

*Twice Under the Sun*



**ANNA GLAZOVA**

**Twice Under the Sun**

*Translated by Anna Khasin*

Shearsman Books  
Exeter

First published in the United Kingdom in 2008 by  
Shearsman Books Ltd  
58 Velwell Road  
Exeter EX4 4LD

ISBN 978-1-905700-92-9

First Edition

Copyright © Anna Glazova, 2008

Translations copyright © Anna Khasin, 2008

Introduction copyright © Geoffrey Squires, 2008

The right of Anna Glazova to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by her in accordance with the Copyrights, Designs and Patents Act of 1988. The right of Anna Khasin to be identified as the translator of this work has likewise been asserted by her. All rights reserved.

# Contents

Preface by Geoffrey Squires 7

Twice Under the Sun 15



## PREFACE

The initial thing that strikes one about this work is its consistency. There is no wavering, searching for a register: from the very first poem we are thrown into a type of writing which is sustained, with very little deviation or let up, until the last: something that is immediately identifiable and which quickly becomes so familiar as to seem inevitable, even natural. There are of course some variations in the substance and form of the poems, reflecting no doubt changes over the period of seven years' work represented here, but in the end it is the unity and integrity of the whole that leaves the lasting impression.

That consistency must also have something to do with the translation. I have seen some other translations of Glazova's work which actually seemed to me more fluent and easier to read, but I suspect that Anna Khasin has preserved a necessary obduracy and jaggedness in the writing. These are mainly short poems, consisting of short lines, often with syntactic breaks within them; so that when occasionally one does come across a long, fluid line, the effect is all the more lapidary:

like those waves were breaking in you not in the sea you swam  
(p.73)

So what kind of consistency is it? Loosely, one might call it a unity of style, except that this implies some kind of space between intention and execution, a matter of writerly choices, whereas here it seems to pertain to the very constitution of the poems. It is hard to imagine them otherwise. The very dislocations within them are part of them, part of what they 'say'; one has the sense that they necessarily came out this way. They are also very dense, compressed: miss a line and you've had it.

So what about 'voice'? In some of the poems, certainly, there is the expression of a self, the conventional subject and source of the personal lyric. That emerges typically as a sudden, abrupt comment or question

so are we alive (p.17)

right, let's go (p.49)

what, what time is it, now? (p.60)

There is also sometimes an explicit or palpable 'you', and some of the poems imply dialogue, relationships of tenderness, anger, closeness, dismay, complexity:

the way I hear you, you hear.  
lay fingers on my mouth  
i will  
lay fingers on your fingers (p.40)

blue.  
like the sky like the sea like the sound wave  
i am silent with, i have agreed not to sing  
as we talk (p.39)

hiding hands in the glove of each other (p.27)

listen, all right, lie, lie, but at least with feeling (p.69)

The personal pronoun is complicated in some cases by compounds which apparently come more easily to Russian than to English: she-i, he-i, it-her, not-you. This points to fissures in identity, and while there a pervasive sense of self in the work, unlike in much post-modernist writing where the very idea of the agentic subject has dissolved into language itself, it is a complex, intermittent, transient sense, which can disappear the very moment it materializes: 'to erase yourself after yourself' (p.21). The personal voice typically functions as intrusion or interpolation in something else:

me, I'm kind of not here. dust. (p.69)



The texture of the writing is so close and compressed that it is difficult if not impossible to separate out the conventional elements of self, object, situation; what we have is a cognitive process, a highly distinctive consciousness, both embodied and disembodied, which cuts across the usual distinctions and categories, and where one word or image often leads directly on to another, without reference to what preceded it, in a kind of weirdly logical, sometimes dreamlike (or nightmarish) progression. This consciousness is grounded in a strong physical, material and organic sense of the world (which is even more evident in the prose pieces at the end of the book): there are frequent references to the body (hands, eyes, throat, skin, pores) to food and the vegetable (oil, honey, apples, figs, berries, pods) to rocks, metals, fish, insects, animals or beasts. Sometimes these occur as blank, random, factual lists:

from it fall  
wool, feather, salt  
ash, nitre. (p.66)

At other times, there is a surreal mixing of forms:

a fish standing in a flood changes,  
grows hooves in the fins maybe  
or maybe its body abates (p.65)

Or a sensuous blending of elements, though the gaps and disjunctions are as important as the substances:

heavy oil unglowing honey  
you tell me in my skin and mouth: "the nape" and the fingers  
are in the hair

i hold the shy bunch  
berries maybe or silent beasts

if they fall, will they break?—silence (p.30)

There is also frequently a sense of minute detail, as if the level of magnification had been turned sharply up:

terrible to hold to the light  
in the index and thumb  
of a skinned grape  
a small heart.

when suspended from every finger  
swings a world. (p.18)

This physical or material sense of the world is counterbalanced by something which I can only call an abstract imagination, a capacity to express what is not:

lamplight falls into no hand (p.62)

you measure air with your back (p.48)

It is this alliance of sensuous and abstract, present and absent that makes these poems so distinctive, giving an almost tactile sense of void, of what is not. Sometimes the very process of perception is thrown into doubt: 'the black sea the blue sea'; 'without a mirror with one' (p.28). One can take nothing for granted, and in this perhaps one can see a shadow of Heidegger's *Unheimlichkeit*, literally not-at-homeness. There is an alternating sense of location and dis-location, familiarity and strangeness, ease and unease. There is also a recurring preoccupation with the internal, with being inside, containment of various kinds:

we have bent the wall so  
that all doors are outside  
and inside is the sea (p.37)

if the inside of the fog is soft  
let's fall there (p.63)

which blurs the boundary between the inner and outer worlds.  
And the very categories of perception are at issue:

the eye which I remember by ear (p.67)

All through there is the effort to articulate, the over-riding need  
to speak but the struggle of syntax and the difficulty of words:

Tikhon, I can't speak, you kept saying  
I cannot speak (p.80)

This contains one of the few purely Russian references in the text which westerners will be unlikely to know: Tikhon was the last patriarch of the Orthodox church who tried unsuccessfully to mediate between the church and the new communist regime; the reference to the hundred-headed city in another poem (p.24) is to the church council or synod which reduced the power of the patriarch in the 18th century. There are perhaps some other allusions to her native country, such as the 'white nights' in one poem, but in general Glazova's work does not depend on understanding location or geographical or cultural setting in the way that some other poets' does.

The compression of the writing, however, borders on the unsayable. Sometimes, for me, a line or phrase simply does not come across: for example 'a ringing stream in the knee jar' (p.25) or 'how we mixed' (p.29). This may be just me, or the inescapable import tariff one pays on translation, though I suspect it is actually a function of the compression of the original, the pushing up to a certain limit. But at other times that compression works superbly, as in one of her finest short poems:

will come and raise up  
the broken in stone  
the greek to me  
and hang it on the wind  
what: the unfurlgrass

★

will not. come or raise. (p.31)

It is not just the density of the imagery that is striking here, but the abrupt halts: (what; will not) and a reflexivity so entwined with the objects of reflection as to be almost inseparable.

It is difficult to place Glazova's work, but one striking feature is its imagery. To understand the nature of images, we have to go back to Aristotle's distinction between essential and accidental attributes. Essential attributes are those which are necessary to the definition or identity of something; accidental ones are non-essential or additional. Few philosophers now espouse this kind of essentialism, but we can substitute the idea of habitual use or meaning found in the later Wittgenstein of the *Investigations*: 'what we call descriptions are instruments for particular purposes'.

Images involve accidental attributes; they highlight aspects of and links between things that we do not usually notice or consider. In this way they enrich our world, and give it a much more associative, complex texture than that of everyday functionality. They create a kind of delicate, often elusive filigree of meaning, providing a surprising and even reassuring sense of the connectedness of things. Some of Glazova's images are of this kind

the white cloth of a wave at rest (p.46)

and the shadow stretches from the staff (p.19)

coiled on the moist  
inside or to be precise with the precision  
of a coincidence you look in that direction (p.20)

However, such images typically leave in place the essences or identities of things, the world we recognise, and in that sense are ultimately representational. Glazova's work goes beyond this, creating a world of pure attributes and qualities: in a word, abstraction.

a ringing stream in the knee jar  
a ringing  
not heard by a silver hammer  
on a gold anvil,

the ringing,  
the knee,  
not heard

from the golden apple of real summer (p.25)

we have so bent the clear sea  
that only night is inside, so we can,  
in the dark, in the neon light,  
see air and light (p.37)

And it is this which perhaps shows most clearly her deep immersion in phenomenology, because for phenomenologists, the very idea of essence is also to be subjected to its unsparing analysis, and our construction of meaning is just one more feature of the world which has to be de-constructed; after all, how could something so basic be exempt? Glazova does not just enrich the textures of our world; the very urge to relate, construct or associate is caught, held, turned back on itself; the poetic equivalent of Husserl's 'presuppositionless philosophy'. And it is this which ultimately places her in a poetics of consciousness rather than a poetics of experience, reflexive rather than reflective, because the very notion of experience contains assumptions which in her writing are themselves exposed and laid bare. There are affinities with abstract painting.

Without knowing Russian, it is difficult to locate her work in terms of what is going on there currently. Glazova's second language is German, and there are possible connections there too. Certainly, her poetry brings something quite different and even alien into the anglophone bloodstream, and Shearsman is to be congratulated for this opening onto another poetic culture, manifest in some of its other published translations also.

However, it is the individuality of this work that strikes me most; I can think of little other contemporary poetry that is so objective in its concern with things, yet somehow personal, as this.

Geoffrey Squires

# TWICE UNDER THE SUN





★ ★ ★

in the sunflower—  
that is: in the sun and in flower—  
so are we alive

then only do seeds ripen  
when the sun burns their skins,  
shields them from the sun with hard night  
and no longer milk—  
dark-pale oil  
fills them.

then only lift my head toward the light  
and shield it  
with your face  
as shade.

★ ★ ★

not lighter not farther north  
but finer and sharper  
flaking away from pain  
a little lens, trembling  
when held to the light, like a drop  
in water.

terrible to hold to the light  
in the index and thumb  
of a skinned grape  
a small heart.

when suspended from every finger  
swings a world.

★ ★ ★

shelled from the pod  
in the earth  
from rocky pores  
and the roe of moles in red shafts

splitting into  
rungs a two-tailed  
bean whip  
climbs the staff of Tiresias  
and the face reaches to

stop the sun?

or not separate  
the two shoots, but weave  
a basket from the stunned snakes.  
gather the golden grains  
from the dark pods which fall  
with a soft thud  
to the earth.

and the shadow stretches from the staff.

★ ★ ★

no lighter than shade  
set like a fig  
with its ovary  
wingless and dry  
inside,  
coiled on the moist  
inside or to be precise: with the precision  
of a coincidence you look in that direction,  
palms above your head,  
and behind the green ribbed wall of your roof  
you know one thing.

how he'd set himself free,  
if at midnight  
the black well of his mind bloomed a hand from his hoof  
setting like a fig  
or a sky: with the shade inside.

★ ★ ★

into what one can stay—  
it will flow and spill out  
and freeze and shiver now steam—  
if you stand up and lean stubborn and dip your hot hand  
only your tracks will stretch  
till there's no trace.

to stay the hands. to breathe from your palm the print.  
to erase yourself after yourself.

## ITHACA

turtledoves hide in trees,  
hard to breathe without stutter,  
like a harpy in a tree sitting  
in a shaggy fleece  
I have spun and spun  
and drawn out what I'd like to forget.

you can't tell who is brooding  
who.

much is born in nests  
which none will see in a dream,  
and you'll miss  
how winged things turn into ghosts when re-told  
like they had never been.

who will teach me to breathe if taken,  
not at his word, but at breath;  
read this tale of nests in which no one is sailing  
and the big eyes of horror  
or maybe a child  
keep a kernel from being born,  
no matter if it's a nut, a bird or a planet?

and your fear sails inside a whole sphere to Ithaca,  
and you sit in it, dimly hoping  
that Icarus, wind or a swan  
will escape from the knot in your throat.

★ ★ ★

go down  
careful and light  
through the bladder air  
through the throat  
into the deep breach, the sharp air

a blaze and dust and in the smoke

dig a hole.  
keep silent the weight of the worn lung away.  
I.  
bury it.

in the holehole  
horsewhip the smoky wail  
of the septagod, pour the ink  
and smile with all seven lips—

sight or unseen

long story or short

when is all said or done

—no  
the sharp-shooting air  
earth.