Collecting Anna Akhmatova
April 2007

Nathan Altman, Portrait of Anna Akhmatova, 1914. The Russian Museum, Petersburg, Russia

Russia is, above all, a country of literature, particularly poetry. (Devotees of Dostoevsky or Tolstoy or Bulgakov or Solzhenitzin or even Rachmaninoff or Mussorgsky might argue the point.) Cab drivers in Petersburg and Moscow readily quote Pushkin; and the characters and lines of his *Evgeny Onegin* are embedded in the Russian national consciousness. Petersburg alone has at least a dozen literary museums dedicated to preserving the memory of the writers who lived there.

Anna Akhmatova (accent on second syllable—"ma") was one of the greatest of these Russian poets. She lived from the late years of the 19th Century until her death in 1966. The early years of the 20th Century are sometimes called the "Silver Age" of Russian poetry. Centered in the two great cultural centers of Moscow and Petersburg, many dozens of writers filled the pages of literary journals and turned out volumes of verse. Their names are mostly unfamiliar to Western audiences because few Westerners read Russian,

and poetry in translation loses most of its music—the rhythms, rhymes, alliterations, and nuances. These Silver Age poets were greatly talented and enormously creative. Today, experts generally regard perhaps five of these at the top level: Akhmatova, Blok, Mandelstam, Pasternak, and Tsvetaeva.

These Russian poets organized themselves into groups or schools: the Symbolists, Acmeists, Futurists (with their many permutations), Imagists, and many others. They published hundreds of volumes of poems—thick books and thin, expensive and cheap, cloth bound and with paper wrappers, and with and without illustrations.

When War and the Revolution came, many of these poets were killed. Some left the country; a few stayed and faced poverty, persecution, censorship, and often much worse. Mandelstam was arrested, interrogated, convicted because of a poem he wrote about Stalin, and died on the way to a work camp in Siberia in 1938. Tsvetaeva hanged herself in 1941. Pasternak was subjected to intense criticism after the publication in the West of *Doctor Zhivago*, but at least managed to die at home, in 1960.

Anna Gorenko was born June 23, 1889, in a town near Odessa on the Black Sea.[1] Joseph Brodsky, the American Poet Laureate and winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature, knew her well. He writes that when Anna's father learned that she was about to publish a selection of her poems in a Petersburg journal, "he called her in and told her that although he had nothing against her writing poetry, he'd urge her 'not to befoul a good respected name' and to use a pseudonym." She chose a name that could be traced back to a maternal ancestor, Achmat Khan, a descendant of Genghis Khan. Brodsky noted that it was her "first successful line"— "Anna Akhmatova"—five open a's ,"memorable in its acoustic inevitability."[2]

Anna's father, Andrey Gorenko, was a naval engineer. The Gorenko family had attained nobility status a generation earlier as a reward to Anna's grandfather for his naval service, but the family was not wealthy. Anna's mother, Inna, was from a family of landowners, but their means were also modest. After Anna was born, her father took a civil service position in Petersburg. From the age of 2 to 16, she and her family lived in Tsarskoye Selo (the " Tsar's village"), a small market town located a few miles south of Petersburg where the Tsar had a great summer palace and many aristocratic families had summer homes.

Life in the Gorenko household had its stresses. Anna's younger brother later described their father as "a great chaser after good-looking ladies and

an even greater squanderer of money."[3] Anna's mother, Inna, was a beautiful and kind woman about whom Anna would later write and speak with affection. Inna was also impractical and disorganized in domestic matters, a characteristic which carried over to her oldest daughter.

Somehow, despite the absence of literary influences in the home, Anna was inclined toward poetry at an early age. When she was a child she found a pin in the form of a lyre in a park, and her governess told her this signified that she would become a poet. Her father called her a "decadent poetess" even before she wrote her first poem.

Anna learned to read at the age of seven and was sent to a school in Tsarskoye Selo at the age of 10. When she was 11, she was gravely ill; it was during this period of illness that she wrote her first poem. She "always linked beginning to write poetry with that illness."[4]

Another influence was the memory of Pushkin, who had attended the Lyceum School on the palace grounds of Tsarskoe Selo almost a century earlier. Today, one can visit the classrooms where he studied and one of the rooms where he lived.

Although the Gorenko family was far from literary, they possessed a book of Nekrasov's poetry, and Anna knew many of his poems by heart. Anna later remembered that it was the only book of poetry in the house.[5] In 1900, age 11, Anna began attending the Maryinsky Gymnasium in Petersburg; by age 13 she was reading Verlaine and Baudelaire.

Anna was an unusual child—more serious than other children, more stoic, perhaps to the point of melancholy. She spent her summers from age 7 to 13 in a dacha near Sevastopol, where the neighbors regarded her as "wild"—something of a tomboy. She swam, climbed, and cared little for the corsets and starched petticoats of well brought up young women.

Her biographer writes that by the age of 14, "Anna had become a beauty, with chiseled features, huge grey eyes and long, black straight hair. She had a dancer's body. As an adolescent she was five feet eleven inches tall, and so lithe and supple that 'she could easily touch the nape of her neck with her heels when she lay prone.'"[6]

The year 1905 was a turbulent one for Russians generally and for the Gorenko family in particular. It was the year of the destruction of the Russian fleet by the Japanese and of the first Russian Revolution, which led to pro-

found changes within the government. It was also the year in which Anna's parents finally separated. Her father moved in with his lover, the widow of a rear-admiral, and her mother took the children to the Crimea.

In spring 1905, about the time of her 16th birthday, Anna fell in love with a student named Kutuzov, who was 10 years older than she. Kutuzov was the first in a long series of lovers. One reads Anna's biography with amazement at the number of serious affairs she reportedly had—before, during, and after her marriages. Explanations are impossible and judging pointless. Perhaps it was part of the culture of the Russian aristocracy, accentuated by the upheavals of the times in which she lived.

During this stormy and stressful year, Anna became a target of the affections of a schoolmate who would later become her first husband—the poet, Nikolay Gumilyov. Nikolay—or Kolya—was far from handsome and was personally awkward with people. But he was on his way to becoming a fine poet. Kolya was 19 in the spring of 1905 when he first declared his love to Anna— about the same time Anna was having her affair with the student Kutuzov. For whatever reason, she rejected Kolya's advances, leaving him so depressed that he threatened to kill himself—which further upset and irritated young Anna.

Given the chaotic nature of their relationship, it was a surprise when Anna announced in February 1907 that she was going to marry Gumilyov. She wrote unenthusiastically to a friend, "He has loved me for three years now, and I believe that it is my fate to be his wife. Whether or not I love him, I do not know, but it seems to me that I do."[7]

During 1906 and 1907 Anna attended school in Kiev, living with an aunt and preparing for examinations. In early 1907, while she was still only 17 years old, she published her first poem: "On his hand are many shiny rings." Gumilyov included it in the second issue of a literary magazine he had started, called *Sirius*. It appeared under her newly-adopted literary name—"Akhmatova." The sadness of some of the lines is striking:

On his hand are many shiny rings —
From tender hearted and submissive girls.
The diamond triumphs, and the opal
Dreams, the ruby glows like a miracle.
On his fingers there is no ring of mine.
Nor will I ever give my ring to anyone.

Not exactly an upbeat attitude toward her upcoming marriage. And in April 1907 she called it off. Kolya did not take the news well and spent much of the summer trying to persuade her to change her mind. When he was unsuccessful, he tried to kill himself—first in August, and again in December.

Meanwhile, Anna had graduated in May 1907, a month shy of her 18th birthday; and in the fall she began studying law at Kiev University. The world of literature is richer for the fact that legal studies did not agree with her.

In late 1909, Anna gave up. Gumilyov had written to her: "I realized that only one thing in the world is interesting to me. And that is everything that concerns you." She needed to be important to someone who wanted her. A law career in Kiev was not an attractive prospect; and continuing to live in Kiev with her aunt and an abusive uncle was unsupportable. She had no money and no way to make a living. Gumilyov offered the chance to live in Petersburg and be part of its literary culture.

So they were married in Kiev in April 1910. None of Anna's family attended the wedding. The young couple went off to Paris for their honeymoon; and it was there that Anna made the acquaintance of a young Italian artist named Modigliani. He wrote many letters to her after she returned to Russia.

One of Modigliani's 1911 drawings

In 1909 Gumilyov, the poet Vyacheslav Ivanov and several colleagues in Petersburg founded a literary and arts magazine entitled *Apollon*. A beautiful publication, it contained literary works as well as essays of criticism, pictures of architecture and art, and reports on exhibitions and indeed the entire cultural life of Petersburg and Russia. As I page through *Apollon*, I am struck by the richness and beauty of the culture of pre-War Petersburg, which underscores the enormity of the devastation that was about to be inflicted on the Russian people by the evil sisters, War and Revolution. Four of Anna's poems were published in the fourth number of *Apollon* in 1911. It was her first major exposure to the Russian literary community.

Gumilyov and Anna had not been married long before, as Anna's biographer delicately puts it, Kolya "began to chafe at the constraints of matrimony." Anna later told a friend that they had been engaged too long, and

that by 1910 her new husband had already "lost his passion" for her.[8] The suspicions and tensions engendered by his behavior worked their way into several of Anna's early poems. For example:

He loved three things in this world:
White peacocks, evensong
And faded maps of America.
He hated it when children cried.
He hated tea with raspberry jam, and
Any female hysteria in his life.
Now imagine it: I was his wife.

Kolya also loved to travel, and by the fall of 1910 he was off on a trip to Africa. He was gone six months. In 1910 one of his poems contained these lines: "From the Serpent's lair / from the city of Kiev / I took not a wife, but a sorceress . . . ." During his absence, Anna worked on several poems of her own that would later appear in her first volume. Several of these were intimate and intense, but whether about Kolya or someone else it is impossible to be sure.

Anna later told a friend that while Kolya was in Africa, "I wrote a lot and had my first taste of fame: all around . . . he came back. I didn't tell him anything. Then he asked: 'Have you written any poetry?'— 'I have.' And I read it to him ... he gasped. From that time onwards, he always loved my poetry very much."[9]

Perhaps the most important figure in Russian poetry at the time was Vyacheslav Ivanov, whose sixth-floor apartment in Petersburg known as "the Tower" was where the major poets and others gathered in the evening to socialize, drink, and hear poetry readings and lectures about poetry. It is there in the spring of 1911 that Anna first met one of the future giants of Russian poetry—Osip Mandelstam.

In March 1911, the month Gumilyov returned from Africa, Anna was invited by Ivanov to read her poems to those gathered in the Tower. One of the poems she read, "The Grey-Eyed King," was written three months earlier and would become one of her best known. It appeared in the pages of *Apollon* in 1911 (No. 4).

The other place where artists and poets congregated was the basement café known as the Stray Dog, which became a focal point for the artistic and literary communities of Petersburg. Akhmatova, Gumilyov, and their fellow

writers spent many evenings there—drinking, smoking, arguing, reading their poems, and—apparently—taking their colleagues' sexual temperatures.

By this time, Gumilyov, Akhmatova, and Mandelstam had identified themselves as a group of poets with common views about how to create great poems. They called themselves "Acmeists," and wrote about concrete objects in the world of reality. In their view, clarity and details rather than gauzy or ambiguous symbols represented the way to achieve beauty through words. The "Guild of Poets," formed by Gumilyov in November 1911, became their organizational vehicle; and their artistic credo would later appear in a manifesto written by Gumilyov that appeared in the January 1913 issue of *Apollon*.

In May 1911 Anna returned to Paris for a brief visit without Kolya. If he could travel on his own, so could she. In Paris she again met Modigliani, with whom she formed a close friendship. How close cannot be known for sure. But it is known that he made several drawings of her— including one of her lying on a bed, and more than one of her nude. She later wrote:

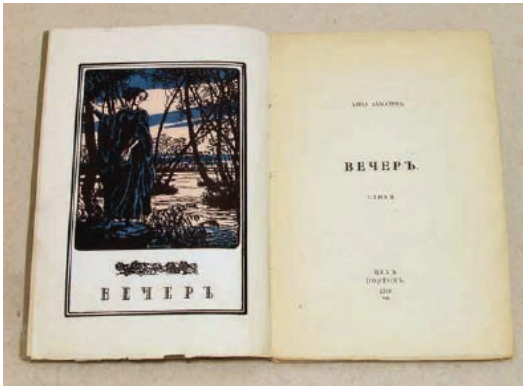
> I didn't pose for his drawings of me; he did them at home and gave them to me later. There were sixteen in all, and he asked me to mount and hang them in my room in Tsarskoe Selo. They vanished in that house during the first years of the Revolution. The one that survived bears the least resemblance to his future nudes....[10]

She later told a young friend that there had been twenty, and that they had disappeared. A few of these have resurfaced in recent years.[11] One of the drawings that survived would later appear on the cover of one of her collections of poetry.

After her return to Petersburg, Anna decided that she had enough poems (those written during the winter of 1910-1912) to comprise a volume. It was published by Gumilyov's Poets' Workship in 1912 in an edition of 300 copies. Entitled *Vecher* — or "Evening"—the slender gray volume contained 46 poems assembled in 92 pages. On the cover appears a lyre—the symbol of the Acmeists. Inside is a drawing of a woman attired in robes and looking downward with a melancholic expression at flowing waters.

One modern critic finds three principal stylistic elements in these early poems: (1) the "decorative stylization which may be called more specifically

the manner of Russian *Art Nouveau*," (2) the use of common, spoken language, including colloquialisms, and (3) the clean, classical element that was associated with Acmeism. The poems in *Vecher* make use of "languishing adjectives" and "lethargic" images.[12]



Vecher ("Evening"), 1912

The critics "received it favorably."[13] Gumilyov wrote one of these reviews: "[W]omen in love, cunning and rapturous, at last speak in their own genuine and at the same time artistically convincing language."[14] The collapse of their marriage did not sour Kolya's genuine admiration for her craftsmanship.

Anna herself was more critical. She later wrote in her draft memoirs:

> These naïve poems by a frivolous girl for some reason were reprinted thirteen times . . . . And they came out in several translations. The girl herself (as far as I recall) did not foresee such a fate for them and used to hide the issues of the journals in which they were first published under the sofa cushions "so that she wouldn't get upset." She even went to Italy (1912), because she was distressed that Evening had been published. Sitting in the streetcar and looking at her fellow passengers, she thought to herself: "What lucky people—they don't have books coming out."[15]

Elsewhere, she wrote that she liked only two of the lines in *Vecher*.[16]

When Anna and Kolya left for Italy in early April 1912 seeking artistic inspiration, she was three months pregnant. In Italy Kolya explored Rome while Anna remained in Florence. They also stayed together in Ven-

ice for about ten days. By October 1, 1912, the day their son Lev was born, she was back in Tsarskoe Selo.

Two of Anna's friends from the Stray Dog basement cabaret were soon involved in a tragic episode that would later feature prominently in one of Anna's greatest works. The two friends were a dancer, Olga Sudeikina, and one of her lovers, a man named Knyazev. Olga was at that time married to an artist, appropriately named Sudeikin. Apparently because of Olga's aggressively non-monogamous behavior, Knyazev shot himself in late March 1913.

The whole affair seems now to have been characteristic of the dissolute condition of the Russian intelligentsia just before the great catastrophes that were to wipe many of its members from the face of the earth. Gumilyov was a part of this culture. Before he headed off to Africa on another creative boondoggle in October 1913, Anna discovered letters to him from one of his inamoratae. About the same time, an illegitimate son of Gumilyov's was born to an actress in Petersburg.

During the fall of 1913 and winter of 1914, through her emotional travails, Anna continued to write. Some of her poems were about her relationships with men other than Gumilyov. One was the art historian Nikolay Punin; another was Nikolay Nedobrovo, a poet and critic. By March 1914 there were enough poems to fill 120 pages of a new collection, which she entitled *Chetki*—or "Rosary" (or, more literally, "Beads"). Perhaps each bead was a different poem— or a different man. The book is on my lap as I write this. Its verses are about sin and sadness, parting and heavy hearts, shame, long walks before nightfall, sleeplessness . . . . Anna later wrote that this book had "sensational press" but "was allotted a life of approximately six weeks."[17]

Chetki ("Rosary"),1914

The great poet Blok a few months later remarked about Anna's poems that, "She writes verse as if she is standing in front of a man and one should write as if one stands before God."[18]

Events would soon force a broadening of her perspective. As the summer of 1914 moved toward August, intelligent people everywhere may have had at least a faint idea of what was about to happen. Anna wrote in July:

Into my yard came a stranger
With only one leg, and he said to me:
"Frightening times are approaching.
Soon Fresh graves will cover the land:
There'll be earthquakes, plague and famine;
Eclipses and signs in the heavens."
And yet our enemies will not Rip up our lands at their pleasure,
For the mother of God herself will
spread A white cloth over our sorrows.

Germany declared war on Russia on August 1, 1914. Gumilyov immediately joined the Russian cavalry, seeking a chance to show his bravery; he was at the front within a few weeks. As with the English "war poets," it took some time for the initial rush of euphoria and patriotism to wear thin.

In September 1914 Anna wrote her poem, "Consolation." She was now beginning to write as if she were standing before God:

You will have no more news of him,
Nor hear about him again.
And you will not find his grave
In the fires of wretched Poland.
Your soul must be quiet and tranquil.
He is no more a lost soul,
But a new soldier in God's army.
So do not mourn any longer.
Your grief and tears are a sin.
Don't weep when you are home.
Think, rather that now you can pray
To an intercessor of your own.[19]

Despite the stresses of the early War years 1914-15, Anna continued to write. She also gave readings at the Stray Dog café, as did the others—Mayakovsky, Kuzmin, Mandelstam, and even Gumilyov, back from the front lines. When the Stray Dog was closed because of suspected subversive activity, the poetry readings shifted to other venues.

In January 1915 Anna read "At the Edge of the Sea" to a group of friends. One of her longer works, it would soon appear in the pages of *Apollon* and in 1921 was published as a separate book. As the War progressed and privations mounted, and as Anna suffered from attacks of tuberculosis, the range of her themes continued to broaden. Her focus was much less on

herself and her romantic attachments, and much more about the shared conditions of life. One of these is typical:

We thought we were beggars without property
Until we began to lose one thing after another.
Then every day became a day of memory
And we began to compose new songs
About the wealth we once had
And God's generosity in the past.

Anna spent much of 1915 at the Gumilyov country family house in Slepnyovo, caring for her son Lev and writing. News of the War and the bitter conditions of Russian life by now had dissipated any remaining enthusiasm for patriotic struggle. In May 1915 Anna wrote "Prayer:"

Give me bitter years of illness
A fight for breath in sleepless fever
Take my child and take my lover
And my mysterious gift of song —
Thus I shall pray at your liturgy
After so many pain-filled days:
Let the dark storm over Russia
Become a cloud of glorious rays.

It was also in the spring of 1915 that Anna met Boris Anrep with whom she soon fell in love; he had spent years in England, and would later go back. She wrote a passionate poem dedicated to him that spring: "You have come many years too late / but still I am glad you are here." Several of her lyrical poems during the 1915-1916 period were about Anrep. They parted when he returned to England in February 1916.[20]

In January 1917 Anna selected the poems that would make up her third collection. Entitled *Belaya Staya* ("White Flock"), and containing 142 pages, the small volume appeared in September 1917 in an edition of 2000 copies. Brodsky says that with this book, Akhmatova's personal lyricism became tinged with the "note of controlled terror"—a note which he says would later become "increasingly intertwined" with her more romantic lyrics. "With this collection, Russian poetry hit 'the real, non-calendar twentieth century' but didn't disintegrate on

Belaya Staya ("White Flock"), 1917

impact."[21] Anna received enough from this book to buy herself a dress and to send money to her mother and her son Lev.[22] But by this time, there were more urgent considerations than the amounts of royalties to be earned from books of poetry.

In February 1917 the revolution started in Petersburg, then called Petrograd. Soldiers fired on marching protestors and mutinied. Nicholas II abdicated in March. In June Gorky wrote to his wife that Petersburg had become "a cesspit. No one works, the streets are filthy, there are piles of stinking rubbish in the courtyards . . . ." There was a moment of hope when Russia was governed by the Constituent Assembly headed by Kerensky, but the hope did not last long. Kerensky's government failed to work out a peace settlement; and by October (November according to the Gregorian calendar) Lenin and the Bolsheviks were in the driver's seat. They brought the war with Germany to an end in December 1917, and Kerensky spent his latter years teaching at Stanford.

As civilization unraveled in Russia, many people with money or education or sense escaped in droves. Anna Akhmatova chose to stay, and it was a choice. She had thought about it. But Russia was home. In the summer of 1917 she had written, with Anrep (who had escaped to England) in mind:

> *You are a traitor, and for a green island,*
> *Have betrayed, yes, betrayed your native land,*
> *Abandoned all our songs and sacred icons,*
> *And the pine tree over a quiet lake.*

She saw Anrep in January 1918 during his brief return, but their affair if not her regret was over. Anrep knew that England would be a more welcoming home for him in the future than a Lenin-led workers' paradise.[23]

In the meantime, Anna had developed an intimate friendship with Vladimir Shileiko, an amateur poet and noted expert on Assyria. When Gumilyov returned to Petersburg in April 1918, Anna asked him for divorce and explained that she intended to marry Shileiko. Gumilyov was shocked as were many of her other friends, but made no effort to prevent the divorce, which was granted in August 1918. Anna married Shileiko in December. She later explained, "I felt so filthy, I thought it would be like a cleansing, like going to a convent, knowing you are going to lose your freedom."[24] The European War had ended the month before.

The year 1918 brought other major changes. Although the War was over, life in Petersburg remained a battle zone for survival. Lenin moved the capital to Moscow in early 1918, leaving Petersburg to decay. There was no electricity, no sewage service, no water, and little food. (Today, tap water still cannot be drunk in Petersburg without boiling it first; and boiling takes care of the bacteria only, not the chemicals.) There were times during the coming years when Anna was near starvation. Many of her friends were dead, others had left.

Anna's new husband Shileiko was egotistical, demanding, jealous, and harsh. Anna took his dictation and fixed his tea. She had little or no time for poetry during 1919 and 1920. Shileiko wanted her attention; he did not want her distracted by writing. Thus she wrote little during the years of their marriage. One of her few poems says it all:

Ice floats by in chunks;
The skies are hopelessly pale.
Why are you punishing me?
I don't know what I've done wrong.
If you need to—then kill me
But don't be so harsh and stern.
You don't want children from me
And you don't like my poetry.
Let everything be as you wish.
I have been faithful to my promise.
I gave my whole life to you —
My sadness I'll take to the grave.

There was probably justification for Shileiko's jealousy, though whether the jealousy or the justification came first is unclear and irrelevant. Akhmatova's biographer reports that she apparently had two intimate relationships with other men while married to Shileiko. One of these men— Artur Lurye— was a musician who shared a flat with the actress, Olga Sudeikina, Anna's friend from the Stray Dog days.[25]

Sometime in mid-1921 Anna moved out of Shileiko's rooms and moved in with Lurye and Sudeikina. She later referred to Lurye as one of her "husbands," though they were never formally married. Perhaps not coincidentally, she resumed writing poems in 1921. One of these—"MCMXXI"— says much about conditions of life in Russia and also Anna's mood:

Everything has been plundered, betrayed or sold;
The black wings of death flicker over us.
The pain of starvation gobbles everything,
So why is it now so bright?
By day the scents of cherry blossoms
Reach us from the woods nearby
And at night there are new constellations
In the translucent depths of the sky.

By 1921 there were enough poems to make a small volume entitled *Podorozhnik*—"Plaintain." About half the poems in it were written to or about Shileiko. It was a tiny book in paper wrappers with only 60 pages, and was published in an edition of 1000 copies. Of these, 100 were numbered and not sold; mine is numbered 56 and is gracefully initialed, probably by Akhmatova.

By the end of the year there were more poems. A new volume was produced, *Anno Domini MCMXXI* (with "1921 Petropolis" on the title page but "1922" printed in words on the cover). It was a bit larger— 102 pages, and there were 2000 copies. It included the poems from the earlier volume, *Podorozhnik*. *Anno Domini MCMXXI*, as Brodsky points out, "was her last collection: in the forty-four years that followed she had no book of her own."[26]

Podorozhnik
("Plaintain."), 1921

Anno Domini
MCMXXI, 1921

The Bolsheviks did not wait long to crack down on intellectuals—particularly writers. In early August 1921 Gumilyov was arrested along with a number of his acquaintances. He had apparently said something critical of the Lenin government a year earlier. Imprisoned, he was brutally interrogated by the Cheka, after which he was declared to be an enemy of the people and sentenced to execution by shooting— along with 61 others.

His execution occurred on August 25, 1921. At his memorial service, Anna was treated as his widow even though his second wife attended as well.[27]

A couple of days after Kolya's execution, Anna wrote in one of her poems:

Terror fingers all things in the dark
Leads moonlight to the axe.
There's an ominous knock behind the wall:
A ghost, a thief or a rat....

Not surprisingly, the executions encouraged many to leave Russia. (Or perhaps it was the continuing general poverty, hunger and wretchedness of living conditions.) One of these was Artur Lurye, Anna's third "husband." But Anna remained. In 1922 she wrote:

My cheeks are sunken, and my lips without blood.
He won't recognize my face;
I am no longer beautiful, nor am I
The one whose songs once troubled you.

She could foresee what was coming and faced it:

I am not among those who left the land
To be torn open by our enemies.
And crude flattery does not influence me,
I will not give them my songs.
Still I feel some pity for an exile
Like somebody sick, or a prisoner.
A refugee has to walk a dark road,
And foreign bread has a bitter flavour.

Here in the smoke of blinding fires
What's left of our youth will be destroyed
And we won't be able to ward off
A single blow from ourselves.
Yet in the final totting up—and
We know each hour will be counted—
There is no people on earth more tearless,
More simple and more proud.

Even though her personal life was chaotic, Anna's poetry now moved further away from the self-focused themes of loves experienced and lost,

and in the direction of the larger themes of life shared in common with the Russian people during the years of hardship.

Meanwhile, some things did not change. As her friend Lurye was making his decision to leave Russia, Anna became enamored of Nikolay Punin, a handsome art historian, with whom she would have a longer relationship than any of her other "husbands." The only problem was that Punin at that time was married to Anna Ahrens, a doctor. He never divorced Ahrens so he and Anna never married—though she referred to him more than once as her "husband." It appears that the pre-War marital practices of the Russian intelligentsia were not altered much by the War or by Revolution. By the end of 1925, Anna had formally been divorced from Shileiko, and had moved into Punin's apartment, sharing it with Punin, his wife and daughter.[28] The flat was in the former Sheremetevo palace known as the Fontanka—the "Fountain House," on the Fontanka canal; the apartment now houses the Akhmatova Museum.

One thing that did change, however, was the government's tolerance for literature that did not contribute to or celebrate Marxist themes. The personal concerns that constituted the subject matter of so much of Anna's earlier verse were simply irrelevant to the construction of the people's state. And irrelevant meant useless, which meant unacceptable. Irrelevant writers would find it difficult to be published. If they persisted in being irrelevant, they might find it difficult to work—or to get food—or to find a place to live.

Anna felt the force of repression. She had hoped to publish a two-volume collection of her poems in 1926, and proofs of the pages were prepared. But the government censors decided to limit the number of copies and to insist on removal of 18 poems from the first volume. Later she was asked to remove another 40 from the second volume. Matters drifted, but it soon became clear that the new collection would not be published at all. Stalin himself may have made the decision.[29]

For the next 14 years, Akhmatova had no new publications. Akhmatova called these "the vegetarian years"; the later and harsher period is often called the "Great Terror."

The Struve edition of Akhmatova's writings lists no poems published in journals between 1924 and 1940.[30] Anna was able to do scholarly work on Pushkin; but though she eventually wrote essays on aspects of Pushkin's work, these were never published as a book. Her health was generally poor; she had little food and almost no money. In 1928 her son Lev came to live

with her and the Punins in Petersburg. But because of Lev's parentage, he was denied admission to academic programs.

The great "peasant poet" Esenin killed himself in 1925. Mayakovsky shot himself in 1930. Three years later, Stalin's wife killed herself. In 1933 Anna's son Lev was arrested briefly, and it would not be the last time. In May 1934 Anna was visiting the Mandelstams when her good friend Osip was arrested.[31] After several weeks, Osip was exiled—eventually to Voronezh.

The killings and torture became more systematic after the assassination of Kirov, a popular party leader, in late November 1934. Both Anna's son Lev and "husband" Punin were arrested in the fall of 1935. It was enough that they were part of the intelligentsia. Anna wrote a personal letter to Stalin giving her personal assurance that neither of them was a spy or counter-revolutionary:[32]

> I have been living in the USSR since the beginning of the Revolution. I never wanted to leave a country to which I am connected by heart and mind, despite the fact that my poems are not being published any more, and critics' reviews give me many bitter moments . . . . In Leningrad I live in solitude, and I am often ill for long periods of time. The arrest of the only two people who are close to me gives the kind of blow from which I shall not be able to recover. I ask you, Iosif Visarionovich, to return my husband and my son to me. I am sure you would never be sorry after doing so. [Note her use of the word "husband" in referring to Punin.]

Miraculously, her letter worked. We know now from the opening of the government archives that Stalin personally wrote across her letter: "To Comrade Yagoda. To free from detention both Punin and Gumilyov [Lev] and reply that this action has been carried out. Stalin." Punin was able to go back to work, but Lev was not permitted to go back to the University and lived on the edge of starvation.[33] Gratitude was not one of Punin's strong suits. By 1936 he had taken a new lover, though he remained married to Ahrens.

By the fall of 1937, during or following her break-up with Punin, Anna developed an intimate relationship with a married doctor and university professor, Vladimir Garshin. She did not finally separate from Punin until the fall of 1938.[34]

In 1938 Lev was arrested again, and was harshly treated during interrogation. Eventually he was sentenced to 10 years in a prison camp. In 1939 his case was reviewed to determine whether he should be executed. In the meantime, he was held in Kresty prison in Leningrad. During the months of his incarceration, Anna, like other women hoping for news of their relatives or for an opportunity to pass food parcels to them, waited in long lines outside the prison. It was often very hot, and Anna was ill much of the time. Her feet and legs sometimes hurt so much she could not stand.

One day as she was waiting in the queue, she was recognized. She told the story in the words she wrote "in the place of a preface" to her great poem, "Requiem":

> In the terrible years of the Yezhov terror I spent seventeen months in the prison lines of Leningrad. One day somebody in the crowd recognized me. Then a woman with bluish lips standing behind me, who of course had never heard me called by name before, awoke from the stupor to which all had succumbed, and whispered in my ear (everyone spoke in whispers there): "Can you describe this?" And I answered, "I can." Then something that looked like a smile passed over what had once been her face.

It is worth the trouble to learn Russian just to be able to read this poem. Her biographer calls it "one of the greatest lyrical sequences in the Russian language."[35] The poet's personal experience becomes enlarged and magnified, and in a sense becomes an artistic expression of the condition of the entire Russian people, or perhaps of any people stressed to the breaking point.

Akhmatova often wrote dates after particular poems or sections of poems, indicating when they had been written. Some of the lines of "Requiem" are dated "1935" but most appear to have been written in 1939 or 1940. A few were added much later—in the late 1950's or even 1961. The translated lines of the "Dedication" provide only a dim idea of the power and beauty of Akhmatova's lines:

> *In the presence of this grief, mountains bow down,*
> *The great river ceases to flow,*
> *But the prison gates are closed,*
> *Behind them are the prisoners' holes*
> *And mortal anguish.*

For someone, fresh breezes blow,
Some are able to enjoy the sunset —
But we wouldn't know, we who everywhere,
Hear only the scrape of the shameful key
And the heavy footsteps of the soldiers.
We arose as if for an early church service,
Walked through the ravaged capital,
And there came together, more lifeless than dead,
The sun is lower, and the Neva cloudy,
But hope sings from a distance.
And then the sentence... And immediately the tears pour forth,
Already she is separated from the others,
As if life was painfully ripped from her heart,
As if they brutally knocked her down,
But she goes on...staggers...alone
Where now are the involuntary friends
Of my two Hellish years?
What do they think goes on in the Siberian storm,
What appears to them dimly in the circle of the moon?
I send them my parting greetings.

The poem is extraordinary. At one point she writes:

If you could have been shown, you mocker,
And favorite of all your friends,
Gay little sinner of Tsarskoye Selo,
What would happen in your life . . . .

Life and the horrors of the Communist regime had put in perspective the frivolity of her earlier years. Anna was now writing as Blok had recommended, as if she were "standing before God."

In the epilogue, she writes that if the people ever erect a monument to her, they should put it in the prison yard, where she waited so many hours. And she concludes:

And may, from unmoving and bronzed eyes,
The melting snow stream like tears,
And may a prison dove coo in the distance,
While ships quietly sail the Neva.

During the 1940s and early 1950s, Anna relied on her memory and that of a few friends for the preservation of this great work. Brodsky points

out that the precaution was not excessive because "people would disappear forever for smaller things than a piece of paper with a few lines on it." Mandelstam's fate was vivid proof. Anna had her son to think about as well as herself. Both their days "would have been numbered had the authorities found her *Requiem*."[36] But there came a time after the death of Stalin when, as common with many works of literature by controversial Russian authors, "samizdat" (self-published) versions began to be circulated surreptitiously before the first book publication in 1963. I have one of these—a 9-page typed version of "Requiem" that Anna gave to one of her friends in 1962. It is not signed, but does have a few corrections she made by hand.

The author's 9-page samizdat copy of *Requiem*, *1962*

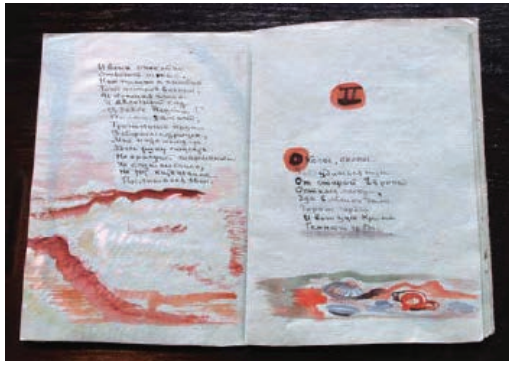
"Requiem" did not appear in book form until it was published in Russian in Munich in 1963, in tan paper wrappers. The full text was not published in Russia until it appeared in a literary journal in 1987.

The first edition of *Requiem*, 1963

The War unexpectedly brought new opportunities for Anna's poems to be published. Stalin and his thuggish government must have concluded that Russia had less to fear and more to gain from inspiring literature. In early 1940 Anna was invited to publish a selection of her poems. When the publisher insisted on removal of two of the poems, Anna acquiesced; she had no choice, and it must have seemed a small price to pay in the circumstances. Then in August publication was delayed again, either by a paper shortage or bureaucratic uncertainties. A month or so later, the difficulty was resolved and the collection was published. *From Six Books*, published in Leningrad, consisted of 327 pages. There were to be 10,000 copies, according to Struve. But shortly after the book was published, "on 29 October it was banned and all copies taken from the shops."[37] Of the copies which survived, most were surely destroyed during the War and its aftermath, so copies in fine or near fine condition are now scarce. Interestingly, the title refers to "six" previous collections even though the sixth had not previously been published in book form.

One of the Anna's great longer poems that was *not* included in the new collection was " The Way of All the Earth," sometimes known as "Kitezhanka," the "woman of Kitezh." Anna's notes say that she had begun this work in March 1940 while she was still in Leningrad. Kitezh was a mythical Russian city, an island city which after having been defended against the Tatars, was believed to have sunk into a lake. The city was said to reappear on special occasions. Anna's poem describes a trip by the "woman of Kitezh," back to the fabled city. The lines of the poem suggest that Anna has been "summoned home," through bullets, past sentries, across trenches, through burning towns,"by way of the crucified capital." Anna later described the process of composition as if the poem had written itself" … disconnected lines began to appear to me out of nowhere … The meaning of these lines seemed very dark to me at that time and, if you wish, even strange. For a rather long time they did not promise to turn into anything whole and seemed to be ordinary meandering lines until they beat their way through and reached that refinery from where they came out as you see them now."[38]"

The Way of All the Earth" was not published in complete form until 1965, 25 years later, although separate parts had earlier appeared in Russian literary magazines. In the meantime, Anna prepared a few samizdat versions to give to her friends. One of the very early samizdat versions of "The Way of All the Earth" is in handwriting, with colorfully-decorated pages. The colored drawings seem to depict scenes in nature—a pool of water, water plants, perhaps a spider web, an insect, and bright flowers. Some but not all of the handwriting appears to be Anna's. The poem is bound in gray-blue wrappers, and bears the name "Anna Akhmatova" on the cover, along with the place and year—"Tashkent 1944." The title page shows the title as "Kitezhanka," with"The Way of All the Earth" shown in brackets as a subtitle. The title page also shows a dedication "to V. G. Garshin," Anna's doctor friend in Leningrad.



An early samizdat copy of *Kitezhanka* ("The Way of All the Earth"), 1944

The inside of the rear wrapper of this hand-written version of "Kitezhanka" contains Anna's personally-inscribed presentation "to Dear Golina Longinovna Koslovsky—in memory of our Tashkent— with love, Anna Akhmatova. 4 February 1944." Golina Kozlovskaya was the wife of Alexei Kozlovsky, a Tashkent composer. Anna was a friend of both the Kozlovskys, and Alexei may have been in love with her. But more of that later.

The German-Soviet non-aggression pact had freed Hitler to attack Poland without fear of having to fight a double-front war, with Russia on the East and the French and English on the West. Similarly, Hitler's early success against the French in May and June 1940 freed him to attack Russia.

In June 1941 the German air force began striking Russian cities. One of the first targets of the German army was Leningrad. When the long siege of Leningrad began in September 1941, Akhmatova was there. She continued to see her friends, including Dr. Garshin, who had become more than a friend. But late in September she was evacuated, along with many other artists and literary figures. She flew to Moscow and then traveled by train to Kazan and then to Tashkent, where she arrived in early November. She would remain in Tashkent until May 1944. At first she lived in a dormitory for writers. Nadezhda Mandelstam, Osip's widow, was given a room in the same building. Later, Anna shared a place with the widow of Mikhail Bulgakov. There were fresh fruits and flowers in the Tashkent market place, though Anna and her friends had little money. In Tashkent Anna continued to write, to read her poems at meetings, and to visit with other exiled writers.

The loosened constraints that had permitted publication of her collection *From Six Books* in Leningrad in 1940 continued to be sufficiently relaxed to allow another group of "selections" to be published. Entitled *Izbrannoe Stikhi* — or "selections of poetry," the little volume appeared in Tashkent in 1943. Government editors did the selecting, not Anna. She referred to it as "small, incomplete and strangely put together." The little book consisted of 114 pages of poems all of which had appeared in earlier volumes and sold for only 3 rubles, 50 kopeks.

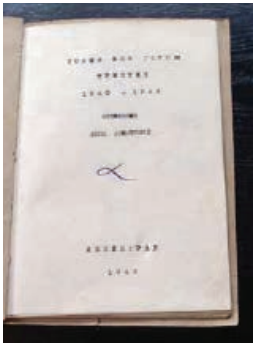
Reportedly 10,000 copies were issued so the book should be very far from rare. But copies are rarely seen; probably most of the copies were destroyed during the war. My copy of this new little collection is one Anna presented

with an inscription: "To my dear Kozlovsky friends," and dated June 20, 1943.

Anna was now thinking more about Doctor Garshin than Punin, referring to Garshin as "my husband," though they were of course not formally married.[39] It will also be recalled that she had dedicated her major poem "Kitezhanka" to Garshin. When the siege of Leningrad was lifted in January 1944, Anna sought permission to return, expecting to be with Garshin. She and Garshin exchanged letters, and in one of these Garshin asked her to marry him. Anna agreed and told friends in Tashkent of her plans to marry him on her return.

In mid-May 1944, she was permitted to go home. Friends remember that though she had gained weight, she seemed young and happy. After a stopover in Moscow, Anna arrived at the Petersburg train station in mid-June 1944. Garshin was waiting for her at the station. He had promised to find a new apartment for them both. But it soon became evident that things had changed. Anna's biographer reports that the privations of Leningrad under siege had been terribly hard on Garshin. His wife had died during the first winter of the siege. As a doctor, he had witnessed starvation and worse. Anna later told a friend that Garshin was mentally ill. He apparently told her that he had had visions of his dead wife, and that she had forbidden him to marry Akhmatova.[40]

But simple explanations are preferred to weird as well as complex ones. Akhmatova's biographer reports that by June 1944, Garshin may have been in the midst of a love affair with a woman doctor. Although Anna would have had ample ground to change her mind about the proposed marriage, it was Garshin who called it off. After a 10-minute conversation on the train station platform, they parted.



Samizdat copy of *Poema Bez Geroya* ("Poem Without a Hero"), 1946

Anna was now in war-ravaged Leningrad with no place to live and little or no money. How she would survive was not clear. But a couple of things are clear. One is that she destroyed all of her correspondence with Garshin. The second is that she removed the dedication to Garshin from " The Way of All the Earth."

In Leningrad, the one constant, amid rubble, sickness, hunger, and poverty, was poetry. Anna had begun her greatest long poem, "Poem Without a

Hero," in December 1940, and she continued to refine it in Tashkent and Leningrad after her return. She worked on the poem until 1963. Anna labeled the poem a "Triptych—1940-1962: Leningrad-Tashkent-Moscow," and dedicated it to "the memory of its first audience—my friends and fellow citizens who perished in Leningrad during the siege." Her biographer says, "It is one of her few long poems: complex, many-layered and allusive; not a series of linked lyrics like *Requiem*, but imagined and invented as a whole."[41]

The events fleetingly depicted in the first part of the poem occurred in 1913 before the collapse of the Russian way of life. Anna dedicated it to the young man whose disappointed love for her friend Olga Sudeikina led him to kill himself. In the introduction, Anna writes that she surveys her life from 1940 "as if from a tower, … as if bidding farewell again to what I parted from long ago …" Ghosts from the year 1913 appear, and she is back in the hall of mirrors of the Sheremetev Palace. One of the apparitions from her past is that of Sudeikina, whose promiscuous self-centeredness (the "goat-legged nymph") became both a symbol of pre-War Russian life in general and a reproach to Anna for her own conduct. Anna labeled her "one of my doubles." Sudeikina had left Russia, lived in Paris, and died there in January 1945. Anna writes, "How did it come to pass / That I alone of all of them am still alive." And, "I do not want to meet again / The woman I was then …"

Anna's friend Gershtein wrote in her *Memoirs* [42] that after Anna returned to Leningrad, she made many copies of "Poem Without a Hero" and gave them to friends. On July 15, 1946, she sent one of these copies to her friend Alexei Kozlovsky in Tashkent. This copy, in brown paper wrappers, contains on the page after the title page, the typed inscription "to"—and the handwritten letters "Al. F. K." with the date "15 May." It is initialed simply "A." The text is typed, but contains several notations or changes in Anna's handwriting. At the end, she signed at the bottom her full name. Interestingly, several quotations in Latin, Italian, and English are printed, apparently by Anna herself. Presumably this is because the Russian typewriter did not have the foreign-language characters so she left the spaces blank to permit the foreign words to be inserted by hand.

My friend Professor Dmitry Bobyshev of the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana (a distinguished Russian poet who knew Akhmatova well) told me about Dr. Natalia Kraineva, a scholar at the Russian National Library in Petersburg, who had spent more than 10 years researching "Poem Without a Hero," and through the miracle of the internet he intro-

duced me to her. Professor Kraineva identifies nine versions of the draft. When it is published, her scholarly work will supersede the recapitulations now found in Kovalenko, *Petersburg Dreams* (2004), and an Appendix to Haight, *Akhmatova, A Poetic Pilgrimage*, New York, (1976).

My copy (given to Kozlovsky) was one of the early "Tashkent" versions. How many copies of this or other samizdat versions exist? Professor Kraineva wrote me that she had found more than 100 copies in samizdat, and that my version was from the third draft, which was composed in 1944. It is "the third carbon copy of the typewriting set." She found two other copies of this version.

In addition to the early samizdat versions, fragments of the poem appeared in literary journals in the 1940s and 1950s. In 1960 an incomplete version of Part I appeared in a New York journal—*Vozduishnye Puti*[43]. Then what Haight calls "probably the first completed version of the poem" can be found in Eng-Liedmeier and K. Verheul, ed., *Tale Without a Hero and Twenty-Two Poems* by Anna Akhmatova (1973).

Russia's war with Germany ended May 8, 1945. Leningrad had been almost destroyed by the siege. After living for a time with friends, Anna moved back into the flat in the house on the Fontanka— Punin's flat. Punin's former wife was dead, but he had a new wife, as well as his daughter by his deceased wife. Given the history of their relationship, it is unsettling to realize that Anna had no choice but to return to Punin's flat; but the "apartment problem," where to live, was a gnawing reality for virtually all Russians during the entire Communist period. During the siege, Akhmatova's personal library had been burned by the person who lodged in her rooms in an effort to keep warm.[44]

To make matters worse, Anna was now under continuing police surveillance. The period of government "relaxation" seems to have ended with the end of the German threat. One of the police reports on her stated:

> Akhmatova has many acquaintances. She has no close friends. She is good-natured and does not hesitate to spend her money when she has it. But at heart she is cold and arrogant with a childish egoism. She is helpless when it comes to the practical tasks of everyday life. Mending a stocking poses an insoluble problem for her. Boiling potatoes is an achievement. Despite her great fame, she is very shy....[45]

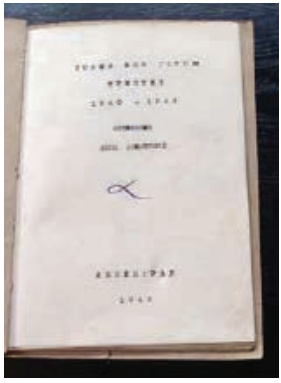
In 1945 Isaiah Berlin, later the renowned Oxford scholar of politics and history, was appointed to the staff of the British embassy in Moscow. He was born in Russia and spoke the language fluently. When Isaiah visited Leningrad, he made a point of visiting the bookshops. In one of these, he asked about the fate of some of Leningrad's authors; he was told that Akhmatova was still alive and that a meeting could be arranged. That afternoon he showed up in her apartment. The story is told in Berlin's book *Personal Impressions* (1981), and reprinted as a preface to Vol. II of Akhmatova's *Complete Poems*.[46]

Berlin told how he climbed the staircase at the Fontanka and was admitted to Akhmatova's room:

> It was very barely furnished—virtually everything in it had, I gathered, been taken away—looted or sold—during the siege . . . . A stately, grey-haired lady, a white shawl draped about her shoulders, slowly rose to greet us.
>
> Anna Akhmatova was immensely dignified, with unhurried gestures, a noble head, beautiful, somewhat severe features, and an expression of immense sadness.

Berlin had given little or no thought to the possibility that Akhmatova was being watched or that contact with an English diplomat could easily be misconstrued by paranoid Soviet leaders as espionage. To make matters infinitely worse, Berlin was at that moment tracked down by an old friend:

> Suddenly I heard what sounded like my first name being shouted somewhere outside. I ignored this for a while—it was plainly an illusion—but the shouting became louder. . . . I went to the window and looked out, and saw a man whom I recognized as Randolph Churchill. He was standing in the middle of the great court, looking like a tipsy under-graduate, and screaming my name.



Samizdat copy of *Poema Bez Geroya* ("Poem Without a Hero"), 1946

Berlin had not seen Randolph Churchill for years and did not know that he had come to Leningrad as a journalist. Berlin noted in his memoir that Randolph was certainly being followed by Russian police. And by this care-

less act, Churchill caused rumors to circulate to the effect that the English diplomats, including the son of the English Prime Minister, were trying to persuade Akhmatova to leave Russia.[47]

Later that same day, Berlin returned to resume his conversation with Akhmatova. They talked about Gumilyov and Mandelstam. Berlin reports that Akhmatova told him that Mandelstam had been in love with her. They talked about Modigliani, and Berlin remembered later that one of Modigliani's drawings of Anna hung over the fireplace. Anna recited for him long passages from her poems. She said: "Poems like these, but far better than mine, were the cause of the death of the best poet of our time, whom I loved and who loved me …" Berlin didn't know whether Anna referred to Gumilyov, her first husband, or Mandelstam; but I think it must have been Mandelstam. Berlin said he asked her about Mandelstam. "She was silent, her eyes filled with tears, and begged me not to speak of him… It took some time for her to collect herself."[48] They talked about Tsvetaeva: "'Marina is a better poet than I am,' she said to me."

She read for Berlin the unfinished "Poem Without A Hero." Berlin said he realized that he "was listening to a work of genius." He described it as a "many faceted and most magical poem"—which "was intended as a kind of final memorial to her life as a poet, to the past of the city—St. Petersburg—which was part of her being…" It was "a mysterious and deeply evocative work." He asked her to let him write down the lines but she declined. And she did not offer him one of the samizdat copies, if any still remained.

Later when Akhmatova was refining "Poem Without a Hero," she added lines and a third dedication to the "Guest from the Future," having in mind Berlin. Some years later, when the poem was published in final form within the Soviet Union, the dedication was removed for political reasons.[49]

Berlin was "the first person from the outside world who spoke her language and could bring her news of a world from which she had been isolated for many years." Berlin came to believe that she saw him as "a fateful, perhaps doom-laden messenger of the end of the world—a tragic intimation of the future which made a profound impact upon her. . . ." Anna believed that Stalin personally learned of the visit and was enraged by the fact that she had "committed the sin of seeing a foreigner without formal authorization … 'So our nun now receives visits from foreign spies,' (so it is alleged), and followed this with obscenities…" Twenty years later, when Anna visited London on the occasion of being awarded an honorary degree, she told

Berlin she heard about Stalin's outburst from someone who was present at the time.[50]

Whether her story about Stalin is accurate or not, within a few days of her meeting with Berlin, the secret police installed a microphone in the ceiling of her room. Also, in August 1946 Akhmatova was denounced by Andrey Zhdanov, one of the party bosses. He said she was "one of the standard bearers of a hollow, empty, aristocratic salon poetry which is absolutely foreign to Soviet Literature." He also called her "half nun, half whore." This denunciation meant the end of any possibility that her poetry could be published, as well as expulsion from the Writers' Union and loss of her monthly stipend and her ration card.[51]

A collection of her poetry planned for publication in 1946 was printed but never made it into the bookstores, and most of the volumes were destroyed. Also, her son Lev was refused readmission to the University, and in 1949 was rearrested and sentenced to 10 years in a Siberian prison camp. In 1950 Anna, like Mandelstam before her, wrote several poems praising Stalin in the hopes that they might save her life or her son's. These poems, "In Praise of Peace," appeared in 1950 in a Soviet literary magazine.[52]

With Stalin's death in March 1953, the sharp edge of totalitarianism became somewhat dulled. Akhmatova began to be given translation work, for which she was paid. A volume of Chinese poetry entitled *Tsui Yuan* translated by Anna appeared in 1954. Two years later, her translation of *Korean Classical Poetry* was published in Moscow. She did not select the poems, and did not know Chinese or Korean. One of her friends who knew the languages gave her the meaning of the poems in Russian, and she created the verse to "translate" the poems. She presented her co-translator, Alexander Kholodovich with copies of both these volumes, and a second edition of the Korean volume. In the latter she wrote: " To Alexander Alekseevich Kholodovich, in memory of the time when we worked on this book, with friendship of Akhmatova."

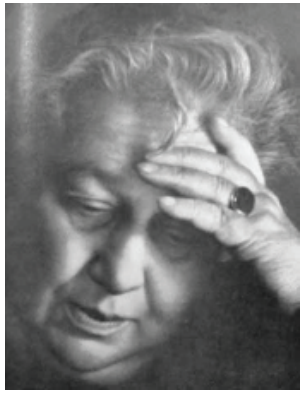
In 1956 Khrushchev spoke to the Twentieth Party Congress about Stalin's crimes, and changes in the political climate accelerated. Not long after, in May 1956 Anna's son Lev was permitted to return home from the prison camp where he had been held. Lev was embittered about his experiences in the camps. He blamed Anna for the fact that he had been imprisoned, and believed that she had not done all she could to help him. He also thought

her intense focus on poetry had been more important to her than his welfare. When Anna was ill in the hospital, he did not visit her.

In 1958 a thin collection of Akhmatova's poems was published in an edition of 25,000 copies. Brodsky described it as consisting of "reprinted early lyrics plus genuinely patriotic war poems and doggerel bits extolling the arrival of peace." The poems were selected by government editors whose aim was to convince the public that Akhmatova was still alive, well "and loyal." [53] Titled simply *Stikhotvoreniya*, or "Poetry," this collection is, of course, not a rare book. Though it contained nothing new, as her biographer put it,"the movement in Akhmatova's life from disgrace to recognition and acclaim had begun."[54]

In 1961 Khrushchev denounced Stalin at the 22nd Congress of the Communist Party accompanied by disclosures far more detailed and critical than his speech five years earlier. The dam was starting to crack open. In 1960-61, parts of "Poem Without a Hero" were published in Russian in New York in the literary magazine, *Vozdushnye Puti*; and in 1963 a small section of the poem was published in Russia in a literary journal called "Day of Poetry." The appearance of this piece inside Russia would have been impossible before the party congress of 1961. About the same time, copies of "Requiem" began to be circulated.

In 1965 a collection of Anna's poems from 1909-1965 was published, entitled *Beg Vremeni*—"the flight of time." It is an attractive book; and the front paper wrapper is graced with one of Modigliana's more modest drawings of Anna. The collection includes poems drawn from seven of her "books"—including the sixth (not separately published) book"Iva,"and also a seventh (not previously published) book, "Sed'maya Kniga"—"Seventh Book." There were 50,000 copies of the 471-page collection, so it is not rare.



Anna, from her last collection, *Beg Vremini*, 1965

In June 1965 (the month Anna became 76) she went to Oxford where she received an honorary degree, arranged by her friend Isaiah Berlin. She also visited Shakespeare's home in Stratford.

Back in Russia, in November 1965 she suffered a heart attack and was hospitalized. In the spring of 1966 she was moved to a sanatorium,

where she was able to receive visitors. She died March 5, 1966, and was buried in Komarova, near Leningrad/Petersburg.

Today, one may visit the Akhmatova museum in Petersburg, located in the apartment palace on the Fontanka where Anna lived many years. The rooms contain furnishings from the 1930s and 1940s, and the exhibition cases contain copies of her books and reproductions of pictures of Anna and her family and friends. But there is nothing in the apartment that is "original"—nothing dating back to the years when she lived there.

I visited the National Library in Petersburg in June 2006 where I met Dr. Kraineva, the editor of the most recent and comprehensive edition of Akhmatova's writings. She showed me Akhmatova's papers, including the spiral notebook in which Akhmatova wrote the original draft of "Poem Without a Hero" and "Kitezhanka," and many of the typed versions that circulated in Russia before publication. She also showed me Anna's scrapbook of fading black and white photographs containing pictures of her as a child with her family, as a young woman in pre-War Petersburg, and in her middle-age.

Isaiah Berlin, with his breadth of vision and his command of Russian and other languages, was perhaps in the best position to evaluate Akhmatova's work and life:

> Akhmatova lived in terrible times, during which . . . she behaved with heroism . . . . She did not in public, nor indeed to me in private, utter a single word against the Soviet regime: but her entire life was . . . one uninterrupted indictment of Russian reality. The wide-spread worship of her memory in [Russia] today, both as an artist and as an unsurrendering human being, has, so far as I know, no parallel. The legend of her life and unyielding passive resistance to what she regarded as unworthy of her country and herself, transformed her into a figure . . . not merely in Russian literature, but in Russian history in [the Twentieth] century.[55]

* * *

NOTES

[1] The basic facts of Akhmatova's life are set forth in a recent biography by Elaine Feinstein, *Anna Of All The Russias*, (London 2005), and

also Amanda Haight's earlier book, *Anna Akhmatova, A Poetic Pilgrimage*, (New York 1976). We also have Akhmatova's own autobiographical notes, published in *My Half Century*, edited by Ronald Meyer (Ann Arbor 1992), as well as the recently-published diaries of one of her "husbands," *The Diaries of Nikolay Punin, 1904-1953*, ed. Monas/Krupala (Austin 1999). I have also made use of Nadezhda Mandelstam's great memoir of her husband and their friends, *Hope Against Hope* (London 1975), and *Hope Abandoned*, (London 1989). Isaiah Berlin's memoir of Akhmatova is a wonderful piece; it can be found as a preface to the second volume of *The Complete Poems*; see below.

Many of the bibliographic details with respect to her books are set out in the notes to the great three-volume collection of her works, *Sochineniya*, edited by G.P. Struve and B.A. Filippov (Inter-Language Literary Associates, 1967), which is now itself a collector's item.

An excellent collection of Akhmatova's poetry in both Russian and English translation is the two-volume *Complete Poems of Anna Akhmatova*, edited by Judith Hemschemeyer (Somerville 1990). Shorter collections in paperback are edited by Stanley Kunitz, *Poems of Akhmatova* (Boston 1967), and D.M. Thomas, *Anna Akhmatova Selected Poems*, Penguin Books,1976. The translations in the present paper may be found in the Feinstein biography.

[2] Brodsky, *Less Than One* (New York, 1986) p. 34- 35.

[3] Feinstein, p. 12.

[4] Feinstein, p. 11.

[5] Feinstein, p. 13.

[6] Feinstein, p. 16.

[7] Feinstein, p. 23.

[8] Feinstein, p. 28.

[9] Feinstein, p. 33.

[10] *My Half Century*, p. 80.

[11] Feinstein, p. 253.

[12] Rannit, Preface to Sochinenie Vol. II, ed. Struve et al, p. 7-12, 1968.

[13] Akhmatova, *My Half-Century*, p. 26.

[14] quoted in Feinstein, p. 37.

[15] *My Half Century*, p. 8.

[16] *Id*., p. 18.

[17] *My Half-Century*, p. 26-27.

[18] Feinstein, p. 52.

[19] Feinstein, p. 52.

[20] Feinstein, p. 62-63.

[21] Brodsky, p. 41.

[22] Feinstein, p. 93, 109.

[23] Feinstein, p. 72-73.

[24] Feinstein, p. 77.

[25] Feinstein, p. 83, 90.

[26] Brodsky, p. 48.

[27] Feinstein, p. 94.

[28] Feinstein, p. 114-123.

[29] Feinstein, p. 126, 134.

[30] *Complete Poems*, Vol. II, 462-469.

[31] See "Collecting Mandelstam," *Caxtonian*, November 2006, Vol XIV, No. 13.

[32] Feinstein, p. 150

[33] Feinstein, p. 151-52.

[34] Feinstein, p. 162.

[35] Feinstein, 171.

[36] Brodsky, p. 51.

[37] Feinstein, p. 178-181.

[38] *Complete Poems*, Vol II, p. 766.

[39] Feinstein, p. 205.

[40] Feinstein, p. 206-208.

[41] Feinstein, p. 237. See also a recent Russian study, Kovalenko, S.A., *Petersburg Dreams of Anna Akhmatova*, Petersburg, 2004.

[42] St. Petersburg, 1998

[43] New York, 1960

[44] Feinstein, p. 211.

[45] Quoted by Feinstein, p. 213.

[46] Somerville, 1990, "Memoir," at 28-45

[47] Berlin, p. 26-27.

[48] Berlin, p. 30-31.

[49] Berlin, p. 35.

[50] Berlin, p. 38.

[51] Feinstein, p. 222.

[52] Feinstein, p. 228.

[53] Brodsky, p. 48.

[54] Feinstein, p. 247.

[55] Berlin, p. 43.