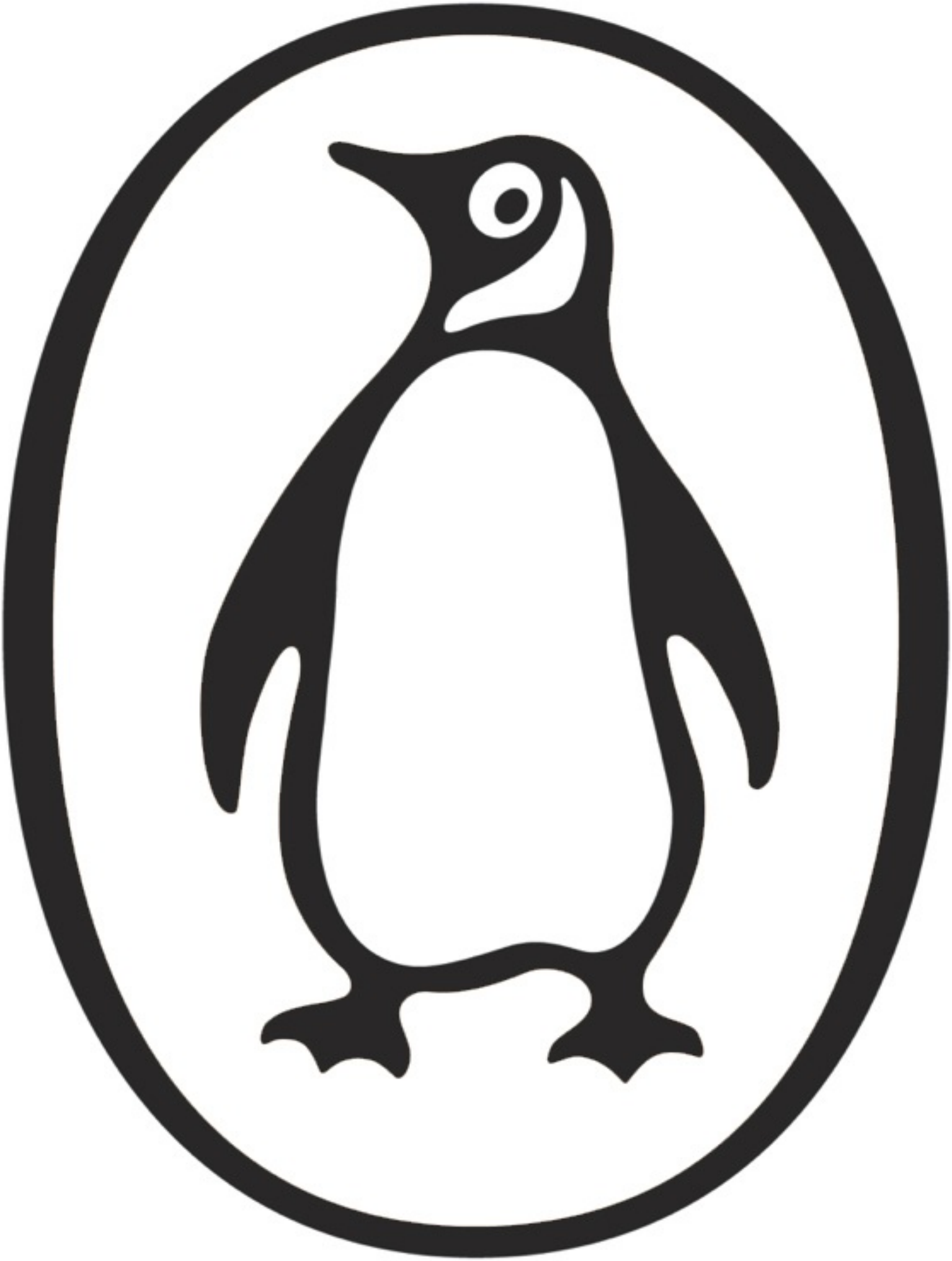

YEVTUSHENKO: SELECTED POEMS

YEVGENY ALEKSANDROVICH YEVTUSHENKO was born in 1933 at Zima, Siberia, and grew up there an in Moscow. He took his mother's surname, of Ukrainian origin; his father's was Gangnus (he was an engineer and intellectual of Latvian descent). His maternal grandfather was a Red Army general, of peasant origin; both his grandfathers fell victim to Stalin's purges.

As a teenager Yevtushenko went on geological expeditions, was a keen athlete and a precocious poet. His first published volume (1952) got him into the Moscow Literary Institu – from which he was subsequendy expelled for insubordination. After Stalin's death (1953) h emerged as the most prominent of the (mostly) young writers who publicly challenged the rigidity of Soviet life and culture in the atmosphere of the 'Thaw'; simultaneously they strov to reintroduce authentic feeling and intimacy to literature. At large public poetry readings Yevtushenko was a notable performer, a skill also used to good effect in visits by invitation to other countries – where his impact was considerable – from 1960. All these themes are chronicled in his *Precocious Autobiography* (1962), and reflected in much of his poetry (notably the narrative 'Zima Junction', 1956).

The year 1961 saw the publication in a journal of 'Babiy Yar', a meditation on anti-semitism that became his most famous short poem. The Soviet authorities veered between permissiveness and repression, taken aback by Yevtushenko's role as 'loyal oppositionalist'. However he continued to write, diversifying into prose (two novels and discursive memoirs) journalism, films – with acting roles in several – theatre, photography, and anthologizing Russian poetry. From 1988 to 1991 he represented Kharkov in parliament. He has received many public honours. Married four times, he has five sons. Since the end of the Soviet Unior he has lived partly in Moscow, pardy in Tulsa (Oklahoma) teaching at the university there, and in New York.

PETER LEVI was a poet, Jesuit priest, archaeologist, travel-writer, biographer, scholar and prolific reviewer and critic. He was lecturer in Classics at Campion Hall, Oxford, and later a Christ Church. Born in 1931, at the age of seventeen he joined the society of Jesus in the novitiate, was ordained in 1964, and remained a Jesuit until he resigned the priesthood in 1977. Subsequently he married and spent a year as archaeological correspondent for *The Times* before returning to academic life, as a fellow of St Catherine's College, Oxford. He wa Professor of Poetry at Oxford from 1984 to 1987.

Peter Levi received particular acclaim for *The Light Garden of the Angel King* (1984), an account of travels in Afghanistan. He published over twenty collections of poetry, including *Collected Poems: 1955–1975* (1976). His many religious, critical and scholarly works include translation of the second-century Greek traveller and geographer Pausanias' *Guide to Greece* (1971), a ground-breaking version of *The Psalms* (1976) for Penguin Classics, and books on Greece, the Ancient World and travel. He edited *The Penguin Book of English Christian Verse*

(1994) and wrote *The Penguin History of Greek Literature* (1985).

His final publication was the posthumous poetry collection *Viriditas* (2001). Peter Levi died in 2000.

ROBIN MILNER-GULLAND is Research Professor of Russian and East European Studies at the University of Sussex, where he taught in the School of European Studies from 1962 to 2001. He has lectured and broadcast widely, including in Russia, and is a Fellow of the British Academy and of the Society of Antiquaries. Among his publications are *Soviet Russian Verse: An Anthology* (1966), *Russian Writing Today* (with M. Dewhirst, 1977), *An Introduction to Russian Art and Architecture* (with J. E. Bowlt, 1980), *Cultural Atlas of Russia* (1989), *The Russians* (1997) and many translations (for example of Yevtushenko, Zabolotsky and Kharms).

YEVTUSHENKO

Selected Poems

Translated by ROBIN MILNER-GULLAND and PETER LEVI
with an Introduction by ROBIN MILNER-GULLAND

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NOTES ON THE POEMS

Introduction

This book came into being by chance. It seems not long ago (albeit in another age) that, just beginning postgraduate work in a field of Russian studies, I was on a train from Oxford to London and found myself sitting opposite the brilliant but ill-fated scholar Alasdair Clayre. We got into conversation, and he told me about his friend, the poet Peter Levi, then training to become a Jesuit priest, who wanted to cooperate with a poetically aware Russianist to fin out more about a young Soviet writer, Yevgeny Yevtushenko. Peter had come across him in an article in the periodical *Soviet Survey,* and was intrigued by excerpts in prose translation from a long narrative poem; he sensed he could make them come alive as English verse. We met, and I got hold of the full text of the poem; we tried working on various passages (with no particular thought of publication) and before too long had done the whole of what Peter decided to call 'Zima Junction' *(Stantsiya Zima,* literally 'Station Winter', the name of the Siberian setdement where Yevtushenko had been born in 1933).

Then I got to Moscow for a year, among the first to benefit from a postgraduate exchange that was a product of the Khrushchev 'Thaw', which itself had stoked Yevtushenko's fame. One forgets how extraordinary that seemed, how closed off the Soviet Union up till then had been (only diplomats or journalists regularly got in or out of it – tourism was stricdy controlled and hugely expensive). At a Moscow University poetry reading I managed to pass note to Yevtushenko – already famous as a public performer – so beginning a long friendship and creative collaboration; I was the first Englishman he had met. I got home to learn that Penguin Books were interested in the project. Peter and I tackled a number of shorter poems all from the decade around 'Zima Junction' (1952–61), to produce this Penguin volume: two students translating a recent ex-student (Yevtushenko had been slung out of the Moscow Literary Institute for insubordination). So emerged this small book, costing at the time half-a crown (now twelve and a half pence); the royalties, after a three-way split, came out at thre farthings (less than half a decimal penny) each per copy. Appropriately, there soon seemed t be one on every student's shelf: it outsold all other books of foreign poetry in translation, with the exception of E. V. Rieu's *Odyssey* (which anyhow had been rendered into prose).

What qualities in Yevtushenko's work fascinated us? People have sometimes been puzzled that Peter Levi, a 'poet of refined sensibilities', later on, as some thought, Very much the dandy of the senior common room' (to quote an obituarist), should have been so keen to plunge himself into a world, and a poetic world, completely alien to his own. Actually, his range of interests, his romantically radical sympathies and his motivation to hear, understan and put him – self at the service of others, wherever and in whatever conditions they might be, were all fundamental to his nature; those who knew and worked with him for as long as did could not be surprised. Peter, alas, died in 2000, and cannot respond to such questions, but we can get some answers from the parts of our joint introduction to the 1962 volume th I know he drafted:

> We have no tradition of this sort of writing, and not only is the personal sensibility expressed in these lines quite different from those of the writers we were reared with,

> but the whole conception and structure of such poetry and the bone on which it grew are somehow outside our experience. In a poem – sensitive to place – about life in contemporary Siberia, this was to be expected. But the very wide area of that life which the poem illuminates, and the direct realism with which so much of it is treated, are more astonishing than any difference of geography or language could account for.
>
> The imaginative core of Yevtushenko's work is in an acceptance of life, a hopefulness, and an honesty, which are directly related to the variety of his surface textures. The first quality of the poet as narrator is youth, and in 'Zima Junction' youth itself comes near to being the subject of the poem. The narrator looks at the external world with directness, at nature with fascination, and at social and industrial circumstances with curiosity, but at the same time his eyes are the introspective and analytical eyes of the young.

So to Peter Levi the fact that Yevtushenko was specifically a Soviet writer was secondary to the vigour, directness and sense of authenticity that drew him to the work. To many or most Western readers, however, it added hugely to the work's curiosity value. The image of the USSR since the Second World War had been of a closed, impenetrable society, whose onl 'voice' was that of the Kremlin. Now it appeared that there were new and diverse voices (Yevtushenko, though a trail-blazer, was not alone) that heralded a real pluralism – bypassir Soviet conformism and primness not through political activities, but through the arts, in particular imaginative literature. These people were not (and could not then be) 'dissident' i the later sense, rather they were what the Russianist Max Hayward termed a 'loyal opposition' of the intellect. Through poetry readings large and small in the cities, publicatior (often obscure), typescripts and word of mouth their messages had huge dissemination in th far-flung country; their Western fellows could only dream of the fame some achieved. The authorities under Khrushchev (who himself respected Yevtushenko but found him 'ungovernable') veered erratically between permissiveness and repression. Under Brezhnev (in the late '60s and in the '70s) things were 'regularized' – but the march of Soviet self-awareness was by then unstoppable. In the West too the impact of such writers was considerable, and was doubtless felt in the revival – often through public readings – of poetr as a popular, and populist, activity (as, for, example, with the 'Liverpool poets' and New Departures, and so on) in the 1960s.

Nowadays the Kremlinological import of Yevtushenko's work, the excited speculation as t what was publishable at a given moment and why, has faded from general interest. But the spectacle of how the literary impulse can well up and manifest itself in unexpected ways anc places, how it can suddenly grasp the imagination of a whole people, retains its fascination. Russia had a strong poetic tradition in the early twentieth century – a flowering of diverse talents that oudasted the Revolution, but seemed to wither in the 1930s under Stalin's policy of cultural conformism. The nation (much of it newly literate) continued to cherish poetry, regardless of the level of sophistication, and with the 'Thaw' after Stalin's death survivors of the earlier 'heroic' generation of modern poets (Pasternak, Akhmatova, Kirsanov, Zabolotsky and others) were able to re-emerge. Yevtushenko indeed felt their influence, and also that o some members of the earlier generation who had died by 1930 (Blok, Yesenin and, above al Mayakovsky), and we can sense his eclectic reading.

However his real roots were in popular verse, folksong and tales, and he has been a public performer since childhood (see, for example, his reputation as a dancer in 'Weddings'). He once told me how, deep in the forests of Belarus, he had sought out members of his peasant family, and when asked what he did, had to explain 'I make songs' (they would not have understood the concept 'poet'). There is a raw, unrefined texture to much of his work; sometimes ambitions have outstripped their best means of realization, and he has been taken to task by some Russian connoisseurs of poetry, above all for lapses of taste – 'unculturedness'. Yet even the fastidious Joseph Brodsky, a very different personality, remarked that he knew several hundred lines of Yevtushenko by heart. Actually, he is far from being a naively spontaneous versifier, but rather is a well-read and highly analytical intellectual, a quick-witted debater (he had three years in the Russian Parliament, 1988–91) and in recent years a teacher and the editor of a substantial anthology of modern Russian poetry in both Russian and English. His work is technically skilled: his lyric poems will often turn on a single striking metaphor, the play of sounds and words, a revealing anecdote. But above all he is a master of unexpected rhyme or assonance, a quality that Peter Levi, though well aware of it, did not even want to try to emulate: as Peter wrote, 'Many of the notes open to him in Russian are extremely difficult to play in English poetry today.'

For all that Peter later became Professor of Poetry at Oxford, his approach to translation was instinctive rather than theory-based. It involved a lot of push and pull between us, but I knew his instincts were sound. They can be summed up in words that the critic Hugh Kenner used of Ezra Pound: 'Translation does not, for him, differ in essence from any other poetic job; as the poet begins by seeing, so the translator by reading; but his reading must be a special kind of seeing.' Out of the window went the idea of imitating thumping rhythms, brilliant half-rhymes or other formal features of the original, save where they could correspond with what Peter felt to be a poetic idiom true to his own talents and feelings. Other translators have subsequendy taken different approaches, but I stand by what we did: at least we were not disposed to produce what Robert Lowell succincdy called 'stuffed birds' examples of taxidermy rather than poetry. So this litde volume, by now a 'classic' – which I think must mean the encapsulation of a time, a place, a situation and a personal sensibility – stands or falls on its own merits: strong as the temptation may be, we have not tinkered with it since its first publication.

After his 'marvellous decades' of the '50s and '60s, Yevtushenko has gone on to do much more. His copious later verse may have had less impact, but his relendess talent has never let him stand still for long. He has played in films and theatrical productions, immersed himself in photography, travelled everywhere he could manage to get to (a *flaneur* in all the world's cities), met anyone who had stirred his imagination, from Robert Kennedy to T. S. Eliot. His poems achieved an extra dimension of fame as texts to Shostakovich's 1962 Thirteenth Symphony (subtitled *Babiy Yar)*: a cumulative portrait of the mood of its times. His best later works have been in prose: the novel *Berry Places* (1982) and a discursive memoir, *Marked Papers* (1998), building on the *Precocious Autobiography* (1962) that he daringly wrote without going through Soviet censorship.

Yevtushenko has called himself a 'seismographer of the twentieth century', for whom 'poetry and life are the same'. Big-hearted, appreciative of others, always questing: his is a generous spirit.

Zima Junction

As we get older we get honester,
that's something.
And these objective changes correspond
like a language to me and my mutations.
If the way I see you now is not the way
in which we saw you once, if in you
what I see now is new
it was by self-discovery I found it.
I realize that my twenty years might be
less than mature: but for a reassessments
what I said and ought not to have said,
and ought to have said and was silent.

My life has often been by backward glances,
few personal emotions, thoughts or wishes,
and in my life, its even turns and courses,
some generous impulse but nothing finished.
Yet always here these means for a new design,
new strength, touching the same ground
where you first moved bare-footed, kicking up dust
I rely often on this ordinary thought:
near Lake Baikal my own town waiting for me.

And the wish to see the pines again,
mute witnesses of time and its distance,
of my great-grandfather and of the others
in exile here after a peasant's rising.
Here herded from the extremities of distance
through mud and rain with small children and wives Ukranian peasants from Zhitomir province.

The trees had spiders' webs.
In wanderings finding fortitude to forget
what each of them loved more than his life.
The guards looked with uneasy eyes
at hands heavy with veins, and the sergeant
sat playing by fire-light: clubs were trumps.
All the night through my great-grandfather
sat thinking there, and lighted up his pipes
with a fiery coal held in his peasant fingers.

What did he think of?

Now it would seem to them
arriving there in an unfamiliar region:
welcomes or threats – God knows what it might be like.
He disbelieved the floated fairy-stories
that simple people lived like princes there,
(when was it that the people lived like princes?)
and disbelieved his sudden thoughts and worries;
whatever happened ploughing and sowing
were bound to be the same where there was soil.
You'll find out when you get there prisoner. March.
Plenty of miles to walk before you get there.
And where is she, Ukraine, mother Ukraine?
Who can find the nightingale
where he sings his early song,
unbroken forest around,
no way to him at all
not walking and
not riding,
not walking and
not riding, and not flying,
and not flying.

These willy-nilly peasant colonists
took (I suppose) this foreign countryside
like fate, to each his own unhappiness:
one's stepmother however kind-hearted
not being the same as a mother.
They crumbled its sou in their fingers,
drank its water, and let their children drink,
questioned, understood, possessed,
felt it as earth and tied by blood to them.
Put on again the yoke of destitution,
that bitter-tasting life. No one blames
an old nail sliding into a wall,
it's being hammered with the butt of an axe.
There were so many hardships
anxieties of survival,
however much they bent their labouring backs,
it always turned out not to be them
who ate the bread, it was the bread that ate.
Threshing, reaping, cleaning-out,
in the fields, in the house, in the barns.
There's truth enough where there's enough bread,

see to the bread and truth sees to itself.

Slow thoughts.
My great-grandfather starved all through his life.
The innumerable badness of those harvests.
This was the truth he dreamed about and not
the truth which happened.

It hadn't much to do with great-grandfather,
there was something new, something of us in it,
in 1919 at nine years old
my mother met it suddenly.
One day that autumn heavy rifle-fire
broke like a storm. Sudden on the hillside
a young man crouching over his horsed neck
with a star on his hat and a cossack hair-tuft,
and over the old and creaking bridge behind him
one thunderous charge of flying cavalry,
then horsemen everywhere,
glitter of quivering sabres in the Junction,

There was something handsome gained in this already
– there were no more raiders when the commissar came,
and something in the comic imitations
of the enemy beside the club-room stove,
and something in that young horseman, the lodger,
frenziedly polishing up his cossack boots.

He fell deeply in love with the schoolmistress,
wandered about beside himself with passion
talking to her about all sorts of subjects,
but mostly about the world, its hydra heads;
and slashing with his theory like a sabre
(or that was what his squadron thought about it)
he valued nothing else except ideas:
bread not at all, to hell with bread.
He said, with his bluster and enthusiasm
(backing it up with fists and with quotations),
that the only thing we had to do was push
the bourgeoisie
into the sea.
All the rest was easy, life would be fine.
Get into line. Shake out the banners.

And sing revolutionary Hosannas.
Into the sun and trumpets, carrying flowers.
And the road seemed clear ahead to the Commune«

How could he know, with his Cossack top-knot,
so easily deciding life in advance,
that for us it wasn't going to be so simple;
how know the weight and mass of the complications?

Then one morning of wind, wet underfoot,
he stuffed his oat-bags tight, mounted his horse,
said to the schoolmistress simply,
'Good-bye – we'll see each other again/
and looked far off, rising high in the stirrups
to where the wind came, smelling of explosions;
and his horse hurtled, hurtled him into the east,
shaking and shaking its beribboned mane.

So years went past, one after the other.
I grew up in the small town acquiring an affection
for the forest and landscape and the quiet houses. I grew up
and at hide-and-seek
uncatchable whatever guard you kept
we peered out from the barn through bullet-holes.
There was war at that time;
Hitler not far from Moscow.
And we
– we were children and accepted a lot lighdy.
From classroom threats untroubled and forgetful
we tore away out of the school playground
and ran down through fields to the river,
broke open a money-box and ran away
to look for the green rods,
baited our wet hooks.
I used to go fishing, stuck paper kites,
or often wandering by myself bare-headed
sucked at clover, grass polished my sandals,
I knew the black acres the yellow hives
the luminous clouds that dropped still lightly stirring
half out of sight behind the immense horizon,
and skirting around outhouses used to listen
for the neighing of their horses, peacefully
and tiredly fell asleep in old hayricks

long darkened by the rain.

I scarcely had one single care in the world,
my life, presenting no big obstacles,
seemed to have few or simple complications –
life solved itself without my contributions.
I had no doubts about harmonious answers
which could and would be given to every question.
But suddenly this felt necessity
of answering these questions for myself.
So I shall go on where I started from,
sudden complexity, self-generated,
disturbed by which I started on this journey.

Into my native forest among those
long-trodden roads I took this complication
to take stock of that old simplicity,
- like bride and groom, a country matchmaking.
So there stood youth and there childhood together,
trying to look into each other's eyes
and each offending, but not equally.
Each wanted the other to start talking.
Childhood spoke first, 'Hullo then.
It's your fault if I hardly recognized you.
Once when I often used to dream about you
I thought you'd be quite different from this.
I'll tell you honestly, you worry me.
You're still in very heavy debt to me.'
So youth asked if childhood would help,
and childhood smiled and promised it would help.
They said good-bye, and, walking attentively,
watching the passers-by and the houses,
I stepped happily, uneasily out
through Zima Junction, that important town.

I worked things out about it in advance
- and just in case – with these alternatives,
if it hadn't got any better then it wouldn't
have got any worse.
Somehow the Corn Exchange had got smaller,
so had the chemist shop, so had the park;
it was as if the whole world were smaller
than it was when I left it.
And it was hard at first among other things

to see the streets hadn't all got shorter,
but I was walking with a longer pace
ranging the town.

Once I lived here as if the place were a flat,
could find whatever I wanted in three seconds,
cupboard or bed, could move here in the dark.
Maybe the circumstances had altered,
- and mine had been too long an absence,
but now I bumped on everything I used
to avoid, now knocked against it awkwardly,
and unfamiliarly they caught my eye:
the tall fence with the obscene inscription,
the drunk slumped against the café wall,
the women quarrelling in the shopping queue.
All right if this were any old place,
but this was here, and where I was born,
where I came home for strength and for courage,
for the truth and truth's well-being.
There was a driver cursing the Town Council,
two cocks were fighting under somebody's laughter
and drowsy audience the big burdocks
listened dustily, never moving an ear.
The wooden legs of beggars banged on cobbles,
a small boy with a stick was chasing a cat….
And purposely at first I didn't go
by the directest way, but then later
I started hurrying.
And this was necessary too.
To have drenched my face in freshness,
as I got near to home, near to the gates,
turning the iron ring.
At once from the very first expostulations,
'He's here!' 'Zhenka!' 'Come and eat something!'
from the first embraces, kisses and reproaches,
'And couldn't you have sent us a telegram?'
from, 'We were just lighting the samovar'
from recollections, 'how many years is it?'
just as I thought, all indecision vanished,
and things became peaceful and full of light.
And anxious Aunt Eliza put forward
the strong proposal I should have a wash
since she knew what those trains were like, she said.
Already tureens and kitchen-implements,

already the table dragged to the living-room,
and passing among the grey-blue onion shoots
I went off for water from the well,
waking the well with a cossack song –
the well kept the smells of my childhood,
the bucket came up bumping on the sides,
the chain was wet and sparkled in the light.
So I from Moscow, I the important guest,
hair damped down, clean-shirted,
sat in a crowd of radiant relations,
centre of questions, glasses, scurryings.
I'd got too weak for the great Siberian dishes
and now despaired at the sight of their abundance.
My aunt said, 'Have another bit of gherkin.
What do they feed you on in Moscow then?
You're eating nothing at all. It isn't decent!
Here, take a dumpling. Have some aubergine/
My uncle said, [C]I expect that Moscow vodka's
what you've got used to; try some of this.
Go on, go on – I do say all the same
it isn't good for you, not at your age.
Who taught you that? Look, down in one gulp I
Well, cheers, and God grant it won't be the last/

We drank and joked and chattered excitedly,
until my sister suddenly thought to ask me
was I at the Hall of Columns in March,
and everyone grew suddenly serious.
They spoke of the year and the year's gravity,
the events and worries and the long reflections.
Uncle Volodya pushed away his glass.
'Nowadays,' he said, 'we all behave
as if we were a sort of philosopher.
It's the times that we Hve in. People are thinking.
Where, what, how – the answers don't come running.
Now the doctors have turned out innocent;
well, why should people suffer in that way?
It's an international scandal, of course it is,
and all that bloody Beria, I suppose.'
Speaking, not capable of rhetoric,
of what stirred up the emotions in those days:
'You live in Moscow; things are clearer there:
tell me about it all, explain it to me.'
He took me by the buttons so to speak

and wouldn't be put off by anybody;
he made himself a home-rolled cigarette
and waited for an answer.
And I think
that I was right, my uncle all attention
as if the truth and I were personal friends,
to answer peacefully, 'I'll tell you later.'

My bed was in the hay-loft as I wanted,
I lay up there and listened for a long time
to the night. Mouth-organ playing. Dance somewhere.
And there was no one any use to me.
It got colder. Prickly with no mattress.
The quiet loft rustled and stirred about;
and Nicky my young brother tirelessly
kept me from sleep, showed me his torch (foreign)
and carried on his grown-up conversation.
But didn't I know Sinyavsky personally?
Had I *really* never seen a helicopter?
And morning came, and I stretched a bit,
and went to sit on the sacks outside the barn,
while dawn rose in the east and lingered on
the heads of cockerels, their scarlet combs.
Half-lighted mist thinned, a few houses
swam into distance, the long poles
of the bird-houses were pushing themselves
ponderously upwards from the ground,
the cows were moving in sedate processions
along the road, an old cowman was cracking
his routine whip a little. Oh it was all
concordant strength and bodily sanity.
I didn't want to think about anything.
Forgetting breakfast, hearing no reproaches,
and travelling light with pockets full of bread
(so when I used to run truant from school,
so now) I got away to the river,
and made for the old big willow on the bank
getting my feet clogged up in the warm mud,
lying on the sand in shade of its branches.
The water murmured in an even voice.
Tree-trunks swam slowly past
bumping now and then. Distant
hooters were sounding.
Some midges sang their high note.

Near by

an oldish railwayman, trousers rolled up,
was standing out on a rock with a fishing-rod.
He was scowling at me: what was I doing there?
If I didn't fish myself why not let him?
He searched my face and came closer and saids
'You can't be – ? but wait a minute I
You can't be Zina Yevtushenko's son?
And there was I… You won't know who I am!
But God bless you! From Moscow? For the summer?
i will make myself at home if you don't mind/
He sat beside me and undid his packet:
a hunk of bread, tomatoes, and some salt.
I got worn out with answering his questions,
there was nothing he didn't want to know:
how much in money was my scholarship worth,
how soon would the Exhibition open again?
He was a prickly obstinate old fellow,
and had some sharp-pointed remarks to make,
the young being nothing now to the old days,
and the komsomol so boring it was a pain.
'I remember when your mother was seventeen,
the lads, they used to be after her in swarms,
but they were frightened of her. You couldn't keep up
with a tongue like she haˆd, not running barefoot.
They used to have army coats cut down for them
all those girls, I remember;
and they used to shout till the moon was up
about plaits being a bourgeois survival.
They were savage! Oh, they used to spout,
They were always full of an idea of some sort:
for instance one might quite suddenly start
about the nationalization of babies;
of course a lot of it was ridiculous,
really harmful at times: but I'll say this –
It worries me, seeing you people,
you haven't got the drive.
The worst thing is – and you can contradict
if you want – you don't think like young people
and people are the same age as their thoughts,
There are young people, laddie, but no youth.
Well, why argue? Look at my nephew,
he won't reach twenty-five this winter,
but you wouldn't put him anywhere under thirty.

What happened? He was a boy like any other,
and you see they put him on the Committee.
He sits there, that green kid,
steamed up, banging his bossy fist –
he even walks in a different way,
There's iron in his eyes; and as for speeches,
it isn't words to get the business done,
it's business only there for the sake of words,
for smooth, obvious speeches. Well then,
what sort of a young chap's that?
What sort of enthusiasm is it?
Because it isn't "sound", you might say,
he plays no football and he's given up girls –
now he's sound. And what about the rest?
Questions? Honest disagreements?
Oh, youth isn't what it used to be.
And nor are fish: they're not the same either/
A heavy sigh. ' Well, that's dinner finished
Let's try a worm/
And he smacked his lips.
A minute later, and there he was taking
a fine great carp off his hook.
'And aren't you a fat one, eh?
And there's a reward/
He glowed with admiration and delight.
'I thought you were saying fish aren't the same?'
He looked cunning. 'Ah, but that wasn't
all of them I was talking about.'
He smiled and waved a monitory finger
as if to say, 'Bear this in mind,
that carp, brother, ended up on a hook.
I'm not proposing to end in the same way.'

Eating my aunt's wonderful soup
I found myself being stupid when talked to.
Why did the old man swim perpetually
into my mind? There are so many of them.
'I'm not your mother-in-law,' my aunt grumbled.
Why are you so melancholy always?
Get out of it I Be simple for a change.
Come out with me and we'll look for some berries/

Three women and two little short-haired girls
and I…

this piled-up lorry flying along
creaking and murmuring from field to field;
glimpses of bright-coloured machinery,
the coats of horses, corn bright pinnacles
caps handkerchiefs. We dug into the basket
and found the bread and the fresh milk for us.
From under the wheels quails shooting up like rockets,
deafening hearing, filling the ears with sound.
The world was hubbub, one great fluttering greenness.
And I lay down in the straw on one elbow
thoughtfully crumbling up a piece of bread,
and listening and watching silently.
Some boys were throwing stones beside a stream,
the sun blazed and burned, it was glowing,
but clouds were heaping up in vaporous drops,
breathing and wheezing, shifting their masses.
Everything became misty and silent.
The country people climbed into hayricks.
And suddenly and without one look back
we crashed into the downpour,
we and the downpour and the flashing lightning
careered together into the forest.
We sensibly reorganized the cart
and pulled up piles of hay to cover ourselvesi
all except one. She didn't cover herself.
One of the women of forty or so,
who had sat all day staring with a fixed expression,
sat silent and eaten unsociably,
now roused herself all of a sudden, stood,
transformed into the uttermost of youth:
Oh, she was crazy, she was spirited,
she pulled the white handkerchief off her hair
and shook her shoulders, sang out loud, she sang
happy and wet through:
Barefooted through the dark forest
the berrypicker runs.
She doesn't stop for the little berries
she looks for the big ones.

She stood with her proud head looking forward
face stung
with wet pine-needles, eyes shining with tears and rain.
'What are you doing up there?
You fool – you'll catch your death.

‘But she was giving herself entire to the rain
and the rain had given itself to her.
She threw back her hair dark-handed,
and looked into the far distance as if
she’d seen what no one else could see in it.
I thought nothing existed in the world
but this, the crowded flying lorry,
nothing existed.

Only the wind beating,
downpouring rain and the woman singing.
We settled into a barn to pass the night.
Under its low roof the stifling smell
of grain and dried mushrooms and wet berries.
Brooms breathed green leaves.
Between the gliding beams of light and dark
the huge horse-collars bulked under the roof
like bats.

I couldn’t sleep.

Texture of dark
showed faces faintly. Woman’s voice. Whisper.
I strained my ears to listen.

‘Liz, Liz,
you don’t know what my life is like, you don’t.
Oh, yes, we have a cactus and a Dutch
oven and a zinc roof all right:
and everything’s spring-cleaned and scoured and
polished.

and I have my husband and the children.
But haven’t I a soul? It’s
so cruel, so cold, and mother asks, “What’s wrong with
him? He isn’t violent,
he has no secrets,
he drinks, but so does everyone drink.”
Liz, he just comes home night after night
drunk, growling:
that anyway I’m his,
he turns me over roughly… without a word
without a word – as if I weren’t a person.
Before I used to cry and not sleep,
but in the end I’ve found out how to sleep.
What I’ve turned into I… People think I’m forty,
and Liz, I’m only thirty-five.
What will happen to me? I’ve no more strength.

If only I had someone I really loved
how I'd look after him. He could beat me
if he loved me. I'd never think
of going out, I'd care for my beauty,
I'd wash his feet for him my darling,
I'd drink the water.'

Yes, she was the one
who flying through the rain and the wind
had sung that simple, blood-heated song.
And I the envious and credulous
had praised her for that easy thoughtlessness.
Conversation faded. Creak of the well
reached us, then it ceased. Everyone
over in the village was in bed.
Some wheels went hub-deep in the roadside mud,
chewing on it with a sated sound.
A small boy in a jacket woke us;
it was early, he had a sunburnt aggressive
nose, and a teapot in his hand.
He looked disdainfully over me and auntie
and all those sweetly asleep on the floor.
'Citizens, aren't you going out for berries?'
I don't know what you're still asleep for.'

A single cow went wandering after the rest,
a woman with no shoes was chopping wood.
A cock was crowing loudly as we passed
out of the village into wide meadows
full of the deafening din of the cicadas.
The rearing shafts of carts as still as ice,
over the earth the blue intense air.
After the open fields you come to bushes,
still cold and glistening with moisture, birds
messing about, a few wild raspberries
among the brambles soft and smoky crimson;
the whortleberries lie there to be rolled in,
pine-needles and cranberries burn your feet.
But we were after the best of
the berries the strawberries that grow in the deep woods.
Someone suddenly called out in front,
'Look there they are, and there's another lot' –
Joy of simplicity, of carrying!
The pattering of the first ones in the bucket.
But we had to submit to the young guide.

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