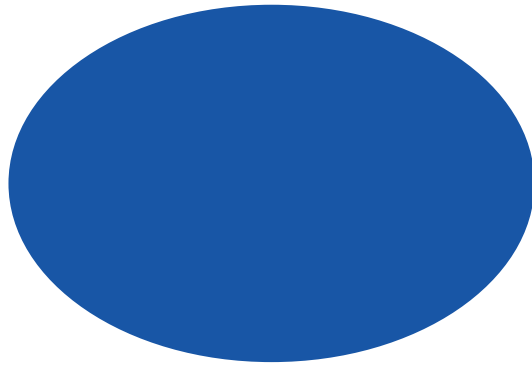


# FOUR CENTURIES

Russian Poetry in Translation



8

2014



Four Centuries

Russian Poetry in Translation

fourcenturies@gmx.de

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## XX

Innokenty Annensky (1855 - 1909)

ИННОКЕНТИЙ АННЕНСКИЙ (1855 - 1909)

Translated by Ian Probstein\*

\* \* \*

I don't know, I can't explain...  
Do I love or do I die?  
Is it a dream or is it Verlaine?  
Is it a spell or a prison cell?

Either the torture of the ideal  
Or the beauty's torment  
Is spilled in the whole world  
From a broken goblet.

The dream might be wrong as well  
Whether she is the one,  
In the light of the ideal  
The dream might guess in vain  
Is it spell or a prison cell?  
Is it a dream or is it Verlaine?

But the roses of my cell  
Breathed the scent to my lips,  
And my dream will sing again  
To the music of Verlaine.

## Petersburg

A yellow vapor of Petersburg winter,  
Yellow snow is clinging to slabs of pavement...  
I don't know where *you* and *we* are,  
But I know that we are tightly blended.

Were we created by the tsar's decree?  
Did the Swedes forget to drown us?  
It is only the stones and scary truth that we  
Have instead of the fairy-tales of the past.

The magician gave us only stones  
And the rusty-brownish Neva River  
And the deserts of dumb squares where  
They beheaded people at dawn.

What we did have in our land,  
What made our two-headed eagle soar high,  
Was our dark-laurelled giant on the rock's end  
That will turn tomorrow into a child's toy.

He was so terrible and brave,  
Yet a wild steed failed him, alas:  
The tsar could not crush the snake,  
And squeezed, it became our idol.

Neither kremlins, nor relics, nor miracles,  
Nor mirages, nor smiles, nor tears...  
Only stones from the frozen wilderness  
And a grasp of a damned error.

Even in May, when the shadows  
Of white nights are spilled over the waves,  
It is not the spell of spring dreams  
But the poison of futile desires.

\* \* \*

Whether a star dims  
Or an earthly torment lasts,  
I never pray since  
I cannot pray, alas.

Time will extinguish the star,  
We'll cope with torment on our own;  
When I go to church, if at all  
I stand next to a Pharisee, alone.

Speechless, with him I will kneel  
And with him, I'll rejoice and revive...  
Why then deep inside me  
Should a publican grieve and strive?

**Ian Probstein**, assistant professor of English in Tour College, New York, a bilingual English-Russian poet and translator of poetry, is writing poetry and on poetry. He published seven books of poetry in Russian, one in English, and more than twenty books and anthologies of poetry in translation. He has translated poetry from English, Spanish, Italian, and Polish into Russian and from Russian into English. A bilingual edition of *Complete Poems and Selected Cantos* of Ezra Pound, which he compiled, edited, commented, and of which he is one of the major translators, was the Best Book of 2003 in Translation and Poetry in Russia. *Collected Poems* of T. S. Eliot in Russian with Dr. Probstein's 50-page introduction, 65-page commentaries was published by Astrel in 2013 in Moscow's Astrel Publishing. Mr. Probstein is also one of the three translators alongside Andrei Sergeyev and Victor Toporov.