

BULLETIN
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Center for Soviet & East-European Studies

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SOVIET NATIONAL POETS

Ukrainian

MAXIM RYLSKI, (1895-1969), born in Kiev, where he attended the University, began to study medicine, but turned to philology. The chaos during and following World War I, prevented his graduation. His first collection, "On the White Islands," appeared when he was only fifteen. During the most turbulent post-Revolution years (1919-1921), Rylski lived in the country, away from the stark realities of the contemporary scene. At that time he did not reveal any nationalist dynamism either, and that was perhaps what saved him from the tragic end of his fellow-writers during the purge of the middle thirties. However, in 1931 he was arrested and imprisoned. From that experience he returned a changed man. For almost a decade his earlier works were banished, while he was given an opportunity to be restored into the favor of the Party. That he succeeded is attested by the two Stalin prizes for literature he received in due course. His poem-vision "Thirst," written under the impact of the German invasion of Ukraine gives the essence of his literary genius. This poem is a parallel to Yevtushenko's "Heirs of Stalin." Rylski's translations from foreign literatures were no less masterful than his original verse. Not long before his death the poet sent an inscribed copy of his last book "Zimovy Zapisi" * to Marshall for translation and here is one of the poems from that book.

* Maxim Rylsky "Zimovy Zapisi Poezii" Vidav. "Radianski Pismennik" Kiiiv 1964. U.S.S.R.

MAXIM RYLSKY: "WINTER TALES"

Authorized Translation from the Ukrainian
by Herbert Marshall

Original
(From the Book)

Вони між нами ходять — і на зборах
Промови виголошують гучні,
Вони не знають тонів небадьорих,
Та очі в них — пригляньтесь! — скляні!

Погляньте пильно — ось вони спинились,
Ті очі бистрі й мертві водночас!
Чи в скельцях тих їх жертви не відбились?
Чи відблиск совісті навіки згас?

Дарма питати! Де вже там сумління,
Де іскра честі в непроглядній тьмі,
Коли їм тільки сите животиння
І травлення нормальне на умі!

Братопродавці з білими руками
І з чорними серцями — ось вони,
Що вслали анонімними листами
Дорогу у кар'єру та в чини!

І ходять ще! І ще земля їх носить,
І ми їм досі руку подаєм,
І піт кривавий їм чола не росить
Під каюття нестерпним тягарем!

Не сніяться діти їм осиротілі
І на могилах скорбні матері,
Вони живуть, вони у добрім тілі,
Їх не зловили на нечесній грі!

Хай зле про них говорять у народі,
Зневага хай бичує світова,—
У них є щит: не впійманий — не злодій!
У них є меч: фальшовані слова!

Та стать людьми — нема, нема надії
Тим, хто життя проповз, немов змія!
Нехай їх вітер вічності розвіє,
Нехай в огні останнім спопеліє
Наклепника останнього ім'я!

21.XII. 1961

Transliteration

ZIMOVY ZAPISI
"WINTER TALES"

Maksim Rylzki
Maxim Rylsky

Voni mizh nami khodiati' i na zbórah
They among us walk and at meetings

Promóvi vigilóshuiut' guchni,
Speeches proclaim clamorous,

Voni ne znaiut' toniv nebad'órikh
They (do) not know tones cheerless,

To óchi v nikh priglián'tesia! skliani!
Those eyes in them look-closely! glassy!

Poglián'te pil'no ós' voni spinilis',
Look carefully here they (are) stopped,

Ti óchi bistrí i mértvi vodnochás!
Those eyes quick and dead simultaneously!

Chi v skél'tsiakh tikh ikh zhértvi ne vidbilis?
Are in glass of-those (eyes) their victims not reflected?

Chi vidblisk sóvisti navíki zgas?
Are reflections of-conscience for-ever extinguished?

Darma pitáti! De vzhe tam sumlínnia,
No-use to-ask Where is there conscience,

De ískra chésti v neproglíadnii t'mi,
Where-is (a) spark of-honesty in (that) impenetrable darkness,

Kóli im tíl'ki síte zhivotínnia
When for-them only well-fed existence

I trávlennia normál'ne na umí!
And digestion normal on (the) mind!

Bratoprodávtsi z bílimi rukámi
Brother-betrayers with white hands

I z chórnimi sertsíami os' voní,
And with black hearts here (are) they

Shcho vsláei anonímnimi listámi
That paved (with) anonymous letters

Dorógu u kar'éru ta v chiní!
(The) road to career and to rank!

I khódiat' shche! I shche zemliá ikh nósit',
And walk (about) still! And still (the) earth them bears,

I mi dósi ruku podaém,
And we till now hand shake,

I pit krivávi im cholá ne rósit'
And sweat bloody their forehead not moistens

Píd kaiattíá nestérpnim tiagarém!
Under remorse's unbearable burden!

Ne sniát'sia díti im osírotíli
not dream of-children they orphaned

I na mogíлах skórbni materí,
And at graves sorrowful mothers

Voní zhivút', voní u dóbrim tíli
They live, they have (a) healthy body,

Ikh ne zlovíli na nechésnii gri!
They-were not caught at dishonest play!

Khái zle pro nikh govóriat' u naródi,
Let evil about them speak by people,

Znevága khái bichúe svitová,—
(With) insult shall castigate (the) world,—

U nikh e shchit: ne vpiímanii— ne zlódií!
by them is (a) shield: not caught— no thief!

U nikh e mech: fal'shóvani slová!
By them is (a) sword: false words!

Ta stat' liud'mi nemá, nemá nídií
But to-become human (is) no, no hope

Tim, khto zhittíá propóvz, nemóv zmiíá!
For-those, who life-long crawled, like (a) snake!

Nekhái ikh víter víchnosti rozvíe,
Let them (by the) wind of-eternity be-blown,

Nekhái v ogní ostánnim spopelie
Let in (the) fire last burn-to-ashes

Naklépnika ostánn'ogo im'íá!
(The) defamer's last name!

21.12.1961

Final Translation

They still walk amongst us and at meetings
hollow speeches still deliver,
and their tone, of course, is always cheerful
but their eyes—just see—are glassy slivers.

Look carefully—they seem to be quite still—
simultaneously those dead eyes are the eyes of the devil!
How is it their victims aren't reflected in those glass eyes
where reflections of conscience have been extinguished for
ever?

Vain questions! How can there be any conscience,
what sparks of honesty in that darkness can you find,
when in them is only animal satisfaction
and only normal digestion is on their mind?

Brother-betrayers with lily-white hands
and black-black hearts—they are still here—
those who anonymous letters penned
to achieve high rank and a government career.

Yes, they are still here! The earth bears them yet,
We still shake hands with them or worse,
and their brow is not dewed with bloody sweat
under the unbearable burden of remorse.

They do not dream of children they have orphaned,
nor of sorrowful mothers standing at sad graves,
They live, they live in bodies plump and cared-for,
No one has caught them cheating, they do not misbehave.

Let them be cursed in the mouths of the people,
Let this whole world voice its castigation—
Behold their shield: who's not caught is no thief!
Behold their sword: words of falsification!

But they will never be human, never worthy of trust,
whose life is to crawl like snakes in the grass!
Let the winds of eternity blow to nothingness,
Let the fires of eternity burn to ashes and dust
the very last names of the slanderers.

A TRIBUTE TO MIKHAIL ILYICH ROMM (1901-1971)

In the thirties, when I was studying at the State Institute of Cinematography in Moscow, part of our work was actual training in a film studio or on location. Generally, film students went back to the area they came from—so a Georgian would go back to the Tblisi Studios; a Ukrainian, back to the Kiev Studios; an Armenian, back to the Yerevan Studios, etc. I, of course, couldn't go back to my English Studios and so I had a freer choice.

The very first practical work I had was with the veteran film director, Protozanov. It was to make a film based on the play of Ivanov, called "THE ARMORED TRAIN," which was produced by the Moscow Art Theatre. It dealt with the Civil War and the foreign intervention into the Soviet Union, in which British troops were also involved, amongst about fourteen other

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nations. As this particular incident concerned the ordinary soldier, an English G.I. whom we called Tommy Atkins, I was asked to coach this Russian actor in speaking a few sentences in English. I only remember that we were out on location in winter with about twenty feet of snow underfoot—we had to shoot on skis and sledges and it was bitterly cold—for the first time in my life, I knew why Vodka was invented! However, for all that I really was only a passenger, what they called an “assistant student-practicant.”

But, my second practical work was with Mikhail Romm. This time, in winter again, we were shooting in the film studios of Moscow, called Potilykha—these were then fairly new. Times were very spartan, not only in relation to food and transport, but also in relation to fuel and electricity. I remember that the limited facilities also meant that the film groups would have two shifts—those shooting during the day, and those shooting during the night. Unfortunately, Mikhail Romm’s group had to shoot at night.

I still remember the dreadful feeling of traipsing to work in the dark and working until dawn in unheated studios (there was just not enough fuel to go around for all day and all night), and we all worked in our heavy boots, fur coats, fur hats—ear flaps down—and though the actors, naturally, had to play in costume appropriate to the situation (in this case 19th Century France!), right up to the moment of shooting they would be wearing their heavy clothes; then when the camera came for action, they would quickly take off their heavy clothes, hand them to us standing around, shoot, and then shiver and put their coats on again to rehearse the next shot.

The film we were making was based on Guy D’Maupassant’s famous story, “BOULE DeSUIFE.” It turned out to be the last silent film made in Russia—maybe the last in the world.

I remember the leading part was played by a star actor of the Vakhtangov Theatre, Gorunov, who later played “HAMLET” in Vakhtangov’s famous “Marxist” production. He was a brilliant actor who died early in life—a natural death—surprising in those years! What I still remember was that this was Mikhail Romm’s first independent directorial assignment, and he was in no way cagey about taking suggestions from his staff; indeed, he gave me free rein to suggest my own ideas regarding *Mise-En-Scene*, acting, business, or shots.

I am grateful to him for giving me my first experiment with professional actors, and his care and solicitude for that young Englishman struggling with the Russian language on those freezing nights in Moscow.

Later, he became a teacher in the State Institute of Cinematography. But, in the days of the purges and later in the days of the growth of antisemitism, he became personally involved, despite the fact that he had made the most pro-Stalin films about the Revolution, “LENIN in 1918,” for example. In these films Stalin was made an equal of Lenin, a participant with him in all preparations and conduct and leadership of the Revolution! A complete distortion of history with complete denigration of Zinoviev, Kamenev and others and the complete omission of Trotsky.

All these films were in one way or the other directed by Stalin, who checked the scripts and their treatment and even indicated who should play what parts, just as in the days of Tsar Nikolai the First, with his personal

intervention in the Imperial Theatre productions and dramas—aided by the *Okhrana*, the Secret Police, as censors.

Later on, during the thaw, Mikhail Romm wrote about the film, “ADMIRAL USHAKOV,” that he had to make, where practically everything—every piece of dialogue, had to be submitted to a committee and eventually to the caucus around Stalin. There was a complete wiping out of all conflict and a total production of stereotypes. He wrote how “the people were depicted as a faceless mass—clay in the omnipotent hands of the flawless hero; and he, too, ultimately lacked individuality, since he had no inner contradictions and therefore no development of character.” (See “*Pravda*” April 17th, 1962)

During the virulent attack on Yiddish culture, with the virtually wiping out of the Yiddish intelligentsia by the Stalinist Communist Party in 1948–1949, the faithful Romm, who had done everything that the Party dictator wanted in his films, was now also attacked as a “Cosmopolitan.” Years later, during the thaw, at a meeting with Kruschchev, he relates that antisemitism had now become a tradition in Soviet life. He said, “After the October Revolution, the expression ‘cosmopolite without a fatherland’ was invented to replace that other expression, ‘dirty Jew.’ Among other things, and in certain instances, the latter expression was even printed. On the cover of the (satirical) magazine, “CROCODILE,” a cartoon appeared during those years presenting a ‘cosmopolite without a fatherland’ of clearly Jewish type, holding a book in his hands on which one could read in big characters the word ‘ZHID,’ * not ‘ANDRE GIDE,’ but simply ‘ZHID.’ Neither the cartoonist, nor any of those responsible for this scoundrel’s joke, has been condemned by us. We have preferred to keep quiet, to forget all this, as one could forget that dozens of our best theatre and movie people were declared ‘cosmopolites without a fatherland’ for instance, others present here. They have been authorized to work again, some in the Party, some in their particular union. But is it really possible to heal the wounds, to forget what one has suffered for many years when you were trampled on and covered with mud?”

The interesting thing is that I learned that Romm was Jewish (which I never knew when I was working with him); but he was an assimilated Russian Jew who had nothing of Jewishness about him in any way and no connections with any kind of religious traditions; as far as I was concerned, he was a Russian. But now, like all the Jews in the Soviet Union, he began to recover his Jewishness and one of his last works was a very important film called in Russian “Common or Garden Fascism” (by which he meant antisemitism) which was a monumental documentary—an editing of news reels showing Nazi atrocities against the Jews and the manifestations of antisemitism. I know most of my colleagues in the film industry were very thrilled that Romm actually made this film and it was actually shown. Jewish authorities now say that this was one of the important contributions toward the reawakening of the Soviet Jews.

Romm, till the end of his life never gave up fighting against Stalinism. He was one of the famous 64 signatories who sent a letter to the Central Committee of the CPSU to protest against re-Stalinization in the late sixties.

I was lucky to meet him in his last years when I went back to my old Alma. Mater, GIK, and we reminisced over the pioneer romantic days when we produced a work of art in the freezing cold Moscow nights. It was indeed a beautiful film, but got lost in the new spate of sound on film.

Let me say "Thank you," to Mikhail Romm for having fought the good fight, despite all the humiliations and the tragedies of the Stalinist era he had suffered through.

* In Russian "ZHID" is the equivalent of the insulting word "Yid," and was a pun on the spelling and pronunciation of the French writer's name "GIDE."

YEVTUSHENKO'S VISIT TO THE UNITED STATES

The Soviet poet Zhenia Yevtushenko's present visit to the United States has aroused great interest and attracted large audiences as well as vociferous protests by representatives of Soviet Jewry and Ukrainians.

The readings of translations of his poems given by Mr. Barry Boys, together with the originals read by Yevtushenko himself, include a number of translations by Professor Herbert Marshall, in particular the famous "Babi Yar." Marshall's translations, published by Dut-

ton in 1966, was the first authorized publication of Yevtushenko's poems in the United States.

"Babi Yar" is included in Shostakovich's *13th Symphony*, and the composer personally asked Marshall to prepare the English version of the *13th Symphony* for performances in the English-speaking world, to which has now been added his *14th Symphony*, an almost entirely choral work.

Since its publication, Marshall has been continuing the translation of poems he has received from the author, including "I Am An Earthman Gagarin," published in English for the first time in the SIU newspaper, "The Egyptian." He is working on the latest poem he just received from Yevtushenko on "The Trumpet of Louis Armstrong." Now once again they met on American soil and discussed the present and the future. This may include a visit to SIU by the poet before he returns to the USSR.

At this meeting, Yevtushenko told Marshall about his invitation to the White House where he had 70 minutes with President Nixon. Professor Marshall presented the President with an autographed copy of his translations and has received a personal reply of appreciation and thanks from the President.

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