

*Peredelkino*

Birches wrapped in paper shivered their thin leaves and gold cupolas flamed metallic beyond the fence. "Just look for two tall pines," the woman had said, but we missed the pines and carried on, turning over dead leaves and creeping weeds with the toes of our shoes, passing fences within fences and mounds blistering the skin of the hill. That whole afternoon we toiled among the grillwork and stones, meeting no one who could tell us where the poet's bones lay. Some ancient need drove us, as if the essence of the man might lie there in the ground, rise tangible, reassuring, before our idiot gaze. As if his snap and whistle birdsong were not enough. The stone, when we found it, gave nothing more: inverse relief, likeness hollowed out of the rock, absence. . . .