

**“Spanners in the Wrong Works”: Translating Dmitry Golyenko**

**Jacob Edmond and Cilla McQueen**

*Dmitry Golyenko*

**Tension Rises**

high tension  
you will contrive to play with us  
bends over, to  
fix on one point

a pantomime character  
got toasted in the sun  
none too soon  
intoxication sets in

---

to raise tension  
blow the nose, a dried fruit  
wrinkled is chewed  
and the gruel crawls out

in due course, what in a goddess  
doesn't satisfy a mortal is  
a bad smell acquired by her  
through self-contempt

---

tension will rise, should  
you get the hots for, try it  
those loosened by paradontosis  
masticate in the subconscious

impresses an attraction  
not to the usual filth, such as  
blah, blah, to the particular  
rhythm tapped out

---

envy raises tension  
pissing envious  
where slops on the sly

*Дмитрий Голыенко*

**Напряжение повышается**

напряженье высокое  
вы сыграть сумеете с нами  
наклоняется над, чтобы  
уставиться в одну точку

опереточный персонаж  
перегрелся на солнце  
чуть позже, чем бы хотелось  
опьянение наступает

---

чтоб напряженье повысит  
надо высморкаться, сухофрукт  
сморщенный разжеван  
и кашица выползает

своим чередом, что в богине  
не устраивает смертного, это  
дурной запах, ею приобретенный  
от пренебреженья к себе

---

напряженье повысится, если  
втрескаться в, попробуйте  
расшатанные пародонтозом  
пережевывают, в подсознанку

впечаталось влечение  
не к обычной пакости, типа  
тыры-пыры, к особенному  
дробь отбарабанили

---

напряжение повышает зависть  
писающая кипятком туда  
где втихаря помои

stream together

pulverized spanners  
in the wrong works, still  
in the company the joker  
started his own bullshit

---

tension rises when the beam  
of the searchlight goes blind, over their faces  
the punch spreads  
a small haematoma cloud

completely off his head he  
got his brains set so straight, turned  
all eyes on himself, having butted the punching bag  
the fist moved back

---

the tension is increased by the weather,  
slushy, a small piebald pooch  
whimpers, pink tongue  
roughens

in the moment of licking  
unknown things, they bought  
lots of booze and by agreement  
without twisting arms

---

heightened tension threatens  
in the anger of a being of the highest ranks  
or a wench's laughter, gathering strength  
from its habit of helplessness

to achieve a good chunk  
chopped off, enough  
to smooth out the place of removal  
and level what is unnecessary

12–16 February 2004

### Excellent Quality

1.  
a drink of excellent quality  
refreshing quenches thirst  
only by halves, a hot cheap standby  
bodes a worthless holiday  
in an Asian hole they look sullen  
at what remains from the powerful  
shakeup from the overcoming of the force  
of circumstances, from the incessant  
efforts, from the girls  
leaping into bed, from the first attempt  
or after half a year of courting

сливают в них же самих

перемолотые кости  
не в том горле, еще живехонек  
в компании приколист  
завел свое трали-вали

---

напряженье повысится, когда луч  
прожектора слепнет, по мордасам  
данный тумак растекается  
облачком гематомы

на всю голову трахнутому  
так вправили мозги, и весь внимание  
обратил на себя, грушу боднув  
кулак двинулся в обратную

---

напряженье повысит погода  
слякотная, песик с подпалинами  
поскуливает, розовый язык  
приобретает шероховатость

в момент облизывания  
незнакомых вещей, накопили  
винища и по согласию  
без выкручивания рук

---

повышением напряженья грозит  
гнев существа из разряда высших  
или бабский смех, набирающий силу  
от привычки к беспомощности

чтобы просечь, откуда оттяпан  
кусман хороший, достаточно  
место отъема подглядить  
и ненужное подравнять

12–16 февраля 2004 года

### Превосходное качество

1  
превосходного качества напиток  
прохладительный утоляет жажду  
только наполовину, горящая путевка  
обещает прогарный отпуск  
в азиатской дырени, смотрят букой  
на то, что осталось от мощной  
встряски, от преодоления силы  
обстоятельств, от непрерывных  
стараний, от прыгающих в постель  
девчонок, с первого захода  
иль после полгода ухаживаний

too lazy to get off your bum, and its cheeks  
when what you saw enters without ceremony  
thickly smeared with snot

2.  
a stop-work of excellent quality  
of manpower brings an outdated sector  
of the economy to the eyes  
of passers-by, an obscenity  
universally understood is vented  
from the lips of a passerby, a woman  
tells a man seriously  
that she doesn't need him, a confession of treason  
extorted by force  
in a southern holiday resort brings  
relief to no one, a legislator  
is caught at the moment of receiving a bribe  
grumpily desires a woman,  
that the strike continue, that the sensor not lie

3  
a sheath of excellent quality  
raises the level of friction, a wet slipcover  
improves the quality of a hard-on to  
the absolute, strong-willed efforts  
cause a qualitative improvement  
in sensation, a particular climate  
is created, thus a Molotov cocktail  
collared with gusto one  
caterpillar track of a tank, and then the other  
a rolled up mattress protector forms  
a mound, behind it a qualitative reduction  
in activity, the risk factor makes one get out another slip-on  
from the chest of drawers, a piece  
of meat is roasted in the frying pan

4  
hopelessness of excellent quality  
elevates the standard of living  
by one grade, tamara  
sucks the demon off, we have  
solicitations aplenty, including sexual ones,  
in the zone of disasters, there were Vikings  
in our day, the stolen time  
of a meeting with a sweetheart at the city hall underneath the clock  
goes to someone else, a nonchalant southerner  
lifts up her smooth legs with dimples  
of fine hair, such that between the  
hairs is a white mass  
of gratitude, having seen enough  
of all kinds of filth, they brush off from an eyelash

лень оторвать и зад, и двоезадые  
когда сильно перемазанное соплями  
входит что видел без церемоний

2  
превосходного качества забастовка  
рабочей силы отсталый сектор  
экономики поднимает в глазах  
прохожих, понятное ежу  
матерное выражение срывается  
с губ прохожего, женщина  
говорит мужчине серьезно  
что он ей не нужен, вырванное  
силой признание в измене  
на южном курорте никому не приносит  
облегчение, законодатель  
пойман в момент получения взятки  
раздраженно желает женщину, забастовку  
чтобы продолжалась, не врал бы сенсор

3  
превосходного качества насадка  
повышает уровень трения, мокрый чехольчик  
качество стояка до абсолюта  
доводит, волевые усилия  
вызывают качественное улучшение  
ощутимости, климат особый  
создается, так Молотова коктейль  
смачно захомутал одну  
гусеницу танка, затем другую  
скатанный наматрасник бугор  
образует, за ним качественное понижение  
активности, фактор риска еще чехол  
заставляет извлечь из комода, кусок  
мяса на сковородке ужарен

4  
превосходного качества безнадега  
способствует росту уровня жизни  
еще на одну отметку, тамара  
отсасывает у демона, домогательств  
в том числе сексуальных, у нас пруд  
пруды в зоне бедствий, были же викинги  
в наши годы, украденное время  
встречи с милой у мэрии под часами  
достается другому, безразличная южанка  
задирает бритые ноги с рябью  
мелких волосиков, то, что между  
ворсинок есть белая масса  
признательности, насмотревшись  
всякой гадости, смахивают с ресницы

5  
intimacy of excellent quality  
in relations with a local, inexpensive  
floozy, at quarter to nine, takes for an  
hour, a solvent relaxation  
beats a holiday without a penny  
a light smoke, heavy on the lungs  
will be bought on the spot, many years of service  
raises the quality of the service  
by fifty percent, intimacy advantageously  
sold lock, stock and barrel,  
lies groaning, a raised rate  
beats off the desire to pay up  
a pricelist in supplementary pleasures,  
it is shameful to shit oneself

6  
a corncob of excellent quality  
spoiled slightly by salt  
finely ground, a tin can of spinach  
touched by mould, a native of the southern  
republics setting up a scam  
for his market clients, a shaggy youth  
hastily drags to the registry office his first  
negative experience, an inventory taker  
disregards the distortions  
in the overheads, the scrubbed floor  
in the hall of the hotel reflects  
the disastrous state of those who have just arrived,  
an inhalation on an empty stomach  
is breathed out with a vile squeak

7  
the impersonality of excellent quality  
of language, spoken by a chick  
with a short hairdo, makes one sick  
of hearing it, a clip downloaded from a paysite  
with hardcore porn gets ahead of coitus  
by two to three seconds, time is a poor guide  
when it comes to a flannelette blanket  
rolled up at one's legs of such a shape  
that you lick your fingers, evil thoughts  
exited in formation from non-Euclidian  
space, shall I feel someone up, a crime  
against morality is also a choice  
between two evils, in order that the broken impersonality  
of language led to some kind of perfection

8  
putty of excellent quality  
in the crack between the lintel and the ceiling  
provokes the urge to scrape it out with one's finger

5  
превосходного качества интимность  
отношений с местной, недорогой  
шлюхой, без четверти девять, берет за  
час, состоятельный отдых  
дает прикурить отдыху без копья  
легкое курево, вредное для легких  
покупается тут же, выслуга лет  
повышает качество обслуживания  
на пятьдесят процентов, выгодно  
проданная с потрохами интимность  
лежит, покряхтывая, поднятая такса  
отбивает желанье раскошелиться  
на дополнительных удовольствиях  
прейскурант, обделаться стыдно

6  
превосходного качества початок  
кукурузы подпорчен солью  
мелкопомолотой, банка шпината  
тронута плесенью, уроженец южных  
республик развел лохотрон  
для клиентов рынка, вихрастый юнош  
тащит в загс опрометчиво свой первый  
негативный опыт, товаровед  
в накладной оставляет приписки  
без вниманья, надраенный пол  
в холле гостиницы отражает  
вновь прибывших бедственное  
положение, вдыхаемое натошак  
выдыхается с мерзким поскрипыванием

7  
превосходного качества безликость  
языка, изъясняемого девчонкой  
с короткой стрижкой, завянуть ухо  
заставляет, с платника скачанный ролик  
с тяжелым порно опережает соитье  
на две-три секунды, время плохой советчик  
если касается байкового одеяла  
скатанного на ножки такой формовки  
что оближешь пальчики, вышли строем  
из неевклидова пространства дурные  
мысли, может, зажать кого, преступленье  
против нравственности тоже выбор  
из двух зол, дабы ломаная безликость  
языка довела до некоего совершенства

8  
превосходного качества замазка  
в щели между притолокой и перекрытием  
подмывает выскрести ее пальцем

the thumb or middle finger, depending on the degree  
of intoxication, to peek at what is going on in  
the house opposite, two or three tenants  
live there, where they look without interest  
nothing interesting happens, teeth  
knockout time for an event which leads  
to such consequences, the extended leg  
of a ballerina points to the north  
of sensuality, or to the south, two young  
penguins masturbate without particular  
enthusiasm, the imaginable drives on

23 May–3 June 2004

большим или средним, от степени опьянения  
в зависимости, подглядеть, что творится  
в доме напротив, двое живут или трое  
жильцов, куда смотрят без интереса  
интересное не происходит, зубы  
выбить пора тому случаю, что приводит  
к таким последствиям, вытянутая ножка  
балерины указывает на север  
чувственности, или на юг, два пингвина  
молодых мастурбируют без энтузиазма  
особого, воображимое подгоняет

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The authors gratefully acknowledge the permission of Dmitry Golyenko to reproduce the originals and translations of these two poems here. The translations were first published in *Landfall* 213 (May 2007).

**JE:** “When the translation seems finished, it means one thing: translate again and again.” So wrote the Russian poet Arkadii Dragomoshchenko in a letter to US poet Lyn Hejinian (21 March 1985, private collection). Elsewhere, I have taken this statement to encapsulate Dragomoshchenko’s view of poetry as a continuous process of rewriting (*Common Strangeness* p. 48). In turning to the topic of translation, I find that his view is one I share.

In writing about translations from Chinese into Western languages and cultural contexts, Haun Saussy redefines the task of comparative literature as “the exploration of interactions—a project . . . far more interesting than the evaluation of similarities and differences” (p. 75). What Saussy says of comparative literature is true also of translation and of writing about translation. It is more interesting and fruitful to track the interactions between languages than to judge their accuracy from what is falsely imagined as an omniscient and neutral position.

In 2006, I was invited to contribute to a special Russian issue of *Landfall* (Edmond et al.). As someone who reads and writes about Russian poetry, I was asked to collaborate with several New Zealand writers to translate a selection of works by contemporary Russian poets. I also worked alongside and in collaboration with Evgeny Palvov, who is a native Russian speaker, a scholar of Russian literature at the University of Canterbury, and an expert translator. The task was an act of reciprocation for a much larger anthology of New Zealand poetry that had recently been published in Moscow in translations by Russian poets (Pavlov and Williams).

But the lines of exchange were not just between Russia and New Zealand. When I was asked to assist Cilla McQueen in translating two poems by Dmitry Golyenko (who also goes by the name of Golyenko-Volfson and who is one of a group of Petersburg poets for whom Dragomoshchenko’s work provided an important example), I became not just the conduit for an exchange between the two poets but

also an active participant in a reciprocal relationship with both writers. To return to these translations is to recall and to re-enter that dialogue.

Cilla's initial response was wary: "Dear Jacob, How does one translate Russian poetry without knowing what it sounds like or being able to read it? I am pretty doubtful of making any useful contribution, really—love from Cilla" (email, 29 Nov. 2006). Yet against her better judgement, I managed to persuade her to give it a go.

**CM:** When he sent me the English literals, Jacob being a poet himself had already done much of the work. As we continued fining them down, the lines assumed shape. Their rhythms and idiosyncratic character became evident.

**JE:** The first poem we worked on was entitled "Napriazhenie povyshatsia," or "Tension Rises." Its regular form is immediately apparent. It is divided into eight units of eight lines. Those eight-line units each divide into two four-line stanzas. Each eight-line unit begins with some variation on the refrain "tension rises." This incessant rhythmic pulse is described in the poem itself:

impresses an attraction  
not to the usual filth, such as  
blah, blah, to the particular  
rhythm tapped out

We went through various versions of this finger tapping, drumming sound before settling on "rhythm tapped out." But what is this "particular / rhythm"? Golyenko's poem questions its own apparently square, regular rhythm by taking the reader repeatedly off guard through mangled or retooled idioms and direction-switching enjambments.

**CM:** I am respectful of the intuitive qualities of poetry.  
The preliminary encounter is with a jumble of rough-hewn literals.  
Metaphors gleam in it.  
Shape appears; meaning becomes partly and then wholly evident.  
Find focus. Get an idea of the topology of the text.

**JE:** A translation is a mapping of possible readings marked as much by absence as by presence.

**CM:** The meaning absorbed, now express its equivalent in correct and nuanced English, to deliver about the same quantum of language as concisely as possible.

**JE:** But of course it's never quite the same quantum. At a reading I attended in St. Petersburg in 2000, Golyenko performed with his head down. Stooped over a table (he is quite tall), he presented an antithetical image to the poet standing and declaiming

his or her work in the incantatory Russian style, as practiced, for example, by Elena Shvarts, whom I also heard read on the same visit. In English, we lack a comparably strong modernist and contemporary tradition of rhymed and recited poetry to react against. Though contemporary English-language poetry has no shortage of aesthetic and ideological differences reflected in various performance styles, the lines of those differences are drawn and expressed differently. To achieve a perfectly correct translation of Golyenko's poetry—to make the poems signify in just the same way—we would have to recreate the entire sociocultural world of contemporary Russian poetry—and Russia itself—in all its details. Once one accepts that such perfection is pure fantasy, the task of translation begins.

**CM:** Because I'm a poet I'm listening to the sound of the translation as I would when I write my own work. Jacob is careful to retain as much of the arrangement of the Russian lines as possible, which is why the translation sounds somewhat foreign to the English ear. He's paying attention to matching sentence construction and syntax where possible, to retain the voice in it which carries the natural rhythms of the poet's speech, the intonation, music and patterns of the language.

**JE:** But Russian, being an inflected language, has much more syntactic flexibility than our analytic language, allowing syntactic inversions where they are impossible—or impossibly awkward—in English. The opening words of each stanza of the poem “Predvoskhodnoe kachestvo” (“Excellent Quality”) are *predvoskhodnogo kachestva* (“of excellent quality”). This visually and aurally arresting echo of the title is inevitably disrupted by the presence of the word “of” in the English translation of the Russian genitive. We did not maintain these words' position at the opening of each stanza. We felt that the syntactic inversion required to do so would undermine the idiomatic feel of Golyenko's poem. We therefore reversed the order, ending up with “a drink of excellent quality,” “a sheath of excellent quality,” and so on.

**CM:** In the first stanza of “Excellent Quality,” we had a large amount of information to distill into a small number of words. A “gleaming / burning ticket” meaning “last-minute holiday deal” or “hot deal with a massive discount” i.e. “the package is about to burn up, or expire” promised a “spend-up-large holiday” i.e. a desirable-sounding holiday deal which becomes the type of holiday on which you spend much more than you planned. “Bodes” was a useful word. “Hot” indicated desirability and rapid uptake. This ended up, concisely, as “a hot cheap standby / bodes an over-extravagant holiday.” The rhythm of the Russian comes through as well as the core information.

**JE:** The word *progrannyi*, which we translated as “over-extravagant,” literally means “burnt up,” allowing for wordplay in the Russian, where the hot deal burns itself out. But here, as Golyenko later pointed out, we misinterpreted the Russian idiom: *progrannyi* would be better translated as “worthless,” a correction we've taken the opportunity to make here. That is, the burnout wasn't so much in funds as a marker of worthlessness, as in a burnt-out car. As we might say in English, the purchaser of this

hot ticket got burnt—and so did the translators in this case. Still, the example illustrates that Cilla grasped the rapid-fire colloquial feel of Golyenko's work, which is full of language from the street, the Internet, and the media. She understood that to retain this almost Ginsberg-like style we had to be as concise and colloquial as possible without veering too far from the original.

**CM:** I was interested in the skewing of attention that a familiar Russian idiom might bring to the English. “An obscene expression understandable to a hedgehog” had to turn out as “an obscenity universally understood” because in English the novel thought of the hedgehog suddenly coming in takes on more weight than the common expression requires in the Russian.

**JE:** Thus to translate is to recognize that nothing is “universally understood,” at least not in the same way. The hedgehog might signal an altogether different context for an English reader, bringing to mind perhaps Isaiah Berlin and the hedgehog who knows one big thing. But Golyenko's poetry works against just such universal statements whether in Russian or English, idiom or fable.

**CM:** Care must be taken lest the translation spark off resonances that were not in the original. Metaphor is capable of transferring ideas greater than the meanings of the words that contain it.

**JE:** One metaphor to which a translator might turn is the translated poem as an unfilled container into which meaning must be poured. But this imagined container—which Walter Benjamin imagined as a whole “vessel” and Dragomoshchenko writes of as a *chashka*, or “cup”—is forever leaking (Benjamin, *Illuminations* p. 79; Edmond, *Common Strangeness* pp. 46–48). There are always holes through which new meanings seep.

**CM:** Our combined notes on the imagery of the first few lines of the third stanza of “Tensions Rises” make puzzling reading:

“A nozzle/mouthpiece/bait [for fish] of excellent quality / raises the level of friction, a wet [case/teacosy?] sleeve? / The quality of a post/stanchion leads to / The absolute, strong-willed efforts / cause a qualitative improvement / in perceptibility” was tricky until one realises what's going on in this bedroom.

We settled in the end for lines which without slipping into a very colloquial interpretation seem to deliver the meaning without losing too much of the original:

“a sheath of excellent quality / raises the level of friction, a wet slipcover / improves the quality of a hard-on to / the absolute, strong-willed efforts / cause a qualitative improvement in sensation”

**JE:** With such lines, I quickly reached the limits of my rather innocent Russian. Evgeny Pavlov came to the rescue but even he commented at one point “To tell you the truth, I never heard ‘pissat' kipyatkom’ [“to piss boiling water”] in the sense of



‘zavidovat’ [“to envy”].’ In my book, it means ‘being excited.’ Maybe it’s a Petersburg thing.” And again, in translating this phrase from “Tension Rises,” just picking an English idiom has its dangers. “Green with envy” is not exactly obscure regional slang, and it loses “pissing,” which continues the bodily ingestion/ejaculation theme of the poem. We would also have lost the connection to the last line where the “slops”—but also implicitly the piss—“stream together.” “Pissing envious” was a compromise. Perhaps we should have gone with “pissed with envy” to catch the similar association of “pissed” with anger in English (where we also have the regional confusion of “pissed” as angry and “pissed” as drunk). In translating the Russian expression for envy or excitement into English, we lost in any case that sense of hot water boiling over so essential to the increase in tension. Maybe “pissed and boiling over with tension.” But then we would have lost the rhythmic concision we were seeking. Instead we took the last line to heart: “level what is unnecessary.”

**CM:** In the sixth stanza of “Excellent Quality,” we enjoyed “an inhalation on an empty stomach / is breathed out with a vile squeak.”

**JE:** Because the translation is never just a translation but always a rewriting, such inhalations and exhalations, digestions and ejaculations start to inhabit the translator’s self-perception as much as the poem: does our inhalation of the Russian poem come out as a vile English squeak?

**CM:** The sound of the English translation is important for fluency and euphony; the substitution of “corn-cob” for “ear of corn” restored rhythm to the line “A corn-cob of excellent quality” and the alliteration goes with that in the next line, “spoiled slightly by salt.”

**JE:** While “Excellent Quality” has no regular rhyme scheme or settled rhythm, its strict division into eight fourteen-line stanzas and its frequent half rhymes (for example, *rolik*, a “clip” downloaded from the internet, rhymes with *sovetchik*, an advisor or “guide”) gave us license to seek similar wordplay. This combined with the enjambment, lack of punctuation, and continuous stream of interlinked, hypotactic phrases encouraged Cilla and me to find similar ways to keep the flow.

**CM:** In the 5th stanza of “Tension Rises,” the final version “the beam of the searchlight goes blind over their faces” had to keep the odd image it conveys, because I learned that the sense of the Russian idiom describing faces (mugs, dials) being blinded by the light literally gives the searchlight itself going blind. Their faces dazzle the searchlight, in a freer translation.

**JE:** The image of the searchlight captures the translator in her or his multiple positions. Is she or he searching the darkness of the mind’s language for an equivalent, or desperately on the run only to be caught (after a wrong turn, or a mistranslation) in the prison guard/critic’s blinding beam? In this case we tripped in the dark of the translation on an unseen comma. What should have been two phrases—“the searchlight goes blind” and “over their faces / the punch spreads”—became one.

While at Golyenko's suggestion we have restored the missing comma here, I continue to enjoy the double reading suggested by the enjambment. The searchlight goes out but also passes over the comma to blind the faces of the translators who then walk straight into the body blow of a mistranslation.

**CM:** In stanza 7 of "Tension Rises," "ground bones / went down the wrong way," we noted that this was a confusion/conflation of two idioms—a bone in the throat means an obstacle and "down the wrong throat" means that "things didn't turn out as you wanted." We stepped out more boldly than usual in this case and offered a similarly customised phrase: "pulverised spanners in the wrong works."

**JE:** Some metaphors stick in a language, on the tongue, or in the throat. A bone and a spanner fire off different networks of connotations even if they plug into similar idioms. And those connotations vary from place to place even within the same language: a spanner may cause confusion for speakers of US English, who generally expect a wrench in their idiom.

As soon as you start messing with the system through translation, the whole poem begins to operate in different ways. The bone in the throat idiom in Russian recalled the line "masticate in the subconscious" in the previous stanza. Now Russian bones go down English throats and morph into spanners, destroying the latticework of connotations in the Russian poem and its theme of bodily ingestion, yet revealing other parts of its inner workings. The translation here throws up the metaphor of the poem as a machine.

Happily for us, Golyenko's poem—with its use and misuse of slang, idiom, and cliché—was already focused on this kind of destructive-creative vandalism. We merely extended it to another language. But of course we lost the voice (the "throat" or *gorlo*) of the original.

**CM:** The translator as conduit throws a rope, a line, across from one language to another, finds a point of contact, makes a correspondence, retaining the character of each side as well as the integrity of the interface.

What comes between the original and the translation is the poetic line.

Integrity of the poetic line.

**JE:** The line is a metaphor and literalizing of connection. We can imagine a line thrown across a gap or down a hole, a tightrope or a rescue line. These are lines that you don't want to snap. But one of the first problems in translating these poems was the line break. The poems depend on strict line arrangements and set stanzas and they rely heavily on a dramatic unwinding (or tension-raising coiling) of lines one on another. Time and again we had to trade off between convoluted syntax and losing this dramatic unwinding of language.

In the lines "heightened tension threatens / in the anger of a being of the highest ranks," we had to forgo retaining "anger" as the grammatical subject in order to keep "heightened tension" as the opening word of the section (a pattern repeated

throughout the poem). Here we went with an intransitive verb. Anger's relation to the verb became merely prepositional. We cut one line of connection to grasp another.

**CM:** The words in this case are each a conduit, making contact, arranging themselves in written or spoken form so as to facilitate exchange of ideas through language. By means of words the language contacts another intelligence, and participates for the duration of the poem in the process of exchange, the self-energizing circle, the motivating feedback. This is well described, I think, by the structure of the benzene molecule.

**JE:** Like a benzene molecule, the translation is a site of multiple exchanges. I find myself here entering or extending another exchange with my collaborator about translation, poetry, and language. Where I stress the breaks, the noncorrespondences, Cilla sees connections. Both are part of the translation process.

**CM:** Translation requires participation in the text at its raw level. Writing down a dream is rather a similar experience. The dream uses a poetic language which is elliptical, apt, unusual, literal. I listen for it and write it down as closely as I can, naming the thought. Writing fixes dream in language as salt fixes the colour of dye.

**JE:** The ink has long since dried on the translation that went to print. But is the translation fixed? What if the poem's concluding effort "to smooth out the place of removal" only exacerbated this continuous unsettlement? In lopping off a "good chunk" of the poem and hurling it into another language, that "space of removal" might be smoothed out in the same way that the poem's colourful language is flattened into abstraction at its end.

**CM:** The received language, i.e. the raw literals, is rather like the dream—inchoate, inviting definition. The translator's job is to find links, resonances, correspondences, not merely contiguity but congruence of meanings at a deep level.

**JE:** What happens then when the poem itself eschews depth and favours the superficial character of a light opera or "pantomime"? I don't want to diminish Cilla's achievement in giving incredible energy to the English version of the poem, her genius in finding quick colloquial renderings in place of their Russian counterparts. But I wonder whether the "deep image" description of translation might usefully be supplemented by the gaudy and caricatured play of pantomime theatrics. In the poem, "the joker / started his own bullshit." Maybe as translators we do the same.

**CM:** When I'm writing my own poetry I listen to the language of thought and attempt to find words for it, to couch it succinctly, leaving its possible meanings and extensions of meaning open, inviting another intelligence to be participant as well as observer and engage with the language.

**JE:** I listen too to Cilla's language. Like the translation game of poetic "Chinese Whispers" that I once participated in, each interpretation, each translation or mistranslation enlarges the text with new meanings (Yang, Edmond, and Mok).

**CM:** You don't have to spell it out; one word can do the resonant job of many. Effective poetry sets up a resonant field, in a register characteristic of the writer and the poem. The translator sets up an equivalent field, hoping to achieve a transparency between them through which meaning can pass. The task is to put the literal text into language which conveys the subtlety and resonance, both linguistic and cultural, of the poet's voice.

**JE:** Take Cilla's rendering "get the hots for," which conveys Golyenko's idiom-rich colloquial language and adds the idea of heat that is not there in the Russian but was lost from our rendition of the Russian idiom "pissing boiling water" in the lines that follow. This new resonant field contributes to the rise in heat, pressure, and tension that reverberates through "Tension Rises."

**CM:** Rhythms under the English equivalent of Golyenko's lines create a certain pace, and drive the poem as I imagine the Russian line driven, by something deeper than sound. I discern a voice and thought-rhythms underneath.

Shades of meaning may be lost. Metaphor is important. The translator acknowledges the impossibility of exactness, but endeavours to find equivalent areas of resonance.

**JE:** "Excellent Quality" is also replete with cultural resonances that signify quite differently, if they signify at all, in translation. When "tamara / sucks the demon off" the Russian reader not only thinks immediately of Lermontov's poem, but also of a whole Russian orientalist tradition of writing about the Caucasus of which that poem is a part. But Golyenko's poem is also written in the context of Russia's contemporary war in Chechnya and its on-going exploitative and aggressive entanglements with the Caucasus region. These appear in the poem's dodgy deals, politically motivated violence, pornography, prostitution, and negative references to Asia and to southerners. Both "Excellent Quality" and "Tension Rises"—with their punching, pissing, and masturbation—also parody and play with the sometimes hyper-masculine gendering of Russian literature.

**CM:** Figure the text in four dimensions,  
here and there impurities, galaxies,  
whirlpools of possible meaning  
as yet unresolved, rippled by gravity waves  
from the splash of a stone already closed over.

**JE:** At one point in "Excellent Quality," Golyenko imagines such a "non-Euclidian / space" but this phrase is sandwiched between "you lick your fingers" and "shall I feel

someone up.” The poem refuses to allow the reader or translator to remain in even non-Euclidian abstraction; it won’t let you keep your hands clean.

**CM:** The idea is to facilitate the interchange of meaning through the surface of language, using the permeable properties of a meniscus.

**JE:** Or maybe a membrane. As Lisa Samuels suggests, our contact with the world is always wet. Instead of imagining a dry process of linguistic exchange, Samuels’s membrane—like Cilla’s meniscus and benzene molecule—stresses the permeability and the materiality of our contact with the world. In Golyenko’s poem, this wet contact extends to the downright mucky. Even when we read a poem on a computer we can’t always avoid getting our hands dirty.

**CM:** This meniscus might be the poetic line, which comes between the original and the translation. A poem of mine from “Soundings” called “Via Media” is about this sort of thing:

### **Via media**

Deep in the brain between right and left  
the electromagnetic charge around the corpus callosum  
aligns nerve impulses, allowing them to flow  
from one hemisphere to the other.

The motto of my grandmother  
was “Per via media tutissima.”

When she died she was as small as a bird,  
but I remember her taller.  
Indeed she was a wise interface,  
the signal box of her family.

This bundle of nerves is at about ear-level.  
I wiggle my ears, locating the via media,  
imagining the centre where the impulses align,  
a grandmother at the interface wisely regulating.

Daily life flows through her fingers  
and passes into dream.  
Dream washes out into the daylight  
and disappears like foam.

It’s a poem about a translation process, in this case the communication channels between the two sides of the brain when I’m writing. You could say that the translator/poet is the corpus

callosum, facilitating the exchange of meaning.

**JE:** What “flows through her fingers” might be just as interesting as what is grasped and communicated. We can sometimes hear those resonant gaps in the static noise that is produced. If Golyenko’s poems enact jarring, tension-raising encounters in language, we might not get the promised “qualitative improvement / in sensation” but certainly “we have / solicitations aplenty.”

**CM:** The poetic line must be supple and economical. What is happening in the brain of the translator as the meaning passes across? Something quite strict and bureaucratic, diligent, meticulous, finickity, searching for correspondences, links, the right words.

**JE:** Though I certainly believe in diligent responsibility to the original, I’m not so confident of finding the “right words.” A Molotov cocktail has a different ring and set of connotations in English. For the English reader, the exotica of central Asian grime, dodgy dealings, and war appear through another layer of Russian exotica.

Or to take another example, what happens when Velimir Khlebnikov’s “*Zakliatie smekhom*” (“Invocation of Laughter”)—a modernist poem completely rooted in the sounds of the Russian language—is translated into English? Actually, there have been some wonderful translations but they work not because they are the same but because they respond to Khlebnikov’s challenge and method. Inspired by these translations, I once rewrote Khlebnikov’s poem as an “Invocation of Bluffers” in homage to Cilla’s hometown of Bluff. Ripped from Khlebnikov’s belief in the magic of his unifying Slavic roots, translation too becomes a kind of bluff. Yet in the encounter between Russia’s Northern Capital and New Zealand’s Deep South, at the intersection of place and language, there is “a particular climate / created.”

**CM:** The poem is more than a collection of words. It is an entity with its own microclimate. The translator sits at the interface which is a circle, or a circuit, rather than a wall.

**JE:** But the wires in this circuit are always getting crossed, double-crossed, crossed out, or crosshatched. Sometimes, it makes me cross, envious of the original’s ease. The crosshatched lines “stream together.” The lines intersect and go their separate ways.

**CM:** The word is a unit of energy rather than a checkpoint.

**JE:** And the translation becomes a field of criss-crossed lines. I’m interested in correspondence as “co-response,” an idea I’ve explored in writing about Dragomoshchenko. Co-response doesn’t mean we get to the right words but envisages translation as a site for communication as dialogue, as “co-making” through continuous response.

**CM:** The unfamiliar language in its raw literals is rather like the language of dream. Its tone, its plays on words and its root words in common with other languages link me and the

unfamiliar poet via a linguistic and poetic manifold. To quote Golynko, “in order that the broken impersonality of language led to some kind of perfection.”

**JE:** But lest we leave the brokenness too quickly for the perfection, Hejinian reminds us that although “the very writing down of a dream seems to constitute the act of discovering it . . . it is also and problematically an act of interpreting it” (139). So too with translation: when we think we have found the perfect translation, we have actually only created another interpretation. This turns out to be not a loss, but a gain—an invitation to begin the task of translation—and so of dialogue and reciprocation—again and again. “The imaginable,” as the poem concludes, “drives on.”

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