



University of Iowa

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International Writing Program Archive of Residents' Work

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## Writing Sample

Maxim Amelin

Includes four untitled poems.

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**Maxim AMELIN**  
**POEMS****[untitled]**

"Long before any signs could augur  
that you and I — called by Divine order  
up from the void — would join the living,  
the trees wept amber tears for us  
because they knew that we would pass  
some day..." The elegy's beginning

ends abruptly. For its continuation,  
alas, I've lost the inspiration  
to drag out line for useless line in vain,  
at least as long as shaggy waves —  
heirs to the golden fleece — do leave  
these rocky tears upon the sand.

**[untitled]**

Shuffle to work like a melancholic,  
then back again, with a skip and a jump,  
swim with the current right into the whirlpool,  
autumn and winter and summer and spring

stroll down the boulevards, all the while knowing:  
can't catch the light, the creator won't come  
bearing new laws in the place of the old ones,  
can't bring to life those lost hearts and those minds

hungry for only the feed at their feet, so  
do what you will, they won't change, and I  
am nothing more than a mutable form of  
being and existence in time.

**[untitled]**

I would like to have my own place  
on the dead shore of a living sea,  
where the winds, Notus and Boreas  
cuff the heavenly bells during their spats  
making the sky's bronze wail o'er the waves,  
where it's never warm, only cold or hot.

A golden sunset is a salve for weaker eyes  
pink, turquoise, and the Milky Way,  
keeping sickness at bay, calming  
the mind. My fine-tuned ear will not  
be horrified by the thund'rous sounds  
of the verb-filled, song-loving chasm.

Familiar, since childhood, its every call.  
I — a rare carrier of these two tongues —  
mangle the mountain dialect  
when human language has hit a wall,  
speaking in song, having turned  
words inside out and laid them flat.

What's left for me to do? The valley  
can't fathom difficult speech, so my voice  
fell flat on its empty ears. Why not  
half-escape and half-live, serving a family  
of dual origin, a flowing bird or a fish that flies,  
in my own place on the outskirts of time.

**[untitled]**

With my antique lyre, acquired  
for pennies at the Tishinsky flea  
market, I walk on,  
ecstatic and indignant, my path  
free of obstructions,

bringing news to cities and hamlets  
near and far, traveling by foot.  
Saying unkind words  
for those patriarchs of privilege  
born of the crown's gold,

I will make haste into the distance  
bringing nearer my destination  
at a clip, which is  
the same thing as standing in one place  
unmoving, as I

know quite well. — If with a cracking sound  
arrows of lightning break the stalwart  
trunk in two, the branch,  
once secondary, becomes at once  
the main and only

living line. — I know I'm not the first  
lover of the brown-eyed muses, but also  
not the last to take  
their dowry and fritter it away  
irresponsibly

without accounting for it, in vain  
to blurt out their sacred treasury  
of words in hasty  
excitement, and may it all burn up  
for all I care,

like a young heir to countless riches  
beset with lustful desire. — The chasm  
isn't all that great  
between Homer and Herostratus,  
from the mighty down

to the powerless. — To build some cheap  
apartment houses, they first knocked down  
abandoned tombstones  
in moss-covered cemeteries. — Time

erects with conviction

and so destroys, turning stone from stone,  
and none left standing. — O, Alexandria!

    You who have salvaged  
poetry from storm and upheaval,  
    unchanged and unscathed,

you are blessed a hundred times. —  
Love and faith have grown poor, downtrodden,  
    only hope is left  
as sustenance for man, a splinter  
    of a generation

of incessant prattlers, now wordless,  
his lips moving barely, fish-like, says:  
    "If all the worthless  
trash were swept out from our memory  
    what would be left us?"

*Translated from the Russian by Matvei Yankelovich*