

Title: Translating *Vanka Kain*: Recovering the Richness of the Eighteenth-Century Russian Novel

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Part art and part science, translation is a tricky business in the best of situations, but the more historically distant the target text, the more its challenges seem to multiply. Although seeking the meanings of obsolete words and the proper definitions for institutions that had long ago faded from memory can often be frustrating, it also opens up a world of opportunities. Why does the modern definition of this word not make sense in this context? Why does this form not appear in any dictionary? Who is this person or what was the responsibility of this institution? What is the effect of the author's approach to punctuation and the structuring of paragraphs? In completing the first English-language translation of the first bestseller in Russian literary history, Matvei Komarov's documentary novel *Vanka Kain* (1779), I have had to answer a score of such questions. The passage of time can rob a work like *Vanka Kain* of much of its meaning for the modern reader; translating it into an accurate and stylistically appropriate idiom, however, can help to reclaim much of the richness of the original and in so doing illuminate the rise of the Russian novel.

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