

Interlude

Translated from Russian

A rest continues the musical flow.
The bows are poised in the air.
The orchestra falters, the trumpets silently glow.
Spruced-up old men cough in the aisles.
In their pockets – cases with horn-rimmed glasses inside.
Around old women's limp necks, amber – yellow and red.
Faded irises, pupils contracted – it all looks like
Since the days of yore, nothing has changed.

Outside the philharmonic walls – winter: this year, very cold;
Cinders strewn over the pressed-down snow.
Cars of three kinds: “Moskvich”, “Pobeda” and “Zil” on the road.
A dog huddles against the wall – more hungry than bold.
We slide along the slippery ice of the time.
From the poster, a tractor driver salutes with a buoyant smile.
More people on stage than in the stalls, on the velvet seats;
Against the backdrop, a choir.

Brass instruments, kettle drums, a short wave
Of the conductor's hand – and again, full swing,
Crescendo towards the finale,
C major, G major, at a lightning speed –
Leaflets tremble in feeble hands.
The concert ended forty years ago
But the music still chimes in my ear.

Hairy Men

Translated from Russian

Oh nineteenth century!
Oh hairy men!
Their sideburns, curtain-like,
Conceal their human cheeks.

Oh hideous Emperor Franz-Joseph!
Oh Prussian Wilhelm with a star!
The leonine Karl Marx;
Bakunin, like a yeti man!

Their beards and whiskers are so feral,
Moustaches lavish or upturned;
The nineteenth century of frock coats,
Compulsive conquest, drill and pomp.

The age of colonies and gunboats

Nineteenth: the blithest age of all!
The age of opera and concerts,
Of super-human Nietzsche's brawl!

But both the anarchists and monarchs
Philosophers as well as sheiks
Wore furs of hair in every color,
As was the era's shared freak.

Tea

translated from Russian

The whole of Celestial Russia
Feasts on hot tea with sugar:
Tears pour from the old marshal's face;
Unbreakable union smolders.
The tea dragon jets through the globe,
And seethes in the hearts of gray beasts.
The tea scalds the stratosphere,
Unsettling the cats on the roofs.

Between the Tigris and Euphrates,
Among the gods,
Between two limbs,
The dirt track swallows cups and saucers
In ash and dreams.
Tea, hot with sugar: blissful treat.
Aum. (*Ragus htiw toh aet.*)