

Translation as Politics: Translating Nikolai Karamzin's *Letters of a Russian Traveler* in Nineteenth-Century France¹

Rodolphe Baudin

Sorbonne University

Rodolphe.baudin@sorbonne-universite.fr

Abstract:

This article examines the three translations of Nikolai Karamzin's Letters of a Russian Traveler published in nineteenth-century France. Relying on Descriptive Translation Studies so as to challenge the traditional narrative about the political innocuousness of Karamzin's travelogue, it reconstructs the historical contexts of the three publications in order to highlight the political agendas of their translators and/or translating patrons. Far from being the innocent product of the translators' sheer curiosity, the three translations prove to be political objects, used at three key moments in the history of Franco-Russian relations in the nineteenth century, in order to call for political change, to try and restore Russia's damaged reputation, or to attempt to forge new diplomatic alliances.

Keywords:

Karamzin, Letters of a Russian Traveler, travelogue, Descriptive Translation Studies, France, Russian-French cultural relations, politics.

In November 2022, the Paris-based Institute of Slavonic Studies published my French translation of Nikolai Karamzin's *Letters of a Russian Traveler*.² The motivation behind this publication was to give French speakers full access to Karamzin's famous travelogue. Indeed, all previous French-language editions of *Letters of a Russian Traveler* focused solely on the French part of Karamzin's text, sometimes adding isolated episodes from the German and Swiss sections. Thus, no full translation offering the entire four parts—German, Swiss, French and British—was therefore available to the French reading public. While the idea of translating the full travelogue originated in 2020 and the translation and comments were completed in 2021, usual editorial procedures delayed the publication for months. As a result, the book came out after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, at a time when Russian culture and its ties to Russian imperialism became part of a general conversation and any celebration of Russian literature the object of legitimate debate. This new context seemed to give an unwanted political meaning to a candid translation attempt, whose introduction and comments did not convey any message in support of Russian imperialism, either now or in Karamzin's time.

This unexpected chronological clash between the big picture of tragic historical events and the supposedly minor event of translating into French a text from eighteenth-century Russian literature did raise questions, however, and fueled the need to take a

¹ I wish to express my gratitude to colleagues from Princeton University, the Study Group on Eighteenth-century Russia and New York University's Jordan Center, whose feedback was paramount in shaping the arguments at the center of this paper. I also thank my two anonymous reviewers for their constructive criticism and comments.

² Nikolai Karamzin, *Lettres d'un voyageur russe*, trans. & ed. Rodolphe Baudin (Paris: Institut d'Études slaves – L'Inventaire, 2022).

closer look at Karamzin's previous translations. A study of the introductions to these previous translations, carried out in order to examine how early translators had legitimized their decision to make Karamzin available to the French public, soon revealed the political dimension of the legitimizing discourse they were mobilizing.

Scholars working on translation since the "cultural turn" of translation studies and the rise of Descriptive Translation Studies in the late 1980s and early 1990s have all emphasized the political dimension of any translation attempt. In the words of André Lefevere: "Translation has to do with authority and legitimacy and, ultimately, with power [...] Translation is not just a 'window opened on another world,' or some such pious platitude. Rather, translation is a channel opened [...] through which foreign influences can penetrate the native culture, challenge it, and even contribute to subverting it."³ Additionally, as Gideon Toury has shown, a translation is not just a textual product, but what he labelled a "translation event," that is the "social, historical, cultural, ideological [...] context of situation in which the act of translation [...] is embedded."⁴ This attention to context incited descriptive translation studies to focus on the agents and institutions involved in "translating events," from the translators themselves to the institution granting them the authority and material conditions necessary to accomplish acts of translation. The work of these agents and institutions, and the relations they develop with translators, form what Lefevere called "translation patronage," which almost always follows political and/or economic agendas.⁵

This attention to the political dimension of translation events seems particularly relevant in the Russian context. As Derek Offord and Vladislav Rjéoutschi have shown, starting from the eighteenth century, "literature and in particular the theatre, as a public form of art, were useful means of improving the image of Russia in Europe. However, the only way to demonstrate the excellence of Russian literature and theatre to Enlightenment Europe was through translation [...] Translation therefore had an important place [...] in the cultural strategy of the Russian court."⁶ Starting with efforts to circulate translations of Kantemir's satires and Sumarokov's tragedies in French journals during the reign of Elizabeth Petrovna, "the conduct of literary propaganda through translation into French was [...] a long-term enterprise,"⁷ which did not end with the eighteenth century but carried on well into the following one.

Together with translations, accounts on Russian literature published abroad were instrumental in offering a positive image of Russia to foreign audiences. Here again, as Carole Chapin has shown, efforts started in the mid-eighteenth century, with the

³ André Lefevere, *Translation/History/Culture* (London: Routledge: 1992), 2.

⁴ Gideon Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1995), 249. Quoted in Christina Schäffner, "Politics and Translation", in *A Companion to Translation Studies*, eds. Piotr Kuhliczak & Karin Littau (Cleveland, Buffalo, Toronto: Multilingual Matters Ltd., 2007), 136.

⁵ André Lefevere, *Translating Literature. Practice and Theory in a Comparative Literature Context* (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1992), 116-118. On the activity of translating agents and institutions in the Russian imperial context, see *Laboratoriia poniatii: perevod i iazyki politiki v Rossii XVIII veka*, eds. S. V. Pol'skoi & V. S. Rzheutskii (Moscow: NLO, 2022).

⁶ Derek Offord & Vladislav Rjéoutschi, "Translation and propaganda in the mid-eighteenth century: French versions of Sumarokov's tragedy *Sinav and Truvor*," in *French in Russia*, eds. Derek Offord, Gesine Argent & Vladislav Rjéoutschi (Bristol: The University of Bristol, 2017), 2, <https://doi.org/10.5523/bris.3nmuogzoxzmpx2l2uum5f3bjp>.

⁷ Offord & Rjéoutschi, "Translation and propaganda," 10.

publication of papers in French journals on the state of literature in Russia, which “testify rather of the existence of a Franco-Russian network than of a sudden interest in Russian literature among French-speaking journalists.”⁸ Among the agents of this active network, Russian grandes, including Andrei Shuvalov, French diplomats stationed in Russia, such as the Chevalier d’Eon and Paris-based French journalists like Élie Fréron collaborated to produce papers pursuing, as Alexandre Stroev has noted, “literary and political goals,” which were meant to assert “the reputation of the (Russian) empress” and strengthen political ties between the two countries.⁹ Here again, far from disappearing in the eighteenth century, such efforts continued well into the next century. Indeed, they peaked in the 1880s with the publication of Melchior de Voguë’s *Le roman russe*, at a time when eighteenth-century-style literary patronage had disappeared.¹⁰

A St. Petersburg-based French diplomat, Voguë played a major role in popularizing Russian literature in France. The publication of his famous book contributed to a boom in translations of Russian novels into French. As Pauline Gacoin Lablanchy has noted, translations of Russian novels increased from 16 in 1886, the year Voguë’s book was published, to 25 in 1888.¹¹ And here again, the combined effort of publicizing and translating Russian literature into French was, at least partly, politically motivated. A firm supporter of an anti-German political alliance between France and Russia, Voguë wrote the following in his introduction to *Le roman russe*:

For reasons of a different nature, which I will not elaborate here since everybody understands them as it is, I believe it is important to work on getting both countries closer by means of a mutual penetration of matters of the mind. As between two men, there can be no close friendship nor solidarity between two cultures before their minds have come into contact.¹²

It seems, then, that commenting on Russian literature to the French public and translating Russian literature into French were often politically motivated endeavors in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, long before they became an element of Cold War politics, with the French communist party developing a policy of translating Soviet classics on the one hand, and anti-Soviet publishing houses translating the works of Pasternak and Solzhenitsyn on the other.¹³ With this in mind, the present article aims at

⁸ Carole Chapin, “Représentations du théâtre russe dans la presse francophone des Lumières,” *Vivlioika: E-journal of Eighteenth-Century Russian Studies* 4 (2016), 128.

⁹ Aleksandr Stroev, “Zashchita i proslavlenie Rossii: istoriya sotrudnichestva sheval’e d’Eona i abbata Frerona,” *Francuzы v nauchnoi i intellektual’noi zhizni Rossii XVIII-XIX vv.* (Moscow: Olma media Grup, 2010), 173.

¹⁰ Melchior de Voguë, *Le roman russe* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1886). On Voguë and his book, see Magnus Röhl, *Le Roman russe de Eugène-Melchior de Voguë. Étude préliminaire* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1976).

¹¹ Pauline Gacoin Lablanchy, “Le vicomte Eugène-Melchior de Voguë et l’image de la Russie dans la France de la IIIe République,” *Bulletin de l’Institut Pierre Renouvin* 1:39 (2014), 71.

¹² Gacoin Lablanchy, “Le vicomte Eugène-Melchior de Voguë,” 75.

¹³ On translated Russian literature as an element of Cold War politics in France, see Pavel Chinksy, “La littérature russe et soviétique dans les ‘Lettres françaises’ de Janvier 1946 à mars 1953,” *Revue des Études slaves* 72:1-2 (2000): 81-95. For a British perspective on the impact of political contexts on translation

studying the political aspects of all nineteenth-century French translations of Karamzin's *Letters of a Russian Traveler*. Such a study has hitherto never been attempted, if only because Karamzin's sentimental travelogue seemed less politically oriented than his *History of the Russian State*. A text immediately perceived as a manifesto of Russian political conservatism, Karamzin's historical opus became the subject of heated debates among liberals, both in Russia and abroad, who felt compelled to counter its historical narrative. When the French painter and printmaker Gustave Doré published *Histoire pittoresque, dramatique, et caricaturale de la sainte russie* during the Crimean War in 1854, he used Karamzin not only as a source of information on Russian history, but also as a political text with which to argue.¹⁴ By comparison, *Letters of a Russian Traveler*, which was mainly regarded as an imitation of Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy*,¹⁵ may have seemed like a politically neutral literary product. Consequently, the translations of *Letters of a Russian Traveler* were never studied as political objects. Widening our focus from translations as pure textual products to include a study of how they are generated by patronage structures and specific historical contexts can help us shed light on the political significance of these texts.

In this article, I comment on these translations in chronological order and begin by introducing an early translation into the picture, unknown to contemporary historians of Russian literature and specialists on the history of cultural relations between France and Russia. Since this study focuses on translation, it offers a few reflections in the field of textual traductology, especially when the stylistic or hypertextual strategies chosen by the translators directly depended on the political contexts of their translation acts. It does not, however, study their market strategies or the reception of their translations by their contemporary audience in France. Studying the first aspect would indeed require an in-depth analysis of the politics of the French print market in the nineteenth-century that would far exceed the specific scope of the present paper. As for the question of reception, whilst I did succeed in identifying several reviews published in French journals after the publication of the two later translations, they focus exclusively on Karamzin's style, the quality of the translations or the value of *Letters of a Russian Traveler* as a source of information on the French Revolution and hence cannot serve as material for the study of the politics of translation.¹⁶

practices vis-à-vis Russia, see the "Translating Russia, 1890-1935" Special Issue of *Translation and Literature* 20:3 (Autumn 2011).

¹⁴ Gustave Doré, *Histoire pittoresque, dramatique, et caricaturale de la sainte Russie* (Paris: J. Bry ainé, 1854). For an English translation, see Gustave Doré, *History of Holy Russia*, trans. Daniel Weissbort (Chicago : Open Court Publishing Company, 1971). On Doré's opinion about Russia, see David Kunzle, "Gustave Doré's *History of Holy Russia*:" Anti-Russian Propaganda from the Crimean War to the Cold War," *The Russian Review* 42 (1983): 271-299. On satire and history in Doré's *Histoire*, see Alain Vaillant, "Rire de l'histoire et comique absolu: la Sainte Russie de Gustave Doré," *Écrire l'histoire* 10 (2012): 89-100.

¹⁵ See Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy* (London: T. Becket and P. A. de Hondt, 1768). On Sterne's influence on Karamzin, see Faina Kanunova, "Karamzin i Stern," *XVIII vek* 10 (Leningrad: Nauka, 1975): 258-264.

¹⁶ I could not find any review on the first of the three translations studied in the present article. The second translation, published in 1866, was reviewed in the following publications: *La Revue moderne* 41 (1867): 677; *Le Correspondant. Recueil périodique* 71 (1867): 783-787; and *La Revue des deux mondes* 68 (1867): 545. The third and last translation, published between 1883-1885, was reviewed in the following publications: *Revue des questions historiques* 36 (1884): 314; *Revue de la Révolution* 6 (1885): 238; *Revue de géographie* 17

Translating Karamzin's *Letters* at the Time of the Downfall of the First French Empire

As Tat'iana Bykova has shown, Karamzin's *Letters of a Russian Traveler* was fully translated into German and English during the author's lifetime.¹⁷ Although it did not enjoy similar success in France, it is erroneous to think that it was entirely ignored in this country before the death of its author in 1826. It was translated, albeit partially and in some fortuitous way, quite early in the nineteenth century. Indeed, the first French translation of *Letters of a Russian Traveler* was not, as the traditional narrative has it, the edition published in 1867 by Viktor Stepanovich Poroshin, which I discuss in my second part. It was the translation of Joseph-Golven Tuault de la Bouvrie (1744-1822), a moderate politician, deputy of the third estate for the seneschalty of Ploërmel at the Estates General of 1789, then a deputy of Morbihan during the First Empire and the Bourbon Restoration.



Fig. 1: Joseph-Golven Tuault de La Bouverie (1744-1822), député du tiers-état de la sénéchaussée de Ploërmel aux Etats-Généraux de 1789 (Paris: Dejabin, 1789).

In 1815, the Breton politician and writer published a 75-page booklet, entitled *Extrait des voyages du Docteur Karamsin, médecin de Moscou*, in the press of Galles Aîné, the king's printer in Vannes.¹⁸

(1885): 469; *Bibliothèque universelle et revue suisse* 28/82-84 (1885): 191 and *Le Livre. Revue du monde littéraire* 7 (1886): 73. For brief mentions of this translation, also see *La Revue internationale* 8 (1885): 36 and Paul Lacombe, *Bibliographie Parisienne. Tableau de moeurs (1600-1800)* (Paris: Rouquette, 1887), 55-56.

¹⁷ Tat'iana Bykova, "Perevody proizvedenii Karamzina na inostrannyе iazyki i otkliki na nikh v inostrannoi literature," XVIII vek 8 (Leningrad: Nauka, 1969): 324-342.

¹⁸ The reason why Tuault de la Bouvrie presented Karamzin as a doctor remains unclear. Karamzin's British translator did not do so.

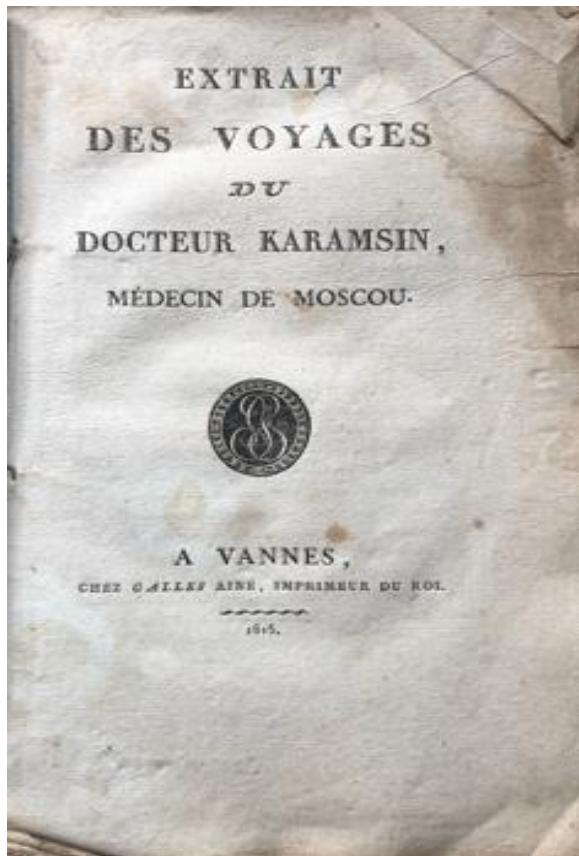


Fig. 2: the title page of Tuault de la Bouvrie's 1815 translation of Karamzin's *Letters of a Russian Traveler*.

In his introduction, written on October 21, 1813 in Ploërmel, where he fulfilled the functions of deputy justice of the peace and county head, Tuault de la Bouvrie wrote:

Monsieur Nicolas KARAMSIN, a Doctor from Moscow, and a very rich man, made a trip to Courland, Poland, Prussia, Switzerland, France and England; he gave the account of it in a work in three volumes, in German, translated into English by an unknown person. I do not understand German, but passably English. The content, the style, the details, the descriptions offered by this interesting journey, where I found new truths for me, as well as a mix of French, English, and even slightly Oriental elements, all presented in a poetic way, pleased me so much that I couldn't resist the temptation to translate the last part, relating to London and the domestic life of the rural inhabitants of this famous island. I wrote it in haste, but as best as I could, according to my custom, without wasting precious time, especially at my age, in correcting the mistakes with which everything that comes out of my pen abounds: I will be satisfied if the reader can guess the talent of the original author, and find a moment of amusement, recreation or distraction! The beginning of the book offers as much interest for foreigners to France as for those curious in history, in science: but it did not please me to the point of giving me the hope of pleasing the audience by translating them. Two episodes provided me

with the material for two little tales in verse, or rather with rhymes. I placed the locations of the scene, situated in Germany for one and in Switzerland for the other in the original book, in the province of Brittany, where I was born, where I lived, where I hope to die, and which was always so dear to my heart. I will try to copy them one after the other, if my health allows me, and I ask for the whole thing a lot of indulgence. I feel how much I need it, and I do not conceal the distance between Mr. KARAMSIN and myself.¹⁹

As this introduction suggests, the first French translation of Karamzin's *Letters* was therefore an indirect translation made on the basis of the English edition of 1803, translated by a man called Feldborg.²⁰ It was also partial, since it only concerned the letters on England. Additionally, even these English letters were translated partially, as Tuault de la Bouvrie faithfully followed Feldborg, who had removed from his translation two of Karamzin's original letters (numbers 153 and 154 in Lotman and Uspenskii's edition).²¹ Similarly, Tuault de la Bouvrie's faithfulness to Feldborg's translation resulted in the removal of entire paragraphs from the end of Karamzin's original letters (numbers 136, 151 and 155).²² Finally, Tuault de la Bouvrie, just like Feldborg, merged some of Karamzin's letters. But if Feldborg had merged only two letters—numbers 144 and 146²³—Tuault de la Bouvrie merged six, the same two as Feldborg, but also letters 136 and 137²⁴ and 142 with 143.²⁵ In this respect, Tuault de la Bouvrie showed more paratextual creativity than Karamzin's English translator. This creativity also materialized at the hypertextual level. As he noted in his introduction, the Breton writer added to his translation two verse rewritings of two prose episodes from Karamzin's

¹⁹ [Tuault de la Bouvrie], "Préface," in *Extrait des voyages du Docteur Karamzin, médecin de Moscou*, (Vannes: Chez Galles Aîné, Imprimeur du Roi, 1815), n.p.: "Monsieur Nicolas KARAMSIN, Docteur-Médecin, de Moscou, fort riche, fit un voyage en Courlande, Pologne, Prusse, Suisse, France et Angleterre ; il en a donné le récit dans un ouvrage en trois volumes, en langue allemande, traduit en anglais par un inconnu. Je n'entends pas l'allemand, mais passablement l'anglais. Le fonds, le stile, les détails, les descriptions de cet intéressant voyage, où j'ai trouvé des vérités neuves pour moi, un genre mixte tenant du français, de l'anglais, et un peu de l'oriental, toujours plus ou moins poétique, m'ont plu au point que je n'ai pas pu résister à la tentation d'en traduire la dernière partie, relative à Londres et à la vie domestique des habitants des campagnes de cette île si renommée. Je l'ai écrit à la hâte, mais de mon mieux, suivant mon usage, sans perdre un tems précieux, surtout à mon âge, à corriger les fautes dont fourmille tout ce qui sort de ma plume: heureux si le lecteur peut y deviner l'auteur original, et trouver un moment d'amusement, de récréation ou de distraction! Les commencemens offrent autant d'intérêt pour les étrangers à la France, que pour les curieux en histoire, en sciences : mais ils ne m'ont pas plu au point de me donner l'espoir de plaire en les traduisant. Deux épisodes m'ont fourni la matière de deux petits contes en vers, ou plutôt en rimes. J'ai placé les lieux de la scène, en Allemagne pour l'un, et en Suisse pour l'autre, dans cette province de Bretagne, où je suis né, où j'ai vécu, j'espère mourir, et, dans tous les tems, si chère à mon cœur. Je tâcherai de les copier à la suite, si ma santé me le permet, et je demande pour le tout beaucoup d'indulgence. Je sens combien j'en ai besoin, et je ne me dissimule pas la distance entre M. KARAMSIN et moi."

²⁰ On the identification of A. A. Feldborg as the anonymous British translator of Karamzin's *Letters*, see Bykova, "Perevody proizvedenii Karamzina na inostrannye iazyki," 334.

²¹ Nikolai Karamzin, *Pis'ma russkogo puteshestvennika*, eds. Iu. M. Lotman, N. A. Marchenko & B. A. Uspenskii (Leningrad: Nauka, 1987), 371-376.

²² *Pis'ma russkogo puteshestvennika*, 334-335, 368-370 & 377-380.

²³ *Ibid.*, 355-357 & 360-362.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 334-339.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 351-355.

original text. The first is the story about Jean and Lisette, told in letter 87 in Lotman and Uspenskii's edition, while Karamzin's narrator travels across the Pays de Gex in France on March 4, 1790.²⁶ The second is the tale about Count Gleichen, told by the Russian traveler in letter 36 in Lotman and Uspenskii's edition, written from Erfurt on July 22, 1789.²⁷

These two rewritings, offered by Tuault de la Bovrie in an appendix to his translation, are interesting in several ways. First, they testify to Tuault de la Bovrie's specific mechanisms of hypertextual appropriation. The French translator relocated the action of Karamzin's tales to his home region of Brittany. The first tale, retitled "Lise and Hylas" in Tuault de la Bovrie's translation, takes place in the Baie des Trépassés, that is the Bay of the Dead in Western Brittany, from which it borrows its subtitle "The Cape of the Dead." The second tale, retitled "A True story," substitutes Count Gleichen with Count du Chastel, a famous Breton medieval vassal. This *Frenchification* of Tuault de la Bovrie's Russian hypotext is remarkable, as it is an early example of reverse dynamics in the circulation mechanisms of literary borrowing from center to periphery in eighteenth-century European literature, an interesting case of French "*sklonenie na nashi nray*," to quote the borrowing model advocated by Vladimir Lukin in eighteenth-century Russia.²⁸

But these two rewritings provide yet additional information. First, they demonstrate that Tuault de la Bovrie's interest in *Letters of a Russian Traveler* was broader than a mere interest in Britain, which he mentions to justify his translation. Second, they testify to the translator's taste for the aesthetic regime used by Karamzin in both tales. As Tuault de la Bovrie explains concerning the first appendix: "I borrowed from this short episode the subject of the following idyll or elegy; but making it really interesting would require the talent of Theocritus."²⁹

What this quote reveals is Tuault de la Bovrie's admiration for Karamzin's ability to imitate in prose the idyllic or elegiac register of ancient poetry, which he himself feels able to render only in verse. In a sense, he bestowed upon Karamzin the same degree of talent as Gessner, who had set the model for adapting modern prose to the sensibility of these two genres of ancient poetry. This specific talent of Gessner and Karamzin resulted in their "elegant simplicity," a distinctive feature of the latter's prose according to another French translator, Henri de Coiffier, who translated Karamzin's *Natalia, the Boyar's Daughter, Poor Liza and Julie* in 1808. In his introduction, Coiffier wrote: "The way they are written is not the least of their merits; and those who have had the chance to read them in the original have saluted the successful mix of elegance and simplicity, of naivety and elevation which reigns in Karamzin's style."³⁰

²⁶ *Pis'ma russkogo puteshestvennika*, 189-192.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 79-81.

²⁸ Lukin explained this conception of borrowing from foreign literary models in the forewords to his plays *Nagrazhdennoe postoianstvo* and *Pustomel'ia*. See *Sochineniya i perevody Vladimira Ignat'evicha Lukina i Bogdana Egorovicha El'chaninova*, ed. P. A. Efremov (St. Petersburg: Izdanie Ivan Il'icha Glazunova, 1868), 82-84 & 110-120.

²⁹ [Tuault de la Bovrie], *Extrait des voyages du Docteur Karamzin, médecin de Moscou*, 66: "J'ai puisé dans ce court épisode le sujet de l'idylle ou élégie suivante; mais il faudrait pour la rendre intéressante le talent de Théocrite."

³⁰ *Romans du Nord, imités du russe et du danois, de Karamsin et de Suhm, par Henri de Coiffier*, Nouvelle édition, revue par le traducteur, tome premier, (Paris: Frechet, 1808), 9: "La manière dont ils sont écrits,

Karamzin's simplicity was obviously seen by Coiffier as a distinctively Russian feature, in accordance with the symbolic hierarchies elaborated by French cultural imperialism, which identified a center (France) and a periphery (Europe's margins, America), whose youth guaranteed its preserved innocence. As Coiffier put it in his introduction: "I will only say that [Karamzin's] sensibility seems to me, so to speak, newer than ours and closer to nature."³¹ Tuault de la Bouvrie expressed a similar idea when he wrote:

The content, the style, the details, the descriptions offered by this interesting journey, where I found new truths for me, as well as a mix of French, English, and even slightly Oriental elements, all presented in a poetic way, pleased me so much that I couldn't resist the temptation to translate the last part.³²

In this sentence, the reference to the supposedly oriental elements of Karamzin's prose was used to explain its appeal. Karamzin's sensibility was neither totally French, nor totally English. It was newer, because it was more natural and simple, thanks to its peripheral character.

Despite its accuracy, apart for the translation of a few names (Bomelli instead of Romelli in letter 135, Brank instead of Banks in letter 140, Sownley instead of Townley – in fact Towley – in letter 141), Tuault de la Bouvrie's translation remained unnoticed and does not appear in the catalogues of France's main libraries.³³ We only know, thanks to

n'est pas leur moindre mérite; et tous ceux qui ont pu les lire dans l'original, ont admiré le mélange heureux d'élégance et de simplicité, de naïveté et d'élévation qui règne dans [le] style [de Karamzine]."

³¹ *Romans du Nord*, 8-9: "[...] j'oserai dire seulement que [la] sensibilité [de Karamzine] me paraît, si l'on peut s'exprimer ainsi, plus neuve que la nôtre, plus rapprochée de la nature."

³² [Tuault de la Bouvrie], "Preface," *Extrait des voyages du Docteur Karamzin*, n.p.: "Le fonds, le stile, les détails, les descriptions de cet intéressant voyage, où j'ai trouvé des vérités neuves pour moi, un genre mixte tenant du français, de l'anglais, et un peu de l'oriental, toujours plus ou moins poétique, m'ont plu au point que je n'ai pas pu résister à la tentation d'en traduire la dernière partie."

³³ Tuault de la Bouvrie's translation is absent from the catalogue of the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BNF) and the catalogue of the French unified university library system (SUDOC). However, for references to the translation, see the catalogue of Sylvestre de Sacy's private library: *Bibliothèque de M. le Baron Sylvestre de Sacy*, vol. 3 (Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1847), 203-204. Also see the 1867 catalogue of the City Library of Nantes: Émile Péhaut, ed., *Catalogue méthodique de la Bibliothèque publique de la ville de Nantes*, volume 4, History, Part One (Nantes: Imprimerie de Vincent Forest et Émile Grimaud, 1867), 56. In Russia, it seems to have been on sale, among other rare books, in St. Petersburg in 1869. See V. I. Mezhov, ed., *Sistematischeskii katalog russkim knigam, prodaiushchimsia v knizhnom magazine Aleksandra Fedorovicha Bazunova* (St. Petersburg: Izdatie knigoprodavtsa A. F. Bazunova, 1869), 712. To my knowledge, it was also mentioned three times in print: first in the proceedings of the St. Petersburg Imperial Library in 1864. See *Otchet Imperatorskoi Publichnoi Biblioteki za 1864 g.* (St. Petersburg: v tipografii II Otdeleniya Sobstvennoi E. I. V Kantseliarii, 1865), 30. It was next mentioned in the proceedings of the Philology Section of the Imperial Academy of Sciences in 1867. See *Izvlecheniia iz protokolov Otdelenii russkago iazyka i slovesnosti. Sbornik statei, chitannyykh v Otdelenii russkago iazyka i slovesnosti Imperatorskoi Akademii nauk*, vol. 1 (St. Petersburg: v tipografii Imperatorskoi Akademii nauk, 1867), L-LII. The third mention can be found in S. Pomonarev's bibliography of Karamzin's works. See S. Pomonarev, *Materialy dlia bibliografii literatury o N. M. Karamzine. K stoletiu ego literaturnoi deiatel'nosti (1783-1883)* (St. Petersburg: Tipografija Imperatorskoi Akademii nauk, 1883), 48-49. It is likely that knowledge of the book was mostly secondhand, as mentions of Tuault de la Bouvierie's translation soon vanished after these mentions and the booklet never became an object of study in Russian and Soviet Slavistics. Significantly, it is absent from the list of foreign translations of Karamzin's works published by the Russian National

Tuault de la Bouvrie's comments in the introduction to his own translation, that he presented his two rewritings in verse to the Paris Philotechnical Society and the Paris Atheneum of the Arts, two learned societies of which he was a member.³⁴

The sessions of the two learned societies during which Tuault de la Bouvrie presented his rewritings took place at some point between the end of 1813 and 1815, since they must have occurred during or after the completion of Tuault de la Bouvrie's translation, which he dated October 21, 1813 and published in Vannes in 1815. This chronology of events reveals another possible reason for Tuault de la Bouvrie's interest in translating *Letters of a Russian Traveler* into French: a political rationale.

By translating from English a Russian text that offered a positive picture of British society, Tuault de la Bouvrie expressed unambiguous political sympathies at a time when the Bourbons were in the process of being restored to the throne of France thanks to the combined efforts of Britain and Russia. Additionally, by dating his translation back to 1813 in his introduction, the French translator emphasized that these sympathies were not new, and as such that they were politically bold, since French literary texts and the press had been dominated by a violently Anglophobic discourse during the last years of the first Empire.³⁵ *Tippo-Saëh*, a tragedy by the French playwright Étienne de Jouy, which featured a plot that took place in India, was staged before the emperor that very same year. It abounded in anti-British verses like:

An invincible Terror
 Seizes my heart when I hear the name English.
 My bosom is full of inextinguishable hatred
 For this treacherous, miser and cruel Nation.
 [...] These bandits from Albion
 Deserve the hatred which I attach to their name.³⁶

Tuault de la Bouvrie's political agenda became even clearer at the end of his booklet. Immediately after the end of his translation, he introduced a paratextual reference that contained an unambiguous hint at ongoing events: "Translated in Ploërmel, from the beginning of October 1813 to this day, October 21. People are dancing in our small town

Library (RNB) in 2016. See "Proizvedeniia N. M. Karamzina v perevodakh na evropeiskie iazyki," *Ispolin russkoi slovesnosti. K 250-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniya Nikolaia Mikhailovicha Karamzina. Katalog vystavki* (Moscow: Pashkov dom, 2016), 102-116.

³⁴ [Tuault de la Bouvrie], *Extrait des voyages du Docteur Karamzin*, 75. The Société philotechnique was established in 1795. The Athénée des Arts was established in 1792 as the Lycée des Arts. It received its later name in 1803. See, "Athénée des arts, sciences, belles-lettres et industrie de Paris," *Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques*, accessed November 13, 2023, [http://cths.fr/an/societe.php?id=100413&soc_liées=](http://cths.fr/an/societe.php?id=100413&soc_liees=).

³⁵ On anti-British sentiments in French newspapers and literature under Napoleon, see E. d'Hauterive, "Napoléon et la presse," *Revue des deux mondes* (1906): 111-134; Jean Guiffan, *Histoire de l'anglophobie en France: de Jeanne d'Arc à la vache folle* (Rennes: Terre de brume, 2004), 101-103.

³⁶ Guiffan, *Histoire de l'anglophobie en France*, 103: "[...] une invincible horreur / Au seul nom des Anglais fait tressaillir mon cœur. / Pour cette nation fourbe, avare, cruelle, / Je porte dans mon sein une haine éternelle. / [...] ces brigands d'Albion / Ont mérité la haine que j'attache à son nom."

on the occasion of the wedding of the *sous-préfet's* son; people would probably not dare to dance in Paris.”³⁷

By emphasizing the happiness associated with the Breton wedding and by contrasting it to the sadness supposedly reigning in Paris as the First French Empire was collapsing, Tuault de la Bouvrie introduced a metaphorical opposition between beginnings and endings and clearly suggested where his sympathies lay. Additionally, his translation was offering a glimpse at what new beginnings could look like for France. Britain, in Karamzin’s depiction, was a stable country, where constitutional monarchy and parliamentarism were the keys to a flourishing economy. This model was obviously Tuault de la Bouvrie’s favorite political option. A politically moderate deputy, he would survive three consecutive regimes: the Revolution, the Empire and the Bourbon Restoration.³⁸

Translating Karamzin’s *Letters of a Russian Traveler* after the January Uprising in Poland:

If the first French translation of Karamzin’s *Letters of a Russian Traveler* was published in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars, its second translation appeared in the aftermath of another political crisis, which opposed, if not France and Russia as states, the French public and the politics of the Russian government during the times of Napoleon III. This second French translation was published under the title *Letters of a Russian Traveler in France, Germany and Switzerland (1789-1790)*.

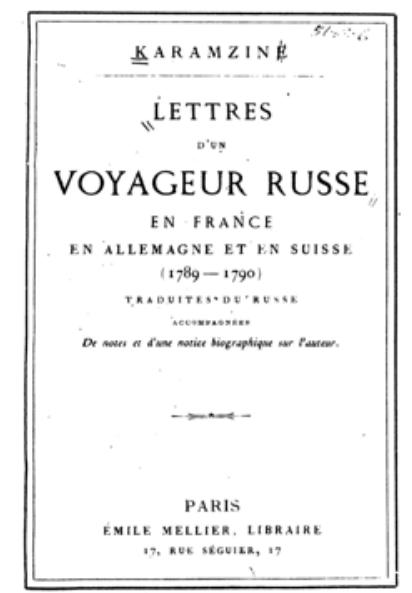


Fig. 3: Front page of Viktor Poroshin’s translation of Karamzin’s *Letters of a Russian Traveler* (Paris: Émile Mellier, Libraire, 1866).

³⁷ [Tuault de la Bouvrie], “Préface,” *Extrait des voyages du Docteur Karamzin*, 65: “Traduit à Ploërmel, au commencement du mois d’octobre 1813, et fini ce jour 21 octobre. On danse dans cette petite ville à l’occasion du mariage du fils du sous-préfet; on n’oserait peut-être pas danser à Paris.” As Paul Keenan noted, October 21 is just a few days after Napoleon’s first major defeat: the Battle of Leipzig, which went from October 16 to October 19, 1813. I am thankful to Paul Kennan for this observation.

³⁸ “Tuault de la Bouvrie (Joseph-Golven),” in *Dictionnaire des parlementaires français comprenant tous les membres des Assemblées françaises et tous les ministres français depuis le 1^{er} mai 1789 jusqu’au 1^{er} mai 1889*, 5 (Pla-Zuy), eds. Adolphe Robert, Edgard Bourlon & Gaston Cougny (Paris: Bourlon, 1891), 457-458.

It appeared in print in December 1866,³⁹ at a time when the French public was still trying to recover from the indignation with which it was filled by the brutal crushing of the Polish insurrection of 1863-1864 by the Russian army.⁴⁰ The translator, Viktor Stepanovich Poroshin (1811-1868), was trained as an economist in Tartu (Dorpat) and in Germany before becoming a professor of political economy and statistics at the University of St. Petersburg.

In 1847, he had left his position at the university and moved to Paris in order to dedicate himself to writing on Russian affairs for the French reading public. His publications included numerous papers for the journal *Le Nord*, as well as various brochures, such as *Régénération sociale de la Russie* (1860), *Solution pratique de la question des paysans en Russie* (1864), and *Les ressources matérielles de la Russie* (1864).⁴¹ Obviously, the greater part of Poroshin's publications commented on the great reforms of Alexander the Second, notably the greatest of them all: the abolition of serfdom. Other publications by Poroshin, however, focused on more politically sensitive topics, such as the brochure *Une nationalité contestée, Russie et Pologne* (1862). According to Charles Corbet, Poroshin's departure from Russia did not mean that he stopped working for the Russian State. His activity as a journalist was just another way to serve it and he was probably on the Russian payroll. A loyal and "conscientious Russian civil servant,"⁴² Poroshin must have been affected by the wave of anti-Russian sentiments that hit France when Russia crushed the Polish uprising. It is only natural, then, that he joined the efforts of the "Russian counter-propaganda in Paris" to fight it.⁴³



Fig. 4: Anti-Russian sentiments in France in the early 1860s: lithograph by Félicien Rops, *L'Ordre règne à Varsovie* (1863).

³⁹ This second translation is mentioned in "Liste des ouvrages et publications diverses qui ont paru dans le mois de décembre (résumé d'après le *Journal général de la librairie*)," *Revue bibliographique et littéraire* III/1 (January 1867), 60.

⁴⁰ Charles Corbet, *À l'ère des nationalismes. L'opinion française face à l'inconnue russe (1799-1894)* (Paris: Didier, 1967), 330.

⁴¹ V. R-v, "Poroshin (Viktor Stepanovich)," in *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar'*, vol 24, eds. F. A. Brokgauz & I. A. Efron (St. Petersburg: Tipolitografia I. A. Efrona, 1898), 594-595.

⁴² Corbet, *À l'ère des nationalismes*, 322.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 323-324, 326.

Far from disappearing with the end of the Russian repression in Poland in 1864, anti-Russian publications continued to flourish in France until the middle of the 1860s. Later in 1864, Schédo-Ferrotti published *Que fera-t-on de la Pologne?*⁴⁴ and in 1866 Henri Martin published *La Russie et l'Europe*⁴⁵, a pamphlet in which he asserted Russia was neither European nor even really Slavic, and called European countries to unite against it.⁴⁶

In the face of such criticism, it seemed difficult to find a better response than to give the French public access to Karamzin's *Letters of a Russian Traveler*, a text whose hero embodied the ideal figure of the Europeanized Russian gentleman, perfectly integrated into the space and culture from which Henri Martin wished to exclude his country. As Poroshin put it in his foreword: "This is, it seems to us, the proper way to acknowledge Karamzin's service to his nation, to the brotherly union of men and to 'European patriotism,' to use the excellent formulation invented by M. Villemain on a memorable occasion."⁴⁷

Officially, this decision to use Karamzin's text to restore Russia's reputation by presenting it as a refined and xenophile country,⁴⁸ relied on the centenary of Karamzin's birth, an event widely celebrated in Russia.⁴⁹ If, as Poroshin suggested in his introduction, introducing French readers to Russia's best son would undoubtedly win him many French hearts, it seems reasonable to assume that Karamzin's translator hoped that this sympathy would extend to Karamzin's country as well. As Poroshin wrote:

Karamzin served the cause of literature; he worked for the propagation of knowledge and the softening of mores: *Emollit mores nec sinit esse feros*. Russia today celebrates the hundredth anniversary of his birth. May this little book, published for the first time in a language that could be said to be universal, make him many friends abroad and inspire in them something of the high and sincere esteem that we profess for his memory!⁵⁰

Though elegantly translated, in a style still relatively close to that of the eighteenth century, Karamzin's *Letters of a Russian Traveler*, in Poroshin's version, was also

⁴⁴ D. K. Schédo-Ferrotti, *Que fera-t-on de la Pologne?* (Berlin: E. Bock (B. Behr), 1864). Schédo-Ferrotti was the pseudonym of Theodor, Baron von Fircks (1812-1872), a Baltic nobleman and civil servant, who wrote several works on the Russian administration and economy, the "Polish question," the Old Believers and Russian nihilism.

⁴⁵ Henri Martin, *La Russie et l'Europe* (Paris: Furne, Jouvet et Cie, 1866).

⁴⁶ Corbet, *À l'ère des nationalismes*, 334.

⁴⁷ V. S. Poroshin, preface to Karamzin, *Lettres d'un voyageur russe en France, en Allemagne et en Suisse (1789-1790), traduites du russe, accompagnées de notes et d'une notice biographique sur l'auteur*, trans. V. S. Poroshin (Paris: Émile Mellier, 1866), viii: "Telle est, ce nous semble, la part à faire aux services rendus par Karamzine, soit à la cause nationale, soit à la cause fraternelle des hommes et au 'patriotisme européen,' suivant le mot heureux échappé à M. Villemain dans une circonstance mémorable."

⁴⁸ On Karamzin as a xenophile, see Joachim Klein, "Karamzin, un Européen russe en France," in *Nikolaï Karamzin en France. L'image de la France dans les Lettres d'un voyageur russe*, ed. Rodolphe Baudin (Paris: Institut d'Études slaves, 2014), 201-206.

⁴⁹ On Karamzin's centennial celebrations in 1866, see Iakov Grot, "Dni karamzinskogo iubileia 1866 goda: (Otryvok 'Dnevnika' Ia. K. Grota)," *Istoricheskii vestnik* 119 (1866): 993-1003.

⁵⁰ Poroshin, preface to Karamzin, *Lettres d'un voyageur russe en France, en Allemagne et en Suisse*, xvii.

incomplete. As its title suggested, this new translation excluded the English episode of the original text, therefore reducing it to its German, Swiss and French parts. Additionally, the title of the translation evoked these parts in an illogical order—first France, then Germany and Switzerland—in order to appeal to its target audience by flattering their personal cultural hierarchies.

Besides, the removal of the English part of the Russian text was not the only reduction imposed on the original text by its second French translator. Even within the three preserved parts, Poroshin made a selection among the German and Swiss letters, and pruned even some of the French ones, when he did not simply remove them. If the text of the translation logically restored the geography mistreated in the title, it offered only 7 of the 40 letters of the German part of the Russian text, beginning it with the depiction of Weimar, which corresponds to letter 33 in Karamzin's original travelogue. The second part of the text, which corresponds more or less to the journey through Switzerland, offered only 32 of the 43 original letters. As for the fourth part, which describes the end of the French episode and the English one, it offered only 16 letters out of the 51 of the original text, mainly as a result of the removal of the part on England. As a consequence, only the third part of Karamzin's original text, which corresponds to the bulk of the French episode, was fully offered by Poroshin's translation. Besides, this does not mean that Poroshin did not prune some of the French letters. For instance, he removed some of Karamzin's sentimental metadiegetic embedded narratives as well as some of the Russian traveler's digressions. These editorial interventions were the result of Poroshin's indifference to the rhetoric of feelings so popular in Karamzin's time. This indifference was obviously common to most readers in the 1860s. If Poroshin himself has nothing but praise for Karamzin's tender heart in his foreword, one of the French reviewers of the 1866 translation expressed this general lack of interest as follows:

These specimens make us regret that, in his book at least, the traveler confined himself to these isolated sketches of the physiognomy of Paris on the day after August 10 and on the eve of the Fête de la Fédération! How much more charming and valuable would paintings painted with this lively, familiar brush be today than *this bland pilgrimage to Jean-Jacques' tomb*, for example, which is twelve pages long in Karamzin's book, when the portraits of the queen and the dauphin each are less than one!⁵¹

Additionally, Poroshin partly reorganized the original text, as Tuault de la Bouvrie had before him, splitting some of the longest letters into two when he obviously considered them too long (see letter nos. 57, 75, 83, 84, 89, 90, 97 and 128), or moving some letters from one place to another inside the translated text (see letter nos. 99 and 100). This free attitude towards the Russian original text was obviously considered too unrestrained by

⁵¹ *Le Correspondant. Recueil périodique* 71 (1867), 787: "Ces spécimens font regretter que le voyageur s'en soit tenu, dans son livre du moins, à ces esquisses isolées de la physionomie de Paris au lendemain du 10 août et à la veille de la fête de la Fédération! Comme des peintures touchées de ce pinceau vif et familier auraient plus de charme et de prix aujourd'hui que ce fade pèlerinage au tombeau de Jean-Jacques, par exemple, qui contient douze pages, chez Karamzine, quand le portrait de la reine et du dauphin n'en ont pas chacun une." *Emphasis mine* (R. B.).

Karamzin's third and last French translator in the nineteenth century: the historian Arsène Legrelle (1834-1899).

Translating Karamzin's *Letters of a Russian Traveler* after the Franco-Prussian War

Legrelle's translation of Karamzin's *Letters of a Russian Traveler* was published in Paris in 1885.

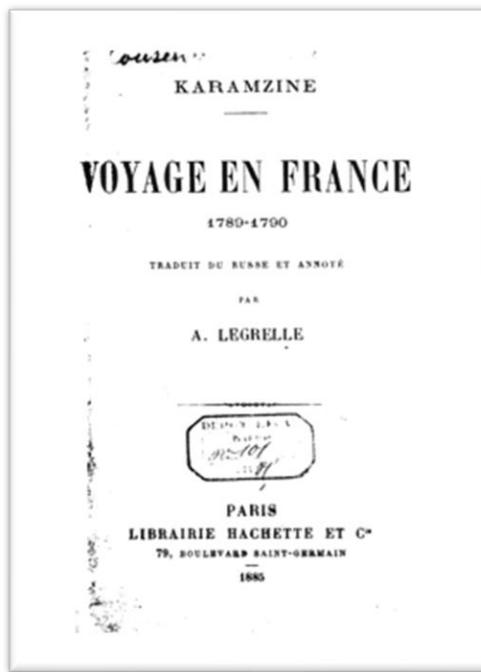


Fig. 5: Title page of Karamzin, *Voyage en France 1789-1790*, trans. Arsène Legrelle (Paris: Librairie Hachette et Co., 1885).

As Legrelle wrote in his introduction:

Why did [Poroshin] remove almost half of the letters and especially why did he decide to prune, squeeze, in other words distort the text he had in front of him? As a result of this systematic reduction effort, instead of a deeply personal way of seeing and expressing things, all that remained was a deeply impersonal text, an insipid one, written in the style of people who do not know how to write.⁵²

Besides respecting the textual integrity of Karamzin's *Letters of a Russian Traveler*, Legrelle also delivered a particularly faithful translation. This was noted by many of his reviewers, who also commended the translation as an enjoyable read. Charles d'Héricault, the reviewer in *Revue de la Révolution*, noted that Legrelle succeeded in

⁵² Arsène Legrelle, foreword to Karamzin, *Voyage en France, 1789-1790*, trans. A. Legrelle (Paris: Hachette, 1885), xxxi: "Pourquoi faut-il [que Porochine] ait passé à peu près la moitié des lettres, et surtout qu'il ait cru partout devoir émonder, resserrer, dénaturer en un mot le texte qu'il avait sous les yeux? Au lieu d'une façon de voir et de dire essentiellement personnelle, il n'est plus resté, grâce à ce système de condensation, qu'une phraséologie sans accent propre, sans relief quelconque, le style enfin de tous ceux qui n'en ont pas."

"respecting both the French language and the Russian spirit,"⁵³ while the anonymous reviewer from the *Bibliothèque universelle et revue suisse* praised Legrelle's "scrupulously faithful translation," which, "far from ruining the elegance of the original text, only emphasized it."⁵⁴ Far from trying to make Karamzin's text sound like a sophisticated French text from the eighteenth century, Legrelle's prosaic translation succeeded in capturing the elegant simplicity of the original.

The son of a notary from Normandy, Legrelle studied at the Royal High School of Versailles, then at the Law School of Rouen University and at the School of Arts and Science of Douai University.⁵⁵ After graduating from university, he embarked on a career as a journalist and a historian, while developing a strong interest in foreign languages and literatures. As a journalist, he was a frequent contributor to the *Revue de l'Instruction publique*, the *Revue contemporaine* and the *Revue européenne*. He was also an active traveler and visited Germany several times. During one of his sojourns in Germany he stayed in Weimar, where he enrolled to write a doctoral dissertation on Goethe. He completed his doctorate in 1863 and defended it at the University of Jena.⁵⁶

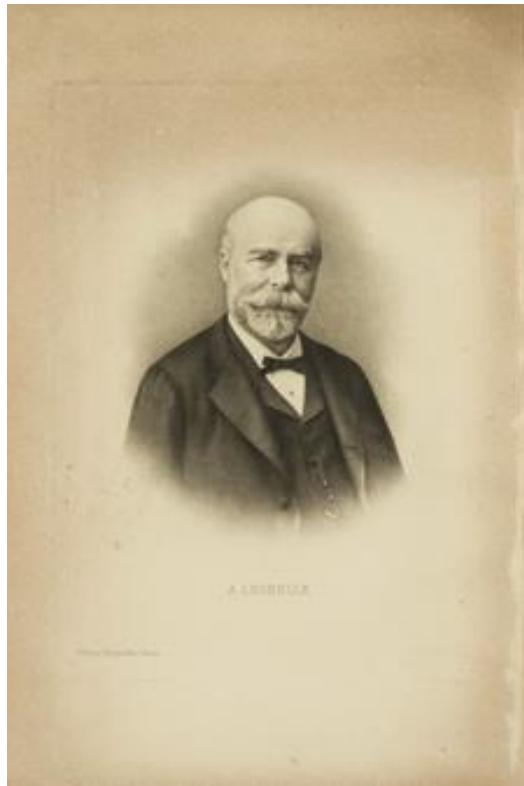


Fig. 6: Portrait of Arsène Legrelle (1834-1899). Published in Maurice Croiset, *Notice sur la vie et les ouvrages de M. Arsène Legrelle* (Braine-Le-Comte: Zech et fils, 1900).

⁵³ *Revue de la Révolution* 6 (1885), 238: "Le traducteur a un plus grand mérite encore à nos yeux, c'est d'avoir respecté la langue française, tout autant que l'esprit russe."

⁵⁴ *Bibliothèque universelle et revue suisse* 28/82-84 (1885), 191: "C'est ce caractère principalement que M. Legrelle s'est appliqué à mettre en relief par une fidélité scrupuleuse, qui du reste n'ôte rien à l'élegance, au contraire."

⁵⁵ Maurice Croiset, *Notice sur la vie et les ouvrages de M. Arsène Legrelle* (Braine-Le-Comte: Zech et fils, 1900), iv-vi.

⁵⁶ Croiset, *Notice*, viii.

His initial interest in Germany soon led him to develop an interest in Denmark, whose language he started studying in order to write a second doctoral thesis on Molière and Holberg, which he defended at the University of Paris in 1864.⁵⁷ After considering an academic career, Legrelle dropped the idea and resumed traveling, visiting first Italy and Spain before developing an interest in Russia, where he traveled for the first time in 1869.⁵⁸

This first trip to Russia led him to study Russian after his return to France and he found an instructor among the Russian émigré community living in Vevey, Switzerland, who taught him the language from 1869 until 1872. He would visit Russia again in 1872, 1875, 1881 and 1884. After his third trip, Legrelle published an account of a journey through the European part of the Russian Empire. The book, entitled *Le Volga*, was published in 1877.⁵⁹ This first book on Russia was soon followed by several translations, which Legrelle published between 1882 and 1888. They included *Le Tsar Boris* by Aleksei Tolstoi, *Le Malheur d'avoir de l'esprit* by Aleksandr Griboedov, *L'Orage* by Aleksandr Ostrovskii, *La Chicane* by Vasilii Kapnist and *Ô temps!* by Catherine II.

As this list suggests, Legrelle seems to have shared a special interest in theater, a literary genre he eventually tried himself in later years.⁶⁰ What is most striking about this list, however, is the eclectic character of Legrelle's literary interests. As a translator, his choice of texts to translate included both important and often recent works, such as Griboedov, Ostrovskii and Tolstoi's plays and more modest texts of historical, rather than literary significance. Additionally, he seems to have been especially interested in eighteenth-century Russian literature, which may explain his decision to translate Karamzin.

If initially fed by intellectual curiosity, possibly in relation to his interest in Holberg, who served as a model for Russia's criticism of Gallomania in the eighteenth-century, Legrelle's interest in Russia soon became political. Indeed, four out of his five trips to Russia happened after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871, which deeply troubled Legrelle, who had previously been a Germanophile for many years. As his biographer Croiset asserts, Legrelle's sympathy for the hard-working and peaceful Saxons soon gave way to a deep hatred of Prussians, whom he saw as essentially brutal and oppressive.⁶¹ This opinion resonated with the wider anti-German feelings of the French population. Legrelle's political evolution, which anticipated the dramatic shift in the European geopolitical alliances that followed the death of Bismarck, is evident in the introduction to his translation. The French translator uses it to express his negative judgement about Prussia:

[Karamzin] arrived [in Berlin] on June 29 and left in haste on July 9, eight days earlier than expected. The truth is that he felt overwhelmed and deeply frustrated by an unbearable sense of boredom. True, Berlin was then celebrating and Karamzin got a chance to see the royal family at a gala show. But the absence of sewers and hygienic measures filled the city

⁵⁷ Croiset, *Notice*, x.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, xi.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, xii.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, xiii. In 1894, Legrelle published a historical drama entitled *Le Siège de Corbie*. The play is set during the reign of Louis XIII.

⁶¹ Croiset, *Notice*, xiii-xiv.

with 'smells so bad you needed to pinch your nose.' Additionally, he had to deal with the countless humiliating formalities imposed on travelers by inquisition-like police. Grandees, regardless of their wealth, distinguished themselves only by their squalid stinginess. As for men of letters, they spent their time in literary feuds that reminded the quarrels of lackeys.⁶²

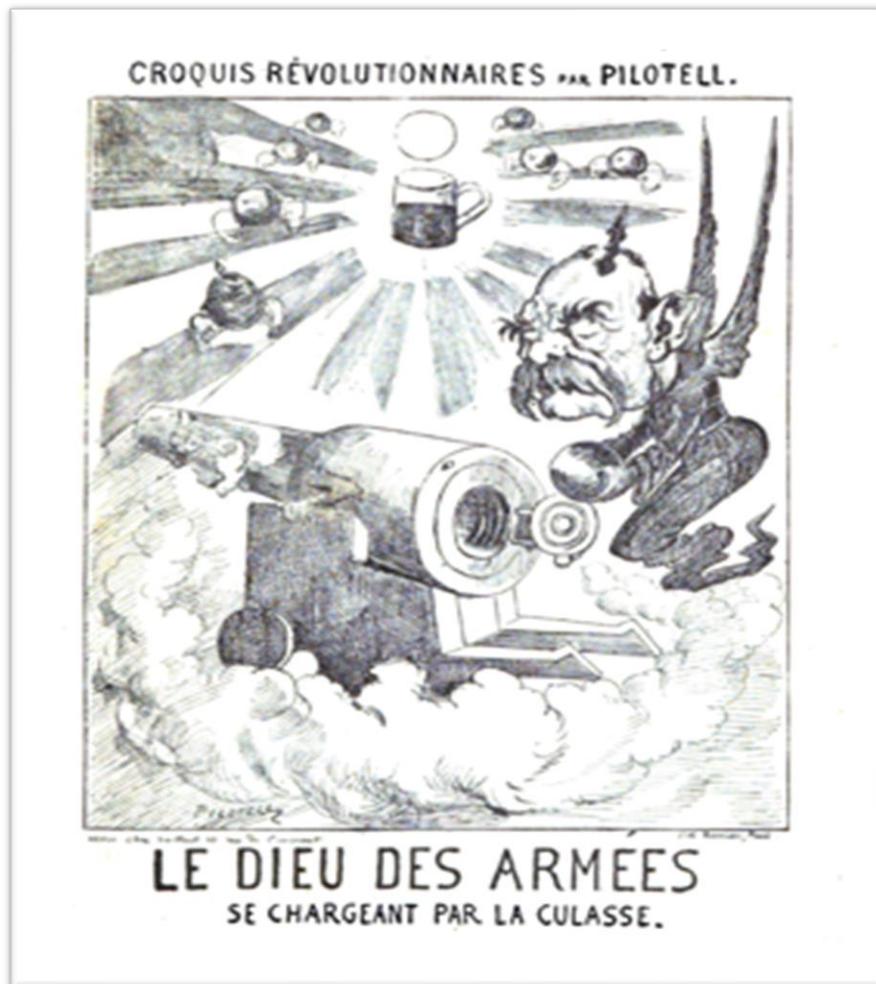


Fig. 7: Anti-Prussian sentiment in France after the French-Prussian War of 1870-1871 was high. See the caricature above by Pilotell, "Le Dieu des armées se chargeant par la culasse," in John Grand-Carteret, *Bismarck en caricatures* (Paris: Perrin, 1890), 171.

Another passage from the translation reveals Legrelle gloating at Karamzin's hint at Russia's victory over Prussia and its occupation of Berlin during the Seven Years' War

⁶² Legrelle, foreword to Karamzin, *Voyage en France, 1789-1790*, viii: "Ce fut le 29 juin [que Karamzine] arriva [à Berlin], et le 9 juillet qu'il en déguerpit, huit jours plus tôt qu'il avait d'abord compté le faire. La vérité est qu'il s'y sentit envahi, débordé, énervé par un ennui incomensurable. Berlin cependant était alors en fête, et Karamzine put y apercevoir la famille royale à un spectacle de gala. Mais, faute d'égouts et de mesures hygiéniques, 'c'étaient partout des odeurs à se boucher le nez.' De plus, il fallait compter à toute heure avec une inquisition policière qui multipliait à plaisir les formalités vexatoires. Les plus riches seigneurs, de leur côté, ne se faisaient remarquer que par les raffinements d'une avarice sordide. Enfin les gens lettrés s'abandonnaient à des tournois de plume qui ressemblaient fort à des querelles de portefaix."

in October 1760: “[Karamzin] could not refrain from experiencing a patriotic satisfaction as he passed by the statue of Frederik-Wilhelm, known as the Great, whose pedestal, if not more, had been damaged by the swords of his compatriots.”⁶³

Finally, while summarizing the stay of Karamzin’s traveler in Dresden, Legrelle hinted at a recent event, which shocked French and European public opinion and was widely used by French propagandists to demonstrate Prussian brutality: the bombing of Strasbourg Cathedral during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871: “In the Catholic church [of Dresden], [Karamzin], moved by the striking and heavenly notes of the organ, kneeled down. The Prussian shells of 1760, whose traces were still visible in various places of the city, had fortunately not hit these wonders.”⁶⁴

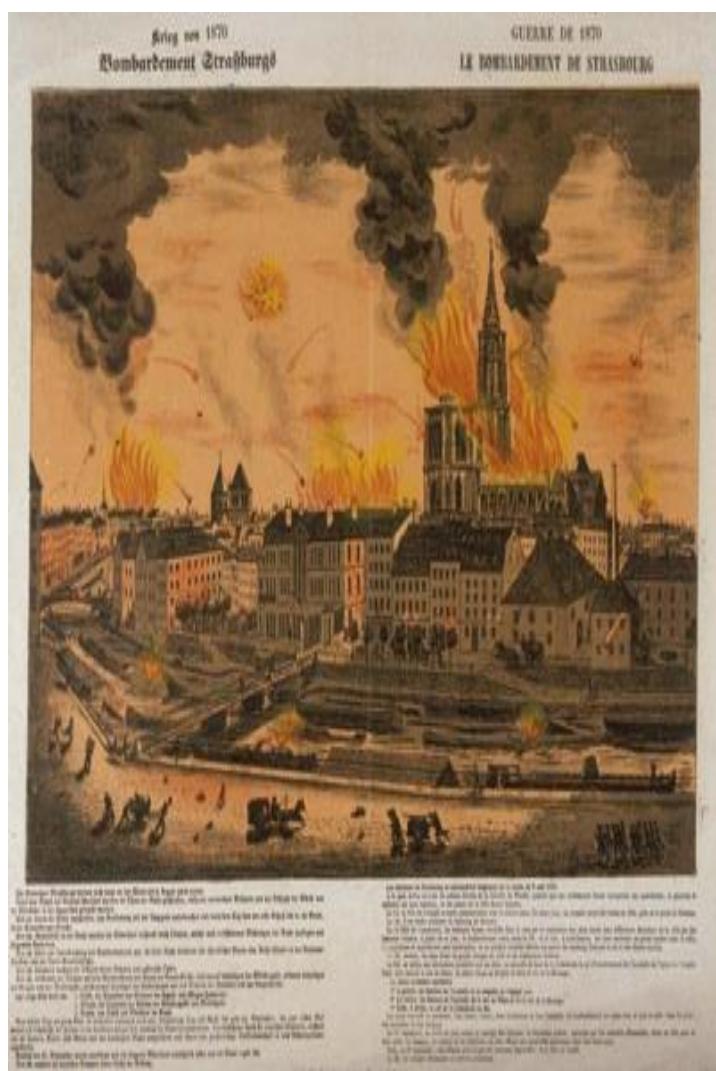


Fig. 8: Anti-Prussian sentiment in France after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871: Lithograph entitled *Le bombardement de Strasbourg* (after 1870).

⁶³ Legrelle, foreword to Karamzin, *Voyage en France, 1789-1790*, ix: “[Karamzine] ne passa pas non plus sans une certaine satisfaction patriotique devant la statue de Frédéric-Guillaume, dit le Grand, dont le piédestal tout au moins avait été quelque peu ébréché par l’arme blanche de ses compatriotes.”

⁶⁴ Legrelle, foreword to Karamzin, *Voyage en France, 1789-1790*, x: “À l’église catholique [de Dresden], [Karamzine] s’agenouilla tout ému sous les foudroyantes et célestes harmonies de l’orgue. Les boulets prussiens de 1760, dont la ville portait encore çà et là les traces, n’avaient heureusement pu détruire ces merveilles.”

Legrelle's references to Karamzin's text to express his own anti-Prussian feelings was, however, not the only expression of his chauvinism. The translator also used the Russian text to express an essentialized form of Anglophobia, a common feeling in France in the 1880s, as French and British imperialist interests increasingly came into conflict in Africa:⁶⁵

"[Karamzin's] usual benevolence could not win over this selfishness, either brutal or hypocritical, which serves as the basic rule for every British action and which makes our neighbors from over the Channel the purest type, like the proof before the print, of the Anglo-Saxon race."⁶⁶



Fig. 9: Anti-British sentiment in France in the 1880s-1890s: A caricature entitled "Le Petit chaperon rouge," from *Le Petit Journal* (November 20, 1898).

Considering Legrelle's prejudices against Germany and Britain, they alone could have justified his decision to translate and publish only the French part of Karamzin's *Letters of a Russian Traveler*. However, his decision originated in yet another argument. It was the result of Legrelle's vision of Karamzin's travelogue mainly being a document about the history of the French Revolution. This understanding of the text explains why

⁶⁵ According to Jean Guiffan, the 1880s saw the return of strong anti-British sentiment among the French, as France and Britain vied over control of Egypt. See Guiffan, *Histoire de l'anglophobie en France*, 127-132.

⁶⁶ Legrelle, foreword to Karamzin, *Voyage en France, 1789-1790*, xxv: "[La] bienveillance ordinaire [de Karamzine] ne put prendre le change sur cet égoïsme tantôt brutal, et tantôt hypocrite, qui sert de règle invariable à toutes les actions britanniques et qui a fait de nos voisins d'outre-Manche le type le plus pur, comme une éprouve avant la lettre, de la race anglo-saxonne."

Legrelle's translation was initially published in the scholarly *La Revue de la Révolution*, before being published as a separate volume.⁶⁷

This conception of Karamzin's text as a document explains two of the three arguments brought up by Legrelle to justify his decision to make the Russian travelogue available to the French public. By translating *Letters of a Russian Traveler*, Legrelle wished to offer them "a picture of Paris in 1790" and a "cold-blooded, common sense-based evaluation of the Revolution."⁶⁸ The last reason he gave was characteristic of the dominant political discourse in France after the 1871 defeat against Prussia. According to Legrelle, Karamzin's "good spirit and sincerity" could play a role in the moral regeneration many in the country were now demanding. Legrelle considered that the Russian eighteenth-century writer could serve as "an excellent antidote against this harmful affliction of contemporary minds," whose characteristics included the following:

A moral imperative of outrageous frivolity, the habit of making fun of every serious matter and every religion, as well as the habit of juggling with ideas, while making fun of oneself and other people, and of treating the most serious questions in the language of Mascarille and Pasquin.⁶⁹

As this quote suggests, Karamzin's appeal to Legrelle lay in the Russian writer's moderate conservatism, as well as in his rejection of radical Enlightenment ideas. As such, Karamzin offered a model for contemporary French politics, but also for contemporary French literature, which Legrelle had violently criticized in a previous series of articles in which he expressed his hostility to contemporary naturalism.⁷⁰ In this sense, Legrelle echoed Vogüé, whose *Roman russe*, as Gacoin Lablanchy reminds us, had popularized Russian Christian-based novelistic realism in the hope that it could replace Zola-type naturalism.⁷¹ Legrelle only came up with a different substitute product that was based on a nostalgia for eighteenth-century elegance, which prefigured its use as a response to Russian populist realist painting by artists of the *Mir iskusstva* collective, such as Alexandre Benois.

Conclusion

As this article has demonstrated, all three translations of *Letters of a Russian Traveler* published in nineteenth-century France were not only the products of their authors' curiosity for eighteenth-century Russian literature, but also of contemporary

⁶⁷ Legrelle, "Dédicace à M. Ch. d'Héricault, Directeur de la *Revue de la Révolution*", in Karamzin, *Voyage en France, 1789-1790*, n.p.

⁶⁸ Legrelle, foreword to Karamzin, *Voyage en France, 1789-1790*, xxxiii-xxxiv: "Un tableau de Paris en 1790" and a "jugement de sang-froid et de bon sens" [sur la Révolution].

⁶⁹ Legrelle, foreword to Karamzin, *Voyage en France, 1789-1790*, xxxvi-xxxvii: "un excellent antidote à cette diathèse néfaste de l'esprit contemporain" [marqué par] "un parti-pris de frivolité à outrance, le dédain railleur de tout sérieux et de toute foi, l'habitude de jongler avec les idées en se moquant de soi-même en même temps que des autres, de traiter dans le langage de Mascarille ou de Pasquin les questions de l'ordre le plus élevé."

⁷⁰ Croiset, *Notice*, xi.

⁷¹ Gacoin Lablanchy, "Le vicomte Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé," 72. Interestingly, tasking Karamzin with the same purpose as Tolstoi and Dostoevskii integrated him into a Russian literary canon that was only too quick to reject anything written before Pushkin. On Legrelle's Catholicism, see Croiset, *Notice*, iv.

local political circumstances, which they wished to comment on and influence. For Tuault de la Bouvrie, translating Karamzin was a declaration of Anglophilia and a political statement in favor of a liberal Bourbon restoration based on the English political model. For Poroshin, translating Karamzin was an attempt, probably sponsored by the Russian government, to present the French public with the portrait of an enlightened, xenophile and fully European Russian nobleman, in order to fight the dominant narrative about Russian political and military brutality that had been exemplified by the recent repression of the Polish insurrectionists in the early 1860s. Lastly, for Legrelle translating Karamzin was a way to fight contemporary French naturalism and cynicism and to replace them with a cultural and moral model imported from Russia in order to fuel pro-Russian sentiments. In 1885, it seemed like a vital political task as France was looking for allies against Germany. The reason why *Letters of a Russian Traveler* was such a convenient vehicle for the expression of different agendas has to do with the very nature of the work. As a text focusing on Russian-Western relations and as an epistolary text, the episodes of which could easily be decontextualized and recontextualized, they were bound to be instrumentalized for extra-literary purposes, both domestically and abroad. In France, they proved useful at three defining points in the history of Franco-Russian relations in the nineteenth century, serving as a positive political, cultural and literary model meant to bring the two countries closer in order to serve the specific political agendas of their translators and/or the patrons that sponsored them.