

Interview with Anatoly Liberman: The 2021 SLD's Greiss Speaker

Interviewer: Nora Seligman Favorov

We are thrilled that Anatoly Liberman has agreed to deliver our 23rd Annual Susan Greiss lecture. Professor Liberman is currently a professor in the Department of German, Nordic, Slavic and Dutch at the University of Minnesota. A Doctor of Philological Sciences, his primary areas of specialization are linguistics, medieval literature and culture, folklore, poetic translation, and literary criticism. An extremely engaging speaker and writer, he has approximately 650 publications to his credit, including extensively annotated poetry translations from English into Russian (William Shakespeare) and vice versa (Lermontov, Tyutchev, and Boratynsky). In addition to his scholarly publications, he has written books on popular linguistics, including *Etymology for Everyone: Word Origins and How We Know Them* (Oxford University Press, 2005). Professor Liberman writes a weekly column on word origins on the Oxford University Press blog, *The Oxford Etymologist*. He has been recognized for Outstanding Contributions to Graduate and Professional Teaching and has been a Guggenheim, Fulbright, and McKnight fellow. He is also a frequent speaker on Minnesota Public Radio (on language) and elsewhere (on language, literature, and culture). In addition to the



Anatoly Liberman

Фёдор Тютчев 1866	From: Anatoly Liberman, <i>On the Heights of Creation: The Lyrics of Fedor Tyutchev</i> (JAI Press Inc.: 1993)
Умом — Россию не понять, Аршином общим не измерить. У ней особенная стать — В Россию можно только верить.	You will not grasp her with your mind Or cover with a common label, For Russia is one of a kind— Believe in her, if you are able...

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Articles of interest to Slavic translators and interpreters are invited.

Designation of Slavic Languages Division membership on ATA membership application or renewal form provides full membership.

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Submissions become the property of the American Translators Association and are subject to editing.

Opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Editor or of the Division.

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Thanks to Jamie Padula of ATA Headquarters for his advice and help.

Greiss Lecture, titled “The Golden Age of Russian Poetry in English” (scheduled for 4 p.m., Friday, October 29), he will deliver a second talk, “Translating Shakespeare’s Sonnets” (2:15 p.m., Saturday, October 30). Times are for Central Daylight Time.

I’d like to start with your professional biography, if I may. Reading your English-language Wikipedia page, there are a few items that inevitably lose something in translation but that readers of *SlavFile* will be able to appreciate. First of all, it’s interesting that your first job was teaching at a “boarding school for underprivileged children” (сельская школа-интернат on the Russian page—definitely not an easy term to succinctly contextualize in English). Second, there is the fact that, after some independent study (I’ll bet it wasn’t easy to get the books you needed) during your tenure at the boarding school, you “became an extramural graduate student” at Leningrad University. Finally, I am intrigued by the suggestion of serendipity contained in the following passage: “Lieberman’s academic adviser was Professor M. I. Steblin-Kamenskij, at that time a Soviet scholar in Old Icelandic literature and Germanic historical phonology. In 1965 [Lieberman] defended his Candidate of Philological Sciences (= PhD) dissertation on a topic of Middle English historical phonology, and in the same year Nikita Khrushchev ordered all the institutes of the Academy of Sciences to open groups for the study of what he called ‘the Scandinavian experience.’ Steblin-Kamenskij was invited to head such a group at the Institute of Linguistics and invited Lieberman to be his full-time junior assistant.” Could you talk a little about the path from *internat* teacher to serious scholar and respected expert?

I realized rather early that my favorite area is literature. Therefore I applied to Leningrad University, to the Department of Russian. My grades guaranteed admittance to any college without entrance exams. But the virulently anti-Semitic Leningrad University “interviewed” me and found me unworthy. That event, which at that time looked like the end of the world, turned out to be the best thing that could have happened to me. I carried my application to the Herzen Pedagogical Institute (now University), where I could only enroll as an English major. (At that time the English *fakul’tet* was rather unpopular, although some twenty years later, English rose to No. 1 among the humanities there, and, as I heard, it became almost impossible to get into it without a medal, a bribe, or *blat*. But in 1954, we were a backwoods, though German and French were even worse—especially French.)

Clearly, some angel was guiding my steps. I had had indifferent English tutors since the age of ten and by the age of seventeen could read rather difficult books and spoke tolerably fluent English. The Herzen Institute turned out to be an ideal place for me. First, by the decree of the same angel, I ended up as a student of a truly great teacher, who became my role model for many years. At the University, I would never have mastered English as I did under her

tutelage. Second, at the Herzen Institute, the accent was on linguistics, not literature. Russian literature was one of the most politicized subjects in the Russian curriculum, while linguistics enjoyed relative neutrality. Those who love literature can learn a lot on their own, but linguistics is a technical subject and needs instructors. Finally, the Herzen Institute, just at that time (!), began to require every graduate to have a double major. Thanks to that regulation, I learned German, which laid the foundation for all my future studies and made me employable in the United States, to which I emigrated in 1975.

I graduated as No. 1 of a class of about 200, but despite the pleas of my former teachers a technicality was used to prevent me from applying to graduate school (alas, for the same reason as five years earlier). This was another stroke of luck, because, as I realized much later, I would not have learned much there. Soviet students were supposed to do their “stint” after graduation and work for three years wherever they were wanted. My nearsightedness saved me from being drafted, and all my faithful teachers could do was to talk the authorities into not sending me to some remote region (even that was not easy).

I ended up as a teacher and counselor (*vospitatel'*) at a *shkola-internat* (school for disadvantaged children) about three hours away, by two trains, from Leningrad. That location allowed me to spend Saturdays and Sundays at the library at home, where I lived with my mother (my father was killed at the beginning of the war). I began to prepare for a set of exams that would allow me to become a graduate student in English philology at Leningrad University without taking the standard entrance exams (once again!). And here two great events happened. First, just then a textbook on the Gothic language was published. Gothic was an important subject. It is the oldest extant Germanic language and is thus a foundational subject to a student of Germanic philology. It was not studied at Herzen (at that time). The language is very difficult for beginners, and, more important, it is not only the language but also the foundations of Germanic philology that were tested at the exams I would be taking. I learned practically the entire spectrum of the *kandidatskii minimum* on my own, while teaching away from Leningrad, and without that book, I would have been lost. Naturally, there is a

spate of books on Gothic in the world, but how could one get hold of any of them in the Soviet Union?! Though scholarly libraries held them, I had no access to any, and most were not lending libraries anyway.

The boarding school was not a penal colony: just a bunch of orphans or sons and daughters of single

Евгений Боратынский 1828	From: Anatoly Liberman. <i>Evgeny Boratynsky and the Russian Golden Age: Unstudied Words That Wove and Wavered</i> (Anthem Press: 2020)
Мой дар убог, и голос мой не громок, Но я живу, и на земли мое Кому-нибудь любезно бытие: Его найдет далекий мой потомок В моих стихах; как знать? душа моя Окажется с душой его в сношение, И как нашел я друга в поколенье, Читателя найду в потомстве я.	My gift is faint, my singing voice is feeble, And yet I live, and probably on earth My being has in someone's eyes some worth: In verses mine, my offspring will be able To see it. And my soul will (who can tell?) With this man's soul establish a relation: I've found a friend amid my generation— A reader 'mid my scions I'll find as well.

mothers burdened with several more sons and daughters. I was only 22. I like children and got along very well with my charges. But those years required a sustained effort, because the work was hard and because, as an undergraduate, I had been exposed only to the rudiments of Old English, Middle English, and theoretical grammar, while Gothic was quite new to me. Of course, Marxism was also a required subject. I learned everything on my own.

The second great event was that the Chair of English at the University agreed to see me, treated me most kindly, and gave me two beautiful books on Old English. She also allowed me to take qualifying exams in her department (a tremendous favor!).

I now had the right to become their graduate student, but the University had not changed a bit, and the Chair told me in plain Russian that my only chance to join the department was in the capacity of an extramural (*zaochnyi*) student, which presupposed having a job. Even that status was the result of her truly heroic efforts. My stint in the boondocks was over, I did find a teaching job and wrote a dissertation on the history of English under one of the greatest specialists in Germanic.

Here is some background about the serendipity you mentioned in your question. Stalin never traveled. Khrushchev's first trip abroad was to Sweden. He expected to see bloated capitalists, impoverished proletarians, surplus value, and the class struggle from Soviet textbooks. Instead, he found a flourishing country and a happy populace. But what struck him most was the fact that Sweden was awash with “socialism.” He naively decided that Sweden was some sort of exception. On return, he ordered all (!) the

Михаил Лермонтов 1829–1839	From: Anatoly Liberman, <i>Mikhail Lermontov: Major Poetical Works</i> (University of Minnesota Press: 1984)
На воздушном океане, Без руля и без ветрил, Тихо плавают в тумане Хоры стройные светил; Средь полей необозримых В небе ходят без следа Облаков неуволнимых Волокнистые стада. Час разлуки, час свиданья — Им ни радость, ни печаль; Им в грядущем нет желанья И прошедшего не жаль. В день томительный несчастья Ты об них лишь вспомяни; Будь к земному без участия И беспечна, как они!	On the infinite expanses Of the boundless cosmic void Planets dance their measured dances, Unconducted, undeployed. On the drift, forever aimless, Fibrous clouds invade the sky, Unattainable and nameless, Slowly floating, flocklike, by. Cold when touching, cold when thronging, They disperse at every blast, For the future never longing, Never caring for the past. On the day of tribulation Think of clouds upon their way, Do not wish for consolation But remain as cool as they.

institutes of the Academy of Sciences to study “the Scandinavian experience.” No one knew what was meant, but no one asked questions. Whether it was zoology or linguistics, everybody had to comply right away.

The Leningrad branch of the Institute of Linguistics was at an advantage, because the greatest Soviet Scandinavian scholar and one of the world’s luminaries in that area was in Leningrad: M.I. Steblin-Kamensky, my dissertation adviser (though my topic was English). He invited me to take a job at the Academy of Sciences, with a specialization in Scandinavian, and I had to learn Scandinavian philology from scratch. The Institute implored him to take over Scandinavian studies there. But he was a professor and Chair of the Scandinavian Department at Leningrad University. He did not want to leave the department he had founded and agreed to go to the Academy “at half-pay” (*na polstavki*), which was allowed by law, but even then only if his conditions were met: 1) His book should be published right away (*vne ocheredi*); 2) He would bring an assistant (*mladshii nauchnyi sotrudnik*, something like a junior fellow), without his candidate being vetted by the personnel department; and 3) The Institute would accept a graduate student in Scandinavian. The Academy had no choice: the negotiations took place in summer, and by September (!) the position had to be filled. They said yes to all his demands, and Steblin-Kamensky offered the position of a junior assistant to me. Miraculously, I had just then finished my dissertation (the defense was scheduled for October), and all the dots could be connected: the Academy needed Steblin-Kamensky, he needed me, and I, a brand-new prospective PhD, was ready to start a new life. Of course, Mikhail Ivanovich knew very well what he was doing by insisting on no vetting by the personnel

department!

I spent ten beautiful years at the Academy’s Institute of Linguistics, wrote my second dissertation there, and if the Academy had not been situated in one of the most inhuman countries in the world, I would have stayed there until my dying day. But luck never deserted me in America. Just off the boat, I spent one year as a visiting professor at the University of Minnesota, and after that my position became permanent.

I mostly read your Boratynsky translations without comparing them to the Russian. The rhyme and rhythm seemed much more precise than what one usually finds in translations of Russian poetry. I’m wondering what your process was and what your criteria were when it came to compromising meaning in order to achieve the level of metrical perfection you attained.

In this area, all native speakers of Russian who dare translate into English share common ground: they cannot imagine “free” versions of Russian poetry. Lyric poetry is about words. While translating Boratynsky, Tyutchev, Lermontov, and others, I was guided by a Utopian aim. I asked myself: “How would they have written their works if they had been born as native speakers of English?” But it was vital not to turn those poets into weak shadows of Byron, Keats, or Wordsworth, because, all the influences notwithstanding, they were highly individual. I have been composing poetry (in Russian) all my life, and I know what it takes to produce a lyric.

My study of many languages and my broad exposure to English literature from many centuries resulted in a rich active vocabulary, and I am used to looking for rhyme. The rest is a matter of patience. It took me more than a month to translate Tyutchev’s famous four-liner about the mystery of Russia (the shorter a poem, the harder it is to translate), but finally, I found the words that more or less rendered Tyutchev’s idea. The reward is that this tiny piece now appears all over the internet. Apparently, people like it.

But most of the difficulties confronting a translator of poetry cannot be defined. They are intuitive. Listen

to your favorite Beethoven sonata or Chopin nocturne as played by several outstanding pianists. They all play wonderfully, but one performance usually stands out, though most of us cannot explain why. Discovering a rhyming word is usually not a problem. It is the casting about for the one unforgettable noun, adjective, or verb that makes you discard variant after variant. And of course with time one learns self-control and knows how to get rid of verbiage: no word is allowed only to fill a space or to provide a rhyme. The problem of formulaic diction (love/above and the rest) is too broad to discuss here. Yet some barriers are insurmountable. For example, dactylic rhyme is in principle alien to English. Hence a heavy barrier exists between English readers and Nekrasov and Blok (a great pity!). Also, I have no idea how to approach Mayakovsky. Lovers of poetry in the English-speaking world have no idea of Mayakovsky.

One of your talks at the ATA Annual Conference will be about the challenges you faced translating Shakespeare's sonnets. Before you decided on the topics of your two talks, I suggested that you might talk about how your etymological research has influenced your work as a translator. Your response included the words "Etymology is hard to connect with translation," but I still have trouble with the idea that your knowledge of where words came from and what associations they had in the past or that their cognates had/have in different cultures doesn't sometimes influence your word choice when translating. Particularly in your work translating Shakespeare I would suspect your etymological expertise would have led to choices other translators might not make. Is there anything to this suspicion?

My answer depends on the definition of etymology. If you mean a branch of linguistics that deals with the origin of words, then perhaps there is no connection. But since etymology deals with language history in the broadest way possible, then yes, the tie is obvious. Shakespeare's sonnets are more than four centuries old. One cannot understand the complexity of Shakespeare's usage without a good knowledge of early Modern English (and sometimes beyond); hence the existence of detailed annotated editions. Philology taught me to treat every word as a small gem, while etymological research taught me great patience. To be sure, the final product should hide the translator's "erudition." Yes, I know that *spirit* in the first line of Sonnet 129 means both what it does today and

"sperm" (a trite piece of Elizabethan slang). My task is to try to achieve a similar effect in Russian. Not unexpectedly, I failed to preserve the pun, but I attempted to create a context in which at least an allusion to Shakespeare's intention could perhaps be preserved, even if subconsciously. This sonnet was as hard to translate as Tyutchev's four-liner. But why hurry? I am not paid for my translations, no one ever rushes me, the translator's reward is modest, and, if Russian readers had waited more than four hundred years for an adequate translation of this unforgettable sonnet, they could certainly wait another month. In sum, I believe that the quality of a piece of translated poetry (and prose!) depends on everything the translator experienced and learned. Philological study, including word history, is part of my mental baggage and could not but rub off on my translations.



To register and
for more information,
go to:
<https://ata62.org/registration/>

Notes from the Administrative Underground

Steven McGrath, SLD Assistant Administrator

After the long lull of the (first? – Perish the thought.) virus year, this summer has really flown by. It seemed like we were just sending out invitations for the **April Networking Meetup** when the next one crept up in July. We are still trying to perfect the organizing procedure, so if there were any issues with your invitation to the Zoom meetings, please contact steven@mcgrathtranslations.com.

We hope you can all join us for **the SLD's Annual Meeting**, which is now definitively scheduled for 4:00-5:00 PM EDT on Sunday, October 10. Yes, this year the meeting will not only be online but two weeks early. The Zoom link can be found through: ata62.org/division-annual-meetings. We look forward to discussing division business with you.

We also hope many of you registered for **ATA's 62nd Annual Conference in Minneapolis (and online)** <https://ata62.org/registration/>. Attendance at last year's virtual conference exceeded expectations, and we hope that the hybrid format will combine that level of accessibility with the enthusiasm of past in-person gatherings. This year we are honored to

welcome the esteemed linguist-historian-poet-lexicographer (and I could keep going) Professor Anatoly Liberman as our Greiss Lecturer. For just the past 15 years of his incredibly prolific career, Liberman has blogged as OUP's "Oxford Etymologist," and you can check out his work here: https://blog.oup.com/category/series-columns/oxford_etymologist/. Maria Guzenko and Janja Pavetic-Dickey round out the SLD's slate of presenters with some fascinating topics, and a full list of sessions is available in this issue of *SlavFile*, as well as on the conference website.

We have announced tentative plans for the **Annual SLD Dinner at ATA62** at a Russian restaurant/bar near the conference hotel. Given unpredictable changes to public health guidance, we will be switching to separate checks in lieu of tickets this year. We will still need to book a table, however, so please RSVP to steven@mcgrathtranslations.com.

**In person or through the screen,
we hope to see you there!**

SEEKING CONTRIBUTIONS FOR THE SPRING 2022 ISSUE OF SLAVFILE:

TRANS-ATLANTYK: FOCUS ON POLISH

IN COLLABORATION WITH PRZEKŁADY, THE ITI POLISH NETWORK NEWSLETTER

In collaboration with our counterparts at the [Polish Network](#) of the UK [Institute of Translation and Interpreting](#) we are planning to primarily devote the spring 2022 issue to Polish translation and interpretation. The idea is to have a set of articles, some produced by ITI members, some by ATA members. These articles would be published on both sides of the Atlantic, in *SlavFile* and in *Przekłady*, the UK ITI Polish Network newsletter. The name of the joint issue takes its inspiration from a 1953 novel by one of Poland's greatest émigré writers, Witold Gombrowicz's *Trans-Atlantyk*.

Send us your glossaries, terminological insights, accounts of interpreting nightmares or triumphs, dictionary reviews—anything that will edify and engage the target audience of Polish<>English T/I professionals, as well as the SLD and ITI Polish Network's membership at large. Please note: articles

must be written in a way that readers who do not know Polish can follow along, although we encourage the use of Polish in examples and, of course, glossaries.

ITI is the only UK-based independent professional membership association for practicing translators, interpreters and language service providers. Founded in 1986, the organization has over 3,000 members, both in the UK and internationally. Much like ATA, it has the stated goal of representing the interests of its members, and those of the industry itself, raising the profile of the profession.

Submission deadline: March 1, 2022

Please contact Nora Favorov (norafavorov@gmail.com) if you are considering making a submission.



ITI POLISH NETWORK

ATA62 Slavic Track Sessions

(011) Vegetative-Vascular What? Navigating Unusual Conditions and Treatments in Eastern European Medical Records

Presented by: Maria Guzenko, CT; Janja Pavetic-Dickey, CT, Anna Steingart

2:15 p.m.–3:15 p.m. CDT Thursday, October 28

Translator and interpreter training in the U.S. focuses on American health care systems and may not cover institutions, diagnoses, treatments, and attitudes common in Eastern Europe. Yet this knowledge is crucial for accuracy and cultural sensitivity in translation and interpreting. This session will help into-English translators decipher lesser-known conditions and recommendations in patient records and avoid “false friends” (think “sanatorium,” “physiotherapy,” or “osteocondrosis”). Health care interpreters may also benefit from understanding what may come up when discussing non-U.S. patient histories. This session will focus primarily on examples in Russian and Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian, but will feature equivalents in other languages where applicable.

Topics: Medical T&I, Slavic Languages, T&I Industry

Presenting Language: English

Level: Intermediate

Hashtag: #ATA62MedicalRecords

(059) The Golden Age of Russian Poetry in English: Susana Greiss Lecture

Presented by: Slavic Languages Division
Distinguished Speaker Anatoly Liberman

4:00 p.m.–5:00 p.m. CDT Friday, October 29

The speaker will discuss the challenges of translating the poetry of the Russian Golden Age into English. The best works of the Golden Age are an integral part of Russian culture. Ideally, in translation, they should merge with the culture of the people speaking other languages. The poets’ language was highly individual. It should remain such in translation, without becoming a replica of Lord Byron. Those poets used rhyme and various metrical schemes. A modern translator confronts an audience accustomed to free verse. One cannot disregard this discrepancy. A tinge of archaism and the formulaic nature peculiar to that poetry should ideally be preserved.

Topics: Slavic Languages, Translation

Presenting Language: English

Level: All Levels

Hashtag: #ATA62GreissLecture

(082) Beyond Meaning: Contrasting Typeface, Capitalization, and Punctuation Conventions in Russian and English

Presented by: Maria Guzenko, CT

10:00 a.m.–11:00 a.m. CDT, Saturday, Oct. 30

As translators, we may focus so much on conveying meaning that we neglect the “technical” aspects of the text and introduce artifacts from the source language into our translation. This session will examine areas of divergence between Russian and English, including colons, dashes, and commas; capitalization, quotes, and italics in titles; and punctuation with direct speech. Translators working in either direction will learn to adjust their target text to reflect the conventions of the target language. The session will end with a hands-on editing activity building on the topics covered.

Topics: Slavic Languages, Translation

Presenting Language: English

Level: Intermediate

Hashtag: #ATA62BeyondMeaning

(109) Translating Shakespeare’s Sonnets

Presented by: Slavic Languages Division
Distinguished Speaker Anatoly Liberman

2:15 p.m.–3:15 p.m. CDT Saturday, October 30

The speaker will discuss the challenges of translating Shakespeare’s sonnets. The originals are masterpieces, so the translator should try to preserve every word. Yet English words are usually shorter than their equivalents in most European languages; something inevitably gets lost. Shakespeare’s vocabulary is full of technical terms (commerce, etc.). Combining such words with those professing lovers’ feelings poses difficult stylistic problems. Multiple puns on sex are important because several sonnets depend on them entirely. Yet the translator cannot afford to use modern vulgarisms, even though the language of the sonnets is archaic. It was not such long ago. Should the translations preserve a hint of that discrepancy?

Topics: German, Literary Translation, Slavic Languages, Translation

Presenting Language: English

Level: All Levels

Hashtag: #ATA62ShakespearesSonnets

ATA SLD Annual Meeting

October 10, 2021, 4:00 PM EDT

Via Zoom

Link can be found by logging in here:

<https://ata62.org/division-annual-meetings/>

1. Call to order
2. Accept agenda
3. Approve minutes of last year's meeting (available in *Winter 2021 SlavFile*, p. 5)
4. SLD Overview for 2021
 - a. Report on *SlavFile* and blog, solicit session reviews
 - b. Report on networking sessions
 - c. Report on website, online forum and social media (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter)
 - d. Report on SLD Outreach initiative
 - e. Report on SLD Podcast (*Slovo*)
 - f. Report on SLD ATA Certification Exam Prep Group
 - g. Report on idioms workshop (March 2020)
5. New Business for 2022
 - a. Note that the Division Handbook exists to help volunteers
 - b. Call for volunteers
 - i. Twitter curators
 - c. ATA's 63rd Annual Conference (Los Angeles, CA October 12-15, 2022)
 - i. Discuss topics and speakers wanted
 - ii. Ask for Distinguished Speaker recommendations
 - iii. Encourage division members to submit session proposals (online deadline February 1)
 - d. Division plans for coming year (if not covered during report on previous year)
 - i. Further professional development, particularly language-specific online workshops
6. Call for feedback and suggestions from the members
7. Announce election results (current officers re-elected by acclamation)
8. Call for newcomers to introduce themselves
9. Adjourn

The Slavic Languages Division Annual Dinner

The SLD plans to continue its tradition of holding an annual dinner at ATA62 in Minneapolis this year with some contingencies based on updates to public health guidance.

The tentative venue for the dinner is:

Hammer & Sickle

1300 Lagoon Ave., Minneapolis, #150

(612) 367-4035

www.hammerandsicklempls.com/

And we plan to leave the conference hotel together on Thursday, October 28 at 7:00pm CDT.

We will not be selling tickets this year, and separate checks will be requested.

To ensure we have an appropriate table, please RSVP by sending an email to SLD Assistant Administrator Steven McGrath (steven@mcgrathtranslations.com). Questions and comments are welcome.

SLAVIC LANGUAGES DIVISION (SLD)

2021 ELECTION CANDIDATES

The Nominating Committee of the Slavic Languages Division is pleased to announce that the following Division members have been nominated as candidates in the 2021 election of officers.

Administrator: Eugenia Tietz-Sokolskaya

Assistant Administrator: Steven McGrath

Thank you to Eugenia and Steve for agreeing to continue their good work for the division for another term. Please take a few minutes to read the following statements from the candidates. As no other candidacies were submitted before the deadline (July 23), this was an uncontested election and the officers will be declared by acclamation at the Slavic Languages Division annual meeting this fall.

CANDIDATE STATEMENTS

CANDIDATE FOR ADMINISTRATOR

Eugenia Tietz-Sokolskaya

I am honored to have been renominated for Administrator of the Slavic Languages Division. I have been serving SLD for four years now, first as Assistant Administrator, then as Administrator. If elected, I intend to leverage my prior experience in division leadership to further initiatives that connect our members and facilitate knowledge transfer.

Being an SLD member has been a central benefit of my ATA membership, providing a community under the broader ATA umbrella to learn from and call home. My primary goal as administrator would be to promote the various resources that the SLD offers and ensure that they remain relevant to our members. These include the website, *SlavFile*, podcast, and blog, as well as the more participatory offerings of the exam practice group, networking meetups, and listserv.

I started in translation a little over 10 years ago, as a sophomore in college, armed only with native fluency in both Russian and English. Since then, I graduated from Kent State University with an MA in Translation, passed the ATA exam for Russian into English, and launched into a full-time freelance career. I now work as a Russian to English translator specializing in legal and financial texts.

I am glad to have this opportunity to continue to serve and promote the SLD!

Eugenia Tietz-Sokolskaya

eugenia@sokolskayatranslations.com

CANDIDATE FOR ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR

Steven McGrath

I am honored to be nominated to continue serving as assistant administrator of the Slavic Languages Division, the office I have held since 2019.

I began accepting freelance translation jobs while I was earning my master's degree at Moscow State University in 2010. When I returned to the United States in 2017, I joined ATA and became certified in the Russian > English language pair later that year. Since then, I have translated three books for publication and have expanded into new areas such as mobile app localization, copywriting and TM building for AI.

As I have seen from the annual ATA conferences and my work for *SlavFile*, the SLD provides an excellent system of collegial support for members. As assistant administrator, I will seek to continue this fine tradition while helping the administrator to address issues that affect SLD members.

I will continue to pursue the following goals, which I set for myself when first elected:

- Support the administrator in coordinating SLD functions and responding to member concerns.
- Encourage dialogue among SLD members to support one another's professional growth and represent the industry. As part of this goal, I helped to organize regular online networking sessions for SLD members after the online 2020 conference.
- Promote engagement among SLD members who work in underrepresented languages.

I am grateful for this opportunity to give back to the SLD, which has done so much for me since joining.

Steven McGrath

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Helpful and/or Interesting Resources Discovered by SlavFile Editors and Readers

Translation as Intuition

Liv Bliss

As a professional translator for more decades than I will admit, now specializing in fiction and general-interest journalistic texts, I am still regularly astonished as I watch a “meh” translation morph into one that *works*.

On the face of it, there’s nothing magical about this. I’m right here at the keyboard. My eyes and my fingers and, on a good day, every nook and cranny of my brain are all fully involved. Decades of education, experience, and engagement, and a level of mindfulness that saps one’s physical and mental stamina more thoroughly than anything else I know all feed into this process that we blithely summarize as “translation.” Yet the best way I have found to describe what happens to our work when everything just clicks is ... alchemy.

That is, after all, a reasonably apt metaphor for the way in which, after the right number of editing passes (my own or my *real* editor’s), the base metal of the original draft takes on the sheen of—well, maybe not gold, but at least something a lot more pleasant to look at than base metal.

This, however, does nothing to explain how that perfect wording sneaks into our consciousness and onto the page—how, during a recent translation project, “with distinct boundaries” became, apparently on its own volition, “strictly demarcated” and “she’d be sorry” turned into “it would be all the worse for her.” (You had to be there: the context heartily embraced those changes and kissed them on the cheek.)

Enter the Seminar in Translation at Boston University’s Geddes Center, whose 2020 Lecture Series in Literary Translation is open to all, free of charge [here](#). I no longer remember who publicized this invaluable resource to the community, but if you happen to be reading this—thank you!

One of many highlights of the 2020 program is Marian Schwartz’s overview of her life in translation, centering on and informed by her longstanding and ongoing project of bringing underappreciated Russian women writers to an Anglophone readership.

And then I came to Peter Bush’s “Translating the Classics: Balzac and Pla.” Professor Wikipedia and Dr. Bush’s own website (www.peterbushliterarytranslator.com/) will give you all the background you might need, so I’ll mention only that he is a much-honored literary translator from French, Spanish, Catalan, and Portuguese into (mostly) UK English.

This is the part of his talk that had me nodding in wide-eyed agreement, delighted to realize that I haven’t actually been doing it wrong all these years. I will shut up now and let him speak:

There are things that come to you in the process of editing and drafting which seem intuitive—if you like, they’re imaginative leaps. But they come from this process of ... it’s not turmoil, it’s a process of churning of languages in your consciousness around a specific translation. And things will emerge that seem out of the blue. But they come out of that process which is not rational, which is subjective, which is, as I’ve mentioned before, performative. And that’s where the translation takes off and has life. And the translator has to have a kind of critical relationship with that, as with every other part of the translation process. Those kind of imaginative leaps sometimes don’t work. They sometimes do. But they are central to the whole process. Because if your writing isn’t loosened up, if you can’t go with the rhythm of what you’re writing, then I feel that the writing will remain perhaps accurate but flat as a read for the reader.

“Performative”! Since there is absolutely nothing I can add, I won’t even try.



Liv Bliss is an ATA-certified Russian to English translator who lives in the White Mountains of Arizona and is still (spoiler alert!) in love with translation. She can be reached at bliss.mst@gmail.com. Grateful thanks go to Dr. Peter Bush for his kind permission to reproduce a portion of his lecture here.

My Translator Story

George Pelka

It is quite a story, so let's start from the beginning. When I was 9, I received the best Christmas present ever—a library card. When I arrived at the library for the first time, I was amazed: there were shelves full of exciting books, with adventures taking place all over the world—Sweden (Astrid Lindgren), Denmark (Andersen), Russia (Krylov), France (Lafontaine), and in exotic places across the globe (Jules Verne). Then I started admiring people who were able to translate those marvelous books from all kinds of languages into my native Czech, and my dream of being a translator was born.

I naturally opted to study English when it was offered to us in seventh grade, unlike most of my more pragmatic classmates, who chose German.

It was love at first sight, also because the teacher was our homeroom teacher, and she was fresh out of college, blonde, freckled, optimistic, and certainly not mainstream (she worked during the summer months with us at a local orchard picking their famous black currants, for minimum wage).

I translated “*do šuplíku*” (a Czech idiom for translating for pleasure, knowing that the translation will never be published), first Tolkien's *Hobbit* and *Leaf by Niggle*, borrowed through interlibrary loan, which my local library graciously facilitated, at no charge to me, and, afterwards, Orwell's *1984* and *Animal Farm*.

I also taped shortwave broadcasts from the BBC (which were too fast for me at first) and the Voice of America in Special English (which was targeted at Asia and was slow, and I loved it). VOA was my favorite, for the “Yankee Doodle” that began the broadcasts and for their concise news and American music (Creedence Clearwater Revival, Jimi Hendrix, Dolly Parton, Johnny Cash, Bob Dylan, etc.). I transcribed these tapes and was happy to see my English getting better.

As an undergraduate at the Vysoká škola ekonomická in Prague, I was happy to improve my Russian and English and to begin seriously studying German.

After university and several government jobs in the field of business administration and education, I defected to the West (my firm decision not to live in a totalitarian state was made after the August 1968 invasion and post-1968 era of “*normalizace*,” a Czech



George Pelka by the Niagara River

expression for getting back to the “normal” state of totalitarianism), which is another long story. A long and winding road through Yugoslavia, Italy, Austria, and Germany finally brought me to Berwyn, Illinois, where my second cousin and official sponsor lived.

Immediately after my arrival in the US in April 1990, I started a full-time work-study program and became an ATA Member.

I began translating and interpreting for agencies and, step by step, I got so much work that after five years I realized that I could earn more as a freelance translator/interpreter than as a shipping/receiving clerk and became a full-time freelance linguist.

I was always a generalist. I did not mind translating small-gadget manuals or technical Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) for OSHA, or interpreting at a grand jury hearing, hospital, or deposition, or a long argumentative and tense meeting among hostile ex-partners in the violin-making business.

Naturally, all translators “*mají v torně maršálskou hůl*” (Czech idiom for “harbor a dream of doing something magnificent”), and many yearn to translate “*krásná literatura*” (belles lettres).

The most rewarding project I ever worked on was translating a rather long religious piece (almost ten thousand words of *krásná literatura*), which required an adventurous journey to a publishing house in Slovakia (yes, I was so bold as to translate into Slovak, of course with double and triple checks for false friends, grammar, and orthography, doing my best not to mix up “s” and “z”, or “i” and “y”). I still have a beautiful leather-bound official Roman Catholic Slovak version of the Bible and related religious literature. This helped prepare me for my future job with the Council of the European Union—I had to fastidiously quote relevant sources (the Slovak Bible and other official religious documents).

Later, in fact, I found all my work on official translations of “*acquis communautaire*” to be rewarding. Being in a team of official translators and editors of EU legislation was an honor, and I spent two wonderful decades (1999 to 2018) doing what I liked most.

As for advice I might give to translators just starting out, in capitalist America (or in the capitalist world in general), I would recall the first advice I heard from a professional linguist at a CHICATA

(Chicago Area Translators Association) meeting in 1993. He told us, fresh, naïve, and overly optimistic translators and interpreters, frankly and in a tough-love way: “You want to be a translator? Get a real job!—and start translating evenings, weekends, part-time.” He was probably tired of hearing the same questions and complaints again and again (how hard it was to get a reasonable, livable rate, how to get a job, how to break into the translating business in the first place).

I followed his advice (of course, I had to), and it took me another five years of working full-time in a small chemical company (see above), studying for a second university degree, and doing small agency linguistic jobs to become a full-time linguist.

Another piece of advice from frank and sincere CHICATA speakers that was useful and that I would like to repeat is: “A specialized linguistics education is OK, but the more formal and informal education and knowledge you have, the better. Dictionaries and glossaries and the internet are useful, but what you have in your head is often faster and more practical.”

Budget-wise, again, I would like to repeat what I recall and what I learned during busy freelance days: “If you are unhappy with low rates and uncooperative clients who pay those low rates late, to boot, try to eliminate them, politely explaining why, and keep the clients you like.”

When figuring out what rate you should charge, factor in:

- your total expenses for living, leisure, and education;
- your availability (365 days/year minus your leisure, family, and study time);
- divide your total expenses (plus the amount you'd like to put into savings) by the available time

My final piece of advice, as a former full-time in-house linguist, which brings good pay, guaranteed new hardware and software every couple of years, and a professional environment, and other benefits—that of course many of us call “rights” (such as good health insurance, paid vacation in the range of five and more weeks, flexible work scheduling and the like):

- Be proactive and follow the internet and other sources to find the proper job openings (sometimes vacancies come up once in five or more years, when the current in-house employees retire, go on maternity leave, or get sick);

- Continue your formal education if you can (an extra MA degree might improve your chances);
- Have available documents regarding all relevant requirements and languages (even documentation of successful testing with government agencies, freelancing for or volunteering with radio stations, etc., might be helpful);
- If you've done well on a prospective employer's test, follow up and get in touch with future colleagues and your future department head (sometimes it takes years before you're actually hired).

To sum up my translator experience, the most challenging and difficult thing was, after 20 years, transitioning from full-time in-house linguist (freelance and side jobs were even prohibited in the employment contract) back to freelance. The reasons for this were:

- Most, if not all, freelance contacts can be lost, and after returning to freelance, new contacts may be difficult to find;
- The former in-house translator, used to different treatment, may not be patient enough, there are more young and gifted linguists, competition seems to be overwhelming, etc.;
- The employment environment is not quite the same (putting it diplomatically);
- An in-house career offers free hardware and software, and other support, including a steady workload.

It is easy to take free, easily available and updated hardware and software for granted, not to mention a steady paycheck. Freelancing can feel like a different world with different rules. Having considered all the above, in my view, it is best to accept a full-time in-house job when you think your employment will last long enough (i.e., be a permanent position) to achieve financial security and a pension and, paradoxically, also, when the job will be short enough that you won't lose touch with contacts, and your marketability will not deteriorate.

Working with languages is a wonderful way to earn a living (despite the tongue-in-cheek warning above about getting “a real job”).

George Pelka is a Life/Associate member of the ATA, a former full-time in-house translator (with the job title “Linguistic Administrator”) for the Council of the European Union and the Government of the Czech Republic (1999 to 2018). He is currently retired and freelancing and lives in western Illinois with his family. He can be reached at jiripelka@gmail.com.

Literary Translation as Mindfulness— and Its Many Benefits

Evgeny Terekhin

When someone asks me how to become a literary translator, I have to stop and think. There is so much to say. Many individual streams feed this wonderful ocean of creativity. Yet there is one stream that, in my opinion, flows underneath it all—and crowns it all. I would put it like this: “Literary translation is a mindfulness practice.”

The Wisdom of a Cat

In his book *The Power of Now*, Eckhart Tolle tells a story of how his cats taught him great wisdom. Imagine a cat sitting in front of a high fence, wanting to jump on it.

It looks up, then down, then around. For a brief moment, it seems to have lost all interest in jumping. Then, all of a sudden, it pricks its ears and looks up again. You wonder if he will make it. The fence is too high. Before you know it, the cat’s body tenses—you can almost “see” how energy accumulates inside it. Where does it come from? Its paws shuffle back and forth for a second or two, and then... it shoots itself up into the air in a most graceful leap, landing exactly where it wanted to be.

What was happening inside the cat? You could almost sense the sudden rise of energy inside this nimble body. It felt almost like the cat was ALREADY up there even before it jumped.

What is the source of this energy? The cat simply projected itself to where it wanted to be. It saw itself ALREADY up there before doing anything. It had no doubt whether it would make it. It was one with its goal.

How Does This Translate to Translating?

I have been doing translations since 1993, and by now I can catch the difference between “just translating” (as in putting words on a page) and getting this “surge of energy inside” because I have seen in my mind what this sentence, paragraph, or text SHOULD be.

There is no doubt at that moment. I don’t hesitate as to what words to use. They just flow. Before I know it, the text is on the page. I am not “thinking” very much; it’s ALREADY there, in my mind.

This state of consciousness is fleeting, of course. It comes and goes. Unfortunately, I am not a cat and can’t bring it about at the swish of a tail. But I have

noticed that, whatever my state of mind at the beginning of the day, I still have some say in what will happen.

Literary Translation as Mindfulness— Am I Playing or Working?

A wise man once said to me: “You are lucky to be a translator. You can always play.” I was surprised. I told him that at times my work felt like drudgery.

He replied: “You still have a choice in the matter. You can choose to play or to toil.”

Chuang Tzu, an ancient Chinese philosopher, told a parable of an archer who “needed to win.” At first, he was shooting just for fun and seldom missed. When someone offered him a reward, a brass buckle, he became nervous. Then he was offered a prize of gold and started seeing double. His skill didn’t change, but the prize divided him. He cared more about winning than shooting.

The Need to Get Results

If I start my day with the mindset “I need to get this done by 5 pm,” I focus on results. On winning. And this mindset divides me. I am not fully present in what I do. Focusing on the goal, not the moment, drains me of power.

But if I let go of the “need to win,” I gradually immerse myself in the process. My mind refocuses on what’s right there on the page. I get centered. I pause. I don’t need to win. I am one with what I do.

This new mindset grows slowly. Every now and then, I still relapse and fall into a mindset of “Am I being productive?” But I let it go again and again, and then suddenly it comes—a surge of energy. I ALREADY see what I want to say even before typing it out. And then... I suddenly find myself up on the fence.

The Result of Not Focusing on Results

It’s impossible to create real quality when your work is a means to an end. Real quality is elusive. It eludes me when I am not in the flow, not in the zone, regardless of how much effort I put in. And it comes organically when I am “not producing” but playing. My work is an end in itself.

Revisiting my client’s comments on the quality of my work, I often see this strange correlation. Not focusing on results usually brings about the best

results. When I am not in the flow and just type words on a page, the quality may not be bad, but it's not what the client will come back for.

The Benefits of Working in the Flow

Science has discovered that when a person is in the flow, the brain releases certain hormones and brain-waves that are conducive to a sudden leap in performance. The neocortex amps up dramatically, increasing the speed of learning. The prefrontal cortex, which is our “conscious mind,” temporarily enters a state of calm, which explains why we lose all sense of time, place, and self.

In other words, this is a neurobiological condition in which outstanding performance and creativity become readily accessible.

How Do You Enter the Flow State?

Even though we have no direct control over the flow, certain mental exercises help facilitate this state of consciousness. All people have a flow-inducing strategy, whether they are aware of it or not.

It takes some self-observation to find situations, contexts, or thought patterns that work for you as a portal into the flow. Have you seen yourself suddenly getting inspired by something to the degree that you become super energized? What touched you to the core? When was it? Where did it happen?

I have noticed over time that I get super energized when I imagine myself reading my translations to my friends gathered in our living room. This is something that has actually happened a lot in the past when we hosted a book club in our apartment. In my mind's eye, I will immediately see my friends' faces, and I want to tell them a good story.

This thought alone sends shivers down my spine. It has worked for me again and again when I want to get in the flow.

Some Questions and Helpful Tips for Getting in the Flow

1. What are the situations, thought patterns, or places that make you come alive again and again?
2. Where does the flow state happen for you the most?
3. What makes these situations, thought patterns, or places so meaningful?
4. When they come to mind, what is happening for you? (Not externally as in: “I am playing music” but internally: “I am making these people happy.”) In my case, I am telling an exciting story to my good friends, and I am loving it.
5. Focus on that inner goal—“I want to tell my friends a good story,” for example—when you start translating.

Evgeny Terekhin is a Houston-based literary translator, interpreter, and editor specializing in English to Russian and Russian to English literary, IT, medical, and legal translations. He is a member of the Houston Interpreters and Translators Association (HITA) and is ATA-certified for English>Russian.

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Translating Foreignness and Folksiness in “Aslan’s Bride”

Shelley Fairweather-Vega



SlavFile is pleased to have received permission to republish an article by SLD member Shelley Fairweather-Vega that originally appeared on the [RusTRANS blog](#). In it, she talks about her experience translating “Aslan’s Bride,” a short story by Kazakhstani author

Nadezhda Chernova. *RusTRANS* is the umbrella under which a number of projects researching the role and production of Russian>English literary translation are being spearheaded by Exeter University (UK) *RusLit* scholars Muireann Maguire and Cathy McAteer. Most of these projects involve scholarly investigations designed to shed light on the political and social forces at play in the publishing of Russian literature in English translation, but one aspect of *RusTRANS* has had a welcome practical impact on working R>E literary translators: it has channeled funding provided by the European Research Council (ERC) to support the preparation of excerpts of translated contemporary Russian literature to be used as pitches to publishers. What Maguire and McAteer ask in return is that they be kept informed about the process of finding a publisher and negotiating a publishing contract, as one of the key academic outputs of *RusTRANS* is to be an academic study analyzing which Russian authors and which Russian literary styles, genres, and topics are more likely to be contracted for translation by English-language publishers. Under the auspices of *RusTRANS*, ERC-funded grants of up to UK£1,000 per translation project were awarded competitively to a total of 14 translators (including two co-translator pairs). All the translators were working on new, un-commissioned translations of contemporary Russian-language prose (you can read more [here](#)). Shelley took advantage of this funding opportunity and was awarded a grant to work on an anthology of new women’s writing from Kazakhstan. As Maguire writes in her introduction, in the article Shelley “talks about the translation issues involved in making a largely unknown ‘small’ literature appeal to Anglophone readers and publishers, and how she dealt with them in her version of ‘Aslan’s Bride.’”

We translators are supposed to make the foreign more familiar. This is true whether we prefer to domesticate or foreignize when translating, whether we explain all aspects of the text to its new readers or

leave multiple semantic and stylistic mysteries for them to consider. Even the most literal translation cannot help but make the original text more intelligible, however slightly, to readers in the new language—the mere act of using familiar words, a familiar alphabet, makes the foreign text that much more understandable, moving it from the realm of the completely incomprehensible to the realm of what could possibly be comprehended.

Yet occasionally we come across a story that purposefully resists our attempts to drag it into familiarity. Some writing is intentionally surreal or nonsensical, of course. But some, like Nadezhda Chernova’s “Aslan’s Bride,” uses the most commonplace, colloquial language possible, and nevertheless places foreignness center stage, forcing characters and narrators to grapple with the unknown. Translating this story, then, presented me with an unusual task: preserve the aura of both folksiness and foreignness, and make sure the characters’ own sense of estrangement reaches target-language audiences intact.

Chernova is a Russian writer who has had a long and successful career in Kazakhstan and is well placed to tell stories that span the multi-ethnic space and painful history of that country. I was introduced to her work by Z aure Batayeva, a Kazakh writer and translator, who is collaborating with me on *Amanat*, our anthology of recent Kazakh women’s writing that is just about complete. *Amanat* is a Kazakh word meaning “sacred trust,” and “Aslan’s Bride” is one of the highlights of this collection. In the story, a hapless young woman with the Russian nickname “Milochka”—“Sweetie,” maybe, though I decided not to translate it into English—leaves her loveless world behind and sets out to points unknown. What she finds is a strange village by a beautiful sea, where the women all wear black and speak a different language (in other words, they’re as incomprehensible to Milochka as an untranslated text!), and where, thirty years after the end of World War II, one woman, Tomiko, is still expecting her son Aslan to return from the front lines.

Presented [here](#) is the first part of the long short story, accounting for about 30% of the full text. The foreignness in the storytelling is not immediately apparent. On the contrary, our introduction to Milochka is unremarkable almost to the point of dullness; she is “not a pretty girl” in an unnamed, uninspiring city, working in a library and clinging desperately to a terrible love affair. The narrator,

channeling Milochka's own thoughts, speaks in naïve (but rather sweet) clichés. In translating this portrayal of Milochka's drab life, it was important to retain all the naivete of Milochka's thinking, all her quiet desperation. And so I replicate Chernova's use of clichés ("her heart would burst from her chest in happiness"), occasionally altered slightly ("She bided her time, but her time just wouldn't come"). And I tried to keep the English as casual and innocent as possible, too, down to the matter-of-factness in the way Styopa's death is announced, and the simple way in which Milochka cries at his grave ("for a while").

Readers' first clue that there is more to the world is Milochka's discussion with her cynical neighbor, Antonina, about geography. Milochka wonders if she should go north to find a husband. Antonina dismisses the idea: "Nonsense! Anyone who can't get married here won't have any luck **up there**. Maybe someone would amuse himself with you a while, dabble a bit, a month maybe, and then—whoosh! They've all got lawfully wedded wives sitting **down south**, waiting for their men to come back rich." Now we know Milochka is living her life in an in-between place, neither north nor south, across which people travel to make their fortunes. And yet, given that the Milochka we meet in the first couple of pages is not one to take charge of her own fate, we are still surprised when we learn of her sudden departure into the unknown.

Where does she end up? This is somewhat of a mystery, both in the original and—intentionally—in translation. There are clues, such as the discussion of north and south already mentioned, and Milochka's thoughts about explorers who cross "the Gobi Desert and the Asiatic steppe and the winter forests of Old Rus'," and if we know that Chernova is a Kazakhstani writer, we can assume that the warm sea Milochka reaches is the Caspian Sea. But who are the somber people she meets there? Again, there are clues, which may or may not be intelligible to the story's original readers and are certainly less so to us reading in English. The people speak a different language and have strange (non-Russian and non-Kazakh) names: Costa, Tomiko, Aslan. In a poster, Stalin's mother looks like one of the local women, who dress in all black. I puzzled over those clues while translating but did not have a good answer until I consulted with Zaure. Her theory is that Milochka stumbled upon a community of Ossetians living on the Caspian Sea, a generation after being deported there by the autocrat



Nadezhda Chernova

in Costa's poster. To the Soviets, and indeed to the czars before them, remote and underpopulated Kazakhstan seemed the perfect place to send undesirable individuals and groups. A long list of ethnic communities, including many from the Caucasus, were deported there during and after the Second World War. Kazakhstan reported a population of about 4,000 Ossetians as late as a 1989 census. So this theory is a good one.

To Milochka, however, the name of the place she has moved to and the origins of the people there are of no real interest. The only thought she articulates to herself on meeting Costa is "What a sloppy old slob!" as she giggles at his clothing and the size of his nose. The original and the translation both persist with Milochka's idiomatic framing of everything around her, including the descriptions of what otherwise might have been portrayed as exotic foreign characters. For instance, later in the story, we're told in quite familiar terms that "Tomiko was all business" and "Costa went around sighing over Tomiko," and they eat berries from a bush or tree whose Russian name, кизил, covers a genus of over 80 diverse species on three continents. My search for an appropriately vague and folksy name for that berry landed on "houndberries." Does it matter, either to Milochka or to us readers, what exact type they are?

The approach I embraced as I completed this translation is to simply preserve these mysteries, letting English-language readers wonder about everything from the houndberries to Tomiko's language. In this modern-day Kazakhstani fairy tale, we don't need to know the name of the city or the sea, or why people have the names that they have, any more than we need that information in a tale from the Brothers Grimm. I admit this approach has backfired—one literary journal rejected "Aslan's Bride," citing its length but also the editorial board's difficulty placing the story in time. The year, however, is the one detail that is specified with certainty in the text. This leaves me to wonder if the editors' real disorientation was in space, not time. That is an understandable response. It's also exactly the response I want this translation to provoke, and celebrate.

"Aslan's Bride" is part of a planned anthology of contemporary women's writing from Kazakhstan, collected and translated by Zaure Batayeva and Shelley Fairweather-Vega and financially supported in part by RusTRANS. Final arrangements with a publisher are pending, but you can learn more about the anthology and individual stories by contacting Shelley at translation@fairvega.com

SLAVFILE LITE: NOT BY WORD COUNT ALONE

Lydia Razran Stone



Dear readers, I am devoting my first column as *SlavFile* editor emerita to the most recent long(ish) poem I have translated. I would like to thank, first of all, the current editors for welcoming my continued participation. I would also like to thank William Parsons, Professor Emeritus of History and Russian Studies at Eckerd College, for (re)introducing this poem to me and working with me on the first few stanzas, as well as Boris Silversteyn, Nora Favorov and especially Liv Bliss for their valuable suggestions and editorial comments.

История российского государства

A History of the Russian State

by Alexey Tolstoy 1868

translated by Lydia Stone 2019

1. Послушайте, ребята,
Что вам расскажет дед.
Земля наша богата,
Порядка в ней лишь нет.

1. Now listen to me, children.
I'm old and know the facts.
Great wealth to us was given,
But order we have lacked.

2. А эту правду, детки,
За тысячу уж лет
Смекнули наши предки:
Порядка-де, вишь, нет.

2. Our ancestors conceded
A thousand years ago
That order was sore needed
For Rus to thrive and grow.

3. И стали все под стягом,
И молвят: «Как нам быть?
Давай пошлем к варягам:
Пускай придут княжить.

3. Our people got together
This fatal lack to rue,
And to determine whether
There was anything to do.

4. Ведь немцы тороваты,
Им ведом мрак и свет,
Земля ж у нас богата,
Порядка в ней лишь нет».

4. They'd heard of Viking brothers
Who order could impose
Upon themselves and others.
And here's what they proposed.

5. Посланцы скорым шагом
Отправились туда
И говорят варягам:
«Придите, господа!

5. "Why shouldn't we invite them
To rule our land as well?
Our riches should incite them
To come to Rus to dwell.

6. Мы вам отсыпем злата,
Что киевских конфет;
Земля у нас богата,
Порядка в ней лишь нет».

6. "We'll offer gold and money,
And for their help we'll plead
Rus flows with milk and honey,
But order's what we need."

7. Варягам стало жутко,
Но думают: «Что ж тут?
Попытка ведь не шутка –
Пойдем, коли зовут!»

7. By this odd proposition
Those Vikings were appalled
But voiced no opposition:
"Let's go since we've been called."

8. И вот пришли три брата,
Варяги средних лет,
Глядят – земля богата,
Порядка ж вовсе нет.

8. To Russia came three Vikings –
Norsemen, no longer young.
They saw we'd riches striking,
But order? We had none.

9. «Ну, — думают, — команда!
Здесь ногу сломит черт,
Es ist ja eine Schande,
Wir müssen wieder fort».¹

9. Said one, "This land's a nightmare.
My brothers, let us flee
I fear to spend one night here.
It's sheer catastrophe."

10. Но братец старший Рюрик
«Постой, — сказал другим, —
Fortgeh'n wär' ungebürlich,
Vielleicht isn's nicht so schlimm.²

11. Хотя вшивая команда,
Почти одна лишь шваль;
Wir bringen's schon zustande,
Versuchen wir einmal».³

12. И стал княжить он сильно,
Княжил семнадцать лет,
Земля была обильна,
Порядка ж нет как нет!

13. За ним княжил князь Игорь,
А правил им Олег,
Das war ein großer Krieger⁴
И умный человек.

14. Потом княжила Ольга,
А после Святослав;
So ging die Reihenfolge⁵
Языческих держав.

15. Когда ж вступил Владимир
На свой отцовский трон,
Da endigte für immer
Die alte Religion.⁶

16. Он вдруг сказал народу:
«Ведь наши боги дрянь,
Пойдем креститься в воду!»
И сделал нам Иордань.

17. «Перун уж очень гадок!
Когда его спихнем,
Увидите, порядок
Какой мы заведем!»

18. Послал он за попами
В Афины и Царьград,
Попы пришли толпами,
Крестятся и кадят,

19. Поют себе умильно
И полнят свой кисет;
Земля, как есть, обильна,
Порядка только нет.

20. Умре Владимир с горя,
Порядка не создав.
За ним княжить стал вскоре
Великий Ярослав.

21. Оно, пожалуй, с этим
Порядок бы и был,
Но из любви он к детям
Всю землю разделил.

22. Плоха была услуга,
А дети, видя то,

10. But Rurik was the oldest
And sang another tune:
“Lest in contempt men hold us,
Let’s not give up so soon.

11. “Although it will be grueling
To tame and fix this mess
Perhaps our way of ruling
Won’t be without success.”

12. The years of Rurik’s reigning
Add up to seventeen,
Our land’s wealth still remaining.
But order? Not yet seen.

13. Next Oleg, by a snake killed,
Succeeded by Igor,
Whose name we venerate still
For his great skills at war.

14. Then Olga in succession,
Then Svyatoslav, the last
In this pagan procession,
For change was coming fast.

15. With Vlad, who sought salvation
For heathens in his land,
Made Rus a Christian nation
And idol worship banned.

16. “Get baptized, Rus!” he ordered.
“Old gods can’t serve us well.
Quick, plunge in Dniepr’s waters
And save your souls from Hell.

17. “False idols can’t defend us
From chaos and abuse
Without them, God will send us
True order here in Rus.”

18. He sent away for Christians
From Tsargrad and from Greece.
To Rus came priests and missions.
Their praying never ceased.

19. They sang sweet hymns, bells sounded.
Our gold their coffers filled.
Our land with wealth abounded.
But order? Lacking still.

20. Vladimir died of sorrow,
His dreams unrealized.
The throne passed on the morrow
To Yaroslav the Wise.

21. O’er order he presided,
But then his life was done,
His will our Rus divided:
One chunk to every son.

22. This act was unsuccessful.
Why had he thought it right?

Давай тузить друг друга:
Кто как и чем во что!

23. Узнали то татары:
«Ну, — думают, — не трусь!»
Надели шаровары,
Приехали на Русь.

24. «От вашего, мол, спора
Земля пошла вверх дном,
Постойте ж, мы вам скоро
Порядок заведем».

25. Кричат: «Давайте дани!»
(Хоть вон святых неси.)
Тут много всякой дряни
Настало на Руси.

26. Что день, то брат на брата
В орду несет извет;
Земля, кажись, богата —
Порядка ж вовсе нет.

27. Иван явился Третий;
Он говорит: «Шалишь!
Уж мы теперь не дети!»
Послал татарам шиш.

28. И вот земля свободна
От всяких зол и бед
И очень хлебородна,
А все ж порядка нет.

29. Настал Иван Четвертый
Он Третьему был внук;
Калач на царстве тертый
И многих жен супруг.

30. Иван Васильич Грозный
Ему был имярек
За то, что был серьезный,
Солидный человек.

31. Приемами не сладок,
Но разумом не хром;
Такой завел порядок,
Хоть покати шаром!

32. Жить можно бы беспечно
При этаким царе;
Но ах! ничто не вечно —
И царь Иван умре!

33. За ним царить стал Федор,
Отцу живой контраст;
Был разумом не бодор,
Трезвонить лишь горазд.

34. Борис же, царский шурин,
Не в шутку был умен,
Брюнет, лицом недурен,
И сел на царский трон.

From competition stressful
His sons began to fight.

23. Tatars, those rabble-rousers,
Saw this and seized their chance.
Clad in their baggy trousers,
On Russia they advanced.

24. They said, "All this infighting's
Turned Russia upside down.
We'll fix it fast as lightning.
For order we're renowned."

25. The tribute that we paid them
And other vile abuse
And sacrileges made them
A plague on Mother Rus.

26. The Russian rulers squabbled —
Complaints, recrimination.
Our land? Still rich, though hobbled:
No order in our nation.

27. Ivan the Third aspired
To break the Tatar yoke.
He did; he's much admired —
Those Tatars were no joke.

28. Our land was liberated,
Freed from the Tatar threat,
No longer subjugated,
But still no order yet.

29. Ivan the Fourth acceded,
His grandpa being dead.
He'd strength to rule as needed.
Want proof? — Those wives he wed.

30. Indeed he was no darling,
Called Terrible and Dread.
But when he wasn't snarling
Our land he aptly led.

31. Though harshly autocratic,
He had an able brain;
Brought order systematic,
And no one dared complain.

32. This order satisfied us;
Of chaos we'd our fill.
But then the fates defied us:
He died, as all men will.

33. The next to reign was Fyodor,
A weak-willed holy fool.
And, quite unlike his father,
He had no gift for rule.

34. His wife's wise brother, Boris,
On seeing things were tough,
Vowed that he'd govern for us,
And life was good enough.

35. При нем пошло все гладко,
Не стало прежних зол,
Чуть-чуть было порядка
В земле он не завел.

36. К несчастью, самозванец,
Откуда ни возмись,
Такой задал нам танец,
Что умер царь Борис.

37. И, на Бориса место
Взобравшись, сей нахал
От радости с невестой
Ногами заболтал.

38. Хоть был он парень бравый
И даже не дурак,
Но под его державой
Стал бунтовать поляк.

39. А то нам не по сердцу;
И вот однажды в ночь
Мы задали им перцу
И всех прогнали прочь.

40. Взошел на трон Василий,
Но вскоре всей землей
Его мы попросили,
Чтоб он сошел долой.

41. Вернулись поляки,
Казачков привели;
Пошел сумбур и драки:
Поляки и казаки,

42. Казаки и поляки
Нас паки бьют и паки;
Мы ж без царя как раки
Горюем на мели.

43. Прямые были страсти —
Порядка ж не на грош.
Известно, что без власти
Далёко не уйдешь.

44. Чтоб трон поправить царский
И вновь царя избрать,
Тут Минин и Пожарский
Скорей собрали рать.

45. И выгнала их сила
Поляков снова вон,
Земля же Михаила
Взвела на русский трон.

46. Свершилось то летом;
Но был ли уговор —
История об этом
Молчит до этих пор.

47. Варшава нам и Вильна
Прислали свой привет;

35. Our enemies had vanished;
We scarcely had a care;
This tsar past ills all banished.
And order? Almost there.

36. False Dmitry, a Pretender,
Claimed right to rule our land.
Boris could not defend her —
He'd died, you understand.

37. Supported by a faction,
This Dmitry won the throne.
The Poles through this transaction
Won power of their own.

38. Although he was quite dashing
And not a fool at all,
He scorned our Russian fashion,
As did his wife, a Pole.

39. In this we sensed a danger.
He seemed, to our dismay,
A Polish-leaning stranger.
We drove his crew away.

40. A fellow called Vasily
Became next tsar in line
But soon left, willy-nilly.
(We forced him to resign.)

41. The Poles returned, invading,
And brought Cossacks along.
There was no use evading
The fact we weren't strong.

42. Time and again they beat us,
And we could only wail.
Without a tsar to lead us,
Our Rus was sure to fail.

43. Though fired up, courageous,
We were in direst need.
Success, though, seemed outrageous
Without one who could lead.

44. To save us from despairing
Pozharsky and Minin,
Two men of stalwart bearing,
Appeared upon the scene.

45. A great armed force recruiting,
They drove the Poles back home,
Saved Rus from foreign looting,
Put Michael on the throne.

46. This young tsar was elected
When an assembly met.
But why he was selected
Nobody's told us yet.

47. He, Romanov's first tsarlet,
Was meek and never bold.

Земля была обильна —
Порядка ж нет как нет

48. Сев Алексей на царство,
Тогда роди Петра.
Пришла для государства
Тут новая пора.

49. Царь Петр любил порядок,
Почти как царь Иван,
И так же был не сладок,
Порой бывал и пьян.

50. Он молвил: «Мне вас жалко,
Вы сгинете вконец;
Но у меня есть палка,
И я вам всем отец!

51. Не далее как к святкам
Я вам подарок дам!»
И тотчас за порядком
Уехал в Амстердам.

52. Вернувшись оттуда,
Он гладко нас обрил,
А к святкам, так что чудо,
В голландцев нарядил.

53. Но это, впрочем, в шутку,
Петра я не виню:
Больному дать желудку
Полезно ревеню.

54. Хотя силён уж очень
Был, может быть, прием;
А всё ж довольно прочен
Прядок стал при нем.

55. Но сон объял могильный
Петра во цвете лет,
Глядишь земля обильна,
Порядка ж снова нет.

56. Тут кротко или строго
Царило много лиц,
Царей не слишком много,
А более цариц.

57. Бирон царил при Анне;
Он сущий был жандарм,
Сидели мы как в ванне
При нем, daß Gotterbarm!⁷

58. Веселая царица
Была Елисавет:
Поет и веселится,
Порядка только нет.

59. Какая ж тут причина
И где же корень зла,
Сама Екатерина
Постигнуть не могла.

Some thought him just a varlet
Who did as he was told.

48. He died, his son acceded,
Disorder still our fate.
Next came the tsar we needed:
Tsar Peter, called the Great.

49. This tsar much valued order,
Though prone to its abuse;
Sought it beyond our border
And brought it back to Rus.

50. He could be cruel, hotheaded,
And how he loved to drink!
His strong will people dreaded,
Or so the scholars think.

51. His boyars he updated,
From which they suffered much.
He thought Old Rus was fated
To be more like the Dutch.

52. He said we looked like scarecrows,
And then things got all weird.
He dressed us up in their clothes
And shaved off every beard.

53. But I'm just being funny;
I'll give this tsar his due.
To cure an ailing tummy
You need a harsh, strong brew.

54. His power autocratic,
Although a bit too harsh,
Birthed order systematic,
And skills to forward march.

55. He left life prematurely,
The lot of many men.
Our land? Still fertile, surely.
But order – gone again!

56. And next our land Eurasian
Was ruled by tsars galore.
Some of the male persuasion,
The female – somewhat more.

57. Queen Anna delegated
Her power to Biron
(A German Russians hated).
We felt ourselves undone.

58. Elizabeth Tsarina
Just loved to laugh and sing.
Rus liked her gay demeanor.
But order? No such thing.

59. Disorder still pervaded.
Was turmoil Russia's fate?
Who knew? Its cure evaded
Her too, Catherine the Great.

60. «Madame, при вас на диво
Порядок расцветет, —
Писали ей учтиво
Вольтер и Дидерот, —

61. Лишь надобно народу,
Которому вы мать,
Скорее дать свободу,
Скорей свободу дать».

62. «Messieurs, — им возразила
Она, — vous me comblez», —⁸
И тотчас прикрепила
Украинцев к земле.

63. За ней царить стал Павел,
Мальтийский кавалер,
Но не совсем он правил
На рыцарский манер.

64. Царь Александр Первый
Настал ему взамен,
В нем слабы были нервы,
Но был он джентльмен.

65. Когда на нас в азарте
Стотысячную рать
Надвинул Бонапарте,
Он начал отступать.

66. Казалось, ну, ниже
Нельзя сидеть в дыре,
Ан глядь: уж мы в Париже,
C Louis le Désiré.

67. В то время очень сильно
Расцвел России цвет,
Земля была обильна,
Порядка ж нет как нет.

68. Последнее сказанье
Я б написал мое,
Но чаю наказание,
Боюсь monsieur Veillot.

69. Ходить бывает склизко
По камешкам иным,
Итак, о том, что близко,
Мы лучше умолчим.

70. Оставим лучше троны,
К министрам перейдем.
Но что я слышу? стоны,
И крики, и содом!

71. Что вижу я! Лишь в сказках
Мы зрим такой наряд;
На маленьких салазках
Министры все катят.

72. С горы со криком громким
In corpore,⁹ сполна,

60. "You'll make your land fantastic,
With order everywhere,"
Came praise, effuse, bombastic
From Diderot, Voltaire.

61. "But you — la reine, their mother —
Must set your people free.
Then you, and no one other,
Will reign in history."

62. "Messieurs," she wrote politely,
"You're much too kind, you rave."
Then she began forthrightly
The Ukraine to enslave.

63. The next to reign was Pavel,
A Knight of Malta bold.
Though I don't want to cavil,
No knight was he, we're told.

64. Rule passed to Alexander,
Next Romanov in line:
High strung and no commander
But, like a Brit, refined.

65. Without a fight, he ceded
Moskva to Bonaparte —
An act that near succeeded
In breaking Russia's heart.

66. You'd think this would consign him
To shame and misery;
But no, quite soon we find him
In France, with King Louis.

67. And then our Russia flourished
Beyond our fondest hope.
Our land was rich, well-nourished.
But order? I'd say nope.

68. I'd finish this discussion
(There's still a ways to go),
But fear some repercussion;
He's strict, Monsieur Veillot.

69. You're apt not to be stable
When on slick ground you walk.
Thus, I, if I am able,
Of recent times won't talk.

70. So far I have been zealous
And spoke just of the throne.
Lest ministers grow jealous
Their praises I'll intone.

71. I am hallucinating:
This scene cannot be real.
They must be celebrating,
Just listen to them squeal.

72. For downward they're all sliding
On small but fancy sleighs.

Скользя, свои к потомкам
Уносят имена.

73. Се Норов, се Путятин,
Се Панин, се Метлин,
Се Брок, а се Замятнин,
Се Корф, се Головин.

74. Их много, очень много,
Припомнить всех нельзя,
И вниз одной дорогой
Летят они, скользя.

75. Я грешен: летописный
Я позабыл свой слог;
Картине живописной
Противостать не мог.

76. Лиризм, на все способный,
Знать, у меня в крови;
О Нестор преподобный,
Меня ты вдохнови.

77. Поуспокой мне совесть,
Мое усердье зря,
И дай мою мне повесть
Окончить не хитря.

78. Итак, начавши снова,
Столбец кончаю свой
От рождения Христова
В год шестьдесят восьмой.

79. Увидя, что всё хуже
Идут у нас дела,
Зело изрядно мужа
Господь нам ниспосла.

80. На утешенье наше
Нам, аки свет зари,
Свой лик яви Тимашев —
Порядок водвори.

81. Что аз же многогрешный
На бранных сих листах
Не дописах поспешно
Или переписах,

82. То, спереди и сзади
Читая во все дни,
Исправи правды ради
Писанья ж не кляни.

83. Составил от былинок
Рассказ немудрый сей
Худый смиренный инок,
Раб Божий Алексей.

Their names headlong go riding
Toward folks in future days.

73. There's Norov; there's Putyatin;
There's Manin and Metlin;
There's Brok, also Zamyatin;
And Korf and Golovin.

74. Have I forgotten any?
I cannot quite recall.
You see there are so many:
They're sliding downhill all.

75. Forgive me if my writing
Conflicts with history.
I'm having trouble fighting
This vision I now see.

76. Such lyric visions haunt me,
Erupting in my blood.
Oh, Nestor, how they taunt me:
Help nip them in the bud.

77. Help quash these visions gory,
My conscientious zeal,
So I can end my story
And not embarrassed feel.

78. And if it should find favor,
My saga I'll update,
From birth of Christ our Savior
To eighteen sixty-eight.

79. Observing how our story
From bad to worse proceeds,
The Lord, in all his glory,
Sent down the man Rus needs.

80. For Russia's consolation,
Bright as the rising sun,
To heal our ailing nation,
Timashev, you have come.

81. I am a rank beginner
And humbly do entreat
You to assist this sinner
His flawed work to complete.

82 With your renowned precision
Please read it carefully
And make each due revision
Without condemning me.

83. It's based on our byliny.
This monk doth meekly pray
That you will find it seemly:
God's servant, Alexey.

1 Ведь это позор —
/ Мы должны убраться прочь (нем.)

2 Уйти было бы неприлично,
/ Может быть, это не так уж плохо (нем.)

3 Мы справимся, / Давайте попробуем (нем.)

4 Это был великий воин (нем.)

5 Такова была последовательность (нем.)

6 Тогда пришел конец / Старой религии (нем.)

7 помилуй Бог! (нем.)

8 Господа, ... вы слишком добры ко мне (франц.)

9 В полном составе (лат.)

(Yet Still More) Pitfalls, Spitballs, and Pratfalls

Sources of Bewilderment or Confusion for Translators in the Idiomatic Language Used in American Political News Reporting (With a Few Mixed Metaphors Thrown in for Good Measure)

Lydia Razran Stone

PART I. Dear readers, once again I want to introduce you to some of the “evil twins” I have found in current political news reports that would seem to me to be potential sources of confusion for non-native speakers of English and particularly translators. Russian translations were provided by *SlavFile* Associate Editor Maria Guzenko, to whom I am most grateful.

1. A **no brainer** (легкая задача, [это] не бином Ньютона, ежу понятно) vs. **brainless** (безмозглый). A *no brainer* is something so simple or obvious that it hyperbolically does not require a brain to understand, or, when used in reference to a decision, to decide upon. *Brainless* refers to a person, action, etc., of impressive stupidity.
2. **Backfire** (обратный удар, неприятные/неожиданные последствия) vs. **fire back** (выпасть [ответ]). *Backfire* originally referred to a mistimed explosion in the cylinder or exhaust of an engine. Metaphorically, the term refers to a plan or action having a negative or opposite effect on the planner or actor. *Fire back* means to react quickly and emphatically to something that has been said or done.
3. **Bend a knee** (преклонить колено) vs. **take a knee** (встать на колено при исполнении гимна перед игрой в знак протеста) vs. **knee bend** (сгибание колена). To *bend a knee* means to submit to someone or something once or habitually. To *take a knee*, originally in American football, meant to go down on one knee after receiving the ball as a signal to stop the game. In recent years the gesture has been used on a sports field, usually before a game, to protest treatment of black people and other minorities. To do *knee bends* is to perform a series of exercises to strengthen the legs.
4. **Bend someone's ear** (зудеть, надоедать, прожужжать все уши) vs. **lend an ear** to someone (выслушать). To *bend someone's ear* is to talk to someone enthusiastically and generally at great and perhaps boring or exhausting length about some topic. To *lend an ear* to someone is to listen to that person attentively.
5. **Boasts record approval** (пользуется рекордной популярностью) vs. **boasts of record approval** (хвалиться/гордиться репутацией). *Boasts* in the first case means to be possessed of something positive, in this case approval. *Boast of* something means to speak of oneself or one's accomplishment receiving unprecedented approval with excessive pride or satisfaction.
6. **Buckle down** (взяться за дело) vs. **buckle up** (пристёгиваться, застёгивать пряжкой, приготовиться к сложной ситуации). *Buckle down* means to get to work on something with determination and stamina. *Buckle up* originally means to fasten a seat belt in a vehicle or plane and, by implication, is a warning or prediction of what is expected to be a bumpy ride or difficult process.
7. **Dig in** (начать есть с аппетитом, основательно засесть за работу, учёбу) vs. **dig into** (копаться в, углубиться в, расследовать, копнуть глубже). *Dig in* may be an invitation or description of beginning to eat with gusto or to get down to work in a similar way. *Dig into* may mean to begin using a supply of something, such as money, or to assiduously investigate someone or something in an attempt to uncover information, frequently negative information.
8. **Get it** (понимать; улавливать смысл) vs. [someone's] **going to get it** (получить взбучку, тебе влетит за это). To *get it* means to understand something, including the implied or hidden meaning. Someone's *going to get it* means someone is going to be punished (especially a misbehaving child) or suffer negative consequences (кто-то получит за это, получит по мозгам, будет наказан).
9. **Get something over/across** (донести мысль, убедительно объяснить) vs. **get over something** (вылечиться от; оправиться) vs. **get something over with** (покончить с чем-либо). To *get something over* or *across* means to communicate some point or points to another or others. To *get over* means to recover from an illness, unpleasant experience, or even to no longer have a particular strong feeling or interest. To *get something over with* means to intentionally undertake something unpleasant but necessary so as to avoid further dread of doing it.

- 10. Give ground** (сдавать позиции, идти на уступки) vs. **provide grounds for** (дать повод, основания). To *give ground* is to give up some advantage in a conflict or contest of some sort. To *provide grounds for* is to provide the basis (often legal) for taking some action.
- 11. Go down in flames** (потерпеть крах) vs. **go down in history** (войти в историю). *Go down in flames* means to fail dramatically. *Go down in history* means to be remembered long after one's death usually (but not necessarily) for positive accomplishments.
- 12. Hang up** (повесить трубку) vs. **hangups**. To *hang up* is to terminate a phone or analogous call, possibly abruptly. *Hangups* (причины нервозности, жалоба, заморочки, тараканы в голове) are a person's individual emotional problems, inhibitions, or negative obsessions.
- 13. Hit list** (список на уничтожение, расстрельный список, список потенциальных жертв/ клиентов/целей) vs. **hit parade** (хит-парад, список или концерт самых популярных песенок). A *hit list* is a putative list of people that a gangster wants to have killed. A *hit parade* was originally a listing of the most popular songs played in the media, and may by implication be a list of a person's or organization's most obvious successes.
- 14. In a rut** (делать одно и то же каждый день, заикнуться на чем-то, быть в колее/тупике) vs. **in a groove** (в отличной форме, в струе, быть удачливым) To be *in a rut* means to be stuck in a limited, usually boring or unsatisfying, course of action or series of actions. To be/get *in a/the groove* means to be performing smoothly and well, usually without expending excess effort.
- 15. In the fold** (быть своим среди кого-либо, быть в теме) vs. **above the fold** (в самом видном месте на странице газеты, быть главным материалом выпуска). *In the fold* means to be a member of a group of people who share one's beliefs. The reference is to a sheep fold. *Above the fold* refers to a story being printed in the top half of the front page of a newspaper and, by implication, considered by the paper to be of top importance and most likely to be noticed and read by the readers. Can be used of other stories highlighted by the media.
- 16. Just seems beyond the pale** (всего лишь кажется за пределами дозволенного,) vs. **seems just beyond the pale** (кажется чуть-чуть вне нормы и моральных принципов/за пределами дозволенного). *Beyond the pale* means outside the bounds of what is considered acceptable. In the first case, *just* modifies seems and implies a personal opinion. In the second, *just* means only a small amount beyond the pale.
- 17. Lead by a nose** (чуть-чуть опередить) vs. **lead someone (around) by the nose** (водить за нос). *Lead by a nose*, a horse racing term, means to be the top contender in some contest, but only by a very small margin. To *lead someone (around) by the nose* means to completely control someone else.
- 18. Lose touch** with someone or something (потерять контакт/связь с кем-либо) vs. **lose one's touch** (утратить навык/квалификацию). To *lose touch* with someone or something means to no longer have any contact with a person or to be unaware of developments in a particular area. To *lose one's touch* is to no longer have the ability to deal successfully with someone or something.
- 19. Pick a fight** (лезть в драку) vs. **pick one's battles** (не распыляться по пустякам, определять приоритеты). To *pick a fight* means to purposely provoke an argument or physical confrontation with someone. To *pick one's battles* is to choose not to participate in minor or unwinnable arguments, contests, etc., saving one's strength instead for those that will be of greater importance or where one has a greater chance of success.
- 20. Russia hawks** (сторонники агрессивной позиции по отношению к России) vs. **Russian hawks** (русские «ястребы»). *Russia hawks* are (usually political) figures who advocate taking an aggressive position toward Russia. *Russian hawks* are Russians who espouse a similar position in general or to a particular nation or nations. Alternatively, *Russian hawks* may refer to raptors indigenous to or common in Russia.
- 21. Sidelined** (оттесненный на обочину, выведенный из строя) vs. **have a sideline** (иметь побочную профессию или занятие). *Sidelined* (sports idiom) means to be removed from the center of activity or attention. To *have a sideline* means to have a job or activity in addition to one's main job or activity.
- 22. Talk over something** (обговаривать, обсуждать) vs. **talk over someone** (перекрикивать). To *talk over something* is to discuss it, usually in some detail. To *talk over someone* is to talk loudly when someone else is talking so as to at least partially drown the other person out.

PART II. It may be that students are no longer told to avoid mixed metaphors. I remember that the example my teachers used to offer many decades ago was Shakespeare’s “take arms against a sea of troubles.” I myself always liked this metaphor as it gave rise in my mind to a picture of a man raising his sword to defend himself from a wave about to engulf him. I do not know whether the bard wished to imply something like this—an attempt clearly doomed to failure. I do not even know if English students are told that mixed metaphors are a no-no. I do know that my corpus of growing idiomatic usages in the reputable US press contains many. Some indeed seem to be beyond the pale or at least over the top. My sources are virtually exclusively *The Washington Post*, which we get in paper edition, and *The New York Times*, which we receive digitally, as well as Google News, which I look through almost every morning.

Here are some examples.

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| <p>1. (Something) highlights an emerging patchwork that would pose obstacles to corralling the pandemic.</p> <p>2. Orchestrating a seamless handoff.</p> <p>3. Gauzy appeals aren’t going to wash here.</p> <p>4. A grass roots uprising that terminated in a shellacking.</p> <p>5. Leave the door open to make arguments down the road.</p> <p>6. The old formulas have lost their purchase.</p> <p>7. The speed bump ahead threatens to drain his momentum.</p> <p>8. The short sellers were forced to fold their cards.</p> <p>9. The ceiling of someone’s approval rating is somewhat baked in from the start.</p> <p>10. It seems clear that any missteps or unclean laundry he may have socked away are likely to be leaked.</p> <p>11. Some want to pump the brakes and reach across the aisle.</p> <p>12. The optics of the decision ignited a storm.</p> <p>13. We fear the razor-sharp pinpricks.</p> <p>14. Climate tipping points could topple like dominoes.</p> <p>15. The goal of pivoting toward the center after running on a hardline message hit a speed bump.</p> <p>16. Looking down the barrel of a long list of changes.</p> | <p>17. There is no daylight with the White House on the path forward.</p> <p>18. By quirk of gridlock, he is literally the swing vote.</p> <p>19. Milking the celebration by funneling events.</p> <p>20. [A senator] has become the powerhouse holding the keys to unlock the vindication the party has been salivating for.</p> <p>21. A barnburner of a briefing on a day of political train wrecks and reality bending sent a clear message.</p> <p>22. Linking seemingly disconnected threads in one massive ball of wax.</p> <p>23. Suddenly he changes in midstream and you find yourself out on a limb that has suddenly been cut off.</p> <p>24. He could be the reset button to break through the partisan sclerosis.</p> <p>25. The stock market is foaming at the mouth.</p> <p>26. It was the virtual equivalent of hand-to-hand combat as nine defendants sought to keep their footholds.</p> <p>27. Creating a sort of perpetual motion machine in which the chicken and the egg are impossible to ferret out.</p> <p>28. The depth to which [a party] has fallen played out in bold colors.</p> <p>29. Lay the groundwork for the forthcoming Ouroboros of rhetoric.</p> |
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