

JAMES BAILEY

(September 28, 1929 – July 20, 2020)

“Had he started his teaching career at Tartu, and not in Madison, he might have been my mom’s professor!” This is something that came to mind the very first time I saw James Bailey (or Jim, as he asked me to call him – the form of address I never managed to master). We met on September 24, 2003, a little less than a month after I had joined the graduate program in Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. We kept on meeting off campus once a fortnight (sometimes once a month) during the following four semesters, before I left for Estonia to revisit Madison only thirteen years later, in May, 2018. Since then, and until James’s health started to deteriorate, we exchanged letters, pictures, sad news, occasional jokes, and also sent each other *privety* (regards) through our mutual friend Tat’iana Vladimirovna Skulacheva. Fate – or whatever equivalent of the power over mortals – brought us together again on the other side of the Atlantic, when in June 2008, I came to a verse theory conference at the V. V. Vinogradov Russian Language Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow. Knowing that James was coming, I prepared a presentation on the structure of Mayakovsky’s poem *Oblako v shtanakh* (*A Cloud in Trousers*) – a tribute to James’s article “The Accentual Verse of Majakovskij’s ‘Razgovor s fininspektorom o poèzii’” from *Slavic Poetics: Essays in Honor of Kiril Taranovsky* (see: Bailey 1973: 25–31; see also: Bailey 2004: 280–290).

James passed away unexpectedly – hope against hope I believed he would write me again one day – in his recognizably cheerful and self-ironic style, so close to his speaking manner. Instead, with a feeling of helplessness, I came across the obituary, which read as follows:

James Orville Bailey, Jr. died at the age of 90 on July 20, 2020 in Madison, Wisconsin. He was born on September 28, 1929 in La Junta, Colorado, but grew up in California where his parents moved when he was six months old. After graduating from the University of Southern California he served three and a half years in the US Army, studying Russian

one year at the Army Language School in Monterey, California. During his service as a Russian translator he met his future wife Hanna Ruth Potempa in Frankfurt, Germany, where they were married November 8, 1956. He received an MA Degree in Slavic Studies at Indiana University in 1958, spent the school year 1958–1959 as an exchange student at Moscow State University during the first year of the cultural exchange with the Soviet Union, and in 1965 he received his PhD degree in Slavic Languages and Literatures from Harvard University. He taught in the Slavic Department at the University of Wisconsin-Madison from 1967 until his retirement in 1995, having served as Chair of the Slavic Department, Head of the Russian Area Studies Program, and Head of the Folklore Program which he helped found. In recent decades he devoted most of his time to the study of Russian folklore, making trips to Russia to carry on research and to visit colleagues. He published numerous articles and several books and collaborated on an anthology of translations of Russian epics. He helped to organize and served as president of the Slavic and East European Folklore Association (SEEFA).

He is survived by his wife Hanna, by their sons Geoffrey Bailey and Michael Bailey, and by their grandchildren Ryan Bailey and Allison Bailey. He was preceded in death by his parents James Orville Bailey Sr. and John Eva Bailey, and by his youngest son Gregory Bailey.¹

After having read this, I spent several hours outdoors recalling my *razgovory* (talks) with James: the affectionate way he always spoke of his teacher Kiril Taranovsky (who did something unimaginable for the Harvard of the early 1960s, inviting a graduate student to a coffee shop to have a talk about literature and Russian verse that lasted for hours and hours), or his habit of making jokes about my *ruskii zheludok* (Russian stomach), which was never ready for anything by the time Americans eat lunch, or the way he once said in passing how easy it had been for him to win a typing competition in his teens (and that's how I learned he was a pianist, a disciple of Agnes de Jahn, who in her turn was a student of a famous Viennese piano teacher Theodor Leschetizky), or how he smiled with content, when on

¹ See: [URL: <https://www.cressfuneralservice.com/obituary/James-BaileyJr>]

Christmas Eve 2004, I was unpacking the most unexpected gift I have ever received as an adult – a leaf-shutter rangefinder Voigtländer Prominent I type 127 (with two interchangeable lenses: the legendary 50mm f/1.5 Nokton and the 35mm f/3.5 Skoparon) made in Germany the same year James and Hanna got married – 1956.

On our very first meeting, James presented me with two books: *Three Russian Lyric Folk Song Meters* and *Izbrannye stat'i po russkomu narodnomu stikhu* (see: Bailey 1993; Bailey 2001). The third book he signed for me during my Madison days was his *Izbrannye stat'i po russkomu literaturnomu stikhu* (see: Bailey 2004), and this is the book by James that I reread (and refer to) most often. Yet just like James, who once said he regretted not attending any lectures of Albert Lord at Harvard (his interest in folklore developed at a later stage of his career), I regret not obtaining in time a hard copy of his first book *Toward a Statistical Analysis of English Verse: The Iambic Tetrameter of Ten Poets* (see: Bailey 1975), which I had read in xeroxes, and also *An Anthology of Russian Folk Song Epics* (see: Bailey, Ivanova 1999) he coedited with Tatyana Ivanova. The third book by James in my library without the author's inscription is the translation of *Three Russian Lyric Folk Song Meters* into Russian (see: Bailey 2010), yet all six – those without inscriptions and those I brought back from the US – have proved to be the least inefficient remedy against my feeling of loss: heartfelt, deep, and prone to coming back unexpectedly – the way only grief knows how to.

Grigori Utgof
(Tallinn)

REFERENCES

- Bailey, J. "The Accentual Verse of Majakovskij's 'Razgovor s fininspektorom o poëzii'." In *Slavic Poetics: Essays in Honor of Kiril Taranovsky*. Edited by Roman Jakobson, C. H. van Schooneveld and Dean S. Worth, 25–31. The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1973.
- . *Toward a Statistical Analysis of English Verse: The Iambic Tetrameter of Ten Poets*. Lisse: Peter de Ridder Press, 1975.
- . *Three Russian Lyric Folk Song Meters*. Columbus: Slavica Publishers, Inc. 1993.

- . *Izbrannye stat'i po russkomu narodnomu stikhu*. Translated from the English by T. V. Skulacheva and M. L. Gasparov. Edited by M. L. Gasparov. Moscow: Iazyki russkoi kul'tury, 2001.
- . *Izbrannye stat'i po russkomu literaturnomu stikhu*. Moscow: Iazyki slavianskoi kul'tury, 2004
- . *Tri russkikh narodnykh liricheskikh razmera*. Translated from the English by E. V. Savina with M. V. Akimova. Edited by M. V. Akimova. Moscow: Iazyki slavianskoi kul'tury, 2010
- Bailey, J. and Ivanova, T. *An Anthology of Russian Folk Song Epics*. Armonk, N. Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1999.