

# *Four Centuries*

*Russian Poetry in Translation*



№ 31, 2023

## *Four Centuries. Russian Poetry in Translation*

Copyright © 2023 by Dr. Ilya Perelmuter, publisher. Mail: [fourcenturies@gmx.de](mailto:fourcenturies@gmx.de)

This edition was typeset by Roman Kostovski ([Plamen Press](#)) using Adobe InDesign. Font: Garamond

*All rights to translations and materials published in this magazine are retained by the individual translators and authors. No part of this magazine may be reproduced, copied, transmitted, distributed or otherwise used without the prior permission of the Publisher. This magazine as a whole can be sent indissolubly per e-mail as a pdf file. Commercial distribution is not allowed.*

This magazine should be cited as follows:

Four Centuries. Russian Poetry in Translation. Essen: Perelmuter Verlag, 2023, № 31.

*Все права на переводы и другие материалы, опубликованные в этом журнале, в полном объёме сохраняются за отдельными переводчиками и авторами.*

Журнал защищён авторским правом в совокупности всех его частей и в полном объёме.

Любые типы копирования, перепечатки, распространения, публикации его отдельных частей без согласия издателя не разрешаются. Журнал может быть послан по электронной почте с сохранением его целостности в формате pdf. Журнал без нарушения его целостности может быть включён в электронную библиотеку с уведомлением об этом издателя. *Коммерческое распространение журнала запрещено.*

Цитирование материалов журнала обязательно в следующей форме:

Four Centuries. Russian Poetry in Translation. Essen: Perelmuter Verlag, 2023, № 31

All cover fotos are from public domain

### **Acknowledgements**

I am very thankful to poets *Marina Gerschenowitsch*, *Julia Pikalova*, and *Alexander Veytsman* for their kind permissions to publish the translations of their poems in this issue of the magazine.

Dr. Ilya Perelmuter

### **Publisher**

Perelmuter Verlag, Dr. Ilya Perelmuter, Publisher

Erikapfad 7, 45133 Essen, Germany

Web: [www.perelmuterverlag.de](http://www.perelmuterverlag.de)

Mail: [fourcenturies@gmx.de](mailto:fourcenturies@gmx.de)

# Contents

## XIX Century Russian Poetry

### Afanasy Fet - Афанасий Фет

<i>Garden's a bloom...</i> . . . . .	6
<i>Take lessons from the birch and from the oak</i> . . . . .	6
<i>We heard this homily in many places.</i> . . . .	7
<i>The Captive</i> . . . . .	7
<i>A splendid night...</i> . . . . .	8
<i>Swallows took their parting...</i> . . . . .	8
<i>Death</i> . . . . .	9

Translated into English by Anna Krushelnitskaya  
Перевод на английский Анны Крушельницкой

### Aleksey Apukhtin - Алексей Апухтин

<i>To Slavophiles.</i> . . . .	10
<i>Flies.</i> . . . .	10

Translated into English by Anna Krushelnitskaya  
Перевод на английский Анны Крушельницкой

## XX Century Russian Poetry

### Bulat Okudzhava - Булат Окуджава

<i>Paper Soldier.</i> . . . .	12
-------------------------------	----

Translated into English by Roman Kostovski  
Перевод на английский Романа Костовского

## XXI Century Russian Poetry

### Marina Gerschenowitsch - Марина Гершеневич

<i>Zwei Alte sehen einen Film...</i> . . . . .	14
<i>Schilderung des Weihnachtsfestes.</i> . . . .	15
<i>Das Geschenk.</i> . . . .	15
<i>Liebe treibt alles an, und sie ertönt.</i> . . . .	15
<i>Das Gebet</i> . . . . .	16

Translated into German by Erich Ahrendt  
Перевод на немецкий Эриха Арндта

## XXI Century Russian Poetry

### Julia Pikalova - Юлия Пикалова

<i>Ca Khúc Opera</i> .....	18
<i>Kitezh</i> .....	19

Translated into Vietnamese by Ngô Bình Anh Khoa  
Перевод на вьетнамский Нго Бин Ан Коа

<i>L'opera</i> .....	20
----------------------	----

Translated into Italian by Paolo Statuti  
Перевод на итальянский Паоло Статути

<i>Kitezh</i> .....	22
---------------------	----

Translated into English by Niles Watterson  
Перевод на английский Нильса Ваттерсона

<i>The Opera</i> .....	23
------------------------	----

Translated into English by Anna Krushelnitskaya  
Перевод на английский Анны Крушельницкой

### Alexander Veytsman - Александр Вейцман

<i>Maria Yudina</i> .....	24
<i>Modigliani</i> .....	24
<i>Miró</i> .....	25
<i>Rue de Rennes</i> .....	26
<i>After Tarkovsky</i> .....	26

Translated into English by Laurence Bogoslaw  
Перевод на английский Лоренса Богослава

# *Four Centuries*

*Russian Poetry in Translation*

**Афанасий Фет (1820-1892)**

**Afanasy Fet (1820-1892)**

Translated into English by Anna Krushelnitskaya

©Anna Krushelnitskaya, 2023, translation

\* \* \*

Garden's a-bloom,  
Evening's a-blaze.  
Fresh is my spirit and joyous my gaze.

Whether I stand,  
Whether I walk,  
I seem to but hear a mystery talk.

This luscious spring,  
Dawn of the year,  
So hard to fathom yet so pure and clear!

Whether I weep,  
Whether I shine,  
You're a magnificent mystery mine.

*1884*

\* \* \*

Take lessons from the birch and from the oak.  
The world is cold. The frost is cruel and stark.  
Their helpless tears are frozen at a stroke.  
The mighty grip of winter cracks their bark.  
The snowstorm grows more violent and shrill;  
The wind tears off their leaves – an angry brute.  
The heart is seized with dismal icy chill.  
They're standing mute. You, too, keep standing mute –  
But trust in spring. Its genius in flight  
Will warm the world again, and make it whole  
To bring you days of light and new insight  
Earned through the pain and sorrow of your soul.

*1883*

\* \* \*

We heard this homily in many places:  
“How sad the childlessness you must endure!  
How sad you’ll never see those little faces,  
Almost angelic faces, sweet and pure.”

Now, to the great content of all our preachers,  
To grant us solace in our twilight days  
God gave us you, our young and blameless creatures,  
Obedient and pliant playful babes.

In our old age, God kindly saved us trouble.  
Play to your hearts’ content, our dearest pups!  
Our Lord of Mercy made his blessing double,  
Since we won’t have to see you as grown-ups.  
1878

### **The Captive**

Thick weeds by the window  
A rustling foam,  
The green leafy willow  
A billowing dome,

The gay boats a-gliding  
Away from the beach;  
The hacksaw is riding  
The bars with a screech.

His grief ceased to bleed him.  
It sleeps in its bed.  
His sea and his freedom  
Lie glowing ahead.

His sorrows accede  
To his soul, unafraid,  
His ear paying heed  
To his hand at the blade.  
1843

\* \* \*

A splendid sight!  
How great your pull!  
The vale is white,  
The moon is full.

High heavens glow.  
A lonesome sleigh  
Cuts sparkling snow,  
So far away.

1842

\* \* \*

Swallows took their parting,  
Yesterday at dawn  
Rooks kept settling, starting,  
Like a netting, darting  
'Round the mountain yon.  
Evenings send me napping.  
Darkness in the yard.  
Withered leaves are flapping,  
Wicked wind is rapping  
On my window hard.  
Frost would be less trying:  
Snow has better charm!  
Southward, cranes are flying,  
Calling loudly, crying,  
Trumpeting alarm.  
How my heart is pounding!  
Fear I might just bawl.  
'Cross the fields surrounding,  
Tumbleweeds are bounding,  
Each a little ball.

1847

## Death

“I want to live!” His bold cries are incessant.  
 “So what if it’s deceit! I’ll take deceit!”  
 He cannot see this ice is evanescent.  
 Beneath, lies deep unfathomable sea.

To run? But where? What’s right? What’s a mistake?  
 What truths to trust? What certitudes to clasp?  
 Should any blossom, any smile awake,  
 Death has them soon in his triumphant grasp.

The blind will try to find their path on bare ground,  
 Blind feelings guiding them in futile search.  
 Beware! If life is God’s rip-roaring fairground,  
 Then death alone is God’s immortal church.

1878

**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 World War II 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.

**Алексей Апухтин (1840-1893)**  
**Aleksey Apukhtin (1840-1893)**

Translated into English by Anna Krushelnitskaya  
©Anna Krushelnitskaya, 2023, translation

**To Slavophiles**

What's all this hue and cry, and rattling of sabers?  
Your patriotism's stale, and pitiful your labors!  
Our Russia won't be stirred when you exclaim and leap.  
Indeed, she has already paid a price too steep  
For Slavic gallantry... A barbarous remainder,  
The brand of Tatar reign has burdened her and pained her:  
Around her, darkling shades of ignorance are drawn.  
To no avail, she's yearning for a lavish dawn,  
While the unlucky serfs keep waiting for the better,  
Each miserable foot still in a heavy fetter...  
Yet, you are not content; yet, you desire for more:  
For Moscow gates to greet in clamor, like before,  
A Czar so strong, so white, so mighty, and so true,  
So greatly fit to rule, so fatherly to you...  
Meanwhile, the barkless hounds he always holds so dear  
Would swiftly ride ahead to keep his roadways clear.  
You wish your clerics wrote their thoughts as legislature;  
You want enlightenment called a witchery by nature;  
You want your nobleman, your Russian joy and pride,  
To be self-willed and cruel, to prance before his bride;  
Yet, in the Palace, for his fealty to be shown,  
He'd crawl and lick the foot of the imperial throne.

1856

**Flies**

Flies, like black thoughts, stay with me all the livelong day, they keep clinging,  
Seething and buzzing over my poor head, and swarming, and stinging!  
I swat one away off my cheek – one more lands on my eye! It is draining,  
There's nowhere to hide from this loathsome swarm which stays reigning.  
My book falls out of my weak hands, my wan words barely flicker.  
Oh, for the evening to set! Oh, for the night to come quicker!

Black thoughts, like flies, stay with me all the livelong night, they keep clinging,  
Seething and buzzing over my poor head, and sniping, and stinging!  
I swat one away from my head – one more stabs my sad heart! I am straining  
Under the thoughts of my life I spent dreaming in vain, my life which is waning.  
I want to forget, to stop loving, but my lovelorn heart's only sicker.  
Oh, for the night, for the true everlasting night to come quicker!

**Булат Окуджава (1924-1997)**  
**Bulat Okudzhava (1924-1997)**

Translated into English by Roman Kostovski  
©Roman Kostovski, 2023, translation

**Paper Soldier**

There was a soldier on this earth  
Who couldn't be more bolder  
But he was a toy for child's mirth  
He was just a paper soldier

To change this world that was his dream,  
So that joy would spread all over  
But he hung above from a feeble string  
He was just a paper soldier

He'd gladly battle fire or smoke  
And die for you twice over  
But you thought of him as a just joke  
For he was paper soldier.

You wouldn't trust him with your life  
Or the pains that weigh your shoulders  
I asked you why, and you replied,  
He was just a paper soldier.

He'd cursed his fate so many times  
For he craved a life of danger  
He begged for battle, he begged for fire  
But he was only made of paper

"Into the flames! I must! I must!"  
He cried as he marched forward  
And there he burned to ash and dust  
For he was a paper soldier.

**Bulat Okudzhava** was born in Tbilisi, Georgia. He was a Soviet and Russian poet, writer, musician, novelist, and singer-songwriter. He was one of the founders of the Soviet genre called “author song” (авторская песня), also referred to as “bard poetry.” He wrote over 200 songs, set to his own poetry. They are a mixture of Russian poetic and folk song traditions and the French chansonnier style represented by such contemporaries of Okudzhava as Georges Brassens. Though his songs were never overtly political, the freshness and independence of Okudzhava’s artistic voice presented a subtle challenge to Soviet cultural authorities, who were thus hesitant for many years to give him official recognition.

**Roman Kostovski** was born in Prague and lived for several years in former Yugoslavia before immigrating to the U.S. He completed his undergraduate studies at the College of William and Mary, graduate studies at the University of Maryland, and a post-graduate program at Charles University in Prague. He taught Slavic languages at George Washington University and currently works as a Central, Eastern, and Southeastern European analyst. He translates poetry and prose from Bosnian, Bulgarian, Croatian, Czech, Macedonian, Russian, Serbian, and Slovak into English. His writings and translations have appeared in numerous journals, including *Absinthe-New European Writings*, *Watchword Press*, and *Poet Lore*. His full-length translations include *Arnost Lustig’s Fire on Water* (Northwestern University Press, 2006), Viktor Dyk’s *The Ratcatcher* (Plamen Press, 2014), an album of bard poetry by Karel Kryl and Jaromir Nohavica *Steel Strings and Iron Curtains* (Plamen Press, 2019), and Vítězslav Nezval’s *Farewell and a Handkerchief-Poems from the Road* (Plamen Press, 2020). He was awarded a National Endowment of the Arts Translation Fellowship in 2017 for translating Hana Andronikova’s *Heaven Has No Ground* (Plamen Press, 2023). He founded Plamen Press in 2014, a non-profit publishing house devoted to the promotion of high-quality English translations of Central, Eastern, and Southeastern European literature. He works and resides in the Washington, D.C., area.

**Марина Гершенович**  
**Marina Gerschenowitsch**

Translated into German by Erich Ahrndt

©Marina Gerschenowitsch, poems

©Erich Ahrndt, 2023, translation

\* \* \*

Zwei Alte sehen einen Film,  
es läuft ein Melodrama.  
Die Kinohelden trinken Wein,  
und liegen trotzdem noch im Streit,  
der Papa liebt die Mama.

Tage vergeh'n im Film sehr schnell,  
da verstreichen fremde Jahre,  
der schlimme Krieg fand auch ein End  
wohl unter der Freiheitsfahne.

Ein Lächeln und des Herzens Lust  
die Handlung des Films verkündet,  
zerstört ihr Schicksal ganz bewusst,  
damit das Paar sich findet.

Die beiden Alten gehen sacht  
vom Saal des Kinos in die Nacht,  
die Stadt löscht schon das letzte Licht,  
es ist kein Krieg, auch Frieden nicht,

Das Liebespaar — verschwunden.  
Da sind's von Freiheit bis zum Leid  
zwei Schritte, und die Spur führt weit:  
zur Regel ewiger Wunden.

Und keiner weiss, wo, wie und wann  
er sterben wird — sollt' denken dran,  
hat jeder das Recht zur Wende.  
Wie wird sie, freundlich oder nicht,  
die letzte Miene im Gesicht  
an seinem Lebensende.

### Schilderung des Weihnachtsfestes

Der großen Kälte Auswirkung ich mag,  
weil an mein Fenster Eisblumen sie malt.

Wenn's dann regnet, bleibt's nicht trocken,  
würd' ich malen auch Schneeflocken.

Es gibt Gebäck und Nüsse nach Begehr,  
das Soufflet ist schneeweiß so sehr,  
vor uns ein Haufen Mandarinen liegt,  
und von der Tanne scheint das Kerzenlicht.

Alles zu zählen nacheinand,  
freut mich den langen Abend dann:  
Musik, sie steigt auf zum Zenit,  
leise Glocken läuten ein Lied.

Ich höre: „Heiligabend...“ hab' gehant,  
das ich mit jemand Wichtigem verbandt.

### Das Geschenk

Ich verrate niemandem, wie sehr das Geschenk mich freut.  
Mittags genau um zwölf Uhr kam ins Haus mein kleiner Bruder heut.  
Kam unbekannt woher und weit, kam ohne Sack und Pack,  
Ähnelt einem Spatzen irgendwie, nur komisch ist sein Gesicht.  
Wie soll ich leben, staune ich, mit ihm, der ganz anders ist?  
Er wird ein Drittel größer noch bis zwei oder drei, oder vier,  
dann lehre ich ihn zu singen und schenk ihm eine Trommel von mir.  
Dann sage ich zu ihm: „Mein kleiner Matz,  
du musst nicht schüchtern sein, bist doch kein Spatz!  
Schlag meine Trommel, hör gar nicht auf,  
trommle und trommle, ich nehm's in Kauf!“

\* \* \*

Liebe treibt alles an, und sie ertönt  
sehr schön durchs Fenster, wenn es angelehnt,  
ob sie von Tasten oder Saiten strömt.  
Taste und Saite — beide straff geformt,  
doch körperlos stets die Musik ertönte.

Liebe treibt alles an: Fleisch und auch Geist;  
ihr ist's egal, ob Geist ist gut genährt,  
ob unersättlich oder essbar, sie stört...

Frag nicht, wie Gott das sieht von oben.  
Frag nie. Leise Musik wird nur loben.

Zeit wird es jetzt, dass man mal endlich löscht  
in den Gedanken Längen und Synkopen.  
Und du schlägst auf dein altes Notenheft,  
in dem man findet keine falschen Noten.

Dort steh'n auf geraden Linien beide, hand-  
geschriebne Bass- sowie auch Violin-  
schlüssel, die öffnen jedes Schloss im Land  
und die verschlossenen Türen und die Riegel.

### **Das Gebet**

Wer der von Dir geschützt,  
denen's Leben im Himmel erlaubt,  
kann Dir in Ewigkeit nützen,  
dienen mit Wahrheit und Glaub?

Wer, der vor Eifer ermüdet  
und der aus Liebe ward klug,  
wartet auf Milde und Güte,  
besänftig auch Deine Wut...

Vögel im Himmel und Tiere:  
Adlern und Löwen und Stieren,  
gehen durch sehr enge Türen,  
dass Deinen Thron man behüt.

Alle gehorchen ergeben  
nur Deinem Wille und Sinn.  
Herr, lass mein Hündchen am Leben,  
ich kann mich sorgen um ihn.

Ich stehe vor Deiner Reinheit  
in größerer Schuld als der.  
Bitte, dass er bei mir bleibt,  
brauchst Du ihn nicht so sehr.

**Marina Gerschenowitsch** is a poet and translator of German and English poetry. Born in Nowosibirsk, she is living now in Düsseldorf. She is the author of a couple of poetry collections. She has published two books of translations into Russian: poems by Mascha Kaléko (2007) and Shel Silverstein (2018). Marina Gerschenowitsch was awarded a literary prize for her poetry. Her poems have been translated into German by Erich Ahrndt (2021).

**Erich Ahrndt** (b.1932), is a prominent translator of Russian poetry and fiction into German. Since 1977 a great number of books of his translations have been published in Leipzig. He has translated poems by Zwetajewa, Akhmatova, Jesenin, Akhmadulina, A. Polonskaya, M. Gerschenowitsch and other poets.

**Юлия Пикалова**  
**Julia Pikalova**

Translated into Vietnamese by Ngô Bình Anh Khoa

© Julia Pikalova, 2023, poems

© Ngô Bình Anh Khoa, 2023, translation

**Ca Khúc Opera**

*“Họ đưa anh về nhà,  
Hóa ra anh còn sống.”  
(Đồng dao)*

Đôi mắt mệt nhòa  
trước ánh đèn lộng lẫy nơi phố thị.  
Ánh đèn hờm hĩnh.  
Ánh đèn táo tợn.  
Tuy nhiên,  
Trên những dòng chữ khổng lồ hiện lên  
lời báo hiệu  
thời khắc TOSCA\* sẽ đến,  
Và chính lúc này đây,  
bấy nhiêu đó thôi cũng đủ rồi.

Ta yêu làm sao  
những nỗi kinh hoàng tội độ này  
và ta biết trước kết cục là gì:  
Giọng nam cao đã chết  
trong bộ áo đầm máu  
sẽ lại trôi dạt mà không hề hấn gì  
trong tràng pháo tay –  
Anh ta sẽ cười  
và hôn lên kẻ đã giết mình  
và kết tình huynh đệ  
với kẻ thù truyền kiếp kia;  
Và rồi, trong vòng tay ấy  
những thanh âm hallelujah sẽ ngân vang,  
một bầu không khí hân hoan  
sẽ bao trùm toàn bộ không gian.  
Niềm vui sướng  
sẽ thăng hoa lên tận các vì sao  
cùng với tiếng hò reo của khán giả  
yêu cầu họ diễn lại một lần nữa.

Và rồi tất cả chúng ta sẽ trở nên bất tử,  
và rồi tất cả chúng ta  
sẽ hiến dâng chính mình thành tế vật  
để được chết.

\*Tosca: 1) Một ca khúc Opera bi kịch của Giacomo Puccini. 2) Trong tiếng Nga, thuật ngữ bất khả dịch này ám chỉ một sự luyến tiếc khó truyền tải được bằng ngôn ngữ khác.

### Kitezh\* (“Đong Đầy Đồi Mắt Với Thi Ca”)

Hãy đong đầy đồi mắt với thi ca. Hãy nằm xuống  
Và quay mặt vào tường. Hãy nhắm chặt mí mắt  
Và giam cầm những giọt lệ bên trong. Hãy chết. Hãy ngủ.  
Hãy mơ. Ôi, đất nước của những con người bị nguyên rửa.  
Cái đất nước bệnh hoạn, đầy rẫy di căn này!  
Hãy từ bỏ mọi hy vọng đi, hỡi những kẻ nào tiến vào đây.  
Hãy từ bỏ mọi hy vọng đi, hỡi những kẻ rảo quang chốn này.  
Hãy từ bỏ mọi hy vọng đi, hỡi những kẻ nằm im bất động  
Với những giọt lệ câm lặng. Hãy từ bỏ mọi hy vọng đi.

Hãy đong đầy đồi mắt với thi ca. Hãy tạo ra một chiếc mặt nạ thạch cao  
Từ gương mặt vẫn còn vấn vương sự sống. Vì Mát-xcơ-va  
Không tin vào nước mắt. Không giọt nước mắt nào có thể chảy ra  
Từ một bản sao làm bằng thạch cao.  
Cái ôm của chúng ta lạnh lẽo và cứng ngắt tựa như áo giáp.  
Chiến xa của chúng ta thì lại linh hoạt và nhanh như sấm chớp.  
Khi chúng ta thối đi một nụ hôn –  
Một cuộc không kích sẽ được gửi đến. Vì vậy,  
Hãy đong đầy đồi mắt với thi ca cho đến khi chúng ta trở nên mù quáng.  
Chúng ta sẽ nghiêng rằng, quỳ xuống quy phục trước định mệnh  
Và chờ đợi khi thành phố Kitezh, cái thành phố bệnh hoạn của người chết này,  
Chìm xuống vực thẳm.

\* Kitezh – một thành phố trong thần thoại nước Nga. Tương truyền rằng, thành phố này bị chìm xuống biển (giống như huyền thoại về thành phố Atlantis) và tránh được một cuộc chinh phạt. Trong tác phẩm này, thành phố Kitezh biểu tượng cho một nước Nga đang lún chìm – một quốc gia đang trải qua một cơn đại nạn.

**Ngo Binh Anh Khoa** (b. 1994) has a Master degree in English Language and is currently teaching at a university in Ho Chi Minh City. He has published more than 200 poems in multiple literary magazines and international contests in countries such as the US, the UK, Japan, India, and elsewhere. In 2021, his Sijo (a traditional Korean poetic form) won first prize in the Sejong International Sijo Competition. His Haiku have also received awards and honorable mentions in international contests.

**Юлия Пикалова**

**Julia Pikalova**

Translated into Italian by Paolo Statuti

© Julia Pikalova, 2023, poems

© Paolo Statuti, 2023, translation

### **L'opera**

“Lo portarono alla sua dimora,  
risultò che viveva ancora.”

Poesiola per bambini

L'occhio è stanco  
del luccichio di Mosca.

E' sgarbato.

E' sfacciato.

Ma in compenso

A caratteri cubitali

si annuncia

la TOSCA\*,

Ed è proprio ciò

che serve adesso.

Le paurose paure

ho sempre amato,

dove il finale in anticipo è appreso:

Il tenore morto

con l'abito insanguinato

tra le ovazioni della sala

si alza illeso –

E ride,

baciando l'uccisore,

e fraternizza

col nemico mortale,

E intorno

c'è un tale calore,

e intorno

c'è un entusiasmo tale,

E la gioia

arriva fino alle stelle,

e un bis

vogliamo ascoltare,

E siamo tutti così immortali,

che ci lasciamo

anche

ammazzare.

**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](http://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) – and his own poetry in *The Wandering Star* (2016).

**Юлия Пикалова**  
**Julia Pikalova**

Translated into English by Niles Watterson  
© Julia Pikalova, 2023, poems  
© Niles Watterson, 2023, translation

**Kitezh\* (“To drink from verse like wine”)**

To drink from verse like wine. to lie prostrate  
before the wall. to seal the eyelids tight  
and lock the tears inside. to die. to sleep.  
to dream. this country of the damned, this sick,  
sick motherland, these metastases!  
all hope abandon, ye who enter here.  
all hope abandon, ye who pass too near.  
all hope abandon, ye before the wall  
who hold a quiet tear. abandon all.

Drink deep the verse like wine. form from  
your living face a gypsum mask. for Moscow  
holds no faith in tears; no tear  
will ever yield from plaster cast.  
our embrace is cold and hard as armor.  
our tanks are deft and lightning fast.  
when we blow a kiss across our fingers –  
an air raid siren blasts.  
and so we’ll drink from verse until we’re blind.  
we’ll grind our teeth, prostrate toward our fate  
and wait as sick Kitezh\* sinks into this  
abyss, this cancerous necropolis.

\*Kitezh – a mythical Russian city that, according to legend, went under water (like the legend of Atlantis) and thus escaped conquest. Here, in a figurative sense, it symbolises a sinking country, Russia, – a country experiencing catastrophe.

**Niles Watterson** is a poet and literary translator in Austin, Texas. He grew up along the front range of the Colorado Rockies but has spent a significant portion of his life in the current and former authoritarian states of Eastern Europe, Russia, and the Middle East. Although he currently works in cybersecurity, his early university training is in Russian language and literature. Niles translates from Russian and Czech into English. A world traveler at heart, his interests include the conflict between the individual and the state, religion, genocide, and the madness of crowds.

**Юлия Пикалова**  
**Julia Pikalova**

Translated into English by Anna Krushelnitskaya

© Julia Pikalova, 2023, poems

© Anna Krushelnitskaya, 2023, translation

**The Opera**

*"If he hollers, let him go!"*  
*(A counting-out rhyme)*

Eyes are burnt by  
 the big city gloss that  
 Shines unwelcoming,  
     arrogant,  
     rough.  
 But large letters  
     proclaim  
     there'll be TOSCA\*,  
 And for now,  
     it is more than enough.

How I love  
     all this terrible terror,  
     and I know how the ending will go:  
 Now the bloody-bloused,  
     fully-dead tenor  
     will arise to a big standing O –  
 And he'll laugh  
     as he kisses his slayer,  
     and he'll cherish  
     his sworn enemy;  
 Then, we'll have  
     jubilation and prayer,  
     hallelujah and praise,  
     glory be!  
 So much laughter  
     we'll find ourselves breathless:  
     bravo, brava, encore,  
     we're so thrilled!  
 And we'll all be  
     so gorgeously deathless,  
     that we'll offer  
     ourselves  
     to be killed.

**Александр Вейцман**  
**Alexander Veytsman**

Translated into English by Laurence Bogoslaw

©Alexander Veytsman, poems, 2023

©Laurence Bogoslaw, translations, 2023

**Maria Yudina**

Inside the concert hall at Finland Station  
She sits in a drawing from a poet's art book.  
Her pedaling canvas shoe might be sustaining  
The counterpoint of Berg or Bartok.  
She sits there, sketched in pencil sparsely  
against the notebook paper's horizontal bands.  
The scene inside the frozen hall, illuminated barely,  
Would be a still life, if not for the shadows of her hands.

Spectacles hide her pupils, making her perspective  
seem trained beyond the Steinway, autonomously ranging.  
Every part of her body is stressing the effect of  
age. As her fingers touch the keys, even they are aging.  
She sits upon the bench as shattered  
canons of piano repertory fall beside her.  
The feeling of a holy fool, bowed down in rapture  
before an icon, bafflingly wells up inside her.

She rises, reads from Pasternak's forbidden compositions,  
and sets the boulder of her body down with gravity.  
Then goes on playing. Motionless until the intermission  
her profile can be seen from the lofty gallery.  
The austere sound embosses her, as it embosses  
all that the hall contains. Stock still, without a breath.  
What's in that hall would make the Christian masses  
brace for the blast of the Day of Wrath.

**Modigliani**

Anna Andreyevna would arrive and remove her clothing.  
She lay down on the couchette, her long body unfolding.  
Extended between light and clay like an isthmus,  
encroached on by cobwebs, the studio space diminished.

He raved about Egypt, Verlaine, and tales from the inferno and paradise of Dante. He cut the Luxembourg Garden's corners, then counted the steps and minutes to Montparnasse. That's how the plan unfolded and a full day was passed.

Not yet a portraitist, he gave landscapes the cold shoulder. She would wonder about this later, grown perceptibly older than his subjects. Older than the El Greco waistlines and the caryatid-inspired face lines.

They would walk about town. And the town was partitioned  
 Into faces. Life seemed slow, free of flashy ambition.  
 In its pace, speech and gestures, the century remained decided-  
 ly nineteenth. And they felt delighted.

In the twentieth, much would change: specifically, mortality would arrive, staving off and deftly parrying poverty. The city's psychology would cast aside nudes. And sex, and Freudian envy. It would rave about Dada as the symbol of enlightenment and frenzy

But the future is not merely mad, impetuous or temporary -- in the context of the past, the gaze finds it secondary. To Anna Andreyevna, these temporal processes grew clearer as her gaze grimly archived an outgoing era.

## Miró

Collage. Against the white, triangles on a yellow field.  
An egg that once was dreamed by Dali giving birth.  
A space of emptiness. Life spun back to days of eld.  
A pinch of dust. A fist of earth.  
Light falls upon the canvas but glances off – still an outsider.  
An eye frames light in view.  
Darkness eclipses dusk but a flat hand rubs it whiter.  
And look: that color's new.

### Rue de Rennes

Bunin blanched by the bridge when he saw a stone roll  
off the edge and bounce onto the square, then the whole  
square cleared out like a mirror held up to the heavens.  
Had that been the real Bunin? Or maybe it hadn't?

Let that be as it may, they all said it had been.  
A black outline, a hat, an inkblot from a pen  
in that Paris café...these were signs bona fide  
that he'd been back again, and that he would abide

until Saint Sulpice ran out of wax, and the cheese  
all grew moldy – these worlds were not his  
to invent, but Arsenyev's (or Dersu Uzala's)  
and they weren't worlds, but shadows in muted gray colors.

Bunin blanched by the bridge when he saw... and in fact,  
the stone really did roll and would always roll back  
to the day when wild beasts and forebears of our race  
had whispered in disbelief as they embraced.

For a ghost is a ghost. Those who tried on that day  
to catch sight of it might have discovered a way  
we can understand memory, beating back fear  
and our ancestors' ashes as Bach fills our ears.

### After Tarkovsky

To Alexander Druyan

Take a peek in that house, where the pollen is playing on notes  
of a nocturne and sifting the flats through the dawn of September  
before ducking in back of a shadow, not lighting at all  
on the curve of a face and not hearing the words "Now the summer...

Now the summer is gone!" And there's no one left – look! – not a soul  
who could read these lines even in whisper tones, much less out loud;  
take a peek in that house, where the hope of spilt milk is compelling  
a pianist to elbow a glass without hearing the swelling

of the flood at the window outside, which will keep pressing on  
till the sixth of the month cascades into the eighth, not subsiding  
until someone remarks en passant: "Now the autumn is gone!"  
Take a peek in that house, but don't let the house know where you're hiding.

**Alexander Veytsman** writes poetry and prose in both English and Russian languages, having authored several books. His original poems, translations, as well as short stories and essays, have appeared in more than 50 publications worldwide. A graduate of Harvard and Yale universities, he lives in New York City.

**Laurence Bogoslaw** is Editor in Chief of East View Press, an independent academic publisher, and also directs the Minnesota Translation Laboratory, a language provider that serves immigrant and refugee communities. Since 1997, Larry has taught Russian and translation courses at various colleges and universities in Minnesota. His first collection of verse translations, „A Succession of Somnolent Souls“ (original Russian poems by Alexander Veytsman), came out in 2022.

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.

### Poets:

Afanasy Fet

- Nr 7, 2014, translated into Hungarian by Árpád Galgóczy
- Nr 14, 2016, translated into Dutch by Paul Bezembinder

Aleksey Apukhtin

- Nr 27, 2021, translated into Italian by Paolo Statuti

Julia Pikalova

- Nr 25, 2020, translated into Italian by Paolo Statuti
- Nr 27, 2021; Nr 29, 2022, translated into Italian by Paolo Statuti; translated into English by Anna Krushelnitskaya

Alexander Veytsman

- Nr 30, translated into English by Laurence Bogoslaw

### Translators:

Paolo Statuti: Nr 25, 27, 29, 30

Anna Krushelnitskaya: Nr 25, 29

Laurence Bogoslaw: Nr 30

Nr 31, Poem titles/ first lines in Russian:

Afanasy Fet

- Сад весь в цвету...
- Учись у них - у дуба, у берёзы...
- Нам повторяли все в речах картинных...
- Узник
- Чудная картина...
- Ласточки пропали...
- СМЕРТЬ

Aleksey Apukhtin

- К славянофилам
- Мухи
- 

Bulat Okudzhava

- Бумажный солдат

Marina Gerschenowitsch

- Два старика пришли в кино...
- Описание Рождества
- Подарок
- Рождественский ноктюрн
- Молитва
- 

Julia Pikalova

- Китеж
- Опера

Alexander Veysman

- Мария Юдина
- Модильяни
- Миров
- Rue de Rennes
- Из Тарковского

