

Year Full of Bogs, Carousels and Boat-Rocking

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December 20, 2012

The Moscow Times

Every year since 2007, a jury of Russian linguists, philosophers, writers and educators gathers together and votes for слова года (words of the year). These are words and phrases that were either coined this year or soared in frequency of use and that encapsulate the year's zeitgeist.

In 2012, the jury apparently decided that the Russian zeitgeist was feisty. The top word of the outgoing year was болотная (boggy), as in Болотная площадь (Bog Square) — the place of numerous oppositional rallies and the symbol of dissent.

No. 2 on the list was the foreign counterpart to Болотная — оккупай (occupy), which was promptly borrowed in Russia, both in word and deed. The rest of this eight-word category reflects the headlines of the year: панк-молебен (punk prayer); кощунницы (women blasphemers, that is, the Pussy Riot women) — a word once so rare a standard spell-checker still flags it; кривосудие (injustice system), based on the contrast between правда (truth, law) and кривда (falsehood, injustice); карусель and карусельщик (carousel voting,

carousel voter); and митинг (demonstration).

One word on the list was the newly minted религархия (religarchy). It should be noted that a religarchy differs from a theocracy. In the former, the religious leaders play a strong role in the government. In the latter, the leaders are believed to be divinely guided. Let's just slide past that distinction.

Moving right along, the top expressions were all white, reflecting the white ribbons worn by opposition demonstrators: белый круг (white circle); белая лента (white ribbon); белая революция (white revolution); and of course, белоленточник (white ribbon wearer, that is, an opposition activist).

Other top phrases included иностранный агент (foreign agent); креативный класс (creative class); список Магнитского (Magnitsky list); and конец света (end of the world), which may occur before anyone reads this if those folks selling end-of-the-world survival kits are right.

Lucky for us, the top phrase of the year was very anti-Mayan: Богородица, Путина прогони! (Mother of God, cast Putin out!) The category of phrases also included мы придём еще (we'll be back) and за честные выборы (for fair elections).

For some people, that may be the end of the world.

The list of антиязык (anti-language, defined by the jury as false and propagandistic words and expressions) included оскорбление чувств верующих (offending the feelings of religious believers); ложные ценности агрессивного либерализма (false values of aggressive liberalism) and не раскачивайте лодку (don't rock the boat).

Am I the only one who heard that last phrase and immediately imagined President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev dancing on the Kremlin walls, singing that song from "Guys and Dolls": "Sit down! Sit down! Sit down! Sit down, you're rocking the boat!"?

Get a grip on it, Berdy.

Finally, this year gave the Russian language and speakers some fine authorial neologisms. My favorite is молчевидец, a blend of очевидец (eyewitness) and молчание (silence) that means: someone who was an eyewitness to events but remains silent about what he has seen. But I also like разгуманитаривание — the dehumanitarization of society, торжество технократического цинизма (the victory of technocratic cynicism).

Oh, dear. Now I can't get the song out of my head. "For the people all said beware / You're on a heavenly trip. ... And the devil will drag you under / By the fancy tie 'round your wicked throat /

Sit down, sit down, sit down, sit down / Sit down, you're rocking the boat!"

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