

# When Writing Becomes a Bulwark against Anarchy and Oppression: Anna Akmatova's Example

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**Abstract:** Anna Akhmatova's poetry and its ongoing transmutations is evidence of the ever-present conflict between the writing subject and its surrounding circumstances, a conflict that might reach the extent of jeopardizing the life and security of the practitioner him/herself. The present paper aims to explore how writing poetry, especially in the 1930s and the 1940s made Anna Akhmatova both the eyewitness and victim of intolerable circumstances that only strong-willed people of her type could endure. Also the nature of her poetry, its development, and characteristic features will be highlighted. The paper comprises four main sections: first, the preliminaries provides some background about the two stages in the writer's poetry and its totally different interests. The second is concerned with the two trends in Russian poetry, i.e., Symbolism and Acmetism which dominated the literary scene in the first half of the twentieth century. The third is the main argument that covers three subsections: Requiem, Poem without a Hero and Akhmatova and Metapoetry. The fourth section is the conclusion where the main points of the paper are recapitulated and highlighted.

**Keywords:** Acmetism, poetry, the past, metapoetry, Requiem, Poem without a Hero.

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## 1. PRELIMINARIES

Choosing a writer about whose poetic achievement there are endless cultural and epistemological debates inevitably entails a reasonable justification. To begin with, the position of Ann Akhmatova (1889- 1866) epitomizes two important periods in Russian life: the pre-revolution Tsarian mode of living and the hectic and destabilizing forces that erupted and accompanied the 1917 revolution. In one of her early poems, Akhmatova tells the reader how she taught herself 'to live simply and wisely/ to look at the sky and pray to God,/ and to wonder long before the evening/to tire my superfluous worries.' In the first two decades of the twentieth century she had the opportunity to enjoy bohemianism that was in vogue then and broadly tolerated. She herself was a great participant in such interests. Her early poems depict the different aspects of that simple and easy-going life. However, time's turbulences suddenly loom heavy on the lives of people and play havoc in their endless enterprises. Indeed after long periods of mandatory 'silencing', Akhmatova, as any ardent lover of poetry, can only surrender to its insurmountable appeal. Due to the actual two stages in her poetry, the researcher finds it apt, if not imperative, to outline the demarcation lines between the poetry written before the revolution and the one that followed it. This is very important simply because her poetry underwent great changes in terms of form and content throughout her development. The lyrical simple and even erotic aspects of her earlier poetry have been replaced by more sober, intricate, philosophical and even metaphysical elements. As will be shown in the following pages, the corpus of the current paper is laid on the second stage although the graceful and lyrical sides of her previous verse are missing.

The rationale behind such a selection lies in the fact the post-revolution epoch is critical for Akhmatova both as a poet and individual. In this regard, she shares the same awful fate of poets of her generation like her first husband, Gumilev, Boris Pasternak and many others. In fact, the terrifying fate awaiting her first husband (execution) along with the arrest of her third husband Punin and that of her only son, Lev, have rendered Akhmatova totally vulnerable to all sorts of obsessions

and death thoughts which she could hardly escape. Curiously enough, the charge raised against her son was his being the son of Akhmatova and Gumilev, the 'adversary' and 'anarchistic' poets. (Amert, p.3) This by itself is further reason for Akhmatova to reconsider her priorities and expectations behind writing poetry in those unfavorable times.

## 2. RUSSIA POETRY BETWEEN SYMBOLISM AND ACMETISM

Any serious study of this epoch in the life of the Russian community and its wide-ranging effects cannot but devote some space to the contesting poetic trends prevalent then and the new one suggested. It is common to say that the Russian poetry has been informed by the Symbolist practices and theorizing. One reason for this great vogue of Symbolism is that it gives much space to spirituality, mystery and transcendental norms. Akhmatova, her first husband and a friend of the family, Osip Mandelstam, established what is called 'Acmetism'. This fresh trend stands counter to the practices of Symbolism in that Acmetism calls for selecting the material from daily reality and its mundane facts. Obviously, the Alchemists refused the division between 'poetic' and 'non-poetic', thus "any experience or perception, however lowly, legitimately came within the poet's sphere" (Knitz & Haywood, p.9). Gumilev expounds on this subject by showing the differences between the traditional (Symbolist) poetry and the new one. He is of the opinion that "Instead of the romantic, the idealistic or the aristocratic dreaming about the pure symbols, about the abstract aesthetics of the world...there has risen a living poetry of the object-word" (Harrington, p.12). This kind of argument brings to mind the theorizing of the realists and naturalists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Europe and U.S.A. Suffice it to remember the views and speculations of writers like Flaubert, Balzac, Hugo, Dickens, Hardy, Thackeray...etc. to realize the roots or parallels between the Russian Acmetism and its counterparts in other parts of the world.

In general, Akhmatova's later poetry shows a great change when compared to her earlier poems which concentrated on the questions of marriage, love, friendship and care-free life. Indeed the term 'confessional' has always been associated with her poetry written before the great upheaval caused by the revolution and two world wars. However, one should note that even in the second and longest stage in her writing, her poetry retains the simplicity and immediacy with the exception of her longest poem, 'Poem without a Hero' (1940-1960). Myths, allegories, cadences and puns are hardly seen in her works. In contrast, her friends, husbands, literary and historical figures throng in her late works. In fact, at a certain moment in her life, she becomes self-critical and recognizes the deadlock she has reached in the painstaking search for valid means of expression and precision in presenting them:

From these strange lyrics  
Every step is a secret,  
When chasms are to the left and to the right,  
When underfoot, like a faked kaf, lies glory,  
Apparently, there is no salvation for me. (Amert, p.20)

In one of her earlier poems, 'I am a Bard', one can easily perceive the tone of optimism and great confidence in the future. Moreover, there is a touch of self-sufficiency which will be missing in the years to come:

I am a bard....I am a heaven bird—  
I need no any richness of the world—  
I love a flower and so charming lass  
In aromatic springs that never pass  
I love a whisper, very gentle and long.  
And, in full silences, a despondent song. (Knitz & Haywood, p.22)

This poem is marked by the simplicity of its diction and common convictions the young usually cherish. It represents a certain stage in Akhmatova's poetry and consciousness that is preordained to vanish once and for all. At the moment of writing 'I am a Bard', she was under the illusion that poetry is the corollary of love, beauty, grace and joy. Only in the dark and bleak times of the future will she realize the futility and flimsiness of such pretensions. Indeed the long distance crossed by the poet from the stability and peace of mind to that of pain and disillusionment can be fully gauged when this poem is aligned with her influential poem, 'Requiem' (1935-1940). In this poem one can notice that she has lost completely her trust in mankind and justice. Set before a dismal jail where her son was imprisoned, the poem gives a panoramic picture of the barbarism of human beings when they are wielding power. This topic will be explored in the following section.

### 3. THE MAIN ARGUMENT

#### a. Requiem:

There is almost a unanimous consent among scholars and specialists in Akmatova's poetry that her two long poems are the best in all her creative career for different reasons. The first is related to the moving tone of utter honesty in the poems serving as the portal for showing the bleeding wounds she incessantly suffered in public life. Also there is a sense of solidarity and togetherness in the two that transcends the solipsism characterizing her earlier works. Moreover, there is depth, complexity, maturity and above all firm faith in the value of words which will survive all the rampant atrocities and malpractices inflicted on her as a human being and poet. The descriptive power of the poet as she invokes those terrible moments in her life excels even plastic arts when she describes the contours of the women standing in the long queue for visiting their relatives. Indeed she gives harrowing and graphic shots of those ghost-like figures enmeshed in that inhuman situation. It is noticeable that the poet's voice is seen to be inseparable from that of people and the nation. Indeed in her striking initial section 'Instead of a Preface', Akhmatova concretizes the fundamental role of poetry: to reflect the anguishes and frustrations of a wide sector of people apart from the poet. It is a general or universal picture, for that matter. It is more reasonable if one leaves the author give in her laconic style the essence of that human catastrophe. If, as already said, Akhmatova is one of the founders and theorists of Acmetists and its call for drawing on plastic arts in their poetic expression, it is nowhere present than in this prose section. Here man's stark dehumanization is apt to reverberate in the reader's mind and consciousness, thanks to the unparalleled descriptive of the poet in presenting her people and their panic:

In the awful days of Yezhovschina I passed seventeen months in the outer waiting line of the prison visitors in Leningrad. Once, somebody 'identified' me there. Then a woman, standing behind me in the line, which, of course, never heard my name, waked from the torpor, typical for us there, and asked me, whispering in my ear (all spoke only in a whisper there):

'And can you describe this?'

And I answered:

'Yes, I can'.

Then the weak similarity of a smile glided over that, what once been her face. (April 1, 1957, Leningrad).

The Epilogue enhances this nightmarish image of the chilling horror when it refers to the poet's innermost wish to erect a monument for herself in that cursed spot in order to keep that experience alive. Of course, the physical is impossible to obtain but the verbal one is certainly feasible:

And if once, whenever in my native land,  
They'd think of the raising up of my monument,  
I give my permission for such a feat,  
But with one condition—they have to place it  
Not near the sea, where I once have been born—  
All my warm connections with it had been torn,  
Not in the Tsar's garden near that tree—stump, blessed,  
When I was looked for by the doleful shade,  
But here, where three hundred long hours I stood for  
And where was not opened for me the hard door.

This is both a personal and impersonal account, a medley of private and public voices inextricably dovetailed in such a way as to make it very hard to sort things out. In fact this memorable portrait of agony and inner torture is what the French writer Alfred de Musset intended by his dictum that decorates the pedestal of his monument 'nothing renders us great (or ennobles us more than) great pain' (cit. in Chalabi, p.11). However, despite the mounting despair looming heavy on her life, Akmatova's faith in poetry as a valid means of warding off despair and melancholy remains unshakable. One brief example here can give the reader the state of up-side-down values prevalent in her society in those fearful times. Even a leading and authoritative critic of Russian Formalism (Boris Eichenbaum) can easily abandon his approach in criticism which leaves aside the author and instead stresses the formalistic and linguistic aspects of the text. Now he can

revert to subjectivity and give an arbitrary judgment of Anna Akhmatova when he calls her 'half harlot, half nun'. Indeed this view became a catchphrase for the indiscriminate authorities and eventually 'gave the Party officials reasons to ban her poetry'(March,2006).

The poem is actually a group of snapshots dealing with certain situations and scenes where man's weakness and vulnerability reaches its critical stage. If some researchers attribute some cinematic devices of zooming, fade, montage and so on, it is quite evident in this poem. Researcher Alexandra Harrington refers to such uses in Akhmatova's poetry when she confirms that 'cinematic narrative techniques are central to modernism and its way of seeing and thinking about the world'(Harrington,p.51), a point that is quite evident in the succession of shots in this impressive poem. In the Prologue, the poet sees that all are involved in this wholesale picture of suffering, persecutor and victim are in the same boat since the country itself is in a state of shambles:

In this time, just a dead could half-manage  
 A weak smile – with the peaceful state glad.  
 And, like some heavy, needless appendage,  
 Mid its prisons swung gray Leningrad.  
 And, when mad from the tortures' succession,  
 Marched the army of those, who'd been doomed,  
 Sang the engines the last separation  
 With their whistles through smoking gloom,  
 And the deathly stars hanged our heads over  
 And our Russia writhed under the boots –  
 With the blood of the guiltless full-covered –  
 And the wheels on Black Maries' black routes.

After this elegy of a whole nation that has gone awry, leaving only sadness and anxiety among its people, the poet brings the reader to her suffering caused by the imprisonment of her son:

You were taken away at dawn's mildness.  
 I convoyed you, as my dead-born child,  
 Children cried in the room's half-grey darkness,  
 And the lamp by the icon lost light.  
 On your lips dwells the icon kiss's cold  
 On your brow – the cold sweet ... Don't forget!  
 Like a wife of the rebel of old  
 On the Red Square, I'll wail without end.

The following snapshot compares between the natural and human: the former retires after its cycle is complete, while the latter's pains are endless simply because man is doomed to be like that, irrespective of the great stages of development and success he achieved. Needless to say, there are remote religious overtones about man's first crime in the universe: it is his brother's blood:

The quiet Don bears quiet flood,  
 The crescent enters in a hut.  
 He enters with a cap on head,  
 He sees a woman like a shade.  
 This woman's absolutely ill,  
 This woman's absolutely single.  
 Her man is dead, son – in a jail,  
 Oh, pray for me – a poor female!

**b. Poem without a Hero:**

If 'Requiem', as already indicated, has focused on widespread despair and horror, 'Poem without a Hero'(1940-1960) is actually a dirge of St. Petersburg or Leningrad as it is called later. Its composition is all the more striking as it took nearly twenty years to finish and its publication was posthumous. In the mean time the process of revising, adding, expanding, deleting polishing and refining has been going on throughout this relatively long time for composing a poem. It is in fact the product or off-shoot of very painful circumstances which put the poem in line with the former one as far as this point is concerned. The sorrowful events cover the execution of her first husband, Gumilev, and the arrest of Punin, the third husband in addition to the imprisonment of her son for no valid reason. The new type of writing has started since the ban was lifted from her works. Akhmatova defends her new type of poetry which might not appeal to the majority of readers as it is devoid of direct exposition of sentiments, longings and erotic suggestions. In her view, the priority at this time is given to reflecting and showing all types of pains and sufferings. She is not in a position anymore to gratify whimsical readers who insist that she follow the same invariable line of writing with which she started her creative career. She has the following to say in this regard:

I began to write again, but my handwriting has changed and my voice actually sounds differently. Life puts in harness a Pegasus, some way recalls the Pale Horse of the Apocalypse or the Black horse from poems that are not yet born. A return to the early manner is impossible. Which is better, which worse, is not for me to judge.(cit.in Harrington, p.21)

'Poem without a Hero' is an ambitious work that traces many stages in the poet's career, in particular her continuous shifting between Leningrad and Teshkend. Although ostensibly dedicated to her beloved city, St. Petersburg (Leningrad), the poem tackles many issues in the poet's life and writing career. The most outstanding elements in this poem are her dead acquaintances and friends that keep haunting her memory restlessly. Also there are scattered references to the psychological and philosophical changes she has undergone throughout this long and hard time--wars, revolution, censorship, banning of her books, the arrest, death or execution of those dear to her. The direct cause behind writing 'Poem without a Hero' lies in the suicide of a young friend of Akhmatova, Vsevolod Knyazev. He was a cadet officer who fell in love with one of Akhmatova's friends, Olga Suleikina. The latter was actually in love with the poet Alexandr Blok. The officer shot himself dead because of that.(Bayley1990).

The poem's structure which is fragmentary and loose might be interpreted as an inevitable outcome of keeping the draft for more than twenty years and at the mean time there are so many variables ceaselessly imposing themselves on its structure and final corpus. Another possibility could be that it is an attempt on the part of the poet to emulate the practices of great modernists in the west such as Wallace Stevens or T. S. Eliot and their deliberate attempts to find correspondences between form and content. If Akhmatova's personal life is full of upheavals and transmutations in place, point of view and even convictions ( she wrote a whole volume of verse in which she paid only lip-service to keep away the watching eyes of the authorities), it is logical to infer that this kind of writing is easy to defend or even mislead. The problem with this poem is that despite the long span of time of writing it, she insisted on postponing its publication till her death. In its present shape, the poem appears to be full of ruminations, speculations and self-introspection which eventually give the poem a special place in her oeuvre.

The initial stanza highlights the fact that the poem is not merely without 'a hero' but also it traces the pathetic absence of the humanitarian spirit. The narrator ( perhaps the poet's alter ego) finds herself prey to the assaults of the destabilizing past--hence the 'dread' and 'ravings':

I have lit my treasured candles,  
 one by one, to hallow this night.  
 With you, who do not come,  
 I wait the birth of the year.  
 Dear God!  
 the flame has drowned in crystal,  
 and the wine, like poison, burns  
 Old malice bites the air,

old ravings rave again,  
 though the hour has not yet struck.  
 Dread. Bottomless dread...  
 I am that shadow on the threshold  
 defending my remnant peace.

As can be seen in the stanza above, the poet is no longer interested in the exterior, tangible reality. Rather her concern is laid on maintaining her inner peace and equilibrium at very bleak times. Memory gets intermingled with fancy or wishful thinking, a situation which is not easy to recapture or get hold of due to its continuous fluidity:

All the mirrors on the wall  
 show a man not yet appeared  
 who could not enter this white hall.  
 He is no better and no worse,  
 but he is free of Lethe's curse:  
 his warm hand makes a human pledge.  
 Strayed from the future, can it be  
 that he will really come to me,  
 turning left from the bridge?

The mirrors can only bring false reflections and apparitions of the past which keep haunting the narrator and eventually bring about a radical change in her psychological and emotional construction. As she herself acknowledges, there is only disillusionment and full realization of the radical change taking place in all her being:

That woman I was once,  
 in a black agate necklace,  
 I do not wish to meet again  
 till the Day of Judgement.

The public life has shown the narrative persona that only illogic and meaninglessness is the prevalent status in her country. Indeed 'absurd' in the philosophical and existential sense is the common feature of her society torn between wars, circumscribing ideology and total cutting off any rapprochement with the outside world:

Absurd, absurd, absurd! From such absurdity  
 I shall soon turn gray  
 or change into another person.  
 why do you beckon me with your hand?  
 For one moment of peace  
 I would give the peace of the tomb.

This escalating sense of absurdity can only be overcome or at least mitigated by the gracious act of writing. In this respect, writing remains the last ditch before the deluge and its menacing forces. The poem eulogizes this faculty of writing, no matter how weak its impacts on the reader might be. The poem shows that the effect of writing on the person practicing it is so great that he/she finds himself unable to rid himself of its allurements. Already the great Irish writer Samuel Beckett at the end of his renowned trilogy referred to the impossibility of continuing this demanding craft and at the same time the difficulty of quitting it, 'I'll never know, in the silence, you don't know, you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on' (Beckett, p.418).

Undoubtedly Beckett is not the only one who conceptualizes the challenging act of writing and its merits and demerits. Giles Deleuze in his turn sees that writing is not a choice; rather it is 'the impossibility of another choice, without a set of impossibilities, you wouldn't have a line of flight, the exit that is creation' (Boundas, p.17).

**c. Akhmatova and Metapoetry:**

The discussion of the effect of creative writing on the poet's own psychological and cultural life in Akhmatova's case is so profound that it is worth further elaboration in the present pages. Writing poetry has been the only feasible response for the series of domestic and public ordeals and setbacks she smarted under for a very long time. When authorities banned her publication and people deserted her and slighted her work, only poetry could provide a glimpse of hope and solace in an otherwise totally hopeless case. As such, it is no surprise that she finds this niche she devoted to writing poetry and its resuscitating effect in her life. Of course, this complex relation tying the creative writer to his/her craft is not confined to Akhmatova. There is an endless series of writers from different parts of the world who have been attracted to the allurements of creative writing. For instance, the British Giles Bolton elaborates on the therapeutic sides embedded in creative writing. As she puts it:

Writing down has sometimes turned me into a sort of dialogue before my unsure and sure self, the best of that was it just grew and I surprised myself by what got written! I suppose that means I've partly become my own therapist. (1988, p.209)

Ernest Hemingway's temporary resisting of his overwhelming depression and its fatal consequences is attributed to the nourishing effects of creative writing. Indeed, this writing is not simply his way of achieving great reputation, prestige and worldwide popularity. Rather it is much more significant than what has already been stated. It is related to his conscious struggle against the mounting and fatal depression by means of creativity and imaginary worlds of writing. As has been aptly suggested, 'his writing was his way of evading the need to die. He could polish his real life experiences at war [...] and burnish his life in hindsight' (Walsh, 2011).

It is within this perspective that Akhmatova perceives the inspiring act of creativity. In 'When I Write Poems', the poet has the following to say in this regard:

When I 'm braced by any inspiration,  
I am a bridge between the sky and earth.  
Of all what heart high-values in creation  
I am a king, when breathing with a verse.

This imagined royal status she bestows on herself by virtue of creativity and poetry enables her to change the norms and laws of the universe and create a world of her own:

And I can, dear, create a world such special,  
That it would change laws of the whole world,  
To call again its own celebration  
And stop the sun from fall in the night cold.

Likewise, her elegy of one of her many friends brings to mind the primary task of poetry, namely the direct expression of the sentiments of the writing subject as well those of the reader. In her felicitous phrase, researcher Iryna Tsoborova spells out this time-honored task of creativity, "Poetry has a restorative and unifying role, helping the lyrical 'I' to rebuild the places of her disintegrated consciousness" (2014, p.69).

Indeed the poem (Here is my Gift) celebrates the great power of the written word which no other means of expression can match in effect and value. Her faith in poetry is firm and fully manifest:

Here is my gift, not roses, on your grave,  
not sticks of burning incense.

The material things mentioned in these initial lines are not what she is after. Indeed she considers the written word to be of lasting effect that even time cannot vanquish. She draws an impressive contrast between the robust and vibrant life of the dead person and his dull and depressing end. When the pomp and conceit of life vanishes, what remains is the reverberating voice of poetry recapitulating the life and end of man, and keeping his memory fresh:

You lived aloof, maintaining to the end  
your magnificent disdain.

.....

Now you've gone, and nobody says a word  
about your troubled and exalted life.  
Only my voice, like a flute, will mourn  
at your dumb funeral feast.  
Oh, who would have dared believe that half crazed I,  
I, sick with grief of the buried past,  
I, smoldering on a slow fire,  
having lost everything and forgotten all,  
would be fated to commemorate a man  
so full of strength and all bright inventions,  
who only yesterday it seems, chatted with me,  
hiding the tremor of his mortal pain.

In another poem published at a late stage in her career ' You Who Was Born' (1956), she repeats almost verbatim Ezra Pound's famous dictum " make it new"(Coste et al,p.27).Also this poem betrays Akhmatova's modernistic orientation in the sense that she advocates and recommends the postulates and objectives of this trend, particularly in Europe and America. In this poem she asserts in one stanza what she considers to be the real essence of poetry:

You, who was born for poetry's creation,  
Don't repeat the sayings of the ancients.  
Though, may be, our Poetry itself,  
Is just a single beautiful citation.

A stanza of this sort brings to mind the tenets of New Criticism which finds paradox as one of the pillars of the preferable type of poetry. At the beginning she vigorously calls for radicalizing the poetic medium to be followed by a statement that neutralizes all what has already been said. Indeed the last two lines stress the innate and inescapable repetition in the entire creative process. This is nowhere evident than in the famous arguments of the French critic Roland Barthes and his half-serious declaration of the death of the author, "The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture" (1997,p.146).

The sublimating and ennobling effects of artistic creation constitute the dominant leitmotif of her poem,' To the Artist'(1924).She acknowledges that her life can only be heightened and enriched by the cross-fertilization and encounter between the writer and artistic creativity. The poem as a matter of fact views that man's presence in this world remains inadequate and that art alone can bring it grace, signification and peace of mind. She begins her poem by eulogizing art:

Wherever I'm, I see your works in greatness,  
Your labors worthy to be blessed and prayed.

The aesthetic and spiritual richness associated with art is felt through the narrator's longing to be fully immersed in its intricate world:

There's just a thought and somnolence, right now,  
Leads me into your quiet gardens' shades,  
When I, afraid of every turn and bough,  
I full forgetfulness, seeks for my former trace.

.....

There I'll be blessed, forever and entire  
And, closing my eyelids, blazed by fire,  
Again obtain my tears' former gift.



Creative writing, as already shown, through the various examples, is definitely a cause for the poet's inner joy which no other power, however mighty, can vanquish or rob. The poems discussed above share one salient trait: the ability to authenticate both personal and public lives enmeshed in difficult times. In 'Muse', this mythological goddess' deserting the city of St. Petersburg is indicative of its barrenness and fruitlessness, a point that runs counter to this city's long history of creativity and wonder. This discontinuity or disruption between the two suggests the cultural and aesthetic fiasco the Russian city suffered from at that time. Hence the narrator's pleadings for the Muse to be there and bless the place and its dwellers:

All that I am hangs by a thread tonight  
 as I wait for her whom no one can command.  
 Whatever I cherish most—youth, freedom,  
 Glory—fades before who bears the flute in her hand.  
 And look! She comes... She tosses back her veil,  
 Staring me down, severe and pitiless.

The last line shows the tense relation between the source of inspiration and the people in the city and that the latter is no longer a place for grace and creativity.

No doubt poems like the ones already mentioned belong to the metapoetic type where creative writing itself as well as its mechanism and tools constitutes the main point. However, Akhmatova's interest in these matters does not end here. She makes use of references to historical, and literary figures from remote history in order to comment indirectly on the current situation in her city by means of comparison and contrast. Names like Sophocles, Cleopatra, or Dante are invoked by Akhmatova to serve her urgent purposes. In 'Death of Sophocles'(1961), for example, she bestows on the Greek dramatist all types of majesty, greatness and sense of wonder. His death as viewed by Akhmatova, is next to miraculous and indeed it shook the whole universe as her poem forcibly asserts:

That night an eagle swooped down from the skies  
 onto Sophocles' house.  
 And the garden suddenly rocked with a cry of cicadas.  
 Already the genius strode toward his immortality,  
 Skirting the enemy camp at the wall of his native city.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Hopefully, this paper has sought to highlight the role of creative writing in Anna Akhmatova's clamorous and stormy life. It is sprinkled with endless situations of bereavement, deaths, arrests, deprivation and all sorts of arbitrary injustices that were inflicted on her. She was a stoic spirit and patriotic one in the sense she did not desert her country at the time of ordeal. The hard times included enforced 'silencing' that lasted for a long time after the 1917 revolution in addition to malnutrition, sickness and censorship. This is quite obvious in many poems dealing with such terrible times. A passing reference to one of these will do. In 'Why is This Age Worse?', she is outspoken as regards the sorrowful time as suggested by its very title:

In the west the falling light still glows,  
 And the clustered housetops glitter in the sun,  
 but here Death is already chalking the doors with crosses,  
 and calling the ravens, and the ravens are flying in.

Her writing career is divided into two different modes in accordance with her experiences and development. In her early, care-free life with Russian bohemians associated with the Stray Dog cabaret, her writing is marked by a poignant lyrical tone, love and erotic concerns and above all an unmistakable sense of hope and faith in life.

With the societal and political transmutations going on in the decades following the 1917 revolution, Akhmatova proved to be capable of transcending the solipsistic and irresponsible attitudes at an early stage and entering a new one of commitment and full identification with the concerns and aspirations of the marginalized and helpless. By means of the

written word and sometimes even by the oral one, she managed to be the voice of the inarticulate and persecuted. The execution of her husband, the arrest of her third husband and the imprisonment of her sole son for seventeen months for no concrete crime or offence, all this was enough to crush anyone. However, Akhmatova proved to be up to the gigantic threats and challenges lurking for her. Her ancestry might explain part of the stamina and fortitude known about this lady in her daily encounters with risks, threats and impending death. Her biographers point out that her name does not carry her father's name (Andrei A. Gorenko) simply because he was dissatisfied with her emphasis on sexuality in her early poetry that he "told her not to bring shame on his name" (Amert, p.88). Therefore, she ransacked in the history of her remote ancestors and came to the conclusion that she was a relative in some form to the Mongol leader Genghis Khan (1162-1227) whose history is wide known.

Lastly, apart from creative writing and its positive role in maintaining her inner peace and equilibrium at very turbulent times, the circle of friends, associates, admirers and followers has been an indispensable element in her life. In fact Akhmatova belongs to those women who had broad circles of men and women involved in the process of writing. In this regard, her relationships bring to mind such famous female writers like Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) in Britain, the American Gertrude Stein (1874-1949) and the Lebanese Mai Zayada in Cairo (1883-1941). Despite her poverty and ill-health, her friends kept supporting and boosting her morale. In an answer to her poem about the Nobel Prize winner (1958) Boris Pasternak, the latter gives his judgment of Akhmatova, which might serve as a proper finale for the present paper:

From your first verses where  
grains of clear speech hardened,  
your eye, the spark that shakes the wire,  
makes all things quiver with the past. (Livingstone, p.200)

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