

The Laureates

“Why don’t they just stay home?”

—Anna Akhmatova

When Robert Frost, on his trip to Russia,
stood by the side of Anna Akhmatova

as she showed him the forest, they gazed
at the pines and she read him her poem,

“The Last Rose,” and Frost turned to her
and asked how much money could be made

by turning those trees into pencils. “Not
possible,” she replied. “There’s a law!”

Later she said she had been embarrassed
that a poet should ask such a question.

“Why don’t these businessmen stay home?”
she asked, then sighed and said, “Banality

will be the death of me. This is enough
to confirm what Count Tolstoy once said

about poets, that they are like plowmen
plowing along and bobbing every second

or third step.” As Anna and Robert stood
gazing into the forest of pines a boy holding

the rope of his sled asked whose grandpa
and grandma they were and why they

were looking at pines, and what had they lost?