

I LIVE I SEE
VSEVOLOD
NEKRASOV

Vsevolod Nekrasov (1934–2009) was a member of the “non-conformist” Lianozovo group, a founder of Moscow Conceptualism, and the foremost minimalist to come out of the Soviet literary underground. Before the fall of the Soviet Union, his work appeared only in *samizdat* and Western publications.

With an economy of lyrical means and a wry sense of humor, Nekrasov’s early poems rupture Russian poetic tradition and stultified Soviet language, while his later work tackles the excesses of the new Russian order.

I Live I See is a testament to Nekrasov’s lifelong conviction that art can not only withstand, but undermine oppression.

I LIVE I SEE
SELECTED POEMS
VSEVOLOD NEKRASOV

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN BY
AINSLEY MORSE & BELA SHAYEVICH

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AFTERWORD BY GERALD JANECEK

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I LIVE I SEE / SELECTED POEMS / VSEVOLOD NEKRASOV

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A WORD FROM THE TRANSLATORS

[I] Not That Nekrasov

When a Russian hears the name “Nekrasov,” the first person that comes to mind is Nikolai Nekrasov, the great nineteenth-century realist-humanist poet and inspiration for Dostoevsky; next, the lesser-known mid-century Soviet prose writer cum émigré publisher Viktor Nekrasov. Vsevolod (“Seva”) Nekrasov was a couple of decades younger than Viktor, but his obscurity outside of contemporary literary circles has little to do with generations. As a young man, he began writing in a way that implicitly contradicted the official Soviet culture and worldview—at least to an extent that prohibited publication or exhibition. For this reason, the poet Vsevolod Nekrasov was virtually invisible to the Soviet reading public until *perestroika*, when Soviet censorship fell to pieces along with the state that enforced it.

A vehement individualist, Nekrasov spent a lifetime fighting political and aesthetic conformism. Despite the consequences of this stance, he wrote steadily from his first efforts (mid-1950s) through his last poems (2009). Although direct references to poetic predecessors appear sporadically in Nekrasov’s poems, formally, his work is hugely innovative—indeed, virtually unprecedented. At a time when the

vast majority of his fellow poets—official and unofficial alike—were writing with rhyme and in traditional syllabotonic meters, Nekrasov was writing, quite literally, anti-poems. Pushing the limits of literary and extraliterary expectations, he proceeds from an investigation of poetic and official (Soviet) linguistic cliché to a critique of language itself, while producing poetry that is irresistibly readable.

[III]

Underfoot out the door
You feel
These leaves

There must be
a road here

That must be
Moscow there

Vacant
Darkness

Rainy
Silence

Distant barks
Halloing

One streetlamp
Another

Vsevolod Nikolayevich Nekrasov was born in Moscow in 1934, an only child to older parents. Despite their poverty, his father had a “good library for those days,” and his mother “insisted on Mayakovsky.”* During the war, the family was evacuated to Kazan, where Nekrasov’s father, too old for conscription, died of pellagra in 1944. In 1947, his mother

* “Vsevolod Nekrasov: Otkryty stikh” (interview), Vzgliad.ru, 2007.

died, leaving 13-year-old Nekrasov in the care of his stepfather's family.

Nekrasov's 1953 graduation from high school happily coincided with Stalin's death. The subsequent cultural thaw brought about greater exchange with the West and the resurrection of many lost arts in the Soviet Union, including the inherently subversive art of parody. In this environment, Nekrasov began his poetic experimentation, exploring the foundations laid by the dark humor of the OBERIU poets and the formal inventiveness of Mayakovsky. By 1957, he had started writing poetry he considered "effective": the beginnings of a sparse, "minimalist" lyric that broke up the traditional lines of Russian poetry and called attention to the visual aspects of the poems.

At the Moscow State Pedagogical Institute, where he studied from 1955 to 1960, he befriended other students interested in literature and began sharing his work. Among these new acquaintances was Alexander (Alik) Ginzburg,⁷ who in 1959 took Nekrasov to Lianozovo. In this suburb of Moscow, the poet and painter Evgeny Kropivnitsky held weekly salons in the barracks-style public housing he shared with his family. The family included Kropivnitsky's son-in-law, the painter Oscar Rabin, whose dark depictions of filth and poverty immediately impressed Nekrasov in their sharp contrast to the banal heroics of Socialist Realist art. At a time

* Names mentioned in the introductions and afterword that may be unfamiliar to the English-language reader are glossed in Appendix A.

when a Soviet artistic education required the acceptance and assimilation of aesthetic and moral absolutes, Rabin's paintings "dumbfounded" Nekrasov: "they made an incomparable impression [...] The paintings took your breath away with the sharpness of their state of being, the experience of the subject depicted—and this is where their factual quality came from, the most active factuality imaginable, insistence and indisputability." This idea of art or poetry *as fact* is central to Nekrasov's own work and his lifelong aesthetic position.

* Vzgliad.ru, 2007.

[III] Lianozovo

Barracks just barracks

2-story barracks

3-story barracks

many many many many many

many many many many many

many-storied barracks

(NUMBER POETRY)

Nekrasov would be associated with the so-called Lianozovo group for the rest of his life. He once explained that Lianozovo “wasn’t a group in the sense of being an intentional gathering. It was just a handful of artists taking advantage of Rabin’s Sunday exhibitions to bring their own work along and show it. Getting to the Lianozovo station was easy enough for some of us. Nothing to write home about.” Nekrasov’s emphasis on the informal nature of the Lianozovo gatherings points to his critical relationship toward the more intentional and self-conscious underground groups that formed during the latter two decades of the Soviet period.

What did unite the Lianozovo poets was their unflinching engagement with Soviet reality. They were all working closely with and within their surroundings: Igor Kholin with his poems about the housing projects on Moscow’s outskirts; Genrikh Sapgir’s universe inhabited by various tattered objects of the Soviet everyday; the pithy, highly colloquial

* *ibid.*

critique of high and low popular culture in the work of Yan Satunovsky. Regardless of their association, each of these poets shows a remarkably singular style, both in relation to each other and to the heritage of Russian poetry. Nekrasov was a regular at the Lianozovo “salon” until its dissolution after 1963, with the opening of an official investigation into the group.

The forced cessation of activities at Lianozovo can hardly have come as a surprise. Alongside selections from Sapgir and Kholin, Nekrasov’s poetry appeared in print in the first issue of Alik Ginzburg’s *samizdat* magazine, *Sintaksis* [Syntax] (1959), thus making his poems among the first to appear in *samizdat*. *Sintaksis* was intended to be a weekly; however, only three issues in, Ginzburg was arrested by the KGB for “anti-Soviet activities.” The authorities proved unable to formulate political charges against Ginzburg, but then found out that he had written a matriculation exam essay for a friend in college, and were able to convict him of forgery. Ginzburg received the maximum sentence and served two years in prison. His conviction was one of the first of many prosecutions for literary/artistic activities in the post-Thaw Soviet Union (including that of Brodsky in 1965, Sinyavsky and Daniel in 1966, and others). Nekrasov’s fear for his own safety and freedom testify to the bitter experience of seeing more than one friend and colleague packed off to camps or permanent exile; this also provided the impetus for his constant condemnation of the Soviet authorities’ crimes.

[IV]

it's suffocating here too

and here

I better take off

the artistic community

groveling

you're community too

totally

although there are

singularities

After the dissolution of the Lianozovo salon, Nekrasov continued circulating his poetry in typewritten manuscripts; some of these, beginning in the 1970s, were also printed in collections of unofficial Soviet writing published abroad. The majority of Nekrasov's pre-*perestroika* work was preserved on A4 sheets that he stashed in oatmeal boxes (which happened to be just the right size).^{*} Meanwhile, he took occasional jobs writing articles and children's literature. He was nominally a member of the literary workers' union but, like many "unofficial" writers and artists during

^{*} For a complete publication history, see Mikhail Sukhotin's "Biographical Note" in the present volume.

this period, he was never formally employed. According to friends, his wife, the literary scholar Anna Zhuravleva, supported him and kept him out of trouble. A former colleague wrote, “If he hadn’t met Anya [...] it’s hard to imagine how he’d have survived. He was intransigent. A maximalist. He always wrote and said exactly what he thought.”^{*} Indeed, by the early 1980s, Nekrasov’s acrimoniousness began to spill over into voluminous polemical writings.

The first breath of *perestroika* saw artists from Nekrasov’s circle begin to gain recognition and attention from various corners, official and unofficial alike. Thus began the canonization of the formerly “unofficial” aesthetics. The history of underground art began to be written—a history that necessarily privileged those artists who were involved with the writing itself. At this time, many of Nekrasov’s former friends became the targets of his bitter reproach, for what he saw as their mercenary participation in the creation of these new canons and hierarchies.

For example, the Moscow Conceptualists received their name and resulting collective identity around this time, in an article by the critic Boris Groys (himself a frequent target of Nekrasov’s arrows).^{**} Nekrasov’s pioneering poetic critique

* <http://vsevolod-nekrasov.ru/O-Nekrasove/Memuary/Kakih-to-desyat-let>

** See, for instance, “TO PRIGOV AND RUBINSTEIN” (238), “Joseph B.” (353), and “now everyone has/recognized these guys” (358), in the present volume.

of stilted Soviet language had anticipated developments by this group of poets, visual and performance artists. Their work exploited the happy conjunction between conceptual art (wherein the idea or concept takes precedence over any other features of the work) and the absurd ideology of the Soviet system. Like Nekrasov, poet-artists such as Dmitri Prigov and Andrei Monastyrsky built structures out of the raw materials of Soviet language. Some of these were as sparse as Nekrasov's, while others revealed their innate absurdity through the intricacy and extravagance of their architecture. Nekrasov knew and associated with most of these artists (e.g., his longtime friend Erik Bulatov, to whom multiple poems in this collection are dedicated), and took part in their projects, in particular the outdoor performance pieces of Monastyrsky's "Collective Actions." Given the many ties of friendship and common purpose, it is not surprising that Nekrasov is sometimes—but not always—counted among the Moscow Conceptualists.

Part of Nekrasov's rage came in response to the emergence of these categories, the sectioning off and cataloguing of art into neat packages. Partly it was righteous indignation—he categorically opposed the rewriting of recent history by the "victors." He was no less furious, however, to find himself repeatedly ignored or dismissed in these new narratives, as though he had not played an essential role in the post-war Soviet underground. Actually, Nekrasov was never truly neglected; by the late 1980s his work had come to the atten-

tion of scholars abroad, had been translated and published there, and a conference had been organized showcasing his work in Germany. Nevertheless, he was incensed that even when it was finally legal for everyone to be published, infighting and power-jockeying meant that former friends and colleagues were ready to throw him under a train in the interest of furthering their new post-Communist careers. While Nekrasov's ripostes are often scathingly personal, they stand as a testament to his aesthetic and ethical principles. Moreover, the social and political changes of the 1990s would soon demonstrate the prudence of many of his judgments, even as they cost him almost all of his friends.

[V] So Communist Will Now Mean Democratic

so communist
will now mean
democratic

so soviet
will now
no longer mean
excellent

but it'll
mean russian

oy eff

Nekrasov's fury didn't abate when he was finally published in Russia, beginning in the 1990s (see Bibliography). The Soviet literary establishment that had oppressed him with its putrefaction and censorship had simply gotten a new name, refashioning itself to include marketable former dissidents. The fall of the Soviet Union was not followed by the emergence of true liberty or democracy. Nekrasov watched the ascension of a corrupt capitalism and its dreadfully familiar trappings, and kept writing all along. Few observers of contemporary Russian politics and society were more clear-eyed and prescient than Nekrasov, who held a stubbornly consistent position on communist-capitalist absurdities.

In a 2007 interview, Nekrasov explained his profound objection to the prescriptive Soviet artistic policy in terms that explicitly join aesthetic and moral categories: “You see, Soviet art and literature weren’t just bad art and literature, it was evil how bad they were; they were actively, maliciously, and intentionally bad.” This position established a powerful poetic and political precedent for subsequent generations of Russian poets, including the current one. In his eulogy for Nekrasov, contemporary poet and political activist Kirill Medvedev wrote: “Vsevolod Nekrasov’s behavior during this period, his fundamental intolerance of any consensus based on cronyism (and there could be no other kind, given the context), does not only seem justified, but also like the only decent course of action given the absence or utterly compromised nature of the structures uniting the artist and society at large.”^{*} In addition to his fierce refusal to compromise in principle, Nekrasov has been influential in his quiet but revolutionary insistence on the essential union of form and content; his deconstruction of language is not formal experimentation, it is an unmediated encounter with reality. When younger, perhaps not expressly radical poets imitate his intonations, repetitions, and word games, they are entering into a conversation with language that is deeply connected to their experience in society.

* Vzgliad.ru, 2007.

** Kirill Medvedev, “...chtob iskusstvo bylo nashim, obshchim, zhivym, postoianno tvorcheskim delom” [“...that art would be our shared, living, constantly creative activity”] (<http://kirillmedvedev.narod.ru/chtob.html>)

[VI] On Translating Nekrasov

What can be done

What can be said

How to say it

Much of Nekrasov's poetry revolves around polysemy, sometimes of a single word or phrase. Nekrasov teases sound and sense to render even the most matter-of-fact linguistic unit maximally resonant. An example: One recurring instance is the play on "*nichego*," which can mean both "nothing" and "it's alright." When a more traditional poet uses this word, the translator may use context or other poetic features to determine which connotation should be emphasized. Nekrasov, however, deliberately foregrounds the multivalency of the word, creating seemingly simple but devilishly difficult tasks: what does it mean when an entire poem is just "*nichego/nichego*"? This feature of his work has certainly contributed to the pervasive belief that Nekrasov is "impossible" to translate. At the same time, the sheer volume of his production (his poems number in the thousands) meant that we were able to cherry-pick poems that could employ analogous wordplay in English. This collection reflects what we found possible: first, in our selection pro-

cess, and subsequently in back-and-forth volleys, editing and re-translating one another's attempts until we determined a poem could bounce on its own. We found that translating in tandem, with four eyes, ears, and hands, was especially useful in this regard.

Beyond the perplexities of paranomasia, there is the unspoken linguistic context of the Soviet official language, which Nekrasov mercilessly lampoons, and of the contemporary vernacular, towards which he demonstrates a more complicated relationship. This language environment is impossible to reproduce elsewhere and after the fact. (Indeed, this may increasingly be a problem for new post-Soviet generations of Russian speakers.) Nevertheless, though the political-historical realia may not be translatable, his technique comes across due to the universality of banal pleasantries and convoluted bureaucratese.

Nekrasov's poems also examine the tension between "outward speech" and "inward speech"—that is, between the languages we use when talking to others and talking to ourselves. As contemporary poet Mikhail Aizenberg put it, "[Nekrasov's] extremely personal intonation gradually becomes so familiar that it ceases to be private, 'someone's'; it becomes yours, that is, everyone's." The interjections and conjunctions that naturalistically render bursts of unfinished thought are sometimes as easy to translate as they seem, although they too can be treacherous.

We have included only a few of the copious epigrammatic diatribes Nekrasov wrote about his critics and colleagues. Most of these poems are built around puns on the addressees' names; the problem of translating such puns and the necessity of footnotes for readers unfamiliar with the late- and post-Soviet literary establishment discouraged us from including too much from this sardonically vitriolic sub-genre. Still, some of these epigrams worked beautifully in English—for instance, the simple rhyme of “Joseph Beuys” and “Boris Groys” proved irresistible. (For reasons of space, we could not include Nekrasov’s extensive essays on art, literature and culture—another rich source of polemics and invective.)

Our ultimate aim with this book is to present a poet who is punning and playing, changing the way people think about language (both poetic and everyday), and politically engaged, all at the same time. Nekrasov’s participation in all three of these realms is not unprecedented in the Russian literary tradition, but the concentration of his lyric—his “minimalism”—is simultaneously the source of his striking, fleeting lyricism and the engine of his anti-establishment humor. Conveying this multifaceted aspect of Nekrasov’s poetic practice was a higher priority for us than capturing (or losing) his (often brilliant) rhymes. We believe that as long as this collection opens new possibilities for Anglophone poets and readers, we have done what we set out to do.

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

This volume is divided into four sections representing our four textual sources: *Stikhi* [*Poems*] 1956-1983 (published 2012), *Doiche Bukh* (1998), *Zhivu Vizhu* [*I Live I See*] (2002), and finally, previously uncollected poems published on poet Alexander Levin's website.

Earlier poems can be found in both the *Poems* and *I Live I See* sections. In each, they are presented in approximate chronological order, as indicated to us by *Poems* editor Mikhail Sukhotin. *Poems* includes versions of works that appeared in *Spravka* [*Certificate*] (1991) and *Stikhi iz zhurnala* [*Poems from a journal*] (1989), Nekrasov's first official (non-samizdat) publications.

We used Levin's site as a source for poems written from the 1990s up to Nekrasov's death in 2009 but never collected elsewhere, likewise arranged chronologically, in accordance with the site's groupings. Several of these poems were originally compiled by Nekrasov for inclusion in a large tome to be published by *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie* [*New Literary Observer*], Russia's most prestigious intellectual publisher. The publication never came to pass, and they appear in print for the first time in the present volume.

Nekrasov made multiple drafts of most of his poems, many of them undergoing decades-long revisions. Our translations reflect the versions taken from each of the sources indicated.

Finally, the facsimile visual poems in this book come from *100 Stikhotvoreniia* [*100 Poems*], published privately in 1987 by Gerald Janecek in Kentucky, and reproduced here with his kind permission.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

\Thanks
So much\
\It wasn't bad\

(from "Sky/Cloud...")

This book would not have been possible without the tireless Mikhail Sukhotin, whose meticulous scholarship kept us on the right side of the textological law; the support and inspiration of Gerald Janecek, the first American scholar to write about Nekrasov; the people at Ugly Duckling Presse, especially Matvei Yankelevich, Daniel Owen, Abraham Adams, and Carly Dashiell; the Nekrasov literary estate, represented by Galina Zykhova and Elena Penskaya; the poets Ivan Akhmetiev, who compiled Nekrasov's poetry on Dmitry Kuzmin's *Vavilon* website, and Alexander Levin, whose online Nekrasov library was invaluable to our work; and finally, *nash kumir* Eugene Ostashevsky, who introduced us to one other.

— Ainsley Morse & Bela Shayevich

Mikhail Sukhotin

VSEVOLOD NEKRASOV (MARCH 24, 1934–MAY 15, 2009):
NOTES TOWARD A POETIC BIOGRAPHY

Vsevolod Nekrasov began life as a poet around 1956–1957, when he began to take part in the literary club associated with Moscow’s Potemkin Pedagogical Institute, where he was a student in the department of history and philology. The literary club was run by a graduate student, Vladimir Leibson, a parodist who initially influenced the verse of the young Nekrasov.

From the very early 1960s, Nekrasov rejected the forms and devices typical of the literature of the time and began to develop his own poetic “dictionary” (Nekrasov’s own term), which would lead ultimately to the foundation of a new poetics. Features of this vocabulary can be seen in most of his texts over the course of his creative life. The formal basis for this vocabulary was the repetition of the word, which along with combinatorial devices became firmly established in Nekrasov’s poetry from the very start.*

Nekrasov’s poems during the second half of the 1960s demonstrate an acute interest in the visual structure of the text, which in many respects links this work with concrete

* cf. “A POEM ABOUT CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES” (47), “VERSES” (48), and “Water / water water water...” (49)

poetry, especially of the German tradition: Gomringer, Rühm, Mon, Heißenbüttel, and Gappmayr. Though the informational field in the Soviet Union at the time was extremely limited and Nekrasov had no contact with contemporary German poets, he arrived independently at the same results as these representatives of Western art. Some of his poems of this period resemble diagrams—but they are living diagrams, diagrams of meaningful intonations:

Last snow
Last snow
I swear
Last snow

I swear
Last snow
Last snow

Last snow
I swear
Last snow

I swear

Last
Snow

An elder contemporary of Nekrasov, the poet Yakov (Yan) Satunovsky, was making comparable discoveries in the poetics of internal speech at around the same time; Nekrasov wrote about this in the article “Explanatory Note” (1979). In these poems, the relationship to the object (image or topic) is significantly more important than its depiction. They are essentially about the author, but not only—they are about everyone who might want to read “Last snow...” with his own unique pronunciation and manner. This quality is more noticeable in the poems of the late 1960s than the earlier part of the decade, although even then Nekrasov was working seriously with repetition. Nekrasov would subsequently “materialize” or concretize many of the intonational diagrams of the later 1960s. Thus the poem originally entitled “Let it be” metamorphosed into “be what will be”:

Let it be
As it will be

And it became
As it was

be what will be
yes
well all right

and right away
everything became
as it was*

The poems of this period, whittled down to three, four, or even two repeated words, reveal with remarkably efficacy

* 1978 working version

two, as it were, poles: the spatial (visual) and vocal (intonational). From this point it's just one step away from performance, which indeed was quickly to spread throughout the Russian unofficial art world beginning in the 1970s. Still, despite this shift, for Nekrasov the best possible performance would always remain the poetic text itself (just as the painting would remain of primary importance for Nekrasov's close friend, the artist Erik Bulatov).

Beginning approximately in 1970, the basic material of Nekrasov's poetry became the fragment. As a rule, the first stage of his work would involve polishing little pieces of texts, from which he would put together a great collection; though the collection was huge, over all the years all its little parts never lost their creative charge for the author. He would then draw on this collection to create what we now know as the texts of his poems. Of course, this cannot be said of all Nekrasov's texts from the first half of his period of creative activity: many of these poems were written right away in their complete form. But the combinatory tendency was nevertheless very powerfully expressed in his work, more so than in that of any of his circle. (Only the "objectarium" poems (*predmetniki*) of Mikhail Sokovnin, a poet and close friend of Nekrasov's who died in 1975, could be said to produce a similar impression: they also consist of one- or two-word pieces/perspectives of things seen and remembered.) We could say that in whatever way these fragments came together, in whatever connection to one another they found

themselves, they were always present in the poet's consciousness as potential initial material for future work—"elements of speech" just as valuable to his poetry as the word itself. Nekrasov himself frequently mentioned the fundamental nature of these "speech sectors" for his poetry: "...art will be that text, that sector of speech which the author, who lives (as we all do) continuously in speech, undertakes to make as good as possible."

Nekrasov had another term, "scraps," i.e. elementary utterances in the form of snatches of speech. These were poetic ingredients, usually connected with one or another topic important to the poet. "Scraps" start showing up in his working notebooks from the late 1960s; by 1970-71 they had already become an object of particular attention. This moment coincides precisely with the development of different types of collateral subordination of texts (usually fragmentary in origin) in Nekrasov's poetry: the period that divides the text into parts, the dotted line, the parallel placement of texts on the page (in the manner of marginalia), parentheses, various sorts of visual signs, and especially the system of footnotes developed during this time. From this point onward, the footnote becomes one of Nekrasov's most operative poetic devices. It brings a multidimensional quality to the utterances and directly contributes to the spatiality of poetic speech.

In the early 1980s, Nekrasov compiled a corpus of his visual texts, thanks to which Gerald Janecek was subsequently able to publish *95 Stikhotvorenii* [*95 Poems*] in 1985.

In the 1990s, when large-scale editions and art presentations became possible in Russia (having been theretofore unofficial), Nekrasov began to speak publically and give readings in both Russia and abroad. With help from friends, some of his books were published (all publications not-for-profit and royalty-free). He also organized a series of Lianozovo evenings, which featured the poetry of Igor Kholin, Genrikh Sapgir (all still alive at the time) alongside his own, and Kropivnitsky, Satunovsky, Sokovnin, who had not lived to see this time. Nekrasov also began to show art works from his large private collection (around 500 pieces, gifts from around fifty contemporary artists, nearly all of whom Nekrasov knew personally). At the time of this writing, 320 of the pieces have been donated to the Pushkin State Museum in Moscow.

In the early 2000s, Nekrasov put together a body of his post-Soviet work for the website of his friend Alexander Levin. He also continued honing the larger-scale texts that he had been writing since the early 1970s. These are long poems about his youth, which are retrospective even in terms of the material: they are for the most part “self-collages,” consisting of a large quantity of self-citations. For instance, the long poem about finishing school, “From March to Solstice, Class of ’53” contains an approximately 30-line fragment that had previously been part of a text dedicated to the artist Nikolai Kasatkin, “but the most/interesting thing...” (1970-1981). The same can be said of the “Rabin I” and “Rabin II” texts: they contain

many fragments from early poems, including poems written in the first half of the 1960s, when Nekrasov was spending a great deal of time with the artist Oskar Rabin in Lianozovo.

Beginning in the 1980s, the poem drafts in Nekrasov's notebooks are ever more regularly accompanied by critical remarks on art, written in prose; such that beginning with *Spravka* [Certificate] (1991), nearly all of Nekrasov's books have consequently contained both poetic and prosaic sections. This shift occurred between 1987 and '89. For Russia, the 1980s ended not with the fall of the Berlin wall, but with the "rebuilding" (*perestroika*) of its own state system; unfortunately, the rebuilding turned out to be aimed largely at the bureaucratic consolidation of the state, the corruption of its economy and undisguised thievery. The criticism of contemporary matters voiced in Nekrasov's poetry (and his articles) becomes ever sharper, and the number of addressees also increases, as Nekrasov reacts to everyday events in public life, politics and—most of all—art. Recalling the late 1950s and early 1960s (the so-called Thaw), Nekrasov was for the second time witnessing how freedom, seeming to have appeared after escaping from beneath the yoke of an oppressive system, immediately replaces itself with a new system, which once tested proves to be in no way better than the previous one. The early-Soviet playwright Evgeny Shvarts put it nicely in his play "The Dragon": "the best way to get rid of dragons is to have your own." But Nekrasov chose a path that bears witness to an opposite sentiment: he was actually able to

uphold his own freedom of artistic creation and to leave us an example of independence from a system always ready to strangle freedom, to mimic it, to switch it out for demagoguery, and sometimes just to buy it. One would hope that his example will not be the only one.

Publication History

The first publications of Nekrasov's verse appeared in the large-circulation newspaper of the Potemkin Pedagogical Institute, *Za pedagogicheskie kadry* [*For Pedagogical Cadres*], and in the first issue of the samizdat journal *Sintaksis* [*Syntax*] (1958–59). From 1959, Nekrasov was part of the Lianozovo group, and from around 1966–67 he became close with the “Chistye prudy” artists (Erik Bulatov, Oleg Vasiliev, Ilya Kabakov). His first publication abroad was in the first issue of the Prague journal *Tvar* [*Face*] in 1964, in translation by Antonin Brousek. Meanwhile, Nekrasov worked as a consultant, edited manuscripts and compiled the anthologies *Mezhdú letom i zimoi* [*Between Summer and Winter*] (1976) and *Skazki bez podskazki* [*Tales Without Tails*] (1981) for the Children's Literature and Baby publishing houses and the journal *Pioneer*. He was a member of the literary workers' union from 1973 (in the critics' section). Throughout the 1970s and the early 1980s, he worked as a travelling critic for the Theater Society along with his wife, Anna Zhuravleva.

In the late 1970s, Nekrasov began to participate in performance pieces by the conceptualist group Collective Actions, as well as in the seminar on Moscow unofficial art, led by Alexander Chachko and Mikhail Sheinker. In the early 1980s he published articles, poems and visual and material artworks collected in the *MANI* archives.* In 1978–79, Nekrasov published around six printer's sheets of poems in Leningrad in the *samizdat* journal 37; in 1981, he published poems and articles in the journal *Graal'* [*The Grail*].

Nekrasov was published in *Freiheit ist Freiheit* [*Svoboda est' svoboda*], compiled by Liesl Ujvary, Zurich (1975), *Apollo 77*, *The Ark* (1979), *A-Ya* (1986) and *Kulturpalast*, compiled by Wonders and Hirt (1984); participants in the latter project took their work on tour to Bohum, Bremen, Essen, Hamburg, Dusseldorf and Cologne in 1989. In 1992, Nekrasov, Kholin, and Sapgir—who had been published in *Lianosowo* (Munich: S-Press)—also read their work in Germany. Nekrasov spoke at the Vienna Symposium on new Russian literature in 1992 and in Luxembourg at the Simoncini Gallery in 1995 (again, with Kholin and Sapgir). He organized exhibitions of work from his own collection (Rabin, the Kropivnitsky family,

* *MANI—Moskovskii arkhiv novogo iskusstva* [*Moscow Archives of New Art*—was a small-format archival project initiated by artist Andrey Monastyrsky in 1981. In four installments compiled in 1981–1982, the archive collected visual and literary works by prominent underground figures of the time, including Ilya Kabakov, Lev Rubinstein, Francisco Infante-Arana, Boris Groys, and others. Their objective was to chronicle and define Moscow Conceptualism.

Vladimir Nemukhin, Erik Bulatov, Oleg Vasiliev and other artists) in Bohum and Bremen in 1992, in the Literature Museum in Moscow in 1991 and 1992, in the Novosibirsk Picture Gallery in 1990, and in the Tiumen Art Museum in 2002. In 1999, he travelled to speak in Gdansk; in 2003 and 2006, to Minsk; and in 1995 and 2005, to Samara.

In 2007 Nekrasov was awarded the Andrei Bely prize “for the uncompromising revelation of the poetic nature of speech as such, for absolute individuality and absolute naturalness of utterance, for an outstanding contribution to the creation of a new poetics, for half a century of creative self-sufficiency.”

[translated by Ainsley Morse]

I LIVE I SEE
VSEVOLOD
NEKRASOV

from *POEMS 1956-1983*

ANTIPOEM

Here's a proton—antiproton
 nucleon—antinucleon

And a cyclone—anticyclone

Nylon?

Antinylon

Antiochus Kantemir

Antigod

Antimir

Antiwhite antilight

Antiwater antiair

And for no and yes, what's here—

Antino

And antiyes!

So it isn't simply anti:

It is anti on the one hand,

anti-anti on the other

If you take it further—more:

Anti

anti

anti

anti

anti-ive

up from one to twenty-five

Anti

Anti

Antelope

The ass is the antiface

What is anti-anti-nonsense?

It is just the same old nonsense

Anti-peg in anti-hole

Jesus Christ

Did arise

and even he was much surprised

Amorality is abnormality
But morality isn't banality

Really
We are all dishonest
Necessarily nervous

Honest ones
Are also nervous
But at least they're honest

I'm silent
stay silent

I'm silent
stay silent

By feel by feel

We flow we flow

I thought what are we staying silent about

We stayed silent

About this

winter summer

winter snow

summer no

to Evgeny Leonidovich Kropivnitsky

We have firs and we have pines
And the birch tree itself
There's a bush and a wood here
There's a needle and a leaf
There's wint here
There's summ
And man the mad
What don't we have

But what
We don't
have here is
There's no
Sycamore

If we don't have it here
Then we don't need it

A POEM ABOUT CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

for Alik Ginzburg

Had it up to here:
Chatted up to here.

Chatted up to here:
Had it up to here.

Chatted,
Had it,

Had it,
Chatted!

VERSES

Growth of

The uttermost subsequent earliest advancement of
measures

According to

The uttermost earliest subsequent advancement of
measures

By

The earliest subsequent uttermost advancement of
measures

On

The subsequent earliest uttermost advancement of
measures

VERSES ON ANY WATER

Water

Water water water

Water water water water

Water water water water

Water water

Water

Flowed

Sergey Sergeyevich the teacher
Bought himself a magnifier
Bought himself a magnifier
Not because he was a teacher
But because he won the lottery

Underfoot out the door
You feel
These leaves

There must be
A road here

That must be
Moscow there

Vacant
Darkness

Rainy
Silence

Distant barks
Halloing

One streetlamp
Another

NUMBER POETRY

Barracks just barracks

2-story barracks

3-story barracks

many many many many many

many many many many many

many-storied barracks

AND I TOO WILL SPEAK OF THE COSMIC

Will I fly or not, I can't tell
To the moon or to a star
But the moon I tasted on my tongue
In Kazan' in '41

darkness
war
nevertheless
moon

white
glow

white
snow

white
bread
there is no

no bread at all

I have long since returned to Moscow
And I dine almost every night

But the moon looked like it tasted good
And the moon tasted white

There's the year
and year
and there

And there's the year
the year and there
And there's the year
and year and there
and there's the year

and year and there

So have you heard
You probably haven't heard
Anything
You girls would have
Embroidered all over
 Had you heard

So have you seen
You probably haven't seen
Anything
You guys would have
Broken all the windows
 Had you heard

GOOD WEATHER

for Kholin

Windows all agape
And flowers like a-gas
And people like a-gasp

AH POEM

Ha haha haha haha

Ah ahah ahah ahah

But ah ahah ahahahah

Ha haha hahahaha

freedom is
freedom is
freedom is
freedom is
freedom is
freedom is
freedom is freedom

“So where is it all?”

“In Moscow.”

“And where’s Moscow?”

“On the moon.”

“And the moon?”

“There is no

Moon.”

Waves

Well then

Stern skyward

Waves

You hear a wave move

In from shore by day

From who knows where at night

I am silent I am silent

The factory toos

- Too

Cables poplars

Suddenly lala

- La

And the wind

The dark

The gate slammed hard

- Ha

Apparently

I'd come here

The light's on

But no one's around

Willow

Fallow

Even

Gleaned

Ale is all

We need

And flocks

And haystacks

What

A lack...

So Maznin, what do you say?

Look now

A little bull

Eating up grass

It could pass
That winter
Somehow

Could up and
Scatter

1961

/Igor Maznin was my tow-
headed buddy/

1971

I am I after all I am I

but not I

and not I

see I can do

without you

and so I'll do

without me too

Here am I

Here am I

Here am I

But where is my

Where is my

Where is my

Where is

My

My

My

My

My

Maw

to Valery Stigneev

Photograph

Photograph

Outrage

Outrage

Democracy

Telepathy

More or less

And so on

That is, this

A dark

Business

The Black
Sea

The railroad
On the mountain, mountain

On the mountain, houses

Geography

Georgia

And I

Black mountain

Mountainous mountain

Full moon

Lunar moon

Warm water

Wet water

Warm locales

Local locales

Strange land

Strange land

Wild moon

Rare moon

Greek or

Turkish moon

Wrong side up

Horns face down

Head over hills

Georgians run over hills

Boots sparkling

Triumphing over rivals

Believing you and I to be

The most foolish of fools

PANORAMA BEFORE DEPARTURE

Drops

Ropes

Clouds

Clouding on all sides

Clouds

Hill Hill

Hill hole

Hill hole

Smoke like gray

Smoke like white

Smoke like smoke like smoke like smoke

I was

here

I was not

here

I was not here

I was not here

I was not here

I was not here

I was

here

Pushkin and Pushkin
Pushkin and Pushkin
Pushkin and nanny
Pushkin and Anya
Pushkin and Lyalya
Pushkin
and mister Vladimir
Pushkin and Lucy
Pushkin and I

Pushkin
And Lucy's aunt

And that aunt of Lucy's
she turned out
smarter than
all of us

The terror
The horror

Riga
Nina said

Riga's a city
Kinda like Paris

A city kinda like Paris

Moscow
and Riga

Communal apartment
but without the screaming

Building windows
Building windows

Building walls
Building walls

Building roofs

Building roofs

Riga Riga

Riga's building

Riga's home

Riga's home

Listen
let's go

and let us just say

Don't ring ring
in your ears

ring
ring in the pines

it's probably not early anymore
right?

and not even not early, but even
in some way
late

fine cold

windy maybe

but you can't see anything
it's dark

that's just it
it's dark

and on top of that
wet

good?

what's good
is good

what's bad
is bad

I.

At night
There's nothing

At night
There's nothing

A black rain—
A black rain

White snow

White snow for sure

II.

It's very strange
at night

It's very strange
at night

But it's alright

III.

morning

morning is morning

this much is clear

In the place where
February is
A black hole

Is forming

Kind of like our yard

Again again

Snow snow

And now again

And now again

Snow—

And now thaw

And now snow again

Night
Tonight is night
Night
At night
Yet

Day
Today it's
Day
Today's the
Day
Day today!

There out there

down the roads
after peas
bare feet
through the dust
just us
through the night
so late
up to the moon
almost

Out there's home

And again
Right here and now
You see—
They've gathered

Those stormclouds
Cloud mounds
Drab and damp

How many are here in all
Soul-
Units
What are they waiting for here

No
They are waiting for something here

Toward nightfall

It's far

It's far

It's far

It's far

It's far

It's fog

It's fog

It's fog

It's fog

It's fog

Wind wind

Rides rides

Rides rides

Wind

rides

Rides

or doesn't?

Rides

Or doesn't

Rides?

no

Wind?

no

Wind?

no

Rides?

no

A bike?

no

A bike?

no

A bike—

a bike

in the morning

for whom for whom

and in the woods
and in the woods

and not in the woods
not in the woods

all around
all around

where it all is
where it all is

really really
very very

sun sun

sun

well

I'll say

just one word

sun and sun

and the sun

tickles your sinuses

I.

sea
what sea

of the sea you can say

a whole sea of sea

a full sea of sea

of the sea you can say

a real sea
a real sea

really
a sea
a sea
a sea

sea sea sea sea

real real

level

probably you can
even
talk about it like this

rather, really,
probably
you can even
see it this way

only very
rarely

March 8, 1968

II.

The sea

And besides the sea

Besides the sea

These peaks

III.

When rocks

When rocks

and water

And water

water and rocks

And water

water and rocks

And water

water and rocks

Then rocks

rocks and
rocks and
rocks and

IV.

sea and sea
sea

and we too

We too

a drop in the sea

and we too

like
a drop in the sea

What is it

What is it

That's it

That's it

Everything and nothing more

Everything and nothing more

And all is very well

And all is very well

That's all

For some reason I really want to go
To Leningrad

I really want to go to Leningrad

Only I really want to go

To Leningrad

And back again

A canal
A streetlight

Here's the streetlight
Here's the canal

Blok was here
He stood

And dunked

The streetlight
into the canal

The streetlight
into the canal

The streetlight
into the canal

Blok dunked

Blok dunked

Brodsky

Helped

While Nekrasov slept

Nekrasov slept

Nekrasov slept

Nekrasov slept

Nekrasov slept

a block

a block

a block

a block

and a canal*

how did you

get here

how did you

make it out here

how did you

find me here

how did you

find me

1.
Exactly that

The building
exactly the same

can you believe it

how can it be that

this is not where I lived

I was walking along
and thinking

/I thought 1. 2. 3./

2.
it's all exactly like that
walking along thinking

what's next

the square named after
comrade Sverdlov,
it's not as though
there is anywhere to go

yeah

Petrovka Pushkinskaya

Kropotinskaya metro

not to mention
Marx Prospect

that's where it really
gets beautiful

3.
I think
that yeah

then
I'm thinking
how about
I

then I'll go
there then
over there

over there

yeah

and end up
not there

where I
always
end up

* otherwise
we keep walking and walking
buildings and buildings
and then
bam
a little square

just exactly like in Moscow

Only in Petersburg
it means a bomb fell here

while in Moscow
it means a church stood here

and so on

it's not like like
our own authorities
foaming at the mouth

A flat city

A wet city

A city

A swamp city

Colossal

Capital

General

Legendary

Regular

Parallel

Perpendicular

No

Not prospectless

Yes

Nevsky Prospect's

Sky prospects

it's still the
important one
most important one
everyone knows

most importantly it's
All like new

Hello
Fellow
Hello

Noble noble
Bronze bronze

Refined
Streamlined

Brodsky
Brodsky

Just like
The real thing

Bourgeo-aristocratic
Aristo-bourgeois

Tikhvinsky

My

Moscow

The corner of Novoslobodskaya

Trammed trammed

Trammed street-lit

Street-lit apartmented

Apartmented typical

Typical bricked

Bricked smoked

Scarcely

gilded

scarcely gilded

Dim

Tin

almost like

it was

Timber once

Before
before

Before the war
Yes

Before
Before the Soviet era

Before
Fyo-
Dor Dostoevsky

Child-like

Child-like

Child-like—
Well—
Child-like
Tsar-like

Child-like

Snowy
Yellowy

Winter
Both wintry and summery

And Summer

Both summery and wintry

Father's and mother's

Father's

mother's

Alexander
Pushkin

The wind the wind
Intrudes intrudes

Piter Piter
Endures endures

Piter

Endure now

Endure endure
Piter

Directly
Directly

Opposite
Opposite

Peter and Pavel

Sickle and Hammer

Tearing and raging

The North is

Visible

The North
The one that's harmful

The city
Not ancient

Pre Revolutionary

Wind
Now that's wind

Saw Piter
Saw Piter

Recalls now
Recalls now

Grasps now
Grasps now

Got it
Got it

Lenin

Lenin

Pushkin

Pushkin

Genius

Genius

Eugene Onegin

Eugene Onegin

Eugene Onegin Eugene Onegin

Eugene Onegin Eugene Onegin

Eugene Onegin

The Russian cold is healthful

Brother Pushkin

But the North is harmful

so

no

You you you you you you you you

you you you you you you you you

Youyou youyou youyou you you

youyouyouyou youyouyouyou

Tungus and friend
Of the steppe, the kalmyk

And everything right back
Where it started

and madness Sovereign

Such
massive sin

The raving
Vissarion

or was it all the joseph
vissarionoviches

On one side

On one side
us

on the other

things go fast here

As you will

Your will is a little chilling
it's our nation after all

/Always the
White nights

But then the
Black days

Flames like what

kind of flames could
have been there back then

City Lights

City of the Yellow Devil

what kind of cities
could there be

and names could be
namely
any whatsoever

named after the Yellow Devil
named after Gorky

" " " " Kirov

" " " " Culture and Leisure

" " " " Ballet and Opera

" " " " if not one

then some other
name

and

Named after
Hunger

Named after
Cold

City
Named after Lenin/

Moscow is the national capital
But Leningrad is the war capital
But war was basically anywhere
War was pretty much everywhere

But Leningrad has the Neva
 Seva

Neva Neva As mama said

Petersburg corners

And figures

In snow

Doughy snow*

And the light

milky milky

mealy mighty

delectable edible

Typical Blok

And really

Even that building

and that blocky one

* And nothing else

But even that's not enough

for us
piled up and up

for two

three four
million

aren't we bastards

Yes
Gentlemen
Yes

Houses of
bricks

Oh gentlemen gentlemen

Truth really is an
Abomination

Well not really

But sometimes
yes

Comrades
comrades

these words are
yours

all the words are yours

were yours

but now mine came

so

and my poems
will be yours

whether you like it
or you
don't
like it

We live
Arguing
With God
Praying
To the administration

That's what we stand for

For
Something like that*

We stand
We stand
Then
We up and

Rise up

And stand again

* Something
Mysterious
Familiar and old-fashioned

This isn't it
this will not work
this is no joke
this will not fly
this is no argument
this is no reason
this isn't anything
this is nothing

this isn't rushed
this is simple
(but along with that,
it's not so simple*)
this is final
this isn't scary
this isn't painful
this isn't anything

this never *was*
this never will be

this cannot
this is not worth
this doesn't mean
this isn't

that

and who
knows

* this just isn't
even a question

please

what can I
say

and what I will have to
say

Thank you

definitely

and don't forget to
say

thank you
thank you
very much
very much

it's nothing

scared
don't be scared
scared
don't be scared

scared?
Scared?
Scared?

I'm not scared of being scared
I'm not scared of being scared

nothing to be and I'm skeered

I'm scared scared
scared
I'll get frightened

the edge of the world

just the edge of the world

the edge of the world

And Moscow

the center

Moscow center

Marx Prospect*

vast is our motherland

come on

and on Marx Prospect

especially

* Dzerzhinsky Square is next
(then some kind of
China-town
is actually there on
Marx Prospect
then suddenly it's
the Great Wall of China)

oh
it was so
bad
bad
bad
bad

the worst part is
now
I remember it
barely

I only remember that

the dog barks*

the wind blows

all night

the dog barks

the wind blows*

how does it bark

“Vsevolod Nikola’ch”

“Vsevolod Nikola’ch”

“Vsevolod Nikola’ch”

* the country calls

the devil knows

Gas and kvass!

Citizens

The rest is not for us

and all in all

but overall

one soul per
soul

no more
no less

just one thing
just
not to offend
the creature
that creature
that creature that
is
not only incapable
of taking off
but can't even take offense
can't
no
maybe you'll be
capable

humanity

keeps treating itself
for something

could it be electricity

it's cold countrymen
windy*

oh my dear
contemporaries

as Anna Akhmatova
would remark
sent off to
Novogireyevo

* and oh so
much space

but not a
single bathroom

which is to say
sadness

sadness*
which is to say
sadness
of no
particularly
high quality

* that is
so it seems

toward the window
toward the window

toward morning
toward morning

now then
now then now then

at night
well then
to hell with it
I don't want to
hell with it
I don't want*

although

what the hell
am I still
doing here

* I don't want
to want
I want
to not want
I don't want
to not want
I want to want

what
bull

...And this name was The Lord

—Zinaida Mirkina

This

Yes

This

Yes

This is it

But what is its name

This

I can't know

You know

This

I can't

Know

pin
and it's
fine

pin
pin
pin
pin
and a pine

and still
it's so totally

a pine
a pine

and suddenly everything's
defined

defined
defined
defined

that I'm
I

There is
News

Christ is risen

Truly he is risen

Listen
Good news

Is good news
But a big secret

It's been good news
For a long time

For a long time
It's been a big big secret

.

Christ is risen

Truly He is risen

Which was to be

Proven

to Roginsky

My
friend

How can January
be tram

March
is tram

So long tram
and hello
trolley

elevator
trolley

or asphalt
and trolley

and television

Elevator

asphalt

trolley

and television

there you go

all of it
after all
but most of all

air

speech

at night

it could be said

in other words

speech

as it is

speech

what does it want

or

or gloaming
in a green wood

in a grave
green wood

it's day
somewhere

but not just somewhere
somewhere around here
some place

the sky is where

in the water
ordinarily

Ostensibly

there's a lake nearby

Biserovo

Be silver,

Silver

Hour by hour

No hours

At all

Zero hours

Night of timber

it happened

it happened

had to happen

had to happen

happened

happened

happened

happened

happened

so fine

Exit

well everywhere around here is an

exit*

into the air

air is air

there is

air

there is a Lord God**

* the exit is here
only we are
so unused to it

exit here
but where are we
where are you

** but the Lord God
is a rare thing
for us here

how to put it

autumn
But it appeared

It turned out to be
autumn

Autumn
appeared

and it turned out to be autumn

it's cold

we'll open the window

it's cold

what that the sky bears no warmth

the sky bears no warmth

the sky beckons

The moon

Oo

The moon

Oo

The moon

Oo

The moon

Oo

The moon

Oo

Oo sky

Ay

Our dear Oleg, dear
Here are the snows of yesteryear

Oh
how many many
little maybe
too bad only
 have to
 yes
 no

The best of all is
Yesterday
And the snow of yesteryear

Oleg Oleg Oleg's to Oleg
Oleg Oleg Oleg

Our colleague Oleg

written
to wit
written
winter
to wit
written
written and spoken

spoken
spoken
spoken
spoken
 spring

but I
do not insist

power power
overpowered

overpowered
settled

and said

SEVA

and said Seva

tree
where's the tree here

and well
to tree with it

how can a tree
nuzzle up to spring

spring
spring
spring

and well
to hell with everyone
and us

utterly

Mother
the earth raw
and all at once

it's always like this
when you need it least
Spring

Night water
Night water
Night water
Night water

Night water
Night water
Night water
Night water

somehow
how good it is
easy somehow
how it so rarely is

so far
but so what
not so far

no
and then it took flight

maybe summer

maybe something

maybe someone

only just

well
ah
barely

Greenery

totally

FROM PUSHKIN

Moon

Moon

Moon

Moon

You dumb broad you

I.

yes

where

I know where

but how

how do I know where

no

how

I am the one who knows how

but where

where do I know how from

II.

there

there

there where

from there

from where

where I'm from

where would I know

from

Moon moon

Moon moon

Moon moon

Moon moon

The way you hang

Who hangs like that

The way you hang

Is that a way to hang

The Soul

/just kidding/

Hold on

I'll take a look at

the clouds
moving along

how things are moving along

Sun

Although after the fact

But still sun

All of it all at once and for all

in toto

in a word

in the morning

and then over there

the woods

in the summer

tea

with sun

and mama with papa

to Erik Bulatov

I feel it already

the thunderhead

though I
don't want to
don't seek to

I live and I see

1969

Well
kind of

thank God

a lea
water aplenty

and the white heads of Vologda

kind of like
there there they are
you
the white heads of Vologda

head
in the water

head
in the sky

foot in shit

Ah that's where the
cold's coming from

a lake
and there
the White*
Sea

and there's
Vologda

the road's
from there

there's
God

there's
the threshold

* the sea is white

and the sky there
is rippled

What can be done

What can be said

How to say it

no no
no and no

no and no and no and no
and no and no and no and no
and no
and I no

just right out and say it
to a jerk

you're
a jerk

that's something
God himself helps me to
right out and say it
that you're a jerk

“No need”

No need
Do you
Understand

We

Understand

isn't that so

isn't that so
or is it not so
it is slander
 slander
 slander
 slander
 slander

isn't that so

and so
on

people lived
they lived

people lived
people lived
people lived
people lived

lived

okay

I repeat

this
cannot
be repeated

I repeat

this
cannot
be repeated

I repeat

this
cannot
be repeated

this
cannot
be repeated

this
cannot
be repeated

I repeat

scrub off the accidental features

two three

scrub off the accidental features

but watch out don't

accidentally

scrub holes

in

got to be glad

and I

yes

I'm glad

it's just a little late

truth be told

So Pushkin

Pushkin here
and Pushkin there
and here

Pushkin
and Pushkin

Pushkin
and Lenin

Pushkin
and Stalin

Pushkin
and Kholin

So who
Is your favorite poet

Pushkin
and Winnie the Pooh

it's nothing thank you

no no it's ok it's ok

it's nothing thank you

it's nothing thank you

it's nothing it's nothing thank you

thank you but it's nothing

Oh what a jerk
A jerk like that living
And people see him
And know him
Look at him
What jerks we have
Some even say that

There goes
A jerk
A jerk like that living

In our country
There's
Room

It's painfully gainful
Dependably comfortable

So many perks
When you're
A jerk

you see

but you
say

Say no more

Or they'll tell

out of all of us
and for one and all of us
one pine

for the pine
spring
fall
all one
sky

good
cold

warm
isn't bad either

by god

needles
cloud
and all
odds and ends

seeing
spring

I fell asleep
awoke
saw a pine
knew the pine
ours
again fell asleep
awoke
and saw
a pine

and again with the
golden words

glory
glory and glory to us

as per our words

in a word
would you all take us

at our word

Definitely

all of this

is

what is not

.

so where'd he come from
Okudzhava

ah

our esteemed
soul

stockings

socks

ties

fabrics

books

fires

shoes

clothes

furniture

hope

love

Moscow's nice
Moscow's nice

And it even seems like
things are not that
bad

Here you go
Moscow

and go ahead

you can
be glad
you can
complain

you can go

A FEW WORDS FOR LEONID SOKOV

1

Ilyich*

* who discovered
electricity

2

Electricity*

* which was invented by
Ilyich

I believe

I believe that I believe

I believe

put a plug in my mouth
go on and
tug on my tongue

it's hard to say*
and hard not to say

and how to say it to you

* the feeling
of infinite love

the fact
we face
is a fact

but if it's approached
politically
correctly

we are facing

a slanderous fact

(and the fact is that
it is not for themselves
but for us that some
countless millions died*)

and another
series of facts

* how many do we need

Alive alive
Well well
Jeans jeans

Fifty-five minutes to
five

Soviet people
Are sleeping

Some
Are even dreaming*

Yids
Yids
Yids yids

And freemasons
And freemasons

* And their dreams
Are amazing

You're a bastard
for being a simple man

you probably won't get away with it

wait a sec

in any case

if you're a simple man

then I am

a man simpler than simple

I live

better it be
worse for me

you
me
and you and I

and a mouse living

with us

it's funny

it got cold

okay
fine

but it got
cold

you don't need to
go far

we're not the
sorry ones

wouldn't you say

in fact you
already said it

who goes where
getting here
gets farther and farther

all gray everywhere

water's
raw and
severe

that's not what water is for
here's the water

then, yeah
let's get
out of here

May Day

Then
The Black Sea

Then May
Day again

to be or not to be

may very well be

I wouldn't say

but I wouldn't refuse

do tell

but what was that thing

I said

I only said

that

I wouldn't be opposed to

a little living

but what I would like
is to forget myself
and shove in
shut up
and conk out

that's mother for you
but look how much light there is
how to comprehend it
is it that even this
light is damned
and bound to go out

but for now
there is light

behind the Soviet
curtain
to the music of
Dunaevsky

magnificent

just look
and instantly

there is mother
mother mother
mommommothermother
Motherland

the land is raw

and there's no metro

but war
there we are

so

there's a
cabinet

on the table*
a tablecloth

a holiday

a draft
blowing through**
radio playing
Moscow
speaking***

* in the interval
this is between
darkness falling
and television
the moment
who can remember it right
at the
moment

** it's cozy
as though somebody's
checking
around here
and now that
all is in order

*** wait til you hear
what it says

at the same time
time has passed
through here

here
things got cheerful

here
it stopped being terrifying

anything
and I'd go here

mama was alive then too

and I'd wish
that you
would be always
and glow like
you glowed

come what may
without reaching that point
it follows that
all of it
is here
that is somewhere
it is
I
whose eyes grew bright

Lights

all that nighttime bustle

always the same

and why's it like that

tons

to do

and little

sense in it

.

and there's nothing to be done about that

.

but you still have to

answer for it

how many of them
and where are they being driven

or better put
who is driving you

after all there's the world
which has so many lights

.

and the stars are
here too

and here's where the stars are

stars
stars
but where do we live
around here
?

Suddenly
Over there

But over there it's
Open

for some

for example
for us

That's just it

For us tatars
Our windows facing Crimea

In the morning

Even though
we're

At home

Is it even man's place

To separate
Spirit from body

Seriously

In his old age even the devil
Signed up with the monks

Forgive me Vadik

Anyway
he ended up joining

No good
our monks

new ones from old devils

No good
our monks
And our devils no better

Well
World harmony

World harmony here
Isn't worth a single tear

But a
National idea
That's a whole other thing

With another
Value, at that

An
N-value

but there was a time

the great helmsman

served tea

and borderless border guards

stood

just stood and watched

so no europe

crept past

Let's say
Let's say like

Let's say
Sic
Sic
Sic
Sic
Sic-xual
Say

Let's say it
Spi-
ritual
Al
Al
Al
Al

Alright
When we say it

Oh when we say it
We'll say it

honestly
nah
it's not that
interesting

what's interesting—
honor

Truly

that is, for the sake of honor
our man
(if he is really
our man)
wouldn't even fear the disgrace

the man's cultured

it's all about caviar

yep
I see

we
we, we;
we, we:
can

do that.

but me
but me
nope

this is shit

but really
whatever works best
 for you

for some reason
I'm not afraid*
not afraid and not afraid
for myself
I am only afraid
that it's that I'm
not afraid not for myself
predominantly

* if I'm not mistaken

looks like

and it looks like
God's alive

so there

but the devil—oh the devil—
that one's
definitely not dead

so that's it

so that's it
so long as it's sacred

and if it's not sacred
then it's all wrong

it's all wrong

here's whose
fault it really is

conversations conversations
chamberlains and chamberlains
intellectuals
idlers
incidents
episodes
instances and instances
elements and elements
simulators
speculators
white finns
contrabandists
competitors competitors
foreign tourists foreign tourists
mendelists morganists
formalists

cosmopolitans
meyerholds
mandelstams
pinnochios pinnochios
cheburashkas
interventionists and
antipodes
opponents
adversaries
the muslims
their fault
the martians
the masons are to blame

Al-mighty

Forgive us

Time to save Russia again

These terrors again

“Save Russia”

And then

Save yourself if you can

But who can save

The saviors

And who can save themselves

From the

Saviors

the fact that

it's all just
a dream

a dream from the past

a dream come true

a dream gone mad

a dream
gone mad
come true

and this

and all this
is worthless

ab solutely

)))

that's just the forest

worrying

dense as it is

right here

billows

nothing

not much
in general

nothing

and then more
nothing

that's how it goes

according to the radio

if it's no secret

if it's no secret
snow

just like that

if anyone asks

hidden freedom

clandestine parasitism

covert glory

ON THE OCCASION OF A POEM'S ANNIVERSARY
(a poem with an epigraph)

A POEM ABOUT THE CALENDAR

And September
ends in ber,

And October
ends in ber,

And November
ber,

And December
ber,

But January
ends in ary,

And February
ends in ary,

But March

ends in arch,

April

in il,

May

in ay,

June

in une...

July

in August,

August

in September

1961

*(A poem from a manuscript submitted to the Children's
Literature publishing house.)*

“Of course sound games are vital for a child’s development. But in playing with sounds, a poet must not only think of the sound of the words, but also of their meaning. Otherwise, an ostensible act of tactlessness may go

unnoticed by the poet. For example, in ‘A Poem About the Calendar’: ‘And September ends in ber, and October ends in ber, and November—ber...’ and so on. Think of the established metaphorical meaning carried by the word OCTOBER, even for little children! This an inevitable result of ‘forced originality’”

(From a review of the book by publishing consultant Boris Aleksandrovich Begak.)

The publisher is in complete agreement with the reviewer: Your poems are not appropriate for publication as a book for young children.

(From a letter from the editor-in-chief for literature for children under 6, Leokadia Yakovlevna Libet, 1977)

Poor
Poems

From Begak
all the way to KayGeeBee
From KayGeeBee
all the way back to Begak

As if
They may as well spend an age
Just skedaddling

(From a response to B.A. Begak, 1977)

...And just maybe
Sometime*
Somehow...

* when there won't be
snitches
and libets

(postscript 1981)

TO PRIGOV AND RUBINSTEIN

and well the devil with you
and lena shvarts
/ “the brilliant lenochka shvarts
and the great krivulin...”
as a certain leningrad poet in a leningrad journal
put it/

'83

we're special*
we're not like everyone else

for we are the only ones
of our kind
in the whole wide world
dear children

what people can do
for us is tsk tsk
in no way permitted
/to at least write the truth/

what others can't do
we can do you see
/even so
who will write down this truth/

but in reality
in the whole wide world

where everyone
was
but where we had not heretofore been
we're not special
just some of the others

and aren't the exclusive ones
exclusively exceptional

the truly orthodox
singular
all to themselves

everyone
not like everyone

everyone
not like
everyone

in the next world
in any case

and in this one
all the more so

no
actually

* masons are eating us (and the special ones
are mostly special immortal ones more or
less a bit doubtless naturally especially if
not just that you know we're here together
that is* but also after all anyone of those
guys of us can do this at least a little bit too
you know this and on his own

* in the sense that we're all tied
together, you and I us and you all
and everyone all together

everything is fine
everything understood
everything forbidden

as a rule

and this first and foremost

as you know perfectly well

of course
rights are not sins
some things are permitted

but how
what

now this is just totally
entirely

especially
separately
and absolutely
absolutely top secret

1981

allow me
if I may of course

of course you may
why not

why forbid it

sure you can

you can do everything

if I may
of course
why not allow it
to be prohibited

TRANSLATION FROM THE POETIC

*It's incomprehensible how one can leave it behind...
The light cold of the autumn sky
Has dissolved countless times in my blood.*

—Stanislav Kunyaev

But to put it
Simply
it's all very good here
The sun shines
And it is all so good here
so good
that there's nowhere to go
Where
yes
no
and leaving

how can people up
and leave

It's no good just doing it like that
up
and leaving

And how could anyone even
leave
here

where I feel so good

where I am so good

But no

to each his own
but for me

No

for me it's

incomprehensible

wait awhile

and maybe you can be
alive

attention
attention I
attention

and don't pay

any attention

to me at all

not under any circumstances

I implore you

just imagine
and silence between us
boys and girls

bushes

poles and moons
moons moons well
there was no war

say so

as though it was

but it was empty

it wasn't
empty

.....

... how can winter not be ...

.....

..... while moreover

.....

..... do notice

glass
possibly
once more
and through it

in thought

but with pleasure I'd

all all
flowing
thawing

bright bright bright
spring spring

and I
know

and you know what
hurry up
and get on the trolley
and go on get going
as fast as you can

yes /sorry/ no
/sorry/

yes or no

the wind went
green

/now you here/

/yes no/

yes and no

and

/does it matter/

/sometimes it seems/

and sometimes

/that yes/

it gets old

/sometimes it seems/

it does

/that no/

/sometimes it seems/

not yes

/that no/

/sometimes it seems/

and not no

/that yes/

/something/

and it was even the right time

and the day was

was

waved like a
flag

what the hell more do we need

both a sign

and a signal

sea and dark
and more so
more so
and more so
sea

So
the sea is uneasy...

Sea
don't be uneasy

I'm not sunk!

oh
you

and here you are
here

 here
and here

and like that

like you are also here

 here
that's who you are

but you you are
the fuzz off a poplar

this
is good

and also
bad

to Erik Bulatov

there

the whole wide world
without secrets

or

or this whole world
is a wide

full
whole
world secret

it's all quite interesting

seems
we might get
Thunder
in the suburbs

and even perhaps
some hail

some other time

and some other
time

time
a rainbow/

/some other

Switched on

click

And just excellent

Click click

And everything's

Zilch

Electricity

Cheerful interesting

Plus nothing is

Impossible

And just whatever you want

Just like this just

Plug in

gardens

the sun moves

higher

and higher

woods

get out of
the forest

grasses

grasses

immediately

out of the grass

and sister

and her sister

istra

lower

and lower

tell me

and the pine spoke

its pine mind

indecipherable

dark not really

not dark

to zamyatino

not to zamyatino

to go not to go no

interesting

it's hard to even
say which one is worse

managing
in the temple

holy-fooling
in the main police directorate

investigating everything
there is out there
or believing in everything
there is in here

and the private ones
have their own rights

as the public ones
have their own rights

only nobody here is too fond

of the very word
right

is it worth it
even wasting the words
on any old idiot

so many idiots
words

any idiot
is not such an idiot

but when it is to his benefit*
then he's an idiot*

and otherwise
even an idiot can have fun

* rather
that's what he thinks

butting in on another
person's rights
they wouldn't say that about you
any
idiot thinks that
this is
somehow
to his benefit

just like any other idiot just like him would

Wherein would you think
Lies
Our singularity

That we would think
Our singularity
Lies in

?

Is it

O again

O beautiful

Joyful

National

Free

Great

Mighty

in one big heap

O let the future see at least

someone left to

read and write in it

the great and mighty

Someone great

and mighty

anyway, I'll do what
I can

Though
better keep mum

Should I
say something

I think
after all

I'll say something sometime
in Russian no worse than you

I live and I see
there is no

that it's somehow
immaterial

people
live

in our very own
homeland

we live*

I keep

living

* also

but not everyone

life is

terrible

but living

is possible

it's like

it's not like you can

but because you must

life is

beautiful

it's so simple

life is beautiful

the poems of nekrasov

everything

it's not so scary

not because you must
but because now even I'm laughing

* and maybe you can't
but we got lucky

you've been given to live
could it not be enough

after all unbelievable
we were given to live

unbelievable

us
given
life

we have to prove

that destroying us
is unnecessary

so
and how will you prove it

and that you can
live

to live as the reason to live
as the reason

respectable

unrespectable

/necessary/ unnecessary/
strikethrough /underline

the cause of death
was living

the immediate cause
of death was

living in Moscow

we live
in a word

hard
all of this

and the trolley
has nothing to do with it

and what does

and also we're crying

about what
in general

and looking like this

and we sleep

and to hell with it
with the world

we'll live

we'll look
maybe even see

we'll be
we'll be

but if we won't be
we won't be

let's give it a try

let's take a look
let's take a look

we'll die
we'll die

we won't die
we won't die

that two times two
is after all
two times two

one hope

and another
hope

but not every time
two times two
two times two

and isn't it true
that this is
not true

it's dark
and who else
you are the only one who can know
this
to live
or to not

all of this all
is sparkling anyway

this world here
is light

otherwise just the edge
of the world

trolley trolley
and
not one trolley

straight ahead

further on there's only
darkness
silence
length
width

latitude and longitude

and not ours not familiar

/somehow it seems off
so far, this here longitude
how long will this go on/

it's dark there

but here
so moving
the metro
and so much of it all

and it's light

light

or else the glass
wouldn't have burst

this
only God knows

but this one man knows
God knows who

how
it is

how
it was

what it is
killing us

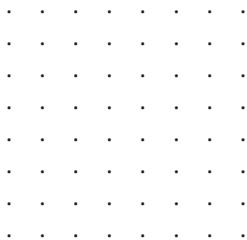
who it was
who killed him

ask
God

ask
the deceased Kostya Bogatyrev

now that's
a mystery

that's a mystery too yes
but not that
mystery



you may live

but maybe — You may leave

two
thousand words
huh?

or our dear
that one
went
weak
so that it
answers words
with words now

tanks
here and there

From the shaken Kremlin
To the walls of immobile China

you
do you all understand

and suddenly this
nonsense

they haven't read Pushkin
in shattered China

so you need a tank
like

a mobile Kremlin

Generally sure
probably right
so it is also right
sure
not so definite
but alright
none of it is
how quickly
how slippery
it's not that simple
strange as it seems
practically plain
it's fairly free
a little more possible
a little more
of what is possible
maybe
just a little bit more
but how much more
well what more can you
say

a white sail
cavorting waves
we sit on the shore
await fairer weather
the dog is barking
it'll happen someday
the bureau writing
paper enduring
when the Lord looks away
Limonov will say
while I will—silence
let Pushkin write it
Pushkin
will write it all off
Denis Davydov
David Samoilov
lesson to others
father to soldiers
neighbor called neighbor
the sister of the genius
(the sister of the genius
Maria Pavlovna Chekhov)
you'll want elections
not fish nor fowl

not hard to say
so soon forgotten
the lofty Brodsky
the gorgeous Kushner
a snatch of Sochi
a snatch
of who knows what
Moscow the capitol
the apple of the eye
the hand of destiny
the nurse and matron
the defense of the peace
the foam on the beer
the crown of wisdom
Volga the car
Pravda the paper
whatever you need
cabbages onions
under construction
hold on a minute
but then of course
there's only hope
for who knows what
God give me speed

fathers and sons
Agatha Christie
Barclay de Tolly
Frigate Pallada
said the gold
already putrefying
made without hands
what else could you want
a regular Soviet
Soviet-Russian
dictionary
go without speaking
Koschei the Deathless
your humble servant
Impoverished Hungry
Budyonny Gorky
prominent scientist
great helmsman
and the most brilliant
architect
the prospect project
the summit subject
from this we see
the favorite city

the joyful wind
a child's balloon
cranberry punch
the friends Belinsky
and Baratynsky
who's this I see
the first I've heard
I'm very sorry
I'm very sorry
totally
but still just please
know to be grateful
teach the teachers
find good solutions
see for yourselves
look with your eyes
not with your ears
make ends meet
play on words
only
we do not have it
you can believe it
I will and gladly
the will

is stronger than the whip
And all of Europe
And all of Europe
not up to his
idiot editor
director predator
director idiot
predator editor
he is all something
some would have argued
to hell with him
he is all somehow
like me
while I'd been thinking
just think of it
the paths and destinies
embracing life
stronger than death
for those at sea
for what we fought for
people live everywhere
I thought so too
like it is morning
the same light rain

not really raining
but just
of course
of course it's lovely
of course it'd be lovely to
drop into this forest
we'll bring a birch
sure and a shrub
the road goes here
leads there and back
if not entirely
peace and freedom
it's hardly freedom
but some
some kind of peace
and that is better
it's all the same
this that the other
it's not important
a little better
I live I see
I live
can it be
that this is possible

and what is wrong with that
to go to seed
I can't see why
and not
it's not your business
go off the rails
something is going on
but what
something is going on
that is what's going on
don't even say that
coming to compromise
going to good use
going on principle
you go on principle
let's go
oh but let's not
then we'll remember
and write it
down then
the game is over
they thought of everything
then an apartment
to keep you quiet

it never happened
let's start over
in the beginning
it was just funny
a funny place
not much to laugh at
really there's nothing
there's nothing funny
not funny, no
but sometimes yes
yes I do think so
and don't you think so
that is so interesting
horribly scary
and absolutely
for no good reason
got used to the thought
old Russian spirit
for some odd reason
hitting a sore spot
at the very least
a silent night
the concert's over
young man

not now tomorrow
what in God's name
the eighth of march
whoever they need
whatever year
then
we felt like it
there was this
summer attempt
the subsequent
and then another
and yet another
at least we're home
it could be worse
the people live
no G no B
to sigh and ah
begin and end
quietly
something's forever
something is missing
it's nothing odious
since it's obvious
regarding the fact that

nothing's forever
and at the same time
nothing's new
all time is time
now's not the time
all in its own time
the feeling that
the feeling that
that they'll...
what does that have to do with it
and in reality
the real real matter
where is the matter
of it
another matter
the matter's closed
not on that matter
not what's the matter
no, it's no matter
not that Nekrasov
don't fight the bosses
start out with that
not us not being
nothing to sneeze at

no piece of cake
'til proven guilty
law unto oneself
no Kremlin ever sleepless
what else could you say
that's what I'll say
don't pray to no God
so tell me mister
I thought so too
they started doubting
or else let's have it
while there's the weather
so long as summer
hasn't thought better of it
but can it be possible
but could it be prohibited
and we had tilled the soil
was it all bad then
Addis Ababa
Odessa mama
freedom of speech*
praise be to God
it's come

it's come out
rainy out
so be it
so-so

do you hear
how the matter turned out
drip drip drip

so what
the same old rain
the good old rain
potato rain

* (freedom of speech is
the betrayal of the homeland)

POEM ABOUT EVERYTHING

This means this
None means none
Clear means clear
Exactly that means exactly that
If you need it you need it
Have to means have to
What

THE LETTER T

What's on the building?

The letter

T

And what's in the building?

Tele vision

It shows

Theater

A play

A turret-tower

Who lives in the tower?

Who lives in the tower

Who lives in the tower

Whoever lives in the tower

Lives in the tower

That's life

power
intellect
honor
conscience
our power
our intellect
our honor
our conscience
is the power
is the intellect
is the honor
is the conscience
this is our power
this is our intellect
this is our honor
and this is our conscience
oh of this our era

POEM
COULD BE ABOUT A CAT
COULD BE ABOUT A DOG

Autumn
Crossed the crosswalk
And settled in the center
Could be a dog
Could be a cat
And sits
And doesn't budge

yes

no

then let's

let's just

think like that

not think
at all

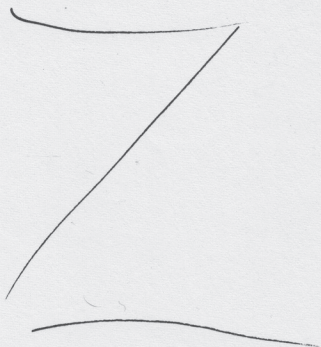
from *100 POEMS*

Sometimes it's like this > and so on >

Somehow > And somehow it's / like / how it should be

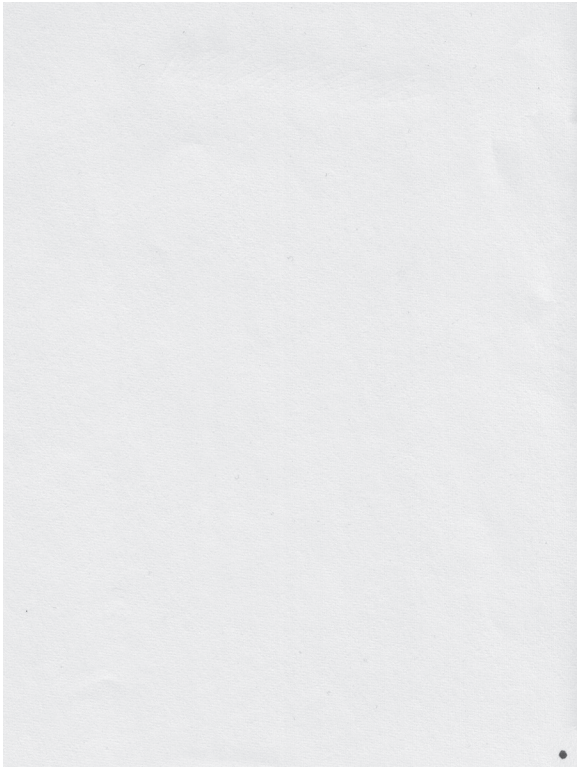
Вот как иногда

и так далее



Как-то

И как-то так
как и надо



.night.

What's interesting

.НОЧЬ.

Что интересно

In Russian, *budet* is the third-person singular future tense of the verb “to be”—thus literally, “[it] will be.” This single-word phrase is used colloquially as a statement of comfort and reassurance, meaning something like “don’t fret” or “it’ll be okay.”

будет

.

however

• однако

Nekrasov plays with the double meaning of the word *nichego*, which literally means “nothing” but also has the colloquial meaning “it doesn’t matter,” “it’s nothing,” and is often used as a consolation, as in “it’s alright,” especially when doubled.

НИЧЕГО

[over] there
[it's like] this

Nekrasov uses the visual resemblance between these two words to highlight both geographical and cultural isolation with “over there.”

TAM
TAK

(in the circle)

GOD . HERE

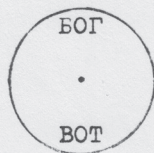
(below the circle)

But it's not God / Here-here //

But God's / Bigger

The two words inside the circle convey the sense that God is about to appear (or is present), which is subsequently explained away.

The word *vot* can mean, variously, simply “here,” “right here,” “now,” and “there,” as in “there you go.”



Только это не Бог

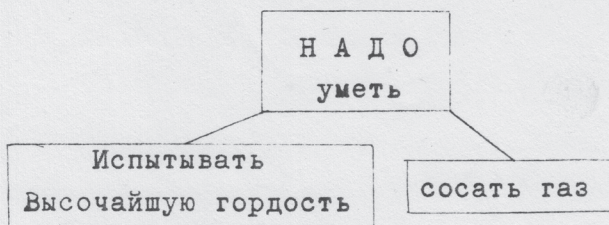
Вот-вот

А Бог
Больше

top: ONE MUST / be able to

left: Possess Ultimate pride

right: suck gas



nobody

rain

////// /НИКТО

ДОЖДИК/

from *DOICHE BUKH*

illumination
my little ones

entire streets
filled with people
apparently germans
to all appearances
so here it appears here that
every day
night
and day too
is victory day
sort of

at the very least

how is that

it just is
they managed to manage

ran off
toward where
they needed to go

some while back
whatever year they needed to
they found the right move
the means
were able to do something so
that the germans
all of them all of them all in civilian clothes
and you can't say
they were pretending

but they did it so
they did it so that
whoever was killed
for nothing
for nothing and you couldn't say
it was for nothing
it was for this for this
the main thing
and whoever was killed

for nothing
not for what
they thought
realized

but here
heaven

ja ja ja ja ja
nein nein nein
we don't need that

you shouldn't say that
it's heaven
not heaven
it's all wrong

it's all comparatively relative yes
I know I know
relative
but relative to us
compared to us
heaven
comparative and relative heaven

and it's right
I'm saying
comparatively
and relatively right

who?
j-I-a?

I — no
nein
in German I no
and I don't speak
but I speak look only
not in German

I

don't understand

Take us riding on your tractor, Petrusha
/was a popular song once/

The price of any good produced at the kolkhoz
includes the cost of taking the tractor on a vodka-run
/Ye. T. Gaidar/

valds 'n' felds
felds 'n' valds

doitchland
and doitchland
and fairly various doitchlands
too

and petrusha with his tractor
what is petrusha doing here on the grass
gunterusha and walterusha
are here too
listen well they're our people our guys
soul mates

doitch doitch
not top-dotch
not top-notch doitch
das ist doitch now, doitch
but aber here this is ist ost
ost doitchland*

that is we have the same thing
the same case
when how do you say it now

not simply simply everything
but everything is
very simple

* and naturally soc-

the debates are already on
who was
worse

hitler stalin here
stalin hitler there
stalin hitler here
 there
hitler is stalin then
stalin is hitler now
and at the same time
hitler is stalin now
stalin is hitler back then
and even like
stalin ist hitler dort
the notorious stalinist hitler
hitler ist stalin hier
the distinguished hitlerite stalin
stalin hitler hier
stalin dort
blast it

hitler
is stalin yesterday

but stalin
that bastard
is hitler today
stalin and hitler and stalins and hitlers
boots brains hitlers are stalins
yesterday
today
and tomorrow

villains they are villains among villains
but we are not villains we have villains
but our villains are not called villains

who was worse
but who'll
tell us
now
who was worse

we'd better take bets on who has it
worse

what're the
stakes
staking the future
staking the claim

that we here
have it worse
took on more

who lived worse
well probably we
lived worse
who are the victims
we are again
more

/though we know
the poles in poland
took it even harder
all because of that same
stalin-hitler-hyper-hitler-ost-vest-
dzhugashvili-schicklgruber-politics/

and we're the ones who won
woeful woeful

really
and

but
how

for every one
of theirs
of our own
three
if not four
laid down
and lucky if two
stayed alive
from every hundred
from start
to finish
all those spent in fighting
so
then how the hell is that victory

victory victory victory victory
victory victory victory victory
victory victory victory victory
victory victory victory victory
victory victory victory victor yes
victory victory victory victory
victory victory victory victory
victory victory victory victory

victory victory victory victory yes
victory victory victory victory
victory victory victory victory
victory victory victory victory
5 years
10 years
15
and 20
and 25 years
and 30
and 40
and soon 55 years
victory victory victory victor-

to
the last

yes after that
what for victory is war
yes it's
base
if
it was for something
then
only for this
that

it
not exist

this kind of victory already
seems
o woe to ye
it'll be worse
and dearer it could well
be
and harder
a different kind now
and defeats

no
but we now
in war we
know victory in war we were victorious
well maybe
but

to wreck
the world

like that
what they're the ones who wrecked us

my dears

just
take a look

she was no?

but became

not the homeland of war
but the heart of europe

terrible worldwide
she was

she became

general

brotherly

became like your own brother
a german

kinda

you wouldn't say that it's
entirely

necessarily

like your own brother

 a neighbor an ordinary neighbor

only if there's

room

which one should we

that is more importantly

which side

would it be better

to root in

toward humanity

after all

if we hope to root in again

if we hope

to venture as if
as in times of yore

if so
after all
it's here

somewhere
in the neighborhood

danke shon
what danke shon
they gave him some chow but he's
one of us
so what'd he do
he chowed down
and chewed good
and took off
and took off and took off

oh how insulted he's been
oh how
scorned he's been here
horribly
horribly

well come on give
come on give him
some more to try
something more

insulting
scorning
to chew
some kind of really tasty chow
so he can get insulted and scorned
so he can grin and bear it
scorn and take a load off

for this
this familiar one here
so insulted
and even scorned
in all of his most Soviet very brightest
best Russian feelings

1990/91

from *I LIVE I SEE*

(LIANOZOVO

is a word

another word

and

CONCEPTUALISM

and what are these

lies for

lies

and lies

most shameless

lies after lies)

(1988)

to Veisberg

there she is
there she is

look at that
water

teasing

like look at it
eyeing it
troubles it
then the water trembles
starts
refracting
straightens
swaying
playing

this way and that way
still and not still
trembling and not trembling
and you know
the youths are speculating

slut
not a slut
slut
not a slut
slut

in the morning

in the morning

in the morning in the morning

in the morning in the morning

in the morning in the morning we

are on the grass

the grass the grass

the grass the grass the grass the grass

But at night-
at night-
No-thing

Dark dark
Black black

Dark and nigh

nigh
nigh

nigh on

Night and night

don't oh boy Beuys
but if you gotta fret
forget Beuys, get

fed up with gross Groys

*

Boris Groys

Boris Groys
& His Master's Voice

Joseph B.
Backstein
plus B. (Boris) Groys
ist nicht Joseph Beuys
O nein nein nein nein
no no no no
no
way

I
like this like this

like this
like this

like this

like this

like this
but what's
the point

II
like this
like this

like this

like this like this

it's
it's

it's

it's it's

Like this.
Good.

Good.
Like this.

- 1) Is it like this?
- 2) Is it good?

to Kabakov

III
and like this
like this +

like this and like this
like this ++

+ like this
in real life

++ like this
in the text

where authority
ends

audacity
begins

the audacity
and the agonized audacity

it's suffocating here too

and here

I better take off

the artistic community

groveling

you are community

too

totally

although there are

singularities

now everyone
has recognized these guys

the first Prigov
Kabakov

the other Kabakov
Prigov

after Konstantinov

first of all

but first of all
is first of all

and second of all

third
and fourth of all
fifth and sixth of all
seventh
eighth

and that's it

and all thoughts too

and if

put in two words

ninth of all

tenth

Doichland doichland
oober alles

so what

no no
just think

you never know

stranger things have happened

aber

aber but
boris groys
oober alles

now this is just
entshuldigen meer for pleees.

(which means we're not the ones for peace

but do excuse me)

to Bulatov

to open
you opened

the window

and there's the world

someone

who's that

*and who is
that
windowsill*

a classic

entitled

Soviet power

and untitled

and the point's not the title

to A. Ponomarev

rough waves
a brutal cascade cast
by our own dear
forbidden zone

hey
forbidden

aye-aye
forbidden

boatswain on the forecastle

aye-aye
a boatswain on the forecastle

forecastles on the boatswain

aye-aye aye-aye
also forecastles on the boatswain

and art
this art
what is it
it is type
or kind
or genre

or it is leonid brezh
oh
no it's not
leonid bazhanov

the marginalized
underground
is the avant-garde
or something

and as it turns out

the underground
is counterculture

counterculture
gets integrated

it's so intertextual
in Saint Petersburg

they lie though
and really they're always lying

and the underground
isn't marginalized

(and if it were marginalized
it wouldn't be the avant-garde)
and it's not the underground
and the culture's not counter
at all
and my dear friends
my dear friends
it won't integrate

won't integrate
just won't integrate:
and soon it will have been forty years
jack shit*
is integrated

* Prigov

now he's integrating

cooperating

with some other
friend of his
like Boris Groys

so
you authority

lap
on the wrist

so to say

and so to say

no filth
this here—
this here—
is not subject to your authority

you were wrong
about that

UNCOLLECTED POEMS

1990 – 2009

(from the website of Alexander Levin)

no
but no
but it's good
that we're here
I would say

I would say
no
but there's this
that feeling that
you're

somewhere

well and well and
well and well and
well and well and
and well

well and well and
well and well and
well and well and
and fine

well but
well but
well but
and
like

the sun shone

the sun shines

/reality/

and the forest

/is a kind of reality/

but if not

but if not

then no

...and again some bastard
once again remains
completely confident
which no bastard should ever be
under any circumstances

heat

sloth

the return of heat
and sloth

life

and the continuation of life

and so what

huh what is there

what's there
was there
beyond those pines

oh there
oh god

well everything

there was everything

there

but no matter what was
there

for instance we were

what kind of repressions could there have been
if now everything's in
equilibrium

there were no repressions
glory to russia

some are for russia
and some are for
that profession

as long as
it's
for the one
who had it coming

as long as it's him
end of story

and don't start spats

don't air dirty linen
and don't split we say
the ranks
of society

of russian society

russia

oh

what russia

ah how russia

and oh

so

and god

god

god

if

god

and if not so

many years almost a century

of violence

and glorified violence

then

the sentence for it should be shorter—who told you
that? where where'd you get that from? where
are you from?

where you are from that's where we're from

that's where we draw our conclusions from

June 98

what a turn of events

what service

what business

what prestige

and what a surprise

what a

what a

surprise

surprise

crisis

and this one here

who's this
this is that intellect

intellect vs. fact

and intellect vs. fact
no
doesn't help

to get
on a bike

have a look
at the world

where'd it all go
there
where
but
it all
didn't go
anywhere

for now I'm just trying
to ride this thing
here and there

bastards

I have the feeling
that bastards*

are still bastards
bastards now
and bastard and bastard
and
again
bastards
and more
bastards
just honestly
bastards

* and their numbers
have grown

Gastronome

...

Gazprom

...

The Russian Lord God

...

Rigor

...

Rule of Law

...

All Rigor

...

In Dependence On One

...

In the Dependence of Everything On One

...

In Independence

...

Not Independently Of

...

Rule of Law

...

Rigorously in Accordance

(a kind of bouts-rimés)

of course

of course

of course

of course

of course

but southern clouds

every one of them

warm water

only the wave's a bit knavish

how it whopped in

there it is

it's

from anapa

op op op op op op

along the coast

along the whole

stretch

excluding abkhazia

georgia

and asia minor

including europe

ukraine and and

well and not counting russia

beating
a real good beating
for stealing
only only not beating the guy
who did the stealing
but again beating the guy
who stood gaping

is this what matters
comrades

well and
well and
well and
well and
well and
well and
well and

and how

whatever

I think

like
most likely yeah

but like most likely
no

like no
the sky shouldn't look like that

so communist
will now mean
democratic

so soviet
will now
no longer mean
excellent

but it'll
mean russian

oy eff

good day

good

day
came and went

without any great
difficulties

didn't do anything
didn't finish anything

climbed up a tree
then climbed down a tree

stop

who understands

it happens

summer

for sure

then of course

but there's no

summer

instead there is

autumn

okay

okay

okay

okay

okay

mania

phobia

mayory

mafia

well it's not my

evil

no evil

of mine

but of the time

just idiots

that's what we thought
we thought
we're just
playing the part

idiots we are idiots

really idiots

the stars

I'm serious

on montmartre
sur le montmartre

no
this is sung
la
sol fa si la sol
fa do si la sol

and that's it
and it's all the same
only now
it's with us
and we too
with all our might

do
si la mi do si
la sol fa si la
sol fa do si la sol

on montmartre

sur le montmartre

la montmartre

sacre coeur

l'escale

le soleil

and shadow

what shadow is here

I don't know

Paris

Can you imagine

oh

but this

this is it here

that

place

where

the sun is

at about

that very spot up

in the sky there

up in the pine

in the neighbors'

therefore

spring
is in the air

so you're right
strange though it may appear

but in the meanwhile it's life

how's life

well you know how it goes

however it seems

it goes on

or

it goes back and forth

sometimes it's

like life

sometimes it's like

what kind of life is this

this is just vile

how many forests

some many

so how many hundreds of

lines

and how many hundreds of miles

of pines

and not just that

also birches

and it was dark
but light

strange

but it was

and it was
light
but dark

it got
hard

the frost
came down

and many other
circumstances

and loud
unpleasant shrieks

like for example
“you pig”

what’s going on here

and really what’s
going on here

life
yes life

which is
life and life

and life
which is
a kind of
now even

sudden thing

apparently you can live
but how exactly
might you be able to
but for whom
for me as I am
or not only me

or not only just me
and not only

think think

okay

okay
I'm thinking, I'm thinking

spring

is approaching
and imminently

the premonition
I think
of spring
I would say
may be
even better
than spring itself

snow still

no
well fine
only here
only wind
clinging on
in vain
clings on in vain
snow clings
in vain
clings
to the earth

the police

with an initiative*

one two three

one

one

stop

one two

* the police
with their initiative
“Police Against Crime”

Lord God Wouldn't mind a nap

(and so what)

year

month

day

last name

name

patronymic

all

still

nothing

no

it's good

a wood
is good

and this place
and instead
snow

it's good

but to be honest
it's cold

they didn't even
change the name

well of course
these guys
already changed the name

made us laugh

between those and these
it's not exactly like
what's the difference

but it's like
we have to live
between those and these

don't make things up
but
and
I'm not making things up
but
I want to say
I want to say
the sense
the sense
that
the sense that
that really
that there really is
a reality

and now you are here too

yes
and I am here too

and now it is ten to ten

what milk

the cat left
on what's called "principle"

but came back
for practical reasons

1.

a cloud

a cloud just a cloud
right

but still

what

oh

a cloud

(this
came up)

2.

how things stand

how things stand

clearly
understood
how things stand here

but properly speaking

things don't stand around here
pines stand
around
us

clouds stand
around
pines

as the pines
go

so the clouds
go

here

but there

but
that's

both here
and there

how things stand
both here and there

3.

why are there clouds
why

what's
the deal

why

clouds

what's going on there

what's going on over there

during the day

why are the clouds

going along like that

acting like that

as if

like

as if they were

where people lived

instead of moscow

or malakhovka

there

as though

there

were here

4.

*O Weather,
The Weather
When it doesn't whip us...*
—Sokovnin

clouds
whatever you are

wherever you're from

from here
from where

it is lovely and dear
to behold it

like this

to face weather head on

after which
in the weather's wake

could this
be the Lord God

in profile

as though

but nevertheless
the sky
how
not to profit from

sunset midnight sunrise
midday
sunset
could was have been

could have

from there so it seems
clouds clouds

but just where are they from

and under them here
underneath them
this
wretched weather

what weather

and the weather the weather yes
wretched

in the third millennium
in the third millennium
we will meet
if it chances to happen
in the third millennium
that's where we'll chat
there
there
there
there
later

in the next
or another world

but if not
then
in the fourth
millennium

on the first thursday
of the fourth millennium

(assuming
the preservation
of our chronometric system)

to me your
windy winds
capital city
metro
new party and government

metro
metro in this direction

this direction's empty

or not the right
direction

Vladimir Vladimirovich\1 and
what seem like entirely reasonable speeches\2

1/ separately

2/ separately

green
but cold
but cold
but green
but cold
but it's green
it's cold
but it's still cold
cold
but it's
green green

you must do good
and not do bad

what is good
it's simple
it's what people do

but bad
it's like
it's like what we do

and one musn't do bad
one must do good

but the main thing
you can't do
you can't
gloat

and again
again
how to be
how
to be
like people

no other way out

configuration	-----	vertical
furbelow	-----	truncheon

/ GENERAL SITUATIONAL CONFIGURATION /

advertising
advertising
advertising
advertising
advertising
advertising
advertising
advertising

but what concern of mine
but what concern of mine
but what concern of mine
my concern is little

one thing
then another

over
and over
this is
our
everything all
our own
russian
slipshod
but unshakable

well
well how much can we take

what's here
is what's here

stop

don't say it

don't say
it's a shithole

a shithole

but on the flip side
a nose

the whole horror of it

and here you are

and here it is

and there it goes

and here it is here

and right here it's

like dyr bul shchyl

was was

suddenly

smack

shh

one

two

balls

benz

and kaputt

so what

it's still not so bad

could be worse

and may be

and maybe

it will

this is very
just very very
this is very
just very smart

generally

generally

but

there's still something else too

I'll say it again

the battle between thieves
and suck-ups

and I'll say it again
in the battle between thieves
and suck-ups
I'll say it again
friendship won

Deputation,
Reputation...
Occupation...

—A.P. Chekhov

Declaration
Decoration
Deformation
Corruption

And provocation—

operation
“Democracy”:

Democracy—
Democracy,

Abomination—
Abomination;

Information—
Information,

Pornography—
Pornography.

the effect

the effect
is evident

I went to school
school went well

went through school
and went on my way

went down the path winding
went by

went all through the assigned path
and wound up
like alley oop oop oop—
on
the path we were led down
understood
clearly

so forgive me
forgive me

it seems that we've wandered down
this very path

already
probably more than once

and poorly

I live

and I look and I see

jungles and jungles

“...The production* of the simplest values—God, Russia, family, property, the state.” “It is really high time to bury the intelligentsia.”

(Maxim Sokolov, *Izvestia*)

“But the problem lies in the fact that neither the army nor the church is capable of carrying out its mission within the parameters of an open society: it’s not working. The church cannot replace its promises of eternal life with routine activities, and the Army, when tolerated merely as a necessary evil, like the sale of alcohol, cannot train men to be capable of doing battle and dying for their country.”

(*Izvestia* 27.4., Maxim Sokolov, “Two vestiges of primitive savagery.” / Or: “Doing battle and dying for the homeland like Maxim Sokolov.” V.N./)

maxim sokolov
and along with him sabaoth
in my dream

you know what
don't mess with god's head
for any reason

all the more
excuse me
don't grab anyone
by the beard
by something else
and drag them off somewhere
to die for their country
for someone
though it would seem for us
with you
it wouldn't be worth it

it's just ungracious

for god's sake

* (The production of God—
that's something.
It's a good place where God is produced
well and abundantly.)

chasing phenomena
with their definitions

I
declare

I
refuse
to chase phenomena
with their definitions

russian russian
doesn't mean murderous and means murderous

we are arguing
over this very question

to Bulatov

I II

III

IV V

VI

and then add VII VIII IX

and X

/it's all in your head/

XI

and you must hope

/you must hope/

as XII is here

so is I

hope
for twelve - zero
zero - one

/but still no
you have to know how/

and no
this is no telephone
number

no
and june
knows how

the place
a forest
and on that
end
a scarp
a swell
scarp
not even a scarp
a slope
sometimes quite cozy
but sometimes look
with a single pine
two

well
three

one and a half tops

how to be

how to be

somehow

some way

but to be

it won't do

not to be

.....

: a little rain and a little rain:
: and a little rain and a little rain:
: and a little rain and a little rain:
: and a little rain and a little rain:
: and a little rain and a little rain:
: and a little rain and a little rain:
: and a little rain and a little rain and also :
..... a little rain and a little rain:

: :
: :
: :
: :
: :
.....

somehow

and so

so

both ways

so and so

the little boa looks

and looks

far

wide

within

deep down

the mysterio-intestinal tract

fall down

they fell down

leaf

leaf

leaf

leaf

leaf

flitting

leaves

onto grass

so now

the grass

look at it

it's where it always was

and it's nearly the same

nearly clean air
and here you will
feel
well
how to put it
very
nearly
like a holy man
in the next world

here you go
it's drawn over
covered
overwhelmed
overcast

and either this
or that

either sky
or swamp

in the sky a proper full
weightless
you wouldn't say
woebegone moon
moon and moon
and you wouldn't say
and clearly

it's clear
but then again

it's also curious

like
when it leaps
out suddenly
as from behind who knows what
from Neskuchny Garden
right in front of
Sparrow Hill
against a background of us
ugh dust
you hang on
hang on

sixth grade
started
you can't fly across
water
hold on
the dressed ones went off
some people own
so many sleeves

who's got
this kind of weather

what clouds
are these

don't pay
attention

and don't pay

and what a sky
and what everything

and what
was
and what
is

gentlemen
oh gentlemen gentlemen

the whole problem lies in the fact that
gentlemen
we did not entirely
jibe with you
and don't jibe
oh no

oh no
and nor will we jibe

sadness

sadness

sadness

and literature is art

/some kind of sadness

sadness and sadness

and what kind of

art is literature/

and sadness

I have to say

and this sadness is

of no particularly high quality

it should also be said

the dough

*was fed through the device
and everything fell into place*

—Igor Kholin

regarding the heavens
heavens heavens
always the same ones it isn't necessary

but as for miracles*
naturally
if none turned up

but there turned up a certain
indeed a certain
misunderstanding

it
was cleared up
not right away
well not right away not right away
but it was cleared up

cleared up again

and then again

and it was cleared up

and everything

here

fell back into place

* still the mirakal

was a mirakal

what does that mean

well that

means everything

/but anyway anyway

I went there

there's nothing there

isn't that something

but now
what do I know

I know
what I know

you know it too

you and I
know

that
it's all stupidities
and trifles

well
almost all of it is

covered in snow
I think everything
is
covered in snow
everything
I think
everything is

on the very very
shores of misery

the dog howls
the dog howls
the dog howls
not at anyone
just because

the dog feels like howling
and so the dog howls

the dog howls
of its own accord

and what's more
the dog howls
the dog lies

so the dog feels like howling

well and finally

the dog howls

and well whom
does the dog have in mind

we'll put it like this

the ecology

moscow

my mouth shut

all

measuring

miracles

city all all soaked

white
white
white leaves

cascaded from the sky
cascaded

and meanwhile
all remained
on the tree
everywhere
where

just
yesterday
they were all
here

and all
all

all went off

things

spring

no
and so far
you wouldn't say so

but in general of course

but in general no

it's so wet
what's wet
is wet
it's wet
it's wet
it's wet
it's wet

but in
terms of
when can you say
it's wet
you could say
now's the time

at least

I think so

but then
when
the water
is at its most stable
then it is winter

1

I live

we'll see what happens later

2

I live

we'll see what happens later

|*I live* *live!*

it gets worse later|

...

and well to hell with it

(view
from above)

could you
I mean you
would you consider it
possible that we could get
that people get
so soaked

I for one
for example
just cannot
get used to it

honor
glory
honor and glory

again

the words

honor
glory

would that it were

shame
conscience

would that they would come first

but
there's none of it

and well and what is this
and is it good?

no
it is not good
it is yevtushenko

It was good there

It was quiet there

—Levin

calm

calm

calm

so your

own

there's this

sea of trees here

and a sea

of water

one could say*

sea

because after all

the views are truly

of a lot of water

although in snow form

all still to come

in the long view

in the sunshine

a flurry

from here you can even see

that it's rough

snow**

a little hill

from afar

like

from far away

or from a ways

like this and like that

and this

any old way

but behind it

a river

in view of
and in review of to skew lyrical
the perspective

the perspective
facing down

* and it stands almost entirely empty
and these here
and these here
the thujas

** there's no time
and here there isn't even any
time

and that's just what they said
these
ladies
said to another
lady they said
from the changing room

vernal
nonvernal

fortune
nonfortune

balance
imbalance

not quite in
balance

interaction

equinox

and nonequinox

news

if there's
news

no
news
but not *Izvestia*

in a state
in no state
in any case

no joy

joy

not saying

no information

no
there is information

can't say

no
and can't not say

to moscow
to moscow
to moscow
to moscow

well
but
but not everyone

not everyone
not everyone

not everyone
at once

chasing some clouds

because of the fact that
and what's
wrong
with that

wander

aim

less

my whole life

well come

on aim

you know where

you know

I know where

towards the south

a subtle matter
a house is burning

it looks like
there might be a house burning over there

like over there
there's a house burning

and so
and what
does this tell us

what it tells us

a good house
burns well

midnight
the feeling
a very strange one
well to hell with him
to hell with all of it
with what
with whom
vsevolod nikolayevich*

with this vsevolod nikolayevich
him first
of all

he will be fine

it's not so scary

sad

this isn't sadness

but that's not the thing to say

not the thing

not the thing not the way

to say

but it was

said

and that's that

* with vsevolod nikolayevich

not very young

entirely

not young at all

Oh how many wonderful discoveries for us

“You don’t want to say anything else”

“I don’t want to say anything else”

it's topsy-turvy
but there's something happy
there's dignity even
in the idea
that not all the world's monsters
are ours

at sunrise
walking away from duty
sleep now

this

and what else

commit

commit
to living on this earth
to be

to be grateful

and not to lose your mind in fat times

THOU SHALT NOT KILL / DO NOT KILL THE FAITHFUL MAN

indian
judean
after all
all say
do not kill
in the sense of
and don't kill anyone
neither your own
nor anyone

no
but
that's the idea
in principle

and in principle
some people
and really quite a lot of
people
it turns out

have to be persuaded
persuaded
prevailed upon
you shouldn't now after all
you shouldn't after all
go around killing
other people
you shouldn't kill
people

people
shouldn't be killed

so now a hundred times already
a hundred maybe a hundred
but anyway how many
times already
have I
said it

I agree to august

there is still not enough
still
lots of stuff there

human speech
is
cat hair

what does it mean
how can it be
how can it be possible to write like that?

it's possible

it's possible
to write like that
it's possible
to write like that

like that
like that possible
to write
to write write
write write write and write like that

well and what do you know
and spring's here

and high
time

and all may

and the rest of it
isn't that interesting

and like you would help
God

and me
what about me

I do
what I can

see
I'm lighting a candle

and there she is
there she is water
and not the local kind
shaggy ice
but the heavenly
drip drip like
drop drop
warm
hold up
you doers
hold on
it's warm
water
at least
not icy

and fell from the sky
not snow
but rain

so I let my soul go

let it go
and I'll go

it'll get dry now

then they
we
now you

hop out
hopscotch

the classics

which
and which
grade
fifth
sixth seventh grades

and I went out
walking

now what time is it
what is it now
oh nothing

and anyway school's out

*The devil'd take them all
and thrash them*

—A.P. Chekhov

the devil thrashed
ghastly cold

darkness

glory

hardly
proper
to call this
glory

yes
but it takes hold somehow

and
this

like it's taken from rabin
takes hold

you

thrashes through

hey oh city of city of moscow
hot damn where's the where's the where's
the tram

two separate things

saturday night

and the dentist

I see as the sun purpleal
sets off to the sea turturbulent
natural
and cultured
literatured
the sea
the sea
a searemonial

 pines
are as pines

but with us everything
 is everything with us

we ourselves
are everything
and we are ourselves
everything
we know
we know
everything
we know
everything

and if we laugh
we are
laughing
rather seriously

a day rain
a day what
a day heat
a day how
a day weather
a day later
then a day
gale

that in these thousands upon legions
you won't find a single dead leaf
alas alack
to hell and back
a mass
a mass of individual cases

everyone knows,

the sea
laughed

and with good reason

there was one

what was it

there is one

there is eternal joy through the leaves

some flying
and some crawling stormclouds
climb

but also
there's flourishing stormclouds

some nearest
and some furthest

some future
and some former stormclouds

here
 some are a bit further up

and some a bit lower
even
a bit deeper

and some a little bit worse
if you please
and some a little bit better

some just completely

and in any case
in any case
anyway

no doubt they're
our stormclouds

no outsiders
here

what's over there
emptiness

what's over here

null

this

knoll

but what's over there
but what's over there

over there

in any event
over there too
there is something

the sun setting
so what
it's a spellbinding spectacle

but if
every time
it were just a bit more
behind schedule

and more northerly
and just a little bit more
bit by bit
ever northerly
sunset shifting
when
and what's more
and anyway what's this all for
what is it coming to
and will it to anything
ever again

it's unknown
this time around

every
this time around

1. Imprinted it
2. Printed it out

Lake Cloud
 more like
cloud lake

What malice could possibly be here
It would seem
Why mention shame

\top
Cloud
Bottom
Lake\

\Toward there
There
There and there\

Yes

It is necessary

but

It all needs to be completely different

There was talk of
A man who looked like a prosecutor
But no talk of a prosecutor who looked like a man
If there's nothing to speak of there's nothing to say

That's life
Or that's how it seems
And mountains like real mountains

Lake this means it feels everything
the weather every scrap here for you here
This Tibet no Tibet
This is that you \none of \this
\Or else everything is just for you and all would be
for you

Quiet little mountains hills Máchov mountains Pushkin's
villages

It's not a public toilet,
It's the people's toilet.

Sky
Cloud
\Thanks
So much\
\It wasn't bad\

Sun air and water
And pineneedles
And Màcha

Màcha
\what they call the spirit\

/let's
and let's us go to
Minsk too
Where every building
Is in place
All over all over/

/just clouds and clouds
Abracloudabra

Yes Zlata Praha

Yes

Oh Yes/

Abracloudabra

And baroque and

Brothers

Baroque for us with us

Baroque

And over there there there

Right there

There

There

Vltava

\And overall\

\And what makes us not Czech\

\This check and that check and that check\

\and on this topic

it's this and that

From hump to hump
From hump to hump

Well aren't you a*
Place

And so it all goes
And the pines also

* Czech place

\not exactly
like the fatherland*

\Honestly
Clearly česke sklo\
As much as would fit\ \

* And really
There was only one
War for the Fatherland

\or there were...\

Snap
And snipped out
And snap snap
And scrubbed out

in a snap

And in a snap
It's like
They never were

O brothers
O children
These virtues of yours
Not so many in me
So many years in me
And
What do you want from me

Stop
Stop
Stop
Who here

Looks like everyone more than everyone else

Looks like everyone more than everyone else
Seva

D'you hear
It's dark
D'you hear
It's dark
To live
Just can't be
may be
No
maybe

Sooner or later it'll peek out from the branches

Sooner or later it'll come out into the open

There's this thing

There's this this

There's such a place

\as\ The world

As for the new here it is there you have it
it'll burn up like calories
While those hideous cities will stay just the way
they are

When it's not bloodthirsty, socialism can be quite cozy.

Socialism or death. Why pick when you can have both.

Roofs roofs roofs roofs shoo shoo

So what

What's the reason they turn out like that

Turns out it's architecture

But here it's not right no not these they're not the
right ones

Try what you will
But you can't do anything
Five six stories
Here's the window
There's light
here

Corner house

And how many years will it last
No
How many I don't know

So thank God
It came back to you

Oy
Two-fold

So I'll die so I'll die
But I'll die
Right
Here
On the corner

then

and now

the writer

the waiter

writes

waits

the reader

the sneezer

reads

teevees

Oh finally

Oh finally

Oh finally

Finally—

oh

And it's final

The light at the end of the tunnel

(and you said it was just a metaphor)

Gerald Janecek

CONTACTS WITH VSEVOLOD NEKRASOV

My first contact with Vsevolod Nekrasov came indirectly through Konstantin Kuzminsky in 1980 when he introduced me to the monumental album *Apollon-77* which he had co-edited with Mikhail Shemiakin.* It contained a selection of Nekrasov poems that immediately drew my attention by their unusual poetics. I therefore put Nekrasov on my list of poets to investigate on my next visit to the USSR, which occurred in 1983. Although my official research topic was visual effects in Russian Futurist poetry, my unofficial agenda was to make contact with as many poets on my list as possible, so as to further investigate their work and its avant-garde aspects. I don't recall the precise channel of our initial contact, but in that summer I visited him several times at his apartment. He was unusually nervous about our meetings and warned me never to call him from my hotel. Instead, we typically made an appointment for my next visit at the end of the one taking place. My guess is that he was concerned that his contacts with foreigners would negatively affect the

* Paris, 1977. The hefty one-time publication *Apollon-77* brought together poetry, prose, and visual art made by both artists living in emigration and still in the Soviet Union. Nekrasov, along with Igor Kholin and Genrikh Sapgir, was one of the few Moscow-based poets to be included in the volume. [—Eds.]

position of his wife, Anna Zhuravleva, a professor of Russian literature at Moscow University. During these visits, I could always count on a bowl of delicious soup as he acquainted me with his work and let me borrow his texts to copy at the US Embassy, which I had the opportunity to do as an IREX Exchange Scholar. He also shared the work of other poets he thought interesting, and this significantly expanded my knowledge of the literary scene.

Since he learned that I was interested in visual effects in poetry, in the spirit of “I’ve done some of that, too,” he provided me with carbon copies of a set of poems with visual or kinetic features. Most of his finished poems were on quarter sheets of paper, a feature that complicated making photocopies (they had to be arranged on the copier glass and easily slid out of place) but underscored Nekrasov’s emphasis on brevity and spatial arrangement. The space as well as the edge of the page were used as important expressive features and there was often unusual punctuation. One of the most minimalist items was the page on which a period was the only mark and it appeared in the lowest far-right corner of the sheet, ending an empty statement at the last possible place (p. 307). Unless you look closely, you might miss the point entirely, not noticing the dot or thinking it was spurious. I had an amusing, but ultimately annoying experience of the sort with another poem I used as an example in my first article on Nekrasov. In this case, the period appears in the middle of the page, ending another empty statement, but

then finds a continuation with the word *odnako* [however].* When I read the proofs, the dot was there (and it also appears in the translation, though not in the appropriate spatial configuration), but when the article came out in print, the dot had mysteriously disappeared, thus destroying the poem entirely. No doubt it was a victim of a zealous editor or compositor who identified it as a defect that needed to be cleaned away.

Returning home with a treasure trove of unpublished or *samizdat* texts from various people, I conceived the project of making these more broadly available in unadorned staple-bound Xerox copies sold at cost. This “publishing” venture was named Listy and one of its accomplishments was the publication of a collection of Nekrasov’s poems titled simply *95 stikhotvorenii* [*95 Poems*] (Lexington, KY: Listy, 1985).** This edition followed Nekrasov’s own format in that it was on quarter sheets of paper, loose-leaf, in typescript. The poems had to be retyped to provide clear copies and I did so using an old manual typewriter in Cyrillic that had the advantage of providing the same spacing as Nekrasov’s originals, allowing me to duplicate their visual features. There was no fixed order of the pages, and they could easily be shuffled. The kinetic and visual features of some of the poems (folding, tabs, use of the paper edge, marks in red, etc.) were reproduced by handwork. The first edition was of

* see p. 313 in the present volume

** *Listy* means pages (leaves) in Russian [–Eds.]

about ten copies and several of these were sold to libraries which responded to the flyer sent to them. While Nekrasov had had some selected poems published at home and abroad, this was his first solo collection, such as it was.

On my next visit to Moscow, in the spring of 1986, I presented Nekrasov with his author's copy. He was pleased with the format idea, since it literally reproduced his originals (a matter of high importance to him and the source of much friction with other publishers), but he immediately became horrified by my incautious inclusion of a poem that he was worried might cause trouble with the authorities:

Russian air here
hear
knock
crack
crunch
squeak
creak
sickle
cross and hammer*

There was also a poem intended to be an attachment to the famous “freedom is” about the obstructionist editor Libet, but it was incorrectly presented as an independent poem.**

*“*tut russkii dukh...*” (*Stikhi 1956-1983*. Vologda: Izd. Germana Titova. 2012. 632)

These and several others that required too much handwork were removed and a few other poems added to round the number up to create *100 Poems* (Listy, 1987). At least 25 copies of this version were then sold or otherwise distributed.

In 1986, I was invited to attend a poetry reading by Nekrasov at the shared studio of Erik Bulatov and Oleg Vasiliev, Nekrasov's close friends at the time. Late in life he took umbrage, as he was wont to do, with something each friend had done or said and broke off relations with them. This was particularly sad in the case of Oleg Vasiliev, who was one of the gentlest, most accommodating persons I have ever known. Vasiliev himself found it difficult to understand what Nekrasov had gotten upset with, but it seems to have involved the use of a poem without his explicit permission. At the end of the poetry reading, Bulatov came up to me with a pencil sketch of his famous painting "Zhivu vizhu" ["I live I see"]—based on the anagram in a Nekrasov poem—and made the request that I write something about Nekrasov's work. Since I had already decided to do so, the request was easy to agree to. The result was the article "Vsevolod Nekrasov, Master Paronymist," which unexpectedly also served as the subject of a talk I was asked to give at the American Embassy in July of the same year.

The American ambassador, Dr. Jack Matlock, had set up a

** For more on Libet, see "On the occasion of a poem's anniversary (a poem with an epigraph)" in the present volume [-Eds.]

* *SEEJ* No. 2, 1989.

speaker series at Spaso House to present the work of American scholars doing research in Moscow. The speech was open to a large group of prominent Muscovites and, certainly in the present instance, was well attended by big names in Russian culture. My idea was to speak for about 20-30 minutes (too brief by local standards, it was felt) to introduce Nekrasov's work, followed by a reading by the poet himself. As it turned out, the occasion was besieged by technical difficulties (the handouts of Nekrasov poems with translations were in short supply, the microphone malfunctioned, etc.), not to mention that my first major talk in Russian did not go smoothly and Nekrasov, who reads in a quiet rapid-fire voice, could barely be heard. One of my Russian friends characterized the event as "bestolkovyi" [incoherent], while Oleg Vasiliev more generously commented that what he could understand of my technical analyses was that I was seriously interested in Nekrasov's poetry. The Q&A during the buffet luncheon that followed was heated, with Evgeny Rein wondering how Nekrasov's work could be called poetry at all, while Vladimir Druk came to its defense.* Nekrasov, nevertheless, was genuinely pleased with the attention and characterized the event as his "moment of stardom" [*zvezdnyi chas*].

Eventually from me there were also several other articles, "Minimalism in Contemporary Russian Poetry, Vsevolod

*Rein and Druk — poets and prominent figures in the unofficial literary scene of the late Soviet period (which was by the late 1980s already merging with the official). [-Eds.]

Nekrasov and Others,”* “Vsevolod Nekrasov and Russian Literary Conceptualism,”** and a chapter currently in preparation in my book on Moscow Conceptualism. The point of the latter two items is to demonstrate the truth of Nekrasov’s contention that he was a major pioneer of Conceptualism, a fact that he insisted upon regularly and sharply in the 1990s and 2000s. No one particularly disputed that, but he felt that more publically active figures such as Prigov had overshadowed his importance, with the result that his often insulting speeches and polemic poems and his frequent walking out of readings led to increased (and unnecessary) isolation. Although we maintained good, if delicate, regular relations and frequent contacts to the end, I myself fell afoul of this problem when he insisted that the translations of his poems that I had made for the important *Third Wave* anthology*** be withdrawn, since the afterword had been written by Mikhail Epstein—who had earned Nekrasov’s permanent enmity by referring to his poems as composed of particles and interjections as if written by Gogol’s Akaky Akakievich,**** certainly an unfair characterization by any measure. The same prohi-

* *SEEJ* 70.3, 1992.

** *NLO* 99.5, 2009 (in Russian).

*** K. Johnson, S. Ashby, eds., University of Mich Press, 1992.

**** Epstein refers to the unhappy hero of Gogol’s famous short story “The Overcoat” (1842), a pathetic clerk whose devotion to the work of copying documents eventually leads to his degeneration into a nearly pre-verbal state. [-Eds.] (Mikhail N. Epstein, “Kontsepty... Metaboly... O novykh techeniakh v poezii.” *Oktiabr’* 4 (1988): 203; *Paradoksy novizny. O literaturnom razvitii XIX-XX vekov* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1988, p. 174-75.)

bition occurred later with the *Crossing Centuries* anthology,^{*} but he did allow me to include four poems in the *Zephyr* anthology, *In the Grip of Strange Thoughts*,^{**} since there was no sign of Epstein there. This extreme sensitivity has limited his exposure in the West and alienated many friends and potential sponsors, but can be seen as a fierce, principled stance of independence from meddling editing by others and an insistence on total authorial control. Finally, in 2012, a substantial collection of his poems in Russian, edited by Mikhail Sukhotin, Galina Zykova and Elena Penskaya, has appeared in print.^{***}

While much work remains to be done to understand and assess Nekrasov's legacy, one thing is clear: like Athena from the head of Zeus, Nekrasov seems to have emerged from the head of Euterpe a fully-formed, mature and unique poet without notable apprenticeship or precedent. He can be seen, as noted above, as a master of paronymy resulting in a unique poetic structure, as a minimalist, a master of formally independent free verse (one of Russian's greatest), a brilliant children's poet, a penetrating art critic, a brilliant visual poet, and a pioneer of poetic conceptualism. The present large selection of his poems should go a long way at last toward solidifying Nekrasov's reputation abroad.

* John High et al., eds., *Talisman*, 2000.

** J. Kates, ed., *Zephyr*, 1999.

*** *Stikhi 1956-1983*; cf. Mikhail Sukhotin's introduction (p. 25) [-Eds.]

NOTES TO THE POEMS

46 *Kropivnitsky* — Evgeny Kropivnitsky (1893–1979) was a poet, artist, and composer born in Moscow. His son and daughter, Lev and Valentina, were also artists; his son-in-law was painter Oskar Rabin. He made his living as a drawing teacher, and taught many of the poets and artists that would form the Lianozovo group.

47 *Ginzburg* — a reference to Alexander (Alik) Ginzburg. For more on Ginzburg see translators' introduction pp. 8-11.

57 *Kholin* — Igor Kholin (1920–1999) was a Moscow poet who had a profound influence on Nekrasov. Despite being a decorated World War II veteran, Kholin was charged with being drunk and disorderly in 1946 and punished by being confined to living in Lianozovo. There, he began writing poetry and, upon making the acquaintance of the Kropivnitskys, became one of the foundational artists of the Lianozovo group.

62, 63 *Maznin* — Igor Maznin (1938–2007) was a poet, translator and, like Nekrasov, a writer of children's books.

66 *Valery Stigneev* — Valery Stigneev (b. 1937) was a prominent Soviet photographer and a widely published critic of photography.

71 *Pushkin* — Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837) is still Russia's best known and most beloved poet. While Nekrasov can certainly be counted among the poet's sincere admirers, several of these poems satirize Pushkin's central position in the Soviet canon of Russian literature as well as Soviet popular culture.

95 *A canal/A streetlight...* — This poem converses with a well-known 1912 poem by Alexander Blok, “Night. Street. Streetlight. Drugstore.” Blok and Joseph Brodsky (the other poet mentioned by name here) are often considered quintessentially St. Petersburg poets, embodying the city’s mythic combination of dreamy melancholia and cold intellect. The poems on pgs. 94-114 are Nekrasov’s “Petersburg poems,” written during or inspired by the poet’s visits to Leningrad and reflections on the relationship between the city and its literary history.

98 *Sverdlov Square; Petrovka; Pushkinskaya; Kropotinskaya; Marx Prospect* — the names of central locations and metro stations in Moscow.

comrade Sverdlov — Yakov Sverdlov (1885–1919) was a leading figure in the 1917 Bolshevik revolution, though he died soon after. During the Soviet period the square in front of Moscow’s Bolshoi Theater bore his name; since 1990 it has been renamed Teatralny (Theater) Square and the monument to Sverdlov removed.

101 *Nevsky Prospect* — the fabled main thoroughfare in St. Petersburg.

102 *bronze* — a reference to Alexander Pushkin’s narrative poem, “The Bronze Horseman.” The horseman of the title is a statue of Peter the Great, a symbol of St. Petersburg that comes to represent brutal and despotic rule.

103 *Tikhvinsky, Moscow, Novoslobodskaya* — street names. Nekrasov’s childhood home was on Tikhvinsky Lane, which intersects with Novoslobodskaya Street in the northwestern quadrant of Moscow.

106 *Piter* — an affectionate nickname for St. Petersburg that continued to be used throughout the Leningrad period.

Peter and Pavel — a reference to the fortress in central St. Petersburg, erected by Peter the Great on the Neva River as the first building in the new city. Pavel is the Russian version of Paul.

106-109 This poem makes reference to several famous works by Alexander Pushkin, including lines from his 1830 novel in verse *Eugene Onegin* and the poem “Ya pamiatnik vozdvig sebe nerukotvornyi... [I erected a monument to myself...]” (1836).

109 *Vissarion* — Stalin’s patronymic (the middle name derived from the father’s name) was Vissarionovich: Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin.

110 *City Lights* — a reference to the 1931 Charlie Chaplin film, set in New York City, that touches on themes of economic disparity.

City of the Yellow Devil — Maxim Gorky’s “City of the Yellow Devil” (1906) is a portrait of urban poverty in New York City, written as a condemnation of capitalism.

112, 152, 525 *Seva* — this is the abbreviated form of Nekrasov’s first name “Vsevolod.” See translator’s introduction.

125 *kvass* — a mildly alcoholic beverage originally made from fermented black bread, widely consumed in Russia today, but also associated with old-fashioned peasant life.

129 *Novogireyevo* — Novogireyevo is, since 1960, an administrative district in northeast Moscow; prior to that, it was a small settlement of country houses.

Anna Akhmatova — Anna Akhmatova (1889–1966) is one of the best-known (and longest-lived) of Russia’s early twentieth century modernist poets. During the war years she spent time in evacuation in Central Asia and Tatarstan, among other places.

133 *Zinaida Mirkina* — Zinaida Mirkina (1926–) is a Moscow poet and translator. Her poetic and scholarly interests include spirituality, Marina

Tsvetaeva, and Rilke.

137 Roginsky — Mikhail Roginsky (1931-2004) was a Russian artist. Although employed in theater design and as a teacher of painting, he had no official exhibitions before emigrating to France in 1978.

143 Biserovo — a large lake 20 miles east of Moscow. In this poem, Nekrasov plays on the associations the word *biser* (pearl, bead) might have with the shining, “silvery” surface of the lake.

165 Erik Bulatov — Erik Bulatov (1933–) is a Russian artist and Nekrasov’s longtime friend and collaborator. Bulatov’s paintings are considered Sots-Art, an artistic movement that (alongside Moscow Conceptualism) used many of the prescribed forms and techniques of Socialist Realism to undermine its legitimacy.

166 Vologda — a mid-sized city northwest of Moscow, on the Vologda river. One possible Finno-Ugric etymology of the name would render it “white (as in transparent, clear) water.”

187 Okudzhava — Bulat Okudzhava (1924–1997) was a singer-songwriter who enjoyed great popularity among the Soviet intelligentsia. Nekrasov encountered him in the literary/artistic circles of Moscow in the early 60s and was a great admirer of his lyrical talent.

190 Leonid Sokov — a Russian artist associated with the Sots-Art movement. Since 1980 he has been living in New York.

Ilyich — Vladimir Ilyich Lenin’s patronymic and a common Soviet diminutive, or sardonic term of endearment, for the nation’s first leader.

204 Dunaevsky — Isaak Dunaevsky (1900–1955) was a famous Soviet

composer and conductor known for his work in film during the 1930s and 1940s.

216 *the great helmsman* — see note to p. 286.

225 *cheburashka* — Cheburashka is a much-beloved hero of Soviet children's literature and animation; the adorable, innocent and fuzzy creature resembles a teddy bear crossed with a monkey.

237 *1981* — date of the postscript and the year L. Ya. Libet was named the editor-in-chief of the publishing house and blocked the publication of Nekrasov's book *Orchestra* (Moscow: Detskaia kniga [Children's Literature], 1983, with illustrations by Ilya Kabakov).

238 *the great krivulin / lenochka shvarts* — Viktor Krivulin (1944–2001) and Elena Shvarts (1948–2010) were central figures in the 1970s–80s Leningrad underground literary scene. Krivulin published a sizable selection in the *samizdat* journal 37, which would later be republished in *Poems from a Journal*.

238 *Prigov and Rubinstein* — Dmitri Prigov and Lev Rubinstein are today the most prominent names in Moscow Conceptualist poetry (though Prigov, like fellow poet Andrei Monastyrsky, was active in many different spheres of artistic production besides poetry). Nekrasov met Prigov in the late 1970s. They developed a prickly relationship by the early 1980s, as this poem indicates.

245 *Stanislav Kunyaev* — In Soviet times, Stanislav Kunyaev (1932–) was a poet and editor whose negative response to the wave of Jewish emigration out of the Soviet Union earned him the epithet of “anti-semite.”

261 *zamyatino, istra* — Zamyatino is a small settlement outside of Moscow; the Istra is a tributary of the Moscow River.

279 *Kostya Bogatyrev* — Konstantin Bogatyrev (1925-1976) was a Soviet poet and translator. During his third year of university, in 1951, he was falsely convicted of plotting to bomb the Kremlin and sentenced to death. His sentence was then commuted to 25 years in prison. After five years in prison, he was “rehabilitated”—all charges were dropped and he was allowed to return to Moscow. Bogatyrev went on to publish translations of Rilke, Goethe, and Klaus Mann’s *Mephisto*, among others. In 1976, Bogatyrev was murdered under mysterious circumstances in the lobby of his Moscow apartment building. His killers were never found; many suspect he was killed by the KGB.

284 *Limonov* — Eduard Limonov (1943–), currently best known as a radical political activist in Russia, was an active member of the underground literary scene beginning in the late 1960s.

Davydov — Denis Davydov (1784–1839) is remembered as a hero of the War of 1812 and for his innovative and rambunctious “hussar poetry.”

Samoilov — David Samoilov (1920–1990) was a Soviet poet well known for his war poetry (he served in the Second World War).

may his example be a lesson to others — an oft-quoted verse from the first stanza of Alexander Pushkin’s novel in verse, *Eugene Onegin* (1823–1831), “His example was a lesson to others” [Его пример другим наука], in sarcastic reference to the narrator’s uncle.

father to soldiers — a well-known quote from Mikhail Lermontov’s epic poem, “Borodino” (1837), in praise of a military leader: “A servant to the tsar, a father to the soldiers” [Слуга царю, отец солдатам!..].

a neighbor called his neighbor — This is the opening line of a well-known fable by Ivan Krylov, “The Musicians,” in which a man invites his neighbor over to hear some singers. When the visitor complains about the terrible music, his host beams: “yes, they sing badly, but they don’t drink!” To which the visitor replies, “it would be better that they were drunkards, but knew what they were doing,” i.e., intelligence and talent trump obedience.

285 Kushner — Alexander Kushner (1936–) is a poet born in St. Petersburg who published extensively during Soviet times. He also served as the editor-in-chief of the popular *Biblioteka poeta* [Poets Library] book series.

the defense of peace — a reference to the Soviet Peace Committee (SPC, also known as the Soviet Committee for the Defense of Peace, SCDP) [Советский Комитет Защиты Мира].

God give me speed — an expression [давай Бог ноги] with folk overtones, used frequently by Ivan Turgenev, who is referred to in the next line (*Fathers and Sons* is the title of his best-known novel).

286 Barclay de Tolly — Michael Andreas Barclay de Tolly (1761–1818) was Minister of War for Russia during the War of 1812.

Frigate Palada — the flagship of Russian Admiral Putyatin during a visit to Japan in 1853. “Pallada” is the Russian for Pallas (as in Athena), and the ship is remembered in literature by an eponymous travelogue written by the novelist Ivan Goncharov.

said the gold — from the first line of Pushkin’s “The Gold and the Sword” [“Золото и Булат”]: “All is mine, said the gold / All is mine, said the sword / I’ll buy it all, said the gold / I’ll take it all, said the sword.”

made without hands — The word in Russian for “made without hands” is a calque from the Greek *acheiropoieta*. In the Orthodox tradition, it refers to icons of miraculous origin (not produced by human hands). The reference to putrefaction in the previous line also has religious overtones (this is what should not happen to the body of a saint).

Koschei the Deathless — an oft-encountered antagonist in Slavic folklore who threatens young women and, as his name implies, is notoriously hard to defeat.

Budyonny — Semyon Budyonny (1883–1973) founded and led the Bolshevik Red Cavalry in the Russian Civil War. A close ally of Joseph Stalin.

Gorky — Maxim Gorky (1868–1936), a writer with a complex political and literary history, is nevertheless best known as the founder of Socialist Realism and the figurehead of programmatic Soviet literature.

great helmsman — although originally applied to God, in Soviet times the epithet “great helmsman” was initially associated with Stalin (though subsequently it came to refer specifically to Mao).

287 *Belinsky* — Vissarion Belinsky (1811–1848) was one of Russia’s greatest and most influential literary critics of the 19th century.

Baratynsky — Evgeny Baratynsky (1800–1844) was a lyric poet and contemporary of Pushkin; his work, along with that of poets like Tiutchev and Fet, experienced a revival during the early twentieth century.

288 *paths and destinies* — *Paths and Destinies* [*Пути и судьбы*] (1958); a Soviet film featuring a highly typical socialist-realist plot: good Soviet citizen exposes corrupt ways of successful bureaucrat.

embracing life — a film with a similar story [*Навстречу жизни* (1952)].

for those at sea — a widely-viewed Soviet film about the Second World War [*За тех кто в море* (1947)].

289 *peace and freedom* — a reference to one of Pushkin’s best-known lyrics, “Tis time my friend, tis time” [“Пора мой друг, пора”] (1834). Nekrasov is quoting this line: “There is no happiness in the world, but there is peace and freedom” [“На свете счастья нет, но есть покой и воля”].

292 *no G no B* — “GB” was a colloquial abbreviation for “KGB.”

294 *so tell me mister* — another reference to Lermontov’s “Borodino”; indeed, the poem opens with this phrase [“Скажи-ка, дядя, ведь недаром...”].

297 *That’s life* — alternate ending.

331 *Ye. T. Gaidar* — Yegor Gaidar (1956-2009) was a Soviet and Russian politician and economist who came to power in the early 1990s. He is credited with officially authorizing a market economy in post-Soviet Russia.

His privatization reforms are said to have led to the rise of the oligarchs.

Petrusha — the affectionate/diminutive form of the name Pyotr (Peter). As the epigraph suggests, the name evokes the image of a cheerful country bumpkin, and Nekrasov subsequently plays with appending the same affectionate-diminutive suffix to typical German first names.

335 dzhugashvili-schicklgruber — Dzugashvili was Joseph Stalin's actual last name. ("Stalin"—which suggests the word "steel"—was adopted by the young revolutionary as an alias.) It was once rumored that Schicklgruber was Adolph Hitler's real last name; in actuality, it was the last name of Hitler's maternal grandmother.

348 Veisberg — Vladimir Veisberg (1924–1985) was a Moscow-based artist and theoretician. Sometimes employed as a teacher in official institutions, Veisberg showed his own work among unofficial colleagues. He was known for his "invisible painting" and "white on white" color experiments.

359 Konstantinov — Alexander Konstantinov (1953–) is a Moscow-based visual artist and sculptor whose work is associated with minimalism. During the Soviet period he was active in unofficial circles; his first official exhibition was in 1990 at Moscow's Center for Contemporary Art, with Alexander Ponomarev (see note below).

352 Groys — Boris Groys (1947–) is an art theorist and critic known for his writing on socialist and postmodern art. He coined the term "Moscow Conceptualism." For more on Groys, see "A Word From The Translators."

353 Joseph B. — Joseph B. Backstein (1945–) is a Moscow art historian, critic, and curator associated with the Moscow avant-garde of the 1980s. In 1991, he became the Director of the Moscow Institute of Contemporary Art.

355, 358 *Kabakov* — Born in Ukraine and educated in Moscow, Ilya Kabakov (1933–) is a renowned visual artist. During the Soviet era, while pursuing a successful career as a children’s book illustrator, he participated in the unofficial Sretensky Boulevard group of artists, which also included Erik Bulatov. This group formed the foundations of the Moscow Conceptualists. After emigrating to the West in 1989, Kabakov became famous for his installation works.

365 *A. Ponomarev* — Alexander Ponomarev (1957–) is a Russian artist whose installations engage heavily with oceanic and nautical themes. He trained as a seaman before devoting his life to making art.

366 *Leonid Bazhanov* — director-for-life of Moscow’s Center for Contemporary Art.

422 *Malakhovka* — a municipality outside of Moscow, well known for its dachas of such famous figures as Anton Chekhov and Maxim Gorky.

423 *Sokovnin* — Mikhail Sokovnin (1938–1975) was a Moscow poet very close to Nekrasov. A small selection of his work survived on tape recordings. A selection was compiled by Nekrasov into a small book (*Рассыпанный набор*, М.: Graffiti) published in 1995. For more, see p. 28.

429 *Vladimir Vladimirovich* — This refers to Russian President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin.

437 *dyr bul shchyl* — the notorious opening to a five-line poem by “trans-sense” (*zaum*) poet Aleksei Kruchenykh. In the declaration “The word as such” (1913), Kruchenykh claimed that “this five-line poem contains more of the Russian people’s essence than all of Pushkin.”

446 *Izvestia* — the official newspaper of the Soviet government from 1917 to 1991, published by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR.

Sokolov — Maxim Sokolov (1959–) is a prominent Russian journalist who began his career at *Izvestia*.

sabaoth — Hebrew: plural form of “host” or “army.” This word is typically used as an epithet of God, in the title “the Lord of Hosts.”

460 *Neskuchny Garden; Sparrow Hill(s)* — neighboring parks in southwest Moscow, near Moscow State University.

477 *yevtushenko* — Yevgeny Yevtushenko (1933–) is a Russian poet, prominent in the Soviet period. During the “Thaw” of the late 1950s–early 1960s, he and a group of other young Moscow poets became very popular for poems that rebuked Stalinism and questioned authority in general while resurrecting early Soviet aesthetics. They were tolerated (and even supported) by the authorities and read their work in stadiums to huge audiences. Nekrasov saw Yevtushenko as a collaborator and charlatan.

478 *Levin* — Alexander Levin (1957–) is a Moscow-based writer, poet, singer-songwriter and computer engineer. His website is the single largest authorized source for Nekrasov’s poetry available online.

518 *Màchov mountains* — Màchov is a small town in a mountainous region of the Czech Republic near the Polish border.

520-522 *Màcha; Vltava; Zlata Praha; česke sklo* — As with the “German” poems, Nekrasov here appropriates Czech proper names into his soundplay: Karel Màcha (1810-1836) was a much-loved Czech Romantic poet (a lake outside Prague, *Màchovo jezero*, is named after him); the *Vltava* (the Moldau) is the river that runs through Prague; and *Zlata Praha* is “Golden Prague,” one of the city’s epithets; *česke sklo* is Bohemian glassware, a favorite Czech souvenir.

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