

MICHAEL LAVERS

Arkhangelsk

From the height of a glacier I beheld half a world. . . .

—Joseph Brodsky

1

The train ride up Russia's
north coast makes him nauseous.
Snow falls, in a hurry
to mimic the mercury,

and flapping seagulls'
Cyrillic squiggles
mark, in mute air, where
the mackerel are.

The barge traffic hum
sounds almost like home,
and a Bolshoi ballet
is pent up in each bullet.

2

If the cliché of the state
is to scribble its *stet*
on each corpus, dictate
its subjects' brief predicate,

demand they pronounce
only plural pronouns,
then what scares the tyrant
is that poems, read

from the right distance,
resemble fingerprints,
that the Hermitage
of one's language,

no matter how abstract,
can't be ransacked.
But what good are metaphors,
he thinks, *if I freeze?*

3

He'll chop a wide plot
through that dark wood
the first autumn, follow
Auden's bright shadow

until his waves crash
their accent against English
shores, making our own lines sound
so far from home.

The moon will recycle,
one day, its sickle
into a rubble
he'll pick from the rubble

of stars, and vanish,
with Charon, past Venice.
But not yet. The train comes
to the end of its sentence.

Full stop. He looks over
the cold samovar
of the evening sea.
What breakers say

to the sand isn't much,
but stones are no match,
being mere matter,
for the water's rough meter.