



MULTIFARIOUSNESS UNDER DURESS: GUSTAV ŠPET'S SCATTERED LIVES

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Abstract

To a significant degree, this study is meant as a contribution to clearing the ground for a proper scholarly biography of Gustav Shpet (1879-1937) which someone might undertake to write in the future (for a first helpful attempt, see Ščedrina 2004). To that end, I draw on previously unheeded published and unpublished sources, bringing together strains of research that have so far remained unconnected. My prime concern will be to establish the most significant aspects of Shpet's involvement with Russian and Soviet culture (including literature, translation, and the theatre). The examination I undertake is intent on revealing his scattered talents and energy, and – in the years after 1927 – his tragically multifarious life under the political duress of Stalinism. I begin by analysing Shpet's intellectual and political predicament at GAKhN in the late 1920s, an episode of crucial significance for his marginalisation and brutal victimisation during the 1930s. As I will demonstrate, the roots of Shpet's instability lay back in the early 1920s, yet it was not until the Stalinisation of culture and scholarship gathered momentum in the second half of the 1920s that his position of leadership and public visibility grew untenable. After focusing on the propaganda campaign against GAKhN and the consequences it had for Shpet, I work back chronologically to review Shpet's immersion in Russian Symbolism and his contacts with the Imagists. In the final two sections I offer an analysis of Shpet's career as a translator and of his theatre affiliations, both falling largely in the 1930s and shaped in no small measure by the ideological constraints of Stalinism.

Keywords: *Shpet; Stalinism; GAKhN*

Špet at GACHN

By 1927 Stalin was the uncontested leader of the Party. At roughly the same time, Gustav Špet published two studies in aesthetics and the philosophy of language and culture: *Introduction to Ethnic Psychology* (1926) and *The Inner Form of the Word* (1927), both going back to ideas he had begun to formulate a decade ago.¹ Incisive and illuminating as these books no doubt were, they nonetheless signalled a return to a philosophical agenda which, by Western standards, looked somewhat dated. Špet's 1926-1927 books betrayed a certain fatigue, revisiting as they did his ideas of the late 1910s-early 1920s and an intellectual agenda essentially shaped by the nineteenth-century and by pre-Husserlian philosophy. Wilhelm von Humboldt, Steinthal, Lazarus, Dilthey, and Wundt had now become the central figures and the major points of reference in Špet's work, even when he was critical of some of these thinkers, as was clearly the case with Wundt.

Špet's creativity seems to have peaked in the years immediately preceding and following the October Revolution of 1917. This is the time when the ideas underlying both his *Introduction to Ethnic Psychology* and *The Inner Form of the Word* were generated. During this relatively brief spell he wrote his important article on ethnic psychology (the nucleus of his future book), as well as 'Hermeneutics and Its Problems' (completed in 1918), the study which propelled his turn to Humboldt and thus bore significantly on his later book *The Inner Form of the Word*. This is also the time when Špet wrote his most significant work on poetics and discourse theory, *Aesthetic Fragments*, the three parts of which took less than a month to complete (26 January-19 February 1922). Finally, during this period of his life Špet published important articles on theatre and offered his own interpretation of the early stages of the evolution of Russian philosophy.

From 1922-1923 onwards, however, Špet's situation began to deteriorate. He became increasingly disillusioned with the regime, soon after he had requested – and with Lunačarskij's support (cf. Polivanov 1995: 12) achieved – that his name be removed from the list of intellectuals who were to be exiled from the country in 1922. The strongest blow must have come a year earlier with the closure of the Philosophy Department at Moscow University. Although Špet continued to teach for a while (he gave his last seminar at the University on 26 June 1922; cf. Severceva 2000: 175), over time he felt deprived of an institutional base and came to suffer the anomy of an academic without students and colleagues. His very identity as a philosopher and scholar was at stake. With seemingly endless opportunities in sight – but without the prospect of a single worthwhile solution – he would scatter his energy in various directions, living a life of enforced multifariousness. His drama was that of a thinker and a public figure whose attention was frequently claimed by more projects than one could have reasonably hoped to

bring to fruition. He never completed the promised sequel to the first volume of his *Outline of the Development of Russian Philosophy* (1922),² nor did he publish the announced fourth instalment of his *Aesthetic Fragments*³ or the continuation of his *Introduction to Ethnic Psychology*.⁴ As I will demonstrate below, Špet was engaged in theatre discussions, in literary disputes, and in the work of various professional societies (often of a trade-union nature); in 1921, he was even busy setting up an Academy of physical culture (Akademija fizičeskoj kul'tury; cf. Marcinkovskaja 2000: 63-67). At the same time he was closely, if briefly, involved with the Institute of Scientific Philosophy, where he served as Director (1921-1923), and – over a considerably longer period of time – with the State Academy for Artistic Sciences (GACHN). Yet even GACHN, increasingly isolated by 1927 and doomed to fall under party control in 1929, could not offer Špet a lasting abode; after various restructuring moves it was dissolved in April 1931, less than ten years after its official launch.⁵

It was precisely Špet's engagement with GACHN, where in June 1924 he rose to become Vice-President, which made him most vulnerable and exposed to the adverse impact of the gradual Stalinisation of scholarly life after 1927. By 1928-1929 the party line was being imposed in the Academy of Sciences (Akademija Nauk, AN), where party membership became an important factor in elections and promotions to posts of leadership and responsibility. In 1927, the new Statutes of the AN were adopted, an act which cleared the way to the 1929 elections organised in order to plant into the AN a large number of prominent Party members. Early in 1928, the Politburo already had a list of 35 desirable candidates (divided into three categories depending on their proximity to the Party leadership; cf. Esakov 2000: 53-54). Špet was formally put forward for a full membership of the AN in 1928 by historian D.M. Petruševskij (seconded by a group of art scholars at GACHN, most proactive of which was Aleksandr Gabričevskij),⁶ but his candidacy fell through, following public accusations of “idealism”⁷ (cf. M. Polivanov 1992: 29; Mjasnikov 2002: 16-22).

In the face of these developments at the Academy of Sciences, Špet and his colleagues at GACHN looked besieged and, if one is to judge by his own intensifying complaints (insomnia, growing alcohol consumption, various psychosomatic disorders),⁸ worryingly depressed. The imminent purges were preceded by a preparatory campaign which exemplified and displayed the worst tools of Stalinist propaganda at work. At the heart of the campaign was a virulent attack launched in *Komsomol'skaja pravda* on behalf of GACHN's “young generation” of scholars. Under the sarcastic heading “‘Immortals’ from dead ideas” (“‘Bessmertnye’ ot mertvykh idej”), referring to GACHN as a body of “immortal” members (by analogy with the French Academy), several articles were run, all with the purpose of creating the necessary public climate of distrust, suspicion, and denunciation. One learns from this lam-

poon that a postgraduate researcher, S.S. Skrjabin, was a follower of Tolstoj's doctrine of non-violent resistance to evil and had thus been tried for refusing to serve in the Red Army; that GACHN sheltered numerous "idealists of a Shpetian mould" ("idealisty špetovskoj zakvaski"; Gabričevskij, Žinkin, Losev, Cires, Nedovič are all mentioned by name); and that Špet himself was at the centre of this reactionary "citadel" of anti-Marxism.⁹ An analysis of this newspaper assault would reveal all the essential ingredients of public opinion-making (and manipulation) under Stalin. The recipe can be summarised as follows: a) throw allegations against the leadership and its ideological soundness; b) raise the stakes by accusing your victim of total uselessness, and even harmfulness; c) show that you can do the work better because you are on the right side of the ideological divide, possessed of more energy, and politically more committed than the "old guard".

The three components can be discerned with embarrassing clarity behind the barrage of petty snipes that found their way into *Komsomol'skaja pravda*. Since the official President of GACHN, Petr Kogan, had embraced an essentially Marxist creed before the October Revolution and had subsequently taken numerous steps to confirm his loyalty to the regime,¹⁰ it was the Vice-President Gustav Špet – harbouring in his student years strong social-democratic convictions and some sympathy for Marxism (for which he was expelled for a time from Kiev University), but never willing to endear himself to the new political elite after 1917 – who was used as the ritual scapegoat the campaign could not do without. His leadership was attacked as aloof (when it came to the Academy's links with the public), nepotistic,¹¹ and elitist. His scholarly production was declared to be of no significance. A set of figures was marshalled to give evidence of the alleged failure of his books to reach a wider readership; if the data is correct, by February 1929 there were 1,227 unsold copies of Špet's 1927 *Introduction to Ethnic Psychology* (out of a total print-run of 2,000 copies), while the collective GACHN volume *Iskusstvo portreta*¹² (with articles by many of those stigmatised as "idealists of a Shpetian mould") had sold only 300 copies (out of 2,000).¹³ Various "gross violations" of the Academy's statutes were highlighted, the worst of which (perhaps because it involved money) seems to have been the fact that some members wouldn't bother to give their mandatory annual lecture to the Academy but would still draw a monthly remuneration of "100 roubles".¹⁴ Even more disquiet was meant to cause the revelation that in an organisation such as GACHN, with a staff of "some 150-200 people",¹⁵ there was no party cell. Thus the Academy had slipped out of control to become the "Trojan horse" ("Trojanskij kon") of idealism in the humanities. Predictably, this was reason enough for a "revolt of the left" ("bunt levych") and a split ("raskol") in the postgraduate community at GACHN. The young, the reader learns, would not put up with the damaging leadership style and the detrimental agenda pursued within the Academy. In a wall newspaper the left

wing protested its unwillingness – “in the face of the Soviet public” – to take responsibility for the political direction followed by the institution. Pressure from outside was solicited to break the crust of autonomy that protected the Academy. Since the majority of the members of GACHN were “idealists” and since three references from members were needed for anyone to be admitted to postgraduate doctoral work (“dlja začislenija v aspiranty”), the vicious circle of reproducing ideologically dangerous views could only be broken, *Komsomol'skaja pravda* insisted, with the help of the Party. Such help was promptly extended, and at the end of 1929 the graduate programme of GACHN, which had been established in 1926, was closed and transferred to RANION (cf. Mislér 1997: 19-20).

On 29 October 1929, some eight months after the assault in *Komsomol'skaja pravda*, Špet was released from his duties as Vice-President of GACHN,¹⁶ with effect from 1 November. In January 1930 his membership was terminated, and in July of that year, after being formally denounced as the person who created out of GACHN a “mighty citadel of idealism” (“krepkoj citadeli idealizma”),¹⁷ he was banned from posts of leadership in the Soviet system of education and “ideological life”. The resolution issued at the end of the proceedings concluded: “Špet may apply his knowledge of foreign languages as a translator, if proper ideological guidance is guaranteed” (quoted in Bowlt 1997: 305).

It is now possible to understand why after 1927 Špet abandoned his research on philosophy and aesthetics. He certainly found it impossible to work on his own projects without the stimulation of immediate publication prospects and in an environment marked by increasing hostility and the lack of trust in his capacity to contribute to Soviet philosophy, aesthetics, and psychology. In fact, after 1927 Špet appears to have produced no more than an updated version of his short article ‘Literatura’ (published in 1982) and an unfinished text (published in 2002) on the philosophical sources of Černyševskij's dissertation, work on which was abandoned in 1929, the year of Špet's deposition as Vice-President of GACHN. In that same year, another Russian thinker and theorist of culture, the then still young Michail Bachtin (b. 1895), was sentenced to exile in Kazakhstan (after the initial sentence had been mitigated). Unlike Bachtin, whose first major work saw the light of day in 1929, by that time Špet (b. 1879) already felt – in his own words – spent and reconciled to “being thrown out of public life and of physical life, too...” (quoted in Bowlt 1997: 300). While in exile, Bachtin was able to write for posterity. His public marginality (almost complete invisibility, by the standards of social success and institutional influence), his mental disposition, notably his serene confidence in the “festive homecoming” of every meaning, finally also his family circumstances, allowed him to do so. Špet's career in the 1920s, an ephemeral web of involvements and commitments ensnaring him in incessant negotiations over power and prestige, as well as – crucially –

his steadily growing disillusionment over the prospects of non-partisan scholarship, had made it much more difficult for him to cope with the growing isolation that Stalinism visited upon him. The responsibilities for a large family were adding to this predicament, barring his access to a much needed inner concentration that could focus his dispersed intellectual efforts. Ever since 1927, bereft of his previous belief in the meaningfulness of philosophy and scholarship, tormented by smear campaigns, purges, marginalisation, trial, and re-trial, Špet wrote for the moment, undertaking translations, adaptations, editorial work, internal reviewing and other duties that could provide a source of income.¹⁸

Špet's forced entrance into these new spheres of activity after 1927 was facilitated by his already extensive network of contacts in the world of literature, publishing, and the theatre. Only insufficient attention has been paid so far to Špet's overall presence on the Russian literary scene of the 1910s-1930s. As a result, our knowledge and appreciation of the scope of his writings and the variety of Russian literary and theatre life in the first third of the twentieth century have remained less rich and well-informed than they could otherwise have been. Špet's participation in these often interconnected spheres assumed different forms: to start with, he wrote on literature and theatre from a theoretical perspective grounded in his overall aesthetics;¹⁹ secondly, through personal friendships and affiliations, as well as through his membership, he played an important part in a number of informal circles or more formally structured groupings, such as the Moscow Linguistic Circle, which promoted literature, theatre, and scholarship on them; last but not least, Špet was active as the Russian translator of, and commentator on, a number of works from the canon of English literature. In what follows, I attempt a chronological examination of Špet's rich involvement in Russian and Soviet cultural life (1910s-1930s), with an emphasis on his largely under-researched contacts with two of the literary currents of the day (Symbolism and Imagism), his equally neglected contributions as a translator, and his as yet insufficiently studied interest in and work for the theatre.

Amongst the Symbolists

Špet's literary and theatre affiliations had commenced in earnest after his move to Moscow in 1907. In Kiev, where he studied at the St. Vladimir University, he had given expression to his early literary ambitions by publishing brief newspaper notes under the pseudonym 'Lord Genry' (M. Polivanov 1992: 15). Yet it was Moscow, and Russian Symbolism, that became the ground of his first serious association with a major literary and artistic circle, "Obščestvo svobodnoj èstetiki" ("The Society of Free Aesthetics"), also known simply as "Èstetika" ("Aesthetics"). "Èstetika" was founded under the

informal leadership of Valerij Brjusov; other distinguished participants included Andrej Belyj, Michail Geršenzon, and the artist Valentin Serov, the literary scholars Sakulin and Dživelegov, and the philosophers Fedor Stepun and Boris Vyšeslavcev, to name but a few. Špet befriended several fellow-participants, notably Jurgis Baltrušajtis, who was to become a life-long friend, and the brothers Ėmilij and Nikolaj Medtner (Belyj 1934: 242); more likely than not, his acquaintance with Pavel Sakulin also goes back to this time. A couple of years later Špet joined the group around the “Musaget” publishing house, dominated by Ėmilij Medtner, Belyj, and Lev Kobylinskij (Ėllis), the latter also a friend of Špet’s (cf. Belyj 1933: 53). Although Belyj perceived Špet as a late-comer, he evidently had considerable respect for Špet’s taste and valued his background in philosophy (Belyj 1933: 75). Špet asserted the “philosophical nature” (“filosofičnost”) of Belyj’s 1904 collection of poetry *Gold in Azure* (*Zoloto v lazuri*; Belyj 1934: 306), but would sarcastically warn him on numerous occasions against playing with, or “parading”, philosophy in his poems; in Belyj’s words – reporting Špet’s – in order to be a truly philosophical poet, one doesn’t need to wear “a shabby tail-coat borrowed from [Heinrich] Rickert’s wardrobe” (307), nor indeed to mix the mystic aspects of a poem with the philosophical ones (Belyj 1969: 561; Belyj 1992: 338). Belyj confessed to being “in love” with Špet’s “subtle and sophisticated mind” (Belyj 1969: 559-560). In September 1909, when it was still unclear whether “Musaget” would be launched as a journal or as a full-fledged publishing house (cf. Belyj 1934: 374), Belyj regarded Špet as a potential contributor to the journal who could write on Fichte and on Polish philosophy and culture (Špet, himself of Polish descent, would read Belyj the poetry of Słowacki and Mickiewicz in Polish; cf. Belyj 1969: 560). Ėmilij Medtner, too, believed at the time that Špet would make a good contributor to the philosophical section of the journal (cf. Ščedrina 2004: 78, n. 18). Yet a year later, in October 1910, Špet’s outspokenness led Belyj to write to Medtner that Špet was “brilliant, but apparently hostile to us” (quoted in Ščedrina 2004: 56). Despite this early crisis, Špet and Belyj worked together once again after the Revolution, in the Moscow branch of the Free Philosophical Association (“Vol’fila”), established in September 1921.²⁰ Belyj became the chairman of the branch’s council, while Špet was elected one of his deputies (Gut 1997: 94; Lavrov and Malmstad 1998: 269, n. 22). A few years later, in 1927, Belyj wrote to Ivanov-Razumnik that his gradual estrangement from Špet had to do with the latter’s attraction to alcohol, which Belyj did not wish to share (Lavrov and Malmstad 1998: 463). Belyj briefly resumed the acquaintance in 1933, about a year before his death (cf. his two letters to Špet of April and August 1933 in *Načala* 1; 1992: 64-65).

Špet was not the only philosopher to participate in the activities around the “Musaget” publishing house; Vladimir Ėrn, Sergej Bulgakov, Sergej Gesen, Nikolaj Berdjaev and Michail Geršenzon were also frequently seen

there. From 1910 to 1914 “Musaget” published the Russian version of *Logos*, the international journal of philosophy, edited by Fedor Stepun and Sergej Gessen. Within the membership of “Musaget”, there was a clear divide between those who were in favour of the line represented by *Logos* and those who opposed it as being too neo-Kantian and not heeding in sufficient measure other currents in contemporary philosophy. Špet, Ėrn and Bulgakov (the latter occasionally ridiculed by Špet as using a “pomade prepared from religious superstition [“iz popovskogo duha”] and memories of a peculiar Marxism”; cf. Belyj 1934: 306) were in the camp of the opponents; in Špet’s case this was no doubt motivated by a rejection of neo-Kantianism in favour of phenomenology.

Amongst the Symbolists, Špet became more intimately acquainted not only with Belyj, Baltrušajtis, Ėllis (and Nikolaj Feofilaktov, the principal illustrator of *Vesy*), but also with Vjačeslav Ivanov. Their contacts are yet to be studied in detail, but it would appear from the scattered evidence available that over time the relationship grew from Špet’s respect for and interest in Ivanov the poet and thinker into a friendship in which Ivanov recognised Špet’s seriousness as a philosopher and commentator on literature. Lev Šestov mentions an evening at his home on 8 December 1914, where he and his guests – Ivanov, Špet and Berdjaev – spent the time in captivating discussions (Baranova-Šestova 1983: 130); Špet’s letters to his second wife Natalija Gučkova-Špet reveal (cf. Ščedrina 2005: 225; 248; 258) that in the summer of 1915 he and Lev Šestov would often visit Ivanov to hear him read from his poetry, sometimes in the company of Bal’mont, Baltrušajtis and Remizov (Špet later received a brief mention in Remizov’s *Vzvichrennaja Rus’*; cf. Remizov 1927: 232), at others in Michail Geršenzon’s. Špet described Ivanov’s poems read on one such occasion (7 June 1915) as “superb” (“prevoschodnyj”). Ivanov was apparently an authority in Špet’s eyes not just as a poet, but also as a mentor inculcating in Špet a relentless work discipline (cf. Serebrennikov 1995: 228). Špet presented Ivanov with three of his publications (cf. Obatnin 2002: 323-334), all with personal inscriptions: ‘Javlenie i smysl’ (1914); ‘Filosofskoe nasledstvo P. D. Jurkeviča’ (1915) and ‘Istorija, kak problema logiki’ (1916). In 1920, Boris Gornung participated in long discussions on the future of Russian culture, in which Ivanov would side with Lunačarskij on all issues, while Gornung was enjoying support from Špet (B. Gornung 2001: 331, n. 26). Later, during Ivanov’s first years in Italy, Špet was apparently instrumental in GACHN electing Ivanov as one of its “member-candidates” in December 1926 (Bird 1999: 320; Kondjurina 2001: 238, n. 3). Špet endeavoured to assist Ivanov by offering to buy on behalf of GACHN his Moscow library (Kondjurina 2001: 373), while Ivanov wanted to entrust Špet with overseeing the final stage of publication, including the proof-reading, of his translation of Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* trilogy (235, 239, 240, n. 5) which was supposed to be published by GACHN. The

task was deemed by Ivanov to demand so much knowledge and organisational talent as to be impossible to assign to anyone but Špet. The publication, however, did not materialise (cf. Bird 1999: 331, n. 110).

Behind these personal ties with some of the major poets of Russian Symbolism, we have to see (and here only briefly refer to) the larger picture: Symbolism left its crucial imprint on Špet's subsequent aesthetic theory, contributing to the formation of his overall conservative platform (cf. Nikolaev 2004: 265-267). Špet's appreciation of "seriousness" and his fight against "emptiness, utilitarian attitudes ("utilitarnosti"), barbarism" found support in the philosophical ambition and *gravitas* of Symbolism, whose praise Špet continued to sing into the 1920s in his *Aesthetic Fragments* (Špet 1989: 357-359), while at the same time rejecting Naturalism and Futurism and criticising Achmatova's acmeist poetry (Špet 1989: 371).²¹

Špet and the Imagists

If it is fair to aver that Gustav Špet's affiliations with Russian Symbolism have not been researched in sufficient detail, the same is true to an even larger extent of his contacts with the Russian Imagists. Špet's sympathy for them would come as a surprise when one recalls his (already mentioned) unambiguous and sharp criticism of Futurism, the most significant manifestation of the Russian literary avant-garde, in the first instalment of the *Aesthetic Fragments* (Špet 1989: 361-363).

Špet's contacts with the Imagists occurred at a time when, on the demise of Symbolism and the fading of Acmeism after the outbreak of the Revolution and the Civil War, it was imperative for the intelligentsia to reposition itself vis-à-vis the new political realities and the new aesthetic trends. Esenin was apparently the first of the future Imagists to make Špet's acquaintance. Andrej Belyj saw behind this friendship a shared proclivity to alcohol-induced merriment (Belyj 1934: 310), but there was undoubtedly more to it than that. Špet was among several members of the Moscow Union of Writers (others included Michail Geršenzon, Michail Osorgin and Georgij Čulkov) who in December 1918 considered a request from Esenin for a document certifying his possession of live stock to be issued, thus enabling the poet to protect himself against tax and requisition (Esenin 2000: 202 and 284). The contacts between the two probably intensified in 1919 when Esenin joined the short-lived literary association "Dvorec Iskusstv", of which Špet, along with Sakulin, Vengerov, Cvetaeva and others, was also a member (Savčenko 2003: 204). More importantly, beyond the drinking companionship and the day-to-day business, Špet was clearly interested in Esenin's poetry. The peak of this interest and of their literary contacts seems to fall in the years 1920-1921, when Esenin presented Špet with inscribed copies (Ese-

nin 2002: 60 and 1999: 158) of his books *Confessions of a Hooligan (Ispoved' chuligana*, 1921) and *Pugačov* (the latter inscription, "Milomu Gustavu / Gustavoviču / S ljubov'ju ljutoj" is dated December 1921, while the publication date indicated in the book is 1922). A copy of the collective publication *Imažinisty* was inscribed by Esenin, Mariengof and Rjurik Ivnev (Esenin 1999: 117 and 447) to Špet's daughter Lenora (1905-1976) in December 1920 (the publication date indicated in the book is 1921). As Mariengof reports in his memoir *A Novel without Lies (Roman bez vran'ja)*, in the summer of 1921 he and Esenin organised a gathering at which they read from their new works (Esenin read from *Pugačov* on this occasion); Špet, Mejerchol'd, the artist Georgij Jakulov, and the sculptor Sergej Konenkov were present (Mariengof 2000: 130; Jur'ev and Šumichin 1990: 383).

Špet must have lent a sympathetic ear to Esenin's and Mariengof's works, for in the first half of September 1921 the Imagists, insulted by an article in which Lunačarskij referred to them as "charlatans who wish to fool ("moročit") the public" (Lunačarskij 1921: 6), published a challenging response in the journal *Pečat' i revoljucija*, calling Lunačarskij to a "public discussion on Imagism, where Prof. Špet, Prof. Sakulin and other representatives of science and the arts will be invited in the capacity of competent judges" (Esenin, Mariengof, Šeršenevič 1921: 249). The letter, a different version of which was also sent to the journal *Kniga i revoljucija* (but did not appear there), was signed by Esenin, Mariengof and Šeršenevič. The original – now considered lost – was handwritten by Mariengof, yet the actual instigator of the letter, according to Matvej Rojzman (1896-1973), himself a minor Imagist poet, was Šeršenevič, as he was allegedly the only one personally familiar with both Sakulin and Špet, paying them occasional visits at their homes (Rojzman 1973: 145).

The accuracy of Rojzman's memoirs ought to be questioned here on two counts. Šeršenevič may well have played a part in suggesting Sakulin for the role of a "competent judge", but more likely than not his name was put forward as a result of a collective discussion rather than by Šeršenevič alone. As for Špet's name, it is more likely that not Šeršenevič but Esenin and Mariengof were the actual force behind his "nomination".

Two arguments seem to be corroborating these conjectures. While Šeršenevič was clearly grateful to Sakulin for giving his adolescent literary ambitions an early (and decisive) impetus (which Šeršenevič duly recorded in his own memoirs; Jur'ev and Šumichin 1990: 428; 460), Esenin, too, felt he was indebted to Sakulin, as the latter had been similarly supportive of his own beginnings as a poet (Kunjaevy 2002: 58. Unfortunately, Kunjaevy reproduce uncritically Rojzman's statement that Šeršenevič was the sole initiator of the letter to *Pečat' i revoljucija*). Thus it is extremely unlikely that Esenin – the fact of whose personal acquaintance with and debt to Sakulin

Rojzman completely neglects – will not have had a say in the conversations on Sakulin's role in the proposed public dispute with Lunačarskij.

On the other hand, Šeršenevič cannot be taken to have been unconditionally fascinated with Špet. Back in December 1918, he had put Špet's name on a list of twenty Russian literati whom Šeršenevič, on behalf of the Professional Union of Poets (Professional'nyj sojuz početov), wanted to see elected on the council (sovet) of the Literary Department of the Narkompros (Drozdov 2003: 148-149). His motion, however, was rejected. Only a year later, in 1919, Šeršenevič opened his poem 'A lyrical construction' ('Liričeskaja konstrukcija') with the impenetrably (to most readers today) ironic line "All who in Čelpanov's cradle their thought have nursed!" ("Vse, kto v lju'ke Čelpanova mysl' svoju / vynjančil!"); Šeršenevič 1997: 204). Georgij Čelpanov (1862-1936) was widely known as Špet's mentor at Kiev University and his "patron" in Moscow (cf. Belyj 1934: 306); Špet was considered Čelpanov's most gifted pupil who eventually overtook his teacher in terms of prestige and recognition (Belyj 1934: 307).²² Šeršenevič's opening line was thus not just collectively addressed to Čelpanov's pupils, but may well have envisaged Špet in particular. This makes it more likely for Esenin and Mariengof, rather than Šeršenevič himself, to have put forward Špet's name as a "judge" in the discussion with Lunačarskij, which in the end never took place (Lunačarskij declined the offer in a response published in the same issue of *Pečat' i revoljucija*). If Šeršenevič was not overenthusiastic about Špet, by the mid-1930s the latter's disappointment over Šeršenevič's career as a poet was equally unconcealed; in a letter of 21 November 1936 to his son Sergej, Špet remarked: "And Šeršenevič, alas, has failed" ("A iz Šeršeneviča, uvy, ničego ne vyšlo", quoted in Serebrennikov 1995: 177).

Špet's contacts with the Imagists appear to have been relatively short-lived. He does not seem to have kept up his friendship with Esenin, nor did he deepen his acquaintance with Mariengof (although as late as 1926 he promised Boris Gornung to establish a contact between him and Mariengof; cf. B. Gornung 2001: 397). Špet's links with the Imagists did not have any noteworthy effect on his aesthetic views or on his immediate political fortunes. The mention of his name in the Imagists' letter did not put off Lunačarskij, who knew Špet from his time in Kiev, from helping the philosopher in 1922 to stay on in Russia after his name had been placed on the infamous list of intellectuals to be exiled from the country. It was only in 1929, after the process of Stalinisation had advanced to the point where a reversal was no longer feasible, that Lunačarskij joined the chorus of ideology-driven criticism of Špet's work, castigating his writings at a meeting at the "Land and Factory" ("Zemlja i fabrika") publishing house in October 1929 as "most harmful" ("vrednejšie sočinenija Špeta"; Lunačarskij 1964: 436). (Lunačarskij's speech appeared on 28 October 1929 in *Literaturnaja gazeta*; the next day, as we have seen, Špet was released from his duties as Vice-President of

GACHN – an unambiguous example of media deployment as an instrument of cadre politics under Stalin.)

Špet's Literary Translations

Špet's contribution to Russian culture should be measured not just by the scope and the quality of his original work. He was an indefatigable promoter of Western philosophy, whose translations span an impressive range of authors from Berkeley to Hegel and Rickert.²³ His single most important translation of a philosophical text, that of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, is a major accomplishment and the result of selfless work and perseverance during the last two years of his life (the translation did not appear until 1959). Here, however, I focus on Špet's contributions as a translator of verse and prose, an aspect of his career that has so far failed to attract serious scholarly attention. The added value of such research is twofold: a) it helps to reveal Špet's extensive network of contacts with a number of both significant and lesser-known twentieth-century Russian poets active as translators, notably Michail Kuzmin, as well as the part he played in a string of journals and almanacs in the 1920s; b) even more importantly, Špet's work as a translator after his expulsion from GACHN assists us in grasping the practice of literary translation as an instrument of ideological power and a site of competing political tenets in the 1930s.

Špet's first known translations of verse are a distich by Plato and a fragment from Alcaeus (Levinton and Ustinov 1990a: 194; the two texts are reproduced in L. Gornung 1992: 178-179), published in the third issue (September 1923) of the obscure typewritten literary journal *Germes (Hermes)*.²⁴ The journal was launched in the summer of 1922 by a group of young men, most of them aspiring poets and philologists. The person behind the first two issues was Boris Gornung (1899-1976), a member of the Moscow Linguistic Circle in its later years.²⁵ He formed an editorial board which included, among others, his brother Lev Gornung (1902-1993), the promising philologist Maksim Kenigsberg (1900-1924) – to whose memory Špet's *Vnutrennjaja forma slova* is dedicated – and Kenigsberg's friend (later his wife) Nina Vol'kenau.²⁶ The last two issues (out of four) saw a change in the editorial board which was now chaired by Kenigsberg and was joined by Aleksej Buslaev (another member of the Moscow Linguistic Circle and its Chairman at the time the first issue of *Germes* was published) and Viktor Mozalevskij. Kenigsberg's untimely death in 1924 meant that only the first part of the fourth issue was prepared, already without Boris Gornung's participation as a member of the editorial board (cf. B. Gornung 1990b: 188).²⁷ More importantly, at the beginning of 1924 a "scholarly-artistic" ("naučno-chudožestvennyj") advisory board was formed, chaired by Špet and including

some of his GACHN colleagues, notably Aleksandr Gabričevskij, Michail Petrovskij and Aleksandr Čelpanov. Špet and his colleagues had great plans for the second part of the fourth issue which was supposed to carry a number of scholarly articles; instead, these were all published some three years later, long after the journal had ceased to exist (Špet's article on Humboldt evolved into a book [*Vnutrennjaja forma slova*, 1927], whereas the articles to be written by Petrovskij, Žinkin, Guber, and Volkov²⁸ appeared in GACHN's 1927 collective volume *Chudožestvennaja forma*; cf. B. Gornung 1990b: 188).

Špet's close involvement with these young literati continued over the next few years, until around 1926-27 (cf. B. Gornung 2001: 331, n. 25). Joined by Nikolaj Berner and Aleksandr Romm (on Berner, see Ustinov 2002: 5-64; on Romm, see Toddes and Čudakova 1981 – who reveal Romm's role as the first translator of Saussure's *Cours* into Russian – and K. Polivanov 1993: 47, n. 12), Boris Gornung conceived the typewritten literary almanac *Mnemosyne* (*Mnemoszina*, 1924); he confirmed in a letter to Michail Kuzmin of September 1924 that Špet had been the driving force behind the formation of the new group that launched *Mnemosyne* (Levinton and Ustinov 1990b: 209). Another almanac, *Hyperborean* (*Giperborej*, which saw the light of day in Moscow towards the end of 1926; Vorob'eva 2000: 177), was the result of collaboration, under Špet's guidance, between the Gornung brothers and several GACHN scholars, including Nikolaj Volkov and Boris Grifcov. A second issue of *Hyperborean* was in preparation in 1927 but was banned by the GPU (178). Špet's afore-mentioned translation of Plato's distich was re-published in *Mnemosyne*, while *Hyperborean* brought out his article 'Literatura' (K. Polivanov 1993: 46), the 1929 manuscript version of which was eventually published in Tartu in 1982.²⁹ Since *Hermes* and *Hyperborean* were produced in just 12 copies each (B. Gornung 1990b: 186;³⁰ Vorob'eva 2000: 179), the likely impact of Špet's contributions there was probably rather limited (although Boris Gornung did insist that these periodicals were read by hundreds of people in Moscow, Petersburg, Kiev, Kazan, and Nizhni Novgorod; cf. B. Gornung 2001: 349). Of the better-known poets, only Kuzmin and Sofija Parnok published in *Mnemosyne*.³¹

In the 1920s Špet was still translating sporadically, and mostly for pleasure; not so in the 1930s when after his removal from GACHN translating became his principal way of earning a living. The remaining years of Špet's life (1930-1937) were spent translating into Russian a vast amount of literature, mainly from the nineteenth-century English canon. Špet was no doubt handsomely equipped for a career as a professional translator. He stated in a declaration to the Prosecution, written in 1937, that he had command of 13 foreign languages: English, German, French, Italian, Spanish, Polish, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, Ukrainian, Bulgarian, Latin, and Greek (Serebrennikov 1995: 190); the number of languages he could translate from

was even larger – seventeen (Špet 2003: 587) – and was magnified to nineteen in petitions to Stalin written on different occasions by Špet's wife and the actor Vasilij Kačalov (Serebrennikov 1995: 284; 287). Špet himself indicated that he undertook editorial work on translations from the canon of English, Polish, German, and Scandinavian literatures (Špet 2003: 589). He also acted as evaluator of translations for various publishers, most frequently for "Academia".³²

More often than not Špet translated prose, Dickens being at the centre of his work after 1930. Both *Hard Times* and *Bleak House* (the latter abridged for children and adolescents) appeared in 1933 in Špet's translation. His translation of Dickens' *Pickwick Club Papers* was, however, rejected (M. Polivanov 1992: 30), and Špet had to resign himself to being allowed to compile a volume of commentaries published in 1934.³³ Vladimir Milaševskij, the artist who illustrated the *Pickwick Papers*, noted in one version of his memoirs that both Špet and Evgenij Lann (who translated the book together with A.V. Krivcova) were hostile towards his illustrations, insisting instead that the edition carry the original illustrations by Robert Seymour, Robert Buss, and Hablot Browne (Phiz). In the end, Kornej Čukovskij succeeded in breaking Špet's vociferous opposition and a compromise was reached: Dickens' text was illustrated by Milaševskij, while the original drawings were reproduced in Špet's volume of commentaries (Juniverg 1992: 51-53).³⁴ Špet was also considering a multi-volume edition of Dickens and even a Dickens Encyclopaedia.³⁵ While in exile, he tried unsuccessfully to get "Academia" to commission him the translation of *David Copperfield* and the editorship of what was meant to be the first complete Russian translation of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*,³⁶ he also translated Oliver Goldsmith's play *She stoops to conquer or the mistakes of a night*.³⁷ Earlier on he had served as the editor of a two-volume translation of Thackeray's writings, for which he wrote the notes to *Vanity Fair* (1933-1934), and had prepared a partial translation of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*.³⁸

Špet's only known translation of German prose are Schiller's letters to Goethe, on which he worked in 1935-37 (the translation is preserved in RGB, f. 718, k. 13, ed. chr. 6); Goethe's letters to Schiller were entrusted to Michail Petrovskij (1887-1937), a literary scholar and Špet's former colleague at GACHN, later an exile in Tomsk where he worked as a scholar-bibliographer at the University Library before being rearrested and shot (Serebrennikov 1995: 115; 263). Despite Špet's reluctance to communicate with someone he believed had betrayed him during the inquest, meeting Petrovskij in Tomsk proved eventually impossible to avoid (Serebrennikov 1995: 215; 226; 235). The translation published in 1937 (with an Introduction by Georg Lukács) did not carry the name of either Špet or Petrovskij.³⁹

It is, however, Špet's work as a translator of verse in the 1930s that gives us access to the intricate politics of translation under Stalinism. The

1930s saw the most sustained and energetic campaign to bring to the Soviet reader the works of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European canon. The idea was initially Gor'kij's, but his pet project (for which the publishing house "Vsemirnaja Literatura" [1918-1924] was founded) lost momentum after he left the country in the autumn of 1921. It is not by accident that the idea came back precisely in the 1930s.⁴⁰ Establishing a new canon of widely read classic works was part of Stalin's cultural politics designed to produce a sentiment of unity and a picture of public consensus built around the supposedly shared aesthetic (read: ideological) values embodied in the Russian and Western literary tradition of the past two centuries. This new canon was more inclusive of works previously stigmatised as representative of the "abstract" bourgeois humanism which the party-minded art had been encouraged to fight and leave behind. From the mid-1930s onwards bourgeois realism was in fashion once again, protected by attempts to reach consolidation around a shared anti-fascist ideological platform. The new line did soften for a while the perception of rigidity which Stalin's cultural policies produced abroad. In 1935, Ėrenburg, Babel', and Pasternak were able to join the Paris Congress for the defence of culture on an equal footing with their Western colleagues. Pasternak's reluctance there to assign art clearly defined political tasks was indicative of this freshly licensed humanistic outlook.

At home, the subscription to the new canon was meant to conceal the deep rifts and the contest between the irreconcilably different national perspectives and the often incommensurable cultural orientations of the different social strata within the multi-national state. To attain this goal, translation had to be a closely monitored activity,⁴¹ and it also had to be proactive and "practice-orientated", i.e. delivering not just samples of great literary style and craftsmanship but above all versions of the classics that would have a purchase on the everyday lives of their Soviet readers. Thus it comes as no surprise that the practice of literary translation in the 1930s was marked by a serious discord between the principles of faithfulness (to the original) and usefulness (to the target audience). The former principle was branded as "literalism" and had to give way to a culture of translation based on lower artistic expectations and higher political returns. The political war over the principles of translation was plain to see in the polemics surrounding two of the most ambitious projects of the 1930s: the multi-volume editions of Goethe's and of Shakespeare's works. The first two volumes of the Goethe edition, in the organisation of which Špet's pupil and friend Aleksandr Gabričevskij was closely involved, were met with protests at the allegedly low use-value of the translations which failed to provide the Soviet readership with those much needed "current phrases" ("chodjačimi vyraženjami") that could be of help to propagandists, philosophers and scholars.⁴² Similarly, the "Academia" edition of Shakespeare's works was attacked (notably by Čukovskij and Mirskij) for the misleading "precision" of some of the trans-

lations, which allegedly made the access of the Soviet reader to Shakespeare more difficult by obscuring rather than revealing his genius.

Špet brought to his work as a translator of verse his baggage of unconditional professionalism, rigorous rationality, and sober-mindedness that also marked his style of philosophising. Small wonder then that he would often be reproached for siding with the “literalists”. Sometimes this was justified by his occasionally excessive faithfulness to the original; at others, he was simply the victim of an overarching ideological imperative – the “democratisation” of the classics – which he felt unable to follow.

Špet’s translations of verse in the 1930s included Byron’s dramatic poems ‘Manfred’, ‘Cain’, and ‘Heaven and Earth’, as well as ‘Age of Bronze’,⁴³ and Tennyson’s ‘Enoch Arden’, the latter translated in September-October 1935 and first published sixty years later (see Serebrennikov 1995: 17-38; 321). Not surprisingly, given the polemics on the philosophy of translation outlined above, his translations of Byron’s poems were met with some hostility. Anna Radlova, the wife of stage director Sergej Radlov and a poet in her own right, wrote to Lev Kamenev⁴⁴ (in response to Špet’s critical remarks on her translations of *Othello* and *Macbeth*) that she was not prepared to accept Špet’s taste and translation techniques demonstrated in his own rendition of Byron (Kuzmin 1998: 228-229). Radlova meant by this Špet’s unbending insistence on precision that on occasion favoured the literal over the creative. Špet defended himself by responding to Kamenev that eminent poets such as Kuzmin and Pasternak had praised his translation (Kuzmin 1998: 229). Accusations of “literalism” were also levelled by Čukovskij and Šklovskij. In February 1934, the latter ridiculed in a letter to Tynjanov Špet’s explanatory notes: “it seems that Špet glossed the word ‘crocodile’ in Byron by adding a note giving the Latin for it” (“Špet, kažetsja, k Bajronu na slovo krokodil dal primečanie, nazvavši éтого krokodila polatyni”, quoted in Pančenko 1984: 204). For once, Šklovskij was not exaggerating, nor was he making things up (cf. Špet’s gloss in *Bajron* 1933: 406).⁴⁵

When considering Špet’s career as a translator of verse, one has to give prominence to his work on the prestigious eight-volume Shakespeare edition published by “Academia” in 1936-1949, under the general editorship of Sergej Dinamov (himself a victim of Stalin’s purges, shot in April 1939) and Aleksandr Smirnov (a prominent literary scholar, the author of *Tvorčestvo Šekspira* [1934] and in 1946 one of the three official evaluators of Michail Bachtin’s doctoral dissertation *Rabelais in the History of Realism*). In a letter to Stalin written in November 1935 in Enisejsk (probably never sent), Špet took pride in his role as a member of the working group preparing the edition and pleaded that he be allowed to resume his editorial duties. Before his arrest he had read a number of draft translations by “experienced translators such as Michail Kuzmin and Osip Rumer” and had “subjected these to brutal

correction" ("žestokoj pravke"), although he knew that not everybody would agree with his demand for "super-philological exactitude" ("sverchfilologičeskoj točnost'ju"; cf. Špet 2003: 592). Špet referred to Smirnov and the poets Kuzmin,⁴⁶ Pasternak,⁴⁷ and Antokol'skij as potential guarantors for the quality of his work (592).

Špet's defensive mention of "super-philological exactitude" in this letter is an unmistakable response to those of his critics who favoured the utilitarian principles of translation over precision and philological soundness. The tension between these two attitudes came to be felt acutely as work on the Shakespeare edition progressed. Over time, Smirnov and Špet had established a smooth and efficient co-operation, with Špet editing meticulously the translations of several key plays, including *Macbeth* (in this case his contribution amounted in effect to co-translating the play) and *King Lear*.⁴⁸ The balance was disturbed when Mirskij was appointed a consultant to the edition, thus strengthening the positions of the "utilitarian" wing around Čukovskij. In his letters to Špet, Smirnov objected to this appointment and to Mirskij's written evaluation of the work that had been done so far. He even contemplated leaving his editorial duties but was dissuaded by Kamenev.⁴⁹ The situation turned truly unpleasant when Smirnov revealed to Špet that Čukovskij was plotting to oust the philosopher from the edition.⁵⁰ Dethroned and fallen from grace after the purges at GACHN, Špet was no longer able to defend himself. An article responding to Mirskij's criticisms of S.M. Solov'ev and Špet's translation of *Macbeth* seems to have remained unpublished; Špet had to content himself with a letter seeking Kamenev's support.⁵¹ The depressing irony in this otherwise banal story of ideological and personal rivalry is that Mirskij himself was soon to become an outcast; he perished two years after Špet, another victim of Stalinism.

Špet's Theatre Affiliations

Špet must have been moving in theatre circles as early as 1905, while still in Kiev, for Aleksandr Tairov, the founder of the famous Chamber Theatre (Kamernyj teatr), acknowledged in his *Zapiski režissera* (1921) Špet's beneficial influence on his formative time there (Tairov 1970: 68). Špet, Tairov and his spouse, the actress Alisa Koonen, preserved their friendship in later years; in the journal of the Chamber Theatre, *The Craft of Theatre (Masterstvo teatra)*, Špet published his main article on theatre, 'Theatre as Art' ('Teatr kak iskusstvo').⁵²

After the October Revolution, a Theatre Department (TEO, Teatral'nyj otdel) was established within the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment (Narkompros) to regulate the work of theatres throughout the country. At its foundation in 1918, TEO consisted of four sections administering, super-

vising and studying 1) theatre history; 2) the organisation and management of the existing theatres and circuses; 3) the repertoire; and 4) theatre pedagogy.⁵³ A section dealing predominantly with questions of theory was later added but then dissolved before being re-established early in 1921, when the writer and critic Andrej Belyj, the philosopher Fedor Stepun and Špet himself were appointed as its only members (Jufit 1968: 72). In discharging his duty of promoting the study of theatre theory and disseminating the results of such studies, Špet published in 1921 a highly interesting and controversial short piece on the process of the differentiation of labour in the modern theatre.⁵⁴ Historically, Špet argued, the playwright and the actor were identical; the first step in the process of differentiation was the separation of the actor from the author. The next step meant that the author also lost the actual function of staging the play: the stage-director and the set designer were born. Finally, Špet claims, the time has arrived for the role of interpreting the meaning of the play to be entrusted to an independent agent – neither the author, nor the stage director, nor the actor should be entitled to impose their interpretations which are anyway often, quite naturally, in conflict with one another. The hermeneutic function, Špet insists, is a difficult one; it requires a degree of specialisation, education and skills which neither the actor nor the stage director necessarily possess. Without a professional interpreter, the “intellectual sense of the play” (“razumnyj smysl p’esy”, Špet 1991: 204) will be lost, and the actors will try to compensate for it by emphasising instead the bodily techniques of the spectacle, so characteristic, Špet implies, of the modern stage (204).

In addition to the controversial ideological implications of this insistence on a single correct interpretation (and its institutionalisation), there is here also a hint of scepticism towards avant-garde theatre, not inconsistent with Špet’s only slightly later attack on Futurism and the avant-garde in his *Aesthetic Fragments* (which we noted earlier). Špet’s reservations towards the theatre of the avant-garde were also evident in his main contribution to theatre theory, the aforementioned article ‘Theatre as Art’. Published in an issue dedicated to the eighth anniversary of the Chamber Theatre and preceded there by an article by Tairov, Špet’s piece nonetheless distances itself from Tairov’s radical insistence that theatre be regarded as completely detached from the task of dialectically comprehending the world that exists outside art (cf. Schmid 1996: 112). In the same article, Špet also criticises Wagner’s thesis of the synthetic nature of theatre (Špet 2000: 112), which later theorists had taken up and solidified into one of the corner-stones of avant-garde performance practice.

The salient paradox of Špet’s theatre affiliations was that while he maintained close contacts with two of the greatest experimenters in the history of Russian theatre, Tairov and Mejerchol’d, he never got involved in an avant-garde theatre production. On the contrary, when Mejerchol’d de-

cided to stage Alexandre Dumas' *The Lady of the Camellias* (premiered on 19 March 1934), Špet not only took on the translation,⁵⁵ but he actively steered the rehearsals as well, achieving, according to one of the actors, a "miracle": Mejerchol'd, the inveterate theatre experimenter, staged the play in a realistic spirit (Mitjušin 1989-1990: 89). Mejerchol'd did insert a few short texts that were not part of the original, and he also reshaped some others to give them a modern feel (Sitkoveckaja 1993: 55), but on the whole the play was done in a way that put historical verisimilitude first.

Špet's preference for realism as an aesthetic foundation of the modern theatre led him to a close association with Stanislavskij's Moscow Art Theatre, at a time when its innovative force had admittedly been on the wane for a number of years. On 24 January 1928, the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment approved the artistic council ("chudožestvennyj sovet") of Stanislavskij's theatre; being at the time (still) the holder of a high office at GACHN, Špet became a member of the council from the quota of the "public organisations" ("ot obščestvennyh organizacij"). From the same quota the renowned expert on Marx and Marxism David Rjazanov and the prominent literary critics Vjačeslav Polonskij⁵⁶ and Aleksandr Voronskij were elected (Trabskij 1982: 186). Preserved are Špet's comments as part of the council's discussions in 1928 on Leonid Leonov's play *Untilovsk* and Valentin Kataev's *The Embezzlers* (*Rastratčiki*), a stage adaptation of his better known novel by the same title (cf. the minutes reproduced in Markov 1976: 562-563; 566-567). In 1933, Špet was one of the initiators of a small working group whose task was to read and comment on Stanislavskij's book manuscript (eventually completed in 1935 and published the following year in English translation in the United States as *An Actor Prepares* (cf. Stanislavskij 1961: 345; 366). (The notes to Stanislavskij's letters wrongly assume that the manuscript was that of the first part of *Rabota aktera nad soboj* published in Russian in 1938, shortly after Stanislavskij's death. The Russian version had been revised by Stanislavskij and differed from the American one; Špet played no part in these revisions, since they took place while he was already in exile.) Špet was also one of the organisers of the nation-wide discussion of Stanislavskij's memoirs *Moja žizn' v iskusstve* (Maksimova 2000: 163; Ščedrina 2004: 258).⁵⁷ As late as 1938, Špet's wife, not aware of his death, wrote to Stalin to ask for a favourable intervention, referring, among other plans, to her husband's project of a nine-volume history of the Moscow Art Theatre (cf. Serebrennikov 1995: 287-288).

Špet's immediate knowledge of the Russian theatre scene also included an acquaintance with Nemirovič-Dančenko, whose memoirs Špet read while already in exile (Serebrennikov 1995: 202). These high-profile contacts in the Moscow Art Theatre, but above all his friendship with Vasilij Kačalov and Ol'ga Knipper-Čechova, two of its most famous actors, meant that Špet was able to rely on the theatre profession to raise a voluble concern when he was

arrested in 1935. Kačalov and Knipper-Čechova were among the signatories to petitions asking for Špet's relocation from Enisejsk to Tomsk, a university town with a library and better conditions for scholarly and literary work, and for a permission for his family to continue to reside in Moscow after he had been exiled (Serebrennikov 1995: 256-257). Finally, Kačalov alone wrote a letter to Stalin, not knowing that Špet had already been shot, asking for his full rehabilitation (283-284).

In 1936, already an exile in Tomsk, Špet renewed his acquaintance, dating back to the GACHN years, with the playwright Nikolaj Ěrdman (1902-1970) who had been involved at the early stages of his career with the Imagists. Ěrdman, too, was exiled and resided at the time in Tomsk, working as the dramatist of the local theatre from September 1935 to the end of October 1936 (Serebrennikov 1995: 242, n.). Špet afforded himself some familiarity in addressing Ěrdman as "Mandat" (237), the Russian title of Ěrdman's most successful comedy staged by Mejerchol'd in 1925. Ěrdman acquainted Špet with a younger stage director who wanted to do *Othello* for the Tomsk theatre and who sought Špet's advice on the interpretation of the play. Having written copious commentaries on ten of Shakespeare's plays for the "Academia" edition (Špet 2003: 589), Špet was undoubtedly well prepared to help the young director with *Othello*. The production, however, did not materialise, nor did the plan to secure for Špet Ěrdman's post in the theatre on the latter's departure (Serebrennikov 1995: 242).

Our knowledge of Špet's literary contacts, his work as translator and his theatre affiliations enables us to appreciate the multifarious texture of his intellectual life, particularly in the late 1920s and the 1930s, a stage in his career marked by diversity under duress. During that time Špet was forced to apply his energy to a growing number of pursuits, none of which could give him the opportunity to advance his own agenda as a thinker and scholar. The propitious volatility of the first post-revolutionary decade, still tolerant and conducive to creativity, had gradually been supplanted by a climate of ideological control and suppression, the brutality of which left its stamp on Špet's declining fortunes and his eventual catastrophe. The last – and at the same time most pronounced and most persistent – Westerniser in the history of pre-1989 Russian thought was relegated after 1927 to an increasingly marginal and unfulfilling existence. Rejecting the props of both Marxism and Russian religious philosophy, Špet was left weathering the storms of history alone, facing his tragic end with consummate dignity.

NOTES

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- 1 The concept and the term “inner form” can be found as early as 1917 in Špet’s article ‘Mudrost’ ili razum?’ (Špet 1994: 294-295); it later recurs in Špet’s *Aesthetic Fragments* (written in 1922). Špet’s *Vvedenie v etničeskiju psihologiju* rests largely on his articles on ethnic psychology published in *Psichologičeskoe obozrenie* in 1917-1918 (in the book, Špet inaccurately indicates the date of their first publication as 1919; cf. Špet 1989: 475); by December 1922 these articles were expanded into a book which the “Kolos” publishing house was prepared to publish quickly (cf. Ščedrina 2005: 499). This did not happen, and in 1926 Špet had to update the manuscript by adding chapters surveying the literature published after 1918. The book appeared in 1926 (Petrickij 1991: 25), even though the official publication date indicated on the cover is 1927.
- 2 On the planned continuation of *Očerki razvitija ruskoj filosofii*, see Ščedrina (2004: 37; 47-48; 247) and Ščedrina (2005: 474-476; 491).
- 3 Špet initially intended to title the series “Aesthetic Promises” (“Ėstetičeskie obeščanija”); cf. Ščedrina (2005: 481). He finally settled for “Aesthetic Fragments”, partly in order to leave the door open for further instalments. The fourth instalment was announced by the “Kolos” publishing house (which published *Aesthetic Fragments*, I-III); a text closely related to the promised fourth instalment appeared in 1923 in GACHN’s journal *Iskusstvo* (cf. Špet 1989: 433; 575). The fullest available version of Špet’s *Aesthetic Fragments* appears to be that published in 1989 as part of his *Sočinenija*; V.K. Kantor restored on that occasion the text cut in the first publication (cf. Špet 1989: 575 and Kantor 2006: 271).
- 4 The title of the book was accompanied by the qualification “Vyp. 1”; on the first page of the Introduction, Špet insisted that this was the “first issue [vypusk]” of his *Introduction* (Špet 1989: 475; emphasis in the original).
- 5 For useful surveys of the institutional history and structure of GACHN (established in October 1921 as RACHN and renamed “GACHN” in May 1925), see Strekopytov (1996 and 1997).
- 6 Špet’s name appeared in the official list of candidates published in *Izvestija* (21 June 1928).
- 7 *Leningradskaja pravda* (17 October 1928) wrote: “Lejtmotiv filosofskih postroenij prof. Špeta [...] zvučit dissonansom v strane strojaščegosja socializma” (quoted in Fedorova 2002: 47).

- ⁸ Špet's health was distinctly fragile throughout the 1920s; as early as 1920-1921 he would describe his condition as manic-depressive (cf. Ščedrina 2005: 348; 364), while Michail Geršenzon would often note Špet's excessive "nervousness" (cf. Geršenzon 1992: 245; 296, n. 4). By 1930, his alcohol intake – clearly a response to the vitriolic public campaign against him – was perceived as a problem even by helpful and benevolent friends; a worried Baltrušajtis dedicated to Špet a poem, 'Netrezvomu Špetu' (cf. the text of the poem dated 9 April 1930 and Ščedrina's comments in Ščedrina 2004: 70). In the late 1920s – early 1930s, Špet suspected he might be mentally ill; he studied psychiatry books and sought the opinion of psychiatrists (M.K. Polivanov 1992: 31).
- ⁹ See the block of articles under the heading "Bessmertnye ot mertvykh idej. Akademija Chudožestvennyh Nauk v plenu u reakcionerov. Trebuem vmešatel'stva proletarskoj obščestvennosti", in *Komsomol'skaja pravda*, 20 February 1929, p. 2 (see also "Liberaly zamazyvajut klassovuju bor'bu v nauke. V Akademii Chudožestvennyh Nauk vdvojne neblagopolučno – GACHN gotovit antimarksistskiju smenu", *Komsomol'skaja pravda*, 1 March 1929). In his reply ("Akademija otvečae. Pis'mo v redakciju"; the reply was accompanied by an editorial counter-response, "Oproverženie ili podtverženie?"), the President of GACHN Petr Kogan stated that Skrjabin had not been tried in court and had been excused from military service as a Tolstoyan. On the accusations against Skrjabin, see also John E. Bowlt, 'Sergei Skriabin' (1997: 181-182). Bowlt attributes the entire block of accusatory articles in *Komsomol'skaja pravda* of 20 February to I. Bačelis; in fact, one of the texts in the block, "Esče odna Akademija", was signed by Šmygov and Valujskij who were identified more than fifty years later in Lev Gornung's memoirs (1992: 179) as, respectively, a worker and a former serviceman sent by the Party as part of a group of four activists to "purge" GACHN. *Komsomol'skaja pravda* was soon joined by the journals *Na literaturnom postu* (1929, Nos. 4-5 and 6; the latter issue even carried a cartoon by the Kukryniks titled 'O GACHNe, Kogane i Špete', accompanied by derisory verse – cf. K.M. Polivanov's notes in L. Gornung 1992: 181-182) and *Pečat' i revoljucija*, which in June 1929 published a diatribe against GACHN by Isaak Nusinov, an ardent proponent of the sociological method (cf. Nusinov 1929: 81-89). Finally, in February 1930, although Špet had already been removed from the vice-presidency by that time, *Literaturnaja gazeta* branded his philosophy as "a reactionary mystique" that "obscures the consciousness of the working people" (17 February 1930).
- ¹⁰ While Kogan's scholarly reputation rested on his pre-revolutionary surveys of West European and Russian literature, by 1927 he was already writing on topical issues such as the Red Army in Russian literature (Kogan 1926). His standing did not spare him Majakovskij's contempt (cf. the mention of Kogan in Majakovskij's poem 'Sergeju Eseninu').
- ¹¹ In the literary section of GACHN, the brothers Michail and Fedor Petrovskij and Boris and Grigorij Jarcho were employed; Aleksandr Čelpanov, the son of

the eminent psychologist Georgij Čelpanov, was also employed, as was his father. More such cases are listed in the documentation reproduced in Bowlt (1997: 304) and Marcinkovskaja (2000: 22), as well as in L. Gornung (1992: 179-180).

12 *Iskusstvo portreta* (Gabričevskij 1928; actually published in 1927; cf. Mikhailov 1997: 10, n. 14).

13 All figures in *Komsomol'skaja pravda*, 20 February 1929, p. 2 (in the section titled "A vy govorite: bumažnyj krizis!"). The "uselessness" of GACHN's published output, accompanied with charges of unskilful editorial policies and squandering of resources (all stones in Špet's garden, as he was GACHN's bursar, as well as Director of GACHN's Editorial Committee), resurfaced in the Resolution of July 1930 which concluded the process of political purges at GACHN. In the Resolution, Špet's *Introduction to Ethnic Psychology* is said to have sold only 39% of its total print run (apparently, in July 1930 the same figures were used as in February 1929; one recalls that in February 1929, 1,227 copies of Špet's book were reported unsold, i.e. exactly 61.35% of the total print run); according to the Resolution, the entire book production of GACHN was printed in a total of 88,000 copies, of which only 57% were sold (for the figures mentioned in the Resolution, cf. Bowlt 1997: 304).

14 The precise figure for a member's monthly salary recorded in the official minutes of the sessions of the "purging commission" was 96 roubles (in 1924, Geršenzon had praised Špet's skills as a bursar, stressing that while Špet was in charge of GACHN's finances salaries almost doubled; cf. Geršenzon 1992: 307). During the purge Špet was accused of money-mindedness and greed; it was claimed that he received a salary of 286 roubles, three times as much as the monthly salary of an ordinary member (cf. the document reproduced in Marcinkovskaja 2000: 22).

15 The estimate of *Komsomol'skaja pravda* was probably correct; for precise figures concerning the membership of GACHN between 1921 and 1927, see Strekopytov (1997: 51-52).

16 On the same day, GACHN's Bulletin was closed (a total of eleven issues were published), and the subscriptions to foreign periodicals were cut (cf. Mislér 1997: 29-30).

17 In the same document, Losev was called a "counter-revolutionary"; cf. Bowlt (1997: 303).

18 On his removal from GACHN, Špet was awarded a monthly pension of 160 roubles (Polivanov 1995: 14), which was clearly not a comfortable income for a family with three children, all aged between 11 and 16 in 1930 (Špet had two more children from his first marriage, aged 25 and 22 at the time).

19 I examine Špet's contributions to literary theory in Tihanov (forthcoming).

20 On the history of "Vol'fila", see V.G. Belous (2005).

21 Achmatova knew Špet from her year as a student at the Kiev Funduleev Gimnazija in 1906-1907 when Špet was her psychology teacher (cf. Reeder 1995: 17-18). Vera Beer recalls a psychology lesson with Špet in which Anna (then still Gorenko) recited Brjusov (Beer 1991: 28; 30; cf. the mention of

Špet and the school half a century later in Achmatova's notebooks, Achmatova 1996: 79). Špet's acerbic criticism of Achmatova's poetry in the *Aesthetic Fragments*, to which Vejdle, amongst others, objected vehemently (even Boris Gornung, Špet's ardent follower, would not agree with him on this point – cf. Gornung's letter to Benedikt Lifšic in B. Gornung 2001: 390), was motivated exclusively by aesthetic considerations. Thus Špet was greatly interested in Gumilev's writings; in 1926 Lev Gornung reported to Achmatova that he had received as a present from Špet the manuscript of Gumilev's novella 'Stradivarius' Violin' which Špet had obtained through Sergej Poljakov, the publisher of *Vesy* where Gumilev's novella appeared in 1909 (L. Gornung 1989a: 69; in a different version of his memoirs, Lev Gornung asserts that the event narrated above took place on 1 October 1928, cf. 177-178). Achmatova and Špet met once again (unintentionally) in May 1934 at Boris Pil'njak's home in Moscow (on receiving the news of Mandel'stam's arrest, Achmatova had left for Moscow from Leningrad), where Špet was in the company of Baltrušaitis and Sergej Prokof'ev (cf. Achmatova 1968: 182).

Čelpanov is mentioned once again, again in a rather ambiguous context, in Šeršenevič's 1920 manifesto '2 x 2 = 5' (Šeršenevič 1997: 407).

For a list of most of Špet's published translations of philosophy, cf. Mitjušin (1992: 91-92); for Špet's translation of Berkeley's *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, published in 1937 without a mention of Špet's name, cf. Serebrennikov (1995: 144, n. 5).

These translations are not mentioned in the bibliography of Špet's literary translations (Mitjušin 1992: 92).

After Jakobson's departure for Estonia and then Prague, Špet's (and through him GACHN's) influence on the Moscow Linguistic Circle had become so overpowering that it eventually led to its split in mid-1922 (Nikolaev 2004: 228). In the final stages of the Circle's existence, several younger members – Gornung, Buslaev, and Žinkin – joined GACHN; the library of the Circle was also transferred to GACHN (Toman 1995: 66).

For short biographies of the Gornung brothers, see Kljuev (1998: 268-273); on Kenigsberg, see Čičerin (1985: 239-250) and Šapir (1994); on Vol'kenau, see K. Polivanov (1993: 47, n. 12).

Lev Gornung reports that Špet was asked to write for the fourth issue of *Germes* a brief note on Tjutčev (L. Gornung 1992: 183-184); the request does not appear to have been acted upon.

Like Špet, Volkov was involved in translation. His partial translation (1927) of Hegel's *Aesthetics* (Volkov translated only the part known as *Einleitung in die Aesthetik*) was amended, edited, and supplied with notes by Špet but remained unpublished (the translation is preserved in Rossijskaja Gosudarstvennaja Biblioteka [RGB, Moscow], f. 718, k. 8, ed. chr. 4 and 5).

Cf. Špet (1982); Igor' Čubarov has published a slightly different version (see Špet 2002: 1133-1136, republished in Čubarov 2005: 253-259).

Unlike his brother, Lev Gornung asserts that *Germes* was produced in three copies only (cf. L. Gornung 1992: 175).

- 31 On Špet's contacts with Kuzmin see further below. In the early 1930s, Špet would visit Parnok on several occasions. As a friendly gesture, he translated into English the aria of Almast from Parnok's eponymous opera libretto (L. Gornung 1989b: 92; L. Gornung 1992: 180). Parnok was, along with Špet, Pasternak, Lev Gornung, Benedikt Lifšic and others, among the initiators of the "Uzel" publishing house which in 1926 brought out books by her, Pasternak, Lifšic, and Aleksandr Romm (cf. K. Polivanov 1992: 134). In August 1933, Špet attended Parnok's funeral (Poljakova 1979: 36).
- 32 Špet was asked to evaluate the translations of Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz* (by Sergej Gorodeckij) and Wyspiański's *Wedding* (by Konstantin Ėrberg); cf. the letter from "Academia" (5 April 1933) in RGB, f. 718, k. 24, ed. chr. 56. Špet's evaluations are at k. 21, ed. chr. 2 and 3 (Ėrberg's translation) and k. 21, ed. chr. 9 (Gorodeckij's translation).
- 33 An abridged translation of the *Pickwick Papers* appeared under Špet's co-editorship: Č. Dikens, *Posmertnye zapiski pikvikskogo kluba* (sokračennyj perevod s anglijskogo). Pod redakcij A.G. i G.Š. [sic!], Moskva-Leningrad: Molodaja Gvardija, 1932. In the absence of any indication of the translators' names, one must assume that the translation (comprising a total of 51 chapters) was undertaken by those referred to as co-editors: Špet and Gornfel'd.
- 34 In a different version of his memoirs Milaševskij makes no mention of resistance on Špet's part (Milaševskij 1989: 303-304).
- 35 See his respective book proposals, both written in 1933 (RGB, f. 718, k. 17, ed. chr. 4). Špet also proposed the publication of a Shakespeare Encyclopaedia (k. 20, ed. chr. 16). The genre was apparently attracting growing attention at the time; in addition to the two projects just mentioned, "Academia" also attempted the publication of a Puškin and a Heine Encyclopaedia (cf. Ostroj 1969: 171).
- 36 In 1930-1932, Špet himself translated chapters 1-9 of the novel (the text is preserved in RGB, f. 718, k. 12, ed. chr. 6). Poe appears to be the only other author from the American canon on whom Špet worked; at different times, he corrected Pjast's partial translation of 'Politian' and also wrote a proposal to "Academia" for the publication of Poe's writings (cf. RGB, f. 718, k. 12, ed. chr. 4 and k. 21, ed. chr. 13, respectively).
- 37 *Nočnye nedorazumenija*, in Špet's 1937 translation (the translation, apparently unpublished at the time, is preserved in RGB, f. 718, k. 11, ed. chr. 10 and 11).
- 38 Cf. Špet's 1934 translation (*Žizn' i mnenija Tristrama Šendi*, Book I, Ch. 1-25 and Book II, Ch. 1-2), preserved in RGB, f. 718, k. 12, ed. chr. 5.
- 39 *I.V. Gete i F. Šiller, Perepiska v dvuch tomach*. Vstup. stat'ja Georga Lukača, per. A.G. Gornfel'da i I.G. Smidoviča, Moskva-Leningrad, Academia, 1937.
- 40 The extent to which the political elite was involved in the realisation of this idea can be judged by the fact that the "Academia" edition of Shakespeare's works was initially supervised by Bucharin. On 11 February 1933 Špet was summoned to a meeting on the preparation of the edition, due to take place on

17 February in Bucharin's office (see the letter at RGB, f. 718, k. 24, ed. chr. 56, l. 21).

41 Control was made easier by setting up a translation sector within the Writers' Union; the first conference of Soviet translators met in Moscow in January 1935 (cf. Smith 2000: 263).

42 See Mariëta Šaginjan's criticism in 'Gete v jubilejnom izdanii' (1933).

43 'Manfred', 'Cain', and 'Heaven and Earth' were published in Bajron [Byron] (1933); 'Age of Bronze' appeared in Bajron (1935).

44 A former member of the Politburo and for a time a deputy prime minister, later twice excluded and twice restored in the Party, at the time Kamenev was still in charge of the "Academia" publishing house. He was removed early in 1935, sentenced to prison for an alleged involvement in Kirov's assassination, and finally shot in 1936.

45 Šklovskij was no doubt delighted to be able to "punish" Špet in this way. Špet and his younger followers around *Germes* had been distinctly anti-formalist in their methodology, distancing themselves emphatically from the "radical" Jakobson, Brik, and Šklovskij (cf. B. Gornung 2001: 372-373). Their anti-formalist platform came to be felt with particular prominence in the collective volume *Chudožestvennaja forma* (Moscow, GACHN, 1927) which was met with irritation by Boris Ėjchenbaum (cf. his letter to Šklovskij of 22 March 1927 in Kertis [Curtis] 2004: 303, where Ėjchenbaum singles out Špet's role as a teacher of the young authors represented in the volume and refers scornfully to the older GACHN associates as "Šory, Špety i Petrovskie").

46 Špet's use of Kuzmin's name in 1934 and in 1935 requires some explanation of the background. Kuzmin and Špet met for the first time on 11 May 1924 in Moscow (Timofeev 1993: 160) in the circle of the young literati around *Germes*. Boris Gornung recalled that Kuzmin had earlier spoken of Špet's *Aesthetic Fragments* in a derisive and sceptic fashion (B. Gornung 1990a: 178), but apparently this did not affect the tone of their first meeting. On this occasion Kuzmin had a lively discussion with Špet and Maksim Kenigsberg (180) on "clarism", on the essence of Romantic aesthetics and irony, on dandyism, and on Achmatova's poetry. Kuzmin and Špet later intensified their contacts while working on the Shakespeare edition, for which Kuzmin translated from 1930 to 1935 eight plays, seven of which were published posthumously in the "Academia" volumes (his translation of *The Tempest* remained unpublished; Ščepkina-Kupernik's translation was published instead in the "Academia" edition). Kuzmin's translation of *King Lear* was corrected and edited by Špet (Morev 1998: 224, n. 16). In 1934 Špet was keen to offer Stanislavskij Kuzmin's translation of *Much Ado about Nothing* (Morev 1998: 99), in the hope that it might be staged. This resulted in Kuzmin, increasingly ailing and frail at the time, suggesting that the translation be amended by Špet who would then figure as co-translator in both the theatre version and in the respective "Academia" volume. Kuzmin was, however, less than thrilled when Špet accepted his suggestion (cf. Kuzmin's diary entry for 29 September 1934 in Morev 1998: 112); evidently he expected Špet to make the

necessary corrections, while still declining out of politeness the offer that his name appear on the cover. Špet was able to negotiate for his work an honorarium amounting to 40% of the whole; his arrest and exile, however, thwarted the plan, and the translation was published in 1937 under Kuzmin's name alone.

- 47 Pasternak mentions Špet in *Ochrannaja gramota*. In the Spring semester 1909-1910, he had attended Špet's seminar on Hume at Moscow University and wrote for Špet an essay entitled 'Hume's psychological scepticism'; the next year he took Špet's course on the "Logic of the historical sciences" (cf. Flejšman et al. 1996: 16; 208; 230-235). On Špet's significance for Pasternak's intellectual formation, see Flejšman et al. (1996: 128-132); on Špet's philosophy as an impulse for Pasternak's early poetry, cf. Han (1997, 1999, 2003; see, however, Aucouturier's objections in Aucouturier [Okutjur'e] 2004: 258-261).
- 48 Špet's experience with translating Shakespeare dated back to 1924 when he produced for the Malyj Teatr a stage version of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (preserved in RGB, f. 718, k. 13, ed. chr. 5); early in the 1920s he had begun (but never finished) an adaptation, again for the Malyj Teatr, of Schiller's *Die Räuber* (RGB, f. 718, k. 17, ed. chr. 7).
- 49 The relevant letters by Smirnov (9 June and 1 November 1934) are in Špet's estate in RGB, f. 718, k. 25, ed. chr. 25.
- 50 Smirnov to Špet, letter of 31 January 1935 (RGB, f. 718, k. 25, ed. chr. 38, l. 9).
- 51 The typescript of the article and the letter are both at RGB, f. 718, k. 20, ed. chr. 3.
- 52 G.G. Špet, 'Teatr kak iskusstvo', *Masterstvo teatra. Vremennik Kamernogo teatra* 1-2 (1922-1923), 31-55; quoted from Špet (2000) where the text is dated 24 September 1922.
- 53 On the early history of TEO, see Zubarev (1999).
- 54 G.G. Špet, 'Differenciacija postanovki teatral'nogo predstavljenija', *Kul'tura teatra* 7-8 (1921), 31-33 (quoted here from Sergej Stachorskij's republication in Špet 1991). This article is not included in the bibliography of Špet's published works in Mitjušin (1992); Marcinkovskaja (2000: 43-46) has published an almost identical version of the article from Špet's estate at RGB, apparently without knowledge of the 1921 and 1991 publications.
- 55 Zinaida Rajch (Mejerchol'd's wife) and Michail Carev (playing, respectively, the leading role and that of Armand) were listed in the programme notes as Špet's co-translators (cf. Sitkoveckaja 1993: 55).
- 56 In 1927, Špet tried unsuccessfully to get Polonskij to publish a selection of Lev Gornung's poetry in *Novyj mir* (cf. L. Gornung 1992: 178).
- 57 The fourth printing of the first Russian version in January 1934 had apparently placed Stanislavskij third (first was Puškin) in popularity amongst readers in the Soviet Union, with the whole print-run selling out in just three days (Stanislavskij 1961: 381; 569).

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