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April 2, 2025

Tatyana Voltskaya and the Desertion of Empire

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Comparative Literature

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Abstract

Tatyana Voltskaya and the Desertion of Empire

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Tatyana Voltskaya is an eminent Russian journalist, poet, and dissident, who, as of recently, has also been designated a “foreign agent” by the Russian government. As the latter, she has joined a famous public list of nearly 1,000 individuals and organizations deemed “undesirable” by the Russian government—a price she pays for the courage with which she has spent her life working to uncover truths where the state has attempted to bury it. While the notion of “foreign agency” is often discussed by literature in the fields of political science and law, this project seeks to humanize the experience of the dissident-turned-“foreign agent” using a compilation of first hand interviews and a collection of poetry made accessible before its formal publication by Voltskaya’s visit for a lecture at Emory University, and thereafter through an ongoing partnership, and friendship, with the author.

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Acknowledgments

Poem translations by Dmitri Manin, Andrey Burago, John Frandon, Richard Combes, Yana Kane, and Polina Sparks—Voltskaya's records were unable to clarify which individual author translated which poems. Voltskaya has not formally published poetry since 2014, so all poems quoted in this paper have not been published officially. Interviews were conducted and facilitated by Elena Glazov-Corrigan and Marc Goedemans.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--------------------------------|-----|
| Introduction | 1 |
| Family | 3 |
| Education of a Dissident | 9 |
| Career(s): In Prose and Poetry | 13 |
| War and 'Foreign Agency' | 17 |
| Conclusion | 31 |
| Interview Transcripts | 32 |
| Additional Poems | 65 |
| Bibliography | 119 |

Introduction

Tatyana Voltskaya is simultaneously a journalist and a poet. In her journalistic career, she has worked for nearly a decade at Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty as an eminent Russia correspondent, covering autocratic political moves by the Russian state in addition to arts and culture. As a poet, she is well-known in Russia and internationally as the author of fifteen published poetry collections, winner of the 1999 Pushkin prize, and PEN club member. A lifelong dissident, she was added to the Russian government's "foreign agent" registry in 2022 for her outspoken criticism of the state.

I first encountered the work of Tatyana Voltskaya when she visited Emory for a guest lecture on September 18, 2024. At the time, I was unfamiliar with her work but had been searching for a way to engage with exiled Russian writers for my thesis.

I was very familiar—from a social science perspective—with the notion of "exile." I worked at the Council on Foreign Relations last summer, where I spent months researching so-called "foreign agent" laws throughout Europe and the former Soviet Union; as such, when I learned Voltskaya had been branded a "foreign agent" by the Russian government, I thought I knew exactly what this meant.

Foreign agent laws have been around since the United States instituted the world's first, the Foreign Agents Restriction Act, to counter Nazi conspiracies in 1938. Since then, they have sprung up as methods to curb foreign influence in the face of perceived threats from beyond national borders. Such laws are not uncommon: roughly sixty countries worldwide have their own "foreign agent" laws. What sets Russia's law apart, however, is not only its severity, but its publicity.

When labeled a “foreign agent,” Voltskaya joined the ranks of a highly detailed registry run by the Russian government—which includes addresses, bank information, family ties, and probably much more—of those whose actions threaten Putin’s chokehold on the country. Those designated “foreign agents” by the government are forced to identify themselves as such—by making an announcement or publishing a formal disclaimer—in any public or media appearance they make.

Should they choose to stay in Russia, most of these “foreign agents” are so intensely humiliated and ostracized for their designation that they lose any semblance of stability and normalcy in their lives. Should they choose to leave, they take control of their own displacement, but accept the fact that they will likely never be able to return home. The psychological toll that this decision—driven by social ostracism and the pariah status it induces—causes is incalculable.

In a practical sense, the life of a “foreign agent,” or any person in exile, is a life of competing tensions and never-ending displacement. The simultaneous pulls of home and family, countered by the pushes the government makes to keep “foreign agents” away, creates unstable footing no matter where they may attempt to set down roots.

Diving into Voltskaya’s poetry, which spans various topics and world regions, I noticed the underlying theme, and pain, of exile. As she said in our last interview, all aspects of her life have been colored by her decision to take ownership of her branding as an enemy of the state by leaving her home country—and so has every dimension of her poetry. This project, through firsthand interviews, poetic analyses, translations, and contextual information, seeks to cut through propaganda to humanize the experience of exile through the biographical lens of Voltskaya’s life.

Family

In many ways, Tatyana Voltskaya grew up with the quintessential Soviet childhood. In her youth, her sense of security in community was centered around her family. According to Voltskaya, her family's tradition of honorable, communally beneficial work stems from her maternal grandfather, Ivan Prokofievich Shapovalov.

Shapovalov worked as a military doctor during the siege of Leningrad, after which he earned medals of honor for his service. Voltskaya believes that her mother was inspired by Shapovalov to pursue a medical career; in the mid-20th century Soviet Union, a time when rigid communist norms dictated much of social status, a communally beneficial career in the medical field was a surefire way to achieve an honorable social status.

Voltskaya recalls her family's legacy in the medical field: "I remember that always when my grandfather was gone and my dad was gone, someone would call, come, and give me something, because Ivan Prokofievich had saved the life of someone they loved. My childhood was spent in such encounters with people." In her 2022 poem "Огребём по полной. Неправедная война" ["We'll pay through the nose. This war, foul and wrong"], however, Voltskaya discusses her grandfather's reputation and mourns the way it has been tarnished by Putin's propaganda.

Огребём по полной. Неправедная война (2022)

We'll pay through the nose. This war, foul and wrong

Огребём по полной. Неправедная война

We'll pay through the nose. This war, foul and wrong,

Обесценила дедовы ордена.
Я держу их в горсти

Renders worthless the medals our grandfathers brought home.

И говорю – прости
Деду Ивану, врачу
В блокадном военном госпитале.

Forgive me, I say, as I stand
Holding them in my hand,
Grandfather Ivan, a surgeon in Leningrad
under blockade.

Хочу услышать – что он сказал бы
На ракетные залпы наши – по Киеву.
Опускаю голову и молчу.

I'd like to know what he'd say of a missile
strike we launched against Kyiv. In that –
I quietly bow down my head.

Слышу, дедушка, голос твой –
Мы зачем умирали-то под Москвой –
Чтобы русский потом – вдовой
Украинку оставил?
Каин, Каин, где брат твой Авель?

Grandpa, my dear, I can hear your words
Was it worth fighting and dying for –
So that a Russian would now in turn
Make a Ukrainian girl cry. Or a mother?
Cain, oh Cain, where is thy brother?

Огребём по полной [“We'll pay through the nose”] is a comparison of two wars: the Soviet Union’s role in World War II, and the conflict in Ukraine, which began in 2022 and continues today. Referred to in literature, media, and propaganda alike as the Great Patriotic War, WWII, with its notions of Russia’s strength and resistance to Nazi occupation, remains a source of great national pride. As estimates assume that up to 34,000,000 soldiers fought for the Soviet Union during WWII (or roughly 15% of the country’s population), the memory of the war remains extremely strong in contemporary Russia, as so many today are descendants of Red Army soldiers—hence the medals brought home by the grandfathers referenced in the poem. As a descendant of a member of the Red Army, Voltskaya and her family took great pride in her grandfather

Ivan's involvement in the Great Patriotic War and his graduation from the Military Medical Academy. His service as a medical doctor during the climax of the Soviet World War—the Siege of Leningrad—brought pride to her family for generations.

Throughout the war in Ukraine, Putin has manipulated the prideful sentiment associated with the Second World War in Russia in an attempt to ignite similar nationalist passion for his invasion. He has explicitly compared the two conflicts in various speeches and public addresses not only to justify the invasion, but to shed Russia's blame as the aggressor. Putin and Russian state media continue to promote the false notion that Ukraine is a neo-Nazi regime, despite the fact that far-right parties receive support from less than 2% of the Ukrainian public. Still, by cloistering Russia's information ecosystem from virtually any sources of external media, Putin's baseless comparisons of what he has termed the "special military operation" in Ukraine to the necessity for Russian self-defense during the Second World War have, to an extent, proven successful in recruiting soldiers to join the war effort. As of January 2025, roughly 300,000 Russians have died in battle under the false pretenses of protecting their country from fascism, and more blood is spilled on the battlefield daily.

The fact that Voltskaya is of Ukrainian-Jewish origin lends an even more personal note to the poem and its critique of Putin's weaponization of Nazi fear mongering. *Орбѣм по полной* ["We'll pay through the nose"] cuts through Putin's propaganda, which merges his contemporary atrocities, national pride, and Voltskaya's personal sense of familial honor, by exposing the shameful forces behind the invasion of Ukraine through the lens of those forced to reckon with the now-twisted legacy of their ancestors.

After her father, Anatoly Stepanovich Voltsky, died shortly before her fifth birthday, Voltskaya was primarily raised by her mother, Irina Ivanovna Voltskaya—a widow and surgeon carrying on the honorable legacy of her father—and grandmother. “She was on call all her life, but not just as a surgeon,” Voltskaya said. As a third-generation Saint Petersburg, Voltskaya grew up well-connected, especially due to her family’s many connections in the medical field. Thus, after her father passed away, members of the community assisted her mother in looking out for her. Coming from a lineage of community-devoted caregivers, her family’s legacy of care and community involvement was reciprocated in Voltskaya’s most dire time of need. Communal support and connection was central—if not integral—to her upbringing. “We lived in such a way that we helped others and were helped all the time.”

Voltskaya recalls that after the death of her father, she developed “an unusually close relationship” with her mother, one that revolved around their mutual affinity for the depths of literature, art and culture. “That’s the best part of my childhood,” she said. “I don’t understand where she got them from in Soviet times, how she knew that I should read Voltaire, read the book *Tsarina*. She read Bulgakov aloud to me, so *The Master and Margarita*, which had just come out in Moscow magazine, she read it all aloud to me.”

“And she taught me to see beauty like this. There were never any conversations with her about everyday life, no, there was always something more urgent. It was always about something very deep, very spiritual. And about beauty, about painting, about sculpture, about the beauty of humanity.”

Over time, however, Voltskaya began to uncover more about her father. She had always been told he was an engineer specializing in vacuum cleaners, but gradually uncovered that he was, to some extent, involved in the military. “They were actually missiles, as it turned out later. So he was such, in general, an engineer who worked for the military-industrial complex, I understand, the so-called ‘box,’ ” Voltskaya said.

Without ever receiving answers about her father’s truthful involvement in the “military-industrial complex,” Voltskaya began to develop a skepticism and critical outlook on Russian militarism and conformist culture—one that would define her approach to education and future career in truth-seeking in journalism and poetry. Her lifelong wariness of Russian militarism, which stems from the obscurity of her father’s legacy, is perhaps best encapsulated by her 2020 work “Господи, почему всё так плохо [“Lord, why is it all so awful”].

Господи, почему всё так плохо,
(2020)

Почему, куда ни сунешься, всё не так,

И только произнесёшь: “эпоха” – Из-за
угла выползает танк.

Или автозак. И это неверно в корне.
Иногда мне кажется, нету ни стран, ни
рас,

А есть только мы и люди в военной
форме – И они догоняют нас.

Они за нами гоняются, как за молью,
Догнав, пытаются, а мы кричим.

Lord, why is it all so awful,

Why’s something amiss, wherever you try,

And as soon as you sound out “epoch”—
From behind the corner crawls a tank.

Or a police van. And that is wrong at the
root. Sometimes I think there aren’t
countries or races,

But only us and the people in military
uniform—And they’re catching up to us.

They chase after us like moths,
And torture us when caught, while we cry
out.

| | |
|---|---|
| Просто им нравится, когда нам больно – Чем нам больнее, тем выше им светит чин. | It’s just that they like when we’re in pain— The more we suffer, the higher the promotion. |
| Вот он – схватил кого-то, бежит обратно, Бьет паренька дубинкой, впадая в раж. | Here’s one—grabbed someone, now running back, Smashing with his baton, enraged. |
| Я говорю себе медленно: это брат мой. Медленно. Брат мой. Сквозь зубы. Внятно. Глядя на сытую харю и камуфляж. | I tell myself slowly: this is my brother. Slowly. Brother. Through my teeth. Clearly. Looking at the sated mug and the camouflage. |

“Господи, почему всё так плохо” [“Lord, why is it all so awful”] can be understood in dialogue with Voltskaya’s upbringing. As the war in Ukraine rages on, she reckons with the rampant corruption of the Russian military—an institution she was raised to perceive as honorable, especially in light of her grandfather’s service. Around her now, however, the state’s actions do not add up to this reputation; children are swiped off the streets, protestors are disappearing, and not far away innocent people are dying at the hands of men in camouflage.

She introduces the notion that Russian soldiers are not only desensitized to violence, but enjoy the pain they inflict on their victims and finds it hard to continue buying the narrative of “brotherhood” with those in uniform that the Russian government sells to its civilians. Instead, “through her teeth,” she feels only resentment: perhaps for the soldiers, perhaps for the state, or perhaps for the inevitable guilt of her implication in the military machine, which swallows everyone without exception. Confronted with this reckoning, Voltskaya questions whether any worldly divisions are as definite and punctuated as that between soldier and civilian: “us and the people in military uniform.”

Education of a Dissident

Voltskaya recalls being drawn to poetry from a young age, “because there were some feelings wandering around in [her] soul.” As a child, like many of us, she felt a strong desire to “say something” and have her voice heard, inspired by the literature and poems her mother would read to her. It was through her mother that she was initially immersed in the Russian literary canon, an exposure that would lead her to discover the works of Joseph Brodsky, Boris Pasternak, and Nikolay Zabolotsky. From the works of these major poetic figures, Voltskaya was also subliminally exposed to the lineage of Russian intellectual dissident thinkers that would come to inspire her own dual career in poetry and journalism.

In school, Voltskaya manifested an individualistic spirit. She recalls being disciplined frequently, though being well-respected among her classmates and teachers. “I didn’t like playing dolls with the other girls like I had nothing to talk about,” she said. “I read, I was sick all the time, I had a sore throat, and I sat at home, reading books.” While not interested in what was presented to her in the classroom, she felt inspired when she joined a poetic circle under mentor Vyacheslav Levkin.

Thus, by the age of 14, and with the help of Levkin, Voltskaya had found herself in one of the many underground literary and poetic circles in Russia at the time: “It was just a real blessing.” The importance of such literary circles was accentuated by the state-enforced book shortage of the late-70s Soviet Union that Voltskaya witnessed as she grew up. Reminiscent of the restrictiveness of the time of Stalin and early-Soviet propaganda and censorship initiatives, Leonid Brezhnev was leading the Soviet Union

toward a renewed period of conservatism—enforcing a return of national censorship of creativity and information.

In the midst of a book shortage induced by state censorship, literary circles kept the legacy of classic Russian and international literature alive, serving as spaces where the Russian state and society could be discussed critically through the lens of literature. Having fallen into this community at such a young age, Voltskaya was offered a rare safe haven for critical thought and intellectual growth. At a time when the Russian literary tradition was under direct attack and being phased out of public education, Voltskaya gained exposure to authors she would otherwise never have had access to. Through her poetic circle, Voltskaya took initiative to expand her education beyond state-promoted narratives. “Somehow humanity found loopholes to pierce through this lie.” She maintains that her entry into the literary criticism community of Saint Petersburg was the most formative—though informal—part of her education.

After completing secondary school in 1978, Voltskaya did not pursue tertiary level studies at a university after a conversation about university admission processes with the mother of one of her childhood friends, who worked at a university in Saint Petersburg. Voltskaya had heard rumors about the corruption in Soviet higher education, especially in admissions, and when her friend’s mother showed her a list of admissions and rejections from the office she worked at—which indicated that individuals with certain, especially Jewish and foreign-sounding last names should not be admitted—she decided not to apply. Instead, she enrolled in one of Leningrad’s technical schools. However, though she did not take part in the specialized programs formally dedicated to arts and culture, she did not abandon her interests. Leningrad at

that time had a rich counter-cultural world—and some of the best informal training for those with an affinity for poetry, literature, and art. In this community, she pursued her interests in literature and criticism. Of finding her voice and the meaning of poetry, Voltskaya wrote “Песочные часы” [“Hourglass”]— a rather unorthodox poem about the need for a female poet to confront the challenges of the context in which they write.

Песочные часы (1997)

Рифма – женщина, примеряющая
наряды, В волосы втыкающая розу.

Она плещется в крови, как наяда, И
выныривает, когда не просят.

Рифма – колокол, отгоняющий злых
духов От души виновной, безлюдной,
Когда ветер в зарослях чертополоха
Плачет ночью холодной.

Рифма – серебряный колокольчик,
Поднимающий меня из гроба, Когда
ты приходишь, мой мальчик, И,
блеснув очками, целуешь в губы.

Рифма – тропинка с земляникой по
краю, То мелькнет, то исчезнет – так
бьется сердце, Я иду по ней – а куда, и
сама не знаю, Заговариваю зубы
смерти.

Hourglass

Rhyme is a woman trying on outfits,
Putting a rose in her hair.

She swims in the blood like a naiad, And
comes out when not asked.

Rhyme is a bell that drives away evil
spirits from a guilty soul, when the wind
cries in the thistle thicket on a cold night.

Rhyme is the silver bell that lifts me out of
my coffin, When you come, my boy, And,
gleaming with your glasses, kiss me on the
lips.

Rhyme is a path with strawberries on its
edge, It flashes and disappears - that's
how my heart beats, I walk along it, but I
don't know where I'm going, I'm talking
death's teeth out.

Voltskaya wrote “Песочные часы” [“Hourglass”] in 1997, one year after she covered the Chechen war as a journalist. The poem can be interpreted as a justification for the purpose of poetry when other forms of articulation fail to enact their desired result. After witnessing firsthand the atrocities that took place in Chechnya, including

what many perceive as an ongoing genocide and mass deportation, she believed authentic journalism on the subject was what was needed to spur momentum to end the atrocities.

This, however, typically proved not to be the case. Journalists exposing the violence perpetrated by the Russian state during the war were often crushed by the opposing force of Russian state media. Out of concern for their own livelihoods, most civilians chose to defer to the narrative constructed by Russian state media surrounding the conflict—whether out of true belief or necessity. Witnessing the frequent inability of her work to achieve its intended result, Voltskaya sought to bring out her voice by alternative means, using different language that may resonate more with people.

Voltskaya recalls the fate of her journalistic writing on Chechnya: it “didn't go anywhere, it wasn't successful, but I just remember that I wrote it...I mean, you know, we're the generation that grew up under Brezhnev, we used to ignore politics, right? It kind of didn't exist for us, because we were fed so much ideology that it was just considered bad form. Well, over the newspaper. You can only laugh at the news. We are, in general, the most cynical generation, because, well, that's it, there's nothing left...There are no illusions left.”

Whether due to mass desensitization, collective cynicism, or reluctance to critical thought, Voltskaya soon recognized that goal in journalism—to speak the truth from within a web of lies spread by a much more powerful, all-consuming entity—was often futile. This is why, maintaining her belief in the power of words, either prose or verse, to change minds, embolden hearts, and motivate resistance, she turned to honing her poetry as an additional way to vocalize her thoughts and truths.

Career(s): In Prose and Poetry

Voltskaya recalls writing her first published poem while she was working as a freelance Russia correspondent for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty covering the Second Chechen War in the late 1990s. While posted there, she witnessed not only the horrors of civilian abuse and politicized violence and murder, but the manipulation of reality for Russian state-backed media outlets that favored Putin, who capitalized on the ethnic conflict to spur a surge of nationalism to ride to on his way to the presidency.

“Chechnya was the first volume,” she said. “As if it had bitten. And yet I wrote more in the newspaper about it, that’s what it was about. Poetry, it hadn’t really come out yet.” At the time, Voltskaya was primarily concentrated on her journalistic career covering the war. It wasn’t until later that she shifted from journalistic writing to poetry to convey certain truths that could not be conveyed through journalism.

Still, her poetry was always inspired by current events at the national and international level. In 2014, when Putin launched the initial phase of his invasion of Ukraine by annexing the Crimean peninsula, “that’s when I wrote the first really civil cycle poems about Ukraine, because it was so shameful that I thought it had nothing to do with journalism. When the war started, Voltskaya recalled feeling “the sense of simple, burning, terrible shame... catastrophe” imminently approaching. These feelings were too intense to incorporate into her journalism, so she returned to poetry as another outlet for them. Out of these persistent feelings emerge some of her most powerful works; her poetic senses have been as heightened as ever during the full-scale war in Ukraine today, out of which emerge her poems И приходит вошь [“Enter a louse”] and Мама, мама, война, война! [“Мама, мама, war, war!”], both written in 2022.

И приходит вошь. (2022)

И приходит вошь.

Ты морщишься, но беды не ждёшь.
Она раздувается долго, покуда вождь
Не проступит из-под белесых ресниц.
Чесаться поздно – приказано падать
ниц
И отдавать ей всё, чем ты раньше жил–

Парк, метро, крыши, карандаши
В школьном пенале, сына, дочь,
Под шипение: отдавай и убирайся
прочь.
Ты лежишь и думаешь: как же так,
Почему я, разиня, трепло, мудака,
Не прибил ее, покуда была мала?

Всё хотел тепла,
Всё сидел на даче, в офисе, в гараже,
В баре с тихой музыкой, не замечая –
она уже
Заслонила полнеба, выпила будущую
весну.

Раздуваясь, вошь затевает войну.
Ты же знать её не хотел –
А она сквозь горы кровавых тел
Глядит на тебя. Пока ты плевался –
тьфу –
Она покусала всех, стораеет страна в
тифу.

И вот теперь
 вошь лишает тебя всего –
Дома, сна, весеннего города,
выворачивает естество

Enter a louse.

Enter a louse.

You wince, but what could happen, at any
rate?
It puffs up for a while, then through its
white eyelashes emerges a Great Leader.
And now it's too late to scratch your head.
You will be forced to prostrate, to give up
the life you were leading --

This park, the rooftops, cafes, your pencils
and brushes,
Even your kids.
Hand it over and get out of here, it hisses
and spits. You lie prone, wondering: why
Was I such a fool, a dimwit, a twat
And didn't swat it when it was little?

You spent time in a cozy bar,
In your office, your country house,
You were keeping warm,
And you didn't notice how it got this far
How the louse blotted out half of the sky,
Sucked the coming spring dry.

As the louse gets bigger, it starts a war.
You never bowed to it, you had no fear --
Now it watches you over corpses and gore.
While you cringed, it was biting people;
therefore
The whole country's sick with typhoid
fever.

And thus,
 the louse deprives you of everything
--
Your home, your dreams, your city in
spring,

Наизнанку, заставляет бежать, куда
 Глаза глядят, ослепнув от ярости и
 стыда,
 И в висках грохочет, то мучительней,
 то слабей:
 Вошь не должна жить – найди её и
 убей!

It turns it all inside out.
 You run for the hills, blind with rage and
 guilt
 As it clangs and raps in your head,
 painfully loud:
 That louse, don't let it live -- seek it out
 and kill it.

As one may expect, “И приходит вошь” [“Enter a louse”] represents Putin’s rise to power. Voltskaya, having watched Putin’s ascent from the front lines in Chechnya and Crimea, now observes his abuses of power in Ukraine. This poem is one of the most notable instances of Voltskaya’s uniquely poetic storytelling.

Masterfully, Voltskaya leaves the addressee of the poem somewhat unclear—whether the proverbial “you” addresses the reader, the collective Russian conscience, or herself is largely unclear. Broadly, though, she appears to blame those who did not squash Putin as he first rose to power as a mere louse, making the poem appear as a critique of the phenomenon of collective dissociation in Russia. It was clear from the beginning that the louse presented a threat as it puffed up and “You” became aware that you “will be forced to prostrate, to give up the life you were leading. This park, the rooftops, cafes, your pencils and brushes, Even your kids.”

И приходит вошь [“Enter a louse”] raises a critical question for understanding Russian history and contemporary politics. How can it be that after Voltskaya assisted in bringing the world awareness of Putin’s war crimes and disregard for human life, he remained largely unchallenged in his rise to power? It is out of frustration boiling over with this question that Voltskaya, and those who are now powerless to stop the louse, “run for the hills, blind with rage and guilt.”

Мама, мама, война, война!*(02.26.2022)*

Эхо в сердце – вина, вина.
 Загорелся Херсон к рассвету –
 Мне за это прощенья нету:
 Подождла-то – моя страна.

Это с нашего большака
 Серых танков течёт река –
 Это я их не остановила,
 И поднимут теперь на вилы
 С нашей улицы паренька.

Мама, мама, из-за меня
 Нашим хлопцам кричат – русня,
 Убирайтесь, мы вас не звали!
 И друзья ночуют в подвале
 В милом Харькове – из-за меня.

И в Жулянах горят дома.
 Я, наверно, схожу с ума –
 С каждым выстрелом по Украине –
 Петербург и Саратов ранен, И мой дом
 накрывает мгла.

Это я виновата, я,
 Что с убийцею, страх тая,
 Проживала в одной квартире:
 Вот стоит он в мире, как в тире,
 Карту комкая и кроя.

Мама, мама, война, война!
 Эхо в сердце – вина, вина.
 Кто горит, кто убит, кто ранен?
 С каждым выстрелом по Украине –
 Убывает моя страна.

Мама, мама, war, war!

In the heart echoing – guilty, guilty
 Kherson burning in the morning raw
 Oh, I cannot be forgiven, for
 My country brought fire, my country.

There's the highway running by
 With its river of tanks grim flowing
 I didn't stop them, did I, did I?
 Now from our street there is a guy
 Raised up on pitchforks, showing.

Mama, mama, because of me
 They're shouting to our lads – hey Russki
 Fuck off, you're not invited, see!
 Friends sleep in basements and freeze
 In lovely Kharkiv, because of me.

Houses in Zhuliany are aflame
 And I am crazy like a dog.
 With each shot fired in Ukraine,
 Petersburg and Saratov are maimed
 And my house is cloaked in fog.

It's my fault, I, hiding my fear,
 Lived with the killer in my head
 In the same apartment here
 He's in the shooting gallery now, I fear,
 Ripping the map to shreds.

Mama, mama, war, war!
 In the heart echoing – guilty, guilty
 Who's killed, who's wounded for
 With each shot in this Ukrainian war
 My country shrinks, my country

War and 'Foreign Agency'

Shortly after the outbreak of the war, Voltskaya was informed that Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty would be shutting down their office in Saint Petersburg and relocating her to Tbilisi, Georgia. She did not choose emigration; rather, emigration became necessary as a result of her work and moral stand. Consequently, she was compelled to abandon her life and one of her sons in Saint Petersburg. At first, it appeared that Georgia may offer a safe haven for her as a dissident. She would soon come to discover, however, that Georgia today is not as welcoming a place to Russians as it once was.

Putin's aggression against Ukraine sparked concerns among many in the Caucasus state that he would set his sights on Georgia next, especially since Moscow's violent annexation of the north Georgian provinces of Abkhazia and South Ossetia 2008. Since this earlier invasion, fear of future Russian aggression has lingered among Georgians and is now especially amplified by the war in Ukraine.

While in Georgia, she learned that the Russian government had promptly designated her a 'foreign agent'—a label applied to those who allegedly threaten to expose state corruption and propaganda. Now, all publications under her name in Russia must begin with a disclaimer stating that the content was “created and/or distributed by a foreign agent.” In a striking irony, this very disclaimer appears as the opening line of her prose diary excerpt, “The Georgian Sketchbook,” which chronicles her adjustment to life in Tbilisi and was published by her online.

Even before the first lines of Voltskaya's own writing, “The Georgian

Sketchbook” is ironically prefaced by the branding message that labels her a ‘foreign agent.’ For Voltskaya, the notice is a blunt reminder that she—now and for the foreseeable future—operates in exile. The diary is her personal attempt to reconcile with this designation in a new environment; everything she sees in Georgia, however mundane, reminds her of the equivalent things she misses at home. Kids play the same way in both Tbilisi and Saint Petersburg, yet are so starkly divided from one another.

Once again, Voltskaya recalls family memories in her lamentation in the expression of her current circumstances, recalling her mother’s post-war experience playing with balls and jump ropes in Saint Petersburg, just like the children in Tbilisi do. In this context, though, her family memories are not directly connected to a sense of pride or patriotism, as they were with her grandfather, but evoke a sense of loss and mourning akin to that which she feels when comparing previous wars to the current one in Ukraine.

This message/content has been created and/or distributed by a foreign media organization acting as a foreign agent, and/or by a Russian entity acting as a foreign agent.

The Georgian Sketchbook (an excerpt translated by Boris Smirnov) (2022)

Three boys are chasing a plastic bucket with long sticks of bamboo. When they get bored, they start fencing. The bamboo is from the botanical garden, which is not far, on the other side of the mountain. The street

climbs to the top for a long time and then drops abruptly as if exhaling. It stumbles at a small church and then continues sedately around the bend. The children of Tbilisi play in the city's streets, playgrounds, and parks unaccompanied by their mothers or grandmothers, on their own and with one another. A small flock of them emerges from a courtyard, overtakes me, skipping, arguing, shouting, and disappears in the next courtyard, past a clothesline of shirts and trousers dancing in the wind. I turn a corner and find another flock playing ball against a wall, clapping, jumping. It's been a long time since I saw children play like that in Saint Petersburg. I'm glad to see them interacting in person, instead of on their phones. I recall not so much my own childhood, but my mother's stories about playing in the courtyards during the postwar years, about her skill with balls and jump ropes—I never even came close.

The word "postwar" makes me ache inside. Someday we'll use it about our own lives. You can't see the war, but it's everywhere; I can't think of anything else. All my friends repeat the same phrase: "I can't believe it's true, I want to wake up.

I woke up in another country. I don't like vacation stories, I don't like selfies taken on location, and I don't like myself in the role of tourist. There is something improper about it, a furtive debauch, voyeurism: been there, done that. Susan Sontag called it the appropriation of the seen: I was here, this is mine. Vacation snapshots remind me of a "Vasya was

here” scratched into a bench. I always felt awkward on vacation—here I am, loafing around this place where people live. There’s nothing that ties me to them, neither the past nor the present, so why am I here?

But I’m not on vacation here in Georgia. I fled here from an insane dictator who is currently destroying a foreign country in my name and will undoubtedly destroy mine too in the process. So, I think, if fate has driven me here, if this land has given me shelter, then I will try to be attentive and grateful to it. I will write a “Georgian Sketchbook,” a diary. I understand that the title is generic, but it is difficult to find a more accurate one: a diary is a look both within and without, and the eyes of a stranger sometimes notice what locals no longer see for being too plain and familiar.

** translation by Boris Smirnov*

At this point, though she has escaped Putin, the “insane dictator” that has essentially barred her from returning to her homeland, the influence of Voltskaya’s exile from Russia has taken over her life so all-consumingly that she cannot possibly ignore it. The challenge of moving to a new place is one many, if not most, people can understand, but being forced into exile is one that draws such a constant sense of loss and betrayal that it can hardly be encapsulated in writing.

Constantly, Voltskaya feels the need to remind herself that she is not a tourist, though she finds such great difficulty in finding any sense of permanence in Tbilisi. It is hard for her not to feel like a leech—a parasitic resident. Yet she

does not feel like a full resident of Georgia: the guilt she feels for running away from the destruction purported by her home country puts her in an impossible position. In different ways, she is both the invader and invaded, the aggressor and the transgressed.

With conflicting loyalties on both sides of the issue, Voltskaya feels that her identity and reality do not fit into any neat confines of an immigrant—whether tourist, resident, or exile. “The Georgian Sketchbook” allows Voltskaya to explore her situation through all these lenses—and, for what it’s worth, to offer her perspective on the new country and city she struggles to call home.

Her subsequent diary excerpt, “The Iron Maiden,” is among Voltskaya’s more hopeful works. Contrasted with the feeling of discomfort and displacement preeminent in the introduction of “The Georgian Sketchbook,” The Iron Maiden implies at least some sense of positive cultural integration.

The Iron Maiden

No sooner had one of our Tbilisi genii told us that sometimes the water level in the Kura River drops, exposing bankside cliffs where houses once stood long ago, than the water really did drop—so abruptly that they must’ve opened a dam downriver. An instant ago, muddy eddies of gray water pinwheeled at the bridge’s piers, and suddenly the small floating dock on the right bank had run aground and tilted over. There came a stench of rotting algae, and the drab bulks of the black cliffs crept back into the light, bearing the brick courses of ancient foundations. Time’s

fetid innards had cracked. Centuries ago, when everything was different, red houses crowded the narrow river. We never got the chance, however, to imagine the people who emerged from their doorways—or how they dressed or what they sold on that bridge that’s being repaved currently. A few hours later, the floating dock has returned to its place, and the slippery monsters with the ghosts on their backs have disappeared beneath the roiling waters. The past does not like to be looked at too long.

When we sit in the kitchen, I look out the window, at the bronze back of King Vakhtang, and at my phone screen, where fragments of the shattered Echo of Moscow and Current Time news swirl among the kaleidoscope of YouTube channels. Russian forces approach a Ukrainian city. A gaunt, middle-aged man looks around a green courtyard and a house mangled by shells—there’s nothing to be done, he has to evacuate. “It’s a pity,” he says with a heavy sigh. He shakes his head, grimaces, and wipes his eyes, angry at his tears. “Everything we had. What a pity—eh!” He swats the air with his fist, irate. “Well, that’s all right . . .” His fist rises into the air. “That’s all right.”

I think of him all the time—and not only at the Russian embassy, which we come upon by chance, recognizing it due to the photographs of the victims of Bucha and the flowers and toys laid before them. The man forced from his city in tears is with me as I walk along Tbilisi’s streets, breathe the scent of the flowering acacias, and buy lavash from a hole-in-the-wall

bakery. He and I have both been torn from our land, our roots dangling in the air. But the comparison ends there—he's so much worse off: his land has been torn apart by bombs, mine has not. The bombs were launched at him from my side, however, and here it's me who's worse off. How will I look him in the eyes if we ever meet?

It is impossible to look at Saint Petersburg from above. Empyreal lookouts like Saint Isaac's Cathedral don't count—they're just rock climbing for tourists. Walking through a horizontal city, you always see it on the same level. It's like your life, which you can't jump out of and see from the side. And if you can, then you must be in love and yearn so much to become someone else, the one you love, that there are rare instants when you succeed—so rare and so empyreal, that when you are suddenly transported to such a peak, your head spins and your breath abandons you. To become another is the highest form of happiness.

Vanya and I hike up the sweltering, steep road almost to the very top of the mountain until we reach a dead end with a wild building. They say it's a palace, but it looks like a bunch of glass jars. Fortunately, a trail is visible a little lower, and we continue along the mountain ridge with relief, skirting both the glass jars and the Kartlis Deda with the ant trails of tourists at her feet. The slope is studded with fresh seedlings of thuja, cypress, and fig. The thin trees are tied to stakes of bamboo. No wonder: there is a botanical garden on the other side of the slope, and its workers are trying

to firm up the soil, which threatens to give way in a landslide. Someday these trees will grow up, but I won't live to see it. Little poppies, like flashes, line our path.

Below, under the mountain, lies the city, and every now and then we stop and dip our faces into the purple petals of its roofs arranged in large clusters. "Look," says Vanya, "that seems to be a courtyard with a well, and over there is some kind of large street, and over there where the golden glare is, that's Liberty Square." The little neighborhoods breathe beneath us, flush with bushes of double lilac. We bury our faces in them. The mountain is a chance to leave the city; it's like leaving your body and then turning to look upon it with surprise. Life assumes a different scale here—as if for a split second your gaze were one with the gaze of God. For an instant, the city becomes you and you become the city, taking it into yourself wholly and forever. It couldn't be otherwise, for the brief instant you're there on that peak is just that—forever.

** translation by Boris Smirnov*

As she tries to focus on the positive moments of her new situation, Voltskaya conveys a limited sense of acceptance of her reality, indicating that the "past does not like to be looked at too long. She will never be able to conceptualize the lives of those she may have seen had the floodgates of time not opened, but she does not seem to be too saddened by this reality. Likewise, she had no control over the flood that forced her out of her home country, but

rather than fantasize about what concrete and potential realities she left behind, she begins to write of her present in Georgia with a sense of gratitude and appreciation. There is a certain intentional distance between her and the past, symbolized by the lives of those along the riverbank she will never be able to understand.

Still, the past—as well as the nearby reality—are never far away. She is constantly reminded of the war, and of her position as an exile. As she stumbles upon the Russian embassy in Tbilisi or glances at a newspaper about the war in Ukraine, she can never quite distance herself from what is happening—neither physically nor emotionally. Voltskaya feels that she and the Ukrainian man she speaks of, whose house and livelihood have been destroyed by a presumed bombing, experience a similar feeling of loss. Yet, though Putin has also etched a target on her back, the man will always see her as the aggressor—a dynamic that she understands and does not blame him for.

Ultimately, however, “The Iron Maiden” is a story of growth, and the ability to find comfort in a state of displacement. Rather than hold on too tightly to the past—whether it means home, family, or previous iterations of herself—Voltskaya begins to find joy, even love, in the act of becoming someone else. She does not try to shed her past—she is acutely aware of her position as a former citizen of the aggressor—but rather begins to shed her portion of the blame for its actions. Through this process of forgiveness and emotional healing, she once again can be “suddenly transported to such a peak, [her] head spins and [her] breath abandons [her]. To become another is the highest form of happiness.”

Still, despite moments of optimism, the strain of Voltskaya's journey—leaving her home country as a “foreign agent”—is omnipresent. Voltskaya is fundamentally changed by her choice to dissent and her subsequent designation as a “foreign agent.”

“That's the shame about the war, then the horror about your own emigration, when you're breaking away from your life, from everything,” she said. “I absolutely didn't want to go anywhere. So it's nostalgia, then some kind of acceptance, then appreciation of the country where you ended up. Well, there are a lot of things like that, which probably give you a reason for poems.”

As an emigrant, Voltskaya finds herself in a cycle of emotions. The nostalgia for the past in which she lived in Russia and had the ability to speak freely in poetry and journalism, the acceptance of her forced exile status, and the appreciation of her new home in Georgia come in waves. It is clear which of her works are motivated by each emotion in this cycle. The introduction to “The Georgian Sketchbook” recalls her nostalgia for her childhood, while “The Iron Maiden” encapsulates her acceptance and eventual, if uncertain, appreciation for her new reality.

“The Iron Maiden” begins to touch on the emotions accompanying her exile, but in a more subtle way than her other pieces. Written in 2022, two of her flagship poems about her exiled status “Мы с тобой – дезертиры империи” [“You and I are the empire's deserters”] and “Когда я поеду назад” [“When I drive back”] are among her most raw. They touch not only on the stages of nostalgia, acceptance, and appreciation Voltskaya discussed in her interviews, but also of the raw grief and hopelessness of an exile with little hope of return.

Мы с тобой – дезертиры империи (2022) **You and I are the empire's deserters**

Вызывающей скуку и страх
Воробьями с намокшими перьями
Мы сидим на чужих проводах.

Feathered bundles of boredom and fear,
Soaking wet, the drizzle has caught us,
We are perching on wires up here.

Где бульвары с нарядными платьями,
Физкультурники, дева с веслом?
Нас с тобой провожают проклятьями,
А заплачем – кричат: “Поделом!”

Pretty frocks on the elegant grass,
Sculpted athletes, the girl with an oar,
All is gone. People curse as we pass,
And they sneer at us – “Cry some more!”

Не смогли, не сумели, не сдюжили,
Провалились в кровавые сны,
А теперь-то подумай, кому же мы,
Неумехи и трусы, нужны.

Should've, would've, but didn't. They won.
Our dreams are now drowned in blood.
Are we anything now, anyone,
Cowards who thought that we could?

Незнакомые площади, станции,
Кто-то зёрнышко словит, глядишь,
А кому-то под вечер достанется
Только в спину злорадное: “Кыш!”

Unfamiliar squares and stations,
Here's to pecking at crumbs, look at you,
Though by nighttime, the likeliest
mention we'd get is a menacing “Shoo!”

Voltskaya sees her departure from her homeland as a part of the steep price she pays as a dissident. Her forced emigration from Russia has impacted countless dimensions of her life: She says she pays every day for her choice of desertion “with a broken life.” She recalls: “the country I lost, the house I lost, the son I lost, one of the sons I am separated from, all my friends.”

The burden of collective national pain and trauma, she argues, is felt by “every citizen of a country,” not only those who chose to leave. As a “deserter of empire,” however, she loses access to what she once had in her homeland, as “staying in Russia also has some advantages. If I were in Russia, I would have the opportunity, for example, to have free healthcare at times when I needed it most—not entirely, but still there.

“And now I'm thinking, what should I do? What should I do? It's a colossal problem that everything here [in Georgia] is paid and very expensive. But it's not for me to explain. I also have absolutely no confidence that I won't be thrown out of the country, right? I mean, there's no solid ground under my feet anymore, there's just no ground anymore, that's all. And also with your dear Trump, now I don't know if I'm going to be free and under the fence, because I'm going to lose my job under these conditions.”

“Мы с тобой – дезертиры империи” [“You and I are the empire's deserters”] captures the steep price paid by Russian—and other—dissidents across the world. It exposes the tradeoff one must make living through any perceived societal injustice: The decision to conform—turning a blind eye to broader issues for the sake of comfort in continuity—or to speak up and risk causing a ripple that will never allow you to find sure footing again. Voltskaya has chosen the latter her entire life. From her earliest memories reading banned books with her mother to her career covering state-purported atrocities under pseudonym in Chechnya, Crimea, and now all of Ukraine, Voltskaya has embodied the dissident lifestyle.

But she pays dearly for this ongoing choice—a tax she must pay for the rest of her life. While she has preserved the honesty and purity of conviction that has always guided her journalism, poetry, and life decisions, this comes at the cost of nearly every other “normal” aspect of existence. Thus, outside her work, she cannot suppress the lingering impression that she is largely left “pecking at crumbs” for mere fragments of comfort, culture, and home.

**Когда я поеду назад по
Военно-Грузинской дороге, (2022)**

За мною потянутся улицы и
провода-недотроги,

Мне дворик на пятки наступит, махая
бельем на верёвке,
И лестницы вслед побегут, дребезжа,
спотыкаясь неловко.

Обнимут за плечи, повиснут на мне
виноградные плети,
Таща за собою чугун и кирпич –
кружева Чугурети,
Брусчатка за мной прошуршит и
платаны – окладом иконным,
Ворота в кипящем плюще и плетёная
люлька балкона.

Насыплются в волосы искры хурмы,
мелколиственных буков,
В глазах замелькают кресты и
грузинские гнутые буквы.
За мной поплывёт Сололаки, догонит
меня Ортачала,
Шершавой щекою потрётся гора,
чтобы я не скучала.

И взмоют за мною, захлопав
окошками, домиков стаи –
И лишь во дворе петроградском
погаснут, поникнут, растают,
Слезую скользнут по скуле, как любви
незаконной приметы –

Когда я поеду назад... когда я поеду.

**When I drive back down the
Georgian Military Highway**

Roads and touch-me-not wires will
stretch out behind me,

A backyard will tread on my heels, waving
a line of washing,
The stairs will run behind me, clumsily
tripping and clashing.

It will cling to my shoulders, embrace me,
the old grape vine –
The lacework of Chugureti, dangling its
bricks and iron.
A boardwalk will rustle behind me,
encased in a golden plane tree,
A gate foaming up with ivy, a woven
balcony cradle.

My hair with fragile beech leaves and
sparks of persimmon peppered,
My vision speckled with crosses and
crooked Georgian letters,
I'll watch Sololaki drift by me before
Ortchala gives chase,
A stubbly cheek of a mountainside
rubbing against my face.

And, flapping windows, behind me, a
flock of houses will soar –
And only back home in my courtyard,
they'll fade and they'll be no more.
They'll run down my cheek, like illicit
love, invisible to the eye,

When I drive back down, when I drive
back, when I drive, when I...

“Когда я поеду назад” [“When I drive back”] is not only one of Voltskaya’s personal favorites, but also perhaps her most heartbreaking poem. It conveys a truth that Voltskaya has experienced all her life: it is impossible not to become attached to a place, whether one ends up there by choice or by force. “Когда я поеду назад” [“When I drive back”] is thus a story of longing, but it’s not entirely clear what for. But now, though she has become attached to Georgia, Voltskaya recently found out Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty would be suspending its operations indefinitely. She is thus left exiled without a job, further compounding her stasis of uncertainty.

“Когда я поеду назад” [“When I drive back”] is about the recurring feeling “when you have to decide whether you will break with everything you hold dear or not,” Voltskaya said. “I had to break with it. I could decide to stay, of course. But I think that with the title of ‘foreign agent,’ which I was given before the war, I had no chance to find a job other than Freedom. And without a job, well, like me, we can’t all survive. That’s just the way it was. So that’s why it was terrible. And then, when I came here, it was also, of course, fierce homesickness, fierce, fierce absolutely now. Now, perhaps, the stage of some kind of acceptance that I live here, that is where I live. But, in general, there is still no feeling. Besides a feeling that there is no stability.”

Conclusion

The opportunity to piece together the life and poetry of Tatyana Voltskaya over the course of this past year has been an illuminating privilege. Analyzing her work and facilitating our interviews has offered insights into fundamental questions surrounding dissidence and displacement that, as a child of emigrants, I have had for a long time.

I walk away from this project with an understanding of the magnitude of the toll that dissidence and displacement have taken not only on Russian dissident thinkers, but those who speak out against injustices around the world. On the other hand, I have been fortunate enough to witness the strength of character, intuition, and conviction it requires to take on such a burden for the sake of social progress and moral standing.

I have come to realize that confronting injustice in the way Voltskaya has is not a choice in the way I initially believed it to be. Rather, it is what she must do to maintain her character and moral clarity—a skill she has carried with her through her mother's teachings, lessons in Soviet literary circles, and covering conflict from the front lines. The poetry she surrounds herself with is an impenetrable protective barrier—one that, in a time when so many of her other boundaries have been crushed by a state apparatus determined to break her, can never be shattered.

The rare courage possessed by Voltskaya is akin to that harbored by all the most resolved activists—a combination of moral conviction and an undeterrable desire for progress. This project, in tandem with my professional pursuits in the realm of “foreign agency” and dissident protection, has solidified my interest in working to protect those like Voltskaya who serve as moral voices of their generations—a indefinite commitment against insurmountable odds, but one that I am privileged to begin to understand.

Interview Transcripts

Interview 1. Russia at the time of war in Ukraine. The uncertain future of Russian culture. Publishing in Russian in Ukraine. December 16, 2024

MARC: You and I talked about the young men who stayed in Russia even though they may be mobilized and would have to go to war.

TATYANA: Yes, if they are conscious people, they make that choice. They somehow try to calculate the incalculable—their future—and hope for the best. They think, "Right now I have a student deferment," but it's not going to last for long.

MARC: One of your sons stayed in Russia and one left with you. What about your son who stayed?

TATYANA: He loves his city and his friends. He is a student now, and possibly he will go to graduate school after. But it's very hard to predict anything. Of course, I've met young people here in Georgia who came from Moscow. I ask them: "Do you have a deferment from the army?" "No, of course not!" "And if the summons comes?" They think: "I'll hide." In general, some don't take it very seriously. There's a Russian slang word—pofigism (total apathy— throwing your future away-relying on fate). It never goes away.

For example, just recently there was a story of a man: somebody else signed his summons and has been receiving his military pay for six months, as if he were at the front. Then the military commander called the unfortunate man and said: "Why aren't you in your unit? If you don't come, we will put you on a wanted list in two weeks." So

now his lawyer is suing the military machine, but there's nothing he can do—he has to go to war. And the person who signed him up doesn't care. This is how it goes.

MARC: Since your son stays in Russia, for you every choice has everything to do with the Russian situation, doesn't it?

TATYANA: Well, naturally, of course. Yes, and yet we are all also worried about Ukraine. But I can talk openly to my son from Tbilisi, but with my son who stayed behind -- we can't even have a conversation about the situation.

MARC: Your grandfather was a military man; he was in World War II. Was the memory of this part of your childhood? This appears in your poems—is it true or is it a metaphor?

TATYANA: No, it's true. My grandfather graduated from the Military Medical Academy; he was a military doctor in besieged Leningrad, a major in the medical service, and he worked through the entire war. The memory of this surrounded me throughout my childhood—it's a kind of default background. In my mind, it lives as both a fusion and a contrast of two war fates.

When the current war started, everything in my mind was raw. But when I looked around me, everything continued as if nothing had happened. I even remember how at the beginning of the war I was walking at the corner of Bolshoi Prospect and my street, looking at how everyone was sitting around in cafes and parks. Everything was normal. A quiet life. These cups in the cafe,

everything so beautiful, expensive, nice, cozy, just like before. It all seemed so wild to me that I wrote a poem about it.

TATYANA: Yes, and it's not an allegorical picture. There's music playing and all of a sudden a table is covered in blood—a shapeless lump, a body part falls down.

MARC: A shapeless lump?

TATYANA: How else do you imagine a man getting blown up by a land mine, blown to pieces and falling onto a glass table? Of course, it's imagined, as if that bloody piece of human meat is flying off the battlefield and appearing in peaceful city – naturally miraculously. Why? Unfortunately, this will happen on the Russian side as well. We've seen it in Belgorod, and Kursk... That's the way it is, that's the way it has been happening and will happen.

MARC: Does this mean it's the end of Russian culture, the end of its literary tradition? That this is the time to abolish Pushkin and Tolstoy?

TATYANA: Of course I don't believe that. There were poems with these thoughts in the first months of the war when these conversations were very heated and intense. [...] I do think such poems have a right to exist as a healthy reaction to what's going on, a healthy reaction to the fact that culture doesn't save us from such atrocity, from barbarism. But as you know, Auschwitz didn't cancel Schiller and Goethe, didn't cancel Kant—canceled nothing. And this terrible war will not cancel Tolstoy or Korney Chukovsky's poem for children, "Moydodyr," as much as Ukrainians might not like it now, and they can be understood. Nor will the Russian atrocities in Ukraine cancel

Ukrainian culture. Let's just say that it continues in parallel. Someone is fighting for life, and that person has the strongest right. But cultures struggle for life as well.

MARC: TATYANA, do you have relationships with people in Ukraine now?

TATYANA: Of course. A Ukrainian poet Vadim Zhuk and I published a joint book; it's now in its second edition, published by the literary press at the corner of Nevsky and Khreshchatyk. That was in 2015—just after Russia's invasion of Crimea. Zhuk and I went there when the book came out. There are books now published jointly by Ukrainian and Russian poets, and I am part of that. But in Ukraine now, nobody wants Russian books. That's another matter altogether.

Interview 2. Confronting the reality of war and snippets of phone calls from Ukraine. War and writing poetry. December 20, 2025.

MARC: What had the biggest effect on you when you, a journalist and poet, began to confront the reality of the war? f

TATYANA: There were intercepted communications of Russian soldiers with their mothers and wives. Those soldiers were looting, raping, killing people in the Ukrainian countryside. They became the anti-heroes in this poem, and their conversations are all the more terrible because they sounded so mundane. It is not that the soldiers were used to killing and raping; yet this was normal when they were fighting and entering people's houses and rummaging through all the drawers in the houses they entered. They would say: "Now we have found money, we will close our big loan." Or they would

say, "Now we found meat in someone's fridge, we'll eat it." And the wife would ask: "Are you raping Ukrainian women?" And when the response was positive, she would say: "I do not want to know. Just do not tell me." It was so normal for them.

MARC: You mean, it was possible to intercept the actual participants of the war talking to their loved ones?

TATYANA: Yes. These were Russian soldiers in Ukraine calling home, talking from morning to night, and they were already conditioned to keep themselves in this crazy state so they could mentally endure everything they did.

MARC: If we are talking about the Russian soldiers, how exactly does this happen? Is there some crazy enjoyment in it? I find it hard to comprehend.

TATYANA: I'm a journalist. I report. These crimes are being talked about, and one must try to comprehend this somehow. They say drugs and alcohol are found there at the front all the time to allow the Russian soldiers to do what they are doing.

MARC: I can't understand this.

TATYANA: My Ukrainian friends often send me clips – video and audio recordings. We watch the videos, hear the conversations and try to understand how this could happen at all. Would a well-off person, living in a normal house with sewerage, a washing

machine, with several rooms—would they go tear off someone else's toilet and send it home? I don't think so. One had to keep these people in a non-human state for decades, for the Russian soldiers came in big numbers from the poorest provinces, and they see how the Ukrainians live and they say: "These Khokhols¹ really know how to live. They have chickens! They have blankets on their beds, they sleep." You see, people who were sent to war had been devoid of basic human, ordinary conditions.

MARC: Do you mean that the Ukrainian level of living was much higher than in the Russian provinces?

TATYANA: Of course. Ukrainians are not comparable to them—they're sleeping in proper conditions while ours are in flooded trenches. Remember, at the very beginning of the war, when there was a storm, there was a characteristic inscription on the wall in the Ukrainian home left by our soldiers: "Who gave you permission to live like this?" I've read many sociologists and historians. I agree with those who say that, in principle, Russia has not completed the transition from peasant society. People have retained peasant consciousness, with the legacy of the experience of radical equalization when it was considered a great sin to stand out from the community and own something.

MARC: Do you mean that it goes all the way back to the end of the nineteenth century when Stolypin² tried to transform Russian villages into semi-German farms?

TATYANA: Yes. But why did the Russian peasants burn farms in Stolypin's time? They burned those people who stood out and tried to work independently. After *perestroika* began, when villagers were given opportunities, what happened? Somebody started growing tomatoes to sell. The neighbors burned those greenhouses first. "Don't live better than us." A disgusting, vile behavior, but it is the manifestation of the psychology of peasants driven to beggary by the state for decades, for centuries. I'm not even taking into account the Tsarist background—their life as serfs. Half a century after the abolition of serfdom the peasants were starting to climb out of it all, and then came 1917, and for another 100 years there was poverty and no private ownership. What else? What can you demand from people who don't know what a toilet is, much less a washing machine? You cannot accuse them, but maybe you should think about why they are like this. It's a very hard question.

MARC: Is poetry suited for these experiences?

TATYANA: You continue thinking about this; it is with you, inside your mind. And then poetry begins. Yes, I have several poems like this: poetry about the conversations that are so cruel—a portrait of these people. They're just conversations, they're so simple. And then there are poems about mothers and the wives on the bus whose men are fighting. Do they ask them not to go to war? On the contrary, they say: "Go, don't be a deserter, don't dishonor your family."

MARC: There's also talk that Russian women are so tired of their husbands and sons being drunk that they just send them away.

TATYANA: It is such an endless tangle. Our present Russia—it is so hard to accept. These are terrible families, relationships without love. It's all shown in Andrey Zvyagintsev's films³—*Elena* (2011), *Leviathan* (2014), *Loveless* (2017). If Zvyagintsev can make such films, one should be able to confront this reality with poetry. So I wrote and wrote. But there is also an expression that goes to the heart of this all: "War is a bludgeon for the poet."

Interview 3. Growing up. Family: Childhood and Youth. February 16, 2025.

MARC: Our conversation today is about your childhood and your family, and, consequently, about the depth of the influences of these early impressions. Which figures from your childhood had stayed with you the longest?

TATYANA: There is a looming figure, my grandfather Ivan Prokofievich Shapovalov. His roots were in a Russian village, but somehow, as we say in Russia, he had "received a lucky ticket": his family was not arrested and interned as "kulaks" -- those peasants who owned something, even minuscule, as, for example, 1 or 2 cows, chickens and a couple

of horses. So my grandfather survived that terrifying process that affected so many peasants -- the liquidation of the kulaks as a class. While still young, he left the village and arrived in Leningrad; he always wanted to study. He was lucky again: he was admitted into the Military Medical Academy, graduated, and worked as a military doctor; he stayed in Leningrad during the siege of the city during WWII, saw deaths everywhere. Leningrad was starving during the siege, but he survived somehow, saved many lives and received awards for his service. He was an admired, widely respected figure. So I remember him as a very powerful presence in my early childhood.

MARC: What about other members of the family?

TATYANA: My grandmother on my mother's side arrived in Leningrad at the age of 17. She came from a Jewish shtetl near Kharkiv. Thus, my grandfather, my mother's father, was from a Russian village, and his wife -- from a Jewish shtetl. And they both arrived in their twenties, at approximately the same time -- in the early 1930s. And they met.

MARC: What about your father?

TATYANA: My father Anatoly Stepanovich Voltsky was an engineer; he too worked in the military-industrial complex in Leningrad. As a young boy, like my grandfather, my father stayed in the city, but only for the first years of the blockade -- the siege of Leningrad. Nevertheless, he spent in Leningrad those two horrible winters -- 1941 and 1942 -- before he and his mother were evacuated in the summer of 1942. As a young

boy, he witnessed his father's death from starvation. My father survived the war, but he died very young -- at the age of 34.

MARC: Do you remember him?

TATYANA: I remember him singing beautifully, so many songs, and I remember very well my father and some of his songs, and particularly my father's violin. When he played the violin, for me it was absolutely a miracle -- the deepest delight. I even remember how much I liked that violin case and the strings. I remember it so well.

MARC: Can I ask you, why was your grandfather, who died during the siege, not in the army? I thought that all adult men had to join.

TATYANA: From what I understand, my grandfather was an engineer and worked, like my father did later, in the military complex. That is why my grandfather was excused from joining the army. This grandfather, Stepan Lukich, came to Leningrad from Ukraine. They all, that whole family, came from Ukraine.

MARC: So the last name Voltsky has come from him, correct?

TATYANA: Yes. The origin of the name is very interesting. The last name of Stepan Lukich's family was "Kot" -- "cat" in English, but my great-grandfather was so impressed when electric lights became part of the city's life that he changed the last name to

Voltsky ("volt" as related to 220 electric volts). He was mesmerized by what electricity could do.

MARC: All your grandparents, then, made their life in Leningrad. They all came to the city as very young people.

TATYANA: Yes, St. Petersburg is in my bloodstream. I am a citizen of St. Petersburg in the third generation. Perhaps, that is why I miss it so deeply. It is my city. I am part of its history.

MARC: How do you know that your father as an engineer worked for Russia's military?

TATYANA: Of course, I was told, and I know that there was a signboard for his office on their street that said "vacuum cleaner production," as if they were developing vacuum cleaners. But in reality they were constructing rockets, as it turned out later. But, as I have said already, he died young.

MARC: And what about the women in your family?

TATYANA: My mother and grandmother. My mother was simply a major figure of my life. As far as the far-reaching influence is concerned, hers was simply profound: it was a form-creating deepest influence, lasting to this day. Very powerful and precious! I wrote a book about her. Following in her father's footsteps, she too became a doctor -- a

surgeon. And my grandmother who came from a Jewish shtetl near Kharkiv was also a force, of course. She too lived with us.

MARC: As I listen to you I begin to understand that for some time -- you, your mother, father, grandmother, grandfather -- lived together in one apartment. Were, then, their living quarters the separate rooms in a communal apartment with other neighbors?

TATYANA: Oh, no. I never lived in communal apartments. And at some point, my mother's brother lived with us as well. In my childhood, until I was 7 or 8, we all lived together in this beautiful apartment -- a four-room professor's apartment on the Petrograd side of Leningrad. My grandfather, a decorated military figure, received this apartment after the war, and it was into this beautiful place that he brought my grandmother when she returned from the evacuation with their children. This was my childhood's "paradise" with a 30-meter dining room which had an oval wooden table in the middle. The apartment had multiple old-fashioned tall stoves that heated the rooms. Those beautiful stoves were in every room -- my comfort and a source of childhood fears. For example, in my parents' room there was this tall stove, and behind it there was always this scraping sound. Naturally, this was mice, but I thought that a wolf lived there and would simply freeze in terror.

MARC: Yet you had to move. Why?

TATYANA: You see, I too had gone through this eventual "archetypal" exile from paradise, my paradise! How did it start? When I was not yet 5 years old, my grandfather died and so did my father; the male members of my family died one after another within a one-week period. After their deaths there were so many visitors who came and brought gifts to us. This too is a very strong memory. And it always stays with me that when my grandfather was gone and my father was gone, someone would call, come and often give me something, because, as they said, Ivan Prokofievich had saved their life. My childhood was spent in the encounters with these people.

MARC: I am trying to visualize how all the members of your family were an intimate part of that special atmosphere in Leningrad after WWII when people who had survived knew that the life they were now living was a miracle. It must have been a very special community: neighbors, people on the street, total strangers who shared the same memory and looked after each other, helped each other, for they remembered those who saved them during the wholesale starvation in the frozen Leningrad.

TATYANA: Yes, this was part of the city's ambiance after the war. I was growing up in that atmosphere, listening to their stories -- the war, the siege, its tragedy and sudden miracles. There was a story, for example, a family legend: how my grandmother was initially not allowed to evacuate with her two children. So my mother and her brother, young children, had to evacuate with an orphanage. Grandmother, of course, thought that she would lose them forever. But then they allowed adults to go after the children -- to join them. Grandmother went and caught up with them in Rostov. And one of our

family legends really starts with the children seeing their mother from a hill: they ran towards her not fully believing it was her, and there was so much joy.

MARC: Your mother must have remembered the evacuation very well. And for your grandmother this must have been a major experience.

TATYANA: Yes, my mother told about how they lived in evacuation in a village in the Urals and what beautiful transparent colored stones one could find in the river. My grandmother told me what hunger there was at first, and how they exchanged things, and how many homeless and very scary teenagers lived in that place's orphanage. And how grandmother used to talk to them, read to them, tell them stories so that they would stop misbehaving. And my grandmother would tell how her son (that is, my mother's brother) was sick with typhus, and she did not allow him to be taken to the hospital 30 kilometers away on horseback, which, of course, would have killed him. Those unending family stories... In general, I remember all these conversations very well. I grew up with them.

MARC: Did your grandfather, Ivan Prokofievich Shapovalov, tell you stories?

TATYANA: I have no memory of my grandfather engaging with me directly. He had already suffered a stroke by then. I recall clearly how he walked with a limp, but more vividly remember him sitting quietly, listening to his transistor radio. He never read

books to me or taught me lessons. He simply wasn't able to. Though there was no direct influence from him, his presence permeated our home.

MARC: What about the experience of the blockade? Your family survived it—your grandfather remained in the city throughout. And your mother was evacuated from Leningrad, correct?

TATYANA: This shaped all of our upbringing. One consequence was our attitude toward food, particularly bread. In our family, we maintained a deeply traditional, almost reverent relationship with bread. If a piece fell to the floor, we would pick it up and kiss it. Finding bread on the street meant rescuing it—picking it up, kissing it, and if you couldn't eat it yourself, placing it carefully on the roadside where no one would step on it or drive over it. Bread was sacred. No one in our family would ever consider discarding bread—the very thought was forbidden. We felt genuine indignation seeing others waste it. After the war, newcomers to Leningrad—people from Novgorod and various small towns and villages—often didn't understand this attitude. They hadn't lived through the blockade and didn't observe our customs. We would sometimes see them throwing away bread, something unimaginable for us native “Leningraders.”

MARC: Let's return to what you described as your "exile from paradise." Did this occur after the deaths of your grandfather and father?

TATYANA: Yes. After they died, my mother had to stop her work as a surgeon for some time.

MARC: Was she still working as a doctor?

TATYANA: Yes. She became a widow so early, and to be a surgeon would add to her overwhelming responsibilities. So she took shifts – all those shifts in the hospital and clinics. This gave her some flexibility but was exhausting. She was taking shifts throughout her life, but no longer exclusively as a surgeon. And there was this responsibility for us -- my grandmother and myself—that now lay on her shoulders. Until my grandmother's death the three of us lived together, but, unfortunately, we had to leave that apartment. According to Soviet laws, we could not stay in this huge space: 3 people in 4 big rooms. But my uncle, my mother's brother, was able to stay there. He was given this apartment because he had already written his PhD, his doctorate, and, consequently, he had the right to stay in a place with an additional 30 meters of space. ... Nothing is simple.

MARC: Have you never lived in a communal apartment?

TATYANA: Never, although my other grandmother, my father's mother, had a small room in a communal apartment, but we, my mother, my grandmother and I, moved into our own apartment. My mother was able to secure it through her job as a surgeon.

MARC: You had to go to school very soon after that. Did you like the school?

TATYANA: I never liked school, I must say. I was never drawn to the collective. Apparently, there was already then a deep individuality in me — individualism always. Probably, the loss of my father affected me very strongly. They didn't tell me anything precisely, but the trauma was colossal. I kept waiting for him to come back. It was such an enormous loss of a father, then the loss of a home.

MARC: So, how did these years in school pass?

TATYANA: I grew up very early. I didn't like playing with dolls, and I rarely played with other girls. Somehow I had nothing particularly to talk about with them. I read a lot, for I was sick all the time. My throat was constantly sore, so I stayed at home, reading books. Consequently, I didn't participate in these school squabbles, gossip, as it often happens. But people – teachers and students – treated me very well.

MARC: Because you were an excellent student, no?

TATYANA: Being an excellent female student -- this doesn't necessarily mean respect. On the contrary, such a girl is often teased, but I was respected somehow in a human way. I can't say anything negative, nothing bad, but I found my school completely uninteresting.

MARC: What were the influences then?

TATYANA: Always, my mother! As I have already said, we had an unusually close relationship. She loved poetry, books, theater, museums. And there were all those books in our apartment. I don't understand where she even got them in Soviet times. She read Bulgakov aloud to me—*The Master and Margarita* which had just been published in the journal Moscow—she read it all aloud to me. And how did she know that one should read Voltaire? And she taught me to see beauty everywhere. There were never any mundane conversations with her or any conversations about everyday necessities. It was always about something very deep, spiritual. About beauty, about painting, about sculpture, about the beauty of human bodies. We used to go to the beach together and looked at those bodies around us, talking of the silhouettes, proportions forms. She and taught how to see beauty everywhere, to appreciate beauty in art, sculpture, and nature. And she herself was very beautiful, with an excellent figure, and she took care of herself, did gymnastics.

MARC: What happened when she came home? Would sick neighbors ask her for help? This atmosphere in which you grew up: your grandfather helping people, mother being a doctor. Was there a feeling that people should be helped, was it part of the family, yes?

TATYANA: This was not discussed explicitly, it was not emphasized. It was somehow self-evident, natural. Mother would come home, and immediately there would be knocks at the door. 'Irina Ivanova, my stomach hurts, or back, or heart, or head. Can you,

please, measure my blood pressure? And my mother wouldn't even have taken a bite of food yet. A knock: "Irina Ivanova, please stop by my place." This was practically every day, and nobody ever talked about it. That's how we lived, constantly helping. And, naturally, it never occurred to us to take some kind of payment. Well, a neighbor would bring some treat on a holiday... They would cut a piece and bring us two or three slices of pie. But only if relations were good, if we were simply friends.

MARC: As you were growing up, were there other people who influenced your childhood and early youth?

TATYANA: There was this poetic circle run by Vyacheslav Levkin - an afterschool group for children. I joined it probably around eighth grade, and it had the greatest influence on me. Vyacheslav Abramovich was a wonderful person, still alive. He just called me, the other day, with his friends – to support me.

MARC: What was this afterschool program that he ran?

TATYANA: I was in this circle (an afterschool group) since I was 14 years old, and it was simply true happiness. That circle was extraordinary. At that time there were literary associations in Russia, and in St. Petersburg too. But they tended to evaluate the work of students and their writing and analyzed their poems. They didn't give grades, but somehow, in general, they probably established among students some sort of hierarchy. Levkin never did that. I later asked him: "Vyacheslav Abramovich, I don't even know

how you felt about my poems and you never said what was good, what was bad.” He answered: “With children, it's not allowed. If you praise one, the other ones can be so easily discouraged.” Somehow he understood this. And so he strove to educate us, read to us, to develop our taste. We read our poetry in our circle or our short stories. He would share his observations. He would say, for example: “Are you sure that this word is from the lexical category where it works correctly for you?” These were the observations he would make. He also treated me very well. I will always remember that.

TATYANA — Interview 4: The Impulse to Write Poetry. February 22, 2025

MARC: The impulse to write poetry — how does it come? When did you know that you are and will be a poet?

TATYANA: There are so many beautiful books, poems, prose. But at some point you realize that all of them cannot say something that you want to be expressed. I mean, by

the way, I didn't start with poetry, I started with prose. I began writing when I was 10 or 11 years old, and I started by writing plays. And then a little bit later, that's when the poems started. Why? Well, because there were some feelings wandering around in your mind, or, as we say in Russian, on our soul. At that age, it's usually very unclear. Look at Joseph Brodsky's poems. They are early, and they are still somewhat out of focus: he has almost nothing to say, but he has powerful music inside him, a powerful desire to speak — music. Well, probably every person who starts writing has this desire to say something, but this need can be false or temporary. Because, well, who didn't write poetry when they were young, right? But then there is a situation when a person really has a need for artistic expression — not just to say I love you, but a real need for another artistic statement to say it all. Indeed, almost everything is said. Is it possible to say a new word? I think it's impossible to say it. But an artistic statement, if it is artistic, will always be new, because it is a word through one's unique lens. Why does the person need to do this? I don't know. I think the image of God embedded in person is the thirst for creativity too — the impulse for creativity given to us by the creator.

MARC: Was there a writer who inspired you? In Russian.

TATYANA: Tsvetaeva. Probably Lermontov. I loved Lermontov as a child as far as his poems go. And then when I got older, there were some other poems. There is this general cloud of poetry, literature, and you are inside it. I told you about my mother, who read a lot to me, gave me a lot. I was always immersed. From my childhood I loved books, always bothered my relatives to read to me when I could not. And then I read on

my own, and you are immersed in all this. And, of course, there is music in you, a need to create too. Then later came Boris Pasternak, Nikolay Zabolotsky.

MARC: I was also wondering how you think your journalism influences your poetry and vice versa?

TATYANA: A very difficult question, very difficult. I remember, for instance, that the first poem that did not go anywhere, wasn't successful, so to speak, was about the war in Chechnya. Remember: we are the generation that grew up under Brezhnev, we used to ignore politics on principle, right? It simply did not exist for us, because we were so much fed up with ideology, so politics was just considered bad form. We did not read newspapers and only laughed at the news. We were, in general, the most cynical generation, because there were no illusions left. We lived our own life completely parallel to the official world — underground. We drank to spite the society — it was a valor. It was. There was drinking, there was, I don't know, debauchery, right? And that too, in general, like, it all counted. Music, dancing — turning off the lights, having affairs, kissing and hugging while — turn off the lights and we'll do whatever we want to do to the music. But then came the 90s — perestroika, when you wanted, even needed to be included in the common life. Politics then has become a shared life.

MARC: When then did the first civilian poem come? Chechnya?

TATYANA: No, Chechnya, the war that started in 1994, was a shock — as if I had been badly bitten. And yet I wrote more newspaper articles about it, much more articles than

poems. But in 2014, when Russia took over Crimea, that's when I wrote my first really civil cycle "Poems to Ukraine." That invasion was so shameful, and I felt it deeply, but the poem had nothing to do with journalism. Nothing at all.

MARC: What, then, is the relationship between journalism and your poetic work?

TATYANA: Journalism is a profession, but it is a profession that makes me more immersed in the news. And now my work as a journalist exposes me to the reality I cannot escape. But poetry is a human voice, not journalistic or rather poetry is more human than journalistic. For instance, I do some interviews with former political prisoners, former deserters and I still work as an editor or edit various interviews. But it seems to me it has nothing to do with poems, for a poem can be written on that day can be about something completely different: about what I see from my window or from my backyard. Think about Griboedov's *Woe from Wit*. Or Tyutchev's poems? Do you see in their texts a reflection of their diplomatic work? They were both very powerful diplomats, but their work doesn't reflect in any way. No, no, no, no...

MARC: But there are themes you take from what you discover as a journalist, is it not so? There is a lament, crying about what's going on — a kind of screaming, definitely grieving. Is it not in your nature? In the ease of youth it was different, but now you cannot get away from crying. Or do you still get some light moments?

TATYANA: There is so much news that stays with you. But poetry... it has nothing to do with my journalistic work, it has to do with just watching the news. Remember when there were intercepts of these telephone conversations of our soldiers from Ukraine who were telling their wives how they killed someone in the woods or how many dollars they stole from Ukrainian houses there. And their wives told them: "You're raping Ukrainian women there, but do not tell me. I do not want to know." This is what entered my poems. It is the same as if you see this on the street, as it happens to you personally. It is not because you are a journalist.

MARC: And yet as a journalist on Radio Liberty one is more exposed. One cannot not know.

TATYANA: Yes, of course. It all reverberates: these lies that outraged me incredibly. I think that was the first impulse when Crimea happened — the lies. I have a poem about how we live on avenues named after executioners. It is all about this unprocessed memory. I've always been very concerned about it. This sense of terrible shame, catastrophe. And that it is reflected in our life, this shame about the war, then the horror about your own emigration, when you're breaking away from your life, from everything, from myself. I absolutely didn't want to go anywhere. So it's nostalgia, then some kind of acceptance, then appreciation of the country where you have ended up. These realities — they give you a reason for poems.

MARC: If we go back to '56, there was the debunking of Stalin, and immediately after that there was an invasion into Hungary. There must have been this deep mismatch between hopes and facts. Perestroika too started with hopes, and suddenly there was a completely different spirit. They have changed the names of the streets, but the old spirit — it came back.

TATYANA: You know what I think? That it's even harder for us than for the young people who didn't know that Soviet oppression because they do not realize the full extent of what is happening.

MARC: When you write poetry does it relieve the feelings of helplessness in the face of what is happening? Or does it increase anxiety?

TATYANA: Well, it is some other mechanism. You're doing something entirely different. You are creating a work of art. And if it works, it strengthens you in some way. But it still doesn't replace the feeling of civic helplessness, for the poems — they cannot change anything. And then, remember, you live in the era of social networks, and if they change algorithms you are silenced. I am putting my poems on my Facebook page, but they have just changed this algorithm of Facebook. You cannot put the whole poem there — just the beginning, and people need to click the message to see everything.

MARC: Yes, you can open it further: you can click and open it.

TATYANA: Yes, you can, but you have to get on the page to do it. And people rarely do that. People watch the feed. So at this time the media with its algorithms does not help my poetry, and my books will not be published in Russia. But the poems, they're breaking through. In fact, I think that if they did not break through, it would be a complete victory of darkness over us. It would mean that the darkness has defeated you. It has triumphed.

MARC: Do you mean that darkness can consume you, and that poetry makes sure that you cannot dwell on it or in it all the time?

TATYANA: In our life there must be weeping and wailing, and I have quite a lot of it in my poetry. There is this real lament for Russia. But it is also interesting that, in general, the main body of my anti-war poems were written in the first months of the war. I can no longer write like that. Now I write more about what I see around me and what is inside — what is right here and now. And this experience of protest — it still remains; it arises periodically, but somehow in a different form.

MARC: How do you see yourself, your role? Do you see yourself as part of the Russian dissident line?

TATYANA: Well, I guess... But I would not say I am a dissident. Because dissidence is, well, always a certain current, isn't it? And it demands your life completely. On the other hand, my youngest son cannot stand Russian dissidents. He cannot stand the fact that

the protests were peaceful — signed letters, Chronicles of Current Events — the samizdat publications — all words, words. They have never taken up arms.

MARC: Does he think that the dissidents should have resorted to violence, to shooting?

TATYANA: In his mind, one has to fight for power. If you cannot fight for power, then what do you do? Just sit there and do what a doctor or a janitor does — a meeting.

MARC: Is there no other way to catch attention except violence?

TATYANA: It's gotten a lot harder, of course. So much information around. Catching attention is not simple.

MARC: But, in your case, what was the price for your civil disobedience? Civil disobedience — this is how Henry David Thoreau would name it.

TATYANA: Payment for dissidence, for the oppositional behavior? One pays with a broken life. Being hit with a crowbar is the most serious payment. In my case, what was the payment? The country I lost, the house I lost, the son I lost, for one of the sons is now separated from me, all my friends and, in general, my habits and preferences, and some practical advantages. After all, every citizen of a country, even if the country is Russia, has some preferences and advantages. For example, if I were still in Russia, I would have the opportunity to have free medical care. It's a colossal problem that

everything here must be paid for, and the expense is very significant. It's not for me to explain what I have lost. And I also have absolutely no confidence that I won't be thrown out of the country. I mean, there's no solid ground under my feet anymore. And also with your dear Trump, I don't know if I'm going to be unemployed for I'm going to lose my job under these conditions. The American government can cut off help. We, at Radio Liberty, are supported by the Congress directly. But Musk has already called for a shutdown — shutting down of the Voice of America and Radio Liberty.

MARC: Are they really going to do it?

TATYANA: They will certainly limit the resources very badly. That is for sure. Where will these scissors going to go? I don't know. Anyway, we're all in limbo. That's the sad part. So you see, you pay with everything, with your life. With the people you love and with your own life.

MARC: Was it impossible not to leave Russia?

TATYANA: The minute the war started I became an employee of an undesirable organization. And I cannot put my name under my articles, for there will be an immediate fine: an article by a foreign agent. Think: I have been working at Radio Liberty for 25 years, and since the war began I've taken my name out of the articles, replaced it with pseudonyms. From the point of view of my country, I am a criminal just for this alone. And if I don't want to go to jail, I cannot go back.

MARC: How long did it take for the decision to mature — the decision to leave Russia?

TATYANA: Not for long. I mean, my superiors at Radio Liberty suggested it. And just then the rumors started that there would be searches of foreign agents' homes. They were probably squeezing us out of the country, those Chekists. And you begin to think: now I'm going to be searched; they will take all the computers, and they will rob everything. And they will take my sons' things as well. It was a horrible, horrible time. The most terrible time was the time before leaving. Because it was a time of fear. Nothing can be worse than fear. For yourself and for your loved ones. That's the way it is. And then this shame, disgrace, horror, for when the war started, you are burning with shame, with a feeling of catastrophe and a crazy pity for the dying. And there is a disbelief. So when I was offered to leave, the horror of the war is intertwined with the horror of my own fate. You begin to understand that you have to break with everything you hold dear.

MARC: Was there no possibility to find another job in Russia?

TATYANA: I could have decided to stay, of course. But with twenty-two years of working at Radio Liberty, and with the title of foreign agent, which I was given before the war, I had no chance to find another job. And without a job, well, one cannot survive. That's just the way it was. It was terrible. And then, when I came to Tbilisi, there was this fierce homesickness. And then comes a new stage — some kind of acceptance that I live here, that is where I live. But, in general, there is still this feeling that there is no stability.

And then, of course, all of us, all of us who moved, we all have lost a lot of money because we don't get paid more, but we are not in our homes, our own apartments. We're all renting. And in my case, I also pay for my relatives who live in Russia. And I also help my sons. And all this, all this, all is hard. And the main thing is that if you look into the future, it is not clear at all.

MARC: Do you feel that there is less danger in Georgia, than in Russia, even with everything that has been happening in Georgia?

TATYANA: There is no immediate danger as far as my immediate life takes place. I can go for walks, enjoy the beautiful city, enjoy the mountains. But the main danger here is that you have to leave the country every year to get a new visa, and they might not let you back in. That's the frightening thought and a really big problem.

MARC: What do you miss particularly strongly outside of your family?

TATYANA: My religious community. For example, I am very grateful to these priests I knew: how they did not rush off, did not move away from me, how they stayed with their flock. However, here, for example, there is a priest who left Russia, and the liturgies take place at his home. And it's made our whole circle a community, right? There are mostly people from Moscow, mostly from the famous Moscow liberal church of Kosma and Damian. Many of that congregation has moved here. And that's why we have an evangelical group now. We still meet once a week, we read together the Gospel or the

Old Testament, but mostly the Gospel. We talk about it, how it is, how it applies to our lives, to us. It's very important, such an important circle. And there are people of all ages, and very young people. This is pleasant, very pleasant. We meet; there is a mountain above us. We met on the New Year's Eve as a community. There were many creative people who organize some Belarusian holidays, some Georgian holidays, some Pancake Day, some movie shows, just meetings and, in general, excursions. I communicate with them from time to time with real pleasure. I loved my New Year's Eve with them. So, of course, there is some kind of communication. Absolutely.

MARC: Can I ask: You have Jewish blood in you, don't you?

TATYANA: What do you mean — Jewish blood? On my mother's side and on my grandmother's side I am Jewish. And I am working now on my Israeli visa. But we were too late to submit the documents in the simplified order, and now we are caught in bureaucracy.

MARC: Do you find your Jewish side objects to your Christian beliefs?

TATYANA: In my community there are many like me, Jewish Christian pilgrims... And there are kids there, too, by the way. So many of them are still affected by Father Alexander Men', his personal journey of faith.

MARC: You are the member of the PEN club. Does it operate here? Does it support you?

TATYANA: Our PEN club was destroyed in St. Petersburg — closed by the government. Naturally, I was invited to some festivals in America a couple of times, and then I was excluded from it, because Ukrainian writers are all there, and they did not want a Russian writer next to them. It was a very interesting correspondence. They sent me the invitations and then wrote: "I'm sorry, but, unfortunately, your performance will not take place." And I wrote about it, and I'm just posting it on my Facebook, all of it. But I remain a member of the PEN club.

MARC: You remember in Osip Mandelstam: "Destroying myself, contradicting myself, as the moth flies to the midnight light/ I want to leave my speech, for all my obligations to it" [Себя губя, себе противореча, Как моль летит на огонек полночный, Мне хочется уйти из нашей речи. За все, чем я обязан ей бессрочно]. He understood the problem when the language is taken over by the murderers.

TATYANA: And he was contradicting himself, like me. Honestly speaking, I had a real withdrawal from writing in Russian, and yet the Russian language was not the aggressor for me — it has looked after me. And I have the feeling that the language is so much bigger than all of us. Much bigger than this generation, this regime. It is ridiculous to say that the language is to blame. And language will digest; it will survive. So many catastrophes have been digested by the language. It's a divine thing, huge...

How can you deny the language of Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy in their commitment to truth. I was just a little bit twitchy, of course, but I quickly got back on track.

MARC: In your view why is poetry important?

TATYANA: Well, in Tbilisi right now there are more or less famous poets from Moscow: Gandlevsky, Kabanov, someone else, right? I am from Petersburg, so they do not fully accept me. Funny... But if you ask any person on the streets of Moscow or St. Petersburg, they don't know any of the biggest poets that we know. I am absolutely convinced. Well, maybe you will come across some individual connoisseur of literature... Is it because there are too many of us, people who have learned how to write? Perhaps. But the number of people who perceive poetry as something that changes your life is always about the same. It has not increased at all, but living with it makes your life profoundly different.

Additional Poems

1 Любимый (1992)

— это древний бог, Которому
несут начатки Колосьев и плодов;
у ног Его дымится пепел сладкий.

Любимый темен и незрим, А
образ грубо размалеван, Но тот,
кто прячется за ним, Не выдает
себя ни словом.

И не достичь его ушей, Закрытых
век, коленей острых Всеми, что
вращено в душе, Под черным
солнцем в рощах пестрых.

В тяжелом золоте костров И в
складках жертвенного дыма, Не
принимающий даров, О нет, не
человек Любимый.

Не тот, кого мы ждем, кому
Мы подвигаем чай в стакане, Чье
тело разбавляет тьму, На ком, как
бы на истукане,

Возможно различить черты Лица,
прийти в расцветший рядом Сад
судорожной наготы, Знакомый с
временем и градом, —

Не человек, не зимний сад, А
сторож сада — нет, не сторож, —

Его не позовешь назад, Не
поцелуешь, не повздоришь, —
Любимый — это божество, Что за
спиной у человека Взывает
именем его, Стуча в стекло без
слов, как ветка.

Не подкупить, не побороть
Окажется желанным самым — А
чтобы сквозь живую плоть Бог
тихо посмотрел в глаза нам.

The beloved is an ancient god, To whom
the stalks of spikes and fruits are borne;
At his feet the sweet ashes smoke.

The beloved is dark and unseen, and his
image is crudely painted, but he who
hides behind him does not reveal himself
with a word.

And his ears, closed eyelids, and sharp
knees cannot reach All that is grown in
the soul, Under the black sun in the
groves of the motley.

In the heavy gold of the fires And in the
folds of sacrificial smoke, Who takes no
gifts, Oh no, not a man Beloved.

Not the man for whom we wait, for whom

We move tea in a glass, Whose body
dilutes the darkness, On whom, as if on a
statue,

It's possible to recognize the features of a
face, To come to the garden of convulsive
nakedness that blooms beside, Familiar
with time and hail, -

Not a man, not a winter garden, But a
watchman of the garden - no, not a
watchman - You can't call him back, You
can't kiss him, you can't quarrel with him,

The beloved is a deity, who behind a
man's back calls out his name, Knocking
on the glass like a branch without words.

2 Бог (1992)

– это первый снег. Он – лист, комар. Он – жгучий Бенедикт, Он – скользкий Абельяр. Он – пестрый камень в озере на дне. Он – пар над молоком. Он прячется во мне. Но не в ушах же, ловящих соблазн, Не в глубине впитавших скверну глаз, Не в черепа глухом и твердом гробе, Не в скачущем птенце – в гнезде из ребер — «Любви! Любви!» – кричащем. Не в крови Нырять Он и плещется: «Лови!» Он для меня – во мне – неуловим. Наверное, под силу лишь двоим Накрыть Его, как журавля, волшебной И тонкой сетью недомолвок и движений. Тогда Он здесь – не то чтобы везде — Но в пальцев кончиках и в кончиках грудей, Которыми едва тебя касаюсь, Когда стою на цыпочках, босая! Поскольку этот миг так обожжен и чист, Как глиняный кувшин, как узкий вербный лист, В нем дышит Бог, Он – холод меж лопаток, Блик на плече и слова отпечаток

Несказанного – на сухих губах:
След ангела. След солнца на камнях.

Not to be bribed, not to be fought, but to be the most desirable of all - But to look quietly into our eyes through living flesh.

God is the first snow. He is the leaf, the mosquito. He is the stinging Benedict, He is the slippery Abelard. He is the mottled stone in the lake bottom. He is the vapor over the milk. He hides in me. But not in the ears that catch temptation, Not in the depths of eyes that have absorbed filth, Not in the skull's deaf and hard coffin, Not in the hopping chick - in the nest of ribs - "Love! Love!" - "Love! Love! Not in the blood He dives and splashes: "Catch!" He is elusive to me, in me. Perhaps only two can cover Him, like a crane, with a magic and delicate network of obscurities and movements. Then He is here, not everywhere, but in the tips of my fingers and the tips of my breasts, which I barely touch when I stand on tiptoe, barefoot! Because this moment is so burned and pure, Like a clay pitcher, like a narrow palm leaf, God breathes in it, He is the chill between my shoulder blades, The glare on my shoulder and the imprint of words

The footprint of an angel. The mark of the sun on the stones.

3 Я хочу с тобой в город (1993)

с названием кратким, как жизнь,
 Где орлиное солнце в цветущих
 колоннах кружит, На молочных
 холмах – непросохшие капли,
 внизу Из набухших фонтанов
 жара выжимает слезу, А в
 соборах-дубах между
 окаменелых ветвей Свили ангелы
 гнезда в тугой золоченой листве,
 Где живеи винограда, прозрачен
 и теплолюбив, Наливается
 мрамор, пространство собою
 обвив. Я хочу с тобой в город,
 насытивший мир молоком
 Иссякающей речи, – где влажное
 эхо кругом, Где арена пуста, но в
 тених полосатых, – как тигр, Под
 мостами мурлыкает желтый
 лоснящийся Тибр, Где оплывших
 ступеней не скроет ни лед, ни
 сугроб. Мы придем с тобой в
 город – в венке его мирт и укроп,
 — Он на раненых нас поглядит
 из-под медленных век. Вниз
 укажет отставленным пальцем. А
 может быть, вверх.

4 Из цикла «Песочные часы» (1997)

Рифма – женщина, примеряющая
 наряды, В волосы втыкающая
 розу. Она плещется в крови, как
 наяда, И выныривает, когда не
 просят.

I want to go with you to the city with a
 name as short as life, Where the eagle
 sun circles in blooming columns, On the
 milky hills there are dripping drops, Below,
 from the swollen fountains the heat
 squeezes the tear, And in the
 cathedrals-oaks between the petrified
 branches Angels have nested in the taut
 gilded foliage, Where the marble is more
 alive than grapes, transparent and
 warm-loving, Wrapped around the space.
 I want to go with you to the city where the
 world is saturated with the milk of fading
 speech, - where the wet echoes echo all
 around, Where the arena is empty, but in
 shadows striped like a tiger, The yellow
 shiny Tiber purrs under the bridges,
 Where neither ice nor snowdrifts can hide
 the melted steps. We'll come with you to
 the city, its wreath of myrtle and fennel,
 and he'll look at our wounded from
 beneath his slow eyelids. He'll point
 downward with a backward finger. Or
 maybe upward.

Rhyme is a woman trying on outfits,
 Putting a rose in her hair. She swims in
 the blood like a naiad, And comes out
 when not asked.

Rhyme is a bell that drives away evil
 spirits from a guilty soul, when the wind
 cries in the thistle thicket on a cold night.

Рифма – колокол, отгоняющий
злых духов От души виновной,
безлюдной, Когда ветер в
зарослях чертополоха Плачет
ночью холодной.

Рифма – серебряный
колокольчик, Поднимающий меня
из гроба, Когда ты приходишь,
мой мальчик, И, блеснув очками,
целуешь в губы.

Рифма – тропинка с земляникой
по краю, То мелькнет, то исчезнет
– так бьется сердце, Я иду по ней
– а куда, и сама не знаю,
Заговариваю зубы смерти.

5 ПЕСНЯ (2007)

А деревня в поле стоит.

А над полем облако спит.

А за полем лес шумит –

Елки, стройные, как солдаты.

Не сносить им всем головы.

Полиняло платье травы.

Заржавело платье листвы.

И молчит валун бородатый.

Затоплю я жаркую печь,

Только жаль, что не с кем
прилечь,

Rhyme is the silver bell that lifts me out of
my coffin, When you come, my boy, And,
gleaming with your glasses, kiss me on
the lips.

Rhyme is a path with strawberries on its
edge, It flashes and disappears - that's
how my heart beats, I walk along it, but I
don't know where I'm going, I'm talking
death's teeth out.

And the village stands in the field.

And a cloud sleeps over the field.

And beyond the field, the forest is buzzing

The fir trees, slender as soldiers.

They're all going to die.

The dress of the grass has faded.

The dress of the leaves is rusty.

And the bearded boulder is silent.

I'll make a hot stove,

I wish I had someone to lie down with,

To make a little speech

Завести негромкую речь
 До того, как белые мухи
 Залетают над головой.
 А на поле пусто – хоть вой.
 А как голос ласковый твой
 Позабуду – стану старухой.

Before the white flies
 Before the white flies fly over my head.
 And the field is empty, I can't even howl.
 And when I forget your voice
 I'll be an old woman.

6 ПИСЬМО ТАТЬЯНЫ К ПУШКИНУ (2007)

Я, правнучка девок, слонявшихся
 по людской,

I'm the great-granddaughter of the girls
 who used to hang around the public
 square,

Пахнувших потом, семечками,
 тоской,

Smelling of sweat, of seeds, of longing,
 Wrapped around the spinning wheel,
 hanging from the spindle,

Обвившейся вокруг прялки,
 свисавшей с веретена,

Swollen and disheveled from sleep.

Опухших, растрепанных после
 сна

On a chest in the corner, giggling, and
 when they're

На сундуке в углу, хихикавших, а
 когда

When they're knocked up by the baron,
 they dissolve like water,

Забрюхатят от барина,
 растворявшихся, как вода,

In the black earth, somewhere in a
 hen-house,

В черной земле – где-то в курной
 избе,

I, who long ago caught their dull-eyed
 stares.

Я, давным-давно поймавшая на
 себе

Their dull-eyed stares, as well as their
 friends.

Их туповатый взгляд – так же как
 их зазноб –

The boorish lackeys and skinny plowmen
 who went to the coffin,

| | |
|--|---|
| Хамоватых лакеев и тощих пахарей, легших в гроб, | before their old age; |
| Не дожив до старости; | I, great-granddaughter of the Rivoks, the Firs, |
| Я, правнучка ривок, фир, | who littered the elegant Malorussian air. |
| Засорявших нарядный малорусский эфир | with the language of the migratory tribe of black birds, |
| Говором перелетного племени, черных птиц, | Gogol's pompous Jewesses, at the bottom of their eye sockets. |
| Пышных гоголевских жиждовок, на дно глазниц | hiding the horror of the pogrom, like under a pile of laundry. |
| Прячущих ужас погрома, как под грудой белья – | I'm the one who hides the horror of the pogrom under a pile of underwear, |
| На черный день заначку в платочке, – я, | As Lev Gumilev would say, one of the chimeras, |
| Как сказал бы Лев Гумилев, одна из химер, | that inhabit the earth, I write to you in the manner |
| Населяющих землю, Вам пишу, на манер | of the shadows you summoned, looking over my shoulder. |
| Вызванных Вами теней, глядящих через плечо. | I'm writing to you. What else? |
| Я пишу Вам. Чего же еще? | Autumn, autumn! Wet gold, scarlet, |
| Осени, осени! Мокрого золота, багреца, | Cuckoo flax, thyme in bloom, |
| Кукушкина льна, отцветающего чабреца, | The first ice in the basin, the empty head, |
| Первого льда в умывальнике, пустой головы, | “The wind's stirred up. I'm a chimera, of course, but so are you, |
| Взвинченной ветром. Я, конечно, | |

| | |
|---|--|
| химера, но ведь и Вы, | Alexander Sergejevich, - I don't mean |
| Александр Сергеевич, - я не имею в виду | The swarthy ancestor and other nonsense, - |
| Смуглого предка и прочую ерунду, - | You, too, locked up like a prison, in a lesson, |
| Ведь и Вы, запертый, словно в тюрьму, в урок, | A general who, with a light cohort of lines. |
| Полководец, легкой когортой строк | who crushed the heavy verses of fashionable men and sensitive hearts, - |
| Смявший тяжкие вирши модников и чувствительные сердца, – | You, who were as much as raw cotton, |
| Вы, кого было столько, сколько хлопка-сырца, | Iron and steel per capita, I can say you're gone. |
| Чугуна и стали на душу, - можно сказать, Вас нет. | That is, I know not whose words, as in a dream, |
| То есть я не знаю, чьи слова, как во сне, | whose lips are repeating, and who was settling on the snow, |
| Повторяют губы, и кто оседал на снег, | who made Marina weep, and me, too. |
| Заставив рыдать Марину, да и меня – зане | Who does not weep when the hero is slain? - |
| Кто же не возрыдает, когда герой сражен? – | Here I stand in the crowd of inconsolable wives. |
| Вот и я стою в толпе неутешных жен. | But it is not for my plebeian eyes to see Your sneer and your death, I could barely get out, by some miracle. - from under your iambs |
| Но не моими глазами плебейскими разглядеть | of your iambs, - no, it was your hand. I threw a pebble and it flew down the mountain, |
| Вашу усмешку и вашу смерть, | On the wreckage of worlds, building their own worlds, Now standing like an autumn forest, |

Еле выбравшись – чудом! –
из-под катка

Ваших ямбов, - да нет, просто
Ваша рука

Бросила камушек, - и он полетел
с горы,

На обломках миров созидаю свои
миры,

Ныне стоящие, как осенний лес,

Полный холодных огней, высоких
небес,

Ангельских арф.

Только я хочу

Видеть ваше лицо, как Психея,
несу свечу,

Но, как девка от барской двери –
голыми пятками топоча, -

Опрометью по лестнице. Гаснет
моя свеча.

Пусть гаснет. В щель между строк
не увидеть лица

Дуэлянта, картежника, мудреца,

Вольтерьянца, Орфея,
придворного, бунтаря,

Волокиты, пророка – попросту
говоря,

Протея, трепещущего в руке

Full of cold lights, high skies,
and angel harps.

Only I want

To see your face, like Psyche carrying a
candle,

But, like a wench from the bar's door,
stomping her bare heels.

I dash down the stairs. My candle's going
out.

Let it go out. I can't see the face between
the lines.

The duelist, the gambler, the wise man,
Voltairean, Orpheus, courtier, rebel,

A thief, a prophet, simply put,
Proteus, fluttering in his hand.

A beast, a bird, a monster, a footprint in
the sand;

And blushing, timid, for daring to come
under the shade.

"I love you!" - How shall I tell them all?

I will not. Only the shadows are puffing up
to the ceiling

Above the extinguished candle. Clutching
my hand to the line,

I search for you with my eyes, but the
gilded cage of lines

is open. The singer has flown away. The
breeze

Still walks with twigs tinkling,

Blowing on my wet cheeks. Forgive me.

Зверем, птицей, чудовищем,
отпечатком ступни в песке;

И краснея, робея – что посмела
прийти под сень, -

«Я люблю Вас!» - как я скажу им
всем?

Не скажу. Только тени – клубами
к потолку

Над погасшей свечой.
Вцепившись рукой в строку,

Я ищу Вас глазами, но золоченая
клетка строк

Открыта. Певец улетел. Ветерок

Еще гуляет, прутиками звеня,

Дует в мокрые щеки. Простите
меня.

7 На сиротских (2010) лицах
одуванчиков,

Как на серых фотках серых лет,

Только тени Венечек и Ванечек,

Стриженных под ноль, а из
примет –

Худоба да страх (отцы
расстреляны,

Матери затихли в лагерях).

Одуванчик в поле с коростелями

On the orphan faces of dandelions,

Like the gray pictures of gray years,

Only the shadows of Venichka and
Vanechka,

with their hair cut short and their features

Thinness and fear (fathers shot,

Mothers are quiet in the camps.)

A dandelion in the field with the
corncrakes -

| | |
|--|--|
| – | If the wind blows, it'll be blown to dust. |
| Ветер дунет – разлетится в прах. | His soul will fly anonymously. |
| Безымянно полетит душа его. | I'll go my own way. |
| Побреду и я своим путем. | I'll be met by three blue-haired bums, |
| Мне навстречу, с шелудивой шавкою, | Three blue-haired bums. With a claw |
| Три бомжа синюшные. Когтем | Scratch something under my ribs: |
| Что-то зацарапает под ребрами: | With a drunken grin, here and there, |
| С пьяненькой ухмылкой, там и тут, | With miserable belongings, in the dark twilight. |
| С жалким скарбом, сумерками темными | The children of the dandelion are wandering. |
| Дети одуванчиков бредут. | |
| 8 Капли все (2010) еще шепчут листьям | The drops still whisper to the leaves |
| Обессиленными губами | With exhausted lips |
| После дождя, когда иссякает приступ | After the rain, when the attack is over |
| Нежности, но продолжает память | Of tenderness, but still the memory |
| Содрогаться – капли по мокрым спинам | Shuddering drops on wet backs. |
| Гладят листья, на ночь им что-то шепчут, | Stroking the leaves, whispering something to them for the night, |
| Протекая по тайным зубцам, ложбинам, | flowing along the secret teeth and hollows, |
| | Letting them go and hugging them tighter. |

| | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Отпуская – и обнимая крепче. | When the last drop is gone |
| Когда последняя капля смолкнет, | And the sleepless downpour is gone, |
| Унося с собою бессонный ливень, | The last leaf will sway for a long, long |
| Последний лист еще долго-долго | time |
| Качается – и заснет счастливым. | And sways and falls asleep happily. |
| | |
| 9 Прощай, страна! (2015) | Goodbye, country! |
| Мы идем ко дну. | We're going down. |
| Ну, да, я любила тебя одну, | Well, yes, I loved you alone, |
| Одержимую демонами, на шаг | possessed by demons, one step away |
| Отступившими вроде бы – но, | who seem to have retreated |
| круша | On the way to the last house |
| На пути последнее, в прежний | back to the old home |
| дом | It's a deal, |
| Возвратившимися. | If truth be told, they could have swept up |
| Поделом, | And clean up the vomit. |
| Если честно: могли бы и | Let me go. |
| подмести | Don't hold me any longer. I don't want to |
| И замыть блевотину. | To lick the executioner's ass, |
| Отпусти. | Or round up the number of dead |
| Не держи меня больше. Я не хочу | Or exhale, "Lucky me!" - |
| Ни вылизывать задницу палачу, | |
| Ни своим нулем округлять число | |
| Убиенных, ни выдохнуть: | |

«Повезло!» -

Проскользнув по грязи,
забившись в щель.

Смотри, какая вокруг метель,
Одичавшие улицы стаей псов
Пробегают, мерещится Пугачев

В подворотне – тулупчик, не то
Махно,

Видишь – во поле пусто, в душе
темно.

Ей бы взмыть, беглянке, в седую
ширь,

Да к ногам привязаны сотни гирь

Те поля заросшие, те холмы,

На которые падая, воем мы.

10 Умираешь, значит? (2015)
Закрываешь лавочку?
Сворачиваешь проект,

На который пошло немеряно
водки, чернил и обесцененных
слез,

И отборных острот, и продукции
сивого мерина. – Неужели
последний аккорд пропет:

Высокий, он не тает в воздухе,
словно радуга. Ты всерьез?

Slipping through the mud, slipping into a
crevice.

Look at the blizzard all around,

The feral streets are a pack of dogs

Running through the streets, I see
Pugachev.

In an alleyway - a tulupka, or Makhno,

You see, the field is empty, the soul is
dark.

She'd like to soar, a fugitive, into the gray
world,

But a hundred weights are tied to her feet.

Those overgrown fields, those hills,

On which we fall and howl

Dying, huh? Closing up shop? You're
scrapping the project,

that's used up a lot of vodka and ink and
devalued tears,

and witticisms, and the products of a blue
gelding. - Is it the last chord:

High, it doesn't melt into the air like a
rainbow. Are you serious?

Yes, of course, not a battlefield, not a
road or a hotel -

Да, конечно, не поле боя, не
дорога и не отель –

Правда, чужбина за
бессмысленной рябью миль –

Но зато в кругу семьи, в своей
постели, как ты хотел.

Мир оседает медленно, как после
взрыва – пыль.

В воздухе проплывает кресло,
обнажая потертый бок,

Проплывают два стула из кухни,
на которых сидели мы, -

Жареная картошка, твоя
любимая, водка, томатный сок,

Суп из фасоли. Чтобы остались
разделены

Красное с белым, водку ты
наливал, подставляя нож,

К стенке стакана – помнишь тот
хитрый трюк?

Хороша была «кровавая Мэри».
Что ж,

И диван проплывает,
расшатанный в хлам, и даже
утюг,

Гладивший блузку перед твоим
приходом, и тот паром,

Первый раз увозивший нас за
границу – почитай, на тот свет,

It's true that there's a foreign land beyond
the meaningless ripples of miles

But with your family, in your bed, just like
you wanted.

The world settles slowly, like dust after an
explosion.

A chair floats through the air, exposing its
worn side,

Two chairs from the kitchen, where we
used to sit, float by -

Fried potatoes, your favorite, vodka,
tomato juice,

Bean soup. To stay separate

Red and white, you poured the vodka with
a knife,

To the side of the glass - remember that
trick?

That was a good bloody mary. Oh, well,

And the sofa floats by, rattled and even
the iron,

that ironed your blouse before you came,
and that ferry,

that took us abroad for the first time,

And I bet the captain still doesn't know
he's Charon,

И капитан, поди, до сих пор не
знает, что он Харон,

Медленно проплывая в воздухе,
руку подняв – привет!

Рядом с ним проплывает причал
и чугунные фонари

У Петропавловки, с
позолоченною стрелой,

Полосатая будка – только
будочника внутри

Расстреляли, когда еще не было
нас с тобой.

Проплывает кладбище
Новодевичьего монастыря

С могилой Тютчева, куда ты меня
водил

Тайными тропами, и, вообще
говоря,

Это место, в виду снесенного
купола и заросших могил,

Выглядело живей, чем сегодня –
с золотом и толпой

К поясу Богородицы, к Бог знает
каким мощам.

Помнишь, в цеху грохочущем – в
бывшей церковке мы с тобой

Полустертых ангелов встретили?
Отощал

Каждый – кто крыльев лишился,

As he sails slowly through the air with his
hand raised, "Hello!

The pier and cast-iron lanterns float by
him.

At Petropavlovka, with a gilded arrow,

A striped booth, but the bailiff inside.

They shot him when you and I weren't
there yet.

The cemetery of the Novodevichy
Convent floats by.

With Tyutchev's grave, where you took
me.

By secret paths, and, generally speaking,
This place, in view of the demolished
dome and overgrown graves,

It looked more alive than it does today,
with gold and crowds.

To the belt of the Virgin, to God knows
what relics.

Remember, in the rumbling shop, in the
former church.

We met the half-faded angels? Emaciated
Each one had lost his wings, each one his
head,

And still they shone, in the dirt and grit, in
spite of it.

I think shame, shame, shame, shame,
shame, shame, shame, shame.
than the Pharisaic painting and
whitewashing...

Rusty boats are sailing by

On the Neva, over which we still sit.

With a bottle of red, with our legs hanging
down, on the fortress wall -

On the edge of the prison, of course, and
colored palaces like smoke,

кто головы своей,
 И все равно светились, в грязи и
 скрежете: вопреки.
 Я вот думаю – срам, поругание –
 страшно сказать – честней
 Фарисейской покраски-побелки...
 Проплывают ржавые катерки
 По Неве, над которой мы до сих
 пор сидим
 С бутылкой красного, свесив
 ноги, на крепостной стене –
 На краю тюрьмы, естественно, и
 цветные дворцы, как дым,
 Клубятся на том берегу.
 А нынче, как на войне,
 Кругом постреливают, но бежать в
 кусты –
 Нет такого рефлекса, а главное –
 не страшной
 Тобой оставляемой пустоты:
 Ни брони от нее, ни
 бомбоубежища, ни траншей.
 Мирная жизнь прекращается
 мигом: вот только что пили чай,
 «Рио-рита» кружилась, и вдруг –
 Левитан, метроном,
 Серые реки бушлатов, скулы,

“and colored palaces like smoke.
 And now it's like a war,
 There's gunfire all around, but running
 into the bushes -
 There's no such reflex, and what's more,
 it's no more terrible
 The emptiness you leave behind:
 No armor against it, no bomb shelter, no
 trenches.
 Peaceful life ceases in a moment: just
 now we were drinking tea,
 “Rio Rita” was spinning, and suddenly -
 Levitan, metronome,
 Gray rivers of canteens, cheekbones,
 bayonets, farewell,
 On the corner, a boarded-up
 “Gastronome”.
 What have you done? A world without
 you, like a piece of clothing thrown on a
 chair.
 Clothes that can't move or breathe.
 Wait, wait, wait, wait, please - see, there,
 on the bridge,
 There's a soul running after you,
 stumbling and falling and crying.

штыки, прощай,

На углу заколоченный
«Гастроном».

Что ты наделал? Мир без тебя,
как брошенная на стул

Одежда, не может ни двигаться,
ни дышать.

Подожди, подожди, подожди,
пожалуйста, – видишь, там, на
мосту,

За тобой, спотыкаясь и падая,
плача, бежит душа.

11 Женщина умирает дважды.
(2015)

Сначала зеркало покрывается
порами, и по капельке, словно
пот,

Красота испаряется, и от жажды

Вернуть ее блещут глаза,
пересыхает рот.

И мужские взгляды, несущие
женщину, будто птицу,

Редуют, гаснут, разбиваются, как
стекло.

Она останавливается у
кондитерской, вдыхает запах
корицы

A woman dies twice.

First, the mirror is covered with pores, and
one drop at a time, like sweat,

♪ Beauty evaporates and the thirst ♪

To get it back, the eyes glisten, the mouth
dries up.

And men's gazes, carrying a woman like
a bird,

Fade, fade, shatter like glass.

She stops at the pastry shop, breathes in
the smell of cinnamon.

And suddenly realizes how heavy

И вдруг понимает, как тяжело
 Ее тело. Она еще борется, но уже
 на полку,
 Вздохнув, ссылает любимое
 платье. «Какого тебе рожна?» -
 Негодует подруга обрюзгшая.
 Агония длится долго.
 Это первая смерть. А вторая не
 так уже и важна.

Her body. She's still struggling, but
 already on the shelf,
 Sighing, she sends her favorite dress.
 "What the hell do you want?" -
 "What's the matter with you?" resents her
 friend. The agony lasts a long time.
 That's the first death. The second is not
 so important.

12 С каждым днем (2015), с
 каждым сном все короче,
 Все прямее оставшийся путь.
 Только не торопи меня, Отче,
 Дай отравленный воздух
 глотнуть,
 Дай поежиться – холодно,
 братцы! –
 Проходя по дрожащим мостам,
 Дай мне досыта нацеловаться
 С сыновьями Адама – а там –
 Как листва в ноябре, отпылаю,
 Упаду, как неслышное “ах!”,
 Только имя Твое сохраняя
 На рассыпавшихся губах.

Every day, every dream gets shorter,
 The path that remains is straighter and
 straighter.
 Don't rush me, Father,
 Let me sip the poisoned air,
 Let me shiver - it's cold, brothers! -
 As I pass over the trembling bridges,
 Let me kiss enough
 With the sons of Adam, and there -
 Like leaves in November, I'll blaze away,
 I'll fall like an inaudible “ah!”
 I'll keep your name
 On my scattered lips.

13 Ты говоришь, я горевать
(31.01.2016) умею –

Вот и учи меня радоваться, учи.

По мостовой поползли ледяные
змеи,

Звякнули капли, как выпавшие
ключи.

Как ни печальна смерть, но игра –
прекрасна,

Главное – просыпаться, не
важно, с кем,

Чтобы струилась прохладная
рябь соблазна

Вдоль по каналу мимо кудрявых
стен,

Чтоб на бульваре, где тополя
срубили,

Между машинами потными и
толпой

Колкой, пеньковой – ария
Керубино

Быстро вплеталась ниточкой
золотой.

Хлещет уха ледяная, ботинки
мочит,

Смерть пролетает низко, свистя
косой,

НА тебе яблоко, милый,

You say I know how to grieve.

Teach me how to be happy, teach me how
to be happy.

Ice snakes crawled across the sidewalk,

The drops rang like keys that have fallen
off.

Sad as death is, it's a beautiful game,

The important thing is to wake up, no
matter who you're with,

So that the cool ripples of temptation flow

Along the canal past the curly walls,

On the boulevard where the poplars have
been cut down,

Between the sweaty cars and the crowd

With a stubby, humpy aria of Cherubino.

And quickly woven in with a golden
thread.

The ice-cold ear bleats, the shoes get
wet,

Death flies low, whistling with his scythe,

There's an apple for you, my dear, as
Mozart

is following in his wake, his scythe raining
down.

In the gleam of elbows and waists
covered with silk,

поскольку Моцарт

Гонится следом – ливень его
косой

В блеске локтей и талий, объятых
шелком,

Словно огнем.

И правда, навел тоску б

Мир – не прижмись мы вовремя к
узкой щелке

Музыки, к тесной щелке
сомлевших губ.

Ну, а прижмешься – и голова-то
кругом:

Катит Радищев в вечном своем
возке,

Хлебников в ситцевой наволочке
Фейсбука

Нянчит стихи, иголка торчит в
виске.

На тебе яблоко. Спелая эта
шкурка

Лопнула, но пока мы еще в раю.

Видишь, канал в проталинах и
окурках

Тащит к Неве пожелтевшую
чешую.

Like fire.

Indeed, it would make the world sad

The world, if we had not pressed in time
to the narrow slit

of music, the tight slit of drowsy lips.

Well, if we do, we'll be dizzy:

Radishchev in his eternal carriage,

Khlebnikov in the chintz pillowcase of
Facebook.

He nurses his poems, a needle sticking in
his temple.

Here's an apple for you. This ripe skin

It's burst, but we're still in heaven.

You see, the canal with thaw and
cigarette butts.

dragging yellowed scales to the Neva.

14 О, Англия! (8.02.2016) Скоро
срубят твои дубы,

Выкинут из Вестминстера
каменные гробы,

Раздавят твои хартии, как
выеденное яйцо,

И побледнеет твое лицо

В рыжих веснушках – ты
вскинешь брови, закусишь губу,

И все твои ричарды перевернутся
в гробу.

О, Франция! Скоро твой
Нотр-Дам де Пари

Осыплется, как осенний лес, ибо
червь у тебя внутри

Высосал твою доблесть,
подточил стебелек

Твоей лилии, колпак
санкюлотский – и тот поблек.

О, Европа нежная, плывущая на
спине быка,

Ты устала держаться за его
крутые бока

И вот-вот соскользнешь,
растерянно теребя

Бычий загрибок.

Как же мы без тебя?!

Oh, England! Soon your oaks will be cut
down,

Your coffins of stone will be thrown out of
Westminster,

They'll crush your charters like an eaten
egg,

And your face will be pale

with red freckles, you'll raise your
eyebrows, you'll bite your lip,

And all your richards will roll over in their
coffins.

Oh, France! Soon your Notre Dame de
Paris

will crumble like an autumn forest, for the
worm inside you

Sucked your valor, sharpened the stem.

of your lily, your Sanquelot cap is faded.

Oh, gentle Europe, floating on the back of
a bull,

You're tired of clinging to the steep sides
of the bull.

and you're about to slip, rubbing the bull's
back.

The bull's rump.

What will we do without you?!

15 ИЗ ЦИКЛА «Б Ы Т И Е» (2016)

Плод наливной, тонкокожий,
словно прозрачный сосуд

С медленным пламенем – кто же
может унять этот зуд

В пальцах, протянутых к ветке,
жадную сухость во рту!

С маленькой черною меткой
вьется листок на ветру.

Господи, разве ты дал нам силы
противиться злой

Жажде и сполохам дальним,
пляшущим под кожей?

Ты же нас хрупкими создал, как
подорожник и рдест,

Если выковывать гвозди – то не
из этих сердец.

Заповедь, Господи, трудно в
жаркой держать голове.

Зверь с чешуей изумрудной
мирно свернулся в траве,

Тих, переливчат и складчат,
влажной спиною скользя.

Ты не сказал нам, что значит,
Господи, слово нельзя:

Ты ничего не сказал нам про
Саламин и Фарсал,

Про бородинские залпы, про

The fruit is plump, thin-skinned, like a
transparent vessel.

With a slow flame - who can take away
the itchy tingle

In the fingers reaching for the branch, the
greedy dryness of the mouth!

With a little black mark, a leaf fluttering in
the wind.

Lord, have you given us the strength to
resist the evil.

To thirst and the distant sparks that dance
beneath the rind?

Thou hast made us as fragile as the
plantain and the rye,

If nails are to be forged, it's not from these
hearts.

A commandment, Lord, is hard to keep in
a hot head.

The beast with emerald scales curled up
peacefully in the grass,

Silent, shimmering and folding, slithering
on its wet back.

You didn't tell us what the word "can't"
means, Lord:

Thou hast told us nothing of Salamis and
Pharsalus,

Thou hast told us of the volleys of
Borodino, of Eisenkur,

| | |
|--|---|
| Айзенкур не сказал, | Kosovo field, Tsushima, the fog of the Mazurian marshes, |
| Косово поле, Цусиму, морок Мазурских болот, | The winter of Stalingrad, the ice of Ladoga in March, |
| Про сталинградскую зиму, мартовский ладожский лед, | And the Warsaw ghetto, Auschwitz, Austerlitz, |
| И про варшавское гетто, Аушвиц, Аустерлиц, | The summer before the war, the look on their faces. |
| Про предвоенное лето, про выражение лиц | The wind |
| Ветром | of riders flying from Dürer's engraving, |
| летающих с гравюры Дюрера всадников, | nor |
| ни | Those who shouted, "My Führer!" Those who said, "Crucify!" |
| Этих, кричавших: «Мой фюрер!», тех, повторявших: «Распни!» | If we only knew about Hiroshima, mustard gas... - |
| Если бы знали мы только про Хиросиму, иприт... - | Your fruit on the branch - what's the use! - The sunset sun burns. |
| Плод Твой на ветке – что толку! – солнцем закатным горит. | |
| 16 Мы живем (15.01-11.02.2017) на проспектах имени палачей | We live on avenues named after executioners. |
| Среди ржавых труб, расшатанных кирпичей | Among rusty pipes and loose bricks. |
| И глядим, как волки, в заросли кумачей, | And we stare like wolves into the thickets of kumachas, |
| Словно там остались залежи | As if there's a deposit of kalacha left there. |

калачей.

Проплывают рядом бетонные
пустыри

И торговых центров стеклянные
пузыри,

Козырьки ларьков. Из серой
юдоли сей

Никакой не выведет Моисей.

Мы живем на проспектах имени
палачей,

В нашем супе бумажный привкус
от их речей.

Мы идем к себе, да никак не
найдем ключей.

Как в блокаду, стулья и книги
внутри печей,

Мы в чугунных лбах сжигаем XX
век, Он горит так долго, что
хватит его на всех.

Мы живем на проспектах имени
палачей, Раскрываем рот – и
голос у нас ничей, Зажигаем в
комнате лампочку в сто свечей,

А она освещает лес, перегной,
ручей.

Утопивши сапог в промоине в том
леске,

Вынимаешь – с дырявым
черепом на носке.

Concrete wastelands float by

And glass bubbles of shopping centers,

The canopies of stalls. Out of this gray
wasteland

No Moses can lead us out of this gray
world.

We live on avenues named after
executioners,

Our soup has the paper flavor of their
speeches.

We go to our homes, but we can't find the
keys.

Like in the blockade, chairs and books
inside the stoves,

We burn the 20th century in our cast-iron
foreheads, It burns so long that it's
enough for everyone.

We live on avenues named after
executioners, We open our mouths and
our voices are nobody's, We light a
hundred-candle bulb in our rooms,

And it illuminates the forest, the humus,
the brook.

When you drown your boot in a hole in
the woods,

You pull it out and you've got a holey skull
on your toe.

Poor Yorick, Yurick, here he is - he ran
and fell,

Бедный Йорик, Юрик, вот он –
бежал, упал,

На подушке мха – головы
костяной овал,

Через дырочку видно атаку,
огонь, оскал

Старшины, колючку, вышку,
лесоповал.

И куда ни пойдешь – на запад ли,
на восток,

Бедный Юрик, бедный-победный
Санек, Витек –

Все тропинки тобой перечеркнуты
– поперек.

Есть во фляжке водка, в термосе
кипяток:

О тебя споткнувшись, о костяной
порог, У сухого пня с тобой
посижу, браток, Пошепчусь,
пошуршу, как сухой листок, -

Пока мне на роток не накинёт
земля платок.

17 Господи (12.09.2017), если
есть у Тебя рай, Ты меня туда,
конечно, не забирай К
праведникам прозрачнокрылым,
Сама знаю – не вышла рылом. А
пусти меня на кухню через
черный ход В 41 год, К Рябинкину
Юре, Чтоб за крестами

On a cushion of moss, a bone oval of a
head,

Through the hole you can see the attack,
the fire, the grin.

A petty officer, a thorn in the side, a tower,
a logging camp.

And wherever you go, west or east,

Poor Yurik, poor Sanek, Vitek, poor
victorious Sanek, Vitek.

All paths are crossed by you.

There's vodka in the flask and boiling
water in the thermos:

Stumbling over you, over the bone
threshold, I'll sit with you by a dry stump,
brother, I'll whisper and rustle like a dry
leaf. - I'll sit with you, brother.

Till the earth puts a handkerchief over my
mouth.

Lord, if You have a heaven, don't take me
there to the righteous and
transparent-winged, I know I'm not good
enough. But let me go to the kitchen
through the back door To Yura
Ryabinkin's house in '41, So that the
winds blow behind the paper crosses, I'll
cook his porridge, put a spoonful in his

бумажными ветры дули, Буду варить ему кашу, класть по ложечке в рот, И он не умрет. Каждый день буду варить кашу – Пшеничную, рассыпчатую – а как же, И когда он поднимет руку, то этот жест Будет лучшим из Твоих блаженств. День за днем буду варить кашу – И о смерти, глядящей в лицо, Юра не скажет. Буду варить кашу вечером и поутру – И мама не бросит Юру, спасая его сестру. И тогда я увижу краешком глаза – Всеми шпильями сразу Колосющийся, будто рожь, Петербург небесный, в котором Ты всех спасешь.

18 Кто мусульманкой (4.11.2017) бабочку назвал,

Тот не жилец уже на этом свете.

С утра одета в чистое, трезва,

Его душа не думает о смерти,

И сон ее тревожен и глубок,

Погашен взгляд, распахнуты ладони,

Она отыщет тихий уголок –

И думает, что скрылась от погони,

Что нипочем ей город-великан

Одышливый – шутнице,

mouth, And he won't die. Every day I'll make porridge, millet porridge, crumbly porridge, and when he raises his hand, that gesture will be the best of Your bliss. I'll cook porridge day after day, and Yura won't speak of death staring me in the face. I'll boil porridge in the evening and in the morning - And my mother won't leave Yura to save his sister. And then I'll see by the corner of my eye - With all the spires at once, Spreading like rye, St. Petersburg in heaven, where You'll save everyone.

Whoever called a butterfly a Muslim,

He's no longer alive in this world.

She's clean and sober in the morning,

Its soul has no thought of death,

And her sleep is troubled and deep,

Her gaze is quenched, her palms are open,

She'll find a quiet corner -

She thinks she's escaped the chase,

She thinks she can't stand the giant city

The breathless city, the joker, the mischief-maker,

озорнице,
 Что не за ней по рыжим облакам
 Бегут подслеповатые зарницы,
 Что черный ворон вьется не над
 ней
 И тормозит не у ее подъезда.
 Она уже почти в краю теней,
 Но мешкает у входа – как
 невеста.
 Ее не занимает кутерьма
 Допросов, протоколов,
 пересылок,
 Она не понимает, где тюрьма
 Кончается – и возникает, зыбок,
 Пейзаж, где даже отнятый паек
 Не важен, и какую яму рыли,
 И кто упал, и горизонт поет
 И дышит, будто бабочкины
 крылья.

19 Беги-беги (13.11.2017)
 походкой резвою –
 Вверх – от разлуки до разлуки –
 По лезвию любви, по лезвию,

That she's not followed by the red clouds
 And the blind and dazzling lightning
 flashes,
 That the black raven does not hover over
 her.
 And brakes not at her doorway.
 She's almost at the edge of the shadows,
 But hesitates at the door like a bride.
 She doesn't care for the hustle and bustle
 The interrogations, the protocols, the
 transfers,
 She doesn't know where the prison
 Ends, and emerges, and ripples,
 A landscape where even the rations taken
 away from her
 and what kind of pit was dug,
 And who fell in, and the horizon sings.
 And breathes like a butterfly's wings.

Run, run, run with a brisk walk
 Up from separation to separation-
 On love's blade, on love's blade,
 With your arms out over the city

Над городом раскинув руки.
 Над этой улицей сирой,
 Пустынной, заспанной, в халате,
 Беги, опасно балансируя,
 Как на невидимом канате,
 Над этой жизнью бесполезною,
 Скрепленной на живую нитку,
 По лезвию любви, по лезвию,
 Покуда нежности в избытке,
 И над согражданами, падкими
 До сладкого и дармового,
 И над дождем, босыми пятками
 Вдруг прыснувшим от постового,
 Беги над пьяными и трезвыми,
 По мокрым рельсам и по шпалам,
 По лезвию любви, по лезвию:
 Оступишься – и все пропало.

20 На глиняной (2.05.2018)
 дороге вафельной,
 Где в ямах ржавая вода, У кочек в
 земляничных капельках
 Стоять останусь навсегда –

Above this street, this street, this street,
 this street, this street,
 Deserted, sleepy, in a robe,
 Run with a dangerous balance,
 Like on an invisible rope,
 Above this useless life,
 Stitched together on a living thread,
 On the blade of love, on the blade of love,
 As long as tenderness is in abundance,
 And over fellow citizens who are addicted
 To the sweet and the free,
 And over the rain, barefooted.
 that suddenly leaps from the postman,
 Run over the drunk and the sober,
 Over wet rails and sleepers,
 On the blade of love, on the blade:
 If you stumble, all is lost.

On a clay waffle road,
 Where rusty water is in the pits, By bumps
 with strawberry drops.
 I'll stand forever
 As long as the music doesn't stop:

Лишь бы не обрывалась музыка: Dogs, saws, voices,
 Собаки, пилы, голоса, If only the bus with the yellow body
 Лишь бы автобус с желтым Half an hour late
 кузовом Burned with a red tablecloth
 Опаздывал на полчаса, Through the Christmas trees the festive
 Горел, накрытый красной sunset,
 скатертью, And Lenka to his mother's reproaches,
 Сквозь елки праздничный закат, The idler, mumbled inappropriately, Only
 И Ленка на упреки матери, to be shushed by his grandmother's cat,
 Бездельник, мямлил невпопад, The neighbor's drunkenness,
 Лишь бы на кошку бабка шикала, And the neighbor's gigolo would fly on a
 Сосед буянил, загуляв, rusty giraffe.
 И, прах взметая, местный жиголо Flying in a rusty Zhiguli,
 Летел на ржавых жигулях, And the day, almost devoid of bitterness,
 И день, почти лишенный горечи, shimmered in the empty fields, like a
 Мерцал среди пустых полей, Как glass of vodka with a crust of bread.
 стопка водки с хлебной корочкой Under your picture.
 Под фотографией твоей.

21 Как же вышло (14.01.2019) так How did it get so ridiculous
 нелепо – Life turned around
 Повернулась жизнь кругом – To a kerosene, to a ration of bread,
 К керосинке, к пайке хлеба, To a faintly visible hole in the sky
 К еле видной лунке неба With a wet, starry float.
 С мокрым звездным поплавком.

Крутанулась и вернулась –

It turned around and came back

В паспорте лиловый штамп, А
свобода ваша – дурость:

Your passport's a purple stamp, And your
freedom's a fool's errand:

Вновь – петля пеньковых улиц,
Вновь – голодный Мандельштам.

Once more the loop of hemp streets, once
more the hungry Mandelstam.

И бояре кличут к бою,

And the boyars are calling for battle,

Как наелись белены, Слышишь
флейты и гобои? Только мы,
дружок, с тобою

Hear the flutes and oboes? Only you and
I, my friend.

All drunk and in love.

Все пьяны и влюблены.

What's our anger, what's our rage?

Что нам злоба, что нам ярость,

No one's delusions, no one's ranks,

Чьи-то бредни и чины,

What do we care for youth, what do we
care for old age?

Что нам юность, что нам
старость, -

We have only tenderness left

Только нежность нам осталась

In the midst of the future plague.

Среди будущей чумы.

The light of evening is sparse and sparse
over the snowy stubble.

Свет вечерний скуп и редок Над
заснеженной стерней.

Only the fir-trees

Только елки напоследок

Black banners of branches

Черные знамена веток

Bend their black banners over the
country.

Наклоняют над страной.

22 Вот он, модерн (12.02.2019),
глаза зеленые, Лица
мучительный овал.

Here it is, modern, eyes green, face
anguished oval.

Creeper, sedge. Lips sleepy

Вьюнок, осока. Губы сонные –

Болотный бог поцеловал.
 Цветут зарницы революции,
 Тихи, несбыточны, легки, В
 пролетке – дальше, чем до
 Слуцкого,
 На Охту или на Пески.
 Потеют штукатур и кровельщик,
 Над туфелькой струится шелк –
 Ан вытекла из шеи кровушка,
 Едва моргнул – и век прошел,
 И к Вологде прижалась Вытегра,
 Осиротевшая Нева
 Негромко охнула и вытекла
 Из акварели Бенуа.
 На стенах – в копоти, в испарине
 –
 То цаплю встретишь, то жука,
 Как будто взяли дочку барина
 И выдали за мужика.
 Смотри, как тошно ей, как плохо
 ей –
 Разбит фонарь, заплыван пол, И
 легкий венский стул – эпохою
 Застыл – как мертвый богомол.

The swamp god kissed them.
 The light of revolution is blooming,
 Quiet, unfulfilled, light, In a carriage,
 farther than to Slutsky,
 To Okhta or to Sands.
 The plasterer and the roofer sweat, The
 silk flows over the slipper.
 And the blood drained out of my neck, I
 barely blinked, and a century passed,
 And Vytegra clung to Vologda,
 The orphaned Neva
 and the orphaned Neva.
 From Benoit's watercolor.
 On the walls - in soot, in vapor -
 One meets a heron or a beetle,
 It's as if they'd taken a baron's daughter
 and married her off to a man.
 Look how sick she is, how sick she is.
 The lantern's broken, the floor's spattered,
 And the easy Viennese chair is an epoch
 old.
 "Frozen like a dead praying mantis.

23 Пусть не (15-17.09.2019) течет
вдоль позвонков липкая влага –

Нет Соловков, нету “Крестов”,
нету ГУЛАГа,

Нет на полу

сбитой под дых “подлой
вражины”,

Нет оправдомов, нет понятых
(все хороши мы),

В камере нет капель воды, не
затихая

Льющихся, нет тухлой еды, нет
вертухая,

Нету ни “Курска” и – потерпи –
нету Беслана,

Нет на Донбасс черной тропы – к
смерти бесславной,

Нет у метро – дома сиди! –
шлемов ОМОНа,

Нет бубнежа сонной судьбы, нет
угомона

Этой земле, этой судьбе, нету
майора –

Ни КГБ, ни ФСБ, нет приговора

Между костров мокрой листвы,
желтых и рыжих,

Нет ничего, кроме любви, –

Let no sticky moisture flow along your
vertebrae -

No Solovki, no Crosses, no Gulag,

There's no “sneaky enemy

No “sneaky enemy” on the floor,

There's no landlords, there's no witnesses
(we're all good),

There's no water droplets in the cell.

There's no rotten food, there's no jailer,

No “Kursk” and - bear with me - no
Beslan,

There's no black path to Donbass, to the
ignominious death,

There's no OMON helmets on the
subway. - No riot police helmets,

There's no sleepy judge's droning, no
restfulness

This land, this fate, no major -

No KGB, no FSB, no sentence.

Between the fires of wet leaves, yellow
and red,

There's nothing but love, do you hear? Do
you hear?

слышишь? Ты слышишь?

24 Лене Чижовой (6.12.2019)

Мы были счастливы вполне,
 Когда нам кляп из пасти вынули –
 Не зарыдали по стране,
 Не оглянулись – руки вымыли.
 Мы проиграли, ты и я,
 Бездарно прогуляли оттепель.
 Наш крест
 взвалили сыновья –
 Нам уготованный – и вот теперь
 Не нам, а им – тюрьма и кнут.
 Мы рядом – плачущею свитою
 Пойдём, не нас, а их распнут.
 Опять. И это мы их выдали.

Lena Chizhova

We were happy enough,
 When they took the gag out of our mouths
 We didn't weep for the country,
 We didn't look back, we washed our
 hands.
 We lost, you and I,
 We wasted the thaw.
 Our cross
 Our sons have borne
 The cross our sons prepared for us, and
 now
 Not for us, but for them, prison and the
 whip.
 We are beside them with a weeping
 retinue.
 Let us go, not us but them to be crucified.
 Again. And it was we who gave them
 away.

25 Надо же, старая перечница,
 смотри-ка, (2019)

Ты еще хочешь жить, любить,
 Продаешь квартиру, полную
 окостенелых криков Страсти, горя,

Look at that, old bag, would you believe it
 You still want to live, to love
 You're selling the apartment full of frozen
 cries
 Of passion, sorrow, hate—all of them.
 Here it is, life, breaking off in pieces

ненависти — любых.

Вот она, жизнь, откалывается кусками
Ладожского льда, уплывая с шорохом
по Неве, Крутясь под мостами, обещая
вернуться — песенка городская,
Застрявшая в ухе, горло царапающая.
Не верь!

Ах, ты не хочешь сидеть, перебирая
прошлое, В мамином кресле, сливаясь
с обоями, но пока Ты спишь, будущее
— железной горошиной Под дырявой
перинкой толкает тебя в бока.

Неужели ты думаешь заклясть это
каменное болото, Обойти со спины
извивающуюся страну, Все ее
скользкие шеи, ядовитые зубы,
вышедший из моды Пыточный
реквизит? Ну-ну.

Ты думаешь, новые стены не будут к
тебе суровы, Из соседних окон на тебя
не нахлынет мгла? Здесь на каждой
стене — непросохшие пятна крови,
Запомни, куда бы ты ни пришла.

Этот город пропитан смертью — не до
идиллий, А сестренка любовь —
попрошайка, дворничиха, швея:
Разрывая объятия, из каждой комнаты
кого-нибудь уводили. Кто знает, чья
теперь очередь. Может быть, и твоя.

26 Подожди (22.01.2020), как же
мне пережить это,

Не ослепнуть, не съехать с ума —

Ветки чёрные, к небу пришитые,

Of Ladoga ice, sailing down the Neva with
a rustle
Spinning beneath the bridges, promising
to return—the city's tune
Stuck in the ear, scratching the throat.
Don't believe it!

So, you don't want to sit, sifting the past
In your mother's chair, blending with the
wallpaper, but while
You sleep—the future, with its iron pea,
Jabs you in the side beneath the ragged
covers.

Do you really think you can bewitch this
stone swamp
Get around back of this writhing country,
With all her slippery necks, venomous
teeth, unfashionable
Props for torture? We'll see.

You think new walls won't treat you
harshly
Darkness won't flood you from
neighboring windows?
Every wall here is stained with undried
blood,
Remember that, wherever you go.

This city is suffused with death—no time
for idylls
And little sister love is a beggar, a janitor,
a seamstress:
Breaking embraces, they took someone
out of every room here.
Who knows whose turn it is. Maybe yours
now.

Wait, how am I supposed to get through
this?

Without going blind, without going crazy

Black branches sewn to the sky

И залитые солнцем дома.
Вон торговка носки разложила,
Вон поставлены розы в ведро,
В тучах золотоносная жила
Открывается у метро,
Зажигается капля на ветке,
И хурма покатила с лотка...
Красота тяжела человеку –
Оттого-то и жизнь коротка.

And sun-drenched houses
There's a sock saleswoman laying out her
socks,
There's the roses in the bucket,
There's a gold mine in the clouds
Opens by the subway,
There's a drop on a branch,
And persimmons rolled off the tray...
Beauty is hard on man -
That's why life is short.

Женщина надевает высокие
каблуки, Бархатное платье с
блестящей застёжкой

A woman puts on high heels, a velvet
dress with a shiny clasp

И идет на свиданье, и ноги её легки,
А голова кружится немножко

She goes on a date: her legs are light,
And her head is a little dizzy

Её провожают взгляды всех
ворожей,
Окна ей подмигивают, как сводни,
По пятам за нею – ненависть всех
мужей,
Но она не знает о ней сегодня.

The eyes of all the witches are on her,
The windows wink at her like pimps,
She's followed by the hatred of all
husbands,
But she doesn't know it today.

Ядовитой радугой перед ней
зажжён
Мост,
торгового центра домна –
Не электричеством, а яростью жён,
Сидящих дома.

A poisonous rainbow is lit before her
The bridge,
The mall's blast furnace
Not by electricity, but by the rage of
wives,
Sitting at home.

Тротуар за ней свивается в жгут,
Пламя витрин так по глазам и
лупит.
Она идёт – даже если ее не ждут,
Она идёт – даже если ее не любят.

The sidewalk behind her is a tangle,
Shop window flames sting her eyes.
She's coming, even if she's not
expected,
She walks, even if she's not loved.

28 Я больше (14.03.2020) не хочу
про Чехова –

I don't want to talk about Chekhov
anymore.

Спроси меня, как я живу.

Ask me how I live.

А спросишь – и ответить нечего:

And if you do, there's nothing to
answer:

Стою, глазею на Неву.

I'm standing, gazing at the Neva.
I don't want to talk about Pushkin
anymore -

Я больше не хочу про Пушкина –
 Не потому, что Пушкин плох,
 А потому что жизнь пропущена –
 Стучал моторчик и заглох.
 Какой-то сбой пошел за тучами,
 Мельканье точек и полос,
 И высыпались строчки Тютчева
 Пучками шпилек из волос,
 И мир с его литературою
 Распался. Только и хочу,
 Что привалиться, дура дурую,
 Беззвучно – к тёплому плечу.

29 Свет вырубился. (12.04.2020)
 Мы зажгли свечу,
 Печь растопили, подогрели кашу.
 Вокруг внезапных огненных
 причуд
 Раскинулись по стенам тени
 наши,
 А наши мысли вышли из углов.
 Дождь кончился, в окно стучался
 ветер.
 В печи дышала гроздь багровых

Not because Pushkin is bad,
 But because I've missed out on life.
 The motor was running, and then it
 stopped.
 There's a glitch behind the clouds
 A flash of dots and stripes,
 And Tyutchev's lines spilled out
 in bunches of hairpins,
 And the world with its literature
 And the world with its literature fell
 apart. All I want to do
 I just want to cuddle, foolish fool,
 and lean silently on his warm
 shoulder.

The lights went out. We lit a candle,
 We melted the stove, heated the porridge.
 Around the sudden fiery whimsy.
 Our shadows spread across the walls,
 And our thoughts came out of the corners.
 The rain was over, the wind was knocking
 at the window.
 A cluster of purple wood breathed in the
 stove,
 A bucket of water sizzled like Darth Vader.

дров,
 Ведро воды сипело, как Дарт
 Вейдер.
 И потянулись к нашему столу
 Гуляки, зависающие в клубах,
 Мазурики, прилипшие к стеклу,
 Раскольники, сгорающие в
 срубках,
 Монахи, старцы, странники,
 хлысты,
 Философы, филологи и волки,
 Глядевшие на нас из темноты,
 И парень с Че Геварой на
 футболке,
 А прочий мир исчез в ночной
 золе.
 Все на свечу глядели, не мигая,
 Пока она плясала на столе,
 Испуганная, стройная, нагая,
 Как будто слово уголками губ,
 Творя миры без видимых усилий.
 И свет зажётся – беззастенчив,
 груб.
 И мы его, конечно, погасили.

And then they came to our table
 The gamblers hanging out in the clubs,
 Mazuriks clinging to the glass
 The dissenters burning in log cabins
 Monks, elders, wanderers, whips,
 Philosophers, philologists and wolves,
 Looking at us from the darkness,
 And a guy with Che Guevara on his
 T-shirt,
 And the rest of the world disappeared in
 the night ash.
 Everybody looked at the candle without
 blinking
 As it danced on the table
 Frightened, slender, naked
 Like a word on the corner of her lips,
 Creating worlds without effort.
 And the light came on, shameless, brutal.
 And we, of course, extinguished it.

30 Я изменяю (15.10.2020) тебе с
сентябрём,

С каждым листом – золоченым,
багровым,

С горестным запахом, что
растворён

В воздухе, с синим просторным
покровом,

Лёгшим на головы дальних осин,

Тёмное поле, сияющий тополь,

С шорохом, с дождиком быстрым
косым,

Что прохуdivшийся вечер
заштопал,

Я изменяю бездумно, вздохлёб –

С облаком, с пёстрой лесною
подстилкой:

Видно, врасплох меня осень
застигла,

Лёгкими пальцами трогая лоб.

Вот я кладу, как на шею твою,

Руку на жёлтую ветку резную,

Вот я лицо погружаю в струю

Стынувших листьев – и слышу:
“ревную”.

I'm cheating on you with September,

With every leaf, gilded and scarlet,

With the sorrowful odor that's dissolved

In the air, with the blue of the vast cover,

that lies on the heads of the distant
aspens,

The dark field, the shining poplar,

The rustling, the quick slanting rain,

That the tattered evening has mended,

I'm cheating thoughtlessly, I'm cheating
lustily.

With the cloud, with the colorful forest
floor:

It seems that autumn has caught me
unawares,

Touching my forehead with light fingers.

I lay my hand on the yellow branch,

I place my hand on the yellow branch,

I put my face in the stream

I hear “jealous.”

31 Господи, почему всё так плохо,
Почему, (2020)

куда ни сунешься, всё не так, И только
произнесёшь: “эпоха” – Из-за угла
выползает танк.

Или автозак. И это неверно в корне.
Иногда мне кажется, нету ни стран, ни
рас, А есть только мы и люди в
военной форме – И они догоняют нас.

Они за нами гоняются, как за молью,
Догнав, пытаются, а мы кричим. Просто
им нравится, когда нам больно – Чем
нам больнее, тем выше им светит чин.

Вот он – схватил кого-то, бежит
обратно, Бьет паренька дубинкой,
впадая в раж. Я говорю себе медленно:
это брат мой. Медленно. Брат мой.
Сквозь зубы. Внятно. Глядя на сытую
харю и камуфляж.

32 Ни запасов, ни надежной норы,
(2020)
Ни спасительных заморских
гражданств.
Отстраниться б от нечистой игры,
Отвернуться бы – да кто ж тебе даст.

Опереться бы на чье-то плечо –
Да такого не водилось вовек.
Остановишься, где речка течет,
Поглядишь, как в воду падает снег,

И пойдешь себе, под нос бормоча –
Сыновей бы убережь, сыновей.
Под ногами – только тень от меча,
Только сумерки вокруг лиловей.

all so awful,
Why is something amiss, wherever you
try,
And as soon as you sound out “epoch”—
From behind the corner crawls a tank.

Or a police van. And that is wrong at the
root.
Sometimes I think there aren’t countries
or races,
But only us and the people in military
uniform—
And they’re catching up to us.

They chase after us like moths,
And torture us when caught, while we cry
out.
It’s just that they like when we’re in pain—
The more we suffer, the higher the
promotion.

Here’s one—grabbed someone, now
running back,
Smashing with his baton, enraged.
I tell myself slowly: this is my brother.
Slowly. Brother. Through my teeth.
Clearly.
Looking at the sated mug and the
camouflage.

No back-up, no safe hole to hide
No foreign citizenship to save you.
If one could shed this filthy game,
Run away – but no-one lets you.

If one could lean on a warm shoulder
But this never happens, no.
So you stay where the river runs
And you watch the falling snow.

Just the sword’s shadow under your foot
Twilight closing in on one.
So you go on walking, muttering –
If you could save your sons, your sons.

33 Мамы с бабушкой
(14-18.01.2021) нет,

А игрушки на ёлке остались:
Красный волк, Айболит,
Белоснежка мерцают, не старясь.

Маленький акробат
Повисает на обруче смело,
И гирлянда горит:
Ёлка – главное дерево мира.

Между веток с утра
Скачет сердце, синицею свищет,
Ну а если пора,
Если ворон прокаркает вещей,
Мне на помощь придут,
Заслоняя от смерти упрямо,
Золочёный верблюд
И картонная курочка Ряба.

34 Как придёт (18.03.2021)
старухам пенсия –

Всей деревнею гульба,
Да не с танцами и песнями –

Mom and Grandma are gone,
But the toys on the tree are still there:
The red wolf, Aibolit,
Snow White shimmering without getting
old.

A little acrobat
Hangs on the hoop bravely,
And the garland lights up:
The Christmas tree is the main tree of the
world.

Between the branches in the morning
The heart of a tit whistles in the morning,
And if it's time
If a raven caws
They'll come to my aid,
Shielding me from death stubbornly,
A gilded camel
And a cardboard hen

When the old women's retirement comes
The whole village will be partying,
Not with dancing and singing
Just a glowing hut,

Просто светится изба,
 На столе бутылка, луковка,
 Таракан – и весь уют.
 Не подметено – так внуков-то
 Все равно не привезут.
 Целых 28 рубликов
 Отвалили – повезло:
 А на что в газете рубрика
 Про счастливое село?
 И в сельпо опять потрафили –
 Привезли с утра муки.
 А по стенкам фотографии –
 В гимнастёрках мужики.
 Выросли по лавкам тени их –
 Время выронив из рук,
 Колыхаясь, как растения,
 Долго смотрят на старух.
 Жизнь разбилась пополам почти
 –
 На когда-то и потом.
 Лук, бутылка. Череп лампочки
 Под дощатым потолком.

There's a bottle and an onion on the
 table,
 A cockroach and all the coziness.
 If it's not swept, they won't bring
 grandchildren
 They won't bring grandchildren anyway.
 28 rubles
 They gave me 28 rubles. I'm lucky:
 What's the column in the newspaper for?
 About the happy village?
 And the village store was happy again.
 They brought flour in the morning.
 And on the walls are pictures
 Men in gymnasium coats.
 Their shadows grew up on the benches -
 Time has dropped out of their hands,
 Swaying like plants,
 They stare at the old women for a long
 time.
 Life is almost cut in half
 A once and a later.
 An onion, a bottle. The skull of a light bulb
 Beneath the boardwalk ceiling.

35 Высокий смысл (12.07.2021)
воды – в самой воде,

До камушков просвеченной,
слоёной,

Как призрак, проникающей везде,
Дробящейся. Особенно солёной.

Нервозной. И растрёпанной с
краев,

Шатающейся, как ступени в доме.

Зачем мы только вышли из неё

На сушу – из раскрывшейся
ладони,

Оторвались, упали на песок

И поползли, поверхности не веря,

Куда глаза глядят, наискосок,

По целине, слепые от потери.

Вот цепью протянулись корабли,

Вот чайка опустилась и взлетела.

Лишь выйдя из воды, как из
любви,

Узнаешь тяжесть собственного
тела.

36 Гробов не будет. наших
детей сожгут (2022)

Гробов не будет. наших детей сожгут
В походной печке, а дым развеют

The high meaning of water is in the water
itself,

“It’s shining through to the pebbles,
layered.

Like a ghost, penetrating everywhere,
Fracturing. Especially salty.

Nervous. And frayed at the edges,
Wobbling like the steps of a house.

Why did we come out of it

To land from the open palm of my hand,

And we broke away and fell on the sand

And crawled, disbelieving the surface,

Wherever the eye could see, askew,
along the virgin land, blind with loss.

Here the ships stretched out in a chain,

A seagull came down and flew up.

When you come out of the water, as out
of love,

You know the weight of your own body.

**There will be no coffins. Our
children will burn to ashes**

There will be no coffins. Our children will
burn to ashes

Над украинским полем, и чёрный жгут
Сольётся с дымом пожара – вон там,
левее.

Вместо тела вежливый капитан,
Позвонив в квартиру, доставит пепел
В аккуратном пакете и молча положит
там,
Под фотографией, где залихватский
дембель

Перерос в контракт. Расстегнув
портфель,
Вынет бумагу и, дёрнув шеей,
Будто что-то мешает, усядется, как на
мель,
На табурет: подпишите неразглашение.

Она подпишет. И он поспешит назад
Мимо телека с Басковым недопетым
И двухъярусной койкой, где младший
брат,
Девятиклассник, с него не спускает
взгляд,
Свесившись – будто ждёт своего
пакета.

37 Мои сыновья не пойдут убивать (2022)

Мои сыновья не пойдут убивать –
Я спрячу их в чашу, в подвал, под
кровать,
Для чёрного дела вам их не достать –
Ни старший, ни младший – не кат и не
тать,
Оставьте мечты – украинская мать
Не будет рыдать по вине их.

In a mobile oven, and the smoke will swirl
and waft
Over the fields of Ukraine where the black
plume meshes
With the smoke of wildfire – up there, on
the left.

Instead of the body, the doorbell will ring,
a polite
Army captain will bring the ashes in a
neat package
And place it silently on the bookshelf, right
By the photo of a brave soldier with
demob patches,

Turned a contractnik. The captain will
open his briefcase,
With a jerk of his head, as if something
bothered
Him, he'll fish out a paper, establish a
base
On the stool, hold it out: sign here for
non-disclosure.

She'll sign. He'll pick up his briefcase and
hustle on
Past the TV with a crooning pop singer
clown
And a bunk bed where on top the younger
son,
A ninth-grade student leans over and
stares down
At him as intensely as if waiting for a box
of his own.

My sons will not go out to kill

My sons will not go out to kill--
I'll hide them in the woods, in the cellar,
under the bed,
You can't get them for a black deed
Neither the eldest nor the youngest is a
kat or a thief,
Leave your dreams behind won't weep for
their fault.
Tell your sons to fight,

Велите сражаться своим сыновьям,
Раздайте разгрузки их сытым друзьям,
В полях украинских – немеряно ям,
Где глубже – подскажет вам вещий
Боян,
Поскольку слепому виднее.

Мои сыновья не пойдут на войну –
Я каждого чёрным дроздом оберну,
И вам не достать их, как с неба луну,
И с вами они не разделят вину,
Останется чистым их сердце:
Топтать под проклятья чужую страну
На светлом Днепре, на широком Дону
Не будут их пыльные берцы.

38 Огребём по полной. Неправедная война (2022)

Огребём по полной. Неправедная
война
Обесценила дедовы ордена.
Я держу их в горсти
И говорю – прости
Деду Ивану, врачу
В блокадном военном госпитале. Хочу
Услышать – что он сказал бы
На ракетные залпы
Наши – по Киеву. Опускаю голову и
молчу.
Слышу, дедушка, голос твой –
Мы зачем умирали-то под Москвой –
Чтобы русский потом – вдовой
Украинку оставил?
Каин, Каин, где брат твой Авель?

39 В ресторане музыка играет (2022)

В ресторане музыка играет,
Женщина, свеча, бокал вина.
Украина – это где-то с краю,
Никому отсюда не видна.

Рвётся пламя, рушатся кварталы,

Hand out unloads to their well-fed friends,
The Ukrainian fields are full of holes,
Where it's deeper, the prophetic Boyan
will tell you,
Because the blind can see better.
My sons won't go to war.
I'll wrap a blackbird around each of them,
And you can't reach them like the moon
from the sky,
And they will not share the guilt with you,
They'll keep their hearts pure
To trample on the curses of a foreign
country
On the bright Dnieper, on the wide Don.
Their dusty boots won't be theirs.

We'll pay through the nose. This war, foul and wrong

We'll pay through the nose. This war, foul
and wrong,
Renders worthless the medals our
grandfathers brought
Home. Forgive me, I say, as I stand
Holding them in my hand,
Grandfather Ivan, a surgeon in Leningrad
under blockade. I'd like
To know what he'd say of a missile strike
We launched against Kyiv. In that –
I quietly bow down my head.
Grandpa, my dear, I can hear your words
Was it worth fighting and dying for –
So that a Russian would now make in turn
Cry a Ukrainian girl
Or mother?
Cain, oh Cain, where is thy brother?

There is music playing in the restaurant

There is music playing in the restaurant,
A woman, a candle, a glass of wine, good
cheer.
Ukraine—the very name means 'at the
margins',
Invisible to anyone in here.

С площади доносится: “Ганьба!”
Женщина движением усталым
Поправляет волосы у лба.

Матовая белая посуда,
Капучино с пенкой и десерт.
Проплывает далеко отсюда
В дымке – чья-то маленькая смерть,

Точкою, горошиною, только
Никому пока что невдомёк –
Рухнет и сюда, за этот столик
Весь в крови, бесформенный комок.

40 Россию отменят. Вместе с Пушкиным и Толстым (2022)

Россию отменят. Вместе с Пушкиным и Толстым.

Когда рассеется дым
Над Украиной,
Мы окажемся на руинах
Царства. Будем дышать с трудом,
И разбитый роддом
В Мариуполе – будут платочком Фриды
Подносить нам каждое утро в
бравурном ритме –
Под наше мычание или стон.
А Россию отменят. С Пастернаком и
Чеховым,
С Мойдодыром, Щелкунчиком – в
самом деле, зачем о них
Вспоминать на обломках больниц и
школ.
На границе вырастет частокол
С черепами горящими,
А железные ящеры,

Flames erupting, whole quarters tumbling,
A voice—Ukrainian—from the square:
‘Disgrace!’

The woman sighs, and with a weary
movement
Pats a curl too bold to stay in place.

Saucers, cups and plates of frosted white;
Cappuccino; something to sweeten the
breath.

And far away from here, passing by
In a haze of smoke—somebody’s little
death,

A tiny dot, a pea, except ... except
—Something no one has yet
understood—

It will come here too, and crumple at this
table,

A formless, shapeless lump, drenched in
blood.

Russia will be cancelled. Including Pushkin and Tolstoy

Russia will be cancelled. Including
Pushkin and Tolstoy.

When all the smoke has cleared away
Above Ukraine,
We’ll discover ourselves among the ruins
Of Empire. We’ll find it hard to breathe,
And the rubble of Mariupol’s maternity
wards

Will be our Frieda’s handkerchief,
Brought to us with stirring chords each
morning

To the backdrop of our mooing or our
moaning.

Oh yes; Russia will be cancelled.
Including Pasternak and Chekhov,
Wash ‘Em Clean, The Nutcracker—really,
why give them room

In the wreck of hospitals and schools.

A palisade with burning skulls
Will bloom along the borderline

Поурчав напоследок, сгниют
 У нас в изголовьи.
 Мы же будем тут
 Толковать привычно про мир и труд
 И писать вам письма – из ада с
 любовью.
 Но они не дойдут.

41 По Украине ходит Вий (2022)

По Украине ходит Вий,
 Шагнёт – и нет моста,
 И Волноваха, вся в крови,
 Свисает изо рта,

И Харьков взорванный хрустит
 В его гнилых зубах,
 И синий Днепр в его горсти
 Седой бедой пропах.

Поверх весны, поверх любви
 Разбрасывая смерть,
 По Украине ходит Вий
 С огромной буквой Z.

Обломок свастики, зигзаг
 Поверх оконных дыр
 Косой чертой – наискосок
 Зачёркивает мир.

На танке, на стене, в пыли,
 Снаружи и внутри
 Души – скорей с лица земли
 Сотри его, сотри!

42 И приходит вошь. (2022)

И приходит вошь.
 Ты морщишься, но беды не ждёшь.
 Она раздувается долго, покуда вождь
 Не проступит из-под белесых ресниц.
 Чесаться поздно – приказано падать
 ниц
 И отдавать ей всё, чем ты раньше жил
 –
 Парк, метро, крыши, карандаши
 В школьном пенале, сына, дочь,

And the Irondrakes will growl
 One final time, and rot and rust
 Atop the headboards of our beds.
 We'll still be here, though; on we'll roll,
 Elaborating, as we do,
 On peace and honest work,
 And writing letters: from Hell with love.
 But they will not get through.

Viy walks around the Ukraine

Viy walks around the Ukraine,
 One step and there's no bridge,
 And Volnovakha, flesh and veins,
 Is hanging from his lip,

And the exploded Kharkiv's crunching
 In his rotten teeth,
 And the blue Dnieper smells with grayish
 Anguish in his fist.

And over spring and over care
 Viy's scattering the death,
 It walks around the Ukraine
 With a huge letter Z.

A piece of swastika, zigzag
 that's over window holes
 Is striking out the world around
 With barbed wire curves

So on the tank, the wall, the dust,
 Both outside and inside
 Of soul, erase it quickly, now
 From face of earth worldwide.

Enter a louse.

Enter a louse.
 You wince, but what could happen, at any
 rate?
 It puffs up for a while, then through its
 white eyelashes
 Emerges a Great Leader.
 And now it's too late
 To scratch your head. You will be forced
 to prostrate,
 To give up the life you were leading --

Под шипение: отдавай и убирайся
 прочь.
 Ты лежишь и думаешь: как же так,
 Почему я, разиня, трепло, мудака,
 Не прибил ее, покуда была мала?
 Всё хотел тепла,
 Всё сидел на даче, в офисе, в гараже,
 В баре с тихой музыкой, не замечая –
 она уже
 Заслонила полнеба, выпила будущую
 весну.
 Раздуваясь, вошь затевает войну.
 Ты же знать её не хотел –
 А она сквозь горы кровавых тел
 Глядит на тебя. Пока ты плевался –
 тьфу –
 Она покусала всех, сгорает страна в
 тифу.
 И вот теперь
 вошь лишает тебя всего –
 Дома, сна, весеннего города,
 выворачивает естество
 Наизнанку, заставляет бежать, куда
 Глаза глядят, ослепнув от ярости и
 стыда,
 И в висках грохочет, то мучительней, то
 слабей:
 Вошь не должна жить – найди её и
 убей!

43 Разговоры (2022)

Он говорит – ты знаешь, у нас тут, по
 ходу, ад.
 Она говорит – да что ты? Он говорит –
 подряд
 Военных и мирных валим. Она говорит
 – да ну!
 Он говорит – по ходу зашли тут в хату
 одну,
 Нашёл пять тысяч зелёных – а хата

This park, the rooftops, cafes, your
 pencils and brushes,
 Even your kids.
 Hand it over and get out of here, it hisses
 and spits.
 You lie prone, wondering: why
 Was I such a fool, a dimwit, a twat
 And didn't swat it when it was little?
 You spent time in a cozy bar,
 In your office, your country house,
 You were keeping warm,
 And you didn't notice how it got this far
 How the louse
 Blotted out half of the sky,
 Sucked the coming spring dry.
 As the louse gets bigger, it starts a war.
 You never bowed to it, you had no fear --
 Now it watches you over corpses and
 gore.
 While you cringed, it was biting people;
 therefore
 The whole country's sick with typhoid
 fever.
 And thus,
 the louse deprives you of everything
 --
 Your home, your dreams, your city in
 spring,
 It turns it all inside out.
 You run for the hills, blind with rage and
 guilt
 As it clangs and raps in your head,
 painfully loud:
 That louse, don't let it live -- seek it out
 and kill it.

Conversations

He's like, listen, it's hell here, fucking hell.
 She's like, are you kidding? He's like, we
 shoot and shell
 Everyone, mil or civ, regardless. She's
 like, you don't say!
 He's like, look, we dropped in this empty
 house today,
 And I grabbed five grand greenbacks, and
 the house burned down.

уже горит.

Она говорит – ни фи́га се, теперь
закроем кредит.

Он говорит – расстреляли троих,
завели в кусты.

Она говорит – не голодный? Хватает
хоть вам еды?

Он – да нет, не особо. Она – совсем
отощал?

Насилуй там украинок, мне только не
сообщай.

Первый – приём, ну, как там? Второй –
у меня тишина,

Дети шли по мосту. – Второй – какого
рожна?!

– Первый – наверно, в школу, несли в
рюкзачках тетрадки.

– Второй – пожалел пока?

Отработаешь на обратке.

Он говорит – алё, мы их ебашим, мам.

Она говорит – скорей всё разнесите в
хлам.

Он говорит – прикинь, ебашим
гражданских, чо.

Она говорит – ну, да, там у вас горячо.

Он говорит – лупили четверо суток по
нам,

Прикинь, мы головы не поднимали,
мам.

Она говорит – убитых много ли? – До
фи́га,

От командира, мам, осталась одна
нога.

Она говорит – когда вернёшься,
назвали срок?

Он говорит – делили на пятерых паёк.

Взломали квартиру, мяса нажарили,
сели есть.

Она говорит – а сколько не ели? – Да
суток шесть.

Он говорит – в деревне все разбито,
разнесено.

Она говорит – Россию ненавидят они

She's like, really, omigod, we'll pay off the
loan.

He's like, we've shot three guys, led them
into the woods.

She's like, do you go hungry? Do you get
enough food?

He's like, 's okay. She's like, down to skin
and bones, are you?

You can rape Ukrainian girls, just don't tell
me when you do.

– One, this is Two, how's it going, over. –
Two, this is One,

All quiet, some kids passed the bridge. –
What the fuck did they want?!

– Guess going to school, notebooks and
stuff in their packs.

– Spared them for now? Cover the target
when they go back.

He's like, hi mom, listen, we shell them
like fuck.

She's like, right, turn everything there into
trash and muck.

He's like, you know, it's all civilian targets
and stuff.

She's like, yeah, you're down in a hot
spot, it's tough.

He's like, they been whacking us four
days in a row.

We were stuck with our mugs in the dirt,
you know.

She's like, many getting killed? – He's
like, yeah, a ton.

The commander's dead, a leg's left, the
rest gone.

She's like, did they tell you when you're
going back?

He's like, we were five guys with one
ration pack.

Broke into a home, roasted some meat
and ate.

She's like, how long haven't you eaten? –
Seven days or eight.

He's like, the village is totally trashed, it's

давно.

Он говорит – машину вчера
расстрелял, ну, да.

А Колька – уже 200-ый. Она говорит –
беда.

Он говорит – надоело, завтра пойду в
отказ.

Она говорит – посадят, зачем ты
позоришь нас?

Он говорит – Серёжка ранен, получит
денег.

Вчера нас стыдил командир, сегодня
стыдил священник:

Как детей воспитаешь, про родину и
про честь.

Я спросил командира – он не знает,
зачем мы здесь

44 Когда я поеду назад по (2022)

Военно-Грузинской дороге,

За мною потянутся улицы и
провода-недотроги,

Мне дворик на пятки наступит, махая
бельем на верёвке,

И лестницы вслед побегут, дребезжа,
спотыкаясь неловко.

Обнимут за плечи, повиснут на мне
виноградные плети,

Таща за собою чугуны и кирпич –
кружева Чугурети,

Брусчатка за мной прошуршит и
платаны – окладом иконным,

Ворота в кипящем плюще и плетёная
люлька балкона,

Насыплются в волосы искры хурмы,
мелколиственных буков,

В глазах замелькают кресты и
грузинские гнутые буквы.

За мной поплывёт Сололаки, догонит
меня Ортачала,

Шершавой щекою потрётся гора, чтобы
я не скучала,

И взмоют за мною, захлопав окошками,
домиков стаи –

nuts.

She's like, they've always hated Russia's
guts.

He's like, yeah, I emptied a magazine into
this car, I did.

And Nick is already 200. She's like: poor
kid.

He's like, got enough of it, tomorrow I'm
gonna refuse.

She's like, it's a disgrace, you'll just get
jail time, what's the use?

He's like, Serge is wounded, he'll get
some dough at least.

Yesterday the commander took us to task,
today the priest:

Bla-bla-bla Motherland, honor, heroes
have no fear...

I asked the commander – he doesn't
know what we're doing here.

When I drive back down the Georgian
Military Highway

Roads and touch-me-not wires will stretch
out behind me,

A backyard will tread on my heels, waving
a line of washing,

The stairs will run behind me, clumsily
tripping and clashing.

It will cling to my shoulders, embrace me,
the old grape vine –

The lacework of Chugureti, dangling its
bricks and iron.

A boardwalk will rustle behind me,
encased in a golden plane tree,

A gate foaming up with ivy, a woven
balcony cradle.

My hair with fragile beech leaves and
sparks of persimmon peppered,

My vision speckled with crosses and
crooked Georgian letters,

I'll watch Sololaki drift by me before

И лишь во дворе петроградском
погаснут, поникнут, растают,
Слезой скользнут по скуле, как любви
незаконной приметы –
Когда я поеду назад... когда я поеду.

45 Видя холод и смятение, (2022)
Видя лютую вражду,
Видя умных в помрачении
И правителей в бреде –

Незаслуженным сиянием
Укрепляя дух и плоть,
Посылает Пиросмани нам,
Будто сжалившись, Господь:

С праздничной землёй накрытою,
Кубком, полным до краёв,
И актрисой Маргаритою
В белом платье её.

Бедный мир, обглодан войнами,
Жёлтой косточкой лежит,
За столом сидят достойные,
Преломляют хлеб мужи,

Лечит пенье душу вялую,
Созревает кабачок,
И косоворотку алую
Надевает рыбачок,

И, чтоб мир спасти таблеткою –
Хватит, пожили во зле –
Доктор с зонтиком и веткою
Едет, едет на осле.

Ortchala gives chase,
A stubby cheek of a mountainside
rubbing against my face.

And, flapping windows, behind me, a flock
of houses will soar –
And only back home in my courtyard,
they'll fade and they'll be no more.
They'll run down my cheek, like illicit love,
invisible to the eye,
When I drive back down, when I drive
back, when I drive, when I...

Seeing coldness and confusion,
Seeing hatred and disdain,
Seeing wise men in delusion,
And the rulers gone insane –

Undeservedly, but kindly,
Taking pity on us all,
God has sent us Pirosmani
To restore flesh and soul.

Earthly feast for us to sit at,
Where the wine will freely flow,
And the actress Margarita
With her dress as white as snow.

Poor world, where conflict rages,
Like a gnawed-out bone lies dead.
At the table, worthy sages
Sit together, breaking bread.

Singing heals the weary spirit,
Squashes ripen in their bed,
And the fisherman will wear it,
His shirt of scarlet red.

And to purge the world with pills –
That's enough of being cruel –

46 Мама, мама, война, война!
(26.02.2022)

Эхо в сердце – вина, вина.
Загорелся Херсон к рассвету –
Мне за это прощенья нету:
Подожгла-то – моя страна.

Это с нашего большака
Серых танков течёт река –
Это я их не остановила,
И поднимут теперь на вилы
С нашей улицы паренька.

Мама, мама, из-за меня
Нашим хлопцам кричат – русня,
Убирайтесь, мы вас не звали!
И друзья ночуют в подвале
В милом Харькове – из-за меня.

И в Жулянах горят дома.
Я, наверно, схожу с ума –
С каждым выстрелом по Украине –
Петербург и Саратов ранен, И мой дом
накрывает мгла.

Это я виновата, я,
Что с убийцею, страх тая,
Проживала в одной квартире:
Вот стоит он в мире, как в тире,
Карту комкая и кроя.

Мама, мама, война, война!
Эхо в сердце – вина, вина.
Кто горит, кто убит, кто ранен?
С каждым выстрелом по Украине –
Убывает моя страна.

His umbrella at a tilt,
Comes a doctor on his mule.

Mama, mama, war, war!
In the heart echoing – guilty, guilty
Kherson burning in the morning raw
Oh, I cannot be forgiven, for
My country brought fire, my country.

There's the highway running by
With its river of tanks grim flowing
I didn't stop them, did I, did I?
Now from our street there is a guy
Raised up on pitchforks, showing.

Mama, mama, because of me
They're shouting to our lads – hey Russki
Fuck off, you're not invited, see!
Friends sleep in basements and freeze
In lovely Kharkiv, because of me.

Houses in Zhuliany are aflame
And I am crazy like a dog.
With each shot fired in Ukraine,
Petersburg and Saratov are maimed
And my house is cloaked in fog.

It's my fault, I, hiding my fear,
Lived with the killer in my head
In the same apartment here
He's in the shooting gallery now, I fear,
Ripping the map to shreds.

Mama, mama, war, war!
In the heart echoing – guilty, guilty
Who's killed, who's wounded for
With each shot in this Ukrainian war
My country shrinks, my country

47 Фашисты стреляют по Харькову,
 Фашисты стреляют по Киеву. (2022)
 Высотки чернеют огарками.
 Фашисты, скажите, какие вы?

Наверно, солдаты Вермахта,
 Поднявшиеся из праха,
 Из Харькова сделав Гернику,
 Расстреливают Волноваху.

Наверно, вот-вот услышу я,
 Как в фильме, застрявшем с детства
 В мозгу, – под родными крышами
 Тяжёлый язык немецкий –

Короткую, ненавистную
 Пощёчину – речь чужую.
 Но слово летит над выстрелами
 Родное – с ума схожу я?

Но слово горит – пожарами,
 И я его понимаю.
 Уж лучше бы эта армия
 Была вообще немая.

Я думала бы – за “тиграми”
 Фон Клейста или Манштейна
 Потянется лента с титрами,
 А танки растают – тенью.

Но нет, не фашисты – русские
 По тем же дорогам мчатся,
 И это не реконструкция,
 А дьяволово причастие.

И плющит безумный молот
 Цветущие города.
 Ни внуки нас не отмолят,
 Ни правнуки. Никогда.

The Nazis are shooting at Kharkiv,
 They are shooting at Kyiv too
 Skyscrapers turn black with cinders.
 Tell me, Nazis, just who are you?

You're probably Wehrmacht soldiers,
 Rising up from the dead ground,
 To turn Kharkiv into Guernica,
 And bomb Volnovakha down?

I'm half expecting to hear,
 Like an old movie stuck in my brain,
 Resounding under native roofs –
 The cruel German accent again.

Curt, brutal and hateful –
 The face-slap of alien speech.
 But the words that fly with the bullets
 Are native – am I crazy, I screech?

The burning words are my own
 And I know each one as it comes
 And I wish this army was silent –
 Completely speechless and dumb.

Then I could think – of the panzers
 Of Von Kleist or of Manstein
 And the end credits will roll away
 And the tanks dissolve on the screen.

But no they're not Nazis, but Russians,
 Hurling across the same levels,
 And this is no reconstruction
 But a communion with the devil.

And this insane hammer is crushing
 Flourishing cities with pain.
 No grandchildren will ever pray for us
 Nor great grandchildren. Never again.

48 Думайте о войне, (2022)

Думайте о войне,
 Не забывайте о ней
 Ни на минуту.
 Пока мы обедаем за столом,
 Осколок влетает в стенной пролом
 К кому-то.
 Пока мы опаздываем на
 Работу, пока говорим: “весна” –
 От снаряда обваливается стена,
 Во дворе воронка, Стрелкой
 компаса на её краю
 Лежит, указывая в мою
 Сторону – и в твою –
 Рука ребёнка.
 Думайте про войну
 по дороге на почту и магазин,
 Думайте про войну
 среди родных осин
 И среди чужих, просыпаясь и отходя ко
 сну,
 Не оставляйте её одну,
 Ни включая компьютер, ни садясь на
 диван –
 Потому что она идёт к вам.

49 Мы с тобой – дезертиры империи,
(2022)

Вызывающей скуку и страх
 Воробьями с намокшими перьями
 Мы сидим на чужих проводах.

Где бульвары с нарядными платьями,
 Физкультурники, дева с веслом?
 Нас с тобой провожают проклятьями,
 А заплачем – кричат: “Поделом!”

Не смогли, не сумели, не сдюжили,
 Провалились в кровавые сны,
 А теперь-то подумай, кому же мы,
 Неумехи и трусы, нужны.

Незнакомые площади, станции,
 Кто-то зёрнышко словит, глядишь,
 А кому-то под вечер достанется

Think about the war,
 Think about the war,
 Don't forget it any more,
 Even for a little bit.
 While we're at the table for breakfast,
 A bomb breaks a wall and in the blast
 Someone's directly hit.
 And as we pause, late for work
 To say, 'It's spring', meanwhile,
 The wall collapses from the missile,
 Making a crater as it lands
 And like a compass from its rim
 Pointing to my side – and yours – grim,
 There is a child's hand.
 Think about the war
 Going to the post and to the store,
 With neighbours and strangers
 Think always about the war,
 When you're going to sleep or just awake,
 Don't give it a moment's break,
 Turning on your laptop or making a brew,
 Yes, she is coming, she is coming to you.

You and I are the empire's deserters,
 Feathered bundles of boredom and fear,
 Soaking wet, now the drizzle has caught
 us,
 We are perching on wires up here.

Pretty frocks on the elegant grass,
 Sculpted athletes, the girl with an oar,
 All is gone. People curse as we pass,
 And they sneer at us – “Cry me some
 more!”

Should've, would've, but didn't. They won.
 Our dreams are now drowned in blood.
 Are we anything now, anyone,
 Clumsy cowards who thought that we
 could?

Только в спину злорадное: “Кыш!”

50 Мы тоже беженцы, мы тоже
отщепенцы – (2023)
Душа заводит жалостные песни,
Как приблатнённый нищий в
электричке –
Мы тоже... Не позорься, истеричка,
Сама подумай – ну, какие твои беды,
Не у тебя же – ни воды, ни света,
Снаряд над головой не у тебя же
Дугой светящейся – рванёт или
промажет.
Тебя не убивали, не пытали,
Всё остальное, знаешь ли, детали.
Ты не стояла за гуманитаркой,
Твой дом покинутый – но с фонарём и
аркой,
Стекло и то не вылетело даже,
И хлопья снежные над ним – как пух
лебяжий.
Какие горести твои, какие дыры,
Ты не в подвале спишь? – Вот и
заткнись, проныра.

Unfamiliar squares and stations,
Here's to pecking at crumbs, look at you,
Though by nighttime, the likeliest mention
We would get is a menacing “Shoo!”

We're homeless too, we too are fleeing –
My soul starts miserably keening,

A dodgy beggar on a train – Girl, psycho,
get yourself restrained, Just ask yourself,
what is your plight? Left without water,
without light – That isn't you. A missile
whistles – It's not your home it strikes or
misses. You've not been killed, you've not
been tortured, The rest is details. You are
fortunate You never had to queue for aid.
You left your home – but it remained
Intact, its archway, glass – not shattered,
Just flakes of snow like feathers fluttered.
What is your grief, what have you lost?
You safely sleep. Shut up, impostor.

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* note: all poetry used in this project was sent directly by the author herself

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