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Edited by Alexandra Berlina,
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Dedicated to De-Stalinization of the air

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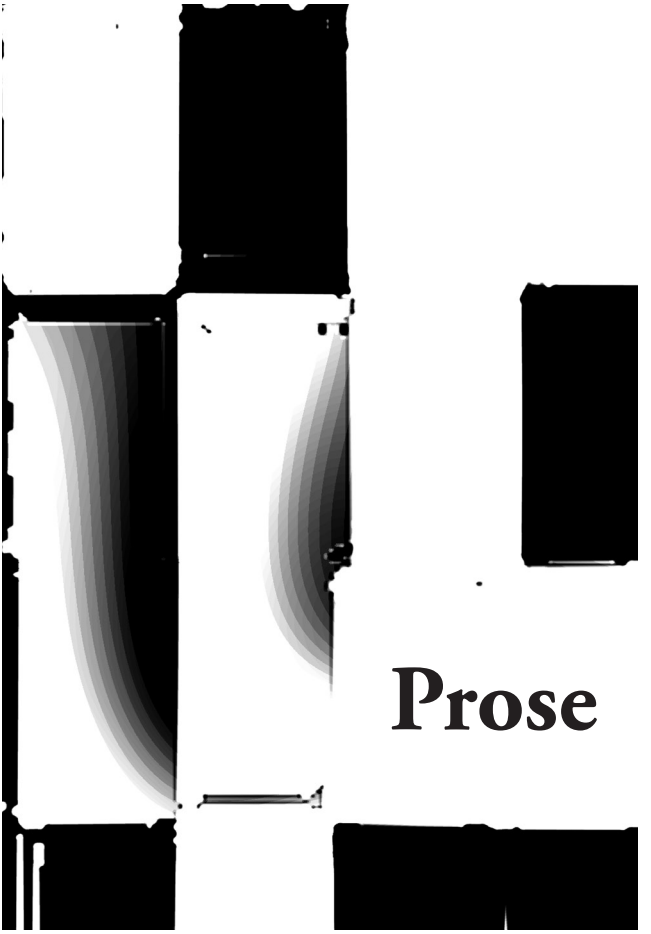

Prose

From *The Death of Vazir-Mukhtar*

Yury Tynyanov

Translated from the Russian
by James Womack

Gaze upon that frozen face,
  Look: no sign of life
Though you can clearly see the trace
  Of its abandoned strife!

A mighty stream, now frozen stiff –
  Its pulse is stilled forever,
Its former howl has died away,
  Above the pit it hovers.

– Yevgeny Baratynsky

On a very cold square in the month of December, in the year eighteen hundred and twenty-five, the men of the 1820s, with their prancing steps, ceased to exist. Time was suddenly broken in two: the sound of bones snapping was heard in the Mikhailovsky Manège – the rebels fled over the bodies of their comrades; time was tortured, it was a "terrible pageant of torment" (that's how they'd put it in Peter the Great's time).

All of a sudden some extraordinarily silent faces appeared, right on the square, the buckskin of their cheeks pulled taut, their tendons ready to snap. These tendons were actually the piping on police uniforms,

piping blue as a northern sky, and the Baltic silence of Benkendorf[1] became the sky over Petersburg.

Then they began to measure things, count things and measure them, started to judge the quavering fathers; the fathers were condemned to execution and ignominy.

A French traveller who happened to be there, shocked by how the Russian machine functioned, wrote that this was "an Empire of catalogues," and added that it was "beautiful."

Fathers bowed down, children began to stir, fathers began to fear their children, to respect them, to try to ingratiate themselves with them. At night they felt pangs of remorse, sobbed heavily. They called this "conscience" and "memory."

And then there were the deserts.

Very few there were who looked out beyond the deserts and saw that the blood had fled from the fathers, who quavered like brittle swords, saw that the blood of the age had moved elsewhere.

The children were, at most, two or three years younger than their fathers. With the hands of slaves or prisoners of war, bustling carefully (but not prancing), they wound the clockwork of the empty Benkendorf machine and set factories and workshops in motion. The 1830s smelt of America, of East India smoke.

Two winds blew: one to the east and one to the west, and both brought with them salt and death to the fathers, money to the children.

What did politics mean for the fathers?

"What's a secret society? In Paris we went to the lasses, here we'll move on the *Bear*," was what Lunin the Decembrist said.

He was not being flippant: he later teased Nicholas with letters and schemes that he sent from Siberia, all of them written in a mockingly clear hand; he tickled the bear with his walking stick, lightly.

Rebellion and women were the sensuous matter of poems and even of ordinary conversation. They gave rise to death, too – rebellion and women.

[1] Alexander von Benkendorf (1783-1844), the founder of the Russian gendarmes and secret police force after the Decembrist revolt of 1825.

People who died before their time found that death came upon them unexpectedly, like love, like rain.

"He took the frightened doctor by the hand and urgently asked for help, begging loudly and shouting at him: 'Don't you understand, my friend, I want to live, I want to live!'"

That was how Yermolov died, the regimental commander of the 1820s whom Tsar Nicholas had pickled in a jar.

And the doctor whose hand he had gripped fell into a dead faint.

They recognised each other later on in the crowd of the 1830s, these people of the 1820s did – they had a set of Masonic signs, a glance and a peculiar smile that others didn't understand. The smile was almost childish.

All around them they heard new words, words like "*valet de chambre*" or "tenancy"; they beat at them with all their strength and did not understand them. Sometimes they paid with their life for this lack of familiarity with the vocabulary of their sons and younger brothers. It is easy to die for "the lasses" or "a secret society," harder to lay down your life for a "*valet de chambre*."

It was a hard death that awaited the people of the 1820s, because their time had died before them.

In the 1830s they had a real flair for knowing when it was time to die. Like dogs, they found the most comfortable corner to die in. And in the face of death they did not ask for love or friendship.

What is love? What is friendship?

Friendship had slipped away from them sometime in the previous decade, and all that remained was a habit of writing letters and petitioning on behalf of guilty friends (incidentally, there were a lot of guilty people around at the time). They wrote each other long sentimental letters, lying to each other as they had previously lied to women.

In the 1820s they joked about women and made no mystery of love. All they did was fight occasionally or die with an expression that seemed to say, "Tomorrow I will be with the dancer Istomina." [1] The

[1] Yevdokia Ilichna Istomina (1799-1848): famous and much-pursued St. Petersburg ballet dancer.

phrase "my heart's wounds" was heard a lot at this time. Of course, this didn't stop marriages of convenience from taking place.

In the 1830s poets started to address themselves to silly society beauties. Women began to wear extravagant garters. Their debaucheries with the women of the twenties came to seem childish and pleasant; the secret societies were nothing more than "a hundred or so ensigns."

Blessed were those who had died like dogs in the twenties, like young dogs and proud, with their vibrant red sideburns.

How terrible life was for the *transformed ones*, for those men of the twenties whose very blood had fled them!

They felt themselves to be the subject of an experiment, executed by a hand whose fingers wouldn't shake.

Time fermented.

Time always ferments in blood – each era brews its own vintage.

The wine of the 1820s was Pushkin.

Griboyedov was the vinegar.

And then, when Lermontov came along, the fermentation of the word and the ferment of the blood both grew rotten, cheap as the sound of a guitar.

Even the subtlest perfume is fixed on rot, on waste (ambergris is the waste product of sea creatures), and the subtlest fragrance is closest in nature to an unpleasant stink.

Nowadays the poets have forgotten about perfume altogether, selling the waste product itself as though it were a fine scent.

Today I have waved away the smell of perfume and of waste. There is old Asiatic vinegar in my veins, and my blood forces its way slowly, as if crossing the deserts of ravaged empires.

A short man, yellowish and prim, occupies my imagination.

He lies motionless, his eyes shining from sleep.

He stretches his hand out for his glasses, to the side table.

He does not think, does not speak.

Nothing has yet been decided.

Chapter One

Sharul belo iz kana la sadyk. [1]
Griboyedov, letter to Bulgarin.

I.

Nothing had yet been decided.

He lifted himself up on his arms, stretching his torso forward; this made his nose and lips stick out like a goose's beak.

How odd! Here in his childhood bed some old habits had returned, bypassing his conscious control. This was how he used to stretch out every morning, listening to his father's house: had mama got up yet, had daddy begun his tirades? A thought flew in casually: whether his uncle, leaning on his stick, would now come in to wake him up, stir up the bed, drag him along on his rounds.

Why did he bustle about with that stick of his?

And now he shut his eyelids furtively, gently snuggling his nose under the covers.

Of course, he soon remembered how old he was.

He stretched out a yellow hand to the side table, balanced his glasses on his nose.

He had slept wonderfully well: he only slept well in unfamiliar places. His father's house now seemed unfamiliar to him; he had spent an excellent night, as if he had been in a peaceful coaching inn, but in the morning had been stifled, as it were, by a mysterious smell that always fills fathers' houses, and for good reason.

Aleksei Fedorovich Griboyedov, his uncle with the stick, had died five years ago. They had buried him here, in Moscow.

So, obviously, he couldn't come into the room.

[1] "It is the greatest misfortune not to have a true friend." Griboyedov's transliteration of a line of poetry by the Arabic poet Al-Mutanabbi (915-965).

When his moment came, daddy had died too.

However, father-ish sounds were still audible throughout the house.

Like cockerels, the clocks called from room to room through the wooden walls. The pendulum in *maman*'s boudoir always ran like a madman.

Then the sound of something being brushed, and someone spat.

It took him a while to work out what the sound meant.

Then muffled laughter (confident, female): the brushing paused for a while and finally began again with increased vigour. Someone began to make shushing noises outside the door; a thick-sounding, trashy little bell trilled out – that had to be from mama's boudoir. Then the meaning of the brush and the spitting became clear, as did the laughter: Alexander was cleaning his master's shoes, spitting as he did so, and nudging mama's maid.

Alexander had displayed unusual rudeness during this latest visit: he had rushed into the family home like a Persian bandit, taken it by storm, said 'we' when he meant "the master," let his eyebrows go flying off in all directions, his nostrils puff out, his whitish eyes had turned stupid. He even put on airs.

And so he got it into his head that "Alexander Sergeyevich won't let anyone clean his clothes like decent folk do," and had spent nights above stairs – and here he was, tickling the maid.

But Alexander Sergeyevich still smiled, because he was very fond of Alexander. Alexander reminded him of a frog.

Mama rang her bell again, trying to protect her bit of peace from Sasha, but she woke him up, it was unbearable.

Then, as if simply out of mischief, the desire to mimic the hateful noise of mama's ringing, but he stretched out his arm and also rang his little bell; it sounded just as petty as his mother's but louder. He rang it again.

Squirming like a snake and shuffling his slippers, Alexander slunk into the room. The way he walked was like how the dervish walked in

"The Passion of Ali."[1] He carried a suit like a sacrificial victim in one of his dangling hands; his quiff was already smeared with *kvass* and curled. He displayed an incredibly stupid smile to Griboyedov, who watched in satisfaction as Alexander put the thin black suit down on a stool and with a ceremonial gesture brushed off the stripes on the trousers.

And they remained in their customary silence, admiring each other.

"Give me some coffee."

"*Kava*, sir? Just a moment," Sasha said, showoffishly emphasising the Persian word, and lining up the sharp long noses of the boots.

("Just make the coffee. The fool, he's found someone to boast in front of.")

"Has the carriage been ordered?"

"It's waiting for you, sir."

Alexander, bowing his nose towards the ground with each step, left the room.

Griboyedov looked at his black suit like a depressed and persecuted beast.

He noticed a spot of dust on the lapel, wiped it off and blushed. He did not want to think about how there would soon be a diamond star shining here, and at the same time he imagined it there absolutely clearly, right there in the spot where he had wiped the dust away.

Coffee.

He got dressed quickly, despairingly made up his mind, went over to Mama's boudoir and knocked on the wooden door with a wooden finger.

"*Entrez*?"

Any surprise in the voice was put on, the way it rose was affected and the question came out a major third too high; Mama's voice was *dolce* during this visit of his, as *dolce* as honey.

Lowering his modest long eyelashes, he immediately entered into many different scents: it smelt of flannels soaked in eau-de-cologne, of sulphur, of juniper powders.

[1] One of the many dramas based on the life and death of Caliph Ali ibn Abi Talib (599-661)

Mama was sitting with a soaked flannel pressed to her temples, where the hair was not grey, but colorless.

Squinting, she looked through her lorgnette at Alexander. Her gaze was mildly carnivorous. Alexander had been promised promotion to state councillor.

"And how did you sleep, my son? This is the second day in a row your Sasha has woken everyone up."

This was the second day in a row that he'd wanted to escape from the house.

He had made up his mind this time and, apparently, had to explain himself. He was escaping to Petersburg, or rather wasn't escaping – he was bringing the Turkmen peace treaty to Petersburg and could only stop for two days or so in Moscow *en route*, but Mama had sighed deeply yesterday when Alexander had said that he was leaving in the morning: surely he could stay on another day in Moscow. He had stayed on. Now she looked at her son in a slightly strange way.

Nastasia Fedorovna was bankrupt.

Was she a spendthrift? She was greedy. Money slipped through her fingers, was scattered like sand – and then the corners began to creak and the house began to crumble again; ruin hung in the air; everything was available but the house grew empty.

Nastasia Fedorovna was clever, was a housekeeper, a mother – where did all the money go? It was as if the very air in the Griboyedov house ate it up. The peasants were already sucked as dry as they could be. Five years ago they had revolted, rebelled, and it had required rifles to pacify them. Notwithstanding this victory, the governor kept dropping by, drinking tea and mentioning that it was preferable to avoid uprisings.

Alexander understood the meaning of his mother's voice and lorgnette very well. The honeyed *legato* was an invitation to chat. Alexander began to speak. With mild contempt he heard a certain excess of expressiveness in his words, as if he had been infected by her voice.

Of course, all this had to end in scandal and be torn apart; both mother and son, knowing this, played for time.

The mother didn't know what her son wanted. He could have served the government here in Moscow, he could go to Petersburg, he could get a posting in Persia. All paths were open to him, it seemed; he had shown himself a skilled diplomat. Mother was already exchanging letters with Paskevich [1], who was married to a relative, and under whom Alexander served; Paskevich, who liked to be surrounded by indebted relatives, had moved Alexander up in the world. He recommended that Nastasia Fedorovna choose Persia.

This was how they decided things behind his back as if he were a little boy; worst of all was that he knew about it. Mother had guessed: as soon as she'd start to talk about Persia, Alexander would react against her, contradict her, even though he might well prefer Persia himself.

Persia was welcome first of all for the money it brought, and the rank, and the fact that Paskevich was the boss there; in Moscow, and even more so in Petersburg, things were different and the work was different too. Neither Persia nor Petersburg were comprehensible to Nastasia Fedorovna – they were places where Alexander spent a few years; just as if he'd gone out to work and come back four years rather than four hours later. In fact, she never even said, "Alexander's in Persia" or "in the Caucasus," but rather: "Sasha's with the mission." A mission was something solid, more peaceful, more secure. All she understood was Moscow, and yet she did not want Sasha to stay in Moscow.

"Will you dine at home today?"

"No, *maman*, I have an invitation."

He hadn't been invited anywhere, but he could not force himself to dine at home. The meals were, it had to be acknowledged, appalling.

Nastasia Fedorovna looked mischievously through her lorgnette.

"Theatres and actresses again, hmm?"

His mother was insulting when she talked about women.

"I'm busy, mother dear. You still think I'm twenty."

"I see you're not hurrying off to Petersburg."

"On the contrary, I'm leaving tomorrow morning."

[1] Ivan Fedorovich Paskevich (1782-1856): General, commander of the Russian forces in the Russo-Persian and Russo-Turkish wars of 1827-28.

She stared at him in frank curiosity through the lorgnette.

"Where are your medals? Your Lion? And your Sun?"

Alexander smiled cautiously.

"My Lion and Sun, mummy, have long been living with a Tiflis money-lender. I had a debt. You mustn't run a debt with your colleagues."

She put her lorgnette aside.

"Already?"

The pawned medal gave her an advantage. The conversation was unavoidable.

"Aren't your preparations a little hasty?"

She fussily patted a flannel against her left temple.

"No. I don't have the right to stay more than one extra day. I'm delayed as it is. It's no laughing matter."

"I wasn't talking about those preparations, I'm talking about what you're deciding to do."

He shrugged his shoulders and looked down at his feet.

"To tell the truth, I haven't thought any more about it."

And what he lifted up to her was a completely altered face, one that wasn't little Sasha's any more: older, with hair brushed back from the temples and a piercing gaze.

"It depends on the outcome of a particular project…"

She took fright, transparent curls fell on her forehead, and her voice dropped all the way down, like a conspirator:

"What project would that be, my son?"

"…one it's to early to speak of, *maman*…"

It seemed that he was victorious. But no, now the histrionics began, which were bitterest of all.

"*Alexandre*, I beg you," she lowered her hands, "I beg you to remember that we are on the edge of…" Her eyes reddened, and her voice trembled, she didn't finish the sentence.

Then she wiped her red eyes with a handkerchief and blew her nose.

"And *Jean*," she said completely calmly, referring to Paskevich, "wrote to me: go to Persia. Go to Persia, and there's an end to the matter."

She said these last words with conviction.

"But maybe I don't know everything: Sasha, perhaps you've decided to stay here and work with the journals?"

Oh it sounded peaceful, but Lord, how *legato* it was!

Jean, and Persia, and all this rubbish decided upon already: he didn't want to go to Persia and he wasn't going to go to Persia.

"I told Ivan Fedorovich that he should only recommend that I receive a monetary reward. I've thought about everything, mother."

Again he looked at her like a diplomat, like a state councillor, like an eastern potentate.

"I really am suited to a sedentary life, a life of study. Anyhow, I'll see…"

He stood up with an air of complete independence.

"I'm going. I'll be late back tonight."

Right at the threshold of safety Nastasia Fedorovna stopped him and said, squinting:

"Will you take the carriage?"

He would have been happy to travel in anything: in a droshky like a guitar, in a dandyish merchant's cart, only not in the family carriage.

"Stepan Nikitich sent a carriage for me," he lied.

"Ah."

And he escaped to the vestibule, through the first drawing-room – bright turquoise, and through the second drawing-room – light blue, Nastasia Fedorovna's favorite colors. There were mirrors in the piers and also little tables with bronzes and extremely thin (and as a result of this eternally dusty) pieces of china; but even an untrained eye could see that the chandeliers were made of paper pretending to be bronze. The scruffy furniture was all covered up, and had been for as far back as Alexander could remember. In the divan-room he slowed down. He was brought up short by a trellis, screening both sides of the divan and wound round with plush material, and two cabinets à la Pompadour.

He couldn't imagine anything stupider or more new-fangled than these new acquisitions of the financially ruined Nastasia Fedorovna.

And on a table a Carcel lamp, this time made out of real bronze.

He stood in the corner by the door, next to a pillar wound round with a plait, a pillar of mahogany that ended above his head in a hook, from which hung a lantern with decorated glass sides.

Everything here was unsuccessful Asia, ruin and deceit.

All that was missing were little multi-colored pieces of glass stuck onto the walls and the ceiling, like in Persia. That would have been brighter.

This was his house, his *Heim*, his childhood. And oh, how he loved it.

He hurried to the vestibule, threw on his raincoat, rushed out of the house, collapsed into the carriage.

1929

Belfast

Vladislav Khodasevich
Translated from the Russian by Bryan Karetnyk

If you go down into Belfast from the tall hills nestling against it in the northwest, the capital of Northern Ireland will seem to you like a handful of wild strawberries on a maple leaf: such are, among the green meadows, the tiled roofs of Belfast.

However, the contemplation of this pleasant scene requires that two important conditions be met: first, that it be a holiday, since work days in Belfast are neither like strawberries nor like anything else: simply put, you won't see it for the black clouds of smoke and soot. The second condition is rather more difficult than the first: that it be a clear day. Such is the climate here: I have spent sixty days of summer in the vicinity of Belfast, and of them only two passed entirely without rain, around ten days saw intermittent showers, and the other forty-eight it has poured from dawn till dusk and from dusk till dawn. For all that, I must do justice to the piety and forbearance of the populace; it would be an understatement to say they haven't complained: indeed, they said that this summer stood out as *comparatively* not at all bad and that the weather was usually much worse.

So, if your luck is in and you approach Belfast from the northwest, and necessarily on a holiday, and necessarily on a fine day, you will see the picture I have described: wild strawberries on a maple leaf. Of course, the sight isn't much to look at, and even less is it significant – but it is pretty nonetheless. What's more, it is to be valued, for you won't see anything better here.

If you descend from the hills and enter into the city itself, however, then nothing can aid you – neither holiday nor clear skies.

Before seeing Belfast, I hadn't imagined a city so ultimately devoid of any charm, any attraction. The streets of Belfast are not broad, not narrow: they are all of an almost identical width, quite conducive to thoroughfare. One cannot say that they run straight, but there is none of that that interesting and unexpected jumble that one finds, for instance, in Moscow. The streets are nothing out of the ordinary: some straighter, some more crooked. On the whole, they are so murderously uninteresting that it's uninteresting to write about them. They intersect at some boring corners and almost always two roads at a time: there are practically no squares, no étoiles in Belfast.

As to the buildings – one is tempted to call them "structures." They are essentially just large stone boxes for accommodating factories, offices, shops and living quarters, all uniform, like offices. Nothing in them brings joy, or even attracts the eye. Several churches, of the most commonplace architecture, are powerless to break the barracks-like monotony of Belfast's streets. If a tower rises up somewhere, you can be certain that its purpose is water-storage – there is simply no architecture. The red backs of factories stretch endlessly along every street. In Belfast there are no gardens, no boulevards. Only in front of the new parliament building (rather handsome in relative terms, but a reproduction, they say, of some other, non-Belfast construction) is there a square of the most bureaucratic fashioning.

Everything you see in Belfast is so undistinguished that the general impression of this city is astonishment not at the poor taste, but at the oppression by tedium, and the lack of talent. Poor taste is the product of the man who desires to create, but is incapable of creating beauty. Here, however, no one has ever set himself that task. Here they simply haven't heard of aesthetics, and the word itself, needless to say, is not in the vocabulary of the Belfast resident.

About the city, for which Berlin's Nollendorfplatz may serve as the greatest embellishment; between the walls, black with rain and soot; beneath the eternal fog, in dampness, semi-darkness and slush; in rubber mackintoshes, antediluvian mantlets, some beneath an umbrella, some just in a bowler hat, along whose curved brims, just like gutters, torrents of rainwater flow – walk grey-faced, sunken-cheeked

men with lopsided jaws, carrying briefcases; and grey-faced, sunken-cheeked women with lopsided jaws, enormous feet in waterproof heelless shoes, carrying bags of groceries. The plainness of Belfast's residents is equalled only by their virtue. Here, powder and paint are considered a mark of depravity. Here, people in their forties look to be in their sixties. Here, a man goes grey almost always by the age of thirty. They say it is a consequence of the climate. Of the tedium, too, I should think: the astounding, overwhelming, stupendous, desert-like tedium, of which none but he who has lived in the English provinces has any notion.

However, there is even in Belfast something that is worth seeing. It is not a museum, a cathedral, a theatre or a library. It is a gigantic shipyard, the second largest in the world, and it turns out ships that are the largest in the world. On one of the most Belfast-like days, when the rain set in at dawn and drizzled on until night, I managed to visit it. I had received permission.

At the appointed hour, I arrived at the head office. The doorman – in terms of venerability, also, I think, the first or second in the world – asked me to wait in a meeting room. The room was spacious enough, finished with all the splendour one would expect to see in a bank. An enormous table covered by a red cloth and surrounded by respectable chairs. Eminently respectable, serviceable inkstands, like pyramids, in front of every chair. The carpet around three fingers' width deep. On the ceiling and walls, solid woodcarving and moulding. Ushering me in, the doorman flicks a switch, and an electric fire lights up, eminently grand and eminently respectable, and moreover profoundly necessary on a summer's day in Belfast.

Presently a young man appears, one of the shipyard's employees, who has been charged with being my Virgil. The name is apt, for he leads me first in circles… the offices: around their endless coiling corridors, where behind thick, curved glass sit countless young and elderly people, doomed to remain here on account of their knowledge of book-keeping.

The circles of the office are succeeded by circles of drafting rooms. They have been inserted within the circles of offices. For this reason

they have almost no windows. There are around fifty halls, chambers and rooms with glass ceilings. An entire system of navy-blue curtains, like sails, guided by rings and cords, regulates the light – even, soft, serene. At long black tables are numberless draftsmen, sunken-chested young men, thinner and with a greener pallor than those in the office, standing and sitting, stooping over tracing paper, carefully outlining the details of ships to come. Here there is total silence. In the office there is the slap of stamps, the clacking of arithmometers and typewriters. Here there is only the waxen rustle of tracing paper. An engineer leans over one of the draftsmen. They speak in whispers.

In the drafting rooms and the corridors stand large glass cases containing model ships. The fine precision and care that has gone into producing these models has the capacity to amuse and entertain. Along the walls are drawings and drafts of ships already launched by the shipyard. Here there are longitudinal sections and deck plans of the *Majestic*, designs for the drawing rooms of the *Olympic*. Yes, all these giant "ics," crossing the oceans under the flag of the White Star Line, are built here. However – there are no models, no designs for the late *Titanic*. Obviously it would be tactless to mention it. I feign that the name hasn't occurred to me.

We leave the main building and get into an automobile: my Virgil is more obliging than his predecessor; that one guided Dante on foot, while this one will drive me in his motor car.

Now there are no circles, but zigzags. After passing several buildings, we enter the shipyards. Of course, this is a whole city, having until recently a population of eighty thousand: such was the number of workers. Now that has reduced by about two-thirds. I shall always recall those innumerable little groups of people in tattered jackets and caps, standing to no purpose from dawn till dusk in the pouring rain, milling about on the streets and crossroads of London and Belfast: unemployment in England is known not from newspaper articles alone: it is simply visible to the naked eye.

This shipyard is comparatively empty. One has the impression that it was intended for a much larger population. Nevertheless, what you see here is in itself remarkable.

Yes, it is an entire city: it has its own streets, its own tracks along which crawl trains made up of railway cars and wagons. What is striking is the variety of constructions: brick, stone, wood, squat and narrow, some without windows, some that seem to be made almost entirely of glass – they are all sharply distinguished from one another, both inside and out. The grandiose scope and design of this city, resembling an independent republic, is staggering. Here, there is everything necessary for its unique way of life, and everything is manufactured on site. They have their own workshops, which turn out all the ships' components, from the iron girders and ties to the fashionable mahogany armchairs and smoking tables. In line with the assortment of tasks, so too the many-faced buildings tower up assortedly, colorfully, fantastically – different-shaped, tall, narrow, broad, with elegant chimney stacks, some billowing out smoke, others steam, silent and snorting, whistling and snuffling. A forest of these stacks, a crowd of towers and derricks, some built of stone, some of iron, some solid, some with only frames, as though twisted out of wire. Behind and among them, cranes, winches, bridges, squat hangars, and again more towers, derricks, glass cupolas and iron cones. But somewhere in the distance are gigantic cubes of scaffolding surrounding the ships under construction, and from there comes a sort of singing, metallic peal and hum.

O poor Russian glorifiers of the furnace and hammer! They adulate the Tsarevokokshaysk Communist Party cell, which, in collaboration with the Komsomol, the Ukom and the Ispolkom, collectively built with three Sundays' worth of voluntary labour two pairs of pliers and weeded out half a pound of rusty nails! Even in their dreams, they haven't seen such work as goes on here, on the half-dead Belfast shipyard. O sorrow-headed Russian futurists and urbanists – the only contingent truly enlisted "at the ploughtail"! What have they seen, other than the quiet Zamoskvorechye and the idyllic stream of the Smorodinka, that same one by which Ilya Muromets sat for thirty three years!

The mahogany workshop. Here they complete the carpentry work for the ships. It is an enormous hall, without a single partition, built to accommodate one thousand five hundred workers. Countless tools,

drills, saws, jigsaws, and above each one an electric extraction unit, continually sucking up the sawdust and wood shavings beneath an iron hood and conveying it along pipes to the neighbouring storehouse, piled from floor to ceiling in pinkish powder. Were it not for these vacuums – a good half of this dust would end up in the workers' lungs.

Again we get into the car and visit the other workshops, and at that only the main ones: in one they manufacture the metal sheeting for the ships: monstrous machines with a little pressure from a short punch coldly pierce almost two-inch-thick steel plates, as we might stamp letters with a clerk's machine; there, knives cut steel girders; there, lance-like drills bore into them, making holes for rivets. Above, some sort of iron turtles run along iron bridges, their backs facing down, like flies on the ceiling… In another they make only lifeboats, and there fragrant boards with sleek, greasy saw cuts are piled up. Boats, finished, half-finished, only just begun, lie on their sides, on their backs with their keels facing up. People knock, plane, caulk – in them, on them and under them.

Finally we head towards the ships. There are two of them. The one on the left is almost ready to launch. It is a giant iron boat, lying on wooden supports and surrounded by wooden and iron scaffolding. Somewhere high up, at the top of a four-storey building, a worker hanging in a cradle hammers away. Among struts and braces we pass beneath the hull, along a dark corridor. The ship hangs above my head. Virgil points, and in the distance of the endless-seeming tunnel I see a little bright, grey spot emitting murky rays. This is the end of the ship and the sea.

The ship on the right is still far from ready to launch. It is a classical ship's skeleton, yet uncovered, with exposed bending ribs. An image, familiar and stirring from childhood, from pictures depicting Peter in Saardam and Robinson building his ship. But instead of wood, I see steel, and I see no workers at all. They are pottering about somewhere in the open belly of the giant, in the gloom, where, exactly like illuminations, we can see the yellow spots of electric lamps. Everywhere, like the entrails of this belly, or like lianas in a forest, snake and stretch out wires, cables and tubing.

However, if the workers here are invisible – they are certainly audible. The whole ship sings and rings from the innumerable electric drills. The sound is quite unlike anything else, indescribable, piercing and – charming.

It calls you – and suddenly, all at once, it will break off with an unbearable nerve-wracking groan. The hammers pounding the iron serve as a musical background to the drills. Here, under open sky, their sound is quiet and disjointed.

Finally, we head towards a third ship. We drive for quite some time, to the other side of the headland, which is occupied by a wharf. This third one is no longer on the ways. It was launched recently and is moored near the shore. Not yet fitted out, it is sitting shallowly, its red underwater hull sitting above the water line. Since it has no cabins, no decks, no funnels, no masts – just a shell – out here, in the open, it doesn't seem so very large. However, this is not the case. It is the biggest ship to be built anywhere in the world since the war. I have, it would seem, inspired in Virgil a certain degree of trust, and he decides to utter that "uncomfortable" word.

"This ship is in all seventy metres shorter than the *Titanic*," he says.

Then, by now already sitting in the motor car, he adds:

"It won't be completed now. The Holland America Line that ordered it has opted to forego its enormous advance rather than complete the ship."

"Why?"

"No money. That's just the way it is," Virgil replies despondently.

He drives me back to the city. We part ways. Rain, rain, rain. After the shipyards of Belfast, it is like returning to the mundane marketplace after festive frolics.

1925

Black Swans

Gaito Gazdanov

Translated from the Russian by Bryan Karetnyk

On 26 August of last year, I opened the morning paper and read that in the Bois de Boulogne, not far from the greater lake, was found the body of a Russian by the name of Pavlov. There were one hundred and fifty francs in his wallet; there was also a note, addressed to his brother:

"Dear Fedya, life here is hard and dull. I wish you all the best. I have written to mother that I have gone to Australia."

I knew Pavlov very well and knew that precisely on 25 August he would shoot himself: the man never lied or exaggerated.

On the 10th of that very month I went to him for money: I needed to borrow a hundred and fifty francs.

"When will you be able to repay it?"

"Perhaps on the twentieth, the twenty-fifth…"

"On the twenty-fourth."

"Fine. Why the twenty-fourth exactly?"

"Because the twenty-fifth will be too late. On the twenty-fifth of August I'm going to shoot myself."

"Are you in trouble?" I asked.

I shouldn't have been so laconic, had I not known that Pavlov never changed his mind and that to try to dissuade him would have been a complete waste of time.

"No, I'm not in any particular trouble. But the life I lead, as you're aware, is unsavory enough; I foresee no change in the future, and I find it all very dull. I see no sense in going on like this, eating and working as I do now."

"But you have family…"

"Family?" he said. "Yes, I do. They won't be much put out by it; that is to say, it will, of course, be unpleasant for a certain length of time, but effectively none of them depends on me."

"Well, fine," I said. "I think you're wrong, nonetheless. We'll talk about this again, if you like – completely objectively, of course. Are you at home in the evenings?"

"Yes, as always. Do come. Although I think I already know what you're going to say."

"We'll see about that."

"All right, goodbye," he said, opening the door for me and flashing that strange, vexing, cold smile of his.

After this conversation, I was certain that Pavlov would shoot himself; I was as sure of it as I was that I would walk out the door and along the pavement. However, had anyone else told me of Pavlov's decision, I would have deemed it unlikely. Just then I recalled that two years ago a mutual acquaintances of ours had said to me:

"You'll see. He'll meet a bad end. Nothing's sacred to him any more. He'll throw himself under a bus or a train. You'll see…"

"My friend, you're letting your imagination run away with you," I had replied.

Of all the men I knew, Pavlov was the most remarkable in many respects; and, of course, physically the most hardy. His body knew no fatigue; after eleven hours of hard graft he could go for a walk and, it seemed, never tired. He could live on bread alone for months on end and feel none the worse for it. He could work like no other, and was thus able to save money. He could go for days without sleep; ordinarily, he slept a mere five hours. I once met him in the street at half past three in the morning; he was walking unhurriedly along the boulevard, hands thrust in the pockets of his lightweight raincoat – it was winter, although apparently he was insensitive to the cold, too. I knew that he was working at a factory and that there were four hours left before the first siren.

"You're out late," I said. "You've got to be at work soon."

"I have four hours left. What do you make of Saint-Simon? A fascinating man, in my opinion."

"Why Saint-Simon all of a sudden?"

"I'm studying French political history," he said, "which figures, as you know, Saint-Simon. I'd been working since yesterday until just a short while ago, so I decided to go out for a walk."

"Aren't you working today?"

"Of course I am. Why shouldn't I be? Goodnight."

"Goodnight."

And so he ambled on, just as slowly down the boulevard. But his physical merits seemed immaterial and of no consequence beside his spiritual strength, which perished to no effect. Perhaps he himself could not determine how to employ his rare gifts: they remained without application. He would have made, I think, an indispensable captain of a ship, but only if catastrophe befell that ship unremittingly; he could have been a wonderful explorer through a city that had suffered an earthquake, or a country in the clutches of a plague epidemic, or through a burning forest. But there was none of this – no plague, no forest, no ship, and so Pavlov lived in a wretched Parisian *pension* and worked like everyone else. One day it occurred to me that it was perhaps this innate strength of his, having been searching for some exit or application, that provoked him to suicide; he exploded like a stoppered bottle, from terrible internal pressure. Yet whenever I tried to fathom the reasons for his voluntary demise, I was forced to abandon this premise, for not one of those principles that determine a man's behaviour in the most diverse circumstances applied to Pavlov, and as a result he always remained outside the whole framework of reason and conjecture: he stood apart from it, he was unlike anyone else.

He had a particular smile, which was unpleasant to begin with: it was a smile of superiority, and one sensed – almost everyone, even the most obtuse people did – that Pavlov had some sort of right to smile like that.

He never spoke untruths – which was utterly astonishing. Moreover, he never flattered, and indeed told each man what he though of him: this was always distressing and awkward, and those who were among the most quick-witted would try to turn it into a joke and laugh; and he would laugh together with them – his peculiar, cold laughter.

Only once in all my long acquaintance with him did I hear in his voice a fleeting softness – something I had assumed him incapable of. We had been discussing theft.

"Ah, it's a curious thing," he said. "You know, I used to be a thief, but then I decided that it wasn't worth it and stopped thieving. These days I wouldn't steal a thing."

"You were a thief?" I replied in astonishment.

"What's so strange about that? The majority of people are thieves. If they don't steal, it's out of fear or by happenstance. But in his heart almost every man's a thief."

"I've heard it said many a time. But I'd rather be inclined to agree that it's one of the most widespread misapprehensions. I don't think every man could be a thief."

"But I do. I have a knack for sniffing out thieves. I can tell at once whether a man's able to steal or not."

"Could I, for instance?"

"You could," he said. "You wouldn't steal a hundred francs. But for a woman you could steal, and if the temptation of more money were there, you might."

'And Lyova?" I asked. Pavlov and I had studied together abroad; we had many friends in common – one of them was Lyova, a jolly, carefree and, for the most part, decent man.

"He would."

"And Vasiliev?"

This was one of the best students – a glum and hopelessly conscientious chap, always unkempt, very diligent and boring.

"Him too," said Pavlov unhesitatingly.

"Oh, come on! He's virtuous, hard-working, and he prays to God every day."

"He's a coward first and foremost: everything else you mention is unimportant. But he's a thief – and a petty thief at that."

"What about Seryozha?"

Seryozha was a friend of ours, an idler, a dreamer and a dilettante – but very able; he would lie on the grass for hours, thinking of impossible things, dreaming of Paris (we were living in Turkey back then), of the sea

and God knows what else; everything surrounding him that was real was alien and indifferent to him. Once, on the eve of an important exam, I awoke in the night and saw Seryozha awake, smoking.

"What's the matter," I asked. "Are you worried?"

"Yes, a little," he said hesitantly. "It's small beers." "Well, not entirely." "Are you afraid you might fail?" "What on earth are you talking about?" he said in amazement. "The exam, of course." "Oh, no, that's a bore. I was thinking about something else entirely." "What then?" "I was thinking that a steam-powered yacht costs an awful lot, whereas one with sails isn't worth it. But then I'd have no money on the steam yacht," he said with conviction. "I'd have nothing to buy cigarettes with." He was smoking – and threw the cigarette end away; it was dark, and I thought I saw the end fall on the blanket. "Seryozha," I said after a minute, "I think your cigarette end fell on the blanket." "What of it?" he replied. "Let it catch, then you'll know all about it. More often than not they go out: the tobacco's damp." And so he went to sleep, probably dreaming of his yacht.

"What about Seryozha," I repeated.

And for the first time Pavlov's face took on a gentle expression that was uncustomary for him, and he smiled in a completely different way than he usually did – a strange and frank smile.

"No, Seryozha would never steal," he said. "Never."

I was one of his few acquaintances; an ever-present curiosity drew me to him, and in conversation with him I would forget the usual necessity of proving myself via some particular means – by making a well-placed remark, by expressing some opinion unlike the rest: I would forget this rotten habit of mine, and only Pavlov's words would hold any interest for me. Most likely, it was the first instance in my life where my interest in a man refused to be dictated by selfish motives – that is, a desire somehow to define myself in yet another different set of circumstances. I could not say that I liked Pavlov, he was too alien to me – but then he never liked anyone, myself included. We both knew this only too well. I knew, moreover, that Pavlov would have felt no regret if some mishap were to have befallen me; had I ascertained that the possibility of such a regret did exist, I would have immediately rejected it.

I remembered how Pavlov had once told me about an acquaintance who asked him for money, giving his word of honor to return it the following day. For two weeks he didn't come back, then he showed up one evening and with tears in his eyes begged for forgiveness – and for another five francs into the bargain, since he had nothing to eat.

"What did you do?" I asked.

"I gave him the money. I wouldn't have given it to another man, but he was no man; I told him as much. He waited silently while I extracted the money from my pocket."

He smiled and added:

"I gave him ten francs, as it happens."

It was not spiritual compassion that he had, but logical compassion; I think it could be explained by the fact that he himself never asked for compassion from anyone at all. He was disliked by his acquaintances, and only the most simple-minded of people were kind to him: they didn't understand him and considered him slightly eccentric, but a wonderful person nonetheless. Perhaps this was true in a certain sense, just not in the one they thought. In any case, Pavlov was quite generous, and the money he earned from his ten or eleven hours at the factory, he spent thriftily and frugally. He handed out a lot of money and had a great many debtors; he often helped strangers who would come up to him in the street. Once, as we were walking along a deserted Boulevard Arago – it was dark and fairly late and cold, the shutters in all the houses were tightly shut, the leafless trees in particular seemed to heighten the impression of desertedness and the cold – a shabbily dressed, thickset man came up to us and croaked that he had been discharged from hospital only the previous day, that he was a worker, that he had been left on the streets in the winter; could we not help him a little? "*Voilà mes papiers*," [1] he said, knowing that no one looks at them. Pavlov took the documents, walked up to the street lamp and showed them to me; there was no mention of a hospital.

"See how he lies," he said in Russian.

[1] *Voilà mes papiers*: 'Here are my papers' (French).

Then, turning to the vagrant, he burst out laughing and gave him a fifty-franc note.

Another time we met a Russian with a limp, who also asked for money. I knew him already. One summer's day – this was shortly after I arrived in Paris – as I walked out of the library and crossed the street, reading, I suddenly felt someone thrust a dry, cold hand across my book – and, raising my eyes, I saw before me a man in a smart grey suit and a fine hat, with a limp. With a casual gesture, he doffed his hat to me and said, remarkably quickly:

"Are you Russian? I'm very glad to make your acquaintance. Owing to my disability, as you can observe, and being deprived of the opportunity, like others, to earn money in exile by hard émigré labour, I'm compelled to turn to you in the capacity of a former officer of the Volunteer Army and a final-year student of the Faculty of History and Literature at Moscow Imperial University, as a former hussar and irreconcilable political enemy of the Bolshevist government, with a request to spare me a moment of your attention and, putting yourself in my position, to do what you can to assist me."

He uttered all this without pausing, and I would never have committed his long and incoherent dissertation to memory – even more so because I had failed to comprehend half of it – had I not the occasion subsequently to hear it again several times, almost without variation; only sometimes he happened to be a student not of Moscow, but of Kazan or Kharkov University, and not a hussar, but an uhlan, or an artilleryman, or a lieutenant of the Black Sea fleet. He was a strange man; I happened to see him one evening in a little garden near the church of Saint-Germain-des-Prés – he was sitting next to an elderly, melancholy-looking woman, hunched over with his head bowed, and he had such an unhappy look about him that I began to feel sorry for him. However, three days later, on the Place d'Odéon, this same man could be found smoking a cigar and sipping some lilac liquid in an especially tall glass, his right arm with some made-up moll in its embrace.

That day, when he first approached me, I had only six francs on me, and I said to him:

"Unfortunately I'm unable to help you; I have no money. I can give you two francs, any more would be difficult."

"Three-fifty, please," he said.

I was amazed:

"Why three-fifty exactly?"

"Because, young man," he replied almost didactically, "three-fifty is the price of a meal in the Russian canteen." Resuming his gracious air, he added: "My thanks, friend." He walked away, limping and leaning on his walking stick.

That was exactly how he addressed himself to Pavlov and me.

"Are you Russians? I'm very glad to make your acquaintance. Owing to my disability…"

"I already know all this," said Pavlov. "I'm well aware that you studied at the universities in Moscow and Kazan, that you were a hussar, an uhlan, an artilleryman and a sailor. Weren't you a submariner too, as it happens, didn't you also attend some theological academy?"

"Don't you know him?" he asked me. "I've already given him money five times over."

"I do know him," I said. "I think he's getting carried away with the Faculty of History and Literature. But he's a poor wretch all the same."

"Next time ask someone else," said Pavlov. "All in all, I've paid you fifty francs: I consider you unworthy of such a sum. Do not think that I say this to you to relish your unfortunate situation: if it were a bishop in your position, I should say the same to him. Here's some money for you."

Pavlov lived in a very small room in one of the cheap *pensions* in Montparnasse. He had painted the walls himself, fitted shelves, set books on them, bought himself a paraffin stove, and when he had managed to save up a certain sum of money allowing him not to work for a period, he would spend whole months in this room, alone from morning till night, going out only to buy bread or sausage or tea.

"What do you do with yourself all that time?" I asked him during one of these periods.

"I think," he replied.

At the time, I ascribed no significance to his words, but later I learnt that Pavlov, this steadfast, unerring man, was a dreamer at heart.

It seemed exceedingly strange and hardly at all like him, yet it was so. I suppose that, apart from me, no one would have suspected this, because no one ever tried to ask Pavlov what he thought about; it never occurred to anyone, all the more so because Pavlov himself was uncommonly uninteresting; he conducted experiments only on himself.

He had lived in Paris for four years, working from morning until night, seldom reading and taking little interest in anything. Then, all of a sudden, he took the decision to complete his higher education. It came about because someone had emphasized in conversation with him that he was a university graduate.

"University, that's no great feat," said Pavlov.

"But you never graduated."

"Yes, but that was purely because of circumstance. At any rate, you've given me an idea: I'll finish my studies."

And so he set to task: he enrolled in the philosophy department of the Faculty of History and Literature and studied in the evenings after work – which would have been beyond anyone else. Pavlov himself knew this well. He would say to me:

"They write about Russians who work at the railway station by night and study by day. Such things remind me of war correspondents' descriptions; I recall reading in one newspaper about the preparations for war. There was a description of "the cannons standing menacingly with their trails pointed towards the enemy." It's clear to any soldier, even to one who isn't an artilleryman, that this correspondent understood nothing about cannon and had probably never seen one in his life. It's the same here: they'll talk to some reporter, and he'll make out as if they work at night and study by day. But just send a reporter like that to do night-time work and he won't even be able to write up his articles, let alone do serious work."

He sank into thought; then he smiled, as always, and said:

"Still, it's just as well there are so many fools in the world."

"Why does that give you pleasure?"

"I don't know. There's a comfort in the fact that regardless of how inferior or worthless you may be, there are still people much lower down than you."

This was the only instance where he expressed his strange malicious joy directly; ordinarily he would never have said it. It was altogether difficult to judge him by his words – difficult and complicated; many of those who knew him insufficiently well simply refused to believe him – which was understandable. He once said:

"When I served in the White Army, I was an awful coward; I was terribly afraid for my life."

This was inconceivable to me, and I asked one of his fellow soldiers, whom I happened to know, about his cowardice.

"Pavlov?" he said. "The bravest man I ever set eyes on."

I mentioned this to Pavlov.

"I didn't say," he replied, "that I ever shied away from danger. I was terribly afraid – and that was that. But it doesn't mean that I hid away. A comrade and I once attacked a machine-gun platoon, taking two rifles, although my horse was killed right under me. I went on counterintelligence missions – and could I have done any differently? But none of that stopped me being a coward. Only I knew of it, and when I told anyone else they wouldn't believe me."

"Incidentally, how are your studies going?"

"In two years I'll have finished university."

Two years later I was a witness to a conversation between Pavlov and that same acquaintance of his, with whom he had first spoken of university. They talked about various things, and at the end of the conversation, Pavlov's interlocutor asked:

"So, do you still think that a university education is all chance and small beers?"

"More than ever."

He shrugged his shoulders and set the conversation on a different track. He made no mention of the fact that in the intervening years he had graduated from the Faculty of History and Literature at the Sorbonne.

His words left a strange impression: never in all that he said did I notice any will to make even the slightest effort to pay a compliment, to say something kind or simply to remain silent about things that were unpleasant; this is why many shunned him. Once, finding himself in the

company of several men, he casually mentioned that he had little money. Among us was a certain Svistunov, a young man, always well dressed and rather boastful: he had a lot of money, and whenever he spoke, his words were forever be accompanied by disparaging gestures:

"I don't understand, gentlemen. You simply don't know how to live. I've never asked anyone for a loan, I live better than the lot of you, and I've never suffered any indignity. I can only imagine what a man must feel asking for a loan of money."

And so this Svistunov, knowing that Pavlov was exceptionally punctilious and that he would risk nothing in offering him his assistance, said that he would gladly give Pavlov however much he wanted.

"No," replied Pavlov. "I won't take money from you."

"Why not?"

"You're miserly," said Pavlov. "And what's more, I don't care for your obligingness. I didn't ask you in the first place."

Svistunov grew pale and stood there dumbstruck.

Pavlov neither knew nor liked women. At the factory where he worked, his neighbour was a Frenchwoman of around thirty-two, widowed not so long ago. She liked him a lot: firstly, he was an excellent worker; secondly, she found him physically attractive: at length she sometimes watched the rapid, uniform movements of his arms, bared below the elbow, the pink nape of his neck and his broad back. She was just a worker and considered Pavlov one too: he almost never spoke with his co-workers in the workshop, and she ascribed this to his characteristic reserve, to the fact that he was a foreigner, and to other circumstances, in no way corresponding to those reasons that really induced Pavlov to silence.

"*Il est timide*," [1] she would say.

At last she succeeded. He spoke French in a slightly bookish style – he never once used any argot. It was a strange conversation: and one could not imagine two more different people than this worker and Pavlov.

"Listen," she said. "You're a young man and, I think, unmarried?"

[1] *Il est timide*: 'He's shy' (French).

"Yes."

"How do you cope without a woman?" she asked.

If they had anything at all in common, it was that they both called a spade a spade. Only they spoke and thought along different lines; and I think that the distance separating them was likely the greatest that could separate man and woman.

"You need a wife or a girlfriend," she went on. "Écoute, mon vieux" [1] – she was already on intimate terms with him – "we could settle down together. I could teach you a lot of things, I see you're inexperienced. And then – you don't have a woman. What do you say?"

He looked at her and smiled. However insensitive she may have been, it dawned on her that she had made a first-rate blunder in approaching this man. There remained precious little hope of a successful exit to this conversation. Yet nonetheless – already mechanically – she asked him:

"Well, what do you say?"

"I haven't any need of you," he replied.

He had yet another trait that was exceedingly rare: a peculiar freshness of perception, a peculiar independence of thought – and a total freedom from those prejudices that his milieu might have inculcated in him. He was *un* déclassé, [2] like others: he was not a worker, not a student, not a soldier, not peasant, not a nobleman – and he lived his life beyond any limitations of birth: all people of all classes were alien to him. But what seemed most surprising to me was that, not being invested with a very strong intellect, he could maintain such independence in everything that touched those areas where the influence of authority dominates – literature, sciences and art. His opinions in this regard were always unlike anything (or almost anything) else that I had until then had occasion to hear or read.

"What do you think of Dostoevsky, Pavlov?" enquired once a young poet who was very keen on philosophy, Russian tragic literature and Nietzsche.

"He was a villain, if you ask me," said Pavlov.

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[1] Écoute, mon vieux: 'Listen here, my dear (French).

[2] *un déclassé*: 'An outcast' (French).

"I beg your pardon, what did you say?"

"A villain," he repeated. "A hysteric who considered himself a man of genius, small-minded like a woman, a liar and a gambler at the expense of others. Had he been a bit better-looking, he might have been kept by an old merchant's wife."

"But what about his literature?"

"That is of no interest to me," said Pavlov. "I've never managed to read a single one of his novels right to the end. You asked me what I thought of Dostoevsky. In every man there is one quality, the most fundamental to his nature – everything else is superfluous. With Dostoevsky, the main thing is that he was a villain."

"You say such monstrous things."

"I don't believe monstrous things exist at all," said Pavlov.

I visited him on the 15th, drank some tea with him, and then I began to talk of suicide.

"You've got ten days left," I began.

"Yes, more or less. Well, what grounds will you give to prove the irrationality of such an act? You may be utterly candid: you know it will change nothing."

"Yes, I know. But I'd like to hear your reasons once again."

"They're exceedingly simple," he said. "Judge for yourself: I work at a factory and live a fairly awful live. It's impossible to pretend otherwise: I had thought of a journey, but now I think that if it happened not to live up to my expectations, it would come as the most devastating blow for me. Next: absolutely no one depends on me. My mother has succeeded in forgetting me; as far as she's concerned, I died ten years ago. My sisters are married and do not correspond with me. My brother, whom you know, that oaf of twenty-five years, will get by without me. I don't believe in God; there isn't a single woman whom I love. I'm bored of living: working and eating? Politics doesn't interest me – nor does art, or Russia's fate, or love: I'm simply bored. I shan't make a career for myself – but then no career would tempt me. Tell me, please: after all that, what sense is there in my living like this? Perhaps if I were still mistaken and thought I had some sort of talent. But I know that I have none. That's all."

He was sitting across from me, smiling, and it was as if he were saying with his arrogant air: You see how simple it all is, and all the same I've realized it, while you haven't, nor will you. I couldn't say that I pitied Pavlov, as I would have done a friend from whose hands, say, I snatched a revolver. Pavlov was somewhere beyond compassion: it was as if he were surrounded by some medium that the feelings of others were unable to penetrate, as rays of light cannot pass through an opaque screen; he was too cold and distant. However, I pitied that after a certain time such a valuable, precious, irreplaceable human mechanism would cease to move and would disappear from life; and all his qualities – tirelessness, bravery and a terrible spiritual might – all this would dissolve into the ether and vanish, never to find any use for itself.

"Now tell me what you think of this," said Pavlov.

"I think," I replied, "that you're wrong to search for some logical justification for everything: truly, it's a waste of time. You say you're bored and that there's no meaning in your life. How can such abstract ideas to force you to commit any act – or, rather, I think the question is beside the point. Imagine that I work for fourteen hours without a break, I'm as tired as a dog and as hungry as if I hadn't eaten for three days. So I go to a restaurant, eat my fill, come home, lie down on the divan and light a cigarette. What the devil sense is there in that?"

He shrugged.

"Or another thing," I continued. "Imagine you've lived a year without a woman: I wouldn't have said this to you, but we haven't much time left to talk, so I don't have the time to find another example. You've spent a year without a woman – then you win the favor of a girl who becomes your mistress. Surely the sense in this would interest you?"

"These are all ephemeral things," he said.

I was surprised that a physical love of life was not strong in this man. Had he been a sickly youth, it would have been understandable. But he was exceptionally strong and hardy; and such a consideration would likely have accounted for why fourteen hours of work did not exhaust him – but not for other things. Pavlov suffered nothing like

despair or disillusionment. I had known this man for many years, I knew him better than other people, and could only think as a result that before me had appeared and disappeared some mysterious apparition, to identify which I lacked the thoughts, the words, even an intuitive understanding. I could calm myself with the idea that Pavlov and his suicide were as enigmatic for me as creatures living on the seabed that look just like plants, as the night-time sound of some unknown incident, as a multitude of other inhuman phenomena. Yet I couldn't reconcile myself to this.

"Is there anything in the world that you love?" I asked. I expected a negative answer. However, Pavlov said:

"There is."

"And what's that?"

And all of a sudden he began to talk. I remember how strange his admissions seemed to me that evening. He spoke without reserve, providing terrible details, which at any other time would have grated on me: but everything then seemed natural – and not for a moment could I forget that Pavlov was condemned to die and that no power could save him: and his voice, which then sounded and wavered, which would vanish without an echo, which would die away in this body that would become a corpse. He began far in the past and told me the story of his childhood, the long years of thieving, an astonishing hunt for a badger with a revolver, in Russia, in Vladimir Province – the little river, the boat he sailed in; and he showed clear signs of excitement when he started talking about swans, which he termed the most beautiful birds in the world. "Did you know," he said then, "that in Australia they have black swans? At a certain time of year, tens of thousands of them appear on the inland lakes of the country." Then he spoke of the sky, covered by their powerful black wings. "It's an alternative history of the world; it's a chance to understand everything in a way other than it exists," he said. "And I shall never see it."

"Black swans!" he repeated. "When the mating season begins, the swans begin to call. It's hard for them to do this, and so, to give out a stronger, clearer sound, the swan will lay its neck on the water

at full stretch and then raise its head and call. On the inland lakes of Australia. To me, these words are better than music."

He continued to talk at length about Australia and its black swans. He knew the many details of their lives; he had read everything there was that had written about them, having spent entire days on translations of English and German texts, with a dictionary and a notebook to hand. Australia was this man's sole illusion. It united all the desires that had ever appeared within him, all his dreams and hopes. I fancied that if he were to invest the power of his feelings in a single glance and direct his eyes towards that island, then the water around it would suddenly begin to boil; and I saw in my mind's eye this fantastic scene that I might have witnessed in a dream: thousands of black wings covering the sky, and a cold, dead evening on a deserted shore, beside which the sea surged and boiled.

I sat with him almost until morning – and left tormented by strange feelings. "All the best," Pavlov said to me. "Goodnight. I have to be at the factory in an hour."

"What do you need to do that for now?" I enquired contrary to my will.

"Money, money. I shan't take it with me, of course, but I need to pay a few people. I'd hate to exploit my situation."

I remained silent.

"Strictly speaking, I'm leaving for Australia."

I walked out with him into the street; it was morning, and daily life had already begun; I looked at the people going past me and thought with rage that they would never understand the most essential things; it seemed to me that morning that I had only just heard and understood them, if this melancholy secret were made accessible to everyone, I should feel wretched and sorry for it. As always, I saw at first something indescribable in all that surrounded me – in the window of the cinema on the corner, in the parked lorry with its wheels turned in, somehow like a man frozen in an unnatural, crooked pose, in the woman selling vegetables, pushing her handcart – I saw in all this an incomprehensible and hidden meaning that I was unable to fathom; however, contrary to habit, the irritation and mute annoyance at this continued for a

short while, because according to what I had just heard, everything had become unimportant and void, merely an optical impression – like dust floating over a road in the distance.

On 24 August I brought Pavlov the hundred and fifty francs.

"Thank you," he said, offering me his hand.

I sat with him the whole evening; we talked about various matters unrelated to his suicide. I was unsurprised by the fact that he maintained absolute calm: perhaps for the first time he found himself in such circumstances where his unspent spiritual strength might prove useful – circumstances in which he ought to have led his entire life. He walked with me to a square with a stone lion, where we parted. I gripped his hand firmly: I knew that this was our last meeting.

"*Au revior*," I said out of habit. "*Au revior*." [1]

"All the best," replied Pavlov.

I walked off, although I kept looking back. When I had made it almost as far as the middle of the square, I raised my hand and his calm, laughing voice reached me:

"Spare a thought some day for black swans!"

1930

[1] *Au revoir*: 'Till next time' (French).

The Art of Choices

Jeff Rehnlund

for Konrad Geca

Life had a little chill. It made him shiver. Deep inside something had come undone. Not like a button, but like the essential thread, coming loose and getting lost, slowly, the adjacent thread was loosening. It was only a matter of time before the whole thing would unspool to a shapeless clump on the floor, pawn to wind, birds, and careless boots.

It was the fifth of their seven days in Krakow. A week may have been too long, they thought, the city is gloomy and reserved, there isn't much to do – after visiting a medieval church, the next stop was invariably some old synagogue – perhaps they should have planned to visit Prague or Budapest, but they didn't have much money and Krakow was by far the cheapest plane ticket from the UK. Early on they decided not to take the daytrip to Auschwitz – they were, after all, on vacation – she said she couldn't stomach it. So they toured the medieval churches and old synagogues, walked up and down the streets in city center. At night, they drank vodka or absinthe in Kazimierz. Their hotel was cozy, if cheap. Pierogies were all right, but overall Polish food was bland. They ate a lot of fried meat and cabbage. For a change, they decided to eat at an Armenian restaurant and it was there they found themselves in a spat.

The wife suggested they split up for a few hours, walk around on their own and cool off. Then she left. He waited for the bill, paid it, tied a shoe, and then set off toward the door. But as he was leaving, a penetrative sadness overwhelmed him and he burst out into the street, almost heroically, to find her, take her back into his arms, apologize, look her deeply in her eyes, and continue their meandering night

through Krakow sipping absinthe and dancing. The restaurant was in a crowded public square and she was nowhere to be seen. He darted through stalls of craft sellers into a side street, figuring if he chose the correct side street, he would reunite with his wife. The side street was bustling. Pedestrians' faces that instantly resembled hers transformed into strangers' faces. New faces appeared and each one was different and wrong.

The husband passed back through the merchant stalls into the square and glimpsed Dorota's bobbing head between two stall slats. He ducked behind a rack of hyacinths to avoid her. Yesterday, Dorota had sold his wife a "secret box." It looked like a wooden block or a paperweight. But it was a trick box. A sequence of hand manipulations – pressure on an innocuous edge, sliding a hidden clasp, mashing opposite sides, etc – turned the seamless block into a compartment, a place for secrets. Dorota told them secret boxes were invented centuries ago in Japan. While his wife's required four manipulations to pop open, some of the Japanese boxes required over five hundred manipulations, and it was said that some even took over a thousand. The box they purchased was especially malevolent – after hours of abject and meaningless maneuvers to obtain access, the action of sliding the final lid compels a cobra to lurch out of the box with red painted eyes, like a second trick.

After Dorota passed, the husband slipped back into the side street. Abruptly, everything appeared unfamiliar to him – the uneven sidewalk, the dog-legged side street, the gleam of the stone building. All the cobblestones seemed to be winking at him. A woman passing him uttered a subvocalization and when he bent to listen – he didn't know Polish – he was struck in the other shoulder by an older woman in a droopy sunhat. He spun around and exclaimed "excuse me," taking full responsibility for the collision, but _ she didn't seem to hear him or care. Now a dog collided with his ankle and again he excused himself, first to the dog, then to the leash-holder, but they didn't glance toward him either. That's when he realized how quiet the city really was. He was the only one barking. Cars and stores do not blare music. Passersby emit slight human murmurs, but no one is talking, no one is laughing.

Not even the pigeons speak. It's as if the entire city conducted itself in whispers. A man with a mustache approached him as if to embrace him. His hand was tucked into his pocket and the husband was suddenly afraid the hand carried a knife. He froze. But the man bumped him and jauntily vanished into a flower stall. The husband decided to get out of the center of the road. If he had a few hours away from his wife, he might as well walk around and enjoy his time in the city. He certainly didn't need her to have fun.

He followed the side street looking into the pizzerias and cafes. Jolly drunks touched glasses and wiped their faces with napkins. Street lamps flashed on above him oozing a soft white light not unlike the top half of an egg. The sun was evaporating into the clouds like a cyclops dozing. Violet streaked across the sky.

In response, one by one, waiters alighted thousands of candles throughout Krakow. How they did it: the first wick was lit with a cigarette lighter. The waiter lit a second candle with the flame of the first, then flipped the candle around and stuck its bottom into the flame to make it molten. When it began to drip, the waiter plunged it into the center of a table and it stuck. The waiter then passed the head and tail of the next candle through this flame and plunged it into the next table, and on and on, racing the falling sun, until the only light in Krakow came from the singular streetlamps and the even more singular candles. Twilight made the sky wine. The rooftops glinted like piles of silver coins. A dormer produced a dully perfect rhombus on the gray stone against the walls. Between cornices, the husband caught sight of the threadlike crust of a demi-moon, almost the entire orb lost to darkness.

The husband made a second left, figuring he'd walked a couple miles, faintly speculating how he'd retrace his steps when realized he was back to the same spot – he'd formed a kind of giant triangle somehow implicit in the network of side streets and alleys. Wind muscled through them like a pack of wild horses, carrying within them the scent of dill and garbage. His hair blew all over. He chose another street and passed a wooden gymnasium, a synagogue, a string of residences. White drapes billowed out an open window above him. Inside he saw someone carrying what looked like a human head, but it was a piece

of fruit. He followed the street around a corner and ran into a wall – a dead end. It was like a wall of congealed air. A single anise hyssop crept out a crack in the wall. He had to double back and found himself on the original side street again. He decided it was a good time to find a nice cafe and have a drink.

He chose the first cafe with an open door. It was difficult to see much inside. Miniature flames flapped on each table. He entered the darkness and caught the quiver of a cello, which was soon joined by drums and then by a vibraphone. Something like jazz snaked through the conversation in the room. He ordered a blueberry vodka. He pulled a wad of zloty from his jacket pocket. It was only ten zloty or two dollars. He found an empty table with its own twisted, hydra-headed candelabrum. He pulled a scrap of paper of his pocket, figuring he'd maybe write a poem while he drank. What it feels like to get lost in Krakow and return to the same place. He started: "pigeons do not speak" but didn't get any further because he felt eyes watching him. He looked around. Across the room a beautiful young woman, was sure enough, looking straight at him. He averted his eyes immediately, but when he looked back she remained intensely staring at him, smoking a cigarette, wearing no expression. He looked down at his poem again, but it was only a few seconds before he was compelled to glance back up at her and there she was staring. Seated there like a rock in the rapids, unflinching and silent. She dressed simply like she was from a forest out in the country. Not Kraków, not even a town. She looked like a starry-eyed peregrine nymph or some kind of exotic bird, but with the vehemence of her gaze, she appeared obstinate, in complete control. The husband was forced to look away again and he used this brief freedom to try and figure out what to do. The first thing he did was finish the blueberry vodka. Of course he had to speak to her. He didn't get many chances like this with his wife around. He looked back up and met her eyes. She exhaled and the smoke hung around her head like a mystique. He said something to himself like, "uh, let's do this." He shoved the poem into his jacket pocket and without a second thought, and barely an initial thought, he slipped his wedding ring from his finger and shoved that into his pocket too.

He crossed the room. He walked through the jazz. She was sitting at a small circular table. The other chair at the table wasn't across from her but right next to her. Even better, he thought. So he sat there and said the first thing that came to his head, which was: "hello." She smiled. The candlelight rebounded around her face revealing a cheek, the skin above her lip, a side of her nose, the cavities of her eyes – at different moments like a cubist painting. The light landed on a snaggletooth, which made her provincial again, but then it disappeared. "Do you speak English?" was the next thing he could think of to say. He knew not a lick of Polish. In fact, he couldn't even pronounce it. "A little" she whispered and her hand appeared on his knee. Now it was his turn to smile. She pointed across the room at racks of liquor behind the bar, the girl and the husband turned and she said: "All those bottles are magic."

"Do you want a drink?"

"No. I have."

It was impossible to catch a good glimpse of her chiaroscuro face, but there was no doubt she was beautiful.

"What's your name?"

"There are no names."

Now what could she mean by this? Does she not understand.. but that must be one of the first English sentences one learns how to answer. He decided to let it slide. All the better if she doesn't learn his name. The name he shared with his wife. He put his hand of her hand and realized she was holding some kind of strap. He followed the strap through the darkness, a darkness he was beginning to feel was obscene, and found at the strap's end a camera. Perhaps a way out of here…

"You take pictures?"

"Yes I love to."

"Do you want to go take some pictures?"

"I am artist. I do the art of choices."

She took her hand from his leg and placed the camera on the table.

"What kind of pictures do you take?"

"When I look at you, I do the art of choices."

"Why did you look at me?"

"To get you."

"What is the art of choices?"

"The art is I make the choice that I get."

Here, she held up the camera and peered through the viewfinder at his tenebrist, lightly confused, smiling face. She said "click" but did not press the button. She pronounced the word so that it rhymed with "seek" and it was, perhaps, the most beautiful moment he shared with her, this pantomime, the moment in which he loved her the most, and they shared very few moments because the next thing she said was:

"Now you go."

"I just got here," he grinned.

"I am done my art of choice."

"Let me buy you a drink."

But she turned and gazed as intensely away from him as she had stared at him from across the room. And she was silent. He tried: "There are no names.." but she wouldn't yield. After almost a minute, he had no choice but to stand up. After he stood up, there was nothing else for him to do but leave the cafe. Stupid Polish slut... she's also too young.

A part of him wanted to return to the hotel. But when he passed another dark open door, he figured he'd throw back a quick vodka to wash his night. Or maybe a few. He ordered a grapefruit vodka. That's when he realized his pocket was empty. The wad of zloty was gone. So was the scrap of paper with the beginning of the poem and so was his wedding ring. Stupidly, he couldn't recall the line of poetry he'd written. He dashed out of the cafe, the bartender yelled something, and he ran back to the cafe where he had met the woman. She wasn't at the table. There was a crowd of people at the bar, but she wasn't there either. Again he burst into the street, almost heroically, but all the strangers' faces were not hers. He chose a side street at random to run down, but she wasn't there either. He tried to make a loop through the peripheral alleys that surrounded the bar, but he couldn't find his way back to the same spot. He didn't see her anyway. So he went back to the hotel room and waited for his wife.

Journey to the Promised Land

Angela Brewer

Soon after the 4th of July Revolution in Baghdad, our family left the city by car to drive to our grandmother's house in the West of England. We would be travelling to a safer place: from tumultuous, unpredictable Baghdad to England, the cool and distant Promised Land, to stay for the summer with my father's family. It was hot and we were looking forward to being somewhere more temperate. After the long holidays we expected to return in September for the autumn term at the university where my father had a teaching job. This was in 1959.

For safety reasons our family had arranged to travel in convoy with a young Swedish couple driving to Syria. Apart from the political disquiet, it was risky crossing the desert stretches. There were few roads, only unmarked rocky tracks punctuated at regular intervals with the skeletons of large animals, usually camels, which had presumably perished from thirst. It was relatively easy to get lost and not be found in time, we were told. Two cars were better than one. Take spare fuel and plenty of water.

The journey began with the dusty drive across the Western desert to Rutbah, the oil pumping station. It was still very hot when we arrived in the late afternoon at the sleepy border post between Iraq and Syria. Not often did they have families passing through; it was mostly trucks with a load of watermelons or other commercial goods crossing at that point. Sometimes oil people travelled that way, but in much more luxurious conditions. There was also the famous air-conditioned Nairn bus that crossed the desert and headed directly into the Lebanon. Our transport was much more humble: a sturdy but superannuated Humber Hawk, with scuffed dark brown leather seats. My father had bought it, a bargain he said, off a departing British couple.

After the customs officials had looked us over carefully, the Iraqi border police began the lengthy exit formalities. Once they were over my father returned to his passengers in the car. Finished at last! The police brought out cups of tea and beckoned my respectable father back inside. What was wrong now, we wondered. We had been there for hours already.

Would he please help someone who had been there all day waiting for a passing car, they asked. A penniless young woman travelling on her own. They were anxious to send her on her way. It would be easier for her to cross into Syria if she were with a family, they said. Would we please take her with us, as they could not possibly keep her overnight?

It was an unusual request. My father passed it on to our mother through the open window when he came back to the car. As we had no room Mother suggested asking the Swedes, who agreed, much to the relief of the border guards. We learned a new word: hitchhiker! We had never seen one before. There were no hitchhikers, and certainly no women hitchhikers travelling solo at that time. In the Middle East it was almost unthinkable for a young woman to be travelling alone, let alone begging for lifts from strangers. We watched goggle-eyed from the back of our car as the unknown being transferred herself and her large rucksack into the back of the Swedes' car. We had no idea what to expect. We hoped for something exotic; we were disappointed. She looked just like a man, apart from the long hair!

Before catching a glimpse of the grubby disheveled Dutch girl I had never seen a woman wearing jeans. At the time my brother and I went to a school where we both wore strict uniform: at our French school, a convent, the nuns were fussy about hem lengths and long hair. When visiting other children we were always smartly and cleanly, if not formally, dressed. Girls hardly ever wore trousers – slacks they were called, jeans and tee shirts had not yet made their appearance – and since there were no shops selling off-the-peg clothes most of mine and my mother's were made by Armenian dressmakers. Suddenly our life had become interesting! We asked our parents endless questions about how she could have got there and where she was going and were disappointed that they seemed to be as clueless as we were.

After entering Syria our two cars made their way to the seashore. That night the little convoy, with its now five adults and two children, stayed on the deserted shore by a beautiful beach. As we brewed our tea on the primus stove and went for our first swim, we felt our holiday had truly begun. We dived and splashed in the sparkling clean sea, away from the dusty desert. What an adventure: camping by the sea with another family we scarcely knew and a mysterious hitchhiker! She was as strange to us as to the border guards. She was a foreign species; she might have been an alien from Mars.

We spied on her and found she had no bathing costume. We gawped as she stripped off all her clothes and ran straight into the sea. Our prudish parents looked away. The Swedish man lent her a clean shirt when she came out, for sitting around on the beach. All her clothes were dirty, she said. She shared our food and drink since she had none left and smoked with the adults by the fireside, passing around a large cigarette of her own. She had nothing else to share. The adults stayed up drinking the Swedes' whisky, while we sleepily attempted to eavesdrop from inside the car where we had been forcibly put to bed. We never heard her story and our parents were not very forthcoming.

Next day the hitchhiker did not want to leave, and did her best to persuade us to stay there with her. In this we two children were her staunch allies. That deserted beach was an unexpected paradise of beauty and wildlife. Wild flowers, pink and blue, bloomed everywhere and succulent plants including water melons and pumpkins grew on the sandy hillside and cliffs. Later in the evening when it was cooler, little animals came out to eat and play and we found we had to tread carefully to avoid squashing the hundreds of small tortoises living there. Wild tortoises! I had seen rabbits in the fields in England but never even imagined there might be places where wild tortoises lived, who of course, could not run away quickly like the rabbits when a giant human crossed their path.

We children certainly did not want to leave, but the convoy had run out of food and we were also all on the verge of sunstroke, since there was no shade during the day. We clamoured to be allowed to take a small tortoise with us, which we did, perched on the back window

ledge, munching the vegetation we had lovingly gathered for it. The tortoise was released further along on our journey, by a similar sandy beach on the Black Sea in Bulgaria. We never knew what happened to the hitchhiker however, whom the adults, having rescued from the border guards, were reluctant to leave behind. But she refused to come with us, and we rather envied her. She kept the shirt.

A few days later we left Syria and came to Turkey. We said goodbye to our amiable Swedish friends who were remaining there to do some archaeological sightseeing, while we pressed on with our long journey. On our last evening the large, jovial Swedish friend brought out his usual bottle of whisky from his abundant supply. He generously shared it with our parents who of course had brought nothing of the kind. Every evening he took a large tot: the best medicine against gut rot, he explained. As they were leaving he expressed the view that the young woman hitchhiker, dressed like a man, would be well advised to wear a roll of barbed wire around her middle instead of a belt to keep her jeans up. We weren't quite sure what he meant, but it sounded pretty uncomfortable.

After losing the Dutch girl and the Swedes the journey was no longer so exciting though at least we now had the tortoise. We were apprehensive of a long dull journey with only our parents and the tortoise for company. But there were other surprises ahead. The next evening we stopped after a long day's driving on slow, almost deserted roads in a spectacular remote mountain area in eastern Turkey. There were few cars around, only the odd ramshackle lorry transporting building materials or a few sheep. The drivers as they passed us picnicking by the roadside slowed down and stared curiously: casual travellers, especially a foreign family, were a rare sight.

The light was fading as we pulled off the road down a rough path, brewed our tea, ate up the last of our simple food. My father seemed to become hypnotised by being at the wheel. We always seemed to stop at night when it was nearly dark. Now we were almost asleep. Our parents were poorly equipped: it had not occurred to them that we might need a tent. Perhaps they couldn't afford one. There may have been no tents for sale in Baghdad. In their own way they were as naive and as trusting

as the hitchhiker. We did however have a groundsheet which they laid on the earth next to the car.

As we got ready to bed down in the cramped car we saw two lanterns swaying in the gathering darkness. Four armed Turkish soldiers were marching towards us. They tramped across from their headquarters to investigate and tell us that we needed to move on. In sign language, without putting down their guns, the soldiers demanded to see our documents, which they carefully though uncomprehendingly examined by lamplight. By now it was dark. They shone their lights on a dusty red warning notice nearby which we in turn could not decipher. We had entered a restricted military zone. We were not allowed to stop there. Seeing an exhausted family with sleepy young children, a discussion took place among them.

Clearly we were far from wealthy, judging by the rusty car and lack of basic camping equipment. We did not look like dangerous suspects. The soldiers relented, put aside their guns and gave us until next morning to leave. We were not allowed however to use our primus stove. Two of the soldiers, now quite friendly, squatted on the ground attempting to make conversation with their hapless unexpected visitors. The other two left and returned shortly afterwards with a tray carrying little cups of sweet tea and delicious white Turkish cheese.

It was still dark when the lights reappeared next morning. The same soldiers plus a new one came to escort us on our way. They were more brusque now, fearing punishment perhaps, though once again they had brought us tea and white cheese. There were in a hurry to see us leave. Before sunrise, they indicated. Now, in fact, no loitering. Nothing personal. My father, normally grumpy in the early morning, hastened to comply, touched by the soldiers' code of honor. These young men had not only disobeyed instructions but had made us welcome on forbidden territory, the laws of hospitality proving stronger for them than military orders. We had clearly been in the wrong and could possibly have been suspected of spying, but seeing us young children had softened their hearts, our mother said. My brother and I glowed with the halo of saviours as we swiftly departed to enjoy our breakfast in a less dangerous spot.

A few days later we were driving over another rough stony road. We reached a small town by a river, near the highest mountain range in Turkey. The road was blocked by notices and barriers. Relieved to have a rest from the noisy bone-rattling, we stopped and had lunch in the local café, savoring the delicious country food served on a terrace shaded by vines, with the lovely sound of the river tinkling in the background. The friendly cook allowed us to select dishes from the kitchen as we were not up to ordering from the menu in Turkish.

When we returned to our car we hoped to be allowed to continue our journey. Remembering the earlier kindly and disobedient soldiers, we were sorely tempted to disregard instructions and press on. But here fierce soldiers barred the way and would not let us through. We tried argument, persuasion, even considered bribery to get them to let us through. They would not budge. Later we were grateful when we learned the reason: dynamite! A new road was being blasted through the Taurus Mountains. The slowly accumulating traffic was being kept at a safe distance while the blasting and rock falls were still ongoing. We realised the bone-rattling on the old road would continue for a while yet.

Our elderly car held out until we reached Yugoslavia, as it then was. We had bought it just before the Revolution in Baghdad and had left a week later than the first exodus of expats afterwards. We could have purchased a newer, far more luxurious car had we but known. But then perhaps the soldiers might not have been so kind, faced with a shiny new Cadillac or Ford. That kind of car might not have stood up to the stony roads for so long. The café owner may not have been so understanding. Who knows? We had to make unplanned halts to replace shock-absorbers (bumpy roads), have the radiator resealed (steady driving overheated it); then the accelerator got stuck and had to be constantly pulled up with a piece of string by the driver each time he wanted to slow down. Fortunately there was little traffic while this episode lasted.

We got used to living with the uncertainty of what would go wrong next. We became accustomed to being stared at, disbelieved and only having ourselves to talk to. We had to count on our parents, whose

reliability seemed rather dubious at times, to know what to do next. We only hoped for something interesting to see or do in the place we would have to stop in. Sadly there was nothing to touch that magic beach in Syria.

As we moved west there was a noticeable lessening of the laws of hospitality. Misunderstanding the force of the evening "passeggiata" in Podgoricà, inland from the shores of Dalmatia, we drove down the main street at the wrong time and our car, with us inside, was bounced off to the side of the road. Passersby, dressed up to the nines, stared at us and shook their fists angrily despite our foreign number plates. On the Côte d'Azur ten days later we were chased off the beach because we refused to pay the exorbitant chaise longue rental fee. When we reached Calais we saw many more of the now recognisable breed called hitchhikers, one of whom tried to force his way into our car. The police were impersonal and officious. There were more cars, people, lorries, more instructions, signposts, roundabouts; life seemed altogether more complicated and competitive. We could not be certain that we had left violence behind.

After weeks on the road, new sights, strange adventures, scary breakdowns, overnight stays in out-of-the-way places, we finally arrived in the West of England where we would squat for several weeks in our grandmother's house. It was a pleasure to sleep in a clean bed, to have other people to talk to and listen to our adventures and to eat cornflakes and Weetabix for breakfast. But gradually we began to miss being on the road. There were no traces of wild tortoises or fierce Turkish soldiers. No one ever came to that house except family. Watery cabbage and custard were on the menu every day. During the cold, wet summers of this regular transhumance, we would hang out, doing nothing much, slaves to mealtimes and the television. On the occasional sluggish wan-sun days we might go on an expedition to a local beauty spot. My father, growing up as the only son in a fatherless family, seemed to slip into paralysis, infantilised by the stern presence of his dominant mother. It was a flat, monotonous existence after our adventures on the road to the Promised Land.

The President's Man

Marjorie Farquharson

When Shodo came in from the cumquat grove his wife said there had been a strange call. The President had phoned and said he would ring back.

"The president of what?" Shodo asked, scraping pruning tar from his fingers with a blunt knife.

"THE President. The President of our country…" Fayzullah said, her voice tailing off and her eyes starting to plead at the same time.

In the silence as they looked at each other, the irrigator went slowly mincing by.

"Tell Fuaz to shift the candelabra," Shodo said rapidly, "and take the bid price for the wall paper" he added to his wife's patterned back.

That night they ate their dinner in their best clothes and silence. Shodo fingered his prayer beads as he ate and rolled the food from one side of his mouth to the other, as though each bite was one of the events of the day. It was hard to swallow that evening.

With the fruit they began to bicker.

"You should never have crossed Rutello over the garage" his wife said for the fortieth time. "I told you. I knew it would come to this."

"You knew it would come to this. You knew it would end in a phone call from the

President. Don't be ridiculous," Shodo scorned.

But he *did* wonder, and began rolling bread into a small grey ball with his free hand.

The phone rang as his wife was clearing the plates. She sat down heavily, and Shodo jumped up, biting his tongue as he did so. He limped in a circle, speechless: the pain at the tip of his tongue was white and his legs began to give way. Fayzullah took the phone.

It was Shodo's sister from the next town. There was election fever in Issyl. There was bunting in the main street. Loud speakers on the lampposts. Two sorts of cheese in the shops. Wallpaper had appeared in the department store.

Later that night, when his sons were back in the house, Shodo emerged from the sauna and walked slowly through the rooms, thinking. The arc light from the orchard spilled across the floor of the lounge, bending on his heavy sideboard of glassware and up the green carpet on the wall. He was pleased with his home; content with what he had made from his father's yard.

He rounded the arch into the kitchen, where even in the half-light he could make out purple paint against the dark brown wall. Fayzullah was color-blind, which was a pity at a time like this. The paint would have to go. As he stood, she appeared with her hair down; on her way to bed but dressed in a summer house coat and carrying a cloth in her hand.

"I thought I would give the phone a little clean," she said tentatively, as though fearing he would be angry.

Fayzullah, my partner in life, mother of my sons. He looked at the pale triangle of her face, bleached by the orchard light, and decided to leave the paint until the morning.

"Good idea," he said gently.

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"Shodo Habobov?" the soft voice enquired two days later. – "There are a lot of foreigners in the country."

"In our province we are being vigilant, sir," Shodo said quickly, then as an afterthought "while welcoming the international approach that our country is taking."

"Oh, really?" the fluent voice asked softly. Shodo stopped. He didn't know what to make of that oh really? Oh really?

"Are you in an election frame of mind?" the voice continued.

"Preparations are going forward." Shodo could hear the thud of his heart in his voice and thought it must be audible down the phone.

A pause. Shodo decided to take a risk.

"The people are being mobilised and assessing the achievements of the past seven years. I think it is obvious to all where their wellbeing lies and many would be happy not to have an election. I would gladly…"

"Shodo Habobov, would you want to stand as President?" the voice interrupted, like a flick of satin.

Shodo's cry was quite genuine. A cry of fear and astonishment.

"Sir," he said, struggling to hold his voice steady. "The President is my father. I am as his son. And what son would pit himself against his father? Sir? I sound shocked, but I feel I have been asked to raise a knife to the heart of our country. Raise it with my own hand."

"Calm yourself, Mr Habobov," the voice said.

"Who would even suggest that?" Shodo continued, his shock turning to cold

suspicion and anger the more he thought about it. "Which two-rouble tyke in platform heels would spread a rumour like that? Like a layer of donkey dung for decent people to tread in, and trail through their homes, and even dirty our dear President's office…?"

"Shodo Habobov, we want you to stand as President. The President wants you to stand against him. The foreigners want to see an opposition."

Shodo slumped against the wall. This was worse. Fayzullah put down the aubergines she was holding and eyed him anxiously. "I obey of course" Shodo said weakly. "Tell me what I must do."

One week later a black car ploughed up the orchard drive, spewing clouds of dust on the cumquat groves, right and left. Shodo's son Fuaz took delivery of election posters that showed Shodo as he had been twenty years ago when he was a lecturer in philosophy at the railway institute, standing in a suit and checked shirt under a tree in the town. The picture must have been taken at long distance with a zoom lens. Shodo and his family had never seen it before.

Four hundred election pamphlets were unpacked from their brown paper in the back seat of the limousine. They were called "Yes! But…" and showed Shodo alone with his head bowed and right hand

on his chin, evidently thinking. Fayzullah recognised the picture. It was taken on the day of the baseball gloves, when he had stood behind the goat shed, calculating a price to shift the load.

Shodo and Fayzullah knew what they must do. They took scissors and cut borders off the posters so they were half their original size, and pinned them in a row on the inside of the goat shed door. If the man came from the president's office they would leave the door open and show they were electioneering. The pamphlets, they put at the bottom of the cumquat crates that were heading for market up north; twenty per crate, giving protection to the plump and aching fruit. Seventeen crates were loaded and hammered shut ready for trucking, the "Yes, Buts…" they hoped, soaking down soon into paper pulp. Fuaz drove the crates down to the fruit and vegetable depot himself and supervised their loading.

Shodo decided to go to a sanatorium in the run-up to the election and stay with his sister in Issyl for a few weeks after, until the fuss had died down. He looked in need of a sanatorium. His cheeks had sunk with strain since that first telephone call and straight black bristles sprang out of them, like the muzzle of an unattractive dog. He sat in the corner with his leg over the chair arm, watching the vast monochrome TV. Tall ladies in traditional costume rolled on tiny feet to greet foreign visitors, who were landing in the airport daily.

Next morning Fuaz came back with the local newspaper and passed his hand over his face while Shodo and Fayzullah leaned over the table, reading it. There was an interview with Shodo on the inside back page called "A Stream Addresses the River…" It explained he was standing against the President to help him move the country forward. It was all in the language of the President's men so difficult to make out, but Shodo felt distinctly uncomfortable to see words like "evaluate" coming from his own mouth, and words like "Yes, But…" Times could change and then where would they be? He looked round the room he loved and shuddered. On the TV, trainloads of troops were shown arriving in the city to do pre-election repairs to the pavements and flowerbeds. "Here come your voters" Fayzullah said, as she rose to go to the kitchen.

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After the interview was published, no one came near them. A neighbour was supposed to return a sieve; Fayzullah found it by chance with no message in the grass at the top of the dirt drive. The district committee was supposed to discuss amenity– provision for houses in their micro-zone. Fuaz found an anonymous note pinned inside the fence saying "No amenities."

Shodo prepared for the sanatorium with relief. It was in the mountains and no newspapers were there. As their truck left the house to take him to the railway station they came across a thin young soldier in brown fatigues hammering a post into the ground at Shodo's gate and attaching a large picture of him to it as they watched. It was the photograph from "Yes, But…" The soldier turned flat shiny eyes from the picture to Shodo with no change of expression, then packed his tools into a hold-all and turned away down the dusty road. The soldier's glance really did make Shodo feel sick. It was the look of someone whom life could not surprise. He continued the drive in silence.

Election day in the town dawned bright and sunny. Bunting fluttered at the main polling booth in the primary school. Bunting was visible too behind muddy green palings that fenced the barracks off from the street. Foreign observers were out in force and responding to questions on TV. Fayzullah watched a man in a flak jacket say he was encouraged by the election bid of Mr Shodo Habobov, campaigning to the last amid the mountain peoples in the east of the country. Fayzullah thought she recognised him. He had been round to their house 18 months before to buy carpets.

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When the results were in and the President's mandate extended for 13 years, four votes for Shodo Habobov could not be accounted for. They had been put in ballot boxes in suburbs where no soldiers were stationed. An investigation began at the highest level. In the

north of the country a man called Leftie Oinikhand was charged with "sabotaging the electoral process" after he had reported finding a piece of election pamphlet stuck to his lip and the words "Yes, But…" on the bottom of a cumquat he had stolen. He couldn't be blamed. There were no newspapers in Khaland and no one had read "A Stream Addresses the River…"

Shodo came home from his sister's house in Issyl to find a Summons on his sideboard. He was being investigated for handling stolen goods and speculating in building materials. After the strain of the previous few weeks Shodo felt relief wash over him as he read the letter. This was something he understood. This was something he could handle.

"Tell Fuaz that first choice of the candelabra goes to Inspector Ballodo's wife," he said to Fayzullah as he disappeared into the sauna. She nodded, glad to have him home. She was comparing swatches of curtain cloth for the kitchen, and decided she would go for tawny whorls.

The Village

Oksana Butuzova
Translated from the Russian by Melanie Moore

There are certain key names in the culture of any people. For Russians, these include the outstanding poet and writer of the 19th century, the creator of Russia's literary language, Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin. Also famed for his sideburns, he was received at the imperial court, married to Natalya Nikolayevna, a byword for beauty at the time, and died in a dual. He was so delighted on completing one of his works that he congratulated himself with the words, "Nice one, Pushkin, you old son of a bitch," which has become a set compliment on a job well done. ""Pushkin is our all" is still taught in schools and stays with people throughout their lives. This story is about just how much the destiny of ordinary people may be linked to and compared with Pushkin's celebrated persona.

If you have no objection to giving up just a tiny bit of your valuable time to indulge in a slightly dubious pursuit that takes place in cramped comfort, where everything rattles around, the cups spit hot tea and the lines of print in the newspapers leap about like mechanical toys; if you can stay awake despite the clunk-clunk-clunk of iron wheels; if you can accept all the demands travel makes to spend minute after minute, hour after hour, dully keeping time with the rocking of railway carriages, then soon, some dozen or so stations and halts down the line, you may find yourself in a remarkable little village.

Outwardly, it's true, there's nothing remarkable about it. There are ramshackle houses that lean in the direction the wind blows, sheds that are full to bursting, bustling hen houses and the eternal benches by the gates. Their owners are also perfectly ordinary – hardworking and idle,

ignorant and inquisitive, good natured and distrustful. All sorts. They do have one thing, however, that binds them together more closely than family ties and makes their shared existence surprisingly different. From time out of mind, all the male members of the village population have been given the name Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin. All of them, without exception.

Who was first to dignify them in this way or why, no-one knows, but not one man in the village has so far tried to change this strange tradition and every newborn baby boy is duly registered as Alexander Sergeyevich, as if his father really was Sergey rather than, as is almost always the case, another Alexander.

Naturally enough, the village has amassed a vast array of Pushkins in the course of its history, and a similar number of inconveniences when villagers endeavor to communicate or to tell one another apart. People are given nicknames just to be able to tell one Pushkin from another. As a result, darting about the village are Pushkin Spots, Pushkin Frock-Coat, Pushkin Left-Limp, Pushkin A-Right-One-for-the-Ladies and Not-So-Lucky Pushkin, the gambler.

The men themselves try to acquire as many distinguishing features as possible, ones the neighbours don't have. But even so, confusion is inevitable. Should you happen to be looking for one Pushkin Moustache, you are bound to be shown Pushkins with a moustache and beard or just a beard or even with just sideburns.

In their daily lives, people have managed to adapt. They avoid using names and greet one another in the street with a quick nod of the head. At public gatherings, they act like city people, pretending they haven't the faintest idea as to who is called what. In the queue for the local food shop to open, they deftly employ innocuous phrases:

"The boy in the crumpled hat's after me. He'll be along in a sec."

"Which one? The one from the nearest house? He's gone home."

"That's a different one. The one with blond hair. He said he would."

From early in the morning, trinities of Alexander Sergeyeviches sit behind the shop, dispensing the hard stuff into identical glasses. The local situation suits them down to the ground: even in your cups, it's

hard to forget the name of the drinking companion who has nodded off in your lap. "You old son-of-a-bitch, Pushkin," they say to one another, fondly, on occasion so awash with feeling that they even recite poetry.

And none of this would have been a problem had it not been for the sheer chaos created by the arrival of the village post. Newspapers and magazines weren't a problem – the villagers took turns reading them; serious stampedes were reserved for the receipt of letters, parcels and official papers. In the crush of enthusiasm, the contents of parcels were squashed flat, letters torn to shreds and official forms disrespectfully trampled underfoot. There was particularly fierce fighting over money orders with nobody taking any notice of house numbers or streets. All that mattered was the name on the envelope. And over that every man in the village was willing to fight to the last.

At one time it was decided to read the letters out loud, once a day, outside the village council building but it did nothing to reduce the commotion. The men would pick a fight after every "Dear Alexander Sergeyevich," "Mr. Pushkin" or "Darling Sasha," and, as well as their bare fists, they would resort to rakes, spades, plough shafts and other persuasive proof that they were of Pushkin stock.

The head of the village, also, of course, a bearer of the designated initials, together with his wife, Natalya Nikolayevna, a fat, unlovely women, was heartily sick of the postal battlefield, sick, in fact, of all the unhealthy excitement attached to that wretched name. And even if his status made him the most senior Pushkin, secretly, of course, he wanted to be the only one.

It was for this reason that the head of the village gathered together all the menfolk in the area and urged them to change their first name, patronymic or surname, the choice was theirs. At the very least they should change just one letter in their surname. Pushkins on all sides set up a wail: "And what letter would that be?" For an instant, it seemed to the head of the village as he chaired the meeting as if all the outraged faces, blackened by the heat of the village sun, had merged into one, huge and savage and ready to swallow him whole, along with his office and his pedigree. The Pushkin-in-chief hastily declared the meeting over, deeming it prudent to contact everyone in writing.

The following day a list appeared on the doors of all the public buildings – the local council, the food shop, the banya and the club – containing every possible variation on the name Pushkin. Using the list, anyone could easily become not Pushkin but, say, Pishkin, Poshkin or Pudkin. Sadly, this effort was not judged on its merits – the villagers were unmoved. They didn't want to change a single letter, not even half a letter, of their surnames. Nor did going to the people help.

"Why is it me who's got to change? Let him next door do it," came the response from everyone and his neighbour.

The recalcitrance of the ignorant peasants thoroughly displeased the head of the village. Their intransigence smacked of rebellion, of opposition to the state even.

"Damn the lot of you! Just you wait. I'll give you something to remember me by."

Whereupon in the name of that state, he imposed an outright ban on the words "Alexander," "Sergeyevich" and "Pushkin," ordered them taken out of documents, out of circulation, out of existence. And boards to be nailed to the crumpled facades of the tumbledown houses to display their owners' new passport details.

To begin with, there was a degree of confusion among the population. People talked among themselves behind their hands, like conspirators. They soon came to their senses, however, and boldly set about taking down the deeply offensive boards. New and more beautiful ones sparkled in their stead. Made to the highest artistic standards and with all kinds of decoration, they were carved, inlaid, lacquered and lit up at night.

Signs reading "A.S. Pushkin lives here" brightened all the houses. The poultry farm hung out a banner, proclaiming "A.S. Pushkin Team: Best Workers' Award." Behind the butcher's counter at the food shop, next to a corpulent individual in a white coat, was the inscription: "A. S. Pushkin – at your service." Even the home of the recently deceased Pushkin Spots bore a memorial plaque, which read: "A.S. Pushkin lived in this house from such and such a year to such and such a year. Here too he breathed his last."

Incidentally, the village cemetery, dotted with A.S. Pushkin graves, was also spruced up. Monuments were cleaned, railings painted and flowers frequently placed on the graves. It reached the point that a tradition arose of laying a slab where a new house was to be built, saying: "A.S. Pushkin will live here. With his wife and children."

And there is nothing to be done about it, no decrees or prohibitions that can prevent it. This is the will of the people.

And so, this extraordinary village exists to this day as anyone may see for themselves.

Three Stories from *Up after Silence*

Georgy Ball

Translated from the Russian by Ainsley Morse

A Responsible Matter

Semyon Karpovich Tugikh killed his wife with an axe. Just cut her down. They'd spent fifty-six years together. Had a grand golden anniversary, everything as it should be…

Now he was sitting on the bench by their cottage. Waiting for someone to walk past, to go tell the police of the deed wrought.

He sat. But as luck would have it no one was out walking.

Semyon Karpovich stroked his grey beard. He felt sleepy. But from time to time he shook his head, not letting himself close his eyes.

If you squint to the right, by the Kiriukhins' porch there's a goat tied to a long rope. How come Nastya tied her up there? There's not much grass, should have put her in the back.

His eyes were closing again. And in his head: "What more do you need?"

His eyes hurt for want of sleep. How long had he been sitting here? Look, nobody…

He squinted: goat on a rope. Look, a goat... Semyon Karpovich stroked his beard. It seemed easier that way, calmer. The goat.

The little Sabeev girl went running past. Then she came back for some reason.

She stood looking at Semyon Karpovich. Stood and looked for a long time.

– What're you staring at? – the old man finally snapped. – Get on, run along outta here.

You can't entrust a little girl with such a responsible matter. She's only about six or eight.

The little girl didn't say anything and began to back away from the old man. Then she ran off.

Thirst and Stone

Borya Vetriukhin-Golovnya didn't leave much of a mark on life. Since childhood he'd been a pebble on the road. Anyone who liked could kick him along. Kick him – and not even notice. And so he just tumbled along, year after year, year after year. Around forty he got heavier. Grew rounded. A prehistoric boulder from the Ice Age.

He didn't stand a chance in the middle of the road anymore. He rolled off to the side. Sprouted moss all over.

In the spring the depths of the moss sprouted tiny boxlets on skinny stems. They looked like little gnome booties.

Nobody shoved Borya around now. Some just walked around him, others would sit down for a spell. Not for too long, so as not to get a chilled bottom. They'd get up and move on.

Borya kept on. He worked to overcome his grey psychic heaviness. And he consoled himself: life is but an instant, and beyond the next bend lies infinity. And there, somewhere out there, he'll have to take a good look around. He'd learned his lesson by now: you won't see him hurrying to reincarnate. If you're going to make a public appearance, it had better be a guaranteed success. Otherwise, why bother?

The familiar course of his deliberation was interrupted by a fat rear. Wary of catching sciatica, the guy who'd decided to sit got out a newspaper. Wanted to spread it out to sit on. Took a closer look. And through the greenish-blue moss he recognized:

– Borya! Is that you?

Vetriukhin-Golovnya hid in silence.

– It's Kharkin, Vitka Kharkin. You don't remember me? We shared a desk in seventh and eighth grade. I was just going to lay down this newspaper, bent down and what do I see – it's Borya. Crazy, to meet like this, right on the side of the road. Did you recognize me?

Vetriukhin-Golovnya sighed:

– Everyone looks the same.

– What a memory I've got, huh? You're not so easy to pick out, but I saw you right away – Borka!

And Kharkin became even more enthusiastic: – I've got a small business, I do resale of garbage disposals. It's a field with a future. I'm the director.

Vetriukhin-Golovnya didn't interrupt. He was having a hard time listening. Lost the habit of paying attention.

– Maybe you've seen some of our old gang?

– I don't know. Vetriukhin-Golovnya had a hard time answering through the moss. And, thinking for a moment, he added humorlessly: – I only see rear ends.

– Yes, – Kharkin didn't let up, – it's been such a long time, ages, as they say. You've really grown over in the face. Beard like a forester... So what do you do? Are you in the lumber business? You don't have to say if you don't feel like it. Ah, Borka, Borka, you were no overachiever, but Marina Seryogina was asking about you. I saw her not long ago. She has a cafe now, "Thirst." It's actually called "Durst" – a joint venture with the Germans.

The little gnome legs started quivering from excitement.

– Marina... Seryogina... about me... – Borya muttered.

– You don't believe me? Remember, she used to sit in front of us, at the third desk in the second row?

– What do you mean, she asked about me? Such a long time. – Vetriukhin-Golovnya realized he was about to crack. First crack, and then crumble into little pieces.

Kharkin felt it:

– Borka, let's go to "Durst"!

– When?

– Why not right now? We'll just hail a car and go. Just think how Marinka will start oohing and ahing! She always liked you, you know. Really...

Vetriukhin-Golovnya was breathing heavily.

Vitka shook his fat stomach in anticipation:

– I'm thirsty, Borya, what about you?

– *Durst*, dummies, – muttered Vetriukhin-Golovnya. – It can't...

– What can't? Why not?!

– After so many years, – and he remembered: back in school they'd called Kharkin "Polecat"; he'd been skinny, big-nosed and fidgety.

And he concluded stonily: Polecat's making fun of me. *Durst*, dummies, schooldays. A whirl of scattered German phrases. *Es ist ... Ich habe*... But I'm – *Stein*, a stone ... She's *Durst*, thirst... *Stein und Durst*... *Und so weiter...* And so on, so on, til the bend in the road.

Vetriukhin-Golovnya didn't notice Kharkin's fat stomach disappear. It widened and blurred in the noise of his heart, which refused to settle down.

The little gnome booties went on swaying for a long time. The rays of the sun were no longer straight. Evening was approaching.

In the Truck

By the station a man was asking: "Whose truck?"

– Dearie! an old lady called out to me. She was sitting on bundles. I didn't recognize her at first – because of the early hour, or this fog, or the waiting – she didn't have a face. – Dearie, she said to me, – go with God. Good! – and quietly complained: – I really have to go, you know.

– Who's driving?

– Vaska Chicherin just woke up. He'll drive.

Skinny Vasily, who looked more like a teenager than a sturdy man, was fussing around the truck, working a rope through the coach body.

– To Tarnoga? asked Vaska without turning his head.

I put my suitcase in the back and helped another old lady drag in her bundles. She didn't have a face either. This old lady wouldn't give up her bag, though; she planted herself at the front near the cab and went still.

I crawled on up as well and settled down on a tarp, in a little hollow between the crates. Down below in a toneless voice the man kept asking:

– Whose truck? and pestering: – Hey you, listen. Whose truck is this, is it from the timber outfit?

– Lay off.

– But, listen... Come on!

– Huh? They only gave me three years.

– Not five?

– Three, just three. I was in Veliky Ustiug.

– Fine. Hey... don't make a racket.

A man in a padded country jacket, his head shaved and carrying a brown hat with ear flaps, scrambled up into the truck. He strode across the crates, looking for a place to settle in.

Down below someone else was already pestering:

– Hey, listen! Whose truck? Listen...

I dozed off. And when I opened my eyes: everything had gone pale from the damp. The sky above me was covered with stormclouds. And a light rain was pattering softly against the tarp.

And the old lady sitting up front struck up:

Oh, I'm looking in the wi-i-indow!
Oh, I'm looking in the wi-i-indow!
In the cry-y-ystal, in the gla-a-as!

– What are we waiting for? asked someone down below. – Why aren't we going already?

Two farmer women crawled in. I fell asleep.

– Something's rumbling, – said the old lady, – won't be long now.

– Huh?

I woke up. Unhurriedly, it was getting lighter.

– I'm leaving because I have to, said the youngest woman. – He just came back from the army. He was coming back from the army, and I kept thinking about how wild we'd been. I was expecting, you know. But I worked as a furnace-stoker – stood there right up against the heat. Up before sunrise, in a rush – running around all day to get everything done. And I worked as an attendant in our hospital. Get up in the morning, run back and forth the livelong day. So I didn't have the baby after all... And then he came back. He's walking toward me and suddenly I thought: how come he didn't smile bigger, he just twitched a little. I decided: it's not him. My guy was completely different. Oh, if only I'd smiled at him bigger!

...And she started crying.

– Well, I'm leaving, – said the old lady, – Went and bought an Orenburg kerchief. Blew 35 rubles all the same – and so I'm leaving.

"I need to fall asleep," I thought. And fell asleep.

I opened my eyes from a pain low in my stomach. I bent over and immediately got a boot in the face.

– Ah-ha! Goddamn con!

The grandmother up front, who now looked like a chicken, was asleep, face buried in her black bag.

But the guy in the padded jacket was lying down, arms wide, waiting for me. "He wants to toss me, – I thought, – throw me out of the truck." I got up and went for him, to attack him first and knock him down. But he turned and started sneaking into my little hollow. I took another step forward and stepped on something soft, it seemed alive – but it was his hat. I stretched out my arm – but his eyes, those eyes of his were closed. I grabbed him by the shoulder and started shaking him:

– Hey, what's your problem! Wake up! Can you hear me?

He started mumbling, then asked quietly:

– Whose truck is this? Is it from the timber outfit?

I shoved him out of my little hollow and fell back asleep.

In the light of day the guy with the shaved head was pitiful to behold – his face ashy, dry skin drawing his eyes almost completely closed. A wad of improbably white gauze protruded from his right ear.

– Are you sick? – I asked.

– Yes.

We had nothing to talk about.

"Good thing I didn't whack a sick man," – I thought. I wanted to go wash my face, but I was afraid – all of us were afraid – of being left behind. The truck might drive off at any moment. And we kept waiting for it to go.

Our grandma kept asserting in her sleep:

– S'rumbling, right? We left or something?

– Aw, grandmama, that's your stomach rumbling, – laughed the girl.

She was cheerful when she wasn't crying.

Things were fine during the day, especially if the sun was shining. And with the arrival of each new train people came running from the station. Still far away, they cried out:

– Whose truck? Hey!

Some of them threw bundles up and hurriedly crawled in. Others called up from below:

– Hey there! Whose truck?!

Later they walked off. And still others came. And left as well. But we, the first ones, sat in our places and waited. I liked some of them, especially this one weird guy, Fedya the electrician. He crawled in with no luggage, yelled:

– Hiya, sleepyheads! – and shook everybody's hand. – Fedya the electrician, Fedya the electrician... Hey ma, he said to the old lady, – how you doing, keeping it together?

The old lady didn't answer him, because lately she'd been sleeping more.

But he shook her:

– Grandmama, what've you got here?

– Two little scarves, – she said, – brown and yellow, a blue polka-dotted dress, and a ladies' woolen sweater too, like new; and here in my bag I have eggs.

– I'll sit with you, Grandmama. Soon's we get there, we have to get married.

– We can work something out, – replied the old lady... and fell asleep.

But by evening he'd already moved in on our girl Lyuba. He moved in, and they started living together. At first it was fine. But then he started smacking her around. He'd run out to the store. Always coming back with a bottle. But she didn't cry. And he was always cajoling her to go somewhere with him, hurrying all of us: let's get going, let's get going. And every night she'd yell:

– Go away! Go away, Fedka!

But he loved her.

And once, one dark night, he said:

– Listen, Lyuba, it'll be winter soon!

– So what, said Lyuba. – I'm not likely to end up cold and alone. Some other guy'll always come round knocking.

Then he started talking big, roared:

– I'll keep it all together! If I can't get married, then neither can you. I swear I'll see you crying over me, Lyuba. Where are your tears? Where?

– What, like you're so attached to me? – and she started laughing. – Idiot, I've had it up to here with you. Leave me alone, Fedka! Remember I worked in a hospital, I've seen plenty of your ilk. I always feel sorry for men. You too, dummy. Just leave me alone.

Later they sang together. Quietly. She sang the first part and he the second. He kept up his end well.

And the time came for her to give birth.

– Mamaaa! – screamed the girl. – Help me.

– Oh, Lord, – the old lady calmed her. – What're you carrying on for? It's not like we're unhappy. A baby is a good thing. You just rock your head over towards me, girlie, I'll call for help. And she yelled: Hey, somebody...people! Someone bring us a bucket. And some hot water, a clean towel. And she calmed the girl: Just a little bit longer... And you go ahead, scream and holler, give it everything you got. Soon's we're done here, you'll be free, you'll go out on the wide porch with your little boy, or your little girl – a girl's just as good, you know. Not to the woods, no way we're going to any woods, dark and deep.

– Where's Fedka? – asked Lyuba. – Ducked out?

– Fedka? What do we need him for now? We've got no use for him. He did his electrician's work on you already...

– I'm scared.

– What's there to be scared of? Look now, imagine you've leapt out into a green meadow, there's a little stream, forget-me-nots like the bluest little eyes, watching you, sweet girl. But you go dashing up like a little cuckoo-bird and fly off to the next little patch of woods, right up to a tall pine or an oak and – cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo... And people start asking you: o little cuckoo, how long do we have left to live... And you just repeat: cuckoo...

We all congratulated the girl, or rather, now mother, except for our con, of course:

"God bless the child." It was a boy after all... And we asked the girl, that is, well, we'd gotten used to thinking of her that way – What'll we call your little boy?

She said:

– Vasya.

And a biting rain rushed in, and then continued without cease, a flood.

The grandmother laughed:

– Thanks be to the Lord, Christ Almighty, the baby's been baptized. Dear Lyuba, birdie mine, gather this water of the Lord in your palm, drink it down sweet and for Vasya's happiness... Vasily, son of Fedya, Vasily Fyodorovich.

And the cry of the infant became a holy day for us.

– Just wait, now your son will be an intercessor for you, – prophesied the grandmother, and fell asleep.

– Lyuba, you should go to Moldova, – said the woman with the Orenburg kerchief. She sighed at the memory. – There are gardens there. What gardens! When the trees are in bloom there isn't a roof to be seen. A person can get killed there, like right next to you, and the body won't ever be found. When I was young I used to think: I'm leaving for Moldova.

– What? – asked the old lady, waking up. – S'rumbling?

Lyuba squeezed the child tight, nestled in and drifted off to sleep smiling. In spring and summer things were, of course, colorful, it was

warm. But we became more patient with the winters, too. They were icy, but not so bad... The main thing was for the truck to get going.

But one time we almost got driven off – very nearly got cleared out.

This was when Vasya had already grown up. Our grandmama called him her Prinz.

So, one day a man started yelling from down below. He was yelling something awful, but we couldn't see him. He stood there down below and yelled:

– Oh you damned duckies! – the man yelled, his voice breaking – you've breathed in more than your share! You've breathed in so much here, grabbed all the curled warmth, curled warmth in the wind, let it out in the wind, blown it all out by the wind...

– S'rumbling, seems like, – the old lady was glad. – Here's what we've been waiting for, thanks be to the Lord!

– That's the stationmaster, – said the woman with the Orenburg kerchief. – He doesn't want us to go, I guess.

– Oh you damned duckies, goddamned duckies, oh! – yelled the man from down below.

– He feels bad for us, – said the woman. – He's having a hard time because of us.

– What'd you all crawl in there for? – the man yelled. – What for?

– He's suffering for our sake, – sighed the woman. – But we don't even know how to suffer properly, we've gotten used to things.

The stationmaster kept yelling for a long time, and the woman told us about how her son was killed in the war. She was sitting just like this at the station – and an airplane killed him; her other son was born deaf-and-dumb.

– And he was born that way, deaf-and-dumb, – said the woman, – cause the first one screamed so awfully. There at the station, when he got hit, I grabbed him and all night long I walked in circles, the trains kept coming, I ducked under them and went across the rails. And my little son was screaming, his voice breaking with a death-cry. I think my other son was born deaf-and-dumb because the first one screamed like that. It was thundering all around – nowhere to run: I kept going across the rails, through the mud, like a horse. And then I see a little fence

ahead, a little side-street, I think: where can I find someone? I open the gate, thinking, I hope now dogs aren't going to tear me and my little son to bits. Shoved in the door... inside there's nothing but an ill wind. The next house – empty too. I think: what can I do? – and the child's screaming. I'm lulling him, coaxing: "Hush! Hush!" Why'd I hush him then – he wasn't bothering anybody. Should've let him scream. I'm a fool, a damn fool – he stopped screaming, all right: and the other one was born deaf-and-dumb.

– Well, no use remembering, said our grandmother.

– When I was little, – said our dear Lyuba and gazed at us with clear eyes, – when I was little I loved picking raspberries. I really did.

– Oh, just wait and hear what I'm going to tell you all, – laughed our grandmother.

– But you, girlie, try to guess. My grandpa used to ask me this riddle. – And she started singing softly:

What burns, what burns,
What burns without a fire?
What shines, what shines,
What shines over the whole world?
What runs, what runs,
What runs without running away?
What blooms, what blooms,
What blooms without fading?
What grows, what grows,
What grows with no roots?
What weeps, what weeps,
What weeps without sobbing?
What weeps...

– Shut up! – yelled Lyuba. – Horses weep without sobbing. What do you care, what difference does it make to you all – but what about me, what am I supposed to do with Vaska here? He needs to go to school, to college. His father was an electricity guy. – And she started crying.

– Ah! – sighed the grandmother. – My old granddad would've told it better. Oh, he was a master at telling the old songs! And he knew a lot, oh-oh-oh. Today's Thursday? He's tending the cows, Thursdays it's our turn to take our cows out to pasture.

And she started murmuring quietly:

– *Oh, I'm looking in the wi-i-indow...*

Oh, I'm looking in the cry-y-ystal...

That evening another one of our scandals blew up, a regular occurrence by now. Vaska was beating his mother and roaring:

– You're filth, you floozy. You're all a bunch of rusted old farts. How many times have you put me off: just wait, any minute now, we'll be going, we're taking off, we're off... But here I am and I still don't have jeans. Mother of mine, do you get me? You're a real bitch, huh?

Lyuba didn't answer.

But this time he leapt down from the truck.

– Vasya! – she screamed. – Wait, sonny, I'm coming with you...

And she too disappeared into the night.

Then the next day the woman with the Orenburg kerchief slipped away.

I sat looking at the train station, the poky little grey building with its tiny front porch, the schedule board, the trash can, the stationmaster in his red peaked cap, and it even seemed to me that we had already driven off, that the station had grown smaller, like it was all miniature, and next to it a miniature stationmaster in a red peaked cap. But where would you go – where to? Away from the station to where? The train whistles were blowing. And everything was grey and like iron: ooo-ooo-ooo-ooo, hooting, lulling.

8.30, 19.20, and 0.15 too – and the trains stop for only two minutes. And the doors slammed on the porch of the poky grey building. And people going to-and-fro, to-and-fro: everyone running. But the train stands for only two minutes, only two minutes, and the tickets still have to get punched. While the trains there wai... The train wai... gone...go... And I started falling asleep.

Then I woke up because – the old lady was shoving me.

– Dearie, watch my bag. I'll be right back.

At 8.30 – like always, the train arrived...

– Hey! Whose truck?

A woman in a raincoat and boots crawled in to join us. She deftly flung in two purses tied together.

– All right now, handsome, scoot over, – she said to the guy with the shaved head. But hey, let me take a look first, you didn't leave a wet spot, did you? She gave out a resonant guffaw and, turning back to the man standing on the road, yelled:

– What're you looking so sad for – no long goodbyes! I've had more than enough of you already. – And then to me: – Tap the driver, sweetie, – let's get going already.

I reached out and knocked on the roof of the cab.

The truck gurgled. And suddenly it started moving.

– Hey, good-for-nothing, don't drink! Don't drink! – the woman yelled to the man on the street.

And then again to the guy with the shaved head:

– You aren't drunk, by any chance?

And to me:

– Don't know why I'm even asking. Who doesn't drink these days – even the telephone poles are holding bottles.

– Whose truck is this? – asked the guy with the shaved head.

– Oh-oh, what are you bugging us for. We're not truck-drivers. Just want to get where we're going. Stop pressing up against me now, sugar-pie. Or maybe we ought to plan the wedding?

– Don't touch me!

– Oh, lemme just stroke your head, you're all rumpled. Just look what a fine fellow – even has gauze in his ear.

– Leave me alone! Whose truck is this?

– Now he's won't let up, – and then to me: – What's wrong with all of you – you're all acting so uncomfortable? – And she reached for the black bag our old lady had left behind.

– Give me the bag, treasure, I'll sit down over there – less bumpy, – and she moved over to the old lady's seat.

– But hey, don't sit on the bag, handsome, there's eggs in there. You'll end up with chicks.

– I didn't lay anything.

– Too early to tell, – and she started laughing. – You'll lay... – And to me: – What's wrong with all of you? You're all so uncomfortable? – And to the skinhead: – Don't shove me with your boots, sweet pea, – and started singing:

– *Oh, sweet pea, let's make it official!*

Why sit back-to-back, let's make it official... Hoo-ee!

– Leave me alone! Leave me alone!

And to me:

– The other night I was on the way here. The driver turned out to be a drunk. We were scared to even get in, but there was a whole truckload of us girls. And there he was, asleep at the wheel – but what can you do, Christ it was funny!

The guy with the shaved head lit up.

– Something stinks, – she said and started laughing. – Come on now, sweet pea, be careful.

– Leave me alone! Leave me alone!

– The gaskets are burning, – said the woman and suddenly noticed: the skinhead's jacket was smoking. – Oy, mama! My boy, you're going to burn down the lot of us.

The guy with the shaved head looked at the woman as if he didn't understand where the smoke was coming from. But then he took off the jacket and started trampling it, kneading and stamping. It kept smoking. And then with one stroke he threw it out onto the road. He looked at the woman – and hurled his hat out after it.

– Oh, sweet pea! – the woman started laughing again. – The hat was all right.

The guy with the shaved head smiled at her. He sighed, stretched out his feet in their boots and settled in to sleep.

Towards evening we drove up to another station.

And I immediately recognized the familiar poky grey building and the stationmaster in his red peaked cap, and the schedule board, and that trash can. People were already running up to our truck.

– Whose truck is this? – they started yelling, still far away. – Hey!..

And suddenly I heard: inside the station building there was beautiful music playing. And someone cheerfully roared out:

– *He squeezed my hand tightly.*

I didn't take my hand away. Hoo-ee!

– What, are they having a wedding? – laughed the woman. – We'd better go have a look.

And then we all saw. In the station, behind bright windows, festive people were dancing a ring-dance, to-and-fro, to-and-fro, and in their center there was a bride in a white dress, just like a queen.

From *The Freedom Factory*

Ksenia Buksha
Translated from the Russian by Anne O. Fisher

Translator's Introduction

The Freedom Factory is the biography of a very unlikely subject: a top-secret defense-industry factory in Saint Petersburg. This real factory hired Buksha to write an imposing coffee-table book about its history and accomplishments, and while that project seems to have never materialized, Buksha took the stories and wrote *The Freedom Factory*, weaving together forty short narratives from different characters of different classes, set in different eras from the 1940s to today. Since the real factory is top-secret, it goes by the pseudonym of the book's title, and its workers are named solely by Latin letters: D, N, G, etc. But behind each letter lies a story. Buksha's narrators and set pieces are lyric, funny, suspenseful, bleak, and joyful by turns. Irony vies with sincerity (case in point: a military factory called "Freedom"). Buksha's dialogue is unflinchingly authentic and stylistically dazzling, whether it portrays a drunk's ramblings, a foreigner's hilarious butchery of the Russian language, or a female engineer's reminiscences. In sum, *The Freedom Factory* is a flawless portrait of a flawed people.

1. The Central Tower

Well, one smart mother did instill it in her first-grade son: when you see those letters, white on red, don't read them, it's pure nonsense–

but don't you tell anybody what I just told you. Pure nonsense, in white letters on a red background, right there above the Freedom factory. A spotlight over the entrance points its beam directly up. Multitudes of snowflakes, tiny as sparks, keep flying into the beam and swirling around like burning gunpowder. The factory workers hurry home in this freezing cold, holding their breath, to ring in the New Year. The snow doesn't just creak under their feet, it actually squeals. Breathing, in this kind of cold, is impossible: you might as well try to breathe black pepper. It feels like the snow would catch on fire if you held a match to it. And no looking up, either, not a chance, although if you do go ahead and try to lift your frost-burned face you'll see red bunting over the entrance, and white letters, and above them the spotlight's beam, drilling through the murky, sleepy sky over the Narva Outpost all the way into outer space, although its target really isn't outer space at all, but the clock on the Central Tower, that's what! The time on the clock is five to ten, but the snow-covered cornices and ledges crowning both the Central Tower itself and the entire recently restored main building gleam white.

Comrades! A clapping of hands gets everyone's attention, and he breaks into the old song: "Five minutes! Five minutes!" No, don't worry, we've still got two hours. What I mean is that in five minutes we will get ready to go and wish each other a Happy New Year, and then we will exit the shop in an orderly fashion, hop on the tram, and be home in time to hear the clock strike twelve on the radio. Attention, attention!

D (a skinny red-head) contends that the module has to be assembled this year, not left until next year. His buddy from school, Q, contends that… Olya! Let's spend the New Year together. The whole year? Oh, sorry about that, I meant to say, New Year's Eve. Although now you mention it, I would spend the whole year with you, Olenka, if you were up for it. I'd rather spend it with D. He's just as much of an idiot as you, but at least he shuts up sometimes. Well sure, of course we'll take D with us! We'll all come over to my place. My dad's on duty, he'll be gone all night. I'll take care of the, you know, the stuff. Come on, D, quit your dawdling and finish it, or else the trams'll stop running. The trams run until eleven (setting a sprocket in graphite

lubricant). I'll be right there. You go on and invite Olya over. I did, I already did! Is that so? When was that…

It's freezing outside, enough to knock the wind out of you. I can't remember it ever being this cold. I can't either. They say it was during the blockade, but I don't remember. Man, when we lived in the Urals, minus forty-five in the winter was no big deal. But at least the air was dry there. Here you've got this mist, this haze. My grandma's been wheezing for three days, she can't take this kind of freezing cold. Then she shouldn't go outside. No, she wheezes inside, too.

Looky there, the light's on in number four. Hey boys, let's go check out four, what'd they do over there? I haven't seen it yet. But what's the time? We got plenty of time. Let's go.

The fourth shop's new, expansive floor. Out past the enormous windows, just touched by frost, the sharp outlines of bare branches. Booming footsteps. An echo reverberates. Get a load of that! What kind of machines are those, anyway? They're, like, war trophies. Careful, boys. Someone's coming.

It's okay, chief, we're from fifteen. Showing the girl around. It's all fancy-schmancy over here now, isn't it? (Felt boots, baggy overcoat, moustache.) Happy New Year! Olya's smile, now, for a smile like that you'd do anything! Olya's with the quality control department. Ah, I see, Happy New Year, kids. Well, there's certainly something worth looking at here, that's right. And I was just thinking, who are those folks. You make sure to come by again. Next time I'll… So you're from fifteen, then, the hardest-working shop, always working late. Puts in the most overtime. (A whiff of hard alcohol.) Go on and take a seat. We'll have us a little chat. The tram won't get away from you. There's quite a lot I can tell you about… I was here way back when there wasn't anything here, nothing at all, but I was here… Wanna know what I did in this factory? I kept this factory from burning down. You don't know about that. That's right, during the war. Come on, now, have a seat. You Komsomol kids! Listen up, I'm gonna tell you how it happened, cause you don't know a thing about it.

It was spring by the time we put out the Freedom fire, it was back in… that's right, it was back in May of forty-two, I think. This was a

textile factory back then. That's right… a fougasse set it on fire, and then at five in the evening the artillery started shelling us. They really let us have it, that's right… And here we are, under fire, putting out a fire, it was absolutely crazy. There were twenty fire crews on hand, the entire Narva outpost, basically… we get here and everything's burning, from the first floor to the last. Children came running out at us, led by their teachers… there was a preschool there, you can just imagine… they'd brought in orphans from all over the outpost. I said to Dimka, you cover the surrounding buildings. I knew there was a cotton storehouse there, it was just awful. There was a power station too, and if that'd caught fire… Dimka and his fellows headed over there, while we focused on the main building… we could see it, burning stronger and stronger. All the shops were full of cotton, and burning cotton came bursting out the windows, inside it was a mess, all the flooring in the factory was soaked in oil, and the fire swallowed it up like it was paper. We sent the officers in training to put out the repair shop on the second floor, we thought it'd be safer, while we went up to the fourth floor… then a shell hits the side of the building, pow! and all those youngsters were lost, just gone… but we didn't know it at the time, no way to tell what was going on. Beams were coming down, the pump was hit by a shell and water wasn't flowing, the hoses had holes in them. And then I look up and the roof's collapsing. That's it, let's go, I say, and we make it down to the second floor, but there's no stairs. There was this one fellow, Yegor Gelfin, he died later at the front… he just jumped down there, without being able to see anything, can you imagine that? That's how he helped get us out. Now that's a feat! And there I was, the last one: I got snagged on something, I had no idea what was going on, it was like I was deaf, but I kept pushing on, the floors were already crackling right behind me, and as soon as I got out the whole thing came crashing down! But we did save two floors, and Dimka saved the cotton warehouse; if that'd gone up we'd've been surrounded, it would've done us all in. When you've got that much fuel, the air itself just catches fire and sucks everything in, like a funnel; that would've been the end, period! But no… we saved the cotton warehouse, and all the outbuildings, you can see yourself this is all old… we saved the factory… we lost eight fighters. That's right…

You're a hero, chief! Who, me? (cough) Come on, now, a hero… (cough) Better to say I'm a hero of the past. And you are the heroes of the future. Whoever wants to pick a fight with us better think twice, am I right? Comrades, this is all great, but the last tram is leaving in five minutes. Goodbye! Goodbye! Happy New Year!

It's hard to run in the freezing cold. Your face burns, and the tiniest little snowflakes sear your cheeks and blow in sparkling flurries up under the hem of your coat. They can already hear the muffled clatter in the dark as they come running off Volynkina onto Kalinina. A headlight approaches from around the corner. They race to the stop as fast as they can, Q dragging Olya by the hand, they spring into the tram, the doors close… and only then do they realize that D had long ago fallen behind. There goes his lanky, disheveled frame, muttonchops frosted over, fur hat askew. The tram picks up speed.

You left him behind, Q! What, is it my fault he runs so slow? I just assumed he was right there with us. You should've grabbed his hand too! Listen, Olenka, if you think about it, what do we need that red-headed weirdo for, anyway? Aren't we better off without him? It's like they say: if you can't catch up, you fall behind. The tram comes to a halt: just a short distance between stops, twelve buildings, one intersection… Olya jumps out into the empty, snowy road, into bitter-cold sparks, the snow is bright orange under the streetlight like the ice in a skating rink, and out above the tops of the trees in Yekateringof Park the black cube of the Central Tower rises up into the murky sky, topped by a bright column of light, and while the tram lurches off with a rattle, carrying Q into the gelid gloom of Obvodny, Olga walks briskly forward, as D's spare frame treads toward her; he's beginning to make her out, but now we can't see them anymore.

16. Testing

On the wall hangs a rug embroidered with a cross–rather, with crosses–that is, with little *x*'s. Kilometers of water and a deep floor are down below, and up above are grey skies and little hillocks. Here's a

yellow *x* walking the hillocks. It's comrade D (from Odessa) in the insulated coat his wife sewed him; he breathes fire as he goes, in his yellow coat with purple pockets. He goes along the path as it winds between the hillocks, and unfamiliar critters peer out at him from behind them. An immensely strong wind's blowing, and has been for more than two weeks, so that now, of all the snow that had been on the hillocks, only the path is left. The path is well-tamped, and the snow sticks better on it. In winter, when the wind swept up big drifts, that path looked like a trench between steep dunes, but now the dunes have melted and the wind's worn them away, and the path's turned into the Great Wall of China, a bridge, and there goes D, balancing on this slippery bridge, bent double in his yellow coat that catches the wind like a sail. D breathes a fire made of sunny, garlicky soup, and vodka, and aspirin, and coughs like he's at death's door. Nothing you can do about it. (We pull back, and see it again: grey on grey, with the little bone of the submarine inside.)

Testing the submarine and all the instruments on it takes twelve days. They do a deep-water dive, three hundred meters. Engineers and military reps packed tight as sardines. Everyone sitting on benches in a stuffy, cramped space. Lots of food, wan lighting. They sit in utter silence, listening for leaks. The boat is under pressure, after all, and if there's a leak anywhere, they'll hear it. Everyone's sitting there and every single one of them, depending on the vigor of his imagination, pictures an oceanic hammer/vice/fist, in which the boat is clamped like an egg/shell/cucumber. Only a few of them have complete faith, trusting utterly in their fate. Our D's one of these. He's serene, almost cheerful, even, but it's not that abnormal cheeriness that usually means someone's manic from staying awake all night; it's more that natural, fully-rounded, calm kind of cheer. And, of course, he's coughing. This is what happens before the testing (we zoom in again): everyone has to get in pairs and go into an icy-cold pool of rusty, cloudy water. In diving suits, naturally. They let you down to around four meters, you walk around on a tether for a while, and then they pull you out. Still with us? Still here. Once D got tangled up with G, an engineer from a big manufacturer of submarine communications systems. The

water was cloudy, of course, couldn't see a thing, and these two big-time engineers are down there feeling their way around. They walked in circles for a while and got completely tangled up. Getting them out was a royal pain.

Five klicks into the hillocks: the path winds through hillocks, skies are grey, and the ocean's right there. D has a coughing fit. Ugh, I'm sweating like a pig! D, big and round, extracts a canteen from the depths of his down jacket. It's five kilometers from home to the pier. The romance of it. Two hundred men on one ship, every single device serviced by its own team of engineers and technicians. D the Odessan is paired up with Vitya P, the famous millionaire of the northern latitudes. Everybody knows you can bring in good money during testing, but the tenacious Vitya has made it into a principle. He's determined to show that a regular Soviet laborer doing honest work really can make enough to buy three two-bedroom apartments in Leningrad. Of course, D's not just twiddling his thumbs, either. Recently he found himself in one of those completely ordinary, everyday situations: he and his wife were going to go to Leningrad (he had to get recertified every six months), and they were going to stay for a week, as usual. Do some shopping, see some shows, get together with the family, that kind of thing. As soon as they arrive at the airport, Ninochka goes, "Mama, I feel sick." His wife goes "we'll be back in a minute" and disappears with Ninka. What the hell! D goes running all over the waiting area, they've given the boarding announcement, but no sign of wife or child! D runs to the administrator, to the airport police... their names are announced over the loudspeaker… not a trace of them. D is actually hopping up and down, he's so mad: boarding is over, and they're nowhere to be found. It turns out that they'd gone back home. They'd just decided not to go on the trip. It happens. But the thing is that the plane that they'd almost flown off in crashed with no survivors. Both his wife and D quickly forgot about this incident, and of course it had nothing to do with the fact that six months later they would move back to Leningrad. It was just that she was pregnant again, and Ninochka was starting school.

The terminal appears in the distance. D the Odessan feels better already. He made it! He didn't blow away in the wind! Tomorrow they

will head out, so now the vessel is crawling with people, all tinkering with this, re-soldering that. Business as usual (gloats D). Some ships don't make it out for days, but not us: we're ready to go. Vitka P tugs on D's arm: pssst, D! Nothing's working. What do you mean? Why not? I mean nothing even turns on… D breaks into a sweat. He scratches his curly head and unbuttons his yellow coat. The remains of the garlicky soup have evaporated. Hold on a minute, I'll open it up.

He opens it up. He looks inside. He parts the device's guts and shines a flashlight into them. He looks, but doesn't find anything. Because sometimes you can get every engineer in the shop to look, and still not figure it out. D is raging mad. It's almost seven, and it's getting dark. They're heading out for testing tomorrow. Vitka paces in a circle. They look at it together. Fuck! I got it! D yells. The lid's crooked! Agh, those idiots! How'd they paint this lid?! It's just like they say: no such thing as a minor detail in this line of work. Shave down the paint, maybe? No, then the seal won't be hermetic. What do we do? That's when D finds a little metal washer, wraps it in electrical tape, and sticks it under the lid, so the contacts meet when it closes. And now to turn it on… (Drumroll.) We have contact! D releases all his pent-up coughing in one deafening paroxysm. Vitka looks around. If the military reps find out about this, they could sue us. We did submit the prototype without a washer wrapped in electrical tape, after all! But who'll go in there besides us? Even if it does break down, we'll be the ones who open it up to fix it. The lid is screwed down tight. It works! It works! Vitka P and D the Odessan's moods lift dramatically. They cast a (victorious) glance at the others.

An enormous rug on the wall, a wool rug, embroidered with *x*'s. Grey waves meet and merge over the little bone of the submarine. Two hundred people inside it, military reps and engineers, keeping quiet as the grave. Silence and a measured, ominous humming. D tries not to cough. He's thinking about the washer. Never mind. To hell with that washer. Relax. So, are we going to launch? It was about two years ago now, when the missiles went the wrong way. They were headed for friendly China, you see. If they'd gotten there, it wouldn't've been pretty. Luckily, we managed to knock them down. The engineers sit,

each thinking about his washer, or his copper wire, or something else along those lines. They think for a long time. The launch window is closing, but nothing's happening. An officer comes in. His face expresses placid desperation. Everyone tries to figure out what's going on. So, are we? Going to launch them? No, we're not. We're not going to launch them today. Stand down, comrades. Some hunters went out into the taiga in sector seventeen. Hunters!? Of all the fucking…!! They had to pick now! Couldn't somebody have warned them!? We're going home. The next attempt will be in three weeks.

D, the Odessan, is the first one to break down laughing. Then other people start laughing too. Washers! moans D, forgetting it's top secret. Electrical tape! Hunters! Ha-ha-ha!

31. Before Dawn

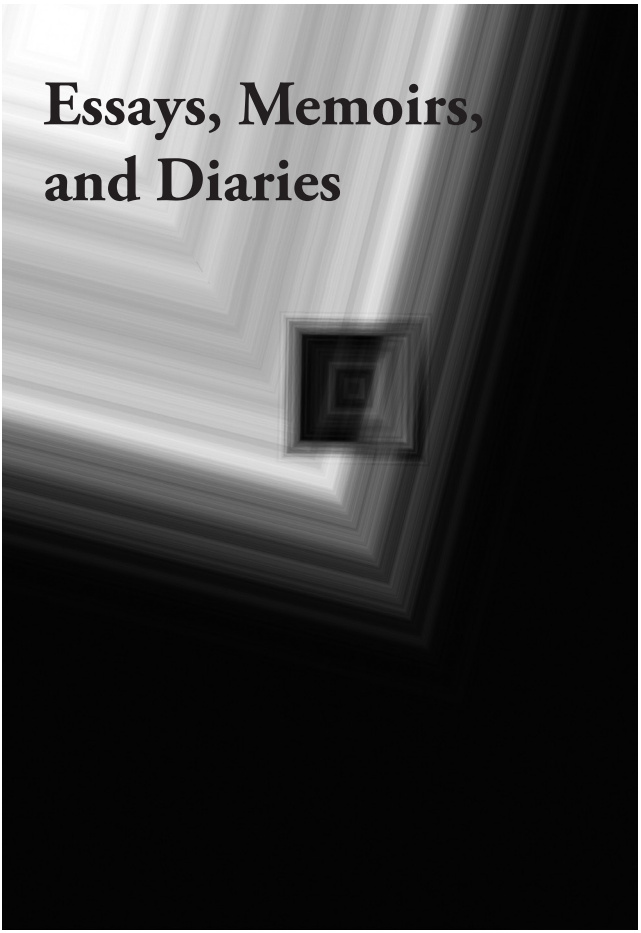
Director NN wakes up, falls back asleep, and wakes back up again. His agonized drowsing goes on and on, refusing to resolve itself in either sleep or wakefulness. He can't feel his body in his sleep, but he can see it before him, like a map of a forest, like a bearskin, like a taxidermied or field-dressed carcass of the country, its cankers and holes glowing in the dark. He falls asleep, wakes up, and falls asleep, or maybe he's coming to life, dying, and coming back to life again. A lake in the forest, or rather a swamp, gleams before Director NN's eyes: water deep in fissures smacks its lips. Grass is springy, green, and disgusting. He can smell wild mint, aspen, and labrador tea, and a loud cluster of poison-yellow birds clatters in some branches. They're talking with NN: sign it, sign it, or we'll crush you.

But NN can't sign it, so moss smothers his face and chest, something's gurgling and seething, clumps of moss rip painfully out of their beds, exposing horrible sores where the earth was rubbed raw, but it's skin, not earth, half-decomposed skin covered in scars, or it's the corpse of the country, or it's his very own hand, just with holes pierced through it at random, the holes brimming with a reeking, combustible slurry. Petroleum. Sign it, NN, sign it, or we'll crush you.

NN wakes up, yanks himself out of his dream, and sits on the edge of the bed. For a while he just sits, a heavy piece of condensed murk in the thin dark of the room, faintly lit from outside. With enormous effort, he stands. His heartbeats are rapid and nauseating. Need to open the window and get a drink of water. Can't take this. NN literally falls onto a chair in the kitchen. They'll kill me. Hell with them. They're killing everybody. But I'm not gonna do it. Then after you're gone D the Odessan will do it for you, or else F, the operations director, will do it, or that optimistic deputy director of his, Danila L. They could intimidate Inga. They could just take the factory by brute force. Easy as pie: just take a defense industry factory by force. This kind of thing is going on everywhere you look. It happens every day. Throwing your life away won't change anything. His mouth goes dry again, but he can't take any more water. Bitter, prevernal freshness pours in through the ventilation window. NN says again, clearly and distinctly: I will not divide Freedom up into shares. Fine, but haven't all the Ninth Directorate's enterprises already been auctioned off? They have. And blood was spilled for every single one of them. Would it really be better to let the government keep Freedom? Yes, that's right: the government. The one that is absolutely no different from us–you know, the mafia? They're the exact same mafia, buddy. Didn't you know that your whole life you've been working for the mafia? Maybe you're a communist, eh, NN, like that shop foreman of yours, Pavel Pavlich P, who keeps his party membership card close to his heart to this very day? You want to go on kissing their asses, just to get the same thing you're already getting now: zero orders to fill? How many months have your workers been going hungry? Veterans of labor who worked for their government, rain or shine, for fifty years! They were betrayed. And you've been betrayed.

That's all true. They haven't eaten in six months. The government lies to us and betrays us. But there's not going to be any deal. And this isn't the government not letting Freedom go. This is Freedom giving the government credit. Freedom's not taking anything, buddy, it's giving it. Long-term and interest-free. We are prepared to wait and work as long as it takes. We'll wait another half century, if we need to. We'll wait another half millennium. We have D the mechanic.

We have Tasya the technician. We have D from Odessa. And we have Director NN, formerly a brilliant scientist, who got sucked into this meat grinder against his own volition, who constantly makes mistakes, who's weak, not hard enough on people, can't see things through, who fobs important decisions off on his subordinates. All true. But you'll sell our Freedom off over my dead body.


Essays, Memoirs,
and Diaries

From *Memoirs*

Igor Golomstock
Translated from the Russian by Sara Jolly

Translator's Introduction

In 1955 the 26 year-old Igor Golomstock, by then a budding art historian, had just returned to Moscow after a year spent travelling the length and breadth of the Soviet Union with a touring exhibition of Soviet painters' work. His meeting with Andrey Sinyavsky was the beginning of a lifelong friendship which was to play a decisive role in Golomstock's own fate. The pair co-authored a monograph on Picasso, published in 1960. This was a very risky move as Picasso, although a Communist, was considered by Soviet ideologues as the epitome of decadent bourgeois formalist artists. The monograph achieved a succès de scandale but marked them out as trouble makers. When Sinyavsky, together with his fellow writer Yuli Daniel, was arrested for publishing 'anti-soviet' literature abroad, Golomstock was called as a witness for the prosecution in Sinyavsky's trial in 1966. His refusal to testify led to his own prosecution. He was sentenced to 6 months' correctional labour but 'the ideological repercussions were much more serious for me than the legal punishment. ……..Contracts for a book on Hieronymous Bosch with Iskusstvo and for an album of paintings by Cézanne with the Aurora Press were cancelled. Wherever I usually published, in newspapers, periodicals, collections, my name was banned.' Golomstock survived these difficulties with the help of friends who published his work under their own names or under pseudonyms and he waited until Sinyavsky was released from the camps in 1971 to fulfil his long-held desire to emigrate.

Chapter 7: The Sinyavskys, Khlebny Lane and the Far North.

When I returned to Moscow in 1955 after my year-long trip with the travelling exhibitions, I discovered that my old friend Maya Rozanova-Kruglikova had started a tempestuous love affair with Andrey Donatovich Sinyavsky. The were very soon married and Maya moved in with Andrey.

They lived at Sinyavsky's place in House number 9 on Khlebny Lane: they had a room in a communal flat, plus a small basement which Andrey had turned into a study and where he hid from tiresome visitors. This is where Rozanova brought me and I lived there for some time.

At first Sinyavsky and I were rather wary of each other, we were sniffing each other out, so to speak. This was only natural because we were living amongst people who were on the whole alien to us, often dangerous, and we could only recognise kindred spirits by using some sixth sense, by catching some fleeting signs. Joseph Brodsky writes in his memoirs that in his circle they chose their friends according to their preference – Faulkner or Hemingway? Our generation had to be guided in their choice by political signs as well as aesthetic ones. In both these areas Sinyavsky and I had much in common. Sinyavsky's father had flung his noble origins into the fire of the revolution, joined the Kadet party, been imprisoned by the Soviet authorities (like my father), and was sent into exile and if anybody had asked us – Picasso or Gerasimov, Platonov or Babayevsky? – our answers would have been the same.

Sinyavsky was at this time an academic at the Gorky Institute of World Literature and was teaching in the theatre school of the Moscow Arts Theatre. In the evenings there would be convivial gatherings in Khlebny Lane. Volodya Vysotsky, who was then a student at the college where Sinyavsky taught, would turn up with his guitar. Another of Sinyavsky's students also came, and his old friend and colleague, Andrey Menshutin, with his wife Lydia, who was the soul of kindness. We sang prison songs and washed them down with vodka and simple snacks. I don't think Vysotsky had started composing his own songs yet. He

sang old songs from the camps – "The rivulet flows..." and " The steam engine flies..." – but he sang with such drawling intonation, expressing these tragic stories with such anguish that the old songs acquired a completely new sound – the sound of his own – future – songs. And his improvised stories were even more extraordinary – a kind of one-man show – about astronauts, about the three bears – who "sat on a golden branch, one of them was small, another swung his legs" and that one, the one swinging his legs, was Vladimir Ilych Lenin, and the she-bear was Lenin's wife, Nadezhda Konstantinovna Krupskaya. It was so funny that I almost split my sides laughing. I don't know if any recordings of these improvisations have survived – I never heard them again, but if they have disappeared it is a great loss for the art of performance. Sinyavsky was usually rather reserved and taciturn in company but on these occasions he relaxed and gave inspired renderings of "Abrashka Terts grabbed a pile of dosh ..."

Abram Terts[1] was the pseudonym he took for his underground writing. Why? Well, Sinyavsky himself has written about this in his novel "Good Night."

Somewhere around 1955 or 1956 he began to read his underground stories – "Pkhents," "The Trial Begins," "Lyubimov Town" and others – to a very small circle of friends. But the fact that he was sending his manuscripts abroad was known only to the Menshutins, the Daniels and myself. Everybody knows what this led to, but I will come to that later.

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Sinyavsky had many interests outside his literary research at the Institute. They included the schism in the church in the sixteenth century, Orthodox heresies, the art of the Russian and European avant-garde and prison songs, a genre which he considered to be an integral part of popular folklore and which to a certain extent even replaced it

[1] The historical Abram Terts was a Jewish gangster from Russia's past.

in Soviet times. Maya was then working in the field of architectural restoration, in fact she was involved in the restoration of St Basil's Cathedral in Red Square. She was interested in folk arts and crafts and old Russian church architecture.Their interests, which coincided for the most part, drew them to the Russian North, then untouched by Soviet civilisation.

The Sinyavskys made their first journey along the river Mezen in 1957. The following year they invited me to go with them. We got hold of an outboard motor in Moscow, then we bought an old boat from a fisherman in the countryside near Vologda and we set off up the Mezen, constantly deafened by the din of the motor. Along the upper reaches of the river there were abandoned villages on the banks for hundreds of kilometres. Sturdy five-walled log huts, all empty, half-ruined old churches, which had been desecrated ....in some of these churches odd bits and pieces of the old iconostases were still standing but parts of them and the icons which had hung on the walls were strewn about the floor, covered with a thick layer of bird droppings. Maya cleaned off the dirt and dung and wiped their blackened surfaces with cotton wool dipped in turpentine and then images from the 16th or 17th century often emerged. Some of the original population were still living in the villages by the lower reaches of the river, but here too there were empty huts, churches with broken crosses and collapsed cupolas. Depending on the time of year, snow or rain poured in and covered any of the wooden icons that had survived there. The local people used these for their own domestic purposes. They patched holes with icons, chopped cabbage on them, used them as lids for their pickling barrels – (we had a friend, Kolya Kishilov, who worked as a restorer in the Tretyakov Gallery, and much later on he went off on an expedition to find icons. In one village he saw a window boarded up with an icon, its image facing outwards – under its thick black surface a thirteenth-century Christ the Saviour was discovered. This icon now graces the Russian Paintings of Antiquity room in the Tretyakov). But the older generation, especially the old women, treated the icons with more reverence. For example, one day the Sinyavskys saw an icon, clearly very old, in one of the huts, and proposed to buy it. "No," said the owner, "If it's for a church, then

you can have it for nothing." "It's not for a church," said Andrey, and we went away empty-handed.

At that time the icon "Klondike," the current looting and pillaging of the whole expanse of what was ancient Russ had not yet started. While I am on this topic I need to run ahead of chronology, and recount here the sad story of the Kargopol Museum.

This was during the early 60s. During one of our journeys to the North, (without the Sinyavskys by this time), we went to the town of Kargopol. The Museum of local lore, history and economy was housed in the former cathedral in the main square. Here there were collections of exhibits of folk art from places which had been centres of artistic production in the North before the revolution. Spinning wheels, embroidery, lace, painted trays, objects crafted from birch bark, icons.....I have never since seen such a cornucopia of folk arts and craft. The museum director was a stocky fellow of about 50 (I think his name was Nikolay Ivanovich). We called on him in his office to get some advice about our onward journey. While we were talking two boys came in, clearly young pathfinders. "We've brought some icons, Nikolay Ivanovich." These were two large panels from a seventeenth century iconstasis. "Put them by the cupboard," said the director, without turning round.

December 1965, a couple of months after the arrest of Sinyavsky and Daniel: Alexander Yesenin-Volpin had organised a demonstration at Pushkin Square under the banners "Respect the Soviet constitution" and "We demand an open trial for Sinyavsky and Daniel" . Maya Sinyavsky was under great strain and we decided to take her to Kargopol for a time. There she would be far removed from the interrogations, from the attentions of the KGB, and from the sensation created by the trial. We wanted to give her a chance to recuperate. Four of us went. Maya, myself and our old friends Gleb Pospelov and his wife Masha Reformatskaya. Naturally the first thing we did was go to the museum. What we found there was like our worst nightmare. There were no art works whatsoever. One room was devoted to photographs of the Kargopol choir, which had won some sort of prize, another displayed a mammoth's tooth, a stuffed hare, a few other examples of local flora

and fauna and so on. Maya, with her characteristic nosiness, dashed off to the director to find out what had happened. The new woman director became flustered. "I know nothing about it. Go to the Culture Department at the town council." We set off for the town council, which was luckily very nearby – on the other side of the square. The head of the Culture Department, Comrade Nosova gave us a hostile reception. "What icons? We never had any icons. What do you want and who exactly are you?" In response to these questions Gleb produced a little red book from his pocket, on the cover of which was printed in gold letters: Ministry of Culture of the USSR (Gleb worked in the Scientific Research Institute of the History of Art attached to the ministry). Comrade Nosova quailed at the sight of this document. "Comrades.... actually, there was an unfortunate episode....." The story was indeed extraordinary. The former director was a simple man. He wasn't a drinker, but on the other hand he did send his children to study in Leningrad and had to support them there, and he earned a paltry salary. And Nikolay Ivanovich (let's call him that) began to sell off exhibits from the museum. At first one piece at a time, but then later, wholesale. People came from Moscow, loaded up their vehicles and drove off with the items, either for their own collections or in order to resell them. The most striking thing about this story is the fact that the money from the museum sales did not cover his fairly modest needs. But as well as being the museum director, he was also chairman of a hunting club, which was building some hunting lodges in the forest. So now he got mixed up in the hunting lodges scheme as well. For some reason no-one paid any attention to the misappropriation of the museum's collections. But now events turned from comedy to tragedy. Nikolay Ivanovich burnt all the inventory records, took an old pistol from a display case, went out of the museum and shot himself, leaving a note: "I request that I be buried like a dog, and that my fur coat be given to the person who buries me."

But it's time to go back to my travels with the Sinyavskys. Andrey's main interest was not so much icons as books. The Old Believers who had once lived in these regions had constructed in their cellars so-called hidey holes. Here some monk who had withdrawn from the world and

from the iniquitous (from the point of view of the followers of the old faith) church, would live and devote himself to copying books. The Sinyavskys had discovered one such hidey hole during their first journey and now they went there again, taking me with them. It was a large windowless space, as big as the whole area of the hut, with a low ceiling and it was literally packed to the gunnels with piles of paper. Manuscripts of the Lives of the Saints, the Apocrypha, early printed editions of the Bible, Lives of the Saints and Martyrs, Old Believer prayer books – all these were piled up in heaps on the floor like so much useless rubbish. The descendants of these bibliophiles, who still lived in the hut, had no interest in these books, didn't see their value and merely used them as cigarette papers.

"Give us a fiver and take as much as you can carry!" We loaded these treasures onto the boat, and then, as we were by now in the densely populated areas along the lower reaches of the Mezen, the Sinyavskys were able to post them to Khlebny Lane.

At that time I was more interested in 15th century Netherlandish painters than in old Russian texts. Whenever we stopped in a place I went fishing, and I enjoyed listening to Sinyavsky's conversations with the old people in the villages – about the past, about their life and faith. I was captivated by the way these local people lived, with their traditional, steady way of life, their enduring moral foundations, their readiness to help kith and kin. It was as if we had gone from the Soviet Union into some miraculously preserved fragment of old Rus. When our engine broke down a good half of the men of the village would cluster round this dratted piece of machinery to get it working again. They refused to take any money. The same thing happened when we wanted to pay for our night's lodging, (usually in a hayloft), or for milk or for the modest fare we ate. Maya had learned from her previous experience and brought a "Moment" camera with her, which could take a snap and produce a print on the spot. One morning when we climbed down from the hayloft we saw a touching sight in front of us. All down the street people were sitting decorously on the *zavalinkas* (earthen ledges) outside their huts, with modestly lowered gaze; old women, in what were obviously their best black dresses, young married

women in their finest clothes, some of them wearing their traditional head-dresses, children who had been washed, brushed and all dolled up. "Take their picture" – our hostess dug Maya in the ribs with her elbow. As a rule family photos were stuck up inside the huts, in the place where the iconostasis would have been in earlier times. Newly weds, deceased relatives, gallant soldiers – snaps sent from the army. But Maya was the first photographer to have appeared in these places for many a year.

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The Sinyavskys infected me with the North. After that, every summer – with rare exceptions – I would set off on a trip with various companions along various rivers – the Northern Dvina, the Vychegda, the Sluda....Once we got as far as the Solovetsky Islands[1] on board a rust bucket carrying a load of hay. That was the first year they lifted the ban on outsiders visiting this hellish spot. At that time it was a desolate and chaotic place. In the Cathedral of Peter and Paul we managed to get through a hole in the wall and go down to the lower rooms – there were corridors, piles of broken banners, placards, broken furniture, empty rooms – either investigators' offices or interrogation cells...but what struck me most of all was the loo: a long staircase ascended behind a small door, and at the top stood an enormous lavatory, like a tsar's throne. Evidently this facility was intended for the personal use of the head of the camp, or if not for him then for one of the most senior staff.

In the last years before I emigrated my favorite place for summer expeditions was the region of Shim Lake in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Komi. We had to get off the Leningrad-Arkhangelsk train at some little halt (the name escapes me), and then walk 50 kilometres

[1] The islands were originally famous for the Russian Orthodox Solovetsky Monastery complex which was founded in the 15th century. By the end of the 16th century, the abbey had emerged as one of the wealthiest and most influential religious centres in Russia. The islands became a penal colony in later tsarist times and after the October Revolution attained notoriety as the site of the first Soviet prison camp, inaugurated in 1921, under Lenin. It was closed in 1939, on the eve of the World War II. By the beginning of the war, there was a naval cadet training camp established there for the Soviet Northern Fleet.

lugging heavy rucksacks of provisions. During the war the route taking provisions to besieged Leningrad had passed through this region. The road surface had been pounded to bits and it had not been repaired since the war. Instead, the region had simply been abandoned. When we asked directions from the local people they replied," Ah, Shim Lake? There's no Soviet power there." There really was no Soviet power there. No electricity, no radio, no post office, no shops – all communications with this area had been cut off. According to the locals, there was another reason for these measures. Somewhere around there were secret underground aerodromes. No trace of them was visible, but sometimes during the day a thunderous noise would roar from the sky, making the fish in the lake jump a foot out of the water. Evidently jet fighters were breaking the sound barrier.

The Vepsi lived here – an Ugro-Finnish people, with their own language and at one time their own system of writing. They had not been expelled, they had simply been deprived of everything necessary for life. The young people and their families had dispersed to various places, just a few old people remained. Only one old man lived in the big village where we usually stayed and on the other side of the lake, two old women whom he took under his wing. The old man caught pike in the lake – enormous fish, two metres long – (I have never seen such fish since), dried them in the stove and in the winter snow he would go by sledge to sell his catch. He would bring back salt, matches, tea, sugar, with which he supplied his old women, as well keeping them stocked up with fish.

Perhaps it was my memories of Kolyma[1] that kindled my love for the North. Although the natural environment in northern Russia is nothing like the wooded tundra of Kolyma, the same kind of unpeopled emptiness, the same kind of wide horizons evoked a sensation, if not of actual liberty, then of free will. Although there were camps and criminals aplenty in the republic of Komi too.

[1] As a boy Golomstock had spent four years in Kolyma, a notorious prison camp in the Outer Far East region where his mother served as a doctor.

Sovereign Antifascism

Lev Rubinshtein
Translated from the Russian by Holt Meyer

Something happened in Russian language during World War II and all the more after the war – that war which supposedly ended with the stunning victory of a "progressive" social system. In this time period, the Soviet leadership usurped the word "antifascism" and rode it into the ground. As the years went by, its meaning became unbelievably flexible. The word "antifascist" developed a truly miraculous capability to be narrowed down or to be widened. It could cross almost any border and take on completely unexpected meanings, meanings which were at times practically incomprehensible.

This version of "antifascism" is a good example of universal Soviet style generic word packaging. It has a boundless breadth of meaning, and is used with typical Russian generosity even now. Any ideology, any social phenomenon imaginable is termed "fascism" as soon as it displeases the speaker in question.

A German friend of mine, an expert in Slavonics who is studying the language of contemporary Russian journalism, asked me recently: "I came across a strange combination of words in an article written by one of your right wing journalists: 'liberal fascism.' What's that? Is it even possible to say that?" "Here, it is possible," I said. I was slightly irritated, and my irritation was caused by two things at the same time: first of all, by the exponentially growing degree of patriotic idiocy all around, and secondly by the disastrous and at the same time traditional inability of Western and Central European intellectuals to grasp the simplest things. "Here, it is possible," I told him. "Where 'sovereign democracy' is possible, 'liberal fascism' is just as possible. So stop already. Don't be so surprised."

As for attacking him for "being surprised"… of course, I had gotten too worked up at this moment. All the more considering the fact that I can't get used to not getting astounded myself, since this would mean my intellectual capitulation.

"Haven't they read Orwell?" – my clever European retorted, refusing to calm down. "Yes, they've read Orwell," I said with firm conviction. – It's just that this reading didn't shock them like it did you and me. It inspired them. If you really want to know, Orwell is the secret to Russian soul in the pocket of the powers that be.

Thus, who could blame our flaming antifascists for being particularly spirited when stories like this one pop up in the news: "Today there was a meeting of the veterans of the 20th division of the Estonian SS and of the "Union of Fighters for the Liberation of Estonia," as well as the "Society of Friends of the Estonian Legion." And who's business is it that the news item continued in this way: "In the proximity of the place where the SS members were meeting, antifascists organized a demonstration. They brought barbed wire and photographs of Nazi war crimes … The participants in the demonstration addressed the Estonian government, stating that supporting Nazis is unacceptable." And what does it matter that in a free country there are all types of people and things. What does it matter that all of these dreadful legionnaires who managed to survive to be such unhappy old men had already been condemned in court for their real or supposed membership in the legions and had gone through all the ordeals of banishment to the endless expanses of Siberia? What does it matter that together with them other compatriots worked in the camps who had nothing to do with any legions and whose only crime was that Stalin "wished to fill his belly."

No! That's not the issue at all! The issue is that the beast of fascism is raising its head once again in the Baltic countries. This is something we can't ignore! Is that what we liberated Europe not only from Hitler, but also from pernicious Western pseudo-democracy for? Anyway, it wouldn't be so bad if the "Balts" had just fought on Hitler's side… it's impossible to tell how many people fought on Hitler's side. But they fought against their big and powerful benefactor, their neighbor in the

East! They fought against a friendly neighbor who wanted nothing else but to bring them light and culture.

Again, it has become normal to turn everyone who rocks the boat into a fascist, particularly if it is the boat of the "forces from above." For them, all these legionnaires and SS units are a gift from heaven. They provide the "antifascists" with all the catchwords they need.

"The Baltic powers provide protection for a group of Nazis, and this says a lot about their sympathies" – these words of a contemporary internet activist of the "antifascist front" could just as easily have been spoken at a demonstration at the Stalin automobile factory in 1937.

"My dear friend," I say to this activist in a somewhat pedagogical tone, – no one is providing protection for anyone. And this is not a group of Nazis. And all this has nothing to do with anyone's sympathies. Just relax, friend. The best thing for you to do is to go to one of these Baltic countries and see for yourself how much fascism you will find there. Your mantras only work on people who read nothing but "Izvestiia," watch nothing but the official news program "Vremia," and who have never left their dear Khriupin or whatever tiny little village they live in – even if this village, under the influence of the provincial "powers from above," has spread out across the whole huge country."

People fighting "nazism" in the Baltic countries often add in the argument that those very legionnaires during the German occupation were quite active in the so-called "final solution of the Jewish question."

I have no doubt that many actively contributed. Not all, but good number of them did, that's true. But it is not only in the Baltic states that you find a good number of such people. It is not a big secret that the representatives of all sorts of cultural groups in our great country were also active to varying degrees in racial discriminaton. While the gold-plated role models of "brother peoples" were dancing their somnambulistic dance around the fountain "The Friendship of Peoples" in the Moscow exposition center "VDNKh," others, in occupied territories where fate caught up with them, others who were made of much cheaper materials, enthusiastically took part in huge "Saturdays for racial purity." These people had no SS insignias, and were not members of any "legions." An ordinary police armband was

enough for that kind of noble labor. It is well known that war is horror always, even you are fighting for the highest ideals, for your home, for your relatives, for freedom. War kills and maims not only physically. It maims the soul and dislocates the brain. It mobilizes people's lowest and darkest attributes. But also their most noble and heroic attributes. It is simply war.

Two of my mother's aunts were murdered in Babii Yar because they were betrayed by a neighbor with whom they had lived in friendship for many years. And another aunt in that same town Kiev was saved because a neighbor hid her for a long time in her own house, and then managed to get her to relatives in a village. None of the villagers betrayed her, and in a village you can't hide anything from anyone.

All sorts of things happened.

In the 70s and 80s, I went on vacation almost every year in Estonia. Each year I went to he same little fisherman's village on the sea. I rented a veranda from the same people every time. The only other people living in this relatively large house were an older couple. They reminded me of Pushkin's "Fairy Tale of the Fisherman and the Fish," particularly since the old man was constantly fixing his nets, like Pushkin's fisherman. The old lady did not exactly "spin her yarn"… rather she constantly nagged her husband. She did this in Estonian, of course, but I could tell she was nagging him by his facial expression, be it guilty or annoyed.

The old man could be silent for days on end, and even when I greeted him he was somehow gloomy. At first I thought he didn't like something about me. Then I understood that was just the way he was.

On working days, he went out with his fishing nets, but every Friday evening he got drunk. After he got drunk, he harnessed the horse, and with a terrible roar he gave children a ride on the main street of the village. Then he came home, sat down on a stool and sang loudly – and he sang surprisingly well. The old lady walked by and just sighed sadly. Then he came with a bottle of self-made vodka in his hand and knocked on my door. I let him in and he sat down, poured two glasses of that terrible stuff. And suddenly, in perfect Russian, he began to tell tales about Siberia. Each episode of his endless stories,

which were, as a rule, very scary, ended the same way: "You are not to blame."

Of course, I sort of knew myself that I was not to blame. But it was pretty difficult to look in his eyes when he said that.

Then came the old woman scolded him for something again. Then she apologized to me for the trouble and lead her husband off to sleep. Then there was a little more shouting and singing, but not really from the heart… more for the sake of order, And then the sounds died away.

However early I managed to wake on the next day, there he was sitting in front of his barn, silently fixing his fishnet. He answered my cheerful "tere!" with a short gloomy nod.

One day or another one of the other vacationers whispered to me that, during the war, my host, then still almost a boy, had gone off to fight on the side of the Germans. Many boys from those parts had done the same. They didn't really have a choice. No one was going to fight for the Red Army after someone from almost every family was sent to Siberia during the first Soviet occupation after the Hitler-Stalin pact. After the war, he too was on the road to Siberia.

On the next Friday, everything was as usual. The old man got drunk, harnessed the horse, gave the village children a ride through the streets, sang, and then came to me with his treasured bottle. Again, he told me terrible stories of Siberia. Again, he finished his story with the words "You are not to blame." This time, I dared to look him in the eye. I told him: "Neither are you."

"With These Cool and Courteous People Behind Him": Collective Diary, 1937

Selected and edited by Maria Bessmertnaia

Translated from the Russian by E. K. Krafft

On honor of the Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Political Repression, Maria Bessmertnaia has curated a collective diary from 1937. This diary illustrates that the victims of this extended terror were not only those who were arrested, but also those who escaped arrest.

JANUARY

January 4

I am very worried about the psychological state of my wife. Over the last six or seven years, her character has changed dramatically. She has become very irritable, constantly yelling at the children, at me, and at our household help. She has also begun to develop persecution paranoia; she sees spies from the State Political Directorate everywhere, and it seems to her that even our nearest and dearest are secret agents.

Lev Nikolaev, anthropologist, anatomist, 39 / Diary

January 25

A few words about January: the twelve days of vacation were pleasant, though we stayed at home, rather than traveling <...> The second trial of Trotskyists is going on now. Terrible things are coming to light. They're probably shooting everyone.

Nina Kosterina, schoolgirl, 16 / Diary

Red Square rally dedicated to the Supreme Court's verdict on the Trotskyists. Photo: photo-archive "Ogonek."

January 26

Why are they so easily recognizable, carrying themselves like red-handed petty thieves? These tired old politics have seen better days. Everyone will soon be repenting in the cells at Lubianka – does this mean that they will realize their trespasses?

Aleksandr Gladkov, playwright, screenwriter, 25 / Diary

FEBRUARY

February 9

It's already become a surprise to me when someone says something good about someone else, or even something not quite bad. When people talk about each other now, it seems that they are crunching, chewing on broken bodies. Even the movements of the mouth when speaking these words are disgusting, gnashing, gnawing. Everyone is fighting.

Aleksandr Arosev, diplomat, 47 / Diary

February 16

The Second Moscow Trial, the trial of the Parallel Anti-Soviet Trotskyist-Center, and surrounding parallel phenomena – what a luxurious subject for reflection! A great dramatic event worthy of the lines of Shakespeare, the notes of Wagner, the brush of David. To the fool heart of the intellectual, it offers an incomparable setting for the blood to run cold. The political mind tragically finds an obliging environment for self-reflection and fortification. To the historian: a dizzying expanse, history. There she is, laid out on a platter, layered with spice and flavor. All that remains is to chew.

Nikolai Ustrialov, philosopher, 49 / Diary

Poster: "Long Live Stalin's Constitution," 1937.
Photo: DIOMEDIA / Superstock FineArt.

February 17

Everyone, everyone without exception knows that what's happening in Russia is something nightmarish and terrible, and that it is all exclusively due to the fact that Russia is being run by enemies of Russia and the Russian people, enemies with no understanding of our civil society, who thought up some utopian and senseless system

of a collective farm-life for the people, which is realized only through coercion and terror.

Evdokim Nikolaev, senior telegraph mechanic, 65 / Diary

February 26 (?)

February 22 brought me some misfortune: when I was presenting a report about the nineteenth anniversary of the Red Army at a meeting of the workers of the Machine and Tractor Station, I was accused of smuggling contraband. As an honest citizen of our beautiful homeland, I could not endure such grotesque slander. I do ask for an investigation. Farewell, darling, loving leader, teacher, father, and friend, dear comrade Stalin. All my life I have hated enemies of the people, thrice cursed Trotsky and his followers, and now I am accused of being among them, and of slandering V.I. Lenin.

Dmitrii Ivanov, administrator of the Perm machine and tractor station / Suicide note

MARCH

March 3

They killed Kirov – for this one bastard, how much blood has been spilled, how many families have been ruined? And you cry out that it is the anger of the people, that it is the people that demand death. Liars, bandits, bloodsuckers – these are your words, not the people's. The people don't need this – the people need healthy, full, and cultured lives, and these words of yours are only for maintaining your continued hold on power.

Anna Pavlova, seamstress, 43 / Letter to Comrade Stalin

March 5

It's happened, the trial of the Trotskyists. My soul burns with anger and hatred; simple executions do not satisfy me. I would like it if they were tortured, broken on the wheel, burned for all the

abominations they committed. Peddlers of the homeland, rabble sucking from the Party.

Maria Svanidze, singer, 48 / Diary

March 27

In the "Literary Gazette," there is a report on the General Meeting of the Leningrad writers. The atmosphere is one of denunciations and censure.

Aleksandr Gladkov, playwright, screenwriter, 25 / Diary

APRIL

April 17

I am a shadow. There is no me. I have only one right – to die. My wife and I edge toward suicide. There's no turning to the Writer's Union – it's useless. They wash their hands of it. There is only one person in the world to whom all of this could be and should be addressed <...> If you want to save me from inevitable death – to save two people – write. Convince others to write.

Osip Mandel'shtam, poet, 46 / Letter to Kornei Chukovskii

April 17

I was upset, angered by these two or three calls from M<andel'shtam>. Such unshakable, mercurial egotism. This need; everyone has this need for limitless attention to themselves, to their problems and their sickness. "World history" is in the air around them. "World history" – and no less – is their personal fate; it is their own biography.

Elikonida Popova, Director, 34 / Diary

April 20

The Party Committee of the Union of Writers excluded the "Trotskyist" S. Vinogradskaia, that old "collaborator," author of the book on Jenny Marx and reminiscences of Esenin; former Secretary of

the Party Committee Marchenko; Dmitrievskii; and someone else. The "Literary Gazette" called Averbakh "notorious." He was recently seen walking through Moscow, but it seems that he was already arrested. There is a rumor of the arrest of Liadov, the director of the Maly Theater. There is a rumor of the disgrace of Krestinskii.

Aleksandr Gladkov, playwright, screenwriter, 25 / Diary

Poster for the 20th Anniversary of the October Revolution, 1937. Iraklii Toidze. Photo: DIOMEDIA / Fine Art Images.

April 24

In the morning – a conference. Secretary of the Party Persits did not fail to continue to slander me. The conference is difficult for me: most regard me as an enemy or a leper, and when we meet, they avert their eyes and try to steal away.

Aleksandr Arosev, diplomat, 47 / Diary

April 23 (?)

I could not imagine that a nearly illiterate woman like Mama could be considered a Trotskyist… In my worst nightmares, I couldn't imagine that they would arrest her now for her old sins – her Kulak past – when her current life is absolutely sinless.

Stepan Podlubnyi, peasant, 21 / Diary

MAY

May 24

The other day at our house on Znamenskii Boulevard, they arrested the engineer K. – a modest and pale man, a member of the Party, but without any significant ties to higher-ups. He seemed to me to be orthodox, even meek. It's difficult to suspect this tidy and ordinary man of any kind of rebellion.

Aleksandr Gladkov, playwright, screenwriter, 25 / Diary

May 25

On the night of the 25th of May, they came knocking. We were resting at home when nine NKVD officials and the director entered. They did a thorough search, told Vladek to get dressed. I, absolutely petrified, stared at Vladek, but I couldn't move. Vladek noticed my state, came to me, took my hands in his, warm and kind, and said calmly, "Don't worry, my love, my darling. Take care of yourself and the children. It's some kind of terrible provocation on the part of the Polish Defense. I will clear everything up and return soon." He kissed me, stroked the sleeping Olesik on the head, came back to me once more, embraced me, kissed me, and left.

Marylia Kraevskaia (wife of Vladek Kraevskii), teacher, age unknown / Memoirs

May 30

The day beforehand, my father and I were at the dacha in Sviatoshina, near Kiev. The telephone rang; they asked for my father.

Voroshilov said to him: "Leave quickly for Moscow, for a meeting of the Military Council." It was the second half of the day. My father replied that there were no more trains to Moscow that day, and he asked permission to fly. "Not necessary. Take the first train tomorrow."

The Moscow train left the next day at 3:15 in the afternoon. I accompanied my father to the station. His mood was anxious; he knew that over the course of the last few weeks, several generals had been arrested, among them Mikhail Nikolaevich Tukhachevskii. As we parted, he said to me, "Be true to yourself, son!" As the train started moving, I saw that a few people in NKVD uniforms jumped onto the previous car (the lounge car, on which my father was traveling, was last).

Petr Yakir, schoolboy (future dissident), 14 / "Childhood in Prison: Memoirs of Petr Yakir"

JUNE

June 1

An even worse period has come for me. In children's publications, they found fault with my verse, and began to persecute me. I stopped publishing. They're not paying me out any money, on account of some random delays. I feel that something evil is happening, something secret. We have nothing to eat. We are terribly hungry. I know that the end is coming soon.

Daniil Kharms, poet, 32 / Diary

June 8

Such a terrible story about Professor Pletnev. In "Pravda," there is an article without a byline. "The professor is a sadistic tyrant." Supposedly, in 1934, he grabbed a patient, bit her on the breast, and she developed some kind of incurable illness. The patient came after him. Madness.

Elena Bulgakova (wife of writer Mikhail Bulgakov), translator, literary secretary, 44 / Diary

June 14

"I did not give anyone the right to be in charge of the life and death of other people," raged Pasternak, when they came to him for a signature. "It's not, after all, just a free pass to the theater."

Zinaida Neuhaus (wife of poet Boris Pasternak), 41 / Memoirs

June 19

I dreamed of mountains, rivers, and movement. Going. Stopping. There's a beautiful church on the right. Or – is it a prison? I'm afraid of it.

Andrei Arzhilovskii, peasant, 52 / Diary

Poster for the 100th anniversary of the death of A.A. Pushkin, 1937.

June 21

Confidential. In the harsh and decisive response to espionage, they don't believe either foreigners or the general local populace. The suspicion of Stalin, and of everyone against everyone else, is enough for their verdicts... Fostering widespread uncertainty, disbelief between one and all, they do damage to the army's morale.

Ernst Kestring, German military attache in Moscow, 61 / Telegram to Berlin

June 22

Today my mother woke me up and said:

"Yura! Get up, I need to tell you something."

I rubbed my eyes.

Tania got up out of bed.

"Last night," began my mother in a trembling voice, "something terrible happened... they arrested your father." She was nearly in tears.

We were in shock…

Today is the most awful day…

Iurii Trifonov, schoolboy, 12 / Diary

JULY

July 16

When the NKVD came for grandfather, there were no adults at home – they were working in the hayfields at the Kolkhoz. Katia ran out to them, and our mother came back from the field. They began a search. They broke everything, even looking behind the icons, overturning the earth in the cellar, in the stable, in the garden. They searched for weapons, anti-Soviet literature... And where would my illiterate grandpa have gotten such a thing? Of course they didn't find anything, but they put my grandfather in prison, anyway, despite the fact that he was an invalid: he returned without legs from the Civil War.

Valentina Pushina, schoolgirl, 10 / Memoirs

July 24

My neighbor said to me: "The worst thing for me is that I've already stopped feeling anything, say with the trial of Kamenev, or Zinov'ev – I'm already used to it. It doesn't affect me as it did before. Well, after all, half the Central Committee is gone – that's how you get used to it."

Iuliia Sokolova-Piatnitskaia, engineer, 39 / Diary

July 28

Two men came to the apartment. At the time, I was getting ready to nurse my tiny baby. They said that they were summoning me to the authorities, that I had about ten minutes and I should hurry up. I handed my daughter to my niece and went with them, hoping that I would quickly return. I sat at the police station for longer than an hour. I knew that my sweet little girl was hungry, crying, and I asked the officers to allow me to run off for just a short time, to feed my child. But they didn't even hear me. They kept me at the station until very late, and at night I was taken to prison.

Vera Lazutkina, upholsterer, 25 / Memoirs

AUGUST

August 7

Walking down the street and looking at different characters and faces, I often thought – how did this happen, how did these millions of people mask themselves, and with their social status, education, and intellect, how is that they were unable to accept the Soviet system, were unable to keep in step with workers and poor peasants, with Socialism and Communism? And here, these chameleons, on the twentieth anniversary of the revolution, were revealed in all their false garb.

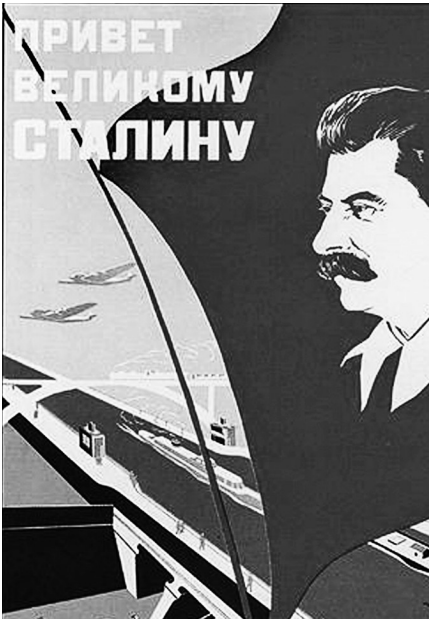
Mariia Svanidze, singer, 48 / Diary

August 22

Something exceptionally terrible happened to our landlords. Today at around twelve, our landlord suddenly came back from work. He was followed by two men, and they began a search. They searched our landlord's

half of the place, and then they moved on to ours. These people, they were full of some kind of icy courtesy. I was completely numb and unable to make even a single movement <…> Then we heard the landlord, loudly and with despair, as if restraining tears, ask: "Please, I beg of you…" <…> Marusia clung to him with such anguish that I overflowed with tears. With difficulty, he finally managed to wrench himself from his daughter and quickly left, with these cool and courteous people behind him.

Nina Kosterina, schoolgirl, 16 / Diary



Poster for the opening of the Moscow Canal – Volga, 1937.

August 25

My father left for the night shift at work. In the daytime, we had been cutting wood together. As he left, he said goodbye sadly, hugging the children. They arrested him at work. I woke up that night to the sound of footsteps – a few people in boots were coming down our long hall. They knocked on our

door. A guard brought our father in, and they started a search. They sat our father at a distance from us, and they wouldn't let him talk. My mother sat with my younger sister on her lap. They didn't find anything. They told my father: "Get yourself together." At the door, my father turned to us and said: "Children, I am not guilty of anything." My sister cried, and my mother turned to stone.

Ol'ga Burovaia, schoolgirl, 14 / Memoirs

SEPTEMBER

September 1

Depressing, this atmosphere of arrests that we live in. You keep hearing: arrested for something-or-other, for something-or-other… It seems that they are tearing apart whole groups, whole populations of people on the rack. The feeling is that shells are exploding all around, taking out whole rows of people. And you wait – will it hit you, or not?

Aleksandr Bek, writer, 35 / Diary

September 5

They were sitting in the garden under the trees when the military man came through the gate. Mama said: "This is for me," and then she got up to meet our "guest." <…> Mama kissed me with a sort of finality, asked again what would become of her daughter, and they took her away in a small, swift car. A short time later, this car came back for me. I don't remember whether or not I cried. I think not. It was already 10 o'clock when we pulled up to a high fence. On the gate was written "State Children's Services: Processing Center."

Vladimira Uborevich, schoolgirl, 13 / Letter to Elena Bulgakova

September 21

Yes – if this is the beginning of a global catastrophe, and if we are waiting for the end of the world, we may as well just lay ourselves down in the coffin. But this is already happening, there is already war, and so look, it will all happen, without catastrophe.

Mikhail Prishvin, writer, 64 / Diary

OCTOBER

October 1

Time passes with no family incidents, and the building tension creates such anxious suspicion everywhere that the very fact that innocent correspondence with family from abroad can lead to misunderstandings compels one to abstain from it.

Boris Pasternak, poet, 47 / Letter to parents

October 7

After the turmoils, which are reaching a crescendo, but obviously before the final catastrophe – work falls by the wayside.

Vasilii Alekseev, philologist and sinologist, 56 / Diary

Poster "Wipe the Trotskyist Enemy of the People and His Whole Bloody Band of Fascists From the Face of the Earth!" 1937, Viktor Denni. Photo: DIOMEDIA / Fine Art Images.

October 9

The nation, held captive by their own government – is this possible? People no longer trust each other; they simply work, now without so much as a whisper.

Mikhail Prishvin, writer, 64 / Diary

October 10

Life no longer leaves me in peace. Today I experienced one of the most bitter disappointments of the last few months. I found out that Vsevelod Ivanov not only voted for my expulsion from the Union (even if it was on account of his weakness, and his desire to live in peace with Stavskii), but he also came forward against Seifullina. He insisted on my expulsion, and signed a letter demanding the exclusion of my whole division <…> Why, then, is it necessary for him to be on good terms with me, to call me his friend, only to stab me in the back?

Aleksandr Afinogenov, playwright, 33 / Diary

October 13

Father sent me to the store to buy groceries. When I returned, a search had begun at our home. They didn't find anything, because there was nothing to find. They took a book of Lenin, put my father's passport in it, and took him to the city. His last words to us: "Children, don't cry, I will be back soon. I am not guilty of anything. It's some kind of mistake…"

Natal'ia Savel'eva, schoolgirl, 13 / Memoirs

October 22

And our consciousness is so muted that impressions slide over us, as over a smooth, lacquered surface. To hear, all night, the death of living and most likely innocent people, and to not go crazy... to fall asleep after that, to continue to live as if nothing happened. Such a nightmare.

Liubov' Shaporina, artist, 58 / Diary

NOVEMBER

November 4

Hello, dear father, mother, Kostia and Vovochka… You know that I am not guilty, but these days, there is no use in hoping that we can count on some reprieve. Know that I have never been an enemy of the people, and I have never caused any harm. I hope that you know that. For me, it will be easier if my family doesn't think that I'm a criminal <…> There is nothing to say about me, and in particular I plead with Papa: it is better to say that I don't exist, that you don't know anything about me, else I fear that they will find fault with you.

Nikolai Zadorozhniuk / Letter to parents

November 7

Hello, dear papa! I promised you (through Lialia) that I would write my impressions on the anniversary of the October Revolution, November 7. The picture this year is quite different compared to previous years. There is none of that former enthusiasm and joy amongst the demonstrators. Many of them are not there by their own wishes, but by force (to avoid the rack or the pillory).

Zhena Lugovskaia, student, 20 / Letter to father

November 11

My father had seen a lot, and as articles appeared in the newspaper, accusing him of being an "enemy of the people," he knew that they would put him in prison. Late at night, when everyone was already laying in bed, there was a demanding knock. I was sleeping on a cot close to the door. In my nightgown and with bare feet, I got up and answered it. Two men in black coats swiftly pushed in and asked for my father <…> They broke everything in the apartment, and methodically looked through all the books and my father's closet. They took his diaries and his weapons, which he had permission to possess. Mother and I were stunned.

When they took my father away, he said to us: "Don't worry, I'll return, they will understand," and then, turning to me: "No more opening the door for anyone anymore."

Klara Kyzlasova, schoolgirl, 10 / Memoirs

November 16

We woke at 2 a.m. There was a search underway in the apartment. Horror. The search ended at one o'clock in the afternoon, and they took papa.Terrible. He said goodbye with his chin up. His last words to me: "Be a good member of the Komsomol, and take care of your mother." In school I got two excellent marks. In German and geometry. I can't write. It's awful. Only Pasha at school knows. I went to bed at 8.

Oleg Chernevskii, schoolboy, 16 / Diary

DECEMBER

December 20

A friend of father's from the Far East, Esfir' Pavlovna, arrived; she had called us. Mama wasn't there, and I did the talking. She asked how things were going for us. I said that Uncle Misha and Aunt Anya had been arrested and that nothing more was known about them, and that Irma, my sister, was in a children's home. I had heard that Uncle Vasia, my father's brother, had been expelled from the Party; he allegedly said that he liked Lenin better than Stalin. <...> When I finished talking, my grandmother immediately pounced on me: why do I tell everyone everything? I said that Esfir' Pavlovna knows Papa, and that in general I never hid anything, and that I talk openly at school. She set in on me, shouting, demanding to know why I dared act in such a way, telling me that none of it concerned me <...> Clearly, they are all afraid – my aunt and my grandmother. I felt such despair after that squabble.

Nina Kosterina, schoolgirl, 16 / Diary

Poster for the Supreme Council Election Day, 1937.

December 18

In the evening (I don't remember where I was returning from), they were already waiting for me. They took me to Kresty Prison. The cell was packed to the brim. We stood, crammed together, all night. Many were crying. In the morning, we were summoned one by one, and they took all of our jewelry, throwing it all together – earrings, brooches, pendants, rings – and led us to cells. In our cell, there were already about thirty people. No cots, no benches, no beds. It seemed to me that I was going mad, and I unwittingly recoiled – almost everyone swayed, rags blowing in the wind. It was very stuffy.

Liudmila Granovskaia (wife of Yuzef Los'-Loseva), student, 22 / Memoirs

December 31

The year is ending. It has left me with a bitter taste.

Elena Bulgakova (wife of writer Mikhail Bulgakov), translator, 44 / Diary

A Diary Entry

Georgy Efron
Translated from the Russian by Olga Zaslavsky

Translator's Introduction

The text below is a June 8, 1943 entry from Diary # 16 by Georgy Efron, the son of the poet Marina Tsvetaeva, published in *The Diaries of Georgy Efron, 1942-1943 (The Tashkent Period*), translated and with an introduction by Olga Zaslavsky, prefaced by Veronique Lossky (The Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston, NY, 2010, pp. 97-99). The original diaries by G. Efron, written in Russian and French, appear in Efron, Georgy. *Dnevniki. V dvukh tomax*. Edited by E.B. Korkina and V.K. Lossky. Moskva: Vagrius, 2004. V.I, 557pp. V. II, 366pp. This particular entry is a translation from v.II (pp. 254-256). In Tashkent, a major Soviet evacuation center during World War II and the setting of the diaries, Efron is an orphaned teenager, having lost both his parents: his mother — to suicide and his father, Sergey Efron (a White Army officer turned NKVD agent in France and repatriated to the Soviet Union) — to execution. His sister, Ariadna Efron, is, at the time, in a Soviet labor camp, serving a long sentence. The diaries, written in two languages — Russian and French — are a testament to Efron's lonely survival in Tashkent in the course of a year — between 1942 and 1943 — and to the hardships and rare merriments of Tashkent's evacuation life. In the diaries, Efron's undoubted brilliance comes forth: his quick judgments on the ongoing world politics, the books he consumes in large quantities, and his views on his fellow evacuees, one of whom was the poet Anna Akhmatova, all provide a wealth of

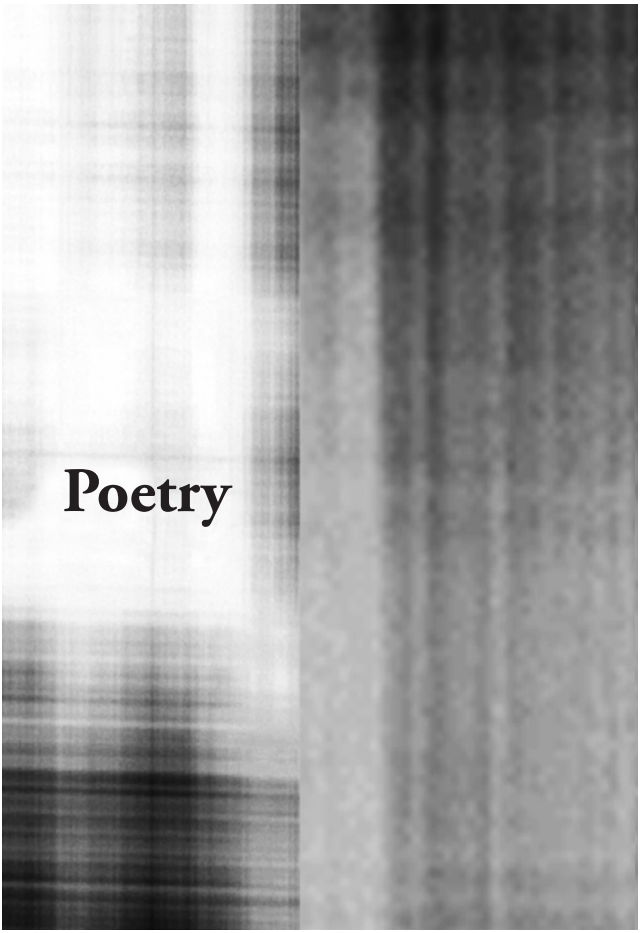
information. The tone of the diaries is in constant flux: Efron can be sophisticated and naïve, pleading and judgmental, in a way, natural to a growing adolescent. All in all, a year in the life of this young person, who eventually dies as a soldier at a Belorussian front, passes before the reader's eyes. In these diaries, Efron's voice makes his personal situation and the events of the past come to life in the most vivid way.

June 8, 1943

So, this morning the dilemma, whether I am going to the army or will work in manufacture, will be solved. Having carefully weighed *le pour et le contre* [pros and cons], I'd be happier with the latter. I don't see myself in the military barracks at all or doing military exercises. I think that, physically, I couldn't handle such pressure. Besides, I feel alienated by any kind of drills and, in addition, there is a risk of dying at the front after all. In general, though, I feel indifferent, as Merezhkovsky said, "Whatever happens, happens." The outcome of events does not depend on me, so the only thing that remains is not to give a damn, whatever the outcome, and to try *faire contre mauvaise fortune bon coeur* [endure bad times with a smile]. Today the bedbugs were eating me alive. After getting up early, I have started to squash them, first on my mattress and, then, on the wooden planks that make up the frame of my bed. I absolutely have to hang out the mattress to dry in the sun, to pour boiling water on the planks, and to put those out in the sun as well. My only fear is that all of that may be snatched away from the yard. Returned the books to the Union yesterday. Lucked out yesterday: using the 4th pass, received 450 grams of herring at the deli, which sold for 130 rubles. Thanks to that, in the evening was able to eat 6 bagels with butter and half a kilo of home fries with onions. Last night my tooth hurt badly; it wasn't even that much of a tooth, but a disgusting *chicot* [stump]. Have decided to write a novel, but there is so much noise in the building all day (it's the so-called "dorm"!), and my head is full of chaotic forebodings that I can't do any serious writing. My livelihood problems are as follows: first, I am left without

a coat after getting rid of the fur coat. Absolutely have to buy a padded jacket. Second, I must buy soap, so I can wash myself. Third, there is a problem with the laundry. I have been wearing dirty underwear, dirty pants, no one would agree to do my laundry without soap, but, even with soap in hand, I couldn't ask anyone. The families in our dorm hire a laundry woman to do large loads, including bed sheets, etc. They provide her with soap, a laundry dish, and also offer her food. I, on the contrary, can not afford anything of the sort. The money I am able to get is spent on food because I have to eat; I keep putting off buying soap, and, that way, I continue wearing dirty clothes and feeling ashamed of all this filth. It's a vicious circle. How much would a padded jacket cost these days? It's hot now, so I don't think a padded jacket at the market would be that expensive. I have to take a look at it. Actually, all this discussion and various plans are only good if I stay in Tashkent and have to think of how to arrange my life in a more or less reasonable way. But if I am sent off to a military school or work outside of Tashkent, then, *tout cela* [all that] besides soap, of course, stops having any relevance for today. By the way, what am I supposed to write Mulya and Alya about my fate? Imagine, in a few hours I will know what to expect, while now I still don't know anything. If you look at all my Tashkent life up to today's turning point, I could say that my life has been boring, lonely, and uncomfortable. The only happy point was appeasing my hunger. Everything was in service of that; all my thoughts were directed at pleasing my body's primitive needs. During this period I finished (practically, not formally yet) 10 grades [high school] and received a secondary education. During this year and a half of my Tashkent life, I have read a great deal. Some of these books will stay in my memory, such as Feuchtwanger's *Success*; *The Adolescent* and *The Possessed* by Dostoevsky, *The Fall of Paris* and *Trust D.E.* by Ehrenburg, *The Men who Betrayed France*, *The Men of Good Will* by Jules Romains, Sholokohov's *Virgin Soil Upturned,* Karel Čapek *The Mother* and others. I am not sorry about anything: I have seen, suffered, and felt a lot in this year and a half. If, at this time, I am morally weakened, if nothing really interests me any longer, if I am not in an enviable state financially, still, the overall sum of the impressions

I have gained from my Tashkent stay and all my feelings and suffering will some day amount to something in terms of life experience and in terms of the most abundant material for the kind of novel I would like to write and which, without a doubt, I will write some day. But for now, I have to repeat together with V. Berestov, "Our path is hard, but we shall overcome it, enduring, suffering, and fighting, passing through the dull rain of routine, through hunger, cold, suffering and filth."


Poetry

The Immigrant, Five Poems

Anton Yakovlev

Many Still Speak of Her

But they all mispronounce her name
to pretend they're speaking of someone else.

Owls turn their heads 180 degrees
to avoid her eyes when she walks by.

She asks for directions, and no one answers.
She just wanders around.

Only a few people have ever touched her,
and those who have scratch at their skin.

It's apple season,
but there are bones in the orchard.

No one remembers her dimples.

Anton Yakovlev

The Immigrant

You bake the pregnant pauses in your small talk,
disarm love in military time,
sprinkle hot sauce in your image
until your solitude becomes a sky.

You threaten the sky with vertigo.

Later, you invite it to dinner.

Oceans huddle in your breast pocket.

–

When you cut film,
your strokes are so severe,
even fresh snow is meat.

Tomorrow you will speak so many languages,
no one will be able to reconstruct
the molecules of your equivocations.

One cannot write enough manuals
to guide anyone through you.

–

Don't talk displacement.
Don't beg for spare infatuation.
Oceans spill out the moment you change your shirt.

Stop fidgeting with your kaleidoscope.
Hold a hand, say hi, have dessert.
Unpack your bags.

It's been twenty years.

Feel the melancholy.

Frog Pond

Your parade of suicidal catamarans
cut such an enticing shooting-star
curve in my oubliettes,
I told you I enjoyed spending time with you
in a clearance summer
in a vacuum timetable.

I didn't do a lot of breathing.

But no matter how much you sang,
your teeth were Stonehenge,
or typewriter keys.

My pastor told me your commuter rail
was made of wooden beetles,
so I made myself sleepy.

I was a kettle,
and you an ice cream accident.

Tonight, in a throwback compound,
your flag has shadowed the grass
I'm made of.
You look at me.

Sorry, homey.

Your ghost has solidified.

Anton Yakovlev

Ordinary Impalers

You punch a pickpocket to thwart him
then doubt your right to keep your own wallet.

You listen to the sirens on the radio
but get sidetracked by a burp half a block away.

How could you ever hope to glow in the dark?

It's April Fools',
so pretend we can cheer each other,
even if it's Russian Roulette we play.

I'll sip some Poland Spring,
wear my lucky coat,
and walk with you past the cliffs.

Those inclined to solve mysteries
can't help seeing murders around them.
I'll gently wave my hand in front of your face
until you're so dizzy you can't remember *who done it*.

It's not midnight yet. Force your aorta to oxygenate.

Won't you pick up some garbage
from that toppled can
and make origami?

Every time the crosswalk walking man
changes back to a red hand stop,
the festival in your eyes
burns down.

It's Ash Wednesday.

The Samurai Season

Move along, nothing more to see here.
The beheadings have all been moved to museums.
We're all here only by the grace of
shutting up – a miniature survival.

Reaching the lookout, you praise the epicurean landscape,
set aside the miserable sticks and stowaways of your child.
You keep readjusting your glow,
you underdog you. In the samurai season, religion
is a kind of ballad, sprinkled with fresh skeletons of birds.

Never mind the pervasive spectacular feathers.
Open your mouth, and the entire forest disappears.

Kidnapping

Polina Barskova

Translated from the Russian by Georgina Barker

Demeter.
Hades.
Persephone.

Demeter, head propped on her hand,
Sat on the porch.
Picked through
The blind mulch of last year's potatoes.
The agony of July presaged
Windlessness, and drought, and inactivity.
Her child, a coddled adolescent,
Darling of animals and servants,
Sniffed at the swift flow
And lacy cloud of pollen.

Their feelings were wound into a ball
And time grew rampant over them in their drawer.
The habit of shaving one's mons pubis in the bath,
Of being truly thankful to nature
For russula mushrooms, for porcini,
And their mimicry of the line of fate.

They are connected not by the umbilical, but by
Another weighty force of past deceit.
In vain struggles the sick moth,
The nightly, putrefying wound.

In the brain's black cell
The darkness will not drain dry.
The musical box
Where Charon dozed
Is caulked with scraps from the table
Of Cerberus, instead of grafting wax.
An o'erwheeze, o'erwhisper, o'ersquawk of crows
The divine transmitter.

Upon expiry of the feast
The fly expects a feast.
These are the basements of the world,
This is the world beyond the grave.
A pink pearl in white,
Long eyelashes. Sob.
Neck's severe bend.
Soon the goblet will shiver, chilled,
From multicolored wines.
The stump of a hairy arm
Amongst peaches and olives.
A marshal of transparent armies,
Victim of faded togas,
In his barracks
Drained a draught of lust.

Heavenly love is deaf and dumb,
Empty, like the conclusion of a letter.
"O Persephone, milky stream!
O Persephone, wintry dawn!
In my madness I wounded my heart
On this cup's sharp rim."

A kitten with a curlicue on its side
Is dashed against a rock by the frenzied wind.
And lightning bolts are drawn through the sky

By the shaking hand of the thunderer.
In the shameless roar of depths and ocean,
In the thick flickering of blue-grey fog
The trail of the catastrophe distracts from
The waters' perturbed handclapping.
The maiden has disappeared. The cry dissolved
In the uncaring landscape's beaker
And a tender yarn spun from seaweed
Bound the mother-earth in a bandage.

She had sliced the tomatoes, onion, dill,
So Demeter went out onto the porch to call
Persephone in for dinner. It was still
The yellow time, in July, of cut grass.
Bold gadflies with aztec masks.
A cockerel absentmindedly crowed
And went back into the hencoop.
Where are you, Persephone?
A roll call of sleepy stars,
A fortune-telling of cicadas.
The little boy waterfall
Pokes at the crabby bridge.
The mother groans wildly
In the burdock at the roadside.
She wakes the dazed birds.
Stops us from sleeping.
Tomorrow will be a new day,
Work awaits us.
What does this shade seek here,
And whom does she call?
The world, cosy-small,
Is enveloped in indifference.
People sleep and gods sleep
In blankets' paws.

The hangover of loneliness comes
With the off-white sniffle of an awkward dawn.
All that last night seemed inconsolable
Becomes diminutive and despisable.
From her hand Demeter licks the crumbs,
Blessed, blissful traces of memories,
And sneers at her midnight hopes.
"You, gods of Greece, haven't the power to help me.
Not because I could not protect my daughter:
Bloodties nag. Weakness is that spectre,
There, not letting me forget myself in sleep.
And then my breast, too, aches constantly,
Here, at my nipple. As if drops of blood
Are exuding from it…"

Once again the comic play
Fidelity and Love has flopped,
And the audience jeers, indefatigable.
In the pit Persephone and Hades
Vaunt the galls of their grudges,
Demeter wipes off greasepaint with a dirty cotton ball.
Are you expecting an aphorism? There isn't one.
The pensive, sullen deity
Sits in the corner, cuddling a chocolate.

Belated Ode to Catherine the Great, Empress and Autocratrice of All Russia, Upon Gazing into a Puddle on a December Evening in 2006 and Seeing the Rippling Reflection of Her Monument on Nevsky Prospect in St. Petersburg

Maxim Amelin
Translated from the Russian by Derek Mong
and Anne O. Fisher

Is it you,
  Tsarina
of this
 Northern
  power,
   to whom I dare raise up
my exaltation, singing after
so many singers richly praised
have already won, long before me,
 prizes and glory for themselves?
    I don't expect one signet ring
      or diamond snuff-box for myself!
    It's easy to celebrate the living
     and it's lucrative to accrue their gold and silver,
    the ranks and titles they offer,
      the estates that promise a steady income
   for their owners, or other acquisitions and blessings,
     each so stable and secure! Any
    singer has thought of this or hoped for it,
     privately or overtly… either way they're justified.
       But it's only the chroniclers impartial
            who pass a posthumous judgment on leaders,
       a way to put them in their proper place
         and deliver to each what's due:
       who ascended skyward like a loose balloon;
         who chanced to fall so low none could sink lower;
       whose blameless blood was wrongly spilled; whose strangled cry
         died in his throat, never fleeing toward freedom;
       whose lover's prattle raced step by step
           up a creaking staircase, until it reached the topmost
             landing from which the world can be surveyed,
                a world as visible and potent as a hemp seed in an open hand;
           about whom the rest were told they must be silent, then forced
             to talk on every corner; about whom the inverse
           was true, just switch the sequence of commands.

People's deeds and truest measure—with help
from history's varied lenses—will be
ascertained without fail. But that work doesn't fit me.
I'm not so much a chronicler as a late-born singer
who's learned to choose his words by consonance
and lay them down in proper measure; nor am I the one—
cold-blooded and pitiless—who'd destroy the system prescribed
by code of law, then ratify another I liked better. It's not my place
to render judgment from afar. So in defense of the sovereign
who wisely ruled that part of land and sea of which the current
nation's but a copy, a shred or tatter persisting after
many repartitions, a mote beyond the pale
of what our senses can apprehend—and in defense of she who deigns to forgo
vengeance against her enemies, she who's just and merciful to all her subjects—
for Catherine, here and now! I've engineered this impartial speech.
O mighty lady! O sovereign surrounded by a crowd of men and women
magnificent! They've compelled trumpets and lyres to harmonize everywhere,
for only the worthy ought convene around a worthy Queen. Behold: a man undrowned by Swedish sailors,
their lion no match for his forest of masts; another snapped the Turkish crescent's horns.
Here's one who plucked the feathers off state birds, both large and small, while this one made a needed peace;
here's the man who conquered salty puddles; and here's the happy victor both of battles
and of bedsheets. Here's the teacher of her Majesty's young, strong river; here's the woman who
bred herds of thought and flocks of sensibility. And here's the righteous herald of deeds,
whose dulcet works will speak to our descendants. All are witnesses
of monumental times (without which the gift of speech will fail to reach fruition).
Worthless the poet whose lot it is to vegetate beneath improvident and feeble
masters, surrounded by a greedy, insatiable crew. What's left to him? To breathe
evenly with those who breathed before, to gaze—with silent sadness, doomed—
at your monument, O Autocratrice, distorted in this December
looking-glass, all overcast, its rippling edges calling to mind
something I knew back in childhood: maybe a card
a fool alone would bet on, maybe the Big Dipper,
its seven stars shining impassively
through space
and time.

"Dawn's Rosy Advent Reddened the East"

Maxim Amelin

Translated from the Russian by Derek Mong
and Anne O. Fisher

Dawn's rosy advent reddened the east.
Modest as a village maiden, she leads Day
like a white-faced calf
behind her, so gently tethered;
it hasn't the slightest suspicion
of the sacrifice impending, of preparations
for the evening slaughter.

What's certain will certainly happen.
Wise Ulysses, though cunning, couldn't check
his unruly troops,
tortured by their hunger, by thirst;
their savage island had pastures so
verdant and varied they'd fattened the sun-god's whole herd,
a year's worth of cattle

so perfectly constant in number
that every fourth winter it added a head,
inevitably
offered on the altar; hard as
Ulysses tried to stop them, words failed.
A flaccid belly glutting its hunger feels no pangs
of conscience, hears no sounds.

And so they attacked it together,
cut a bloody line along a vein pulsing
down a bull's strong neck,
then ate their fill of smoking meat,
fresh-killed, not roasted in a cook fire.
They gnawed the flesh off their own return, they snapped its bone,
they sucked out the marrow.

This would render death their lot, meted
out to each in turn and visited on all.
Not a single man
would see his home again. It was
the singular Ulysses who'd heed
that celestial voice and not the clarion call
of his grumbling belly,

thus securing a deferred (if sure)
return to hearth and homeland. But why rehearse
this same old story?
The doomed are utterly bereft
of memory. It's time to remind
you all again: the Lord is the source of all we have
but he can call it back.

Screen

Leo Shtutin

It is the unaugmented body that is rare now.
– Rebecca Solnit

…my fingers' dance into Nowhen
upon a screen against the swarm
of Time. "Oh, to *swipe away* our form,
to *pinch* it from existence, and then
to trade its contours – bodied, warm,
capricious – for data's deathlessness!"

Soft-sifting fat and muscle, slow
churn of innards, shifting skin-lines:
short-shrifted, all. Beyond the confines
of this pixel-prison – what? "Its glow
is blinding! Carousel of signs,
limitless, beguiling! But wait…" Yes?

"What is this ticking?" Time's locusts.
"Sacred *icon*, holy *widget* –
I want away, transport me!" Digits
flicking, gaze hollow and yet focused.
What is this? Ticcing: hands fidget
ceaselessly, for nothing can repress…

The Prose of Life

Marina Eskina
Translated from the Russian by Ian Singleton

As for the prose of life, just let it be,
whether and what for it's got poetry,
and what string, other than the one you pluck,
resonates with the wail of ambulance or fire truck…
If you wish, whip up odes to pans, stanzas to the salad,
all the same, they're steamy for a ballad,
that refracts the whole wide world, like a prism,
until it's got the ragtag sweep of truism,
idle and ruinous. Undercover,
the defense and prosecution cotton to each other.
Raking up leaves, slitting your wrists,
you can be inspired, but you'd rather be obvious.
The prose of life doesn't need to write a sonnet
to hold its own, get in some licks, tack an end on it.

This winter has been long…

Alyssa Dinega Gillespie

This winter has been long, how long – I cannot know.
For years the frost has lasted, biting deep.
The greens that coil beneath a crushing crust of snow
Had weakened, yellowed, settled into sleep…
I never guessed they waited still! I hardly dared
To wish… They gave no sound. All birds had flown,
All echoes too. A solitary oak stood scared,
Alert, and mute. The cold gripped tongue and bone.

And yet the deep-lodged earthy greens are stirring now
Beneath the ice; and yet the lonely oak
Begins to dream, the frost to melt, the pith to sing…
New, tender word-buds swell within the bough,
A whole new language sprouting, words I never spoke:
My friend, when you are near, my heart takes wing.

Winter Étude on the Death of Joseph Brodsky

Alyssa Dinega Gillespie

One can hardly discern in this haze
traces of trees, black against white:
sketches in sky and memory
marking how minutes branch into days,
days into years, until suddenly
all time is a lacework of light
and darkness
in wintry, raveled, urban gardens.

Now it's too late for letters.
Must settle for branches, aeons of sky;
honor the sparrow perched there,
shaking its head, plucking out feathers—
naked and prinked to fly
into the lonely, ice-riddled air:
small solace
with wings of doubt is what a soul is.

Always, you bode in the distance,
Joseph Brodsky, writing your poems.
Winter star, winter bird, winter song,
sunken in snow where so few listened,
muffled in moss and loam,
subtle as lichen livid among
mere people—
you steeped your words in greys and purples.

Still, you were present; now you are past,
shaved to a suffix, pinched to a nib,
purged by the grammar of paradox,
Joseph Brodsky, now you are frost!
Now you are all parameters
taken at once, now you slip
asunder
from pronouns, tenses, questions, answers...

Now it's too late for lateness itself.
Alleyways, traffic, rhythms and rhymes—
all are obscured by the muttering
blizzard of death drifting in swells,
clinging at roots stubbornly.
Silence. No memories climb
up treeboles
to set forsaken voices trembling.

Thickening haze will abide
once the last bird has tumbled away
into the hoarfrost of history
that's deep in the chinks of a winter's day.
All of time is a lacework of glistening
galaxies branching wide—
pray starlight
can soften even such brisk sorrow.

February 20, 1996

Spaghetti Midwestern II

Kathleen Balma

If the cowboy rides the film's horizon line
past the Colorado Rockies and Topeka,

he will meet the farm hand on the other side
of the Kansas montage, and plant himself askance

in a two-bit store aisle, with rows of wide brim hats
they both admire. If they trade shirt pocket jerky,

beef for venison, then play billiards in a room
with swinging doors, the pool halls of St. Louis

will be saloons in spirit, and the strip joints of
Shy Town–for one night only–true bordellos.

Wild horses from Montana will enter at
a canter. Blink: now they're mild cows in Amish

Kentuckiana. The strip pit swimming hole
is a coal country oasis on dog days. Those outlaw

bathers? Humanesque outcroppings: limestone
cowboys for a cinematic hour. John Wayne

rides on John Deere through cornfields. His quick
draws (*presto!*) softball lobs (*adagio*). The figment of

Tonto fades near Cahokia. He has no mound. He is
the dead the dead don't know. The bullies of high

noon take lunch break; afterschool shootouts
can be arranged. Shootouts will be voted out

for sit-ins. This town ain't big enough for horse operas.

Chicken

Kathleen Balma

Poor man. He didn't see his wife's new tristesse
was a consequence of her having been happy
so long, that despair would be only one season

of a seven seasoned life, unless he left. Only then
would sadness sink within both of their year tides;
only then would her summers, and his, fly away.

Poor chicken. She didn't know she was only a poultry thing,
that her body, though succulent, was no delicacy, no
ratite soufflé. A dowdy bod for a leg man to chomp,

there was a market for her that day. There was demand
for a decked out, passive bird with an impassive gaze;
chosen because she was chicken, not chicken.

Poor wife. She didn't see that poulet as a threat.
She trusted her husband to be himself. He rebelled.
It wasn't her fault so much as the vegetables'.

They were stalking him, tossing morels, planting
fowl thoughts. You're better off without roots, said carrot.
You can be your bush self again, said stick. So he stood

at the crossing of roads and clucked his new darling,
who flocked to his side. But why trade a lonesome dove
for a lonelier chick? Yesterweek it was *coo* made him tick.

Khodasevich

Alexander Veytsman

The day they will both arrive there some bridges will shed
the burden of rains overpowering the motion of street noise.
The lilies will lose their petals, the roses – their scent,
as the autumn sets in and the winds propel themselves outward.
They will come at an hour when clocks can decelerate no more,
when the merchants stop selling the meats at a nearby market.
They will come when the lights are turned off across all upper floors,
while mosquitoes from neighboring streets die off from despair and Celsius.
Such day shall indeed come about for Moscow, with
their joined biographies making a pass for some abstract
and inglorious struggle, one that's equally effortless,
as the throwing of stones at the edifice shielded by steel.
They'll arrive, he and Nina, they undoubtedly, braving train schedules,
will appear in coats they preserved from the date of departure,
which was too long ago, during sunrise too blessed by the epitaphs,
it was too long ago – in a world unmarked by remembrance.

Merezhkovsky

Alexander Veytsman

During those sunsets we sat around and talked civil war,
feasting on Spanish champagne and Astrakhan caviar,
with nothing held back, only poetry as a caveat.

We pictured cavalry, violating hunched prairies;
torched buildings shadowing the likeness of sunrise;
vomiting foam left behind the overloaded steamers;

women, hands outstretched, running barefoot;
czar's generals put on trial and summarily shot
or exiled. Those scenes were perfect art.

There was no war, to be precise, at least not at the time.
The world was alive, much like Ferdinand.
The three empires still existed, though to no end.

We talked civil war and we quoted from texts
none of us read, their pages and plots
utterly baseless, starting with Socrates

and concluding with Nietzsche, as if there was reason
to discover new gods, to welcome the person
who alone claimed the colors to the missing horizon.

We talked civil war – yes, indeed, we were foolish.
We were mortal, not to mention the impact of Spanish
champagne on our thoughts. As we talked and we punished

calm winds from northwest and overall fair weather,
we departed from the present, going farther and farther
toward the sights that to date we were unable to fathom.

Gippius

Alexander Veytsman

That night a black pigeon appeared
uninvited
on a window sill,
sauntering lazily and implying
an iambic tetrameter of sorts,
one that doesn't get forgotten.
As if someone from Belyov
was sending the message about
an imminent celebration,
a wedding perhaps,
one that suggests her attendance.
As if she never left,
old memories and letters nonexistent.
As if she never cursed the past,
vowing not to return.
As if there was anyone awaiting her return
in that land effaced by four years
of war.

She was dead for more than six months now.
Her room remained untouched, with furniture
approximating *nature morte*.
Chairs in white covers.
Two bookcases, half-crooked.
A green curtain covering the armoire.
A miserable clock above the window frame.
That night, in late April 1946,

appeared unpleasant
both for humans and pigeons.

Whatever sounds the pigeon
sought to utter –
she must have known them
in advance.
She was simply flattered that someone
would bother with a visit.
It has been, after all, a while
since any soul came to the abandoned
apartment.
She was lonely,
lonely and silent.

Perhaps now others would also
visit her:
to pay homage
or simply to saunter along the
window sills, with laziness
as the best tempo.
She was unsure, who would come,
but she welcomed
both humans and pigeons.

Nefertiti

Zbigniew Herbert
Translated from the Polish by Galina Itskovich

What happens to the soul
after so many loves

it's no longer a huge bird
whipping air with its white wings
every night before dawn

the moth
flew out of the lips
of the dead Nefertiti
the moth
multicolored sighing

oh how long is the path
from the terminal breath to
the nearest eternity

the moth swoops over the head
of the dead Nefertiti
swathing her in the cocoon
of silk

Nefertiti
the moth
takes so long to wait
for your takeoff

for you spreading the wings
which will take you away
one-day
one-night

over all the gates of abyss
over all the canyons of skies

Shabbat

Ganna Osadko
Translated from the Ukranian
by Galina Itskovich

To Moysey Fishbein

A button of blood pressure pill dissolves,
And live the way you like, as you've resolved –
Wrapped in your wisdom and your patience thoroughly,
You chew on silence and keep reading Torah,
Day in and out, count falling leaves
And ask,
"What did I do to get all this?"

October's growing old; the Jew is old.
Along the heater, his winter Wailing Wall,
He's cozied up, and softly cries, as if
All prayers weaved into a sole motif
Of rains and shivering bushes, in one word,
"Let this cup pass my lips, oh Lord."

His cup is full – spills over – makes a mess.
Wind is for starters; wind is followed by death.
They come inside; they at the table sit down,
"Shalom, shalom, our tired little son…"
It's Shabbat in the world, and candles burn.
And then he'll die.
It'll be November's turn.

Streets of Kiev

Stephen Oliver

after Osip Mandelstam

In Red Square, giant plasma screens loom blank
and wall-eyed, there's no news today. The Kremlin

thug needs time to think. He never counts his
losses, pays no heed to them. His mongoloid eyes

turn unperturbedly to the southwest. Any day now,
he will perform the prisyadka in Khreshchatyk Street.

Under the black belt moon, he cocks one leg,
a kick to the solar plexus, to the groin, to the temple.

Pectorals flex, Abs ripple. His favorite cocktail,
Polonium-210, he serves up to those who dare oppose.

His expression resembles that of a firing squad,
this former KGB analyst calculates the odds quiet

as frost at midnight, his every move accounted for:
pieces of tibia, femur, cranium, each precious object

finds a place on his chessboard. Any day now,
he will perform the prisyadka in Andreevsky Spusk.

Night After Night from the musical *Red Cavalry*, based on the stories of Isaac Babel

Atar Hadari

Night after night
I dream the same dream
Caught in a fight
I can't run, can't scream

But the horse underneath me
Keeps running along
Yes the horse underneath me
Can do no wrong –

Night after night
I'm in my platoon
All Cossacks can fight
I can't load my damn gun.

But the horse underneath me
Keeps running along
Yes the horse underneath me
Rides like a song –

One day I'll get a stallion
Black as the midnight coal
He'll trot for the battalion
And save my worthless soul

That's what I dream of every night
A horse that can't go wrong,
I ride past Cossacks left and right
And no one sees I'm done.

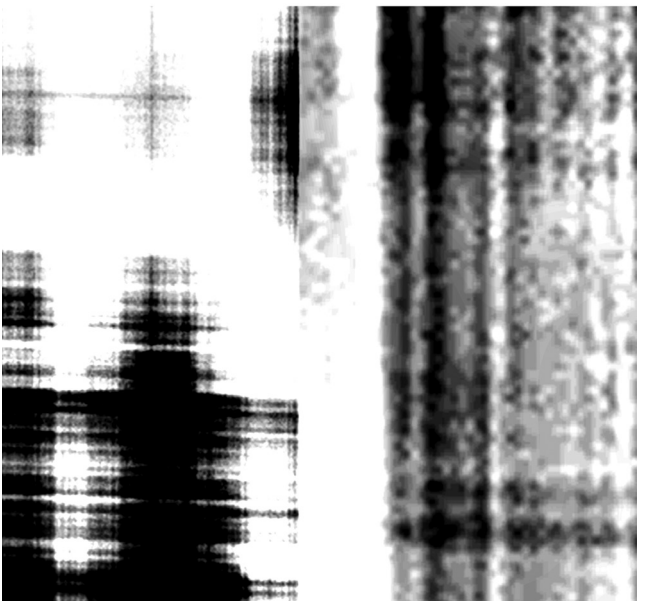
One day I'll ride that stallion
Right past my own platoon
They'll keep roasting their onions
And won't speak till I'm gone.

One day I'll ride that stallion
And look up at the moon
And smell the roasting onion
And say, "I have come home."

Night after night
I dream the same dream
Caught in a fight
I can't run, can't scream

But the horse underneath me
Keeps running along,
Yes the horse underneath me
Knows where he belongs.

The Art of Translation



Gavriil Derzhavin's Poetic Monuments

Alexander Levitsky

This modest contribution to *Cardinal Points*, devoted chiefly to translation, attempts to show Derzhavin principally as a poet to English readers, not just palpably a poet in translation. The notion of publishing a meaningful sampling of Derzhavin's poetry in English began taking shape in earnest during a seminar on "Derzhavin and His Epoch" that I taught at Brown some years ago. Overcoming considerable financial obstacles and time constraints, a volume of Derzhavin's poetry finally appearing as part of *Brown Slavic Contributions*.[1] If the editorial work, the introductions based on archival research, and all final translations were mine, substantial credit should go chiefly to my principal co-translator Martha T. Kitchen, who imprinted our former readings with the necessary changes to make them not only reflect Derzhavin's metric preferences, but to fit the tenor of the volume as a whole. The project also attracted the help of the Pennsylvania based poet Emeline K. Diener, who was not part of the seminar, but who contributed to the volume by providing her renditions of a couple of poets and whose exquisite four free variants on Derzhavin's *On Transience* are republished here in endnotes. The present selection represents my continued shared work with Martha Kitchen and attempts to offer a representative selection of Derzhavin's longer works in English; it attempts to keep, whenever possible, every nuance of his thought intact, while scrupulously preserving Derzhavin's meters and stanzaic lengths, unless otherwise noted. It is a collaborative effort, and whenever I use the first person plural pronoun "we" or the possessive "our," I refer to our combined work, rather than any royal personage connotations.

Gavriil Romanovich Derzhavin (1743-1816) died approximately one year after the fifteen-year-old Aleksandr Sergeevich Pushkin (1799-

1837), during a viva voce examination at the Tsarskoe Selo Lycée on January 8, 1815 (old style), declaimed a meditative poem entitled *Reminiscences at Tsarskoe Selo* (*Vospominaniia v Tsarsom Sele*) before the grand old man of Russian letters. At this examination Derzhavin was moved to tears and asked for a copy of the verses to be given to him. Pushkin was, in fact, also moved by the attention given to his still green yet already accomplished poetry and fled from the exam after the reading, apparently overcome by shyness in the presence of Russia's reigning premier poet, who had become an emblem of the epoch in which he lived. Indeed, "Derzhavin was a poet of his age and of his country"; it was with this laconic and exact description that G. A. Gukovskii, an eminent Russian scholar, began one of his studies devoted to the poet whose illustrious career spanned the reigns of five Russian monarchs (Elizabeth I, Peter III, Catherine II, Paul I and Alexander I) and who was to become one of Russia's most important historical and literary figures, dominating the last quarter of the eighteenth century and the first two decades of the nineteenth. Although Derzhavin based his reputation on honorable service in government posts, he is best remembered for his kaleidoscopic and imaginative lyrics. This incident, immortalized in Russian cultural history, is considered to be the inauguration of modern Russian literature. Indeed, as the years unfolded, Pushkin was to develop a new vein in Russian poetry, removed, it would seem, from Derzhavin's inimitable style, a vein which nearly all Russians have come to embrace at the expense of Derzhavin. Yet Pushkin himself certainly considered Derzhavin to have been a great poet, deserving the appellation of a "genius," as early as 1822 (in a private letter to a friend). He made other, sometimes conflicting, remarks in the 1820s, but he was to return to Derzhavin's poetry over and over again throughout his lifetime, for in it he consistently found sources for his own poetic themes, philosophical aims, and aesthetic transformations. I am preparing a separate publication of Derzhavin's and Pushkin's poetry in English translation, tracing Pushkin's profound interest in Derzhavin's *oeuvre*, which might provide a substantial rethinking as to when so-called "modern" Russian literature actually begins. The present contribution contains but a mere sampling of Derzhavin's

works, which contributed to Pushkin's creative "dialogue" across the decades, as reflected in four seminal works representing the process: Derzhavin's *Waterfall* (*Vodopad*), *To Eugene: Life at Zvanka* (*Evgeniiu. Zhizn' zvanskaia*), *Monument* (*Pamiatnik*), and *On Transience* (*Na tlennost'*). In our forthcoming projected publication it will be shown how Pushkin's *Bronze Horseman* (*Mednyi vsadnik*) and *Autumn* (*Osen'*) hearken back to Derzhavin's entries presented here; the former engages the same elemental power of water as the first and last contributions, while *Autumn*, a pivotal philosophical work devoted to the problem of poetic creativity, written at the pinnacle of Pushkin's fame, begins with an epigraph from Derzhavin's *To Eugene: Life at Zvanka*. Both of these Pushkin works were already published in our *Worlds Apart*,[2] and will be republished in our aforementioned planned publication. Excerpts from Derzhavin's *Waterfall* and *To Eugene. Life at Zvanka* were recently published in *The Penguin Book of Russian Poetry*,[3] and we are grateful for the opportunity to publish them now in complete rhymed versions. Derzhavin's *Monument* is a well known Horatian ode to Melpomene; the famous epilogue to the first three books of Horace's *Odes* (III, 30) had been previously rendered by several eighteenth-century poets, including M. V. Lomonosov, but it is clearly Derzhavin's version with which Pushkin engaged shortly before his own untimely death in his own *Exegi Monumentum*.... We offer them both in our newly rhymed translations, along with Derzhavin's *On Transience*.

The Waterfall (Vodopad)

The Waterfall was composed by Derzhavin to mark the passing of Prince G. A. Potemkin (1739-91), Russia's renowned military leader and close confidant of Catherine the Great. This ode, considered one of the poet's most accomplished commemorative works, in its first stanzas exemplifies Derzhavin's penchant for opening a work with a strikingly powerful image from which related images and ideas proceed. Among the most dominant traits of *The Waterfall* is the poet's emphasis on the concurrence of permanency and transience in human life. This theme is embodied in the first stanza, which unites the images of solids (diamonds, cliffs, pearls, silver) with the fluid nature of water. The initial stanzas of this ode – one of the poet's longest (74 iambic tetrameter sestets) – prefigures the substance of one of his briefest works: his last, *On Transience*, apparently written several hours before his death (Cf. our last entry). As in our original Derzhavin volume, we found it serviceable to use some of H. B. Segel's endnotes to this poem, and we continue to use them here with permission from Dutton.[4] The poem will be fully commented and supplied with much more detailed annotation in our forthcoming edition. What we are offering here is the text itself – the first rhymed English translation of this monumental work of Russian prosody. This poem requires a far more detailed commentary than possible in this venue, but one thing must be pointed out at once. Due to its length and freight of historical detail, it must be viewed as one Derzhavin's first attempts to combine the lyric and epic modes, an aspiration that will be realized at the beginning of the nineteenth-century in the development of a new Russian hybrid genre, the so-called "liro-epicheskij gimn" (the lyrico-epic hymn), which became especially favored by some Russian poets during the Napoleonic wars, and in which Derzhavin himself participated.

1. A mount sifts diamonds in rows,
Down from the heights, four cliffs cascading;
A pearl and silver chasm below

Churns water up in massy braiding;
A blue hill looms within the spray;
The roar resounds from far away.

2. It roars; amidst the deep pine thickets
Diffuses, blending with the brush;
Athwart the brook, a swift ray quickens;
'Neath shifting vaults of trees, kept hushed,
The waves roll slowly, weighed by sleeping,
Their course in milky surges keeping.

3. In dark, dense thickets by the verge
Deep mounds of grayish spume are foaming,
The wind bears hammer-blows, the whirr
Of saws, the bellows' hollow groaning:
O Waterfall! Your dread abyss
Devours all in depthless mist!...

4. When wind-struck do the pine trees creak? –
You tear asunder their tall stand.
Does thunder split the mountain peak? –
You grind all stones to finest sand.
Does ice-floe dare to bind your waters? –
To glassy dust it's crushed in torrents.

5. A lonely wolf prowls 'round: all fear
He scorns as naught, then stops and listens;
As in his eyes bright flames appear,
Black bristles on his shoulders glisten.
Born to shed blood in Nature's wars,
He howls, and tunes his bay to yours.

6. A timid doe approaches gently
To sense your crashing waters' roar;
Aback she bends her curving antlers

And speeds across the forest floor.
She flees all sounds, however brief,
Beneath her hooves – the brittle leaf.

7. A restive stallion, approaching
As is his want, with prideful gait.
With thick mane arched, no rider coaching,
Hot nose and ears twitch to your bait:
He gives a snort, and ponders leaping
Down from the cliff to your depths sweeping.

8. Beneath a sloping cedar's trunk,
In sight of Nature's dreadful Beauty,
Upon an old, protruding stump
Above your waters – raging, brutal –
I see a certain gray-haired man,
Bent down, inclined, with head in hand.[5]

9. His lance and sword, his mighty shielding,
And helmet wound with twining grass,
All, having served his land, not yielding,
Rest at his feet now, on the moss.
There, shining in his golden armor,
Like evening in its rose-red garment, [6]

10. He sits – and, gazing at the flow
Of waters, sunk in thought, he ponders:
"Does not this splendid Waterfall
Portray a man's life, as he wanders?
It nourishes with glinting spate,
The proud, the meek, the reprobate.

11. "Does time not flow thus down from Heaven?
Do not our passions boil within;
No Fame resound, nor Glory leaven;

The way our fair days, in their spin,
With Beauty's joyful feelings raging,
Are marred by sorrows, woes, and aging?

12. "Do not we see in graves each day
The aging Universe's graying?
Nor hear in clocks that toll away
The tomb-gate's creek and Death's dark baying?
Into this gulf do there not fall
The Tsar from throne and his friend's all?

13. "They fall – Rome's Soldier undefeated,
Great Caesar grasps the longed-for crown,
Midst triumphs that the Senate greeted,
Just then he veils his face, falls down:[7]
Gone, schemes and hopes to which he hearkened,
The eyes that sought the throne are darkened.

14. "They fall – like that man, matchless, brave,
Whose chariot seized scores of conquests,
Earth's model for great souls to crave,
Who scorned the crown, that root of conflicts:
Keen Belisarius kings prized,[8]
Yet in their dungeons plucked his eyes.

15. "They fall. – And did not dreams entreat me
When I, in bloom, was but a lad,
When cities long ago did greet me,
In laurels and in olives clad?
Was this long since? – In war, my hand
No longer wields the lightning brand!

16. "With my strength gone, a sudden gale
The spear-haft from my grip has sundered;
Although my spirit is yet hale,

Fate now my Victory has plundered."
He spake – then Sleep his musings sealed,
By wing of Morpheus concealed.

17. October Night fell earthward, darkened, [9]
Deep Silence softly spread once more,
To nothing does my ear now hearken,
But for your wave's incessant roar,
Crushed from the heights against the granite,
Resurging like a snow-clad summit.

18. The wasteland with its gaze downcast,
The mountain crags, and cliffs were dreaming;
And clouds in regiments rolled past,
Their wavelike ranks in silence streaming,
From out which, in a pallid swoon,
Now downwards gazed the trembling moon.

19. She gazed, and lowered, barely gleaming,
Before the aged man her horns,
She bowed low in salute, esteeming
Her former foe, whom fate adorned,
She faced him once with fear unbounded,
By whom the Earth had been confounded.

20. He slept – and in that vatic sleep
Upon him stole heroic visions.
Wherein it seemed to him that he
Led forth invincible divisions:
That near him, Russia's Thor held still
Responsive only to is will.

21. That at the pointing of his finger
The cannon lines exhaled their glow;
That on the boundless field there lingered –

Yet from his single word would grow –
His regiments, there set in motion
Like hills of mist upon the ocean;

22. That only dew tracks might uncover
Just where his midnight passage led,
As clear dawn brightens dust clouds hover;
Too late the foe learns he is fled.
That, like the hawk's, his keen eye stirs
To trace the flight of lesser birds;

23. That, laying out his maps and planning –
An unseen Wizard in his keep –
He sends to dales Chimeras landing,
To mountain tigers turns his sheep;
With his resolve then firmly grown,
On thousands hurls his thunder down;

24. That Crescent's pride and Eagle's boldness,
Upon the Black and Amber shores, [10]
He tamed, along with gold-fleeced Colchis; ,[11]
And losses that the White Tsar bore[12]
Before the evening's golden portals
Avenged a hundred-fold of mortals.

25. That, as with scarlet ray at dawn,
His nation was with glory covered;
And every foreign crown and throne,
Joined Russia and her own fair Sovereign,
In tending him their lavish praise,
And in his name did triumphs raise. [13]

26. That thus his image, his account,
And name might bloom midst gem-strewn splendors;
And o'er his silver brow should mount

The crimson wreath that lightning renders
And glow through future ranks of men,
In countless hearts to shine again;

27. That, from his forceful brightness, Envy
Shall turn away its pallid glance,
And, with a silent whimper delving,
Shall hope upon a lair to chance,
Where it can see, deep cover finding,
That none can match his glory blinding.

28. He sleeps – those dreams where joy's awaiting
Regale him with the wolfhound's howls,
The roar of winds and oak trees' grating,
The screeching moans and hoots of owls
As eerie beasts call in the distance,
And phantoms chirr with soft insistence.

29. He hears: a fir is crushed to splints
As ravens flock now harshly calling,
Split wide is now the mound of flint,
The summit with its riches – fallen:
An echo through the mountains rumbles,
Like thunder thundering on thunders.

30. He sees, enrobed in sable clothing
A certain woman, pale and winged;
She seems as one who, wild hair tossing,
The news of death or war might bring,
She stands there, scythe and trumpet bearing,
And speaks one word – "Awake!" declaring.

31. Atop her helm crowned with an Eagle
He saw the mournful God of Thunder,
As well as Russia's crest most regal,

Then, agitated by this wonder
He sighed and, midst the tears he shed,
Declared: "Our hero must be dead!"[14]

32. "Blest is this man: for glory searching,
He kept in mind our common weal!
In bloody combat he showed mercy,
The lives of foes he spared with zeal;
Blest be for ages upon ages
This friend of mankind – sage of sages!

33. "Blest be the epitaph in praise
Of this man's deeds inscribed forever:
His service dedicated days
To Man, shall be forgotten never;
By fame alone he was not bought,
And lying praise he never sought."

34. "O Glory that the mighty treasure!
Your essence is – the Waterfall.
Its waters pour forth with no measure
Their rushing chill refreshes all;
'Tis dazzling, light, sublime, resplendent,
Resounding, lucent, strong, and splendid;"

35. "Its splendors gather swelling crowds
Of folks astonished, as they wander;
Yet if its waters, rich and proud,
Do not sate most men, and are squandered
In ripping through the shores' deep pass,
Then what can mortals gain? – Alas!"

36. "Ought not a stream be less imposing
But be to men of greater use?
More as a lovely brook proposing

The gardens, fields, and meads to sluice,
And with its distant susurration,
To lure a future generation?"

37. "A passer by might, at this mound,
Be seated on the turf's wild clutter,
And read, his head bent to the ground,
The writing on the grave – then utter:
'Here rests a man, in war extolled,
Whose grandest gift was his great Soul'."

38. "O! Be immortal – Prince of warfare,
Your Duties done pass in review!"
Thus spake the crowned-in-whiteness elder
And, glancing heavenwards, fell mute.
Fell mute – but his wise words rebounded,
And everywhere his call resounded.

39. But who among the hills now wades,
Then, moon-like, views dark waters welling?
And – leaping over clouds – whose shade
Seeks there an airy mountain dwelling?
Upon his brow and darkling gaze
Deep Thought enthroned is cloaked in haze!

40. Who is this winged, amazing Spirit
Who southward soars from Northern lands?
And swoons beyond the swift wind's limit,
At once surveying realms, all grand;
His thunders now – now, Star-like, glimmers,
A trail of sparks behind him shimmers.

41. Whose corpse, as at a crossroads mist,
Lies on Eve's breast, as dark Night hovers?
In rags clad for his mortal tryst;

A pair of coins his eyes now covers; [15]
Clenched at his chilling heart his fingers;
His lips agape, no word there lingers!

42. Whose bed is Earth; roof – pitch-blue Air;
Those waste and barren tracts – whose chambers?
Are these not yours, o Fortune's heir,
And Glory's splendid Prince of Tauris? [16]
From Fame's height fallen in Life's race
Is now the steppe your resting place?

43. Were you not trusted friend and gentle,
Of wise Minerva's Northern throne?[17]
Apollo in the Muses' temple;[18]
Upon the Field of Mars best known;
A judge in war or peace transpiring,
Though not a blue-blood – Awe-inspiring?

44. Was it not you who singly dared
To raise up Russia's spirit, power,
And with Great Catherine's help declared
To cast your thunder o'er the towers
On which the ancient Rome did stand[19]
With all the World at its command?

45. And you who our rapacious neighbors
And all their mighty hordes cast down?
Did not the barrens by your labors
Give place to fertile field and town,
The Black Sea yield to Russia's rudder,
Did you not cause Earth's core to shudder?

46. Were you not wise enough to look
To Russia's strength and chose apt trial
By trampling Nature as you took

Ochakov's fortress,[20] then Izmail,[21]
And by your stalwart martial art
Astounded Valor's very heart?

47. 'Tis you, the paragon of daring!
Your fertile Mind keeps plans aflame!
By beaten pathway never faring[22]
But by your own – to heirs your fame
Stands beacon, as a mighty cedar.
'Tis you, Potemkin, peerless leader!

48. 'Tis you, to whom in lieu of gates
Triumphal arches were erected.[23]
The Arts and Beauty twined as mates
Of Mind – with laurel wreaths perfected.
There joy and splendor did you grace,
As luck and glory matched your pace.

49. 'Tis you, whom I had thought to render
The fruit of Heaven's rarest gift,
In harmony with vibrant Pindar,
The strains of my tuned lyre to lift:
I sang of Izmail's renown,[24]
I sang – as Death's your life cut down!

50. Alas! My choruses' sweet sound
Has turned into a moan; my fingers
Have let my lyre fall to the ground;
I entered where, as my tears lingered,
Once gulfs of many-colored stars
Revealed your Paradisal halls.[25]

51. Alas! – To silence now are shortened
The thunder-peals that round you roared;

With sobs your regiments – now orphaned –
Have filled the air and sheathed their swords;
And all that glittered at your nearness
Has grown disconsolate and cheerless.

52. How sere, your wreath of laurel made,[26]
Your marshal's mace has left your keeping,[27]
Your sheath would not accept your blade,
When grieving Catherine fell to weeping!
And half the globe drew sobbing breath
To mourn with Her your sudden death!

53. Green olive-branches, garnered newly,
The God of Peace has brought here and strown;
Friend's wails, and kin in grief unruly,
With Grecian Muses plaint resound,
As these for Pericles keep vigil:
Maecenas' loss thus mourned great Virgil,[28]

54. Like any sovereign on his throne,
Agleam with brightly hued medallions,
In gilded phaeton he would roam,
Conveyed by fleet, rose-silver stallions,[29]
Or shine mid mounted throngs diverse:
Then fell into an ebon hearse![30]

55. Where is true Grandeur? Where is Glory?
Where are thou, o, our stalwart man?
Methuselah is but a story,
A tale; a shade, our earthly span:
Naught else is all Man's life but seeming
A spate of vain and empty dreaming.

56. Or no! – Life's like a weighty sphere,
From finest, lightest hair suspended,

Which storms – as lightning bolts career
And swerve, the Heavens rending –
From every corner beat and cuff.
Alas! Mild Zephyr strikes enough!

57. One hour gone, one moment flying
Suffice to bring a kingdom down;
The merest Elemental sighing –
To ash are Hero-Giants ground:
We vie to equal them not knowing
Their dust about our feet is blowing!

58. Their dust? – Not so! – The deeds they wrought
Confound the dark and shine through eons,
Pure memory, and praise unsought,
Take wing and soar from out the ruins;
Like hills, their graves sweet blooms afford:
Potemkin's work shall Time record.

59. His theater – the plains of Euxine;[31]
Hearts bound by gratitude – his shrine;
The hand with proffered crown – Great Catherine's;
His incense – Glory's heady wine;
His life – of triumphs, blood an altar,
A sepulcher of dread and ardor.

60. When Luna reddens Heaven's nave,
Through pitch-black skies its dim beam pushes,
And Danube's drear and murky wave
Bears glints of blood, while through the bushes,
About Izmail, rough winds lurk
To groan and howl – what thinks the Turk?

61. Although his eyes are closed – he trembles,
Sees bayonets flash yet again,

Where forty thousand Turks assembled[32]
Lie circling Weismann's grave – all slain.[33]
Their shades still flock to haunt his dreaming:
Their blood 'round Russian knees is steaming!

62. He trembles – as he turns his gaze
On scenes to his shy vision offers,
To pillars in the skies ablaze
From all Crimea's lands and waters![34]
Once more he feels Ochakov seized
His blood still flows, yet starts to freeze.[35]

63. But in broad day, 'midst sparkling vapor,
Like schools of fish pass in the sky[36]
Where patterned ensigns gently caper,
Thus do our ships on white sails fly
Through distant bays to their curves heeling:
What then is every Russian feeling?

64. Elation, bliss, each feels – but fear
And terror o'r the Turks now lour.
To their eyes moss and thorns appear,
For us sweet bay and roses flower
Where tombs of our great leaders stand,
Who held their sway o'er Sea and Land.

65. Beneath a tree, at twilight's glowing,
Sits pensive Love, her zither's strings
Waft forth a spring breeze, widely sowing
The sweetness that her pure voice brings;
Her pearl-white breast is softly sighing,
A hero's image vivifying.[37]

66. In morning when the sun's bright ray
The golden monument sets gleaming,

As drowned by sleep, the doe still lay,
And curls of mist past hills are streaming;
Drawn near, the sage on it descries:
"Here great Potemkin's body lies!"

67. Great Alcibiades![38] – What daring
A worm must have to blight your dust!
Does not Thersites[39] cower, staring
At bold Achilles' helm in lust? –
If mortal flesh and works all perish
How then is Glory to be relished?

68. 'Tis Truth alone that grants us wreaths,
Which Time cannot bring to their fading;
'Tis Truth that bards to all bequeath
For its eternal worth, whilst aiding
Their thundering songs to their sweet lyres:
The just alone earn sacred fires.

69. Ye heads, in chaos with ambition!
Pay heed now, Earthly waterfalls!
If Truth has been your life's great mission,
Then pure your sword, and bright your halls,
If bringing joy to all, forever,
Has been your uttermost endeavor.

70. Roar on, blare on, O Waterfall,
The very heavens' spheres pervading!
Our ears, our sight you do enthrall
With your bright sonorous cascading.
And let your splendor's boundless span
Live on in memories of man!

71. Live on – and let the gloomy vapors
Pass seldom o'er your rapid course,

In thoughts of you let no mind waver
At blazing thunder's smold'ring force;[40]
That all may love you far and near:
Your Splendor and your Worth revere.

72. O mother of the waterfalls!
Great Suna, Northland's thund'ring river –
If you can gleam from summits tall
As Dawn aflame begins to quiver,
And, boiling, sow a sapphire dew,
Or fire, ablaze with purple hue –

73. Then as your flow is calm and soothing,
Your strengths and strivings are the same,
Your swift course keeps its pace, diffusing,
Translucent are your depths and tame,
Tumultuous, stately, without foaming,
Contained, yet regal in your roaming,

74. And unalloyed by outland streams
You slake the shores through acres golden;
Majestic flows your fluid seam
To bright Onega's deeps emboldened.[41]
Oh, what a scene delights our eyes!
In you the heavens new arise!

Variants:

#29. Its echo through the mountains soars
Like thunder over thunder roars.

#49. I sang of Izmail diminished,
I sang – as Death's scythe had you finished!

To Eugene. Life at Zvanka (Evgeniiu. Zhizn' zvanskaia)[42]

Throughout his creative history, Derzhavin saw country life as idyllic and dreamed of enjoying the freedom of life on his own estate away from the vanities at court. When in 1795 he married Dar'ia Alekseevna D'iakova, his second wife, Derzhavin was able to fulfill his wish. The Derzhavins began to spend summers at Dar'ia Alekseevna's country estate, Zvanka, which was located outside Novgorod. Zvanka became a living and lasting celebration of Derzhavin's intimate friendships and artistic aspirations. It also served as the inspiration for *To Eugene. Life at Zvanka*, which is far more than just a poem in the genre of the epistle of friendship. Composed in 1807, it functions as a unique celebration of life, depicting an ordinary day at the poet's estate in all of its sensory fullness. At times odic, at times descriptive or elegiacal, this poem speaks for the private strivings of the privileged Russians of his time, who aspired both to enjoy life and, in their own domains, to create an ideal that would endure into the future. The sounds of birds, horses, lambs, of human songs, chatter and gossip, of horns, harps, and other musical instruments – all these blend with the aromas, tastes, and splendid patterns and colors of the poet's surroundings to re-create his experience of a life enjoyed amid cow barns, beehives, birdhouses, and ponds; amid the gold of butter, honeycombs, and leaves; amid the purple of berries and the velvet down of mushrooms. At the midday meal he sees a flower garden of dishes, set out in patterns on the table with "Crimson ham, green sorrel soup with yolk of yellow, rouge-golden pie, white cheese, red crayfish, caviar, both pitch-black and amber, and a rainbow pike with a blue fin – all beautiful." At the end of the poem Derzhavin in a waking dream overlooks his lands on the Volkhov River and expresses doubts about the future of Zvanka. He prophecies that it "will be torn down, its forests and gardens will wither," so that only "fire-green eyes of owls will peer from the hollows" where it used to be. Yet he also understands that his own and Zvanka's immortality have already been achieved through his art.

Derzhavin was clearly a patriot, and singing of the Russian countryside was one of his major achievements in Zvanka. In it he presents readers with a multi-dimensional imagination and a life-affirming spirit. Another of his accomplishments was to find ways to see all phenomena of life as possible subjects for poetry. He was one of the first Russian poets to sing of feasts, as in *An Invitation to Dinner* (Priglashenie k obedu). The objects of Derzhavin's mature poetic vision are as richly vibrant as the most accomplished still-lives by seventeenth-century Dutch painters: their specificity is attained not only by descriptions of their visual, oral, and tactile texture, but by their origin as well. Hence his fish is either from the river *Sheksna* or from Astrakhan, his beer Russian or English, his ham Westphalian, his seltzer water drunk from Viennese crystal glasses, his coffee sipped from Chinese faience. In depicting such native foods as kaimak, borscht, or pirogi, as tastier to his persona than those preferred by his peer francophile aristocrats, Derzhavin gives Russian cuisine the status of a self-sustained, rich tradition worthy of respect in world culture. In this he anticipated the views that Tolstoy was to voice in his novelistic world.

Derzhavin is one of those few poets in whose work philosophy is as much a product of poetry as it is its agent. Continually aware of death, he overcomes death's seeming omnipotence by capturing life as it manifests itself in varied colors, smells, sounds and moods; he covets life and easily assures us of its continuance in his art.

Derzhavin dedicated this epistle to Metropolitan Evgenii (Eugene) Bolkhovitinov (1767-1837), one of the most learned figures in the Russia of his day in both religious and secular matters. Derzhavin first made Bolkhovitinov's acquaintance when the latter requested biographical information for the Dictionary of Russian Writers, which he was engaged in composing at the time. After this first visit, Eugene frequently visited Derzhavin at Zvanka, and thereby became a great "witness to the songs" of the poet. In Derzhavin's latter years, the metropolitan offered his aid and critical opinion as the poet wrote his treatise on the art and functions of lyrical or odic poetry (*A Discourse on Lyrical Poetry*, or the Ode, 1811-14). In *To Eugene. Life at Zvanka*, Eugene provides the potential voice of

History that – the poet hopes – will convey the harmonies of his life to future generations.

The poem is composed of 63 iambic quatrains (of which the first three lines are in hexameters and the last in tetrameter), rhymed AbAb, which was the focus of our English variant.

1.

Blest is that man who least depends on other men,
Whose life is free from debt and from capricious striving,
Who goeth not to court for praise, or gold to lend;
And shuns all vanities conniving!

2.

Why venture to Petropolis, if uncompelled,
Change space for closeness, liberty for locks and latches,
Live weighed with luxury and wealth, their siren spell,
Endure the gentry's quizzing glances?

3.

Can such a life compare with golden freedom here,
With Zvanka's solitude, with Zvanka's rest and quiet?
Abundance, health, sweet concord with my wife – and peace
To round my days – these I require.

4.

I rise from sleep and lift to heav'n my humble gaze;
My soul sings matins to the Lord of all creation;
I thank Him for the superflux of wondrous days,
Renewed now in this dawn's elation.

5.

When I review the days gone by, how pleased I am
That discontent's black serpent never gnawed my bosom;
What happiness I count it I abandoned Man,
Escaping thus Ambition's venom.

6.

Then breathing innocence, imbibing dewy cool,
I seek the crimson dawn, the sun as it arises,
Its scepter tracing out a lovely temple's pool
Amidst my lily-beds and roses.

7.

I see my doves with grains of wheat well fed,
Then watch them as they wheel their flight above the waters,
I view the many-colored songbirds, warbling in their nets,
And fowl which cloak the mead like snowfall.

8.

Nearby, I hearken to the shepherd's horn; aloft –
I hear a snipe; afar – the heath-cock's muffled drum call,
Below – the nightingale; now oriole peals forth,
Now horses neigh, now cattle bellow.

9.

As swallow on the roof begins her chirr, then scent
Of Manchu tea or Levant coffee wafting, prompts me,
I take my place at table – the gossip starts at once:
Of dreams we talk, of town and country,

10.

Or of the feats ascribed to those great men of yore
Whose portraits shine from golden frames upon the panels,
Preserving thus their days of fame – now kept as lore –
While sprucing up my drawing-chamber,

11.

In which same room, at morning or at even,
I read the Herald, save the broadsheets for tomorrow,
I revel in our Russia's might: each man – a hero,
Commanding general – Suvorov!

12.

In which, before the mistress, for the guests to praise,
They bring the divers fustians, homespuns, textiles, weavings,
And patterned samples of embroidered napkins, lace,
Of floor-cloths woven in the evenings.

13.

I see there, from the barns and hives, the cotes and ponds,
Rich gold in butter and in honeycombs on tree limbs,
In berries – royal purple, on mushrooms – velvet down,
And silver, in the bream atremble;

14.

Where, in the clinic having seen those ill or bruised,
Our surgeon comes, reporting of their health and sickness,
Then orders up their diet: for some it's bread and gruel,
For others wait his herbal mixtures.

15.

Where also sometimes on the tally-stick or beads
A bearded elder or fat miser from the village,
Sums up the treasury, the grain, provisions, deeds,
And smiles – a trickster's roguish grimace.

16.

And where, from time to time, young artisans will flock
To show their efforts, limned on canvas or on beech-planks,
And some receive a coin or other for their work,
Mayhap a half a ruble, each one.

17.

And where, to chase off sleepiness before we sup,
We – sometimes with great vigor for the games, and ardor –
Take up the cards, play faro or at whist, set up
For kopeck forfeits, never rendered.

18.

From thence I come into the Muses' sacred grove,
With Horace, Pindar, feasting with Olympians,
I raise my song to monarchs, friends, to realms above,
Or tune my lyre to rustic paean.

19.

Or in the glass of History, with wagging head,
I scan the furors, deeds of early days and late-times,
And see there nothing but the love of self inbred,
Or petty brawls 'twixt man and mankind.

20.

"All striving after wind!" I, sighing, then opine;
But when I raise my eyes to see the noontide's splendor:
"How beauteous is Earth! Why is my soul weighed down?
Our world's upheld by its Creator.

21.

And here on Earth, as in the Heaven's farthest trace,
His will be done, who lives and moves in all His creatures!
He sees into my heart's most secret, deepest place;
And is my Fortune's guiding Teacher."

22.

The while, a crowd of peasant children gathers round:
For any of my thoughts they hardly make their visit,
But rather that each one may have a pretzel or a roll,
And learn their master's not a skinflint.[43]

23.

And now my scribe must comb my botched and blotted page,
As shepherd combs his sheep for burdocks and for thistles,
To smooth the fleece – though no great thoughts do there engage –
Yet pebbles in their foil may glister.[44]

24.

When noon has struck, the servants rush to dress the board;
The mistress leads our troop of guests to sit at table.
And to my gaze the varied dishes there award
A patterned garden, neatly angled.

25.

The crimson ham, green sorrel soup with yolks of gold,
The rose-gold pie, the cheese that's white, the crayfish scarlet,
The caviar, deep amber, black, the pike's stripes bold,
Its feather blue – delight the eyesight.

26.

Delight the eye, and joy to every sense impart;
Though not with glut, or spices brought from foreign harbors,
But with their pure and wholesome Russian heart:
Provisions native, fresh and healthful.

27.

When downing good Crimean or Don-region wine,
Or linden mead, blond beer from hops, or black beer spuming,[45]
Our crimson brows a little fuddlement avow,
The talk is merry through the pudding.

28.

Then silently we rise, and Russia's nectar soars,[46]
Ascends in sparkling, glowing streams up to the rafters,
We drink a thunderous toast: the health of our kind Tsar,
His wife, his royal heirs, his daughters.

29.

And now a sip or two of coffee, a nap perhaps;
Then playing chess or bowls, or bow and arrow aiming,
Or with the raquet lofting feathered shuttlecock,
I thus divert myself with gaming.

30.

Or from the crystal waters, pools 'mid sylvan meads,
(I stand in blessed shade, nor sun nor man observing),
Afar I hear the lads – at hand, the splashing maids,
And own a quickening in secret.

31.

Through optic glass, most picturesque of views I scry
Of my estates – on scrolls, the cities and the kingdoms
With forests and the seas – Earth's splendors all reside
In eye, displayed though cunning windows.

32.

By lantern's magic then I marvel at the stars,[47]
They trace the billows' dark-blue wake in silent coursing:
In just this way, think I, ablaze do flow the suns,
Thus Wisdom's radiance endorsing.

33.

We watch as water thunders from the dam, cascades,
And fuels the mill that splits huge tree-trunks into lumber,
How seething flame twixt two cast-iron poles escapes,
As grinder, fed by steam then rumbles.

34.

Or eagerly we gaze on waves of pure-white fleece,
Which pour like snow through rows of pulleys, wheels and needles:
The weaving-looms knit yards of cloth and fluffy lace,
Thanks to the help of our Maria.[48]

35.

We view the luster, hues diverse of silk and flax,
From our Czarina's precincts comes afresh their splendor;
Or see the rugged steel that melts as crimson wax,
When forged into bright shiny halberds.

36.

Then village warriors who shield our kingdom's realm,
Who race to join our troops in knightly garb, will thunder:
"We'd rather die for Russia's Faith, our Tsar, our home,
Than be enslaved by France's power."

37.

I sail along the river, or pace the shores on foot,
Or ride a droshki in my neighbors' train of wagons;[49]
With lead we down the game, we bag the fish with hooks;
Then chase the hare with pack of greyhounds.

38.

Or pause and hear the rolling waves of black and green
As plows build mounds of turf; the grass is felled with sickles,
The gold of corn with scythes – the breeze, now spicy-sweet,
Wafts through the ranks of fair field-nymphets.

39.

Or watch a running cloud, its shadow ebon-hued,
And trace its flight o'er hay-stocks in the verdant pasture;
As off beyond the hills and groves of deepest blue,
The sun sinks down to find his lodging.

40.

Or, wayworn, we may seek the ricks' or oak-trees' shade,
Or, by the Volkhov's shore, we light a smoking bonfire,[50]
And watch the splendid day spread out along the waves,
In open air, sip tea so fragrant.

41.

Diverting! Dories, men, and nets in lazy swarms
Float by, affrighting water-prey with gunwales drumming;[51]
As boats are moved by sails, so haulers tug the barge,
Their song amid the tow-ropes humming.

42.

Sublime! The river's tranquil shores, its sloping leas –
As scattered hills, set here and there with simple boroughs,
Incline their ploughed and banded fields, their open meads,
And silent stand above the current.

43.

Most pleasant! How from far away the scythe-blade gleams,
How echoes roar beneath the mist of distant forests
From corps of harvesters in song: they quit the fields
As we ride from our ramble homewards.

44.

My shrine-like mansion burns, its window-glass ablaze
At twilight paint a golden dawn amidst the roses;
In front, the fountain's rays ascend in sparkling rain;
As distant band its tune composes.

45.

On holidays from iron muzzles thunder roars;
With lightning stars and glowing trees from pyrotechnics,
Whilst peasants and their wives drink wine and beer, in droves
They sing and dance to piping music.

46.

But growing weary of this rustic gaiety,
We take ourselves indoors, to our capitals' amusements:
Compel our children to display their dazzling gifts
In singing, or in dance and music.[52]

47.

As Cupids 'midst the Graces dress'd, or rural folk,
They romp, with Terpsichore and Thalia their muses,[53]
Young shepherd plaits there flowered wreaths for his betrothed,
Entranced, we gaze in fond bemusement.

48.

Sporadic rumblings of the harp engulf our souls,
And blend with the pianoforte's pliant thunders –
The sense of harmony provides mingling flow
Which holds intact the laws of Nature.

49.

Yet holiday or not, I often take my leave
To sit alone, atop the span of newel railing,
My gray head bending to the gusli's tunes at eve,[54]
I soar in cherished dreamworlds, sailing –

50.

What nimble thoughts do not then brim my sleep-drowned mind?
I see how all Time's dreams are swiftly flying,
The days roll on, the years, the roar of seas and wind,
And all the Zephyrs' gentle sighing.

51.

Ah! Seeking 'round, where may I find this fair day fled?
Great Catherine's radiance, her victories and valour?
And where the works of Paul? The sun is shrouded – hid!
An Eagle's flight who may foreshadow?[55]

52.

To us, these Alexandrine years have seemed fair days;
Fit have they been to stir the tender strings upon the psalter;[56]
And men have known the sweet felicity of peace,
Yet even now does threaten thunder.[57]

53.

When will its bolts of lightning cease? – He only knows,
Who charts a destined course for all the spheres of heaven,
Who with His finger pilots them in ordered rows,
And wills them work for common welfare.

54.

He sees the root of each design, each fancy's flight,
Holds up to scorn the vanity of mankind foolish:
To some gives the day, from some withholds the light,
And so with ages – present, future.

55.

A fortress did He make of Russia's breast to stand
At Pultusk, Preisch-Eilau, against new Timur warring;[58]
The gaze of youthful leaders there did wreaths command,
And dimmed was gray-haired Eagle's glory.[59]

56.

And thus from night to night the brightest stars now blur;
What is this paltry life? My lyre is clay and mortal!
Alas! The dust of my remains shall be dispersed
From off this world by wings of Saturn.[60]

57.

This house shall fall to ruin, its orchard blighted, bare,
And no one shall recall the very name of Zvanka;
From hollow yet shall flash the barn owl's flame-green stare,
And smoke will smolder from the hovel.[61]

58.

Or mayhap not, Evgenii! You, who here have caught
The echo of my songs, shall mount to that dread summit,
Concealing deep within its bowels, its narrow vaults,
The tomb of warlord's bard or shaman,[62]

59.

From which you'll hear, as peals of distant thunder roll,
The muffled rumbling of the damask gateposts' shiver,
And copper armor clashing 'neath the forest floor,
The clang of arrows in their quivers.

60.

Dear Pastor! You, perhaps, may seize your Staff again,
And strike my iron tomb, now overgrown with lichen,
Thus banish pallid Envy's coiling serpent den[63]
From off my grave – into the chasm.

61.

You, marking not the turn of woeful days and blithe,
Nor yet the rise and fall of Fortune, gained or squandered,
You shall my name within the hearts of men revive
With Truth alone – through Clio's concord.[64]

62.

Beyond the gloom of of endless time, her Trumpet's call
Will hail again this place, where echoes of my lyre
Resounded like a rushing river over holms,
Ravines, and furrowed plains entire.

63.

You heard my songs – you with your pen shall rouse and warn
Our heirs from sleep, in that metropolis due Northward;
And whisper to the trav'ler, like a distant storm:
"Here dwelt God's bard – Felitsa's prophet."[65]

Monument (Pamiatnik)[66]

This poem, first published in 1795 under the title *To My Muse. An Imitation of Horace*, is a free reworking of Horace's ode *To Melpomene* (Odes, book. 3, xxx). Since the posthumous publication of Pushkin's very similar poem, both have been widely referred to by the simple title *Monument* (*Pamiatnik*). Many poets since Horace have taken up this theme, asserting the timelessness and durability of their verse and their fame.[67] Derzhavin returns to the Horatian model perhaps more closely than most, staking his claim at least in part on his innovative use of language and style – as does Horace.[68] Yet, as opposed to his Russian predecessor in this vein, M. V. Lomonosov (first to translate *To Melpomene* in syllabotonic verse fifty years earlier), Derzhavin substitutes features of the Russian landscape for the Roman in order to assert his role as a national poet, indeed a poet of all Slavic nations (cf. verse 8). In contradistinction to Horace, who uses only two, he mentions fully seven major bodies of water (rivers and seas), which typify the Russian landscape. Thus this ode, which closes his first volume of collected *Works*, is linked to all his poems in which water imagery is so pivotal (such as *The Spring, The Waterfall*, etc.), including his last poem, *On Transcience*, better known as *The River of Aeons*.[69]

I've raised my monument, a marvel everlasting,
More firm than bronze and loftier than the Pyramid;
The wind, the swiftly rolling thunder shall not blast it,
Nor shall the ever fleeting years its granite split.

Thus! – I shall never wholly die! My greater essence
Shall burst to life, escape decay's ensnaring seam,
And my acclaim shall grow apace, nor know senescence,
So long as Slavs are held on Earth in high esteem.

Thus word of me from White Sea unto Black shall travel,
Where Volga, Don, Neva now flow, Ural pours down,

And every member of the countless clans will marvel
How, from obscurity, my name received renown,

As one who first dared sing in playful Russian lyrics
And praise the fair Felitsa's virtue in all things,
In lauding God with open heart, dared discourse freely,
And, with a candid smile, speak Truth to kings.

O Muse exult! In glory well-deserved, rejoice!
Should any thee despise, to them turn back their scorn,
With hand unhurried, gesture unconfined, unvoiced,
Anoint thy brow, and crown it with immortal dawn.

On Transience (Na tlennost')[70]

If throughout his works Derzhavin invoked Horace's *carpe diem* as a guide to the well-lived life, on the eve of his own death he was to return to the solemn mood of *Exegi monumentum*… The eight-line masterpiece *On Transience* contains an acrostic whose encrypted message seems to be at odds with the poem's theme of *sic transit gloria mundi*. "Ruina chti," it reads – "Honor the ruin." In this brief but supremely powerful work the poet in fact raises for himself a lasting monument: his poetic legacy is to be understood as the indestructible ruin from which both Time's all-effacing river and Poetry's eternal waterfall flow. It is indeed for this legacy that Derzhavin richly deserves the appellation Russia's Horace, accorded to him both by his contemporaries and later generations.

Better known to Russian readers by its opening words, *The River Of Ages…* (*Reka vremen…*), the poem was written a few days, or perhaps hours, before Derzhavin's death on July 8, 1816. Revisiting the *vanitas vanitatum* theme from Ecclesiastes, Derzhavin here – as in *The Waterfall* and other works – takes the image of flowing water as his central focus. When read in its normal progression, the poem presents a morbid view of the fate of all human endeavors, expressly the poet's own (by its allusion to the lyre and the trumpet standing for the varied modes of his poetry). Yet an alternative message arises in its acrostic, discovered by M. Halle.[71] Formed by the first letters of each line, it reads: "Ruina chti," perhaps best translated as "Honor the Ruin" or, ignoring the syntax and the word division, either as "ruinhail" or "ruinread."

There is little doubt that Derzhavin chose the word "ruin" to stand for his own persona which, when embedded in the River of Ages, would represent the most lasting and grand monument to the meaning of his poetry, withstanding – like a Sphinx, or perhaps the "four-tiered mount" from the Waterfall – eternity itself. Given the importance of this last poem, Derzhavin's widow, Darya, donated the little writing board on which it was scribbled to the then just opened Imperial Public Library in St. Petersburg, in which it is located to this day.

In its original version, the poem was written in iambic tetrameter (rhymed a B a B c D c D), as is offered in my translation, here. However, the poem's innate power has stimulated the contributors to our first volume devoted to Derzhavin, to offer seven additional variations on the last lines of Derzhavin's poetry, included in the Endnotes. Though they are not limited to the original meter and rhyme scheme, nonetheless each of them offers a unique, personal rendition of the possible meaning of Derzhavin's acrostic, as well as the poem itself. In deference to the poet, they are presented here as a series of seven additional interrelated, individually numbered stanzas, with the translators' initials listed below each version.[72]

Relentless River, coursing ages,
Usurps all works of mortal hands;
It sinks all worlds, in darkness rages:
Naught shall be saved – not kings, nor lands.
Should any trace endure an hour
Through Lyre's chord or Trumpet's call,
Obscured it drowns, by Time devoured,
Purged of its form – the Fate of all...

Aleksandr Sergeevich Pushkin

Exegi Monumentum

I've raised my monument, by mortal hands not fashioned,
To it the people's path shall not be overgrown,
Its capstone soars, more prideful and impassioned,
Than Alexander's spire of stone.

No, I shall never wholly die – my willed Lyre's Spirit
Shall long outlive my dust, intact escape decay –
And I shall be acclaimed, should yet a single lyric
Alive beneath the moon remain.

And word of me shall be through mighty Rus proclaimed
Within her shall my name peal forth from every tongue,
The Slav's proud grandchild, and the Finn, the yet untamed
Tunguz, Kalmyk the steppeland's son.

And long for this shall I be treasured in my kingdom,
That I have roused good feelings with my reed,
That in my ruthless age I sang in praise of Freedom,
And for the fallen did I plead.

By the Almighty's will, o Muse, be ever guided,
Do not fear calumny, nor yet demand a crown;
Unmoved, accept thy fate, now lauded, now derided,
Nor trouble to dispute a clown.

Pushkin's *Exegi Monumentum*, composed in 1836 but not published in his lifetime, is a clear response to Derzhavin's *Monument*, written over four decades earlier, and is one of the last poems preserved by the poet's own hand. In this regard, it is also analogous to *On Transience* – Derzhavin's ultimate meditation on the theme of poetic immortality (which Pushkin knew by heart and inscribed from memory in a friend's album in 1830).

Due to the fact that Pushkin tragically died in a duel half a year after composing this unambiguous summary of his major achievements, the poem became one of the most anthologized of Pushkin's works and an absolute requirement for school children to memorize by heart. Practically every Russian who knows how to read knows this work. For this and many other reasons it is also one of the most commented of Pushkin's texts, and no introductory summary, however brief, can do justice to the multitude and volume of the views expressed on this poem. But since Derzhavin's *Monument* was certainly Pushkin's central focus in 1836 – his *Exegi Monumentum* matches Derzhavin's version in its number of stanzas and meter, and uses certain of Derzhavin's word clusters for its own purposes – it was generally assumed that Pushkin's work is, at its core, a response to Derzhavin, and even "anti-Derzhavinian." Selecting various of Pushkin's statements about the nature of his life's goals and listed accomplishments, line by line, stanza by stanza, any reader can easily see – even in translation – that Pushkin accentuates achievements different from those Derzhavin identifies in his *Monument* around more or less the same or similar thematic loci in each stanza. For instance, in the very first stanza, one can see how Derzhavin claims the durability of his fame to be greater than that of any Pyramid – a symbol of temporal power so ancient as to be almost generic. In contrast, Pushkin – after literally repeating Derzhavin's words "I've raised my monument" – asserts his claim over a monument from his contemporary reality: "Alexander's spire of stone," the colossal granite column that stands in the largest square adjacent to the Winter Palace in Saint Petersburg.[73] Later on, unlike Derzhavin (who

took pride in his reformation of the tenets of Russian verse, as well as daring to "speak Truth to kings"), Pushkin asserts his own claim to greatness based on his lyre's service to humane ideas and to the cause of freedom for the oppressed and the fallen. One can easily imagine, even without reading such statements *verbatim*, with what verve the progressively minded Russian nineteenth-century intelligentsia and, later on, Soviet scholarship expanded the superlatives attached to the meaning of the poem, placing the poet on the pedestal as the most "democratic," "civic-minded", "progressive" poet Russia ever had, and, quite simply, "Russia's everything."

But Pushkin's intent in writing *Exegi monumentum* was far more complex than simply winning the love of all flag-waving Russians; he had a more exclusive circle of implicit addressees. It was certainly not addressed to mob admirers or to "clowns" on whom he ends his poem. Most of my thoughts on this subject, as well as on the subject of Pushkin's continued interest in Derzhavin's legacy, as well as a detailed synopsis of Pushkin's implicit "dialogue" with the poet, were recently published in my study *Derzhavin kak ispovednik Pushkina* (*Derzhavin as Pushkin's Confessor*).[74] Among other observations, the study took an alternate view regarding Pushkin's understanding of Derzhavin's legacy to the one posited by David M. Bethea a decade earlier.[75] At variance with Bethea's reading, I suggested that Pushkin – far from supposedly being caught in a dialectic thought process in choosing between "positive" memories of his life-long closest friend Baron Anton Delvig and "negative" ones connected with Derzhavin – was turning to *both* for a positive input into his private deliberations on the nature of the creative process and the meaning of poetry. This became especially true after Delvig's untimely death in 1831, which robbed Pushkin of one of his most trusted and beloved friends. Pushkin fervently hoped that Delvig might have escaped literal death and entered the realm of Poetry's *Elysium* – which Derzhavin had deservedly occupied since 1816 – from where *both* poets could function as arbiters of Pushkin's own continued questions about the value of art and poetic creativity.

Since Delvig – who, in his turn, nearly deified Derzhavin – was the key person in introducing Pushkin to Derzhavin's poetry, as well as the first of his generation to nominate Pushkin – after Derzhavin's demise in 1816 – as the rightful heir to the great bard's leading role in Russian literature, a few notes about Pushkin's relationship with his friend must be entered here.[76] Typical of Pushkin's private musings with or about Delvig is a note that he penned in a mixture of Russian and French in his diary, after visiting Delvig's grave in early April 1836[77]:

I've paid my visit to your grave – alas, it's cramped there;
les morts m'en distraient [The dead distracted me] –
now I proceed to offer my respects to *Tsarskoe Selo* and *Babolovo.*[78]

One should note the personal, conversational tone Pushkin employed here, as if Delvig was not really dead, but simply constrained by the grave, in which his physical body was destined to rest for eternity. The next day, Pushkin's "diary" continued as follows:

The Tsar's Village!...
(Gray) les jeux du Lycée, nos leçons...
[(Gray) the joys of the Lycée, our studies...]
Delvig and Kiuchelbecker, *la poésie* [poetry] –
Babolovo.

The thoughts about Delvig certainly continued in this entry written upon reaching *Tsarskoe Selo*, but the tone had shifted (whilst eliciting happy memories of yet another of his Lycée friends, Kiuchelbecker). Pushkin mentions the "joys" of the *Lycée*, and *poetry*. Although Derzhavin is not named, his presence is implied; Pushkin is certainly recalling his fateful debut, reading his first major poem in front of Derzhavin at the *Lycée* in 1815. It was this event that inaugurated Pushkin's formal entry into the world of poetry itself, his mastery in the field of "*poésie*" highly and emotionally approved by the supreme arbiter of such valuations at that time – Derzhavin himself. It must be noted that Delvig – Pushkin's closest friend from

that time on – already in 1815 prophesied that Pushkin would reach the same exceptional status in Russian verse as had Derzhavin. Delvig was convinced of this not due to the friendship that he shared with Pushkin, but simply from the special vantage point of a rising literary connoisseur who was exhaustively well-read in the fine aspects of ancient Greek literature and was already uniformly admired for his knowledge and taste.

Pushkin certainly believed in his friend's judgement. He was convinced that Delvig was the final authority in passing a constructive and professional opinion on the quality of any literary creation, painting, or artifice, which required unprejudiced taste. It is for this reason that, in a poem completed about two weeks before the aforementioned diary entries (and during his visit to the great Russian sculptor Orlovsky's workshop), Pushkin relegated the supreme judgment about the exceptional in art he was just viewing at the time precisely to Delvig. It was composed in dactylic hexameter, a meter atypical for Pushkin but beloved by Delvig.[79].

To the Artist

Somber and cheerful I come, o Master of Form, to your workshop:
Gypsum rebounds from your thought, Marble submits to your will:
Many a god with their goddesses, heroes!...See Zeus with his storm-bolts,
See, with his gaze slewing up, ripples the Satyr his pipes.
Barclay, the spearhead, is here, and yon – the triumphant Kutúzov.
Here is Apollo – Ideal, there is Niobe – pure Grief...
Cheerful am I. But the while – 'midst the swarm of such still-silent idols –
Sadness takes over my passage: my good-hearted Délvig is gone:
Dark is the coffin restraining my friend and the patron of Artists.

How he would clasp you, enthused! How he would share in your pride!

Significantly, this poem was composed in 1836 – a most difficult year for Pushkin – and shortly before his own mother's death, which happened on the first day of the Russian Easter. Pushkin was close to his mother and her death prompted thoughts of his own demise.[80] These thoughts gave rise to a number of poems composed during this year (all interconnected, as argued in our aforementioned study of 2011) and certainly *Exegi monumentum*, finished by Pushkin's own dating on August 21, 1836. There must have been many associations in Pushkin's mind linked to this month and year. Fully 20 years had passed since Derzhavin's death (this anniversary was marked broadly by Russian *literati* of the time, including Gogol), but also two decades since Delvig himself claimed Pushkin to be the natural successor to Derzhavin's legacy on the Russian Parnassus in his own poem of July, 1816, titled "On the Death of Derzhavin." Moreover, August was the month in which Delvig was born (as Pushkin certainly remembered), and, curiously enough, it was exactly ten years earlier, on August 21, 1826, when his exile to his family estate at Mikhailovskoe began.

All these minute details are recounted here in order to identify the minimal set of implicit addressees in Pushkin's *Exegi Monumentum* and its inspiration. A brief mention of Pushkin's relationship to Delvig was necessary in order to comprehend that there were actually at least four direct addressees of his *Exegi Monumentum*: Horace (from whose ode Pushkin borrows his epigraph), Derzhavin (from whose ode Pushkin borrows certain word clusters to expand his own ideas connected to them), Delvig (who brought Derzhavin to Pushkin's serious attention and who, by naming Pushkin as Derzhavin's heir on the Russian Parnassus, literally forced his friend to think of his own craft, however different it may be, as being on the same level as that of the master), and of course, Pushkin himself (as an object of introspection, after his lyrical persona enunciated all the ideas and thoughts posited in the finished poem).

The general tone of the poem, even if it deviated from Derzhavin's *Monument* in many places in insisting on different accomplishments, was certainly not "combative" with respect to the old bard. And for good reason. Pushkin knew by the time that he wrote this poem that Derzhavin had done literally the same things of which Pushkin was so proud: Derzhavin did, in fact, using Pushkin's words, "rouse good feelings," did "sing in praise of Freedom", and "for the fallen did he plead." Moreover, for Derzhavin, the geographic realm over which Pushkin claims his verse would hold sway is the same – Russia. The only trouble for Pushkin was that he lived in a "ruthless age," as he calls it, rather than with Derzhavin in the "golden age of Catherine," as Delvig called it.

Thus, the chief cause for making a summary of his own accomplishments in front of what he was convinced were the eternal dwellers of Elysium – including Horace, Derzhavin, and Delvig, but also many other select equals (especially Krylov) – was that he might have by now earned entry to the place they currently occupied. Derzhavin was to have over twenty years to revise the first vision of his poetry's meaning in the *Monument*, and he composed several other works on the theme, including *The Swan, The Crown of Immortality*, *To Eugene. Life at Zvanka*, *To Polyhymnia*, and *On Transience*. Pushkin read them all and *knew* that the accomplishments he himself had claimed as his own were, in fact, claimed by Derzhavin as well in these and other poems. The only value that Pushkin defended more intensely than the older poet was the concept of absolute *Freedom*. For Derzhavin, the concept was more closely measured by the notion of absolute "independence" from anyone's views. But sorting out these differences might have required a different poem, whereas Pushkin was fated to leave *Exegi Monumentum* as his sole testament for posterity.

Notes for Alexander Levitsky's text

[1] *G. R. Derzhavin: Poetic Works. A Bilingual Album*. Brown Slavic Contributions v. XII, Ed. by A. Levitsky; Transl. by A. Levitsky and M. Kitchen (Providence: Brown Slavic Dept., 2001), xii+590 pp.

[2] *Worlds Apart: An Anthology of Russian Fantasy and Science Fiction*. Edited and with Commentary by Alexander Levitsky; translated by Alexander Levitsky and Martha T. Kitchen (NY, Woodstock, London: Overlook Duckworth, 2007), pp. 67-80.

[3] *The Penguin Book of Russian Poetry*, ed. By R. Chandler (Penguin: London, 2015) pp. 12-17.

[4] H. B. Segel. *The Literature of Eighteenth-Century Russia*. Vol II. (NY: Dutton, 1967), pp. 288-303.

[5] An allusion to Count Rumiantsev.

[6] The color mention in the original is: *kak vecher vo zare rumianoi*. Derzhavin's use of the "rumian" color is playing on the root of the name Rumiantsev–rumianyi, "rosy," "reddish," "ruddy."

[7] A reference to Julius Caesar's assassination.

[8] Belisarius (sixth century A.D.), a Byzantine general convicted of treason and blinded.

[9] Potemkin died on October 5, 1791, on a journey between Jassy and Nikolaev.

[10] The "amber waves" refer to the Baltic Sea where Prussian forces were defeated by the Russians in the Seven Years' War (1756-1763). The "black waves" refer to the Black Sea and Russian victories over the Turks.

[11] An ancient country in Transcaucasia, on the eastern shore of the Black Sea. The legendary Golden Fleece was in Colchis. Derzhavin erroneously uses Colchis (Kolkhida, in Russian) with reference to thc Crimea, which was "humbled" during the First Turkish War.

[12] A reference to the Russian tsar.

[13] A reference to the celebrations and honors tended Rumiantsev for his victories.

[14] That is, Poternkin.

[15] Sensing the approach of death, Potemkin asked to be taken from his coach and laid on the grass of the steppe he was traveling across at the time. When he died, a hussar closed his eyes with two small gold coins.

[16] For his victories over the Tatars and Turks, which facilitated the Russian annexation of the Crimea, Potemkin was permitted to add the honorific "Tavricheskii" (of Tavrida, an old name for the Crimea) to his name.

[17] A reference to Potemkin's close ties to the Empress Catherine.

[18] Potemkin enjoyed the reputation of a patron of the arts.

[19] The reference is to Constantinople (Istanbul). Potemkin had grandiose plans for the collapse of Ottoman power, and felt himself entrusted with the task of "saving" Europe from the Turks.

[20] The Turkish fortress of Ochakov in the Crimea was seized during the Second Turkish War on December 6, 1788.

[21] Izmail, another Turkish stronghold on the Black Sea, was seized by the Russians on December 11, 1790.

[22] A reference to Potemkin's frequent use of less orthodox military strategy.

[23] In honor of Potemkin's victories in the South, a triumphal arch of marble was erected in Tsarskoe Selo (near St. Petersburg) in 1791.

[24] Derzhavin is referring here to his own ode *On the Capture of Izmail* (Na vziatie Izmaila, 1790-1791, printed 1793).

[25] A reference to brilliantly illuminated celebrations in Potemkin's palace.

[26] A reference to the laurel wreath of diamonds presented to Potemkin by Catherine in recognition of his victories.

[27] The *bulava* in Russian was a field marshal's baton. It also indicated the Cossack *hetmanate* that Potemkin held in 1790.

[28] In his *Eclogues* Virgil glorified the Roman statesman and patron of literature, Gaius Cilnius Maecenas (c. 70-8 B.C.).

[29] A reference to Potemkin's famous phaeton and tandem of horses.

[30] A reference to an actual event in Potemkin's life. Leaving church after the funeral of the Prince of Wittemberg (the brother-in-law of Paul, the successor to the throne), who died on August 13, 1791, Potemkin was sunk in thought and actually boarded the hearse instead of his own carriage.

[31] A Russianized form of Pontius Euxinus ("hospitable sea"), the Latin name for the Black Sea.

[32] The Turkish garrison at Izmail numbered 40,000 men.

[33] Baron Otto Weismann von Weisenstein. A general who lost his life in the First Turkish War on June 22, 1773, and was buried in Izmail.

[34] A reference to the fires of Turkish fortresses under siege and the burning of Turkish naval vessels.

[35] Ochakov fell in December on a bitter cold day.

[36] The poet is speaking of the reflections of clouds and naval ensigns on the water on a clear day.

[37] A reference to the medallions of Potemkin many Russian women wore on their chests.

[38] The Athenian general and statesman in the Peloponnesian War. He lived from c. 450-405 B.C.

[39] A coward who condemned Achilles. Probably here an allusion to Prince Zubov, who was sometimes critical of Potemkin.

[40] The poet is speaking of the ruin personal ambition can cause.

[41] The Suna River flows into Lake Onega in northwestern Russia.

[42] *To Eugene. Life at Zvanka* (*Evgeniiu. Zhizn' Zvanskaia*) was first published in *Works, 1808*.

[43] Derzhavin was particularly kind toward those who lived and worked on his estate. He liked to spend time with the peasants' children

and often acted as the arbiter or judge in their arguments, which in miniature replicated his final post as Minister of Justice in the Imperial Russian government.

[44] Derzhavin refers here to the work of his secretary-scribe, Abramov, who was appointed to straighten out the course of the poet's handwriting.

[45] These are Russian alcoholic drinks made from the honey produced from the pollen of different trees.

[46] This is a champagne-like drink made in Russia from apple or birch sap.

[47] A *camera obscura* takes images of light and projects them onto a dark surface. Here Derzhavin is describing a projection of the sparkling sunlight on the waves and currents of the river Volkhov.

[48] A reference to the Empress Mariia Feodorovna, who ordered the automatic weaving looms, the milling machine, and the wood-cutting machine from abroad for Derzhavin's estate.

[49] A *droshki* (plural in Russian) is a Russian cart or carriage.

[50] The Volkhov is the river located in front of Derzhavin's manor.

[51] With this method, the fishermen would frighten fish into crowding together and jumping upward so that the nets would close on a large school of fish.

[52] Derzhavin and Dar'ia Alekseevna were childless, but their manor was always alive with guests. When Derzhavin married Dar'ia Alekseevna, he became the third man of his literary-poetic circle to marry a woman of the D'iakov family. Derzhavin's closest friends, N. A. L'vov (a Renaissance man whose talents included architecture, mechanics,

poetry, art, and science) and V. V. Kapnist (another renowned poet and playwright) had previously married Dar'ia Alekseevna's two other sisters. The children of the L'vovs and Kapnists spent extended periods of time with the Derzhavins at Zvanka. Derzhavin even composed a short play, "Confusion of the Kondratiis," for the three L'vov daughters to act out when they were small children. Later, L'vov's daughter Elizaveta Nikolaevna lived almost permanently with the Derzhavins, and she served as Derzhavin's personal secretary when he was composing and dictating the volume of explanations of his poetry.

53 In Greek mythology, Thalia was the Muse of comedy or drama, while Terpsichore was the Muse of dance.

54 The *gusli* were a Russian version of a psaltery, a stringed instrument resembling a zither.

55 This "Eagle" refers to Russia. Derzhavin was unsure of the policies that the emperor Alexander I would follow, particularly with an increasingly bellicose Napoleonic France.

56 Alexander himself had artistic talent, and he was a good patron of the arts.

57 This is a hint at Alexander's wars with Napoleon's France.

58 Pultusk and Preisch-Eilau were the locations of significant Russian victories over Napoleon's army. Timur was Tamerlane, the 14th-century Turkic conqueror.

59 This "Eagle" refers to the chief commander M. F. Kamenskii, who left his commanding role during the war in Poland. Then Benningsen took over the command and defeated the enemy in Pultusk.

60 Saturn was the Roman god of time, like Chronos in Greek mythology.

[61] Derzhavin's statements about Zvanka were prophetic. During World War II, the area around Novgorod was a particularly fierce battleground, and bombings and battles leveled all the buildings remaining on the hill.

[62] Local lore told of a warrior/sorcerer who was buried in a hill on Derzhavin's estate above the Volkhov River. This legend was expressed, in part, in Derzhavin's poem *Zlogor*. The river was named for this sorcerer (in Russian, "volkhv"). Derzhavin used this lore to mystify his own poetic persona on a number of occasions, including countless images of depicting himself as writing poetry while seated on the mound in which Zlogor was presumably buried.

[63] The imagery of snakes indicates envious people at court who might try to slander Derzhavin's name after his death.

[64] Clio is the Muse of History. Eugene was then gathering materials for a historical encyclopedia of Russian authors.

[65] A reference to his two most revered odes, *God* and *Felitsa*.

[66] XVIII. *Monument* (*Pamiatnik*) was first published in *Priatnoe i poleznoe preprovozhdeniie vremiani*, 1795 VII, p.145. The original consists, as does our version, of five four-line stanzas of iambic hexameter, rhymed *a B a B, c D c D*, etc.

[67] Cf., for instance, Shakespeare's sonnets 55 and 107. The notion of the timeless value of his poetry will be reasserted by Derzhavin in closing each of his separate volumes of *Works* (excepting the fourth, devoted to drama) published during his life.

[68] At the same time, just as in his first Horatian imitation, *The Spring*, Derzhavin also imparts to the classical model a Christian interpretation of his artistic immortality in using the adjectives *chudesnyi* and *vechnyi* (miraculous and eternal). These are clearly the attributes of

the Divine , which will later be transformed in Pushkin's version to the adjective *nerukotvornyi* (not made by hands), used to denote the miraculous creations of God (refering either to his cosmic abode, or, in Greek tradition, to the *mandilion* or *acheiropoietos*–the Veronica image in western tradition).

[69] Cf. my article "Obraz vody u Derzhavina i obraz poèta" (1996).

[70] *On Transience* (*Na tlennost'*) was first published in 1818.

[71] Morris Halle. "O nezamechennom akrostikhe Derzhavina," *International Journal of Slavic Linguistics and Poetics*. 'S-Gravenhage, 1959, I/II. pp. 232-236.

[72] Seven further translations of *On Transience*.

i

Relentless River in its course of aeons
Usurps all deeds and works of mortal men,
It plunges Universe in dark oblivion:
Naught shall remain of kingdoms, kings or clans.
Should any shell of life remain, persist,
Thanks to a lyre's sound, a trumpet's call,
Obscured, it shall be crushed in the abyss,
Purged of its form, to meet the Fate of all!

A. L. and A. G. M.

ii

River of aeons in its ceaseless torrent
Unmakes and drowns all work of human hands;
In dark oblivion it plunges kingdoms:
Naught leaves behind of nations, rulers, lands.
Howbeit that some note of lyre or trumpet
A little while escape, endure, resound,
It too the maw of ages shall devour,
Like all else it to Fate and Death is bound.

M. T. K.

iii

How swift Time's river! In its ceaseless flowing
Away are borne all works of mortal men.
It sinks and drowns in depths of dark oblivion
Lands and their peoples, kingdoms with their kings.
Remains there yet, unconquered, still surviving
Unquenched, a poet's song or hero's deed?
In Time's great maw it will be soon devoured,
None may our common mortal Fate evade.

M. T. K.

iv

How swift Time's river! Its enraged torrent,
Ancient of aeons, bears downward all our pride.
Is there no immortality for kingdoms,
Lords and their vassals, nations, clan, or tribe?
Relentless flood! May no man-spawn escape you,
Up, from your coils leap gasping on the sand?
I covet Man, his seed, his works, his music...
None may the ever-flowing tide of Time withstand.

E. K. D.

v

All-purging flood, in whose murmurous coils
Vanish all works and all kingdoms of men,
Engulfed the victor, entombed his spoils,
Royalty, peasantry, noble and swain!
Unmerciful tide, will you suffer not one song
Issue immortal from trumpet or lyre?
Not one voice will conquer Eternity's silence,
Although it cry only "All, all must expire!"

E. K. D.

vi

Adrift upon the River of Oblivion,
Vortices swallowing all man's work and pride,
Engulfing nations, dynasties and kingdoms,
Ruler and subject, chieftains and their tribes...

Unsparing of the least of man's creation,
Into the abyss, lyre's note and trumpet's call!
None may escape the jaws of Time's Leviathan:
Alas! Time conquers, Time devours all!

E. K. D.

vii

Alas that rushing spate of our oblivion,
Voracious of Man's work, his seed, his pride,
Engulfs, erases dynasties and kingdoms,
Ruler and subject borne away alike.
Unsparing flood, nor soul nor song escapes it,
Immortal Sons of Time may never be.
None may outlive the hunger of the ancient
All-purging stream where all are borne and die!

E. K. D.

[73] The monument was erected by the monarch to commemorate Russia's victory over Napoleon. It was topped with a statue of an angel, modeled on the facial features of Alexander I, whom Pushkin personally strongly disliked, for some obvious and some not well-explained reasons. Among the obvious ones was the fact that it was under the reign of this monarch that Pushkin was exiled from the capitol at least twice, the first time for writing an audaciously direct poem glorifying the concept of nearly absolute freedom.

[74] *Russkaia Literatura #1* (SPb.: Academy of Sciences, 2011), pp. 3-23.

[75] cf. his *Realizing Metaphors – Alexander Pushkin and the Life of the Poet (Madison: Wisconsin Center for Pushkin Studies, 1998)*.

[76] That relationship is exhaustively dealt with by Bethea in his aforementioned monograph and no introductory notes to the poem, supposedly addressed to a different poet, can do justice to

the fullness and depth of Pushkin's appreciation of this lifelong, trusted friend from the Lycée.

[77] In order to keep the stylistic flavor of these notations, we have kept Pushkin's French original readings, followed by our translations of such utterances in brackets.

[78] NB: The Babolovo estate is opposite the main gates to the west of Catherine Park. Catherine laid out the estate when the water supply was being constructed for Tsarskoe selo in the 1770s. The canal that brought water from a spring 15 versts from the palace is still there. The canal runs underground until it reaches the western end of Babolovo Park, after which it is landscaped in the English manner. Catherine gave the estate to her lover Grigorii Potemkin, and he built a kind of pleasure pavilion or spa at the point where the underground tunnel and the fresh spring water came out into the open. Alexander I installed a vast granite bath in the pavilion, which became known as the little palace, or Babolovo palace. It is now a ruin, but the huge bath still stands; there are also almshouses, which were built by Alexandra Feodorovna for crippled soldiers. It is rumored that Pushkin used the Babolovo Park for walks when he was studying at the Lycée, as well as for meetings in private matters.

[79] Pushkin's newly translated poetic legacy of 1836 is forthcoming in its entirety in a separate edition. It will also trace Pushkin's profound interest in Derzhavin's *oeuvre* in other years, and will provide a substantial stanza by stanza comparison, wherever needed.

[80] Having to wait with the burial of his own mother throughout the long Easter holidays (the Russian Orthodox Church does not allow any funerals for over a week, following the Easter) he moved her corpse from St. Petersburg to the Sviatogorsk Monastery near his family estate in Mikhailovskoe. It is at this time that he decided to make his own final resting place next to his mother's.

Translating "A Voice from the Chorus" by Aleksandr Blok

Stephen Capus

Of the major 20th century Russian poets Aleksandr Blok continues to be among the least frequently translated into English. At first glance the absence of Blok from the corpus of Russian poetry in translation seems puzzling, given the eminent position which he occupies in the hierarchy of Russian modernism, both on account of his own merits, and the influence which he exerted upon such younger cotemporaries as Pasternak, Akhmatova and Tsvetaeva.

And yet we don't need to read Blok's poetry for long before we discover the reason for his relative neglect. For it soon becomes apparent that the values which inform this poetry are quite different from those which are commonly held to lie at the heart of the English poetic tradition. A particularly good illustration of this feature of Blok's writing is provided by "A Voice from the Chorus." The poem is undoubtedly one of Blok's greatest; and yet it's also a poem which is profoundly recalcitrant to English poetic conventions. With its solemn, prophetic tone, its preference for grand generalizations over concrete particulars, and its highly formalized verse structure in which rhyme and metre are accorded a crucial role, the poem would seem to offend against all the rules of good taste which govern contemporary English-language poetry. How could such a thoroughly alien poem ever be a candidate for translation into English?

There is, in fact, an influential strand in Anglo-Saxon critical opinion which would argue that it's a mistake even to attempt to translate poetry like this: that such willfully un-English poems should be barred entry to the realm of English literature altogether, and that we

should concentrate our efforts instead on other, more amenable kinds of foreign poetry. On the other hand, another, less hardline, strand of opinion will concede that it might be possible to translate such poetry such as Blok's into English, while insisting that before it be permitted entry to the language, it must at least be taught to respect local customs and values, and compelled to leave its more objectionable foreign habits behind at the border. According to this view, the act of translation must include a process of re-education whereby the recalcitrant foreign poem is systematically divested of all those features which make it an affront to English poetic taste.

Implicit in both the foregoing views on translation are a series of assumptions about the nature of English poetry. And these assumptions are rooted in turn in a belief in some such entity as the "essence of the English Language": a set of enduring characteristics which determines what kind of poetry can, and cannot, be written in the language. The essence of English is located to begin with in the material sounds of the language: English, we're told, is primarily a consonantal language of sturdy, robust Anglo-Saxon monosyllables; and these sound-characteristics make it the natural medium of expression for a down-to-earth, clear-sighted view of the world. English, then, is in its "essence" the language of solid, palpable, concrete reality and, as such, it eschews the vapid mists of abstract theorizing and wooly-minded generalizations, the excitable gestures of overheated emotions, in favor of the careful observation and precise description of facts and things, and of the measured understatement of feeling. English, we're also told, is a deregulated language which is impatient of restrictive formality of all kinds, and refuses to submit its native energy and inventiveness to the stifling limitations of rigid rules of grammar and prosody.

From this characterization of the English language is derived a corresponding stereotype of English poetry. The only kind of poetry which can be written in English, we're assured, is that which corresponds to the "essence" of the language outlined above. And of course this means that foreign poetry, too, if it's to succeed in English translation, must likewise be made to respect the essence of the language by displaying the authentic English virtues of precision,

concreteness, emotional restraint, understated metres and rhymes – if not their elimination altogether – and a generally unassuming and commonsensical demeanor. If a foreign poem is unable to satisfy these requirements – as is surely the case with most the work of Blok – then it should be refused admission to English altogether!

And yet it's surely debatable whether the expressive possibilities of a language are quite so rigidly determined by its material characteristics. If language in general has a defining characteristic, then it's rather its infinite flexibility – a flexibility which can be explained in part by the fact that languages, far from being pure homogenous entities, are composed of heterogeneous elements derived from diverse origins. Languages are historical constructs which, far from being rigidly chained to a fixed identity, endlessly evolve in response to the changing expressive demands of their users.

Critics who speak of the "essence" or "genius" of the English Language are in fact guilty of confusing the concepts of essence and tradition. A series of characteristics which are the product of historical developments in the practice of English are reified into a fixed, ahistorical "essence" which is then adduced as a warrant for a set of narrowly prescriptive assertions concerning the kind of poetry which can be written in English.

In theory, then, what a language can and can't do, it's range of expressive possibilities, is limited by nothing more than the ambition and vision of its users. This isn't to say, of course, that the weight of tradition, particularly when it's become solidified into an "essence," can't have a restrictive effect on the users of a language, coercing them into accepting a limited conception of its expressive range. But tradition can, and ought to be, questioned. And it's in relation to this effort to question the authority of orthodox practice that poetry in translation can be of especial value, introducing us as it does to conceptions of poetry which are other than those with which we've become familiar. On this view, the function of poetry in translation is not to reaffirm the prejudices and habits which buttress orthodox English poetic practice, but rather to subvert them. Within the Russian canon, the poetry of Blok, which is so consistently at variance with the rules of English

poetic taste, is especially well qualified to perform this function. Consequently, to require of the poetry of Blok– or of any other foreign poet – that it must, in the act of translation, be coerced into sounding like a certain kind of average contemporary English-language poem is to defeat one of the central purposes of translation.

With the foregoing reflections in mind, the following translation of Blok's "A Voice from the Chorus" has avoided the temptation to edit out the un-Englishness which can make his work such a stumbling-block for Anglo-Saxon readers who hold the conventions of contemporary English poetry to represent universal rules of good taste to which all poetry, whether native or foreign, must conform if it's to have any value. Instead, the translation seeks to preserve precisely those features of Blok's poetry which run counter to contemporary taste, in the belief that it's surely the foreignness of foreign poetry that open-minded readers must value above all else.

A Voice from the Chorus

Aleksandr Blok
Translated from the Russian by Stephen Capus

How often the likes of me and you
Complain we're feeling sad and bored:
But oh, my friends, if you only knew
The cold, dark days that lie in store.

For now you laugh, you joke, you hold
Your darling by the hand;
And you weep to hear of the lies she's told,
Of the knife her hand will one day hold,
Oh, foolish man.

Deceit and lies are everywhere
But death won't come;
This terrible world grows dark with despair
And the crazy dance of the stars up there
In the sky goes on and on.

But the final age, the most grim of all,
You and I shall live to see;
Sin will increase as darkness falls,
The laughter upon our lips will stall,
Mankind will cease to be.

And you'll call, my friend, on the absent sun,
But the sun won't rise again;

Stephen Capus, trans. Aleksandr Blok

And then you'll wait for spring to come,
But you'll wait for spring in vain;
And the scream you utter will sink like a stone
And never be heard again.

Then be content, don't ask for more,
Be quiet as water, humble as grass;
My friends, if you could only guess
The cold, dark days that lie in store.

Three Translations from the Russian

Peter Daniels

There isn't much to say about the Bunin poem except that a verse translation started to occur to me while I was reading it in the old Penguin anthology edited by Obolensky. I am not otherwise familiar with Bunin.

I was looking at Gumilev (again in Obolensky's anthology) and I found "The Runaway Tram" took me over, like the tram itself. I hadn't read Boris Dralyuk's translation in the new Penguin anthology yet, so I kept away from his version until I was happy with mine. I made it a "runaway" tram rather than "lost", to give the title more rhythm and no doubt as a reminiscence of the song "The Runaway Train" from my childhood, though I kept "lost" in stanza 3. An unrhyming version would feel unsatisfying, as the nightmare anti-logic runs along with a clear musical sound pattern in the tradition of Edward Lear or Lewis Carroll, but rhyming second and fourth lines, like a traditional ballad, seems a reasonable way with Russian quatrains. Gumilev's metre has some variations; my rhythm has become more dactylic/anapaestic, especially as the narrative pressure builds. There is the usual problem of needing to find more syllables in English without redundant filling, and choosing words for rhythm and rhyme that have enough semantic reason to be there: e.g. having "ravens" rather than "crows" for the Poe echo; introducing "loomed" which seemed to help the mood though in Russian the tram is only flying; adding "sense" to "a hole in time" to reinforce the feeling of an "abyss", not a word I wanted to use; giving the head-chopper an axe, useful for a rhyme as well as slicing off heads. For Mashenka, "where can you be – have you gone to your death?" is more elaborate than "can it be that you have died?" but it felt allowable to suggest the possibility of her being executed.

Berlin was the first destination of Khodasevich's exile beginning in 1922. "Everything is stony" has taken me some time to reach what feels like a finished version: for that reason it missed inclusion in my Angel Classics book of Khodasevich, which otherwise contains only one explicit Berlin poem (as his German translator Adrian Wanner has noted!). There was the usual work finding convincing rhymes, but there were also some negotiations with sense. I have the ocarina as a moan / blown rather than that it simply blows (*dunet*) – for musical effect and rhyming with an additional instance of "stone" that I introduced, rather than Berlin only heaped up (*gromozdkogo Berlina*); this freedom did feel in keeping with the spirit of the poem. The final couplet took me the most trouble, and when I thought I might have done it, I clearly hadn't – two judges in the 2014 Brodsky-Spender competition praised parts of my entry in their reports but avoided mentioning the ending, so I could tell that was why it wasn't successful and I had to keep trying. I had been distracted into cleverness that only turned out clumsy and too far from the original, but I have now found something simpler and more correct.

"You looked at me"

Ivan Bunin

Translated from the Russian by Peter Daniels

You looked at me as softly as a doe
and all I loved so tenderly in that,
I have not to this day forgotten yet,
although your face is misty, fading now.

And one day even sadness disappears,
and memory's dream dissolves in deepest blue,
where there is no more joy and no more woe
but the complete forgiveness of the years.

Peter Daniels

"Everything is stony"

Vladislav Khodasevich
Translated from the Russian by Peter Daniels

Everything is stony. On the stone stairs
night moves along. At gateways and at doors

couples like statues, joined as if they're stuck.
And heavy sighs. Cigars with heavy smoke.

Keys clinked on stone, the bolt clanged in the lock.
You've had to walk the stones till five o'clock.

Wait: piercingly, an ocarina moan
is blown through chinks in lumpy Berlin stone;

behind the houses, ugly morning breaks:
the stepmother of Russian cities wakes.

The Runaway Tram

Nikolai Gumilev

Translated from the Russian by Peter Daniels

I walked an unfamiliar street
and heard the ravens' sudden scream,
a strumming lute, a thunder peal –
before me loomed a flying tram.

I put my foot upon its platform,
how I did I couldn't say,
and in the air its trails of fire
burned brighter than the light of day.

It rushed like a storm on darkest wings,
lost down a hole in time and sense…
"Stop it, mister tramcar driver,
make this tramcar stop at once!"

Too late. We'd sidled round a wall
and rumbled through a palm-tree grove,
across the Neva, over the Nile,
clattering past the Seine we drove.

And by the window, flashing past,
two penetrating eyes I knew:
that poor old beggar who met his death
down in Beirut, a year ago.

Where am I? Troubled and slow, my heart
beats out its answer with a sign:
"Do you see the station where tickets are sold
to travel the Indian Spiritual Line?"

A notice… the bloodstained letters reading
"Greengrocer" – and I can tell
instead of turnips and heads of cabbage,
dead men's heads are what they sell.

In a scarlet shirt, with a face like an udder,
the head-chopper came for me too with his axe
and sliced off my head, which lay with the others
in the slime down here at the bottom of the box.

And yet there's a lane with a picket fence,
a house with three windows, and grass that's grey,
"Stop the tram, mister tramcar driver,
stop this tram at once, I say!"

Máshenka, here you were living and singing,
you wove me a carpet, we plighted our troth,
where are you now, your voice and your figure,
where can you be – have you gone to your death?

How you were sobbing that time in your chamber,
when I in my powder-stiffened coiffure
went to be bowing in front of the Empress,
and we would catch sight of each other no more.

I realise now: what freedom we have
comes in from elsewhere on a light breaking through;
people and shadows must wait to go in
at the gates of the interplanetary zoo.

And a breeze springs up, so sweet and familiar,
and flying towards me, from over the bridge,
the hand of a rider in a gauntlet of iron
and a pair of hooves that belong to his steed.

Fortress of Orthodox faith, St Isaac's
engraves its profile against the sky.
I'll ask for a service of prayers for Máshenka's
health, with a requiem mass for me.

And still for ever my heart is mournful,
to breathe is so hard, and it's painful to live…
Máshenka, I would never have thought
it was possible so much to love, and to grieve.

Yevgeny Baratynsky's "À Aurore Chernval": The Story of a Twinned Poem

Yefim Somin

Avrora Karlovna Chernval (1808-1902) was the daughter of Carl Johan Stjernvall, the governor of the Vyborg Province in the Grand Duchy of Finland, then part of the Russian Empire. In 1825, by then the stepdaughter of another high official, and living in Helsingfors, the capital of the duchy, she was the object of adoration of many a young man of the local high society. An exquisite beauty with a lively mind and an angelic character, she fully deserved her legion of admirers. Her name, both first – the goddess of dawn – and family (Chernval – the gallicized version of the Swedish "Stjernvall" – "Star") provided a ready allegory for her brilliant qualities. Among her admirers was a non-commissioned officer Yevgeny Baratynsky.

Baratynsky was a scion of prominent nobility. His father was an Adjutant-General, an honorary title awarded to assistants of the Tsar. At the age of 12, Yevgeny was enrolled in the Page Corps in St. Petersburg, an elite military school for sons of high-ranking generals and noblemen. In 1816, after a prank that went out of control, he was expelled and blacklisted. He eventually managed to enlist in a Life Guards regiment as a private. By the time we are interested in, he had been promoted to the rank of non-commissioned officer and transferred to Finland. He had also established a literary career, after the first publication of his verse by Pushkin's friend, Anton Delvig. Although Baratynsky's military rank was low, his status as a nobleman provided him an entrée to the high society in Helsingfors.

It would be reasonable to assume that the language used by Baratynsky to communicate with Avrora and other members of the

Chernval family was French. Baratynsky grew up speaking French. Indeed, one of his first poems was a madrigal in French to his mother. In it he, probably unwittingly, restates the thesis of "Ballade des dames du temps jadis" by François Villon, but with a twist. While Villon mourns the fabled ladies of the past, as ideals never to be matched again, Baratynsky hails his mother as the new non-mythical epitome of the ancient virtues. The Swedish Chernvals, were also undoubtedly thoroughly gallicized.

It is not clear whether Baratynsky was pursuing Avrora with serious hopes. At the time, she seemed to have already chosen her favorite, Alexander Mukhanov. Nevertheless, love and poetry were in the air, and a poet had to respond. He wrote his sparkling madrigal in French. Soon after, he translated the poem into Russian, and published it in "Polar Star," a leading literary magazine, along with works by Pushkin, Vyazemsky and other stars of the day. It was published under the title "To the Girl Whose Name Was: Aurora" ("Девушке, которой имя было: Аврора.").The Russian version differs from the French original in meter and tone, but this was a common approach to translation at the time.

It is interesting to note that Avrora was not the only Chernval sibling to become a society star and an addressee of ardent poetry. Her sister Emilia, two years her junior, was also a court sensation. Blonde and blue-eyed, she provided a striking contrast to her raven-haired sister. Opinions diverged on which of the two sisters was more beguiling and irresistible. Another famous poet, Mikhail Lermontov, assiduously pursued Emilia, but without success. His madrigal, dedicated to her, reflects his frustration:

To the Countess E.K. Musina-Pushkina

The Countess Emily
Is whiter than a lily.
Her lissome profile is
Unmatched in the universe.
Her luminous eyes

With Italian skies converse.
But Emily's cruel heart
Is kept in a castle apart.

(Tr. Yefim Somin)

À Aurore Chernval

Yevgeny Baratynsky
Translated from the French by Yefim Somin

How thee becomes thy name Aurora
Oh, rosy-fingered nymph of Morn!
Shed brilliant light of daybreak aura,
Sound reveille for hearts forlorn.
Pray, hear thou cries of desperation
From youth in mournful resignation:
"For whom this charming rises Dawn?
Who will attain her adoration,
Whom, like the sun, she'll shine upon?"

Original French:

Oh, qu'il te sied ce nom d'Aurore
Adolescente au teint vermeil!
Verse lumière, et plus encore
Aux coeurs dont tu romps le sommeil.
Entends la voix déjà souffrante
De la jeunesse prévoyante:
„Pour qui se lève ce beau jour?
Pour qui cette Aurore charmante
Sera-t-elle soleil d'amour?"

A Translator's Ruminations (on Translating Goncharov's "Обыкновенная история" / "The Same Old Story")

Stephen Pearl

A BRIEF GUIDED TOUR AROUND THE TRANSLATOR'S WORKSHOP

Some hidden reefs and shoals not apparent on the surface of the water to the passengers on deck – or the readers of a translation – but which have to be navigated carefully by the helmsman – or translator – to ensure the passengers smooth sailing.

UNANSWERED – AND UNANSWERABLE – QUESTIONS

Grappling with a work of classical literature poses one extra difficulty for a translator – the author of the work is no longer available for questioning.

It must be a rare work of fiction which has not raised questions of various kinds in the minds of its readers. With authors who are alive and available, a translator can seek clarification on any point which raises doubts, defies comprehension, or would deepen the translator's understanding of context, background, and characters' motivations. Apparent inconsistencies may also arise, especially in a work which has been written over an extended period of time – sometimes over several years. In this connection, it is worth recalling that before the advent of word processing, and even the now extinct typewriter, books were written by hand, and checking several hundred handwritten pages with all their marginal annotations, insertions, and

deletions for inconsistencies, would have been a task of an entirely different order of difficulty in mid-nineteenth century Russia.

QUOTATIONS

What to do about quotations in general. Is it part of the translator's task to track down their origins – author and work? Well, the author whose work you are translating didn't provide this service to *his* readers, so why should you? Since your author didn't feel it necessary to do so, it can be inferred that he felt he was safe in assuming that the quotation in question would have been familiar to *his* readers. Should then the readers of the translation, who can largely be assumed *not* to be familiar with them, be left without this information, which would help to level the cultural playing field for them? Or should the translator take that extra step and supply it for them? This step, however, may be the beginning of the slippery slope of crossing the frontier into editorializing or exegesis, properly the territory of the scholar, especially since the reader is also left in the cultural dark by the far greater number of opaque ***allusions***–which inevitably crop up in a work aimed at a readership in an alien culture, and also far removed in time.

Even if the translator decides that it is his job to supply such playing field levelling information, that still leaves unsolved the problem of the ***form*** in which it should be provided, and, above all, ***where*** it should appear: in an introduction, footnotes on the same page as the quotation or allusion in question, or listed in successive clusters somewhere at the back of the book.

Each of these options create distractions which stop the readers'flow, and work against the primary objective of providing them with as identical as possible a reading experience as that of the author's contemporaries in *his* and *their* own language.

Readers of ***contemporary*** fiction translated from another language – and culture – rarely encounter distractions of this kind. A case in point is the trilogy by Stieg Larssen, "The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo," so smoothly translated, and so free of the distractions just

described, that it would not surprise me if some readers of its English version were virtually oblivious to the fact that it was ***a translation*** that they were reading.

QUOTATIONS IN VERSE
(which occur unusually frequently in TSOS)

The extra problem posed is not the same as the problem which faces a translator who undertakes the entirely different task of translating the whole of the original poem from which these passages have been taken.

The choice is essentially between a version in prose or in verse.

However, in the case of these isolated excerpts, it is clear to me that priority should be given to presenting the *sense* of the passage to one's readers so that they can understand its relevance to the surrounding context. Any attempt to render the passage in verse in order to preserve the style, charm, humour, beauty, quirkiness or any other aesthetic value of the original – especially if it rhymes – would inevitably be at the expense of the sheer meaning and relevance of the quotation to its context.

"BEING FAITHFUL TO THE ORIGINAL"

An elevated and noble sounding precept, but like so many such, it tends to crumble under closer inspection, and disintegrate under a microscope. To wit:

One reader wrote to offer a commendation of the Oblomov translation, but with a gentle sting in its tail, he asked: "Can it be true that an illiterate servant girl could quote Alexander Pope? She says: ' . . .for fools rush in where fear to tread.' No doubt, Goncharov knew this; has he put 'it' in the wrong mouth?' "

An adequate response to this comment, on the face of it a perfectly legitimate one, means spelling out or peeling off the layers of the translator's thought processes as he mediates between what some describe as "remaining faithful to the original", and what fewer have

described as "faithfully serving the readers" by transmitting something that will make perfect and accessible sense to them in their own language, will not jar and stop the flow, or leave the reader puzzled or baffled, while remaining "faithful" to the author's ***thought***, as well as, in this case, couched in the original epigrammatic or proverbial form chosen by the author.

By "it" did that reader mean the saying he quotes in English? If so, there is no evidence whether Goncharov knew "it" or not, since his original Russian expression "Для дураков закон не записан" [*dlya durakov zakon nye zapisan*] literally translated becomes "For fools [the] law is not written."

This expression [lit."For fools (the) law is not written.] is a sawn-off version of a longer "winged utterance," as such locutions are known in Russian, in the same way that "As fools rush in" is a sawn-off version of ***its*** original. Illiterates, be they servants or not, girls or not, are probably just as likely to make use of figures of speech, proverbs, and other "winged utterances" as any other native speakers of their language. English speakers grow up absorbing and using a great number of them which originated in the Bible and the works of Shakespeare, without necessarily having read, or being able to read either.

When it comes to rendering "sayings," many – often conflicting – factors enter into the equation, and the result is always a trade-off. Some "purists" or "extremists" might advocate staying "faithful to the original" A recent oft-quoted example would be the rendering of a certain original Russian expression as "Drinking up his trousers," which has been justified precisely by invoking the precept of "faithfulness to the original," although its actual effect is simply that of dumbfounding any "literate English servant girl" who may happen to be reading it. She might, of course, be comforted to learn that it, was "***faithful to the original***" [**пропил брюки – *propil bryuky***]. An equally extreme example of following this precept would be to translate ***literally*** into Russian the expression "he's lost his marbles," or a figurative expression which was once used at the United Nations about President Reagan's tax proposal: "everyone was wondering

whether he was going to run or pass, but in the end he punted." sowing no little consternation among the interpreters.

It seems to me that the *reductio ad absurdum* of this approach would be simply to transliterate the whole text of a Russian original into the reader's native alphabet – what could be more" faithful" or "closer to the original"

Here is a further example of a literary translation problem of a different order which challenges (or should challenge) the translator.

Translating the ***ipsissima verba*** [i.e. the "raw material"] of the original, even correctly, is often a far cry from delivering it in "processed" form, i.e. in a form which makes sense of those words to a contemporary English speaking reader – and as close as possible to the sense in which they would have been understood by the Russian speaking contemporaries of the author.

At a certain point in the story, the author tells us that in the aftermath of a failed love affair which leaves an embittered Aleksandr in its wake, he, Aleksandr, has written a novella which according to Goncharov is about "ordinary people," and depicts them as "liars, cheats, dissemblers, and hypocrites" with, apparently, no redeeming features. The sentence immediately following this is a comment by the author himself. His comment reads: " . . .it was appropriate and in its proper place."

How does this apparent contradiction square with the sentence it follows?

And what on earth are readers of the translation going to make of it?

I have canvassed the opinions of one or two native Russian speakers, and they read into the words a certain irony on the part of the author, Goncharov, at the expense of Aleksandr, the author of the novella, and may in fact be a "put down" – in spite of the fact that what the actual words, taken at face value, amount to is a commendation rather than a snide criticism.

In the event, my judgment call, or trade –off, was to leave the ***ipsissima verba*** exactly the way they are. Any other course would have been tantamount to an editorial comment or a lengthy footnote along the very lines of what I have just written.

"STRAIGHTFORWARD RUSSIAN WORDS – AND "STRAYING FROM THEM"

A reviewer of my translation of *Oblomov*, clearly dissociating himself from the comment itself, wrote "Purists may object that Pearl has strayed too far from what are often 'straightforward Russian words'. . ."

Again, the only way of responding to this comment is to invite the "purists" into the labyrinth of the translator's thought processes as he deconstructs the seemingly innocent and unexceptionable expression "straightforward Russian words."

Clearly, here the reviewer is dissociating himself from this stricture. Whether the three words in question are his own, or the words of one of the "purists," they require a great deal of elucidation, and would benefit greatly from reference to specific examples. Part of the problem lies precisely in the use of the word "words." To put it briefly, the "stricture" implies that it is individual words that have to be translated, rather than a sequence of "words" in the form of a phrase or a sentence – especially in the course of literary translation rather than, say, the Canadian weather forecast – one of the first machine translations (between English and French) to survive the process intact and usable. How one translates individual "words" depends heavily in their immediate as well as their larger context.

Furthermore, the notion of "straightforward" is not at all "straightforward."

Even such an apparently "straightforward" word as an everyday concrete object such as кран [*kran*] not only warrants half a dozen equivalents in my Russian –English dictionary, but even there its immediate context changes and determines its translation. No doubt the first English word that would come to any translator's mind would be "a tap," but even this does not go without saying because of the peculiar feature of English as the world's dominant language. "Tap" would not be the word that would come to an American translator's mind. It would be "faucet." I have no idea what it would be in the case of a Caribbean/ Australian/Philippine or Indian translator.

As to the "immediate context" factor, my dictionary offers the following examples: пожарный кран (firecock), водоразборный кран (hydrant), плавучий кран (floating crane), подъёмный кран (hoisting crane). A translator would have to travel very far afield to come up with the correct term for the "straightforward" word *kran* in all these different "immediate contexts."

At the opposite extreme (whatever may be thought to be the opposite of "straightforward") are chameleon, or "blank cheque" words like "условный" [*uslovniy*], "вообще" [*voobshche*] and "деятель" [*deyatiel'*], which cannot possibly offer an obvious, "straightforward" English equivalent. For "*uslovniy*," dictionaries usually offer a choice of three "words" – "conditionally," "provisionally" and "conventionally," which could not be further from being exhaustive. On my list of "blank cheque" words (i.e. words whose "amount" is waiting to be filled in according to context value), "uslovno" is one of the "blankest" along with "*voobshche*." Would the failure by a translator to translate "*voobshche*," as "in general" or "on the whole" [as TASS translators did as a matter of course – and wrongly – in Soviet times], or "*uslovniy*" as "conditional," "provisional" or "conventional," be regarded accordingly as "straying too far . . ."? Dogs can only be described as having "strayed too far" if they have broken free of the leash by which they have been tethered, but the distance they are "free" to travel depends on the length of their leash. In the case of "straightforward Russian words," the length of the leash varies – and varies considerably – depending on how "straightforward" they really are, not to mention the immediate context in which they embedded. With a word like тоска [*toska*], even the tersest of Russian-English dictionaries can hardly offer fewer than 7 "equivalents." Smirnitsky has 16! And, it must be said, even these do not cover the whole spectrum of the nuances of this all-encompassing emotion or mood to which the Russian "soul" is so sensitive – and prone.

As an example of how unstraightforward a "straightforward Russian word" can become when it comes to translating it ***for the benefit of*** readers or an audience of an alien culture, here is a case in point.

The Простокваша ("*prostokvasha*") problem.

As a Russian word, this one is about as straightforward as they come.

And the problem?

First of all, it took this translator a good forty minutes of research to come up with its "straightforward" meaning in English, namely one of the many variations on the theme of "soured milk" which bulk so large in Russian cuisine.

But, since it was the one and only dish being served by his hostess for his supper to an honored guest of higher social rank who was showing a promising interest in her unmarried daughter, it was hard for me to believe that this meal really consisted entirely of some form of soured cream. However, all my sources concurred in this definition, and I felt that readers of the translation would also find such ungenerous and grudging hospitality a baffling incongruity, especially since the Count, the guest in question, is then described as tucking into it with gusto..

Further research revealed that it would not have been at all uncommon in that society and at that time, for this dish ***alone*** to be served as the last meal of the day, partly, I believe, on the grounds that this kind of dairy product was good for the digestion. Feeling, as I did, that a lengthy footnote to this effect would be too much of distraction to the reader, I decided to compromise with a word which, although on the archaic side, would at least be recognisable to the reader,"curds" – if only because of Miss Muffet – and was at least in close culinary and semantic proximity to "prostokvasha."

Now that food has reared its ugly head, something should be said about some of the other –

SPECIFICS OF EVERYDAY LIFE

In 19th century Russia, people travelled in a wide variety of vehicles, practically none of which have counterparts in the English speaking world today – except for trains in the latter part of the century. Since these conveyances are for the most part mentioned purely for the narrative purpose of getting the *dramatis personae* from one place to another, and it is clear that they have wheels [runners in winter] and are drawn by horses, and are driven by coachmen rather than their owners, and come in almost as bewildering a variety as the cars we travel in today, I believe

that readers rarely need to be told anything else about them. If they ***did*** need to know, only an illustration, or a paragraph length description would serve the none too relevant purpose.

They also wore a wide variety of garments, only some of which happen to coincide with or resemble what today's English speakers are wearing, while there are other items of clothing which simply have no counterpart today in the target culture partly because of climatic differences, partly because of changes of fashion and mores, and partly because modern English speaking countries have long since shed their peasantry.

DIALOGUE

Which is one of Goncharov's great strengths, and which figures prominently in this novel, poses distinctive problems of its own.

To mention but one. Sometimes in dialogue, Russian can be very elliptical and laconic, but an interlocutor of the relevant time and place, would have enjoyed the benefit of the speaker's tone, intonation, gestures, facial expression and body language in order to capture the full flavor of the words themselves. Therefore in order to offset that disadvantage, and to maintain equivalence, more – sometimes many more – words have to be used in the translation.

Have you ever found yourself reading a book for the second time, and noticing things you missed the first time; and the same goes for plays and films? And it's not just the things that you consciously skipped – or skimmed – the first time!

I had read this book several years before, but in the course of translating it, I was astonished to discover that my memory of it was not only impressionist, but positively pointilliste – actually, more like a particularly porous sieve!

I come away from this experience with the profound conviction that:

"YOU HAVEN'T REALLY READ A BOOK UNLESS YOU'VE TRANSLATED IT"

From Alexey Tolstoy's *The Portrait*

Translated from the Russian by Leo Shtutin

Best known as a historical dramatist and writer of satirical verse, Alexey Tolstoy (1817-1875), second cousin of his more illustrious namesake, also penned several narrative poems, of which *The Portrait* (1873) is the longest and most psychologically compelling. Tolstoy is known for the musicality of his verse – indeed, many of his shorter pieces have been set to music by Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, and other composers – and preserving this musicality is one of the primary goals of this English rendering.

13

Reality – a seasonless procession!
Same settings, same décors, the same array
Of teachers, visiting in swift succession…
My dancing-master, brimming with ballet,
Would gambol in for our Thursdaily session;
His shrill violin in hand, he'd flit and play.
And I was taught by my domestic tutor
The tricks of Latin's third-declension neuter.

14

Teutonic to his very toes, well-read,
Well-ordered, staid, he'd reprimand me tartly
Whenever I spilt ink or broke my lead
(In fairness, he reproved *himself* most smartly).
But the profundities of what he said,
I must confess, I understood but partly,
Not least when he endeavored to reveal
The shades of meaning in the term *Ideal*.

15
He relished Strabo, Pliny highly rated,
With Horace was disgustingly *au fait*;
All flowerings of art he keenly fêted –
A penchant we so seldom see today.
The principle of S-shaped lines, he stated,
Was beauty's precondition; to convey
His system by example – prove it finely –
My tutor'd sip and sup most serpentinely.

16
He always was decorous thro' and thro',
With form his principal preoccupation:
"*Das Formlose* – zis simply vill not do,"
He'd oft repeat, beset by indignation
If anyone should wilfully eschew,
Or fail to hone (a lesser irritation),
Exactitude in form. And he'd portray
Form's beauty in a histrionic way.

17
"Look closely: I shall affect an antique pose –
Nay, sev'ral! – by way of illustration.
Now this," he'd say, "this is the stance of Milo's
Venus; this is Zeus, as the narration
Of the *Iliad* describes; now, *sans* arrows –
Per Praxiteles' interpretation –
Here's Eros. I now assume Apollo's shape" –
And promptly gained the likeness of an ape.

18
O Reader, it's not difficult to see
That with all this I couldn't be contented;
Moreover, Nature had bestowed on me
A sense of beauty all my own. Presented

With the humdrum, our phantasies run free –
What isn't there shall always be invented;
The term I couldn't grasp, yet I could feel
The power of a different, fresh Ideal.

19
Altho' I sought its presence, craved it greatly,
Our home was little suited to this quest.
My pedagogue was anything but stately;
My ancient aunts with beauty were unblest.
That I dismissed these models as innately
Unbecoming, you surely will have guessed;
But there it was, true beauty, in the hall –
My fancy found it, hung upon a wall.

20
'Twas this: a portrait of a youthsome girl,
Elegantly poised, its colors dulled away –
Or p'rhaps the light that filtered through the swirl
Of window-curtains made it *seem* that way.
Now, upon her shoulder fell a powdered curl;
Her breast, meantime, was adorned with a bouquet,
And her fingers clutched the taff'ta trimming
Of her apron, with roses o'er-brimming.

21
"An empty beauty, ruled by trite convention!
Mere decadence!" So others will maintain,
Yet every fold enraptured my attention;
Meanwhile, one subtle feature teased my brain,
A riddle that invited comprehension:
Altho' her eyes were filled with sorrow's pain,
I thought her lips – all rascally and wily –
Were quirking upward, edges curling wryly.

22
Th'expression of her face, to my surprize,
Was predisposed to constant variation;
I spied these metamorphoses of guise
Countless times daily – fluctuation
In the elusive color of her eyes,
Her lips' mysterious configuration –
And saw her gaze alternately express
Reproof, entreaty, coquetry, tendresse.

23
Her fate's a mystery: perhaps – O pity! –
'Twas on the guillotine she met her end,
A French marquise? Or was her native city
Our splendid Petersburg, and did she spend
The evens playing ombre, cordial, witty,
And, thriving under Catherine, then attend
Potyomkin's glittering, resplendent ball,
Her beauty, sun-like, charming one and all?

[…]

32
Her eyes' eccentric beauty tempted me –
An icy streamlet for a desert-rover.
I'd take my dose of Latin and *ennui*;
Released at two, I glorified Jehovah!
We then ate luncheon, served at half past three,
But by this time, the day was all but over;
In January, the light is quick to die –
By four it's gone, and cheerless dusk is nigh.

33
Each day at two, foretasting liberation,
I dusted off my collar, smoothed my hair

And washed my hands; replete with animation,
I shut my books, leapt high into the air,
And headed picture-ward… for observation.
'Twas on the sly, of course, I wended there,
"Whole-heartedly indifferent" to the way
My charming girl might gaze on me to-day.

34

A semi-darkness veiled the empty hall,
But th' ingle's quick, unsteady light was slung
Across the frescoed ceiling, and flecked the wall
On which my dear beloved canvas hung.
A barrel-organ, whence, if I recall
Aright, Mozart's cavatinas always sprung,
Played outside. List'ning to its tune unfurl,
I gazed – unblinking, steadfast – at the girl.

35

A key! That tune explained (such were my fancies)
Her enigmatic traits. Desire wended
Through my soul, progressing by degrees;
Rapturous delight with sorrow blended.
A slave to youth's tempestuous decrees,
This vague desire I scarcely comprehended;
My lips half-whispered something, or half-sang,
Until at length the bell for luncheon rang.

36

I'd spoon my soup with a reluctant sigh,
My psyche filled with brooding ruminations,
While all regarded me with mocking eye;
As a result of these preoccupations,
I daily grew more reticent and shy,
And, gawking vacantly at my relations
(My face, no doubt, inane!), I oft incurred,
Thro' my dis-ease, a reprimanding word.

37

But as regards my greatest apprehension,
The very *thought* sufficed to turn me red,
Constricting my young breast with nervous tension:
If any one should take it in his head
To speak – or even make a passing *mention* –
Of the picture, I'd quake with anxious dread,
And would far sooner die by rifle-fire
Than broadcast my iniquitous desire.

Three Poems, Three Melodies: Translations from the Russian

Alyssa Dinega Gillespie

In her essay "Art in the Light of Conscience," Tsvetaeva writes about the precedence of melody over word in her creative process: "I hear, not words, but a kind of soundless tune inside my head, a kind of aural line, from a hint to a command – but this is too long to tell now, it is a whole distinct world, and to tell of it is a whole distinct duty." [1]

In my view, the entire Russian poetic tradition, ranging from classical to avant-garde and contemporary, is governed by musical principles and sensibilities, in contrast with the English tradition, which is, on the whole, a more intellectual one. English-language poetry weighs the nuances of one word against another and rests upon a foundation of carefully constructed ideas and images (there are, of course, exceptions); while Russian poetry is shot through with a backbone of throbbing rhythm or vectors outward on the wing of a soaring phrase. In Russian poetry, however profound the ideas, however striking the imagery, the melody line is paramount. In Russian, without melody, there is no verse; there is nothing but "chatter" (as Pushkin termed it) – i.e., prose.

My approach to translating Russian poetry, therefore, is founded upon the belief that it is not enough for the translator simply to convey a poem's constitutive components from one language to the other. By "components" I mean not only the semantics of the individual words

[1] Marina Tsvetaeva, *Art in the Light of Conscience: Eight Essays on Poetry*, translated by Angela Livingstone (Highgreen, UK: Bloodaxe Books, 1992, 2010), 177.

and expressions that make up a poem, but also the other features (such as rhyme and meter) that generally come into play in the great (and mostly, I think, misleading) debate between proponents of semantic vs. formal "faithfulness" in poetic translation. On the contrary, however diligently a translator renders a poem's semantic meanings, meter, and rhyme scheme, if there is no music – if the whole clatters and thuds like a pile of awkwardly mortared bricks – then there is no poem, no conveyance, no takeoff, no flight – and so, no translation, in the deepest sense of the term.

What I attempt to do as a translator of poetry is to take seriously the imperative that Tsvetaeva articulates in the passage I quote above: I try to catch the sound (a sort of sonal glimpsing) of a poem's melody (Tsvetaeva's "soundless tune" or "aural line") that prefigured the formulation of the poem itself into words, and then to render that wordless melody into English. There is something both mystical and musical in this particular sort of listening. It requires almost a trancelike receptive state, and what I am listening *for* when I enter that state in my one-on-one encounter with a poem's aural essence has much more to do with patterns of breath and emotional coloration than it does with the technicalities of precise form. Put another way, I attempt to render a poem's melody by looking for equivalents rather than exact matches (the solutions I develop in any given poem, consequently, are determined in large part by accidents of sound in English, for the work cannot but be shaped, to some degree, by the material from which it is constructed).

In my three translations published here – of three very different poems, by three very different poets – there can be heard a range of melodies, and my solutions for how to render them into English also range widely. In the case of the Tsvetaeva poem, the clipped syntax and drumming regularity of the short lines of the poem's first six stanzas express the poet's awareness and acceptance of the inevitability of her fate; even the final two stanzas, with their longer lines and seemingly comparative spaciousness, are mostly deceptive, as they carry the very same entrapping drumbeats of the previous lines. It is only thanks to the flowing, multisyllabic keywords in those last two stanzas (*solitude,*

isolate, absolution) that the poet can depart the relentless rhythms and incline toward the beyond.

What characterizes the Tyutchev poem's melodic contour in my hearing is its measured iambic flow and variable line length, a balance of constancy and freedom that is figured, too, in the shift from the alternating rhyme scheme of the first two stanzas to the enclosed rhyme scheme of the last one – a shift that, in fact, creates an effect that is the opposite of enclosure: a sudden sonorous release as the song of departing birds is replaced by the spilling of the sky's azure and the fullness of the poet's heart, swelling with all this beauty. Not an entrapping, but the rapture of a homecoming. Moreover, the enjambments between lines 3 and 4 of each of the poem's last two stanzas ("thread / adorns…"; "spills / onto…") are essential to the melody's motive overflowing. This counterpoint of patterning and movement, measure and release (rather than the particulars of line length and line endings) informs my translation.

Finally, in the Gippius poem, I hear long, monotonous, swaying lines, both soporific and eerie, that mimic the sound of the boat of the dead as it floats slowly along the underground river… Yes, in the Russian, this effect is created by the use of amphibrachic tetrameter lines with feminine-only endings that seem to almost swallow up the rhyme, as the earth has swallowed up the speaker; I try to recreate this haunting, hollowly plashing melody through equivalent means (using fewer, though still many, feminine endings and a constantly undulating sound-web of rhymes and slant-rhymes that echo off the cavernous walls).

Three different poems about release; three different melodies. From a hint to a command. A whole distinct world; a whole distinct duty.

Alyssa Dinega Gillespie

"There is, when autumn first sets in…"

Fyodor Tyutchev

Translated from the Russian
by Alyssa Dinega Gillespie

There is, when autumn first sets in,
A short, delightful moment –
The days are wholly crystalline;
The evenings are resplendent…

Where once the sickle briskly sped,
The fields lie wide and fallow –
Only a spider's glistening thread
Adorns the barren furrow.

The air is emptying of birds,
But winter's storms are distant still –
And purest, warmest azure spills
Onto the resting earth…

1857

There

Zinaida Gippius

Translated from the Russian by Alyssa Dinega Gillespie

I'm in Charon's boat with an uncaring oarsman.
The onerous water is viscous as tin.
Above voiceless Styx is a nebulous dankness.
The vault of the heavens is made of dark stone.
Here's Lethe. I don't hear the babble of Lethe.
The strokes of the spreading oars noiselessly dip.
Our lackluster, flickering lantern illumines
The heavenly stone with a deep, purple glint.
The water is murky, by languor constrained…
Aroused by our light, and alarmed by our shades,
A slow-witted owl, two bats, and a vampire
Who's legless and grizzled, of delicate wing
All follow our vessel in soundless foreboding…
Nor faster nor softer, our boat glides along.
The vampire caressed me with vaporous wingtips…
I mindlessly watch the obedient flock,
And everything here seems so queerly unmeaning:
My heart, here as there, back on earth, is a blank.
Remember how sometimes we longed for the finish,
And waited, had faith in the promise of endings…
But death, it turns out, is the same empty chore,
I'm equally bored now as I was before.
No pain, and no peace, and no fear, and no gladness,
Nor even oblivion Lethe bestows…

Above voiceless Styx is a nebulous dankness,
And scarlet reflections roam over the stones.

1900

Garden

Marina Tsvetaeva
Translated from the Russian
by Alyssa Dinega Gillespie

For this, my hell,
For this, my craze,
Send me to dwell
In garden ways.

In older years,
Of older lack:
For drudging years
And hunching back…

For brutal years
A welcome weal:
For scorching years –
A garden's cool…

To end my chase
This garden fill
With not-a-smile,
With not-a-soul!

Green: not one foot!
Green: not one glance!
Green: not one hoot!
Green: not one laugh!

With not-a-whiff
My garden sow:
With not-a-sniff!
With not-a-soul!

Say: "Well, enough of torment – here's
A garden girt with solitude."
(But even Thou mayst not stand near!)
– A garden, isolate as God.

Just such a garden when I'm old…
– A garden? Or – the grave's repose? –
In distant, older years bestow
For absolution of my soul.

October 1, 1934

Peter Oram

David Samoylov's Pärnu Elegies

Translated from Russian by Peter Oram

If we set David Samoylov's *Pärnu Elegies* – sixteen miniatures of which only one exceeds (by two) 12 lines and of which the shortest is 4 – beside Brodsky's monolithic masterpiece of well over 200, the *Great Elegy for John Donne,* we are almost bound to ask ourselves what definition of the genre referred to in their respective titles could conceivably include both works, and our incredulity increases when we note that the plural title of the former requires that we compare the Brodsky not with the whole set of sixteen, but with its individual components, even that 4-liner, on its own.

David Samoylov was born David Samuilovich Kaufman on 1 June 1920 in Moscow and died in Tallinn in 1990 on 23 February (4 years later to the day than Boris Slutsky). He was not only one of the most important Russian poets writing in the wake of WW2 but was also one of the most popular. He was a student at the Moscow Institute of Philosophy, Literature and History during the early years of the Second World War, but then attended an infantry officers' school and in 1942 was sent to the front.

Samoylov turned to writing as a central activity relatively late in life, and during the post-war years worked mainly as a literary translator. A first collection of verse appeared in 1958. But the restrictions imposed by the Brezhnev regime on literary life and the creative spirit, after the expectations of increased freedom that had been encouraged by the Thaw, didn't sit well with Samoylov, and in 1976 he moved together with his family to the small seaside resort of Pärnu on the Estonian Baltic. Here, far from Moscow, life was as near to European norms as it could ever be in the Soviet Union in those days, and he felt a growing need to engage with what he saw as the fundamentals of life. At least

here he could breathe in the open spaces and the sea air, or host soirées where he could meet and talk freely with other writers and artists, out of the crossfire of censors and samizdat.

But although in the Pärnu Elegies we are given fleeting images of such newly-attained freedom, and the sea breezes of the Baltic occasionally slap our cheeks with the cold and salty spray, it's clear that he cannot, any more than Brodsky, throw off that fundamental fatalism that was inevitable in a century of so much violence, war and oppression. It is this sense of omnipresent tragedy, this persistent, pervasively pessimistic take on life that illuminates the common ground between Samoylov and Brodsky, revealing their shared historical heritage and giving them ample justification for the use of the term "elegy" in their respective titles.

I

One of these days we're going to tell
of that strange country where we dwell
illuminated by the sea
where, like some genius, in the sand
the wave writes of its troubles and
then rubs all out impatiently.

II

The beauty of a desert tree
or of November's pallid light
there is no simpler thing to see,
nor is there a more painful sight.
So motionless and so profound,

in this place where the silence lingers,
the pines, like pillars rough and round,
the elms with gently probing fingers.

The surface of a still pool flies
in whirling showers of spray with every
gust of wind. Time soon will prise
apart the present and the "never".

III

But then love's world began to crash,
the day lurched forward drunkenly
and the accursed mountain ash
reached red-stained fingers out to me.

Don't wave, accursed rowan tree,
Don't wave to me, don't even start!
I don't care what becomes of me
since my whole soul-world fell apart!

IV

How wretched are all things, all people
my soul's like some poor Grecian girl
who, scarf grippied tight between her teeth,
is running down a sandy beach,
sad and alone. But for a seagull
ahead of her no one's in reach…

V

Here, it's not great dreams we dream
but through nocturnal minds there teem
the long-forgotten faces of
those whom we hated, those we loved.
But this dream of deception wears
you down like ancient, painful sores.
You have to go where this dream takes you –

worse still, though, if someone wakes you:
as if you'd heard the siren's call
and lost your way once and for all.

VI

Like trees that would escape the tide
I tried to flee my woe, but tried
in vain. I want to, but cannot
for I am rooted to the spot.

VII

When in the winter garden
the plants are seized by frost
you scarcely can imagine
that all will turn to dust.

But we survive beneath the snow
through icy wintriness,
survive like bare and leafless stems
frozen, motionless.

Yes, we'll dream for a long long time,
not years but centuries,
of young and rosy cheeks, and lashes
whitened by the freeze.

VIII

How fine these open spaces are!
The bay's curve in its snowy garment ...
what coldness now is in the soul.
to all that's neither love nor torment!
How could I ever fall so low,

could fall in such a dreadful fashion
tired of passions, blind to death
and weary, weary of compassion!

IX

I don't know how to love
I don't want to know how
I go deaf, I grow dumb
and my sight's going now
the game of my life
I've forgotten to play
I don't know how to love
and I'm dying away.

X

I wander through our part of town
where the snow that's drifted down
transforms each branch on which it's spread
like water changes molten lead
in Christmas fortune-telling games ...
But why this sorrow? Such a shame
with so much beauty! Yet this whole
world's just as fragile as the soul.
Don't turn too suddenly – take care:
just one wrong move – the branch is bare.

XI

Light snow falling over Pärnu.
Such a free and cheerful day!
Not a single foot has trodden
in the snow along the bay.
Here comes a skier, like a streak

of lightning, blue, he flashes past.
The fresh snow by the sea is like
the shoreline of the universe.

XII

When the flesh bewitches,
poetry is servant of the dust,
but there's no poetry that can vanquish
fear, vanity, or lack of trust.

And neither can we clear the mind:
each sense impression leaves its mark.
All anxieties are combined
in us. Rain. Wind. Sea-smells. The dark.

XIII

All things I've lost mean more to me
than all the gifts that came:
though these might bring serenity,
it's simply not the same.
I begged God for oblivion:
instead he broke apart
my sense of limits, left me then
with anguish in the heart.

XIV

Suddenly March is in the bays.
The snow now starts to disappear
and that which was unhappiness
shifts up into another gear.
Oh, this month of dreary weather!
Oh, these grey and gloomy days!

I'm filled with expectation ... Father,
rescue me, make safe my ways!

XV

In place before a sheet of paper,
lined with sombre poetry,
while tears stream down your cheeks as in
some wonder-working iconry.
But what is happening to me now
I'm quite unable to convey:
one moment bathed in heavenly light
the next, the blessing's stripped away.

XVI

Odds or evens?
Blizzard. Night.
Healing music:
Schubert's Eighth.

But Schubert,
silly little boy,
does music heal?
– no, it destroys.

Snow-blanket.
Torment. No respite.
Music kills.
The blizzard, night.

The blizzard,
night.

PRE-SUBMISSION GUIDELINES FOR TRANSLATED POETRY

Boris Dralyuk

Before sending poetic translations to Cardinal Points, think about your audience. Our intended reader is a person sensitive to English as it is spoken, susceptible to the effects of verse, and at least somewhat familiar with the Anglophone poetic tradition. These are the people who browse through the poetry shelves at the local bookstore, who open literary journals and flip to the poetry section, who see a box of text with an unjustified right margin in their newspaper and consider giving it a read. In other words, any poetic translation you choose to send out into the world must be good English – and good English verse, at that.

Things to avoid:

1. Unnatural phrasing. If one can't imagine a native English-speaker saying a certain phrase to another native English-speaker, then the phrase must go.

2. Poetic inversions (at least when translating most post-18th C. poetry).

3. Padding to fill out metrical lines.

4. Forced rhymes.

Many translators of Russian poetry believe it their duty to hew closely to a poem's original form. It serves to remember that, to today's

Anglophone reader (and not just today's, really), the persistent use of exact rhyme produces a comic effect, especially when coupled with a clangorous short-lined meter like the trochaic tetrameter. If you want your translations to appeal to Anglophone readers, consider loosening the metrical grip – which doesn't necessarily mean abandoning meter, just playing closer attention to rhythm, diversifying the lines, leaving some ictuses unfilled. The original meters are often a trap: they don't mean the same thing for an Anglophone reader as they do for a Russian, with the trochaic tetrameter being a case in point. If you find that you need to add words in order "to fill out" a line, then your line is too long. And don't contort natural syntax in order to fit a rhyme scheme.

AUTHORS AND CREDITS

Georgii Ball (1927-2011), during the Soviet period, was known first and foremost as a children's writer. His adult work, written "for the drawer" and circulated among friends, began to be published only in the 1980s. This is the first publication of his work in English.

Maxim Amelin is a poet, critic, editor, and translator who received the 2013 Solzhenitsyn Prize for his contributions to Russian literature. The author of three books of poetry, including *Cold Odes* (*Холодные оды*, 1996), *Dubia* (1999), and *The Horse of the Gorgon* (*Конь Горгоны*, 2003), as well as a collection of prose and poems, *Bent Speech* (*Гнутая речь*, 2011), he is the editor-in-chief at OGI.

Kathleen Balma is a public school teacher and librarian from the Ohio River Valley of Illinois. She is the recipient of a Fulbright Teaching Grant and a Pushcart Prize for poetry. Balma's maternal family line is Czech and Prussian; her grandmother and great aunts grew up speaking a dialect only heard today in the rural Czech Republic. She lives in New Orleans.

Yevgeny Abramovich Baratynsky (1800 – 1844) was a poet of the Golden Age of Russian literature. He was a contemporary and friend of Alexander Pushkin, who praised his "freshness and precision of expression" and "originality of thought." While Baratynsky wrote predominantly in Russian, he also produced a few poems in French, as well as translated some of his works from Russian.

Georgina Barker is a Wolfson Postgraduate Scholar at the University of Edinburgh, where she is writing her PhD on the reception of classical antiquity in contemporary Russian poetry. She

studied Latin and Russian at Oxford University, and has a Masters in Modern Languages from Bristol University. She has a red-lored amazon parrot (who, sadly, does not speak Russian).

Polina Barskova has written and published poetry prolifically from early childhood, and has numerous books to her name. She teaches Russian literature at Hampshire College, Massachusetts, having completed her PhD at the University of California, Berkeley. Her research focuses on the Siege of Leningrad, in particular its victims' artistic responses to the Siege. Themes from her undergraduate studies in Classics at Saint Petersburg State University continue to inform her poetry.

Aleksandr Blok was born into the Russian gentry in Saint Petersburg in 1880, and graduated from the Historical-Philological division of Saint Petersburg University in 1906. After the success of his visionary first collection, *Verses about a Beautiful Lady*, published in 1904, his subsequent books gradually moved towards a closer engagement with the urban reality of contemporary Russia. He celebrated the October Revolution in his most famous poem, *The Twelve*, but quickly became disillusioned with the new regime. He died in 1921.

Angela Brewer has worked as a conference interpreter and literary translator for many years. She grew up and attended a French convent school in Baghdad. Now she is writing both fiction and life stories. She enjoys living in a border town but misses the sea and so divides her time between Strasbourg in France and Devon in England.

Ksenia Buksha, 32, is an economist by training and a writer by calling. Critics compare her prose to that of Khlebnikov, Joyce, and Andrey Platonov, but in general she confounds categorization, which is probably why the prolific Buksha, who lives in St. Petersburg and whose work has been published by major Russian presses since 2007, is relatively unknown in English.

Ivan Bunin (1870-1953) is known especially as a prose writer, but in his early literary career his poetry was praised for subtlety and poise, and work as a poet shaped his approach to prose. He emigrated to Paris in 1920, and was subsequently the first Russian recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Oksana Butuzova, St. Petersburg author, came to the attention of readers and critics in 2007 with her debut novel, "Home", which was long-listed for two major prizes in Russia. Even when her work reflects the concerns of her career in scientific research, she retains an accessible story-telling style and a humorous touch as illustrated in the story reproduced here.

Stephen Capus studied Russian, Serbo-Croat and Italian at Birmingham University, and conducted research on the poetry of Marina Tsvetaeva at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies in London. He has published poems, translations and reviews in various periodicals, including *Acumen*, *Modern Poetry in Translation*, and *The London Magazine*. A number of his translations were included in the *Penguin Book of Russian Poetry*, published in 2015.

Peter Daniels has won poetry competitions including the Arvon, Ledbury and TLS, and published a number of pamphlets. His collection *Counting Eggs* appeared from Mulfran Press in 2012, and Gatehouse will publish a new collection in 2016. His translations of Vladislav Khodasevich from Russian (Angel Classics, 2013), were shortlisted for the Rossica, Oxford-Weidenfeld and Read Russia prizes, and commended in the Popescu.

Georgy (Mur) Efron (1925-1944) was the son of Marina Tsvetaeva (one of Russia's greatest twentieth-century poets) and Sergey Efron, a White Russian Army officer, turned NKVD agent. Born near Prague, G. Efron spent most of his young life in France, with the last five years, between 1939 and 1944, in the Soviet Union. Between 1939 and 1943, Georgy had kept bi-lingual, Russian-French, note-

books in the form of a diary. The notebooks were collected in two volumes and published in Moscow (Vagrius) in 2004 by the Tsvetaeva scholars E. Korkina and V. Lossky.

Marina Eskina was born in Leningrad, now Saint Petersburg. She graduated from Leningrad State University. Her poetry and translations are published in Russian and international periodicals, almanacs and anthologies. She is the author of three books of poetry in Russian, the last one is *The Strange Ally*, (*Strannyi Soiuznik*, 2014), and a children's book in English *Explanation of a firefly*. She is a finalist of the First poetry competition "Criteria of Freedom", held by Joseph Brodsky memorial Fund. Since 1990, she lives in Boston, USA.

Marjorie Farquharson lives in Scotland but over the last 15 years has worked a lot in Central Asia, one time mapping how many people there are actually stateless and another, joining forces with local abolitionists who made Tajikistan the first to throw out the death penalty. In between, Marjorie has pondered what life is like for a Presidential favourite? Like Wolf Hall, perhaps – with cumquats?

Anne O. Fisher translated Ilf and Petrov's novels *The Twelve Chairs* (Northwestern UP, 2011) and *The Little Golden Calf* (Russian Life Books, 2009). She has also translated the fiction of Andrey Platonov, Margarita Meklina, and Ksenia Buksha. With co-translator Derek Mong, she won an NEA translation grant to support work on Maxim Amelin's poetry; these translations have appeared in *Asymptote*, the *Brooklyn Rail*, *Lunch Ticket*, and elsewhere.

Gaito Gazdanov (1903–71) was a novelist, short-story writer and journalist. He joined Baron Wrangel's White Army aged sixteen and fought in the Russian Civil War. He lived exile in Paris from 1923 onwards, working a series of gruelling manual jobs. His first novel, *An Evening With Claire* (1930), placed him on the literary map of the emigration, winning accolades from the likes of Maxim Gorky.

Alyssa Dinega Gillespie is associate professor and Russian Department chair at Bowdoin College. She is the author of *A Russian Psyche: The Poetic Mind of Marina Tsvetaeva* (2001), published in Russian as *Марина Цветаева. По канату поэзии* (2015). She won first prize in the Compass Translation Awards in 2012 and shared third prize in the 2011 Brodsky/Spender translation competition. She has been writing poetry since she was a child, but this is the first publication of her original poems.

Zinaida Gippius (1869-1945) was a poet, writer, and religious thinker who, together with her husband Dmitry Merezhkovsky, is considered to have founded the Russian Symbolist movement. Gippius experimented with an androgynous image and often wore men's clothing and used male pseudonyms. Her deeply intellectual poetry explores rending inner conflicts and the dark side of the human personality through themes of blasphemy and sexual transgression. She and her husband lived in exile in Western Europe following the Bolshevik Revolution.

Igor Golomstock (b.1929) spent twelve years working as an art historian in the Pushkin Museum in Moscow. He published books on Cézanne, Hieronymus Bosch and on the art of ancient Mexico. In 1972, he emigrated to the United Kingdom, where he taught at the universities of St. Andrews, Essex and Oxford, before working for many years for the BBC Russian Service. In 2011 Overlook Duckworth republished his authoritative *Totalitarian Art*, first published in English in 1990. The first half of his memoirs, covering his years in the Soviet Union, were first serialised in the journal Znamya, published in book form in 2014 and long listed for the Big Book Prize, (formerly the Russian Booker) in 2015.

Nikolai Gumilev (1886-1921) was taught at the Tsarskoe Selo gymnasium by the poet Annensky. He became one of the founders of Acmeism, and was married to Anna Akhmatova from 1910 although they were not long together. He served as an officer in the First World

War and was actively against the Bolsheviks. Accused of a monarchist conspiracy, he was shot by firing squad.

Atar Hadari's "Songs from Biaik" (Syracuse University Press) was a finalist for the ALTA Award and his "Lives of the Dead: Poems of Hanoch Levin" is forthcoming from Arc Publications. His debut collection "Rembrandt's Bible" was published in 2013 and he lives in Yorkshire where his plays have most recently been performed at West Yorkshire Playhouse and the Carriageworks Theatre. He is a member of the BML musical theatre workshop and has this year been writing songs for a musical based on the RED CAVALRY stories by Isaac Babel.

Zbigniew Herbert (1924-1998) was a Polish poet, essayist, playwright and philosopher, a true son of the century full of trauma, turmoil and political tension. He is one of the best known and the most translated post-war Polish writers. The poem "Nefertiti" comes from his first book "Hermes, a Dog and a Star" ("Hermes pies i gwiazda", Warsaw, Czytelnik, 1957).

Galina Itskovich, born in Ukraine, has lived in New York City for almost a quarter-century. In addition to practicing psychotherapy and teaching the art of therapy nationally and internationally, she also writes and translates short fiction and poetry. Her translations, poems and short stories in English and Russian first came out of her drawer in 2012 and, to date, appeared in several journals, almanacs and collections.

Sara Jolly is a documentary film maker and translator. She lives in London.

Bryan Karernyk is an editor and a translator of Russian literature. His translations of Gaito Gazdanov's novels *The Spectre of Alexander Wolf* and *The Return of the Buddha* are published by Pushkin Press. Alongside a PhD, he is currently preparing an anthology of Russian émigré short fiction for Penguin.

Vladislav Khodasevich (1886–1939) came to prominence as a poet of Russia's Silver Age. In emigration, he lived with Nina Berberova and Maxim Gorky in Sorrento before moving to Berlin, where he presided over the circle of Russian writers in exile. Regarded by Vladimir Nabokov as one of the twentieth century's greatest poets, Khodasevich was also a biographer, memoirist and influential critic, as well as a writer of several short stories.

E.K. Krafft recently received her Ph.D in Slavic Studies from Brown University, and her current teaching and research focuses on the intersection of Russian literature and visual art, dissidence, feminism, and social theory. She studied translation at the University of East Anglia in Norwich, U.K.

Alexander Levitsky is Professor of Slavic Studies at Brown University, having served the department as Chair and Director of Graduate Studies for decades. His research includes Eighteenth-Century and Modern Russian, Czech and Polish Literatures, and the theory and practice of translation. He is a recognized specialist on Russian Sacred Poetry with an edited volume on V. K. Trediakovsky's *Psalter* and the *History of Russian Sacred Verse* (Schöningh, 1989) and on the cultural legacy of G. R. Derzhavin, to which he has contributed dozens of studies and a Bilingual Album of G.R. Derzhavin's Poetic Works (Brown Slavic Contributions, 2001). His recent work has focused on editing the collected works of Russia's foremost early-modern poet, G.R. Derzhavin and on poetry translation.

Osip Mandelshtam was born in Warsaw in 1891. He grew up and matured in Saint Petersburg influenced by this city's cultural richness. An acmeist poet, he gravitated towards concrete imagery, condensation, and precision while incorporating world history and culture into his works. A victim of Stalin's purges, he perished in a transit camp near Vladivostok in 1938.

Prof. Holt Meyer is a Sicilian-American of German extraction teaching Slavic Literatures at the University of Erfurt. He scholarly inter-

ests range from sacrality and visuality to ostraenie and the role of brackets in fiction.

Derek Mong is the author of two poetry collections from Saturnalia Books, Other Romes (2011) and The Identity Thief (forthcoming 2018). He recently completed a Ph.D. at Stanford University. New work has appeared or will soon appear in the Kenyon Review, Two Lines, Waxwings, and the Brooklyn Rail. He blogs at KROnline and writes reviews for the Gettysburg Review. Read more at www.derekmong.com.

Melanie Moore has been a Russian translator for over 30 years but became a literary translator only recently after a summer course at Birkbeck University [now Translate in the City]. Her published translations include "The Little Man" by Liza Alexandrova-Zorina (Glas, New Russian Writing, 2014) and "The Investigator" by Margarita Khemlin (Glagoslav, 2015).

Ainsley Morse is a literary translator and PhD candidate at Harvard University, writing on the peculiarities of unofficial Soviet-era literature. She translates twentieth and twenty-first century Russian and Yugoslav/former Yugoslav literature.

Stephen Oliver Lived in Australia for 20 years. Now NZ. He is the author of 17 volumes of poetry. His most recent book, *Intercolonial,* Puriri Press, Auckland, NZ (2013). His work has been translated into German, Spanish, Chinese, Dutch and Russian. *Forthcoming:* poetry in *Ghost Fishing*: An Eco-Justice Poetry Anthology, edited by Melissa Tuckey. Represented in *Writing To The Wire Anthology*, edited by Dan Disney and Kit Kelen (2016).

Peter Oram, b. 1947 Cardiff. First class honours degrees in music and german, and a masters in musical composition. Publications include 3 volumes of translations of Rilke's French-language poetry; "The Page and the Fire" (translations of poems by Russian poets on/to

Russian poets); two novels ("The Rub", "Maddocks":) several volumes of poetry ("White", "Tease it Free", "Revolver Night" et al) and also much educational material. A collection of Tarkovsky's poems is to be published by Arc Publications, and he is a contributing translator to the recently released Penguin Classics book of Russian Poetry. He lived for many years in Pembrokeshire, Weat Wales, but now lives in Schwabach, near Nürnberg.

Ganna Osadko lives in the city of Ternopol, Ukraine. In addition to her work as an editor and an illustrator at the Bogdan publishing house, she also writes poetry, creates stained–glass works and children's books. Her first book of poetry came out in 2009. This poem is dedicated to Moysey (Moses) Fishbein, an influential Ukrainian poet and translator of Jewish origin. He immigrated in 1979 to Israel, and later to Germany. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, he returned to Ukraine.

Stephen Pearl grew up in the UK, where he graduated from Oxford University. Worked at UN, New York as Interpreter from French, Russian, Spanish from 1962, heading the English Interpretation Department from 1985 to 1994; published literary translations from Russian include work by Israelyan and Goncharov, and letters by Tchaikovsky.

Jeff Rehnlund lives and writes in North Carolina. His short fiction has appeared in *Hellscapes*, *époustouflant!*, and *Body-Building*. While residing there, he covered arts for *The Korea Times.* He's currently working on a detective novel about a single tear that has gone missing in heaven and a biographical dictionary about people who have become stuck in walls. Otherwise he works as a night nurse in a trauma ward.

Lev Rubinstein is a Russian avant-garde poet, essayist and dissident. He is the creator of the genre of "index card poetry" and Andrey Bely Award laureate.

David Samoylov was born in Moscow in 1920. From 1938 – 1941 he was a student at the Moscow Institute of Philosophy, Literature and History. He tried to volunteer on two occasions for the army, but was refused first for health reasons and then because he was overage. Instead he served in a trench digging brigade. But he contracted typhoid fever and was evacuated to Samarkand, After that he entered an infantry officers' school, from which he graduated in 1942, and was sent to the Volkhov front. He remained on active duty until the end of the war and was wounded several times. During the second half of his life, he moved to Pärnu, where he continued writing. Besides his own poetry much of which relates to war experiences and which has enjoyed much popularity in Russia but is virtually unknown outside, he has translated the work of many Estonian, Czech, Polish and Hungarian writers into Russian. He died in 1990.

Leo Shtutin completed a D.Phil in French literature at Merton College, Oxford in 2014 and is now working as a freelance translator from Russian and French, principally for online publications such as The Calvert Journal. His D.Phil thesis is currently under review at OUP, and his translation of Victor Beilis's novel Death of a Prototype is due to be published by Thames River Press.

Ian Singleton is an award-winning writer with stories, essays, and translations in *Digital Americana*, *Midwestern Gothic*, *Fiddleblack*, *Ploughshares*, *Fiction Writers Review*, and *Asymptote*, where another Marina Eskin poem appears. His collection, *Grow Me Up: Stories*, is seeking a home. He is working on a novel. Ian teaches Russian Literature at San Francisco State University and works at Stanford University Law School. He lives with his family in San Francisco.

Yefim Somin is a retired computer scientist. He enjoys studying languages and traveling to the countries where they are spoken. He uses his knowledge of languages to investigate exotic locales and groups and write in-depth reports on his adventures. He occasionally translates poems that strike his fancy.

Alexey Tolstoy (1817-1875), best known as a historical dramatist and writer of satirical verse, second cousin of his more illustrious namesake, also penned several narrative poems, of which *The Portrait* (1873) is the longest and most psychologically compelling. Tolstoy is known for the musicality of his verse – indeed, many of his shorter pieces have been set to music by Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, and other composers – and preserving this musicality is one of the primary goals of this English rendering.

Marina Tsvetaeva (1892-1941) was one of a pleiad of brilliant poets who lived in the first half of the twentieth century. Fiercely independent, she never belonged to any poetic movement but developed her own unique poetic style, characterized by paronomastic word play and strongly synchopated rhythms. She lived in emigration in Western Europe for many years after the Russian Revolution and Civil War but followed her family back to the USSR in 1939, committing suicide two years later.

Yuri Tynyanov (1894-1943) was a historian, translator, literary theorist and novelist. His historical and theoretical thinking--Tynyanov was a key member of the Russian Formalist group--influenced his fiction, a synthesis most successfully shown in his trio of historical novels KIUKHLYA (1925, about Vilgelm Kiukhelbeker), SMERT' VAZIR-MUKHTARA (1928, about Griboyedov), and the unfinished PUSHKIN (1936). He also wrote the satirical povest POD-PORUCHIK KIZHE (1927), inspiration for Prokofiev's famous Kije Suite.

Fedor Tyutchev (1803-1873) was a late Romantic poet who was little known in his own lifetime. Tyutchev grew up in Moscow but joined the Foreign Service as a young man and spent over two decades abroad in Western Europe; while living in Munich, he was strongly influenced by the German Romantic poets. He is known for his beautiful love poems and for his metaphysical poetry, in which the order of nature barely conceals a chaos seething within.

James Womack (1979) was born in Cambridge and studied in Russia and Iceland before moving to live in Spain, where he runs Ediciones Nevsky, a publishing house that specialises in translating Russian fiction into Spanish. He translates from Spanish and Russian into English, and has produced versions of works by Roberto Arlt, Silvina Ocampo and Boris Savinkov, among others. He is currently preparing a collection of translations from Vladimir Mayakovsky.

Olga Zaslavsky, currently a Center Associate at the Davis Center for Russian Studies, Harvard University, is interested in the work of Marina Tsvetaeva and her legacy. Her work on Georgy Efron (the son of Marina Tsvetaeva) includes a book-length translation of his Tashkent Diaries (the Edwin Mellen Press, 2010), which take place at the time of his evacuation to Uzbekistan during World War II.

Alexandra Berlina is the laureate of several translation prizes, the author of *Brodsky Translating Brodsky: Poetry in Self-Translation* (2014, Anna Balakian Prize 2016) and the editor-translator of *Viktor Shklovsky: A Reader* (2016).

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