

Volume I Poet's Theatre Series No. 17/Producer: Scotti D'Arcy/Russian Consultant: Isabelle Burke

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FL 9868

THE POETRY OF

YEVTUSHENKO

READ BY MILT COMMONS with Jere Jacob
IN ENGLISH

ZIMA JUNCTION



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get honester" 24:49

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woke us" 23:37

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with Jere Jacob

IN ENGLISH

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

Library of Congress Card Catalogue No. R 67-3834

© 1967 Folkways Records & Service Corporation,
701 Seventh Ave., New York, New York 10036

Distributed by Folkways/Scholastic Records,
906 Sylvan Ave., Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey 07632

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FL 9868

FOLKWAYS RECORDS Album No. FL 9868
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The Poetry of YEVTUSHENKO

Volume I Poet's Theatre Series No. 17 / Producer: Scotti D'Arcy
read by Milt Commons and Jere Jacob
in English
Russian Consultant: Isabelle Burke

Yevgeny Yevtushenko

Yevtushenko is the spokesman for young intellectuals here and abroad. His, *A Precocious Autobiography*, that tells of this brilliant poet's life and of his fight for freedom under Stalin and Khrushchev, is currently on the best-seller list. His poetry is always in demand. Whenever it appears in print, it is at once a runaway best seller. He is one of the most controversial writers of our time. His courage to speak the truth has been a vital aid in promoting good relations between Russia and the United States. In this album we present, through his poetry, the man and his bloodless intellectual revolt against Russian dictatorship and censorship.

Yevtushenko's poetry is young, fresh, outspoken; it is rich with his dreams, memories, thoughts and realities. He can protest in a loud voice against injustice, as in his noted poem, "Babiy Yar," written about the Jewish pogrom at Kiev. By the same token, he can express in the most lyric and gentle tones the delicate experience of personal love, as in the quiescent lines of, "Waiting," and, "Colours." Whatever his subject, he brilliantly records his impressions with an eloquent concern for his fellow human being. His work is both sincere and dramatic -- assuring the listener an enriching literary experience.

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Zima Junction

As we get older we get honest,
that's something.
And these objective changes correspond
like a language to me and my mutations.
If the way I see you now is not the way
in which we saw you once, if in you
what I see now is new
it was by self-discovery I found it.
I realize that my twenty years might be
less than mature: but for a reassessment:
what I said and ought not to have said,
and ought to have said and was silent.

My life has often been by backward glances,
few personal emotions, thoughts or wishes,
and in my life, its even turns and courses,
some generous impulse but nothing finished.
Yet always here these means for a new design,
new strength, touching the same ground
where you first moved bare-footed, kicking up dust.
I rely often on this ordinary thought:
near Lake Baikal my own town waiting for me.

And the wish to see the pines again,
mute witnesses of time and its distance,
of my great-grandfather and of the others
in exile here after a peasant's rising.
Here herded from the extremities of distance
through mud and rain with small children and wives

Ukrainian peasants from Zhitomir province.
The trees had spiders' webs.
In wanderings finding fortitude to forget
what each of them loved more than his life.
The guards looked with uneasy eyes
at hands heavy with veins, and the sergeant
sat playing by fire-light: clubs were trumps.
All the night through my great-grandfather
sat thinking there, and lighted up his pipes
with a fiery coal held in his peasant fingers.
What did he think of?

Now it would seem to them
arriving there in an unfamiliar region:
welcomes or threats - God knows what it might be like.
He disbelieved the floated fairy-stories
that simple people lived like princes there,
(when was it that the people lived like princes?)
and disbelieved his sudden thoughts and worries;
whatever happened ploughing and sowing
were bound to be the same where there was soil.
You'll find out when you get there prisoner. March.
Plenty of miles to walk before you get there.
And where is she, Ukraine, mother Ukraine?
Who can find the nightingale
where he sings his early song,
unbroken forest around,
no way to him at all
not walking and not riding,
not walking and not riding,
and not flying,
and not flying.

These willy-nilly peasant colonists
took (I suppose) this foreign countryside
like fate, to each his own unhappiness:
one's stepmother however kind-hearted
not being the same as a mother.
They crumbled its soil in their fingers,
drank its water, and let their children drink,
questioned, understood, possessed,
felt it as earth and tied by blood to them.
Put on again the yoke of destitution,
that bitter-tasting life. No one blames
an old nail sliding into a wall,
it's being hammered with the butt of an axe.
There were so many hardships
anxieties of survival,
however much they bent their labouring backs,
it always turned out not to be them
who ate the bread, it was the bread that ate.
Threshing, reaping, cleaning-out,
in the fields, in the house, in the barns.
There's truth enough where there's enough bread,
see to the bread and truth sees to itself.
Slow thoughts.
My great-grandfather starved all through his life.
The innumerable badness of those harvests.

This was the truth he dreamed about and not
the truth which happened.

It hadn't much to do with great-grandfather,
there was something new, something of us in it,
in 1919 at nine years old
my mother met it suddenly.

One day that autumn heavy rifle-fire
broke like a storm. Sudden on the hillside
a young man crouching over his horse's neck
with a star on his hat and a cossack hair-tuft,
and over the old and creaking bridge behind him
one thunderous charge of flying cavalry,
then horsemen everywhere,
glitter of quivering sabres in the Junction.

There was something handsome gained in this already
- there were no more raiders when the commissar came,
and something in the comic imitations
of the enemy beside the club-room stove,
and something in that young horseman, the lodger,
frenziedly polishing up his cossack boots.

He fell deeply in love with the schoolmistress,
wandered about beside himself with passion
talking to her about all sorts of subjects,
but mostly about the world, its hydra heads;
and slashing with his theory like a sabre
(or that was what his squadron thought about it)
he valued nothing else except ideas:
bread not at all, to hell with bread.
He said, with his bluster and enthusiasm
(backing it up with fists and with quotations),
that the only thing we had to do was push
the bourgeoisie

into the sea.

All the rest was easy, life would be fine.

Get into line. Shake out the banners.
And sing revolutionary Hosannas.
Into the sun and trumpets, carrying flowers.
And the road seemed clear ahead to the Commune.

How could he know, with his Cossack top-knot,
so easily deciding life in advance,
that for us it wasn't going to be so simple;
how know the weight and mass of the complications?

Then one morning of wind, wet underfoot,
he stuffed his oat-bags tight, mounted his horse,
said to the schoolmistress simply,
'Good-bye - we'll see each other again,'
and looked far off, rising high in the stirrups
to where the wind came, smelling of explosions;
and his horse hurtled, hurtled him into the east,
shaking and shaking its beribboned mane.

So years went past, one after the other.
I grew up in the small town
acquiring an affection for the forest
and landscape and the quiet houses.
I grew up
and at hide-and-peek
uncatchable whatever guard you kept
we peered out from the barn through bullet-holes.
There was war at that time;
Hitler not far from Moscow;
And we
- we were children and accepted a lot lightly.

From classroom threats untroubled and forgetful
we tore away out of the school playground
and ran down through fields to the river,
broke open a money-box and ran away
to look for the green rods,
baited our wet hooks.
I used to go fishing, stuck paper kites,
or often wandering by myself bare-headed
sucked at clover, grass polished my sandals,

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I knew the black acres the yellow hives
the luminous clouds that dropped still lightly stirring
half out of sight behind the immense horizon,
and skirting around outhouses used to listen
for the neighing of their horses, peacefully
and tiredly fell asleep in old hayricks
long darkened by the rain.

I scarcely had one single care in the world,
my life, presenting no big obstacles,
seemed to have few or simple complications –
life solved itself without my contributions.
I had no doubts about harmonious answers
which could and would be given to every question.
But suddenly this felt necessity
of answering these questions for myself.
So I shall go on where I started from,
sudden complexity, self-generated,
disturbed by which I started on this journey.

Into my native forest among those
long-trodden roads I took this complication
to take stock of that old simplicity,
– like bride and groom, a country matchmaking.
So there stood youth and there childhood together,
trying to look into each other's eyes
and each offending, but not equally.
Each wanted the other to start talking.
Childhood spoke first, 'Hullo then.
It's your fault if I hardly recognized you.
Once when I often used to dream about you
I thought you'd be quite different from this.
I'll tell you honestly, you worry me.
You're still in very heavy debt to me.'
So youth asked if childhood would help,
and childhood smiled and promised it would help.
They said good-bye, and, walking attentively,
watching the passers-by and the houses,
I stepped happily, uneasily out
through Zima Junction, that important town.

I worked things out about it in advance
– and just in case – with these alternatives,
if it hadn't got any better then it wouldn't
have got any worse.
Somehow the Corn Exchange had got smaller,
so had the chemist shop, so had the park;
it was as if the whole world were smaller
than it was when I left it.
And it was hard at first among other things
to see the streets hadn't all got shorter,
but I was walking with a longer pace
ranging the town.

Once I lived here as if the place were a flat,
could find whatever I wanted in three seconds,
cupboard or bed, could move here in the dark.
Maybe the circumstances had altered,
– and mine had been too long an absence,
but now I bumped on everything I used
to avoid, now knocked against it awkwardly,
and unfamiliarly they caught my eye:
the tall fence with the obscene inscription,
the drunk slumped against the café wall,
the women quarrelling in the shopping queue.
All right if this were any old place,
but this was here, and where I was born,
where I came home for strength and for courage,
for the truth and truth's well-being.
There was a driver cursing the Town Council,
two cocks were fighting under somebody's laughter
and drowsy audience the big burdocks
listened dustily, never moving an ear.
The wooden legs of beggars banged on cobbles,
a small boy with a stick was chasing a cat...
And purposely at first I didn't go
by the directest way, but then later
I started hurrying.
And this was necessary too.

To have drenched my face in freshness,
as I got near to home, near to the gates,
turning the iron ring.
At once from the very first expostulations,
'He's here!' 'Zhenka!' 'Come and eat something!'
from the first embraces, kisses and reproaches,

'And couldn't you have sent us a telegram?'
from, 'We were just lighting the samovar'
from recollections, 'how many years is it?'
just as I thought, all indecision vanished,
and things became peaceful and full of light.
And anxious Aunt Eliza put forward
the strong proposal I should have a wash
since she knew what those trains were like, she said.
Already tureens and kitchen-implements,
already the table dragged to the living-room,
and passing among the grey-blue onion shoots
I went off for water from the well,
waking the well with a cossack song –
the well kept the smells of my childhood,
the bucket came up bumping on the sides,
the chain was wet and sparkled in the light.
So I from Moscow, I the important guest,
hair damped down, clean-shirted,
sat in a crowd of radiant relations,
centre of questions, glasses, scurrings.
I'd got too weak for the great Siberian dishes
and now despaired at the sight of their abundance.
My aunt said, 'Have another bit of gherkin.
What do they feed you on in Moscow then?
You're eating nothing at all. It isn't decent!
Here, take a dumpling. Have some aubergine.'
My uncle said, 'I expect that Moscow vodka's
what you've got used to; try some of this.
Go on, go on – I do say all the same
it isn't good for you, not at your age.
Who taught you that? Look, down in one gulp!
Well, cheers, and God grant it won't be the last.'

We drank and joked and chattered excitedly,
until my sister suddenly thought to ask me
was I at the Hall of Columns in March,
and everyone grew suddenly serious.
They spoke of the year and the year's gravity,
the events and worries and the long reflections.
Uncle Volodya pushed away his glass.
'Nowadays,' he said, 'we all behave
as if we were a sort of philosopher.
It's the times that we live in. People are thinking.
Where, what, how – the answers don't come running.
Now the doctors have turned out innocent;
well, why should people suffer in that way?
It's an international scandal, of course it is,
and all that bloody Beria, I suppose.'
Speaking, not capable of rhetoric,
of what stirred up the emotions in those days:
'You live in Moscow; things are clearer there:
tell me about it all, explain it to me.'
He took me by the buttons so to speak
and wouldn't be put off by anybody;
he made himself a home-rolled cigarette
and waited for an answer.

And I think
that I was right, my uncle all attention
as if the truth and I were personal friends,
to answer peacefully, 'I'll tell you later.'

My bed was in the hay-loft as I wanted,
I lay up there and listened for a long time
to the night. Mouth-organ playing. Dance somewhere.
And there was no one any use to me.
It got colder. Prickly with no mattress.
The quiet loft rustled and stirred about;
and Nicky my young brother tirelessly
kept me from sleep, showed me his torch (foreign)
and carried on his grown-up conversation.
But didn't I know Sinyavsky personally?

Had I *really* never seen a helicopter?
And morning came, and I stretched a bit,
and went to sit on the sacks outside the barn,
while dawn rose in the east and lingered on
the heads of cockerels, their scarlet combs.
Half-lighted mist thinned, a few houses
swam into distance, the long poles
of the bird-houses were pushing themselves
ponderously upwards from the ground,
the cows were moving in sedate processions
along the road, an old cowman was cracking
his routine whip a little. Oh it was all
concordant strength and bodily sanity.
I didn't want to think about anything.
Forgetting breakfast, hearing no reproaches,
and travelling light with pockets full of bread
(so when I used to run truant from school,
so now) I got away to the river,
and made for the old big willow on the bank
getting my feet clogged up in the warm mud,
lying on the sand in shade of its branches.
The water murmured in an even voice.
Tree-trunks swam slowly past
bumping now and then. Distant
hooters were sounding.
Some midges sang their high note.

Near by
an oldish railwayman, trousers rolled up,
was standing out on a rock with a fishing-rod.
He was scowling at me: what was I doing there?
If I didn't fish myself why not let him?
He searched my face and came closer and said:
'You can't be – ? but wait a minute!
You can't be Zina Yevtushenko's son?
And there was I... You won't know who I am!
But God bless you! From Moscow? For the summer?
I'll make myself at home if you don't mind.'
He sat beside me and undid his packet:
a hunk of bread, tomatoes, and some salt.
I got worn out with answering his questions,
there was nothing he didn't want to know:
how much in money was my scholarship worth,
how soon would the Exhibition open again?
He was a prickly obstinate old fellow,
and had some sharp-pointed remarks to make,
the young being nothing now to the old days,
and the komsomol so boring it was a pain.
'I remember when your mother was seventeen,
the lads, they used to be after her in swarms,
but they were frightened of her. You couldn't keep up
with a tongue like she had, not running barefoot.
They used to have army coats cut down for them
all those girls, I remember;
and they used to shout till the moon was up
about plaits being a bourgeois survival.
They were savage! Oh, they used to spout.
They were always full of an idea of some sort:
for instance one might quite suddenly start
about the nationalization of babies;
of course a lot of it was ridiculous,
really harmful at times: but I'll say this –
It worries me, seeing you people,
you haven't got the drive.
The worst thing is – and you can contradict
if you want – you don't think like young people
and people are the same age as their thoughts.
There are young people, laddie, but no youth.
Well, why argue? Look at my nephew,
he won't reach twenty-five this winter,
but you wouldn't put him anywhere under thirty.
What happened? He was a boy like any other,
and you see they put him on the Committee.
He sits there, that green kid,
steamed up, banging his bossy fist –
he even walks in a different way.
There's iron in his eyes; and as for speeches,
it isn't words to get the business done,
it's business only there for the sake of words,

for smooth, obvious speeches. Well then,
what sort of a young chap's that?
What sort of enthusiasm is it?
Because it isn't "sound", you might say,
he plays no football and he's given up girls -
now he's sound. And what about the rest?

Questions? Honest disagreements?
Oh, youth isn't what it used to be.
And nor are fish: they're not the same either.
A heavy sigh. 'Well, that's dinner finished.
Let's try a worm.'

And he smacked his lips.
A minute later, and there he was taking
a fine great carp off his hook.
'And aren't you a fat one, eh? And there's a reward.'
He glowed with admiration and delight.
'I thought you were saying fish aren't the same?'
He looked cunning. 'Ah, but that wasn't
all of them I was talking about.'
He smiled and waved a monitory finger
as if to say, 'Bear this in mind,
that carp, brother, ended up on a hook.
I'm not proposing to end in the same way.'

Eating my aunt's wonderful soup
I found myself being stupid when talked to.
Why did the old man swim perpetually
into my mind? There are so many of them.
'I'm not your mother-in-law,' my aunt grumbled.
'Why are you so melancholy always?
Get out of it! Be simple for a change.
Come out with me and we'll look for some berries.'

Three women and two little short-haired girls
and I...

this piled-up lorry flying along
creaking and murmuring from field to field;
glimpses of bright-coloured machinery,
the coats of horses, corn bright pinnacles
caps handkerchiefs. We dug into the basket
and found the bread and the fresh milk for us.
From under the wheels quails shooting up like rockets,
deafening hearing, filling the ears with sound.
The world was hubbub, one great fluttering greenness.
And I lay down in the straw on one elbow
thoughtfully crumbling up a piece of bread,
and listening and watching silently.
Some boys were throwing stones beside a stream,
the sun blazed and burned, it was glowing,
but clouds were heaping up in vaporous drops,
breathing and wheezing, shifting their masses.
Everything became misty and silent.
The country people climbed into hayricks.
And suddenly and without one look back
we crashed into the downpour,
we and the downpour and the flashing lightning
careered together into the forest.
We sensibly reorganized the cart
and pulled up piles of hay to cover ourselves:
all except one. She didn't cover herself.
One of the women of forty or so,
who had sat all day staring with a fixed expression,
sat silent and eaten unsociably,
now roused herself all of a sudden, stood,
transformed into the uttermost of youth:
Oh, she was crazy, she was spirited,
she pulled the white handkerchief off her hair
and shook her shoulders, sang out loud, she sang
happy and wet through:

Barefooted through the dark forest
the berry-picker runs.
She doesn't stop for the little berries
she looks for the big ones.

She stood with her proud head looking forward
face stung with wet pine-needles, eyes shining
with tears and rain.

'What are you doing up there?
You fool - you'll catch your death.'
But she was giving herself entire to the rain

and the rain had given itself to her.
She threw back her hair dark-handed,
and looked into the far distance as if
she'd seen what no one else could see in it.
I thought nothing existed in the world
but this, the crowded flying lorry,
nothing existed.

Only the wind beating,
downpouring rain and the woman singing.
We settled into a barn to pass the night.
Under its low roof the stifling smell
of grain and dried mushrooms and wet berries.
Brooms breathed green leaves.
Between the gliding beams of light and dark
the huge horse-collars bulged under the roof
like bats.

I couldn't sleep.
Texture of dark
showed faces faintly. Woman's voice. Whisper.
I strained my ears to listen.

'Liz, Liz,
you don't know what my life is like, you don't.
Oh, yes, we have a cactus and a Dutch
oven and a zinc roof all right:
and everything's spring-cleaned and scoured and
polished.

and I have my husband and the children.
But haven't I a soul? It's so cruel,
so cold, and mother asks, "What's wrong with
him?"

He isn't violent, he has no secrets,
he drinks, but so does everyone drink."
Liz, he just comes home night after night
drunk, growling:
that anyway I'm his,
he turns me over roughly... without a word
without a word - as if I weren't a person.
Before I used to cry and not sleep,
but in the end I've found out how to sleep.
What I've turned into!... People think I'm forty,
and Liz, I'm only thirty-five.
What will happen to me? I've no more strength.
If only I had someone I really loved
how I'd look after him. He could beat me
if he loved me. I'd never think
of going out, I'd care for my beauty,
I'd wash his feet for him my darling,
I'd drink the water.'

Yes, she was the one
who flying through the rain and the wind
had sung that simple, blood-heated song.
And I the envious and credulous
had praised her for that easy thoughtlessness.
Conversation faded. Creak of the well
reached us, then it ceased. Everyone
over in the village was in bed.
Some wheels went hub-deep in the roadside mud,
chewing on it with a sated sound.
A small boy in a jacket woke us;
it was early, he had a sunburnt aggressive
nose, and a teapot in his hand.
He looked disdainfully over me and auntie
and all those sweetly asleep on the floor.
'Citizens, aren't you going out for berries?'
I don't know what you're still asleep for.'

A single cow went wandering after the rest,
a woman with no shoes was chopping wood.
A cock was crowing loudly as we passed
out of the village into wide meadows
full of the deafening din of the cicadas.
The rearing shafts of carts as still as ice,
over the earth the blue intense air.
After the open fields you come to bushes,
still cold and glistening with moisture, birds
messing about, a few wild raspberries
among the brambles soft and smoky crimson;
the whortleberries lie there to be rolled in,
pine-needles and cranberries burn your feet.

But we were after the best of the berries
the strawberries that grow in the deep woods.
Someone suddenly called out in front,
'Look there they are, and there's another lot' -

Joy of simplicity, of carrying!
The pattering of the first ones in the bucket.
But we had to submit to the young guide.
'Citizens, you just make me laugh,
we haven't got near the berries yet.'
And then a clearing broke through the trees
with a drunkenness of berries, sunlight,
and flowers, it dazzled on our eyes,
it was one breathing Oh.
The strawberries were like a waking dream
their smell was terrifying. We ran
in among them with rattling pails,
and tripped, lay there drugged, using our lips
to pluck the big berries on their stems.
On the hillocks the downy grass
hanging like smoke. The forest humming
with swarms of midges, thin humming of pines.
And I

the strawberries dropped out of the mind,
my eyes were on that woman, watching pleasure
in all her movements taking turn with pleasure.
Her white kerchief slipped down on her forehead,
she was laughing, and picking strawberries,
and she was laughing

I the incredulous,
and trapped by hesitation in confusion
got up out of the warm and crumpled grass
and poured my berries into someone's bucket,
and wandered through the forest by no path.
From memory, no subtraction,
the calculation of remembered factors.

I came out from the pines their hollow noise
into the wheat lay shut-eyed at its feet,
and opening an eye (bird crossing sky)
sat up on the dry, stalky ground, fingered
the wheat, its ripening ears. I asked the wheat
how happiness could come for everyone.
'What can be done, wheat? Wise wheat.
Personal shame. Personal weakness.
I don't know how to set about it
I mayn't be saint enough or fitted for it.'
And the wheat answered
with head scarcely moving,
'You're neither bad nor good,
but simply very young.
It was a good question:
forgive this mute reply,
But mute comprehension
won't do to answer by.'
I followed meadow paths and tracks,
carts abandoned, whiff of tar,
met with a happy-looking fellow,
bare feet, ungodly air,
snub-nosed, covered in dust,
small, hungry, and young,
possessive with a birchwood stick
on which his boots were slung.
He talked to me with fury of
the wheat scorched where it stood
and the farm president Pankratov,
much harm and little good.
He said, 'I'm not going to take it.

I'm off. I'm for the truth;
and if they won't help at Zima,
I'm going to Irkutsk.'
Then suddenly somewhere a car appeared,
and riding in it symbol of his office
the briefcase politician in his jeep,
a man enthroned as if it were a committee.
'What's this? The hero's march on Zima?
Just mention Pankratov once again,
and you'll know it.' And he hurtled off.
There was no sober substance in the fellow,

but in the boy in his iron belief,
unmechanized, barefooted, and ungodly.
We said good-bye. He went his way, small-looking
dragging his feet rather in the dust,
boots swinging on his stick in the distance.

A few days later we were going off
one sleepy morning on a three-ton lorry
going our way. There were formal good-byes
spoken with feeling to the head of the house.
Handshakes, promises of many visits.
He was a tough, dignified old man,
a genuine Siberian lumberman.
He filled the lorry up unhurriedly
from a bucket tied with cloth to filter it.
The morning stars had faded from the sky,
under the swimming deepening blue of air
our three-tonner moved off along the road,
with the young grass still hanging from the wheels.
I won't say much about it.

Better to speak of how we all got home:
how I woke with the world

the drink of milk,
went off alone, the green line of the steppe,
the uncut forest on this side and that,
wandering, walking through shadows of thoughts,
treading the moving shadows of the clouds.
Sometimes I took a shot-gun into the forest,
there was no point in that, but the walking
grew pensive for me while I carried it.
I sat beneath a birch, beneath an oak,
so many meditations

thought of you
Uncle Volodya, Uncle Andrei,
with love.

Andrei's the elder
I love his sleeping, crumpled,
hardly living,
the way he washes, rising very early,
the way he carries other people's children.
He runs the garage, everlastingly
enraged and smeared all over, careers
along in a van he calls the Billygoat,
with his big forehead hunched over the wheel.
His sudden quarrels, disappearances
into the country for a day or two,
and home he comes, benevolent and tired,
smelling of petrol and of virgin forest.
He likes to shake a hand until it cracks,
in fights he throws people around by twos
for amusement, does everything gaily and well,
from wood-cutting to sprinkling salt on bread.
Uncle Volodya: wonderful
the working metal seems as he grips it
shaking the woodshavings out of his hair,
and ankle-deep in the light-coloured foam:
and there's a carpenter! A carpenter!
and what a storyteller, an expert,
and often standing in the barn or sitting
on one side perched up on his joiner's bench
- about the cook who stole and who was shot
and how the fighters passed through a village
and a woman called Francesca sang
a song from *Peter* to him.

Oh my uncles.
Oh my people.
How glorious it was until the neighbour
got at me. 'Andrei,' she said,
'and one of the drivers' wives. You could drop
a little hint to auntie. But why should you?
She knows. Volodya's a fine carpenter,
but he's a drunk, the whole town knows about it.'
She hammered at me like a woodpecker;
I ought to show some interest.

I didn't.
But round that time the younger of my uncles
mysteriously disappeared somewhere.

When people came the whole time wanting things
mended (toys, sofas) they were told,
'He's away for a week. Business.' Simply that,
And then the neighbour, liverishly yelling,
showing that sharp nose in through the gate:
'Zhenka, they're ashamed in front of you:
he's laid himself out. You must learn,
my little student, you must learn from life.
Come on then.'

Quite radiant with evil
she took me like the mistress of the house
into the larder. There lay my uncle
fuming with vodka in his underwear,
trying to sing *Yablako* to the wrong tune.
He saw us and half got up,
confused and sobered and sad-looking,
and said quietly, 'O Zhenka my dear,
do you understand how fond I am of you?'
I couldn't stay and watch. I was horrified,
and shocked. So I stopped eating at home,
and went off to the town café alone.

Summer's hot breathing in the town café.
At the back they were noisily slaughtering pigs.
Flash of a tray. Faces. Flypapers
hang in the windows stuck all over with flies.
The teacher blinks, fumbles with the menu,
the farm girl grumbles into the thin soup,
the woodcutter with his huge, dark arm
taps a fork on a magisterial glass.
Rather a lot of noise in the town café,
and a surging sound of flying waitresses.

Glasses of tea. In a chance conversation
we suddenly lay bare ourselves talking,

I and a man with a fat face and glasses,
quite intelligent he seemed to be.
He classed himself a Moscow journalist
writing a feature piece in *Zima* Junction.
I talked quite openly with him about
those first one-sided certainties,
and not unraveled knots and the profound
and intricate honesty of the hesitations.
He buying me a cranberry vodka
and gesturing away tobacco-smoke
answered, 'My dear young innocent,
I used to be just the same myself:
and always wondered what came from where,
and thinking I could manage everything,
always analysing and fighting
and trying to build a new age out of one's head.
I was brash, of course, and aggressive,
and didn't have much time for lamentations
until I needed. Later of course
I wrote my novel, it wasn't published,
and had my family. Well you have to live.
Now I'm a hack. There are a lot worse.
Took to the bottle. Disappointed they say.
Not writing now. What is he now, a writer?
He's not an influence, he's a custodian
as if his thoughts were public monuments.
Oh there are changes: but behind the speeches.
Elsewhere from what was publicly spoken
this nebulous exercise takes place:
this ruminating of yesterday's silence,
and silence smothering yesterday's events.'

And in his measuring glance and his repetitions,
I could see nothing but a rage of unbelief.
Unbelief. Believing is loving.
With a pessimistic, red, fat face
he ate, lamented, smacked his lips,
well-fortified against belief or loving
by a complacent personal discontent.
'Oh hell, I was forgetting the feature piece;
I must get along to the saw-mill, time I was going.
How vile this cooking is. Well anyhow
what else could one expect. What a hole this is.'

He wiped his mouth on a paper serviette
and noticing me scowling. 'Oh yes,'
he said, 'of course this is where you come from;
I quite forget, so sorry, do excuse me.'
He muddled stupidly around
and shambled across to the door with no good-bye,
concerned neither with me nor with the others.

I paid for my indecision with interest,
wandering in the untouched forest
and listening alone to the pine-needles.

And Andrei said, 'If only I could cure you,
silly lad; come down to the club with us,
there's a concert by the Irkutsk Philharmonic.
Everyone's coming to it. Here are the tickets.
And look how crumpled up your trousers are.'
So I wandered civilly along dressed up
in a shirt that still had the heat of the iron in it,
with glorious uncles stepping it out beside me,
taking great care about their shoes, smelling
of shoe-polish, alcohol, and eau-de-Cologne.

Top of the bill was a pink-coloured torso,
Anton Bespyatnykh, Russian hero.
He did it all. Straining magnificently
he lifted a bundle of weights between his teeth,
he skipped about on sharpened cutlasses,
and did a trim little waltz on a violin,
he juggled bottles and threw balls about
and brilliantly dropped the whole lot,
he flourished inexhaustible handkerchiefs
and tied them all in one and then undid it:
embroidered with a dove with an olive branch
- the ideological climax of the show.
All the uncles applauded. 'There's a trick.'
'He's good, this fellow. Look! Look!'
And I? I too clapped a little,
otherwise I should have given offence.
Bespyatnykh bowed, exhibiting his muscles.
We went outside into the night and dark.
'Well, my boy, what did you think of it?'
But I had to have solitude for a time.
'I'm going off for a walk.' 'You hurt us you know,
the whole family's wondering about it:
you're never at home at all. Surely
it isn't a romance you're working at?'
I walked along silent and not noticed
thoughts on the ground, no soaring fantasies.
And what's a concert? Well, good luck to it!
But such a number of them I'd seen,
so very many antique performances,
with such uneconomic sycophancy
applauded pretty pictures on plates
when you couldn't get barley for soup-making;
considering the real and the unreal,
and all the metamorphosis of the truth
with the untrue, I thought also of this:
we are the guilty.
Of the miniature significant irritation,
of bodiless verses, boring, numberless
quotation and the mechanical peroration.
These long reflections . . . There are two kinds of
lovers.
One sort who cover over any offence
in flattery, who in flatteries and forgiveness
and in their longing wish obliterate it.
And after this the remorse that we nourish
so much in these our days, so long in them.
No use now for the self-blinded lover,
but for love's sight and careful, obstinate thoughts,
the exact detail and mountainous reflection
whose depth admits nothing fortuitous:
not what was great deceives or can deceive
but human falsity detracts from it.
I can neither praise what is weak nor can excuse
those who exchange the wise visions of Russia
for a conversational point. These anxious wishes
belong to the weak, their easy critical lives.

What is glorious and great for which Russia
is waiting from me is no weakness.
And courage is my wish,
in every implication of the simple fire
of single truth I shall never turn back from.
Oh everywhere, oh over the seared steppe
and the undulations of the rust-coloured sand,
over my head

the flags their shivering sound
staff in my hand this wood that I walk by
- conscious of nervous hesitations,
not disbeliefs but a love too violent.
In the name of truth I make these revelations
and in the name of those who have died for it.
Life not lived by the wind's emptiness.
Discriminations of the questioning reason.
Greatness in its own voice calls. Consider,
and answer equably.

So on and on these odd long wanderings:
and wooden pavements woke their clattering echoes,
houses here and there scraped their shutters,
small noisy girls ran by shouting.
'In love he said.' 'You too?' 'Do you think I'm
dotty?'

So on and on. The mist had settled close
containing night and the night's sleeplessness,
holding hidden or suddenly revealing
a strength of engines, railways, furnaces,
dark iron mounting in the half-visible stacks.
Queer shunting-engines with prolonged funnels
moved wheezily or screamed.
Thunder of hammers.
The moving muscles of the active young
their turning shoulders, teeth, grimy faces.
Sharp and aggressive from among the wheels
the hissing steam detaching. Cold glitter
catching the track. Sides of the tenebrous engines.
Easily rolling a cigarette for a pal
flag stuck under one arm a signalman
sighed, 'Late again from Irkutsk.
Did you hear Vaska's getting a divorce?'
Then I was standing absolutely still,
peering, remembering.

In the oil-stained coat
stepping inattentive across the rails
that chap there with the suitcase in his hand.
Not true! I thought he must have left the district;
I went close up and said in a voice like death
'I think we used to know each other once.'
And it was him! We laughed. The same Vovka!
(only no *Robinson Crusoe* in his pocket)
his lies and quarrels and those same noisy jokes,
Vovka, he must be the life of the depot.
'Can you remember our revenge on Petka?
And singing to soldiers in that hospital?
And that small girl you were going to marry?'
I wanted us to talk on and on
and to tell him everything.

The joy and the pain.



MILT COMMONS

'Vovka you're tired. You've just come off from work.'
'Oh drop all that, come down to the river.'
The path wound among night-time shadows
following shoe and boot and bare footprint
among the umbrella shapes of vegetation
and giant burdock, pewter-coloured leaves.
I was talking freely, uneasily,
and cursing quite a lot.
He listened warily, attentively,
giving no answer.
The two of us went down this small path.
There was the rottenness of the reed-beds,
the sand and smell of fish; the wet timber,
some fisherman's fire smoking. The river close.
We swam there in its black expanses.
He shouted a few words and suddenly -
forgetfulness by no deliberation,
and against expectation, memory.
Later we sat on the moon-lighted bank,
our thoughts moved in the rocking water's motion.
Somewhere not far off among the fields
horses moved in the mist. Whinny.
I thought my thought, watching the slow surface:
personal guilt.

'You're not alone,' said Vovka,
'this is a time for all considering men.
Don't sit like that or you'll get your coat crumpled.
What a chap you are after all.
Everything's going to be discovered
and understood in the course of time,
only we have to go on thinking.
What's the hurry?' The night air moaned
with distant hooters. He got up from the ground.
'That's how it is. Well, there's work to be done;
I must get home, it's eight for me in the morning.'

It dawned.

Everything seemed younger.
Night dissolved away to nothingness,
it got a little colder for some reason,
masses took on their authentic colour.
Some rain blew down, not enough to notice,
and he and I wandered along together.
Somewhere else, driving around,
Pankratov, complacent in his jeep,
the ponderous didactic president;
and happy with his stick of birchwood
walking among the dew's heavy sprinkle
the sly boy: stubborn, with bare feet.
Nothing exceptional. Not cold; not hot.
It was a day like any other one
but such a crowd of pigeons in the air;
I was someone good, young, going away.
I felt sad and clean
and sad perhaps because
of having learnt something
and not yet knowing what.
I drank some vodka to my friends
and strolled through Zima Junction one more time.
It was a day like any other one

Milt Commons

Mr. Commons is no stranger to the New York
Theatre World. He has appeared both on and
off Broadway. Last season he was associated
with such productions as, "Life Is But a Dream,"
and, "Witches." He is also well acquainted
with Dramatic Records, having directed the
Shakespeare for Students production of, "Mid-
summer Night's Dream," released by Folkways
Records last season.

Jere Jacob

Miss Jacob was seen off-Broadway last season
playing the coveted role of Violaine in Paul
Claudel's, "The Tidings Brought to Mary." She
is currently appearing in Jere Jacob in Concert --
a concert reading of the poetry and prose of
Jeffers, Millay, Gibran, etc. During the Fall
season of 1965, she appeared as Portia in the
Shakespeare for Seven Players Company produc-
tion of, "The Merchant of Venice."

the trees their brilliant shivering foliage
luminous green against the ground.
A few boys throwing rubbish at a wall,
a queue of lorries stretching, women at market
among the cows and different sorts of fruit.
And sad and free on and on
I passed the last house, climbed into the sun,
and for a long time stood on the hill-top
looking across at the station buildings
and farmhouses and barns.
And the voice of Zima Junction spoke to me
and this is what it said.
'I live quietly and crack nuts.
I gently steam with engines.
But not without reflection on these times,
these modern times, my loving meditation.
Don't worry. Yours is no unique condition,
your type of search and conflict and construction,
don't worry if you have no answer ready
to the lasting question.
Hold out, meditate, listen.
Explore. Explore. Travel the world over.
Count happiness connatural to the mind
more than truth is, and yet
no happiness to exist without it.
Walk with a cold pride
utterly ahead
wild attentive eyes
head flicked by the rain-wet
green needles of the pine,
eyelashes that shine
with tears and with thunders.
Love people.
Love entertains its own discrimination.
Have me in mind, I shall be watching.
You can return to me.
Now go.'

I went, and I am still going.



JERE JACOB

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