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My Poems: Selected Poetry Of Marina Tsvetaeva



Synopsis

Marina Tsvetaeva (October 8, 1892 - 31 August 31, 1941) is considered by many to be Russia's greatest female poet, rivaled perhaps only by Anna Akhmatova. Tsvetaeva's poetry was often of a very passionate and almost obsessive nature. She writes of unrequited love and heartbreak, of her admiration for other writers, of the devastation of war, and of her generally troubled life. Nonetheless, she is always able to contain this raw emotion in an extremely rigorous and disciplined form, unique only to her. Especially in her later poetry, frequent enjambments, inner rhymes, short lines, word play, and numerous allusions dominate her work. In this dual-language selection, Andrey Kneller offers his attempts to capture this distinctive style of Marina Tsvetaeva's poetry by preserving both the message and the music of the originals.

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Customer Reviews

The life of Russian poet Marina Tsvetaeva reads like a microcosm of the tragedy that befell Russia in the first half of the 20th century. Born in 1892 in Moscow to an upper class family, she married fairly young, only to have her firstborn child, a son, raised by her in-laws, with her husband's concurrence. Two daughters followed. She published her first book of poems when she was 18, and

she was something of an overnight literary sensation. She continued to publish, and then came World War I and the Russian Revolution. Her husband, Sergei Efron, joined the White Army during the Russian civil war. During the great Moscow famine in 1919, she placed her daughters in a state orphanage; one of them died of starvation. Three years later, the family fled Russia and eventually settled in Paris. They lived in poverty; her husband found work as an agent for the Soviet secret police. Returning to Russia in 1939, her husband was arrested and executed, and her surviving daughter was sent to a labor camp. She and her son fled eastward as the German armies invaded Russia. In August, 1941, Marina Tsvetaeva committed suicide. What she left behind was her poetry, poems full of passion, emotion and yearning, poems about love and the devastation of a country, and devastation of a life. *In the Winter* is from a collection of selected poems entitled *My Poems*, translated and published in 2011 by poet Andrey Kneller.

The bells again break the silence,
Waiting with remorse
Only several streets divide us, Only several words!
A silver sickle lights the night,
The city sleeps this hour,
The falling snowflakes set alight
The stars upon your collar.
Are the sores of the past still aching?
How long do they abide?

I've been interested in reading Tsvetaeva's poetry for some time now, with little success. Her Selected Poems (Tsvetaeva, Marina) (Twentieth-Century Classics) were disappointing, my frustration the result of not knowing if my ambivalence was a function of translator or poet. Andrey Kneller provides the answer I was searching for. First, a remark about translating poetry - as Kneller writes in the introduction, poetry is ridiculously difficult to translate: "(translators) focus so much on word choice and literal meaning that in the end all of the supporting details are lost, and the reader is left with a skeleton of what used to be a beautiful poem. This is not a *translation*, this is a *transgression*." Towards these ends, Kneller has made a noble effort to both "preserve details, without losing sight of the big picture. Meter, rhyme, line length - all these elements are essential in understanding the complexity and beauty of Marina Tsvetaeva's work." He has brilliantly succeeded with the collection here. The collection is dual-language, as those with even a passing familiarity with Russian will be able to get a sense of the work. The English translations are excellent as well, as meter and especially rhyme are preserved, while still maintaining the overall poetic sensibility. This is no easy feat, and I am very impressed with Kneller's work. In fact, his translation is why I give the book a 5-star review rather than 3 or 4 stars.

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