

**Julia Titus,**  
*Dostoevsky as a Translator of Balzac*  
 (Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2022), xxiv + 128 pp.

Julia Titus argues that Dostoevsky's first published work, his "free translation" of Balzac's *Eugénie Grandet*, which appeared anonymously in the journal *Repertuar i panteon* (1844) when he was 22 years old and marked his "only successful venture in his career as a translator" (xv), ought to be considered among his literary texts. Repeatedly straying from Balzac's original, Dostoevsky offered Russian readers a narrative that contains many of the themes that later became central in his own literary work. Titus selects three topical and engaging examples in the chapters that constitute the body of her book: female characters, the material world, and money.

The book's method of comparing Balzac with Dostoevsky is quite helpful for understanding the points made. Titus provides Balzac's text in both French and English and then Dostoevsky's translation of it in both Russian and English, a technique that makes the contents of her book accessible to those who cannot read all three of these languages well. She then reviews the discrepancies that surface, many of them indicative of themes familiar in Dostoevsky's later work and explored in the discussion of selected texts. Attention is also given to features that both Balzac and Dostoevsky share.

Titus's very readable introduction explains that Dostoevsky chose the earliest of the three different editions of *Eugénie Grandet* available at the time, although his motivations for making that selection are not clarified. This project was one of young Dostoevsky's several Razumikhin-like attempts to make a living through literary work and it was inspired both by his own great enthusiasm for the French novelist and his awareness of Balzac's marketability in Russia. His translation followed on the heels of two similar projects that had failed: a rendition of Eugene Sue's *Mathilde*, which he abandoned, and a translation of George Sand's *La Dernière Aldini* (now unfortunately lost), which Dostoevsky completed only to discover that it had already been published.

We learn here of Balzac's popularity in the Russian Empire, of his ties to Petersburg and Ukraine, and of his ten-week visit to the capital in 1843, an event which "inspired" Dostoevsky's translation of *Eugénie Grandet* (xvi). A spurious report of Balzac's visit to Kherson even became the subject of an article published in *Sovremennik* in 1838 (xi). Titus gives the title as "Balzac dans la province de Kherson", although it was actually "Бальзак в Херсонской губернии" and written by none other than Panteleimon Kulish. The article describes the

pandemonium created in Kherson by a mistaken rumor that Balzac is coming to town, thus poking fun at silly women readers in the provinces. Confusion over this article's title and contents may result from the fact that Titus appears to base her account of this incident on the French translation of Leonid Grossman's *Bal'zak v Rossii* (1937).

The introduction also touches upon a number of interesting issues relating to the nature of literary translation and to Dostoevsky's views on it. He Russified his text in various ways, adding Russian diminutives, for example, and removing French technical terms. "Co-creation" or "translator-centered" reworkings were considered legitimate at the time (xvi-xvii), although Dostoevsky was also criticized for having been "too free and taken too many liberties," Titus argues (xvii), albeit without providing details on the reception of this work. A subsequent translation of *Eugénie Grandet* by Yurii Verkhovskii (1935) is now considered the Russian standard, while Dostoevsky's version – missing from various editions of his collected works – was not republished until 2014 (xvi).

Chapter 1 addresses "reflections of Eugénie in Dostoevsky's female characters". Highlights include Dostoevsky's addition of touches of religious martyrdom to Eugénie's suffering (2-3). We also see that Eugénie's multiple charitable endeavors become briefer in her Russian instantiation and are reordered to begin with her generosity to the schools (4-5). Interestingly, Dostoevsky also removes Balzac's criticism of the provinces in this and other passages, a theme that had little interest for him (3). We also discover that the notion of "meek resistance" (*кроткое сопротивление*), later made famous in *The Meek One* (*Кроткая*), first appears in Dostoevsky's translation of *Eugénie Grandet*, in an addition that he made to Balzac's text (10). Eugénie is characterized by "attributes typically used in describing saints" (22) and absent from Balzac's original, while suggestions of her sensuality are replaced by chastity, purity, and virtue (26). Not all of the divergences identified in these textual comparisons lead to threads running through other texts. The provocative point that Dostoevsky ignores the gender reversals implicit in Balzac's description of Charles as an effeminate dandy and Eugénie as "*grande et forte*" is noted, but undeveloped, for example (32-33).

Titus's second chapter explores descriptions of the "material world" in Balzac and Dostoevsky, especially links between housing, clothing, luxury items and individual character. Dostoevsky simplifies many of Balzac's details for "average Russian readers, many of whom had never been abroad" (40) – as, indeed, he himself had not. Interesting points made in this chapter include the note that Dostoevsky's translation omits Balzac's application of the term "physiognomy" to Monsieur Grandet's house, but later uses it for Rogozhin's dwell-

ing in *The Idiot* (44). Surprising variance appears in the two writers' respective treatments of luxury. Dostoevsky's descriptions of "objects of beauty and luxury" are reduced with respect to Balzac's and he is more interested in "ugliness" (*безобразие*), a term that acquires religious overtones (54). "Elegance" is never mentioned in Dostoevsky, Titus states, without providing the Russian term that she has in mind, but "luxury" (*роскошь*), appears repeatedly and brings with it a suggestion of sensuality and vice (72). If in Balzac, luxury catalyzes action, in Dostoevsky it corrupts (74). The discussion of luxury's material manifestations includes several interesting and infrequently cited passages, such as that describing Katerina Ivanovna's delight in a new collar and cuffs from *Crime and Punishment* (75-77). This chapter also includes a long discussion of physiognomy in Russia that is not firmly grounded historically: Lavater's ideas had been familiar since the late eighteenth century and Lombroso's would not appear for another twenty years.

Chapter 3 addresses the "theme of money", linked in Balzac's Monsieur Grandet to passion and greatness (82), but in Dostoevsky, for whom "avarice is the top human vice" (xxiii), connected with sin and the road to "moral degradation or addiction" (120). Titus very interestingly shows Dostoevsky's translation to reveal the influence of Pushkin's "Miserly Knight" (*Скупой рыцарь*) in its similar emphasis on the old miser's sensual delight in his chest full of riches (93), for example. While Balzac tries to make Grandet more than a miser, highlighting his business acumen, Dostoevsky emphasizes his miserliness to an extreme (89). When Balzac's aging and infirm Grandet experiences "beatitude" in admiring his wealth, Dostoevsky's feels only "meaningless self-oblivion" (*бессмысленное самозабвение*, 99).

Titus convincingly demonstrates that this translation is a "crucible for [Dostoevsky's] own literary style" and (quoting Judith Woodsworth) "an exercise" or "prelude to and preparation for original work" (xix). We also see that in revising Balzac, Dostoevsky "amplified [...] emotional tension" to concentrate "on the theme of self-sacrifice, love, and faith"; and that the "brilliant treatment of dialogue" and "very active narrative voice" found in his translation of Balzac "later become distinguishing features of Dostoevsky's own novels" (xx). That said, some of the features selected for discussion in this book are more significant than others and the depth of the elaborated comparisons is variable. Most effective are Titus's discussions of divergences between Balzac's original and Dostoevsky's translation that point to notions particularly cherished by Dostoevsky and recurring in his later work. Less successful are her attempts to describe features that both writers share as demonstrating that Balzac's influence somehow determined Dostoevsky's later evolution. Certainly, Dostoevsky was

influenced both by French ideas and by Orthodox tradition (x) and indubitably he appreciated Balzac for the attention paid to themes that were also of interest to him personally. But what does this tell us of Balzac's influence? What of the influence of Eugène Sue or George Sand together with dozens of other writers and genres? Why should features shared between Dostoevsky and Balzac indicate that Dostoevsky is specifically borrowing from Balzac rather than that both were absorbing ideas from the broader context of European literary culture?

There are some repetitions in the text and a number of typographical errors, although the presence of footnotes is a rare treat. The bibliography includes several classic works on Balzac and Dostoevsky (e.g. L. Grossman, D. Fanger, J. Frank, S. Zweig), but lacks a number of Russian-language sources addressing Dostoevsky's translation that would have helped to deepen its analysis (e.g. T. Magaril-Il'iaeva, V. Nechaeva, G. Pospelov, K. Stepanian, S. Kibal'nik, S. Shkarlat). That said, this accessible book will appeal to students interested in translation studies, in Dostoevsky's rapport with Balzac, and in the recurrence in Dostoevsky's oeuvre of the specific themes outlined here. Titus provides a number of glosses explaining literary terms and cultural figures. Her book will lead readers of Dostoevsky to Balzac (not only to *Eugénie Grandet*, but also to *Le Père Goriot* and other texts) and back to read Dostoevsky with a new awareness of some of the first choices that he made in articulating his favorite themes.

*Sara Dickinson*