

To cite this article:

Windle, Kevin. "An epistolary story by Artyom Vesyoly, translated from Russian." *The AALITRA Review: A Journal of Literary Translation* 18, (June 2023): 45-60.

aalitra.org.au

Australian Association for Literary Translation

An epistolary story by Artyom Vesyoly, translated from Russian

KEVIN WINDLE Australian National University

The name of Artyom Vesyoly, pseudonym of Nikolai Kochkurov (1899-1938), is less familiar to English readers than those of some other Russian writers of his time, such as Isaak Babel, Konstantin Paustovsky, Boris Pasternak, Mikhail Bulgakov or Vesyoly's close friend Mikhail Sholokhov. If he has suffered from neglect in the Anglophone world, this may be attributed to a combination of circumstances: first, his early death in Stalin's Great Terror cut short a promising career and meant that he was "unpersoned" in the USSR. His works were removed from libraries and destroyed, while no public mention of the author could be made until his posthumous rehabilitation in the 1950s. Second, his prose does not lend itself easily to translation: in an afterword to a German version of his major novel, Jekatherina Lebedewa, described it as "so gut wie unübersetzbar" [virtually untranslatable] (Wesjoly 632).

The work in question was Vesyoly's masterpiece *Russia Washed in Blood*, a modernist novel written in the 1920s and early 1930s about the Russian Civil War of 1918-1921. Though published in the USSR and widely applauded, within a few years it was found to be ideologically suspect and therefore proscribed, while the author, a veteran of the Civil War, found his loyalty to the regime called into question. He was accused of failing to recognize the leading role of the Communist Party and slandering the regime and its rulers. He was duly arrested in October 1937 and shot in April 1938 (see Vesyoly xi-xvi).

Despite Lebedewa's comment on Vesyoly's untranslatability, his novel has long been known in translations into Polish, Czech, Bulgarian and French; an excellent German version is now available, and in 2020 an English version was published by Anthem Press (Wesjoly; Vesyoly).

His short story "The Barefoot Truth", written concurrently with parts of *Russia Washed in Blood*, marks the onset of his serious difficulties with the guardians of ideological purity. When it appeared in the journal *Molodaya gvardiya* in 1929, the Central Committee of the Communist Party reprimanded the journal's editors for allowing into print a "one-sided, tendentious caricature of Soviet reality". It was, they declared, "of value only to our class enemies" (see Vesyolaya 160). Clearly, the story gave deep offence by expressing the feelings of those who, like Vesyoly himself, had fought to establish Soviet rule in a savage conflict, yet soon found themselves neglected, their service and suffering dismissed as of no account while the new bureaucracy took root.

The story takes the form of a letter from a group of Civil War veterans to their former commander, describing the plight of some of their comrades-in-arms and seeking his help in achieving justice for them. It describes village life in the Kuban region in the late 1920s, a time when a kind of stability had returned after the ravages of the Civil War. To the veterans, it is a highly unsatisfactory stability: well-to-do peasants and opponents of the revolution prosper at the expense of the poor, former Red Army soldiers are reduced to penury, and criminals such as the "rich Cossack" rapists go unpunished. The letter recalls scenes of fratricidal bloodshed and mayhem which have left their mark on the survivors. A note at the end states that "the commander's reply will appear in a forthcoming issue of *Molodaya gvardiya*". If Vesyoly was indeed planning to publish such a reply, it did not eventuate. He and his protagonists were not to know that very soon the stability would end with the onset of collectivization, mass deportation of the wealthier peasantry (*kulaks*), and famine (the *golodomor*). The concluding

lines, warning that "our republic will still be licking its wounds in a hundred years", may be seen to have prophetic resonance in the light of events in nearby Ukraine since February 2022.

Like Russia Washed in Blood, this story shows the author's mastery of skaz, in which the narrative is heard directly from an uneducated participant, unmediated by any "intellectual" intervention. Vesyoly's unnamed narrator is a man of limited schooling but strong opinions, striving to master a genre – letter-writing – which does not come naturally. Nevertheless he is able to make his points forcefully, in colourful language. Much humour derives from incongruities of register: fragments of officialese conflict with earthy demotic expressions, eloquent colloquialisms and terms of abuse, and occasional poetic turns of phrase. Markers of sub-standard Russian are frequent, and seldom amenable to a close or "literal" translation. Instead the translation resorts to a compensatory method, introducing ungrammatical forms of English, not necessarily at the same points, to give some indication of the writer's distinctive voice: double negatives, "ain't", "we was", "they was" etc.

English lacks the resources to form the expressive diminutives favoured by the narrator: e.g. rubliki (from rubli [roubles]); kupchishki (from kuptsy [merchants]) and even advokatishki (from advokaty [lawyers]). A suffix which usually denotes young animals such as kittens and piglets is applied creatively to the young of the aristocracy and the bourgeois: grafyata (from graf [count]), and burzhuyata (from burzhuy [bourgeois]). "Princelings" will serve for knyazishki, but in other cases the translator has little choice beyond recourse to a compensatory adjective. The translator's task is further complicated by two stanzas of song. These are clearly important in as much as they vividly encapsulate the theme. If the song moves war veterans to tears, as the writer claims, some indication of its emotive power must be given in the translation. To that end, it needs to appear singable (although we may not know the melody), and this can only be achieved by some semblance of the original rhyme scheme and dactylic metre.

A literal translation of a work such as this, assuming it were possible, would at many points give the reader considerable difficulty. The translation given below, while of the "domesticating" variety, makes occasional concessions to the "foreignizing" tendency when untranslatable Russian terms are retained and footnoted (e.g. GPU, bandura, Komsomol, stanitsa). Annotation is also needed for references to historical personages unlikely to be familiar to the new readership. The translation of skaz-like texts shares features with that of drama. Since we are dealing with a kind of performance, the product needs to be no less performable than the original. Two criteria proposed by Fabienne Hörmanseder for the translation of drama therefore come to the fore: Sprechbarkeit ("speakability") and Spielbarkeit (jouabilité, "playability") (Hörmanseder 97-111; Windle 156ff.). These concepts have served the translator of Vesyoly's "Barefoot Truth" as guidelines, along with Korney Chukovsky's well-known warning against what he termed "imprecise precision", or excessive literalism (Chukovsky 56ff.). In a similar vein, Walter Arndt, the distinguished American translator of Pushkin, spoke of conveying the "total effect", in which the "import" and the "impact" need to be considered equally (Arndt xiv-xv). The aim here has been to create a performable text which produces in the reader or hearer an impression roughly equivalent to that made by the original on its audience, while acknowledging that such impressions cannot be in any way measurable.

The translation is based on the text published in Vesyoly 1990. The translator is grateful to Dr Elena Govor, Vesyoly's grand-daughter, for much background material and advice on matters of translation, and to the journal's reviewers for their detailed comments and suggestions.

Bibliography

Arndt, Walter. Pushkin Threefold. Allen & Unwin, 1972. xiv-xv.

Chukovsky, Korney. Vysokoye iskusstvo. Moscow, 1968.

Hörmanseder, Fabienne. Text und Publikum. Kriterien für eine bühnenwirksame Übersetzung im Hinblick auf eine Kooperation zwischen Translatalogen und Bühnenexperten. Stauffenburg, 2009.

Vesyolaya, Zayara. "Rossiya krov 'yu umytaya Artyoma Vesyologo. Po materialam lichnogo arkhiva pisatelya." Novy mir 5, 1988, pp. 135-161.

Vesyoly, Artyom. Izbrannoye. Pravda, 1990.

--. *Russia Washed in Blood*. Translated by Kevin Windle, with an introduction by Kevin Windle and Elena Govor. Anthem Press, 2020.

Wesjoly, Artjom. *Blut und Feuer*. Translated by Thomas Reschke, with an afterword by Jekatherina Lebedewa, "Artjom Wesjoly - Revolution und Poesie." Aufbau Verlag, 2017.

Windle, Kevin. "The Translation of Drama." *The Oxford Handbook of Translation Studies*, edited by Kirsten Malmkjær and Kevin Windle, Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 153-168.

Босая правда Артём Весёлый

The Barefoot Truth Artyom Vesyoly

Translated by Kevin Windle

Дорогой товарищ, Михаил Васильевич!

Проведав, что ты, наш старый командир, живешь в Москве и занимаешь хорошую должность, мы, красные партизаны вверенного тебе полка, шлем сердечный привет, который да не будет пропущен тобою мимо ушей.

Горе заставило нас писать.

Надо открыто сказать правду – в жизни нашей больше плохого, чем хорошего.

Известный вам пулеметчик Семен Горбатов голый и босый заходит в профсоюз, просит работу. Какая-то с вот таким рылом стерва, которую мы не добили в 18 году, нахально спрашивает его:

- Какая твоя, гражданин, специальность?
- Я не гражданин, а товарищ, отвечает Семен Горбатов.
 Восемь огнестрельных и две колотых раны на себе ношу, кадетская пуля перебила ребро, засела в груди и до сего дня мне сердце знобит.
- О ранах пора забыть, никому они не интересны. У нас мирное строительство социализма. Какая твоя, гражданин, специальность?
- Пулеметчик, тихо ответил герой, и сердце его заныло от обиды.
 - Член профсоюза?
 - Нет.
- Ну, тогда и разговор с тобой короток. Во-первых, таковая специальность нам не требуется, во-вторых, у нас много членов безработных, а ты не член.
- Почему скрываете распоряжения нашей матушки ВКП? спрашивает Семен Горбатов. Не должны ли вы предоставлять работу демобилизованным вне очереди?
- Мы не скрываем распоряжений и даем работу молодым демобилизованным

Dear Comrade Mikhail Vasilyevich,

We have learned that you, our old commander, are living in Moscow and have a good job, so we Red partisans of the regiment you commanded send you our cordial greetings, which you shouldn't turn a deaf ear to.

Hard times have forced us to write.

We have to call a spade a spade: we're seeing more bad than good in our lives.

Semyon Gorbatov, the machine-gunner you will remember, goes to the Union office barefoot and skint, to ask for work. There some slut we didn't finish off in 1918 has the nerve to ask him,

"What's your trade, citizen?"

"'Comrade' to you, not 'citizen'," Semyon replies. "With eight bullet wounds and two stab wounds. A cadet bullet broke one of my ribs and lodged in my chest, so my heart's playing up to this day."

"Time to forget about your wounds. Nobody's interested in them now. We're peacefully building socialism. What's your trade, citizen?"

"Machine-gunner," says the war hero quietly, feeling his heart pained.

"Union member?"

"No."

"Well, in that case, we've nothing to talk about. First of all, we don't need your trade. Second, we have lots of unemployed members, and you're not a member."

"Why are you keeping our mother-Party's instructions secret?" says Semyon Gorbatov. "Ain't you supposed to offer jobs to demobilised soldiers first?"

"We aren't hiding any instructions; we give jobs to young soldiers demobilised in the

последнего года, а вас, старых, слишком много.

- Куда же нам, старым, деваться, ежели не всех нас перебила белая контрреволюция?
 - Профсоюз не богадельня.
- А скажите, сколько у вас в трестах и канцеляриях сидит кумовьев и своячениц?
 - Не мешайте, гражданин, заниматься.
- Значит, с бессильным презрением говорит Семен Горбатов, вы смотрите на меня в моем отечестве хуже, чем на пасынка?

На эти слова он не получил ответа и голодный ушел от порога профсоюза.

Командир 2 эскадрона Афанасий Сычев, ежели вы, Михаил Васильевич, его припомните, боролся в наших рядах, начиная с Корнилова и включая до разгрома Колчака и Врангеля. В 1921 году названный Сычев вернулся на родину, чтобы поправить здоровье и разоренное хозяйство, но хозяйства никакого не оказалось, так как на плане двора торчали лишь горелые пеньки. Когда летом 1918 г. Деникин занял нашу станицу, то в ряд с другими товарищами была повешена 60летняя мать Сычева, Авдотья Поликарповна. Жена его с перепугу из станицы убежала на хутор Лощилинский, где и вышла замуж за вдового казака.

Пришлось Афанасию со всеми своими бедами примириться. Принялся он, в силу партдисциплины, побивать бандитов; побивал их беспощадно до полного уничтожения и в камышах за войсковой греблей саморучно застрелил полковника Костецкого. Спустя сколько-то времени, за неимением капиталов, пошел Афанасий неприятелю батрачить К своему Гавриленке. Тайком от хозяина посещал он собрания ячейки, но тот дознался и выгнал его, крикнув на прощанье:

past year, and there are too many of you old ones."

"So what are we old ones supposed to do if the White counter-revolution didn't wipe us out?"

"The Union's not a poorhouse."

"So tell me: how many of your folks and relations do you have sitting in your branch offices and sub-branches?"

"Let me get on with my work, citizen."

"So in the land of my fathers you see me as something worse than a stepson, do you?" says Semyon Gorbatov, filled with impotent contempt.

To that he received no reply and left the Union office empty-handed.

Afanasy Sychyov, commander of the Second Squadron, if you remember, Mikhail Vasilyevich, fought in our ranks, starting when we was fighting Kornilov and including when we beat Kolchak and Wrangel. In 1921 the said Sychyov returned home to restore his health and fix up his ruined small-holding, but there was nothing left of it. Just a few burned stumps in the yard. In the summer of 1918 Denikin had occupied our *stanitsa*, ² and Sychyov's 60-year-old mother Avdotya Polikarpovna was hanged along with some other comrades. His wife fled in panic to the village of Loshchilinsky and married a widowed Cossack.

So Afanasy had to make the best of his troubles. Party discipline meant he went to work to lick the bandits, lick 'em mercilessly till they was completely crushed, and he shot Colonel Kostetsky with his own hand in the reedbed above the weir. Some while after that, not having no capital, Afanasy goes and takes up farm labour with his enemy Gavrilenko. Without telling his boss, he went to meetings of the Party cell, but Gavrilenko found out and kicked him out, shouting at him, "Out of my sight! If you like the Party cell so much, the Party cell can feed you."

² Anton Denikin (1872-1947): general, assumed command of the White Volunteer Army after Kornilov's death. *Stanitsa*: Cossack township.

¹ Lavr Kornilov (1870-1918): general, commanded the anti-Bolshevik forces in southern Russia. Alexander Kolchak (1874-1920): admiral and leader of the White movement. Executed by the Bolsheviks in February 1920. Pyotr Wrangel (1878-1928): commander-in-chief of White forces in southern Russia after Denikin.

Сгинь с глаз. Как ты привержен к ячейке, пускай тебя ячейка и кормит.

Определили Сычева сторожем при исполкоме, но и тут его стерегла неудача. пасху как большой любитель церковного звона залез он на колокольню и, для веселья сердца, позвонил в колокола. За таковую слабость Афанасий и был изгнан из партии, как «интеллигент, религиозными зараженный заблуждениями», а он двух слов подряд правильно написать не умеет и бога не признает с первых дней революции. Когда прочитал в газете об исключении, то бедняга заплакал и сказал:

 Орловские... Отрывают они сердце от тела.

Собрались мы несколько партийцев, описали геройские подвиги Афанасия при взятии Ставрополя, вспомнили атаку под Лисками, изложили в подробностях действия 2 эскадрона на польском фронте и все это послали в райком. В ответ ни звука. Шлем еще одно заявление и опять ни гу-гу.

Тут мы и задумались...

Али и впрямь орловские такую возымели силу, что ни с беднотой, ни с нами, рядовыми коммунистами, и разговаривать не хотят?

Похоже – так.

Посиживают они в холодочке, чаи гоняют, о массе не думают, сами себя выбирают, сами себе жалованье назначают.

Что же это за звери такие?

К концу гражданской войны, как вам, Михаил Васильевич, хорошо известно, красная сила толкнула и погнала из России белую силу. Хлынули насиженных мест графы и графята, буржуи и буржуята и так и далее, и так и далее. Главные тузы утекли за границу, а всякая шушера - князишки, купчишки, адвокатишки, офицеры, исправники - остались, как раки на мели, на кубанском берегу. Возвращаться в свои орловские губернии они побоялись - там их знали в лицо и поименно. Осели они у The executive committee took Sychyov on as a watchman, but here again disaster was lurking. He really loved the sound of church bells, so at Easter he climbs up the belfry and rings them to gladden his heart. For that weakness, he gets expelled from the Party, as an "intellectual infected with religious delusions", although he can't write two words properly and rejected God as soon as the revolution started. When he reads in the paper that he's been expelled the poor soul bursts into tears and says, "It's that lot from the North, from Oryol. They rip the heart out of you."

Some of us Party members got together and drew up an account of Afanasy's heroic deeds in the capture of Stavropol and the attack on Liski; we set down in detail all the action of 2nd Squadron on the Polish front and sent it off to the District Committee. Not a peep in reply. We sent another statement, and again not a word.

Then we fell to thinking ...

Maybe the Oryol lot really were so strong they couldn't be bothered even talking to the poor or the likes of us rank-and-file Communists.

That's what it looked like.

They was sitting taking their ease, brewing tea, not thinking of the masses, electing themselves and setting their own pay rates.

What sort of creatures were they?

As you well know, Mikhail Vasilyevich, by the end of the Civil War the Red forces had kicked the White forces out of Russia. All the lords and lordlings and bourgeois and their brats and so on and so on had fled their lofty perches and run away abroad, and all kinds of riff-raff – princelings, merchants, pettifogging lawyers, officers, priests and police inspectors were left behind like so many stranded crabs on the bank of the Kuban. They was too scared to go back to Oryol, where everybody knew them. So they settled here and found themselves places in councils, trusts, the Party, in schools, cooperatives and so on and so on. Our local contras, who did all they could to harm us

нас и полезли в советы, в тресты, в партию, в школу, в кооперацию и так и далее, и так и далее. Не отставали от них и местные контры, которые при белой власти вредили нам сколько могли. Все они хорошо грамотны и на язык востры — для каждого нашлось местечко, а куда орловский втерся, туда еще не одного однокашника за собой протащит.

В станице нашей на 30.000 населения — 800 здоровых и калечных красных партизан. В ячейке 40 человек: партизан 4 (когда-то нас было 9); вдовакрасноармейка 1; рабочий с элеватора 1; батраков 2; подростков 7; присланных из края 5; орловских и сочувствующих им 22.

Откуда орловским знать, с какой отвагой защищали мы революцию? Когда-то станица выставила два конных полка и батальон пехоты. В юрте нашем есть хутора, откуда все с мальчишек и до дряхлых дедов отступали с красными.

Время идет, время катится...

Сычев до того дожился, что харкает кровью и кормится при тетке из жалости.

Орловские все глубже пускают корень. Дети их лезут в комсомол, а внуки в барабанщики. Таких комсомольцев мы зовем золочеными орешками. Орловские нас судят и рядят, орловские ковыряют нам глаза за несознательность, орловские нас учат и мучат. Мы перед ними и дураки, и виноваты кругом, и должники неоплатные...

Эх, Михаил Васильевич, взять бы их на густые решета...

Описываем нашу жизнь дальше.

Боец Егор Марченко живет попрежнему в своей бедной хижине, так как дворца ему не досталось, хотя и много покорил он земель и городов. Живет с той лишь разницей, что раньше было у него when the Whites held power, weren't far behind. They could all read and write well and had the gift of the gab. They all set themselves up nicely, and where one Oryol man found himself a nice spot he brought all his mates along as well.

In our *stanitsa*, out of a population of 30,000, there are 800 Red partisans, fit and maimed. Our Party cell is 42 strong: that's 4 partisans (used to be 9); 1 Red Army widow; 1 granary worker; 2 farm labourers; 7 youngsters; 5 sent in from the district; and 22 from Oryol with their sympathisers.

How are those Oryol people to know how valiantly we defended the revolution? At one time our *stanitsa* fielded two regiments of horse and a battalion of foot. There are villages where all the menfolk from young lads to feeble old men retreated with the Reds.

Time passes, time rolls by ...

Sychyov reached the point where he was hawking up blood, and his aunt was feeding him out of pity.

The Oryol lot are putting down deep roots. Their children are getting ahead in the Komsomol, and their grandchildren in the Young Pioneers as drummers.³ They're the kind of Komsomols we call gilded toffs ... It's Oryol who lays down the law, tells us to be more politically aware and deals out lessons and punishment. To them we're all stupid and to blame for everything and don't pay our debts ...

Yes, Mikhail Vasilyevich, we ought to put 'em right through the wringer ... 4

Here's some more about the way we live.

Yegor Marchenko, the soldier, is back living in his shabby old cabin, since he didn't get himself a palace, although he'd captured lots of territory and towns. The only difference is that, before, he had that bit of property to call his own, even if it was small,

³ Komsomol: the Communist Youth Organization. Young Pioneers: a mass organization for children, overseen by the Komsomol.

⁴ The uncommon expression used here was repeated by Mikhail Sholokhov, quoting Vesyoly, in a letter dated July 1929. Sholokhov denounced the new policies being applied to the peasants and the confiscation of their "surplus" grain. The letter was passed in edited form to Stalin. See Sholokhov M. A. – Levitskoy E. G., 18 iyunya – 2 iyulya 1929. http://sholohov.lit-info.ru/sholohov/pisma/letter18.htm (accessed 22 March 2022).

хотя и небольшое, но свое хозяйство, а ныне в погоне за куском ходит в плотничьей артели, имеет топор, пилу да полны горсти мозолей. Только сын Спартак поднимает дух Егора, а так хоть и глаза домой не кажи – теща ругает, жена ругает, прямо поедом едят. Иногда отгрызнется Егор, а чаще бывает – припрут его, и он, не находя ответа, убегает ночевать к кому-нибудь из приятелей.

И в самом-то деле, оглянешься назад, вспомнишь, сколько мы страху приняли, сколько своей и чужой крови пролили, – и чего же добились?

Землю есть не будешь, а обрабатывать ее и не на чем, и нечем. Из 6 купленных станицей тракторов 2 достались кулакам, 1 совхозу, 1 колхозу и 2 куплены середняцким товариществом. Плывет изпод бедняка завоеванная земля кулаку в аренду.

Много оголодавшего народа уходит в города на заработки.

Газеты пишут, что Москва отпускает на поддержку бедняцких хозяйств большие рубли. До нас докатываются одни истертые гроши, да и то редко.

От большой семьи вахмистра Бабенко осталась в живых одна старуха Печониха. Самого Бабенка. как вы. Михаил Васильевич, помните, белые зарубили под Царицыным. Старший сын его – Павел, командовавший бронепоездом «Гроза», геройски взорвал себя, не желая предаваться врагу. Младший сын Василий погиб в горах Чечни от тифу, а дочь Груню на глазах у матери казаки занасиловали до смерти. Ходит Печониха с холщовым мешком под окнами и выпрашивает милостыню у тех богатеев-казаков, которые занасиловали ее дочь и загнали в могилу мужа и двух сынов. В прошлом году мы выхлопотали старухе пенсию в 6 р. 50 к. Три раза ходила она в район и не могла получить. Орловские отовсюду гнали ее неграмотную, и ни один сукин сын не захотел войти в ее несчастье, и никого не and now he goes around with a team of carpenters to keep the wolf from the door. He owns an axe, a saw and two fists full of calluses. Only his son Spartak keeps Yegor's spirits up. Otherwise, he'd best not show his face at home: his mother-in-law scolds him, his wife scolds him – they'd eat him alive. Sometimes he snaps back at them but mostly he's under their thumb and when he can't come up with an answer he runs off and spends the night at some friend's place.

And really, when you look back and remember the fear we went through, and all the blood we shed, our own and others', where did it get us?

You can't eat land, and we've nothing to work it with. Out of 6 tractors the *stanitsa* bought, the kulaks got 2, the state farm 1, the collective farm 1, and the association of middling peasants bought 2. Any land the poor peasants won is rented to the kulaks.

A lot of starving folk are going off to town to try and make a living.

The newspapers say that Moscow is allocating lots of roubles to support poor farmers. What trickles down to us is just worn-out pennies, and that not often.

Of Sergeant-Major Babenko's big family, only his old widow Pechonikha is still alive. As you will recall, Mikhail Vasilyevich, Babenko himself was cut to pieces by the Whites at Tsaritsyn. His elder son Pavel, who commanded the "Thunderstorm" armoured train, heroically blew himself up, rather than surrender to the enemy. His younger son Vasily died of typhus in the mountains of Chechnya, and some Cossacks raped his daughter Grunya to death before her mother's eyes. Pechonikha takes a canvas sack and begs for handouts under the windows of the same rich Cossacks who raped her daughter and drove her husband and two sons into the grave. Last year we took some trouble and got her a pension of 6.50 roubles. She went to the district office three times for it, and couldn't get it. The Oryol crowd chased her out for being illiterate and not a single son of a bitch would put himself in her position and

тронуло горе ее... Казаки редко кто подаст корку хлеба, больше надсмехаются — не могут они забыть, что Бабенко сам был природный казак и все-таки пошел за красных. От великого горя и обиды старуха стала полусумасшедшей, голова ее поседела и трясется, мальчишки дразнят ее трясучкой. Жалко ее нам, старым партизанам, но чем поможешь? Сами варим щи из крапивы, да и то через день.

Наш уважаемый старичок Черевков, израненный в схватках лихих за совет, ослеп, и ноги больше не держат хилого тела. В память о повешенной снохе и в память о сыне Дмитре, испустившем дыхание на офицерском штыке, осталось старику пятно от рода, то есть внучек Федька. Ночуют они где придется и кормятся кое-как. Вешает Федька деду на плечо бандуру и ведет его по базарам и трактирам. Старика кругом на сто верст знают. Сядет он в толпе, ударит по струнам перерубленной в бою рукой и дребезжащим голосом запоет:

Слышу, как будто, грохочут удары Прошлой войны, и тоска Живо рисует вам страсть и кошмары. В бурунах пустыни песка Красных героев рассыпаны кости, Жизнь положивших в бою...

Кончились схватки, домой воротился К участи горькой такой. Старый, седой никуда не годился Всеми забытый герой...

Кто испытал гражданскую войну, на ком горят еще раны, того эта песня до слез

they're all unmoved by her plight. A Cossack will hardly ever give her a crumb. Mostly they just make fun of her. They can't forget that Babenko was a native Cossack himself but still joined the Reds. The old woman's gone half mad with grief and resentment. Her hair's gone grey and she shakes, so small boys call her "Shaky". We old partisans feel sorry for her, but what can we do? We're reduced to making nettle soup ourselves, and that only every other day.

Our old respected Cherevkov, who was wounded in fierce fighting for the Soviets, has gone blind and his legs won't hold up his ailing body. All the old man has left to remind him of his daughter-in-law, who was hanged, and his son Dmitro, who breathed his last on the point of an officer's bayonet, is his grandson Fedya, the last of all his kin. They spend their nights wherever they can and eat anything they can get. Fedya hangs a bandura round his grandad's neck and leads him round the markets and inns.⁵ The old fellow's known for a hundred versts around. He sits himself down with a crowd round him, plucks the strings with a hand deformed in the fighting, and strikes up a song in his thin trembling voice:

Thundering echoes of past warlike actions Are borne to my ears on the air.

Longing paints clearly our nightmares and passions.

The sands of the desert lay bare

The scattered remains of our gloried Red heroes,

Who laid down their lives in the fray.

.....

The fighting is over and home is the hero, Home to a sorrowful fate.

Grey-haired and old and condemned to be useless,

Abandoned by all to his fate.

Anyone who was in the Civil War or still has burning wounds from it will be moved to

_

⁵ Bandura: Ukrainian stringed folk instrument, also known as kobza.

прошибает. И бросают, бросают старику медяки, а иные язвят: «Довоевался».

Много крови, много горя... На всей Кубани и одной хаты не найдешь, которая не была бы задета войной. Все воевали. Михаил Васильевич, кто топчет надежды наши? Или разливали мы кровь свою ни за-нет? Или, утратив силу в огне, кровью своей оконфужены?

Где-то И кто-то разъезжает ПО санаториям и курортам, а у нас в этом году на лечение 28 красных инвалидов совет ассигновал 47 рубликов. Прикинь, дорогой наш командир, по скольку это выйдет на голову. «Для нашего излечения, сказал как-то страдающий ревматизмом бывший чекист Абросимов, - жалеют кубанской грязи, а ведь мы ее, эту грязь, своей кровью замесили».

Было время, мы протаптывали для дорогой советской власти первые кровавые тропы, а теперь она забывает нас. Али Печониха и старичок Черевков не стоят маленького сожаления и товарищеской любви?

Кавалер золотого оружия Федор Подобедов, командовавший в разное время эскадроном, кавполком и бригадой в 20 году, памятным всем нам приказом РВС был отстранен от командования по несоответствию. А кто первым выступил на защиту молодой советской власти? Федор Подобедов. Кто, не жалея здоровья и не щадя жизни, гонялся по камышам за повстанцами-казаками?

Федор Подобедов! Кто под Фундуклеевкой вырубил три сотни махновцев? Федор Подобедов со своей бригадой. Он хотя и неграмотный, но многие ученые генералы и бандиты не знали, куда от него бежать.

tears by that song. But they just toss the old man a few coppers, and some sneer: "See where all his fighting spirit got him."

Too much blood, too much sorrow ... In all of the Kuban you won't find one home untouched by war. Everyone was in it. Who's trampling our hopes into the ground, Mikhail Vasilyevich? Or did we shed our blood for nothing? Or have we burned up all our strength in the furnace and addled our blood as well?

Some people are swanning around sanatoriums and rest homes somewhere, while this year the Soviet allocated just 47 miserable roubles to treat 28 Red cripples. What does that come to per head, dear commander? Abrosimov, the former Chekist who's suffering from rheumatism, 6 once said: "They won't give out as much as a bit of Kuban mud to treat us, and we're the ones who mixed our blood in it."

Time was when we was taking our first bloody steps towards getting a government of our beloved Soviets, and now that government's forgetting all about us. Don't old Pechonikha and Cherevkov deserve a bit of sympathy and comradely love?

Fyodor Podobedov, holder of the St George's Cross for valour, who commanded a cavalry squadron, then a regiment, then a brigade in 1920, was removed from his command as unsuitable, by order of the Revolutionary Military Council, as we all remember. And who was the first to step forward and defend the young Soviet regime? Fyodor Podobedov. And who hunted the Cossack rebels through the reedbeds, unsparing of himself or his health? Fyodor Podobedov. Who cut down three hundred of Makhno's men at Funkuleyevka? 7 Fyodor Podobedov and his brigade. Even though he was illiterate, any number of educated generals and bandits didn't know how to get out of his way.

_

⁶ Chekist: member of the Cheka, the Extraordinary Commission for the Struggle against Counter-Revolution, forerunner of the GPU, OGPU, NKVD and KGB. The term "Chekist" remained in use to denote members of the successor organizations.

⁷ Nestor Makhno (1888-1934): leader of anarchist forces in southern Russia and Ukraine.

Не мимо говорит пословица: «Лаял Серко – нужен был, а стар стал – со двора вон».

Препоручили Федору должность базарного распорядителя, но ему, как мужчине красивому молодому, стыдным показалось расставлять порядок возы и собирать с торговок гривенники. К тому же и знакомые станичане зло насмехались над красным командиром, дослужившимся до метлы. Послужил он неделю, пришел в исполком, сорвал с груди медную бляху базарного распорядителя и бросил председателю под ноги.

Покрутился-покрутился наш Федор и с горя запил. Потом назначили его в территориальную часть завхозом. К тому времени он уже окончательно пристрастился к водочке и однажды промахнулся — пропил двух казенных лошадей.

Потянули его под суд.

Сколько-то просидел он в городской тюрьме, потом вызывают на допрос. И кого же он встречает? А встречает он в трибунале прапорщика Евтушевского.

Вспомните, Михаил Васильевич, бой под Кривой Музгой. Федор с полком стоял от нас левым флангом. Так вот тогда он и захватил в плен рыжего полковника и двух прапоров. Полковника, как водилось, отправили в штаб Духонина, а за прапоров заступился дурак эскадронный Еременко: «Вручить им,— говорит, — по кнуту и посадить ездовыми, пускай кобыл гоняют, а мы нал ними посмеемся».

И оставлены были оба прапорщика ездовыми в обозе второго разряда. Что с ними было потом — неизвестно, но война окончилась, и Евтушевский — вот он гад — незаменимый технический работник и следователь в трибунале. Сколько годов прошло, а сразу узнал Подобедова и с надменной улыбкой начал спрашивать:

Помнишь, товарищ Подобедов, Кривую Музгу? The old saying is spot on: "They needed Rover as long as he could bark, and kicked him out when he got old."

They gave Fyodor the job of managing the market stalls but, being a young and handsome fellow, he felt ashamed at having to arrange carts in order and collect kopecks from the market-women. Besides, the townsmen who knew him were laughing at the Red commander who'd been awarded the order of the broom. He worked at that job for a week, then went to the executive committee rooms, ripped off his badge of office and threw it at the chairman's feet.

Our Fyodor doesn't know where to turn next and takes to drink to drown his sorrows. Then they made him bursar in a rear unit. By that time his drinking habit had a firm hold on him, and once he went too far – he sold two army horses for vodka.

He was hauled before a court and spent some time in the local lock-up before being called out for questioning. And who should he meet on the tribunal? Warrant Officer Yevtushevsky.

You will remember the battle at Krivaya Muzga, Mikhail Vasilyevich. Fyodor and his regiment were on our left flank. There he took three prisoners: a red-haired colonel and two warrant officers. They sent the colonel off to Dukhonin's staff office, following regulations, and that fool Yeremenko, the troop commander, spoke up for the warrant officers: "Give 'em a whip each and use 'em as drivers. They can drive some mares while we have a laugh at 'em."

So they were both made drivers in a rearsupply column. What became of them later I don't know, but the war ended, and that snake Yevtushevsky becomes an irreplaceable technical worker and investigator on the tribunal. All those years have passed, but he recognises Podobedov at once, and starts questioning him, with this high-and-mighty smirk on his lips:

"You remember Krivaya Muzga, Comrade Podobedov."

- Помню.
- Помнишь, как все вы издевались надо мной?
 - Помню.
- Почему же такое, товарищ, был ты революционером, а стал конокрадом?

Разволновались в красном герое нервы, затрясся он от злости, но промолчал.

– Помнишь, – спрашивает опять следователь, – поход на Маныч? Косяки калмыцких лошадей гнали за собой, а тут и двух пропить не разрешают... Не восемнадцатый, верно, годочек?

Не стерпел Федор таковых слов, выхватил у конвойного шашку и, потянувшись через стол, нарушил тишину — зарубил того незаменимого Евтушевского прямо в мягком кресле.

Дальше-больше, слышим, ушел Федор за Кубань в горы и увел за собой обиженных бойцов Коростелева, Хвороста, Шевеля, Сердечного, нашего батарейца Разумовского, Круглякова Гришку, что зарубил в поединке под гвардейского Каялом полковника. пулеметчиков Табаева И Калайду, однорукого Курепина, старика Бузинова, милиционеров Моисенку и Колпакова, бойцов Есина, Кабанова, Кошубу, Соченко и Назарку Коцаря. Долгое время бандиты гуляли по Закубанью – жгли совхозы, громили советы, вырезали коммунистов и комсомольцев, поезда грабили. Батальон ГПУ с помощью нас, местных коммунистов, хорошо знающих местность, расколотил банду, но самого Подобедова так и не удалось взять. Турции Недавно ИЗ прислал брательнику письмо: клянет советскую власть и сообщает, что с курдами ему и то жить приятнее.

Горько и прискорбно...

Мы остались в живых по нашему счастью или по нашему несчастью. Тлеем в глухих углах, как искры далекого пожара, и гаснем.

"Yes."

"Remember how you lot all laughed at me?"

"Yes."

"How come you, comrade, a former revolutionary, became a horse thief?"

Our Red hero's nerves were on edge and he was shaking with rage, but he kept quiet.

"You remember the Manych campaign?" asks his interrogator. "We was driving herds of Kalmyk mares along, and nobody gave us permission to sell two horses for drink ... That would have been in 1918, wouldn't it?"

That was too much for Fyodor. He grabs his escort's sabre, reaches across the table, breaking his silence, and cuts the irreplaceable Yevtushevsky to pieces right there in his easy chair.

It gets worse. We hear that Fyodor's gone off to the Kuban, taking with him some exsoldiers with a grudge: Korostelev, Khvorost, Shevel, Serdechny, our gunner Razumovsky, Grishka Kruglyakov, who cut down a colonel of the Guards in a duel at Kayal, the machinegunners Tabayev and Kalaida, one-armed Kurepin, old Buzinov, the policemen Moisenko and Kolpakov, and the soldiers Yesin, Kabanov, Koshuba, Sochenko and Nazarka Kotsar. For a long time the bandits roved over the southern Kuban region, burning state farms, sacking Soviets, killing Communists and Komsomols and robbing trains. A GPU battalion,8 with help from us, the local Communists who knew the lie of the land, broke up the gang, but didn't manage to catch Podobedov himself. Not long ago he sent his brother a letter from Turkey cursing the Soviet regime and saying he was better off living with the Kurds.

It's a sad and sorry business.

For better or for worse, we got through it alive. We smoulder away in dark corners, like what's left of some distant fire, fading away.

-

⁸ GPU: State Political Directorate. See Note 6 above.

Старая партизанская гвардия редеет. Кто стал торговцем, кто бандитом, иные, как жуки, зарылись в землю и ничего дальше кучки своего дерьма не видят и видеть не желают, многих сломила нужда и, когда-то разившие грозного врага, теперь на мирном положении сами попадают в плен к кулакам.

Начальник конной разведки Яков Келень, при поддержке тестя, сумел обзавестись богатым хозяйством и не считает нас больше своими товарищами. Весной из города приезжал сотрудник истпарта и со всех нас, революционных бойцов, отбирал гром преданий о похождениях наших. Яков Келень не захотел с ним разговаривать и сказал только одно: «В Красной Армии я никогда не служил».

Как же так, спросите вы, Михаил Васильевич, али совсем нет в станице живых людей?

Есть, есть умные и понимающие люди, да только у одного руки коротки, у другого совесть сера, этот рад – пригрелся и жалованье получает, тот глядит, как бы хозяйство свое приумножить, пятый бывает сознательным только на собраниях, десятый и рад бы чего-нибудь хорошее сделать, да один не может.

Взять хотя бы секретаря нашей ячейки Маркина. Деляга парень – плакаты рисует, лозунги пишет, диаграммы составляет, уголки организовывает, на всех собраниях выступает, полы в ячейке и то сам моет: расходам экономия, - а на бархатное знамя и на приветственные телеграммы за израсходовали больше двухсот рублей. Попадешься Маркину на глаза и сейчас он сноровит разграфить тебя и занести в какой-нибудь список. Троицын день встал на паперти и давай считать, сколько верующих заходит в церковь: для отчета. Старухи разодрали на нем рубаху и прогнали от церкви. На лекции или вечере обязательно перепишет, сколько присутствует The ranks of the old partisan guard are thinning. Some have gone into trade, some are gangsters, some have burrowed into the ground like beetles and can't see nothing beyond a heap of their own turds, and don't want to. Lots have fallen on hard times, and men who were once the terror of a fierce enemy now in peacetime are themselves falling captive to the kulaks.

Yakov Kelen, chief of the mounted scouts, with his father-in-law's support, has managed to get himself a wealthy farm and no longer sees us as his comrades. Last spring a Party historian came from the city and tried to strip away the glory of all our exploits as fighters for the revolution. Yakov Kelen wouldn't talk to him; he just said, "I never served in the Red Army."

You'll be asking, Mikhail Vasilyevich, how it's possible, and ain't there no living souls at all left in the *stanitsa*?

Yes, there are some with brains who understand things, but some have no power to do anything, others have uneasy consciences; some have found themselves cushy jobs and get a wage, some are looking for ways to add to their property, some are politically aware only at meetings, and others might be glad to do something useful but can't do it alone.

Take our branch secretary Markin, for example. The lad's an eager beaver, draws posters, writes slogans, drafts diagrams, organises propaganda sections, speaks at every meeting, washes the branch floors himself. He keeps an eye on expenses, but over 200 roubles went on a velvet banner and welcome telegrams in one year. If Markin so much as catches sight of you, he'll have you classified and in a box or list in no time. Last Whitsun he stood at the church door and counted all the believers coming in: for a report. The old women ripped the shirt off his back and chased him out. At any lecture or talk he'll be sure to list how many men, women and young people are present, their age, occupation, and how much property they

мужчин, женщин и подростков, скольку им лет, чем занимаются, велико ли хозяйство. Из-за этой самой переписки многих теперь и насильно не затащишь в Народный дом. Прочитает Маркин газету и в дневник запишет: «Столько-то минут потрачено на читку». Подметет комнату, заправит лампу и опять в дневник. Пойдет столовку обедать, поговорит запишет: «Выдано станичниками И столько-то и таких-то справок». Не поймешь, по дурости он это творит или от великого усердия - службист, сукин сын, как бывалошный фельдфебельишка из учебной команды. Живет на свое бедное жалованье плохо и вообще такой же пенек, как и мы, но все старается возвыситься над нами, а чуть что – грозит.

Или вот другой наш вождь — заведующий кооперацией, бывший кузнец Евтихий Воловод. Закрыл глаза портфелем, прибил, гад, на кабинетной двери лозунг: «Без доклада не входить».

За что мы, Михаил Васильевич, воевали – за кабинеты или за комитеты?

Евтихий Живет капитаншей Курмояровой, которую он забрал в плен под селом Кабардинкой, где, как тебе, дорогой товарищ, известно, мы прижали убегающих деникинцев К морю вырубили их там счетом шесть тысяч. В самый разгар боя Воловод набросил на капитаншу – она сидела на возу – набросил бурку и сказал: «Моя. Никто не моги до нее коснуться – застрелю». Не дожидаясь окончания войны, уволок он ее в станицу, и поживают они с этих пор на шее советской власти и ох не скажут. В усадьбе у них стоит раскрашенный в две краски сортир на замке. Сходит в тот сортир сам хозяин и на ключ запрет. Сходит хозяйка и опять запрет. Кухарка с кучером на огород бегают. Евтихий партийную школу кончил, потом какие-то курсы кончил, теперь нас уму-разуму учит. Oн нам про строительство социализма, а мы ему про сортир напомним, он про хозяйственный рост страны, а мы про то, что жрать нечего, а у own. Because of that, wild horses won't drag many out to the House of the People. Markin will read from a newspaper and make a note in the minutes: "X minutes devoted to reading." He'll sweep the room, fix the lamp, and make a note in the journal. He'll go to the canteen for lunch, chat with some townsfolk and write down: "X roubles spent and information dispensed." Is it because he's not too bright, or just so keen, you can't make out. Loves his red tape, the son of a bitch, like that little sergeant-major from the training team. Hardly gets by on his miserable pay, and he's just as dim as the rest of us, but keeps trying to put himself above us, and starts breathing down your neck at the first sign of anything..

Or take that other chief of ours, Yevtikhy Volovod, the former blacksmith who runs the co-op sector. He hides his face behind his briefcase, the snake, and pins a note on his office door: "No Unannounced Admittance".

What did we fight for, Mikhail Vasilyevich? For offices and committees?

Yevtikhy lives with Captain Kurmoyar's wife. He captured her at the village of Kabardinka, where, as you know, dear comrade, we pushed Denikin's fleeing army to the coast and slaughtered 6,000 of 'em. In the heat of the battle, Volovod threw a burka over the captain's wife – she was sitting on a cart - and said: "She's mine! I'll shoot anyone who touches her!" Without waiting for the war to end, he hauls her off to the stanitsa, and from that day on they've been sponging off the Soviet regime and living in clover. In the garden they have this two-toned outhouse with a lock on it. The owner visits it, comes out and locks it behind him. His missus visits it and locks it again, while the cook and the driver have to run to the vegetable patch. Yevtikhy finished the Party school, then took some other courses, and now thinks he can teach us something. He tells us about building socialism, and we remind him of that outhouse, he talks about the economic development of the country, and we tell him there's nothing to eat, and he

него полон двор птицы, поросят, две коровы, жнейка, косилка, четыре собственных лошади. «Вы, - кричит, разложившийся элемент, в текущей политике ни уха, ни рыла не понимаете, мертвый груз нашем коммунистическом корабле». «Чего же спрашиваем, делать, куда деваться?» «Газеты читайте центральные и краевые, и окружные, и местную стенную». «Hac, хором отвечаем мы, - на всю жизнь Деникин выучил, еще десять лет не будем ни одной газеты читать, а понять, чего надо, все поймем». И тут спускаем мы штаны, заворачиваем рубахи и показываем раны раны стреляные, колотые, следы ШОМПОЛОВ нагаек. Насчет газет. понятно, сгоряча брякнем, ну да все равно...

На первое мая вечером, после речей и парада, вышли МЫ радостные прогуляться, наша скоро но радость помрачнела. На площади в окнах – большой свет: «Кафе-ресторан Президиум». Подходим ближе заглядываем в окна через занавески. На столах жратва и вина всевозможные. Музыканты играют, и по залу в обнимку с девками и с базарными торговками танцуют те, кто еще недавно говорил нам секретарь исполкома, нечесе, фининспектора, землемера, лва прикащики из хлебопродукта и славный наш кооператор Евтихий Воловод.

Скрепя сердце мы отошли.

Голоса наши когда-то гремели на кровавых полях, а нонче они робко звучат в стенах канцелярий. Много погибло наших дорогих товарищей, но о них и помину нет местной властью. защитников и завоевателей, восхваляют и призывают только большим праздникам, да когда в нос колет - во какой-нибудь проведения кампании, а потом опять отсовывают в темный Закомиссарились угол. властью. Ежели прохвосты, опьянели таковые и впредь останутся у руля, то has a yard full of poultry, piglets, two cows, a reaper-and-binder and four horses of his own. "You lot," he yells, "are degenerates! You don't know nothing about politics. You're a dead weight on our Communist ship." "So what are we to do?" we ask. "Where do we turn?" "Read the papers! The central press, the regional and district press and the wall newspaper." We answer as one: "Denikin taught us one lesson for life: we won't read another newspaper for another ten years. But we'll understand what we need to understand." With that we drop our breeches, pull up our shirts and show our stab wounds and bullet wounds and the scars we carry from floggings. About the papers, we were a bit hasty of course, but what does it matter?

On May Day, in the evening, after the speeches and parade, we go out for a stroll, as happy as can be, but our happiness is very soon clouded. In the square we see this big sign lit up in some windows: "Presidium Café and Restaurant". We go up close and look in through the curtains: tables groaning with grub and all sorts of wine. A band's playing, and the lot who was speechifying to us just now are waltzing about the floor with tarts and market-women in their arms: the executive committee secretary, financial inspectors, two surveyors, some salesmen from the bakery and our glorious co-op manager Yevtikhy Volovod.

We went on our way with heavy hearts.

Time was when our voices thundered over fields of blood, but nowadays they whisper timidly in office walls. Many of our dear comrades perished, but our local authorities never mention them. We the defenders and conquerors get praised and called on only on major holidays, and when they're feeling the heat, when there's some sort of campaign on. Then they shove us back into our dark corner. A bunch of scoundrels drunk with power are playing at being commissars. If their type stay at the helm, our republic will still be

наша республика еще сто лет будет лечить licking its wounds in a hundred years, and раны и не залечит.

Ждем ответного письма. С товарищеским приветом.

1928. (Подписи.) they won't have healed. Awaiting your reply.

With comradely greetings,

1928 (Signed)

Ответ командира будет напечатан в гвардии».

The commander's reply will be published одном из ближайших номеров «Молодой in a forthcoming issue of *Molodaya gvardiya*.

[1929] [1929]