



ПОЭТ **VOZNEZENSKI**

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(The Poet Voznezenski)

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With less than a day's notice, the KGB gave Siberian poet Andrej Vosnesenski a visa to fly to Minnesota. There was no time to promote the event.

A handful of writers and scholars and a few Soviet emigrés cluster in the front rows of the roped off-Northrop Auditorium, a mere 50 people dotting the 5,000 seats while, standing like a speck

upon the giant stage, the poet groans and lifts his fist like a guillotine blade, poised to come down hard.

He reads his famous poem about Goya, the Spanish painter of the post-Napoleonic years, regarded by many as the last of the old masters and the first of the moderns, assailing power for its crushing offenses.

An English actor translates, but no one listens to that blow-dried fop.

All eyes are on the pumping hand, all ears attuned to Vosnesenski's condemnation of tyrants.

No one understands, and yet everyone understands.

And as he moves into action, one word thunders
through the auditorium –

GOYA!

Goya reanimates the frozen corpses of the field.

Goya daubs you with the blood of your victims.
The dashed, the dead, the unblinking eyes.

Goya stands against the blistering fire, accosting
you with your gruesome crimes.

Goya wields the hammer
that cracks the rock.

Goya swings the scythe
that mows down the grain.

Even when all the words against you
are shredded ...

Even when the books
have made a roaring fire ...

The lies that murdered millions
come back on you

Goya is implacable
in the face of every rifle

Goya sees who you are

Goya stabs and stabs with his truth

Goya announces that the day is over

The whited dead cry out for justice

You mighty leaders have not prevailed

You are vanquished by your deeds

Your generations are sown with lime

You have not won, you are dead
and just don't know

Goya!

Afterward the reading breaks up and the poets and professors drive through the snow and ice to Chester Anderson's to boast and jostle and drink ...

Voznesenski alone at the end of the couch with a shy, puzzled frown on his face.

Several beers later, I take to the bathroom,
where Chester's golden retriever lies on a pink
poof rug.

I step over the dog to pee.

Behind me, Voznesenski creeps into the room
And kneels by the dog on the pink poof rug,

a foot from the stream splashing against the
porcelain lip.

He scratches the dogs ears
and smiles seraphically

His two eyes closed, his face held out,

the dew alighting like communion from God

on his face,
as if finally,
finally free.

