

Title: Mobile Mimesis: The Humanist Potentials of Vysotsky in Translation
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Abstract:

Several major studies of the past century have described mimesis as a relationship between an artwork and a *national or quasi-national* reality, from Erich Auerbach's contrast between "Jewish" and "Greek" mimetic devices to Barbara Fuchs's discussion of mimesis as a means of imperial self-definition and self-distinction. The allegorical war songs of Vladimir Vysotsky seem at first to meet these scholarly expectations. "Korabli," for instance, refers to the real-world entity of the Soviet navy through a fictional persona to comment on the perpetuity of Soviet wartime trauma more broadly. However, translating Vysotsky's songs out of Russian can have the curious effect of replacing the historical realities to which the songs refer. Because "Korabli" contains no location markers apart from the language in which it is sung, Arkady Dukhin's performances of the song in Hebrew allegorize the perpetuity of conflict in Israel and Palestine from an Israeli sailor's perspective.

This paper explores how versions of Vysotsky's songs in Arabic and Turkish as well as Hebrew quite literally translate/*perevodiat* their empirical referents, using the original's mimesis to detach reality from nationality. I call this device mobile mimesis: because these songs' ties to individual places are so loose, they seem instead to tether the realities of politically opposed nation-states together. The intergenerational grief of "Synov'ia ukhodiat v boi" retains its mimetic potency whether the sons in question speak Arabic or Hebrew; "Pesnia o neitral'noi polose," in which a Russian squadron confronts a Turkish-speaking enemy, has been translated into Turkish. Mobile mimesis poses a provocative question to its spectators: is the reality to which an allegory refers truly different when, after translation, the same plot begins speaking to a different national history? Drawing on recent breakthroughs in the study of non-Western humanisms and internationalisms, this paper probes the ethical potentials that question contains.