

Five Poems

Translated by Robert Conquest and Max Hayward

Andrei Voznesensky

Leaves and Roots *"Priglasenie", c. 1922*

They bore him to no entombment,
They bore him to enthronement.

Greyer than a monument's
Granite, a roan tint
Like its bronze, who living
Had been a locomotive in
Full steam,
 the poet, unkempt,
Found spades more divine
Than any votive lamp.

Thirst parched his lilac . . .
Like a starstream

 sweat
Was steaming from his back,
An oven full of bread.

His house gaped, empty from
Attic down to hall;
No one in the dining-room.
In Russia—not a soul.

The artists depart, hats
Off
 as to church,
For echoing estates,
The oak tree and the birch.

Burgeoning, they vanquish,
Vanish to new beginning
For the plains and planets,
Away from false gilding.

Above, the forests loose
Their leaves, but out of sight
In the soil fivefold roots
Are twisting, tough and tight.

translated by Robert Conquest

Andrei Voznesensky

Evening on the Building Site

They nag me about "formalism".

Experts, what a distance
You are from life! Formalin:
You stink of it, and incense.

They've got their virgin lands, I know,
Where not one pearl of grain can grow. . . .

Art's deathly without a spark—
Human rather than divine—
For bulldozermen to mark
In the taiga's trackless zone;

It comes to them raw and salt
To straighten them up at once,
Unshaven like the sun, pelt
Peeling like bark from pines . . .

For some girl of the Chuvashi,
Brushing a blue tear away,
Brushing it—sweetly, sluttishly,
Brushing it—like a dragonfly,
To clap hands at rowdily . . .

So to me they mean little,
The spearpoints of libel,
And the furious labels.

translated by Robert Conquest

Andrei Voznesensky

You live at your aunt's

You live at your ballad-studying aunt's.
She sneezes and wears men's underpants.
The damned witch! How we hate her.

We're friends of the barn, like a good bear;
It warms us like hands stuffed in a sweater,
And smells of bee-hives.

And in Suzdal it's Easter!
In Suzdal, there's crowds, laughter, rooks.

You whisper of childhood, as we touch cheeks.
That country childhood, where horses and suns
And honeycombs glitter like icons.
And look at your hair, its honey tints . . .

I live in Russia, among snows and saints!

translated by Robert Conquest

Victor Sosnora

Dolphins

I don't trust dolphins.
 These frolics come from fishfat.
 From the fact that puny sprats
 Are always in the swim.
 Dolphin's blood
 is sluggish
 in sclerotic veins.
 Their joie-de-vivre
 comes from the guts and roes of others.
 This is the playfulness of gluttons.
 I don't trust dolphins one iota,
 these gracious leaps,
 and giant pearly bodies.
 It's a corps-de-ballet.
 This snorting
 and galumphing is for films,
 for painters putting their talents
 into handclaps of colours.
 Dolphins dote on music, eh?
 What's so cute,
 after gorging for a week,
 about understanding clarinet,
 and cutting comic capers?
 Taking lodgings in the sea
 doesn't make them into fish!
 They fly in the air,
 but haven't an earthly chance of turning into birds.
 Dancing dolphin ballerinas,
 brutes with long beaks
 and curving cruel teeth.

translated by Max Hayward

Boris Slutsky

A Footnote to the Debate about Andrey Rublyov*

No, not everything fits into a scheme,
 however much you try:
 Rublyov, when he took the vows
 was scarcely an unbeliever.

He fell on his knees
 before the Word—the one
 that was in the Beginning.

* *Rublyov*, Famous Russian icon painter (c. 1360–1430)