

CBC TUESDAY NIGHT
“HOPE AGAINST HOPE”: THE
POETRY OF OSIP MANDELSTAM
CBL/CBC: 8.10-9.00

SCRIPT: George Whalley
[Radio 1 February 1972]
PRODUCTION: John Reeves

MUSIC #1: INTRO A 4: SEGUE BG REAR 2

OSIP: What street is this?
Mandelstam street.
What a hell of a name!
Whichever way you turn it
It sounds pretty crooked.

REPEATS POEM IN RUSSIAN (#277 STANZA 1)

MUSIC #1: UP, HOLD TO CADENCE, AND OUT

NARRATOR 1: Osip Emilievich Mandelstam – poet – a Jew – was born in Warsaw on the 15th of January 1891. He died a political prisoner in a transit camp near Vladivostok (on the Sea of Japan) on or about the 27th of December 1938.

NARRATOR 2: Mandelstam’s father was a leather merchant. His mother was a teacher of piano, a woman of some literacy and cultivation.

He grew up in St Petersburg – the scene and focus of all his autobiographical reminiscences. He attended the Tenishev School, and then studied for a while at the Sorbonne, in Heidelberg, and at the University of Petersburg – the classics, Italian, philology, the history of architecture – cultivating what he called his “nostalgia for

world culture.” In 1910, when he came back to St Petersburg from his European wanderings, he joined a group of poets who called themselves *Acmeists*, among them his lifelong friend, Anna Akhmatova.

NARRATOR 1: His first book of verse, published in 1913, was characteristically entitled *Stone*; it immediately won for him in his own circle a celebrity that – to his surprise – he relished. His *Second Book*, written during the Revolution in the relative quiet of Georgia and the Black Sea coast, was published in 1922 –

NARRATOR 2: – the year of his marriage to Nadezhda Yakovlevna Khazin; the book was dedicated to her. The collective volume called *Poems*, published in 1928, included most of his published poems up to 1925. He was then, at the age of 37, at the height of his powers – and among perceptive readers he was at the height of his fame.

NARRATOR 1: When Mandelstam had returned from the Black Sea coast in 1922, all the literary monthlies still had his name on their lists of potential contributors; but it was becoming increasingly difficult for him to publish anything.

In 1922 Stalin was elected general secretary of the Communist party.

PARTY-LINE VOICE: The party-line of Soviet literature is the historical property of our Soviet literature. Soviet writers, both party and non-party, must recognise the correctness of the Communist Party’s ideas and defend them in their work; therefore they will naturally acknowledge the guiding role of the party in all literary affairs. Writers are engineers of human souls.

NARRATOR 1: In 1923 Mandelstam's name was abruptly removed from all the lists of contributors, at one stroke.

NARRATOR 2: As an editor in Petrograd, Stalin had every means of knowing about Mandelstam. He and Akhmatova were the first to feel the venom of Stalin's power. Soon everybody would learn what it meant.

NARRATOR 1: Akhmatova stopped publishing her poetry in 1922, and for a time wrote nothing. Mandelstam could get no work from the Union of Writers except translating; it was officially spread about that he was translating because he no longer wrote poetry; his name was no longer discussed by critics.

NARRATOR 2: The way the censors handled the text of his *Second Book* showed him that he was being placed under restraint. He began to think that, as a poet, he was not needed by anyone. By 1926 he could compose no poems at all. Then in the autumn of 1930 a long-desired trip to Armenia set his tongue free. After that, only death could silence him.

MUSIC #2: *BG NEXT: A BASS LINE ONLY (SE) TO (X) AND THEN ADD TREBLE (SW)*

OSIP: My age – my beast – who will be able now
To look straight into the pupils of your eyes
And stick together with blood the vertebrae of two
centuries?
From all earthly things the building blood gushes;
Only the parasite trembles on the threshold of the new
days.....(X)
To wrench life from bondage and start a new world,
The knotted figures of the days must be linked in a

flute-tune.

The age rocks the wave with man's anguish;

A viper in the grass breathes the golden measure of the
age.

And the buds will swell again, and the green shoots
sprout.

But your spine has been smashed, my beautiful pitiful
age.

You look back, cruel and weak; crippled, you look back
With a stupid grin at the tracks left by your own paws.

MUSIC #2: UP AND OUT

NADEZHDA: Osip Emilievich and I first met on May Day 1919 in Petrograd. We were married in 1922, and lived in Petrograd – Leningrad – as best we could, writing journalism, editing, translating. Ever since the purges started in 1923 we had been under a cloud – so many of our friends had been taken away at night that dread was now a pervasive fact of our lives. We all had to learn to be discreet, to be careful who we spoke to and how we spoke. Osip, never political, could only see straight and shape into poems with a sharp cutting edge whatever, with the eye of his mind, he saw. Some of us were delighted by what Babel had said at the Second Congress –

BABEL: I have invented a new genre – the genre of silence.

NADEZHDA: But even silence was forbidden.

WESTERN VOICE: No area there is excluded from the Party's directives; and to refuse to say what has been ordered is insubordination, and punishable.

OSIP: I cannot be silent. I have one purpose left in the world – a golden purpose – how to free myself from the burden of time.

NADEZHDA: So for us it could only be a matter of time. And when we had moved from Leningrad to a writers' apartment in Moscow in order to be closer to the work we had to live by, it became clear – certainly by the beginning of 1934 – that whenever the blow fell it would probably not be connected with any definable cause. When a friend was arrested, we no longer asked “what for?”

PARTY-LINE VOICE: Put a man in my hands and I'll find a cause.

NADEZHDA: The authorities always seemed to get restless in May; and it was in May that our trouble came – as though it was an anniversary. In the winter we had had a party in our apartment in Furmanov Street. Borodin, the novelist, insulted me. A writers' “court of honour” sat to decide who was to blame; Count Alexei Tolstoi was president. The court exonerated Borodin and blamed me for inciting him. Some time later Osip went to Leningrad and, at a meeting in the director's office of the Leningrad Writers' Publishing House, slapped Tolstoi in the face – hard and deliberately. (X) There were witnesses.

SOUND: AT (X) ABOVE, A SLAP

TOLSTOI: (DRAWING HIS BREATH IN SHARPLY AT (X) ABOVE, NOW SHOUTS) Mandelstam! We'll teach you to strike Russian writers. I'll see to it that you are never published again. I'll see that you are expelled from Moscow.

SHORT SILENCE

NADEZHDA: After slapping Tolstoi in the face, Osip immediately returned to Moscow. Every day he called Akhmatova in Leningrad, begging her to come. She was hesitant and he was angry. It was dangerous for her. But she came. It was the 13th of May when she came from the train to Furmanov Street.

SOUND: A CLOCK TICKS BG

NADEZHDA: The day dragged in that tiny apartment, with excruciating slowness. In the evening the translator David Brodski turned up and just wouldn't leave. There wasn't a bite to eat in the house; when Osip went out to try to get something for Akhmatova's supper, Brodski followed him. They came back with an egg. Brodski sat down and went on talking and reminiscing and reciting his favourite poems – there was nothing he didn't know about Russian and French poetry. Akhmatova and I sat crowded into the little kitchen – “the sanctuary” as we called it. Only after midnight did we realise why Brodski was being such a bore.

SOUND: SHARP KNOCK AT DOOR

NADEZHDA: (SOFTLY, IN HORROR) They've come for Osia!

SOUND: OSIP'S FEET GO 1D TO 2D: AT 2D HE OPENS DOOR

OSIP: Have you come for me? (MATTER-OF-FACT, DIGNIFIED VOICE)

SOUND: 3 AGENTS IN HEAVY BOOTS & 2 WITNESSES ENTER: SHUT DOOR: ENACT FOLLOWING SCENE 1D-11D

AGENT 1: (AS THOUGH SMILING) Your papers. Here.
Read this – a warrant for your arrest. We will search the place.

NADEZHDA: (SOFTLY, IN HORROR) Men in civilian overcoats – uniforms underneath – with no hesitation they come in past me, not pushing though – their skill and speed and silence – checking our papers, searching us for weapons – the little apartment suddenly full of people – a “night operation” – three agents – two witnesses –

Brodski, just reach down those books above you for Osip Emilievich to take –

BRODSKI: (INSULTINGLY) Let Mandelstam get them himself.

AGENT 1: (CONTEMPTUOUSLY) You can go home now, Brodski.

BRODSKI: (SURPRISED AND CRESTFALLEN) What? Go home now?

AGENT 1: (PEREMPTORILY) Get out!

NADEZHDA: The two witnesses flopped down on chairs in the hall and went straight to sleep. No arrest should take place without due process of law; there must be a warrant and witnesses. The witnesses slept. The two younger agents carried on their search – very clumsily – looking in all the places cunning people are supposed to hide their secret documents, shaking out every book, squinting down the spine, cutting open the binding, examining desks and tables for hidden drawers, peering into pockets and under beds. The oldest agent – the one in command – short, lean, silent, with fair hair – went straight to the trunk that we kept our papers in and squatted down to look through the papers – working slowly, deliberately, thoroughly –

examining each paper carefully and either throwing it on the floor or putting it on a chair in the growing pile of papers to be confiscated. I offered to help, so that I could guess what accusation would be placed –

(TO AGENT) Here, I can read the writing easily. I can tell the dates too –

AGENT 1: What's this? (HE READS CLUMSILY)
For the sake of the thunderous achievements of
centuries to come,
For the sake of an exalted race of men –
(IMPATIENTLY) Doesn't make sense. And what's this?

NADEZHDA: Oh – that's a *funny* poem – about one of the tenants playing a harmonium against the rules – and the manager of the apartment smashed it up.

AGENT 1: (BAFFLED) Uh-huh. And this one – what's this about? What do *you* think?

NADEZHDA: The egg brought for Akhmatova lay untouched on the table.

ANNA: Osia, you should eat something before you go. You *must*. Take the egg. Here.

NADEZHDA: He looked at it as though it were a new thing just discovered. He took it from her, and sat down at the table, and put salt on it, and ate it.

The two piles of papers – on the chair and on the floor – continued to grow. We tried not to walk on them, but our visitors took no such care.

The night turned and the light became stronger. The agents led Osip away. It was the morning of the 14th of May. I was left alone with Akhmatova in the empty ravaged apartment. We just sat facing each other in silence. We never thought of going to bed; it never occurred to us to make tea. We were waiting for the hour when we could leave the building without attracting attention. But where could we go? Who could help us?

(TO ANNA) Anna. *Why* has this happened?

ANNA: Tolstoi's vengeance probably. People get exiled for that sort of thing. But they come back.

NADEZHDA: But they were looking for poems. And Osip was really worried when he left, when he kissed you goodbye. He's worried about the Stalin poem. But there's no copy here – we never wrote it down. He did recite it some weeks ago – was it at Pasternak's? – there were only five people there, all close friends of ours. That must be what they were looking for.

OSIP: (READING FORMALLY, DISTINCTLY, WITH GREAT SELF-POSSESSION AND NO ANIMUS)

We live deaf to the land beneath us.
Five steps away no one hears what we are saying.

But where there's so much as half a conversation
All *we* hear is the Kremlin mountaineer,

The murderer, the peasant-killer.

His fingers are as fat as grubs,
And the words fall from his lips, as final as lead
weights.

His cockroach whiskers leer
And his boot-tops gleam.

Around him a rabble of thin-necked leaders –
Fawning half-men for him to play games with;

They whinny and purr and whine
As he prates and points a finger,

Forging his laws one by one, to be flung
Like horseshoes at the head, the eye, the groin.

And every killing is a treat
For the broad-chested Georgian.

(PAUSE)

I take myself by the hand –

MARKISH: (QUIETLY) – and lead yourself to your execution.

NADEZHDA: The fair-haired agent came back for a second search – obviously looking for the Stalin poem. But there was no third search and *we* were not arrested. Anna and I started at once the same routine as everybody whose people have been picked up – “going the rounds,”

trying to get people to intervene, running around the city the whole day long. We found out very little, except that the officer who had made the arrest was too senior for the accusation to be trivial.

Two weeks later something happened – totally unexpected – a miracle. (Y) Christophorovich – the official who was interrogating Osip – rang me up and asked me to come to see Osip. He sent a pass round at once. I went up the broad staircase of the Lubyanka, then along a corridor, and stopped at the interrogator’s door as I had been told. Just as I got there I saw a prisoner being led along the corridor – a tall Chinese with wildly bulging eyes. I could only see his fear-crazed eyes, and that he had to hold up his trousers with his hands. The guards saw me, made a quick movement, and hustled the prisoner into a room. The “inner guard” – I caught a glimpse of their faces, and felt a shock of horror and loathing creep down my spine. Whenever I hear of people being shot, I see the eyes of the tall Chinese man.

OSIP: (VERY QUIETLY – IT IS ANNA’S POEM)

There – in the very heart of the crowded city –
They take my shadow for questioning.

NADEZHDA: When Osip was brought in I saw at once that he was as wild-eyed as the Chinese, and that his trousers were slipping down in the same way – a precaution (they say) against suicide.

OSIP: (WILDLY) Nadia! You’re wearing somebody else’s raincoat. Whose is it?

NADEZHDA: Mother’s.

OSIP: When did *she* arrive?

NADEZHDA: Four days after you left.

OSIP: So you've been at home all the time?

NADEZHDA: Yes, all the time. Anna too.

OSIP: But *he* said you had been arrested.

NADEZHDA: Arrested. You said that? Why? I *demand* an explanation.

CHRISTOPHOROVICH: *Demand*, comrade? In the Lubianka? (IRONICALLY) Come, come, madam.

OSIP: (SOFTLY, TO HIMSELF) "Do not command" is one of the commandments.

NADEZHDA: Osip thought we probably wouldn't meet again for a long time – if ever. He hurried to tell me, in hidden terms, the things he wanted me to carry to the outside world. I understood that the interrogator had the text of the Stalin poem – in the first draft – an important clue to the person who had betrayed Osip.

CHRISTOPHOROVICH: ("A LARGE MAN WITH THE STACCATO OVEREMPHATIC DICTION OF AN ACTOR OF THE OLD SCHOOL") This poem is a counter-revolutionary document of quite unprecedented viciousness. Mandelstam has admitted that he wrote it, and that he recited it in the hearing of others. Astonishing – quite astonishing.

The sentence originally considered was that he be sent to a labour-camp on the White Sea Canal. That, however, has now been commuted – by the supreme authority. Mandelstam is to be exiled to the town of Cherdyn in Siberia: to be “isolated” but “preserved.” You may accompany him if you wish. Meanwhile he stays here.

MUSIC #3: BRIDGE (SOFT, HARSH, LACONIC) ON NE AND SE: SEGUE BG ON NE AND NW, OUT AT (X) BELOW

SOUND: UNDER START OF NEXT, FADE UP THE CONFUSED ECHOING SOUND OF A BIG RAILWAY STATION, INDETERMINATE VOICES, SOUND OF TRAINS

NADEZHDA: Akhmatova and my brother and Osip’s brother came to the station to see us off. (X) I had had to stop at the Lubianka on the way to pick up Osip’s suitcase. At the station I was intercepted by the short fair-haired agent; he handed me a ticket. We had to wait a long time. When the train pulled in, Osip was already in a compartment, guarded by three soldiers.

Suddenly we were in the compartment together –

SOUND: SHUT DOOR (1½D) AND MUTE STATION SCENE

OSIP: It’s a miracle!

NADEZHDA: – and our two brothers standing on the platform. But the glass was a barrier of silence between us, impenetrable. And here we were, the two of us, guarded by three well-briefed peasant youths, sent off by an unseen and irresistible force to some place in the East where Osip

Emilievich was to be “isolated, but preserved.” Were they interrogating the tall Chinese man in the Lubianka now?

SOUND: TRAIN WHISTLE (10DB), TRAIN JOURNEY BEGINS (10½D) AND GOES CLOCKWISE, REACHING 11½ BY (Y) BELOW AND FADING OUT BY (Z)

OSIP: Nadia – Nadezhka. (HE SPEAKS WILDLY, ALMOST HYSTERICALLY, OCCASIONALLY RELAPSING INTO HIS TYPICAL CONTROLLED IRONIC VOICE) I didn’t think I would ever see you again. I expected to be shot – all the time I expected to be shot. (IMITATING CHRISTOPHOVICH) “For a poem like that,” the interrogator kept saying – “for a poem like that – you *did* write it, you said? – a certain person in authority can be expected to be very angry.” For a poem like that – we always knew, didn’t we! – I expected all the time to be shot – shot while I am trying to hold my trousers up. (IMITATING AGAIN) “It happens to people, you know.” (TENDERLY) Nadia, I got off very lightly: only three years in exile.

NADEZHDA: Yes. Lightly perhaps. People come back.

OSIP: Yes. (THEN WHISPERING, WILDLY) But don’t trust them. I don’t trust them an inch. They’re thinking – “This will keep people quiet – people will forget.” But up top they don’t forget – they don’t ever forget. They’ve only put off my execution to a more convenient time.

SOLDIER: (TO NADEZHDA) Tell him we don’t shoot people for making up poems.

OSIP: (BELLIGERENTLY) Now listen! Pushkin was sent away for his poems – even the Czars did that.

WESTERN VOICE: The writer presents society with its image; he calls upon society to acknowledge the image or to change itself. In that way, the writer gives society a guilty conscience, and is in perpetual opposition to the conservative forces which maintain the balance he tends to upset.

SOLDIER: (BORED) I still say, we don't shoot people for making poems.

NADEZHDA: On the first night in the train, when I noticed that Osip was not sleeping, but sitting with his legs crossed and listening very intently, I realised that he was seriously ill. Whenever our eyes met he would say –

OSIP: Do you hear, Nadia? Do you hear *that*?

NADEZHDA: I listened – there was only the hammering of the wheels and the snoring of passengers –

OSIP: (DISGUSTED) You have stone ears. You never hear anything. (Y)

NADEZHDA: But this wasn't a question of *hearing*. He spent the whole journey listening like this; and from time to time he would shudder and tell me that disaster would strike at any moment – that we must be ready, not to be caught unawares. (Z) At Solikamsk the truck taking us from the station passed through a forest clearing. One of the men in the truck was carrying an axe. Osip was certain that they were going to behead him.

SOUND: FROM (Z) ABOVE TRUCK MOVES FROM 11½ to 12½: C/F WITH NEXT MUSIC

MUSIC #4: A SHORT, INDETERMINATE BRIDGE, BEGUILING

NADEZHDA: Cherdyn looked pleasant enough – perhaps this is what the country was like before the time of Peter the Great. The soldiers took us to the local Cheka – the Commandant the sort of man who has worked “inside” and has seen so many unmentionable things that he has been posted to a remote place where his voice cannot be heard – even by accident.

OSIP: (GAILY) I am a very special bird, you know, Comrade. I am to be isolated, but the order says that I am to be “preserved” without fail. Just look at the papers – you’ll see.

NADEZHDA: Commandant. My husband is ill. He has not slept for five days. You can see. We need to go to the hospital. Will you grant that?

COMMANDANT: (BRUSQUELY) This is most irregular. Exiles who arrive under military guard are not entitled to be sent to hospital. (*SOUND OF PAPERS*) (TO HIMSELF) Yes – “to be isolated but preserved.” (ALoud) Very well. You are to be taken to the local hospital. Report here when you are discharged.

NADEZHDA: Another miracle. In the hospital we were given a large empty ward with two creaking beds set up at right angles to the wall. I hadn’t slept for five nights watching over Osip. Exhausted by the endless white night, I fell into a troubled wakeful kind of sleep through which I could see Osip, legs crossed and jacket unbuttoned, sitting on the shaky bed, listening to the silence.

(WITH MOUNTING AGITATION) Suddenly – I sensed this through my sleep – suddenly everything changed. Osip was all at once on the window sill and I was there beside him. He put his legs outside; I just had time to see him begin to lower his whole body. The window sill was high. I reached out frantically with both hands and grabbed the shoulders of his jacket. He wriggled out of the sleeves and dropped.

SOUND & OSIP: THE THUD OF HIS FALL FROM THREE STOREYS, AND OSIP'S CRY

NADEZHDA: His jacket was left hanging in my hands.

SCREAMS

SOUND & NADEZHDA: SHE RUNS DOWN THE WARD CRYING OUT "OSIA! OSIA! OSIA!"

SILENCE

NADEZHDA: For two weeks Osia lay in the hospital at Cherdyn, looking closely at everything around him with a studious and very serene gaze. He had never looked so alert and so calm as during his illness. The other people in the hospital – all, like ourselves, exiles – were friendly and tried to set my mind at rest about Osip's health –

EXILE 1: They all come out of the Lubianka in this state. They get over it. Make the best of Cherdyn. It's a breathing-space.

EXILE 2: Here there is only one key to sanity: expect nothing; be ready for anything.

NADEZHDA: When Osip's crisis had passed, we would walk around Cherdyn during the day, talking to people, and spend the nights in the hospital. Osip was much calmer; I no longer had to watch the window. But he was ill and still waiting for death.

(SHORT PAUSE)

Miracles always come from above. When they happen, we are so grateful that we forget that "up there" they can make other things happen too. We hadn't been in Cherdyn a month when the next miracle occurred to put us off our guard – a telegram from my brother Evgeni saying: "Sentence commuted to minus twelve" – the same period of exile, but now it could be spent anywhere except in twelve major cities.

OSIP: (TANTALIZINGLY) Comrade Commandant. We have just received this telegram. Sentence commuted to "minus twelve." Look for yourself.

SOUND: RUSTLING PAPER

COMMANDANT: Incredible. Probably a hoax – one of your relatives. How am I to know? I don't accept evidence like this. We'll see about it. By the time *I* hear it'll be winter. Find something without cracks in the walls – it gets cold in these parts.

NADEZHDA: The official telegram came the next day – we knew from the girl clerk in the telegraph office. But the Commandant kept us waiting three days while he got confirmation from Moscow.

COMMANDANT: (COLDLY) I have received confirmation. It is “minus twelve” – three years. Where are you going?

OSIP: Going? We’ll need a little time to think –

COMMANDANT: (ANGRILY) Time? You must decide *at once*. I have to make an entry. There is nothing in this telegram about time for thinking things over.

NADEZHDA: (TO OSIP) Where can we go? All our friends are in Leningrad or Moscow. Can *you* think?

OSIP: Not an idea. Wait! Leonov, at Tashkent University – he spoke well of *Voronezh*. His father was prison doctor there. (CHEERFULLY) We might need a prison doctor, you know. (TO COMMANDANT) *Voronezh*.

COMMANDANT: (SUDDENLY ALMOST FRIENDLY) *Voronezh*. I have a travel warrant here. I’ll have the official horse and cart to take your belongings to the pier. (A LITTLE SHEEPISHLY) That too is in the orders – that you are to be given – facilities.

OSIP: (IRONICALLY) I am gratified.

(SHORT PAUSE)

NADEZHDA: At first we were better off in Voronezh than we had ever been before. The State Publishing House, impressed by our miraculous status of “isolate but preserve,” gave me translation work, and we got other jobs too. But in the autumn of 1936, when the terror began, the local radio was abolished, the theatre folded, our newspaper work dried up, and by the winter of 1937-8 neither of us could find work of any kind.

PARTY-LINE VOICE: Any work of a Soviet writer is political work. It is possible to perform it with honour only by steadfastly following the party line and party discipline.

NADEZHDA: Osip was always collecting documents to support applications to go to Moscow – on any pretext. Akhmatova and Pasternak made pleas on his behalf: They were always turned down. Everything suggested that the end was near, and Osip was trying to take full advantage of what time was left. He was possessed by the feeling that he must hurry or he wouldn't be able to say what he still wanted to say. Sometimes I begged him to rest, to go out for a walk, to have a nap; but he dismissed the idea –

OSIP: You must understand, Nadia, that I shan't have time otherwise.

NADEZHDA: And the poems poured out of him, one after another. He worked on several at once, and often asked me to take down at one sitting two or three which he had already completed in his head. I wrote them all down for him in four school exercise books – we called them the Voronezh Notebooks.

But he drove himself so hard during the whole of that year that he became even more painfully short of breath; his pulse was irregular

and his lips were blue. He generally had his attacks of angina on the street, and in our last year in Voronezh he could no longer go out alone. Even at home he was calm only when I was there. We sat opposite each other, and I watched his moving lips as he tried to make up for lost time, hurrying to record his last words.

OSIP: (QUOTING) Ahead is only torment, and torment is
behind me.
Sit with me a while, for God's sake, sit
with me a while.

MUSIC #5: BG NEXT LOW, SAD, UNOBTRUSIVE

OSIP: (COMPOSING) Unlucky is the man who is mowed down by
the wind
And is as frightened by the barking of dogs
as of his own shadow.
And wretched is the man who – half-alive –
Begs alms of a shadow.

MUSIC #5: UP POIGNANTLY AND OUT

NADEZHDA: By the middle of May 1937 the three-year term of exile was supposed to end. We knew, of course, that the length of the term was a matter of chance, not law: it could always be lengthened or shortened, depending how your luck ran. So on the 16th of May we went up to the same window in the MGB office in Voronezh where Osip had handed over his travel warrant from Cherdyn, and where since then he had conducted all his business with the State. The line was not long that day – we stood for only half an hour.

OSIP: (TO NADEZHDA) What surprise will they have for us this time, do you think, Nadia? (THROUGH THE WINDOW) Name – Osip Mandelstam – exile. Term of exile ended 15 May 1937. Have you anything for me?

(PAUSE)

SOUND: PAPERS LEAFED THROUGH

CLERK: Here.

OSIP: I can't read it clearly. Look Nadia. What does it say? (TO CLERK) Does that mean I can go where I please?

CLERK: What the hell do you think it means. Next –

NADEZHDA: It took a few days to wind up our affairs in Voronezh – to collect our few possessions so painfully and expensively acquired, and sell some and give the rest away. We were a little dazed. It took a few days to return to Moscow. Our first concern was to get our residence permit. When we applied to the district police, they refused us a residence permit and referred us to the Central Police. Here the permit was refused again, at a glance.

OSIP: But why? I have served my three-years' exile. I lived in Moscow before. I own an apartment. I don't understand.

POLICE: You cannot be allowed to live in Moscow. You are entered as a "convicted person."

NADEZHDA:

Next day Osip went to the Union of Writers and was refused an interview; then to the Literary Fund – but on the stairs he had a heart attack and was brought home in an ambulance. For some days he lay resting and a doctor from the Literary Fund came each day to examine him.

It was the beginning of June when we left Moscow and settled on the Volga in Savelovo, a village with two or three streets.

Then we moved to Kalinin. We had nothing to live on; we had to beg from our friends. Every time we went to Moscow to look for work, or to try to get an interview with Stavski, of the Union of Writers, we returned empty-handed. Then in February we were summoned by Stavski. Osip had been trying to see him for months, without success; now Stavski sent for *us*. It had been represented to him, Stavski said, that Osip's health was poor; he had arranged that we should go for a time to a rest home. All the arrangements had been made; the Literary Fund had issued vouchers to spend two months in a home at Samatikha. He handed us the vouchers. Another windfall from above – another miracle.

Everything went very smoothly. A sleigh was waiting for us at the station at Charusti, with sheepskin rugs to keep us warm for the journey to Samatikha. The resident doctor told us that he had been instructed to provide the best possible conditions for Osip. What a change in our fortunes – to have people looking after *us* – this had never happened to us before.

In April, a well-educated young woman of intellectual appearance arrived at the rest home. She was a “convicted person,” she said, and had served five years – though she looked too young for that. She

knew Kaverin and Tynianov, and several others that we trusted. She spent a good deal of time with us in our hut; Osip read poems to her, and she screamed with delight at the boldness of many of them. Though she was to have stayed for two months, she left some days after the middle of April. And a few days later, when the whole place was being spring-cleaned for the May-Day holiday, we noticed – as we walked across to the dining room – two cars standing outside the doctor’s house; and by the dining room we ran into a doctor with two strangers – large, beefy, well-groomed types, one in military uniform, the other in civilian clothes.

OSIP: I wonder if they’ve come to check up on *me*!

NADEZHDA: On May Day we didn’t go out at all, except for meals. All day we could hear the sounds of shouting, singing, and sometimes fighting.

In the morning – quite early – we were wakened by somebody knocking quietly on the door. Osip got up to open the door and three people came in: two men in military uniform and the doctor. Osip began to dress. I put on a dressing gown and sat on the bed.

SOLDIER 2: A warrant for your arrest. (SILENCE)

OSIP: Nadia. Look at it. Can you see when it was signed?

NADEZHDA: A week ago.

SOLDIER 2: It’s not our fault. We have too much to do. Then we have to work while other people are celebrating. Everybody off duty in Charusti. You don’t know what trouble we had getting a truck.

NADEZHDA: (Coming to my senses, I began to get Osip's things together.)

SOLDIER 2: Why so much stuff? He won't be in long. They'll just ask a few questions and let him go.

NADEZHDA: (There was no search. They just emptied the contents of our suitcase into a sack they had brought with them.)

We live in Furmanov Street in Moscow. All our papers are *there*.

SOLDIER 2: What do we need your papers for? Now, you will come with us.

OSIP: Nadenka – come with me in the truck as far as Charusti –

SOLDIER 2: That's not allowed.

(PAUSE)

NADEZHDA: All this took no more than twenty minutes – probably less. The doctor went out with them. I heard the truck start up outside. I remained sitting on the bed, unable to move. I didn't even close the door behind them.

Osia and I first met on May Day in 1919; he told me then that because of the murder of Uritski the Bolsheviks had made a "hecatomb of corpses." It was on May Day 1938 that we parted. When he had jumped from the hospital window in Cherdyn, he left his jacket in my hands; this time he just left it behind – he hadn't even put it on. He walked out of the door, the two soldiers and the doctor following him. We had no time to say anything to each other – we were interrupted when we tried to say goodbye. (PAUSE:

THEN IN A STRONG DESPERATE VOICE) We are all the same: sheep who went willingly to the slaughter, or meek assistants to the executioners. Whichever role we played, we were eerily submissive. Why did we never try to jump out of windows or give way to unreasoning fear and just run for it – to the forests, to the provinces, or simply into a hail of bullets? Why did we stand by respectfully as they went through our belongings? Why did Osip obediently walk out the door in front of the soldiers; and why didn't I throw myself on them like a wild animal? What had we to lose?

It was not a question of fear. It was something quite different – a paralyzing sense of utter helplessness. We were all prey to it, not only those who were killed, but the killers too.

MUSIC #6: (NW & NE) A BRIDGE REFLECTING FIRST THE NUMBING IMPLICATIONS OF WHAT HAS JUST BEEN SAID, AND THEN PREFIGURING THE DISQUIET OF WHAT IS ABOUT TO BE SAID

NADEZHDA: The only link between a person outside and a person in prison is the window on the Sophia Embankment where you hand in parcels and money to be forwarded by the authorities. Once a month, on the day for the letter "M," I would come in to Moscow, and after waiting three or four hours in line give my name at the window. The clerk would thumb through his list, ask again for first name and initial, then put his hand through the window. I would put in it my identity papers and some money; the hand would then return the papers with a receipt.

POLICE CLERK: Next. Hurry along.

NADEZHDA:

After coming several months and standing in line at the window I was told that Osip had been transferred to Butyrki – a prison where people were held before being sent off in prison trains to labour camps. I rushed to Butyrki and waited for the day for the letter “M.” Only once was I able to hand in anything for him. The second time I was told that he had been sent to a labour camp for five years by decision of the Special Tribunal. I applied for information at the Special Prosecutor’s office; exactly a month later my request was turned down. Then a letter came from Osia – addressed to his brother Shura, and to me.

OSIP:

Dear Shura –

I am in Vladivostok – North-Eastern Corrective Labour Camp, Barracks No 11. I was given five years for “counter-revolutionary activity” by the Special Tribunal. The transport left Butyrki on September 9th, and we got here October 12. My health is very bad, I’m extremely exhausted and thin, almost unrecognizable, but I don’t know whether there’s any sense in sending clothes, food, or money. You can try, all the same. I’m very cold without proper clothes...

My darling Nadia – are you alive, my dear? Shura, write to me at once about Nadia. This is a transit point. I’ve not been picked for Kolyma and may have to spend the winter here.

I kiss you, my dear ones. Osia.

Shura – one more thing. The last few days we’ve been going out to work. This has raised my spirits. This camp is a transit camp; they send us from here to regular labour camps. It looks as though I’ve been rejected, so I must prepare to spend the winter here. So please send me a telegram and cable me some money.

NADEZHDA: I sent him a package at once – and wondered how it could reach him – more than 5000 miles to Vladivostok, and if he were sent to Kolyma, almost another 2000 miles North.

Some time in January 1939 I was sent a notice to go to the post office at Nikita Gate –

POST OFFICE CLERK: A parcel – returned –

NADEZHDA: (VERY QUIETLY) – the parcel I sent him in Vladivostok –

POST OFFICE CLERK: The addressee is dead.

NADEZHDA: That happened to be the day the newspapers published a long list of Government awards to Soviet writers – the first list ever.

(PAUSE)

More than a year later – in June 1940 – Osip’s brother was summoned to the Registry Office for central Moscow. He was handed a death certificate, with instructions to pass it on to me. “Name – Osip Emilievich Mandelstam. Age – 47. Date of Death – 27 December 1938. Cause of Death – heart failure, arteriosclerosis.” (ANGRILY) Which is to say that he died because he died. What is death but heart-failure? (QUIETLY) And yet – the certificate was a rare favour. I know of no other prisoner’s wife receiving a certificate like this.

Over the years we gleaned a few unreliable details – very few – rumours and camp-legends, but no reliable facts. In one legend he

lived on as a demented old man of seventy who had once written poetry in the outside world and was therefore nicknamed “The Poet.” Another old man – or was it the same one? – lived on in the transit camp at Vtoraya Rechka, waiting to be shipped to Kolyma, and was thought by many people to be Osip Mandelstam – and, for all I know, may have been. He must have recited his poems sometimes – several of them turned up in camp anthologies. But nobody has said that he actually saw Mandelstam dead. Nobody claims to have washed his body or put it in the grave. I can be certain of only one thing – that somewhere Osip’s sufferings ended in death.

WESTERN VOICE: (WITH GREAT STRENGTH AND PASSION) The best way to kill art is to canonize one form and one philosophy. Real literature cannot be produced by painstaking and well-meaning officials. It can only be produced by dreamers, hermits, sceptics, rebels, heretics, madmen.

SILENCE

NADEZHDA: Afterwards I went to live in Strunino, a small cotton-mill town beyond Zagorsk on the Yaroslavl railway along which prisoners are taken to Siberia. By autumn I had to think of getting work; my friends helped me to get a job in the spinning shop.

Working on the night shift and running from one machine to another, I kept myself awake by muttering Osip’s verse to myself. I had to commit everything to memory in case all my papers were taken away from me, or my friends panicked and burned the papers I had left with them. My memory was an additional safe-guard – and it was an indispensable help to me in my drudging task. So I spent my eight hours of night work spinning yarn and memorizing verse.

NARRATOR 2: Eventually the police identified her in Strunino. After their first ominous interview with her, her friends urged her to disappear before the police took action. Watched and hunted and pursued, she kept alive somehow, sometimes starving, sometimes finding odd jobs as a teacher, keeping herself inconspicuous in order to sustain her devoted task of collecting – in manuscript and from her own memory and from the memory of her friends – everything Osip Mandelstam had written.

NARRATOR 1: After Stalin's death, Mandelstam was posthumously reinstated; the charges against him were formally annulled.

NADEZHDA: I was no longer a "convicted person." Until then I could remember everything by heart, both prose and verse. So that I shouldn't forget any of it, I had to repeat a little to myself each day of those fifteen dark wandering years – as long as I thought I still had a good while to go on living.

NARRATOR 2: Nadezhda's memory was an archive that no interrogator could penetrate or seize or defile. And her name in Russian – Nadezhda – means "hope."

NARRATOR 1: In 1956 she was promised that a complete edition of Mandelstam's work would be published in Russia. She was given 5000 roubles in compensation – which she immediately distributed to the friends who had helped her and Osip in the years of their distress. An editorial committee was formed and a text of Mandelstam's work prepared. But year after year the authorities have postponed publication. The only collective edition was published by two

Russian emigres in Washington in 1967 – nearly 500 poems and verse translations, and a quantity of his prose. But by no means all.

WESTERN VOICE: – and if you don't have everything of Mandelstam's yet, don't worry. If we were speaking of a little poet, there would be reason to worry about not finding everything. But we are speaking of Osip Emilievich Mandelstam – one of the greatest poets of our time. Everything – absolutely everything – the poems, the prose, the letters – every single thing will be published in the end.

NARRATOR 2: And when it is, it will vindicate the love and courage Nadezhda Mandelstam – who still lives, tough-minded, feminine, indomitable. She has set down her own witness to Osip Mandelstam, to the life that informed his writing, to the regime that finally silenced him. In Russian her book has no title. In English it is called – in a pun on her own name – *Hope against Hope*.

MUSIC #7: *(NW & NE) A SHORT TRIBUTE TO A GREAT LADY.*

MUSIC #8: *(SE & SW) BG NEXT ENGLISH TRANSLATION*

OSIP: For the sake of the thunderous achievements of centuries
to come,
For the sake of an exalted race of men,
I have been deprived of well-being and honour – deprived
even
Of the cup at the feast of my fathers. And at my back
prowl
Centuries of wolf-exterminators.

By blood, I am not a wolf. Better tuck me like a cap
Up the sleeve of the warm fur-coat of the Siberian steppes
So that I can't see the coward or the clinging filth
Or the bloodied bones on the wheel – so that all night
 long
The blue foxes will shine to me in their pristine beauty.

Take me away then into the night,
Where the Yenisey flows and the pinetrees
Reach up to the stars.
By blood I am not a wolf: I can be killed only by my
 peers.

MUSIC #8: *CONTINUES BG, ADDING NW & NE*

OSIP: *REPEATS LAST STANZA IN RUSSIAN (#197) OVER MUSIC.*

MUSIC #8: *UP TO END*