

Sophia Parnok: A Collection In Progress

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To Khodaseyevitch

Memory of a child: these pears -
wrinkled, small, pinched,
and tucked with sour flesh
that sudden-pursed my mouth: just so
my pleasure in your poems'
harsh-bitter skelfs.

Ghazals

Comfort of pain – your hand,
white bullbay flower – your hand.

One winter afternoon tapped on my door,
a sable-fur held in your hand.

Ah, butterfly on the stalk of my wrist,
it glimmered and stayed – not now – your hand!

And your hand fired what your enemies
damped – and I – but did not put out.

The megrim queen that fired the fiery
soft-sweetness in me – your hand!

It spurned me straight in the heart (how
could I complain, it is yours) – your hand.

On Other Shores

So on other shores, by another singing sea,
millenia later, in such a youthful spring,
vaguely recalling her ancient Aeolian childhood,
a thoughtful maiden runs her fingers over the strings.

Hellas's breath flows to her as a wind from the sea;
the wind, unsensed by others, moves her heart:
the maiden feels she will complete your dreams, Sappho,
she'll sing the songs that have not fully sounded to us.

Grey Rose

Night. Clotted snow drops.
Moscow is asleep... but I...
ah, I am all awake
my love!

Ah, my blood starts to sing
in this stifling night...
Listen! Listen! Listen!
my love:

Silver rimes
in your petals.
O, grey rose,
my poems – for you!

You breathe beneath the white,
Rose of December,
and dole to me
your restless joy.

I drink and cry,
cry and drink,
and cry that I may lose you,
my Rose!

In a White Night

It is not the sky – this stifled dome
atop the nude blank whiteness of the houses,
as if some careless thing
had spread a shroud on people and all things.

And dark – like light's shadow,
and light – like dark's reflection.
Was it a day? Or was it night?
Or some disturbed half-dream?

I look upon all this with wiser eyes,
and thus my peace is gentler still,
I look upon your mouth, stopped
with kisses that are not mine.

So let it be, your lie-be-gentle, lie-unruffled
look beneath those lidded eyes –
surely, underneath this sky
anyone may be to blame!

Sapphic Strophes

If I catch the song of the Aeolian lyre,
I burst into flame, I don't walk – I dance,
my voice imitates, my hand is nimble –
in my veins, music.

I'm not trying the pen, I'm tuning strings,
occupied with an inspired concern:
to release into freedom, pour from my heart
the stringed sounds.

I've not, as you see, in this life forgotten
the unforgivable joys of unforgettable songs,
which of old my girlfriends sang
in Sappho's classroom.

The Church Organ

I remember a solemn voice,
An alien service and temple.
I'm a teenager. In the sun my hair
Shines like fire; my tread is stubborn.

Grown tired of prayerful glances,
Of the foreign, too-pious shrines,
I was almost gone when the choir loft
Thundered a whole new Latin...

Who are you, light or wrathful angels?
I hadn't known paradise cried.
Is it from bliss they sing like that,
Or from an enormous longing?

And what flash has pierced through this
Thunderpounding dark?
I close my eyes. – This is how Isaac
Waited, patiently, to be slain.

And that's when a seed of fire fell
Onto my soul. That's when, seized
By the ultimate madness, all
The organ's voices exploded.

And it wasn't me who cried out –
This terror of bliss, this intolerable
Wholeness, for the first time
Unlocked the lips of a poet!

TRANSLATED BY SIBELAN FORRESTER AND IRINA MASHINSKI

A Greedy Spirit

A greedy spirit could not conquer
your self-betraying thoughts' caprice –
and, from thousands up for hire,
one night was given by you to me.

You had been tutored by dispassion
a brilliant artistry in love.
But suddenly, though used to quarry,
you arms, embracing me, convulsed.

Your eyes are frantic, stung by yearning,
your mouth is grim, clenched jealously,
you're paying fate back for my tardy
arrival by tormenting me.

1916

Love's Torment

Not satiation, not desire
your languorousness brings to mind.
To all your speech and gaze are kind,
no one and everyone's my rival

But to delights that are mere wishes
how can dreams not betray me, when
you say not no, not yes, but then,
your eyes imprint my mouth with kisses?

O, arms affectionate and prudent,
how you protect your indolence...
But shadows under your eyes grow dense:
"Twill be, the hour of love's torment!"

January 1915

Untitled (from the unpublished *Juvenilia*)

That evening was dimly smoldering –
but for me it was a fiery one
On that evening, as you had been hankering,
we went out to the "Union."

I remember your hands, weak from happiness,
the veins – networks of navy blue.
And touching your hand was impossible,
both were covered in gloves by you

Ah, again you approached so close by to me,
and again you turned to the side!
It was clear to me: words were unfindable
irregardless of how I tried.

And I said: "Your eyes in the gloominess
are deep brown and look remote... "
As a waltz played we watched scenes of Switzerland –
in the mountains a tourist, a goat.

Then I smiled – you didn't respond to me ...
Don't we all think that we're the aggrieved!
And so lightly that you wouldn't notice it,
I caressingly smoothed your sleeve

January 1915

Not You

And truly handsome, shapely young man, are you:
beneath the eyelashes' fringe two dark blue suns,
and curls, a darkly streaming whirlwind
grander than laurel, crown your soft features.

A real Adonis, young precursor of mine!
You began the cup which is now passed to me –
pressing the lips of my beloved,
with a doleful thought myself I comfort:

not you, oh young man, unbound the spell on her.
Marveling at the flame of her loving lips,
oh, first one, not yours enviously,
my name shall a lover murmur, praying.

October 3rd, 1915

All of Me

All of me is twined in memories' rapture,
I say, as from happiness I weaken:
"Lesbos! Source of Lyric poetry
at the last of Orpheus's harbors!"

And was my soul with wonderous avarice,
to the muses we did not give leisure.
In that country I was not alone,
Oh, my splendid woman-friend and lover!
Underneath my hand, which was not at full strength,
you forgave the unfull sound of the lyre,
you, whose languid name inside of me,
like the moon, draws waves upon the shoreline.

1922

In a Breeze

In a breeze it does not always burn brighter,
oh my friend, sometimes a torch is extinguished.
Waves do not always make easier sailing
more than calm waters.

Heedless young man, you hurry bliss unduly,
in scolding your maid for her languid passion –
have you forgotten that many like lightning
less than slow burning?

Not to him is given the wondrous singing
of the lyre, whose hand plucks the strings insanely –
many rules are in the (here is one – remember!)
amorous science:

as your long kiss creeps down from her smooth shoulders,
do not hasten there, where in drowsy languor,
two white turtle doves, two beloved marvels
sweetly respire.

1922

Life is a Woman

Life is a woman. Merely by her own seductions
intoxicated, she will stand above her victim
The more unhappy is the soul that lies before her,
the fuller she all is with unrestrained desire.
How often her mysterious gaze has hovered over
my soul with powerful inquisitiveness,
but merely had my soul to quiver in responding–
and silently, with unconcern, she sought the distance.

Leave me Here

Leave me here as soon as possible! Oh, faster!
I'm smothering; I'm growing dull;
I'm becoming malicious and nasty;
I now shun everyone...
I don't feel at all engaged with other people.
Their happiness gives me no joy...
I despise all people...
Animals are a hundred times dearer to me.

Hardly Flesh

Not spirit yet, but hardly flesh,
I have no need of bread so often,
it seems my finger, were it pricked –
would drip not blood, but drops of heaven.

But there are times: I'll pour a glass
brimful of wine – and it is wanting,
and salt my bread until it's white,
but to my lips it tasted unsalted.
And whispers in my torrid dreams
predict I'll suffer from my body,
the same as from a pregnant wife,
one oddity upon another.

Oh, dark, dark, dark path,
why are you so dark and lengthy?
Oh, veil that opened but a bit,
and then just wound itself up tighter!

To bear one's seld right up to God,
and fall back into night, like stone,
and wait, until a lazy flame
will penetrate you to the bone!

1922

Music

A spider spun my dark-hinged icon
and all my prayers' words are dead,
and in a day becoming witless,
upon the pillow shall sink my head

That's the way she'll come for me –
not as music, not sweet fragrance,
not as a darkly winged demon,
not as inspired quietude –

instead, a dog will howl, or else a
motorcar will sound its horn and
a rat will slither in its hole,

That's how she'll be! Not good, not evil,
that's the music which I've lived to,
that's the music to which I'll die

1922

To Seluc-Rasnatowskaya

So strong, like death, seductively-superbly,
Each part of her whole being powerfully,
Lovingly enticed us all to her.
Unbounded passions of the southern girl
Came forth, it seemed, in all her singing,
Resplendent, hot, and powerful Delilah!
Acknowledging the celebration's start,
She slithered, like a snake, around her prey...
Not feeling love, she unrestrainedly
And passionately gave herself; –for god,
That god whom all her patrimony's sons,
Oppressed slaves, adored and owed obeisance,
With zeal she tried enticing Samson into
Seductive snares, not feeling any love.
Kalypso-like, what power she put into her acting!
And with your furious and forceful passion,
You have infected certainly not Samson
Alone, it seems to me, Delilah!

In Pain

I'm in pain. I lack the strength to speak...
Perhaps I *am* pathetic, perhaps I *am* worthless...
I can't keep you from thinking that...
But judges! The accusation is false!

But are the surges of my passions,
their profundity, known to you?
And do you have the ability to desire
something as strongly as I?

No, no! Not I, it's you who are powerless!
And it is for the likes of you to judge me?!...

And if I, *pathetic creature* that I am,
could meld some patience with the force of my desire,
then I, *pathetic creature* that I am,
would subdue the world entire.

To Liza Danziger

Twilight time autumnal, Greyish all around...
Sparse and thinning forest, river, naked ground.
Earth is hidden under a yellow covering,
Dusky like song, the ditty that I sing.
I don't feel like singing songs bright as day,
I don't feel like singing in general anyway...
Twilight time autumnal, Greyish all around,
That, my dearest friend, is how our life is bound.

Perhaps

Perhaps because I wished to fall in love with being
with so much obstinate avidity
I felt more vividly how bottomless
dispassion for it had come over me.
But what of now? Can I be captivated
by life in an enraptured rush I do not understand?
My soul luxuriates in boundless freedom,
as if inhaling life for the first time.

Listen

Just listen, how amidst inspired dreaming
the soul will suddenly lay bare its secret curves.
Let your thought illuminate them brightly
with creation's breath in an audacious surge.
You will see, then, how the endless distance
so easily and wondrously removes its haze,
and there upon a lofty pedestal of marble
the depth of worlds feels Beauty's silent gaze

Gilded Trees

In mournful luxury of trees that have been gilded,
in tiredness of branches bent without a quiver
is Autumn's quietude. Deserted and so pale
the distance that has dimmed; and in the night the play
of stars is cold; and a discerning silence
stands guard, or so it seems, to see if some weak sobbing
will not break out, a last enfeebled groan
from fading foliage. The air, though, is made thick
with fog . . . and it appears that the exhausted garden
wants to sigh, but doesn't dare; and strangely blazes
among the tree-tops, colorlessly gold,
a single ruby leaf, as if with blood engorged.

I Know

I know profoundly well—you've shown me everything,
the breathing of the skies, and speech of mighty billows
and twinkling of the stars within the depths of air,
and lightning's vivid laugh in gloomy quietude
you've given me with you in brilliant consonance.

1905- 1906

Mistress Anguish

Oh mistress Anguish! You, the muse of incantations,
make one bright moment show from all the recollections
of my superfluous, unhappy , boring days!
And that unbounded moment , when, as in a graveyard,
the soul by the deserted silence is bewitched,
and cemetery visitors, the pangs of conscience,
will dig the past up from the bottom of all graves—
may you and I be reconciled in that moment,
and may the aimless lot I've drawn be bound with life,
as rainbows brightly unify the earth
with the heavens' inextinguishable blue.

In Words

In words, in their cold interlacing,
your movements' melody and pacing
how can I say?
Your raptures' whims, your passion's slumber,
your power, and the way you tremble
can I convey?
The misty North has not made cooler
your mouth's vermilion, or your golden,
deep suntan's stream;
the sun's warmth, live and animating,
flows on in you without abating,
my very dream.
All of the East's intoxications
I drink in the deep undulations
of your night eyes.
Your spicy smell, can I convey it?
My drunken heart, how shall I say it?
Oh love of mine!

Strangers

Whose strange and savage will had cast a spell on us,
at that despondent, that night-time hour deep—
was I tormenting fate, was I by fate tormented,
who came and stood your life in front of me?
Our hearts are still replete with our night's madness,
but there's a lifeless wrinkle by your mouth;
the needless words we speak are more abrupt and cruder,
an emptiness has frozen in our eyes...
Oh ominous design! Paints that have been poisoned!
What has the artist of this canvas done
to paint two solitary, tragic masks like ours,
and merge two strangers' bodies into one?

At Times our Premonitions

At times our premonitions, at times our recollections
uncover to our souls a world beyond our knowledge:
we like the features of the faces we have dreamed of,
the voices and the hues that make our hearts responsive;
and often all our lives, we yearn for them in secret.
We can't resist a thing that resonates their music;
we seek them in all things, the fleeting and eternal,
in pictures, poems, and in our beloved women...
Is that not why, my darling, you have me in your power?
What voice has made your voice become its repetition?
From whose curved lips have yours retained their obstinacy?
Whose arms encircle me when I'm in your embraces?

A Light Profound

A light profound, a light endearing,
you passed along this soul of mine—
your ray plunged under fields to shine
on cornshoots, previously fallow.
And then I dreamed—of blossoming,
and bounteous harvests in my desert,
and in my heart, blue and calmly,
streamed morning from my years of spring.

We Hadn't Noticed

We hadn't noticed what the dusk was up to,—
the muslin curtains suddenly looked grey,
the carpet deepened, the armchairs' outlines softened,
and you became—not you, and I became—not I.
A total stranger dropped her hand in sorrow
upon the place your hand had been till then,
and suddenly we knew our love was joyless,
and bloomed while hiding its own lack of strength.
Day's plashes had died down outside the windows
when oddly sharp, your voice began to speak
unnecessary words we both found strange;
when you got up, your shawl around your shoulders,
and rustling, your silks said their "so-long,"
when leaving, you gave me the merest nod

You Wrote Your Sister

You wrote your sister, "What a pity!
I forgot my sleeveless cloak."
Your fine script helps me track the features
of a soul I did not know.
You were incapable of trusting:
your o's and a's are tightly spaced.
I try in my imagination
to sketch the outlines of your face.
You were quiet, uningenious,
like your lines, formed modestly.
And everything my heart cherishes
you would malign as vanity.
I cling, though, to the tempting dream
that all the same, you would have loved me:
the flourish ending your delicate,
small "I" is just so lovely.

Like a Small Girl

"Like a small girl you appeared in my presence ungracefully"—
Ah, Sappho's single-line shaft pierced to my very core!
During the night I leaned over your curly head pensively;
motherly tenderness stilled passion's mad rush in my heart—
"Like a small girl you appeared in my presence ungracefully."

Embroidery

Embroidery has covered up
my windowpane. Oh day of parting!
I press my anguish-ridden hands
against the glass's unsmooth surface.
My devastated eyes look out
upon the frost, first gift of winter,
the way the icy moire melts down
and then dissolves away in teardrops.
The fence is buried in a drift,
the rime is fluffier, more like terry,
the garden under silver fringe
and tassels—like a brocade coffin...
No walkers and no cars are out,
my telephone is cruelly silent.
With letters on the sign GEORGES BLOK
I play at guessing odds or evens.

Signal to Depart

Again we have the signal to depart!
On a wild midnight we left our moorings.
My heart—a captain who's gone mad—
sets sail for unavoidable destruction.
Whirlwinds have set the moon-ball dancing
and stirred up heavy breakers all around...
—Pray for us, the unrepentant,
oh poet, companion of all seekers!

Remember

Remember: one little hair of my own head
Is dearer to me than all other heads.
So go away... You too,
And you too, and you.
Stop loving me, all of you stop loving me!
Don't watch over me in the mornings,
So that I might be free to go out
And stand in the breeze.

Sonnet

You watched the little boys at all their games,
and showed indifference to smiling dolls.
A superfluity of energy propelled you
from your cradle straight astride a horse.
Years have passed, by their ominous shadow
your power-loving outbursts have not been
blotted out in your heart—how little I mean
to it, Bettina Arnim and Marina Mnisek!
I gaze upon the ash and fire of your curls,
upon your hands, more generous than a king's,
the lack of colors on my palette defeats me!
You, passing by to your own fate!
Where does the sun rise that is your mate?
Where is your Goethe, and where your False Dmitri?

May 9th, 1915

What do I Care

What do I care for the scorn on those cruel lips!
Tell me, valuer, on what scales have you weighed
everything I live by and in which I unhesitatingly believe?
With what measure have you measured a living soul?
Were you here when my soul was conducting her affairs
in silence?

1916

All Ablaze

All ablaze, the clouds fly by,
the sky city lies in ruins.
My step is obstinate and light,
the wind has spread a willful windlass.
Who blessed me as I headed off?
Who murmured, "Have a happy journey?"
Let the winds not cease to blow,
to urge me from my threshold.
To the devil for his use
I throw the past—my fateful burden.
Up above my homeless head
blaze on, nomadic heaven!

Blindly Staring Eyes

Blindly staring eyes of the
Holy Mother and Savior Child.
Smell of incense, wax, and oil.
Sounds of soft weeping filling the church.
Melting tapers held by young, meek women
in fists stiff with cold and roughskinned.
Oh, steal me away from my death,
you, whose arms are tanned and fresh,
you, who passed by, exciting me!
Isn't there in your desperate name a
wind from all storm-tossed coasts,
Marina, named after the sea!

I'll Remember Everything

I'll remember everything. In one boundless moment,
the obedient herds of all my days will crowd before me.
On the paths I've trodden I shall not overlook
one track, like the lines in my reference book,
and to the evil of all my days I shall softly say "yes."
Are we not summoned here by the whim of love—
love, I have not endeavored to break your chains!
And without fear, without shame, without despair
I'll remember everything.
Even if my toil has yielded me a pitiful harvest,
and my barns are full of wormwood rather than corn,
and even if my god has lied, my faith is firm,
I won't be like some contemptible defrocked monk
in that endless moment, the last moment, when
I'll remember everything.

To Blush

To blush for poems that you wrote,
demand that I return your letters,
your gift is sacred, independent
of those blasphemous hands of yours!
What can I return? Here, catch
your notebook full of written pages,
but the fire, moisture, and wind in murmurs
of love can not be given back.
Aren't they why my night is black,
my eyes—vacant, my voice tender,
but do I know which ear of corn has
arisen from the seed you've sown?

To Lyudmila Erarskaya

Can a lynx ever really be tamed,
so why play the kitten with me?
How you soften your fateful face
with that smile so skillfully!
Thus an actress should play saucy girls:
training her gold, gypsy eye
from beneath sultry lashes downcurled
to look at you while looking aside.
Oh that ominous calm before storms:
it is just like the quiet was when
Don Jose said, "You're the devil himself,"
and Carmen replied, "I am."

They Won't Come

They won't come and it's really no matter,
—they'll recall me in joy or in wrath;
in the ground I shall not be more homeless,
than I was when I walked on this earth.
And the wind, my unhired mourner,
will twirl up over me snowy lees...
Oh my path, sorrowful, distant, somber,
predetermined uniquely for me.

On Other Shores

Thus, on other shores, by another melodious sea,
a millennium later, in just such a young spring,
calling to mind her own ancient childhood,
a maiden pensively drew her finger over her strings.
She feels the breath of Ellada in a breeze from beyond the sea,
a breeze, unsensed by other people, stirs her heart:
it seems to the maiden she will dream out your dreams, Sappho,
she will finish your songs, which have not reached our ears.

On its Delicate Stalk

On its delicate stalk droops a flower...
Oh beloved, all I have ever loved
and will leave on this earth when I go,
finish loving , beloved, in place of me,
these petals as soft as a kiss,
this fire splashed over the heavens,
these tears (which only a poet
understands!)—the anguish of bliss.
And a lonely grave-mound in the steppe,
and majestic singing of verses,
but the gypsies' wild tambourines
love in this life no less...
In the twilight the cupolas pink
as the pigeons fly out over Moscow.
Oh beloved, please love above all
the bells tolling eventide!

Shade from the Windmill

Shade from the windmill
creeps along the vineyard.
Mysterious anguish
bewitches my heart.
Again a dark circle
has closed in above me,
Oh my tender friend,
my implacable one!
Cicadas' rasping chirrs
fill the sultry silence.
There's no way back
for you, me, or us—
a hot, languid spirit
hovers over the earth...
Oh, my passionate friend,
my insatiable one!

So Softly...

So softly and so wonderfully
the roses have not ever bloomed:
your breath is here, and you are lovely
with all the earth's sad loveliness.
How softly has the sky above you
stretched out its tender covering!
And the world's first evening wasn't
so blissful as these evenings here...
And there, above us two, THE STERNEST
is trying not to knit His brow,
but He and all the lesser godlings,
have fallen in love with our love.

Today I Do Not Want You

No, today I do not want you,
Memory, so just hold your tongue,
you, vainglorious procuress,
don't procure me anyone.
Don't seduce me down dark alleys,
to the places left behind—
to the bold or to the timid
lips I've kissed so many times.
Sacrilegiously inspired,
I have ploughed my heart soil up,
rooting out the names of lovers
from my sacred calendars.

Every Evening

Every evening now I pray
God to let me dream of you:
I have loved you to the point
where I can no longer love.
Every day I walk myself
past our now deserted rooms,
trying to arouse my memory,
but she won't remember you...
And I stubbornly repeat your
name again , and once again,
softly and with angry lips to
try to resurrect my love.

If You Should Cry Out In Your Sleep

If you should cry out in your sleep,
and your voice should begin to sound angry,
I'll gently take hold of your finger
and whisper, "Come, talk about me,
just tell me, my love, how you love me,
just tell me, my dove, how you touch me."
And doors which were shut until then
will burst terrifyingly open,
the pain lying hidden and dormant
will gush in a torrent of words,
and your heart as it weeps will be shaken
at the furiousness of its hatred.

The Lord Has Not Heeded My Yearning

The Lord has not heeded my yearning,
has not delighted me with coldness,
has not led my exhausted
flesh out of the circle of flame.
And people drink of my lips
though their last heat is not yet drunk.
Like centuries-old mead, my blood is thick—
oh, my sultry captivity! My Egypt!...
But I dream, from hollow depths
arises a light-blue stream,
and I'm borne aloft, and there alone
I am face to face with Thee.

Liberty

For long I lived in love with liberty,
with no more thought of God than has a bird,
directing my flight merely for the sake of flight.
And the Lord remembered me—and so,
like heat lightning, the soul in me was sparked,
everything lit up. And I found you,
to die in you and to be born again
for other days and for other heights.

The Lord Has Made Note

The Lord has made note of me too,
I dream of mysterious sounds:
for names I do not search in books,
I carry my calendars in me.
I baptize in a sacred font,
—the one I had hurt with a nickname,
I haven't endeavored to try
gold locks with a burglar's lockpick.
My world may be sparsely settled,
but I have my godchildren with me,
and in the eternity of names
the name I have given blossoms.

Unconquerable Heaviness

Oh, the unconquerable heaviness
of these waters silenced
behind centuries-old dams!
Oh Lord! Still the same for me, hard for me,
with my heart full to overflowing,
with a muse who's untalkative.

You Sleep

You sleep, my companion-lover, just like
a child on the breast of its mother!
How sweet: for you to fall asleep,
for me to lack strength to awaken,
since, tell me, is this not a dream,
this bed abounding in rapture,
the sonorous twilight, and you,
and you in my peaceful embrace?
Oh delicately winding tendrils
on your moist temple! Oh violets!
The same as the ones which would bloom
for us in our native meadows.
The two of us wove floral wreathes,
and where there were wreathes there was singing,
and songs came with bliss... Oh my last,
my sweet dream, are you finally asleep?...
Flow gently, Aeolian sky,
as you drift and drift up above me,
keep blazing, last sunset of mine,
keep foaming, my ancient wine!

Into Battle

I went into battle armed with a deathless rose
rather than a deadly spear. In ancient times
my ur-mother went against Achilles
differently armed.
It's the same he in murderous battle array,
his heart full of hate. But I am anguished:
I have not borne the ancient hatred
up to this life...
Quietly returning from the field of battle
and cursing the evil lot of female warriors,
Penthesilea presses her hands to her breast—
and weeps.

Homeland

My homeland is the place where my spirit rose,
as a vine in that saline soil; where my troubled
blood ceased boiling, and my ear took wing,
and my body delighted in its weakness.
That place is where I heard the music of light in
cicadas' chirrs, and rustles of the heat-cracked earth,
that place is where you brought me cooling grapes
to soothe my feverish lips—a sacred eucharist...
And if all that was just a dream, lest I
forget an unforgettable dream forever,
oh my beautiful and splendid godmother,
at least appear to me in dreams, Sugdalian Sibyl!

You Came In

You came in just as thousands have entered,
but the doors for an instant breathed fire,
and I realized: your hand has been hewn with
that selfsame, prophetic sign.
Yes, I know it, the ring—of Venus
marks your palm in the very same way:
for your walk is entirely too measured,
and the light far too dimmed in your gaze,
and your face powder covers up tear stains,
and your lipstick is smeared over blood—
yes, my sister, I know, that's precisely
how she chokes you with kisses—love!

The Mad Hour

"What time is it?" "The mad hour. Come take a look:
eleven o'clock, midnight, one, two, three!
A moment and the hand will come full circle.
Is this feverish thumping in the clock or in me?
It makes my heart beat faster, and faster still
in furious rapid patters of its own...
Ah yes, I know—soon I'll also rush about
just like that pendulum which has gone mad,
and dimly-dimly will the night-light glow,
and in despair my clockmaker will spread his hands,
my heart will start its beating, and wheeze, and groan,
and on my chest the sheet will bobble up and down...
And at that midnight hour, where will you be?
You who once slept on my breast, come, come to me!"

Like Music

Like music I love your sadness,
your smile, so similar to tears,
like the tinkle of cracked crystal,
like the fragrance of December roses.

Sacred

It's not passion's bed that is sacred,
but bread a guest breaks over victuals
at moments of being friends.
Forgetful girl, fond of good eating,
from whose hands have you only not nibbled,
my chirruper, tidbits of seed?
Yet, as in a church for a feast day,
at home I lit all of the candles
the night you came flying to me...

1923- 1924

The Cloud

A cloud lit up from inside.
It was suddenly light and mysterious—
the hour when a single image is
revealed behind chance appearances!
I'm leaving on a narrowish path.
It's as silent as in a cloister.
Intoxicating and desperate,
as it can only be from music.
And the places are so familiar..
It's been hundreds of years since I left home,
and I've returned to the same house,
always back to the same pure lake.
And the water babbles... Isn't that you
calling to me in the moist babble?...
The guslas weep above Lake Ilmen,
white swans are swimming out.

My Heart

My heart will burn to ashes,
my spirit rise from them.
I pray to all the martyrs
that the flame won't dim.
Rage, my blizzard-fire,
in your thicket black,
until my spirit finds a
baptismal font inside the
blaze of seething fire

I Haven't Died Yet

I haven't died yet,
I still can sigh,
just let me listen
to all this quiet,
catch this faint babble
slipping away,
see off this sailboat
floating away...
Ducklings dive into
watery blue,
quiet the sandbar,
still through and through...
Yesterday's passing
left no regrets.
Just one more minute,
don't wake me yet.

Treasure Hunt

People treasure-hunt at midnight,
I come in the light of day,
I don't hunt your soul in secret,
you'll hear me from far away.
Thieves maraud with lockpicks, crowbars,
but, my friend, I must disclose,
I've no crowbar, but a word with
which to enter in your soul...
Locks and clamps can all be broken
by the marvelous breach-grass:
from my soul straight into your soul
come the words that I've addressed.

The Aged Pine

Drowsily an aged pine
rustles in her sleep.
Leaning on her coarse-grained trunk,
here I stand and speak.
"Little pine-tree, just my age,
give me of your strength!
Not the usual nine months,
forty years I carried,
forty years I had been bearing,
forty years I had been begging,
begged my heart out, got by pleading,
brought to term
my soul."

I Sing

I sing about the kind of spring
which is in fact unreal,
but in my dream, toward quiet light,
like a sleepwalker you steal.
The paltry music of mere words
is now not only verse,
but interchanges of our dreams
and secrets—mine, yours...
And so the glimmering vista of
deserted lunar blue,
shows through the icelike crystal there
right in front of you.

To My Little Deer

A mare snorts beneath her covering
and savoringly chews her hay.
And like a blindman with his leaderess
my body follows my soul again.
Not to my proud Muse for a rendezvous—
she's not what I am yearning for—
to wordless music, to the ultimate,
lead me, darling, lead, my soul!
The door was open, we stepped out quietly.
Where have all the meadows gone?
As if on holiday, luxuriant,
tall banks of snow stand all around...
From melancholy and from tenderness
I cannot make a move to go.
And over there, off in the distances,
are deer tracks on the blueing snow.

I Loved You

"I loved you," "I love you," "I'll always love."
But my guest's eyes are greedy.
The way a woodpecker dully drums wood
day and night, day and night, without ceasing,
the way that a drop drips, until it will eat
through granite; that worms gnaw at souls...
Each sinner in the world has his cross to bear,
and mine's—to hear speeches like those.
"Please don't blaspheme!" I answer.
"Better sing, curse me out!
By compassion, not passion
does love make itself felt."
"I love you!" her mouth full of teeth repeats,
it repeats, and her eyes stay open.
Thus dully echoes a clump of earth
as it's striking the lid of a coffin.
It's quieted down, the air is dead,
unbearable calm before thunder...
"Now you're being chastised," I hear in my head,
"the way you chastised others."

Cigarette After Cigarette

Cigarette after cigarette.
We have meetings, discuss, make judgments.
Amid the smoke, throughout the evening,
auburn-haired I appear to people.
While my other self roams in the wilds...
Light's ineffable blueness!
Every leaf on them tremulous,
sorrowful aspens shudder.
Heaven's somnolent vaults move asunder,
into view comes a luminous bee garden—
"Step-daughters of mine! Stepchildren!..."
respires nature.

My Earthly Day

My earthly day is finishing,
without dismay I greet the evening,
and what is past no longer flings
back from in front of me a shadow—
that long shadow, the very same
which our confused-articulation
distinguishes from its relations
and says that "future" is its name.

Softly Do I Weep and Sing

Softly do I weep and sing
for the life I'm burying.
Dim light cuts the semi-gloom
from the window in my room,
from the corner dark escapes
taking an old werewolf's shape.
Tediously her slippers shuffle
and again, her toothless mouth
mumbles its persistent snuffle,
God knows what it's all about.
Up against the wall she's spraddled
and she stands behind my chair
as a long and hunchbacked shadow,
and she whispers in my ear,
and she prattles on with vigor,
and I hear the old crone snigger:
"Die? Alas, she didn't die,
all she did was pass the time!"

Thank You

Thank you, my friend,
for your quiet breathing,
the tenderness of your sleepy arms
and whispers of your sleepy lips,
for your arched eyebrows
and hollow temples,
for not possessing the anguish
of my thick blood,
for the palm amulet-like
you lay upon my breast,
and the fire slows its course
through my tensed-up veins,
for my gazing at your face
with eyes that can see—
for, my angel, being you,
and being next to me!

Twilight

We sank in a chair at twilight—
all alone, my anguish and I.
We'd all have been dead for ages now,
but there's no time to die.
And there's no one for complaining to,
and no one who's to blame,
that there's no time—
to live,
no time—
to rebel,
and no time— to die,
that a body's in despair of
beating the air in vain,
and the pendulum has wearied
of swinging night and day.

Old

Old beneath an aged elm tree,
old beneath an aged sky, an
aged woman in old anguish,
I have fallen into thought.
And the moon drills like a diamond,
sweeps a coverlet of moon snow,
spreads a carpet out of moon stream
over all the midnight fields.
In an icy sheen enveloped,
there steps out a shimmering specter,
in impenetrable silence
it's impenetrably still—
And its radiant image sparkles,
and it floats in pearly vestments,
passing
 passing,
 passing,
by my outstretched hands.

Yellow leaves

I gaze at the piles of yellow leaves...
It's all here, a treasure house of gold!
Riches do not green my eye with envy—
Rich is she whom evil does not scare.
I am playing out my final game,
I don't know what's dream and what's for real,
and I'm living life in total freedom
in a twelve-square-yard paradise.
Where is there a sunset that's so hopeless?
Where—a more intoxicating one?
I am happier, my foreign brother,
happier than you are, prodigal!
I do not believe beyond that line the
air is free, the living—paradise:
Over there is gaiety, but others',
here we have misfortune, but our own.

You are young

You are young, long-limbed! With such
a marvelously molded, winged body!
How awkwardly and with such difficulty
you drag around your spirit, anguish-stunned!
Oh, I know that spirit's way of moving
through whirlwinds of the night and ice-floe gaps,
and that voice that rises indistinctly,
God alone knows from what living depths.
I recall the darkness of bright eyes like those.
As when you read, all voices would grow quiet,
whenever she, a madman raving verses,
with her frenzy would ignite our souls.
How strange that you remind me so of her!
The same rosininess, goldenness,
and pearliness of face, and silkiness,
the same pulsating warmth.
And the coldness of serpentine wiles
and slipperiness... But I've forgiven her,
and I love you, and through you, Marina,
the vision of the woman who shares your name.

A Shortage

My blood and my rhymes have a shortage.
We're no longer whinnying or snorting,
we don't frolic, or slant our eyes—
we're reconciled to this life!
With age we've become more docile,
we dream of the warmth of the stable,
we've forgotten our wild oats,
in favor of daily groats...
Trudge on, trudge on, my placid gelding!
Your step is heavy, your step is measured,
and the fire in your eyes has gone out,
my Pegasus who has grown stout!

For Maria Maksakova

Does winter really have thunderstorms
and sky that's bluer than a blueprint?
I like the fact that you have eyes that slant,
and also that your soul comes slanted.
I like the headlong briskness of your gait,
the chilly feeling of your shoulders,
your frivolous and none-too-ready talk,
your tight-drawn thighs, just like a mermaid's.
I like how when I'm in your chilly breeze,
as in a raging fire I just melt,
I like—oh how can I admit to this?!—
I like that you don't like me yet.

1931

Unglorious Day

My unglorious day is waning,
finally, the end has come...
Oh my ash tree-ice! My poems,
light-transparent, frigid ones!
I do not intend to leave my
useless goods to anyone.
I am polishing the crystal
and the silver just for one.
And my icon lamp is burning,
getting rosy from inside...
Well, and all of you who spurn it, from my feast just
hide your eyes..
It's the arctic here. With reason
I keep warm as daylight wanes
with this secret heat, emitted
from my glassy-surfaced blaze.

One Cannot Predict

And truly, one cannot predict
who in the world will be one's reader:
a ball can't know what it will hit
once it's been shot into the distance.
Well, then, my life-creating verse,
whom I breathe, in whom I live,
fly into the darkness, into the void,
or simply, into the secret drawer!
Our path was blocked at midpoint by
a cruel century. But we're not complaining—
let it be! And yet, and in the main, it's
a splendid thing, this century!
Perhaps it has no use for poems,
or for names and patronymics,
or for separate lonelinesses—
still, it kneads the dough of centuries!

G*psy Song

I know who you're mad for, darling!
And for whom your sighing pleads:
and it's me who has enflamed you
with this burning, chilly breeze.
Don't lie low, don't be persistent—
either way, you'll come again,
gypsy love has put its stinger
in our hearts and done us in.
I feel frolicsome this evening,
like a thunderstorm in May...
Oh, you won't forget these shoulders
and this slant-eyed gaze!

from the perspective of M. Maksakova

The Hole

They've cut a hole through
the dark blue thickness of ice:
an air vent for big fish and little,
water for water hoistings,
a way out for a weary woman traveler,
if, in the end, life turned out
not to be traveling her road,
if she had nowhere to go!

Blind Woman

I, like a blind woman, find my way by touch
to your voice, your warmth, your smell...
In Pluto's garden I shall not get lost:
where you went in is East, West where you went out.
All right then, lead me, lead, lead
even through all the circles of hell
to that sandstorm blowing up ahead,
you're the only Virgil that I need!

Your Eyes

Your eyes are wide open, your mouth clamped shut.
And I feel like shouting at you rudely:
"You senseless woman you! The other way about—
Shut, shut your eyes, open your lips to me!"
That's the way, tormentress... At long last!...
Let us not make haste in vain.
Leave rushing to the callow youth,
in kisses I'm fond of five-year plans!

Silver Grey

A head of silver grey. And youthful features.
And Dante's profile. And a winged gaze,
and sorrow runs its fingers over my heart strings:
ah but the love I feel is out of place!
But be a little curious, just listen,
how aging women suddenly go mad...
Yes, I'd like to be a little stronger, drier,
like old wine—you know, I'm old myself!
If time could just evaporate this sweetness!
I've had enough. I do not want to want!...
Happy are those who in their youth can manage
to get their fill of sparkle, froth, and song...
I've come too late. The curtain has been lowered,
the hall empties. Not for intermission—it's the end.
Just in the gallery there one fool's still raving,
the more despairingly, the more intense.

I Live

I live, and even from myself I hide
that I'm exhausted and that I'm
tormented by you as I am by music!
I live off-target, out-of-tunely,
but in a temper, at top speed,
willfully, defiantly—
and so, full blast, I'll take a running
leap into death, as into languor.

Oh My Love!

Oh my love! My madcap demon!
You're so bony that while eating,
a cannibal in search of meat
would very likely break his teeth.
But I'm above that sort of crudeness
(and besides, I'm somewhat toothless),
I won't tear you all to bits,
since I'll eat you with my lips!

A Song to Vedeneyeva

You outsiders see more plainly—
what am I to do with her,
she, who makes me feel on fire,
she, who ices my desire,
with my . . . yeyeyeyeva?
Yeyeyeye, yeyeyeye—
how that ye-quartet can hum!
Each and every ye I treasure,
each one dizzies me with pleasure,
not mere life, Elysium!
Music haunts me when I'm sleeping:
"Yeyeyeye" moans a line.
Water-maiden! Loreleya!
Oh how sweetly I am ailing
from the greenness of your eyes!

Note: This has been said to lose something when converted into english phonemes

It Seems

It seems to me together we'd have been
so tender, so intense, so unbearably...
Isn't that why, in blind stubbornness,
you pass by me unresponsively?

So much the better! Let darkness gape,
and night more bottomlessly yawn—
or else, I wouldn't be able to die:
I would drink life from your palms!

What dreams we would have dreamed awake,
what music would have rocked and lulled us—
like a tiny boat at its mooringplace...
But enough. Pass by. I won't call out.

Ere St. Rodyon-Icebreaker

Ere St. Rodyon-Icebreaker's,
thirteen days ahead of time,
tremors shook the river's bosom,
fissures cleave d the stubborn ice.
I'd not ventured to the river,
but I caught a certain signal
and was absolutely sure,
she was just about to stir:
water was already streaming,
coursing warmly through the ice,
and beneath the cramped streams a
mermaid leaned her shapely thighs:
nature was awake and restless,
and her wine went to one's head—
something's on the verge of coming
that will simply knock 'em dead!

Exhausted

Exhausted, weary unto death,
but all—fire, but all—poetry—
and she's at your feet, here she is,
the elements' shaggy fosterling!
You coddle her the way a dove does,
you pull and tug at her forelock,
and it seems to you: you love as
you have never loved before.
How long and fixed is your stare!
But you should not believe your eyes.
Remember: no zoologist's aware
what species beasts like her comprise.

I See

I see: you're getting off the streetcar— utterly beloved,
a breeze, and in my heart it breathes you're— utterly beloved,
I can't tear my eyes from you because you're— utterly beloved!
And however did you come to be so— utterly beloved?
You, she-eagle from Caucasian glaciers, where in heat it's cold.
You, carrier of a very sweet contagion, who never has a cold.
You, beclouder of your lover's reason with logic clear and cold.
All five senses reel from your intoxication— utterly beloved !

Through All That I Do

Through all that I do, that I think, or remember,
through all of the voices inside me and out,
like a moment of stillness more vast than all noises,
an overtone, aftertaste, ray in the dark—
like wind which is moved by the stars' exhalation—
that's just how it was you burst into my life—
oh darling, my joy! Oh my inspiration!
Oh bitterly-bitter misfortune of mine!

How Can I

How can I root out this awful tumor,
so it won't grow into my soul, my thoughts, my blood!
How rid my heart of, cauterize with weeping
my illness, a creeping cancer—love!
Run, run, run with my eyes screwed shut!
Where? God knows where, but just away
from this fiery subterranean storm
that at midnight, night lets off its chain!

To My Self

When we're on the far side of forty,
it's late to be playing with Muses,
late to moon over music,
gulp down enflaming intoxicants,
take it easy— that's what we oughta do,
oughta fuss over our grandsons,
put our affairs in order,
when we're on the far side of forty.

When we're on the far side of forty,
it's pointless being precipitate;
scribbling love letters? no point in it,
pointless to roam the house nightly,
cursing out dastardly passion,
pointless believing in fantasies,
living in seventh heaven,
when we're on the far side of forty.

! When we're on the far side of forty,
when we're on the far side of forty ,
we're just the step-kids of Venus,
whether New Yorkers or Moscovites,
we're sent off to live in the boonies...
That's how it is, granny Sophie—
that's what they call philo-Sophy,
when we're on the far side of forty!

Don't Ask

Don't ask what's laid the poet low
and why she acts so dreamy:
she's simply been, from head to toe,
vedeneyevized completely!

I'd Beg From Death

I'd beg from death a
year or two,
but it's too little time to breathe in
all of you.
And if I lived to be a hundred,
my misfortune,
I couldn't finish looking,
I couldn't kiss my fill.
So I look and melt away,
my love,
clearly, you're too good-looking
to look at enough!

Ghazals (for Vedeneyeva)

Straight between your lips I whisper to you— ghazals,
With my breath I want to pour you full of— ghazals.
Ah, how consonant with my obsession— ghazals.
You, be careful, don't you dare stop loving— ghazals.
In midwinter spring is blossoming— in ghazals,
From his sleep a dead man is waked up— by ghazals,
When old hops ferment and raise some hell— it's ghazals,
And I celebrate you, my gazelle—with ghazals!

No If's, And's and But's

With no if's, and's, or but's whatever,
accept your lot right till the end,
and have the self-possession never
to interrupt smug, lying men.
And for your part, to play at something:
at war, at love, but do it right,
as long as you still have desire,
as long as you still have some bite.
As long as this same gambling fever,
mad and mischievous, rules the world,
and death has not mixed up forever
all the luckless cards you hold.
No, damn it! I've had it up to here with
the game—too much of a good thing.
I've rubbed the corns hard in my heart
and trashed my spirit, littering—
that's what life—a stubborn game— has
left me to remember her by,
but I will outstubborn her,
the demoness! It's time!

Give Me Your Hand

Give me your hand and let's go to our sinful paradise!...
Defying all State Pension Plans of heaven,
May returned for us in wintertime,
and flowers blossomed in the greening meadow,
where in full bloom an apple tree inclined
its fragrant fan s above the two of us,
and where the earth smelled sweet like you,
and butterflies made love in flight...
We're one year older now, but what's the difference—
old wine has also aged another year,
the fruits of ripe knowledge are far more succulent.
Hello, my love! My grey-haired Eve!

Night

Night. And it's snowing,
Moscow sleeps... But I...
Oh but I feel sleepless,
my love!
Oh, the night's so stifling,
my blood wants to sing...
Listen, listen, listen!
My love:
in your petals glisten
silver streaks of frost.
You're the one my song's for,
my silver rose.
Oh rose of December,
you shine under snow,
giving me sweet comfort
that can't console.

Young At Heart

It still hasn't got any cares, it's still young at heart,
it still hasn't cut its first teeth, our Passion—
not vodka, not spirits, yet no longer water,
it's mischievous, bubbly, melodious Asti.
You still don't know how to pale when I come up to you,
your pupil still doesn't become fully widened,
I know, though, you think that the magic I do
exceeds what I did in Kashira or affectionate Kashin.
Oh where is that tiny, forsaken, and gardenfilled town
(perhaps on the map they don't bother to site it?)
where my daydream is running as fast as it can
in some kind of sixteen-year-old excitement?
Where's the cottage with jasmine and the welcoming night,
and curlicue arches of hop-plants above us,
and thirst which could no longer be satisfied,
and sky, and a sky more impassioned than Petrarch's.
At the end of my last or my next-to-last spring—
oh how belated it was, our meeting!—
together the two of us dreamed crazy dreams,
I burned up my night in a savage, a beautiful fire!

Remember

Remember the narrowish corridor
through the black currant bushes?
Since then you've been my daydream's music, a
marvelous motherland.
You became both life and death for me—
so very delicate—
and you evaporated, enervated,
my beloved!...
Forgive that I, a guest uninvited,
don't bring you happiness,
I too am falling beneath this burden,
this burden passionate.
Oh but this grief is unassuageable!
There is no name for it...
Forgive me for loving you, beloved,
farewell, forgive me!

Come What May

"Come what may," you wrote, "we shall be happy..."
Yes, my darling, happiness has come to me in life!
Now, however, mortal weariness
overcomes my heart and shuts my eyes.
Now, without rebelling or resisting,
I hear how my heart beats its retreat.
I get weaker, and the leash that tightly
bound the two of us is slackening.
Now the wind blows freely higher, higher,
everything's in bloom and all is still—
Till we meet again, my darling! Can't you hear me?
I'm telling you good-bye, my far-off friend!

Upon Your Grey Head

Upon your grey head
I can't eyes
That's I kiss
the last time.

words from the poet's deathbed, August 26, 1933