

## Twitter Thread by Maurice Casey



**Maurice Casey**

@MauriceJCasey



**I am reading through reams of late-1920s communist poetry and easily my favourite title so far is: "To a Lady who Rejected a Poem about Spring as a Petit-Bourgeois Deviation"**

The last lines:

"So here's my hat into the air,  
Three cheers for your amazing hair,  
For coal mines, and for turbines, too,  
For steel, the Comintern and you!"

A not exactly graceful (though possibly satirical) title: "Lines Disassociating Myself from Yessenin and Supporting the Otherwise Unfounded Legend that I am a Foremost Proletarian Writer"

An excerpt:

"Goodbye verses of Yessenin  
Goodbye literary slop-  
You are not the line of Lenin  
You are not the line of WAPP

Never shall I moan a  
simple lyric from the heart  
I'll devote my new corona  
to the proletarian art"

The poet was Joseph Freeman, who published much of his revolutionary verse in the New Masses, a stylish journal of the interwar American literary Left.



There's an interesting history behind "Portrait of a German Comrade", a 1926 tribute to the Polish-German revolutionary Elise "Sabo" Ewert, who lived with Freeman in Moscow's Hotel Lux.

# POEMS FROM SOVIET RUSSIA

By JOSEPH FREEMAN

## HOME THOUGHTS FROM ABROAD

In houses people live and laugh and cry—  
And merchants walk the world to sell and buy;  
The merchant buys and sells each lovely thing,  
And ho, my friend, the merchant is our king!  
Then knock him down, and rolling in the gutter  
Let him compute the price of bread and butter.  
While down the Avenue we'll damn all wrongs,  
Shout merry tales and whistle merrier songs.  
Damn it! forget your job, forget trade orders—  
The skies have stars; the town, thank heaven, has borders;  
The fields are wide for any man to range;  
The seas are older than the Stock Exchange!  
And better worlds than ever a merchant made  
Shall spring to life behind the barricade.  
*On the Volga River.*

## DEATH OF A REVOLUTIONIST

F. E. Djerdjinsky

Time shall forget the monstrous nightmare  
of czars landlords bankers priests  
Time shall remember our time of heroes  
scouring tyrannys rubbish off the earth

not one, not ten—millions struck for freedom  
the world heaved with masses breaking free  
resolute the advance guard marched before them  
the iron-hearted leaders showed the way

these seeing mankind going mad, cried out  
blew the sirens, knocked on the factory doors  
(Earth, take this comrade dearly to your bosom  
he was of those who saw, labored, fought)

workers strict battalions, marching,  
beat the streets of cities like deep drums  
the dark-faced peasants' roar rocked the meadows  
saluting the sunrise of the new-born day

nine years loom like nine black tombstones  
over the tyrants graves  
nine years gleam like nine steel gateways  
swinging open to the workers world

this was not done with white gloves, this  
was not done with prayers and invitations  
(Earth, take this comrade dearly to your bosom  
he was of those who saw, labored, fought)

workers and soldiers, hold heads high at his grave  
watching the outlines of the world he dreamed of  
he died with the battle raging: bury him slowly  
keep rifles clean: the last shots must be fired.

*Moscow.*

## PORTRAIT OF A GERMAN COMRADE

moscows midnight  
painting the window blue  
exhibits the independents show  
of gilded academic domes outside  
piercing the sky with spires  
looming behind  
picassos beer hall  
yellow and green across the street  
the waiter shoves the bank clerk  
on the droszhky

she serves us tea at home  
around the table  
with the shaded lamp  
shining in the darkness of her room  
as shines a good deed etc  
this delicate touch  
expropriated from the worlds bohemia

lenins wise face  
smiles on the wall behind her head  
wonderful clever eyes  
eight inches from his beard  
a postcard stalin  
covers rykovs nose

hydroelectric stations  
slaughtered midnights magic  
no one remembers nightingales  
buy roses at the corner  
the english comrade  
from hampstead heath  
having once read this fellow keats  
tells how the boys  
walloped during the general strike  
the cops in sheffield



DRAWING BY WANDA GÁG

she lays out ham and sausage  
cuts bread like a man  
with thumb and penknife  
pours tea quickly  
statistically cursing ultra lefts  
brunhilde playing housewife  
—men do not take to me as men  
she lights a cigarette  
scorning to explain  
digresses to the year  
she learned to read her Marx in english  
in a canadian jail  
the time in dresden  
the Party saw the eyes of victory  
—we should have fired  
we had no iron leaders

o the years the years  
the hundred miles an hour years

at twenty when the war was young  
she wrote three chapters of a novel  
took courses in aesthetics  
—now is no time for fooling  
next year  
back to germany  
dieses mal müssen wir gewinnen

—you are young she says pouring tea  
i do not measure you by calendars  
learn to be critical  
conserve hit hard  
behind her wisdom  
lurks a deeper wisdom  
how should she say  
be strong like me  
choose  
eliminate  
march straight as heroes do

she  
never kneeling at his shrine  
sees what is great in lenin and in man  
measures this age  
with the vast gauges of her nature  
pouring tea quickly  
in moscows midnight blue  
quoting faust  
kidding the english comrade  
from hampstead heath

*Moscow.*

## PRINCE JERNIKIDZE

Prince Jernikidze wears his boots  
above his knees: his black mustache  
curls like the kaisers: when he shoots,  
friend and foe turn white as ash.

The movements of his hands are svelt  
Ivory bullets grace his chest.  
The studded poignard at his belt  
dangles down his thighs: the best

dancers in Tiflis envy his  
light lesinka's steady whirl.  
He bends his close-cropped head to kiss  
the finger-tips of every girl.

Over the shashleek and the wine,  
his deep and passionate baritone  
directs the singing down the line,  
and none may drain his glass alone.

When morning breaks into his room,  
he dons his long Caucasian coat;  
marches to the Sovnarkom,  
knocks on the door and clears his throat;

opens the ledger with his hand,  
bows to the commissars who pass,  
calls the janitor comrade—and  
keeps accounts for the working class.

*Batoum.*

## TIFLIS

Here, from the distant shores of Greece,  
Jason sought the Golden Fleece;  
These hills heard Rustavelli's voice,  
And saw Tamara's love-lit eyes;  
The Persian elephant-riders came  
And left their mark in blood and flame;  
Turkish scimitars were gory,  
For rich lands, horses, Allah's glory;  
Here Russian duke and Princess met  
And drank the Georgian peasant's sweat;  
Sniffing petrol in the air,  
Britons turned machine-guns here;  
This town Jordania's salesmen sold  
Upon the Paris Bourse for gold,  
Till workers, roaring like the sea,  
Struck down the head of tyranny.  
Now creeps the tramway from afar  
Shining with the Soviet star;  
The peasant leads his mountain ass  
Where commissars and comrades pass;  
Red soldiers, singing in the rain,  
Swear to defend the workers' gain;  
And from the walls look Lenin's eyes,  
Impatient, resolute and wise.

*Tiflis.*

Right, here's some more excerpts from the Comintern Tractor Love poem, since everyone's enjoying it:

"There is the turbine and the steel,  
The coal mine and the tractor wheel;  
Let them continue to be there,

So long as I can see your hair"

"Industry that's running snappy  
Is good it it makes mankind happy  
But men not only work with steel,  
They sometimes even think and feel"