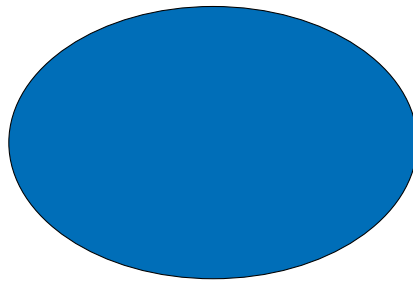


FOUR CENTURIES

Russian Poetry in Translation



№ 25, 2020



Four Centuries. Russian Poetry in Translation

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Four Centuries. Russian Poetry in Translation. Essen: Perelmutter Verlag, 2020, № 25.

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Цитирование материалов журнала обязательно в следующей форме:

Four Centuries. Russian Poetry in Translation. Essen: Perelmutter Verlag, 2020, № 25.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to FTM Agency Ltd. for their kind permission to publish translations of Boris Pasternak's poems into Italian. I am grateful to Mr. Sergej Kuznetsov for his kind permission to publish translations of Nina Iskrenko's poems in our magazine. I would also like to thank the poets David Shrayner-Petrov, Vladimir Gandelsman, Julia Pikalova, Tatjana Vinogradova, Dana Kurskaya and Vlad Gagin for their kind permission to publish the translations of their poems.

Publisher

Perelmutter Verlag, Dr. Ilya Perelmutter, Publisher

Erikapfad 7, 45133 Essen, Germany

www.perelmutterverlag.de, ilyaperelmutter@aol.de

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The Four Centuries Library

Dear Friends,

Thank you very much for reading our magazine. Concurrent with the *Four Centuries* journal, Perelmuter Verlag is also creating a library of Russian poetry in translation – the *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 the collection as a whole to a university or public library. You can join me in my efforts to implement this idea by sending your donations in the following categories:

- Monographic poetry collections by separate poets translated into different languages;
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Please, send your donations to:

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

Yours,
Publisher

Aleksandr Pushkin (1799–1837)
Александр Пушкин (1799–1837)

Translated into Italian by Paolo Statuti
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* * *

Si dirada di nubi lo strato scorrente.
O stella della sera, stella così dolente,
Il tuo raggio inargenta le pianure sfiorite,
Il golfo che sonnacchia e le rocce annerite.
Amo la tenue luce nell'alto del cielo,
Essa ha tolto ai pensieri il loro greve velo.
Ricordo il tuo spuntare, ogni cosa splendeva
Sul quieto paese, dove tutto al cuore piaceva,
Dove il pioppo nelle valli si levava armonioso,
Dove sonnacchia il mirto e il cipresso tenebroso,
E dolci frusciano l'onde di meridione.
Là un tempo sui monti, il cuore in meditazione,
Trascinavo la mia indolenza taciturna,
Quando sui tetti calava l'ombra notturna
E una fanciulla nella nebbia ti cercava,
E alle amiche il tuo nome pronunciava.

1820

Il prigioniero

Siedo nella prigione dietro la grata.
Giovane aquila nel servaggio allevata
La mia triste compagna batte senza tregua
Le ali e becca la sanguinante preda,

Becca, e getta, e guarda alla finestra,
Quasi pensasse: «Una cosa sola resta»
Il suo sguardo chiama e sembra che un grido dia
E voglia dire: «Voliamo via! Voliamo via!»

Siamo liberi uccelli, fratello, è ora di andare!
Là, dove azzurreggiano i paesi sul mare,
Là, dietro le nubi, dov'è il monte natio,
Là, dove volano soltanto il vento ... ed io!»

1822

* * *

(2 novembre)

Inverno. Che fare in campagna? La mattina
Il domestico con la solita tazzina
Di tè. Chiedo: fa caldo? la bufera è finita?
Nevica ancora? si può lasciare l'imbottita
Per la sella, o meglio prima di pranzare
Le vecchie riviste del vicino sfogliare?
Neve fresca. Ci alziamo, a cavallo all'istante,
E al trotto all'alba nel campo biancheggiante.
Il frustino in mano, i cani dietro contenti,
Guardiamo la pallida neve con occhi attenti,
Vaghiamo, giriamo a lungo, ma è già ora,
Due lepri scappate, torniamo alla dimora.
Dove sei allegria? E' sera: fuori tùrbina,
La candela arde cupa. Il cuore si turba.
Mando giù il veleno del tedio così mesto.
Voglio leggere. Gli occhi scorrono sul testo,
Ma la mente è lontana ... Il libro chiudendo,
Cerco la penna, mi siedo e pretendo
Dalla musa assonnata parole senza senso.
Al suono il suono non giunge ... Perdo consenso
Con la rima, con la mia strana ispiratrice:
Il verso indolente si trascina infelice.
Stanco, con la lira sospendo la tenzone,
Vado in salotto; là sento una discussione
Sullo zuccherificio, su elezioni non lontane.
La padrona cupa come il tempo invernale,
I ferri da calza agita con stizza,
O sul conto del re di cuori profetizza.
Così giorno segue giorno in romitaggio!
Ma se verso sera in questo triste villaggio,
Quando in un angolo siedo giocando a dama,
Su di un carro da una località lontana,
Vengono inattese una vecchietta e due sorelle
(Due bionde fanciulle, leggiadre e snelle), –
Come si anima quel villaggio di pena!
Come la vita, mio Dio, ridiventa piena!
All'inizio sguardi sghembi e indiretti,
Poi qualche parola, poi dialoghi dilette,
E canti di sera, e risate generali,
E valzer vivaci, e sussurri gioviali,
E languidi sguardi, e motti spensierati,
E sulla stretta scala incontri prolungati.
E una fanciulla sul terrazzo si affaccia:

Scoperti il collo, il petto e la bufera in faccia!
Ma la bufera un rosa russa non offende.
Com'è caldo nel gelo un bacio ardente!
Com'è fresca nella neve una fanciulla russa!

1829

L'addio

Il tuo volto una volta ancora
Con la mente oso carezzare,
In sogno con la forza del cuore,
Con diletto triste esitante,
Il tuo amore per me ricordare.

Il nostro tempo fugge via
Tutto muta e porta via con sé,
Per il tuo poeta, diletta mia,
Di tenebra tu sei già vestita,
E anche il poeta è morto per te.

Accogli dunque, amica lontana,
L'addio del mio cuore attristato.
Come sposa che vedova rimane,
Come amico che abbraccia in silenzio
Un amico che viene esiliato.

1830

* * *

Mio Dio, fa' ch'io non perda la ragione.
No, meglio la bisaccia e il bordone;
No, meglio la fame e le fatiche.
Non perché a questo mio senno
Io tenga molto; e nemmeno
Perché privo d'esso sarei infelice:

Se mi lasciassero in libertà,
Oh, come fuggirei ben lesto
In una cupa foresta!
Canterei in un'ardente voluttà,
Sprofonderei nello stordimento
D'un sogno informe e stupendo.

Ascolterei le onde frusciare,
Non mi stancherei di guardare
I cieli vuoti e smisurati;
E libero e forte sarei allora,
Come turbine che i boschi falcia
E lascia i campi scavati.

Ma se la ragione perderai,
Come l'orribile peste sarai,
Ti metteranno da parte
Con la catena del mentecatto,
E attraverso le sbarre ad un tratto
Prenderanno ad irritarti.

E ogni notte triste e solo
Non la chiara voce dell'usignolo
Non il fruscio dei rami
Udrò – ma solo lamenti e pene
E gli insulti dei guardiani,
Urla e stridio di catene.

1833

La lettera di Tat'jana

Vi scrivo, che altro fare?
Questo è ciò che mi detta il cuore.
Sì, lo so, voi penserete
Che io ho perso il mio pudore.
Ma se per la mia triste sorte
Un po' di pietà voi avrete,
Forse non mi ignorerete.
Dapprima volevo tacere,
Credetemi: il mio disonore
Non avreste mai conosciuto,
Se la speranza avessi avuto
Di vedervi almeno un'ora,
Di sentire la vostra voce
In questa nostra dimora,
E poi sognare soltanto
Giorno e notte, notte e giorno
Il vostro prossimo ritorno.
Ma voi siete un solitario,
La campagna per voi è tediosa

E per noi gente semplice
La vostra visita è preziosa.

Perché siete apparso tra noi?
Nel nostro sperduto villaggio,
Di questa mia sofferenza
Ora non sarei un ostaggio.
Col tempo, quietato (chissà?)
Il mio ingenuo tumulto
Un buon amico avrei trovato,
Sarei stata fedele sposa
E anche madre premurosa.

Soltanto a te darò il mio cuore!
No!.. Un altro non avrò mai.
E' un verdetto sceso dal cielo,
Lo so, soltanto tu mi avrai.
Tutta la mia vita annunciava
Questo incontro e lo preparava,
Mi sei stato mandato da Dio,
Fino alla tomba custode mio ...
Tu nei sogni mi apparivi,
Il tuo sguardo avvertivo
Da sempre nell'anima mia,
La tua voce io sentivo.
Da tanto ... no, un sogno non era!
Sei entrato e subito ho saputo,
Sbigottita, infiammata,
Che eri tu il mio benvenuto!
Non è così? Tu mi parlavi
Quando i poveri aiutavo,
Quando pregando placavo
L'angoscia dell'anima inquieta ...
Non eri tu che in quel momento,
O dolce visione, sei apparso
Per lenire il mio tormento?
Tu che parole di speranza
Mi sussurravi con amore?
Chi sei tu? L'angelo custode
O il perfido tentatore:
Oh, i miei dubbi risolvi.
Forse tutto è una fantasia,
Un inganno dell'anima mia!
E ad altro sono destinata ...
Sarà quel che essere dovrà!

La mia sorte ti ho affidata,
Davanti a te il mio pianto verso,
La tua protezione imploro ...
Pensa: io qui sono sola,
Nessuno legge nel mio cuore,
La ragione sto perdendo
E in silenzio sto morendo.
Io ti aspetto: con un tuo sguardo
Di' che non è un'illusione
O interrompi il sogno penoso,
Ahimè degno di riprovazione!

Termino! Rileggere non oso,
Provo vergogna e timore ...
Ma senza esitare e sperando
Io mi affido al vostro onore ...

Paolo Statuti is an Italian poet and interpreter. Born in Rome and currently residing in Poland, he has a degree in Political Science and a degree in Russian and Slavic languages and literature (a student of the legendary Angelo Maria Ripellino). Paolo has been translating Russian poetry, as well as Polish, Czech, and English for over 50 years. An avid writer and painter, he also runs a blog musashop.wordpress.com (Un'anima e tre ali) dedicated to poetry, music and painting. In the recent years, his notable translations of the Russian poetry published in Italy have been: Pushkin, *32 poems* (2014) and *Ruslan and Lyudmila* (2019); Lermontov, *Demon* (2016) and *Poems* (2019); Pasternak, *30 poems* (2014); Mandelstam, *30 poems* (2014) – as well as his own book of poetry *The Wandering Star* (2016).

Boris Pasternak (1890–1960)

Борис Пастернак (1890–1960)

Translated into Italian by Paolo Statuti

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* * *

Come cenere bronzea di braci,
Il giardino assonnato sparge calabroni.
Al livello mio e della mia candela
I mondi fiorenti penzoloni.

E, come in una fede inaudita,
In questa notte poter passare,
Dove il pioppo decrepito-grigio
Ha coperto il confine lunare,

Dove lo stagno è un segreto svelato,
Dove sussurra la risacca del melo,
Dove il giardino su palafitte è posato
E regge davanti a sé il cielo.

Primavera

Primavera, vengo dalla via, dove il pioppo è sorpreso,
Dove la distanza fa paura, dove la casa è insicura,
Dove l'aria è azzurra, come il fagotto di panni
Di chi è dimesso dalla casa di cura.

Dove la sera è vuota, come un racconto sospeso,
Lasciato da una stella senza prosecuzione
Per lo stupore di mille occhi chiassosi,
Senza fondo e privi di espressione.

Nella Settimana Santa

Intorno ancora la nebbia notturna.
Ancora nel mondo è così presto,
Che il cielo pullula di stelle
E ognuna, come il giorno, è luminosa,

E se solo la terra potesse,
Dormirebbe il giorno di Pasqua
Alla lettura del Salterio.

Ancora intorno la nebbia notturna.
Ancora è così presto nel mondo,
Che la piazza giace coricata
Come in eterno da tutti i lati,
E mille anni ancora la separano
Dall'alba e dal calore.

Ancora la terra è completamente nuda,
E di notte essa non ha niente
Per far oscillare le campane
E fare eco ai coristi dall'esterno.

E dal Giovedì Santo
Fino al Sabato Santo
L'acqua perfora le rive
E intesse mulinelli.

E il bosco è spoglio e scoperto,
E sulla Passione di Cristo,
Come folla in preghiera,
Veglia la turba dei tronchi di pino.

Ma in città, in un piccolo
Spazio, come a una riunione,
Gli alberi guardano muti
Le grate della chiesa.
E il loro sguardo è preso dal terrore.
E' comprensibile il loro sgomento.
I giardini escono dai recinti,
Vacilla il sistema terrestre:
Seppelliscono Dio.

E c'è la luce nella porta regia,
E il nero manto, e la fila di candele,
Volti rigati dalle lacrime –
E a un tratto la processione viene
Incontro col lenzuolo tombale,
E due betulle presso la porta
Devono tirarsi da parte.

E il corteo gira intorno alla chiesa,
Riempie il marciapiede fino al bordo,

E porta dalla strada sul sagrato
La primavera, le ciarle primaverili
E l'aria che sa di prosfora
E di ebbrezza di primavera.

E marzo sparge la neve
Nell'atrio sulla folla degli storpi,
Come se qualcuno fosse uscito
Portando l'arca e l'avesse aperta
Distribuendola a tutti.

E il canto dura fino all'alba,
E, dopo aver tanto singhiozzato,
Giungono sommessi dall'interno
Nel luogo vuoto sotto i fanali
Il Salterio e l'Apostolo.

A mezzanotte taceranno la creatura e la carne,
Avendo udito la voce primaverile,
Che appena tornerà il sereno –
La morte si potrà sconfiggere
Con lo sforzo della resurrezione.

In ospedale

Come davanti a una vetrina
Affolla la gente il marciapiede.
Nella macchina la barella è messa.
Alla guida l'infermiere si siede.

L'ambulanza, abilmente evitando
Veicoli, bighelloni, fanali,
Il caos notturno delle strade,
S'è tuffata nel buio coi fari.

Polizia, strade, facce dei passanti,
Tutto sotto i lampioni balenava.
Con la boccetta dell'ammoniaca
L'infermiera chinandosi vacillava.

Pioveva e nell'astanteria la gronda
Aveva un suono triste e vario,
Nel frattempo riga su riga
Scarabocchiavano il questionario.

L'hanno sistemato vicino all'entrata.
Non c'era altro posto in quel momento.
C'era puzzo di iodio tutt'intorno
E dalla strada infuriava il vento.

La finestra un po' di giardino e di cielo
Mostrava in un quadrato.
Alla corsia, ai camici, al pavimento
Si abituava il nuovo arrivato.

Ma dalle domande dell'infermiera
Che scoteva la testa con compassione,
Egli capì subito che difficilmente
Sarebbe scampato alla situazione.

Poi con gratitudine guardò la finestra,
Dietro cui la parete mostrata
Era come una scintilla d'incendio
Dalla città tutta illuminata.

Là la barriera rosseggiava,
E nella luce della città un ontano
Mandava al malato di continuo
L'estremo saluto con un ramo.

‘O Signore – pensava l'infermo –
I tuoi atti sono così perfetti,
La notte della morte e la città di notte,
Le pareti, la gente, i letti.

Ho preso una dose di sonnifero
E piango mordendo il fazzoletto.
O Dio, le lacrime di commozione
Mi celano il tuo volto benedetto.

Mi è dolce nella fioca luce
Che cade a stento sul mio cuscino,
Me stesso e la mia sorte riconoscere
Come un tuo dono divino.

Morendo in un letto d'ospedale,
Delle tue mani sento il calore.
Come tua creatura e come un anello
Nell'astuccio mi riponi, o Signore.’

David Shroyer-Petrov (1936)
Давид Шраер-Петров (1936)

Translated into English by Maxim D. Shroyer and Tatiana Rebecca Shroyer
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LIFT ME UP: NINE POEMS

Nostalgia

It feels good to return
To the old haunts,
Where a steeple beckons
From the overpass.

At a nearby synagogue —
There's a cemetery, a burial ground
And a common road
Amid crosses and stars,

Familiar and sundry
Like bales of fresh hay,
Eternally suffering
Like the Russian soul.

A Broken Wall

At a broken old wall,
From which a rose bush grows,
We understood that we'll
No longer share the road,

The empty road that brought us
To this wall. Here we'll die.
You and I have hit rock bottom,
Fate has slammed the door shut.

It's true, my love, a dead end
Before us. Here life stands still.
Not the moon, but a foreign face,
I'm tired, you see, I'm ill.

In this dead end of stone
I'm ready to settle down

.....
.....

.....
.....

What's that light up ahead?
Will it bring us glad tidings?

Will the blushing rose suddenly blossom
On the wall destroyed by drudgery?
Will I once again become gold-mouthed,
Will you once again cling to me?

The Pocasset River Scrolls *

One swimmer lies on tall wet grass
Her legs spread out from her sides,
Her head meanwhile escapes and flies
To an unthinkable blue sky

That floats over there above
The forest, river, and soccer field.
In turn the other swimmer sheds
Her watch and bathing suit, her hand

Is reaching out to catch the moon
That took a plunge into the sea.
And now the third one, chest upturned
Screams to her destiny: "Adjourned!"

By now an angler has picked up
Her urgent call. He's ready for the chase!
Yes, he's ready from his boat
To start the devilish swimming race.

But at this point above the river
A glassy helicopter hovers,
The pilot, blue capped with a cord
Of silver, signals to the angler,
He surely means: "All clear! All clear!"

* The term "Scrolls" in English here approximates the Russian *stolbtsy* ("scrolls" or "columns"), the chosen form and the title of the second poetry collection of Nikolay Zabolotsky (1903-1958).

You Told Me: "I Love You"

You told me: "I love you." And it was
The truth of it, the time was right to tell
When sunlight gave October days
Its final yellow farewell.

You spoke. I took your words with my mouth—
The way a wolf picks up his cubs,
The west wind takes the Urals with its breath,
The drunken revelers party all night long.

Winter Song

All birds have flown away, except birds of winter,
Where they have flown, Lord only knows.
Sing, my darling, please sing for me
The wintriest of our songs.

That it's time to seal the windows,
Gather leaves into brown sacks,
That the autumn gold of the meadows
Will soon rest beneath the snowpack.

Perhaps it's time, it's time, it's time
For us to play a brand new song.
But how can we change the ragged old tune
When we can't love, sing, or kid around?

Now listen, my love, we can't really
Let melancholy take control.
Throw on your shawl and get ready
To rush into a whirlwind of snow.

There's our song, the wintriest of tunes,
The song of pine trees and northern stars.
On the violin—gleaming sleigh runners,
On the flute—a frozen thrush.

If We Were to Compute

If we were to go ahead and compute
the sum total of happiness
we had once received

in our dear old stagnating country,
and then set the results against the happiest of times
we've had in the New World,
a very odd proportion would emerge:
there happiness was more shrill.

But if we recall
how many times
they humiliated us, dragged us through the dirt,
pushed us to tell lies after scaring us to death,
then we would know that *here*
our lives are much more trouble free
even though not as joyous
as we had hoped.

Lift Me Up

If I fall, lift me up, don't be proud,
Don't take me to an old people's home, don't hand me over
to callous doctors.
Better that my reckless life expire by your side
Than to live out my days amid strangers and laughing foes.

Last Roses

*It is right in there,
Betwixt and between*
Robert Frost

The last roses of autumn
Bloom in November,
The last dewfalls come down
At daybreak and wander.

Without call or gesture
Like italics on a page
The rabid dogs of winter—
Storm and rage.

Just one look at the snow
That shrouds the back yard,
In our memory now
Bloom the flowers of November.

Not the young Paschal tenders
Of May flower buds
But yellow treetops
And frozen sod.

The crow calls at sunset
Portend winter chill,
Like darkly lit faces
Of the border patrol.

The Autumn Garden

My poor garden has shed its leaves,
Roses, plums, and raspberries,
Silhouettes of naked trees
Augur the coming of winter freeze.

Only the fir tree near the porch,
Bridging the past and a new beginning,
Like a bear shakes its paws:
There's no end to living.

[David Shraye-Petrov](#), poet, fiction and nonfiction writer, playwright, and literary translator – and a medical scientist in his parallel career – was born in 1936 in Leningrad (St. Petersburg) and has been living in the USA since 1987. He is the author of twenty-five books, including *Doctor Levitin* (2018), the English translation of part one of his acclaimed refusenik trilogy. His tragicomedy in verse *Vaktsina. Ed Tenner* (*Vaccine. Ed Tenner*) is forthcoming in January 2021 in Moscow. David Shraye-Petrov and his wife, Emilia Shraye, live in Brookline, Massachusetts.

Eight of these nine poems have previously appeared in the original Russian in Shraye-Petrov's collections *Piterskii dozh* (*The Doge of Petersburg*, St. Petersburg, 1999) and *Forma liubvi* (*Form of Love*, Moscow, 2003). All nine appeared as part of the section *Zimniaia pesnia* (*Winter Song*) in Shraye-Petrov's collection *Propashchaia dusha* (*Lost Soul*, Providence, RI, 2007). All nine poems were reprinted in 2016 in the cycle *Ne posylai menia na krai zemli* (*Don't Send Me to the End of the World*) in *Etazhi* magazine.

[Maxim D. Shraye](#) (Moscow, 1967), David Shraye-Petrov's son, has been living in the USA since 1987. He is Professor of Russian, English, and Jewish Studies at Boston College and the author, most recently, of the poetry collection *Of Politics and Pandemics: Songs of a Russian Immigrant* (2020).

[Tatiana Rebecca Shraye](#) (Boston, 2007), David Shraye-Petrov's granddaughter and Maxim D. Shraye's daughter, is a seventh-grade student at the Driscoll School. She is the author of the poetry collection *Searching for Bow and Arrows* (2020), which won second place in the 2019 *Stone Soup* book contest.

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The translators thank Dobrochna Fire for her valuable comments on a draft of these translations.

Vladimir Gandel'sman (1948)
Владимир Гандельсман (1948)

Translated into English by Anna Halberstadt
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In a room during the day ...

In a room during the day of a winter starting
A bluish light and an off-white ceiling.
And I see you, a girl, who's sad
without an interest weaved with
a desire for living.

The day calms down without your participation,
Mother comes from work,
Warms up the mushroom soup (a bunch of mushrooms
drying behind the door)
and then she continues aging over cutting patterns
and sewing.

You'll also see her covering the lamp
with a newspaper and it'll feel so sad,
as if you were contemplating –
if life was worth or not worth living, –
not so compelling.

There I love you so, and nothing feels
more boundless, and purer,
more beautiful and sad and human,
than this indecisiveness and a beggar's freedom.

On the way from the music school
by the pond reflecting like a mirror
(still andante from sonata
echoing in ears
like the dying sound of 'Dante')
incredible transparent light
I met in early May

among the willows.
And from that point on
there was not a note
that did not ring false.
In the sky the birds' lives
still floated
but Beatrice
had already disappeared
(again sonata ...)
in the sunset.

A sketch

What kind of god-forsaken suburbs
get resurrected from the dust!
That's how you suddenly get
touched by lousy poetry.

You'll see apartments from the past, –
in passing, that's how
a poor clumsy soul talks
through holes in poems.

How could get he rewarded
for trying hard in vain?
How wholeheartedly the cloth of your being
gets eaten by death?

You'll disappear, as if lost behind
the lining of a coat
Into the quiet of the home –
and sleep through the
deadly grip of time by morning.

... and pines are standing, like a church choir
and air, perfumed with pine needles, is dry,
the dead asleep, as if indeed they had been siblings ...
and have no willpower to part.

Just tell me, where one finds love among the losses? ...
And how and into what it could have turned?

I don't know, where. But aren't you delighted ...
and does not a book lie open in front of you? ...
So read: here is Ian, and here is Margaret ...

I walk towards the bay, passing by
golden ears in rippling fields, and they,
who had connected hands under the ground,
walk behind me towards the precipice
and waves' polyphony is growing from the sea.

Mother, resurrected

Put on your coat. Put on a scarf.
Today's windy. Close the closet door.
When will you be back. When are you back.
They promised rain today. It rains.

Buy bread on the way back. Bread.
Get up, it's five minutes of.
I brought for us something good to eat.
We'll try to make it till the second day
of the coming month.

This was saved for the holiday. Why open?
Oh, God, what did you do again.
Go away. Go away, you bastard.
Daddy and I spent a sleepless night.

How days are running. Days running.
Button the upper button. They are pushing you towards
a slippery slope.
Get a haircut. Your chest

is not covered. Isn't this nuts?
What do you think, we have
extra fat?
Be a mensch. Last reserves.
An emergency fund.
Watch your posture. Walk straight.

Need to visit a special place.
Put it on a hanger.
I don't like how your cough sounds.
Lie down. Lie down. Go to bed.

Don't say it in front of him.
It's already five to. Time to get up.
Get up.
What was the purpose of buying a piano. Piano. What a deal.
Temper yourself like steel.

He is going to drive me mad. Drive me mad.
Let me try your forehead. Forehead.
Don't smoke. Don't ruin your lungs.
Don't be rude to mom.

Don't catch a cold. It snowed.
last night. I can see – you drank.
I can see – you drank. Tell the truth.
You are staying all alone. Water the plants.

The mind of words

From part five – “and he said ‘almighty,’ in order to start ...”

* * *

Oh, the night is falling, the river is getting dark,
turns into a beast, tries to break off from here, its banks are hurting,
the autumn grabs you by the throat and pulls you by the hand,
the coat rack stands empty, not a single ticket inside.
Oh, the night is falling, the platform's getting wet,
urns are scattering ashes, brief tornadoes
are being created, the cashier in the token booth smokes,
jokes with a late hour rider, улица loses its name, turns into a street.
I fumble in the opposite hemisphere, looking for cents,
in vast like boredom folds of my raincoat, this country doesn't fit me,
the size is wrong, but what the fuck, if you respond without thinking.
Maybe, on the surface it's cleaner, but the lining's the same,
The train gets hysterical in exactly same way, and I am not blind,
maybe it's better not to be here at all, than to be, but without you.
Life is philosophy's failure, superior philosophy's, of any kind.
Perhaps in a window, perhaps, in a hole within a day of this fall,
an old man doses off, leaning his emaciated body on one side,
starting to fall, perhaps, a family tortures a child with his violin practice,
perhaps, a door's gotten slammed, and I vanished from sight.

Anna Halberstadt grew up in Lithuania. She was trained as a psychologist at Moscow University and in the U.S. She is a poet and a translator from Russian, Lithuanian and English. Her poetry in English was widely published in journals such as *Caliban*, *Cimarron Review*, *Literary Imagination* (Oxford Journals), in Russian in *Arion*, *Interpoezia*, *Children of Ra* and many others. She published two collections of poetry in English – *Vilnius Diary* and *Green in a Landscape with Ashes*, as well as collections of poetry in Russian – *Transit* and *Gloomy Sun*. Anna published a book of her translations of poetry by Eileen Myles, *Selected*, and *Nocturnal Fire* by Edward Hirsch. She guest-edited two volumes of Russian poetry in English translation for *The Café Review* (2019 and 2020). Anna Halberstadt is a recipient of the International Merit Award by Atlanta Review, 2016. She received a Poetry prize by the Russian literary journal *Children of Ra* in 2016. *Persona PLUS* journal called Translator of the Year 2017 for her translation of Bob Dylan's poem *Brownsville Girl*. *Vilnius Diary* in Lithuanian has become one of the TOP10 books, published in Lithuania in 2017, named by the Lithuanian news site Lt.15. It was also chosen for the list of most important books in translation in 2017 by the Lithuanian Translators Association.

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Julia Pikalova (1971)
Юлия Пикалова (1971)

Translated into Italian by Paolo Statuti
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© Paolo Statuti, translations, 2020

Le due pietà di Michelangelo

*'Non ha l'ottimo artista alcun concetto
Ch'un marmo solo in sé non circoscriva ...'*
Michelangelo, RIME (151)

Davanti alla pietà di Lei il mondo ammutisce
E si stupisce. Interminabile istante.
Un tale dolore non ha nome, ma del marmo
E' più chiaro il chiarissimo sembiante.

Lei, addolorata, nei secoli ti glorificherà.
Nella grandezza modesta. Giovane come te.
'E il sommo genio non aggiungerà
Un solo pensiero a ciò che il marmo ha in sé ...'¹

Tu capirai poi, vivendo nel suo tormento.
Tutto scorre. La fine non termina mai.
La *tua* pietà. Tu abbandoni le braccia.
Nessuno vede il volto che tu hai.

Ma a quelli di noi che non sperano più,
Con le braccia già pronte e cadere,
Tu dirai: Lui invisibile il mondo sosterrà,
Che nessuno avrà la forza di sostenere.

¹ Nella traduzione dal russo della frase di Michelangelo (N.d.T.)

Quarto concerto per pianoforte. Beethoven

Cessa l'udito terreno, ma cresce la musica interiore.
Ti laceri e la gente – è sempre più selvatico – dice.
Questa musica – libera, libera o muori.
Così Orfeo implorava nell'Ade per la sua Euridice.

Così Orfeo implorava. Cessa l'udito. Sogghigna la gente.
Il Quarto è scritto, ma il Terzo vogliono eseguire.

Questa musica libera, libera! – no, non la danno,
E finché vivrai nel tuo spartito dovrà morire.

Ehi, davvero non sapete? Ai cieli non è gradita!
L'udito terreno, umano – è un ostacolo per voi, vili uomini!
Cessa l'udito. Cessa l'udito! Ma il Quarto tu lo eseguirai:
E' l'ultima tua uscita – in alto, oltre la scala dei toni.

Il Salvatore. Rachmaninov

Il cuore gioioso è ferito,
La mente si offusca per amore:
La mia patria – Rachmaninov –
Nel mio sangue scorre.

Quanti anni si possano sfogliare –
Ci solleva, appena arrivato,
Il suo indomito slancio
E il suo spirituale afflato.

Atteso il futuro in anticipo,
Volendo il triste fato sviare,
La mia patria sconfinata
Su di un'ala LUI vuol portare.

E vola, vola più disteso,
Tutta in se stesso presente,
Dilagante e libero
Un motivo fedele e credente,

E il mio paese che soffre
Nella stipa e nel catrame,
Dalla colpa si libera
Sulla sua ala immane.

1940. Shostakovich

Al quartetto 'Borodin'

Dell'anima inquieta, giovane in eterno,
Risuona un motivo dimenticato.
Diversamente vibrano le corde,
L'agitazione senza aver domato,
E dentro te con un mite sorriso
Tu guardi felice: io sono di me stesso!..

Così in inverno respira il breve giorno,
Tra due notti strettamente messo.

Il poeta e la gente. Lermontov

*Io ero pronto ad amare il mondo intero, ma
nessuno mi ha capito e io ho imparato a odiare.*
M. Lermontov, 'Un eroe del nostro tempo'

Intorno gli occhi: così la solitudine è più viva.
Non mi rifletterò in nessuno, passando,
Tra idiomi e consonanze altrui
Le mie parole rapprese ingoiando.

Occhi-occhi, schermi trasparenti,
Delle dolciastre labbra il dolciastro accento
E Lermontov troppo presto è scomparso,
Per trovare su questo un commento.

Astrazione, frustrazione, chimera –
La vicinanza umana, dalle tu un nome,
Ma in alto c'è ancora la fede
Nella grande d'amore illusione!

Oh, io ho provato, salendo in alto:
Respirare è più arduo, ma in compenso
Nessuno telefonerà e nessuno scriverà.
Io questo amo e al colonnello penso.²

Qui, in alto – senza trambusto e con rigore.
Amare la gente è più facile da lontano.
Ed io a un tratto capisco Dio,
E perché ci dice: 'ancora vi amo'.

² Riferimento al romanzo di Gabriel García Márquez: *Nessuno scrive al colonnello*.

Ciaccona

*'Non voglio più gelarmi di paura,
Meglio mettere di Bach la Ciaccona,
E dietro entrerà la persona ...'*
Achmatova

1.

Barocco è una parola elegante,
E accanto ad essa il buio e la peste –
Forse a riscuotere il tributo
Nelle case vostre irromperanno presto.

Non sembra siano contaminate –
Ma la lavandaia non era contagiosa? –
La manica degli abbienti – di batista,
E degli indigenti – di stoffa non preziosa.

Oggi siete vivo e vegeto?
Cercate di vivere senza scosse!
La lavandaia ha le mani porpora.
La lavandaia ha le mani rosse.

2.

Ti porterà il tuo principe
Alle terme coi suoi musicisti.
Tua moglie attenderà coi figli:
Sei un genio, ma i tuoi cari nutrisci.

Il tempo per le cure, la fine
Non si può prevedere.
Ma non riceverai un dispaccio.
Ma non ti avviserà un corriere.

Di notte sotto un tetto non tuo
La tua casa tu sogni forse ...
Ma la lavandaia ha le mani porpora.
La lavandaia ha le mani rosse.

3.

Ed ecco il ritorno a Kothen.
Dei vicini lo sguardo inquieto.
Domanda il caro figlio 'Chi è là?' –
A chi è tornato non indietro.

Maria, Maria, Mari ...
Soltanto due mesi separati.

Barocco è una parola elegante,
Elegante, demoni dannati!

Ora mai più ti abbraccerà,
Ora niente più ti sussurrerà ...
La prenderà un ospite silenzioso ...
E le tue spalle col peso incurverà.

Allora dalla scenografia terrena
Varchi la soglia che ti ha derubato:
Non c'è la morte, ma delle variazioni
C'è il torrente che a Dio t'ha portato!

.....
.....
.....
.....

4.

La felicità futura propagandata,
E le pareti ascoltano le mosse,
La lavandaia ha le mani porpora,
La lavandaia ha le mani rosse.

E le labbra si serrano severe,
Le persone hanno il viso stravolto,
E in una piccola anticamera
Dell'inquilino c'è solo il cappotto.

E non c'è né il bene, né la legge ...
Ma c'è un virtuoso udito,
La cesellata parola ciaccona
E lo spirito dal dolore forbito.

Questa poesia si basa su fatti reali. A luglio del 2020 ricorreva il trecentesimo anniversario della morte di Maria Barbara, prima moglie di Johann Sebastian Bach. Il decesso fu rapido e inaspettato. Bach accompagnava il principe Leopoldo coi suoi musicisti nel suo viaggio alle terme di Karlsbad (oggi Karlovy Vary). Quando Bach era partito Maria Barbara stava bene, ma quando tornò due mesi dopo, seppe che era morta il 7 luglio. La causa della morte non si conosce. Secondo molti ricercatori la celebre ciaccona (inclusa nella partita per violino n. 2) fu scritta da Bach in memoria di Maria Barbara.

‘Le pareti ascoltano le mosse’, ‘Dell'inquilino c'è solo il cappotto’ – tutto questo si può vedere nell'alloggio-museo dove abitò Achmatova. Il cappotto apparteneva al marito della poetessa Nikolaj Punin, che da lì fu portato via alla polizia segreta. Morì in un lager nel 1953. In questo appartamento Achmatova scrisse il suo *Requiem*. Achmatova ascoltava e amava la *Ciaccona* e la ritroviamo in diverse sue poesie. Un particolare interessante: sia la *Ciaccona* di Bach, che il *Requiem* di Mozart sono in re minore.

Julia Pikalova is a Russian poet. Born in Moscow, she is a graduate of St. Petersburg State University (Master of Philology) and of California State University (Master of Business Administration). She has made a successful career in major international companies and has worked in many countries. Having moved to Italy, Julia has restarted playing the piano; since 2017, she has been participating in the *Milano Amateurs and Orchestra* festival and has won it twice. Julia's poetry is published in the best magazines of Russian literature, from Canada to the Far East. It is not easy to translate her poetry because of Julia's virtuoso capacity to play with the sounds, meanings and syntax of the Russian language. Yet, 60 poems have been translated into Italian in 2020 thanks to the effort of the prominent slavist Paolo Statuti.

Book announcement

We are happy to announce a new and upcoming edition of Russian (free) verse in English translation, *Contemporary Russian Free Verse*. The book's editor is Yuri Orlitsky, whose own poetry may be found in issue № 24 of *Four Centuries*. The poetry of Gertsik, Iskrenko, Vinogradova, Kurskaya and Gagin (all featured in this issue) will also be included in the book.

Contemporary Russian Free Verse will *not* be an anthology of contemporary Russian free verse but rather a *testimony* of the 25 festivals of Russian free verse conceived and organized by Yuri Orlitsky. Hence, several important poets, such as Gennady Aigi and Olga Sedakova, are not represented in this collection – since they did not participate in any of those festivals. On the other hand, there are some lesser known poets who did take part in several festivals and were included. The Moscow Writers Union that financed the Russian two-volume edition of the book suggested to translate it into English to familiarize the English-speaking readers and scholars both with Russian free verse and its main practitioners.

More information about the book may be found at verbum.tilda.ws/anthology

Vladimir Gertsik (1946-2019)
Владимир Герцик (1946-2019)

Translated into English by Ian Probst
© Ian Probst, translation, 2020

for Mikhail Fainerman

Verse libre
Is sliced prose.
Good prose
Is verse libre in one lump.

You own only that
What you can give out.
The rest
Owns you.

Kids were running along a slope.
One of them rushed to me
and dug his teeth
in my left leg.
I yelled and woke up.
I armed myself with a sword
and went back to sleep.

A Dream

A figurine
as if from clay —
a fairy of my childhood,
my granny Shura.
I can talk to her.

Incidentally, I drop the figure,
and I am left
with a dumb broken shell.

It's bitter.
The other grandmother tells me,
“Well, you keep writing poems,
but you didn't do your lessons,
lessons.”

The door opens and suddenly
an unseen ethereal something
crawls at me
glistening in the void.

My shell
Is full of fear

I woke up.
Palpitations.

The Wonder of Perception

At a bus stop
a bumpkin
sells vegetables.
Two women come
yelling:
— Here they are, potatoes!
— Not at all! These are tomatoes! I don't have potatoes!
And they moved on.

I clearly see
that there're
nice peppers in the box.

A poem
is a house of cards.
Take out one word
or overload it a bit —
it will collapse.
You can take out
only the upper cards
cautiously.

Vladimir Gertsik (1946), a theoretical physicist and a poet, studied physics at the Moscow State University. After his graduation he worked at the Institute of Earth Physics and later at the Institute of Earthquake Prediction Theory and Mathematical Geophysics. He started writing poetry in mid-1960's and soon became well known among underground poets of Moscow. His collection of poetry was published in 1992 in München. He considered himself to be a 'pre-semantic poet', engaged in coding of the so-called 'pre-semantic structures'. Vladimir Gertsik passed away in 2019 after a long and serious illness.

Ian Probst is full professor of English at Touro College. He has published 12 books of poetry, translated more than a dozen poetry volumes, and has compiled and edited more than 30 books and anthologies of poetry in translation. His translations of Osip Mandelstam into English were chosen as a runner-up to the *Gabo Prize for Literature in Translation & Multi-Lingual Texts* (2016), while his translations of Ezra Pound's *Cantos* were shortlisted for the *Russian Guild of Translation Master Award*. His most recent book is *Sign Under Test. Selected Poems and essays of Charles Bernstein* (Moscow: Russky Gulliver, 2020). He also published an annotated edition of T. S. Eliot's *Poetry and Plays* (SPb.: Azbuka, 2019).

Nina Iskrenko (1951–1995)
Нина Искренко (1951–1995)

Translated into English by Ainsley Morse
© Ainsley Morse, translation, 2020

Song of the Skylark

At first they were rolling grinding balls around
Then spilling water in a thin crooked stream
Then all six of them moved aside the iron hatch
all wrapped in scraps of cloth and spiders
and once they'd moved it they immediately put it back
And like that several times
Then it was like the connection was broken
Through the tense silence you could feel
that they were just sticking out their tongues
but it turned out they'd decided to strip off the wallpaper bit by bit
and this is how they did it
they would feel around for a small area poking out and find an opening next to it
They'd stick a longish pencil into the opening and lightly swish it around
gradually increasing the range of movement
The wallpaper was old and would come off in chunks
practically right away rustling and scattering fine plaster dust
Then they boiled beans
I don't know where they got all those beans from
and why they're that color
but evidently some command had been given at four in the morning
to spit out boiled beans through cardboard tubes with a diameter of
about a centimeter
probably through thermometer cases
they fell in in squares and and flew off in triangles toward
the Belorussky train station with a faint threatening jingling
The one thing I don't get
How did they manage to get out of an apartment with the windows taped shut with
no ventilation hatches
After all, even barred hatches are covered in screens to
keep the mosquitoes away
But anyway it's their problem
It's worse that along with them disappeared any possible notion of temperature
As a result water came pouring right out of the floor lamp onto the blanket
and had a sort of wooden taste
while the Friendship-brand processed cheese that costs seven fifty

turned out to consist entirely of the foil it used to just come wrapped in
back then of course it only cost 30 kopecks
The door hinges started stretching out like spandex while the doors themselves
went so soft they could be wrapped around like spandex while the doors themselves
went so soft they could be wrapped around the person coming in like a wetsuit
or well-kneaded dough plastered on top to bottom and smeared all down the hallway
Right then my throat started hurting
and it started to seem that the air was made up of razors and confetti
although actually it was standing to the bitter end like meat jelly let out of the can
of dutch sausages until the ceiling started to cave in
and the first drops of concrete began pummeling the piano
and the night-watchman's lid
In response the night watchman took off his lid and shook his walnut
pipe-stem at his invisible opponent
Gradually the room filled with a great number of unnecessary details

[Ainsley Morse](#) teaches at Dartmouth College and translates Russian and former Yugoslav literatures. Recent publications include Andrei Egunov-Nikolev's 'Soviet pastoral' *Beyond Tula* (ASP, 2019), and, with Bela Shayevich, Vsevolod Nekrasov's *I Live I See* (UDP, 2013). With Galina Rymbu and Eugene Ostashevsky, she is editor of the anthology *F-Letter: New Russian Feminist Poetry* (isolarii, 2020).

Tatiana Vinogradova (1965)
Татьяна Виноградова (1965)

Translated into English by Anton Yakovlev
© Tatiana Vinogradova, 2020, poem originals
© Anton Yakovlev, translation, 2020

The Stone Tree

The stone tree
grows silently
in a city with no walls.

Black and white rain comes down
in a mirthless country.

Landscapes are vast/sad.
Rivers wait pensively.

The stone tree takes root
in my head,
rustles its brick foliage.

The stone tree
grows into others' dreams,
touches their thoughts with its branches.

I await this strange
fig tree's fruits.

I fear the stone tree,
it's too alive.

I watch the city.
Soon it will be a forest.

Heaven

... And in heaven we'll meet everyone we loved.
Even the cats.
And we will see everything we wanted to see
but didn't get around to in life.
Even God.

And there will also be flowers
never given to us by those
whom we so...

And they will also be there.
And we will have time for them all,
and they will have time for us,
because there's plenty of time in heaven – all of eternity.

And no one will ever be jealous,
and no one will fall into depression,
and no one will take their own death
or banish themselves from heaven
claiming they're fed up with playing the harp.

Because we all
Have nowhere
 left
 to go.

... And if anyone doesn't like the harp,
they will be given a drum set.

Because Lord's mercy knows no bounds.

* * *

For Svetlana Chernyshova

It's easy to write of the sea, of freedom, of dreams,
and – of course! – of the desperately dreamy seagulls
when you live in a snow-white seaside town
that knows no snow,
a town whose streets cheerfully gather
to the calls of Poseidons, Amphtrites, and Tritons,
and you – you wake up and fall asleep to the sound of surf
as salty clouds drift above.

No-o-o, try to write of freedom, the sea, and dreams
when you've lived all your life in a giant,
hopelessly dry and landlocked metropolis
where the rain smells of nothing but wet asphalt
and occasionally of freshly shaved lawns
and never of faraway strange lands.
Where there are no seagulls, only dirty proud pigeons,

where clouds are not salty but scorched,
in fact they're not even clouds but smog and smoke
from nearby forest fires.

Write about it, please!
Use your imagination, prove your professionalism!
Write of the doleful dolphins, of marmalade mermaids
(can't do without the mermaids) and other naïve naiads.
Can't do it?

... But the best at writing about the sea, freedom, and dreams
will be the blind poet born in the desert
who's never even known the smell of wet asphalt.
He will write a new *Odyssey*.
Because the sea is inside.

[Tatiana Vinogradova](#), poet, critic and graphic artist, was born in Moscow on Jan.15 1965. She graduated from the Journalist Department of Moscow State University in 1990. She took the post-graduate course and defended her Ph.D. thesis on Russian rock-poetry in 1997. She is a member of Moscow Writers Union (since 2002), International Federation of Artists, and Moscow Organization of Literary Persons. Her poems have been published in literary journals and anthologies in Russia as well as in other countries.

The Last Poet of the Village, [Anton Yakovlev](#)'s book of translations of poetry by Sergei Yesenin, was published by Sensitive Skin Books in 2019. His latest English-language poetry chapbook is *Chronos Dines Alone* (SurVision Books, 2018), winner of the James Tate Prize. He is also the author of *Ordinary Impalers* (Kelsay Books, 2017) and two prior chapbooks. His poems have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The New Criterion*, *The Hopkins Review*, *Measure*, *Posit* and elsewhere. Born in Moscow, Anton is a graduate of Harvard University and a former education director at Bowery Poetry Club in New York City.

Dana Kurskaya (1986)

Дана Курская (1986)

Translated into English by Nina Kossman

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When you are drunk ...

When you are drunk
and you yell at me
that no one needs you
that everyone laughs at you,
and also something about your pain,
if, at that moment,
you took me to a mirror
you would notice
that my eyes
were amazingly similar
to those of plush animals
that are left on graves
These animals are called
to support and encourage
children
on their way to the world of death.
But they never asked
anyone for this.
They did not choose
this fate.

A Gull

There, over the lake, are blue shadows
at the bottom - silent fish, gull bones
fallen stars, which turned into sea stars
we stand still at the very edge of the water
we do not breathe

How the high reed sways, bends in the wind,
ripples multiply as with a beaded thread, as though
the Earth begins to rotate faster
All life will make
will make a sad circle

And the thing spinning under our feet
is not the sandy beach
but boards
merely a stage

and those red eyes are not the Devil's
it's the spotlight
and we're almost done acting

and there is a first soft clap
as if a bottle of ether burst
Take us all far away from here
Thing is, Konstantin Gavrilovich shot himself

[Dana Kurskaya](#), born in 1986 in Chelyabinsk, Russia, has been living in Moscow since 2005. She is the author of two poetry collections, *Nothing Personal*, and *Giving Evidence*. She has been widely published in journals, newspapers and online magazines, including *New Youth*, *Day and Night*, *Khreshchatyk*, *Auto-graph*, *45th Parallel*, *Network Literature* and others. She was the recipient of numerous literary awards and has been shortlisted for a number of prizes.

Moscow born [Nina Kossman](#) is a painter, bilingual writer, poet, and playwright. Her publications include two books of poems in Russian and in English, two volumes of translations of Marina Tsvetaeva's poems (*In the Inmost Hour of the Soul* and *Poem of the End*), a collection of stories about her Moscow childhood, an anthology she edited for Oxford University Press (*Gods and Mortals: Modern Poems on Classical Myths*), a new book of English poems, two books of short stories, and a novel. Her translations of Russian poetry have been anthologized in *Twentieth Century Russian Poetry* (Doubleday, 1993), *The Gospels in Our Image* (Harcourt Brace, 1995), *The World Treasury of Poetry* (Norton, 1998), and *Divine Inspiration* (Oxford University Press, 1998). Her Russian short stories and poems have been published in Russian literary magazines in and outside of Russia. Her English poems and short stories have been published in a wide spectrum of American and Canadian literary magazines, e.g. *Tin House*, *The Columbia Journal*, *The Threepenny Review*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Columbia*, *Confrontation*, etc., and have been translated into several languages, including Japanese, Dutch, and Greek. Two of her plays have been produced off-off Broadway. One of her plays was included in Best Women Playwrights 2000. She received a UNESCO/PEN Short Story Award, an NEA fellowship, and grants from Foundation for Hellenic Culture, the Onassis Public Benefit Foundation, and Fundacion Valparaíso. She lives in New York.

Vlad Gagín (1993)

Влад Гагин (1993)

Translated into English by Anna Krushelnitskaya

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A Few Questions about Combinations

1.

on some photos it looks like the edge of the world,
beyond which there is nothing but the shore and retirees
but is it really true? No, it's a large American city
the color red: road signs, rows of stoplights, advertisements
the color red cutting into the dark bubble of the ghetto
of gentrified blocks, and I
feel like I've already stood at this intersection, I feel
I feel like, yes – perhaps a dream, on acid
the moment of re-learning... the moment of the return of speech
a second, as they say, before the catastrophe
a second before the catastrophe you were having coffee
no one was quietly twisting your fingers, fingers
where do pyrrhics come from, Elizaveta?
let me rephrase the question: in what way do these words, these schemes
combine with what I know about the instances of torture? Large
American cities are pierced by inner nighttime movement
I feel that someone is squirming inside a constrictive bag, fighting to break free
trying – fingers, fingers – everyone bouncing off one another
losing minds inside the Ludwig corpus, molding links
but there's no more talking of the pyrrhics, not even
of the possibility of thinking about them, and what of the large
American cities pretending to be seashores? Who
Knows; perhaps, those streets, as well, are closed, taped off

2.

enough with the questions: whether they are about what the intersection is
where I stand or stood somewhere in a dream,
or about how the terror engulfing me, as well as
the joy engulfing me, are linked to
the manufacture of boring services
the clothes sewed of hunger
the daily grind in which all of us move
like through a tunnel of eternal shortage

eternal shortage, surplus, ennui –
and many inner loci are filled with malice
I understand people in uniform, in combination with
the horror at the intersection a “second” before the catastrophe
the joy at the intersection a “second” before the catastrophe
but where it that intersection, concealed
in a barely perceptible fold, in the loci covered in fog?
It doesn't matter – simply
reassemble the self-blindfolded
without vision, without the option of looking around
interminable flashes of instructions do not work for the blind
An American city masquerading as a seashore
as a complex environment – the abandoned buildings
the shallows, the evidence of time, remembered by the sand
a landscape which only exists
as a virtual response to virtuality
a picture of a part of a large American city
a intersection crossing into night
a complex environment locus, a counter-torture practice
performed in another room of the Ludwig corpus
on the blind who may be seeing a little farther

* * *

gray April light in a narrow window
the music played for the first time in a Lithuanian church
the music of glitchy grace, a long
conversation with the parents after which
mama forgot to hang up, which means
to end the call, and I hear their intonations
sounding faraway through a wall of interference, but I don't understand a word

the days when everything moves away, the distant background
a videogame character, recurring details
note: a lecture making background noise from the laptop
or, otherwise, columns of pictures multiplying
there will be many more of them or else at some point
we will close our photo albums, our eyes
pass by the world waves, of any kind,

like the TV noise in the parents' bedroom
if the historian is not acquitted
I may kill myself, you said
to politicize depression is the best way to do it

but today a happy gray April
light falls on our faces, so we celebrate bit by bit
a pause in terrifying broadcasts, watching another movie

isn't humankind in any way like the monster
virus you keep under your skin?
sometimes I feel like everything exists
only to keep on suffering, to keep organs
exploding inside, cells warring with one another
a pinkish spacesuit burns up again in the atmosphere
a few thoughts are offered on this occasion

by the gray April light in a narrow window
the music played for the first time in a Lithuanian church
the music of glitchy grace, a long
conversation with the parents after which
mama forgot to hang up, which means
to complete the call and I hear their voices
through a wall of interference, just like mine, but I don't understand a word

[Vlad Gagín](#) was born in Ufa, Bashkortostan. He currently lives in St. Petersburg where he completed an MA in Philology at St. Petersburg State University. His poems have been published in magazines, such as *New Literary Review*, *Dreams*, *Cirk olimp*, *Flags*, *Articulation*, *Snob*, *notknowing* and others. He is one of the Editors of the *Stenogramme* magazine. He was shortlisted for the Arkady Dragomoshchenko Award in 2019. Vlad Gagín is a regular participant of the poetry workshop *Krasnoe Znanie* (Red Knowledge). In 2020 his book *Like Engagement in the Dark* was published by the independent bookstore Word Order.

[Anna Krushelnitskaya](#) was born on the Sakhalin Island in the Soviet Far East. She grew up in the Siberian city of Chita, where she graduated from the Trans-Baikal State University with a degree in Foreign Language Education. Anna taught college in Russia before moving to the US in 2004. In the US, she worked as a teacher, court interpreter, Red Cross instructor, and garden hand. Anna lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan with her husband and three children. She enjoys freelance writing, literary translation and blogging on Soviet topics. Anna will have her translations appear in forthcoming collections of Soviet ww2 poetry, contemporary Russian free verse and two Soviet children's literature anthologies slated for publication in 2021. In 2019, Anna published *Cold War Casual*, a collection of transcribed oral testimony and interviews translated from Russian into English and from English into Russian that delve into the effect of the events and the government propaganda of the Cold War era on regular citizens of countries on both sides of the Iron Curtain. © Translations: Anna Krushelnitskaya, 2020.

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If you want to delve deeper into the work of a poet or translator featured in this issue, some of the previous issues of *Four Centuries, Russian Poetry in Translation* may certainly be worth looking into! Here are the references you will need.

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Translators

- Nina Kossman: 21; 24
- Ian Probststein: 3-10; 12; 14; 17; 18; 21; 24
- Maxim D. Shrayer: 2; 4; 7; 11; 15; 16
- Tatiana Rebecca Shrayer: 16

Poem titles / first lines in Russian

Vladimir Gandel'sman

- Днем в комнате зимы начальной
- Идя из школы музыкальной
- Набросок
- И сосны как церковный хор
- Воскрешение матери
- О, вечереет чернеет

Nina Iskrenko

- Песнь жаворонка

Dana Kurskaya

- Когда ты, будучи пьян ...
- Чайка

Boris Pasternak

- Как бронзовой золой жаровень
- Весна
- На страстной
- В больнице

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- Лермонтов
- Чакона

Aleksandr Pushkin

- Узник
- Редет облаков летучая гряда ...
- Зима. Что делать нам в деревне?
- Прощание
- Не дай мне бог сойти с ума.
- Письмо Татьяны

The Four Centuries Library

These are the books and periodicals collected in the library of our magazine. If not otherwise indicated they were donated by the publisher of *Four Centuries*.

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