

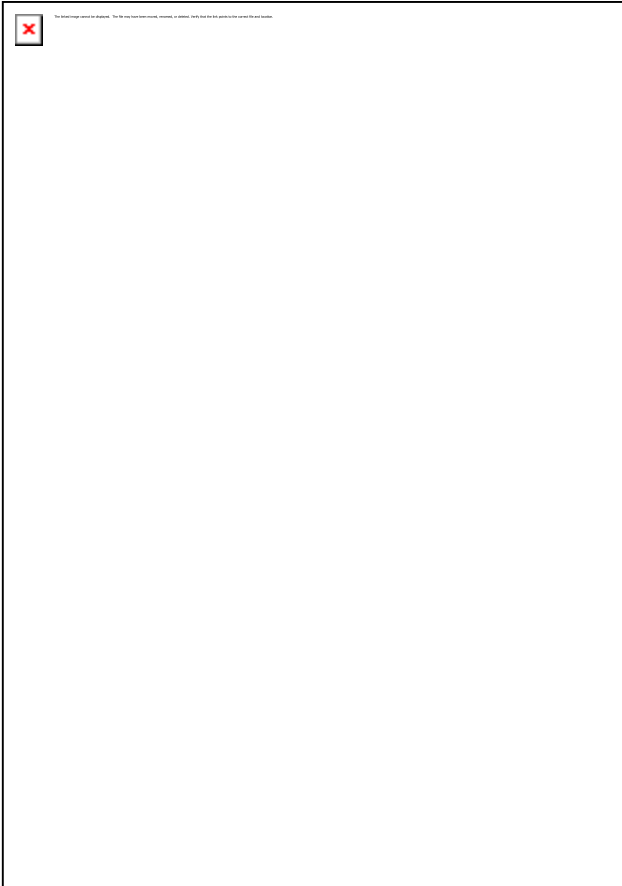
OCASO PRESS RUSSIAN PAGES

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RUSSIAN PAGES



Evening Bells by Isaac Levitan.

(87 x 107.6) 1892. Tretyakov, Moscow.

Isaac Levitan (1860-1900) was influenced by Impressionism, but his paintings are more subdued, with a melancholy poetry that is distinctly Russian. Behind his paintings there was usually some trace of narrative, if only an intimation of man's place in the universe, usually a rather somber place.

Levitan was a Lithuanian-born Jewish painter who became one of Russia's most influential landscape artists and the founder of the 'mood landscape'. His childhood and youth were marked by poverty and the early death of parents. Among his first teachers at the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture were Aleksey Savrasov, who had first developed lyricism in Russian landscape painting, and Vasily Polenov, who developed plein air approaches. Levitan saw his mission as combining atmospheric effects with poetry in the lives of Russian peasants, and beyond them, the larger spiritualizing aspects of poverty. Epic panoramas had already appeared alongside intimate motifs in Savrasov's work, and the difference between a study and a finished painting became merged in Polenov's work

Levitan brought to these trends a formal clarity, broadening their scope and unifying their disparate elements, in a markedly romantic style. Some of outdoor paintings indeed surpassed those of the French Impressionists, whose work he studied at first hand when he travelled through Europe in the 1890s.

Isaac Levitan was the outstanding Russian landscape painter of the 1890s, absorbing Savrasov's lyrical approach, the plein air techniques of Polenov, and Kuindzhi's breadth of generalisation to create a passage towards Impressionism that would influence painters like Svetoslavsky and Ostroukhov. In his short life — his health, like that of his

friend Anton Chekhov, was always indifferent — Levitan was continually experimenting, using Impressionist techniques in his spontaneous but fragmentary outdoor sketches and then trying to amalgamate them in more finished compositions in the studio, which were generally larger pieces employing multiple glazes. While the earlier work captures some of the delight in the senses, the animal pleasure of simply being alive, the later is more decorative and generalised. {1}

Aims of these Russian Pages

Introduction

Russian poetry is becoming better known, thanks very largely to the Internet and to the many translations by Russian speakers domiciled in the west. Most readers will know something of Pushkin and Pasternak, and will probably have heard of several others Blok, Mayakovsky, Evtushenko and Brodsky, etc. Why my interest here, and what further can be done?

My main hope is to make the translations of Russian verse more acceptable English poems. This is not a comment on previous or contemporary translations, many of which are excellent, but a shift of emphasis. Most existing translations are rather simple: they scan and they rhyme — which is a considerable achievement given the very different languages, especially where the feminine rhyme is concerned. But in both languages, Russian and English, poetry needs a great deal more than these basics to come

alive. Different traditions are involved, and indeed different sensibilities. From the nineteenth century onwards, Russian poetry has been very susceptible to European influences, but they have been given a very Russian flavour. In all the arts indeed in painting, novels, short stories, poetry — and possibly music, though the argument becomes somewhat nebulous — Russia has divined a more universal man, a basic humanity that works, loves, hopes and suffers, an intuited morality called 'the Russian soul'. That is a feature of the arts generally in Russia, and I shall try to include notes to these parallel developments, so that the poetry is not seen in isolation, but as one strand in many that made up the contemporary literary scene. I shall translate Russian verse into English verse, and have nothing to do with the contemporary fad for 'free verse', which is generally prose, and often an unlovely prose at that. Russian poems usually rhyme, and it was this and their musicality that kept them memorized through the Stalinist years of repression, when it was dangerous to write poetry or even possess written versions. The feminine rhymes I shall translate as appropriate, when they add something positive to the translation, and not as a matter of unyielding principal. The feminine rhyme places great restrictions on poems of any length, tending to make them un-English and contrived, as translations of *Eugene Onegin* should influence their work, not unduly, but in the sense that each rendering opens up new avenues of thought, new ways of using the resources of English verse to achieve a certain objective — which in my

case is a living English poem rather than what is obviously a translation.

The larger intention is that outlined in the Prologue to Tony Kevin's book *Return to Moscow* {1}: a desire to understand a nation still demonized in the west: His 'book is dedicated to the unique resilience and courage of the Russian people, who have triumphed over unimaginable cruelties at the hands of both invaders and their own past rulers, to create a society that is today worthy of admiration; to the beauties of Russia's landscape, history and culture; and to the grace of Russia's women, who continue to inspire me, in life as in art.'

A nation's literature cannot be understood without knowing something of its history — its cultural traditions, the make-up of its classes, institutions and social aspirations, and why these differ from country to country. Russia began in the city states of the Ukraine — Kiev, Novgorod and Vladimir, with their complex religious and cultural inheritance from Byzantium — but these were overrun in the 13th century by the Mongols, who plunged the country into centuries of backwardness. The Grand Duchy of Moscow began its preeminence by acting as tax collectors for the Golden Horde, but a succession of strong-willed, indeed tyrannical, tsars gradually expanded the state and gained increasing independence from their Muslim rulers, though the threat remained. Russia's turn towards the west began with Peter I, who imported ideas, technologies and experts from Europe. Autocratic and centralising tsars — Anna and

particularly Catherine the Great — continued those westernising trends, and pushed Russian control eastwards over the fraying medieval Muslim states of central Asia. By the mid-19th century, Russian rule stretched unbroken to the Pacific, but control was still tenuous and sometimes contested. Also imported from the west were European notions of democracy, wildly repugnant to the paternalistic Russian state. {2}

Alexander I (1796-1825), who suffered Napoleon's invasion but made Russia a force on the European stage, was succeeded by his brother Nicholas I (1825-55). The Decembrist uprising, which tried to demote him into a constitutional monarchy, only made the new tsar even more autocratic and suspicious of new ideas. Alerted by the Crimean War and other disasters, Alexander II (1855-81) did finally introduce many much-needed reforms, most importantly the abolition of serfdom, but was assassinated by anarchists, just as ministers had warned. Alexander III (1881-94) was a throwback to the tsars of old, and those outmoded beliefs he passed to his son, Nicholas II (1894-1917), who unfortunately lacked the acumen and iron will needed to survive the disasters of W.W.I. {3}

The Romanov dynasty, founded in 1613 after the expulsion of the Poles, ruled through families they ennobled, and from whom they took advice, but such a system of government required the tsar to be far-sighted, politically astute, sensitive to social and economic concerns, and of strong

personality. Such was Peter the Great, but the last tsar was far happier acting as paterfamilias than ruling a vast and vexing empire, about which there was still much strange and medieval outside the cities and new industrial zones.

Nicholas II came to the throne when his father died prematurely in October 1894, married Princess Alix of Hesse-Darmstadt (Alexandra) within the month, and became in due course the amiable father of five children. {4} Only social banalities feature in his diary entries, and indeed in no matters of an economic and/or political nature did Nicholas show much interest or understanding.

The country was his to rule without laws or parliaments, guided only his conscience before God. Indeed officialdom barely reached into the countryside, where the Church and local communes retained their inveterate and often barbaric customs: wife-beating, drunkenness and floggings for trivial offences. The court, city life, the professions and industry were a world apart from the countryside, and even the aristocracy owed their lands and position to the military and administrative services they provided the tsar, making them an ineffective counterweight to autocratic rule. The educated class that had grown up in the later nineteenth century could see what was needed, but censorship was strict and political change stifled. Well-read in European thought and literature through social mobility and ready access to university education for both sexes, they lovingly depicted the countryside in paintings, novels and short stories, but attempts by such Populists to idolize and reform

communities were fiercely resented by all parties. {3, 5} The nobles wanted their large estate kept unchanged. The peasants trusted only themselves. They had been emancipated from serfdom, but were still their backward, superstitious and unruly selves, forced to rent the better agrarian land from the gentry class or find work in the expanding mines and factories towns, from which they sent money home, or returned themselves at harvest time, but where they also picked up ideas made ever more extreme and subversive by government repression. {5}

Factory life was hard and dangerous, and more so in the many small workshops, which had even fewer safeguards. Strikes were legion, and often flared into riots, pogroms and machine-breaking rampages. Trade unions were banned until 1905, blocking democratic expression through moderate socialist parties. An intelligentsia, themselves newly emancipated from rural servitude, joined an exploited working class, and revolutionary movements smouldered beneath the surface, ready to break out with dangerous violence when disasters struck. {5}

And disasters came from all sides. The great famine of 1891 and the death of half a million from cholera and typhus a year later had polarized opinion badly, but Nicholas did not accede to political demands for change on his accession to the throne: quite the contrary: rule akin to his father's was his solemn duty, though he lacked Alexander's domineering personality. Relief was organized by district councils, which

slowly added political influence to their philanthropic aims. Government prestige was further damaged by defeat in the 1904-5 Russo-Japanese War. When St. Petersburg crowds peacefully demonstrating for food in January 1905 were mowed down by cavalry and rifle fire the mood hardened. The middle classes were horrified. There were protests, strikes and mutinies across the country, even a mutiny of the Black Sea fleet, made famous by Eisenstein's 'Battleship Potemkin'. The more educated demanded some form of representative government, the Duma, which Nicholas had to accept, though it was largely consultative and repeatedly dissolved. {5}

Russia was ill-prepared for W.W.I, though Nicholas could not keep his throne without respecting his treaty obligations to Serbia. The court was rumoured to be too pro-German anyway, and the unwholesome influence of Rasputin on his wife, and through her to Nicholas himself, provided yet more scandal. The war was the turning point. After some Russian successes, the Germans rolled back the huge but ill-supplied and misdirected Russian armies, and the heavy losses were difficult to make good. Factories fell behind in supplying clothing or armaments, and many divisions had find their weapons on the battlefield. Heavy conscription led to food shortages in cities, and to long queues and mutinies when troops refused to fire on rioting crowds. In a move that damaged his prestige further, Nicholas assumed command of the army, though his previous title of colonel was largely honorary. Food queues grew longer and more threatening. Rather than quell disorder, troops fired on the police. When

in February 1917 his ministers admitted that they could no longer implement his measures, or even count on the loyalty of the army, Nicholas was obliged to abdicate, which he did calmly, as though finally released from a distasteful duty. {5}

A Provisional Government was formed, and then a more progressive one under Alexander Kerensky. But with opportunity after opportunity for sensible dialogue and compromise wasted, the time for distant promises was over. Only immediate power would satisfy peoples brutalized by war, hunger and exploitation. Peasants had seized gentry lands, and workers had taken over factories — aided by the Red Guard, which the Bolsheviks controlled. Lenin, who had arrived at the Petrograd Finland Station in April 1917, announced his terms: an immediate peace, all power to the Soviets, and no cooperation with other parties. Many thought him unrealistic, or mad even, but the Bolsheviks gained a good showing in subsequent elections, and promptly took over Petrograd in a coup d'état. Russia broke into warring factions. Nicholas and family, already irrelevant to the country and denied exile in Britain, were executed by the Bolsheviks at Yekaterinburg in July 1918. Ahead lay vast and often catastrophic social experiments: collectivisation and the elimination of the kulak small-holding class, rapid industrialization under Stalin's ambitious five year plans and always political repression: the purges, gulags and the great terror. All could have been avoided had Nicholas risen to the occasion, but what the tsar lacked in vision and determination the Bolsheviks had in plenty. {5}

The Soviet Union did not become repressive by industrializing: the Bolshevik state was repressive from the first. Lenin seized power in a coup d'état, and added forced labour camps, terror, torture and wholesale murder to the autocratic system he inherited. Perhaps a million people disappeared in these early years of communism: there is little way of knowing for sure. But then few democratic counterweights had existed to government in tsarist Russia. Books and newspapers were strictly censored, and even the educated classes had limited contacts with the common people. The serfs had become land-owning peasants, but were driven just the same by rural backwardness and poverty to the new cities and factories where, denied political expression, they supported a socialist intelligentsia with extremist policies. Worse appeared under Stalin: the 1937-8 Great Terror, the labour camps or gulags whose output became essential to the Soviet state, and collectivisation that led to starvation and destruction of the peasant's way of life, seen by many historians as a catastrophe from which the system never fully recovered. And if desperate measures were born out of the miseries of WWI, they were only intensified in WW II. Troops were stiffened with commissars to prevent desertion, and victories achieved with horrific loss of life. Yet even this truly heroic period — credited to Stalin and unyielding communist principles — was unmasked by Khrushchev's 1956 speech when the reality of Stalin's despotic rule was disclosed, only partially, but sufficient for disillusion to set in. The young turned away from the stern principles and suffering that

characterized their parent's and grandparent's lives, and looked to the west for alternatives. The great social experiment was over, and, though the Union was kept together by political and military force for several decades more, its end was inevitable when Gorbachev relaxed that force. {3,5}

Vladimir Putin is a controversial figure but remains popular in Russia by rescuing the country from Yeltsin, whose election was financed by western institutions, and whose government proved more destructive than the Great Depression in America. {6} Putin ended the war in Chechnia, turned the economy around, and made Russia a respected player again on the world stage. {7} The annexation of the Crimea, the war in Syria and the shooting down of MH17 are all seen differently by the Russian press, as indeed by independent media outlets. {8} We need informed and balanced views when reading Russian literature.

The Living Poem

'Living' does not mean 'a free rendering' but one that understands how the Russian poem works in the Russian tradition, and renders it, as faithfully as possible, in something that belongs to the English tradition. In doing so I shall look closely at details of Russian poems and suggest parallels in English. More than that cannot be claimed. Russian is only a moderately difficult language, nothing like Arabic or Chinese, for example, but does use sounds that

have no equivalent in English, and employ a slightly more taxing grammar. That means that lines can only occasionally be rendered word for word, and that the special ways that Russian poetry employs language will not necessarily have counterparts in the English poetry. But I shall do my best. If the Russian poem is humorous, colloquial, sly or whatever, I shall try to make its English equivalent comparable. {6-7}

I'm far from fluent in Russian, and comments and/or corrections are very welcome. I hope to improve and extend these translations as time allows, no doubt changing lines and accompanying text in due course. I apologise in advance for the changes, but a fully corrected work would never see the light of day. A translation of Pushkin's Gypsies has been issued as a free ebook, and can be downloaded [here](#). When appropriate, I'll also make a little collection of Russian poetry translations, again as a free pdf ebook.

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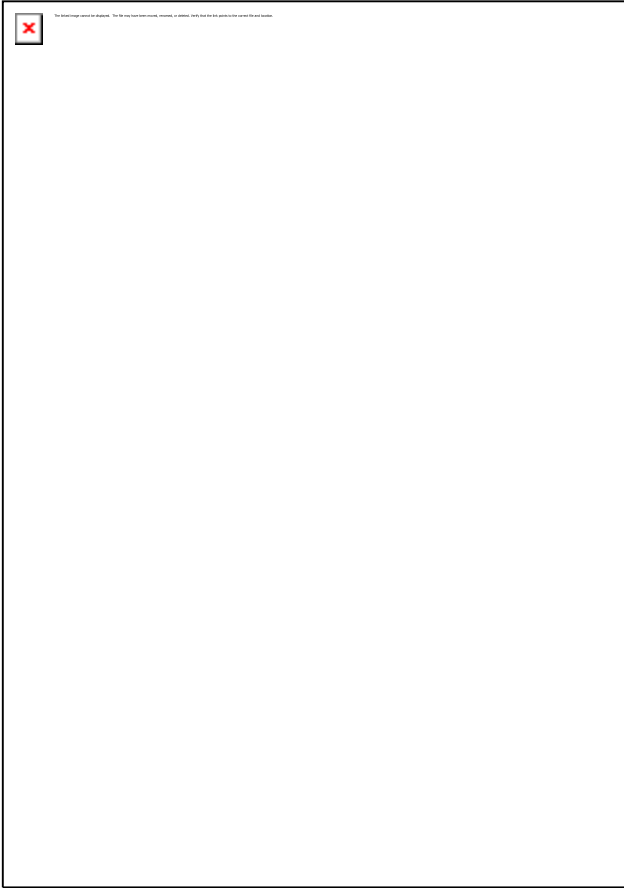
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Translating Annensky's *Among the Worlds*: Early Symbolism



Alenushka by Viktor Vasnetsov. 1881. Tretyakov, Moscow.

Viktor Mikhailovich Vasnetsov was a painter best known for historical and legendary scenes representing Russia's colourful past. Vasnetsov researched his subjects carefully, but added a certain poetry and carefully designed atmosphere to the historical accuracy. The result had a large impact on Russian landscape painting, which typically combines 'realism' and 'mysticism'.

Vasnetsov in fact started as a member of the the

Wanderers, a progressive art movement that depicted local genre scenes, but moved on as the public turned against such a prosaic, social art. Additionally, he was also one of the first painters (as opposed to artisans) to create theatre backdrops, which in its turn encouraged the Russian Revival. {1}

The Early Russian Symbolist Poem

Introduction

Innokenty Annensky was an early Symbolist poet, publishing little in his lifetime but becoming an important influence on Akhmatova, Mandelshtam and others. {1-3} The anguish and torment (*muka*, *toshka*) of his physical life also run through his poetry, giving it a Baudelaire-like preoccupation with the fabric of existence, often with the same response in spleen and boredom. {2} These elements are present in his best-known poem, 'Among Worlds', which has been widely translated, {4-8} but often sentimentalised into a regret for past love. It's not quite that, {2} nor really comparable to Pushkin's *I Loved You*. {8}

The Russian text is:

Среди миров, в мерцании светил
Одной Звезды я повторяю имя...
Не потому, чтоб я Её любил,
А потому, что я томлюсь с другими.

И если мне сомненье тяжело,
Я у Неё одной ищу ответа,
Не потому, что от Неё светло,
А потому, что с Ней не надо света.

The poem is in pentameters, with alternate masculine and feminine rhymes:

Сре *ди* ми *ров*, в мер *ца* ни и све *тил* 5а
Од *ной* Звез *ды* я пов то *ря* ю и мя... 5В
Не по то *му*, чтоб я Е ё лю *бил*, 5а
А по то *му*, что я том *люсь* с дру *ги* ми. 5В

И *ес* ли мне сом *нень* е тя же *ло*, 5с
Я у Не ё од *ной* и *щу* от *ве* та, 5D
Не по то *му*, что от Не ё свет *ло*, 5с
А по то *му*, что с Ней не *на* до све *та*. 5D

Interpreting 'Among the Worlds'

Our first need is to understand the poem. The word-for-word Yandex translation is:

Among the worlds, in the twinkling of the luminaries
Of one Star I repeat the name...
Not because I loved Her.,
It's because I languish with others.

And if me doubt it's_hard,

I by her one search answer,
Not therefore that from it light,
And because, that with her not need light.

Anatoly Liberman's literal translation is:

Among the worlds, in the twinkling of the light Star, I repeat
the name . . . Not because I loved it, but because I'm
languishing with others.

And it's hard for me, I'm the one looking for an answer, Not
because it's light, But because she does not need light.

And his verse translation:

Amid the worlds, 'mid luminaries' gleam,
One Star I know whose name I keep repeating.
It's not that of my love for Her I dream:
It's that with others all is mirthless cheating.

And when oppressive doubt I have to fight,
Her answer only have I sought and heeded.
It's not that She is emanating light:
It's that with Her around no light is needed.

That's a very fair guess at the meaning, which Symbolist
poems don't readily give up. Звезда (star) is a feminine
noun, and 'her' appears in both stanzas, but who the woman
was we don't know. We might suppose Annensky is thinking

of some star of the ballroom, but he was not a frequenter of high society but a retiring scholar, poet and translator. We need to look deeper into Annensky's aims and approaches.

The 'Pishi-Stihi' site explains that the star was indeed a personification of hope and faith in eternal values to this most lonely of men, one to whom women remained an abstract ideal. {10} The uNotices site {11} says a good deal more. Annensky's works combined the lyrical poetry of Pushkin and Tyutchev with psychological insight. The works were often mysterious, but the mystery in this poem does not lie in complexity, cipher and semantic vagueness, (a feature of French Symbolist poetry) but in a special psychological sharpness that is born from nothing but 'verbal dust'. To be specially noted are:

1. The anaphora: Not because I loved her, / but because I'm languishing with others ... repeated with Not because of Her light, /And because with Her there is no need for light ...
2. The loneliness of the poet: I'm angry with others, doubt is heavy, I beg the answer, no need for light.
- 3 The capitalisation of Star, Her, and Her. She is important, irreplaceable.
4. The musicality of the piece.
5. The poem's tight-knit nature: no word is superfluous.

With this mind, we'd be well off target to write: (1)

In other worlds, their stars yet flickering,

there's still a name my calling covers.
It's not that love for Her's continuing
but more I'm languishing among the others.

It's hard for me, who's lost in painful night,
yet she's the answer to this hesitation
from one who was perpetual light,
and in herself beyond all admiration.

This is unattractive for many reasons: rearrangement of the lines, expansion of sense and the heavy, unconvincing rhymes. It seems better to reverse the masculine and feminine rhymes in translation, and for three reasons. It's fairly intolerable to the English ear to round off a stanza with a weak, feminine line. Secondly, there are comparatively few rhyme words available in English for the particular line. And, thirdly, previous translations {4-8} haven't been successful in doing so: all add words to meet the rhyme needs, and these words damage the poem's simple fabric.

So, continuing with the swopped rhyme schemes, we can get a bit more musicality and avoid the more obvious rhymes with: (2)

Among the worlds of glittering luminaries,
there's still a single star whose name I see.
and not because the light of loving carries,
but simply as all others weary me.

When painful tedium afflicts the living
she alone I sense to answer right:
it's not because of any light she's giving,
who was and is herself perpetual light.

But the first stanza has a name 'I see', and the second is a bit over-clever. We still haven't got to the heart or essence of the poem, its Symbolist belief that matters can only be hinted at, and that 'truth' lies in the multiple associations of words, not in anything tangible that can be extracted and analysed. As is often the case, it's best to go back to the most literal translation, and try to construct something nebulously close to the simple words. (3)

In other worlds, among the luminaries,
there's still a Star I name for everything,
it's not that any love for Her still tarries,
but more with others I am languishing.

It's hard for me, who in this doubt is living,
but She's the one who yet might answer right,
and not because of any light She's giving,
but more because she does not need the light

The translation is fairly close to the original, replicating its features, though the lines are not particularly evocative or musical in English. We can of course combine versions (2) and (3), and move words around, to make a more attractive English poem, but not everyone would accept it as a proper

translation: (4)

In other worlds, in stars of luminaries,
one name I'd replicate in everything,
and not because the light of loving carries,
but more with others I'm left languishing.

It's hard for me, who in this doubt is living,
to find the one who yet might answer right,
and not because of any light she's giving,
but more because She is perpetual light.

There are other possibilities:

There's still one Star whose name I'd replicate / but more
the others I would deprecate.

One star whose name I call continually / but simply as all
others weary me.

I'd probably stick with a modified version of the previous:
(5)

Among the worlds of flickering luminaries,
there's still one Star I'd name continually,
and not because of light that loving carries,
but simply since all others weary me.

It's hard for me, who in this doubt is living,

but She's the one who still might answer right.
It's not because of any light She's giving,
but more because She does not need the light.

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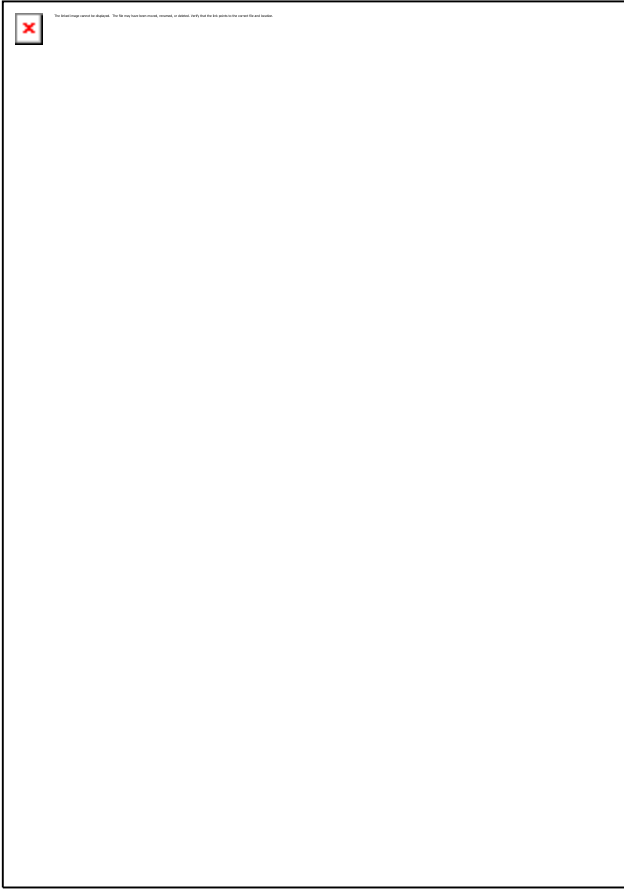
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Translating Blok's *Black Raven*: Dol'nik Verse



Smiling Girl by Abram Arkhipov. 1920s. {1}

Abram Arkhipov (1862-1930: birth name Abram Pyrikov) was born in the Ryazan Oblast and studied in the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture under Perov, Polenov and Makovsky. In 1883, he moved to the Imperial Academy of Arts at Saint Petersburg for two years, returning to Moscow. Arkhipov joined the Wanderers in 1889, and then the Union of Russian Artists in 1903, and later the Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia. In 1927 was

awarded the title of People's Artist of the USSR. {2}

Arkhipov's paintings were in the realistic naturalism tradition, with a predilection for showing the harshness of peasant life, particularly of women. They were often freely painted with a flamboyant touch of lyricism, however, as in the painting above. {2-3}

Blok: Black Raven

Russian Text

Черный ворон в сумраке снежном,
Черный бархат на смуглых плечах.
Томный голос пением нежным
Мне поет о южных ночах.

В легком сердце - страсть и беспечность,
Словно с моря мне подан знак.
Над бездонным провалом в вечность,
Задыхаясь, летит рысак.

Снежный ветер, твое дыханье,
Опьяненные губы мои...
Валентина, звезда, мечтанье!
Как поют твои соловьи...

Страшный мир! Он для сердца тесен!
В нем - твоих поцелуев бред,

Темный морок цыганских песен,
Торопливый полет комет!

Александр Блок. Избранное.
Москва, "Детская Литература", 1969. {1}

Machine Code Translation

Black raven in the gloom of the snow,
Black velvet on swarthy shoulders.
A languorous voice with a gentle voice
I'm singing about the southern nights.

In a light heart - passion and carelessness,
As if from the sea I was given a sign.
Over the bottomless failure into eternity,
Panting, the trotter flies.

A snowy wind, your breath,
My intoxicated lips ...
Valentine, star, dreaming!
How your nightingales sing ...

A terrible world! He is too small for the heart!
In it - your kisses are nonsense,
Dark gypsy songs,
A hurried flight of comets!

Analysis

The piece, written in 1910, is almost in iambic tetrameters, but the odd additional syllable shows this is dol'nik verse, which Blok was particularly fond of. {2}

Чер ный ворон в сум раке снеж ном, 4A
Чер ный бар хат на сму глых пле чах. 4b
Том ный го лос пен ием неж ным 4A
Мне по ет о юж ных но чах. 4b

В лег ком сер дце - страсть и бе спеч ность, 4C
Слов но с мор я мне по дан знак. 4d
Над без дон ным про ва лом в веч ность, 4C
За ды ха ясь, ле тит ры сак. 4d

Снеж ный ве тер, тво е ды хань е, 4E
Опь я нен ные гу бы мо и... 4f
Ва лен ти на, звез да, меч тань е! 4E
Как по ют тво и со лов ьи... 4f

Страш ны й мир! Он для серд ца те сен! 4G
В нем - тво их по це лу ев бред, 4h
Тем ный мо рок цы ган ских пе сен, 4G
То ро пли вый по лет ко мет! 4h

Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Blok (1880-1921)

By retreating into the inner world of imagination, the Symbolists were a reaction to the crass materialism of the age and to the social intentions of civic poets like Nekrásov.

Important predecessors were Tiutchev and Fet, but the strongest influences were French: Baudelaire, Verlaine and Mallarmé. All explored a reality beyond the world of the senses, and tried to bring poetry closer to the art of music. In Russia these experiments inspired a whole movement, equal in many ways to the accomplishments of Pushkin and his circle, but where the most confident and accomplished performer was Aleksandr Blok. He used a metaphoric language to convey spiritual and psychic experience, and his many religious and love poems brought a Romanticism back into fashion. Blok hailed the Russian Revolution as liberation from outworn conventions, and though he was disappointed by its reality, and indeed died a broken man, empty of inspiration, he left behind a new technical mastery, particularly in stress verse, where it was the number of stresses to the line, and not the metre, that gave verse its coherence. {3}

Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Blok was born into a sheltered and intellectual environment. His father was a law professor, and his mother the daughter of the rector of St. Petersburg University. He was reared in the atmosphere of artistic refinement at the manor of his aristocratic maternal grandparents, and in 1903 married Lyubov Mendeleyeva, daughter of the famous chemist. Poetry came easily and naturally to Blok, and the early verse celebrated the exaltation and spiritual fulfillment of marriage. The technical mastery of Pushkin, and the apocalyptic philosophy of the poet and mystic Vladimir Solovyov were important

influences on Blok, who developed inovatory rhythms where sound and musicality were paramount. The first collection of poems, the cycle *Stikhi o prekrasnoy dame* (1904; 'Verses About the Lady Beautiful'), focuses on personal and intimate themes but these are somewhat aetherial and mystical, where the lady is a symbol for eternal femininity. {4}

The following collections were different. *Nechayannaya radost* (1907; "Inadvertent Joy"), *Snezhnaya maska* (1907; "Mask of Snow"), and *Zemlya v snegu* (1908; "Earth in Snow") were set in contemporary city life, and included revolutionary events, deeply-felt love, and complex psychologies. It was the third volume that contained Blok's strongest work. Older poems were incorporated with new to give an historical and mystical perspective of Russia in the 1910s. Blok did not see combat in W.W.I, serving in the the engineering and construction corps, but he was well aware of the 1917 Revolution, which he saw as part of a world-wide period of change — critical, tragic, and threatening in its consequences, but to be welcomed by Blok's faith in humankind. Blok worked for a commission investigating crimes of the imperial government, and later directly for the Bolsheviks, whom he felt represented the will of the people. "Terrible, sweet, inescapable, imperative" was how he expressed it in his poetry, which was represented by the novel in verse *Dvenadtsat* (1918; The Twelve) and the poem *Skify* (1918; "The Scythians"). Blok vividly expressed the mood of the time, but quickly became disillusioned with the

Bolshevik government, practically ceasing to write poetry thereafter. {4}

Final Translation

Blok's verse is dol'nik, i.e. slightly irregular. Should our translation render that irregularity? Occasionally, I think, without impeding the verse flow. Extra syllables occur in 'langorous' , 'careless, the', 'Valentina, my star' and 'delirium':

Black raven in the snowy evening:
black-mantled swarthiness invites.
Languorous voice, as soft as breathing,
sings to me of southern nights.

Intense and careless, the heart agreeing,
a sign that's sent me from out the sea.
Across the pit the rider's fleeing,
breathless to eternity.

How chill the snowy breath you're bringing,
intoxicating lips, that seem
but nightingales: how sweet they're singing:
Valentina, my star, my dream!

Delirium of kisses, they too fearing
a world too narrow for the heart:
Dark holds of gypsy songs I'm hearing:
how fast the comets flare apart.

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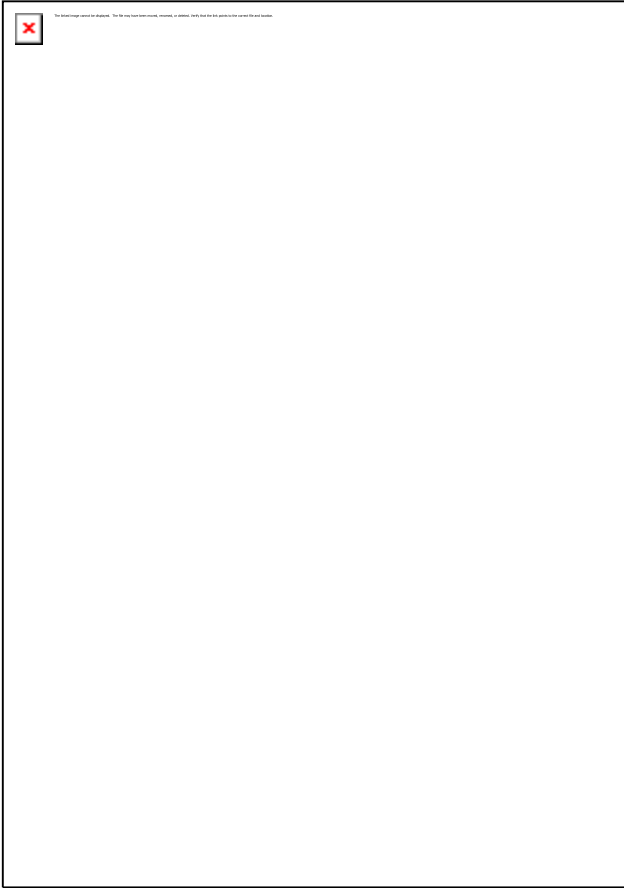
Audio Recording

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eCCYB_nZDtY

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1. Smiling Girl by Abram Arkhipov. Public Domain,
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Translating Blok's *Stormy Weather*: High Symbolism



St. Petersburg by Osip Braz. c. 1915.

Osip Emmanuilovich Braz (1873-1936) had a colourful life, much of it spent outside Russia. He studied painting in Odessa, and then in Munich (1891-1893), where he studied at the Academy of Fine Arts. After Germany he went to Paris and the Netherlands, studying and collecting paintings, thence returning to Russia and studying in the workshop of Ilya Repin (1895-6). For the next thirty years, Braz turned out portraits of fellow artists, including the poets Leonid Pasternak and Sergey Ivanov, plus prominent figures of

Russian culture. There were also landscapes of France, the Crimea, and Finland, and from 1900 to 1905 he gave lessons in his studio on the Moyka River. From 1907 to 1911 Braz lived in France, and was much influenced by contemporary movements. In 1914 Braz became an academician, and a member of the commission for the restoration of paintings by the Hermitage Museum. He was appointed curator of the Hermitage when the Soviets came to power. {2}

In 1924, however, Braz was arrested on false charges of buying paintings for export abroad, and of espionage. He spent three years in Solovki prison camp, and his art collections, including important Dutch works from the 17th century, were confiscated and made state property. After his release in late 1926, Braz moved to Germany and then settled in Paris, where he spent the last years of his life — painting, trading in antiques and collecting. {2}

Blok: Stormy Weather

Russian Text

Пусть светит месяц - ночь темна.
Пусть жизнь приносит людям счастье,-
В моей душе любви весна
Не сменит бурного ненастья.

Ночь распростерлась надо мной
И отвечает мертвым взглядом
На тусклый взор души больной,
Облитой острым, сладким ядом.

И тщетно, страсти затая,
В холодной мгле передрассветной
Среди толпы блуждаю я
С одной лишь думою заветной:

Пусть светит месяц - ночь темна.
Пусть жизнь приносит людям счастье,-
В моей душе любви весна
Не сменит бурного ненастья.

Machine Code Translation

Let the month shine - the night is dark.
Let life bring happiness to people, -
In my soul of love, spring
Will not change the stormy weather.

The night stretched out above me
And answers with a dead gaze
To the dull eyes of the sick man,
Poured with a sharp, sweet poison.

And in vain, passions,
In the cold mist of before dawn
Among the crowd I wander

With only one thought cherished:

Let the month shine - the night is dark.

Let life bring happiness to people, -

In my soul of love, spring

Will not change the stormy weather.

Analysis

The verse is close to iambic tetrameters, rhymed aBaB, but the occasional extra syllable means it's probably better seen as dol'nik verse:

Пусть све тит мес яц - ночь тем на. 4а

Пусть жизнь при но сит лю дям счастье е,- 4В

В мо ей ду ше люб ви вес на 4а

Не сме нит бур но го не насть я. 4В

Ночь рас прос тер лась на до мной 4с

И от ве ча ет мерт вым взг ля дом 4D

На туск лый взор ду ши бо ль ной, 4с

Об ли той ост рым, слад ким я дом. 4D

И тщет но, страсти за та я, 4е

В хо лод ной мгле пе ред расс вет ной 4F

Сре ди тол пы блуж да ю я 4е

С од ной лишь ду мо ю за вет ной: 4F

Пусть све тит ме сяц - ночь тем на. 4g

Пусть жи знь при но сит люд ям счастье е,- 4H

В мо ей ду ше люб ви вес на	4g
Не сме нит бур но го не насть я.	4H

Russian Symbolism

Symbolism in literature was a complex movement that deliberately extended the evocative power of words to express the feelings, sensations and states of mind that lie beyond everyday awareness. The open-ended symbols created by Charles Baudelaire (1821-67) brought the invisible into being through the visible, and linked the invisible through other sensory perceptions, notably smell and sound. Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-98), the high priest of the French movement, theorized that symbols were of two types. One was created by the projection of inner feelings onto the world outside. The other existed as nascent words that slowly permeated the consciousness and expressed a state of mind initially unknown to their originator. {4-5}

Like their French originators, the Russian Symbolists also wrote verse as something aspiring to music, but broke into two factions. Some, like Bryusov, saw Symbolism as a purely literary movement. Others, notably Vyacheslav, Ivanov, Bely and Blok, believed Symbolism was a mystical religion to which poets served as high priests. Blok was the greatest of the Symbolists, using metaphorical language of marked originality to convey spiritual and religious experiences, and with the images possessed of multiple meanings to express the link between the visible and invisible worlds. {4}

The notion is not difficult to understand. Words do not get their meaning from definitions or dictionaries but from their social purposes, Wittgenstein was to argue, from the practical context in which they are employed. Many nineteenth century also thinkers rejected the Enlightenment's notion of progress and abstract categories, and spoke instead of a Volk, a people — something that was not rationally grounded or justified, but grew from feelings and traditions previously overlooked. Social life was indeed analogous to organic growth, and aspects of social life were related to each other like functions of a living body. Herder developed this notion, relating earth to the cosmos, man to earth, man as a social and historical being. History was the growth of a single, marvellous tree whose branches were the cultures of mankind. If all reality is fundamentally one, and the Divine is present in all its manifestations, then what occurs in history is Revelation. Individual conscience may be fallible, but it is the role of man's moral sense to penetrate deeper into the nature of all that exists. The sense of the dark and hidden, the feeling of dependence and awe, and a worshipful acceptance of the fullness of being, are the attitudes which put religious man in touch with the Divine. The Slavophiles in Russia of the 1830s and 1840s also believed in the primacy of the moral and religious law, the ancestral tradition and the spontaneous sense of the right and just over the written laws and regulations of the state.

{5}

Words were natural intermediaries in this process, and could yield their shadowy and larger meanings if used appropriately. Blok saw art as an element in cultural history, and the latter also had a religious dimension — which in Blok's case was a mystical love for Divine Wisdom. He began to interweave love, art and dissident views into his duties as the high priest of Symbolism, engaging in affairs — which, when reciprocated by his wife, ended in disillusionment and wrecked his first marriage. The Beautiful Lady of his early poems gave way to correspondences taken from contemporary Russia, often with urban, everyday and dispiriting imagery, for which he had an innate sense of the appropriate. Blok first welcomed the Revolution but grew increasingly depressed and finally silent over its reality. The stern necessities of a communist regime fighting for its life with harsh decrees became very different from the artistic and highly-cultured society in which he was reared, and was worlds apart from the social realism it advocated. To the new democratic purposes of the common man, Symbolism had become a reactionary bourgeois art form. {6}

Final Translation

Symbolism is the most difficult style to translate because the meanings that in one language produce a musical and evocative phrase will probably not do so in another, i.e. literal translation will generally lose the poetry. The loss is particularly the case with second stanza we could render as:

The night far out above the street

is hoisted to a dead man's guise,
a poor sick man where poison, sweet
and perilous, still fills the eyes.

But that, I think, personifies the night too much, where the
literal meaning is:

The night stretched out above me
And answers with a dead gaze
To the dull eyes of the sick man,
Poured with a sharp, sweet poison.

We don't really know if the poor sick man is the poet or just
the night sky, and it seems better to keep that ambivalence:

Answering to a dead man's gaze,
the night extends above the street:
and dull the poor, sick eyes that blaze
with poison that is sharp and sweet.

We also have the Dol'nik question, but here it seems wise to
let the verse have an idiomatic vitality, rather than introduce
extra syllables. The poem is then:

Let the month shine out and bring
a happiness to life together.
In my soul of love the spring
will not undo the stormy weather

Answering to a dead man's gaze,
the night is stretched above the street:
and dull the poor, sick eyes that blaze
with poison that is sharp and sweet.

Though vain is passion, in the frost
of crowds and early dawning mists
I wander as a soul half lost
but find one cherished thought persists.

Let the month shine out and bring
a happiness to life together.
In my soul of love the spring
will not undo the stormy weather

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6

Audio Recording

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Fet: Clear and Golden

The Russian text is: {1}

В вечер такой золотистый и ясный,
В этом дыханьи весны всепобедной
Не поминай мне, о друг мой прекрасный,
Ты о любви нашей робкой и бедной.

Дышит земля всем своим ароматом,
Небу разверстая, только вздыхает;
Самое небо с нетленным закатом
В тихом заливе себя повторяет.

Что же тут мы или счастье наше?
Как и помыслить о нём не стыдиться?
В блеске, какого нет шире и краше,
Нужно безумствовать — или смириться!

The machine code translation is:

In the evening, so golden and clear,
In this breath of spring the all-conquering
Do not remember me, my dear friend,
You are about love our timid and poor.

Breathes the earth with all its aroma,
The sky unfolds, only sighs;
The sky itself with the incorporeal sunset
In a quiet bay itself repeats itself.

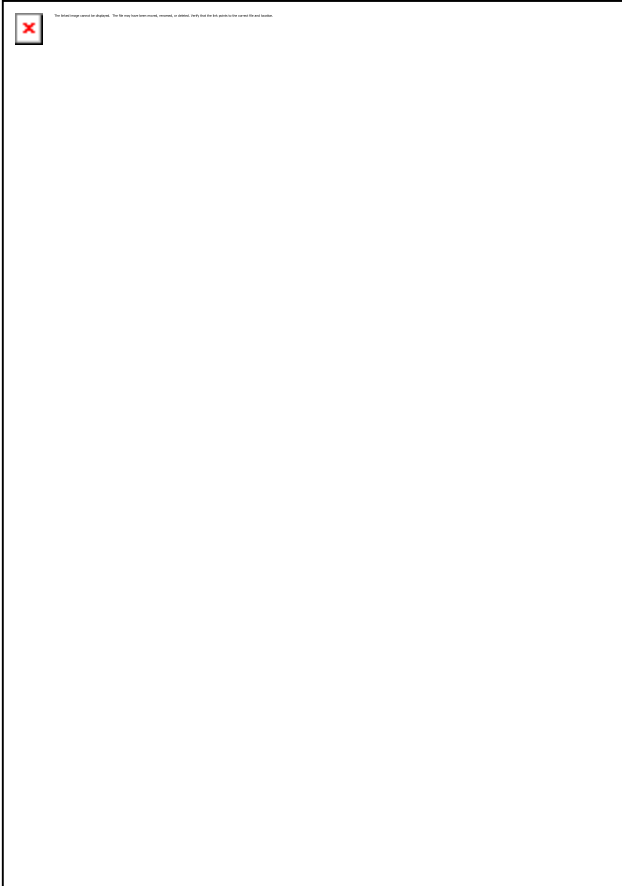
What are we or our happiness?

How and think about it is not to be ashamed of?

In brilliance, which is no wider and more beautiful,

It is necessary to be mad - or to put up!

January 1886



The Blond (Portrait of Tevashova) by Ilya Repin (71cm x 58cm) 1898 {1}

Ilya Yefimovich Repin (1844-1930) was the leading exponent of Russian realism. He was born in Chuguyev, in the Kharkov Governorate (now the Ukraine) and began his local apprenticeship by painting icons. But in 1863 he went to St. Petersburg Art Academy, met many painters later important,

exhibited at the Paris Salon in 1874-6, and became an academician. Celebrated paintings followed: Reply of the Zaporozhian Cossacks (1891), Religious Procession in Kursk Province (1883), and Ivan the Terrible and His Son Ivan (1885). He became well off and purchased an estate, the Penates, in Kuokkala, Finland.

Repin was instrumental in getting Russian painting known internationally. In 1901 he was awarded the Legion of Honour. He generally welcomed the Revolution, but was sceptical of its promises, turning down the many offers from the Soviets to return to his country of origin. Celebrations of his works in Moscow and Leningrad notwithstanding, Repin remained in Finland, where he died, being buried at the Penates. {2}

Analysis of the Poem

The poem is in the amphibrachic (u-u) or ternary metre:

В ве чер та кой зо ло тис ты й и яс ный,	4A
В этом ды ха ныи вес ны все по бед ной	4B
Не по ми най мне, о друг мой пре крас ный,	4A
Ты о люб ви на шей роб кой и бед ной.	4B

Ды шит зем ля всем сво им а ро ма том,	4C
Не бу раз верс та я, толь ковзды ха ет;	4D
Са мо е не бо с нет лен ным за ка том	4C
В ти хом за ли ве се бя пов то ря ет.	4D

Что же тут мы и ли счас ти е на ше?	4E
-------------------------------------	----

Как и по мыс лить о нём не сты дить ся? 4F
В блес ке, ка ко го нет ши ре и кра ше, 4E
Нуж но бе зумст во вать — и ли сми рить ся! 4F

Afanásy Afanásievich Fet (1820-92)

Afanásy Afanásievich Fet was the son of a Russian squire named Shenshín and a German wife, but the marriage, contracted abroad, was not recognised at home. It was not until 1876 that a royal decree allowed Fet to adopt the surname Shenshín, and in fact he kept the earlier name for his publishing life. Fet's progress was rapid. He published, at his own expense, a volume of poems in 1840 that showed little promise, but was sending to the Moskvityánin some of his most perfect lyrics only two years later. He entered military service and served in various cavalry regiments for the next fifteen years. Promotion was slow, however, and it was only in 1856 that Fet could leave as Captain of the Guards and a title. After a short journey abroad, he married sensibly and settled down to make a success of his estate. Fet was exceptionally reserved, but his poetry was well received, making him one of the best-known literary figures in the 1850s, familiar with Turgénev, Tólstoy and other luminaries of the day. The exclusively aesthetic nature of his poetry made him enemies among those promoting civic poetry, however, and in 1863, after the third edition of his poems appeared, Fet retired from the literary scene. Twenty years went by. After 1883 Fet occasionally issued small volumes under the title of Evening Lights, but he was never prolific, preferring to work instead on three volumes of memoirs and translations of the Roman poets. {2}

Fet was a devotee of the aesthetic aspects of poetry, and was appreciated as such by the creative writers of his time, but not by critics who saw these gently melodic pieces as little better than 'moonshine'. But for Druzhinin the chief property of Fet's talent was 'the ability to catch the elusive, to give an image and a name to what was before him nothing more than a vague, fleeting sense of the human soul, a feeling without an image and a name'. {3} After 1863, and especially in the 1880s, Fet's poetry becomes more difficult, metaphysical and condensed. {4} The greatest achievements in the last years were the love poems, remarkable in a man of seventy, but more so for the saturation of experience compressed into hard outlines. {2}

Final Translation

We could translate the lines as tetrameters, but their ternary or amphibrachic nature suggests the pentameter would be better: the lines have ten or more syllables. There should also be a quiet musicality:

Clear and golden is the sunlight's end,
nor from their breaths the conquering springs withdraw.
Do not remember me, my dearest friend
nor think our love was all too shy and poor.

The breathing earth gives up aromas yet;
and sky unfolds into its breathy wealth:
rich and imperishable will all suns set,
and quietly, bay on bay, repeat itself.

What is happiness, and what is there
to feel ashamed about? Surely now because
of that great light and beauty everywhere
it's madness not to take it as it was.

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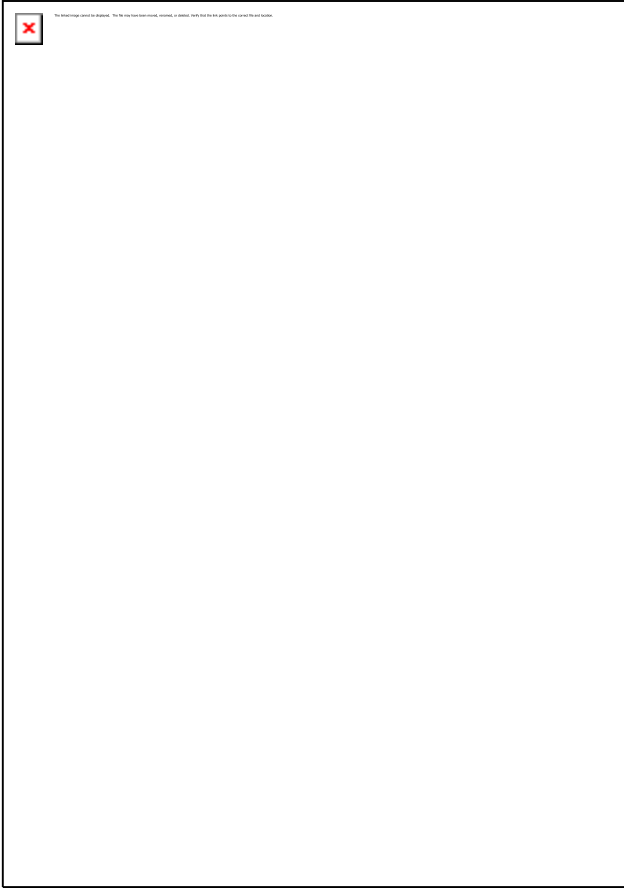
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Nekrasov Poem: 'At the Entrance'



Sunday Reading at a Village School by Nicklay Bogdanov-Belsky 1895. {1} Bogdanov-Belsky (1868-1945) was active in St. Petersburg to the early 1920s, but then worked exclusively in Riga, Latvia. He became a member of several prominent societies, including the Peredvizhniki from 1895, and the Arkhip Kuindzhi from 1909. Most of the work is genre paintings, notably of the education of peasant

children, portraits, but also includes some impressionistic landscapes and commissioned portraits, including those of the nobility and royal family. He died in Berlin. {2}

Russian Text, starting at line 40 of the 120 line poem:

Размышления у парадного подъезда {1}

Вот парадный подъезд. По торжественным дням,
Одержимый холопским недугом,
Целый город с каким-то испугом
Подъезжает к заветным дверям;
Записав свое имя и званье¹,
Разъезжаются гости домой,
Так глубоко довольны собой,
Что подумаешь - в том их призванье!
А в обычные дни этот пышный подъезд
10. Осаждают убогие лица:
Прожектеры, искатели мест,
И преклонный старик, и вдовица.
От него и к нему то и знай по утрам
Всё курьеры с бумагами скачут.
Возвращаясь, иной напевает "трам-трам",
А иные просители плачут.

Раз я видел, сюда мужики подошли,
Деревенские русские люди,
Помолились на церковь и стали вдали,
20. Свесив русые головы к груди;

Показался швейцар. "Допусти",- говорят
С выраженьем надежды и муки.
Он гостей оглядел: некрасивы на взгляд!
Загорелые лица и руки,
Армячишка худой на плечах,
По котомке на спинах согнутых,
Крест на шее и кровь на ногах,
В самодельные лапти обутых
(Знать, брели-то долгонько они
30. Из каких-нибудь дальних губерний).
Кто-то крикнул швейцару: "Гони!
Наш не любит оборванной черни!"
И захлопнулась дверь. Постояв,
Развязали кошли пилигримы,
Но швейцар не пустил, скудной лепты не взяв,
И пошли они, солнцем палимы,
Повторяя: "Суди его бог!",
Разводя безнадежно руками,
И, покуда я видеть их мог,
40. С непокрытыми шли головами...

Machine Code Translation

Here is the main entrance. On solemn days,
Obsessed with the slave's illness,
A whole city with some kind of fright
He drives up to the cherished doors;
Having written down his name and his name,
Guests go home,

So deeply satisfied with themselves,
What will you think is their calling!
And on ordinary days this magnificent entrance
10. They beset the squalid faces:
Spotlights, place searchers,
And an old man and a widow.
From him and to him then and know in the morning
All couriers with papers skip.
Coming back, another hums the "tram-tram",
And other petitioners cry.

Once I saw, the men came up here,
Rural Russian people,
Prayed at the church and stood in the distance,
20. Bracing fair-haired heads to the chest;
The porter appeared. "Allow it," they say.
With the expression of hope and flour.
He looked at the guests: ugly in appearance!
Tanned faces and hands,
Armchuyushka skinny on the shoulders,
On the knapsack on the backs of the bent,
Cross on the neck and blood on the legs,
In self-made bast shoes
(To know, they walked a long time, they
30. From some distant provinces).
Someone shouted to the porter: "Drive!
Our does not like ragged rabble! "
And the door slammed shut. After standing,
The pilgrims were unleashed,

But the doorman did not let him in; he did not take a
meager mite,
And they went, the sun of the palima,
Repeating: "Judge his god!",
Waving her hands hopelessly,
And, as long as I could see them,
40. With bare heads went ...

Analysis

The poem is written in the ternary metre, generally
amphibrachic (u-u), sometimes a little less regular. In the
more lyrical sections the metre is probably better called
dactylic (- u u). The rhyme scheme is aBBa or AbbA:

Вот па *рад* ный подъ *езд*. По тор *жест* вен ным дням, 4а
О дер *жи* мый хо *лоп* ским не *ду* гом, 4В
Це лый *го* род с ка *ким*-то ис *пу* гом 4В
Подъ *ез* *жа* ет к за *вет* ным две *рям*; 4а
За пи *сав* сво *е* и мя и *звань* е, 4С
Разъ *ез* *жа* ют ся *гос* ти до *мой*, 4d
Так *глу* бо *ко* до *воль* ны со *бой*, 4d
Что по *ду* ма *ешь* - в том их *приз* вань е! 4С
А в о *быч* ные дни э тот *пыш* ный подъ *е* *зд* 4е
О саж *да* ют у *бо* ги *е* *ли* ца: 4F
Про *жек* *теры*, ис *ка* те *ли* мест, 4F
И прек *лон* ный ста *рик*, и *вдо* *ви* ца. 4е

Background

Nekrasov's main theme was, as he put it, 'the suffering of
the Russian people.' In this he was entirely sincere, though

his own life was often very different from what he espoused — a reason perhaps for the bitter irony, gloom, distraction and guilty conscience that featured prominently. Yet, though subjective, that tortured compassion for his fellow men allowed Nekrasov to get inside his characters, identifying with their humour and native cunning as much as with the monstrous suffering they received at the hands of land-owners and officialdom. Sometimes he idealized the serfs, which could lead to sentimentality, and that flaw is not entirely missing from the later stages of this poem, where Nekrasov turns his savage invective on:

You inhabiting great luxury
will in your deepest slumber see . . .
Who say that's life's a blessing all the same
with comfort and a need for name . .

The poem ends with:

Wherever people are, you'll hear them sigh
and groan, so have the heart to ask them why.
You will wake and see and, gathering strength,
observe your destinies, obey what's right
All you could have done is here at length
set down: I've made this aching song to light
the spirit on to its eternal strength.

Final Translation

A pentameter is suggested by the ternary rhythm — is indeed required to capture the content and strict rhyme.

Nekrasov's verse is also a little rough, which I've tried to keep with:

We're at the entrance now. A solemn date.
As though beneath the will of some enslaving rite,
the town compelled there out of fright,
they drive up to that all-compelling gate.

Thence, having written down their name and rank,
our visitors go home; each one
delighted with importance won
you'd think their status was the thing to thank.

On other days this most imposing entrance sees
10. a press of squalid faces, each aware
what words will do. An old man there,
or widow cursed by life's infirmities.

Indifferent to them, shuffling papers, come and go
the buzz of various flunkies. Still they wait
all morning sometimes on this specious show,
while more petitioners besiege the gate.

And once I saw a group of men, our nationhood
of good plain rural Russian folk, each blest
by church attendance. They at distance stood
20. respectfully, with blonde head bent to chest.

They begged admission of the porter; he

observed how hope and terror had unmanned
each features. Ugly too, for one could see
the skin on hands and head was rudely tanned.

Armchyushka's shoulder bones poked through, but shored
up heavy knapsack on his back.

One had a cross, another's legs were scored
with blood, and sported shoes of bast.

(In fact they'd walked a goodish length, and some
30. indeed had come from distant provinces)
but someone shouted at the ragged scum,
affronted by life's wearied instances.

The porter, therewith, in a proper fright,
rammed shut the door on such affray,
refused entreaties, and the pilgrim's mite,
and stoutly sent them on their way.

'May God who judges show what's right,'
so said the hands there flailing helplessly.
I watched them filing out of sight;
40. It seemed their heads were bared eternally.

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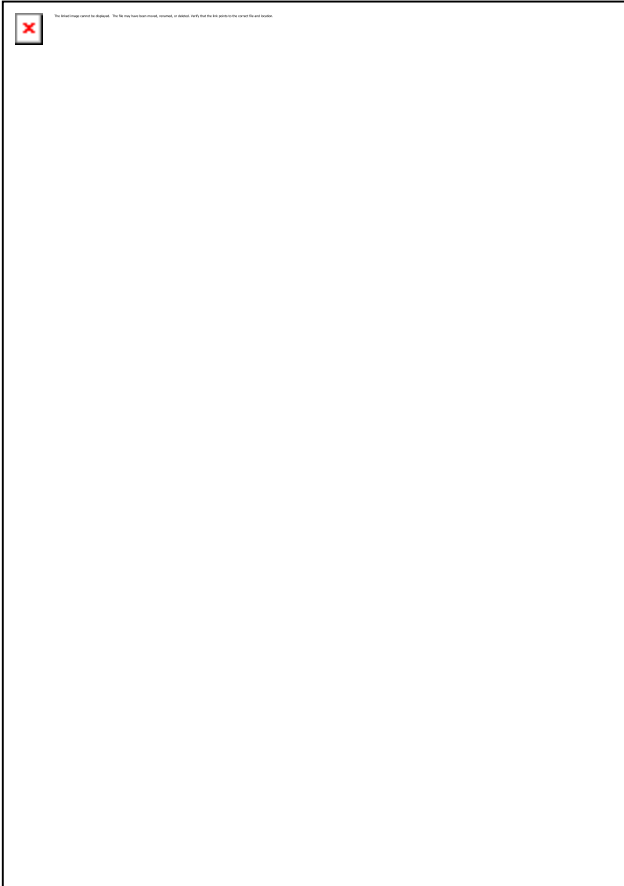
Audio Recording

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y-YE7WSND4Y>

Illustration

1. Sunday Reading in a Village School by Nikolay Bogdanov-Belsky - Belygorod.ru, Public Domain,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=1422998>
2. Nikolai Bogdanov-Belsky (1868–1945) Paintings from collections in Latvia and Germany.

Nekrasov: See How Many Goods I Pack



Fair by Ivan Seminovich Kukilov 1910. {1} Kukilov was born to a rural peasant family that had recently moved to Murom, where he met Alexander Morozov and was encouraged to enrol in the drawing school at the Imperial Society for the Encouragement of the Arts. He then moved to St.Petersburg, worked as an assistant in Morozov's studio, took classes at the Imperial Academy of Arts, and, from 1901 to 1902, together with Boris Kustodiev, helped Repin paint his monumental 'The Ceremonial Meeting of the State Council May 7, 1901' for the Mariinsky Palace.

Russian Text:

Слова Николая Некрасова {3}

«Ой, полна, полна коробушка,
Есть и ситцы и парча.
Пожалей, моя зазнобушка,
Молодецкого плеча!

Выди, выди в рожь высокую!
Там до ночки погожу,
А завижу черноокую –
Все товары разложу.

Цены сам платил немалые,
Не торгуйся, не скупись:
Подставляй-ка губы алые,
Ближе к милому садись!»

Вот уж пала ночь туманная,
Ждет удалый молодец.
Чу, идет! — пришла желанная,
Продает товар купец.

Катя бережно торгуется,
Все боится передать.
Парень с девицей целуется,
Просит цену набавлять.

Знает только ночь глубокая,
Как поладили они.
Расступись ты, рожь высокая,
Тайну свято сохрани!

«Ой! легка, легка коробушка,
Плеч не режет ремешок!
А всего взяла зазнобушка
Бирюзовый перстенок.

Дал ей ситцу штуку целую,
Ленту алую для кос,
Поясок — рубаху белую
Подпоясать в сенокос —

Всё поклала ненаглядная
В короб, кроме перстенька:
«Не хочу ходить нарядная
Без сердечного дружка!»

То-то, дуры вы, молодочки!
Не сама ли принесла
Полуштофик сладкой водочки?
А подарков не взяла!

Так постой же! Нерушимое
Обещаньице даю:
Опорожнится коробушка,
На Покров домой приду

И тебя, душа-зазнобушка,
В божью церковь поведу!»

Machine code translation:

"Oh, full, full of box,
There are chintz and brocade.
Pity me, my feast,
Well done shoulder!

Get out, get high rye!
There until the night I'll wait,
And I'll blacken the black-eyed -
All goods will be disposed.

Prices themselves paid not small,
Do not bargain, do not be stingy:
Put your lips scarlet,
Closer to the pretty one! "

So the night fell, misty,
Waiting for a good fellow.
Chu, it's coming! "Came the coveted,
The merchant sells goods.

Katya carefully trades,
All afraid to convey.
The guy with the girl kisses,
Asks the price to add.

She only knows the night is deep,
How they got along.
Straighten up, rye is high,
Keep a secret!

"Oh, it's easy, it's easy,
The shoulder does not cut the strap!
A whole took a feast
The turquoise perstenek.

I gave her a piece of chintz,
A ribbon for scarfs,
Belt - white shirt
Gird in the haymaking -

Everything was sacrilegently beloved
In the box, except for the ring:
"I do not want to go dressy
Without a heart buddy! "

That's it, you fools, young people!
Did not I bring myself
Half-stitch of sweet vodka?
And she did not take gifts!

So wait! Indestructible
I promise the Promised:
Empty the box,

I'll come home to Pokrov
And you, the soul is a feast,
I'll lead you to the church! "

Analysis

The poem is written in regular iambic tetrameters, rhymed AbAb, where the feminine rhyme has a second syllable (but isn't stressed, i.e. doesn't turn the line into a pentameter). The result is a ballad-like rhythm, which suits the folk-tune style that Nekrasov was fond of.

«Ой, пол на́, пол на́ ко ро́ буш ка, 4A
Есть и си́тцы и пар ча́. 4b
По жа ле́й, мо я́ заз но́ буш ка, 4A
Мо ло де́ц ко го пле ча́! 4b

Вы ди, вы ди в рожь вы со́ ку ю! 4C
Там до но́ч ки по го жу́, 4d
А за ви́ жу чер но о́ ку ю – 4C
Всё то ва́ ры раз ло жу́. 4d

Це ны сам пла ти́л не ма́ лы е, 4E
Не то ргу́й ся, нес ку пи́сь: 4f
Подс тав ля́й-ка гу́ бы а́ лы е, 4E
Бли́ же к ми́ ло му са ди́сь!» 4f

Вот уж па́ ла ночь ту ма́н на я, 4G
Ждёт у да́ лый мо ло де́ц. 4h
Чу, и де́т! — приш ла́ же ла́н на я, 4G
Про да ёт то ва́р ку пе́ц. 4h

Кáт я бé реж но тор гу́ет ся, 4I
Всё бо и́т ся пе ре да́ть. 4j
Па́рень с де ви́ цей це лу́ет ся, 4I
Прó сит це́ ну на бав ля́ть. 4j

The concluding verse has six lines:

Так пос той же! Не ру ши мо е 4A
О бе ща ныи це да ю: 4b
О по рож нит ся ко ро буш ка, 4A
На Пок ров до мой при ду 4b
И те бя, ду ша-заз но буш ка, 4A
В бож ью цер ковь по ве ду!». 4b

Nikolay Alexéyevich Nekrásov (1821-72)

On the basis of his 1840 volume of verse, which showed no promise whatsoever, Nikolay Alexéyevich Nekrásov gave up his studies at St. Petersburg University and turned to literature, which prompted his bullying squire of a father to immediately sever the allowance. For three years, Nekrásov lived in direst poverty, experiencing at first hand what was to be a constant theme of his work: the sufferings of Russia's oppressed classes. But by 1845, through an astonishing amount of hack journalism, commercial acumen and genuine critical taste, Nekrásov had become the principal publisher of a new literary school, which in time brought out all the leading names of Russian literature in the mid-to-later nineteenth century. His own verse improved, and found enthusiastic support from Belinsky and other leading critics. In 1847, Nekrásov acquired the

Sovreménnik, which had been Pushkin's journal, and soon turned a valetudinarian relict of the aristocracy into a splendidly paying affair and the principal literary review in Russia. Surviving the hard times of reaction, it became the rallying ground of the extreme left, for which was closed down the following year in the panic that followed the first attempt on Alexander II's life. Two years later, Nekrásov took over the Otéchestvennye zapíski, where he remained the owner and editor of the most radical journal in the country until his death. {4}

Nekrásov was an editor of genius, getting the best from his contributors, finding the talent, encouraging, supporting and guiding their efforts through the perilous waters of state censorship, and still making money through the most ingenious of business novelties. {5} Yet this leader of exemplary opinion was anything but honest. All attest to his hard-hearted, rapacious and unscrupulous nature. This social reformer also gambled lavishly, made no secret of pursuing the pleasures of women and dining out, and snobbishly hob-nobbed with his social betters. To save himself and his Sovreménnik, this unapologetic hypocrite also composed and read in public a poem praising Count Muraviëv, the most brutal and determined of reactionaries. Turgenev, Herzen and other principled radicals hated the man with a vengeance, but Nekrásov remained undeniably popular with his co-workers and the masses, his funeral being a noted social event.

Nekrásov was not a careful craftsman, and, though he was an excellent critic of others' work, had little capacity for his own.* Nekrásov's work is prolific but very mixed. It was not so much lapses of taste but of no taste at all, of not being concerned with such matters. Nekrásov has none of the tact, balance and luminous sense of limits that inform the work of Pushkin, Turgenev and Tiutchev, and the dangerous facility he acquired in his years of hack journalism allowed him to mechanically churn out verse on anything he pleased, as and when the need came to him. What most drove him to hold forth were the monstrous sufferings of the poor, with whom — his own life-style notwithstanding — he genuinely sympathised. He identified personally with his subjects, moreover, and almost alone among the great Russian poets, could enter into the peasant's hopes, sufferings and rough good humour. Many of his pieces have the genuine air of folksongs. At his best, Nekrásov is incomparable, writing with intense humanity, often with biting satire and savage invective. He was also able to incorporate colloquialisms and slang into his verse, compose in loose ternary measures, and carry off such incongruous matters quite naturally.

Critical opinion is therefore still divided over Nekrásov, between those who despise his style (which concerned him not at all) and those who value the searing frankness of his views (which he saw as the obvious truth). He was undoubtedly the greatest civic poet of the second half of the Russian nineteenth century, and there are poems that only he could have produced: *Who Can Be Happy in Russia?*,

Frost the Red-Nosed, and the piece translated here.

* Somewhat debatable and overstated. Nekrasov's verse does in fact have its defenders. See my translation of [Frost the Red-Nosed](#).

Final Translation

The ballad meter in English is the iambic 7 syllable line arranged as rhyming pairs, i.e. 4a 3b 4a 3b stanza, but is too short for translation here. It seems best to ignore the extra feminine line and employ the tetrameter, which is the 'singing' line in English:

See how many goods I pack:
fine braid and cotton for your hair.
Pity me and do not lack
what these manly shoulders bear!

Until the night-time fills the skies,
within the rye I'll wait, and show
how dark will be those dark, dark eyes:
everything I have must go.

Think what prices I have paid:
don't be cautious, do what's right.
Your lips will make a fine brocade:
come, my sweet, and snuggle tight.

The night assumed a foggy cast,
but on the jolly fellow fares:

The long-awaited comes at last,
and now the merchant sells his wares.

How carefully, carefully Katya trades
apportioning what soon is lost,
but then that care in kissing fades:
he bids her name her highest cost.

She only knows the night is deep,
and what there happened so befell
her where the springing rye would keep
her secret hidden, none to tell.

How easy now to bear the load,
the strap marks do not hurt the skin:
in all I offered her she showed
a preference for that turquoise ring

So not the chintz or coloured scarf,
the shift, or any useful thing.
She wouldn't wear for hay's behalf
the girdle made for harvesting

.

It was the ring, for all I pressed
her, she'd have nothing of my fare.
'Why flaunt myself with all the rest
if one I want is nowhere there?'

So girls no better than they ought

will stoop to play their silly tricks:
I it was sweet vodka brought,
but she who still refused my gifts.

So you, unyielding one, now wait,
take all I promised, all my wealth,
flaunt the treasures that you hate.
I come to Pokrov, not in stealth,
but celebrate your soul's estate:
I'll lead you to the church myself.

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Audio Recording

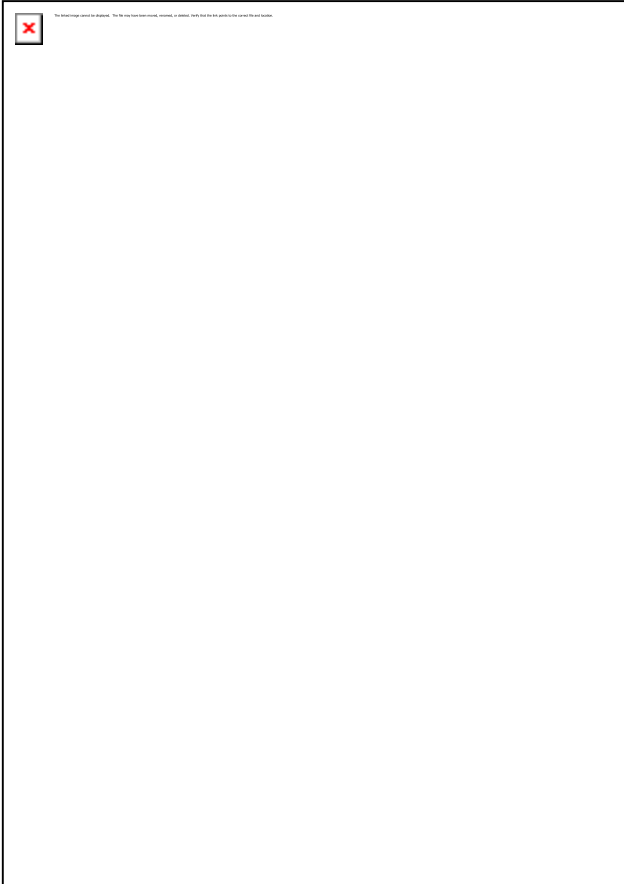
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Illustration

1. Fair by Ivan Semionovich Kukilov 1910.
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Translating Nekrasov's *Silence*: Colloquial Diction



Holy Rus by Mikhail Nesterov 1901-06 Russia Museum {1}. Mikhail Nesterov (1862-1942) came from a strongly patriarchal merchant family, trained at the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture, and then entered the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts. He supported himself with magazine and book illustration until, in 1889, his 'Hermit' was purchased by Pavel Tretyakov and the artist was able to visit Austria, Germany, France and Italy. Nesterov joined a

right-wing nationalist party in 1905, survived the Revolution and purges of the 30s to be eventually awarded the Stalin Prize and then the Order of the Red Banner of Labour.

Russian Text and Machine Code Translation. At 180 lines, the poem is too long to be given in its entirety here, but opens with: {1}

ТИШИНА

Все рожь кругом, как степь живая,
Ни замков, ни морей, ни гор...
Спасибо, сторона родная,
За твой врачующий простор!

За дальним Средиземным морем,
Под небом ярче твоего,
Искал я примиренья с горем,
И не нашел я ничего!

Я там не свой: хандрю, немею,
Не одолев свою судьбу,
Я там погнулся перед нею,
Но тыдохнул - и сумею,
Быть может, выдержать борьбу!

Я твой. Пусть ропот укоризны
За мною по пятам бежал,

Не небесам чужой отчизны -
Я песни родине слагал!

И ныне жадно поверяю
Мечту любимую мою
И в умиление посылаю
Всему привет... Я узнаю

Суровость рек, всегда готовых
С грозой выдержать войну,
И ровный шум лесов сосновых,
И деревенок тишину,

И нив широкие размеры...
Храм божий на горе мелькнул
И детски чистым чувством веры
Внезапно на душу пахнул.

The machine code translation is:

Silence

All the rye is round, like the living steppe,
Neither castles, nor seas, nor mountains ...
Thank you, my dear,
For your healing space!

Behind the far Mediterranean Sea,
Under the sky is brighter than yours,

I sought reconciliation with grief,
And I did not find anything!

I'm not there myself: I'm muffled, I'm numb,
Not having overcome my destiny,
I ducked there before her,
But you have died - and I will,
Perhaps, to withstand the struggle!

I am yours. Let the murmurings be reproachful
Behind me on the heels ran,
Not heaven of a stranger to our homeland -
I wrote songs to my native land!

And now I'm avidly believing
My beloved dream
And in the sentimental send
All hello ... I find out

Severity of rivers, always ready
With a thunderstorm to withstand the war,
And even noise of pine forests,
And the villages are quiet,

And the fields are wide ...
The temple of God on the mountain flashed
And a childlike pure sense of faith
Suddenly he smelled like a soul.

Analysis

The poem is written in tetrameters rhymed aBBa or AbbA, generally iambic, but with the occasional extra or missed syllable making it more dol'nik verse — unless this Nekrasov's rather casual versifying. {2}

Все рожь кру гом, как степь жи ва я, 4A
Ни зам ков, ни мо рей, ни гор... 4b
Спа си бо, сто ро на род на я, 4A
За твой вра чу ю щий про стор! 4b

За даль ним Сре ди зем ным мо рем, 4C
Под не бом яр че тво е го, 4d
Ис кал я при ми рень я с го рем, 4C
И не на шел я ни че го! 4d

Я там не свой: хан дрю, не ме ю, 4E
Не о до лев сво ю судь бу, 4f
Я там пог нул ся пе ред не ю, 4E
Но тыдох нул - и су ме ю, 4E
Быть мо жет, вы дер жать борь бу! 4f

Serfdom

The flavour of Russian country life is best grasped through the pages of Turgenev, Leskov, Chekhov and Bunin, but not the bald facts. Serfdom in fact arrived in Russia much later than in Europe generally, and survived longer. It was not a leftover from a feudal world, but a system gradually imposed in the 14th and 15th centuries as tsars created a more centralised state, and noblemen sought to protect their

lands from Tartar depredations, particularly those from the Khanate of Crimea, the successors of the Mongol Golden Horde. Peasants were prohibited from leaving their lands in 1597, and flight was made a criminal offense in 1658. Landowners could trade in serfs, i.e. sell serfs to neighbours, but not kill them. Runaway serfs had to be returned, and often suffered barbaric punishment. 'House servants for hire' and similar advertisements applied to the sale of landless serfs. At Emancipation in 1861, some 10.5 million serfs were privately owned, some 9.5 million were in state ownership and another 900,000 serfs were under the tsar's patronage.

Serfdom was inefficient but gave political stability. The serfs had lifetime tenancy but little incentive to improve their land or lot. Unrest was frequent, moreover, and often exploited by Cossack uprisings, where the serfs sometimes took Cossack identity to escape bondage.

Change came gradually. Peter III's measures in 1762 ended the compulsory military service for nobles which had served to justify serfdom, but many were nonetheless conscripted into the Napoleonic wars. An increasing proportion were 'mortgaged' to state credit associations: 20% in 1820 and 66% in 1859. The bourgeois were also allowed to own serfs for factory work: 52% of factory workers were in fact serfs by 1825. But serfdom was abolished from 1816 to 1819 in Estland, Courland, and Livonia, though the land stayed in noble hands and labour rent lasted till 1868. Serfdom was

replaced by landless laborers and sharecropping, where workers had nonetheless to ask permission to leave an estate.

The Great Emancipation of 1861 was on contentious terms, which only increased revolutionary pressures. The nobles kept most of the meadows and forests, and had any resulting debts forgiven by the state. Ex-serfs had to pay well over the market price for the small plots they kept, and such redemption payments were not abolished till 1907. Serfs also had to work for the landlord for two years, and landless serfs (domestic servants) naturally stayed landless. Alexander II's decree was in response to western ideas and the threat of widespread rebellion, but the social attitudes persisted. Serf families were strongly patriarchal, and marriages were often arranged, with landowner help if necessary. Agricultural and domestic jobs were group efforts, with the wage going to the family, supplemented by factory earnings if children had left the land. Livestock and land were in the husband's name, but wives were responsible for clothing and home utensils. {3-4}

Final Translation (First Nine Stanzas)

The real difficulty with Nekrasov is reproducing the tone: how formal or colloquial should it be? A point in question is line 3. Literally speaking, Спасибо, сторона родная, means simply Thank you, my dear — which I have expanded to meet stanza requirements as My dear, in gratitude accept. I'm also not wholly happy with Not heaven by foreigners belied, which is anything but idiomatic, but tight rhyme

schemes create many problems in Russian verse translation.
Clearly, the piece needs much more work.

Silence

The rye's around, the breathing steppe:
no forts or seas or stony place.
My dear, in gratitude accept
my thanks for this remedial space

The Mediterranean brought relief
for sky is brighter there than yours
I, who would make good this grief,
found nothing there but barren shores.

I had no business there, was numb
at destiny, what we must do
have to these poor evasions come.
Though you have died, and I will too,
I will see this contest through.

I'm yours: let murmurings not chide
me, though it's on my heels I go.
Not heaven by foreigners belied,
I write of native lands I know.

Belief in you I'll not suspend,
that dream I love and apprehend.
And in my touching you I send

such truth in finding, to the end.

How fast and hard the rivers run,
and me from thunderous war defend.
The trees and houses have begun
to settle to their quiet end.

God's temple on the mountain smiled
with blessings, and the fields are broad:
So faith, which is a little child,
became a soul and dwelt in God.

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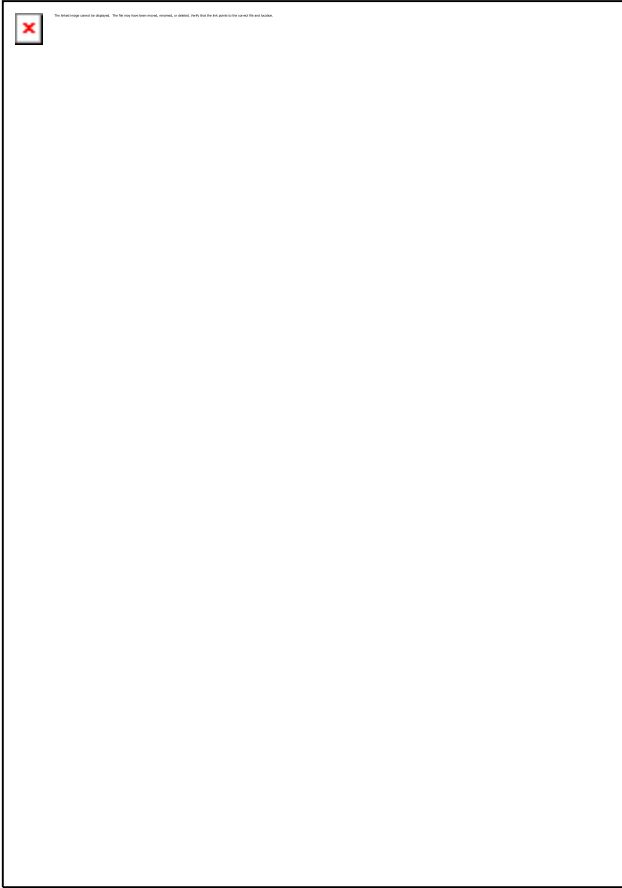
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Translating Vasiliev's Natalya: Coy Tone and Other Troubles

Pavel Vasiliev was one of many writers, artists and intellectuals who disappeared in the Great Purges of the 1930s. His boisterous love of life, not to mention his rowdy hooliganism and outspoken contempt of Stalin and Stalinism, made him an obvious target. He was arrested briefly in 1932, expelled from the Union of Soviet Writers and then barred from publishing in 1934. In February 1937 he was arrested once more, convicted of treason, and shot at Moscow's Lefortovo Prison on July 16, his ashes being buried in an unmarked mass grave at the Donskoi Cemetery. {1}



On the Don by Boris Sporykhin (87 x 107.6) 1892.
Tretyakov, Moscow. {1} Boris Sporykhin was born in Rostov on Don in 1928, studied at Art Studio in Rostov on Don 1939-1941, and graduated from Rostov Don Art College in 1950. He then graduated from Surikov Art Institute in Moscow in 1956, and has been a Member of the Union of the artists since 1956. Important shows include 'Soviet Russia', Moscow in 1960 and solo exhibitions in Rostov on Don 1968, 1978 and 1989.

Biography

Vasiliev was born in the city of Zaisan (now in Votochnyi Kazakhstan Oblast) to a Cossack family and had his first

poem published at the age of 16. Abandoning studies at Novosibirsk University, he spent two years as a sailor and gold miner, experiences he later described in two books of essays, *Gold Exploration and People of the Taiga* (both 1930) and in 1928 moved to Moscow, where his promise was immediately recognised. Publications followed rapidly: an epic poem *Song About the Death of the Cossack Army* (1928 to 1932), *Troika* (c. 1933), *Fists* (1934), *The Salt Rebellion* (1934), and the lyric cycle *Poems for Natalya* (1934). Vasiliev was one of the last great exponents of "peasant poetry", a movement in 20th Century Russian and early Soviet Literature, epitomized by Sergei Yesenin. Vasiliev himself used folkloric elements, musical rhythms and violent, colorful imagery in describing the Siberian countryside and its rapid transformation under communism.

{2}

Soviet Russia

Russia was slow to industrialize, but on the eve of revolution had 71,000 km of railway track, smelters producing 4 million tons of pig iron per year and mills processing almost as much cotton (from Uzbekistan) as Germany. Almost half the population was literate. Private banking was rudimentary, however, and the country relied on foreign capital, funding the railways, for example, by selling securities overseas. The share of heavy industry in Russia's GDP rose from 2% in 1885 to 8% in 1913, but agriculture still took the lion's share. The 1917 Revolution was followed by four years of civil war, in which the Bolsheviks had to accept the peasants' demand for ownership and equal division of the

land. {3-7}

The Soviet 'big push' began in 1928 with the first Five Year Plan. Investment was channelled into heavy industry and machinery production. Targets were set, and bank credit extended where necessary. Mass education was enforced and adult education encouraged. The fourth pillar was collectivisation, and a disaster: farm output fell, and millions died of starvation in 1933. In other respects the plan succeeded. Pig iron production had expanded to 15 million tons by 1940. Electric power generation had increased from 5 to 42 billion kilowatt-hours. The investment rate rose to 19% of GDP in 1939. In the same year, the USSR processed 900,000 tons of ginned cotton, 50% more than Britain's, though only 52% of America's figure. {3-7}

Always brutal in his methods, transporting millions to new territories, to slave labour in the gulags, or to their deaths on murderous projects like the White Sea Canal, Stalin strengthened his hold on power through party appointments, informers, an efficient secret police force, swift removal of potential opposition and the 1937-8 reign of terror. Hundreds of thousands perished as the tortured 'named' their fellow conspirators. Illustrious Bolsheviks, fellow colleagues who had made the Revolution, 'confessed' to treasonous crimes in show trials and were executed. The army was purged of its experienced men — 80,000 officers were shot — and therefore seriously weakened when Germany broke its 1939 Non-Aggression Treaty. Horrific

battle losses were slowly reversed, however, and Stalin gradually left the command to professional soldiers. German supply lines were over-extended, and all combatants had then to face the Russian winter. Stalingrad proved a turning point, and by 1944 Soviet armies were recapturing enemy ground and advancing on Germany allies. {3-7}

Verses in Praise of Natalya

First the Russian: {8}

СТИХИ В ЧЕСТЬ НАТАЛЬИ

В наши окна, щурясь, смотрит лето,	5A
Только жалко - занавесок нету,	5A
Ветреных, веселых, кружевных.	5b
Как бы они весело летали	5C
В окнах приоткрытых у Натальи,	5C
В окнах незатворенных твоих!	5b

И еще прошеньем прибалуя-	5d
Сшей ты, ради бога, продувную	5d
Кофту с рукавом по локоток,	5e
Чтобы твое яростное тело	5F
С ядрами груди позолотело,	5F
Чтобы наглядеться я не мог.	5e

Я люблю телесный твой избыток,	5G
От бровей широких и сердитых	5G
До ступни, до ногтей люблю,	5h
За ночь обескрылевшие плечи,	5i

Взор, и рассудительные речи, 5i
И походку важную твою. 5h

А улыбка - ведь какая малость!- 5J
Но хочу, чтоб вечно улыбалась- 5J
До чего тогда ты хороша! 5k
До чего доступна, недотрога, 5L
Губ углы приподняты немного: 5L
Вот где помещается душа. 5k

Прогуляться ль выйдешь, дорогая,
Все в тебе ценя и прославляя,
Смотрит долго умный наш народ,
Называет "прелестью" и "павой"
И шумит вослед за величавой:
"По стране красавица идет".

Так идет, что ветви зеленеют,
Так идет, что соловьи чумеют,
Так идет, что облака стоят.
Так идет, пшеничная от света,
Больше всех любовью разогрета,
В солнце вся от макушки до пят.

Так идет, земли едва касаясь,
И дают дорогу, расступаясь,
Шлюхи из фокстротных табунов,
У которых кудлы пахнут псиной,
Бедра крыты кожей гусиной,

На ногах мозоли от обнов.

Лето пьет в глазах ее из брашен,
Нам пока Вертинский ваш не страшен-
Чертова рогулька, волчья сыть.
Мы еще Некрасова знавали,
Мы еще "Калинушку" певали,
Мы еще не начинали жить.

И в июне в первые недели
По стране веселое веселье,
И стране нет дела до трухи.
Слышишь, звон прекрасный возникает?
Это петь невеста начинает,
Пробуют гитары женихи.

А гитары под вечер речисты,
Чем не парни наши трактористы?
Мыты, бриты, кепки набекрень.
Слава, слава счастью, жизни слава.
Ты кольцо из рук моих, забава,
Вместо обручального надень.

Восславляю светлую Наталью,
Славлю жизнь с улыбкой и печалью,
Убегаю от сомнений прочь,
Славлю все цветы на одеяле,
Долгий стон, короткий сон Натальи,
Восславляю свадебную ночь.

The Penguin Book of Russian Verse has a good prose translation, {9} but the machine code translation of the above is:

In our windows, squinting, looking at the summer,
Only sorry - no curtains,
Windy, cheerful, lacy.
How they would fly happily
In the windows ajar in Natalia,
In the windows of your uncircumcised ones!

And even the passing of a long,
You are, for God's sake, sensible
A jacket with a sleeve over the elbows,
To your furious body
With the cores of the breasts gilded,
To look at it, I could not.

I love the flesh of your excess,
From the brows of broad and angry
Up to the feet, I love marigolds,
During the night, the drained shoulders,
Look, and judicious speeches,
And your gait is important.

A smile - because what a small! -
But I want to smile forever,
Up to what then are you good!

To what is accessible, touchy,
Lips corners raised slightly:
This is where the soul is placed.

Walk around, dear,
All of you appreciating and glorifying,
Our intelligent people are watching for a long time,
He calls "charm" and "pava"
And he makes a noise after the majestic:
"The country is beautiful in the country."

So it goes that the branches are green,
So it goes that nightingales chumyut,
So it goes that the clouds are standing.
So it goes, wheaten from the light,
Most of all, love is warmed up,
In the sun everything from the top to the toe

So it goes, barely touching the ground,
And they give way, parting,
Whores from foxtrot herds,
In which the curls smell of dog,
The hips are covered with goosebumps,
On the feet of callus from updates.

Summer drinks in her eyes from the braches,
To us while Vertinsky your is not terrible-
The devil's a flyer, a wolf syat.
We still knew Nekrasov,

We also sang the "Kalinushka"
We have not yet begun to live.

And in June in the first weeks
A cheerful fun in the country,
And the country does not care about the trash.
Do you hear a beautiful ringing?
This is the bride's singing begins,
Try the guitars of the grooms.

And guitars in the evening speechers,
What are not the guys our tractor drivers?
Mitya, shaved, caps on the head.
Glory, thankfully, life is glory.
You're a ring from my hands, fun,
Instead of engagement put on.

I glorify the bright Natalya,
I praise life with a smile and sadness,
I run away from doubt,
I praise all the flowers on the blanket,
A long groan, a brief dream of Natalia,
I glorify the wedding night.

We should note that Vertinsky was a well-known Russian cabaret singer, and Kalinushka is a folk-song. {9} Nekrasov is the nineteenth-century Russian poet who spoke most eloquently of the country's poor.

Analysis

The poem is in iambic pentameters, rhymed a a b c c b.

В на ши ок на, щу рясь, смот рит ле то, 5A

Толь ко жал ко - за на ве сок не ту, 5A

Вет ре ных, ве се лых, кру жев ных. 5b

Как бы о ни ве се ло ле та ли 5C

В ок нах при отк ры тых у На тал ьи, 5C

В ок нах не зат во рен ных тво их! 5b

There is no particular pattern to the masculine and feminine rhyme pairs, and I suggest we stick to masculine rhymes where possible.

There are several points of interest. First is the tone. How do we translate the first two lines, where жалко means 'sorry'? As: At the windows summer looks uncertain: / that seem, please pardon me, to lack a curtain? Probably not: the uncertain / curtain rhyme is too glib, and introduces a feminine rhyme in this translation that otherwise avoids them. The please pardon me also seems somewhat arch or ruefully condescending. It may be best leave the жалко only implied: The windows squinting through the summer air, / are stupified to find no curtain there. It's really a question of taste, of how colloquial we want to make the diction. Lines 11 and 12 are translated by Obolensky as: with the cannon-balls of breasts, may become golden and that I may never tire of gazing at you. Strictly speaking, the Russian doesn't quite say that, and it may be better to have a jocular and knowing admonition: let's have no golden

cannon balls for breasts: / no: just to look at them, I sure could not. By stanza three the coyness is lost, and the poem moves to straightforward declaration.

Final Translation

The windows, squinting through the summer air,
are stupefied to find no curtain there.
No lace to hide and tease and have its fun
but, startling, to the looker-on proclaim
they have Natalya in their open frame:
how bold at windows our unwedded one.

I've just the one request to make,
that you be sensible, for Heaven's sake.
I'm talking of that short-sleeved top you've got,
in which your long, ferocious body nests:
let's have no golden cannon balls for breasts:
no: just to look at them, I sure could not.

The sturdy flesh, I love, its wholesome zest,
and then the widespread eyebrows broadly vexed
to feet, the soles of them, and all the nails.
The night will see your shoulders shed their wings,
and look: your lips disclose judicious things,
while, over all that movement, sense prevails.

Your smile, how faint it is, how small and far
that I would have you as the smiling are:
for then how beautiful you'd be, and graced
with all that's giving, and your 'touch me not'

be like the upturned touch your mouth has got
at its two ends, and where your soul is placed.

And when you walk, my love, all look at you,
and praise and magnify the things you do,
the most intelligent, at every hand,
and in the wake of your great moving say,
'A peach she is, she has a swan-like sway:
a wondrous beauty is abroad this land.'

'She walks and trees are green in every shoot.
She walks and nightingales are mad and mute,
She walks and motionless the great clouds grow.
She walks and harvest corn reflects her hue.
In her is love awoken, warm and true,
as sunlight blesses her from top to toe.'

'She walks and then so lightly it behoves
the tarts like trotting foxes in their droves
to stop and have their startled hair prefer
the smell of dogs or wide, goose-pimpled hips,
or feet so calloused when a new shoe slips:
all pause and falter and make way for her.'

'In her eyes the summer eats and drinks,
and, unafraid of what Vertinsky thinks,
or what the wolves will eat, or devil give
who knew old Nekrasov, his tales of wrong,
but at the Kalinushka sang along,

are we who haven't yet begun to live.'

The first fine weeks of June are in the air:
our land sees merry-making everywhere.
There is no trash about such great events
but great delight appears in everything:
a bride that's only starting out to sing:
the grooms are tuning up their instruments.

Guitars at evening, an infernal noise,
but aren't the tractor-drivers splendid boys --
washed, clean-shaven, with their caps askew?
Life is happiness, so do not linger,
take this ring, my love, from off my finger:
my wedding ring it is, and wrought for you.

I praise Natalya of the good tomorrow,
that life has joys and sadness, smiles and sorrow.
Let any doubt of that be gone from sight,
and have the flowering of her blanket keep
Natalya long in moans and short in sleep:
I sing the praises of the wedding night.

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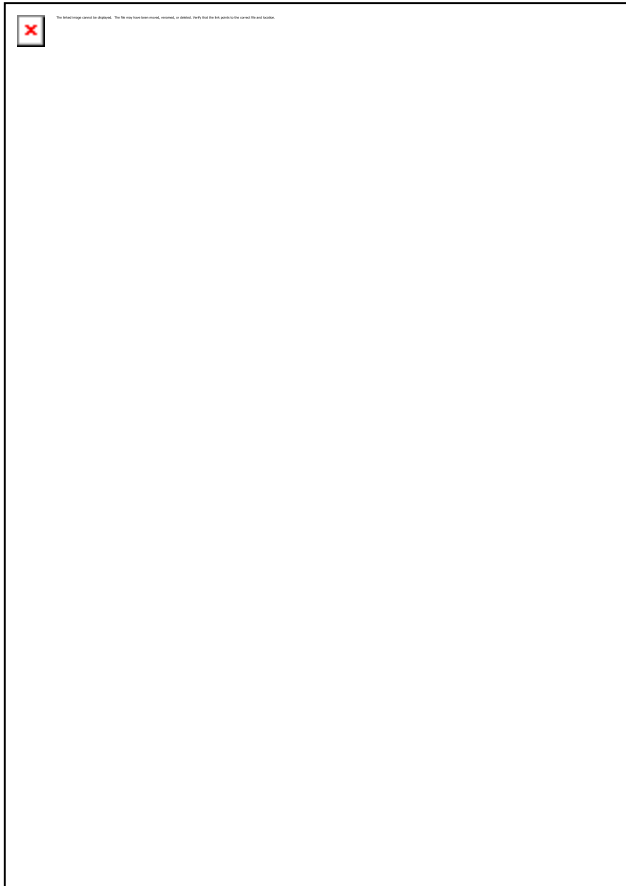
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Translating Pushkin's *Caucasus*: the Amphibrachic Tetrameter



In the Caucasus Mountains by Lev Lagorio 1870 (53cm x 76cm) {1}

Lev Lagorio (1826-1905) was the son of Genoese merchant serving as Vice-Consul for the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. He received his first art training in the studios of Ivan Aivazovsky but later attended the Imperial Academy of Arts. In 1852 he became a Russian citizen, visiting Paris (1853)

and then Rome (1853-59) before settling in Russia as a full professor. {2}

Russian Text

Кавказ {1}

Кавказ подо мною. Один в вышине
Стою над снегами у края стремнины;
Орел, с отдаленной поднявшись вершины,
Парит неподвижно со мной наравне.
Отселе я вижу потоков рожденье
И первое грозных обвалов движение.
Здесь тучи смиренно идут подо мной;
Сквозь них, низвергаясь, шумят водопады;
Под ними утесов нагие громады;
Там ниже мох тощий, кустарник сухой;
А там уже рощи, зеленые сени,
Где птицы щебечут, где скачут олени.

А там уж и люди гнездятся в горах,
И ползают овцы по злачным стремнинам,
И пастырь нисходит к веселым долинам,
Где мчится Арагва в тенистых берегах,
И нищий наездник таится в ущелье,
Где Терек играет в свирепом веселье;

Играет и воет, как зверь молодой,
Завидевший пищу из клетки железной;

И бьется о берег в вражде бесполезной
И лижет утесы голодной волной...
Вотще! нет ни пищи ему, ни отрады:
Теснят его грозно немые громады.

CAUCASUS

Machine translation:

The Caucasus is under me. Alone in the sky
Standing over the snows at the edge of the slopes;
Eagle, with a distant rising of the top,
It floats motionless with me on a par with.
From here I see the stream's birth
And the first terrible landslides movement.

Here the clouds humbly walk beneath me;
Through them, overthrown, noisy waterfalls;
Beneath them are cliffs of naked masses;
There below the moss is lean, the bush is dry;
And there are already groves, green canopies,
Where the birds chirp, where the deer leap.

And there too people nest in the mountains,
And the sheep creep along the grassy slopes,
And the shepherd descends to the cheerful valleys,
Where Aragva rides in shady banks,
And the poor rider lurks in the gorge,
Where Terek plays fierce fun;

He plays and howls like a young beast,
Seen food from an iron cage;
And it strikes against the shore in a feud of useless
And licks the cliffs with a hungry wave ...
Here it is! there is no food for him, no consolation:
The threatening dumb masses are pressing.

PoemHunter has this unattributed translation, perhaps not in
a contemporary style but useful nonetheless: {2}

The Caucas lies before my feet! I stand where
Glaciers gleam, beside a precipice rock-ribbed;
An eagle that has soared from off some distant cliff,
Lawless as I, sweeps through the radiant air!
Here I see streams at their sources up-welling,
The grim avalanches unrolling and swelling!

The soft cloudy convoys are stretched forth below,
Tattered by thronging mad torrents descending;
Beneath them the naked rocks downward are bending,
Still deeper, the wild shrubs and sparse herbage grow;
But yonder the forests stand verdant in flora
And birds are a'twitter in choiring chorus.

Yonder, cliff-nested-are dwellings of mortals,
There pasture the lambs in sweet blossoming meadows —
There couch the herds in the cool deepening shadows —
There roar the Aragua's blue sparkling waters,

And lurketh the bandit safe hid in lone caverns,
Where Terek, wild sporting, is cutting the azure!

It leaps and it howls like some ravening beast
At first sight of feeding, through grating of iron —
It roars on the shore with a furious purring,
It licks on the pebbles with eagerest greed.
Vain struggle and rancor and hatred, alas!
'Tis enchained and subdued by the unheeding mass.

Analysis

The Caucasus is written in ternary tetrameters, rhymed abbacc. There there is no constant pattern to masculine and feminine rhymes, though they tend to aBBaCC.

Кав каз по до* мною. О дин в вы ши не 4a
Сто ю над сне га ми у кра я стрем ни ны; 4B
О рел, с от да лен ной под няв шись вер ши ны, 4B
Па рит не под виж но со мной на рав не. 4a
От се ле я ви жу по то ков рож день е 4C
И пер во е гроз ных об ва лов дви жень е. 4C

Здесь ту чи сми рен но и дут по до мной; 4D
Сквозь них, низ вер га ясь, шу мят во до па ды; 4E
Под ни ми у те сов на ги е гро ма ды; 4E
Там ни же мох то щий, кус тар ник су хой; 4d
А там у же* ро щи, зе ле ны е се ни, 4F
Где пти цы ще бе чут, где ска чут о ле ни. 4F

А там уж и лю ди гнез дят ся в го рах, 4g

И пол за ют ов цы по злач ным стрем ни нам, 4Н
И пас тырь нис хо дит к ве се лым до ли нам, 4Н
Где мчит ся Араг ва в те нис тых бре гах, 4g
И ни щий на езд ник та ит ся в у щель е, 4I
Где Те рек иг ра ет в сви ре пом ве сель е; 4I

И гра ет и во ет, как зверь мо ло дой, 4j
За ви дев ший пи шу из клет ки же лез ной; 4K
И бьет ся о бе рег в враж де бес по лез ной 4K
И ли жет у те сы го лод ной вол ной...4j
Вот ще! нет ни пи щи е му, ни от ра ды: 4L
Тес нят е го* гроз но не мы е гро ма ды. 4L

* Normally stressed in speech but can optionally be regarded in verse as not taking a stress. {3} Since в is not pronounced but attached to the following syllable, the metrical pattern is x - x x - x x - x x - / x - x x - x x - x x - x, i.e. amphibrachic, based on the (x - x) foot.

Translation Issues

Translation is straightforward if we dispense with feminine rhymes:

Below, the Caucasus. To view
comes crest on crest without a pause,
that from a cliff, an eagle soars
as solitary as I am too.
Here mighty rivers have their birth,
and rockfalls thick with snow and earth.

The clouds pass humbly underneath,
and here the noisy waterfalls
give way to bare rock mountain walls
with thin, dry moss, a upland heath
that, lower down, sees deer and trees
and birds singing in green canopies.

Folk live within these mountain flanks,
sheep meditating in the grass.
Through sunny valleys shepherds pass
as Aragvi shady banks.
No riders are by gorges sought,
where Terek brims in fearsome sport.

It howls, an animal that's grown
incensed by food beyond its cage.
It rasps the shore with frothing rage
as thirsty for the driest stone.
No food or comfort come, but force
to hold it to a senseless force.

That is a little free and omits several key words, but let's
press on. We have two problems still: the feminine rhyme
and the amphibrachic metre. The first I don't propose to
consider: there is nothing mannered or playful about the
tone of this poem to make the feminine rhyme appropriate.
The metre is another matter: The amphibrachic is common
in Russian verse but scarce in English, even as an
unstressed syllable plus anapaestic measure (x | | - x x | -

x x | - x x as in Byron's The As sy | rian came down | like
the wolf | on the fold, |) or iamb plus dactylic measure (x - |
| x x - | x x - | in Tennyson's Half a league, | half a league,
|| | Half a league | on ward). {4} The dirge-like dactylic
hardly seems appropriate but 'Caucasus' has a natural falling
rhythm, as does 'solitary' Since ternary rhythms are
common in Russian verse, and we shall need some
approximations when translating Nekrasov and others, it is
worth seeing what can be done. The following is not entirely
regular, and for several reasons. Entirely x - x metres are
difficult to write in English, and appear not wholly natural,
indeed bravura pieces. And, in practice, even Byron slows
the rhythm with When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep
Galilee. So:

A |round me the | Caucasus | offer a | view
of | snow slopes un | broken, with | never a | pause.
An | eagle from a | cliff face | suddenly | soars
a | loft and is | solitary, | as I am | too.
The | mightiest | rivers here| find their | birth
and av | alanches | level the | fearful | earth.

Here | humbly the | clouds flow | far under | neath
re | vealing the | thunderous | water | falls,
and | then there are | cliffs, bare | mountainous | walls,
dry | mosses, odd | bushes, a | thin upland | heath.
In | verdant deep | groves, with deer | leaping past | trees,
are birds | singing in | leafy green | cano | pies.

| Home steads | nest le in pre | cipitous | flanks,
as | sheep lie | meditating, | lost in soft | grass.
Through | cheerful long | valleys the | shepherds must |
pass
as | also the | Aragva through | shade-heavy | banks.
Poor | riders shun | gorges, as | well they | ought
when the | Terek runs | boisterously | in its fierce | sport.

It | howls like an | animal and | one that has | grown
| uselessly | violent, in | constant | rage
from | food that's de | nied it | by an iron | cage.
It | vengefully | reaches for the | driest | stone.
Wi | thout prey or | purpose, by re | sistless | force
huge | masses con | fine it to | one fixed | course.

A few lines are passable, perhaps, but the rhythm overall is gullumping and contrived. More work might mend matters a little, but reproducing the amphibrachic in English will always produce something like this. As we noted with the feminine rhyme, what works in one literary tradition won't necessary work in another. The solution is not 'free verse' I think, as the form is alien to Pushkin, and indeed all Russian poetry till comparatively recently, but another variety of the iambic. This most flexible of forms, the great workhorse of English poetry, can be adjusted in various ways, and here I'd suggest we try to get closer to the meaning, where I think a paraphrase will be acceptable at times, as Pushkin does not achieve his effects by image and metaphor but through 'le mot juste', by finding the exact word . {5}

Round me are the Caucasus:
I stand upon great slopes of white.
An eagle distant, out of sight,
soars solitary as one of us.
Here great rivers have their birth,
and avalanches, threatening earth.

From clouds, a humbly moving coverlet,
long drops with thunderous waterfalls
to echoing chasms of mountain walls:
thin moss and with dry bushes set.
Below, thick canopies of green
with leaping deer and birds unseen.

People nestle in these mountain flanks,
and sheep that venture slopes of grass.
Through cheerful valleys the shepherds pass
as Aragva through shaded banks.
No horseman keeps to gorge today
while Terek boils in dangerous play.

An animal that howls the more
that, seeing prey beyond the cage,
its strikes can be but helpless rage.
It scours the cliffs with hungry paw
but, twisting to a headlong force,
the huge rocks hold it to its course.

But of course we are rendering the Russian tetrameter as an English tetrameter, forgetting that the amphibrachic tetrameter has some ten or eleven syllables, i.e. is closer to the pentameter in length. So:

Around me loom the Caucasus: a constant view
of snow-draped cliffs and slopes, where now my eyes
pick out an eagle, solitary, whose distant rise
will leave it motionless, where I am too.
In these great heights whole rivers have their birth,
and levelling avalanches, threatening earth.

The humble clouds spread out, to cover all below
but give a glimpse of thunderous waterfalls
that echo emptily through mountain walls.
Here mosses starve and shrivelled bushes grow.
Beneath are groves, rich canopies of green
where deer leap and birds sing on unseen.

And there are people nestled in these mountain flanks,
and sheep that venture down long slopes of grass.
How cheerfully through valleys shepherds pass,
as must the Aragva through shaded banks.
No timid horseman takes the gorge today
while Terek leaps and foams in troubled play.

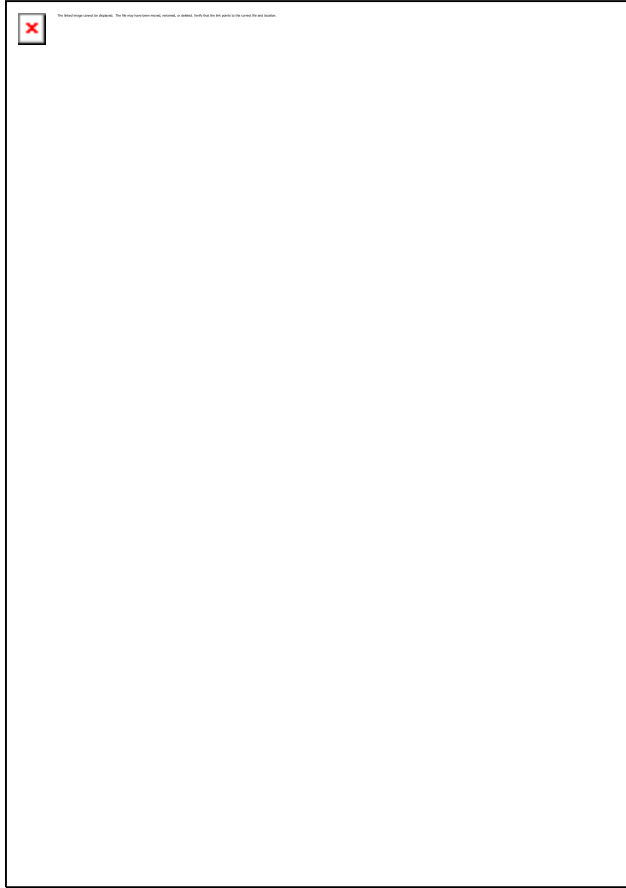
An animal it is, that howls the more
for prey outside the iron bars of cage,
although it strikes at banks with helpless rage.

Along the cliffs it runs its hungry maw
but finds no food or rest: the senseless force
of huge rocks holds it on its headlong course.

Background

The Caucasus is one of Pushkin's southern exile pieces. In 1820 he wrote his 'Prisoner of the Caucasus' poem, which became enormously popular, but his political verse and lampoons nonetheless earned the deep distrust of Alexander I. From 1820 to 1823, Pushkin was exiled to the Caucasus and Crimea, where wrote 'The Fountain of Bakhchisarai'. {6} Pushkin was then recalled, but a revealed interest in atheism earned him a further two years of exile, now on his mother's estate near the north-west frontier town of Pskov, where he wrote most 'The Gysies'. With the accession of Nicholas I, Pushkin was again recalled from exile, married and found a nominal position at court, more as the husband of the impecunious beauty Natalya Goncharova than on his recognised merits. {7} The 'Caucus' belongs a later cycle of poems, published in 1836.

{8}



The Caucasus, that southwest-trending mountain range now occupying parts of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, is linguistically diverse terrain, {9} and was even more so in Pushkin's day. Its peoples were fiercely independent, and therefore trouble to the Russian government right through to their 'pacification' in the protracted Caucasian Wars (1817-64). {10} Artists saw the area differently, delighting in the romance of a country so different from the unchanging steppelands, matched by a wild history and clash of colourful peoples, each with their strange customs and exotic dress. More than anyone, however, it was Pushkin who created its literary character. {11}. His Prisoner of the Caucasus (1822) was inspired by the poet's

exile in Pyatigorsk, and successfully worked in Romantic and Orientalist themes around the Byronic figure of a Russian officer captured by tribesmen but rescued by a beautiful Circassian woman. {11} Despite its obvious Romantic and Orientalist themes, borrowed in part from Chateaubriand, Pushkin's use of academic footnotes and reliable ethnographic material his Prisoner gave the poem almost factual credibility. {12} It was highly influential on popular perceptions of this troublesome region. The poem indeed remains one of Pushkin's most famous works, and is often referenced in Russian popular culture, in films such as the Soviet comedy Kidnapping, Caucasian Style.

By 1818, Pushkin had acquired the accent that is his alone. The early poetry, that of Ruslan and Ludmilla, for example, was cold and brilliant, astonishingly assured by technical standards, but essentially French, depending on the exact word and use of metonymy and similar figures of speech rather than any persuasive emotion. His greatest successes were Prisoner of the Caucasus (1822) and The Fountain of Bakhchisaray (1824), where the form (verse and diction) were perfect but more impressive than the content. Byron was an inspiration, here, but not much of an influence: Eugene Onegin has none of the sweep and satiric power of Don Juan. The first chapter is the crowning achievement of Pushkin's youth — brilliant, light-hearted and ebullient, growing slowly into the resigned and muffled tragedy of the eighth chapter. It has spontaneous vitality and an unerring sense of artistic measure, plus that peculiar Russian realism

that is poetical without idealising anything way from reality — one which continued in Lermontov, Turgenev, Chekhov and Bunin. {15}

Caucasus is a little later, appearing in the 1823-36 collection, which includes impressions of journey Pushkin made to the region between May and August 1829. {13} Here again there is the love of freedom, denoted by the eagle and the turbulent Aragvi and Terek Rivers. The Caucasus is still a breath-takingly beautiful place, of course, {14} and Chechnya independence continues to trouble Russian autonomy. {16}

Postscript

The Caucasus ends on the point of saying more, and Pushkin did indeed write an incomplete stanza that would have been difficult to publish at the time. It was added to the 1936 collection of his works, and runs: {8}

Так буйную вольность законы теснят, а
Так дикое племя под властью тоскует, В
Так ныне безмолвный Кавказ негодует, В
Так чуждые силы его тяготят. . . а

So long is liberty oppressed by laws,
so will the tribes resist until they're free:
at length the smoldering Caucasus will be
unburdened by this monstrous foreign cause.

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Illustration

1. In the Caucasus Mountains by Lev Lagorio -

mylivepage.ru, Public Domain,

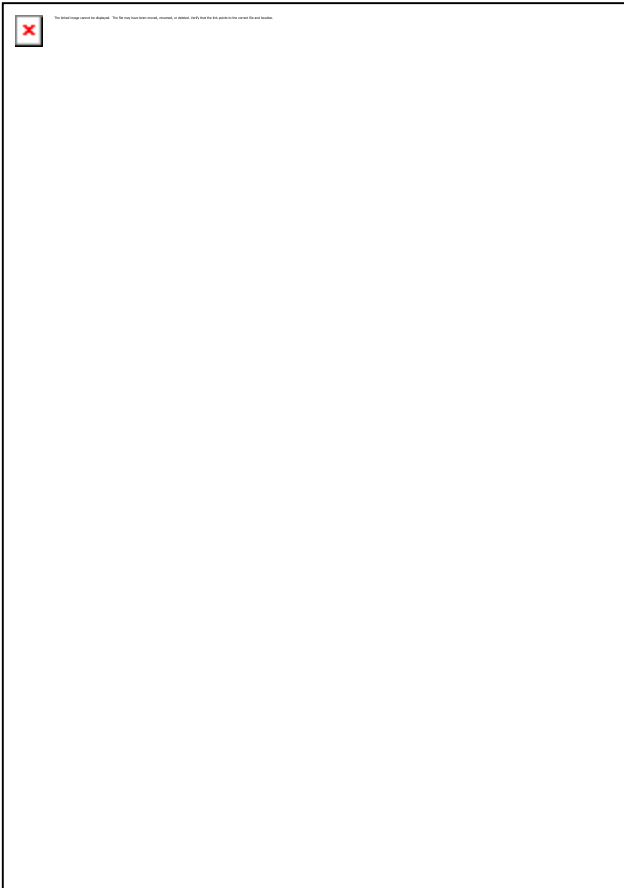
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7

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Translating Pushkin's *Confession*: Russian Light Verse



Portrait of Maria Lopukhina by Vladimir Borovikovsky. 1797
Oil: 72 cm x 53.3 cm Tretyakov, Moscow. {1} Borovikovsky
(1757-1825) was born Volodymyr Borovyk in Myrhorod (now
the Ukraine), the son of a Ukrainian Cossack and an
amateur icon painter. All four of his sons served in the
Myrhorod regiment, but Volodymyr retired early, and took
up icon painting for local churches. So he might have
remained but for the commission from his friend Vasyl
Kapnist for two allegorical paintings, which so pleased the

Empress Catherine II that she asked the artist to take up residence in St. Petersburg. Accordingly, Borovyk changed his name to the more aristocratic Borovikovsky, and became a popular and prolific portrait painter, running a large studio and turning out some 500 works. {2}

ПРИЗНАНИЕ {1}

Я вас люблю, - хоть я бешусь,
Хоть это труд и стыд напрасный,
И в этой глупости несчастной
У ваших ног я признаюсь!

Мне не к лицу и не по летам...
Пора, пора мне быть умней!
Но узнаю по всем приметам
Болезнь любви в душе моей:

Без вас мне скучно, - я зеваю;
При вас мне грустно, - я терплю;
И, мочи нет, сказать желаю,
Мой ангел, как я вас люблю!

Когда я слышу из гостиной
Ваш легкий шаг, иль платья шум,
Иль голос девственный, невинный,
Я вдруг теряю весь свой ум.

Вы улыбнетесь, - мне отрада;
Вы отвернетесь, - мне тоска;

За день мучения - награда
Мне ваша бледная рука.

Когда за пальцами прилежно
Сидите вы, склонясь небрежно,
Глаза и кудри опустя, -
Я в умиленьи, молча, нежно
Любуюсь вами, как дитя!..

Сказать ли вам мое несчастье,
Мою ревнивую печаль,
Когда гулять, порой в ненастье.
Вы собираетесь в даль?

И ваши слезы в одиночку,
И речи в уголку вдвоем,
И путешествия в Опочку,
И фортепьяно вечерком?..

Алина! сжальтесь надо мною.
Не смею требовать любви.
Быть может, за грехи мои,
Мой ангел, я любви не стою!

Но притворитесь! Этот взгляд
Всё может выразить так чудно!
Ах, обмануть меня не трудно!..
Я сам обманываться рад!

Machine code translation:

I love you, even though I'm in a rage,
Although it is labor and shame vain,
And in this stupid unhappy
At your feet I confess!

I can not face and not for years ...
It's time, it's time for me to be smarter!
But I recognize all the signs
The disease of love in my soul:

Without you I'm bored. I'm yawning;
With you, I'm sad, - I endure;
And, there is no urine, I wish to say,
My angel, how I love you!

When I hear from the living room
Your easy step, it dresses noise,
Or a virgin, innocent voice,
I suddenly lose all my mind.

You will smile, - I feel good;
You turn away, I am longing;
For the day of torment - reward
Me your pale hand.

When behind the hoop diligently

Sit you, leaning casually,
Eyes and curls omitted, -
I'm touched, silently, tenderly
I admire you as a child! ..

Shall I tell you of my misfortune,
My jealous grief,
When to walk, sometimes, in a bad weather,
Are you going to the distance?

And your tears are on your own,
And speeches in the corner together,
And travel to OPOCHKA,
And the pianoforte in the evening? ..

Alina! have pity on me.
I dare not demand love.
Perhaps, for my sins,
My angel, I'm not worthy of love!

But pretend! This look
Everything can express so wonderfully!
Ah, it's not difficult to deceive me! ..
I'm happy to deceive myself!

Analysis

The poem is arranged in stanzas as 4 4 4 4 4 5 4 4 4 4. The
quatrains rhyme aBBa (1,9, 10):
{8}

Я вас люб лю, - хоть я бе шусь, 4а
Хоть э то труд и стыд нап рас ный, 4В
И в э той глу пос ти нес част ной 4В
У ва ших ног я приз на юсь! 4а

Or аВаВ (2-5, 7-8):

Мне не к ли цу и не по ле там...4а
По ра, по ра мне быть ум ней! 4В
Но уз на ю по всем при ме там 4а
Бо лезнь люб ви в ду ше мо ей: 4В

And the central section rhymes :

Ког да за пяль ца ми при леж но 4А
Си ди те вы, скло нясь не бреж но, 4А
Гла за и куд ри о пус тя, - 4b
Я в у ми ле ньи, мол ча, неж но 4А
Лю бу юсь ва ми, как ди тя!..4b

Russian Society

Russian society was essentially composed of two classes, the aristocracy and the peasants. The middle class of merchants, professional and the intelligentsia naturally feature strongly in Russian literature, but was a small and rather ephemeral entity, arising largely in the 19th century, disappearing again after the 1917 Revolution (and now reappearing as Russia develops into a 21st century country, though very unequally).

The Boyars were the old Russian nobility — grand dukes, dukes, princes, counts and barons — usually landlords with large estate who were also engaged in commercial activities licensed from the state. Industrial activity grew in the 18th century: mines, textiles, factories run on steam power. The richest lived a lifestyle to rival the tsar's, and their splendid palaces were speedily requisitioned by the communist state. The nobility that couldn't make a living from their estates entered the civil service or the military.

The Russian aristocracy enjoyed social gatherings at their estates, picnics in the country, and trips to the seashore. Some escaped the Russian winter by heading to warm climates in Venice, the Crimea and southern France. The spa of Baden Baden in Germany became popular with rich and influential Russians after the czarina Elizabeth took regular vacations there with her huge entourage. Tolstoy visited, Turgenev carried on his perpetual affair with a Spanish diva, and Dostoevsky gambled away the money he obtained from pawning his wife's wedding ring, recounting the experience in his novel *The Gambler*. {11}

Society became less rigid in the later nineteenth century. The civil service and the military (colonel in the army, captain the navy, or its equivalent) offered a path to ennoblement, and, conversely, estates were sold off by noblemen moving into business or hard times. Some 70% of officers were of peasant origin by 1917. Philanthropists, businessmen, and others who had rendered service to

government and society were also ennobled, or rewarded by membership in the privileged honored citizen category, and these groups became more diverse over time, including Conservatory graduates from the 1890s. {12-13}

Discussion

The poem is a favourite of Pushkin lovers, and has been widely translated. {2-7} The crucial question is how seriously we're to take the inveterate womaniser, the scamp who bragged of 113 great loves before marriage. {9} I take the poem as a waggish piece, with tongue firmly wedged in cheek, and so replicate the feminine rhymes. A more charitable view would be simply to take it as accomplished light verse, which was popular in Pushkin's circle. {10}

Final Translation

Enraged by you, for you I sigh
even as my love is shaming.
Against my will am I proclaiming,
vanquished, at your feet I lie.

Away from you I'm bored and yawning,
with you sad, though I endure
again a passion that is dawning
in my soul for one so pure.

How innocent that girlish chatter,
then I hear your step next door:
instantly my poor wits scatter:
what is all this longing for?

You smile, and happiness I'm feeling:
turn away and dark is day,
but at the torment I'm revealing,
one pale hand is all you pay.

Diligent, you're bent to needle:
against that look the heart proves feeble.
By those eyes and curls beguiled
that I'm astonished, of all people,
wondering at you as a child.

Should I tell you, when together
of the jealousies I know,
or when you walk in frightful weather
I dread the distances you go.

And in the carriage to OPOCHKA
with tears so silent, out of sight,
the corner piece must be the watcher,
as at piano late at night.

I do not dare to ask for love.
Pity me, my dear Alina.
For every sin and misdemeanour
I beg alone of Him above!

My angel: let's pretend it's so.
How easily you could deceive me

when, my darling, please believe me,
truly I'd not care to know.

Confession was written while Pushkin was still popular, wildly so before his marriage in 1830. The twentieth century sees what was published later as his crowning achievement, but the public of the time was less enthusiastic. His *Boris Gudunov* (1831) was met with faint praise and loud blame, and by 1834 Pushkin was seen by the younger generation as a relict of the past. Pushkin was never a Romantic, moreover, and the profundity beneath the light touch has often been compared to Mozart: Russian literature, we have to remember, was a decade behind that of the west. {12}

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https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Borovikovsky_maria_Lopukhina.jpg

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Pushkin's Eugene Onegin The Feminine Ending in Russian Verse

We deal here with that most vexing of translation problems, the frequent use of the feminine rhyme (i.e. possessing an extra unstressed syllable) in Russian verse. It's probably best known to English readers through Eugene Onegin, {1} which is written in strict iambic tetrameters A b A b C C d d E f f E g g where the feminine rhyme is shown in upper case. {2}

In fact, as the late Professor Lee has pointed out, {2} the demanding Onegin stanza has been replicated in many translations of the last half century, and was indeed employed in narrative poems by Vikram Seth (*The Golden Gate*), Diana Lewis Burgin (*A Life in Verse*), Jon Stallworthy (*The Nutcracker*), John Fuller (*The Illusionists*), Matt Rubinstein (*Equinox*) and Jim Blyth (*The Length of Love Street*). Clearly, the feminine rhyme *has* been employed in translation and original work. To help answer the question whether it *should* be employed, we might look at following translations of Eugene Onegin, all borrowed from the late Professor Lee's invaluable listing (in case the source be removed in the usual budget cuts: a little simplified).

Pushkin's Eugene Onegin

Pushkin's Text of First Stanza {1}

«Мой дядя самых честных правил,

Когда не в шутку занемог,
Он уважать себя заставил
И лучше выдумать не мог.
Его пример другим наука;
Но, боже мой, какая скука
С больным сидеть и день и ночь,
Не отходя ни шагу прочь!
Какое низкое коварство
Полуживого забавлять,
Ему подушки поправлять,
Печально подносить лекарство,
Вздыхать и думать про себя:
Когда же чёрт возьмёт тебя!»

Translations of First Stanza:

1. Arndt (1963) {3}

"Now that he is in grave condition,
My uncle, decorous old prune,
Has earned himself my recognition;
What could have been more opportune?
May his idea inspire others;
But what a bore, I ask you, brothers,
To tend a patient night and day
And venture not a step away:
Is there hypocrisy more glaring
Than to amuse one all but dead,
Shake up the pillow for his head,
Dose him with melancholy bearing,

And think behind a stifled cough:
'When will the Devil haul you off?'"

2. Arndt (1992) {4}

"Now that he is in grave condition,
My uncle, decorous old dunce,
Has won respectful recognition;
And done the perfect thing for once.
His action be a guide to others;
But what a bore, I ask you, brothers,
To tend a patient night and day
And venture not a step away:
Is there hypocrisy more glaring
Than to amuse one all but dead,
Shake up the pillow for his head,
Dose him with melancholy bearing,
And think behind a public sigh:
'Deuce take you, step on it and die!'"

3. Beck {5}

"My uncle's acted very wisely,
to seek his bed when he's so sick;
his family's reacted nicely
and he's most happy with his trick.
He's set the world a good example,
which others really ought to sample,
but it's a bore, when night and day
the sick man forces you to stay!
To keep him sweet, as if he's dying,
give him his daily medicine
and make quite sure that it goes in,

adjust the pillows while one's sighing:

'Don't even think of getting well,
the devil take you, go to hell!'"

4. Bonver {6}

"My uncle, of the best traditions,
When being almost deceased,
Forced men to treat him with distinction,
Which was the best of his ideas.
Yes, his example – to us for learning,
But, Heavens, how it is boring
To sit with him all day and night,
Not having right to step aside!
What a deplorable deception
To entertain the man, half-dead,
To fix a pillow in his bed,
To give him drugs with sad attention,
To sigh and think in deeps of heart:
When will the deuce take you apart?"

5. Briggs {7}

"Uncle, a man of purest probity,
Has fallen ill, beyond a joke.
Respected now, and scorned by nobody,
He has achieved his masterstroke
With this exemplary behaviour,
But it would try the Holy Saviour
To tend a sickbed night and day,
And never stir a step away,
Employing shameful histrionics
To bring a half-dead man some cheer,

Plump pillows and draw sadly near,
Indulging him with pills and tonics,
Heaving deep sighs, but thinking, 'Ooh!
When *will* the devil come for you?'"

6. Clarke (2011) {8}

"Man of highest principles, my uncle...
When he fell ill in earnest,
he won respect — he couldn't
have thought of a better way.
His example's a lesson to others...
But, God! — what a bore
to sit with an invalid day and night,
never moving one step away!
What base hypocrisy
to try to amuse a man half-dead,
straighten his pillows,
solemnly administer medicine,
keep sighing — and think to oneself,
'Will the Devil never take you?!'"

7. Clough {9}

—"When Uncle took to his bed
it was clearly going to be no joking matter
(he's a gentleman of the most punctilious principles).
O yes, he's made me respect him —
couldn't have thought of a better way —
sets an example to the rest of us. . .
but my God! What a bore it all is!
Sitting with a sick man day and night,
not being able to step outside his room

(the crafty bastard's arranged it all),
trying to amuse a near corpse, shaking up its pillows every
few minutes,
bringing it medicine with a suitably long face —
but inwardly sighing, privately thinking
'When is the Devil coming to collect you?'—"

8. Corré {10}

"My uncle, long a prince among
The upright, got so very ill.
But honors of the highest rung
He asked for, and he got his fill.
His model men came to adore.
But, oh my goodness! what a bore
To sit with uncle night and day,
And never from his bedside stray!
What an awful, low-down scene
His half-dead person to amuse,
Arrange his pillows, and to choose
Lugubriously his medicine,
While sighing in sad undertones:
'When will old Nick consume your bones?'"

9. Deutsch (1936) {11}

"My uncle's shown his good intentions
By falling desperately ill;
His worth is proved; of all intentions
Where will you find one better still?
He's an example, I'm averring;
But, God, what boredom—there, unstirring,
By day, by night, thus to be bid

To sit beside an invalid!
Low cunning must assist devotion
To one who is but half-alive:
You puff his pillow and contrive
Amusement while you mix his potion;
You sigh, and think with furrowed brow—
‘Why can’t the devil take you now?’”

10. Deutsch (1943) {12}

“My uncle always was respected;
But his grave illness, I confess,
Is more than I could have expected:
A stroke of genius, nothing less.
He offers all a grand example;
But, God, such boredom who would sample?—
Daylong, nightlong, thus to be bid
To sit beside an invalid!
Low cunning must assist devotion
To one who is but half-alive:
You smooth his pillow and contrive
Amusement while you mix his potion;
You sigh, and think with furrowed brow—
‘Why can’t the devil take you now?’”

11. Deutsch (1964) {13}

‘My uncle always was respected,
But his grave illness, I confess,
Is more than could have been expected:
A stroke of genius, nothing less!
He offers all a fine example.
But, God, such boredom who would sample

As day and night to have to sit
Beside a sick-bed — think of it!
Low cunning must assist devotion
To one who is but half-alive;
You puff his pillow and contrive
Amusement while you mix his potion;
You sigh and think with furrowed brow:
“Why can’t the devil take you now?”

12. Elton {14}

‘When Uncle, in good earnest, sickened
(His principles were always high),
My own respect for him was quickened;
This was his happiest thought,’ said I.
He was a pattern edifying:
– Yet, heavens! how boring, and how trying.
To tend a patient night and day
And never move a step away!
And then – how low the craft and gross is! –
I must amuse a man half-dead,
Arrange the pillows for his head,
And bring, with a long face, the doses
And sigh, and wonder inwardly,
‘When *will* the Devil come for thee?’

13. Emmet & Makourenkova {15}

“My Uncle based life’s regulation
“On high ideals; when he fell ill,
“His bearing forced our admiration,
“One could not dream of better still,
“A model posed to tutor others;

"But God Almighty, what a bother,
"A bedside watch by night and day,
"Without a chance to step away!
"How filled with shame and gross deception
"To entertain the living dead,
"To smooth the pillows at his head,
"While sadly bringing pill and potion,
"To sigh, and think with hidden woe:
"When will the devil come for you!"

14. Falen {16}

'My uncle, man of firm convictions . . .
By falling gravely ill, he's won
A due respect for his afflictions—
The only clever thing he's done.
May his example profit others;
But God, what deadly boredom, brothers,
To tend a sick man night and day,
Not daring once to steal away!
And, oh, how base to pamper grossly
And entertain the nearly dead,
To fluff the pillows for his head,
And pass him medicines morosely—
While thinking under every sigh:
The devil take you, Uncle. Die!'

Hobson {17}

15. My uncle, honest fellow, seeing
That he was now a dying man,
Required my last respects, this being
His best, indeed, his only, plan.

The plan may be worth imitating;
The boredom is excruciating.
Sit by a sick-bed night and day
And never move a step away.
With what low cunning one tries madly
To amuse a man who's half alive,
Adjust his pillows, and contrive
To bring his medicine to him sadly,
Then sigh while proffering the spoon,
'Let's hope the devil takes you soon.'

16. Hofstadter {18}

"My uncle, matchless moral model,
When deathly ill, learned how to make
His friends respect him, bow and coddle —
Of all his ploys, that takes the cake.
To others, this might teach a lesson;
But Lord above, I'd feel such stress in
Having to sit there night and day,
Daring not once to step away.
Plus, I'd say, it's hypocritical
To keep the half-dead's spirit bright,
To plump his pillows till they're right,
Fetch his pills with tears veridical —
Yet in secret to wish and sigh,
'Hurry, dear Uncle, up and die!'"

17. Hoyt {19}

"My uncle's ruled by utmost honor:
When taken seriously ill,
He got himself to be respected,

And nothing better could devise.
His case for others is a lesson,
But God, how boring to be sitting
With a sick person day and night,
Not moving even one step off.
What despicable calculation
To keep a half-dead man amused,
Glumly his medicine to serve him,
To set his pillows straight for him,
To heave a sigh and to reflect,
When will the Devil take you off?"

18. Johnston (1977) {20}

'My uncle – high ideals inspire him;
but when past joking he fell sick,
he really forced one to admire him –
and never played a shrewder trick.
Let others learn from his example!
But God, how deadly dull to sample
sickroom attendance night and day
and never stir a foot away!
And the sly baseness, fit to throttle,
of entertaining the half-dead:
one smooths the pillows down in bed,
and glumly serves the medicine bottle,
and sighs, and asks oneself all through:
"When will the devil come for you?"'

19. Kayden {21}

"My uncle was the soul of honor
And, when at last he took to bed,

He had the sense to make his kin
Respect his smallest wish, in dread
Before his disapproving gaze.
But Lord above! what fearful boredom
To tend the sick all day and night,
And never move for days and days!
What pitiful dissimulation
A dying man to entertain,—
Arrange the pillows for his head,
Prepare his medicine, then feign
A sigh of grief and wonder why
The devil takes his time to die.”

20. Kline {22}

‘My uncle, what a worthy man,
Falling ill like that, and dying;
It summons up respect, one can
Admire it, as if he were trying.
Let us all follow his example!
But, God, what tedium to sample
That sitting by the bed all day,
All night, barely a foot away!
And the hypocrisy, demeaning,
Of cosseting one who’s half alive;
Puffing the pillows, you contrive
To bring his medicine unsmiling,
Thinking with a mournful sigh,
“Why the devil can’t you die?”’

21. Kozlov (1994) {23}

'My uncle keeps to honest systems:
By falling ill, yet not in jest,
He made me love him with insistence
And couldn't find some better test.
Well, his example gives a lesson;
But goodness me, it's quite distressing
To sit with him all day and night,
Not stepping out of his sight.
And what insidiousness you show
When you amuse a man half dead
Arrange the pillows in bed
Then sadly give him drugs in sadness, though
You sigh, not speaking of your will,
When will the devil come for him!'

22. Kozlov (1998) {24}

"My uncle keeps to honest systems:
By falling ill, if not in jest,
He made me love him with insistence
And couldn't find some better test.
Well, his example gives a lesson;
But goodness me, it's quite distressing
To sit with him all day and night,
But staying always in his sight.
What perfidy you are displaying
When you amuse a man half-dead
Arranging pillows in his bed
Then sadly give him drugs, delaying

You sigh, not speaking of your dream,
When will the devil come for him!"

23. Ledger {25}

"My uncle, a most worthy gentleman,
When he fell seriously ill,
Constrained everyone to respect him,
Couldn't have done better if he tried.
His behaviour was a lesson to us all.
But, God above, what crashing boredom
To sit with the malingerer all day
Not moving even one footstep away.
What demeaning hypocrisy
To amuse the half-dead codger,
To fluff up his pillows, and then,
Mournfully to bring him his medicine;
To think to oneself, and to sigh:
When the devil will the old rascal die?"

24. Liberson (1975) {26}

"My uncle is a clever man—
"By getting seriously ill,
"He knew I'd be his faithful fan,
"Worthy heir of a worthy will.
"But what a chore to please a patient,

"To fix his pillow, smile and sigh,
"To amuse him, so frail and ancient
"And yet to think: when will you die?"

25. Litoshick {27}

My uncle was a man of virtue,
When he became quite old and sick,
He sought respect and tried to teach me,
His only heir, verte and weak.
He had the fun, I had the sore,
But gracious goodness! what a bore!
To sit by bedplace day and night,
Not doing even step aside,
And what a cheep and cunning thing
To entertain the sad,
To serve around, make his bed,
To fetch the pills, to mourn and grim,
To sigh outloud, think along:
'God damn old man, why ain't you gone?'

26. Lowenfeld {28}

" My uncle, man of rules, most honest,
When he fell ill beyond all joke,
Respect for himself forced upon us
(Better than that could not be hoped)
Let others learn from his example,
But Lord, how deathly dull to sample
The patient's sickbed night and day,
And never take a step away!
What execreably base dissembling
To keep someone half-dead amused,
Prop up his pillows, sadly brood,
With melancholy bring him medicine,

Sigh — as you ask yourself — all though —
When will the Devil come for you!”

27. Mitchell {29}

My uncle is a man of honour,
When in good earnest he fell ill,
He won respect by his demeanour
And found the role he best could fill.
Let others profit by his lesson,
But, oh my God, what desolation
To tend a sick man day and night
And not to venture from his sight!
What shameful cunning to be cheerful
With someone who is halfway dead,
To prop up pillows by his head,
To bring him medicine, looking tearful,
To sigh – while inwardly you think:
When will the devil let him sink?

28. Nabokov (1964) {30}

“My uncle has most honest principles:
when he was taken gravely ill,
he forced one to respect him
and nothing better could invent.
To others his example is a lesson;
but, good God, what a bore to sit
by a sick person day and night,
not stirring a step away!
What base perfidiousness
To entertain one half-alive,
adjust for him his pillows,

sadly serve him his medicine,
sigh—and think inwardly
when *will* the devil take you?”

29. Nabokov (1975) {31}

“My uncle has most honest principles:
when taken ill in earnest,
he has made one respect him
and nothing better could invent.
To others his example is a lesson;
but, good God, what a bore
to sit by a sick man day and night,
without moving a step away!
What base perfidiousness
The half-alive one to amuse,
adjust for him the pillows,
sadly present him the medicine,
sigh—and think inwardly
when will the devil take you?”

30. Phillipps-Wolley {32}

A perfect life without a flaw,
Till sickness laid him on his bed,
My grandsire lived: himself a law
By which our lesser lives were led.
Respect from all (or high or low),
The best he knew, or cared to know!
Yet, oh, my God! how slow to spread
The pillows for the sick man’s head:
What prostitution of one’s wit
To raise a smile on lips half cold,

With downcast eyes his medicine hold.
All day, all night, beside him sit,
And sighing to oneself still muse
"When will the Devil take his dues?"

31. Portnoi {33}

"My uncle was a man of most honorable principles,
When he was taken seriously ill,
He made everyone respect him,
And couldn't have had a better plan.
His example is a lesson for others;
But, oh my God, what a bore it is
To sit at the sick man's bedside day and night,
Not moving a step away!
What a low dishonesty it is
To entertain a half-dead man,
To adjust his pillows,
To solemnly serve him his medicine,
To sigh and to say to oneself,
'When will the devil take you?'"

32. Radin & Patrick {34}

"My uncle's verse was always upright
And now that he has fallen ill
In earnest he makes one respect him:
He is a pattern for us still.
One really could not ask for more—
But heavens, what a fearful bore
To play the sick-nurse day and night
And never stir beyond his sight!
What petty, mean dissimulation

To entertain a man half-dead,
To poke his pillows up in bed,
And carry in some vile potation,
While all the time one's thinking, 'Why
The devil take so long to die?'"

33. Sharer {35}

"My uncle ought to be respected:
As soon as he was gravely ill,
He told his kin they were expected
To be attentive to his will.
One must obey when fate is calling.
But, Lord, what can be more appalling
Than through the day and through the night
To be the ailing man's delight?
How wearisome and unaesthetic
To have a helpless patient fed,
To tiptoe softly round his bed,
Be sensitive and sympathetic,
And think, while trying to console:
'When will the devil take your soul?'"

34. Simmons {36}

"Heigh ho, what a fatigue, and what a bore,
To sit all day beside a dying man,
And only steal away when he doth snore,
And for the half-dead some amusements plan;
To give him medicine; his brow to fan;
To think when you his crumpled pillow shake,
'When will the devil this old devil take?'
My uncle lives a life of rectitude,

An honest man, if ever there were such,
But given much, I fear, to platitude —
It seems to me he utters them too much;
But when this fever his old bones did touch
Upon his relatives he forced respect;
On his example others made reflect."

35. Spalding {37}

"My uncle's goodness is extreme,
If seriously he hath disease;
He hath acquired the world's esteem
And nothing more important sees;
A paragon of virtue he!
But what a nuisance it will be,
Chained to his bedside night and day
Without a chance to slip away.
Ye need dissimulation base
A dying man with art to soothe,
Beneath his head the pillow smooth,
And physic bring with mournful face,
To sigh and meditate alone:
When will the devil take his own!"

36. Stone {38}

"My uncle makes a big production
of being ill, and truth be told,
I'd offer him just one instruction:
'Give up the ghost — you're weak and old!'"

37. Thomas {39}

'Now that my uncle's truly dying
He seems more decent than before.

You have to praise the way he's trying
To keep a grip, if nothing more.
A fine example to us all, but
The thought of what I face – appalling!
Sitting with him by day and night,
Not venturing as step outside!
What boredom, what a base betrayal,
To entertain a man half-dead,
Plump up the pillows by his bed,
Sigh, with a spoon held to his frail
Old lips, while thinking to yourself,
When will the devil take you off!'

Rhyme, particularly the feminine rhyme is clearly a hurdle. It *can* be overcome, or, more exactly, be *employed* successfully – as in numbers 11, 14, 18, 31 and 32 – but the others present problems. Numbers 19, 24 and 36 do not respect the form. Numbers 4, 6, 7, 17, 28, 29 and 31 do not employ rhyme. In numbers 1, 2, 4, 5, 8, 12, 14, 16, 21, 27, 30, 34 and 35 the rhyme is contrived, and in numbers 13, 19, 21, 22, 23, 25, 26, 32 and 37 the rhyme is uncertain. There are issues of tone in numbers 3, 7 and 34. And so on. But the issue is not whether the feminine rhyme can be employed in translation of Russian verse, but whether it *should* be. Are other features — an easy naturalness of expression, sincere emotion, compelling force — being sacrificed for a feature not intrinsic to English verse? Even the most successful examples above are a little mannered, acceptable in the good-natured, half-humorous introduction

to Eugene Onegin, but perhaps less so in the more serious sections, e.g. Tatiana's letter.

But there are still difficulties, perhaps more so. Long vowels and diphthongs vastly outnumber short vowels, which makes finding appropriate rhymes difficult and time-consuming. The verse itself is rather flat and undistinguished. The difference between long and short vowels will not be apparent to most readers, which means we're making a lot of effort for little effect.

This alternative to the English feminine rhyme could be useful on occasion, therefore, but in general the translator has to simply decide to use or not to use feminine rhymes, basing the decision not on outdoing other translators' ingenuity, but on whether the feminine rhyme really enhances the rendering.

In place of this:

My uncle who, except when jesting,
Maintained himself an honest man
In falling ill has stooped to testing
Our fond regards when this began.
And what a lesson he has taught us:
Lord, what boredom he has brought us!
From the malingerer night and day
Be not allowed one step away:

What shows more cunning and is meaner,
Than feigning to a man half dead,
Bring medicine, pillows, soothe the head
And, grieving, wear a glum demeanour
While sighing, if the heart spoke true,
When will the devil come for you? {41}

We could write:

My uncle was an honest man
But not in jest has fallen ill,
So testing us when this began
On how we would regard him still.
And what a lesson he has taught:
And, Lord, what boredom he has brought!
From the malingerer night and day
Be not allowed one step away:

What shows more cunning, feint and guile,
Than feigning to a man half dead,
Bring medicine, pillows, soothe the head
And wear a glum demeanor all the while
In sighing, if the heart spoke true,
When will the devil come for you?

And in place of the first Tatiana translation we could write
(essentially the second translation, but with a few
improvements):

I write this letter: you will see
there's little that I do not say,
and at this lack of modesty
it's in your gift to make me pay.
But if you have some care for me
and could incline to pity, think
how much it shames me, do not shrink
from all association, when
it was my hope to keep from you
what heart of mine has made me do.
I simply hoped to hear again
your voice and, maybe once a week
about the village hear you speak
on this or that or other tale,
but in that silence would be gone,
both day and night, in thinking on
to what that meeting might unveil.
But you're, they say, unsociable,
or rustic setting is to blame,
and we, no doubt, are awfully dull
but glad to see you just the same.

Conclusion? I prefer the versions employing the feminine rhyme, which seem a little livelier. The result needn't be burlesque, provided we write decent verse and choose sensible, everyday words for the feminine rhymes. I don't personally see a need for more translations, but new versions of *Eugene Onegin* would doubtless use the feminine

rhyme as we have now come to expect Pushkin's rhyme scheme will be followed.

Why Rhyme At All?

But why use rhyme at all? Most of today's poets don't, and we are trying to create somethings that reads as fresh and contemporary. After all, rhyme is only a shaping device, something that pulls the stanza into line, and give the constituent words their autonomy in that other world we call art. Looking at two renderings of Pushkin's poem *Remembrance*.

Воспоминание 1828

Когда для смертного умолкнет шумный день 6a
И на немые стогны града 4B
Полупрозрачная наляжет ночи тень, 6a
И сон, дневных трудов награда, 4B
В то время для меня влачатся в тишине 6c
Часы томительного бденья: 4B
В бездействии ночном живей горят во мне 6c
Змеи сердечной угрызенья; 4B
Мечты кипят; в уме, подавленном тоской, 6d
Теснится тяжких дум избыток; 4e
Воспоминание безмолвно предо мной 6d
Свой длинный развивает свиток: 4e
И, с отвращением читая жизнь мою, 6f
Я трепещу, и проклиная, 4g
И горько жалуюсь, и горько слезы лью,- 6f
Но строк печальных не смываю. 4g {42}

One by Evelyn Bristol:

Memory

When for mortal man the noisy day does end 6
And when the city squares are silent, 4
Half in transparency night's shade comes down to rest, 6
And sleep, reward for each day's labor — 4
For me that is the time when in the silence drag 6
The hours of my tormenting vigil: 4
An idleness at night more lively burns in me 6
The constant bites of my heart's serpent 4
My daydreams roil, and in my mind, crushed down with
grief, 6
Crowd thoughts excessive and too weighty, 4
Then does my memory in silence before my eyes 6
Unwind a scroll that seems unending; 4
And with revulsions deep, as I do read my life, 6
I tremble and I curses utter, 4
And bitterly complain, and bitter tears I weep, 6
Nor wash away one line of sorrow. 4 {43}

And another by Maurice Baring:

Remembrance

When the loud day for men who sow and reap 5a
Grows still, and on the silence of the town 5b

The insubstantial veils of night and sleep, 5a
The meed of the day's labour, settle down, 5b
Then for me in the stillness of the night 5c
The wasting, watchful hours drag on their course, 5d
And in the idle darkness comes the bite 5c
Of all the burning serpents of remorse; 5d
Dreams seethe; and fretful infelicities 5e
Are swarming in my over-burdened soul, 5f
And Memory before my wakeful eyes 5e
With noiseless hand unwinds her lengthy scroll. 5f
Then, as with loathing I peruse the years, 5g
I tremble, and I curse my natal day, 5h
Wail bitterly, and bitterly shed tears, 5g
But cannot wash the woeful script away. 5h {44}

We see immediately how much powerful and effective is the rhymed version, licences notwithstanding — pentameters throughout, no feminine rhymes. And Maurice Baring will have known what he was about: he was a distinguished man of letters, fluent in Russian, more than familiar with the country and its literature. Professor Bristol's version, on the other day, does exactly what her most useful book intends: provides translations that accurately convey the sense, rhythm and the stanza shape.

Summing up so far, I'd suggest:

1. The feminine rhyme should be retained where it makes a positive contribution to the translation.

2. Rhyme, essential to Russian poetry, should also feature in translations.

3. More important than matters of rhyme, feminine or otherwise, is verse craft (of which rhyme is only one small part.)

With that in mind, it seems to me that both our section of Tatiana's letter (to make it crisper and emotionally effective) and Remembrance (to respect the 6 4 stanza shape and feminine rhymes) should be rewritten. So, Tatiana's letter:

I write to you, and this confession A
leaves but little left to say. b
But yet I have the strong impression A
that you will scorn me, make me pay b
for blurting out this indiscretion. A
But if there's pity in you, think c
how much it shames me, do not shrink c
from one who in her silent being D
kept from saying, lest you know e
how far this girlish heart would go. e
That was my hope, one guaranteeing, D
round our village, once a week f
or more, I'd see you, hear you speak f
of this and that, the usual greeting G
but also thinking what you'd say h
or could — so looking, night and day, h
towards some consequential meeting. G

But you're, they say, unsociable, i
dislike our rural isolation, J
and we no doubt are awfully dull, i
but pleased you grace our invitation. J

Perhaps a small improvement: there are clearly many
variation we could write, doubtless more than the reader
will want demonstrated. The key matter is naturalness, and
a flow that keeps tightening the plot as, phrase by phrase,
Tatiana makes her unwise declaration. *Remembrance* is
more difficult. Rephrasing Baring in 6 4 lines is
straightforward:

When this, the clamorous day for men who sow and reap, 6a
Grows still, and on the silent town 4b
There fall the insubstantial veils of night and sleep, 6a
our labour's respite, settling down, 4b
Then come for me amongst the silence of the night 6c
The burning hours that drag their course; 4d
Across the overwhelming darkness comes the bite 6c
Of all the serpents of remorse; 4d
Dreams seethe about me; fretful infelicities 6e
Beset my over-burden soul. 4f
Vile memories, before my eyes, and noiselessly, 6e
unwind their long-unburdened scroll 4f
And make me stare with horror at the loathsome years 6g
And, trembling, curse my natal day. 4h
How bitterly I weep, but know no bitter tears 6g
Can wash the sorry script away. 4h

But introducing a feminine rhyme on the tetrameter line entails all kinds of adjustments and rephrasings:

When the loud day for those who sow and reap 6a
 Grows still, and on the empty places 4B
Of the city drift the insubstantial veils of sleep, 6a
Loom to watchfulness, and then the wailing night 6c
 More brims with hours, where each tormenting 4D
Ache of consciousness assumes the serpent's bite 6c
 Of long remorse, and unrelenting 4D
Seethe the frightful dreams and infelicities. 6e
 Around me is the night uncoiling 4F
Its dreadful scroll of dark and wounding memories, 6e
 noiselessly, and soul besoiling. 4F
And then with grief and loathing I peruse the years, 6g
 To see my life as misbegotten, 4H
But know my sins, for all the tears, the bitter tears,
 stay uneffaced and unforgotten. 4H

But that wanders from the sense a little, and is clearly badly forced. The problem lies in the abstractions and circumlocutions that the feminine rhyme so often introduces. *Eugene Onegin*, being a blend of the sentimental and the Byronic, can take the round-about, insinuating and slightly humorous tone, even where, towards the end, the poem becomes sombre and elegaic, but any touch of humour in *Remembrance* is instantly fatal. That poem demands to be fully modelled, heart-felt and direct, which any feminine

ending in the final line will weaken. No doubt better renderings are possible, but that last problem will always remain.

As though in confirmation, the talented Imagist poet, Babette Deutsch, working with her husband, Avrahm Yarmolinsky, produced something that doesn't respect Pushkin's rhyme scheme properly, doesn't employ feminine rhymes, and doesn't respect the 6 4 line form. The failures show how very difficult a full translation of Russian verse can be: {47}

When noisy day at last is quieted
And on the hushed streets of the town,
Half diaphane, night's shadow lies, and sleep,
The wage of toil, is handed down,
Then in the silence how the hours drag out
My weary vigil; then up start
Snakes of remorse nocturnal torpor wakes
To livelier flame that stings the heart.
Dreams surge and eddy; anguish crowds the mind
With wounding thoughts that press too close;
In silence memory unrolls for me
A scroll as long as it is gross;
I read and loathe the record of the years,
And shake, and curse the grim display;
My groans are bitter, bitter are the tears
That wash no sorry line away.

One answer may be to forget the experimental Modernist approaches and build sentences that replace images with argued sense:

When the loud day for those who sow and reap 6a
grows silent, on the city sowing, 4B
in squares and streets, the insubstantial veils of sleep, 6a
our toil's respite, there comes the growing 4B
vigil of our waking hours. And then the vast, still night 6c
brings hours that drag their hard, tormenting 4D
course, and consciences will feel the serpent's bite 6c
of harsh remorse, and unrelenting 4D
press of dreams and fretful infelicities. 6e
An ever-lengthening scroll's uncoiling 4F
with hurtful episodes and hateful memories, 6e
without a sound, but soul besoiling. 4F
Then, though with grief and loathing I peruse the years, 6g
and curse my natal day's occasion, 4H
there is no flood of tears, of bitter, bitter tears, 6g
removes a single line's contagion. 4H

We have evaded the inherent weakness of the feminine line concluding the couplet, but at some cost, many would argue. The verse meanders, lacking proper shaping, and *строк печальных* means sad lines, not 'line's contagion'.

In short, Russian translation *is* difficult, and feminine rhymes should be used with caution, generally on occasions where

some detachment or hint of humour is intended by the poet. Even at their best, feminine rhymes create a good deal of trouble for the translator, often without much of a corresponding benefit to the reader, indeed the opposite too often, reeking of contrivance that weakens the emotional effect.

Summing up so far, I'd suggest:

1. The feminine rhyme should be retained where it makes a positive contribution to the translation.
2. Rhyme, essential to Russian poetry, should also feature in translations.
3. More important than matters of rhyme, feminine or otherwise, is verse craft (of which rhyme is only one small part.)

It is *always* possible to replicate rhyme schemes, but the labour can be immense, even self-defeating, making us toil away at ingenuity rather than recreate the living poetry.

Note

I have not found a really acceptable rendering of the feminine line in Pushkin's *Onegin*, but it is possible to reproduce the feminine rhyme of Russian verse, e.g. J. S. Phillimore's translation of Nekrasov's *The Reaped Field* {53} The second stanza runs

Surely these cornstalks whisper one to another:

'This Autumn wind, it has a weary sound:
And weary work it is to sink and smother
Good grain in dust by bending tops the ground.'

The rendering is close and even reproduces the ternary metre of the original.

Кáжется, шéпчут колосья друг дрúгу:
"Скúчно нам слúшать осéнную вьúгу,

Скúчно склоня́ться до са́мой земли,
Ту́чные зёрна купа́я в пыли́!

The fuller line (-uu-uu-uu-) translates to the pentameter in English, however, which greatly eases the search for rymes. The iambic of Onegin has to stay in tetrameters.

Pushkin's Excellence

Pushkin is Russia's greatest poet, widely read in and beyond the country, and commemorated everywhere. Why the enthusiasm, indeed veneration?

Pushkin was not the originator of modern Russian poetry. That honour belongs to Mikhail Lomonosov (1711-65), and his achievements were further developed by Gavril Derzhavin (1743-1816), Vasily Zhukovsky (1783-1852) and Konstantin Batyushkov (1787-1855). Pushkin's early work owes much to the last two, but is distinguished by his greater precision of language, the artistic concentration, the

simple and direct approach to experience, the unfailing sense of balance and his humanity. {50} He had an extraordinary ability (and the critical sense) to assimilate other styles, {50} most notably that of Byron in 1820-3, adopting his rhetoric and self-dramatisation, while learning from Zhukovsky's mellifluousness. But Pushkin gradually abandoned that self-conscious style after 1823, creating instead something more direct and vigorous, depending for its effects on the choice and positioning of individual words, and on the interplay of rhythm and intonation. That is the style of *Eugene Onegin*, and indeed most of his longer poems. Though Pushkin concentrated more on prose after 1830, his verse became more austere and bereft of ornament, gaining in vigour and aphoristic concision. His view of human nature also darkened, with an awareness of mankind's vulnerability to fate, and the threat of power to individual happiness, a theme that underlies his *Bronze Horseman*.

There is therefore more to Pushkin than technical wizardry. As Evelyn Bristol points out, Pushkin is exceptionally clear on the surface, but also elusive and inscrutable when probed, as he had good reason to be. He was continually in trouble for his 'liberal' views, being transferred from the Foreign Office to Kishinev, then to Odessa, and subsequently to house confinement on a family estate at Mikhailovskoe, near Pskov. On the orders of Nicholas I, Pushkin was released from Mikhailovskoe in 1828, but closely monitored, forbidden to travel or have his works unpublished when too outspoken.

In 1831 he married Natalya Goncharov, — a beautiful but empty-headed creature — 'beauty and the beast' as they were often termed at court — whose flirtations led to the fatal duel of 1837. It's doubtful if the match suited either party: Pushkin's work becomes deeper and more thoughtful after the marriage, but the love poems disappear. Some of the unpublished poems in fact speak of inner anguish (*O God, don't let me go insane* of 1836, a bitter note in his adaptation of Horace's *Exegi monumentum*.)

Eugene Onegin (1831) is probably his most popular poem in Russia, but is nonetheless a pastiche of classical, sentimental and romantic traditions. {51} Little happens to the protagonists Eugene and Tatiana. The other characters are largely cyphers, and the ending is profoundly dispiriting, as film makers have found. Even without his Byronic pose, Eugene was not made for marriage, any more possibly than was its self-centred author.

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Audio Recording

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Natalya's Letter: The Feminine Ending in Russian Verse

This is the second article on that most vexing of translation problems, the feminine rhyme in Russian verse. We have looked at its use in Eugene [Onegin](#) and here we concentrate on the Natalya's letter part, which is likewise written in strict iambic tetrameters A b A b C C d d E f f E g g where the feminine rhyme is shown in upper case.

Pushkin's Natalya's Letter

If we look at three versions readily available on the Internet:

1. Kline 2009

'I write – what more is there to say? a
How shall I add to my confession? B
I know it's in your power today a
To punish me with your derision. B
Yet had compassion a part to play a
In your thoughts, you would wait, d
And not abandon me to fate. d
At first I wished to stay quite silent, E
Thus, you never would have heard f
Of shame or misery, one word. f
If I'd reserved a hope, content E
To see you but once a week, g
Be in your presence, hear you speak, g

Utter a few words of greeting, H
And then, while you were gone, i
Have that to think, and think, upon, i
Day and night, till our next meeting. H
You're unsociable, they say J
That the country bores you, sadly; K
And we....don't shine in any way, a J
Although we welcome you, so gladly. K {1}

This is not really verse but 'free verse'. i.e. prose, which conveys the content well (see below), but does not sufficiently support and shape it.

2. Ledger 2009

I write this to you - what more can be said? a
What more can I add to that one fact? b
For now I know it is in your power x
To punish me contemptuously for this act. b
But you, keeping for my unhappy lot c
Even one drop of sympathy d
Will not entirely abandon me. d
At first I wished to remain silent; *E*
Believe me, my shame, my agony, e
You never ever would have heard. f
As long as hope remained preserved f

That rarely, even once a week, g
I'd see you in our country house, h

To hear your voice, to hear you speak, g
To say a few words, and then, and then i
To think, and think, and think again i
All day, all night, until the next meeting. J

But it is said you are unsociable, k
And in this backwater all is tedious to you, l
While we... well here we shine at nothing, M
Although we're glad to welcome you. l {2}

The rhyming is incomplete, largely abandons Pushkin's scheme and does not use feminine rhymes. As verse, it's rather a disaster: stumbling lines and unconvincing rhymes, but there are good phrases occasionally: *For now I know it is in your power, we shine at nothing.*

3. Johnson 1977

I write to you - no more confession A
is needed, nothing's left to tell. b
I know it's now in your discretion A
with scorn to make my world a hell. b

But, if you've kept some faint impression A
of pity for my wretched state, c
you'll never leave me to my fate. c
At first I thought it out of season D
to speak; believe me: of my shame e
you'd not so much as know the name, e

if I'd possessed the slightest reason D
to hope that even once a week f
I might have seen you, heard you speak f
on visits to us, and in greeting G
I might have said a word, and then h
thought, day and night, and thought again h
about one thing, till our next meeting.G
But you're not sociable, they say: i
you find the country godforsaken; J
though we... don't shine in any way, i
our joy in you is warmly taken. J {3}

The rhyme scheme follows Pushkin's (see below), the text is believable and the rhymes are generally acceptable. There are certainly a few things we could question (*hell, warmly taken*) but the more general point is that the verse is still not really shaping the content.

Be that as it may, we now need to check the prose sense of the above to the Russian. We start with the Russian text, noting the rhyme scheme of the tetrameters (A is a feminine rhyme, b is a masculine one). Tatiana's famous letter starts:

Я к вам пишу – чего же боле? А
Что я могу еще сказать? b
Теперь, я знаю, в вашей воле А
Меня презреньем наказать. b
Но вы, к моей несчастной доле А
Хоть каплю жалости храня, с

Вы не оставите меня. с
Сначала я молчать хотела; D
Поверьте: моего стыда е
Вы не узнали б никогда, е
Когда б надежду я имела D
Хоть редко, хоть в неделю раз f
В деревне нашей видеть вас, f
Чтоб только слышать ваши речи, G
Вам слово молвить, и потом h
Все думать, думать об одном h
И день и ночь до новой встречи. G
Но, говорят, вы нелюдим; i
В глуши, в деревне всё вам скучно, J
А мы... ничем мы не блесним, i
Хоть вам и рады простодушно. J {43}

The uncorrected machine code translation is:

I write to you - what more the same?
What can I yet to tell?
Now, I know of your will
Me despicable punish.
But you, of my unhappy share
Although a drop of pity storing,
You will not leave me.
At first I wanted to be silent;
Believe me: my shame
You would never know,
If I had hope

Although rarely, at least once a week
In our village to see you,
Just to hear your speeches,
You have the floor to say, and then
All thinking, thinking about one thing
And day and night until a new meeting.
But, they say, you are unsociable;
In the backwoods, in the country you are bored,
And we ... we do not shine anything,
Although you are happy and simple.

We see that the meanings of the translations are indeed correct, but only if we round out what is rather plain and limited in the prose transcription.

So we come to a parting of the ways, between the more faithful academic rendering that transcribes only what's on the page, and the more literary one that tries to breathe life into the rendering and make it a pleasure to read. In all these Russian pages I am concerned with literary matters, and would myself accept very wide departures from the literal if they will make the text come alive. Indeed, just as the writer of historical romances has to fashion something convincing, not quite contemporary but not hopelessly antique, for her dialogues, so we have to fashion something, it seems to me, where the words and rhyme schemes convey the hopes, aspirations and fears of a living person.

In fact it's not so difficult, and restraint is needed. Tatiana

is inexperienced, but not simple-minded. She knows the risks she runs in disclosing her feelings, and indeed suffers for the indiscretion: she makes a brilliant marriage eventually, but to a much older man, and those girlish hopes and fancies have to be left behind, which even a remorseful Onegin cannot afterwards recover. So, with this in mind, and adopting some of Johnson's rhymes, we can write:

I write to you, and this confession A
has little left in it unsaid. b
So bad will be the first impression, A
you may well scorn me, so ill-bred b
as venture on this indiscretion. A

But, if there's pity in you, think c
of how I feel, and do not shrink c
from giving grounds for hoping, seeing D
I never wanted you to know e
how far this girlish heart would go. e

My simple wish? To will your being D
round the village once a week f
or so, to see you, hear you speak f
of something fuller in your greeting, G
yes, something other you might say, h
and altogether, night and day, h
resolve upon another meeting. G

But you're, they say, unsociable, i

and do not like this rural isolation, J
and we, of course, are awfully dull i
but pleased you grace our invitation. J

Avoiding the Feminine Ending

So the answer is: yes, the Onegin stanza *can* be made into convincing dialogue, though the above probably needs more art and shaping. But, rather than employing the English feminine rhyme, however, which has an extra syllable tacked on, we could perhaps employ the French one. The alexandrine always consists of exactly twelve syllables, and each syllable of the alexandrine is a sounded vowel. The neutral e is not sounded when occurring at the line end, but lengthens the preceding vowel/syllable. A similar rule applies to the third person plural present tense ending of 'ent. Lines ending in e or *ent* are termed feminine. Other lines are masculine. Though they may end with the same sound, feminine and masculine lines do not rhyme. A feminine line can only rhyme with another feminine line, and a masculine line rhyme with masculine one. French classical verse is written in alternating pairs of masculine and feminine lines. Thus Racine (*Phèdre*, IV. 6):

Par do nneUn Dieu cru el | a per du ta fa mille : 4 2 | 2 4 f
Re co nnais sa veng ean | ceux fu reurs de ta fille. 3 3 | 3
3 f
Hé las ! du cri mea ffreux | dont la hon te me suit 2 4 | 4 2
m
Ja mais mon tri ste coeur | n'a re cuei lli le fruit. 2 4 | 4 2 m

English is not a quantitative language, but does distinguish between long and short vowels. The short vowels are in bat, bet, bit, got and gut. The long vowels are in laid, beat, bite and suit. Diphthongs are long: mark, idea, wear, poor, hire, boy, our, lawyer, prayer. Vowels can be lengthened by the addition of some consonants: measure, hatch, badge, siege. Rewriting Tatiana's speech with these quieter rhymes:

I write this letter: you will see A
there's very little left unsaid. b
At your discretion you can be A
contemptuous, curbing one ill-bred b
enough to scorn propriety. A

But if you have some pity, think c
how much it shames me, do not shrink c
from all association: these D
were thoughts I did not mean to tell. e
Indeed for me it would be well e
to have what silence guarantees: D
a naturalness in greeting us f
as, round our village we discuss f
some this or that, and how it goes. G

My night and day is ever gone h
in just supposing, passing on h
to what new meetings might disclose. G
But you're, they say, unsociable, i

or rustic setting is to blame, J
and we, no doubt, are awfully dull i
but glad to see you just the same. J

But there are still difficulties, perhaps more so. Long vowels and diphthongs vastly outnumber short vowels, which makes finding appropriate rhymes difficult and time-consuming. The verse itself is rather flat and undistinguished. The difference between long and short vowels will not be apparent to most readers, which means we're making a lot of effort for little effect.

This alternative to the English feminine rhyme could be useful on occasion, therefore, but in general the translator has to simply decide to use or not to use feminine rhymes, basing the decision not on outdoing other translators' ingenuity, but on whether the feminine rhyme really enhances the rendering.

That said, let's continue in this vein to complete the piece.

The Russian text:

22. За́чем вы посе́тили нас? I
В глу́ши|глуши́ забы́того селе́нья K
Я ни́когда́ не зна́ла б вас, I
Не зна́ла б го́рького муче́нья. K
Ду́ши|Души́ нео́пытной волне́нья K
Смири́в со вре́менем (как знать?), m

По сёрдцу я нашлá бы дрúга, N
Былá бы вёрная супрúга N
30. И добродётельная мать. m
Другóй!.. Нет, никомú на свéте O
Не отдалá бы сёрдца́ я! p
То в вýсшем сужденó совете... O
То во́ля нéба: я твоя́; p
Вся жизнь моя́ былá залóгом Q
Свидáнья вёрного с тобо́й; r
Я зна́ю, ты мне по́слан бо́гом, Q
До грóба ты хранíteль мой... r
Ты в сновидéнях мне явля́лся, T
40. Незрímый, ты мне был уж мил, u
Твой чúдный взгляд меня́ томíл, u
В душé твой го́лос раздава́лся T
Давно...нет, это был не сон! v
Ты чуть вошел, я вмиг узнала, W
Вся обомлела, заплыла W
И в мыслях молвила: вот он! v
Не правда ль? Я тебя слыхала: X
Ты говорил со мной в тиши, y
Когда я бедным помогала X
50. Или молитвой услаждала X
Тоскú волнúемой душí? y
И в éто сáмое мгновéние z
Не ты ли, мíлое видéние, z
В прозрачной темнотé мелькнúл, a
55. Проникнул тíхо к изголо́вью? B
Не ты ль, с отра́дой и любóвью, B

Слова надежды мне шепнул? а
 Кто ты, мой ангел ли хранитель, С
 Или коварный искуситель: С
 60. Мой сомненья разреши. d
 Быть может, это всё пустое, Е
 Обман неопытной души! d
 И суждено совсем иное... Е
 Но так и быть! Судьбу мою f
 Отныне я тебе вручаю, G
 Перед тобою слёзы лью, G
 Твоей защиты умоляю... f
 Вообрази: я здесь одна, h
 Никто меня не понимает, I
 70. Рассудок мой изнемогает, I
 И молча гибнуть я должна. h
 Я жду тебя: единым взором J
 Надежды сердца оживи k
 Иль сон тяжёлый перерви, k
 Увы, заслуженный укором! J
 Кончаю! Страшно перечёсть... I
 Стыдом и страхом замираю... M
 Но мне порукой ваша честь, I
 79. И смело|смело ей себя вверяю...M

And translation: I think we should aim for decent verse and
 heartfelt, simple expression, i.e. something that a young
 Russian woman could conceivably write:

22. Why did you visit us, and call I

on such a wretched isolation? K
I'd not have known you then at all, I
nor felt that wild exhilaration K
become the heart's deep laceration. K
I could have found some other you, m
in time, to friendship acquiescing, N
have made a wife, and thence, progressing, N
30. been found a virtuous mother too. m

Another? No, there's no one ever O
in this wide world to take your place: p
by Heaven I am yours forever, O
and bound to you by Heaven's grace. p
We walk a conjoined path together: Q
my life till now is as this heart. r
What God has made we can't untether Q
until the grave will break apart. r

For you appeared to me in dreaming, T
40. invisible, but dear to me; u
that torment was my destiny, u
and in my soul your words were teeming . . . T

And from the first those thoughts have stayed, v
when in you walked, not wild delusion W
45. but adding to my stunned confusion: W
I saw the man for whom I prayed, v
and heard him also while attending X
former silence, pure and whole, y

and while to prayers was likewise bending, X
50. and clothes of poor folk also mending: X
in pain and rapture was my soul. y

And at this moment, as I write, z
aren't you still foremost in my sight? z

In darkness even, I could hear, a
55. at my headboard, through my slumber, B
words of love I cannot number, B
and hope was with them, quiet and clear. a

My guardian angel: would you leave me, C
have your whispered words deceive me? C

60. Resolve the matter, tell the truth: d
this may be all an aberration, E
inexperience that comes with youth, d
who's destined for some other station . . . E

Well, be it so! You are my fate. f
65. I'm wholly under your direction. G
I place myself in your protection G
though bitter tears may come too late, f

Imagine how alone I stood h
where no one had the least conception I
70. of my thoughts and my dejection, I
of silences then kept for good. h

So now I wait. Your words approach J
which maybe will revive my hope k
but just as likely give you scope k
75. for greater censure and reproach. J

I daren't reflect on what I've done. I
But though I fear it will be weeping, M
my honour yet you cannot shun I
that's here entrusted to your keeping. M

This needs a little more work, but illustrates the problem. It is *always* possible to replicate rhyme schemes, but the labour can be immense, even self-defeating, making us toil away at ingenuity rather than recreate the living poetry.

Dispensing with the Feminine Rhyme

The sensible approach, it seems to me, is to do away with the feminine rhyme altogether, avoiding such contrivances as 'leave me/deceive me', 'conception/dejection', 'weeping/keeping', etc. So:

I write this letter: you will see
there's very little left unsaid.
It's clearly in your gift to be
contemptuous of me, one ill-bred
enough to flout propriety.

But if some pity can be stirred
you will not leave my call unheard.

I'd, firstly, never meant to tell
how far this girlish heart would go
nor what these shameful thoughts would show
but simply hoped all things went well.

I'd barely see you once a week,
around our village, hear you speak,
would hold forth naturally and then,
in greeting you, have every right
to think on further, day and night,
towards the hour we'd meet again.

But you're, they say, unsociable:
our rural solitude's to blame,
20. and we, of course, are awfully dull,
but pleased to see you all the same.

Why did you visit us, or even deign
to know us in this backward place?
I'd not have met you, nor would pain
have left its heart-tormenting trace.
Just inexperience, is it? Start
of new adventures for the heart?
It could have been some other you
where I in time would find a friend,
30. and be good wife to, doubtless end
as well-regarded mother too?

But, no! There's no one here on earth

I'd give my heart to, see as cause
for that high court to prove its worth.
It's Heaven's will that I be yours.

My life till now was golden shod
with faithfulness conjecture gave.
I know that you are come of God
to be my guardian to the grave.
40. You've long appeared to me in dreams,
and, though invisible, took form
that winning words at once were warm
and close inviting . . . are, it seems . . .
For though it came as from afar
immediately that voice was true,
a man walked in, and that was you.
My whirling mind said, here you are!

But I had heard you, so I swear,
through silence, to the very core,
50. when I was helping with the poor,
or close delighting in my prayer,
and in that tumult knew my soul
was one with yours, complete and whole.

In darkness even I could see
you whisper words that in my bed
were love and joy to me ahead.
Were not these proper hopes for me?
My guardian angel, aren't you, who

would never tempt with things not true?

60. Resolve the matter, tell that truth.
Is this some made-up, empty source,
or some confusion sprung from youth,
when future takes a different course?

Suppose that's so, does not my fate
depend on what I'm telling you?
In tears I lie before you: do
not expose me to this state.

Imagine me alone instead,
who lacks a friend to hear her out,
70. whose burdened mind gives way to doubt
and to the grave leaves thoughts unsaid.

So now I wait. Your words approach
which maybe will revive my hope
but just as likely give you scope
for fitting censure and reproach.

I dare not read what's written here
for shame, and consternation too:
my honour's forfeit: all too clear
the self that I entrust to you.

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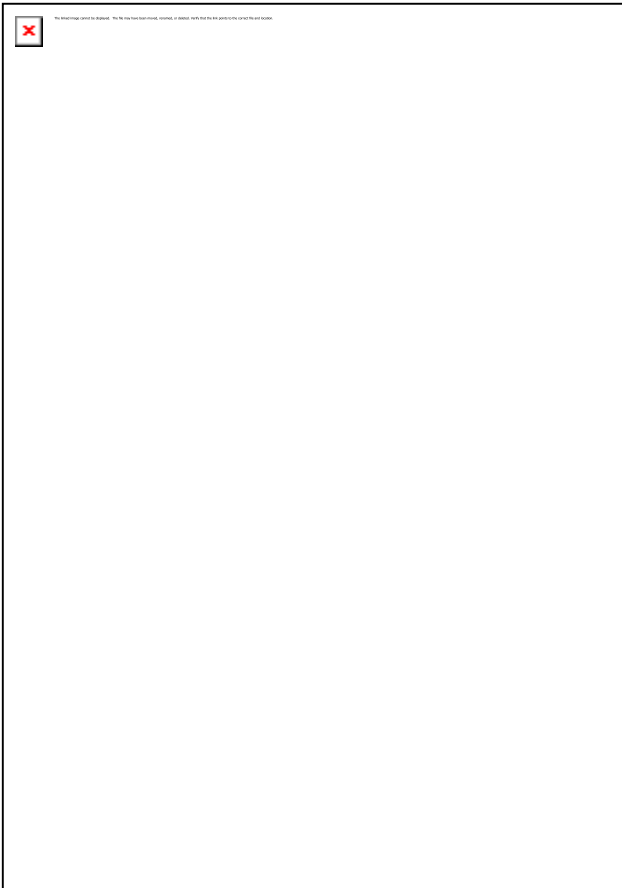
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Translating Pushkin's 'I Loved You': Simplicity is Difficult

Pushkin's *I Loved You* is studied at school and probably known by heart across the Russian continent. {1-4} It has seen many translations, {5} and there now numerous readings available online (which also show how approximate are the machine code transcriptions). {6}



Portrait of Denis Davydov by Orest Kiprensky. 1809. {1} A swash-buckling portrait of D.V. Davydov (1784-1839) by Russia's greatest Romantic painter. As general, poet and writer, Davydov was more than a poster child for Czarist

causes. He devised an Hussar poetry noted for its hedonism and bravado, which his own life spectacularly illustrated. Born into the Russian nobility with Tatar roots, Davydov became a guerrilla leader of the Russian Patriotic War, a romantic hero, and an idol of Pushkin and the Decembrists. The poems depict the bon-vivant life of a Russian officer, and address such themes as courage in battle, harlots, vodka, and the value of true friendship. The diction is direct, sometimes more so than the censor would allow, but the poems are full of spirit and sentiment. His later poems were inspired by love for a very young girl. Davydov took part in the Russo-Iranian War (1826-28), wrote a treatise on guerrilla warfare, and memories of military life on which Tolstoy drew for his *War and Peace*. {2}

The Russian text is: {1}

анализировать Я вас любил: любовь еще, быть может,
В душе моей угасла не совсем;
Но пусть она вас больше не тревожит;
Я не хочу печалить вас ничем.

Я вас любил безмолвно, безнадежно,
То робостью, то ревностью томим;
Я вас любил так искренно, так нежно,
Как дай вам бог любимой быть другим.

The Yandex translation service {7} gives:

I loved you: love still, perhaps,

My soul is not extinguished yet;
But let it no longer disturb you;
I don't want to sadden you with anything.

I loved you silently, hopelessly,
Shyness, jealousy was stressed;
I loved you so sincerely, so tenderly,
As God grant you love to be different.

But so understand what each word is doing, we need to look
at the literal, word-for-word rendering:

I loved you: love still, perhaps, I
n soul of_my extinguished not quite
But let it you more not disturb I
not want sadden you nothing.

I you loved silently, hopelessly,
The shyness, the jealousy, torment
I loved you so sincerely, so tenderly,
As give you God beloved be other.

Previous Translations

In this light, the Liberman literal translation, intelligent and
sensible, is already adding to the plain words: {4}

I loved you; perhaps love has not yet quite gone out in my
soul, but let it no longer trouble you: I don't want to sadden
you in the smallest way. I loved you silently, hopelessly,
tormented now by shyness (timidity), now by jealousy; I

loved you so sincerely, so tenderly, as God grant you may be loved by another man.

Background

The woman addressed is either Caroline Subansky, whom Pushkin met in his southern exile, or the cultivated and aristocratic daughter of the President of the St. Petersburg Academy of Arts, Anna Olenina, to whom Pushkin proposed, but was rejected. Pushkin, the compulsive womaniser, is here being serious, or thought himself so, and the sentiments have to be taken at their face value.

Versification

The transcription into innately stressed and unstressed syllables is: {8}

Я вас любíл: любóвь ещё, быть móжет, 5А
В душé моёй угáсла не совсém; 5b
Но пусть она́ вас бо́льше не трево́жит; 5А
Я не хочú печáлить вас ничém. 5b

Я вас любíл безмóлвно, безнаде́жно, 5С
То ро́бостью, то ре́вностью томím; 5d
Я вас любíл так íскренно, так не́жно, 5С
Как дай вам бог любíмой быть другím. 5d

The work is written in five-foot iambics with alternating male

and female rhymes. The rhythm is complex but precise; with a pause in each line after the fourth syllable. All the rhymes in the even lines contain the sound "m": 'not quite', 'nothing', 'then', 'other', 'torment'. All the rhymes in the odd lines contain the sound "ж": 'perhaps', 'disturb', 'hopelessly', 'tenderly'. {3}

First Translation Attempts

If we dispense with the feminine rhymes, we can rough out a translation fairly easily:

I loved you, and perhaps within the soul
love still acknowledges that lingering sway.
I beg no more my sadness takes its toll,
and you're not troubled in the slightest way.

I loved you silently and hopelessly,
and jealously as only the timid can.
God grant that tender love again
may be sincerely given by some other man.

We then have two main problems, and a host of subsidiary ones (pause after fourth syllable, the extensive alliteration, the internal rhymes). As the first problem we have transferred 'sincerely' to 'given', where Pushkin writes 'sincere and tender' love, i.e. the sincerely belongs to love, not its being given by another man. As the second main problem, we have evaded the feminine rhymes. The first is not too serious, I'd suggest, since 'sincerely' transfers itself by implication to love. But we can also write:

I loved you silently and hopelessly,
and jealously as only the timid can.
God grant my true and tender love may be
as much so given by some other man.

The second problem is a serious one, and afflicts all Russian poetry translation: the feminine rhyme, which is common to Russian verse but foreign to English. Our language is not abundantly endowed with rhymes in the first place, and is even less prodigal in feminine rhymes. At their best, feminine rhymes in English are apt to sound a little mannered; at worst they introduce contrivance and circumlocution, destroying any simple expression of feeling. The Liberman translation, for example, has to use 'embers' to rhyme with 'remembers', and then 'surrender' to rhyme with 'tender'. There are also problems, I'd suggest, with 'bit' / 'lit' and 'vexed' / 'next'. 'A bit' is too colloquial, and one can't really be 'vexed' by torment, however gentle: different connotations are involved.

But other rhymes are available. Gene Skuratovsky's rendering omits the feminine rhymes in the first stanza, and has to introduce 'fear', but is otherwise very close to the sense : {7}

I loved you once: that love thus far, I fear,
Has not completely died within my soul;
It should not worry you, my dear:

I do not wish to sadden you at all.

I loved you in a silent, hopeless fashion,
Now sorely shy, now jealously in pain;
I loved you with such honest, gentle passion
As, I pray God, you may be loved again.

So we can perhaps write:

I loved you once. Perhaps that adoration
is still acknowledging your lingering sway.
But not that trouble has its new occasion
or even saddens you in any way.

I loved you silently, in hopeless fashion,
then jealousy as only the timid can.
Pray God that my sincere and tender passion
again be given by some other man.

But the second stanza is rather limp (listen to the Russian recordings), and I suggest we reorder for emphasis.

Perhaps:

I loved you once. Perhaps that adoration
is still acknowledging your lingering sway,
but not to trouble you, or have occasion
now to sadden you in any way.

I loved you silently, in desperate fashion:

tormented, to jealousy my feelings ran.
God grant that such sincere and tender passion
again be given by some other man.

The rhythm is paused and kept varying with the sense;
there is a little alliteration, and a vestigial pause after the
fourth syllable in lines 1, 3, 6 and 8. But nothing as
musically finished, alas, as the original.

Employing Previous Translations Intelligently

All previous translations are enormously useful. Even if we don't agree with the rendering, or like the verse for various reasons, each offers suggestions of ways to go, or not to go. Moreover, as I have argued in my web-page on Racine's *Athalie*, {10} fidelity in translation can be fidelity to the prose sense, to the verse features of the original, or to the English verse tradition. In the examples collected by All Poetry, the first is more observed by the literal translation, the second by the 'another translation' (with respect to the feminine rhymes) and the third by the Deutsche translation. If we now go back to the word-for-word rendering:

I loved you: love still, perhaps,
In soul of_my extinguished not quite
But let it you more not disturb
I not want sadden you nothing.

I you loved silently, hopelessly,

The shyness, the jealousy, torment
I loved you so sincerely, so tenderly,
As give you God beloved be other.

We can see that our last version is faithful to the Russian verse in conveying the feminine endings but otherwise conforms too closely to the English verse tradition — i.e. it's refracted through countless other English poems, and draws its strength from them. But the Russian tradition doesn't necessarily observe the graces of English verse. Indeed, the word-for-word rendering, for all its obscurities and broken sense, makes a much more direct and stronger appeal. Pushkin's poem is in fact quite regular, {1} though there are inversions of the normal speech order, and the last line does not quite encompass the full sense. Bearing all that in mind, my inclination is to change the odd lines into more broken and declamatory expression, and leave the even lines to round off matters smoothly.

I loved you, love you still, that adoration
perhaps acknowledges your lingering sway.
It won't now trouble you, or have occasion
to see you saddened in any way.

How hopelessly I loved, in silent fashion;
to jealous torment then my feelings ran.
I loved sincerely with a tender passion:
pray God you find that in some other man.

But we are still left with the fashion / passion rhyme, which I strongly suggest we do not want. Such banal, pantomime rhymes are less objectionable in long narrative pieces, but destroy the simple, heart-felt lyric. But if we go back to the word-for-word rendering, and our very first draft, we can write:

I loved you, love you still, that adoration
perhaps commemorates your lingering sway,
I would not trouble you, or have occasion
now to sadden you in any way.

I loved so silently, so hopelessly,
that all ran envy, as such shyness can.
God grant that true and tender love may be
as fully given by some other man.

Pushkin's Love Poetry in Context

Given Pushkin's libertine reputation, {10} his own identification with the dissident hero of Romanticism, the amorous gossip of the times and the innumerable love poems he dashed off, it is exceedingly difficult to know how seriously to take Pushkin's protestations. Certainly he fell desperately in love on occasion, {11} perhaps on many occasions, but he could also be the disenchanted skeptic depicted in *Eugene Onegin*. {12} Exiled to Kishinyov, a remote outpost in Moldavia, for example, he devoted much time to writing, but also plunged into a life of amorous intrigue, hard drinking, gaming, and violence. {13-14} At Odessa he fell in love with and seduced the wife of his

superior, the kindly Count Vorontsov, governor-general of the province, who was eventually obliged to ask for Pushkin's removal when the affair became too public. {15}

Pushkin's love poetry was inspired by many women, but the greatness of the poetry does not necessarily reflect the depth of his affections. Poetry and love (spiritual and carnal) remain somewhat different entities. Pushkin was no worse than his dissipated contemporaries, of course, but his affairs were often not edifying, despite the legions of poetry lovers wishing to believe otherwise {16} As W.B. Yeats remarked, 'The poet is not the man who sits down to breakfast.' 'Poetry is often both a pragmatic and imaginative assertion of the self' {17} Writers adopt the personae of their social milieu, moreover, and poets are notorious for their split personalities, that imaginative sympathy allowing them to assume feelings which they then write about. But women did inspire Pushkin to write his most famous lines, however, so that the affections expressed in many poems will be true as far as they go, which is while the poem is being composed. The caveat is what we have to remember, I think, when devotees say 'love fills all the poems of Pushkin -- and this forms a lively, passionate and iridescent mosaic of his life, and at the same time a Russian archetype of love for a woman. Love is sometimes enthusiastic, sometimes rational, often insane, and at times mysterious, but always sincere.' {18} Beyond that, for Pushkin away from the writer's desk, we have to go to biographies {19} and detailed critics of Pushkin's work, which, on the Internet, are

predominantly in Russian. {20-21}

But that is also beside the point. Pushkin used his love affairs, and their expression in verse, as a means to explore deeper aspects of life. He moved further than Baratynsky in his Epicureanism, valuing freedom, independence and solitude, and, given his disappointment in these, turned to skepticism and demonism. In the end, he came to accept life as it is, and to value harmony, mercy, forgiveness and acceptance as something given from above. From the spiritual and physical harmony of love, Pushkin came to feel the wholeness of the world, and it is that which underlies his lyric poetry. His moral values were always open to reassessment, it has been argued, and became more so as he pushed back the boundaries of existing artistic, religious and philosophical forms. Pushkin could accept contradictions, and had the ability to go beyond subjectivity into the objective, synthesizing something larger than the two in his longer poetry tales. {22}

In short, his literary gifts made Pushkin the poet larger than Pushkin the man because the first is a reworking of the vast heritage of poetry while the second, or at least as we see him in biographies and memoirs, appears in the ordinary language of prose.

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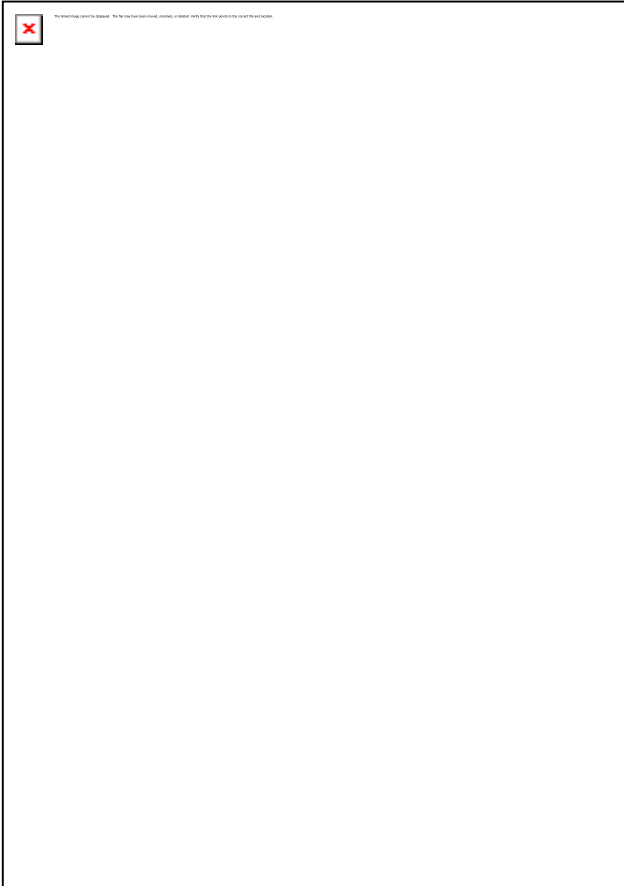
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Pushkin's The Gypsies



Gypsy Woman by Nicolai Yaroshenko 1886 Poltava Art Gallery {1} Yaroshenko (1846-98) was born in Poltava (now the Ukraine) to an officer in the Russian Army, and first chose a military career. But he also studied art at Kramskoi's drawing school, and then at the Saint Petersburg Imperial Academy of Arts. While still a military officer he became a leading member of a group of Russian painters called the Peredvizhniki or Wanderers, dedicated to portraying local Russian life as it was. {2-3}

The opening Russian text is:

ЦЫГАНЫ

Цыганы шумною толпой	a
По Бессарабии кочуют.	B
Они сегодня над рекой	a
В шатрах изодранных ночуют.	B

Как вольность, весел их ночлег	c
И мирный сон под небесами;	D
Между колёсами телег,	c
Полузавешанных коврами,	D

Горит огонь; семья кругом	e
Готовит ужин; в чистом поле	F
Пасутся кони; за шатром	e
Ручной медведь лежит на воле.	F

Всё живо посреди степей:	g
Заботы мирные семей,	g
Готовых с утром в путь недалёкий,	H
И песни жён, и крик детей,	s
И звон походной наковальни.	H

Но вот на табор кочевой	i
Нисходит сонное молчанье,	J
И слышно в тишине степной	i
Лишь лай собак да коней ржанье.	J

Огни везде погашены,	k
Спокойно всё, луна сияет	L
Одна с небесной вышины	k
И тихий табор озаряет.	L
В шатре одном старик не спит;	m
Он перед углями сидит,	m
Согретый их последним жаром,	N
И в поле дальнее глядит,	m
Ночным подёрнутое паром.	N
Его молоденькая дочь	o
Пошла гулять в пустынном поле.	P
Она привыкла к резвой воле,	P
Она придёт; но вот уж ночь,	o
И скоро месяц уж покинет	Q
Небес далёких облака, -	r
Земфиры нет как нет; и стынет	Q
Убогий ужин старика.	r
Но вот она; за нею следом	S
По степи юноша спешит;	t
Цыгану вовсе он неведом.	S
"Отец мой, - дева говорит, -	t
Веду я гостя; за курганом	U
Его в пустыне я нашла	v

И в табор на ночь зазвала.	v
Он хочет быть как мы цыганом;	U

Его преследует закон,	v
Но я ему подругой буду.	W
Его зовут Алеко - он	v
Готов идти за мною всюду".	W

Старик

Я рад. Останься до утра	z
Под сенью нашего шатра	z
Или пробудь у нас и доле,	A
Как ты захочешь. Я готов	b
С тобой делить и хлеб и кров.	b

Будь наш - привыкни к нашей доле,	A
Бродящей бедности и воле -	A

А завтра с утренней зарёй	c
В одной телеге мы поедem;	D
Примись за промысел любой:	c
Железо куй - иль песни пой	c
И сёла обходи с медведем.	D

Алеко

Я остаюсь.

Земфира

Он будет мой:	e
Кто ж от меня его отгонит?	F
Но поздно... месяц молодой	e
Зашёл; поля покрыты мглой,	e
И сон меня невольно клонит.. {1}	F

Where lower case indicates masculine rhymes and upper case the feminine rhymes.

The machine translation is:

GYPSIES

Gypsies in noisy crowd
round Bessarabia wander.
They today over river,
in tents tattered spend night.

5. How free, welcome their stay
and peaceful sleep under heavens;
Between the wheels of carts,
half hung carpets.

A fire is burning; family around
10. is cooking dinner; in open field
graze horses; behind the tent
a tame bear lies in wild.

Everything alive in middle of steppes:
caring peaceful families,
15. Ready in morning to leave shortly
and songs wives, and shouts of children,
and ringing of marching anvil.

But here at camp nomadic
descends sleepy silence,
20. and heard in silence of steppe
only bark dogs yes horses neigh.

Lights everywhere extinguished,
Calm everything, moon shines
one from heavenly height
25. and quiet camp illuminates.

In tent alone old man not sleep;
he before coals sits,
Warmed their last heat,
and in field far gazes,
30. night covered with haze.

His young daughter
went for walk in desolate field.
She got used to independent will,
she will come; but now already night

35. and very soon the moon will leave

heaven far clouds, -
Zemfira very much not; and getting cold
poor dinner of old man.

But here she; behind her
40. through the steppes young man hurries,
gypsy completely he unknown.
"My father, - says maiden -

lead I guest; behind mound
him in wilderness I found
45. and in camp for night I called.
He wants to be as us a gypsy;

him is chasing law,
but I his girlfriend was
His name is Aleko - he
50. ready to follow me everywhere. "

Old Man

I am glad. Stay till morning
under canopy of our tent
Or stay with us and share
as you want. I'm ready
55. with you share and bread and shelter.

Be ours – get used to our lot,
roaming of poverty and will –

And tomorrow with morning dawn
in one cart we will go;
60. take over fishing any:
iron working – or songs sing
and villages go round with bear.

Aleko

I am staying.

Zemfira

He will be mine:
65. Who from me him drive away?
But late ... moon young
rest; the fields covered with gloom
and sleep me involuntarily attends .

Metrical Analysis

The poem is in iambic tetrameters, generally rhymed aBaB:

Цы га ны шум но ю тол пой 4а
По Бес са ра би и ко чу ют. 4В
О ни се год ня над ре кой 4а
В шат рах и зод ран ных но чу ют. 4В

Как воль ность, ве сел их ноч лег 4с
И мир ный сон под не бе са ми; 4D
Меж ду ко лё са ми те лег, 4с

По лу за ве шан ных ков ра ми, 4D

But there are also sections rhymed aaBaB, abba, etc, as the Russian text above indicates.

Gypsies in Context

The Gypsies is the last of Pushkin's four southern poems, the others being *The Prisoner of the Caucasus*, *The Robber Brothers* and *The Fountain of Bakhchisaray*. It was written in exile on his mother's estate near Pskov in 1824, and published in 1827. Prince Mirsky {2} speaks highly of the piece: '*The Gypsies* is among the greatest works of Püshkin. . . The Gypsies are not treated realistically but merely as ideal representatives of a natural state of human society. . . a strong affirmation of freedom. . . and patently a plea for anarchism. It was Pushkin's first attempt at tragedy and one of his greatest. It is less easy to do justice to its poetical beauty, and speaking of it, one is too likely to forget the lesson of restraint that is the best lesson to be learned from Pushkin. The verse, less fluent and volumptuous than in *The Captive* and in *The Fountain*, is tighter, fuller, and more saturated with complex expressiveness. Such passages as the old gypsy's tale of Ovid, the end of the poem (with the speech of the old man on Aleko's murder), and especially the epilogue, are unsurpassable summits of poetry.'

Previous Translations

The gypsies has seen several translations. That by G.R.Ledger is firmly modelled in rhyming quatrains, effective but not always following Pushkin's rhyme scheme. {2}

A noisy multitudinous throng
The crowd of gypsies streams along
The plains of Bessarabia.
Their camp by the riverside today

Is pitched and set for their nighttime stay.
In ragged tents spread far and wide
Like freedom is their sojourn there,
Under the skies in the midnight air.

Between the wheels of the drawn up carts,
Half covered with carpets thrown across
The bonfire glimmers. The family starts

To prepare a meal. On the steppe nearby
The horses pasture; behind the tents
The tame bear sleeps with an open eye.
In the vasty steppes all is noisy and lively:
The gypsy family's anxiety
Since the early morn on their short planned journey,
The children's cries and the women's singing,
And the sound of the travelling anvil's ringing.

But now upon their nomadic camp
Descends a sleepy silentness
And the only sounds in the steppe's quietness
Are the barking of dogs and the horses' neighs.

The fires everywhere are all put out,
All is at peace, the solitary moon
Shines from the summit of the skies
And brightens the encampment with its rays.

The translation by Irinia Zheleznova (1922) is a remarkable achievement, reproducing Puskin's rhyme schemes and the feminine lines. There are inevitable contrivances to accommodate so demanding a form (river/cover, leap, under/wander, gathered/untethered, etc), a rather free rendering in places, and the verse lacks Pushkin's quicksilver charm. But the language is largely fresh and convincing, making for an enjoyable read. {3}

The Gypsies Bessarabia roam
In noisy crowds. . . Above a river
In tattered tents they make their home.
From night's cool breezes seeking cover.

In open air calm is their sleep;
Like freedom glad their rest is. . . Under
The rug-hung caravans there leap
A fire's bright flames whose shadows wander

And lick the wheels; close to the blaze,
A family, for supper gathered.
Prepare their meal ; a tame bear lies
Behind the tent; nearby, untethered.

The horses graze. . . The steppe all round
Is full of life; their camping ground
The Gypsies leave at dawn; the ringing
Of anvils mingles with the sound

Of children's cries and women singing. . .
Then all at once a hush descends
Upon the camp; a horse's neighing
At times the dreamy quiet rends
Or else a watchdog's frantic baying.

The unattributed Wikipedia samples may be simply a literal rendering: {5}

Between the wheels of the carriages
hanging carpets folded over in two
burns a flame, and the family around it
cook their supper; in the fresh field
the horses are at pasture; beyond the camp
a tame bear lies uncaged.

William Arndt also produced a very readable version, though the diction is now a little dated:

Between Moldavian settlements
In clamorous throng the gypsies wander.
Tonight they spread their tattered tents
Encamped beside the river yonder.

Gay is their camp, in freedom gay,
Their sleep beneath the stars untroubled;
Amid the wheels of van and dray
Their sides with hanging carpets doubled,

the campfire burns, and over it bent
They cook their meal; at pasture scattered,
Their horses graze; {6}

Yevgeny Bonver's version is not particularly accurate or pleasing:

The Gypsies in the noisy throng
Stray Bessarabia around.
Today over the river, long,
They're lodging in their tents, worn out.

Like freedom their night-resting is –
And peaceful sleep the heavens under.
Between the wagons' tired wheels,
Covered with rugs, long-used in wonders,

A fire's flamed. A family's
Preparing, round it, a dinner;
A horse is gazing in the fields,
Is sleeping, free, a teamed bear-thriller. {7}

Zemfira's Song

The Gypsies has also been translated more recently by
Antony Wood, but below is the only excerpt I can find on the

Internet (it being standard practice these days for reviewers *not* to substantiate their remarks with extensive quotation, a practice I find less than honest, and indeed suspect):

Old husband, dread husband,
Stab your wife, burn your wife:
Firm I stand—I don't fear
Fire or the knife.

I hate you, despise you,
Another I love;
He has all my heart,
I shall die for my love. {8}

Clearly we can't draw many conclusions from so short a section, but the meter adopted is an irregular stress rhythm, effective but rather broken, and so differing from the original lines, which are a regular ternary dimeter, rhymed ababccdc. Antony Wood's rendering is very close to the Russian meaning, however. The Russian with meter, rhyme schemes and natural word stresses is:

Стáрый муж, грóзный муж, А (- у у – у у)
Режь меня́, жги меня́: b (у у – у у -)
Я тверда́; не бою́сь а (у у – у у -)
Ни ножа́, ни огня́. b (у у – у у -)

Ненави́жу тебя́, с (у у – у у -)
Презира́ю тебя́; с (у у – у у -)

Я друго́го люблю́, bd (u u – u u -)
Умира́ю любя́. с (u u – u u -)

And the word-for-word rendering:

Old husband, menacing husband,
Cut me, burn me:
I am firm; not afraid
no knife, no fire.

Hate you,
I despise you;
I love another
I die loving.

As I repeatedly mention, reading other efforts is an essential part of any translation, and to understand why translators have written what they have, it's often helpful to repeat the translations from their perspective, i.e. in their style and with their intentions. So, in stress verse, and preserving the sense and original rhythms more (as far as we can: the ternary rhythm tends to revert to the iambic in short lines) and ignoring the rhymes (as translators often do these days), we could write:

Husband old, menacing,
you may cut, you may burn:
I am firm, have no fear
of the knife, of the fire.

You're the one I will hate,
and the one I despise;
now I love someone else,
though I die loving him.

I don't find this particularly attractive, though Zemfira's song is a special case: most of *The Gypsies* is in tetrameters. For various reasons – rhyme, properties of the trimeter, difficulties with the anapaestic/dactylic in short lines – my present idea is to replace the ternary dimeter with an iambic trimeter, i.e. keep the six syllables and the rhyme, but aim for a more 'singing' line:

Husband old and stern,
hurt or harm your wife:
Firm am I and spurn
the fire or threatened knife.

You I hate and scorn,
find you aged and worn;
another's love I'll be,
though to death be sworn.

Main Text Translation Choices

Unless we want prose, our translation should respect Pushkin's tetrameters, but should these be fully rhymed, i.e. with masculine and feminine rhymes, or with masculine rhymes throughout, or follow current conventions, with the verse unrhymed (i.e. when it's not simply 'free verse' or

segmented prose)? Rather than argue their merits in abstract, it may be better to try and see what each produces. Unrhymed tetrameters run:

The gypsies in a noisy crowd
that far through Bessarabia roam
today are camped across the river:
in threadbare tents they spend the night.

5. How freely given is their stay
in peaceful ease beneath the sky.
Between the wagon wheels of carts
and in the half-hung rugs they sleep.

Beside the fire a family
10. is cooking food. In open fields
the horses graze, and unrestrained
a bear is tame behind the tent.

In truth the steepelands are alive
with peaceful caring families,
15. each ready on the dawn to leave,
with children's shouts and women's songs,
to beats the marching anvils bring.

At present on the nomad camp,
a silence full of sleep descends,
20. but through the quietness of the steppes
comes bark of dog or neigh of horse.

The lights are everywhere put out
and calmness deepens out. The moon
in shining from its heavenly height,
25. illuminates the quiet camp.

But in one tent alone there sits,
an old man by the glowing coals,
and, warmed by the expiring heat,
he gazes at the fields around
30. where night mists glimmer hazily.

For there his unwed daughter went
across the desolating waste.
But she was often out alone,
and would return. But now it's night,

35. and very soon the moon will leave
its heavenly refuge in the clouds,
but no Zemphira comes, and cold
the food uneaten on his plate.

But here she is. Zemphira comes,
40. a young man following in haste.
'As gypsy he is one unknown
to you, my father', the woman says.

'I bring a guest. Behind the mound
I found him in the wilderness,

45. and on this camp tonight I call
With one who would be gypsy too.

The law pursies him, certainly,
but I will be his true love now.
His name is Aleko, and he
50. will henceforth join me everywhere.

Old Man

I'm glad to meet you, have you spend
till morning with us in our tent,
or stay with us, and join our life --
just as you wish, for I'd be pleased,
55. to share this awning and our bread.
Be one of us and know our lot
of roaming poor but as we will.

And when tomorrow brings the dawn,
together in one cart we'll go.
60. You'll learn our songs and fishing spots,
our metal trade, at villages
go round with our performing bear.

Aleko

I'm joining you.

Zemfira

He will be mine,
65. for who would drive this man away?
But now it's late, the moon is soon
to sink and leave on fields a haze,
and sleep attend me nonetheless.

This rendering is very close to the prose sense of the original, with only a few expansions and circumlocutions (notably the last line).

The rhymed versions are more difficult: we have to write compact tetrameters with Pushkin's tight rhyming schemes. Our rendering has to appear natural, with the rhymes seeming inevitable — and of course exhibit a proper understanding of the original. Everything Pushkin writes has a purpose, though it's often understated by its author, who has a deft, almost eighteenth-century lightness of touch. The translation is probably better done in two stages, first a fairly literal one:

It's gypsies in their noisy way
that far through Bessarabia roam:
across the river now they stay
in rough felt tents that serve for home.

But they are free: the heavens keep
them in their wise and sovereign grace:

between the wagon wheels they sleep,
secure within a rug-hung space,

with folk toward the fireside blaze
and meal together seeming leant.
In open fields the horses graze;
a tame bear lies behind the tent.

The steppes are never short of sound
when children cry, the women round
about will sing, and anvils ring
as waiting folk across the ground
anticipate what mornings bring.

Yet all is silent, now, a force
that settles on them, self-aware:
a bark of dog or neigh of horse
comes faintly on the thin night air.

The lights are doused, and everywhere
there's calm: the coming moon is bright:
the camp beneath the heaven's care
is flooded with a silver light.

But one old man is not asleep
but from the warmth the ashes keep
still gazes from his tent to see,
across the steppelands, wide and deep,
the night mists glimmer hazily.

And somewhere out there, far from sight,
across the fields his daughter went,
and by her love of freedom sent.
But she'll come back, if now the night

is almost spent, the moon foretold
to fall from its cloud-pillared state.
Yet no Zemfira comes, and cold
the food uneaten on his plate.

But here she is. Behind her too
a young man waits impatiently.

'This man will not be known to you,
my father, but is one who'll be
henceforth my guest, and one to do
my bidding always. One I found
45. in fields behind the barrow mound.

He'll be a gypsy, will pursue
his way with us outside the law.
Aleko, now my friend, will share
his life with us, and evermore
50. will travel with me everywhere.

Old Man

Till morning I'd be glad to see

you rest beneath our canopy,
of, if you wish, for longer stays,
as by your inclinations led,
55. to share this awning and our bread

and grow accustomed to our ways
of roaming poor throughout our days.

Let us see what dawn will show
to our cart off to anywhere.
60. You'll fish or sing the songs we know
adopt our metal-working, go
the rounds with our performing bear.

Aleko

I'll stay.

Zemfira

He will be mine, for who
would dare to make it otherwise?
65. It's now grown late: the young moon too
has thrown on fields a misty hue,
and sleep is heavy on my eyes.

Working notes

There are many ways of going wrong, and though rhyme gives shape and grace, it is equally likely to produce dull, inept and/or contrived passages if we don't continually push its powers to the limit. Baudelaire's albatross is an apt image. We have to get the verse airborne even on the most mundane of matters, or, to change metaphors, to get the words resonating with fuller meanings and connotations as Pushkin does in the very plain verse that makes his *Gypsies*. Our verse has to be simple without being plebeian, mean or pinchbeck. And that can be difficult.

To take the earliest problem: in line 1, толпой means 'crowd' or 'by the crowd'. But if we use the word we're stuck with something like: *The gypsies in a noisy crowd / are down from Bessarabia way. / Today, across the river, loud / and in their tattered tents they stay* which is not too elegant. We can use 'lot', of course, but the problem remains with: *The gypsies are a noisy lot that far through Bessarabia roam. Today they're by the river spot, in tattered tents that are their home.* We don't really want to designate the group at all, as this colours our view of them: all groupings have overtones, some faintly derogatory. It seems better to avoid the problem altogether with the *It's gypsies in their noisy way* adopted above.

The problem with lines 13-19 is setting them out in chronological order: Pushkin rather anticipates. *Everything is alive in the middle of the steppes: / Concerns of peaceful families, / Finished with the morning in the path of the*

*near,/ and the Songs of wives, and the cries of children, /
And the ringing of the marching anvil* Zheleznova's solution
therefore seems sensible, which is to make the future into a
general condition: *In the vasty steppes all is noisy and
lively: / The gypsy family's anxiety / Since the early morn
on their short planned journey. So our steppes are never
short of sound*

Rhyme should not be too obvious, I think, using *see/canopy*
in lines 56-7 above rather than *Then stay till morning. I'm
content / that you should choose to share our tent.*

With those fundamentals in place, we can write something
more fluent and integrated (though still needing work):

The gypsies in their noisy way
that far through Bessarabia roam
are camped across the river, stay
in threadbare tents that make their home.

5. But they are free: the heavens keep
their welcome for this peaceful race:
between the wagon wheels they sleep:
the folded rugs give each his place.

A fire burns: around the blaze
10. are people on their dinner bent.
In open fields the horses graze;
a tame bear's loose behind the tent.

The steppelands come alive with sound
when on the morrow all are found —
15. while children bawl, and women sing —
to exit from their camping ground
to beats the marching anvils bring.

For now there's only silence where
the night for nomads takes its course.
20. The bark of dog or neigh of horse
frays thinly through the steppeland air.

The lights are doused, and everywhere
a calm collects. The moon is bright.
The camp beneath its heavenly care
25. is flooded with a silver light.

But one old man is not asleep
but from the warmth the ashes keep
still gazes from his tent to see
across the steppeland's distant sweep
30. the night mists glimmer hazily.

There went his daughter, far from sight,
so much in love of freedom grown
she often wandered on her own.
She will return, but now the night

35. is almost spent, the moon foretold

to leave its cloudy-pillared state,
yet no Zemfira comes, and cold
is poor food left upon his plate.

But here she is. Behind her too
40. a young man steps impatiently.
'This man will not be known to you,
my father, but is one who'll be

my guest tonight, this one I lead
from wildernesses where I found
45. him lost behind the barrow mound.
He will our gypsy customs heed

although much wanted by the law.
He's now my love in everything.
Wherever we may go, for sure,
50. Aleko will be following.

Old Man

Be welcome then. I'm pleased to see
you grace our tent's plain canopy
tonight, or maybe longer stays.
Be by your inclinations led
55. to share this awning and our bread
and grow accustomed to our ways
of roaming poor throughout our days.

Tomorrow in that cart will show
what routes together we can share.

60. You'll fish or learn the songs we know,
adopt our metal-working, go
the rounds with our performing bear.

Aleko

I'll stay.

Zemfira

He will be mine, for who
65. would dare to make it otherwise?
But now it's late: the young moon too
has thrown on fields a misty hue,
and sleep is heavy on my eyes.

Duplicating the feminine rhymes is another order of
difficulty, but we can adapt the previous rendering to get:

The gypsies in their noisy way
that down from Bessarabia wander
have pitched their threadbare tents and stay
tonight across the river yonder.

5. But they are free: their welcomes keep
them peacefully beneath the heavens
between the wagon wheels they sleep:

where folded rugs the hard ground leavens.

Camped round the fireside blaze
10. finds people to their dinner bending
In open fields the horses graze;
behind the tents a bear's attending.

The steppelands come alive with sound
when on the morrow echo round —
15. the children shouting, women singing —
the gysies leave their camping ground
and march in time to anvils ringing.

The night for nomads takes its course:
a sleepy silence falls, reposes.
20. With bark of dog or neigh of horse
a sound in silence interposes.

The lights are doused, and everywhere
a calm extends. The moon is shining
down its radiant, sovereign care,
25. a light that has its silver lining.

But one old man is not asleep
but from the warmth the ashes keep
still gazes from his tent flap, seeing
across the night mists' hazy sweep
30. a glimmer of some other being.

Across those wastes till out of sight
his daughter went, the independent,
always on her will attendant.
She will return, if now the night

35. be almost spent, the moon now ruling
the heavens in their clouded state,
yet no Zemfira comes, and cooling
stays the food untouched on plate.

But here she is. Behind her hurries
40. a young man also. 'Father see,
here's one to never bring you worries
although unknown, he's one to be

my welcome guest, and will endeavour
to be a gypsy. One I found
45. in fields behind the barrow mound.
He's mine tonight, and wheresoever

I may go. Outside the law,
he is, Aleko, but is sharing
our life together, one who's sure
50. to follow me, however faring.

Old Man

Till morning then. I'm glad to see
you grace our simple canopy,

of, if you wish, here longer staying,

as by your inclinations led,

55. to share this awning and our bread.

Thus wandering and poor obeying
our wish for freedom, never straying.

On the morrow we will go
together in one cart, conforming.

60. You'll fish or sing the songs we know,
adopt our metal-working, show
your mettle with our bear performing.

Aleko

I'll stay.

Zemfira

He will be mine, for who
65. would have me make my love forsaking?
It's now grown late: the young moon too
has thrown on fields a misty hue,
and sleepiness its course is taking.

In verse terms, duplicating Pushkin's full rhyme scheme
gives us another animal. It's further displaced from the
prose sense (particularly with the 'interposes' etc. nonsense)

but breaks the hard compactness of the masculine rhymes, perhaps suggesting the more fluid nature of Russian verse. All versions need more work, but the outlines should be clear. The first rendering is close to the prose sense, but emotionally a little flat. The second has some of the grace of Pushkin, but lacks the exactness of Pushkin's word choice. The third might be charming eventually, with radical redrafting, but wanders from the sense and may well, as so often happens with difficult stanza forms, become a miracle of misplaced ingenuity more than poetry as such.

So what version is best? At present it's difficult to know, and I may consider an ebook with all three versions, plus notes on the prosody and Pushkin's use of Russian for some time later in 2019. I'll keep readers posted.

Digression: Prose Versions

But what about prose? All the above notwithstanding, perhaps we'd do better with prose. Below is the best version I can find, by Roger Clarke in the Wordsworth Classics series: {9}

A noisy band of gypsies was roaming through Bessarabia. They had pitched their tattered tents for the night above the river. Their camp was as cheerful as it was free, and their sleep would be a peaceful sleep under the open sky. Between wheels of waggons half draped with rungs a fire burned; round it a family was preparing supper; in the open grassland horses were grazing; behind a tent a tame bear lay untethered. Here midst empty plains was a place of life:

families busying themselves peacefully as they made ready for a short journey the next morning, women singing, children shrieking, the travelling anvil clanging. Then the silence of sleep descended over the nomad encampment; and there was nothing to be heard in the stillness of the steppelands but the barking of dogs and the neighing of horses. Everywhere the fires had been put out; all was calm; only the moon shone from high heaven and cast her light over the quiet camp.

In one tent an old man was not asleep; he sat by the embers of his fire, warming himself on their last glow, and he looked over the distant grasslands now overlaid with nocturnal mist. His precious young daughter had gone for a stroll in the empty country. She was used to the freedom of doing what she fancied; she would come back, he knew; but he saw it was already night, and before long the moon would leave the distant heavens to the clouds. There was still no sign of Zemfira; and the old man's meagre supper was getting cold.

Then there she was. And close behind her a lad was hurrying across the steppe; the gypsy didn't recognise him at all. 'Father,' the girl said, 'I'm bringing a visitor; I found him behind the burial mound where there's nobody, and I've asked him into the camp for the night. He wants to be a gypsy like us; the law is after him: but I'll be his friend. His name's Aléko; he ready to come with me anywhere.'

Old Man

I'm glad. Stay in the shelter of our tent till morning, or spend longer with us, as you please. I'm ready to share food and living quarters with you. Be one of us. Try out our way of life, wandering in poverty and freedom; tomorrow at daybreak we'll ride off together in one waggon. Take up any job you want: work iron or sing songs and go round villages with the bear.

Aléko

I'll stay.

Zemfíra

He'll be mine: no one will separate him from me . . . But it's late . . . the young moon has set; the country's shrouded in mist; I can't hold up my head for sleep.

This is a faithful, intelligent and sensitive rendering, clearly so, but also perhaps a little flat — not through any fault of the translator but because prose is the less emphatic medium. Verse can do things that prose can't, or, at least, not easily so, without rhetorical devices that would be out of place in this simple description. And that prose leads to a few problems:

1. Is 'lad' the appropriate term for Aléko, who partners the wild Zemfíra, and on whom the tragedy turns? Pushkin is not suggesting that the callowness of youth precipitates trouble,

but someone whose faults embody the failures in us all.

2. Do gypsies sleep 'under the open sky'? The text doesn't say so, and Pushkin would have known that the Romani sleep in wagons and/or tents. The sense, I think, is rather more that the heavens keep watch over this peaceful race.

3. Is not 'precious' a trifle unfortunate? Pushkin simply implies she's important to the old man through the narrative, and the word in English also carries a disapproving sense of someone affectedly over-sensitive, which Zemfíra is not.

4. Again, is 'as she fancied' quite what's wanted? Zemfíra is not little Miss Contrary but a full-blooded and determined woman.

All this could be corrected with a little work, but I suspect it's the prolix nature of a pleasing and balanced prose that betrays the translator into filling out sentences with extra matter. All translation styles need a careful choice of words.

Postscript: The Bronze Horseman

Currently, looking at translations of Pushkin's *The Bronze Horseman*, I am even more thinking that the feminine rhyme is ill advised. Here are opening sections of the poem by three distinguished translators:

There, by the billows desolate,
He stood, with mighty thoughts elate,
And gazed; but in the distance only
A sorry skiff on the broad spate
Of Neva drifted seaward, lonely.
The moss-grown miry banks with rare

Hovels were dotted here and there
Where wretched Finns for shelter crowded;
The murmuring woodlands had no share
Of sunshine, all in mist beshrouded. {10}

A wave-swept shore, remote, forlorn:
Here stood he,
rapt in thought and drawn
To distant prospects. Broad and chartless
The river ran, along it borne
A lonely skiff, rough-hewn and artless.
Darker against the marshy green
Of moss-grown banks appeared some mean
Log huts: the poor Finns' habitation;
And forests which had never seen
The mist-veiled sun's illumination {11}

On a deserted, wave-swept shore,
He stood – in his mind great thoughts grow –
And gazed afar. The northern river
Sped on its wide course him before;
One humble skiff cut the waves' silver.
On banks of mosses and wet grass
Black huts were dotted there by chance –
The miserable Finn's abode;
The wood unknown to the rays
Of the dull sun, by clouds stowed,
Hummed all around. {12}

The Russian text is:

На берегу пустынных волн
Стоял он, дум великих полн,
И вдаль глядел. Пред ним широко
Река неслася; бедный чёлн
По ней стремился одиноко.
По мшистым, топким берегам
Чернели избы здесь и там,
Приют убогого чухонца;
И лес, неведомый лучам
В тумане спрятанного солнца,
Кругом шумел. {13}

The Yandex code translation shows how simple is the prose sense:

On the shore of desert waves
He stood, full of great thoughts,
And looked away. Before him widely
River necklace; poor shuttle
On it sought to.
On mossy, swampy shores
Blackened huts here and there,
Shelter wretched Finn;
And the wood unknown to the rays
In the fog of the hidden sun,
It was noisy.

Many other translations can be found on line, at least in selections, {14} but few are acceptable verse. Some are

fairly dreadful: wrenched accents, tin ear, contrived rhymes. In short, to anything that reads naturally, with a seeming inevitability in the lines that verse deepens into significance, the feminine rhyme is a decided obstacle.

eBook

I have now completed the translation of Pushkin's *The Gypsies*: the free [ebook](#) can be download from Ocaso Press site. Readers will find a formal translation with facing Russian text, an Introduction to the poem, and an Appendix containing a literal word-for-rendering and a full description of Pushkin's prosody. Pushkin's rhyme schemes are faithfully reproduced, but as masculine rhymes only, for reasons given above and in the ebook itself.

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Audio Recording

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Illustration

1. Gypsy Woman by Nicolai Yaroshenko.

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Pushkin Gypsies

Alexander Pushkin was born in 1799 to an ancient aristocratic family and died of a duelling wound in 1837. In that short and often thwarted life, Pushkin modernized the Russian language, widening its vocabulary, removing archaic terms, and employing tones of address that would make Russian a fit vehicle for a century of poets, novelists and short story writers, many of them deservedly world famous.

Published in 1827, *The Gypsies* is the last of Puskin's southern cycle of romantic narrative poems, and the most popular. In it Pushkin moves away from the earlier influences of Byron and Chateaubriand, and fashions something cooler and more exact, a style that will serve him well with the later *Eugene Onegin* and *The Bronze Horseman*.

Prince Mirsky called it: 'among the greatest works of Püshkin. . . The Gypsies are not treated realistically but merely as ideal representatives of a natural state of human society. . . a strong affirmation of freedom. . . and patently a plea for anarchism. It was Pushkin's first attempt at tragedy and one of his greatest. It is less easy to do justice to its poetical beauty, and speaking of it, one is too likely to forget the lesson of restraint that is the best lesson to be learned from Pushkin. The verse, less fluent and voluptuous than in *The Captive* and in *The Fountain*, is tighter, fuller, and more saturated with complex expressiveness. Such

passages as the old gypsy's tale of Ovid, the end of the poem (with the speech of the old man on Aleko's murder), and especially the epilogue, are unsurpassable summits of poetry.'

A free [Pushkin Gypsies e-book](#) in pdf format.

Excerpt (Opening of The Gypsies)

The gypsies in their noisy way
that far through Bessarabia roam
are camped across the river, stay
in threadbare tents that make their home.

5. But they are free: the heavens keep
their welcome for this peaceful race:
between the wagon wheels they sleep:
the folded rugs give each his place.

A fire burns: around the blaze
10. are people on their dinner bent.
In open fields the horses graze;
a tame bear's loose behind the tent.

The steppelands come alive with sound
when on the morrow all are found —
15. while children cry, and women sing —
to exit from their camping ground
to beats the marching anvils bring.

For now there's only silence where
the night for nomads takes its course.
20. The bark of dog or neigh of horse
comes thinly through the steppeland air.

The lights are doused, and everywhere
a calm collects. The moon is bright.
The camp beneath its heavenly care
25. is flooded with a silver light.

But one old man is not asleep
and from the warmth the ashes keep
still gazes from his tent to see
across the steppeland's distant sweep
30. the night mists glimmer hazily.

There went his daughter, far from sight —
so much in love of freedom grown
she often wandered on her own.
She will return, but now the night

35. is dark about him, moon foretold
to leave its cloudy-pillared state,
yet no Zemfira comes, and cold
the scraps of food left on his plate.

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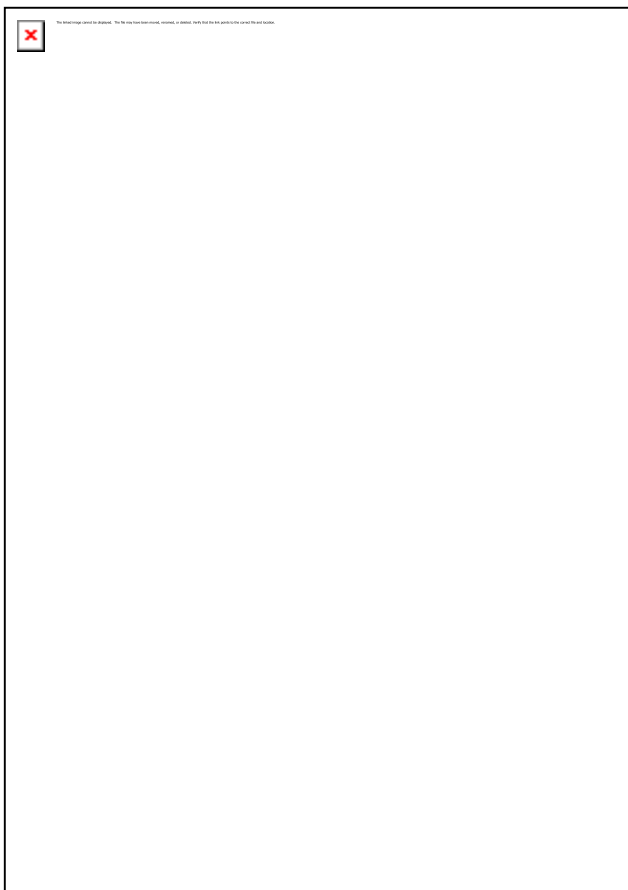
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Tiutchev: Autumn Evening



Tiutchev's poetry seems insubstantial, hardly worth the writing down: {1}

Федор Тютчев «Осенний вечер»

Есть в светлости осенних вечеров
Умильная, таинственная прелесть!..
Зловещий блеск и пестрота деревьев,
Багряных листьев томный, легкий шелест,

Туманная и тихая лазурь
Над грустно-сиротеющей землею
И, как предчувствие сходящих бурь,
Порывистый, холодный ветер порою,

Ущерб, изнеможенье — и на всем
Та кроткая улыбка увяданья,
Что в существе разумном мы зовем
Божественной стыдливостью страданья!

The machine code translation is:

Fedor Tyutchev: "Autumn Evening"

Is in the lordship of the autumn evenings
A charming, mysterious charm! ..
The ominous brilliance and variegation of trees,
Scarlet leaves languid, light rustling,

Foggy and quiet azure
Above the sad-orphaned earth
And, like a premonition of coming storms,
A gusty, cold wind sometimes,

Damage, exhaustion - and everything
That gentle smile of wilting,
That in the rational being we call
Divine bashfulness of suffering! ..

Analysis

Есть в свет лос ти осен них ве че ров 5а
У миль на я, та инст вен на я пре лесь!..5В
Зло ве щий блеск и пест ро та де рев, 5а
Баг ря ных листь ев том ный, лег кий ше лест, 5В

Ту ман на я и ти ха я ла зурь 5с
Над груст но-си ро те ю щей зем ле ю 5D
И, как пред чувст ви е схо дя щих бурь, 5с
По ры вис тый, хо лод ный ветр по ро ю, 5D

У щерб, из не мо жень е — и на всем 5е
Та крот ка я у лыб ка у вя да нья, 5F
Что в су щест ве ра зум ном мы зо вем 5е
Бо жест вен ной стыд ли вость ю стра дань я!.. 5F

Fëdor Ivánovich Tyútchev (1803-73)

Outwardly, Tyútchev's was one of the most unpoetic of lives. He was born into the ancient nobility, educated at the University of Moscow, and entered the diplomatic service, remaining abroad in Europe for the following 22 years. He married a Bavarian member of the aristocracy and regarded Munich as his true home. He corresponded with Heine and Schilling, sent some verse to Pushkin's *Sovreménnik* over the 1836-38 period, where they were published over the signature of 'F.T.' but attracted no attention. Tyútchev lost his first wife but married a second time, again to a Bavarian, and was posted to Turin, which he detested. Without permission he left his post of chargé d'affaires, and was expelled from the diplomatic service, settling as a private

citizen in Munich. In 1844 he returned to Russia and there obtained a post in the Censorship. In 1854 his poetry first appeared in book form, but Tyútchev was now a pugnacious and hardened reactionary: the poems were strongly nationalistic and Slavophile, making 'painful reading' for liberal opinion. In 1873 he died, after a stroke that left only his brain operational. {2-3}

Tyútchev was rediscovered by Nekrásov, and remains celebrated for the intense love poetry that has a passion and poignancy like nothing else in Russian. They were written for Mlle Denísieva, his daughter's governess, with whom he had an affair that tainted his reputation and ruined hers. When, in 1864, Mlle Denísieva died, Tyútchev was plunged into grief and despair, his guilt only sharpened by the forbearance shown by his wife and the brilliant figure he still cut in society as Russia's greatest wit and conversationalist. The poems are the more remarkable in that he used Russian infrequently: his wives did not speak Russian, and Tyútchev's everyday speech and correspondence was in French. {2-3}

Tyútchev is now regarded as the true descendent of Pushkin: the little poems sent to *Sovreménnik* are known by heart across Russia and the love poems speak with an anguished directness that no one will envy. All the poetry, except some the savage invective of the political pieces, which sometimes rise into true eloquence, is pantheistic, profoundly pessimistic and dualistic, indeed Manichaen. The

Cosmos around us is always at the mercy of Chaos. Our existence here is fleeting and precarious. Tyútchev's Russian is a little more archaic than Pushkin's, and he has none of the great poet's range, but the romantic style marries vivid imagery with classical order. {2-6}

In the light of John Dewey's excellent *Mirror of the Soul: A Life of the Poet Fyodor Tyutchev* (2010, Brimstone Press, but kindly made available as a free Pdf ebook at <http://www.tyutchev.org.uk/MOTS.html>) {7} the biographical notes here and on the second Tyutchev webpage are very incomplete and somewhat misleading. Tyutchev is not the dry civil servant who unaccountably managed to write some of the greatest lyrical poetry in Russian, but a much more complex individual: the polished diplomat but also sensitive student of poetry from his earliest days, a serious-minded and gifted man, but also impractical, somewhat lazy and with a genius for romantic attachments that caused no end of grief. I will try to update this note in due course.

Final Translation

We have to convey Tyutchev's restraint and musicality, perhaps as something like this:

Autumn Evening

What lordly airs the autumn evening has;
what charms are here, mysterious and sweet.
The trees in brilliant reds are various

as leaves fall soft, unthreatening at our feet.

A blue that's lightly touched with fog now forms
above this sadly-orphaned forest spot:
a premonition too of coming storms,
of cold and gusty winds, as like as not.

Exhaustion, injury, a going hence,
from everything a smile that's fading out:
and some intelligence around we sense
as modesty in suffering, and devout.

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Illustration

1. Clodt, M. (1874) Evening view in village.

http://lj.rossia.org/users/john_petrov/179587.html, Public Domain,

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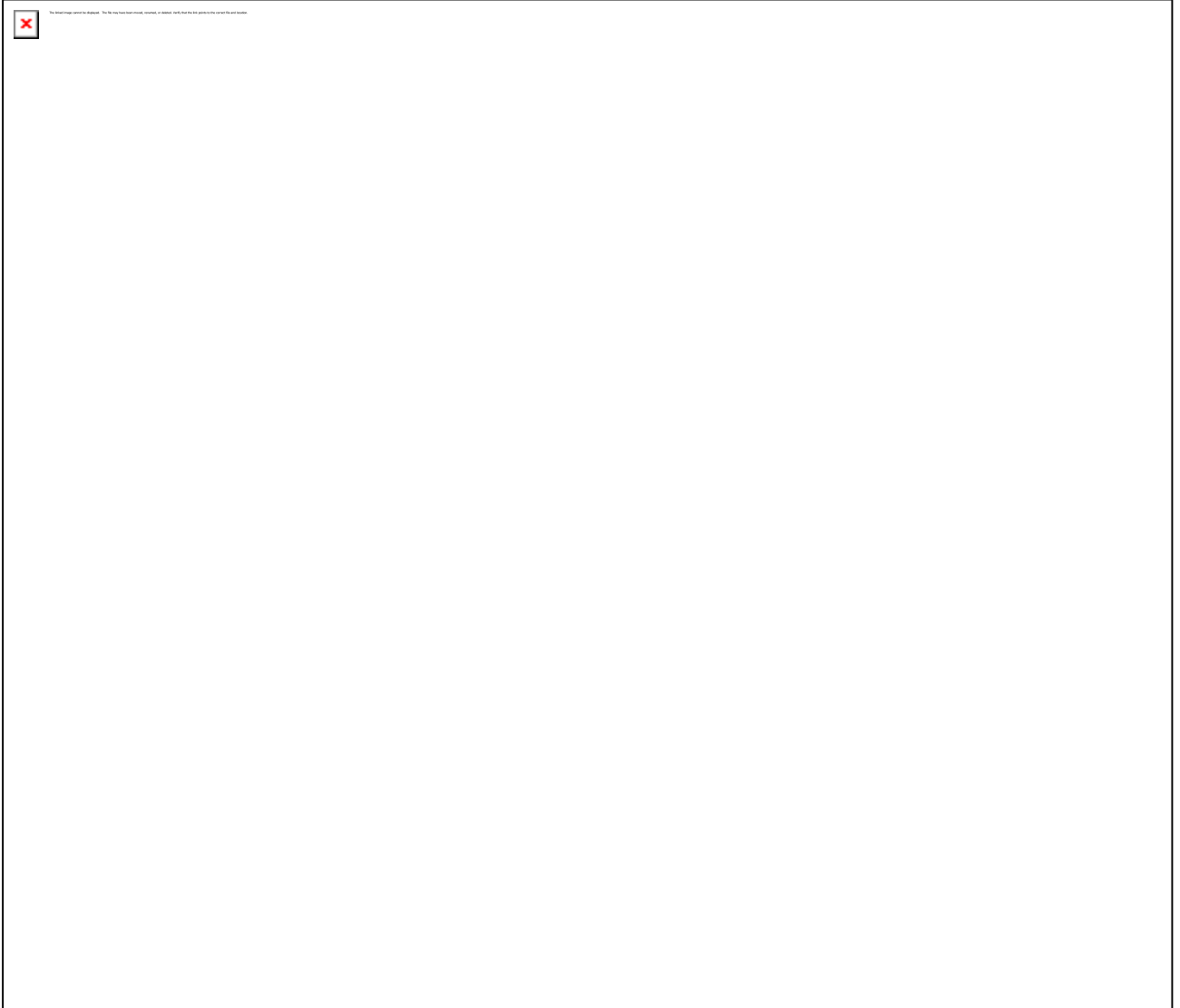
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Tyutchev: Silentium



The Pool by Borisov Musatov 1902 (177cm x 216cm)
Tempora. Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow {1} Musatov (1870-1905) was born in Saratov, Russia. A childhood injury made him a humpbacked, and his health was never good anyway. He was also plagued with money troubles till the last years of his life, when his work began to sell. Borisov-Musatov

returned to Russia in 1898 and was almost immediately overcome by its 'fin de siècle' world-weariness, from which he escaped into a half-illusory world of the 19th century nobility, their parks and country-seats. {2-3}

Silentium is a well-known poem that anticipated Symbolism. The Russian is:

SILENTIUM! *

Молчи, скрывайся и таи
И чувства и мечты свои -
Пускай в душевной глубине
Встают и заходят оне
Безмолвно, как звезды в ночи,-
Любуйся ими - и молчи.

Как сердцу высказать себя?
Другому как понять тебя?
Поймёт ли он, чем ты живёшь?
Мысль изречённая есть ложь.
Взрывая, возмутишь ключи,-
Питайся ими - и молчи.

Лишь жить в себе самом умей -
Есть целый мир в душе твоей
Таинственно-волшебных дум;
Их оглушит наружный шум,
Дневные разгонят лучи,-
Внимай их пенью - и молчи!.. {1}

* Latin for *Silence*.

And machine code translation:

SILENTIUM!

Shut up, hide and hide
And your feelings and dreams -
Let it be in the depths of the soul
Get up and go on
Silently, like the stars in the night, -
Admire them - and be quiet.

How can you express yourself to your heart?
How else can another understand you?
Will he understand what you are living?
The thought that is uttered is a lie.
Blowing up, disturbing the keys, -
Eat them - and be quiet.

Only to live in yourself,
There is a whole world in your soul
Mysterious and magical doom;
They will be deafened by outside noise,
Daytime disperses the rays, -
Listen to them with a whip - and be silent! ..

Analysis

The piece is written in iambic tetrameters, generally rhymed aabccb, though lines 4 and 5 end in feminine rhymes and are a little irregular. Strictly, they should be scanned as:

Вста ют и (stressed word missing) за хо дят о не 4В
Без молв но, (stressed word missing) как звез ды в но чи,-
4С

but perhaps can be read as:

Вста ют и за хо дят о не 4b
Без молв но, как звез ды в но чи,- 4с

Otherwise, the poem is regular:

Мол чи, скры вайс я и та и 4а
И чувст ва и меч ты сво и - 4а
Пус кай в ду шев ной глу би не 4b
Вста ют и за хо дят о не 4В
Без молв но, как звез ды в но чи,- 4С
Лю буйс я и ми - и мол чи. 4с

Как сер дцу выс ка зать се бя? 4d
Дру го му как по нять те бя? 4d
Пой мёт ли он, чем ты жи вёшь? 4е
Мысль из ре чён на я есть ложь. 4е
Взры ва я, воз му тишь клю чи,- 4f
Пи тай ся и ми - и мол чи. 4f

Лишь жить в себе самом умей - 4g
Есть целый мир в душе твоёй 4g
Та инстинктов-волшебных дум; 4h
Их оглушит на ружейный шум, 4h
Дневные разгонят лучи,- 4i
Внимай их пенью - и молчи!.. 4i

Fédor Ivánovich Tyútchev (1803-73)

Though Tyútchev professed to see his poetry as a pastime, it has a distinctly metaphysical flavour, where nature is a process, something that extracts order from chaos, as do the Greek myths he sometimes incorporated, and the German philosophy he read. Man's psyche, or 'soul' as he called it, is one of vague troubles, inarticulate aspirations, dilemmas or even perversities. The psyche is aroused at dubious hours and in abnormal states: in insomnias at night, in dreams or over storm-ridden seas. The nighttime sphere gradually emerged in his thinking as the primordial chaos in the myths of antiquity. In *Silentium*, the abyss of the ineffable is not the outer world but inside. {2-3}

The nature poems reflect a spontaneous love for the earth, which is expressed in direct statements. Many poems express no more than moods and aimless meditations, often at the turning points of the seasons: spring brings elation, joy and promise, the autumn brings melancholia and reflection. The style throughout is elevated -- solemn and rhetorical in the earlier pieces, with some eighteenth-century relish for pointed comment, but later less formal. All the work was musical, and much is to a consistently high

standard, though of course reactionary to liberal opinion in the late pro-Slavic poetry. 'Silentium' anticipated Symbolism. {2-3}

Final Translation

As in the *Autumn Evening*, Tiutchev's musicality is what we have to aim for:

Silentium

Be silent, hide yourself, conceal
the things you dream of, things you feel:
As the stars in motion, let
these marvels from ascension set.
Let depths of soul then stay unheard.
In awe reflect without a word!

The flowering heart is not divined
so can some other know your mind?
Or say what you are living by
when words once spoken are a lie?
The water's clouded when it's stirred,
so drink the spring without a word:

So live within your self's control:
a world is centered in your soul:
a world of strange enchanted thoughts
that noisy flare outside distorts.
By day's hard glare be undeterred
take in those songs without a word

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Audio Recording

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X0TWyMvOO6w>

Illustration

1. The Pool (1902) by Victor Borisov-Musatov
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Russian Versification: Reading the Poetry

Early Russian Poetry

Though we are more familiar with its novelists and short-story writers, the glory of Russian literature to Russians is their poetry. It did not suddenly begin with Pushkin, however, but goes back to the eleventh century, when the Byzantine influence combined with old Slavonic to create highly literate tales — part prose, part poetry — that urged Kievan unity in the face of Turkic invasion. The greatest work is the 12th century Lay of Igor's Conquest, but a courtly culture continued throughout the Middle Ages, one which has come down to us as *byliny*: heroic folksongs. In later medieval times these *byliny* were sung by *skomorokhi*, fraternities of wandering minstrels, but Russian written poetry seems to have emerged independently in the middle seventeenth century, in ways that are still obscure, no doubt influenced by *byliny* and the *skomorokhi*, but with a syllabic versification imported from Poland. {1}

The later, urbane and cosmopolitan poetry, which could hold its own against European examples, owed much to the westernising reforms of Peter the Great (1689-1725). Indeed the first poets were court officials, beholden to the tsar for patronage and any liberty to write at all. Competent didactic poetry and satire was being written by the mid 18th century, and these forms were regularised by Lomonosov (1711-65) and given their greatest expression by Gavrila

Derzhavin (1743-1816) and Aleksandr Radishchev (1749-1802). {1,3}

Brief History of Russian Poetry

Not surprisingly, late eighteenth century poetry tended to the serious, uplifting and civic-minded. Such state-sponsored poetry ceased in the early nineteenth century, however, and was replaced by Salon-influenced aristocrats, who wrote on more personal matters for their friends. Nikolai Karamzin brought poetry closer to the spoken idiom. Konstantin Batiushkov drew on Italian models, and Vasily Zhukovsky on German models, but the great poet of the epoch, and indeed of all epochs, was Aleksandr Pushkin. Though continually assailed by censorship, from Pushkin's golden pen poured out a great mass of work, from insults to religious verse, from love poems to fairy tales, and from comedy to tragic works, all with a great surface clarity that was only approached by Evgenii Baratynsky. After Pushkin's early death, the golden age of Russian poetry enjoyed a brief flowering in Mikhail Lermontov and then gave way to prose writers, many deservedly famous. There were still outstanding poets in the nineteenth century, but they worked independently, not as tight-knit groups with common aims. Nikolai Nekrasov wrote socially-engaged poems on the monstrous suffering of the Russian poor. Fedor Tiutchev wrote in the more speculative vein of Romanticism. Afanasy Fet withdrew to his estates and wrote in an introspective verse in the 'art for art's sake' manner. {1}

The 1890-1920 period is called Russia's 'Silver Age' though, excepting the incomparable Pushkin, its poetry is not inferior to the previous 'Golden Age'. Valery Briusov wrote in the Symbolist vein of European Decadence. That Symbolism took a religious turn in the poetry of Zinaida Gippius. Vladimir Soloviev's philosophic and mystical poetry was the inspiration of three outstanding poets who sought to transcend the physical world: Aleksandr Blok, Andrei Bely and Vyacheslav Ivanov. Mikail Zuzmin was not a Symbolist but had similarly wide-ranging interests and talents. Two movements came to the fore after 1910: Acmeism (a neoclassical form of modernism) and Futurism. The great poets of Acmeism were Anna Akhmatovna and Ossip Mandel'sham. The Futurists embraced technology and/or a neo-primitivism: Aleksei Kruchenykh, Velimir Khlebnikov and Vladimir Mayakovsky. Independent of these movements, but also rising from the ferment of the Revolution were Boris Pasternak and Marina Tsvetaeva, both producing linguistically brilliant, challenging and emotively compelling work.{1}

Political orthodoxy and then the Stalin years asphyxiated poetry. Some poets emigrated but found little of a receptive audience. Some remained in Russia, being persecuted by the state (Akhmatova) or murdered (Mandel'shtam). Tsvetaeva spent hard years as an émigré, returning at last to Russia where, obscure and destitute, she took her own life. Poetry continued to be written under the communist regime, of course, but is of mixed quality. A more unofficial

poetry emerged after Stalin's death, however, with Evgeny Evtushenko, and from the seventies appeared many avant-garde practitioners, of whom the best known to western audiences may be Joseph Brodsky. Censorship disappeared with the fall of the Soviet Union, but poets also lost their dissident status, being forced to compete with more popular forms of entertainment. As in the west, contemporary poetry in Russia retains a small but devoted readership. {1}

Versification

It is difficult to convey the flavour of Russian verse, but it is worth quoting Maurice Bowra's assessment:

'For poetry Russian is superbly fitted. Its rich and expressive syntax enables it to dispense with many artifices required by English. Its strong stress-accent allows it to fall easily into almost any kind of metre. It varied and uncorrupted vowels, its abundance of liquid consonants, its combination of long and short words, its large vocabulary, its affectionate diminutives, all fit it for verse. It is rich in rhymes not merely single but double and even triple. It can have the monumental conciseness of Latin, the magnificence of English, the subtlety of French. The only language with which it may be compared in Greek, and to that it is inferior. For Greek has all the ease and fluency of Russian, all its adaptability and variety and expressiveness, but it is more muscular, more masculine. It rises without effort to sterner altitudes for which Russian is less fitted. But with this exception, Russian is perhaps of all European languages the most gifted by nature for poetry.' {RP12}

He also remarked:

'When we come to Russian poetry from English or French or Italian, we feel at first that its tones are quieter, its colours more subdued, its subjects less adventurous, its range more limited. It is not merely that Russia has had no Renaissance, no Reformation, no Grand Siècle, nor that the centuries in which it was severed from Europe deprived it of the historical development which created our own civilisation; it is that even in the nineteenth century the world revealed in Russian poetry is much quieter, much closer to common life, than we should expect in the age of Shelley and Hugo. . . Exaggeration, rhetoric, unfettered fancy, histrionic gestures, are not in the Russian tradition.' {RP12}

Rhyme retains a key role, even in Modernist works. The position of the caesura (a pause in the syntax or logic of the sentence) can be a defining feature. Feminine lines (ending - u) are common, and the verse is more fluid and delicately patterned than strict English measures allow. There are indeed several systems of versification, reflecting the nature of the Russian language itself and the influence of foreign traditions (notably the German and Polish). {1}

Lay of Igor's Conquest

Не лепо ли ны бяшет, братие, начяти старыми словесы
трудных повестий о полку Игореве, Игоря Святославлича!

Начати же ся той песни по былинамъ сего времени, а не по замышлению Бояню! {3}

(Is it not foolish for us, brethren, to begin in the manner of ancient lays the difficult stories about Igor's campaign, Igor the son of Svyatoslavich! rather let us begin this song in accordance with events of our own time, and not on the plan of Boyan!)

Byliny

Не бумажные листочки расстилаются,
Расстилается сын перед батюшкой,
Он и просит себе благословеньица:
«Ох ты, гой еси, родимый, милый батюшка! {4}

(Not a damp oak on the ground, / Not paper leaves spread out, / The son is stretched out before the father, / He asks for a blessing: / "Oh, you, dear father, dear father of mine!)

Syllabic Verse

Syllable verse is based on the number of syllables in a line, no more than that. Unlike syllable verse in English, a twentieth century variety of free verse, syllabic verse was a brief eighteenth century phase that was superseded by the syllabo-tonic system that is still largely in use today. {1}

Syllabo-Tonic

The syllabo-tonic system is superficially similar to our own sense of meter with its regular pattern of stressed (-) and unstressed (u) syllables. There are seven constituent 'feet' making up metre in Russian poetry: {1}

Iambic: u -

Trochaic: - u

Dactylic: - u u

Amphibrachic: u - u (ternary metre)

Anapaestic: u u -

Pyrrhic: u u

Spondee: - -

All are used much more widely than is the case with us, where the iambic is the great workhorse of English poetry, generally in pentameters or tetrameters. Russian verse is more varied in line length and metre.

How a Russian word is stressed has to be learnt or looked up in the dictionary, however: it is not disclosed by simply inspecting the word. {2} Russian words may or may not have a stressed syllable, but never have a secondary stress. One word, of whatever number of syllables, can therefore have no more than one syllable stressed. Our English word 'secondary', for example, carries a secondary stress on the third syllable: **se** con **da** ry. In Russian that would have to be **se** con da ry. In English we could write an acceptable tetrameter as: It **has** / a **sec** / on **da** / ry **stress**. But in

Russian, at best, we could only write: It **has** / a **sec** / on da / ry **stress**. In fact many Russian words carry no inherent stress at all, so the same line in Russian might run as: It has / a **sec** / on da / ry stress. Just one syllable is stressed in the whole line. {1}

It was to avoid such metrically shapeless lines that the convention arose of giving an unvoiced stress (accent in Nabokov's terminology) to syllables: It **has** / a **sec** / on **da** / ry **stress**, where only **sec** is heard on reading aloud. The others are 'sensed' or 'heard' only in the mind. But, however artificial the convention, there had to be rules. Only verbs, nouns, adjectives and adverbs could carry an unvoiced stress, and then generally on the second syllable of the word. Prepositions and conjunctions couldn't carry an unvoiced stress, but personal pronouns could. To add to the complications, it was possible for lines to end with an unstressed syllable, the so-called feminine lines (- u). Such lines are very common in Russian verse, which has borrowed a convention from the Polish language, where most words end with an unstressed syllable. It was even possible for lines to end with two unstressed syllables (- u u), though they would generally have to rhyme. Those extra unstressed syllables do not change the terminology, however, and a tetrameter plus pyrrhic ending (u u), for example, is still counted as a tetrameter. Acceptable tetrameters can have 8, 9 or 10 syllables, therefore, and anything from 0 to 4 voiced stresses. That being the case, it is sometimes difficult to discern the metre immediately, but some lines in a poem will

usually have their full complement of voiced stresses, and their metres will give the metre of the whole poem. {1}

The tetrameter in this passage from Pushkin's 'The Prophet' has a regular meter of 4 stresses to the alternate masculine and feminine lines, but the rhythm, — i.e. the stresses actually realized or voiced — is much more variable. Only line 2 has all four stresses realized. Lines 1 and 4 have three stresses realised, and line 3 only two. {5}

Духовной жаждою томим,
В пустыне мрачной я влачился,
И шестикрылый серафим
На перепутье мне явился.

(Languishing with spiritual thirst, / I dragged myself
through a gloomy desert, / And a six-winged seraph / I
came to at the crossroads.)

This trochaic tetrameter comes from Pasternak's Hamlet.
{6}

Гул затих. Я вышел на подмости.
Прислонясь к дверному косяку,
Я ловлю в далёком отголоске
Что случится на моём веку́.

(The rumble ceased. I went out on the stage. / Leaning
against the door jamb, / I catch in a distant echo / What will

happen in my time.)

Dactylic is the commonest of the ternary meters: Fet {7}

Буря на небе вечернем
Моря сердитого шум —
Буря на море и думы,
Много мучительных дум —

(The storm in the evening sky / Sea angry noise — / Storm
on the sea and thoughts, / Many painful thoughts —)

This amphibrachic comes from Lermontov's The Angel {8}

По небу полуночи ангел летел,
И тихую песню он пел;
И месяц, и звёзды, и тучи толпой
Внимали той песне святой.

(In the middle of the night the angel flew, / And he sang a
quiet song; / And the month, and the stars, and the clouds
by the crowd / We listened to that holy song.)

Blok's To the Muse provides this anapaestic: {9}

Есть в напевах твоих сокровенных
Роковая о гибели весть.
Есть проклятье заветов священных,
Поругание счастья есть.

(There are in your tunes the secret / Fateful death of the
message. / There is a curse of the covenants of the sacred, /
The blasphemy is of happiness.)

Some further variation was allowed. Iambic lines could start with a spondee (- -). Some lines have stresses on the first and fourth syllables, an arrangement that Nabokov termed a 'tilt'. Most importantly, words that *do* have an inherently stressed syllable, however, must retain that stress when put together as verse: that inherent stress cannot be masked or lost by arranging words astutely. {1}

Russian verse is therefore less regimented by metre than English. Conversely, rhyme is more important, strictly observed until recently, even by Revolutionary and Modernist poems. Rhyme needs a stressed vowel and adjacent consonant (but can be followed by one or two unstressed syllables that do not have to rhyme). Rhyme is based on sound, not letters, moreover, vowels notwithstanding. The rules governing rhyme were also stricter at first, matching by parts of speech: a noun had to rhyme with another noun, for example. Such rules were relaxed in the nineteenth century, and consonant pairs (e.g. d/t) could also serve in rhymes if devoiced, but rhyme still had to make meaningful connections.

Clearly, the syllabo-tonic system is a convention, highly artificial, but one that has served well for two centuries of

Russian poetry. {1}

Accentual Verse

Accentual verse is defined on the number of *realized* stresses, i.e. regardless of the overall number of syllables. Most poets from the 18th century to the present used the syllabo-tonic system, but accentual verse also occurs, particularly in the 20th century. Dol'nik verse is a transitional form where accentual verse scans as syllabo-tonic. {1} Blok's dol'nik can be very regular: {10}

Крыльцо Ее словно паперть.
Вхожу — и стихает гроза.
На столе — узорная скатерть.
Притаились в углу образа.

На лице Ее — нежный румянец,
Тишина озаренных теней.
В душе — кружащийся танец
Моих улетевших дней.

(Her porch is like a church's porch. / I enter and the storm subsides. / On the table is a patterned tablecloth. / The icons lurk in the corner. // On Her face there is a gentle blush, / The silence of illuminated shadows. / In soul — a whirling dance / My days gone by.)

Though this may seem to have syllabo-tonic lines, there are

difficulties in so reading it. Line 2 could be amphibrachic trimer (stresses on syllables 2,5 and 8) and lines 4 and 6 as anapaestic trimeter (stresses on syllables 3, 6 and 9). But none of the other lines fit this pattern, and it's best to simply count the stresses: it's accentual verse with some similarities to a syllabo-tonic form.

Rhymeless Verse

Rhyme is crucial to Russian verse: the so-called free verse, lines without rhyme, is a late development. Nonetheless, there was also blank verse, used in the late 18th to early 19th century, where the lines do not rhyme, but where the caesura plays a leading role. Whatever its place in one line must be reproduced in all lines. {1} In this example from Pushkin's Boris Godunov the caesura comes after the second foot: {11}

Ещё одно, / последнее сказанье –
И летопись / окончена моя,
Исполнен долг, / завещанный от бога
Мне грешному. / Недаром многих лет
Свидетелем / господь меня поставил
И книжному / искусству вразумил;

(One more, last narration – / And the Chronicle is over, /
Duty fulfilled, bequeathed from God / I am a sinner. Not
for many years / Did he place me as a witness / And

enlightened me in the art of books;)

Other Aspects

Enjambment is more common in later Russian verse, and stanzas may or may not wholly enclose the meaning. Russian verse also uses a poetic diction, rather grand in 18th century verse when poets were court officials, and employed church Slavonicisms. French and polite society came to influence word choice in the nineteenth century, but diction could be close to the vernacular by the close of the century. Much depends on the poet and topic. Nekrasov incorporated common words and expressions in his civic verse of social conscience, but Tyutchev employed a more elevated diction. Assonance and rhetoric is as common in Russian verse as English, but poets like Batinshkov could employ hiatus (similar conjoining vowels) to obtain melodious effects. The elaborate Russian case system allows a freer word order than is possible in English. {1}

Vladimir Nabokov's Contribution

Russian delights in long words of six or seven or more syllables, where English does not. {12} Polysyllabic words in fact create all kinds of problems in English verse, and are studiously avoided. {13} In notes to his Eugene Onegin translation, Nabokov reserves the word 'stress' for the underlying (i.e. not necessarily voiced) unvarying pattern of the iambic rhythm, and uses the word 'accent' to describe

where the accent falls in speaking a line. Nabokov also recognises what he calls a 'scud' and 'tilts'. A scud is an unaccented stress (a common feature of Russian verse). Tilts are various patterns of accented and unaccented syllables: a 'duplex tilt', for example, is a disyllabic word where (unusually) the accent falls on the first syllable in ordinary speech. He also contrasts English and Russian tetrameters as follows:

English

1. Scudless lines are more common than scudded lines.
2. Sequences of scudded lines are short.
3. Scuds are frequently associated with weak monosyllables, duplex tilts, and scudded rhymes (in the final foot)
4. Scuds in feet 1 and 2 occur about as frequently as in foot 3; scuds in foot 4 are rare. The line is weighted accentually towards its end.
5. Feminine rhymes are scarce, insipid, or appear as burlesque.
6. Elisions are relatively common.

Russian

1. Scudded lines are much more common than scudless lines.
2. Scuds often form linked patterns from line to line, often in sequences of twenty or more lines. Sequences of scudless lines rarely occur in sequences longer than two or three

lines.

3. Scuds are frequently associated with the unaccented syllables of long words; there are almost no duplex tilts. Rhymes are not scudded (i.e there is no scud in the final foot).

4. Scuds in foot 3 are by far the most common. The line is weighted accentually towards its beginning.

5. Feminine rhymes are as frequent as masculine ones.

6. There are strictly speaking no elisions of any kind.

Linguistically, the details are complex and contested, with some authors arguing that Russian has an intrinsic trochaic metre: 'a trochaic foot underlies the Russian metrical structure and emerges in both default stress and rhythmic alternations.' {14}

Transcription Services

Online translation services that also provide a transcription of the Russian, (i.e. an approximation in English letters of how the Russian words sound), are useful for beginners, but should be used with caution. Their coding may not capture all the pronunciation rules. Спасибо can be transcribed as 'spasibo', for example, because the coding does not recognize that the Russian unstressed 'o' is pronounced as an 'a'. To put the matter more exactly, these are transliteration services rather than transcription.

Russian words are generally pronounced as written, but,

ignoring some complications, is also subject to these rules:

Stress is heavier than in English, and harder to predict. As noted above, the stress pattern for a word has to be learnt or looked up in the dictionary. Different forms of the same word may have different stress patterns. Рука for 'hand' is stressed on the last syllable (ruka) , but the plural, Руки, is stressed on the first (ruki).

Hard and soft consonants sound quite different to the Russian ear, and the ъ and ь indications are usually transcribed, often as " and '. The letters е ё и ю я and ь make the preceding consonants soft, except when these preceding consonants are ж ц and ш, which are always kept hard (i.e. with no 'y' sound). The voiced consonants б в г д ж з turn into unvoiced equivalents consonants when appearing at the ends of words, and if they come immediately before an unvoiced consonant, i.e. к п с т ф х ц ч ш щ. The voiced consonants then sound as a p, f k t sh and s respectively. Similarly, the unvoiced consonants become voiced when appearing immediately before б г д ж or з.

Pronouns are read as though joined to the following word.

Pronunciation of the vowels о е and я changes according to whether are stressed or not. An unstressed о sounds like а. An unstressed е sounds like an unstressed и. The vowel я in the syllable before the stressed syllable also sounds rather

like и.

Pronunciation varies a little with dialect, and several common words have simplified pronunciations. In the Moscow dialect, Что (what) is pronounced 'shto'. ero (his) is pronounced yevo. Пожалуйста (please) is often pronounced pa-zhal-sta. Здравствуй (hello) is pronounced zdra-stvooy-tye. Сегодня (today) is pronounced sve-vod-nya. Радио is pronounced ra-dee-o because of foreign origin. And so on: this is only an introduction.

A Further Note on Rhyme

As the rules governing rhyme become more complicated in later Russian poetry, it may better to set them all out more fully here.

Rhymes may be masculine (stress on the last syllable, feminine (stress of the second syllable) or dactylic (stress on the third syllable from the end). Two rhyme types commonly occur in the same poem, but rarely all three. (There is also the hyperdactylic rhyme where the stress comes before the third syllable from the end, but this is rare.) Masculine rhymes ending on a vowel must match on the vowel, and on the preceding consonant. Other rhyme types must match on the vowel stressed and all that follows it.

Rhyme in eighteenth century syllabic verse was exclusively feminine. It rhymed и with ы, but not а with о, nor и

unstressed with e. The rhyme of e with ë was also rejected, though was sometimes relaxed in later syllabic verse.

Poetry in the nineteenth century, particularly from the 1830s, was based on the Moscow pronunciation and so allowed a to rhyme with unstressed o, e to rhyme with и and unstressed я, and o to rhyme with ë. The identity of a o and ы after a stress in a close syllable was also accepted, but these are generally case endings. Hard and soft consonants could not rhyme. Nor could the rhyme be truncated (i.e. a word ending in a consonant could not rhyme with one ending in a vowel: взором does not rhyme with скопо).

Rhyming in the mid nineteenth century was generally more flexible, and the phonetic identity of vowels was only strictly observed when those vowels were stressed.

Modern poets, especially those writing after 1920, have been much more flexible, indeed versatile. Rhymes have been truncated, so that встречей will rhyme with вечер, for example. Feminine rhymes can end with different consonants: собан and добым. Rhymes have become closer to assonance, therefore, the more so with consonants than vowels. A few poets (but only a few, like Mayakovsky) have also rhymed words where the stress does not fall on the same syllable counted from the line end. In practice, this has produced two rhyme combinations: dactylic + feminine and hyperdactylic + dactylic. Very occasionally, even the

virtuoso, Mayakovsky altogether disregarded the final syllable. The result of this flexibility has been richness rather than disorder, however, especially in the possibilities for consonants before the stressed vowel. Many matches introduce a touch of humour, of course, and in that category is also the broken rhyme: *интересней* rhyming with *сентябре с ней*.

Unrhymed verse belongs to four categories:

1. Translations from German and English classics, especially plays.
2. Imitation of classical metres like the hexameter and elegaic couplets: never very popular.
3. Imitations of folk poetry, i.e. *bylina* and popular songs.
4. Occasional work by individual poets, e.g. Zhukovsky and Nekrasov (in *Who is Happy in Russia*).

Modern poets (Blok, Akhmatova and Kuzmin in particular) will also write lines where the stresses are more variably distributed, which turns verse into a rhythmic prose.

Examples and Individual Traits

Russian verse is far too various to illustrate all its forms, but here are a few examples:

Vasily Trediakovsky spent his extravagant student days in

Paris, but could still compose stirring patriotic pieces: {15}

Россия мати! свет мой безмерный!
Позволь то, чадо прошу твой верный,
Ах, как сидишь ты на троне красно!
Небо российску ты солнце ясно!

(Mother Russia! my immeasurable light! / Allow me to ask,
who am your faithful child / Oh, how you sit so well on the
throne! For Russians you are the sun in the clear sky!)

Lomonosov's ode to the battle of Khotin is in the grand
style: fairly regular and solemn: {16}

Восторг внезапный ум пленил,
Ведёт на верьх горы высокой,
Где ветер в лесах шуметь забыл;
В долине тишина глубокой.

(The sudden delight captivated my mind / Conducts me to
the peak of high mountains, / Where the wind has forgotten
to make a noise / In the valley the silence is deep.)

Pushkin could write memorably in any style, here in the
opening to his love poem Awakening iambic dimeters, all
faultlessly rhymed: {17}

Мечты, мечты,
Где ваша сладость?

Где ты, где ты,
Ночная радость?
Исчезнул он,
Весёлый сон,
И одинокий
Во тьме глубокой

(Dreams dreams, / Where is your sweetness? / Where are
you, where are you, / Night's joy? / It's gone / a happy
dream / I am alone / In the darkness of the deep)

Batiushkov makes much use of hiatus, consecutive vowel
sounds where (contra Nabokov above) syllables tend to be
elided, yet with harmonious results: {18}

От волн Улеи_и Байкала,
От Волги, Дона_и Днепра,
От града нашего Петра,
С вершин Кавказа и_Урала!..

(From the waves of Uleyi and Baikal, / From the Volga, the
Don, and the Dnieper, / From the city of our Peter, / From
the peaks of the Caucasus and the Urals!)

Lermontov's Cossak Lullaby is a stylized folk song: {19}

Спи, младенец мой прекрасный,
 Б а ю ш к и - б а ю .
Тихо смотрит месяц ясный

В к о л ы б е л ь т в о ю .

(Sleep, my beautiful child, / Lullaby. / The bright moon looks quietly / Into your cradle.)

Nikolai Nekrasov was very different: an easy fluency, and colloquialisms, prosaisms and vulgarisms of popular speech and folklore that were better used than by other poet in the 19th century. But rhymes can be somewhat approximate. He was also fond of ternary rhythms, which have great variety. Here the metre is fairly regular, though line 1 has a final pyrrhic, and first syllable in line 3 is accented, i.e. the line carries four accents. {20}

Вот **парад**ный под**ъезд**. По тор**жествен**ными дням,
Одер**жи**мый холопским нед**угом**,
Целый **город** с **каким**-то испугом
Подъезжает к заветным дверям;

(Here is the main entrance. On solemn days, / Obsessed with the slave's illness, /A whole city with some kind of fright / He drives up to the cherished doors;)

Afanasy Fet's nature poems can be deceptively simple: plain description without verbs, pronouns, adverbs, elaborate syntax and grammatical complexities. The poetry works by repetition: rhythm, sounds and images. The rhymes are often over-emphatic: {21}

Буря на небе вечернем,

Моря сердитого шум —
Буря на море и думы,
Много мучительных дум

(A storm on the evening sky, / The noise of the angry sea —
/ A storm on the sea and thoughts, / Many painful thoughts
)

Rather similar is Tyutchev's These poor settlements, which
are tetrameters employing nouns in nominative and genitive
cases and a complicated word order: {22}

Эти бедные селенья,
Эта скудная природа —
Край родной долготерпенья,
Край ты русского народа!

(These poor villages, / This sparse nature — / The land of
native patience, / You realm of the Russian people!)

Vyacheslav Ivanov is often seen as the forefather of Russian
Symbolism: {23}

Как осенью ненастной тлеет
Святая озимь — тайно дух
Над чёрною могилой реет,
И только душ легчайших слух

(Just autumn rains smoulder / The holy winter — the spirit

secretly / Over the black grave, / And only the souls of the
lightest hearing)

Aleksandr Blok took many liberties with the standard iambic.
{24} Lines 4 and 5 have all the stresses realized. In line 6
the first potential stress is unrealised; in line 2 the second
potential stress is unrealised; in line 8 the the third potential
stress is unrealized. Line 1 begins with a spondee (- -), and
7 has a stress on syllables 1 and 4 (Nabokov's 'tilt'). begin
with a stressed syllable

Ночь, улица, фонарь, аптека,
Бессмысленный и тусклый свет.
Живи еще хоть четверть века —
Все будет так. Исхода нет.

Умрешь — начнешь опять сначала
И повторится все, как встарь:
Ночь, ледяная рябь канала,
Аптека, улица, фонарь.

(Night, a street, a lantern, a pharmacy, / A senseless and
dim light. / Live for another quarter century — / Everything
will be this way. There is no way out. // If you die, you'll
begin again from the start, / And everything will repeat as it
did long ago: / The night, the icy ripple of a canal, / A
pharmacy, a street, a lantern.)

The stress in line 1 of Mandel'shtam's first poem in his

collection entitled Stone {25} falls on the first syllable:

Звук осторожный и глухой
Плода, сорвавшегося с древа,
Среди немолчного напева
Глубокой тишины лесной. . .

because important (Sound cautious and deaf) — it was in fact a personification of the poet himself. The full translations runs: A sound cautious and deaf / The fruit that fell from the tree / Among the unceasing melody / deep silence in the forest. . .

Mayakovski could use a stressed verse where the unvoiced syllables could vary widely, leaving the reader somewhat bewildered by the patterning. In fact there are four accents to the line, if lines 1 and 2 are counted as a single line: {26}

Вашу мысль,
мечтающую на размягченном мозгу,
как выжиревший лакей на засаленной кушетке,
буду дразнить об окровавленный сердца лоскут:
досыта изъиздеваюсь, нахальный и едкий.

(Your thought / dreaming of a softened brain, / like a servant run to fat on a greasy couch, / I will tease against the bloodied rag of my heart, / I, brash and caustic, am getting rid of satiety.)

Diction also varies considerably, from Tiutchev's Day and Night: {27}

На мир таинственный духов,
Над этой бездной безымянной,
Покров наброшен златотканый
Высокой волею богов.

(On the world of mysterious spirits, / Above this anonymous abyss, / A veil woven of gold is thrown / By the high will of the gods.)

Pasternak's Without a Name: {28}

Пошло слово любовь, ты права.
Я придумаю кличку иную.
Для тебя я весь мир, все слова,
Если хочешь, переименую.

(The word 'love' is banal, you are right. / I'll come with another name. / For you I am the whole whole world, all the worlds, / If you like, I'll rename it.)

Mandel'shtam often used an iambic hexameter in poems about antiquity. In this last stanza of 'Sleepless' only line 2 has its full six accents: {29}

И море, и Гомер - всё движется любовью.
Кого же слушать мне? И вот Гомер молчит,

И море черное, витийствуя, шумит
И с тяжким грохотом подходит к изголовью.

(And the sea and Homer — everything is moved by love. /
But whom shall I to listen to? And Homer is silent / And the
Black Sea, in motion, makes noise / And with a heavy crash
approaches the head.)

Anna Akhamatova's I don't ask for love carried on a long
tradition of lost love in this apparently artless piece, so
naturally that it seems autobiographical: {30}

Я не любви твоей прошу.
Она теперь в надёжном месте.
Поверь, что я твоей невесте
Ревнивых писем не пишу.

(I don't ask for your love. / It's now in a safe place. /
Imagine me as your fiancée / I don't write jealous letters.)

Marina Tsvetaeva's An Attempt at Jealousy is much less
accepting, and the verse less regular: {31}

Как живётся вам с другою, —
Проще ведь? — Удар весла! —
Линией береговою
Скоро ль память отошла

(How's life with another woman, — / Easier, after all? —

Beat the oars! — / Along the shore-line / Soon the memory's
gone)

In Paris, as poster-boy for the new Soviet regime, Vladimir
Mayyakovsky wrote of his homesickness for mother Russia:
{32}

В авто,
последний франк разменяв.
— В котором часу на Марсель? —
Париж
 бежит,
 проводжая меня,
во всей
 невозможной красе.

(In the car, / the last franc is exchanged. / 'What time is the
last train to Marseilles?' / Paris runs / seeing me off, / in all /
its impossible beauty.)

Much on this page is drawn from Michael Watchel's excellent
introduction. The further section on rhyme is based on B.O.
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3. Golden Stihophone. Old recordings and some modern readings. <http://gold.stihophone.ru/>

4. Russian Audiobooks. <https://www.litres.ru/>

5. Voices of Russian Poets and Writers. Old recordings by 20th century figures: <http://pisateli.rusarchives.ru/>

6. Audiobook of Russian Poetry.

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