CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN RUSSIAN LITERATURE

Marina Tsvetaeva

The Woman, her World and her Poetry

CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN RUSSIAN LITERATURE

General editor MALCOLM JONES

In the same series

Novy Mir:
A case study in the politics of literature 1952–1958
EDITH ROGOVIN FRANKEL

The Enigma of Gogol:
An examination of the writings of N. V. Gogol
and their place in the Russian literary tradition
RICHARD PEACE

Three Russian writers and the irrational:
Zamyatin, Pil'nyak, Bulgakov
T. R. N. EDWARDS

Word and music in the novels of Andrey Bely
ADA STEINBERG

The Russian revolutionary novel:
Turgenev to Pasternak
RICHARD FREEBORN

Poets of Modern Russia
PETER FRANCE

Andrey Bely:
A critical study of the novels
J. D. ELSWORTH

Nikolay Novikov:
Enlightener of Russia
W. GARETH JONES

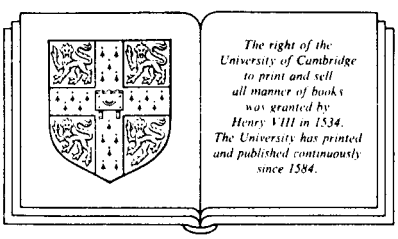
Vladimir Nabokov:
A critical study of the novels
DAVID RAMPTON

Portraits of early Russian liberals:
A study of the thought of T. N. Granovsky,
V. P. Bothan, P. V. Annenkov, A. V. Druzhinin
and K. D. Kavelin
DEREK OFFORD

Marina Tsvetaeva

The Woman, her World and her Poetry

SIMON KARLINSKY



CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE
NEW YORK NEW ROCHELLE
MELBOURNE SYDNEY

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521275743

First published 1986
Reprinted 1987, 1988
Re-issued in this digitally printed version 2009

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Marina Tsvetaeva: the woman, her world, and her poetry.
(Cambridge studies in Russian literature)
Bibliography: p
Includes index.
1. Tsvetaeva, Marina, 1892-1941. 2. Poets, Russian —
20th century — Biography. I. Title. II. Series.
PG3476.T75z743 1986 891.71′42 [B] 85-11309

ISBN 978-0-521-25582-0 hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-27574-3 paperback

Contents

Foreword

As a belated graduate student, after getting an M.A. in 1961, I decided I wanted to do a doctoral thesis on Marina Tsvetaeva. I had admired her verse and prose for a number of years. Since so little was known about her then, I thought it a good idea to investigate her biography and to establish the corpus of her writings. Few Slavicists in America would have agreed at that time that Tsvetaeva's poetry was worth a dissertation. Professor Gleb Struve of the University of California, Berkeley, was one of those few. With his encouragement and under his kind and patient direction, I completed the dissertation in 1964. A book based on it and bearing the same title, *Marina Tsvetaeva. Her Life and Art*, was published by the University of California Press in September 1966.

I had found so much information on Tsvetaeva, so many little pieces of fact that needed to be recorded, that I may have overdone comprehensiveness a bit and turned the results into something like a bouillabaisse. There was a biography, necessarily sketchy in some areas; a study of the poet's language and versification; a survey of all the genres that she practiced; and a great deal of annotations that recorded everything written about Tsvetaeva that I could find. My aim was to assert her reputation, record her circumstances and lay up the supplies for those who would study her after me.

Now, twenty years later, I have written a second, very different book about Marina Tsvetaeva. There is no need to assert Tsvetaeva's reputation today: she is an internationally famous poet, with figures of the stature of John Bayley, Susan Sontag and Joseph Brodsky writing about her in *The Times Literary Supplement* and *The New York Review of Books*. Her language and versification have been studied with great subtlety by G. S. Smith, Robin Kemball, Günther Wytrzens and a slew of linguists in the Soviet Union. Tsvetaeva's verse has been translated brilliantly into French by the late Eve Malleret; into English by Elaine Feinstein, Robin Kemball and Joseph Brodsky; her prose and verse into Italian by

Serena Vitale (who accompanies her translations by some of the most wonderful essays about Tsvetaeva ever written) and Pietro Zveteremich; into German by Ilma Rakusa, Felix Philipp Ingold and Marie-Luise Bott. In addition to these able scholars and poets, Tsvetaeva's recent reputation has also drawn to her a few translators into English and German who do not understand her elliptical style, miss her use of idioms and have nevertheless published their renditions of her prose and verse, often to considerable critical acclaim.

But fortunately the good outnumbers the bad. There have been imaginative studies of Tsvetaeva in Polish by Jerzy Faryno and Zbigniew Maciejewski. In the English-speaking countries, there are the doctoral dissertations of Ieva Vitins, Margaret Troupin Babby, Olga Peters Hasty and Michael Makin. There is also a detailed biography by Maria Razumovsky in German and in Russian and the as yet unpublished one by Irma Kudrova, which, judging from the one chapter I've seen and the overall quality of this critic's work, is sure to be superb. Lily Feiler is preparing a psychobiography of Tsvetaeva, chapters of which I have cited in my book. All this and more has happened since my 1966 book.

The present study is not addressed primarily to a scholarly audience. My task this time round, therefore, was simply to introduce Tsvetaeva, rather than to amass every fact about her that can be found or to do an in-depth study of her poetry. I wanted to tell the story of her life, with the inclusion of all the factual materials that have come to light in the past twenty years, to place this life in its historical context, and to give an overview of her *œuvre* and of the criticism about it.

Many aspects of Tsvetaeva's biography were inaccessible or unknown when I was writing my dissertation in 1962–4. There were no bibliographies, no collections of critical articles, no minimally complete editions of her poetry. What she did and wrote in 1914–16 (the collection *Juvenilia*, the long poem 'The Enchanter' and the relationship with Sophia Parnok) was shrouded in a mist. The correspondence with Rilke and Pasternak was not available. The period after Tsvetaeva's return to the Soviet Union in 1939 was a near-total blank. These and many other lacunae have now been filled through publications that have appeared in the last two decades.

Marina Tsvetaeva often said that she did not belong in her time.

In her poem 'Homesickness' ('Toska po rodine'), she asserted that while her fellow man may belong in the twentieth century, she herself came from a time before there were centuries. And yet, it would be hard to think of any other poet whose life was so constantly affected by historical events. She was born during the famine of 1892, which is the key to much in subsequent Russian history. Tsvetaeva's views and sensibility were shaped by the revolutions of 1905 and 1917 and her art grew out of the creative ferment of the period between those revolutions.

The October Revolution and the ensuing civil war are a major theme in Tsvetaeva's life and her poetry. With a million other Russians, she experienced the post-revolutionary exile in the 1920s. She was repeatedly caught in the battles between various factions of the emigration. She returned to the Soviet Union in the wake of the Great Terror and she died, at the age of forty-eight, during World War II. All these developments need to be understood if one is to explain Marina Tsvetaeva's fate. I have made a particular effort to outline in detail the historical and cultural background of her life and writings. This is an area in which my 1966 book was particularly deficient because at that time I myself did not know enough about the February and October revolutions and the composition of the post-revolutionary emigration. I am aware that some of the historical issues I felt compelled to emphasize (viz., the democratic nature of the revolutions of 1905 and February 1917, as opposed to the totalitarian October Revolution, or my insistence that the Russian emigration of the 1920s and 30s was mostly liberal, rather than monarchist or pro-fascist) are extremely unpopular with some Western readers today. From past experience I know that making such points can elicit disbelief or anger from critics. But this is what decades of close study of the periods in question have shown me. Everything about Marina Tsvetaeva's experiences further confirms these conclusions.

This book could not have been written without the research and publications of the scholars whose work is enumerated in the Appendix on Sources at the end. I met many of them at the memorable Tsvetaeva Symposium, organized by Robin Kemball and held in Lausanne in the summer of 1982, and have admired the depth of their dedication to Tsvetaeva. Those who helped me by supplying unpublished materials or copies of their own publications are thanked individually when the sources for each chapter are

listed. Serena Vitale and Viktoria Schweitzer have been especially kind in this respect and deserve additional gratitude. Closer to home, I want to thank Peter Carleton for help with editing and my colleague and neighbour Olga Raevsky Hughes for sharing her research with me. Robert P. Hughes, Hugh McLean and G. S. Smith read various portions of the manuscript and offered valuable suggestions.

Back in 1926, when Tsvetaeva was alive and at the peak of her genius, Dmitry Sviatopolk-Mirsky wrote that a book about her was needed and this book ought to be written with pride and rejoicing. Contemplating her fate four decades after her death, however, is likely to arouse humility and sadness. But if we consider her ultimate triumph, her 'victory over time and gravity,' as she once put it, we can indeed feel pride for her and rejoicing for all those who can now partake of the living waters of her imperishable poetry.

SIMON KARLINSKY

Fall of 1984