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JUDITH HEMSCHEMAYER
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The Complete Poems of Anna Akhmatova

Anna Akhmatova, Judith Hemschemeyer (Translator), Roberta Reeder (Editor)

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Initially published in 1990, when the New York Times Book Review named it one of fourteen "Best Books of the Year," Judith Hemschemeyer's translation of The Complete Poems of Anna Akhmatova is the definitive edition, and has sold over 13,000 copies, making it one of the most successful poetry titles of recent years.

This reissued and revised printing features a new biographical essay as well as expanded notes to the poems, both by Roberta Reeder, project editor and author of Anna Akhmatova: Poet and Prophet (St. Martin's Press, 1994). Encyclopedic in scope, with more than 800 poems, 100 photographs, a historical chronology, index of first lines, and bibliography. The Complete Poems will be the definitive English language collection of Akhmatova for many years to come.

The Complete Poems of Anna Akhmatova Details

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From Reader Review The Complete Poems of Anna Akhmatova for online ebook

Ian says

Anna Akhmatova's first husband was murdered by Lenin's secret police the Cheka. Her next husband and her son were both sent to the Gulag by Stalin. Most people would have a complete breakdown after enduring such tragedy. Akhmatova, much like fellow poet Paul Celan, turned that unbelievable suffering into some of the greatest poetry of the 20th century. Few have ever captured the suffering of their native people the way Akhmatova did. Her most famous poem and quite possibly my favorite is "Requiem"

Interesting tidbit: She was a proven descendent of Genghis Khan and had a Mongol grandmother from whom she took her pen name.

Kasia says

Her poetry is breathtaking.

Hadrian says

I haven't read the complete collection, just an edited anthology with Kunitz translating.

A slow and languorous howl of a collection - Russian poetry at some of its finest. Intense emotions in sparse words.

Rachel Hope Miranda says

Since I was required to read one of Akmatova's works in my World Literature course I found myself enthralled with her poetry. After finding myself searching through book stores for different translations, I fell in love with Judith Hemschemeyer's most recent translation of her work. Within Akhmatova's poetry, throughout each and every one of the translations, I see a woman full of emotions and tragedy. Her poems speak volumes as we see the inner workings of her mind while dealing with loss and adaptation to her circumstances. Much of her works seems to focus more on emotion then imagery, metaphor or symbolism rather than sensory. Hemschemeyer's translation, I feel, brought out the true poetry in her words as Hemschemeyer not only translated it and oriented it to her era, but also created work that flowed, almost magically, from sentence to sentence, poem to poem. My soul focus right now is poetry and since reading Akhmatova's works I find myself striving to create the emotional appeal which she was able to create for me.

Janet says

Wow. This complete book of poems of Akhmatova was a mind-blower. Would have liked bilingual, but it would have had to be in two monstrous volumes. Akhmatova was brilliant at the start and got even more so as her life went on--and is simply a testimony to how a poem can condense an enormous experience into just a few lines. Poem Without a Hero, Northern Elegies and Requiem came late in her writing life, pure tragedy, like a cello, or someone playing a piano in a huge empty hall. The more I read about her, the more the poems unlock their secrets.

Edward says

List of Illustrations

Translator's Acknowledgements

Publisher's Acknowledgements

Translator's Preface, by Judith Hemschemeyer

Mirrors and Masks: The Life and Poetic Works of Anna Akhmatova, by Roberta Reeder

Anna Akhmatova: A Memoir, by Isaiah Berlin

Chronology

Third Printing (Revised): New Poems and Revisions

Second Edition: New Poems and Revisions

Notes on the Text

Portfolio: Tsarskoye Selo

--**Evening** (1912)

(ADDITIONS)

--"I pray to the sunbeam from the window. . ."

Two Poems:

--1. "Both sides of the pillow. . ."

--2. "That same voice, that same gaze. . ."

Reading Hamlet:

--1. "Dust rose from the vacant lot. . ."

--2. "And as if by mistake. . ."

--"And when we had cursed each other. . ."

--First Return

--"I wept and repented. . ."

--"At the new moon he abandoned me. . ."

--"Moorka, don't go. . ."

Portfolio: Petersburg

--**Rosary** (1914)

(ADDITIONS)

--"I led my lover out to the hall. . ."
--"Can you forgive me these November days?"
--"I'm not asking for your love. . ."
--"The palms of your hands are burning. . ."
--"You will live without misfortune. . ."

--**White Flock** (1917)

(ADDITIONS)

--"And it seems --- a human voice. . ."
--"When, in the gloomiest of capitals. . ."
--"How steep and resounding these bridges are. . ."
--"Why then did I used to hold you in my arms. . ."
--"I was born neither too early nor too late. . ."
--"I don't need much happiness. . ."
--"The city disappeared. . ."
--"Oh, there are unique words. . ."
--"I dream of him less often now, thank God. . ."
--"Not mystery and not grief. . ."
--"We will be together, darling, together. . ."
--"The dark road twisted. . ."
--"How I love, how I loved to look. . ."

--**Plantain** (1921)

(ADDITION)

--To Zara

--**Anno Domini MCMXXI** (1922)

Portfolio: Photo Biography

--**Reed** (1924-1940)

--**Seventh Book** (1936-1964)

--**Odd Number**

Epic and Dramatic Fragments and Long Poems

--From a Primeval Poem

Epic Motifs:

--I. "At that time I was a guest upon the earth. . ."
--II. "Having forsaken my homeland's sacred groves. . ."
--III. "Night came on and in the dark blue sky. . ."

--Fragment from . . . "The Russian Trianon"

--In Smolensk Cemetery

Northern Elegies:

--1. Prehistory

--2. "So here it is --- that autumn landscape. . ."

--3. "I, like a river. . ."

--4. "There are three ages to memories. . ."

--5. About the 1910's

--6. "It was dreadful to live in that house. . ."

--7. "And I have been silent, silent for thirty years. . ."

--Lyrical Digression on the Seventh Elegy

--At the Edge of the Sea

--The Way of All the Earth

from **Prologue**

--"Certainly no one in the world. . ."

--" . . . I was the one forbidden book. . ."

--"Though you are three times more beautiful than angels. . ."

--"And you know, I agree to everything. . ."

--"Because I shared the primal darkness with you. . ."

--"However many tortures the other invented for me. . ."

--"This paradise, in which we did not sin. . ."

--"You frighten with caresses. . ."

--"Do not take yourself by the hand. . ."

--"Release me if just for a minute. . ."

--"The world never perceived such poverty. . ."

--"We tasted the forbidden knowledge. . ."

--POEM WITHOUT A HERO: A Triptych (1940-1962)

--Additions (Stanzas not included in the text of 'Poem Without a Hero', and poems relating to its composition)

Portfolio: The Artist's Muse

Uncollected Poems and Fragments

1904-1917

--"I plucked lilies, lovely and fragrant. . ."

--"I walked with you over the black abyss. . ."

--"Oh, hush! these strange, thrilling words. . ."

--"I know how to love. . ."

--Spring Air Imperiously Courageous

--"On his hands are lots of shining rings. . ."

--"My night --- feverish ravings about you. . ."

--From the First Notebook

--"Either I stayed with you. . ."

--"Your crazy eyes. . ."

--"They came and said: 'Your brother died.'"

--"For you, Aphrodite, I'll compose a dance. . ."

--"In my room lives a beautiful. . ."

--"On the little table, tea, rich pastries. . ."

--"I am fatal for those who are tender and young. . ."

--"For a long time I stood at Hell's heavy gates. . ."

--Solitude

--In the Forest

--The Old Portrait

--"The old oak rustles about the past. . ."

--"You are with me again. . ."

--"In the corner an old man resembling a ram. . ."

--"When we die it won't become darker. . ."

--"You've spent the whole day at the window. . ."

--"As if with a huge, heavy hammer. . ."

--"Come and take a look at me. . ."

--(To F.K. Sologub)

--"The corolla's needles catch fire. . ."

--"We will still add to this. . ."

--"In your fine hand you are writing *Lise*. . ."

--The Reply

--"I won't say anything, I won't open the door. . ."

--Latest Letter

--"I saw the field after the hail. . ."

--"And the fever at evening. . ."

--"Beyond the hazy pattern of the windowpanes. . ."

--"I'm not embarrassed by offensive remarks. . ."

--"And through everything and every moment. . ."

--"He smiled, standing on the threshold. . ."

--"Like someone who has left by the western gate. . ."

--From Old Verses

--"How long the New Year's holiday. . ."

--"Empty white Yuletide. . ."

--To Tamara Platonovna Karsavina

--"Some great misfortune happened to me here. . ."

--"Nowhere did I find my beloved. . ."

--"From you came uneasiness. . ."

--"You, the leader, standing by the spring. . ."

--" . . . it is the one who gave me the zither. . ."

--"The bare, bleak days pass peacefully. . ."

--Last Will and Testament

--"The evening bell on the monastery wall. . ."

--"Flowers, cold from the dew. . ."

--"He did not kill, did not curse. . ."

--White Night

--"It's time to buy land. . ."

--"They are bearing someone's yellow coffin out. . ."

--"Because sin is what I glorified. . ."
--"In the interval between thunderstorms. . ."
--"I don't like flowers. . ."
--"And in the Kievian church of Divine Wisdom. . ."
--"On the right, the Dneiper. . ."
--Fragment
--"With the first sound falling from the piano. . ."
--"If the moon does not wander through the sky. . ."
--"Marvelous destiny named us. . ."
--" . . . You can't make a soul mortal. . ."
--"You won't divine it immediately. . ."
--"In the city of the gatekeeper of paradise. . ."
--"In this church I heard the Canon. . ."
--"On the drawbridge. . ."

1919-1941

--"I am bitter and old. . ."
--"The tomtits sing well. . ."
--"Good fortune flew away from me. . ."
--"Isn't it strange that we knew him?"
--"A light beer has been brewed. . ."
--"That evening should be put to death. . ."
--"Hello, Piter. It's bad, old boy. . ."
--"The devil didn't betray me. . ."
--"How boring to have to defend. . ."
--"It has been seven years. . ."
--"I will not profane my lips with your name. . ."
--"Here the most beautiful girls fight. . ."
--"It would be so easy to abandon this life. . ."
--"And you will forgive me everything. . ."
--"Forgive me, that I manage badly. . ."

--To the Caucasus

--"And I will wander here at night. . ."
--"Ah! --- where are those islands. . ."
--"Why did you poison the water. . ."

--A Little Geography

--"Speaking frankly. . ."
--"And I am not at all a prophet. . ."

--Imitation from the Armenian

--" . . . I know I can't move from this place. . ."
--"To the New Year! To new bitterness!"

--To the Memory of M.B.

--"I put my curly-haired son to bed. . ."

--Stanzas

--Belated Reply

--"And here, in defiance of the fact. . ."
--"The neighbor, out of pity. . ."
--"And all those whom my heart won't forget. . ."
--"What I am doing, everyone is capable of doing. . ."

--"Such a thunderstorm. . ."

1941-May 1945

--"To live --- as if in freedom. . ."

Leningrad Quatrains:

--1. "The enemy banner. . ."

--2. "Dig, my shovel. . ."

--3. "Even though the signal fire is not burning. . ."

--"And of everything earthly there remained. . ."

--"This is how I am. . ."

--"It's amusing for you, under the floorboards. . ."

--"If you are death. . ."

--Typhus

--"My eyes don't move from the horizon. . ."

--"Leningrad blue eyes. . ."

--"We will go to Samarkand to die. . ."

--"When out of habit I say. . ."

--"And the double in the mirror conceals. . ."

--Inscription on the Poem 'Triptych'

--Postscript to 'The Leningrad Cycle'

--(Another Postscript to the 'Leningrad Cycle')

--Death

--"*De profundis*. . . My generation tasted little honey. . ."

--"You, Asia --- motherland of motherlands!"

--Palmyra

--"Can it be I'm no longer the one. . ."

--"Our feelings then were so much alike. . ."

--". . . For the lily-of-the-valley month of May. . ."

--"Our boys, they defended us. . ."

--Lamentation

--"If, when I flew, overtaking the sun. . ."

--"Because of the strange lyrics. . ."

--Additions to the Cycle 'Victory'

--"There's a silhouette of Faust in the distance. . ."

--"There's something wrong with me again. . ."

--"The one people once called. . ."

September 1945-1956

--"I wouldn't have known how the quince tree blossoms. . ."

--"Let a wave of music crash. . ."

--"And the sly crescent moon. . ."

--"At great expense and unexpectedly. . ."

--"I bid farewell to everyone. . ."

--"With the rabble in a ditch. . ."

--Lullaby

--The Glass Doorbell

--"Everyone left and no one returned. . ."

--Shards
--"I don't have special claims. . ."
--Festive Song
--"Ah, for you Russian is not enough. . ."
--"Regarding myself as a mere echo. . ."
--From the Cycle 'Secrets of the Craft'
--From the Cycle 'Burnt Notebook'
--"Others go off with their loved ones. . ."
--Prologue
--"Even that voice will not deceive me. . ."
--"I am drawn to the roads around Moscow. . ."

1957-1966

--"They will forget? --- How astonishing!"
--"In vain you fling at my feet. . ."
--August
--"It's no wonder that sometimes my unruly verse. . ."
--"At least today give me a call. . ."
--"Chopin's Polonaise is passing once more. . ."
--"Away from me, as from that countess. . ."
--"All the unburied ones --- I buried them. . ."
--"To bequeath to some wild violin. . ."
--"And you will be one of those old women. . ."
--"And everyone followed me, my readers. . ."
--Inscription on a Book
--"Don't disturb my life. . ."
--"This is neither old nor new. . ."
--Speed
--"But I didn't give you the ring. . ."
--"I threw thousands of bell-towers. . ."
--"It's not that I am searching for you. . ."
--"I was captivated by mistake. . ."
--Ravings
--Four Seasons of the Year
--"For a long time I haven't believed in telephones. . ."
--Creation
--March Elegies
--The Heiress
--"You are to live, but I, not very much longer. . ."
--"And it is impossible to take from them. . ."
--"And the mad face of black music. . ."
--"What is separation to us? --- A jaunty game. . ."
--"These praises for me are not due to rank. . ."
--From the Sketches
--"Somebody's voice can be heard by the porch. . ."
--"What? Only ten years, you're joking, my Lord!"
--"You were the first to yield. . ."
--"And she could have done this. . ."
--"Like someone mute and blind and deaf. . ."

--To the Memory of Anta
--"No more joking. . ."
--"And he lures me with youth, and promises fame. . ."
--The Pines
--"And the flock of pansies. . ."
--"Under the cherished maple. . ."
--"No, we didn't suffer together in vain. . ."
--"Sickness has kept me languishing. . ."
--Listening to Singing
--"Prayerful days in the hospital. . ."
--"You were right not to take me along. . ."
--"You won't have to answer for me. . ."
--Imitation of the Korean
--Almost into the Album
--The Publication of a Book
--"And the northern news. . ."
--More about This Summer
--"What do we have in common?"
--"Perhaps afterwards you hated me. . ."
--"Everyone, even the uninvited. . ."
--"How forgetful life is, and death. . ."
--Sonnet
--Midnight Verses
--"An unforeseen evil befell. . ."
--"And it was so good this summer. . ."
--"From the burial mound's deadly vault. . ."
--"Abused, praised. . ."
--The Fifth Rose
--"You --- in fact, are somebody's husband. . ."
--"Everything in Moscow is steeped in verses. . ."
--"Leave me alone with music. . ."
--"I'm playing the very game. . ."
--" . . . and to die in haughty consciousness. . ."
--Forbidden Rose
--"Grand Confession"
--"I'm walking again in the thickets of night. . ."
--The North
--Romance
--Christmastime (December 24)
--From the Diary of a Traveller
--From the Italian Diary
--"But who would have thought that Sixty-Four. . ."
--"The violent wine of lechery. . ."
--To Music
--"And as music began to sound. . ."
--"We learned not to meet anymore. . ."
--"I am going where nothing is needed. . ."
--"Only life is forgetful. . ."
--"The aria Zibelia is still suffering there. . ."

--"Who sent him here. . ."

--"It's not being with you that comforts me. . ."

--"Torment proved to be my muse. . ."

--"And your dome was not touched with the gold. . ."

--"And the harsh sounds became damp. . ."

--"Off in the distance hung some sort of bridge. . ."

--"So we lowered our eyes. . ."

--"And you will love me all your life. . ."

--Fragment

--"Let the Australian sit down, invisible. . ."

--Sonnet

--"And my sonnet arises. . ."

--"Ice is growing on the windowpanes. . ."

--"I am still at home today. . ."

--Little Song

--"Strain both your voice and hearing. . ."

--"I lift the receiver --- I say my name. . ."

--"She replaced the receiver. . ."

--"And I go about my own house. . ."

--"No, not chess, not tennis. . ."

--"It is terrifying to be praised by you. . ."

--"And a strange companion was sent to me by hell. . ."

--"I don't know what was guiding me. . ."

--"There's no way for me to take flight. . ."

--"You loved me and pitied me. . ."

--"Stop it, I was like all of them. . ."

--"And I have no claims. . ."

--"Sooner than anything, love turns to mortal ashes. . ."

--" . . . that rhymes with blood. . ."

--To the Defenders of Stalin

--"They swore by the Hammer and Sickle. . ."

--"Not to a secret pavilion. . ."

--"In sorrows, in passions. . ."

--"Oh, how your grandfathers loved me. . ."

--"The poet is not a person. . ."

--"Don't lie to me, don't lie to me. . ."

--"Soon I will leave you. . ."

--"What is lurking in the mirror? Grief. . ."

--"You cranks, you could have chosen. . ."

--"By turning endings into beginnings. . ."

--"Not in vain did I bear. . ."

--"Waiting for him gives me more pleasure. . ."

--"The hostess is rosy cheeked. . ."

--To Music

--"Luring with the Pied Piper's flute. . ."

--"Speechlessness became my home. . ."

--Music

--Stravinsky's 'Jeremiah'

--"And in the depths of music. . ."

--"Don't give me anything to remember you by. . ."
--"Pray, at night, that you won't. . ."
--" . . . But there is no power more formidable. . ."
--"Necessity herself has finally submitted. . ."

Notes to Poems

Notes to "Mirrors and Masks"

Appendix: "In Praise of Peace"

Index to Poems---By Source

Index of Titles & First Lines

Index of Proper Names

Select Bibliography

Biographical Notes

Snail in Danger (Sid) Nicolaides says

I enjoyed these poems. They are melancholy in places (okay, almost all the time), but they are — this is going to sound strange — the kind of melancholy that you can enjoy. When you want to appreciate some high angst because you're not feeling very angsty, this is the place to go. Good poems to read in the winter when you are snug and warm inside.

"Poem Without a Hero" I just enjoyed the word-imagery of. Some of the other epic fragments were very enjoyable, but I preferred the shorter poems, for the most part.

Laura Hartmark says

It's a long collection. There's a lot of poems. But you're not in a Soviet gulag or under the surveillance of the KGB. So stop complaining. Relax. You'll get through it. And it's worth it. "Can you write about this? Yes, I can." - Anna Akhmatova

Terence says

Don't have anything terribly profound to say about Akhmatova. Overall, the collection here merits three stars. I find that I prefer her earlier stuff, pre-Revolution and from the early '20s (before Stalin solidified his control), but there are some very affecting stuff from the period when her son was in a gulag (I'm thinking here, though I can't remember the specific poem, of the image of the women waiting in line to hear news of their husbands, lovers, sons, etc.).

Some of the more memorable verses (for me):

*Now, like a little snake it curls into a ball,
Bewitching your heart,
Then for days it will coo like a dove
On the little white windowsill.*

*Or it will flash as bright frost,
Drowse like a gillyflower...
But surely and stealthily it will lead you away
From joy and from tranquility.*

*It knows how to sob so sweetly
In the prayer of a yearning violin,
And how fearful to divine it
In a still unfamiliar smile.* p. 81

*There is a sacred boundary between those who are close,
And it cannot be crossed by passion or love -
Though lips fuse in dreadful silence
And the heart shatters to pieces with love.*

*Friendship is helpless here, and years
Of exalted and ardent happiness,
When the soul is free and a stranger
To the slow languor of voluptuousness.*

*Those who strive to reach it are mad, and those
Who reach it - stricken by grief...
Now you understand why my heart
Does not beat faster under your hand.* p. 181

...
*Damned if I will. Neither by glance nor by groan
Will I touch your cursed soul,
But I vow to you by the garden of angels,
By the miraculous icon I vow
And by the fiery passion of our nights -
I will never return to you.* p. 285

*That was when the ones who smiled
Were the dead, glad to be at rest....* p. 386

*A sky white with a frightful whiteness,
And the earth like coal and granite.
Under this withered moon
Nothing shines anymore.*

*A woman's voice, hoarse and impassioned,
Doesn't sing, but yells, yells.
On the black poplar right above me
Not a single leaf rustles.*

*Was this why I kissed you?
Was this why I tormented myself, loving?
To remember you now, calmly and wearily,*

With loathing? p. 643

*O God, for myself I could forgive everything,
But I would rather be a hawk clawing a lamb,
Or a serpent biting someone sleeping in the field,
Than be a human and be forced to see
What people do, and from putrid shame,
Not dare to raise my eyes to the heavens on high.* p. 647

Ruby says

Exceptional!

Rick says

A great starting place if you've never read Anna Akhmatova would be *Poems of Akhmatova*, Selected, Translated and Introduced by Stanley Kunitz with Max Hayward. It's career spanning but at only 173 pages, including presenting the poems in Russian with facing page English translations, it will convince you of her genius and invest you with an interest for a deeper engagement with her work and life. Then when you are ready, *The Complete Poems of Anna Akhmatova* awaits. Published in an expanded edition in 1997, this is a monumental volume, 946 pages, including poems, preface and introduction, chronology, notes, photographs, bibliography and index. I read it poorly, over a number of years in fits and starts but it moved and impressed with every fit and start.

The Complete Poems, while no place to start, is essential to any library of 20th century poetry and a tremendous anthology for its comprehensiveness and organization. And it's not just that there are so many more great poems than are fitted into the forty poem selected or that the great long poems "Requiem" and "Poem Without a Hero" are here in their entirety, along with several other excellent longer poems, but that even among the abandoned fragments and miscellaneous poems there are verses, lines, images that stop you in your readerly tracks. "I didn't know that the moon / was in on everything." Or: "Darkness will be light and sin lovely." Or "The most reliable thing on earth is sorrow." Or: "How short became the road / That seemed the longest." And: "I'm walking again in the thickets of night, / There the vagabond nightingale sings, / Sweeter than honey, sweeter than wild strawberries / Even sweeter than my jealousy."

Akhmatova had a difficult life, coming of age and launching her career as the Revolution brought a betrayed freedom that claimed lives in civil war and long decades of hideous repression. Stalin took her livelihood, killed her ex-husband, imprisoned her son, numerous friends, and a lover or two. She remained dedicated to her art and to her homeland and wrote brilliantly, passionately, and tragically about it in the poems that fill this great collection. I believe I will read each of the whole collections published in her lifetime and gathered here—*Evening*, *Rosary*, *White Flock*, *Plantain*, *Anno Domini MCMXXI*, *Reed*, and *Seventh Book*—over the next seven weekends. And then sometime down the summer road will read Poem Without a Hero again. So I will keep this collection in reach.

J.M. Hushour says

Another mammoth undertaking and I'm hardly worthy of reviewing it (is anyone?), but well worth the slog if you can hang with Akhmatova.

Spaka Eon says

I love her poems... and I have her book with me since high school. One of the few books that I took with me when I moved overseas.

There is a site with awesome translations to English <https://sites.google.com/site/poetrya...>
made me realize that my own translations of poems loose poetic sense and become pure translations))

Levka says

So much of translated poetry depends on the translator. Translating Akhmatova from Russian must be near impossible; the Russian language is structured so that, more or less, most words can rhyme with all the others by modifying the word endings... you can hear her tendency for rhymed couplets if you ever listen to some of her poetry being read around in the original Russian. I partially chose Hemschemeyer because I wanted to read all of Akhmatova's poems. But the other part is because she chooses to use traditional poetic forms, though typically the lines do not rhyme in couplet form too often. There is a solemnity and a mystery to Hemschemeyer's translations, which are sparse and small and not too overdone, though I find her translation of "The Grey-eyed King" to be a little flat, compared to some of the ones I've read online. To talk about Akhmatova herself... what do you say about the Russian poet who changed the face of Russian poetry? It's so hard to know how to describe her poems when I can't read them in Russian yet. But even in English, her poems have a beauty and a lyricism, striking me with images both beautiful and terrible, that startle me and provoke me. She's my favorite poet, because she's subtle, and soft, painting a picture of a Russia that has vanished, while speaking of the universality of the human condition.

Ted says

I never stopped writing poems. In them is my link with time, with the new life of my people. When I wrote them, I believed in the resounding rhythms reflected in the heroic history of my country. I am happy that I lived in these years and saw events which cannot be equalled.

V. 1.0

A drawing of Akhmatova by Amadeo Modigliani, pictured in this book. Akhmatova met Modigliani in

Paris in 1910. Though she was recently married, it has been said (by Wiki for example) that the two had a love affair. I might find further remarks about this in notes and the index of the book being reviewed, but I'm unable to explore that possibility ... because the book is almost 2000 miles away.

aside

I find myself in Kalispell Montana, about to embark on a several days tour of Glacier National Park, with the prospect of very little internet access during the week.

I've been struggling with this review for months. It seems impossible to finish. There is no end to what I find fascinating about Akhmatova's life and poetry.

Therefore, tonight, the "short" part of the review which was mostly written long ago will be submitted as the entire review. I may add more later. I've got much more written. This may be only a first installment. But ... well, there are bears in Glacier NP. So ...

short review

Anna Andreyevna Gorenko was born in the Ukraine in 1889 (the same year that another who had a profound effect on her country was born – Adolf Hitler). Her family soon moved to Tsarskoye Selo, near (Saint) Petersburg (changed to 'Petrograd' in 1914, Leningrad in 1924, and in 1991 back to Saint Petersburg); this is where Anna grew up.

She began writing poetry in 1900. In 1907 her first poem was published, under the name "Anna G.". Her next publications, four years later, were under the name "Akhmatova".

Akhmatova had six editions of her poetry published in the years 1912 – 1940. All these poems, plus many more unpublished poems, fragments, and even her most famous poem - *Poem Without a Hero* - that were not published in her lifetime in Russia, are included in the book reviewed. As far as I know, this is the only edition of the complete poems of Akhmatova available in English.

Akhmatova's poetry is usually described as modern, though exactly what that means, especially in the context of Russian poetry, is beyond my ken. But it's true that according to my diffuse ideas of modern poetry, she is a modern poet. Her poems are often connected to people she knew, admired, loved – and to events, many terrible, that she experienced in her life. Many of these events were shared with the Russian people; others were peculiar to her own circumstances, both as a poet and as a woman.

I have no way of judging the translations by Judith Hemschemeyer. However, Ms. Hemschemeyer contributes a 16-page Preface to the volume; the larger part of this is her personal view of the reasons that contribute to the power of Akhmatova's poems; the last few pages are a cogent description of the task of translating the poems into English, and the special characteristics of Russian language and grammar which present special challenges to a translator of poetry. I was quite impressed by this: "My first goal was to understand the poem; only then, I felt, could I present the poem to others. This took time – more than ten years – and at least several versions of each poem.

This book was the greatest challenge I've ever undertaken in reading poetry. If you, reader, would have

compared it to the only two poetry books I've reviewed before (Sailing Alone Around the Room and Walking the Black Cat), you might have forecast that I would never finish it. But finish it I did, and I loved every step I took on that long path.

If you love poetry yourself, I couldn't recommend a thick, complete edition of any poet's works more highly than this one.

To be continued? Maybe. If and when I add any significant writing, the version number at the top will change from V 1.0.

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Previous review: The Kingdom

Random review: Slaughterhouse-Five *or The Children's Crusade: A Duty-Dance with Death*

Next review: Cuz: The Life and Times of Michael A. *a woman remembers her efforts to help her cousin*

Previous library review: Selected Stories *Chekhov*

Next library review: Life and Fate *Vasily Grossman*

Ekin says

"You demand poems from me bluntly...
Somehow you'll manage to live without them.
Not a gram of my blood remains
That hasn't absorbed their bitterness.

We burn up the golden and splendid days
Of an unrealizable life,
And the fires of the night do not whisper to us
Of a meeting in the heavenly fatherland.

And from our magnificence
A chill wave streams,
As if on a mysterious gravestone,
Flinching, we read someone's name.

Not to contemplate on endless separation,
It would be better-right now, to...
For surely no one in this world was ever
More separated than we are.

1962, Moscow

Daveterp says

Stunning, personally raw poetry from a pioneer of the "acme" school of Russian poetry. Was introduced to her when an 86 yo Russian emigre handed me a small worn copy of a volume of her works, in both English and Russian after we had begun an impromptu conversation about poetry. Put it in my hands, cupped his hands over mine and said "keep this, learn about her. I have no more need of it."

Rusty says

Okay, I only made it through about half of this, maybe a little more. It's a broswing book I'll learn my way into, I hope. When she's good, it's astonishing, when it's not. . .it's not. I think I expected more knock-my-socks-off work than I actually found, hence the somewhat muted rating.

April Helms says

This fulfills the challenge for reading a collection of poetry in translation on a theme other than love. There are love poems in this anthology (and I probably should mention here that what I wrote was merely Vol. 1 of the collection), but many poems are Akhmatova's reflections on her growing up during the Russian Revolution, her distaste for Communism and her faith. To call Akhmatova prolific would be indulging in understatement. Her writing is spare; she uses many allegories in her writing but I found it fairly easy to follow. The forwards by Hemschemeyer and Reeder are definitely worth the time to read for better understanding. My Russian is crude at best; I could pick up a word here and there but am in no position to judge the quality of the translations. Still, from the descriptions of Akhmatova's writing style and from what (very) little I could glean from the Russian, the translations seemed to translate the spirit of this Russian icon well. I usually don't read end notes, but these, too, are worth checking out. This was a challenging read, but I'm glad I selected this book as my final one needed for this year's Book Riot Read Harder challenge.

Levent says

she knew
