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Title: Displacement in Time: Exile in the Poetry of Anna Akhmatova

Abstract:

Anna Akhmatova considers the year 1914 to be a complete rupture in her life, as it was then that she had to “part with Petersburg... forever” and realised that “everything had changed,” (26-27). Akhmatova turns to poetry to strengthen her connection to her lost home, cope with a sense of displacement, and yet also help her navigate and find a place in her new milieu. Such pursuits are characteristic of many poets in exile. Contemporary theory of exile literature suggests viewing these seemingly contradictory concepts in a dialectic tension, as authors explore the conflictive emotions that come with such an experience. I propose a re-conceptualisation of this theory for Akhmatova, shifting the focus from geographic to temporal displacement, in an attempt to best appreciate the complexities and ambiguities of Akhmatova’s verse. This paper focuses on her collection *Trostnik* (‘*Reed*’), written during the 1920s and 30s, as one of its main themes is the fate of a poet and their craft, and even its title evokes the metapoetic discussion it contains. Akhmatova alternates poems explicitly about exiled poets with poems about separation, loss, and forgetting, evoking common themes in exilic literature. She interposes her verse with prolific intertextuality, especially with Dante, one of the most representative poetic voices of exilic experience. Dante’s words cross spatial, temporal, cultural, and linguistic borders on their journey to her pages. Similarly, Akhmatova’s poetry enables her to forge connections with that which was lost, thereby overcoming the seemingly impenetrable border of time. This paper argues that *Trostnik* reveals Akhmatova’s attempt to cope with the pain of her temporal exile, as she looks back at a lost time, despairs about the separation, but yet believes in poetry’s ability to transcend the depths of her exile.

Akhmatova, Anna. *Listiki iz dnevnika. Proza. Pis'ma*. Izdatel'stvo AST, 2017.