Modern Poetry in Translation

New Series / No. 11 / Summer 1997

Poetry from Peru
[Ribeyro, Watanabe, Verastegui, Mora, Varela, Chocano];

Russia
[Krylov, Pushkin, Turgenev, Oleinikov, Voedensky, Vinokurov, Mark, Papadin, Tychyna, Encounters];

and also from
Argentina [Gelman, Castilla];
France [Bonnefoy, Nerval];
Germany [Heine, Lessing];
Greece [Kavvadias];
Hungary [Ady, Pilinszky, Petrőczl];
India [Grover, Gil];
Japan [Katsumi, Eiko];
Italy [Pascale];
Poland [Twardowski];
Sweden [Wästberg];
Uruguay [Benedetti];

Special feature: James Kirkup as Translator
Grigori Mark

Translated by Daniel Weissbort

Grigori Mark lives in St. Petersburg. He began publishing only recently: Gravyor (Engraver) 1991 and Sredi Veshchei Golosov (Among Objects and Voices) 1995. The translations printed here are from this second book.

from Selected Dreams

12 November 1992

A toothless man
with a goatee,
emerges from inside,
looks around the yard,
and a smooth palm —
not a single line on it —
shines in the dark,
like a red traffic light.

November 1993

At the tables are stout women.
Anaemic virtue sleeps
in the semicircles of inclining faces.
In their arms chubby children
suckle, smiling sleepily...

A crazy, lisping wind,
moaning, swells with sound,
licks the round heads of the children.
Over the icon, in the corner, the air putrefies,
God's countenance shines gently on them.

The millenium comes to an end...
This strange body, in which I've been walking for more than half a century already, grows numb as I look at it.

You stop - and from everywhere, branching out through the new soil, hairy white roots swiftly germinate in monstrous profusion.

And when, writhing in pain, you tear yourself out and leave, dragging appendices after, the web of torn destinies, the soles of your feet sense someone, fierce, powerful, underground in the darkness urgently following, waiting for you to get tired, to stop, to send out roots. So as to seize hold with a dead grip and haul them to itself...

November 1994

Each day, at seven, a thick curtain of rain descends. The icy water washes my plastic house in the dark. A hungry herd of urban instruments under the window begins to whimper, and then in the centre of the Universe a star lights up, and like violins antennae on the roof dutifully enter the autumnal orchestra of rain. From the water the little bells of trams germinate. The wind touches the wires with a naked bow...

And a singing lily directly above the house drops cloud petals through the rain.
from Not a Diary, but an Answer

13 March 1993

All the time we grab
with hands, words.
Although we understand,
in actual fact,
that the Lord is more
in the fleet gazelle
than in the hippo's hulk.

8 August 1992

Silently the moon exploded in the window.
And fragments formed into the Word, as if
A message had caught fire in the sky for me...
But I could not read these letters.

May 1993

Blue trees.
Sway silently in the sunset,
Like camels, they stray across the snowy wastes.
I sit in the kitchen
And all evening study the number.
The number of those who left last year.

30 November 1993

My brain, my shrewd servant,
Grows impudent and now dissembles with me.
As if I had acquired an enemy
Under my very own cranium.
8 December 1993

We might sit in a café, in a foreign country,  
In winter. Wood is crackling in the fire-place.  
And with my back to the wall  
Carefully I am letting words drop into the air,  
As if I wanted to touch you between the legs -  
In the pearly whiteness words  
Might swell, like seeds...

1 November 1994

The cone of tomorrows grows  
from today, tapering into luminescence,  
like a frail boat of light.  
Already the shore is out of sight.  
I sail in the dark,

and my sole chance of salvation is  
that I'm three hundred poems  
closer to You.