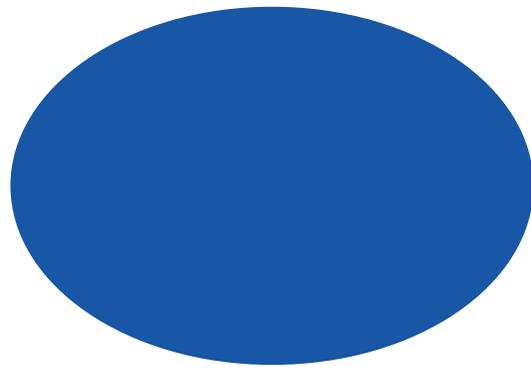


# FOUR CENTURIES

Russian Poetry in Translation



21

2019



Four Centuries. Russian Poetry in Translation  
fourcenturies@gmx.de

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The choice of colours for different languages is just random and has nothing to do either with national flags or national traditions.

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

## XX

Уладзімір Маякоўскі (1893 - 1930)

Владимир Маяковский (1893 - 1930)

Переклад Андрэя Хадановіча\*

Translated into Belorussian by Andrej Khadanovich\*

### А вы маглі б?

Я карту будня з маху змазаў,  
адкрыўшы п'янай фарбы рану.  
На дрогкай студзіне паказваў  
касыя скулы акіяну.

Мне новых вуснаў кліч здалёку  
гучаў лускай бляшаных рыб.

А вы  
на флейце вадасцёка  
накцюрн  
зайграць маглі б?

1913

### Наце!

Праз гадзіну па адным у чысты завулак  
брудным тлушчам адсюль пацечацё назад.  
А я паадчыняў вам столькі вершаў-шкатулак,  
я -- бясцэнных слоў мантач і магнат.

Вось вы, мужчына -- з вусамі ў капусце  
недаператраўленай, як вашае жыццё;  
вось вы, жанчына -- з пудраю ў найгусцейшым гусце,  
вустрыцаю з ракавіны рэчаў гледзіцё.

\* © Andrej Khadanovich, translation, 2019

Будзеце на мятліка паэтавага сэрца,  
брудныя, грувасціцца ў галёшах і без галёш,  
па адным і дзікай зграяй, з перцам і з імберцам --  
ашчацініць ножкі стагалова вощ.

Да абрыдне сёння мне, грубаму гуну,  
вам на смех крыўляцца, грывасячы плач, --  
і я зарагачу ды радасна пюну,  
пюну ў твар вам  
я -- бяспэчэнных слоў магнат і мантач.  
1914

### А ўсё-такі

Вуліца правалілася, нібы нос сіфілітыка.  
Рака -- юрлівай слінай па летнім чэраве.  
Зняўшы бялізну аж да апошняга лісціка,  
пахабна сады разваліліся ў чэрвені.

Я выйшаў на плошчу,  
спалены сквер  
надзеў на голаў, як рыжы парык.  
Людзі жахаюцца: рот мой -- ашчэр,  
дзе б'ецца нагамі непражаваны крык.

Але не асудзяць, не скажуць "камедыя".  
Як прароку, кветкамі ўсцелюць мне след.  
Бо кожны правалены нос добра ведае:  
я -- ваш паэт.

А калі суд ваш страшны -- не п'яныя чуткі,  
праз агонь і руіны з чорнымі зданямі,  
як святыню, мяне на руках панясуць прастытуткі  
і пакажуць богу ў сваё апраўданне.

І бог заплача над вершам, заахае:  
не словы -- у горле зліпаюцца курчы!  
І пабяжыць па небе з кніжкай маёй падпахаю,  
і будзе чытаць знаёмым, нервова курачы.

1914

### Паслухайце!

Паслухайце!  
Калі зоркі запальваюць --  
значыць -- гэта камусьці патрэбна?  
Значыць -- камусьці важна, каб зоркі былі?  
Значыць -- хтось называе тья плявочки  
срэбнымі?  
І праз завеі пылу паўднёвай зямлі  
ірвецца --  
баіцца спазніцца --  
да бога,  
плача,  
цалуе яму жылістыя рукі,  
просіць абавязкова --  
хоць зорку для неба сляпога! --  
клянецца --  
не вынесе гэтай бяззорнай мукі!  
А потым  
ходзіць трывожна,  
але трываючы вусціш.  
Некаму кажа:  
"Цяпер не страшна?  
Не горка?  
Болей святла?"  
Паслухайце!  
Калі зоркі запальваюць --  
значыць --  
гэта патрэбна камусьці ж?

Значыць -- яно неабходна,  
каб кожны вечар  
над дахамі  
хоць бы адзіная зорка была?!

1914

### **Вам!**

Вам, што пражываеце за оргіяй оргію,  
маеце ванну й клазет з падагрэвам!  
Над газетай -- з прадстаўленымі да Георгія --  
сорам вачэй не дзярэ вам?!

Вам, што пілі раскошу нагбом бы,  
помнячы войны толькі з падручніка, --  
лепей не ведаць, як вырвала бомбай  
ногі ў Пятрова паручніка!..

А калі б ён, прыведзены на забой,  
раптам убачыў, зранены,  
як вы перапэцканай у катлеце губой  
юрліва падпяваеце Севяраніну!

Ці вам, бяздарным, ласым да блуду,  
жыццё аддаюць ахвяры?  
Я лепей ваду ананасную буду  
блядзям падаваць у бары!

1915

## Гайнэпадобнае

З вачэй -- маланкамі -- бліскі:  
"Я з іншай  
цябе заспела!  
Ты самы подлы,  
ты самы нізкі..."  
б'е ў чорнае  
сэрца мне,  
белая.  
Не грыміце лірыкай, любая,  
бо мне фізіка не чужая:  
раз маланка не стала згубаю --  
то і гром,  
дальбог, не спужае.

1920

## Гора

Марна біўся аб вечар  
вечер нечалавечы.  
Кроплі крывавым рэхам  
мацалі гонту стрэхам.  
І аўдавелая ўночы  
поўня пайшла адзіночыць.

1920

## Люблю: фрагменты паэмы

### Юнаком

Юнацтву заняткаў маса.  
Граматыкам вучым дурняў, дурніц мы.  
Мяне ж,  
толькі вышыблі з 5-га класа,  
як сталі ў маскоўскія кідаць вязніцы.  
У вашым маленькім  
утульненькім свеціку  
на кожную спальнічку --  
па кучаравым паэціку.  
Што знойдзеш у гэтых балонкавых лірыках?  
Мяне вось  
любіць  
вучылі  
ў Бутырках.  
Што мне туга па Булонскім лесе?!  
Што мне куротныя ўздыхі ды пляжыкі?!  
Я вось  
"Бюро пахвальных працэсій"  
любіў  
праз "вочка" сваёй каталажкі.  
Глядзяць на сонца ў нудоце багемнай:  
"Нашто нам  
дурнога свяцілка праменне?"  
А я  
за сонечны зайчык  
на столі турэмнай  
аддаў бы тады паўсвету -- не меней.

## Мой універсітэт

Французскую ведаеш?  
Дзеліш?  
Множыш?  
Скланяць умееш?  
Навука файная!  
Скажы --  
а з домам спецца  
ці зможаш?  
Ці зразумееш мову трамвайную?  
Малы чалавечак --  
носам у спытах,  
ледзь выйдзе з яйка --  
па кніжку лезе.  
А я вучыўся чытаць па шылдах,  
гартаў старонкі з бляхі й жалеззя.  
Хтось возьме зямлю,  
схаваную ў шафе, і  
тыкае ў глобус --  
то ў Прагу, то ў Падую.  
А я  
бакамі вучыў геаграфію,  
бо на зямлю  
начлегамі  
падаю!  
Хай гісторык над рэбусам б'ецца, гадае:  
-- Ці была барада ў Барбаросы рудая?  
Кіньце! Я ведаю лепей, чым вы,  
гісторыю  
вуліц ды корчмаў Масквы!  
Бярэ Дабралюбава (зло яго гідзіць),  
ды прозвішча -- супраць,  
аж кпіць з яго ведаў.

Я  
тоўстых  
з дзяцінства прывык ненавідзець,  
калі прадаваў сябе  
дзеля абедаў.  
Навучыцца,  
сядзе, --  
расказвае даме,  
бо хоча бліснуць ідэйкай нясвежай.  
А я размаўляў  
з аднымі дамамі,  
сумоўнічаў з воданапорнаю вежай.  
Акно слыхавое мае ўвушшу  
усё, пра што я ў ночы прашу.  
А дах,  
разносячы  
слова прарочае,  
цяжка язык свой --  
флюгер --  
варочае.

### **Што выйшла**

Болей чым можна,  
болей чым нельга --  
болей,  
чым разам да зорнага дна ісці --  
камяк сардэчны разросся да неба:  
неба каханья,  
неба нянавісці.  
Збіваецца  
цяжкай ношай  
хада так!  
Ці мне, асілку,  
рыдаць  
па-юначы?

А ўсё ж цягнуся,  
сардэчны прыдатак,  
косым сажнем плечы згінаючы.  
Вяршкамі верша ўзбухаю --  
не выліцца,  
няма куды больш -- і поўнюся занава.  
Набраклы паэзіяй --  
свету карміліца,  
гіпербала  
правобразу Мапасанава.

### Так і са мной

Як у гавань родную -- флоты,  
як цягнік -- на станцыю родную,  
да цябе --  
бо маё святло ты! --  
зноў вяртаюся незваротна я.  
Як скупы спускаецца рыцар  
сутарэнню свайму скарыцца,  
тваім сэрцам,  
жыццё і згуба мая,  
нібы скарбам,  
любуюся, любая.  
Так прыходзяць з працы ўначы,  
бруд змываюць,  
здымаюць стому.  
Хіба ж я,  
да цябе ідучы, --  
не іду,  
шчаслівы,  
дадому?!  
Рукатворны -- не ўнікнеш гліны.  
Пералётны -- знойдзешся ў леце.

Так і я --  
штодня,  
штохвіліны --  
да цябе,  
расстаўшыся ледзьве.

**Andrei Khadanovich**, poet and translator (Belarus) is the author of eight collections of poetry, including *Лісты з-над коўдры* (*Letters From Under the Blanket*), 2004, *Несымэтрычныя сны* (*Nonsymmetrical Dreams*), 2010, and a poetry book for children, *Намаўкі таткі* (*Father's Notes*). He has translated poetry from English, French, Lithuanian, Polish, Russian, and Ukrainian. He has had his work translated into 15 languages. He is the former President of PEN Belarus (2008-2017). He teaches literature at Belarusian State University and translation at Belarusian Collegium.

Vladimir Majakowskij in *Four Centuries*:  
13, 2016, p. 9-10, translated into German by Adrian Wanner

## XXI

Dmitry Strotsev

ДМИТРИЙ СТРОЦЕВ

Translated into English by Ian Probstein\*

### A Letter to My Son

who am i  
in this evangelic darkness  
    asks the bishop  
  
and a man in the crowd  
                    with a stone in his hand  
in his heart  
                    has already stoned  
a victim  
  
a harlot  
half-dead  
                    in the depth of her soul  
unable  
                    even to ask  
for mercy  
  
a galilean  
                    who defended her  
  
a disciple  
                    who is not pleased  
with his teacher

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\* © Ian Probstein, translation, 2019

*Four Centuries. Russian Poetry in Translation, 21, 2019*

a passer-by  
    having his own opinion  
insulted by a violent scene  
    on his way  
                    to the house of prayer  
                    and grace

### **My need**

In memoriam Vladimir Bibikhin<sup>1</sup>

the problem is not that I am  
smart among the stupid  
strong among the weak  
kind among the evil

but that i  
need someone's darkness  
for my light

<sup>1</sup> Vladimir Veniaminovich Bibikhin (1938-2004) was the most prominent Soviet and Russian religious thinker of the New Russia and continued the Russian tradition of early 20th century religious thinking. He was known as a philosopher, philologist, and translator, best known for his translations of works by Martin Heidegger.

\* \* \*

... but it lives without any glory  
    A. Pushkin,  
    A Fairy-tale of the Dead Princess and Seven Hero Knights

1.

sacred is  
language  
but  
communication  
is  
communion



\* \* \*

although your eyes may be closed

try however to look

to look at the blinding snow  
along the Smolensk road  
with my eyes

don't tears interfere?

\* \* \*

a poet  
like anyone else  
wants to sleep over  
all this horror

he  
unexpectedly even for himself  
slips off into a dream  
of gethsemane of the apostles  
into a dream of the seven  
sleepers  
and wakes up  
already  
in the golden age  
of poetry harmony and freedom  
on his way  
under guard  
to the GULAG

\* \* \*

it is sweet and terrible

to plunge with God  
to plunge with a friend

down into

the world

### **For Alexander Skidan**

in an autumn park  
hungry eyes  
leftovers  
on  
a newspaper  
among us

breathing of beasts  
roaring in the cage  
of the breast  
bums German shepherds  
among us

tell me  
tell me

i  
among you

### **Freedom**

if God wanted  
to demand anything from us

He would have first and foremost  
produced convincing evidence  
of His existence

and if I am hollow and free  
full of freedom  
full of you

## A Reverse Perspective

no one is convicted unjustly  
the Moscow metropolitan Philaret once  
told Haass<sup>1</sup>

no one is innocent  
repeated Stalin almost word for word  
sinking a barge  
with clergymen

there are no Christians here  
finishes the argument  
the prison priest Vasily  
only criminals

<sup>1</sup>Dr. Friedrich Joseph Haass (Russian: Фёдор Петрович Гааз, Fyodor Petrovich Gaaz, 10 August 1780-28 August (O.S. 16 August 1853) was the "holy doctor of Moscow". Born in Bad Münstereifel, as a member of Moscow's governmental prison committee, he spent 25 years until the end of his life to humanize the penal system. During the last nine years before his death he spent all of his assets to run a hospital for homeless people. He died in Moscow. Twenty thousand people attended his funeral at the Vvedenskoye Cemetery, which was paid for by the state as he had no more money. He has a Catholic remembrance day of the 16th of August.

\* \* \*

When  
we grow in numbers  
and outnumber them

and their  
number decreases  
sufficiently

without thinking  
I rush  
to their side

just to prevent  
the boat  
from capsizing

\* \* \*

not a pillar of salt

love in the world

salt in the sea

\* \* \*

and the soul is just the multiplication of simplicity

\* \* \*

but the Church

is only People

the Son of Man Christ

and crucifying You

the people of God

and I am the most evil of you

\* \* \*

and yet God there is nevertheless much more God

\* \* \*

during twenty years

one gets used to one's wife

for twenty years

she is the same

who inebriated you

like God

during twenty ages

one gets used to God

twenty centuries

he is the same

who inebriated you

like a wife

## One Flesh

one is getting upset  
hiding one's eyes  
hiding one's wrinkles

wishing to hide it  
my age

## Acme

the age when  
one gets parents  
in one's arms  
like children

spoon feeds them  
changes diapers

when one anticipates  
advice and understanding  
from one's children  
like parents

\* \* \*

happiness  
smells  
of old men  
and  
children

\* \* \*

may i be spared  
of jealousy to my childhood  
and envy of my youth

let me go to the west  
with gracious faith

## Father and Son

I will leave a book a book for you

I will leave a book a book for you for a hundred years  
it's neither a gun nor a bomb neither a bomb nor a gun  
you'll read and read in it the words the words the words  
the words the words will light and lighten up your eyes your eyes  
and your heart will then be kindled by the words the words  
and the beasts the beasts will run into your eyes into your seas  
and the rivers rivers will then flood your lands your lands  
boundless they will flow into your seas and flood your seas  
and the orchards orchards will sing in your heart your heart  
just don't forget the book the book and me my son  
and keep them in your heart your heart the book and me

and the heart heart heart is born to run and run and run  
and it can't be halted at full tilt or stopped by any rock

and near the book there is a clock a clock a clock  
and the hours run near the book they run  
and which is stronger whose footfalls are louder  
but the brightest of all are your footfalls on the earth  
your footfalls footsteps treads are heard are heard  
and for you for you all chasms and deeps and abysses are burned  
and all the whales the whales and elephants the elephants as well  
are madly in love with you my little one with you my son  
you just have to wish just have to wish it with all your will  
and all will start will start to rush to fly to run in flight  
and you and you will run and fly with ease so light  
and on the fly rejoicing you'll drink the milk of freedom then

here and there here and there  
they fly and run and fly and swim  
whales and elephants and elephants and whales  
elephants whales and a trunk as well  
i beg your pardon ma'am beg your pardon ma'am  
but i won't give you my trunk  
in it there are elephants and whales  
elephants and whales are running swimming  
running and swimming there and here  
and there and here and my trunk is there

you are bestowed with the gifts the gifts the gifts  
all days and nights all ways and all the worlds the worlds  
you are bestowed the gift to keep the gifts the gifts  
and yet to play a game you will be free to change the rules the words  
your father's world your tender home which isn't a dear home  
it will be changed into a wolf's world and in other's anxious dream  
the mirrors will reveal distorting mirrors will reveal  
that i do not exist there is no good or evil and that black is white  
when they whisper whisper that i ceased to exist  
open the book unfold it in your heart your flame  
unfold the book the scroll unfold it in your heart your flame  
and in your heart look into your heart embracing me my son

here and there here and there  
they fly they crawl they crawl and fly  
balloons and cubes balloons and cubes  
balloons and cubes and a drum  
i beg your pardon ma'am i beg your pardon ma'am  
i won't give you my drum my drum  
why ma'am would you need a drum  
i beg your pardon ma'am i'm sorry ma'am  
there are cubes and balloons in the trunk  
cubes and balloons crawl and fly  
crawl and fly here and there  
here and there and a drum

and if you forgot for good forgot for good  
the one you loved the loved one you forgot  
but i will not forget i never will and i will wait around  
i'll wait and wait as as seed is waiting in the ground  
and like a seed a grain i'll die for you I'll die  
until one morning you come back and you wake up  
and all will start will start to run to rush to fly  
and you and you will run and fly with ease with ease  
and on the fly rejoicing you'll drink the milk of freedom you sure  
will  
and you are bestowed with the gifts the gifts the gifts  
all days and nights all ways and all the worlds and seas  
and all the whales the whales and elephants the elephants as well  
are madly in love with you my son with you my little one

you just unfold the scroll the world the book in your heart your flame  
and look straight into your heart embracing me my son  
and the heart the heart is born to run is born to run  
and it can't be halted at full tilt it can't be stopped or tamed.

\* \* \*

each day your arm grows  
weaker  
your embrace grows  
emptier  
which I  
forever warm up in vain  
an old man  
this look is already  
distant  
in the window pit  
a fog yawns  
and calls

## **A Tree**

In memoriam Victor Lauferov

children run upwards  
relying on the voice  
get away from me  
I stay in the darkness

do you hear  
get away from me  
while you hear me  
you are still here  
in the darkness

there  
where speech ends  
the voice is cut off  
a beam begins  
do you hear

get away from me  
the shoots  
relying on the voice  
run from the roots  
into light

### **In memoriam Oleg Yankovsky**

my kind day I love you so  
let the day be and the day inebriates me  
and a breathing day I love you so  
and a singing day and the day intoxicates me  
and a breathing day and a maiden day and night  
and a maiden day and night and night and day  
and the maiden illuminates me day and night  
let the night be I love you so  
and the maiden day I love you so  
and the maiden night and the night bemuses me so  
and day and night breathing day and night  
and singing day and night and night and day  
and thinking day and night and night and day  
and a morning day and night and the night makes me so drunk  
and evening night and day I love you so  
my dear day I love you so  
let the night be and the night illuminates me so

## Optimus

for Rene Girard

look at beautiful Europe  
how she has changed  
and in two thousand years  
not because of violence  
tyranny  
or revolution  
but because someone  
still  
opens the Gospel

**Dmitry Strotsev**, 1963, an architect by education, is a poet, a bard, a critic, and a publisher. He lives in Minsk, Belarus. He is the editor of the almanac *Minsk School* and of the publishing *Novyie Mekhi* (*New Windbags*). He is also an organizer of poetry festivals *Time and Space* (Minsk, 1995, 1996) and co-curator of the *Festival of Voice Poetry* (Moscow 2005-2013). Winner of the *Russian Prize* (2008), Dmitry Strotsev is the author of eight books of poetry and numerous publications in major periodicals. His books were shortlisted in *Andrei Bely Prize* (2009), *Moscow Count* (2010, 2013), *International Voloshin Prize* (2010). Dmitry Strotsev is a member of the Belorussian PEN and the Writers' Union of Belarus. His poems were translated into English, Swedish, French, Italian, Hebrew, Georgian, Ukrainian, and Belorussian.

**Ian Probstein** is associate professor of English at Touro College. He has published eleven books of poetry, translated more than a dozen poetry volumes, and has compiled and edited more than thirty books and anthologies of poetry in translation. His translations of Ossip 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 in English is *The River of Time: Time-Space, Language and History in Avant-Garde, Modernist, and Contemporary Poetry* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2017). He also published an annotated edition of *T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays* (SPb.: Azbuka, 2019).

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Ian Probstein

Ян Пробштейн

Übersetzt von Eric Boerner\*

Transltd into German by Eric Boerner\*

\* \* \*

Die Zeit hat keine Zeit  
für Zeit. Die Gegenwart  
Freund Orpheus gleicht:  
Du blickst zurück --  
fast nur Verluste  
und vor dir unsichtbar  
die Zukunft.  
Schreit mutig weiter  
doch denk dran:  
Bist du verstummt  
Zerteilt dich dann  
der ungehemmte Chor der Spötter:  
All jene die dich einst vergöttert.

### **Der Weltuntergang am Ende der Welt**

Der homo sapiens hörte von einer terra incognita  
und riss die letzten Luftschlösser ein.  
Elefanten zertrampelten Türme von Elfenbein.  
Die Diebe entwendeten die Diebamanten;  
die Reste die Gäste und andre Verwandte.  
So blieben am Ende nur noch Illusionen,  
die rechtzeitig flohen in neutrale Zonen  
von theoretischen Terrariumsterritorien.

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\* \* \*

Das Ende korrumpiert mit Schmeichelworten,  
Das Schweigen tiefer Stille ist genug,  
Man braucht die Botschaft nicht, auch keinen Boten,  
Auch nicht des Himmels ewiggleichen Zug.

**Erik Boerner**, 1965, was born in Braunschweig and lives in Berlin. He studied Slavistics, the History of Eastern Europe, and Mass Media Studies in Mainz, St. Petersburg and Berlin. He is translator and editor of Russian literature, as well as English (Shakespeare) and French (Villon, Baudelaire, and Rimbaud) ones. He is well-known for his online anthology "*Illeguan - Deutsche und russische Literatur*", [www.illeguan.de](http://www.illeguan.de)

Vladimir Pryakhin  
Владимир Пряхин

Translated into English by Nina Kossman\*

**How the Maw is Made**

inside the maw everything is subordinate  
to technologies processing life  
into another life:  
a tooth to bite  
a tooth to rip  
a tooth to knead  
a tongue  
to push the edible bits further  
inward  
and to throw out  
words that justify this

**On Ithaka Now**

forests and newspapers die  
and you say -- memory!  
everything has changed  
on our Ithaka:  
taxes grow on the site of olive trees  
and the grass dries out

our words crumble away  
like flakes of dry paint  
from old picture frames

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too many names given  
to different things  
and they suffocate under the weight of meanings  
try lifting a thing --  
a sudden abyss opens under it  
put it back in its place  
no use looking there

I am completely alone  
When you sailed away  
the spider also left home  
I didn't dare to destroy his web  
at the ceiling's corner  
I watched it  
during those long days  
in the house that you had built

then even the spider web was blown away  
only smooth bare walls were left  
and no "golden sections" --  
symmetry of death:  
a correctly constructed cube  
with me in its center

### **Herod's Death**

from a pit  
crawling with worms  
a hand is painfully reaching for the light

an eye sprouts on its palm  
dead babies' souls soar around  
and everyone spits on the palm

its last eye closes  
and from under an eyelid  
a worm crawls out into the light

\* \* \*

lamb pie  
cannon with cannon fodder  
they are sold together  
so if you buy one  
you don't have to look for the other  
our habit of defense  
a full kitchen and combat kit  
minced meat from the best parts of the body  
that have absorbed gunpowder residue  
plus a bottle of champagne  
pompously smash it against a board  
or just pour it in glasses  
and modestly say a toast  
"for peace!"

### **Origins of Self-Awareness**

"why do I live like a pig  
and not like a bird?"  
a pig asked itself  
and immediately felt  
  
its wings growing  
its face flattening  
its nose stretching out  
and turning into a beak  
and its right eye beginning to see  
only things on the right  
and its left eye seeing only  
things on the left  
and no matter how it turned its head  
it could not see the same object  
with both eyes  
  
then its right eye began to mourn the left eye  
and its left eye mourned the right eye

it didn't know yet  
that looking at things in different ways  
was an inherent quality of the feathered

### **Psalm (17)**

I placed in my heart  
the sadness of your heart  
and there was room in my heart for it

and I placed in my mind  
your grief  
and it did not clutter my mind

and I was surprised  
at the workings of my own heart and mind  
I was surprised because I had imagined them differently

but an angel appeared from behind my back  
and said:  
-- look at the heart of the One,  
who created you in His image --

did his heart become smaller  
when he took into him  
the world's suffering and grief?

and I was ashamed of my surprise  
and of my lack of understanding

### **A Portrait**

great is your sadness  
and it is in your eyes

as though each of your eyes beholds  
a hundred women in a yellow clay desert

driven into slavery  
by a horde of Babylonians

shouts of Chaldean warriors  
petrified in the expectation of a striking whip

sound of feet walking up the stairs  
the knocking on the door  
and night-time arrests

your child  
and well-fed Egypt  
luring your child into its net of reeds

as though from the reeds you behold  
the waves of the Nile  
on a boat taking away your child

great is your sadness  
and it is in your eyes

### **Inhumanity**

the inhumanity of animals --  
that's what attracts my attention!

killing just to eat!  
or to protect yourself and your cub!  
or just because  
of an invasion  
to your personal territory --  
because everything is primitive  
and it simply indicates a low IQ!

of course  
killer whales and lions  
plan a hunt  
but to plan a murder for years...  
to napalm  
to gas...  
only higher creatures are capable of it  
real grand inhuman plans  
born in the depths of intellectual elites!  
I too could say ingenious phrases  
to cover up my defense of killers  
and pass for a humanist

and I could stuff this text with metaphors  
like a potato bag  
or weave an intricate web out of words  
so it would be considered "strong"

and I could put my thoughts in rhyme  
and that would be "nice"  
and I would be read more often  
with sighs  
and without anyone delving into the essence of it

but I expect from myself  
inhuman speech  
plain  
like a cat's meow  
is a request to open a door

is a cat capable  
of spending the night with you in bed  
and then writing a denunciation at daytime?

the inhumanity of an animal

rarely can a dog  
forget a person  
with whom it lived for many years

this is the manifestation of the nonhuman in a living being  
and a crocodile does not manufacture a device  
for removing living skin  
even that  
even the one that lives in the lower reaches of the Mekong River  
where  
once they established production of such products  
to increase the effectiveness of interrogations

and is there at least one leader  
in the world of predators that starves his pack  
just so  
he can buy himself a good yacht?

the inhumanity of animals is negligible --  
but they are still speechless --  
probably  
so they would not lie

however  
I knew one person  
who always spoke the truth  
and hugged me sincerely  
like a lemur  
hugs a person with Down syndrome...

so my speech today is  
a squeak of a rodent  
who is looking not for a word  
but for something real --  
a seed  
a grain  
or a nut

find it  
grab it fast  
spit out the husk

and swallow it  
or put it in the cheek

and back into the hole!  
and nothing more  
and nothing more  
nothing at all  
no tricks:

the inhumanity of the animal --  
Not human inhumanity!

**Vladimir (Vlad) Pryakhin** is a Russian poet as well as a publisher of poetry. Born in 1957 in Tula, he lived in Tula, the Baltic states, the Smolensk region, and in Moscow. In the late 1980s - early 1990s he was an active participant in the democratic movement in Russia. In the 1980s he published "*The Idealist*", a samizdat journal of poetry and prose. Since 1992 his poems and short articles have been published in literary magazines in Russia as well as Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. He is the author of ten books of poetry. In 2012 he became the editor and publisher of "*The Environment*", an international literary almanac. Since 2017 he has been the editor of [www.medium.land](http://www.medium.land), a portal dedicated to poetry, as well as a moderator of literary video channel LITINFO. A winner of several literary awards he participated in free verse festivals in Moscow and in St. Petersburg.

**Nina Kossman** is an artist, writer, poet, and playwright. The recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship, a UNESCO/PEN Short Story Award, grants from Foundation of Hellenic Culture and Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation, she is the author of two books of poems in Russian and English as well as the translator of two volumes of Marina Tsvetaeva's poetry. Her other books include *Behind the Border* (Harper Collins, 1994) and *Gods and Mortals: Modern Poems on Classical Myths* (Oxford University Press, 2001). Her work has been translated into several languages, including Japanese, Dutch, Greek, and Spanish. She lives in New York.