

Simon Karlinsky, *Marina Tsvetaeva: the Woman, her World and her Poetry* (1985).

When Tsvetaeva read at a women poets' reading on Dec 11, 1920, chaired by Soviet poet Valery Briusov, whose introductory lecture asserted that women are capable of writing only about love and passion and are unable to handle any other themes, she defied Briusov [who tried to cut her short] by reading a provocative poem "proclaim[ing] her right to shout Hurrahi! For the tsar the way street urchins shout in all the squares in the world: [ . . . ] This was obvious insanity," she commented later, "but I was guided by two, no three, four aims: 1) seven poems by a woman without the pronoun "I"; 2) proof that poetry makes no sense to the audience; 3) dialogue with some one particular person who *understood* (perhaps a student); 4) and the principal one: fulfilling here, in the Moscow of 1921, an obligation of honor. And beyond any aims, aimlessly, stronger than aims, a simple and extreme feeling of: what if I do." Had there been a single person in the audience willing to denounce her to the Cheka, she would have been arrested that very day (98).

From *Marina Tsvetaeva, Art in the Light of Conscience*. Trans. Angela Livingstone. (Harvard UP, 1992)

What is the 'I' of the poet? It is — to all appearances — the human 'I' expressed in poetic speech. But only to appearances, for often poems give us something that has been hidden, obscured, even quite stifled, something the person hadn't known was in him, and would never have recognized had it not been for poetry, the poetic gift. Action of forces which are unknown to the one who acts, and which he only becomes conscious of in the instant of action. An almost complete analogy to dreaming . . . That which is hidden and buried in you is revealed and exposed in your poems: this is the poetic 'I,' your dream-self. The 'I' of the poet, in other words, is his soul's devotion to certain dreams, his being visited by certain dreams, the secret source — not of his will, but of his whole nature. The poet's self is a dream self and a language-self; it is the 'I' of a dreamer awakened by inspired speech and realized only in that speech. This is the sum of the poet's personality. This is the law of his idiosyncrasy. This is why poets are all so alike and so unlike. Like, because all without exception have dreams. Unlike, in what dreams they have. Like—in their ability to dream; unlike — in the dreams (136).

Genius: the highest degree of subjection to the visitation—one: control of the visitation—two. The highest degree of being mentally pulled to pieces, and the highest of being—collected. The highest of passivity, and the highest of activity. To let oneself be annihilated, right down to some last atom, from the survival (resistance) of which will grow—a world (152).

The condition of creation is a condition of entrancement. Till you begin—obsession; till you finish—possession. Something, someone, lodges in you; your hand is the fulfiller not of you but of it. Who is this it? That which through you wants to be (172) Things always chose me by the mark of my power, and often I wrote them almost against my will. All my Russian works are of this sort. Certain things of Russia wanted to be expressed, they chose me. And how did they persuade, seduce me? By my own power: only you! Yes, only I. And having given in — sometimes seeing, sometimes blindly — I would obey, seek out with my ear some assigned aural lesson. And it was not I who, out of a hundred words (not rhymes! but in the middle of a line), would choose the hundred and first, but *it* (the thing), resisting all the hundred epithets: that isn't my name . . . By the obviously *not-this* I recognize that. Native to every sleeper and writer is the blow of recognition (173).

For discussion, see Shane Alcobia-Murphy, *Sympathetic Ink: Intertextual Relations in Northern Irish Poetry*. (Liverpool UP, 2006): 231-6

## Harem Trousers

*Dedicated to Nuala Ni Dhomhnaigh*

Asleep on the coast I dream of the city.  
A poem dreams of being written  
Without the pronoun 'I'.

The river bends lovingly  
Towards this one, or that one, or a third.  
The staircase resumes its never-mentioned  
Ladder shape, as anything  
That is being hurt overflows its innocence.

It straightens, stands, it walks  
Timid and incongruous  
Through roadblocks and breadlines.  
It holds the hundred and first word  
In its fingers and tears it apart,

So the openness within the sound  
Is forced to break, dislodging  
Its already dove-grey music.  
An extreme and simple feeling  
Of 'What if I do enter?—

As I run to fetch water  
In my mouse-coloured sweater,  
Unkempt, hysterical, from  
The river that lives outside me,  
The bed whose dishevelment  
Does not enchant me.

Your room speaks of mornings,  
A stem, a verb, a rhyme,  
From whose involuntary window one  
May be expelled at any time,  
As trying to control a dream  
Purs the just-completed light to rest.

*Nealbh  
McGruckan*

*On Ballycastle Beach*

*DUP, 1988*