

To the Russian Poets

I am only familiar with Pushkin, Mandelstam, Pasternak, Tsvetaeva, Brodsky and Akhmatova. In different ways they all tackle the problem of human consciousness in an unforgiving universe. They are all on the edge of the abyss and have the courage to stay there till the end. This example gives them a special insight. It is that insight which attracts me and is not equalled in world literature. In the English speaking world we have not had to face the challenge of internal totalitarianism- the enemy, that one, has always been external. (I am speaking of the last 200 years). I believe this challenge paradoxically has given their art its cutting edge and made the rest look washed-out. The exceptions in the 20th century are Hardy, Frost, Yeats, Eliot, Auden, Montale, Milosz. While we fought our imaginary woes in the West they fought a homicidal state in the East. This reality commands a special place and if they found help in a "spiritually imaginative world" to meet this horror what greater validity is needed to show its truth. Of course they used the imagery supplied by the Greek/Roman/Judaic/Christian/scientific tradition which is surely on one trajectory. Leaving aside the idiocies in each of them it is that tradition of enquiry at the physical and meta-physical level which we have to continue. Their example makes life possible and when impossible their example makes that too. With them it is worth going on and joining them wherever they may be.