

Slava Yastremski, 1952–2015

Family, friends, colleagues, and the Slavic scholarly world were deeply saddened to hear of the passing of Bucknell University Professor Slava Yastremski on November 13, 2015 following a battle with cancer for several months. I had gone to a housewarming party in early May 2015 to Slava's and his artist wife Ira's lovely new home atop a hill in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania. That day, Slava proudly showed all the visitors the deck, gazebo, and two fishponds in the sloping back yard. It was truly a great place to relax and commune with nature. Scores of friends attended: current students, former students, Bucknell faculty, Slava's poker partners, and many other local friends from all walks of life. Spring, hope, and joy were in the air on that sunny day following Slava's recovery from a kidney operation a few months earlier. The last time I saw Slava was in late July 2015 when he finished teaching a Russian 002 class in our Penn State Summer Intensive Russian program. Slava was his smiling, fun-loving, affable self then, which is the way I always have seen him and the way I will forever remember him. His long, bushy beard that he always stroked with his fingers when he was thinking deeply or laughing reminded me of Solzhenitsyn or of a jovial Russian monk. As we walked to his car after that final class, Slava told me then he was about to undergo treatment at Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York. Unfortunately, he was to discover all too soon that the cancer had progressed too far, and that treatments had failed to build up his immunity before chemotherapy could even begin. The last time I spoke to him by phone, a week or so before he succumbed, Slava told me he was experiencing bad side effects from the treatments. His voice sounded weary and not very hopeful, a state I had never found him in before in all the time I had known him. I received a call from Slava's wife Ira the day after he died on Friday 13, telling me that Slava had passed away with her and their son Alex at his side. Alex told me that those last few days his father asked him to read aloud the translations from our recently published *The Essential Poetry* of Marina Tsvetaeva, a project of which Slava was particularly proud.

Slava was born in 1952 and grew up in Moscow, Russia, and graduated from the Department of Theater History and Dramatic Literature of the Moscow State Theatrical Institute. He worked in Russian theater at the Tanganka Theater, wrote for the *Izvestia* newspaper, and worked as an assistant director in Russian TV and film. He emigrated to the US in 1975 with his family and received his PhD from the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of Kansas. After completing his degree, he took a position in 1981 as a lecturer at Yale University where he was in charge of the third-year Russian language program for nearly a decade. He also worked at Middlebury College in their summer program for many years where he taught advanced Russian and often directed Russian plays with students.

I first met Slava in 1982 in the *podval*, the basement of the Hall of Graduate Studies at Yale University, where we both had offices. I had just been hired to direct the second-year Russian program and to coordinate the TAs. Slava welcomed me heartily, and we immediately became fast friends. While at Yale we worked together closely to develop new video materials for Russian classes in the then new age of the VCR, arranged for trips to Brighton Beach with our Yale students, organized conferences, and began our collaboration on our first book together, a translation of Marina Tsvetaeva's *After Russia* (eventually published with Ardis Publishers in 1992).

Slava joined the Bucknell University faculty in 1990, two years after I had moved to Penn State. The short one hour and fifteen minute drive that separated us allowed

us to continue our close scholarly collaboration and friendship. His warmth and positive energy helped to create a close symbiosis between Bucknell and Penn State faculty. Slava taught all levels of Russian at Bucknell and was equally adept at teaching beginning to advanced students. He also taught numerous courses in Russian literature, theater and culture, as well as in the Comparative Humanities and the Film Studies programs at Bucknell. He was also an active member and a positive force in the residential colleges at Bucknell and served on the editorial board of Bucknell Press for a term of five years.

Slava was passionate about everything he did and imparted his enthusiasm on thousands of Bucknell students over the course of his career. His aim was always to convey the best of what Russian culture had to offer to the world and to enlighten students with life lessons. Slava was welcoming, patient, but demanding with his students. A catch phrase I have heard him use on more than one occasion in language classes was “come on guys,” meaning “you can do better,” with a broad smile that really did coax his students into doing better. Students gravitated to him, connected with him deeply, and loved him both as a teacher and as the fine human being he was. In explaining his teaching philosophy, Slava perhaps put it best on his Bucknell webpage: “The key word to all of my work is ‘engagement.’ I don’t want to teach so much as I want my students to discover things. If you’re not engaged in what you’re doing, then what’s the point?” Virtually all of Slava’s students got the point. In looking back at Slava’s impact on his students, both undergraduate and graduate from both Yale and later from Bucknell, I see many of them at AATSEEL and ASEES conferences every year. They have advanced degrees in Russian history, Russian and comparative literature, journalism, applied linguistics, politics, area studies, and many other fields.

Slava’s foremost scholarly contribution to the Slavic field consisted of his many annotated translations with introductions of prominent Russian prose writers, playwrights, and poets. The first to appear was a collection of Vassily Aksyonov’s stories *Surplussed Barrelware* (translated with Joel Wilkinson for Ardis Publishers in 1990). Ardis also published our bilingual edition of Marina Tsvetaeva’s *After Russia* in 1992. *Abram Terz’s Strolls with Pushkin*, co-translated with Catherine Nepomnyashchy, appeared with Yale University Press in 1994 and received the AATSEEL Book Translation of the Year Award that same year. Most of Slava’s other book-length translations were co-translated with me and include: Olga Sedakova’s poetry (with additional translations by Andrew Wachtel and Catriona Kelly); *Poems and Elegies* (Bucknell UP, 2004); the prose of Igor Klekh, *A Country the Size of Binoculars* (Northwestern UP, 2004); Olga Sedakova’s selected essays, *Freedom to Believe: Philosophical and Cultural Essays* (Bucknell UP, 2010); Russian playwright Nadezhda Ptushkina’s selected plays, *The Battle of the Sexes Russian Style* (Glagoslav Publishers, 2013); a book of translations of Marina Tsvetaeva’s poetry, *The Essential Poetry* (Glagoslav Publishers, 2015); and the forthcoming book of Igor Klekh’s essays on Slavic food, *Adventures in the Slavic Kitchen: A Book of Essays with Recipes* (forthcoming with Glagoslav Publishers, 2016). Slava’s colleague Greg Clingham was an extremely encouraging force in supporting our Slavic publication projects at Bucknell University Press, as has been Maxim Hodak at Glagoslav Publishers.

It was a delight to work with Slava on those translations. Of virtually the same mind and literary taste, we always gravitated toward challenging authors. Slava was a walking encyclopedia of Russian literature and culture, with an incredible ability to notice even the faintest echoes of subtexts. His copious footnotes for many of the translations and his highly informative introductions comprise a treasure trove for casual readers and scholars alike. Translation for Slava has always truly been an act of deeply understanding a text and trying to convey as many nuances of the original

Russian as possible to an Anglophone readership. The projects echoed Slava's interests in poetry (particularly Pushkin and Tsvetaeva), the theater, the culinary arts, the spiritual (especially regarding Russian Orthodoxy), the philosophical, and the inherent transformational power of culture. Slava's son Alex mentioned to me in a phone conversation that it struck him that his father was always "otherworldly." He meant that Slava focused on the invisible reality beyond the corporeal world. This explained Slava's attraction to writers such as Olga Sedakova and Marina Tsvetaeva, for whom otherworldly orientation was central.

A humanist in the finest sense of the word, Slava in recent times had become greatly disillusioned with his native Russia's turn from democracy. Instead of visiting Russia as he often used to, over the last few years he began to travel to Kazakhstan to promote Russian studies there, giving lectures and working with graduate students on their research. He also traveled to conferences in Granada, Spain to explore connections between Russian and Spanish culture. His range of interests was ever expanding.

I could not have asked for a better friend or colleague in this world than Slava and I will sorely miss him. Besides our collaborative work together, I will miss our myriad friendly conversations, as well as our personal and professional meetings in Lewisburg, in State College, and at conferences throughout the U.S. We published six books of annotated translations together and were in the process of finishing three more when he died. Slava's colleagues in the Comparative Humanities program at Bucknell Katie Faull and James Shields plan to organize a *Festschrift* in his honor. *Vechnaya pamiat'* (eternal memory) to Slava! We who knew him well will never forget him as a generous colleague, a great friend, and a wonderful soul.

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Abbott "Tom" Gleason, (1938–2015)

Abbott Gleason passed away on Christmas Day 2015 of complications from Parkinson's disease. Tom, as he was known, taught at Brown University from 1968 until retirement in 2005. He directed the Wilson Center's Kennan Institute from 1980 until 1982. Tom was long associated with Brown's Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs and chaired the university's History Department.

As Tom revealed in his memoirs *A Liberal Education*, his youth in the 1950s and 1960s was divided between Washington, D.C. and Cambridge, Mass., where he completed both his undergraduate and graduate education at Harvard before joining the Brown Faculty. He also taught at Tougaloo College, a historically black institution in Mississippi, while participating in the Civil Rights Movement during the 1960s.

Driven by a profound quest for the meaning of European modernity in all of its horrors and achievements over the past two centuries, Tom's work was rooted in a moral vision that had been informed by liberalism, while always remaining mindful of its shortcomings. His writings are marked by a consistent effort to tie intellectual inquiry to the reality of individual human experience—be it Ivan Kireevskii's painful struggle to properly educate his son Vasily; or George Orwell's physical agony as he sat in forced isolation in the Scottish Hebrides after World War II struggling to complete what would become his landmark novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*; or, nineteenth century Russian revolutionary Ivan Pryzhov's identification of self with dogs, "particularly with dogs that had been beaten, chained up, and otherwise abused."