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Anna

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Anna

“Only in Russia is poetry respected—it gets people killed. Is there anywhere else where poetry is so common a motive for murder?”
—Osip Mandelstam

Akhmatova had a method—each day the poet was to pretend she was condemned to death so as to make every impression more vivid and each insight and inscape more searing.

And, as promised by the ancient Alexandrian who contrived it, the rule worked for Anna as roses burned red in her mind and music played only by the breeze proved polyphonic.

The muse arrived now and then, more or less on schedule, bringing greetings from Dante. For a few years Anna followed this rule and it led her to fame and great honors.

She was regarded as a national heroine as thousands flocked to hear her readings. Stalin himself seemed to adore her. But then catastrophe struck and she was declared an enemy of the State. Former friends crossed the street to avoid her. Her previous husband had been executed, her son imprisoned, and she was exiled to a provincial town,

shared an apartment with the widow of Osip Mandelstam, whom Stalin had sent to the Gulag for alleged rudeness in a poem. Poetry, long second only to Anna’s love for her son,
now seemed a curse, and the sentence of death no longer a fiction. Each day she was more eager to have it carried out, be it by nature or by Stalin's assassins.

As if she were becoming a statue destined to stand in the snow, Anna began to worship silence with the same intensity that had fired, word by word, the heroic carnage of her poems.