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Writing Sample

Maxim Amelin

Includes four untitled poems.

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Maxim AMELIN
POEMS

[untitled]

"Long before any signs could augur
that you and I — called by Divine order
up from the void — would join the living,
the trees wept amber tears for us
because they knew that we would pass
some day..." The elegy's beginning
ends abruptly. For its continuation,
alas, I've lost the inspiration
to drag out line for useless line in vain,
at least as long as shaggy waves —
heirs to the golden fleece — do leave
these rocky tears upon the sand.

[untitled]

Shuffle to work like a melancholic,
then back again, with a skip and a jump,
swim with the current right into the whirlpool,
autumn and winter and summer and spring

stroll down the boulevards, all the while knowing:
can't catch the light, the creator won't come
bearing new laws in the place of the old ones,
can't bring to life those lost hearts and those minds

hungry for only the feed at their feet, so
do what you will, they won't change, and I
am nothing more that a mutable form of
being and existence in time.
I would like to have my own place
on the dead shore of a living sea,
where the winds, Notus and Boreas
cuff the heavenly bells during their spats
making the sky's bronze wail o'er the waves,
where it's never warm, only cold or hot.

A golden sunset is a salve for weaker eyes
pink, turquoise, and the Milky Way,
keeping sickness at bay, calming
the mind. My fine-tuned ear will not
be horrified by the thund'rous sounds
of the verb-filled, song-loving chasm.

Familiar, since childhood, its every call.
I — a rare carrier of these two tongues —
mangle the mountain dialect
when human language has hit a wall,
speaking in song, having turned
words inside out and laid them flat.

What's left for me to do? The valley
can't fathom difficult speech, so my voice
fell flat on its empty ears. Why not
half-escape and half-live, serving a family
of dual origin, a flowing bird or a fish that flies,
in my own place on the outskirts of time.
[untitled]

With my antique lyre, acquired
for pennies at the Tishinsky flea
market, I walk on,
ecstatic and indignant, my path
free of obstructions,

bringing news to cities and hamlets
near and far, traveling by foot.
Saying unkind words
for those patriarchs of privilege
born of the crown's gold,

I will make haste into the distance
bringing nearer my destination
at a clip, which is
the same thing as standing in one place
unmoving, as I

know quite well. — If with a cracking sound
arrows of lightning break the stalwart
trunk in two, the branch,
one secondary, becomes at once
the main and only

living line. — I know I'm not the first
lover of the brown-eyed muses, but also
not the last to take
their dowry and fritter it away
irresponsibly

without accounting for it, in vain
to blurt out their sacred treasury
of words in hasty
excitement, and may it all burn up
for all I care,

like a young heir to countless riches
beset with lustful desire. — The chasm
isn't all that great
between Homer and Herostratus,
from the mighty down

to the powerless. — To build some cheap
apartment houses, they first knocked down
abandoned tombstones
in moss-covered cemeteries. — Time
erects with conviction

and so destroys, turning stone from stone,
and none left standing. — O, Alexandria!
You who have salvaged
poetry from storm and upheaval,
unchanged and unscathed,

you are blessed a hundred times. —
Love and faith have grown poor, downtrodden,
only hope is left
as sustenance for man, a splinter
of a generation

of incessant prattlers, now wordless,
his lips moving barely, fish-like, says:
"If all the worthless
trash were swept out from our memory
what would be left us?"

Translated from the Russian by Matvei Yankelevich