

Ivan Bunin's Poetry



translation and notes by colin holcombe

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A Selection

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Colin John Holcombe

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Contents

List of Poems Translated

Introduction	1
Russian Text and Formal Translations	5
Appendix	
Significance of Bunin's Work	129
Prosody and Word-for-Word Rendering	147
Selected References and Resources	267

Translations

Childhood	5
April	7
First Thunder	9
How Sad the Moon	11
Leaf Fall	13
Spring	27
Baba Yaga	31
Epiphany Night	33
Pleiades	39
Mountain Forest	41
Evening Fades	43
Midnight	45
No Birds Visible	47
Song	49
In a Dacha Chair	51
At Some Late Hour	53
Angel	55
We Met By Chance	57
Circe	59
Wild Flowers	61
Red Needles	63
Loneliness	65

Jasmine	69
Istambul	71
Bedouin	73
Egypt	75
Elburs	77
Indian Ocean	79
War	81
The Word	83
And Flowers and Bumblebees	85
Hayfield	87
The Last Bumblebee	91
Dog	93
Canary	95
Fisherwoman	97
Village Beggar	99
Stone Woman	103
Departures	105
On the Train	107
Hopelessness	109
In an Estuary	111
Sometimes the Sea Is White	113
The Water, Sunk In Hollow Sags	115
Again the Sea Is Pale	117
The Poet	119
The Archipelago	121

Homeland	123
Sirius	125
Morpheus	127

Introduction: Ivan Bunin 1870-1953

Ivan Bunin was born on his parents' ancestral estates in central Russian, became a widely-respected writer, was awarded the Pushkin Prize for Poetry on three occasions, left Russia after the Bolshevik Revolution, continued to write in France, won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1933, and became internationally known for his short stories, many of which exhibit an acute nostalgia for a vanished way of life.

Bunin in fact published a wide variety of work throughout his life — poems, stories, novellas, a semi-autobiography and literary memoirs — but poetry remained his first love. A poem was indeed his earliest published work, and poetry of a special sort informed most of what he wrote thereafter, even in his bleakest portrayals of Russian village life. Bunin largely gave up verse for prose in middle age, but that prose was also written to the high standards of verse, i.e. with a sharp ear for the exact word and a sense of an inner music on which the piece depended for its structure and lasting appeal.

Even that well-known short story, *Sunstroke*, has the sounds of an impending change echo through the story, and many of his later stories are winnowed down to the minimum of words needed to evoke a specific setting or sensation. The inconsequentiality of life so prominent in

Chekhov's stories, also appears in Bunin's work, but with less mischievous irony and more pathos. Life is a desperately real business: love's raptures are short-lived, sexual experiences are unsettling, and memory is a desolating testimony to what could have been.

Unlike his prose, Bunin's verse is exceptionally quiet, impersonal and unassuming. His long working life spanned the Silver Age of Russian poetry in its entirety. He knew the Symbolist poets (Aleksandr Blok, Andrei Bely and Vyacheslav Ivanov). He read the great poets of Acmeism (Anna Akhmatovna and Ossip Mandelstam) and of Futurism (Aleksei Kruchenykh, Velimir Khlebnikov and Vladimir Mayakovsky). Even as an émigré poet he would have been aware of Boris Pasternak and Marina Tsvetaeva, both producing linguistically brilliant, challenging and emotively compelling work.

But Bunin remained studiously unaffected by all such movements. His poetry shows the influence of Symbolism and Acmeism occasionally, but not markedly so. He knew its celebrated poets personally, and was respected in his turn, but Bunin simply produced collections of very conventional poems on very conventional themes. The personal element is not so much missing as muted, only hinted at in the ironic phrase or reflection, as is the case in his prose works. Many of the poems do indeed anticipate the short stories, but the affection for all things Russian has yet to become an overwhelming nostalgia. In Bunin's work there remained the encompassing love of humanity, but also a stern eye for realism, and Bunin thus

had little of Gorky's idealism of the common man, or Blok's unrealistic hopes of the Revolution. As his social world collapsed, first in Russia, and then in the Nazi takeover of France, he increasingly adhered to the traditionalist view, that poems give enduring life to what is only particular and evanescent.

Poetry for Bunin required application, observation and detachment. Each poem was a separate conception, therefore, born of what its author felt and saw at that particular moment, and not the product of a sustained reflection on intellectualised themes, as Modernist work tends to be. Bunin was thus a very traditional poet, indeed reactionary in later years. A poet in Bunin's view does not create from sustained imagination, but must fuse sense impressions and craft to produce aesthetic entities that reconcile us to our existence as it generally is, fragmentary and in the end unsatisfactory, but still mysteriously life-enhancing.

I have tried in this small selection of Bunin's poetry to indicate the range of his themes, the technical variety of the verse and, above all, to represent the pieces that have remained popular with the Russian reading public. Biographical and literary details are given in the extensive Appendix.

Russian

Детство

Чем жарче день, тем сладостней в бору
Дышать сухим смолистым ароматом,
И весело мне было поутру
Бродить по этим солнечным палатам!

Повсюду блеск, повсюду яркий свет,
Песок - как шелк... Прильну к сосне корявой
И чувствую: мне только десять лет,
А ствол - гигант, тяжелый, величавый.

Кора груба, морщиниста, красна,
Но как тепла, как солнцем вся прогрета!
И кажется, что пахнет не сосна,
А зной и сухость солнечного лета.

1906

Translation

Childhood

The hotter grows the day, the sweeter blooms
the forest glade, the smells more resinous:
I walk through morning gladness as through rooms
alive with sun, and warmth as generous.

All sparkles here, and has a robust shine.
The sand is soft as silk, and here I cling
as someone ten years old to one gnarled pine,
its trunk a brutal, giant, majestic thing.

The bark is rough and wrinkled, a deep-stained red,
and redolent of sap the sun has sent.
No overwhelming pine tree smell: instead,
the summer's heat and dryness in the scent.

1906

Апрель

Туманный серп, неясный полумрак,
Свинцово-тусклый блеск железной крыши,
Шум мельницы, далекий лай собак,
Таинственный зигзаг летучей мыши.

А в старом палисаднике темно,
Свежо и сладко пахнет можжевельник,
И сонно, сонно светится сквозь ельник
Серпа зеленоватое пятно.

1906

April

The moon's a misty crescent, indistinct,
as is the barn roof in the dull grey light.
A sound of far-off dogs and mill, that's linked
with bat's mysterious and zigzag flight.

The old front garden apes an ancient plot
of dark, though junipers smell fresh and sweet,
and through the spruce firs, sleepy in the heat,
there glows a sickle-shaped and greenish spot.

1906

Первый гром

Вновь тучи синие нахмурились кругом,
Вдали идёт дождя туманная завеса,
Из леса и с полей повеяло теплом, —
И вот уже гремит весенний первый гром,
И радуга сверкает из-за леса!

То с юга май идёт по рощам и полям, —
Как юный светлый бог, смеётся и ликует,
И пробуждает жизнь, и возвещает нам,
Что уж настал конец последним тёмным дням,
Что он весны победу торжествует!

First Thunder

Once more the clouds are frowning through their blue surround,
and in the distance misty curtains tell of rain.

The warmth that fled the woods and fields returns again.

Already the first of thundering is heard, that spring-time sound:
above the woods the rainbow's brilliant skein.

And from the south progresses May through field and wood,
a laughing, bright young god, exultant, reveling
in life anew, announcing to us, as he should,
that here's an end to winter's dark grey widowhood:
victorious, triumphant in everything.

* * *

Багряная печальная луна
Висит вдали, но степь еще темна.
Луна во тьму свой теплый отблеск сеет,
И над болотом красный сумрак реет.
Уж поздно - и какая тишина!

Мне кажется, луна оцепенеет:
Она как будто выросла со дна
И допотопной розою краснеет.
Но меркнут звезды. Даль озарена.
Равнина вод на горизонте млеет,

И в ней луна столбом отражена.
Склонив лицо прозрачное, светлеет
И грустно в воду смотрится она.
Поет комар. Теплом и гнилью веет.

1902

How sad the moon

How sad the moon now seems, a distant red
across the steppe's vast blackness. Overhead
it sows a glossy haze into the gloom,
and on the swamps a twilit crimson fume
as though the evening's late, with nothing said.

I think the moon has frozen into place
and, from the bottom, here has grown upon
some flowered, primaeval, red-tinged space.
The far-off stars are fading, horizon gone
as silver sinks into some watery base.

And there the moon's reflected, a pillared light
whose face now empties to some thinner play.
How sadly water sees it, where tonight
a mosquito whines through fetid, warm decay.

1902

Листопад

Лес, точно терем расписной,
Лиловый, золотой, багряный,
Веселой, пестрою стеной
Стоит над светлою поляной.

5. Березы желтою резьбой
Блестят в лазури голубой,
Как вышки, елочки темнеют,
А между кленами синеют

То там, то здесь в листве сквозной
10. Просветы в небо, что оконца.
Лес пахнет дубом и сосной,
За лето высох он от солнца,

И Осень тихую вдовой
Вступает в пестрый терем свой.

15. Сегодня на пустой поляне,
Среди широкого двора,
Воздушной паутины ткани
Блестят, как сеть из серебра.

Сегодня целый день играет
20. В дворе последний мотылек
И, точно белый лепесток,
На паутине замирает,

Leaf Fall

The forest, a towering, painted wall
of purple, gold and crimson shade
rejoices in the sunlight's fall
from heights into this brilliant glade.

5. The birch-tree shavings, yellow-white,
thin-glimmer in the azure light,
while tall, dark firs that soar on through
the gaps in maples fade to blue.

In places through the foliage shine
10. odd windows where the sky has won.
The forest smells of oak and pine,
of summers dried out in the sun.

Now autumn, in her sadder shows,
adopts the widow's quieter clothes.

15. Today, athwart the light, is laid
across an empty courtyard space,
the spider's web of silver braid
that was an aerial net of lace.

About the yard, throughout the day,
20. the last moth flutters, then is still,
when, like a petal in the chill
of winter, in the web will stay.

Пригретый солнечным теплом;
Сегодня так светло кругом,
25. Такое мертвое молчанье
В лесу и в синей вышине,

Что можно в этой тишине
Расслышать листика шуршанье.
Лес, точно терем расписной,
30. Лиловый, золотой, багряный,

Стоит над солнечной поляной,
Завороженный тишиной;
Заквохчет дрозд, перелетая
Среди подседа, где густая

35. Листва янтарный отблеск льет;
Играя, в небе промелькнет
Скворцов рассыпанная стая –
И снова все кругом замрет.
Последние мгновенья счастья!

40. Уж знает Осень, что такой
Глубокий и немой покой –

Предвестник долгого ненастья.
Глубоко, странно лес молчал
И на заре, когда с заката

45. Пурпурный блеск огня и злат
Пожаром терем освещал.

But in the sun great warmth is found,
as from the splendour all around.

25. But also silence in the light
that falls from blue and forest height.

What does this close, thick silence hold
that we can hear a leaf unfold?

The forest, a towering, painted wall
30. of purple, gold and crimson shade.

Across this simple, happy glade,
and spell-bound by the silence made,
a blackbird calls and seems to fly
from where the thickest shadows lie.

35. Deep amber gleams the foliage there,
but scattered through the heaven's air,
wide, scattered flocks of starlings press:
then all is still, as though aware
of this last flood of happiness.

40. So autumn knows its settled lease,
accepting deep and thoughtful peace.

And with bad weather on its way,
the forest heeds that silent call.
Yet dawn and sunset both inlay
their wealth of purple-gold display,
irradiating forest wall.

Потом угрюмо в нем стемнело.

Луна восходит, а в лесу

Ложатся тени на росу...

50. Вот стало холодно и бело

Среди полян, среди сквозной

Осенней чащи помертвелой,

И жутко Осени одной

В пустынной тишине ночной.

55. Теперь уж тишина другая:

Прислушайся - она растет,

А с нею, бледностью пугая,

И месяц медленно встает.

Все тени сделал он короче,

60. Прозрачный дым навел на лес

И вот уж смотрит прямо в очи

С туманной высоты небес.

0, мертвый сон осенней ночи!

0, жуткий час ночных чудес!

65. В сребристом и сыром тумане

Светло и пусто на поляне;

Лес, белым светом залитой,

Своей застывшей красотой

Afterwards it falls to night;
a sullen moon comes into view
to throw long shadows on the dew,
50. where all at once is chill and white.

So autumn in the woods, and spread
through thickets patchy, thin and dead:
how sinister the way that led
to terrors in the night ahead.

55. The silence now seems different;
it's one which — listen — swells and grows:
a sort of whiteness that has lent
to moon its fervour as it slowly rose.

With ever shorter shadows there,
60. it peers through mist-clad thoroughfares
to seek the truth within its lair.
The hazy height of heaven fares
not well this autumn night. Beware,
this hour has strange and gloomy airs!

65. The fog, a wet and silvered gaze,
is littering the forest ways.
The clearing in that flooded light
has sharp, crisp beauty, edged in white.

Как будто смерть себе пророчит;
70. Сова и та молчит: сидит
Да тупо из ветвей глядит,
Порою дико захохочет,

Сорвется с шумом с высоты,
Взмахнувши мягкими крылами,
75. И снова сядет на кусты
И смотрит круглыми глазами,

Водя ушастой головой
По сторонам, как в изумленье;
А лес стоит в оцепененье,
80. Наполнен бледной, легкой мглой
И листьев сыростью гнилой...

Не жди: наутро не проглянет
На небе солнце. Дождь и мгла
Холодным дымом лес туманят,-
85. Недаром эта ночь прошла!
Но Осень затаит глубоко
Все, что она пережила
В немую ночь, и одиноко

Запрется в тереме своем:
90. Пусть бор бушует под дождем,
Пусть мрачны и ненастны ночи
И на поляне волчьи очи
Зеленым светятся огнем!

It speaks of death. On its behalf
70. the birds like owls are silent, sat
there moping in the branches that
betray at times a spooky laugh.

From those it falls and from a height,
still waving its soft wings, and flies
75. to find new branches, there alight,
and stare once more with large, round eyes.

Prominent are tufted ears
that in amazement turn to gaze
on forests sinking into haze,
80. a whitish mist that slowly clears
to leaves thick-piled in rotting tiers.

But do not hope for morning sun:
with rain and mist it's overcast.
With chilly fog the day's begun.
85. No wonder that the night has past,
though autumn's breath will travel deep
in what it overcame at last:
the night is lonely, far from sleep,

and, locked within the towering wall,
90. will see with rage the hard rain fall
blackening the stormy night.
In clearings, spots of fierce green light
where prowling wolf's eyes probe and trawl.

Лес, точно терем без призора,
95. Весь потемнел и полинял,
Сентябрь, кружась по чащам бора,
С него местами крышу снял
И вход сырой листвой усыпал;
А там зазимок ночью выпал

100. И таять стал, все умертвив...
Трубят рога в полях далеких,
Звенит их медный перелив,
Как грустный вопль, среди широких
Ненастных и туманных нив.

105. Сквозь шум деревьев, за долиной,
Теряясь в глубине лесов,
Угрюмо воет рог туриный,
Скликаая на добычу псов,
И звучный гам их голосо
110. Разносит бури шум пустынный.

Льет дождь, холодный, точно лед,
Кружатся листья по полянам,
И гуси длинным караваном
Над лесом держат перелет.

115. Но дни идут. И вот уж дымы
Встают столбами на заре,
Леса багряны, недвижимы,
Земля в морозном серебре,

Without a prize the forest stood
95. in darkened, thin deficiency.
September, whirling through the wood,
removed wide swathes of canopy,
there strewing entrances with leaves
where night fell under empty eaves.

100. Now life retires and starts to yield
a sense that, far away, is felt
the blare of horns that seems to wield
a coppery bluster, soon to melt
in rain-drenched fog and sodden field.

105. Beyond the valley sounds or tree,
and lost in forest depths around,
a horn is howling sullenly.
It calls to those who hunt and hound,
and to the quarry gone to ground,
110. a threat that's growing, distantly.

And then the cold rain starts to bite.
Like whirling leaves across the glade,
migrating geese above have made
extended caravans of flight.

115. The days go by, inscrutable,
but at the pillars of the dawn,
the forests, mauve, immutable,
are with a silver pencil drawn.

И в горностаевом шугае,
120. Умывши бледное лицо,
Последний день в лесу встречая,
Выходит Осень на крыльцо.

Двор пуст и холоден. В ворота,
Среди двух высохших осин,
125. Видна ей синева долин
И ширь пустынного болота,

Дорога на далекий юг:
Туда от зимних бурь и вьюг,
От зимней стужи и метели
130. Давно уж птицы улетели;

Туда и Осень поутру
Свой одинокий путь направит
И навсегда в пустом бору
Раскрытый терем свой оставит.

135. Прости же, лес! Прости, прощай,
День будет ласковый, хороший,
И скоро мягкою порошей
Засеребрится мертвый край.

Как будут странны в этот белый,
140. Пустынный и холодный день
И бор, и терем опустелый,
И крыши тихих деревень,

And then the soundless ermine go
120. as shadows flit across a face,
and these last days of autumn show
a forest tossed upon the porch.

The yard is cold and empty, gate
has now two aspens trees, both dry.
125. The swamp and blue of valley sky
equally look desolate.

The road goes southwards on its own,
and southwards too the birds have flown,
in colds and blizzards every day
130. the winter here will further stay.

From autumn and the break of day
the lonely path goes on and on:
what can the forest do but stay
with all its wealth of foliage gone.

135. In this, the forest bids goodbye,
though days to come may still be good.
For soon new-fallen snow is stood
on ground where death and silver lie.

How strange that is, though nothing's there
140. but snow and days of desolation.
The woods and village ways are bare,
but all their roofs a white occasion.

И небеса, и без границы
В них уходящие поля!
145. Как будут рады соболя,
И горностаи, и куницы,

Резвясь и греясь на бегу
В сугробах мягких на лугу!

А там, как буйный пляс шамана,
150. Ворвутся в голую тайгу
Ветры из тундры, с океана,
Гудя в крутящемся снегу

И завывая в поле зверем.
Они разрушат старый терем,
155. Оставят колья и потом
На этом острове пустом

Повесят инеи сквозные,
И будут в небе голубом
Сиять чертоги ледяные
160. И хрусталем и серебром.

А в ночь, меж белых их разводов,
Взойдут огни небесных сводов,

Заблещет звездный щит Стожар –
В тот час, когда среди молчанья
165. Морозный светится пожар,
Расцвет полярного сиянья.

1901

Beneath the heavens, fields stretch far,
and make a white-bound entity:

145. how happy will the sable be,
and as the stoats and martins are.

Basking, running, all at play
in fields' long snowdrifts through the day,

and dancing with the shaman's potion,
150. all through the naked taiga go.
And from the tundra and the ocean
comes the whirling, spinning snow.

Like beasts themselves, the winds are howling,
along the forest walls are prowling.
155. The trees are stripped to stakes, each gone
into a wind-picked skeleton.

And then the scorching hoarfrost falls
from the overarching blue,
occasioning vast silvered halls,
160. crystalline and icy too.

At night, and through that white divorce,
the firmament will take its course.

The shining points of Pleiades
will glitter in their silent hour,
165. and flares of frost, that burn and freeze,
see heydays of Arora's power.

1901

Весеннее

Тает снег - и солнце ярко
Блещет в полдень над полями;
В блеске солнца влажный ветер
По лесам-полям гуляет.

5. Но поля еще пустыньны,
Но леса еще безмолвны;

Только сосны, точно арфы,
Напевают монотонно.
И под их напев неясный
10. В заповедных чащах бора

Сладко спит весна-царевна
В белоснежном саркофаге.
Ветерок ее ласкает,
Пригревает полдень ясный,
15. Но, бледна и неподвижна,

Спит царевна в сладких грезах.
Спит, - а скоро уж в долинах

Солнце белый снег растопит,
И пойдут бурлить потоки
20. По долинам и оврагам;
Налетят лесные птицы,

Spring

The snow is melting, sun is bright
and floods its noon day on the fields.
And in the glare the wet wind walks
across the field and forest ways.

5. Each wood is silent though, and yields
no more than do the empty fields.

The pine trees sound as though their strings
were heavy-damped and watertight.
A humming monotone still sings,
10. but in the depths and out of sight.

A white sarcophagus is still her dress,
the Princess, while the soft winds play
about her hair. The sunlight's rays
may brighten all the noonday things
15. but here she's pale and motionless.

The princess sleeps and what she seems
is innocence and only dreams.

The snow, beneath the sun's fierce rays,
already melts, the water sings:
20. and through the valleys and ravines
go forest birds on new-found wings.

Зашумят грачи, а с ними –
Зацветут, зазеленеют,
Оживут леса и рощи.
25. И придет апрель-царевич

Из заморских стран далеких
На заре, когда в долинах

Тают синие туманы,
На заре, когда от солнца
30. Пахнет лес зеленой хвоей,
Пахнет теплою землею
И апрельскими цветами.

И склонится он с улыбкой
Над царевною безмолвной
35. И прильнет к устам царевны
Крепко жаркими устами,

И она в испуге вздрогнет,
Разомкнет ресницы сразу,
Глянет, вспыхнет - и улыбкой
40. Озарит весь мир влюбленный!

1893

The noisy rooks now have a stake
in world-wide bursting into green.
The groves and forests come awake,
25. and April brings Tsarevich.

But more within the foreign sway,
at dawn, in valleys far away,

blue mists are melting: all is well.
From dawn has come the sun's pale light,
30. and aromatic needles tell
how warm and fragrant is the earth,
in this our April's flowery smell.

And he will bow down with a smile
above the princess all the while,
35. and then how warmly will he press
those sleeping lips with tenderness.

And she will wake in wild amaze,
her opening lashes break the spell,
and, wondering, look at him and smile
40. at all the world in love and well.

1893

Баба-Яга

Гулкий шум в лесу нагоняет сон –
К ночи на море пал сырой туман.
Окружен со всех с четырех сторон
Темной осенью островок Буян.

А еще темней - мой холодный сруб,
Где ни вздуть огня, пи топить ее смей,
А в окно глядит только бурый дуб,
Под который смерть закопал Кощей.

Я состарилась, изболелась вся –
Десять сот годов берегу ларец!
Будь огонь в светце - я б погрелася,
Будь дрова в печи - похлебала б щец,

Да огонь - в морях мореходу весть,
Да на много верст слышен дым от лык...
Черт тебе велел к черту в слуги лезть,
Дура старая, неразумный шлык!

1908

Baba Yaga

The forest booms and has a sleepy sound.
At night a damp fog's fallen on the sea.
The island senses, on its four sides bound,
the threat of dark and rowdy vagrancy.

And even darker has the log-house grown
that, fan or pump the fire, is all it owns.
You see the window stare out on its own,
towards a old brown oak with buried bones.

I got old and sick all over. So my health
for long years bound within this casket's loop.
If there were sun enough I'd warm myself,
or, wood in stove, would make myself some soup.

Yes, there's fire on water, fresh news bred;
you hear the birch bark crackling from afar. . .
Best serve for hell itself, the Devil said,
and what a plain dull-witted hag you are!

1908

Крещенская ночь

Тёмный ельник снегами, как мехом,
Опушили седые морозы,
В блёстках инея, точно в алмазах,
Задремали, склонившись, берёзы.

5. Неподвижно застыли их ветки,
А меж ними на снежное лоно,
Точно сквозь серебро кружевное,
Полный месяц глядит с небосклона.

Высоко он поднялся над лесом,
10. В ярком свете своём цепенея,
И причудливо стелются тени,
На снегу под ветвями чернея.

Замело чащи леса метелью, —
Только вьются следы и дорожки,
15. Убегая меж сосен и ёлок,
Меж берёзок до ветхой сторожки.

Убаюкала вьюга седая
Дикой песнею лес опустелый,
И заснул он, засыпанный вьюгой,
20. Весь сквозной, неподвижный и белый.

Epiphany Night

Dark spruces with their snow like fur,
with grey frosts fallen like a cloth:
the spangles glitter, diamond bright,
but birches here have nodded off.

5. Their branches here are motionless,
where heavy busts of snow still lie,
each fretted out in silver lace:
a full moon views us from the sky.

It soars above the forest, throws
10. a light that's bright and vitreous.
Beneath the branches, shadows turn
both black and more mysterious.

The snowstorm's buried all the forest,
left but winding pathways bare,
and in the pines, on birches hung,
the remnants of a gatehouse there.

A thick grey snowstorm brought its sleep,
a wild song filled the empty light.
The covering blizzard, end to end,
20. have left the prospect stiff and white.

Спят таинственно стройные чащи,
Спят, одетые снегом глубоким,
И поляны, и луг, и овраги,
Где когда-то шумели потоки.

25. Тишина, — даже ветка не хрустнет!
А, быть может, за этим оврагом
Пробирается волк по сугробам
Осторожным и вкрадчивым шагом.

Тишина, — а, быть может, он близко...

30. И стою я, исполнен тревоги,
И гляжу напряжённо на чащи,
На следы и кусты вдоль дороги.

В дальних чашах, где ветви и тени
В лунном свете узоры сплетают,
35. Всё мне чудится что-то живое,
Всё как будто зверьки пробегают.

Огонёк из лесной караулки
Осторожно и робко мерцает,
Точно он притаился под лесом
40. И чего-то в тиши поджидает.

Бриллиантом лучистым и ярким,
То зелёным, то синим играя,
На востоке, у трона господня,
Тихо блещет звезда, как живая.

So sleep the slender-woven thickets,
so sleep, in swaddling bands of snow,
the glades, the meadows and ravines
where once the roaring streams would go.

25. In silence: not a branch will crack,
though maybe far from this ravine
a wolf will pick its way through drifts
with steps both cautious and unseen.

The silence looms, is somehow close.
30. I stand and feel the sense bestowed
on me and thickets, an anxiety,
in tracks and bushes by the road.

But in the distant, branching shadows,
and in the patterning moonlight too,
35. I picture something there alive:
quick animals are running through.

The light throughout the forest seems
to show its cautious, flickering states,
a though a creature hidden there,
40. within the silence, stares and waits.

As a diamond, radiant and bright,
at first a green, and then clear blue,
and in the East, the throne of God,
a vibrant star comes into view.

45. А над лесом всё выше и выше
Всходит месяц, — и в дивном покое
Замирает морозная полночь
И хрустальное царство лесное!

1901

45. Above the forest, high it rises
and, with the moon, brings wondrous peace:
with frosted midnight in the forest
that crystal kingdom's not to cease.

1901

ПЛЕЯДЫ

Стемнело. Вдоль аллея, над сонными прудами,
Бреду я наугад.
Осенней свежестью, листвою и плодами
Благоухает сад.

Давно он поредел, — и звёздное сиянье
Белеет меж ветвей.
Иду я медленно, — и мёртвое молчанье
Царит во тьме аллея.

И звонок каждый шаг среди ночной прохлады.
И царственным гербом
Горят холодные алмазные Плеяды
В безмолвии ночном.

1898

Pleiades

It's dark. By sleepy ponds and paths I'm wandering
at random, aimless, where
the smells of leaves and autumn garden fruitage bring
sweet richness to the air.

The trees are thinner here: a starry radiance pours
on limbs its clothing sheath:
I walk more slowly now and feel the quiet outdoors
through alleyways beneath.

All steps are audible in this still, cooling air,
the heavens an heraldic sight,
where, high above, the diamond-glittering Pleiads flare
in silence through the night.

1898

Горный лес

Вечерний час. В долину тень сползла.
Сосною пахнет. Чисто и глубоко
Над лесом небо. Млечный змей потока
Шуршит слышней вдоль белого русла.

Слышней звенит далекий плач козла.
Острей стрекочет легкая сорока.
Гора, весь день глядевшая с востока,
Свой алый пик высоко унесла.

На ней молились Волчьему Зевесу.
Не раз, не раз с вершины этих скал
И дым вставал, и пели гимны лесу,

И медный нож в руках жреца сверкал.
Я тихо поднял древнюю завесу.
Я в храм отцов забытый путь искал.

1908

Mountain Forest

The evening hour with shadowed valley deeps,
and smell of pines. Above the forest is the sky,
clean and unfathomable. The river sweeps
on past, a thick white serpent rustling by.

The distant hiccups of a goat ring out,
and some odd magpie has its rasping say.
The mountain looked out from the east all day,
its scarlet summit seen from far about.

It was the god of wolves they worshipped here,
and, often, from the top of rocks there rose
the smoke, with chants to reach the forest's ear.

The priest's knife glittered in its copper hue:
it was the past's old veil I lifted, as to peer
at what our forebears' long-lost temple knew.

1908

* * *

Гаснет вечер, даль синееет,
Солнышко садится,
Степь да степь кругом - и всюду
Нива колосится!
Пахнет медом, зацветает
Белая гречиха...
Звон к вечерне из деревни
Долетает тихо...
А вдали кукушка в роще
Медленно кукует...
Счастлив тот, кто на работе
В поле заночует!

Гаснет вечер, скрылось солнце,
Лишь закат краснеет...
Счастлив тот, кому зарею
Теплый ветер веет;
Для кого мерцают кротко,
Светятся с приветом
В темном небе темной ночью
Звезды тихим светом;
Кто устал на ниве за день
И уснет глубоко
Мирным сном под звездным небом
На степи широкой!

1892

Evening fades

Evening fades into a distant blue,
and soon the sun will set.
In steppes around and everywhere
rich life is teeming yet.
With honey smells, in warmer hue,
the buckweed floods in white.
The vesper bell from village there.
chimes quietly out of sight.
The cuckoo in its wooded lair
is slowly calling too.
Happy one who now must share
this night with much to do.

The sun goes down; grey shades are drawn;
the sunset blushes rose.
Happy will be one at dawn:
to find a warm wind blows.
But now the twinkling stars come out
and give their welcome glow:
how dark the firmament about,
how quietly stars still show.
So those who worked the whole day through
profoundly sleep tonight,
within the star-clad heaven's view
and peaceful steppeland's sight.

1892

МОЛОДОСТЬ

Ноябрь, сырая полночь. Городок,
Весь меловой, весь бледный под луною,
Подавлен безответной тишиною.
Приливный шум торжественно-широк.

На мачте коменданта флаг намок.
Вверху, над самой мачтой, над сквозною
И мутной мглой, бегущей на восток,
Скользит луна зеркальной белизною.

Иду к обрывам. Шум грознее. Свет
Таинственней, тусклее и печальней.
Волна качает сваи под купальней.

Вдали - седая бездна. Моря нет.
И валуны, в шипящей серой пене,
Блестят внизу, как спящие тюлени.

6.VIII.09

Midnight

November. Here at this raw midnight's hour,
a village, chalk-white daubed beneath the moon.
Unanswered silence follows quickly on, and soon
there comes the solemn tidal roar of power.

A pole where movement in the flag has ceased:
it's wet and limp. Aloft, above the pole,
a thick and murky haze is gathering east.
The moon glides out, a pale but mirrored whole.

At the cliff-line now, the sound more threatening,
as is the sad, mysterious, whelming pace
of waves that rock the piles of bathhouse base.

Beyond is greyness: unseen waters sing
and sizzle through the boulders in a heap
as from the glistening backs of seals asleep.

6. VIII. 09

* * *

Не видно птиц. Покорно чахнет
Лес, опустевший и больной.
Грибы сошли, но крепко пахнет
В оврагах сыростью грибной.

Глушь стала ниже и светлее,
В кустах сваялася трава,
И, под дождем осенним тля,
Чернеет темная листва.

А в поле ветер. День холодный
Угрюм и свеж - и целый день
Скитаюсь я в степи свободной,
Вдали от сел и деревень.

И, убаюкан шагом конным,
С отрадной грустью внемлю я,
Как ветер звоном монотонным
Гудит-поет в стволы ружья.

1889

No birds are visible

No birds are visible. The wood,
unwell and empty, thinly leans
towards the smells thick mushrooms should
remunerate in damp ravines.

The brush is thinner in the main:
and through the bushes grasses spill,
when, smouldering in the autumn rain,
the foliage, dark, turns blacker still.

All day I find the cold wind yields
both crushed and sharp-eyed images.
I walk at hazard through such fields
here far from house or villages.

Now lulled by this, my horse's pace,
how fond and sad the winds become:
through barrels of my gun, they trace,
monotonous, their plaintive hum.

1889

Песня

(Я - простая девка на баштане...)

Я - простая девка на баштане,
Он - рыбак, веселый человек.
Тонет белый парус на Лимане,
Много видел он морей и рек.

Говорят, гречанки на Босфоре
Хороши... А я черна, худа.
Утопает белый парус в море -
Может, не вернется никогда!

Буду ждать в погоду, в непогоду...
Не дождусь - с баштана разочтусь,
Выйду к морю, брошу перстень в воду
И косою черной удавлюсь.

1903-1906

Song

(I'm a simple girl on a bashtan...)

For I'm the simple country lass, you see,
where's he's the traveler, a fisherman.
The white sail dwindles down the estuary:
to think what gifts of waters he must scan.

Greek women on the Bosphorus, says he,
are blonde and beautiful. I'm thin and black!
The sail retreats and sinks into the sea:
I fear, how much I fear, he won't come back.

Good weather days, and foul, I still must stay
persistent, waiting, or I'll not survive.
For in the sea I'd throw my ring away,
and hang myself upon this old black scythe.

1903-1906

* * *

В дачном кресле, ночью, на балконе...
Оксана колыбельный шум...
Будь доверчив, кроток и спокоен,
Отдохни от дум.

Ветер приходящий, уходящий,
Веющий безбрежностью морской...
Есть ли тот, кто этой дачи спящей
Сторожит покой?

Есть ли тот, кто должной мерой мерит
Наши знанья, судьбы и года?
Если сердце хочет, если верит,
Значит — да.

То, что есть в тебе, ведь существует.
Вот ты дремлешь, и в глаза твои
Так любовно мягкий ветер дует —
Как же нет Любви?

1918

In a dacha chair

A balcony, a night, a dacha chair:

Oksana with a lullaby.

Be trusting of this gentle, calming air,
let idle thoughts go by.

The wind both comes and goes, and, up all hours,
the sea's vast fullness floods the place.

Is there someone sleeping here with powers
to guard this tranquil space?

Who knows the truth of what his eye perceives?
or knows what coming years and fate will bring?
Perhaps what heart can wish it so achieves,
and 'yes' may sing.

What's most inherent in you, that is there,
and what you're dreaming of, the eyes will tell.
For, with the winds' soft trifling in your hair,
is there not love as well?

1918

* * *

В поздний час мы были с нею в поле.
Я дрожа касался нежных губ...
«Я хочу объятия до боли,
Будь со мной безжалостен и груб!»

Утомясь, она просила нежно:
«Убаюкай, дай мне отдохнуть,
Не целуй так крепко и мятежно,
Положи мне голову на грудь».

Звёзды тихо искрились над нами,
Тонко пахло свежестью росы.
Ласково касался я устами
До горячих щёк и до косы.

И она забылась. Раз проснулась,
Как дитя, вздохнула в полусне,
Но, взглянувши, слабо улыбнулась
И опять прижалась ко мне.

Ночь царила долго в тёмном поле,
Долго милый сон я охранял...
А потом на золотом престоле,
На востоке, тихо засиял

Новый день, — в полях прохладно стало...
Я её тихонько разбудил
И в степи, сверкающей и алой,
По росе до дому проводил.

1901

At some late hour

Out in the fields with her, at some late hour,
I brushed her lips to gauge how things would be.
'I want a hug that hurts me: all your power
to be unpitying and rough with me'.

At length and wearily, she stopped and said,
'You have my leave to lull me to my rest.
Don't kiss so hard, but lay, by kisses led,
that head, so mutinous, against my breast.'

The stars were softly sparkling overhead
the scent of soft, sweet dew was in the air;
to those soft lips I was more fully wed,
those burning cheeks I kissed, and braided hair.

So she forgot herself. And I awoke
to find her in that child-like, dreamy state.
She smiled at me, looked up, and almost spoke,
then snuggled up as much she'd done of late.

So on those fields with her, the darkness grown
to be a dream's contentment through that night,
the daylight broke, and, from its golden throne,
the east lay open-robed in sober light.

And with the day about us, coolly spread,
I woke her up, she slowly coming to:
we walked through steppeland fields light-touched with red,
that sparkled, far about us, with the dew.

1901

Ангел

В вечерний час, над степью мирной,
Когда закат над ней сиял,
Среди небес, стезей эфирной
Вечерний ангел пролетал.

Он видел сумрак предзакатный, -
Уже синел вдали восток, -
И вдруг услышал он невнятный
Во ржах ребенка голосок.

Он видел колосья собирая,
Сплетал венок и пел в тиши,
И были в песне звуки рая –
Невинной, неземной души.

«Благослови меньшого брата, -
Сказал Господь. – Благослови
Младенца в тихий час заката
На путь и правды и любви!»

И ангел светлою улыбкой
Ребенка тихо осенил
И на закат лучисто-зыбкий
Поднялся в блеске нежных крыл.

И, точно крылья золотые,
Заря пылала в вышине.
М долго очи молодые
За ней следили в тишине!

1891

Angel

An evening in the peaceful grass,
with sunlight falling. Through the sky
the ethereal spirit seemed to pass,
an evening angel hastening by.

Who saw the twilight close around,
the east already touched with blue:
and heard the words, the distant sound:
from rye, a child was calling through.

He plucked the wheat and wove a wreath,
then sang in silence to the whole.
So Paradise was heard beneath
in innocence, a guiltless soul.

'Now to our little brother, power
and all true blessings,' said the Lord.
A child that's born this sunset hour
knows paths of love and true accord.

The angel rose, and with a smile
was radiant as the dawn light brings.
And bright and trembling all the while,
was sunset on extended wings.

And like the golden sweep of them,
the burning dawn then also saw
the child regarding her, and M
transfixed in long and silent awe.

1891

* * *

Мы встретились случайно, на углу.
Я быстро шел - и вдруг как свет зарницы
Вечернюю прорезал полумглу
Сквозь черные лучистые ресницы.

На ней был креп,- прозрачный легкий газ
Весенний ветер взвевал на мгновенье,
Но на лице и в ярком свете глаз
Я уловил былое оживленье.

И ласково кивнула мне она,
Слегка лицо от ветра наклонила
И скрылась за углом... Была весна...
Она меня простила - и забыла.

1905

By chance

By chance, at that street corner, so we met,
a lightning flash when I was rushing by.
At once, and through the evening's dreary fret,
those dark, voluptuous lashes caught my eye.

Through half-transparent crepe the gaslight fell.
The spring wind, too, was buffeting my face,
but in the face and eyes, as I could tell,
was animation of some other place.

Affectionate the nod in everything,
then to the wind she turned, as like as not,
to vanish round the corner. It was spring,
and she forgave me, and as soon forgot.

1905

ЦИРЦЕЯ

На треножник богиня садится:
Бледно-рыжее золото кос,
Зелень глаз и аттический нос -
В медном зеркале все отразится.

Тонко бархатом риса покрыт
Нежный лик, розовато-телесный,
Каплей нектара, влагой небесной,
Блещут серьги, скользя вдоль ланит,

И Улисс говорит: "О, Цирцея!
Все прекрасно в тебе: и рука,
Что прически коснулась слегка,
И сияющий локоть, и шея!"

А богиня с улыбкой: "Улисс!
Я горжусь лишь плечами своими
Да пушком апельсинным меж ними,
По спине убегающим вниз!"

1916

Circe

The goddess by a tripod sits and shows
the pale gold braiding of her lustrous hair;
a copper mirror shone with all that's there:
the sea-green eyes, and perfect Attic nose.

All was powdered over, had a velvet hue,
the face more delicate in its own flesh,
and like the God's true nectar, sweet and fresh,
hang earrings, glittering, as from leaves the dew.

Then Ulysses must say. 'With Circe posed,
the world's made beautiful.' But then her hair
she touched, but lightly though, as if to share
what shining elbow and her neck disclosed.

'But Ulysses,' she says and smiles, 'you know,
I'm proudest seeing how these haunches fare:
this rampant mass of fluffed-up orange hair,
which runs and clothes me from my head to toe!'

1916

Полевые цветы

В блеске огней, за зеркальными стеклами,
Пышно цветут дорогие цветы,
Нежны и сладки их тонкие запахи,
Листья и стебли полны красоты.

Их возрастили в теплицах заботливо,
Их привезли из-за синих морей;
Их не пугают метели холодные,
Бурные грозы и свежесть ночей...

Есть на полях моей родины скромные
Сестры и братья заморских цветов:
Их возрастила весна благовонная
В зелени майской лесов и лугов.

Видят они не теплицы зеркальные,
А небосклона простор голубой,
Видят они не огни, а таинственный
Вечных созвездий узор золотой.

Веет от них красотой стыдливою,
Сердцу и взору родные они
И говорят про давно позабытые
Светлые дни.

1887

Wild Flowers

It is a plate glass, gala-bright event:
wild flowers, and set out there as pricey gems.
How sweet and delicate is each soft scent,
such beauty in their forward leaves and stems.

Raised carefully in warm conservatories,
and drawn across blue seas from far abroad,
they have no snows to fear that winter sees,
or stormy thunderstorms fresh nights afford.

I think of modest ones, from Russian fields,
but still companions of exotic flowers.
They drank the incense that the spring-time yields
when woods and meadowlands have May-time powers.

There were no forcing houses they would see;
the sky was always blue from days of old.
Mere light is not for them, but mysteries
of constellations in their patterned gold.

Theirs is a shamefaced beauty, maybe, won
from what the heart at peace and eyes would say.
They talk about the long-forgotten ones
of some bright day.

1887

* * *

Рыжими иголками
Устлан косогор,
Сладко пахнет елками
Жаркий летний бор.

Сядь на эту скользкую
Золотую сушь
С песенкою польскою
Про лесную глушь.

Темнота ветвистая
Над тобой висит,
Красное, лучистое,
Солнце чуть сквозит.

Дай твои ленивые
Девичьи уста,
Грусть твоя счастливая,
Песенка проста.

Сладко пахнет елками
Потаенный бор,
Скользкими иголками
Устлан косогор.

30 июня 1916

Red needles

Red needle leaves
are heaped in soft, sweet swells,
and summer warmth now weaves
its pungent pine-tree smells.

Now on this sun-warmed slope
where gleaming needles press,
your Polish words evoke
a singing wilderness.

Dark the shade, aslant,
now hanging over you;
red-soaked and radiant
the sunlight falls on through.

Give me what I ask,
your girl's soft, lazy mouth
it is a simple task
for sad songs of the south.

The summer warmth still weaves
its pungent pine-tree smells;
red needle leaves
lie heaped in soft, sweet swells.

June 30, 1916

Одиночество

И ветер, и дождик, и мгла
Над холодной пустыней воды.
Здесь жизнь до весны умерла,
До весны опустели сады.

5. Я на даче один. Мне темно
За мольбертом, и дует в окно.

Вчера ты была у меня,
Но тебе уж тоскливо со мной.
Под вечер ненастного дня
10. Ты мне стала казаться женой...

Что ж, прощай! Как-нибудь до весны
Проживу и один -- без жены...

Сегодня идут без конца
Те же тучи--гряда за грядой.
15. Твой след под дождем у крыльца
Расплылся, налился водой.

И мне больно глядеть одному
В предвечернюю серую тьму.

Loneliness

But wind and rain and mist ahead,
and vague, cold, watery concerns.
For prior to spring all things are dead,
the gardens bare till warmth returns.

5. How dark my dacha here has grown,
at easel working, and alone.

And you were here till yesterday
but also rather bored with me.
That evening of a stormy day
10. you proved the partner life could be.

To that, goodbye! I'll lead a life
alone, without a so-called wife.

The sky above seems one grey stain
of clouds that jostle, undeterred.
The porch's footprint in the rain
soon fills with water and is blurred.

It hurts me now to gaze alone
out here, in this grey darkness thrown.

Мне крикнуть хотелось вослед:
20. "Воротись, я сроднился с тобой!
Но для женщины прошлого нет:
Разлюбила -- и стал ей чужой.

Что ж! Камин затоплю, буду пить...
Хорошо бы собаку купить.

1903

I tried to shout on after her,
'Come back. You can't. You are my wife.'
But women spurn their past, prefer
to call love failed a stranger's life.

A fire and drink will cleanse this fog,
It may be time to get a dog.

1903

Жасмин

Цветет жасмин. Зеленой чащей
Иду над Тереком с утра.
Вдали, меж гор - простой, блестящий
И четкий конус серебра.

Река шумит, вся в искрах света,
Жасмином пахнет жаркий лес.
А там, вверху - зима и лето:
Январский снег и синь небес.

Лес замирает, млеет в зное,
Но тем пышней цветет жасмин.
В лазури яркой – неземное
Великолепие вершин.

1904

Jasmine

The jasmine blooms. From thicket greens
I cross this morning into Terek's zones
of distant, brilliant mountain scenes
that glitter as clear silver cones.

The river's roar, the sparks of light,
the jasmine with hot piney scents,
and at the top the constant sight
of springtime white in sky's events.

The forest settles, stilled in heat:
the jasmine of such brilliance speaks.
Unearthly is the bright blue sheet
of splendour in the mountain peaks.

1904

СТАМБУЛ

Облезлые худые кобели
С печальными, молящими глазами -
Потомки тех, что из степей пришли
За пыльными скрипучими возами.

Был победитель славен и богат
И затопил он шумною ордою
Твои дворцы, твои сады, Царьград,
И предался, как сытый лев, покою.

Но дни летят, летят быстрее птиц!
И вот уже в Скутари на погосте
Чернеет лес, и тысячи гробниц
Белеют в кипарисах, точно кости.

И прах веков упал на прах святынь,
На славный город, ныне полудикий,
И вой собак звучит тоской пустынь
Под византийской ветхой базиликой.

И пуст Сераль, и смолк его фонтан,
И высохли столетние деревья...
Стамбул, Стамбул! Последний мертвый стан
Последнего великого кочевья!

1905

Istambul

Multitudes of thin-limbed, shabby men
who stare at you with sad and pleading eyes:
descendents of the creaking, dusty wagons when
they came from steppelands in their nomad guise.

Rich and famed, their leader, who would need
to give his noisy Horde a splendid view
of palaces and gardens: he decreed
a rest as satiated lions do.

The days fell faster than the birds may fly,
and in Scutri now the churchyard stones
within black shadows of the cypress lie
as white, innumerable as confined bones.

The dust of ages fell on marbled shrine,
and now that half-wild glory must expire
as pitiful as desert dogs that whine
about their delapidate St. Sophia.

Of Seraglio and fountain, not a trace,
nor of the trees with centuries of grace.
Istambul, the last great stopping place
of that indomitable, nomadic race!

1905

БЕДУИН

За Мертвым морем - пепельные грани
Чуть видных гор. Полдневный час, обед.
Он выкупал кобылу в Иордане
И сел курить. Песок как медь нагрет.

За Мертвым морем, в солнечном тумане,
Течет мираж. В долине - зной и свет,
Воркует дикий голубь. На герани,
На олеандрах - вешний алый цвет.

И он дремотно ноет, воспевая
Зной, олеандр, герань и тамарикс.
Сидит, как ястреб. Пегая абая.
Сползает с плеч... Поэт, разбойник, гикс.

Вон закурил - и рад, что с тонким дымом
Сравнит в стихах вершины за Сиддимом.

1908

The Bedouin

Beyond the Dead Sea waters, ashy bits
of hills poke up. It's noon, and time to eat.
He bathes his mare, smokes his hookah, sits
on Jordan's sand that's bronze-like in the heat.

Beyond the Dead Sea waters, space becomes
elusive mirages of blazing light.

Warmth, doves cooing. Spring's geraniums
and oleanders stand out, pink and bright.

He whines a drowsy song, as thin as smoke.
Oleander, geraniums, tamarisk and heat.
Now like a hawk he squats: the piebald cloak
slips from his shoulders. Thief and poet meet

in this fierce tribesman as the thin smoke fills
the peaks beyond those distant Siddim hills.

1908

* * *

В жарком золоте заката Пирамиды,
Вдоль по Нилу, на утеху иностранцам,
Шелком в воду светят парусные лодки
И бежит луксорский белый пароход.

Это час, когда за Нилом пальмы четки,
И в Каире блещут стекла алым глянцем,
И хедив в ландо катается, и гиды
По кофейням отдыхают от господ.

А сиреневые дали Нила к югу,
К дикой Нубии, к Порогам, смутны, зыбки
И все так же миру чужды, заповедны,
Как при Хуфу, при Камбизе... Я привез

Лук оттуда и колчан зелено-медный,
Щит из кожи бегемота, дротик гибкий,
Мех пантеры и суданскую кольчугу,
Но на что все это мне - вопрос.

1915

Egypt

With pyramids, the sun in going down provides
rich spreads of gold. The Nile, to please its foreign guests,
hauls sailboats' silk reflections into water calms;
the famed white Luxor steamer makes its usual jaunts.

It is the hour of rosaries and distant palms.
On Cairo glass the sun takes scarlet, glistening rests.
The Khedive has his Landau ride. Off-duty guides
escape to coffee shops beyond their masters' wants.

Southwards, under lilac skies, the Nile will see
Nubia the wild, cataracts, vague apparitions
not really of this world, but of the Odyssey,
Khufu and Cambysses. And I have brought a bow

and quiver made of copper with green verdigris,
a hippopotamus shield, flexible dart, unwanted additions
to this panther fur, Sudanese chain-mail filigree,
though what these all amount to, I really do not know.

1915

Эльбурс

(Иранский миф)

На льдах Эльбурса солнце всходит.
На льдах Эльбурса жизни нет.
Вокруг него на небосводе
Течет алмазный круг планет.

Туман, всползающий на скаты,
Вершин не в силах достигнуть:
Одним небесным Иазатам
К венцу земли доступен путь.

И Митра, чье святое имя
Благословляет вся земля,
Восходит первый между ними
Зарей на льдистые поля.

И светит ризой златотканой,
И озирает с высоты
Истоки рек, пески Ирана
И гор волнистые хребты.

1905

Elburs

(An Iranian myth)

On Elburz ice the rising sun
completes the life it had begun.
Around it in the firmament
the diamond-twinkling planets run.

The fog creeps up the lower slopes,
below the summit sits and mopes,
yet from this heavenly Namavand
there ran a path to crowning hopes.

Mithras, with its holy name,
that blesses everywhere the same,
has yet One rising up between,
and dawn on icefields makes its claim.

It shines on clothed and golden lands,
and looking down from its great height
on river sources, Iranian sands,
holds mountain ranges in its sight.

1905

Индийский океан

Над чернотой твоих пучин
Горели дивные светила,
И тяжело зыбь твоя ходила,
Взрывая огонь беззвучных мин.

Она глаза слепила нам,
И мы бледнели в быстром свете,
И сине-огненные сети
Текли по медленным волнам.

И снова, шумен и глубок,
Ты восставал и загорался —
И от звезды к звезде шатался
Великой тростью зыбкий фок.

За валом встречный вал бежал
С дыханьем пламенным муссона,
И хвост алмазный Скорпиона
Над чернотой твоей дрожал.

1916

Indian Ocean

Above your glossed and dark designs
were marvellous and glinting lights,
as though that breaking swell were sites
of detonation, deep in mines.

My eyes were blinded, almost lost
in that quick-changing, livid fire:
a net of bright blue, burning wire
was in those long, slow billows tossed.

And in that deep and noisy cast
you rose and spread in fiery light,
and star to star throughout the night
close-wavered round the shifting mast.

Beneath that mast another ran,
with moonsoon heats beneath the sail,
a scorpion with a diamond tail,
both black and threatening this poor man.

1916

Война

От кипарисовых гробниц
Взлетела стая черных птиц. –
Тюрбэ расстреляно, разбито.
Вот грязный шелковый покров,
Кораны с оттиском подков...
Как грубо конское копыто!

Вот чей-то сад; он черен, гол –
И не о нем ли мой осел
Рыдающим томится ревом?
А я - я, прокаженный, рад
Бродить, вдыхая горький чад,
Что тает в небе бирюзовом:

Пустой, разрушенный, немой,
Отныне этот город - мой,
Мой каждый спуск и переулок,
Мои все туфли мертвецов,
Домов руины и дворцов.
Где шум морской так свеж и гулок!

1915

War

From cypress tombs they gather flight,
a flock of birds as dark as night.
The turbaned stone is cracked and broken,
and here the silk covering of the Koran
is mired beneath both horse and man:
the cavalry has rudely spoken.

This was someone's garden, where
my donkey stops: it's burnt and bare.
Distant now the sobbing cry.
This leper, far from living folk,
goes wandering, snuffing bitter smoke
that melts into a turquoise sky.

All this is mine: these steps I trace
across a silent, emptied place.
From alley way and steep decline
in dead men's shoes my shambling goes
past house and palace porticoes
to meet the hard, fresh smack of brine!

1915

Слово

Молчат гробницы, мумии и кости,—
Лишь слову жизнь дана:
Из древней тьмы, на мировом погосте,
Звучат лишь Письмена.

И нет у нас иного достоянья!
Умейте же беречь
Хоть в меру сил, в дни злобы и страданья,
Наш дар бессмертный — речь.

Москва, 1915

Word

Through silent tombs, and mummies and through bones
it lengthens out our lives:
in ancient darkness and past churchyard bones
the written word survives.

We have no other gifts that count, but bring
within its sheltering reach,
this gift through angry days, this suffering,
our immortal speech.

Moscow, 1915

* * *

И цветы, и шмели, и трава, и колосья,
И лазурь, и полуденный зной...
Срок настанет - господь сына блудного спросит:
"Был ли счастлив ты в жизни земной?"

И забуду я все - вспомню только вот эти
Полевые пути меж колосьев и трав -
И от сладостных слез не сумею ответить,
К милосердным коленям припав.

1918

Flowers and bumblebees

With flowers, and bumblebees, the grass, and sheaves of hay,
among this blue and midday heat,
he Lord will ask the prodigal, on some such day,
if life so given him were sweet.

And all that's past will be forgotten, only these
odd paths through fields I shall recall,
and in my flooding tears, and on my grateful knees,
scarce find the words to speak at all.

1918

Сенокос

Среди двора, в батистовой рубашке,
Стоял барчук и, щурясь, звал: «Корней!»
Но двор был пуст. Две пегие дворняжки,
Щенки, катались в сене. Все синей

5. Над крышами и садом небо млело,
Как сказочная сонная река,
Все горячей палило зноем тело,
Все радостней белели облака,

И все душней благоухало сено...

10. «Корней, седлай!» Но нет, Корней в лесу,
Осталась только скотница Елена
Да пчельник Дрон... Щенок замял осу

И сено взрыл... Молочный голубь комом
Упал ни крышу скотного варка...

15. Везде открыты окна... А над домом
Так серебрится тополь, так ярка

Листва вверху - как будто из металла,
И воробьи шныряют то из зала,
В тенистый палисадник, в бересклет,
20. То снова в зал... Покой, лазурь и свет...

В конюшне полусумрак и прохладно,
Навозом пихнет, сбруей, лошадьми,
Касаточки щебечут... И Ами,
Соскучившись, тихонько ржет и жадно

Hayfield

In the courtyard, in a cambric shirt
is Barchuk standing, calling: much ado
about the piebald puppies in the dirt
there playing, rolling in the hay. All blue

5. the sky above the roofs and garden, soft
as water in the dreaming river. Heat
is everywhere, intense. The clouds aloft
are bleached and spreading in a thin white sheet.

The stifling smell of hay, essential earth.
10. ('Let's saddle up!') that's rooted like a tree.
Elena the cowgirl stays. A thick hive's worth
of sounds. A puppy startles at a bee.

The hay, the milky pigeons: one long drouse
and not a roof of cattle-barn in sight.

15. All windows open, and, above the house,
the poplar's glinting with a silver light,

where, at the topmost part, hard metals perch.
Now from the hall the sparrows take their flight.
half darkness shades the garden and a birch:
20. all's peaceful, sleeping in a pale blue light.

Manure and harnesses, the odd debris
that comes with stables here is out in force,
and there is Ami, an impatient horse,
that's bored and says so, neighing greedily.

25. Косит спой глаз лилово-золотой
В решетчатую дверку... Стременами
Звенит барчук, подняв седло с уздой,
Кладет, подпруги ловит - и ушами

Прядет Ами, вдруг сделавшись стройней
30. И выходя на солнце. Там к кадушке
Склоняется, - блеск, небо видит в ней
И долго пьет... И солнце жжет подушки,

Луку, потник, играя в серебре...
А через час заходят побирушки:
35. Слепой и мальчик. Оба на дворе
Сидят как дома. Мальчик босоногий

Стоит и медлит... Робко входит в зал,
С восторгом смотрит в светлый мир зеркал,
Касается до клавиш фортепьяно –
40. И, вздрогнув, замирает: знойно, странно

И весело в хоромах! - На балкон
Открыта дверь, а солнце жарким светом
Зажгло паркет, и глубоко паркетом
Зеркальный отблеск двери отражен,

45. И воробьи крикливою станицей
Прносятся у самого стекла
За золотой, сверкающею птицей,
За иволгой, скользящей, как стрела.

1909

25. It squints an eye of singing lilac-gold
to harnesses beyond the gated door.
Now Barchuk lifts the reins and saddle: cold
they sit upon the back they're destined for.

The horse spins round, seems suddenly more sleek,
30. and trots out in the sun. Now, like as not
to drink, it leans and long reflections speak
of sky and clouds. The saddle-cloth is hot.

Luca marks with silver every card
and sweats it out. Two beggars then appear,
35. a blind man and a boy. Here in the yard
they sit. The barefoot boy betrays some fear

but, hesitating, walks on through the hall,
delighted, sees himself upon the wall
of mirrors, touches then the piano keys —
40. and shudders, seems to start and freeze.

How happily the stream of sunlight falls
across the breadth of gleaming parquet floors.
A deep reflection of the open doors
is flooded through these airy mansion halls.

45. The sparrows speak of homely destinations
and flit on past the pane of mirroring glass,
and then the shining, golden delegations
that, like the Oriole in arrows, pass.

1909

ПОСЛЕДНИЙ ШМЕЛЬ

Черный бархатный шмель, золотое оплечье,
Заунывно гудящий певучей струной,
Ты зачем залетаешь в жильё человечесьё
И как будто тоскуешь со мной?

За окном свет и зной, подоконники яркие,
Безмятежны и жарки последние дни,
Полетай, погуди - и в засохшей татарке,
На подушечке красной, усни.

Не дано тебе знать человеческой думы,
Что давно опустели поля,
Что уж скоро в бурьян сдует ветер угрюмый
Золотого сухого шмеля!

1916

The Last Bumblebee

Clothed in gold and velvet black, the bumblebee,
must hum and sadly now its muted song.
Why would you come inside, the refugee
in places where you don't belong?

Intense the window light beyond this room,
what warm serenity these last days keep.
Be gone, and find some tufted thistle's plume
and on its purple pillow sleep.

You cannot know that human knowledge leads
to empty fields, and that full presently:
how soon the winds disperse the sullen weeds,
and you, a gold, dry, bumblebee.

1916

СОБАКА

Мечтай, мечтай. Все уже и тусклей
Ты смотришь золотистыми глазами
На вьюжный двор, на снег, прилипший к раме,
На метлы гулких, дымных тополей.

Вздыхая, ты свернулась потеплей
У ног моих - и думаешь... Мы сами
Томим себя - тоской иных полей,
Иных пустынь... за пермскими горами.

Ты вспоминаешь то, что чуждо мне:
Седое небо, тундры, льды и чумы
В твоей студеной дикой стороне.
Но я всегда делю с тобою думы:
Я человек: как бог, я обречен
Познать тоску всех стран и всех времен.

1909

Dog

Dream on, though smaller, dimmer what you see
with those great amber eyes of yours. They go
from blizzards in bare yards, to wadded snow
in every broom of smoky poplar tree.

You growl and warmly curl up at my feet,
and think — what do you think? I speak
of things we humans long for, incomplete
and past all wastes and Permian mountain peak.

What you recall is not for me: the strange
grey skies and tundra, ice and plague times too.
In icy ancestry how far you range
through what I'd still and gladly share with you.

Though human, as a god I'm cursed to know,
all times, all countries, how man's longings go.

1909

Канарейка

На родине она зеленая....

Брэм

Канарейку из-за моря
Привезли, и вот она
Золотая стала с горя,
Тесной клеткой пленена.

Птицей вольной, изумрудной
Уж не будешь,- как ни пой
Про далекий остров чудный
Над трактирную толпой!

10 мая 1921

Canary

At home, it is green....

Bram

A canary from across the sea,
and brought so far that we can gauge
in bars of gold what grief can be
when trapped inside a tiny cage.

But you a free and emerald bird
will tell no tale, though sung aloud:
your marvelous home will stay unheard
above the noisy tavern crowd!

May 10, 1921

РЫБАЧКА

- Кто там стучит? Не встану. Не открою
Намокшей двери в хижине моей.
Тревожна ночь осеннюю порою -
Рассвет еще тревожней и шумней.

- "Тебя пугает гул среди камней
И скрежет мелкой гальки под горою?"
- Нет, я больна. И свежестью сырою
По одеялу дует из сеней.

- "Я буду ждать, когда угомонится
От бури охмелевшая волна
И станет блеклым золотом струиться
Осенний день на лавку из окна".

- Уйди! Я ночевала не одна.
Он был смелей. Он моря не боится.

1908

Fisherwoman

Who's that knocking on my hut's wet door?
No one's to get me up on such a night.
The autumn is uneasy here, but more
alarming still is dawn's loud, boisterous light.

'The roar through rocks and stones — it frightens you,
or mountain's pebbled, slow-grinding sound?'
Myself, I'm sick of it, of weather too
that falls in fresh, raw blankets hard around.

'I'll wait for it to settle down and be
some fierce, drunk wave that's by the wild storm thrown.
It will in time adopt a golden key
as placid streams the window bench has known.'

'So go away!' I did not sleep alone:
my man was bold and had no fear of sea.

1908

Деревенский нищий

В стороне от дороги, под дубом,
Под лучами палящими спит
В зипунишке, заштопанном грубо,
Старый нищий, седой инвалид;

Изнемог он от дальней дороги
И прилег под межой отдохнуть...
Солнце жжет истомленные ноги,
Обнаженную шею и грудь...

Видно, слишком нужда одолела,
Видно, негде приюта сыскать,
И судьба беспощадно велела
Со слезами по окнам стонать...

Не увидишь такого в столице:
Тут уж впрям истомленный нуждой!
За железной решеткой в темнице
Редко виден страдалец такой.

В долгий век свой немало он силы
За тяжелой работой убил,
Но, должно быть, у края могилы
Уж не стало хватать ему сил.

Village Beggar

Here off the road, beneath a broad oak tree,
he's sleeping unprotected from the sun's hot rays:
in much-darned cloak and clothes, how wretchedly
the grey old beggar goes his limping ways.

The long, hard journey and oppressive heat
have now exhausted him. He takes his rest
beside the hedge: the hot sun stings his feet:
his neck is bare as well, as is his chest.

Apparently it's need that sent him on:
apparently beyond all shelter here.
Merciless the fate that he be gone
beyond what these and pitying windows fear.

You'll not see this in any normal day
in our good capital: a man in need.
Or in some dungeon, even, locked away:
rarely is such suffering decreed.

Old men like him have yet the power
to go on working at the hard and rough.
He must be at the grave's own ending hour
to find himself no longer strong enough.

Он идет из селенья в селенье,
А мольбу чуть лепечет язык,
Смерть близка уж, но много мученья
Перетерпит несчастный старик.

Он заснул... А потом со стенаньем
Христа ради проси и проси...
Грустно видеть, ка много страданья
И тоски и нужды на Руси!

1886 (Первое напечатанное стихотворение)

From village to village the poor man goes:
with plea he babbles out to take on trust.
So death approaches, sufferings; he knows
that he'll endure them, as he plainly must.

He fell asleep at last, but with a groan
that asks and asks of Christ's own giving hand.
How sad to see such pain and suffering thrown
on this, our mother Russia's needful land.

1886 (First printed poem)

КАМЕННАЯ БАБА

От зноя травы сухи и мертвы.
Степь - без границ, но даль синее слабо.
Вот остров лошадиной головы.
Вот снова - - Каменная Баба.

Как сонны эти плоские черты!
Как первобытно-грубо это тело!
Но я стою, боюсь тебя... А ты
Мне улыбаешься несмело.

О, дикое исчадье древней тьмы!
Не ты ль когда-то было громовержцем?
- Не бог, не бог нас создал. Это мы
Богов творили рабским сердцем.

1906

Stone Woman

The grass has dried up and looks dead from heat.
The steppe fades out into a thin blue stain.
But on this horse-head island we must meet
this stonebuilt woman, who is here again.

She sleeps with her flat features close to dreams,
the body's vigorous but primitive:
I stand in awe of you. Afraid. It seems
both faint and cautious that the smile you give.

Oh, wild thing born of distant time's abyss,
a thing of darkness with the thunderer's part.
Not God, not God created us, but this
that we conceive of with a captive's heart.

1906

ПРОВОДЫ

Забил буграми жемчуг, закружится,
Взрывая малахиты под рулем.
Земля плывет. Отходит, отделился
Высокий борт. И мы назад плывем.

Мол опустел. На сор и зерна жита,
Свистя, слетелись голуби. А там
Дрожит корма, и длинный жезл бугшприта
Отходит и чертит по небесам.

Куда теперь? Март, сумерки... К вечерне
Звонят в порту... Душа весной полна,
Полна тоской... Вон огонек в таверне...
Но нет, домой, Я пьян и без вина.

1908

Departures

The water boils in lumpish, thick-clogged pearls,
explodes in green beneath the steering wheel.
The wide earth floats. We leave, the sail unfurls
and, tilting wildly, it is back we reel.

The pier is empty. Whistling flocks come fast
to congregate on seeds or refuse there.
Much agitation and the bowsprit mast
draws all before it, cleaving sky and air.

Where now this March and vespers? Twilight glows.
A call to port is made. The soul's divine
in spring, but filled with longings. A tavern shows . .
but no, I'm drunk enough without more wine.

1908

В поезде

Все шире вольные поля
Проходят мимо нас кругами;
И хутора и тополя
Плывут, скрываясь за полями.

Вот под горою скит святой
В бору болеет за лугами...
Вот мост железный над рекой
Промчался с грохотом под нами...

А вот и лес! - И гул идет
Под стук колос в лесу зеленом:
Берез веселых хоровод,
Шумя, встречает нас поклоном.

От паровоза белый дым.
Как хлопья ваты, расплзаясь.
Плывет, цепляется по ним.
К земле беспомощно склоняясь...

Но уж опять кусты пошли,
Опять деревьев строй редееет.
И бесконечная вдали
Степь развернулась и синееет.

Опять привольные поля
Проходят мимо нас кругами.
И хутора, и тополя
Плывут, скрываясь за полями.

1893

On the Train

Increasing open fields one sees,
that passing then will circle round,
and farms and now the poplar trees
that float and hide in built-on ground.

A Holy Hermitage beneath the hill,
and forest not with meadows grassed,
a river, bridge of iron will:
they each and all go roaring past.

And so the forest, hum of wheels,
reflected from that tree-lined wall:
the birches dance their merry reels:
they bow to us in this odd ball.

From the engine puffs of smoke,
like cotton flakes that then are clearing,
clinging, flung out like a cloak
and at the ground then disappearing.

More clumps of bushes, how they rise on
slopes of trees that thin to view:
endless to the wide horizon
the steppeland are returned to blue.

Increasing open fields one sees,
that passing then will circle round,
and farms and now the poplar trees
that float and hide in built-on ground.

1893

Безнадежность

На севере есть розовые мхи,
Есть серебристо-шелковые дюны...
Но темных сосен звонкие верхи
Поют, поют над морем, точно струны.

Послушай их. Стань, прислонись к сосне:
Сквозь грозный шум ты слышишь ли их нежность?
Но и она — в певучем полусне.
На севере отрадна безнадежность.

1907

Hopelessness

There are pink mosses in these northern lands,
the dunes silk-silver in what daylight brings,
the pines reverberate in gloomy stands:
the wind that resonates on ocean strings.

Listen to them, propped against this tree,
and hear a tenderness in these harsh sounds.
It sings as half asleep, contentedly,
this hopelessness in which great joy abounds.

1907

С ОСТРОГОЙ

Костер трещит. В фелюке свет и жар.
В воде стоят и серебрятся щуки,
Белеет дно... Бери трезубец в руки
И не спеши. Удар! Еще удар!

Но поздно. Страсть - как сладостный кошмар,
Но сил уж нет, противны кровь и муки...
Гаси, гаси - вали с борта фелюки
Костер в Лиман... И чад, и дым, и пар!

Теперь легко, прохладно. Выступают
Туманные созвездья в полутьме.
Волна качает, рыбы засыпают...
И вверх лицом ложусь я на корме.

Плыть - до зари, но в море путь не скучен.
Я задремлю под ровный стук уключин.

1905

In an Estuary

Fire crackles. Light and heat throughout the boat,
and in the water, wavering, the silvery pike.
In white we glimpse the swirling bottom, strike
and pause, and strike again, again by rote.

Too late. That force becomes a hurtful dream,
disgust with bloodied killings intertwined.
We stop and leave, and on the estuary find
a bonfire where we watch the smoke and steam.

Now things are easy. The night is cool. I keep
an eye on how the constellations turn.
The water round me settles, the fish asleep:
I lie, face upward, in the boat's broad stern.

Or I can swim till dawn, not quite awake
to rhythms that the sea and the rowlocks make.

1905

* * *

Бывает море белое, молочное,
Весь зримый Апокалипсис, когда
Весь мир одно молчание полночное,
Армады звезд и мертвая вода:

Предвечное, могильное, грозящее
Созвездиями небо - и легко
Дымящееся жемчугом, лежащее
Всемирной плащеницею млеко.

1925

Sometimes the sea is white

Sometimes the sea is milky white, with scars
of some apocalypse, the whole world stark
to midnight's listening silence, and the stars
in vast Armadas interspersed with dark,

dead water — serious and threatened by
the whirling constellations as they fall
with strung-out pearls across the outstretched sky,
the world beneath them shrouded, close and small.

1925

* * *

Бушует полая вода,
Шумит и глухо, и протяжно.
Грачей пролетные стада
Кричат и весело, и важно.

Дымятся черные бугры,
И утром в воздухе нагретом
Густые белые пары
Напоены теплом и светом.

А в полдень лужи под окном
Так разливаются и блещут,
Что ярким солнечным пятном
По залу «зайчики» трепещут.

Меж круглых рыхлых облаков
Невинно небо голубеет,
И солнце ласковое греет
В затишье гумен и дворов.

Весна, весна! И все ей радо.
Как в забытии каком стоишь
И слышишь свежий запах сада
И теплый запах талых крыш.

Кругом вода журчит, сверкает,
Крик петухов звучит порой,
А ветер, мягкий и сырой,
Глаза тихонько закрывает.

1893

The shallow water

The shallow water seeming rocks
in some prolonged but quiet applause,
while rooks in congregated flocks
give out their joyful ragged caws.

Dark, smoking mounds the snow has left
exposed to warming by the morning air,
nor is their whitish mist bereft
of light and movement anywhere.

Noon puddles at the window seem
to flood on out to blazing light.
Reflected spots of sunlight gleam
around the room or out of sight.

The clouds are fluffy, loosely spun
of innocence and calm blue air.
Both warm and gentle is the sun
on courtyards and on people there.

Spring. Spring. Such happiness.
The past is only where you stand.
Rich gardens smells are here to bless,
and thawing roofs are close to hand.

Around the sparkling waters lie,
quiet murmuring, and roosters call.
The wind is raw and soft, and all
encompassed by the closing eye.

1893

* * *

И вновь морская гладь бледна
Под звездным благостным сияньем,
И полночь теплая полна
Очарованием, молчаньем –

Как, господи, благодарить
Тебя за все, что в мире этом
Ты дал мне видеть и любить
В морскую ночь, под звездным светом.

1908

The sea is pale

The sea is pale and memorable
beneath the stars' benevolence.
The midnight here is warm and full
of charm and quiet obedience.

But how are we to thank you, Lord,
for all within this world of ours.
You let my sight and love accord
with sea and night through star-lit hours.

1908

Поэт

Поэт печальный и суровый,
Бедняк, задавленный нуждой,
Напрасно нищеты оковы
Порвать стремишься ты душой!

Напрасно хочешь ты презреньем
Свои несчастья победить
И, склонный к светлым увлечениям,
Ты хочешь верить и любить!

Нужда еще не раз отравит
Минуты светлых дум и грез,
И позабыть мечты заставит,
И доведет до горьких слез.

Когда ж, измученный скорбями,
Забыв бесплодный, тяжкий труд,
Умрешь ты с голоду,- цветами
Могильный крест твой перевьют!

1886

The Poet

Though sad, severe the poet be,
a poor man bowed down by his need,
he'll break these chains of poverty,
declare his soul will set him freed.

And vainly will his thoughts despise
an urge to win, to be above
the world of pastimes, gain the prize
of self-belief, of faith and love.

That need will come again and add
its poison to life's hopes and fears.
He will forget what dreams he had
and know but time's yet bitter tears.

Then he, so long in sorrow's powers,
forgetting fruitless artistry,
will pine away, not even flowers
to mark where gravestone used to be.

1886

В АРХИПЕЛАГЕ

Осенний день в лиловой крупной зыби
Блистал, как медь. Эол и Посейдон
Вели в снастях певучий долгий стон,
И наш корабль нырял подобно рыбе.

Вдали был мыс. Высоко на изгибе,
Сквозя, вставал неровный ряд колонн.
Но песня рей меня клонила в сон -
Корабль нырял в лиловой крупной зыби.

Не все ль равно, что это старый храм,
Что на мысу - забытый портик Феба!
Запомнил я лишь ряд колонн да небо.

Дым облаков курился по горам,
Пустынный мыс был схож с ковригой хлеба.
Я жил во сне. Богов творил я сам.

1908

The Archipelago

In burnished copper shone that autumn day.
Poseidon and the winds groaned somberly.
And like a fish, on through that purple sea,
our vessel dipped and rose and found its way.

There, far ahead, a cape, and I could tell
at intervals how broken columns showed.
The sun-god made me sleepy: still we rode
across that white-combed, purple, heavy swell.

All seemed quite natural: sky and distant cape,
the sun-god's temple, gracious portico,
but etched into my mind what they would show . . .

the smoke-rings round the hills, the headland's drape
on homely loaves. In dreams I made it so,
and gods as only I myself would shape.

1908

Родине

Они глумятся над тобою,
Они, о родина, корят
Тебя твоею простотою,
Убогим видом черных хат...

Так сын, спокойный и нахальный,
Стыдится матери своей -
Усталой, робкой и печальной
Средь городских его друзей,

Глядит с улыбкой сострадания
На ту, кто сотни верст брела
И для него, ко дню свиданья,
Последний грошик берегла.

1891

Homeland

They mock you, who would only see
our land stuck fast in some hard rut,
your homely, sweet humility
the squalor of some darkened hut.

Casually the son reports
on his poor mother's odds and ends,
bewildered, shy and out of sorts
with his new, smart and city friends.

A smile, and in compassion's way,
and for the mile on mile he's braved,
I'll give, that very date and day,
the last poor kopek I have saved.

1891

Сириус

Где ты, звезда моя заветная,
Венец небесной красоты?
Очарованье безответное
Снегов и лунной высоты?

Где молодость, простая, чистая,
В кругу любимом и родном,
И старый дом, и ель смолистая
В сугробе белом под окном?

Пылай, играй стоцветной силою,
Неугасимая звезда,
Над дальнею моею могилою.
Забытой богом навсегда!

1923

Sirius

Where are you now, my favoured star,
whose sky-born beauty does not fade?
Unrequited is your call from far
who are of snow and moonlight made.

Where is the magic of my youth,
where are those loved and dear to me,
those window banks of snow — in truth,
that home of one far house and tree?

Blaze on, unquenchable in power,
in varied lights that you evince.
You flood my grave in some late hour
God knew but has forgotten since.

1923

Морфей

Прекрасен твой венок из огненного мака,
Мой Гость таинственный, жилец земного мрака.
Как бледен смуглый лик, как долог грустный взор,
Глядящий на меня и кротко и в упор,

Как страшен смертному безгласный час Морфея!
Но сказочно цветет, во мраке пламенея,
Божественный венок, и к радостной стране
Уводит он меня, где все доступно мне,

Где нет преград земных моим надеждам вешним.
Где снюсь я сам себе далеким и нездешним,
Где не дивит ничто - ни даже ласки той,
С кем бог нас разделил могильною чертой.

1924

Morpheus

How beautiful the fire-red poppies of your wreath
to that strange guest inhabiting dark earth beneath:
how pale the sunburnt look, how long the saddening ways
with which you stare at me with mild and point-blank gaze.

How terrible for man the silent hour of Morpheus,
the weave of blaze and darkness with the fabulous.
Divine the wreath is, and to a joyful country he
conveys me: wholly rendered and well-known to me.

No hopes forbidden there, nor is the wild spring far,
this place where self I dream of stays familiar.
No marvels, nor is kindness superfluous
in those from whom the God-made grave divided us.

1924

Appendix

Significance of Ivan Bunin

Ivan Alekseyevich Bunin was born in 1870 on parental estates in the Voronezh province of central Russia. He was the third and youngest son of Aleksey Nikolayevich Bunin (1827–1906) and Lyudmila Aleksandrovna Bunina (née Chubarova, 1835–1910). The family were minor gentry with a distinguished Polish and Tartar past, one that included the poets Anna Bunina (1774–1829) and Vasily Zhukovsky (1783–1852), the most celebrated court poet of his time after Pushkin. His older brother Yevgeny had the largest influence on Bunin, helping to give him an education that his father's financial troubles — drink, gambling and sheer impracticality — had prevented. {1-2} Bunin began writing poems at an early age, and displayed an extraordinary keenness to the nuances of nature. 'The quality of my vision was such that I've seen all seven of the stars of Pleiades, heard a marmot's whistle a verst away, and could get drunk from the smells of landysh [lily of the valley] or an old book', he remembered later. {3} Bunin's experiences of rural life had a profound impact on his writing. 'There, amidst the deep silence of vast fields, among cornfields — or, in winter, huge snowdrifts which were stepping up to our very doorsteps — I spent my childhood which was full of melancholic poetry.' {4}

Yevgeny taught Bunin psychology, philosophy and the social sciences, encouraging him to read the Russian

classics and develop his gift for painting. Bunin was then sent to a public school in Yelets, but finances did not allow him to complete the course. He did not go on to university in the usual way of his class, but opted for literature, starting unambitiously in local journalism. In May 1887 Bunin published his first poem, and his first short story two years later. Happily, it was his position as editorial assistant, and then de facto editor, of the local Oryol newspaper that allowed him to place his own short stories, poems and reviews in its literary section. Bunin's debut book of poetry was published in 1891, and some of his writings for the Oryol newspaper began to feature in the Saint Petersburg periodicals.

Bunin spent the first half of 1894 travelling all over Ukraine. 'Those were the times when I fell in love with Malorossiya (Little Russia), its villages and steppes, was eagerly meeting its people and listening to Ukrainian songs, this country's very soul', he later wrote. He visited the Russian capital in 1895, and met some of its literary figures, becoming close friends with Anton Chekhov, Konstantin Balmont and Valery Bryusov. 1899 saw the friendship with Maxim Gorky, to whom he dedicated his later *Leaf Fall* (1901) collection of poetry, and a continuing association with Leo Tolstoy, who advised against slipping into 'total peasantification'. In 1895–6 Bunin divided his time between Moscow and Saint Petersburg, and in 1897 published his first short story collection (*To the Edge of the World and Other Stories*), followed a year later by his second (*In the Open Air*) and then his second collection of poems. {5} Bunin moved to

Odessa in June 1898, becoming friendly with local writers, but in Moscow attended the Wednesday Literary Group, where his uncompromising views on realism were not always welcome.

The next decade was one of steady progress: several collections of short stories, translations, the above-mentioned *Leaf Fall*, which won acclaim as much from critics as the Symbolist poets: Alexander Blok, Aleksandr Kuprin and Valery Bryusov. 'A welcome antidote to Symbolist excess' and 'definitely Pushkin-like', full of 'inner poise, sophistication, clarity and wholesomeness', said the critic Korney Chukovsky. It was for this collection, and his translation of Longfellow's *The Song of Hiawatha*, that Bunin won his first Pushkin Prize. Poetry continued, but Bunin now began importing the features of poetry into his prose, which became richer in lexicon, more compact and evocative. {1-2} 'For me the crucial thing is to find the proper rhythm. Once it's there, everything else comes in spontaneously, and I know when the story is done.' {6}

Bunin was now an established, well-respected writer, and compilations started to appear. Znanie began publishing *The Complete Bunin* series from 1902, which ran to several volumes by 1910. The Public Benefit publishing house followed suit. Bunin became a close friend of the Chekhov family, travelled extensively, and published in the popular magazine of Adolph Marks. He kept out of debates — 'I did not belong to any literary school; I was neither a decadent, nor a symbolist nor a romantic, nor a naturalist' — but was increasingly depressed by the

horrific slaughter of the war. Bunin and common-law wife returned to Moscow to be with Vera's parents, and in April 1917 Bunin loosened ties with the pro-Revolution Gorky, beginning a rift that was never healed, though Gorky's own relationship with the Soviets was fraught and difficult. In May 1918, Bunin and Vera Muromtseva obtained official permission to leave Moscow for Kiev, then continued their journey to Odessa, and thence to Constantinople. {1-2}

In March 1920, the couple arrived in Paris, and Bunin's émigré existence began. He hated the Bolsheviks, supported foreign intervention, and only slowly adjusted to his new circumstances. Nonetheless, his new book *Scream*, published in France and composed of short stories written in the 1911–1912 interval, represented, he said, the happiest days of his life. He belonged to the old world, which was now lost, but some of the best work, including *Mitya's Love* (1924), *Sunstroke* (1925), and *The Life of Arseniev* (1930-33) was written in the next decade. His 1925–26 *Cursed Days* started to appear in the Paris-based *Vozrozhdenye* newspaper, and Bunin could be seen as the moral and artistic spokesman for a generation of expatriates who impatiently awaited the collapse of Bolshevism. He became the first Russian to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, which was awarded to him in 1933 'for following through and developing with chastity and artistry the traditions of Russian classic prose'. Bunin found himself an international celebrity. His travels through Europe were noted in the newspapers, though the reaction in Russia was distinctly frosty. {1-2}

1934–6 saw *The Complete Bunin* in 11 volumes, published by the German company Petropolis. Bunin finished his recollections of Tolstoy (*The Liberation of Tolstoy*) and began in 1938 a celebrated cycle of nostalgic stories with a strong erotic undercurrent, the first eleven stories coming out as *Dark Avenues* in New York (1943), and full version in France (1946). The reception of what Bunin saw as his best collection of short stories was deeply disappointing. The Nazi occupation of France had made Bunin's prose more gloomy and introspective; the melancholy was sharper; the erotic element seemed overdone and tasteless. {7} Refusing the invitation to live out the war in America, the couple had opted to remain in Grasse, living in a small community high in the mountains, where they grew their own food and wrote incessantly to ward off hunger, cold and fear. They gave shelter to Nazi fugitives, but were not seriously at risk. {1-2}

On Liberation, the Bunins returned to Paris, which they never afterwards left. Bunin's 75th birthday was widely celebrated in the émigré community, and he now had Soviet admirers. A return to Russia was contemplated, but came to nothing after the publication of his *Memoirs* (1950), which were scathing of Soviet cultural life. In explanation, Bunin wrote: 'I was born too late. If I had been born earlier, my literary memoirs would have been different. I wouldn't have been a witness to 1905, the First World War, then 1917 and what followed: Lenin, Stalin, Hitler... How can I not be jealous of our forefather Noah. He lived through only one flood in his lifetime.' {2}

After 1948, in financial straits and with his health deteriorating, Bunin concentrated upon writing his memoirs and a book on Anton Chekhov. In 1951 he was elected the first-ever honorary International PEN member, representing the community of writers in exile, but Bunin's last years were marred by bitterness, disillusionment and ill-health. His last diary note of 2 May 1953, was: 'Still, this is so dumbfoundingly extraordinary. In a very short while there will be no more of me — and of all the things worldly, of all the affairs and destinies, from then on I will be unaware! And what I'm left to do here is dumbly try to consciously impose upon myself fear and amazement.' He died of heart failure, cardiac asthma and pulmonary sclerosis in November 1953. {2}

Some reparations were made. Bunin became the first Russian writer in exile to be published officially in the USSR. In 1965, *The Complete Bunin* appeared in Moscow in nine volumes, but his more controversial books remained banned in the Soviet Union until the late 1980s. {2}

Bunin's first love was Varvara Pashchenko, a classmate at Yelets and the daughter of a doctor and an actress. It was a stormy and difficult affair, opposed by Varvara's father and terminated in 1894, when Varvara's marriage to the actor and writer A.N. Bibikov brought Bunin close to suicide. In 1898 he met and quickly married Anna Tsakni, the daughter of a Greek social-democrat activist, a

beautiful, vivacious and society-loving creature with few of Bunin's interests. The marriage soon became acrimonious, and collapsed altogether when their five-year-old son died. {2}

Ivan Bunin's second wife was Vera Muromtseva (1881–1961), the niece of a high-ranking politician and to whom Bunin remained devoted, marrying her in 1922 when his divorce from Anna was finalised. But the quixotic heart had not yet finished with Bunin. In 1927, Bunin fell for the Russian poet Galina Kuznetsova, on vacation at Grasse with her husband, who stormed off when matters became public. Nonetheless, Bunin not only convinced Vera that the affair was purely platonic, but got her to accept Galina as a secretary and family friend. As Vera herself had a secret lover in Leonid Zurov, who stayed with the Bunins as a guest for many years, it was more a 'love quadrilateral' than triangle. The affair ended dramatically in 1942, when Galina went off with another frequent guest, the opera singer Margo Stepun. Margo and Galina were eventually accepted as 'friends' by Vera, however, and with both women Bunin and his wife maintained a regular correspondence until their respective deaths. {8}

Prose Legacy

Bunin's mastery of the short story was acquired by repeated improvement, and the better stories appear at intervals over a long working life. The earliest were uneven in quality, often over-earthy, lacking an adequate

plot and too much based on the simple leitmotif contrasting nature's beauty with humanity's ugly shallowness. After Tolstoy's eye for detail, and Gogol's fusion of prose and poetry, it was Fet's gift for indefinable atmosphere that most attracted Bunin and then Tyutchev's 'poetic cosmology'. What he had above all, and what he shares with the writer and painter Eugène Fromentin, was the ability to convey in words the exact smell, taste, sound and visual impressions of a scene. {1} However depressing the circumstances — and they were exceptionally so in *The Village* and *Dry Valley* — there was always an animal happiness in Bunin, the unquestioning intoxication of being alive, though sometimes in a nightmarish sort of way, very different from the melancholy grace of Turgenev. {7} Bunin gradually refined his style, reducing language to a resonant minimum, to something detached but evocative, informative and not always pleasant.

Bunin kept to his gentry roots, and had little time for the Symbolists and many avant-garde schools that flourished in early twentieth century Russia. Things had to be exactly observed, not created by some rodomontade of language. He had an interest in philosophical and mythological speculation, but readers have not generally valued these digressions. {1,2,7}

Cursed Days anticipated memoirs like Yevgenia Ginzburg's *Journey into the Whirlwind* (1967) and Nadezhda Mandelstam's *Hope Against Hope* (1970), indeed the anti-Soviet tradition that began with Evgeny Zamyatin

and Yury Olesha and that incorporated Mikhail Bulgakov, Boris Pasternak and Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Despite his work being banned in Russia, Bunin also influenced several generations of Soviet writers, from Mikhail Sholokhov onwards. {2}

Bunin was a conscientious writer, who never took himself less than seriously. As a young man he had some of the good humour and acting ability of his father, but these became overlain by a fastidious caution and reserve in later years. Bunin the writer was not noted for any sense of boisterous fun or extravagance. The talent was always apparent, however, and this collected, sharp-tongued and perceptive figure who maintained his cool demeanour at the many literary circles he frequented, surprised no one in being elected to the Russian Academy in 1909 while still in his thirties. {1-2}

Poetry Legacy

Outside Russia, Bunin is best known for his many short stories, {9}, his brief novels (*The Village* and *Dry Valley*) his 1917-18 diary (*Cursed Days*) and the autobiographical novel (*The Life of Arseniev*). In all there is a strict artistry and exactness of description that Russians see as 'the last of the classics', in the tradition of Tolstoy and Chekhov, but with an intricate richness of language called the 'Bunin brocade'. But, in fact, Bunin began as a poet, and continued to produce poetry throughout his exceptionally long working life, though this was subsequently more of a

poetic sensibility worked into the fabric of the later prose. He won the Pushkin Prize for poetry on three occasions, and was admired by literary figures of very different sensibilities, from Chekhov through Gorky and Blok to later poets. {1-2}

Bunin, one of last products of the gentry culture, did not feel at home with Symbolism, particularly its decadence, cultivation of the abnormal, artificial and neurotic. He tried to avoid his landscape becoming raw material for transcendental speculation, instead stressing objectivity, a training of sensory perception, and an attitude that remained clinically detached and impassive before nature. Avoiding any false lyricism altogether sometimes left Bunin close to a threadbare matter-of-factness, but he nonetheless sought a unity and harmony in life, often finding them, like Saadi, his favourite poet, in travel, antiquity and the beauty of the world. He was particularly drawn to the east because its many graves and ruins gave him a sense of continuity with the past. {10}

Like their French originators, the Russian Symbolists also wrote verse as something aspiring to music, but broke into two factions. Some, like Bryusov, saw Symbolism as a purely literary movement. Others, notably Vyacheslav, Ivanov, Bely and Blok, believed Symbolism was a mystical religion to which poets served as high priests. Blok was the greatest of the movement, and he used metaphorical language of marked originality to convey spiritual and religious experiences. Using images possessing multiple

meanings, also allowed him to express the link between the visible and invisible worlds. {3,11-15}

Naturally, a reaction to Symbolism itself came in time. Europe had seen poets turn inward, to private thoughts, associations and the unconscious. Like good Marxist intellectuals they policed the area they arrogated to themselves, and sought to correct and purify the language that would evoke its powers. Syntax was rearranged by Mallarmé. Rhythm, rhyme and stanza patterning were loosened or rejected. Words were purged of past associations (Modernism), of non-visual associations (Imagism), of histories of usage (Futurism), of social restraint (Dadaism) and of practical purpose (Surrealism). By a sort of belated Romanticism, poetry was returned to the exploration of the inner lands of the irrational. Even Postmodernism, with its bric-a-brac of received media images and current vulgarisms, ensures that gaps are left for the emerging unconscious to engage our interest.

In Russia, however, the immediate reaction to Symbolism was Acmeism in the work of Anna Akhmatova (1889-1966) and Osip Mandelstam (1891-1938). The first was essentially a love poet, a great but unhappy love poet, who wrote in a deceptively simple style on matters that increasingly found itself at odds with doctrinaire Stalinism. Mandelstam also aimed at clarity, in his case the clarity of the classical world through which he explored the dimensions of the human spirit. He drew on the philosophic dimensions of Tyutchev and Ivanov, became increasingly pessimistic at the future of Russia, and disappeared in the great Stalinist purges of the thirties.

Aspects of both Symbolism and Acmeism appear in Bunin's poetry, to which we now turn.

Bunin's Poetry in Detail

Bunin's poetry is probably better known in the passages that so often act as an envoi in the short stories:

'Ahead of it, the dark summer sunset was becoming extinguished, gloomily, dreamily and diversifiedly reflected in the river, showing patches glimmering with tremulous ripples in the distance under the sunset, and the flames scattering in the darkness round the steamer were receding and receding.' {16}

Or:

'We lunched that day until eleven o'clock at night. And then we went to Yar's Restaurant, and from Yar's to the Strelna, where just before dawn we ate pancakes, ordered a red-capped bottle of the roughest vodka and all in all behaved quite disgracefully — singing, shouting and even dancing the *kazachok*. The composer danced in silence, but with a ferocious exuberance and lightness extraordinary for one of his build. When we rode home in the troika it was already morning, terrifying pink and frosty. As we went past the Strastroi Convent an icy red sun suddenly appeared over the rooftops and the bell-

tower sent forth its first particularly heavy and magnificent boom, which shook the whole of frost-bound Moscow, and the composer suddenly tore off his cap and with tears in his eyes shouted with all his might in a voice which filled the whole square: "Sun of my life! My beloved! Hurrah!"{17}

As many have noted, {18} that personal note, with its deep sense of nostalgia and regret for wasted opportunities, is markedly absent from Bunin's poetry. Technically, the verse is exceptionally well-turned and regular — Bunin uses all the regular Russian metres, but not the Dolnik, nor the improvised forms of the experimental poets — but the poetry is curiously modest and unassuming. It records but doesn't usually comment.

Bunin's Development

Bunin enjoyed an unusually long writing life — longer than Tolstoy's, longer even than Goethe's. {19} His first published poem appeared in 1886, and he wrote his last poem shortly before his death in 1953, a span of 66 years. In fact Bunin wrote verse and prose continuously throughout his life, but poetry preponderates in his early and middle years, as the following table of the number of published poems written each year indicates: {5}

1886:	5	1902:	18	1917:	28
1887:	8	1903:	31	1918:	3

1889:	11	1904:	18	1919:	5
1890:	3	1905:	43	1920:	3
1891:	7	1906:	63	1921:	3
1892:	6	1907:	46	1922:	20*
1893:	10	1908:	27	1923:	5
1894:	6	1909:	20	1924:	11
1895:	8	1910:	4	1925:	7
1896:	8	1911:	17	1926:	1
1897:	4	1912:	21	1927:	2
1898:	12	1913:	12	1946:	1
1899:	4	1914:	6	1947:	1
1900:	28	1915:	28	1952:	2
1901:	45	1916:	92	(1960:)	1

* {15, 20}

There were several phases. In the first, 1886 to 1909, Bunin wrote direct impressions of life, generally of the Russian countryside. The 1910-20 period saw the influence of the Symbolist movement, an increase in novelistic poems, and more poems with a cultural theme. After the Revolution of 1917, which appalled Bunin, the volume falls away sharply. After 1920 the poems are more elegiac, less adventurous in diction, themes and metre, employ stock poetry phrases more often, and aim for verse musicality. Bunin had moved to Paris and was distilling an acute nostalgia from Russian memories in the cycles of short stories for which he is best remembered.

As the prosody pages show, Bunin used the wide variety of metres usual for Russian poets, but in fact the iambic made up almost 60% in the 1912-17 period, and 75% in 1922. The language of the poems written in France also

became more abstract and archaic, with Slavonicisms rather than the colloquialisms, exotic and dialect words of before. Poetry's stock-in-trade diction appeared: *face, gaze, captivates, about the past, brow, overshadowed, vanity, silent, reserved, host, milky, persistent, sultry crucible, unknown*. Plus words with a religious significance: *benevolence, wondrous vision, chosen by the Creator, full of the Lord's grace, before the end, unclean, sacred, shameless, despicable, as a sign of betrothal*, etc. Religious phrases also became more common, giving the late poetry an archaic flavour. {19}

Also a feature of Bunin's later poetry was the use of leitmotifs, repetition and paralleled themes: *sadness, hope, delight, gaze, clouds, grave, resurrection, forgiveness, wondrous, pale, blissful, midnight, earthly, heavenly, past, sorrowful, shines*, etc. Some leitmotifs were in contrasting pairs: *heaven-earth, life-death, grief-rapture*, etc. Equally apparent were allusions to other poems, to those of Pushkin and Tyutchev. In *Sirius*, for example, Bunin has *Where are you, my cherished star and over my farthest grave*, where Chuyevsky had *Your rays with heavenly power, and I will die*. {19}

Many of Bunin's late poems were thus elegiac, oddly out of place in the twentieth century, drawing on models dating back to early nineteenth-century models: addressed to deceased lovers à la Zhukovsky — to Masha Protasova, Pushkin — to Amalia Riznich, and Tyutchev — to E. A. Denisieva. Some of the diction went back to the arsenal of the classical Russian Elegy, and this also

appeared in his prose works, in *The Life of Arsenyev*, and the short stories collected in *Dark Alleys*. Many, indeed, of the later prose pieces had their genesis in Bunin's earlier poems: *Sukhodol*, for example or *Chang's Dreams*. For these and similar reasons, many of today's readers prefer the exploratory freshness of the earlier poetry. {18-19}

Nonetheless, after a slow start, Bunin's lifetime of writing has collected a large bibliography, {20} some anecdotal {21-23} and some more literary, {24-27} though the man himself remains somewhat elusive, even in his many-layered prose. Ironically, it is through the late prose, {23, 28} that we gain some insight into Bunin's approach, or into what he is *not* trying to do. Context, setting, environment — these are of first importance to Bunin, but they remain ancillary and independent, not serving the story in any obvious way. Some mythological associations are hinted at, but they don't express the characters' psychology or inner moods, but stay obstinately part of life that simply *is* that way, evoked in its sensory exactness. It is that larger, natural world dimension that makes Bunin's characters seem so fragile, so at the mercy of unseen events.

And it is also the way that Bunin created his poetry, which in one sense is conventional, painfully old-fashioned by Modernist conventions, but is in fact more varied than first appears. Traces of Symbolism appear in *Elburs*, *Sometimes the Sea is White*, and *Morpheus*. Poems like *The Archipeligo* and *The Shallow Water* are close to the

Acmeist model of compactness and clear language. There is also more than a little sly humour in *Song, By Chance, Circe, Loneliness and Egypt*. Each poem is created anew, moreover, which may seem to non-poets the natural way of proceeding but which I suspect is not. Most poets are building on what they wrote before — if not listening to a music they can barely hear, then at least trying to say a little more exactly what they sensed or felt at the time. Poems are then a progression, stopping places where poets take stock of their achievements and surroundings. Bunin, however, always starts from scratch, from this man, in this place, at this time, an approach that requires a certain innocence and openness to experience. There are certainly developments in Bunin's poetry, as to be expected, and noted above, but they are secondary to Bunin's painful awareness of the natural world.

That awareness can be difficult to catch. An academically 'correct' translation of a conventional poem by Bunin will probababy be rather dull, flat and unconvincing. It is truism that poetry is exceptionally difficult to render — poetry is that which gets lost in the translation, quipped Robert Frost — but here the difficulties are magnified by the very quiet and apparently unambitious nature of Bunin's work. The poems have few striking images or metaphors, no ecstatic or anguished tone, no dazzling trains of thought. That being the case, translations have to be created from the originals in the way Bunin created the poems from experience, i.e. re-sensed, re-responded to, employing Bunin's words wherever possible.

In this way, I've tried to create translations that work as poems rather than appear as prose-correct translations. That has meant some deviations from the literal sense, though not grievously, I hope, as readers may see for themselves in looking through the notes and literal renderings that follow.

Prosody

Lines are regular iambic (and occasionally trochaic) if shown without comment. The scansion of other metres are shown in brackets, plus any departures from strict regularity in the iambic and trochaic metres. Tetrameters are shown by 4, pentameters by 5, etc. Feminine end rhymes are indicated by upper case letters, and masculine rhymes by lower case. I have used a masculine iambic throughout that approximates to the same number of syllables.

Детство

Чем жарче день, тем сла́дстей в бору́	5a
Дыша́ть сухим смоли́стым аро́матом,	5B
И вёсело мне бы́ло поутру́	5a
Броди́ть по э́тим со́лнечным пала́там!	5B

Повсю́ду блеск, повсю́ду я́ркий свет,	5c
Песо́к - как шёлк... Прильну́ к сосне́ коря́вой	5D
И чу́вствую: мне то́лько де́сять лет,	5c
А ствол - гигант, тяжё́лый, велича́вый.	5D

Кора́ груба́, морщи́ниста, красна́,	5e
Но как тепла́, как со́лнцем вся прогрё́та!	5F
И ка́жется, что па́хнет не сосна́,	5e
А зной и су́хость со́лнечного ле́та.	5F

1906

Audio Recordings

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d1SScbrsI_A
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HrLZSYvJpNo>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BZWXyCww2u0>

Critical Articles

<https://ostihe.ru/analiz-stihotvoreniya/bunina/detstvo>
<https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/osobennosti-sozdaniya-floristicheskikh-obrazov-v-lirike-i-a-bunina/viewer>
<https://rustih.ru/ivan-bunin-detstvo/>
<http://newyork-school.ru/krasnorechie/stihotvorenie-ivana-bunina-detstvo-analiz-i-istoriya-sozdaniya-analiz/>

Literal Translation (lightly-corrected machine translation)

Childhood

The hotter the day, the sweeter the forest
Breathe a dry resinous aroma,
And I had fun in the morning
Wander through these solar chambers!

There's a sparkle everywhere, a bright light everywhere,
Sand is like silk... Cling to the gnarled pine
And I feel: I'm only ten years old,
And the trunk is a giant, heavy, majestic.

The bark is rough, wrinkled, red,
But as heat, as the sun all warmed up!
And it doesn't smell like pine,
And the heat and dryness of a sunny summer.

Comments

A recollection of childhood, written when Bunin was 25 and frequenting literary salons with Maxim Gorky and Leonid Andreev. The poem was not published until 1906, and contains an inaccuracy: the last word should be 'sunlight' rather than 'sunny summer', though this hardly changes the sun-filled, happy atmosphere. Note how the sound echoes the sense, here in lines 5-9 anglicized:

pav-SEW-doo blesk, pav-SEW-doo YAHR-kiy svet,
peh-SOK kahk shalk. . . preel-NOO k sas-NEH kaw-RYAH-voy
ee CHOOST-voo-yoo mneh TOL-kaw DEH-syaht let,
ah stval ghee-GAHNT, tyah-JAW-liy, veh-lee-CHAH-viy

kaw-RAH groo-BAH mor-SHHEE-nees-tah, krahs-NAH

Апрель

Туманный серп, неясный полумрак,	5а
Свинцово-тусклый блеск железной крыши,	5В
Шум мельницы, далёкий лай собак,	5а
Таинственный зигзаг летучей мыши.	5В

А в старом палисаднике темно́,	5с
Свежо́ и сладко пахнет можжевельник,	5D
И сонно, сонно светится сквозь ёльник	5D
Серпа́ зеленоватое пятно́.	5с

1906

Audio Recordings

<https://www.liveinternet.ru/users/4373400/post41284762>

Critical Articles

<https://pishi-stihi.ru/aprel-bunin.html>

<http://www.vestnik.vsu.ru/pdf/phylogolog/2014/02/2014-02-06.pdf>

April

A misty crescent, an indistinct half-light,
The leaden, dull gleam of the iron roof,
The noise of the mill, the distant barking of dogs,
Mysterious zigzag of a bat.

And the old front garden is dark,
Juniper smells fresh and sweet,
And sleepily, sleepily glows through the spruce forest
Sickle greenish spot.

Comment

The poem was written on April 15th, 1906 and again shows Bunin's acute sense of place and atmosphere. It opens with the crescent moon and closes with a sickle-shaped spot of green. The poem is short and ostensibly simple: two quatrains in iambic and rhyming abab and cddc, typical of Russian nineteenth-century poetry. The novelty lies in the almost Gothic setting, which is both mysterious and impersonal, and also hung with the sounds and smells suspended between the earth and heavens. The fourth line, which I as have translated as 'with the bat's mysterious zigzag flight' is softer and more mysterious in the Russian: 'tah-EENST-ven-niy zeeg-ZAHG leh-TOO-chay MIH-shee'

April, the central month of spring, with new beginnings and memories of past hopes, was important to Bunin. It coincides with Easter and the Resurrection, of course, and appears in Bunin's *April* short story of 1938. Even the earlier (1922) short story *Long Ago* ends with the desolating: 'Dear Prince, dear Ivan Ivanych, where are your bones rotting now? And where are those foolish hopes and joys we shared, where is our long ago Moscow spring?'

Первый гром

Вновь т́учи с́иние нахму́рились круго́м,	6a
Вдали́ идёт дождя́ тумáнная завéса,	6B
Из лéса и с полéй повéяло теплóм, —	6a
И вот ужé гремит́ весéнный пéрвый гром,	6a
И рáдуга сверка́ет из-за лéса !	5B

То с ю́га май идёт по рóщам и поля́м, —	6c
Как ю́ный свéтлый бог, смеётся и ликúет,	6D
И пробужда́ет жизнь, и возвещáет нам,	6c
Что уж настáл конéц послéдним тёмным дням,	6c
Что он весны́ побéду торжествúет!	5D

Audio Recordings

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3_zxhEgLFdE

First Thunder

Again the blue clouds frowned around,
In the distance it is raining a misty curtain,
Warmth came from the woods and fields, —
And now the first thunder of spring is already thundering,
And the rainbow sparkles from behind the forest!

Then from the south May goes through the groves and fields, —
Like a young bright god, laughing and exulting,
And awakens life, and proclaims to us,
That the last dark days had come to an end,
That he is triumphant for the victory!

Comment

A short poem on a favourite theme of Russian nature verse: conventionally metred (iambic) and rhymed, four hexameter lines plus a concluding pentameter make each stanza. The comparable Tytchev poem that Bunin will have known (Spring Storm, 1828) is simpler and more immediate, but also ends on an elevated note:

*You'll say that Hebe, giving sup
to Zeus' eagle here has downed
the thunder from her heavenly cup
and, laughing, spilled it on the ground.*

I have tried to duplicate some of the assonance of Bunin's lines with
Once more the clouds are frowning through their blue surround,
but the original is much more musical:

vnov TOO-chee SEE-nee-yeh nahh-MOO-ree-lees kroo-GOM

Note also the softness of the sounds as the distant rain is evoke:

vdah-LEE ee-DYOT daj-DYAH too-MAHN-nah-yah zah-VEH-sah

And so on. Russian is a language eminently suited to poetry, though its novelists and short-story writers are better known in the west.

* * *

Багряная печальная луна	5a
Висит вдали, но степь ещё темна.	5a
Луна во тьму свой тёплый отблеск сеет,	5B
И над болотом красный сумрак реет.	5B
Уж поздно - и какая тишина!	5a

Мне кажется, луна оцепенеет:	5C
Она как будто выросла со дна	5d
И допотопной розою краснеет.	5C
Но меркнут звёзды. Даль озарена.	5d
Равнина вод на горизонте млеет,	5C

И в ней луна столбом отражена.	5e
Склонив лицо прозрачное, светлеет	5F
И грустно в воду смотрится она.	5e
Поёт комар. Теплом и гнилью веет.	5F

1902

Red sad moon

Red sad moon

It hangs in the distance, but the steppe is still dark.
The moon sows its warm glow into the darkness,
And over the swamp the red twilight floats.
It's really late - and what a silence!

I think the moon will freeze:

It's like it's grown from the bottom
And an antediluvian rose blushes.
But the stars are fading. The distance is illuminated.
The plain of waters on the horizon melts,

And in it the moon is reflected in a column.
Bending his face transparent, lighter
And it looks sad in the water.
A mosquito sings. It smells warm and rotten.

Comment

An untitled piece, one of many in Bunin's output, close to a sonnet but arranged 5 5 4 rather than the usual 4 4 3 3 form. Bunin is now in full possession of his powers, capable of exactly evoking an atmosphere, which is not at all pleasant here, threatening and oppressive. Again, Bunin is venturing on Tyutchev's ground. Line 4, which is a little enigmatic, I've taken to simply mean that the normal daylight world is far away and that we are now among more elemental things, a theme developed in stanza two, where the moon appears more as a strange carnivorous plant than a heavenly body. I've had some difficulty with line 8, which I've provisionally translated as:

some flowered, primaeval, red-tinged space.

It is worth noting how Russian verse delights in polysyllables, where English does not. The antediluvian of допотопной sits well in ee daw-paw-TOP-noy RAW-zaw-yoo krahs-NEH-yet.

because followed by two polysyllabic words in the Russian: рózою краснéет.

Листопад

Лес, точно терем расписной,
Лило́вый, золоти́й, багря́ный,
Весёлой, пёстрою стено́й
Стои́т над све́тлою поля́ной.

4a
4B
4a
4B

5. Берёзы жёлтою резьбой
Блестят в лазури голубой,
Как вышки, ёлочки темнеют,
А между клёнами синеют

4c
4c
4D
4D

То там, то здесь в листве сквозной
10. Просветы в небо, что оконца.
Лес пахнет дубом и сосной,
За лето высох он от солнца,

4e
4F
4e
4F

И Осень тихою вдовой
Вступает в пёстрый терем свой.

4g
4g

15. Сегодня на пустой поляне,
Среди широкого двора,
Воздушной паутины ткани
Блестят, как сеть из серебра.

4H
4i
4H
4i

Сегодня целый день играет
20. В дворе последний мотылёк
И, точно белый лепесток,
На паутине замирает,

4J
4k
4k
4J

Пригретый солнечным теплом;
Сегодня так светло кругом,
25. Такое мёртвое молчанье
В лесу и в синей вышине,

4l
4l
4M
4m

Leaf Fall

Forest, exactly painted tower,
Purple, gold, purple,
Fun, colorful wall
Stands over a bright glade.

5. Birches with yellow carvings
Glisten in azure blue,
As the tower, Christmas trees darken,
And between the maples they turn blue

Here and there in the foliage through
10. The gaps in the sky that little window.
The forest smells of oak and pine,
Over the summer it dried up from the sun,

And Autumn is a quiet widow
Comes in colorful tower your.

15. Today in an empty clearing,
Among the wide courtyard,
Air web fabric
They glisten like a net of silver.

He's playing all day today
20. The last moth in the yard
And like a white petal,
On the web freezes,

Warmed by the warmth of the sun;
Today it is so light around,
25. Such a dead silence
In the forest and in the blue height,

Что можно в этой тишине	4n
Расслышать листика шуршанье.	4N
Лес, точно терем расписной,	4a
30. Лило́вый, золоти́й, багря́ный,	4B
Стоит над со́лнечной поля́ной,	4B
Завороже́нный тишино́й;	4a
Заквохчет дрозд, перелета́я	4Q
Среди́ подсе́да, где густа́я	4Q
35. Листва́ янтарный о́тблеск льёт;	4r
Игра́я, в небе́ промелькне́т	4r
Скворцо́в рассы́панная ста́я -	4S
И снова́ всё круго́м замрет.	4r
После́дние мгнове́нья сча́стья!	4S
40. Уж зна́ет О́сень, что тако́й	4t
Глубо́кий и немой́ поко́й –	4t
Предвесе́тник до́лгого нена́стья.	4U
Глубоко́, стра́нно лес молча́л	4v
И на заре́, когда́ с заката́	4U
45. Пурпу́рный блеск огня́ и злата́	4U
Пожаро́м те́рем освеща́л.	4v
Пото́м угрю́мо в нём стемне́ло.	4W
Луна́ восходи́т, а в лесу́	4x
Ложатся́ те́ни на росу́...	4x
50. Вот ста́ло хо́лодно и бело́	4W
Среди́ поля́н, среди́ сквозно́й	4y
Осе́нней ча́щи помертвело́й,	4W
И жу́тко О́сени одно́й	4y
В пусты́нной тишине́ ночно́й.	4y

What is possible in this silence
Hear a leaf rustle.
Forest, exactly painted tower
30. Purple, gold, purple,

Stands over a sunny glade,
Spellbound by the silence;
A blackbird screams as it flies
Among the undergrowth, where thick

35. Foliage amber glow pours;
Playing, in the sky will flash
Starlings scattered flock -
And again everything around will freeze.
Last moments of happiness!

40. Autumn knows what it is
Deep and silent peace -

A harbinger of long bad weather.
Deep, strange, the forest was silent
And at dawn, when from sunset
45. Purple glow of fire and gold
Fire lit the tower.

Then it darkened sullenly.
The moon is rising, and in the forest
Shadows fall on the dew...
50. Now it was cold and white

Among the glades, among the end-to-end
Autumn thicket dead,
And terribly Autumn one
In the empty silence of the night.

55. Тепéрь уж тишина́ другáя:	4Z
Прислу́шайся - она́ растёт,	4a
А с не́ю, блéдностью пугáя,	4Z
И ме́сяц ме́дленно встаёт.	4a
Все те́ни сде́лал он коро́че,	4B
60. Прозра́чный дым навёл на лес	4c
И вот уж смóтрит прýмо в óчи	4B
С тумáнной высóты высоты́ небéс.	4c
0, мёртвый сон осéнной но́чи!	4B
0, жу́ткий час ночных чудéс!	4c
65. В серебри́стом и сырóм тумáне	4D
Светло́ и пýсто на поля́не;	4D
Лес, бе́лым све́том зали́той,	4E
Свое́й засты́вшей красото́й	4e
Как бýдто смерть себе́ прорóчит;	4F
70. Сова́ и та молчи́т: сиди́т	4G
Да ту́по из ветве́й гляди́т,	4G
Поро́ю ди́ко захохо́чет,	4F
Сорвётся с шу́мом с высоты́,	4h
Взмахну́вши мя́гкими крыла́ми,	4I
75. И сно́ва сядет на кусты́	4h
И смóтрит кру́глыми глаза́ми,	4I
Водя́ уша́стой голово́й	4j
По сторонáм, как в изумленье;	4K
А лес стои́т в оцепененье,	4K
80. Напо́лнен блéдной, лёгкой мглой	4j
И листьев сы́ростью гнило́й...	4j

55. Now the silence is different:
Listen - it's growing,
And with it, the pallor scaring,
And the moon slowly rises.

All shadows made it shorter,
60. Transparent smoke pointed at the forest
And that's really looking directly into the eyes
From the misty height of the heavens.
O, dead sleep of an autumn night!
Of O, spooky hour of the night of miracles!

65. In silver and wet fog
Light and empty in the clearing;
Forest, white light flooded,
Its frozen beauty

As if death itself prophesies;
70. Owl and its kind speaks out: sits
Yes stupidly from branches looks,
Sometimes wildly laughs,

Will fall with a noise from a height,
Flap its soft wings,
75. And will sit on the bushes again
And looks round eyes,

Leading the big-eared head
On the sides, as in amazement;
And the forest stands in a daze,
80. Filled with a pale, light haze
And leaves with rotten dampness...

Не жди: наутро не проглянет	4L
На небе солнце. Дождь и мгла	4m
Холодным дымом лес туманят,-	4L
85. Недаром эта ночь прошла!	4m
Но Осень затаит глубоко	4o
Все, что она пережила	4m
В немую ночь, и одиноко	4O
Запрётся в тереме своём:	4p
90. Пусть бор бушует под дождём,	4p
Пусть мрачны и ненастны ночи	4Q
И на поляне волчьих очи	4Q
Зелёным светятся огнём!	4p
Лес, точно терем без призора,	4R
95. Весь потемнел и полинял,	4s
Сентябрь, кружась по чащам бора,	4R
С него местами крышу снял	4s
И вход сырой листвой усыпал;	4T
А там зазимок ночью выпал	4T
100. И таять стал, все умертвив...	4u
Трубят рог в полях далёких,	4V
Звенит их медный перелив,	4u
Как грустный вопль, среди широких	4V
Ненастных и туманных нив.	4u
105. Сквозь шум деревьев, за долиной,	4W
Теряясь в глубине лесов,	4x
Угрюмо вбегает рог туриний,	4W
Скликающая на добычу псов,	4x
И звучный гам их голосов	4x
110. Разносит бури шум пустынный.	4W

Do not wait: the next morning will not be overlooked
The sun is in the sky. Rain and mist
Cold smoke fogs the forest,-
85. No wonder this night has passed!
But autumn will hold a deep breath
Everything she went through
In the silent night, and lonely

It will lock itself in its tower:
90. Let the forest rage in the rain,
Let the nights be dark and stormy
And in the clearing wolf eyes
Green glow with fire!

Forest, like a tower without a prize,
95. All darkened and faded,
September, whirling through the thickets of the forest,
It took the roof off it in places
And the entrance was strewn with damp leaves;
And there the nightfall fell!

100. It began to melt, everything dead...
Trumpeting horns in the fields far away,
Rings of copper overflow,
Like a sad cry, among the wide
Rainy and foggy fields.

105. Through the noise of the trees, beyond the valley,
Lost in the depths of the woods,
Sullenly howls the horn of heaven,
Shouting at the prey of dogs,
And the resounding din of their voices
110. Carries the storm noise desert.

Льёт дождь, холóдный, тóчно лёд,	4у
Кружáтся листься по полянам,	4Z
И гúси длинным каравáном	4Z
Над лёсом дёржат перелёт.	4у
115. Но дни идúт. И вот уж дымы́	4А
Встаúт столбáми на зарé,	4b
Лéса Лесá багряны, недви́жимы,	4А
Земля в морóзном серебрé,	4b
И в горноста́евом шугáе,	4С
120. Умы́вши блéдное лицó,	4d
Послédний день в лесú встречáя,	4С
Выхóдит Óсень на крыльцó.	4d
Двор пуст и хóлоден. В ворóта,	4Е
Средí двух вы́сохших осíн,	4f
125. Виднá ей синевá долíн	4f
И ширь пусты́нного болóта,	4Е
Дорóга на далёкий юг:	4g
Тудá от зíмних бурь и вьюг,	4g
От зíмней стúжи и метéли	4Н
130. Давно́ уж птíцы улетéли;	4Н
Тудá и Óсень поутрú	4i
Свой оди́нокий путь напра́вит	4J
И навсегда́ в пустóм борú	4i
Раскры́тый тéрем свой оста́вит.	4J

It's raining, cold as ice,
Whirling leaves across the glades,
And geese in a long caravan
Over the forest hold flight.

115. But the days go by.
Get up the pillars at the dawn,
Forests are purple, immovable,
Earth in frosty silver,

And in ermine sludge,
120. Wash your pale face,
Last day in the forest meeting,
Autumn comes out on the porch.

The yard is empty and cold. At the gate,
Among the two dried aspens,
125. Visible to her is the blue of the valleys
And the expanse of a desolate swamp,

Road to the far south:
There from winter storms and blizzards,
From the winter cold and blizzard
130. Long ago the birds flew away;

There and autumn in the morning
Your lonely path will guide
And forever in an empty forest
The opened tower will leave its own.

135. Прості́ же, лес! Прості́, проща́й, День бу́дет ла́сковый, хоро́ший, И ско́ро мя́гкою поро́шей Засеребри́тся ме́ртвый край.	4k 4L 4L 4k
Как бу́дут страна́ны в э́тот бе́лый, 140. Пу́стынный и холо́дный день И бор, и те́рем опусте́лый, И крýши ти́хих дере́вень,	4M 4n 4M 4n
И небеса́, и без границы В них уходя́щие поля́! 145. Как бу́дут ра́ды собо́ля, И горноста́и, и куні́цы,	4O 4p 4p 4O
Резвя́сь и гре́ясь на бегу́ В сугро́бах мя́гких на лугу́!	4q 4q
А там, как бу́йный пляс шамана́, 150. Ворву́тся в го́лую тайгу́ Ветры́ из ту́ндры, с океа́на, Гудя́ в крутя́щемся снегу́	4R 4s 4R 4s
И завыва́я в по́ле зве́рем. Они́ разру́шат ста́рый те́рем, 155. Оста́вят ко́лья и пото́м На э́том о́стове пу́стом	4T 4T 4u 4u
Пове́сят и́неи сквозны́е, И бу́дут в не́бе голу́бом Сия́ть черто́ги ледяны́е 160. И хрусталём и серебро́м.	4V 4w 4V 4w

135. Forgive me, forest! I'm sorry, goodbye,
Day will gentle, a good,
And soon a soft newly-fallen snow
The dead edge will be silvered.

How strange they will be this time,
140. Deserted and cold day
And the forest, and the tower deserted,
And the roofs of quiet villages,

And heaven, and without borders
They have outgoing fields!
145. How sable will be happy,
And stoats and martens,

Frolicking and basking on the run
In soft snowdrifts on the meadow!

And there, like a wild dance of the shaman,
150. Break into the naked taiga
Winds from the tundra, from the ocean,
Buzzing in the swirling snow

And howling like a beast in the field.
They will destroy the old tower,
155. Leave the stakes and then
On this skeleton empty

Hang frost through,
And will be in the sky blue
Shine halls of ice
160. And crystal and silver.

А в ночь, меж бѣлых их развѣдов,	4X
Взойдѣт огнѣ небѣсных свѣдов,	4X
Заблѣщѣт звѣздный щит Стожар -	4y
В тот час, когдѣ средѣ молчанья	4Z
165. Морѣзный свѣтится пожар,	4y
Расцвѣт полярного сиянья.	4Z

1901

Audio Recordings

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O7nPxVxs21k>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cEy_CNntjM

Critical Articles

<https://rustih.ru/ivan-bunin-listopad/>
<https://www.stihi-rus.ru/1/Bunin/49.htm>
<https://obrazovaka.ru/analiz-stihotvoreniya/bunin/listopad.html>
<https://goldlit.ru/bunin/380-listopad-analiz>
<https://ostihe.ru/analiz-stihotvoreniya/bunina/listopad>

And in the night, between their white divorces,
The lights of the firmament will rise,

The star shield of Pleiades will shine -
In the hour of silence
165. Frosty is lit on fire,
The heyday of the Aurora Borealis.

Comments

One of Bunin's most celebrated poems, which (with his *Hiawatha* translation) won him his first Pushkin prize. It was written in August 1900 and first published in a St. Peterburg magazine, there called *Autumn Poem* and dedicate to M. Gorky. The poem shades into several sequences: an opening description of the forest flooded with autumn colours (lines 1-12), autumn personified as the widow (13-26), late autumn in the forest gradually succumbing to the privations of winter (27-148), and full winter in the forest (149-166). These last two sections are interspersed with the appeal of the forest to its inhabitants (31-9, 69-82, 105-110, 119-20, 143-8). The overall tone is melancholic, in places folk-song like in its cadences, and the poem is often seen as an elegy to the passing of summer's richness.

The poem is conventionally written in iambic metre, masculine and feminine rhymes alternating, generally in stanzas of 4 lines, but occasionally of 2, 5 and 6 lines.

Bunin was thirty and entering his maturity as a poet when he wrote the piece. The verse is well turned, and employs many devices with confidence: inversions (e.g 15-18, 35), and antithesis (e.g. whirling leaves to direct flight of geese: 111-114). The comparisons are generally apt and striking (of the spider's web to silver braid: 17, of a moth to a petal: 20-21) There is metaphor (e.g. halls of ice: 159, shield of stars: 163) and personification (of the autumn: e.g. 84, 113, 135) throughout. The epithets are carefully chosen (e.g. peace: 41, and hunting horns: 102).

Bunin uses repetition (anaphora), assonance on "o" and "e" to give a sad melody to the poem, and alliteration of the sounds "sh" and "s", creating sound images of silence and rustling leaves. One example, lines 109-110:

ee ZVOOCH-niy gahm eehh gaw-law-SOV
rahz-NAW-seet BOO-ree shoom poos-TIN-niy.

Весеннее

Тает снег - и солнце ярко 4A
Блещет в полдень над полями; 4B
В блеске солнца влажный ветер 4C
По лесам- полям гуляет. 4D

5. Но поля ещё пустынные, 4B
Но леса ещё безмолвны; 4B

Только сосны точно арфы, 4B
Напевают монотонно. 4A
И под их напев неясный 4B
10. В заповедных чащах бора 4A

Сладко спит весна-царевна 4A
В белоснежном саркофаге. 4E
Ветерок её ласкает, 4D
Пригревает полдень ясный, 4B
15. Но, бледна и неподвижна, 4A

Спит царевна в сладких грёзах. 4F
Спит, - а скоро уж в долинах 4F

Солнце белый снег растопит, 4D
И пойдут бурлить потоки 4B
20. По долинам и оврагам; 4G
Налетят лесные птицы, 4B

Spring

The snow melts and the sun is bright
It shines at noon over the fields;
In the glare of the sun a wet wind
On forests-fields walks.

5. But the fields are still empty,
But the woods are still silent;

Only pine trees, like harps,
Humming in a monotone.
And under their chant unclear
10. In the reserved thickets of the pines

Sweet sleeps spring-Princess
In a snow-white sarcophagus.
The breeze caresses her,
Warms the noon clear,
15. But, pale and motionless,

The Princess sleeps in sweet dreams.
Sleeping, - and soon already in the valleys

The sun will melt the white snow,
And the streams will begin to boil
20. Through valleys and ravines;
Forest birds will fly,

Зашумя́т грачи́, а с ни́ми –	4B
Зацвету́т, зазелене́ют,	4D
Оживу́т леса́ и ро́щи.	4B
25. И приде́т апре́ль - царевич	4G
Из заморских стран далёких	4E
На заре́, когда́ в доли́нах	4E
Та́ют си́ние туманы́,	4B
На заре́, когда́ от со́лнца	4A
30. Па́хнет лес зелёной хво́ей,	4B
Па́хнет тёплою земле́ю	4H
И апре́льскими цвета́ми.	4B
И скло́нится он с улы́бкой	4I
Над царевно́ю безмо́лвной	4I
35. И прильне́т к уста́м царевны́	4B
Кре́пко жа́ркими уста́ми,	4B
И она́ в испу́ге вздро́гнет,	4D
Разомкне́т ресни́цы срáзу,	4B
Гляне́т, вспыхне́т - и улы́бкой	4I
40. Оза́рит весь мир влюбле́нный!	4B

1893

Rooks will make a noise, and with them –
Bloom, turn green,
Forests and groves will come to life.
25. And April will come - Tsarevich

From foreign countries far away
At dawn, when in the valleys

Blue mists are melting,
At dawn, when from the sun
30. The forest smells of green needles,
It smells like warm earth
And April flowers.

And he will bow down with a smile
Above the silent Princess
35. And cling to the Princess's lips
Firmly with hot lips,

And she will start in fright,
Open lashes immediately,
Look, flash - and smile
40. Light up the whole world in love!

Comments

A simple, perhaps over-pretty poem from Bunin's youth. The epithets are very traditional, though there's also some hint of Bunin's developing powers of observation, in the glare of the sun and the wet wind (line 3), in the smells of pine trees (lines 6-7) and of green needles (line 30-31) – which Bunin will use to more effect later.

Many poets have produced similar trifles, e.g. Robert Frost (A Prayer In Spring), Edna St. Vincent Millay (Spring), Dylan Thomas (Holy Spring), Keith Douglass (Villanelle of Spring), etc., none of them particularly good. The obvious in poetry brings its pitfalls.

The rhymes show considerable license, but the metre is a regular trochaic (i.e. either -u-u-u-u (fem) or -u-u-u-u- (masc)).

Баба-Яга

Гу́лкий шум в лесу́ нагоня́ет сон	5a (-uu-u-uu-u-)
К но́чи на мо́ре пал сыро́й тумáн.	5b (-uu-u-u-u-)
Окружён со всех с четырёх сторóн	5a (-u-u-u-u-)
Тёмной о́сенью острово́к Буя́н.	5b (-uu-uu-u-)
А ещё темне́й - мой холо́дный сруб,	5c (-u-u-uu-u-)
Где ни вздуть огня́, пи топíть её смей,	5d (-u-u-u-uu-)
А в окно́ гляди́т то́лько бу́рый дуб,	5c (-u-u- -u-u-)
Под кото́рый смерть закопа́л Коще́й.	5d (-u-u-uu-u-)
Я состáрилась, изболéлась вся –	5e (-u-uu-u-u-)
Де́сять сот годóв берегú ларéц!	5f (-u-u-uu-u)
Будь ого́нь в светце́ - я б погрелася,	5e (-u-u-u-uu-)
Будь дрова́ в пéчи - похлебáла б щец,	5f (-u- -uu-u-u-)
Да ого́нь - в моря́х морехóду весть,	5g (-u-u-uu-u-)
Да на мно́го вёрст слы́шен дым от лык...5h (-u-uu-u-u-)	
Чёрт тебе́ велéл к чёрту в слúги лезть,	5g (-u-u-uu-u-)
Ду́ра ста́рая, неразу́мный шлык!	5h (-u-u-uu-u-)

1908

Audi Recordings

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_0nn6t49lgw

Critical Articles

<https://pishi-stihi.ru/baba-yaga-bunin.html>

Baba Yaga

The booming noise in the forest makes you sleepy –
By nightfall, a damp fog had fallen on the sea.
Surrounded on all four sides
Dark fall the rowdy island.

And even darker - my cold log house,
Wherever you blow up a fire, you can't drown it,
And only the brown oak looks out of the window,
Under which the death of the buried bones.

I got old, got sick all over
Ten hundred years on the shore of the casket!
Be a fire in the sunshine - I would warm myself
Be the wood in the stove - chowder,

Yes, fire in the seas news to the sea,
Yes, for many miles you can hear the smoke from the bark.
The devil told you to go to hell as a servant,
You old fool, you stupid sap!

Comments

Baba Yaga is the sorceress from Slavic folktales, a supernatural being appearing as a ferocious, deformed old woman, often flying around with a mortar and pestle. She has many identities, some helpful to humans and some distinctly not. Much against her will, she lived in a dark house (traditionally supported by chickens' legs) on the gloomy island of Buyan, where she kept a casket after the death of Koschei, her male equivalent. (Wikipedia has much more on Baba Yaga and Koschei.)

The poem is unusual for Bunin, and cost him some effort: its writing was spread over the 1906-8 period. The metre is trochaic-dactylic, with a pause around the middle of the line, giving the piece a folk-song lilt (listen to the audio recording). Worth noting also is the verse texture, the sheer musicality of Russian verse: first two lines:

GOOL-kiy shoom v leh-SOO nah-gaw-NYAH-yet san
k NAW-chee nah MAW-reh pahl sih-ROY too-MAHN

Крещенская ночь

Тёмный ёльник снегами, как мехом, Опушили седые морозы, В блёстках инея, точно в алмазах, Задремали, склонившись, берёзы.	4X (-u-uu-uu-u) 4A (-u-uu-uu-u) 4X (-u-uu-uu-u) 4A (-uu-uu-u)
5. Неподвижно застыли их ветки, А меж ними на снежное лóно, Точно сквозь серебрó кружевнóе, Пóлный мéсяц глядít с небосклóна.	4X (-u-uu-uu-u) 4B (-u-uu-uu-u) 4X (-u-uu-uu-u) 4B (-u-uu-uu-u)
Высоко́ он подня́лся над лéсом, 10. В ярком свéте своём цепенéя, И причúдливо стéлются тéни, На снегу́ под ветвя́ми черне́я.	4X (-u-uu-uu-u) 4C (-u-uu-uu-u) 4X (-u-u-uu-) 4C (-u-uu-uu-u)
Замелó ча́щи лéса метéлью, — Тóлько выóтятся следы́ и дорóжки, 15. Убегáя меж сóсен и ёлок, Меж берёзок до ветхой сторóжки	4X (-u-u-uu-u) 4D (-u-uu-uu-u) 4X (-u-u-uu-u) 4D (-u-uu-uu-u)
Убаю́кала выю́га седáя Дíкой пéснею лес опустéлый, И засну́л он, засы́панный выю́гой, 20. Весь сквозно́й, неподви́жный и бéлый.	4X (-u-uu-uu-u) 4E (-u-uu-uu-u) 4X (-u-uu-uu-u) 4E (-u-uu-uu-u)

Epiphany Night

Dark spruce forest snows like fur,
Grey frosts have fallen,
In spangles of frost, as if in diamonds,
The birches nodded off.

5. Their branches were motionless,
And between them on the snow bosom,
Exactly through silver lace,
The full moon looks down from the sky.

He rose high above the forest,
10. In the bright light of its petrified,
And the shadows are fanciful,
On the snow under the branches turning black.

The thickets of the forest were covered with a snowstorm, —
Only winding tracks and paths,
15. Running away between pines and fir trees,
Between the birches to the ramshackle gatehouse.

A grey snowstorm lulled it to sleep
Wild song the forest is empty,
And it fell asleep, covered with a blizzard,
20. The entire end-to-end, fixed and white.

Спят таинственно стройные чащи, 4F (-u-uu-uu-u)
Спят, одётые снегом глубоким, 4X (-u-uu-uu-u)
И поляны, и луг, и овраги, 4F (-u-uu-uu-u)
Где когда-то шумели потоки. 4X (-u-uu-uu-u)

25. Тишина,— даже ветка не хрустнет! 4X (-u- -u-uu-u)
А, быть может, за этим оврагом 4G (-u-uu-uu-u)
Пробирается волк по сугробам 4X (-u-uu-uu-u)
Осторожным и вкрадчивым шагом. 4G (-u-uu-uu-u)

Тишина,— а, быть может, он близко... 4X (-u-uu-uu-u)
30. И стою я, исполнен тревоги, 4H (-u-uu-uu-u)
И гляжу напряжённо на чащи, 4X (-u-uu-uu-u)
На следы и кусты вдоль дороги. 4H (-uuu-uu-u)

В дальних чащах, где ветви и тени 4X (-u-uu-uu-u)
В лунном свете узоры сплетают, 4I (-u-uu-uu-u)
35. Всё мне чудится что-то живое, 4X (-u-uu-uu-u)
Всё как будто зверьки пробегают. 4I (-u-uu-uu-u)

Огонёк из лесной караулки 4X (-u-uu-uu-u)
Осторожно и робко мерцает, 4J (-u-uu-uu-u)
Точно он притаился под лесом 4X (-u-uu-uu-u)
40. И чего-то в тиши поджидает. 4J (-u-u-u-u-)

Бриллиантом лучистым и ярким, 4X (-u-uu-uu-u)
То зелёным, то синим играя, 4K (-u-uu-uu-u)
На востоке, у трона господня, 4X (-u-uu-uu-u)
Тихо блещет звезда, как живая. 4K (-u-uu-uu-u)

45. А над лесом всё выше и выше 4X (-u-uu-uu-u)
Всходит месяц, — и в дивном покое 4L (-u-uu-uu-u)
Замирает морозная полночь 4X (-u-uu-uu-u)
И хрустальное царство лесное! 4L (-u-uu-uu-u)
1901

Audio Recordings

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mWRxkEF7ioE>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8zemkxI3_t4

Critical Articles

<https://rustih.ru/ivan-bunin-kreshenskaya-noch/>
<http://www.litra.ru/composition/download/coid/00027201184864203256/>
<https://litfest.ru/analiz/kreshenskaya-noch.html>
<https://pishi-stihi.ru/kreshenskaya-noch-bunin.html>

Sleep mysteriously slender thickets,
Sleep, clothed with deep snow,
And glades, and meadows, and ravines,
Where once the streams roared.

25. Silence — even a branch will not crack!
Or perhaps beyond this ravine
A wolf makes its way through the snowdrifts
With a careful and insinuating step.

Silence — and, perhaps, it is close...
30. And I stand, filled with anxiety,
I stare intently at the thicket,
On the tracks and bushes along the road.

In the far thickets, where the branches and shadows
In the moonlight patterns are woven,
35. I keep imagining something alive,
All as if animals run through.

The light from the forest sector
Cautiously and timidly flickers,
As if it was hiding under the forest
40. And waiting for something in the silence.

A diamond radiant and bright,
Then green, then blue.,
In the East, at the throne of God,
Quietly shines the star, as if alive.

45. And above the forest higher and higher
The moon rises — and in wondrous peace
Frosty midnight freezes
And the crystal Kingdom of the forest!

Comments

The poem was started in 1896 and only finished in 1901, when Bunin was 31. The poem is a popular one, but unusual for Bunin — in its concentration on the author himself, and in the rhyme scheme (even-numbered lines only are rhymed). The poem passes from straight description to a spellbound air of mystery, and thence to frozen splendour of the scene lit by the Epiphany star and the moon. His 1901 visit to his elderly parents brought back memories of a happy childhood in the Orel forests, which were waiting for him, unchanged, though he himself was now burdened by broken affairs and an unsuccessful marriage to Anna Tsakni.

ПЛЕЯДЫ

Стемнело. Вдоль алле́й, над со́нными пруда́ми, Бре́ду я науга́д.	3b	6A
Осе́нней све́жестью, листво́ю и плода́ми Благоуха́ет сад.	4b	6A
Давно́ он пореде́л, — и звёздное сия́нье Беле́ет меж ветве́й.		6C 3d
Иду́ я ме́дленно, — и ме́ртвое молча́нье Цари́т во тьме алле́й.	3d	6C
И зво́нок ка́ждый шаг среди́ ночной прохла́ды. И ца́рственным гербо́м	3f	6E
Горя́т холо́дные алма́зные Плея́ды В безмо́лвии ночно́м.	3f	6E

1898

Audio Recordings

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Z6_FIPC9zQ

Critical Articles

Pleiades

Full dark. Along the alleys, over the sleepy ponds,
I'm wandering at random.
Autumn freshness, leaves and fruits
The garden is fragrant.

5. It has long thinned out, and the starry radiance
White between the branches.
I walk slowly — and a dead silence
Reigns in the dark alleys.

And every step in the cool of the night.
And the heraldic coat of arms
Burning cold diamond Pleiades
In the silence of the night.

Comments

An ostensibly simple poem, with alternating feminine and masculine rhymes on a 6363 stanza pattern. Four things are worth noting. The first is how well the hexameter-trimeter pattern works, with the longer line laying out the observations and the shorter collecting them into an emphatic statement. The second is the acuteness of the observations which go beyond description to create an air of breathless silence. Third is the verse texture. Here is the first stanza in an anglicized transliteration:

stem-NEH-law vdal ahl-LAY nahd SON-nih-mee proo-DAH-mee,
BREH-doo yah nah-oo-GAHD
aw-SEN-nay SVEH-jest-yoo, leest-VAU-yoo ee plaw-DAH-mee
blah-gaw-oo-HHAH-yet Sahd.

Note the evocative assonance and how *сонными прудами*, magical even in English, is more so in Russian: SON-nih-mee proo-DAH-mee.

Finally there is the viewpoint, which shifts from earth to the heavens, a favourite device of Bunin's, which here creates a semblance of eternity, the ancient stars watching over the earth but ultimately transcending human experience.

Горный лес

Вечёрний час. В долину тень сползла.	5a
Сосною пахнет Чисто и глубоко	5b (u-u-u-uu-u-)
Над лесом небо Млечный змей потока	5B
Шуршит слышней вдоль белого русла.	5A (u-u-u-uu-)
Слышней звенит далёкий плач козла.	5c
Острей стрекочет лёгкая сорока	5D
Гора, весь день глядевшая с востока,	5D
Свой алый пик высоко унесла.	5c
На ней молились Волчьему Зевесу.	5E
Не раз, не раз с вершины этих скал	5f
И дым вставал, и пели гимны лесу	5E
И медный нож в руках жреца сверкал.	5f
Я тихо поднял древнюю завесу.	5e (u-uu- -u-u-u)
Я в храм отцов забытый путь искал.	5f

1908

Mountain Forest

Evening hour. The shadow slid into the valley.
It smells like pine. Clean and deep
Above the forest is the sky. Milky serpent of the stream
Audible rustling along the white river.

The distant cry of a goat rings louder.
The light magpie chirps more sharply.
The mountain that looked out from the East all day,
She carried her scarlet peak high.

On it they prayed to the wolf's Zeus.
More than once, more than once from the top of these rocks
And the smoke rose, and they sang hymns to the forest,

And the copper knife in the priest's hands glittered.
I quietly lifted the ancient curtain.
I was looking for a forgotten way to the temple of the fathers.

Comments

Another descriptive poem, which like the one preceding and Tyutchev's *Snowy Mountains* (1825-9) moves to a loftier realm, here the primaevial past. Tyutchev's poem concludes:

Grief as native deities
above the earth where all things die
contends in fierce identities
with that iced azure of the sky.

Bunin is quieter and less given to intellectual gymnastics. In lines 9-11, Bunin's thoughts stray to man's pre-archeological past, and then to hidden mysteries that may have been forgotten but still add an aura of wildness to surroundings. Those surroundings are not passive, of course. Shadows slide. The river rustles as a serpent. The mountain rears its head, stained crimson in the sunset, but also bloodily cutting into the curtain of sky. Bunin disliked the affectation and decadence of the Symbolist poets, but his poetry also hints at a larger dimension, one taken from outdoor life and by no means consoling or unthreatening.

* * *

Гаснет вечер, даль синееет,	4A
Солнышко садится,	3b
Степь да степь кругом - и всюду	4C
Нива колосится!	3b
5. Пахнет мёдом, зацветает	4A
Белая гречиха...	3D
Звон к вечерне из деревни	4C
Долетает тихо...	3D
А вдали кукушка в роще	4C
10. Медленно кукует...	3A
Счастлив тот, кто на работе	4C
В поле заночует!	3A
Гаснет вечер, скрылось солнце,	4E
Лишь закат краснеет...	3F
15. Счастлив тот, кому зарею	4E
Тёплый ветер веет;	3F
Для кого мерцают коротко,	4G
Светятся с приветом	3H
В тёмном небе тёмной ночью	4G
20. Звёзды тихим светом;	3H
Кто устал на ниве за день	4X
И уснёт глубоко	3g (-u-uu-)
Мирным сном под звёздным небом	4H
На степи широкой!	3X

1892

Audio Recordings

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4YawS3bbVt4>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s20raT-8-7o>

Critical Articles

<https://pishi-stihi.ru/gasnet-vecher-dal-sineet-bunin.html>

Evening fades

Evening fades, the distance turns blue,
The sun is setting,
Steppe and steppe all around - and everywhere
The field is teeming!
Smells of honey, blooms
White buckwheat...
Bell for vespers from the village
Flies quietly...
And in the distance a cuckoo in a grove
Slowly chuckles...
Happy is the one who is at work
In the field will spend the night!

Goes out the evening, the sun disappeared,
Only sunset blush...
Happy is he who in the dawn
The warm wind blows;
For whom twinkle sweetly,
Glow with greetings
In the dark sky on a dark night
Stars with a quiet light;
Who is tired in the field for the day
And sleep deeply
Peaceful sleep under the starry sky
On the broad steppe!

Comments

The subject was dear to one of Bunin's landowner origins, and was returned to often in short stories after his exile to France. It is a romantic view that overlooks just how hard life could be on the great estates, but was a view informed by deep love and genuine knowledge nonetheless. The scene is broadly sketched in the appropriate colours, smells and sounds in stanza one, and then repeated (anaphora) in stanza two. The sun sets, the sky darkens and a warm wind blows over those who will sleep under the stars.

Except in line 22, the metre is a regular trochaic, though the rhyming is a little free. Note in the audio-recordings how quiet and matter-of-fact is Bunin's Russian here.

МОЛОДОСТЬ

Ноябрь, сырая полночь. Городок, 5a
Весь меловой, весь бледный под луною, 5B
Подавлен безответной тишиною. 5B
Приливный шум торжественно-широк. 5a

На мачте коменданта флаг намок. 5c
Вверху, над самой мачтой, над сквозною 5D
И мутной мглой, бегущей на восток, 5c
Скользит луна зеркальной белизною. 5D

Иду к обрывам. Шум грознее. Свет 5e
Таинственной, тусклее и печальней. 5F
Волна качает свои под купальней. 5F

Вдали - седая бездна. Моря нет. 5e
И валуны, в шипящей серой пене, 5G
Блестят внизу, как спящие тюлени. 5G

6.VIII.09

Midnight

November, raw midnight. Village,
All chalky, all pale under the moon,
Overwhelmed by the unanswered silence.
The tidal noise of solemn and wide.

The flag on the commandant's mast is wet.
Above, above the mast itself, above the draught
And the murky haze, running to the east,
The moon glides with a mirror-like whiteness.

Going to the cliffs. The noise is more threatening. Light
More mysterious, dimmer, and sadder.
A wave swings the piles under the bathhouse.

In the distance—a gray abyss. There is no sea.
And boulders, in a sizzling gray foam,
Shine down, as the sleeping seals.

Comments

Another of Bunin's poems on the ineluctable reality of our existence, the way incidents and aspects of life intrude without any apparent reason. That inconsequentiality is a feature of many of Bunin's best-known stories — the odd assortment of guests thrown together in The North Pole lodging house of *Long Ago*, for example, or the brief affair that so changes the young officer in *Sunstroke* — and here we are given a scene, probably in the Crimea, which is clinically observed but only given 'as is'. The objectivity was a feature baffling to many of Bunin's contemporaries, who naturally expected the local setting to support the story in some way, not be largely the story itself. But that is Bunin, the source of his individuality.

The poem is a conventional sonnet, fastidiously turned, but not exhibiting any great beauties of language. Note how many polysyllabic words make up the first stanza, which is made impressive by its quiet detachment: this is 'how it was' the poem says: 'you make what you wish from the experience':

naw-YAHBR sih-RAH-yah POL-nach. Gaw-raw-DOK
ves meh-law-VOY ves BLED-niy pad loo-NAW-yoo
paw-DAHV-len beh-zat-VET-noy tee-shee-NAW-yoo.
pree-LEEV-niy shoom tor-JEST-ven-naw shee-ROK.

* * *

Не видно птиц. Покóрно чáхнет 4A
Лес, опустéвший и больно́й. 4b
Грибы сошли́, но крéпко па́хнет 4A
В овра́гах сы́ростью грибно́й. 4b

Глушь ста́ла ни́же и светлée, 4C
В куста́х свая́лася трава́, 4d
И, под дождём осéнним тлéя, 4C
Черне́ет тёмная листьва́. 4d

А в по́ле ве́тер. День холо́дный 4E
Угру́м и свеж - и це́лый день 4f
Скита́юсь я в степи́ свобóдной, 4E
Вдали́ от сёл и деревéнь. 4f

И, убаю́кан ша́гом ко́нным, 4G
С отра́дной гру́стью внемлю я, 4h
Как ве́тер зво́ном монотóнным 4G
Гудит-поёт в ство́лы ружья́. 4h

1889

Audio Recordings

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a1nwkAJq5hI>

Critical Articles

<https://rustih.ru/ivan-bunin-ne-vidno-ptic/>
<http://bclubcompany.ru/taxes-and-fees/stihotvorenie-ne-vidno-ptic-bunin-ivan-alekseevich-analiz-stihotvoreniya/>

No birds visible

No birds visible. Meekly pines
The forest, empty and sick.
The mushrooms are gone, but it smells strong
In the ravines with mushroom dampness.

The wilderness was lower and lighter,
Grass was piled up in the bushes,
And, in the autumn rain smouldering,
Dark foliage turns black.

And in the field the wind. Cold day
Sullen and fresh - and all day long
I wander in the free steppe,
Far from villages and villages.

And, lulled by a horse's pace,
I hear it with a pleasant sadness,
As the wind sounds monotonous
Humming-singing into the barrels of a gun.

Comments

A very early poem, written when Bunin was working as a proof-reader for a local newspaper, a rather precarious existence that nonetheless gave him time to indulge his passion for hunting. It's probably autumn or early winter. The forest is drab and joyless, stripped of vegetation, and Bunin's only companions are his horse and the incessant wind which moans down the barrel of his shotgun. The sadness was a reflection of Bunin's own life at the time. He was attached to a girl his parents did not approve of, nursed dreams of poetry his parents did not attach much importance to, and was unfitted for a life in the military or the professions that would normally be expected of him.

A simple piece, written in rhymed iambic tetrameters, masculine and feminine rhymes alternating, as is usual in Russian verse. Bunin's task was to make these rather matter-of-fact observations into something more, to invest the quotidian of life with an extra dimension or vitality, something that was pressingly real and not simply conjured from the imagination, as the Symbolists poets were apt to do. It would take Bunin his whole life to achieve this end, with results that were always uncertain, sometimes delighting his public but also, especially in the late, erotic stories, filling them with disquiet and sometimes dismay.

Песня

(Я - простая девка на баштане...)

Я - простáя дéвка на баштáне,	5A
Он - рыбáк, весёлый человек.	5b
Тóнет бéлый пáрус на Лимáне,	5A
Мнóго víдел он морéй и рек.	5b

Говорáют, гречáнки на Босфоре	5C
Хорошí... А я чернá, худá.	5d
Утопáет бéлый пáрус в мóре -	5C
Мóжет, не вернётся никогдá!	5d

Бúду ждaть в погóду, в непогóду...	5E
Не дождúсь - с баштáна разочтúсь,	5f
Выйду к мóрю, брошу пёрстень в вóду	5E
И косóю чёрной удавлúсь.	5f

1903-1906

Audio Recordings

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=We5DIsTDS_U

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=73ZIU5ib_qs

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QHKIKGumIuE>

Critical Articles

[http://www.buninlib.orel.ru/ekoll/Bunin%20i%20musik%20\(2008\).pdf](http://www.buninlib.orel.ru/ekoll/Bunin%20i%20musik%20(2008).pdf)

Song

The song (I'm a simple girl in a bashtan...)

I'm just a girl in a bashtan,
He is a fisherman, a jolly man.
Sinking white sail on the estuary,
He saw many seas and rivers.

They say Greek women on the Bosphorus
Good... And I am black and thin.
The white sail sinks into the sea -
Maybe he'll never come back!

I will wait in the weather, in bad weather...
If I can't wait , I'll be disappointed,
I will go to the sea and throw the ring into the water
And I'll strangle myself with a black scythe.

Comments

This is a popular piece, and many composers have set not only this poem but many of Bunin's works to music. Bunin was markedly musical in his verse, of course, and also music-loving, being friendly with the singer Shalyapin and composer Rachmaninov, for example, and regularly attending concerts and musical recitals. As the first of the audio recordings indicates, the poem transfers well to music, in fact enchantingly so, and it's worth enquiring why.

The poem is trochaic, set in pentameters rhymed AbAb, and so is not folksong-like in itself. But the words have that timeless element of the jolly rover, so attractive to women but doubtful of fidelity, and the verse itself, though very regular in metre, obligingly amplifies the sense. As usual in Russian verse, some lines have sections with no inherent stress at all, and it's these intervals that allow the woman to express her uncertainties and fears. Lines 1,2 and 4 in the first stanza have only three inherent stresses, for example, and a similar pattern holds for the other stanzas:

Yah pras-TAH-yah DEV-kah nah bahsh-TAH-neh
a-net BEH-liy PAH-roos nah lee-MAH-neh,
MNAW-gaw VEE-del an maw-RAY ee rek.

Bashtan is a rural locality, often a strip of arable ground or vegetable patch.

* * *

В дачном кресле, ночью, на балконе...	5A
Оксана колыбельный шум...	4b (u-u-u-u-)
Будь доверчив, краток и спокоен,	5A
Отдохни от дум.	3b
Ветер проходящий, уходящий,	5C
Вьющий безбрежностью морской...	5d
Есть ли тот, кто этой дачи спящей	5C
Сторожит покой?	3d
Есть ли тот, кто должной мерой мерит	5E
Наши знания, судьбы и года?	5f
Если сердце хочет, если верит,	5E
Значит — да.	2f
То, что есть в тебе, ведь существует.	5G
Вот ты дремлешь, и в глаза твои	5h
Так любовно мягкий ветер дует —	5G
Как же нет Любви?	3h

1918

Audio Recordings

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kF9hFiIYGz0>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wzCNETvKiVI>

Critical Articles

In a dacha chair

In a dacha chair, at night, on the balcony...
Oksana lullaby noise...
Be trusting, gentle and calm,
Take a break from your thoughts.

Wind coming and going,
The sea that breathes vastness...
Is there someone who is this cottage sleeping
Guarding the peace?

Is there any one who has a measure of merit
Our knowledge of the fate and years?
If the heart wants, if it believes,
So Yes.

What is in you is there.
Here you are dozing, and in your eyes
So lovingly soft the wind blows —
How can there be no love?

Comments

A simple, evocative poem of four stanzas, where three pentameters are followed by a shorter trimeter (or dimeter in stanza two). Oksana is a popular woman's name, in fact of Ukrainian origin.

Stanza one sets the scene: night on a dacha balcony, Oksana is singing a lullaby, soft and trusting, inviting us to simply accept what the song says. In stanza two we hear the sea wind, coming and going, and think of someone breathing in the dacha and so guarding the place. Stanza three repeats the first theme: accept the scene. We cannot know the future, so let things be as the heart professes. Stanza four focuses on the singer and again repeats the theme: in the soft wind and the expression of the eyes how can there not be love?

We show also note the musicality of the verse, how the sound echoes the sense, with soft syllabants in the long multisyllabic words. Stanza two:

VEH-ter pree-hhaw-DYAH-shhiy oo-hhaw-DYAH-shhiy
VEH-yoo-shhiy bezb-REJ-nast-yoo mor-SKOY. . .
yest lee tot, ktaw EH-toy DAH-chee SPYAH-shhay
staw-raw-JEET paw-KOY.

* * *

В по́здний час мы бы́ли с не́ю в по́ле.	5A
Я дрожа́ касался не́жных губ...	5b
«Я хочú объ́ятия до бо́ли,	5A
Будь со мной безжа́лостен и груб!»	5b
Утомясь, она́ проси́ла не́жно:	5C
«Убаю́кай, дай мне отдохну́ть,	5d
Не целу́й так крèпко и мятéжно,	5C
Положи́ мне го́лову на грудь».	5d
Звёзды т́ихо й́скрились над на́ми,	5E
Тонко па́хло све́жестью росы́.	5f
Ла́сково касался я уста́ми	5E
До горя́чих щёк и до косы́.	5f
И она́ забы́лась. Раз просну́лась,	5G
Как дитя́, вздохну́ла в полусне́,	5h
Но, взгляну́вши, сла́бо улыбну́лась	5G
И о́пять прижалася ко мне.	5h
Ночь цар́ила до́лго в те́мном по́ле,	5I
До́лго ми́лый сон я охраня́л...	5j
А пото́м на золоти́м престóле,	5I
На восто́ке, т́ихо засия́л	5j
Но́вый день, — в поля́х прохладно ста́ло...	5K
Я её тихо́нько разбуди́л	5l
И в степи́, сверка́ющей и а́лой,	5K
По росе́ до до́му проводи́л.	5l

Trochaic metre 1901

Audio Recordings

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KrXc8t841so>

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLcF3T2qQ5Qy5yGYi7iuYA5yw_Jt2WАy2Q

At some late hour

At a late hour we were in the field with her.
I touched her soft lips trembling...
"I want a hug that hurts,
Be merciless and rude to me!"

Weary, she asked gently:
"Lull me to sleep,
Don't kiss me so hard and rebellious,
Put your head on my chest."

The stars sparkled softly above us,
The air smelled faintly of fresh dew.
Gently I touched my lips
To the hot cheeks and to the braid.

And she forgot herself. Once I woke up,
Like a child, she sighed in a half-dream,
But when she looked up, she smiled faintly
Then she snuggled up to me again.

Night reigned long in the dark field,
Long sweet dream, I was guarding...
And then on the Golden throne,
In the East, quietly shone

A new day — in fields cool became...
I woke her up quietly
And in the steppe, sparkling and scarlet,
I walked home through the dew.

Comments

A celebratory poem not on the school syllabus. Trochaic pentameters, regularly rhymed AbAb in five stanzas. The pressing question is what to make of *И она забылась*, literally 'and she forgot herself'. She forgot her inhibitions? Probably not if she has urged the poet to be rough with her. She gave herself to the poet? Probably, or as good as. But then we have all those reservations that plague Bunin's late stories: the breaking of taboos, overt sexuality, innocence taken advantage of. The themes of Bunin's short stories often appear, decades earlier, in his poems, though no more properly resolved. Sexual infatuation was often a dark force for Bunin, deeply troubling, sometimes disastrously powerful and immiserating. It seems wise to leave the phrase as it is, enigmatic, and let the resulting joy speak for itself.

Ангел

В вечерний час, над степью мирной,	4A
Когда закат над ней сиял,	4b
Среди небес, стезей эфирной	4A
Вечерний ангел пролетал.	4b
Он видел сумрак предзакатный, -	4C
Уже синел вдали восток, -	4d
И вдруг услышал он невнятный	4C
Во ржах ребёнка голосок.	4d
Он видел колосья собирая,	4E (u-u-u-uu-)
Сплетал веночек и пел в тиши,	4F (u-u-u- - u)
И были в песне звуки рая –	4E
Невинной, неземной души.	4F
«Благослови меньшого брата, -	4G
Сказал Господь. – Благослови	4h
Младенца в тихий час заката	4G
На путь и правды и любви!»	4h
И ангел светлою улыбкой	4I
Ребёнка тихо осенил	4j
И на закат лучисто-зыбкий	4I
Поднялся в блеске нежных крыл.	4j
И, точно крылья золотые,	4K
Заря пылала в вышине.	4I
М долго очи молодые	4K
За ней следили в тишине!	4I

1891

Audio Recordings

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xenc_I_1naU
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-Cv9W2jxfM>

Critical Articles

<https://pishi-stihi.ru/angel-bunin.html>

Angel

In the evening, over the peaceful steppe,
When the sunset was shining over her,
Among the heavens, the path of the ethereal
The evening angel was flying by.

He saw the twilight of the sunset, -
The east was already blue in the distance, -
And then he heard an indistinct voice
In the rye of a child a voice.

He saw the ears of corn when he was picking them,
I wove a wreath and sang in silence,
And there were sounds of paradise in the song -
An innocent, unearthly soul.

"Bless the little brother, -
Said The Lord. - Bless
Baby in the quiet hour of sunset
On the path of truth and love!"

And an angel with a bright smile
The child quietly dawned
And the sunset is radiant and unsteady
Rose in the glow of tender wings.

And, like wings of gold,
The dawn was burning high.
M long in the eyes of the young
She was watched in silence!

Comments

An early and successful poem where Bunin imagines an angel that, impressed by a simple child in his devotions, blesses him with a safe path through life's temptations. The larger theme is the wonder of the world, which a child possesses, but we too often lose sight of in everyday existences. I do not know to whom the M refers, but the quivering wings of the angel (who is feminine here) turn into the dawn's gold, and the child's eyes fill with silent wonder.

That sense of wonder, though it grew less focused, and less expressed in overt religious symbols, is something that never left Bunin. It reappears specifically in the late poems, but is always present in the short stories, where even the most sordid surroundings are imbued with the inexplicable breath of life.

* * *

Мы встрéтились случайно, на углу. 5a
Я бы́стро шёл - и вдруг как свет зарни́цы 5B
Вечёрнюю прорéзал полумглу́ 5a
Сквозь чёрные лучи́стые ресни́цы. 5B

На ней был креп,- прозра́чный лёгкий газ 5c
Весéнный вéтер взвёял на мгновéнье, 5D
Но на лицé и в ярком свéте глаз 5c
Я уловил́ былóе оживленье. 5D

И ласково кивну́ла мне она́, 5e
Слегка́ лицó от вéтра наклони́ла 5F
И скры́лась за углу́м... Была́ весна́... 5e
Она́ меня́ прости́ла - и забы́ла. 5F

1905

Audio Recordings

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sxt2CkuHMg0>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WHQ4CW_MgtY

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hFuK2CaZ_-Q

Critical Articles

<https://lit.ukrtvory.ru/analiz-stixotvoreniya-bunina-my-vstretilis-sluchajno-na-uglu/>

<https://pishi-stihi.ru/my-vstretilis-sluchajno-na-uglu-bunin.html>

We met by chance

We met by chance at the corner.
I was walking fast - and suddenly like the light of a lightning bolt
The evening half-light cut through
Through black, luminous lashes.

It was crepe, a transparent light gas
The spring wind blew for a moment,
But on the face and in the bright light of the eyes
I caught a glimpse of former animation.

And she nodded to me affectionately,
Slightly face from the wind tilted
And disappeared around the corner... It was spring...
She forgave me - and forgot.

Comments

A simple little poem written as three pentameter quatrains rhymed aBaB. Despite its slight nature, the poem makes full use of the possibilities of Russian verse. Note the sinewy assonance in the first stanza, brought out well in the first audio recording:

mih VSTREH-tee-lees sloo-CHAI-naw, nah oog-LOO.
yah BIST-raw - shol ee vdroog kahk svet zahr-NEE-tsih
veh-CHER-new-yoo praw-REH-zahl paw-loomg-LOO
skvoz CHOR-nih-yeh loo-CHEES-tih-yeh res-NEE-tsih.

The poet encounters a woman he once knew, an association she acknowledges with an affectionate nod of the head, and then passes by. Whether the poet was really responsible for the suffering caused — as in Bunin's own case with Varvara Pashchenko — is open to doubt, especially if the woman promptly forgets the encounter. I'd read the poem as a sardonic reflection on the brevity of our affections, suggesting that Bunin no more wore the heart on his sleeve than did his mentor Chekhov.

ЦИРЦЕЯ

На тренóжник богíня садíтся:	5A (-u-uu-uu-u)
Блédно-ры́жее зóлото кос,	5b (-u-uu-uu-)
Зéлень глаз и аттíческий нос -	5b (-u-uu-uu-)
В мéдном зéркале всё отразíтся.	5A (u-u-uu-uu-u)

Тóнко бáрхатом рíса покрýт	5c (-u-uu-uu-)
Нéжный лик, розовáто-телéсный,	5D (-u-uu-uu-u)
Кáплей нектáра, влáгой небéсной,	5D (-uu-uu-u)
Блéщут сéрьги, скользjá вдоль ланít,	5c (-u-uu-uu-)

И Улисс говорít: "О, Цирцея!	5E (-u-uu-uu-u)
Всё прекрáсно в тебе: и рукá,	5f (-u-uu-uu-)
Что причёски коснóлась слéгка,	5f (-u-uu-uu-)
И сияющий лóкоть, и шéя!"	5E (-u-uu-uu-u)

А богíня с улы́бкой: "Улисс!	5g (-u-uu-uu-)
Я горжúсь лишь плечáми сво́ими	5H (-u-uu-uu-u)
Да пушкóм апельсíнным меж нíми,	5H (-u-uu-uu-u)
По спинé убегáющим вниз!"	5g (-u-uu-uu-)

1916

Circe

The goddess sits on a tripod:
Pale red gold braid,
Green eyes and an attic nose -
The copper mirror will reflect everything.

Thin velvet-covered rice
Delicate face, pinkish-flesh,
A drop of nectar, a heavenly moisture,
Glisten earrings, gliding along leaves,

And Ulysses says, "Oh, Circe!
Everything is beautiful in you: and the hand,
That she touched her hair lightly,
And the shining elbow and neck!"

And the goddess with a smile: "Ulysses!
I'm only proud of my shoulders
Yes, the fluffy orange of between them,
On the back of running down!"

Comments

Another mischievous little poem, here written when Bunin was in his forties. The metre is now dactylic, and the pentameters are regularly rhymed AbbA, etc.

Circe is not the formidable enchantress here, nor fully smitten with Ulysses, but is posing as a society belle mischievously alluding to her powers. Perhaps she is about give Ulysses a splendid coat of her own orange hair. Or perhaps not. Bunin is playing with his audience as Circe plays with hers.

Полевые цветы

В блёске огнёй, за зеркальными стёклами, Пышно цветут дорогие цветы, Нежны и сладки их тонкие запахи, Листья и стёбли полны красоты.	4A (-uu-uu-uu-uu) 4b (-uu-uu-uu-) 4A (-uu-uu-uu-uu) 4b (-uu-uu-uu-)
Их возрастили в теплицах заботливо, Их привезли из-за синих морей; Их не пугают метели холодные, Бурные грозы и свежесть ночей.	4C (-uu-uu-uu-uu) 4d (-uu- -u-uu-) 4C (-uu-uu-uu-uu) 4d (-uu-uu-uu-)
Есть на полях моей родины скромные Сёстры и братья заморских цветов: Их возросла весна благовонная В зелени майской лесов и лугов.	4E (-uu-u-uu-u-uu) 4f (-uu-uu-uu-) 4E (-uu-uu-uu-uu) 4f (-uu-uu-uu-)
Видят они не теплицы зеркальные, А небосклона простор голубой, Видят они не огни, а таинственный Вечных созвездий узор золотой.	4F (-uu-uu-uu-uu) 4g (-uu-uu-uu-) 4H (-uu-uu-uu-uu) 4g (-uu-uu-uu-)
Вéет от них красотóю стыдливою, Сéрдцу и взóру родные они́ И говорят про давно́ позабы́тые Свётлые дни.	4H (-uu-uu-uu-uu) 4i (-uu-uu-uu-) 4H (-uu-uu-uu-uu) 2i (-uu-)

A fairly regular dactylic. 1887

Audio Recordings

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zho7j23DsqM>

Critical Articles

<https://rustih.ru/ivan-bunin-polevye-cvety/>

<http://www.nado5.ru/e-book/bunin-i-a-polevye-cvety>

Wild Flowers

In the glare of lights, behind plate-glass windows,
Grow wild flowers are expensive,
Delicate and sweet are their subtle scents,
The leaves and stems are full of beauty.

They were carefully raised in greenhouses,
They were brought from across the blue seas;
They are not afraid of snowstorms cold,
Stormy thunderstorms and fresh nights...

There are modest ones in the fields of my homeland
Sisters and brothers of overseas flowers:
They grew up in the spring of incense
In the green of May woods and meadows.

They don't see glasshouses,
And the sky is blue,
They do not see lights, but a mysterious
Eternal constellations pattern gold.

They give off a shamefaced beauty,
They are dear to the heart and eyes
And they talk about long forgotten ones
Bright day.

Comments

A very accomplished poem for a young man of 17, who in fact should have been in school — had not his father run through the family fortune and found himself unable to finance his son's career, who had to be tutored at home by his older brother. Five stanzas of dactylic tetrameters, rhymed AbAb. The last, perhaps too abrupt to be wholly successful, has only two stresses. As the audio recordings indicate, the verse lacks the musical texture of his better work, but shows Bunin's early promise. The poem was printed in Bunin's first poetry collection.

Wild flowers are contrasted with cultivated varieties, not wholly to their disadvantage, and the poem moves from the 'eternal costellations of patterned gold' in stanza four to thoughts of 'lost love' in stanza five. Bunin would find this happy affectation only too real over the next twenty years when had first to contend with dashed hopes over Varvara Pashchenko and then the failed and acrimonious marriage to Anna Tsakni.

* * *

Ры́жими иго́лками	3A (-u-u-uu)
Устлан косо́р,	3b (-u-u-)
Сла́дко пахнё́т ёлка́ми	3A (-uu-uu-)
Жа́ркий ле́тний бор.	3b (-u-u-)
Сядь на э́ту ско́льзкую	3B (-u-u-uu)
Золо́тую сушь	3c (-u-u-)
С пе́сенкою по́льскойю	3B (-u-u-uu)
Про лесну́ю глушь.	3c (-u-u-)
Темно́та ветви́стая	3D (-u-u-uu)
Над тобо́й висит,	3e (-u-u-)
Кра́сное, лучи́стое,	3D (-u-u-uu)
Со́лнце чуть скво́зит.	3e (-u-u-)
Дай тво́й ле́нвые	3F (-u-u-uu)
Де́вичьи уста́,	3g (-u-u-)
Грусть тво́я сча́сливая,	3F (-u-u-uu)
Пе́сенка проста́.	3g (-u-u-)
Сла́дко па́хнет ёлка́ми	3H (-u-u-uu)
Потаё́нный бор,	3i (-u-u-)
Ско́льзкими иго́лками	3H (-u-u-uu)
Устлан косо́р.	3i (-u-u-)

30 июня 1916

Red needles

Red needles
Covered slope,
Smells sweet like Christmas trees
Hot summer pine forest.

Sit on this slippery
Golden dry
With a Polish song
About the wilderness.

Branched darkness
Hanging over you
Red, radiant,
The sun shines through.

Give your lazy
Girl's mouth
Your sad sadness
The song is simple.

Smells sweet like Christmas trees
Secret pine forest
Slippery needles
Covered slope.

Comments

A simple and rather popular poem that was doubtless difficult to write: trimeters faultlessly rhymed AbAb, where the feminine rhyme takes an extra syllable. The last stanza essentially repeats the first, but with the line order reversed.

What the Polish song refers to I do not know, and perhaps doesn't matter much. It's a mood that's captured, where the poet, now comfortably off in his mid forties, longs for the apparent simplicity of youth — which is, of course, illusory, particularly so in Bunin's case. Poets are not reliable biographers.

Одиночество

И вѣтер, и дѳждик, и мгла Над холѳдной пустыней вѳды Здесь жизнь до весны умерла, До весны опустѳли сады.	3а (u-uu-uu-) 3В (uu-uu-u-u) 3а (u-uu-uu-) 3b (uu-uu-uu-)
5. Я на дѳче одѳн. Мне темно За мольбѳртом, и дѳет в окно.	3с (uu-uu-uu-) 3с (uu-uu-uu-)
Вчера ты была у меня, Но тебе уж тоскливо со мной. Под вѳчер ненастного дня 10. Ты мне стала казѳться женой...	3d (u-uu-uu-) 3E (uu-uu-uu-u) 3d (u-uu-uu-) 3E (uu-uu-uu-u)
Что ж, прощѳй! Как-нибудь до весны Проживѳ и одѳн -- без жены...	3f (uu- -uu-u-) 3f (uu-uu-uu-)
Сегѳдня идѳт без конца Те же тѳчи--грядѳ за грядѳй. 15. Твой след под дождѳм у крыльца Расплылся, налился водѳй.	3g (u-uu-uu-) 3H (uu-uu-uu-u) 3g (u-u-u-uu-) 3H (u-uu-uu-u)
И мне бѳльно глядѳть одному В предвѳчернюю серую тѳму.	3i (uu-uu-uu-) 3i (uu-uu-uu-)
Мне крикнуть хотѳлось вослѳд: 20. "Воротѳсь, я сроднилсѳ с тобѳй!" Но для жѳнщины прѳшлого нет: Разлюбѳла -- и стал ей чужѳй.	3j (u-uu-uu-) 3K (uu-uu-uu-u) 3j (uu-uu-uu-) 3K (uu-uu-uu-u)
Что ж! Камѳн затоплю, бѳду пить... Хорошѳ бы собаку купѳть.	3l (uu-uu- -u-) 3l (uu-uu-uu-)

1903

Audio Recordings

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AszLnDg4OC8>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TmwjUerYUgE>

Critical Articles

<https://rustih.ru/ivan-bunin-odinochestvo/>

<https://obrazovaka.ru/analiz-stihotvoreniya/bunin/odinochestvo.html>

<http://www.litra.ru/composition/download/coid/00061001184864244796/>

<https://usfeu-tds.ru/bank-sochinenij/bunin-odinochestvo-analiz.html>

Loneliness

And the wind, and the rain, and the mist
Over a cold desert of water.
Here life before spring is dead,
The gardens were empty until spring.

5. I'm alone in my dacha. I'm dark
Behind the easel, and blowing out of the window.

You were with me yesterday,
But you're too bored with me.
In the evening of a stormy day
10. You seem like a wife to me...

Well, good-bye! Sometime before spring
I can live alone without my wife...

Today they go on without end
The same clouds-ridge after ridge.
15. our footprint in the rain on the porch
Blurred, filled with water.

And it hurts me to look alone
Into the gray evening darkness.

I wanted to shout after him.
20. "Come back, I am related to you!"
But for a woman there is no past:
She fell out of love and became a stranger to her.

Well! I'll light the fire and drink...
It would be nice to buy a dog.

Comments

Another popular piece, dedicated to Peter Nilus, a painter from Odessa and close friend of Bunin's. The poem was begun in Constantinople, when Bunin was himself in the painful throes of separating from his first wife Anna Tsakni. The bleakness of the scene echoes his own apparent future. The poem is written in anapaestic trimeters and rhymed aBabcc.

A dog is man's faithful friend, but I suspect Bunin's is being a little mischievous in the wry comments and recommendations.

Жасмин

Цветёт жасми́н. Зелёной ча́щей	4A
Иду́ над Те́реком с утра́	4b
Вдали́, меж гор - престо́й, блестя́щий	4A
И чёткий ко́нус серебра́.	4b

Река́ шуми́т, вся в и́скрах све́та,	4C
Жасми́ном па́хнет жа́ркий лес.	4d
А там, вверху́ - зима́ и ле́то	4C
Январский снег и синь небёс.	4d

Лес замира́ет, мле́ет в зно́е,	4E
Но тем пы́шней цветёт жасми́н.	4f
В лазу́ри я́ркой – неземно́е	4E
Великолéпие верши́н.	4f

1904

Critical Articles

<https://pishi-stihi.ru/zhasmin-bunin.html>

Jasmine

Jasmine is blooming. Green thicket
I'm going over the Terek in the morning.
In the distance, between the mountains - simple, brilliant
And a clear cone of silver.

The river is noisy, full of sparks of light
Jasmine smells like a hot forest.
And there, at the top - winter and summer:
January snow and blue of heaven.

The forest freezes, dies in the heat,
But jasmine blooms with that magnificent.
In the bright blue - unearthly
The splendor of the peaks.

Comments

The poem was first published in 1903, in the Moscow magazine *Novoe Slovo*, and was entitled *Kazbek*, after a volcanic peak in the Caucasus. The later title reflects the richly coloured palette of the poem, and Bunin's own temperament. Russian poets, from Pushkin and Lermontov on, have written on the beauties of the Caucasus, its wild setting and rushing Terek river, so different from the monotony of the Russian steppes. Pushkin, as might be expected in his *Caucasus*, saw the Terek as a symbol of liberty. The last stanza (my translation):

An animal that howls the more
that, seeing prey beyond the cage,
its strikes can be but helpless rage.
It scours the cliffs with hungry paw
but, twisting to a headlong force,
the huge rocks hold it to its course.

Bunin avoids such easy comparisons and is more concerned with conveying the quiet splendour of the mountains, the exact colours of the scene, and the hot scent of flowers in the Terek valley.

Jasmine is in quatrains, three stanzas of iambic tetrameters rhymed AbAb.

СТАМБУЛ

Облѣзлые худы́е кобели́	5a
С печальными, молящими глазами -	5B
Потомки тех, что из степей пришлѣи	5a
За пыльными скрипучими возами.	5B
Был победитель сла́вен и богáт	5c
И затопил он шумною ордóю	5D
Твой дворцы́, твой сады́, Царьград,	5c
И предáлся, как сы́тый лев, покóю.	5D (uu-uu-u-u-u)
Но дни летя́т, летя́т быстрее́ птиц!	5e
И вот уже́ в Скутари на погóсте	5F
Черне́ет лес, и ты́сячи гробни́ц	5e
Беле́ют в кипарисах, то́чно ко́сти	5F
И прах веко́в упáл на прах святы́нь,	5g
На сла́вный го́род, ны́не полуди́кий,	5H
И вой соба́к звучи́т тоско́й пусты́нь	5g
Под византи́йской вѣтхой базили́кой.	5H
И пуст Сера́ль, и смолк егó фонтáн,	5i
И вы́сохли столѣтние дере́вья...	5K
Стамбу́л, Стамбу́л! Послѣдний мѣртвый стан	5i
Послѣднегo вели́кого кочевья!	5K

1905

Istambul

Shabby skinny males
with sad, pleading eyes -
Descendants of those who came from the steppes
Behind the dusty, creaking carts.

The winner was famous and rich
And he flooded the noisy Horde
Your palaces, your gardens, Tsargrad,
And he gave himself up to rest like a well-fed lion.

But the days are flying, flying faster than the birds!
And now in Scutari in the churchyard
Black forest, and thousands of tombs
White in the cypress trees, like bones.

And the dust of ages fell on the dust of shrines,
On the glorious city, now half-wild,
And the howling of dogs sounds like the longing of the desert
Under a dilapidated Byzantine Basilica.

And the Seraglio is empty, and its fountain is silent,
And the hundred-year-old trees dried up...
Istanbul, Istanbul! The last dead camp
The last great nomad!

Comments

Bunin went abroad during the first wave of revolutionary unrest, to Greece and the Middle East. Like many poets, he was attracted to the past, whose monuments sometimes appeared as simple descriptions in his travel poems, but it was generally the peoples and their contrast to past splendours that most captured his imagination.

But for line 8, which has an extra couple of unstressed syllables, the poem in regular iambic pentameters, rhymed aBaB, four lines to the stanza. Bunin's powers of description were favourably noted by contemporaries, but have less appeal to Russian readers today, who prefer his love of mother Russia. Bunin's poems are now sturdily constructed. The first stanza:

ab-LEZ-lih-yeh hhoo-DIH-yeh kaw-beh-LEE
s peh-CHAHL-nih-mee, maw-LYAH-shhee-mee - glah-ZAH-mee
paw-TOM-kee tehh, shtaw eez steh-PAY preesh-LEE
zah PIL-nih-mee skree-POO-chee-mee vau-ZAH-mee.

БЕДУИН

За Мёртвым мóрем - пéпельные грáни 5A
Чуть вíдных гор. Полднёвнýй час, обéд. 5b
Он вы́купал кобы́лу в Иордáне 5A (u-u-u-uu-u)
И сёл ку́рить. Песóк как медь нагрёт. 5b

За Мёртвым мóрем, в сóлнечном тумáне, 5C
Течёт мирáж. В доли́не - зной и свет, 5d
Воркúет дíкий гóлубь На герáни, 5C
На олеáндрах - вéшний áлый цвет. 5d

И он дремóтно нóет, воспева́я 5E
Зной, олеáндр, герáнь и тамарикс. 5f
Сидíт, как ястреб. Пéгая абáя. 5E
Сползáет с плеч... Поёт, разбóйник, гикс. 5f

Вон закури́л - и рад, что с тóнким ды́мом 5G
Сравни́т в стихáх верши́ны за Сиддимом. 5G

1908

The Bedouin

Beyond the Dead Sea - ash faces
Barely visible mountains. Noon hour, lunch.
He was buying a mare in Jordan
And sat down to smoke. Sand is heated like copper.

Beyond the Dead Sea, in a sunny haze,
A mirage flows. In the valley-heat and light,
Cooing of a wild dove. On geraniums,
On oleanders - spring scarlet color.

And he drowsily whines, singing
Heat, oleander, geraniums and tamarisk
Sits like a hawk. Piebald abaya
slides off shoulders... Poet, robber, tribesman.

Lit a cigarette - and is glad that with a thin smoke
Compare in verse the peaks behind Siddim.

Comments

Another of Bunin's travel poems, here from Jordan, which he visited after his Istanbul trip. The poem is a Shakespearean sonnet, iambic pentameters rhymed AbAb CdCd EfeEf GG. Verse texture is simple: stanza two:

Zah MYORT-vim MAW-rem PEH-pel-nih-yeh GRAH-nee
choot VEED-nihh gor. Pald-NEV-niy chahs, aw-BED.
Oon VIH-koo-pahl kaw-BIH-loo v ee-or-DAH-neh
ee syol koo-REET. Peh-SOK kahk med nahg-RET

The first two stanzas set the scene, the third homes in on the Bedouin, and the final couplet places the man in his larger setting — which I have translated simply as 'in this fierce tribesman as the thin smoke fills / the peaks beyond those distant Siddim hills.'

The point that Bunin is contemplating, I think, is how the Arabs, who once conquered the whole of the Middle East and beyond, have now only dreams of that larger worlds. Because this is twentieth-century poem, however, there are no grandiloquent phrases on the 'glory that was Greece' etc., but only the plain hard facts presented as sharp details of the current scene. Bunin's verse mastery has advanced sufficiently to allow him to compose lines that simply list objects, especially so in line 10, but also generally. This is a poem composed largely of nouns, of separate, distinct images, similar to what western Imagist poets were to do a decade or so later.

* * *

В жарком зóлоте закáта Пирамíды,	6A
Вдоль по Нíлу, на утéху инострáнцам,	6B
Шёлком в вóду свéтят пáрусные лóдки	6C
И бежит луксорский бéлый парохóд.	6d
Это час, когдá за Нíлом пáльмы чётки,	6C
И в Каире блéщут стéкла áлым глянцем,	6B
И хедíв в ландó катáется, и гíды	6A
По кофéйням отдыхáют от госпóд.	6d
А сирéневые дáли Нíла к югу,	6E
К дíкой Нубии, к Порóгам, смýтны, зыбк	6f
И всё все так же мíру чужды, заповédны,	6G
Как при Хуфу, при Камбизе... Я привéз	6i
Лук оттúда и колчáн зéлено-мédный,	6G (-u-u-u- -u- -u)
Щит из кóжи бегемóта, дрóтик гíбкий,	6F
Мех пантéры и судáнскую кольчúгу,	6E
Но на что всё все éто мне - вопрóс.	6i

1915

Egypt

In the hot gold of the Pyramid's sunset,
Along the Nile, for the comfort of foreigners,
Sailboats shine like silk into the water
And runs the Luxor white steamer.

This is the hour when the rosary of palm trees is beyond the Nile,
And in Cairo the glass glistens with a scarlet gloss,
And the Khedive rides in a Landau, and guides
In coffee shops, they take a break from the masters.

And the lilac gave the Nile to the South,
To the wild Nubia, to the Cataracts, vague, unsteady
And still alien to the world, reserved,
As with Khufu, when Cambyses... I brought it

Out bow and quiver of green-copper,
The shield from the skin of a hippopotamus, the dart is flexible,
The fur of a Panther and the Sudanese coat of mail,
But what is all this to me-the question.

Comments

Another poem from Bunin's journeys in the Middle East, ostensibly portraying a world unfamiliar to most of his Russian readers, but also one poking gentle fun at himself and fellow tourists. Because the past fascinated Bunin he has bought himself various souvenirs, which seem on reflection to be tawdry and pointless beside the natural splendours of the Nile to the south, or the achievements of the Fourth Dynasty Egyptian pharaoh who built the great pyramid at Giza, and Cambyses who founded the Archaemenid dynasty of Persia. 'Landau' is probably the luxury motor vehicle but could refer to a horse-drawn carriage. 'Rosaries' I take to be prayer beads (misbaha in Arabic) by which the faithful keep count of their prayers.

The poem is written in hexameters, regular but for a non-stress missing from line 13. This is an unusual form in Russian, and the rhyme scheme is also a little novel. The last line in each stanza has a masculine rhyme, and rhymes in stanza four repeat those from stanza three. An experimental piece that shows a less serious Bunin.

Эльбурс

Иранский миф

На льдах Эльбурса со́лнце всхо́дит.	4A
На льдах Эльбурса жи́зни нет.	4a
Вокру́г него́ на небосво́де	4X
Течёт алма́зный круг планёт.	4a
Тума́н, всполза́ющий на ска́ты,	4B
Верши́н не в си́лах досягну́ть:	4B
Одним небесным Иазатам	4x
К венцу́ земли́ досту́пен путь.	4b
И Ми́тра, чьё свято́е и́мя	4C
Благословля́ет вся земля́,	4c
Восхо́дит пе́рвый ме́жду ни́ми	4X
Заре́й на льди́стые поля́.	4c
И све́тит ри́зой златотка́ной,	4D
И озира́ет с высоты́	4e
Исто́ки рек, пески́ Ира́на	4D
И гор волни́стые хребты́.	4e

1905

Elburs

An Iranian myth

On the ice Elburs the sun rises.
On the ice Elburs life.
Around him in the firmament
The diamond circle of planets flows.

Fog creeping up on the slopes,
I can't reach the top:
One heavenly Yasalam
There is a path to the crown of the earth.

And Mithras, whose Holy name is
Blesses the whole earth,
The first one rises between them
Dawn on the ice fields.

And shines with a golden cloth,
And looks down from a height
The sources of the rivers, the sands of Iran
And the mountains are undulating ridges.

Comments

Another of Bunin's travel poems, probably dating from his first visit to the Middle East. The poem is written in iambic tetrameters but the rhyme scheme is very free.

Elburs, also spelled Alburz, are the Iranian mountains dividing the subtropical shores of the Caspian from the harsh deserts of the south. Yasalam is Damavand, the volcanic peak that now hosts a sky resort north of Teheran. Mithras was the god of a mystery religion, practiced in Rome but associated with Zoroastrianism.

Critics were now beginning to pay more attention to Bunin's colourful though restrained poetry. 'In terms of artistic precision he has no equal among Russian poets,' wrote Vestnik Evropy. Bunin also felt himself one of that special 'type of people who tend to feel strongest for alien times and cultures rather than those of their own', being drawn to 'all the necropolises of the world.' Travel also gave Bunin the opportunity to see Russia more coolly and objectively.

* * *

Над чернотой твоих пучин	4a
Горели дивные светила,	4B
И тяжело зыбь твоя ходила,	4B
Взрывая огонь беззвучных мин.	4a

Она глаза слепила нам,	4c
И мы бледнели в быстром свете,	4D
И сине-огненные сети	4D
Текли по медленным волнам.	4c

И снова, шумен и глубок,	4e
Ты восставал и загорался —	4F
И от звезды к звезде шатался	4F
Великой тростью зыбкий фок.	4e

За валом встречный вал бежал	4g
С дыханием пламенным муссона,	4H
И хвост алмазный Скорпиона	4H
Над чернотой твоей дрожал.	4g

1916

Critiques

<https://pishi-stihi.ru/indijskij-ocean-bunin.html>

Indian ocean

Above the blackness of your deeps
Wonderful lights were burning,
And your swell was heavy,
Blasting the fire of silent mines.

It is eyes blinded us
And we pale in the light of the rapid,
And blue-fire networks
They flowed in slow waves.

And again, noisy and deep,
You rose up and caught fire —
And from star to star staggered
With the great cane, the wobbly foresail.

Behind the shaft the counter shaft ran
With the fiery breath of the monsoon,
And the tail of a diamond Scorpion
Over your blackness I trembled.

Comments

Bunin was now training himself to observe closely and make something of his immediate surroundings, whatever their poetic potential, a practice that will help enormously when writing his evocative short stories during the exile that was soon forced on him. In this poem he is simply staring into the evening waters of the Indian Ocean, probably on his voyage to or from Ceylon, which he visited in early 1911.

Scorpion may refer to the constellation actually reflected in the waters, or to an atmosphere of malevolence in the dark waters.

The poem is in iambic tetrameters, regularly rhymed aBBa.

Война

От кипарисовых гробниц 4а
Взлетела стая чёрных птиц. – 4а
Тюрбэ расстреляно, разбито. 4В
Вот грязный шёлковый покрóв,
Кораны с óттиском подкóв... 4с
Как гру́бо ко́нское копы́то! 4В

Вот чей-то сад; он чёрен, гол – 4d
И не о нём ли мой осёл 4d
Рыдающим томится рёвом? 4Е
А я - я, прокажённый, рад 4f
Бродить, вдыхая горький чад,
Что тает в небе бирюзóвом: 4Е

Пустой, разрушенный, немой, 4g
Отныне этот город - мой, 4g
Мой каждый спуск и переулóк 4Н
Мой все ту́фли мертвецо́в, 4i
Домóв руины и дворцо́в. 4i
Где шум морско́й так свеж и гу́лок! 4Н

1915

War

From cypress tombs
A flock of black birds took flight. –
The turban was shot and broken.
Here is a dirty silk cover,
Korans with horseshoe impressions...
How rude a horse's hoof is!

Here is someone's garden; it is black, bare –
And isn't that what my donkey is talking about
Sobbing languishing roar?
And I - I, the leper, am glad
Wander, inhaling the bitter smoke,
What melts in the turquoise sky:

Empty, destroyed, mute,
From now on, this city is mine,
My every descent and alley,
My all dead men's shoes,
Ruins of houses and palaces.
Where the noise of the sea is so fresh and booming!

Comments

War seen through an outcast's eyes, a leper in the Middle East, possibly in Istanbul. Three stanza of iambic verse, written in tetrameters and rhymed aaBccB. The verse is supple and effective. The first stanza runs:

Ot kee-pah-REE-saw-vihh grob-NEETS
Vzleh-TEH-lah STAH-yah CHOR-nihh pteets –
Tewr-beh rahsst-REH-lyah-naw, rahz-BEE-taw.
Vot GRYAHZ-niy SHOL-kaw-viy pak-ROV,
Kaw-RAH-nih s OT-tees-kom pod-KOV. . .
Kahk GROO-baw KONS-kaw-yeh kaw-PIH-taw!

Where some of the Futurists like Mayakovsky initially welcomed war in 1914, Bunin did not, and in remained fastidiously opposed its barbarities, and indeed all perversions of human nature, from which Dostoevsky was not exempt. Bunin loathed the man and work throughout his life. Both Russia and Turkey suffered enormous casualties in W.W.I, of course, which led in turn to revolution and the overthrow of both empires.

Слово

Молча́т гробни́цы, му́мии и ко́сти	5A
Лишь сло́ву жизнь да́на:	3B
Из дрéвней тьмы, на мирово́м погóсте,	5A
Звуча́т лишь Письме́на.	3b
И нет у нас ино́го досто́янья!	5C
Уме́йте же берéчь	3d
Хоть в ме́ру сил, в дни зло́бы и страда́нья,	5C
Наш дар бессме́ртный — речь.	3d

Москва, 1915

Audio Recordings

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KX1hEL7yueI>

Critical Articles

<https://rustih.ru/ivan-bunin-slovo/>

<https://сезоны-года.рф/анализ-стихотворения-Слово.html>

Word

Silent tombs, mummies and bones,—
Only the word life is given:
From the ancient darkness, in the world churchyard,
Only writing sounds.

And we have no other property!
Know how to protect
Though in the measure of strength, in the days of anger and
suffering,
Our gift is immortal — speech.

Moscow, 1915

Comments

Bunin's belief, as it is the hope of all literary men, that the word will survive and give life to the past. This is simple poem of two stanzas, where each is a pentameter followed by a trimeter. The first stanza is rhymed 5A3B5A3B, i.e. in feminine rhymes throughout, while the second employs masculine rhymes on the even numbered lines: 5C3d5C3d.

The poem was written in the early years of WWI, and only five years before Bunin would leave Russia for permanent exile in France. The war was already going badly for the country, and there was growing discontent at government incompetence and lack of basic supplies, of equipment at the front and of foodstuffs at home. Bunin wrote little during this period, and was all too conscious that the Russian Empire might be consigned to the past, as had the Egyptian and other empires before it.

* * *

И цветы, и шмелі, и травá, и колосья,	4A (uu-uu-uu-uu-u)
И лазурь, и полуденный зной...	3b (uu-uu-uu-)
Срок настанет - господь сына блудного спросит:	4A (uu-uu- -u-uu-u)
"Был ли счастлив ты в жизни земной?"	3b (uu-uu-uu-)

И забуду я всё - вспомню только вот эти	4C (uu-uu-u-uu-u)
Полевые пути меж колосьев и трав -	3d (uu-uu-uu-)
И от сладостных слёз не сумёю ответить,	4C (uu-uu-uu-uu-u)
К милосердным колёням припáв.	3d (uu-uu-uu-)

1918

Audio Recordings

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8iM7qU0AGuo>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C0UGn5vh9wg>

Critical Articles

<https://pishi-stihi.ru/i-cvety-i-shmeli-i-trava-i-kolosya-bunin.html>
<https://analiz-stihov.ru/bunin/i-czvetyi-i-shmeli-i-trava-i-kolosya>

Flowers and bumblebees

And flowers, and bumblebees, and grass, and ears of corn,
And the azure, and the midday heat...

When the time comes, the Lord will ask the prodigal son:
"Were you happy in your earthly life?"

And I will forget everything - I will only remember these
Field paths between ears and grasses -
And from sweet tears I will not be able to answer,
To the merciful knees.

Comments

A simple but popular poem, expressing a patriotic love for the mother Russia that Bunin was soon to leave. The poem was written on July 14, 1918 on the eve of Bunin's reluctant departure for Europe. He had delayed his departure from Odessa until the last moment, but the bloodshed and repeated shifts of power in the city convinced him that it was futile to expect a quick return to the world he knew and loved. 'And I will forget everything - I will only remember these field paths between the ears and grasses,' the poet says, emphasizing that for him there is no greater happiness than to inhale the aroma of mown hay and look at the bottomless Russian sky. This is the meaning of earthly existence and the highest happiness, and for which Bunin thanks merciful fate.

The poem is written in an anapaestic metre in alternating tetrameter and trimeter lines rhyming AbAb. As usual, I have rendered these in iambics, but swelled the lines to alternating hexameters and tetrameters to take account of the extra syllables. Note the assonance in the first stanza, first in 'ee' and then in the rounder 'oo' and 'o' sounds.

ee tsveh-TIH, ee shmeh-LEE, ee trah-VAH, ee kaw-las-yah,
ee lah-ZOOR, ee paw-LOO-den-niy znoy...
srok nahs-TAH-net - gas-POD SIH-nah BLOOD-naw-vau SPRAW-seet:
'bil lee SCHAHS-leev tih v JEEZ-nee zem-NOY?'

Сенокос

Среди двора, в батистой рубашке,	5A
Стоял барчук и, шурясь, звал: «Корней!»	5b
Но двор был пуст. Две пегие дворняжки,	5A (u-u-u-u- -u)
Щенки, катались в сене. Всё синей	5b
5. Над крышами и садом небо млело,	5C
Как сказочная сонная река,	5d
Все горячей палило зноем тело,	5C
Все радостней белели облака,	5d
И всё душной благоухало сено...	5E
10. «Корней, седлай!» Но нет, Корней в лесу,	5f
Осталась только скотница Елена	5E
Да пчельник Дрон... Щенок замаял осу	5f
И сено взрыл... Молочный голубь комом	5G
Упал ни крышу скотного вара...	5H (u-u-u-u- -u)
15. Везде открыты окна... А над домом	5G
Так серебрится тополь, так ярка	5h
Листва вверх - как будто из металла,	5I
И воробьи шныряют то из зала,	5I
В тенистый палисадник, в бересклет,	5j
20. То снова в зал... Покой, лазурь и свет...	5j
В конюшне полусумрак и прохладно,	5K
Навозом пихнет, сбруей, лошадыми,	5I
Касаточки щебечут... И Ами,	5I
Соскучившись, тихонько ржет и жадно	5K

Hayfield

In the middle of the courtyard, in a cambric shirt,
Barchuk stood there, squinting, calling: "Roots!"
But the courtyard was empty. Two piebald mongrels,
Puppies, rolling in the hay. All blue

5. Above the roofs and the garden the sky was soft,
Like a dreamy river,
Everything of body burned with heat,
More and more joyfully the clouds whitened,

And all the more stifling was the smell of hay...
10. "Roots, saddle up!» But no, the roots are in the forest,
Only Elena the cowgirl remained
Yeah the bee-hive drone... The pup hushed up the wasp

And the hay blew up ... Milky pigeon lumpy
Not a roof of cattle brewing fell ...
15. Everywhere windows are open ... And above the house
So silver poplar, so bright

Foliage at the top - as if made of metal,
And the sparrows are sneaking out of the hall,
In a shady front garden, in a birch tree,
20. Then back to the hall... Peace, azure and light...

The stable is half dark and cool,
Manure shoves, harness, horses,
Hives chirp... And Ami
Bored, quietly neighing and greedily

25. Косит спой глаз лилово-золотой	5m
В решётчатую дверку... Стременами	5N
Звенит барчук, подняв седло с уздой,	5m
Кладёт, подпрыги ловит - и ушами	5N
Прядёт Ами, вдруг сделавшись стройней	5p
30. И выходя на солнце. Там к кадучке	5O
Склоняется, - блеск, небо видит в ней	5p
И долго пьёт... И солнце жжёт подушки,	5O
Лукú, потник, играя в серебрé...	5q
А через час заходят побирúшки:	5R
35. Слепой и мальчик. Оба на дворе	5q
Сидят как дома Мальчик босонóгий	5R
Стоит и мэдлит... Рóбко входит в зал,	5s
С востóргом смóтрит в светлый мир зеркал,	5s
Касáется до клавиш фортепьяно –	5T
40. И, вздрóгнув, замираёт: знóйно, странно	5T
И вéсело в хорóмах! - На балкóн	5u
Открыта дверь, а солнце жарким светом	5V
Зажгло паркét, и глубокó паркéтом	5V
Зеркальный óтблеск двéри отражён,	5u
45. И воробьи крикливою станицей	5W
Пронóсятся у сáмого стекла	5x
За золотой, сверкающею птицей,	5W
За íволгой, скользящей, как стрелá.	5x

1909

Critical Articles

http://litasadba.imli.ru/sites/default/files/zhaplova9460_20160112.pdf

25. Squints sing eye lilac-gold
Through the barred door... Stirrups
Barchuk rings, raising the saddle with the bridle,
Puts, girths catches - and ears

Ami spins, suddenly becoming slimmer
30. And going out in the sun. There to the tub
Leans, - Shine, the sky sees in it
And long drinks... And the sun burns the pillows,

Luca, sweating, playing in silver...
An hour later the beggars come in:
35. A blind man and a boy. Both in the yard
They sit at home. The boy is barefoot

Stands and hesitates... Timidly enters the hall,
With delight looks into the bright world of mirrors,
Touches the piano keys -
40. And, shuddering, freezes: sultry, strange

And fun in the mansions! - Onto the balcony
The door is open and the sun is hot
Lit parquet, and deep parquet
The mirror reflection of the door is reflected,

45. And sparrows shouting village
They pass right by the glass
For the golden, glittering bird,
Behind the Oriole, gliding like an arrow.

Comments

An affectionate portrait of the landed gentry's estates at a time when most Russian estates were in dire straits, hardly making ends meet and beset by widespread social unrest. Bunin's most extended portrait is in his *The Life of Arseniev*, but his poems too show the estates as a place of refuge, light and airy, open to whoever comes their way. The inhabitants of *Hayfield* go about their occupations unhindered by the owner, for example, who may indeed have been absent. Even the tramps in this poem are free to wander through the rooms, touch the piano keys and admire the golden oriole, a bird that's a summer migrant to Russia, and so perhaps a reminder that this way of life is soon to pass. The poem is in iambic pentameters, rhymed AAbb, aBaB, AbAb and AbbA.

ПОСЛЕДНИЙ ШМЕЛЬ

Чёрный бархатный шмель, золотое оплечье,
Заунывно гудящий певучей струной,
Ты зачем залетаешь в жильё человечье
И как будто тоскуешь со мной?

4A (uu-uu-uu-uu-u)

4b (uu-uu-uu-uu-)

4A (uu-uu-uu-uu-u)

3b (uu-uu-uu-)

За окном свет и зной, подоконники яркие,
Безмятежны и жарки последние дни,
Полетай, погуди - и в засохшей татарке,
На подушечке красной, усни.

4C (uu-uu-uu-uu-u)

4d (uu-uu-uu-)

4C (uu-uu-uu-uu-u)

3d (uu-uu-uu-)

Не дано тебе знать человеческой думы,
Что давно опустели поля,
Что уж скоро в бурьян сдует ветер угрюмый
Золотого сухого шмеля!

4E (uu-u-u-uu-u)

4f (uu-uu-uu-)

4E (uu-uu- -u-uu-u)

3f (uu-uu-uu-)

1916

Audio Recordings

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8nJqeNyo8iQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F84Fly9gC0Y>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GexpGvaAo8g>

Critical Articles

<https://rustih.ru/ivan-bunin-poslednij-shmel/>

<http://journal.osnova.com.ua/article/54217->

[Лингвистический и литературный анализ стихотворения](#)

http://www.rodvoederevo.ru/family19565/book_record4637

The Last Bumblebee

Black velvet bumblebee, gold shoulder strap,
Mournfully humming a singing string,
Why do you fly into human habitation
And as if you yearn for me?

Outside the window, light and heat, the sills are bright,
Serene and hot last days,
Fly, honk-and in a dried-up thistle,
On a red pillow, go to sleep.

You don't know what people think,
That the fields have long been empty,
That soon the wind will blow into the weeds sullen
Dry gold of a bumblebee.

Comments

The poem, written during W.W.I, is an imaginary dialogue with a bumblebee in which Bunin foresees the death of the gentry class and of Russia itself. The war, with its jingoistic slogans and senseless slaughter, horrors that the fastidious Bunin loathed with his whole being, is not going well. The revolutionary movements are steadily growing stronger. The autocratic government of Nicholas II seems not only remote but incompetent, incapable of providing anything but disasters, massacres and hunger. Inevitably it was losing the respect and support of the aristocracy, whom Bunin and his class saw as vital to setting standards and governing the country properly.

The first stanza introduces the bumblebee, handsome in its regal gold and funereal black, into the poet's room, where its hums mournfully. The scene shifts in the second stanza to the warm fields outside, to what Bunin calls the hot and serene last days, emblematic of the old Russia and estate life he loved. The third stanza looks ahead to the autumn winds that sweep away the things of beauty, leaving the bumblebee a withered shell.

The poem is in anapaests, tetrameters for three lines and a concluding trimeter, conventionally rhymed AbAb. Note the rich consonantal music possible in Russian, especially the ch, sh, ye and iy sounds.

CHOR-niy BAHr-hhaht-niy shmel, zaw-law-TAW-yeh ap-LECH-yeh zah-oo-
NIV-naw goo-DYAH-shhiy peh-VOO-chay stroo-NOY
tih zah-CHEM zah-leh-TAH-yesh v jeel-YEH cheh-law-VECH-yeh
ee kahk BOOD-taw tos-KOO-yesh saw mnoy

СОБАКА

Мечтáй, мечтáй. Все ужé и тусклéй 5а (u-u-uu-uu-)
Ты смóтришь золотíстыми глазáми 5В
На выóжный двор, на снег, прилípший к рáме, 5В
На мётлы гúлких, дымных тополéй. 5а

Вздыхáя, ты свернúлась потеплéй 5с
У ног моéих - и дúмаешь... Мы сáми 5D
Томím себя - тоскóй инúх полéй, 5с
Инúх пустынь... за пёрмскими горáми. 5D

Ты вспоминаéешь то, что чúждо мне: 5f
Седóе нéбо, тúнды, льды и чúмы 5G
В твоéй студёной дíкой сторонé. 5f
Но я всегда делю с тобóю дúмы: 5G

Я человек: как бог, я обречён 5h
Познáть тоскú всех стран и всех времён. 5h

1909

Audio Recordings

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JgdvF87eXEw>

Critical Articles

<https://rustih.ru/ivan-bunin-sobaka/>
<https://pishi-stihi.ru/sobaka-bunin.html>

Dog

Dream, dream. Everything is narrower and dimmer
You look with golden eyes
On a blizzard yard, on the snow stuck to the frame,
On the brooms of echoing, smoky poplars.

Sighing, you curled up warmer
At my feet, you think... We ourselves
We torment ourselves with the longing of other fields,
Other deserts... beyond the Perm mountains.

You remember things that are foreign to me:
Grey sky, tundra, ice and plague
In your cold, wild side.
But I always share my thoughts with you:

I am a man: as a God, I am doomed
To know the longing of all countries and all times.

Comments

The poem was written in August 1909 in a cottage at Yelets, which Bunin had rented to gain the solitude needed for his writing. He was by now well known, indeed a member of the Academy of Sciences, and had little need to prove himself. Poems on animals are generally uncommon in Bunin's work — where even the short story *Chang's Dreams* (1916) is about its owner's life seen through the eyes of a dog rather than the dog itself — but Bunin's poem is written about a husky owned by Maxim Gorky, at a period when the two writers were still close friends. Perm is on the edge of the Ural Mountains.

The poem is a sonnet: three quatrains of pentameters rhymed aBaB, with a concluding couplet. In the first stanza, Bunin shares the dog's discomfort, here being stuck in the warm and rainy Russian summer far from its preferred northern haunts. In the second stanza Bunin reflects that men are always dissatisfied with their lot, continually dreaming of some better, distant place. Those thoughts he would share with the dog, the third stanza suggests — with its preference for snow, the grey skies and natural disasters. Why? asks the concluding couplet. Because, says Bunin, echoing a line of Derzhavin's, man has some of god's need to know all things and all times. A simple, affectionate little piece.

Канарейка

На ро́дине она́ зелёная....

Брэм

Канарейку́ из-за моря́	4a (-u-u-uu-)
Привезли́, и вот она́	4b
Золота́я ста́ла с горя́,	4a (-u-u-uu-)
Тёсной кле́ткой пленена́.	4b (-u-u-uu-)

Пти́цей во́льной, изумру́дной	4C
Уж не бу́дешь,- как ни пой	4d
Про дале́кий о́стров чу́дный	4C
Над тракти́рную толпо́й!	4d

10 мая 1921

Audio Recordings

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DJ6c_acFIyE

Canary

At home, it is green....

Bram

A canary from across the sea
Brought, and here it is
Gold has become of grief,
Trapped in a tight cage.

A free, emerald bird
You won't, no matter how you sing
About the distant island of the marvellous
Above the tavern crowd!

Comments

A slight, late poem that needs little explanation. Two quatrains of tetrameter verse, with the abab rhymes all masculine in the first stanza and more usual interweaving of feminine and masculine rhymes in the second. The metre is a little irregular but generally trochaic. The quotation is possibly from a story by Bram Stoker where the singing of a canary is resisted by angry cries in the tavern.

РЫБАЧКА

- Кто там стучит? Не встану. Не открою
Намокшей двери в хижине моей. 5A
Тревожна ночь осеннюю порою - 5b
Рассвет ещё тревожней и шумней. 5A
5b
- "Тебя пугает гул среди камней 5c
И скрежет мелкой гальки под горю?" 5D
- Нет, я больна. И свежестью сырою 5D
По одеялу дует из сеней. 5c
- "Я буду ждать, когда утомится 5E
От бури охмелевшая волна 5f
И станет блеклым золотом струиться 5E
Осенний день на лавку из окна". 5f
- Уйди! Я ночевала не одна. 5g
Он был смелый. Он моря не боится. 5G

1908

Fisherwoman

"Who's knocking?" Not rise. Not open
A wet door in my hut.
Uneasy night autumn sometimes -
The dawn is even more disturbing and noisy.

"Does the noise among the stones frighten you
And the grinding of small pebbles under the mountain?"
"No, I'm sick. And fresh raw
On the blanket blows from the canopy.

"I'll wait for it to settle down
From the storm a drunken wave
And will become a pale gold stream
Autumn day on the bench from the window."

"Go away!" I didn't sleep alone.
He was bolder. He is not afraid of the sea.

Comments

An uncompromising piece where the poetry lies in the verse texture, the sound imitating the sense. The second stanza:

- teh-BYAH poo-GAH-yet gool sreh-DEE kahm-NAY
ee SKREH-jet MEL-koy GAHL-kee pad gaw-RAW-yoo?"
net, yah bal-NAH. ee SVEH-jest-yoo sih-RAW-yoo
paw aw-deh-YAH-loo DOO-yet eez seh-NAY.

It's a sonnet: three quatrains rhymed AbAb or aBBa, plus a concluding couplet, though here the masculine ending is rhymed with a feminine. This is unusual for Bunin, but his contemporaries were taking far greater liberties with Russian verse.

Деревенский нищий

(Первое напечатанное стихотворение)

В сторонé от дорóги, под дýбом,	3A (uu-uu-uu-u)
Под лучáми палящими спит	3b (uu-uu-uu-)
В зипунишке, заштóпанном гру́бо,	3A (uu-u-uu-u)
Стáрый нíщий, седóй инвали́д;	3b (-u-uu-uu-)
5. Изнемóг он от дáльной дорóги	3C (uu-uu-u)
И прилég под межóй отдохнýть...	3d (uu-uu-uu-)
Сóлнце жжёт истомлénные нóги	3C (-uu-uu-u)
Обнажённую шéю и грудь...	3d (uu-uu-uu-)
Вíдно, слíшком нуждá одолéла,	3E (-u-uu-uu-u)
10. Вíдно, нéгде прию́та сыскáть,	3f (-u-uu-uu-)
И судьбá беспощáдно велéла	3E (uu-uu-uu-u)
Со слезáми по óкнам стонáть...	3f (uu-uu-uu-)
Не увíдишь тако́го в столи́це:	3G (uu-uu-uu-u)
Тут уж впрям истомлénный нуждóй!	3h (uu-uu-uu-)
15. За желéзной решёткой в темни́це	3G (uu-uu-uu-u)
Рéдко вíден страдáлец тако́й.	3h (-u-uu-uu-)
В дóлгий век свой немáло он сíлы	3I (-uu-uu-uu-u)
За тяжёлой рабóтой убíл,	3j (-u-uu-uu-)
Но, должнó быть, у кра́я могíлы	3I (uu-uu-uu-u)
20. Уж не стáло хватáть ему́ сил.	3j (uu-uu-u-u)

Village Beggar

(First printed poem)

Off the road, under an oak tree,
Under the scorching rays he sleeps
In Sipanska, astapana roughly,
An old beggar, a gray-haired invalid;

He was exhausted from the long journey
And lay down under the hedge to rest...
The sun stings his tired feet,
Bare neck and chest...

Apparently, too need overcame,
Apparently, there is no shelter to find,
And fate mercilessly ordered
With tears on the windows to moan...

You won't see this in the capital:
Here is a man in need!
Behind an iron grate in a dungeon
Rarely is a sufferer seen like this.

In his long age he has a lot of power
For hard work.,
But it must be at the edge of the grave
He was no longer strong enough.

Он идёт из селёнья в селёнье,
А мольбú чуть лепéчет язык,
Смерть близка́ уж, но мно́го мучёнья
Перетёрпит несча́стный старик.

ЗК (uu-uu-uu-u
Зl (uu-uu-uu-)
ЗМ (uu-uu-uu-u)
Зl (uu-uu-uu-)

25. Он засну́л..А потóм со стенаньем
Христа́ ра́ди проси́ и проси́...
Гру́стно ви́деть, ка мно́го страда́нья
И тоски́ и нужды́ на Ру́си!

ЗN (uu-uu-uu-u)
Зk (u- -uu-uu-)
ЗМ (-u-uu-uu-u)
Зk (uu-uu-u-)

1886

Audio Recordings

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UegCDiApLmo>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7V4whvTB3Mg>

Critical Articles

<https://rustih.ru/ivan-bunin-derevenskij-nishhij/>
<https://pishi-stihi.ru/derevenskij-nishhij-bunin.html>
<https://lit.ukrtvory.ru/analiz-stixotvoreniya-bunina-derevenskij-nishhij/>
<https://zen.yandex.ru/media/id/5b463f82a9563500a96ca93f/ivan-bunin-derevenskii-niscii-5b9baa9224977400ab6a5ad5>

He goes from village to village,
And the plea is slightly babbled by the tongue,
Death too close, but a lot of suffering
The poor old man will endure it.

25. He fell asleep... And then with a groan
For Christ's sake, ask and ask...
It's sad to see so much suffering
And longing and need in Russia!

Comments

This poem, written when Bunin was 16 years old, and printed a year later, was the first of his work to see publication. Though written in the social realism style of Nekrasov, and close to a poem of the same name by Ivan Nitikin, it is an original piece of work, competently written, and true to life. Beggars did indeed ask for alms 'in the name of Christ', and had become a frequent sight, throughout Russia, in towns and the countryside, following the abolition of serfdom. The young poet does not ask the reasons for social distress, which were to contribute to the overthrow of the tsarist government three decades later, but simply accepts these hard facts of life, when the beggar's sufferings become a symbol for mankind's sufferings, and those of mother Russia in particular.

The poem is written in anapaestic trimeters rhymes AbAb (except stanzas six and seven, where the third line of each stanza rhymes.) The verse is competently turned but lacks the rich musicality of the mature Bunin. An astapana is a cloak, and Sipanska is in Croatia. Perhaps Bunin simply means that the beggar is not native to his surroundings, which are here described a little repetitiously. It is interesting to see the young Bunin, who like his mentor Chekhov, is coolly detached and non-judgemental in his mature work, nor indeed politically orientated, started with something closer to a social conscience.

КАМЕННАЯ БАБА

От знóя трáвы сýхи и мертвы́.	5a
Степь - без грани́ц, но даль синéет сла́бо.	5B
Вот óстров лошади́ной го́ловы.	5a
Вот снóва - - Ка́менная Ба́ба.	4B
Как со́нны э́ти плóские черты́!	5c
Как первобы́тно-гру́бо э́то тéло!	5D
Но я стою́, бою́сь тебя́... А ты	5c
Мне улыба́ешься несме́ло.	4D
О, ди́кое исчадьe дрéвней тьмы!	5e
Не ты ль когда́-то бы́ло громове́ржцем?	5F
- Не бог, не бог нас созда́л. Э́то мы	5e (u-u-uu- -u-)
Бого́в твори́ли ра́бским се́рдцем.	4F

1906

Critical Articles

<https://www.vestnik-mgou.ru/Articles/Doc/5291>

Stone Woman

The grass is dry and dead from the heat.
The steppe is without borders, but the distance is faintly blue.
Here is the island of the horse's head.
Here again - - Stone Woman.

How sleepy those flat features are!
How primitive and crude this body is!
But I stand, afraid of you... And you
You smile at me timidly.

Oh, wild thing of ancient darkness!
Were you not once a thunderer?
- Not God, not God created us. This is us
The gods were created with a slave's heart.

Comments

One of several poems Bunin wrote on ethnological subjects, here on a stone idol that predates Christianity. Bunin acknowledges the crude power of these images, which speak of shaman beliefs held by the many Scythian confederations that preceded the Russian empire.

The poem consists of three quatrains, each constructed of three pentameters and a concluding tetrameter, rhymed aBaB. The verse is straightforward, an iambic but with a forward-driving energy. The lines are often end-stopped. The first stanza anglicized:

At ZNAW-yah TRAH-vih SOO-hhee ee mert-VIH.
Step bez grah-NEETS, naw dahl see-NEH-yet SLAH-baw.
Vot OST-rov law-shah-DEE-noy GAW-law-vih.
Vot SNAW-vah - - KAH-men-nah-yah BAH-bah.

ПРОВОДЫ

Забíл бугра́ми жёмчуг, заклуби́тся,	5A
Взрыва́я малахи́ты под рулём.	5b
Земля́ плывёт. Отхо́дит, отдели́лся	5A
Высо́кий борт. И мы наза́д плывём.	5b
Мол опустёл. На сор и зёрна жи́та,	5C
Свистя́, слетели́сь го́луби. А там	5d
Дрожи́т корма́, и дли́нный жезл бугшприта	5C
Отхо́дит и че́ртит по небеса́м.	5d (u-uu-u-u-uu-)
Куда́ тепе́рь? Март, су́мерки... К вече́рне	5E
Звоня́т в по́рту... Душа́ весно́й полна́,	5f (u- -uu-u-u-)
Полна́ тоско́й... Вон огонёк в таве́рне...	5E
Но нет, домо́й, Я пьян и без вина́.	5f

1908

Departures

Clogged the pearls, swirled,
Exploding malachites under the steering wheel.
The earth is floating. Departs, separated
High side. And we're going back.

The pier was empty. On the litter and grain of the git,
Pigeons came whistling. And there
Shaking food, and a long rod of the bowsprit
Goes away and draws on the sky.

Where to now? March, twilight... By vespers
They call at the port... The soul is full in spring,
Full of longing... There's a light in the tavern...
But no, home, I'm drunk and without wine.

Comments

Bunin's technique was now cinematographic, recording events, observations and impressions as they came to him and setting them down as vividly as they appeared. Western poets, notably Ezra Pound and the Imagists were doing something similar, but Bunin was more radical, simply letting events speak for themselves and drawing fewer mythological, sometimes portentous, conclusions. The problem, as always with this approach, was aesthetic unity, of ending up with a satisfying poem. Bunin here has a narrative, however, a ship leaving port, and the poem concludes with the narrator professing himself drunk with the power of these impressions.

A poem with three quatrains of pentameters consistently rhymed AbAb.

В поезде

Все шíре вóльные поля	4a
Прохóдят мíмо нас кругáми;	4B
И хúтора тополя́	4a (u-u- -u-)
Плывúт, скрыва́ясь за поля́ми.	4B
Вот под горóю скит свято́й	4c
В борú болéет за лугáми...	4D
Вот мост железный над рекóй	4c
Промчáлся с грóхотом под нáми...	4D
А вот и лес! - И гул идёт	4e
Под стук кóлос в лесú зелёном:	4F (u- -uu-u-u)
Берёз весёлых хоровóд,	4e
Шумя́, встречáет нас поклóном.	4T
От паровóза бéлый дым.	4g
Как хлóпья вáты, расползáясь.	4H
Плывёт, цеплáется по ним.	4g
К землé беспóмощно склоня́ясь...	4H
Но уж опя́ть кусты́ пошли́,	4i
Опя́ть деревье́в строй редéет.	4J
И бесконéчная вдали́	4i
Степь разверну́лась и синéет.	4J
Опя́ть привóльные поля́	4k
Прохóдят мíмо нас кругáми.	4L
И хúтора, и то́поля	4k
Плывúт, скрыва́ясь за поля́ми.	4L

1893

On the Train

More and more free fields
They pass us in circles;
And farms and poplars
Floating, hiding behind the boxes.

Here is a Holy Hermitage under the mountain
In the forest, he is sick for the meadows...
Here is the iron bridge over the river
It roared past us...

And here is the forest! - And the hum goes
Under the sound of wheels in the green forest:
Birches of merry dances,
Noisily, he meets us with a bow.

White smoke from the engine.
Like cotton flakes, spreading out.
Floating, clinging to them.
To the ground helplessly leaning...

But again the bushes went,
Again, the line of trees is thinning.
And endless in the distance
The steppe has turned blue.

More free fields
They pass us in circles.
And farms and poplars
Floating, hiding behind the boxes.

Comments

Railways date from the 1830s in Russia, which is ideally suited to such transport — enormous distances and nearly flat terrain — but the trans-Siberian railway was built much later, between 1891 and 1916. Railways feature in metropolitan Russian life depicted by Tolstoy and Chekhov, of course, but continued to hold a fascination for later Soviet writers, probably because of that eternal wish to know the world beyond the horizon, which stretches in Russia across the endless expanses of steppe and forest. Bunin is here recording his modest impressions. A simple poem written in iambic tetrameters, rhymed aBaB, with the last verse repeating the first.

Безнадежность

На се́вере есть ро́зовые мхи,	5а
Есть серебри́сто-шёлковые дю́ны...	5В
Но те́мных со́сен звонкие верхи́	5а
Пою́т, пою́т над мо́рем, то́чно стру́ны	5В
Послу́шай их. Стань, прислони́сь к сосне́:	5с
Сквозь гро́зный шум ты слы́шишь ли их не́жность?	5D
Но и она́ — в певу́чем полусне́.	5с
На се́вере отра́дна безнаде́жность.	5D

1907

Critical Articles

<https://pishi-stihi.ru/beznadezhnost-bunin.html>

Hopelessness

There are pink mosses in the North,
There are silver-silk dunes...
But the dark pines ringing the tops
They sing, they sing over the sea like strings.

Listen to them. Stand, lean against a pine tree:
Do you hear their tenderness through the terrible noise?
But she, too, is in a singing half-sleep.
In the north, hopelessness is welcome.

Comments

A love for the Russian landscape was an inherent part of Bunin's makeup. He spent the first three years of his life in the Voronezh province of central Russia and then moved with his family to Oryol. Those first impressions seem to have lingered, making him sometimes more comfortable with 'heartless, witless nature' than specious humankind. Few people, said Blok, knew and loved the Russian landscape better than Bunin, and Gorky compared Bunin's sharp eye for detail with the landscapes of Levitan, another close friend of Chekhov's.

Bunin's gift for the exact word is part of a long tradition of Russian writers, in Tolstoy most of all, but also in Baratynsky, Fet, Polonsky and Tyutchev. Bunin conveys the beauty of this harsh landscape, and the exhilarating feeling of the wind singing in the pine trees. In the apparent hopelessness there is also joy. The poem, ostensibly a simple one with two stanzas of four pentameters rhymed aBaB, is in fact carefully phrased with the inherent stresses of the Russian words set up their own narrative. The second stanza:

Pos-LOO-shy Eehh. Stahn prees-law-NEES k sas-NEH:
Skvaz GROZ-niy shoom tih SLIH-sheesh lee eehh NEJ-nast?
Naw ee aw-NAH — v peh-VOO-chem paw-loos-NEH.
Nah SEH-veh-reh at-RAHD-nah bez-nah-DYOJ-nost.

С ОСТРОГОЙ

Костёр трещит. В фелюке свет и жар. 5а
В воде стоят и серебрятся щúки, 5В
Белéет дно... Берí трезúбец в рúки 5В
И не спеши́. Удáр! Ещё удáр! 5а

Но пóздно. Страсть - как слáдостный кошмáр, 5с
Но сил уж нет, протíвны кровь и мúки... 5D
Гасí, гасí - вали́ с бортá фелюки 5D
Костёр в Лимáн... И чад, и дым, и пар! 5с

Тепéрь легко́, прохлáдно. Выступáют 5Е
Тумáнные созвездья в полутьмé. 5f
Волнá качáет, ры́бы засыпáют... 5Е
И вверх лицóм ложúсь я на кормé. 5f

Плыть - до зарí, но в мóре путь не скúчен. 5G
Я задремлю́ под рóвный стук уклúчин. 5G

1905

In an Estuary

The fire crackles. There is light and heat in the felucca.
In the water are standing and silvering pikes,
The bottom is white... Take the trident in your hands
And don't rush. Blow! Another blow!

But too late. Passion is like a sweet nightmare,
But the forces are no longer there, the blood and agony are
disgusting...
Extinguish, extinguish -- get off the felucca
Bonfire in the estuary... And smoke, and smoke, and steam!

Now it's easy, cool. Perform
Nebulous constellations in the semi-darkness.
The wave shakes, the fish fall asleep...
And I lie face up in the stern.

Swim - until dawn, but in the sea the way is not boring.
I'll doze off to the steady rattle of the rowlocks.

Comments

Though poem is a formal sonnet — three quatrains of pentameters rhymed aBaB or aBBa and a concluding couplet — it tells a story, i.e. is more a narrative than the usual contemplation of a scene or thought. Bunin is on a fishing expedition, hunting pike in the clear waters of the estuary. Stanza one depicts the scene and the brutal business of spearing the fish. In stanza two the narrator has had enough of the bloodshed, and retires to a fireside, probably on the shore or possibly still aboard the felucca (a small boat propelled by oars or lateen sails). In stanza three, the fishing done with, the narrator, absorbs the night scene: the airy coolness, the starry constellations and the quiet waters where the fish are now sleeping. The concluding couplet wraps up the episode: the narrator swims or sleeps as he is rowed back to the ship.

This is the mature Bunin, with specific details chosen to accurately recreate the scene and the verse more than competently handled. Note the interwoven 'ee', 'oo' 'aht' and 'ahr' sounds in the following (first stanza).

kas-TYOR treh-SHHEET. v feh-lew-keh svet ee Jahr.
v vau-DEH staw-YAHT ee seh-reb-RYAHT-syah SHHOO-kee,
beh-LEH-yet dnaw...beh-REE treh-ZOO-bets v ROO-kee
ee neh speh-SHEE. oo-DAHR! yeh-SHHAW oo-DAHR!

* * *

Бывáет мóре бéлое, молóчное,	5A
Весь зрímый Апока́липсис, когдá	5b
Весь мир однó молчáние полнóчное,	5A
Армáды звёзд и мёртвая водá:	5b
Предвéчное, могíльное, грозя́щее	5C
Созвёздиями нéбо - и легкó	5d
Дымя́щееся жёмчугом, лежáщее	5C
Всеми́рной плащеницею млéко.	5D (u-u-u-uu-u-u)

1925

Sometimes the sea is white

Sometimes the sea is white, milky,
The entire visible apocalypse, when
The whole world is one midnight silence,
Armadas of stars and dead water:

Eternal, grave, threatening
Constellations of the sky-and easy
Steaming with pearls, lying
The world shroud of is small.

Comments

In this small poem, so redolent of Tyutchev, Bunin explores the reality behind the night scene of stars and sea. But where Tyutchev evokes a larger, more fundamental and threatening world behind appearances, Bunin simply describes the scene, though still employing aggrandising words like 'apocalypse' and 'armadas'.

The poem is in pentameters, rhymed aBab, with an irregularity in the last line (an extra syllable, and this feminine line 8 rhymes with a masculine line 6). The verse is initially quiet and carefully controlled, but opens up towards the end of stanza one:

bih-VAH-yet MAW-reh BEH-law-yeh, maw-LOCH-naw-yeh,
ves ZREE-miy ah-paw-KAH-leep-sees, kag-DAH
ves meer od-NAW mal-CHAH-nee-yeh pal-NOCH-naw-yeh,
ahr-MAH-dih zvyazd ee MYORT-vah-yah vau-DAH:

pred-VECH-naw-yeh, maw-GHEEL-naw-yeh, graw-ZYAH-shheh-yeh
soz-VEZ-dee-yah-mee NEH-baw ee leg-KAW
dih-MYAH-shheh-yeh-syah JEM-choo-gom, leh-JAH-shheh-yeh
Bvseh-MEER-noy plah-shheh-nee-tseh-yoo MLEH-kaw.

The poem ends in the repeated assonance of lines 7 and 8.

* * *

Бушует полая вода, 4а
Шумит и глухо, и протяжно. 4В
Грачей пролётные стада 4а
Кричат и весело, и важно. 4В

Дымятся чёрные бугры, 4с
И утром в воздухе нагретом 4D
Густые белые пары|пары 4с
Напоены теплом и светом. 4D

А в полдень лужи под окном 4е
Так разливаются и блещут, 4F
Что ярким солнечным пятном 4е
По залу «зайчики» трепещут. 4F

Меж круглых рыхлых облаков 4g
Невинно небо голубеет, 4H
И солнце ласковое греет 4H
В затишье гумен и дворов. 4g

Весна, весна! И всё ей радо. 4I
Как в забытьи каком стоишь 4j
И слышишь свежий запах сада 4I
И тёплый запах талых крыш. 4j

Кругом вода журчит, сверкает, 4K
Крик петухов звучит порой, 4I
А ветер, мягкий и сырой, 4I
Глаза тихонько закрывает. 4K

1893

Audio Recordings

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UmKU_fYzC_Q
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j11KS8MtAmA>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=POyYs5ivoko>

Critical Articles

<https://pishi-stihi.ru/bushuet-polaya-voda-bunin.html>
<https://lit.ukrtvory.ru/analiz-stixotvoreniya-bunina-bushuet-polaya-voda/>

The shallow water

Raging hollow water,
The noise is both muffled and prolonged.
Rooks flying flocks
Screaming and fun and important.

Smoking black mounds,
And in the morning in the air heated
Thick white vapors
Filled with warmth and light.

And at noon puddles under the window
So they spread and shine,
What a bright spot of sunshine
The sunlight flutters round the room.

Between round loose clouds
Innocent sky turns blue,
And the sun is warm and gentle
In a lull of humans and courtyards.

Spring, spring! And everything is happy for her.
As in oblivion what are you standing in
And you can smell the fresh smell of the garden
And the warm smell of thawed roofs.

All around the water murmurs, sparkles,
The crowing of roosters sounds sometimes,
And the wind, soft and raw,
Eyes quietly closes.

Comments

Bunin's celebration of spring, which is now evoked by sounds, colours and smells of the Russian spring. This is still an early poem, and in fact written around the same time as the *Spring* translated above, but the approach has shifted from a rather unsuccessful attempt on conventional lines to one conveying how it actually feels to experience the scene, from conception dressed up in expected imagery to accurate observation.

The poem is in quatrains, iambic tetrameters rhymed aBaB, AbbA or aBBa.

* * *

И вновь морская гладь бледна	4а
Под звёздным благостным сияньем,	4В
И полночь тёплая полна	4а
Очарованьем, молчаньем –	4В

Как, господа, благодарить	4с
Тебя за всё, что в мире этом	4D
Ты дал мне видеть и любить	4с
В морскую ночь, под звёздным светом.	4D

1908

Again the sea is pale

Again the sea is pale
Under the starry benevolent radiance,
And midnight is warm and full
Charm, silence –

How, Lord, to thank
You for everything in this world
You let me see and love
In the sea night, under the starlight.

Comments

A little poem similar to *Sometimes the sea is white* translated above, but a little earlier in date of composition and with a religiosity that never entirely left Bunin. It is markedly present in *And flowers and bumblebees* translated above, which has something of the same theme as this piece.

The poem is written in quatrains, iambic tetrameters rhymed aBaB. The verse is quietly textured, with a good deal of assonance, 'ee' and 'o' sounds in the first stanza, and 'ee' in the second.

ee vnav mors-KAH-yah glahd bled-NAH
pod ZVYOZ-nim BLAH-gos-nim see-YAHN-yem,
ee POL-nach TYOP-lah-yah pol-NAH
aw-chah-raw-VAH-nee-yem, mol-CHAHN-yem —

kahk GOS-paw-dee, blah-gaw-dah-REET
teh-BYAH zah vsyaw, shtaw v MEE-reh EH-tam
tih dahl mneh VEE-det ee lew-BEET
v mors-KOO-yoo nach, pad ZVYOZ-nim SVEH-tam.

Поэт

Поэт печальный и суровый,	4A
Бедняк, задавленный нуждой,	4b
Напрасно нищеты оковы	4A
Порвать стремишься ты душой!	4b

Напрасно хочешь ты презрением	4C
Свой несчастья победить	4d
И, склонный к светлым увлечениям,	4C
Ты хочешь верить и любить!	4d

Нужда ещё не раз отравит	4E
Минуты светлых дум и грёз,	4f
И позабыть мечты заставит,	4E
И доведёт до горьких слёз.	4f

Когда ж, измученный скорбями,	4G
Забыв бесплодный, тяжкий труд,	4h
Умрешь ты с голоду,- цветами	4G
Могильный крест твой перевьют!	4h

1886

Audio Recordings

Critical Articles

<https://rustih.ru/ivan-bunin-poet/>

Poet

The poet is sad and severe,
A poor man crushed by need,
In vain the shackles of poverty
You want to break it with your soul!

In vain do you want to despise
Your adversity to win
And, inclined to light hobbies,
You want to believe and love!

Need will poison you again
Minutes of bright thoughts and dreams,
And it will make you forget your dreams,
And bring to bitter tears.

When, tormented by sorrows,
Forgetting the fruitless, hard work,
You will starve to death, - flowers
Your grave cross will be destroyed!

Comments

A very early poem written when Bunin was only sixteen, but illustrating his outlook to the calling, and his gloomy expectations. Poetry brings few rewards in the material world, and many poets die young and unknown. Perhaps Bunin was thinking of Thomas Chatterton (1752-79) or Ivan Surikov (1841-80), who both received more recognition after their deaths, but clearly the young Bunin was not too hopeful of his gifts. Financial troubles at this time had interrupted his schooling, and Bunin's parents were not enthusiastic about literature as a profession.

It is a rather indulgent and sentimental poem, of course, and Bunin in fact made strenuous efforts to ensure he did not join the ranks of the neglected genius. He joined a local newspaper to find a platform for his work, made friends with those who could be useful, and was famously reserved about the poetry he did not like. Nonetheless, many uncertainties, if often of his own making, attended Bunin's early steps in literature.

The poem is written in quatrains, iambic tetrameters rhymed aBaB.

В АРХИПЕЛАГЕ

Осённый день в лиловой крупной зыби	5A
Блистал, как медь. Эол и Посейдон	5b
Вели в снастях певучий долгий стон,	5b
И наш корабль нырял подобно рыбе.	5A
Вдали был мыс. Высоко на изгибе,	5C
Сквозь, вставал неровный ряд колонн.	5d
Но песня рей меня клонила в сон -	5d
Корабль нырял в лиловой крупной зыби.	5C
Не всё ль равно, что это старый храм,	5e
Что на мысу - забытый портик Феба!	5F (u- -uu-u-uu-)
Запомнил я лишь ряд колонн да небо.	5F
Дым облаков курился по горам,	5e
Пустынный мыс был схож с ковригой хлеба	5F
Я жил во сне. Богов творил я сам.	5e

1908

The Archipelago

Like copper shone the autumn day. Poseidon
And Aeolus moaned softly, mournfully.
Huge, surging, lilac waves rose on the sea.
Our ship dove fish-like in and out among them.

The cape lay far ahead, and high upon it
Now and again a row of columns showed.
The gods' song made me nod. Our vessel rode
The lilac waves and climbed each snowy summit.

The Sun-god's temple!.. Yet this was as naught.
Alone the sky and those white columns gracious,
A row of them, remained etched on my senses.

The hills in smoke-like rings of cloud were caught.
The cape looked like a loaf of bread. In fancies
And dreams I lived. The gods myself I wrought.

Comments

The Silver Age of Poetry, through which Bunin lived and worked, did not leave him unaffected. The Symbolists, drawing their theories from Baudelaire, Verlaine and Mallarmé, sought symbols of a larger reality in shadowy intimations of the present, and tried to bring poetry closer to music. In contrast, and as a reaction to the diffuse nature of Symbolism, Acmeism — with which this poem has some affinities — cultivated a severe classicism stressing clarity, impersonal diction and economy of language. This poem is exceptionally formal, a Petrarchian sonnet conventionally arranged as 4 4 6, and rhymed accordingly. The language is also elevated, and richly coloured.

Poseidon is the sea god, and Aeolus the god of winds. Who is undertaking the voyage is not so clear, but the incident may allude to the Odyssey Book 12, when Ulysses, avoiding the Syrens, lands on the island of Thrinacia. Against his wishes, the men make a feast of cattle belonging to the sun god Hyperion, for which they are punished by shipwreck. Bunin's narrative is rather different. Here the voyage is made through dreams and self-creations, and the gods are only as the poet makes them.

Родине

Онѝ глумя́тся над тобо́ю,	4A
Онѝ, о ро́дина, коря́т	4b
Тебя́ твоёю простото́ю,	4A
Убо́гим ви́дом чёрных хат...	4b

Так сын, споко́йный и наха́льный,	4C
Стыди́тся ма́тери своёй -	4d
Уста́лой, ро́бкой и печа́льной	4C
Средь городски́х его́ друзе́й,	4d

Гляди́т с улы́бкой сострада́нья	4E
На ту, кто со́тни ве́рст брела́	4f
И для него́, ко дню свидáнья,	4E
После́дний гро́шик берегла́.	4f

1891

Audio Recordings

Critical Articles

<https://rustih.ru/ivan-bunin-rodine/>

<https://pishi-stihi.ru/rodine-oni-glumyatsya-nad-toboyu-bunin.html>

<https://bolcheknig.ru/terminy/oni-glumyatsya-nad-toboyu-bunin-analiz-oni-glumyatsya-nad-toboyu-bylinka/>

Homeland

They mock you,
They are about homeland reproach
You with your simplicity,
The squalid appearance of black huts...

So son, calm and cheeky,
Ashamed of his mother -
Tired, timid, and sad
Among his city friends,

Looks with a smile of compassion
On the one who walked hundreds of miles
And for him, for date day,
I saved my last penny.

Comments

Russian poets have various images for mother Russia. Pushkin has her as a meek, orthodox martyr. In Nekrasov, she appears as a strong woman buffeted by the harsh blows of fate. Yesenin sees her as a young pagan girl dancing among ripe ears of corn and slender silver birch. Bunin is closer to Nekrasov, but with some echoes of Tyutchev's:

These villages that house the poor,
are all that meager nature gives.
No countryman can suffer more,
yet in these straits our Russian lives.

Bunin sees mother Russia through her people, here an peasant woman, pious and old fashioned in her ways, but willing to give her last kopek to her son who has now acquired smart city manners and friends she doesn't understand. The timid mother and ungrateful son was indeed a prophetic image as Russia teetered towards more democratic government; the Duma was repeatedly installed and closed down, and the gathering revolutionary movements threatened to sweep away all that Bunin held dear about his homeland.

A simple, early and popular piece written as three quatrains of tetrameters rhymed AbAb.

Сириус

Где ты, звезда моя заветная,	4A (-uu-u-u-uu)
Венец небесной красоты?	4b
Очарованье безответное	4A
Снегов и лунной высоты?	4b

Где молодость, простая, чистая,	4C
В кругу любимом и родном,	4d
И старый дом, и ель смолистая	4C
В сугробе белом под окном?	4d

Пылай, играй стоцветной силою,	4E
Неугасимая звезда,	4f
Над дальнею моей могилою.	4E
Забывтой богом навсегда!	4f

Dactylic

1923

Audio Recordings

Critical Articles

<https://www.liveinternet.ru/users/3370050/post112147418/>
<https://pishi-stihi.ru/sirius-bunin.html>

Sirius

Where are you, my cherished star,
The crown of heavenly beauty?
Unrequited charm
Snow and moonlight?

Where is youth, simple, pure
In a circle of beloved and dear,
Both the old house and the resinous spruce
In a white snowdrift under a window?

Blaze, play with hundred-coloured power
Unquenchable star
Over my farthest grave.
Forgotten by God forever!

Comments

Bunin wrote this poem in 1922, in France, to which he had fled to escape the Red Army and the destruction of the old way of life that had been mother Russia. Sirius is the brightest star in the night sky, and is looking down, Bunin realizes, not only over the busy streets of Paris, but on his homeland, which he will not see again. Very probably, he will be buried far from the land God watches over, and therefore lie forgotten by what is most dear to him, the lands of childhood and his parental home.

The stars held a particular fascination for Bunin, and Sirius indeed featured in the mythology of past civilizations, whose remains Bunin had visited on his earlier trips abroad. Man's empires come and go, but the stars remain, ever the same, indifferent to our short lives. But in this way the light that Sirius sheds may give Bunin's grave some permanence when he lies forgotten in his homeland. In fact, of course, Bunin is not forgotten, in Russia or elsewhere, and many nationalities come each year to lay their flowers on his Paris grave.

Морфей

Прекрасен твой венóк из óгненного ма́ка,	6A
Мой Гость тайнственный, жилéц земно́го мра́ка.	6A
Как блéден смýглый лик, как до́лог гру́стный взор,	6b
Глядя́щий на меня́ и крóтко и в упóр,	6b
Как стра́шен смéртному безгла́сный час Морфея!	6C
Но скáзочно цветёт, во мра́ке пламенéя,	6C
Божéственный венóк, и к ра́достной странé	6d
Уво́дит он меня́, где всё досту́пно мне,	6d
Где нет прегра́д земны́х мо́им наде́ждам вéшним.	6E
Где снюсь я сам себе́ далёким и незде́шним,	6E
Где не диви́т ничто́ - ни да́же ла́ски той,	6f
С кем бог нас раздели́л могильно́ю черто́й.	6f

1924

Morpheus

Your wreath of fire poppies is beautiful
My Guest is mysterious, a tenant of earthly darkness.
How pale the swarthy face, how long the sad gaze,
Looking at me both meekly and point blank

How terrible to mortal the mute hour of Morpheus!
But fabulously blossoms, in the darkness of flame
Divine wreath, and to a joyful country
He takes me away, where everything is available to me,

Where there are no earthly barriers to my hopes of spring.
Where I dream about myself distant and not alien
Where nothing marvels - not even the affection of that
With whom God divided us with a grave.

Comment

Bunin, never the wild revolutionary, was even more conservative in his later years. The poetry became more fixed in the older forms, and, rather than looking on to embrace the new ideas, Bunin was more continually looking back to treasure what had been lost, which indeed existed only as memories of friends and family in another country, far away and now torn apart by civil war.

Morpheus was the god who shaped the dreams through which he appear to mortals in forms of his own choosing. As such, he was the messenger of the gods, able to give divine messages to sleeping mortals. Morpheus and his extended family lived in the Underworld, and only the gods on Olympus could visit him there. Morpheus himself slept in a cave filled with poppy seeds, and of course from varieties of poppies is opium extracted. Also located in the land of dreams were the River of Forgetfulness and the River of Oblivion, which Bunin has seen in this poem as the grave that divides the living from the dead.

Sucessful hexameters are difficult to write in any European language, as the line continually threatens to break into smaller units. Russian verse is generally happier with the tetrameter and occasional pentameter, moreover, so that the poem here is something of a triumph of craftsmanship. The three quatrains are faultlessly rhymed AAbb throughout.

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