

Сергей Есенин

Sergei Yesenin

*ПОЦЕЛУЙ  
ДА В ОМУТ*

*A KISS BEFORE  
DROWNING*

Избранные стихотворения

Selected poems

*С комментариями и  
переводом на английский язык*

*Annotated  
and translated into English*

*доктора филологических наук, профессора*

Д. И. Ермоловича

*by Professor*

Dmitry Yermolovich

Москва



AUDITORIA

Moscow



AUDITORIA

УДК 82-1  
ББК 84(2=411.2)  
Е82

Есенин С. А.  
Е82 Поцелуй да в омут. Избранные стихотворения / Перевод на англ., предисл. и комм. Дмитрия Ермоловича. — На рус. и англ. языках. — М.: Аудитория, 2020. — 256 с.  
ISBN 978-5-6042967-5-2

В сборнике представлены избранные стихотворения и поэмы великого русского поэта Сергея Александровича Есенина (1895–1925).

Они печатаются с параллельным стихотворным эквиритмическим переводом на английский язык и постраничными комментариями известного российского филолога проф. Д. И. Ермоловича. В комментариях раскрываются обстоятельства написания и особенности произведения, а также персоналии, подтексты, значения редких слов и сложных образов.

Книга предназначена для широкого круга любителей поэзии, в том числе читающих на английском языке.

УДК 82-1  
ББК 84(2=411.2)

ISBN 978-5-6042967-5-2

Copyright by © Ермолович Д. И. (составление, перевод на англ. яз., предисловие, комментарий), 2020  
© Зунин П. Л. (дизайн обложки, оформление), 2020  
© Изд. «Аудитория», 2020

*English text editor*  
Richard Willis

Научные редакторы  
канд. филол. наук, доцент МГЛУ Ваняшкин С. Г.,  
канд. психол. наук, доцент МГЛУ Ермолович В. И.,  
Смирнов В. Д.

*Воспроизведение, распространение и доведение до всеобщего сведения данного произведения (полностью или частично) любым способом, в том числе путем перевода в электронные файлы и открытия доступа к таким файлам через телекоммуникационные сети и каналы связи, без договора с правообладателем запрещается и преследуется в соответствии с 4-й частью Гражданского кодекса РФ и Законом №149-ФЗ «Об информации, информационных технологиях и о защите информации» с учетом изменений, внесенных в него Законом № 364-ФЗ.*

Издание классической литературы.  
Не требует маркировки знаком информационной продукции

## Unraveling Sergei Yesenin's Mystery

Maybe I'll deserve  
A passing mention  
By a Claude  
Or a Miss Mitchell  
In New York  
After they read this in a translation.

*Sergei Yesenin. Batum (1924)*

Russia gave its people (and the world) a galaxy of poetic titans, including a Nobel Prize winner,\* but the popular love for Sergei Yesenin† as a national poet can perhaps compare only to that for Alexander Pushkin almost a century earlier or Vladimir Vysotsky half a century later. This love began in his lifetime—that is, in the second decade of the 20th century—and has not waned to this day. Despite periods of harsh critical attacks and official bans, much of his verse has been put to music and is sung as well as recited. It is also an ample source of quotations, idioms and catchphrases. Anyone who has grown up in Russia must have a string in their soul that resonates with Yesenin's poetry.

Why so? His immense poetic talent is the obvious answer, but are there other reasons? Did the short span of his life, just thirty years, contribute in any way to his popularity? That may be, especially if we recall that the other two favorites, Pushkin and Vysotsky, did not live very much longer. Our hearts are invariably filled with sympathy for those who die young.

He was also the “fairest of them all,” that cornflower-eyed fellow with thick and wavy golden hair. How can anyone not fall in love with such a handsome young man who also happens to be an acclaimed poet? “*Zolotaya golova*” (literally, “Golden Head”) was the nickname that the celebrated American dancer Isadora Duncan, his second official wife 18 years his senior, gave to Yesenin, straining her scant Russian vocabulary. It was obviously infatuation with his looks, not his verse (which she did not understand anyway) that caused the convinced feminist to marry Yesenin and to take him along on her European and United States tour.

\* Joseph Brodsky.

† The correct stress in this name falls on the second syllable (IPA: jə'sɛnɪn).

Another reason, I think, why every speaker of Russian knows and loves (or at least likes) Yesenin's poetry is its universal appeal to human nature, whatever the reader's age, education, status, lifestyle, political allegiance, or other preferences. Even in the 1920s, when his books were denounced as reactionary, and in the 1930s and '40s, when they were banned and it was dangerous to own them, the poet's immense popularity never waned. People would copy his poems by hand from old editions and share them secretly.

As a man, Yesenin was made up of apparent contradictions: an innocent-looking boy with early worldly experience, a 'peasant' who loved to parade in a top hat and patent leather shoes, a lover of women who never stayed long with them (or his own children), but happily cohabited with friends, a largely self-educated intellectual easily turning into a violent foul-mouthed brawler, an unbeliever whose language was full of spiritual references, a compliant 'fellow traveler' of the Communists who detested their rule... One could go on and on with this list.

Yesenin's contradictions and ambivalences, however, were thoroughly glossed over by Soviet critics after the ban on his poetry was cautiously lifted under Khrushchev in the 1950s. Not only did they have to toe the party line; they apparently found it more comfortable to go with the conventional tastes and standards of 'propriety.' This selective, lopsided approach is still very much alive and, surprisingly, has been generally followed by foreign scholars (with some rare exceptions, one of them being the late Professor Simon Karlinsky of University of California). As a result, the critical syrup poured over Yesenin's legacy has turned him, in the general public view, into little more than a saccharine patriotic singer of Mother Russia.

In short, the true Sergei Yesenin remains undiscovered by many, if not by most, readers in Russia, to say nothing of other nations. An added veil of mystery envelops his sudden and tragic death with a farewell poem written in his own blood, as much crucial evidence around the tragedy still remains classified.

Yet I believe that any attentive reader of his poems can unravel a large part of the Yesenin riddle. Just try to look through and beyond the thick wrappings of critical eulogies and truisms, and you will find answers to almost all your questions. You do not even have to read between the lines: the poet bares his very soul in verse. Especially if laid over the circumstances of his life at the time he wrote them, his poems can be a true revelation. That is why this book is an annotated edition: I have collected Yesenin's best poems and provided notes on

the same pages in an effort to elucidate the contexts and implications the reader may not gather from the poetic lines alone. The timeline of the poet's life, which concludes the book, should also be of help.

Professional translations of Yesenin's poetry are scarce (amateur exercises, though plentiful, do not count, of course), and very few avoid distortions or do justice to the poet's rhyme and original meter—attributes without which *his* verse cannot exist. As mentioned above, many of Yesenin's poems have been put to music and are sung. It was exciting to try and render them in English so they could be sung to the same music.

This edition is bilingual as it is intended for both Russian and English speakers, to help them more fully appreciate and enjoy the work of one of Russia's most loved poets too little known beyond his country's borders. Hopefully, this edition may contribute to redressing this unfair situation.

As the Romans used to say, *feci quod potui, faciant meliora potentes.*<sup>‡</sup>

Dmitry Yermolovich

*Professor of Translation,  
Dr. of Advanced Studies in Philology*

---

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to

RICHARD WILLIS (United Kingdom),  
editor of the English text, for providing me  
with 'a foreigner's perspective' so essential to the project,  
and to Yesenin scholars

Dr. LYNN VISSON (United States) for her interested comments

and Dr. MAKSIM SKOROKHOV  
of the Gorky Institute of World Literature in Moscow  
for sharing some very valuable links and resources.

---

<sup>‡</sup> I've done what I could, let those who can do better.