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## Dostoevsky's "Bobok": A Translation to the Language of the Stage

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Dostoevsky's "Bobok":  
A Translation to the Language of the Stage

Senior Project submitted to

The Divisions of  
Languages and Literature and the Arts

of Bard College

by Daniel Krakovski

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*This project would not have been possible without Fergus Baumann, Eileen Goodrich, my advisors, and my parents.*

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Photographs by Doug Baz.





## I. Introduction

*“A word does not start as a word—it is an end product which begins as an impulse, stimulated by attitude and behavior which dictate the need for expression”*

- PETER BROOK (“The Deadly Theater”)<sup>1</sup>

Since I am pursuing a joint major in Russian & Eurasian Studies and Theater & Performance, my senior project is a translation of Fyodor Dostoevsky’s short story entitled “Бобок: записки одного человека” [Bobok: Notes of a Certain Individual] (1873) from Russian into English. This translation then served as the textual foundation for what eventually—after a six-month rehearsal process—became a solo performance featuring an actor named Fergus Baumann. I co-directed the performance in tandem with my collaborator Eileen Goodrich. Our production was featured in the Theater & Performance Senior Project Festival, which provided us with three performances in the Luma Theater of the Richard B. Fisher Center for the Performing Arts<sup>2</sup>.

This paper will operate under the following framework. First I will detail a general outline of the project. After that, I will comment on the process of translation from Russian to English. This will be followed by an analysis of how the translated text evolved over the course of our six-month rehearsal process, all the way through the performances. I will conclude with an evaluation of the successes and challenges of the project as a whole: what worked, what did not? What would I have done differently? What’s next for “Bobok” in its full evolution? This project

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<sup>1</sup> Brook, *The Empty Space*, 12.

<sup>2</sup> February 27<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup>, and 29<sup>th</sup>. All at 6:30pm.



is the culmination of my academic experience at Bard College—having the opportunity to reflect back on this process, the chance to share and detail its mechanism, is indispensable.

Dostoevsky first published “Bobok: Notes of a Certain Individual” in 1873 in the weekly literary journal “Гражданин” [The Citizen], of which he was editor-in-chief from 1873 to 1874<sup>3</sup>. As editor-in-chief, Dostoevsky introduced his *Diary of a Writer* in which “he could comment freely on current events and express, in a variety of literary forms, his reactions to the deeper moral-social and religious-philosophical problems that they raised” (Frank 89). In this series, Dostoevsky utilized the form of the diary entry to create narrators with vividly opinionated inner monologues in order to humanize his polemics with his contemporaries. “Bobok” is an example of this. As Frank notes, “Bobok” was written in the context of a contemporary’s criticism of Dostoevsky’s *Diary of a Writer* in another journal, *Голос* [Voice] (116). Dostoevsky was criticized for only dealing “with the “abnormal”, the “unhinged”, [and] the psychopathic” (116). “Bobok” was written in response to this criticism<sup>4</sup>.

The first-person narrator of “Bobok”, the “Certain Person”<sup>5</sup>, is a struggling writer named Ivan Ivanovich. While not a psychopath, Ivan Ivanovich can certainly be described as “abnormal” and “unhinged”. The story begins with Ivan rambling about the disintegration of the contemporary intellectual, literary, and social scenes: the lack of ideals in modern writing, the pretentiousness of the “sane” who feel themselves to be in the position to indict others as insane, and the lowliness of the work he is able to get (“The Art of Attracting Women”). His mental state is also disintegrating, which is first evidenced when Ivan Ivanovich brings up: “I’m starting to hear some very strange things [...] “Bobok, bobok, bobok”. In need of a diversion, he

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<sup>3</sup> Frank, Joseph. *Dostoevsky: The Mantle of a Prophet 1871-1881*, 36-37.

<sup>4</sup> The critic in question ascribed the aforementioned features of his work to his portrait. In “Bobok”, the narrator’s portrait is also exhibited in this way (Frank 116).

<sup>5</sup> This is a recurring character in *The Diary of a Writer* (Frank 112).

stumbles upon the funeral of a distant relative. He does not stay for the entire funeral service, however, opting instead to wander about the tombstones while deep in thought. It is here that Ivan Ivanovich experiences the peak of his auditory hallucinations. This episode occurs as he loiters amidst the first-class tombstones, “where the voices belong to erstwhile pillars of society of exalted rank; and they replicate in the netherworld all the injustices, corruption, and dissipation of the lives they had led “up above”” (Frank 117). Voyeuristically, he eavesdrops over these voices only to discover that they are just as base and crude as the living. This is very disappointing to Ivan, who declares “This I cannot allow!” and it reaffirms the theme of disintegration. Frank notes that “The aim of *Bobok*, however, was not to take such isolated potshots at Dostoevskian targets but to depict, in a brief and concentrated form, the general disintegration and moral corruption of the ruling strata of Russian society” (117). The dead’s morals disintegrate in tandem with their decomposing bodies thus resulting in their trademark “moral stench” or “a stench of the soul”. The worse your soul is, the worse you smell.

Then Ivan sneezes and the voices vanish without a trace—“true graveyard silence ensued”. Realizing that what he had just heard would make for a great story, and recognizing that his contemporary critics would dismiss it for the same reasons of dealing only with the “abnormal” and the “unhinged”, Ivan Ivanovich decides to bring his story to “The Citizen”. In this way Dostoevsky ends this story by cyclically sending his narrator to the journal in which “Bobok” was published.

Because I performed two primary roles—translator and co-director—there are an equal number of ways of classifying this project. One could make a case for it being just a work of translation as easily as one could suggest that it is solely a directing, or theater, project. Albeit a synthesis of the two, my project is ultimately one of translation. This must be so because, as I

will argue throughout this work, my objective as a translator was to create a text for performance. The ultimate performances themselves, which were shaped throughout an extensive rehearsal process, were the culmination of what my translation originally set out to achieve.

It is precisely this notion of a translation having a clear and specific objective that dictates my translation. The concept of objectives permeates both the fields of translation and theater, which in this project cross paths at the juncture of Dostoevsky's "Bobok." The objective of my translation is to create a text for a solo-performance in English out of the original Russian short story.

The final draft of the text included in this senior project is the by-product of two kinds of translation: Russian to English, and page to stage. As our actor remarked after the performances, the final version is practically unrecognizable when compared to our first draft. And he is absolutely correct: for the first iteration of the translation was still in the form of a short story, whereas its ultimate counterpart became a play—a text coming to life on stage. The act of translation is the genesis of the entire project.

## II. On the Translation Process

In order to best detail my process of translation for this project, I will first attempt to situate it within the spectrum of translation theory. This will be followed by specific examples of how the translated product took shape, and concluded with a statement on the state of the translation as we began our rehearsal process, the topic of which will serve as the basis for the third chapter of this project.

If translation is a linguistic and idiomatic journey between two languages, then translation theory is the medium through which this journey is contextualized. Translation theorists spend their scholarly careers attempting to define exactly what it means to translate something. The core dichotomy that permeates this discussion is that of fidelity versus liberty. Namely: how loyal must a translator be to the original text?

Translators who adhere to the former approach favor such loyalty. Their objective is to translate with syntactical exactitude. A staunch supporter of this method is Vladimir Nabokov, who details his point of view in his essay “Problems of Translation: Onegin in English”:

The person who desires to turn a literary masterpiece into another language, has only one duty to perform, and this is to reproduce with absolute exactitude the whole text, and nothing but the text. The term “literal translation” is tautological since anything but that is not truly a translation but an imitation, an adaptation or a parody (Nabokov 134).

Nabokov argues that a translation that does not adhere to “absolute exactitude” is inherently of lower quality<sup>6</sup>. It is for this reason that he is a good representative for the fidelity portion of the dichotomy we are examining.

On the other side of the proverbial aisle are the translators who adhere to the latter. Namely: they prioritize the “spirit”, or the “essence”, of the original work over syntactical scrupulousness. This point of view is well articulated by the translation theorist John Dryden in his essay “On Translation.” In this work Dryden articulates that his objective, as a translator, is to *imitate* the original author:

I take imitation of an author, in their sense, to be an endeavor of a later poet to write like one who has written before him, on the same subject; that is, not to translate his words, or to be confined to his sense, but only set him as a pattern, and to write, as he supposes that author would have done, had he lived in our age, and in our country (Dryden 19).

A translation of this nature is not as formulaic as its counterpart, which renders this method much looser. Dryden explicitly denounces the formulaic nature of the fidelity approach, claiming the artistic nature of translation does not permit it: “[...] the verbal copier is encumbered with so many difficulties all at once, that he can never disentangle himself from all [...] For many a fair precept in poetry is, like a seeming demonstration in mathematics, very specious in the diagram, but failing in the mechanical operation” (Dryden 18, 22). Likewise, Nabokov denounces this very definition of imitation as an approach to translation.

It is clear now that a translator is forced to pick a side, for fidelity and liberty in translation are not compatible. One cannot simultaneously have the conscious objective of preserving textual exactness in tandem with trying to imitate the original author in a modern [?]

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<sup>6</sup> Granted, Nabokov is talking about translation of poetry—and even more specifically: his translation of Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin*, the novel which he accompanied with extensive footnotes. His translation is designed to be read in tandem with the footnotes. The latter are themselves an example of Nabokov’s brilliant prose rather than mere explanatory comments. This “companion” style of footnotes is a valid approach for the translation of prose as well.

and foreign idiomatic context. It is possible, however, that while employing one objective, a translator may encounter the opportunity to utilize the other. For example a translator concerned with fidelity of language has the liberty of deciding what particular word most truthfully corresponds to the original. Likewise: a translator concerned with evoking the spirit of the work may encounter a word—or a turn of phrase—that is perfectly translatable into the target language, without the necessity of idiomatic/syntactical imagination. The point here is that the translation must be committed to one or the other, while also remaining receptive to the demands and realities of a translation process. The dichotomy of fidelity versus liberty is the necessary first step towards situating one’s translation within the spectrum of critical theory because of its polarity of objectives.

That being said, my process was not as cut-and-dried as our polarizing dichotomy suggests. My translation is certainly more aligned with that of liberty than that of fidelity. My objective as I translated was never to render the text with “absolute exactitude”, but rather to evoke the colloquial and fragmented texture of the narrator’s speech. A good example of where I utilized a liberal to evoke these specific qualities comes when Ivan Ivanovich, “Bobok’s” narrator, transitions to the scene at the cemetery. In need of a distraction from his own rambling intellect, Ivan declares, in his original Russian “Надо развлечься. Ходил развлекаться, попал на похороны”<sup>7</sup>. A literal translation of this would read as: “I have to distract myself. I went to distract myself, arrived at a funeral”. In order to highlight the humor of these sentences, which can best be characterized as a witty non sequitur, I introduced the element of word play in my translation with: “I need to unwind. I went to unwind and I wound up at a funeral.” This is an example of where my translation follows a liberal approach to achieve an analogous tonal effect

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<sup>7</sup> Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *Собрание Сочинений*. Vol. 10. Moscow: Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, 1958. Print.

as that of the original. There were also instances in which fidelity to the text was possible, such as the simple sentence of “Пряатель прав (Dostoevsky 343)”, which I translated verbatim as “My friend is right” in order to highlight the firm and surprisingly not-fragmented quality of the sentence—a rare occurrence for Ivan Ivanovich. The question of fidelity versus liberty is the first of many a translator must keep in mind, but it is not the finish line.

Beyond this dichotomy, which looks at translation on the macro level, there is a more sophisticated and nuanced micro levels to discuss. Translators must be more precise with their objective than simply preserving accuracy or spirit. They have to know very clearly for themselves the answer to the following question: why translate this text? Whatever one’s answer may be, it must be clear. If it is not clear, the translation runs the risk of becoming shapeless and unnecessary. Why should somebody read your translation if it does not have a clear reason behind its existence? One could simply read someone else’s translation, as long as it is not the first translation of its kind. Objective-oriented translation leads to work with identity. The translator’s objective is like a motor that perpetuates the translation forward to its logical conclusion because the initial intention guides all future choices. This aspect of translation theory is well articulated in Friedrich Schleiermacher’s treatise, *On the Different Methods of Translating*, in which he details his framework for understanding translation on a more detailed, objective-oriented level than the initial dichotomy of fidelity versus liberty.

In his work, Schleiermacher also presents his theory of translation through the lens of a governing dichotomy: “Either the translator leaves the writer alone as much as possible and moves the reader to the writer, or he leaves the reader alone as much as possible and moves the writer toward the reader” (Schleiermacher 42). In the former case, the translator is *not* trying to accommodate the reader by making the language of the translation more familiar and accessible.

Instead, the translator tries to preserve the foreign nature of the original work in their translated product. This means that cultural and linguistic peculiarities of the original are generally left unaltered, which results in a product similar to that of a museum exhibit. Namely: the original is presented for what it is, and it is the reader's job to recognize the presence of linguistic and cultural dissonance. It is for these reasons that Schleiermacher defines this side of the dichotomy as the translator bringing the reader to the writer. In the latter case, translators consciously try to accommodate their contemporary audience by transforming the language of the translation into something more familiar and accessible to the target language. Namely: translators attempt to, again, *imitate* how the original writer would have written their work in the translators' target language.

Thus the imitator has not the slightest intention of bringing the two together—the writer of the original and the reader of the imitation—because he does not believe that an immediate relationship between them is possible; he only wants to give the latter an impression similar to that which the contemporaries of the original received from it (Schleiermacher 41).

This concept is very similar to that of Dryden's imitation, but not entirely.

The key difference between Schleiermacher and Dryden lies in their definition of imitation. [First explain, then cite. The explanation can be very short: 2-3 words.]

For it is an entirely different matter to comprehend correctly the influence that a man has exerted upon his language and somehow to represent it, and again quite another matter to guess how his thoughts and their expression would have emerged if originally he had been accustomed to think and express himself in another language! (Schleiermacher 49).

Schleiermacher draws a distinction between the idea of representing a foreign language through the conventions of a target language, and the idea of trying to reimagine the author of the original as a native of a target language and culture. This is an important difference, for the latter of these two ideas is precisely what Dryden argues for.



This does not mean, however, that Schleiermacher rejects the notion of reimagining the language of a translation in favor of literal accuracy—as the initial dichotomy may suggest. On the contrary, he draws this distinction precisely to illustrate that the translator must utilize their mastery of both the original and target languages.

Indeed, as much as anyone else, [the translator] has the duty to observe at least the same scrupulous attention to the purity and perfection of language, to strive for the same grace and naturalness of style, for which his writer is praised in the original language (Schleiermacher 49).

Schleiermacher argues that the translator must imitate the mastery of the original, as opposed to imagining the author of the original having a different cultural identity, which he argues is an irreverent pursuit. The objective of translating the mastery of is a valid one because it materially involves the original text in a meaningful way.

This concept inevitably yields the following question: what is this mastery and where does it come from? Schleiermacher essentially argues for a liberal translation informed equally by the intricacies of both the source and target languages. Dryden, on the other hand, contends that it is the translator's ability to rewrite the original in the target language in a way that evokes a contemporary reading experience. As was cited earlier, he explicitly denounces an approach that requires a formulaic preservation of verbatim accuracy. And finally Nabokov posits that it is the translator's sole duty to translate the text exactly, and nothing else. On top of the initial dichotomy of fidelity and liberty, Schleiermacher's work alone is not enough to answer this question of mastery.

In order to attain a better grasp of this illusive concept, one must look beyond the actual act of translation and examine the nature of language. What are the inherent qualities of language that make the task of translation complicated? In his work *On Linguistic Aspects of Translation*, Roman Jakobson insightfully begins to answer this question: "Languages differ essentially in

what they *must* convey and not in what they *may* convey” (149). Jakobson is a particularly apt theorist in the case of my senior project because he deals with the topic of Russian-to-English translation specifically.

To illustrate his point, let us take the first line of text spoken by the narrator of “Bobok” Ivan Ivanovich. In its original Russian, the text reads: “Семен Ардальонович третьего дня мне как раз: -- Да будешь ли ты, Иван Иванович, когда-нибудь трезв, скажи на милость?” If this excerpt were to be translated with naught but verbatim accuracy, it would read dreadfully as follows: “Semyon Ardiolonovich on the third day to me happened once: yes will you, Ivan Ivanych, sometime be sober, tell me on mercy?” Obviously this approach does not work for my translation because no one speaks English this way. The trouble with the literal version is that it does not contain the same implied information as that of the original. As one may have noticed, for example, the English sentence does not contain a verb. This is because it is implied in the original Russian rather than explicitly stated. When Ivan details “[...] третьего дня мне как раз”, he implies the verb “to say”, which in Russian is “сказать”. The point here is that Russian allows for this verb to be left out and remain implied, which gives the original text a very colloquial texture. English, on the other hand, does not allow the same privilege. Leaving a verb out of a sentence for the sake of conversational implication does not work. This is a good example of Jakobson’s claim about the varied requirements of linguistic syntax.

I navigated the challenge of this sentence with the following translation: “On the third of the month, Semyon Ardiolonovich says to me: ‘Honestly, *Ivan Ivanych* will you ever be sober?’” I wanted to preserve the colloquial nature of Ivan’s speech, but in order to do so I had to first take care of the other dissimilarities between Russian and English. First on this list is “On the third of the month”. The original text only contains the words “On the third day”, which out of

context is vague. It could mean the third day of anything. Most importantly: it implies a day that is not today. Wanting to retain the specificity of Ivan’s reference, which is very true to his character, I chose to translate it as “third of the month” because it sounds most nearly like a date than anything else. The choice of “[...] ‘Honestly, *Ivan Ivanych* will you ever be sober?’” was constructed as follows. The quotation marks were included to indicate that Ivan is quoting his contemporary Semyon Ardiolonovich—that much is obvious. More so, this choice allows the actor playing Ivan to demonstrate that these words are not his<sup>8</sup>. The content of Ivan’s citation was meant to indicate the rudeness of Semyon’s query. This was highlighted by the word “honestly”, which implies a degree of superiority, and by the italicizing of Ivan’s name. This latter choice was two-fold: firstly it highlights Semyon’s use of the formal name-patronymic address, which suggests a formal quality of familiarity between the two, and secondly it allows Ivan the opportunity to inform the audience who watch “Bobok” performed on stage that his name is in fact Ivan Ivanovich<sup>9</sup>.

It is remarkable how true Jakobson’s concept holds when one is translating Russian into English. From the very first line of text, all the way through the last, it is clear that the translator needs to be aware of the inherent differences of the languages in tandem with what he or she wants out of their translation. In the case of my translation of “Bobok”, as demonstrated by the opening line, a certain degree of creative liberty is required to achieve my objective of preserving Ivan’s colloquial, detail oriented tone. The translation of this tone, the ability to identify its qualities in the original and faithfully recreate them in English, is the core objective of my translation process. It follows Schleiermacher’s notion of translating the mastery of the original.

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<sup>8</sup> Our actor made the choice to have Ivan lazily impersonate Semyon Ardelionovich’s voice and body language.

<sup>9</sup> There is a footnote in the text of the translation that explains the tonal difference between Ivanych and Ivanovich.

But again the recurring question: what is this mastery and where does it come from? The context of this answer begins with Jakobson and continues with Walter Benjamin.

As a mode of communication, language is seldom the sum of its words. The hypothetical exchange of: “So how’ve you been?” “I’ve been good. Pretty good, yeah”<sup>10</sup>, is incomplete without its context. The meaning and significance of these sentences in the context of a mechanically polite scene of idle chitchat is completely different from one of an unlikely reunion of three? people caught in a love-triangle. The words themselves are only part of the content: it is the thing that makes them necessary that is of interest for translator and director alike. In his work *The Task of The Translator*, Walter Benjamin concerns himself precisely with the notion of an Ideal language. What is it that makes the words on the page necessary in the original, and how does one translate *that* as opposed to simply the words on the page?

Benjamin argues that the original and its translation are products of the same source: a greater language.

In the same way a translation, instead of resembling the meaning of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original’s mode of signification, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel (79).

Rejecting the idea of translation “being a sterile equation of two dead languages” (75), which may be interpreted as a literal translation, Benjamin argues for an approach that accepts the notion “that kinship does not necessarily involve likeness” (75). This means that a translator should rely on neither textual exactness nor absolute freedom of interpretation. Instead, Benjamin calls for a translation of what makes the words necessary in the first place—the mode of signification. The translation must access the same source of creativity as the original. Both

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<sup>10</sup> Rapp, *Red Light Winter*, 64.

are translated from the greater, “Ideal” language, which for Benjamin is tantamount to the translation of mastery.

This is a significantly deeper realm of theory than the intermediary split of “bring the reader to the writer” or vice-versa, and even more so than the introductory dichotomy of “fidelity versus liberty.” This type of approach, albeit abstract in that it does not spell out instructions, is quite apt in that it may lend itself to any one of the subsidiary aspects of translation theory. Alas, the translator is again confronted with the question: how do you know which approach is the right one? As a wise man once cautioned me: “theory is only as good as your next sentence.” This means that the translator must not look to the theorists in answering this, but should rather focus on their objective.

My intention was to create and use my own translation of the text as a blueprint for our production. This entailed first translating the text from Russian to English, which served as the first draft of what would eventually develop into a coherent script.

I began translating in early June of 2015. Aboard an Amtrak train from New York City to Northampton, Massachusetts, I opened up the original Russian text. The font was small and each page was covered from top to bottom. My initial task was simple: read through the text and highlight any word, or turn of phrase, that was unfamiliar to me. It would be impossible to do an adequate translation of “Bobok,” or any text for that matter, without a complete understanding of the original’s language. Armed with a pink highlighter, I commenced my task.

There was no shortage of things to highlight. From the story’s subtitle to its final two lines, it was clear that compiling a glossary was necessary. The nature of my glossary entries varied from unfamiliar words, and turns of phrase, to familiar terms with multiple possibilities of translation. Examples of the former range from ordinary Russian words that I did not know the

precise meaning of at the time—like the word “Робки”, which I denoted as meaning “timid/sheepish/pusillanimous”—to specific cultural terms such as “Панегирик”, which may be translated either directly as “panegyric” or more liberally as “eulogy”<sup>11</sup>. Examples of the latter include turns of phrase such as “из случайности”. The two words “из” and “случайности” literally mean “from” and “accident”, respectively. While familiar with the meaning of both the words and the sentiment of this expression, which is that of an introduction to an anecdote of sorts, I thought it necessary to include a few options. My initial translation, which incidentally is the one that made it into the final draft, reads as: “it so happened that”. The alternatives read as follows: “by sheer happenstance” and “as it were”. I chose to include multiple choices because I wanted to provide our actor with the opportunity to choose which one worked best for him. As Robert Corrigan writes in his essay *Translating for Actors*, which I will comment on more extensively in the following chapter of this project: “[...] in the theater you write only for actors—never for readers.”<sup>12</sup>

After this initial phase of reading, highlighting and annotating, I transitioned to the actual act of translation. To do so, I sought out the aid of a key resource for this project: my father—Dmitri. Because I was translating “Bobok” for the purposes of a live performance in which the text would exist aurally, it was equally important for me to be able to hear the original text read aloud in a most perfect way as possible. While I myself am quite capable of reading the original text aloud, I recognized that my father—a native speaker of Russian—would do it much better. My instinct was that I, as a translator, would be able to pick up on “the mastery” of the original more comprehensively through the lens of his spoken voice, which would intuitively understand

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<sup>11</sup> The sentence containing this word was eventually omitted from the translation as a result of the rehearsal process.

<sup>12</sup> Corrigan, Robert W. "Translating for Actors." *The Craft and Context of Translation*. Austin: U of Texas, 1971. 95-106. Print.

and communicate the tones and cadences—the proverbial “music”—of Dostoevsky’s Russian more effectively than if it were me alone.

Laptops in lap, we commenced this stage of the translation process on the couch in the living room. We worked chronologically, moving at a rate of one paragraph at a time. First he would read aloud to me the paragraph in question. I would then render my initial translation in English. I would do so by trying to imagine how to best communicate the tone of the text read aloud to a native speaker of English with no knowledge of Russian whatsoever. This was my “target audience”, so to speak, because this best describes the audience of the eventual performances.

In this sense, I am moving the writer to the reader because I am trying to imitate how the original language feels to me through the conventions of English. This does not mean, however, that I am actively seeking to eliminate the foreign, Russian nature of the text by accommodating it for the American ear. On the contrary, I preserved as many foreign details as I could. An obvious example of this is the translation of names. Russian names, patronymics, diminutives, and last names are proven to be exceptionally complicated for Americans to understand and pronounce<sup>13</sup>. They are extremely contextually specific. Nonetheless, I chose to include all names in full as presented in the original text<sup>14</sup>. To make another example out of the first sentence of the text, I could have translated “Semyon Ardiolonovich” as “an acquaintance”, which would have arguably preserved the general sense of who he is to Ivan. This version of the translation lacks the specificity of the name for the sake of simplicity, which is contrary to both my objective as a

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<sup>13</sup> During the rehearsal process, I insisted on giving our actor a comprehensive tutorial on this matter.

<sup>14</sup> There are a few exceptions. There is an instance in which the character Katya, which is already a diminutive of Ekaterina, is referred to as Katyusha—a further diminutive. I left her name as Katya because I felt that this diminutive of a diminutive, which is difficult for the English speaker to fathom and pronounce, would not be a necessary distinction in English. Including “Katyusha” runs the risk of an audience member mistaking this for another character.

translator as well as to Ivan's character. Circumventing the names for the sake of the audience's clarity seemed too patronizing to me as a translator.

As I translated, I would also keep in mind the voice of our actor. The logic was that if Fergus is to speak the entirety of text, as he is our solo performer, then I as a translator should try to imagine his voice saying my translation. This too was a great privilege because I have known Fergus most of my life, and my innate knowledge of his voice and acting ability allowed me to be very specific with the imagination and creativity behind the translation.

The stimulus fueling the translation can best be described as a harmony of voices and languages. First there is the voice of Dostoevsky, who presents the voices of his narrator and other characters in 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian. This is then filtered to me by my father's voice, which reads the older Russian in a 20<sup>th</sup> century voice, and provides commentary in 21<sup>st</sup> century Russian. This experience is, in turn, interpreted by my 21<sup>st</sup> century voice, in tandem with my imagination of Fergus' voice, and translated into an English that is not bound to anything but that which makes the original and translation necessary to begin with: Benjamin's "greater language". Benjamin would further argue that Dostoevsky himself translated his own text from that amorphous idiom that is the language of inspiration—and Jakobson would say that each of these vocal filters is an act of translation because all of language is an act of translation<sup>15</sup>. My language of inspiration, my Dostoevsky, is tonally composed of this chord of voices. My translation is one of liberty in that it aims to preserve a quality of the text that is greater than mere syntax. It aims to translate that which is behind the words: Dostoevsky's intention.

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<sup>15</sup> "[...] the cognitive level of language not only admits but directly requires recoding interpretation, i.e., translation" (Jakobson 149).



### III. On Directing

This chapter will focus on my role as a director in the context of our rehearsal process. It will begin with a critical look at the nature of translating from the page to the stage, followed by a detailed analysis of the dramatic structure of the solo-performance, and will conclude with an examination of how the text of the translation evolved on the page as a result of this process.

In addition to the translation of language, this senior project is also concerned with a translation of artistic medium. In its original, as Dostoevsky composed it, “Bobok” is a short story. Its design dictates that it is read privately in one’s head, which fundamentally disqualifies it as a dramatic text. Plays, on the other hand, are written for performance, and therefore are dramatic texts. They are genetically engineered for production—a public act. As a group of co-creators, our job was to create a theatrical event out of a text that was not designed to do so.

This task invariably begs the following question: what does it mean to translate “Bobok” to the language of the stage? To answer this question, we must first define what exactly “the language of the stage” is—and there is no better place to start than with Peter Brook’s iconic work *The Empty Space*. In his chapter “The Deadly Theater” Brook eloquently details the fundamental principles of what it means to put a text on stage, arguing that it is far from a straightforward task.

Because if one starts from the premise that a stage is a stage—not a convenient place for the unfolding of a staged novel or a staged poem or a staged lecture or a staged story—then the word that is spoken on this stage exists, or fails to exist,

only in relation to the tensions it creates on that stage within the given stage circumstances. In other words, although the dramatist brings his own life nurtured by the life around him into his work—the empty stage is no ivory tower—the choices he makes and the values he observes are only powerful in proportion to what they create in the language of theatre (37-38).

One cannot simply “put” a text on stage, not even a theatrical one. Unless the entire production of “Bobok” consists of the text literally lying stationary somewhere upon the stage, more work is required. Brook’s argument is quite relevant to our production of “Bobok”, as he specifically cites the potential downfall of thinking of the stage as a “convenient place” for staging a short story. Staging a theatrical text requires a director to do a tremendous amount of dramatic analysis, translating the words on the page into specific units of analysis: the event of a scene, objectives, obstacles, and tactics. Staging a non-theatrical text, properly, requires a further step of analysis and imagination: creating a structured journey.

Because the original “Bobok” is a non-theatrical text, we did not have the luxury of the fundamental elements that a dramatic text would provide: the division of acts, scenes, a list of characters, stage directions, etc. Therefore, we were forced to create all of these components using the translated text as the source. The most noticeable way that this took shape on the page is the way I organized the text by speaker. The text of my translation is divided by who is speaking on stage, just like a play. Most of the text is denoted as Ivan, and Ivan also performs the subsequent characters that appear—this is emphasized in a footnote in the script. By dividing the text according to when a character is to speak on stage, the translated text takes the form of a script for a play, which is a theatrical text.

There is an additional factor pertaining to my translation, however, that makes it receptive to facilitating a theatrical event: it was translated specifically for an actor. As Robert Corrigan notes, the language of the stage is different from the language of literature: “[...] the

language of the theater must be considered as something other than a means of conducting human characteristics to their external ends [...] The theater is dead the moment there is a substitution of statement for dramatic process (97).” This essentially means that elements such as subtext, for example, are palpable in different ways on the page versus the stage. The page can rely on the reader’s intuition and critical reading ability, the stage cannot. As both the translator and director, I have to be acutely aware of the fact that creating a play out of “Bobok” means absolutely nothing without an actor to perform it: “It is a playwright’s vanity to claim creation because he is the first link in the chain of a production. His play would be no play if it remained words on paper (99).”

As a result of our rehearsal process, “Bobok” operated under the rubric of a very specific dramatic structure. In order to best detail this, I will first outline it generally. Then I will analyze it in the context of Robert Jackson’s article *Some Considerations on “The Dream of a Ridiculous Man” and “Bobok” from the Aesthetic Point of View* in order to illustrate the principal differences between “Bobok” as a short story and “Bobok” as a theatrical event.

Because the original short story is written as a first-person narrative, it naturally lends itself to solo-performance: the story’s narrator, Ivan Ivanovich, becomes a character on stage. He then plays all of the other characters that appear in this story, quite literally for the audience’s benefit. It is one actor, Fergus, playing the narrator, Ivan, who then presents all of the other characters as required. This is a core conceit of our production.

One obvious question that arises from this conceptual framework is: why does it have to be a solo-performance? There are more characters in “Bobok” besides the narrator, why did we not cast other actors to perform these roles? The logic behind this dramaturgical choice is grounded in two ideas: an affinity between the first-person narrative and solo-performance, and

the linguistic similarities shared by Ivan and the other characters—the voices of the dead. In the short story the reader experiences narrator’s inner monologue. The only way to share this content is through the private act of reading the words on the page. The narrator does not take into account the reader’s reaction. On the stage however, Ivan is very aware of his audience because they are sitting right in front of him. They are both occupying the same space and are both participating in the public act of performance. The private narrator-to-reader relationship is translated into a public performer-to-audience relationship, which constitutes the affinity between the first-person narrative and solo-performance.

The linguistic similarities between Ivan and the other characters suggest the latter’s subservience to the former. Over the course of the text, Ivan impersonates several other voices in passing—his more critical contemporaries. He gives us Semyon Ardiolonovich, which has already been discussed; the portraitist who painted him “not for the sake of literature, but rather for the two symmetrical warts on his forehead”; the editorial office staff that consistently reject him and his work on the basis of lacking “salt”; the gossiping contemporary that writes off people like Ivan on account of madness, who then makes a reappearance at the conclusion of Ivan’s “Spanish anecdote”; and finally his friend who is able to aptly diagnose the choppy nature of Ivan’s style of speech, writing, and overall life—as Ivan himself acknowledges. On the page of the original, these instances appear as the narrator quoting these other characters, whereas on the stage Ivan consciously presents them to the audience by means of imitation<sup>16</sup>. Because Ivan is speaking all of these words, it is challenging to discern whether Ivan is in fact citing his contemporaries faithfully—both on the page and on the stage. Because Ivan is our sole source for this information we are forced to accept it. On the stage, this concept establishes a linguistic

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<sup>16</sup> These imitations were mostly satirical in nature, particularly if Ivan was presenting his contemporary critics that reject him and write him off. The major exception to this is his presentation of his friend, whom he agrees with.

similarity between Ivan's language and the language of the voices he is presenting. A key example of this is the heavy repetition of the phrase "so to speak"<sup>17</sup>. Ivan utilizes this expression with reckless abandon, which practically amounts to an aural representation of the frequent commas of his sentences, which are responsible for his admittedly choppy style. While it can be argued that the Russian term "дескать", a relatively archaic term seldom heard in contemporary Russian, is simply common for Dostoevsky's Russian, the reader and audience member alike have no choice to but accept that it is *Ivan's* language. This renders his imitations as filtered citations, ultimately amounting to his words rather than the words of those he is imitating.

The voices of the dead are composed of perfectly commonplace societal figures: a General and his subordinate official, a shopkeeper, an irritable lady, an engineer, and so on and so forth. They are an accurate representation of the living world both vocationally and linguistically. Each of them speaks? their own language, representing a social type, sorts. Lebezyatnikov is quite servile and is very reverent of his superior, General Pervoedov, constantly repeating the phrases "Your Excellency" and "so to speak". As a superior, Pervoedov himself does not half to worry about the formalities of titles and his language is thus blunt, as he is allowed to speak his mind: "A bit boring though". The shopkeeper is notably pious and proud, qualities that are marked by his religious references such as "the sacrament of death" and the retort of "I would not lay next to you, not for any amount of gold". Avdotya Ignatyevna, the "irritable lady", is best characterized by the noise "Ack!", which viscerally demonstrates her trademark irritability. While there are more voices of the dead, this initial selection is an ample amount of evidence to demonstrate that each voice is unique. The voices of the dead begin to sound more and more like Ivan as the text advances. Not only does Ivan's commonplace "so to

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<sup>17</sup> In Russian: *дескать*—*deskat'*.

speak” permeate their collective language, they make a specific reference to the idea of inertia—something Ivan mentions when contemplating the question of “what makes dead people that much heavier in their coffins”—when Lebezyatnikov cites the “locally made” philosopher Platon Nikolaevich’s theory on why they are still alive beyond the grave. This, in tandem with the analysis of Ivan’s impersonations of his contemporaries, gives credence to the idea of “Bobok” being a solo-performance featuring Ivan the narrator, who then presents other characters. While it is perfectly plausible to have as many actors as there are characters, this would result in a very different production and would have to be grounded in a different type of creative process and analysis.

The dramatic structure for our production of “Bobok” is composed of the following sequence of phases: reality, reprieve imagination, nightmare, and reality\*. It begins with Ivan and the audience sharing the same space. Ivan is on the stage performing for the audience, who are seated. The audience and the performer are in the same room, the same abstract space. In this space Ivan is able to speak to the audience directly and candidly. His objective is to charm them through this intimate connection. Unfortunately for Ivan, his attention span is too scattered to support this connection. In his article, Jackson too notes this quality in Ivan: “The opening lines of Ivan Ivanovich’s notes provide a kaleidoscopic impression of his world, something like photomontage shifting images, fragmented scenes, and witty social commentary” (295). It is precisely Ivan’s fragmented disposition that is his undoing. Jackson further notes that the story is composed of “three descending circles”, the first of which is “the social milieu of the narrator” (294). Ivan’s preoccupation with this social milieu is the stimulus for his distraction. In this phase of the dramatic structure there is a clear distinction between Ivan speaking directly to the audience and him speaking aloud to himself, tangentially. This toggling, of sorts, begins to break

Ivan, which directly links to theme of disintegration in “Bobok” detailed in Jackson’s article: “The drama of “Bobok” is not a drama of transfiguration, but one of disintegration” (295). This opening phase begins in reality, which then disintegrates. This is marked by Ivan’s auditory hallucination of someone near him saying “Bobok, bobok, bobok”, which on the stage was evoked with the use of sound design—a core tool of our production.

To relieve the pressure of his cognition, the seams of which are perhaps starting to come apart, Ivan transitions to the next phase: that of reprieve imagination. In this phase Ivan tries to enchant his audience by telling them the incidental story of his trip to the cemetery, which in Jackson’s article constitutes the second circle. Here Ivan attempts to hold both his and the audience’s attention alike by shifting his speech into the past tense, thus transforming the fabric of the shared space into that of the cemetery. Ivan guides us, or tries to, through this “place of decidedly unholy doings, smells, open graves, and corpses” (294-295). His tone is longer that of a candid interlocutor—it is now one of intense story telling. Ivan transforms the stage into the cemetery of his imagination, leading the audience along by the proverbial hand.

What he leads them to is the voices of the dead, which in our production manifested itself as a piece of writing that Ivan had written and prepared for performance. The script in Ivan’s hand on stage is in fact the script of the translation, which Ivan uses in order to portray all of the voices of the dead while running from imaginary grave to imaginary grave. He is at that moment an actor that is not yet off-book. Eventually, this task gets too tiring for Ivan and Fergus alike. Ivan stops his own performance to catch his breath with the excuse of not approving of his character’s attitudes beyond the grave: “No, this I cannot allow! And *this* is a contemporary dead person?” This, however, is where Ivan’s reprieve imagination takes a turn for the worse.

The penultimate phase of the dramatic structure is that of nightmare. It is here that the voices of the dead that Ivan has been portraying acquire their own agency and continue the story without him. They come alive off the page in the form of auditory hallucinations, which the three of us—Fergus, Eileen, and I—painstakingly designed on Logic Pro X over the course of several months. The hallucination begins by interrupting interruption, when the voice of Lebezyatnikov is heard independent of Ivan: “A new one, Your Excellency”. Ivan attempts to continue his expository monologue, but the interruption repeats and gets louder. He then realizes that the voice of Lebezyatnikov is calling for him to skip ahead to a later part of the story, the arrival of the “young man” character. Bewildered, Ivan tries to catch up only to find that the voices seem to be functioning on their own. This dynamic grows to the point where Ivan is left with absolutely no control of the voices, which now sound jumbled—much like the state of his cognition. He is terrified when he is able to make out an exchange between Klinevich and Lebezyatnikov that directly references his hallucination of “Bobok, bobok, bobok”. It is here that, in attempt to save himself from this developing hallucination, he tears up his own script—the symbolic DNA of the voices.

This plan backfires. As he throws the remains of the script into the air in frustration, the space retaliates by raining paper on him. The voices are now are now cacophonously accompanied by other auditory hallucinations as well. The text of the voices of the dead at this point demonstrates a moment in my translation where I bring the reader to the writer because I preserved all of the foreign references without accommodating their language. Lines like “First off, General, you’re playing preferans<sup>18</sup> in your grave” demonstrate this. There is no difference at this point between hallucination and a living nightmare—Ivan begging the audience to make it

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<sup>18</sup> A popular card game among Russians.



stop. As the hallucination reaches its overwhelming peak, it stops and the space is returned to the way it looked in the initial reality phase—except that the floor is covered in shreds of paper.

In the final phase, which is denoted as “reality\*” to indicate that it is supposed to resemble the initial phase only something is not quite the same about it. The audience has now experienced Ivan’s turmoil, which puts the opening frame in a different light. Ivan’s goal is now to save the audience from the horrors he has seen—a point reinforced by Jackson: “But the message of “Bobok” is clear”: like the *danse macabre* of medieval painting, “Bobok” emerges as a stark and grim admonition, a warning of impending catastrophe for society” (302). As Ivan desperately tries to pick up the shreds of paper, an apt visual metaphor for the state of his mind, the opening music of the show repeats—indicating that Ivan is to everything start over. Our production concluded with Ivan repeating his opening lines, with an extra set of repetition of the line “will you ever be sober?” Like Sisyphus, he has a task that is to be repeated forever.

Obviously, there is a drastic difference between “Bobok: Notes of a Certain Individual” on the page and “Bobok” on the stage<sup>19</sup>. The core of this difference is well articulated by Jackson’s analysis of the grotesque: “The grotesque in “Bobok” is a device. The author uses it not to affirm a vision of the grotesque, the authenticity of an estranged universe, but to parody it”. (302) On the stage, in our production, the grotesque is an overwhelming nightmare. It may be a device for Ivan Ivanovich, who becomes the author in our production, but it turns on him. The story, the device, no longer needs him. It goes on to own him, forever. It is far from a removed, benign device. This is in fact the greatest way in which “Bobok” differs on the stage versus on the page.

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<sup>19</sup> We chose to omit the subtitle along with the paragraph long introduction featured in the original. The original context of the story appearing in a literary journal did not seem pertinent to the dramatic event of “Bobok”.

#### IV. Conclusion: The Performances

Being an audience member for my own production is a feeling I will never forget. I had spent so much time on this project at that point that the company of people who had not gone on this journey with me felt quite strange. I had to remind myself, of course, that they were in fact the “target audience” I had in mind when I began translating in the first place. Nonetheless, I could not help but feel as though everyone were watching me in addition to the performance—even though this was not actually the case.

I thought the performances were a great success. Fergus gave excellent performances each and every night, as he always does, and each night I learned something new about my own translation. It is difficult to describe exactly what I learned, but is closely related to the aforementioned notion described in Corrigan essay: “[...] in the theater you write only for actors—never for readers” (Corrigan 98). Experiencing the performances as an audience member, having the opportunity to see my actor and my translation become one on stage, not knowing where one ends and the other begins, truly highlighted this notion. I also had the oddly wonderful experience of being present for the show in which an audience member’s phone went off towards the end of the performance—after the conclusion of the hallucinatory soundscape. Fergus’, or rather Ivan’s reaction, was simultaneously cringe-inducing and utterly fantastic. He interpreted the influx of sound as an extension of his hallucinations and proceeded to scream at the phone and phone owner alike until the sound was exterminated. Having seen my text on

stage and in rehearsal hundreds of times, I must say this particular experience was a refreshing novelty that really highlighted how present Fergus was as a performer.

Translating and directing are very similar tasks in a certain way. Both require the objective of attaining that which makes the words necessary in the first place—the Ideal language. My objective of translating “Bobok” for the stage was achieved. The text of the translation included in this senior project reflects exactly what Fergus said in the performances, which I consider to be the translation’s ultimate conclusion. While the original and my translation appear very different in their form, they are composed from same intangible material. In the words of Jean Paris, my translation is a brother of the original text in that both use the greater, Ideal language as their source<sup>20</sup>. If I were to do this project over, I would ground it more in the history of Dostoevsky. Because the nature of our rehearsal process was a devised one in that we were making a performance out of a text that does not inherently contain one, I felt that the discoveries made in rehearsal had more to do with the dynamics of performance rather than the dynamics of the original’s context. This however is a product of hindsight. It is time now to put “Bobok” to rest.

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<sup>20</sup> “[...] a successful translation should be rather the brother than the son of the original, for both should proceed from the same Ideal which is the real but invisible father of the work” (Paris 63).

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## Bobok

*OPENING MUSIC. IVAN RISES TO GREET HIS AUDIENCE. OPENING MUSIC FADES.*

### IVAN

On the third of the month, Semyon Ardalionovich says to me: “Honestly, *Ivan Ivanych*<sup>21</sup>, will you ever be sober?” A strange demand. I’m not offended, I’m a timid man—but, then again, they’ve made a lunatic out of me. It so happened I was getting my portrait done when the portraitist remarks: “So, they say you’re a literary scholar, so to speak”. I gave in, and he—I read to you: “Come on up to witness this sickly, close to insane, individual.”

I mean whatever, but then again, such ad hominem vindictiveness—and in print? The printed word is meant for noble things; one needs ideals—but here...

You could have at least said it indirectly, so that I could have the last word. But no, he doesn’t want “indirectly”. These days humor and good style are disappearing, replacing invective for insight. I take no offense: I wrote a novella—they didn’t print it. I wrote a feuilleton—rejected. I wrote many feuilletons for many editorial offices, all rejected. They say, “You lack, shall we say, salt.”

Salt. What salt, I ask? Attic salt?

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<sup>21</sup> “Ivanych” is the less formal version of the patronymic “Ivanovich”.

Lately I've been translating from French, for booksellers. I even write advertisements for merchants: "A rarity! Red", so to speak, "tea! From colonial plantations." I compiled "*The Art of Attracting Women*". I myself have released six such books in my career. I want to compile Voltaire's *Bons Mots*, but I'm afraid the public will find it tasteless. Who's Voltaire now? These days it's a bludgeon to the face, not Voltaire! Everyone's knocked each other's teeth out!

And so, that is the extent of my literary activity.

I think that the portraitist painted me not for the sake of literature, but rather for the two symmetrical warts on my forehead: a phenomenon, they say. They're out of ideas, after all, so they depend on phenomena. This they call realism.

As for the insanity, well last year many were written off on account of madness. And with what rhetoric: "Such a distinctive, so to speak, talent...and in the end...well, this should have been foreseen long ago..."

I recall a Spanish anecdote in which the French, two and a half centuries ago, built for themselves their very first madhouse: "They locked away all of their idiots in a special building to reassure *themselves* that they are, in fact, smart people." My point exactly: locking someone up in a loony bin does not demonstrate one's intelligence. "So-and-so went crazy, this, in turn, means we are smart". No, it doesn't.

Ah, devil take it! And why am I obsessing over my own intellect? Grumble, grumble. I've even worn out my housekeeper. Yesterday a friend came by: "Your, so to speak, style is changing, it's choppy. You chop, chop—an inserted sentence, and yet another inserted sentence within the inserted sentence, and then you add a parenthetical about yet another thing, and then again you chop, chop..."

My friend is right. Something strange is happening to me. And my character's changing, and my head aches. I'm starting to see and hear some very strange things. It's not so much voices, but rather it's as if someone were near me: "Bobok, bobok, bobok!"<sup>22</sup> What is this "bobok"? I need to unwind.

I went to unwind and wound up at a funeral. I haven't been to a cemetery, I don't think, for twenty-five years; and what a spot it is!

First of all, the smell. About fifteen dead people arrived. Many grieving faces, even falsely grieving faces, and many exhibited unreserved happiness. The clergy can't complain: income's income. But the smell, the smell. I would not want to be in their place.

I peeked at the dead people's faces with caution. Some expressions are soft, others are unpleasant. Overall, smiles are not so nice, some especially so. I don't like it; they haunt my dreams.

What makes dead people that much heavier in coffins, I wonder? They say it's from some sort of inertia, that the body is no longer in control of itself...or some such malarkey; this contradicts mechanics and intelligent thought. I don't like it when those with mere general educations apply themselves in solving complex quandaries; and this is rampant.

I don't understand, however, why I stayed at the cemetery. I sat down on a tombstone and naturally fell deep into thought.

I began with the Moscow exhibition, and concluded with the concept of astonishment, as a topic. Here is what I concluded on "astonishment": "To be astonished by everything is, of course, stupid, and not being astonished by anything is considered much more beautiful and is, for some reason, accepted as good tone. But this is hardly the case in actuality. I think, not being astonished by anything is much stupider than being astonished by everything. Besides: not being

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<sup>22</sup> Bobok sound effect is played simultaneously.



astonished by anything is almost the same as not respecting anything. The stupid person is incapable of respect.”

This is where I really lost my way. I don't like reading tombstones; they're always the same.

It is safe to infer that I had been sitting for a long time, even too long; in other words I lay down on a long rock in the shape of a marble coffin. And how did it happen that I started to hear various things? I didn't pay attention to it and dismissed it with disgust. But, as it were, the conversation continued. I listen—muffled sounds, as if mouths were smothered by pillows; and all the while articulate and very close. I came to, sat up, and began to eavesdrop very attentively.

**LEBEZYATNIKOV<sup>23</sup>**

Your Excellency, this is simply impossible, sir. You called for hearts, I called whist, and suddenly you have seven diamonds. You have to decide before hand about diamonds, good sir.

**GENERAL**

So what, we have to play by memory? Where's the appeal in that?

**LEBEZYATNIKOV**

It's not allowed, Your Excellency, without a guarantee it's not at all allowed. It has to be the dummy, and there must be a blind deal.

**GENERAL**

Well you won't get a dummy here.

**IVAN**

What rude words! Both strange, and unexpected. One is all uncompromising with a solid voice, the other is softly sweeter; I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't heard it myself.

**SHOPKEEPER**

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<sup>23</sup> Until noted otherwise, it is Ivan playing all other characters.

Oh, ho, ho, ho!

**IVAN**

Suddenly sounded an entirely different voice; about five yards the general's spot and from a totally fresh little tomb—a voice male and simple, but softly pious and tender in manner.

**SHOPKEEPER**

Oh, ho, ho, ho!

**AVDOTYA**

Ack, again he's hiccupping!

**IVAN**

Suddenly rang a highly squeamish voice of an irritated lady, one holier than thou.

**AVDOTYA**

Being near this shopkeeper is a punishment!

**SHOPKEEPER**

I didn't even hiccup, I haven't even eaten; it is but my nature. But you, madam, and your-here caprices are in every way preventing you from relaxing.

**AVDOTYA**

Then why did you have to lie here?

**SHOPKEEPER**

They put me here, my wife and my little children put me here, I didn't up and lie here. This is the sacrament of death! And I would never lay next to you, not for any amount gold—we are equally sinful in God's judgment.

**AVDOTYA**

Equally sinful!

**IVAN**

Mocked the dead lady with contempt.

**AVDOTYA**

And don't you dare even speak with me!

**SHOPKEEPER**

Oh, ho, ho, ho!

**LEBEZYATNIKOV**

It would seem that the shopkeeper is obeying the lady, Your Excellency.

**GENERAL**

And why wouldn't he obey?

**LEBEZYATNIKOV**

Well it is known, Your Excellency, that there is a new order here.

**GENERAL**

What's this new order?

**LEBEZYATNIKOV**

Well we, so to speak, died, Your Excellency.

**GENERAL**

Ah, yes! Well, order is order.

**OLD TIMER**

No, I'd live some more! No...you know...I'd live more!

**IVAN**

Suddenly rang a new voice.

**LEBEZYATNIKOV**

You hear that, Your Excellency, he's at it again. For three days he's silent and then suddenly: 'I'd live more, no, I'd live more!' And with such an appetite, don't you know, he-he!

**GENERAL**

A bit boring, though.

**LEBEZYATNIKOV**

A bit boring indeed! Perhaps we can tease Avdotya Ignatyevna again, he-he?

**GENERAL**

Oh no, if you please. I can't stand that unrelenting pain-in-the-ass.

**AVDOTYA**

And I, on the other hand, can't stand either of you! You're both utterly boring and have no ability to speak in ideals.

**IVAN<sup>24</sup>**

No, this I cannot allow! And *this* is a contemporary dead person? However, I should listen more and not jump to conclusions. What next, however.

What followed was such a hullabaloo, that I was unable to retain it all, as many more awoke: an official awoke, a State Councilor, who began to imminently and immediately engage the general on the topic of a topic of a sub-committee in the Ministry of 'such and such' Affairs—

**LEBEZYATNIKOV**

A new one, Your Excellency...

**IVAN**

...which very much entertained the general. I admit, I myself learned a lot—

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<sup>24</sup> Ivan no longer plays any of the other characters. The voice of the dead now speak for themselves.

**LEBEZYATNIKOV**

A *new* one, Your Excellency...

**IVAN**

..and was even surprised by the possible opportunities of learning such administrative news—

**LEBEZYATNIKOV**

A new one, Your Excellency! A new one!

**IVAN**

Um. I, uh—

**LEBEZYATNIKOV**

A new one, Your Excellency, a new one!

**YOUNG MAN**

Ah, ah, what's happened to me?

**AVDOTYA**

Oh, it sounds like a young man!

**YOUNG MAN**

I...I...from complications, and so suddenly!

**GENERAL**

Well, can't help it now, young man.

**YOUNG MAN**

What do you mean? I was at Shultz's—I had, you know, complications, first my chest and a cough—

**LEBEZYATNIKOV**

You said your chest first?

**YOUNG MAN**

Yes, my chest! And then suddenly no chest, no phlegm, and I can't even breathe...and you know—

**LEBEZYATNIKOV**

I know, I know—but for the chest, you should rather see Ecke, not Shultz.

**YOUNG MAN**

You know, I was going to see Botkin—

**GENERAL**

Well, Botkin's a bit much.

**YOUNG MAN**

What do you mean? I hear he's all attentive and can prognosticate everything in advance.

**LEBEZYATNIKOV**

His Excellency was referring to the *cost*.

**YOUNG MAN**

What? But he's just three rubles, and he looks you over and writes you prescriptions...and I absolutely wanted to, I was told he's the best! So what, gentlemen, what should I do, go to Ecke or to Botkin?

**GENERAL**

What? Go where?

**AVDOTYA**

Dear boy, dear, lovely boy, how I love you so!

**LEBEZYATNIKOV**

Your Excellency, Privy Councilor Tarasevich awakens!

**TARASEVICH and IVAN**

Ah? What?

**LEBEZYATNIKOV**

It's me Your Excellency, sir, just me thus far, sir.

**TARASEVICH and IVAN**

What do you require from me?

**IVAN**

*OVERLAPPING WITH THE NEXT LINE.*

Shh, quiet! I'm Tarasevich.

**LEBEZYATNIKOV**

Only to inquire as to His Excellency's well being; newcomers here always feel themselves claustrophobic, sir...General Pervoedov would like to have the honor of making your acquaintance with Your Excellency and hopes to—

**TARASEVICH and IVAN**

*OVERLAPPING AND OUT OF SYNC.*

Never heard of him.

**LEBEZYATNIKOV**

But please, Your Excellency, General Pervoedov, Vassily Vassilyevich...

**TARASEVICH**

You're General Pervoedov?

**LEBEZYATNIKOV**

No sir, Your Excellency, I am but Court Councilor Lebezyatnikov, at your service, but General Pervoedov—

**TARASEVICH**

Nonsense! And I ask you, leave me be.

**GENERAL**

Leave it.

**LEBEZYATNIKOV**

*TO GENERAL PERVOEDOV.*

He's just not fully awake yet, Your Excellency, it must be taken into account, sir; this they do out of unfamiliarity: once he's fully up, he'll receive you kindly, sir...

**GENERAL**

Leave it!

**KLINEVICH**

Vassily Vassilyevich! Ey you, Your Excellency! I've been observing you all for two hours already, I've been here three days, after all; do you remember me, Vassily Vassilyich? Klinevich, we met at the Volkonsky house, where they, I don't know why, even received you.

**GENERAL**

Well, Count Pyotr Petrovich...even you...and at such a young age...I'm so sorry!

**KLINEVICH**

I'm sorry myself, but I don't care, I want to make the best out of everything. And it's Baron, not Count, nothing but a Baron. We're raggedy little Barons, once lackeys, I don't know why, I spit on it. Avdotya Ignatyevna, remember when you took me, fifteen years ago, when I was still a fourteen-year-old page, and corrupted me?

**AVDOTYA**



Ah, it's you, you rascal, well at least God sent you, because here—you wouldn't believe, Klinevich, wouldn't believe, the lack of life and wit here.

**KLINEVICH**

Well yes, yes, and I aim to stir-up something quite original here. Your Excellency—not you, Pervoedov—Your Excellency, the other one, sir Tarasevich, the Privy Councilor! Answer me! Klinevich, the one who transported you to Mademoiselle Furie during Lent, remember?

**TARASEVICH**

I hear you, Klinevich, and I'm quite happy to hear from you, believe me—

**KLINEVICH**

I don't believe you one bit, and I spit on it. I bet he's already sniffed out Katya Berestova.

**TARASEVICH**

Who? What Katya?

**KLINEVICH**

Ah, what Katya? Over here to the left, five steps from me, ten from you. This is her fifth day here, and if you only knew, *grand père*, what a little hellcat she is... Katya, make yourself known!

**KATYA**<sup>25</sup>

He-he-he-he-he-he!

**TARASEVICH**

And she's blonde?

**KATYA**

---

<sup>25</sup> This line through Avdotya's next line are bordering on an indiscernible jumble, until they are cut through by Klinevich's next line.

He-he-he!

**TARASEVICH**

I've...for a long time...fantasized about a blonde...around fifteen years old...and in these exact circumstances...

**AVDOTYA**

Ah, you sick bastard!

**KLINEVICH**

Enough! I see the material is excellent. You, official of some sort, Lebezyatnikov, I think you were called!

**LEBEZYATNIKOV**

Lebezyatnikov, Court Councillor, Semyon Evseych, at your service and with great pleasure.

**KLINEVICH**

I spit on your pleasure, it just would appear that you seem to know everything around here. Tell me: first off, this has been puzzling me since yesterday, how is it that we are able to speak here? We did die, after all—

**LEBEZYATNIKOV**

This, if you please, Baron, could be better explained by Platon Nikolayevich.

**KLINEVICH**

What is this “Platon Nikolaevich”? Enough hemming and hawing, get to the point.

**LEBEZYATNIKOV**

Platon Nikolaevich is our locally made philosopher, natural scientist and magister. He released a few philosophical books in his time.

**KLINEVICH**

Get to the point, the point!

**LEBEZYATNIKOV**

He explains it all with the simplest facts, namely, that up there, when we were still living, we mistakenly thought our death there as death. Here the body becomes sort of alive again, the remains of life concentrate, but only in consciousness. This—I don't know how to express this—continues life, as if by inertia. It's all concentrated, in his opinion, somewhere in one's consciousness and goes on for another two or three months...sometimes even for half a year. There is, for example, someone like that here, who's almost entirely decomposed, but once a week at six in the morning he still mumbles one word, meaningless of course, about some sort of bobok: "Bobok, bobok"—but in him too, there is still a glimmer of life, perpetuated by an invisible spark.

**KLINEVICH**

Enough! The rest, I'm sure, is all nonsense. Above all, it's two or three months of life and in the end—*bobok*? I offer you all to spend these two months as pleasantly as possible, and therefore come up with new rules. Gentlemen! I propose to be unashamed!

**ALL (OR MOST)**

Ah, let's, let's be unashamed!

*FIRST EXPLOSION*<sup>26</sup>.

**KLINEVICH**

We shall live these two months in the most shameless truth! Let us strip and get naked!

**ALL (OR MOST)**

Strip, get naked!

---

<sup>26</sup> This section is defined by repeated fragments of text for each of the voices. They are layered over each other and are underscored by Lebezyatnikov's explanation of the afterlife, a ringing drone sound, and Katya's giggling. It is meant to sound like the immediate aftermath of a real explosion.

*SECOND AND THIRD EXPLOSIONS.***AVDOTYA**

I really, really want to be naked!

**YOUNG MAN<sup>27</sup>**

Oh...oh... Oh, I see, it will be quite fun down here, I don't want to go to Dr. Ecke!

**OLD TIMER**

No, I'd live some more, no, you know, I'd live some more!

**KATYA**

He-he-he

**KLINEVICH**

Most importantly, no one can prevent us, and although Pervoyedov, I see, is upset, he can't reach out and touch me. *Grand père*, do you agree?

**TARASEVICH**

I completely, completely agree with upmost pleasure, but especially with Katya going first with her "biography".

**GENERAL**

I protest! Protest with all my might!

**LEBEZYATNIKOV**

Your Excellency, but it's more profitable for us, if we agree. There's, you know, this girl...and finally, all these different little things.

**GENERAL**


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<sup>27</sup> This line through Avodya's last line are entirely overlapping—total cacophony. This section is meant to be overwhelming for Ivan; it is the peak of his hallucination. Other sounds seep in as well. Towards the end, Ivan pleads to the audience, screaming; "Make it stop! Make it stop! He is barely audible at this point. As he continues to scream in vain, everything stops abruptly.

Yes, this girl, but...

**LEBEZYATNIKOV**

More profitable, Your Excellency, by God it's more profitable! Just for example, let's at least try...

**GENERAL**

Even beyond the grave they don't let you be!

**KLINEVICH**

First off, general, you're playing preferans in your grave, and secondly, we-spit-on-you!

**GENERAL**

My dear sir, I ask you, not to forget yourself.

**KLINEVICH**

What? You couldn't even reach me if you tried, and I can tease you from here, like Yulka's little bichon. And, first of all, gentleman, what kind of general is he here? He was a general there, but here he's "pshick"!

**GENERAL**

No, I'm no "pshick", even here—

**KLINEVICH**

Here you'll rot in your grave, and all that will be left of you will be six copper buttons.

**ALL (OR MOST)**

Bravo, Klinevich, ha-ha-ha!

**GENERAL**

I served my sovereign...I have a sword—

**KLINEVICH**

Go poke mice with your sword, besides, you've never even taken it out!

**GENERAL**

Nonetheless, sir, I was part of the whole.

**KLINEVICH**

As if there were a shortage of parts of the whole,

**ALL (OR MOST)**

Bravo, Klinevich, bravo, ha-ha-ha!

**ENGINEER**

I don't even understand, what is this sword?

**GENERAL**

The sword, mister, is an honor!

**AVDOTYA**

Oh quicker, be quicker! Ah, when will we start being unashamed?

**IVAN**

And here I suddenly sneezed. This happened quite unexpectedly and unintentionally, but the effect was utterly shocking. Everything went silent, as it would be at a graveyard, vanished, like a dream. True graveyard silence ensued. I don't think they were ashamed in front me, they did decide to be unashamed! I waited five or so minutes and—not a word, not a sound. I conclude, naturally, that they must have some kind of secret, unknown to mortals, which they carefully keep from all things mortal.

“Well,” I thought, “my darlings, I'll visit you yet”—and with these words, I left the cemetery.

*THE BOBOK SOUND EFFECT IS REPEATED.*

No, this I cannot allow! No, absolutely not! Bobok does not deter me (so this is what Bobok turned out to be!).

Depravity in such a place, depravity of the last hope, depravity of meek and rotting corpses, and—they don't even value their final moments of consciousness! They were given, gifted those moments and...and above all, in such a place! No, this I cannot allow...

I'll visit other classes, and listen everywhere. That's just it, you have to listen everywhere, and not just from the edge, in order to form an understanding. I hope to stumble upon something comforting.

But I will certainly visit them again. They promised their biographies, and various anecdotes. Tfu! But I'll go, absolutely I'll go, it's a matter of conscience!

I'll bring it to "The Citizen"—it's a literary journal. Perhaps they'll even print it...

*OPENING MUSIC REPEATS.*

On the third of the month, Semyon Ardalionovich says to me: Honestly, Ivan Ivanych, will you ever be sober? Will you ever be sober? Will you ever be sober? Will you ever be sober? Will you ever be sober?

*MUSIC FADES OUT.*

Will you ever be sober?