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YANKEE, GO HOME! : TRANSLATIONS AND POEMS WITH CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

by

Devin Jay Hepner

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

of

DEPARTMENTAL HONORS

in

English

Approved:

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This paper attempts to outline the various influences and similarities of my poetry to other poets and poetry of the twentieth-century. The critical introduction will cover those influences and the research I have done on the poets. It also contains individual poems that I feel have a connection with my own poetry and poetic translation. After the critical introduction, I include my poetry in stylistic order followed by Russian translations in chronological order. I will first describe how I came to write and read poetry and its value for me.

I found poetry to be a useful art form when I was a young adult and read some Shakespearean sonnets for an English course in High School. Since that time my interest has grown to encompass a wide variety of poets, poetry and writing. While many of the poets I am now acquainted with have had little visible impact on my own poetic creative thought, others have added greatly to my personal writing.

As my first acquaintance in what I understand as "real" poetry, or poetry that one does not find on a hallmark card or hear from the customary church service pulpit, William Shakespeare's sonnets gave me a foundation for my own poetry. After reading and memorizing Shakespeare's 29th sonnet which begins, "When in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes," I was instantly enamored not only with the language and music but with the beautiful twist at the poem's end. His poem had such an impact on me that I could not get it out of my mind and to this day I find myself consoling myself with its lines when depressed. Something about the way Shakespeare ordered the words, figured in the rhyme scheme, crafted the images and worked through the beat makes his 29th sonnet instantly memorable, universally applicable and personally significant. Of course at the time I read it first, I did not know a thing about how a poet crafts poems beyond the rhyming of two words and the stanza structure. Lacking the

personal aptitude to delve further into poetry in High School, I did not attempt to grapple with it until my new life in Russia.

While serving an LDS mission in St. Petersburg, Russia, I learned the Russian language and re-learned the English language. Before one can begin to grasp another language he/she must first understand their own. After I understood the rules and abilities of English I fell in love with its beauty and capacity for creation. At the same time I began an affair with Russian that is still developing every time I read a Russian poem or listen to a Russian song. In the lonely town of Pushkin (named after the demigod of Russian poetry) I found solace again in the Shakespearean sonnet that had before merely been a pleasant collection of sounds, images and rhythm. Except this time, the poem affected me to the deepest level of my self and gave me hope in a place where it was in short supply. It felt hopeless, at times, trying to help people whose response often was only "Yankee, go home!" I bought a small book of Shakespeare's sonnets that had the English verses alongside the Russian translations and began to memorize other sonnets. Those sonnets have since come to represent works of supreme beauty to me which are more consoling than any music, scripture or psychiatric method I know. At the same time, the sonnets contain wit, social commentary and humor that only deepens the usefulness of the craft and beckons me write my own.

In Russia, I did not feel I had enough instruction and did not know enough of technique to write poetry. Only after returning to the States did I learn the necessary skills and techniques to write viable poems. Though my first attempts at writing poetry were pathetic and I filled many a garbage can with scraps of paper in all shapes and sizes, I had begun – and that was vital. While I still fill garbage cans with pathetic poetry, I have begun to find a voice within that is my own. This is not to say that other poets have not influenced me, though.

Like Shakespeare's sonnet, several poems have had long-term effects on my writing and me. I include T.S. Eliot's poem, "The Love-song of J.Alfred Prufrock" for its striking images, references to historical events and esoteric dialogue/language. I discuss Seamus Heaney's translation of *Beowulf* because of the beauty and accuracy of his language in an antiquated epic poem; and Ezra Pound's poem "In a Station of the Metro" enters the discussion because it made me more aware of powerful succinctness in poetry. In addition I will discuss in detail two poets, Anne Sexton and Anna Akhmatova, whom I studied and whose poetry interacts with mine as a result.

Anna Akhmatova

After studying Anna Akhmatova's poetry and life, I am impressed with the range and depth of her writing and experience. Her poetry was the furthest thing from my mind when I visited her grave just north of St. Petersburg. The gravesite lacks the expected vigor and grandeur of one of Russia's major poets. In the middle of a swampy forest of pines and ubiquitous Russian birches, the gravesite sits off the soft path and features a stone wall with a plaque and a large, iron Russian Orthodox cross. I had never heard of Akhmatova outside of Russia and I hoped to find out more about this poet, buried in a meek place in an area called Komorova, named for the Russian word for mosquito. We did not stay long at the gravesite (the cemetery lived up to the area's reputation and namesake) and I did not revisit Akhmatova until I studied her poetry several years later for an English Honors project.

While studying Akhmatova, I relied heavily on Lydia Chukovskaya's collections of reminisces and journals about Akhmatova and uncovered the depth and breadth of a poet whom I had known only as a white face cast in stone amidst the dark, damp of Russia's swampland. Chukovskaya corresponded with Akhmatova in her later years as a nurse and close friend.

Through Chukovskaya's entries, I found that although her body was often ill, her soul always soared. Akhmatova lived through a tumultuous era in Russia's history. She survived the October Revolution, the bombardment of Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) and the horror of Stalinist politics. After discovering that she had lived through war, poverty and terror, it left no doubt how she achieved such depth in her poetry.

Akhmatova's poetry represented a step away from the social questions and ideas that Russian poets preceding her practiced. She wrote flowing free verse that captured the plight of herself, as a woman poet living in difficult times, and her nation's struggle for survival. Akhmatova took refuge in poets like Shakespeare and Russia's iconic Pushkin, who serve as influences and subject material for her own work. In "Cleopatra," Akhmatova prefaces the poem she bases on Shakespeare's "Antony and Cleopatra" with an epigram from Pushkin that reads "A sweet shade covered Alexander's palaces." By using both great poets she influences her work to greatness, but this is only because she understands and uses them effectively. In his essay, "To What Extent is *Requiem* a Requiem? Unheard Female Voices in Anna Akhmatova's *Requiem,*" Boris Katz describes the adoptive nature of Akhmatova's verse as it applies to hidden subtexts in her poetic series, *Requiem*. Katz comments that "Akhmatova's poetry of the late period is literally woven with threads connecting a poem with numerous other texts … literary subtexts, of course, play the most essential part" (254). Essentially, Akhmatova mastered the art of allusion.

In my own poetry, I avoid using too many references or allusions to great poets of the past. This stems from my fear of attaching my mediocre poetry to their masterpieces. In the few poems that I allude to other poets and poetry, the inspiration came from reading poems such as "Cleopatra" that use them so well. When I do allude to other poets, I keep them in low profile and add them almost as an aside. For example, in my poem, "Poet's Play," I write, "leaves / of

grass", the title of Walt Whitman's classic book of transcendental American poetry (ll. 11-12). While this allusion supports the theme of poetry made from the remains of other poetry, I try to use it in a way that removes the actual poetry, while including the aura of a great poet. I believe this works well in "Poet's Play" because the poem seeks to capture this "borrowing" aspect of modern poetry. In "How I Came to Love," I include a reference to Shakespeare to create or support an image which I find delightful. A poem about my wife, "How I Came to Love" was difficult to write because the subject matter was so close and accessible, yet quite hard to describe. With the phrase "bawdy as a Shakespearean play," I hoped to create a tonal image that reflected my wife's witty, fun, sophisticated and, at times, edgy personality (l. 1) Not only did this image describe her multi-faceted personality well, it also brought a dimension of literary pursuit and knowledge that justifies itself through her intensive study of literature as an English major. Again, I did not use the allusion to bolster my own work by attaching it to greater work; I included the reference to support a difficult image.

The difficulty of Akhmatova's early poetry also lay in the images. Her first poetic utterances came from the mouth of an acmeist, a literary movement in Russia, founded in the early 1900s. Her poetry, explains critic Leonid I. Strakhovsky, "Perhaps more so than was the case of other acmeists … is 'the language of objects – an extraordinary and intimate language'" (Anna Akhmatova – Poetess of Tragic Love, 3). Judging by my own experience uncovering multi-faceted, concrete images that function well, Akhmatova's mastery of such objects and images astounds. Akhmatova crafted her images so well that her first book with its "concreteness of word-images together with new rhythms, which critic Zhirmunsky compared with the music of Debussy, so pleased the Russian reading public that her book was sold out in record time and her name was soon on the lips of lovers of poetry throughout the length and breadth of Russia"

(Strakhovsky 3). Akhmatova continued her use of striking, concrete images and experimentation in rhythm throughout her career, all the while improving her poetic spontaneity and uniquely feminine view of the world.

Critics of Akhmatova's time railed against the lack of ideas and solutions to the social problems that they felt society needed. Akhmatova rejected the voices of her critics and understood that "the Russian reader of those years was not interested anymore in ideologies and social problems … What attracted [others] in Akhmatova's poetry was the spontaneity of feeling and the humane, feminine touch of her lyre. (Strakhovsky 4). She was not so much writing for her society, as for herself, though. Much of her poetry reveals a woman who must confront herself and emerge the victor.

In my translations of Akhmatova, along with the thread of historical and literary allusion I see a thread of examination into Akhmatova the woman. She explores her motherhood in "Mother's Lament" with images of the speaker's lost child and abandonment. She questions a woman's role in "Cleopatra" as well as her freedom with images of "as a slave," "chained the children" and "the last prisoner of her beauty" (ll. 5-9). And in "Wild honey smells of freedom," Akhmatova explores the plight of "the Scottish queen," referencing Shakespeare's "Macbeth" (l. 12). Akhmatova's search for personal justification or understanding may appear self-centered, but, as Akhmatova's contemporary Boris Zaitsev wrote of *Requiem*, her poetry serves as a "lament, a female, motherly, lament, not only for herself, but also for all those who are suffering, for all wives, mothers, brides, and in general for all those who are being crucified" (Katz 262). Like Akhmatova's introspective tendencies, my poetry explores particulars of life which cause me to lament or question it. While my poetry cannot approach the genius and the experienced flavor of Akhmatova's, for my own less-conflicted life it serves me well.

Introspection looms over my poem "Discord in a Villanelle Theme," where I try to explain my distorted fascination with events of which I am no part. Taken in part from an actual event, this poem attempts to revisit the jealousy, anger and sadness that went through my mind during the late night interlude. I found through this introspection that the anger and jealousy which I "coldly felt" and which left me to "lie in green within my bedroom door" stemmed not from my love for either party, but at not having someone that close of my own (ll. 5, 18). By including the line "and wait to find a lip without a tear," I conclude that my future late night companion will uphold a level of virtue that the parties "without my bedroom door" lack (ll. 1, 19). I will not divulge whether my poetic promise succeeded, but the process by which I came to that conclusion remains, at least in part, in my current poetry. The poetics of introspection and self-analytics find their essence mostly in the Confessional movement in mid twentieth-century American poetry.

Anne Sexton

Psychoanalysis emerged in the mid twentieth-century as many of the medical professionals who dealt with broken minds practiced Psychoanalytical processes. This school of thought sprang from the research of Josef Breuer, Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, a group of men who believed that the mind was but a puzzle which required a proper key to open its secrets. Psychoanalysis was also a means to cure painful mental illness. In her book of poetry entitled *To Bedlam and Part Way Back*, Anne Sexton explores her own mind in an attempt to make sense of her mental illness and find truth. Her poetry reflects the trends in psychoanalysis that prevailed in her time, taking its foundation from her thoughts, feelings and memories. Sexton explores her broken mind throughout the poems in a process that has a beginning and an end. The beginning comes from her imprisonment in a psychiatric ward and the start of her search for sanity. The

end reveals itself in her mother, in Christ's love and in a closer understanding of her mind's intricacies. The title of her book clearly indicates that, though she makes it to bedlam, she has come only part way back. Sexton's journey into her broken mind is not yet complete – as her poetry shows.

In *To Bedlam and Part Way Back*, Sexton includes a series of exploratory poems meant to uncover truths about her past, present and future. The first poem, "You, Doctor Martin," and her last poem, "The Division of Parts," presents her readers with the beginning of her journey and the end (or the beginning of the end) to understanding her past. These two poems show significant changes that occur in Sexton through the different style, imagery and subject matter each poem contains. Analyzing the poems this way succeeds, as Sexton's life coincides with her poetic narrator.

Dr. Martin, Sexton's primary therapist, played a significant role in Sexton's life and poetry. Diane Wood Middlebrook's, *Anne Sexton: A Biography*, remarks that "the seeds of [Sexton's] identity as an important American writer were sown in the rich mess that spilled from her first mental breakdown in 1956" (Middlebrook 4). Sexton struggled with mental illness throughout her adult life and spent much time with her therapists. Although she began writing poetry as a teenager, Sexton's psychoanalytic poetry came as a source of therapy during her bouts of depression. Dr. Martin Orne, "was trained during an era in which all psychiatrists were introduced to analytic principles, and these showed up in the language of the insights they reached in the course of treatment"(44). While Orne may have influenced Sexton's poetry through their sessions, Sexton's psychoanalytic flair came mostly from her own research: "she did not pursue a systematic understanding of the subject, in the sense of studying it, but once Dr. Orne became her psychiatrist, she began reading both popular and professional literature in the

field" (53). In fact, Sexton once told Dr. Orne that "'someone asked me the other day if my doctor is analytical … I said, No – just me" (53).

The psychoanalytic side of Sexton melded with the poetic half, and "in Sexton's first years of treatment, writing reinforced the effects of psychotherapy, and the two activities almost completely interlocked" (Middlebrook 52). This style of writing was a hallmark of confessional poets who, as critic J.D. McClatchy notes in "Anne Sexton: Somehow to Endure," closely associated with psychotherapy:

> All the contemporary poets central to confessionalism have undergone extensive psychotherapy, and while it would be foolish to account for their poetry by this experience, it would be careless to ignore its influence, especially given the strong similarities between the process of therapy they have needed as individuals and the poetic process by which they have then sought to express the lives they have come to explore or understand. (33-34)

Not only did Sexton's writing take on analytic qualities, but it became therapy in and of itself: "any work that elicited approval would, quite obviously, assist in the repair of self-esteem, and writing had a special validity in Sexton's family … by writing poems, Sexton confirmed her own existence as an able person" (McClatchy 45). It is obvious, especially in the set of poems in *To Bedlam and Part Way Back*, that Sexton's narrator and Sexton are identical personalities. Sexton's poetry, then, attempts to psychoanalytically find a path from mental illness to clarity and understanding. Her technique requires a brief introduction of the ideology behind psychoanalytic theory.

Freud's original theory was influenced by Josef Breuer and what he termed the *catharsis method.* In *A Brief History of Modern Psychology*, Ludy T. Benjamin, Jr. discusses Breuer's idea behind cathartic cure: "symptoms are believed to be the result of pent-up emotions, and if the emotion is released, then the symptoms should disappear" (Benjamin 116-117). One of Breuer's patients suffered from "the death of her father, to whom she was greatly attached,

experience[ing] problems such as headaches, partial paralyses, periods of overexcitement, visual disturbances, and loss of sensation" (116). Breuer cited that his method "had cured Anna O. [his patient] of all her symptoms" and was a successful means to understanding the underlying causes of patient illness.

Sexton ascribes to similar analytic processes through her poetry and masterfully includes her own reality and experience with mental illness. In her poem, "You, Doctor Martin," Sexton uses the title to introduce her narrator's location and perspective. This poem takes place in an asylum where the narrator, along with other patients, receives treatment for a mental illness. The first lines and images in this poem are moribund at best:

> You, Doctor Martin, walk
> from breakfast to madness. Late August,
> I speed through the antiseptic tunnel
> where the moving dead still talk
> of pushing their bones against the thrust
> of cure.... (Sexton ll.1-6).

What strikes the reader as odd in these opening passages are the verbs and nouns Sexton uses to describe the mad and dead. "Speed," "moving," "talk," "pushing" and "thrust" are all very active words that denote the search for a 'cure.' Sexton immediately introduces a conflict and a resolution. The mentally ill are in a state of death; though they are very much alive and in search of a cure. Sexton's narrator sees herself as the "queen of this summer hotel," suggesting either the extent of her insanity amid lesser patients or her sense of superiority over the other patients (3). This poem also indicates the imprisonment of the psychiatric patients who "stand in broken / lines and wait while they unlock / the door and count us at the frozen gates" (ll. 8-10). The

psychiatric ward is also described as a place of learning where "We chew in rows, our plates / scratch and whine like chalk / in school" (ll. 13-15). However in the narrator's school they "make / moccasins all morning," a task as menial as it is useless (ll. 16-17). These descriptions of the people and lifestyle of the psychiatric ward serve a variety of purposes for Sexton's introductory poem. First, they establish the idea of the general state of mental illness as a point of reference for upcoming events. After finding out from whence the narrator has come, the reader sees that the patients are actively pursuing a cure to their condition. The educational and moccasin-making activities in the ward do not help the narrator find a cure and are therefore pointless and tedious. But the narrator is learning, however slowly, to take "back, each angry finger that demands / I mend what another will break / tomorrow" (ll. 20-22). The narrator shows little optimism in this act and remains pessimistic about everything in the ward except the doctor.

As the title suggests, Sexton wrote this poem partially to her doctor. Concerning Sexton's poetry, Middlebrook remarks that "by typing them out for her doctor, she entrusted herself ever more deeply to his affirming attention" (45). Indeed, the poem's narrator seems to answer her doctor with the phrase "Of course, I love you;" (l. 22). To the narrator, the doctor is a force for good: "you lean above the plastic sky, / god of our block, prince of all the foxes … light[ing] the separate boxes / where we sleep or cry." (ll. 23-24, 27-28). Interestingly, Sexton's own perception of God was that of "a nursing mother's face, God's face bends over the world," just like her poem's doctor leans over his patients (Middlebrook 355). Sexton's narrator laments that the doctor's profession is difficult and notes how "You twist in the pull / of the foxy children who fall / lie floods of life in frost." – speaking of the patients as 'foxy children who fall' (ll. 34-36). Despite the doctor's benevolent presence, the narrator remains pessimistic about the future.

Later in *To Bedlam and Part Way Back,* Sexton's poetry changes to a more self-affirming psychoanalysis. In the third section of "The Division of Parts," one of the last poems in the book, the speaker feels the need for Christ's healing, grounding influence. Since the death of her mother, the speaker admits that "I have pretended ease" (l. 1). She still cannot regain clarity after her mother's death, try as she may. She searches her past for closure and finds little solace: "I fumble my lost childhood / for a mother and lounge in sad stuff / with love to catch and catch as catch can" (ll. 7-9). By herself, she can merely 'fumble' and 'lounge' in the past, but "Christ still waits" to help her find closure (l. 10). The speaker explains how she tries "to exorcise the memory" of her mother, yet her attempts at forgetting fail (l. 11). Ridding herself of her mother's memory is impossible, because the narrator is "still a mixed child, / heavy with cloths of [her mother]" that weigh her down and remind her (ll. 12-13). At this point, the speaker sees her mother as a "sweet witch," again betraying the contrasting emotions of love and loathing that she has towards her mother (l. 14). But her mother leads her as a "worried guide" to a place where the "walls creak *Anne! Convert! Convert!"* (ll. 14 & 16). This is the first time Sexton refers to herself directly as the speaker, right at the moment she is about to convert to Christianity. By doing this, Sexton shows how Christianity appeals to her personally, even enough to subvert her role as narrator in the poem. From this point on, the poem becomes entirely Sexton's and may be interpreted as her personal feelings and experiences. Sexton sees what must be done and seems to reach the end of her journey to bedlam. Now she must go back to living her life with a newfound faith in Christ and a greater understanding about her mother:

> [...] For all the way I've come
> I'll have to go again. Instead, I must convert
> to love as reasonable

as Latin, as solid as earthenware:

an equilibrium

I never knew. And Lent will keep its hurt

for someone else. Christ knows enough

staunch guys have hitched on him in trouble,

thinking his sticks were badges to wear. (ll. 19-27)

Sexton's own relationship with Christ was very similarly based on love; she did not have any desire to praise his death, but his life. As Middlebrook writes, "Anne really tried to trust the connections she felt with that Jesus, the ordinary man" who lived and cared about people like her (Middlebrook 356). Now Sexton has something 'as solid as earthenware,' 'as reasonable as Latin' and an 'equilibrium' that could help her overcome her mother's death and her mental illness. The fourth and final section of "The Division of Parts" adds closure to her experience with her mother and mental illness. And while it does not finalize her recovery, it leads the reader to believe it is a possibility and quite probable.

Sexton's journey in *To Bedlam and Part Way Back* is a journey from mental illness to sanity, from confusion and pain to understanding and love. Critics have argued over Sexton's speaker and where that speaker exists in context to her mental illness:

> What use Sexton made of the loss of social functioning labeled 'madness.' Both sides granted the authenticity and skill of her work, but was it interesting or was it embarrassing? Discussion of the quality of Sexton's poetry throughout her career tended to the question whether the speaker was the victim or the moral survivor of her illness. (Middlebrook 126)

My argument tends toward the "moral survivor" side of the debate. Sexton finds a way out of pain and "madness" through a morally perfect Christ, and survives her ordeal. Other critics, such as Cheryl Vossekuil, have concluded similarly about Sexton's *To Bedlam and Part Way Back*:

"her first three collections – *To Bedlam and Part Way Back* (1960), *All My Pretty Ones* (1962), *Live or Die* (1966) – show her to be life-affirming, struggling with the temptation of death, but choosing life – at least for a time" (120). Even Middlebrook points out that Sexton's poetry reflects a 'moral survivor' theme: she reflected the recuperation of self in the aftermath of mental illness and then of medical treatment (126). Sexton's *To Bedlam and Part Way Back* is the story of a survivor, of a woman who overcomes both suffering and mental illness through a belief in Christ. Her psychoanalytic journey to understanding and closure succeeds, liberating her from the prison of her own mind. Sexton's poetry succeeds in administering a degree of comfort and understanding for her in the midst of crippling mental illness.

With my poetry, I see a connection to Sexton in the search for meaning in difficult circumstances that I experienced. I feel a similarity to Sexton's introspective psychoanalytic journey through the poem "Prospekt Lenina." In this poem, the speaker has tried to recover from the experience of a family in turmoil. As "yellow fists and words / glazed with vodka and hate" (ll. 6-7) run through the speaker's mind, he cannot understand the reason behind such a scene, leaving him "too dry for tears" (ll.13). Unfortunately, as the speaker attempts to make sense of the insanity he witnessed, his friend rudely wakes him, "tear[ing]" him from bed (l. 14). Unlike Sexton's Christian conversion which aids her discovery of solace and understanding, the speaker's Christian faith restricts his understanding and offers little solace. The sarcastic refrain, "we are, after all, soldiers of Christ," represents the speaker's consignment of any further psychoanalytic process that might lead to understanding or at least closure (l. 18). Because the speaker lacks the ability to go against his faith and purpose as a missionary, he asks "but what can I say in my defense?" (l. 17) and retains the unhappy image of yesterday's painful episode:

His thoughts follow the planner in his hand,

mine follow a tear

that cleaned a path

through young

Tanya's dirty,

dimpled

cheek. (ll. 23-29)

Similar to "Prospekt Lenina," my poem "Feeding the Rabbits" retains an unfulfilled introspection and lack solace by the poem's end. "Feeding the Rabbits" contains painful images, though these images offset with images of fun and child-like pursuits: "forts and snakes" and "X-Men and Ninja Turtles" (ll. 4, 8). The contrasts of happy/sad, fun/work and anticipation/ disappointment accentuate the bewilderment in the poem. I do not reach a conclusion or point of solace, leaving the experience open-ended and painful – as it was even after several years. As in "Prospect Lenina," where I use the contrast of a scene, "too dry for tears" (ll. 13), this poem also uses images of wet and dry to convey the disorder in such an image. In "Feeding the Rabbits," the contrast between wet and dry, "pellets and dust" (l. 17) with a "wet upper lip" (l. 20), exemplify that confusion. Such strong and functional images create mood, relate the experience to the reader and make the poem interesting to read.

Ezra Pound

The method I use to create images in my poems stems from my reading of other, image-conscious poets like Ezra Pound. Much of his poetry contains powerful images that need little explanation and hold themselves without needless language. One such poem, which bases itself on the Japanese haiku-style poetry, contains powerful images that carry the poem's succinct message: Pound's "In a Station of the Metro."

Pound wrote "In a Station of the Metro" in two lines, and as the essay "Pound's "'Metro' Hokku'": The Evolution of an Image" indicates, Pound "retains the spare, condensed presentation the imagists aspired to; and its structure and punctuation are consistent with other imagist poems Pound wrote in this period" (Chilton and Gilbertson 229). The strong language offers the reader an image that appeals to the senses and emotions while addressing to his/her logic without saying it does so. The first line, "The apparition of these faces in the crowd;" proposes an image that the last line convolutes: "Petals on a wet, black bough." (ll. 1-2). Pound uses every word, every syllable and every punctuation mark to convey the image. The poem, "with its semicolon holding at arm's length its two honed lines … captures this Poundian revelation in the most extreme demonstration of the imagist aesthetic, in which, as imagist Richard Aldington wrote in 1914, 'We convey an emotion by presenting the object and circumstance of that emotion *without comment*'" (Chilton and Gilbertson 232). The lack of comment in "In a Station of the Metro," gives the poem a heightened reliance on the strength of image: "rather than giving us an equation or comparison, the poet gives us, as Pound writes in 'Vorticism,' an image that is 'itself the speech. The image is the word beyond formulated language'" (Chilton and Gilbertson 231).

My poetry seeks to convey images in the imagistic style. Obviously I am no imagist, but I feel my poetry has improved as a result of studying poems like "In a Station of the Metro" and Eastern haikus. In my attempts at writing haikus, or variations of them, I tried to cut any needless language while keeping the images strong. The last of the three haikus represents my most polished attempt. First comprised of several, explanatory words, I cut and crafted the poem until it felt I could remove no more without losing its character. As a direct result of studying Pound, I removed the word "and" after the first line, "Soap gels in my ear;" (l. 1). I replaced "and" with a

semicolon, trying to achieve the same affect of "In the Station of a Metro." It also helps reduce the poem even more while sharpening the image, something I try to do with all of my poetry.

T.S. Eliot

Like Pound, T.S. Eliot uses powerful images in his poetry. Eliot's poetry mirrors much of what Pound wrote; they were contemporaries and edited each other's poetry. One difference from Pound's poetry that I find fascinating in Eliot comes through his unique esoteric imagery and phrases. I especially enjoy "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" for the mystery between the words. Critics debate endlessly about the meaning behind Eliot's poetry, probably enough to fill entire libraries. One such debate about "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" concerns Eliot's first three lines, "Let us go then, you and I, / When the evening is spread out against the sky / Like a patient etherized upon a table;" (ll. 1-3). Not only do the contrasting images strike the reader like a defibrillator, but Eliot also leaves the "you" and the "I" ambiguous. Researcher Donald J. Childs writes that "Critics have made these opening lines to 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' the cornerstone of their readings of the poem. The central preoccupation has been with the notorious distinction between Eliot's subject and speaker, or his use of 'you and I.'" (*Knowledge and Experience* 687). Childs believes that Eliot's dissertation holds the key to understanding these opening lines, while others see other threads and interpretations. Eliot's genius, in my consideration, emerges from the esoteric language that permeates so much of his poetry.

In "Poet's Play," I attempt to leave the poem's speaker and subject ambiguous. As a master at his craft, Eliot's ambiguity keeps through a poem of several pages; mine keeps for less than a page. "Poet's Play" seeks to both generalize the poet, which I refer to as "it," and to ambiguously treat the "you" in the poem. I hoped that this would allow the reader to make

his/her own assumptions as to the personalities in the poem and the tone of the poem. The tone could either feel spiteful or playfully satirical, the reader must decide. For as Eliot outlines in his dissertation, "all such necessarily 'partial and fragmentary truths' should be reinterpreted: 'the finest tact after all can give us only interpretation [of lived truths], and every interpretation, along with perhaps some utterly contradictory interpretation, has to be taken up and reinterpreted by every thinking mind and by every civilization" (qtd. in Childs 697). According to Eliot, then, I should let my readers interpret for themselves what I mean when I write "Let a poet into your home / and it will sleep / with your daughter," (ll. 19-21). Along with letting others interpret my poetry, I ask only that I may interpret other's poetry, too. My interpretations of poetry run a wide gamut, and grow with each poem I analyze. Translations present me with the most difficult, yet rewarding interpretations because they not only need interpretation, but the translation itself requires deep analytic plumbing and cultural understanding.

TRANSLATION

Translation helps me understand another culture's similarities and differences as it broadens my poetic imagination and sympathy. As I mentioned before, I am still falling in love with the Russian language. One of the primary reasons I cannot stop studying Russian is the unique, culturally thick and inventive poetry of Russia. The Russian people have a long tradition of loving poetry and poets as though they came directly from the hands and mouth of God. I have attempted to translate (I call them attempts because translating poetry is always only that) a wide sampling of Russian poetry from throughout their history. Focusing on iconic poets like Anna Ahmatova, Aleksander Pushkin and several older Russian poets, I hope to explore the vital essence of Russian poetry while evaluating my own as it relates to modern American poetry and

the obvious Russian influence. My translated works represent an important aspect of my poetic voice, allowing me to better understand the Russian culture and poetry itself.

My interest in translation came, of course, through my two years in Russia. I would translate from Russian into English and from English into Russian, as needed. However, not until I returned to America did I begin to translate Russian poetry into English. My first experience in translating poetry was Anna Akhmatova's poems for an Honors project. I soon found that translating poetry from one language into viable poetry in another language has its difficulties. Willis Barnstone, author of the book *The Poetics of Translation*, defines poetry as "the ultimate challenge at the complex heart of literary translation. More so than prose, poetry, because of its prosody, is polysemous, with many layers of meaning – aesthetic, phonic, and expressive – to transpose between tongues" (4). My poetic translation were very time consuming and mind bending, as I struggled over the exact phrase, syntax or word that would best transfer the meaning behind the original. Russian, with its lack of articles (the, a/an, some/any) retains a difficulty in nuance and meaning about which George Steiner remarks, "notoriously, the absence of the article in Russian can lead to pluralities and ambiguities which English misses or renders by expansive paraphrase" (After Babel 306).

This ambiguity reared its ugly head in almost every poem I translated. Lack of articles forced me to infer from syntax and the previous and proceeding lines. For example, in several of my close translations I had to choose between what, in English, "the" or "a/an" would define. In "Mother's Lament" I struggled over the eighth line, "Magdalene took a young son." Akhmatova's original poem proceeds ambiguously here; the meaning could be that Magdalene took "the son," "a son," "her son" or "my son." I chose to leave it ambiguous by saying "a son" since that variation of son could be any of the sons I mentioned. In my translations that I changed

greatly through syntax and word choice, the lack of articles presented few problems. The free form of such poetic translation helps avoid the pitfalls of differences in language structure, but the original poem fades as the new poem changes.

Translation of poetry can align with either free or literal interpretations. These two fields of translation have their detractors as well as their adherents. Poet translators like Ezra Pound and Robert Lowell translate poems freely, and "critics praise [them] for their resurrection of earlier poets while faulting them for not letting the original poet speak" (Barnstone 84). In the other camp come poet translators like Robert Fitzgerald and Vladimir Nabokov. These translators try to remain loyal to the poem's original as much as possible, for as Nabokov proclaims, "The clumsiest literal translation is a thousand times more useful than the prettiest paraphrase" (qtd. in Barnstone 30). These two types of translation have their plusses and minuses. Barnstone attempts both types of translation on a Latin bestiary, offering first a few lines of direct translation which are then followed by a second, freer translation:

Sirens are monsters of the sea with great resonance
Whose song is formed of many voices and modulations
Before whom incautious sailors often come near.

Sirens are singing monsters of the sea,
With many voices and varied melody.
Often the reckless sailors passing near
Are sung to sleep with sweetness in their ear. (50)

The second translation attempts to imitate the original rhyme of the Latin poem while the first declines any musicality while retaining the original word order and a more direct meaning. Barnstone argues that "this verse translation demonstrably reproduces the poem's literal as well

as its wider connotative and musical meanings more closely than my first few lines" (50-51). I tend to appreciate Barnstone's comments more and more as I transfer poems from Russian into English. Literal translations retain meaning just like technical translations of rocket fabrications. They may seem a truer representation of the original, but unlike Nabakov I do not see my free translations as "minute excrement on the poet's monumental white page" (48). Indeed, I follow Barnstone's comment that "perfect translatability is impossible" (42). I go so far as to believe in the untranslatability of languages, but I also believe that poetic meaning translates. Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote that "It were as wise to cast a violet into a crucible, that you might discover the formal principle of its color and odor, as seek to transfuse from one language into another the creations of a poet" (qtd. In Barnstone 346). This statement contains truth, to be sure, but Shelley "proved a superior and abundant translator of classical poetry" and obviously tried to transfer the beauty in the poetic meaning (346). Such inconsistency in poetic translation theories and stances betrays the difficulty of the subject. Perhaps that difficulty and the resulting skill increase is what caused Shelley to translate when he thought poetry untranslatable. Ludwig Wittgenstein noted that "Translating from one language into another is a mathematical task, and the translation of a lyrical poem, for example, into a foreign language is quite analogous to a mathematical problem" (qtd. In Barnstone 19). While it was difficulty that drew me to translating poetry and I see myself a better poet for it, the time spent on a translated poem compared to original poetry makes me reticent to continue.

Perhaps my most extensive translation of poetry was "The First Journey of Ilya Muromets." After finishing that translation I never wanted to see another long Russian poem again. This poem held significant challenges for someone who had little knowledge of the older Russian language. I translated from the eleventh to twelfth-century poetic mini-epic (though as a

fable it had been updated) and fought with the antiquated language. One of the most common repetitive refrains in the fable, "Ох, ты гой еси!," I was unable to translate for a long time; my Russian contacts and dictionaries could not tell me what the phrase meant. I had to scour the Internet and finally found the meaning through a Russian grammar site. Without a valid English equivalent for the phrase, I chose one myself: "Oh, thou of my own blood" (l. 4). I found justification in creating a refrain for the translation in the poetic translator's license to create where nothing yet exists. One of my partners in the crime of creating new language was Polish translator Bronsilaw Zielinski. He translated *Moby Dick* into Polish, though "He could not produce a literal, work-for-word translation because there was no whaling vocabulary in Polish" (Barnstone 41). Poland had no whaling industry. For this type of translation I could not hope to represent the original meaning accurately in English if it was obsolete already in Russian. After several weeks I hammered out a representation that I felt at least vaguely reflected the original content and musicality.

I took comfort in my translation of the early Russian epic when I read Seamus Heaney's translation of "Beowulf." Obviously Heaney's translation represents a closer, more beautifully-crafted poem than my own, as well as it must have been more difficult. While the Russian language continues to this day, Old English lives in the past. Heaney must have struggled with word choice and modern equivalents more than I, yet he translated brilliantly and beautifully. If Heaney translated something so difficult, I could translate something as simple as Russian "Bylini," or "Stories of the Past." Heaney's translation also helped me with mine because I saw how he carefully weaved the old ideas and words with modern speech. An example of this comes in the beginning of "Beowulf:"

There was Shield Sheafson, scourge of many tribes,

A wrecker of mead-benches, rampaging among foes.

This terror of the hall-troops had come far. (ll. 4-6)

Heaney creates words, "mead-benches" and "hall-troops," that do not exist in modern English. He combines these creations with modern language that clarifies the poem and brings it closer to modern readers. In my translation, I also had to create words/phrases such as "wonder-workers"(ll. 7-8) and "father-lord" (l. 39) for antiquated speech that Russian today does not use (and certainly not English speakers). Heaney also contended with the Old English Germanic verse structure, which consists of two half-lines, each containing two stressed and two or more unstressed syllables, linked by alliteration (Ferguson, Salter and Stallworthy 1).

The twelfth-century Russian language does not have such a rigid structure, but it relies on repetition in word endings such as "sya," "om," "im" and "ka" throughout the poem. This repetition produces a bard-like song that makes reading the poem easy and memorable. The early Russians were largely illiterate and such repetition and song-like verse facilitated remembering the poem. In my translation I did not reproduce the repetition of word endings within the poem's lines; instead I tried to rhyme the endings of each line in couplets and applied a loose iambic pentameter. While some of the form and syntax feels a little outdated and lacks modern flair, I attempted to make the poem understandable and readable. The difficulty of translating such old Russian poetry has kept me from such translation ever since as I have little time for epic pursuits. My translations of long, old poetry ended with Ilya Muromets because I did not feel comfortable with that type of translation.

Translation comes more naturally to me now as I have worked over many different poems and poetic time periods. As my translation improves, I have begun to notice how much of life depends on translations. Barnstone puts it better than I could hope to when he says that

> Every act of reading, writing, and interpretation of a text, every role by each actor in the cast, every adaptation of script by a director of opera, film, theater, ballet, pantomime, indeed every perception of movement and change, in the street or on our tongues, on the page or in our ears, leads us directly to the art and activity of translation. (19)

Translation pervades life and art, finding application in almost all situations. The poems I chose to translate from Russian represent an exploration into the variations and breadth of Russian poetry.

The first few poems I translated were experiments in style and translation more than my later poems which reflect a more central type of translation. I now see that translations need to find a middle ground between literalism and free interpretation. In my later poems I try to capture the central essence of the original poem, but I do not let the structure or literal meaning over shine the musicality and rhyme. I now try to create a poem that is a "child born of the art … forever BETWEEN home and alien city … new-born and different" (Barnstone 265). The poem "On the eve of the anniversary of August 4, 1864" shows the way I retain elements of the original poem while attempting to convey essential meaning. Tyuchev's original Russian verse sounds beautiful on the page. His rhyme scheme is ABAB CDCD ABAB and he uses iambic tetrameter throughout. Although my English translation does not capture the poem's supreme sadness, it does offer a glimpse. I tried to convey the sad undercurrent through repetition, long vowels and the fading images.

Tyuchev includes repetitive lines in the original: "My angel" and "can you see me" repeat thrice in the poem. "Tomorrow" repeats twice in both poems. The repetition shows that the speaker dwells on those ideas, ideas he/she cannot (or will not) forget. In my translation I repeat the same lines in the same way, and hopefully to the same affect. The mournful tone continues to assert itself in the back vowel, *ō*, and the eerie *oo* vowel sound in both the original and my own translation: "road," "too," "you," "glow," "tomorrow" and "souls." These vowels express again

the speaker's sentiment about his/her loss and enhance the gloomy tone. Fading images also significantly impact the poem's meaning and tone. Many of the images report a fleeting, distant object that the speaker cannot quite obtain, though he/she searches. The poem begins, "Here I am, wandering along a bulky road / In the quiet light of a fading day," suggesting a half-hearted search for something that fades, as does the day. As noted, the article at the end of these lines, *a*, is ambiguous in Tyuchev's Russian poem. I chose *a* over *the* because the ambiguity of *a* lends itself to the "wandering" and "fading" in the poem. The fleeting, mournful tone of the poem continues through images of numbing legs, darkening horizons and the unanswered questions at the end of each stanza. The best way I found to keep the tone for Tyuchev's poem was to keep from the rhyme scheme. I felt it hindered the meaning when I tried to apply rhyme in English; it came off much too sing-songy and dull.

My latest translations more or less expound on what I learned in my first translations. Hopefully they represent a more mature, able translator who combines meaning with musicality in a way that does not transliterate the poem, but creates a new poem for a new audience. The basic tone and images in the translations remain, but different readers interpret poetry differently. As I mentioned before in the section on Eliot, a poem should be translated, interpreted and argued with. This should be done in different ways and it needs to be done in all cultures. What Akhmatova may have meant in "Cleopatra" and what her Russian readers understood should not constrict what American readers understand about the poem. Similarly, my poems give themselves to the reader to be abused and read as the audience sees fit. If I have done my job properly, the poems I create become their own and must defend themselves without me.

Thankfully, I have had wonderful teachers and have done intensive research that influences my poetry to stand on its own. My poems have their origins in poets like Akhmatova

and Sexton whose striking subtexts and psychoanalytic tendencies introduce readers to the poet's mind and experience. The poems I write attempt to approach the poetic genius of the imagist poet Pound and Eliot's esoteric depth. Studying these and other poets from many different schools and ages give me the skills and confidence to forge my own poems in a way that appeals to broad audiences. Translation also helps me broaden my poetry as it opens my mind to new possibilities, thoughts and techniques that reading English poetry alone could never bring. My sincere hope for my writing relies on a continual study of such poetic genius and translation that will further my budding desire to write effective poetry.

The Poems

EXPERIMENTS IN FORM

Discord in a Villanelle Theme

A gentle creak without my bedroom door
kept me from sleeping, though the bed was warm,
the pillow bunched about my ears - it tore me.

Muffled gaping, scathing on the floor,
I coldly felt their hot, impassioned storm
and played the part of death behind my door.

A giggle burst, low moaning. She adored
the way he spoke and in his slow perfor-
mance pleased. The hour was late, their conscience torn.

I tried to sleep; I hoped to cut the cord
that bound my ears but plunged into the course
of noise that echoed off my bedroom door.

They grew more silent, crisp, as if they bored
of stretching weary lips in morning's court.
Then their silence restored my anxious dreams.

A gentle creak became a misplayed chord
that keeps me far away from such *amour*.
I lie in green within my bedroom door
and wait to find a lip without a tear.

Three Variations on Haiku

1
Nude mountains today
peek over white roofs,
daring me to look away.

2
Whiskers tremble under
the weight of a day's rest; night
sleeps in an underground den.

3
Soap gels in my ear
and I can hear the sad
song of the deep.

Sonnet 33

I met you when I thought my life was full
of words, of art, of fresh, freewheeling air,
and as creeping vines unbrick a mossy wall,
your curled perfections cut wherever they dared.

How did a simple word become an ode
which made my open mouth tremble as if in fear?
A better being would tell me not to load,
in a troubled, wandering mind, a silent mirror.

You bowled me over, not with a painted face,
but as a friend I never had forgotten.
For a chime, a color, a scent, a palm's embrace
I would gladly trade this shifting life with men.

Put on your hat; I will take your steady hand.
Together we'll build empires out of sand.

FREE VERSE

Poet's Play

A poet's family knows only its

words,
which they hold like sacred
crosses

at
funerals.
A poet's death, is a passing
rain cloud that gives life to flowers

and mushrooms
that feed off decomposed
leaves
of grass.

The crisp of white, lazy
rain turns it into coal
stoves and trackless
banks that deposit more
than the deep fur
of sleeping hats.

Let a poet into your house
and it will sleep

with your daughter,
tie your dog

to a tree limb
and fix your chimney

with shot gun mortar,
just to make The New Yorker.

Feeding the Rabbits

Summer held me tightly that day,
inviting me not to care about anything but forts and snakes.
Those twitching muzzles could wait
until I couldn't see to climb trees anymore.

Then Dad slowly drove up the gravel drive.
Some days he came home late
and would still listen
to my adventures of X-Men and Ninja Turtles.

But he must have scrapped out an expensive part
that day; when I climbed the steps his boots were not set
on the porch.

We met in a doorway and he lifted me up.
He didn't want to hug me
and my bleary eyes were leveled with his
above my dangling, knobby knees.

I couldn't see the soft, white fur that night
as I filled their containers with pellets and dust.
Their eyes shone too brightly red from my flashlight.
Like my stinging face and
wet upper lip.

Chess

Trumpets sound the pawns' forward push over
checkered fields. The rook
steadies his march with the martial howl of a French
horn. Passing by, knights cut
with a violin's precision. The bishop follows with cello
cadence. From behind the
standing troops, the queen waits to press, the white
and black keys of ivory.
Kings conduct them all, a ballet that pirouettes
from the tune of a mind.

Vacuuming my Car

I find skeletons of leaves in the mat,
their spindle appendages tangled in the cloth.
Under the seat, a fry sleeps, draped in dust.
A naked gas receipt curls into a bow
beneath blackened springs.
Crumbs gather like snow in the crevasses of the back seat.
Carefully draped over the passenger
seat a long lock of hair shimmers.

I like a clean car; but today,
my hand doesn't reach that far.

How I Came to Love

Bawdy as a Shakespearean play.
Doesn't like the round coins of paper
left from a three-hole-punch.
Harmonizes with Jewel Kilcher
a few notes higher while preparing
papers for the day's classes.
Her Care Bear bandage covers
a bruise.

Sleeps in deposits of sheets
and thick, bread-like blankets,
a gerbil greedily snuggling
with squinty eyes and a bushy rust mane.

An obsession for chocolate and raspberries,
the glue that gums my poor palate makes her glide
around our too-small apartment hung with paintings of impressionists and
a reproduction of Charles Burton Barber's
Rival Distractions that is not her taste.

Our spray-painted black furnishings squeeze my charcoals
and Spiderman blues
into her pastel pinks and pearl grays.
Dijon mustard jars, Van Gogh's sunflowers, squat clay pots
and the sun's valley valence now takes my eye.
And I am rubber-necked and dizzy
from staring at the mountains that surround me outside
under the warm, or at her neck's nape,
inside the warm with me.

Monday Morning

I thought I would catch beauty
unaware in my Canon Powershot A540,
before the dust from a city between two states
settled in the mountain air.

It had rained the night before and February
held the droplets against the heavy branches
of confused trees.

Beauty would not expect someone
catching her on an American Monday.

My feet confused themselves
as they tried to hold against the cement
droplets when we neared the steel
bench on a hillock where I hoped to catch her
against the western mountains.

She saw me through black fur
with steel eyes,
though, perched on a white, cracking
window seat with a fish-shaped collar
glinting off the eastern mountains.

She caught me from behind in her eastern headlight.

I brought four AA batteries but my camera died
trying to hold her melting droplets.

POEMS ABOUT RUSSIA

St. Petersburg Taxi

The slow shuffle of fur and wet leather
shakes my crusted window. Mustard painted bricks
almost toppling under the heaving
of the street. I exhale into the hanging
smoke from the driver's homemade
cigarette, making tumbling currents
that try to hoist my damp luggage
handles from my hands.
Long words deflect from the windshield and bloodshot
eyes reflect in the rearview mirror. Short words burn
like vodka on my tongue
and are lost in the creak
of shocks and brakes and a shaking head.
He stops,
flicks his ash through a half-open window.
Priehali!
Thick air steals us away across cracked pavement
and blank puddles.
I am home.

Prospekt Lenina

My eyes close in a pillow,
but in my head they fill with scattering cockroaches
on peeling plaster.
We've just returned from
Pyotr and Nadezhda's apartment.
Yellow fists and words
glazed with vodka and hate still shook me. Three children
who spoke like sailors pushed against the trunks of their parents' legs.
Their efforts were futile as the cardboard
in their window where glass had been.
We all choked on the ash of rotted maws
and winced with it in our eyes.
Too dry for tears.

Are you going to sleep all day, or what?

My friend's words tear
me from bed, and I am no longer forcing myself
between a trembling husband and his soiled wife.
But what can I say in my defense?
We are, after all, soldiers of Christ.
Silence follows us down the crumbling steps
of our apartment, past Cyrillic graffiti
written in ash and blood.
We both think as we walk in blackened snow.
His thoughts follow the full planner in his hand,
mine follow a tear
that cleaned a path
through young
Tanya's dirty,
dimpled
cheek.

Slavs – Slaves no More

Sleeping trees, statues – grand, unblinking eyes
crying only in the spring. Ribs
of fences too thin to hide, too thick for feeling to
enter except at the interment gate. Crosses on crosses at uniform
angles amid birch oak benches for frozen stiff
bums frozen to their beer – too poor
for vodka. Ravens cry in every birch.
Black and grey eagles of the forgotten and misused
carcasses. Unlike pigeons they belong in this climate and have feet
to show for it. Pigeons easily pushed over with a frosted foot,
a plump pigeon that the ravens later carve,
solid blood, sticking the pavement.
These eagles hide in the spring and come out in the fall
from the skeletons of trees.

Young, fit men of farms tread deep in this new, horribly rich earth
full of fertilizer blood – a German chocolate cake too rich
for these men who give their lives for a smile
and perhaps some relief from their freezing backs
and sluggish joints.
They follow men who catch bullets in their teeth
and do not know that wars are won by hate.

A world of eagles
embroidered into one man's golden
sleeve. Forced to serve a life sentence
at the death of his Herculean father,
Nicholas II, Prince of all Russia, loves two families distantly,
closely.
He waxes his mustache of many colors –
colored like his face in a Spartan mirror, encrusted
with jewels from a dead relative he would never
disappoint. A reborn Alexis the
Mild, last of the Muscovite tsars.
Above his eye an oriental
scar unbalances his distant face multitudes see
Christ in.
Out the tall window
past the statues of mounted fat generals and prancing naked nymphs
rows of oak birch lead to standing spears black and
gold, sharp and garlanded.
He sees an image of this
in a red cellar
with no windows.

TRANSLATIONS: Chronologically Arranged

First Journey of Ilya Muromets
Ilya Muromets and the Nightingale-Robber
11^{th}-12^{th} century

It is not a green oak bending to
The earth and not loose leaves of paper strewn
About, but a son spread out before his father.
He asks a blessing, "Oh, thou of my own blood,
My father kind and kin, please sir, grant
Your blessing. I will go to elegant
And royal Kiev-city to pray to wonder-
Workers in Kiev; to bow before
The Prince Volodimir; to serve his land
In faith and honor; to stand for Christian faith.
The elderly Ivan Timofeevich
The Christian answered, "I will bless that which
Is good in deeds, but there can be no blessing
For the bad. So when you travel, wring
Your heart of evil to the Tartars, in
The open field do not destroy a Christian."
Ilya Muromets bowed to the ground
Before his father, then sat upon his mount,
So stout, and left into the open field.
He beat the horse's steepened flanks until
He beat to blackened flesh and his angry steed
Sprang from the earth and higher than the trees.
He galloped, just below the moving clouds.
The first leap took them near a mile, the proud
Horse jumped again and sprang a sparkling well.
Ilya, at the well, felled an oak
To build a chapel, and signed his name, "A hero, strong
And mighty rode here, Ilya Muromets
Son of Ivan." The horse's third leap set
Them in Chernigov-city. There stood
A force – it was impossible, one could
Not estimate their size. At Chernigov
Three princesses stood, each with a force of
Forty thousand. The hero's heart was ardent:
Hotter than fire burned his heart, it lent
Itself to burn more than the dancing frost.
Then Ilya Muromets spoke to the host,
"I never thought to oppose my father's words,
Nor the wishes of my father-lord."
He clutched his battle saber in his hands

And stepped into the fray. New lands
He made and streets and squares wherever he
Turned. Ilya went up to the three
Princesses and said to them, "Oh, you
of my own blood, my three princesses!
Shall I take you prisoners, or take
From you your luxuriant heads? If I take
You prisoners I will have roads to walk
Upon and bread; and if I remove your tops
I will then kill the seed of kings. So
Go among your lands so all may know
That Holy Russia does not stand empty, Holy
Russia has a hero, strong and bold."
The governor of Chernigov then said,
"What is this messenger of the Lord, hence led?
He has purified our great city,
Chernigov!" The governor then called
His mates, his princes and boyars, "Do go, and call
The strong young man to me and so we shall
Dine on bread and salt." The princes and boyars
Went to Ilya: "Oh, thou of our own blood,
Stout young fellow! What is your honored name,
And what is the name of your father?" –"My honored name
Is Ilya, and I am son of the great Ivan!"
The men then asked, "Oh, thou of our own blood,
Please come to our commander and let him dine
On bread and salt with you!" Then spoke in kind
Ilya, "I will not go this time to your
Commander; I do not wish to dine. Restore
Me to the straight path that leads to royal
And great Kiev-city!" The princes and boyars
Saw he would not budge and offered him a
Humble answer, "Oh, thou of our own blood,
Muromets! The straight path does not stand
Safely, it overran the forests of Brinsky,
There the river of Samorodina flows; what's more,
The Nightingale Robber evermore
Sits on the road upon twenty-seven
Oaks, he has sat there near to heaven
For thirty years. He lets no riders through,
Nor those on foot!" Ilya bowed, withdrew
In thanks and then he rode to the forest Brinsky.
The Nightingale heard the hero's cry,
And whistled in a loud voice, the steed
Was startled under Muromets. He pleaded
To his valiant horse, "Oh, thou of my own blood,

Heroic mount! Have you never heard
The whistling birds within the darkened woods!"
Ilya took three of his strong arrows:
He shot but did not reach the target, he shot
Again but sent it flying high, he shot
The third and struck him in the eye, his right,
And knocked him from the standing oaks. He tied
Him to his saddle's back and rode toward
The glorious Kiev-city. Then pled
The Nightingale-Robber, "Oh, thou of my own blood,
Please let's visit my home!" The Nightingale's wee
Daughter saw them coming, "Look, here comes
Our father carrying a one-eyed chump
Upon his saddle!" The eldest daughter looked,
"Ah you blind fool! You mistook
Our father for a stout, young man!" And they
Then ran to Ilya with bludgeons sway-
Ing. The Nightingale then spoke, "Do not commit
Yourselves to rage and do not anger this stout
Young fellow!" Ilya then said these words, "Why are
Your children all so very singular
In appearance!" The Nightingale then answered,
"Whenever I have a son, to my daughter
I marry him. Whenever I have a daughter
I marry her to my son. Thus I secure
The purity of my seed." This did not
Sit well with Ilya. He quickly sought
His saber and he cut up all the children
Of the Nightingale Robber. He soon
Thereafter arrived in Kiev-city and shouted
With a loud voice. "Hail, hear me out
Father Volodimir-Prince! Do
You need, will you accept true
And strong heroes, Father, in honor
And praise, to protect your royal city, to slay
Your enemies the Tartars?" The Prince
Volodimir answered, "Yea, since
before your arrival I have needed
you and sought to hear of you. A steed,
a sturdy Latin horse I wish to give you!"
Ilya spoke, "I have already a horse to
ride, a Latin both sturdy and brave. I would
like to have stood with you at Mass as I did
with my father at Morning Service, but on the journey
three obstacles hindered me: my first, I purified
the city of Chernigov; my second,

I made bridges to span nearly a mile beyond
the shores of the river Samorodina;
my third obstacle, I shot Nightingale the
Robber down from his oaks." Then yelled
Father Volodimir-Prince himself,
"Oh, thou of my own blood, Nightingale Robber!
Come to my palace of white stone!" The Robber
answered, "I will not serve you, for I
am not your servant, nor will I listen to you!
I serve only Ilya and him alone obey!"
The Prince was not amused, inside he raged,
then spoke Volodimir, "Oh, thou of my own blood,
Ilya Muromets, order him
to enter my palace of white stone!" The hero
then ordered him to enter. The Prince then spoke,
"Oh, thou of my own blood, dear son of Ivan,
Ilya Muromets, order him
to whistle in a loud voice!" The hero told
Father Volodimir-Prince not to scold
Him for he must take the Prince under
His arm and the princess beneath the other, secure.
And Ilya spoke these words, "Whistle at half-
strength, Nightingale!" He whistled, but at
Full voice. The top of the palace was taken from
The window panes, all the connections of iron
Were broken, the mighty heroes fell to the ground,
All the wise princes and boyars fell to the ground,
Ilya Muromets alone stood.
"Well done, Nightingale! Shrewd
Ilya, how indeed did he capture you, Robber?"
Nightingale answered, "At that very
Moment I was sore drunk; it was
My daughter's name day." Ilya's anger had cause
To rise, for this confession hurt his pride.
He took the Robber by his head and strode
To the Prince's courtyard. He hurled him high-
Er than the trees and just below the high-
Est cloud, he let him fall quite near the ground
But caught and threw him up again, then down
Again until the Robber's bones were shattered.
Then Ilya went to the Prince's dinner, who said,
"Oh, thou of my own blood, son of Ivan!
I bestow on you three seats: one
Is next to me, the second across from me,
The third wherever you wish to sit." Proudly
Ilya went round the bench and pressed aside

The princes and the boyars and the wide
And mighty heroes. He found himself across
From the Prince. His actions made one cross,
Alyosha Popovich, who grabbed his knife
Of sharpened steel and threw to take the life
Of Ilya Muromets. Ilya caught
The knife from out the sudden air, and drove it
In the oaken table, which held the knife for good.

As I say in the critical introduction, this poem was the most involved and difficult of all my translations. The difficulties came in the antiquity of the language and the fine line I had to follow between using modern language and older-sounding language. This poem represents a significantly-crafted work that combines an Old Russian epic with a modern American interpretation.

Untitled Petrarchan sonnet (1823)
Baron Anton Del'vig

Amour is not a stranger when in Spain
And he is not a guest but native, heard
In castanet's bold, beautiful refrain
He sings love songs and dances – true Spaniard.

The myrtle breathes and oranges waft their fragrance.
He shines with fire on blushing cheeks and burns.
He's in a chest, in lively, glowing glance,
In Spanish maidens' burning ears – whispers.

He cares for us as well, omnipotent,
And in the North we are in his broad view.
You eyes, their shine did he not once accent?
In coral lips a row of pearls bedew?

He twisted this soft silk in curls and clothed
Your life in charm that I adore and know.

This translation was one of the most entertaining, yet challenging of them all. I especially liked converting the original Russian Petrarchan sonnet into an Elizabethan sonnet. The difficulty with this poem was trying to capture the images as they are in Russian. I have to say that there was something lost in the translation, but I did all that I could to make that loss minimal

Prophet
Aleksander Sergeevich Pushkin
1826

Tormented by spiritual thirst
In a dismal desert I dragged myself,
And the six-winged seraphim
Revealed himself to me on that lonely path.

With fingers weightless like a delusion
He felt my eyes:
They opened visionary eyes,
As if they were the eyes of a startled eagle.
He fingered my ears,
And they filled with din and clanging:
And I heard heaven shuddering,
And the precipitous flight of angels,
And the underwater slithering of the reptilian,
And the valley's vine growing.

He bowed to my jaws,
And tore out my sinful tongue,
The idle and deceitful licker.
The sting of a sensible serpent
Into my deadened lips
He placed with his hands full of blood.
And he pared my chest with a sword,
And my palpitating heart he rent from its cavity
And laid a coal, blazing with flames
Into my breast, into the opening he had made.

Like a corpse in a waste I laid,
Until God's voice named me:
"Arise, prophet, and observe, and listen,
Be fulfilled with my will,
And traverse the sea and land,
Igniting with my word the hearts of man."

Pushkin uses rhyme and short lines in his original, in which style the Russian language is well-attributed to function. This type of poem was meant to be recited and so includes a musical quality absent in my free verse translation. The original Russian poem has an ABABCDCDEFEF etc. rhyme scheme and is in iambic tetrameter.

Song
Aleksei Vasilevich Kol'tsov
5 April 1838
Villanelle Variation

Oh, why did they marry me against my will?
To love a man so old - It would not do.
Is Mother now glad to wipe my tears that spill?

Is Father now glad to see my life – a chill
That breaks his heart – when Easter's day debuts?
Oh, why did they marry me against my will?

I bring them gifts from my *beloved*, yet still
My face shows sadness, my soul an anguished hue.
Is Mother now glad to wipe my tears that spill?

It is too late to blame the fates, to feel
The future, fortunes guess, my grief undo,
Oh, why! Did they marry me against my will?

Let the ships come sailing in and deal
The gold onto the floor the one who threw it
Is my Mother, now glad to wipe my tears that spill

Upon the grass that will not grow – it steals
Away in fall. Flowers wilt in snowy dew.
Oh, why did they marry me against my will?
Is Mother now glad to wipe my tears that spill?

Kol'tsov wrote this poem originally as a song, much like Scottish poet Robert Burn's poetry. The poem lent itself easily into a villanelle because it dealt with a recurring theme. It was a huge project figuring out the iambic pentameter and the rhyme scheme. While the poem's original tone remains, the transition is obviously awkward.

On the eve of the anniversary of August 4, 1864
Fyodor Tyuchev
1865

Here I am, wandering along a bulky road
In the quiet light of a fading day.
This is all too heavy, my legs are beginning to numb …
My darling friend, can you see me?

It gets dimmer and darker above the land –
The last glow of the day hurries away …
Here is that world where we lived, you and I.
My angel, can you see me?

Tomorrow will be a day of supplication and mourning,
Tomorrow will be the commemoration of that fatal day …
My angel, wherever souls may dwell,
My angel, can you see me?

Tyuchev creates a fantastic mood of sadness and longing in his original Russian poem. My idea with this translation was to keep to that sadness and longing tone as closely as possible. I reworked some of the phrasing, such as the first line that originally reads "Behold I wander amidst a large road." I feel the poem adequately captures the essence and tone of the original.

Holy Russia
Maxmillian Voloshin
19 November 1917

Didn't Suzdal and Moscow
Gather the land into a kingdom for you,
Along with a taut bag of gold?
Saving your dowry in coffers,
As they raised you as a bride
In a colorful and stale tower?

Didn't the Carpenter-Tsar build a great home
For you at the sources of great rivers
With windows looking to five of the land's seas?
From the beauty of your brides and your abusive power
Were you not the most desirable
For knightly sons beyond those seas?

But since childhood you were a lover
Of deep forests, of wooden framework,
Of the steppes of the nomads without roads,
Free expanses and chains,
Imposters, thieves and false monks,
Nightingale the Robber's whistle, and prisons.

You didn't want to be the Tsar's
Things just turned out that way;
An enemy whispered: scatter and squander,
You gave away your treasure to the rich,
Authority to the serfs, power to your enemies,
To villains your honor, to usurpers your keys.

You yielded yourself to evil counsel,
You gave yourself to the robber and the thief,
You set fire to the crops and grain,
You ruined the ancient dwelling place
And left desecrated and poor,
And slave of the last slave.

Do I dare to throw the stone?
Can I condemn your passionate and turbulent flame?
With my face in the dirt should I not bow down,
Blessing the barefoot trace of your leg?
You – homeless, wandering, drunken,
In Christ, crazy Russia!

"Holy Russia" is a poem that both praises and criticizes Russia. The difficulty with this poem was mainly in Voloshin's language style. He wrote the poem in an older form of Russian (nearing Ilya Muromets-like language) and some of the words were very outdated. I decided to avoid rendering the old language into archaic English because I felt his satiric freshness could stand without the addition of anachronisms.

Untitled
Anna Akhmatova

Wild honey smells of freedom,
Dust – a ray of sunlight,
A young girl's mouth – a violet,
But gold? Nothing.
A raseda smells of water,
And love – an apple.
But we will always find
That blood smells only of blood …
And in vain the placed man of Rome
Washed his hands before the people
Beneath ominous black cries;
And the Scottish queen
With narrow palms tried in vain
To wash the red spray
In the tight gloom of her royal home …
[Akhmatova's Ellipses]

This translation was rather straight-forward and needed little maneuvering to sound good. I changed a few phrases like "but we will always find" from the original that reads "but we have forever found." This detracts little from the poem's meaning and I found it worked better and sounded more natural.

Cleopatra
Anna Akhmatova

The sweet shade veiled
Alexander's lines.
-Pushkin

She already kissed her Anthony's dead lips,
Already stooped to her knees before Octavius and wept …
And the servants had betrayed. The victory trumpets swell
Beneath the Roman eagle, and evening's darkness spreads.

And the last prisoner of her beauty enters,
Tall and stately, he whispers in uncertainty:
"You – as a slave … in triumph will he send before himself …"
And the incline of her swan neck stands tranquil.

But tomorrow they will chain the children. Oh, how little she has left
To do on earth – still to trifle with this man
And a black snake, as if a farewell pity,
On her dark chest she will place with an uncaring hand.
[Akhmatova's Ellipses]

Cleopatra" succeeds as a poem in many different ways. It is a transformation from a historical account about a Roman emperor that was made into a Shakespearean play, and from there into a Russian poem that now is an American translation. The poem carries the voices of each transformation and remains poignant and interesting. Akhmatova's female background adds a unique insight into Cleopatra's experience. Her Russian-ness adds a dimension of pathos unique to the Russian soul and her art and literature (hence, the quote by Pushkin). The English language I translate into adds historical baggage that injects the poem with countless accounts of Anthony and Cleopatra – including, of course, Shakespeare.

Mother's Lament
Anna Akhmatova

"Where, majestic woman, is your gypsy-child,
Who cried beneath a black shawl,
Where is your first small child,
What do you know or remember about him at all?"

"The fate of a mother is bright blight,
I was not worthy of being one.
The wicket gate opened in a paradise of white,
Magdalene took a young son.

Each day of mine is good, joyful,
I lose myself in a long spring,
Only, my hands long for a laden armful,
Only, I hear his cries in my dreams.

My heart becomes restless and slow,
And I remember nothing,
Always wandering about the room in a balmy glow,
Always searching for his cradle."

This poem was originally untitled, but I decided to give a title to pinpoint an interpretation. I feel this poem was less than it could be because I have never been a parent, nor will I ever be a mother. What I tried to contain in the translation is a sense of loss and heartache that I can understand from my own experience. Along with the difficulty in rendering a true-to-tone translation, I struggled with the Russian language's lack of articles. In the line "Magdalene took a young son," the lack of an indicator for whose son it was caused me to infer from the context. I decided to use 'a' instead of 'my,' 'hers' or 'the' because the poem assumes a general loss as opposed to an entirely specific loss. The speaker speaks of herself in the third-person, suggesting a wider perspective. I stretched that perspective to include the son that Magdalene takes.

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