



## **Lydia Chukovsky on Anna Akhmatova**

Isaiah Berlin Online aims to post, in the fullness of time, PDFs of all Berlin's uncollected and unpublished work, including lectures, interviews and broadcasts, so that it is conveniently readable and searchable online. The present PDF is part of this series.

The PDF is posted by the Isaiah Berlin Legacy Fellow at Wolfson College, with the support of the Trustees of the Isaiah Berlin Literary Trust.

All enquiries, including those concerning rights, should be directed to the Legacy Fellow at [berlin@wolfson.ox.ac.uk](mailto:berlin@wolfson.ox.ac.uk)

## Lydia Chukovsky on Anna Akhmatova

Note on Lidiya Chukovskaya, *Zapiski ob Anna Akhmatovoi* [*Notes about Anna Akhmatova*], vol. 1, 1938–1941 (Paris, 1976),<sup>1</sup> in ‘In absentia: Some Books of the Year’, *The Times Literary Supplement*, 23 November 1979, 4



*Lidiya Korneevna Chukovskaya (1907–96)*

I FOUND Lydia Chukovsky's *Notes about Anna Akhmatova* (recently published by YMCA Press, Paris, in Russian) a deeply moving book. The author, daughter of one of the most distinguished Russian men of letters of this century, is herself a novelist and critic whose fabulous courage and integrity have not made life easier for her in her native land. She was a close friend of Akhmatova, whose poetry (and personality) she ardently admires. The book is the first volume of a diary of their meetings, day by day, sometimes hour by hour,

<sup>1</sup> [Translated by Milena Michalski, Sylva Rubashova and Peter Norman, and revised and extended by the author, as *The Akhmatova Journals*, vol. 1, 1938–41 (New York, 1994).]

LYDIA CHUKOVSKY ON ANNA AKHMATOVA

during the dark years of 1938–41, and is an account of how they lived and what they felt and thought. It is written in simple, quiet and beautiful Russian, untouched by ‘literariness’ or the desire to teach or preach, to denounce or defend. Apart from what it tells us about a great poet, it is a detailed and vivid description (which conveys a sense of complete authenticity greater than even Nadezhda Mandel’shtam’s memoirs) of the intellectually and imaginatively rich lives of a heroic handful of wholly civilised human beings, bound by ties of continuous common suffering and of love and respect for one another, who were concerned with central moral and aesthetic issues, without any trace of pettiness or triviality (perhaps the result of enforced isolation). The effect of this book is both morally and intellectually exhilarating.

© Isaiah Berlin 1979

Posted in Isaiah Berlin Online and the Isaiah Berlin Virtual Library 19 April 2023



*Akhmatova in 1940*