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Home

Lord of Scoundrels

The Perks of Being a Wallflower

Shantaram

The Old Man and the Sea

The Alchemist

The Sweet By and By

Replay

About a Boy

The Daily Drucker: 366 Days of Insight and Motivation for Getting the Right Things Done

Brave New World

The Book Thief

I Know This Much Is True

The Kitchen God's Wife

The Comedy of Errors

The Hundred Secret Senses

The Outsiders

Posted on 24 January 2019 By Nadezhda Mandelstam

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We live, not sensing our own country beneath us, Ten steps away they dissolve, our speeches, But where enough meet for half conversation, The Kremlin hillbilly is our

preoccupation. They're like slimy worms, his fat fingers, His words, as solid as weights of measure. In his cockroach moustaches there's a hint of laughter, while below his top boots gleam. Round him a mob of thin-necked henchmen, He pursues the enslavement of the half men. One whimpers, another warbles, A third miaows, but he alone prods and probes. He forges decree after decree, like horseshoes In groins, foreheads, in eyes, and eyebrows. Wherever an execution's happening though there's raspberry, and the Ossetian's giant torso. This is the Stalin Epigram, written by the poet Osip Mandelstam in 1933. He recited it to a small circle of friends, one of whom was a rat. He and most of the other friends were arrested that same year. By some miracle or some intervention from friends in the Kremlin Mandelstam was not executed for this blasphemy against the dictator. He and his wife were exiled into the Urals, but then even that comparatively mild sentence was commuted to banishment from the largest cities. But even this fragile peace did not last long. The couple were under constant surveillance from the secret police, and his publishing activities were curtailed. By 1937, in the middle of the Great Purge, Osip's few remaining patrons had been disappeared, and he was arrested and sent to a prison camp where he died about 1938. This memoir is written about that thin sliver of time. It is partly the story of Mr. Mandelstam himself, the story of the survival of a marriage, a story of the few huddled survivors of the Russian intelligentsia, and also the story of survival under a totalitarian regime. It is at first a memoir, but it is a long journey ending in tragedy. It goes from a huddled poetry circle in the great cities out to exile then a return, then a desperate hope for survival again. If Osip Mandelstam's history is of a great poet who died for his writing, then Nadezhda Mandelstam's story is of a great memoirist who had the further difficulty of surviving during such a regime. Her great achievement is in remembering the trials of this life. It is to remember, but that is not only to pay homage to the dead. It is only near the end of the book that she acknowledges that her husband has died in a transit camp before he reached the frozen hell of Kolyma. It is to instruct and inform the living. Even so, this book is not entirely gloomy. It is capable of understanding misfortune accurately. It avoids the two extremes of melodrama or understatement. This is just life, albeit life under the most harsh circumstances. Nadezhda Mandelstam cannot explain why this terror occurred, just how one lived through it. At times it's even funny. Some of the NKVD spies pretend to be admirers of the poet who then ask for his newest work. He chases them out of his house. She talks about the happiness of their marriage, of his eccentric work habits, those few happy moments spent with brave guests. How Osip once slapped Alexei Tolstoy that's in the very beginning. Her husband is not the only one who talks. Her own memories live here. A funny thing is that she was not at first a writer; she was inclined to the visual arts, but she forced herself to write all this down and to commit her husband's surviving poems to memory, for she could not trust paper or the eye of some wandering visitor. This story moves out from Osip's own life; it was about both of them, how the two of them clung onto hope and survival beyond the bitter end. It was a story of how life was, and preserving every aspect of memory even

after his papers were burned and any recordings of him were destroyed, as if the regime wanted to remove every memory and trace of him. For that was the nature of a tyranny which demanded obsessive control, which demanded prison time for poets. It is a truism that a dictator must dictate or control everything, and such even poetry against him, for even daring to go against the narrow lines of his control, must be exterminated. For what can poetry do against the titanic mechanisms of power, for a power which sought to control or eliminate entire languages and peoples, remove thoughts, reshape time, space, and history. Osip Mandelstam wrote poetry about this, too. This is part of *Preserve My Words*. Preserve my words forever for their aftertaste of misfortune and smoke, for their tar of collective patience and conscientious work. Water in the wells of Novgorod must be black and sweetened to reflect a star with seven fins at Christmas. Oh my fatherland, my friend, my rough helper, remember your unrecognized brother, the apostate from the people's family. And that is what Nadezhda Mandelstam did. Resistance against terror takes many forms; it is not just men with guns shooting other men with guns, but people who take on and preserve the ideas of what another world is like, an alternative to the seductive lies which are imposed upon them. That is what she accomplished here. (((KINDLE)))

????????????? ? The Story Of The Poet Osip Mandelstam, Who Suffered Continuous Persecution Under Stalin, But Whose Wife Constantly Supported Both Him And His Writings Until He Died In Hope Against Hope Was First Published In English In It Is Nadezhda Mandelstam S Memoir Of Her Life With Osip, Who Was First Arrested In And Died In Stalin S Great Purge Of Hope Against Hope Is A Vital Eyewitness Account Of Stalin S Soviet Union And One Of The Greatest Testaments To The Value Of Literature And Imaginative Freedom Ever Written But It Is Also A Profound Inspiration A Love Story That Relates The Daily Struggle To Keep Both Love And Art Alive In The Most Desperate Of Circumstances Only a process that is very beautiful and very terrible could produce this book the anguish of two human souls being tormented by a cruel, fiendishly clever, and virtually all powerful State determined to murder both the body and soul of its victims Whether we deserve to benefit as readers from the terrible tempering endured by the poet Osip Mandelstam and his widow Nadezhda Mandelstam is a matter that can be easily determined we do not deserve it We are not worthy of the Mandelstams They belong to a very select group of all the human beings who have ever lived, most of whom we will never know Thanks to her memoir, we do know Nadezhda and Osip. If Osip s great characteristic was his commitment to truth, Nadezhda s was her endurance if this sounds dismissive recall that the New Testament repeatedly includes endurance as one of a short list of authentic signs of the divine Spirit Her survival made possible the survival of most of Osip s poetry, and of the story of their lives, preserved in this unique memoir Wordsworth defined poetry as emotion recollected in tranquility , and this memoir has something deeper than tranquility to it, a profound serenity, a luminous sadness, a fusion of love and truth which is the pivot on which human history revolves. It is clear from reading this book that Osip was

one those described in the 11th chapter of Hebrews as those of whom the world was not worthy. What better way to understand the industrial scale barbarisms of the twentieth century than to read about how they were observed and interpreted through the sensibilities of great poets and writers. Perhaps because of the relative brevity of the Thousand Year Reich, we have had far more accounts from Hitler's victims than from Lenin and Stalin's victims. But the ones that did survive from the Soviet Union, not just *HOPE AGAINST HOPE* but works by Ginzburg, Brodsky, and Solzhenitsyn, are testaments of the human spirit of the same order as the those written by witnesses to the Holocaust. But the significance of *HOPE AGAINST HOPE* is not primarily its historical account of the Stalinist system, but its depiction of cosmic injustice and the possibility even in the worst circumstances for some kind of ultimate triumph of truth and integrity and decency and love. I doubt that a person picking up this book on a whim will read it through, unless, without knowing it, they have been preparing themselves for years to understand what Osip and Nadezhda have to tell us about ourselves and about the human potential for choosing truth and acting with moral courage. That was true for me. I bought this book twenty years ago, and although I started it a couple of times, I have only just read it after all that time it has been on my shelves. Paradoxically, although it's a life changing book, perhaps one's life has to have already changed, or begun to change, before one can engage with it.

CONT D AS COMMENT 1

CLASSIC EDITION

Nadezhda



Mandelstam

HOPE AGAINST HOPE



Translated by Max Hayward

With Introductions by Clarence Brown and Joseph Brodsky

"It leaves you richer, more hopeful than our best right to be." —GEORGE STEINER

Unlike many wives of famous husbands who tend to emphasize that their husbands would have been nothing without their love and support or their vanity let's call a spade a spade, Nadezhda Mandelstam wrote an absolutely heartbreaking and devastating chronicle of her husband's life which she happened to share as a fellow traveller and devoted supporter, not as a glamorous muse. Her immense talent of a storyteller makes her memoirs a lot more than just memories of Mandelstam and their life. Nadezhda Mandelstam tells the story of the whole generation, utterly lost and deliberately unheard in the noise of time, the story in which her husband is one of many, and yet unique. I love her voice, it's sharp and recognizable, intent on telling the truth, or, rather, on documenting the truth and leaving it as it is for someone to read and remember. Utterly heartbreaking. An essential witness.

Anticipating his arrest, Mandelstam obtained a copy of the Divine Comedy in small format and always had it with him in his pocket, just in case he was arrested not at home but in the street. And after his death or even before it, perhaps he lived on in camp legend as a demented old man of seventy who had once written poetry in the outside world and was therefore nicknamed The Poet. And another old man or was it the same one lived in the transit camp of Vtoraya Rechka, waiting to be shipped to Kolyma, and was thought by many people to be Osip Mandelstam which, for all I know, he may have been. That is all I have been able to find out about the last days, illness and death of Mandelstam. Others know very much less about the death of their dear ones. . . A remarkable book so far. Mandelstam landed in hot water for this poem on Stalin which is sometimes called the Kremlin Mountaineer: We live, deaf to the land beneath us, Ten steps away no one hears our speeches, All we hear is the Kremlin mountaineer, The murderer and peasant slayer His fingers are fat as grubs And the words, final as lead weights, fall from his lips, His cockroach whiskers leer And his boot tops gleam Around him a rabble of thin necked leaders fawning half men for him to play with The whinny, purr or whine As he prates and points a finger, One by one forging his laws, to be flung Like horseshoes at the head, to the eye or the groin And every killing is a treat For the broad chested Ossete.

Update 7 2 09 Whew. Hope Against Hope is one of the great witness books of the last century. I've been meaning to turn to it for years, intrigued by the literary friendship between the two great Russian poets, Mandelstam and Anna Akhmatova, as recounted in Roberta Reeder's biography on Akhmatova. Current events in Iran finally pushed me onward. Well, I was not disappointed, since Mandelstam's wife, Nadezhda, was a great writer herself. So much so, that this story, meant to preserve the memory of her poet husband, becomes equally her story. And her voice, as an indictment of Stalin and his system, is every bit as powerful as Solzhenitsyn's. One chilling part of this book is the appendix with its numerous names. If you turn to it as each new name comes up and I encourage you to do so, you soon become stunned at how many of these people end up in prison, executed, as suicides, etc. Mandelstam's memoir of her and her husband's life in Soviet Russia between 1934 and 1938, between which times he is twice taken into the Gulag, the second time fatally, is among the best and most powerful of nonfiction books. It is

not only a unique and exceptionally frank personal testament but a work of art. Nadezhda means hope in Russian, which makes the title a wryly ironic pun. Mandelstam's wit and resilience are the twin beacons that light this memoir of life in a relentlessly dark time. The memoir starts after slapping Alexei Tolstoy in the face, M immediately returned to Moscow. M is Osip Mandelstam and the book's immersive brilliance begins with that startling sentence and continues throughout. In recounting M's subsequent order into exile, on which his wife was allowed to accompany him, the order included a visit from the secret police to their home. M was out. The agents seized a bunch of manuscripts, not all or even most but the visit was designed to unsettle. Mandelstam writes about the visit: "If M had fallen into the hands of our agents, they would have hauled him off together with our manuscripts. He was lucky. Just as he was also lucky not to survive till the next wave of arrests and die in his bed or a hospital ward in Chukhloma or some other such place he was allowed to live in. Like the dramas of family life, this was normal and hence could be regarded as happiness. To understand this one had to go through a certain schooling. That certain schooling is what *Hope Against Hope* provides a way to understand how normal definitions and understandings of life, possibility, happiness were turned upside down. Nadezhda Mandelstam is a brilliant aphorist as well. Witness: "Fear and hope are bound up with each other. The ordeal by fear is the most terrible there is, and people never recover from it. Silence is the real crime against humanity. Terror and despotism are always short-sighted. The only good life is one in which there are no need for miracles. But poetry is a law to itself; it is impossible to bury it alive. Mandelstam makes clear that the reign of terror in the Soviet Union began before Stalin, though Stalin would perfect it and take it to levels of terror and brutality that defy comprehension, which is why books like *Hope Against Hope* are essential. We lived in a world where people were always being hauled in and asked for information about our thoughts and feelings. They summoned people who were compromised by their background or by psychological deficiencies, threatening one because he was the son of a banker or Czarist official, and promising favors or protection to another. They summoned people who were afraid of losing their jobs or wanted to make a career, those who wanted nothing and feared nothing, and those who were ready for anything. The object of all this was not just to gather information. Nothing binds people together than complicity in the same crime: the people could be implicated and compromised, the traitors, informants and police spies there were, the greater would be the number of people supporting the regime and longing for it to last thousands of years. As Mandelstam recounts her husband's struggles to maintain his integrity, to find a way to survive, to bear witness in poems his wife would memorize in case her efforts to preserve his manuscripts, she reveals a truth that the deep evil can and will be defeated but only at a very human and very high cost. It is heartbreakingly heroic testimony, both daunting and inspiring. If you are anything like me, you'll start to feel pretty bad about eating while reading *Hope Against Hope* even drinking tea starts to feel like you're mocking Mandelstam and her friends. Look at me, sitting here in

my capitalist comfort, my hybrid bourgeois intelligentsia existence, with the air conditioning on and very little chance of being arrested How can I stand myself So, yeah, it took me a while to get through this Partly because it s loosely structured, so sometimes it s hard to follow the timeline But man, it s worth it I haven t read any of Osip Mandelstam s poetry, and tbh, I m probably not going to now because poetry in translation is a misery But Nadezdha is a supremely interesting memoirist, sensitive and observant, evocative, oddly humorous ah, the hilarity of totalitarianism Betrayals and blessings are conveyed with sharp eyes, with great resolve, with an amazing lack of self pity.

New Post

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Bridge of Sighs

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The Complete Stories and Poems

Cutting for Stone

A Prayer for Owen Meany

1984

Catch-22

Anne of Green Gables

Lord of Scoundrels

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The Hobbit, or There and Back Again

Lord of the Flies

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The Day of the Triffids

Slaughterhouse-Five

Flowers for Algernon

The Merchant of Venice

Cloud Atlas

Twilight

Catching Fire

Life of Pi