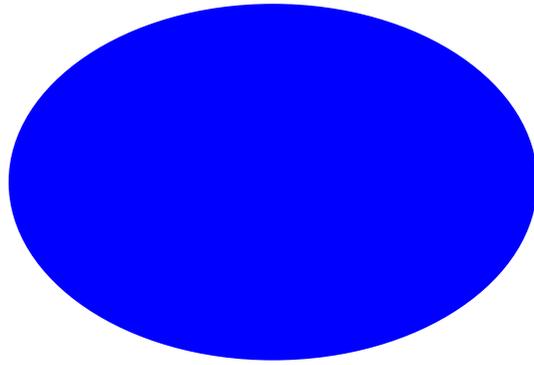


# FOUR CENTURIES

Russian Poetry in Translation



4

2013



Four Centuries

Russian Poetry in Translation

fourcenturies@gmx.de

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*Four Centuries Library* 45

Letter from the Publisher

### **Four Centuries Library**

Dear Friends,

The following text of the Publisher's Letter was published in *Four Centuries*, Nr. 3:

Dear Friends,

Thank you very much for reading our magazine.

I would like to open its third issue by launching a new initiative to create a library of Russian poetry in translations - ***Four Centuries Library***.

The ambitious goal of this project is to collect books, periodicals and other papers with Russian poetry, old and new, translated into different languages, and finally to donate collection as a whole to one of the university or public libraries. At the end of this issue you will find the list of more than thirty items - a starting contribution from my personal collection. You can join me in my efforts to implement this idea by sending your donations in the following categories:

A. Monographic poetry collections by separate poets translated into different languages

B. Anthologies of Russian poetry translations

C. Periodicals with translations of Russian poetry

Please, send your donations to:

Dr. Ilya Perelmutter, Erikapfad 7, 45133 Essen, Germany

The list of all the gifts with the names of the donators will be published in *Four Centuries*. Thanks a lot for your support in advance!

Yours,

Publisher

In this issue you will find new donations to the *Four Centuries Library* at page 45

# XIX

Ivan Turgenev      Prose Poems  
Иван Тургенев      Стихотворения в прозе

Translated by Alex Cigale\*

## Canine

There are two of us in the room: my dog and I. In the yard, a dreadful frenzy of a storm howls.

The dog sits before me - and stares directly into my eyes.

And I too am looking into his eyes.

It's as though he wants to tell me something. He is dumb, wordless, he does not understand himself - but I understand him.

I understand, that in this moment in both him and in me dwells one and the same instinct, that between us there is absolutely no difference. We are identical; in each of us burns, fluttering, the same flame.

Death will fly over and spread above him its cold, broad wing.

The End!

Who then will bother to sort out precisely which flame burned in each one of us?

No! It is not an animal and a human being who are exchanging glances...

These are two pairs of identical eyes directed one toward the other.

And in each of these pairs, in the animal and in the human - one and the same life cleaves, one to the other in fright.

*February 1878*

## **We Will Slug It Out Yet!**

What an insignificant trifle can at times transform a person entirely!

Preoccupied in thought, I walked once down a broad road.

Heavy foreboding tightened in my chest; I was overcome with worry.

I raised my head...Before me, between two rows of tall poplars, the road shot forth into the distance like an arrow.

And over it, over this very road, some ten paces from me, all burnished golden by bright summer sun, an entire family of sparrows bobbing in a single file, hopping along boisterously and self-importantly in a comical way.

One of them in particular sidling towards me, inflated his crop and twittered impertinently, as though he could dance with the devil! A warrior victorious - if ever I saw one!

In the midst of this, high above in the sky circled a hawk, for whom perhaps it was fated to scarf down this very warrior.

I wondered at this sight, tittered and shook myself off - and my despairing thoughts immediately scattered away: I sensed courage, daring, a hunger toward life.

May my own bird of pray circle above me...

- We will slug it out yet and devil-may-care!

*November 1879*

## **Quail**

Lying in bed, oppressed by a lingering and seemingly inescapable melancholy, I thought: what had I done to deserve this? what am I being punished for? me, why me? It is unfair, unfair!

And the following vision came into my head...

An entire family of young quail - some twenty of them - huddled together in a thicket of standing straw. They are pressed one to another, poking at the loose earth in sweet abandon. Suddenly a dog startles them - they fly up as one, and a shot rings out - and one of the quails, with a wounded wing, all pitted, plummets and, with difficulty dragging its little feet, stashes itself away underneath a bush of wormwood.

While the dog seeks it out, the unfortunate quail, perhaps, also thinks: "There were twenty of us, all just like me... Why then was it me, why was I placed in the sights and must die now? Why? What had I done to deserve this instead of all my sisters? This is not fair!"

Lie there, ill creature, while death searches you out.

*June 1882*

## **The Russian Language**

In the days of doubt, in the days of oppressive deliberations about the fate of my country - you are my only buttress and support, oh, great, mighty, truthful, and free Russian tongue! Were it not for you - how is one not to fall into despair in the sight of all that is happening in our house? For it is impossible to believe that such a tongue was not given to a great people!

*June 1882*

**Alex Cigale's** own English-language poems have appeared in the *Colorado*, *Green Mountains*, *North American*, *Tampa*, and *Literary* reviews, and online in *Asymptote*, *Drunken Boat*, and *McSweeney's*. His translations from the Russian can be found in *Ancora Imparo*, *Cimarron Review*, *Literary Imagination*, *Modern Poetry in Translation*, *PEN America*, and *Two Lines*. Currently he is an Assistant Professor at the American University of Central Asia in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

Iakov Polonski (1819 - 1898)

Яков Полонский (1819 - 1898)

Traduit par Christine Zeytounian-Belous\*

Translated into French by Christine Zeytounian-Belous\*

### **Le soir**

Le feu mourant de l'aurore  
parsème le ciel d'étincelles.  
La mer lumineuse respire,  
des grelots le babil disparate  
sur la route s'est tu.  
Le chant sonore des bergers  
s'est perdu dans les bois.  
Dans le brouillard transparent  
passe une mouette criarde.  
L'écume blanche est bercée  
sous le rocher, comme dans son berceau  
l'enfant qui dort.  
La rosée fraîche a semé ses perles  
sur les feuilles du châtaignier,  
dans chaque goutte frémit  
le feu mourant de l'aurore.

1843

\* \* \*

La falaise chenue soulève vers le ciel  
la tour en ruine, aire de l'aigle,  
s'inclinant au-dessus de l'abîme marin,  
tel un vieillard sous un fardeau précieux.

La tour contemple longuement, chagrine,  
la gorge sourde où le vent siffle,  
la tour écoute et croit entendre  
des chevaux au galop qui hennissent gaiement.

Et la falaise aussi scrute les profondeurs  
où le vent berce et fait courir les vagues,  
et voit frémir dans leur éclat trompeur  
le fracas des trophées guerriers.

1845

**Christine Zeytounian-Belous**, artist, poet and translator, born in Moscow, has been living in Paris since childhood. She has translated 60 books of prose and poetry from Russian into French (Andrej Bitow, Sergej Dowlatow, Wladimir Makanin, Olga Slavnikowa etc.) She is the editor and co-editor of a number of modern Russian poetry anthologies. She writes poetry both in French and Russian, her Russian poems have been published in anthologies and journals, such as *Журнал Поэтов*, *Нева*, *Освобождённый Улисс*, *Дети Ра* and others. As an artist Christine Zeytounian-Belous takes part in exhibitions in France, Russia and other countries, she publishes her graphic works in French and Russian press. For her translations she has been awarded two literary prizes.

## XX

Konstantin Balmont (1867 - 1942)

КОНСТАНТИН БАЛЬМОНТ (1867 - 1942)

Translated by Alex Cigale\*

### **The Devil's Voice**

With a passion I detest the saintly -  
Their scrupulous and tortured concerns  
And shallow thoughts are for themselves;  
Themselves alone exclusively they save.

They fear exclusively for their souls,  
In terror of their dreams' gaping abyss  
And of that ancient poisoner the Worm  
They execute without guilty conscience.

I would have hated heaven just as well,  
Among those shades with meekly smiles,  
Where the eternal holiday, forever May,  
Proceeds on its measured, pacing way.

I have no wish to live in Paradise  
While executing the Serpent's wiles.  
From childhood years I've loved the Asp  
And am amazed by it as by a masterpiece.

I have no wish to live in Paradise  
Among dullards writhing in ecstasy.  
I'm dying, I'm destroyed, am killed - I sing,  
The mind-deprived demon of dreams lyrical.

## **The Accursed Foolishness**

All crippling, disturbance, consumption,  
All fallen and abysmal games of spite  
Are a part of this world I barely bear,  
And even in you I have found mystery.

For those who love monsters all, discovery;  
Alien among animals my life was spent.  
And as for an incorrigible alky - vodka,  
I prize fate's harmony as heaven-sent.

I love this universe's squeaking axes,  
The vulture's screeching at night's ditch,  
And this life's rutted and eroded paths.

To each thing its own gilding due each gaze.  
Yet to the heart despicable an idiot's stare;  
Such foolishness I will never understand!

1899

\* \* \*

Above all, necessary to love and kill,  
Above all, necessary to be set in type,  
On the outside strict yet endlessly kind,  
Luring all with worry's beautiful face.

Also needed is this. You understand why:  
All of us are seeking God; we tend to Him,  
But God, always leaving, attracts us nearer,  
Desires darkness after light, night then day.

He's always varying, wants novel dreams,  
Even of barbaric and disordered worlds  
If they are lively and, pitching their screams,  
Passively go out having created a moment.

The world's pendulum, invisible to our eyes,  
Leads through a labyrinth of sunrises and nights,  
And the brace of stars racing on their scary way.  
And God is always leaving us. We follow Him.

1901

\* \* \*

Filled with horror, these days, I read fables -  
Not those that we as children read and knew.  
No: the living pain in her eyes over breakfast  
Beyond the frightful rustle of the daily news.

It seems to me into our sphere has entered  
That ancient darkness centuries had dimmed,  
Blood gushing from the corpse of Godunov,  
And the spines of captives broken on the rack.

Tearing of tongues, eyes out, use of thumbscrews,  
Into an opened stomach a skewier is stuck, night  
Teeming with sounds that make one's skin crawl:  
Laughter of thieves, howls of abducted wives.

In the midst of day the streets are ghost-filled,  
Mumbling something, whispering into the void,  
Bullet-ridden bodies, the warp of twisted souls,  
The Devil hunts himself. Scram! Shake a leg!

Faster! Get him! Chop with an ax to pieces!  
Whip with a lash! Shoot him! Flay his flesh!  
I'm falling. I stiffen. Rigor mortis sets in.  
I'm their brother and must live amongst them!

Wait! Where am I? This hut. Whose feet these?  
A human bone. Is it for that ancient crone?  
And blood. The road is all; the road goes on.  
Aaah! Can anyone hear me? Help! There she is.

*December 1905*

Ossip Mandelstam      Осип Мандельштам

Translated by Ian Probstein\*

### **Verses on the Unknown Soldier**

Let this air be my eyewitness,  
Its long-range heart,  
In the dug-outs - omnivorous, active  
Substance - a windowless ocean strives.

How cunning these stars are!  
They would peep and watch - why?  
Onto the windowless ocean, the substance,  
To convict the judge and the witness.

A dreary shower, rain,  
Its nameless manna remembers  
How a forest of crossed marked  
The ocean or a fighting file's members.

Sickly, freezing men  
Will kill, chill, and starve,  
And an unknown soldier then  
Will be laid in his famous grave.

A sickly swallow unable to fly,  
Teach me: how can I  
Reach that grave in the air  
Without a rudder or sails?

And I will give you a strict account  
For Lermontov, Michail - how  
A hunchback is taught by the grave  
And the airy hole hauls.

These worlds threaten us  
With stirring hanging grapes,  
And the tents of stretched constellations  
Hang like stolen towns,  
Golden hints, slanders, denunciations,  
Berries of poisonous cold,  
Golden fat of constellations.

Through the ether of ten-digit zeroes  
The light of speeds ground down to a ray  
Starts a number, made lucent and clear  
By the bright pain of holes and moles.

And a new battlefield beyond the field of fields  
Flies like a triangular flock of cranes,  
The news flies like a new light-dust,  
And it's bright from the yesterday's fight.

The news flies like a new light-dust:  
- I am not Leipzig, not Waterloo,  
Not the Battle of Nations - I am new,  
I will dazzle the world with my light.

Arabian mess, mash and hash,  
The light of speeds ground down to a ray -  
And trampling my retina with its squint soles,  
The beam flattens the pupil of my eye.

The millions of murdered at a cheap price  
Have trampled a path to the void -  
Good night, good sleep to them all  
On behalf of the dug-out battlements.

Incorruptible heaven of trenches,  
The sky of deaths, large-scale and wholesale,  
Beyond you, the whole one - from you -  
I fly on my lips in the dark

Past the shell holes, mounds and mudslides,  
Mayhem, where he lingered in maze and haze,  
Gloomy, pockmarked and humiliated genius  
Of ingenious overturned graves.

The infantry dies nicely,  
And nicely sings the mighty choir,  
At Corporal Schweik's flattened smile,  
At Don Quixote's bird-shaped spear,  
And at birdlike visitor of a knight.  
And the cripple makes friends with the man,  
There is work for both of them here:  
The family of wooden crutches goes knocking  
Around the century's outskirts -  
Hey, comradeship - terrestrial globe!

Should the skull develop its brow  
Wide and high - from temple to temple,  
So that the troops cannot but flow  
Flooding its eyes - its dear apples?

The skull develops through life  
Along the whole brow - from temple to temple -  
It tempts itself with the purity of its joins,  
Shines with an intelligent dome,  
Foams with thought, dreams of itself,  
A cup of cups, homeland's home -  
A cap sewn with a starry seam -  
A Cap of joy - the father of Shakespeare.

Ash-tree's clarity, sycamore's sharp sight  
Rush home, slightly tinted in red,  
As if casting a spell of faint  
On both skies with their pale fire.

Only abundance is our ally,  
The depth to be fathomed, not abyss ahead,  
And to struggle for our daily air  
Is the glory beyond compare.

Is the package of charm stored  
In empty space so that white stars  
Should rush home slightly tinted in red?  
And casting a spell of a half-fainted life

On my own consciousness,  
Can I not but drink this brew  
Eat my own head under fire?!  
Do you feel, the night,

A stepmother of a gypsy camp of stars,  
What will happen from now on?

Aortas are flooded with blood,  
And a whisper spreads through the ranks:  
- "I was born in the year ninety-four,  
- I was born in the year ninety-two..."  
And squeezing in my fist a worn date of birth,  
With bloodless lips I whisper amid crowd and herd:  
"I was born on the night of the second and third  
Of January in the unreliable year  
Of ninety-one, and the centuries  
Encircle me with fire."

*1-15 March 1937*

\* \* \*

I beg like compassion and grace  
Your land and honeysuckle, France,

The truth of your doves and the lies of your dwarf vines  
With their guaze-like divides;

Your brushed air in a mild December  
Freezes - money-seeking and offended...

But there's a violet even in jail: one can lose head  
in this infinity!  
A careless mocker, a song, still whistles light-heartedly -

Where a July curved street  
Boiled, sweeping royalty...

And now in Paris, Chartres, Arles  
There is a new king - Chaplin Charles:

With a flower girl he swaggers and fidgets  
In an ocean bowler hat,  
with a perplexed precision on hinges...

It's a shame that an aerial grateful carousel  
Turns inhaling a town -  
Where the shawl of a cobweb turns into stone  
Sweating with its double towers -

Turn your neck, a godless beauty  
With golden goatish eyes,  
And tease with curved guttering scissors  
The clumps of niggard roses.

*3 March 1937*

\* \* \*

I will say it in draft, in a whisper -  
Since the time has not come yet:  
The game of the instinctive heaven  
Is attained through experience and sweat.

And beneath a temporary sky  
Of purgatory we often forget  
That this happy heaven's depot  
Is our expending and lifetime haven.

*9 March 1937*

\* \* \*

It might be the point of insanity,  
It may be my consciousness as well:  
A knot of life, in which we are  
Singled out and untied for life.

Thus a diligent spider, light,  
Disperses cathedrals of superhuman crystals  
Upon liernes and ribs and then  
Gathers them into a single beam again.

Led by a quiet ray,  
Grateful beams of pure lines  
Will gather one day,  
Like friendly guests at table, -

Only here, on earth, not in heaven,  
As in the house full of music,  
No one should hurt them or scare -  
Oh, if we could live to see it...

Forgive me what I have said  
And quietly recite and re-read.

*15 March 1937*

\* \* \*

To help a friend of wind and rain  
Save his sandstone within,  
Crowds of herons and vessels scrawled  
Their sketches in the vessels of dawn.

Egyptians' state shame  
Was adorned with a chosen canine,  
They gave odds and ends to the dead,  
And the trifle of pyramids still sticks.

How much better is my favourite friend,  
My consoler, my kin, sinful singer:  
Your gritting teeth are still heard,  
The plaintiff of careless justice...

The clew of his ill-willed assets  
He unwound for two testaments,  
And departing, gave us in a thrill  
The world as deep as a skull;

Spitting at the spider's rights,  
An impudent scholar, a stealing angel,  
Played tough tricks near Gothic sites  
Unrivaled Villon François.

He is a heavenly robber,  
It is not shameful to sit near him:  
Skylarks will still ring and warble  
Before the end of the world.

*18 March 1937*

\* \* \*

I'm under fire of a bird cherry and a pear tree -  
Without missing their shrapnel fire hits me.

Constellations with bunches, clusters with stars -  
Why the diarchy? In which inflorescence is the truth?

They shoot in full bloom or in full swing with whole-air:  
White bunches or bludgeons are shaking the atmosphere.

While the sweetness of the double aroma from the start  
Struggles and stretches, is mixed, torn apart.

*4 May 1937*

**Ian Probst**ein, assistant professor of English in Tour College, New York, a bilingual English-Russian poet and translator of poetry, is writing poetry and on poetry. He published seven books of poetry in Russian, one in English, and more than twenty books and anthologies of poetry in translation. He has translated poetry from English, Spanish, Italian, and Polish into Russian and from Russian into English. A bilingual edition of *Complete Poems and Selected Cantos* of Ezra Pound, which he compiled, edited, commented, and of which he is one of the major translators, was the Best Book of 2003 in Translation and Poetry in Russia.

Roald Mandelstam (1932-1961)

Роальд Мандельштам (1932-1961)

Translated by Ian Probstein\*

### **Walks in the Museum**

#### 1. Amphora

I like the past as this museum vase -  
A cannon of freedom and norm,  
But the glue takes away that Attic reason,  
And clay - that ancient form.

#### 2. A Sword Hilt

Wild metal is bound  
By a mighty fantasy of lines.  
- Oh, Benvenuto Chellini,  
Who wouldn't know your hand!

#### 3. Icons

Miracle-making fingers of icons  
In a cypress oil of sorrow  
Were shivering from fever  
And each finger ended  
With a tuning fork.

#### 4. Scarab

A silver shorthand of cracks  
Repeats a classic dream:  
Pharaoh entrusted his life  
To a chariot obedient as a wife.

\* \* \*

A clot of houses and a ball of sunset -  
In the world of a fading dawn  
On the grey body of an electric ray  
Street lamps glow.

Late and joyless calm  
Invaded night towns:  
- Let the night be! - The stars smolder.  
- Let the sleep be! - The night is proud.

Autumn is raving in pre-snow orchards;  
Timpani - gold - leaves...  
Yet, there is no life and no hope -  
Only a shadow of hunchbacked bridge.

There is and always be - eternally -  
It's such dead verbiage of words!  
Art - temples - stars - candles -  
Her eyes - an oval of - the sea -

An avalanche of exultant claptrap,  
Prometheus utters an iron moan:  
Having fallen from his father's chariot,  
Yesterday  
                    Perished  
                                    Phaeton.

### **Variation**

A clot of houses and a ball of sunset  
Against a bronze dawn,  
On the grey body of an electric ray  
Street lamps burn.

From the house tortured by asthma,  
Heading home through a dead man's cold,  
Like a gallant mouse, Richard Vasmi  
From the back door prowls.

My broken hopes -  
His full resilient flesh,  
Sunset's serene sky  
In his peaceful dress.

His black-ink crystals  
Denatured spring.  
Though tired, hurry to meet it -  
Don't sleep! Don't trust sleep!

1954

### **A Scarlet Streetcar**

A dream was cut off: unfinished  
Was the laughter and barking of stones.  
A scarlet streetcar rushed forward  
In a starry frost of the night.

A few empty corridors run  
One by one, and in each  
Rides a double of Commander<sup>1</sup> -  
His granite feet are stone cold.

- Who's there?  
- The grave's conductor!

Black is the lightning of his gaze;  
His blue throat is squeezed  
By the chain of the Golden Fleece.

- Where am I? (He bursts into laughter).  
- What is it? Heaven or Hell?

A scarlet streetcar is hurled  
Into a starry frost of the night.

<sup>1</sup>An allusion to Pushkin's *Stone Guest* and Mozart's *Don Juan* as well as Nikolai Gumilev's poem "Wayward Trolley" (Translator's note)



\* \* \*

Heavens are turned upside down,  
They burn as if seized with fever:  
A torpedo of the dawn has blown  
A heavy dreadnought of the night.

An inky mass is broken!  
The moon killed by the blast,  
Arises like a dead fish  
In the square of a window glass.

Below, where the rails cross  
And the bread of the square is stale,  
A bloody drop of the trolley  
Scrawls down the rail.

### **Meeting spring**

A street wind laughs  
With a bark-like guffaw:  
A Scarlet Streetcar is cast  
Into a starry frost of the night!

A long silver ring  
Made people drowsy...  
Someone yelled: "Spring"  
In a drowsy car.

- What a strange and dim ray  
Of a rubber boot jumped as a hare  
Into a gray boredom and rain  
On an early gloomy day?

Just someone's transparent shadow  
Glided along the glass,  
Touched a yellow handrail,  
And a belt of the handrail stirred.

Who would fail to notice?  
Who would see and miss  
Sunny laughing wind  
And a sea of miling faces?

As if a dawn scarlet streetcar  
Cast ist icy bell  
Into April or May  
From a murky March night.

\* \* \*

The entire block is swept and chilled,  
A wet wintry city dreams of dawn,  
Dropping into azure pools  
Golden chains of lamps.

No star,  
    No cloud,  
            No sound -  
In a window pale as pain  
Stretching their yearning arms  
The belfries long for gods.

I greet with old rhymes  
The sun's dazzling advent -  
A morning with game cocks  
Slowly passes by the gate.

### **Alba**

The entire block is swept and chilled,  
A wet wintry city dreams of dawn,  
Dropping into azure pools  
Golden moons of lamps.

The masts, severed from sails, dry,  
The belfries, longing for gods, raise  
Their yearning arms to the sky  
Above the roofs which look like hay stacks.

For a charming hour of your cool,  
Eos, a rosy-fingered dawn,  
I cast joyous treasures of street-lamps  
As a glowing amber string

And greet a dazzling dawn  
With a new song -  
A morning with game cocks  
Slowly passes by the gate.

### **Alba (variation)**

The entire block is swept and chilled,  
A wet wintry city dreams of dawn,  
Dropping into azure pools  
Golden moons of lamps.

The dawn slightly stirs its wings  
On the grey canvas of the sky,  
Cautiously painting the roofs in  
A window that quietly grows blue.

Like a shield never seen before  
In the coat of arms of those  
Who came a long way from afar,  
An ashy field blooms into golden roses of clouds.

With a fur of burning red fox  
Covering the entire glassy sky,  
A morning with game cocks  
Slowly passes by the gate.

### **Morning**

The entire block is swept and chilled,  
A wet wintry city dreams of dawn,  
Dropping into azure pools  
Opaque moons of street lamps.

- Listen, how measured is the sea's breath!  
- Look, the morning's ahead! -  
There is no more joyful grief in the world  
Than the sorrow of crying ice

When a white feather grows  
Covering a flock of clouds,  
And the silver splashes the sidewalks  
With the bells of a scarlet streetcar,

The pedestrians will hurry to ride  
To the last station near the plant  
Leaving cars smelling of pine  
For a bright northern spring.

### **Morning**

Laying bare stiffening pedestals,  
A hundred gates wide open their mouths.  
The wind gusts from the roof-tops:  
The sail of dark is crumpled and torn  
Over the sea of rusty umbra.

I cast joyous treasures  
of street-lamps,  
Like a string of glowing amber,  
For a melancholic hour of your cool,  
Eos, a rosy-fingered dawn.

Ilya Selvinsky (1899 - 1968)

Илья Сельвинский (1899 - 1968)

Two Shoah Poems\*

Translated by Maxim D. Shrayer\*\*

**I Saw It**

Germany, now we weave you a shroud,  
And into it we weave a threefold scourge.  
Heine, "The Silesian Weavers"\*\*\*

One may choose to dismiss people's tales  
Or disbelieve printed columns of news.  
But I saw it! With my own eyes.  
Do you understand? I saw it. Myself.  
Here--the road. Over there--a higher plain.  
Between them, just so--a trench.  
From the trench rises boundless pain  
And sorrow--without end.  
No! About this one cannot--with words...  
One must sob. Roar.  
7000 murdered ones--in a wolf's hollow.  
A hollow rustly like ore...  
Who are these people? Soldiers? Hardly.  
Perhaps partisans? No.  
Here lies the pug-nosed Kolka--  
He's eleven years old.  
His kin is all here, Merriment Homestead,  
All the Samostroy houses--120 of them,  
So dear...so scary...Like new residents,

\*Both poems are translated by permission of Tatyana Selvinskaya and are forthcoming in Maxim D. Shrayer, *I SAW IT: Ilya Selvinsky and the Legacy of Bearing Witness to the Shoah*. Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2013

\*\*©Maxim D. Shrayer

\*\*\*Deutschland, wir weben dein Leichentuch

Wir weben hinein den dreifachen Fluch.

Heinrich Heine, "Die schlesischen Weber", 1844

Their bodies have moved into the trench.  
Lying, sitting, sliding onto the breastwork,  
Each one--his own inimitable pose.  
Winter froze in the dead ones  
What the living felt at their death.  
And corpses wander, menacing, abhorring...  
Like a rally, this dead silence rumbles.  
No matter how they looked when they had fallen--  
With eyes, bared teeth, shoulders, necks--  
They wrangle with their executioners,  
They cry out "You will not triumph!"  
    Over the gully there dangles a cripple,  
His black crutch still juts out.  
A young hawk bows his little curved beak.  
Then jumps on the chest--and the corpse groans.  
An old woman in a tattered nun's habit.  
The wax has hardened, sealing her left eye.  
But her right one gazes deep into the heavens  
    Through clefts in this cloudy sky.  
And such crow-calls fill her gullet,  
Such words rage in her throat cavity,  
Just touch it--and out, with seething sounds,  
    A disavowal of divinity.  
This means: through this ancient, mossy, overgrown  
Black-crow mysticism--light has burst,  
"If fascists live in this world,  
    Then there is no god..."  
Nearby, a mauled Jewish woman,  
And a small child with her. Is he awake?  
The mother's grey shawl is wrapped with such care  
Around the babe's neck.  
O maternal, o ancient strength!  
Walking to the execution, just before she was killed,  
An hour, half an hour, before the grave,  
Mother was saving child from a chill.  
And even death has not pried them apart.  
Over them the enemies have no power.

An auburn trickle from the child's ear  
Seeps into the mother's cupped palm.  
Go now. Brand them! You have seen the blood bath.  
You have caught them red-handed--an eye-witness.  
You see how with armor-piercing bullets  
The executioners decimate us.  
So thunder now, like Dante, like Ovid,  
Let nature itself weep and moan,  
    If  
        you  
            saw  
                all of this,  
    And have not gone mad.  
But silent I stand over the burial pit.  
What words? The words have turned to rot.  
There was a time: I wooed a sweetheart,  
    I praised a nightingale's chant.  
One might have thought--so what?  
    Same old tune. And yet,  
Try finding the right word,  
    Even for a familiar event.  
And here? Here the nerves are like taut bows,  
But the strings... are deafer than boiled sturgeon sinews.  
No, for this unbearable torment  
    No language has been devised.  
To do this, one would have to call a council  
Of all tribes, flagpole to flagpole,  
And from each one take all that is personal--  
Over the centuries everything bewailed--  
And if all tribes were to give to this chorus  
One word each, one word we all shared,  
Then the great Russian sorrow  
    To each word would add seven.  
But no such language has been devised.  
Even if in unheard-of stanzas  
I have failed to mourn your blood-soaked sunset,  
We do have just the kind of speech,

More scorching than any verbal artistry:  
Canister shots, r's misrolled, keep  
Rattling the larynx of the battery.  
Can you hear this blast at the boundary?  
The avenging fire... Murderers grow pale!  
But they will have nowhere to flee  
    From your blood-soaked burial.  
Now relax your muscles. Lower your eyelids,  
Rise like grass over these heights.  
He who saw you, henceforth forever  
Shall carry your wounds in his heart.  
The trench... Tell about it in meter?  
7000 corpses... Jews... Slavs...  
No! About this one cannot--with words:  
Fire! Only with fire.

1942

Translated, from the Russian, by Maxim D. Shrayer

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Source: Il'ia Sel'vinskii, "Ia eto videl!" *Oktiabr'* 1-2 (1942): 65-66.

## **Kerch**

In high school we divided the Crimea  
Into Hellenic and Wild. The coast  
From Eupatoria down and all the way to Kerch  
Was called Hellas. And then, if one should happen  
To steal across the mountains and descend  
Unto the steppe, we used to call this:  
"Going to Scythia," although in jest  
We called our towns and cities  
By their Greek names, as in days of yore.  
I had long forgotten all about this.  
But suddenly when our landing forces  
Traversed the strait and took their positions

On the Crimean shore, when I saw  
Not far ahead of me the city of Kerch.  
My voice whispered: "Panticapaeum."

In lilac and orange fog, above the sea  
An amphitheater of a resplendent city  
Soared, while some white and lofty temple  
Rose from a mountain into the sky  
Amid smoking clouds. A distant cape  
Shone black over the bay of chrysolite.  
And silhouettes of buildings at daybreak  
Suggested porticoes and columns  
And statues in the forum, while Hellas  
Breathed in her deep slumber. Only the fog,  
Like reveries, encircled colossal sails,  
A horde of billy goats or a crowd of satyrs,  
And I was older by five thousand years.  
Enveloped by the dozing centuries,  
In my thoughts I roamed the square,  
Where the Hellenes bargained like old birds  
And fish scales passed locally for silver  
Here bread and cheese were traded for horse mackerel;  
A copper shield filled to the brim with mullet  
Was an apposite payment for an ode.  
And if with a spindly sturgeon they paid  
For a young lady of matching shape and form--  
The same aqueous sheen, the very same  
Body contours and flowing curves,  
The sturgeon wouldn't be offended.  
(And what about the young lady? Of her offence  
They hardly thought in those ruffian days.  
A terrible age!) And suddenly upon this city,  
Like Furies dispatched by Zeus,  
Airplanes! And when out of the smoke  
The city once again appeared over the bay,  
And tanks with red flags rolled in, one after another  
Along the embankment, then encountered a ditch

And drove through a bank's façade into a side street--  
By now Kerch was lying there by the shore.  
Thus, in one day I got to see two faces  
Of the same city. But the war  
Held a third one in store for me.

That night

To the office of the army newspaper, very quietly--  
Like a somnambulist, as though before him  
The same vision stood incessantly, forever  
Stuck on the same unceasing thought--  
Came someone not pale, but simply white,  
A man in some ways unimaginable.  
In a faraway voice (so faraway  
That we felt it wasn't he who spoke,  
But someone else who spoke for him)--he told us  
In caveman's speech of Stone Age intonations,  
Incising the full stops:

"Six miles from here.

There's Bagerovo. A small town.  
Before you get there, to the right there's a ditch.  
Anti-tank. They took over there  
Seven thousand folks. Myself included.

But I

On purpose threw myself down a second earlier.  
I didn't even hurt myself. On top of me  
Mother fell. They--in the head. Then...  
Then wife. And after that--both my daughters...  
One was still moaning. I dug myself out  
And carried her in my arms. But in vain.  
She's in the well, for now. Each time  
I see her little eyes beneath the water.  
Her little mouth. When the water surges,  
It looks like my daughter's swimming...

So then...

What was that I was telling you about?  
Oh right, about Bagerovo. So then:  
About five hundred yards before you get there, turn right."

We set out right away. The writer Romm.  
The photographer, myself, and the critic Goffenshefer.  
By sunrise we had come upon a valley  
All covered in some dappled cotton fabric. Those were  
The dead who had crawled out during the night.  
I have described this very hazily  
In the poem "I SAW IT!"  
And I cannot add even a single word.  
Kerch...

There are cities whose significance lies  
Not in their landscape, nor in their culture,  
Nor in the aura of their everlasting glory,  
But in that lightning rod of verity,  
When the smoldering mystery of the epoch  
Would suddenly be revealed, like a ditch in morning fog.  
Who were we before our meeting, Kerch?

The writer seems nervous. He strikes  
One match, then another, while forgetting  
That his own jaws are clenched with anger--  
And not from the sensation of the cigarette.  
"What beastliness!" the writer slowly says.  
And then the critic echoes: "Beastliness."  
Language is their trade. Their element, speech.  
They have rummaged through the whole dictionary  
To choose the selfsame word: "Beastliness."  
But wild beasts under cover of night approached  
The morgue so vast it covered the horizon,  
And felt with all the senses of wild beasts  
The elemental horror standing silently  
Before them.

Magpies and crows  
Taking off, flying over each other, wouldn't dare  
Cross over that line of hillocks.  
The karagan fox, though following the scent  
Along the rabbit tracks beyond the deep ravine,  
All of a sudden veered off the path,

Scurried away, yelping and howling in terror,  
As if a thunderous pack of hounds were chasing her.  
And even the shadow of a wolf amongst the dead  
Whirled around anxiously... Then froze...  
Another trotted back to his remote barrow  
From there the wolf's shadow turned despondently,  
Lingered, then quietly vanished from sight.  
Kerch,  
You are the mirror, in which the abyss has been reflected.

1942

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Source: Il'ia Sel'vinskii, "Kerch" *Znamia* 2 (1945): 78-79

**Ilya Selvinsky** (b. 1899, Simferopol - d. 1968, Moscow), poet, dramatist, memoirist, and essayist, was a poetic virtuoso of high caliber. Selvinsky holds a prominent place in the history of modern Russian poetry and in the history of Jewish literature and Shoah literature. Selvinsky's unclipped literary achievements include the epic poem *The Lay of Ulyalaev* and the novel in verse *Fur Trade* (1928). Selvinsky published his first poem in 1915 and in the 1920s experimented with the use of Yiddishisms and thieves' lingo in Russian verse. He is credited with innovations in Russian versification, including the proliferation of *taktovik*, a Russian nonclassical meter. From 1924 until its dismantlement in 1930, Selvinsky was the Leader of the Literary Center of Constructivists (LTsK), an early Soviet modernist group, and edited several landmark anthologies by constructivist authors. In the middle to late 1920s, after the publication of *Records*, *The Lay of Ulyalaev* (1924) and the narrative poem *Notes of a Poet* (1927), Selvinsky achieved fame and acclaim. In 1929, his tragedy *Army 2 Commander* was staged by Vsevolod Meyerhold. A major mentor to the younger generation of Soviet Russian poets, during World War II Selvinsky served as a military journalist and combat political officer in his native Crimea, North Caucasus, and Kuban. In the poem "I Saw It!" ("Ia eto videl!"), composed in January 1942 and published shortly thereafter, Selvinsky depicted the aftermath of the

mass execution, in November-December 1941, of thousands of Jews at the so-called Bagerovo anti-tank ditch outside the Crimean city of Kerch. According to research of Maxim D. Shrayer, Selvinsky's "I Saw It!" was the first literary text about the Shoah in the occupied Soviet territories to reach a nationwide audience. In late 1943 Lieutenant Colonel Selvinsky was summoned to Moscow, punitively dismissed from the army, and subjected to repressions. One of the principal Soviet literary witnesses to the Shoah, Selvinsky treated the topic of the mass extermination of Jews by the Nazis and their accomplices in two other works of 1942, "Kerch" and "A Reply to Goebbels," and in other wartime poems. Selvinsky's long poem *Kandava* (1945) unfolds around a nightmare in which he imagines himself and his wife "somewhere in Auschwitz/or Majdanek." Through a combination of personal bravery and political navigation, Selvinsky weathered the storms of Stalinism. He remained a proud Jew during the most antisemitic of the Soviet years and despite direct official ostracism. Shortly before his death, Selvinsky published the autobiographical novel *O My Youth* (1966), where Jewish themes figured prominently. (Translator's Note, © 2013 Maxim D. Shrayer)

**Maxim D. Shrayer** (b. 1967, Moscow) is a bilingual American writer and Professor of Russian, English, and Jewish Studies at Boston College. Shrayer has authored and edited a number of books, among them the literary memoir *Waiting for America*, and the collection *Yom Kippur in Amsterdam*, and the forthcoming *Leaving Russia: A Jewish Story*. His *Anthology of Jewish-Russian Literature* won the 2007 National Jewish Book Award. He was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2012. For more information, visit [www.shrayer.com](http://www.shrayer.com)

Полина Барскова

Полина Барскова

Превод: Мария Липискова\*  
Translated into Bulgarian by Maria Lipiskova\*

## FISH

Целуни ме ето тук:  
Ето тук имам вода.  
Целуни ме ето там:  
Ето там имам вода.  
Дъждът вали вече четири дни  
И през цялото време върху мен.  
Целуни ме по челото:  
Ето там имам рибен сок.  
Целуни ме в прозрачната уста:  
Там живее рибка-рибка.  
Целуни ме бързо в устатата:  
Както сом целува сом.  
Риба-меч е цяла в бяс.  
Тя не иска нашите срещи.  
И застана между нас,  
Както течното стъкло.  
Но през него  
Виждам аз  
Драгоценните шевици  
Отворени за мен уста.  
Отворени за мен уста.  
В тихата тъма да шепнат:  
You are so sweet and warm  
Like a little darling worm.

## В очакване да стана на 30

Твърде късно е да си намерим приятели  
Да ги заведем при себе си като в музей:  
*А ето тук е особено интересно.*  
От тази медна пита, с най-добрия сок.  
От балтийско си донесох пясък.  
Челюстта се разтваря в прозявка.

Живей си с паметта за тях.  
В местата на съмнителна утеха  
(И Конят там е Блед, и нощите са бели)  
Влизат в теб без звук,  
От гръбнак - до гръбнак:  
Научи се, като патоанатом.  
Снегът вали и се разпада като атом.

Снегът вали, покрива сняг реката,  
И хората покрива,  
Сякаш спяща красавица,  
В прозрачната си ларва,  
Ти продължаваш вятърничаво и вярно,

Когато с теб в мълчанието,  
Като медузи се свивахме -  
В подводното пространство на нощта.  
И изумрудените огърлици  
На шията (Бяла? Златиста?)  
Чернееха? Тлееха? Зеленееха?  
Блестеше кожата, като вълната морска.  
Минутите течаха, седмици течаха,  
Аз бях изпълнена с теб.  
Като дете, като жених, като дума,  
Като костилка - на есенен плод.

С какво ново въплъщение  
Ще мога да заменя този първи, този  
Единствен, неловък опит  
На две да разделя неделимото?

Този смях, този сън, този вик, този шепот.  
Знам - част от мен е мъртва,  
Тази, която умееше  
Да прощава и веднага - да се променя.

Снегът вали мръсно, бяло.  
Площадът зад реката е черен  
Като печата на молба.

**Polina Barskova**, born in 1976 in Leningrad, started publishing poems at the age of nine. Her first book of poems was published when she was still a teenager. After receiving a degree in Russian Literature and Classics from St. Petersburg University she came to the United States where she earned a Ph.D. in Russian Literature from University of California, Berkeley. Author of seven books of poetry, Barskova teaches at Hampshire College.

**Maria Lipiskova** - Bulgarian poet, writer and translator, born in 1972 in the city of Teteven, Bulgaria. She has a M.A. (Bulgarian Philology) and MLIS (Library of Information Science and Cultural Policy). Her translations have been published in literary periodicals in Bulgaria and abroad. She has translated Boris Dubin, Mikhail Iampolski, Mikhail Epstein, Joseph Brodsky, Oleg Yuriev, Leonid Shwab, Polina Barskova and Gleb Shulpyakov from Russian into Bulgarian. The publishing house SONM is about to publish her translation of Gleb Shulpyakov's collection of poems *Letters to Yakub*. Her poetry and prose have been translated into English, German, Romanian, and Croatian.

Oleg Yuriev

Олег Юрьев

Translated by Aleksey Porvin\* and Tony Brinkley\*\*

\* \* \*

Let's leave this place - the house is bad,  
Here the mouse-babble is muffled:  
Sleek little ones in the sideboard  
Squeeze through the slippery cheeses,  
And these family members wag  
Their hard whiskers from the hole.

Let's leave this place - here in January  
Woman is still in the rib,  
But by February she goes about the garden  
Shaking her hair, tied in a knot,  
And the drop of sweat above her lip  
Is more transparent than poison.

### **Mechanica Aetheris Nova**

Between day's hemispheres, Earth is a disk  
That turns into night's wings,  
These wings are too fast for me to see -  
Only a dark shimmer, only the semblance of powerlessness.

The Earth is a night-bird. By day  
It sleeps quietly, embraced by its own wings.  
It moves in night - and its flight is not  
Deflected by neighboring bodies.

\* ©Aleksey Porvin

\*\*©Tony Brinkley

And more: as wings weaken  
At sunrise, as the flickering slows,  
Look: fellow travellers are still at the same speed  
In the dark, straightaway, following the same trajectory.

1982

**Oleg Yuriev** is a Russian poet, writer and playwright, born in Leningrad in 1959. During the Soviet times he participated in Leningrad's unofficial cultural life (the "Kamera Khranenia" group). Starting in the late 1980's his original works have been published and staged in Russia. He is the author of five collections of poetry, and now lives and writes in Frankfurt.

**Aleksey Porvin** is a Russian poet born in 1982. His poems can be found in *World Literature Today*, *Cyphers*, *Saint-Petersburg Review*, *Ryga Journal*, *SUSS*, *Words Without Borders*, *Fogged Clarity*, *The Straddler*, *The Dirty Goat*, *Action Yes*, *Barnwood International Poetry Mag*, *Otis Nebula*, *New Madrid*, *The Cafe Review*, *The New Formalist* etc. He is author of two collections of poems in Russian - *Darkness is White* (Argo-Risk Press, Moscow, 2009) and *Poems* (New Literary Observer Press, Moscow, 2011). His first book of poems translated into English, *Live By Fire*, was published by Cold Hub Press in 2011. Poems by Porvin have been recently short-listed by Andrey Bely Prize (2011). Aleksey Porvin is winner of The Russian Debut Prize (2012).

**Tony Brinkley**, born 1948, is a Professor of English at the University of Maine. His poetry has appeared in *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *New Review of Literature*, *Cerise Press*, *Drunken Boat*, *Otoliths*, *Hungarian Review*, *Poetry Salzburg Review* etc. His translations from Russian, German, French, and Hungarian have appeared in *Shofar*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *New Review of Literature*, *Cerise Press*, *MayDay*, *World Literature Today*, *Hungarian Review*. He is the author of *Stalin's Eyes* (Puckerbrush Press) and the co-editor with Keith Hanley of *Romantic Revisions* (Cambridge University Press).

Глеб Шульпяков

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Превод: Мария Липискова\*

Translated into Bulgarian by Maria Lipiskova\*

\* \* \*

прозрачен като напечатан лист,  
безцветен и замислен,  
живее пейзажа в моя прозорец,  
това, което ти се струва във,  
отдавна вътре в мен живее -  
градината, където белее се прането  
и супата на огъня кипяща  
са също в мен,  
трийсет и три прозореца  
отворени са в мен - в тъмата  
на душата, в която е градината, в нея  
гори, гори сухия огън,  
в живота ми, което е било  
(чува се как кукувица кука)  
- и от огънят израства  
пейзажът, в който мен ме няма

\* \* \*

отвътре моята стена мълчи;  
от този край на стената гори  
фенер или прозорец без щори -  
оттук, не се вижда добре какво,  
слушам скърцането на камъните,  
*които се приближават все по-плътно до мен*  
стената със себе си говори  
- мълчи стената, и аз мълча

\* \* \*

в мен живее сляп и мрачен скарабей;  
скрит в празната кутия под кибритените клечки,  
с грапава повърхност  
от хитин - и с бутаци крачета, -  
с мен му е уютно и не му е тясно,  
с години книгата за слепи  
чете в джоба на старото палто,  
което са преместили отдавна

**Gleb Shulpyakov**, 1971, studied journalism at the Moscow State University. His first book of poems *The Flick* was published in 2001. He is also the author of two other poetry collections, three novels, a book of travel essays, and a play. He writes constantly for Russian periodicals.

## *Four Centuries Library*

Here are the books donated to the Library:

A. Books by separate poets.

*In German*

33. Brodsky, Joseph: Gedichte. Ausgewählt von Raoul Schrott, Siegfried Völlger und Michael Krüger. Aus dem Russischen von Felix Philipp Ingold, Sylvia List und Birgit Veit. München, Wien: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1999, 47 S., ISBN 3-446-19710-9

34. Rimma Kasakowa. Übertragen von Annemarie Bostroem und Eva Strittmatter. Poesiealbum 176. Berlin: Verlag Neues Leben, 1982, 32 S.

35. Boris Sluzki. Poesiealbum 38. Berlin: Verlag Neues Leben, 1970, 32 S.

36. Wosnessenskij, Andrej: Dreieckige Birne. Dreißig lyrische Abschweifungen. Aus dem Russischen übertragen von Eckhart Schmidt und Alexander Kaempfe. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1963, 95 S.

Donated by Holger Wendland, *Edition Raute, Dresden:*

37. Balmont, Konstantin: Unterwasserpflanzen. Gedichte. Auswahl, Übersetzung aus dem Russischen und Vorwort von Christoph Ferber. Dresden: Edition Raute, 2012, 64 S., ISBN 978-3-929693-78-2

**Many thanks to Mr Holger Wendland for his generous donation!**

38. Druskin, Lew: Mein Garten ist zerstört. Ausgewählte Gedichte. Aus dem Russischen übersetzt von Kay Borowsky and Ludolf Müller, mit einem Nachwort von Kay Borowsky. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1983, 89 S., ISBN 3-87808-187-1

39. Druskin, Lew: Licht im Fenster. Russische Gedichte aus Heimat und Fremde mit deutscher Übersetzung herausgegeben von Ludolf Müller. München: Erich Wewel Verlag, 1990, 156 S., ISBN 3-87904-107-5

40. Jewtuschenko, Jewgeni: Ausgewählte Gedichte. Nachdichtungen von Rainer Brambach, Beat Brechbühl, Paul Celan et al. Zürich: Diogenes, 1972, 76 S., ISBN 3-257-20061-7

41. Jewtuschenko, Jewgeni: Das dritte Gedächtnis. Gedichte. Hrsg. von Aljonna Möckel unter Mitarbeit von Harald Raab. Berlin: Verlag Volk und Welt, 1967, 183 S.

B. Anthologies.

*In German*

42. Lagerfeuer an der Milchstraße. Prosa und Lyrik von fünfzehn sowjetischen Autoren über das erste Jahrzehnt der Sowjetmacht. Hrsg. von Nadeshda Ludwig. Berlin: Buchverlag Der Morgen, 1977, 288 S.

C. Periodicals.

*In German*

43. Sinn und Form, 1967, Heft 5: Sergej Jessenin, Gedichte, übersetzt von Walter Fischer

44. Sinn und Form, 1979, Heft 3: Sergej Jessenin, Gedichte, übersetzt von Rainer Kirsch

45. wespennest, 2003, 4. Quartal: Lew Rubinstein, Sergej Stratanowskij, Iwan Achmetjew, Olga Sedakowa, Sergej Gandlewskij, Dmitrij Prigow, Julij Gugoljew, Michail Eisenberg, Jelena Fanajlowa, Timur Kibirow, Leonid Joffe, Jewgenij Saburow, Wera Pawlowa