

Mikhail Kuzmin's *The Trout is Breaking Through the Ice*:

A Poem of Gay Experience in the Early Soviet Union

(Russian Text, Translation and Introductory Essay)

Mikhail Kuzmin is often labeled the first gay Russian poet and novelist. He is certainly the most prominent. His career as poet, novelist, composer and critic began shortly after the turn of the 20th century and survived the Bolshviek Revolution. Kuzmin published eight books after the Revolution, poetry, fiction and essays, the last in 1929. He continued his early success with “gay” themes. *Wings* (1907)—often called the first Russian gay novel—and the cycle “The Alexandrian Songs” from *Nets* (1908) were still popular twenty years after initial publication. Seven years after the Revolution, on October 11, 1925, Kuzmin celebrated the 20th anniversary of his literary debut with a reading and gathering of literary friends. A photograph, now in the Anna Akhmatova Museum (Fontana House) in Petersburg documents the event. From 1913 until his death Kuzmin was with Iuri Iurkun, lover and minor poet. Their love was complicated by Iurkun’s bisexuality and his relationship with Ol’ga Arbenina.

After a year in and out of hospitals, Kuzmin died of pneumonia March 1, 1936. His shabby funeral procession included some forty mourners, one of whom, Erikh Gollerbach, commented on how few they were. “Remember that seven people walked behind Wilde’s coffin, and then not all of them walked to the end” (qtd. in Malmstad and Bogomolov 138, 437). His colleague from the 1910s, Anna Akhmatova was, ill and sent her husband, Punin, to represent her. Lidiia Ginzberg visited the Punins the night of the funeral and recalled that “Akhmatova was upset that she had not been able to attend”

(437). Punin commented earlier in the day “We are burying Kuzmin, like Mozart, during a snowstorm” (reported by Ginzberg, qtd. in Malmstad and Bogomolov 138).

In 1929 Kuzmin published his last book *ФОРЕЛЬ РАЗБИИЕТ ЛЕД*ⁱ (*The Trout Breaks the Ice, or The Trout is Breaking The Ice, or The Trout is Breaking Through The Ice*). The volume opens with a poemⁱⁱ in 15 sections of the same name. It was written completely in one remarkable week in July 1927. The rest of the book collects poems from 1925-9, and forges new ground since his previous volume *Otherworldly Evenings: Poems 1914-1920*, which was hermetic in cast drawing on a private system of Gnostic symbols. Speaking of the volume as a whole Cornwell writes:

By the time of *Forel' razevaet led* [The Trout is Breaking Through The Ice] (1929), a more densely metaphorical poetry is instead structured primarily on an ostensible flux of emotional and intellectual associations. This draws on a bewildering array of sources—from *Dracula*, expressionist cinema, and journalistic gossip, to Wagnerian opera, Renaissance poetry and the Lives of the Saints—which ultimately serve to “double”, shape, and transform autobiographical experience (alternately personal-tragic or trivial and second-hand, but frequently defying critical reconstruction) into powerful symbol and myth. (482).

The generative cognitive action of the title poem is how memory fuses past and present.

[It] is dictated . . . by the agent of memory itself. It is memory which confuses past and present—or rather, sees both time and nature as indivisible, a frequent occurrence in Kuzmin’s poetry. It is memory which whimsically arranges and rearranges events in a series of associative chains, in which events and the

participants in them are treated as motifs or links to be arranged into associative patterns seemingly at will. It is Kuzmin's mature artistic task to recreate and give meaning to his own experience—to transform that experience into a personal myth—by crystallizing these memories around a single thematic pivot, a highly concentrated metaphor (Malmstad and Shmakov, 140)

The personal myth of *Trout* is remarkable and its publication under the Soviets in 1929 is historical. Although Malmstad and Shmakov in 1976 printed the long out-of-print Russian text and wrote an essay about it, the poema has not, as far as I know, been translated into English.

Besides two prefaces and an epilogue, *Trout* consists of 12 Удара (“stabs” or “thrusts”ⁱⁱⁱ). The overarching metaphor is a trout captured beneath the frozen surface of a stream that slams its tail upward against the ice to break open an air hole—a metaphor of striving for freedom. The relentlessness of the stabs also suggests a thrusting toward the release of orgasm. The 12 stabs are separate poems forming a cycle. They vary in length and formal features. Midway, stab 6 stands as the apex of the poema's architecture. In the form of a border ballad, it is the longest section, set in Scotland. Settings vary from a glittering performance of *Tristan and Isolde* at the Petersburg opera, to a remote Carpathian hunting lodge, to a back alley gambling club, to Scotland, and persons who appear more than once do so in with individuals from unrelated sections. Separate sections have clear narratives, but they do not link up into an obviously coherent story. Kuzmin, in the epilogue, questions the reader and then gives a matter-of-fact answer:

Can't you tell? Right from the start

I tried to make a record of twelve months

And simply show how each encounter went

As I lightly explored the circle of desire.

And here is what turned out! . . .

How the 12 stabs represent months is not clear, but that they “explore the circle of desire” is exactly right. The stabs plot emotional points that close the circle of the narrator’s desire for his beloved. The circle begins as a dream in which former lovers return uninvited, blending different men and periods in the dreamer-narrator’s mind. Kuzmin draws on multiple prototypes for key personages. The composite lost-beloved is thus still an object of desire and closure to the past has not been attained.

The first stab is set at the opera where the narrator’s attention splits between a striking lady and Tristan who, as he dies, longs to reunite with Isolde. Wagner’s story exfoliates a fantasy of desired reunion in which the separated lovers do physically reunite, but as they do, first Tristan dies then Isolde. As it unfolds, Kuzmin’s poema offers a different, more startling outcome for the plot of desired reunion. Tristan’s scene is in act 3, so Kuzmin’s stab is set late at the performance, when a stunning beauty captures his gaze—a sensation of beauty. His attention is split. After the performance, as the narrator departs the theater he sees her again and as they jostle in the lobby he notices her escort, a man of twenty years. The reader realizes that the two men have been lovers and that the younger man seeks not to acknowledge that they have ever met.^{iv}

The stabs of the poema are “emotional moments”—points that plot the circle of desire. The emotional pang at the opera is because the narrator lost his youthful beloved to a woman. Kuzmin a number of times fell in love with men who were bisexual in practice, including his long “marriage” (1913-1935) to Iurkun, with whom he lived at the

time he wrote Trout. From 1920 until his execution in 1938, Iurkun also kept a relationship with Ol'ga Arbenina. By the mid-1920s she joined Iurkun and Kuzmin in a *ménage à trois* that included Iurkun's mother who had lived with them for several years. The anxiety at the heart of Trout is not Tristan's anxiety that because he had transgressively loved his lord's wife he could never reunite with her again, but rather that any lover Kuzmin might have would be wooed by a woman and cause irreparable loss.

In Stab 2 an intense ritualistic love-exchange between narrator and composite-beloved is consummated, only to have the beloved leave. This departure in stab 3 occurs abruptly while the two men read Shakespeare's sonnets. One wonders if they were reading the torturous group in which Shakespeare's persona, the golden haired youth and the dark lady are bound in a confusing triangle that seems to climax with the youth and the lady leaving the older Shakespeare-persona alone. The sonnets thus exfoliate a narrative of an unattainable longing to reunite.

In stab 4 the men share a blissful domestic moment at breakfast. But stab 5 introduces Elinor who has joined the men in a *ménage à trois*. Her presence draws the beloved away. She seems innocent walking in the morning garden, but she has slowly made the household "her green country!" And the section ends with the question:

Whose idea was it that peaceful landscapes
Cannot be arenas of catastrophe?

Stab 6, the Scots ballad, at first seems a *non sequitar*. Ervin Green, a "goodly mariner," leaves home and his betrothed Annie Ray. He returns years later, an old man. As they reunite and are married, mysteriously he turns back into his younger virile self. Annie is unnerved by the power he seems to hold over her. She asks is his soul at peace

with the Lord. His reply is evasive. The mariner's last words leave open how willing Annie is, or could be, in taking back her youthful beloved. The mariner says:

Like Satan—I can destroy your soul
If I should so desire;
But likes of you, love I will,
Till death, my wife, transpires.

This ballad's plot is heterosexual; like Tristan it leads to reunited lovers; but the fantasy is unsatisfactory. Tristan and Isolde's transgressive love is re-consummated in death. Ervin Green and Annie Ray's betrothal is consummated in belated marriage under the menace he holds over her choice. Kuzmin's circle of desire stabs on seeking an outcome better than Tristan's fatal, Shakespeare's unattainable, or Annie Ray's sinister reunions.

Stab 7 is the bucolic "Premonition? Memory?" (line 17) of the narrator watching a young naked swimmer dive from a cliff who like Narcissus emerges from the water embarrassed. As the swimmer again dives underwater he lashes against the undertows near the bank and his beating arms are compared to a struggling trout. Metaphorically, is the beloved stabbing and thrusting to get back to the man he abandoned? The poem suggests that reunion, if it is to occur, is because both parties subconsciously will it.

Stab 8 is more surreal than others. A motorcar arrives. The narrator expects his long-absent beloved, but the man who steps from the car is a stranger. He offers to stay, but the narrator-lover responds "But can't you see: not possible!" Five days later a letter arrives from Grinoke, Scotland—the town where the Ervin Green in stab 6 stayed.

Stab 9 retrospectively implies the previous rejection by the lyric persona is misprision and that the stranger was indeed the beloved whom he failed to recognize. It

registers the narrator-lover's attempts to while away his loneliness, but he questions whether Grinoke really exists, and whether one must "learn to endure / Ervin Green, the mariner" who will never return. Stab 10 has him in despair. He seeks out "light amusements" in the back alleys of Petersburg, tries gambling, and meets a man who invites him to visit his "small museum" of bizarre collections. This man is compared to Dr. Caligari in the German 1919 expressionist movie, *Das Kabinett des Doktor Caligari*^v (*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*). While looking at the strange exhibits in this bizarre cabinet, the narrator realizes that:

I had been seeking for my second half

All day and trust there's light at tunnel's end.

Isn't he clear at a glance?—A twin!

The strange host leads him deeper into the museum where suddenly the lost lover is discovered. The narrator realizes that "this twin" is the man he had pledged love to in the Carpathian hunting lodge and who then abruptly left him while reading Shakespeare's sonnets. As they face each other in mutual recognition, the section ends. Stab 11 is a lyrical duet between two reunited voices—a re-consummation. And in Stab 12 the two men drive home along the Neva riverbank to resume their domestic life together.

Unlike the reunion fantasies that drive Tristan and the ballad of Annie Ray, Trout offers a fantasy unprecedented in previous gay poetry. The triangle harks back to Shakespeare's sonnets in order to reverse Shakespeare. Kuzmin's passion is not simply physical attraction or sexual consummation; it is a pledged bonding and twining. If the pledge is earnest, Trout argues, no matter what woman or span of time or space intervenes, or mishaps and misprisions occur, the men will in their "twin-ness" find each

other and reunite. Another aspect of this myth of gay bonding is that the relationship is best experienced in egalitarian domesticity. Kuzmin celebrates mystic twining and egalitarian domesticity. But is Elinor a part of the reconstituted *ménage*? Apparently it no longer matters. She may share the home or not, because the re-consummated male bond is on a level no longer vulnerable to her threat. This outcome reflects the psychological stasis Kuzmin achieved in his “marriage” to Iurkun during their last decade which included Arbenina in their home. Trout in effect represents Kuzmin’s *ménage à trois* from his perspective.

Kuzmin’s view of egalitarian homosexual bonding may hark back to the English “gay movement” of the previous generation and the writings of Edward Carpenter. As noted earlier, Gollerbach’s description of Kuzmin’s funeral likened him to Oscar Wilde and the second introduction to *Trout* refers to Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

And even without the rain,
Oh, you, Mister Dorian—
Do you so freely take
A place upon the divan?

Kuzmin knew Wilde’s work and was involved in a production of his play *Salome*, and may well have been exposed to Carpenter’s ideas. Carpenter and John Addington Symonds derived their ideas of a superior homoerotic bond between men from Plato (Lauritsen and Thorstad, 31-3). Walt Whitman was influenced by Carpenter’s book of poems *Towards Democracy* (1883) with its celebration of lofty egalitarian comradeship, and Kuzmin may have been too. For all its stunning innovation of theme, Trout lies within a discernable tradition.

Kuzmin's *ménage* and its celebration in Trout was also sociologically grounded. The Bohemian intelligentsia who gravitated to St. Petersburg and Moscow during the early 20th century came from across Russia. Some were of peasant and non-Russian ethnicities but most came from the administrative class or lesser gentry. They were bright independent artists, actors and intellectuals who supported themselves on small family stipends and occasional income from publications, exhibits, lectures and performances. They believed in their essential social function. Kuzmin was influential in Petersburg artistic circles.

Economically, many lived on the margin of the middle class but did not perceive themselves as marginal, say, as Beatniks in 1950s America did. They economized by rejecting bourgeois pretensions and living in less prestigious districts. They opened apartments or shared households. This pattern of fluid living arrangements continued throughout the post-revolution period and became a norm for many artists, writers and even professors and teachers. Often shared households were economic conveniences but others were built on emotional and sexual bonds. Households might include a parent or other relative of one of the members and as people aged their own children too. Feinstein compares the Petersburg/Petrograd Bohemians with the London Bloomsbury group. At least one man, the artist Boris Anrep, moved between both groups, finally settling in London (63, 78). The stable social system in England versus the volatile revolutionary conditions in Russia make the two “sexual revolutions” distinct and different.

The Bohemian economic marginality and eschewal of bourgeois pretension created conditions in which sexual and emotional *ménages à trois* could thrive—and did. I use the term *ménage à trois* with caveats. Some included more than three persons.

Ménage à trois connotes for us something risqué, probably unstable and, from the view of sexual orientation, transitional for one or more of the participants, none of which typically characterizes the Russian *ménage* type I describe.

Unlike the London Bloomsbury group's merely social/sexual "revolution," in 1917 (March and October) Russia underwent a political revolution, and by the end of 1917 Bolsheviks controlled administrative and legislative functions. Bolshevism saw its role as vanguard for revolutions elsewhere and at various international congresses was the anti-capitalist and anti-bourgeois voice. It sent delegations to the International Congresses of the World League for Sexual Reform in 1921 (Berlin), 1928 (Copenhagen), 1929 (London) and 1930 (Vienna) (Lauritsen and Thorstad, 66). In December 1917 the government passed sweeping "reforms in sex-related matters" and "ushered in a new atmosphere of sexual freedom" (Lauritsen and Thorstad, 63). A pamphlet by Dr. Grigorii Batkis, Director of the Moscow Institute of Social Hygiene, describes the new sexual order in the Soviet Union. He presented it in 1923 to the World League For Sexual Reform. It explains Bolshevik doctrine at the time. He argues that the revolution grew out of the broad masses' yearning for economic independence.

In the first period of the war, women won economic independence both in the factory and in the country—but the October Revolution first cut the Gordian knot, and instead of mere reform, it completely revolutionized the laws. The revolution let nothing remain of the old despotic and infinitely unscientific laws; it did not tread the path of the reformist bourgeois legislation which, with juristic subtlety, still hangs on the concept of property in the sexual sphere, and ultimately

demands that the double standard hold sway over sexual life. These laws always come about by disregarding science. (qtd. in Lauritsen and Thorstad, 63-4)

Bolshevik legislation abolished the property concept and double standard in sexual matters. Women and men were equal under law. Either could dissolve a marriage. The church had no role in marriage. Couples simply applied to a state clerk and were granted a license the same day. Either spouse could initiate divorce which was often granted that day. Property disputes went to the appropriate court but divorce did not depend on a resolution to such a dispute if it arose. The state provided protection of children whose parents could not.

Batkis's pamphlet, italics in the original, enshrined a basic principal regarding sexual matters: "*It declares the absolute non-interference of the state and society into sexual matters, so long as nobody is injured, and no one's interests are encroached upon*" (qtd. in Lauritsen and Thorstad, 64). This principal applied without discrimination to non-heterosexual relations.

Concerning homosexuality, sodomy, and various other forms of sexual gratification, which are set down in European legislation as offenses against public morality—Soviet legislation treats these exactly the same as so-called 'natural' intercourse. All forms of sexual intercourse are private matters. Only when there's use of force or duress, as in general when there's an injury or encroachment upon the rights of another person, is there a question of criminal prosecution. (qtd. in Lauritsen and Thorstad, 64)

Although marriage licenses were reserved for one woman with one man, the policies for allocating housing space, which were based on the importance of one's service to the

state not one's private resources, for a time treated same-sex couples equal to both married and unmarried heterosexual couples. Formal marriage was so weakened by this legislation that many couples at all levels of society entered into and dissolved "marriages" often without applying for a license or a divorce. Cohabitation defined marriage as much as legality did.

Some argue the Bolsheviks did not really take a liberal view toward homosexuals and that the legislation was cosmetic to be used as propaganda abroad, but Lauritsen and Thorstad point out that in the first edition of *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia* in 1930, the extensive piece on homosexuality was built on the work of the early "gay rights" pioneer in Germany, Magnus Hirschfeld and to a lesser degree Freud (64) and was far in advance of information on homosexuality in major reference books in the West.

One repercussion of this legislation was that for the Bohemian intelligentsia, the social and sexual experiments in living arrangements that they had attempted before the Revolution were no longer subject to state control. State sanction was bestowed which no other European country at this time had as fully as the Soviet Union. For a brief while, this group, however else they might have struggled with poverty, illness and censorship, lived "liberated" lives in their domestic and sexual interactions. The short-lived Bolshevik "sexual revolution" extended well beyond the intelligentsia and Bohemian subcultures at least as far as the rights of women in marriage and divorce.

The third factor to shore up experiences of *ménages à trois* was the new Soviet system of allocating living quarters amid chronic housing shortages. Shortages in cities plagued the entire Soviet era but were worst during the periods following each of the great wars. During the 1920s and 1930s the situation was exacerbated by collectivization

and industrialization. The larger more commodious residences, such as the historic palaces in Leningrad or the grand apartments blocks built in the 1890s in Moscow, were divided so two to four households with one or two rooms each shared a common cooking area and bathroom. Anyone who has seen the movie version of *Doctor Zhivago* or read Lidiia Chukovskaia's *Maria Petrovna* is familiar with such communal households. Former serfs, factory workers and professionals jostled around each other. A Committee Chairman set kitchen schedules, assigned tasks, resolved conflicts and assessed fines on persons who was not communal enough. Bickering was common. A person who lost employment could be voted out on a charge of parasitism. There was little privacy.

Thus, Bohemian sexual and household experimentation of the 1910s, early Soviet legislation governing marriage, gender equality and the status of homosexuals, the housing shortage, and the fact that most people in cities lived in communal quarters, fostered conditions in which persons inclined to *ménages à trois* could do so with relative little fear of ostracism. The Kuzmin-Iurkun-Arbenina *ménage* thus was not so unusual.^{vi}

In the 1930s Bolshevism shifted into what we now call Stalinism. A mythology was promulgated which claimed homosexuality was “the product of decadence in the bourgeois sector of society” and “the fascist perversion” (Lauritsen and Thorstad 68). In January 1934 one of the first waves of the Stalinist purges was mounted against gay men and mass arrests were made in Moscow, Leningrad, Kharkov and Odessa. The arrests were “followed by numerous suicides in the Red Army itself” (68). Most of those arrested were sent to Siberia and in March of the same year legislation reversed the 1918 laws and punished homosexual acts with eight years in prison. This legislation began the state enshrinement of the nuclear family. In 1934 abortions were outlawed and mothers

were rewarded for the number of children they bore. Kuzmin survived this wave of persecutions to die of pneumonia in 1936. Iuri Iurkun did not. On the night of February 3-4, 1938 he was arrested. Although accused of counterrevolutionary activity, the charge was a code for his sexuality. Although sentenced to ten years of confinement, in fact he was shot sometime after midnight on September 20, 1938. His mother died of heart failure after his arrest, but Ol'ga Arbenina survived until 1980. She did not learn of his death until after the Second World War (Malmstad and Bogomolov, 363-364).

The rediscovery of Kuzmin's work in the United States began in 1972 with Granoien and Green's translation of *Wings: Prose and Poetry by Mikhail Kuzmin*. Malmstad and Shmakov's essay on Trout appeared in 1976. In 1997 Moss's anthology *Out of the Blue: Russia's Hidden Gay Literature: An Anthology* devoted a section to him and in 1999 the biography by Malmstad and Bogomolov was published. Editions of his poems are now available in Russia. But compared to his international modernist gay contemporaries such as Fernando Pessoa, Federico Garcia Lorca or C. P. Cavavy, Hart Crane or W. H. Auden his work is still unknown outside Russia.

The Trout is Breaking through the Ice is a remarkable poems. It registers a particular psych-erotic construction from the perspective of an older man toward a younger male beloved in the context of a *ménage a trois* that includes the younger man's female lover. It also registers a queer socio-erotic construction that is paradigmatic of a particular historical moment during the first decade of Soviet life in Russia.

ФОРЕЛЬ РАЗБИВАЕТ ЛЕД

Михаил Кузмин

А. Д. Рагдловой

1

ПРЕВОЕ ВСТУПЛЕНИЕ

Ручей стал лаком до льда:
Зимнее небо учит.
Леденцовые цепи
Ломко брячат, как лютя.
Ударь, форель, проворней!
Тебе надоело ведь
Солнце аквамарином
И птиц скороходом—тень.
Чем круче сжимаешься—
Звук резче, возврат дружбы.
На льду стоит крестьянин.
Форель разбивает лед.

2

ВТОРОЕ ВСТУПЛЕНИЕ

Непрошенные гости
Сошлись ко мне на чай,
Тут, хочешь иль не хочешь,
С улыбкою встречай.

Глаза у них померкли
И пальцы словно воск,
И нищенски играет
По швам жидовский лоск.

Забывшие названья,
Небывшие слова . . .
От темных разговоров
Тупеет голова . . .

Художник утонувший
Топочет каблучком,
За ним гусарский мальчик
С простреленным виском . . .

THE TROUT IS BREAKING THROUGH THE ICE

by Mikhail Kuzmin

A. D. Radlova

1^{vii}

First Introduction

The brook stands sealed beneath the ice:
From there you study the wintry sky.
The frozen boundary surface makes
Fragile vibrations, like a lute.
Against it the nimble trout strikes.
Through it the aquamarine sun
Makes you frenzied with torment.
And a scampering bird's—shadow.
The sharper your thrashing presses—
The sharper the sound returns an echo.
Beside the ice a peasant stands.
The trout is breaking through the ice

2

A Later Introduction

Uninvited guests
Join with me for tea
Wanting or not to be here
Smiling as we meet.

Their eyes are cloudy dim,
Their fingers are like wax,
Wretchedly touching the rim
Of the weak-tea's steamy glass.

Forgotten are their names
Like nonexistent words . . .
Their talking is obscure
As from retarded minds . . .

The drowned painter clicks
And clatters his little heels,^{viii}
Behind him the soldier boy
With temples low-cut and pale . . .^{ix}

А вы и не дождались,
О, мистер Дориан,—
Зачем же так свободно
Садитесь на диван?

Ну, память-экономка,
Воображенье-воу,^x
Не пропущу вам даром
Проделки я такой!

3

ПЕРВЫЙ УДАР

Стояли холода, и шел «Тристан»,
В оркестре пело раненое море,
Зеленый край паром голубым,
Остановившееся дико сердце.
Никто не видел, как в театр вошла
И оказалась уж сидящей в ложе
Красавица, как полотно Брюллова.
Такие женщины живут в романах,
Встречаются они и на экране . . .
За них свершают кражи, преступленья,
Подкарауливают их кареты
И отравляются на чердаках.
Теперь она внимательно и скромно
Следила за смертельной любовью,
Не поправляя алого платочка,
Что сполз у ней с жемчужного плеча,
Не замечая, что за ней упорно
Следят в театре многие бинокли . . .
Я не был с ней знаком, но всё смотрел
На полумрак пустой, казалось, ложи . . .
Я был на спиритическом сеансе,
Хоть не люблю спиритов, и казался
Мне жалким медиум—забитый чех.
В широкое окно лился свободно
Голубоватый леденящий свет.
Луна как будто с севера светила:
Исландия, Гренландия и Тулэ,
Зеленый край за паром голубым . . .
И вот я помню: тело мне сковала
Какая-то дремота перед взрывом,
И ожидание, и отвращенье,

And even without the rain,
Oh, you, Mister Dorian—^{xi}
Do you so freely take
A place upon the divan?

Well, keeper of memory,
I cannot return this relic,
Your imaginary “boy”^{xii}
Free of charge, now can I?

3

First Stab

While she sat aloof, *Tristan* progressed,
With full orchestra, he sang of his wound to the sea,
Where the green borders on the blue,
Coming to rest in his tempestuous heart.
No one had seen how he had entered the hall
And happened to be sitting in a box
With the young beauty like a Bryullov canvas.^{xiii}
Such women inhabit only novels,
Or chat together as if projected on a screen . . .
Beyond them there are those who commit thefts
And crimes, or feed their carriage horses,
Or poison themselves in attics.
Meanwhile, fastidious and demure,
She looked down on the fatal lovers,
Not even replacing her scarlet shawl,
Which, due to her scrutiny of the hall
Through her lorgnette, had slipped
Completely from her pearly shoulders . . .
I did not know her, but everyone
In the dim, bland, pretentious boxes gazed . . .
Then I was with spiritualists at a séance
But I do not like spirits, and always seem
The sorry blockhead—forgetting what to do.
Inside the wide window, the freezing light
Spilled freely and turned blue.
From the north the moon was shinning:
Iceland, Greenland and Thule
Where green boarders on the blue . . .
And now I remember: my body was immobile,
With anticipation and disgust,
As if dozing before some outburst,

Последний стыд и полное блаженство . . .
А легкий стук внутри не прерывался,
Как будто рыба бьет хвостом о лед . . .
Я встал, шатаюсь, как слепой лунатик,
Дошел до двени . . . Вдруг она открылась . . .
Из аванложи вышел человек
Лет двадцати, с зелеными глазами;
Меня он принял будто за другого,
Пожал мне руку и сказал: «Покурим!»
Как сильно рыба двинула хвостом!
Безволие—преддверье высшей воли!
Последний стыд и полное блаженство!
Зеленый край за паром голубым!

4

ВТОРОЙ УДАР

Кони бьются, храпят в испуге,
Синей лентой обвиты дуги,
Волки, снег, бубенцы, пальба!
Что до страшной, как ночь, расплаты?
Разве дрогнут твои Карпаты?
В старом роге застынет мед?

Полость трепетя, диво-птица;
Визг полозьев—«гайда, Марица!»
Стоп . . . бежит с фонарем гайдук . . .
Вот какое твое домовье:
Свет мадонны у изголовья
И подкова хранит порог,

Галереи, сугроб на крыше,
За шпалерой скребутся мыши,
Чепраки, кружева, ковры!
Тяжело от парадных спален!
А в камин целый лес навален,
Словно ладан, шипит смола . . .

Отчего ж твои губы желты?
Сам не знаешь, на что пошел ты?
Тут о шутках, дружок, забудь?
Не богемских лесов вампиром—

Followed by shame, and later, unalloyed bliss . . . ¹
A light persistent knocking from inside
As if a fish beat its tail against ice . . .
I got up, tottering, like a blind sleepwalker,
Couples were leaving . . . Suddenly she appeared . . .
Stepping out from the outer foyer with a man
Of twenty years, his eyes were green;
He greeted me as if I were someone else,
And pressing my hand, said: “Have a smoke!”
Like a fish working its tail hard!
Weak-willed—or at the verge of a loftier will!
Followed by shame, and later, unalloyed bliss!
Where the green borders on the blue!

4

Second Stab

A steed beats its hoofs snorting to go,
A blue ribbon hangs from a hunting bow,
Wolves, snow, little bells, gun shots!
Like night, is this some dire retribution?
Is it the Carpathians, chilling to the bone?²
Is that honey hardened in an animal’s horn?

The lap rug jerks, a bird of wonder;
The sledge runners screech—“you, Mari,^{xiv} driver!^{xv}”
Halt . . . the driver escapes with your lantern . . .
Here, such as it is, is your household:
A Madonna lights the head of the bed,
A horseshoe enshrined above the doorstep.

Outside the hallway, the snowdrift crunches,
Behind the hedgerow a mouse scratches,
With saddle blankets, lace and carpets
The formal bedroom is heavily spread!
In the fireplace a whole tree is heaped,
And like incense, its sap sparkles . . .

Why does the fish seem yellow to you?
Do you even know what you came to do?
Dear, can you leave off making jokes?
No vampires here, no Bohemian woods—

¹ The exact same line is the penultimate line to section 12.

² The Carpathians appear in section 12.

Смертным братом пред целым миром
Ты назвался, так будь же брат!

А законы у нас в остроге,
Ах, привольны они и строги:
Кровь за кровь, за любовь любовь.
Мы берем и даем по чести,
Нам не надо кровавой мести:
От зарока развяжет Бог,

Сам себя осуждает Каин . . .
Побледнел молодой хозяин,
Резанул по ладони вкось . . .
Тихо капает кровь в стаканы:
Знак обмена и знак охраны . . .
На конюшню ведут коней . . .

5

ТРЕТИЙ УДАР

Как недобитое крыло,
Висит модель: голландский ботик.
Оранжевое светло
В стекле подобных библиотек.

Вчерашняя езда и нож,
И клятвы в диком исступленьи
Пророчили мне где-то ложь,
Пародию на преступленье . . .

Узнать хотелось . . . Очень жаль . . .
Но мужественный вид комфорта
Доказывал мне, что локаль
Не для бесед такого сорта.

Вы только что ушли, Шекспир
Открыт, дымится папироза . . .
«Сонеты»!! Как несложен мир
Под мартовский напев вопроса!

I name you now to the whole world—
So much like one—“brother for life!”

By law we should be imprisoned.
Alas, from free lives restricted:
But blood for blood and love for love.
Received and given in truest reverence,
Ours is no blood oath of simple vengeance
That God’s command can unmake,

Or place on one’s self the mark of Cain . . .
The young landlord seems to faint,
As he cuts a diagonal across his palm . . .
The silent blood drips into the flagon:
Sign of exchange, sign of protection . . .³
They lead the steeds out from the stable . . .

5

Third Stab

Like wings that can no longer beat,
Mounted specimens: Holland boats
In miniature. Or greenhouse light
As bright as from library windows.

Yesterday was the ride and the knife,
And the wild ecstatic blood-shared oath
That to me presaged deceit and lies
And some future travesty of truth.

To know desire . . . It is too bad
But manly types have brought me peace
In ways that among the local crowd
It is best for one not to converse.

You had hardly left, Shakespeare⁴
Lay open, a butt was still smoking . . .
“The Sonnets”!^{xvi} The world, wide and clear,
Spread beneath March wind’s questioning!

³ The “обмен” (exchange, pledge, bonding) is spiritual and transcendent. It appears also in section 6, 10 and 13.

⁴ Shakespeare appears in Section 12.

Как тает снежное шитье,
Весними гонясь лучами,
Так юношеское житье
Идет капризными путями!

6

ЧЕТВЕРТЫЙ УДАР

О, этот завтрак так похож
На оркестрованные дни,
Когда на каждый звук и мысль
Встает, лювя, противовес:
Рожок с кларнетом говорит,
В объятьях арфы флейта спит,
Вещает траурный тромбон—
Покойникам приятен он.

О, этот завтрак так похож
На ярмарочных близнецов:
Один живот, а сердца два,
Две головы, оиди спина . . .
Родились так, что просто срам,
И тайна непонятна нам.
Буквально вырази обмен—
Базарный выйдет феномен.

Ты просыпался—я не сплю,
Мы два крыла—одна душа,
Мы две души—один творец,
Мы два творца—один венец . . .
Зачем же заперт чемодан
И взят на стайцин билет?
О, этот завтрак так похож
Не подозрительную ложь!

Just as embroidered patterns of snow thaw
When spring follows the first warm rays
So youth exists young and raw,
In certainty of its erratic ways.

6

Fourth Stab

Oh how this breakfast is akin
To an orchestrated day,
In which each sound and thought,
My love, lifts up similes:
French horn and clarinet converse,
The harp and piccolo embrace,
The funereal trombone's lament—
Brings consolation to his end.

Oh how this breakfast is akin
To a pair of sideshow twins:⁵
A single stomach and two hearts,
Two heads and a single back . . .
Born to bear simple taunts,
A mystery inexplicable to us.
To reveal the exchange outright—⁶
Will make one a fairground sight.

You flow—I'm not submerged,
We are two wings—one soul,
We are two souls—one artist,
Two artists—one laureate . . .
Later with bags packed for the train
Why is the ticket still locked in?
Oh how this breakfast is akin
In no way to lies and suspicion.

⁵ Twins appear in section 12.

⁶ The “обмен” (exchange, pledge, bonding) is spiritual and transcendent. It appears also in section 4, 10 and 13.

ПЯТЫЙ УДАР

Мы этот май проводим как в деревне:
 Спустили шторы, сняли пиджаки,
 В переднюю бильярд перетащили
 И половину дня стучим киями
 От завтрака до чая. Ранний ужин,
 Вставанье на заре, купанье, лень . . .
 Раз вы уехали, казалось нужным
 Мне жить, как подобает жить в разлуке:
 Немного скучно и гигиенично.
 Я даже не особенно ждал писем
 И вздрогнул, увидавши штемпель: «Гринок».
 —Мы этот май проводим как в бреду,
 Безумствует шиповник, море сине
 И Эллниор прекрасней, чем всегда!
 Прости, мой друг, но если бы ты видел,
 Как поутру она в цветник выходит
 В голубовато-серой амазонке,—
 Ты понял бы, что страсть — сильнее воли.—
 Так вот она — зеленая стпана!—
 Кто выдумал, что мирские пейзажи
 Не могут быть ареной катастроф?

ЩЕСТОЙ УДАР / Баллада

Ушел моряк, румян и рус,
 За дальние моря.
 Идут года, седеет ус,
 Не ждет его семья.
 Уж бабушка за упокой
 Молилась каждый год,
 А у невесты молодой
 На сердце тяжкнй лед.
 Давно убрали со стола,
 Собака гложет кость,—
 Завыла, морду подняла . . .
 А на пороге гость.

Fifth Stab

We cheat this May as if numbed by ice:
 We unfurled the awning, removed our coats,
 Dragged the billiard table onto the porch
 And spent half the day from breakfast until tea
 Pinging balls with cues. An early dinner,
 Rising at dawn, bathing, relaxing . . .
 Time for you to go, and it seems I have to live
 As if to live in separation suited me:
 Somewhat prosaic, somewhat sanitized.
 I was not even waiting for a particular letter
 And winced at the canceled stamp” “Grinoke.”^{xvii} 7
 —We cheat this May as if in delirium,
 A madman with briar-roses, a blue sea
 And Elinor⁸ as breath-taking as ever!
 Forgive me, my friend, but look close and see
 When she comes out mornings to the garden,
 How she is a pigeon-gray Amazon—
 Look close and see how passion—only strong will. —
 Look and see and how this is her—green country! —⁹
 Whose idea was it that peaceful landscapes
 Cannot be arenas of catastrophe?

Sixth Stab / A Ballad^{xviii}

A goodly mariner, ruddy and tan,¹⁰
 By sea journeyed afar.
 As years went by, gray beard grew long,
 His family waited no more.
 The granny long since passed away
 Who each year prayed for him,
 The heart of his youthful fiancée
 Grew hard as ice with time,
 Under the table out of the way,
 With bone an old dog snores—
 Forgotten when his master sailed . . .
 He knows the guest at the door.^{xix}

⁷ Grinoke appears in sections 10 and 11.

⁸ Elinor appears in section 10.

⁹ The green country appears in sections 11 and 12.

¹⁰ In section 13, the returning lover regains his ruddy coloring.

Стоит моряк, лет морока.
—Кто тут хозяин? Эй!
Привез я весть издалека
Для мисстрис Анны Рэй.
—Какие вести скажешь нам?
Жених погиб давно!—
Он засучил рукав, а там
Родимое пятно.
—Я Эрвин Грин. Прошу встречать! —
Без чувств невеста—хлоп . . .
Отец заплакал, плачет мать,
Целует сына в лоб.
Везде звонят колокола
«Динг-донг» среди равнин,
Венчаться Анны Рэй пошла,
А с нею Эрвин Грин.
С волынками проводят их,
Оставили вдвоем.
Она:—Хочу тебя, жених,
Спросить я вот о чем:
Объездил много ты сторон,
Пока жила одной,—
Не позабыл ли ты закон
Своей страны родной?
Я видела: не чтишь святынь,
Колен не преклонял,
Не отвечаешь ты «аминь»,
Когда поют хорал,
В святой воде не мочишь рук,
Садишься без креста,—
Уж не отвергся ли ты, друг,
Спасителя Христа?
—Ложись спокойно, Анна Рэй,
И вздора не мели!
Знать, не видала ты людей
Из северной земли.
Там светит всем зеленый свет
На небе, на земле,
Из-под воды выходит цвет,
Как сердца на стебле,
И всё ясней для смелых душ
Замерзшая звезда . . .
А твой ли я жених и муж,
Смотри, смотри сюда!—

The mariner stands, old and confused.
 —Hey, who’s master here?!
 From distant parts I carry news
 For Mistress Annie Ray.
 —What news do you have to tell us then?
 Your betrothed’s vanished and gone!—
 He rolled up his sleeve and showed the skin
 Where a birthmark brightly shown.
 —I’m Ervin Green¹¹ and beg to come in! —
 Heartless the fiancée—slaps . . .
 The father sheds tears. And kissing her son
 On his forehead, the mother weeps,
 On every side ring out the bells,
 A festive “ding” and “dong,”—
 “Ding-dong” in celebration,
 For Annie Ray with the bridal veil
 Took Ervin Green as her own.
 With bagpipes leading the wedding band,
 The couple dropped behind.
 Says she: —To you, my wedded man,
 I beg to receive one boon.
 With detours as you journeyed far,
 Till now you lived alone—
 Have you forgotten the country’s law
 Of the land of your sweetheart’s home?
 I watched: did any shining visions,
 In prayer as you knelt down,
 Appear in answer to your “Amens,”
 Whenever they sang the hymns,
 And when you dipped the holy water
 And sat before the cross,
 Were you, dear, not rejected there
 By our Lord Savior Christ?
 —Hush, Annie Ray, and listen well
 And let this nonsense be!
 You have not seen the folk who dwell
 Far off in the north country.
 There shines to all a greenish light
 On earth and in the skies,
 From underwater a flower bright
 Blooms as its stems arise,
 As clear to one who risks his life
 As are the freezing stars . . .
 And whether we are man and wife
 See, see what now appears!—

¹¹ Ervin Green appears in section 11.

Она глядит и так и сяк,—
В себя ей не прийти . . .
Сорокалетний где моряк,
С которым жизнь вести?
И благороден, и высок,
Морщин не отыскать,
Ресницы, брови и висок,—
Ну, глаз не оторвать!
Румянец нежный заиграл,
Зарделася щека,—
Таким никто ведь не видал
И в детстве моряка.
И волос тонок, словно лен,
И губы горячей,
Чудесной силой надели
Зеленый блеск очей . . .
И вспомнилось, как много лет . . .
Тут . . . в замке . . .на горе . . .
Скончался юный баронет
На утренней заре.
Цветочком в гробе он лежал,
И убивалась мать,
А голос Аннушке шептал:
«С таким бы вот поспать!»
И легкий треск, и синий звон,
И огоньки кругом,
Зеленый и холодый сон
Окутал спящий дом.
Она горит и слезы льет,
Молиться ей невмочь.
А он стоит, ответа ждет . . .
Звенит тихонько ночь . . .
—Быть может, душу я гублю,
Ты, может,—сатана:
Но я таким тебя люблю,
Твоя на смерть жена!

She glanced about both here and there—
Herself she scarcely knew . . .
Where's the forty-year mariner,¹²
With whom her life's to be?
He is noble, he is tall,
No wrinkles mar his face,
Lashes, brow and forehead—well!
She can't avert her gaze!
A charming blush began to play
Making his cheeks turn red—
No one had seen him ever this way
Even in childhood.
And hair as fine as beaten flax,
And a passionate red mouth,
Of him the green light's sparkle makes
A miracle of strength.
And after all these years recalled . . .
Here . . . at the castle . . . his sorrow . . .
The youthful-looking baron died
Just at the break of the marrow.
Flowers strewed the grave where he lay,
The mother sore did weep,
And Annie's voice did speak softly:
“With the likes of him must I then sleep!”
With a gentle crash and dark-blue peal,
And small lights all around,
Hers was a dream both green and cold,
As covered she slept at home.
Her body burns, her eyes shed tears,
Unbearable, she prays.
And there he stands to answer her . . .
Amid night's dimest rays . . .
—Like Satan—I can destroy your soul
If I should so desire;
But likes of you, love I will,
Till death, my wife, transpires!

¹²

Forty is also used in section 11.

СЕДЬМОЙ УДАР

Неведомый купальщик
 Купается тайком.
 Он водит простодушно
 Обиженным глазком.
 Напрасно прикрываешь
 Стыдливость наготы—
 Проходим деревенским
 Неинтересен ты.
 Перекрестился мелко,
 Нырнул с обрыва вниз . . .
 А был бы ты униее,
 Так стал бы сам Нарцисс.
 И мошки, и стрекозы,
 И сельский солнцепек . . .
 Ты в небо прямо смотришь
 И от земли далек . . .
 Намек? Воспоминанье?
 Всё тело под водой
 Блестит и отливает
 Зеленою слюдой.
 Держи скорей налево
 И наплывешь на мель! . . .
 Серебряная бьется
 Форель, форель, форель! . .

ВОСЬМОЙ УДАР

На составные части разлагает
 Кристалл лучи—и радуга видна,
 И зайчики веселые живут.
 Чтоб вновь родиться, надо умереть.
 Я вышел на крыльцо; темнели розы
 И пахли розовою плащаницей.
 Закатное малиновое небо
 Чертили ласточки, и пруд блестел.
 Вдали пылило стадо. Вдруг я вижу:
 Автомобиль несется как стрела
 (Для здешних мест редчайшее явление),
 И развеивается зеленый плащ,

Seventh Stab

An unexpected swimmer
 Mysteriously swims.
 He drives toward an opening
 That compels and maddens him.
 Embarrassed you try to hide
 Your nakedness in vain—
 And take no interest in
 The surrounding rural scene.
 Making the sign of the cross
 He dove straight down from a cliff . . .
 Then cleverly was standing
 Like Narcissus himself.
 With the gnats, and dragonflies,
 And a blazing country sun . . .
 From the heavens you look down
 As if from a distant land . . .
 Premonition? Memory?
 His body underwater
 Sparkles and is shot through
 With a mica green color.
 The current near the bank
 Swiftly runs, keep left! . . .
 Silvery bright and beating
 The trout, the trout, the trout! . .

Eighth Stab

The crystal spreads out beams into distinct¹³
 And separate parts—a rainbow then appears
 Refracting merrily as if alive.
 If one is born again, one first must die.
 I stepped on to the porch; the roses dimmed
 Beneath a cloak of rosy furrowed clouds.
 The sunset spattered swallows out across
 The crimson sky, and sparkled on the pond.
 A far flock glowed. And suddenly I see:
 A motorcar that darts up arrow-like
 (A rare phenomenon around these parts),
 And out of it unfurls a bright green cloak,

¹³ The refraction of light into the spectrum appears also in sections 11 and 12.

Я не поспел еще сообразить,
Как уж смотрел в зеленые глаза,
И руку жали мне другие руки,
И пыльное усталое лицо
По-прежнему до боли было мило.
— Вот я пришел . . . Не в силах . . . Погибаю.
Наш ангел превращений отлетел,
Еще немного—я совсем ослепну,
И станет роза розой, небо небом,
И больше ничего! Тогда я прах
И возвращаюсь в прах! Во мне иссякли
Кровь, желчь, мозги и лимфа. Боже!
И подкрепленья нет и нет обмена!
Несокрушимо окружен стеклом я
И бьюсь как рыба! «А зеленый плащ?»
— Зеленый плащ? Какой? — «Ты в нем приехал».
— То призрак, — нет зеленого плаща.—
Американское пальто от пыли,
Перчатки лайковые, серый галстук
И кепка, цветом нежной rose champagne.^{xx}
«Останься здесь!» — Ты видишь: не могу!
Я погружаюсь с каждым днем всё глубже! —
Его лицо покрылось мелкой дрожью,
Как будто рядом с ним был вивисектор.
Поцеловал меня и быстро вышел,
Внизу машина уж давно пыхла.
Дней через пять я получил письмо,
Стоял всё тот же странный штемпель: «Гринок».
— Я всё хотел тебе писать, но знаешь,
Забывчивость простибельна при счастье,
А счастье для меня то — Эллинор,
Как роза — роза и окно — окно.
Ведь, надобно признаться, было б глупо
Упрямо утверждать, что за словами
Скрывается какой-то «высший смысл».
Итак, я — счастлив, прямо, просто — счастлив.—
Приходят письма к нам на пятый день.

I have no time at all to ponder it
 As I look straight into the sharp green eyes,
 And somehow changed his hand grasps mine,
 And right away a dusty weary face
 Inspires in me the old exquisite pang.
 —I felt strange there . . . Deminished . . . Weak.
 Our angel of the transformations fled,¹⁴
 A while longer—I'll be fully dazed,
 And the rose be just a rose, the sky be sky,
 No longer vast! I then, again, from dust
 Began to turn to dust! And drying up
 Were blood and bile and brains and lymph. Good God!
 No sign of rest and no sign of exchange!¹⁵
 I am encircled by unyielding glass
 And like a fish I stab! “But a bright green cloak?”
 —Green cloak? Which one? — “The one in which you came.”
 —That? an apparition — there's no green cloak. —
 A large American coat to keep out dust,
 Soft gloves, a jaunty cap, and gray cravat¹⁶
 The color of a fine rosé champagne.^{xxi 17}
 “Stay here!” — But can't you see: not possible!
 I sink more deeply with each passing day! —
 A fleeting chill has passed across his face
 As though he were a vivisectionist.
 I acquiesced and quickly stepped outside,
 The motor had been chugging all the while.
 And after five days I received a letter
 With the foreign cancellation: “Grinoke.”¹⁸
 — I only longed to write to you, lest you
 By luck excusably forget, but that
 Was just my luck—because with Elinor,¹⁹
 A window is—a window, rose—a rose.
 You see, one ought to recognize, even
 If one thinks it foolish to condone,
 That within words a “higher meaning” lurks.
 So then by simple luck, by pure raw luck,—^{xxii}
 A letter on the fifth day came to us.

¹⁴ The angel reappears in section 12.

¹⁵ The “обмен” (exchange, pledge, bonding) is spiritual and transcendent. It appears also in section 4, 6, and 13,

¹⁶ The American coat and cravat appear in section 12.

¹⁷ The exact same line appears in section 10.

¹⁸ Grinoke appears in section 7 and 11.

¹⁹ Elinor appears in section 10.

ДКВЯТЫЙ УДАР

Не друзей — приятелей зову я:
 С ними лучше время проводить.
 Что прошло, о том я не горюю,
 А о будущем что ворожить?
 Не разгул—опрятное веселье,
 Гладкие, приятные слова,
 Не томит от белых вин похмелье,
 И ясна пустая голова.
 Каждый час наполнен так прилежно,
 Что для суток сорок их готовь,
 И щекочет эпидерму нежно
 То, что называется любовь.
 Да менять как можно чаще лица,
 Не привязываться к одному.
 Неужели мне могли присниться
 Бредни про зеленую страну?
 — Утонули? — В переносном смысле.
 — Гринок? — Есть. Шотландский городок.
 Все метафоры как дым повисли,
 Но уйдут кольцом под потолок,
 Трезвый день разгонит все химеры,—
 Можно многие привести примеры.
 А голос пел слегка, слегка:
 —Шумит зеленая река,
 И не спасти нам челнока.
 В перчатке лайковой рука
 Всё будет звать издалека,
 Не примешь в сердце ты пока
 Эрвина Грина, моряка.

ДЕСЯТЫЙ УДАР

Чередованье милых развлечений
 Бывает иногда скучнее службы,
 Прийти на помощь может только случай,

Ninth Stab

Companionless—I seek out other friends:
 Preferring now to spend my time with them.
 I do not grieve what's past, nor what portends
 Of future happenings, dare I assume?
 No revelry—no sociable good cheer,
 No voluble and charming pleasantries,
 And from white wine I'm not hungover nor
 Worn out with obvious and glassy eyes.
 For forty days and nights I am prepared,²⁰
 My time is diligently occupied,
 Caressingly I soothe my flesh with care,
 And to myself I say that I am loved.
 Some people may change faces when they want,
 They may not be restricted to one only.
 Is it quite possible I've simply dreamt
 Up all this nonsense of a green country?²¹
 — But is he drowning? — Figuratively.
 — And Grinoke?²² — It exists. A small Scots town.
 All metaphors suspended smokily
 Will flee beneath the ceiling in a ring,
 And sober day dispel all chimeras—
 Perhaps they also are examples set for us.
 A voice is singing clear and far:
 —The river green, one starts to hear,
 The tiny boat we cannot save.
 A waving hand in soft kid glove
 Still beckons to you from afar
 Until your heart learns to endure
 Ervin Green, the mariner.²³

Tenth Stab

To alter some of my light amusements, I
 At times go out to those drab buildings where
 On entering I test my skill at chance,

²⁰ The reference to the 40 days' flood in the story of Noah in *Genesis* recalls the end with God's sign of the rainbow, which appears also in sections 10 and 12. The number 40 is also used in section 8.

²¹ The green country appears in sections 7 and 12.

²² Grinoke appears in sections 7 and 10.

²³ Ervin Green appears in section 8.

Но случая не приманишь, как Жучку.
Храм случая—игорные дома,
Описывать азарт спаленных глаз,
Губ пересохших, помертвелых лбов
Не стану я. Под выкрики крупье
Просиживал я ночи напролет.
Казалось мне, сижу я под водою.
Зеленое сукно напоминало
Зеленый край за паром голубым . . .
Но я искал ведь не воспоминаний,
Которых тщательно я избегал,
А дожидался случая. Однажды
Ко мне подходит некий человек
В больших очках и говорит: — Как видно,
Вы вовсе не игрок, скорей любитель,
Или, верней, искатель ощущений,
Ию, в сущности, здесь—страшная тоска:
Однообразно и неинтересно.
Теперь еще не поздно. Может быть,
Вы не откажетесь пройтись со мною
И осмотреть собрание небольшое
Диковинок? Изъездил всю Европу
Я с юных лет; в Египте даже был.
Образовался маленький музей, —
Меж хламом есть занятные вещицы,
И я, как всякий коллекционер,
Ценю внимание; без разделенья,
Как все другие, эта страсть—мертва. —
Я быстро согласился, хоть по правде
Сказать, не нравился мне этот человечек:
Казался он назойливым и глупым.
Но было только без четверти час,
И я решительно не знал, что делать.
Конечно, если разбирать как случай—
Убого было это приключенье!
Мы шли квартала три; подъезд обычный,
Обычная мещанская квартирка,
Обычны подделки скарабеев,
Мушкетеры, сломанные телескопы,
Подъеденные молью парики
Да заводные куклы без ключей
Мне на мозги садилась паутина,
Подташнивало, голова кружилась,
И я уж собирался уходить . . .
Хозяин чуть замаялся и сказал:
— Вам, кажется, не нравится? Конечно,

But chance is not what lures me like a cur.
 In the church of chance—the secret gaming-house,
 I cannot start to tell the fervid sleeping
 Eyes, parched lips, and brows grown numb and pale.
 And there beside the shouting *croupier*
 I sat the whole night through without a break.
 It seemed to me I struggled under water,
 The green *baize*^{xxiii} table cover calls to mind
 The green country²⁴ beyond the blue ferry . . .
 But nothing there I saw could call to mind
 The one who'd gone away, and so I took
 My chance at playing cards. A man with large
 Eyeglasses one time spoke: — Obviously
 You are no player, just an amateur,
 Or better yet, a seeker of sensations,
 But in essence here—it's all a dreadful bore,
 Monotonous and quite uninteresting.
 It's not yet late. Could it be that you
 Might be induced to walk along with me
 As I go view some minor local sights?
 And I am one, who in my younger years
 Had toured all Europe; even Egypt once.
 Things that constitute a small museum, —
 Among the junk and entertaining trifles,
 Like all collectors, I find value in
 What calls attention; no selectiveness,
 This passion is, like all the others—dead. —
 I hastened to agree to go, although
 I do admit I did not like this man:
 He seemed both brash and asinine.
 But it was now a quarter until one,
 And I had no idea what to do.
 However chance arranged it all—and yes,
 This venture was becoming a sordid mess!
 We crossed three neighborhoods; the average gates,
 The average middle class apartment blocks,
 Bourgeois and drab, the average forgeries
 In scarabs, muskets, broken telescopes,
 And well-worn parkas eaten up by moths
 And lovely puppets who had lost their sticks.
 My brain was overgrown with spider webs,
 Disoriented, and my head was spinning.
 I still intended, even then, to leave . . .
 Just then the owner halted me to say:
 —Do we displease you? So it seems. Of course

²⁴ The green country appears in sections 7 and 11.

Для знатока далёко не товар.
Есть у меня еще одна забава,
Но не вполне закончена она.
Я всё ищу вторую половину.
На днях, надеюсь, дело будет в шляпе.
Быть, может, взглянете? — Близнец! — «Близнец?!»
— Близнец. — «И одиночка?» — Одиночка,
Вошли в каморку мы: посередине
Стоял аквариум, покрытый сверху
Стеклом голубоватым, словно лед.
В воде форель вилась меланхолично
И мелодично била о стекло.
— Она пробьет его, не сомневайтесь. —
«Ну, где же ваш близнец?» — Сейчас, терпенье. —
Он отворил в стене, с ужимкой, шкаф
И отскочил за дверцу. Там, на стуле,
На коленкоровом зеленом фоне
Оборванное спало существо
(Как молния мелькнуло—«Калигари!»):
Сквозь кожу зелень явственно сквозила,
Кривились губы горько и преступно,
Ко лбу прилипли русые колечки,
И билась вена на сухом виске,
Я с ожиданием и отвращеньем
Смотрел, смотрел, не отрывая глаз . . .
А рыба бьет тихонько о стекло . . .
И легкий треск и синий звон слились . . .
Американское пальто и галстук . . .
И кепка цветом нежной gose champagne.^{xxiv}
Схватился за сердце и дико вскрикнул . . .
— Ах, Боже мой, да вы уже знакомы?
И даже . . . может быть . . . не веню счастью! . . .
«Открой, открой зеленые глаза!
Мне всё равно, каким тебя послала
Ко мне назад зеленая страна!
Я—смертный брат твой. Помнишь, там, в Карпатах?
Шекспир еще тобою не дочитан
И радугой расходятся слова.
Последний стыд и полное блаженство! . . .»
А рыба бьет, и бьет, и бьет, и бьет.

For connoisseurs these wares are far from fine.
 And yet for me it has become a game
 And one that's not yet played out to the end.
 I had been seeking for my second half
 All day and trust there's light at tunnel's end.
 Isn't he clear at a glance? — A twin!— “A twin?”²⁵
 — Twin. — “Separated?” — Separated
 And so we entered the small room: there stood
 In the middle, an aquarium, on top
 Covered, like ice, with bluish tinted glass.
 A sluggish trout threaded the water and
 Rhythmically beat against the glass.
 —Its beating's lackadaisical. —
 “Well, where is your twin now?” — Be patient please. —
 He opened up a passage in the wall,
 And smirking, jumped behind the door. And there,
 On a stool, with calico green background was
 A ragged drunken entity of sorts
 (Like the lightning bolt in — “Caligari!”):
 While tints of green were showing through his skin,
 His lips were twisted, sinister and strained,
 And the dry veins across his temple beat,
 With light-brown ringlets pressed against his brow,
 I stared with expectation and disgust
 And could not stop my eyes from staring hard . . .
 The fish beat gingerly against the glass . . .
 A gentle clinking thumped and brushed the blue . . .
 A large American coat, and gray cravat . . .²⁶
 The color of a fine rosé champagne.^{xxv 27}
 A clutching at the heart and wild scream . . .
 — Oh, my God, why are you so familiar?
 And luckily . . . not just veins. . . can still beat! . . .
 “Open, open your green eyes again!
 I am the same to whom you used to send,
 Those distant postings from the green country!
 I am—your mortal brother. The Carpathians—²⁸
 Remember? You were reading Shakespeare then²⁹
 And the words disperse in the rainbow sign.³⁰
 Followed by shame, and later, unalloyed bliss! . . .³¹
 And the fish beat, and beat, and beat, and beat.

²⁵ Twins appear in section 6.

²⁶ The American coat and cravat appear in section 10.

²⁷ The exact same line appears in section 10.

²⁸ The Carpathians appear in section 4.

²⁹ Shakespeare appears in section 5.

³⁰ The diffusion of light into the spectrum appears also in sections 10 and 11.

³¹ The exact same line appears 13 lines from the end of section 3.

ОДИННАДЦАТЫЙ УДАР

- Ты дышишь? Ты живешь? Не призрак ты?
- Я—первенец зеленой пустоты.

- Я слышу сердца стук, теплеет кровь . . .
- Не умерли, кого зовет любовь . . .

- Румяней щеки, исчезает тлен . . .
- Таинственный свершается обмен . . .

- Что первым обновленный взгляд найдет? —
- Форель, я вижу, разбивает лед. —

- На руку обопрись . . . Попробуй . . . встань . . .
- Плотнеет выветрившаяся ткань . . .

- Зеленую ты позабудець лень?
- Выхожу на следующую ступень! —

- И снова можешь духом пламенеть?
- Огонь на золото расплавит медь.

- И ангел превращений снова здесь?
- Да, ангел превращений снова здесь,

ДВЕНАДЦАТЫЙ УДАР

На мосту белеют кони,
 Оснеженные зимой,
 И, прижав ладонь к ладони,
 Быстро едем мы домой.

Нет слов, одни улыбки,
 Нет луны, горит звезда—
 Измененья и ошибки
 Протекают, как вода.

Вдоль Невы, вокруг канала, —

ELEVENTH STAB

- You breathe? You live? No apparition?
 — I—the first-born of the green emptiness.
- I hear a heart pound, warm with blood . . .
 — I, who asked for love, am not yet dead . . .
- Ruddy cheeks come back, decay reverses . . .³²
 — An enigmatic exchange is unfolding³³ . . .
- What does restored sight first discover? —
 — A fish, I see, breaking through the ice. —
- Let my arms enclose you . . . Try . . . standing . . .
 — It makes way for air in the thick covering . . .
- From unconscious laziness did I make you green?
 — I am rising up to the next level. —
- And may your spirit flame again?
 — The fire melts copper into gold.
- And is the angel of transformations here again?³⁴
 — Yes the angel of transformations is here again.

Twelfth Stab

At the bridge the horse grows white
 Covered by snow coming down
 And hand into hand is gripped
 As quickly we drive back home.

There are no words, just smiles,
 No moon, just burning stars—
 Cycles and anomalies
 In constant flux, like water.

Along the Nevá, around the canals, —

³² The mariner in section 8 is described as ruddy.

³³ The “обмен” (exchange, pledge, bonding) is spiritual and transcendent; also sections 4, 6 and 10.

³⁴ The angel had fled in section 10.

И по лестнице с ковром
Ты взбегаешь, как бывало,
Как всегда, в знакомый дом.

Два веночка из фарфора,
Два прибора на столе,
И в твоём зеленом взоре
По две розы на стебле.

Слышно, на часах в передней
Не спеша двенадцать бьёт . . .
То моя форель последний
Разбивает звонко лед.

Живы мы? и все живые.
Мы мертвы? Завидый гроб!
Чтя обряды вековые,
Из бутылки пробка — хлоп!

Места нет печали хмурой;
Ни сомнений, ни забот!
Входит в двери белокурый,
Сумасшедший Новый год!

15

ЗАКЛЮЧЕНИЕ

А знаете? Ведь я хотел сначала
Двенадцать месяцев изобразить
И каждому придумать назначенье
В кругу занятий легких и влюбленных.
А вот что получилось! Видно, я
И не влюблен, да и отяжелел.
Толпой нахлынули воспоминанья,
Отрывки из прочитанных романов,
Покойники смешались с живыми,
И так всё перепуталось, что я
И сам не рад, что всё это затеял.
Двенадцать месяцев я сохранил
И приблизительную дал погоду,—
И то не плохо. И потом я верю,
Что лед разбить возможно для форели,
Когда она упорна. Вот и всё.

1927

(Yeremen 531-546)

And up the snow covered stairs,
You run straight into the house
As if welcome and long familiar.

Two small china garlands,
At the table two places, set,
And deep in your green eyes
Two roses on a stem reflect.

The entrance clock resounds
With twelve unhurried strokes . . .
This at last is my trout's resonant
Breaking through of the ice.

Are we alive? alive and real.
And were we dead? The longed-for grave!
And in its time-honored ritual
The cork from the bottle—pops!

This is not a place of mourning;
Nor of distrust, nor of care!
Come, fair-haired, through the door
Into this crazy New Year!

15

Epilogue^{xxvi}

Can't you tell? Right from the start
I tried to make a record of twelve months
And simply show how each encounter went
As I lightly explored the circle of desire.
And here is what turned out! Clearly, I
Desired nothing and became dejected.
It is reminiscent of an unruly mob
Extracted from some once read novel,
The deceased all jumbled with the living,
Mixed up in such a way that I myself
Was hardly pleased I'd even started it.
Through twelve months I persevered
And gave the approximate weather
And that's not bad. And I trust it's possible
For a trout to break through the ice
If it persists hard enough. That is all.

1927

ⁱ The Russian verb “разбивает” is in the imperfective mood. Most references to the poema in English translate the title “The Trout Breaks the Ice”; Malmstad and Shmakov translate it “The Trout Breaking Through the Ice.” Their title is more accurate grammatically; more importantly, it reflects the poema better, for the trout struggles to break through the ice and succeeds only at the end. “The Trout Breaks The Ice” suggests that the action occurs and is over with, but the poema is about the effort and struggle to break through.

ⁱⁱ Poema is the word usually used in English for the 19th century Russian genre of a long poem that mixed narrative and reflective elements. Editions of Russian poets typically group their poetry, regardless of chronology, in a section together. In English, works as disparate in style and length as Wordsworth *The Prelude* and Eliot’s *The Waste Land* might fit the genre definition of poema. Originally it was always narrative in structure, but cycles of poems around a narrative situation came to be called poetry as well.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Russian word “УДАР” is difficult to translate. Malmstead and Shmakov opt for “thrust,” to capture both the trout’s action in attempting to break through the ice, and to evoke sexual innuendo. But “thrust” and “thrust through” are so similar with the completing of action often implied in the action of “thrusting” that the verb seems misleading. The Russian word carries considerable violence and suddenness. It means everything from hit, strike, give a blow, to slam as in slamming one’s fist down. Mager chose “stab” because one often has to “stab at” something a number of times before breaking through or completing the action, thus, the trout would stab at the ice. In English, “stab” also carries a secondary connotation of “to attempt” as in “He took a stab

at it.” Thus, the sections of the poem are “stabs” at telling the story rather than the closure implied by terms like chapter or canto. The sexual innuendo is not as transparent as with “thrust” although more suddenness and violence are evoked, which seem part of Kuzmin’s intention. No single English word is fully satisfactory.

^{iv} His age, association with the color green and in particular his green eyes identify him strongly with Vsevolod Kniazev. Vsevolod Gabreilovich Kniazev (1891-1913) was an amateur poet and handsome young military cadet. Thus this emotional moment is very close to the phantasmagoric material in Anna Akhmatova’s *Poem Without a Hero*, and the beautiful woman equates with Ol’ga Sudeikina (actress, dancer, Petersburg beauty), who in real life had seduced Kniazev away from Kuzmin almost twenty years prior to *Trout*, and who is the “heroine” of Akhmatova’s poem which offers a cryptic fictionalization of the affair leading the Kniazev’s suicide.

^v The expressionist silent film classic *Das Kabinett des Doktor Caligari* (The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari) was released in 1919, directed by Robert Wiene. It starred Friedrich Feher, Hans Heinrich, Werner Kraus and Conrad Veidt. Veidt (1893-1943) also played the lead role in *Anders Als Die Anderen* (Different From the Others) the 1919 polemical film in defense of homosexual rights. Caligari broke new ground in terms of suspense, camera angles and editing, and the use of surrealistic sets. The story played with narrative perspectives, reality and imagination, sanity and insanity. It was widely viewed throughout Europe and the Americas and quickly established itself as a classic and model. Later the expressionist style came to be associated with German Weimar Republic decadence which Soviet critics condemned as bourgeois and socially

reactionary, even through Soviet filmmakers learned from and borrowed techniques from German expressionist films like *Caligari*.

vi Without narrating the evidence or analyzing the inner dynamics of these post-Revolution households, among major writers of the period, we can list the following examples of queerly arranged households and relationships.

- Vladimir Maiakovskii's place in the home of Osip and Lili Brik from the early years after the Revolution until his suicide.
- Nikolai Kliuev's role in Sergei Esenin's life both between and during his various marriages and affairs, from the time they met in the early 1910s until Esenin's suicide.
- Sergei Rudikov's residence with Osip and Mandel'shtam, Nadezhda during the Voronezh years in the mid-1930s.
- Mandel'shtam's simultaneous relationships with his wife and Mariia Petrovykh.
- The years of Pasternak's uneasy transition from his first to his second marriage.
- Anna Akhmatova, Artur Lur'e and Ol'ga Sudeikina in the early 1920s.
- Akhmatova's marriage to Nikolai Punin while he continued to live with his first wife, Anna Ahrens, and their daughter—a household that lasted over 20 years.

This list reflects only poets who have been well-researched since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Similar lists of novelists, playwrights, screenwriters, musicians, composers, dancers, actors, painters, sculptors and other intellectuals could be compiled.

vii As an appendix to Gibian and Tjalsma's *Russian Modernism: Culture and the Avant-Garde, 1900-1930*, a full text of Kuzmin's poema is printed (217-231). It is "reproduced from M. Kuzmin, *Forel rasbivaet led, stikhy 1925-1928* (Leningrad: Isdatel'stvo Pisatelei ve Leningrade, 1929). It is essentially the same as Yeremen's

except that the sections do not have numbers, only titles. This is the text used by Malmstad and Shmakov.

viii Malmstad and Shmakov identify this as Nikolai Sapunov. Nikolay Nikolayevich Sapunov (1880-1912) was a painter, and set and costume designer. He collaborated on productions with Kuzmin and with Meyerhold, among others, and painted a portrait of Kuzmin, which at one point seemed to be “possessed,” such that painter and subject contemplated destroying it unfinished. Among their collaborations was the sensational and famous production of Aleksandr Blok’s *The Puppet Booth* (in 1907), with Kuzmin’s music and Sapunov’s sets under Vsevolod Meierkhol’d’s direction.

Malmstad and Bogomolov’s biography make no mention of an affair between Kuzmin and Sapunov; but the essay by Malmstad and Shmakov includes Sapunov as one of the “two previous friends or lovers” who appeared as uninvited guests at the beginning of *Trout* (138). The poema states that this “guest” had drowned.

ix Malmstad and Shmakov identify this as Kniazev.

x “Boy” is in English in the original text.

xi An allusion to Dorian Gray, the handsome young man in Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

xii In the Russian text, “boy” is in English.

xiii Karl Briullov (1799-1842) was a society painter of portraits who often depicted ladies with a slightly exposed shoulder.

^{xiv} “Марица” are the Mari people from the Mari Autonomous Republic in the USSR the former Cheremis region in the middle Volga valley with Yoshkar-Ola the capital city. There language is Finno-Ugric.

^{xv} The word “гайдук” has two meanings: (1) historically a heyduck was a rebel fighting the Turks in the Balkans, or (2) the footman in a noble household.

^{xvi} The abandoned open volume of *Sonnets* by Shakespeare, just having been perused, is indeed a significant detail. Malmstad and Shmakov (148) see it as allusion to the three-way relationship that several of the sonnets explores, an older man infatuated with a young man who is seduced by the older man’s mistress, the infamous “dark lady.” Beginning in the late 19th century and continuing until today, theory after theory has been put forward, that attempts to discover a story that links the sonnets into a single (or sometimes two) coherent sequences. Oscar Wilde’s “The Portrait of Mr. W. H.” (1889) is one of the first such attempts, albeit embedded in a short story, and one of the first to fully exploit the possible same-sex aspects of the poems. Kuzmin knew Wilde’s work, and was involved in performances of some of his plays, and may have known this story. The sonnets, however, are complicated and do not easily reduce to a coherent story. Many of the long first group, the so-called “young nobleman” group, recycle a narrow set of themes through an astonishing array of metaphors and rhetorical voices: the ephemeral beauty of youth and its power to generate unrequited desire, the frustrated belief that love is ennobling, and the artist’s claim that his linguistic prowess can bestow immortality. Any and all of these could be called upon as contexts for Kuzmin’s allusion. Perhaps, mention of the opening sonnets functions more as a cultural sign than as a specific allusion. In the post-Wilde era, mention of Wilde and by extension Shakespeare’s

sonnets often displayed a homosexual sub-culture's shared practices of reading, which the educational and official scholarly communities continued to resist. Contemporary to Kuzmin, demonstrations of similar reading practices have been found among gay writers and readers in Germany, America, England, France and elsewhere. Kuzmin's work in many ways, arguably, was a conscious project to build on and expand a "known," albeit hermetic, "gay canon." Indeed, by the end of the 20th century, his novel *Wings* and early volume *Alexandrian Songs* had achieved the status of gay literary classics well beyond Russia.

^{xvii} One can only speculate about why Kuzmin has the letter postmarked from a village in Scotland or why this woman is named Elinor, when none of the other persons in the poema is named except Annie Ray and Ervin Green, both also associated with ballads. Malmstad and Shmakov speculate that both names are linked to ballad literature, as in Edgar Allen Poe's poem and the Scottish boarder ballads. The next poem, Sixth Stab, is called a ballad. Furthermore they see the Scots references linked to other northern locations such as Greenland and Iceland, and therefore with the poema's ice imagery (149-50).

^{xviii} As Malmstad and Shmakov point out Kuzmin draws on a number of literary ballads: Tennyson's "Enoch Arden" (which also has an Annie Ray), Bürger's "Lenore" and its various Russian adaptations, and the Scottish border ballads like "The Demon Lover" with their ambiguities about who is living and dead. They also point to debt to Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," which is strong indeed. Not only does Kuzmin emulate Coleridge's ballad form, instead of the typically Russian one, the return of a mariner who has experienced some sort of transformative experience and must tell it,

is at the heart of both poems. (Malmstad and Shmakov, 130-1) Lermontov's "The Demon" with the theme of a lover who might destroy the woman's soul lies behind the poem as well, although Kuzmin's mariner apparently renounces his demonic powers and accepts conventional marriage instead.

xix The motif of the old dog being the only one to recognize the returning master goes back to Odysseus and his return to Ithaca in *The Odyssey*.

xx In English in the original text.

xxi In English in the original text.

xxii The original Russian has a period before the dash.

xxiii Baize is a coarse felt fabric, usually green or olive colored, used to cover billiard and dice tables.

xxiv In French in the original text.

xxv In English in the original text.

xxvi Pushkin often ends his poem with ironically playful addresses to the reader that underplay the significance of the work at hand. Kuzmin appropriates this Pushkinian device in his own epilogue. A good example is the final stanzas of Aleksandr Pushkin's *ДОМИК В КОЛОМНЕ* (*The Modest House in Kolomna*).

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