

Александр Вейцман

ДЕМОГРАФИЯ
ДРЕМЛЮЩИХ ДУШ



A SUCCESSION
OF SOMNOLENT SOULS

Alexander Veytsman

Translated by Laurence Bogoslaw



АЛЕКСАНДР ВЕЙЦМАН

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ДУШ

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ALEXANDER VEYTSMAN

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Демография дремлющих душ

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ОТ АВТОРА

Когда Лэрри Богослав предложил перевести несколько моих стихотворений на английский язык, я пообещал ему, что буду следовать двум простым правилам: не вмешиваться в процесс перевода и быть благодарным. Поскольку стихотворный жанр по большому счёту мало кому нужен, а людей, которых интересует нечто рифмообразное, становится всё меньше, то именно молчание и благодарность представляются мне наиболее надёжным модусом операнди не только между автором и переводчиком, но и в рамках окружающего мира, куда направлены те или иные строки.

Я благодарен Лэрри.

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Я благодарен всем, кого люблю.

Александр Вейцман

14 августа 2022

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

Laurence H. Bogoslaw

The finest aesthetic moments contain a sense of wonder: a recognition of something great emerging from a unique, unrepeatably set of elements. I experienced such a moment when Alexander Veytsman read one of his original works in an intimate space at Poets House in New York City in 2015, during the presentation of the Compass Poetry Translation Awards. This poem was inspiring in two ways. First, it affirmed the abiding value of the written word to preserve art and memory; and second, it contained a challenge I could not resist. When I heard the lines:

а Моцарт в птичьей гамме
летит, попутно рассекая облака

[a Mótsart v ptíchei gámme / letít, popútno rassekáya
oblaká]
(literally: and Mozart in the scale of birds / flies, slicing
through clouds on the way)

...I was transported to the pastoral scene of Fyodor Tyutchev's 1830 poem "Vesenniyaya groza" (Spring Tempest), which contains the line *В лесу не молкнет птичий гам* [V lesú ne mólknet ptíchii gam] ("in the forest the din of birds does not fall silent"). With just one added syllable — *gam* to *gamma* (musical scale) — Veytsman had brought together two eras, two nations, two forms of art. My thought at this moment was: "How impossible to translate!" — followed immediately by: "How necessary to translate!"

After the reading, I asked Veytsman to consider letting me try. He graciously consented, emailing me a Word copy of his entire 2011 collection. So it was that in the summer of 2015, I began the process of delving into the mysteries that lie at the heart of Veytsman's meticulously crafted poems. Since then, with his constant encouragement and consultation, I have drafted at least rough English versions of nearly every work in that collection, as well as several poems he has published since then. He and I have been in regular contact by email and phone, exchanging drafts, questions, comments, and answers.

Veytsman himself set no parameters for how his poems should be approached. For example, he gave me total choice in poetic structure, as he recognizes that free verse has long been the standard for English poetry, and he himself writes free verse in English. However, the choice was obvious to me from the beginning that the translated poems should follow the meter and rhyme of the original.

I realize that this choice goes against the modern poetic tradition, not only for original works but for translations as well. In the 1980s, Robert Bly made an argument in *The Eight Stages of Translation* that has stood the test of time: poetry translated into American English should follow the tone, diction and style of contemporary English. In our era, he wrote, poetic diction no longer uses the "high" or "aristocratic" style that English literature of past centuries used to have.

All language has two levels at least: an upper and a lower. We recognize the "upper" in Shakespeare's sonnets: language high-flown, ethereal, elaborated, capable of concept, witty, dignified, noble in tone. We might speculate that in the American language now only the "lower" level is alive. It flows along on earth; it is a physical language that everyone contributes to, warm, intense, with short words, well connected to the senses, musical, capable of feeling. This

sensual language is the only one we have... William Carlos Williams used this language by principle... In America the “noble” stream dried out around 1900, against the will of Henry James, and since that time, as Williams declared, the writer has had no choice. (Bly 1982: 79)

However, the idea that poetry should sound warm, intense and sensual does not mean that verses from other languages should be translated as prose. In fact, Bly himself wrote that a translator should internalize the rhythms and sounds of the original in order to make the English version musical. I would argue that even poetry translators who claim to privilege “content” over “form” (Bly did not fall into this trap) also seek to preserve something of the elegance and harmony of the original. There are many possibilities here: syntactic parallelism, lexical cohesion (including repetitions of words and phrases), internal rhyme and near-rhyme, vowel harmony, alliteration, and much more. These elements are never completely ignored.

Therefore, one might ask: with all of these poetic devices at my disposal, why impose the additional strictures of rhyme schemes and metrical forms? The answer is twofold. First, when translating any work (prose, poetry, song) I try to do justice to the original poet’s technical expertise, which in Veytsman’s case is considerable. Even if my poetic product does not measure up to his achievement, I consider it my duty as a translator (as well as a great pleasure) to pursue the *process* of making poetry: seeking the most precise phrasing, the most moving rhythm, trying out fresh possibilities over and over again until the poem sounds right. Second, Veytsman’s choice to use canonical rhyme and meter in itself attests to his reverence for the Russian poetic tradition. To discard those compositional elements would be to discard part of Veytsman’s role in that tradition.

The cases where I relax these standards are those in which the poet does so himself: for example, Veytsman sometimes writes stanzas with varied line patterns (mixing trimeters, tetrameters, pentameters, and longer measures), uses accentual verse (dolniks) instead of uniform feet, opts for near-rhymes, and occasionally mixes in irregular rhyme schemes.

Going back to the question of tone, in my pursuit of equivalent rhyme and meter I have done my best to match Veytsman's verbal style as well — or rather his variety of styles, which range from casually conversational (“Fall 2008,” “One More Email to the State of Chaos”) to ritualistically formal (“Cavafy's Monologue”). At times I have intentionally strayed into the realm of contrived syntax and lexical choices for the sake of reproducing the original wordplay. For example, in “Battery Park City,” the poet Gumilyov adds his “train of thought to the train of clouds” (my attempt to preserve Veytsman's repetition of *khod* “movement”) and various forms of “to be” weave alliteratively with the names Bunin and Bach in “Rue de Rennes.”

An entirely different dimension of Veytsman's poetry is his imagery, which is often rooted in history, visual art, history, music. These images are not always self-explanatory to the non-Russian reader, and thus the motivation for using them is not necessarily clear in translation. Rather than try to articulate some overarching principle of how far to go in “domesticating” or “foreignizing” a given image or allusion (to cite Lawrence Venuti's famous dichotomy), I will present a narrative of how a line-by-line “prose” translation (more or less what I started with for every poem) became transformed through a recursive process of close reading, appreciation of poetic structure, analysis of lexical meaning, and research on extratextual references. I will begin with the aforementioned poem that drew me into Veytsman's work; please refer to the Russian original on page 144.

І. УДАЛЯЮЩЕЙСЯ ФИГУРЕ

И задохнулся:
«Анна! Боже мой!»
Давид Самойлов

I. TO A RETREATING FIGURE

And choked through passion:
“Anna! Dear Lord!”

David Samoylov

СЕНТЯБРЬ 2004

Посредством столкновения двух тел
и времени, без прониканья слова,
вначале были ночи и удел
зачатия в двенадцатиметровой
обители, где шторы белокуро
охватывали конус абажура.

Как фон, тогда вибрировал карниз,
пружин тахты глуша стальной избыток.
И было так: благая клетка X
искала сочетанья с клеткой Y.
Ход мыслей, то бушуя, то немея,
озвучивал явление Борея.

Теперь, тот акт спустя — мне двадцать пять.
Я вслушиваюсь в клён, вспотевших окон
касающийся. В стоны, скрип, кровать
за стенкой слева. Снова кто-то создан.
Я вслушиваюсь, зажигаю свечи
и грею воском наступивший вечер.

SEPTEMBER 2004

There came a moment when two bodies met
in time, without a word exchanged by either:
in the beginning was night and the kismet
of life conceived within a twelve-square-meter
apartment, where the blinds reflected blondely
a lampshade's cone, enveloping it fondly.

A curtain rod's vibration joined the swell
as steely strains of couchsprings marked the time.
Here's how it was: a virtuous X cell
was looking for connection with a Y.
A train of thoughts, now muffled, now unbridled,
announced the chilling Boreal wind's arrival.

Now time's moved five-and-twenty years ahead.
I listen to the maple branches grazing
the steamy windows. Moans, a creaking bed
behind the wall. Again, a life created.
I listen, kindle lights, watch the flames weaving,
and with the wax I warm the newborn evening.

ГЕФСИМАНСКИЙ САД

Со временем станет ненужною речь,
чей сын я: земной или божий. А станет
естественным эхом опущенный меч
для звуков ударов и звуков стенаний.

Всё меньше тех снов, для которых Отец
собрал эти кости в учительский образ.
Всё реже мне ныне является текст
истории ветхой: теперь он лишь возглас.

Вдыхая пространство живой темноты,
я выжженный куст озираю с тревогой.
Где корни растенья, там корни тщеты
пускаются вглубь, отстраняясь от Бога.

Но новый день будет, и будет он днём,
каких не бывало в минувших столетьях.
Наступит прощенье для всех, а потом
второй день придёт, и он сменится третьим.

THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE

Someday there will be no more point in contesting
whose son I am — God's or the earth's. And someday
a sword-beaten-plowshare will be the last vestige
of echoes from slashes and wails of dismay.

The dream-lessons grow ever fewer that Father
assembled these bones in a body to teach.
The testament text for me fades ever farther
in history: now it's just ritual speech.

Inhaling the dark space of living humanity,
I look on the burnt bush with fear in my blood.
Because where its roots are, the long roots of vanity
run deep, growing more and more distant from God.

But a new day will follow, and that day to come
will be for the ages a groundbreaking chapter.
The warmth of forgiveness will touch everyone,
then the next day will dawn, and the third will come after.

РАЗВИВАЯ РЕПЛИКУ

«Я спал, мадонна, видел Ад».
 В нём было слишком много света.
 Свет излучал спокойный взгляд.
 И этот взгляд был взгляд поэта.

— Вергилий, —
 я спросил его,
 припомнив словеса латыни.
 — Я жив иль умер? Кто я? Что
 там впереди? Что там отныне?

Учитель! Вождь! Ответь: когда
 я сделал то, за что спустился?..
 Я умер, да?

— Ты умер — да,
 ответил мне Вергилий.
 — Из-за

неё. Вернее, для неё
 ты ныне здесь, вдали от Бога,
 с собой неся бывшее зло
 и невозможность диалога.

IN SEARCH OF A REPLY

“Madonna, I just dreamed of Hell.”
But it was light like summer days.
That light from a serene gaze fell.
And that gaze was a poet’s gaze.

“O Virgil,”

I called out to him,
recalling words of schoolboy Latin.
“Am I alive or dead? Who am
I? What comes next? And what will happen?”

O Teacher! Guide! Pray tell me: Why
did I descend? What was the cause?
I died, right?”

“Yes, indeed you died,”
Virgil replied to me.

“Because

of her. Or rather, for her sake
you walk here, far from God’s salvation,
bearing your sins without a break
or any chance of conversation.”

М. В. ЮДИНА

Л. Д.

В Концертном зале у Финляндского вокзала
она сидела на рисунке у поэта.
Возможно, Берга или Бартока играла,
тяжёлым кедом педалируя при этом.
Она сидела в минимальном изложении
карандаша и незаметного блокнота.
В застывшем зале при убогом освещении
лишь тени рук мешали жанру натюрморта.

Зрачки очками прикрывались так, что зрячесть
могла казаться автономной от Стейнвея.
Все части тела в ней подчёркивали старость.
И даже пальцы шли по клавишам, старея.
Она сидела, и разбитые каноны
пианистической игры валялись подле.
И роль юродивой, согбенной у иконы,
являлась в ней, неискушённой в этой роли.

Она вставала и читала Пастернака.
Закончив, грузно опускала глыбу тела.
И вновь играла. Неподвижным до антракта
был виден профиль с тверди зрительского кресла.
Суровый звук чеканил профиль, как чеканил
тогда всё то, что было в зале. Всё, что было.
А было то, что, в общей массе, христиане
назвали б новым проявлением Dies Irae.

MARIA YUDINA

To L.D.

Inside the concert hall at Finland Station
she sits in a drawing from a poet's art book.
Her pedaling canvas shoe might be sustaining
the counterpoint of Berg or Bartok.
She sits there, sketched in pencil sparsely
against the notebook paper's horizontal bands.
The scene inside the frozen hall, illuminated barely,
would be a still life, if not for the shadows of her hands.

Spectacles hide her pupils, making her perspective
seem trained beyond the Steinway, autonomously ranging.
Every part of her body is stressing the effect of
age. As her fingers touch the keys, even they are aging.
She sits upon the bench as shattered
canons of piano repertory fall beside her.
The feeling of a holy fool, bowed down in rapture
before an icon, bafflingly wells up inside her.

She rises, reads from Pasternak's forbidden compositions,
and sets the boulder of her body down with gravity.
Then goes on playing. Motionless until the intermission
her profile can be seen from the lofty gallery.
The austere sound embosses her, as it embosses
all that the hall contains. Stock still, without a breath.
What's in that hall would make the Christian masses
brace for the blast of the Day of Wrath.

* * *

Дух ринулся ввысь, не касаясь перил,
но вскоре рассеялся в облаке страха...
Я вздрогнул от сна и, раскрыв оба века,
на зеркале справа свой взгляд заострил:
в нём мать умирала повторно от рака,
а я отражался наплывом чернил.

Я медленно встал и холодной воды
отпил. Быт привычно просился на ощупь.
Опять доносился Бетховен в звучащих
аккордах. Опять — сквозь уход темноты.
Я вышел из спальни: спокойней и проще
казалось теперь наступленье беды.

* * *

My soul hurtled upward, too giddy to think,
but soon it dispersed in a white cloud of terror...
I jolted awake, and my eyes didn't blink
but stared to the right at the opposite mirror:
my mother was dying of cancer all over
again, while I flailed in a stormwave of ink.

I slowly stood up and threw back a cold glass
of water. By habit, life came to my senses.
Once more I heard Beethoven play in ascending
arpeggios. Once more, as the darkness regressed.
I came out of the bedroom: more simply and gently
the tide of affliction now seemed to flow past.

MODIGLIANI

Anna Andreyevna would arrive and remove her clothing.
She lay down on the couchette, her long body unfolding.
Extended between light and clay like an isthmus,
encroached on by cobwebs, the studio space diminished.

He raved about Egypt, Verlaine, and tales from the inferno
and paradise of Dante.

He cut the Luxembourg Garden's corners,
then counted the steps and minutes to Montparnasse.
That's how the plan unfolded and a full day was passed.

Not yet a portraitist, he gave landscapes the cold shoulder.
She would wonder about this later, grown perceptibly older
than his subjects. Older than the El Greco waistlines
and the caryatid-inspired face lines.

They would walk about town. And the town was partitioned
into faces. Life seemed slow, free of flashy ambition.
In its pace, speech and gestures,
the century remained decided—
ly nineteenth. And they felt delighted.

In the twentieth, much would change:
specifically, mortality
would arrive, staving off
and deftly parrying poverty.

Психология города отвергнет ню.

И секс, и Фрейда.

Дадаизм станет главным символом

просвещения и бреда.

Однако грядущее не столько безумно и брэнно,

сколько в контексте минувшего

для взора второстепенно.

Временные процессы Анна Андреевна неплохо

понимала, помечая во взоре уходящую эпоху.



Александр Вейцман

пишет стихотворения и прозу на английском и русском языках. Автор нескольких книг. Его стихи, переводы, рассказы и эссе опубликованы более чем в пятидесяти журналах в разных уголках земного шара. Выпускник Гарвардского и Йельского университетов. Живёт в Нью-Йорке.



Laurence Bogoslaw

is the director of East View Press and a co-founder of the Minnesota Translation Laboratory, a community language service for immigrants and refugees. He has taught Russian and translation courses at various universities. In addition, he regularly gives presentations on translation, culture, literature and journalism.



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