

Munich, 6 September 1963 (Non-Target Communist Area Analysis
Department: Translation of the Tvardovsky poem by Dr. Vera S. Dunham,
Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.)

Whether he liked it or not,
At the age of less than thirty,
Terkin arrived in the other world,
Vanishing, thus, from this one.

Both departure and arrival
Occurred at a late hour of New Year's Eve,
And it's for the first time that Terkin
Gazed upon the nether-world.

Thus, my plan is line after line,
To disclose the picture.
But vigilant readers say:
-What kind of devilry is this!
and others chime in:

-In the age of cosmic rockets
And great discoveries,
The subject is mighty strange.
-It goes without saying...
-It's unbecoming...

-And, it's not without some calculation...
-The ins and outs of it are not simple...
-That's just it...

Author, you better hang on: the overseer is severe--
He penetrates everything from the very first lines.

Oh, my friend, my expert reader,
Grant me the following honor:
Punish me severely, if you wish,
But first, read my poem.

Do not hurry with flat assumptions
As if you were a learned critic
Who hears everywhere echoes
Of forbidden ideas.

Do not imitate his dashing habit
To reach way out--
And to see everywhere decadence,
Demoralization, enemies.

From the store of superstitions
Don't blow up alleged horrors
Which are about to undermine
The foundations of Soviet power.

Don't look everywhere for a trap,
Don't scare me from behind a bush.
Lose the habit. It's not the same epoch.
Like it or not, it's not the same! —

Do trust me according to our old,
Good friendship of war years:
I wouldn't be telling you tall stories
About the other world in vain.

The point is that it doesn't matter
Whether there is paradise or hell,
Satan or devil. Cannons go to battle
Backwards. This had been said long ago...

That's all the preface
The author needs for his story,
An unusual story, possibly,
A strange one, possibly, in spots.

However, -- let's be off. The pen starts singing.
And we shall see what's what.

To repeat: in his prime,
At the peak of his good strength,
Our Vassily landed in the other world
Inadvertently, indeed.

He looks about. It's light and warm.
Passages, overpasses -
Like in a subway station,
Only the vaults are a bit lower.

The ceilings are mighty solid.
Far, more than triple deckers.
That's where a bomb can't do
A damn thing. Nothing doing!

(Yes, a bomb! Staring at the vault
And thinking about a bomb,
Terkin had no way of knowing
That it depends on the kind of bomb

And that nowadays -- should
The scientific calculations work --
There is no salvation from it
Even in the other world.)

So far, what's real, what's dream,
Terkin is not quite sure,
But he does see that his felt boots
Have carried in dirt by the door.

And it's awfully clean here,
No place to toss a cigarette butt.
This made our soldier uneasy
And he signed: Culture... —

That's how winter quarters
Should be everywhere.
Now, let's see, he thought,
What gives here.

A sign says "Entrance", and "Exit"? None.
Now it's lucid clear.
It means, warmest greetings,
The road back is closed.

Well, that's the way it is
Even if it's peculiar.
If only one could
Get a drink of water.

From unprecedented heat
This throat turned dry,
But let's bear it for awhile,
Patience is nothing new for us.

Terkin notices the final station.
Trains arrive there, far away,
From eternal
Darkness.

Trains are met by someone,
Solemn and imposing:
This side's chief, the man in command,
A General quite dead.

Not alone, of course, he stands.
He's flanked by guards.
Whatever for -- that's not for us to judge.
But it is quite strange.
For, once you are written off,
Once you are here,
No matter what your rank,
One ought not be scared,
Not until the Last Judgment.

According to regulations,
Stepping forward,
Terkin reported
His arrival in the nether-world.

The General, looking glum,
And sounding tired, querries
As to which precise echelon
Our man is part of.

Terkin, at attention, stiff,
Answers militarily:
-Comrade General, this private here
Got here all alone, by foot.---

-What's that?! By foot?!

-Sorry!

(The commanders here are stern)

-Soldier confess that you fell behind
Having lost your detachment!

Whether true or not - it's all the same,
You can't argue with a general.

-Yessir! I understand.

It will never happen again, said Terkin.

-That's ridiculous, my boy,

Do believe me!

For the simple reason that

You cannot arrive here twice.

Thusly grinned the General and said:

-All right. Go and register.

Order is important here.

For it's an establishment.

Each must be received and lodged

According to his merit.

But at times it's not too certain

Who was yellow, who was brave.

Discipline must be maintained

Absolutely perfect-

End of Part I

BL 1500