MANDELSTAM, BLOK, AND THE BOUNDARIES OF MYTHOPOETIC SYMBOLISM
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Диночке
с любовью
CONTENTS

Acknowledgments ix
Note on Transliteration xiii

PART I

Chapter 1 Introduction 3
Immediacy and Distance 3
“The living and dangerous Blok . . .” 6
Symbolism and Acmeism: An Overview 8
The Curtain and the Onionskin 15

Chapter 2 Prescient Evasions of Bloom 21

PART II

Chapter 3 Departure 35
Chapter 4 The Pendulum at the Heart of Stone 49
Chapter 5 Struggling with the Faith 56
Ambivalent Irony and the Word 57
Inverting the Symbolist Heresiography 64
Stumbling into a New Poetics 71
Stealing the Sanctuary 79
PART III

Chapter 6  Bedside with the Symbolist Hero  85
Chapter 7  The Superficial and the Profound  100
  Fodder for Parody  100
  Modernist Time Poetics  105
  The Mythopoetics of Tristia  109
Chapter 8  Blok’s Theater Poems  130
Chapter 9  Boundaries Erected, Boundaries Effaced  147
  Masquerade Bounded  148
  Theatrical Wonder Breaks Free  153

PART IV

Chapter 10  “To Anaxagoras” in the Velvet Night  167
  Visions Apart  172
  “To Anaxagoras” in the Velvet Night  176
Chapter 11  From Theatricality to Tragedy  185
Chapter 12  Of Badgers and Barstvennost’  197
Chapter 13  Conclusion: Whence (and Whither) Authenticity?  211

Appendix  217
Notes  221
Selected Bibliography  277
Index of Works by Mandelstam and Blok  291
Subject Index  297
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Russian quotations and bibliographic citations, as well as the names of contemporary scholars publishing primarily in Russian, are transliterated according to the simplified U.S. Library of Congress system. Names of Russian cultural icons, as well as those of Russian scholars broadly publishing or well recognized in the West, are given in the text in commonly used forms (e.g., Mandelstam, Gogol, Bely, Lydia Ginzburg).
PART I
Osip Mandelstam was a poet renowned for the breadth of his culture and the seeming ease with which he navigated this self-designated “blessed inheritance, / The wandering dreams of other bards.” But he was also, through no choice or fault of his own, a younger contemporary of Russian Symbolism. Transplanted as a small child from Warsaw to St. Petersburg, one of two centers of Russian Symbolism, he received his secondary education at the Tenishev School, where his teacher of Russian literature was Vladimir Gippius, a poet and aficionado of Symbolist verse with personal ties to the movement. In 1909, Mandelstam first participated in the poetry workshops of Viacheslav Ivanov, one of the Symbolist maîtres, and he continued to attend Ivanov’s “Academy” often, if not constantly, as late as 1911. Mandelstam's own first published poetry was written contemporaneously with the beginning of the decline of Russian Symbolism, and the period of his poetry through 1911 has long been recognized, with some qualifications, but fundamentally accurately, as his “Symbolist” period.
Such a uniquely non-elective connection to Russian Symbolism—among all the manifold artistic phenomena that would later sound in the poet’s “thousand-barreled reed pipe, animated at once with the breath of all ages”—demands special consideration. Mandelstam’s overarching strategy for incorporating Western culture into his poetry was “licenced thievery,” i.e., complete freedom to choose or pass over the gifts of the past. Symbolism, however, could not be freely chosen because it had, in a sense, already been given.

At the same time, the “confessional mode” and prophetic stance of the Symbolist poet were not open to Mandelstam as a Jew and a newcomer. The poetry of the “second generation” of “mythopoetic” Symbolists had been dominated by the quest for an all-transforming, mystical union with the Divine Feminine or Russia as Bride. Mandelstam, the young and somewhat awkward Jew, was, as Gregory Freidin has pointed out, no suitable bride-groom for Russia. At the same time, as the movement aged and journals became ever more inundated with the work of epigones, the late-coming Symbolist poet no longer had access to the charismatic aura necessary to maintain the crucial tension of the diaphanous word, simultaneously relating to this-worldly and otherworldly reality. As Mandelstam himself was to put it a little over a decade later, “Russian Symbolism shouted so much and so loudly about the ‘ineffable’ [neskazannoe] that this ‘ineffable’ passed hands like paper money” (II, 423).

So what was given could not be taken; nor could it be effectively employed. In a poetics that would be dominated by “distanced reiteration,” Mandelstam first had to generate distance from Symbolism in order to create the aesthetic tension required for an effective and palpably new return.

In his earliest essay, “François Villon” (Fransua Villon, 1910), Mandelstam describes how Paul Verlaine “smashed the serres chaudes [hothouses] of Symbolism,” which contained the protective atmosphere allowing that movement’s embodied allegories to flourish. Verlaine in this sense repeats the feat of Villon, who freed French poetry from the medieval “rhetorical school,” the “Symbolism of the 15th century” (II, 301). It is inevitably implied that Mandelstam can be a Villon/Verlaine on Russian soil. However, Mandelstam, the poet, “learns from everyone and speaks to everyone.” After the initial Acmeist polemics of 1912–14, Mandelstam is more concerned with incorporating the Symbolist legacy as an enriching element of his verse than in “smashing” it. As Omry Ronen notes, “In accordance with its stated aims, acmeism subordinated all cultural codes, as material, to the tasks of poetry as such, considered to be the most universal of models.”

At the same time, Symbolism was more to Mandelstam than simply a
raw material, interchangeable with any other. One has a sense that the cha-
otic, Dionysian element foregrounded in Symbolism fed Mandelstam’s own
worldview, that it was necessary to his art. After the too staid poetic cosmos
of his first book, Stone (Kamen’, 1916), the poet, faced with the turmoil of
the Great War, felt an inner call to reintroduce the Symbolist chaos to his
poetry.14

However, by 1911–12, the Symbolist poetics had in many ways spent its
charge. As noted above, lofty words had undergone “inflation” and hemor-
rhaged the value that was once perceived in their relation to a higher reality.
A major question I will be asking on these pages is how does Mandelstam
“reinvigorate” those elements of the spent Symbolist poetics that he actively
needs? As I intend to show, his main tactic is to generate productive ambiv-
alence of tone through a distinctive play with immediacy and distance.
Mythopoetic Symbolism represents a historical stage in the development of
Russian verse and of Mandelstam’s own poetry, with its own characteristic
set of motifs, *topoi*, and narrative structures. As these elements of Symbolist
poetics enter Mandelstam’s poetry, the fluid boundaries characteristic of the
Symbolist worldview—between this world and the other world, biography
and history, the world of art and the world beyond its frame—become mir-
rored within his poems. However, the Symbolists’ metaphysical boundary-
crossings and conflations of distinct spheres were in the eyes of the Acmeists
“unchaste.” When Mandelstam depicts such “encroachments,” as when the
spiritual other enters his poetry, particularly in terms borrowed from the
Symbolists themselves, there is always an open question as to the author’s
attitude toward them and as to their ontological “reality,” both within and
beyond the world of his verse.

The angle of refraction at which Symbolist *topoi* enter Mandelstam’s
poetry—which is to say, the tone and the pragmatics of the text—is ulti-
mately the key to meaning. However, tone is a notoriously difficult thing
to pin down. Therefore, while Mandelstam’s oeuvre contains varied and
often antithetical approaches to almost every problem, it is fortunate that
his poems often hold the structural cues through which we can begin to
question this angle. For instance, within two poems written in 1920 lurk
elements of the Symbolist worldview. However, in “Venetian life, morbid
and barren” (Venitseiskoi zhizni, mrachnoi i besplodnoi), boundary-dissolv-
ing masquerade—a fine analogue for one major element of the Symbolist
worldview—is paradoxically contained by manifold non-permeable frames
of paintings and mirrors. Remove is inscribed in the poem’s structure and
imagery. In contrast, in “The spectral stage barely glimmers” (Chut’ mertsai
prizrachnaia stsena), with its permeable theater curtain and semiotically
unified space of theater and vestibule, the transcendent, otherworldly realm of art, which Mandelstam depicts in terms reminiscent of the Symbolists’ vision of their Ideal, leaks out—from stage to hall to vestibule to street—by analogy contaminating, if only temporarily, the world beyond the text. Not aesthetic distance, but immediacy of experience is implied.

At the end of the Introduction, in “The Curtain and the Onionskin,” I explore two of Mandelstam’s own “metadescriptions” of this play with immediacy and distance, two metaphorical embodiments within his writings of the productively unstable boundaries at the poet’s command.

“THE LIVING AND DANGEROUS BLOK . . .”

One major goal of this study is to delineate Mandelstam’s diverse strategies for writing and rewriting his relationship with the Symbolist heritage, primarily on the cusp of and after his “conversion” to Acmeism in 1912, and to seek out the visible traces of Mandelstam’s ephemeral play with the boundary between two poetics. As an upper chronological limit for the study, I take, roughly, the period after Blok’s death in the early 1920s. This encompasses Mandelstam’s most active overcoming and assimilation of the Symbolist legacy. During this time, Symbolist authors were still active on the literary scene in Russia, however they may have come to be overshadowed for posterity by the emergence of the new movements of Acmeism and Futurism. Moreover, the literary shadow of the poet’s own genesis within the Symbolist womb had not yet dissipated to be replaced by the shadow of history, paradoxical as that may seem in 1910s Russia. Within this time frame, I focus particularly on those strategies that are not reducible to an Acmeist/Symbolist dichotomy but continue to actively engage the Symbolist tradition.

My second major goal is to present, for the first time, a coherent narrative of Mandelstam’s relation to Alexander Blok, far and away the most compelling poetic voice among the Symbolists, and the only Symbolist poet who presented Mandelstam with any apparent creative anxieties. Mandelstam was perceptive enough to note that the rival poetic movement, Futurism, “should have directed its attack [ostrie] not against the paper fortress of Symbolism, but against the living and truly dangerous Blok” (II, 348). Blok loomed large, even from the face of postcards, and his high-Romantic stance, which maintained its tragic essence even when outwardly undermined by irony, was in many ways antithetical to that which Mandelstam would cultivate.

Blok’s poetry projected a cult of the Romantic persona. Mandelstam, in
the period we are considering, claimed that his memory was “inimical to all that is personal” (II, 99). In 1921, after Blok’s death, Yury Tynianov would write:

[A legend] surrounded [Blok’s lyric hero] from the very beginning; it seemed even that it anticipated the very poetry of Blok, that his poetry only developed and supplemented the postulated image.

In this image [people] personify the whole art of Blok; when they speak of his poetry, almost always behind the poetry they inadvertently substitute a human face—and it is this face, and not the art, that everyone loved.\(^{17}\)

In contrast, the sensitive critic Boris Bukhshtab, writing in 1929, which is to say, without access to either the as-yet-unwritten poetry of the 1930s or Mandelstam’s early unpublished Symbolist verse, could assert, “a portrait accompanying Mandelstam’s poetry would be artistic tactlessness.”\(^{18}\)

In addition, Blok’s rather uncharitable view of the young poet surely had some effect on their personal relations. Mandelstam intersected with Blok in the 1910s, as might be expected, at St. Petersburg/Petrograd cultural gatherings, but he also spent at least some time with Blok in close company, thanks to their common friend, Vladimir Piast. The attitude of Blok, who despised pretense in personal relations, could not have been entirely masked, and these feelings are documented in his diaries. A. L. Grishunin catalogs most of Blok’s derogatory and often anti-Semitically tinged remarks about the younger poet.\(^{19}\) He omits one particularly telling entry: “In the evening, the ‘Academy’—Piast’s talk, his old article about the ‘canon,’ Viacheslav Ivanov’s verbosity [mnogoglagolanie] put me to sleep entirely. In the evening, we drink tea at ‘Kvisisana’—Piast, I and Mandelstam (eternal [vechnyi])” (29 October 1911).\(^{20}\) “Eternal” nicely situates Mandelstam among the other tiresome presences that oppress Blok, while simultaneously, through a nod at the Wandering Jew (Vechnyi Zhid), hinting at both the younger poet’s ethnic identity and one widely noted element of his character (that of a wanderer).\(^{21}\)

For Mandelstam, Blok’s poetry stood at the boundary between tragedy and tragic pose, which was, for him, its inherent travesty. Russian Symbolism struck the mature Mandelstam with its theatricality, and Blok possessed the voice that either could transcend this theatricality or was its most dangerous siren. Moreover, Blok’s often unpalatable and sometimes “maximalist” stances on social issues and history were foreign to the younger poet. And ultimately, Mandelstam was to find in Blok a repellent personal barstvennost’ (lordliness), judging by the subterranean jabs in Mandelstam’s prose. All
these elements combined to make Blok a deeply problematic figure, demanding much inner struggle on the part of Mandelstam.

In the context of Western literary scholarship, such a state of affairs brings to mind Harold Bloom’s theories on the anxiety of influence. In chapter 2, I set Bloom’s theories in the context of turn-of-the-century Russia. I demonstrate the awareness of Russian poets, long before Bloom, of the mechanisms and anxieties of influence, analyze Mandelstam’s ingenious and seemingly prescient dialectical evasions of Bloom, and finally, following David Bethea and Andrew Reynolds, consider the adjustments necessary to Bloom’s theories for application to Russian poetry, with its unique emphasis on word as deed and the lived life of the poet. Thus placed in proper perspective, Bloom indeed turns out to be useful for examining certain aspects of Mandelstam’s relation to Blok.

The heart of the narrative of Mandelstam’s relation to Blok is to be found in the chapters beginning with chapter 6, “Bedside with the Symbolist Hero.” Of course, it is not always possible or desirable to separate Mandelstam’s coming to terms with Blok from his assimilation of Symbolism more broadly.

**SYMBOLISM AND ACMEISM: AN OVERVIEW**

Russian Symbolism emerged in the 1890s under the influence of European, and particularly French, Symbolism and as a reaction to the positivist aspects of Russian literary realism and the social directedness of Russian literary criticism.22 These dogmas had exerted an almost suffocating dominance in the development of Russian poetry from the 1840s on, marginalizing aesthetic concerns and those poets who were given over to them. Early Russian Symbolist poets—for instance, Dmitry Merezhkovsky, Valery Briusov, Zinaida Gippius, Konstantin Bal’mont, Fedor Sologub—were importers of recent European cultural developments and proselytizers of a pan-aestheticizing worldview, megalomaniacal, amoral individualists and seekers of the new religious consciousness. Often, they combined these seemingly contradictory impulses in complex and paradoxical amalgams.

The second “generation” of Symbolists, whose literary debuts came shortly after the turn of the twentieth century, were deeply influenced by such contradictory forces as Friedrich Nietzsche, on the one hand, and Vladimir Solov’ev’s Sophiological theology and messianism, on the other.23 Drawing upon Orthodox religious philosophy, a variety of mystic traditions, German Romanticism, and the theories of the nineteenth-century Ukrainian linguist Alexander Potebnia, they developed a Neoplatonic understanding
of the nature and function of the word and artwork, the value of which lay in its connection to the greater reality of the ideal realm. Thus emerged an eschatologically oriented poetics, weighted toward tragedy (both personal and national), which viewed art from within a religious-teleological framework and valued Dionysian rapture and transcendence of the self.

These poets believed in the inseparability of life and art and the importance and the possibility of life-creation (zhiznetvorchestvo)—both on a personal-artistic plane and also on a cosmic scale, which demanded that the artist be a theurgist, that is, act upon the world through the connection of his or her art to a higher reality. Their ultimate goal, arising from these precepts, was, at least theoretically, collective creation—myth-creation (mifotvorchestvo). At the same time, artists such as Blok and Andrei Bely could not help experiencing doubts as to the reality—or at least imminence—of all these things. Doubts generated more whirlpools of tragedy (heroic pessimism) and irony, disillusionment and rebirth, stoic renunciation of the poet-prophet's path, and "heretical," at times carnivalesque, aestheticism.

"Mythopoetic" (myth-creating) is a potentially problematic term, and I want to make clear that I have no intention of implying an adequacy of the Symbolists’ works to the nature of myth in archaic cultures. The term is no more nebulous or inaccurate than the more broadly used “younger,” however, and it certainly speaks more profoundly, even if demanding corrections and qualifications, to the nature of the younger Symbolists’ art. In any case, we can speak of a striving toward myth, which perhaps, strictly speaking, “devolved” into the generation of narratives, but narratives that were latent in these poets' works from the very beginning because of their investment in certain archetypal situations, which lent their works structure and commonality. Hence, the mythopoetic Symbolists’ works exhibit not only retrospective descriptions and rearrangements of their own earlier poetry into narrative form, but also anticipations in their early poetry of later developments, precisely because these developments are structured into the initial problem.

Blok’s poetic path, in particular, struck contemporaries with its apparent organicity, its semblance of natural generation from its roots. Modest Gofman, writing in 1908, highlights an important aspect of Blok’s poetry:

[Blok] starts from wavering and doubt in the existence of the World Soul as a Prekrasnaia Dama.

Но страшно мне: изменишь облик Ты,
И дерзкое возбудишь подозренье,
Гофман продолжает: “И всё первые романтические периоды творчества Александра Блока (дойдя до “Снежной маски” [Snezhnaia maska, 1907, S.G.]) можно охарактеризовать как развертывание этих строк”29

И в терминах повествования, мы можем даже говорить, в пределах этого движения, об обобщённом романтическом эпосе включая в себя визуализацию, потерю и кругоход возврат, с обогащением память.30 Блок представил эту внутреннюю историю пути символиста-поэта в виде хегелевского триада (”О текущем состоянии русского символизма” [O sovremennom sostoianii russkogo simvolizma, 1910]), Бели в терминах неизвестного, и, следовательно, внушенного, видения новичка, приводящего к духовной смерти и воскресению (“Вместо вступления” [Vmesto predislovia] в Urna [Urna, 1909]).31 Третий большой мифологический символистский поэт и наиболее видный представитель движения — Вячеслав Иванов. Его точка зрения с самого начала кажется всеобъемлющей и неизменной, будто бы с верхов и магистратов.32 Однако, то же ”миф“ информирует Иванова’s ранних работ на другом масштабе. С одной стороны, это исторический масштаб человечества уходящих от прямого опыта бога, потребность искать пути назад к близости или взаимодействию в настоящее, и ожидание (chaianie) воскрешения общечеловеческого и возрождения архаического-религиозного трагедии как конечной цели искусства в будущем.33 С другой стороны, это продолжающийся и бесконечно повторяющийся драматический путь ведущего души к богу, как изображено, например, в поэме “Маена” (Menada, 1905).34

Опора на все другие структуры на мифологическом повествовательном изложении, как изложено в винт Сержи Соловьева’s обзора All Melodies (Vse napévy, 1909), одного из основных символистских поэтов старшего поколения:35

The imperial quiet of fall has descended on the poetry of Briusov:

*And ever more calmly, ever more submissively*
*I walk toward some Bethlehem.*
With these words he ends his book. The poet heads for Bethlehem, carrying the gold of his poetry as a gift to the unknown god. It is pure and imperishable: the poet has turned to gold the tears of Orpheus, pining for his lost Euridice.36

Briusov saw *All Melodies* as the end of an epoch in his poetry. His poem “Star” (*Zvezda*, 1906) is indeed written in the mythopoetic mode, summing up certain key themes of his poetry and submitting them all to an overarching narrative of mystical revelation and humble pilgrimage and expectation. However, “Star” is not the end of the book; it is one of four poems that, in their symmetry, make up the final section of *All Melodies*—“Conclusion.” “Star” is not even the last of these, each of which is a summation of Briusov’s poetry from a different perspective, stressing the many faces of his art. Solov’ev, however, has a need to see the mythopoetic narrative as the *telos* of Briusov’s poetry as a whole.

It is surely not coincidental that Mikhail Gasparov, supremely aware of Mandelstam’s writings and skeptical of the religious content of the Symbolists’ art, challenges the mythic status precisely of Don Juan and Carmen, those two archetypal plot kernels that Mandelstam, on the basis of Blok’s poetry, asserts have recently attained “civic equality” with myth.37 Mandelstam himself, as we see, chooses these words carefully, even as he accords Blok this grandest achievement among his contemporaries. Still, Mandelstam is receptive not only to Blok’s myth-making, but also to Ivanov’s claims to mythological thinking (in the archaic sense) and also applies the concept of contemporary myth-making in his own work.38 At the same time, Mandelstam is careful not to repeat the errors of Ivanov, who, despite the authenticity of his archaism—“never for a minute does he forget himself, speaking in his barbaric native tongue”—“unbelievably overloaded his poetry with Byzantine-Hellenic images and myths, significantly devaluing it” (II, 343, 341).

A sense of the power of myth-creation, at least within the artistic realm, is, in fact, one of the more profound aspects of the younger Symbolists’ influence upon Mandelstam. In his programmatic essay “Pushkin and Skriabin” (*Pushkin i Skriabin*, 1916–17?), Mandelstam writes about the “myth of forgotten Christianity.” This myth, the generative power of which is precisely in its occlusion of truth—Christianity has been forgotten, allowing us to search for it anew—is the gift, in large part, of the Symbolists themselves. Their anguished searchings betray their failure to recognize the redemption. Mandelstam’s *Tristia* demonstrates how this myth can become a fertile conceptual model, spreading through and organizing, to varying degrees, individual poems.39
The diachronic Symbolist macroplot takes its inner dynamism at any given point from the striving of the poet—treated with seriousness or ironically undermined—to break down the walls of rational, three-dimensional, historical existence, traversing, through theurgy and life-creation, the boundaries between “this world” and the “other world,” art and life. As Briusov notes, “Art is only there, where there is audacious striving [derznovenie] to get beyond the limit, where there is a thrust beyond the boundaries of the knowable, in the thirst to draw even a drop of the ‘alien, otherworldly element’ [stikhii chuzhdoi, zapredel’noi].” Acmeism originated in the wake of the Symbolists’ own “crisis” and debates on the nature of art, and not least from a desire to re-establish these boundaries, which the poets and their epigones had often too cheerfully vanquished. “The first condition of successful building,” wrote Mandelstam, “is sincere piety toward the three dimensions of space—to look at the world not as a burden and an unfortunate accident, but as a God-given palace” (II, 322).

Still, it was clear even from the beginning—at least to the Acmeists themselves—that this respect for boundaries should not exclude religious feeling. Nikolai Gumilev: “To always remember the ineffable, but not insult one’s thought about it with more or less likely conjectures—this is the principle of Acmeism.” Mandelstam: “The Middle Ages are dear to us because they possessed to a high degree a sense of boundaries and partitions. They never mixed different planes and related to the otherworldly with enormous restraint. A noble amalgam of rationality and mysticism and a perception of the world as a living equilibrium binds us to this epoch [ . . . ]” (II, 325).

The sense of boundaries and equilibrium in early Acmeism led, particularly in the poetry of Mandelstam, to the magnificent graphic and architectural poetry that to this day underlies some studies of Acmeist poetics. But the rigor of this distance between poet and world, subject and object, was precisely what was necessary in order to lay the foundation for more subtle play with, and sometimes assaults on, boundaries. As Sergei Averintsev wrote, “Mandelstam’s path to the infinite [ . . . ] is through the taking serious of the finite as finite, through the firm laying of a sort of ontological boundary.”

As has been noted many times, Acmeism defies easy or precise characterization in terms of chronology, adherents, or poetics. In a compelling synthesis, Oleg Lekmanov, in Kniga ob akmeizme (1998), defines the movement as a series of concentric circles. On the outside, there was the loosely allied Poets’ Guild, organized by Gumilev and Sergei Gorodetsky in October 1911, which included a fairly broad variety of mostly younger poets. Their meetings consisted of reading by each participant and grounded, detailed
discussion and criticism. Many of these poets published in the substantially Acmeist journal *The Hyperborean (Giperborei)*, edited by the substantially Symbolist Mikhail Lozinsky. The middle circle consisted of those six poets who named themselves Acmeists, and whose collective publications, together with Gumilev and Gorodetsky’s manifestoes, presented the face of the new movement in early 1913. These were Vladimir Narbut, Mikhail Zenkevich, Gorodetsky, Gumilev, Anna Akhmatova, and Mandelstam. They still represented very broadly differing poetics, ranging from the more staid and classical to the more earthy and grotesque. (As Lekmanov and others have noted, Mandelstam himself leaned at times to the “left” wing, and even courted Futurism.) The innermost circle was defined by the “semantic poetics” and ongoing subtextual dialogue of those three poets, still varying broadly in temperament, the sum of whose works have largely defined our picture of the movement *ex post facto*: Gumilev, Akhmatova, and Mandelstam.

Victor Zhirmunsky, in his classic first analysis of the new movement, summarized Gorodetsky and Gumilev’s program: “the exiling from art of mysticism as a mandatory topic and the fundamental goal of all poetic creation,” “instead of a complex, chaotic, isolated individual—the variety of the outside world, instead of emotional, musical lyricism—precision and graphic visuality in the combination of words.” Generalizing, we can speak of a series of contrasts of emphasis, differentiating Symbolism and Acmeism in the Acmeists’ writings: music vs. architecture, the Dionysian vs. the Apollonian (chaos vs. cosmos), religious initiates vs. a guild of medieval craftsmen (but also Masonic builders), impressionism vs. clarity/precision, the other-worldly vs. the culturally distant and the extrapersonal (the interlocutor, the precursor) as the source of art’s seeking outside of itself.

Mandelstam noted, however, that “not the ideas, but the tastes of the Acmeists” dealt a mortal blow to Symbolism. “The ideas turned out to be adopted in part from the Symbolists, and Viacheslav Ivanov himself aided much in the construction of Acmeist theory” (II, 257). The Acmeists’ new tastes were connected, first and foremost, to a sense of balance—balance in worldview, balance in approach to the individual (*lichnost’*), and balance in the development of and attention to all aspects of poetic language, in a way that does not favor any one factor or distinguish between form and content.

Still, Acmeism also arose as a reaction against the hypertrophic musically and vagueness of Symbolism. “For the Acmeists, the conscious sense of the word, Logos, is just as beautiful a form as music for the Symbolists,” wrote Mandelstam (II, 321). Later, Mandelstam would call the Acmeists “smysoviki” (senseworkers), and one of the most influential studies of the
poetics of Acmeism finds its essence precisely in its “semantic poetics.” This semantic poetics was not neutral but tended toward the compounding of “ambivalent antitheses” and the multiplication of semantic vectors. Mandelstam had a deep affinity for the writings of Pavel Florensky, perhaps in part because, for Florensky too, “both thesis and antithesis, in their contradictory simultaneity, are essential to ‘truth.’”

This perception of truth as the simultaneous presence of contradictory perspectives and a feeling for the exponentially expansive associative potential of language underlie the dialogism of Acmeism—its renowned subtextual poetics. In the Acmeists’ poetry, the voices of others are not subsumed in the monolithic voice of the poet (as in Blok’s allusions to other poets, for instance) but remain a simultaneously composite and organic whole, a fugue of perceptibly competing voices and impulses, which is nonetheless transcended in the organic voice of the poet.

Competing and coexisting components of truth are also visible in the interrelation of humor and seriousness in Acmeism and in the nature of Acmeist irony. For Blok, irony was a destructive force, a seductive, derisive nihilism, which he himself applied to consummate artistic effect in the poetry and drama of his “antithesis.” The other Symbolists’ irony was more diverse and more constructive. However, it was hardly comparable in tone to the Acmeists’ “luminous [svetlaia] irony, not undermining the roots of our belief.”

Similarly, Acmeism was characterized by the sting of inside jokes, and in its early period, by a certain cabaret atmosphere, which can inform in absentia even the most serious of the Acmeists’ works. One did not hamper the other, and even existentially sustained it. In Mandelstam, the beautiful and serious—even lofty—“slow whirlpool” [medlennyi vodovorot] of “Sisters—heaviness and tenderness” (Sestry—tiazhest’ i nezhnost’, 1920) can reappear, transformed into the “funnel of a urinal” [voron(ka) pissuara] in a 1925 translation from Jules Romain’s Les Copains (1913), with no perceived threat to the integrity of the original context. In Blok’s poetry, such transformations, for instance, that of the transcendent Fair Lady into a prostitute or cardboard doll, are perceived as an attack on the ontological reality of the original revelation or, at the least, a ridiculing of the poet’s earlier naïveté.

The expression “ambivalent antithesis” emphasizes the irreconcilable and unreconciled in Acmeism: “I’m a double dealer, with a dual soul, / I am friend of night, I’m day’s champion” [Dvurushnik ia, s dvoinoi dushoi, / Ia nochii drug, ia dnia zastrel’shcik]. However, Acmeist poetics can, as Omry Ronen demonstrates, also often be perceived as dialectical synthesis or sublation. The second wave of influence of Symbolism in Mandelstam’s poetry,
first visible in “Ode to Beethoven” (Oda Betkhovenu, 1914) and palpable throughout the poetry of the Tristia period (1916–early 1921), is just such a sublation of Apollonian and Dionysian, masculine and feminine impulses in a tonally ambivalent and entirely new synthesis worthy of the “hermaphroditic” lyric poet (“François Villon”).

Another powerful example of Acmeist sublation is Mandelstam’s understanding of the nature of the word. As we see in “On the Nature of the Word” (O prirode slova, 1922), the word, for Mandelstam, is freed of its connection to a Platonic idea, of its realism, in that counterintuitive medieval-philosophical sense that underlies Ivanov’s usage in the term “realistic Symbolism.” Hence, he is in his rights to speak of Russian nominalism (referring to the competing strain of thought, which saw meaning as deriving from linguistic convention). However, it is specifically the word’s “inner freedom”—its freedom from the bonds of reference and from utilitarianism, even (or especially) the utilitarianism of “mystic intuition”—which makes it akin to Christ, the Word, makes it “active flesh, resolving itself in an event” [plot’ deiatel’naia, razreshaiushchaiasia v sobytie] (II, 246). Mandelstam thus comes to a remarkably deep and original synthesis between linguistic rationalism and a “mystic presumption” about the nature of the word.

THE CURTAIN AND THE ONIONSKIN

In Mandelstam’s works we encounter two images that most emphatically demonstrate, even embody, the poet’s play with the productively unstable boundaries between discrete spheres of existence: in one case, temporal planes, and in the other, poetry and life. As such, the curtain and the onionskin are fine models for the shifting and ambiguous state of remove at which the Symbolist heritage finds a place in Mandelstam’s poetry.

In the final paragraph of “In a Fur Coat above His Station” (V ne po chinu barstvennoi shube), the last essay of Mandelstam’s autobiographical The Noise of Time (Shum Vremeni, 1923–24), Mandelstam writes, “With trepidation do I lift [slightly, tentatively, S.G.] the film of onionskin covering the winter hat of the writer” [S trepetom pripodnimaiu plenku voshchennoi bumagi nad zimnei shapkoi pisatelia] (II, 108). The raising of the corner of the fine sheet of translucent paper that shielded portraits and engravings in the era’s books visually evokes the poet’s play with immediacy and distance. Moreover, the image that had been shielded by the layer of onionskin itself represents both immediacy—the writer’s unmediated contact with the frigid night of Russian reality, “where terrible statehood is like a stove, piping with
ice” [gde strashnaia gosudarstvennost’; kak pech’, pyshushchaia l’dom] (II, 108)—and remove—the aristocratic “fur” that the writer of the nineteenth century “grew” in order to protect himself from the cold: “Night thickened his coat. Winter clothed him” (ibid.).

The essay’s overarching theme is the poet’s transition from vicarious witness of Symbolism as a child, experiencing contact with literature through the mediation of books and Symbolist “house servant” Vladimir Gippius, to Russian Poet in the present. This shift, echoed metaphorically in the poet’s initial stepping out into the cold together with Gippius, engenders ambivalence on several levels. Partly, this ambivalence is connected to issues of class, nineteenth-century Russian literature’s perceived barstvennost’ (aristocracy, lordliness), which will be at the center of our attention in terms of Mandelstam’s relation to Blok in chapter 12. But also, contact with reality is fraught with real dangers. The writer in the main stream of the Russian tradition is a writer in the world.66 As Bethea once put it, “the lived life of the poet” becomes “a record of the authenticity of the text.”67 And Mandelstam himself had seen in the death of the artist a final, transformative creative act (II, 313).

The onionskin thus represents the translucent, tissue-fine boundary between the writer as writer and the writer as social actor, between word as art and word as deed—in essence, between literature and life.68 Not surprisingly, this final image of The Noise of Time possesses a rich dualism. On the one hand, the present-tense “pripodnimaiu” [I lift] can convey past action, the perspective of the child, who, raising the corner of the onionskin together with Gippius, gets his first intimations of the exhilarating and frightening presence of the Russian poetic tradition. Mandelstam the child lifts the onionskin from the book-bound portrait of the writer cautiously, and he very well may let it fall in fright. On the other hand, the mature poet, in the 1920s, is forced to raise the onionskin in earnest, for the deaths of Blok, Gumilev, and Velimir Khlebnikov serve as an undeniable affirmation of the potent and, in fact, deadly relationship between literature and life. Still, there is an aesthetic pleasure to be derived from this play with perspective, a pleasure that one clearly senses in this passage as well.

Another locus of play with immediacy and distance, this time taken from Mandelstam’s poetry, is the “theater” curtain of “I will not see the celebrated Phèdre” (Ia ne uvizhu znamenitoi “Fedry,” 1915), the poem that closes the canonical 1916 edition of Mandelstam’s first book, Stone:

Я не увижу знаменитой «Федры»
В старинном многоярусном театре,
С прокопченной высокой галереи,
При свете оплывающих свечей.
И, равнодушен к суете актеров,
Сбирающих рукоплесканий жатву,
Я не услышу, обращенный к рампе,
Двойною рифмой оперенный стих:

— Как эти покрывала мне постылы...

Театр Расина! Мощная завеса
Нас отделяет от другого мира;
Глубокими морщинами волнуя,
Меж ним и нами занавес лежит:
Спадают с плеч классические шали,
Расплавленный страданьем крепнет голос,
И достигает скорбного закала
Негодованьем раскаленный слог...

Я опоздал на праздник Расина!

Вновь шелестят истлевшие афиши,
И слабо пахнет апельсинной коркой,
И словно из столетней летаргии
Очнувшийся сосед мне говорит:
— Измученный безумством Мельпомены,
Я в этой жизни жажду только мира;
Уйдем, покуда зрители-шакалы
На растерзанье Музы не пришли!

Когда бы грек увидел наши игры...

I will not see the celebrated Phèdre
In a venerable, many-tiered theater,
From the high, soot-smoked gallery,
By the light of guttering candles.
And, indifferent to the bustle of the actors,
Gathering a harvest of ovations,
I will not hear addressed to the footlights,
A verse plumed with double rhyme:

How these veils weary me . . .
Theater of Racine! A mighty curtain
Divides us from another world.
Agitating with deep furrows,
Twixt them and us a curtain lies:
Classical shawls drop from shoulders,
A voice molten with anguish strengthens,
And the diction, inflamed by indignation,
Strikes a mournful temper . . .

I am late to Racine’s festivities!

The crumbled programs rustle once again,
And the scent of orange rind faintly wafts,
And my neighbor, as if awakened
From a hundred-year lethargy, says to me:
—Tortured by the ravings of Melpomene,
In this life I thirst for only peace.
Let us hence, while the jackals of the audience
Have not yet come to tear the Muse asunder.

If only could a Greek observe our games . . .

Outwardly, the poem affirms the inaccessibility of a cultural heritage that will forever remain in the past. The shift from the alexandrine couplets of Racine’s Phèdre to this poem’s blank verse seems to subtly reinforce the concept of a barrier that makes a perfect translation from one cultural idiom to another impossible. However, even in the first octave, as Gregory Freidin was first to note, Mandelstam quite vividly brings to life that very same theater of Racine, which his hero “will not see.” What is more, in the first monostich, Phèdre appears almost to empathize with the hero, to similarly suffer from the mutual impenetrability of their worlds.

“How these veils weary me!” she laments. And though, in the world of Racine’s tragedy, her words refer to the oppressive splendor that surrounds her in her shame, in Mandelstam’s poem the mention of these coverings (pokryvala) immediately precedes the theme of the “mighty curtain,” which, “agitating with deep furrows,” separates Racine’s theater from the present. Phèdre’s words, we are told, are directed at the footlights, that sublime boundary that forms the very essence of theater and is the natural locus of the invisible, but weighty, curtain. “Plumed,” like an arrow, or a swallow, Phè-
Dre's line, which is to say Racine's poetry, tests the powerful dividing curtain from the opposite side.\textsuperscript{73}

The description of the curtain is followed in the second octave by a pronounced crescendo—not quite conveyed in the translation, where the syntax has forced me to reverse the last two lines. Here, the poet mentally enters and seems on the verge of embodying in the present the space of Racine's theater. The structure of the poem primes us to expect that the “voice molten with anguish” will belong to Phèdre. However, Racine's heroine unexpectedly, but judiciously, fails to materialize in the second monostich, supplanted by the voice of the poet: “I am late to Racine's festivities!” I say judiciously because it was, after all, the dividing curtain that “agitated,” provoking this “diction, inflamed with indignation.”\textsuperscript{74}

Though the lyric persona once more laments having missed the performance, the third octave even more openly asserts the re-emergence—even resurrection—of Racine's era in the present: “Vnov’ shelie stlevshie afishi” [The crumbled (decayed) programs rustle once again]. In the final monostich, the poet again seems resolved to the firm delineation of cultural strata—twentieth-century Russia, seventeenth-century France, and the ancient Greece of Euripides. Mandelstam's attempts to breach the boundary between epochs are accorded the status of play, “games.”

However, in the next poem, which opens the poet's second collection, \textit{Tristia}, all curtains are raised.\textsuperscript{75} Racine's Phèdre now declaims her role in proper alexandrine couplets. She is answered by a voice that speaks as part of an archaic tragic chorus and seeks to appease the god-like black sun, which has risen as a result of her guilt.\textsuperscript{76} Still, a consciousness of the fact that there was and is a curtain, and that it has been raised, remains. This consciousness serves as a prerequisite, allowing, in the end, for the more “Symbolist” poetics of \textit{Tristia} as a whole, in which chronological and spatial boundaries are often wiped away, taboos subverted.\textsuperscript{77}

The poet's words in “Pushkin and Skriabin” about how the pre-existing salvation of the world by Christ frees the Christian artist to “wander the footpaths of mystery” \textit{in play} (II, 315) are a similar logical “loophole.” They allow the poet not to renounce the footpaths of mystery—that is, the central theme of mythopoetic Symbolism—while at the same time not implicating himself in the Symbolists' hubris. (The Symbolists of course believed that they were wandering or straying from these paths in earnest.)

Applied to Symbolism, play with the curtain or the onionskin, the translucent and dynamic barrier that separates the two poetics, amounts to play with the pragmatics of the text, the relation of the text to its audience and
to extratextual reality. In a variety of ways, not the last of which is a special sort of ambiguous and almost weightless irony, Mandelstam establishes one degree of separation between the “author” and renewed and reactivated motifs, ideas, and poetic devices borrowed from Symbolism. However, this paper-thin and always ambiguous separation often allows not so much for the dismissal or ridicule of Symbolist claims—for instance, to the transcendent power of word and name—as for their underhanded affirmation, with a renewed force, which proceeds from an infusion of conceptual complexity and healthy, self-deprecating doubt.

Mandelstam came to understand this power of ambiguous denial very early. So he concluded his earliest essay, on that “thieving angel” François Villon, and with it, later, his collection of essays, On Poetry (O poezii, 1928):78

“I know well that I am not the son of an angel, crowned with the diadem of a star or another planet,” said about himself a poor Parisian schoolboy, capable of much for the sake of a good dinner.

Such denials are equivalent to a positive conviction. (II, 309)79
What happens when, rather than testing the applicability of Harold Bloom’s theories of poetic influence to Mandelstam’s poetry, one instead uses the works of Mandelstam and other turn-of-the-twentieth-century Russian poets to test Bloom himself, to put to question the inevitability of what Bloom represents as universal mechanisms of authorship and literary evolution? By looking at these poets, and especially Mandelstam, we may observe that the issues Bloom raises are in fact real, and, indeed, of importance to Russian poets, but, at the same time, that they are not hidden from view, as Bloom would have it, expressed only at the level of a Freudian repression and compensation. Moreover, we will see that Mandelstam demonstrates a range of compelling strategies not only to circumvent these anxieties, but to obviate them on a plane that represents a dialectical revision of Bloom’s theories.

Bloom, in 1973, when he was publishing *The Anxiety of Influence*, probably did not know Mandelstam or his works. Moreover, one senses that he would be little concerned with the results of the present research—for he is far more invested in the creative force of his own theoretical narrative. However, it is nonetheless instructive...
to juxtapose these two very distant authors: Bloom, the poetically minded theorist of late-twentieth-century America, and Mandelstam, the early-twentieth-century Russian poet.3

Mandelstam seemed to Anna Akhmatova a poet uniquely without influences. “Mandelstam has no teacher,” she wrote, “I don’t know a similar instance in world poetry.”4 At the same time, Nadezhda Mandelstam noted the poet’s openness to the work of others: “I learn from everyone—even from Benedikt Livshits,” he is reported to have said.5 Mandelstam indeed presents at least the appearance of having completely escaped poetic anxiety. Still, he clearly did experience some degree of anxiety before Alexander Blok, and his “superhuman chastity” in regard to Alexander Pushkin (noted by Akhmatova) also points to latent anxieties.6 The need to sidestep anxiety goes to the heart of what is Bloomian, and it is the poet’s struggle precisely with the most powerful precursor or precursors that typically draws Bloom’s interest. And yet Mandelstam appears to me to be a “strong latecomer” in a sense both unforeseen by Bloom and anticipating him—the poet presciently aware of the mechanisms and psychology of influence. His success in sidestepping verbal anxiety is attributable particularly to his ingenious positioning of his poetry vis-à-vis the concepts of influence, priority, and originality.

Bloom’s Anxiety of Influence theory centers on the concept that poetic influence, rather than expressing acceptance of the poetic father figure through direct borrowing, is a process of repulsion from the past through acts of creative “misprision” (misreading). The poetic present is progressively narrowed as ever-diminished poets search for their own space in a universe divested of priority. Strong poets are those who are able to take up the struggle with the father figure and emerge as individual poetic voices. Bloom’s post-Freudian approach to the psychology of poetic creation is centered around the image of the “Family Romance,” with its latent tension between son and father (precursor); Bloom represents this Oedipal struggle as the core narrative of any strong poet’s genesis as poet.7

Mandelstam’s immediate literary context as a beginning poet and the source, positive or negative, of much of his conceptual framework as a thinker about poetry is to be found in Russian Symbolism and, in particular, in Viacheslav Ivanov.8 Michael Wachtel, in his study of the influence of Goethe and Novalis on Ivanov, argues that the Russian Symbolists defy the Bloomian model altogether, as a result of their lifelong emphasis on poetry as reception. A single, synthetic tradition, and cults of memory and simul-
taneity, lead to a poetics that celebrates, rather than resists, the poetic past. “Rarely,” he writes, “has a creative movement so eagerly and energetically looked backwards.”9 Still, the Russian Symbolists, while affirming the continuity of the tradition, provided vivid examples of strong misprision. Consider, for instance, Bely’s reading of the Nietzsche of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as a Christ figure.10 Continuity meant that every great artist was a Symbolist and ought to be read as such.

The Symbolists, it should be noted, displayed a demonstrable awareness of issues of originality, priority, and influence. Briusov, for instance, wrote, in 1920:

> Often places not at all similar in terms of outward content more deeply reveal the influence of another writer than those that are almost identical. In the very insistency with which one or another method is repudiated, one can sometimes more accurately trace influence than in imitations.11

It would be hard to get closer, in the rationalist language of Briusov, to the underlying principle of Bloom’s Anxiety of Influence, stripped of its Freudian and Romantic-metaphorical vestments. Even among the younger Symbolists, with their religious/mystical bent and striving for collective (*sobornoe*) creativity, there reigned a *de facto* code of originality. Consider the following letter, written by Blok to Sergei Solov’ev in December 1903, shortly after the publication of Briusov’s *Urbi et orbi*:

> Your last name is pasted onto your poems . . . In my opinion, in [“Korolevna”] there is no imitation of Bely. I hurry to assure you that you never seemed to me a “humble worker” . . . Is it possible to write: “Malchik na gorke uzh vez sanki s obmerzloi verevkoi?” It’s already written in “Urbi et Orbi!” I will not suffer such a usurpation from Briusov, and I will take revenge on you with a dagger—in my time. Incidentally, one should think that soon I myself will write poems which will all turn out to be duplicates of Briusov.12

First, Blok seems to answer concerns, apparently voiced earlier by Solov’ev himself, that the latter poet may be too dependent on Bely, even that all of his last poems are imitative (that his name is pasted onto *others’* poems). Then, he playfully criticizes Solov’ev for repeating Briusov, himself incorporating a paraphrase from Briusov’s epistle to Bely in *Urbi et Orbi*, and, finally, unerringly foretells his own coming dependence on Briusov’s poetry. We can see, then, that for Solov’ev and Blok, originality (hence priority) is a concern and
a valid criterion for evaluating poetry, if, for Blok at least, it is apparently not a matter of great anxiety.

Blok the Symbolist appears largely free of poetic anxiety—and, in fact, the ease with which he borrowed led to certain disingenuous comments by Mandelstam:

Beginning from a direct, almost pupil-like dependence upon Vladimir Solov’yev and [the late Romantic poet Afanasy] Fet, Blok did not completely break with a single one of the obligations he had taken upon himself, did not cast off a single piety, did not trample a single canon. He only complicated his poetic credo with more and more pieties [. . .]. (SS, II, 273–74)

Blok’s poetry, perhaps because of his great “receptiveness,” provides some excellent examples of Bloom’s *apophrades*, an opening of one’s poetry to the spirits of the dead, with the “uncanny effect [. . .] that the new poem’s achievement makes it seem to us, not as though the precursor were writing it, but as though the later poet himself had written the precursor’s characteristic work.” Bloom later writes, “When I read [Stevens’s] *Le Monocle de Mon Oncle* now, in isolation from other poems by Stevens, I am compelled to hear Ashbery’s voice, for this mode has been captured by him, inescapably and perhaps forever.”13 Similarly, in some of Fet’s poetry of the late 1880s, when one reads it now, one cannot help hearing to an uncanny extent strains of Blok. What was an incidental strand in the former has become central to the latter.14

In Mandelstam’s poetry, we can sense, if not anxiety, then an awareness of poetic latecoming as a problem that demanded overcoming. His most eloquent statement on poetic belatedness is “The bread is poisoned and the air drunk up” (1913):

Отравлен хлеб и воздух выпит.  
Как трудно раны врачевать!  
Иосиф, проданный в Египет,  
Не мог сильнее тосковать!

Под звездным небом бедуины,  
Закрыв глаза и на коне,  
Слагают вольные былины  
О смутно пережитом дне.

Немного нужно для наитий:
It is well known that air is a frequent symbol of poetic freedom and poetic creation in Mandelstam’s poetry, recurring regularly almost from his first poems to his last. In “The bread is poisoned,” the air has been drunk, used up. Moreover, to take our cue from the poet’s namesake, Joseph, the biblical dream reader, it has been used up by his jealous and ungifted brothers. This image of poetic deprivation is contrasted to the final three stanzas’ depiction of a poetic golden age, displaced from the “poet” not chronologically, but culturally, in the improvisatory and oral creation of the Bedouins, who are uninhibited latecomers. These free artists exist in a space of unstifled creation (their “free lays” contrast with the image of Joseph, sold into slavery), a space where one can breathe and sing “with the whole chest.” It is finally
this uninhibited, but, for the “poet,” unattainable, freedom that can produce a transcendence of all spatial boundaries and a face-to-face meeting with the eternal stars.

It is more than tempting to read this account as an expression of anxiety of influence with regard specifically to the Russian Symbolists. The younger generation, with the exception of Ivanov, are, by age, more accurately described as elder siblings than poetic fathers. Their proximity, in both time and place—down to a frequenting of the same cultural gatherings and publication in the same journals—makes them prime candidates to steal the “poet’s” air. Their jealous stinginess in recognizing Mandelstam’s talents equates them with Joseph’s brothers.

Moreover, in the poem’s finale, Mandelstam’s lyric “I” lays claim, through the surrogate Bedouins, and over the heads of the also latecoming Symbolists, to the stars. Stars, while a natural association for the once Sabaean Bedouins, were a central symbol particularly for the younger generation of Symbolists, led by Ivanov, whose first books of poetry and theory were entitled *Pilot Stars* (Kormchie zvezdy, 1903) and *By the Stars* (Po zvezdam, 1909), respectively.\(^\text{18}\) It is a trick of Mandelstam’s virtuosity that the overall impression derived from the poem is one of absolute freedom, rather than the latecomer’s suffocation. This impression is not only a result of the poem’s composition—the preponderance of strophes dealing with the Bedouins. Mandelstam, who, like the horsemen of the second stanza, was noted for reading his poetry with his eyes closed, subtly interpolates—in fact, almost sublimates—himself into the picture of poetic uninhibitedness.\(^\text{19}\)

In addition, the concept that “little is needed for inspiration” challenges the Symbolists’ valorization of universal themes.\(^\text{20}\) Priority, for Mandelstam, does not depend either on chronology or on scale, as it clearly does for Bloom. Creative space (“Prostranstvo, zvezdy”) can emerge suddenly from the infinitesimal (a pathway more fully explored in Mandelstam’s poetry of the 1930s).\(^\text{21}\) Finally, it gives some satisfaction to note that, in Mandelstam’s “Bloomian” poem *avant la lettre*, the family feud of literary succession is expressed without resort to the Freudian crudities of the “Family Romance,” with its accidental Oedipalism.\(^\text{22}\)

Mandelstam has an array of strategies for actively defusing the threat of anxiety of influence. In the larger scope of the poet’s creative life, “The bread is poisoned” is an early poem, written during what he would later call the “Sturm und Drang” [buria i natisk] of Acmeism. Just a year later, Mandelstam would stake out one of his quintessential positions regarding the shape of poetic tradition in “I have not heard the tales of Ossian” (Ia ne slykhal rasskazov Ossiana, 1914).
“Poetry is property,” avers Bloom. Mandelstam’s “answer”:

Я получил блаженное наследство —
Чужих певцов блуждающие сны;
Свое родство и скучное соседство
Мы презирать заведомо вольны.

И не одно сокровище, быть может,
Минуя внуков, к правнукам уйдет;
И снова скальд чужую песню сложит
И, как свою, ее произнесет.

I received a blessed inheritance—
The wandering dreams of other bards;
We are free of course to scorn
Our kin and boring neighbors.

And more than one treasure, maybe,
Will, passing the grandchildren, to the great-grandchildren go;
And once again the skald will compose another’s song
And pronounce it like his own.

As Clare Cavanagh encapsulated the ethos of this poem, “culture and poetic tradition become a kind of licensed thievery. They leave the poet free to ransack history for its treasures, to pick and choose among pasts.”

Mandelstam thus challenges the concept of poetic propriety. The better part of a decade later, he openly challenges the concept of poetic priority as well:

Often one comes to hear: that’s good, but it is yesterday. But I say: yesterday has yet to be born: it still hasn’t happened for real. I want Ovid, Pushkin, Catullus again, and I am not satisfied with the historical Ovid, Pushkin, Catullus. [. . .]

So, not a single poet has yet been. We are free from the burden of memories. But how many rare premonitions: Pushkin, Ovid, Homer. [. . .] (II, 224–25)

Here chronology is set on its head. Not only does Mandelstam emerge as precursor of the “real” Ovid, Catullus, and Pushkin, but he also can be the imaginative will that generates these “ancestors” to his own specification (“I
want”). It is too little, for Mandelstam, like Bloom’s strong poet, to create himself, to beget himself incestuously on the precursor’s Muse. Mandelstam will also re-beget the precursor’s poetry, as it ought to be.

This rewriting might be seen to exemplify the Bloomian/Nietzschean “will to power,”

were it not for Mandelstam’s statements circumscribing the role of the individual creative will. It is the pre-existing form of the poem, its “audible cast” [zvuchashchii slepok]—which the poet must “hear” and “divine”—that defines the category of “imperative” or “ought to be” for Mandelstam. The individual creative will (Pascal’s reed, in the quotation below) is subverted to a greater power, which, not contained within the poet, also cannot be subsumed in the reflected solipsism of the Romantic poet’s “Muse”:


Not mine, not yours—but theirs
Is all the power of gendered [or ancestral] endings:
The reed sings and is cleft with their air,
And with gratitude the snail spirals of human lips
Will pull onto themselves their breathing weight.
They have no name. Enter into their gristle,
And you will be heir to their princedoms [ . . . ]

This rewriting of the precursors’ poetry, as it should be, for the first time, might also be considered a Bloomian clinamen (a “swerve”), were there any element of psychological repression involved. Instead, Mandelstam is supremely conscious of his own relation to the poetic past, present, and future.

A differing relation to the past accords with a differing conceptualization of “new” and “old.” Romantics and Symbolists strive after new experience. In Mandelstam, the highest joy of poetry is that of recognition—achieved through iteration, distanced both chronologically and in artistic realization—of archetypal situations and motifs. The new vision that, for the English Romantics as well as for the Russian Symbolists, is called upon to transform the world—as M. H. Abrams puts it, “a revolution in seeing which will make
the object new” — is, for Mandelstam, a new vision of an old scene: “the poet does not fear repetitions and easily becomes drunk on classical wine. [ . . . ] Classical poetry is the poetry of the revolution” (II, 225, 227).

The reader’s experience of distanced iteration is bound up in the phenomenon of intertext. Mandelstam’s intertextual poetics, already mature in *Tristia*, might be seen, taking some liberties with Bloom’s terminology, as a sort of *apophrades*, a controlled welcoming of the shades of the unthreatening dead, especially given the consonant imagery of the collection. Ivanov is perhaps the most important influence in the transformation of Mandelstam’s poetry as he moves from *Stone* to *Tristia*. However, one can discover little real anxiety in relation to Ivanov or almost any other of the many poets whose voices resound in Mandelstam’s second collection (the key exception being Blok). Furthermore, intertextuality, in the broadest sense, leads Mandelstam to an answer to the problem of self-creation, that fundamental need of all poets upon which Bloom’s argument, to a great extent, rests.31 In his most powerful (and natural) sublation of Romantic categories, Mandelstam defines the “organic poet” as a ship “all [ . . . ] hammered together out of salvaged boards,” but with “its own build” (III, 34).32 The poet’s originality and organicity exist in harmony with his composite nature and indebtedness to the past.33 As we can see, Mandelstam’s poetics represents a dialectical revision of the very Romantic mindset that exacerbates, if not generates, the burdens of influence and the anguish of foregone priority.

So far, my observations have related to how Mandelstam ingeniously obviates anxiety of influence on a specifically verbal plane. However, as David M. Bethea, Anna Lisa Crone, and Andrew Reynolds have shown, in the Russian context, poetic anxieties can be overshadowed by extra-poetic ones. In a context in which speech acts entail real and not just psychological dangers, the Poet as Poet cedes his place to the Poet within History. In Russia, confrontation with history often meant censorship, censure, isolation, starvation, exile, or execution; however, history also preserves models of courageous inner freedom. For the Poet within History, the tsar or state can function, in Bloomian terms, as the obstructive father figure, in the tension of the struggle with whom the strong poem is generated.34 This type of anxiety played an important role in Mandelstam’s development. The shadow of an increasingly intolerant state was enough to silence the poet in the second half of the 1920s and to provide a powerful counterweight to his creativity in the 1930s.35

At the same time, the poet’s potential anxieties may relate not only to the state, but also to those individuals who lived in its shadow, accepted the mortal stakes involved, and emerged as strong poets.36 For these, the lived life
of the poet becomes an element of the poetic record. Moreover, if it is indeed “ontological rhymes” (Bethea) that may be observed within and between the lives of Russian poets in the Pushkinian tradition, then this implies the conscious, or at least intuitive, structuring of life and art, of poetic past and present. Not Bloomian blindness, but an uncanny ability to look the past and potential future face on and not flinch, despite intimations of violent and untimely death—this is what is demanded of a Pushkin or a Mandelstam.37 Given the stakes, anxiety before the precursor’s word, deed, and fate is only natural. However, I do not see in Mandelstam’s anxiety before Pushkin the ache of belatedness and deficiency, the original wound implied by Bloom—which can be assuaged only by a reduction of the precursor. Rather, in that finding of “evidences of election that will fulfill his precursors’ prophecies by fundamentally re-creating those prophecies in his own unmistakable idiom” (Bloom)—well-demonstrated by Reynolds in regard to “To the empty earth” (K pustoi zemle, 1937)—Mandelstam appears to express, instead, awe and love for Pushkin and to savor the honor of participating in the ongoing conversation of poetry, of joining its table, having finally earned his place as an equal.38

In Russian literature we may also observe more traditionally Bloomian anxieties, situated, however, not surprisingly, at the crossroads of poetic and extra-poetic reality. Blok himself once shared an anxiety of this sort with Anna Akhmatova. She writes:

I mentioned in passing that the poet Benedikt Livshits complains that he, Blok, through his very existence [odnim svoim suschestvovaniem] gets in the way of him writing verse. Blok didn’t laugh, but answered with complete seriousness: “I understand that. Lev Tolstoy prevents me from writing.”39

In the case of Livshits, it is Blok the “person” who prevents him from writing—“through his very existence.” In the case of Blok and Tolstoy, the same is true, and the contrast between Tolstoy the writer and Tolstoy the man is amplified by the fact that Blok’s anxiety crosses the boundary between prose and poetry.

For Mandelstam, the key precursor, whose mix of poetics and persona necessitated a “Bloomian” response, was Alexander Blok. As noted above, Gregory Freidin has written on the ways in which the charismatic expectations attached to the Symbolist poet, of whom Blok was the paragon, effectively excluded the young, Jewish Mandelstam from the position of “Russian poet” until he could generate his own poetic mythology and write himself
into that tradition. However, the young Mandelstam also defines a new relation between author and text that circumvents those expectations. Rather than take up, more or less unmodified, the charismatic role of the Symbolist poet \textit{qua} prophet/martyr, Mandelstam, in the second half of \textit{Stone}, banishes the Symbolist \textit{lyric hero} from his poetry.\textsuperscript{40} Having done so, Mandelstam’s entire poetic stance performs a Bloomian kenosis in relation to Blok’s poetry. Through a casting off of the Symbolist-theurgist’s manifest role in the drama of salvation, Mandelstam deflates Blok’s overstated tragic-prophetic stance. What is more, his resulting, more subtle spokesmanship ultimately regains an element of the charismatic power that he divests from the Symbolists.

Mandelstam’s struggle with Blok is a struggle with the lyric hero who is most representative of the Symbolist tradition and, ultimately, with the man behind the mask of that lyric hero. It is also a struggle to reshape, or sublate, the Romantic expectations of these two poets’ common readership.

Ultimately, Mandelstam’s evasions of the yet-to-be-born Bloom are as precise and prescient as they are because his poetic development is in large part a dialectical transformation of Symbolism (antithesis–synthesis), while both Bloom and Symbolism grow out of the same precursor: the Romantic tradition. Mandelstam is, paradoxically, both before and after Bloom.
Шаги Командора
V. A. Зоргенфрею

Тяжкий, плотный занавес у входа,
За ночных окном — туман.
Что теперь твоя постылая свобода,
Страх познавший Дон-Жуан?

Холодно и пусто в пышной спальне,
Слуги снят, и ночь глуха.
Из страны блаженной, незнакомой, дальней
Слышно пенье петуха.

Что изменнику блаженства звуки?
Миги жизни сочтены.
Донна Анна спит, скрестиев на сердце руки,
Донна Анна видит сны...

Чьи черты жестокие застыли,
В зеркалах отражены?
Анна, Анна, сладко ль спать в могиле?
Сладко ль видеть неземные сны?
Жизнь пуста, безумна и бездонна!
Выходи на битву, старый рок!
И в ответ — победно и влюбленно —
В снежной мгле поет рожок...

Пролетает, брызнув в ночь огнями,
Черный, тихий, как сова, мотор.
Тихими, тяжелыми шагами
В дом вступает Командор...

Настежь дверь. Из непомерной стужи,
Словно хриплый бой ночных часов —
Бой часов: «Ты звал меня на ужин.
Я пришел. А ты готов?»

На вопрос жестокий нет ответа,
Нет ответа — тишина.
В пышной спальне страшно в час рассвета,
Слуги спят, и ночь бледна.

В час рассвета холодно и странно,
В час рассвета — ночь мутна.
Дева Света! Где ты, донна Анна?
Анна! Анна! — Тишина.

Только в грозном утреннем тумане
Бьют часы в последний раз:
Донна Анна в смертный час твой встанет.
Анна встанет в смертный час.

**Steps of the Knight Commander**
*V. A. Zorgenfrei*

A heavy, dense curtain at the entrance,
Beyond the night window—fog.
What now is your tired freedom,
Don Juan, who has tasted fear?

The luxurious bedroom is cold and empty,
The servants sleep, and the night is deep.
From a blessed, unfamiliar, distant country
The singing of the cock is heard.

What are the sounds of paradise to a traitor?
Life’s moments are tallied up.
Donna Anna sleeps with hands crossed on her chest,
Donna Anna sees dreams . . .
Whose cruel features have frozen,
   Are reflected in the mirrors?
Anna, Anna, is it sweet to sleep in the grave?
   Is it sweet to see unearthly dreams?

Life is empty, crazy and unfathomable!
   Come to battle, hoary fate!
And in answer—triumphant and enamored—
   A horn sings in the snowy gloom . . .

Having sprayed [its] lights into the night, flies by
   A black motorcar, silent as an owl.
With quiet, heavy steps
   The Knight Commander enters the house . . .

The door flung wide. From the inordinate cold,
   As if the hoarse striking of a night clock—
The striking of a clock: “You called me to dinner.
   I’ve come. But are you prepared? . . .”

There is no answer to the cruel question,
   There is no answer—silence.
In the luxurious bedroom, it is frightening at the hour of dawn,
   The servants sleep, and the night is pale.

At the hour of dawn it is cold and queer,
   At the hour of dawn—the night is bleary.
Maiden of Light! Where are you, Donna Anna?
   Anna! Anna!—Silence.

But in the menacing morning fog
   The clock strikes for the final time:
*Donna Anna will rise at your mortal hour.*
   *Anna will rise at the mortal hour.*

1910–12

Blok, *Stikhotvoreniiia*, III, 93–94
ABBREVIATIONS

PSS  Polnoe sobranie sochinenii (except in relation to Mandelstam, in which case—Polnoe sobranie stikhovorenii)
SS   Sobranie sochinenii
SS8  Sobranie sochinenii v vos’mi tomakh, etc.
IRLI Institutut russkoi literatury (Pushkinskii Dom), St. Petersburg
GLM  Gosudarstvennyi Literaturnyi Muzei, Moscow
RNB  Rossiiskaia Natsional’naia Biblioteka, St. Petersburg
L.   Leningrad
M.   Moscow
Pb.  Petersburg
Pg.  Petrograd
SPb. St. Petersburg

EDITIONS OF MANDELSTAM

When not otherwise indicated, poems written through 1915 are cited from Kamenny’ (1990), while poems written after 1915 are cited from PSS. References to Mandelstam’s texts by volume and page number in parentheses are to SS. References to Blok’s poetry by volume and page number without further clarification are to Stikhotvoreniiia (SPb.: Severo-zapad, 1994), 3 vols., which is identical in textology to the analogous volumes of the 20-volume Polnoe sobranie sochinenii (M.: Nauka, 1997–).

This book is designed for both general reader and specialist. The casual reader should not feel obliged to refer to these endnotes, and the book is designed, as any good book should be, so that it may be read coherently without them. The reader who wishes to delve deeper will find here not only documentation, but, I hope, a wealth of other useful information, both filling out the picture developed in the main narrative and suggesting avenues for further exploration.

CHAPTER 1

1. “I did not hear the tales of Ossian” (Ia ne slykhal rasskazov Ossiana, 1914).
2. Blinov, “Ivanov i vozniknovenie akmeizma,” 18. Blinov notes that, as late as December of that year, Mandelstam gave a talk at Ivanov’s “academy” on Dionysiasm in Innokenty Annensky’s works (ibid.).
4. “Licenced thievery” is Cavanagh’s formulation (Modernist Creation, 96).
5. This is not to say that Mandelstam could not, as a practical matter, pick and choose “gifts” from among the possibilities offered by the Symbolists’ poetry. See, for instance, the poet’s own catalog of what were for him the individual Symbolists’ most lasting contributions in “Storm and Stress” (Buria i natisk, 1923).
6. I borrow the term from Hansen-Löve, who designates the second major phase of Russian Symbolism, most prominently practiced by the “younger” generation of Symbolist poets, including Alexander Blok, Andrei Bely, Viacheslav Ivanov and Sergei Solov’ev, “mythopoetic” (myth-creating), in opposition to the preceding “diabolic” Symbolism (introductions to Rannii simvolizm and Mifopoeticheskii simvolizm). Our usage is not, however, identical. (See below.)
9. The problem of Mandelstam and Symbolism has been considered from a number of different perspectives—primarily biographical and subtextual, but also on the level of poetics. See, especially, Taranovskii, “Pchely i osyi,” revised in his Essays, 83–114; Morozov, “Piš’ma”; Levinton, “Na kamennykh otrogakh”; Meijer, “Early Mandel’štam”; Ronen, Approach; Malmstad, “Mandelštam’s ‘Silentium’”; Freidin, Coat; Venclova, “Ivanov and the Crisis,” 206, 213; Averintsev, “Sud’ba i vest’”; Mikhail Gasparov, “Tri poetiki”; and his “Sonety Mandel’shtama”; Toddes, “Zametki”; Kling, “Latentnyi simvolizm”; Segal, Mandel’shtam. Istoria i poetika; Goldberg, “Poetics of Return”; Lekmanov, Kniga ob akmeizme; Musatov, Lirika; Broitman, Poetika. My study brings to this discussion new ma-
terials and parallels (though this is not my primary goal), new conceptual analysis, new close readings. More importantly, a focus on the pragmatics of the text, the poet’s play with distance and immediacy as the overarching strategy through which Mandelstam negotiates his relationship to Symbolism (see below) opens up fundamentally new perspectives on his works. Nor has anyone previously attempted to address the problem of Mandelstam and the younger Symbolists with similar scope and focus.

10. On “distanced reiteration” in Mandelstam’s poetics, see Ronen’s seminal “Leksi-
cheskii povtor, podtekst i smysl.”

11. See Cavanagh, *Modernist Creation*, 51; Mikhail Gasparov, “Poet i obshchestvo,” 29–30. Note also the potential connection to one of Mandelstam’s own most important Symbolist poems, “A body is given me—what shall I do with it” (Dano mne telo—cht o mne delat’ s nim, 1909) which, under the title “Breathing” (Dykhanie), opened the first edition of his first book, *Stone* (Kamen’, 1913). As Musatov felicitously notes, “the poem as a whole is organized around the metaphor of the fragile, warmth-loving plant, which has grown in a greenhouse” (*Lirika*, 26). Mandelstam, in shattering the *serres chaudes* of Russian Symbolism, is also shattering the protective atmosphere of his own earliest poetry.


15. The scholarship on Mandelstam and Blok is spread over a large number of articles and books. Among the most informative, if one is to take the individual references in total, are Ronen’s *An Approach to Mandel’stam* and Gregory Freidin’s *A Coat of Many Colors*. Broitman submits several individual intertextual parallels to extensive analysis and considers Blok’s influence on Mandelstam in his earliest poetry (articles collected in *Poezietika*). Grishunin’s article is largely documentary in approach (“Blok i Mandel’shtam”). For aspects of the influence of Blok’s poetics on Mandelstam, see Zhirmunskii, “Poeziia Bloka,” 123–24; Gromov, A. *Blok*, 357ff.; Broitman, “Venetseiskie strofy”; one should also mention the classic contrastive analysis of these two poets in Ginzburg, *O lirike*. Several problems have been subjected to repeated analysis. These include, for instance, Mandelstam and Blok’s Venice (Ivask, “Venetsiiia”; Ronen, *Approach*, 353; Crone, “Blok’s Venecija”; Broitman, “Venetseiskie strofy”) and Mandelstam’s reaction to Blok’s prose in the 1920s (most extensively, Margolina, *Mirovozzrenie*; Segal, *Mandel’shtam. Istoriia i poetika*); the resonance between Mandelstam’s and Blok’s sense of history; the Blokian subtextual layer of “Concert at the Railway Station” (*Kontsert na vokzale*, 1921?); the Blokian letters and diary entries (particularly the derisive “Mandelstamishness” [mandel’shtam’] [SS8, VII, 100] and “A premium-grade Rubanovich” [Rubanovich luchshego sorta] [ibid., VIII, 344] and Blok’s eventual recognition of Mandelstam [see chapter 9]); finally, Mandelstam’s essay on Blok (see chapter 12). In addition, there are brief, but often invaluable, individual observations scattered throughout the scholarship on Mandelstam. This is a rich scholarly heritage that calls out for a more sustained, focused, synthesizing approach.


17. Tynianov, “Blok i Geine,” 240. Unless otherwise marked, italics convey author’s emphasis.

19. Grishunin, “Blok i Mandel'shtam,” 154–57. Regarding Blok’s anti-Semitism, both as relates to Mandelstam and more broadly, see Brown, Mandelstam, 301n21; Nebolsin, “Iskazhennyi i zapreshchennyi,” 181–83; Cavanagh, Modernist Creation, 345n36; Timenchik and Kopel'man, “Viacheslav Ivanov i poeziia Bialika,” 113–14n21; Bezrodniy, “O ’Iudoboiaznii,” 101–2. Mandelstam was of course subject to repeated episodes of everyday (bytovoi) antisemitism, from the quota on Jews at St. Petersburg University to the moniker “Zinaida [Gippius’] little yid” [Zinaidin zhidenok] (N. Mandel’shtam, Vtoraia kniga, 33) to Sergei Gorodetsky’s underhanded praise of Mandelstam—in print—for having “learned” Russian, “though no study can replace a native [prirodnoe] knowledge of the language” (excerpt from “Poeziia kak iskusstvo” [Lukomor’e, 30 April 1916], in Mandel’shtam, Kamen’ [1990], 228). Memoirists too left any number of caricaturish portraits. Whether this social anti-Semitism presented an active psychological block to the young Mandelstam’s writing is perhaps open to question, although his initial ambivalence toward his Jewishness and his reclaiming of the heritage of the Jewish outsider in the 1930s certainly imply that it did. Also of note is Mandelstam’s letter to Yuri Tynianov of January 21, 1937: “Now it’s already a quarter century that, mixing the serious with trifles, I stream onto Russian poetry; but soon my poetry will become one with it [sol’iutsia s nei], having changed something in its structure and composition” (SS, III, 281). Here, Mandelstam’s inorodnost’ ([ethnic] foreignness) to Russian poetry is presupposed. The power of his legacy is such that his “foreign” voice, having gradually infiltrated the tradition, will have qualitatively altered what Russian poetry is.


21. The Russian phrase “Vechnyi Zhid,” neutral in itself, uses a word for Jew that, by the late nineteenth century, had become unequivocally demeaning.


23. For a succinct semiotic analysis of the differences between these two waves of Russian Symbolism, see Smirnov, Khudozhestvennyi smysl, 53–59. The traditional distinction among “generations,” however, can also give a false impression of strictly linear evolution and is overly dependent on the poets’ own discourse. See, for instance, Z. G. Mints, “Ob evoliutsii russkogo simvolizma.” For a more detailed overview of the movement, see Pyman, History of Russian Symbolism; Paperno and Grossman, eds., Creating Life; Matich, Erotic Utopia.

24. On the influence of Potebnia on the “culture of the Word” in Russia at the turn of the century, see esp. Seifrid, Word Made Self.

25. Myth-creation does not have to be collective in the present, however. In Ivanov’s “Two Elements in Contemporary Symbolism” (Dve stikhii v sovremennom simvolizme, 1904), a veritable manifesto of myth-creation, the author notes that “myth, before it is lived through by all, must become “an event of inner experience, personal in its arena, suprapersonal in its content” (Po zvezdam [hereafter, PZ], 284).

26. In critiquing I. S. Prikhod’ko’s use of the term “mythopoetic” to describe Blok and the Symbolists, Mikhail Gasparov writes that a “criterion for extracting ‘myths’ from the mass of other subtexts is structurality (strukturnost’): Myth is there, where discrete elements fuse into a whole, which underlies all of the work or the entire oeuvre of the poet and even the whole epoch.” However, Gasparov finds that, for Prikhod’ko, the “Symbolist ‘macro-myth’” instead amounts to an eclectic lumping together of heterogeneous mystic traditions, hardly a meaningful structural framework (“Otzyv,” 8). Gasparov praises
Prikhod’ko precisely for her work in defining individual sources (“Otzyv,” 6). It should be noted that Hansen-Löve, even more than Prikhod’ko, is concerned not with the individual sources of individual poets, but with parallels and sources, even if indirect, in a vast, eclectic range of mystic literature and classical mythologies (and even Jungian archetypes), sources to which the Symbolists collectively had potential access, and which can clarify the underlying valences of their imagery (Mifopoeticheskii simvolizm, 12–13). Hansen-Löve sees the overarching universal myth of Symbolism primarily synchronically, in terms of the nature of the symbol, the (Neoplatonic) relationship of world and text to ideal existence, and the poet’s role in the revelation of this relationship, and defines the overarching plot-oriented autodescriptions and recyclizations of the Symbolists as a third stage in the development of Symbolism, closer to classical forms of mythology, which have rationalized their original mystical-symbolic content (ibid., 8–9, 52–55n60). However, it is precisely this overarching emphasis on structure, and, as a corollary, on emplotment, in the poet’s life and work, which is a compelling characteristic of the mythopoetic Symbolists’ work as a whole.

27. See Hansen-Löve, who reviews a broad range of scholarship contrasting mythological thinking and narrativity (ibid.). Robert Bird, in contrast, equates mythologizing and narrativizing (even “allegorizing”) elements in lyric poetry (Russian Prospero).

28. Both Bely’s and Blok’s oeuvres can be seen as jigsaw puzzles (note the varying density of conceptual and structural information about the whole in individual poems), with interchangeable parts of shifting scale, due to the poets’ recyclization of their poetry; the poems as “details of a vast canvas” (as Vera Lur’e wrote about Bely in 1923). Lavrov cites Lur’e in “Ritm i smysl,” 7, and notes the dramatically shifting nature of the relation of the individual pieces to each other and the whole, as a result of Bely’s continual recyclization (ibid., 8). On the similar dynamics of cyclicization in Blok, see Sloane, Dynamics, esp.118ff.

29. Gofman, Poety simvolizma, 301. On this narrative “prefiguring” in Blok’s trilogy, see Sloane, Dynamics, 130. On Blok’s “path” more generally, see esp. the first half of Maksimov’s fundamental Poezii i proza Al. Bloka; Mints, Lirika Aleksandra Bloka.

30. Briusov, that master of fully realized themes (cf. Mandel’shtam, SS, II, 342–43), presents a quite recognizable composite of this narrative in 1907 in “La belle dame sans merci.” On the impact of the secularization of Christian history, which underpins this structure, in Western and especially English Romanticism, see Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism.

31. Cf. also Blok’s self-reflexive “Instead of a Preface” (Vmesto predisloviia) to Earth in Snow (Zemlia v snegu, 1908); the poets’ articles (Bely’s “Green Meadow” (Lug zelennyi, 1905), Blok’s “Stagnation/Evil Times” [Bezvremen’ e, 1906]).

32. Ivanov’s personal ‘investment’ does seem to grow in Cor Ardens with the revolution of 1905 and the death of his wife, Lidia Zinov’eva-Annibal. See, for instance, Wachtel, Symbolism and Literary Tradition, 103.

33. For Ivanov, this falling away from the deity is already apparent in the Orphics’ canonization of Dionysian orgiastic religion. See his “O Dionise orficheskom,” 2nd pagination, 98.

34. Bird sees generative loss as a key trope in Ivanov’s life and works and illuminates a series of narrative structures drawing in elements of vision, loss, searching, memory, and return (Russian Prospero). On the broader implications of “Maenad” as “an anthem that encapsulated Ivanov’s complex social and metaphysical program in the wake of the 1905 revolution,” see ibid., 59.
35. Human relations, as well, were subverted to mythopoetic emplotment by Bely’s circle, the Argonauts, “becoming in many ways similar to artistic texts: they had their plot, their pragmatics, their system of stylistic definitions” (Lavrov, Belyi v 1900-e gody, 141).


38. See Wachtel, Russian Symbolism, 97; Mandel’shtam, SS, II, 343.

39. See Freidin, Coat, 87–88; chapter 7 below.

40. Briusov, “Keys to the Secrets” (Kliuchi tain, 1904), SS, VI, 92. Pyman notes the tendency of Briusov, in his essays in Libra (Vesy), to apheristically articulate the consensus in all manner of debates, rather than expressing his personal views (History, 176).

41. “The Legacy of Symbolism and Acmeism” (Nasledie simvolizma i akmeizm, 1913), in Gumilev, SS4, IV, 175.

42. Rubins, Ecphrasis.

43. These assaults are portended already in “The Morning of Acmeism” (Utro akmeizma)—“We do not fly, we climb only those towers which we ourselves can build” [II, 325]). Cf. Bely’s “Symbolism as Worldview” (Simvolizm kak miroponimanie, 1904): “Others can answer [those who mourn for the setting sun], believing limitlesslessly in the miracle of flight” (Arabeski, 238).

44. Averintsev, “Sud’ba i vest’,” 15.

45. For an overview of the problem, see Lekmanov, “Kontseptsiia,” 216–19. See also Timenchik’s fundamental “Zametki ob akmeizme.” Such authors as Levin et al. (“Russkaia semanticheskaia poetika”); Taranovsky (Essays); Ronen (Approach) Freidin (Coat); Doherty (Acmeist Movement); Shindin (“Akmeisticheskiy fragment”); Hansen-Löve (“Tekst-Tekstura-Arabeski”); and Lekmanov (Kniga ob akmeizme) present nuanced understandings of Mandelstam’s Acmeist poetics unbounded by the tenets of the poet’s often quite applicable, but not all-encompassing essays.


47. Mandelstam’s manifesto, “The Morning of Acmeism”, was not printed at the time. On the dating of this essay, likely completed in its present form in 1914, see Mets, Mandel’shtam i ego vremia, 51–72. For excellent readings of “Notre Dame” and Gumilev’s play Acteon respectively as artistic manifestos of early Acmeism, see Steiner, “Poem as Manifesto”; Basker, “Gumilyov’s ‘Akteon.’”


49. On the influence of Ivanov’s essays on Mandelstam, see especially Lekmanov, Kniga ob akmeizme, 119–28.


51. Nadezhda Mandel’shtam, Vospominaniia, 195; Ginzburg, “Kamen,” 266; Levin et al., “Russkaia semanticheskaia poetika.” See also Tyitianov’s “Promezhutok” (1924), in his Arkhaisty i novatory, 570–73.

52. On the fundamental duality and “ambivalent antitheses” of Mandelstam’s poetry, see, l.a., Segal, “O nekotorykh aspektakh”; Levin, et al. On semantic vectors, see Mandelstam’s “Conversation about Dante” (Razgovor o Dante, 1933), SS, II, 374. For a provocative mapping of the writing-reading process as conveyed in this essay, see Glazov-Corrigan, Mandelstam’s Poetics, 68–110.

54. The nature of Mandelstam’s poetics, his self-conscious citation and unparalleled “keyboard of references” [upominateľnaia klaviatura] (II, 368) make the recognition of subtext vital to any rounded reading of his works. The scholarly works of Taranovsky, Ronen and others present models for effective—even virtuosic—reading based on subtext. At the same time, subtextual criticism, in its arch-textual focus, can overlook other levels of meaning. Cf. Timenchik’s broad theoretical approach to “the other’s word” (“Tekst v tekste”). See also Mikhail Gasparov’s admonitions regarding the attestation of subtexts in “Literaturnyi intertekst.”

55. On the nature of Blok’s allusion, in contrast to Acmeism, see Ronen, *Poetika*, 72–73.


57. Cf. Lavrov on Bely: “The lofty-mysterial is a recast into the humorous and grotesque without losing its essence and without any axiological recoding: the ironic element refracts in itself rays from the invisible center, making it possible to perceive the outlines of ‘foggy Eternity’ through the shroud of life’s realia” (“Ritm i smysl,” 23); Broitman on the “da” and “net,” which are the inseparable components of the skeptical irony of Briusov (*Poetika*, 215).


59. See, i.a., Levinton, “K voprosu” and “Akhmatovoi ukoly”; Parnis and Timenchik, “Programmy.”

60. “O, годы! O, часы! O, бремя Иссуара! / Проточная вода в воронке писсуара! / В прорывы бытия брось лилию, Амбер! / Амбер! Кто вплел в твой герб позорный камамбер?” [O, years! O, hours! O, burden of Issoire! / Running water in the funnel of a urinal! / Into the breaches of existence throw a lily, Ambert! / Ambert! Who has braided into your coat of arms disgraceful camembert?] (PSS, 375)—“У меня остается одна лишь забота на свете: / Золотая забота, как времени бремя избыть. [. . .] В медленном водовороте тяжелые нежные розы, / Розы тяжесть и нежность в двойные венки заплела” [One care remains for me in the world: / A golden care—how to cast off the burden of time. [. . .] In a slow whirlpool heavy, tender roses, / The roses heaviness and tenderness are braided into double wreaths] (PSS, 149). So Mandelstam amuses himself, translating the results of a game of *bout-rimés* from Romains’ novel. (The original reads: “Le temps! Le temps! Issoire, / Il coule et tourne et gire et vire et filtre en ta passoire, / Emmi l’absent décor lilial d’Ambert . . . / Issoire! Qui a dit que tu faisais des camemberts?” [Romains, *Les Copains*, 30]. A majority of the key words linking the translation to “Sisters,” and even the image of the flower in the whirlpool, are Mandelstam’s [as is of course the laying bare of the *pissoir* hiding in Romains’ *passoire*].)

61. This was the basis, of course, for Bely’s ongoing accusations that Blok had betrayed their common ideals. Magomedova presents an engaging and compelling argument that
Blok’s insistence that through his inconstancy he was true is grounded in a Gnostic myth of the imprisonment of Divine Wisdom within the world (Magomedova, *Avtobiograficheskii mif*, 76ff.).


63. See Ronen, “Sublation”—expanded as “Akmeizm” (2008)—a valiant attempt to present a concise, synthetic poetics of Acmeism (nonetheless, however, strongly focused around Akhmatova and Mandelstam).


65. I borrow the term “mystic presumption” from Averintsev (“Strakh, kak initsiat-siia,” 18).

66. In Mandelstam’s essay, this tradition begins with the great publicist Nikolai Novikov and civic poet Alexander Radishchev, reaches its peak in Pushkin and the Decembrists (“Feast in the Time of Plague” and conspiratorial punch) and Nikolai Nekrasov, fades in Afanasy Fet and Fedor Tiutchev (cf. their illnesses) and has its death-throws in Symbolism, whose early practitioners are “militant young monks” (II, 105) and evangelical abstractions are reeking, dead fish. Bethea has recently written about Pushkin and Joseph Brodsky as functional “bookends” for the “notion of romantic biography” in Russian poetry (“Brodsky and Pushkin Revisited” I, 101–2). Note, however, the way that this concept lives on in the works of Boris Ryzhii.


68. The essay, in fact *The Noise of Time* in general, is full of often ‘barometric’ breachings of the boundary between literature or theory and life. To take just a couple examples, literature is like a “layman, rudely awakened and called, no, better, dragged by the hair to be a witness in the Byzantine trial of history,” while “Life will burst into the most protected [teplichnaia], most sterile [vykipiachennaia] Russian school [. . .] A volume of *Libra* under the desk, and next to it, slag and steel shavings from the Obukhov factory” (II, 103, 86).

69. The word “afishi,” which meant “playbill” in Mandelstam’s day, as it does today, had meant “program books” up through the early nineteenth century. This is clearly the usage that is operative here, in all its appropriate obsolescence. See Fedosiuk, *Chto neponiatno*, 240.

70. The poet here does not outwardly accept the Symbolist syncretism of eras evinced, for instance, in Blok’s “On Kulikovo Field” (Na pole kulikovom, 1908). Mandelstam’s 1921 essay “The Word and Culture” (Slovo i kultura), which asserts that contemporary poets “In a sacred frenzy [. . .] speak in the language of all times, all cultures” (II, 227), demonstrates the renewed influence of Symbolist theory, specifically, Bely’s “Emblematics of Sense” (Emblematika smysla, 1909; see Ronen, *Approach*, 134) and Ivanov’s “Thou art” (Ty esi, 1907).

71. Freidin comments on the two antithetical forces dominating the poem, the “Apol-lonian ‘heavy curtain’ hiding that ‘other world’” and the “Dionysian elimination of all boundaries.” The poem is thus simultaneously “elegaically nostalgic and full of loss” and “ample and restorative” (*Coat*, 90–91). See also Zholkovskii, “Klavishnaia progulka,” 177.

72. “Que ces vains ornements, que ces voiles me pèsent” (Racine, *Oeuvres*, 826, noted in Freidin, *Coat*, 90–91).

73. Note also the irony: Mandelstam’s lyric “I” (supposedly) will not hear Phèdre’s
line both because of his vividly imagined indifference as a member of the audience within Racine’s theater and because of his historical distance from that very theater.

74. The transitive “agitating” [volnuia] is of course paranomastic play upon underlying “rippling” [volnuias’].


76. On this poem, see also, particularly, Etkind, “’Rassudochaia propast’,” 209–12; Terras, “Black Sun,” 46–49.

77. In this sense, incest, which serves as the fundamental underlying paradigm for Mandelstam’s mythology of self in Freidin’s reading of Tristia in Coat, can be seen as one subset of transgressed (or non-transgressed) boundary.

78. Villon is described as “thieving angel” (angel voruiushchii) in Mandelstam’s “So that, friend of wind and drops” (Chtob, priiatel’ i vetra i kapel’, 1937).

79. “Takie otritsaniia ravnotsenny polozhitel’noi uverennosti.”

CHAPTER 2

1. The first critics to apply Bloom’s theories to the context of Russian modernism were, it seems, Laferrière (“Mandel’shtam’s ‘Tristia’”) and R. D. Timenchik (“Tekst v tekste,” 68, 71). Note also Pratt’s Bloom-inspired “Antithesis and Completion.” More recently, Bethea, Pratt, Crone, and Reynolds have attempted to more broadly evaluate Bloom’s potentialities and shortcomings as applied to the Russian context, with its traditionally permeable boundary between word and deed. See Bethea, Realizing Metaphors (esp. “Bloom: The Critic as Romantic Poet”); Pratt, “Garol’ d Blum”; Crone, “Fraternity or Parricide?”; a number of studies by Reynolds, including “Burden of Memories” and “Return of the Dead.”

2. Bloom, Anxiety of Influence.

3. Aspects of the argument I present below are open to accusations of reductiveness: first, in that I do not engage Bloom on the terms of his own poetic discourse on poetry, and, second, in that I choose to focus on one early, though of course seminal, work of Bloom’s. However, there remains a fundamental irony. Bloom’s Anxiety of Influence, which—adopting Bloom’s own terms—is a self-begetting of the author as strong critic, is itself belated, and not only, as has been pointed out, in relation to the overshadowing Poetic tradition or to previous critics (Pratt, “Garol’d Blum,” 8–10)—but also in relation to poets’ own perceptions of the mechanisms of influence. In the Russian context, the most prominent critic in relation to whom Bloom can be seen as belated is Yuri Tynianov. See Zholkovsky, Text counter Text, 1.


5. Nadezhda Mandel’shtam, Vtoraiia kniga, 87. Livshits was a Futurist poet, friendly with Mandelstam in the mid-1910s, author of The One-and-a-half-eyed Archer (Polutoraglazyi strelets, 1933), a highly regarded memoir detailing the emergence of Russian Futurism.

6. Akhmatova, Sochineniia (1990), II, 162. The problem of Pushkin and Mandelstam has been explored extensively, specifically from a Bloomian perspective, by Andrew Reynolds. A recent attempt to broadly address Mandelstam’s relationship to Pushkin is Surat, Mandel’shtam i Pushkin.

7. “But what is the Primal Scene, for a poet as poet? It is his Poetic Father’s coitus with the Muse. There he was begotten? No—there they failed to beget him. He must be
self-begotten, he must engender himself upon the Muse his mother” (Bloom, *Anxiety of Influence*, 36–37). This passage is unusually straightforward. Typical of Bloom’s playfully shifting logic is the fact that, in the next passage, it is the Son who begets the Father by defining him. The basic underlying features of Bloom’s theory remain, however, clear.


14. Particularly striking in this regard is Fet’s “You are all in lights. Your distant flashes” (Ty vsia v ogniah. Tvoikh zarnits, 1886).

15. See, i.a., Tarasov, *Essays*, 10–14; Ronen, *Approach*, 80–82; Reinolds [Reynolds], “Smer’t avtora,” 207.

16. The image of the biblical Joseph plays an important role in Freidin’s analysis of Mandelstam’s “mythologies of self-presentation” in *Coat*. However, the author does not discuss “The bread is poisoned,” and his references to Joseph are directed quite differently from mine here.

17. The Bedouins can be seen as an analogue of Homeric naivété in the modern world and are perhaps evoked as descendants of the actors hinted at in the first stanza (the “caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead,” Gen. 37:25).


20. “[. . .] Now those were poets: what themes, what sweep [razmakh], what erudition! . . .’ Lovers of Russian Symbolism are unaware that it is a giant many-tiered mushroom on the swamp of the 1890s, done-up, robed in many raiments” (SS, III, 32). The contrasting ethos of Acmeism is clearly visible in Akhmatova’s “I have no use for odic hosts” (Mne ni k chemu odicheskie rati, 1940).

21. On the “infinitesimal” and the “inner excess of space”—the internal realm that, contained in a small compass, has potential for infinite expansion,” see Pollak’s reading of Mandelstam’s “Octaves” (*Mandelstam the Reader*, 49–79).

22. Cf. Bethea on Freud and literature: “there is a literalism (which at the same time can be completely reversible and hence a pure figuralism) about the Freudian mythos that makes it difficult to accept as continuously operative in the present of a creative personality and of his or her evolving biography” (*Realizing Metaphors*, 67).


25. Interesting, in this regard, is a comment Mandelstam made to Sergei Rudakov. The latter was downcast after the publication of Boris Pasternak’s poems on Stalin in the
New Year’s issue of Izvestiia in 1936, feeling that his own unpublished poetry would now be judged imitative of Pasternak’s new work. Mandelstam commented, “Poetry never nullifies other poetry” (Mandel’shtam v pis’makh Rudakova, 178).

26. Crone notes the Bloomian character of these lines (“Fraternity or Parricide?”).
27. See Bethea, Realizing Metaphors, 70.
28. “The poem is alive through the inner image, that audible cast of form that anticipates the written poem. There is not yet one word, but the poem already sounds. It is the inner image that sounds; it is this that the hearing of the poet senses” (II, 226–27). On “the category of imperative” [kategoriia dolzhennostvaniia], classical poetry as “that which ought to be,” and not “that which already was,” see “The Word and Culture” (Mandel’shtam, SS, II, 224).
29. “Not mine, not yours—but theirs” (Ne u menia, ne u tebia—u nikh, 1936). Note that, in this admittedly late poem, the use of the pronoun “they” excludes a reading under the aegis of a Romantic God figure/prophet relationship (while gesturing at, but not insisting on, the equally Romantic category of the folk). Pollak’s Mandelstam the Reader contains a number of excellent passages on this poem.
31. A modified Bloomian approach is valuable precisely for presenting an alternative, in conceptualizing Mandelstam’s interactions with other poets, to subtext (the reigning modus operandi). Bloom, however, too hastily rejects intertext as a meaningful indicator of influence. Practice in reading Mandelstam’s poems shows that it is almost always one or more key subtexts (of the many which may be present in a poem), which direct the reader to the poet’s key interlocutors, in the tension with whom the poem is generated.
32. Mandelstam refers here to Innokenty Annensky.
33. In general, in Acmeism, a valorization of the organic coexists with a sense of constructedness, craft with inspiration, as has been commented on, i.a., by Hansen-Löve (“Tekst-Tekstura-Arabeski”) and Doherty (Acmeist Movement, 130ff.).
34. See Bethea, Realizing Metaphors, 67–88; Crone, “Fraternity or Parricide?”; Reynolds, “Burden of Memories” and “Return of the Dead.”
36. These mortal stakes were clearly apparent to Mandelstam, author of “Pushkin and Skriabin” (1916–17). See chapter 11, p. 190.
37. See Bethea, Realizing Metaphors and Reynolds, “Return of the Dead.”
38. Bloom, Anxiety of Influence, 152. Reynolds demonstrates how Mandelstam creates an in no way banal or incidental extratextual element to his ontological rhyme, which can be passed on by only one memoirist, Natasha Shtempel’ (“Return of the Dead”). One can only be amazed at the poet’s faith in literature’s “house servants” (“In a Fur Coat beyond His Station”) and literary providence! In The Noise of Time (1923), Mandelstam has not yet earned his seat as equal at Walsingham’s table (an allusion to Pushkin’s Feast in the Time of Plague) together with the writers of the Russian nineteenth century (II, 107–8).
39. Anna Akhmatova, Sochineniia (1990), II, 137.
40. See chapter 6.
CHAPTER 3

1. The extent to which composition plays a functional role in Mandelstam’s books is addressed more fully in chapter 4, “The Pendulum at the Heart of Stone.” For the literature on the composition of Stone, see chapter 4, note 8.

2. On “I am given a body” and its role in the composition of Stone (1913), see Lekmanov, O trekh akmeisticheskikh knigakh, 75–80; Musatov, Lirika, 25–26.


Mandelstam’s first known poems—civic poems, published in the politically radical Tenishev School journal Awakened Thought (Probuzhdennaya mysl’)—date from 1906. (On Awakened Thought, see Mets, Mandel’shtam i ego vremia, 42–46.) Frolov, through an analysis of Mandelstam’s prosody, presents powerful evidence that the three fragments opening Stone were composed later than 1908, and, more specifically, after the poet began attending Ivanov’s “Academy” in spring of 1909 (Frolov, “Stikhi 1908 g.,” 463–73). Mikhail Gasparov had similarly suggested in an unpublished encyclopedia article that “The sound, muffled and cautious,” might have been composed later (related by Iu. L. Freidin). In any case, we can state with certainty that it was not the Mandelstam of 1908 who chose these four taught, iconic (Tsveetaeva, Pollak), “palpable” (Ronen) lines, from which, in true Acmeist fashion, sense spreads as if a sheaf, to be his “first poem” (Pollak).

4. The allusion to Pushkin is addressed by Ronen (Approach, 150), as well as Pollak, Reynolds and Frolov. On Tiutchev, see Khardzhiev, “Primechania,” in Mandel’shtam, Stikhovtorvrenia (1973), 255; on Sologub, see ibid.; Bel'skaia, “Tsitata,” 13; Toddes, “Zametki,” 288. Lekmanov sees an additional interwoven allusion to Tiutchev and Sologub in the first stanza of “In the forests” (Kniga ob akmeizme, 681); Broitman an interesting allusion to Blok in “To read only children’s books” (Poetika, 282). See also Frolov, who adds to the list Verlaine, along with a number of other connections, some highly attenuated (“Stikhi 1908 g.,” 474ff.); Bel’skaia, 12–14.


6. Rhythmically, “Your vivacious tenderness” presents a mirror pattern of alternating three-beat and two-beat dol’niks, the scheme of which is 3–2–3–2–2–2 | 2–2–2–3–2–3. (Dol’nik is the term used in Russian prosody for meters usually with a regular number of icti but with an interval of either one or two unstressed syllables between stresses.). Mirroring is also intensified through the poem’s tautological and semantically proximate (glaza-sleza) rhyme.

7. As M. Iu. Lotman notes, the rhyme scheme is additionally complicated by an initial impression of “two half-rhymed sestets: XaBxBa and aBxBaX.” Lotman writes that “one can state with a great deal of certainty that the poet’s goal here was far from contrivances with chains of rhyme, but rather an exit beyond the boundaries of temporal single-directedness” (Mandelštam i Pasternak, 73). Given Mandelstam’s choice not to publish,
However, we might surmise that he himself felt that the poem’s achievement as a lyric did not transcend its experimental character.

11. On the discursive possibilities of the Sophiological tradition, see ibid., 224.
12. Even after Briusov’s open disavowals, Blok continued to believe that his poetry was addressed to Sophia: “Briusov hides his knowledge of Her. In this he is sincere to the extreme” (Blok, Zapiski knizhki, 65). Baudelaire’s “À une passante” and its Russian offspring are engaged most directly in Mandelstam’s works in “A thousand-streamed torrent” (Tysiachestruinyi potok, published in The Hyperborean in December 1912), with its passing stranger in mourning, but with frivolous black “voilette” (vualetta). A connection to Blok’s “Stranger”—apt, but too narrow—is noted in Broitman, Poetika, 284.
13. Cf. “Her porch is as if a parvis” [Kryl’tso Ee, slovno papert’]: rumianets-tanets, rumiantsa-tantsa (I, 314); “O, what to me is the flush of sunset” [O, chto mne zakatnyi rumianets] (II, 313).
16. Cf. Panova: “Despite the fact that about ten Russian poets contributed to the Sophiological canon, Sophia is associated with only two of them, and so firmly that their brethren in the guild made these poets the heroes and antiheroes of her cult” (Russkii Egipet, 225). On Gorodetsky and Briusov’s negotiation of issues of poetic propriety and struggle with Blok’s too firm enencsnonce in the role of Bridegroom, see my article “Your Mistress or Mine: Three Symbolist Claims on Blok’s Muse” (in preparation).
17. “She, She, everywhere She [Ona, Ona, vezde Ona]” (Zinaida Gippius, quoted in Blok, SS12, I, 333, my emphasis).
18. Tynianov wrote, “[Blok] prefers traditional, even trite images (commonplace truths), since in them is preserved old emotion; slightly updated, it is stronger and deeper than the emotion of a new image” (“Blok i Geine,” 245–46). Note also the possible, but distant, association with Blok’s “The Inevitable” (Neizbezhnoe, 1907) from “The Snow Mask” (Snezhnaia maska): “Inevitably and calmly / [My] gaze fell into her eyes” [Neizbezhno i spokoino / Vzor upal v ee glaza] (II, 277). Blok’s poem begins, “She led me quietly from the rooms, / Shut the door” [Tikho vyvela iz komnat, / Zatvorila dver’], i.e., with a situation roughly akin to the lovers’ exit in “From the half-lit room,” which can be seen as introducing “More tender than tender” in Stone (1916).
19. Blok’s image is of course constructed on the conflict between the image of the prostitute/Stranger and the icon with which she is openly and blasphemously conflated in the introduction to his second book, Unexpected Joy (Nechaiannaia Radost’, 1907, the name, also, of the famous icon). On this icon, reflecting the intercession of the Mother of God for a terrible sinner, who, however, has always been loyal in his love for Her, see Blok, SS12, II, 5.
20. Segal, “Stanovlenie,” 482. Interestingly, Segal notes, in regard to her “antithetical” nature, that the heroine’s “other characteristics force one, apparently, to assume that her fingers will be cold, cooling [ostyvaishchimi]. But this is not so. In other words, tender [nezhnoe], white, distant associates with cold, but here this association is broken” (ibid.). It seems curious, however, that tenderness should be associated with cold, were not these both characteristic elements of the implicit prototype, Blok’s maiden: “Rose-colored, tender / Morning wakes the world. [. . . ] The Maiden in snowy hoarfrost / I will meet in the
waking world” [Rozvoe, nezhnoe / Utro budit svet [. . . ] Deva v snezhnom inee / Vstre-
chu naiauv] (I, 149). Cf. also “Before you—like a flower—I am tender [Pred toboi—kak
tsvetok—ia nezhna] (I, 330); “The Snow Maiden” (Snezhnaia deva, 1907).


23. Gorodetsky praises in his article precisely this image of Blok’s hero: “The recep-
tive soul of the youth, lighting candles at the altar, tending the incense flame [. . . ] was
in communion with the mystery” (ibid., 99). On the liturgical function of sunsets for the
Argonauts, see, for instance, Lavrov, Belyi v 1900–e gody, 135.

24. Perhaps also “Vsegda vostorzhennuiu tish’” [Always ecstatic stillness] recalls Ro-
mantic poet Vladimir Lensky’s “Vsegda vostorzhennuiu rech’” [Always ecstatic speech]
(SS, V, 39) in Pushkin’s Eugene Onegin, in effect confirming the directedness of Mandel-
stam’s lines toward a clichéd, overly Romantic poetry—like that of the Symbolists. I thank
an OSU Press reviewer for pointing out this connection.

25. Cf. what may be a retrospective nod at the image of poets as idols in The Noise
of Time. I restore the second sentence, elided by Ronen, who was uninterested in the
Symbolist aspect but cites this passage to much the same purpose (Approach, xiv): “The
intellectual erects a temple of literature with immobile idols [istukany]. For instance, [the
Symbolist novelist Vladimir] Korolenko, it seems to me, wrote so much about the Komi
[zyrians], that he himself turned into a Komi god [zyrianskii bozhok]. V. V. [Gippius]
taught [us] to construct literature not like a temple, but like a clan [rod]” (II, 106).


27. Belyi, Stikhovoreniia i poemy, I, 206.


29. Belyi, Stikhovoreniia i poemy, I, 79; Ivanov, Stikhovoreniia, I, 84.

30. Cf. Mandelstam’s later reflections on the Symbolists: “abuse of big themes and ab-
stract concepts, poorly imprinted in the word” (II, 342); “absence of a sense of measure,
characteristic of all Symbolists” (II, 341).

31. Blok: “And your eyes shine for me / In reality or a dream?” [I tvoi mne svetiat ochi
/ Naiavu ili vo sne?] (II, 279); “(Or is this but a dream?)” [(II’ eto tol’ko snitsia mne?)” (II,
212); “not dream, nor waking” [ni son, ni iav’] (III, 32).

32. “What is Chénier’s poetics? Maybe he has not one poetics, but several in different
periods, or, rather, minutes of poetic consciousness?” (Mandel’shtam, II, 299).

CHAPTER 4

1. On the history of Works and Days, see Lavrov, “‘Trudy i dni,’” in his Russkie sim-
volisty, 499–514. Ivanov, and Bely—until his fascination with anthroposophy—used the
journal as a mouthpiece for orthodox recastings of theurgic, “realistic” Symbolism. Blok
noted in his diary at the time that “for authentic ‘life-creation’ (the ‘mode’ of Works and
Days) [. . . ] ‘one must become embodied, show one’s sorrowful human face, and not the
pseudo-face of a non-existing school’” (ibid., 508; Blok, SS8, VII, 140).

2. On the artistic design of Hallelujah, see Beletskii, Narbut, 64–65. On Wild Por-
phyry and Hallelujah, see Lekmanov, O trekh akmeisticheskikh knigakh.

3. Public discussion of the movement, including reactions in print, began after Gor-
detsky’s lecture, “Symbolism and Acmeism,” presented at the Stray Dog cabaret, 19 De-


7. Lekmanov, Kniga ob akmeizme, 29ff. Cf., however, Panova’s recent revoicing of the opposite claim, about the Acmeists’ attachment to the earth (“Mir,” “prostranstvo,” “vremia” [hereafter, MPV], 124ff.).


9. “Let, in the stuffy room, where there are clumps of gray cotton” (Pust’ v dushnoi komnate, gde kloch’ia seroi vaty), “Barrel Organ” (Sharmanka), “When [the clock] shows eight” (Kogda pokazyvaiut vosem’) and “A thousand-streamed torrent” (Tysiachestruinyi potok).

10. The single instance in which the author openly violates chronology, placing “When blow meets blows” (Kogda udar s udarami vstrecheatsia)—marked “1910”—amidst poems marked “1909,” can be seen as a subtle tip-off that the collection is compiled in conditional, rather than absolute, chronological order.


13. In his notes to the edition of Mandelstam in the Novaia biblioteka poeta series, Mets writes of a growing tendency toward exact chronological order in the placement of poems in Mandelstam’s books and argues that violations of this order, as a rule, can be explained through lapses of memory on the part of the poet (Mandel’shtam, PSS, 517, 521). The key document supporting this point of view is a copy of the third edition of Stone (1923), found by Mets in the rare book fund of the State Literary Museum (GLM). Indeed, based on Mandelstam’s markings in this collection, it is possible to suppose with a great deal of likelihood that the poet re-examined the chronology of the poems in Stone while preparing his collection Poems (Stikhovoreniia) in 1927, and that, at that time, he could not remember the precise dating of all the poems. However, firstly, it is the correct year for each poem that Mandelstam attempts to recall, and, secondly, this fact does not at all annul the poet’s work on the composition of the collection, which is based also on the omission and addition of poems and on the choice of position within any given year for those poems that are relocated. For instance, during the final stage of compilation of Poems, Mandelstam inserted two poems, “Like the shadow of sudden clouds” (Kak ten’ vnezapnykh oblakov) and “From an evil and miry pool” (Iz omuta zlogo i viazkogo) between the the relatively weakly linked “Hearing tenses its sensitive sail” (Slukh chutkii parus napriagaet) and “In the giant pool it is transparent and dark” (V ogromnom omute prozrachno i temno), creating, in this way, two additional clearly palpable facing pairs of poems (reflected in IRLI, f. 124, op. 1, ed. khr. 208, l. 94 [table of contents of the proofs]; RNB, f. 474, al’bom 2, ll. 375–76). In addition, the bulk of the work on the composition of Stone was completed in 1915, and afterwards much simply did not change. It is entirely likely that the poet followed more strict chronological principles in compiling the other portions of his collection in 1927–28. (Still, “mountains . . . of Siena” [sienskie . . . gory] in
the single retained stanza of “What steepness in the crystal pool!” [V khrustal’nom omute kakaia krutizna!], with the marked date—1919 [also a late addition to the collection], follow “Venetian life” [Venitseiskoi zhizni] among the poems of 1920, possibly to distract attention from this stanza’s real calling—to be a marker for the entire absent Christian thematic layer of Tristia.) There are also, in Poems, instances of apparent “disinformation,” beyond the placement of “We shall gather anew in Petersburg” (V Peterburge my soidemsia snova), which, as is well known, was moved to the beginning of the collection for censorship reasons. See my article, “The Shade of Gumilev.” Mets does not provide supporting evidence for his assertion that the more chronologically flexible composition of the third edition of Kamen’ is not the author’s (PSS, 521).


15. This irony is palpable, for instance, in an echo of Blok’s The Fair Booth (Balagan-chik, 1906). Subtext noted by Ronen, Approach, 69.

16. The poet’s thought, antagonistic to the empty heavens, is also perceived in “I hate the light” as an arrow and a gothic spire. However, Toddes correctly notes that Blok’s “Siena” (1909), which utilizes similar imagery, was published too late to have influenced Mandelstam’s poem. To the potential sources that he demonstrates from Briusov (“Nabliudenia,” 327n5) and that Ronen attests from Gogol and Chaadaev (“Leksicheskii pover-tor,” 368–69), as well as Pindar’s “Second Olympian Ode” (Approach, 188–89), we might certainly add Verlaine’s “L’Angoisse”: “Je ris [. . .] des tours en spirales / Qu’étirent dans le ciel vide les cathédrales” (Verlaine, Oeuvres, 65); in Sologub’s translation: “Mne smeshno [. . .] i khram i bashni vekovoi / Stremlenie gordoe v nebesnyi svod pustoi” [I find humorous [. . .] also a church, and the haughty striving of an age-old tower into the empty heavenly vault] (Verlen, Izbrannye stikhotvoreniia [1912], 21). Nor, indeed, should we ignore Blok’s deeply consonant 1904 poem “Vse otsoshli, shumite sosny” (All have left, rustle, pines, 1904), in which the projectile of the poet’s thought meets no resistance from a seemingly empty and imcapable heavens: “Mechty pronzitel’nyi oskolok / Svobodno primet sineva” [The blue will freely accept / The piercing shard of a dream] (II, 72, emphasis mine). The last two lines of Mandelstam’s poem, with their Symbolist coordinates (“There—I could not love, / Here—I fear to love . . .” [Tam—ia liubit’ ne mog, / Zdes’—ia liubit’ boius’ . . .]), are quite possibly in dialogue with Harlequin’s accusations in The Fair Booth: “Here, no one knows how to love . . . [Zdes’ nikto liubit’ ne umeet . . .]” (SS6, III, 18).

17. Stratanovskii points out the influence of Bely in “I shudder from the cold,” and particularly of Bely’s images of dancing gold and dancing worlds, images that Bely himself borrows from Nietzsche’s Thus Spoke Zarathustra (“Tvorchestvo i bolezn’,” 215). However, Mandelstam’s ‘dancing’ dol’nik shows little rhythmical variation. Perhaps, here, we can already see an attraction to the stricter rhythmical organization of logaoedic verse.


22. It is possible that Mandelstam himself ultimately found this juxtaposition of “Falling” and “Tsarskoe selo” too jarring. In the third edition of Stone (1923), this set of
poems is absent. (Clearly, censorship or self-censorship impacted the decision to drop “Tsarskoe selo,” which would have seemed ironic-nostalgic from the point of view of 1923. Note, though, that the poems are dropped as a pair.) The composition of the author’s manuscript of Poems (1928)—without “Falling” and transposing “Tsarskoe selo” and “Gold Ruble”—goes about the task of achieving a pendulum construction differently, but with similar results (IRLI, f. 124, op. 1, ed. khr. 208, ll. 1, 31–33). “Gold Ruble” again falls on the conventionally Symbolist pole, but is paired with the quintessentially Acmeist “Tsarskoe selo;” while the three “confessional” poems, all securely Acmeist in their poetics, naturally form a mini-cycle.

23. Mikhail Gasparov finds the poem more akin to Symbolism than “Pedestrian” (“Sonety,” 158). To prove that “Falling” is **stylistically** still under the sway of Symbolism would demand a separate and entirely different kind of study. Purely intuitively, however, I will note that the poems in **Stone** on the Symbolist pole of the pendulum “catch up” stylistically to the Acmeist poetics of “Casino” only in “Gold Ruble.” By this time, however, we have already read “Tsarskoe Selo,” a poem absolutely free of any characteristic of Symbolism whatsoever. (Poems like “Casino” and “Gold Ruble” retain Symbolism as a crucial point of reference.)


25. Steiner. “Poem as Manifesto.” The cycle of three Christian confessions, noted by Brown, and the sonnet series noted by Lekmanov (introduced by “No, not the moon”) function as counterpoints to this binary organization (Brown, *Mandelstam*, 189; Lekmanov, *O pervom “Kamne,”* 32).

26. This phenomenon can be observed on a wider scale in Mandelstam’s poetry: “ . . . every poem turns out to be tied to another through the mediation of semantic oppositions” (Levin et al., “Russkaia semanticheskaia poetika,” 58).

27. *Kamen’* (1990), 216.

28. Ibid., 222.

29. On the second wave of influence of Symbolism in *Tristia*, the approach of which is visible already in “Ode to Beethoven” (Oda Betkhovenu, 1914), see, i.a., Mikhail Gasparov, “Tri poetiki,” 15; Segal, *Mandel’shtam. Istoriia i poetika*, 331–38; and chapter 7 below.

**CHAPTER 5**


2. In this sense, Mandelstam’s late-Symbolist “Your image,” while differing in tone, bears comparison on a semiotic plane to that stage of Symbolism, which Hansen-Löve labels SIII: “For the grotesque image of the world of SIII, it is characteristic that, here, simultaneously and in equal measure, both models [i.e., art as ersatz of religion, SI, diabolic Symbolism, and art as ersatz-religion, SII, mythopoetic Symbolism] are realized as alternating poles of some vertical hierarchy of values [ . . . ] in one text, within the boundaries of one pragmatic situation” (*Mifopoeticheskii simvolizm*, 10).


7. Ibid., 31.
9. A typewritten manuscript of “You passed through a cloud of fog” was found in Lozinsky’s archive among papers relating to the first issue of The Hyperborean, in which “Your image” was first published (Mets, “Primechaniia,” in PSS, 642). The connection to Blok in this latter poem had been even stronger in one of the drafts: “You walked past, queen of the fog” [Ty proshla tsaritseiu tumana] (PSS, 507, emphasis mine).
10. In the first stanza, the reality of the impending vision is subtly undermined in the “flickering of red lamps” [mertsan’(c) krasnykh lampad]; in the third stanza, through the racing of “fairytales and dreams” (I, 240).
11. Ibid.
12. Mandelstam’s transposition of Blok’s play with icon and essence to the realm of the word mirrors the analogy in theological terms between the doctrine of the living word and the problem of the ontology of icons. See, for instance, Losev, “Imiaslavie”; Paperno, “O prirode,” 30; Seifrid (who presents Sergei Bulgakov’s exposition), Word Made Self, 128.
13. “Nochnye dushi” [night souls] is clearly paranomastic play on “nashi dushi” [our souls], the two concepts being essentially equivalent in Blok’s metaphysics.
15. The connection is perhaps not entirely absent, however. Cf. Kudeiarov’s birdlike incantations: “Staridon, karion, kokire—stado [herd]: stridado . . .” Dry shards of curses, prayers, incantations and shouts cluck death-like in his very throat: are spit out with a cough; this whole motley herd, spit out by the carpenter, now chased after Matrena” (ibid., I, 574, my emphasis). Cf. also the final lines of Blok’s “Incantation by Fire and Darkness” (Zakliatie ognem i mrakom, 1908): “The living name of the Snow Maiden / Will still fly from [my] tongue . . .” [Zhivoe imia Devy Snezhnoi / Eshche sletaet s iazyka . . . ] (II, 318–19, emphasis mine) The poet’s heart is compared to a bird earlier in the cycle.
16. Note the use of the same device in the opening line of “You passed through a cloud of fog.”
17. The folk colorings are strongly reinforced in the meter, which borrows from a long tradition of folk imitations. The first poem of the cycle, for instance, is made up entirely of highly characteristic pentasyllabic feet with stress on the third syllable. Kliuev, though, combines this folk rhythm with rhyme.
18. Giperborei 1 (1912), 19.
20. Bely notes, with reference to Nietzsche, that an author’s “attitude toward the content of expressed opinions, this accompaniment of the soul to words, is what is most important in the sage” (Arabeski, 229). While tone does not lend itself to quantification, Averintsev’s similar interpretation of the multiple shifts between seriousness and irony in the poem (without specific reference to Symbolism) serves as powerful confirmation of my reading, which was initially formulated without consideration of his model. See Averintsev, “Konfessional’nye tipy,” 288–89.
21. In contrast, Blok could find it difficult to use the words “zdes’” [here] and “tam” [there] without invoking their Symbolist connotations. See Ronen, Approach, 175.
22. These two lines “in the reader’s perception may easily approach the boundary of the comical” (Averintsev, “Konfessional’nye tipy,” 289). Cf. Victor Shklovsky, referring to Mandelstam’s poetry of 1920: “And all this seems almost a joke, so loaded is it with proper nouns and Slavonicisms. As if it were written by [the nineteenth-century fictional deadpan
comic poet] Koz’ma Prutkov. These poems are written on the boundary of the comical” (Mandel’shtam i ego vremia, 109).

23. Averintsev calls it “not more than an exclamation,” but “simultaneously a substitute for the most important, unspeakable Biblical name of God” (“Konfessional’nye tipy,” 289).

24. This “serious irony” is itself inherited, in a less radical form, from the Symbolists. See Introduction, note 57.

25. Cf. Sergei Gorodetsky: “Both [Georgii Chulkov and Viacheslav Ivanov] are characteristic in that the heretics turned out to be the Symbolists themselves; heresy was initiated [zavodilas’] in the center” (Ot simvolizma do “Oktiabria,” 91); and Paperno on “Your image”: “A scion of Symbolism, not having refused its inheritance, Mandelstam seeks new paths, giving himself up to (from the point of view of Symbolism) ‘heresy’ and ‘Protestantism’” (“O prirode,” 32).

27. Ibid., 35.

29. Ivanov, SS, II, 613.
30. Ibid., 619.
31. Ibid., 621.
32. Solov’ev, SS, IV, 42–43.
33. Ibid., 36–38.
34. Ibid., 42–43.
35. Babayan, Mystics, Monarchs & Messiahs, xvi.
36. See ibid., xv, xxivff.
37. Cited in OED, s.v. “Pedestrian.”
38. Cf., for instance, Taranovsky on the sources of the connection of the swallow with the underworld in Mandelstam’s later poetry (Essays, 158).

39. Gorodetsky, in his review of the first edition of Stone, noted: “Mandelstam doesn’t embellish or exaggerate his experience” (Kamen’ [1990], 216).

42. Rusinko remarks on “Nietzsche’s recognition of the practical impossibility of purely Dionysian music”: “Such pure music would be shattering in its evocation of primordial universality and its unbearable representation of suffering and pain, which is the Dionysian truth about the world” (“Nietzsche’s influence,” 98).

44. Segal, “Poezia Mikhaila Lozinskogo,” 403; Lekmanov, Kniga ob akmeizme, 36.
45. Mikhail Gasparov calls the parallels with Lozinsky “too distant” (“Sonety,” 155).

In addition, it seems that “Wayfarer”—anything but a programmatic poem and written in relatively distant 1908—is unlikely to have served as a basis for dialogue between these two poets who grew close in 1912. Note that none of the poems included by Lozinsky in his first publications (in Giperborei 2 [1912] and 6 and 9/10 [1913]) had been written earlier than 1910.

46. One might suppose, following Ronen (Poetika, 193–94), that Mandelstam dedicated his poem to Lozinsky not right away, but in answer to the latter’s poetic response. (The 1913 edition of Stone does not include the dedication.)

47. Shileiko’s poem “His love struggled overmuch” (Ego liubov’ pereborolas’, 1914),
which references Lozinsky’s “At the river’s edge” (U potoka, 1913), reads “But in him alone can I find / All that is antiquated, all that is beloved” [No v nem odnom mogu naiti / Vsê, chto starinno, chto liubimo] (Shileiko, Pometki, 10; cited in Segal, “Poeziia Mikhaila Lozinskogo,” 358). See also a Latin inscription of February 1916 (A. G. Mets and I. G. Kravtsova, “Predislovie,” in Shileiko, Pometki, 6).


49. On the contemporary reception of Brand, see Eroshkina and Khalizev, “Spektakl’ i p’iesa.”

50. Somewhat muddled lines from an impromptu sonnet-acrostic by Vladimir Piast (who was sure to have shared it with Mandelstam) serve as evidence that contemporaries saw Bely as a “walker” (khodok). The original version, differing somewhat from that printed in Piast’s memoirs, is reproduced in “Trankhops.” Ronen’s mention of Pavel Batiushkov is likely motivated by the figure of the bridge in the latter’s idiolect, and perhaps also by a scholarly pun: early nineteenth-century poet Konstantin Batiushkov has long been considered a potential prototype here (see Kamen’ [1990], 294).


52. Belyi, Stikhotvoreniia i poemy, I, 301–2, emphasis mine.

53. Arabeski, 231–32, emphasis mine.

54. Ibid., 343, emphasis mine.


56. Stratanovskii sees “Pedestrian” as a polemic against Ibsen as much as Bely (a challenge to whom he sees, in general terms, on the basis of Bely’s desire to efface “the boundary between life and art”) (“Tvorchestvo i bolezn’,” 216). However, a rejection of the path of Ibsen’s heroes on a personal plane is combined in Mandelstam with an acceptance of Ibsen’s posing of the questions that confront them. A careful reader of Ibsen, not blinded by the epoch’s infatuation with moral maximalists like Brand—i.e., someone like Mandelstam or, indeed, Annensky (“Brand-Ibsen,” 1907), could not help seeing that, in Brand, the righteousness of the hero’s convictions and his approach to life are put to question. Bely felt that Brand perished because of a moment of doubt (Arabeski, 34–35), i.e., that he was not strong enough! The clear implication of the play’s ending, however, is that Brand has misconceived the nature of God, who indeed is not the God of comfortable bourgeois morality, but is “Deus Caritatis”—caring, merciful. One can also see in the deaths of Brand and Rubek (on whom, see also Ronen, Poetika, 195) inevitable retribution for attempting the heights of spiritual ascension, for treading forbidden ground. In this sense, we can see Mandelstam as saying that he believes in the fate of Ibsen’s heroes, who perish in the quest to ascend spiritual heights, not the sanguine claims of Bely’s lyric hero, who watches from his perch on the mountaintop as the avalanche rolls by into the abyss. Mandelstam’s personal choice, however, is to reverse (not just reject), the developmental trajectory of Ibsen’s heroes. As Bely put it (in a passage that Stratanovskii quotes): “Rubek sat at a restaurant table and suddenly stepped into a new heaven, onto a new earth. True, he didn’t make it
across [ne pereshagnul], he fell to his death” (Arabeski, 33). As Mandelstam moves from “Pedestrian” to the quatrains and then tercets of “Casino” on the facing page, he passes from an immediate sensation of the true danger of the real abyss to contemplation of an abstract, metaphorical one and, finally, finds himself back at the restaurant table—though not “stonefaced,” as Bely describes Rubek (ibid.), but enamored of the simple pleasures of life.

57. Margolina’s analysis betrays a dogmatic faithfulness to the allegorical sense of Father Pavel Florensky’s writings which is out of place when applied to to Mandelstam’s poetry (Mirovozzrenie, 39–42). Ronen has returned repeatedly to the Biblical subtexts of “Falling,” most recently in Poetika, 196; on these, see also Margolina, Mirovozzrenie, 22–24; Gasparov, “Sonety,” 151–52. Broadly, on the crisis of faith in Mandelstam’s early poetry, see, for instance, Musatov, Lirika, 45–50.

58. Kamen’ (1990), 204.

59. Ibid.

60. On the potential motives for Mandelstam’s conversion, see esp. Averintsev, “Konfessional’nye tipy,” 291–92; Mikelis, “K voprosu o kreshchenii.”

61. On these poems, see Ronen, “Mandelshtam, Osip Emilyevich” (1973); Taranovsky, Essays, 51–54; Freidin, Coat, 48–54.

62. Cf. Alexandre Benois: “At the present time, Catholicism, one might say, hangs on aestheticism, and beauty is its last (but how powerful!) bastion” (“Khudozhestvennye eresi” [1906], 86).

63. On this reversal, see Averintsev, “Konfessional’nye tipy,” 289. Ronen and Ospovat present a detailed analysis of the semantics and subtextual underpinnings of Tiutchev’s “kamen’ very,” particularly in relation to Mandelstam’s works, in “Kamen’ very.” To their observations, I will add that the appearance in “A black crucifix” of the word “sviatynia” (a sanctuary; a relic; or generally something held sacred), rather unexpected from the point of view of usage (hence my unusual translation), implies that Mandelstam was thinking here of the source of the image of the stumbling block in Isaiah 8:14: “And he will be a sanctuary; but for both houses of Israel he will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. And for the people of Jerusalem he will be a trap and a snare.” (Cf. the Synodal translation: “I budet On osviashcheniem i kamnem pretknoveniia, i skaloiu soblazna dlia oboikh domov Izraelia” and the French, “Et il sera un sanctuaire, Mais aussi une pierre d’achoppement, Un rocher de scandale pour les deux maisons d’Israel.” Note that the image of shipwreck is potentially present in this passage (in the Russian and French), and that the promised fall specifically threatens the houses of Israel. The call to Christian faith, for Mandelstam, represents a special danger—because of his Jewish roots.

64. Cf. Shershenevich: “. . . precision and fluidity of verse are undermined by striking tastelessness. He doesn’t shy from setting down in verse such maxims [the first two lines of “Falling” are quoted, S.G.]” (cited in Kamen’ [1990], 220).


66. On 1 Peter in this context, see Ronen, Approach, 204–5. Note that I do not wish to impute a linearity of development to the poet, but rather to explore the implicit logic of intersecting texts that form a progression when viewed in hindsight.

67. The allusion to Tiutchev’s stone from “Problème” has been commented on numerous times, starting with Toddes, “Mandelshtam i Tiutchev,” 77ff. Toddes calls the
reference to Tiutchev in “The Morning of Acmeism” “significantly more unexpected from both a literary-historical and a logical point of view than the Symbolists’ statements about Tiutchev” (“Mandelstam i Tiutchev,” 78). On chapter 2 of Daniel as foundation for Tiutchev’s “Problème” and Mandelstam’s semantics of the stone in “The Morning of Acmeism” and related poems, see Ronen, “Mandelstam (1891–1938),” 1634–35. Mandelstam himself realizes the allusion to Daniel retrospectively, when in “On the Nature of the Word” (1922), he calls the Symbolism of the poets of Libra a “colossal structure, even if on clay feet” (II, 255). The implication of course is that Acmeism, armed with Tiutchev’s stone, has destroyed this idol of pseudo-Symbolism (izhesisvolizm).


69. Cf. Bely’s “In the Church” (Vo khrame, 1903): “And once more I pray, tormented with doubts. / From the walls saints threaten with a shriveled finger” [I snova ia molius’, somnen’iami tomim. / Ugodniki so sten groziat perstom sukhim] (Stikhotvoreniia i poemy, I, 94).

70. One might conjecture that the poet had in mind such figures as his older friend, the deeply religious S. P. Kablukov, secretary of the Religious-Philosophical Society, when he penned that line. Cf. his unfinished “I remember the ancient shore” (Ia pomniu bereg vekovoi, 1910), dedicated to Kablukov (Kamen’ [1990], 242).

71. Kamen’ (1990), 206, emphasis mine.

72. See Dal’, Tolkovyi slovar’, s.vv. “morok,” “obmorochit’.” Cf. Gogol’s defense of the colossal scale of Gothic architecture: “Magnificence [velikolepie] casts the simpleton into some sort of dumbfoundedness [onemenie] . . .” (“Ob arkhitekte nyneshnego vremeni,” PSS, VIII, 66); Bely on Ivanov: “he will not rest until he captivates [plenit]” (O Bloke, 353); Blok’s epistle to Ivanov: “Many enchantments, and many songs, / And the beauty of ancient visages . . . / Your world, indeed, is wondrous! / But you are autocratic tsar.” [I mnogo char, i mnogo pesen, / I drevnikh likov krasoty . . . / Tvoi mir, poistine, chudesen! / Da, tsar’ samoderzhavnyi—ty] (III, 166).

73. Cf. Blok’s “The distance is blind” (Dali slepy, 1904), the poem that closed his collection Poems about the Fair Lady (1905): “There will be springs in an eternal chain / And the yoke of fallings” [Budut vesny v vechnoi smene / I padenii gnet] (II, 337). Falling is also, of course, a key topos for the decadent older generation. See Hansen-Löve, Russkii simvolizm, 122–125 and elsewhere.

74. Bely on Blok: “Symbols, like roses, hide the sense and wholeness of the dramas lived through; lift up this garland; a funnel [proval; cf. provalit’ia—to fall through] into emptiness will look back at you” (Arabeski, 464).

75. The connection with Nadson, posited by Lekmanov (Kniga ob akmeizme, 474–76), would not exclude this circle of associations. See chapter 6, pp. 95–96.

76. Fantasies about the cowl perhaps reach an apogee in Sergei Solov’ev’s “Sergii Radonezhskii,” in which a youthful casting of the famous monk serves as a mask for the lyric “I.” Solov’ev, it should be noted, made good on this monastic imagery, entering the priesthood in life.

77. Blok, “Monk” (Inok, 1907), II, 320.

78. “From the crystal fog” (Iz khrustal’nogo tumana, 1909), III, 12. Cf. Mandelstam on the Symbolists in “Letter on Russian Poetry”: “[ . . . ] the lovers of the grand style sigh [ . . . ]: ‘Now those were poets; what themes, what sweep [razmakh]’” (III, 32). Ronen sees the poet in this stanza addressing François Villon, who envisions his impending hanging (Poetika, 197–99). While I read this stanza differently, it is worth noting that Villon is, for
Mandelstam, the prototype of the poet who can smash the hothouse of allegorical poetry, thus the spiritual father, in my reading, of this poem's “So, be damned.”

79. Cf. Mandelstam: “You can't light a fire because what it could mean you yourself will regret” (II, 255); Briusov: “May your virtue be— / A readiness to ascend the pyre” [Da budet tvoia dobrodetel’— / Gotovnost' vzoi ti na koster] (SS, I, 447).


84. Mikhail Gasparov, “Poet i obshchestvo,” 27.

85. A revision to the poem introduced by Gumilev, but not reflected in the publication in *Apollo*, seems calculated to eliminate this “Symbolist” accent (“I bogomofo’tsev gulkoe rydan’ e [And the resonant wailing of pilgrims]). On the textual history, see Mets, “Primechaniiia,” PSS, 531.


CHAPTER 6


2. On “akme” understood as ostrie—“edge, tip, point”—in the writings of Acmeists and contemporaries, see Timenchik, “Zametki ob akmeizme” (1974), 39ff.; specifically in Mandelstam, see Ronen, “Leksicheskii povtor,” 368–69.

3. On the role of charisma in Russian poetry, see Freidin, “Sidia na saniakh” and *Coat*, 1–19 and elsewhere. On the Symbolist lyric hero, Freidin writes: “In fact, these aspects of the lyric [. . .] constituted a specific ‘confessional’ mode, a matter of tradition and choice, which put a high premium on the poet’s ‘sincerity’ of expression—a mode that Blok practiced with consummate skill” (ibid., 47).

4. The word toska lacks a compelling equivalent in English. It combines connotations of world-weariness, longing, sorrow, and mental anguish and might be described as a feeling of palpable absence or emptiness.


6. *Slovar’ sovremennogo russkogo literaturnogo iazyka*, s.v. “Gigantskii [gigantskie shagi].” I would like to thank Prof. R. D. Timenchik for first bringing this definition to my attention.


10. An additional impetus for the equation of clock and steps may have come from
Émile Verhaeren’s “Les horloges”: “Les horloges / . . . / Pareilles aux vieilles servantes / Ta-pant de leurs sabots ou glissant sur leurs bas” (Poèmes, 203). Cf. also Briusov’s translation, in which an open connection is made to illness: “Chasy! / . . . / Vy stuchite nogami služa-nok v bol’šikh bashmakakh, / Vy skol’zite shagami bol’nichnykh sidelok” [Clocks! / . . . / You knock with servants’ feet in great shoes, / You glide with the steps of hospital nurses] (Verkharn, Stikhi o sovremennosti [1906], reprinted in Stikhotvorenia, 67, my emphasis).


13. Lerner, “Smert’ i pokhorony Pushkina,” 133. That Mandelstam personally reacted to this date is hinted by the fact that he may have begun to wear his sideburns in 1912. See Karpovich, “Moe znakomstvo,” 260–61.

14. The leap from “Quiet, heavy steps” [Tikhimi, tiazhelymi shagami] to “Giant steps” [Gigantskie shagi] is assisted by the Pushkinian subtext (“What a giant he is made here!” [Kakim on zdes’ predstavlen ispolinom!] “Kamennyi gost,” SS10, V, 390, emphasis mine).  


17. “Like Ovid in Pushkin’s The Gypsies [Tsygany], Alexander Blok had the gift not only of poetic invention, but of the embodiment of his creations in the material of audible speech [real’no zvuchashchaia rech’]. In articles dedicated to the memory of Blok [ . . . ] invariably we encounter references to the ‘surprising mastery’ with which he pronounced his poems, to the individuality of his manner of declamation, to his ‘voice, indelible in memory’” (Bernshtein, “Golos Bloka,” 458–59). See also Piast, “Dva slova.”

18. Should we mere mortals doubt Mandelstam’s ability to meaningfully allude to “Steps of the Knight Commander” after a single hearing, let us consider the testimony of Sergei Rudakov, who wrote his wife on 16 May 1935, after reading to the poet his elegy on the death of Konstantin Vaginov, “I was witness to an unbelievable [neveroiatnoe] physical phenomenon: he listened one time—[then] repeated the whole poem, declaiming it like his own poetry (on account of which it sounded even better)” (“Mandel’shtam v pis’makh Rudakova,” 50).

19. Mandelstam may also possibly be overlaying “Steps of the Knight Commander” upon Blok’s translation of Verhaeren’s “Les pas” (published in the New Year’s issue of Niva for 1907). This translation, entitled “Steps” (Shagi), appears to have influenced “Steps of the Knight Commander” and contains several images evocative of “Let, in the stuffy room”: phantoms, a brain burning with exhaustion, “steps heard in childhood” [shagi, us-lyshannye v detstve] that are “like news of a terrible vengeance” [kak vesti groznoi mesti], as well as a loop [petlia] and dull straps (Blok, SS8, II, 344–45).

20. “∞” is, of course, the mathematical symbol for infinity.

21. Annenskii, Stikhotvorenia i tragedii, 55, emphasis mine.

22. Blok, SS8, V, 82.

23. Kamen’ (1990), 195. Cf. also, from “Petr Chaadaev” (1914): “progress,’ and not history, the mechanical movement of a clock-hand, and not the sacred connection and succession of events” (ibid., 191).

24. On the image of the rooster in Akhmatova, Blok, Mandelstam, and others, see Toporov, Akhmatova i Blok, 26, 107–8n64.

25. “[ . . . ] the ‘antithesis’ begins, the ‘changing of aspect,’ which was anticipated already in the very beginning of the ‘thesis’” (Blok, SS, V, 428); “But I fear: You will change Your appearance” [No strashno mne: izmenish’ oblik Ty] (I, 99).
26. Belyi, “To Bal’mont” (Bal’montu, 1903), Stikhovtoreniia i poemy, I, 79.
27. Merezhkovskii, PSS, XV, 7. On the influence of this poem on Blok, see Toporov, Akhmatova i Blok, 108n64.
28. I thank G. A. Levinton for this observation.
29. Fet, Polnoe sobranie stikhovtorenii, 260.
30. Dal’, Tolkovyi slovar’, s.v. “Ves [Vesy],” My thanks to Nikolai Bogomolov, who pointed out the connection to Libra, and the fact that Libra was a September sign before the revolution.
31. Coincidentally, September also marks the “hatching” of Symbolism (or at least the naming of the movement) through the publication of Jean Moréas’s manifesto, “Le Symbolisme” (Le Figaro, 18 September 1886).
32. Cf. Fet, “Organ Grinder” (Sharmanshchik, 1854): “And—the old song!—with melancholy / We tenderly coddle the past” [I—staraia pesnia!—s toskoi / My proshloe nezhno leleem] (Polnoe sobranie stikhovtorenii, 464). Mandelstam’s generally Symbolist barrel organ is also tinted with specifically Blokian references. The most characteristic comes in the first stanza: “viscous arias” (tiaguchi(e) ari(i)). “Barrel Organ” is dated 16 June 1912, three days after Mandelstam saw Blok at Vladimir Piast’s apartment (Blok, SS, VII, 150). At the time, Blok was working on Rose and Cross [Roza i krest], and June 1912 falls in the interlude during which Blok considered this work an opera libretto (ibid., IV, 583–85). Blok’s diary entry displays more direct points of contact with “Barrel Organ”: “During the day, I wander aimlessly—heat, stench, melancholy. The city reeks” [Dnem shliaius’—znoi, von’, toska. Gorod provonial] (ibid., VII, 150). Cf. “I wander like a shadow” [brozhu kak ten’]; “the laziness of stagnant waters” [vod stoichikh len’] (emphasis mine); the barrel organ itself, with which toska is a recurrent association (“Barrel organ, barrel organ, melancholy and melancholy! [Sharmanka, sharmanka, toska i toska!],” Gorodetskii, “Sharmanka,” in Poety simvolizma [1908], 355). In addition, a barrel organ plays a crucial role in the “poet’s” genesis in Blok’s “Conceived in the night, in the night I was born” (Zachatyi v noch’, ia v noch’ rozhden, 1907).
33. On the biographical plane, Piast notes that Blok, in the winter and early spring of 1912, was obsessed with rollercoasters and sledding down ice hills (Piast, “Vospominaniiia,” 384–85).
34. Cf. “In the poetry of Russian Symbolism repetition found its embodiment particularly in ‘rotational’ [krugovaia] symbolics—of the ‘circle,’ ‘swings,’ ‘carousels’” (Panova, MPV, 359). Iurgis Baltrushaitis’s “Carousel” (Karousel’), from his book Mountain Path (Gornaia tropa), reviewed in the inaugural issue of The Hyperborean (Oct. 1912), brings together several of these images, which unite Mandelstam’s sonnets: carousel, barrel organ, mechanistic circular motion, falling: “And from this monotonous song / Often, often, in a tiresome hour, / The knight falls from [his] horse . . .” [I ot pesni odnozvuchnoi / Chasto-chasto, v chas dokuchnyi, / Rytsar’ valitsia s konia . . . ] (Baltrushaitis, Derevo v ogne, 131).
35. “The highest accusation against contemporary bourgeois civilization is the accusation of its non-musicality [bezmuzykal’nost’]” (Mints, “Blok i russkii simvolizm,” 505).
36. In fact, in Church Slavonic, the word rooster appears, besides alektor, as pêtel’ and pêtel’, in both cases with the anticipated nominative plural pêti.
38. Nadson, Polnoe sobranie stikhovtorenii, 245–46. Lekmanov is convinced that at this time Mandelstam was reading Nadson’s diaries and letters, newly published in con-
nection with the fiftieth anniversary of his birth (Kniga ob akmeizme, 474). On Nadson's cult in the 1880s, see Mandelstam's "Bookcase" (Knizhnyi shkap), SS, II, 59–61.

39. Nadsonovshchina is a derisive collective designation for poetry in imitation of or influenced by the immensely popular, politically engaged poet, Semyon Nadson, who, for the generation of Modernists, became a shibboleth for second-rate poetry.

40. Mikhail Gasparov, "Sonety," 150. The date (Gasparov gives 1910) is taken from Mets, Mandel'shtam i ego vremia, 37. While the exact date of Sinani's death is not known, Mets relates in private correspondence that a relative communicated to him that Sinani died in May.


42. "On Drama" (O drame, 1907), Blok, SS, V, 186–93.

43. Pushkin's death came to play a central role in Mandelstam's art and thought. Cf. Mandelstam's "Pushkin and Skriabin": “Twice the death of an artist has gathered the Russian people and lit above them a sun. They showed an example of communal, Russian death, died a full death, as people live a full life. Their person, in dying, expanded to become a symbol of the whole people, and the sun-heart of he who was dying was forever halted in the zenith of suffering and glory [. . . ] It seems to me that the death of an artist should not be removed from the chain of his creative accomplishments but should be looked at as the last, concluding link [. . . ] They buried Pushkin at night [. . . ] at night they laid the sun in a coffin" (II, 313). See chapter 11, note 11.

44. Akhmatova called Blok "the epoch's tragic tenor" (‘And having groped around in black memory, you will find’ [I v pamiati chernoi poshariv, naidesh’], 1960). Cf. Blok's own statement, recorded by Akhmatova in her short memoir about Blok: “Anna Andreevna, we are not tenors” (Akhmatova, Sochinenia [1990], I, 365; II, 136).


46. It may be particularly appropriate to speak of the poem as a talisman, given Mandelstam's use of that word in line seven. Pushkin appears to be anagrammatically encoded in the first half of the opening line: “PUst' v dUSHnoi KomNate.” In general, the poem brims with understated sound play: STKkkliANKI—GlgANTSKIe; pETLI—verTEL-Is'; GRUZno—KaRUSEl'; and the exquisite mirroring in “V TU maMIa Viden'ia ozhIVUT.” On the place of incantation, shamanism and talismans in Mandelstam's poetry, see Ronen, “An Introduction”; and Freidin, Coat, 5ff., 180–81, 284–85n65. Ronen mentions “Let, in the stuffy room” among Mandelstam's poems that openly used the word "talisman."

47. See also S. N. Broitman, who presents a compendium of Blokian subtexts—sometimes too laxly attributed—in Mandelstam's earliest poetry (“Rannii Mandel'shtam i Blok,” in Poetika, esp. 282–84).


CHAPTER 7

1. See, however, Panova's intriguing "Uvorovannaia Solominka," 134–43; and Gorelik, “’Tainstvennoe stikhotvorenie “Telefon’,” 49–52, both of which tie Mandelstam texts of this interim period to "Steps of the Knight Commander."

2. “Thus we struggle within the walls of the old jail, in which paganism struggled [. . . ] The reason for our illness is our forgetting of Christianity [zabvenie khristianstva]. Humanity forgot that which was already revealed in Christianity” (PZ, 420, my emphasis;
noted by Mets in “Mandel'shtam. 'Skriabin i khristianstvo, ’” 77). Mandelstam announces this myth in “Pushkin and Skriabin”: “We demand a chorus, we are bored with the grumbling of the thinking reed. For a long, long time we played with music, unsuspecting of the danger which is hidden within it, and for now—maybe from boredom—we thought up a myth, in order to beautify our existence, music cast us a myth—not invented, but born, foam-born, mantle-born, of royal descent, the legitimate heir of the myths of antiquity—the myth of forgotten Christianity” (II, 317).


4. Briusov, in his introduction to a volume of translations of Verlaine’s poetry, described the poet’s final years thus: “So, over the course of more than 10 years, the greatest lyric poet of late-19th-century France led a piteous existence, alternately revoltingly drunk, shouting curses with bloodshot eyes, or a pitiful, infirm old man, jotting down verse [. . .] At times religious moods once again seized Verlaine, and then this ‘dualistic person,’ who had spent the night in a tavern, went to church, fell on his knees, cried, prayed . . . and at the doors of the church he was awaited by one of his lovers [. . .] or her pimp” (Verlen, Izbrannye stikhovorenia, 16).

5. Mikhail Gasparov notes that the resemblance of Verlaine and Socrates was a commonplace (“Komentarii,” in SP, 617).


7. This is said only on the way to establishing their own thesis, that “the hero of ‘Old Man’ is the word, and, more than that, precisely the comic word,” embodied in the multivalent, wandering morpheme “mot” and its paranomastic and semantic echoes (Amelin and Morderer, Miry, 74). This layer of the poem, however, if indeed it exists, remains, at best, secondary.


9. Shindin, “Tret’i mezhdunarodnye Mandel’shtamovskie chteniia,” 337. Shkuropol also connects the “grotesque” in Mandelstam’s urban poems of the early Acmeist period to the Petersburg of the Symbolists, particularly Blok’s ‘terrible world,’ which becomes a “parodic underworld” (“Grotesk,” 92–93).

10. Blok revisits this image, with a clearly negative valence, in “Irony” (SS8, V, 346).

11. The subtext is noted by A. D. Mikhailov and P. M. Nerler (“Kommentarii,” in Mandel’shtam, Sochineniia, I, 462–63). Its implications, however, have not been explored.

12. Tynianov, Arkhaisty i novatory, 433.


15. This phrase, heralding back to Orthodox theology and the writings of Solov’ev, is used by Blok in his foreword to Vozmezdie, where it refers to “art, life and politics” (SS8, III, 296). Broitman traces its history and usage in Poetika, 147–57.

16. Panova conducts an extensive and rigorous grammatical analysis of time structures as they relate to competing models of time in Mandelstam’s poetry (MPV, 340–477). In her analysis, the conceptual collapsing of time inherent in Bergson’s fan can correlate to cyclical and spiral models of time, as well as “synchronization of events.” The markers of these time structures in Mandelstam’s poetry include, firstly, the phenomenon of repeti-
tion in culture (427), propagated particularly through choice of narratives, arrangement of events, organization of classical plots and subtexts (440) and the overlaying of classical plots on the personal (453–55; Panova draws here upon research by Ginzburg and Mikhail Gasparov); secondly, dynamic shifts in tense (for instance, “narrativity, opening the poem, establishing temporal distance, and then superseded by present tenses, which cancel this distance” [455]), present tenses of description and generalization, as well as the “usual” (uzual’noe) present tense (reflecting the world as it is and ought to be, reality conceptualized through adherence to natural laws [zakonomernosti] [426]); finally, lexical markers of eternal return and synchronization. Interesting in this regard is the decrease in markers of subjectivity in Tristia (428). This seems logical, as the syncretism of eras, in order to be compelling, must be perceived as an objective reality (the actuality of time’s shape), not the impressionistic fruit of the poet’s imagination.

17. Translation, Harris and Link, in Mandelstam, Collected Critical Prose, 117. It seems that Harris was first to establish that this passage is a misreading of Bergson (“Mandelstamian zlost’,” 116, 130). Recent scholarship on the influence of Bergson on Mandelstam includes Panova, MPV, 343–56, 444; Lachmann, “Cultural Memory,” 369–70; Pak, “Problema.”
19. Ibid., 439.
20. See chapter 6, pp. 89–90. In any case, Blok published his poem that fall in Russkaia mysl’, no. 11.
21. Consummate Modernist Valerii Briusov was taken aback by “Don Juan’s ‘motor-car’” (SS8, III, 520).
22. See Ronen on this Blokian subtext (Poetika, 76–77).
23. Kamen’ (1990), 298.
25. Regardless of the wealth of interpretive possibilities opened up through the poet’s suggestive evocation of Hippolytus (see esp. Freidin, Coat) and third-person depiction the young Levite (“Among the priests a young Levite” [Sredi sviashchennikov levitom molodym, 1917]), the texts in which they appear do not insist upon a relation of “inseparability and unfusedness” between these heroes and a poetic “I.” “For not being able to keep hold of your hands” (Za to, chto ia ruki tvoi ne sumel uderzhat’, 1920) is most similar in character in this regard to “On a straw-covered sledge.” On “We shall gather anew in Petersburg,” see chapter 10.
26. Nietzsche, Birth of Tragedy, 121.
27. Ibid., 109ff.
28. Ibid., 59, 67, 74.
30. “Religia Dionisa” (hereafter, RD), Voprosy zhizni 7 (1905), 140.
31. Ibid.
34. RD, Voprosy Zhizni 7 (1905), 133–34, 142–43, and elsewhere.
35. RD, Voprosy Zhizni 7 (1905), 136, 142ff. In this influential and expansive early comparative mythological and anthropological study in two parts, “The Hellenic Religion of the Suffering God (Ellinskaia religiia stradaishchego boga) and “The Religion of Dionysus” (Religiia Dionisa), Ivanov traces the history of the religion of the Greek god. According to Ivanov’s study (which relies heavily in this argument upon Frazer’s The Golden
Bough), the cult of Dionysus arose from cannibalistic and orgiastic funeral feasts, particularly in Asia Minor, in which a ritual victim took on the role first of a deceased hero, then later of the dying god, periodically resurrected (RD, *Voprosy zhizni* 6 [1905], 185–220). This chthonic cult gradually took on features of the Greek Dionysian myths. In Greece, the new religion quickly gained ground, absorbing many local cults until its expansion was finally halted through a truce with the religion of Apollo, in which each god adopted many of the other’s features and emblems (RD, *Voprosy zhizni* 7 [1905], 122–33). The “barbarian” religion of Dionysus emerged from this synthesis “illuminated” (ibid., 124), and from the Dionysian-Apollonian synthesis, the art of ancient Greek tragedy was born (ibid., 130.). Through the Hellenic thought of the Alexandrian period, the central ideas and symbols of the Dionysian religion prepared the ground for widespread acceptance of Christianity in the post-Hellenic world (ibid., 133–34). For other contemporary sources on the development of tragedy and the sources of Dionysian religion, see Levinton, “Na kamennykh otrogakh;” 208–9.


37. Freidin considers the “myth of forgotten Christianity,” as do I, central to Mandelstam’s poetry of this period (Freidin, *Coat*, 77–78, 87–88; Freidin, “Sidia,” 25). However, our understanding of the sense of this myth differs radically: while Freidin sees the poet taking the role of prophet among forgetful contemporaries, I see *Tristia* as the poet’s own willed act of forgetting and remembering over time. In addition, Freidin’s archonological analysis of the poet’s use of analogical “masks” contrasts with my focus on this myth as narrative. Finally, while Freidin chooses the term prolepsis (anticipation) to describe the relation of *Tristia* to Mandelstam’s later works in which his “Dichtung and Wahrheit” become “mutually transparent” (Freidin, *Coat*, 221), he nonetheless sees the poet’s artistic career, as projected within “Pushkin i Skriabin” and *Tristia*, as possessing the “capacity to redeem a collectivity that had fallen into sin” (ibid., 73). In contrast, I see the poet’s art as inherently and necessarily distanced, as play, from extraliterary redemption, taking the poet himself at his word (see below, pp. 127–28).

On the mythopoetics of *Tristia* generally, see also, i.a., Levin, “Zametki”; Myers “‘Hellenism’ and ‘Barbarism’”; Hansen-Löve “Thanatopoetics”; Terras “Black Sun”; Koval’eva, “Psikheia u Persefony.”


39. On the controversy surrounding *Tristia* (1922) and the poet’s rejection of the volume, see Lekmanov, *Kniga ob akmeizme*, 490; *Zhizn’,* 102; Levinton, “Eshche raz,” 230. Levinton argues for an undercurrent of playful literary malice (directed against Mikhail Kuzmin) in the poet’s perhaps too vociferous note for posterity (“This book is compiled without me against my will by illiterates from a pile of randomly pulled pages”). It is all too easy, however, to imagine his indignation at the volume’s mangled composition and terrible distortions (“Solominka, when you sleep . . .” in a poem about insomnia; “from the blessed, singing den of sin [priton]”). In any case, what Mandelstam rejects is not the concept of his second book, but its realization.


42. Aeschylus, *Seven Against Thebes*, 293. This specifically ritual dirge is contrasted by the chorus to the personal lament of Antigone and Ismene.
43. On Ivanov’s influence in “Ode to Beethoven,” see Freidin, Coat, 366n66; Margolina, Mirovozzrenie, 30–31; Segal, Mandel’shtam. Istoriia i poetika, 331–38; Mets, in Mandel’shtam, PSS, 537; Dobritsyn, “Slovo-logos,” 39–40.

44. See Przybylski, God’s Grateful Guest, 92–93; Mikhail Gasparov, “Tri poetiki,” 15. This poem is properly seen as a synchronic anticipation of Mandelstam’s diachronic challenge to Ivanov and Nietzsche in Tristia.

45. Roman numerals I and II reflect the publication in Tristia.


47. Taranovsky relates this passage to the 1917 poem “Still far is of the asphodels” (Eshche daleko asfodelei) in Essays, 157.


49. Ibid., 130.

50. A copy of Athena-Minerva’s statue stood in the Admiralty (Svin’in, Dostopamiatnosti, 384).

51. Cf. Ivanov’s “dithyramb” “The Firebearers” (Ognenostsy), from Cor Ardens: “Unstable and new / Are the Olympian thrones, / Ancient chaos in the dungeon is more sacred” (SS, II, 239). Ivanov is, however, in this poem, unequivocally sympathetic to the rebellion of these chthonic forces, which are for him allied with Prometheus and Dionysus and, through them, oppressed humanity. Mandelstam clearly has a more ambivalent attitude toward Tiutchev’s “ancient chaos.”

52. The Dionysian context is strongly reinforced through an echo of Verhaeren’s Hélène de Sparte in Briusov’s translation (first publ., Vesy 8–12 [1908], separately 1909): “Bacchante: We glorify Dionysus. Our body / Burns; you, Helen, we thirst for! / The dark enebriates us, like black wine. / The woods quake from our night dances” [Vakkhanka: Diónisa my slavim. Nashe telo / Pylaet; my tebia, Elena, zhazhdem! / T’ma nas p’ianit, kak chernoe vino. / Ot nashikh pliask nochnykh drozhat lesa] (Verkharn, Elena Spartanskaia, 81).


54. The poems most obviously “out of character” in this regard are the frightening and retrograde “Return to the incestuous womb” (Vernis’ v smesitel’noe lono, 1920) and the incantatory “I want just like the others” (Ia naravne s drugimi, 1920).

55. For readings of “On the rocky spurs,” see Taranovsky, Essays, 83–98; Nadezhda Mandel’shtam, Vtoraia kniga, 36–37, 120; Levinton, “’Na kamennykh’”; Przybylski, God’s Grateful Guest, 166–89; Segal, Mandel’shtam. Istoriia i poetika, 562–78. Despite the vast comparative, subtextual, and structural material gathered in these studies, the underlying semantic structure of the poem, which connects its images, has not been described in its richness and simplicity.

56. On this occasion, see Nadezhda Mandelstam, Vtoraia kniga, 120.

57. In spite of Taranovsky’s assertion that this feature is a synecdoche for the muses (Essays, 153n12), the primary referent here is Sappho, the human “tenth muse.” (See Levinton, “’Na kamennykh,’” 136; Terras, “Classical Motives,” 261.) The expression “tenth muse” is also repeated in Ivanov’s introduction to Alkei i Safo, 17. Inasmuch as this same feature also evokes, in a more general way, the Muses and Nadezhda Mandelstam, the poem’s addressee (see Taranovsky, Essays, 153n11), it can also be seen to hint at three sources of the poet’s inspiration.

58. The tone of these is tender, and the thematics relevant. Cf. particularly fragment XLV; see Taranovsky, Essays, 86; Levinton, “’Na kamennykh,’” 129.
59. Ivanov concludes the introduction to his translation of Sappho and Alkeus with Sappho’s own words: “Trust that, with time, someone / Us too will remember” [Vspomnit so vremenem / Kto-nibud’, ver’, i nas] (Alkei i Safo, 27).

60. See Taranovsky, Essays, 87–92.

61. On the paronomasia, see Hansen-Løve, “Thanatopoetics,” 142. Levinton’s claim, that “cherepakha-lira” is a “compression” of the literal “cherapakha” used in Ivanov’s translation of Sappho’s fragment about her lyre and the explanatory “lira” found in Veresaev’s translation, is unfounded (“Na kamennykh,” 125). “Cherepakha-lira” is simply a calque from the Greek “chelys-lyra,” the full name of the ancient instrument. On death as the penalty for poetic creation in Mandelstam’s poetry, see Taranovsky, Essays, 78, 81, 160n23.

62. The chelys-lyra even resembles a forehead when seen from the back. The effect is accentuated as the bars (sometimes antelope horns), which hold the cross-bar to which the strings are attached, are reminiscent of horns emerging from this forehead.

63. Alkei i Safo, 95, emphasis mine.

64. Hesiod, Homeric Hymns, 111.

65. “Why does the turtle-lyre await Terpander and not Mercury?” Irina Odoevtseva purportedly asked Mandelstam after he read “On the rocky spurs” for the first time. “Because Terpander was really born, lived on Lesbos and really made a lyre,” Mandelstam replied (Odoevsteva, Izbrannoe, 336). On this incident, see Levinton, “Germes, Terpandr.”

66. Taranovsky, Essays, 94; cf. also Terras, “Classical Motives,” 261; Gasparov in Mandel’shtam, SP, 635.

67. Note that, in “The Shell” (Rakovina, 1911), the poet is not simply an empty vessel; his “shell” lacks a pearl, but there is something within it—be it only a lie—that the night will come to love.

68. See Nancy Pollak on the image of the skull-cupola and the “inner excess” of salient figures in Mandelstam’s poetry of the 1930s (Mandelstam the Reader, 21, 35, and passim).

69. “Bare-headed” grass rustles [Prostovolosaia shumit trava] implies mourning or loss (cf. Mandelstam’s “Tristia” [1918]; see below), and “Lungwort wafts to the delight of wasps” is, here, unsettling, while the Ukrainian-intoned krinitsa [spring] localizes the stanza, at the same time that it betrays its inner Greek heritage (κρηνών) (see Levinton, “Na kamennykh,” 125, 135–36, 148–49). In this sense, my reading contrasts with both Przybylski, who sees in these lines “the Arcadian image of the land of inspiration” (God’s Grateful Guest, 186) and Taranovsky, who sees “absolutely no reason to tear these lines away from the central two stanzas” (Essays, 96). I see in these lines a sharp break that returns us to the poetic present and, tonally, prepares the wistful call of the final lines.

Note that while wasps are often positively encoded by Mandelstam, resemantization of the image occurs constantly in Mandelstam’s poetry within the context of individual works. Bukhshtab, for instance, contrasts Mandelstam and Blok on the basis of the tendency of Blok’s vocabulary to accrue persistent and cumulative symbolic meaning based upon prior contexts (“Poeziia Mandel’shtama,” 137–38, 146). In this poem, ancient poets are compared to bees. They and the metaphorical honey (med) of their verse give way to literal wasps and medunitsa of the present.

There is no controversy surrounding the heartfelt longing that must have provoked Mandelstam’s idyllic outpouring during times of bloodshed. See Przybylski, God’s Grateful Guest, 189; Taranovsky, Essays, 98; Segal, Mandel’shtam. Istoriiia i poetika, 567.

70. Schiller, Werke, I, 123; Reed, Schubert Song Companion, 217–18, line breaks added.

71. I thank the anonymous reviewer at The Ohio State University Press, who sug-
gested this subtext, as well as my colleague, Bettina Cothran, for her translations and her advice on the cultural context of Schiller’s poem.

72. Schiller, Werke, II, Part 1, 366; Reed, Schubert Song Companion, 164, line breaks added. Mandelstam simultaneously alludes to the idyll embedded in Roman poet Tibullus’s third elegy from the first book in Batiushkov’s “free translation” (Elegia iz Tibulla. Vol’nyi pervoeid, 1814). “Zachem my ne zhivem v zlatye vremena?” [Why do we not live in the golden age?], asked Tibullus (and with him Batiushkov), in earlier, but no less real, or war-filled, times (Batiushkov, Opyty, 207).


74. Saito, “Poetika izgnaniia,” 48. “Tristia” is also meaningfully mapped onto Tibullus’s separation from and reuniting with Delia in Elegy I, 3, mentioned above (Bukhshtab, Poezia Mandel’shtama, 143–44; Saito, “Poetika izgnaniia,” 66). The competing set of associations for loose hair, with sexuality—as, indeed, in the finale of Tibullus’s elegy—is not, however, activated in the closing stanza of “On the rocky spurs.” Note that both the verb “shumit” [lit., make noise] and the adjective “prostovolosyi” are far closer to Mandelstam’s own usage in the opening of “Tristia” than to the finale of the elegy.


76. My thanks to the anonymous reviewer who suggested this potent connection between the broken bread and forgotten Christianity. Cf. the following description of a scene symbolizing the Eucharist from the early Christian Catacombs of St. Callixtus: “Both sides of the composition, right and left, are coordinated semantically through the inclusion in one and the other of the foregrounded lamb [agnets] and its metaphor—the broken [nadlomlennyi] bread, which reminds us of the liturgical bread” (Vorob’eva, “Tema trapezy,” 21).

77. See Mikhail Gasparov in Mandel’shtam, SP, 635; Brown, New Companion, 120 (s.v. “libation”). Here too, Mandelstam subtly, and paradoxically, inscribes death into his poem. Fet’s translation of the sixth stanza of Schiller’s poem reinforces the contrast specifically between Christian and pagan rites: “Strogii chin s pechal’nym vozderzhan’ em / Byly chu”zhdy zhertvennomu dniu” [The severe rite and sorrowful temperance / Were foreign to the day of sacrifice] (Vechernie ogni, 104). “Chin” describes specifically a Church rite, as, among others, chin Prichashcheniia (the rite of Communion).

78. The allusion to Schiller’s “Gods of Greece,” with its image of the passing of the old gods, perhaps also pulls within the associative range of the collection Plutarch’s resonant myth of the death of Pan—patron of idyls—during the reign of Tiberius. This myth signaled for Christian writers the death of the old gods at the instant of Christianity’s birth.

79. See chapter 9, note 27.

80. Ronen notes how the four “Lethean” poems in Tristia—“Still far is of the asphodels,” “When Psyche-life descends to the shades” (Kogda Psikheia-zhizn’ spuskaetsia k te- niam, 1920), “I have forgotten the word,” and “I into the circle dance of shades, trampling a tender meadow” (Ia v khorovod tenei, toptavshikh nezhnyi lug, 1920)—“i.a., through a montage of numerous classical and modern motifs, [produced] an extremely complex and emotionally and semantically charged quasi-mythological plot, in which the reality, soul, poetic word, and name appeared as protagonists in four interrelated texts […] describing the act of recollection in terms of the Orphic or Eleusinian katabasis [i.e., descent to the underworld, S.G.]” (Ronen, “Dry River,” 177).

82. It may reasonably be asked how *Tristia* evinces the myth of forgotten Christianity while including Christian poems. “Behold the pyx, like a golden sun” (Vot daronositsa, kak solntse zolotoe, 1915) was among the tail end of the transplants from the period of *Stone*, none of which were included in later editions of *Tristia/Vtoraia kniga*. It is this Eucharist that must be forgotten to initiate the collection. “In the crystal pool,” while celebratory in tone, has as much to do with Palestrina’s Christian music as with Christianity *per se*, and “In the cacophony of the maiden choir” (V raznogolositse devicheskogo khora, 1916) to an even greater extent deals with cathedrals only as a medium for talking about architecture, art and the symbiosis between Russian and Italian culture. “Among the priests a young Levite” (Sredi sviashchennikov, levitom molodym, 1917) is manifestly a poem of retrovert time and forgotten Christianity. The phrase “uzh nad Evfratom noch’” [already over the Euphrates it is night]—during the morning watch—implies, from the perspective of Jerusalem, not so much a portentous eclipse (Nadezhda Mandelstam), as the unnatural regress of time. In addition, a Sabbath mentioned by the elders cannot be Christ, whether we understand these elders as memory-laden Judean Jews or as amnesia-stricken Russian Christians, and in any case, their “heavy menorah [semisveshchnik],” can only be seen as a most iconic reference to Judaism (cf. Mandel’shtam, SS, II, 65). Musatov’s reading (*Lirika*, 160–65) notes aspects of this retrograde time but persists in equating the Sabbath with Christ. On “O, etot vozdukh, smutoi p’ianyi” (O this air, drunk with trouble, 1916), see below.


84. See * Zhiv Bog*, 328.

85. See, for instance, Ivanov’s “The Calling of Bacchus” (Vzyvanie Vakkha), as well as “Trial of Fire” (Sud ognia), which retells what is, for Ivanov, quite possibly the quintessential Dionysian myth, that of Eurypylos (*Stikhotvoreniia*, I, 319, 232–35).


87. Ivanov, SS, III, 188. This, Alexander Skriabin’s final, synthetic and synaesthetic composition, of which he completed only the poetry and some musical sketches for a “Preliminary Act” (*Predvaritel’noe deistvo*) before his sudden death in 1915, was intended, in completion, to be literally transfigurative.


89. Mandelstam preferred to efface the too-obvious symbolism of the opening lines as cited here. The *Tristia* version of “St. Isaac’s” is, it seems, an early version, as the first five lines, replaced in a 1922 journal publication, are crossed out in the State Literary Museum *Tristia*. Mandelstam wrote next to these lines “iskazheno” [distorted]. However, it stretches the imagination to believe that these five lines, functionally similar to, though weaker than the journal version, were composed by Kuzmin or another of the editors.

A Eucharist is also implied subtly in the form of the poem, with its “semantic” anaphora in the key central stanza:

Соборы...
Амбары...
Зернохранилища...
И риги...

Cathedrals . . .
Storehouses . . .
Granaries . . .
And threshing barns . . .

Anaphora is the central section of the Orthodox liturgy containing those prayers of thanksgiving from which the Eucharist derives its name and during which the priest holds aloft the Gifts (Zhiv Bog, 319ff.).
90. Tristia version, PSS, 512, 415.
91. See E. Toddes, “Poeticskeia ideologiia,” 38; Mandel’shtam, PSS, 652; chapter 11, p. 189.
93. See Przybylski, God’s Grateful Guest, 94. In an autograph from RGALI [photocopy, GLM, f. 352-k], Mandelstam wrote in and then crossed out a title to the stanza in which he directly addresses Beethoven as Dionysus: “Kniaz’ vinograda” [Prince of Grapes]!
94. The Dionysian coloring of the passages on Skriabin, the analysis of music (the Phrygian mode, Beethoven), the call for the chorus, the mention of the night sun (in conjunction with the sun-heart [solntse-serdtse]), and references to anamnesis (once more, appearing next to the name Dionysus) point directly to Ivanov. On Ivanov in “Pushkin and Skriabin,” see Freidin, Coat, 70–73, 310n66; Mets, introduction, and Mets et al., notes to “Mandel’shtam. ‘Skriabin i хрістіанство,’” 68, 76–77; Lekmanov, Kniga ob akmeizme, 125–26; Musatov, Lirika, 137–41; Terras, “Black Sun,” 52.

According to Nadezhda Mandelstam, the poet said of this only partially preserved essay, “the most important [thing I have] written . . . is lost . . . I’m unlucky” (Vospomnaniia, 183). Nadezhda Mandelstam herself calls the article “a true companion to Tristia, beginning from Phaedra and ending with the poem about the granaries, where the ‘grain of deep, full faith’ was preserved” (Vtoraia kniga, 114).
95. Freidin’s statement, referring to the Christian artist’s death in Mandelstam’s essay, that “More important, such a death, imitating Christ’s passion, had the power of an innocent’s self-sacrifice, that is, the power of ‘extrapersonal’ redemption” (Coat, 73) is clearly contradicted by this passage.

It is worth noting that, in Tristia, a book thoroughly suffused with images of death and the underworld and written during the World War, revolutions, and Civil War, no individual contemporary’s death is ever addressed. After the loss of Blok and Gumilev, death takes on a qualitatively different immediacy.
98. Ivanov’s Cor Ardens, the long, opening section of the eponymous two-volume collection, like Tristia, follows a path, loosely speaking, from the Dionysian to the Christian. While Dionysian and Christian imagery is greatly mixed throughout—sometimes conflated within a single poem, sometimes dispersed among various poems—the first poem of the “book” is the Dionysian “Maenad” (which Mandelstam remarks on positively [II, 343]), while the last depicts a universal Eucharist: “Look: at the rim of the deep chalice / The yellow honey of sunset radiances has mingled / With the dim poppy, that blossomed, a moon, in the pastures of the ether. / And the beneficence of dark waters / Produces the wine of divine freedoms, / A communion at the vespers of the world . . .” [Гляди: в краях глубокого потира / Закатных зорь смесился желтый мед / И тусклый мак, что в
пажитях эфира расцвел луной. / И благость темных вод / Творит вино божественных свобод / Причаством на повечерии мира . . . ] (Ivanov, SS, II, 281–82). This is also roughly the path of Ivanov’s own evolution as a religious thinker.

99. Cf. “A sense of the past as the future makes [Ivanov] akin to Khlebnikov” (II, 343). A comparison of Mandelstam’s analyses of each of these two poets in this essay, “Storm and Stress,” demonstrates the depth of the similarities he sees in them.

100. “There is an unshakable scale of values” (Est’ tsennostei nezbylemaia skala, 1914).

CHAPTER 8

1. The most expansive analysis of theatrical motifs in Mandelstam can be found in Segal, “Fragment.” See also, i.a., Broyde, Mandel’štam and His Age, 76–102; “Opernyi teatr,” in Mandel’shtam, SS, III, 401–4; Malmstad, “Note”; Myers, “Hellenism and ‘Barbarism,’” 89ff.


3. By and large, analyses of Alexander Blok and theater break down into three categories: Blok’s dramaturgy, essays, and theatrical productions and their role in the development of Russian theater (e.g., Westphalen, Lyric Incarnate; Borisova, Na izlomakh traditsii); the biographical aspect of Blok’s theatrical relationships and the reflections of these relationships in his poetry; and Blok’s professional involvements in the post-Revolutionary Russian theater. Analyses of the theater poems are sometimes included in works on Blok and theater (e.g., Volkov, Blok i teatr), and the interconnectedness of Blok’s lyrics and dramas is broadly acknowledged (cf. Rodina, Blok i russkii teatr, 14). Gromov is particularly sensitive to the “theatricality” of Blok’s lyrics [cf. Blok, 111–12]). However, to the best of my knowledge, there has been no significant inquiry into the impact of Blok’s theatrical sense on the structuring of space in his theatrical poems. There have been excellent analyses of spatiality in Blok’s poetry more generally (Bowlt, “Question of Space”; Mints, “Struktura ’khudozhestvennogo prostranstva’ v lirike Al. Bloka” [1970], in her Poetika: 444–531).


7. See Bakhtin, Rabelais, 7. Bakhtin refers to carnival, but describes it in precisely these terms.

8. Cf. Viacheslav Ivanov: “Dionysus accepts and, together, rejects any predicate; in his understanding, A is not A” (PZ, 8). As Oleg Lekmanov has noted (Kniga ob akmeizme, 121), Mandelstam attacks this postulate when he proposes, “A=A: what a wonderful poetic theme” (“Utro akmeizma,” II, 324).

9. “Through the sanctuaries of Greece leads the path to the Mysterium, which transforms the crowds who have gathered to the spectacle into true communicants of the Mystery [Deistvo], a living Dionysian body” (Ivanov, PZ, 67).

10. On the “homology” between these two artistic systems, see Khanzen-Lève, Rannii simvolizm, 15.
11. These formulations on the nature of theater and the rampa have been greatly aided by Lotman’s articles, “Semiotika stseny” and “Teatr i teatral’nost’ v stroe kul’tury nachala xix veka.”

12. “Teatr dla sebia” was Nikolai Evreinov’s slogan and the title of a theoretical work (1915–17) in which he called for “the creation of theater in everyday life.” See Clark, Petersburg, 105–6.

13. Ginzburg, O lirike, 283, emphasis mine.

14. Cited in Pyman, Life, I, 273. V. I. Verigina, Volokhova’s friend and another actress of Kommissarzhevskaya’s theater recognized this poeticized existence, in hindsight, as precisely masquerade: “Our life of the period also went on in some unreal plane, in play [. . . ] we did not guess that the spell of Blok’s poetry almost deprived us of our real essence, having turned us into bauttas [Venetian half-masks]” (Verigina, “Vospominaniia,” 437–38). Verigina’s memoirs contain interesting insights into the psychology of masquerade, from the initial awkwardness of using the familiar “you” at the first masked ball to the manner in which the atmosphere and mood of “The Snow Mask” built gradually before coming to fruition (ibid., 428, 424).

15. Theater as a framework is prominent only in the opening poems of “Faina,” which I will be discussing below, although similar dynamics are revealed in other poems as well (see note 21 below). As the cycle took form only in 1916 (the poems had been included previously in various other groupings in Earth in Snow [Zemlia v snegu, 1908] and Collected Poems [Sobranie stikhotvorenii, 1911–12]), I am less concerned with its structure or the full development of the heroine as realized in some of the later poems than in the theatrical poems themselves, which present a contemporaneous alternative to the masquerade aesthetics of “The Snow Mask.” As the dating of the poems demonstrates, it would be wrong to see in Blok a linear evolution from Symbolist masquerade to post-Symbolist theater, despite the impression clearly created by Blok himself in the final cyclization of his poems in the second book: from the masquerade of “The Snow Mask” to the theater poems and the prosaic conclusion of “Faina,” and then to the “Realism” and blank verse of “Free Thoughts” (Vol’nye mysli, 1907). On Blok’s structuring of his poetic path through the final arrangement of these cycles, see Maksimov, Poeziia i proza, 92–94; Mints, Lirika, 152, 167–68; Sloane, Dynamics, 251–52.


17. Bowlt remarks on the absence, in Blok’s poetry, of a middle ground that would connect the foreground (conventionally viewed spatially) and the background, a “space beyond space,” in the viewing of which “perspective, proportion, ratio, chiaroscuro assume unorthodox, ‘unreal’ values” (“Question of Space,” 63). I would argue that the footlights, in the theater poems, serve, in spatial terms, to replace the middle ground, not only separating, but connecting—idiosyncratically and according to the laws of theater, as Blok understands them—foreground and background, here and there.

18. Cf. Blok’s letter to Fedor Sologub and Anastasia Chebotarevskaya (22 January 1909): “If you insist, it means that you love not me but my mask, which always brings me suffering” (SS8, VIII, 271).

19. Note that in an open field the sun sets at the horizon, lighting the world from below.

20. The veil as mask presents a shifted dynamic between the visible and the actual. The eyes of a mask, generally, can provide an outlet to the real (cf. the eyes of an icon), producing play between the wittingly posed and a reality, which, stripped of social determinacy and conventions, is, in a sense, more real than could be achieved without shielding the
face. The veil is an arch-Blokian mask: it gives an imperfect and shifting (or shimmering) vision of the reality it hides.

21. This same fundamental structure (unattainable heroine/well-defined boundary/reception by the hero of a “draught” of her essence) is also repeated in “non-theatrical” poems from “Faina.” In “The Snow Maiden” (Snezhnaia deva, 1907), it is armor that functions as the boundary, but snow, the heroine’s element, rushes into the hero’s spirit. In “Monk” (Inok, 1907), the boundary is formed by the river and the monastery wall, while the heroine’s “blossoming hop” [tsvetushchii khmel’] strikes the hero (II, 320–21).

22. “I entered the lower world” seems, intuitively, to carry an inordinate semantic weight within the cycle. It is interesting to note that at the time of its appearance (before the body of “The Snow Mask”), it “garnered exceptional attention since it appeared as the resolution of Blok’s agitated mental state” (Verigina, “Vospominaniia,” 415). Note, however, that, at the time this poem is written, Faina has yet to take shape in the socially concrete form developed in the play or later poems of the cycle, which do not exist even in outline yet.

23. The vertical hierarchy of space is also suggested by the Heroine’s cosmic quality (“I am the star . . . You burn, my slender belt, / The Milky Path!”).

24. Alexandre Benois and Igor Stravinsky’s ballet *Petrouchka* is a prominent contemporary example of exploitation of the topos of tragic hero as puppet. Moreover, in Blok’s “On the Contemporary State of Russian Symbolism” (O sovremennom sostoiании russkogo simvolizma, 1910), the poet depicts himself, in his poetic “antithesis,” as the demiurgic director of a puppet theater, who also takes a role on stage. On this essay, see Masing-Delic’s close reading (“Symbolist Crisis,” 216–22); and Bogomolov’s contextualization within current occult trends (Russkaia literatura i okkul’tizm, 186–202).

25. Cf. the use of this topos in Eugene Onegin (Pushkin, PSS10, V, 18).

26. It is possible to envision the hero on a stage, it is true, looking up at the heroine’s box, though this demands the larger leap of faith, given the transition from “I was embarrassed and joyous” and the darkness of the “theater,” which would seem to imply that the play on stage has not yet begun. More importantly, however, the lower level of the theater presents one unified space within the poem. It is ultimately irrelevant whether the hero finds himself on stage or in the orchestra seats because, on a metaphysical plane, he is on stage even in the audience, and the performance has begun as soon as the Heroine’s footlight-eyes light up in the lower world.

31. Ibid., 68.
33. Ibid., 211.
34. The potential for a “one-sided,” erotically charged meeting with the heroine is reinforced in Blok’s poetry through his famous “Stranger” (Neznakomka, 1906).
36. Duality in unity (*dvuedinstvo*), as the underlying quality of Godmanhood (*bogochelovechestvo*), played a central role in the theology of Vladimir Solov’ev. “Del’mas,” consubstantial to both life and art and, therefore, providing the lyric hero access to an inner or other realm of music, displays a semi-secularized duality in unity.
37. These lines are part of the cycle’s repeated allusions to Pushkin’s poems to Amalia
Riznich, “Under the blue sky of her native land” (Pod nebom golubym strany svoei rodnoi, 1826) and “For the shores of a distant homeland” (Dlia beregov otchizny dal’nei, 1830).

38. On the place of music in Blok’s worldview and its relation to the “World Soul,” see Maksimov, Poeziia i proza, 361–64; Mints calls music the “main criterion of value” in Blok’s third book (Mints, “Blok i russkii simvolizm,” 505). It is notable that music figures in Blok’s vision of the rampa in “I was embarrassed and joyous”: “And music transfigured / And burnt your face” (“I muzyka preobrazila / I obozhgla tvoe litso].

39. Cf. “do uzhasa znakoma” [familiar to the point of horror]. Mints interprets this remembering in a different, but ultimately complementary key, through the prism of Blok’s “first love” (Lirika, 326), which is also directed beyond this world and the confines of his experience.

40. The development of the sixth quatrains in the manuscript is interesting in this regard. The first variant (written in pencil) ends: “I ne blesnet mne riad zhemchuzhnyi” [And the pearl row will not flash to me]. (The stanza remains incomplete, without a fourth line.) Possibly under the influence of “The snowy spring rages” (Bushuet snezhaia vesna, 1914), where the lyric hero is transported by a similar flash of Carmen’s teeth (occurring in the novella), Blok initially conflates his hero with the opera’s Jose. However, this is in clear conflict with the line “A tam, pod krugloi lampoi, tam” [But there, under the round lamp, there] above. The second variant (changes in pen) reads: “I ne blesnet uzh riad zhemchuzhnyi / Zubov stradal’stu moemu.” [And the pearl row of teeth / Will not flash for my sufferer.] While no longer conflating himself with Jose, the lyric hero still expresses an “Onegin-like” closeness to the hero on stage. It is only in the final version (in which “stradal’stu moemu.” is crossed out, also in pen, with “neschastnomu tomu . . .” [that unfortunate . . . ] written in) that Blok differentiates himself completely from the actor on stage, reaffirming the dynamics of contrast between stage and hall, real and the false theater, that I have been discussing (Blok, signed draft [chernovik-avtograf] of “Serdityi vzor bestsvetnykh glaz,” IRLI [Pushkinskii dom], f. 654, op. 1, no. 72).

41. Or inasmuch as the hero himself is an artist: “I am the same, Carmen” [ia sam takoi, Karmen] (III, 272).

CHAPTER 9


2. Ronen was first to note the influence of Images of Italy on the poem (Approach, 353). Muratov describes the dissolute life of eighteenth-century Venice in connection with its representation in Pietro Longhi’s paintings just pages after a discussion of Tintoretto and a full-page reproduction of “The Bathing Susanna” with the caption “Susanna i starsty” [Susanna and the Elders] (Obrazy Italii, vol. 2). See also Panova, MPV, 447–49.

3. The concept of “ambivalent antitheses” is applied extensively in relation to “Venetian life” by Segal in his thorough structuralist reading (“Fragment,” 61–86, and elsewhere; see also his Mandelshtam. Istoria i poetika, 607–8ff.). Margolina writes that the “lyric hero” of [Venetian life] . . . is antinomy” (Mirovozzrenie, 84–85). See also Freidin, Coat, 150 (on the partial resolution of antagonistic essences); Gasparov and Ronen, “O Venetsiiskoi zhishni . . .” 197.

10. Margolina and Segal attribute the voice that speaks these lines to the “poet” (*Mirovozrenie*, 86; “Fragment,” 81–82). Indeed, the words “Green Adriatic, farewell!” may be understood as the speaker’s own play at “Venetian death.” However, the following lines, “Why are you silent, do tell, veneziana / How can one escape this festive death?” do not at all indicate that the farewell to the Adriatic cannot be pronounced by the veneziana, who presumably, at this point, would be either dead or playing dead.
13. Full text restored according to Mandel'shtam, *Sochineniia*, I, 488. The editors, Mikhailov and Nerler, cite Grishunin as the researcher who conveyed to them the complete text.
15. Note the tone with which Nadezhda Mandelstam conveys his: “Blok alone [among the Symbolists] vacillated a bit, but still [vse zhe] wrote in his diary about the yid and the artist” (*Vtoraia kniga*, 344, emphasis mine).
17. The relation of the poem’s images to Venetian art, almost certainly perceived by Blok, to judge by his diary entry, and noted specifically already by Ivask (“Venetsiia,” 116), has received much attention.
19. See, for instance, Hadeln, “Veronese’s Venus,” 115; Goodman-Soellner, “Poetic Interpretations”; Santore, “Tools of Venus.” Curiously, these last two articles interpret the tradition of the “Lady at Her Toilet” as, on the one hand, a visual analogue of Petrarchian love poetry, on the other, visual representations of Venetian courtesans. Our reading is only strengthened by the traditional poetic references to Venice as queen of the sea, gazing into the looking glass of her canals. See subtexts from Karolina Pavlova and Apollon Grigor’ev, noted in Poliakova, “Oleinikov”, 74; Gasparov and Ronen, “O ‘Venitseiskoi zhizni,’” 199–200.
20. Cf. Blok’s note to the 1912 publication of “The Girl from Spoleto” (Devushka iz Spoleto, 1909): “The artists of the Renaissance loved to depict themselves on their own paintings as witnesses or participants. Some of them watch wantonly from behind a curtain, like the elders the bathing Susanna [. . .]” (III, 339).
23. The unexpected imagery of this line finds its explanation in Arbenin’s description
of the crowd in Lermontov’s *Masquerade* (Maskarad, 1835): “*Pestreet i zhuzhzhit tolpa peredo mnoi . . .*” [The crowd is *mottled and buzzes* before me . . .] (Lermontov, SS, III, 271). *Masquerade* was another of Meyerhold and Golovin’s famed productions (Alexandrinsky Theater, 1917) and a production in which Olga Arbenina, to whom “The spectral stage” is dedicated, participated.


25. Ginzburg was first to point out the connection to the death of the Italian singer Angiolina Bosio, related in Nikolai Nekrasov’s “*On Weather*” (O pogode, 1858–65) (*O lirike*, 384–85).

26. “*I kromeshna nochi t’ma*” [And the darkness of the night is infernal] (PSS, 462).

27. See Mandel’shtam, SS, III, 402–4; Nadezhda Mandel’shtam, *Vospominaniia*, 148; Broyde, *Mandel’stam and His Age*, 83ff.; Malmstad, “*Note,*” 193ff. Even Alexandre Benois, set designer of Diaghilev’s *Petrouchka* (1911) and the lone critical voice who generally disapproved of the production, noted that the transition to Elysium was among “the most magical moments I have ever seen” (*Meierkhol’d v teatral’noi kritike*, 244).

28. In this, Meyerhold and Golovin hoped to emulate Gluck’s own skilful accommodation of the “real and conventional” in one plane (*Meierkhol’d, O teatre*, 204).


31. Notably, Kommissarzhevskaya’s Theater is, for Mandelstam, like Gluck’s Elysium and the Elysium of his own “*Lethean poems,*” a “disembodied, transparent little world” (II, 101). The house curtain was painted by Lev Bakst, and the center portion, a study for which can be seen on the cover of this book, even depicted an “Elysium.” Mandelstam refers to Blok in a negative sense in his essay on Kommissarzhevskaya—Blok’s wickedly metatheatrical *The Fair Booth* (Balaganchik, 1906, dir. Meyerhold) destroys the fragile “theatrical wonder” of Komissarzhevskaya’s theater. However, he was likely influenced in his definition of “theatrical wonder” by Blok’s own essay on Komnis—sarzhovskaya and the “*chuvo*” (miracle) of her production of Maurice Maeterlinck’s *Sister Beatrice* (“*The Dramatic Theater of V. F. Komissarzhevskaya [A Letter from Petersburg]*” [Dramaticheskii teatr V. F. Komissarzhevskoi (Pis’mo iz Peterburga), 1906]).


33. In “*I have forgotten the word,*” the “poet” is an Orphic figure who strives to retrieve the lost word from the underworld, and, for his labors, retains but “the memory of a Stygian ringing” on his lips (and his poem). See Taranovsky on the underworld associations of the swallow (*Essays*, 158n18). Kikhnei notes an interesting and well-developed parallel between “*I have forgotten the word*” and Blok’s “*Artist*” (Khudozhnik, 1913) (Kikhnei, “*Gieraticheskoe slovo,*” 189–91).

34. Cf. Segal, “*Fragment,*” 96–97.

35. Toddes, “*Mandel’shtam i Tiutchev,*” 83–84. Gasparov and Ronen see here a subtext (“*Pokhorony solntsa,*” 219).

36. Segal recalls Mandelstam’s “*Eucharist*” in connection with the motifs of this final stanza (“*Fragment,*” 96).

37. Averintsev, “*Chut’ mertsaet,*” 121. Viacheslav Vs. Ivanov had previously commented on the influence of the meter (and also to some extent imagery and rhythm) of “Steps of the Knight Commander” on “*Venetian life,*” “*The spectral stage,*” and “*We shall gather anew in Petersburg*” (V Peterburge my soisemisna snotva, 1920) (“*K issledovaniu,*” 175–76).
38. Nadezhda Mandel’shtam, Vtoraia kniga, 37. (See also ibid., 119.)
39. Taranovsky’s analysis can be found in Essays, 83–98.
40. The allusion is noted in Freidin, Coat, 211.
42. This passage is compared to “The spectral stage” in Poliakova, “Oleinikov”, 106.
43. In this regard, cf. Averintsev, “Sud’ba i vest’,” 43.
44. Poliakova notes that the plural is not used to convey a simple, physical reality (“onto the snow”) (“Oleinikov”, 112).
45. Ibid., 104.
46. Broyde, Mandel’shtam and His Age, 86.

CHAPTER 10

1. See chapter 9, note 37.
2. Broitman, “V Peterburge,” 145. In “Letter on Russian Poetry” (Pis’mo o russkoi poezii, 1922), which Mandelstam did not include in his collection On Poetry, the poet writes: “We measured the past with Blok as a land surveyor parcels with a fine net the boundless fields. Through Blok we saw Pushkin and Goethe and Baratynsky and Novalis, but in a new order, for they all stood before us as tributaries of Russian poetry, flowing into the distance, unitary and undiminishing, in eternal motion” (SP, 526). Note, however, the geographical and temporal limitations of this vision when juxtaposed with the full range of Western culture accessible to and accessed by Mandelstam. The overarching thrust of Mandelstam’s essays will be precisely to highlight Blok’s myopia in this regard. (See chapter 12.)
3. Both of these subtexts are noted by Khardzhiev (“Primechaniia,” in Mandel’shtam, Stikhotvoreniia, 279).
4. Private collection of A. A. Ivich (I. I. Bernshtein), photocopy, Gosudarstvennyi Literaturnyi Muzei (GLM), Moscow, f. 352-k. Tristia has one additional significant change, “tsvetet” (bloom) in line 8, where the autograph has “zhivot” (live).
5. In a more general sense, Mandelstam did indeed see in the Petersburg of 1920 a “half-Venice, half-theater” (Akhmatova, Sochineniia [1986], II, 206). On post-revolutionary mass theater, see, for instance, Clark, Petersburg, 122–34. V. I. Ivanov’s role in the development of the Soviet ideology of mass performance implies the deep potential kinship between these two modes of theater (mass enactments and mysterium). See Bird, “Massovye prazdnestva.” On the semiotics of masquerade and mysterium in the context of Lotman and Bakhtin’s theoretical writings, see chapter 8.
7. Mandel’shtam, PSS, 154, with original, Tristia version of lines 25–28 restored per ibid., 461.
8. On the orphic in Mandelstam and its roots in V. I. Ivanov, see especially Ronen, Approach, 198–99; Terras, “Black Sun”; cf. also Freidin, Coat, 155–58; 183–86.
Expanding our frame of reference to include the Dionysian in Mandelstam or the night and black sun in general yields a very large body of literature. We would be remiss, however, not to mention “Chernoe solntse,” in Mandel'shtam, SS, III, 404–11.


10. Nadezhda Mandelstam and Kiril Taranovsky each challenged the association with love poetry (Vtoraia kniga, 65; Taranovsky, Essays, 164n26). Gasparov and Ronen defend a reading growing out of these thematics (“Pokhorony,” 210–11). For a summation of the controversy, see ibid.

11. See, for instance, Freidin, Coat, 182.


13. “We, with a funeral song [. . .] will appease the black sun of wild and sleepless passion” [My zhe, pesn’iu pokhoronnoi, / [. . .] / Strasti diki i bessnonoi / Solntse chernoe uimem]. Cf. “But the golden-haired luminary / Becomes well again” [No svetilo zlatokudroe / Vyzdoravlivaet vn’v], from a variant recorded in S. P. Kablukov’s copy of Stone (PSS, 453). The phrase “I will pray in the Soviet night / For the blessed, senseless word” [Za blazhennoe, bessmyslennoe slovo / Ia v nochi sovetskoi pomolius’] retains two equally valid meanings: prayer to heal or protect the Word and prayer to obtain the Word as a protective and curative talisman in the Soviet night. On this latter sense, see Ronen, Approach, 5–7; Freidin, Coat, 181–83.

14. The logic of the entire circle of ideas, particularly apparent in Mandelstam’s essay “Pushkin and Skriabin,” is as follows: the night sun is a sun of redemption, which has been banished to the underworld, while the black sun of guilt is that which ascends to replace it in moments of retrograde historical movement. Russia, in placing its faith in the retrograde and Christ-/redemption-forgetting Skriabin (who functions as antithetical hypostasis of the Pushkinian sun), raises from the depths the black sun of guilt and banishes (buries) the sun of Christian culture, represented by Pushkin (about whom Vladimir Gippius had written as Christian artist par excellence in “Pushkin and Christianity” [Pushkin i khristianstvo, 1915]). Note, however, that in “Pushkin and Skriabin” and “This night is irreparable” (Eta noch’ nepopravima, 1916), the terms (night sun vs. black sun) are reversed in comparison with “How these coverings” and “We shall gather anew in Petersburg.” On the influence of Gippius’s book on Mandelstam, see Freidin, Coat, 69–70.


16. “On Kulikovo Field” (Na pole Kulikovom, 1908). Note Blok’s gloss in “The People and the Intelligentsia” (Narod i intelligentsiia, 1908): “[. . .] Gorky’s intellect [. . .] ‘deifies’; Gorky’s heart, however, is troubled and loves, without deifying, severely and demandingly, in the way of the people [narod], as one may love a mother, a sister and a wife in the single person of the motherland—Russia” (Blok, Rossia i intelligentsiia, 12).

17. Blok, Foreword to “Retribution” (Vozmezdie, publ. 1921), SS8, III, 298.

18. Freidin points out the incongruence, for 1920, of a “capital” called “Petersburg” (Coat, 182); cf. also Eng-Liedmeier, “Mandel’shtam’s Poem,” 185, 193–94. While it should be noted that roughly half of the books published in this city in 1920 were imprinted
“Petersburg,” rather than “Petrograd,” still it is significant that the poem’s draft is dated “24 noiabria 1920. Petersburg” (24 November 1920. Petersburg—with a hard sign!). A hard sign, it seems, also graces the poet’s rather blotchy signature. These are the sole instances of the use of the hard sign in the draft and would seem to convey graphically that vital connection between past, present, and future which is developed thematically in the poem.


20. Cf. Mandelstam’s “Where night drops its anchors” (Gde noch’ brosaet iakoria, 1920), in which “Remote constellations of the zodiac” (Glukhie sozvezdiia zodiaka) is clearly code for epochs not bordering (or equivalent to) a utopic Age of Aquarius.

21. Syntactically, the expression is then akin to “noch’ bezlunna” [the night is moonless], morphologically to “mnogotonnyi” [from “tonna” [ton]]. Compare also Sergei Gorodetsky’s resemanticizing of the Church term “Nenevestnaia” [Virgin/Unbridal] in the poem “Nevesta” (Bride, publ. Niva 43 [24 October 1909], 737). Gorodetsky, with some bitterness, depicts his muse, Rus, spirited away and defiled—hence, no longer “nevestnaia” [of bridal quality]—by a “bridegroom” transparently representing Blok’s lyric hero. In the hero’s perception, Anna is nowhere to be found: “Maiden of Light! Where are you, Donna Anna? / Anna! Anna!—Silence.”

22. On the connection to Eugene Onegin, see Malmstad, “Note,” 194–97.

23. Note also the presence of the patrol, which Segal not unreasonably connects to Blok’s “The Twelve” (Mandel’shtam. Istoriiia i poetika, 623). Elsewhere, he unconvincingly links Mandelstam’s “word” through Gumilev’s Word to Christ as Word in the Gospel of John and thus to Blok’s finale (ibid., 123–24).

24. “Afishi,” in Pushkin’s time, meant program books. See Introduction, note 69. Clearly it is these, and not playbills, that drift down from the gallery.

25. See, i.a., Brown, Mandelstam, 231–33; Broyde, Osip Mandel’shtam, 90–92; cf. Akhmatova, Sochineniia (1990), II, 162.

26. Blok, “Bez bozhestva, bez vdokhnoven’ia (Tsekh akmeistov), ” SS8, VI, 178; Stikhotvoreniia, III, 71. “Courageously sober” is a quote from Gumilev’s Acmeist manifesto, but Blok asserts, not entirely without cause, that the concept was stolen from his essay, “On the Contemporary State of Russian Symbolism.” On the influence of Gnosticism on Blok, see especially Magomedova, Avtobiograficheskii mif, 70–83.

27. Kremlin (kreml’) is the old Russian word for a city fortress, and such kremlins can still be found in many Russian cities today (Novgorod, Pskov, Suzdal, Kazan). The Moscow Kremlin, with its venerated cathedrals and icons, indeed came under destructive fire during the October Revolution.

28. See Blok, “Intelligentsiia i revoliutsiia,” in his Rossiia i intelligentsiia, 37.

29. Note, however, that in Orphic fashion, these positively charged phenomena draw their vitality from the surrounding night and death. Cf. Terras, “Black Sun,” 57. See also Ivask, “Mandel’štam’s ‘We Shall Gather,’” 255; Gillespie, “Between Myth and History,” 364.


31. In contrast, in “Venetian life, morbid and barren,” fear and love are equal counterweights on the Saturnian wheel of existence.

32. Perhaps the “wind-up doll of an officer” in the Tristia version of these lines also arose from a set of Blokian associations. As Gillespie notes, the sense of the phrase is ambiguous. She ties it to Blok’s deflations of the Fair Lady (“Between Myth and History,” 379). In addition, if we understand the officer as the wind-up doll itself, Blok is a possible model. One of the anonymous reviewers at OSU Press submits the following intriguing summary: “Blok [. . . ] struck many as a man of military bearing and he was actually an officer
(provisions) in the first world war and also lived on ‘Officer Street’ [. . .] Furthermore, by this time Blok was already a person with medical and psychological problems, and his movements could have appeared to be those of a ‘wound-up doll.’” Of course, this equation would place Blok himself inside the sanctum of the theater, even if he is represented in a most ambiguous light. At the same time, Gumilev, a rival for Arbenina’s affections, was also an officer of notably stiff comportment; Shubinskii sees him here (“Neuiazvimyi,” 472).

33. Through careful analysis of the handwriting of the draft, I have been able to demonstrate that the reading given in Mandel’shtam, PSS, 462, implying denial of “communion” with the night sun (“ne prigubish’ ty” [you won’t partake of]), is in error. “Pogubish’” (you will not destroy) has now been accepted by the editor, A. G. Mets, and is given in the just published Osip Mandelstam, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v trekh tomakh (Moscow, 2009–11), I:459.

37. Toddes, “K teme,” 97; Boris Gasparov, “Tridsatye gody”; Note that in editions of Pushkin’s works through at least 1887 “To Krivtsov” was incorrectly dated 1819 (Gaevskii, “Pushkin i Krivtsov,” 456).

38. This profound imitation of Pushkin is echoed superficially in Mandelstam’s appearance at the masquerade ball at the Zubov mansion (11 January 1921) dressed as Pushkin (Musatov, Lirika, 201). On Mandelstam’s extensive imitatio Pushkin in the 1930s, see especially Boris Gasparov, “Tridsatye gody”; Reynolds, “Smert’ avtora” and “Return of the Dead”; Surat, Mandel’shtam i Pushkin.

39. “As is visible from later hints, Krivtsov ‘tried to corrupt’ [razvrashchal] his young friend, especially through his disbelief, more precisely—superficial materialism,” Gershenson, Dekabrist Krivtsov, 93. Gaevskii, however, describes Krivtsov as “always merry and joyous” (Gaevskii, “Pushkin i Krivtsov,” 456), an assertion seemingly well supported by the biography he provides.

40. Pushkin, PSS10, I, 326.
41. Mandelstam’s line, “Chasovykh ia ne boius’” (I do not fear the watchmen), recalls the forbidding of the striking clock in “Steps of the Knight Commander.” On the choice of “chasovykh” (watchmen), rather than the reported early variant “militsionerov” (militiamen), as an abstracting marker of “time itself,” see Gillespie, “Between Myth and History,” 368.

42. See, however, Lindeberg, “Vospominaniia Vl. Gippiusa,” 255.
43. [Gippius], Noch’ v zvezdakh, 113. Cf. also “And walk in darkness, as in the light!” [I vo mrake idi, kak v svetu!], from his Vozvrashchenie, 37. Curiously, one of the copies of Vozvrashchenie held by the Russian National Library (under call no. 37.35.5.14) features what appears to be a dark sun, hand-drawn in ink and painstakingly centered in the bottom third of the cover above the lower line of text (the only image on the usually unadorned cover).

44. Giperboeri. Ezhemesiachnik stikhov i kritiki 2 (1912), 3.
45. Ibid., 4. Cf. also Blok’s “When I first gained insight” (Kogda ia prozreval vperyve, 1909), in which the day is actually a voiceless night: “The daytime night is mute” [Nemotsvet dnevnaia noch’] (III, 84).

46. Gippius himself notes that Blok, though he never answered this “lengthiest homily” (Gippius’s expression), replied instead through an inscription on his Collected Works
The inscription was a quatrain taken from Gippius’s *Vozvrashchenie*. Gracheva, who relates this episode in Gippius’ words, is mistaken, however, in concluding that “Blok’s inscription attested to the poet’s desire to end the polemics on a conciliatory note” (ibid., 248) The inscription, when read carefully, appears intended to say that Gippius himself understands deep down that Blok is right. After all, he let slip out:

И усыпительно и сладко
Пойет незвучная вода, —
Что сон ночной, что сумрак краткий —
Не навсегда, не навсегда...

And soporifically and sweetly
Sings the hushed water—
That the nightly slumber, that the brief gloom—
Is not forever, not forever . . . (ibid., emphasis mine.)

In terms of their image structure and the nature of their irony (possibly unintended by Gippius?), these lines could have come straight from a poem by Blok. The outer message of the water, that the dark, unconscious night is soon to end, is but a sweet siren lulling the feckless poet back to sleep, and preventing the clear vision and actively willed struggle that Blok himself espouses.

49. See, in this regard, Broyde, *Mandel’štam and His Age*, 101; Eng-Liedmeier, “Mandel’štam’s Poem,” 199. See also Ivask’s rich interpretation of this line (“Mandel’štam’s ‘We Shall Gather,’” 258).
50. “Voice from the Chorus” was the only poem printed out of chronological order. Its function in setting the collection’s tone was thus clearly emphasized. The perceptive reader would also have noted, however, that the volume closes with “You assert that I am cold, remote, and dry” (Ty tverdish’, chto ia kholoden, zamknut i sukh, 1916), a poem that presents a distinct counterpoint to “Voice from the Chorus” (though still positing light from outside the world).
51. This subtext is first noted in Gasparov and Ronen, “Pokhorony,” 213–14, and, though it is not explored by the authors, its implications are, it seems, quite apparent. One particularly suggestive source for the image of the snuffed out candles in “We shall gather anew in Petersburg” is Leonid Andreev’s “Darkness” (T‘ma, 1907): “If we can’t light all the darkness with our lanterns [fonariki], then let’s douse all the lights and all creep into the dark […] Let’s drink, girls, to all the lights going out [chtoby vse ogni pogasli]” (Andreev, SS, II, 298; my thanks to Alexander Zholkovsky for suggesting this connection). Blok liked and wrote about Andreev, whom Mandelstam disliked, and “Darkness” had a particularly strong resonance for him (see ibid., 536). The story’s continuing importance is attested by a letter to the poet’s cousin, S. N. Tutolmina (16 January 1916), in which Blok specifically refers to “Darkness” (though not by name) and writes: “sometimes even these individual bright spots seem a sacrilegious dissonance because the night which surrounds us is too black, and, in its blackness, majestic” (SS8, VIII, 454).
52. One may see lines 29–31 as an inversion of the theatrical imagery that initiates and frames "Steps of the Knight Commander" ("A weighty, dense curtain at the entrance" [Tiazhkii plotnyi zanaves u vkhoda]). Cf. Broitman, “V Peterburge,” 146–47; Dmitrienko, “O problematike,” 50–51. In Mandelstam's conception (expressed in his essay “Iakhontov” [1927]), a "complete" theater includes “the square and the frosty night” outside (SS, 3:113). Poliakova juxtaposes this passage with “The spectral stage” and “Valkyries fly” in "Oleinikov", 106.

53. Cf. Blok: “The excited theater was extinguished/went dark” [Teatr vzvolnovannyi pogas] (II, 290). Historically, of course, in the period through the mid-nineteenth century, when theaters were actually illuminated by candles, these were not extinguished during the action. Cf. Mandelstam's own “I will not see the celebrated Phèdre.”

54. Blok's half-participation in the circle of culture in Mandelstam's eyes should also be seen in light of the cultural situation in Petersburg in 1920. Mandelstam appears to have participated in a project, possibly initiated in a narrow sense by Gumilev, but clearly tapping into broader artistic sentiments then current, to rejuvenate and redefine, to see and greet anew the Word. One important reflection of this labor was the almanac, The Dragon (Drakon, publ. Feb. 1921), which included such manifestos of the new poetics of the Word as Gumilev's “The Word” [Slovo, 1919] and “Poem of the Beginning. Book One. The Dragon” [Poema nachala. Kniga pervaya. Drakon, 1918–19?], Andrei Bely's "Excerpts from Glossolalia (A Poem about Sound)" (Otryvki iz Glossolalii [Poemy o zvuke], 1917) and Mandelstam's own “The Word and Culture.” Blok, in his contribution, “The Sphinx” (Sfinks, 1902 [sic!]) intoned: “I will grasp the forgotten word Love, / In a forgotten, living language! . . .” [Ia postignu zabytoe slovo Liubov', / Na zabytom zhyvom iazyke! . . . ] (Drakon. Al'manakh stikhov [Peterburg, 1921], 4). As Georgii Ivanov rightly noted in a review, Blok's submission, though good, did little to expand anyone's conception of the author ("O novykh stikhakh, " 97). It should also be noted that Blok's version of the myth of the Word is executed in a deeply personal key. Rather than the mythologizing abstractions of Gumilev, Bely, or Mandelstam, Blok's claims relate to his own "I." Moreover, the word that he will recall lies at the heart of his own personal poetic mythology: "Liubov'" (Love/Lyubov), the name of his forgotten Heroine (cf. “Those Who Have Forgotten You” [Zabyvshie Tebia, 1908]). On the antagonism between Blok and Gumilev and their struggle for leadership of literary organizations in 1920–21 Petersburg, see, for instance, Khodasevich, "Blok i Gumilev," in his Nekropol', 87–91.

CHAPTER 11

1. “There is an unshakable scale of values” (1914).
2. These names clearly include that of Blok, as Annensky devotes several passages to the poet in his essay.
3. Annenskii, “O sovremennom lirizme,” 6–7, my emphasis. According to Mandelstam, Annensky's reticence was “fed by a consciousness of the impossibility of tragedy in contemporary Russian art, thanks to the absence of a synthetic national consciousness, indisputable and absolute.” “Born to be a Russian Euripides,” Annensky instead “bore with dignity his lot of withdrawal—renunciation [otrechenie]” (Osip Mandel'shtam, SP, 527–28).
4. Bely's "fall," however, itself smacks of tragedy: “to laugh at Bely is unwelcome and a sin: he wrote Petersburg” (II, 423).
5. Cf.: “The apothecary from Christiania [i.e., Ibsen] succeeded in luring a thunderstorm into the professorial chicken coop and raising the ominously courteous squabbling of Hedda and Brack to the heights of tragedy” (II, 101).

6. This text correctly reproduces the first edition, while Filippov and Struve have a distorting error in the final line of the essay.


8. Ibid., 44–46, 45. Similarly, Sergei Solov’ev wrote to Bely under the fresh impression of Blok’s death: “We did not believe in the sincerity of his ‘snow pyres;’ but now he has proven that the theme of death was not, for him, ‘literariness’” (cited in Gaidenko, “Soblazn,” 109).

9. On this eighty-fourth Pushkin anniversary, see Khodasevich, Nekropol’, 85–87; Hughes, “Pushkin in Petrograd.”

10. See Mets, “Primechania,” in Mandel’shtam, PSS, 652; and Surat, Mandel’shtam i Pushkin, 34–35, who cites Nadzhdav Pavlovich’s description and adds a telling detail—that Pushkin had similarly ordered a memorial service for Byron on the anniversary of his death.


12. Strangely, it seems that the obvious subtext of “We shall gather anew” in this regard, which would seem to underly the understanding of Ivask and others, has not been noted: “Ugas, kak svetoch, divnyi genii” [The wondrous genius went out like a torch] (Lermontov, “The Poet’s Death” [Smert’ poeta, 1837], SS, I, 372). Note also Vasily Surikov’s painting “Morning of the Execution of the Streltsy” (Utro streletskoi kazni, 1881), in which the strel’tsy hold burning candles, and one of Peter the Great’s soldiers is seen blowing out a candle.

13. “Blok died over the course of several months, before everyone’s eyes; he was treated by doctors—and no one named or was able to name his illness” (Khodasevich, Nekropol’, 93). On Blok’s illness, see Shcherba and Baturina, “Istoriia bolezni” and Matich’s retort (Erotic Utopia, 106–11).

14. Naturally, we are not speaking here of any simple linearity, but rather of a complexly signifying relationship. In “Pushkin and Skriabin,” the artist’s death is part of his Christ-like play. However, this play is fraught with meaning. See chapter 7, pp. 127–28. Similarly, in “Conversation about Dante,” the poet describes prison as a “resonator” for the “cello-like voice of Ugolino” (II, 398).

15. On “Concert at the Railway Station,” see esp. Ginzburg, O lirike, 372–74; Taranovsky, Essays, 7–17; Ronen, Approach, xvii-xx; Freidin, Coat, 187–94; Boris Gasparov, “Eshche raz”; Faryno, “Arkheopoetika”; Purin, Vospominaniia o Evterpe, 72–79; Musatov, Lirika, 231–40; Surat, Mandel’shtam i Pushkin, 37–39, 266. On Blokian echoes, see below, note 24. Surat’s discussion happens to concur on certain important points with my 2001 Ph.D. dissertation. These include Blok’s Pushkin speech (first noted by Musatov [“Mifologema,” 284]) and Pushkin’s last words as subtext to line 1; the passage on Skriabin from The Noise of Time as subtext for the third stanza (Surat cites Morozov’s commentary [2002]); and the memorial service for Pushkin as the primary reference for the funeral feast here.
16. A similar, radical revision of the poet’s response to a contemporary can be observed in connection with Mayakovsky’s suicide in 1930. As Lekmanov demonstrates, Mandelstam’s understanding of Mayakovsky as a “well-healed Soviet writer” was overturned in an instant by, as the poet himself put it, the “oceanic tidings of Mayakovsky’s death.” Mandelstam praised Mayakovsky effusively, hyperbolically at a reading in 1932 (Lekmanov, “Mandel’shtam i Maiakovskii,” 223).


19. Cited as per SP, 86, but with date as printed in Stikhotvoreniia (1928). Angle brackets mark a line omitted in Stikhotvoreniia.

20. This seemingly idiosyncratic reading, overriding conventional logic, is suggested by the cadence of the lines and underscores the way in which disharmony is synthesized within the music of this final concert. A more neutral translation would be “And once again, the violin-filled air, torn by the whistles of steam-engines, is fused.”


23. Mandelstam wrote, with the hindsight of the Pushkin speech, in which Blok had revised his concept of stagnant civilization and dynamic, but destructive culture: “Poetic culture arises from a striving to stave off catastrophe, to make it dependent on the central sun of the entire system, be that love, about which Dante spoke, or music, to which, in the end, came Blok” (II, 275). Blok’s repentance of his former views can be observed directly in his letter to N. A. Nolle-Kogan of 8 January 1921 (SS6, VI, 300).

24. Ronen, Approach, xviii–xx; Freidin, Coat, 191–92. These include passages from “Gogol’s Child” (Ditia Gogolia, 1909), “Irony,” “The Wreck of Humanism” (Krushenie gumanizma, 1919 [publ. 1921]), “Intelligentsia and Revolution” and “Lightning Flashes of Art” (Molnii iskusstva, 1909; publ. 1923). On Blok in “Concert at the Railway Station,” see also Gasparov, “Eshche raz,” 172–73; Purin, Vospominaniia, 74–78; and Surat, Mandel’shtam i Pushkin, 37–39. Purin, assuming that his disquisition on Blok is meant to imply a similar conception on Mandelstam’s part, comes to an understanding of Mandelstam’s relation to Blok before and after his death diametrically opposed to my own, i.e., that Blok’s performance is initially believed, but with the loss of his physical presence unravels, leaving only “a foggy phantom—the eternal companion of undiscriminating youth” (76). Purin’s argument in this regard is based not on an analysis of Mandelstam’s writings, but on misrepresentation of Tynianov’s “Blok and Heine” (1921) and a late-twentieth-century perspective on Blok. Moreover, as far as this reader can see, Mandelstam demonstrated such youthful indiscrimination in regard to Blok in only one place, the poem “Dark bonds of worldly imprisonment” [Temnykh uz zemnogo zatocheniia, 1910?], assuming, as likely is the case, that there is no irony implied in his donning there of Blok’s masks.

25. See chapter 2, note 15.

26. Subtext noted by Ronen (Approach, xix).

27. Cf., in his letters, “it’s hard to breathe” [trudno dyshat’] (to his mother, 4 June 1921, SS8, VIII, 539); “I’m constantly short of breath” [postoianno zadymhaius’] (to N. A. Nolle-Kogan, 2 July 1921, SS6, VI, 306). Here, perhaps, is a secondary source of the talk that Blok “suffocated,” talk that Khodasevich derives, not of course without cause, from the Pushkin speech (Nekropol’, 92–93). See also Surat, Mandel’shtam i Pushkin, 37–38.


29. “Here the cupola writhing with worms turns into the vault of a sepulchre (this
image is reinforced, of course, in such details as ‘the scent of roses in rotting hothouses’)’ (Boris Gasparov, “Eshche raz,” 166).


31. The image of the station perhaps reflects the underground hall of Blok’s “Canto of Hell” (Pesn’ ada, 1909), lines 22–33. Compare the following passages:

[... ] здесь умерли слова;  
[... ]  
И ни одна звезда не говорит,

Все к пропасти стремятся безнадежной,  
И я в послед. Но вот в прорыве скал,  
Над пеной потока белоснежной,  

Передо мною бесконечный зал.  
Сеть кактусов и роз благоуханье,  
Обрывки мрака в глубине зеркал;  
[... ]  
И душное спирается дыханье.  

Нельзя дышать [... ]

Мне этот зал напомнил страшный мир,  
Где я бродил слепой, как в дикой сказке,  
И где застиг меня последний пир.

[... ] here words have died;  
[... ]  
And not a single star speaks,

All rush toward the hope-bereted precipice,  
And I behind. But there, in the breach of the cliffs,  
Above the foam of the snow-white torrent,  

Before me is an endless hall  
A grid of cactuses and the scent of roses,  
Shards of darkness in the depth of mirrors;  
[... ]  
And stuffy breath comes up short.

This hall reminded me of a frightening world,

And I enter the glass forest of the station

[Vauxhall]

And the scent of roses in rotting hot-houses—

One cannot breathe [... ]

I'm late. I'm frightened. This is a dream.
Where I wandered blind, as in a savage fairytale, Hot steam blinds the pupils of the violin bows.

And where the final feast overtook me.
Where are you off to? At the funeral feast of a dear shade

Music sounds for us for the final time!

32. On line 3 as polemic against Lermontov, see Taranovsky, Essays, 15; O poezii, 27–28, 31.
34. This is all not to say that Skriabin is the “native shade” of this stanza (a possibility Przybylski toys with [God's Grateful Guest, 99]), although this possibility cannot be excluded. (Native is then taken in the sense that he is native, akin, close to the nineteenth century and music—hence to the station—rather than to the speaker, and in comparison with those who only pass through.) In general, we might allow for Skriabin as “native shade” and Pushkin as “dear shade” (since it was his “funeral feast” that was being celebrated in 1921 just before Blok and Gumilev prematurely left the “station”). Note also that these two artists are two hypostases of the same sun for Mandelstam, the “sun of redemption” and “sun of guilt” (“Pushkin and Skriabin”). The question of Annensky, raised by Purin (Vospominaniiia, 73–74, 78–79), is quite interesting, though Purin ultimately accords him an altogether outsized role in the poem.
35. Ronen, Approach, xviii.
36. See Ginzburg, O lirike, 373; Purin, Vospominaniiia, 72. On the ontology of the text, see, for instance, Faryno, "Arkheopoetika," 183–84.
37. See, i.a., Ginzburg, O lirike, 374; Averintsev, "Sud'ba i vest',' 44, 64.
38. On the influence of Gumilev's "Wayward Tram" on Mandelstam's poem, see Freidin, Coat, 193; Boris Gasparov, "Eshche raz," 173–75. On the relevance of the date 1837 and the opening of the train line, see Boris Gasparov, "Eshche raz," 171. The Pavlovsk portion of the line opened in 1838.
40. Purin, Vospominaniiia, 73.
41. “Trakhops.”
42. Boris Gasparov, “Eshche raz,” 168ff. The most powerful textual evidence Gasparov presents is the connection to the “dear shade” [milaia ten’] of “I into the circle dance of shades” (1920), a poem permeated with clear subtextual references to Pushkin. Hughes notes the presence of Kuzmin’s “Pushkin” as a subtext in the final stanza of “Kontsert na vokzale,” strenghtening Gasparov's already convincing argument (“Pushkin in Petrograd,” 211n5).
43. Given the paradoxes noted above, a glass entrance compartment is not too off-putting.
44. Musatov, Lirika, 235–36. Musatov is also strangely reductive in his insistence that the poem represents specifically the Pavlovsk Station of the 1890s (ibid., 233–34, 236).
45. “Blok is a most complicated manifestation of literary eclecticism—he is the gatherer of Russian verse [sobiratel’ russkogo stikha], scattered and lost by the historically fragmented nineteenth century. The tremendous labor of the gathering of Russian verse completed by Blok is still not clear to his contemporaries and is only felt instinctively by them as melodic power [pevuchaia sila]” (Mandel’shtam, SS, II, 347–48). See also chapter 12, pp. 200–202.
46. See Pyman, *Life*, II, 365–66. We are speaking here of a relative silence, but a silence Blok’s contemporaries and the poet himself acknowledged as a psychological reality: “All the sounds have gone silent. Can’t you hear that there aren’t any sounds any more?”; “It would be blasphemous and false to try by any rational process to recall sounds in soundless space” (ibid.). See Lotman on Pushkin’s remarkably resilient creativity during his difficult final years (*Pushkin*, 167ff.).

47. Elements of polemic vis-à-vis Blok’s conception of the nineteenth century, pointed out by Ronen (who sees Mandelstam allying with Gogol *Approach*, xix–xx), seem ultimately secondary to the integration of Blok within Mandelstam’s composite image of the musical nineteenth century.

**CHAPTER 12**

1. Barstvennost’ means “lordliness,” particularly in that sense of lordly that is conveyed in the OED by the words “haughty, imperious, lofty, disdainful.”

2. “A. Blok: 7 August 1921–7 August 1922” was published in *Rossiia* 1 (1922).


4. Mandelstam’s references to Blok’s conservatism are touched upon in Musatov, *Lirika*, 11–12, who cites the two passages quoted immediately below, as well as Gurvich, “Tip teksta,” 36. More broadly speaking, Gurvich’s polemical article unfortunately relies on a combination of omissions of the best scholarship and straw-man fallacies in an attempt to discredit *en masse* the entire compelling corpus of semantic readings of Mandelstam.

5. Cf. Ivanov-Razumnik’s “Blok i revoliutsiia,” *Znamia* (1921), which sets forth the thesis that “Blok is the bearer of the ‘great truth’ of the revolution” (“Blok v kritike sovremennikov,” 809). Mandelstam talks about the “swamp vapors” [bolotnye ispareniia], the “poisonous fog” of Ivanov-Razumnik and others’ criticism after Blok’s death (II, 270). Cf. also Mandelstam’s reference to “idle talk” about the meaning of “The Twelve” (II, 274).


7. I have adopted several phrases from Harris and Link’s translation in Mandelstam, *Collected Critical Prose*, 177.

8. Mandelstam clearly sympathizes here with Khlebnikov, as is apparent from his poem “No, never was I anyone’s contemporary” (Net, nikogda nichei ia ne byl sovremen-nik, 1924). On Mandelstam’s shift to a positive conception of the “contemporary” in the early 1930s, see, for instance, Ronen, *Approach*, 335–36.


10. Regarding Blok’s knowledge of antiquity, see Magomedova, *Avtobiograficheskii mif*, 60–83.

11. Cf. Lekmanov on Blok’s bilious final essay, “‘Without a god, without inspiration’ (The Acmeists’ Guild’ ‘Bez bozhestva, bez vdomkhnoven’ia’ [Tsekh akmeistov]), 1921): “The snickering comparison of Nikolai Gumilev to a foreigner runs like a crimson thread through Blok’s article” (“O sta’t’ ‘Bez bozhestva,’” 215). While the article did not appear, as planned, in *Dom iskusstv* 2 (1921), its general thrust was likely known to Mandelstam, and perhaps here Mandelstam repays Blok.
12. See Mikhail Gasparov, Zapisi i vypiski, 8.
13. “The poetic fate of Blok was tied in the closest way to Russian poetry’s nineteenth century” (“Storm and Stress,” II, 341). On Mandelstam’s “one-sided” understanding of Blok in this regard, see Gromov, Blok, 359.
14. Sloane, Dynamics, 328. Note that the passage to which Sloane refers, about “all contemporary Russian poetry” emerging “from the native womb of Symbolism,” is connected specifically, by name, with Viacheslav Ivanov (II, 230).
15. Cf. Akhmatova: “Calendar dates have no meaning. Undoubtedly, Symbolism was a phenomenon of the 19th century. Our revolt against Symbolism was entirely natural, since we felt ourselves people of the 20th century and did not wish to remain in the preceding one…” (cited in Timenchik, “Zametki ob akmeizme” [1974], 46).
17. Struve and Filippov give “measure” and “see” [III, 33]), citing Molot (Rostov-na-Donu), 1922, and making no mention of a section on the Imaginists. Russian editions, starting with Slovo i kul’tura (1987), reproduce the text cited here, giving the source as Sovetskii iug (Rostov-na-Donu), 21 January 1922. There, Mandelstam first published several articles in early 1922.
18. Mandel’shtam, SP, 527.
19. “Live yet another quarter century—/ It’ll all be the same. No escape” [Zhivi eshche khot’ chevert’ veka—/Vse budet tak. Ishoda net] (Blok, III, 42). See Segal, “Fragment,” 118; Ronen, Approach, 77, 297–98. In addition, The Noise of Time as a whole begins with an allusion (or retort) to Blok: “I remember well the lost years [glukhie gody] of Russia—the [18]90s” (II, 45). The reference is to “Those born in the lost years” (Rozhdennye v goda glukhie, 1914): “Those born in the lost years / Do not remember their way” [Rozhden­nye v goda glukhie / Puti ne pomniat svoego] (III, 319), and also the introduction to the second chapter of Retribution. As early as 1925, D. Sviatopolk-Mirskii noted that Mandelstam’s book begins with a “semiquote” from Blok (cited in Mandel’shtam, Sochineniia, II, 384).
20. Mochul’skii, Blok, 93.
23. Ibid., 584.
24. As noted in the Introduction, the two shared a common friend, Vladimir Piast. Piast, incidentally, caused a stir with a December 1913 lecture in which he contrasted Blok and Mandelstam, such that “it was clear that Piast considers Mandelstam a much greater poet [poet gorazdo krupneishii] than Blok” (I. V. Evdokimov, cited in Lekmanov, “Dva poeta,” 286). On Blok’s anti-Semitism, see Introduction, p. 7 and note 19.
26. Blok, SS8, III, 296. The editors note that Blok, at the time of the incident, signed an appeal aimed at exposing the fabrication (ibid., 615). On Mandelstam’s reaction to the Beilis reference in Vozmezdie, see Gershtein, Memoir, 27.
27. It is likely that some version of “Shuba” was seen by Shklovsky, who, in his memoirs the following year, seems to answer Mandelstam’s vignette quite in the mode of “lit­erary malice”: “Mandelstam loved sweets to the point of hysteria. Living in very difficult conditions, without boots, in the cold, he managed to remain spoiled” (Mandel’shtam i ego vremia, 109). Shklovsky is also the prototype for the following lines from The Egyptian Stamp (1927–28), which continue the exchange: “No one ever particularly spoiled them, but as their whole life they received an academic ration with
sardines and chocolate. These are bunglers, who know only chess moves [cf. Shklovsky's *Knight's Move* (Khod konia, 1923), S.G.], but nonetheless clamber into the fray, to see how it will turn out" (II, 13–14). Ronen's recent article "Poedinki" relates a similar “sharp, but well-meaning” exchange between Mandelstam and Shklovsky (220–21). For a radically contrasting, positive reading of the image of Shklovsky in “Fur Coat,” see Toddes, “OPOIAZovskaia filosofiia,” 81–82.


29. Brown's translation with slight modifications (Mandelstam, *Prose*, 122–23). This passage regarding the biography of a *raznochinets* betrays the direct influence of Vladimir Gippius (subject of the following essay), who wrote his own biography as a series of sonnets chronicling his reading (II, 13–14).

30. Mandelstam told Semen Lipkin that *Retribution* did not work because the rhythmic structure is “slavishly borrowed from Pushkin [. . . ] Schoolboy iamb [Gimnazicheskii iamb]!” (in contrast to the development of iambic tetrameter in Tiutchev, Nekrasov, and Blok himself, later in the century) (*Mandel'shtam i ego vremia*, 204).


34. Pushkin, PSS10, III, 208.

35. This association arises from Mandelstam's “Petersburg Strophes”: “The eccentric Evgeny—is ashamed of his poverty, / Breathes gas fumes, and curses his fate!” [Chudak Evgenii—bednosti styditsia, / Benzin vdykhaet i sud'bu klianet!].


37. On the lowbrow Chaplin as Mandelstam final double, see Cavanagh, *Modernist Creation*, 286–303.

38. Cf. *Fourth Prose* (Chetvertaia proza, 1930): “My blood, weighed down with the inheritance of sheep herders, patriarchs and kings, rebels against the thievish gypsim of the writers' brood” (II, 187).

39. Kahn, “Bely, Dante.” Kahn is clearly correct that Mandelstam in the 1930s identified with Bely as *raznochinets*. Less convincing is his assertion that the Dante of the “Conversation” is drawn from the older poet. It should be noted that, while Bely the artist Mandelstam was able to capture in his memorial poems with deft precision (as Kahn illustrates), Bely the person he deeply misread (as demonstrated on the basis of Bely’s letters and contemporary memoirs by Lekmanov [*Zhizni*, 163–65]).

40. Cf. the following phrases from Mandelstam's essay, underscoring Chaadaev's independence and elitism: “private person”; “absolute freedom”; “the structure of chosen minds” [stroi izbrannykh umov]; “proud” mind”; “sovereign individual” [suverennaia lichnost’]; “hieratic pomp” [gieraticheskia torzhestvennost’] (II, 284–91).

42. “[. . . ] ‘aristocratic behavior’ as a system not only allowed for, but presupposed certain exceptions to the norm [. . . ] The striving of the nobleman to take part in another lifestyle for short periods—the life of the backstage, the [Gypsy] encampment, the folk festival [narodnoe gulyan'e]” (Iu. M. Lotman, “Teatr i teatral'nost',” 628). Cf. Masing-Delic on Blok's self-fashioning as a Dmitry Karamazov in "On the Contemporary State of Russian Symbolism" ("Symbolist Crisis," 220). Joseph Brodsky has a fine, sensitive reading of these lines making reference only to the “merchant class” (“‘S mirom derzhavnym,’” 12–13).

43. Ronen, Approach, 286.

44. Cf. also the “embarrassment, heartbreak and grief” [smushen'(e), nadsad(a) i gor(e)] Mandelstam reaps from the tender “European” beauties of the Crimea in “I was linked with the world of power” and Blok's habitualized and effective romantic skills: “And, having wrapped an arm round a slender frame, be sly” [I, tonkii stan obniav, luka-vit'] (III, 22); “And there remained [but] a brow shifted with a smile, / A taught mouth and the unfortunate power / To rile up insatiable female blood, / Igniting animal passion . . . ” [I ostalos'—ulybkoi svedennaia brov', / Szhatyi rot i pechatiia vlast' / Buntovat' nenasyst-niu zhekskuiu krov', / Zazhigaiia zverinuiu strast'] (III, 182). On the “Fourth Estate,” see esp. Ronen, Approach, 314–18. On Mandelstam’s raznochinstvo, see also Nadezhda Mandelstam, Vospominaniia, 183–84.

CONCLUSION

1. Gershtein, Memuary, 27.

2. For examples, see Gershtein, Memuary, 30; “Mandel’shtam v pis’makh Rudakova,” 126, 77.

3. “The cult of Dantine mysticism spread luxuriously [. . . ] In our Russia the victim of such salacious philistinism on the part of Dante’s rapt adepts, who do not read Dante, was none other than Blok: ‘The shade of Dante with aquiline profile / Sings to me of the New Life . . . ’ [Ten’ Danta c profilem orl'nym / O Novoi Zhizni mne poet . . . ]. The internal illumination of Dantine space, derived only from structural elements, interested decidedly no one” (II, 378). On Blok in “Conversation about Dante,” see Grishunin, who cites the draft version, “A Dantine effigy from the nineteenth century” (Mandel’shtam, SS, II, 181; Grishunin, “Blok i Mandel’shtam,” 157–58); Pinskii, Magistral'nyi siuzhet, 391–96. During his exile in Voronezh, Mandelstam also prepared a radio show about Blok, though we do not know the contents (Mikhailov and Nerler, “Kommentarii,” in Mandel’shtam, Sochineniia, I, 442).

4. This does not exclude, of course, individual echoes and reactions. For instance, Ronen analyzes Mandelstam's negotiation of the “Russian voice” on the backdrop of Blok's poetry in “Preserve my speech for all time for the aftertaste of misfortune and smoke” (Sokhrani moiu rech' navsegda za privkus neschast'ia i dyma, 1931) (Poetika, 51–52); Zholkovskii (following a suggestion by Magomedova) traces the source of the image of “limpid anguish” [iasnaia toska] from “Don't compare: the living is incomparable” (Ne sravnivai: zhivushchii nesravnim, 1937) to a note by Blok regarding Dante (“Klavishnye progulki,” 174, 182n20).

5. Cf., in this regard, Gromov’s spot-on contextualization of Blok’s quip, “a premium-grade Rubanovich (by the name of Mandelstam)” (Blok, 357–58).

6. A rough draft of “Conversation about Dante” seems to confirm this understanding: “[Dante] is the instrument itself in the metamorphosis of collapsing and unfolding
literary time, which we have ceased to hear, but study both here and in the West as a paraphrase of so-called ‘cultural formations’” (II, 181).

7. Tynianov’s vision regarding the necessity of poetry to continuously transform itself is largely cognate with Mandelstam’s: “I speak about that novelty of interaction of all aspects of poetry [stikh, a word with technical/stylistic connotations], which gives birth to new poetic sense [novyi stikhovoi smysl]” (“Promezhutok,” in Arkhaisty i novatory, 549).

8. Ronen gives a likely source of this image in Gippius's poetry (Approach, 293). His characterization of Mandelstam’s own practice is somewhat misleading, however: “M. himself has used the three favorite rhymes of Gippius ‘vigorously and happily’” (ibid.). “Energichno i schastlivo” implies a lack of reflection or tension in usage and, likely, repetition. Mandelstam indeed uses all three rhymes, but plot’-Gospod’ only in two early Symbolist poems, while plamen’-kamen’ appears in one poem, in which the semantics of ardor-inertness his criticism presumably implies are not reproduced, and in another very early unpublished poem. In 1906, Mandelstam rhymed liubov’-krov’ quite vigorously and happily in the Nadsonian civic style. This rhyme will be repeated only twice more, however, once in an early love poem never published and a second time, retaining its traditional semantics, in a poem that is clearly part of his main corpus—“I just like the others” (1920). Surely, this rare usage should not be compared to the reflexiveness that Mandelstam criticizes.

9. Nadson rhymes krov’-liubov’ and zakhlebnetsia v krovi—k bezzavetnoi liubvi (will choke with blood—to selfless love) in “My friend, my brother, [my] weary, suffering brother” (Drug moi, brat moi, ustalyi, stradaushchii brat, 1880), a poem of known significance to Mandelstam. “And innocent blood flows— / Believe: a time will come—and Baal will perish, / and love will return to the Earth” [I struitsia nevinnaia krov’,— / Ver’: nastanet pora—i pogibnet Vaal, / I vernetsia ne zemliu liubov’] (Polnoe sobranie stikhovorenii, 110). Cf. Blok (with a variation on the rhyme scheme): “Spring will pass—above this virgin soil, / Watered with your blood, / Will ripen a new love” [Proidet vesna—nad etoi nov’iu, / V spoennaiia tsvoeu krov’iu, / Sozreet novaia liubov’] (III, 102). In general, Blok is not at all averse to this traditional rhyme. (Cf., among many examples, the finale of “Gem Ring-Suffering” [Persten’-Stradan’, 1905].)

10. “Stanzas” (Stansy, 1935), emphasis mine. While not contesting—and in fact affirming—the “organicity” of Mandelstam’s “worldview” [tselostnost’ miroponimaniia], I fail to see any indication that Mandelstam himself saw in this, as Nadezda Mandelstam indicates, “the measure of the authenticity of the poet.” She is, however, unquestionably correct when she connects authenticity with the concepts of pravota (rightness) and priamizna (straightness, directness). These are precisely the terms Mandelstam himself engages: “Where is the straightness of speech // Tangled like honest zigzags” [Gde priamizna rechei, // Zaputannykh kak chestnye zigzagi] (“10 January 1934” [10 ianvaria 1934]). (Straightness and propulsion—the comparison as it develops is to a speed skater—here emerge in a synthesis of seemingly antagonistic vectors.) The poet’s widow is likewise on the mark when she further connects the poet’s authenticity to his or her role as “unsettler of sense” [kolebatel’ smysla] (“Conversation about Dante”) and rejection of pre-existing “proposition-formulas” [suzhdeniia-formuly] (“Chitatel’ odnoi knigi,” in Vospominaniiia).

11. Blok’s maturation, however, is implicitly cast by Mandelstam as an outgrowing of Romanticism after Pushkin’s model (SP, 526).

12. This discomfort is conveyed quite powerfully, for instance, in Khodasevich, Nekropol’, 91–92. One must wonder how well Blok must have liked Mandelstam’s brilliant
Mandelstam too, of course, reacts to a—rapidly and radically—changing world. Again, the difference is of emphasis, the “specific gravity” so to speak within their respective poetics of these types of change. Cf. Blok: “I find it painful [. . .] when [Ivanov] crows about κάθαρσις with the same tone in 1912 as [he did] in 1905” (SS8, VIII, 386); Mandelstam: “[Pushkin], the author of Boris Godunov, even if he wanted to could not repeat the lyceum verse, just like nowadays no one will write a Derzhavin ode. Who likes what better is another thing” (II, 244).

14. See Mikhail Gasparov, Zapis i vypiski, 245.

15. “Doomed” (Obrechennyi, 1907).

16. Building upon the observations of Zhitenev (“Oskorblennyi i oskorbitel’”), we can say that, through the communicative strategies of “scandal” in “Fourth Prose,” Mandelstam achieves in deed the exit beyond the bounds of “civilized” literature that Blok espouses in his essays, and, with it, an authenticity in the mode of Trilling (Sincerity and Authenticity, 11) and Blok himself.

17. Blok, Stikhotvorenia, I, 343. This evidence is an important corollary to Blok’s more Romantic statements: “In light of such a consciousness, artists’ works themselves become secondary, since to present they are all imperfect creations, fragments of concepts far grander” (Blok, SS8, VI, 109). At the same time, when Blok asks, “why are we moved by Andreev’s Life of Man, which is distant from art [. . .]?” (SS8, V, 278), he both demonstrates that he recognizes artistry and its absence and makes a compromise unimaginable for Mandelstam.

18. Ivanov, PZ, 250.


20. This shift has significant consequences. If sincerity is located in the poet (or if the anointedness of the poet is assumed), then the ethics of the work are not essential to its validity (as opposed to the precision with which it conveys the poet’s privileged vision). For Blok, individual poems patently “erroneous” in their outlook retain their validity as genuine stages of his poetic path. Their truth is specific to the poet. In contrast, if the authenticity of the poem is external to the poet and the mark of sincerity is the “audible” veracity of the artwork itself, then ethics—conscience, as an active and searching faculty—arises as a key element within the individual poem.
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INDEX OF WORKS
BY MANDELSTAM AND BLOK

WORKS BY MANDELSTAM

Poetry:

“1 Ianvaria 1924” (1 January 1924), 207–9
“10 Ianvaria 1934” (10 January 1934), 275n10
“Abbat” (Abbot), 52
“Admiralteistvo” (The Admiralty), 108
“Aiia-Sofiia” (Hagia-Sophia), 50–51, 54, 57, 79–81, 106, 107
“Amerikan bar” (American Bar), 101
“Amerikanka” (American Girl), 101
“Bakh” (Bach), 52, 112
“Batishkow,” 273n36
“Besshumnoe vereteno” (The noiseless spindle), 38
“Chut’ mertsat prizrachnaia stsena” (The spectral stage barely glimmers), 5, 153–64, 167
“Chtob, priiatel’ i vetra kapel’” (So that, friend of wind and drops), 119, 273n36
“Dano mne telo, chto mne delat’ s nim” (A body is given me, what shall I do with it), 35, 223n11
“Dev polunochnykh otvaga” (The valor of northern maids), 230n18
“Dombi i syn” (Dombey and Son), 101
“Esche daleko asfodelei” (Still far is of the asphodels), 250n47, 252n80
“Est’ tselomudrennye chary” (There are chaste charms), 43–47
“Est’ tsennosti nezyblemaia skala” (There is an unshakable scale of values), 186, 255n100
“Eta noch’ nepopravima” (This night is irreparable), 262n14
“Evkharistiiia” (Eucharist). See “Vot daronositsa”
“Evropa” (Europe), 52
“Gde noch’ brosaet iakoria” (Where night drops its anchors), 263n20
“Gde sviazannyi i prigvozhdennyi ston?” (Where is the bound and crucified moan?), 186
“I ponyne na Afone” (And to this day at Mount Athos), 61–62
“Ia naravne s drugimi” (I want just like the others), 250n5, 275n8
“Ia ne slykhral rasskazov Ossiana” (I have not heard the tales of Ossian), 26–27, 200
“Ja ne uvizhu znamenti o ‘Fedry’” (I will not see the celebrated Phèdre), 16–19, 111, 266n53
“Ia nenavizhu svet odnoobraznykh zvezd” (I hate the light of the monotonous stars), 51–52, 54, 230n18
“Ia slovo pozabyl, chto ia khotel skazat’” (I have forgotten the word), 193, 252n80, 260n33
“Ia v khorovod tenei, toptavshikh nezhnyi lug” (I into the circle dance of shades, trampling a tender meadow), 160–61, 252n80, 270n42
“Ia vzdragivaiu ot kholoda” (I shudder from the cold), 51–52, 54, 85, 230n18
“Isakii pod fatoi molochnoi belizny” (St. Isaac's under a veil of milky white), 123, 125–27
“Iz omuta zlogo i viazkogo” (From an evil and miry pool), 235n13
“Iz polutemnoi zaly, vdrug” (From the half-lit hall, suddenly), 36–37, 233n18
“Kak etikh pokryval i etogo ubora” (How these coverings), 19, 111–12, 171
“Kak ten’ vnezapnykh oblakov” (Like the shadow of sudden clouds), 235n13
“Kontsert na vozvale” (Concert at the Railway Station), 190–96, 212
“Letaiut val’kirie, pout’ smychki” (Valkyries fly, bows sing), 174, 266n52
“Liuteranin” (Lutheran), 51, 53, 66
“Mne kholodno. Prozrachnaya vesna” (I am cold. Transparent spring), 274n4
“Na kammenykh otrogakh Pierii” (On the rocky spurs of Pieria), 116–22, 160
“Na perlamutrovyi chelnok” (Onto the mother-of-pearl shuttle), 237x342
“Na rozval’niakh, ulozhennykh solomoi” (On a straw-covered sledge), 108–9
“Net, nikogda nichei ia ne byl sovremennik” (No, never was I anyone’s contemporary), 271n8
“Nevyrazimaia pechal’” (Inexpressible sadness), 52
“Notre Dame,” 50–51, 54–55, 71, 81, 106, 107, 216, 243n86
“O, gody! O, chasy! O, bremia Issuara” (O, years! O, hours! O, burden of Issoire), 14, 227n60
“O, esot vozdukh, smutoi p’ianyi” (O, this air, drunk with trouble), 125, 253n82
“Obraz tvoi, muchitel’nyi i zybkii” (Your image, agonizing and unstable), 51–54, 56, 57–64, 85, 237n2, 238n9
“Oda Betkhovenu” (Ode to Beethoven), 15, 112, 237n29, 254n93
“Otravlen khleb i vozdukh vypit” (The bread is poisoned and the air drunk up), 24–26
“Padene—nezimennyi sputnik strakha” (Falling is the constant companion of fear), 51, 53–54, 56, 71–79, 94
“Peshekhod” (Pedestrian), 51, 53–54, 56, 64–71, 78–79, 87
“Peterburgskie strofы” (Petersburg Strophes), 95, 107, 237n35
“Pust’ v dushnoi komnate, gde kloch’ia seroi vaty” (Let, in the stuffy room where there are clumps of gray cotton), 85–99, 235n9
“Rakovina” (Seashell), 119
“S mirom derzhavnym ia byl lish’ rebiacheski sviazan” (I was linked to the world of power in but a childish way), 207, 274n44
“Sestry—tiazhest’ i nezhnost’” (Sisters—heaviness and tenderness), 14
“Sharmanka” (Barrel Organ), 85, 94, 235n9
“Skudnyi luch, kholodnoi meroiu” (A meager beam, with chill measure), 47–48
“Slukh chutkii parus napriagaet” (Hearing tenses its sensitive sail), 237n4
“Sobiralis’ elliny voinoiu” (The Hellenes mustered for war), 52, 271n6
“Sokhrani moiu rech’ navsegda za privkus neschast’ia i dyma” (Preserve my speech for all time for the aftertaste of misfortune and smoke), 274n4
“Sredi sviashchennikov levitom moldym” (Among the priests a young Levite), 115, 248n25, 253n82
“Starik” (Old Man), 101–5, 107
“Stikhi o neizvestnom soldate” (Verses on the unknown soldier), 119–20
“Sumecky sbodovy” (The Twilight of Freedom), 115
“Susal’nym zolotom goriat” (In the forests Christmas trees), 36–37, 232n3
“Syn’va Aimon” (Aymon’s Sons), 52
“Temyntykh uz zemnogo zatocheniia” (Dark bonds of worldly imprisonment), 268n24
“Tennis” (Tennis), 100
“Tol’ko detskie knigi chitat’” (To read only children’s books), 36, 232n3
“Tristia, “ 122
“Ty proshla skvoz’ oblako tumana” (You passed through a cloud of fog), 41–42, 59, 238n16
“Tysiachestruinyi potok” (A thousand-streamed torrent”), 233n12, 235n9
“V ogoromnom omute prozrachno i temno” (In the giant pool it is transparent and dark), 235n13
“V tot vecher ne gudel strel’chatyi les organa” (That evening the lancet for- est of the organ did not hum), 52, 115, 250n52
“V khrustal’nom omute kakaia krutizna!” (What steepness in the crystal pool!), 236n13, 253n82
“V Peterburge my soiemsia snova” (We shall gather anew in Petersburg), 167–84, 188, 190, 211, 236n13
“V raznogolositse devicheskogo khora” (In the cacophony of the maiden choir), 253n82
“Veniteiskoi zhizni, mrachnoi i besplodnoi” (Venetian life, morbid and barren), 5, 148–53, 164, 167, 236n13, 263n31
“Votaronositsa” (Hold the pyx), 123, 253n82, 260n36
“Za to, chto ia ruki tvoi ne sumel uderzhat” (For not being able to keep hold of your hands), 248n25
“Zolotoi” (Gold Ruble), 51, 53–54, 230n18
“Zvuk ostorozhnyi i glukhoi” (The sound, cautious and muffled), 36–37

Essays:
“A. Blok: 7 August 1921–7 August 1922,” 189, 197, 200. See also “Barsuch’ia nora”
“Barsuch’ia nora” (Badger Hole), 167, 197–203, 207
“Buria i natisk” (Storm and Stress), 98, 199, 202, 222n5, 255n99
“Deviatnadtsatyi vek” (The Nineteenth Century), 114, 148
“Franseu Villon” (François Villon), 4, 20, 40, 71, 75, 103, 147–48
“Gumanizm i sovremennost’” (Humanism and Modernity), 182
“Iakhontov, “ 162, 266n52
“Krovavaia misteriia 9-go ianvaria” (The Bloody Mystery Play of the 9th of January), 169
“O prirode slova” (On the Nature of the Word), 15, 106, 199, 226n50
“Petr Chaadaev,” 244n23
“Pis’mo o russkoii poezii” (A Letter about Russian Poetry), 187, 201, 213, 242n78
“Pushkin i Skriabin” (Pushkin and Skriabin), 11, 19, 115, 118, 126–27, 129, 175, 189–90, 194, 231n36, 245n43, 247n2, 262n14
“Razgovor o Dante” (Conversation about Dante), 120, 168, 206, 207, 212, 267n14, 275n10
“Slovo i kul’tura” (The Word and Culture), 198, 215, 231n28, 228n70, 266n54
“Utro akmeizma” (The Morning of Acme-ism), 71, 75, 78, 226nn43, 47

Prose:

Chetvertaia proza (Fourth Prose), 210, 214, 273n38
Egipetskaia marka (The Egyptian Stamp), 187, 204–5, 272n27
“Shuba” (Fur Coat), 204, 272n27
Shum vremeni (The Noise of Time), 172, 195, 197, 205, 228n68, 272n78
“Sem’ia Sinani” (The Sinani Family), 95, 97
“Komissarzhevskaya,” 187–88, 202, 205
“V ne po chinu barstvennoi shube” (In a Fur Coat above His Station), 15–16, 79, 98, 148, 202–3, 231n38, 234n25

Books:

O poezii (On Poetry), 20, 197–98
Kamen’ (Stone), 29, 31, 106, 112
Stone (1913), 35, 98, 47, 50, 54, 223n11, 234n46
Stone (1916), 16, 35, 37, 49–55, 98–99, 233n18
Stone (1923), 36, 51–52, 235n13, 236n22
Stone (1928, in Poems), 36, 51, 235n13, 237n22
Tristia, 11, 15, 19, 29, 100, 109–29, 130, 168, 211, 236n13
Vtoraia kniga (Second Book), 110, 118
Stikhotvoreniia (Poems), 110

Radio program:

“Iunost’ Gete” (Goethe’s Youth), 151

WORKS BY BLOK

Poetry:

“Balaganchik” (The Fair Booth), 134, 188–89
“Bushuet snezhnaya vesna” (The snowy spring rages), 258n40
“Dali slepy” (The distance is blind), 242n73
“Devushka iz Spoleto” (The Girl from Spoleto), 259n20
“Ee pesni” (Her Songs), 94
“Golos iz khora” (Voice from the Chorus), 171, 265n50
“Ia byl smushchennyi i veselyi” (I was embarrassed and joyous), 135–36, 139
“Ia, otrok, zazhigaiu svechi” (A youth, I light the candles), 45
“Ia v dol’nii mir voshla, kak v lozhu” (I entered the lower world as a theater box), 136–39, 144, 145
“Ia zhdu prizvya, ishchu otveta” (I await a call, I seek an answer), 60–61, 63
“Inok” (Monk), 257n21
“Iz khrustal’nogo tumana” (From the crystal fog), 242n78
“Khozhu, brozhu ponuryi” (I pace, I wander downcast), 92
“Khudozhnik” (Artist), 260n33
“Kogda ia prozreval vpervye” (When I first gained insight), 264n45
“Kryl’to Ee, slovno papert’” (Her porch is as if a parvis), 233n13
“Moei materi” (To My Mother, 1905), 91–92, 98
“Na ostrovakh” (On the islands), 209
“Neizbezhnoe” (The Inevitable), 233n18
“Net, nikogda moei, i ty nichei ne budesh’” (No, never mine, nor anyone’s will you be), 145
“Neznakomka” (The Stranger), 42–43, 104, 145, 233n12, 257n34
“Na pole kulikovom” (On Kulikovo Field), 106, 228n70, 262n16
“Na smert’ Komissarzhevskoi” (On the death of Komissarzhevskaya), 159–60
“Na snezhnom kostre” (On the Snow Pyre), 171
“Neznakomka” (Stranger), 257n34
“Noch’, ulitsa, fonal’, apteka” (Night, street, street lamp, pharmacy), 203
“Persten’-Stradan’e” (Gem Ring-Suffering), 275n9
“Pesh’ ada” (Canto of Hell), 269n31
“Predchuvstvuiu Tebia. Goda prokhodiat mimo” (I feel Your approach. The years go by), 9–10, 53
“Rozhdennye v goda glukhie” (Those born in the lost years), 272n19
“Serdityi vzor bestsvytnyh glaz” (The angry gaze of colorless eyes), 140–45, 171, 177
“Sfinks” (Sphinx), 266n54
“Shagi” (Steps, translation from Verhaeren), 244n19
“Shagi Komandora” (Steps of the Knight Commander), 89–90, 93–95, 99, 106, 107, 159, 167–68, 171, 172–74, 188, 197, 201, 203, 217–19, 244n19, 246n1, 260n37, 264n41, 266n52
“Siena,” 236n16
“Snezhnaia deva” (The Snow Maiden), 257n21
“Tri poslaniia” (Three Missives), 171
“Ty, kak otzvuk zabytogo gimna” (You are like the echo of a forgotten hymn), 159
“Ty tverdish’ , chto ia kholoden, zamknut i sukh” (You assert that I am cold, remote and dry), 265n50
“V chas, kogda p’ianeiut nartsissy” (At the hour when the daffodils become intoxicated), 133–34, 139
“Venetsiia” (Venice), 108, 150, 151–52, 171
“Vkozhu ia v temnye khramy” (I enter dark churches), 59–60
“Vl. Bestuzhevu. Otvet” (To Vl. Bestuzhev. Reply), 181
“Vot iavilas’ . Zaslonila” (She appeared. She overshadowed), 134–35, 136
“Vse na zemle umret—i mat’ , i mladost’” (All on Earth will die—both mother and youth), 180
“Vse otooshi, shumite sosny” (All have left, rustle, pines), 236n16
“Zachatyi v noch’, ia v noch’ rozhden” (Conceived in the night, in the night I was born), 245n32

Long poems:
“Dvenadtsat’” (The Twelve), 173, 263n23, 271n5
“Vozmezdie” (Retribution), 150–51, 203, 205, 212, 231n35, 247n15, 272n19

Cycles:
“Arfy i skripki” (Harps and Violins), 193

Plays:
“Balaganchik” (The Fair Booth), 95, 132, 188–89, 236n15–16, 260n31
“Neznakomka” (The Stranger), 104–5
“Pesnia sud’by” (Song of Fate), 91
“Roza i krest” (Rose and Cross), 245n32

Prose and essays:
“Bez bozhestva, bez vodkhnoven’ia (Tsekh akmeistov)” (Without a god, without inspiration [The Acmeists’ Guild]), 271n11
“Bezvremen’e” (Stagnation/Evil Times), 90–91, 225n31
“Ditia Gogolia” (Gogol’s Child), 268n24
“Dramaticheskii teatr V. F. Kommissarzhevs’kogo (Pis’mo iz Peterburga)” (The Dramatic Theater of V. F. Kommissarzhevskaya [A Letter from Petersburg]), 260n31
“Intelligentsiia i revoliutsiia” (Intelligentsia and Revolution), 173, 175, 263n28, 268n24
“Ironiia” (Irony), 98, 247n10, 268n24
“Krushenie gumanizma” (The Wreck of Humanism), 213, 268n24
“Molniia iskusstva” (Lightning Flashes of Art), 268n24
“Narod i intelligentsiia” (The People and the Intelligentsia), 262n16
“O sovremennom sostoianii russkogo simvolizma” (On the Current State of Russian Symbolism), 10, 257n8, 263n26

“Faina,” 133–39, 145
“Strashnyi mir” (Frightening World), 193
“Karmen” (Carmen), 133, 140–45, 159
“Nepodvizhnost’” (Motionlessness), 59
“Pliaski smerti” (Dances of death), 259n19
“Pod znakom Devy” (Under the Sign of Virgo/the Virgin), 94
“Snezhnaia maska” (The Snow Mask), 10, 94, 132–35, 140, 233n18
“Stikhi o Prekrasnoi dame” (Poems about the Fair Lady), 59–61
“Zakliatie ognem i mrakom” (Incantation by Fire and Darkness), 238n15
“Vol’nye mysl’i” (Free Thoughts), 256n15
“Pis’mo o teatre” (Letter on the Theater), 133

**Books:**

*Sedoe utro* (Gray Morning), 183
*Sobranie stikhov* (Collected Works), 256n15, 264n46
*Stikhi o Prekrasnoi Dame* (Poems about the Fair Lady), 41–42, 59, 103–4, 242n73

**Speech:**

*Nechaiannaia Radost’* (Unexpected Joy), 233n19
*Zemlia v snegu* (Earth in Snow), 225n31, 256n15

*“O naznachenii poeta”* (On the Calling of the Poet), 182, 184, 189–90, 193, 211, 268n23
For reasons of space, names of scholars have been indexed only when appearing in the main text.

Acmeism, 6, 26, 44, 53–55, 57, 61, 65, 68, 71, 75, 78, 81–82, 85, 99, 100, 112, 167, 171, 216, 221n33, 241n67; definition of, 12–13; organicity and constructedness in, 29; overview of, 12–15; piety of artist-builder in, 12; rationality and mysticism in, 12; respect for boundaries in, 12; semantic poetics of, 13–14; struggle in vs. conversion, 50, 54–55; sublation in, 14–15; subtextual poetics of, 14; synthesis with Symbolism in Tristia, 100, 129; and taste, 13; year 1912 in, 49–50

Acmeists: as “younger Symbolists,” 50

Aeschylus: The Eumenides, 115; The Libation Bearers, 114; Seven Against Thebes, 112

Akhmatova, Anna, 13, 22, 30, 49–50, 182, 195, 202, 207, 212, 246n44; Evening (Vecher), 49; “I have no use for odic hosts” (Mne ni k chemu odicheskie rati), 230n20


Anaxagoras. See Pushkin, “To Krivtsov” Andreev, Leonid: “Darkness” (T’ma), 265n51; Life of a Man (Zhizn’ cheloveka), 97

Annensky, Innokenty, 185–86, 195, 211, 230n8, 231n32; “The Dying Turgenev” (Umiraiushchii Turgenev), 85; “≈”, 90; Mandelstam on Dionysiam in, 222n2 anti-Semitism, 7, 152, 203–4, 212, 224n19

anxiety of influence. See Bloom, Harold; creative anxieties

Aphrodite, 175, 177–79
Apollo (Apollon), 49, 50, 243n85

Apollonian and Dionysian, 5, 9, 13–15, 68, 71, 109–10, 129, 216
apophrades (Bloom), 24, 29
Arbenina, Olga, 176–77, 260n23, 264n32
Argonauts (Bely’s circle), 45, 226n35
aristocracy, 78, 199, 201–5, 206–7
Athena, 114–15
authenticity, 11, 16, 211–16; skepticism as to Symbolist, 66–67, 69–71, 131–32, 185–88
Averintsev, Sergei, 12, 51, 159
Awakened Thought (Probuzhdennaia mys’), 232n3
Azov, Vladimir, 153

Bakhtin, Mikhail, 255n7
Bakst, Lev, 260n31
Bal’mont, Konstantin, 8, 85
Baltrushaitis, Iurgis: “Carousel” (Karusel’), 245n34
Baratynsky, Evgenii, 201
barbarism, 129
bezvremen’e, 90–91, 92, 173
Bliuzhkov, Konstantin, 273n36, 240n50; “Elegy from Tibullus. Free Translation” (Elegiia iz Tibulla. Vo’n’yi perevod), 252n72
Bliuzhkov, Pavel, 69, 240n50
Baudelaire, Charles, 39, 41; “À une passant,” 233n12
Bedouins, 25–26
Bely, Andrei, 9, 23, 38, 49, 58, 69–70, 93, 187, 203, 207, 214, 225n28, 227n61, 236n17
Works: Arabesques, 70; The Beginning of the Century (Nachalo veka), 69; “Emblematics of Sense” (Emblematika smyssla), 228n70; “Excerpts from Glossolalia (A Poem about Sound)” (Otryvki iz Glossolalii [Poemy o zvuke]), 266n54; “F. Nietzsche” (F. Nitishe), 70; Gold in the Azure (Zoloto v lazuri), 46, 95; “Green Meadow” (Lug zelenyiy), 225n31; “Images” (cycle, Obrazy), 95; “In the Church” (Vo khrame), 242n69; “Meeting” (Vstrecha), 69–70; Northern Symphony (Severnaia simfoniia), 95; Notes of an Eccentric (Zapiski chudaka), 69; Petersburg, 266n11; The Silver Dove (Serebriany golub’), 61; “Stamped Galosh” (Shtempelevannai kalosha), 70; “Symbolism as Worldview” (Simvolizm kak miroproimanie), 70, 226n43; “To Briusov” (Briusovu), 69; Urn (Urna), 10, 69; “The Wilderness” (Pustynia), 46; “World Soul” (Dusha mira), 41
Benois, Alexandre, 241n62, 260n27
Benthamines (Utilitarianism), 128
Bergson, Henri, 106
Bethea, David, 8, 29–30
besvrement’, 90–91, 92, 173
Black Hundreds, 204
black sun, 19, 111–12, 126, 171. See also night sun
Blok, Alexander, 123, 130–46, 225nn28–29, 266n2; and anti-Semitism, 7, 203–4, 212; aristocracy (barstvennost’) of, 7, 199, 201–5, 207–8, 212; as badger, 199–200; and Briusov, 233n16; charisma of, 30–31, 85–86, 198, 211; conservatism, 198–99, 201, 203; creative anxieties of, 23–24, 34; death of, 6–7, 16, 105, 167, 187, 190, 192–93, 196, 197, 211, 254n97; and Fet, 24; and Vladimir Gippius, 180–81; attitude toward formal perfection, 214; and Gnosticism, 175, 227–228n61, 262n15; and Gorodetsky, 233n16; Heroine, 41–43, 46, 53, 103, 130, 134–39, 144, 263n32 (see also Ideal); irony in works and worldview of, 6, 14, 98, 185, 189, 265n46; “living and dangerous,” 6–8; lyric hero, 7, 31, 53, 85–86, 98, 104–5, 108–9, 139, 211, 263n21; Mandelstam and, 6–8, 11, 16, 22, 24, 29–31, 41–43, 47–48, 50, 58–61, 63, 77, 85–86, 88–98, 100–101, 103–9, 148, 150–52, 159–60, 167–68, 171–84, 185, 187–90, 192–93, 195–96, 197–210, 211–14, 216; 232n3; maximalism of, 7, 99, 188; and melodrama, 259n12; metaphorical poetics of, 100, 105–6, 211; and modernist time structures, 100, 106–9; myth-making of, 11, 197; and music, 94, 145, 192–93, 271n45; and nadsonovshchina, 95–96; and Pushkin, 97–98, 177–79, 182, 184, 189–90, 195–96, 206, 273n30; Romantic persona, 6–7; semioticization of traditional imagery in, 42; theater poems of, 130–46; theatricality of, 7, 96, 130, 151, 167, 184, 185, 188, 196, 211; tragic-prophetic stance of, 6–7, 31, 89–90, 94, 98, 172–73, 183, 188–89, 199–200, 211; and Vladimir Solov’ev,
Index of Works, Blok

Bloom, Harold, 8, 21–24, 26–31; The Anxiety of Influence, 21; and Freudian "Family Romance," 22, 26; and subtextual criticism, 231n31

bogochelovechestvo (Godmanhood), 64, 257n36

Bosio, Angiolina, 260n25

boundaries: between art and life, 5–6, 15–16, 140, 147–48, 151–53, 156, 161, 163–64, 228n68; clock face representing temporal, 90; footlights as, 18, 131–46; incest as transgression of, 229n77; ontological, 12; play with, 5–6, 12, 15–19, 140, 144–46, 163–64; between religion and life, 69; between self and world, 187; between spatial realms, 174–75; between Symbolism and Acmeism, 6, 19–20, 55; Symbolist transgressing of, 5, 12, 65–66, 131; between this and other world, 5, 46, 60, 65; between time frames, 18–19, 106–9; between tragedy and theatricality, 7, 185–89

Briusov, Valery, 8, 12, 23, 38, 42, 50, 214, 236n16, 243n1, 247n4; and Blok, 233n16

Works: All Melodies (Vse napevy), 10–11; "La belle dame sans merci," 225n30; "Star" (Zvezda), 11; "To Her, Close at Heart" (K Blizkoi), 41; Urbi et Orbi, 23

Brodsky, Joseph, 228n66

Broitman, S. N., 46, 106, 108, 168

Brown, Clarence, 53

Broyde, Steven, 163

Bukhshtab, Boris, 7

Bulgakov, Sergei, 238n12

candor, 214, 216

Carmen, 11, 140–43, 188, 202

Catullus, 27

Cavanagh, Clare, 27, 44, 46, 80–81

Chaadaev, Petr, 207, 236n16

Chaplin, Charlie, 207

charisma, 30–31, 86, 198, 211, 243n3

Chebotarevskaya, Anastasia, 50

chelys-lyra, 251nn61–62

Chénier, André, 197, 206

chorus, 192, 194; of antiquity, 19, 111–12, 126, 171; operatic, 122, 154, 156; rebirth of, 110–11, 247n2, 254n94


circular motion: of clock hands, 87, 91; of gigantskie shagi, 87, 94; of horseman (Blok, "Bezvremen' e"), 90–91; sentimental song of barrel organ, 94; of weathervanes, 92. See also eternal return

Classicism, theater of, 131

clinamen (Bloom), 28

composition: and censorship, 236n13, 237n22; chronology in, 235n13; use of facing pages in, 51–53; of Stone (1913), 50, 54; of Stone (1916), 49–55, 98–99; of Stone (various editions); 35–37, 235n8; of Tristia, 110–11

Constantinople: Hagia Sophia, 126–27

Craig, Gordon, 151

creative anxieties, 6, 8, 21–31; extra-poetic, 29–30; among younger Symbolists, 23–24

creative freedom, 4, 25–26, 29, 127, 190, 193, 197, 205, 209

Crone, Anna Lisa, 29

Cubofuturism. See Futurism

curtain and onionskin. See distance and immediacy

Dal', Vladimir, 88

Dante, 42, 206, 209
d'Anthès, George, 88

David, King, 207

David Copperfield (Dickens), 203
death, 61, 120, 190; of the artist, 16, 118; of the poet, competing models of, 86, 88, 90, 94–98, 189–90, 194; theatrical, 150–52

De'lamas, Liubov', 140, 143–46, 176

Dionysian, 68, 110, 112, 115; and Apollonian, 5, 9, 13, 15, 109; and boundaries in Mandelstam, 228n70; Christianity and, 110, 112, 124–25, 127; religion, 110–11

Dionysus, theater of, 111
distance: in Acmeism, 12; imposed from
mythopoetic Symbolism, 45; necessary for aesthetic tension, 4
distance and immediacy: curtain and onion-skin as representation of, 6, 15–20; play with, 3–6, 15–20, 55, 150–153, 163–64, 216
distanced reiteration, 4, 28–29
Divine Feminine. See Ideal
Dobroliubov, Alexander, 77, 204
Don Juan, 11, 89–90, 172–74
Donna Anna. See Ideal

Dragon, The (Drakon), 266n54

Ego-Futurism, 49
Eikhenbaum, Boris: “Blok’s Fate” (Sud’ba Bloka), 185, 188–89
epigones, 4, 12, 57, 70, 131
Epirus, 119
Eternal Feminine, 41, 42, 45, 59, 93, 104, 173–74, 215. See also Ideal
 eternal return, 90, 102, 106–7, 173
Etkind, Efim, 140
Eucharist, 122–25, 127, 254n98, 264n33
eunomia, 114
Euripides, 19
Evreinov, Nikolai, 151, 256n12
exaggeration, Symbolist/Romantic, 66–67, 71, 99
excesses: artistic and epistemological of Symbolism, 46

Fair Lady. See Ideal
Fet, Afanasy, 42, 122, 228n66; influence on Blok, 24, 93
 Works: “Convalescent” (Bo’noi), 93; “Organ Grinder” (Sharmanshchik), 245n32, “You are all in lights. Your distant flashes” (Ty vsia v ogniakh. Tvoi kh zarnits), 230n14
Field, The (Niva), 88
Finland, 97
Florensky, Pavel, 14, 241n57
footlights: as boundary, 18–19, 131–46; false vs. real, 138
footpaths of mystery, 19, 115, 128
France, 19
Frazer, James: The Golden Bough, 248n35
Freidin, Gregory, 4, 18, 30–31, 111, 192, 210, 249n37

French Revolution, 114, 148
Furies, 114–16, 123
Futurism, 6, 13, 49

Gasparov, Boris, 179, 190, 192, 195–96
Gasparov, Mikhail, 11, 88, 96, 106, 176
Geertz, Clifford, 128
Gershtein, Emma, 212
gigantskie shagi (yard game), 87, 96–97
Ginzburg, Lydia, 132–33, 140
Gippius, Vladimir, 3, 16, 73, 78–79, 179–81, 203, 204, 213; and Blok, 180–81
 Works: “To Alexander Blok” (Aleksandru Blokii), 180–81; “I was overtaken by ecstasy in the steppe” (Menia vostorg v stepi nastig), 180; “Pushkin and Christianity” (Pushkin i kristianstvo), 262n14; Return (Vozvrashchenie), 264n43, 265n46; Starry Night (Noch’ v zvezdakh), 180
Gippius, Zinaida, 8
Gluck, Christoph Willibald: Orpheus and Eurydice, 122–23, 156–57, 163, 269n30
Goethe, J. W. von, 42, 201
Gofman, Modest, 9
Gogol, Nikolai, 69, 76, 242n68, 242n72, 271n47; “Overcoat” (Shinel’), 107, 236n16
Golovin, Alexander, 122, 156, 260n23
Gorodetsky, Sergei, 12–13, 49–50, 224n19, 234n3, 239n25, 239n39; and Blok, 233n16
 Works: “Bride” (Nevesta), 263n21; “Idol-creation” (Idolotvorchestvo), 44–46
Gothic, 71, 76
Great War, 5
Greece, ancient, 19, 119. See also Aeschylus, Athena, chorus (of antiquity), etc.
Grene, David, 112
Grishunin, A. L., 7
Gromov, Pavel, 106, 108
Gumilev, Nikolai, 12, 13, 49, 50, 195, 243n82, 243n85, 264n32; death of, 16, 190, 192–93, 196; reviews of Stone (1913) and (1916), 54–55; theory of the word, 171, 263n11
 Works: “Anatomy of a Poem” (Anatomiia stikhovoreniiia), 226n50; “The Life of Verse” (Zhizn’ stikha), 147; “Poem of the Beginning. Book One. The Drag-
on” (Poema nachala. Kniga pervaia. Drakon), 266n54; “Wayward Tram” (Zabludivshiisia tramvai), 194; “The Word” (Slovo), 266n54

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>heresiography, 56; Christian, 64–65; Islamic, 65–66</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homer, 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeric Hymn to Hermes, 118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>homoiousia vs. homoousia</em>, 65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyperborean, The (Giperborei), 13, 49, 59, 62, 85, 98,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>179, 233n12, 238n9, 245n34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ibsen, Henrik, 200; <em>Brand</em>, 68–69, 240n56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideal (or ideal realm), 4, 6, 9, 14, 41–42, 90, 92,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93–94, 103, 139, 215; and idols, 45–46; location of,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>175; and poetic image, 44–45. See also Eternal Feminine;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blok (Heroine)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran, 65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>irony, 6, 9, 12, 14, 20, 47, 52–53, 88, 98, 161,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>164, 189, 216, 265n46; ambivalent, 20, 56–64; in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolism and Acmeism, 14, 98, 227n57–58; “luminous,”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam, 65–66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivanov, Georgii, 266n54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivanov, Viacheslav, 10–11, 29, 38, 49–50, 58, 67–68,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76, 100, 109–12, 114, 118, 123–25, 127–29, 159–60,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>171, 186, 215, 250n55, 251n59, 255n8, 260n37, 261n5,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>272n14; dithyrambs, 112, 250n51, early influence on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandelstam, 22; and heresy, 65; lectures on versification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Academy), 3, 7, 40, 232n3; realistic and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>idealistic Symbolism, 15, 44, 214; and receptivity in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>poetry, 215; religious experimentation and syncretism,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Works</em>: <em>Alkei i Safo</em>, 250n57; <em>By the Stars</em> (Po</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zvezdam), 26, 76–77, 81; “The Calling of Bacchus” (Vzyv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yanie Vakha), 253n85; <em>Cor Ardens</em>, 225n32, 254n98;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Firebearers” (Ognenos-tyi), 250n51; “The Hellenic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion of the Suffering God” (Ellinskaja religia stra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>daushchego boga), 248–49n35; “Exit Cor Ardens,” 254–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55n98; “Maenad” (Menada), 10, 254n98; “On Sect and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on Dogma” (O sekte i o dogmate), 65; <em>Pilot Stars</em> (Korm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chie zvezdy), 26; “The Religion of Dionysus” (Reli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>giia Dionisa), 248–49n35; “Sporady,” 253n88; “Thou art”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Ty esi), 228n70; “Trial of Fire” (Sud ognia), 253n85,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Artistic Creation” (Tvorchestvo), 46; “Two Elements in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemporary Symbolism” (Dve stikhii v sovremen-nom sim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>volizme), 224n25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivanov-Razumnik (Razumnik Ivanov), 271n5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivich collection, 168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph (biblical), 25–26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judaism, 4, 7, 73, 210, 224n19, 241n63, 253n82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judas (Gnostic), 262n5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kablukov, S. V., 242n70, 271n6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kahn, Andrew, 207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kenosis (Bloom), 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khardzhiev, Nikolai, 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khayyam, Omar, 139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khazina, Nadezhda. See Mandelstam, Nadezhda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khlebnikov, Velimir, 199; death of, 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khodasevich, Vladislav, 238n19, 268n27, 276n12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kliuev, Nikolai: “Woodsong” (Lesnaia), 62–63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kochanowski, Jan, 139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kommissarzhevskaya, Vera, 134, 151, 156, 159, 200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Konevskoi, Ivan, 77, 204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krivtsov, Nikolai Ivanovich, 179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kul’bin, Nikolai, 103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuzmin, Mikhail, 249n39, 253n89; “Pushkin,” 189, 270n42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kvisisana (restaurant), 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lattimore, Richmond, 114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebedev, L. V., 195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lekmanov, Oleg, 68–69, 78; <em>Kniga ob akmeizme</em>, 12–13,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lermontov, Mikhail, 192–93; <em>Masquerade</em> (Maskarad),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>148, 260n23; “The Poet’s Death” (Smert’ poeta), 267n12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lerner, Nikolai, 88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levinton, Georgii, 87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Libra</em> (Vesy), 93, 226n40, 228n68, 241n67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject Index</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libra (zodiacal sign), 93–94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>life-creation, 9, 12, 64, 97, 131, 234n1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“literary malice,” 98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lived life of the poet, 8, 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livshits, Benedikt, 22, 30; The One-and-a-half-eyed Archer (Polutoraglazyi strelets), 229n5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logos, 13, 15, 78, 171, 184, 190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longhi, Pietro, 148, 258n2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lotman, Yuri, 131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lozinsky, Mikhail, 13, 70, 195; “At the river’s edge” (U potoka), 239n47; “Stones” (Kamen’ia), 243n82; “There is in the world a music of windless heights” (Est’ v mire muzyka bezvetrennykh vysot), 68; “Wayfarer” (Putnik), 68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lyric hero, Symbolist. See Blok (lyric hero)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lzhe­simvolizm (pseudo-Symbolism), 132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maeterlinck, Maurice, 200; Sister Beatrice, 260n31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandelstam, Osip. See Index of Works, Mandelstam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandelstam, Nadezhda, 22, 50, 118, 160, 249n38, 250n57, 254n94, 259n15, 275n10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margolina, Sof’ia, 72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mask, 133, 135, 185, 256–57n20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>masquerade, 131–35, 140, 148–53; and mysterium, 132, 169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>materialism, 110, 179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matich, Olga, 151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayakovskiy, Vladimir, 106; “Down the Cobblestones” (Po mostovoi), 41; suicide of, 268n16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medusa, 114–15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melpomene, 18, 154, 156, 158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mendeleev, Dmitry, 207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mendeleeva, Lyubov’, 134, 152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merezhkovskiy, Dmitry, 8; “Children of the Night” (Deti nochi), 93; “On the Reasons for the Decline of and New Currents in Contemporary Russian Literature” (O prichinakh upadka i o novykh techniakh sovremennoi russkoj literatury), 224n22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>metatheatricality, 145, 187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meter: dol’nik, 52, 232n6; hexameter, 205; logaoedic, 52; pentasyllabic, 238n17; in Mandelstam’s poetry, 18–19, 39, 52, 93, 163, 167, 232n6; of “Steps of the Knight Commander,” 167, 260n37. See also stanzaic structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mets, A. G., 50, 195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meyerhold, Vsevolod, 130, 156, 187, 260n23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milky Way, 139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minsky, Nikolai, 214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mints, Z. G., 140, 143–44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>misprision (Bloom), 22–23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>modernist time poetics, 105–9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moréas, Jean: “Le Symbolisme,” 245n31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morderer, V., 103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morozov, A. A., 96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moscow Art Theater, 151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mount Athos, Orthodox monks of, 57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muratov, Pavel: Images of Italy (Obrazy Italii), 148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musatov, Vladimir, 196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mysterium, 132, 169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>myth-creation (mifotvorchestvo), 9, 11, 211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“myth of forgotten Christianity,” 11, 100, 109–29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadson, Semyon, 98, 213, 242n75; “I dreamed I was ill, that my brain burned” (Snilos’ mne, chto ia bolen, chto mozg moi gorit), 95–96; “My friend, my brother, [my] weary, suffering brother” (Drug moi, brat moi, ustalyi, stradauish-chii brat), 275n9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nadsonovshchina, 95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narbut, Vladimir, 13; Hallelujah (Alliluiia), 49; review of Cor Ardens, 235n5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nekrasov, Nikolai, 98, 202; “On Weather” (O pogode), 260n25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neoplatonism, 8–9, 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nietzsche, Friedrich, 8, 28, 69, 102, 109, 110, 115, 116, 122, 173, 238n20; The Birth of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tragedy, 109, 116, 156; Thus Spoke Zarathustra, 23, 64, 70, 236n17
night sun, 97, 126, 168, 171, 173, 175, 177, 179, 182, 184, 254n94, 262n14. See also black sun
nominalism, 15
Northern Flowers (Severnye tsvety), 59
Novalis, 201
Novikov, Nikolai, 228n66
Odoevtseva, Irina, 251n65
“ontological rhymes,” 30
opera, 116, 122–23, 140, 151, 156–58, 163, 245n32
Orpheus and Eurydice (Gluck), 122–23, 156–57, 163, 269n30
Orthodoxy, Russian, 8, 57, 125–27, 227n53, 247n15. See also Christianity
Other. See Ideal
“overcoming” of Symbolism, 6, 50, 56, 87
Ovid, 27, 122

pairing of poems, compositional, 51–54
Panova, Lada, 41, 102, 106–7, 247n16
Paperno, Irina, 57–58
parody, 100–105
Pascal, Blaise, 28
Pasternak, Boris, 230n25
Pavlovich, Nadezhda, 267n10
Pavlovsk, 194–95
pendulum: Mandelstam’s poems of 1912 organized as, 49–55
Peter’s Academy (Petrovskoe uchilishche), 89
Petersburg, 3, 7, 49, 114, 145, 153, 156, 163, 168–69, 184, 195, 205, 262–63n18, 266n54; myth, 107; Symbolists, 70
Petrarch, 42
Petrouchka (Benois and Stravinsky), 257n24
Piast, Vladimir, 7, 203, 240n50, 245n33, 272n24
Pindar, 236n16
play: aesthetic, 6, 55; with boundaries, 12, 132–33, 140, 144–46, 163–64; with boundaries of Sophiological tradition, 41–42; Christian art as, 19, 128; with immediacy and distance, 6–5, 216; poetry as deep, 128; with pragmatics of text, 19–20; realm of within artwork, 45–46
Plutarch: myth of the death of Pan, 252n78
Poe, Edgar Allan: “The Fall of the House of Usher,” 78
Poets’ Guild, 12, 49
positivism, 8
Potebnya, Alexander, 8
pragmatics of text, 5, 19, 46, 131, 164
Prekrasnaia Dama. See Ideal
priority (poetic): and Mandelstam, 27–28
Prometheus, 186, 250n51
propriety (poetic): and Mandelstam, 27
Proserpina, 113–15
Protestantism, 62, 66, 73, 239n25
Prutkov, Koz’ma, 238–39n22
Pushkin, Alexander, 27, 30, 37, 89, 126, 175–76, 184, 195–96, 201, 204, 206, 228n66, 262n14; anniversaries, 88, 184, 189, 192; and Blok, 97–98, 177–79, 182, 184, 189–90, 195–96, 206, 273n30; death of, 88, 97, 184, 189–90, 193–94, 246n43; imitation of, 179; Mandelstam’s “superhuman chastity” before, 22
Works: “The Bronze Horseman” (Mednyi vsadnik), 95, 107, 206; Eugene Onegin (Evgenii Onegin), 107, 174, 234n24, 257n25; Feast in the Time of Plague, 203, 231n38; “For the shores of a distant homeland” (Dlia beregov otchizny da’nei), 257n37; “Gabrieliade” (Gavriliada), 160–61; “My Genealogy” (Moia rodoslovnaja), 206; “Prophet” (Prorok), 62; “Remembrance” (Vospominanie), 88; The Stone Guest (Kamennyi gost’), 95; Stone Island cycle, 196; “Tale of the Golden Cockerel” (Skazka o zolotom petushke), 95; “To Kvitsov” (Kvitsovu), 168, 177–79, 182; “Under the blue sky of her native land” (Pod nebom golubym strany svoei rodnoi), 257n37
Racine, Jean: Phèdre, 18–19, 119
Radishchev, Alexander, 228n66
rampa. See footlights
rationalism, 15, 110
raznochinstvo, 204–10
Realism, 8; theater of, 131
realism (medieval philosophical), 15
receptiveness, vs. independent creativity, 24, 28, 45, 215–16
revolution, 28–29, 114, 122, 125, 148, 168–69, 174–75, 197–99
Reynolds, Andrew, 8, 29
Romains, Jules: *Les Copains*, 14
Romanticism, 6, 8, 10, 23, 79, 105, 115, 131, 161, 172–73, 186; as precursor of Bloom and Symbolism, 28–29, 31; theater of, 131
Rome: St. Peter's Cathedral, 126–27
Ronen, Omry, 4, 14, 44, 46, 59, 68–69, 72, 176, 192, 196, 203, 208
Rudakov, Sergei, 230n25, 244n18, 265n48
Russian civil war, 118
Russian Orthodoxy. See Christianity
Russian Riches (Russkoe bogatstvo), 95
Russian Thought (Russkaia mysl'), 89, 94
Ryzhii, Boris, 228n66
St. Petersburg. See Petersburg
St. Petersburg University, 224n19
Sappho, 118–20, 160
Schubert, Franz: *Lieder*, 115, 121
Scorpio: publishing house, 93; zodiacal sign, 93
Segal, Dimitrii, 68, 151–52
Sel’vinsky, Ilya, 214
Severianin, Igor, 49
Shakespeare, William, 139, 200
Shashina, Elizaveta, 193
Shileiko, Vladimir, 68; “His love struggled overmuch” (Ego liubov’ pereborolas’), 239n47
Shkovsky, Victor, 204, 238–39n22; *The Knight’s Move* (Khod konia), 272n27
Shkurapat, I. I., 103
Shtempel’, Natasha, 231n38
Sinani, Boris, 95–97, 172
Skriabin, Alexander, 125, 190, 262n14; Mysterium, 125; “Preliminary Act” (Predvaritel’noe deistvo), 253n87; *Prometheus*, 193–94
Slap in the Face of Public Taste (Poshchechina obschestvennomu vkusu), 49, 243n1
Sloane, David A., 201
“smysoiliki” (senseworkers), 13
Socialist-Revolutionaries, 96–97
Socrates, 102–4
Sologub, Fedor, 8, 37, 42, 50, 185, 236n16
Solov’ev, Sergei, 23, 203, 267n8; “Korolevna,” 23; review of *All Melodies* (Bruisov), 10–11; “Sergii Radonezhskii,” 242n76
Solov’ev, Vladimir, 8, 39, 42, 81, 93, 236n16, 257n36; influence on Blok, 24; theology of, 64–65
Sophia, divine, 8, 81, 103
Sophiological poetry, 41–42
spatial issues in theater, 131–46
spring (Symbolist), 93
Stalin, Iosif, 230n25, 231n35
stanzaic structure, 18, 35, 38–41, 162–63; sonnet, 53, 85, 87. See also meter
State Literary Museum, 125, 235n13
Stray Dog cabaret, 49, 103
subtextual criticism/poetics, 13, 29, 44, 150; and Bloom, 231n31
Surikov, Vasily: “Morning of the Execution of the Streltsy” (Utro streletskoi kazni), 267n12
Symbolism: crisis of, 12; early Russian, 8, 11, 42, 77–78, 132, 242n73; European, 8, 42; rhymes, 41, 79, 159, 213; theater of, 131. See also mythopoetic Symbolism
syncretism, temporal. See modernist time poetics
Taranovsky, Kiril, 114, 160, 192
Tenishev School, 3, 232n3
Terpander, 118–19
theater: Blok’s poems of the, 130–46; definition of, 132–33; Mandelstam and, 151, 153–64, 167; vs. masquerade, 131–35
theatricality, 130–46, 148, 151–52, 167, 184; tragedy and, 7, 96, 98, 185–96
theatrical wonder, 153–64
theurgy, 9, 12, 31, 46, 64, 111, 171, 179
Tibullus, 252n72 and 74
time poetics, modernist, 105–9, 247n16
Tintoretto: “Susanna and the Elders,” 153, 258n2
Tiutchev, Fedor, 37, 68, 73–74, 79, 158, 192, 228n66, 250n51; “Problème,” 75–76
Toddies, Evgenii, 158, 179
Tolstoy, Lev, 30; *Anna Karenina*, 196
tone: ambivalence of, 5, 43, 45–47, 58, 63,
74; structural cues to, 5; subtleties of, 37–38, 41, 43; unity of, characteristic of Symbolism, 47–48

tragedy: Greek, 109–12, 115, 156; and theatricality, 7, 96, 98, 185–96

Tsarskoe selo, 195

Tynianov, Yuri, 7, 105, 224n19, 229n1, 233n18, 275n7; “Blok and Heine,” 268n24

Unexpected Joy (Nechaiannaia radost’; icon), 233n19

Vaginov, Konstantin, 244n18

Verhaeren, Émile: Hélène de Sparte, 250n52; “Les horloges,” 243n10; “Les pas,” 244n19

Verigina, V. I., 256n14

Verlaine, Paul, 4, 77, 102–3, 105, 232n3; “L’Angoisse,” 236n16; Parallélément, 51 “verses to you,” 37, 41–42

Villon, François, 4, 77, 206, 242n78; rhyme in, 40

Virgo (zodiacal sign), 93–94

Volokhova, Natalya, 133, 134

Wachtel, Michael, 22–23

Wandering Jew, 7

Warsaw, 3

Wilde, Oscar: Salome, 151

Word, the. See Logos

Works and Days (Trudy i dni), 49

World Soul. See Ideal

Yakhontov, Vladimir, 162

younger Symbolists. See mythopoetic Symbolism

Zenkevich, Mikhail, 13; Wild Porphyry (Dikaiia porfira), 49

Zhirmunskii, Viktor, 162; “The Poetry of Alexander Blok” (Poeziia Aleksandra Bloka), 105–6, 189; “They Who Have Overcome Symbolism” (Preodolevshie simvolizm), 13, 50

zhiznetvorchestvo. See life-creation

Zhukovsky, Vasily: “Pushkin’s Last Minutes” (Poslednie minuty Pushkina), 88–89

Zinov’eva-Annibal, Lidiia, 225n32

zodiacal signs, in Symbolism, 93–94