

DEGREE: OF STABILITY

GENNADY AYGI

**TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN
BY PETER FRANCE**

DP

ALSO BY GENNADY AYGI
(IN PETER FRANCE'S TRANSLATION):

VERONICA'S BOOK
POLYGON, 1989

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WINTER REVELS AND EVER FURTHER INTO THE SNOWS
RUMOR BOOKS, 2009

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WINTER MARKED BY GOD

a second white luminous one
the land was at rest

it was cause of darkness at table
and for its own sake making peace
gave not knowing where or to whom

and god came close to his own being
already allowing us to touch
his enigmas

and sometimes in jest
gave back life to us
just slightly cold

understood afresh

1960

VIOLA

to F. Druzhinin

a black bird has lost itself here
oh bright monk of the galleries
and fragment of snow like star of reward !

detaching themselves from the fingerboard
here planks of villages fall
in the yard long since deserted

and the tree is pleased by the tree's dislocation
the velvet by pieces of silk

but the strings would lie more clearly on books
lit by snow on the roof
through the window

1962

FIELD — TO THE FOREST'S EDGE

after the white field — broad and ours — gradually foreign
a barrier — ours from a distance — and while I am raging — mine

and palace-garden white in the open
saraband-space
pure with no beat and again with no beat

alone and grown-up from this edge I shall grasp
the color of that to-the-edge
there beyond green of the hollow
double of the human conception of “field”
slender black branches of trees
and sledges and children in the gully

like flippers — pure distant and weak !
especially — in the field ! with cold necks !
and if the soul like god explains
that like god you can break all necks
transparency loving not seeing
then in the field
abandoned by me over eyes for memory's sake
the children are in their place and I in mine

and allowed as in sleep gradually
to be and to look and feel pain

and possess without fail something secret
possess something special
resembling both gauze and a bandage — dropped
in an empty house

but clearly knowing in myself the cuts of purity in purity
I know there is also the double of burial

there is a place where are only island-doubles
of the pure first — pure third — pure eternal
pure field

KOLOMENSKOE CHURCH

to Igor Vulokh

oats

copying you in its grains
was reflected in a red stain
on us both together
when we were first seen in the likeness of thought
by the Saviour

a net

in autumn heat upon berries is possible
over skin with your clangour
but the message
going up to the heights
is a single essence

the wind

the bluetit and my friend
I asked them if we are forever
and sadly she answered from outside
“three”

1964

SECOND MADRIGAL

to A.B.

as with blue stone the “special treatment”
was quietly staining your face
and with a green lamp on the watchtower
they loved the fact of your being

but the ash
did it touch you on the neck in sleep
like children — weakly then more strongly !
and a handful of it fitting as a tree
in festive light it is it is
perhaps near the poplar oh over the yard by the path
or somewhere birds will start singing again

but at evening the metal of trolleys is pitiful
— who more than they can forgive
why do such stabs bring joy
and they all wanted themselves to adorn you
but many not knowing how

oh I shall preserve this wound as a centre
I shall say let it shine
let it shine with existence
you slide away and already a star

and so that it alone should be
it is time to quench the end where I am

1964

(A.B. — the poet Anna Barkova, a victim of Stalinist repression)

WE APPROACH THE FOREST

to G. Gavrilenko

in diurnal — shining — maidenly sleep:

distractedly you track
the cloudy dampness:

as behind the temples:

pearls-of-shade ! —

resembling
this tender mixture:

the forest's misty edge:

distributing movements through itself
alarms itself:

from within ! —

and: as soul is pure there are only shades and many
unclear only from what over what:
oh one of them surprise and console ! —

such
darkening islands:

to others for vision
not marked out:

not hastening seek one another:

along the forest's edge:

and upwards

DEGREE: OF STABILITY

to V. Shalamov

You yourselves are visited already by something like skyglow:

and the image perhaps
has been made real for all:

independent of all:

is this not the unseen flame of poverty
in the noiseless wind:

of the shortlived features ? —

or possibility of the perilous **it is** :

in faces illumined —

as if waiting to be opened:

like those who guard something ? —

or — with un-clear incandescence (as if staring with a kind of vision of
unhurried illness):

everywhere — unseen — illuminating all:

the ultimate it
of the Fire-Word:

which long ago seized
the very places of our thoughts ?—

everywhere as if in a noiseless wind:

without word without spirit:

has **it** come into being ?

AGAIN: PLACES IN THE FOREST

again **they are sung** ! yes ! again it is **them**
everywhere — sounding — at once ! —

again at the same hour
at awakening:

bright
— as a clearing-suffering! —
unmoving
and clear — unending ! —
and as if steadfast was the morning
in me: as in the world : entire:

and there they have placed that place
between others related
to them:

that at one time I knew ! —

it seemed the hour
of happiness shone:

with a high
clear centre:

hawthorn — silent in singing
like a silent god — behind the sounding Word:

silent — in intangible self:

just touch — and it will be: **there is no God**

AND ONCE MORE: HAWTHORN

to V. Silvestrov

oh voices-**places of the forest** ! —

again
like some anniversary
the time of their clearness
and strength:

again
they are in that same gathering
where there are now
for them no losses ! —

and an image of such an hour
shining among them
that we want to cry out: time of happiness ! —

the place of the hawthorn sings:

the Voice always-youngest sings:

like that of God himself!
and more and more itself:

the voice that leads like God:

uniting the "I"-voices !—

in a gathering of singing places in the forest
still sings the divinity ! —

it is coming to be

UNTITLED

...what places in the forest? they are sung — by God... (1969)

but to what then? — only this is listened to! —

and into heaven is whispered: let there remain
in the country taken from us
if only among stars not-humanly
the tomb of hearing! — if already
you are the graves of sounds! . . . —

oh even so — there is no privation
in my consolation...voices-places! —

and in the sarcophagus of vision
you will be untouched:

transparency — your visibility
your ordering:
in the land — in the place... — even with special
burialings of singing:

aerial and inaccessible! . . . —

but my faithfulness to you is your clear echo in memory (as if — still —
crystalline! — in the clearing...):

and I beg — take the place of the silent voice
into your family! . . . — **to fall silent — thus — to me also**
let it be given:

obediently
(like you too)

(among you and with you)

BRIEF CONNECTION OF PINE-TREES

and you turn so high the volume of the inward chorale

(PINETREES PINETREES STROKE UPON STROKE OF ALARM BELL) —

that it may be too much to bear ! . .

1976

PHLOXES IN THE BEGINNING

and sun-like — they were vessels each moment open
here and there
in disorder
from afar
porcelain-sonorous white:

to the clouds — from earth — aspiring ! —

like water like light ! — the power of their consciousness
celebrated priest-like
the place of their being:

on Earth is this Event — Skyglow of the law of the lord: —

we are vessels no less !
opened out to freedom !
iridescent they gleamed — as if tickling a child's loving skin:

and abiding — “like it or not” —

as if whispering in the dress of their lips'
three weeks' whiteness

1976

EVENING: PHLOXES: ABSENCE

to the memory of G. Rusetskaya

but at times
in emptiness wafts in
(to veranda
to memory)
that whiteness:

clear cold of **absence**: of her who so loved them —

(...somewhere like children's dreams —

...and she did not wake... —

were verses) —

in the daughter's heart it is constant immense and pure —

(as if you saw
a distant-whitening
suddenly looking into eyes)

1977

PINE-TREES: PARTING

It is time for the simple (the Sun is Simple).

and such is Parting (as if of Eyes — into the equally-holding
Soul-Eye: the Sun).

And you are not only Roaring and Majesty. You, with the Sun,
were correspondences — to the Shining of Simplicity beyond the World:

Love
(not ours) —

it is — Not:

(Shining):

of death —

(so simple, that it is not).

1977

VIEW WITH TREES

Night. Courtyard. I touch the birds on the branches — and they do not fly away. Strange shapes. And something human — in the wordless comprehensibility.

Among the white shapes — such living and complete observation: as if my whole life was seen by a single soul — from the dark trees.

1979

FIELD: AND BEYOND IT A RUINED CHURCH

but this was long ago
and — thanks be to God! —
there is no other

and it seems
some happiness
(of *this*
place
maybe)
starts to ache with (“purest”) pain:

oh in this state
(“unto tears”)
of gratitude! —

and in quietness (as if spirit stumbled
not understanding — and at peace with
not-understanding) — oh in this! —

in just such shining:

birches
are glistening
(as if
in this
the most Meaningful was happening) —

and it breathes — no-saying-where — oh it breathes
everywhere breathing
and in the shimmer
ever more so
the surfaces of hill-circle are like miracles) —

and shadows
with the quiet
speech of “somebody”
retaining
(like the soul)

their fullness
(both-giving-and-uninvaded)

shadow the field

1980

LITTLE SONG ABOUT A LOSS

to Peter

long
like a desert
in such freedom it starts

further — still further — more fathomless seen
carpenters laying (reddening ever more distant)

and they weep as they fall on the log —

but this is such boundlessness
clearing-in-sleep-of-the-edge-of-burning:

so it was purified — no more will anything be:

and even — unseen: to the soul! —

only reddening (ever more distant)
they weep — as they fall on the log

1983

FOREST — AFTER FIELD

distance — illuminates you: not showing
(as if
with no sign of time
something
similar
was passing)
shadow in the fields — like sufferings of space! —

I forget myself: absence of seeing
ever more becomes
absence of hearing: freest — of musics!
there is — no soul that knew this! —

(and so much
passes by
all is finished
and yet it continues)

no seeing no knowing no reaching!
and only then it grows clear
that — which already
is something of you:

a shudder — a breathing! —

as if in invisible bowing
womanly — light — and tall

1983

ROADSIDE SONG

it is only damp branches in mist but I name it sorrow
and in roadside grief from a life forgotten I am glimpsed by rails
where a peasant woman with a basket shines restlessly red and white
in a field of sadness — as if blood moved through that same sunset
to draw me too and absorb me into salvation (and such flowerings we
know)

it means the time to be gone — we must no longer repeat
it means (and the blood flows in) so simple — and here for the univer-
sally-silent world's freedom
world already empty-and-free
here among beggarly branches
as if belonging to no-one — at last — the time

29 July 1987

Village of Sosnovo near St. Petersburg

AGAIN — WHISPERINGS-AND-RUSTLINGS

1

and the cuckoo's voice a dim coal
patiently hollowing a pit in the forest
its dampness reaching the heart
and the heart slumbers and does not wake me

2

and later (slumbering by day)
in children's play is less and less light
and their noise is the stuff of death
(and ever more sadly disappearing
in calamity — as in rubbish — I feel comfort)

3

and this is that time of Self-Dying

4

and sleep snowstorm like a white cloud
armour of non-active youth
(and not "struggle" my friend but living —
lingeringly — unto-death in the stillness)

5

And its true name rustles — Lifedeath.

1994

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Many years ago Roman Jakobson described Gennady Aygi as “an extraordinary poet of the contemporary Russian avant-garde”. Aygi, who died in 2006, is now regarded as a classic of this avant-garde, and although he himself found the term misleading and limiting, his work can certainly be seen as a continuation of the artistic explorations begun more than a century ago by the great generation which included the poet Khlebnikov and the painter Malevich – both talismanic figures for Aygi. His writings exist in a constant dialogue with such masters of modernism as Kafka and Kierkegaard, and with modern poetry from all over Europe and America.

But he came from a different world. He was not a Russian, but a Chuvash, born in 1934 in a remote village and growing up in an ancient rural culture marked by memories of pagan religion and ritual and by a language and poetry quite unlike those of Russia. When he was 19, however, he went to study at the Gorky Literary Institute in Moscow, where he was close to Boris Pasternak at the time of the Nobel Prize affair. Pasternak encouraged him to write in Russian, and though he continued to write and translate in his native Chuvash, it is as a Russian poet that he has become known all over the world.

Living in “underground” artistic circles, often in poverty and hardship, he accumulated book after book of Russian poetry, almost none if it published in the Soviet Union until the late 1980s – not so much because of political dissidence as because of the very nature of his poetry. But he was published and translated outside Russia and hailed as a unique poetic creator. His poems, all in a free verse which was very unusual in Russia until recently, explore the possibilities of language, syntax, punctuation, sound and silence to express a tragic yet positive vision of the life of human beings, often through images of his Chuvash homeland – field, forest, snow...

Perestroika came, and Aygi, who lived mainly in Moscow, began to win public recognition and to be published in Russia. He was able for the first time to travel abroad, including a memorable visit to the USA in 2003. In Chuvashia, having been persecuted over the years, he was now celebrated as the national poet; his *Anthology of Chuvash Poetry* has been published in several languages (in English in 1992 by Forest Books, London). The present selection offers poems from forty years in translations which aim to echo the forms of the original. A listing of larger editions of his poetry in English will be found at the beginning of this publication.