

SVOLOCH

This one's for you, sallow third man
in the row of Customs officials at
Sheremetovo. Marina Tsvetaeva, in Paris,

would have loved the quiet voice
in which you pointed out that some of her
twenties' poems in this four-volume

New York edition were disrespectful
to Soviet authority. To you, she would
have thrown a quizzical smile from

under her bangs, and with a stylish wave
of her hand, she would have said "Oh
well — it's good, my friend, to see

someone reads my verses." After all,
you know so much more about Russian
literature than the freckled young

soldier, the first line of protection
of the Soviet borders, who having spotted
one Russian book in my suitcase, called

for his still uniformed but beefier
superior, who in turn found (not that they
were hidden) three novels by Aksyonov.

But for you, the expert in a gray suit,
authority, it was left to take Tsvetaeva,
two slim volumes of Joseph Brodsky, and,

68 years after the Great October
Revolution, in the consummate act
of defense of the motherland, to confiscate

the cassette of the Haydn Cello
concertos, played by Mstislav
Rostropovich, such sweet subversion.