

TO YOU – IN 10 DECADES

Selected Poems

by

*Marina Tsvetaeva
Bella Akhmadulina
Arseny Tarkovsky*

*Verse translations from Russian
by Alexander Givental
and Elysée Wilson-Egolf*

Sumizdat

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FOREWORD

Уроки музыки

Люблю, Марина, что тебя, как всех,
что, – как меня – озябшею гортанью
не говорю: тебя – как свет! как снег! –
усильем шеи, будто лед глотаю,
стараюсь вымолвить: тебя, как всех,
учили музыке. (О крах ученья!
Как если бы, под богов плач и смех,
свече внушали правила свеченья.)

Не ладили две равных темноты:
рояль и ты – два совершенных круга,
в тоске взаимной глухонемоты
терпя иноязычие друг друга.

Два мрачных исподлобья сведены
в неразрешимой и враждебной встрече:
рояль и ты – две сильных тишины,
два слабых горла музыки и речи.

Но твоего сиротства перевес
решает дело. Что рояль? Он узник
безгласности, покуда в до диез
мизинец свой не окунет союзник.

Music lessons

I love, Marina, that you were, like all,
that you – like me – I am, my larynx frozen,
not saying: You – like light! like evenfall! –
but as if choked on ice, my struggling bosom
is trying to exhale: You were, like all,
taught music lessons. (Oh, absurd of schooling!
As if, to God's amusement and appall,
a magnet were instilled with rules of pulling.)

Two darknesses would hardly get along:
You and the piano, two complete dimensions,
two aliens to one another's songs,
two rivals jointly serving their detentions.

Two stubborn sullennesses are opposed
in an insoluble, unfriendly silence:
The grand and you – two powers of the pause,
Two fragile instruments of vocal science.

Your orphanhood is the head start that tips
the scales. For, what's a piano but a captive
of voicelessness, until an ally dips
his fingertips into diminished Septimes.

А ты – одна. Тебе – подмоги нет.
И музыке трудна твоя наука –
не утруждая ранящий предмет,
открыть в себе кровотоечение звука.

Марина, до! До – детства, до – судьбы,
до – ре, до – речи, до – всего, что после,
равно, как вместе мы склоняли лбы
в той общедетской предрояльной позе,
как ты, как ты, вцепившись в табурет, –
о карусель и Гедике ненужность! –
раскручивать сорвавшую берет,
свистящую вокруг головы окружность.

Марина, это все – для красоты
придумано, в расчете на удачу
раз накричаться: я – как ты, как ты!
И с радостью бы крикнула, да – плачу.

1964

And you are – solo. You yourself suffice.
And music finds your recipe misleading:
Not conjuring an injuring device,
to let the cords reveal acoustic bleeding.

Marina – fore! Fore destiny, and sin,
fore youth, and voice, and poetry, and prose,
we both, together, bowed our foreheads in
that childhood-wide before-a-piano pose,
like you, like you, hands clinging to the stool –
Oh, metronome, don't wag your angry finger! –
to circle right, and left, and upward too,
and on the very edge of falling linger...

Marina, this has been – don't misconstrue
my silly aim – designed in vain, in trying
for once to cry enough: like you, like you!
And I would love to, but instead, I'm crying.

1964

BEFORE EXILE

Молитва

Христос и Бог! Я жажду чуда
Теперь, сейчас, в начале дня!
О, дай мне умереть, покуда
Вся жизнь как книга для меня.

Ты мудрый, ты не скажешь строго:
– “Терпи, ещё не кончен срок.”
Ты сам мне подал – слишком много!
Я жажду сразу – всех дорог!

Всего хочу: с душой цыгана
Идти под песни на разбой,
За всех страдать под звук органа
И амазонкой мчаться в бой;

Гадать по звёздам в чёрной башне,
Вести детей вперёд, сквозь тень...
Чтоб был легендой – день вчерашний,
Чтоб был безумьем – каждый день!

Люблю и крест, и шёлк, и каски,
Моя душа мгновений след...
Ты дал мне детство – лучше сказки
И дай мне смерть – в семнадцать лет!

Таруса, 26 сентября 1909

Prayer

My God and Christ! I crave to witness
A miracle: anon, betimes! –
My death – while life is still as sweet as
An open book before my eyes.

You're wise, you will not tell me sternly:
“Endure until I call your name!”
You offered me too much – I'm yearning
At once for every role and aim!

Yes, I want everything: Like Gypsies
To plunder armed with soulful songs,
Like Saints avert apocalypses,
And charge at foes like Amazons;

Lead children forward through a danger,
Tell fortunes, watch the Milky Way...
To make of yesterday – a legend,
And lunacy – of every day!

I love the cross, and silk, and rifles,
My soul is a collage of scenes...
You gave me youth – no daydream rivals,
And give me death – at seventeen!

Tarusa, September 26, 1909

* * *

Моим стихам, написанным так рано,
Что и не знала я, что я – поэт,
Сорвавшимся, как брызги из фонтана,
Как искры из ракет,

Ворвавшимся, как маленькие черти,
В святых местах, где сон и фимиам,
Моим стихам о юности и смерти,
– Нечитанным стихам! –

Разбросанным в пыли по магазинам
(Где их никто не брал и не берет!),
Моим стихам, как драгоценным винам,
Настанет свой черед.

Коктебель, 13 мая 1913

* * *

My rhymes, so early written that an inkling
I hardly had I bore a poet's mark,
My rhymes, that burst as from a fountain sprinklings,
As from a rocket sparks,

That broke, like little nymphs in devil's dresses,
Into a dormant, incense-breathing shrine,
My rhymes about death and adolescence,
– Unread, unheeded rhymes! –

That rest on dusty shelves of book resellers,
As yet unsold, uncut, and undisturbed,
My poems will, like precious wines in cellars,
Live to their rightful turn.

Koktebel, May 13, 1913

* * *

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

Мне нравится еще, что Вы при мне
Спокойно обнимаете другую,
Не прочтите мне в адовом огне
Гореть за то, что я не Вас целую.
Что имя нежное мое, мой нежный, не
Упоминаете ни днем ни ночью – всуе...
Что никогда в церковной тишине
Не пропоют над нами: аллилуйя!

Спасибо Вам и сердцем и рукой
За то, что Вы меня – не зная сами! –
Так любите: за мой ночной покой,
За редкость встреч закатными часами,
За наши не-гулянья под луной,
За солнце не у нас над головами,
За то, что Вы больны – увы! – не мной,
За то, что я больна – увы! – не Вами.

3 мая 1915

12

* * *

I like that I am not Your inner pain,
I like that You are not my inward tears,
That our heavy planet's firm terrain
Beneath our feet will never disappear.
I like that it's alright being unrestrained,
Ridiculous, and not to jest or jeer,
Nor feel so suffocatingly ashamed
When our sleeves in passing interfere.

I like that You don't deem it indiscreet
To hold another when I am around,
And for my kissing someone else, don't plead
For my eternal burning underground.
That You, my tender one, do not repeat
My tender name – in vain – all days throughout,
That we in solemn quietness won't read
The words that would make us forever bound.

I'm grateful, as my hand and heart would fain
Attest, that You – unknowingly, I fear –
Do love me: that so calm my nights remain,
That bluebirds sing at dawn when we don't hear,
That they're so sweet, our never-walks in rain,
That over-not-our-head the sky is clear,
That I – alas! – am not Your inner pain,
That You – alas! – are not my inward tears.

May 3, 1915

13

Стихи о Москве – 4

Настанет день – печальный, говорят!
Отцарствуют, оплачут, отгорят,
– Остужены чужими пятками –
Мои глаза, подвижные как пламя.
И – двойника нащупавший двойник –
Сквозь лёгкое лицо проступит лик.

О, наконец тебя я удостоюсь,
Благообразия прекрасный пояс!

А издали – заввижу ли и Вас? –
Потянется, растерянно крестясь,
Паломничество по дорожке чёрной
К моей руке, которой не отдёрну,
К моей руке, с которой снят запрет,
К моей руке, которой больше нет.

На ваши поцелуи, о, живые,
Я ничего не возражу – впервые.
Меня окутал с головы до пят
Благообразия прекрасный плат.
Ничто меня уже не вгонит в краску,
Святая у меня сегодня Пасха.

Поems about Moscow – 4

The day will come – a sad one, people say!
There will have reigned, have cried, have shined, have shamed,
– Cured by your pair of double-headed eagles –
My eyes erratical, like flame, and eager.
And – as a twin discovering its twin, –
An aery mask will surface through the mien.

Oh, finally, at last I'll be endowed
With you, serenity's enchanting shroud!

And pilgrims (see You there among the guests?)
Will, crossing inconstolably their chests,
Stretch, from afar, along a beaten track to
My hand, that won't be bashfully retracted,
My hand, whose guardianship was dismissed,
My hand, that does not anymore exist.

Your – oh, alive ones – kissing lips' persistence
For once – will not be met with my resistance.
For I have been enveloped heel to head
In you, serenity's enchanting plaid.
No cause will prompt a blush of mine to blossom;
This is my Holy Easter, saint apostles!

По улицам оставленной Москвы
Поеду – я, и побредёте – вы.
И не один дорогою отстанет,
И первый ком о крышку гроба грянет, –
И наконец-то будет разрешён
Себялюбивый, одинокий сон.
И ничего не надобно отныне
Новопроставленной болярыне Марине.

*11 апреля 1916
1-й день Пасхи*

Along the streets of Moscow left behind
We will begin: you – trotting, riding – I,
And more than one will wearily walk off, and
First clods of dirt will fall onto the coffin, –
And finally, at last there will be blessed
That egotistic, solitary rest.
And nothing will be needed ever in it
By Her Serenity lamented late Marina.

*April 11, 1916,
the 1st day of Easter*

* * *

Из строгого, стройного храма
Ты вышла на визг площадей...
— Свобода! — Прекрасная Дама
Маркизов и русских князей.

Свершается страшная спевка, —
Обедня ещё впереди!
— Свобода! — Гулящая девка
На шалой солдатской груди!

26 мая 1917

* * *

Forsaking her solemn cathedral
She marched through the rampage of *rues*.
O, Liberty! — fondly considered
Their Lady by Gauls and *princes russes*.

A fateful duet is debuting,
Its future is frightful at best.
O, Freedom! A marketplace beauty
Embraced on a rifleman's chest!

May 26, 1917

Дон – 2

Кто уцелел – умрёт, кто мёртв – воспрянет.
И вот потомки, вспомнив старину:
– Где были *вы?* – Вопрос как громом грянет,
Ответ как громом грянет: – На Дону!
– Что делали? – Да принимали муки,
Потом устали и легли на сон.
И в словаре задумчивые внуки
За словом: долг напишут слово: Дон.

30 марта 1918

Дон – 2

Who lived will die, who fell will rise. In wonder,
Descendants will appraise the times foregone:
“And where were *you?*” the call will cannon-thunder;
Will thunder back the answer: “River Don!”
“What did you do?” – “We paid our (martyr’s) ransom,
Then fell asleep, too spent to carry on.”
And in thesauruses, your thoughtful grandsons
Will next to *duty* add the entry: *Don*.

March 30, 1918

Психея – 1

Не самозванка – я пришла домой,
И не служанка – мне не надо хлеба.
Я – страсть твоя, воскресный отдых твой,
Твой день седьмой, твоё седьмое небо.

Там на земле мне подавали грош
И жерновов навешали на шею.
– Возлюбленный! – Ужель не узнаёшь?
Я ласточка твоя – Психея!

Апрель 1918

Psyche – 1

Not an impostress – it's my home address,
Nor servantess – I need no daily leaven.
I am your passion, your sabbatic rest,
Your holy seventh day, your seventh heaven.

They, on the Earth, put pennies in my hand,
And graced my neck with millstones to their liking.
My love! – I am your swallow-bird. Why can't
You recognize me? – I am Psyche!

April 1918

* * *

В чёрном небе слова начертаны –
И ослепли глаза прекрасные...
И не страшно нам ложе смертное,
И не сладко нам ложе страстное.
В поте – пишущий, в поте пашущий!
Нам знакомо иное рвение:
Лёгкий огонь, над кудрями пляшущий, –
Дуновение – Вдохновения!

14 мая 1918

* * *

Words arise in the night-sky ebony –
And the eyes are bedazzled, glamorous...
And we're fearless of deathbed agonies,
And we're passionless for beds amorous.
You, a penner, perspiring pantingly!
We've experienced urges eagerer:
Flares of light, dancing by enchantingly,
And a whiff – Inspiration's triggerer!

May 14, 1918

* * *

Я – страница твоему перу.
Всё приму. Я белая страница.
Я – хранитель твоему добру:
Возращу и возвращу сторицей.

Я – деревня, чёрная земля.
Ты мне – луч и дождевая влага.
Ты – Господь и Господин, а я –
Чернозём – и белая бумага!

10 июля 1918

26

* * *

I am parchment to your writing quill.
All-inviting. I am snow-white parchment.
And your goodwill treasurer: I will
Nurture good to hundredfold enlargement.

I am: farmland, soil as black as night.
You are: ray and fertilizing rain-pour.
You – my Lord and Sovereign, and I –
Ink-black soil – and snow-white writing paper!

July 10, 1918

27

Тебе – через сто лет

К тебе, имеющему быть рожденным
Столетие спустя, как отдышу, –
Из самых недр – как на смерть осужденный,
Своей рукой пишу:

– Друг! не ищи меня! Другая мода!
Меня не помнят даже старики.
– Ртом не достать! – Через летейски воды
Протягиваю две руки.

Как два костра, глаза твои я вижу,
Пылающие мне в могилу – в ад, –
Ты видящие, что рукой не движет,
Умершую сто лет назад.

Со мной в руке – почти что горстка пыли –
Мои стихи! – я вижу: на ветру
Ты ищешь дом, где родилась я – или
В котором я умру.

На встречных женщин – тех, живых, счастливых, –
Горжусь, как смотришь, и ловлю слова:
– Сборище самозванок! Все мертвы вы!
Она одна жива!

Я ей служил служеньем добровольца!
Все тайны знал, весь склад ее перстней!
Грабительницы мертвых! Эти кольца
Украдены у ней!

To you – in ten decades

To you, who rightfully was granted entrance
A century past my retreat from Earth,
I, from the depths of it – as one death-sentenced,
Send my handwritten verse:

Friend! do not look for me! An ancient fashion,
I'm not remembered even by your grands.
Here, across Lethe's waves, are my, with passion –
Too far for lips! – two hands.

I see your eyes above me: two infernos
That peer into the grave – my refuge – hell,
Through thickness of a hundred years discerning
Her – still as immortelles.

Held in my hand, a pinch of dust – my verses
Are here with me! – I see: in rainy haze,
You're looking for my home of youth – my birthplace,
Or – for my resting place.

With pride I watch the way you look at others –
Those living, happy – and can hear you cry:
'Mob of impostors! You're all corpse-like! Rather,
She is the one alive!

I knew, a faithful servant at her pleasure,
All of her secrets, all her rings and bands.
You're robbers of the dead! These buried treasures
Are stolen from her hands!

О, сто моих колец! Мне тянет жилы,
Раскаиваюсь в первый раз,
Что столько я их вкривь и вкось дарила, –
Тебя не дождалась!

И грустно мне еще, что в этот вечер,
Сегодняшний – так долго шла я влед
Садящемуся солнцу, – и навстречу
Тебе – через сто лет.

Бьюсь об заклад, что бросишь ты проклятье
Моим друзьям во мглу могил:
– Все восхваляли! Розового платья
Никто не подарил!

Кто бескорыстней был?! – Нет, я корыстна!
Раз не убьешь, – корысти нет скрывать,
Что я у всех выпрашивала письма,
Чтоб ночью целовать.

Сказать? – Скажу! Небытие – условность.
Ты мне сейчас – страстнейший из гостей,
И ты откажешь перлу всех любовниц
Во имя той – костей.

Август 1919

Oh, hundreds of my rings! I'm so conflicted,
The first time ever feel remorse
For all those gifts – so random, and so frequent. –
They had to be all yours!

And presently, tonight, I'm feeling lonesome
From looking forward for so long: in shades
Of twilight, to the setting sun – and also
Our date – in ten decades.

I bet your words of rigorous resentment
Will thunder to my friends' address:
'All eulogized! Has anyone presented
Her with a rosy dress?!

They were so mercantile?! Nor was I better.
Since you won't kill me, it won't pay to hide
That I from everyone extorted letters –
For kissing them at night.

I will be straight! Non-being matters little.
Today you're my most amorous of beaux,
And you'll decline all lovers' pearly glitter
For love of *that* one's – bones.

August 1919

* * *

С. Э.

Писала я на аспидной доске,
И на листочках вееров поблёклых,
И на речном, и на морском песке,
Коньками по льду и кольцом на стёклах, –
И на стволах, когорым сотни зим,
И, наконец – чтоб было всем известно! –
Что ты любим! любим! любим! – любим! –
Расписывалась – радугой небесной.

Как я хотела, чтобы каждый цвёл
В веках со мной! под пальцами моими!
И как потом, склонивши лоб на стол,
Крест-накрест перечёркивала – имя...

Но ты, в руке продажного писца
Зажатое! ты, что мне сердце жалишь!
Непроданное мной! *внутри* кольца!
Ты – уцелеешь на скрижалях.

18 мая 1920

32

* * *

S. E.

I used to scribble on a writing slate,
And on old fans, those folding souvenirs,
And on the sands of seas, and sands of lakes,
With skates on ice, and with a ring on mirrors,

And on a tree, three hundred winters young,
And ultimately – to inform all neighbors
That you are loved! are loved! are loved! – I flung
Across the sky my calligraphic rainbows.

Oh, how I wanted everyone to bloom –
Under my fingers! – in the coming ages!
And how I later, sullen in my room,
By crossing strokes removed – the name – from pages...

But you, what hands of this corrupted scribe
Are clenching tight! what stings my heart and itches!
Withheld from sale! *inside* the ring! *inscribed!* –
Thrive in imperishable scriptures.

May 18, 1920

33

Н.Н.В. – 21

И не спасут ни стансы, ни созвездья.
А это называется – возмездье
За то, что каждый раз,

Стан разгибая над строкой упорной,
Искала я над лбом своим просторным
Звёзд только, а не глаз.

Что содержанием Вас признав на веру,
– Ах, ни единый миг, прекрасный Эрос,
Без Вас мне не был пуст!

Что по ночам, в торжественных туманах,
Искала я у нежных уст румяных –
Рифм только, а не уст.

Возмездие за то, что злейшим судьям
Была – как снег, что здесь, под левой грудью –
Вечный апофеоз!

Что с глазу на глаз с молодым Востоком
Искала я на лбу своём высокою
Зорь только, а не роз!

20 мая 1920

Н.Н.В. – 21

And stanzas will not save nor constellations,
And this is what is called retaliation
For sins – that all the times

In front of an unyielding verse, unbending
My slender waist, I languished for attentive
Stars only, and not eyes.

That You, on faith enlisted with my heroes,
Not for a single moment, charming Eros,
Were missed, while on my own!

That during nighttime, feverish and hectic,
My tender lips were blissfully expecting
Not lips, but rhymes alone.

For my offense – that to the wildest jury
I was like snow, that here inside – the fury
Of worship never slows!

That meeting tête-à-tête with handsome Morning
I always welcomed, for my hair's adorning,
A sunrise, not a rose!

May 20, 1920

* * *

Проста моя осанка,
Нищ мой домашний кров.
Ведь я островитянка
С далёких островов!

Живу – никто не нужен!
Взошёл – ночей не сплю.
Согреть чужому ужин –
Жильё своё спалю.

Взглянул – так и знакомый,
Взошёл – так и живи.
Просты наши законы:
Написаны в крови.

Луну заманим с неба
В ладонь – коли мила!
Ну а ушёл – как не был,
И я – как не была.

Гляжу на след ножовый:
Успеет ли зажить
До первого чужого,
Который скажет: пить.

Август 1920

36

* * *

My attitude and posture
Are straight, possessions scant.
I'm native to the coast of
The Seldom-Traveled Land!

No guests – no time to suffer!
He's in – I toss and turn.
To serve a stranger supper,
I'd have my dwelling burn.

Eyes met – we are acquainted,
Hands met – feel free to dwell.
These rules were plainly stated
In my ancestors' cells.

At will – we'll lure from heaven
The Moon into our paws!
When gone – like never happened,
And I – like never was...

I lick, and wonder: what if
The wound won't heal before
The first to whisper: "Water!"
Knocks on my open door?

August 1920

37

AFTER RUSSIA

Wires – 8

As a patient that holds his breath,
As a patient one – for his death,
Patient as when Job's news receiving,
Patient as when revenge conceiving,

I will wait for you (take your time –
Thus queen's lover awaits his Mistress).
As a poet awaiting rhymes,
As a pilgrim enduring distance,

I will wait for you (bitten lips,
Earthward eyelashes. Lockjaw. Iron).
Patient as when prolonging bliss,
Patient as when untangling wiring.

Creak of sleigh, in return the creak
Of the door. Raving northern blizzards.
His Preeminence's decree:
'Change of reign, and signora's visa.'

And – a flight
At the speed
Of light.

March 27, 1923

41

Провода – 8

Терпеливо, как щебень бьют,
Терпеливо, как смерти ждут,
Терпеливо, как вести зреют,
Терпеливо, как месть лелеют –

Буду ждать тебя (пальцы в жгут –
Так Монархини ждёт наложник)
Терпеливо, как рифмы ждут,
Терпеливо, как руки гложут.

Буду ждать тебя (в землю – взгляд,
Зубы в губы. Столбняк. Бульжник).
Терпеливо, как негу длят,
Терпеливо, как бисер нижут.

Скрип полозьев, ответный скрип
Двери: роког ветров таёжных.
Высочайший пришёл рескрипт:
– Смена царства и въезд вельможе.

И домой:
В неземной –
Да мой.

27 марта 1923

40

Поэты – 1

Поэт – издалека заводит речь.
Поэта – далеко заводит речь.

Планетами, приметами, окольных
Притч рыгвинами... Между *да* и *нет*
Он даже размахнувшись с колокольни
Крюк выморочит... Ибо путь комет –

Поэтов путь. Развеянные звеня
Причинности – вот связь его! Кверху лбом –
Отчаяйтесь! Поэтовы затменья
Не предугаданы календарём.

Он тот, кто смешивает карты,
Обмывает вес и счёт,
Он тот, кто *спрашивает* с парты,
Кто Канта наголову бьёт,

Кто в каменном гробу Бастилий
Как дерево в своей красе.
Тот, чьи следы – всегда простыли,
Тот поезд, на который все
Опаздывают...
– ибо путь комет

Поэтов путь: жжя, а не согревая,
Рвя, а не возвращая – взрыв и взлом –
Твоя стезя, гривастая кривая,
Не предугадана календарём!

8 апреля 1923

Поэты – 1

A poet fetches far for his discourse.
A poet reaches farther in its course.

By way of asteroids, omens, zillions
Of undercurrents, between *yea* and *nay*,
He, even earthward from a campanile,
Will manage a detour... For comets' way

Is Poet's way. Elisions and ellipses
Of consciousness – these are his links! Indoors
Of reason – you'll despair! For his eclipses
Are unpredictable by *calendârs*.

He is the one, who weight and distance –
Deceives, who messes plans and cards,
Who at the blackboard – asks and listens,
Who easily surpasses Kant,

Who in Bastillean dreadful quarters
Is like a redwood in its prime,
Whose only footprints are – on water,
The train that's always gone, each time –
Mysteriously ...
– for a comet's way

Is Poet's way: sun-burning yet not warming,
Ice-melting but not mending – scalds and scars –
Your orbit – circumventing, nonconforming –
Is unpredictable by *calendârs*!

April 8, 1923

Страна

С фонарём обшарьте
Весь подлунный свет!
Той страны на карте –
Нет, в пространстве – нет.

Выпита как с блюда, –
Доньшко блестит.
Можно ли вернуться
В дом, который – срыт?

Заново родися –
В новую страну!
Ну-ка, воротися
На спину коню

Сбросившему! Кости
Цель-то – хотя?
Эдакому гостю
Булочник – ломтя

Ломаного, плотник –
Гроба не продаст!
Той её – *несчётных*
Вёрст, *небесных* царств,

Той, где на монетах –
Молодость моя,
Той России – нету.

– Как и той меня.

Конец июня 1931

Country

Search by name or address –
You can't find that land!
Cannot – in your atlas,
In the cosmos – can't.

Drained as from a basin –
To the bottom's glaze.
Can a man regain his
Home – that has been razed?

Have a second birthplace?
Motherland – anew?
Come climb up the horseback
That unsaddled you,

Would-be-mustang-breaker!
Bones ain't busted yet?
To such bastards, bakers –
Half a slice of bread,

Carpenters – a dentless
Coffin will not sell!
Russia – that, of *endless*
Miles, of *tolling* bells,

Where on silver eagles
My young seasons fly –
Is no longer real.

– Nor am that one I.

The end of June 1931

* * *

Никуда не уехали – ты да я –
Обернулись прорехами – все моря!
Совладельцам пятёрки рваной –
Океаны не по карману!

Нищеты вековечная сухомять!
Снова лето, как корку, всухую мять!
Обернулось нам море – мелью:
Наше лето – другие съели!

С жиру лопающиеся: жир – их «лоск»,
Что не только что масло едят, а мозг
Наш – в поэмах, в сонатах, в сводах:
Людоеды в парижских модах!

Нами – лакомящиеся: франк – за вход.
О, урод, как водой туалетной – рот
Сполоснувший – бессмертной песней!
Будьте прокляты вы – за весь мой

Стыд: вам руку жать, когда зуд в горсти, –
Пятью пальцами – да от всех пяти
Чувств – на память о чувствах добрых –
Через всё вам лицо – автограф!

1932 – 1935

46

* * *

It's our traveling destiny – mine and yours!
On the rocks we are – testing no reefs nor fjords.
Co-possessors of five-buck riches
Find sea beaches beyond their reaches.

Taste of poverty: salt on a crust of rye!
One more summer will turn, like our ration, dry!
All our seas turned – like pockets – shallow,
Summers – eaten by other fellows!

By those bursting with fat (“gloss,” as they explain),
Who eat bread – not with butter alone – with brain
In our poems, sonatas, paintings:
Modern cannibals – Paris dandies! –

Who are feasting on us: half a franc per seat.
Oh, the monster, who has, between fish and meat,
Cleansed his palate with two eternal
Songs – God damn you for this internal

Shame: to shake your hand, when is itching mine
All five fingers and feelings to intertwine
On your face – as a sign of kinship –
In a memorable inscription!

1932 – 1935

47

Стол – 2

Тридцатая годовщина
Союза – верней любви.
Я знаю твои морщины,
Как знаешь и ты – мои,

Которых – не ты ли – автор?
Съедавший за дестью десть,
Учивший, что нету – завтра,
Что только сегодня – есть.

И деньги, и письма с почты –
Стол – сбрасывавший – в поток!
Твердивший, что каждой строчке
Сегодня – последний срок.

Грозивший, что счётом ложек
Создателю не воздашь,
Что завтра меня положат –
Дуришу – да на тебя ж!

1933

Desk – 2

Tricennial interlinking
By partnership, friendship, love.
I notice your every wrinkle
As you every mine – whereof

You are – aren't you? – the crafter,
Consuming a quire a tryst,
Insisting there is no – after,
That only anon – exists.

The desk, dumping off the surface
All money, all mail – away!
Maintaining that every verse has
Its deadline – which is today!

Forewarning that table silver
Won't add to the Maker's wealth,
That soon I'll be resting, silly –
Face up – and upon yourself!

1933

* * *

Вскрыла жилы: неостановимо,
Неостановимо хлещет жизнь.
Подставляйте миски и тарелки!
Всякая тарелка будет – мелкой,
Миска – плоской.
Через край – и мимо –
В землю чёрную, питать тростник.
Невозвратно, неостановимо,
Неостановимо хлещет стих.

6 января 1934

* * *

I let blood: here is, beyond recover,
Irrevocably outpouring life.
Hurry to refill your bottles, dishes!
All your dishes will be insufficient,
Bottles little.
To the brim – and over –
Here is, downward, to the blackened earth,
Irreversibly, beyond recover,
Irrevocably outpouring verse.

January 6, 1934

* * *

Тоска по родине! Давно
Разоблачённая морoka!
Мне совершенно всё равно –
Где совершенно одинокой

Быть, по каким камням домой
Брести с кошелёкою базарной
В дом, и не знающий, что – мой,
Как госпиталь или казарма.

Мне всё равно, каких среди
Лиц ошестиниваться пленным
Львом, из какой людской среды
Быть вытесненной – непременно –

В себя, в единоличье чувств.
Камчатским медведём без льдины
Где не ужиться (и не тшусь!),
Где унижаться – мне едино.

Не обольщусь и языком
Родным, его призывом млечным.
Мне безразлично – на каком
Непонимаемой быть встречным!
(Читателем, газетных тонн
Глотателем, доильцем сплетен...)
Двадцатого столетья – он,
А я – до всякого столетья!

* * *

Nostalgia, homesickness! Oh, what
a long-denuciated longing!
It matters absolutely not
where I would absolutely lonely

be, passing by which street-name sign
I'd roll back home my shopping barrows –
A home, yet clueless it is mine,
as if a hospital or barracks.

It makes no difference, whose grins
amid, to bristle like a captive
beast, nor from which fraternal rings
to be expelled – into effective

self-insulation – where belong.
I, a Kamchatkan floe-less bear, –
where not to (try to) get along,
where to abase myself – don't care!

The mother-tongue, its luring pitch,
too, to my hearing, risks no dangers.
It couldn't matter less *in which*
to be misunderstood by strangers

(books' readership, or gossip's ears,
consumers of newspaper pages ...)
They're in the nineteen-something years,
and I'm yet in unnumbered ages!

Остолбеневши, как бревно,
Оставшееся от аллеи,
Мне всё – равны, мне всё – равно,
И, может быть, всего равнее –

Роднее бывшее – всего.
Все признаки с меня, все меты,
Все даты – как рукой сняло:
Душа, родившаяся – где-то.

Так край меня не уберёт
Мой, что и самый зоркий сыщик
Вдоль всей души, всей – поперёк!
Родимого пятна *не* същёт!

Всяк дом мне чужд, всяк храм мне пуст,
И всё – равно, и всё – едино.
Но если по дороге – куст
Встаёт, особенно – рябина...

3 мая 1934

To me, impressionable like
a log in a forgotten forest,
all means the same, all looks alike,
and maybe most alike, and foremost

the same – and sane – remains the past.
All dates, all tags I used to bear,
have been stripped off of me at last:
A mortal given birth – *somewhere*.

So thoroughly my native soil
abandoned me, that – search the ground
and far and wide across my soul! –
a single birthmark won't be found!

Each home feels void, each temple vain,
all ties are burnt, all ashes buried.
But if a bush is on my way,
especially a rowan-berry ...

May 3, 1934

* * *

"Двух станю не боец, а – если гость случайный..."

А. К. Толстой

Двух станю не боец, а – если гость случайный –
То гость – как в глотке кость, гость – как в подметке гвоздь.
Была мне голова дана – по ней стучали
В два молота: одних – корысть и прочих – злость.
Вы с этой головы – к создателю чуду
Терпение мое, рабочее, прибавь –
Вы с этой головы – что требовали? – Блуда!
Дивясь на ответ упорный: обезглавь.
Вы с этой головы, уравненной – как гряды
Гор, вписанной в вершин божественный чертеж,
Вы с этой головы – что требовали? – Ряда.
Дивясь на ответ (безмолвный): обезножь!
Вы с этой головы, настроенной – как лира:
На самый высший лад: лирический... – Нет, спой!
Два строя: Домострой – и Днепрострой – на выбор!
Дивясь на ответ безумный: – Лиры – строй.

56

* * *

"A guard to neither camp – a guest to both at random ..."

A. K. Tolstoy

A guard to neither camp, and if a guest at random,
A guest that spells unrest, guest that commands: detest!
Upon my only head, there drummed a tireless tandem:
Self-interest of some, pure evil of the rest.
You from this very head – and to the Maker's wonder
Be sure to add my own, a mortal's, drive and thirst –
You from this head demanded – what exactly? – Whoredom!
Amazed by the persistent plea: Behead me first!
You from this head, lined up – like Himalaya ranges –
In the divine arrangement of the Universe,
You from this head demanded – what exactly? – Ranging.
Amazed by the reply in Sign: De-feet me first!
You from this very head, concordant with the lyric,
Sublimest of all strings, demanded: Sing in verse
Two motives: *Domostroy* or *Dneprostroy* – choose freely!
Amazed by the reply (insane): Destroy me first!

57

И с этой головы, с лба – серого гранита,
Вы требовали: нас – любви! тех – ненавидь!
Не все ли ей равно – с какого боку битой,
С какого профиля души – глушимой быть?

Бывают времена, когда голов – не надо.
Но слово низводить до свеклы кормовой –
Честнее с головой Орфеевой – менады!
Иродиада с Иоанна головой!

- Ты царь: живи один... (Но у царей – наложниц
Минута.) Бог – один. Тот – в пустоте небес.
Двух станю не боец: судья – истец – заложник –
Двух – противубоец! Дух – противубоец.

25 октября 1935

58

You from this very head – this monolithic granite,
Demanded: be like us: *like us!* disfavor them!
Be beaten from this side, the other one – goddammit!
How could it matter less, which way to be condemned?

A time may come when heads will be no longer needed.
But words as feed for herds?! Be merciful: get rid
Of intellects the way, of Orpheus' the maenads!
The way Herodias of John the Baptist's did!

It's said, "Kings live alone!" (– save concubines aplenty!)
God is alone in space – on His eternal post.
Two camps, I'm not your guard: a justice – hostage – plaintiff!
A guest – to both opposed! A ghost – to both opposed.

October 25, 1935

59

Стихи к Чехии. Март – 8

О слёзы на глазах!
Плач гнева и любви!
О Чехия в слезах!
Испания в крови!

О чёрная гора,
Затмившая – весь свет!
Пора – пора – пора
Творцу вернуть билет.

Отказываюсь – быть.
В Бедламе нелюдей
Отказываюсь – жить.
С волками площадей

Отказываюсь – выть.
С акулами равнин
Отказываюсь плыть –
Вниз – по течению спин.

Не надо мне ни дыр
Ушных, ни вещей глаз.
На твой безумный мир
Ответ один – отказ.

15 марта – 11 мая 1939

Poems to Czechia. March – 8

O, water in the eyes!
Of love and anger flood!
O, Czechia retired
In tears, Spain soaked in blood!

O, terrible *Mont Black*
That blanketed all light!
Accept, Our Maker, back
My ticket for the ride.

Thus I refuse – to be.
With this inhuman breed,
Thus I refuse – to breathe.
With vultures of the street,

Thus I refuse – to scream.
With pirates of the plain,
Refuse to swim downstream –
On corpses – to the drain.

And neither aural whorls
I want, nor seer's eyes.
To your demented world
One word applies: denied!

March 15 – May 11, 1939

BACK HOME

* * *

Стол накрыт на шестерых,
Розы да хрусталь,
А среди гостей моих
Горе да печаль.

И со мною мой отец,
И со мною брат.
Час проходит. Наконец
У дверей стучат.

Как двенадцать лет назад,
Холодна рука
И немодные шумят
Синие шелка.

И вино звенит из тьмы,
И поет стекло:
“Как тебя любили мы,
Сколько лет прошло!”

* * *

Our table's set for six,
Roses, crystal gloss.
And among the guests, amiss,
There are grief and loss.

Here comes father from the past,
Brother from the war.
Hours pass. We hear, at last,
Knocking at the door.

And her hand is just as cold
As 'twas twelve years back,
And unfashionable folds
Shine in silky black.

And the clinking glasses chant
In the murky glow:
“O, how much we loved you, and –
O, how long ago!”

Улыбнется мне отец,
Брат нальет вина,
Даст мне руку без колец,
Скажет мне она:

– Каблучки мои в пыли,
Выщела коса,
И поют из-под земли
Наши голоса.

1940

We exchange our smiles with dad,
Brother serves us wine,
And she says, her hand unwed
Gently touching mine:

“Ah, my heels are all in mold,
And my braid got thin.
From the underground cold
Our voices sing.”

1940

* * *

"Я стол накрыл на шестерых..."

Все повторяю первый стих
И все переправляю слово:
– "Я стол накрыл на шестерых" ...
Ты одного забыл – седьмого.

Невесело вам вшестером.
На лицах – дождевые струи...
Как мог ты за таким столом
Седьмого позабыть – седьмую...

Невесело твоим гостям,
Бездействует графин хрустальный.
Печально – им, печален – сам,
Непозванная – всех печальной.

Невесело и несветло.
Ах! не едите и не пьете.
– Как мог ты позабыть число?
Как мог ты ошибиться в счете?

Как мог, как смел ты не понять,
Что шестеро (два брата, третий –
Ты сам – с женой, отец и мать)
Есть семеро – раз я на свете!

* * *

"The table has been set for six ..."

One word. My lips can't help but fix
One word as I rehearse your verses.
"The table has been set for six..."
You've missed one more, the seventh person.

There is much sadness in all six.
Your faces are like rainy heavens...
How could you, to a feast like this,
Forget to summon her, the seventh ...

There is much sadness in your guests.
The crystalline carafe is idle.
You are heartbroken, they depressed,
Disconsolate – the Unentitled.

There is much grief and little light.
Ah! – food and drink – you'd do without.
How could you dare not get it right?
How could you err on this account?

How dared you never realize
That six (two brothers, then your parents,
Your wife and you yourself) give rise
To seven souls – for, I am there!

Ты стол накрыл на шестерых,
Но шестерыми мир не вымер.
Чем пугалом среди живых –
Быть призраком хочу – с твоими,

(Своими)... Робкая как вор,
О – ни души не задевая! –
За непоставленный прибор
Сажусь незваная, седьмая.

Раз! – опрокинула стакан!
И все, что жаждало пролиться, –
Вся соль из глаз, вся кровь из ран –
Со скатерти – на половицы.

И – гроба нет! Разлуки – нет!
Стол расколдован, дом разбужен.
Как смерть – на свадебный обед,
Я – жизнь, пришедшая на ужин.

...Никто: не браг, не сын, не муж,
Не друг – и все же укоряю:
– Ты, стол накрывший на шесть – душ,
Меня не посадивший – с краю.

6 Марта 1941

You've set the table for all six.
That doesn't set the rest a desert.
Than be a dread midst living things,
I want to be a ghost together

With your (hence also my) sextet.
Oh, timid like a thief, tonight at
The non-existing diner's set
I'll slip, the seventh, uninvited.

Whoops! – knocked a glass! And all that could
Be shed, that craved for spilling out:
Salt from the eyes, blood from the wounds,
Poured downward to the under-ground.

And – none is missing! none deceased!
The home awake, carafe enabled.
Like Death at an engagement feast,
I'm Life, at the remembrance table.

...Son, brother, husband? – Not at all,
Nor friend – and nonetheless I'm charging:
“You set the table for six souls,
And didn't leave for me – a margin.”

March 6, 1941

EPILOGUE

* * *

Четверть века, Марина, тому,
как Елабуга ластится раем
к отдохнувшему лбу твоему,
но и рай ему мал и неравен.

Неужели к всеведению мук,
что тебе удалось как удача,
я добавлю бесформенный звук
дважды мною пропетого плача?

Две бессмыслицы – мертв и мертва,
две пустынности, два ударенья –
царскосельских садов дерева,
перedelкинских рощиц деревья.

И усилюм двух этих кончин
так исчерпана будущность слова.
Не осталось ни уст, ни причин,
чтобы нам затевать его снова.

* * *

For a fourth of a century's while
you've reposed in Yelábuga's Eden,
but, Marina, for foreheads that wide,
even Eden is tight and uneven.

Will, indeed, the omniscience of woe
you've perfected like any vocation
be complete with the orderless blow
of my chanted two-times lamentation?

Two absurdities – his grave and hers,
two inanes, two grammatical genders.
Tsarsko-Selsky imperial firs,
Peredelkino pinery's splendors.

Insomuch these two ends have eclipsed
and exhausted all lettery matters
that we're left neither reasons nor lips
to continue our literate madness.

Впрочем, в этой утрате суда
есть свобода и есть безмятежность:
перед кем пламенеть от стыда,
оскорбляя страниц белоснежность?

Как любила! Возможно ли злей?
Без прощения, без обещанья
имена их любовью твоей
были посланы в даль обожанья.

Среди всех твоих бед и плетей
только два тебе есть утешенья:
что не знала двух этих смертей
и воспела два этих рожденья.

1966

76

Yet there is liberation and peace
in the loss of the paramount judgment.
For, whose ear would I fear to displease,
desecrating this lily-white parchment?

How you loved them! Who'd fiercer admire?
Unforgiving and uncompromising,
you commanded their names, with your lyre,
into exile above the horizon.

And amidst all your grief and distress
you've been blessed with but two consolations:
to have seen neither one of these deaths
and have sung each of these two creations.

1966

77

COMMENTARIES*

Marina Tsvetaeva was born on October 8 of 1892 (September 26 Old Style) to the family of Ivan Tsvetaev, professor of Antiquities at the Moscow State University (and later the founder of what is known now as the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, the primary collection of European art in Moscow).

At the age of 19, she marries 18-year-old Sergei Efron. They give birth to two daughters: Ariadna "Alya" in 1912 and Irina in 1917.

During the 1st World War, Sergei becomes an officer, and after the October Revolution of 1917 joins the White Army fighting against the Bolsheviks. His family stays in Moscow, unaware until 1921 of his coming fate in the Civil War.

In the winter of 1920, Irina dies of starvation.

In 1922, M. Tsvetaeva and S. Efron reunite in Berlin. They give birth to son Georgy "Mur" in 1925 while living near Prague, and later move to the suburbs of Paris.

In exile, Marina remains apolitical yet suspicious of the Soviet regime in Russia, but pro-Soviet sentiments among members of her family grow stronger. In the early thirties, Sergei is secretly recruited to work for the NKVD (The People's Committee for Domestic Affairs, the KGB's predecessor).

In 1937, Alya returns to Russia. Soon her father follows, as his involvement with the NKVD becomes apparent.

In 1939, Marina and Mir also return to Moscow to reunite with the family. Not for long though, since in a few months Alya, and then Sergei become arrested as "spies" against the Soviet state.

Unable to publish, or even to write, struggling to find places to stay and means to support herself and her son, fearing an arrest by the NKVD as well as the daily bombardments of Moscow and other consequences of Hitler's invasion, Marina takes Mir to the town of Yelabuga, an evacuation location between the Volga river and the Ural mountains.

There, on August 31, 1941, she hangs herself.

*In the preparation of these commentaries, we relied on the following sources: Марина Цветаева. *Книги стихов*. Москва, Эллис Лак, 2004; Анна Саакянц. *Марина Цветаева. Жизнь и творчество*. Москва, Эллис Лак, 1997; Ирма Кудрова. *Путь комет. 2е издание*. Санкт-Петербург, Крига, 2007.

Sergei was sentenced to death, and executed on October 16, 1941. Mur was drafted to a penal battalion (as the son of a convicted father) and killed in action against the Germans in 1944. Ariadna served eight years in Stalin's hard labor camps, but survived. She became an artist, translator, and her mother's biographer, and died in 1975.

Marina Tsvetaeva's writings from over three decades of relentless work in the genres of poetry, drama, autobiographical prose, and translation (even without considering drafts, diaries, and extensive correspondence) are comparable in volume to those of Pushkin or Shakespeare. Before the exile, only her juvenilia was published in Russia. In exile, her poetry and prose became well-known in emigrant circles, but remained virtually unavailable in Russia. Since her return and until long after her death, Tsvetaeva's writings were essentially banned from circulation in the USSR. It took several decades, starting from the sixties, for Tsvetaeva's entire heritage to return from this forced oblivion and find its rightful place among the pinnacles of world literature.

Bella Akhmadulina (1937–2010) is one of the central figures in Russian poetry of the second half of the 20th century. She continued the traditions of Ahmatova, Mandelstam, Pasternak, Tsvetaeva and other poets of the Silver Age, going back to the classical Russian poetry of Lermontov and Pushkin. Her first collections appeared in the sixties, during the Khrushchev Thaw. One of them was named after the poem “Music lessons.”

Уроки музыки / Music lessons by Akhmadulina is based on Tsvetaeva's autobiographical essay “Mom and Music” (*Мать и Музыка*, 1934), where Marina vividly recalls the uneasy relationship between piano and able child, destined for a different kind of music.

Твое сиротство (Your orphanhood) – Tsvetaeva's mother, M. A. Meyn, was herself an accomplished musician and worked hard to pass her passion and skill on to her daughters, Marina and Anastasia. She died of tuberculosis when the girls were respectively 14 and 12.

Diminished Septime – an outdated term for the diminished seventh, a musical interval. Still found in English musical literature at the beginning of the 20th century.

Молитва / Prayer was written on Marina's 17th birthday, and was included along with over a hundred other verses in her first book, “Evening album” (*Вечерний альбом*), which she self-published in 1910. The book sported several reviews, all favorable. The most farsighted one, written by Maximilan Voloshin, mentioned this verse with particular fondness.

Мои стихам / My rhymes – written in Koktebel, Crimea, where Marina and Sergei were spending their summer among the poets and artists invited by M. Voloshin to his home on the Black Sea.

It has become Tsvetaeva's signature poem. For example, it is exhibited on a building in Leiden (the Netherlands) as part of the “Wall poems” project. Interestingly, this poem, expressing the author's confidence that her poetry will eventually reach her audience, was written in 1913 – that is, before most of Tsvetaeva's masterpieces were created. This is one of the striking examples of how she “pre-programmed” her fate in her poems.

Мне нравятся / I like is addressed to M. A. Mintz, who at that time was dating Marina's sister. Notice the stringent rhyming scheme: *abababab cdcdcdcd abababab*. Intense emotions in Tsvetaeva's poetry are often squeezed into a tight frame of self-imposed constraints, such as a demanding rhyming or rhythmic scheme, or a song form with repeated refrains.

Стихи о Москве 4 / Poems about Moscow 4 was written, as indicated by Tsvetaeva, on the 1st day of *Pascha*, the Russian Orthodox Easter. It is celebrated after the 40-day-long Great Lent and symbolizes liberation from desire and temptation.

Double-headed eagles – refers to the coins used to weigh down the eyelids of the deceased.

An airy mask will surface through the mien – in the original: *Сквозь легкое лицо просунут лик*, where *лицо* and *лик* have the same root, but the former refers to a human face and the latter to the sublime, iconic facial image (usually of a saint).

Serenity's enchanting shroud / serenity's enchanting plaid – Here *serenity* stands for *благодобразие*. The word literally means “having a good image” and, being rather dated, evokes the image of the Noble Joseph (*Благообразный Иосиф*) from the story of Crucifixion.

Из строгого, стройного храма / Forsaking her solemn cathedral – written between the two Russian revolutions of 1917, which ended the monarchy and capitalism in February and October respectively. In eight hammering lines, Tsvetaeva in effect foreshadows the whole bloody history of the 20th century. Here is a draft from another epoch:

А Бог с вами!

Будьте овцами!

Ходите стадами, стаями

Без меты, без мысли собственной

Вслед Гитлеру или Сталину.

Ah, to hell with you!

Be sheep!

Walk in herds, in hordes

Without a mark, an original thought

Following Hitler or Stalin.

Consonant with some debates of the 60s – 80s, it was actually written in 1934.

How can a poet so distant from the public arena as Marina Tsvetaeva be so unmistaken (and far ahead of many of her politically savvy contemporaries) in detecting social evil? Joseph Brodsky argues in his Nobel lecture of 1987 that *aesthetics is the mother of ethics*, as illustrated by a baby's rejection of strangers prior to any conception of good and evil. Tsvetaeva's case seems to provide a powerful confirmation to Brodsky's somewhat controversial theory: She rejects the ugly.

Gauls and princes russes – in the original: *Маркизов и русских князей* (Marquises and Russian princes) – apparently is a reference to the French Revolution of 1789 and to the Decembrist uprising in Russia of 1825, among the leaders of which there were princes Trubetskoy and Volkonsky.

Liberty / Freedom – in Russian, it is the same word: *Свобода*.

Дон 2 / Don 2 is the second of three verses in the *Don* cycle, named after the great river flowing into the Azov sea. In 1918 the White Army, relying chiefly on former Russian officers (Marina's husband being among them), suffered a devastating defeat there at the hands of the revolutionary Red Army.

Later Tsvetaeva collected her “anti-revolutionary” poems into the book “The Demesne of the Swans” (*Лебединый Стан*). It was published only in 1957.

In “A Hero of Labor” (1925), an essay Tsvetaeva wrote in memory of Valery Bryusov, she recalls a notable episode: the *evening of nine poetesses* organized by Bryusov in 1921 at the Moscow Polytechnic Museum. After the introductory word where Bryusov characterizes “women's poetry” as being exclusively about “love and passion,” Marina volunteers to begin the evening, and to the enthusiastic applause of the young, *Red* audience, reads seven poems from “The Demesne of the Swans,” starting with this one.

Психея 1 / Psyche 1 belongs to a cycle of two poems. Among female mythological figures, Tsvetaeva often identified herself with Psyche, and always contrasted with Eve.

... *Воскресный отдых твой, Твой день седьмой, твоё седьмое небо. / Your sabbatic rest, Your holy seventh day, Your seventh heaven.* – It is interesting to compare this passage with W. H. Auden's “Funeral Blues,” where the mourner says: “He was ... My working week and my Sunday rest.” In his Russian translation of the poem, Joseph Brodsky makes this line ring a Biblical bell: *Мой шестидневный труд, мой выходной восторг* (My six-day work, my holy day delight). It seems plausible that Brodsky borrowed this idea from Tsvetaeva.

В чёрном небе слова начертаны / Words arise in the night-sky ebony.

Perhaps one of the most brilliant pieces written in Russian on the subject of poetic inspiration, this short poem not so much explains the phenomenon, but rather demonstrates it in action. The same can be said about another poem in the present collection, *Poets – I*. It describes the inner workings of a poet's mind in terms which are not to be perceived “indoors of reason.”

Я – страница / I am parchment – In her 1931 essay about Osip Mandelstam, “The story of one dedication” (*История одного посвящения*), Tsvetaeva comments on this verse: “Did I realize then, in 1918, that by likening myself to the most humble (black soil and white paper) I named the greatest: bowels of the earth (black soil) and all the capabilities of a blank page? That I, in the complete frenzy of one enamored, was likening myself to simply everything?” And then: “One can only address God this way. For it is a prayer! One cannot pray to a person.”

Тебе – через сто лет / To you – in ten decades.

Immortelles – dry decorative flowers; while this image seems to fit well with the poem, it would be fair to note that it is not present in the original.

Hundreds of my rings ... – can be understood figuratively as poetic treasures dedicated by the author to numerous contemporaries. However, Tsvetaeva, while being generally careless about her appearance, was often noted to wear several silver rings and bracelets at a time, and on some occasions presented her friends with rings as tokens of gratitude. This may serve as an example of how metaphors in Tsvetaeva's poetry are frequently backed up by factual details.

Писала я на аспидной доске / I used to scribble on a writing slate. Written in 1920 with a different version of the second stanza, this poem carried the dedication to Sergei Efron: S. E.

In 1940, Marina was preparing a book of selected poetry for possible publication in the USSR. She took this poem out of the chronological flow of the book, and placed it, in this new version, on the introduction page (removing the dedication, for Sergei had already been arrested). In effect, Marina thereby dedicated the whole book to her husband, whose fate and whereabouts, just as 20 years earlier during the Civil War, were unknown to her.

There is another dimension to this introduction. In 1940, Tsvetaeva feels that her life is on the home stretch, and she does not believe that the book she is preparing will pass Soviet censorship.¹ So she is actually finalizing her selected poetry, thinking of future readership. In the third stanza, Tsvetaeva speaks of her desire – to immortalize everyone she admires – which always turns out to be as tentative as the writing mediums she chooses. What remains truly imperishable is referred in the 4th stanza by personal *ты* (thou), yet also marked as inanimate by employing the neutral grammatical gender (*ты – зажатое, непроданное*). She literally speaks of *the name* (*имя*), but could also be referring to the whole of the book introduced by this poem.

With a ring on mirrors – in the original: *кольцом на стёклах* (with a ring on [window] panes). In Tsvetaeva's play "An adventure" (*Приключение*, 1919), the words carved by a girl on a window pane with her ring remind Casanova thirteen years later of his forgotten encounter with her.

Внутри кольца (inside the ring) – On the inside of Marina's wedding ring, her name and the date of marriage are engraved. Sergei's ring did not survive.

Н.Н.В. 21 / N.N.V. 21 belongs to a cycle of 28 poems dedicated to artist and sculptor Nikolai Vysheslavtsev (1890 – 1952).

Над лбом своим просторным, на лбу своём высокою ("above my spacious forehead," "on my high forehead") – This and some other Tsvetaeva's poems refer to the author's actual physical features. She was noted to have a high forehead, green eyes, golden hair (which looks dark in all photographs), slender waist, and sporty stature which she managed to maintain until her death.

¹ She was right: The collection was "killed" by K. L. Zelinsky, an established Soviet critic, who will be chiefly remembered for his vile review, in which he labeled Tsvetaeva's poetry "formalistic."

Проста моя осанка / My attitude and posture are straight, possessions scant (in the original: *Ниц мой домашний кров* = My household is poor.)

The expropriation of Marina's inheritance from her mother during the years of the Revolution left her without any regular income. Once she tried on a daily job as a newspaper cataloger, but walked out of her office after a few months, and never tried again "to serve." In those cold and hungry years, Marina sustained herself by selling family valuables (unskillfully: gold in her hands turned into iron, as she often said), participating in poetry concerts (when invited), and selling her hand-copied "books" of poetry (while often purchasing somebody else's) at the writers' bookstore.

Жилё своё сжало (I'd have my dwelling burn) – Marina's house, where she lived with Alya before going to exile in 1922, was gradually deteriorating to a dire state – from natural causes, but also because furniture, railings, etc. were sometimes used as firewood.

Провода 8 / Wires 8 – Written in 1923 in Czechia, the *Wires* cycle (referring to telegraphic ones) consists of ten poems addressed to Boris Pasternak. The two poets fell in love with each other's poetry when they were already separated by international borders. Their pen-and-ink romance continued for years, but took a particularly dramatic turn during the year of 1926, in the form of an epistolary love triangle with Rainer Maria Rilke as the third apex.

Job's news – bad news.

Job – from the Old Testament, the prototype of a patient man.

И домои: / В неземной – / Да мой. – Tsvetaeva, being quite masterful in the genre of miniature poetry, often incorporated its elements into larger pieces. Here a unit, rhythmically equivalent to one regular line of the poem, is split into three parts which all rhyme, and besides *Да мой* (Yet mine) is homophonic to *домой* (home!)

Поэты 1 / Poets 1 – belongs to a cycle of three poems.

A poet reaches farther in its course – in the original: *Поэма – далеко заводит речь (A poet is taken far by his discourse)*, so for accuracy the translation had to be in the passive. This seemingly minor distinction becomes substantial in a larger context. Joseph Brodsky quotes this line in his 1979 essay "Poet and Prose," emphasizing the idea that language often takes a poet farther than he intended, or even wanted to be. In his Nobel lecture of 1987, he even defines a poet as someone who has fallen into such dependency on his language.

Кто в каменном гробу Бастилий (Who in Bastilean dreadful quarters) –
reference to poet André Chénier, a victim of terror during the French Revolution.

Страна / Country.

Небесные царства (Heavenly kingdoms) – a paraphrase from *Царствие ему небесное!* (God rest his soul!)

На монетах – Молодость моя (On the coins – is my youth) – Russian coins of that period, together with double-headed eagles and/or the Tsar's profiles, feature the year of the mint.

Никуда не уехали / It's our traveling destiny – Written in France, where the Efrons moved in 1925. In 1926, Tsvetaeva gives a triumphant poetry performance for Paris emigrants, but then gradually, due to her uncompromising character, becomes an outcast in this community too. She continues to give public performances and publish poetry and prose in emigrant press (often on terms humiliating to her). New periodical editions, organized with Sergei's active participation, fail economically and die soon. The family is sustained by Marina's grant from the Czech government and by regular private subsidies. Yet shortage in everything, including food, living space, privacy, and summer vacation money, accompanies Marina's life in exile all the years throughout.

Stол 2 / Desk 2 – The second in a cycle of six poems, commemorating thirty years of writing, and created in 1933 – 34.

Вскрыла жилы / I let blood – Perhaps this verse inspired Akhmadulina's metaphor *кровотечение зюка* (“acoustic bleeding”) in “Music lessons.”

Неостановимо хлещет стих (Irrevocably outpouring verse) – By 1934, when this was written, the continuous flow of verse typical for the Tsvetaeva of the 20s has subsided, as she was already mostly writing prose – yet the slower poetic output of this period seems to consist exclusively of masterpieces.

Тоска по родине / Nostalgia – One of Tsvetaeva's most famous and frequently quoted poems. Her contemporary Vladislav Khodasevich, himself a remarkable poet and deep critic, considered it one of the best.

Рябина (rowan-berry) – a tree typical of the Russian landscape, whose bitter scarlet berries remain intact in winter after all foliage is gone. The image of the rowan-berry has special significance in Tsvetaeva's poetry.

Но если по дороге куст (But if a bush is on my way) – Critics still debate whether the last sentence makes the poem self-defying. Pyotr Vail, in his book

“Poems for me” (*Стихи про меня*, 2006) argues that Tsvetaeva knowingly calls the tree a bush thereby rendering the encounter surrealistic. Anna Saakyants, in her encyclopedic biography “Марина Тsvetaeva: Life and Work” (1997), arrives at a similar conclusion on more fundamental grounds: she posits that the rowan-berry in Tsvetaeva's writings symbolizes her *past*, the *inner* homeland, and thus the mention of it reinforces her claim of longing for the real homeland to be “denunciated.”

Дух станов не боец / A guard to neither cause – The epigraph is from Alexey Konstantinovich Tolstoy (1817 – 1875), a famous Russian poet, novelist, and playwright.

Domostroy. Dneprostroy – Dneprostroy was the name of a major construction project of Soviet Russia's First Five-Year Plan (1928 – 1932), a gigantic electric power dam across Dnieper, a great river in Ukraine. Domostroy is the 16th century code of traditional domestic obedience. Tsvetaeva is making a play on four words with the same Greek root *stroy* (meaning “to build”), which in Russian can also mean “a social order” (*два строя*) and a tuning system of a musical instrument (*лiras – строй*).

Maenads – in Greek mythology, these female characters ripped the poet Orpheus to shreds for not honoring his god, Dionysus.

Herodias – according to the New Testament, this princess requested that the head of John the Baptist, baptizer of Jesus, be delivered to her on a platter.

It's said, “Kings live alone!” – In the original, *Ты царь: живи один* (You are a tsar: live alone!) is a quotation from Pushkin's sonnet “To the Poet” (*Поэту*).

Стихи к Чехии. Март – 8 / Poems to Czechia. March – 8. On September 30, 1938, the agreement known now as the Munich pact (or Munich betrayal) was signed, which led to the occupation of Czechia by the Nazis in March 1939. Shocked by these events, Marina Tsvetaeva responded with two cycles of *Poems to Czechia*, one subtitled “September” (and consisting of five poems), the other “March” (thirteen poems). In her three-volume biography of Tsvetaeva, Irma Kudrova mentions the poem *О слёзах на глазах!* as her “last *chef-d'oeuvre*.”

Arseny Tarkovsky (1907 – 1989) is a highly regarded Russian poet and poetry translator. In Tsvetaeva's life, he appeared in 1940, when she, too, was trying to make a living in Moscow by translations. His work impressed Marina a lot, and he had been a fan of her mastery since his youth and named daughter after her. When they met, they grew very fond of each other from the first conversation.

Tarkovsky's own verse didn't praise Stalin, and was published seldom. Yet in 1945 he assembled a poetry collection, which turned out to be more successful than Tsvetaeva's and reached the stage of galley proofs. His first publication of a poetry book (with ten more to follow) had to wait until 1962, the year when his son Andrei received his first international award as a movie director.

A. Tarkovsky. Стол накрыт на шестерых / Our table's set for six. The six are: Arseny himself, his brother who was killed in the Civil War in 1919, his father who died in 1924, his first love Maria Faltz (they met for the last time in 1928, and four years later she died), as well as *grief* and *loss* (“горе да печаль”).

M. Tsvetaeva. Я стол накрыл на шестерых / The table has been set for six. This response of Tsvetaeva to Tarkovsky is considered her last poem. Marina heard Arseny read his verse in public, apparently misinterpreted who the six characters were, and somewhat misquoted the first line in her epigraph.

Раз! – опрокинула стакан! (Whoops! – knocked a glass!) – This line illustrates how Tsvetaeva often chooses words with dual meaning so that each adds to the picture. Here Tsvetaeva's character appears at the dinner as a ghost and – following a traditional superstition – announces her presence by spilling over a glass full of wine. However, *to knock a glass* (*опрокинуть стакан*) can also mean “to drink a glass of vodka,” and the physical effect of this on the drinker is consistent with the feeling of shedding “salt from the eyes, blood from the wounds.”

B. Akhmadulina. Четверть века, Марина / For a fourth of a century ...

Елабуга (Yelabuga) – the town where Marina Tsvetaeva committed suicide.
Дажды пронетый плач (*chanted two-times lamentation*) – Akhmadulina refers to the funerals of Boris Pasternak (1890 – 1960) and Anna Akhmatova (1889 – 1966), the last two great Russian poets of the Silver Age.

Царскосельских садов дерева (*Tsarsko-Selsky imperial firs*) – Marina Tsvetaeva admired Akhmatova's poetry, dedicated several poems to her, and nick-named her “the Tsarsko-Selsky muse” after the town Tsarskoe Selo near St. Petersburg where Akhmatova spent her young years.

Переделино – the famous dacha complex of Moscow writers, where Pasternak spent many years of his life.

Два ударения (*two stresses*) – Akhmadulina is making a word play which we are unable to reproduce in English: *мёртв* and *мертв* (masculine and feminine “is dead”) differ by the stress, as well as *дерева* and *дерёвья* (both meaning “trees”).