

OSIP MANDELSTAM

FROM THE VORONEZH NOTEBOOKS

TRANSLATED BY JOHN HIGH AND MATVEI YANKELEVICH

NOTEBOOK II, NO. 6

My goldfinch, I'll throw back my head—
Let's eye the world, the two of us:
Does this winter's day, prickly as chaff,
Scrape your pupil, as well?

Boat-shaped tail, feathers black to yellow,
A wash of color below the beak,
Do you know you're such a goldfinch,
A dandy all the way?

What kind of air is in his skull?
Black & red, yellow & white!
Two eyes keep watch both ways at once,
And when not looking—gone!

December 10-27, 1936

NOTEBOOK II, NO. 7

When the goldfinch in the shortened air
Shudders, like a heart beating—
Spite peppers its learned cloak,
Its bonnet primps beautiful black.

The perch slanders and the slat maligns,
The cage slanders with its hundred spokes,
And the whole world is upside down
 But for those unruly, sharp birds
There's the forests above Salamanca.

December 1936

NOTEBOOK II, NO. 9

A long sleep's stubble is easily shorn
With the Gillette's thin metal:
Let's the two of us recall
That half-Ukrainian summer.

Distinguished summits, you,
Celebrations of shaggy trees—
Glory of Ruysdael's brush—
Beginning with a single bush
Set in amber and meat of red clay.

The earth runs upward. It's good
To stare out at the virgin planes,
And to be master of this bounded
Seven-chambered simplicity.

His hills fly to a distant goal
As airy haystacks. The steppe-like
Boulevard of his roads—a chain
Of tents moving off into the shady heat!
The willow lurches toward the fire,
And a poplar stands admiring itself.
The ruts of frosted smoke above
The yellow camp of harvest's fields.

And the Don, still a half-breed,
Drawing just a half-dipper of water,
Silvering shallowly and awkward,
Losing its way, same as my soul

When evening's burden
Lay down on hard beds
And drunkard trees caroused
And fled the banks...

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