



# Apollo in the Grass: Selected Poems

*Aleksandr Kushner*

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*The more softly the word is pronounced  
The more ardent, the more miraculous.  
The less it dreams of becoming a song  
That much nearer it draws to music.  
-from "Apollo in the Grass"*

For the Nobel laureate Joseph Brodsky, the poems of Aleksandr Kushner were essential: "Kushner is one of the best Russian lyric poets of the twentieth century, and his name is destined to rank with those close to the heart of everyone whose mother tongue is Russian."

*Apollo in the Grass* is the first collection in English translation of Kushner's post-Soviet poems, and also includes certain earlier ones that could not be published during the Soviet era.

Kushner speaks to us from a place where the mythic and the historic coexist with the everyday, where Odysseus is one of us, and the "stern voice" of history can transform any public square into a harrowing schoolroom. This layering of times and events is also embodied in Kushner's distinctive poetic voice. Echoes of earlier Russian poets and styles enrich and complicate an idiom that is utterly natural and contemporary.

Now, as in the Soviet era, Kushner's work is especially cherished for its exemplary stoic integrity. But these lyrical poems are also pieces of exquisite chamber music, songs where poetry dazzles but "greatness is . . . sooner scaled to the heart / Than to anything very enormous."

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