

STUDY GUIDE

ANNA AKHMATOVA (RUSSIAN)

REQUIEM (1939-1943)

1. Why does the woman in the preface ask the narrator, “Can you describe this?” Why is she happy at the poet’s response?
2. How does the figure of the narrator change over the course of the poem? Does she lose or gain a sense of identity (or both)?
3. What coherence do you perceive in the numbered poems taken as a group? What themes or strategies hold them together?
4. To what extent do the individual poems stand on their own, as independent pieces?
5. Why does the tenth numbered poem suddenly present a biblical scene? What previous elements prepare this shift in setting?
6. Does the United States have “national writers”? Regional writers? Are American writers and artists expected to act as a “national conscience”? In what way?
7. How effective do you find the poem as a political protest? *Requiem* was not published until well after the purges were over and Stalin was dead; is it, then, totally lacking in influence?
8. How does the poem witness to feelings that are timeless?