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.