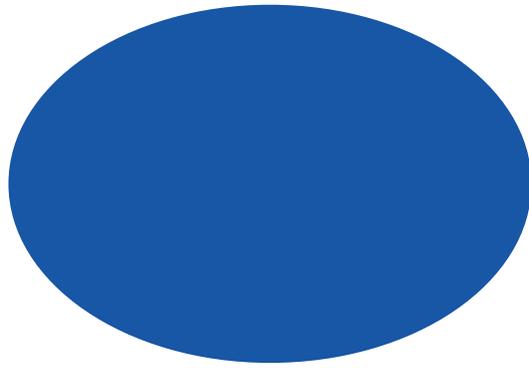


FOUR CENTURIES

Russian Poetry in Translation



8

2014



Four Centuries

Russian Poetry in Translation

fourcenturies@gmx.de

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Letter from the Publisher

Four Centuries Library

Dear Friends,

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

Dear Friends,

Thank you very much for reading our magazine.

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

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

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

B. Anthologies of Russian poetry translations

C. Periodicals with translations of Russian poetry

Please, send your donations to:

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

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

Yours,

Publisher

In this issue you will find new donations to the *Four Centuries Library* at page 38.

XIX

Alexander Shenin (1803 - 1855)

Александр Шенин (1803 - 1855)

A Cadet's Escapades

extracts from a long poem in two parts

Translated by Alex Cigale*

Book 1

I

Tomorrow, I depart from our academy,
A full-fledged corporal of the Royal Guard,
A red fringed mantle round my shoulders,
And very soon I'll be turning twenty one.

Alas, so sad that shortly I'll be leaving
The venerable pink old house on Garden Ring,
Where our debauchery knew no bounds,
Where the law of Sodom was enshrined.

A word of explanation here in order,
I'll tell you that all the military cadets
In the capital of our northern province
Are known philanderers, buggers or johns.

I wish in every detail now to share
With you the story of my escapades,
Among high society's exquisitely refined,
Pampered, and spoiled upper echelons.

Our day and age has seen revived the glory
Of ancient Rome and Greece and the Near East;
Those fabulous, long-standing customs
Have bloomed yet once again in their excess.

*Alex Cigale, translation, 2014

In sum, I was deprived of my innocence
The moment I was admitted to the ranks;
I was immediately corrupted,
And now, the sin of Sodom's my delight.

II

First among officers to become my suitor
Was a tall and handsome, dark-eyed adjutant.
He didn't waste much time or effort to
Tell me: "When will you give me what I want?"

He queried me directly, embraced me boldly,
Kissed me all over, wildly, passionately.
My ears began to tingle and my head spun;
My cheeks turned beet-red and I was stunned,

As though turned to stone under his spell...
He bossed over all of us, his the upper hand;
Being intelligent, skilled, and educated,
He easily cast all our objections aside:

It wasn't long before I too became his bride.
He took me by the hand and led me upstairs
Where the sheets and pillows lay piled up;
I followed quivering in my boots, uncertainly.

"You've come to our regiment so recently,
You cannot possibly yet know our ways.
We live here merrily, downright wonderfully.
And you will be our lady-in-waiting cadet.

It will not do that you remain a virgin.
You must take one of us as your gentleman.
And since to make a wise choice isn't easy,
Do not delay, choose me, I'm your best bet."

Together, he and I lay down on the sofa
And both of us stripped off our pants.

He had his fill of gazing at my bottom
And then he slipped his thin long pole inside.

I must say that at first it hurt a little,
Just when his shaft did penetrate my bum,
But soon enough I learned to like his diddle,
My lover took full pride in calling me his "son",

That he had won his bid to pop my cherry.
Before that point in time my heart was pure,
And only now I knew what love was really like.
Amor, my lord of coquetry attractive,

Had stuck his arrow straight into my heart;
I was in love, at first without measure,
With all-my soul though without knowing why.
When I did whisper in his ear so gently

That he for me is the perfect, ideal man,
He would feel up my ass and do it roughly,
And begged me please to let him bugger mine
Like a lady. His passion was so great that I

Powerlessly looked on as my great love,
Pure fire of the heart, was snuffed to nothing.
His name for me, in laughter and abandonment,
Was "my dearest and most sentimental lady",

And the meaning of his filthy, debased words,
I came to understand better as time went on.

III

No longer do I dare to doubt it,
My soul was created a woman's, a gal's.
My inclination is for manly muscles,
And I was given in life the lady's part.
My mind thinks only womanly ideas
And when I sing my voice is an octave high.

Being fragile, fearful, passive, it is fine
To list me a member of the weaker sex.

My derriere is broad, fat and capacious,
But with a waist that's narrow like a child's,
And for a man I'd say my height is slight;
A lady's shoe-size being a point of pride,

All find enthralling my womanly glide.
I waive my ass around like a magic wand,
Against my snowy skin my blue eyes shine:
It's only a regret I do not have a cunt,

That all a man can do is stroke my penis,
And with my fire-filled butt I still cannot,
Though much I've tried, replace a twat.
Its entryway commodious and hairless,

My lips are petite, pinkish-purplish, plump,
And my coquettish nose always turned up.
With dark blue eyes, exquisite face, a blonde,
I'm definitely a Miss and not, my Sir, a man.

IV

At first I was more than a little modest,
I stuck my ass out but thought it crass,
With a young girl's face and a gaze of longing,
And a smile endearing I played the part.

A youth whose looks are like a little lady's,
Everyone here I quickly managed to charm,
My body capable of giving pleasure,
I began to burn up everyone with lust.

And soon enough they all for me had fallen,
My lover was not the jealous kind,
He didn't care for cause or explanations,
Having all sorts of sordid things in mind.

I took upon myself to learn the ways of fashion,
My nickname soon became Cadet Devine.
I took all lovers on and when they offered
I gently, lovingly squeezed their hands in mine.

Invariably the gentlemen that very moment
Would ask if we could make a date that night.
And every evening a different swain would
Join me, one after another, to share my bed.

The regiment began to swirl with rumor,
I had loose morals, was a whore, a tart.
Batting my eyelashes, flashing "come-hither",
I prayed on my lovers, and made them hard.

My red lips working overtime I licked them
Generously, getting their pricks to stand up.
And with my swollen, capacious backside
Ardently pumped them, humping on and on.

I dove into the depth of tortuous pleasure,
And then a new diversion joined my repertoire.

V
All sort of other kinds of mischief followed
And with no special effort on my part
I managed to make valuable connections
Among our bleak capital's mounds and lumps.

That winter I diligently made the rounds
Of all the masquerades in women's clothes,
My costume, ladies wear, I displayed proudly,
Arrayed in lacey gossamer silk stockings
Gartered on buttons just above the knee.
Like a Parisienne, an alluring sight,
In high couture sandals to dance at the ball,
And oversized bows dripping from all sides.

Fashionable dress out of a French catalogue,
Face fully covered, or a black domino mask,
Backside perfumed with eau de cologne,
I aimed to hide my unobtrusive member

Behind a front of sweetly scented flowers;
Hems of my cambric shirt trimmed round
With a broad fringe of hand-knitted lace,
And underneath my skirt, my naked thighs.

My bracelet dazzled them with diamonds:
Ball gloves extending above the elbow,
And bustier exposing a nipple for a flash,
So terribly effective in giving men a rise.

I was exceptionally happy then, felt alive.
Innocently flirting with everyone
I searched out all my admirers so we could
Peacefully screw at leisure later on;

I'd make a date to meet them at LeGrand's.
There, lured by sweet orgies, my participants
Would fly aboard a snowy troika sledge,
Bopping along stone-paved bumps as a gang,

Becoming thus engorged with blood and lust.
Arriving there, they'd pull my skirts up high
And opening wide my voluptuous bottom
Proceed to cover it with kisses, first, then blind

Would fuck me in the ass till I was nearly bust.
My company of friends had given me a name
Full of romantic overtones. Natasha - I was,
The honorific - young Countess Pavlovna.

I spoke pretending that I was a woman;
It happened to me more than once that I was

Doubly banged, by two lovers, from both sides:
While I was busy sucking one's cock the other

Would have his way with my behind.
And on occasion a man would take my foot
And kiss it, shod as it was in a satin pump,
While fondling and jerking off my rod,

Another penetrating with tongue my crack.
I sensed the full sweetness of their incursions
As well as if my buttocks were made a cunt;
The flush of youth seeks out carnal pleasures

To soothe all craving, and tastes of every kind.
My education, bodily and soul, had lasted
The two years of my enrollment as cadet,
And there I tasted the long forbidden fruit,

And found my love and happiness in men.

The 1843 pornographic poem, "Pokhozhdenia Pazha", though admittedly of minor literary merit, will perhaps be of interest to some as a parody of Pushkin, for its place in the long tradition of Petronius, Ovid, Catullus, Boccaccio, de Sade, etc., and in light of the recent Russian "anti-gay" laws. Though not overtly biographical, or even based in reality, the author of the work, a respected lexicographer and instructor at a military academy, was forced to retire and was ultimately exiled, dying in poverty. Though circulated privately during the 1840s, it was first published only posthumously, in 1879 in Geneva, in a limited edition of 100 copies.

Alex Cigale

Alex Cigale has been awarded a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship for his work on Mikhail Eremin. From 2011 till 2013 he was Assistant Professor at the American University of Central Asia in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

XX

Innokenty Annensky (1855 - 1909)

ИННОКЕНТИЙ АННЕНСКИЙ (1855 - 1909)

Translated by Ian Probstein*

* * *

I don't know, I can't explain...
Do I love or do I die?
Is it a dream or is it Verlaine?
Is it a spell or a prison cell?

Either the torture of the ideal
Or the beauty's torment
Is spilled in the whole world
From a broken goblet.

The dream might be wrong as well
Whether she is the one,
In the light of the ideal
The dream might guess in vain
Is it spell or a prison cell?
Is it a dream or is it Verlaine?

But the roses of my cell
Breathed the scent to my lips,
And my dream will sing again
To the music of Verlaine.

Petersburg

A yellow vapor of Petersburg winter,
Yellow snow is clinging to slabs of pavement...
I don't know where *you* and *we* are,
But I know that we are tightly blended.

Were we created by the tsar's decree?
Did the Swedes forget to drown us?
It is only the stones and scary truth that we
Have instead of the fairy-tales of the past.

The magician gave us only stones
And the rusty-brownish Neva River
And the deserts of dumb squares where
They beheaded people at dawn.

What we did have in our land,
What made our two-headed eagle soar high,
Was our dark-laurelled giant on the rock's end
That will turn tomorrow into a child's toy.

He was so terrible and brave,
Yet a wild steed failed him, alas:
The tsar could not crush the snake,
And squeezed, it became our idol.

Neither kremlins, nor relics, nor miracles,
Nor mirages, nor smiles, nor tears...
Only stones from the frozen wilderness
And a grasp of a damned error.

Even in May, when the shadows
Of white nights are spilled over the waves,
It is not the spell of spring dreams
But the poison of futile desires.

* * *

Whether a star dims
Or an earthly torment lasts,
I never pray since
I cannot pray, alas.

Time will extinguish the star,
We'll cope with torment on our own;
When I go to church, if at all
I stand next to a Pharisee, alone.

Speechless, with him I will kneel
And with him, I'll rejoice and revive...
Why then deep inside me
Should a publican grieve and strive?

Ian Probstein, assistant professor of English in Tour College, New York, a bilingual English-Russian poet and translator of poetry, is writing poetry and on poetry. He published seven books of poetry in Russian, one in English, and more than twenty books and anthologies of poetry in translation. He has translated poetry from English, Spanish, Italian, and Polish into Russian and from Russian into English. A bilingual edition of *Complete Poems and Selected Cantos* of Ezra Pound, which he compiled, edited, commented, and of which he is one of the major translators, was the Best Book of 2003 in Translation and Poetry in Russia. *Collected Poems* of T. S. Eliot in Russian with Dr. Probstein's 50-page introduction, 65-page commentaries was published by Astrel in 2013 in Moscow's Astrel Publishing. Mr. Probstein is also one of the three translators alongside Andrei Sergeyev and Victor Toporov.

Sergej Gandlewsky

Сергей Гандлевский*

Übersetzt von Anna Davidian**

Translated into German by Anna Davidian**

* * *

Es quietscht? Dann nimm ein Zeitungsstückchen,
Leg' es zusammen als Quadrat
Und pass' so an, dass dieses Türchen
Zubleibt, wenn man es nötig hat.

Im steinernen Stadtbrunnen rieselt
Der erste dünne Schnee ganz hoch.
Das war's schon alles, doch noch offen
Ist eine kleine Schuld jedoch.

Noch müsste sich ein Mensch erinnern,
Was er im Leben nicht gemacht
Auf dem Weg zur Apotheke
In der pulsierend stillen Nacht.

Unter der roten Schlange stehen,
Das Böse ohne Bosheit sehen
Nie hat aus Güte, sondern weil
Sein Leben ist damit vorbei.

*© Сергей Гандлевский

**©Anna Davidian, translation, 2014

* * *

Als ich in jetzt und hier lebte,
Mit dieser Luft und diesem Licht,
Und diese Handlungen vollbrachte,
Die anderen dagegen nicht,
Mal schwieg, mal mutig aussagte,
Gebunkert hab' und angelegt,
Mich aufregte, weinte, lachte
Und schließlich nichts zurückgelegt -
Und jetzt, wo schließlich ich gestorben
Und zur Materie geworden
Wird weder Kirkegaard noch Buber
Erklären mir, zu welchem Zweck
Und aus welchem vieler Gründe,
Zu welchem einzigen Anlass
Ich wurde wach zur späten Stunde
Und durch die Gegend starrend saß...

Sergey Gandlevsky, 1952, started publishing his poems in the 1980s and today he is one of the most famous contemporary Russian poets. Winner of the *Russian National Poetry Prize* in 2010, both *Little Booker Prize* and the *Anti-Booker Prize* for his poetry and prose, he has published a number of books of poetry, prose as well as essays and a memoir.

Anna Davidian works in Hamburg as a translator and interpreter. She devotes her free time to translating Russian poetry into German. She took part in the well-known poetry festival "Pushkin in Britain".

Kiril Korčagin

Кирилл Корчагин*

Prevedla v slovenščino Jelka Ciglenečki**

Translated into Slovene by Jelka Ciglenceki**

* * *

sneg v vdrtinah v motnem
kinu se premika svetloba
v mikroskopskih vdrtinah
in rumeneča svetloba od znotraj
napolnjuje gube

tako drsi vso noč neizbežni
masiv in koraki odzvanjajo
po hodniku veselje nam nosijo
in praznik nosijo prekinejo
nepremično streljanje topov

kdo živi na teh svetlih dvoriščih
pušča prižgano luč kuha
težko hrano in bleščeče žalovanje
se prebija skoze metež
in okna zvenečega mraza

zajame juh veter vlažen
dotik raztopljenih
oblakov na s snegom zožanem
vzponu v luknjičavih gubah
v neskončni ljubezni kamnov

* © Кирилл Корчагин

** © Jelka Ciglenceki, translation, 2014

putra

z glasovi muz obkroženi
z izmaličenimi radijsimi oddajami
s pasovi sedimentov
na fluorescenčnem ovoju
zaspijo v sprejemni sobi
kjer so vrtnice in slavčki
kovinski glossar
nad karminsko plesnijo jezera

zaspri v tihem miru
vse tišju in pridušen
razsekan in znova
s snegom drsečim drgetajoča
s hostijo pod jezikom
v alkimistični poškodbi
v neizbežnem listju
znova se premika spanec in nad njim

živosrebrni oblaki smejalnega
plina posušenih trav počasen
tok in ta, ki leti nad oceanom
zamre in valovi reliefov
se cedijo z nalomljenim zvenom
med tem ko pod sloji pene na obalo
skupaj z smetmi atlantika
valovi odlagajo ribe

* * *

začela so me zanimati dejstva
in z njimi povezani procesi
šel sem tja kjer je
luminiscenčna noč

kjer drsi ravnodušen
hlad in plašno polni
vsako besedo vsaki besedi
zvest in brez življenja v hrustljavi
barbarski nagoti

tako se okrog mene obrača
drgeta in diha nemirni
vodni masiv brez zraka in to kar je
sonce odrezalo z njegovega roba in je ostalo
nekje ob meni

in če si ne zapomniš
večine tega ti preostane le da gledaš
kako se prevrne v taktilni
peklen koža suha vlažna koža
na pregibih komolcev

* * *

trkajo v neredu se dotikajo krožijo
nekakšne točke in tančica za njimi
in ne da se ravno približujejo pač pa
se blizu ne glede kdo se pojavi
dvigajo navzgor stebri čeprav
jim vroč puh ne pusti da bi se vso
višino dvignili k nečemu to je če
preprosto sojijo in čakajo ne na
videz ne da jih ne bi obšla groza a tudi ne brez
opustošenosti celo če
bomo trije in se bodo hrbti dotikali
potem tak jutranji zrak nastanjen
na višini ki nam več ne pripada

agora

kdo bi se spomnil teh uličic
gričevja njihovih lukenj njihovih jarkov
v njih vsi ležimo poletni
in zbirajo se zvoki in se razletijo
zvoki in se znova zbirajo

kot v ovojih vzvišenih
traja s praskajočim jezikom
koplje in glej zavrti se
v rokah ki pregledujejo
pod madeži delavske obleke

dvignil bi se skupaj z njimi
na iglaste gore harza
raztekal bi se od enega vrha
do drugega zapolnjeval bi špranje svetlobe
prerešettane perspektive

nedaleč od praznika pa vendar
sredi hladnih vej
toliko jih je sklenjenih
izgublja se pogled in počasi
se z vrha premika svetloba

* * *

glej tako se združita na dvorišču noč in pod vodo glas

razprostirale so se stepe in sanje so plašile
skrbelo je gošče na hladno zemljo
ko popotnik zlatolasi
ne zmeni se za prah es ist zeit sagt mir in mi

odprta so vrata okna se ne svetijo in glas je drugačen
(na napev stare pesmi)

il pleut im stillen raum kako v srcu poje
odsek dneva
a dima se ne vidi samo megla se dviga
nad neskončnimi grapami poljska miš
ribiško pesem poje

rastline med kamni in ta in drug v nastopajoči tišini

kot lovci v praznih vaseh in ti ki jim pridejo nasproti
in ti ki gredo po sledih veselo pesem pojejo
ki razlega se nad polji
kot na rokah romarja nesejo

(tako poje angel z nami)

Trava pa kakor se spodobi ponikne pod zemljo

necah

ponoči spijo tone kamnov
in bukov gozd jih straži
nedvomno ljubimci spijo
pokriti s senco listov

v vozlih vej nabrekajo
neločljivi plodovi in sklepi
neločljivi
in s tokovi se zemlja ne bo dvignila
in potoki bodo nežni

in tudi toliko ptic nikoli
nisem videl v bleščečem perju
ta zrak in vlaga
in veje teh dreves

ki pokrivajo kačje brloge
polne molka in tišine
v opustošenosti
izmaličenega sonca

Kirill Korchagin, 1986, poet and critic, graduated from Moscow State Institute of Radio Engineering, Electronics and Automation and took up postgraduate studies at the V. V. Vinogradov Russian Language Institute of the Russian Academy of Science, where he is working now as a researcher. He is one of the founders of poetic section of the National Corpus of the Russian Language. He has curated a number of literary projects and published his poems in the main literary journals of Russia. His poems have been translated into English, French, Slovene, Serbian and Latvian. He has won some prestigious literary awards for his poetry and critical studies.

Jelka Ciglenceki, 1980, was born in Ptuj and now lives in Ljubljana, Slovenia. She studied comparative literature and Russian language and literature at the Academy of Arts in Ljubljana. She spent one year in Moscow studying Russian literature at the Peoples' Friendship University. She translates Russian poetry and prose into Slovene (Gazdanov, Bitov, Dovlatov, Dragomostchenko, Fanailova, Ivaniv etc.). She is a member of Slovene Translators' Association and Slovene Literary Critics' Association. In 2008 she received Stritar's Award for Best Slovene Literary Critic.

Andrei Sen-Senkov
Андрей Сен-Сеньков*

Tradução de Ana Hudson**

Translated into Portuguese by Ana Hudson**

Eléctricos portugueses - percursos

* * *

em Évora também são as cegonhas que trazem os bebés
voando ainda sem carga vão tocando
pedaços de céu com as garras furtivas
modelando o rosto da criança que há-de vir
com base nos fragmentos das caveiras

* * *

só no céu
no norte
no porto
se um pingo desse vinho se entorna,
fica ferido geme baixinho pelo ar
e quando cai
escurece
como uma maçã mordida

* © Андрей Сен-Сеньков

** © Ana Hudson, translation, 2014, from the English version by Ainsley Morse

* * *

há duzentos anos que em lisboa
se opera no *hospital das bonecas*
um hospital de brinquedos
onde se trata
dos que estão partidos dos que já não conseguem chorar
dos que já não têm rodas dos que têm o coração despedaçado
de nós

dos que pelo menos uma vez na vida
lamberam grades de metal em dias de gelo

* * *

na rua das matemáticas em coimbra
numeram-se as casas em deliberada desordem
quando deus vem
para como de costume matar alguém
fica confuso
vira a cabeça da esquerda para a direita da esquerda para a direita
como um espectador num jogo de ténis entre o bem e o mal
quando a contagem está prestes a atingir o empate

ÁFRICA EM TRÊS REFEIÇÕES

pequeno-almoço

aqui quando chove
chove por muito tempo

assim como
uma transfusão de sangue translúcido

almoço

a maioria dos insectos esquisitos
deste mundo (que não são nada deste mundo)
parecem ter sido concebidos
durante um coito magnificamente interrompido

jantar

a deus branco aborrece-se em África
a quando tem visitas
esconde-se
atrás da porta
entretém-se
a fingir que é criança
e diz com uma
vózinha
"Não posso abrir a porta,
os meus pais não estão em casa"

Andrej Sen-Senkov was born in 1968 in Tajikistan. He graduated from the Medical Academy in Jaroslavl. He is the author of eleven books. He has been shortlisted for Andrej Belyj Prize three times and has been translated into sixteen languages.

Ana Hudson is responsible for "*Poems from the Portuguese*", www.poemsfromtheportuguese.org, the most comprehensive anthology of 21st century Portuguese poetry online and offline, which she set up and devised. Her translations have been published in literary magazines and e-magazines. She is a contributor to the two most important international poetry websites, *Lyrikline*, www.lyrikline.org, and *Poetry International Web*, www.poetryinternationalweb.net. Her translations have been read in several international poetry festivals and events in Europe, the USA and South Africa. She has a BA in translation, BAHons in Modern Languages and Literatures, a PGTTTC, and an MA in Portuguese Studies.

Veniamin Blazhennyi (1921 - 1999)

ВЕНИАМИН БЛАЖЕННЫЙ (1921 - 1999)

Translated by Ian Probstein*

Sandglass

Sandglass shows time as if all arguments and wars
Of all the kings and shahs
And their palaces and harems were weighed
And blown like sand away.

Sandglass! Where are those noble lords
Who indulged themselves in wine and love
And caressed slave girls with tender
Sand-soft skin and hot poison in their blood?...

Sandglass! Where are those colorful bazaars
Where those merchants with Oriental eyes
And amber beads in their hands
Who sat in their brightly painted stands?...

Sandglass! Where are those poets
Who pale with inspiration,
Sang canzoni and couplets at the courts
Of European princes? Where is their dust?

Sandglass! Where are those carnivals
Of careless Italian cities?
Where are those facemarks and lips like corals
Of graceful women - dancing wives and widows?

Oh, sinful world - it was so hot and greedy
And proud for its valor and beauty. Alas!
It was devoured grain by grain by minutes
And sank into sand without trace like dew.

Sandglass! I watch your work
With rage and horror
As if I were rye for threshing
And had been already thrashed by time...

Sandglass! I'm perhaps still smaller than
A grain of sliding greedy sand.
I slide and sink like sand between men and women
And therefore I'm weighed down by angst.

Sandglass! How merciless is time!
It's hanging like an ax, our predestined end.
Yet, not an ax cuts down our crown -
It's sand, sand, sand...

* * *

Yet I managed to tell them before I left
That I will never be myself again,
I begged them to forgive my getting wild,
When I lift up my bushy furry tail.

When I regain my former face at last -
Never mind that it resembles an ugly muzzle -
I will enjoy meowing and howling and
I will be proud to have a fluffy tail.

Only the beasts know all the secrets of being
Hidden in the depth of their mysterious pupils,

Following the night with their sleepless eyes,
They roam along a cloudy Milky Way.

Only the beasts are so open-minded that
They are not afraid to go to the end of the world:
Neither heat nor cold can break them,
They are unmoved by earthly merry-go-round.

6 March 1992

* * *

I ask you to forget me completely in this world,
And scatter the needless memory of me like fluff,
And let old men and children in various ways
Call my old Biblical name of Benjamin.

And let some bore call me a fable,
He forgot that I sat like a bird on his hump
While he tried to fly with his weak wings
But could not overcome his fear and master his fate.

Well, children in their pigeon tongue
Will call me a wizard. I truly am that old sorcerer
Who once turned fearlessly the entire world upside down,
That happened in some God-forgotten year.

That happened when I was so fleshless
That only eyes were left in my frail body,
But both a bird and a beast liked me in a way,
And a dragonfly looked at the world through my eyes.

6 December 1992

* * *

They did not need the simple confessions of an angel,
They needed man's hungry lips,
And while my childish soul wept nearby,
I heard their laughter - mocking, coarse, sweet.

So I thought that a woman was a body fodder of devil,
That buffalo cows shook the world with their heavy feet,
And above them were scarlet and crimson heights
Where God's birds were burning alive.

Then I walked away indifferently as if I were blind,
Leaving offenses, fear and sorrow behind,
Being faithful only to a magical feline crowd,
And my feline girlfriend caressed me with her furry paw.

22 March 1994

* * *

They spoke apathetically and lightly
And their speech was enlivened with jokes
And the queen of seduction reigned at the ball,
A very talkative wench.

All the trials of life seemed trifles to them
But the talk would pause for a while
As if some idol ruled the talk
With an intimate and lecherous smile.

As they were chatting at Olympus,
Their soft gestures were so graceful
And the fingers suck like lazy flies
In a raspberry syrrop of a worldly lust.

9 July 1995

Poem of Departure

More than life I loved a miraculous bird of freedom,
The one that once loomed to me in a dream,
I have learned only a proud move of departure,
And I leave, leave - don't say your farewell to me.

I leave the talks of those with stomachs full and peaceful,
Whose stoop bald heads count profits meanwhile,
Whose each nod is meticulously designed and measured,
I'm not scared of thunder - I'm afraid of your mercantile whisper.

With indifference, I leave your high truths,
Luminaries of art, petty swindlers,
Selling lyres and brushes as goddamn goods,
Counting your pennies on soiled counters.

I am leaving you, selling rich bodies,
Masters of borsht and of sexual pleasures,
Using cabbage, onion, loins, front and rear
To back up your husbands and to steer their career.

How you value your profits and your peace of mind,
Young misers and shaky old men,
I was born an outcast and lived a wolf's life,
And I don't need a thing from your stinking hands,

This land will never forgive me my wolf's stature,
Distributed cattle will never forgive me my pride,
Lame miles drive me into an ambush astride,
And a rifle round will mark my departure.

My fate was governed only by wind and by freedom,
I don't regret a thing: I lived as my soul desired:
I roamed at dawn in the field like rain and like snow,
And thunderbolts stuck in the ravines of my ears.

No, I am not a wolf, not a beast - I have bitten no one,
Having roamed half a century-long way of milestones and fate,
An unknown friend to each downtrodden creature,
I was like Jesus to stray dogs and cats.

...If I happen to be in paradise, and the Lord
Will seem an unwise or misery or a funny old man,
Hungry as a dog, I will refuse his heavenly soup,
That soup, the heaven and God won't worth it a bit!

I will leave paradise - this heavenly capital city,
As I left earth and my home long time ago...
I will leave everything. I don't need a thing -
Oh, how a poor soul, a pauper can breathe freely at Last.

Benjamin Aizenshtadt (1921-1999) has chosen a pen-name Benjamin the Blessed. In Russian the word "blessed" can mean a freak, a jester, and a saint. The Soviet authorities treated him as a fool, a freak, an utterly unpractical person. Needless to say, none of Aizenshtadt's poems was published until the late 1980s. After the war, the poet was not allowed to finish his education because he was not a member of the communist party. Moreover, for his strange (anti-social) behavior he was from time to time put in a mental institution. Otherwise, he worked in a warehouse for the disabled, and took care of his wife, a disabled veteran of WW II. For the last 20 years of his life he barely left his apartment in Minsk, Belarus. Beginning from the 1980s his poems started to appear in periodicals and immediately startled the critics who did not know how to classify them: Blazhennyi did not fit in any school or trend. It was well after the so-called perestroika, when poets, critics, and publishers frequented his tiny apartment, taking interviews and asking for poems. Thus how his books were published in Belarus, Russia, and Israel under the pen-name of Benjamin Blazhennyi (the Blessed). It is notable to say that St. Augustine is called Augustine the Blessed in Russian. Therefore the Blessed is a saint, the one who communicates with the Divine spirit. His poetry is full of powerful images: it is both pious and iconoclastic, sacred and profane, tranquil and full of fury.

Benjamin Aizenshtadt was born in 1921 in a small Byelorussian shtetl Kopys' in a Jewish family. His father, Michail was an unpractical man as well. As the poet wrote:

My father Michail Aisenshtadt was the biggest fool in town:
He claimed that wolf and lamb had soul.

He claimed that a mosquito and a fly had soul as well
He wore worn-out trousers and never learned to sell.

When a Jew was sorry for a wounded nestling of a jackdaw,
He did not need a store. Why would he need a store?

Before World War II Benjamin finished one year of a pedagogical college majoring in history. Since he had poor health, Aisenshtadt was not drafted into the army. The family managed to escape to a small village in Gorky oblast (now Nizny Novgorod) where Benjamin taught history at school. He discovered a rich library at school untouched by Bolshevik purges, and was copying books in his notebooks. After the war he visited his favourite poets in Moscow - Boris Pasternak and Arseny Tarkovsky. Pasternak was reluctant to meet with young emerging poets, perhaps fearing the ungifted who had the nerve to get a reference from famous poets and writers to the publishers. However, after reading Benjamin's poems he did not only welcome him, but their meeting started a lifetime friendship and correspondence. Aisenshtadt also wrote essays and memoirs of Pasternak.

Ian Probst

Anatoly Kudryavitsky*
Анатолий Кудрявицкий*

Four Prose Poems

Translated by Siobhán McNamara**

The Wind of History

The beggar stood in the underpass beside the Education Ministry. Catching sight of a rare passer-by, he unbuttoned his minister's overcoat with the flair of a conjurer. The art of the future, that he had promised years ago, started emerging from little pockets full of poets, musicians and actors. He groped for one of these figures and began blowing it up with vain air.

Nobody was paying him any attention; everyone was just hurrying by. Closer to night-time, a pair of culturally-concerned passers-by threw in the idea of blowing up all the figures straight away.

At last, the clock struck midnight. The figures gaped at the concert and theatre posters, and bowed like puppets in the wind.

* © Anatoly Kudryavitsky

** © Siobhán McNamara, translations, 2014

Nostalgia

Gogol returned to Italy one hundred and fifty years later - this time under the name Tarkovsky. Every so often dodging mopeds, he strolled around the Palatine and then unexpectedly ended up at the tomb of Roman literature. The tomb frightened him - he didn't like tombs, literature or even Rome. He flinched painfully, and returned to his hotel. He took his key from the porter, and noticed that he was being reflected in other people's mirrors once again. His chin looked familiar, but his lips were speaking a language he didn't know, thought Gogol. What were they saying? That it's easy to translate a person into another dialect, but who's going to read him?

In the evening he fixed a swan quill that he had found in a park, and wrote in his notebook in flame-coloured ink: "He who reads not what is written by me, but me, finds a strange pleasure in this. Otherwise he wouldn't amuse himself with this for so long. Essentially he could slam the book shut without any moral consequences for himself. I could also snap myself shut, but I don't do this because I have the professional habit of reading two-volume novels to the end and watching two-part films until they put me to sleep."

Indiots

It is beautiful inside the heads of indiots - paper gardens blossom and little Cupid-decorated fountains gurgle. It is stuffy there, however, like in a closed orangery - we are only tickled very rarely by the artificial scent that escapes from it. Indiots have their own literature, films and songs, and none of this has really been studied, even though their language is the same as ours. Yet, indiots know the secret words of indiots, which are unknown to other people. And you'd never guess that we meet representatives of this alien, mysterious tribe every day on the street.

The Polish Corridor

Striding through Europe, Napoleon suddenly found himself in the Polish Corridor. This corridor was decorated with the crests of the Polish nobility and horned Teutonic heads. Napoleon was on his way to the Baltic, but for some reason he kept ending up in Eastern Prussia. The Russians also ended up there, and for bravery they shot at Napoleon with catapults, then immediately ran away and hid in Livonian marshes. Re-loading the catapults, they cried "The world needs peace!" Napoleon went forward obstinately, and, scratching the wool on his back, thought "I'll show you what peace means!" Eventually the pebbles stopped tickling his back. Napoleon was just about to rejoice when he discovered that he had unwillingly wandered into a peaceful future. He looked back, but couldn't see a single one of his soldiers behind him. When he finally managed to get out of the Polish Corridor, Napoleon found a way to return to the past, and, surly as a bear, set off voluntarily for the island of St. Helena to make the whole of Europe tremble.

Anatoly Kudryavitsky is a Russian-Irish poet and novelist. He has published three novels, seven collections of poems in Russian and three in English, the latest being *Capering Moons* (Doghouse Books, 2011). A book of his selected novels in English translation titled *Disunity* has been published by Glagoslav Publications (England/the Netherlands) in 2013. He was also editor of *A Night in the Nabokov Hotel*, an anthology of contemporary Russian poetry in English translation (Dedalus Press, 2006), and *Bamboo Dreams*, an anthology of Irish haiku poetry (Doghouse Books, 2012). He lives in Dublin, Ireland, and works as editor of *Shamrock Haiku Journal*.

Siobhán McNamara is an Irish literary translator, a member of the Irish Translators and Interpreters Association (ITIA). Some of her translations from contemporary Russian poets were published in English-language magazines. She researched into the works of Korney Chukovsky, a prominent Russian writer of the first half of the 20th century, and translated some into English. Her translation of *A Parade of Mirrors and Reflections*, a novella by Anatoly Kudryavitsky, has been published by Glagoslav Publications in 2013. She lives in Dublin, Ireland.

Four Centuries Library

Here are the books donated to the Library:

In German

69. Roshdestwenski, Robert. Poesiealbum 164. Übertragen von Herbert Krempien, Helmut Preißler und Günter Wünsche. Berlin: Verlag Neues Leben, 1981

70. Dudin, Michail. Poesiealbum 212. Übertragen von Helmut Preißler. Berlin: Verlag Neues Leben, 1985

72. Block, Alexander: Die Zwölf. Ausgewählte Dichtungen. Übertragung und Nachwort von Johannes von Guenther. Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 1966

In English

71. Mandelstam, Osip: Poems. Translated by Peter France. N. Y.: New Directions, 2014, ISBN 978-0-8112-2290-7