

THE TWO STORYLINES OF THE COLLECTION  
"BOTTOMLESS MOMENTS"  
(«БЕЗДОННЫЕ МГНОВЕНЬЯ / PÕHJATUD  
SILMAPILGUD») BY DAVID SAMOILOV  
AND JAAN KROSS\*

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"Bottomless Moments", the collaborative collection of David Samoilov and Jaan Kross published by "Eesti raamat" in 1990 [БМ/PS], is mentioned in the biographies of both poets, but until now has not been the subject of study. Books published in "miniature" format, such as this collection, are more often looked upon as souvenirs, objects of art, or collectibles, but not as "real" books. Of course, one should not claim that the miniature publication from the "Handshake" series («Рукопожатие / Käepigistus») held great ideological significance for the authors. Nonetheless, the contents and composition of Samoilov's and Kross's book deserve exploration and interpretation.

For the literary historian, the study of poetry collections is a rewarding task. There exists a long-standing tradition of such studies, and works on types of supertextual units and forms of intertextuality are numerous. But this is not the case in regards to bilingual texts. There are few such texts, and even fewer in which the authors translated each other's work. Indeed, the interests of poets do not often coincide, and the translation of an author's own work does not always incite him to want to translate the translator's original work. Finally, there is the language barrier to consider.

Nevertheless, suitable conditions arose in Soviet literary life for the emergence of mutual translations. The principle of socialist internationalism, combined with governmental orders regarding literature, made translation work

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not only practically unavoidable for writers, but often desirable because it was profitable. Russian poets and writers translated authors from “brother republics” and “countries of the socialist camp”. In turn, the “national staff writers” received orders for translation of Russian and Soviet classics into their own languages so that their peoples could come to know “great Russian literature”. Publication plans also included translation of contemporary authors.

Examples are extremely rare of direct dialogue between two poets within one book, of mutual translations within one dust jacket; thus, the “Handshake” series, released by Estonian Republic presses in the second half of the 1980s, can be considered unique. The history of this series reflects the decline of the Soviet book-publishing system.

In 1984, the “Eesti raamat” publishing house produced the miniature book “Handshake” («Рукопожатие / Käepigistus»), edited by M. Korsunsky [P/K]. The book includes the poems of Vsevolod Azarov and his translations of Ralf Parve’s poetry. The translations are published side-by-side with their source texts. The poems and the translations are preceded by introductory notes by both authors. The visual layout affirms the principle of “artistic reciprocity”: the book includes photographs from 1945 of Azarov and Parve in military uniforms, as well as two photographs of them together, from 1945 and 1983. The choice of photographs and the contents of the author’s notes paint an optimistic picture of international friendship. The release of the predominantly war-themed book coincided with the anniversary of the victory in World War II (the connection between the echoing dates of 1945 and 1985 was used in the book’s design). In the Estonian Republic a year earlier, the anniversary of the Tallinn Operation was celebrated, thereby connecting the book to two military anniversaries. Azarov and Parve both fought in the war, and they both wrote about it, making their poetic dialogue quite appropriate for the commemorative book-publishing program. This collection makes no mention of belonging to a series; the idea of serial publication most likely arose later<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> M. Korsunsky was in the navy, and worked for the newspaper “Strazh Baltiki” («Страж Балтики»), which published Azarov, who was the director of the literary group “Way to the sea” («Путь на моря»), from which arose many “sailor poets”; this, most likely, explains the choice of author. Moreover, Korsunsky was a passionate fan of miniature books, which is evident in the format of “Handshake”.

Korsunsky wrote a series of books about naval history, revolutionary figures, and war: “My Friends, the Military Engineers”, “On the Shores of Estonia: Pages from the History of the Destroyer ‘Karl Marx’”, “The Three Lives of the Smith Lees: the History of One Destiny” (about R. Lesov, a worker in the Leningrad shipyard), “Called to Revolution...”, and “Fritz from Friendship Street”. Korsunsky also self-published a 1993 narrative essay entitled “About Korinfskies, Olderogge, and others...”.

With the start of Perestroika, book publishing in the Soviet Union experienced a noticeable revival (needless to say, the politics of publishing changed dramatically during this time). The series of miniature bilingual collections were published in Tallinn during this wave. The title of the 1984 book “Handshake” («Рукопожатие / Käepigistus») became an apt metaphor to describe “creative dialogue”. In 1987 two books were released simultaneously: “The Time Has Come” («Время пришло / Aeg tuli») by Anna Akhmatova and Dabora Vaarandi [ВП/АТ], and “Feedback” («Обратная связь / Tagasiside») by Yevgeny Yevtushenko and Arvi Siig [ОС/ТС]<sup>2</sup>.

It is clear from the third book that the Soviet book publishing system was rapidly deteriorating. The Akhmatova-Vaarandi collection, submitted to the press in November, 1986 and released in the beginning of 1987, is a good-quality printed product. The same cannot be said for the next book in the series. It lacks necessary technical information and data about the edition. Very likely, the names of the editor and proofreader are not listed in the technical information about the book because they did no work on it: the text is full of mistakes. The publisher attempted to preserve the appearance of the series: both texts published in 1987 contain photographs of the authors, as well as illustrations. However, of greater interest is the books’ composition; that is, the principles that guided the formation of the collections.

The first book in the series is commemorative and was released according to an official date; it is of less interest. Its history and composition were completely determined by the official culture of the late Soviet era. Azarov was a totally “safe” Soviet writer. He was born in 1913 and completed a philological degree at Leningrad University. After the war he served in the political management of the Baltic navy. His poems were published in periodicals and collections. He was acquainted with E. Bagritsky, A. Grin, N. Tikhonov, and V. Lugovsky, considering them his poetic teachers<sup>3</sup>, and wrote the play “Wide is the Sea” with Vs. Vishnevsky and A. Kron. Ralf Parve was an officially recognized Estonian Soviet poet, and lived a long life (1919–2011). Before the war and just after it, Parve worked as a journalist, later taking up literature. He became a member of the Estonian Writers’ Guild in 1945, joined the Communist Party

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<sup>2</sup> One might suppose that the series was continued for economic reasons. However, an edition of 1,000 copies, as the first, second, and fourth books of the series were released, could not have turned a profit. N. D. Abashina, who worked at “Eesti raamat” in the 1980s, explains that the editor and compiler, Korsunsky, “strong-armed” the series into publication due to his great love of miniature books.

<sup>3</sup> The name of the poetry cycle “The Boy’s Magical Horn” and the epigraph from Baratynsky exemplify Azarov’s taste and scholarship.

in 1947, and in 1959 received the title of Distinguished Writer of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic. His wife, Lilly Promet, was a well-known writer and author of a series of stories, including some about the war. According to the foreword to “Handshake”, it was Promet herself who wrote the crib notes to Parve’s poems that Azarov used in his translation of them.

The two books released in 1987 are more interesting in regards to editorial strategy. The documentary history of the publication has yet to be researched; the reconstruction presented here is only preliminary. For the beginning of the series, editor and compiler Mikhail Korsunsky chose big name poets: the absolute pinnacle of poetry, Anna Akhmatova, and the USSR-wide celebrity, Yevgeny Yevtushenko. Moreover, Yevtushenko was an officially recognized poet of the Soviet Union, Akhmatova was practically so, and she was given the additional “weight” of Debora Vaarandi and her role as the “Soviet Koidula” (a title resulting from some superficial similarities, her official recognition, and her marriage to Juhan Smuul, which brought the spouses the status of “first couple” among writers of the ESSR).

It must be noted that the history of Akhmatova’s translations of Debora Vaarandi requires additional research. The University of Tartu library houses four collections containing translations of Vaarandi into Russian: “Verses and Poems” («СТИХОТВОРЕНИЯ И ПОЭМЫ») [Вааранди 1956], “Dreamer at the Window” («Мечтатель у окна») [Вааранди 1960], “Bread of the Coastal Plains” («Хлеб прибрежных равнин») [Вааранди 1967], and “People Look at the Sea” («Люди смотрят на море») [Вааранди 1968]. The first contains no translations signed by Akhmatova; the second contains only one. The 1967 collection includes five translations, but does not include the one first published seven years earlier. Thus, six of the seven translations included in the miniature “The Time Has Come” appeared in print only after the death of the translator. “The Time Has Come” also contains a poem not found in the above-mentioned collections, “Sunset Reddens the Evening...” Moreover, the bilingual poetry collection lacks any introductory notes by the poets about each other; there is only an afterword by Jaan Eilart. Of course, Akhmatova could no longer have written anything, but Vaarandi was still living. In summary, this historical and literary story requires additional research.

In contrast to the second tome of the “Handshake” series, the third book has a transparent history. Arvi Siig (1938–1999) was an officially recognized writer (evidenced in part by his role as deputy in the Supreme Council of the ESSR), but he was also highly regarded in Estonian cultural circles, far from official life. Later appraisals by his contemporaries presented Arvi Siig as a Beatnik singer, a cult poet of the liberal youth of the 1960s, and a forerunner of Es-

tonian rock and punk [Kallas]. He was set apart by his obvious interest in the literary life of Moscow, from which many of his Estonian peers deliberately distanced themselves. Siig was a venerable translator of 20<sup>th</sup> century Russian poets, from Mayakovsky to Yevtushenko and Voznesensky. Siig knew Yevtushenko personally, and accompanied him when he visited Estonia. His translations of Yevtushenko had already been published separately (“Loits” [Jevtušenko 1977] and “Kolmas mälu” [Jevtušenko 1985]), so appropriate verses needed only be selected for the miniature book. The first three poems in the booklet were translated before the rest (and were included in both the 1977 and 1985 collections), followed by poems from the 1985 collection. The book’s composition was formulated by the translators, not the editor: in the introduction, Siig describes in detail how Yevtushenko came to Estonia in 1980 (nearly seven years earlier) and Yevtushenko, apparently, specially translated his poems — admitting, in the introduction, that translating the work of a poet whose language one does not know is difficult even with excellent crib notes.

Thus, the second and third books of the “Handshake” series were composed in different ways. “The Time Has Come” is more of an editor’s collection: one of the authors was already deceased at the time of publication, and the other kept silent about the first (including no introduction). However, the significant number of poems — 22 translated by Vaarandi versus eight translated by Akhmatova — and the breaking of chronological order point to Debora Vaarandi’s participation in the poem selection process; possibly, the poems were arranged not at the time of publication, but at the time of translation. On the other hand, the collection of mutual translations by Yevtushenko and Siig, “Feedback”, can certainly be considered an author’s collection.

Turning, at last, to the fourth book in the series, the collection of translations by Samoilov and Kross, “Bottomless Moments”. There is almost no documentary information regarding the history of this booklet. One may only guess the extent to which the poets participated in the compilation of the book; both authors lived in Estonia at the time, so contact with one another and discussion of the contents was possible. However, there is no mention of preparations regarding the book in available in any of Samoilov’s writings, nor in “Daily Notes” [Самойлов 2002], nor in the published correspondence between Samoilov and L. K. Chukovskaya [Переписка]. To this day the full corpus of Samoilov’s translations has not been compiled, so it is impossible to reconstruct the procession of work on them. There is no record of Samoilov translating into other languages. For these reasons, the conclusions reached herein are based only on the printed materials available and make no claim to constituting a final, reliable evaluation.

The following poems, originals published side-by-side with translations, constitute the bilingual collection “Bottomless Moments” («Бездонные мгновения / Põhjatud silmapilgud»):

By David Samoilov

Дом-музей	The Museum
Смерть Ивана	Ivan's Death
Баллада о немецком цензоре	The Ballad of the German Censor
Завсегдагай	The Frequenter
Рихтер	Richter
«Деревья должны...»	“The Trees Should Be...”
Афанасий Фет	Afanasy Fet
Сандрильона	Cendrillon
Залив	The Gulf
Муза	Muse
«Пахло соломой в сарае...»	“It Smelled of Hay in the Barn...”
Ээстимаа	Eestimaa

By Jaan Kross

Laul seitsmest lukust võtmetega
Uks
Laul pimedale trofeehobusele telliskivivabrikus
“Õhus ämbliklõngade lend on...”
“Mu noorus, sulipoiss — sa kaod?”
“Luiteliivadel joostes...”
Tallipoisi laul
Kõrgmäestik
Ehitusmeistri mõtted
Lõokesed
Veebruari kevad
Õhtu ja hommik
Säilimine
“Luule on...”
“Sellega, kes on näinud tuhandeid...”
“Hakkas juba oskama näha...”
Autobiograafia süvitsi
“Mu sõbra avatud akna all...”
Põhjatud silmapilgud

The introductory notes each poet wrote about the other make no mention of who selected the poems; they speak more about their friendship than about the verses and translations (in the case of Samoilov, it's a friendship that is very nearly in the past).

Samoilov's translations of Kross's poems — with two exceptions, "Autobiograafia süvitsi" and "Mu sõbra avatud akna all..." — had all been published previously in the authorial collections "Notches in the Cliff" [Kpocc 1962] and "Stone Violins" [Kpocc 1973]. From this information one may conclude that Samoilov did not translate anything specially for this new collection; the selections were practically ready to simply be placed in the new book.

The situation is more complicated regarding Samoilov's own poetry. His poems were written in different decades, from the 1940s to the 1980s, and Kross's first translations that made their way into this collection were done at the beginning of the 1960s.<sup>4</sup> The selections are not presented in chronological order, so it is possible to view them as a supertextual unit, deliberately ordered, presumably with an internal story. The question of the authorship of this supertextual unit will be set aside for now.

The selection of Samoilov's poetry opens with "The Museum", the author's somewhat ironic manifesto. As a first text that establishes the tone of the texts that follow, "The Museum" can only be imagined in a "non-serious" publication. Samoilov's collections came out rarely and with difficulty; for them, of course, the author chose different key texts. But here, in the miniature publication, "The Museum" is placed at the beginning, where its obvious facetiousness is a perfect match for a booklet somewhat comedic in the sophistication of its format.

On the other hand, the ideological implications of "The Museum" point the reader to what could be called Samoilov's political/historical or historiographical line of poetry. This line is represented later in the collection by two nearly contrasting poems: "Ivan's Death" and "The Ballad of the German Censor". The protagonist of "The Museum" is endowed with a range of Pushkin-esque characteristics — but not only Pushkin-esque; they are mixed with characteristics of the "universal poet of the 19<sup>th</sup> century". Near the end of the poem, chronological markers become few, while details arise that are more closely associated with modernity and with Soviet realities. As a result, the figure of a "transformed Pushkin" arises in the poem, the real poet's twin, whose biography is the inverse of Pushkin's fate. The irony, then, has two-fold direction: it is aimed not only at the protagonist, but at any poet, including the author himself.

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example: *Samoilov, D. Kahekümnenda sajandi puud; Ballaad saksa tsensorist // Looming. 1962. Nr 10. Lk 1504–1506; Samoilov, D. Maja-museum // Värsipõimik. Tallinn, 1965. Lk 120–121. For a full list of translations, see: Kross, J. Bibliograafia / Koost. V. Kabur, G. Palk. Tallinn, 1997. Lk 93.*

“Ivan’s Death”, from the cycle “Poems About Czar Ivan”, gains new meaning when taken out of the context of the cycle as a whole. Its first layer of meaning is revealed in the juxtaposition of Ivan the Terrible with “the young bellringer”:

Помирает царь, православный царь!  
The czar is dying, the Orthodox czar!

Колокол стозвонный раскачал звонарь.  
The ringer has rocked the hundred-ring bell.

От басовой меди облака гудут.  
The clouds hum from the bass copper.

Собрались бояре, царской смерти ждут.  
The boyars have gathered, awaiting the czar’s death.

Слушают бояре колокольный гром:  
The boyars listen to the thunder of bells:

Кто-то будет нынче на Руси царем?  
Who will be now the czar of Rus?

А на колокольне, уставленной в зарю,  
And in the belltower, up at dawn,

Весело, весело молодому звонарю.  
Merry, merry is the young bellringer.

Гулкая медь,  
Resounding bronze,

Звонкая медь,  
Ringing bronze,

Как он захочет, так и будет греметь!  
As he desires, so it will thunder!

Thus “Ivan’s Death” extends the theme of “the poet and the czar” hidden in the subtext of “The Museum”:

Вот письмо: «Припадаю к стопам...»  
Here is the letter “Clinging at your feet...”

Вот ответ: «Разрешаю вернуться...»  
Here is the answer: “You are allowed to return...”

< ... >

Завитушки и пробы пера.  
Flourishes and the first attempts of writing



Варианты поэмы «Ура!»

Variations of the poem “Hooray!”

И гравюра: «Вручение медали».

And an etching of “Presentation of a medal”.

The young bellringer’s “self-will” elevates him above “the old poet”, that “lover of the quiet life”. The “small man”, having broken with “the large world”, turns out to be stronger than he, although death awaits him all the same — just as in “The Ballad of the German Censor”, which follows “Ivan’s Death”. These two poems, which had never been published together in one collection before, here form a storyline sequence which presents different possible fates for the protagonist.

Moreover, “Ivan’s Death” and “The Ballad of the German Censor” represent the type of lyricism toward which Samoilov gravitates: narrative, verging on epic<sup>5</sup>. The latter text’s name includes a genre, the ballad, so in this case there can be no doubt as to its narrative nature. “Ivan’s Death”, with its extended plot and song-like refrains, is clearly reminiscent of traditional historical poems (here it recalls songs, and thoughts, and Lermontov’s poem-“song”). David Samoilov, as A. S. Nemzer<sup>6</sup> has observed, thought of the narrative poem as the pinnacle of poetic creation (as indicated by his long and hard work on narrative poems versus other types of texts). Samoilov wrote many poetic texts that could be classified as “epic verses”. They are denoted by extended plots, and their heroes are markedly separated from the narrator. It is not precisely a dramatic monologue in the style of Nekrasov, but it is similar; the closest parallel here from the poetry of Nekrasov would be not “The Gardener”, but “The Pupil”. Potential genre prototypes for Samoilov’s poems of this type could be Baratynsky’s inscriptions in verse to portraits of the classical period (Pushkin’s era),

<sup>5</sup> From a poem of 1972:

Меня Анна Андревна Ахматова	Anna Andrevna Akhmatova
За пристрастие к сюжетам корила.	Reproached me for my addiction to stories.
Избегать бы сюжета проклятого	Would that I flee the cursed plot
И писать — как она говорила.	And write as she said.
А я целую кучу сюжетов	But I spun a whole pile of
Навал. И пристрастен к сюжетам.	Stories. I am partial to plots.
О, какое быть счастье поэтом!	O what happiness to be a poet!
Никогда не пробиться в поэты.	Impossible to break into the poets.

See also the diary entry: “Anna Akhmatova reproached me for my predilection for plot. I didn’t completely understand what was the matter. Now I understand” [Самойлов 2002: II, 284].

<sup>6</sup> Regarding this, see: “... his faithfulness to the narrative poem genre (predominantly, though after “The Last Holiday” only to “story poems”, which unite the Samoilov narrative poem to his smaller “epic” verses, where purely lyrical lines are removed to the subtext) sharply separates the author from the majority of his contemporaries (both his peers and those that followed him)” [Немзер 2011: 271].

such as “Look upon this cold face...”, or the beginning of the message from P. A. Vyazemsky to F. Tolstoy, “The American and the Gypsy...”.

There are several such “epic verses” by Samoilov in “Bottomless Moments”. After the balladic “Ivan’s Death” and “The Ballad of the German Censor”, there follows “The Frequenter”, “Richter”, “Afanasy Fet”, and “Cendrillon”. These four can clearly be divided into two pairs — poems about “artists” and poems about “protagonists” from “foreign” spaces.

After the fictional bellringer of “Ivan’s Death” follows Richter, marking the appearance of the theme of music<sup>7</sup>; after the obscure German censor follows Afanasy Fet. Thus there are two “players” and two “writers”, and to their number one can add the “old poet” from “The Museum”. The theme of creativity is developed throughout these epic poems and continued in the lyrics of the last part of the selection.

The poems about “protagonists” from “foreign” spaces introduce the theme of Estonia in the selections from Samoilov. “The Frequenter” is a poem about a meeting between a poet and his acquaintance, a student, who is given such Mephistophelian characteristics that the poet’s meeting with him is appears to be a visit to “another world”, a meeting with the devil. The setting of this text is marked by an Estonian toponym. In a small town marked by its “Germanness”, even the “cross-eyed devil” turns out to be harmless; “mephistopheles” (with an intentional lower case letter) sits in a brewery, where the waiter is friendly to him:

Вторая кружка для студента, Косого дьявола из Тарту, Который дважды выпил где-то И починает третью квартиру.	A second mug for the student, That cross-eyed devil from Tartu, Who twice drank somewhere And now begins his third quart.
Он в сером свитре грубой вязки, По виду — хват и забияка, Он пьет и как-то залихватски Разламывает шейку рака.	He’s in a coarse knit sweater of gray, By the look of him, a gallant and a bully, He drinks and somehow dashinglly Breaks the neck of cancer.
< ... >	...
Он мепфистофель и приятель Буфетчицы и судомоек.	He is a mephistopheles and the friend Of barmaids and dishwashers.
< ... >	...
Он не опасен. Пусть он шпарит Двусмысленные парадоксы	He isn’t dangerous. Let him yammer his Double-meaning paradoxes

<sup>7</sup> For more about this poem, see the article in this volume by L. Pild: pp. 138–145.

И пусть себе воображает,	And let him imagine
Что он силен в стихах и в боксе.	That he's good at poetry and at boxing <sup>8</sup> .

The connection to the Estonian theme in “Cendrillon” becomes apparent only in the finale: “High above the gray sea / Seagulls, stormclouds, ships”. The girl from the cobbler’s workshop who awaits her knight in shining armor is not even called Cinderella, but the French name Cendrillon (her “prince” in the “Lada” is called “Cendrilloner”). The heroine’s exotic name can be interpreted here as a poeticization. By using the French variant of her name, its etymology is obscured, thereby “elevating” the heroine. This technique reflects the structure of the entire plot: an ordinary occurrence in the lives of ordinary characters grows as the action progresses into a fantastic, miraculous event:

Сандрильона ждет карету,	Cendrillon awaits the coach,
Чинно курит сигарету,	Primly smokes a cigarette,
Ждет, чтоб прибыл сандрильонец	Awaits the arrival of her <i>Cendrilloner</i>
Из компании гуляк —	From the company of revelers
С туфелькой, на «Жигулях».	With a little shoe, in a Lada.
< ... >	...
В ней не счастье, не страданье,	In her there is no happiness, no suffering,
Все — сплошное ожиданье.	Nothing but pure expectation <sup>9</sup> .
Наконец приходит он.	At last he arrives.
И, с задумчивым соседом	And without saying goodbye
Не простившись, выйдет следом	To her pensive neighbor, she leaves
За плечистым сандрильонцем	Following her broad-shouldered
	<i>Cendrilloner</i>
Из сапожной мастерской.	From the cobbler's workshop.
< ... >	...
И уедет Сандрильона,	And Cendrillon drives off,
С ней — волос ее корона,	Her hair as her crown,
Вместе с гордым модельером	With her proud designer
На машине «Жигули».	In a car called Lada.

It is of note that almost all the protagonists of Samoilov’s “epic poems” in this collection are foreigners, strangers.

After “Cendrillon” follows a widely-known text, accepted as Samoilov’s poetic and biographical manifesto: the poem “The Gulf”. This poem begins

<sup>8</sup> More about this poem and about the Pasternakian subtexts of its Mephistophelian theme, see A. S. Nemzer’s article “The Two Estonias of David Samoilov” («Две Эстонии Давида Самойлова») [Немзер 2010].

<sup>9</sup> This phrase, it seems, plainly alludes to those famous passages from Tolstoy’s “War and Peace” dedicated to Natasha Rostova.

a strictly lyrical procession of poems: “Muse”, “It Smelled of Hay in the Barn”, and the concluding “Eestimaa”.

And so, the collection begins with the theme of “the poet and authority/the world”, tinted with alarming irony (“The Museum”). It continues with the theme of history both “long” and “short”, as developed in the two balladic poems of “Ivan’s Death” and “The Ballad of the German Censor”. These poems take up the story of “the artist and the world” introduced in the first text, and present variations of the fate of the protagonist who has been freed from pressure: either a rupture and a departure, “Get ready, libertines, to the Don, the Don!” or a rupture and a rebellion: “He underlined everything truthful and crossed out everything else”. “Afanasy Fet” develops something closer to the first variant of this story (the protagonist bifurcates into Shenshin and Fet, which becomes its own type of departure). “Richter” presents a variation on the ideal destiny of an artist, attainable, apparently, only by a musician and by art beyond words. The protagonists observed by the poet in two poems are marked by signs of “Estonian” space, and find themselves raised above the commonplace thanks to literary allusions that ascribe the “little person” to the high world; this same technique is used in “The Ballad of the Censor”. In this way the space to which the lyrical hero of “The Gulf” “emigrates” appears as already poeticized, inhabited, and mastered by the protagonist-poet by means of cultural codes.

It is remarkable that “Muse”, a fundamental poem for Samoilov, is found specifically in this lyrical section of his collection. The appearance of the Muse in “the dreams of infantrymen” turns soldiers into poets:

И когда посинеет и падает замертво  
 And when day turns blue and falls down dead  
 День за стрелки в пустые карьеры,  
 Behind the arrows and empty mines,  
 Эшелоны выстукивают гекзаметры,  
 Echelons tap out hexameters,  
 И в шинели укутываются Гомеры.  
 And Homers bundle up in greatcoats.

This verse, it may be supposed, explains the absence of Samoilov’s most well-known poems from the collection, those about war, such as “Fatal Forties” («Сороковые, роковые...»). “Muse” speaks to the victory of poetry and harmony over tragedy. The placement just after “Muse” of “It Smelled of Hay in the Barn...” is completely justifiable, given the inclusion in its finale of the persistent wish to “freeze the moment”, to preserve an achieved harmony. In “Eestimaa” the plot of the collection concludes: the historical theme circles

back through an indirect mention of Czar Ivan, via a mention of “Russes” among those who came to make war with the Ests (Ivan IV lay siege to Tallinn in 1577):

Датчане, шведы, немцы, руссы, латы  
 Danes, Swedes, Germans, Russes, Lats  
 Сбивали их, как масло в Эстимаа.  
 Were churned like butter in Estimaа.  
 Они в глуши хранили свой обычай  
 They kept their traditions in the wilderness  
 И свой язык, как драгоценный клад,  
 And their language as a precious treasure,  
 В котором длинных гласных щебет птичий,  
 In which long vowels twitter like birds,  
 Согласных — твердость камня и раскат.  
 And consonants roar with the hardness of stone.

In this collection of Samoilov’s poetry, Estonia is featured by the poet because it has preserved its language (along with singing: “long vowels” and “twittering birds”). That is, the space which the poet-protagonist tests out, makes his own, and experiences was intended for him by history itself, since the people living on that land repeated the destiny of Samoilov’s poet-artist, having saved, despite enormous pressure, their “precious treasure” — their language.

Returning, at last, to the question of the “two plots” within the collection. Two different storylines are discernable in this collection, depending on whether one looks at the selections as the result of the author’s work, or the result of the translator’s work (or the editor’s). If one credits the author with constructing this meaningful composition, then it can be interpreted as a kind of *alternative* variant of poetic autobiography. Samoilov’s fully developed autobiography came into being in other genres, and was developed already in part in his better known books. It is in those books that the military phase of his life is creatively relived, his difficult life is poetically reestablished and re-experienced with all its external details and internal collisions. The plot laid out in the miniature publication obscures or eliminates the darkest periods of the lyrical hero; war, creative crises, the deaths of his mentors (“Well that’s it, the eyes of geniuses have closed...”), etc. are only hinted at in the stories of the selection. In this way the protagonist moves “toward light”, and happiness signifies the conclusion of his creative biography. In the cultural space of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the idyll can be perceived as nothing other than a lighthearted,

playful genre, making the booklet form of “Bottomless Moments” the most appropriate place for its use.

If, on the other hand, the selection of poems is attributed to the translator and/or the editor, then the biography becomes one of a poet approaching a new homeland. In just this moment the concept of “alienness” plays its role, as the foreign origins of Samoilov’s characters indicate the European-ness of his poetic protagonist and his potential inclusion in a foreign, non-Russian space. This potential inclusion becomes, in the end, a real inclusion, as the Russian poet “chose the gulf”, and obtained a new home in Estonia, where he met another poet who speaks the language the Ests rescued long ago as a “precious treasure” from multitudinous conquerors.

The storylines pointed out in this article from Samoilov’s selections in “Bottomless Moments” are quite similar, but have varying centers of gravity. If three parties were involved in compiling the collection — both authors and the compiler — then the meaning of this group of poems could be different. Reconstruction of the compilation process would require documental research. For now, analysis is limited to personal interpretation.

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