

ADDITIONAL 1980 LETTERS

The following letters were not included in Affirming: Letters 1975–1997. They are posted here for the convenience of readers, but have not yet been fully annotated as they would have been in a conventionally published selection.

TO HENRY HARDY

9 June 1980

Headington House

Dear Henry,

Thank you for your letters of 30 May and 4 June, and copy of your letter to Mr Meeuws.¹ Let me answer them in order. The *Pelican* has arrived but I have not had time to read it yet. H. G. Nicholas has indeed finished – some people work fast. Do let Segal have the galleys, as you suggest. Thank you for the reviews of Herzen and for your kind words about the sales conference – I am glad that others enjoyed it more than I did.

Now, about your letter of 4 June. Let me begin by saying that I fully understand why you should think that your revision of my ‘footnote’ on the Guest from the Future is wholly reasonable – it would have been so but for the peculiar circumstances which surround the text of AA’s poems. I am, of course, grateful to you for following Pat’s suggestion and letting me look at the relevant text.

Your typed version of my footnote, as sent to the printer, seems to me *prima facie* correct, although I have not checked it word for word. I should still prefer it to be a footnote, long as it is, in type however small, but if you think an appendix is indispensable, so be it.

The transliteration is whatever you wish it to be; the only thing I would like to insist on is that you keep – in this article only – the apostrophe for the soft sign: it is so concerned with words in Russian – far more than *Russian Thinkers* – that I should like to

¹ All three letters missing.

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make the transliteration as exact as possible, since there is in it material for scholars, as there is not in the other essays. But in the case of names well known abroad, perhaps the Western version has better be used, e.g. Nijinsky, not Nizhinski.

Now, the longer v. the shorter version of the footnote. Although I have based myself on the Zhirmunsky edition as being more authoritative, it is quite difficult to procure – it exists in libraries, of course, but scholars can no longer obtain it from the Soviet Union, as everything there goes out of print rapidly, particularly editions of not too well approved-of writers; consequently, I notice that the great majority of those who write about AA use Struve–Filippov. This alone is a reason for the cross-references. Moreover, there are scholars who do not read Russian who write about AA, whom they read in translation only, and these for the most part, I tend to think, refer to S–F only. In addition to this, Struve is acutely sensitive about Akhmatova texts, writes me letters about all this, and would be bitterly offended if I ignored his edition in these references, and this would to some degree affect reviewers, to whom he would certainly – and from his own point of view justifiably – vehemently complain. The last thing I wish to do is to fall out with him, as he has been most considerate in letting me know all kinds of things in connection with his editions of Russian poets. And another point: neither edition, whatever it may claim, is complete; Z leaves out, honourably, the pro-Stalin poems extorted from her in an effort to save her son, and her translations of non-Russian poets; S–F includes the Stalin poems and omits the poems which ‘I cannot find’. Consequently the omission of either edition is wrong in principle.

This is complicated further by the following. An American correspondent quotes to me certain lines which he says are from ‘Epilogue’ in *Poem without a Hero* (1946–56), beginning with the words *Za tebya zaplatila Chistoganom*, which clearly refer to my visit: I cannot find these words in Z, and propose to look for them in S–F, vol. 2, which I do not possess (it seems to have been stolen by someone) – if I can find these lines, they should certainly be referred to in my S–F references.

I accept your point about not saying ‘I cannot find’ this or that ‘in S–F’ – as you say, it is either there or not there – but one cannot be certain that it is not tucked away somewhere. I therefore

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deem it best simply to omit references to Z or S–F, as the case may be, where lines seem to be missing, and let the reader infer their absence from the relevant edition – I would rather not say ‘not in Z’ or ‘not in S–F’, for I cannot be certain; although if you want me to do that I am ready to write to Struve and ask him whether indeed the missing texts are truly missing from his edition.

There is also this further point. The order of the stanzas, poems, etc. in Z and S–F is sometimes different – again, if scholars wish to consult the original texts, Z alone is not sufficient. The differences in order are not arbitrary: Z and S–F grouped the poems as they did for various reasons of their own – relevance, date, AA’s instructions, order in original publication, etc. – and this makes a difference to their interpretation, i.e. to scholars seeking to unravel some of the truly dark mysteries of her poems (she admits that she uses a triple bottom in her box).

For all these reasons the cross-references must be kept.

As to the titles of the poems, their names in English and Russian, their date and place of composition, page refs to the editorial notes, etc., these must be kept because Z is not easily available and because the translations are the basis of much writing about AA. I don’t want to take a haughty line whereby only those who read Russian can be regarded as interested in what I have to say. Hence the need for all these pedantic details. I don’t think we are obstructing rather than aiding researches of scholars by the fullness of references – no scholar known to me has ever complained of this in any field of knowledge (reviewers may do so, but to hell with them – in this connection).

I am truly grateful to you for realising that I might disagree with you on this issue. I must now go and try to trace the new lines which my American correspondent has sent me: I shall ask Pat to ask you where vol. 2 of the second edition of S–F is most easily accessible. If I cannot find the lines even there, I shall have to write to Chicago – do bear with me over this, the lines are worth recording if only for completeness’ sake – it would be absurd to make such a pile of references and then omit material lines.

Now with regard to your specific points:

1. *Nechet* is the title of poems 451–6, that is quite clear in Z, I have not bothered to look at S–F. It is the title of a cycle – if we quote such titles elsewhere, why not here?

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2. ‘The White Hall’: you are right, it is indeed the title of a single stanza, to her of immense importance as it is a historic room in the Sheremetev Palace, next door to her own room there. It should therefore be referred to as the title of the italicised verses in question, as you have done in the version sent to the printer.

3. You are quite right about Z pp. 412–13: this is my mistake, misplaced by me. The reference should read ‘(Z pp. 235-7, notes pp. 412–13 and 488;)’.

4. I cannot answer this until I have seen S–F vol. 2 – I may well be wrong again.

Could you add to the list of references to ‘me’ the following: ‘“Prichitaniye”, 555, 27 January 1946 (Z p. 296)’ – and I may be able to give you an S–F reference after seeing vol. 2.

Yours,
Isaiah

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