

Two Requiems, or the English Dolnik on Russian Soil

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In these remarks we will be dealing with a problem that, we believe, was very close to the scholarly interests of M.A.Krasnoperova and in one way or another was touched upon in practically all her main publications. In its most general form, this problem can be called the non-coincidence of the observed prosodic structure of verse with its reconstructable “basic”, or metrical, structure. In more familiar terms, this is the problem of the non-coincidence of “meter” and “rhythm”. Marina Abramovna saw one of the main tasks of her theory to be “the description of the interaction between the language system of meter and the rhythmical structure of the created text” (Krasnoperova 2000: 199). However, the material we are going to consider below is somewhat different: we will be discussing tonic verse, which in general has been much less studied in modern verse theory, and more specifically, the *dolnik*.

The text we would like to analyze in this connection is a very well-known poem by Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894), perhaps his best-known poem: the last three lines of it are inscribed on his gravestone on the Samoan island of Upolu. However, it was written long before his death and was included in his poetry collection *Underwoods*, published in 1887. This is a short poem, consisting of just two quatrains¹:

(1) Requiem

Under the wide and starry sky	0*2*1*1*0
Dig the grave and let me lie.	0*1*1*1*0
Glad did I live and gladly die,	0*2*1*1*0
4 And I laid me down with a will.	2*1*2*0
This be the verse you grave for me:	0*2*1*1*0
<i>Here he lies where he longed to be;</i>	0*1*2*1*0
<i>Home is the sailor, home from sea,</i>	0*2*1*1*0
8 <i>And the hunter home from the hill.</i>	2*1*2*0

Among Russian translations (which are rather numerous, if one takes into account the amateur translations of various years — Stevenson has always been

¹ To the right of each line we have placed its metrical scheme, in which an asterisk stands for an ictus, the numbers between the asterisks indicate the quantity of interictic syllables, the first number gives the length of the anacrusis, and the last number the length of the clausula. This annotation has been used in a whole series of works on the English and Russian dolnik, beginning, it seems, with the writings of Marina Tarlinskaja; metrists of Marina Krasnoperova’s school have employed it as well.

popular in Russia), that of Andrei Sergeev (1933-1998) deservedly enjoys the greatest renown:

(2) **Last Will**²

	К широкому небу лицом ввечеру	1*2*2*2*0
	In the eve, face to the wide sky,	
	Положите меня, и я умру,	2*2*1*1*0
	Lay me down, and I will die,	
	Я радостно жил и легко умру	1*2*2*1*0
	I gladly lived and I will easily die,	
4	И вам завещаю одно –	1*2*2*0
	And to you, I entrust one thing –	
	Написать на моей плите гробовой:	2*2*1*2*0
	To write on my gravestone:	
	<i>Моряк из морей вернулся домой,</i>	1*2*1*2*0
	<i>The sailor has returned home from the seas,</i>	
	<i>Охотник с гор вернулся домой,</i>	1*1*1*2*0
	<i>The hunter has returned home from the mountains,</i>	
8	<i>Он там, куда шёл давно.</i>	1*2*1*0
	<i>He is there where he was long going.</i>	

Sergeev's translation is undoubtedly successful in regard to all the criteria usually used to evaluate poetic translations, but despite that — or perhaps just because of that — it comprises an independent poem rooted in the Russian poetic context hardly less than the original is rooted in English poetry. First of all, the poem is a typical example of the Russian *dolnik* – just as (1) is a rather typical example of the English *dolnik*. For all its undoubted and even masterly similarity to the original, the translation noticeably differs from the English text in some important aspects. And one of these aspects is precisely the meter, which we intend to analyze in more detail.

However, before we focus on the meter, it will be useful to compare the translation with the original text in regard to other features that are more immediately perceptible. The differences that are observed in this comparison will turn out to be unexpectedly confirmed by the metrical analysis.

First of all, it is noticeable that the greatest formal liberty taken by the translator involves the syntax. While on the whole he closely adheres to the lexico-syntactic structure of (1), he nevertheless shifts line 6 of the original to the end of the poem. As a result, the line that forms the ending of the English text (*And the hunter home from the hill*) is shifted in the translation closer to the beginning and becomes less accentuated, while the final line of the Russian

² Here and below the literal translations are ours. They of course are not meant to be literarily polished and are provided only to make the accompanying analyses more comprehensible.

variant turns out to be placed in a less significant position in the English text: the second line of the second quatrain (*Here he lies where he longed to be*). Thus, in the Russian text the accent is placed on wish fulfillment, i.e., on a subjective perception of life's course, while the English original emphasizes the restoration of the initial state of things, i.e., an objectivized picture of the world.

Another distinctive difference could be called grammatical and concerns the time during which the situation evolves. In the English text the key moment of the hero's death is rendered chiefly in the past tense: *Glad did I live and gladly died, And I laid me down with a will*. The death has already occurred and is described post factum. Only the instructions related to the burial of the poem's hero—regarding how to make his tomb—are not in the past tense. The Russian text is quite different. In it, the hero's death has been clearly moved to the future: for him, death only lies ahead. Moreover, the reader of the Russian version cannot even be certain that the death of the hero is imminent. Stevenson's hero has already died, while the hero of Sergeev's text only informs us that he will die as soon as he finds a suitable place for his tomb (almost as in the well-known lines of Akhmatova: *Я места ищу для могилы – не знаешь ли, где светлей?* [*I am searching for a place for a grave – would you know of someplace brighter?*]³). Sergeev's translating the poem's title as "Last Will" is also intentional, for the Russian text speaks only about arrangements for the future—unlike Stevenson's "Requiem," which is in response to a death that has already occurred. Stevenson's hero is almost deprived of personal emotions: the death is an accomplished fact, one needs only to frame it suitably and remind the world that its primordial harmony has not been destroyed. On the contrary, Sergeev's hero is totally absorbed in the emotional experience of death: death has not yet come, but one has to meet it so as to leave a memory in the world, to leave one's own particular trace. The English author worries more about the world than about himself, while the Russian translator does the opposite. And though critics usually include Stevenson among the romantics, Sergeev, and not Stevenson, is here far more of a romantic. In his "Requiem," the latter expresses a stoic code, very characteristic of British culture, and not the codes of romantic individualism, which consciously or not have been read into his text by the translator.

Less obvious than the syntactic and grammatical differences, but also important, is the difference between the vocabularies of both texts. At first glance, the translator has achieved the greatest similarity to the original precisely on the lexical level. However, some distinctive features appear here as well. First of all, our attention is drawn to the greater lexical asceticism of the English text. With the exception of the first line where the sky, under which the hero is fated to lay, is termed spacious (literally, *wide*) and *starry*, the English text practically does not contain any lexical decoration: nouns are not accompanied by modifiers, and even

³ The beginning of the poem «Похороны» ("Burial," 1911), from the book «Вечер» (*Evening*). In Akhmatova's poem the hero (or heroine?) is burying a dead (or dying) friend, who "is accustomed to rest and loves the sunlight" («привыкла к покою и любит солнечный свет»).

verbs virtually disappear by the middle of the second quatrain. Only the verb *to be* remains, but even it is subjected to ellipsis in the last line. Thus, by the end of the poem the text has attained the utmost conciseness, having become compressed like a spring. The Russian translation reproduces this asceticism only partially and, on the whole, much less consistently. In comparison to the original, it clearly contains more “superfluous” details. The first two lines are already indicative in this regard: instead of the dry and businesslike English *disposition* (*Under the wide and starry sky Dig the grave and let me lie*) we find a much more descriptive and emotional *prediction* of one’s own destiny: *К широкому небу лицом ввечеру Положите меня, и я умру* (*In the eve, face to the wide sky, Lay me down, and I will die*). Yes, the sky in both cases is *wide*, but with this any resemblance practically ceases. The romantic hero of the Russian text considers it necessary to specify that he should be laid with his face to the sky—that is, *глядя задумчиво в небо широкое* (*pensively looking into the wide sky*), like the hero of Turgenev’s well-known romance of 1843 (for the hero of Stevenson’s “Requiem” that, apparently, has no value any more—and, furthermore, this should happen in the eve (*ввечеру*)).⁴ Both

⁴ Allow me to make a digression on purely a matter of taste. In my view, this *ввечеру* is the only word whose choice may seem unfortunate in Sergeev’s masterful translation. It is not just that clarifying the time is rather alien to Stevenson’s manner (although one could surmise that the *evening* hour of burial in the Russian text arose as an indirect reflection of the *starry sky* in Stevenson). More importantly, the adverb *ввечеру* in modern dictionaries is marked as “obsolete,” and is clearly not in keeping with the style of the rest of the text. Of course, on the one hand *ввечеру* is undeniably a poeticism during the 19th and early 20th centuries. In Stevenson’s day and even somewhat later this word was not simply actively used in Russian poetry, but was much more frequent than its common literary synonym, *вечером* (the picture in prose was the reverse already in the 19th century, and by the second half of the 20th *ввечеру* had practically disappeared from prose, remaining only in stylistically marked contexts). There are many neutral examples of *ввечеру* in the poetry of this period: from Pushkin (*И сам не знает поутру, Куда поедет ввечеру*, [*And in the morning he does not know himself Where he’ll go in the evening*, 1826]) and Fet (*А вчера у окна ввечеру Долго-долго сидела она*, [*And yesterday evening by the window She sat for a very long*, 1842]) to the early Blok (*Ты, заслышав меня издалёка, Свой костёр разведёшь ввечеру*, [*You, having heard me from afar, Will kindle your campfire in the evening*, 1901]) and Akhmatova (*He поцелуемся мы утром рано, А ввечеру не поглядим в окно*, [*We will not kiss early in the morning, And in the evening will not look out the window*, 1913]). However, today it sounds more like low colloquial speech in folklore, has a “rural” feel, and vaguely but perceptibly strikes a discordant note against Stevenson’s serious and solemn stoicism. In the second half of the 20th century a translator should certainly have taken this into account. It is also interesting that, according to the Russian National Corpus [www.ruscorpora.ru/search-poetic.html], in original Russian poetic texts the rhyme *ввечеру ~ умру* (*in the evening ~ I will die*) is often employed, primarily in ironic contexts (by Zhukovskii, Arukhtin, et al.); cf.: *Во вторник ввечеру Я буду (если не умру Иль не поспорю с Аполлоном) Читать вам погребальным тоном, Как ведьму чёрт унёс, И напугаю вас до слёз.* (*Tuesday evening I will [if I don’t die Or quarrel with Apollo] Read to you in a funereal tone, How the devil carried off a witch, And will frighten you to*

говорили всем: “Она не страшна, they said to all: “It’s not frightening, потому что люди теперь – солдаты, because the people are now soldiers, а смерть – это только война”. and death is only war “.	2*1*1*2*0 2*1*2*1*1 1*2*2*0
Был парень весёлый, забавник ловкий, There was a cheerful guy, a dexterous wag, и не злой, да хитрый подчас, как тать, – not at all malicious, yet crafty, sometimes, like a robber, зарядил обоймами грудь винтовки he loaded with chargers the chest of a rifle, и в поле пошёл умирать. and went in the field to die.	1*2*2*1*1 2*1*2*1*0 2*1*2*1*1 1*2*2*0

However, in Forshteter, for all that he chose a rare meter (if one considers the meter in combination with the stanzaic form), he employs the more usual, for Russian poetry, alternation of masculine and feminine rhymes and not a protracted rhyme scheme with a constant masculine clausula, as in Stevenson. In addition, the final line in all the quatrains of “The Ensign” is not a 3-ictic dolnik, but a pure 3-foot amphibrach.

The reasons for the rarity of this combination of features are, in general, clear. In Russian poetry the use of the dolnik on a mass scale begins only at the border of the 19th and 20th centuries. Moreover, the dolnik was perceived as a deviation from traditional poetics, as a means of the “new expressiveness” (for further details, see Plungian 2010) that undermined the strict canons of traditional syllabo-tonic verse and weakened the formal restrictions of 19th-century poetics. The weakening of formal restrictions clashed with the attempts to devise non-trivial types of stanzaic forms: these trends were going in different directions. For just this reason the Russian modernist poets who were notable for particularly intensive experiments with stanzaic forms (for example, Sologub and Balmont) hardly used the dolnik. And conversely, the poets, in whose metrical repertoire the dolnik occupied an essential place (for example, Blok or Akhmatova) turned out to be disinclined to use exotic stanzaic forms. To a degree Briusov and especially Viacheslav Ivanov represent exceptions, but the former does so more due to the somewhat mechanical pursuit of formal variety that was characteristic of him and the latter has not left all that many examples of the classical dolnik: Ivanov’s experiments in tonic verse were more original in nature (for further details, see Plungian 2010).

Matters stood differently in English poetry, where the dolnik for several centuries remained a quite natural choice (see Gasparov 2003, Tarlinskaja 1993), so there was no conflict between the metrics of the dolnik and strict stanzaic

forms. In regard to formal features, Stevenson's poem is not especially innovative, but the Russian translator, in choosing the dolnik as the meter of the translated text, sets it in a somewhat different aesthetic paradigm, where the combination of the dolnik ("destroyer" of traditional form) and a rigid stanzaic form (which introduces additional formal restrictions) is aesthetically paradoxical. Generally speaking, in aesthetic terms it would have been quite legitimate to translate Stevenson's text by, for example, strictly regulated iambs or dactyls, i.e., by a regular syllabo-tonic meter (just such a choice would most likely have been made by a 19th-century Russian poet contemporary with Stevenson, if he wanted to write a poem on a similar subject). But Sergeev did otherwise. However, his translation is by no means an equi-rhythmical one. The poem does not reproduce the actual English dolnik, but *replaces* it entirely with another type of dolnik, the most traditional type of Russian dolnik that had received its definitive form by the end of the 1910s. Thus, in metrical terms the translation modernizes Stevenson (or more precisely, makes him a "modernist"): an English poet from the end of the 19th century is translated using Russian metrics from the beginning of the 20th century. In this way, though, he is transported into a different cultural context: an aesthetically rather conservative English romanticist starts to sound like a Russian decadent of the Silver Age. Note that, generally speaking, this metrical substitution goes in the same direction as the lexical and grammatical innovations (discussed in detail above) that appear in the Russian translation: this involves the same stylistic change from an ascetic stoicism (which, we now add, is stylistically quite traditional) to an emotional individualism (which, we now add, is stylistically much more in the spirit of modernist poetics).

However, this is still not all. The most interesting aspect of the metrical comparison is the difference between the two types of dolnik, Russian and English, which so far we have not yet discussed in detail. The general features of this difference are well known (they were examined, for instance, in the works of Gasparov and Tarlinskaja) and involve the predominant types of intervals between ictuses. In the dolnik of the English type, monosyllabic intervals prevail, while disyllabic intervals dominate in the dolnik of the Russian type. As a result of this difference, instances of disyllabic meters are not rare in the English dolnik, while regular trisyllabic meters not infrequently appear in the Russian dolnik. Regular disyllabic meters in Russian dolniks are rare. Such lines occur sporadically in the 19th century, mainly in translations under the influence of German and English models. In the period when the classical dolnik begins to flourish they initially give way⁷ and later, at the turn of the second and third decade of the

⁷ Once again Viacheslav Ivanov is a partial exception in this regard (see Plungian 2010). His early 3-ictic dolnik verse is in many ways oriented toward the "German" type. Among the few other examples of Russian dolnik verse at the beginning of the 20th century with predominantly one-syllable intervals, several experiments by Blok are worthy of note: both in original poems (for example, «Ещё прекрасно серое небо...», ["The grey sky is still beautiful...," 1905]; «Дух прятный марта был в лунном круге...»,

20th century, start to be developed once again, initially by Kuzmin (see Plungian 2011) and then mainly by poets in the circle of younger Acmeists. As an example of such verse we cite the beginning of a poem by G.Shengeli (1924; here “ ° “ denotes an unaccented ictus):

(4)	Всё, что надо, есть: и лампа,	0*1*1*1*1
	There is everything necessary: a lamp,	
	И бумага, и тишина, –	0°1*2°1*0
	And paper, and silence, —	
	Что же гипсовая немота	0*1*2°1*1
	Why then does a plaster muteness	
	 Заливает мои слова?	 0°1*2*1*0
	Inundate my words?	

This type of *dolnik*, however, was never very popular in Russian poetry (the verse of type [4] not coincidentally sounds as though it has a slight “foreign accent”), and it is not too surprising that Sergeev did not want to copy Stevenson's metrical models: the choice of the *dolnik* for a Russian poem by default suggests a preference for disyllabic intervals and encourages a mix of *dolnik* lines and those in regular trisyllabic meters. In other words (as it has been frequently formulated), the English *dolnik* exists on the basis of disyllabic syllabo-tonic meters, while the Russian *dolnik* exists on the basis of trisyllabic meters. We will not now delve into what deeper theoretical concepts may stand behind this somewhat fuzzy formulation but will arbitrarily accept it as the most straightforward, i.e., purely statistical, explanation, which is in fact what M.L.Gasparov does in his analysis (2001: 148-151). We will only note that in one of the approaches, the “German” type of *dolnik* is described as a *rhythmical derivative* of disyllabic syllabo-tonic meters, and the classical Russian *dolnik* is considered as a rhythmical derivative of trisyllabic syllabo-tonic meters (possibly, recalling the quotation from Marina Krasnoperova at the beginning of this article, such an interpretation would be close to hers). See our work (Plungian 2011) for more on this issue.

If we once again consider metrical schemes (1) and (2), we will find convincing evidence as to the profound nature of this difference. In Stevenson there is one regular trochaic line, and, on the whole, monosyllabic intervals predominate: in each line of his poem no more than one disyllabic interval occurs. On the contrary, in Sergeev disyllabic intervals predominate: two of his lines are regular amphibrachs, in three lines there is just one monosyllabic interval, and only in two lines of eight are there two monosyllabic intervals (*Положите меня, и я умру*, and *Охотник с гор вернулся домой*) — these last come closest to Steven-

[The heady spirit of March was in the moonlit circle”, 1910)], as well as in translations (of Heine’s cycle *Die Heimkehr* «Опять на родине», 1909 [*The Homecoming*]).

son's rhythm. However, even here the resemblance is incomplete. Sergeev, as has already been noted, employs a variable anacrusis, with one or two syllables, that also makes his verse more like regular trisyllabic meters. Even in *Положите меня, и я умру* the initial “anapaestic” anacrusis establishes the rhythmic inertia of a trisyllabic, not disyllabic meter. Recall that Stevenson’s 4-ictic lines have a regular zero anacrusis, which does not appear at all in Sergeev’s translation! Thus, the rhythm of the anacrusis separates Sergeev’s verse from its English original almost as strongly as does the rhythm of interictic intervals. However, each of these factors unambiguously links Sergeev’s text to the basic corpus of classical Russian dolnik verse that is based on regular trisyllabic meters.

Thus we see that the translator has implemented a quite significant aesthetic reinterpretation of Stevenson’s text. He has used a set of formal devices more typical of Russian modernism at the beginning of the 20th century than of the Russian poetry at the end of the 1870s that was contemporary with Stevenson, thereby immersing the original into another cultural space. Comparing the original text (1) with its translation (2), we observe a subtle interaction of metrical and stylistic features that lead in the same direction: the choice of meter dictates a more “modernist” and “romantic” interpretation of the text, while the lexical and grammatical choices reinforce and underline this interpretation. Thus an English requiem turns into a Russian last will.

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