

Chapter & Verse

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Thank you everybody who attended the *From Suffolk to the Hebrides* event and the *Voices and Images of Islay* exhibition in Aldeburgh a couple of weeks ago. It was a wonderful afternoon of poetry, music and dance. Thanks also to everyone who took part.

Knowing The Truth: Marina Tsvetaeva (1892 - 1941)

Although Marina Tsvetaeva was born in Moscow, her wealthy parents moved around a good deal in her childhood. When she was twelve, Marina was sent to a boarding school in Switzerland. Four years later, she went on to study at the Sorbonne in Paris.

After university, she moved to the Black Sea resort of Koktebel which attracted many Russian writers and artists at the beginning of the twentieth century. It was in Koktebel that she met her husband, Efron with whom she had a rather tempestuous relationship. Marina had a number of affairs, including one with the great Russian poet, Osip Mandestam. She also had a passionate affair with a female poet, Sofia Parnok.

At the age of just eighteen, Marina paid for the publication of her first collection of poems entitled *Evening Album* but the poems in this collection lack the power and intensity of the poetry written after the Russian revolution in 1917 which was to cause her so much suffering.

Both she and her husband were totally opposed to the revolution and her husband joined the anti-Bolshevik White Army which was eventually defeated, after years of terrible conflict, in 1923. While her husband was away fighting, Marina was trapped in Moscow

Hell, my ardent sisters, be assured,
Is where we're bound; we'll drink the pitch of hell
We, who have sung the praises of the lord
With every fibre in us, every cell.

We, who did not manage to devote
Our nights to spinning, did not bend and sway
Above a cradle, in a flimsy boat,
Wrapped in a mantle, we're now borne away.

Every morning, every day, we'd rise
And have the finest Chinese silks to wear;
And we'd strike up the songs of paradise
Around the campfire of a robbers' lair,

We, careless seamstresses (our seams all ran,
Whether we sewed or not) yet we have been
Such dancers, we have played the pipes of Pan:
The world was ours, each one of us a queen.

First, scarcely draped in tatters, and dishevelled,
Then plaited with a starry diadem;
We've been in jails, at banquets we have revelled:
But the rewards of heaven, we're lost to them,

Lost in nights of starlight, in the garden
Where apple trees from paradise are found.
No, be assured, my gentle girls, my ardent
And lovely sisters, hell is where we're bound.



which was in the midst of a famine which led to the deaths of many thousands of people. In order to save her daughter, Irna from starvation, she placed her in a state orphanage but this could not save her as Irna died of hunger. In the poem *Bound For Hell*, she writes with bitter irony and surreal despair. In 1922, she was able to escape from hell to Prague where her husband became a student at the university but she could not escape unremitting poverty. She went on writing and publishing poetry but when invited to give a reading, she had to borrow a dress from a friend as her only dress was in tatters.

Still, it was the writing of poetry which sustained her during those years of exile from the homeland she had loved as a child. In the poem, *Oh, table on which I write!* she blesses the table she writes upon.

In 1925, she and her husband, sons and surviving daughter moved to Paris where they lived for the next fourteen years. Unknown to Marina, her husband

had slowly developed Soviet sympathies and he became a spy for the organisation which was later to be known as the KGB. When his activities were discovered, he had to escape from Paris and in 1939 Marina and her son joined him in Moscow. She had unwittingly re-entered the jaws of hell.

Stalin was paranoid about any Russian who had come from abroad, particularly members of the intelligentsia. Marina found that all doors were closed to her. Her husband and her son, Alya were arrested for espionage and

Efron was shot in 1941. Marina was moved to the far distant town of Yelabuga with no possible means of earning a living. The poverty she had suffered all her adult life increased. Driven to abject despair, she hanged herself. She left a note to her son, Mur: *Forgive me, but to go on would be worse.* She paid the ultimate price for seeing into the dark heart of life, having been hounded by suffering for so many years. It's only in death that she could imagine any sense of peace, the peace which had eluded her all her life.

Oh, table, on which I write!

Oh, table, on which I write!
I thank you with all my heart:
You've given a trunk to me
With goal a table to be

But keep being the living trunk!
With over my head your leaf, young,
With fresh bark and hot pitch's tears,
With roots till the bottom of Earth

I Know the Truth

I know the truth - forget all other truths!
No need for anyone on earth to struggle.
Look - it is evening, look, it is nearly night:
what will you say, poets, lovers, generals?

The wind is level now, the earth is wet with dew,
the storm of stars in the sky will turn to quiet.
And soon all of us will sleep beneath the earth, we
who never let each other sleep above it

Love

A fire, a sword, doing
you awful harm?
No! These words are
too loud and shabby!
A pain, well-known like
to eyes – a palm,
Like to lips – a name of
a dear baby.