home from abroad you soften from feelings
then even the smoke of home seems good and sweet.

Kross's translation contains fundamentally new shades: instead of the indeterminate "reis" (trip), he uses "võõrsilt" (from abroad), which more closely aligns with the understanding of Chatsky's travels. It is allowable that this replacement also could be understood in the context of the return of people from exile (including Kross himself), particularly since the location of the patriotic "Fatherland" is exchanged for "home", the beloved place of every person.

4. The ideologically significant passage from Chatsky's monologue, which serves as the source of several widely-used quotes [Ашукин: 250, 488; Vene kirjandus 1964: 142–143] that describe the comedy's conflict:

Как посравнить, да посмотреть / Век нынешний и век минувший:
Свежо предание, а верится с трудом; [Грибоедов: 28]

How to compare, or look upon / Today's century and the one just past:
Fresh is the story, yet difficult to believe;

On rumalaks läind maailm, / te võite ohkel öelda praegu;
kui võrdleb vaim ja vaatab silm / nii praeguseid kui möödund aegu;
ehk värske küll legend, on raske uskuda [Kärner: 42].

The world became stupid, / you can now say with a sigh;
 When reason compares and the eye sees / how today like the time past
 May be a fresh legend, but hard to believe.

Jah: rumalamaks läheb ilm! / Nii ohata küll yöite praegu.
 Kuis yõrrelda saab vaim ja silm / käesolevaid ja möödunud aegu:
 nii hiljutine aeg, kuid uskumatu näib [Kross 1964: 37].

Yes: the world is becoming stupider! / So you may sigh now.
 As the mind and eye may compare / current and past times:
 Such a recent time, but it seems unbelievable.

Here Kross's distinct orientation on his predecessor is notable, both in his use of the same rhyme of "praegu / aegu", and in the related lexemes "möödunud" "võite" (underlined in the above excerpts). Moreover, he applies the same method of conveying the verbs "compare" and "look" through parts of the body: "reason compares and the eye sees" (Kärner) and "The mind and eye may compare" (Kross). However, Kärner's translation of the original's "fresh story" («свежо предание») as "fresh legend" ("värske legend") is not taken up by Kross, who substitutes "such a recent time" ("nii hiljutine aeg"). Such a substitution makes the past not a "legend" (something far away), as in Kärner's version, but something close to the present moment. On the one hand, this brings Kross's version closer to the original, and on the other, allowed the play's 1963 viewers to see a sharply relevant allusion in these verses.

It is important to note that Kross's borrowing, noted above, was not accidental. He undoubtedly made use of the 1945 translation and did not ignore the experience of his predecessor in his own work, in some places even using Kärner's word choices and, more often, his rhymes:

Помилуйте, не вам, чему же удивляться?
 Что нового покажет мне Москва?
 Вчера был бал, а завтра будет два [Грибоедов: 19].

Upon my word, what should surprise me, if not you?
 What can Moscow show me that is new?
 Yesterday there was a ball, and tomorrow there will be two.

Kui mitte teid, siis keda imetella?
 Mis uudiseks on Moskva uuemaks?
 Ball eile oli, homme on neid kaks [Kärner: 28].

If not you, whom should I admire?
 What fresh news is there in Moscow?
 There was a ball yesterday, tomorrow there will be two.

Oh arm! Kui mitte teid, siis keda imetleda?
 Mis Moskvas uut ma veel küll avastaks?
Et eile oli ball ja homme neid on kaks! [Kross 1964: 25–26]
 Oh mercy! If not you, whom should I admire?
 What else new in Moscow might I discover?
 That yesterday there was a ball and tomorrow there will be two!

Kross appears to repeat the most successful of Kärner's rhymes, often correcting his errors in verse length:

Гоненье на Москву. Что значит видеть **свет!**
 Где ж лучше? — Где нас **нет** [Грибоедов: 19].
 'Persecution of Moscow. So this is seeing the world!
 'Where better?' 'Where we are not'.
 See kiusujutt. Seks maailm õpetanud **teid!**
Kus on siis parem? — Seal, kus pole meid [Kärner: 28].
 'This stubborn conversation. With this you teach the world!
 'Where then better?' 'There where we are not'.
 Laim puha! Lai maailm?! Mis sinna kisub **teid!**
Kus parem on? — Kus pole meid [Kross 1964: 26].
 'Nothing but slander! The wide world? What draws you there?'
 'Where better?' 'Where we are not'.

See also other such cases of the repetition of rhymes and their nearby lexemes, particularly often in Act I: "Ma kuulsin teie häält" ... "panna — anna" [Kärner: 19; Kross 1964: 18]; "Tõin paberid" ... "puudus — truudus" [Kärner: 20; Kross 1964: 18]. Using and improving the poetry of his predecessor's work, Kross set other goals in his translation.

Regarding the opportunities for the allusive reading characteristic of theatrical plays, the clues described above regarding the new stage interpretation of "Misfortune" are noticeable also in Kross's conveyance of certain dynamic scenes. For example, at the end of Act I, Scene III, Liza pulls apart Sophia's and Molchalin's hands, which is emphasized by Griboedov in her line: "God bless you, remove your hand. (*Separates them...*)" [Грибоедов: 8]. Kärner translates this as: "No jumal teiega; te minge juba. (*Lahutab nad...*)" [Kärner: 13], thereby transforming the line into "God bless you, go already"; that is, addressing it to Molchalin. Kross underscores Liza's use of force: "Noh aitab! Võtke ära käsi. (*Tirib nad teineteisest eemale. ...*)" [Kross 1964: 13] ("Enough! Remove your hand! (*Pulls them apart*)"). In this translation, the separation of Sophia and Molchalin gains a more intimate character, while the stage direction under-

scores the expressive nature of the maid's movement. This is both closer to the original intent and also oriented toward actual performance on stage by actors.

Even the limited number of examples presented herein demonstrates the main stylistic differences between the two translators.

Kärner strove predominantly to convey the original word-for-word, sometimes ignoring the rhyming structure and context of lines of dialogue. Not allowing himself to stray from the original text, he filled his translation with the realities of the 19th century, relevant to Griboedov, but completely unfamiliar to the Estonian reader of the 1940s. Instead of using Estonian equivalents of antiquated Russian words, the translator conveyed the realities of the original through transliteration ("skomorohhidele", "phussurmaniks" [Kärner: 17, 110]). Clearly, this was connected with the educational function of his publication, which was especially equipped with numerous annotations (44 in all) explaining unfamiliar words and realities. The translator's focus on a "precise" translation, the heavily annotated nature of the 1945 version of "Misfortune", and particularly the inclusion of the translation in the school curriculum lead to reception of Kärner's work as literary, "textbook", and antiquated, as Tormis noted in her review.

The strategy of "free translation" [Левый: 120] used by Kross was devoted to the task of creating a modern version of "Misfortune" designed to be heard from the stage. This explains his preference for preserving the given rhythmic structure rather than the literal meaning of the dialogue. Rich and regular rhymes allowed Kross to create a resonant translation that was much closer to the poetry of the original than its predecessor. Characteristically, Kross's translation contains an almost equal number of lines as Griboedov's original: 2,423 in the original versus 2,448 in Kross's translation.

Free translation traditionally strives to preserve meaning without complicating the text with incomprehensible realities; rather, conveying them through other lexical means. For example, Griboedov's "Did he become a Mohammedan?" («Пошел он в пусурманы?» [Грибоедов: 75]) becomes in Kross's translation "Did he convert to Islam?" ("Läks muhhamedi usku?" [Kross 1964: 96]). This also must have made it easier for audiences to understand the comedy. In addition, by shedding overly specific historical details, Kross achieved a more universal and allusive sounding text of the comedy, which was consistent with the Zeitgeist of The Thaw and the expectations of the viewing public. The result was a first-rate theatrical equivalent of "Misfortune", received as a work of independent poetic value for Estonian literature in the 1960s.

6. The Misfortune of Being Soviet

If the silence of certain critics regarding Haravee's successful production²¹ was attributed by contemporaries to the intrigues of the editors of "Edasi" newspaper against Kaarel Ird [Советская культура; Ird: 303], then the overt evidence of Griboedov's near irrelevance was completely ignored in Estonian press about Kross's translation (see: [Bibliograafia]). However, another picture emerges when spheres of culture are addressed that are, to a great extent, obedient to official ideology.

Despite the radical reduction in time devoted to study of "Misfortune" in Estonian school curriculum, it is precisely in the newly-edited 1974 textbook of Russian literature for the 9th grade by Harald Reinop that the only positive reference to Kross's translation appears²². In place of excerpted quotes from Kärner's translation there appear a larger quote from the dialogue about the danger of books (30 lines) from Kross's translation, which was preserved through subsequent editions and revisions and only in 1977 was somewhat reduced (to 21 lines) [Vene kirjandus 1974: 20–21; Vene kirjandus 1977: 21–22]. Moreover, the textbook's author placed a quoted paragraph from Kross's official-sounding afterword, but in conjunction with praise of the translator: "Against the backdrop of sentimental drama and watery vaudeville found in Russian theater at that time, "Misfortune", through its Decembristic social criticism, Griboedov-esque realistic satire, and ingenious folk verse, was a triple bomb', aptly characterized the play that most famous of its translators into Estonian [eestindaja], Jaan Kross" [Vene kirjandus 1977: 23]. Thus, from 1974 on Kärner's translation was replaced by Kross's in school practice.

The new translation's theatrical character, as noted above, later contributed to the appearance of new productions of Griboedov in the 1980s. In 1984 Estonian Radio produced and aired a radio play based on Kross's translation of "Misfortune" [Kuuldemäng]. In the history of Griboedov's reception in the Estonian language, the use of such media significantly widened the audience of the production, as the number of potential listeners could have been up to 49% of the Estonian population of the ESSR [Raadio: 108]. Of course, the comedy presented on official Estonian Radio obviously complied fully with Soviet cultural policy.

²¹ The play was performed 13 times over two seasons, which some considered a success [Советская культура] and others did not [Tonts: 283].

²² There is a mistake in Kross's bibliography [Bibliograafia: 87] — it is Kärner's translation, not Kross's, that was used in the Reinop / Tobias 1964 textbook [Vene kirjandus 1964: 141–145; Kärner: 38–44].

According to the current database, the last time “Misfortune” was performed in Estonian was in Viljandi by the Ugala Theater on February 1, 1987. Jaak Allik’s production again failed to interest critics. There is very little material on which to reconstruct this production; however, it is worth noting the producers’ experimental approach to the text of the comedy. At its center lay Kross’s translation, but Kärner’s translation “was used for its revision” [Andmebaas]. Both versions were thus in demand in late-Soviet Estonian theater.

7. Conclusion

The reception of the classics of Russian literature in the Soviet period, as demonstrated through the example of Griboedov, was, above all, connected with the cultural and educational policy of the government, geared toward the Sovietization of the country.

The first Estonian translation of “Misfortune” was commissioned by the government in an attempt to provide examples of “progressive” Russian classics in the national languages of the republics, with two goals: 1) to demonstrate general cultural values shared by the Estonian “nation” with the “family of nations” in the USSR, within the context of the 1945 commemoration of Griboedov; and 2) for inclusion in the revised (regarding societal norms) literature curriculum in Estonian schools. This commission was completed quickly by Kärner, who was loyal to the authorities, allowing the ideologically-relevant Griboedov to be included in the school curriculum in 1946. Kärner’s translation was “precise”, as evidenced by his word-for-word conveyance of “aphorisms” and details irrelevant to Estonian readers. In total, this translation was distributed mainly through textbooks and was very rarely used for theatrical productions.

The next translation of Griboedov’s play, completed by Kross for the Vanemuine Theater in 1962 and published in 1964, had a fundamentally different character. The expectation of being spoken aloud on stage determined the translator’s strategy (“free translation”), who strives through the whole text to convey the meaning and particularities of Griboedov’s verse. At the same time, the translator easily reworked those “aphorisms” honored by Lenin’s use of them, giving them a more allusive sound. Kross’s approach was in many ways determined by the new cultural trends of the era of The Thaw and the rethinking of “Misfortune” in this context. Successful in its execution, the new translation replaced the previous one in school textbooks and contributed to the temporary relevance of Griboedov’s comedy in Estonian theater.

Nevertheless, the official interpretation of Griboedov's biography, having received the most widespread distribution, turned out to be fatal for his subsequent reception in Soviet and post-Soviet Estonia. The "textbook" and "Soviet" classic could not be saved even by Kross's successful translation, which, in turn, was also forgotten²³.

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²³ This is evidenced by the absence of new editions, and in particular, by the fact that modern translators of Griboedov's aphorisms into Estonian are ignorant of its existence [Aforismid: 181–182].

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