

Anna Akhmatova Spends the Night on Miami Beach

Well, her book, anyway. The Kunitz volume
left lying on a bench, the pages
a bit puffy by morning, flushed with dew,
riffled by sea breeze, scratchy with sand
--the paperback with the 1930's photo
showing her in spangled caftan, its back cover
calling her "star of the St. Petersburg circle
of Pasternak, Mandelstam, and Blok,
surviving the Revolution and two World Wars."

So she'd been through worse...
the months outside Lefortovo prison
waiting for a son who was already dead, watching
women stagger and reel with news of executions,
one mother asking, "Can you write about this?"
Akhmatova thinking, then answering, "Yes." [stanza break]

If music lured her off the sandy bench
to the clubs where men were kissing
l'outré wouldn't have concerned her much
nor the vamps shashaying in leather.
Decadence amid art deco fit nicely
with her black dress, chopped hair, Chanel cap.
What killed her was the talk, the empty eyes,
which made her long for the one person in ten thousand
who could say her name, who could take her home,
giving her a place between Auden and Apollinaire
to whom she could describe her night's excursion
amid the loud hilarities, the consuming hungers,

arriving towards the end of the American era.

--*Granta* and *Empires*