

Interview with Professor Dmitry Buzadzhi

SLD's 2022 Greiss Speaker

Interviewed by Nora Seligman Favorov

This year's distinguished speaker was invited on the strength of a recommendation by one of our newer members, Elizabeth Tolley, who recently earned an MA in RU<>EN conference interpretation from the Middlebury Institute of International Studies, where Dmitry Buzadzhi is currently teaching. We thank Elizabeth for that recommendation. Since receiving it, I've been familiarizing myself with the YouTube channel of which Dmitry is co-founder: «Перевод ЖИВ» (Translation Lives). I myself do not interpret, and I assumed that, for me, this channel dedicated to the art and science of interpretation into and out of Russian would be of limited personal interest. But then I started watching and couldn't stop: I was as entertained as I was enlightened and, well, dazzled by the high-level production values, by the professionalism of the presenters (sometimes Dmitry himself, sometimes one of his collaborators), by the behind-the-scenes peeks at various international forums, and by, as these videos make clear, the level of skill, training, and



Dmitry Buzadzhi. Used with permission

conditioning (analogous to what Olympic athletes go through) it takes to be and stay a top-level interpreter. In short, I look forward to two excellent talks at ATA63 in Los Angeles: the Susana Greiss Lecture: "Translation and Interpreting as Acting" (Thursday, October 13, 2:00 pm-3:00 pm) and "Anticipation in Interpreting" (Friday, October 14, 4:45 pm-5:45 pm). Please help us spread the word, including to colleagues working in other languages.

Some biographical details: Dmitry Buzadzhi is a graduate of Moscow State Linguistic University's School of Translation and

Interpretation, with a degree in translation and interpretation (Russian, English, German). After earning his Candidate's degree at MSLU, he taught translation in the English Translation and Interpretation department for ten years before serving as head of that department for five. As mentioned, he is currently a professor of English-Russian Interpretation, Russian as a Foreign Language, and the Interpretation Practicum, at the Middlebury

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Dmitry is an active translator and simultaneous interpreter. As an interpreter, he has worked at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, the Eastern Economic Forum, the Fort Ross Dialogue, and other important international events. His literary translations into Russian include *Babel 17* by Samuel Delany, *The Lathe of Heaven* by Ursula K. Le Guin (forthcoming as «Жернова неба» [Azbukal]), and short stories by Antonia Byatt. He has published over 50 articles on translation and interpretation, has co-authored two textbooks, and recently collaborated on a chapter on conference interpretation in Russia for the Routledge Handbook of Conference Interpreting.

He is a member of the editorial board of «Мосты» (*Bridges*), a leading Russian quarterly on TI, and is on the jury panel of Cosines Pi, an international contest for simultaneous and consecutive interpreters, as well as a regular presenter at such major industry conferences in Russia as Translation Forum Russia and the Global Dialogue.

As mentioned in the introduction to this interview, I find your YouTube channel, «Перевод жив» to be extremely impressive. How did the idea to start the channel come about and how is it produced? It's obvious that a lot of work goes into each episode. What sort of team puts it all together? And who's in charge of finding the snippets of old films that inject a nice dose of humor?

This is really the work of just two people, myself and my long-time friend and colleague Alexander Shein, who was my classmate at Moscow State Linguistic University. The idea initially came from me, although we both have been teaching translation and interpretation (TI) and thinking about it from what could, perhaps grandly, be described as theoretical and pedagogical perspectives, as well as actually practicing it, since we graduated from MSLU.

On the one hand, I've always liked transferring my practical TI experience into teaching and some kind of theoretical generalizations, which, among other things, helps you understand your own work better. On the other, I think we were both inspired by some great educational videos (not necessarily related to TI or linguistics) you can find online these days.

Unlike articles or textbooks, videos are more versatile, give you a more direct tool to reach your audience and get their feedback, and eliminate the middleman, i.e., publishers, editors, etc. Apart from that, we both enjoy dabbling in technology, so it was a perfect excuse to get some gear and get more serious about filming and editing.

As for snippets of old films, we both are in charge of finding them depending on who is editing a given video. I personally love intertextuality and am a huge fan of Soviet cinema, so it's hard to resist the temptation to insert a movie quote here and there.

Any plans to expand it beyond a Russian-speaking audience?

Not at the moment. We mostly cover things related to English-Russian TI and the Russian-language market, so you need to speak Russian anyway for our content to be of any value to you. We're always open to suggestions and collaborations though.

Tell us a little about how you happened to translate Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Lathe of Heaven*? Was this on your initiative or were you approached by someone else?

The new Russian translation is published by Azbuka, one of Russia's biggest publishers. I have worked with Azbuka before, so this time one of their senior editors just sent me an email asking if I would be interested. I couldn't refuse of course, having read and re-read Le Guin's *Earthsea* trilogy several times since my teenage years, every time completely enraptured by the depth of the story and the powerful characters.

The *Lathe of Heaven* has no spells or dragons, it's more rationalistic and less epic, but it has an interesting correlation with *The Farthest Shore*, the concluding novel of the *Earthsea* trilogy, which was completed at about the same time, in the early 1970s. In both novels, the "villain" is someone whose quest for absolute power and abstract "good" threatens to destroy the fabric of our imperfect yet magical world, although in *The Farthest Shore* it's an evil sorcerer who wants to defeat death and in *The Lathe of Heaven* it's a very liberal psychiatrist who attempts to improve the world in the interests of humanity.

Whether you're in the booth doing synchronous interpretation or at your keyboard working on a literary translation, you're bound to run into "untranslatables"—things for which there's no equivalent in the target language/culture. What are the different ways you handle those instances during T vs. I? Can you offer an example or two?

That's a great question: "untranslatability" is something I could talk about forever. Actually, things that really are untranslatable are simply omitted or don't (or shouldn't) get submitted for T or I in the first place, so there are no clever solutions there. However, as you rightly said, there are many things for which there is no direct or conventional equivalent in the target language/culture, and these, challenging as they are, give the translator/interpreter a great chance to be creative.

The main differences in handling these things in T vs. I are, of course, time constraints and the completeness of context. When translating, your time for thinking and doing research can be considered unlimited (although in reality it is not), and you know the full context. If it's a pun, a meaningful name, or an expression in an invented language, in a sci-fi novel, for example, you know exactly what its function is, and you can take into account not just its significance for what has been written so far but also its implications for the rest of the text. In consecutive or simultaneous interpretation, all decisions have to be made on the spot, and you should always bear in mind that you don't know how the speaker might refer to this "untranslatable" later or how your equivalent might be used by target-language speakers who may want to follow up on the previous speaker's remarks.

To give a short answer to your first question, I'd say that, in T, you can and should be creative and try to recreate the communicative effect of the "untranslatable" for the target-language audience as fully as possible, even if it means spending a long time on a short passage. In I, however, you have to act quickly and most likely focus on just the most important part of the message (e.g., sacrificing stylistic or cultural nuances to render factual information) and try to play it safe. To a certain degree, a bland but factually correct rendering can be said to be a bad option in literary translation but a good option in simultaneous interpretation.

I'm not sure if I have a list of the best examples in my head, so I'm just going to give a couple of the more recent ones. One of the main characters in *The Lathe of Heaven* is called George Orr, who at first appears meek and indecisive. When he stands up a woman for lunch, she has this angry internal monologue where she calls "that little bastard" "Mr. Either Orr." Now, "Either Orr," apparently, is an attempt to dismiss him as a wishy-washy guy who can't make up his mind and commit.

The same conjunction in Russian (*или... или*), obviously, sounds very different, and changing his last name to something sounding more or less like *или* ("eely") for the purposes of this little joke is out of the question (it would probably sound silly, Le Guin nerds would be annoyed, and you'd lose the likely allusion to George Orwell). So I thought of a different way a Russian speaker might angrily work someone's last name into a disparaging description of someone who appears dubious. What I ended up writing was «Надо все-таки снова встретиться с этим мелким засранцем. Мистером Орром-Не-Пойми-Которым» (literally: "Mister Orr-I-Don't-Know-Who", but the

point is, for those who don't speak Russian, there's a rhyme here). Which—talking of Soviet movies—actually reminds me of a scene where a woman, who doesn't quite know what to make of a guy named Tikhon she just met, refers to him, in her head, as «Тихон – с того света спихан» (literally: “Tikhon, pushed back from the netherworld,” again with a rhyme).

Moving on to interpreting, there was a funny episode at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum where I interpreted this year. We were working at a session, the closing session of the day, titled «ПМЭФ без галстуков» [SPIEF without ties/in shirt-sleeves]. I saw that the title had been translated into English as “What SPIEF Left Behind,” which kind of made sense because the idea was that they would casually wrap up the day and pick up some odd bits and pieces that may have been overlooked by other speakers. So I began my interpretation by saying something like, “Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to our session called ‘What SPIEF Left Behind’...” There was a pause, and I peered at the screen to see what the moderator was doing. He was ripping his tie off in a very deliberate manner. So I had to add quickly, “Or, as it's called in Russian, SPIEF with your tie off.”

In general, how much of the work of Russia-based interpreters working between Russian and English involves interpreting for people for whom English is not a native language?

It's true that much of the work Russian-English interpreters do in Russia involves interpreting for non-native speakers of English. You will end up interpreting for native speakers of Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, Hindi, Italian, Swedish, Norwegian, etc., etc. Which is actually a pity for our colleagues because Russia has an excellent tradition of training translators and interpreters with a wide range of languages, and, in many of these instances, professionals with these speakers'/listeners' native languages could be found. Unfortunately, too many people in the world rely on English these days, although that's a good thing for TI professionals with English in their combination.

Working with non-native English speakers involves many challenges. On the one hand, you get all kinds of unbearable accents, some of which are undecipherable even to a native speaker of English. Such cases are especially painful because the interpreter may only have a vague idea of what the speaker is trying to say but, to everyone else, since “English” is being spoken on the floor, any problems with interpretation are the interpreter's fault.

On the other hand, if these non-native speakers are your audience, you may sometimes have to use simpler language just because you realize they may not understand your fancy word choices, even if they are absolutely correct.

Final question: Your English is exceptional for someone who grew up outside of an English-speaking country. Could you say a few words about your first encounters with foreign languages?

Thank you for your very generous comment! My first encounter with foreign languages was hearing my parents (both trained as teachers of foreign languages, although they never taught) talk French to each other so that I couldn't understand what they were discussing. It seemed to be some kind of a supernatural power, a secret code, and must have piqued my interest.

Learning German and English at school came later. My first encounters with actual speakers of English occurred during my final year of high school, when, by a stroke of luck, I had a chance to spend an entire academic year at a boarding school in England. There was greater exposure to all things foreign when I became a student at MSLU, of course, and, towards the end of my studies there, I began to get my first interpretation assignments.

I'll add one more thing, although you didn't really ask me that. I'm not saying that spending some of your formative years in a country where your B language is spoken isn't helpful for your linguistic progress. It certainly is, and the fear of speaking “Russian English” is probably something I'm never going to get out of my system. However, teaching in America has allowed me to see the other side of the coin. Quite often, students who had formal language education in their home countries (this applies to both native speakers of Russian and English) have an advantage over their peers who just picked up their B language living abroad. The latter may sound more fluent and idiomatic at times, but they often lack more formal vocabulary, don't have a structured view of the language, and may be clueless about some mistakes they still make because they never learned the rules in the first place.

Notes from the Administrative Underground

Eugenia Tietz-Sokolskaya, SLD Administrator

This time of year is always a busy one for our division (as it probably is for every division!), with the ATA Annual Conference just around the corner. I, for one, am looking forward to finally attending in person after two years behind a screen. Even though the number of Slavic Languages sessions is admittedly small this year, there is plenty to highlight and look forward to. (You can find a rundown on the following page.)

Something to mark on your calendar even if you're not going to the conference is our division's annual meeting, which is being held online again this year, on Saturday, October 1, 2022, at 1:30 PM EDT. The best way to get the most out of your division membership, and arguably out of your ATA membership, is to get involved. Being involved doesn't just mean volunteering, if that's not your cup of tea! Your feedback and input are also invaluable—the good and the bad. We're here to serve you, our members, and we can't know what that service should look like unless we hear it from you.

I know this year's conference hasn't even come and gone yet, but since you're reading this column, I would like to ask you—yes, you!—to think about submitting a session proposal for next year or a subsequent year. This year we had four slots available and filled only three, because that's how many proposals we received. We can't fill empty slots with proposals we don't have! It can be daunting to imagine yourself as a conference speaker; it can feel like you have nothing particularly interesting to say. I'm here to tell you that you probably do!

Do you have a specialization?

Share what you wish more people knew about it. Do you have a favorite kind of project, something that is particularly well-suited to your skills or interests? Get into the weeds on what makes it fun and engaging, because that kind of enthusiasm is often infectious. Do you have a favorite resource, technique, or life lesson that you find yourself coming back to again and again? The rest of us want to know! And keep in mind: you don't have to give your presentation solo. The Slavic track has included many successful panel presentations, including some covering multiple Slavic languages.

Don't be afraid to go too deep down a rabbit hole. In fact, our professional development survey in 2020 and conversations with members have revealed a thirst for specialized and especially language-specific educational content. You don't have to attract all of ATA; you can tailor your session to a niche within our division. So if you have an idea, go for it! And feel free to contact me for guidance on the submission process.

I hope to see many of you in Los Angeles in October, or on Zoom for the annual meeting. The conversations—in the hallway and over meals, before and after sessions, on the way to and from events—are my favorite part of the Annual Conference, and I look forward to getting to know more of our members and becoming inspired and energized from the exchange of ideas and perspectives. Talk to you soon!



Slavic Track Sessions at ATA63

This year there are only three sessions scheduled for the ATA Annual Conference classified as being under the “Slavic Languages” track, although there are many sessions of potential interest to our members, not to mention the Welcome Celebration (where we get to see old friends in the flesh, put faces to names, and generally emerge from our rabbit holes), the Job Fair, Speed Networking, Stronger Together Networking, Buddies Welcome Newbies, the Exhibit Hall, and the Conference Dance Party that wraps things up. We also hope to be able to keep our Russian singalong tradition going. The full schedule can be found at <https://ata63.org/sessions/>

(022) Susana Greiss Lecture: Translation and Interpreting as Acting

2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. Thursday October 13

Presented by: Dmitry Buzadzhi

While purely linguistic approaches to understanding, practicing, and teaching translation and interpreting are certainly necessary, sometimes we have to look at our profession from a different perspective to understand what underlies a translator's or interpreter's strategies. This session will explore similarities between Konstantin Stanislavski's concept of acting and techniques used by interpreters and translators, as well as teachers who train them. The speaker will provide specific examples from his experiences as a translator/interpreter and professor and suggest solutions that could help both practitioners and educators achieve their goals more effectively.

(091) Anticipation in Interpreting

4:45 p.m. – 5:45 p.m. Friday, October 14

Presented by: Dmitry Buzadzhi

Success in interpreting depends on much more than the ability to recognize words, remember their equivalents in the target language, and produce a target text. To be able to deliver a coherent and accurate interpretation with a smooth delivery, the interpreter must be able to predict the speaker's intentions at all levels of communication. This session will outline the concept of anticipation and focus on examples of anticipation based on logical and linguistic indicators. The examples will be in Russian and English, but English explanations will be provided to make the material accessible to listeners who do not speak Russian.

(111) Americanisms: To Use or Not to Use?

8:30 a.m. – 9:30 a.m. Saturday, October 15

Presented by: Svetlana Ruth

American English has long been established as a global language. How do Russian speakers use terms from this English variant? This session will examine several studies of current trends and analyze expectations for written and oral translations. Attendees will have the opportunity to engage in small-group guided discussions and reflect on their own strengths and challenges when dealing with Americanisms. Attendees will be encouraged to set professional development goals to use Americanisms more effectively in performing translation and interpreting.

A Volunteer Opportunity: English for Ukrainian Newcomers

Liv Bliss

First, the basic scoop: The Wonder Heritage Language Centre (WHLC) in Toronto, Canada has developed a volunteer program of English-language tutoring for Ukrainian native speakers who are recent arrivals in an Anglophone country or are preparing to make the move.

For the life of me, I can't remember how I first heard about it. So if you're reading this, and it was you who posted the announcement I read—*Thank You!*

There's a brief description of the program [here](#), which is also where you can link to the application form. There you will see that the program is called "Conversation Practice" and is intended for Ukrainian speakers with at least some knowledge of English.

Here's how it worked for me. I applied through the site and soon afterward was invited to sign up for a short online (Zoom) orientation session. A number of dates were available, so scheduling was no problem. Volunteers also receive a short PDF densely packed with dos, don'ts, and other hints and information. Shortly after that, I was matched with a learner and had to contact her directly to set up our first meeting. The means of communication (Zoom, Google Meet, etc.) was left up to us.

My learner already had Zoom installed on her phone, so Zoom it was. My being a Zoom newbie—except as an invitee—exposed me to a bit of a learning curve. But it was wonderfully shallow, and now I can set up our meetings in my sleep (although that is not recommended).

As instructed, I first contacted my learner by email in Russian (with apologies for not speaking Ukrainian), but since then, Russian has played only a very small part in our interaction. That's a faint echo of my training for an EFL teaching certificate, many decades ago.

There were other, more resonant, echoes: relentless repetition, back-chaining (shun – siashun – nunsiasun – pronunsiasun), prior introduction to the vocabulary to be used in teaching a particular grammatical pattern, a brisk tempo, homework as reinforcement, and visual aids. Lots and lots of visual aids. (Oddly, I still had a stash of magazine photos and my own drawings from back in the day. But now the blessed internet spares me from having to sketch a lion that comes out looking more like a mangy chihuahua.) Right now, in readiness for today's session, there's a lesson plan and a stack of graphics on my desk, along with a can of Pepsi, some bottled water, a can of beer, a bottle of vodka, and an airline-sized bottle of wine. Please don't ask.

I quickly found out that my learner's comfort level is boosted once she sees unusual words and weird grammar written down. So I come to every session with a black marker and a bunch of blank paper slips. I really should invest in a small dry-erase whiteboard one of these days.

My lessons are generally planned around blank spots that came up in the lesson before. For example, I found that my learner was having a hard time with "this/these" vs. "that/those" (which is so much easier to teach face-to-face than remotely, where wild gestures can be sadly misinterpreted), so I sent her an illustrated exercise that we explored in the next session, following it up with homework that we discussed in the session after that. She's great with homework: always does it and usually aces it. I wouldn't impose it on her if it was a burden, though. "Do you want some homework on this?" I routinely ask, and she always gives me a big grin and a "Yes, please!"



As you'll have gathered by now, this has proved to be a fairly structured series of lessons, spiraling upward in complexity week by week, rather than a more laid-back conversation practice, which is fine with me but may not suit everyone. WHLC tries to match pairs based on, among all else, the tutor's English teaching experience (if any) and knowledge of Ukrainian/Russian (ditto), but I'm quite sure that any instances in which tutor and learner proved in the end to be hopelessly mismatched would be swiftly rectified. The program is not intended to start beginners off from scratch: my learner had several years of post-Soviet high-school English that has grown rusty in spots over the decades since.

I won't fib and tell you that the preparation for our sessions takes only "a few minutes," as the WHLC site suggests. But that's likely attributable to my learner's needs and my own foibles—no seat-of-the-pants teacher, I! The follow-up to each lesson—an emailed list of new words and expressions—takes a little time too. Two or three sessions a week is generally preferable, per WHLC, but we now have to arrange our meetings around my learner's work schedule, because a mere week or so after arriving in Canada, she had her child in school and had found a part-time job. I'm so proud of her.

WHLC asked to be notified after the first meeting had happened but otherwise stays pretty much out of the process. There's a Google Docs spreadsheet to which tutors are encouraged to add online resources, and also a Slack workgroup for tutors, where we can ask and answer questions and generally share our experiences. That apart, this is an entirely self-motivated program, and the only metric of success is that beaming smile and that "Oh!" when a grammatical pattern suddenly makes sense. How long will it last for my learner and me? I have no idea. As long as I can be useful, I suppose.

I know that we SLD-ers can be inveterate volunteers and that it's easy to become over-extended and all volunteered out. So if any of this is news you can use, great. If not—well, it's been fun telling you about it.

Liv Bliss, an ATA-certified Russian to English translator, can be reached at bliss.mst@gmail.com, in case you have any comments or questions about the WHLC program—or about anything else, for that matter. This article has been seen and approved by Dr. Marina Sherkina-Lieber, founder of the Wonder Heritage Language Centre.

SLD Dinner at ATA63

Please join us for a convivial evening during the ATA 63rd Annual Conference in Los Angeles. The SLD dinner this year will be a family-style, Armenian-Lebanese meal. Enjoy a great meal, greet friends and meet new colleagues.

When

Thursday, October 13, 2022 6:30–8:30 PM

Where

10e Restaurant
811 West 7th Street
213-488-1096 <https://www.10erestaurant.com/>

What

Menu available here:

www.ata-divisions.org/SLD/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/SLDDinnerMenu_ATA63.pdf

Tickets cost \$50 per person (tax/gratuity included). To RSVP, specify dietary restrictions, or ask any questions, please email Eugenia Tietz-Sokolskaya at eugenia@sokolskayatranslations.com. Submit your payment either via PayPal to the same email address or via check to

565 Juniata Ave
Swarthmore, PA 19081

Payment must be received by Friday, October 7.

QUESTIONS? Contact Eugenia Tietz-Sokolskaya

Translating Okudzhava: Turning «Песенка старого шарманщика» into “The Organ-Grinder Ditty”

Vladimir Kovner



I suspect that I am a generation or two removed from the majority of *SlavFile*'s current readers. Nevertheless, I hope that they all know the name Bulat Okudzhava and are familiar with at least some of his works. In the late '50s, Okudzhava began to perform his poems/songs—basically

poetry set to music accompanied by guitar—for his friends. Thus began the highly influential era of the Russian “bards,” of which Okudzhava is considered to be progenitor. I got my very first tape recordings of one of his performances in late 1959 and met him in person in 1962 at a home concert in Leningrad. Later I had the pleasure of recording his performances in Leningrad, Moscow, Detroit, and Oberlin, Ohio.

I'd like to start by saying a few words about the uniqueness of his poetry. In 2011, A.V. Sycheva (a professor at the University of Magadan and a protégé of the outstanding scholar Professor Roman Tchaikovsky) remarked in her dissertation “About Translations of Okudzhava's Poetry into English” that the majority of the bard's translators recreate only the basic sense of his poetry, their translations being interlinear or free, not even rhymed. In her opinion, only slightly more than 16 percent can be considered adequate. Later, explaining why even some decent renderings cannot be considered adequate, she explains: “In most cases, the completed translations of Okudzhava's lyrics do not comply with all the criteria of that genre. Even if the original poetic texts of his songs are reflected quite successfully in the English language versions, some extremely important components of his poetry, such as its folkloristic character

and musicality, are quite often completely absent in translation.” Later, we'll come back to the discussion of that problem.

Before his first performance in the Leningrad House of Art in 1960, Okudzhava said to Alexander Volodin, a well-known playwright and poet who was tasked with introducing Bulat to the audience: “Don't call my works songs. I am a poet. They are poems.” But later Volodin added to that story: “Long ago poets were called singers. They composed verses and melodies, and performed them with their own zither accompaniment... In our time, in our country, the first one to accomplish this was Okudzhava. Every word of his poetry is a word of a song that is supposed to soar over this vast country.”

The uniqueness of Bulat's poetry is in his incredible musicality. We translators have to understand that more often than not his poetry is not simply verses. Even his poems that for some reason were not set to music beg to be sung. According to Vladimir Frumkin, a musicologist, one of the founders of the “bard” movement, and one of the best if not *the* best performer of Okudzhava's songs, his verse-songs are unique because they have been created/composed as a cohesive whole that comprises not only lyrics and music but also the author's own performance, his unique, somewhat restrained voice, a subtly ironic manner, a deeply individual cadence, and his guitar accompaniment. Together, these elements give us a unique genre known as “guitar poetry.” In his song «Главная песенка»/“[The Paramount Song](#)” (the version below is translated by Lydia Razran Stone and myself and was published in the journal *Readings*, no. 31, summer 2015). Bulat demonstrates how to create a song (music and lyrics) as a single whole:

Наверное, самую лучшую
На этой земной стороне
Хожу я и песенку слушаю —
Она шевельнулась во мне.
Она еще очень неспетая.
Она зелена как трава.
Но чудится музыка светлая,
И строго ложатся слова...

The best thing that life on Earth brings to me,
That causes most joy in my heart,
I walk, and from nowhere it sings to me,
A song that is longing to start.
Not yet a true song, but developing;
Unripe, like green fruit on the vine.
The melody's splendid, enveloping,
And words fall precisely in line...

“Okudzhava’s songs are more a phenomenon of oral than of written poetry, like folksongs” (Vladimir Frumkin). Let’s add that Okudzhava heard music emanating from everywhere (e.g., from Moscow streets, from architecture), then he constantly and naturally incorporated the most diverse musical instruments and genres into his poetry: guitars, horns, drums, flutes, clarinets, waltzes, marches, and so on. Furthermore, as he described it: “I write when I feel like it, under the influence of various moods and impulses that are sometimes not even clear to me...” And finally, he possessed a remarkable musical ear. This is why I believe it is essential for translators of Okudzhava’s songs to spend time listening to how he performs them to be sure that not only their translation adheres to the original meter and rhyme pattern (that is relatively simple), but that it is singable to the original melody, with the rhythm pattern of the translated song matching the pattern in the original.

Returning to A.V. Sycheva’s analysis, obviously the majority of translators were either tone deaf or failed to consider the melodic component important and based their renderings on his written poetry.

Let’s come back, at last, to the subject of our discussion: a very unusual poem-song, «*Песенка старого шарманщика*». Before I describe the very interesting and complex process of translating that song into English, I’d like to say that the following translation represents my efforts to match the brilliance of Okudzhava’s original lyrics and my very useful and important periodic discussions with Nora Favorov, who critiqued some of my early versions and suggested a few interesting alternatives that I gratefully accepted.

Песенка старого шарманщика. Булат Окуджава.

Е. Евтушенко

Шарманка-шарлатанка, как сладко ты поешь!
Шарманка-шарлатанка, куда меня зовешь?

Шагаю еле-еле – вершок за пять минут.
Ну как дойти до цели, когда ботинки жмут?..

Работа есть работа, работа есть всегда,
Хватило б только пота на все мои года.

Расплата за ошибки – ведь это тоже труд.
Хватило бы улыбки, когда под ребра бьют.
Работа – есть работа...

Composed circa 1960–62

The melody follows a waltz rhythm (one-two-three, one-two-three), a naïve charming waltz for a street-organ. (The standard rhythms for street-organ music were older forms of dances such, as the waltz, two-step, polka, etc.)

“The Organ-Grinder Ditty” by Bulat Okudzhava

dedicated to Yevgeny Yevtushenko

Oh, charlatan, street organ! Your singing is so sweet.
You devious street organ! Where do you summon me?

I trudge on, legs feel heavy, five minutes – just one inch.
How can I reach my haven in boots that cramp and pinch?

What’s work? Just work I get. Jobs – plenty, good and bad.
God, help me toil in blood-n-sweat through years that lay ahead.

A payback for my blunders – that’s also labor, but...
Can I still smile, I wonder, when punched straight in the gut?
What’s work? Just work I get...

There are eight lines in this short song, each one is six poetic feet long—hexameter, consisting naturally (remember, it’s a waltz) of two iambic trimeters. Every two consecutive lines (1-2, 3-4 and so on) are rhymed at the end and in the middle of lines. All the rhymes are perfect (exact). It’s a straightforward pattern for a translator.

Let’s begin with the title of that song: *Песенка старого шарманщика*. Why did Okudzhava call it “песенка” rather than “песня?” Actually, he used both titles many times. Possibly through this choice Okudzhava was trying to underline the idea that «песенка» (“ditty” in English or *chansonette* in the French manner) brings an element of intimacy between a performer and listeners. Also, it is possible that while he often repeated that his songs were foremost poems and he was basically performing guitar poetry, he underestimated his exceptional musical gift and incredible merits and the value of his songs’ melodic aspect, meaning for him his songs really were just ditties. It is interesting that in Vladimir Nabokov’s novel *Invitation of a Small Guest* the author refers to Okudzhava’s “Sentimental March” as a “...soldier dit[ty] of singular genius...” Based on all that, we will render the English title of this work as: “The Organ-Grinder Ditty.”

We have to repeat that this poem is very unusual: the whole poem, including its title, is written as a witty satire in the best traditions of Aesop. (Okudzhava wrote two more poem-songs of this type.)

Before singing this song for Western audiences, Vladimir Frumkin used to tell them that the old organ-grinder in this song by Bulat Okudzhava is not really an organ-grinder. Soviet listeners understood this perfectly well: the author was hinting at what the creative intelligentsia—poets, writers, composers, and artists—had to endure working under the pressures of total censorship. As Fyodor Raskolnikov wrote in an open letter to Stalin in 1938: “You have forced art into a straitjacket in which it suffocates, withers and dies.”

By using an organ-grinder as camouflage, Okudzhava was trying to disguise the true meaning of the song from the censors, the literary gendarmes, Soviet cultural authorities, and, of course, the communist media. There is a curious story about this song connected with Professor Charles Gribble of Ohio State University, who in 1966 founded Slavica Publishers. In 1976, Frumkin suggested that he publish an encyclopedia of Russian bards and sang him several songs. After hearing “The Organ-Grinder Ditty,” Professor Gribble, who at the time was making frequent trips to the Soviet Union, replied: “No way. I cannot publish anti-Soviet poems. The Russians will never let me in again.” Obviously, Professor Gribble saw through the Aesopian language, and of course Okudzhava’s audience in the Soviet Union (both his fans and the authorities) were even less likely to miss the song’s true meaning.

The song was composed circa 1960–62, performed at home concerts and, like the rest of his songs, widely distributed by way of “magnitizdat” tape recordings. It was not officially published until 1983.

What pushed Bulat Okudzhava over the edge and made him compose a song in which a lilting melody and the quaint image of a street-grinder are paired with a series of much darker images: the singer is too hobbled by painful shoes to walk more than an inch in five minutes, has to pay for his blunders, and is punched in the gut: шагаю еле-еле, ботинки жмут; расплата за ошибки, под ребра бьют.

We have to recall what the situation was at the time this song was written.

It was composed around the same time as the 22nd Communist Party Congress. The brightest prospects for the country within the next twenty years were heralded from the podium, along with confident assurances that it would attain communism, that all socioeconomic differences between the city and the countryside and between toilers of the body and the

mind would disappear, and so on and so forth. In short, universal rejoicing was in order.

What about Bulat at that time? According to Professor Anatoly Kulagin, Okudzhava’s name always sounded suspicious to the Soviet regime. They sensed covert, if not overt, opposition, an unwillingness to “play along” by performing ritual displays of loyalty and producing art with the required slant in exchange for the ability to publish, to be granted a government apartment, summer dacha, or sanatorium stay, etc. In spite of the fact that at that time Okudzhava was the head of the poetry division at the most prominent national literary weekly in the former Soviet Union, *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, authorization for release of his first recording was blocked, Kiev TV cut all of Okudzhava’s poetry from a TV program based on the contents of *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, and, in a May 1961 speech, the secretary of the Komsomol’s Central Committee characterized Okudzhava’s songs as fit only for a boudoir, a remark intended as a huge insult for a Soviet poet.

Here is Okudzhava’s reaction in his own words: “I started to sing my poems, not imagining what a scandal was to break out in a short time. Guitarists accused me of lack of talent...composers of lack of professionalism... singers of having no voice at all, and all of them together of impudence and banality...The officials accused me of pessimism, anti-patriotism, pacifism, and the press backed them up” (from the book *ОКУДЖАВА 65 лет*, by Vladimir Frumkin, English translation by Eve Shapiro). Already a member of the Union of Writers, after working at *Literaturnaya Gazeta* for less than four years, in early 1962 Okudzhava left the newspaper. Obviously Bulat was sick and tired of all the government’s “sweet promises”—actually endless lies, and the belittling criticism of so-called cultural workers and “brother-writers” organized “from the bureaucratic top.” Fed up, he composed and began performing “The Organ-Grinder Ditty.”

Translating “The Organ-Grinder Ditty”: A Couplet-by-Couplet Annotation

My goal in translating this poem-song was to accurately reflect the underlying Aesopian meaning while maintaining the formal metrical structure.

Шарманка-шарлатанка, как сладко ты поешь!
Шарманка-шарлатанка, куда меня зовешь?

Oh, charlatan, street organ! Your singing is so sweet.
You devious street organ! Where do you summon me?

The sweet (сладко) singing of the organ-grinder represents the temptations the Soviet government put before people aspiring to work in the arts. For the Russian word “звать” (to call), we chose a stronger word, “summon,” specifically implying the exercise of authority.

Шагаю еле-эле, – вершок за пять минут. Ну как дойти до цели, когда ботинки жмут?..	I trudge on, legs feel heavy, five minutes, just one inch. How can I reach my haven in boots that cramp and pinch?
---	---

The first line of this couplet alludes to the constraints placed on Okudzhava. In 1962, despite being a very popular bard, he had only been allowed to publish two tiny books of poetry—*Lyrical*, 63 pages, and *Islands*, 91 pages—and not a single record had been released. А вершок is an antiquated Russian unit of measurement just under 2 inches. Next, the image of painfully tight shoes is an obvious reference to the straitjacket of literary censorship (ботинки жмут).

Цель (goal) is a polysemantic word. For a writer it could be to publish a novel, for a composer, to hear his new symphony in a concert hall, for Bulat, say, to see *The Complete Poetry of Bulat Okudzhava* in print. While “haven” and “goal” are not exact equivalents, given the constraints of meter, we felt this word fit with the underlying meaning: the ability to freely exercise his art was, for Okudzhava, a sort of haven, both a place of refuge and a desired goal.

Работа есть работа, работа есть всегда, Хватило б только пота на все мои года.	What’s work? Just work I get. Jobs – plenty, good and bad. God, help me toil in blood-n-sweat through years that lay ahead.
---	--

As Nikolai Bogomolov, a professor at Moscow State University has observed: “Projecting the real situation in Russia onto this song, we see an obvious clash between the dulcet tones of the street-organ and social and political reality, and the only solution that crosses the minds of many people is that there is nothing left for them but work. Работа есть работа, работа есть всегда...” (In fact, work—as in paid work—was not always available, since when a writer was expelled from the Writers Union or other analogous professional organizations, he/she was deprived of any possibility of making a living in that field, as

was the case with Boris Pasternak in 1958 and with Alexander Galich in 1971.)

Regarding the phrase “Хватило б только пота...” in 1986, when asked how young writers and poets were able to establish themselves in the field of literature, Okudzhava replied: “One’s talent has to fight its way through sweat, blood and toil. And this is fair!” I assume that Okudzhava knew the Speech of Winston Churchill at the beginning of the war in May of 1940: “*I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat.*” We draw on this phrase in translating the second line of this couplet.

Расплата за ошибки – ведь это тоже труд. Хватило бы улыбки, когда под ребра бьют. Работа – есть работа...	A payback for my blunders – that’s also labor, but... Can I still smile, I wonder, when punched straight in the gut? What’s work? Just work I get...
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Of course, as for “ошибки/blunders,” we have to acknowledge the note of irony: Okudzhava’s unpromising stances vis-à-vis the behavior expected from Soviet writers were blunders from their point of view, but not his own. Being forced to openly admit “blunders” was worse than hard physical labor for many.

The last line, “Хватило бы улыбки, когда под ребра бьют”, reflects a slight exaggeration in regard

to the Khrushchev era. Although Stalin’s torture and merciless executions of the most talented people of all persuasions and professions, including writers, were over, the persecution and harassment of dissenting writers under Nikita Khrushchev (and later Brezhnev) continued.

Alas, throughout Russian history, punches in the gut, whether literal or figurative, have been a fact of life for centuries.

Vladimir Kovner is an engineer, journalist, and English<>Russian translator and editor specializing in poetry, bard songs, ballet, and idioms. He participated in the edition «Песни Русских Бардов» (The Songs of Russian Bards, Paris, 1976), a collection comprising four volumes and 40 cassette tapes, and has published two books of poetic translation from English into Russian: «Приласкайте Льва» (Pet the Lion; 2010), and a bilingual edition titled *Edward Lear: The Complete Limericks with Lear’s Own Drawings* (2015). He also translated (in collaboration with Nora Seligman Favorov), Sergey Baimukhametov’s *Magic Dreams: Confessions of Drug Addicts*. His memoirs, «Золотой век Магнитиздата» (The Golden Age of “Magnitizdat,” were published in the United States, Russia and Germany. He enjoyed a long-term collaboration with Lydia Razran Stone. They made several joint presentations at ATA Annual Conferences and together wrote the “Idiom Savants” column in *SlavFile*. They jointly authored an article about translating Edward Lear in the Moscow journal «Мосты» (*Bridges*; 2012), a bilingual edition of the journal Чтения/Readings devoted to Okudzhava (2015), and *Sports Idioms: English-Russian and Russian-English Dictionaries* (2017). He can be reached at 19vovakova02@gmail.com

Tracking Down Russian Historical Terminology: A Tale of Two Terms and Two Resources

Nora Seligman Favorov

In the introduction to Yuri Aleksandrovich Fedosiuk's book **«Что непонятно у классиков или Энциклопедия русского быта XIX века»** (What is Unclear in the Classics or An Encyclopedia of 19th-Century Russian Daily Life; Moscow: Flinta, 2017), the author's son explains the book's origins by quoting a 1959 letter-to-the-editor his father wrote to the journal «Вопросы литературы» (Questions of Literature):

For an ever-expanding subset of contemporary readers, hundreds of expressions encountered in the writings of the Russian classics and reflecting social relationships and the everyday features of prerevolutionary Russia are becoming stumbling blocks, being either utterly baffling or misunderstood. [...] As someone acquainted with only the metric system, it is unclear to me whether a nobleman possessing two hundred *десятина* of land is rich or poor, whether a merchant who has consumed a *пол штоф* of vodka is very drunk, and whether an official who gives a tip of a *синенькая*, a *красненькая*, or a *семитка* is being generous. Which character in a story holds a higher position when one is addressed as *ваше благородие*, another as *ваше сиятельство*, and a third as *ваше превосходительство*? (All translations of Fedosiuk are my own.)

Reading this gave me a warm, fuzzy “I’m not alone!” sort of feeling.

Fedosiuk ends his letter by urging philologists and historians to undertake the task of creating reference works that elucidate the terminology of prerevolutionary daily life in order to help a wide range of readers (first and foremost literature teachers, students, and schoolchildren) to “more deeply penetrate the works of the classics, reinvigorating many lines that have faded since the concepts they deal with have, in our era, been relegated to archives.”

Literary translators are not listed among those needing to “more deeply penetrate” the Russian classics, but we might be the ones with the most desperate practical need. Of course, Fedosiuk wrote his

letter before the internet, where explanations of most if not all of the puzzling terms he names can be easily found. And since 1959, Fedosiuk himself has produced the valuable resource cited above (available in physical form through Amazon and kniga.com or for download through LitRes.com).

I first heard of this book from Erik McDonald, professor of Russian literature, literary translator, and [blogger](#). At the time, we were both translating works by the prolific, popular, and currently almost-unheard-of nineteenth-century writer Nadezhda Khvoshchinskaya (~1822–1889), who published under the pseudonym V. Krestovsky. He was working on her 1879 novella «Свидание» (*The Meeting*, 2022), and I was working on «Братец» (The Brother; the original was published in 1858 and the translation will soon be pitched to a publisher). Both these works had rather puzzling references to **билеты**. Erik had already discovered Fedosiuk's book and found the explanation we needed in the chapter on *Ценные бумаги* (loosely, financial instruments): *билет* was the term commonly used for the piece of paper representing ownership of a sum of money that had been deposited with a financial institution. This fit the context in both our novellas nicely.

But the story behind the *билет* appearing in my novella involved another puzzle Erik and Fedosiuk helped me solve. In *The Brother*, before any *билет* is mentioned, we learn that one of the eponymous brother's sisters had inherited 5,000 rubles from a godmother and that sum had been «положенная в N-ском приказе»—deposited in a “*приказ*” in the town of N (the seat of the province in which the story takes place). Toward the novella's conclusion the sister «взяла билет приказа и понесла его брату» (retrieved the *prikaz билет* and brought it to her brother). *Приказ*? I knew by then that the term *приказ*



had long since gone out of use as a term for agencies/offices of the Russian government, with one exception: the **Приказ общественного призрения**.

This term brings me to another usually invaluable resource for R>E translators dealing with the prerevolutionary period: ***Dictionary of Russian Historical Terms from the Eleventh Century to 1917***, compiled by Sergei G. Pushkarev and edited by George Vernadsky and Ralph T. Fisher, Jr. (Yale University Press, 1970). Several years ago I had trouble finding this book for any reasonable price, but I see that it is now easily and affordably available on, for example, AbeBooks. (As a side note, I was thrilled when I did finally receive a copy I ordered from Amazon and found a lovely cursive inscription inside the front cover: “Susan C. Brownsberger, 1976.” Brownsberger [1935–2021] is my idol; her brilliant translation of Iskander’s *Sandro of Chegem* is what first inspired me to pursue literary translation.)

Pushkarev offers the following entry for *Приказ общественного призрения*:

Distinct from the Muscovite PRIKAZY, these departments were established in each GUBERNIIA capital by the statutes on guberniia administration of 1775. They dealt with health, welfare, and primary education. After the introduction of the ZEMSTVOS in 1864, these functions were transferred to the zemstvo institutions, and the priказы obshchestvennogo prizreniia remained only in those guberniias that did not have the zemstvo organization.

Pushkarev has helped me solve many terminological riddles, but this entry wasn’t helpful at all. This *приказ* didn’t sound like the sort of institution in which money would be deposited. At least one historian, John P. LeDonne, translates the name of this institution as Board of Public Welfare. “Board” is more appropriate than, say, “Office,” since it apparently “consisted of six assessors from the intermediate courts representing the nobility, the townsmen, and the peasants of the treasury, but it met under the chairmanship of the governor only during the winter months” (John P. LeDonne, *Absolutism and Ruling Class: The Formation of the Russian Political Order, 1700–1825*, Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 254).

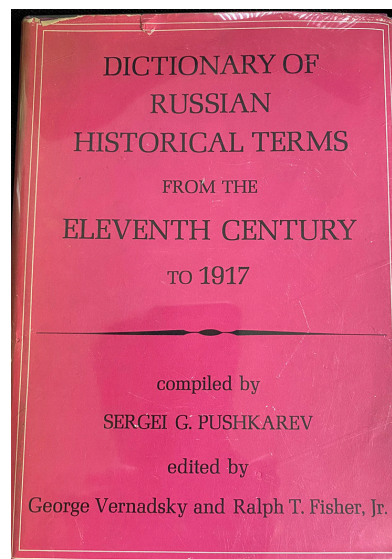
Again, Erik guided me to a passage about this приказ in Fedosiuk’s chapter on *Губернские власти* (provincial government).

Приказ общественного призрения, which was responsible for local vocational schools and all manner of medical and charitable institutions, came directly under the authority of governors. This приказ had the right to engage in financial operations for the purpose of augmenting its meager budget. Knowing this sheds light on Dobchinsky’s response to Khlestakov’s request for a loan of “about a thousand rubles”: “My money, I regret to inform you, is deposited with the приказ общественного призрения.”

Indeed, this приказ does come up in Gogol’s *Inspector General*, as Fedosiuk points out. The two translations of the play I was able to find on Google Books render this institution as “the State Savings Bank” (Thomas Seltzer) or “the state bank” (Fruma Gottschalk). This is understandable. It would distract and confuse readers of Gogol’s brilliant play if Dobchinsky had for some unknown reason deposited his money with the Board of Public Welfare. The only version of *The Inspector General* I have on my shelves, published in the National Textbook Company’s “Annotated Reader for Students of Russian” series in 1993, glosses all the vocabulary *except* for this tricky term, leaving it to the imagination of struggling students of Russian.

Some readers of *SlavFile* may recall a presentation I made at the 2020 ATA Annual Conference about translating historical terminology, in which I discussed the challenges I faced translating the 1863 novel *City Folk and Country Folk*. This novel was by Nadezhda Khvoshchinskaya’s younger sister, Sofia. The Khvoshchinskaya sisters grew up in a close-knit, well-educated, and poor noble family. When Sofia and Nadezhda were children, the family was financially ruined after their father was falsely accused of misappropriating government funds. They lost their estate,

and he was disqualified from government service. During the eleven years that passed until he was exonerated, both daughters, but especially Nadezhda, helped their father as he struggled to support the family through copy work—reproducing calligraphic versions of government documents and topographic maps. The daughters’ detailed knowledge of the bureaucratic workings of Russia’s provincial governments in the mid-nineteenth century is reflected in their work, and this makes them both exceptionally hard to translate. Their fiction is filled with passing mentions of phenomena that would



have been immediately familiar to their educated contemporaries but require hours of research by translators diligent enough to burrow down the necessary investigatory rabbit holes.

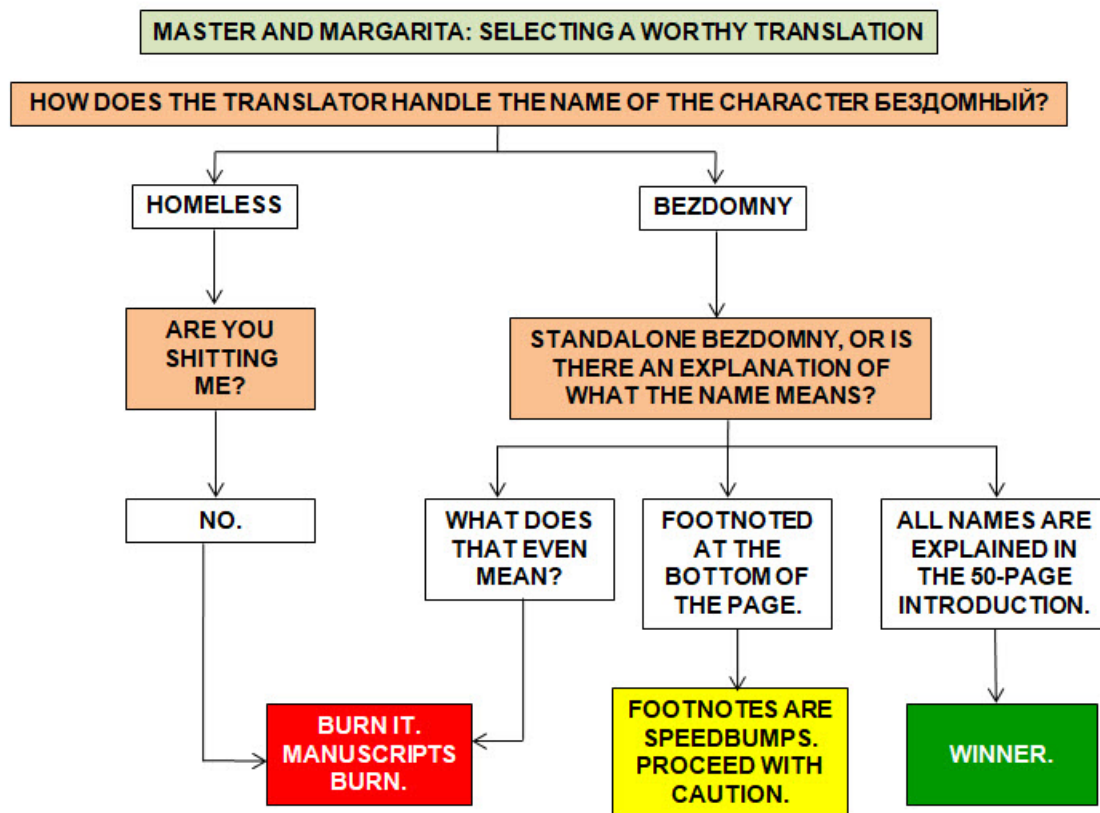
I am grateful to Erik McDonald for introducing me to Fedosiuk's book and to Yuri Alexandrovich for writing it. One drawback for people wishing to use it as a reference is that it is not designed for quick searches. The eBook is not searchable, so when you want to look something up you have to go to the TOC at the end and read through the chapters potentially related to your term. Pushkarev's *Dictionary* is organized as such (with the Russian words in Latin rather than Cyrillic letters and alphabetized A-Z rather than А-Я). Its primary drawback is that it was published in 1970 and has never been updated or expanded.

There are surely many other resources and tricks for translators of prerevolutionary Russian texts. Beside the obvious approach of perusing Russian-language material that comes up in response to internet searches, I often plug the puzzling term into

Yandex and/or Google in transliterated form to see if Anglophone historians have written about the given phenomenon. That is how I found the LeDonne text cited above. I'd love to hear what tricks and texts my colleagues use to research Russian historical terminology: contact me, or write an article of your own. Tales of terminological searches are yawn-inducing for ordinary mortals, but if you've made it to the end of this article, you're no ordinary mortal.

Nora Seligman Favorov is a Russian-to-English translator specializing in Russian literature and history. Her translation of Sofia Khvoshchinskaya's 1863 novel *City Folk and Country Folk* (Columbia, 2017) was recognized by the American Association of Teachers of Slavic and Eastern European Languages as "Best Literary Translation into English" for 2018. Her translation of *Stalin: New Biography of a Dictator* by Oleg Khlevniuk (Yale, 2015) was selected as Pushkin House UK's "best Russian book in translation" for 2016. She serves as translation editor for *Russian Life* magazine and took over as chief editor of *SlavFile* in 2021 after Lydia Razran Stone's retirement. She can be reached at norafavorov@gmail.com.

Found on Twitter / with thanks to @translatormonk1



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AN IDIOMATIC PAIRING OF RUSSIAN AND ENGLISH SAYINGS

Lydia Razran Stone



In 2015, Svetlana Beloshapkina and I gave a presentation at the ATA Annual Conference on translating Russian idioms and other idiomatic phrases, including proverbs and related sayings. In this connection I perused the largish collection of books of Russian folk proverbs that I had accumulated over my years as a translator of Russian and felt inspired to translate them into English rhyme. In these translations I tried to stick as closely as possible to the literal Russian while conveying the meaning and not straying too far from the tone, as in pairing «Волков бояться – в лес не ходить» with “If from wolves you’d keep away, into the forest do not stray.” However, I also felt inspired in some cases to come up with equivalent modern English idiomatic phrases to some of these folk sayings. For example, for the above: “If you can’t stand the heat, stay out of the kitchen.” A selection of the fruits of this inspiration is offered below. There is at least partial but not always total overlap in the situations to which these Russian and English sayings are applied.

Special thanks to Elana Pick for her Russian-native-speaker editorial assistance.

Алмаз алмазом гранится.	Takes one to know one./Takes a thief to catch a thief.
Аппетит приходит во время еды.	Try it, you’ll like it. /Bet you can’t eat just one!
Артель воюет, а один горюет.	The union makes us strong.
Беда вымучит, беда и выучит.	If life hands you lemons, make lemonade.
Без одежды, но не без надежды.	Down, but not out.
Белая ворона.	Sticks out like a sore thumb
Близ норы лиса на промыслы не ходит.	Don’t s_____ on your own doorstep. Don’t foul your own nest.
Блином масленым в рот лезет.	What a snow job!
Болтун – находка для шпиона.	Loose lips sink ships.
Бог троицу любит.	Third time’s the charm.
Бойкий скачет, а смирный плачет.	Go hard or go home. Fortune favors the brave.
Бумага все стерпит.	Just because you read it in the paper doesn’t mean it’s true.
Будет и на нашей улице праздник.	There’s always a light at the end of the tunnel. Our day will come.
Был конь, да изъездился.	The old gray mare ain’t what she used to be.
В ногах правды нет.	Take a load off.
Вместе тесно, врозь скучно.	Can’t live with ’em, can’t live without ’em.
Вертеться как белка в колесе.	Run around like a chicken without a head.
Волка ноги кормят.	You got to hustle. /Go hard, or go home.
Волков бояться, в лес не ходить.	If you can’t stand the heat, stay out of the kitchen.
Все там будем.	We all got to go sometime.
Всяк молодец на свой образец.	It takes all kinds.
Всяк сверчок знай свой шесток.	Mind your own beeswax.
Всякая тряпица в три года пригодится.	Don’t throw it out; it might come in handy someday.
Всякая тряпица в три года пригодится.	Waste not, want not.
Всякий Демид для себя норовит.	They’re all part of the Me generation.

Высоко поднял, да снизу не подпер.	The higher they climb, the harder they fall.
Высосать из пальца.	Pull something out of one's hat/ass.
Где прибыль, там и убыток.	Easy come, easy go.
Где выросла сосна, там она и красна.	Bloom where you're planted.
Гладко было на бумаге, но забыли про овраги.	Well, it looked fine on paper.
Гони природу в дверь, она влетит в окно.	You can't fool Mother Nature.
Два медведя в одной берлоге не живут/ не уживутся.	This town ain't big enough for the two of us.
Деньга деньгу наживает.	Them that has gets.
Держать камень за пазухой.	Have a chip on one's shoulder.
Держи карман шире.	In your dreams.
Дитя не плачет, мать не разумеет.	The squeaky wheel gets the grease.
Доброе дело без награды не останется.	No good deed goes unpunished.
Доход не бывает без хлопот.	No pain, no gain.
Думаешь, поймал – ан нет, сам попался.	Hoist on your own petard.
Ешь пирог с грибами, а язык держи за зубами.	A closed mouth gathers no flies.
Золотой ключик все двери отпирает.	Money talks.
Избыл нужду, забыл и дружбу.	A fair-weather friend.
Из хама не сделаешь пана.	You can take the boy out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the boy. You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.
Ищи дурака, кроме меня.	Find yourself another sucker.
Казенного козла хоть за хвост подержать – можно шубу сыскать / сшить.	No one who feeds at the public trough goes hungry.
Как аршин проглотил.	As if he has a poker up his ass.
Как аукнется, так и откликнется.	What goes around, comes around.
Как постелешь, так и выспишься.	The chickens will come home to roost.
Кто в море не бывал, тот досыта Богу не молился.	There are no atheists in foxholes.
Куда иголка, туда и нитка.	Joined at the hip.
Куда ни кинь – всюду клин.	Damned if you do, damned if you don't.
Куда один баран, туда и все стадо.	Monkey see, monkey do.
Легок на подъем.	Up for anything.
Ленивому всегда некогда.	If you need something done, ask a busy person.
Лучше умереть, чем рабство терпеть.	Before I'll be a slave, I'll be buried in my grave.
Мели, Емеля, твоя неделя.	You're full of it.
Мил гость, что недолго гостит.	Fish and visitors smell after three days.
На брюхе шелк, в брюхе щелк.	All hat and no cattle.
На вкус да цвет товарищей нет.	Different strokes for different folks.
Надейся на добро, а жди худо.	Hope for the best, prepare for the worst.
Не бойся собаки брехливой, а бойся молчаливой.	It's the quiet ones you have to watch out for.

Не буди лиха, пока тихо.	Do not trouble trouble till trouble troubles you. Let sleeping dogs lie.
Не было печали, так черти накачали.	I should have known that things were going too well.
Не дорог подарок, дорога любовь.	It's the thought that counts.
Не задавай вопросов – не услышишь лжи.	Don't ask, don't tell. Ask me no questions, I'll tell you no lies.
Не было у бабы хлопот, так купила порося.	She went looking for trouble.
Не пойман – не вор.	The only crime is getting caught.
Недоученный хуже неученого.	A little knowledge is a dangerous thing.
Осердясь на блох, да и шубу в печь.	Don't shoot yourself in the foot.
От добра добра не ищут.	If it ain't broke, don't fix it.
Открыть Америку.	Reinvent the wheel.
Отольются кошке мышкины слезки.	What goes around, comes around. Their chickens have come home to roost.
Попался, который кусался.	He got his.
Посади свинью за стол, она и ноги на стол положит.	Give someone an inch, they'll take a mile.
Попытка не пытка.	Can't blame a person for trying.
Притча во языцех.	It's gone viral.
Пришло махом, и пошло прахом.	Easy come, easy go.
Пролитого да прожитого не воротишь.	No use crying over spilled milk.
Рука руку моет.	Scratch my back and I'll scratch yours.
С больной головы на здоровую.	To pass the buck.
Свои собаки грызутся, чужая не суйся.	Don't get between the bark and the tree.
Своя ноша не тянет.	He ain't heavy, he's my brother.
Седина бобра не портит.	Age is just a number.
Сердцу не прикажешь.	The heart has its reasons.
Слухами земля полнится.	I heard it through the grapevine.
С сильным не борись, с богатым не судись.	You can't fight city hall.
С соседями дружи, а тынгороди.	Good fences make good neighbors.
Старость – не радость.	Old age ain't for sissies. /Old age is a shipwreck.
У лодыря Федорки одни отговорки. У всякого Федорки / Егорки всегда отговорки.	That Fyodor is full of excuses.
У семи нянек дитя без глазу.	Everybody's business is nobody's business.
Уговор дороже денег.	A bargain is a bargain.
Утро вечера мудренее.	I think we should sleep on it.
Хвастать – не косить, спина не болит.	He talks a good game.
Хмель шумит, ум молчит.	That's just the liquor talking.
Худая трава из поля вон.	Throw the bums out.
Час от часу не легче.	Things are going from bad to worse.
Чуть-чуть не считается.	Almost only counts in horseshoes.
Язык до Киева доведет.	Don't be afraid to ask for directions.
Язык мой – враг мой.	Me and my big mouth!

Slavic Poetry In Translation

Feature Editor: Martha Kosir

MIKLAVŽ KOMELJ

Translation and introduction by Martha Kosir

Miklavž Komelj was born in 1973, in Kranj, Slovenia. He earned his doctorate in art history from the University of Ljubljana with the thesis “The Meaning of Nature in Tuscan Art in the First Half of the 14th Century.” He is recognized as one of the leading Slovenian poets and art critics of his time.

A highly prolific author, Komelj has to date published thirteen books of poetry: *Dolphin's Light*, *Dew*, *Amber of Time*, *Hippodrome*, *Names Without Titles*, *Blue Dress*, *Hands in the Rain*, *The Night is More Abstract Than N*, *Minima Impossibilia*, *Liebestod*, *11*, *Stigmatization*, and *The Burning Book*. In addition, he has published the novel *Hide Me, Snow*, three books of short prose (*The Soviet Book*, *Larvae*, *The First Firefly*), and the dramatic poem “Can’t Wait in Vain,” along with an identically titled book of paintings.

He has produced two collections of essays entitled *The Necessity of Poetry* and *Hierarchy* and a scholarly monograph, *How to Think Partisan Art*. Moreover, he has published several chapbooks and numerous scholarly and professional articles in the fields of art and literary theory. He has co-authored monographs on the Slovenian painters Ivo Šubic and Venko Pilon and on the Slovenian poet Matej Bor.

Komelj has edited collected poems by the Slovenian poet Jure Detela, diverse texts from the Srečko Kosovel estate, and letters by Karel Destovnik-Kajuh. He works as a translator from several languages, having published translations of works by Petar Petrović Njegoš, César Vallejo, Djuna Barnes, Fernando Pessoa, Pier Paolo Pasolini, and Alejandra Pizarnik.

Recognition for Komelj’s work has come in the form of numerous awards, including the Prešeren Fund Award, the Veronika Award, the Jenko Award, the



Miklavž Komelj Photo by Matej Metlikovič. Used with permission.

Rožanč Award, and the Župančič Award, plus an award for the best translation from Spanish into Slovenian, and the Igor Zabel Association for Culture and Theory scholarship.

Along with his work as a poet, translator, and literary and art critic, Komelj is an accomplished painter and has so far held three solo art exhibitions. He was one of the curators of the permanent collection at the Ljubljana Museum of Modern Art.

The two poems presented here have not previously been published in English translation. In them, Komelj’s poetic genius and his extraordinary scope of knowledge are unmistakable. The poems encourage the reader to take a critical step beyond beliefs and beyond the apparent simplicity of seeing and understanding. They strip away surface perceptions, surmounting the distinction between visibility and invisibility to reveal a truer reality through the awareness of the onlooker’s own self. And most of all, of exercising sight for being chosen to do so. No more and no less. The poems are pure inspiration and an invitation to contemplate, because you can and because you should.



Martha Kosir has been contributing to *SlavFile* since 2008 and has served as our poetry editor since 2011. In addition to translating poetry from Slovenian into English, she has done poetry translations from English into Spanish, from Slovenian into Spanish, and from German into Spanish and English. In addition to *SlavFile*, her translations have been published in the literary magazine *Sirena: Poetry, Art and Criticism*, the journal *Contemporary Slovenian Poetry*, *The International Poetry Review*, *The Drunken Boat*, *Solstice*, *Plume*, and *Source*. She has likewise completed translations into English and Spanish of several poetry collections by the Slovenian-Bosnian poet Josip Osti. Her research focuses on translation studies, film, and cultural studies. She works as Professor of Spanish and Program Director for Global Languages and Cultures at Gannon University and can be reached at: kosir001@gannon.edu

Golota

*Being no longer human, why should I
Pretend humanity or don the frail attire?*

Ezra Pound, "Paracelsus in Excelsis"

Golota, odločitev:
videti vse, kot je –
reže bolj kakor britev –
od tebe zahteva vse –
ves neobvladljivi tovor
determinizmov sveta
se izkaže kot izgovor –
ki ga Duh ne prizna.

Dejavnosti, projekti,
dogovori ljudi med seboj
so kot pripadnost sekti,
vsak Potem in Takoj.
In čisto vsaka »družba« –
o smrtna samota komun! –
se izkaže kot okužba –
ki je Duh nanjo imun.

Kako bi se ne smejal,
ko gre proti meni plaz?
Kako bi se mu podrejal,
če vem, da ga usmerjam jaz?
Mar gora izziva strele,
če je visok njen vrh?
Mar cvet izziva čebele?
In vendar – čutim srh.

Pred črtami na dlani?
Pred videnjem iz tišin,
da sta na isti strani
etika in zločin?
Ne, pred tem, kar je tišje,
pred tem, kar bolj diši,
pred tem, kar je višje, višje –
pred tvojimi očmi.

Od kod bi vzel rigidnost
laži, da nisem Bog?
Vidnost ali nevidnost
ne igrata nobenih vlog
pred tem, da vidiš – da vidim –
da vidiš – onkraj Boga –
tudi če gre v oči dim –
tudi če gre temà.

To je odgovornost:
kar vidiš, s tem narediš.
Kar je manj, je iluzornost,
kar je več – s tem živiš.
Za zdravega niso kužni
bolni. Piramid
niso zgradili sužnji.
Zdaj jih gradi tvoj vid.

Na svetu ni procesa,
ki bi bil neobvladljiv,
če obvladaš proces telesa,

Nakedness

*Being no longer human, why should I
Pretend humanity or don the frail attire?*

Ezra Pound, "Paracelsus in Excelsis"

Nakedness, decision:
to see everything as is –
it cuts sharper than a razor –
it demands everything from you –
the entire, uncontrollable cargo
of world determinisms
becomes an excuse –
not acknowledged by the Spirit.

Activities, projects,
arrangements among people,
are like belonging to a sect,
each Later and Right Away.
And just about every "society" –
oh, mortal loneliness of communes! –
develops into an infection –
to which the Spirit is immune.

How would I not laugh
when an avalanche is moving toward me?
How would I not succumb
if I know I'm directing it?
Does a mountain provoke lightning
if its top is high?
Does a flower provoke a bee?
And yet – I quiver.

Before the lines on the palm?
Before realizing in silence
that ethics and evil
find themselves on the same side?
No, before what appears quieter,
before what has a stronger aroma,
before that which is higher, higher –
before your eyes.

From where would I draw the severity
of the lie that I am not God?
Visibility or invisibility
play no role
in the very fact that you see – that I see –
that you see – beyond God –
even if smoke gets in the eyes –
even if everything goes dark.

This is the responsibility:
to exercise what you see.
What is less is illusory,
what is more – you live with it.
For the healthy, the sick are not
contagious. The pyramids
were not built by the slaves.
It is your sight that builds them now.

There is no process in the world
that is uncontrollable
if you master the process of the body,

ki je bolj zapleten, občutljiv.
Če lahko dvigneš roko –
in je ta gib res tvoj –
kaj bi bilo previsoko?
Kaj hoče v rani gnoj?

»Je vredno? Vse je vredno ...«
Glasove prepoznaš.
»Toda ta upor nas vedno
vodi v laž ...«
Toda v resnici vlada
moč, ki je brez prič.
Glej, jajce Feniksa pada
z neba, kot da ni nič.

Ne s tem, čemur se upiraš,
ne s tem, kar te opredeli,
ne s tem, kar lahko izbiraš,
odločiš se s tem, kar si.
Ne izbira – izbranost –
tvoja odločitev je to,
kar je resnična danost.
Tvoja duša? Tvoje telo?

Odločitev, golota,
ki je celo od Duha
nedotaknjena! – Gmota
je z nje zdavnaj odpadla na tla.
To je eno, ne dvoje.
To sem jaz. To si ti.
To je moje telo. To je
moja kri.

Med

Apokalipsa kaže:
vedno je bil konec sveta.
Če samemu sebi ne laže,
se vsak čas lahko prepozna
v koncu časov – kot vedno –
ki ni izgovor, da bi kdo trepetal –
ali da bi – ni vredno –
žalosten postal.

Tudi Kali Juga –
tudi »Prihodnost je umor« –
nista izgovor – druga
jasnost, drug napor
kličeta – brez napora –
takoj ko lahko rečeš Jaz.
Brez umora –
nezadržno – kot plaz.

Le to, kar je res moja volja,
le to, kar hočem, ni
samovolja –
ni druge poti.
Zvestoba, močnejša
od ognja – kot edini princip
etike – luč ni temnejša,
če brizga črn timer iz sip.

which is more complex, sensitive.
If you can raise your hand –
and this movement is really yours –
what would be too high?
What is pus doing in a wound?

“Is it worth it? Everything is worth it...”
You recognize the voices.
“But this resistance always
leads us to lies...”
In reality, it is power
without witnesses that rules.
Look, a Phoenix egg is falling
from the sky as if it were nothing.

Not what you resist,
not what defines you,
not what you can choose,
your decision is what you are.
Not choice – being chosen –
your decision is
what is truly given.
Your soul? Your body?

Decision, nakedness,
untouched even
by the Spirit! – All the mass
long since fallen to the ground.
This is one, not two.
This is me. This is you.
This is my body. This is
my blood.

Honey

The apocalypse reveals:
there always has been the end of the world.
Without lying to itself,
any time can be recognized
as the end of times – as always –
which is no excuse for trembling –
or – needlessly –
becoming sad.

Kali Yuga –
and “The future is murder” –
are not an excuse either – another
clarity, another exertion
are calling forth – readily –
as soon as you can say I.
Without murder –
unstoppable – like an avalanche.

Only what truly is my will,
only what I want, is not
arbitrariness –
there is no other way.
Loyalty, stronger
than fire – as the only principle
of ethics – the light is not darker,
if it ejects ink from cuttlefish.

Ne glede na to, s kakšno lahkoto
se dogaja menjavanje ver.
Rekel sem: »Isto samoto
dihata Jagnje in Zver.«
Kar je, se ni spremenilo.
Tudi če je zalajalo.
Če je karkoli minilo,
ni nikdar obstajalo.

Neomajna drža stilita
prebuja slutnjo, kako
neskončno pot naredita
gora in drevo.
Gola Diana se slači
naprej, naprej. Slekem sem
staro kožo Kači.
Rekel sem:

»Potok in žuborenje
skupaj tečeta.
Potapljata se v zrenje.
Nič ne rečeta.
Blisk, me boš udaril,
ker se te ne bojim?
Bog je svet ustvaril,
jaz pa govorim.«

Je za grozo totalne kontrole
res lahko kriv Zmaj?
Mulier amicta Sole
in *Babilon magna* – si zdaj –
in vekomaj – mirno zreta
iz oči v oči?
Ne umreta
od tega, kar skoznje žari?

Če je na neko čelo
napisano: Skrivnost –
zakaj čebelo želo
raztrga? Med je gost.
Kako bo karkoli uzrl,
kdor ne sprejme, kdor si ne prizna,
da je Kristus umrl
tudi za Hitlerja?

»Srečen, kdor bere in sliši
besede te
prerokbe ...« Srečen ... Zapiši
si v srce ...
Zver je okrutna,
če sem popustil jaz.
Zvestoba! Absolutna!
Jaz – vedno močnejši od nas.

Regardless of how easily
the changing of religions occurs.
I said, "The Lamb and the Beast
breathe in the same loneliness."
What is, has not changed.
Even if it started to growl.
If anything has passed,
it never existed.

The steadfast posture of a stylite
awakens a premonition
of an endless journey undertaken
by a mountain and a tree.
Naked Diana continues
to undress. I removed
an old layer of skin from a Snake.
I said:

"A stream and its burbling
run in unison.
They dive into contemplation.
They say nothing.
Lightning, are you going to strike me
because I do not fear you?
God created the world,
and I am talking."

Can you really blame the Dragon
for the horror of total control?
Mulier amicta Sole
and *Babylon magna* – do you now –
and forever – gaze at each other peacefully,
eye to eye?
Do you not die
from the piercing glow?

If it is written
on someone's forehead: Mystery –
why is a bee torn apart
by its sting? The honey is thick.
How will they see anything,
those, who do not accept, who do not admit,
that Christ also
died for Hitler?

"Happy are those who read and hear
the words of this
prophecy..." Happy... Write
it down in your heart...
The beast is cruel,
if I have relented.
Loyalty! Absolute!
I – always stronger than us.