



The Burners, The Buriers

Everything I leave behind me, burn unread
wrote Kafka to Max Brod.

Petrarch consigned a thousand
work-sheets, he said, to Vulcan for correction

and Henry James in a fit of depression
burned his correspondence with

the magisterial Edith.
We might have lost

the whole *Aeneid* had Augustus
not overridden Virgil's

deathbed request. Plato as well
mistrusting his 2nd Epistle

declared
it should be set afire

but Alexander Pope asked everyone
to send his letters back again

so he could elaborate upon them
for publication.

When Prussian soldiers threatened
to storm the gates in 1871

Flaubert buried what was thought to be
a packet from Louise Colet

and far too hastily
Dante Gabriel Rossetti

griefstricken when
she overdosed on laudanum

buried all his yet
unpublished oeuvre with wife Elizabeth.

Seven years elapsed until
his want grew greater than his will.

Good friends exhumed
his manuscript from her grisly room.

But it was the Russian poets who
knew how to dig a hole for, take a match to

hoard paper, make do
with scratches on a bar of soap

who smuggled out, besmirched and pied
their Cyrillics of hope

excoriating lines we weep to read
yet leave them no less dead

Osip Mandelstam
sentenced for his Stalin epigram

Vasil Stus
buried with other zeks

along the Potma rail line
assigned a stone with number but no name.

So little rescued for posterity:
Everything I leave behind me, hold fast. Keep dry.

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