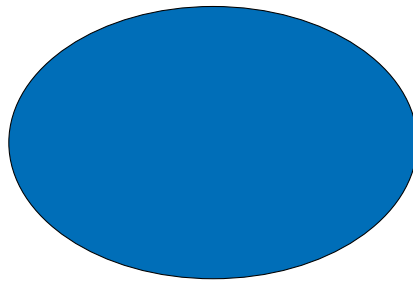


FOUR CENTURIES

Russian Poetry in Translation



№ 27, 2021



Four Centuries. Russian Poetry in Translation

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(The choice of colors for different languages is random and has nothing to do either with national flags or traditions.)

The Four Centuries Library

Dear Friends,

Thank you very much for reading our magazine. Concurrent with the *Four Centuries* journal, Perelmuter Verlag is also creating a library of Russian poetry in translation – the *Four Centuries Library*. The ambitious goal of this project is to collect books, periodicals and other papers with Russian poetry, old and new, translated into different languages, and finally to donate the collection as a whole to a university or public library. You can join me in my efforts to implement this idea by sending your donations in the following categories:

- Monographic poetry collections by separate poets translated into different languages;
- Anthologies of Russian poetry translations;
- Periodicals with translations of Russian poetry.

Please, send your donations to:

Dr. Ilya Perelmuter
Erikapfad 7
45133 Essen, Germany

The list of all the gifts with the names of the contributors will be published in *Four Centuries*.
Thanks a lot for your support in advance!

Yours,
Publisher

Ivan Krylov (1769–1844)
Иван Крылов (1769–1844)

Translated into English by Olga Dumer
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The Monkey and the Glasses

With time, old Monkey's eyes were getting poor;
One day, she heard that Glasses were the cure.
 If it was true indeed what people said,
 Then her predicament was not so bad!
 She got the Glasses – half a dozen frames;
And tried them on in each and every way;
Applied them to her chest and tied them to her tail;
 And smelled and licked them, pair after pair;
 And all of it – to no avail.
“Damn it!” – she cried – one who believes this drool,
 Is nothing but a stupid fool:
 It is just hogwash; not a word of truth;
They lied to me: these Glasses are no use!”
Frustrated and upset, old Monkey threw a fit
And smashed the Glasses on the wall so hard
They changed to piles of tiny sparkling bits.

Some human species, sadly, are the same:
A clueless boor would eagerly defame
A useful thing, regardless of its merit;
And if he happens to be born a magnate,
He'd use his power to persecute or ban it.

The Quartet

One summer day, a monkey
A goat, a bear, and
A donkey
Got the idea to perform as a quartet.
They got a cello, violins, and music scores
And settled comfortably outdoors -
To charm the audience with gentle minuets.
They struck the chords with ample force, and yet
No tune, just raspy squeaks. “Oh, wait!”

The monkey cried,
“The music would not flow unless you're sitting right!
You, dear Bear, sit beside the violin
Your cello then will have a better sound.
That's when the real music will begin
You'll see the trees dance in a merry round!”
They switched their seats according to her claim.
No harmony, the strings still screeching.
At once, the donkey brayed “Wrong tune again!
Now I know why; let's have another go
This time we will arrange a single row.”
Once more, they moved according to his word,
Alas! Their bows still sounded in discord!
The hapless team, upset by their trouble,
Began to squabble.
A wakeful nightingale, who heard the noise below,
Came down and landed on the nearest bough.
The band appealed to her,
“Please, do us all a favor,
Please tell us why our effort is a failure!
We have the instruments; we have the music sheets
Just help our orchestra to choose the proper seats!”
“Your ears are not keen for music scale”,
Replied the nightingale with a sweet warble,
“The skills are key to music, not your squabble.”

Your changing seats, or places, or positions
Will not help you, my friends, become musicians.”

The Rooster and the Pearl

While digging through a heap of muck,
By chance, a village rooster plucked
A shiny pearl. He looked at it and wondered
“What is the use of it?
And why is it so pricey?
This pearl is nothing but a silly bead!
Pearl barley pleases me much more indeed!
Its grains may not have visual appeal
But make a hearty meal.”

The same with dunces; if they have no clue
About something, then it's worthless in their view.

Olga Dumer was born and educated in Moscow, Russia. Her Ph.D. work in Linguistics with the Russian Academy of Sciences addressed the problems of poetry translation. She taught English as a Second Language in Russia and Germany. She also worked as a translator and interpreter in both countries. She has worked as Associate Professor of English, ESL and Linguistics at Moreno Valley College, California. Translating Russian poetry into English has been her lifelong passion.

Yevgeny Baratynsky (1800–1844)
Евгений Баратынский (1800–1844)

Translated into Italian by Paolo Statuti
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Roma

Eri tu, o altera Roma, la conquistatrice indefessa?
Eri tu, o libera Roma?
Alle tue mute rovine
L'ospite straniero triste s'appressa.
Perché hai perso la grandezza degli antichi miti?
Perché, possente Roma, t'hanno obliata gli dei?
Dove sono ora le tue sale sfarzose?
Dove i tuoi uomini forti, o patria di arditi?
Il potente genio del trionfo ti ha tradita?
Tu al crocevia dei secoli
Stai nel disonore delle stirpi,
Come sontuoso sepolcro di una progenie finita?
Chi minacci ancora dai tuoi sette colli?
Del fato di tutti i sovrani torva messaggera?
Oppure, come ombra-accusatrice,
Con aria afflitta i tuoi figli accogli?

Paolo Statuti is an Italian poet and interpreter. Born in Rome and currently residing in Poland, he has a degree in Political Science and a degree in Russian and Slavic languages and literature (a student of the legendary Angelo Maria Ripellino). Paolo has been translating Russian poetry, as well as Polish, Czech, and English for over 50 years. An avid writer and painter, he also runs a blog musashop.wordpress.com (Un'anima e tre ali) dedicated to poetry, music and painting. In the recent years, his notable translations of the Russian poetry published in Italy have been: Pushkin, *32 poems* (2014) and *Ruslan and Lyudmila* (2019); Lermontov, *Demon* (2016) and *Poems* (2019); Pasternak, *30 poems* (2014); Mandelstam, *30 poems* (2014) – as well as his own book of poetry *The Wandering Star* (2016).

Aleksey Apukhtin (1840-1893)
Алексей Апухтин (1840-1893)

Translated into Italian by Paolo Statuti
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Al futuro lettore

Anche se il nostro verso è invecchiato, ascolta lo stesso
E sappi che dei cantori d'un tempo invano
Cercheresti il canto, il loro sguardo è spento,
La penna è caduta loro di mano!
Ma la morte qualcosa ha lasciato, tra i monumenti
La traccia perenne del passato si cela:
Le corde sono troncate, ma il suono ancora senti,
L'altare è già freddo, ma il fumo ancora si leva.

Anna Achmatova (1889–1966)

Анна Ахматова (1889–1966)

Translated into English by Boris Kokotov

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N.V.N.

There is a certain line that can't be crossed
by the most feverish love and passion –
It doesn't really matter how close
the bodies merge in their carnal clashes.

No friendship can surmount this barrier,
no happiness that lasted many years,
when souls soar high – serene and free
from sensual, voluptuous desires.

Those striving for this line are all insane.
Those who have reached it – gripped by sadness ...
By now you should understand
why in your arms my heart is silent.

* * *

At the bottom of the Neva
I concealed my heart from you ...
In your house I'm living,
tamed, obedient, and mute.

But at night I hear noises.
Does somewhere a stranger lurk?
Sheremetyev's lindens gossips ...
Goblins' roll call in the dark ...

Distant murmuring of water.
Someone gingerly steps up.
Pesky whispers of misfortune
are assaulting me nonstop

trying hard to make a point,
all night through repeating this:
“Hey, you want to feel at home –
do you know what that means?”

* * *

And a word, that was as heavy
as a stone, fell down on my chest.
Have to deal with it, be savvy –
I will try to do my best.

On my list are many chores:
I have memories to stifle,
I must harden my heart and soul,
I must force myself to live.

Otherwise ... The summer racket
outside, a joyful buzz.
I have long anticipated
this bright day, this empty house.

A Flashback

You made me up. No one like that exists.
No one like that could come about.
A doctor will not cure, a poet will not ease –
The shadow of a specter hunts you down.

We met in an awful year when the world
was facing such adversities and terrors.
The only thing for many was to mourn
those whom they loved but lost forever.

Without lighting, the embankment was pitch-black.
The night transformed itself into a nightmare ...
I called out for you – why I was doing that
I was, back then, completely unaware.

And, as if guided by a star, you came to me
through a dangerous and tragic autumn,
into the ruined house of my dreams
from where escaped a flock of tortured poems.

A Dream

Is it sweet to see unearthly dreams?

A. Blok

Prophetic was this dream or not prophetic ...
Mars shone amongst the multitude of stars
and seemed somehow sinister and hectic –
that night I dreamed that you would surely come.

All signs were here: in Bach's chaconne, in roses,
that by the end of summer bloomed in vain,
in far-away bell ringing, monotonous,
above the blackness of the plowed plain,

and in the fall that gingerly crept closer
then changed her mind and stepped back.
Oh August, on the dreadful anniversary
you sent a message that I didn't expect!

How will I pay for such a royal present?
Where should I go, with whom to celebrate?
I'm writing poems promptly as I used to
in my notebook – perhaps it's not too late.

Boris Kokotov is a poet and translator. He is the author of several poetry collections in Russian language. His translations from German Romantics were published in the anthology *The Century of Translation* in Moscow. His translation of Louise Glück's *The Wild Iris* was published in 2012 (Vodoley, Moscow). His original work in English and translations into English appeared in *Adelaide*, *Blackbird*, *Constellations*, *Poet Lore* and *Washington Square Review*, among others. He lives in Baltimore.

Julia Pikalova (1971)
Юлия Пикалова (1971)

Translated into Italian by Paolo Statuti
Translated into English by Anna Krushelnitskaya

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Beethoven

tu ordinerai ai servi di non aprire a Beethoven
lo bloccherai nel messenger e nei vari siti
alcuni combattono altri estraggono bitcoin
alcuni fanno intrighi altri si sono smarriti
i due precedenti insieme non centrano la vena
la verità storico-isterica i suoi diritti protesta
sul ponte non distrutto entra l'armata francese a Vienna
e io guardo da lì il Danubio e mi gira la testa

tu ti costringerai a partire pur con il crepacuore
ma conserverai le lettere col settimo sigillo
io sto sul ponte l'autunno è terribile e muto
"tu chiedi come io vivo ma preferisco non dirlo"
Napoleone fa saltare le mura fortificate
com'è vile chi trova un uomo già a terra e lo finisce
e sotto il ponte il sangue blu da Vienna
fluisce fluisce

meglio il blackout di un piccolo sussurro e le dicerie
un nero quadrato ogni cosa che vuoi conterrà
perduto tutto l'ultimo ride bene del tempo
che ci ha mentito dicendo che tutto sparirà
troveranno le tue lettere tra un secolo e mezzo
le tradurranno e pubblicheranno io le leggo ora
peccato che non ho detto io: dell'uomo intero
ci resterà parte del discorso* la testa gira ancora

cosa hai provato tu troncando i cari rapporti
è stata la tua grave disgrazia o la colpa ahimé
sempre scorre scorre a Vienna il sangue blu
e tu vivrai finché esso si verserà in te
la distruzione la rovina tamburi e sciacalli

la città la terra l'anima nel fuoco nel fuoco
significa che lui troverà sostegno in sé
e ne darà anche me un poco

io sto appoggiata alla ringhiera e comincio
appena a distinguere nei fragorosi tuoni
*“solo coi suoni – ah non sono forse immodesto
pensando che più delle parole mi ubbidiscono i suoni”*
solo coi suoni nell'oscurità informe brancolando
e che lui non senta neanche una stereocannonata
né il silenzio ma così è più semplice e più fedele
perché la musica sopra tutto è sempre stata

Le parole in corsivo sono tratte dalle lettere di Beethoven a Josephine Deym, rinvenute negli anni '50 del XX secolo negli archive della famiglia Deym. Dalla corrispondenza di Beethoven sono tratte anche altre parole quali: sostegno in sé, distruzione, rovina, tamburi. (1) *“Parte del discorso”* è il titolo di una raccolta poetica di Josif Brodskij.

Beethoven

you order your servants to keep out that Beethoven
you block him on social networks and messenger apps
some fight battles while others mine bitcoin
yet others are mired in intrigue and mazed amid maps
the fourth kind a mix of the last two enter the vein and miss a smidge
hysterical truth takes possession of its rights
the French army enters Vienna via an unblown bridge
my head spins when I watch the Danube from its heights

you order yourself to go go squash your own wish to come
but you keep the letters you seal with the seventh seal
I stand on the bridge the autumn is vicious and numb
“you ask how I'm doing it's something I would rather not reveal”
Napoleon blows down bastions nearby again and again
to be scared not to kill off a man lying down it's the lowest of lows
there's blue blood under the bridge from the opened Vienna vein
it flows it flows

a blackout is better than being whispered about and harassed
a black square contains all things every and each
he who laughs over a spilled head laughs best and last
at time which lied about making it all water under the bridge
your letters will get found in a century and a half
translated and published I'll read them two centuries in
pity it wasn't me who said when a man is gone
all we have is a part of speech my head continues spin

how did it feel to chop yourself live knowing
you're splitting was it bad luck any blame to give
blue blood runs through Vienna flowing flowing
as long as you receive the blood you live
devastation desolation drums and marauders
the city the soil the soul are aflame aflame
it means it is only within himself he can search for order
when he finds it I also receive the same

I stand clutching the rails and I hear in the throbbing thunder
from so far away that sounds only barely reach
*"only sounds – oh could I be too modest I wonder
in thinking that sounds obey me better than speech"*
only sounds come by feel out of shapeless darkness
so he can't hear the stereobombardment of
cannons nor silence but that's good in its plain starkness
because music is – above

Based on Beethoven's letters of the period of Napoleonic wars, mainly from the correspondence with Josephine Deym that was found in 1950-ies. The direct citations are in quotes/italic; some other words (like "devastation, desolation, drums, searching for order within himself") are from other letters.

Film on YouTube

There is a 4-minute film *Beethoven* based on this poem. It took five months to create these four minutes! The poem and the film contain the words and the handwriting of Beethoven; the manuscripts are from the archives of the Beethoven-Haus in Bonn. Symphony no.7 (mov. II) is performed by the Kostroma Gubernsky Symphony Orchestra, and conducted by artistic director and chief conductor Pavel Gershtein. Russian with English titles and subtitles. Link: youtu.be/SqowZiXsl5w

Julia Pikalova is a Russian poet. Born in Moscow, she is a graduate of St. Petersburg State University (Master of Philology) and of California State University (Master of Business Administration). She has made a successful career in major international companies and has worked in many countries. Having moved to Italy, Julia has restarted playing the piano; since 2017, she has been participating in the *Milano Amateurs and Orchestra* festival and has won it twice. Julia's poetry is published in the best magazines of Russian literature, from Canada to the Far East. It is not easy to translate her poetry because of Julia's virtuoso capacity to play with the sounds, meanings and syntax of the Russian language. Yet, 75 poems have been translated into Italian in 2020/21 thanks to Paolo Statuti.

Anna Krushelnitskaya was born on the Sakhalin Island in the Soviet Far East. She grew up in the Siberian city of Chita, where she graduated from the Trans-Baikal State University with a degree in Foreign Language Education. Anna taught college in Russia before moving to the US in 2004. In the US, she worked as a teacher, court interpreter, Red Cross instructor, and garden hand. Anna lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan with her husband and three children. She enjoys freelance writing, literary translation and blogging on Soviet topics. Anna will have her translations appear in forthcoming collections of Soviet ww2 poetry, contemporary Russian free verse and two Soviet children's literature anthologies slated for publication in 2021. In 2019, Anna published *Cold War Casual*, a collection of transcribed oral testimony and interviews translated from Russian into English and from English into Russian that delve into the effect of the events and the government propaganda of the Cold War era on regular citizens of countries on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

References

If you want to delve deeper into the work of a poet or translator featured in this issue, some of the previous issues of *Four Centuries, Russian Poetry in Translation* may certainly be worth looking into! Here are the references you will need.

Poets

Ivan Krylov

– № 26, 2021: translated into English by Irene Gersch

Julia Pikalova

– № 25, 2020: translated into Italian by Paolo Statuti

Translators

– Anna Krushelnitskaya: 25

– Boris Kokotov: 26

– Olga Dumer: 24

– Paolo Statuti: 25

Poem titles / first lines in Russian

Anna Achmatova

– There is a certain line that can't be crossed > Есть в близости людей заветная черта

– At the bottom of the Neva > От тебя я сердце скрыла, // Словно бросила в Неву ...

– And a word, that was as heavy > И упало каменное слово

– A Flashback > Воспоминание

– A Dream > Сон

Aleksey Apukhtin

– Al futuro lettore > Будущему читателю

Yevgeny Baratynsky

– Roma > Рим

Ivan Krylov

– The Monkey and the Glasses > Мартышка и очки

– The Quartet > Квартет

– The Rooster and the > Петух и жемчужное зерно

Julia Pikalova

– Beethoven > Бетховен