

From Poetry to Memes: Poetic Citation in Russian Language and Culture

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Structure of Modules

1. Get acquainted with the poem
 - Discuss poem's general theme
 - Fill-in-the-blanks of missing end-rhymed words

Generating Missing Words

Умом Россию не понять,
Аршином общим не измерить:
У ней особенная стать –
В Россию можно только верить.
-Ф.И. Тютчев

One can't grasp Russia with the mind,
Or measure her [it] with a common unit:
She [it] is of a unique type –
One can only believe in Russia.
-Fyodor Tyutchev

Student responses:

- верить (“believe,” correct)
- жить (“live,” ungrammatical and doesn't scan)
- пить (“drink,” ungrammatical and doesn't scan)

Dangers of Vocabulary Overload

Alexander Pushkin, “Winter Morning” (Зимнее утро),
first stanza:

Мороз и **солнце**; **день чудесный!**
Ещё ты **дремлешь**, **друг прелестный** —
Пора, **красавица**, **проснись**:
Открой сомкнуты негой **взоры**
Навстречу северной Авроры,
Звездою севера **явись!**

-all words in **red** had to be glossed

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 - Structured, content-based discussion in Russian

Analyzing a Marina Tsvetaeva poem

The poem:

Мне нравится, что Вы больны не
мною,

Мне нравится, что я больна не Вами
[...]

Что никогда в церковной тишине
Не пропоют над нами: аллилуйя!

I like that you're not sick with me,
I like that I [*feminine*] am not sick with
you [...]

That in the silence of church, never
Will "hallelujah!" be sung above us.

My question:

По вашему мнению, какая самая
главная тема этого стихотворения?
Почему?

- а) здоровье
- б) любовь
- в) религия

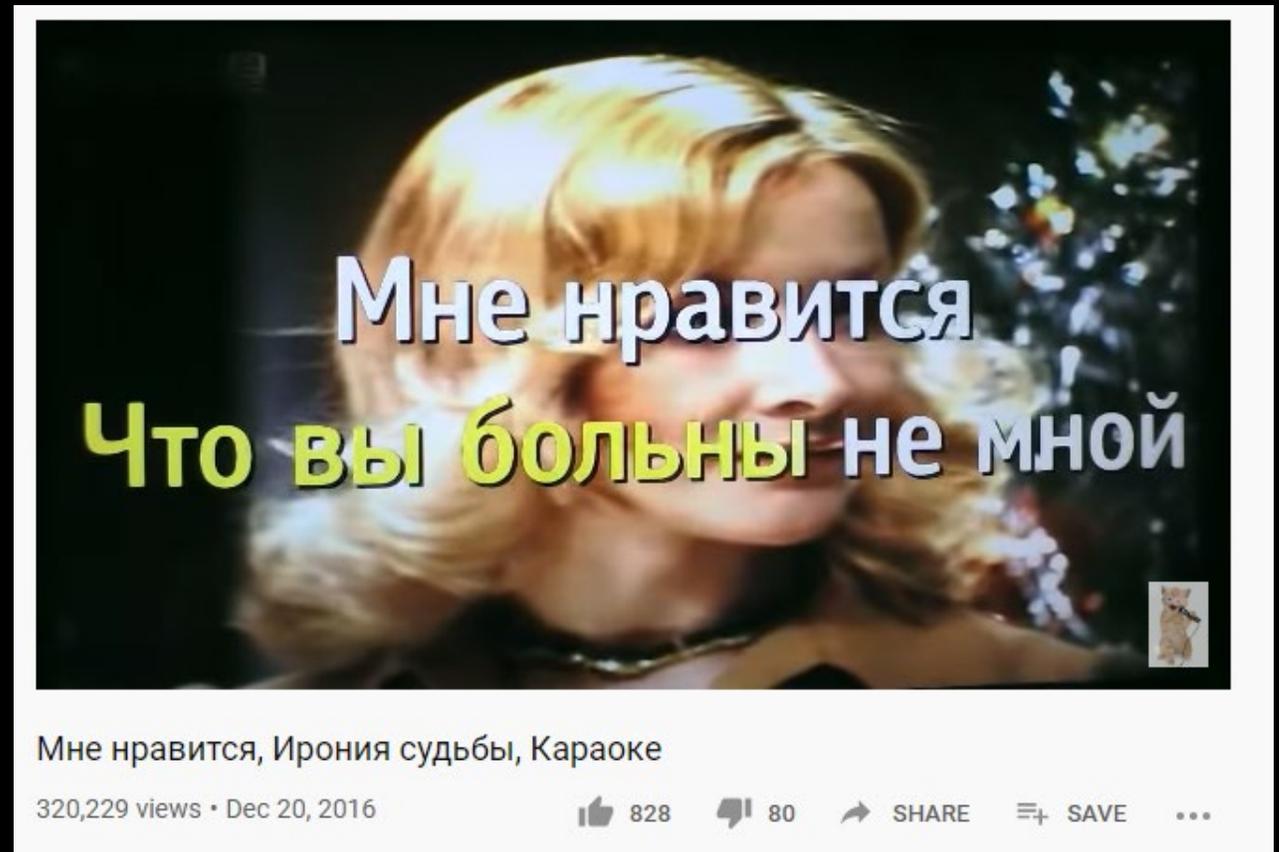
In your opinion, what is the most
important theme of this poem? Why?

- a) Health
- b) Love
- c) Religion

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 - Branding, journalism, film, music, memes...

Tsvetaeva's poem as Soviet pop song:
sung by Alla Pugacheva, popularized in the
New Year's movie *The Irony of Fate*
(*Ирония судьбы, 1976*)



A karaoke version

Pushkin's poem as vodka brand(s):

First line: "Мороз и солнце; день чудесный!"

"Frost and sun; a marvelous day!"



"Frost and Sun"
(with a free shot glass)



"Frost and Sun" next to "Marvelous Day"

Tyutchev's poem as national aphorism:



Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on a state visit to Russia: "I'm not Tyutchev, but 'one can only *believe*' in Japan, too"



Умом Россию не
понять

An ironic internet meme: "One can't grasp Russia with the mind"

Discerning Tone and Humor



- Students were asked: “Is Tyutchev’s poem funny or serious?” (it’s serious)
 - Two out of three groups: it’s funny
 - Third group: it’s serious – not because of the text, but because of Tyutchev’s “serious face”

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 - Metrical exercise

Sample slide introducing poetic meter

ямб [*iamb*]: unstressed syllable, then stressed syllable: ' -

Например: [*For example:*]

уро́к [u-ROK, *lesson*]
по́том [po-TOM, *later*]
оте́ц [o-TYETS, *father*]
лю́блю [lyu-BLYU, *I love*]
мо́я/моё́/мои́...
[mō-YA/mo-YŌ/mo-YI, *my, mine*]

Какие ещё ямбические слова вы знаете?
[What other iambic words do you know?]

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 - Analyze, compare, and reproduce oral performances

Performative and Intonational Decisions (with Tsvetaeva's "I like that you're sick not with me")

Listen to the performance of Tsvetaeva's poem.

Mark all pauses with slashes, like this: /

Note any particularly emphatic words by underlining them.

If you notice that the reader makes a mistake with a word – either forgetting it or changing it – circle that word.

Мне нравится, что Вы больны не мной,
Мне нравится, что я больна не Вами,
Что никогда тяжёлый шар земной
Не уплывёт под нашими ногами.
Мне нравится, что можно быть смешной --
Распущенной -- и не играть словами,
И не краснеть удушливой волной,
Слегка соприкоснувшись рукавами.

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5. Memorize and recite the poem
 - Students memorize at home, and recite in-class
6. Cite the poem for your own creative and communicative purposes

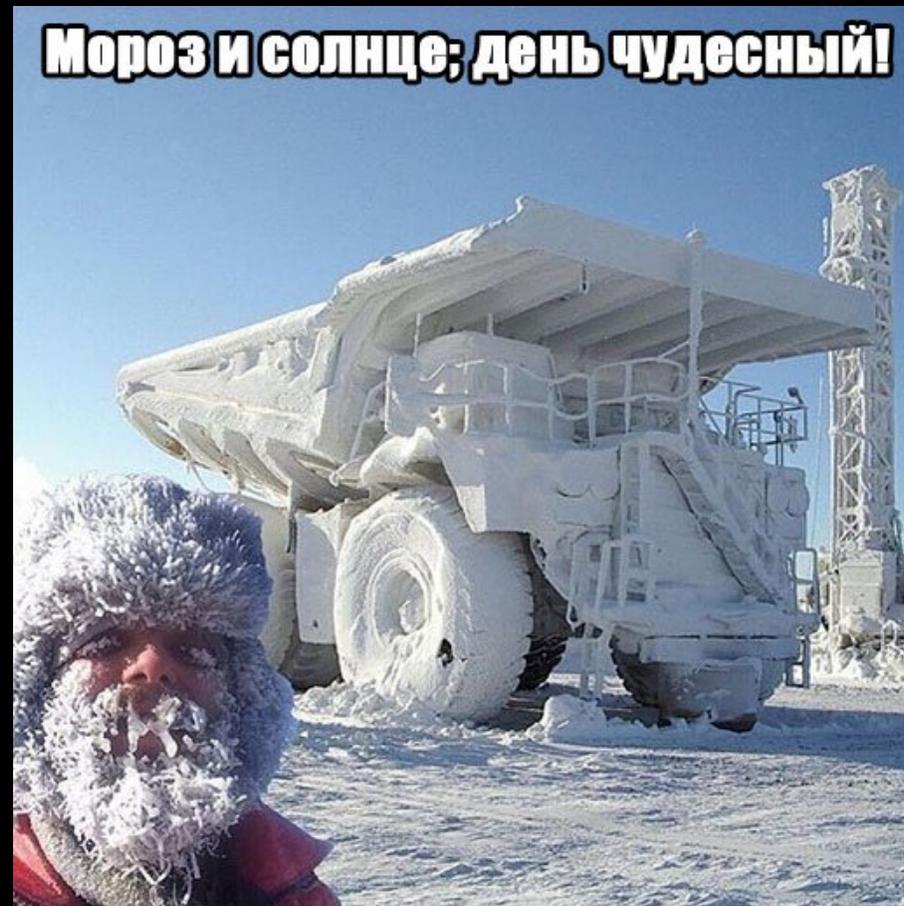
Mememes and Russian Poetry



УМОМ РОССИЮ
НЕ ПОНЯТЬ

Найди Путь

From Tyutchev: "One can't grasp
Russia with the mind"



Мороз и солнце; день чудесный!

From Pushkin:
"Frost and sun; a marvelous day!"

Mememes and Russian Poetry



From Tsvetaeva:
"I like that you're sick not with me"
-Alois Alzheimer (namesake of Alzheimer's Disease)

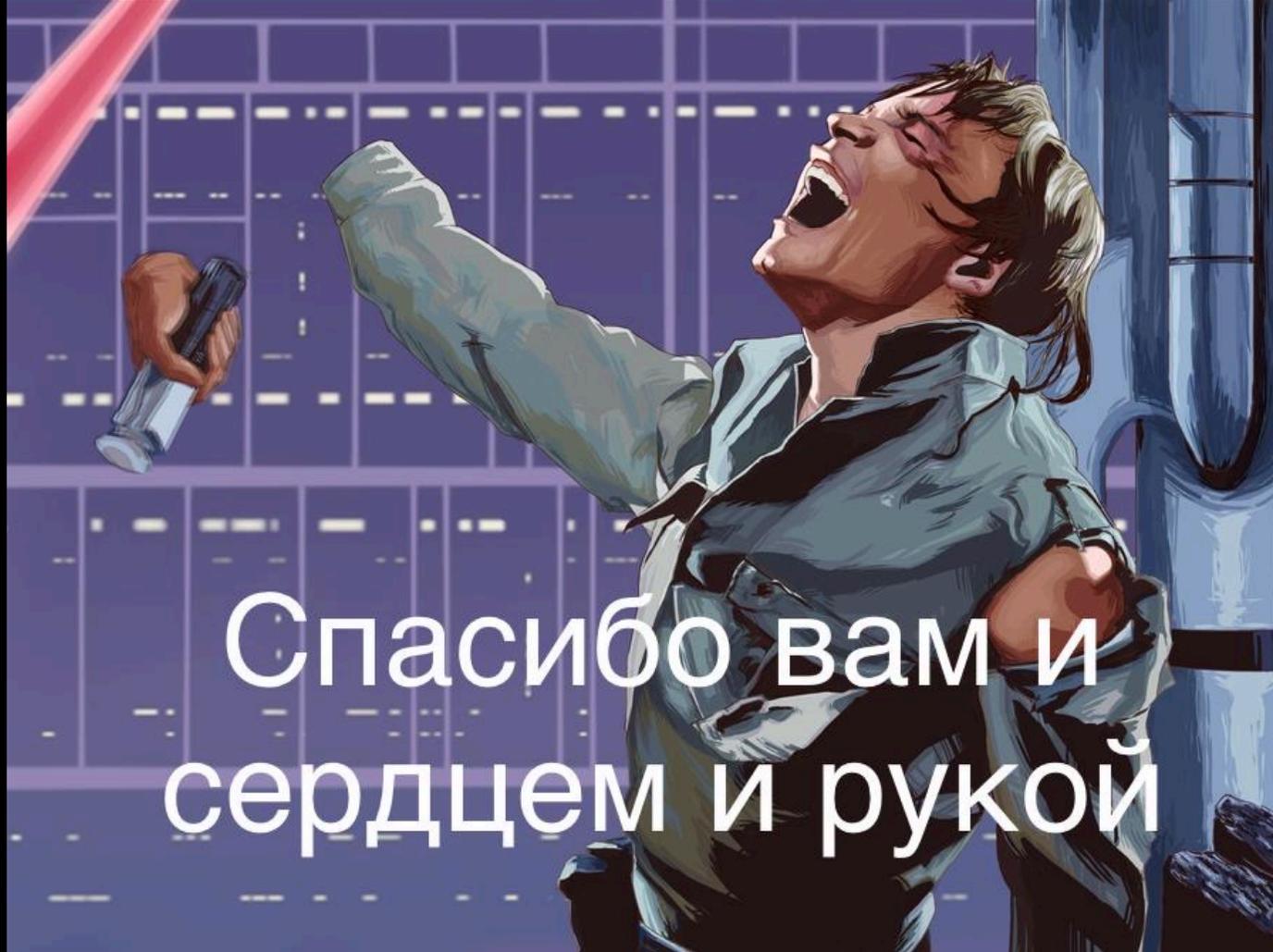
“Meme” as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary:

NOUN

1. An element of a culture or system of behaviour passed from one individual to another by imitation or other non-genetic means.
2. An image, video, piece of text, etc., typically humorous in nature, that is copied and spread rapidly by Internet users, often with slight variations.

Piloting the modules: Students' Memes

From Tsvetaeva, in Russian 4:



**“Thank you with both my heart and hand”
(the first line of Tsvetaeva’s third stanza)**

Piloting the modules: Students' Memes

From Tyutchev, in Russian 3:



УМОМ ЧЕЛОВЕК НЕ ПОНЯТЬ

“One can’t grasp people with the mind/one can’t understand people” (contains a grammatical error)



УМОМ КОШКУ НЕ ПОНЯТЬ

“One can’t grasp [this] cat with the mind”

Students' Memes: applying other poetic citations

From Alexander Pushkin, "The Bronze Horseman: A Petersburg Tale"
(Медный всадник. Петербургская повесть):

Люблю тебя, Петра творенье...
(I love thee, O Peter's creation...)



Умом Россию не
понять



ЛЮБЛЮ ТЕБЯ, ПЕТРА ТВОРЕНЬЕ