

## UKRAINE

**Oksana Batyuk**

### Columns of hermetic reality

Columns of hermetic reality  
make fingers bleed

from observing  
convulsions of conjecture

and watching  
lightning bolts of Memory  
flounder in the bog  
of general development

how I love  
the smell of a fresh  
Word

### It's so hard to be somebody

It's so hard to be somebody  
but these days this doesn't  
concern me too much

sometimes I wake up  
in another life  
then fall asleep again

but the coffee cup  
decorated with your cigarette smoke  
is more important than any brand of  
hyperreality

*Oksana Batyuk is aged 20. These previously  
unpublished poems were written in 1991-2.*

**Serhi Lavrenyuk**

### I am a Raphael without hands

I am a Raphael without hands  
I paint a sinner with the eyes of a child  
but on the canvas the features of  
a beautiful woman appear

who outshines every woman  
ever painted  
but I am a Raphael without hands  
so no one will ever see  
this painting

*Serhi Lavrenyuk is aged 26. This unpublished  
poem was written in 1992.*

**Oleh Lysheha**

### On learning new party hymns

I am scum  
I wrote poems about the breath of spring  
when the far off bluffs of Siberia blossom pink.  
My mother, father and sister have disowned me.  
They no longer send me messages here in far off provincial Sezhuan.  
I dig the earth here, raise fortifications, I am happy.  
During breaks, in dreams, and at dawn, I learn new party hymns.  
I am scum — I wrote poems about the breath of spring  
when my dear bluffs of Siberia blossom pink.  
I will make every effort to justify the trust placed in me  
and will return reformed and will school my old friends  
who are still in the grasp of the Green Dragon.

I am scum — I wanted to trick the Party and my friends —  
I felt chilled — standing in the forest near the fire —  
as we dug an underground tunnel from Sezhuan to the Great Wall.  
But we worked, and we sang, and I carted tons of dirt in wheelbarrows.  
I was a traitor to my class and asked for kitchen duty  
but they didn't trust me to prepare the food,  
so I was given a rag and told to wipe the kitchen floor  
and stir the pots. At night, as they slept happily after work,  
it was my turn to dine on cheap broiled fish  
and hot tea. Sometimes I even got a handful of rice  
from the pilaf our Uzbek friends made.  
I shed tears of thanks as I sang.

I am scum — I wrote poems about the breath of spring  
when the local bluffs of Siberia blossom pink.  
I will make every effort to justify, with honour, the trust placed in me  
and will return totally reformed and will school my old friends  
who are still in the grasp of the Green Dragon.  
(1979)

*Oleh Lysheha was born in 1949 in the Carpathian region of Ukraine. He was  
expelled from Lviv University in the 1970s. His collection of poetry The Great  
Bridge was published in 1989. He lives and works in Kiev, where in March  
1992 his play Friend Li Po, Brother Tu Fu was performed by the Budmo  
Theatre. He has translated Ezra Pound, D H Lawrence, William Carlos  
Williams and Sylvia Plath into Ukrainian.*

**Translated by Virlana Tkacz and Wanda Phipps**

*Virlana Tkacz and Wanda Phipps have worked together translating Ukrainian  
poetry since 1989. Their work has appeared in Agni Visions International and  
Onthebus. Last year they were awarded the Agni Translation Prize and have  
received grants from NYSCA and the National Theatre Translation Fund. They  
have also co-created theatre pieces: A Light from the East, Explosions and  
Blind Sight. Wanda Phipps works at St Mark's Poetry Project. Virlana Tkacz  
heads the Yara Arts Group, which is a resident company at La Mama  
Experimental Theatre in New York.*