

## Ol'ga Berggol'ts After the War: A Pre-Emptive Response to Zhdanov

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THE limited freedom that Soviet writers enjoyed during the years of the Second World War did not come to an end in May 1945 but in August 1946, when the Central Committee Resolutions on literature and art made it clear that writers were to dismiss any hopes for greater artistic autonomy, and that certain developments, such as the revival of lyric poetry and the reappearance of 'personal' themes, were to be curtailed. Between May 1945 and August 1946, however, the absence of unequivocal signals from above offered writers and critics the opportunity to continue their efforts to determine the direction of Soviet literature themselves. This article will consider the ways in which an article written during 1945–46 by Ol'ga Berggol'ts on the war poetry of Anna Akhmatova demonstrates the relative openness of the pre-Zhdanov cultural climate; many of the points made by Berggol'ts can be read as a pre-emptive response to the attacks that Zhdanov would make on Akhmatova in 1946. The article will set what Berggol'ts wrote in the cultural context of the war years and immediate post-war period, and demonstrate how Berggol'ts uses the change in perceptions resulting from the war to argue in favour of a thoroughgoing re-evaluation of Russian art and literature during the first half of the twentieth century. In the immediate post-war period, up to August 1946, it was still possible to think that a relatively objective reappraisal of the literary pantheon might actually happen, and that writers might be released from some of the intrusive prescriptive state controls. Grigorii Svirin's account of post-war Soviet literature names the first post-war year as 'the year when Russia began to recover from fear. A chronic illness can let up for a while in just the same way'. On 14 August 1946, however, 'the intoxicating sensation of victory vanished'.<sup>1</sup>

There had been ominous signs, even before the end of the war, that the authorities had little intention of allowing the war to be seen as a catalyst for social and political change, and that the limited cultural autonomy that had come about during the war years would not be allowed to continue. When Stalin said, in February 1946, that 'our victory means above all that our *social* system has won [. . .] Our *political*

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<sup>1</sup> Grigorii Svirin, *Na lobnom meste*, London, 1979, p. 23.

system has won', he was setting out a view of the war as a test which the Soviet state had passed triumphantly, thereby confirming the value of its institutions.<sup>2</sup> Such emphasis on the victory as proof of the system's virtues was accompanied by a change in the status of individual military commanders who had been most closely identified with the victory. In June 1946 Marshal Zhukov who, a year before, had led the victory parade on Red Square, was censured for his lack of deference to the Commander in Chief, Stalin, who by then bore the title 'generalissimus'. Zhukov was removed from his seat on the Central Committee and despatched to a more junior post in the Odessa military district and, two years later, to a post in the Urals region. Under Stalin, 9 May, Victory Day, lost its status as a public holiday after the first anniversary of the end of the war. As Lev Lazarev comments: 'Stalin had no desire to remember the war.'<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, a similar shift of emphasis took place in the cultural sphere. In May 1945 young poets were advised by critics to stop writing about the war; their work carried a distinct flavour of a generation confident of its ability to work together and overcome great obstacles.<sup>4</sup> Writers were guided towards 'peaceful reconstruction' and to focus on Soviet Man's exceptional qualities as worker rather than victor. The new Five Year Plan was announced in March 1946, an event marked by a leading article in the Writers' Union newspaper, *Literaturnaia gazeta*, which set the post-war agenda for Soviet writers: 'We must continue the labour of creating monumental works in which the man of our age, the man of the Stalin type, the creator of the Plans, will be revealed in his full stature.'<sup>5</sup> In June 1946 the first issue of a new cultural journal, *Kul'tura i zhizn'*, was published by the Central Committee, which would soon be preparing the August Resolutions. Berggol'ts's article on Akhmatova was written during the brief interval between war and post-war reaction, testimony to what she, and the editors of *Znamia* who commissioned it, thought it possible to publish — before the Zhdanov era overtook them.

While Berggol'ts's article does not represent a significant contribution to the study of Akhmatova's poetry as such, the very fact that it was commissioned, accepted for publication and passed by the censors says a good deal about post-war Soviet cultural life. Of greater significance, however, is the relationship between Berggol'ts's article and her own development as a poet, which will be explored in detail

<sup>2</sup> Adam Ulam, *Joseph Stalin*, New York, 1973, p. 630.

<sup>3</sup> Lev Lazarev, 'Russian Literature on the War', in *World War Two and the Soviet People*, eds John and Carol Garrard, Basingstoke, 1993, pp. 28–37 (p. 30).

<sup>4</sup> Nikolai Tikhonov, 'Pered novym pod'emom', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 17 May 1945, p. 2; F. Levin, 'Zhizn' idet vpered', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 5 October 1946, p. 3. See Semen Gudzenko's poem 'Moe pokolenie' which speaks of returning home and obtaining the victory with bayonets: *Stikhi slagalis' na khodu*, Moscow, 1990, pp. 128–29.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted by George Reavey, *Soviet Literature To-Day*, London, 1946, p. 173.

below. The article offers a rare glimpse of Berggol'ts's response to Akhmatova's poetry. Information on her relations with Akhmatova is relatively limited, and most of it comes from third parties. Here, though, Berggol'ts makes her partisan support for Akhmatova's work clear, as she refutes charges normally directed at Akhmatova by Soviet critics. In writing about Akhmatova, Berggol'ts was also writing about her own views on poetry. This article will examine in particular Berggol'ts's analysis of Akhmatova's treatment of the theme of love in relation to Berggol'ts's own work as both poet and critic, and show how she uses Akhmatova's case to argue for poetic integrity and autonomy, in ways which, again, had a particularly personal resonance. The ideas expressed in her discussion of Akhmatova's poetry reappear in her later critical writing, especially in polemical articles and speeches of the mid-1950s, and are key to Berggol'ts's own understanding of her role as a poet.

The article 'Voennye stikhi Anny Akhmatovoi' (Anna Akhmatova's War Poetry) was delivered rather later than the editors of *Znamia* would have liked, in June or July of 1946, and some minor alterations and excisions were agreed. Plans for publication had to be abandoned, however, in response to the Central Committee Resolution of 14 August 1946 condemning Akhmatova, among others. The article eventually appeared in *Znamia* in October 2001, thirteen years after the Resolution which had prevented its publication had been revoked, and almost a decade after the Soviet Union had ceased to exist. Berggol'ts's article had been preserved in the State Archive for Literature and Art in Moscow.<sup>6</sup> There had been only the barest hints at its existence in one published source, a memoir of Akhmatova by the literary scholar Georgii Makogonenko who was, in 1946, Berggol'ts's husband. Makogonenko's account concentrates on the second half of the 1940s; he recalls the numerous meetings which Leningrad writers were obliged to attend in the immediate aftermath of the August 1946 Resolutions, and sets out the names of those who were added to the initial list of offenders. Among them were Vissarion Saianov, editor of the journal *Zvezda*, and Boris Likharev, editor of *Leningrad*. Also included were the writer Iurii German, who had published an article on Zoshchenko in *Leningradskaiia pravda*, and Ol'ga Berggol'ts who, Makogonenko reports 'had written about Akhmatova'.<sup>7</sup>

The fact that the article had been commissioned at all is evidence of a considerable shift in official attitudes towards both its author and subject. Before the war both women had been on the margins of Soviet

<sup>6</sup> See Evgenii Efimov's account of the article's origins, 'Neizvestnaia stat'ia Ol'gi Berggol'ts ob Anne Akhmatovoi', *Znamia*, 10, 2001, pp. 139–41.

<sup>7</sup> Georgii Makogonenko, 'Iz tret'ei epokhi vospominaniia', in M. Kralin (comp.), *Ob Anne Akhmatovoi*, Leningrad, 1990, pp. 261–81 (p. 271).

literary life. Berggol'ts had been expelled from the Party in 1937 and imprisoned in 1938–39; after her release from prison and reinstatement in the Party she managed to obtain a contract to publish a collection of her poetry, but the agreement was cancelled in 1940. Akhmatova had been unable to publish a single collection since 1923. Malicious critics claimed that she had fallen silent, that she belonged to the past, and had nothing of value to offer contemporary readers. In 1940, however, her collection *Iz shesti knig* (From Six Books) appeared, only to be hurriedly withdrawn from circulation. During the war years, which Berggol'ts spent mainly in Leningrad, apart from a couple of months in Moscow in early 1942, and which Akhmatova spent as an evacuee in Tashkent, until her return to Leningrad in 1944, both poets were able to publish once more, and won enthusiastic acknowledgement from the public. Berggol'ts became well known as a result of her radio broadcasts of her poetry on the Leningrad Siege, and published four collections of her wartime work.<sup>8</sup> Akhmatova published a slim collection of her work in Tashkent in 1943; on her return from evacuation she was greeted at poetry readings in Leningrad and Moscow by standing ovations, and journals begged her for new poems which they could publish.

The relationship between the two poets was of long standing. By 1946 Berggol'ts had known Akhmatova for almost twenty years. Their friendship endured in spite of differences of opinion and outlook on both politics and literature; their experiences of the Stalinist Terror, and of the war, helped to strengthen the bond. The fact that Berggol'ts was a Party member was no obstacle to her profound respect for Akhmatova's poetic authority, or to Akhmatova's recognition of Berggol'ts's poetic talent. Memoirists such as Lidiia Chukovskaia, Sofiia Ostrovskaia and Faina Ranevskaiia evoke the respect and affection between the two poets.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, each voiced reservations about the other's work and opinions at times. Akhmatova felt that Berggol'ts had not entirely fulfilled her early promise, and was too ready to compromise her poetry. Lidiia Chukovskaia recorded Akhmatova's comments about Berggol'ts's latest collection of poetry in January 1957:

<sup>8</sup> During the war years, Berggol'ts published the following collections: *Leningradskaiia poema*, Leningrad, 1942; *Leningradskaiia tetrad'*, Moscow, 1942; *Leningrad*, Moscow, 1944, *Leningradskii dnevnik*, Leningrad, 1944.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Lidiia Chukovskaia, *Zapiski ob Anne Akhmatovoi*, 2 vols, Paris, 1980 (hereafter, *Zapiski*), 2, pp. 166–67; Lev Levin, 'Zhestokii rastsvet', in G. Tsurikova and I. Kuz'michev (eds), *Vspominaia Ol'gu Berggol'ts*, Leningrad, 1979 (hereafter, *Vspominaia O. B.*), pp. 50–91 (pp. 84–86); Faina Ranevskaiia, 'Nenapisannaia kniga Ranevskoi', *Ogonek*, 11, 2001, pp. 38–43 (pp. 41–42); Sofiia Ostrovskaiia, *Memoirs of Akhmatova's Years 1944–1950*, trans. Jessie Davies, Liverpool, 1988, pp. 48–49; Dmitrii Khrenkov, *Ot serdtsa k serdtsu: o zhizni i tvorchestve Ol'gi Berggol'ts*, Leningrad, 1982 (hereafter, *Ot serdtsa k serdtsu*), pp. 190, 224–27.

Olia is talented, she can write concisely. She can write the truth. But alas! She is well able to divide herself into pieces and write lies. I put my money on two horses a long time ago: the dark one in Moscow and the fair one in Leningrad. The fair one has been divided into pieces since her youth and gets side-tracked because of this, though she has a great talent.<sup>10</sup>

Berggol'ts acknowledged Akhmatova as an authoritative figure and a mentor, allowing herself only the occasional departure from respectful admiration, as in her note of 1944 quoted below, which describes Akhmatova's war poetry as rather disappointing. They disagreed strongly in their views on Tsvetaeva, according to one memoirist: Akhmatova found the emotional intensity of her work somewhat hysterical, an opinion which Berggol'ts did not share.<sup>11</sup> In spite of these differences, they were united by a common predicament, and had both experienced the pressures which led them to make concessions to official pieties. According to Vladimir Lakshin, Akhmatova once asked Berggol'ts to compose verses in praise of Stalin to be published in Akhmatova's name, in an attempt to help her son, Lev Gumilev, but Berggol'ts did not carry out this request.<sup>12</sup> Poetry, for both women, was not to be reduced to the status of a product of a Stalinist 'engineer of the soul'; they were conscious of the need to uphold the best traditions of Russian poetry which were threatened by 'official' culture. In their writing they bore witness to the Terror, and to the world of personal emotion which had been all but banished from contemporary published literature.

As far as the secret police, the MGB, was concerned, Berggol'ts was, in August 1946, one of Akhmatova's closest associates in Leningrad, along with her husband Makogonenko, the poet Sergei Spasskii, and Professor V. N. Orlov of the Literary Institute.<sup>13</sup> When the Resolutions of August 1946 were published, Berggol'ts was steadfast in her support for Akhmatova. This refusal to join in the general condemnation cost Berggol'ts her position on the Board of the Leningrad Writers' Union, and almost led to the cancellation of a planned collection of verse; she was censured in the press for her failure to exercise appropriate self-criticism.<sup>14</sup> According to Lakshin's memoir, Berggol'ts spoke out against the decision to deprive Akhmatova of her ration card when she

<sup>10</sup> Chukovskaia, *Zapiski*, 2, pp. 183–84. The 'dark horse' in Moscow to whom Akhmatova refers is Mariia Petrovykh. See also pp. 63–64 and 484 recording Akhmatova's reservations about Berggol'ts's work.

<sup>11</sup> Khrenkov, *Ot serdtsa k serdtsu*, pp. 226–27.

<sup>12</sup> Vladimir Lakshin, 'Ol'ga Berggol'ts', in *Otkrytaia dver'*, Moscow, 1989 (hereafter, *Otkrytaia dver'*), pp. 332–61 (p. 345).

<sup>13</sup> 'Spravka MGB po Leningradskoi oblasti ob Anne Akhmatovoi', *Itogi*, 21 August 2001, pp. 42–43, published by Denis Babichenko with his article 'Zakat leningradskoi zvezdy', pp. 40–45.

<sup>14</sup> See Berggol'ts's 1952 autobiography, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 3 vols, Leningrad, 1988–90 (hereafter, *Sobranie sochinenii*), 3, p. 494.

was called to account for providing her with material support, and told the meeting, 'I am convinced that the Revolution does not include starving a poet to death among the punishments available to it'.<sup>15</sup> Ten years later, in the wake of Khrushchev's speech at the Twentieth Party Congress, Berggol'ts addressed a meeting of Moscow writers and called for the 1946 Resolutions to be rescinded, since they were 'the expression of Stalin's personal taste, that is, they were entirely the creation of the personality cult', and when viewed objectively, could be seen to be utterly groundless.<sup>16</sup>

The 1946 article on Akhmatova's war poetry is the only known instance of Berggol'ts writing specifically about Akhmatova's work; otherwise Akhmatova is the subject of brief reminiscences, some of which appeared in the 1960s, and of a small number of poems.<sup>17</sup> Most of this material is concerned with the early days of the Leningrad Siege, shortly before Akhmatova was evacuated from the city. Even if Berggol'ts wrote little about Akhmatova's poetry as such, there is evidence that she knew it well. Lines by Akhmatova are quoted in her diaries.<sup>18</sup> In the 1946 article she makes it clear to the reader that she is no impartial commentator on Akhmatova's work: 'I know very well that it is incredibly difficult to write about poems, particularly about poems you love, poems which have become part of your soul.'<sup>19</sup>

It was the change in the cultural climate which took place during the war which enabled Berggol'ts to contemplate making such a public declaration of her affinity with a figure who had not so very long before been an outcast. In her article, she makes repeated references to the changed perspectives of those who had experienced the war, and to the war as a catalyst for a far-reaching re-evaluation of recent art and culture. Berggol'ts, like many other writers, had allowed herself to hope for lasting changes in the Stalinist regime after the victory. Taking part in a war of liberation against a foreign enemy almost inevitably raised the question of domestic liberation. In her diary of 13 April 1942 Berggol'ts outlines her own war aims, starting with the elimination of the NKVD, which had recently deported her father, a doctor, from Leningrad because he would not agree to act as an informer:

<sup>15</sup> See note 12 above.

<sup>16</sup> Speech to meeting of Moscow writers, 15 June 1956, in *Dnevnye zvezdy. Govorit Leningrad*, Moscow, 1990, pp. 382–93 (p. 388).

<sup>17</sup> 'Sto sorok solnts', *Literaturnaia Rossiia*, 19 July 1963, pp. 6–8; 'Slushai nas, rodnaia strana!', *Literaturnaia Rossiia*, 20 January 1964, p. 10; 'Ot imeni leningradtsev', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 9 May 1965; 'Slovo proshchaniia', *Literaturnaia Rossiia*, 11 March 1966, p. 21.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, quotations from 'Kleopatra' in her wartime diaries: 'Blokadnyi dnevnik' (hereafter, 'Blokadnyi dnevnik'), *April'*, 4, 1991, pp. 128–44 (p. 136); 'Ol'ga Berggol'ts: iz dnevnika' (hereafter, 'Iz dnevnika'), *Zvezda*, 6, 1990, pp. 160–72 (p. 170).

<sup>19</sup> 'Voennye stikhi Anny Akhmatovoi' (hereafter, 'Voennye stikhi'), *Znania*, 10, 2001, pp. 141–49 (p. 143).

I'm fighting so that their disgusting, degenerate institution, which attacks our own people, can be removed from the face of the Soviet earth. I'm fighting for the freedom of the Russian word — we would have worked so much more and much better if we had enjoyed complete trust [. . .]. I'm fighting so that good Soviet people can be allowed to live peacefully without the fear of exile or prison. I'm fighting for free and independent art.<sup>20</sup>

The desire for 'free and independent art' was one which Berggol'ts had in common with many of her contemporaries, and one which they had begun to express during the war years, if only in private. The NKVD made it its business to find out what writers were thinking, and reported on the opinions of several writers in October 1944, all of whom were bitterly critical of the constraints placed on them. The poet Iosif Utkin had apparently said: 'Poetry cannot be controlled, all that can be done is to create favourable conditions for poetry, and then it will flourish, but it can also be put in a straitjacket, and then it becomes the kind of poetry which is printed in our journals'. Nikolai Aseev, a poet of the older generation who had been an associate of Maiakovskii, looked forward to a new start for literature after the end of the war: 'when we have demobilization people will return to their lives having seen everything. These people will bring with them a new way of measuring things. I [. . .] believe that this will be a time of free poetry.' Lev Kassil, a writer for children and young people, was reported to have called for radical changes: 'The Union of Writers must be closed immediately, and writers given the opportunity to meet in groups in their homes and to discuss what they have written in accordance with their own creative taste and opinions.'<sup>21</sup>

Although Berggol'ts did not use her article on Akhmatova as an occasion to call for the dissolution of the Writers' Union, she did make a case for a thorough and scholarly re-evaluation of twentieth-century Russian literature and art, and devoted much of her discussion of Akhmatova to overturning the standard Soviet critical view of Akhmatova's poetry. Berggol'ts's case for a far-reaching re-evaluation of literature and art rested on her interpretation of the war as a significant turning point in the lives of all who lived through it. In an article of May 1945, she had already described how the experience of war had enabled people to view themselves in a new light as heroic figures who had made great sacrifices to bring about victory.<sup>22</sup> In her article on Akhmatova's war poetry, she explores the effects of the war on the consciousness of a group she describes as 'people of the 1940s', a group made up of people from different generations, of different ages, whose

<sup>20</sup> 'Iz dnevnikov', p. 157.

<sup>21</sup> Denis Babichenko, *Pisateli i tsenzory: sovetskaia literatura 1940-kh godov pod politicheskim kontrolem*, Moscow, 1994, pp. 101, 98, 102.

<sup>22</sup> 'Put' k zrelosti', *Sobranie sochinenii*, 2, pp. 354–58 (p. 356).

wartime experiences had made them aware of their role as liberators who fought and suffered in the knowledge that their efforts were helping to rid the world of Fascism. She describes them as 'defenders of humanity and of human beings, of people's most beautiful and elevated characteristics, hopes and feelings'.<sup>23</sup> By invoking the 'people of the 1940s' and the shift in their self-awareness, Berggol'ts prepares the ground for her suggestion that the new insights gained in wartime should be applied to Russian art and literature of the twentieth century:

it is the war, apart from anything else, which has set the past at a great distance from us, has even drawn new conclusions from things that happened in the past and given them a new significance. We have realized that the art of the past contains many treasures which were neglected earlier, and vice versa: there is many a 'monument' of the past that has suddenly shrunk to microscopic proportions.<sup>24</sup>

As Berggol'ts was preparing her article for publication, there was some reason for her to think that the process of cultural re-evaluation was already under way. In early 1946, the publication of a volume of Akhmatova's poetry was imminent. By aiming to get the article into print at roughly the same time as this volume, Berggol'ts had the opportunity to contribute to the first major Soviet re-evaluation of Akhmatova's reputation. The volume would present readers, for the first time, with a broad sweep of Akhmatova's poetry from before the October Revolution until the present day. Though the title of her article, 'Anna Akhmatova's War Poetry', suggested that it was Akhmatova's wartime writing which would be the principal focus of discussion, Berggol'ts also drew on poems written decades earlier in order to challenge what had become the standard Soviet preconceptions about Akhmatova, such as the claims that she was entirely alien to contemporary society, and that her emphasis on personal themes, particularly the theme of love, meant that she was in thrall to decadent bourgeois individualism rather than in tune with the collective spirit of the times.

At the heart of Berggol'ts's defence of Akhmatova's poetry is its concern with what Berggol'ts terms *chelovecheskoe* ('human values', 'humanity').<sup>25</sup> She was not alone in her insistence that it was this quality of humanity which had taken on new significance during the war years. In an article of 1946, the critic Kornelii Zelinskii, writing on lyric poetry in wartime, declared that 'humanity was the principal value for the sake of which the war against Fascism was fought'.<sup>26</sup> The germ of

<sup>23</sup> 'Voennye stikhi', p. 143.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>26</sup> Kornelii Zelinskii, 'O lirike', *Znamia*, 8–9, 1946, pp. 179–99 (p. 180). Many of the points made by Zelinskii in support of lyric poetry in 1946 are echoed in Berggol'ts's polemical articles of 1953–54.



Berggol'ts's article can be seen in a note from 1944 about Akhmatova's wartime poetry:

Akhmatova's civic achievement [*podvig*] does not lie in the fact that she 'renounced narrow intimate themes' and began to write about the Fatherland War (though the poems are, for the most part, rather weak!), but in the fact that she was able to maintain in her poems that particular Akhmatova-esque human quality, those eternal feelings, that full, highly-charged, pure and dramatic love, without which neither a person nor his society can exist, without which civic duty becomes a pointless set of empty words, — it is not performed in the name of something in particular, like the war and the victory, — but becomes an end in itself. But the victory (and overfulfilling the plan) has to be for people, so that they can love, enjoy art, wish for happiness and life.<sup>27</sup>

Akhmatova's poetry, Berggol'ts argues, presents readers with elevated, powerful, and tragic emotions, and is a powerful expression of precious human qualities which contemporary readers, the 'people of the 1940s', have come to appreciate with renewed force during the war. Their new awareness of their own role as defenders of human values against Fascism has manifested itself, Berggol'ts argues, in contemporary readers' response to Akhmatova's poetry. She refers to the enthusiastic public reception of Akhmatova's war poetry in the summer of 1941 as evidence of her ability to capture the essence of what the people of Leningrad were thinking and feeling as they faced the German assault. Moreover, Berggol'ts argues that the wartime growth in popularity of Akhmatova's work did not rest exclusively on her war poems: 'at the same time there was an unstoppable increase in the numbers of new, MASS READERS of Akhmatova, who eagerly searched for her books, continually sent letters to her from the front during the war and from all corners of the country now, and these letters actually talk about all of Akhmatova's poems.'<sup>28</sup> Although the reputation which had been constructed for Akhmatova by Soviet critics might have made her sudden popularity seem surprising, Berggol'ts insists that preconceptions about Akhmatova's work as 'indoor poetry', 'narrowly personal', 'chamber poetry', 'purely intimate', are mistaken:

Of course the great war of liberation and the mighty upsurge of people's patriotism illuminated, accentuated, and inspired in Akhmatova's work certain special new forces, but these forces had to have been there long before the war; the right kind of voice and the right kind of path had to have been there long since, so as to coincide completely, at the most fateful moments, with the voice and the path of the whole people.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> *Vstrecha*, compiled, with notes and commentary, by M. F. Berggol'ts, Moscow, 2000 (hereafter, *Vstrecha*), p. 278.

<sup>28</sup> 'Voennye stikhi', p. 143. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

Akhmatova's wartime poetry is claimed as an organic part of Akhmatova's work as a whole; Berggol'ts implies that it is not the poet who has been changed by war, but her readers, the 'people of the 1940s'. Since they now see themselves as defenders of humanity and human values, Berggol'ts is able to argue that Akhmatova's explorations of human emotions are relevant and important to them. Foremost among these emotions is love. Stalin-era culture was not at ease with representations of love in literature and art. Nevertheless, during the war love poetry had enjoyed a revival, with celebrations of the sustaining power of love between the soldier at the front and his wife back at home. The work of Konstantin Simonov was prominent in rehabilitating the love theme, although it is alleged that Stalin complained that his collection of love lyrics, 'S toboi i bez tebia' (With You and Without You) should have been printed in two copies only: one for the poet and one for his lover, to whom his work was addressed.<sup>30</sup> Even during wartime, writing about love in ways which had more to do with the erotic than with comradely devotion was seen as suspect. Stalin-era attitudes towards sexual love reflected a distrust of any forces which might prove to have a stronger claim on a person's allegiances than his or her fidelity to the state. After lively debates on the merits of 'free love' in the 1920s, the 1930s saw a steady imposition of traditional ideas of puritanical sexual morality. Igor' Kon interprets such developments as part of an attempt by the state to monopolize all aspects of people's lives: 'In order to ensure total control over the individual it had fully to "deindividualize" the individual, to emasculate the individual's autonomy. To these ends the totalitarian state began consistently to root out and disparage all that was erotic in human beings.'<sup>31</sup> Stalin-era attitudes towards love, and sexual love in particular, are expressed in the reading of Akhmatova which Andrei Zhdanov was to produce in 1946. Among the accusations he aimed at Akhmatova was her supposed fixation with the erotic. In his notes for his speech to a meeting of Leningrad writers he describes her as 'a crazed gentlewoman. The themes of her poetry — between boudoir and chapel. Poetry of the upper 10,000. Lips and teeth, breasts and knees. Yearning. Loneliness. Zoological individualism . . . Digging around in one's own

<sup>30</sup> Konstantin Simonov, 'S toboi i bez tebia', *Sobranie sochinenii*, 6 vols, Moscow, 1966–70, 1, pp. 125–202, includes the poem 'Zhdi menia', pp. 138–39, which was well received for its evocation of faithful love. Other poems in the collection, however, found less favour with the authorities. For Stalin's comments on 'S toboi i bez tebia', see K. Hodgson, *Written with the Bayonet: Soviet Russian Poetry of World War Two*, Liverpool, 1996, p. 84; see also, V. Aleksandrov, 'Pis'mo v Moskvu', *Znamia*, 1, 1943, pp. 149–60 (pp. 154–56), where the critic voices his reservations on Simonov's excessive 'frankness' and evocations of brief encounters between strangers.

<sup>31</sup> Igor' Kon, 'Sexuality and culture', in Igor' Kon and James Riordan (eds), *Sex and Russian Society*, Bloomington, IN, 1993, pp. 15–44 (p. 24). For debates of the 1920s, see Eric Naiman, *Sex in Public: The Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology*, Princeton, NJ, 1997.

emotions. Inner emptiness.<sup>32</sup> These comments do not reflect any knowledge of Akhmatova's poetry; instead they reveal the anxieties of the Stalin era about love when it was not assigned a secondary role as something which could function solely as a source of family and social stability. Outside these confines it was a threat to the collective spirit, something which could lure individuals into taking an unhealthy interest in their own psychological state. Akhmatova's alleged erotic obsessions are treated by Zhdanov as evidence of her alienation from Soviet society, a leftover manifestation of bourgeois individualism.

Berggol'ts's discussion of love in Akhmatova's poetry addresses, preemptively, Zhdanov's accusations of decadent individualism. Her underlying argument throughout is aimed at overturning assumptions about Akhmatova's supposed individualism and isolation from society. Berggol'ts states that the poet's selfless love for one person does not exclude, but rather, it guarantees the same kind of love for the people and the country.<sup>33</sup> She enlists the 'people of the 1940s' in support of Akhmatova's love poetry: they would not consider dismissing her work as 'chamber poetry' simply because a great deal of it is about love, but would instead be glad to see love being treated as 'an emotion which is of value in itself, worthy of being celebrated simply because it is a human emotion'.<sup>34</sup> Berggol'ts then proceeds to locate her subject's love poetry on the moral high ground:

Readers, people of the 1940s, will be captivated by the characteristics of Akhmatova's lyric persona: the categorical nature of her extraordinarily high demands towards love, towards herself and the world; her capacity for simple and lofty self-denial for the sake of the person she loves; readers will be struck by the unhypocritical purity, pride, profoundly tragic nature, and complexity, not of passion nor of frivolous amusement, but of the 'great earthly love' which Akhmatova celebrates.<sup>35</sup>

This claim is illustrated by quotations from a number of poems from before the Revolution, poems of the early 1920s and, of course, the most recent work. Berggol'ts identifies the moral code which underlies Akhmatova's poetry as selflessness and love in the widest sense, which together provide the source of the poet's happiness. She is at pains to explain that this vision of love has nothing in common with the contentment of stable mutual affection which is to be found in conventional Soviet poetry; in Akhmatova's poetry love is not reciprocated with the same total self-surrender, and so it is inevitably tinged with tragedy, associated with pain, sorrow and parting. In Berggol'ts's

<sup>32</sup> Quoted by Denis Babichenko, *Literaturnyi front: istoriia politicheskoi tsenzury 1932–1946 gg.: sbornik dokumentov*, Moscow, 1994, pp. 227–28.

<sup>33</sup> 'Voennye stikhi', p. 146.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

view it is this element of tragedy which brings Akhmatova's love poetry closer to her contemporary readers than other Soviet poets' static evocations of 'happy' love. Tragedy opens up 'a vast panorama of feelings . . . a thirst for perfection, and striving towards perfection; this tragic quality emphasizes the beauty and force of emotion, its unlimited possibilities, — movement'.<sup>36</sup> In contrast to the 'hundreds of smooth poems about happy love' which are offered to the Soviet reader, where love is treated as 'some kind of auxiliary activity to the fulfilment of one social task or the other — establishing a family, overfulfilling the plan etc.', Berggol'ts claims that Akhmatova's love poetry provides the reader with emotional education in its representation of pure and selfless love, and is all the more successful as it does not attempt to impose any ready-made answers.<sup>37</sup> Berggol'ts insists that though love in Akhmatova's poetry is not 'contented', it is not in the least 'unhappy'; what the poetry shows is that real happiness is to be found in the capacity to love selflessly, even if such love is not reciprocated.

Berggol'ts had written of the need to value lyric poetry and not to be afraid of representing personal emotions in 1936, and would return to this theme in polemical articles of 1953 and 1954, where she voiced her dismay at the near-total absence of poems on the theme of love in the early 1950s, and at the colourless way in which love was represented as a state of placid contentment.<sup>38</sup> In her polemical 'Razgovor o lirike' (Conversation about Lyric Poetry) of 1953 she argues for the need to explore love in a less one-sided way than her contemporaries had done 'when a person struggles with himself, struggles for the love of another person, experiences not only joy but sorrow as well, encounters disappointment, finds within himself the spiritual strength to overcome it'.<sup>39</sup> Her treatment of love in her own poetry left little room for evoking straightforward contentment; towards the end of the war she wrote of the emotional confusion of continued love for a husband who had died during the war, while also coping with the demands of a new relationship.<sup>40</sup> The complexity of these emotions was lost on the critic

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 146. Berggol'ts's 1954 verse drama, 'Vernost', was designated by the author as a tragedy, and was an attempt to revive a literary genre which Soviet culture had rejected because of its supposed 'negativity'. Berggol'ts, on the other hand, saw the potential for cathartic emotional expression which the model of classical tragedy offered. See K. Hodgson, *Voicing the Soviet Experience: The Poetry of Ol'ga Berggol'ts*, Oxford, 2003 (hereafter, *Voicing the Soviet Experience*), pp. 104–16.

<sup>37</sup> 'Voennye stikhi', pp. 144, 146.

<sup>38</sup> 'Doverie k sebe: o zadachakh liriki', *Sobranie sochinenii*, 1, pp. 575–57; 'Razgovor o lirike', *ibid.*, 2, pp. 367–78; 'Protiv likvidatsii liriki', *ibid.*, 2, pp. 378–90; speech at 1954 Writers' Union Congress, *Vtoroi vsesoiuznyi s'ezd sovetskikh pisatelei, 15–26 dekabria 1954 goda: stenograficheskii otchet*, Moscow, 1956 (hereafter, *Vtoroi vsesoiuznyi s'ezd*), pp. 344–46.

<sup>39</sup> 'Razgovor o lirike', *Sobranie sochinenii*, 2, p. 376.

<sup>40</sup> See, for example, 'Izmena', *ibid.*, 2, p. 91, and 'O, ne ogliadyvaites' nazad . . .', *ibid.*, p. 96.

who, in the immediate aftermath of the August 1946 Resolutions, attacked her long narrative poem of 1945, 'Tvoi put' (Your Path), for allegedly representing a heroine who was able to embark light-heartedly into a relationship with another man immediately after the death of her husband from starvation in the Leningrad Siege. The critic found the poem distasteful, and declared: 'This vulgar story has nothing in common with the heroic defence of Leningrad.' The play 'U nas na zemle' (In Our Land), which was co-authored with Makogonenko, attracted critical condemnation in 1947 because it was felt to pay undue attention to a female Stakhanovite's emotional life.<sup>41</sup> According to the values by which these critics judged, the heroism of a people at war, and the dedication of a people at work, risked being trivialized by an excessive emphasis on 'irrelevant' emotional concerns.

Towards the end of the war Berggol'ts had come under attack for an alleged preoccupation with suffering in the poems she had written about the Leningrad Siege, and her evocations of love were found to exhibit a similarly unhealthy interest in painful emotions. Many of Berggol'ts's poems about love, written in the second half of the 1940s and the early 1950s, were not published at the time.<sup>42</sup> One of the few that were published in 1953 as part of a cycle commemorating the construction of the Volga-Don Canal caught the attention of Berggol'ts's critics. The initial response to 'Ia serdtse svoe nikogda ne shchadila ...' (I Never Spared My Heart ...) was a sense of bewilderment: what was a poem about love doing in a celebration of a major construction project?<sup>43</sup> In 1954, when the post-Stalin debates about lyric poetry were in progress, this poem was seized on by those wishing to discredit Berggol'ts's call for 'self-expression' (*samovyrazhenie*). Critics found its treatment of love unpalatable; it was claimed, in terms which recalled the charges aimed at her war poems for 'celebrating suffering', that the poem turned love into 'self-torment, torture, suffering'.<sup>44</sup> This was certainly not the sort of love poem which usually appeared in Soviet periodicals. The poem is a recognition that whole-hearted love brings an austere and demanding happiness, even if it means accepting sorrow and fear:

... Puskai eti slezy i eto udush'e,  
 pust' khleshchut upreki, kak vetki v nenast'e.  
 Strashnei — vseproshchen'e. Strashnei — ravnodush'e.  
 Liubov' ne proshchaet. I vse eto — schast'e.

<sup>41</sup> Quoted by Berggol'ts in her 1952 autobiography, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 3, p. 494; the article may have been by S. Osov'tsov, 'Na pereput'e', *Vechernii Leningrad*, 18 September 1946. 'Tvoi put', *Sobranie sochinenii*, 2, pp. 74–84. 'U nas na zemle', *Zvezda*, 12, 1947, pp. 120–61.

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, the cycle 'Stikhi o liubvi', *Sobranie sochinenii*, 2, pp. 94–95.

<sup>43</sup> Iurii Lukin, 'Bez masterstva, bez vdokhnoveniia', *Pravda*, 1 February 1953, p. 3.

<sup>44</sup> Iosif Grinberg, 'Oruzhie liriki', *Znamia*, 8, 1954, pp. 170–84 (p. 179).

Ia znaiu teper', chto ona ubivaet,  
 Ne zhdet sostradan'ia, ne delitsia vlast'iu.  
 Pokuda prekrasna, pokuda zhivaia.  
 Pokuda ona ne utekha, a — schast'e.<sup>45</sup>

Never mind these tears and this suffocation, let reproaches lash like twigs in bad weather. More terrible is all-forgivingness. More terrible is indifference. Love does not forgive. And all of this is happiness. I know now that it kills, does not expect sympathy, does not share its power. It is still beautiful, still alive, as long as it is not an amusement, but happiness.

The poem was wilfully misinterpreted to read as advocating 'non-resistance to evil and general reconciliation with failure, disaster, grief, tears: all of that is happiness, insofar as it is life'.<sup>46</sup> In the light of what Berggol'ts wrote in 1946, however, the poem should be read as an evocation of the tragedy inherent in love, and of the dynamism inherent in love which is not 'contented' but also not 'unhappy'. As in other love poems of the 1950s by Berggol'ts, the speaker is unable to love in half-measure, and finds that her feelings are not fully reciprocated.<sup>47</sup> Her interpretation of Akhmatova's treatment of love may be read as a manifesto for her own poetry of the post-war period.

In her articles and speeches after Stalin's death, as well as arguing for the poet's right to write about love as a complex human emotion, Berggol'ts also spoke in support of the poet's right to creative individuality and autonomy. This is a theme which is introduced in the 1946 article on Akhmatova when Berggol'ts raises the possibility that the war brought about a sudden transformation in Akhmatova's writing, only to dismiss it at once by saying that the qualities which were displayed then were already inherent in the poet. She resists the idea that a poet can be moulded by external forces, arguing that a poet's essential qualities are not subject to change: 'a true poet has only one voice, — the poet may lower it to a whisper or raise it to a shout, but he is not free to change its nature.'<sup>48</sup> This assertion of a poet's essential creative integrity and individuality, made in 1946, was repeated in Berggol'ts's 1954 speech to the second Writers' Union Congress, with explicit reference to the external forces which assumed their right to direct a poet to alter his own voice:

<sup>45</sup> 'Ia serdtse svoe nikogda ne shchadila . . .', *Sobranie sochinenii*, 2, p. 123.

<sup>46</sup> Nikolai Gribachev, Sergei Smirnov, 'Violonchelist poluchil kanifol', *Razgovor pered s'ezdom*, Moscow, 1954, pp. 265–78 (p. 276). This was not the first time Gribachev had maliciously misread Berggol'ts; he had dismissed her 1952 poem 'Vstrecha', saying that her journey to the Volga-Don Canal site was undertaken with the sole aim of finding a new love. See Gribachev, 'Pravda i domysel': zametki o stikhakh', *Pravda*, 26 June 1952, p. 3.

<sup>47</sup> For example, 'Vo imia luchshego slova . . .', *Sobranie sochinenii*, 2, p. 103. 'Nichto ne vernetsia. Vsemu prednaznacheny sroki . . .', *ibid.*, pp. 103–04; 'O, kak ia ot serdtsa tebia otrывala! . . .', *ibid.*, pp. 122–23.

<sup>48</sup> 'Voennye stikhi', p. 143.

It is not uncommon for critics and various organizations to impose on whole groups of writers, including poets, something which is not in a given poet's nature. Each poet has his own profile, his particular qualities, and it is wrong to attack him for something he has not got and could not possibly have, instead of helping him develop those qualities which are his own.<sup>49</sup>

In her 1946 article on Akhmatova, Berggol'ts combines her view of a poet's unchanging essence with an image suggesting continuous evolution: the path. It is not, she explains, a straightforward path:

it does not run straight across a flat plain, but is a spiral mountain path. The poet, constantly remaining the same, appearing to repeat the previous loop of the spiral, is endlessly climbing upwards, passing through a series of new zones — storm, wasteland, or flourishing ground — making the poetry of each new zone his own, endlessly striving to reach the summit, the altitude of which is unknown to the poet and can never be determined in advance.<sup>50</sup>

Berggol'ts uses this image of the ascending spiral path to justify her claim that Akhmatova's wartime poetry is an organic part of her work as a whole. She illustrates her view of Akhmatova's poetic evolution by comparing poems written at the time of World War One with those written in World War Two. While the earlier poems express emotions verging on despair, the later work, Berggol'ts states, shows how the poet was able to draw on forces which, though inherent, had previously lain undiscovered. Akhmatova, by her very nature as a poet, possessed the resources which allowed her to give voice to her people's resolve in 'Muzhestvo':

. . . Ne strashno pod puliami mertvymi lech',  
Ne gor'ko ostat'sia bez krova.  
No my sokhranim tebia, russkaia rech',  
Velikoe russkoe slovo . . .<sup>51</sup>

It is not frightening to lie dead beneath the bullets, not bitter to be left without a roof. But we will preserve you, Russian language, the great Russian word . . .

While in one of the poems on the First World War quoted by Berggol'ts, the speaker covers her face and prays for God to kill her before the first battle, the later poems show a different response: 'And Akhmatova no longer covered her face, but fearlessly and unwaveringly, as only a poet can, she looked into the savage face of disaster.'<sup>52</sup> The exact process by which Akhmatova's inner resources had been brought into play is not explained, except through the image of the rising spiral path. It is

<sup>49</sup> Speech at 1954 Writers' Union Congress, *Vtoroi vsesoiznyi s'ezd*, p. 345.

<sup>50</sup> 'Voennye stikhi', p. 143

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

suggested, though not made entirely explicit, that it is the war that has released the poet's potential: 'While still remaining herself, the poet then, as though all at once, moved forward by several huge turns on her single upward spiral path, rising up above herself, — we know there is no more difficult or honourable ascent [. . .]. The poet's one voice gained in strength in all her new songs, has been enriched with new notes which were engendered by the poetry of life itself.'<sup>53</sup> For Berggol'ts's intended readers, however, the 'people of the 1940s', it would have been clear that the poet's path would have led her through another, earlier disaster which overtook the Soviet Union in the late 1930s: the years of Stalin's Terror. The poem which Berggol'ts quotes in the conclusion of her article, 'A vy, moi druž'ia poslednego prizyva . . .', is ostensibly a commemoration of the war dead, but can also be read as an act of remembrance for the victims of the Terror as, indeed, can many commemorative works written during and immediately after the war. Berggol'ts claims that the new elements which have been introduced into Akhmatova's poetry, by what she terms the 'people's stern struggle for liberation', mean that it has exchanged the passivity of mourning for a more active intervention. Berggol'ts quotes the lines:

. . . Nad vashei pamiat'iu ne styt' plakushchei ivoi,  
A kriknut' na ves' mir vse vashi imena . . .<sup>54</sup>

I will not stand motionless over your memory like a weeping willow, but shout all of your names out to the whole world . . .

Akhmatova's resolute pledge to preserve the memory of the names of the dead echoes lines from her cycle 'Rekviem':

. . . Khotelos' by vsekh poimenno nazvat',  
Da otniali spisok, i negde uznat'.<sup>55</sup>

I would like to mention everyone by name, but the list has been taken away, and there is nowhere to find them out.

It is not certain that Berggol'ts was one of those who knew 'Rekviem' in the 1940s, but even if she did not, she was well placed to understand that the 'new, powerful, stronger civic intonation' found in Akhmatova's wartime poetry, in addition to the familiar qualities of 'unique "Akhmatova-esque" intimacy with an unusually personal attitude towards everything that happens', did not originate from the war alone.<sup>56</sup> Both Akhmatova and Berggol'ts responded powerfully to the Terror of the Stalin years, writing poetry in which they not only

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 147.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>55</sup> From the epilogue to 'Rekviem', *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy*, Moscow, 1989, pp. 328–34 (p. 334).

<sup>56</sup> 'Voennye stikhi', p. 149.



expressed their own fears and despair, but also gave voice to a traumatized society, and assumed the duty of witness to the ordeal of the victims, inside and outside the prison camps.

Berggol'ts's own career has often been interpreted as being marked by a sudden transformation at the start of the war.<sup>57</sup> As poetry relating to her persecution, arrest and imprisonment in the late 1930s gradually emerged in the 1960s, and to a far greater extent in the late 1980s and early 1990s, this interpretation became untenable. Berggol'ts's poetry of 1937–41 shows that her own experiences during the years of the Terror equipped her to act as a poet who would record the tragedy of Leningrad under siege. Her notebooks and diaries suggest that imprisonment had been a preparation for the war years: 'Prison was the source of our victory over Fascism. Because we knew that prison was Fascism, and we were fighting against it, and we knew that the war would come soon, and were ready for it.'<sup>58</sup> In her article on Akhmatova, Berggol'ts describes the 'people of the 1940s' as defenders of humanity against Fascism; it would be consistent with the post-war mood to perceive an implied suggestion that the task of the 'people of the 1940s' was not yet complete, that Fascism had not yet been entirely defeated. The idea of defending human values, which plays an important role in the 1946 article, can also be related to the Terror through a remark made by Berggol'ts in her diary of December 1939. There she writes that it was in prison that she acquired *chelovechnost'*, that human quality which she later attributed to Akhmatova's poetry, and identified as the source of its appeal to contemporary readers.<sup>59</sup> While the Terror could not be referred to openly in 1946, the war certainly could be cited as an example of suffering bravely endured in resistance to tyranny. The idea of the poet's path implies a journey through, and a creative response to, events which could not be mentioned, except metaphorically as 'storm' and 'wasteland'.

The image of the poet's path as an ascending spiral was one which Berggol'ts also used to describe her own career, and her life. In an undated note, she wrote: 'I'm writing in circles. A spiral rising

<sup>57</sup> Among critics who have written about Berggol'ts's 'sudden' wartime transformation are Z. Shteinman, 'Stikhi i vstrechi', *Zvezda*, 7, 1959, pp. 189–91; N. Gubko, 'Put' k vershinam: zametki o poezii Ol'gi Berggol'ts', *Neva*, 5, 1961, pp. 190–94; G. Tsurikova and I. Kuz'michev, 'Put' k glavnoi knige: ot sostavitelei', *Vspominaia O. B.*, pp. 3–30 (p. 12), and Evelyn Bristol, *A History of Russian Poetry*, Oxford and New York, 1991, pp. 270–71. These views have been challenged by Aleksei Pavlovskii's introduction to O. Berggol'ts, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, Leningrad, 1983, pp. 5–48 (pp. 5–10), and by Liudmila Chashchina, 'Put' vozvrata: k 80-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia O. F. Berggol'ts', *Iskusstvo Leningrada*, 5, 1990, pp. 21–28 (p. 24).

<sup>58</sup> *Vstrecha*, p. 311.

<sup>59</sup> 'Iz dnevnikov Ol'gi Berggol'ts', *Neva*, 5, 1990, pp. 171–78 (p. 175).

upwards.<sup>60</sup> The note is headed 'K glavnoi knige' (Towards the Main Book), which links it with her unfinished prose autobiography, *Dnevnye zvezdy* (Daytime Stars). The first volume, which was completed and published in 1959, presents a non-chronological account of moments and events which are drawn from all stages of the poet's life, from her childhood to the recent past. Certain key moments are designated as a 'vershina' ('summit') or a 'den' vershin' ('day of summits'), when the narrator achieves heights of awareness extending beyond the normal boundaries of past, present and future. This yoking of ascent and insight is reminiscent of the upward spiral path pursued by an essentially unchanging self which gradually grows in understanding as it moves towards an as yet unseen and unknown goal. It is an image which allows for contradictions and apparent reversals to be built into a vision of coherent and implicitly dialectical development. It was the pursuit of wholeness, according to Berggol'ts, which brought her to attempt writing an autobiography in the first place:

The need to bring together my life in a single whole, the need to remember, compare, reassess everything that happened in it, starting from its sources, to reassemble myself as something which is unified, but which was split apart first by the war, then by the events of 1953–1957, — that's what my striving to 'start from the very beginning' means, I think.<sup>61</sup>

For someone whose own path had led her through Party loyalty to disillusion, through attempts to merge with the collective which had foundered in the irreducibly individual experience of bereavement and unjust accusations, a view of poetic development which could accommodate such apparent contradictions was vitally important. It could be argued that the image is essentially evasive in its refusal to confront certain events. The narrative of *Dnevnye zvezdy* does not relate the author's experience of imprisonment, and refers only obliquely to the persecution she experienced when she was excluded from the Party in 1937.<sup>62</sup> Plans to write about the Terror in the second volume were not, it seems, ever realized.<sup>63</sup> If Berggol'ts is evasive, however, it is because

<sup>60</sup> *Vstrecha*, p. 272. The image of the ascending spiral was widely used in the Modernist period, particularly by Symbolist writers, and especially by Andrei Belyi, whose work demonstrates a preoccupation with the reconciliation of contradictions. The image of the spiral to express the individual's path towards illumination is found in the works of Rudolf Steiner, under whose influence Belyi came to see life as 'a paradoxical progression through evolutionary revolution'. See Samuel D. Cioran, *The Apocalyptic Symbolism of Andrei Belyi*, The Hague, 1973, p. 193.

<sup>61</sup> *Dnevnye zvezdy*, in *Vstrecha*, pp. 73–74.

<sup>62</sup> 'Ta samaia polianka', in *ibid.*, pp. 52–64. The original scenario for the film version of *Dnevnye zvezdy* (dir. Igor' Talankin, 1968) contained a scene set in the prison hospital which was filmed but then removed from the final version. See Ol'ga Berggol'ts, *Pesy i stsensarii*, Moscow, 1988, pp. 338–39.

<sup>63</sup> Brief notes on plans for writing about her imprisonment in the second volume of *Dnevnye zvezdy* can be found in *Vstrecha*, pp. 259, 311.

there were powerful reasons to act in this way. It was a strategy which enabled her to publish, to reach an audience which might be able to read between the lines. Her poems, written in wartime in the besieged city of Leningrad, only hinted at the extremes of suffering encountered there. This was enough to enable Berggol'ts's readers to supply, from their own experience, the details that could not be fully expressed in print.

Berggol'ts's experience of the Stalin era was of a world in which divisive categories were imposed: she had been both an 'enemy of the people' in the late 1930s and a Stalin Prize winner in the early 1950s, but neither category is remotely adequate in capturing the blend of idealism, fear, creativity and resistance which helped to shape her life and career. To interpret her either as a conventional, 'official' Soviet poet, on the basis of some of her published work, or as a voice of dissent and doubt, on the basis of what emerged later, would be to impose an artificial simplicity on a complex situation. Reading the range of her poetry which is now available in print, it is striking to see how poems affirming support for the Soviet state were being written at the same time as poems recording the tragedy of that state's reliance on terror and oppression. It is tempting to read the 'official' poetry as a ritual gesture that Berggol'ts performed in order to have her work published, nothing more. This seems to be Akhmatova's view, expressed in her 1957 comments to Chukovskaia quoted above. In her choice of words, Akhmatova appears to have latched on to a line from a poem by Berggol'ts, written in 1949 and first published in 1956, in which the poet rejects the well-meaning advice of friends to follow a path of compromise:

Druz'ia tverdiat: 'Vse sredstva khoroshi,  
Chtoby spastii ot zloby i napasti  
Khot' chast' Tragedii, khot' chast' dushi . . .'  
A kto skazal, chto ia delius' na chasti?<sup>64</sup>

Friends repeat: any means are acceptable in order to save from malice and disaster just part of the Tragedy, just part of your soul . . . But who said that I can be divided into pieces?

Akhmatova, speaking of Berggol'ts's inner divisions as a factor which impeded her poetic development, uses precisely the same expression, 'delit'sia na chasti' ('to be divided into pieces') and claims that as a result, some of her writing is 'lies'. For a Communist idealist like Berggol'ts, it was not so easy to be so categorical. In fact Berggol'ts did not deny the existence of inner divisions, as can be seen in the lines from *Dnevnye zvezdy* quoted above, and in a pre-war poem about a

<sup>64</sup> 'Druz'ia tverdiat: "Vse sredstva khoroshi . . ."', third poem of the cycle, 'Piat' obrashchenii k tragedii', *Sobranie sochinenii*, 2, p. 110.

palmist's comment on a life line divided into two.<sup>65</sup> Her writing, however, shows no easy acceptance of divisions, and is often concerned with attempts to reconcile apparent contradictions. In Berggol'ts's case, a belief in the ideals of Communism co-existed with the awareness of the terrible things that had been done in the name of these ideals; neither cancelled out the other, both needed to be voiced as testimony to her own, and her contemporaries' experience. Il'ia Foniakov describes Berggol'ts's work as 'an honest attempt to encapsulate her times as a whole, with all their grandeur and horror'.<sup>66</sup> It is not hard to see why Berggol'ts might have been preoccupied with the quest to achieve wholeness, to reconcile what might seem irreconcilable. In her article on Akhmatova, the creation of the image of the ascending spiral as a model of poetic development was a response to those who would have liked to divide poets, and their works, into two categories, only one of which could be acknowledged. It enabled Berggol'ts to argue for the acceptance of Akhmatova's work as a whole, and to set out an image of creative integrity and continuity for herself and for her fellow writers.

Berggol'ts's article, 'Voennye stikhi Anny Akhmatovoi', completed shortly before the Central Committee Resolutions of August 1946, is evidence of the changes in the cultural atmosphere which had come about during the war, and of a certain confident expectation that these changes would not be easily reversed. It was written at a time when two volumes of Akhmatova's poetry were about to be published, and when she was able to take part in highly successful public poetry readings. While the fact that it could not be published as originally planned is entirely the result of renewed campaign of Stalinist repression, the fact that it was commissioned and delivered shows that Berggol'ts, and the editors of *Znamia*, felt that the time was right to add their contribution to Akhmatova's rehabilitation from her previous pariah status. The article gives us at least a partial view of Berggol'ts's response to Akhmatova's poetry, not available elsewhere. It also conveys a good deal of information about the way in which Berggol'ts understood her own role as a poet. Themes which she takes up in her discussion of Akhmatova are returned to in her later writing, both in her polemical defence of lyric poetry in 1953–54, and in her support for the poet's right to creative integrity. In her analysis of Akhmatova's love poetry Berggol'ts explores ideas which are embodied in her own poetry of the 1940s and 1950s, and her image of the poet's path as an ascending spiral played an important part in her view of her own life and work. It

<sup>65</sup> See, 'Mne khiromantka ryzhaia gadala . . .', in *Voicing the Soviet Experience*, p. 70.

<sup>66</sup> Il'ia Foniakov, 'Ispytanie na razryv: k 90-letiiu Ol'gi Berggol'ts', *Zvezda*, 5, 2000 pp. 231–39 (p. 236).

might be argued that Berggol'ts was using Akhmatova's poetry as a convenient vehicle for expressing some of her own ideas. It is more likely, however, that the article's overriding concern is with making a case for Akhmatova's contemporary value and relevance. By writing about Akhmatova in terms which she would later use elsewhere about literature in general, and which would resurface in her own work, Berggol'ts was indicating the extent of her affinity to the older poet and writing about her as an exemplary figure who had retained her integrity and, who, for Berggol'ts, represented 'the pride of Russian poetry'.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>67</sup> 'Blokadnyi dnevnik', p. 136.