

CULTURE

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Boris Zaitsev's *Uedinenie*: A Case of Russian Petrarchism

Uedinenie, a short story written by Boris Zaitsev in 1921, is set in the chaos of Revolutionary Moscow. There is little by way of plot; instead there is a series of tableaux: the narrator escapes from the bustle of everyday life into a Petrarchan sonnet; there is a traditional domestic scene in a Moscow flat, and the narrator's wife goes out onto the streets, followed by the narrator; a priest delivers a sermon, and the narrator reflects on love and death; there is a commotion, shouts of robbery, people executed in broad daylight; passengers board an overfull provincial train; a young man accidentally shot dead lies in the street, sniffed at by dogs, his boots stolen; two young women discuss whether the soul is eternal; a bibliophile peasant coachman collects the narrator from a station, and there is an altercation with travellers in another coach; the pre-dawn stars are described; a writer is hard at work, then goes out to the Arbat, remembers childhood and contemplates change whilst wandering through the ruins of Moscow, which merge with those of Rome; the narrator predicts Moscow's resurrection. The story's disparate fragments of contemporary life are connected and interpreted through moments of peaceful introspection which punctuate the narrative, alternating with the violence and confusion of the external narrative. As suggested by the title, *Uedinenie*, these interludes provide the cohesion and true philosophical focus of the story. *Uedinenie*'s characteristic voice of solitary contemplation is linked throughout with Petrarca, who acts as Zaitsev's interlocutor in the story.

Zaitsev was deeply influenced by Italy and its writers — his travels there became the theme of much of his work, including a collection of short prose *Italiia*: ‘Замечательным вдохновителем, несколько позже, оказалась также Италия. С ней впервые я встретился в 1904 г. — а потом не раз жил там — и на всю жизнь вошла она в меня’.¹ He was a member of the ‘Studio italiano’ writers’ group from 1918,² which he formed along with his friend Pavel Muratov, with whom he had shared his first visit to Italy in 1908,³ and to whom he dedicates *Uedinenie*. Nevertheless, Petrarca is an unusual choice of interlocutor for Zaitsev, as he turns far more frequently to Dante. Zaitsev names Dante one of ‘двух спутников моих навсегда’:⁴ many of his essays address Dante; Dante seems almost one of the characters in Zaitsev’s novel *Drevo Zhizni*, so often is he invoked; and early in his career Zaitsev translated *L’Inferno* into Russian.⁵ Elsewhere, Dante, rather than Petrarca, unites *Uedinenie*’s themes of Italian culture and the aftermath of the Russian Revolution. In *Moskva 20—21 gg.* Zaitsev schematises the events in early twentieth century Russia as a reversal of *La Divina Commedia*: ‘три эпохи русского человека’, from the paradisaical turn of the century, ‘перв[ая], [мирно-договорная], поэтич[еск]ая, когда Италия входила золотым светом’, through the purgatorial Revolution, ‘Втор[ая] трагическ[ая], — в ужасе, ярости и безобразии жизни [Италия] была единственным как бы прибежищем’, to the hell on the other side, ‘Революция кончилась. Но для нас кончилось и младенчески-поэтическое. [...] спустились мы в «бытие». Пусть ведет вечный Вергилий. Началось схождение в горький мир, в

¹ Boris Zaitsev, ‘O sebe’, *Sobranie sochinenii: V 5 tomakh, Tom 4, Puteshestvie Gleba* (Moscow: Russkaia kniga), p. 588.

² Alexandra Smith, ‘Boris Zaitsev (1881—1972)’, in *Dictionary of Literary Biography 317*, ed. by Maria Rubins (Gale, 2005), p. 343.

³ N. Komolova, ‘“Vechnoe op’ianenie serdtsa Italiei’ Borisa Zaitseva’, in *Problemy izucheniia zhizni i tvorchestva B. K. Zaitseva: Pervye Mezhdunarodnye Zaitsevskie chteniia*, ed. by A. P. Chernikov (Kaluga: Izdatel’stvo ‘Grif’, 1998) p. 109.

⁴ Boris Zaitsev, ‘O sebe’, *Sobranie sochinenii: V 5 tomakh, Tom 4, Puteshestvie Gleba* (Moscow: Russkaia kniga), p. 588.

⁵ Alexandra Smith, ‘Boris Zaitsev (1881—1972)’, in *Dictionary of Literary Biography 317*, ed. by Maria Rubins (Gale, 2005), p. 343.

«темный лес».⁶ He quotes from his own translation of the first stanza of the first canto of *L'Inferno*, under the heading 'Данте у скифов', implying Russia's descent from classically-informed civilisation into the dark forest of Scythian savagery:

На половине странствия нашей жизни
Я оказался в некоем темном лесу,
Ибо с праведного пути сбился.⁷

Whilst *Moskva 20—21 gg.* characterised Russia's trajectory as opposite to Dante's, leading back to Hell, *Uedinenie* engages instead with Petrarca's *Trionfi*, which promotes a view defined by a wider philosophical, temporal, and creative perspective. In *Konets Petrarki* he schematises the Triumphs thus:

Каждый Триумф поглощает предыдущий. Любовь господствует над всеми людьми, сам поэт был подвержен ей. Но Целомудрие, под видом Лауры, побеждает Любовь. Смерть торжествует над всем вообще, даже над добродетелью. Дальше идут Слава, переживающая Смерть, но Время одолевает и Славу. А все упокоятся в Вечности, возводящей на небо к Богу.⁸

Uedinenie follows the same pattern (whether intentionally or not): the story begins with Petrarca's love poems, the glimpse of Laura, and the alluring presence of the wife: Love. She exits, and her place in the story is taken by a priest: Virtue. There follows two episodes of random, shameful killings: Death. Next there is the writer, the epitome of one seeking, like Petrarca, to outlive death: Fame. By the end of *Uedinenie* its backdrop — time, eternity, and God — becomes its focus: Time. So in *Uedinenie*, although his abhorrence for the Revolution remains, Zaitsev wants to avoid an atmosphere of Dantean torment, and to promote instead a quieter,

⁶ Boris Zaitsev, 'Moskva 20—21 gg.', in *Moskva* (Munich: Izdatel'stvo Tsentral'nogo Ob"edineniia Politicheskikh Emigrantov iz SSSR (TsOPE) 1960), p. 125.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

⁸ Boris Zaitsev, 'Konets Petrarki', *Dalekoe* (Washington, DC: Inter-Language Literary Associates, 1965), pp. 181—2.

more reflective attitude, creation amidst turmoil, the transformation of turbulent events into measured art. For this Petrarca, who in his *Canzoniere* transformed suffering into elegant and refined art, is the ideal model.

Petrarchism had been a fact of Western European poetry for centuries before the phenomenon appeared in Russia. After Petrarca's death in 1374 his Italian poetry spread westwards through Italy, France, Spain, and England during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, inspiring imitations as it went, so that by the eighteenth century Petrarca was credited with dispelling the Dark Ages through his poetic descendants: "Il a dissipé les ténèbres de la barbarie qui couvroient l'Europe [...]. Il a donné à votre Poésie une douceur, une harmonie, des graces..."⁹ The spread of Petrarchan poetry eastwards into Russia was far slower. Under the narrow definition of Petrarchism, "the writing of lyric verse under the direct or indirect influence of Petrarch in a period beginning in his lifetime and ending about 1600",¹⁰ Russia could not possibly be the site of such a movement, as Petrarca did not become known there until the eighteenth century: "Общепризнанно, что в России, где Петрарка получил известность гораздо позже, настоящего петраркизма не было."¹¹ According to Pil'shchikov, the first instance of Russian Petrarchism is in the poetry of the eighteenth century polymath Lomonosov, whose line 'из мысли ходим в мысль, из света в свет иной' recalls Petrarca's 'Di pensier in pensier, di monte in monte'.¹² Then comes a trickle of poems and translations, such as Dmitriev's *Podrazhanie Petrarke*, or *Sonet k Nine* attributed to Krylov.¹³ The first sustained attempt to famil-

⁹ Abbé J. F. P. A. de Sade, *Mémoires pour la vie de François Pétrarque*, in Stephen Minta, *Petrarch and Petrarchism: the English and French Traditions* (Manchester University Press, 1980), p. 2.

¹⁰ E. H. Wilkins, *A General Survey of Renaissance Petrarchism*, p. 281, *ibid.*, p. 9.

¹¹ I. A. Pil'shchikov, 'Петрарка в России', in *Петрарка в русской литературе (книга первая)*, ed. by V. T. Danchenko and Iu. G. Fridshtein (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo 'Rudomino', 2006), p. 16.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Grigorii Lozinskii, 'Петрарка и ранние русские петраркисты', *Vestnik Evropy* 12 (2004) <<http://magazines.russ.ru/vestnik/2004/12/lo23.html>> [accessed 20 January 2012] (para. 16-end).

iarise Russian readers with Petrarca was Batiushkov's translations of *Rotta è l'alta colonna...* and *Ne la stagion che 'l ciel rapido inchina...*, and his essay 'Petrarka', which moved Pushkin to (mis)quote Petrarca in *Metel'*, 'Se amor non è, che dun<qu>e?...?' (Pushkin wrote 'no' instead of 'non', following the mistake in the first edition of Batiushkov's essay).¹⁴ He also misquoted Petrarca in *Evgenii Onegin*, 'La sotto i giorni nubilosi e brevi / Nasce una gente a cui l'morir non dole', taking the quotation from Sismondi's *De la littérature du midi de l'Europe* rather than the original.¹⁵ However, quotation of Petrarca by Pushkin, in any form, brought the Italian poet into the Russian literary mainstream. Nevertheless Petrarchism was by and large a minor current in Russian literature until the Silver Age, when the Symbolists seized upon Petrarca as a predecessor who was relevant to their aesthetic, and began to translate and reference him.

Vladimir Solov'ev's cycle *Iz Petrarki: Khvaly i moleniia Presviatoi Deve* first brought the attention of his fellow poets and the Russian reading public to Petrarca. It comprises seven sections, the first six taken from the final poem of the *Canzoniere*, the last Solov'ev's own. He chooses the most atypical poem in the *Canzoniere* to translate, in which Petrarca switches from praise of Laura to praise of the Virgin Mary (in the artistic equivalent of a death-bed conversion). Solov'ev does so in order to teach "the true meaning of love", the "graduation from the love of a real woman to the mystic love of Sophia".¹⁶ His translation introduces Sophiological vocabulary not present in the original, and the final section breaks Petrarca's pattern of beginning each stanza with 'Vergine' and decreases Christian imagery to increase the Sophiological, mystical, Romantic imagery. Solov'ev's use of Petrarca cannot have been lost on Zaitsev, as he cites Solov'ev as a fundamental influence: 'Для

¹⁴ I. A. Pil'shchikov, 'Pushkin i Petrarka (iz kommentariiev k *Evgeniiu Oneginu*)', *Philologica* 6 (1999/2000)

<http://www.rvb.ru/philologica/06rus/06rus_pilshchikov.htm> [accessed 20 January 2012] (para. 5).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, (para. 8).

¹⁶ Pamela Davidson, *The Poetic Imagination of Vyacheslav Ivanov: A Russian Symbolist's Perception of Dante* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 67.

внутреннего же моего мира, его роста, Владимир Соловьев был очень, очень важен.¹⁷ Later Symbolists, influenced in part by Petrarca, followed Solov'ev in elevating earthly women to an embodiment of Sophia, as Belyi (Bugaev) recalls:

в январе 1901 года заложена опасная в нас «мистическая» петарда, породившая столькие кривотолки о «Прекрасной Даме»; корень ее в том, что в январе 1901 года Боря Бугаев и Сережа Соловьев, влюбленные в светскую львицу и в арсеньевскую гимназистку, плюс Саша Блок, влюбленный в дочь Менделеева, записали «мистические» стихи и почувствовали интерес к любовной поэзии Гете, Лермонтова, Петрарки, Данте.¹⁸

Blok acknowledges Petrarca's influence as a prototype with the epigraph to a poem in *Stikhi k Prekrasnoi Dame*: 'Все двери запорты, и отданы ключи / Тюремщиком твоей безжалостной царице',¹⁹ which he attributes to Petrarca. It is taken from the second of Merezhkovskii's 'Dva soneta Petrarki', which is a free translation of Petrarca's sonnet 76:²⁰

Amor [...]
mi ricondusse a la prigionia antica,
et die' le chiavi a quella mia nemica.²¹

¹⁷ Boris Zaitsev, 'O sebe', *Sobranie sochinenii: V 5 tomakh, Tom 4, Puteshestvie Gleba* (Moscow: Russkaia kniga), p. 588.

¹⁸ Andrei Belyi, *Nachalo Veka* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia Literatura, 1990), ch. 1, 'Argonavty: God zor'.

¹⁹ Aleksandr Blok, 'Mne bitva serdtse veselit', *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v dvadtsati tomakh, Vol. 1* (Moscow: Nauka, 1997—), p. 83. An interesting discussion of Blok's influence on *Uedinenie* can be found in A. M. Liubomudrov, "Pokazat' by vam svetlyi Bozhii mir..." (Liricheskii esse B. Zaitseva 'Uedinenie' — polemicheskii otklik na 'Dvenadtsat' A. Bloka), *Problemy izucheniiia zhizni i tvorchestva B. K. Zaitseva: Tret'ie Mezhdunarodnye Zaitsevskie chteniia*, ed. by A. P. Chernikov (Kaluga: Izdatel'stvo 'Grif', 2001) pp. 120—7.

²⁰ 'Lukavyi bog liubvi, ia vnov' v tvoei temnitse' originally published in *Mir bozhii*, no. 3 (1893), pp. 52-3. Ibid., p. 503.

²¹ Francesco Petrarca, *Sonnets and Songs*, trans. by Anna Maria Armi (Universal Library Edition, 1968), p. 128. All further references to Petrarca's poems are from this edition, given in brackets after the text.

The most serious Russian Petrarchist was Viacheslav Ivanov. He translated more of Petrarca's *Canzoniere* than any other Russian poet — thirty three poems.²² His interest was not only poetic but scholarly: he gave lectures on Petrarca at Baku university in 1920—21,²³ and wrote a paper in Italian which he gave at a conference on Petrarca, 'Il lauro nella poesia del Petrarca'. Ivanov frames poetry about his earthly loves in Petrarchan terms. His poems mourning his first wife are consciously styled on Petrarca's *Sonetti e Canzoni in morte di Madonna Laura*, "42 сонета и 12 канцон должны [...] войти в мою будущую книжку «sub specie mortis»".²⁴ His cycle *Zolotyie zavesy*, inspired by a later romantic relationship, is prefaced with the well-known lines 'Di pensier in pensier, di monte in monte / mi guida Amor'.²⁵ The poetic process that the various beloveds of the Russian Symbolists undergo is the same as that undergone by Laura into "the sublime ideal, expressed in terms strongly reminiscent of Platonic thought [...] the 'real' Laura [...] has become the image of the concept of the beautiful, [...] the embodiment [...] of good and right."²⁶ The Symbolists' dream of Sophia and their equation of their women to her pre-dated their enthusiasm for Petrarca, but it is unsurprising that they were drawn to the expression of love and fidelity to the Eternal Feminine that they found in his poetry.

Uedinenie forms an unusual case of Silver Age Petrarchism in prose, doubtless prompted by this Petrarchan atmosphere around the Symbolist poets, as much as Zaitsev's enthusiasm for Italian literature. Zaitsev moved in the same circles as the Symbolist poets; their poetry and the directions it took affected his writing: "Воздух

²² Grigorii Lozinskii, 'Petrarka i rannie russkie petrarkisty', *Vestnik Evropy* 12 (2004) <<http://magazines.russ.ru/vestnik/2004/12/lo23.html>> [accessed 20 January 2012] (para. 12).

²³ Pamela Davidson, 'Ivanov and Dante', in *Vyacheslav Ivanov: Poet, Critic and Philosopher*, ed. by Robert Louis Jackson and Lowry Nelson Jr. (Yale Russian and East European Publications, 1986), p. 150.

²⁴ Pamela Davidson, *The Poetic Imagination of Vyacheslav Ivanov: A Russian Symbolist's Perception of Dante* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 192—3.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 183

²⁶ Theodor E. Mommsen, in Francesco Petrarca, *Sonnets and Songs*, trans. by Anna Maria Armi (Universal Library Edition, 1968), p. xxxvii.

тогдашний наш был — появление символизма в России”.²⁷ He viewed the Symbolists’ cult of the Beautiful Lady in terms of its Italian predecessors, Dante’s Beatrice (and by extension Petrarca’s Laura): ‘Блок написал книги, глубоко вошедшие в нашу поэзию. [...] «Прекрасная Дама» рухнула, вместо нее метели [...] хаос, подозрительные незнакомки — искаженный отблеск прежнего, Беатриче у кабацкой стойки.’²⁸ Zaitsev’s approach to *Uedinenie* through Petrarca introduces a poetic, markedly Symbolist aesthetic which contrasts with the realism of the other parts of the story. This is not unusual for Zaitsev’s prose, whose “lyrisme”, “rêverie «sans objet»” places him “à mi-chemin entre le symbolisme et le réalisme.”²⁹ But *Uedinenie* displays more extreme shifts between Realist and Symbolist characteristics than most of his work, due perhaps to the connection Zaitsev sees between Petrarca’s Laura and the Symbolists’ Prekrasnaia Dama. Zaitsev’s narrator voices his understanding of life and love (the fabric of Petrarca’s poems) in overtly Symbolist, poetic terms: ‘Где лазурь, сияние, весна? Нельзя без них ведь. Там же. Все в напеве, в символе, в мистерии. В ней выступаем мы за жизнь, мы любим.’³⁰ This single question and answer phrase introduces many Symbolist key-words into the text at an early point, the second contemplative interlude. ‘Лазурь’ was a central part of Symbolist vocabulary — Belyi entitled a collection of poems *Zoloto v lazuri*; Blok’s poems include the lines ‘бездна разорванной в ключья лазури’, ‘Розы в лазури. Пора!’, ‘Лазурью бледной месяц плыл’,³¹ all of which involve the poet meeting a mysterious woman. Spring also features

²⁷ Boris Zaitsev, ‘O sebe’, *Sobranie sochinenii: V 5 tomakh, Tom 4, Puteshestvie Gleba* (Moscow: Russkaia kniga), p. 588.

²⁸ Boris Zaitsev, ‘Pobezhdennyi’, *Dalekoe* (Washington, DC: Inter-Language Literary Associates, 1965), p. 8.

²⁹ René Guerra, *Bibliographie des oeuvres de Boris Zaitsev* (Paris: Institut d’études slaves, 1982), p. 13.

³⁰ Boris Zaitsev, ‘Uedinenie’, *Sobranie sochinenii: V 5 tomakh, Tom 2, Ulitsa sviatogo Nikolaia: Povesti. Rasskazy*. (Moscow: Russkaia kniga), p. 331. All further references to *Uedinenie* are from this edition, given in brackets after the text.

³¹ Aleksandr Blok, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v dvadtsati tomakh* (Moscow: Nauka, 1997—): ‘Na serye kamni lozhilas’ dremota’, vol. 2 p. 136; ‘Videnie’, vol. 4 p. 132; ‘Lazur’iu бледnoi mesiats plыл’, vol. 2 p. 120.

frequently in Blok's work. Bal'mont's poetry in particular is strewn with various kinds of 'сияние'. Music is central to the Symbolist aesthetic, as they followed Schopenhauer's theory of music as the "ideal and absolute form of art"³² and elevated music to "that intermediate realm between heaven and earth usually occupied by Sophia".³³ It is unsurprising that Zaitsev connects Petrarca's 'little songs' that reach up to his Ideal, Laura, with the musicality of Symbolist poetry. Zaitsev identifies poeticism and musicality as a fundamental element of his style, and cites unspecified 'literary influences' (probably Symbolism) as its source:

так могу определить раннее свое писание: чисто поэтическая стихия, избравшая формой не стихи, а прозу. (Поэтому и проза проникнута духом музыки. В то время меня нередко называли в печати «поэтом прозы».) Это основное, «природное», свое. Оно оправлено влияниями литературными³⁴

The final words, 'symbol' and 'mystery', are unambiguously Symbolist.

The text's Symbolist aesthetic also manifests itself in the way that art becomes more real than the reality it depicts. The narrator perceives events in Moscow as unreal. After describing the scene of a young man's death, complete with realistic details and dialogue, he dismisses it: 'все выдумка ночи неистойой' (332). The dismissal then takes the form of a poetic flight with Petrarchan undertones: 'несись, черный корабль ночей ноябрьских [...] корабль страданий, бед' (332). (Petrarca uses the metaphor of an ill-fated ship to encapsulate the none-too-smooth course of his life and love in poems 80, 189, 235, and 268.) The duality of poetry and prose, Italy and Moscow, contemplation and chaos, Symbolism and Realism that pervades *Uedinenie* — that is, indeed, its main

³² In Janet G. Tucker, *Innokentij Annenskij and the Acmeist Doctrine* (Columbus: Slavika, 1986), p. 11.

³³ Samuel D. Cioran, *Vladimir Solov'ev and the Knighthood of the Divine Sophia* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1977), p. 123.

³⁴ Boris Zaitsev, 'O sebe', *Sobranie sochinenii: V 5 tomakh, Tom 4, Puteshestvie Gleba* (Moscow: Russkaia kniga), p. 588.

stylistic feature — expresses the disconnection Zaitsev sees between the artistic life of pre-revolutionary Russia and the horror of post-revolutionary Russia. Zaitsev describes the effect the violence of the revolution had upon his prose: 'В самый разгар террора, крови, автор уходит, отходит от окружающего — сознательно это не делалось, это просто некоторая *évasion*, вызванная таким «реализмом» вокруг, от которого надо было куда-то спастись.'³⁵ His description of the resulting work, the book which *Uedinenie* is part of, applies closely to *Uedinenie*: 'лирический отзыв на современность, проникнутый мистицизмом и острой напряженностью («Улица Святого Николая»).'³⁶ This drama, Zaitsev's dilemma of '*évasion*', is played out in *Uedinenie*, both in the trajectory of the main character and the dual modes of the story's style, as each is torn between the 'Realism' of reality and the safety of a poetic inner world.

Zaitsev may have been drawn to Petrarca by a certain similarity between their writing styles. Critics frequently highlight the poetic character of Zaitsev's fiction, in which "short episodes are put together to form a kind of poem in prose",³⁷ a form Zaitsev himself called 'бессюжетный рассказ-поэм[а]'.³⁸ "There is no movement in Zaitsev's stories; all illuminated with the same steady pale light, they are written in a transparent style where words do not correspond to realities but only to moods",³⁹ like Petrarca's static, mono-thematic, stylised, emotional poems. Similarly, Zaitsev "is not afraid of stale words and clichés, but under his pen they become part of a fragile structure"⁴⁰ — so the repeating motifs of the Petrarchan style, turned by centuries of imitation into clichés, and phrases in which musicality takes precedence

³⁵ Ibid., p. 590.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 589.

³⁷ Vsevolod Setchkarev, 'Review of *Bibliographie des Oeuvres de Boris Zaitsev*. by René Guerra; Wladimir Weidle', *Slavic Review*, vol. 43, no. 3 (Autumn, 1984), pp. 524–5.

³⁸ Boris Zaitsev, 'O sebe', *Sobranie sochinenii: V 5 tomakh, Tom 4, Puteshestvie Gleba* (Moscow: Russkaia kniga), p. 587.

³⁹ Leonid I. Strakhovskii, 'Boris Zaitsev — The Humanist', *Russian Review*, vol. 12, no. 2 (April, 1953), p. 96.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

over meaning, actually create atmosphere and structure in his writing, and hint at the realer reality beyond them, as the same technique does amongst the Symbolist poets.

It is not only Petrarca's style that Zaitsev was drawn to. Zaitsev perceived affinities between himself and Petrarca: he frames his biographical sketch of Petrarca, *Konets Petrarki*, with autobiographical reminiscences of visits to Italy, and pictures himself at Arquà, in Petrarca's home. He stresses the elements of Petrarca's life that coincide with his own — his exile, and the civil wars that raged around him. He calls Petrarca 'перв[ый] в средневековье человек[] нового времени'⁴¹ — that is, the first Humanist, the first person in history with a world view with which Zaitsev can identify. Zaitsev, too, has been called a Humanist:

To him the human being seeking happiness and salvation, the human being with all its weaknesses and failings, yet carrying in its breast the spark of God in the form of its immortal soul, is the most important subject. Zaitsev is immensely attracted by man — the seeker, not man — the doer. ('Boris Zaitsev — The Humanist')⁴²

Petrarca is one of those 'seekers' whom Zaitsev chooses to portray, and *Uedinenie* is ultimately about the evolution of a 'seeker' in the Petrarchan mould, conveyed through the increasing dominance in the narrative of poetically styled reflection over real life action.

Despite the Petrarchan atmosphere, and the references to and quotation of Petrarca through the text, the story's focus on the Italian poet would not be obvious without the title and epigraph, which introduce the story's main theme, solitude — one which is quintessentially Petrarchan. As well as the constant recurrence of the motif of the solitary poet in his *Canzoniere*, Petrarca also wrote the treatise *De vita solitaria* ('Об уединенной жизни' in Russian), "which calls for a divesting of oneself [...] in order to [attain] the

⁴¹ Boris Zaitsev, 'М. О. Гершензон', *Moskva* (Munich: Izdatel'stvo Tsentral'nogo Ob"edineniia Politicheskikh Emigrantov iz SSSR (TsOPE), 1960), p. 126.

⁴² Leonid I. Strakhovskii, 'Boris Zaitsev — The Humanist', *Russian Review*, vol. 12, no. 2 (April, 1953), p. 99.

realm of pure spiritual perfection".⁴³ The epigraph comes from a Latin motto 'Beata solitudo, sola beatitudo' and recalls 'Solo et pensoso', Petrarca's sonnet 35, which depicts the poet's flight from other men. This is echoed in the narrator's pointed avoidance of company on the road, and the many occurrences of the words 'alone', 'distant', and cognates in the text. In sonnet 35 Petrarca "joins together thinking and solitude in order to dramatize how self-reflection can be best achieved",⁴⁴ a process Zaitsev also dramatises in the first paragraph of *Uedinenie*, and explores and questions through the rest of the piece. The title word 'Уединение' is repeated three times in the body of the text at key points, the first two times in direct reference to Petrarca, the last one in connection with the story's narrator. Each occurrence signals an exploration and questioning of the significance of writing for the narrator. The first is after the first paragraph, in which one person amidst the crowd starts to become a thinker, a solitary individual, a monk; and before the need for solitude is questioned. The second precedes an evaluation — first positive, then negative — of Petrarca's life and work. It is framed by unconnected incidents from realistic sections of the story, which are relevant to the Petrarchan theme, if removed from its mood. A snatch of conversation between two girls contains the phrase 'душа не может умереть. Ведь и любовь бессмертна.' (333) This is what the entirety of the *Canzoniere* must prove to its reader, as Petrarca's love crosses the boundary of death time and again. A peasant is introduced as 'Любитель просвещения' and 'Почитатель', and his inarticulate, enthusiastic speech, 'Да ведь это просвещенье! Ведь познания какие... книги!' (333), suggests that although not entirely enlightened by (The) Enlightenment, it has nevertheless touched him. The peasant greatly resembles Petrarca's fans amongst Italian peasants in Zaitsev's imagining of the end of Petrarca's life, *Konets Petrarki*. The final occurrence of 'уединение' coincides with the completion of the transformation, when the reader is shown the author/narrator figure at work in Petrarchan solitude: 'лишь упорный труже-

⁴³ Giuseppe Mazzotta, *The Worlds of Petrarca* (Duke University Press, 1993), p. 43.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

ник внизу все строчит что-то, пишет, и спины не разгибает [...] хорошо работать в час уединения.’ (335) This portrait is strikingly similar to his depiction of Petrarca as a solitary graphomaniac in *Konets Petrarki*, a work which, tellingly, is a blend of biography and autobiography.

The narrator’s transformation from just another face in the crowd into a reader, then a thinker, then a writer, begins with a sonnet, Petrarca’s signature form: ‘Вдруг человек остановится, прочитает стихи. Лишь сонет прочтет. Задумается. И захочет на минуту быть один.’ (330) Poetry becomes a force for calm against the chaos of post-revolutionary Moscow described in the story’s first words: ‘Трохот и ветер, пыль рушащегося. Кровь, голод и сытый жир. Речи, собрания. Шум разговоров.’ (330) The escape offered by poetry is equated with religion, the ascetic lifestyle of a monk, Petrarca’s profession: ‘основал малый скит на базаре [...] Прозвонит в нем к заутрене’. (330) Having built up these references to Petrarca, at the end of the paragraph Zaitsev reveals that it is from him that the call to poetry has come: ‘бледно-серебряным стихом Петрарка. И рука Лауры проплывет, в шелковой перчатке, шитой золотом.’ (330) This is an impressionistic, personal summary of Petrarca, evocative of his oeuvre as a whole rather than alluding specifically to any one poem. ‘Pale’ is an apt word to describe Petrarca’s poetry, for it is one he frequently applies to himself programmatically to show the suffering of unrequited love. The opposition of silver and gold is also appropriate, for Petrarca often portrays himself and even compares himself with the moon (e. g. sonnet 237), and constantly compares Laura to the sun and comments on her golden hair: ‘piú bei capelli, / che facean l’oro e ’l sol parer men belli’ (348: 484); the single instance of the word ‘silver’ in the *Canzoniere* is in sonnet 12, as the opposite of gold — Laura’s hair in old age: ‘i cape’ d’oro fin farsi d’argento’ (12). Zaitsev orchestrates Laura’s appearance with a typical Petrarcan device, a blason, which focuses on a single part of the beloved’s body. Here, it is Laura’s gloved hand, as in the famous pair of sonnets 199 and 200: ‘O bella man, che mi destringi ’l core / [...] Candido, leggiadretto et caro quanto’ (199: 290).

An authoritative voice, probably God's, addresses Zaitsev's monk at prayer: 'Час стояния тихого — и ответа. Как живешь, человек? Помолчи. И будь скромн.' (330) This voice denies the apparent rightness of being at one with Petrarca's poetry, 'Не думай, что такой уж подвиг — замечаться над стихом. [...] Очень далеко тебе до подвига', before giving the dreamer patronising permission to continue, 'Но побудь в своей киновии придорожной.' (330) This suggests that by removing himself into poetry, the narrator risks real life passing him by. Against the backdrop of an exaggeratedly typical scene of traditional Russian life Zaitsev introduces an exotic, Petrarchan element: the narrator's wife. 'Слегка подведены глаза, слегка духи, слегка изящество; походкой легкой, отдаленной удаляется из дома'. (330) Her grace, distance, fragrance and desirability, as well as the strange lyricism of the phrase, recall Laura. The description also follows Petrarca's representation of Laura's twin role as divine guide and temptress. The identification of this woman with Laura is supported by the unattributed lines of Italian that follow, which are, in their original form, the final lines of Petrarca's sonnet 293 about Laura's death. They describe how, having sorrowed for his loss in poetry long enough, Petrarca would like to write pleasing verses for his readers, yet cannot, as Laura is calling him after her. The quotation applies well to the situation in the story, as the narrator has followed his wife out into the night: 'Ночь, приветствуй сердце. Ликом ясным и прохладным нас овей.' (331) But the lines in *Uedinenie* are misquoted. Instead of 'ma quella altera, / Tacito, stanco, dopo sé mi chiama' (293: 414), Zaitsev has 'ma questa altera, / tacita, stanca, dopo sé mi chiama', and mistranslates it as 'Но тот, другой, молчаливый пруд с тех пор меня призывает' (331). It is difficult to say whether the mistakes are Zaitsev's. The misquotation of Petrarca makes sense in Italian, and could have been a slip of his memory, or could even have been deliberate: 'that lofty woman' of the original has become 'this lofty woman', and could make the poetry refer not to the obvious, only, universal woman whom the reader will recognise instantly as Laura, but to a specific woman just referred to, the wife; and the adjectives 'silent' and 'weary' have had their gender altered to apply not to

the poet but to the woman. However, the Russian mistranslation of this misquotation is so erroneous as to be ridiculous: 'altèra', 'lofty', is mistaken for 'altra', 'other'; 'stanca', 'weary', is mistaken for 'stagno', 'pond' (!); and 'dopo sé' is translated as 'ever since', instead of 'after her(self)'. Zaitsev's acquaintance with Italian was too great to allow such errors, it seems, so the Russian translation of a foreign quotation within the text is more likely that of an editor.

Zaitsev begins the middle section's foray into Petrarca with his defining word for the man and his poetry: 'Уединение Воклюза, Сорга, жизнь Петрарки. Отдаленные прогулки по холмам в Провансе.' (333) Here he encapsulates briefly the central aspects of Petrarca's biography and poetry. Inspired by the beauty of the place, Petrarca made his home in a valley in Vaucluse, Provence; his poems are suffused with this beloved natural setting. Zaitsev is right to select the Sorgue, and rivers in general, as integral to Petrarca's natural aesthetic: 'И ручьи. И реки светлые.' (333) The poems in the *Canzoniere* that mention rivers and streams are too many to list; but Petrarca often associates such water sources with the laurel, Laura's plant. Laurel is also the plant of inspired poetry, traditionally Apollo's emblem since Daphne, the water nymph he was chasing, transformed into a laurel on a riverbank. Sonnet 148 most exemplifies this: the entire first quatrain consists of names of rivers; Petrarca attributes his writing to an inner stream of tears, its purpose — praising the laurel: 'un bel rio ch'ad ogni or meco piange, / co l'arboscel che 'n rime orno et celèbro'; and he ends the poem with an image of himself writing by a river: 'al suon de l'acque scriva.' (240) Zaitsev cites the air as the other bright element of Petrarca's poetry: 'И светлый воздух'. 'L'aura' is Petrarca's favourite pun in the *Canzoniere* — the word appears in that form thirty two times, twelve of them capitalised at the start of a line, and each one not merely in the simple sense of 'the air', but with the added meaning and thrill of being Laura's name. These aspects are brought out most completely in poem 129:

Ove l'aura si sente
D'un fresco et odorifero laureto:

Ivi è 'l mio cor, et quella che 'l m'invola (214).

The air is experienced sensorily by Petrarca as real air, but it smells of (significantly loaded) laurel; it is not just l'aura but Laura. Petrarca chooses the latter interpretation: both his heart and his beloved reside where this air is.

Just as at the beginning the narrator first promoted then questioned the rightness of solitary contemplation, in this middle Petrarchan digression he negates the positive statements about Petrarca's poems he had made just a sentence before: 'Все — сон. Все — нежность, стон любви, томление смерти.' (333) If this is read as a mere statement of their content, then this is a fair judgement. It is also, by Zaitsev's own measure, praise, for in the intensely prosaic era of post-revolutionary Russia, such inconsequential, poetic, Petrarchan suffering raised the artist above the crowd: 'Что сказал бы кто-нибудь из нас о пайках, смычках, пятилетках! Считалось, что настоящий человек — это романтик, живущий неуловимыми томлениями сердца, красотой (стиха, Италии, театра).'⁴⁵ Once again Zaitsev conflicts poetic abstraction and reality, taking the poetic, intangible terms he had used to describe Petrarca's corpus and translating them into concrete elements of existence: 'Смерть — наш хозяин; кровь — утучнение полей; стон — песня.' (333) Despite reality's supremacy in the first two instances, in the third he shows poetry prevailing: the groan of pain becomes song. The 'we' of 'Мы любим. А не любят — нас' (333) seems to refer to the narrator and Petrarca. Petrarca's love for Laura was notoriously unrequited; he relates only one meeting with her. Petrarca's fleeting contact with Laura is hinted at in the coachman's two cries of 'А барынька...' (334), both followed by murmuring of the wind that suggests to the narrator the play of a woman's fingers: 'ветерок берет арпеджио перстами девичьими' (334). It is unclear in the text to whom this refers: it could either recall the narrator's wife from three pages previously, or the female outlaw in the coach racing against the narra-

⁴⁵ Boris Zaitsev, 'P. M. Iartsev', *Moskva* (Munich: Izdatel'stvo Tsentral'nogo Ob"edineniia Politicheskikh Emigrantov iz SSSR (TsOPE), 1960), p. 74.

tor's; so the most prominent reference is to the story's other, non-appearing yet omnipresent woman, Laura.

Night, the quintessential Petrarchan setting, suffuses *Uedinenie* from the beginning, and the word 'night' appears 16 times in the story. That Petrarca depicts himself writing poetry at night highlights the disturbance love has brought to his daily rhythms:

Quando la sera scaccia il chiaro giorno,
et le tenebre nostre altrui fanno alba,
miro pensoso le crudeli stelle (22: 22).

Like Petrarca, Zaitsev personifies night and welcomes it: 'Ночь, приветствуй сердце. Ликом ясным и прохладным нас овей' (331), feels trepidation about the dawn, although night is difficult, 'О, смутные утра и ночи тяжкие, тяжелые раздумья' (331), and links it with the overlooking, unchanging stars, 'небо превечное с ночною синью и звездой недвижною.' (332) The stars disappear from *Uedinenie* when the moon appears. In Petrarca the moon is the border between the human sphere and the celestial: above it are the eternal, uncaring stars, 'sopra 'l cerchio de la luna / [...] tante stelle' (237: 338), whereas the phrase 'under the moon' becomes a set phrase and synonym for being alive, appearing three times in the *Canzoniere*, each with the same metaphorical meaning. He links it with his suffering: 'tanti affanni uom mai sotto la luna / Non sofferse quant'io' (237: 338). It becomes part of his elaborate poetic system: with Laura as his sun, the moon symbolises her absence and the poetry which is a pale reflection of her brilliance: 'al lume de la luna / Canzon nata di notte' (237: 340). Like Petrarca's, Zaitsev's moon brings thoughts of suffering and poetic escape: 'Мир, отдохни! Завтра жизнь новая, новые страсти, тяготы, мучения. Но сейчас луна так светит. Так высоко, чисто в небе, так безбрежно в сердце.' (335) The introduction of the moon begins a grounding process for the story as it moves from the higher, uncaring backdrop of the stars to the earthly sphere.

The presence of Petrarca in a story of contemporary Moscow brings perspective — both temporal and spatial distance, a sense

that all the events depicted have been seen before, that they are both familiar and relatively unimportant. Perspective defines the contemplative interludes from the beginning. When the narrator and his wife lose themselves in the crowds the lens of the story pans out to view change against the scale of eternity: 'И ты один, пустынен, легок и неслышен в пестрой суতোлке бульвара, в море лиц, фигур, желаний и сердцебиений. Не одна жена уходит. Жизни начинаются, текут, расходятся. [...] Это древнее, все то же, милое и жаркое. Ты помнишь?' (331) When the narrator is introduced in the final part of *Uedinenie* as not just a reader of Petrarca, or a critic of his life and work, but a writer in the Petrarchan mould, he sees his life and surroundings in context, from birth to death and further: 'Как все знакомо здесь! И старо, и ново, мило, грустно, кладбище и росток жизни.' (335) Fleeting images of childhood play and adult disaster are summed up by an inverted translation of the first line of Petrarca's sonnet 272: 'La vita fugge, et non s'arresta una hora' (394) — 'жизнь не ждет, и час идет' (335). This affects even the narrator's perception of Moscow. The ruins of modern Moscow, 'Фундаменты видны еще под грудой кирпичей', bring to mind the ruins of Ancient Rome from Zaitsev's memories of contemporary Rome: 'вода, и мох, и плесень, точно бы родник Ютурны в Риме. [...] кошки, как на форуме Траяна' (335). In *Moskva 20–21 gg.* he makes this comparison overt: 'пройдешь среди [...] развалин фундаментов, «римским форумом», как я называл'.⁴⁶ Following the myth of Moscow as the Third Rome, Zaitsev hints that the ruins of Rome are literally the foundations of the Russian city, which is now repeating its predecessor's fate.

The move to classical, rather than medieval, antiquity triggers the change from Petrarchan, Christian diction, to pagan: 'Рука судеб. Воля Божеств.' (335) Zaitsev rarely engages with Italy's classical period; when he does, it is in response to the classicism of Italian writers. The classical tone is not incompatible with Petrarchism, for Zaitsev would have known of Petrarca's intense engagement with classical authors: that he rediscovered and imitated Ci-

⁴⁶ Boris Zaitsev, 'Moskva 20-21 gg.', *ibid.*, p. 122.

cero's lost letters, took greater pride in his Latin works than his *Canzoniere* in the vulgar tongue — although these were ultimately what he was remembered for — and strove to bring medieval Latin back to classical standards. Zaitsev uses a quotation from Tibullus as the epigraph for his essay *Iu. I. Aikhenvaľ'd*: 'Te spectem suprema mihi cum venerit hora, / Te teneam moriens, deficiente manu'. He wrongly attributes to Catullus, 'кажется, из Катул-ла'.⁴⁷ The quotation appears in Batiushkov's essay *Petrarka*, where it serves to exemplify the difference between Petrarca's Christian poetry and his pagan forebears' poetry on the same theme. From Zaitsev's haziness as to the author of the quotation, and the fact that it coincides exactly with the citation in Batiushkov, it appears that he both read and remembered this essay.⁴⁸

When describing Petrarca's poems Zaitsev calls them 'светлые стихи' (333). It is odd that he should term them 'bright', as they are inherently, persistently sorrowful. Yet despite all their lamenting, their moments of deep despair, Petrarca's poems about his unrequited love for Laura are a pleasure to read, for the beauty of the language and Petrarca's joy in the various beauties of life, even when its crowning beauty was denied him, shine through. And so the vocabulary Zaitsev uses to talk about Petrarca in *Uedinenie* and elsewhere comes from this word 'light' and its semantic field. Recalling the period when he wrote *Uedinenie* Zaitsev describes Petrarca's poetry as a source of heat: "Именно вот тогда я довольно много читал Петрарку, том «Canzoniere» [...], который купил некогда во Флоренции, на площади Сан-Лоренцо [...]. Думал ли я, покупая, что эта книга будет меня согревать в дни господства того Луначарского [...]?"⁴⁹ This hints at the vital, and frequently deadly, seriousness that literature took on at this time in Russia. For Zaitsev, writing *Uedinenie* in a Petrarchan manner was not mere art for art's sake, it was a means of keeping a grasp on what was for him a better time, and it ultimately set him apart

⁴⁷ Boris Zaitsev, 'Iu. I. Aikhenvaľ'd', *ibid.*, p. 69.

⁴⁸ See K. N. Batiushkov, 'Petrarka', *Opyty v stikhakh i proze* (Moscow: Nauka, 1977), p. 151.

⁴⁹ Boris Zaitsev, 'Moskva 20—21gg.', *Moskva* (Munich: Izdatel'stvo Tsentral'nogo Ob"edineniia Politicheskikh Emigrantov iz SSSR (TsOPE), 1960), p. 121.

from a regime that did not take kindly to dissent. When explaining Petrarca's significance for him Zaitsev purposefully equates Petrarca the writer and Petrarca the persona with a physical book of his poetry and with his works, which becomes a very real presence:

мой Петрарка — нехитрое издание, но в переплете с корешком ослиной светлой кожи. Он уехал со мной в Россию, долго там жил. По нем я несколько вошел в его мир. Книжка же с пергаментным переплетом погибла в России, в революцию. Но поэтический след остался — и в ранних моих писаниях, и в душе, в воспоминании о страшных годах. Такой спутник помогал тогда. («Звон светло-серебряный стиха Петрарки»)⁵⁰

The book's 'death' demonstrates the impossibility of survival for beautiful art in such dark times, yet equally the impossibility of its total destruction.

The phrase Zaitsev uses here to characterise the bright mark that Petrarca's poetry left with him, 'Звон светло-серебряный стиха Петрарки', appears thrice in *Uedinenie*: slightly altered at the beginning, 'Прозвонит [...] бледно-серебряным стихом Петрарка' (330), as an echo in the middle, 'Серебряное, тихое прошло по ночи' (334), and unchanged at the end. The 'call', whilst primarily from Petrarca, is also linked on each occasion with nature and God, most evidently in its final occurrence: 'Рука судеб. Воля Божеств. Синяя твердь, пустынное море. Звон светло-серебряный стиха Петрарки.' (335) Thus Zaitsev views Petrarca's poetry as equivalent to a natural and supernatural force, a constant in a changing world, and something to turn to in hardship: "в «Уединении» мрачной стихии, проснувшейся в русском народе, противопоставлена вечная мировая гармония, явленная в дуновении ветерка и стихах Петрарки, в тихих возгласах священника."⁵¹ The plea that follows and closes *Uedi-*

⁵⁰ Boris Zaitsev, 'Konets Petrarki', *Dalekoe* (Washington, DC: Inter-Language Literary Associates, 1965), p. 185.

⁵¹ A. M. Liubomudrov, "Pokazat' by vam svetlyi Bozhii mir..." (Liricheskii esse B. Zaitseva 'Uedinenie' — polemicheskii otklik na 'Dvenadtsat' A. Bloka'),

nenie is directed to God and nature, but above all to Petrarca and his poetry: 'Дай любви — вынести. Дай веры — ждать.' (335) These qualities — love, endurance, faith, and patience — are the core of Petrarca's persona in the *Canzoniere*.

As the tome of Petrarca had done for Zaitsev in real life, in *Uedinenie* the 'call' of Petrarca's poetry is to make sense of chaos through art. Zaitsev recognised that Petrarca, too, lived through revolution and civil war: 'Гражданские войны не с наших времен существуют. В век Данте и Петрарки были они чуть не общим правилом'.⁵² The quality he perceives in Petrarca and hopes to replicate in *Uedinenie* is the creation of beauty from pain and out of the midst of chaos. By quoting, alluding to, and replicating the atmosphere of the *Canzoniere*, Zaitsev views suffering through the prism of Petrarca's world of complaint and sorrow, but also beauty and light. It is the largely superficial, beautiful complexion of pain within Petrarca's poetry that causes Zaitsev to turn to him at a time of darkness and real suffering.

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⁵² Boris Zaitsev, 'Konets Petrarki', *Dalekoe* (Washington, DC: Inter-Language Literary Associates, 1965), p. 180.

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