

Classic Poetry Series

Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Blok

- poems -

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Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Blok (28 November 1880 – 7 August 1921)

During the last period of his life, Blok emphasized political themes, pondering the messianic destiny of his country (Vozmezdie, 1910–21; Rodina, 1907–16; Skify, 1918). Influenced by Solovyov's doctrines, he had vague apocalyptic apprehensions and often vacillated between hope and despair. "I feel that a great event was coming, but what it was exactly was not revealed to me", he wrote in his diary during the summer of 1917. Quite unexpectedly for most of his admirers, he accepted the October Revolution as the final resolution of these apocalyptic yearnings.

Blok was born in Saint Petersburg, into a sophisticated and intellectual family. Some of his relatives were literary men, his father being a law professor in Warsaw, and his maternal grandfather the rector of Saint Petersburg State University. After his parents' separation, Blok lived with aristocratic relatives at the manor Shakhmatovo near Moscow, where he discovered the philosophy of Vladimir Solovyov, and the verse of then-obscure 19th-century poets, [Fyodor Tyutchev](http://www.poemhunter.com/fyodor-ivanovich-tyutchev/) and [Afanasy Fet](http://www.poemhunter.com/afanasy-afanasyevich-fet/). These influences would affect his early publications, later collected in the book *Ante Lucem*.

In 1903 he married Lyubov (Lyuba) Dmitrievna Mendeleeva, daughter of the renowned chemist Dmitri Mendeleev. Later, she would involve him in a complicated love-hate relationship with his fellow Symbolist [Andrei Bely](http://www.poemhunter.com/andrei-belyi/). To Lyuba he dedicated a cycle of poetry that made him famous, *Stikhi o prekrasnoi Dame* (Verses About the Beautiful Lady, 1904).

Blok's few relatives live currently in Moscow, Riga, Rome and England.

By 1921 Blok had become disillusioned with the Russian Revolution. He did not write any poetry for three years. Blok complained to Maksim Gorky that his "faith in the wisdom of humanity" had ended. He explained to his friend Korney Chukovsky why he could not write poetry any more: "All sounds have stopped. Can't you hear that there are no longer any sounds?" Within a few days Blok became sick. His doctors requested that he be sent for medical treatment abroad, but he was not allowed to leave the country. Gorky pleaded for a visa. On 29 May 1921, he wrote to Anatoly Lunacharsky: "Blok is Russia's finest poet. If you forbid him to go abroad, and he dies, you and your comrades will be guilty of his death". Blok received permission only on 10 August, after his death.

Several months earlier, Blok had delivered a celebrated lecture on Alexander Pushkin, the memory of whom he believed to be capable of uniting White and Soviet Russian factions.

Work

The idealized mystical images presented in his first book helped establish Blok as a major poet of the Russian Symbolism style. Blok's early verse is musical, but he later sought to introduce daring rhythmic patterns and uneven beats into his poetry. Poetical inspiration was natural for him, often producing unforgettable, otherworldly images out of the most banal surroundings and trivial events (*Fabrika*, 1903). Consequently, his mature poems are often based on the conflict between the Platonic theory of ideal beauty and the disappointing reality of foul industrialism (*Neznakomka*, 1906).

The description of St Petersburg he crafted for his next collection of poems, *The City* (1904–08), was both impressionistic and eerie. Subsequent collections, *Faina* and *the Mask of Snow*, helped augment Blok's reputation. He was often compared with [Alexander Pushkin](http://poemhunter.com/alexander-sergeyevich-pushkin/), and is considered perhaps the most important poet of the Silver Age of Russian Poetry. During the 1910s, Blok was admired greatly by literary colleagues, and his influence on younger poets was virtually unsurpassed. [Anna Akhmatova](http://poemhunter.com/anna-akhmatova/), [Marina Tsvetaeva](http://poemhunter.com/marina-ivanovna-tsvetaeva/), [Boris Pasternak](http://poemhunter.com/boris-pasternak/) and Vladimir Nabokov wrote important verse tributes to Blok.

Blok expressed his opinions about the revolution by the enigmatic poem "The Twelve" (1918). The long poem exhibits "mood-creating sounds, polyphonic rhythms, and harsh, slangy language" (as the *Encyclopædia Britannica* termed it). It describes the march of twelve Bolshevik soldiers (likened to the Twelve Apostles of Christ) through the streets of revolutionary Petrograd, with a fierce winter blizzard raging around them. "The Twelve" alienated Blok from many of his intellectual readers (who accused him of lack of artistry), while the Bolsheviks scorned his former mysticism and asceticism. Blok considered this poem to be his best work. Searching for modern language and new images, Blok used unusual sources for the poetry of Symbolism: urban folklore, ballads (songs of a sentimental nature) and ditties ("chastushka"). He was inspired by the popular chansonnier Mikhail Savoyarov, whose concerts during the years 1915–1920 were visited often by Blok. Academician Viktor Shklovsky noted, that the poem is written in criminal language and in ironic style, similar to Savoyarov's couplets, by which Blok imitated the slang of 1918 Petrograd.

Symbolism

Blok considered his poetical output as composed of three volumes. The first volume is composed of his early poems about the Fair Lady. The second volume comments upon the impossibility of attaining the ideal for which he craved. The third volume, featuring his poems from pre-revolutionary years, is more lively. For Blok's poetry, colours are essential. Blue or violet is the colour of frustration, when the poet understands that his hope to see the Lady is delusive. The yellow colour of street lanterns, windows and sunsets is the colour of treason and triviality. Black hints at something terrible, dangerous but potentially capable of esoteric revelation. Russian words for yellow and black are spelled by the poet with a long O instead of YO, in order to underline "a hole inside the word".

Imitating Fyodor Tyutchev, Blok developed a complicated system of poetic symbols. In his early work, for instance, wind represents the Fair Lady's approach, whereas morning or spring is the time when their meeting is most likely to happen. Winter and night are the evil times when the poet and his lady are far away from each other. Bog and mire represent everyday life with

no spiritual light from above.

A Girl Sang a Song

A girl sang a song in the temple's chorus,
About men, tired in alien lands,
About the ships that left native shores,
And all who forgot their joy to the end.

Thus sang her clean voice, and flew up to the highness,
And sunbeams shined on her shoulder's white --
And everyone saw and heard from the darkness
The white and airy gown, singing in the light.

And all of them were sure, that joy would burst out:
The ships have arrived at their beach,
The people, in the land of the aliens tired,
Regaining their bearing, are happy and reach.

And sweet was her voice and the sun's beams around....
And only, by Caesar's Gates -- high on the vault,
The baby, versed into mysteries, mourned,
Because none of them will be ever returned.

Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Blok

Don't fear death

Don't fear death in earthly travels.
Don't fear enemies or friends.
Just listen to the words of prayers,
To pass the facets of the dreads.

Your death will come to you, and never
You shall be, else, a slave of life,
Just waiting for a dawn's favor,
From nights of poverty and strife.

She'll build with you a common law,
One will of the Eternal Reign.
And you are not condemned to slow
And everlasting deadly pain.

Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Blok

From The Twelve

III

The lads have all gone to the wars
to serve in the Red Guard ~
to serve in the Red Guard ~
and risk their hot heads for the cause.

Hell and damnation,
life is such fun
with a ragged greatcoat
and a Jerry gun!

To smoke the nobs out of their holes
we'll light a fire through all the world,
a bloody fire through all the world -
Lord, bless our souls!

XII

... On they march with sovereign tread...
'Who else goes there? Come out! I said
come out!' It is the wind and the red
flag plunging gaily at their head.

The frozen snow-drift looms in front.
'Who's in the drift! Come out! Come here!'
There's only the homeless mongrel runt
limping wretchedly in the rear...

'You mangy beast, out of the way
before you taste my bayonet.
Old mongrel world, clear off I say!
I'll have your hide to sole my boot!

The shivering cur, the mongrel cur
bares his teeth like a hungry wolf,
droops his tail, but does not stir...
'Hey answer, you there, show yourself.'

'Who's that waving the red flag?'
'Try and see! It's as dark as the tomb!'
'Who's that moving at a jog
trot, keeping to the back-street gloom?'

'Don't you worry ~ I'll catch you yet;
better surrender to me alive!'
'Come out, comrade, or you'll regret
it ~ we'll fire when I've counted five!'

Crack ~ crack ~ crack! But only the echo
answers from among the eaves...

The blizzard splits his seams, the snow
laughs wildly up the whirlwind's sleeve...

Crack ~ crack ~ crack!

Crack ~ crack ~ crack!

... So they march with sovereign tread...

Behind them limps the hungry dog,
and wrapped in wild snow at their head
carrying a blood-red flag ~

soft-footed where the blizzard swirls,
invulnerable where bullets crossed ~
crowned with a crown of snowflake pearls,
a flowery diadem of frost,
ahead of them goes Jesus Christ.

Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Blok

Gamajun, the Prophetic Bird

On waters, spread without end,
Dressed with the sunset so purple,
It sings and prophesies for land,
Unable to lift the smashed wings' couple...
The charge of Tartars' hordes it claims,
And bloody set of executions,
Earthquake, and hunger and the flames,
The death of justice, crime's intrusion...
And caught with fear, cold and smooth,
The fair face flames as one of lovers',
But sound with prophetic truth
The lips that the bloody foam covers!...

Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Blok

Halls grew darker

Halls grew darker and somehow faded.
Grates of windows drowned in black.
Every knight, every beautiful lady
Knew the tiding: "The Queen's deadly sick."

And the king, very silent and frowned,
Passed the doors, lost of pages and slaves ...
Every word, that by chance cast around,
Proved the truth of the closing grave.

By the doors of the silent abode
I was crying, while pressing the brace ...
At the end of the passage remote
Someone echoed me, hiding his face.

By the doors of the Beautiful Lady
I was sobbing, attired in blue ...
And the stranger of ashen face sadly
Echoed me all my sufferings through.

Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Blok

He, who was born

He, who was born in stagnant year
Does not remember own way.
We, kids of Russia's years of fear,
Remember every night and day.

Years that burned everything to ashes!
Do you bring madness or grace?
The war's and freedom's fire flashes
Left bloody light on every face.

We are struck dumb: the toxin's pressure
Has made us tightly close lips.
In living hearts, once full of pleasure,
The fateful desert now sleeps.

And let the crying ravens soar
Right over our death-bed,
May those who were striving more,
O God, behold Thy Kingdom's Great!

Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Blok

I Apprehend You...

I apprehend You. The years pass by -
Yet in constant form, I apprehend You.

The whole horizon is aflame - impossibly sharp,
And mute, I wait, - with longing and with love.

The whole horizon is aflame, and your appearance near.
And yet I fear that You will change your form,

Give rise to impudent suspicion
By changing Your familiar contours in the end.

Oh, how I'll fall - so low and bitter,
Defeated by my fatal dreams!

How sharp is the horizon! Radiance is near.
And yet I fear that You will change your form.

Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Blok

I Prefer the Gorgeous Freedom

I prefer the gorgeous freedom,
And I fly to lands of grace,
Where in wide and clear meadows
All is good, as dreams, and blest.
Here they rise: the clover clear,
And corn-flower's gentle lace,
And the rustle is always here:
"Ears are leaning... Take your ways!"
In this immense sea of fair,
Only one of blades reclines.
You don't see in misty air,
I'd seen it! It will be mine!

Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Blok

I Wait For You...

I wait for you. The years in silence pass
And as the image, one, I wait for you again.

The distance is in flame -- and clear one as glass,
I, silent, wait -- with sadness, love and pain.

The distance is in flame, and you are coming fast,
But I'm afraid that you will change your image yet,

And will initiate the challenging mistrust
By changing features, used, at long awaited end.

Oh, how I will fell -- so low and so pine,
Unable to overcome my dreams' continued set!

The distance is such bright! And azure is so fine!
But I'm afraid that you will change your image yet.

Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Blok

On the Field of Kulicovo

The river stretched. It flows, idly grieves,
And washes both banks.
In steppe, above light clay of cliffs
Rinks mourn in ranks.

O Russia! Dear wife! With clearness and pain
We see the lengthy way!
It sent an arrow of ancient Tartar reign -
In breast it lay.

The way through steppes and an incessant plight,
Through your, o Russia, lot!
And alien dark and dark of night
I fear not.

Let be the night. We'll ride and light in gloom
Camp-fires late.
The holy flag will flash in fume,
And Khan's steel blade ...

And endless battle! We only dream of peace
Through blood and dust ...
The mare of steppes flies on and flees,
And tramples the grass ...

There's no end! The miles and cliffs flash past
Stop crazy flood!
The frightened clouds go fast,
Sun sets in blood!

Sun sets in blood! Blood streams from heart away!
O cry, my heart ...
There's no peace! Through steppe the bay
Prolongs the flight!

Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Blok

Servus -- Reginae

Don't call. Without any summons
I'll reach the shrine.
And droop my head in even silence
To your feet fine.

I will your orders shyly listen
And will remain
To catch our meetings, short and instant,
And wish again.

I fell before your passions' power,
Before its wave,
Sometimes -- a serf; sometimes -- a lover;
Always -- a slave.

Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Blok

Snow Maiden

She hailed from a very distant country,
Nocturnal child of ancient times;
She had no kin to greet her entry
Not even skies with a welcome shine.

And just the Neva's faithful sentry -
The sphinx with an indented face -
Under the blizzard, fierce and wintry
's reminiscent of her birthplace.

And when the tempest showers snowflakes
Upon her shoulders, hair, and breast,
Nocturnal Egypt wakes her heartache
In the midst of northern fog and mist.

My hometown, gray and distant,
Its wind and chill, and gloom and rain,
With faith -- so unexplained and fervent --
She had received as her domain.

She fell in love with regal buildings,
At rest in the stillness of the night.
And peaceful cozy light in the windows
Became one with her inner sight.

She recognized its morning frown,
Its mansions, lights, and snowy twirl.
This whole unfathomable town,
She knew, unfathomable girl.

Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Blok

Street Circus

A small circus is amazing;
It's for kids who are merry and bright;
There a girl and a boy're gazing
At the ladies, kings, and droll sprites.
... And that terrible music cries over our lot,
Despondently howls the bow...
The scary sprite has captured a tiny tot,
With cranberry juice dripping down.

- The boy -
He'll be rescued from a new burst of anger
With a wave of a delicate hand.
There – lights coming on,
See their growing reflection?
See the smoke? See the torch on the stand?
This must be the royal procession.

- The girl -
Come now, why all this teasing talk?
This is the devil's escort...
In the daylight the queen goes out for a walk,
Head to toe with rosebuds decorated.
And escort of knights hold the train of her frock
And jingle their swords, all excited.

Suddenly the clown twists in the lights
Screaming, «Please help me! Please help!
I am bleeding red cranberry juice!
I have bandages made of rags!
I have a paper helmet on my head!
I've a wooden sword in my hand!»

Here both the girl and the boy broke into tears,
And the merry street circus shut its doors.

Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Blok

The Death of Grandfather

We waited commonly for sleep or even death.
The instances were wearisome as ages.
But suddenly the wind's refreshing breath
Touched through the window the Holy Bible's pages:

An old man goes there - who's now all white-haired -
With rapid steps and merry eyes, alone,
He smiles to us, and often calls with hand,
And leaves us with a gait, that is well-known.

And suddenly we all, who watched the old man's track,
Well recognized just him who now lay before us,
And turning in a sudden rapture back,
Beheld a corpse with eyes forever closed ...

And it was good for us the soul's way to trace,
And, in the leaving one, to find the glee it's forming.
The time had come. Recall and love in grace,
And celebrate another house-warming!

Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Blok

The Faithless Shadows.

The faithless shadows of day are running
And high and clear is the call of bells,
Steps of the church are blazed as with the lightning,
Their stones are alive and wait for your light steps.

You'll here pass and touch the chilly stone,
That's dressed in awful sanity of span,
And let the flower of spring be thrown
Here, in this dark, before the eyes of saint.

The rose shadows in misty darkness grow,
And high and clear is the call of bells,
The darkness lays on steps, such old and low --
I'm set in light -- I wait for dear steps.

Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Blok

The Scythians

You are but millions. Our unnumbered nations
Are as the sands upon the sounding shore.
We are the Scythians! We are the slit-eyed Asians!
Try to wage war with us-you'll try no more!

You've had whole centuries. We-a single hour.
Like serfs obedient to their feudal lord,
We've held the shield between two hostile powers-
Old Europe and the barbarous Mongol horde.

Your ancient forge has hammered down the ages,
Drowning the distant avalanche's roar.
Messina, Lisbon-these, you thought, were pages
In some strange book of legendary lore.

Full centuries long you've watched our Eastern lands,
Fished for our pearls and bartered them for grain;
Made mockery of us, while you laid your plans
And oiled your cannon for the great campaign.

The hour has come. Doom wheels on beating wing.
Each day augments the old outrageous score.
Soon not a trace of dead nor living thing
Shall stand where once your Paestums flowered before.

O Ancient World, before your culture dies,
Whilst failing life within you breathes and sinks,
Pause and be wise, as Oedipus was wise,
And solve the age-old riddle of the Sphinx.

That Sphinx is Russia. Grieving and exulting,
And weeping black and bloody tears enough,
She stares at you, adoring and insulting,
With love that turns to hate, and hate-to love.

Yes, love! For you of Western lands and birth
No longer know the love our blood enjoys.
You have forgotten there's a love on Earth
That burns like fire and, like all fire, destroys.

We love cold Science passionately pursued;
The visionary fire of inspiration;
The salt of Gallic wit, so subtly shrewd,
And the grim genius of th German nation.

We know the hell of a Parisian street,
And Venice, cool in water and in stone;
The scent of lemons in the southern heat;
The fuming piles of soot-begrimed Cologne.

We love raw flesh, its color and its stench.
We love to taste it in our hungry maws.
Are we to blame then, if your ribs should crunch,
Fragile between our massive, gentle paws?

We know just how to play the cruel game
Of breaking in the most rebellious steeds;
And stubborn captive maids we also tame
And subjugate, to gratify our needs...

Come join us, then! Leave war and war's alarms,
And grasp the hand of peace and amity.
While still there's time, Comrades, lay down your arms!
Let us unite in true fraternity!

But if you spurn us, then we shall not mourn.
We too can reckon perfidy no crime,
And countless generations yet unborn
Shall curse your memory till the end of time.

We shall abandon Europe and her charm.
We shall resort to Scythian craft and guile.
Swift to the woods and forests we shall swarm,
And then look back, and smile our slit-eyed smile.

Away to the Urals, all! Quick, leave the land,
And clear the field for trial by blood and sword,
Where steel machines that have no soul must stand
And face the fury of the Mongol horde.

But we ourselves, henceforth, we shall not serve
As henchmen holding up the trusty shield.
We'll keep our distance and, slit-eyed, observe
The deadly conflict raging on the field.

We shall not stir, even though the frenzied Huns
Plunder the corpses of the slain in battle, drive
Their cattle into shrines, burn cities down,
And roast their white-skinned fellow men alive.

O ancient World, arise! For the last time
We call you to the ritual feast and fire
Of peace and brotherhood! For the last time
O hear the summons of the barbarian lyre!

Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Blok

The Snowy Spring Is Raging Mad

The snowy spring is raging mad,
I look away from the saga;
O, dreadful hour, when she read
The palm extended by Tsouniga.

Into his eyes she aimed her gaze,
There was mockery in her dark eyes,
The row of pearly teeth had blazed,
And I forgot all the days and midnights.

The heart got overflowed with blood,
My homeland memories erasing.
A voice would sing, 'With all your being
have to pay me back for love.'

Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Blok

The Stranger

The restaurants on hot spring evenings
Lie under a dense and savage air.
Foul drafts and hoots from drunken revelers
Contaminate the thoroughfare.
Above the dusty lanes of suburbia
Above the tedium of bungalows
A pretzel sign begilds a bakery
And children screech fortissimo.

And every evening beyond the barriers
Gentlemen of practiced wit and charm
Go strolling beside the drainage ditches --
A tilted derby and a lady at the arm.

The squeak of oarlocks comes over the lake water
A woman's shriek assaults the ear
While above, in the sky, inured to everything,
The moon looks on with a mindless leer.

And every evening my one companion
Sits here, reflected in my glass.
Like me, he has drunk of bitter mysteries.
Like me, he is broken, dulled, downcast.

The sleepy lackeys stand beside tables
Waiting for the night to pass
And tipplers with the eyes of rabbits
Cry out: "In vino veritas!"

And every evening (or am I imagining?)
Exactly at the appointed time
A girl's slim figure, silk raimented,
Glides past the window's mist and grime.

And slowly passing through the revelers,
Unaccompanied, always alone,
Exuding mists and secret fragrances,
She sits at the table that is her own.

Something ancient, something legendary
Surrounds her presence in the room,
Her narrow hand, her silk, her bracelets,
Her hat, the rings, the ostrich plume.

Entranced by her presence, near and enigmatic,
I gaze through the dark of her lowered veil
And I behold an enchanted shoreline
And enchanted distances, far and pale.

I am made a guardian of the higher mysteries,
Someone's sun is entrusted to my control.

Tart wine has pierced the last convolution
of my labyrinthine soul.

And now the drooping plumes of ostriches
Asway in my brain droop slowly lower
And two eyes, limpid, blue, and fathomless
Are blooming on a distant shore.

Inside my soul a treasure is buried.
The key is mine and only mine.
How right you are, you drunken monster!
I know: the truth is in the wine.

Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Blok

The Twelve

III

Our sons have gone
to serve the Reds
to serve the Reds
to risk their heads!

O bitter, bitter pain,
Sweet living!
A torn overcoat
an Austrian gun!

-To get the bourgeoisie
We'll start a fire
a worldwide fire, and drench it
in blood-
The good Lord bless us!

-O you bitter bitterness,
boring boredom,
deadly boredom.

This is how I will
spend my time.

This is how I will
scratch my head,

munch on seeds,
some sunflower seeds,

play with my knife
play with my knife.

You bourgeoisie, fly as a sparrow!
I'll drink your blood,

your warm blood, for love,
for dark-eyed love.

God, let this soul, your servant,
rest in peace.

Such boredom!

XII

... On they march with sovereign tread...
'Who else goes there? Come out! I said
come out!' It is the wind and the red
flag plunging gaily at their head.

The frozen snow-drift looms in front.
'Who's in the drift! Come out! Come here!'
There's only the homeless mongrel runt
limping wretchedly in the rear ...

'You mangy beast, out of the way
before you taste my bayonet.
Old mongrel world, clear off I say!
I'll have your hide to sole my boot!

The shivering cur, the mongrel cur
bares his teeth like a hungry wolf,
droops his tail, but does not stir ...
'Hey answer, you there, show yourself.'

'Who's that waving the red flag?'
'Try and see! It's as dark as the tomb!'
'Who's that moving at a jog
trot, keeping to the back-street gloom?'

'Don't you worry ~ I'll catch you yet;
better surrender to me alive!'
'Come out, comrade, or you'll regret
it ~ we'll fire when I've counted five!'

Crack ~ crack ~ crack! But only the echo
answers from among the eaves ...
The blizzard splits his seams, the snow
laughs wildly up the whirlwind's sleeve ...

Crack ~ crack ~ crack!
Crack ~ crack ~ crack!
... So they march with sovereign tread ...
Behind them limps the hungry dog,
and wrapped in wild snow at their head
carrying a blood-red flag ~
soft-footed where the blizzard swirls,
invulnerable where bullets crossed ~
crowned with a crown of snowflake pearls,
a flowery diadem of frost,
ahead of them goes Jesus Christ.

Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Blok

Those Born In Obscure Times

Those born in obscure times
Do not remember their way.
We, children of Russia's frightful years
Cannot forget a thing.

Incinerating years!, do you bring tidings
of madness or of hope?
The days of war, the days of freedom
Have left a bloody sheen on our faces.

There is a muteness - the tocsin bell
Has made us close our lips.
In our hearts, once so ardent,
There is a fateful emptiness.

Let the croaking ravens
Take flight above our deathbed -
O Lord, O Lord, may those more worthy than us,
Behold Thy kingdom!

Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Blok

To the Muse

In your hidden memories
There are fatal tidings of doom...
A curse on sacred traditions,
A desecration of happiness;

And a power so alluring
That I am ready to repeat the rumour
That you have brought angels down from heaven,
Enticing them with your beauty...

And when you mock at faith,
That pale, greyish-purple halo
Which I once saw before
Suddenly begins to shine above you.

Are you evil or good? You are altogether from another world
They say strange things about you
For some you are the Muse and a miracle.
For me you are torment and hell.

I do not know why in the hour of dawn,
When no strength was left to me,
I did not perish, but caught sight of your face
And begged you to comfort me.

I wanted us to be enemies;
Why then did you make me a present
Of a flowery meadow and of the starry firmament --
The whole curse of your beauty?

Your fearful caresses were more treacherous
Than the northern night,
More intoxicating than the golden champagne of Aï,
Briefer than a gypsy woman's love...

And there was a fatal pleasure
In trampling on cherished and holy things;
And this passion, bitter as wormwood,
Was a frenzied delight for the heart!

Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Blok

Unknown Woman

Above the restaurants in the evenings
The sultry air is wild and still,
And the decaying breath of spring
Drives drunken shouting.

Above the dusty distant lanes
The boredom of summer homes,
The baker's gold sign barely shines
And a child's crying rings out.

Each night, beyond the crossing gates,
With bowler hats tipped rakishly,
The practiced wits stroll with the ladies
Among the drainage ditches.

Out on the lake, oarlocks creak
And a woman starts to squeal,
While up in the sky, inured to it all,
The moon's disk senselessly leers.

Each night my solitary friend
Is reflected in my glass,
Made meek and reeling, like myself,
By the mysterious, astringent liquid.

And drowsy lackeys lounge about
Beside the adjacent tables
While drunks with rabbit eyes cry out
'In vino veritas!'

And each night at a certain hour
(Or am I only dreaming it?),
A girl's figure, swathed in silk,
Moves across the misty window.

And slowly passing among the drunks,
Always alone and unescorted,
Wafting a breath of perfume and mist,
She takes a table by the window.

And an air of ancient legend
Wreaths her resilient silks,
Her hat with its funereal plumes,
And her slender ringed hand.

And entranced by this strange nearness,
I look through her dark veil,
And see an enchanted shore
And a horizon enchanted.

Deep secrets are entrusted to me,
Someone's sun is in my care,

And at every turn, astringent wine
Pierces my soul.

And drooping ostrich plumes
Waver in my brain,
And fathomless blue eyes
Bloom on the distant shore.

A treasure lies in my soul,
And the key belongs to me alone!
You are correct, you drunken fiend!
I know it: wine brings truth.

Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Blok