

ABOUT THE TRANSLATION OF THE POEM BY GABRIEL ARESTI “THE HOUSE OF MY FATHER”

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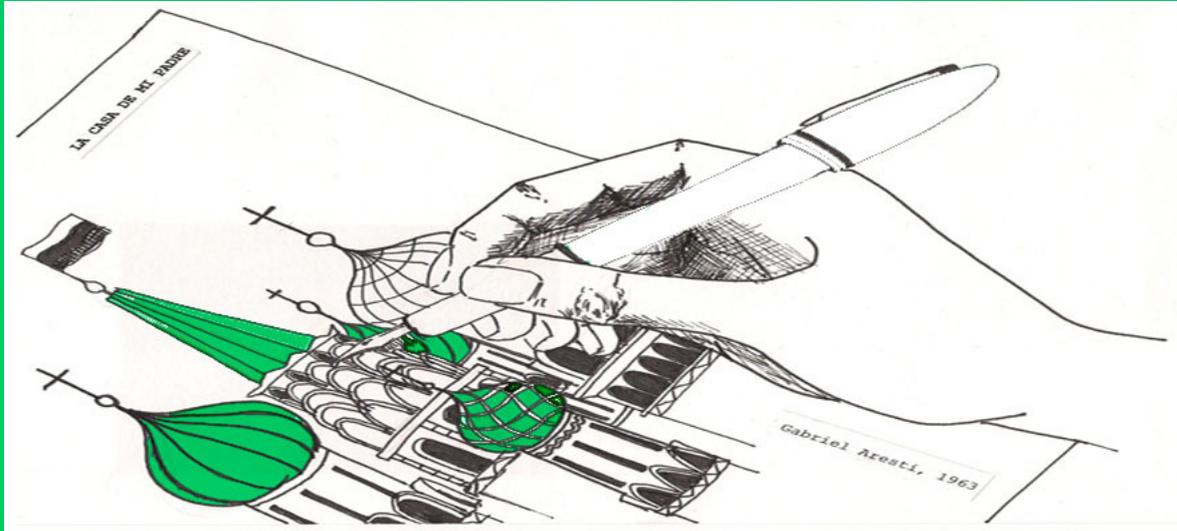
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Abstract || In this article, several versions of the poem “The House of my Father” by Gabriel Aresti are analysed. The author studies in depth the theory and the practice of translation with the example of several translators. In the article, several specific examples of diverse translations by K. Gamsakhurdia, M. Tsvetaeva, V. Nabokov, J. Borges, etc, are quoted. At the end of his work, the author suggests his own version of the Russian translation of the poem by Gabriel Aresti “The House of my Father”.

Key-words || Translation | Translator | Translation technique | Aresti | Zytsar.

0.

In the journal *Gernika*, a translation to Russian of a classical poem of 20th century Basque poetry, “The House of my Father” by Gabriel Aresti, has been published translated by the Russian bascologist Y. Zytsar (1). For nine years I have been translating to Georgian different poems by Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, Federico García Lorca, Juan Ramón Jiménez and several Basque poets (Unamuno, Celaya, Aresti). During this time, of course, more than once the question of the techniques and the rules of literary translation have arisen. Previously, I had read the translation of the poem by Roberto Serrano and Roman Ignatiev (2), that, undoubtedly, differs from the version by Y. Zytsar. As a result of both translations arises a third one, my own, and also a whole article through my gaze as an author on the literary types of translation.

To start with, I propose to the reader the translations of the two versions of the above mentioned poem by Gabriel Aresti.

Translation by Yuri Zytsar:

Дом моего отца
у самых верхов границы
я защищу от волхвов, волков,
землетрясений, ростовщиков,
мафии
и юстиции.
От всего защищу,
как ни тих и ни щупл.
Всю защиту ему обеспечу.
Обесконечу.

Как задаток приму синяки.
Потеряю скот, поля, сосняки.
Дивиденды, доходы, проценты,
последние центы.
Всё, исключая ключи от рая,—
всё потеряю.
Но дом отца?..
У самого краха края
род жены решит (– дня ясней),
что, мол, муж-то мул,
и уж муж ли, эй,
и уж нужн ли ей?

Отберут у меня и оружие.
Что ж, и тут я не запищу:
просто пальцами защищу.

Срежут пальцы с рук,
руки срубят, уже беспальные...
Друг!
Не плачь ты о бедном малом.
Плачь ты лучше о небывалом:
удалом, пусть и неудалом.
Я зубами заскрежешу:
рук
об
руб
ками
не пущу.
Пусть я мул, даже мум и му, старый пень в дыму,
но и думать о доме не дам – сомну.
Но тогда уж,
дойдя до плеч,
подберутся к душе
в груди.
Что же – лечь?
Не-ет, минуточку подожди.
В самый плача миг
на палачий мир
я душой замахнусь:
дом отца –
рушить?
Стой? Куда ж ты бежишь-то, гнусь!
Задушú
за дúшу.

Но допустим,
когда-нибудь пусть
где-то в толще лет – голубой чащё,
да не будет ей путь пуст,
срок придет и моей
душé.
А за ней и потомкам,
моим котёнкам.
А дом отца?..
А вот он-то,
как солдат после фронта,
лишь смеясь над веками,
и лишь веками щурясь вслед,
ни один не обронит камень.
Вот
свят
Свет.

Translation by Roberto Serrano and Roman Ignatiev:

Я защищу
Дом своего отца.
От волков,
От засухи,
От ростовщиков,
От правосудия
Я защищу
Дом
Своего отца.
Я потеряю скот,
Огороды,
Сосняки;
Я потеряю
Проценты,
Ренты,
Дивиденды,
Но я защищу дом своего отца.
Они отнимут у меня оружие,
А я руками защищу
Дом своего отца;

Мне отрубят руки,
А я культиями защищу
Дом своего отца:
Они оставят меня
Без рук,
Без плеч
И без груди,
А я душой защищу
Дом своего отца.
Я умру,
Потеряется моя душа,
Погибнет мое потомство,
Но дом моего отца
Останется
Стоять.

1.

Now let us know, briefly, the reasonings of certain classics of translations, authors that made it possible to analyse translation in a scientific way. In the books by Amparo Hurtado Albir (2007), translation is considered a capacity, a knowing how to create, based on knowing how to do research into the process of translation and solve the difficulties that arise in that process, that take place in this

specific event. Basing herself on the well-known difference between different types of knowledge, explanatory (*know how*), and creative and active (operative), the capacity of translation is much based on knowledge of the operative type, mainly, and for this reason, it is fundamentally obtained with practice.

However, in order to define translation this author considers it possible to base the definition on another classification, proposed by Jakobson in 1959, according to which three kinds of interpretations of the verbal sign exist:

1. Intralinguistic translation, or reformulation: interpretation of the verbal signs with the help of other signs of the same language;
2. Interlinguistic interpretation, or translation: interpretation of the linguistic signs with the help of another language;
3. Intersemiotic translation or transmutation translation: interpretation of the linguistic signs by means of non-sign systems.

Jakobson demonstrated that the interlinguistic translation is the authentic translation. Later, other authors shared this point of view. For example, Ljudskanov (1969) observed translation as a process of transformation of the signs and preservation of the contents, and he searched for an effective algorithm for human and mechanical translation; Arcaini (1986) studied the intersemiotic translation between linguistic signs and icons and wrote on verbal codes and icons; Steiner (1975) considered interlinguistic interpretation as the only and privileged type of communication.

Albir considers three questions: why is translation needed? what is translation needed for? whom is translation necessary for? In her opinion, translation is the consequence of the existence of different languages and cultures; she answers the question “What is translation needed for?” in this way: for communication, to overcome the barrier of lack of communication, the objective of translation is communicative. The third question “whom is translation necessary for?” is answered thus: for those who do not know the language nor the original culture. The translator does not translate for himself (only in exceptional cases), and the objectives of translation can be diverse.

Marco Antonio Campos, in the article “Poesía y traducción”, asks these same questions. In his opinion, there exist two fundamental reasons for translation: translation as a means to survive, and translation for pleasure. It is possible to consider translation as a job, and at the same time there is the opportunity to choose the authors to translate for pleasure. He translated for the pleasure of discovery,

according to general perception, to thank the author who taught him something or moved him in some way for any reason. The question “what is translation needed for?” gives as an answer, first of all, to give the reader the opportunity to discover in his mother tongue an unknown author; furthermore, and retaking what has been already translated, in order to correct lexical mistakes, inaccuracies in rhyme, the rigidity of the translation or unnecessary literary elements. The author advises not to translate what is already translated, if one cannot improve it, or at least, make a new and perceptibly improved version. Besides, during translation one enriches the language during the never-ending process of linguistic transformation. This is a wonderful thing, like a written poetry, a painted painting or an already filmed film (4).

Regarding the translator, the first idea is that he has to master both languages. Here, three questions arise:

1. Should the translator know both languages at the same level?
2. Should the translator and the interpreter have the same level of linguistic knowledge?
3. Should the translator be an expert in language or linguistic theory?

In the opinion of Amparo Hurtado Albir (2007), bilingualism is not a *sine qua non* condition for the translator (even more so if one takes into account the fact that the two situations, written or oral translation, are different). Besides, the translator with no doubt also has to have a good command of non-linguistic knowledge, for example on the culture of the countries of origin of the translated texts. However, practice demonstrates that even this on certain occasions is insufficient (3).

Now, let us briefly review the traditional classification of translation.

Saint Jerome distinguishes the mundane translation from the religious. Vives (1532) tells the difference between the versions that only consider the meanings, from others that take into consideration the sentences and the terms, and a third one that affects the balance between style and words, in which the terms add strength and elegance to the sense. Fray Luis de León (1561) distinguishes translation (*trasladar*) from declaration (*declarar*): the first one is “secure and wise” and “if it is possible one has to count the words, so as to change them for the exact number”, and the second one is “as a play upon words, adding and subtracting according to one’s own wish”. Dryden (1680) proposes to distinguish metaphrasis (literal translation), paraphrasis (translation of the meaning) and imitation (free diversion in form and meaning). Schleiermacher (1813) differentiates between the translation of commercial, literary

and scientific texts.

In poetic translation, its own particular types are enhanced. This question was studied by Holmes (1969: 195-201, 1978: 69-82), Holmes, de Haan and Popovic (1970), Lefevere (1975), Popovic (1976), de Beaugrande (1978), Etkind (1982), Raffel (1988), Saez Hermosilla (1987) and others (5-11).

Colmes (1988): the poetic texts are polisemantic. Poetic translation is a metapoem, and the translator is a metapoet.

Etkind (1982): the verse is a “system of conflicts” (between syntax and metrics, metrics and rhythm, poetic tradition and poetic innovation). The author distinguishes six types of poetic translation:

1. informative (in prose and with no artistic pretensions);
2. interpretative (linked to historical and aesthetic teachings);
3. demonstrative (with the presence of certain aesthetic criteria, nevertheless without the influence of a particular aesthetic system);
4. aproximative (with the presence of a partially aesthetic system; for example, rhythm without measure, rhythm without rhyme etc.);
5. imitative (when the translator is a poet and he freely expresses himself);
6. recreative (authentic poetic translation, that transmits verses with the characteristics of the original).

Raffel (1988): poetic translation is a “game of balances”.

2.

Fleeing from influences, I read on purpose the book of translations by G. Lorca, published in Moscow in 1987 (12), just after having translated myself some poems by Lorca. I compared both translations of the same poem.

The famous poem by Lorca “The Guitar” from *Cante Hondo* was translated by Marina Tsvetaeva (Lorca: 44-45). To study the role of this great Russian poet in worldwide literature is not the aim of this article, she has been studied and will be studied by writers and by men and women of letters. Here we are simply going to underline her translation technique with the example of two poems. It is well-known that Tsvetaeva translated a lot (Saakiantz: 31) from several languages, Spanish was among them. In “The Guitar” the poet uses a resource of translation that reappears in another poem by Lorca, “And then...” (Lorca: 46-47).

At the end of the poem (“The Guitar”) Tsvetaeva translates (we do not use the verb «write» on purpose):

This way the bird says farewell to life
Under the threat of the snake’s bite

Whereas in Lorca’s original these verses appear thus:

And the first dead bird
on the branch.

In this case the variation from the poetic text is very clear. However, in another poem we no longer find ourselves with any variation, but with additions and ellipsis to the original:

It fell silent, stopped,
dried up, worn out,
disappeared.

This stanza is missing in the original verses by Lorca, but it exists in its translation. Besides this, the poet ends the translation of the poem taking off the last verse, which is an independent sentence:

Only desert
Remains.

Since in the original, after the stanza “Only desert / Remains.” there is still another one, the last stanza: “Undulating / desert.”

Here we have to point out that the measure of Spanish, Russian and Georgian differs, which complicates the comparison of the original and the translations. That very thing is what happened with the translations of Bécquer (Bécquer: 1985). I read this book three years after my translations were published in the literary papers.

It is convenient to remember Tsvetaeva’s point of view on translation: “I translate through the ear and the soul (of things). It is more than a thought.” (Saakiants: 31). In our opinion this is entirely subjective thinking. From where can we know in which specific verse Lorca placed his “soul”? Could it not be in this very last sentence that the translator ignored (erased)?

That very same opinion on translation was also shared by the Georgian writer K. Gamsakhurdia: “the translating activity is a most complicated task. The translator does not have to follow the text translated literally. For example, when I translated Werter, I removed certain passages of the original, since they suggested nothing to

the Georgian reader. This principle is compulsory in translation, as the translation is the transmission of the soul of the book, not of its letters” (Gamsakhurdia: 564-656).

“They suggested nothing to the Georgian reader”, is this not completely subjective? In Gamsakhurdia’s opinion “they suggested nothing” and in another translator’s opinion maybe they “would suggest a lot” and they would be translated. When I say another translator, for example, I am thinking of Vladimir Nabokov:

In the whimsical world of translation there are three kinds of sins. The first and the most innocent evil are the obvious mistakes, made out of ignorance or incomprehension. It is the common human weakness, and they are entirely forgivable. The following step forward to hell is taken by the translator that consciously ignores those words or strophes, in which meaning he has not even bothered to penetrate or that, in his opinion, can turn out as incomprehensible or indecent for a blurred imagined reader. He has no scruples about marginalizing the meaning that the dictionary offers him, or about sacrificing the message in exchange for a passing precision: he is ready in advance to know less than the author, assuming, however, that he knows more. The third, and the most serious evil in this chain of sins is perpetrated by the translator that spends his time polishing and tuning the work, embellishing it contemptuously, making it adequate and adapting it to the tastes and prejudices of the reader. This sin deserves to be punished with the cruellest tortures, as plagiarism was punished in the Middle Ages (Nabokov: 389).

Nabokov was a writer with a profound individual thinking. The same can be stated of Tsvetaeva, and of other writers that could not publish under the Sovietic power. However, we have to emphasize that in spite of the coincidence in thought, Nabokov and Tsvetaeva were two diametrically diverging personalities. This difference is expressed in their relation with translation. Leigh Kimmel published an article “Nabokov as translator”, in which he shows the evolution of the writer’s translation doctrine (Leigh: 2001). The author of the article distinguishes two groups of translators: some during the translation prefer to preserve the integrity of the text, some translate the “soul” of the work (as Tsvetaeva). With the example of two translations of Nabokov’s the author tries to explain the evolution of the translation task.

The first translation analysed by Kimmel is “Ania v strane chudes”. The author of the original, Lewis Carroll, plays with the English words, basing himself on their polysemy and especially on the phonetic coincidence of several terms, creating a humorous effect. During the translation of the original Nabokov placed it nearer to the Russian language. He started by changing the name “Alice” for “Ania” and every new foreign element was “translated” to Russian. So that he moved more and more away from the original, and finally achieved a result that “said something to the Russian reader”, so as to express

it in the same terms as Gansakhurdia.

Unlike the translation just cited, Nabokov translated *Evgeni Onegin*, following the opposite principles. The first concern of the translator was to preserve the integrity of the text, in order to do this he attached 1100 footnotes. He considered his translation not as the reading of a literary text, but as an introduction to the Russian text for those who did not have a good-enough command of Russian to read the book. The author of this article does not agree with the opinion that he translated Carroll for children and Pushkin for students, which would explain such a change in the strategy of translation. It is perfectly well known that Nabokov himself changed the content of his own writings when he translated them (as in the case of *Camera obscura*, that he renamed *Laughter in the Dark*, and he practically rewrote). According to the opinion of Kimmel, it is possible that Nabokov reached the conclusion that only the author has the right to change the content of the text.

In connection to recreating the work of somebody else, the story of Edward FitzGerald's translations of *Rubaiyat* by Omar Hayam is well known, but the translation of these poems from English to Spanish arouses a special interest (21, 22). According to the legend, Borges junior inherited the writing talent of his father. With the exception of some orientalist texts and the novel *El Caudillo*, Jorge Guillermo Borges published a few poems, among which three pieces called "Momentos" (that were published by the prestigious magazine *Nosotros* in Buenos Aires in 1914) could be found. Later, Borges senior translated from English *Rubaiyat*, taking as a reference the translation by FitzGerald.

Edward FitzGerald published for the first time the version of *Rubaiyat* in 1859. Altogether in the course of his life four editions of the translation were published. The fifth and last one was published after the death of the translator in 1889, including the annotations that FitzGerald had prepared for the fourth edition. In the original each "Rubay" consists of a stanza of two verses, each one splits into two hemistiches, forming four verses altogether (from this, in principle, he took the name ruba'i). The verses rhyme with each other, except for the third line, that can rhyme or not. When he translated, FitzGerald chose the AABA rhyme scheme.

Each quartet is on its own an independent poem, having at the beginning a descriptive or narrative element, whereas in the last verse it concludes with a moral maxim or a philosophical conclusion. FitzGerald gathered several stanzas of the original, without respecting the Persian initial system. This order varied between the first and the fifth edition, which already at that time had 101 stanzas, whereas in the original there are 75 altogether.

There are at least three translations of the *Rubaiyat* to Spanish. The first, carried out by Borges in 1907, was published in the magazine from Madrid *Renacimiento*, in that same year and without indicating the translator. The second translation belongs to the quill of Carlos Musio Peña, with an introductory article by Alvaro Melian Lafinur. In 1922, in the magazine by Rafael Losano, a series *Los mejores poemas (líricos) de los mejores poetas* was published, among which was Omar Hayam. What is more, the “first translation from Persian” was published by Ventura García Calderón. In 1925 the translation by Adolfo Salazar was brought out, and in 1927 the one by Joaquín V. González.

To be fair to Borges we have to admit that his was the first translation to Spanish that preserved the metrics of the original. The English original was made up of a verse of ten syllables with the accent on the last syllable, which when transferred into Spanish becomes a hendecasyllable. During the translation, Borges disregarded the rhyme and alternated the paroxytone hendecasyllabic verses (that are stressed on the penultimate syllable) with the oxytone ten-syllabic verses, since, despite the different quantity of phonological syllables, all the verses have to be read as eleven syllables according to the metric rules commonly accepted.

In general, of course, this task would not be called translation, but re-creation, as in the case of FitzGerald. However, Borges went further than FitzGerald, removed some of the original stanzas by FitzGerald, varied the order of the rest, and added some of his own. It turned out that Borges, inspired in the translation by FitzGerald, wrote his own *Rubaiyat* in Spanish, and FitzGerald, in turn, inspired by the original of Hayam, wrote his own *Rubaiyat* in English.

Marco Antonio Campos, in the article already mentioned above, differentiates between seven types of translation (4).

1. Translation as creation, when the author exactly translates the poet of another language, and at the same time he embellishes it with his own style (for example, Borges and Octavio Paz);
2. Literary translation, the eagerness of every writer is centred on the correspondence of the verbal objects of the original and the translation. Contemporary translation of poetry is not possible; at the very least it dilutes and loses its musicality. As a reader and a translator, the author of this article confesses his respect and love for poetic translation. Of course, he does not refer to literal translation, where you notice nothing or notice very little, as the academic personnel pretend, who suffer from being tone-deaf. They respect the text in a literal sense, nevertheless they do not respect poetry;

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3. Free translation, variety of translation as creation and translation as personal work. It is also called “librismo” in Spanish. In this case the translator moves away from the original and immerses himself in a world of free actions, to such a degree that the verses become his own verses. An example of this would be the case of Edward FitzGerald’s *Rubaiyat*.
 4. Translation as personal work, the author considers the translated verses a part of his literary legacy, among others, when they are incorporated into his text, or at the end of his own work;
 5. Translation of translation, when the translator does not have a good command of the original language and he bases his work on other languages. As an example we can take the translations by Octavio Paz (from Japanese, Chinese, Swedish and Hungarian) and José Emilio Pacheco (from Polish and Modern Greek);
 6. Translation as modern adaptation of an ancient text to the same language, for instance the translations by Alfonso Reyes (*Myo Cid* or *The Lay of the Cid*) and Henry U. Longfellow (*Heimskringla* by Snorri Sturluson);
 7. Adaptation, a didactic or summarized transliteration of the original.

3.

In my opinion, the translation technique of FitzGerald, Borges, Tsvetaeva and Gamsakhurdia remarkably moves the reader away from the original. The text translated by them not only does not contain all the stanzas or all the chapters of the primary text, but neither do they bring the integrity of the original. If in some cases the change of terms or sentences is theoretically acceptable, it is not in some other cases, as in the avant-garde poetry by Lorca, in which a word (which usually is a complete sentence) brings a special meaning. When it is removed (erased) an idea of the original is extracted, and it should have been passed on by the translator.

Let us see the case when the text of the author completes itself. It is possible that Tsvetaeva added the paragraph mentioned before in the poem by Lorca “The Guitar” in order to reinforce the effect (idea) that it brings. In the first place, there is no need to “reinforce” Lorca, his “strength” can lie in the poetic form erased by the translator and there is no need to “polish and mend” (Nabokov). In the second place, the added stanza, Russian in its anatomy, does not sound at all Spanish. This is logical, since Tsvetaeva belongs to that group of Russian writers that deeply felt the Russian word. Under the wish to enjoy Russian poetry, with great pleasure do I leaf through Khodasevich, Tsvetaeva or Akhmátova, but I will not search for the

Russian soul in the translations of Lorca, Jiménez or the Machado brothers. Probably this is what Vladimir Nabokov had in mind:

But henceforth a fully grown-up poet takes the quill, and while he composes his own poems he gets inspiration through the translation of something by Lermontov or Verlaine. Usually either he does not know well the original language and carelessly he translates literally, not as brilliantly, but much better than an educated person, or, he knows the language, does not have the pedantry of the academician nor the experience of the professional translator. In this case, the more poetic talent he has, the stronger his honeyed words will tarnish the brilliant original text. Instead of getting dress with the author's suit, he dresses the author with his own suit. (Leigh: 1998)

In short, how should a translator be? We will make a last reference to V. Nabokov:

... Now we can consider what the characteristics the translator has to get dressed with are, to recreate an ideal text of a piece of art of the foreign literature. First of all he must have as much talent as the author he has chosen, or the temper of both must be of identical nature. In this sense, and only in this sense, Bodler and Po get on in an ideal way, or Zhukovskiy and Schiller. In second place, the translator must perfectly know both people, both languages, all the details of the style and method of the author, the origin and formation of the terms, the historical allusions. Here we meet the third important characteristic: besides the talent and the education, he must control mimesis, and act in such a way, as if he was the original author, reproducing his speech and behaviour, tastes and thinking with as much veracity as possible (Nabokov: 395).

Of course, we can hardly call Nabokov a humble person: he compares himself with Pushkin because he is his translator. I do not think the translator should have a comparable temper to the brilliant writer, if this was true writers themselves would translate their own works (did Nabokov translate his?). Probably, the main effort of the translator must be to transfer the "soul" of the work, preserving as much as possible the form of the original. So that everything is not "flat" in the translated language, so that it has the "smell" of the original, this will produce once more the wish to read the work of art in its original version. For me, as a reader and a translator, the translation by R. Serrano and R. Ignatiev gets much nearer (not only to the original text, but also to its "soul") than the translation by Y. Zytsar. This last one, at the translator's wish, moves away from the original (1), but it offers an unquestionable interest from the point of view of the alternative method of translation.

Finally, I want to thank Y. Zytsar, R. Serrano and R. Ignatiev, whose translations inspired me in the writing of this article and in offering my own translated version of the work before mentioned by Gabriel Aresti:

Отстою отчий дом.
От волков,
засухи,
лихоимства
и правосудия
отстою отчий дом.
Лишусь
стад,
огородов,
сосновых пущ,
добра,
доходов,
долей
но отстою отчий дом.
Отнимут оружие, и руками
отстою отчий дом;
отнимут руки, и плечами
отстою отчий дом;
отнимут плечи, предплечья и грудь
и душой
отстою отчий дом.
Умру.
Потеряется душа моя,
погибнет потомство мое,
но отчий дом
устоит.

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