

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Great Russian Women Poets of the 20th Century

Barbara Kraft · Thursday, March 24th, 2016

I have been fascinated, intrigued and beguiled by the Russian poets of the 20th century since I first read them in my late teens. In particular, by Osip Mandelshtam and the two great women poets, Anna Akhmatova and Marina Tsvetaeva. As Josef Brodsky writes, “It’s an abominable fallacy that suffering makes for greater art. Suffering blinds, deafens, ruins, and often kills.” Mandelshtam was a great poet before the revolution. So was Anna Akhmatova, so was Marina Tsvetaeva – they would have become what they became even if none of the historical events that befell Russia in 20th century had not taken place: Because they were gifted. Basically, talent doesn’t need history. In one of his essays on Nadezhda Mandelshtam, Brodsky wrote, “In educated circles, especially among the literati, being the widow of a great man is enough to provide identity. This is especially so in Russia, where in the 30’s and 40’s the regime was producing writers’ widows with such efficiency that in the middle of the 60’s there were enough of them around to organize a trade union. At the age of 65, Nadezhda Mandelshtam wrote a two-volume memoir that “amounts to a day of judgement on earth for her age and it’s literature....A judgement administered all the more rightly since it was this age that had undertaken the construction of earthly paradise...Her memoirs are something more than a testimony of her times; they are view of history in the light of conscience and culture.”

As Nadezhda Mandelshtam wrote in *Hope Abandoned*, “my impression of Tsvetaeva was that she was absolutely natural and fantastically self-willed. I have a vivid recollection of her cropped hair, loose-limbed gait – like a boy’s – and speech remarkably like her verse. Her wilfulness was not just a matter of temperament, but a way of life.”

She could never have reined herself in, like Akhmatova did. Tsvetaeva hung herself in 1941 at the age of 49; Akhmatova died a natural death at the age of 77.

I will discuss the contributions of Anna Akhmatova (1889-1966) and Marina Tsvetaeva (1892-1941) during my lecture:

### Great Russian Women Poets of the 20th Century

**Saturday, March 26, 2016**

**3:30-5 p.m.**

Palms-Rancho Park Branch

2920 Overland Ave.

Los Angeles 90064

(310) 840-2142

For ADA accommodations, call (213) 228-7430 at least 72 hours prior to event.

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