

A Free Variation of
Anna Akhmatova's *Lines* · Stephen Berg

I rake the hotbed straw.
I look left half a mile downhill
where the big green pond, cleared evenly around the edge,

shimmers: bare dirt circles the water.
Even from this far I can see
frilly gray scum shifting on the water

around the edge. The pond's a perfect oval.
Lamps, chairs, books: what's man-made barely has a smell.
I think I hear a little boy singing,

I think of the blackness of night, of one
especially when you never came back.
My face still feels like your face, when I remember you.

A chill floats in.
I've placed flowers all around the house,
heaped vegetables on a bed of pure black loam.

The silence of you gone—it will never end—
my lines desolate, true:
now the deep blue cloth of each lapel's

here again as I sew them onto the notched collar,
now the brass eagle-figured buttons, the stripes, the insignia,
the weeks it took to finish, weeks when the snow

stopped a minute or two then fell endlessly:
red splashes, frozen mules, my needle whisking the blue thread
through wool, air, sky . . . God

Nothing is heard unless your dying guides my hand. Hold me.
Snow makes the silence hollower. Listen.
No story. No elegy. Only

I need to say to you—
without hope, without fear, in one cold line—
28 bullet holes in the last uniform I sewed.