

Requiem Redux: A Chorus for the Present

Scott Ennis

Requiem Redux: A Chorus for the Present is a sequence of original sonnets in poetic dialogue with Anna Akhmatova's *Requiem*. It reimagines her elegiac witness to Stalinist terror within today's shifting authoritarian landscapes, from border detentions to surveillance states and the weaponization of silence. Written in a blend of traditional and contemporary registers, the sequence centers women's voices across space and time, forming a transhistorical chorus of resistance. Rather than translating Akhmatova, the work engages in a creative correspondence with her: each sonnet is both an echo and an answer. This poetic offering builds a living archive of grief, defiance, and remembrance, where the lyric becomes an act of refusal. The piece is offered as a creative response to the rise of gendered authoritarianism, and speaks to the theme of gender politics within the new right. It may be performed, read aloud, or presented as text.

Requiem Redux: A Chorus for the Present

A Performance Script in Sonnets

By Scott Ennis

Inspired by and in dialogue with Anna Akhmatova's *Requiem*

Cast of Voices

POET – Contemporary narrator bridging past and present

ANNA – Akhmatova's voice: lyrical, firm

MOTHER – Modern-day woman facing state repression

GUARD – Border official, conflicted

DAUGHTER – Next generation, inheriting resistance

CHORUS – Collective voice of women across time

I. BEFORE THE GATES

Spotlight. The POET stands center, addressing the audience.

POET

We do not knock; the guards have no such door

We stand in queues of code, of barbed regret

No stone, no cell, no paper to abhor

Just silence signed by fingerprints and debt

A woman's voice cracks through a filtered screen
Her child was taken for the state to cleanse
The echo rings in sterile, glassy green
Where laws collapse and mercy never mends

I've learned to breathe without a sound or plea
To swallow names before the drones can hear
What they call justice doesn't come for free
And in this queue we barter pain for fear

The ghosts of Leningrad come haunt this place
They mouth our words, then vanish without trace.

II. AFTER AKHMATOVA

Side lighting. ANNA is seated, composed, her voice unwavering.

ANNA

No, not beneath the eyes of silent drones
Did I rehearse my grief in measured lines
The frost upon the prison's copper stones
Felt warmer than the age that now confines

I stood with mothers, centuries away
With sisters mourning, kin in whispered names
They choked us with the ash of every day
And lit our silent pyres with their flames

I gave no outcry but I did not yield
My voice, though veiled, remained intact, alive
I stitched it in the hem of what was sealed
A gospel no regime could yet deprive

The poet's task is not to beg or bow
But witness, with her broken, bloodless brow.

III. DETAINED

MOTHER stands or sits quietly, holding a child's paper fan.

MOTHER

They took my daughter in a windowed van
The papers said it wasn't theft at all
She stole a slice of bread with trembling hand
Her hunger born of poverty's great call

I dream her hand still folds her paper fans
Each crease a prayer, a promise not to break
They say her name beyond the windowed vans
Too soft for wind, too slow for breath to take

I count the codes, the filings, the appeals
The doors stay locked. The system hums its lie
The legalese obscures what justice feels
A child afraid beneath fluorescent sky

Let every border guard and scribe take note
My silence is the anthem that I wrote.

IV. THE GUARD'S SONNET

GUARD speaks slowly, halting, then gains clarity.

GUARD

I mark the boxes. I don't read the names
The ink is data, and the data's clean
A mother wails. I don't play petty games
I tally crossings, not the souls between

But once a girl not older than my niece
Looked up and asked if poetry could die
She held a doll, a verse stitched in the fleece
And whispered, "They erased my lullaby"

My kin read Akhmatova in the war
And taught me not to flinch at sorrow's call
I looked away. The child knelt on the floor
And silence settled thick against the wall

Each border crossed is written on the skin
And some of us are traitors deep within.

V. THE DAUGHTER'S RETURN

DAUGHTER speaks standing, proud, voice bright with fire.

DAUGHTER

They told me you had vanished. But you wrote
In thread, in margins, in the flour bag's seam
I read your syllables like they could float
Like voice could resurrect a buried dream

You wrote of barbed wire gardens, rusted gates
Of lullabies that sharpened into knives
You wrote the names of women lost to fates
Too small for courtrooms, too immense for lives

They taught me numbers. You gave me the word
You hid it in a map beneath my bed
It pulsed. It bled. It dared to be unheard
And now I speak it for the nameless dead

The ink survives. The terror does not stay
Your silence shaped the words I speak today.

VI. CHORUS

ALL voices. Lines overlap, then converge in unison.

CHORUS (fragmented, overlapping)

We are the women, knowing what we know

We are the girls with silence in our hands

We are the mothers forced to let them go

We are the ghosts that rise in foreign lands

You'll find us in the footnotes and the files

Our language shifts, but never begs or pleads

In scraps of cloth, in silent signs, in miles

Where whispered prayers are passed through hidden deeds

We do not ask permission now to speak

The breath you tried to crush drew strength from pain

We rose from rubble, starving, scorched, and weak

And carved the names you buried in disdain

ALL (in unison, rising)

The poet lives. The state will pass away

And still our tongues remember how to pray.

VII. CODA: FOR AKHMATOVA

POET alone. One step forward, softer tone.

POET

Anna, I keep your picture on my wall

Not framed, but taped, as if to say you stayed

Your gaze is not forgiving, not at all

You ask me: Have you watched your people fade?

I try, I fail. I write and try again

I fashion sonnets like they might resist

Your silence echoes in my subtle pen

Your name survives, not carved, but softly kissed

They'll say the world is new, that you are gone
But I have seen you in the refugee
In every poet smuggling a dawn
In girls who learn to name their agony

And when I'm told to hush or walk away
I mouth your lines and dare again to stay.

End.

I am a poet, a sonneteer who has written more sonnets than Shakespeare. My name, Scott Ennis, forms the anagram "Sonnettics." In 2011, I traveled on a literary tour of Russia, where I was introduced to the brilliant and harrowing work of the poet Anna Akhmatova. That experience stayed with me. Over time, I began expanding my writing into short stories and drama, so composing a short play in sonnets felt like a natural evolution.

The current state of the world made me reflect on the repetition of history and inspired me to create my own interpretation of current events based on the events Akhmatova memorialized in her piece, Requiem. If I am ever asked, as she once was, "Can you describe this?"—I hope I will have the courage to answer, as she did: "Yes, I can."