

2.9 U-2 (1968)

The prison hasn't changed him,
nor the months his face.
Fancy: it was as though I
should never see him again,
after that morning we drove him.

Even now, I do not comprehend
the chance that brought us face
to face that day, and brings us here today –
this town, this court-room thick with
people wholly strange to me,
who seem to hang on every word I say:
for them this was some great triumph but
to me, he's just that boy delivered –
not for me to judge him either way.

I, Viktor Asabin, whose fingers
look, are rougher than this rail
they hold and square as bolts ...
yes, it's near four months since then ...
I, Asabin, came the first -
after that noise and the disbelief,
there was smouldering of dust
in the place, sun on glass,
and the dull permeation of something
at the core - not metal, neither dust nor glass...
You watch me, yes, my face is old,
with the mountains ... you see, I stood,
not doubting: then there was Surin running,
and suddenly this boy was on the field,
so still, it seemed delivered, something
God-like, and I laughed
With fear of the light of him.
And I see him just the same today.

Then ... O, then Chuzakhin came
the young one ... Yes,
I think that's all you need to hear from me.

London (1968)

By the time Gary Powers, pilot of the U-2 spy plane shot down by Soviet Russia on 1st May 1960, came before a Russian court, Khrushchev had already exploited the incident to intense embarrassment of President Eisenhower by berating the US and walking out of the Paris Summit held on 16th May, which immediately collapsed. At the court hearing evidence was given by three peasants – Asabin, Surin and Chuzakhin, who were first to arrive at the wreckage of the plane.