**TSVETAEVA, Marina (ЦВЕТАЕВА, Марина) (1892-1941)**

One of the best-known and influential Russian Modernist poets, Marina Tsvetaeva (1892-1941) wrote lyric and narrative poetry, plays, autobiographical and memoir prose, and essays in literary history and criticism. Her biography is so full of incident that it can tend to crowd out her poetry in studies of her life. Born in Moscow, she began her poetic career among the Moscow Symbolists but never joined a poetic school. She wrote all through the Revolution and made a splash when she was able to publish again in the early 1920s. After emigrating in 1922 she wrote and published a great deal of poetry, but later she switched largely to prose, at least in part because it was easier to publish. Her culminating book of poetry is *After Russia* (Paris, 1928). Life in Paris became difficult as journals closed and opportunities for publication shrank. Tsvetaeva returned to the USSR for family reasons in June of 1939. There she worked as a translator; she committed suicide in August 1941. Since her work began appearing more widely in the 1960s, Tsvetaeva has been recognized as a ground breaking poet, impacting writers and poets all over the world, and of particular interest to feminist critics and scholars.

A young Tsvetaeva,

photograph from 1917.

**Timeline of Tsvetaeva’s life and most significant works:**

**1892**: Marina Ivanovna Tsvetaeva born in Moscow on October 8. Father Ivan Vasil'evich Tsvetaev was a professor of Italic languages who founded the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts. Mother Maria Alexandrovna, née Meyn, was a frustrated concert pianist who had studied with one of Nikolai Rubinshtein’s students.

**1904-1905**: Tsvetaeva and her sister Anastasia attend school in Italy, Switzerland and Germany while their mother is treated for tuberculosis. Maria Alexandrovna dies in 1905.

**1910**: Published her first collection of poetry, *The Evening Album*, at her own expense. Reviews appeared from Valerii Briusov, Nikolai Gumilev, and Maximilian Voloshin – striking success for a young and unknown poet.

**1912**: Married Sergei Èfron; published *The Magic Lantern*; daughter Ariadna born in September.

**1914-1916**: Affair with Sophia Parnok; writing intensively but publishing little.

**1917-1922**: Trapped in Moscow during the Revolution and Civil War. Her second daughter, Irina Èfron, dies of starvation in February 1920.

**1922**: Tsvetaeva emigrates; she and Ariadna first go to Berlin, then join Èfron in Prague. Publishes five books – in Berlin, Moscow and Petrograd. Begins corresponding with Boris Pasternak.

**1924**: Writes two of her greatest narrative poems, “Poem of the Mountain” and “Poem of the End,” in the aftermath of a love affair.

**1925**: Son Georgii born in Prague; the family moves to Paris later in 1925. Her long folkloric satirical poem *The Pied Piper* appears serially.

**1926**: Begins corresponding with Rainer Maria Rilke, who writes her a poem. She addresses several poems and prose works to him, after his death in late 1926.

**1928**: *After Russia*, the last book published in Tsvetaeva’s lifetime, appears in Paris. The family regularly moves from one Paris suburb to another in search of cheaper lodgings.

**1930-1936**: Increasing difficulties publishing poetry in the bad economy; Tsvetaeva writes memoirs, autobiographical prose, critical essays.

**1937**: Ariadna Èfron returns to the USSR. Later this year, Sergei Efron is implicated in a botched assassination and returns to the USSR. Tsvetaeva ostracized by many Russians in emigration.

**1939**: Tsvetaeva and Georgii Efron return to USSR in June. Ariadna and Sergei Èfron arrested later that year for espionage.

**1940-1941**: Tsvetaeva makes a scanty living by translating, writes very little original poetry. Evacuated to the small Tatarstan town of Yelabuga as WWII begins in the USSR, Tsvetaeva hangs herself on August 31, 1941.

Marina Ivanovna Tsvetaeva (1892-1941) is one of the most important Russian Modernist poets. She wrote lyric and narrative poetry, plays, letters, autobiography and memoirs, and critical essays. Her biography, full of incident, can tend to crowd out the poetry in studies of her life, but she managed to write through various kinds of disruption for years. Born in Moscow, Tsvetaeva married at nineteen; the family could afford servants, thus she could concentrate on writing. She never joined a poetic school, though she knew many Moscow Symbolists and later admired both Acmeists and Futurists. She was able to publish a great deal after emigrating to Berlin and Prague (1922), and then Paris (1925). In 1926 she corresponded briefly with Rainer Maria Rilke. In the 1930s she shifted largely to prose: it was easier to publish (and the honoraria helped to support her family). Tsvetaeva’s autobiographical prose, memoirs of writers, and critical essays of the 1930s are models of thoughtful construction and continue many traits of her poetry. In June 1939 she returned to the USSR, making a scant living as a translator. She committed suicide in August, 1941. Tsvetaeva’s poetry reemerged in the 1960s; she is now widely recognized, influencing writers and poets around the world, and particularly interesting to feminist critics and scholars.

A stop to this buttonesque nonsense, Muse!

Enough bobtailed truths!

Buttons won’t save us from revolution:

They’ll all tear loose!

An excerpt from Tsvetaeva’s long poem

*Krysolov* (The Ratcatcher) (1925)

Translation by Angela Livingston

Tsvetaeva grew up in Moscow with two older half-siblings and a younger sister. After her mother died in 1906 the girld adopted a bohemian lifestyle. Tsvetaeva published her first book at her own expense and met her husband, Sergei Èfron, in the informal artist’s colony at Maximilian Voloshin’s house on the Black Sea. Tsvetaeva and Èfron had three children: Ariadna (1912-1975), Irina (1917-1920), and Georgii (1925-1942). Tsvetaeva followed Èfron into emigration, where his evolving political sympathies complicated their lives. In 1937 Ariadna and then Sergei returned to the USSR; Tsvetaeva and Georgii followed in 1939. Tsvetaeva killed herself in Tatarstan as WWII began in the USSR; the reasons are still a matter of speculation.

Slums of God’s chosen folk!  Ditch and curb.

Mer—cy do not bid!

In this most Christian of possible worlds

All poets—are Yids!

Excerpt from *Poema kontsa* (Poem of the End)

(1924)

Translation by Alyssa Gillespie

Tsvetaeva’s early verse is juvenile in content; she began developing her poetic voice during an affair with the poet Sophia Parnok (1885-1933). The Revolution provided another impulse towards seriousness. Tsvetaeva had no skills but writing: she sold her belongings, leased rooms in her apartment, and worked for a time at the Commissariat of Nationalities, but mainly she wrote, often finding inspiration in romantic and sexual relationships. The Revolution also opened new linguistic possibilities. Tsvetaeva emigrated to Prague in 1922 with a tremendous backlog of work, much of it soon published, and wrote a great deal in Prague and Paris. Her prose of the 1930s continued many verbal techniques used in her poetry. Her prose includes autobiography and memoirs of poets she knew (BELY, BRIUSOV, MAYAKOVSKY, PASTERNAK, Voloshin) or read (Pushkin), and addresses questions of artistic creativity.

Tsvetaeva’s work has a strong Romantic streak but also draws on Classicism and Classical antiquity. Her lyric poems, often in cycles, became increasingly demanding over time. Her narrative poems draw on folklore and intensely personal experience, and her plays on classical subjects. She found support in correspondence with distant friends or other poets like Pasternak and, for a few brief but transformative months, Rilke.

Tsvetaeva on vacation

at the seaside in the

1930s.

**References and Further Reading**:

Ciepiela, Catherine. (2006) *The Same Solitude: Marina Tsvetaeva and Boris Pasternak*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Treats the work and creative thinking of both poets and particularly their important continuing correspondence and creative interactions over many years.

Dinega, Alyssa W. (2001). *A Russian Psyche: The Poetic Mind of Marina Tsvetaeva*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.

Traces several major elements and stages of Tsvetaeva’s writing and poetic development, reading deeply into the implications of her writing for the creative process.

Hasty, Olga Peters. (1996). *Tsvetaeva’s Orphic Journeys to the Worlds of the Word*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Examines Tsvetaeva’s poetics and philosophy, particularly from the point of view of her relationship to Rilke.

Karlinsky, Simon. (1985) *Marina Tsvetaeva: The Woman, Her World and Her Poetry*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Expands and builds on the material in Karlinsky’s first (1966) book on Tsvetaeva, bringing in facts and texts that were not known in the 1960s. Karlinsky was Tsvetaeva’s first biographer in English, and he gets things right.

Schweitzer, Victoria. (1992) *Tsvetaeva*, translated by Robert Chandler, H. Willetts, and Peter Norman. London: Harvill Press, 1992.

A loving and detailed biography by a consummate scholar of Tsvetaeva; non-Russian readers will appreciate Schweitzer’s notes of Tsvetaeva’s references to other poets.

**Major works:**

**Poetry:**

Vechernii al'bom (*The Evening Album*) [1910]

Volshebnyi fonar' (*The Magic Lantern*) [1912]

Iz dvukh knig (*From Two Books*) [1913]

Versty (*Mileposts*) [1921]

Versty, Vypusk I (*Mileposts, Book One*) [1922]

Razluka (*Separation*) [1922]

Stikhi k Bloku (*Poems to Blok*) [1922]

Tsar'-devitsa (*The Tsar-Maiden*) [1922]

Remeslo (*Craft*) [1923]

Psikheia (*Psyche*) [1923]

Molodets (*The Fine Young Man*) [1924]

Poema kontsa (*Poem of the End)* [1924]

Krysolov (*The Ratcatcher*) [1925]

Posle Rossii: 1922-1925 (*After Russia: 1922-1925*) [1928]

Lebedinyi stan (*The Demesne of the Swans*) [1957]

**Plays:**

Konets Kazanovy (*The End of Casanova*) [1922]

Metel'. Prikliuchenie. Ariadna. P'esy (*The Blizzard. Adventure. Ariadne. Plays*) [1978]

**Prose:**

Proza (*Prose*) [1953]

**Criticism/Theory:**

Moi Pushkin (*My Pushkin*) [1967]

*Art in the Light of Conscience*, trans. Angela Livingstone [1992]

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Source URLs for Images:

1917 (source: http://braungardt.trialectics.com/wp-content/gallery/people/marina1917.jpg):

Tsvetaeva on holiday at the seashore, 1930s (source: http://www.sophiamurashkovsky.com/):