From the holdings of the Department of Special Collections , Princeton University Library, Princeton, NJ

These documents are either in the public domain, or can only be used for educational and research purposes (Fair use) as per U.S. Copyright law (text below). By accessing this file, all users agree that their use falls in the public domain or within fair use as defined by the copyrightlaw. We do not charge any permission or usage fees for the publication of images of material inour collections, including those provided by Princeton University Library, via our website, catalog, or directly from staff.For more information regarding copyright, credit, and citation please review the information onthe Copyright, Credit and Citation Guidelines page of our website.
https://library.princeton.edu/special-collections/policies/copyright-credit-and-citation-guidelines. If you have any questions, including how to order higher-quality images from the collection, contact Special Collections Public Services via our Ask Us! Form. https://library.princeton.edu/special-collections/ask-us

Doctoral Dissertations, 2011-2026 Comparative Literature

2013

The Poem at the Border of Translation: Osip Mandelstam, Paul Celan, and the Lives of the Word

Schnairsohn, Leeore

Princeton, NJ : Princeton University

http://arks.princeton.edu/ark:/88435/dsp01ns0646097

U.S. Copyright law: The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, §108, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research. If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excess of fair use that user may be liable for copyright infringement. This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve a violation of copyright law. https://www.copyright.gov/title17/title17.pdf

THE POEM AT THE BORDER OF TRANSLATION:
OSIP MANDELSTAM, PAUL CELAN, AND THE LIVES OF THE WORD

Leeore Schnairsohn

A DISSERTATION

PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY

OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE

OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

RECOMMENDED FOR ACCEPTANCE

BY THE DEPARTMENT OF

COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

Adviser: Dr. Olga Peters Hasty

April 2013

© Copyright by Leeore Schnairsohn, 2013. All rights reserved.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ..... *ii*

ABSTRACT ..... *iv*

INTRODUCTION *1*

CHAPTER ONE *13*

CHAPTER TWO *65*

CHAPTER THREE *101*

CHAPTER FOUR *152*

CHAPTER FIVE *214*

CHAPTER SIX *269*

CONCLUSION *304*

BIBLIOGRAPHY *312*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you above all to my adviser, Olga Peters Hasty, the Department of Slavic Languages and Literature, for her unfailing support and dedication to this project and for her amazingly sharp eye and sensitive ear. This prose, both in form and in content, owes much to her.

Many thanks also to my readers, Daniel Heller-Roazen in the Department of Comparative Literature and Joshua Kotin in the Department of English.

Thank you to everyone in the Slavic Department at Princeton, especially those who had contact with my work and were able to lend their ears and voices: Michael Wachtel, Caryl Emerson, Zaur Agayev, Lindsay Ceballos, Yuri Corrigan, Christine Dunbar, Jesse Menefee, Timothy Portice, Jason Strudler, and Timothy West.

Thank you to everyone in the Department of Comparative Literature at Princeton, chiefly Thomas Hare, Michael Wood, Catherine Hansen, Rachel Galvin, Jens Klenner, and Ari Lieberman.

Thank you to all who lent their ears and voices outside Princeton in various classes and conferences I attended, chiefly Clare Cavanagh, Elena Glazov-Corrigan, Andrew Kahn, Oleg Proskurin, Marina Rozhavina, Maria Shardakova, Richard Sieburth, Michael Ossorgin VIII, and Alyson Tapp.

A special thank you to my friends, constant interlocutors, and fellow *ревнители художественного слова* in whatever language it comes: Anthony Carelli and Evan Sicuranza.

A happy shout-out to Pat C. Hoy and everyone at the Expository Writing Program at NYU. In addition to everything else the Program has given me, you are paying for the printing and binding of this dissertation.

Special thanks to Alan and Linda Stockdale and to David Marty, who offered me their beautiful houses when I had no funding.

Thank you to my parents, Howie and Rivka, to Nili, Josh, Tess, and finally Jackson who beat this document into the world by two months and to whom I will present it when he comes of age.

Finally, an acknowledgment of the beaches and jets that made the landscape of my early childhood, to the Reykjavik summit of 1986, to *Rocky IV,* to Dostoevsky in the Garnett translation, and to someone's purple bookbag at whose existence I marveled in third grade, all of which allowed Mandelstam to take hold.

ABSTRACT

When the Russian poet Osip Mandelstam (1891-1938) died, he left behind a trove of analytical and critical prose: essays, reviews, and long pieces of literary criticism many of which can now fall under the aegis of theory. Within this multifarious body of work, few of whose components are clearly aware of their place in the whole or their debt to a general organizing principle, two strands of thinking emerge which dominate the poet's evolving understanding of the poetic word. These are the life of the word and the role of the reader.

Over the course of Mandelstam's career as a prose writer and literary critic (roughly 1913 to 1934), these two strands, word and reader, come ever closer together. This dissertation argues that they finally merge in the *Conversation about Dante,* Mandelstam's final, longest, and most involved piece of literary criticism. We argue as well that, at this point of convergence, Mandelstam's poetics comes closest to including translation in its conceptual point of view. There are several strong reasons that this poet would have been disinclined to consider translation as theoretically interesting; but the shadow of translation is nonetheless there in his thinking. It is thus fitting that the Bukovinian poet Paul Celan (1920-1970), whose experience of Mandelstam was chiefly as his first translator into German, was able in his own critical writing to add another dimension to Mandelstam's theory of poetic discourse—one, we argue, that depends upon an open consideration of translation.

This dissertation traces a kinship across time and death, one whose workings are based in the life and afterlife of the poetic word. From it emerges a model of reading and translation that is both appropriative and generous. Mandelstam and Celan claim that the

reader constitutes the text not only as it is being read, but also as it is being written; thus every text is written toward its own translation.

§

Nothing can surprise me now, nothing can astonish
or alarm me now the god of gods has galled the midday
into night and trimmed the light of the westering sun.
Surely anything can happen now, anything at all,
so brace yourselves for the sight of milk cows grazing
the dolphin-crowded seas, of sure-footed deer
and mountain goats crossing the talus of a cresting wave.

Archilochus (tr. Sherrod Santos)

Slovo—Psikheia. (The word is Psyche.)

Osip Mandelstam

It is an ancient, formidable suggestion that the Muses of memory and of invention are one.

George Steiner

§

A note on documentation:

Citations of Mandelstam's poetry are indicated by page number referring to *Sobranie stikhotvorenii,* the definitive Biblioteka Poeta edition, with the exception of drafts not included in that volume: these are indicated by volume and page number referring to *Sobranie sochinenii v chetyrekh tomakh.* There are also occasional references to the commentary in *Sobranie sochinenii v dvukh tomakh,* indicated by SSDT followed by volume and page number.

Citations of Mandelstam's prose are indicated by volume and page number referring to *Sobranie sochinenii v chetyrekh tomakh.*

Citations of Vyacheslav Ivanov are indicated by page number referring to *Selected Essays* or by volume and page number referring to *Sobranie sochinenii.*

INTRODUCTION

THE FARTHER PONDS

In late 1928, with Stalin's Soviet Union on the brink of a lean and violent decade of starvation, collectivization, and purges, the young critic Emma Gerstein met the poet Osip Mandelstam at a sanatorium outside of Moscow. Both shared a vital interest in literature, and they became natural companions. Gerstein ate with Mandelstam and his wife, Nadezhda, and took long walks with the poet around the grounds of the sanatorium. According to Gerstein, these walks were marked by conversation of an unusual kind: a monologue on Mandelstam's part which he claimed was dialogue. Though only the poet spoke aloud, he spoke as if in conversation with others. As Gerstein describes it,

> He drew me towards the ponds, one stretching darkly after the other. On their banks, his pliant voice loudly declaimed entire sentences, with unexpected metaphors and meanings that I could not penetrate. It was an irresponsible improvisation, directed not at me but towards the farther of the ponds, and I vaguely recalled how Pushkin wandered above the same small lakes, singing his verse and frightening the ducks.
>
> (Gerstein 2004, 11)

This is a picture of a person touched by mania, or by a Romantic inhabitation: the the poet's living interlocutor has no part to play in his conversation. In general, Gerstein describes Mandelstam's speech as "dialogue with a silent interlocutor," elaborating: "he would start by muttering, then threw out disconnected phrases, gradually transitioning to coherent speech" (Gerstein 1987, 277), often producing "a brilliant aphorism...which sometimes developed into an impassioned improvisation with devastating logical deductions" (Gerstein

2004, 16). Whatever logic may have lain in these deductions, however, they could be subverted by the poet's love of cognitive leaps: Mandelstam admits to Gerstein that his thinking proceeds along "omitted links" (Lekmanov 113).

Yet—despite the inaccessibility of this strange conversation to a real and present interlocutor—Mandelstam apparently expects a response. Gerstein notes his disappointment when she failed to respond to his apparent soliloquies, telling her "with some disappointment, 'I toss you a ball, but you don't catch it'" (2004, 7). It would seem a tall order to "catch" the spontaneous inventions of Mandelstam's famously arcane and elusive mind, and moreover to prove that one had caught them. But, looking back at his work, we can see Mandelstam consistently making such demands on both the artist and the audience throughout his writing life. In an early poem of 1912, the spectacle of the stars prods him (unwillingly) to sing his verse, and he rouses himself into action thus:

> Томись, музыкант встревоженный,
> Люби, вспоминай и плачь
> И, с тусклой планеты брошенный,
> Подхватывай легкий мяч!
>
> (Languish, anxious musician,/ Love, remember and cry/ And catch the buoyant ball/ Thrown from the wan planet!) [1]
>
> (101)

The poet is exhorting himself to perform his calling, by invoking not only poses of poetry that would have been familiar from the Romantics (languishing, loving, etc.), but also a sign of the poetics of Symbolism: a transmission from another world. The image of the "buoyant ball" thrown from, or by, the "wan planet" (likely the moon) combines play and uncanniness—both of which obsessed the young Mandelstam (especially when he imagined

[1] Легкий/legkii is, quite simply, "light." I have translated it as "buoyant" to distinguish from "brilliant."

and theorized reading) and both of which he invokes again when admonishing Gerstein for not being ready for his own transmission. Speaking, for him, is a game with serious consequences: a loading of the Symbolist sign with the responsibilities of human relationship. The poetics of Symbolism—which Mandelstam was still keen on inhering in 1912—demanded a 'catcher' who was qualified as such by his poetic talent. Mandelstam's rebellion against this poetics, beginning in the 1910s and continuing its development until his death in 1938, was founded in large part on his desire to share the gift and responsibility of 'catching' with any reader at all.

When Gerstein met him, Mandelstam was suffering a period of intense and painful alienation. He was throwing himself everywhere, it seems, and no one was daring (or bothering) to catch—despite recent publications of Mandelstam's fiction, poetry, and critical prose. In May the journal *Zvezda* printed the novella *Egyptian Stamp* (Egiptskaia marka), Mandelstam's only published work of fiction. The State Publishing House *(Gosizdat)* had released a retrospective collection comprising his first two books of poetry—*Stone* (Kamen'), first published in Petrograd in 1913, and *Tristia,* which had come out in Berlin in 1922—as well as yet uncollected poetic works completed in the following six years. Finally, the Academia press published *On Poetry* (O poezii), a collection of literary essays and articles dating from 1915 to 1927. This was an unheard-of aggregate of publication for an unofficial poet, especially all at once, and had at least been eased if not mandated by Mandelstam's patron in the Politburo, Nikolai Bukharin.[2] But most of this work met with a quiet or hostile reception: even advocacy at as high a level as Buhkarin's couldn't protect the poet against criticism on the official line. Though reviewers gave his mastery of the poetic craft its due, they attacked Mandelstam as bourgeois, "European," unrepresentative of the

[2] See Lekmanov 114.

proletariat—too well-crafted, in fact; too literary.[3] Then, in a chilling turn of events, Mandelstam was attacked for plagiarism of a translation of Charles de Coster's novel *The Legend of Thyl Ulenspiegel*—a scandal likely fanned by those in power to drive the poet further out of circulation (and out of his mind). Finally, whether in concordance with these events or with the whims of the muse, Mandelstam found himself unable to write poetry. At the Moscow sanatorium, Emma Gerstein found a poet in trouble: paranoid, asthmatic, despairing of an audience, and worried for his life.

Had Gerstein read the essays Mandelstam had written as a young man, she would have found a theoretical prediction of his current real position. Already in 1913, well before the revolution that sealed his biographical fate, Mandelstam had compared the writing of a poem to a desperate act on the high seas: the poet was like "a sailor in a critical moment," who, storm-tossed and hopeless, "throws into the waters of the ocean a sealed bottle with his name and a description of his fate" (I 183-4).[4] Gerstein might in fact have understood Mandelstam's locutions to the farther ponds (as Pushkin recited to the ducks; as the poet in Pushkin's "Poet" sang to deserts and trees) as bottles he was casting out into the ocean.

The sailor does not expect to survive long enough to be read, never mind to meet his addressee—yet Mandelstam complained when Gerstein couldn't read him at the instant he spoke, couldn't catch what he'd only just tossed to her. This complaint reveals a tension between the theoretical doomed sailor and the real human being in crisis: the sailor doesn't expect an interlocutor, but the human being needs one. Mandelstam theorizes the poet as simultaneously the sailor and the man in crisis, as a speaker whose words cannot expect a

[3] Bukharin himself wrote to the Gosizdat's chief: "True, he's not a mainstream ["massoviy"—of the masses] poet. But he has—and should have—a significant place in our literature." Whether one was considered "mainstream," of course, carried political as well as artistic consequences. See Lekmanov 114, 120. Bukharin was shot nine months before Mandelstam's death.

[4] Мореплаватель в критический момент бросает в воды океана запечатанную бутылку с именем своим и описанем своей судьбы.

response, and at the same time cannot be spoken without the expectation of a response. Poetry, as the closest we come to an individualized language[5], is at once utterly private and utterly social. Its vector of communication, thus, is hardly a straight line. If Gerstein's intuitions are correct, the poet throws his words out so that they may return: they must reach the farther ponds (and reach Pushkin—for a Russian, both the aggregate and guarantee of all poetry) before boomeranging to the listener's ear and understanding.

The story of the bottle doesn't end with the sailor. In fact, the heart of Mandelstam's 1913 essay "On the Interlocutor" (O sobesednike) lies in what happens when the bottle is found. Here the sailor disappears, and the essay's writer ("I") takes over as protagonist:

> Many years later, wandering in the dunes, I find [the bottle] in the sand, read the letter, learn about the date of the event and the last will of the one who perished. I was in the right to do this. I didn't open someone else's letter. The letter sealed in the bottle is addressed to the one who finds it. I found it. Therefore, I am the secret addressee.
>
> (I 184) [6]

The sailor's plight is quickly forgotten as the finder (the young poet) insists on his right as a reader to appropriate this artifact of the past, to deem it his inheritance. Not only does he judge the object as being for him by virtue of his having found it; he also (more boldly, or more recklessly) submits his own subjective being (his "I") as equivalent to the bottle's open addressee ("the one who finds it"). In fact, Mandelstam asserts himself as the bottle's *only* addressee. Otherwise he would cast himself as the bottle's *chance* or *lucky* addressee, not its *secret* addressee. To be the secret addressee means to be intended—or fated—and judged by an authority of great distance, one that can see into the life of language across aeons: the thing that Bakhtin called a "third" and Mandelstam calls the word.

---

[5] See Chapter Six and Glazov, *passim.*

[6] Спустя долгие годы, скитаясь по дюнам, я нахожу ее в песке, прочитываю письмо, узнаю дату события, последнюю волю погибшего. Я вправе был сделать это. Я не распечатал чужого письма. Письмо, запечатанное в бутылке, адресовано тому, кто найдет ее. Нашел я. Значит, я и есть таинственный адресат.

The poem, once it is cast out, travels a distance across which it is impossible for its creator to pass or even see. The real poet writes for an unknown reader in the future, and a reader can only initiate the proper response to a poem if he is removed from its composer by a similar degree of distance: as Mandelstam writes in "On the Interlocutor," "An address to a concrete interlocutor de-wings the poetic line, deprives it of air, of flight… Turning to someone known, we can only speak of what is already known" (I, 185).[7] A spontaneous vocal utterance might also qualify as poetry if it first met this condition: to be spoken to someone unknown. So it may be that, as he strolled the sanatorium grounds with Emma Gerstein, Mandelstam was trying to awaken the muse—to at least perform the part of a poet—by speaking to the unknown (to posterity; to the ducks; to Pushkin and the farther ponds) at the same time as he spoke to his young companion. Or perhaps he was exercising what would become, in his conception, a vital stage in the life cycle of the word: the word's death, which alone enables its rebirth in reading.

The life cycle of the word and the role of the reader remain close but separate concepts through most of Mandelstam's theoretical and poetic work; but they are always drawing closer, and by his *de facto* critical apotheosis,[8] the *Conversation about Dante,* they have grown together to become part of the same set of images. It is also in the *Conversation* that Mandelstam first comes upon the image of the reader as translator. This dissertation argues that the translator's appearance together with the confluence of these two concepts is no coincidence. At several key moments in Mandelstam's critical thinking over the course of his career, he stops just short of theorizing translation, but it is asking to be discussed. The deaths of the author and of the word—both, in his thinking, essential to

[7] …обращение к конкретному собеседнику обескрыливает стих, лишает его воздуха, полета… Обращаясь к известному, мы можем сказать только известное.

[8] Between the Conversation's composition (1933) and Mandelstam's death (1938), he wrote no more works of literary criticism—at least, no drafts of any remain.

the survival of poetry—demand it. Yet—in a sublunar reflection of these sublime images—it took Mandelstam's death and the momentary disappearance of his work from the world stage for that poet and his work to be reborn,[9] and it took Mandelstam's first major translator, Paul Celan, to complete his theorization of literary rebirth.

By the late 1950s, when Celan bought his copy of the Struve edition of Mandelstam's Collected Works (New York, 1955—untranslated)[10] Mandelstam was long dead in a labor camp in the Far East, his eminence largely erased: the expunging begun with the *Eulenspiegel* affair seemed complete. But in Paris, Celan, a Holocaust survivor and now poet of worldwide fame, began with great enthusiasm to translate the Russian poet into German. Celan wrote in a letter of 1958: "Mandelstam is the greatest Russian lyricist in recent decades; he is *the* metaphysician—I feel a bit of pride, having found and translated him" (FN 399).[11] In addition to Celan's interest in Mandelstam as a metaphysician—Celan constantly tested the idea of language as a measure of the world (see, for example, p. 280)—the Bukovinian poet saw the Russian as a fellow Jew and sufferer. (Celan's parents had been killed in a camp, and until the 1960s Celan believed Mandelstam to have been murdered by a German *Einsatzgruppe* during the war.)

It was likely Mandelstam who put *finding* so prominently on Celan's mind. In the same year as the letter (1958), Celan gave a speech to accept the Bremen Literature Prize, in which he exposed more directly a commonality with Mandelstam's idea of reading, if not the Russian poet's outright influence:

---

[9] Actually, his work never disappeared from the world stage, because it was never there to begin with. As far as we can discern, he was untranslated until Celan began his versions in the late 1950s. And it never fully disappeared inside the Soviet Union, where repressed poetry continued to circulate in secret and survive in memory.

[10] Celan bought a copy of this edition in 1957 or 1958. See Eskin 165.

[11] Mandelstamm is wohl der grösste russische Lyriker der letzten Jahrzehnte, er ist *der* Metaphysiker, ich bin ein wenig stolz, ihn gefunden und übersetzt zu haben.

> A poem, being an instance of language, hence essentially dialogue, may be a letter in a bottle thrown out to sea with the—surely not always strong—hope that it may sometime wash up somewhere, perhaps on a heart-land.
>
> (GW III 186)[12]

Taken together, these thoughts of 1958 put Celan on the shore that Mandelstam theorized in 1913: a finder of a message—a speech act, a poem—from a sender long gone. With Celan as finder of Mandelstam, as with Mandelstam's theorized finder on the shore, the poem's receiver is motivated by a felt personal summons and a sense of appropriation: in Mandelstam's case, "I found it. Therefore, I am the secret addressee"; in Celan's case, "I feel a bit of pride, having found and translated him." There seems a great difference between an interpellation by a text (Mandelstam's secret addressee) and the capture and reinvention of a text (Celan's proud "found and translated"). But the model of reader reception that Mandelstam begins and Celan completes is based on the idea that interpellation carries in it the seed of reinvention, that the reformation of the self occasioned by an encounter with a text is always and already reinventing the text—that recollection and invention (to paraphrase Steiner) are part of the same movement.

According to Mandelstam's theories of reader reception, the boomerang of the poetic word,[13] when it returns from the "farther ponds," will bear Stygian traces; it will communicate something of the underworld to the receiving hand. The receiver, feeling the jolt of the returning instrument against his palm, will perceive something of this deathly journey, from which no human being could have returned. When he opens his mouth, he will attempt to speak something of what the jolt and the Stygian trace have imparted to

[12] Das Gedicht kann, da es eine Erscheinungsform der Sprache und damit seinem Wesen nach dialogisch ist, eine Flaschenpost sein, aufgegeben in dem—gewiß nicht immer hoffnungsstarken—Glauben, sie könnte irgendwo und irgendwann an Land gespült werden, an Herzland vielleicht. Trans. Rosmarie Waldrop in *Collected Prose* (35), slightly altered.

[13] This is my own crude formulation: we will thankfully visit Mandelstam's own in the upcoming chapters.

him—and he will of course do this in his own voice. This model so far is a condensation of Mandelstam's ideas of reading, which we will begin to pursue in the first chapter. Where Mandelstam stops short—and where Celan picks up—is the border between languages: the idea that the catcher of the word must speak (re-speak) it in his own language. Mandelstam only begins to approach the territory of translation in his final work on poetry, the *Conversation about Dante.* Celan, in his translations of Mandelstam, his own poetry surrounding these translations, and his poetological prose of the same period, will carry Mandelstam's thought over the border.

Immediately upon discovering Mandelstam, Celan became deeply interested in his life and work, and translated enough of his poems to compose and publish a collection, *Ossip Mandelstamm: Gedichte* (Poems) in 1959, between the publications of his own collections *Sprachgitter* (Speech-grille, 1959) and *Die Niemandsrose* (The no-one's rose, 1961)—the latter of which he dedicated to Mandelstam. In 1960 he wrote a dialogue for radio titled *Die Dichtung Ossip Mandelstamms* (The Poetry of Osip Mandelstam), which was broadcast in the same year. This dialogue is the only source of Celan's thought about the Russian poet published in his lifetime; the others lie scattered over letters, hints in the Bremen Prize speech, and early versions of and notes for the *Meridian* speech (1960).

In the radio address, what interests Celan in Mandelstam's work (especially his early work, upon which the address focuses) is an anticipation of the other—a complicated other, constituted both by the phenomenal world and the reader. In the act of poetry, the poet addresses both the phenomenal world and a reader. Moreover, the line between the world and the reader is unstable: it is hard to tell where world ends and reader begins. Both world and reader pose a question of epistemology—what is this other? this world? this reader?—and in so doing creates the conditions necessary for poetry to take

place. Fittingly, the poems of Mandelstam with which Celan punctuates the radio address (in his own translation) tend thematically to stress the anticipation of the other. Celan in including these particular poems is claiming that Mandelstam's poetry is thematically marked by an anticipation of the other, and thereby, to follow Celan's logic, an anticipation of translation.

The present study explicates the claim that Mandelstam's thinking about the reader, about the word, and about translation twine ever closer throughout his career, and that they they are only brought together as Celan interprets his thinking and translates his poetry. Chapter One looks at the existential poetics of Mandelstam's early poetry in light of Celan's formulation "address to phenomena." Chapter Two charts Mandelstam's first forays into a theory of poetic communication through the ideas of correspondence and theft, and explores Mandelstam's evolving conception of subjective bifurcation as necessary to poetic discourse. Chapter Three examines ideas of time and repetition in Mandelstam's essays of the 1920s and echoes of these ideas in his translations of the same period. In Chapter Four, Mandelstam's anxieties about translation are viewed through his ideas of literary evolution of the late 1920s and early 1930s. Finally, Chapter Five treats the masterwork *Conversation about Dante* and surrounding texts in the context of hybridity and performance, and explores these concepts as a frame for Mandelstam's image of Dante as translator. Chapter Six examines Celan's collection *Die Niemandsrose* in the context of his translations of Mandelstam, which are explicitly and implicitly present throughout the collection, and opens a up few key moments in Celan's *Meridian* speech as syntheses of Mandelstam's poetics. Overall, the dissertation examines Mandelstam's writings on poetry and poetic discourse in the context of the questions Celan raises in his thinking about Mandelstam: namely, how does poetry guarantee the survival of language?

What trials must the word endure in order to reach a reader? What happens to the word and the reader in that encounter, and how and when do the stories of the word and the stories of the reader intertwine—indeed, become the same story? Finally, why does Mandelstam's thinking about the word and the reader stop short of an explicit consideration of translation—and what happens when Celan views Mandelstam through that lens?

Celan, after all, stood in 1958 on the far side of the ponds—after, in his words, the German language had "pass[ed] through its own answerlessness *[Antwortlosigkeit]*…through a dreadful silence…through the thousand darknesses of death-bringing speech" to wash up on some new shore. The poetic task Celan had set for himself—to bring German out of this dark and silent place, to restore it as a human language—echoes Mandelstam's own cultural mission of replanting the legacies of world culture in new poetic soil. As Mandelstam translated from Greek and Roman antiquity to his Russian quotidian, so did Celan attempt to replant the Russian poet's work in the new soil of his own language. As Mandelstam can help us understand key parts of Celan's thinking in the *Meridian* and other prose of the late 1950s and early 60s, Celan can help us see the kenotic drive in Mandelstam's thinking about the word as a positive trajectory, one that leads to resurrection and life, but that must also pass through forgetting and unknowing, in order to rise anew. Celan can also help us envision a model of reading in which the period of darkness and silence, which for Mandelstam is necessary for the word to survive, can exist in the space between languages as well as in the "time-ditch"[14] between historical epochs. Speaking to the farther ponds, and by extension all poetic speaking, is an attempt to bypass the thousand darknesses of time by substituting for them the artwork

[14] See discussion of *The Noise of Time* in Chapter Three.

with its inexhaustible, defiant excess of signification, and make the death and rebirth of the word happen in one epoch, one durée.

CHAPTER ONE

THE ADDRESS TO PHENOMENA

> *In other words, as soon as an art has become autonomous, it makes a fresh start. It is therefore salient to consider this start as a sort of phenomenology.*
>
> *Gaston Bachelard*

> [Mandelstam's] poems are the poems of something that apprehends and attends, facing toward the phenomenal, interrogating and addressing the phenomenal; they are a *conversation* [Gespräch]. In the space of this conversation the Addressed constitutes itself, realizes itself, assembles itself around the I that addresses and names it. But the Addressed, which by being named has also become a kind of *You,* brings into this present its otherness and foreignness. Even in the poem's here and now, in this immediacy and nearness, the Addressed lets its distance speak along with it, preserving what is most proper to it: its time.
>
> —Paul Celan, *The Poetry of Osip Mandelstam* (radio address), 1960
>
> (Im Luftgrab 73) [1]

In his radio address on Osip Mandelstam (1960), Paul Celan invents a curious formulation: that Mandelstam's early poetry "interrogat[es] and address[es] the phenomenal." This interrogation and address he calls "conversation" with a collocutor formed out of the address itself. Celan's exposition of what he means by conversation complicates the issue as much as clarifies it: the receiver of the poetic address in Celan's idea of dialogue turns out to be a shadow of "the phenomenal" rather than a subject himself—that is, something

[1] Diese Gedichte sind die Gedichte eines Wahrnehmenden und Aufmerksamen, dem Erscheinenden Zugewandten, das Erscheinende Befragenden und Ansprechenden; sie sind *Gespräch.* Im Raum dieses Gesprächs konstituiert sich das Angesprochene, vergegenwärtigt es sich, versammelt es sich um das es ansprechende und nennende Ich. Aber in deise Gegenwart bringt das Angesprochene und durch Nennung gleichsam zum *Du* gewordene sein Anders- und Fremdsein mit. Noch im Hier und Jetzt des Gedichts, noch in dieser Unmittelbarkeit und Nähe läßt es seine Ferne mitsprechen, bewahrt es das ihm Eigenste: seine Zeit.

that suggests monologue at least as much as it suggests dialogue. The "addressed," which up to this point is identified with "the phenomenal," now "by being named has also become a kind of *You."*

What kind of address is Celan describing—how might a poet address phenomena in their totality (or phenomenality—whatever is meant by *das Erscheinende);* and how does this totality become a *Du,* a subjective singularity, presumably capable of being addressed as well as answering? This chapter will suggest a theoretical scheme for such an address, taking the following form: The poet, in speaking a poetic address, creates an alter ego somewhere between the *I* of his subjectivity and the *You* of the subjectivity of an addressee. The alter ego is, in a sense, an instantiation of the poet's subjectivity: a phenomenal extension of the apparent infinity of the I. In another sense, the alter ego is the space in which the poet encounters being, as represented by phenomena in their totality. Thus the alter ego is a locus both of the phenomenal and of the essential: it is an instantiation of the I, yet reflects the I's essence; it is part of the world of phenomena, yet speaks out of an inexpressible totality. I will explicate this model with help from close readings of poems from the period of Mandelstam's work to which Celan is referring (1910-1913), which reveal Mandelstam's enactment of this "address to phenomena" as occurring specifically in a mode of questioning. I will then explore some of the philosophical roots of Mandelstam's early work that will guide his thinking about language—specifically his idea of reading and reception—here and throughout his career. This chapter will end at the moment before Mandelstam theorizes the reader—when the bow wave that poetry casts into the world of phenomena begins to look like Celan's *Du.*

Address as Interpellation

As the nexus of the model Celan presents in the above passage, "conversation" *(Gespräch)* deserves attention. The term presents an initial difficulty: that of accounting for dialogue as a function of a written text.[2] One solution is put forth by Michael Eskin in his book *Ethics and Dialogue in Levinas, Bakhtin, Mandel'shtam, and Celan.* In his translation of the above passage, Eskin renders Celan's *ansprechen* as "to interpellate," with the result that Celan "interrogates and *interpellates*…the phenomenal" (148). This interpretation will help up begin to conceive of what Celan may mean by poetic "conversation."

Eskin's purpose, as he lays it out in the first sections of his book, is to locate in poetry a nexus between semiotics, semantics and ethics, which he calls "semethics."[3] Eskin's preference for "interpellation" over "address" comes out of this focus on ethics: specifically from Emmanual Levinas, a study of which occupies the first chapter of *Ethics and Dialogue.* Eskin claims that interpellation is key to Levinas's model of dialogue, in which a subject feels himself created as an ethical being by the immediate presence of another.

Summarizing Levinas's thought on dialogue, Eskin claims that "my relation to the other 'is essentially interpellation, the vocative'" (32). In a Levinasian model, the subject is immediately responsible to the other in the context of dialogue; he is constituted as a subject through his interpellation by the other. Thus, "ansprechen" after a Levinasian fashion would indicate addressing as interpellation, an act in which one creates the interlocutor in the act of address. But Levinas's dialogic model depends on the interlocutor's presence—on the sight of his face[4]. Eskin readily admits this in his analysis:

[2] Celan presents no context for this term, no definition outside his own. Readers of Bakhtin would be familiar with his own estimation of poetry as particularly poor dialogic material.
[3] See Eskin 39 for definition and defense, and *passim* for development.
[4] See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity, passim.*

while Levinas's term *visage* can be expanded beyond the phenomenal face to mean "the 'manner in which the Other presents himself surpassing my idea of the Other'," the "originary interpellation of the other as visage" is nonetheless "'the production of sense'" (33) and not of the intellect (as in reading). On the other hand, Celan's poetry, like most poetry, is not produced in the presence of its addressee, if it has an addressee at all. There is no human presence on the other side of the table (or the pond) to present an ethical imperative; if a like interlocutory presence is indeed felt by the artist, its structure cannot be translated from that of a encounter between living beings without adjustment and comment. This is especially true if, as Celan is claiming, a poet (here the young Mandelstam) is addressing not an interlocutor but "the phenomenal" itself, and only through such a turn creating a *You* that at best *stands in* for an interlocutor.

There is a way, however, to recover interpellation for (Celan's) Mandelstam, and this is by appealing to Louis Althusser. Althusser's long essay *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* is political in its nature and its aims; nevertheless he drops some interesting phenomenological claims as he illustrates his theses—claims that can illuminate Mandelstam's poetics as an address to the phenomenal, especially as they focus not on interpellation by *visage,* as Eskin does, but on interpellation by voice: the creation of a subject through a verbal address. Althusser writes:

> I shall...suggest that ideology "acts" or "functions" in such a way that it "recruits" subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or "transforms" the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: "Hey, you there!"

> Assuming that the theoretical scene I have imagined takes place in the street, the hailed individual will turn round. By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a *subject.* Why? Because he has recognized that the hail was "really" addressed to him, and that "it was *really him* who was hailed" (and not someone else).
>
> (48)

Here, the subject is created in at least two ways. First, the policeman's call construes him as a political subject. Second (and more relevant to the present study), he becomes aware of his own presence in the world: it's "really him…and not someone else" who was hailed. In a few pages, we will encounter a poem of Mandelstam's in which he asks "Can it be true that I'm real/ And death will really come?" The discovery (or recovery) of presence and its attendant ontological responsibilities is a fixation of Mandelstam's early poetry, and we will see that this discovery or recovery also depends on being hailed. For Mandelstam, as Celan sees it, questioning creates conditions for reading; that is, it creates the possibility that the finder of a poem will come into being as its reader—in the young Mandelstam's words, its "interlocutor."[5]

In Chapter Two, we will see Mandelstam insisting that a reader's subjectivity is constituted in being addressed; that is, that *reading* is founded on interpellation. The receiver of the speech act, both in Althusser and in Mandelstam, participates in interpellation (his subjectivity depends on it). But the utterer of the speech act is not involved in interpellation: his address is not meant to be constitutive. We know this because Mandelstam's address to phenomena (in Celan's words) is also an interrogation (also Celan's word): it is a mode of questioning. It is the poem, not the poet, that interpellates the reader. The poet does something else—but what?

[5] See Chapter Two.

Questioning and the Alter Ego

To address phenomena, one must trust them.[6] That is, one must be content with appearances—in the world as it appears (or as it is appearing)—and consider that one's address will not penetrate appearances to something which lies behind them, but will rather land within the appearance (or the appearing) itself. This attitude of Mandelstam's is important both to his history and his esthetics as a poet. Historically, his concentration on phenomena aligns him with the Acmeist movement, which he joined at the time of the early poems that Celan discusses.

Acmeism was one of the chief movements of Russian poetry that attempted to answer the crisis of Symbolism at the end of the 1910s; its stated goal was to return poetry to the world, to sing appearances as reality rather than valuing them as veils or signs of an immanence. Acmeism had its roots in the Tower *(Bashnya)* of the Symbolist poet and theorist Vyacheslav Ivanov, where in 1909 a group calling itself the Society of Devotees of the Artistic Word *(Obshchestvo revnitelei khudozhestvennogo slova)* began to meet once or twice a month. From this group emerged a subgroup, the Guild of Poets *(Tsekh poetov),* led by the young poets Nikolai Gumilev (1886-1921) and Sergei Gorodetsky (1884-1967). Out of this subgroup would come the program of Acmeism, with a mission to cast aside the moral murkiness and mystical pretensions of the reigning Symbolist aesthetic and began building images of the everyday and alive, with simple "manly"[7] language and a focus on the perceptible world and its constituents.

---

[6] Here and in the rest of the chapter, I use "phenomenon" and "appearance" in the Kantian sense, to distinguish from essence or thing-in-itself.

[7] Gumilev granted the avant-garde movement of Adamism (to him, identical with Acmeism) "...a masculinely firm and clear view on life." (…мужественно твердый и ясный взгляд на жизнь .) ("The Legacy of Symbolism and Acmeism" (Наследие символизма и акмеизм), http://gumilev.ru/clauses/2/).

Esthetically, Mandelstam's examination of the phenomenal exceeds the Acmeist project and survives its tenets. Acmeism freed Mandelstam from the esthetic burden, pertinent to much of the Symbolist project, of aiming his poetic investigations toward a *beyond*—if he is a metaphysician (as Celan claimed), his investigations are aimed at phenomena, not behind them. But unlike his fellow Acmeists, he does not use phenomena as suggestive set pieces for emotional and conceptual explorations—his interests begin and end in the set.

Mandelstam's first collection of poems, *Stone (Kamen'),* contains poems written between 1909 and 1913, the year of the book's first edition. These years form the bookends of Mandelstam's artistic identification with Acmeism and of the first explicit[8] formation of his poetics through the Acmeist project. Of *Stone's* twenty-three poems, ten were finished in 1912, three in 1913, and ten between 1909 and 1911. Despite Mandelstam's having taken several steps to package the collection as an Acmeist book (its title—changed from the more Symbolist "Seashell"[9]—not least among them), nearly half its contents were composed before Acmeism was declared a school and its tenets formulated, and nearly one-quarter were finished before the Guild of Poets (the larger post-Symbolist circle out of which Acmeism emerged) was itself formed. The poems are arranged more or less chronologically; the reader is invited to witness the maturation (and the coming to consciousness) of a poetic voice over the space of a few formative years—ending with the famous "architectural" poems "Aia-Sofiia" and "Notre Dame." The latter, together with Mandelstam's manifesto "Morning of Acmeism," firmly place Mandelstam's interest in things of the world behaving *along with* (and not as a function of) the poetic word.

[8] Relatively speaking.

[9] This title is taken from the poem of the same name, whose Tiutchevian allusions and symbolic correspondences reveal Mandelstam pushing himself through the border of Symbolism, but not entirely out of it (its ectoplasm, in fact, would adhere to him until his break with poetry in the late 20s).

Gumilev in his review of *Stone* labeled the first portion of Mandelstam's collection "Symbolist"; these poems' successes were realized in terms of "Music with a capital M"[10] (music being a lodestar of Symbolist poetry in general). However, while Mandelstam did profess admiration for numerous Symbolist poets both before and after his Acmeist confession, it it not accurate to label these pre-Acmeist poems Symbolist by default. They are united by the aesthetic preoccupations of at least two Symbolist poets: first, a focus on the small and "insignificant" *(nichtozhnoe),* which Mandelstam would later ascribe to the influence of Innokentiy Annensky; second, an abnegation of the received world, inherited at least in part from Valeriy Briusov, whose work "captivated" the young Mandelstam with its "brilliant courage of negation, pure negation" (Lekmanov 2000, 23). But within these thematic keys, Mandelstam is also raising his own questions, which between 1909 and 1913 become more and more distinct, and which emerge more clearly as challenges to aesthetic mainstays of late Symbolism (already, according to its master Vyacheslav Ivanov, in crisis). It is fitting that in this period of Mandelstam's biographical and artistic adolescence, these challenges should group themselves around existential concerns. It is interesting that he expresses so many of these concerns through some turn of address—recalling Celan's formulation of Mandelstam's early poetry as an address to existence.

Out of *Stone's* twenty-three poems, not less than seventeen contain a thematic, motivated turn of address; at least half of these seventeen maintain a state of addressing for the bulk (if not the whole) of the poem. Much of *Stone* can thus be said to be conducted in the act of address. The address, and its addressee, are indicated in various ways: in eight of the poems (nearly half of the seventeen address poems) the address is expressed through metaphysical questions. The addressee is implicated (or, if we read Eskin,

[10] See Lekmanov 70.

interpellated) not as a possible source of knowledge, but as a co-listener to an unanswerable question. Such questions, spread out over the poems of the collection, include:

> За радость тихую дышать и жить,
> Кого, скажите, мне благодарить?
>
> (For the quiet joy of breathing and living,/ Whom, tell me, have I to thank?)
>
> Отчего так мало музыки
> И такая тишина?
>
> (Why is there so little music/ And such silence?)
>
> Неужели я настоящий,
> И действительно смерть придет?
>
> (Can it be true that I'm real,/ And death will really come?)
>
> Что мне делать с птитцей раненой?
>
> (What should I do with this wounded bird?)
>
> К чему дышать?
>
> (To what end breathe?)
>
> Нет, не луна, а светлый циферблат
> Сияет мне, и чем я виноват,
> Что слабых звезд я осязаю млечность?
>
> (No, not the moon, but a glowing clockface
> Shines to me, and how am I to blame,
> For making out the weak stars' milkiness?)
>
> (Kamen', *passim.)*

A second set of addresses, spanning four to five poems from the collection, point the discourse toward a specified but metaphysical addressee: Aphrodite ("Silentium"); the night ("Rakovina" "Seashell")*;* God ("Zmei" "Snake," and perhaps also "Obraz Tvoi…" "Your image… "); and a dead man ("Liuteranin" "Lutheran"). "Poedem v Tsarskoe Selo!" "Let's go to Tsarskoe Selo!") is addressed, if incidentally, to an unnamed companion—

and finally and perhaps most interestingly, the two poems about cathedrals that finish out the first edition of *Stone,* "Aia-Sofiia" and "Notre Dame," contain apostrophic addresses to these very cathedrals.

To begin with the "question" addresses: the first observation that can be made about this form of addressing is that it doesn't predict or expect a response. In nearly every case, the question is not designed to be answered; the addressee is not expected to be capable or desirous of response. What, then, can the address be said to evoke—and in whom? The turn toward address in these poems is not intended to encourage the reader to substitute himself for the logical object of the poem's address—that is, to seek to answer the question or even to imagine what that answer might be. Rather, the poem seeks to instantiate itself as part of a dialogue, as if it is one in a series of related and successively responsive speech acts. These unanswerable or unanswered questions are not deployed strictly rhetorically; they respond to a scene or philosophical problem that excites or perturbs the poem's speaker.

The speakers in this type of dialogue are not turned toward one another, but toward a common point that lies at a great distance; the trajectory of their gaze begins in the perturbation that has birthed the poem. The speakers do not engage in *inter*-locution, but rather *co*-locution[11]: Mandelstam hails the reader to attract his attention not to himself, but to the point where the poem is headed; the reader for his part re-speaks the poem along with its creator to help it along on its journey. Since we are dealing here with a type of speech act that demands the absence of an actual interlocutor—at least of his face—it is therefore disqualified from a Levinasian model of dialogue, which depends upon the interpellation of a present subject as an addressee. The address must then be to some

[11] That is, they are not facing toward each other, but rather at a common distant point. (See Chapter Two.)

degree artificial—hence the requirement of art. In Dmitri Nikulin's book *On Dialogue,* address is conceptualized in terms of what Nikulin calls *eidema:* a speaking self that emerges as an intermediary between speaker and addressee. Nikulin writes:

> ...one's eidema[12]...is...the *other* of oneself, because the self is never realized as a fixed entity that is identical to itself. Hence, one's eidema is one's personal other, which accounts for one's sameness, and which cannot be established in the absence of the other. As one's personal other and the other of oneself that cannot be separated from the self, one's *eidema* is neither 'external' nor properly 'internal'; it defines a person without definition, for one's *eidema* is not an entity that might be expressed in finite terms or in a finalized exchange. Being inexhaustible, one's *eidema* can never be thematized and is therefore the other of oneself, in which the self is unfinalizably exemplified in dialogical exchange with the other person. Thus, one's *eidema* can also be called one's personal other.
>
> (71-2)

Nikulin's echoes of Mikhail Bakhtin are unmistakeable, in particular when speaking of the unfixed, unfinalizable nature of the self. Two notes from Bakhtin's late writings help clarify the *eidema* as speaking self and provide terms through which we may explore the peculiar mode of questioning in Mandelstam's poetry as quasi-dialogical. Bakhtin writes, in notes uncollected during his lifetime, "It is customary to speak about the authorial mask. But in which utterances (speech acts) is there a *face* and not a mask, that is, no authorship? The form of authorship depends on the genre of the utterance" (*Speech Genres* 152). Bakhtin here observes that the authorship ascribable to a text in fact applies to any speech act; that there is a mask, I would argue analogous to a speaking self or *eidema,* which speaks in the stead of the speaker's face. If we substitute this mask for the interpellating *visage* in the Levinasian model, we observe a masque of interpellation, in which the addressee is addressed only by a replica (if not a parody) of a human face and therefore does not feel the ethical obligation toward the other that is essential to Levinasian interpellation. When we find ourselves addressed by a mask—whether a Greek grotesque

[12] Pol Vandevelde in his review of *On Dialogue* cogently defines *eidema* as "the consistency and coherence a person manifests with regard to others and self, which is revealed in and as the voice."

or a blank Noh slate—our obligation is more aesthetic than ethical. But Bakhtin would extend the shadow of aesthetic obligation (without thinking to abandon the ethical) to the mask of the interlocutor, or, to redeploy Nikulin and Levinas, to the interceding quasi-*visage* of an interlocutor's speaking self. In this sense, any utterance presents an eidemic mask, an interposed *visage* that is identifiable with the speaker's face but does not quite constitute it. In a textual utterance, it follows, this *visage* comes into being not through the presence of a speaking human being and its attendant ethical obligation, but rather in the ranges and depths of language itself, the "audible and palpable alternation of the very implements of poetic discourse"[13] which is housed in a text.

A second note from Bakhtin's late writings highlights the dialogical exchange specifically in terms of questioning, and will help clarify Mandelstam's use of the interrogative turn as an entry into dialogue. In the notes collected as "Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences" (put down by Bakhtin in 1974), questioning is posited as emblematic of dialogue because it casts light on the insurmountable divide between interlocutors. Bakhtin writes:

> *Question* and *answer* are not logical relations (categories); they cannot be placed in one consciousness (unified and closed in itself); any response gives rise to a new question. Question and answer presuppose mutual outsideness.
>
> (*Speech Genres* 168)

Questioning presupposes a distinct self and a distinct other; together they extend the questioning into an "infinite dialogue in which there is neither a first nor a last word" (167-8). This is Socratic dialectic stripped of rhetorical or pedagogical goals; it is mutually assured spontaneity. But to get to poetry, Bakhtin's dialogue-enabling mutuality of outsideness must be transferred to a text: a context where an author's *eidema,* housed in

[13] This phrase comes from Mandelstam's *Conversation about Dante* (1933) and will be explored in detail in Chapter Five.

text, enters into a relationship with a living reader. Bakhtin lets slip a clue as he continues: "If an answer does not give rise to a new question from itself, it falls out of the dialogue and enters systemic cognition, which is essentially impersonal" (168). That is, a question is dialogic if it occasions a new question. Consequently, an author, if he wants to enter a dialogue through his text, may pose a question in that text that gives rise to another question that he couldn't have predicted. An authorial question puts the reader on alert—hails him, in other words; constitutes him as a respondent. When he finds he cannot answer the question, he is invited to pose his own, and the dialogue begins (or, per Bakhtin, continues).

An analysis of one of *Stone's* poems will demonstrate a conscious attempt on Mandelstam's part to enact and describe a poetic engagement of the reader in questioning—that is, to speak questioning through an authorial *eidema,* thus drawing the reader into a dialogue that neither points to nor skirts a determined answer. Thus, Mandelstam repeatedly thematizes a moment of realization whose object is the being of something unrealizable. In a 1911 poem that begins "Why is the soul so melodious" the trope of questioning becomes the key to existential self-awareness. The poem opens out to the reader its questioning of existence—its realization of the unrealizable—inviting him to question along with the poem:

> Отчего душа — так певуча,
> И так мало милых имен,
> И мгновенный ритм — только случай
> Неожиданный Аквилон?
>
> Он подымет облако пыли,
> Зашумит бумажной листвой,
> И совсем не вернется — или
> Он вернется совсем другой...

О широкий ветер Орфея,
Ты уйдешь в морские края, —
И, несозданный мир лелея,
Я забыл ненужное "я".

Я блуждал в игрушечной чаще
И открыл лазоревый грот...
Неужели я настоящий
И действительно смерть придет?

(Why is the soul so melodious,/ And why so few dear names,/ And why is the momentary rhythm only happenstance,/ An unexpected Aquilon?// It raises a cloud of dust,/ Rustles the paper foliage/ And won't ever return—or/ Will return completely different...// O vast Orphic wind,/ You will depart to watery realms, —/ And, cherishing the uncreated world,/ I forgot the unneeded "I."// I wandered in a toy thicket/ And discovered an azure grotto.../ Can it be true that I'm real/ And death will really come?)

(99)

The poem contains two moments of questioning, one in the first stanza and one in the last. The first laments the disharmony between the soul, which is naturally melodious, and the paucity and unpredictability of the elements that give it substance and form as poetry, that is words ("dear names") that lend the melody semantic markers, and meter ("rhythm") that organizes the melody with its "names" into feet and lines. This lament is reinforced by the address to Orpheus (or his "wind," now, unlike Aquilon, unnamed), the formless creative element that both inspires the poet and abandons him at will. The second moment of questioning greets the poet as he escapes the world of phenomena to wander through the halls of imagination. He may indeed have ventured into the world of pure forms—the "thicket" is a toy, a model without utility; the "grotto," a cave, is marked as "azure," the color of sky). In this moment, with its echoes of the sublime, the poet encounters pure form and loses his own name, his marker of integrity and identity, and is startled by the fact that he exists as a phenomenon, with the attendant inevitability of death. He moves from complaining about the difficulty of artistic creation (giving

phenomenal form to the creative impulse) to celebrating the realm of pure forms from which this impulse comes, and the privilege of the artist in visiting it.

The poem's questions switch perspective from the created (phenomenal) to the uncreated (imaginative) world. First, the poet, standing in the created world, wonders why the uncreated can't accede to the demands of the created. Second the poet, wandering in the uncreated world, can't bring himself to believe that the created can't participate in the freedom of the uncreated. In between these moments stand the poem's middle two stanzas, which describe an encounter between the poet and the "Aquilon," the "Orphic wind," which is metonymous for the creative breath or spirit which blows between the uncreated and created worlds. This "wind" uses the poet as conduit: the poet inhales it as wild-creative (Dionysian) impulse and exhales it as form-granted (Apollonian) poetry[14]. Specifically in the third stanza, two moments of subjective shift signpost the poem's transition from question to question, from a first subjective perspective to a second. These are the poet's apostrophic address to the wind, and the poet's "forgetting" of the first-person singular pronoun *ia.*

There is no obvious reason that the poet should switch from describing the wind in the third person (stanza 2) to addressing it in the second person (stanza 3); in both cases, he is revealing the action of the creative impulse. In stanza 2, he describes how the wind enters and leaves a room, or how the impulse enters and leaves the poet's creative consciousness. In stanza 3, line 2, he describes how the impulse's home lies either in or beyond watery realms—these realms can stand for anything from the kingdom of Poseidon/Neptune (identifiable with Hades) to the unformed deeps *(tohuwawohu)* over which moves the holy spirit *(ruach,* wind or breath) at the opening of Genesis. What

[14] Mandelstam's relationship with these Nietzschean terms will be discussed below, in the discussion of Vyacheslav Ivanov.

justifies the turn in that same line to the second person—to an addressee? And what does it mean?

If we track the poem's instances of personal pronouns, we find the following:

Stanza 1:	(no personal pronouns)[15]		
Stanza 2:	**on/he;**	**on/he**	
Stanza 3:	**ty/you;**	**ia/I;**	**ia/I**
Stanza 4:	**ia/I;**	**ia/I**	

Since *ty* occurs before *ia* in stanza 3, the poem's final four pronouns (more than half of the poem's total of seven) are the first person singular. It is possible that the poem hosts a movement from the third to the first person *through* an instance of the second person—that the second person is a conduit drawing the poet from an *I-it* into an *I-thou* relationship with the creative impulse.[16] The *I-thou* relationship involves the subject's loss of externality—we might say of phenomenality—and a concurrent speaking with one's "whole being" *(Ich und du,* 3). Thus it makes sense that following this instance of *ty* (thou) in stanza 3, the *ia* (I) should then appear and immediately come into question ("Ia zabyl nenuzhnoe 'ia'" "I forgot the unnecessary 'I'"). The *ia*-in-quotation-marks is likely the phenomenal *ia,* the object-*ia,* which the subject-*ia* sheds and through this shedding attains the world of forms, as the poem's next line indicates: "Ia bluzhdal v igrushechnoi chashche" "I wandered in a toy thicket." The poet now abandons the earthly scene—where spirit is but wind that shakes the leaves—and wanders through the chaotic space of imagination, an echo of the watery realms into which the *ia's* harbinger—the *ty*—departed a few lines before.

[15] An absence perhaps connected to the line "And why so few dear names?" in this stanza.
[16] I use these Buberian terms out of convenience and do not mean to point to anything beyond the most general difference between the two modes of relationship.

This movement of shedding the phenomenal self is reinforced rhythmically. The poem, a *dol'nik,*[17] consists of two types of lines, with the odd lines of each stanza each ending in a feminine foot, and the even lines in masculine:

(1) anapest (m), iamb (m), anapest (f/m) [- - ' / - '/ - - ' -] or [- - ' / - '/ - - ']
(2) anapest (m), anapest (m), iamb (f/m) [- - ' / - - ' / - ' -] or [- - ' / - - ' / - ']

The first two lines of each stanza are invariably of type (1), indicating that Mandelstam was likely following a set rhythmic plan. The second two lines of each stanza vary in pattern, so that the scheme of the poem looks like this:

	Line 1	Line 2	Line 3	Line 4
Stanza 1:	(1)	(1)	(1)	(2)
Stanza 2:	(1)	(1)	(2)	(2)
Stanza 3:	(1)	(1)	(2)	(1)
Stanza 4:	(1)	(1)	(1)	(2)

The stanzas' third lines, as we can see, are split between (1) and (2), and the fourth lines feature (2) except in the third stanza. The fourth line of the third stanza, therefore, is the most rhythmically anomalous in the poem, and indeed it is this line where the poet announces, "I forgot the unneeded 'I'." Tellingly, only the line's *second* I (marked as "unneeded") receives a stress—the narrating I (the one doing the forgetting) receives no stress; nor does the I that follows immediately at the beginning of the next stanza to wander in a toy thicket.

The fourth stanza repeats the meter of the first down to the final beat—with one key difference. The final line of the *first* stanza distributes only two stresses over pattern (1) ("Neozhídannyi Akvilón" "An unexpected Aquilon"): the stress of the line's central foot is

[17] See Wachtel, 23-4.

unrealized. The final line of the *fourth* and final stanza, on the other hand, realizes the stresses of all three feet: "I deistvíten'no smért' pridiót?" "And death will really come?" The difference in the final line, the additional stress, is made up by *smert'*—death. It is not for nothing, then, that the "unneeded I" in the previous stanza received a salient stress: now, in the fourth stanza, death occupies the salient stress, and death now dominates the poet's jarring, paradoxical cognition of his own existence.

The poet is able to speak his final questions (Am I real? Will death really come?) upon reentry into existence from the world of the imaginary, the yet uncreated. The poet cannot consort with Dionysus forever but must always perform an Apollonian descent from the heights and carry the poetic gift back to his home in the world of appearances. The question thus delivered to the world of appearances (Am I real?) reminds of Celan's interrogation and address to the phenomenal: a speech act that thrills and frets at translating the stuff of the uncreated world ("soul" or "toy" or "sea") into forms ("names" and rhythms) upon the poet's reentry into the earth's resistant atmosphere.

The Echo of (and Answer to) Vyacheslav Ivanov

It is impossible to appreciate the poetics of the young Mandelstam, which depend on a complex attitude toward Russian Symbolism, without turning to the poetry and philosophy of late Symbolism's leading light as well as one of modern Russia's most charismatic scholars of antiquity, Vyachesav Ivanov. Mandelstam defined his early poetics largely through a polemic with Ivanov, whose intellectually motivated Symbolism focused on distinction and division between worlds: between poet and reader, between the phenomenal and the metaphysical. Ivanov's mission as a poet is to transcend and dissolve such distinctions and divisions: his address to the reader is in order to reveal his

discoveries. On the other hand, we can observe the young Mandelstam's poetics emerging as he reacts against Ivanov, complaining that a dissolution of distinctions creates a closed (and thereby untrustworthy) semantic system: once we assure ourselves we know what everything means, there's nothing left to talk about. Mandelstam seeks a system that accosts phenomena in process[18]: a poem will open language to the reader and invite him to participate in the poetic act. Rather than address a reader about the revelation of essences, Mandelstam aims to point the reader to phenomena as they reveal themselves, to create a space (what he might call a rhythm) where the poem and the reader may attend to them together.

Vyacheslav Ivanovich Ivanov (1866-1949) was the leading theoretician of the "young Symbolists" and an intense, though ambivalently felt, influence on Mandelstam. Ivanov, like the younger poet, was interested in the poetic address as a call cast between the world of phenomena and the "uncreated" or essential world. Both poets postulated a vital divide between the essential source of poetry and poetry's manifestation in phenomenal (visual, aural, thus comprehensible) forms; both were interested in the act of poetry as constituting passage between these worlds. But by 1912, the time of Mandelstam's composition of "Morning of Acmeism" *(Utro Akmeizma),* his first programmatic essay on poetics, both his poetic practice and theory have become clearly distinguished from Ivanov's. Mandelstam's poetic voice and eye have fixed on the *incomplete moment of realization* of an *unrealizable* essential being, while Ivanov's poems still describe a *completed realization* of an essence that is *realizable,* though only to the poet[19]. Thus Mandelstam has come to see Symbolism as a closed system of signification with no outlet into the phenomenal world—once the poem is done, the game is over, and the reader has no place to stick his beak in. Though

[18] As he will put it in the *Conversation about Dante,* poetic discourse "performs a piece of nature."
[19] Ivanov was quite comfortable with the idea of the poet as priest. Mandelstam (especially in the early essays "Morning of Acmeism" and "On the Interlocutor") argues against such a monopoly on meaning.

both poets remain dualists, Mandelstam attains his poetic majority (and his concomitant emancipation) when he rejects the role of messenger and settles his eye and voice on the phenomenal, human side of the divide.[20]

In the essay "Thoughts on Symbolism," which debuted as a 1912 talk which there is a good chance Mandelstam attended, Ivanov writes: "I am not a Symbolist if my words do not arouse in the listener a feeling of connection between his 'I' and what he calls his 'not-I,' a connection between things that are empirically divided...", and throughout his theoretical work, the poetic act centers on a communion of essential elements heretofore separated by mundane manifestations and influences. According to Ivanov, poetry reveals connections specifically that stretch beyond human reason: it convinces the reader of "the existence of hidden life where his reason did not suspect life at all..." (53). That is, it intimates to the reader symbolic realms which the poet (by virtue of his unique gift) has visited—and the approaches to which the poet (also by virtue of his unique gift) can actually point out to the reader.

In Ivanov's idea of communion, the positions of poet and reader are essentially unequal, so much so that Ivanov consistently casts the poet as the unique bearer of a divine creative impulse. According to Ivanov's essays, symbolic poetry "descends from the divine womb" (13), specifically at the behest of such divine figures as Dionysus, Apollo, Aphrodite, and Demeter: gods of love, creation, and transformation. Puskhkin, the sun of Russian poetry, is himself a "theurgist" (42), a white-magician. Like a bit of magic, the symbol "cuts through all planes of being and all spheres of consciousness" (13). Giving himself over to such magic, the poet experiences a sublime "self-oblivion" (38). The poet, having "surrendered his personal will and lost his self" and "become the passive tool of the god that

[20] Mandelstam will, of course, assign this role to various familiars—the word, Christ, Persephone, et al.—throughout his career. The transformations of the messenger through Mandelstam's poetic career could make a great study.

lives within him..." (12), in turn exercises divine authority over the reader. Ivanov is thus not content with the self-immolation and surrender associated with the sublime encounter, and must push even that concept off of its aesthetic (human, artistic) foundation and onto a divine one:

> The "sublime" in aesthetics...is an essentially religious phenomenon that thereby transcends the bounds of aesthetics. Concealed within it is the symbolics of a theurgic mystery and a mystical antinomy... when the Divinity offers such a gift [as of battle], it whispers to the soul: "Come and take it!"... He who offers up a sacrifice draws the divine down to himself and becomes a God-bearer.
>
> (6)

Even the sublime, which in its classical understanding both tests and reinforces the division between the human and the superhuman, in Ivanov's conception becomes a conduit between the two. The experiencer becomes the partaker; the mystical contiguity of worlds becomes a place of communion, whose traces last. The resulting artwork, therefore, is energized by the divinity itself rather than by the loss of or separation from divinity, as in the Kantian sublime.

Ivanov insists that antinomies, and indeed syntactical categories, are collapsed in the moments of communion and of the creative act that hypostasizes this communion. The creative act, in this case poetry, enables transcendence of the perceived reality of earthly manifestations and makes apparent the world(s) of divine truths and essences, moving the word, in his famous formulation, *a realibus ad realiorum* (from realia to the most real).[21] This goal, Ivanov claims, is most fully achieved by Symbolist art. In Ivanov's essay "Thoughts on Symbolism," the symbol is figured as "a rainbow that flares up between the ray of the word and the moisture of the soul that reflects the ray..." (51). It is an incantatory word that at once creates and reveals hidden truths, *realia in rebus* (24). The poet—as a

[21] See *Selected Essays,* 28.

priest, a magician—incants the poem in order to make the reader aware of the essences secreted within the phenomenal worlds.

Ivanov's collection of essays *By the Stars (Po zvezdam)* appeared in 1909, including both "Nietzsche and Dionysus" and "The Symbolics of Aesthetic Principles." In August of the same year, Mandelstam (then eighteen years old) wrote a letter to Ivanov from a sanatorium in Montreaux. This letter was part of a one-sided volley of correspondence from Mandelstam to Ivanov from 1909 to 1911, and is the first and only of Mandelstam's known letters to Ivanov in which the younger poet criticizes the work of the elder. He begins with praise: "Your book achieves the beauty of great architectural creations and astronomical systems. Every true poet, if he could write books founded on the precise and immutable laws of his art, would write like you"—then continues onto more dangerous territory, though still in a mode of praise: "You are the most difficult to understand, most obscure...poet of our time..." Finally Mandelstam voices contention: "It just seemed to me, that your book is too—how should I say it—circular, angleless." This circularity turns out to be that of a closed system, which in the younger poet's opinion is better left open. His praise of Ivanov at times seems faint, precisely because of this circularity: "How could someone who stands under the vaults of Notre Dame and ponders the rightness of Catholicism not become a Catholic simply by virtue of finding himself beneath these vaults?" (IV 14-16) That is, Ivanov's aesthetic system is so grand and perfect that it induces a kind of conversion—but this is a transformation that happens automatically, without the participation of the subject.

Mandelstam introduces a Nietzschean line of thought by invoking Nietzsche's philosophical novel *Thus Spoke Zarathustra:* "…the breathing of the Cosmos fans your

book, giving it the same charm[22] as 'Zarathustra'— making up for the astronomical circularity of your system." The starry figure of Zarathustra presents a way to critique Ivanov: the cosmos, endowed with breath, is opposed to the abstract circularity that Ivanov imposes upon it. He continues, raising Ivanov's hermeticism to outright hostility: "Something else your book has in common with "Zarathustra"—each word fulfills its meaning with fiery hatred, and sincerely detests both its place and its neighbors" (IV 14-16). If the poet is a prophet, Mandelstam is saying, Ivanov's version of the poet-prophet stands above his reader in scorn and spite. (Looking ahead to Mandelstam's 1913 essay "Morning of Acmeism," we find a contrary vision in which the word works together with its neighbors, "participate[s] in joyful interaction with others like it."[23])

Mandelstam also criticizes specific concepts in Ivanov's aesthetic cosmos, and here again he draws from Nietzsche, this time from *The Birth of Tragedy*—which he is more justified in invoking because it deals specifically with aesthetics, and because Ivanov relies heavily upon it in developing his stance with regard to tragedy, and to the dialectic of Apollo and Dionysus.

Mandelstam focuses on the terms *tragedy* and *ecstasy,* complaining that in Ivanov's scheme these concepts are too circular and therefore inaccessible—complaints that might as well have come from Nietzsche. In Nietzsche's conception, tragedy consists in the interplay between a Dionysian satyr-chorus and an Apollonian stage-scene: "...the satyr chorus is, first of all, a vision of the Dionysian mass of spectators, just as the world of the stage, in turn, is a vision of this satyr chorus" (63). Further,

> ...the Dionysian reveler sees himself as a satyr, *and as a satyr, in turn, he sees the god,* which means that in his metamorphosis he beholds another vision outside himself, as the Apollinian complement of his own state. With this new vision the drama is complete.

[22] *Prelest':* charm as personal attraction or beauty.
[23] ...участвовать в радостном взаимодействии себе подобных. I 178.

(64)

For Nietzsche, tragedy happens between a throng and a vision; the Dionysian chorus "ever anew discharges itself in an Apollinian world of images" (65). This process mimics human psychology itself:

> The Greek knew and felt the horror and terror of existence. That he might endure this terror at all, he had to interpose between himself and life the radiant dream-birth of the Olympians...out of the original Titanic divine order of terror, the Olympian divine order of joy gradually evolved through the Apollinian impulse toward beauty...
>
> (42-3)

As the Greek created the Olympian gods to stand between himself and bare existence, so does the tragic spectator, imagining himself in the Dionysian chorus and thereby entering into the reality of the play, dream (in Nietzsche's words) the stately, discrete, comprehensible images of the Apollinian stage-scene. The tragedy is purpose-built for psychological participation.

For Ivanov, however, tragedy inherits a different scheme. In "The Symbolics of Aesthetic Principles," Ivanov assigns tragedy to embody the principle of ascent, in which the artist (poet, personality, soul) transcends the world and itself to partake in the religious sublime. He locates the tragic arc, as Nietzche does, between the throng and the image, but relocates the tragic experience on the arc's other end: not on the spectator but on the hero:

> Ascent is a symbol of the tragic element that appears when one of the participants in the Dionysian chorus is separated from the dithyrambic throng. The impersonal element of the orgiastic dithyramb gives rise to the sublime image of the tragic hero, who is revealed as an individual personality and is condemned to death precisely for being separated and exposed.
>
> (7)

> As in Nietzsche, we begin in the Dionysian chorus—but it is no longer a crucible of the spectator's gaze, but rather an orgiastic element out of which the

individual is born. Discussing the tragic hero, Nietzsche describes individuation as "the origin and primal cause of all suffering" (73). For Ivanov, the individual is born not into suffering but into ecstatic, righteous death: "Whoever separates himself from the world for the sake of the world, dies for the world; he must exhaust himself and die, just a seed will not grow if it does not die..." (6).[24] Ivanov's hero breaks from a Dionysian integrity in order to commune with a sublime that is part Dionysian, part Christian. As is typical of Ivanov's early aesthetics, in his conception of tragedy the middle-space of human activity (art, suffering, work) is vague or lacking.

Mandelstam's letter states, simply enough, "One can't approach [the system] from any side, to smash it or to smash oneself against it. Even tragedy in [your system] doesn't constitute an angle—because you agree to it. Even ecstasy isn't dangerous—because you foresee its outcome" (IV 14).[25] Here he claims that the circularity of Ivanov's system ignores artistic and even human struggle ("you agree to it"), and secondly that it prevents participation ("one can't approach") in the poetic event. Mandelstam seeks a sharp edge, a border by which he can judge his relationship to the work of art. For him, participation includes setting apart as well as taking part; the one demands the other.

In 1909, Mandelstam in his poetry is already looking for the angles he found missing in Ivanov, seeking out the junctures between worlds that his mentor passes over in his transcendental ecstasies. In Mandelstam's poetry, these junctures often involve the poet's address to existence, both explicitly—in the form of questions—and implicitly, in the poems' form.

---

[24] The reference is to John 12:24, also famously placed by Dostoevsky at the head of his *Brothers Karamazov*. Implicit here is Ivanov's main critique of Nietzsche: that he does not go *far enough,* that he returns from the Dionysian rather than being subsumed in it, and thereafter taken up in a new, transformed life. Part of Ivanov's complaint is that Nietzsche is not a Christian.

[25] Ни с какой стороны к ней не подступиться, чтобы разбить ее или разбиться о нее. Даже трагедия в ней не угол — потому что вы соглашаетесь на нее. Даже экстаз не опасен — потому что вы предвидите его исход.

For Mandelstam, encounters across divides, both inside and outside the work of art, are very different from those theorized by Ivanov. Ivanov's religious sublime has for its counterpart in Mandelstam a more Kantian sublime: a repulsion from the superhuman and a resulting reflection in the individual consciousness. Mandelstam's poet may wonder about the will behind the movement of the clouds or the nature of the chasm behind the glass of eternity, but he does not make judgments about them. Rather, his poetry of this period is thematized by proximity to the unknowable and characterized stylistically by metaphors that are unstable at heart. Whether or not Mandelstam intended the poems he included with his August 1909 letter to Ivanov[26] to argue outright with Ivanov's aesthetic scheme (as the letter does), they clearly do not fit in that scheme. Their juxtaposition with the letter paints a double-sided picture of Mandelstam's aesthetic development at this historical moment. On the one hand, his reaction in prose is to question the closed system of Ivanov's symbolics—a theme which, though the young poet has yet to publish a prose piece, will later be developed through and beyond "Morning of Acmeism" (1912), arguably all the way to the "Conversation about Dante" (1933). On the other hand, Mandelstam's poems thematize the anxiety of creation as a tension between the world of appearances and the world of essences. Exploring this tension, Mandelstam moves away from a symbolic poetics of transcendental truth to an existential poetics that questions the position of the poet as a mediator of the word.

The position of the speaker in Mandelstam's early poems is often located at these junctures: between knowledge and obscurity, light and darkness, the past and the present, existence and nonexistence. The juncture implicitly challenges a closed system like the one Mandelstam sees in Ivanov—and its hallmark is a kind of split personality that takes place

[26] "Istonchaetsia tonkii tlen" "A delicate decay grows thin"; "Ty ulibaeshsia komu" "You smile at whom"; "V prostorakh sumerechnoi zaly" "In the expanse of the twilit parlor," 300-302.

in the poet, a chink in the poet's identity that allows his material also to be chinked. One of the most famous poems of this period, which Mandelstam placed at the head of *Stone* in 1913, describes the position of a speaker at such a juncture:

> Дано мне тело — что мне делать с ним,
> Таким единым и таким моим?
>
> За радость тихую дышать и жить
> Кого, скажите, мне благодарить?
>
> Я и садовник, я же и цветок,[27]
> В темнице мира я не одинок.
>
> На стекла вечности уже легло
> Мое дыхание, мое тепло,
>
> Запечатлеется на нем узор,
> Неузнаваемый с недавних пор.
>
> Пусть мгновения стекает муть —
> Узора милого не зачеркнуть![28] (1911)
>
> (A body has been given to me — what should I do with it,/ So singular and so mine?// For the quiet joy of breathing and living/ Whom, tell me, should I thank?// I am both the gardener and the flower,/ In the dungeon of the world I am not alone.// On the glass of eternity my breath,/ My warmth, already lies,// A pattern is imprinted upon it,/ Recently unrecognizable.// Let the blur of the moment drain away —/ The dear pattern can't be crossed out!)
>
> (91)

The first two stanzas describe a juncture between cognitive modes—between the apperception of the poet's momentary state and the intimation of his mortal condition—and question whether it can be traversed. Here, we encounter a voice to whom a body belongs, who can't grasp where the body has come from or what is to be done with it. The body—existence, sensation—is a gift, but the giver, as one would expect in Mandelstam, remains a

[27] "I am both the gardener and the flower," i.e. I help my own developing self or voice to grow: Here is an uncanny echo of Mandelstam's joke about the Symbolists in "On the Interlocutor" that they craft their own Stradivariuses, that they attempt to construct their readers in perfect acoustical proportions to their poetic messages and thus "play" them. The joke ("The poet is both musician and Stradivarius") and the confession ("I am both gardener and flower") will finally shake hands in 1933's *Conversation about Dante* (see Chapter Five).
[28] In the first edition of *Stone,* this poem carried the title "Dykhanie" ("Breathing").

mystery. The question "Whom, tell me, should I thank?" is at least partly rhetorical, thus partly ironic; the idea that there is someone to thank, in other words that at the other end of the cognitive divide there is a being who supersedes us but speaks within our mode of existence, is held up to question. Meanwhile, the process of asking develops an awareness of the self, as something that can be felt when it comes against the divide.

Structurally, the two questions that open the poem also open the poem out: rather than setting its boundaries (as it would if the poem attempted actually to answer the questions), it spreads out a field of questioning that subtends but does not limit the contemplations in the remaining stanzas. Thematically, the two questions also widen the field of the "poet" himself, dislodging the integrity associated with a poetic (or a human) voice. The first-person pronoun *ia* appears in these first two stanzas three times, each time in an oblique case (the dative, *mne).* The questions are thus rendered impersonal by grammatical means, yet at the same time thematically address very personal concerns: where is the division between the body and the self, and what is the power by which that self is given substance and life? In the third stanza *ia* appears three times again—now in the nominative case. But the person is again subverted thematically: *ia* is two things at once (gardener and flower); it is "not alone," which in the context of this poem—narrated by a speaker who is subject to depersonalization and splitting—might well mean that the speaker's implied companion is, again, himself.

Splitting, and all it might imply, is reinforced by the poem's structure: rhymed couplets of iambic pentameter, an extremely rare form for Mandelstam, including this early period of his work. The rhymed couplet mimics the pattern of breathing: an inhalation and exhalation that mirror one another and aggregate into a unit of breath. The title, "Breath" or "Breathing" (used, incidentally, in the first version of *Stone* and then

dropped) thus becomes a label for what the poem *is* as well as what it discusses. In this way, the poem moves beyond an act of speaking and becomes a phenomenon—enters the world of appearances, or pretends to, as an act of breathing. An additional subjective split occurs when the poet describes his breath escaping him and leaving a pattern in its condensation on the glass panes of eternity, a unique pattern meant to stand for the uniqueness of his life and identity. Mandelstam thus pays tribute to the ephemerality of life and self even as the poem protests the annihilating action of passing time. As the poet speaks about the condensation of his breathing, the voice and the condensation represent stages in exhalation of the same breath; both exist in the scene of speaking. These are identical as emblems of the speaker's unique being, but they are phenomenally distinct from one another.

As such, the poet and his condensed breath are in a relationship with one another, a feedback loop in which the poet renews the condensation with each breath, and each time reads in it a pattern that helps him understand that he exists. He does not move beyond the questions he asks at the poem's opening—rather, he lives inside the questions. The purpose of questioning at the beginning of the poem is not to set up an investigation that will result in answers or even clarifications of the questions. It is to set up a charged space of wonder, of perpetual tension and release, that makes it possible for the poet to apprehend—and, finally, defiantly affirm—his own existence.

To further cement the artistic differences between the young Mandelstam and his mentor Vyacheslav Ivanov, we may turn to a poem Ivanov had published seven years before Mandelstam finished "Breath," in his book *Pilot Stars (Kormchie zvezdy).* "Eternity and Moment" *(Vechnost' i mig)* shares fundmental existential concerns with Mandelstam's poem

(as is already apparent from its title) as well as a structure which asks

rhetorical questions early on. However, reading the Ivanov, we can see a major difference. The poet does not appear as a character in Ivanov's poem, while in the Mandelstam the poet exists in time and space, very consciously so, his subjectivity serving as the testing-ground for the poem's journeys of thought. Ivanov envisioned the poet as a prophet, and accordingly his speaker is a witness, not a character. The mission of Ivanov's poet is not to test and model essays of thought and experience (as Mandelstam's poet does) but rather to suffer a revelation and try to strike a ripple of that revelation in the reader.[29]

We will see in Ivanov no chinks—none in the poet's identity, none in his subject—in his thoughts on Eternity and Moment we will see a play of mobile concepts (what a Symbolist would call a Symbol) none of which will deign to submit to the vicissitudes, the changes and rhythms, of living bodies. To become a Symbol, a concept inhabits meanings, not flesh; its ethic does not permit experimentation on human beings.

ВЕЧНОСТЬ И МИГ (Eternity and Moment)

Играет луч, на гранях гор алея;
Лучится дум крылатая безпечность...
Не кровью ль истекает сердце, млея?..

Мгновенью ль улыбнулась, рдея, Вечность?
Лобзаньем ли прильнуло к ней Мгновенье?..
Но всходит выше роковая млечность.

Пугливый дух приник в благоговенье:
Гость бледный входит в льдистый дом к Безсмертью,
И синей мглой в снегах легло Забвенье...

Молчанье! Вечность там, одна со Смертью! (1903)

[29] See discussion of Ivanov's "Thoughts on Symbolism," p. 86.

> (A ray of light plays, glowing crimson on the mountains' edges;/ A winged unconcern of thoughts radiates.../ Is it blood that overflows the dying heart?...// Was it to the moment that Eternity smiled, reddening?/ Was it with a kiss that Moment nestled up to her?/ But the fateful milkiness rises higher.// The timid spirit was in awe:/ A pale guest enters the icy house to Immortality,/ And Forgetfulness lay in the snow, a dark-blue mist.../ Silence! Eternity is there, alone with Death!)
>
> (I 605)

There are three key moments in this poem: first, the moment when the presumably setting sun casts cliffs in a red light; second, the moment when the speaker, questioning the metaphysical implications of the vision of sunset, is repelled by the gravity and awesomeness of the question or the spectacle; and third, the moment after the sun has gone, a dusky chill that smacks of unconsciousness and death. This final moment seems to answer the questions posed in the second stanza, though from an unexpected angle. Obviating the beauty and emotional thrill of the moment, and the apprehension of eternity within it (nicely framed by the image of a ray of sunlight fixed in time and space, almost materializing in the redness of the cliffs), the final stanza asserts that Eternity is revealed when Moment departs, in the loss of perception and memory.

The brilliance of the poem lies in the puzzle of the fourth and fifth lines, in which eternity "smile[s] to the moment" and then "Moment nestle[s] up to Eternity." In this vision of sunset on the cliffs, *Eternity*—immeasurable time—is felt to be smiling to a *moment*—a segment of time that, though also ineffable, is marked by a beginning and an end, the first step in measurement. Almost immediately, *moment* becomes *Moment,* gains the status of Symbol. But *Moment* does not appear again in the poem, which moves to a dark revelation of Eternity as "one with" Death. We are left with an epistemological conundrum about time: what is it we are seeing when the redness hits the cliffs; what are we sensing when we experience a moment? What does it mean that eternity reveals itself through a moment?

As in Mandelstam's "Breath," Ivanov's questions are not answered in the rest of the poem. They serve a structural purpose, highlighting the poem's motivating puzzle. The difference between Ivanov's unanswered questions and Mandelstam lies in the poems' respective positioning of the poetic subject. In Ivanov, as we have seen, the subject is a witness, perhaps a prophet. In Mandelstam, the subject is a thinking body, an *experimental* subject. Therefore, the field of questioning that Ivanov opens out remains at the level of symbol, while Mandelstam's field of questioning is occupied by the human subject—eternity and moment are tested out on the body. This difference also makes for a difference in the poetic address. Ivanov presents his reader with a puzzle, a mystery whose answer (whose truth) promises to be itself ineffable. Mandelstam, on the other hand, is asking the difficult questions *together* with his reader. While Ivanov's words partake of the beyond and speak from above, Mandelstam remains on the same level as his reader. Meanwhile, the discourse in which the poet and reader can identify with one another is that of living existence (being in the world)—and the mortality from which it is inextricable.

The central difference between Mandelstam's poetic project and Ivanov's is the epistemological aim in each poet's conception of language. Ivanov's Symbolist slogan *"a realibus ad realiora"* (from realia to the most real) describes the epistemological movement out of the world of phenomena to the world of essences—the poet's task is to lead the reader in this movement, to initiate the reader into truths. The poetic word is a summons and a way towards these essences, these truths. However, while the reader is engaged in a movement out from the phenomenal, the poet completes the opposite movement: having partaken of a Dionysian ecstasy in the sphere of essences, he returns to earth with the Appolinian task of fashioning a record of his ecstasy and enlightenment that will be

comprehensible to mundane readers.[30] The word, then, is a way for the poet to embody and translate his experience of the essential (it helps him move *a realioribus ad realia,* in other words); while, conversely, the word helps the reader expand his understanding from the phenomenal world to the world of essences *(a realibus ad realiora).*

The fact that (for Ivanov) the poet speaks down to his reader[31]—from a sphere of greater knowledge to a sphere of lesser knowledge—sets a limit on what the language of a poem can do. Language, as an epistemological mode, can seek no farther than what the poet already knows and wishes to impart to the reader. It is a scheme of revelation and translation, whose dealings in the divine and the universal make it at heart general and impersonal. Moreover, since the Symbolist poet translates essences into words, the reader never sees the original. Mandelstam, on the other hand, does not imagine the poet as someone who enters the sun and brings back gold for his readers. Rather, he wants the reader to experience the poem along with the poet. His poem does not point beyond itself to a frieze of essences (as in "Eternity and Moment"), nor does it point to a concrete speaker or addressee, as conventional dialogue might. It points, rather, back at itself, and thereby becomes both lens and specimen (remember: "both gardener and flower" in the poem called "Breathing") and enacts the process of awareness that Heidegger called *Dasein:* the being that reflects on its own being.[32] The reader cannot but see the original toward which the poem points: it points to itself—yet that self-identification is not any kind of answer to the poem's questions. It rather defines the mode of inquiry. To approach the poem is to approach a certain kind of self.

---

[30] See I 823-830.
[31] See I 605-606.
[32] See Introduction to *Being and Time:* "[Dasein] is…distinguished by the fact that in its being this being is concerned *about* its very being... *Understanding of being is itself a determination of being of Dasein* (10).

In his book *The Word Made Self,* Seifrid reveals the roots of Mandelstam's poetics in a centuries-long discussion among Russian authors and philosophers about the psychology and soul of the word. Seifrid locates the modern inception of this discussion in the writings of Wilhelm von Humboldt, whose 1836 work *On Language (Über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues...)* bore much influence on Russian philosophers of language in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The Humboldtian conception of language in Seifrid's words, is "something directly involved in the ontology of selfhood" (17).

Humboldt writes that language is an othering of the self:

> As mental striving "breaks out through the lips" its acoustical product is returned to the speaker's ear. The result is something like a self harmoniously poised between inner and outer worlds. "Thus the presentation becomes transformed into real objectivity, without being deprived of subjectivity on that account. Only language can do this."
>
> (Seifrid 17)

The metaphysical leap in this conception goes exactly as far as the alter ego of language, poised between the self's interior and exterior. For Humboldt, it is a Hegelian "spirit" that seeks expression and becomes instantiated through language. Oleksandr Potebnia, who relied heavily on Humboldt and whom Mandelstam carefully read, made the important move of de-essentializing the inner world, "redefin[ing it] psychologically, as individual mental activity" (35) and thereby limiting the source of its linguistic expressions to the subjective (and mortal) singularity that can be said to emit them.

The Potebnian legacy that Seifrid claims for Mandelstam is twofold. It consists first in the necessity of dialogue for the word to come into being. In Potebnia, as in Nikulin (and by extension Bakhtin)[33], the alter-ego-in-speech *(eidema,* in Nikulin's terms) can only be activated by the presence of the other. Seifrid cites Potebnia on this score and comments:

[33] See above, 23.

> "To speak [Potebnia writes] does not mean to convey one's thought to another but only to stimulate in the other his own thoughts." So "unfinalized" is this process, to use a Bakhtinian term, that for Potebnia (as for Humboldt) when language is at work "all understanding is misunderstanding," and every new use of a word constitutes a new word.
>
> (33)

Second is Potebnia's idea of the word's "inner form," which, Mandelstam will claim in "The word and culture" (1920), the poet can perceive as a prelingual sound: "Even when no word yet exists, the poem already sounds. It is the inner form that sounds, and the ear of the poet can sense it" (I 215).[34] When the speaker (or the poet) objectifies this inner form into a palpable linguistic fact, Mandelstam writes in "On the nature of the word," the resulting word becomes like an organ, a liver or a heart (I 229). The word is thus made a strange phenomenon: one that resides in the physical self and assumingly partakes of the subject's consciousness and self-knowledge. Together, these ideas speak of a self that is at once objectified and in flux, of a linguistic production that is of the self but cannot help but partake of what lies outside the self (like a liver or a heart)—what lies outside can take the form of the other, the world of phenomena, or both. According to Seifrid, Potebnia claims that "direct knowledge of the self is impossible…but the primary action exerted on the speaker by the use of a word is to divide the speaker's mental world immediately into 'I' and 'not-I' and thus lay the foundation for self-consciousness" (34).

As an epistemological tool in the Humboldtian/Potebnian vein, poetry can discover something outside of itself and outside the poet's self only if it is also simultaneously uncovering these two selves. For Mandelstam, and indeed for Celan, the objects of poetic inquiry are inextricable from the selves by means of which the inquiry is given. This

[34] Ни одного слова еще нет, а стихотворение уже звучит. Это звучит внутренний образ, это его осязает слух поэта. For source in Potebnia, see Seifrid 76 *n. 99.*

conception involves an ontology of the self that can be elucidated with the help of Hegel and Heidegger, the former in regard to identity and the latter in regard to the work of art.

Hegel and the Law of Identity

We have glimpsed the presence of Hegel in Humboldt's philosophy of language as ontology of self. In *Phenomenology of the Spirit,* Hegel describes more fully his position as philosopher of language. For Hegel, language exists in the confrontation between the irreducible ego and its expression into words, which become a part of the phenomenal world as soon as they're spoken: in Seifrid's words, "a contradiction in which the self, which is spirit, must...confront a part of itself that has entered the world of things; but this thinglike part of the self is now paradoxically recuperated as an organic, even essential component of the self" (21). Of special interest to Mandelstam's early language theory (and to the concerns of this chapter) is the idea of recuperation of the reified (phenomenalized, estranged) self into the "spirit"-self. In exploring this idea, Mandelstam doesn't use the terms of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* but rather the concept of identity as Hegel presents it in his *Logic.* Through Hegel's law of identity, Mandelstam can speak not only of the reach of language toward phenomena but also of the splitting of self which is essential to his poetic discourse (and which will come to the fore in Chapter Two).

These two theoretical concerns are not two halves of one process of identification—it is a given in Mandelstam that a word cannot be identified with a thing[35]. Language is rather a means to document the relationship between a thing and itself—especially the identity of a perceiving, putatively essential self with its perceived being in the world.

[35] A view expressed most famously and beautifully in the 1920 essay "The word and culture (Slovo i kul'tura): "The word is Psyche. The living word does not signify objects, but freely selects (as if choosing a habitation) this or that objective significance, phenomenality (veshchnost'), dear body. And around the thing the word wanders freely, like a soul around a cast-off but not forgotten body." II 215.

Hegel's version of the law of identity comes to the fore in Mandelstam's 1913 programmatic essay "Morning of Acmeism." Here he uses a Hegelian lens on identity to achieve two theoretical aims: to deride the Symbolist aesthetic for denying the identity of the thing with itself; and to explore the paradoxical freedom that this identity grants the word.

Mandelstam never admitted a debt to Hegel (Nadezhda Mandelstam, in fact, asserts that he "could not stomach" him),[36] but he was at least acquainted with the philosopher's works during his studies in Heidelberg in 1909, either directly or through the commentary of his professor Kuno Fischer.[37] Moreover, several of Mandelstam's essays make Hegelian claims. For example, Omry Ronen in his 2008 article "Acmeism" claims that Mandelstam adapts Hegel's idea of language as being, pointing out a passage in the 1921 essay "On the nature of the word" that seems to rehearse Hegel's "Phenomenology of the Spirit." Mandelstam, speaking of the importance of the Russian language to Russia's culture and history, claims that "the life of language in Russian historical reality outweighs all other facts with the plenitude of its phenomena, of its being..." (I 220); the relevant passage in Hegel reads: "...language is the highest element—it is an at-hand being, which possesses an immediate existence through self-awareness" (Ronen 2008). Ronen also invokes in this light Mandelstam's conception of the word as Psyche, and the personifications of the word in Mandelstam's collection *Tristia* certainly help to bear this connection out. Hegel shows up in Mandelstam's thought as early as 1912, in the programmatic essay "Morning of Acmeism," and helps him elucidate his turn away from the closed system of Ivanovian symbolics and toward his own developing aesthetics of ontological and subjective revelation.

[36] See Glazov-Corrigan 6.
[37] See Ronen 2008, *n.* 2.

Ivanov, as befits a man of his erudition, knew Hegel well, and argued distinctly with him in his theoretical writings.[38] In terms of aesthetics, Ivanov seems to view Hegel as an enemy of Symbolism because he shuts down the possibility of transcending the falsehood of appearances and knowing the real. In his essay "Two Elements in Contemporary Symbolism," Ivanov invokes Hegel in an attempt to rescue Plato for symbolic art, claiming that the "later" category of *Begriff* (concept, notion) reduces Plato's "idea" to something divorced from reality:

> Since Plato's ideas are *res realissimae* (things in truth), he demands that art provide such a close signification of these things that the accidental features of their reflection in the physical world would fall away like scales that obscure true vision (i.e. he demands symbolic realism). However, insofar as Plato's ideas, in the interpretation of later thinkers[39], turn into "concepts" *(Begriffe)* in the sense of formal logic or epistemology, aesthetics begins to see Plato as a proponent of idealistic art, of a free creativity that has rid [...] itself of the need to account for the data of both observed and intuited reality...
>
> (17)

It is easy to see why Ivanov would have refused a Kantian *Begriff,* as it presupposes an impermeable divide between a conception and the thing itself, which "is taken as something complete and finished on its own account, something which can entirely dispense with thought for its actuality."[40] Ivanov's "symbolic realism" (which he reads as intentional in Plato) demands exactly the opposite approach: that conceptions must engage with phenomena to reveal what they really are.

But Mandelstam values the cognitive limitation inherent in the Hegelian *Begriff*, because it collects two impossibilities around which his poetics orbits: transcendence of self

---

[38] See, for example, "On the Russian Idea" (1909), "The Religious Task of Vladimir Solovyov" (1910, 1916), "Ancient Terror" (1909), "On the Crisis of Humanism" (1919).

[39] i.e. Hegel. See Ivanov, *Selected Essays* 240.

[40] *Wissenschaft der Logik,* qtd. in Carlson 49. Hegel's idea of *Begriff* counter's Kant's, but not in the direction Ivanov would have liked. Kant's view, according to Hegel, "can be countered by the simple observation that these very things which are supposed to stand...beyond the thoughts referring to them, are themselves figments of subjective thought." (An earlier Russian Symbolist such as Konstantin Balmont would have found this perfectly fine, but Ivanov was concerned with Symbolism as a realistic art, and the artist's vision as necessarily bound up with things in themselves.)

and direct apprehension of the world. Once the concept is cut off from the thing, the only object of conceptualization (even cognition) is the self: for Hegel, "the truth of the object is its Notion... Notion therefore *is* the content of the object" (Carlson 49). In the face of appearances thought turns in on itself: "Not until knowing inwardizes, recollects itself out of immediate being, does it through this mediation find essence" (SL 389). Hegel's term for this inward action of thought is "reflection." Once the thing-in-itself is redefined as a concept, the goal is no longer to transcend appearances—it becomes rather to establish a dialectic between immediate being and reflection, expressed in the Notion (*Begriff):*

> ...the Notion is to be regarded in the first instance simply as the third to *being* and *essence,* to the *immediate* and to *reflection.* Being and essence are so far the moments of its *becoming;* but it is their *foundation* and *truth* as the identity in which they are submerged and contained. They are contained in it because it is their *result,* but no longer as *being* and *essence.*
>
> (SL 577)

The notion is thus a record of becoming (or becomings), which leads Hegel to claim that "if we can draw the Notion from the object, then thinking becomes free. *Free* thought is that which is 'performed with an awareness of what is being done'" (Carlson 49). This idea of freedom through "awareness" runs counter to Ivanov's thinking, where the desired awareness is of a revealed truth, not of the process of cognition or discovery itself. Likewise, the freedom Ivanov imagines is spiritual, not intellectual. It presages a principle that Mandelstam will hold dear and continue to develop throughout his career: freedom through reflection.

Reflection comes about—as in the Kantian sublime—when the organs of perception and cognition are overwhelmed and the mind turns inward to study itself. This happens in both poems analyzed above: in "Why is the soul so melodious?" (p. 25) the poet gets lost

> in his imagination and returns to himself with a more powerful sense of his own

existence and mortality. In “Breathing” (p. 38), the poet, having come face to face with the arbitrariness and cold of existence, claims his individual significance in the “pattern” left by his condensed breath. In each case, the poet is threatened by an Ivanovian trascendence (“Silence! Eternity is there, alone with Death!”), and each time he returns to stop on himself (“Can it be true that I’m real?” — “[My] dear pattern can’t be crossed out!”). But what is freeing about this kind of realization and assertion? Doesn’t it rather bind the subject—to himself, to death?

Of course, it does—but these are inescapable truths of life; so, at least, an Acmeist would claim. Is the poet’s task to ignore them and construct fantasies about essences and correspondences, or rather to look things in the face (with a “manly” eye, Gumilev might add) and find meaning where they are and not in some theosophical beyond? Small wonder that Mandelstam valorizes a Hegelian freedom in reflection (as opposed to transcendence) in his most overt polemic with Russian Symbolism, the programmatic essay "Morning of Acmeism” (1913).

The fifth part of "Morning of Acmeism," its penultimate section and the apotheosis of its philosophical arc, fashions the law of identity into a principle of poetry. "A=A: what a lovely poetic theme!" Mandelstam begins, and then continues to proclaim that "logic is the kingdom of surprise. To think logically means constantly to be astonished" (I 180). Though strange, this idea emerges from the essay's thematic development. In Part IV, Mandelstam has criticized the Symbolist project for neglecting something much more interesting than celestial correspondences: the human body, and its projections into ontology and metaphysics:

> That which in the 13th century appeared to be the logical development of our understanding of the organism—the Gothic cathedral—now has the esthetic effect of a monstrosity: Notre Dame is a festival of physiology, its Dionysian debauch. We [Acmeists] do not wish to entertain ourselves with a walk into the [Baudelairean] "forest of symbols," because we have a denser, more primeval forest—sacred physiology, the infinite complexity of our obscure organism.
>
> (I 179)[41]

Mandelstam reads the Gothic cathedral not as an esthetic figuration of the divine but rather as an extrapolation of physiological principles. These principles reach an apotheosis of sorts in the architectural frenzy of Notre Dame—and in this Dionysian demonstration in the heart of Paris Mandelstam sees an epistemological goal for poetry. Like Ivanov—towards whom, again, he felt an intense ambivalence—Mandelstam is interested in a Christian Dionysus. But while Ivanov's suffering god is transfigured into ecstatic oblivion (see above and below), Mandelstam's Dionysus-Christ is transfigured into an artwork. His poem "Notre Dame" (written the same year, 1913), begins by showing us the cathedral as a transfigured human body:

> Где римский судия судил чужой народ —
> Стоит базилика, и — радостный и первый —
> Как некогда Адам, распластывая нервы,
> Играет мышцами крестовый легкий свод.
>
> Where a Roman judge judged a foreign nation/ Stands a basilica, and—joyful and primary,/ Like Adam was once—stretching out its nerves,/ The light cross-shaped vault plays with its muscles.
>
> (107)

This architectural body is Christian in the sense that it transfigures Adam (man) into something new and primary: a second Adam, or a Christ. It is Acmeist in that it reveals a sacred structure as an excess of the human, not a trespass into the divine. It is

[41] То, что в XIII казалось логическим развитием понятия организма — готический собор, — ныне эстетически действует как чудовищное: Notre Dame есть праздник физиологии, ее дионисийский разгул. Мы не хотим развлекать себя прогулкой в «лесу символов», потому что у нас есть более девственный, более дремучий лес — божественная физиология, бесконечная сложность нашего темного организма.

Mandelstam's because it desires a physiology that comprises both stuff and memory.

Mandelstam looks across the Seine at this "debauch" of stuff and memory and sees his "own obscure organism." This surprising recognition will lead him to develop a poetic principle of identity in Section V. This development comes at least in part from Ivanov, who also concerned himself with the principle of identity in the context of a Dionysian poetics.

Ivanov's essay "Nietzsche and Dionysus" (1904, 1909) briefly concerns itself with the law of identity, if only to illustrate the irreversible communion that Ivanov places at the end of the poet's journey toward the world of essences. This experience of the religious sublime depends on a unity of logical subject and therefore knows no predicate: "Dionysus accepts and simultaneously rejects any predicate; in his conception 'a' is 'not-a' *[a не-a];* in his cult, the sacrificial victim and priest are united as an identity" (181). There are two ways to read this inversion of the law of identity. First, it is an outright refutation of the principle of contradiction as found in Aristotle, which states that the propositions "A equals B" and "A does not equal B" are mutually exclusive. In Ivanov's view, the Dionysian principle accepts both propositions simultaneously. Second, Ivanov may be commenting on the principle of identity as developed by Hegel, subjecting Hegel (as he does Nietzsche) to a religious, or at least transcendental, judgment. Hegel's discussion of identity in *Science of Logic* follows on his discussion of essence and reflection. The subsection titled "Identity" begins: "The Essence lights up *in itself* or is mere reflection: and therefore is only self-relation, not as immediate but as reflected. And that reflection is self-Identity" (SL &166). Thus, the identity of self comes into being as a relation of self to self. Inherent in this relation is self-negation. Carlson explains:

> When reflective thought senses an object, it realizes that its own self (thought) is precisely not the object sensed. The object given by sensation is, in effect, negated by thought when thought realizes that it is "not the object." Reflection is therefore thought's highly negative statement, "I am not *that."*
>
> (256)

Paradoxically, identity becomes positively defined at the same time that it negates itself. Carlson continues:

> The trick in Hegel's Reflection is that the object ("that") which Reflection negates ("I am not *that")* is *Reflection's own selfhood...* In this capacity of making express what it is not, Essence shows what it is: "at one with itself in this its own difference from itself."
>
> (257)

Identity as difference is commensurable with Mandelstam's poetics of self-reflection, but not with Ivanov's poetics of transcendence. When Ivanov brings the priest and sacrificial victim together in "one identity," he dissolves the subjective boundaries between them: they are together subsumed in divine communion, in a transcendent moment. When Mandelstam says, "I am both the gardener and the flower/ In the dungeon of the world I am not alone," he makes the opposite move. The self, expressed as unitary by the name "I," now becomes multiple. The earth—a "dungeon"—forces its subject to turn inward by virtue of its inescapability. The difference between these two poets—the difference, really, between Symbolism and Acmeism—is the choice of scene for the poetic event. Ivanov claims access to *realiora* and divine light—meanwhile Mandelstam sets up to survey the cave.

The difference between Mandelstam's poetics and those of Symbolism turns out to be grammatical. In "Nietzsche and Dionysus," Ivanov claims that "Dionysus accepts and simultaneously rejects all predicate." Per Hegel, even the possibility of rejecting predicate

> would catapult the Dionysian out of the realm of logic entirely. "A=A" itself,

Hegel writes, is merely "an abstract understanding. The propositional form itself contradicts it: for a proposition always promises a distinction between subject and predicate; while the present one does not fulfil what its form requires" (SL &167). Thus, according to the propositional scheme of the statement A=A, A in being thought as A—struck off from the mold of A, as it were—is therefore unidentifiable as A. In other words, the equal sign fulfills the grammatical function of copula, already marking the second iteration of A as predicate.

Ivanov may be invoking the predicate in order to summon, then smash a Hegelian view of identity. The Dionysian "A is not-A" reflects Hegel's claim that the law of identity contains a predicating copula which actually prohibits identification. Ivanov must erase the equal sign in order to bring A back to A. "A is not-A" is another way to say that A *is* A without the logical fallacy of the predicating copula. Nietzsche in *The Will to Power* has asked whether Aristotle's laws aren't more normative than descriptive: "Are the axioms of logic adequate to reality or are they a means and measure for us to create reality…for ourselves?" (279). Ivanov goes further, asserting that, in the realm of art (which is a window onto truth), predication loses all meaning whatsoever.

While Ivanov theorizes a Dionysian communion in which A and not-A are enfolded into one identity, Mandelstam in "Morning of Acmeism" continues his surprising opening to Section V: "A = A: what a lovely poetic theme. Symbolism languished, longed for the law of identity; Acmeism makes it its slogan and offers it up instead of the untrustworthy *a realibus ad realiora"* (I 180).[42] This statement works on several levels. Most clearly, Mandelstam is refuting the Symbolist credo of moving from reality toward higher realities with a common-sense scientism, and moreover thematizes this existential truism as a

[42] A=A: какая прекрасная поэтическая тема. Символизм томился, скучал законом тождества, акмеизм делает его своим лозунгом и предлагает его вместо сомнительного a realibus ad realiora.

source of beauty, of poetry.[43] Second, Mandelstam contradicts the Ivanovian notion that poetic identification means rejecting predicate—that all is subject. In arguing that A in fact equals A, Mandelstam valorizes predicate as poetically valuable, as a way to bring being to the word, and to reveal being through it.

What is still missing is the situational predicate of the poetic act: that is, the addressee, or (in both Mandelstam's and Celan's terms at various times) the *interlocutor.* Hegel has helped Mandelstam find a rift between an object and its predicate, as well as between the thinking subject and the self as object of reflection. But Celan claims that while all this happens in the poetic address to phenomena, there is more in Mandelstam's early poetry that comes out of this address: namely, the formation of an addressee, a *Du.* To speak about this *Du,* Celan goes by way of a thinker to whom Mandelstam had no access, but with whom Celan maintained a lifelong fascination and an intermittent conversation: Martin Heidegger.

"Bruder Ossip" and the Absolute Poem

Celan, delivering his 1960 *Meridian* address on the art and fate of poetry, pronounces: *"Ich spreche ja von dem Gedicht, das es nicht gibt!"*—I am speaking of the poem that does not exist! One might well ask what Celan means by this, and looking just a bit further in the address, one encounters some illumination: the poem that doesn't exist is the "absolute" poem (das absolute Gedicht) (Meridian 10), versions of which are struck when phenomenal poems come into existence, and which itself invisibly subtends these "actual" (wirkliche)

[43] Hegel himself apparently made a similar statement, off the record. Carlson quotes the following anecdote: "The great joke, Hegel wrote in a personal note, is that things are what they are. There is no reason to go beyond them" (49).

poems. Celan's statement comes at an interesting point in the *Meridian* address, just after he has spoken a passage about how poetry brings its addressee into existence:

> The poem becomes—by means of such conditions!—a poem of something that is always apprehending, facing toward that which appears, interrogating and addressing it; it becomes dialogue—*often a dialogue of desperation.*
>
> Only in the space of this dialogue does the Addressed constitute itself, assembles itself around the I that addresses and names it. But the Addressed, which by being named has also become a kind of *You,* brings into this present its otherness. Even in the poem's here and now—the poem itself has always only this one, singular, select present—even in this immediacy and nearness the Addressed lets what is most proper to it—to this Other—speak along with it: its time.[44]
>
> (9-10)

These paragraphs are lifted almost verbatim from Celan's radio address on Mandelstam (see Introduction), broadcast earlier the same year. So far we have attempted to explicate Celan's tricky formulation about a poem interrogating and addressing phenomena; we will now further consider that question in light of another important moment in this passage: the idea that the Addressed (meaning the You, along with the totality of phenomena) speaks (by virtue of being addressed) its own most appropriate property ("das ihm, dem Anderen, Eigenste"), which is its time. This instantiation (appearance) of a most appropriate, peculiar property belonging to the Addressed stands in counterpoise to the idea of a poem (an address) which does not exist ("which is not there,")—that is, which does not appear in time and is irreconcilable with it—and which is accordingly an "absolute" poem.

---

[44] Das Gedicht wird—unter welchen Bedingungen!—zum Gedicht eines—immer noch—Wahrnehmenden, das Erscheinenden Zugewandten, dieses Erscheinende Befragenden ud Ansprechenden; es wird Gespräch—oft ist es verzweifeltes Gespräch.

Erst im Raum dieses Gesprächs konstituiert sich um das es ansprechende und nennende Ich. Aber in diese Gegenwart bringt das Angesprochene, versammelt es sich um das es ansprechende und nennende Ich. Aber in diese Gegenwart bringt das Angesprochene und durch Nennung gleichsam zum Du Gewordene auch sein Anderssein mit. Noch im Hier und Jetzt des Gedichts—das Gedicht selbst hat ja immer nur diese eine, einmalige, punktuelle Gegenwart—, noch in dieser Unmittelbarkeit und Nähe läßt es das ihm, dem Anderen, Eigenste mitsprechen: dessen Zeit.

Martin Heidegger in his essay "The Nature of Language" (1957-8) pauses on the understanding of "es gibt" as "there is," and suggests that when we are considering language, "es gibt" might be better understood closer to its literal sense, as "it gives":

> The word itself is the giver. What does it give? To go by the poetic experience…, the word gives Being… We are familiar with the expression "there is, there are…" In our present reflection, the expression is used differently. We do not mean "There is the word"—we mean "by virtue of the gift of the word there is, the word gives…"
>
> (OWL 88)

To translate Celan's *"das Gedicht, das es nicht gibt"* into a Heideggerian understanding of language and the poem would mean to look at Celan's "absolute poem" in both senses of "es gibt." Such an interpretation reveals a complication: on the one hand, the absolute poem does not exist; on the other, it does give existence to non-absolute poems, that is to all poems that are spoken through language and thus appear in the world. This understanding of the poetic word—of the ineffable "absolute" poem striking poetic concretions into the world—dominates the *Meridian,* and knowing Celan's fascination with Heidegger and the close relationship between the two speeches, it is reasonable to assume that these ideas were on Celan's mind as he composed the *Meridian* as well as the Mandelstam address.

The relationship between the poet and his breath (per Mandelstam) bears a striking resemblance to the relationship between the "absolute" poem and the poem that exists (per Celan). The relationship between a poet and his breath may seem a solipsistic one—and it is, if the pane of glass exists only so that the poet may view his production of himself. But Mandelstam imagines the "dear pattern" surviving him, and the poem itself, of course, is designed to do the same. The visible breath is a showing of the poet's spirit, in the sense that *phainomenon* is "what shows itself, the self-showing, the manifest" (BW 73). This definition comes from Heidegger's Introduction to *Being and Time,*

where he elucidates the concept of phenomenon as drawing from the Greek verb *phainesthai* ("to bring into daylight, to place in brightness"), which, it is important, is a middle-voice verb.[45] Heidegger's brief discussion of phenomena in the Introduction focuses on the idea that a phenomenon appears through appearing, which is a "making itself known through something that shows itself." The phenomenon, in the act of appearing, makes itself known through an appearance; at the same time, the appearance is not the same as the phenomenon: "Phenomena are never appearances, but every appearance is dependent on phenomena" (BW 75). In such a scheme, when I hold a book, I know that there is a book there because my hand and eyes sense its appearance; the phenomenon of the book is showing itself through this appearance, yet this appearance *is not* the book. In Mandelstam's scheme, the breath-spot on the glass (the *appearance* of the poet's being) will disappear, leaving the "pattern"—now unrecognizable within the "blur" of condensation—forever. The pattern—*the phenomenon*—will survive its appearance (in the case of breathing, its multiple appearances).

Celan, in the *Meridian,* proposes a commensurable scheme for the absolute poem and the existent poem: "The absolute poem—no, it certainly does not exist, it cannot exist! But no doubt there is, in each actual poem, there is in even the most unassuming poem, this irrepudiable question, this unheard-of address" (10).[46] To translate this relationship into Heideggerian terms, the appearances that indicate the presence of the poem (as a phenomenon) are question and address—and they announce the poem as inevitable (because irrepudiable) and new (because unheard-of). In this scheme of poetic presence, the

[45] The middle voice of classical Greek occupies a place between the active and passive voice, and, though it is difficult to translate its function into an English context, often describes actions which are both explicitly reflexive (washing oneself) and less explictly so (becoming baptized). "Appearing," therefore, can be understood with the help of the middle voice as "revealing oneself," and "appearance" as "a self-revealing."

[46] Das absolute Gedicht—nein, das gibt es gewiß nicht, das kann es nicht geben! Aber es gibt wohl, mit jedem wirklichen Gedicht, es gibt, mit dem ansprungslosesten Gedicht, diese unabweisbare Frage, diesen unerhörten Anspruch.

inevitable question and the new address constitute the poem as we see and hear it, and also as we think it. A question such as we have seen in Mandelstam's early work (e.g. What should I do with this body which is mine?) is inevitable as soon as the self turns its attention to its own existence. In the same poetic conception, the poet's address is renewed with every breath[47], every new spot of condensation on the panes of eternity. Thus, Celan designates a Heideggerian unfolding[48] to Mandelstam's early poetry, and by extension in *Meridian* to all poetry—but there is something else too. We may note an addition in the *Meridian* to the first paragraph quoted above, a phrase that did not appear in the Mandelstam radio address: "The poem...becomes dialogue—*often a dialogue of desperation."* Heidegger's writings about language—as well as Mandelstam's early poetry—are marked by a discussion of language *as* language: neither predicts an actual interlocutor in his explorations of being and language.[49] In his radio address, Celan has already read into Mandelstam's "address to phenomena" a *Du* which that address creates—in effect granting an interlocutor to Mandelstam's poetic address—but now in *Meridian* he goes further to label this kind of dialogue one of desperation.

The idea of poetic speech born of desperation is nothing new to Celan's thinking. In his Bremen Prize address, given two years previously, he figures the medium of poetic address as an ocean, an image in which communication becomes nauseous, so to speak: there is no ground to stand on, and the word is borne along an unpredictable and turbulent medium. On the water, the address is a stab across infinite odds at finding a place to come to rest. Celan writes that the poem, as "essentially dialogue, may be a letter in a bottle

[47] Here we may imagine "address" as both *Anspruch* and *Addresse;* that is, the poet locates himself with each instance of addressing.
[48] See "A Dialogue on Language," *passim.*
[49] Heidegger's "A Dialogue on Language" is an apparent exception—but even here, language develops a life of its own between the two speakers: they work together to bring language into its own. The goal, as always, is "to bring language as language to language" (*Basic Writings* 398).

thrown out to sea with the—surely not always strong—hope that it may sometime wash up somewhere, perhaps on a heart-land."[50] It is a message in a bottle, cast out with no direction. Presumably, it is intended to be received, as dialogue is automatically aimed toward an other. Though Celan does not go so far as to posit a receiver, he imagines the bottle someday, somehow, washing up on land, and in that action being accepted into another's heart. He continues: "In this way, too poems are en route: they are headed toward." What the poems are en route *to* is not clear: a heart-land *(Herzland),* Celan writes: "...something open, inhabitable, an addressable you *[ansprechbares Du],* perhaps, an addressing reality *[ansprechende Wirklichkeit]"* (GW III 183-4): homes that remain vague and conceptual but always emerging out of the *Anspruch,* the address.

The word itself will remain immanent—unfolded in the world—until it reaches one of these harbors; neither can the harbors themselves be instantiated until the word reaches them. With this image, Celan is already speaking back to an image of the young Mandelstam—he restates the image of poetry as a bottle cast into the sea which occupies the center of Mandelstam's 1913 essay "On the Interlocutor." As we will shortly see in Chapter Two, Mandelstam's bottle is addressed "to the one who finds it." This addressee stands in meaningful distinction to Celan's immanent *Du,* as the dunes upon which Mandelstam's bottle lands varies from Celan's Herzland. Both poets' ideas of reading reception begin with the word-caster's desperation; but Celan's despair seems motivated by a more salient singularity of presence: a face, yet unnamed, but perhaps with features. His *Du* is undoubtedly a more personal address than Mandelstam's "one who finds it." I would argue that Celan is able to motivate his address in such a way because he speaks from the perspective of a translator, and may thus give a name to his unknown (and unattainable,

[50] See Introduction.

and unfinalizable) addressee—or, as in this case, the second-person singular pronoun, which is farther toward a name than Mandelstam's third-person "one." In translation, Celan wishes his word to unfold at once toward a reader and toward the original poet (we will examine this claim in Chapter Six), a multiple directionality that Mandelstam never discovered (as far as his writings give out) for the poetic address, perhaps because he never considered translation as art. It is possible that Celan meant to bestow translation, both in fact and in idea, to Mandelstam as a gift. He would thereby have granted Mandelstam not only the freedom of this multi-vectored address, but also a halting-place for the word, which for Mandelstam was always on the march.

Among Celan's papers is an unfinished poem titled "Bruder Ossip," which is the only known instance in his poetry or prose where Celan addresses Mandelstam in the second person:

> Es spielt der Schmerz mit Worten:
> Es spielt sich Namen zu
> Er sucht die Niemandsorte,
> Und da, da wartest du.
>
> Du bist der Russenjude,
> Der Judenrusse, und
>
> (1961)
>
> (Pain plays with words:/ It passes on names to itself/ It seeks out the no-man's-places,/ And there, there you wait.// You are the Russian-jew,/ The Jew-russian, and)
>
> (Pickford 27-8)

Here pain, rather than despair, is the site of poiesis, and the no-man's-places, rather than a heart-land, is the site of reception. A poem is a game that pain plays with words and names, dealing them out in various combinations until they apophatically suggest the no-mans-land where the *Du,* free of the restriction of personality, is free to form. Celan continues by shuffling *Russe* and *Jude* (a trope of permutation that is a

dominant feature of *Die Niemandsrose,* in which, judging by the date, this poem would have been included had it been finished) in another stab through variation and repetition of bringing his addressee to light. For both Celan and Mandelstam, a reader unfolds along with the word and the poem—and here, in Celan's clearest address to Mandelstam, he thematizes this unfolding. Mandelstam was not born *Bruder Ossip,* nor was he *Bruder Ossip* at his death. His philosophy of the word and poetry brought him, by the end of his writing life, to the border of translation; in his last theoretical writings he had just begin to imagine the ways in which his work might be reborn after the "Soviet night"[51] from which he was sure he wouldn't wake.

We will now leave Celan for the bulk of this dissertation, and find him again in the final chapter where his collection *Die Niemandsrose (The no-one's rose)* will be examined together with his translations of Mandelstam. Until then, let us look carefully over the next four chapters at the path Mandelstam took on his way to becoming *Bruder Ossip.*

[51] See p. 124.

CHAPTER TWO

CORRESPONDENCE AND THEFT IN MANDELSTAM'S EARLY ESSAYS

> Seems I'm not alone in being alone.
> *—The Police, "Message in a Bottle"*

Inherit the Moon

According to an anecdote of Nikolai Gumilev's, Mandelstam declared himself an Acmeist on an evening walk in 1912 with Gumilev and Anna Akhmatova. Catching sight of an illuminated clock-face, a watchmaker's shop-sign, he recited a newly composed poem, which Gumilev understood as Mandelstam's renunciation of Symbolism and confession as an Acmeist poet:[1]

> Нет, не луна, а светлый циферблат
> Сияет мне, и чем я виноват,
> Что слабых звезд я осязаю млечность?
>
> No, not the moon, but a glowing clockface/ Shines to me, and how am I to blame,/ For making out the weak stars' milkiness?
>
> (102)

To Gumilev, this declamation put Mandelstam in line with the Acmeist program: a concentration on things of the world and a denial of the power of symbols. These lines parody the Symbolist project of discovering the essences behind phenomena. Here the sky does not hold myriad secret significances, but rather patches of spilled milk; rather than projecting beyond it, Mandelstam brings the sky down to earth. In his essay on François Villon, written the same year as this poem, Mandelstam will praise the medieval French

[1] See Lekmanov 62-63.

poet's attention to earthly objects rather than things unattainable—specifically the moon. But in 1914—two years after this Acmeist confession—the moon will appear in a different frame, pointing to another stage in the development of Mandelstam's poetics:

> Я не слыхал рассказов Оссиана,
> Не пробовал старинного вина;
> Зачем же мне мерещится поляна,
> Шотландии кровавая луна?
>
> I have not heard the tales of Ossian,/ Nor sampled ancient wine;/ So why does a glade appear to me,/ And Scotland's bloody moon?[2]
>
> (120)

This stanza opens a poem about poetic inheritance: how a poet's voice and subject are legacies from the distant past. Here, a (presumably) poetic vision appears through a transcendental influence. The poet hasn't heard Ossian's tales, yet they pop into his imagination nonetheless. The moon here heralds a journey into the imagination, a theme which the young Mandelstam often celebrates—but here it is a journey into someone else's imagination: a move toward transcendence that does not seem to jibe with "No, not the moon," written only a few years earlier. In fact, it seems to revert from what Gumilev called Mandelstam's Acmeist declaration, and toward a transcendental poetics that could have been seen as Symbolist backsliding.

But Mandelstam is not interested in the moon as a symbol, or in anything else as a symbol for the moon. Rather, he is laying out his own theory of poetic correspondence—not a Symbolist correspondence between phenomenon and essence, nor an Acmeist correspondence between the thing and itself, but a (Mandelstamian) correspondence between poet and reader, and between poet and poet: a correspondence that is outside of time but yet (unlike a symbol) bound to its dates. "I have not heard the tales of Ossian" ends with these lines:

[2] For a more comprehensive treatment of this poem and the phenomenon of Ossian, see Chapter Four.

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

And more than one treasure, perhaps /Skipping the grandchildren, will pass to the great-grandchildren, /And again a skald will compose another's song /And pronounce it as his own.[3]

Mandelstam, like the skald, is pronouncing a foreign artwork as his own. Interestingly, Mandelstam can appropriate Ossian's "moon" *because* he has never heard Ossian's tales. He only knows he's stealing the vision from somewhere because it has been granted to him. Moreover, this granting comes by virtue of a recognition of the sway of time, as well as the possibility of its transcendence inherent in the creative act: the poet is writing the past into the present toward the future.

The clockface in "No, not the moon" can be read as a different version of the same thing. As the Scottish moon "appears to me" *(mne mereshchitsia)*, so does the clockface "shine to me" *(siiaet mne).* In both cases the object presents itself to the poet's vision; his response is to appropriate it for himself. In "No, not the moon" he places the clockface in a discourse with the night sky to stake an aesthetic claim; in "Ossian" he reads the moon as a correspondence between poetic visions across eons. In each case, the object was someone else's: now it's his. This chapter charts Mandelstam's first forays into a theory of poetic communication through the ideas of correspondence and theft. We will observe his early claims on the literary past and his resultant appropriative poetics; we will also see the figure of the appopriative/creative reader become the basis of Mandelstam's idea of poetic reception.

[3] A skald, according to the OED, is an itinerant or court oral poet, especially Scandinavian. Knowingly or not, Mandelstam is suggesting transmission not only across time and space but also across cultures and languages.

"François Villon": Love and Theft

Ce que nous valons
Notre sang le chante!
L'épine méchante
Te mord aux talons?

Le vent taquin ose
Te gifler souvent?
Chante dans le vent
Et cueille la rose!

—Paul Verlaine, from "Conseil Falot"[4]

(195)

The first evidence of Mandelstam's thinking of poetic communication appears in his essay "François Villon" (begun 1910, published 1913). He opens the essay, as he opens the Ossian poem, by invoking a heavenly body as a sign of poetic correspondence both bound by historical time and free of it: "Astronomers precisely predict the return of a comet across a large span of time. For those who know Villon, the appearance of Verlaine presents itself as just such an astronomical marvel" (I 169).[5] The idea seems to be that French Symbolist poet Paul Verlaine (1844-96) is a new iteration of an existing poetic impulse, which when it last appeared—hundreds of years before—was embodied in François Villon, a Medieval French poet who lived roughly between 1431 and 1464. This jibes nicely with the final image of "Ossian," in which a bard pronounces another's song as if it were his own: both are examples of identical appearances that carry traces of different epochs. Mandelstam, appropriately to "Ossian," continues the Villon essay by talking about voice: "The vibrations

[4] "Our blood's song reveals/what we're worth and how born!/Some evil thorn/is biting your heels?/Face slapped by the blows/as the winds tease?/Sing back at the breeze/and go pick the rose!" From "Droll Advice."
[5] Асрономы точно предсказывают возвращение кометы через большой промежуток времени. Для тех, кто знает Виллона, явление Верлена представляется именно таким астрономическим чудом.

of these two voices are strikingly similar."[6] Now, though, Mandelstam wants to concentrate on the destructive effect of both poets' vibrations—he is intertested in them because they break glass:

> ...besides timbre and biography, the poets are bound by a nearly identical mission within the literature of their time. Both were destined to appear in an epoch of artificial, hothouse poetics, and as Verlaine smashed the *serres chaudes* of Symbolism, Villon lobbed a challenge at the mighty rhetorical school that by all rights may be called the Symbolism of the 15th Century.[7]
>
> (I 169)

This is a strange claim for Verlaine, who was one of French Symbolism's main stylistic and theoretical pillars. Verlaine's work shares many central themes and concerns with the Russian school of Symbolism, which Mandelstam sought to join as a young poet—a goal toward which he was still working as he began to compose "Villon." But even if Mandelstam is still writing under the sway of Symbolism, he identifies within it something stifling, which he terms "hothouse," and celebrates its destruction. Moreover, there is a quality particular to Verlaine that makes his work antithetical to this "hothouse," and therefore hostile to (or perhaps exceeding) the Symbolist project. The point where Mandelstam reads Verlaine as anti-Symbolist is also the point where he designates and denigrates the Symbolist "hothouse," and indeed where his own post-Symbolist poetics begins to emerge.

Interestingly, Mandelstam shares the urge to smash hothouses with Russian Symbolist poet and theorist Vyacheslav Ivanov. Mandelstam's invocation of *serres chaudes* is most likely a reference to Belgian Symbolist Maurice Maeterlinck's 1889 collection of poems *Serres chaudes (Hothouses)*—and in 1909, three years before "Villon," we already

---

[6] Вибрациа этих двух голодов поразительно сходная.

[7] ...кроме тембра и биография поэтов связывает почти одиноковая миссия в современной им литературе. Обоим суждено было выступить в эпоху искусственной, оранжерейной поэзии, и подобно тому, как Верлен разбил serres chaudes символизма, Виллон бросил вызов могущественной риторической школе, которую с полным правом можно считать символизмом XV века.

find Ivanov valorizing Verlaine as an answer to Maeterlinck's hothouse poetics. In the essay "On Verlaine and Huysmans" (O Verlene i Geismanse, 1909), Ivanov declares that for Verlaine, "decadence was the business of life and the principle of self-destruction" (II 564)[8] and that he, with Huysmans, ended up as "sublime shipwrecks of living people.[9] Ivanov sets these examples of praiseworthy shipwrecks against the "safe sailing of the painted tombs of exultant 'modernism…'"[10]

> ...like Maeterlinck, who duly considered it easier and more comfortable (like his farsighted bourgeois, at whom he also somehow laughs) to live without gods and without mystery...[11]
>
> (II 565)

Ivanov, though generally approving of Maeterlinck as a dramatist, faults him for not writing in the presence of gods or mysteries, something which would presumably have led him to an honorable wreck. This critique of Maeterlinck's "bourgeois" mentality is echoed even in Ivanov's praise of the Belgian writer in another essay published the same year, "Auguries and Omens" (Predchustviia i predvestiia, 1909):

> The new theater tends once more toward its dynamic origin. Is this not like the theater of Maeterlinck, leading us to the labyrinth of mystery, to abandon us in front of the locked iron door?[12]
>
> (II 94-5)

Here, according to Ivanov, Maeterlinck is indeed drawn to mystery, but doesn't go as far as to attempt to plumb it. There is no wreck here.

Mandelstam would also have Verlaine wreck Maeterlinck's hothouses, but the terms of his critique are different from Ivanov's, and highlight a different set of poetic values. In

---

[8] ...декаденство было делом жизни и принципом саморазрушения."
[9] Величавы[е]…кораблекрушения жывых.
[10] Благополучные плавания раскрашенных гробов торжествующего "модернизма..."
[11] ...вроде Метерлинка, вовремя сообразившего подобно его дальновидным, но почему–то им же осмеянным буржуа..., что легче и удобнее живется без богов и без тайны...
[12] Новый театр снова тяготеет к началу динамическому. Не таков ли...театр Метерлинка, уводящий нас в лабиринт тайны, чтобы покинуть перед замкнутой железной дверью?

Maeterlinck's poem "Serre chaude" and in the collection in general, the poet might long for the world outside the hothouse, but he only reaches toward it, without breaking the glass. "Serre chaude" opens and closes thus:

> Ô serre au milieu des forêts !
> Et vos portes à jamais closes !
> ...
> Mon Dieu ! mon Dieu ! quand aurons-nous la pluie,
> Et la neige et la vent dans la serre !
>
> (O hothouse in the middle of the forests!/And your doors are forever shut!/.../My God! my God! when will we have rain,/and snow and wind in the hothouse!)
>
> (*Serres chaudes* 9-10).

In Mandelstam's reading, which sees the hothouse as stifling and inhibiting—something to be smashed—the end of Maeterlinck's poem betrays an anxiety about Symbolism itself; that it has forever shut out the phenomenal world for the sake of cultivating symbolic representations.

Mandelstam faults Symbolism (both French and Russian) for constructing an artificial environment in order to grow flesh for mysteries and ideals. After invoking Verlaine as an epoch-ending comet, Mandelstam returns to the fifteenth century, to demonstrate the "symbolism" against which Villon reacted:

> The famous *Roman de la rose* first built the impenetrable fence, inside of which the hothouse atmosphere, necessary for the allegories created by this novel to breathe, continued to thicken.[13]
>
> (I 169)

The *Roman de la rose,* the foundational medieval French poem of courtly love, is held up as a source for the sway of allegory as literary device, mainly due to its singular pre-Gutenberg popularity and its overarching allegory of the rose with love. Mandelstam here suggests that a Symbolist hothouse does not separate the phenomenon (rose) from its

[13] Знаменитый Роман о Розе впервые построил непроницаемую ограду, внутри которой продолжала сгущаться тепличная атмосфера, необходимая для дыхания аллегорий, созданных этим романом.

essential referent (love)—as would be the case in Ivanov's idea of correspondences—but rather encloses the phenomenon together with its essence inside the hothouse, from which there is no escape. Inside the hothouse, Mandelstam writes, the rose does not exist for itself, but as an incarnation of an ideal—this incarnation, moreover, is an unnatural being that can only breathe artificial air. In the *Roman de la rose,*

> Love, danger, hatred, and guile are not dead abstractions. They are not disembodied. Medieval poetry, as it were, gives these specters astral bodies and tenderly cultivates the artificial atmosphere so necessary to their support and existence.[14]
>
> (I 169)

Allegory, which Mandelstam is aligning with symbol, thrives only in a constructed, enclosed (even close) environment; the denizens of this environment are not real unto themselves but serve as clothing for specters. Meanwhile, Mandelstam opposes the stifling artificiality of the hothouse with an incessant movement he sees in both Verlaine and Villon. Quoting Villon's poetic "credo," "Du mouvement avant toute chose!" (Movement above all else!), Mandelstam goes on to compare the "inspiration" *(voodushevlenie)* of Villon's verse to a wind that "...shakes the body of the unlucky ones, here and there, willy-nilly..." (I 174).[15] If Mandelstam is here aligning stasis (and implied suffocation) with artificiality, one imagines that movement—which he explicates in various drafts of the essay in detailed analyses of Villon's versification—signifies something genuine.

Rather than cultivate roses, Mandelstam asserts, Verlaine and Villon pluck them—that is, they grab rather than maintain; they thieve rather than own. Such appropriation is always risky—the plucked rose will die if mishandled—but for Mandelstam this gesture is the honest one. He faults Symbolist thought for its proprietary attitude toward the poetic

---

[14] Любовь, Опасность, Ненависть, Коварство — не мертвые отвлеченности. Они не бесплотны. Средневековая поэзия дает этим призракам как бы астральное тело и нежно заботится об искусственном воздухе, столь необходимом для поддержания их существования.

[15] …раскачивает тела несчастных, туда-сюда, по произволу...

object. In assigning a phenomenon (the greenhouse rose, let's say) the role of symbol—binding it to a corresponding essence that resides outside the greenhouse wall—the Symbolist poet acts as if he owned it:

> Modern French Symbolists are in love with things as if they were their proprietors. Perhaps the very "soul of things" is none other than the feeling of ownership, spiritualized and ennobled in the laboratory of subsequent generations.[16]
>
> (I 173)

The "soul of things" *(dusha veshchei),* which Mandelstam puts in quotes, is a likely reference to the French Parnassian poet Maurice Rollinat (1846-1903), whose poem "Le Silence" (1898) appeared in Russian translation by the Symbolist poet Innokenty Annensky in 1904.[17] The poem's dominant line is "Le silence est l'âme des choses" (Silence is the soul of things), which appears once in each of its three short stanzas. In Annensky's Russian version, regularized to iambic pentameter, the line is "Bezmolvie — eto dusha veshchei." Mandelstam's inclusion of Rollinat makes sense in keeping with "François Villon's" constant reference to the French poetic tradition and its Russian inheritors—but he may also be giving us a source for his own early poem "Silentium" (1910).[18] In Mandelstam's poem, silence is something like a "soul of things," appearing as an "unbreakable bond between everything that lives." Mandelstam's silence is a charged one, betokening an imminent creative disruption, and the anxiety before this disruption makes the poet cry out, in the final stanza: "Remain foam, Aphrodite,/ And, word, return into music…!" (94). This cry marks a difference between Mandelstam's poem and Rollinat's: Mandelstam is asserting that the poet's role is to wrestle with the mysteries of creation rather than to

---

[16] Современные французские символисты влюблены в вещи, как собственники. Бытъ может, самая 'душа вещей' не что иное, как чувство собственника, одухотворенное, и облагороженное в лаборатории последовательных поколений.

[17] Annensky, though not much discussed in this dissertation, was at least as important an influence on the young Mandelstam as was Vyacheslav Ivanov. It is very likely that Mandelstam had read Annensky's translations of Rollinat.

[18] For a fuller treatment of this poem, see Chapter Five.

make pronouncements about them. Mandelstam's poet is not content to repeat that silence is the soul of things—he wants to know what he should do about it. [19]

Mandelstam is saying that what *really* lies at the heart of things for poets like Rollinat is a feeling of proprietorship. When a rose is treated as a symbol, it trades in its life for an abstracted, generic significance; it becomes a hothouse variety that survives by dint of its abstractedness. Maeterlinck's "rain, and snow, and wind," presumably still wild, introduce a tension into his poem: a tension of unmatched correspondences. The rain, snow, and wind cannot enter the hothouse because no referents for them exist inside it; they cannot yet be represented as poetic property. If anything, the cry at the end of "Serres chaudes" admits a failure of Symbolism, not least because it asks a question—a rhetorical move that runs counter to the inspired declarations of metaphysical truth, both baseless and solipsistic, against which Mandelstam felt he was reacting.[20]

Rather than proprietorship, Mandelstam suggests, the key to living poetry is *appropriation.* In the *Testaments,* Mandelstam finds evidence of the value of Villon's profession of thief:

> Property taunted Villon his whole life like a musical siren, and made him a thief...and a poet. The pitiful tramp appropriated for himself unattainable gifts with the help of irony.[21]
>
> (I 173)

Villon is barred by his poverty from being a proprietor; he doesn't have the wherewithal to own. His constant thirsting for objects reveals to him a principle that for Mandelstam is essential to for hothouse-smashing: the poet doesn't own the objects of his representation.

---

[19] Rollinat is one of many implied interlocutors in "Silentium." Mandelstam is speaking most clearly to Fyodor Tiutchev's "Silentium," Vyacheslav Ivanov's "Molchan'e" (Silence), and Valery Briusov's "Tvorchestvo" (Creation).
[20] See treatment of Ivanov, "Eternity and Moment," in Chapter One, p. 41. The questions posed in this poem are purely rhetorical.
[21] Собственность всю жизнь манила Виллона, как музыкальная сирена, и сделала из него вора...и поэта. Жалкий бродяга, он присваивает себе недоступные ему блага с помощью иронии.

> Villon knew well the abyss between subject and object, but understood it as an impossibility of ownership. The moon and other neutral "objects" were absolutely excluded from his poetic purview.[22]
>
> (173)

There are two theoretical positions embedded in this claim. The most immediate debases the moon as a poetic object; this is Mandelstam speaking from the Acmeist pulpit. He is likely pointing to Gumilev's claim in his article "Acmeism and the Legacy of Symbolism" (Nasledie simvolizma i akmeizm) that "All the beauty, all the holy significance of the stars lies in the fact that they are infinitely distant from the earth and no feats of aviation will bring them closer."[23] Mandelstam is also pointing to his own Acmeist-programmatic poem, composed around the same time as "Villon," in which he reimagines the moon and stars as clockface and milk: objects earthly and at hand.[24] Speaking about his own poetics through a purported analysis of another poet (as was his lifelong habit), Mandelstam tells us Villon became more inspired the more at-hand and physically nourishing his poetic object: "…he rouses himself at once when the talk turns to roasted ducks in sauce..." (I 173).[25]

Villon's thirst for the at-hand and physically nourishing leads to the second theoretical position in Mandelstam's claim: he is likely pointing to his own fascination with the "abyss" between the self (subject) and phenomena (objects)—meaning *any* phenomena, especially those that are putatively attainable. Villon the thief longs for the things he can't have, but also grabs the things he can—and now the crisis of representation that so interests Mandelstam becomes more interesting. It seems the closest he can come to an idea of poetic appropriation demands the salvation of the object from its thrall to *time:*

---

[22] Виллон отлично сознавал пропасть между субъектом и объектом, но понимал ее как невозможность обладания. Луна и прочие нейтральные 'предметы' бесповоротно исключены из его поэтического обихода.
[23] Вся красота, все священное значение звезд в том, что они бесконечно далеки от земли и ни с какими успехами авиации не станут ближе.
[24] See p. 65.
[25] Зато он сразу оживляется когда речь заходит о жареных под соусом утках...

> The present moment can withstand the pressure of centuries and maintain its wholeness, remain the same "now."[26] One must only know how to tear it from the soil of time, without harming its roots. Otherwise it will wither.[27]
>
> (175)

Plucking the moment from the soil of time is reminiscent of Verlaine's "Droll Advice": "Sing back at the wind/and go pluck the rose!" Mandelstam is marshalling Villon *through* Verlaine as a hothouse-smasher who preserves the rose not by constructing an artificial environment for it but by plucking it. This is something like a crime, as it guarantees the flower's death—is is valuable, however, as an appropriation that does not pretend to proprietorship. Mandelstam's next task is to explain how this mini-murder guarantees the object against the greater danger of time.

Indeed, in Mandelstam's solitary explication of a passage from Villon's verse, his claim is that Villon preserves his object against time: "The bell of the Sorbonne, interrupting [Villon's work] over the *Petit testament,* sounds to this day" (1 175).[28] The lines about the Sorbonne's bell almost certainly come from Canto 35 of the Petit Testament, as this is the only passage in the Testament that features the bell. Looking at Villon's text, it seems Mandelstam must get his idea from the bell's role as interruption in the scene of writing:

> Finalement, en estrivant,
> Ce soir, seullet, estant en bonne,
> Dictant ces laiz et descripvant,
> Je ouys la cloche de Sorbonne,
> Qui tousjours à neuf heures sonne
> Le Salut que l'Ange predit :
> Cy suspendis et cy mys bourne,
> Pour prier, comme le cueur dit.

[26] A moment that partakes of eternity demands, in a Faustian equation, the sale of a soul—or, as Mandelstam might have it, an abiding gravitation toward the moment's poetic antipodes in Hell. We'll see more of this in Chapter Three.

[27] Настоящее мгновение может выдержать напор столетий и сохранить свою целость, остаться тем же "сейчас". Нужно только уметь вырвать его из почвы времени, не повредив его корней, — иначе оно завянет.

[28] Колокл Сорбонна, прервавший [работу Виллона] над 'Petit Testament,' звучит до сих пор.

> (Finally, at work/ this evening, all alone and in fine form/ saying these lais and writing them out/ I heard the bell of the Sorbonne/ that strikes the Angelus/ at nine every night/ at this I stopped and made an end of it/ in order to pray as the heart dictates.)
>
> *(The Poems of François Villon,* 100, 102. Translation mine.)

The bell wakes the poet from the mundane work of composition (of the Testament itself) and inspires him to prayer: an address that more immediately follows the dictates of the heart. Villon is not making a claim that words preserve; in this canto, the power of words rests in their spontaneous flow from the heart. In the preceding cantos, the poet has been bequeathing obects he either owns or doesn't own to various friends and enemies: a parody of testament, an ironic jab at the concern for the material in the face of death. Mandelstam, however, doesn't focus on any of these many bequeathed objects, which would seem to engage the discourse in which he's interested. But Mandelstam wants to make a point about plucking, not about bequeathal. The recipient of a bequeathed object, after all, has nothing to contribute to the object. A plucker, however, has dug out a living thing to which he now bears a vital responsibility.

In his long essay *Conversation about Dante* (Razgovor o dante, 1933) Mandelstam will write: "A citation is a cidada. It is inherently incessant" (Tsitata est' tsikada. Neumolkaemost' ei svoistvenna) (III 220). But the model of reading that Mandelstam is envisioning across these early essays also depends on the incessance of plucked material, whether that material has been plucked from art or life. Interrupting the work, the bell has plucked Villon out of his work; Villon has in turn plucked the bell out of the moment and inscribed it in that work. Now Villon's reader (Mandelstam) has also plucked the bell from the framework of the canto and resuited it to his own mise-en-scène. This move sets itself up to be repeated: Mandelstam's essay predicts a reader who will commit a further act of plucking upon the bell—and, indeed, this is how the bell will keep sounding, how it will

become incessant. Villon's gift, as Mandelstam sees it, is to demonstrate interruption: to show what plucking looks like. Each reader plucks the object anew; and its moment survives the passage of time in a series of buryings and pluckings.[29]

Incessance also sheds light on one of the more curious claims in "François Villon": that the lyric poet is a hermaphrodite. In Villon Mandelstam sees an incessant conversation between distinct voices:

> The lyric poet by his very nature is an androgynous creature, capable of innumerable splits in the name of internal dialogue. This 'lyrical hermaphroditism' manifested itself in Villon as in no one else.[30]
>
> (I 173)

"Internal dialogue" is twice sexed in this short passage: Mandelstam first casts Villon as an androgynous (*dvupoloe)* creature and then labels his lyrical sensibility hermaphroditism *(germafroditizm).* In a hermaphrodite, two discrete sexes are represented in an integral body; likewise, in a poem discrete literary elements are presented at once in an integral voice. The poem's roses and bells, its moments, ripen for plucking in the field of the poem's language: in the poet's unceasing conversation with himself.

For the voice that speaks the poetic moment to be incessant, it cannot strive toward any fixed teleology. This stands in contrast to the Symbolist idea of androgyny and the teleology of the sexes, which contained only one long action (reminiscent of Plato's *Symposium)* in which male and female were temporary (and degraded) divisions of the original and ideal human being, and at the end of days would be reunited into one androgynous creature. This idea takes its form in Russian Symbolism beginning with

---

[29] To pluck the flower, it seems, one must also plunge a hand into the earth. In future writings of Mandelstam's, plucking will become katabasis: for the poet, accompanying the word into the underworld; for the reader, accompanying the poet there. We will see this idea bloom in the poetry and prose of the early 1920s (see Chapter Three) and culminate in the 1933 *Conversation about Dante* (see Chapter Five).

[30] "Лирический поэт, по природе своей, — двуполое существо, способное к бесчесленным расщеплениям во имя внутренного диалога. Ни в ком так ярко сказался этот 'лирический гермафродитизм', как в Виллоне.

Vladimir Solovyov's (1853-1900) long essay "The Meaning of Love" (Smysl' liubvi, 1892-3). In the essay, Solovyov gives the separation of the sexes primary place in the grand narrative of the human spirit. He opens the fifth section by juxtaposing verses from the Old and New Testaments, then proposing that gender unity lies at the beginning and end of the spiritual narrative:

> "On the day that God created the human, he created him in His image, male and female he created them."
>
> "This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church."
>
> The primary, mysterious image of God, in which the human being was created, has nothing to do with the independent part of the human creature, but rather with the true unity of his two fundamental aspects, male and female.[31]

Solovyov posits that the distinction between the two sexes is illusory or obscures the divine unity that male and female share. His judgment results first from a close reading of the verse in Genesis 1 in which the Priestly author describes the creation of the human being.[32]

> 27. And God created the human in His image,
> In the image of God He created him,
> Male and female He created them.[33]

Solovyov is clearly interested in the difference in number between the third-person pronouns in the second and third lines. In the second line, "him/'*oto*" refers to the grammatically masculine "human/'*adam*" in the line above. The third line presents the genders in distinction to one another; we see "him" split into "them/'*otam*" and—perhaps consequently—the image of God fall away. Solovyov then highlights the New Testament's typological reading of the Old Testamant—the body of the primary *'adam* becomes the body

---

[31] "В день, когда Бог сотворил человека, по образу Божию сотворил его, мужа и жену сотворил их."/ "Тайна сия велика есть, аз же глаголю во Христа и во Церковь."/ ... Не к какой-нибудь отдельной части человеческого существа, а к истинному единству двух основных сторон его, мужеской и женской, относится первоначально таинственный образ Божий, по которому создан человек.

[32] The designations Priestly and Yahwist (see below) come from the Documentary Hypothesis of Biblical authorship; for a full picture, see (e.g.) Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* New York: HarperCollins, 1987.

[33] Alter 19.

of the church—and finally predicts an endpoint in which the separate sexes will recover their unified origin.

Solovyov's New Testament source is St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians. Paul draws out an analogy between erotic and sacred love, comparing the love of a man for his wife to the love of Christ for the church. In doing so, he invokes the Yahwist creation story in Chapter 2 of Genesis:

> 22And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.
> 23And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.
> 24Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

In Ephesians 5, Paul writes:

> 30For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.
> 31For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh
> 32This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.[34]

By invoking Paul's typological reading of the creation story in Genesis, Solovyov combines the two divergent creation myths into a singular teleology: first, man and woman were created at once in a primary splitting of the human essence. Second, by inhabiting the spiritual figures of Christ and the church, the two sexes are bound metaphysically to merge at the end of days.

Solovyov thereby gives Biblical backing to the Symbolist vision of a cataclysmic universal sexual event. Olga Matich in her book *Erotic Utopia: The Decadent Imagination in the Russian Fin-de-Siècle* sums up the teleology of Symbolist erotics thus: "Transfiguration can be accomplished only by humankind's participation as a whole in a universal coupling that will transcend biology as destiny" (75). This universal coupling

[34] Translations of both passages are from KJV.

would then achieve that mystical union betweeen man and woman, as well as humankind and the Godhead, whose attainment is the goal of Solovyov's philosophy of love.

If Solovyov has provided a philosophical basis for Symbolist androgyny, it is the literary theory of Vyacheslav Ivanov that brings it into Mandelstam's purview. Ivanov, valorizing Solovyov's impulse towards universal union, holds up an idea of transcendent unity over what he calls "individual symbiosis" *(individual'nyi simbioz)* between a singular man and a singular woman. Ivanov's article "On the value of woman" (O dostoinstve zhenshchiny) expounds Ivanov's take on love and the family, which owes much to Solovyov's "The Meaning of Love." In the essay's fifth section, Ivanov engages in a discussion on the purpose of the erotic, making reference to the Pauline teleology of the split sexes: "...if a person enters into marriage, two will become one flesh; God has joined them" (III 142).[35] Ivanov opposes this successful transcendence of individuality to the creation myth recounted by Aristophanes in Plato's *Symposium,* in which once hermaphroditic creatures, now split, strive unsuccessfully to unite with their lost halves. This quest is bound to fail, Ivanov observes, because each creature is seeking an original individuality, while the teleology of the human is to become part of a universal whole.

Eros, then, should also strive toward this unity, which (following Paul and Solovyov) Ivanov assigns a decidedly Christian flavor: "The church likens marriage to martyrdom. Two unite for a common crucifixion on the cross of flesh" (III 143).[36] The union of the sexes for Solovyov was a typological teleology that linked Genesis with Christ; Ivanov goes further to analogize erotic passion with Christological passion. Flesh is the field of torment and also the gateway to transfiguration, and if two members of opposite sexes undergo the same crucifixion, they are transfigured into one. Communion by flesh stands as a typology

[35] …если человек вступил в брак, два будут единою плотью, их сочетал Бог.
[36] Церковь уподобляет брак мученичеству: двое соединяются для сораспятия на кресте плоти…

for communion by spirit; connecting the two hypostases is the idea of infinite flesh that is implied both in Ivanov's "cross of flesh" and in Solovyov's universal erotic teleology of human sexuality.

In the same essay, Ivanov's critique of the drama "Kol'tsa" (The ring) by his wife Lidiia Zinovieva-Annibal further draws out the difference between a Platonic "individual symbiosis," which he denigrates, and spiritual union, which he valorizes:

> "Further, further!" we read in Zinovieva-Annibal's drama "The Rings," "that there be no iron ring for two, that there be no dead mirror for the world." Individual symbiosis secures the bad individuation[37] of the human being.[38]
>
> (142)

This line is spoken by "Kol'tsa's" heroine, Aglaya, to her lover Vanya, in order to remind him of his accusation, earlier in the play, that her love was like an iron ring that excluded his own love. In this scene, Vanya asks whether Aglaya's love goes beyond even herself, and she responds affirmatively: "Further, further!" and then speaks against the fetters of individuality (the iron ring). Aglaya's love is not exclusive, as Vanya thought, but rather transcendent of the "iron ring for two"; it tends towards the universal.

Unlike Ivanov, Mandelstam finds value in the rings and fetters of the world, and mistrusts transcendence and universality. His essay "Utro Akmeizma" ends with a paraphrase from Sergei Gorodetsky, a minor Acmeist poet, with which he proclaims the Acmeist mission to "...more easily and freely [bear] the mobile chains of being" (181).[39] Likewise, in "Villon," he claims that to disavow one's (chained) being for the promise of "realiora" is to stop being mobile—that is, imprisonment comes not from the bonds of perceived existence but in isolation from the world. Likewise the fetters of gender: in the

---

[37] "Bad/*durnoi"* here carries a hint of "spurious," as in "bad infinity/*durnaia beskonechnost'."*

[38] «Дальше, дальше!» — читаем в драме Л. Зиновьевой-Аннибал «Кольца», — «чтобы не было железного кольца для двоих, чтобы не было мертвого зеркала для мира». Индивидуальный симбиоз закрепляет дурную индивидуацию человечества...

[39] ...легче и вольнее [носить] повижные оковы бытия.

hermaphroditic body of the poet, Mandelstam allows monadic counterparts to remain set against one another without attempting combination—without exceeding the bounds of the phenomenological. Mandelstam's erotics lies not in a transcendent, redemptive eschatology, but rather in the at-hand. Accordingly, the function of doublesexedness in Mandelstam's poetics is not mystical union—which is only possible in the ideal—but phenomenal dialogue. Unlike Solovyov, Mandelstam doesn't want to wait until the end of days to make his move on the object of desire. He wants to do it now, and constantly: he wishes the poet's internal dialogue to be present and ceaseless.

The incessance of this dialogue, though it raises a challenge to the passing of time, nevertheless depends upon it, and upon the world in which time passes. The essential distinction between Mandelstam's idea of ceaselessness and the inherent timelessness of the Platonic (and Solovyovian, and Ivanovian) ideal is visible in their respective attitudes toward the hermaphroditic body. In Plato, intercourse (of any kind) between the exiled halves seeks after a unity, past which the conversation ceases. Mandelstam works in the opposite direction: any putative unity really is built on an inherent conversation, which it is the poet's task to nourish and reveal—not to complete, and thereby push out of the world. Mandelstam's poetic teleology does not, however, concern the story of the body—which will die—but rather the story of the word. Villon, he says, is a past master at capturing different voices:

> What a variegated selection of enchanting duets: bereaved and comforter, mother and child, judge and defendant, proprietor and pauper...[40]

Just as Villon rescues and preserves voices in their individuality, he also maintains the divisions within himself—and here Mandelstam imposes a juridical model on the poet's split self:

[40] Какой разнообразный подбор очаровательных дуэтов: огорченный и утешитель, мать и дитя, судья и подсудимый, собственник и нищий...

> Villon's attitude towards himself never exceeds the known borders of intimacy. He is as gentle, attentive, and solicitous of himself as a good lawyer is to his client.[41]
>
> (I 173)

Not to exceed the borders of intimacy means backing off from the object—recognizing its skin, acknowledging the distance between it and the observing subject. Like a good lawyer, the poet is there to help the client-object tell its story, as well as to defend it against injustice and falsehood, not (like a bad lawyer) to use it for his own purposes. The poet is a poet in that he continues the story of the word—the word is not there to help the poet fulfill his own teleology. Nonetheless, the "client" that Mandelstam puts forth is Villon's own self, and therefore the poetic subject must maintain a dialogic relationship with himself even as he allows the dialogic properties of his objects to sound forth.

In "Villon," the poet's goal is neither fusion nor proprietorship, but dialogic appropriation. The special appropriation that Villon enacts upon his voice-pairs and upon the Sorbonne's bell does not pretend to exceed their phenomenality; neither does it attempt to force them into service. Rather, it appropriates them just enough to let them speak, preserving their identities as other voices. As such, they may engage in perennial dialogue and also remain perennially readable, open to the appropriation of others. Parallel to this dialogism of the poetic object is a dialogism of the poetic subject: Villon as poet is a hermaphrodite, a bifurcated figure who engages in ceaseless dialogue with himself. Mandelstam will extend this complex model of poetic dialogue to a theory of reader reception in his essay "O sobesednike" (On the interlocutor), a discussion of which follows.

[41] Отношение Виллона к себе никогда не переходит известных границ интимности. Он нежен, внимателен, заботлив к себе не более, чем хороший адвокат к своему клиенту. SS 1, 173.

"On the interlocutor": The Other's Word

In 1913 Mandelstam wrote one of his most well-known pieces of prose, a model of reader reception central to his thinking about poetry. It comes in the second section of his essay "On the interlocutor," published in *Apollon* in 1913:

> A sailor at a critical moment throws into the waters of the ocean a sealed bottle with his name and a description of his fate. After many long years, wandering through the dunes, I find it in the sand, read the letter, find out the date of the event, the final will of the victim. I was correct to do this. I did not open someone else's letter. The letter sealed in the bottle was addressed to the one who finds it. I found it. Therefore, I am the secret addressee.[42]
>
> (I 183-4)

In this first critical foray after "François Villon," Mandelstam casts the poem out towards an unknown reader, hoping that this reader will become a friend in posterity or indeed a co-creator, a partner in dialogue. Only through the crucible of the unknown can a poem survive its creator, to be discovered anew by a real, breathing other who lives according to his own rhythms and conceptions, and thus to be amenable to what Mandelstam considers poetic dialogue. Thus, from "Villon" to "On the interlocutor," Mandelstam's concept of poetic discourse moves from "internal dialogue" to dialogue with an indefinitely deferred other. To make this move, Mandelstam must account for the presence of the other, and he does this despite a mistrust of what lies outside the self—by locating dialogue within one speaker, and activating it toward the other through a Villon-esque appropriation.

"On the interlocutor" locates the poem as taking place in something like a verbal conversation: a shared space between a speaker and an interlocutor. Mandelstam asks not whom the poet writes for, but rather "whom…the poet speak[s] with" (I 183). The poet is

[42] Мореплаватель в критическую минуту бросает в воды океана запечатанную бутылку с именем своим и описанием своей судьбы. Спустя долгие годы, скитаясь по дюнам, я нахожу ее в песке, прочитываю письмо, узнаю дату события, последнюю волю погибшего. Я вправе был сделать это. Я не распечатал чужого письма. Письмо, запечатанное в бутылке, адресовано тому, кто найдет ее. Нашел я. Значит, я и есть таинственный адресат.

figured as speaking ("govoroiu," "govorit"), and the reader as a listener ("slushatel'") and interlocutor ("sobesednik"). The communication between poet and reader is based on empathy—the poet seeks to "...be amazed through [the reader's] amazement, rejoice through his joy, fall in love through his love" (I 187)—but these empathic vibrations come back to the poet not from an actual interlocutor, but from beyond the horizon toward which he's cast his words: from the farther ponds, from the echoes of the poem itself. Likewise, the reader's experience is effectively that of putting his own name on the poem he's found ("I found it. Therefore, I am the secret addressee.") In neither "conversational" act—writing nor reading; casting nor finding—can the interlocutor actually be present. The spontaneity and unpredictability (in Bakhtin's words, the unfinalizability) unique to a live correspondent must be replaced by an equivalent unfinalizability unique to poetry. [43]

Mandelstam's model of empathic dialogue has a precedent in a talk given by Vyacheslav Ivanov in February 1912, at the Society for Devotees of the Artistic Word entitled "Mysli o simvolizme" (Thoughts on Symbolism). It is likely that Mandelstam attended this talk, and equally likely that he read it in article form in the Symbolist collection *Works and days* (Trudy i dni), which appeared later the same year. In his paper, Ivanov lays out a model of reader reception from which Mandelstam likely drew terms for his own ideas about poetic communication. This model, like Mandelstam's, models reader reception on a live aural transmission whose goal is to strike an empathic vibration. For Ivanov, however, it is not speech that suggests poetic vibration, but rather singing—a singing which may be fulfilled by a voice ("golos") or instrument ("fleiti," flutes), and which therefore doesn't require words. Ivanov analogizes empathy to a harmonic vibration, created by a poet to evoke a concordant vibration in his listener. But though the poet sets the vibration in motion, is not his originally: it comes from higher spheres. Ivanov defines

[43] See discussion of eidema, p. 23.

Symbolism itself as working to "force the listener's very soul to sing with me in a voice other than mine" (II 606).[44] Further on, he clarifies the otherworldly provenance of this "other voice" and the poet's role in directing it towards the "soul" of the listener:

> I am not a Symbolist if my words are equal to themselves, if they aren't an echo of other, unknown sounds—like the Spirit, whose provenance and destination are unknown—, and if they don't rouse an echo in the labyrinth of souls.[45]
>
> (II 608)

Mandelstam will strike a similar chord in "On the interlocutor," claiming that "the only thing that pushes us into the interlocutor's embrace is the desire to be surprised by our own words…" (I 187).[46] While Mandelstam's version echoes the otherness of poetic language that Ivanov values, it lacks Ivanov's higher guarantee for the sympathetic vibration between poet and reader, a surety that would come from beyond both speaker and interlocutor. Empathy for Ivanov is struck not *by* the poet, but rather *through* him.

Ivanov's invocation of the Holy Spirit (Dukh) recalls the scene of Pentecost from the book of Acts, in which the Spirit acts as the guarantee of language itself. In this scene, Christ's disciples, "filled with the Holy Spirit...began to speak with other tongues, which the Spirit gave them utterance." When a crowd gathers around them, "every man heard [the disciples] speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?" Here is a Christian guarantee for Ivanov's conceptualization of reading: a speaker is overtaken by a voice from a higher sphere in order to communicate to a listener in the listener's "own tongue."[47] The higher sphere

---

[44] …заставить самое душу слушателя петь со мною другим, нежели я, голосом…
[45] Я не символист, если слова мои равны себе, если они — не эхо иных звуков, о которых не знаешь, как о Духе, откуда они приходят и куда уходят, — и если они не будят эхо в лабиринтах душ.
[46] …единственное, что толкает нас в объятия собеседника, — это желание удивиться своим собственным словам…
[47] Acts 2:4-8

guarantees communicability and appropriateness, but there remains an admixture of otherness in this conflated voice.

In "On the interlocutor" Mandelstam reinforces the conflation of self and other in his own idea of reading, but takes issue with the idea of a higher guarantee. In Mandelstam's conception, there is no infallible guarantor of language, only speaker, addressee—and time. Time, not the higher voice, guarantees otherness. The transference of language, occurring as it does across a sea of deep time, is unpredictable; otherwise there would be no otherness and no surprise.

In the essay's first section, Mandelstam makes a distinction between an unknown reader and one that doesn't exist—evoking, to illustrate the latter, the uncanny sensation of being addressed by a madman. The speech of a madman, Mandelstam claims, is frightening because it is not addressed to anyone in particular: "Nothing frightens a person more than another person who has nothing to do with him" (I 182).[48] However, the speech of a poet is also not addressed to anyone in particular:

> Usually, when a person has something to say, he turns to people, seeks out listeners—It's the opposite with a poet: he runs "to the shores of desert waves, to the wide-rustling forests." The abnormality is plain... The suspicion of madness falls on the poet.[49]
>
> (I 182)

The embedded citation of the final lines of Puskhin's lyric "Poet" ("to the shores...") cements and legitimizes the poet's isolation from the quotidian business of "normality" and his ejection from the quotidian world which is "filled with sounds and storm"[50] (Pushkin, II 179) out toward the edges of civilization. But despite Mandelstam's ironic judgment on the

[48] Нет ничего более страшного для человека, чем другой человек, которому нет до него никакого дела.
[49] Обыкновенно человек, когда имеет что–нибудь сказать, идет к людям, ищет слушателей; — поэт наоборот, — бежит "на берега пустынных волн, в широкишумные дубровы." Ненормальность очевидна... Подозрение в безумии падает на поэта.
[50] Звуков и смятенья полн.

"abnormality" of Pushkin's poet-figure, he observes quite seriously poets can be told from madmen because their speech is not *really* addressed to no one:

> ...people are correct, when they slander with insanity the person whose speech is directed at inanimate objects, at nature, and not at his living brothers. And they would have the right to turns away from the poet in horror, as from a madman, if his word was really addressed to no one. But that's not so...[51]
>
> (I 182-3)

Following this observation, Mandelstam invokes the figure of a poet-priest—a caricature of a Symbolist poet after Ivanov's conception—who in orienting his speech toward a perfectly attuned reader-listener ends up speaking to no one, and thereby inhabiting the discourse of a madman rather than that of a poet.

Typefying the figure of the poet-priest, Mandelstam defines him as someone who "directed his attention exclusively to acoustics" (I 183).[52] The gesture toward acoustics can be read as a dig at Ivanov's concentration on harmony in "Thoughts on Symbolism," especially as this "harmony" presupposes a perfect attunement that can only be guaranteed from beyond the phenomenal world. For Mandelstam, acoustics turns into a byword for the egocentrism and practical solipsism which characterize an "acoustic" attitude towards the reader.

> He casts a sound into the architecture of the soul and, with his characteristic narcissism, tracks its wanderings beneath the vaults of another's psyche... In this respect he is like "prétre Martin"...who performs and attends[53] the same Mass...[54]
>
> (I 183)

---

[51] ...люди правы, когда клеймят именем безумца того, чьи речи обращены к бездушным предметам, к природе, а не к живым братьям. И были бы вправе в ужасе отшатнуться от поэта, как от безумного, если бы слово его действительно ни к кому не обращалось. Но это не так.

[52] …обратил свою вниманию исключительно на акустику.

[53] The verb *slushat',* while when paired with *messa* (Mass) means "to attend," carries the fundamental meaning of "to listen (to)."

[54] Он бросает звук в архитектуру души и, со свойственной ему самовлюбленностью, следит за блужданиями его под сводами чужой психики... В этом отношении он будет похож на "prétre Martin"... который сам служит мессу и слушает ее.

The confluence of the words priest *(prétre),* architecture *(arkhitektura),* and vault *(svod)* place this speech act in a cathedral, which for Mandelstam in this period is the primary site both of the creative act and of the birth of his post-Symbolist poetics (see below). In this figure, the poet-priest is misusing the creative space of the cathedral to seek out the echo of his own voice. The very architecture into which he casts his voice recalls the idea of architecture in "Morning of Acmeism" as the pinnacle of human creation, something built to achieve heights not originally given to human beings. This association suggests that the priest-poet may also in some way be the architect of the cathedral, that he has in fact built it for the purpose of echoing his own voice—and this idea is followed up in the same paragraph of "O sobesednike," when Mandelstam provides another image—also of sound and vibration—to amplify the narcissistic solipsism of a poet who would create his listener: "The poet isn't just a musician, he's also Stradivarius...occupied with measuring the proportions of the violin's 'body'—the listener's psyche."[55] But readers are not violins, Mandelstam asserts in the following lines; a listener who shares properties with a musical instrument simply does not exist: "We don't know, we never know, where these listeners could be..." (I 183).[56]

For Ivanov, however, the structure of the soul is not architectural, but ephemeral, and does not seek predictability. It is not a cathedral into which one casts his voice for the sake of a famliar echo, but rather a labyrinth, in which a voice would not only presumably be transmuted by the unpredictable paths it must follow, but would also suffice for the only deictic marker that might orient a speaker and interlocutor (assuming they're stuck in the same labyrinth) to one another.

[55] Поэт не только музыкант, он же и Страдивариус, великий мастер по фабрикации скрипок, озабоченный вычислением пропорций «коробки» — психики слушателя.
[56] Не знаем, никогда не знаем, где эти слушатели...

For Ivanov, the poet's voice provides deictic markers not only between the poet and reader, but also to a further triangulated point above them. The poet causes a vibration in the reader that alerts him to universal harmonics which he has not yet heard. This is a distinctly Symbolist reading of acoustic resonance, as the overtones that the poem brings forth for the reader to catch are inherently transcendent; they span the individual souls of the poet and reader and join them to the oversoul. Indeed, Ivanov claims that a poet distinguishes himself as a Symbolist precisely by evoking a harmonic vibration in the addressee's soul:

> And so, I'm not a Symbolist, if I don't awake with an ineffable hint or influence in the heart of a listener a feeling of things untransmittable, similar to a primordial memory or a distant, dim premonition, or a trembling at the approach of someone familiar and desired...[57]
>
> (II 608)

The symbol itself tunes the receptive soul to the penetrating vibrations of the artwork—elsewhere, Ivanov likens it to a rainbow which "flares up between the ray of the word and the moisture of the soul that reflects the ray..." (51). The poem strikes a note that is both familiar and new to poet and listener: it evokes harmonies latent in the reader's soul, which are reflected back to the poet as both his own and not his own. It is in a sense the discovery of a new sound, a new voice. Ivanov's Symbolist poet is then not a Stradivarius designing the perfect violin; in fact,

> …if my listener is only a mirror, only a reverberation, only a receiver, only a container—if the ray of my *word* doesn't betroth my *silence* to his silence in a *rainbow* of a mysterious *testament*: then I'm not a *Symbolist* poet...[58]
>
> (II 606)

---

[57] Итак, я не символист, если не бужу неуловимым намеком или влиянием в сердце слушателя ощущений непередаваемых, похожих порой на изначальное воспоминание…порой на далекое, смутное предчувствие, порой на трепет чьего-то знакомого и желанного приближения…

[58] …если мой слушатель — только зеркало, только отзвук, только приемлющий, только вмещающий, — если луч моего *слова* не обручает моего молчания с его молчанием радугой тайного завета: тогда я не символический поэт...

While Mandelstam figures the parodic poet-priest as designing instruments according to his own harmonic standards, Ivanov's actual reception scheme depends on the existence of harmonic standards that originate outside both poet and reader. This scheme, then, does allow in some measure for the unexpected—the tuning of the space between reader and poet to the vibrations of higher, heretofore unknown spheres. Mandelstam's claim that "there is no lyric without dialogue" *(net liriki bez dialoga)* (I 187) therefore has more in common with Ivanov's acoustic orientation than he lets on.

When Mandelstam's own reception model comes to the fore in Section II of "O sobesednike," its real differences from Ivanov's model begin to become clear. These differences are apparent in Mandelstam's concentration on the word rather than on music, his expansion of the poet-reader relationship out into a historical line of interlocutors, his preference for water (rather than air) as the element that commumicates poetic discourse—but mainly his introduction of time as a key factor in poetic reception. Tying these ideas together is a model of poetic transmission that bases itself on appropriation. In fact, appropriation may be what Mandelstam believes enables poetic communication, and this idea becomes apparent through analysis of his famous emblem for the poet-reader relationship: the sailor who casts a message-bearing bottle into the waves, and the bottle's finder on the shore.

This emblem is deceptively simple: Mandelstam sneaks a bold and perhaps fallacious logical move into his detailed analysis of the act of reception (finding on the shore) after a brief treatment of the act of writing (casting the bottle). The poet-sailor's side is accounted for with a predictable anxiety before death and desire to preserve one's name and story in any way possible: "A sailor at a critical moment throws into the waters of the ocean a sealed bottle with his name and a description of his fate." This is the only sentence

devoted to the poet's side of the reception model. The rest of the model is devoted to the act of reading, and the very quantity and detail of prose on the reader's side shift the model's weight of subjectivity firmly to the reader.

Mandelstam concentrates on uncertainties of time and space to distinguish reading from listening in the normal sense, and here his model begins to depart from Ivanov's ideal. First, the passage of time comes to the fore: " After many long years, wandering through the dunes, I find [the bottle] in the sand..." Second, Mandelstam emphasizes water as the medium of communication:

> The ocean with all its vast element has come to [the bottle's] aid and has been able to fulfill [the bottle's] fate; and a feeling of providence overcomes the finder.[59]
>
> (I 184)

Mandelstam's ideas of both time and space emphasize happenstance and surprise. In the first case, the reader-figure is wandering through the dunes' barren territory, searching for nothing in particular; meanwhile, the bottle has been traveling for many years on an uncharted course over the water. These are two indeterminate vectors, one of shifting and random directionality, the other of deep time. They are brought together (and into line) at the moment of finding. By comparison, when poet and reader meet in Ivanov, it is according to a plan, even if that plan is incomprehensible to the rational mind. In Ivanov, poetry is delivered by resonance with a higher or holy truth—and indeed Mandelstam shows the reader, at the moment of finding, seized with a feeling of providence. But if the bottle is hereby fulfilling a predestination, as Mandelstam indicates, that fate is achieved in the encounter between the finder and the word, not between the finder and the *realiora* the door to which the word unlocks. (The end of the investigation and the source of mystery, for Mandelstam, is the word.)

[59] Океан всей своей огромной стихией пришел ей на помощь, — и помог исполнить ее предназначение, и чувство провиденциального охватывает нашедшего.

The most immediate difference between Mandelstam's model and Ivanov's becomes apparent between his discussions of time and space. This is the primacy of the individual, the reader's subjectivity in poetic discourse—a primacy which according to Ivanov's assimilative, transcendental philosophy would be misguided (if not evil) and would point humanity away from its goal, whether moral or aesthetic. For Mandelstam, the subjectivity of the individual is where poetry happens, and therefore it occupies the center of his idea of reception. This concentration on the individual echoes Mandelstam's idea of poetic appropriation in "Villon," but that appropriation now presupposes the presence of a reading other rather than a bifurcation of the poet's subjectivity.

To illustrate the reading other, Mandelstam describes his own experience reading a poem by Evgeny Boratynsky from 1828. He orients the poem's dominant subjectivity not in the poet but in the reader: "I find it in the sand, read the letter… I had a right to do this. I didn't open someone else's letter. The letter sealed in the bottle was addressed to the one who finds it. I found it. Therefore, I am the secret addressee." The word "I" (ia) appears five times in this passage, three times occupying the primary or final position in the sentence, so that it becomes a rhythmical marker. Though the sailor has written his name on the message, the reader doesn't seem to notice it. Rather, he pushes forward his own subjectivity as holding sway over this inscriptive act. Rhetorically, Mandelstam transforms the unstable and anonymous addressing of the bottle "to the one who finds it" into the present subjectivity of the self: "It was addressed to me." The sailor survives in his message as a set of traces: his name, his date, and his "last will," which presumably bequeaths the message (in the absence of any possessions) to its finder.[60] These traces make the finder into a reader.

[60] It turns out the poem (or perhaps the work of art) is a bequeathal in which Mandelstam is interested. (See p. 77.)

The primacy of the self in this model echoes Mandelstam's model of poetic empathy, analyzed above. In that model, everything—even surprise—emanates from the "ia." Thus Mandelstam seems to posit a part of the "ia"—the present self—that is two things at once: it is the part of the self that surprises the self (here taking the form of words with which one surprises oneself), and also the actual other, the interlocutor, insofar as the self can represent this other to itself. We have seen Mandelstam, considering the cathedral of Notre Dame in "Morning of Acmeism," suppose that the logical extension of the self into a bodily representation (in this case, architecture) creates a "kingdom of surprise" (see p. 52). He looks at Notre Dame and is surprised to see himself. In "On the interlocutor," conversely, he looks at himself and sees a conversation partner.

Mandelstam takes care when setting up his reception model to center it on a "ia" that lies between the poet and reader, a subjectivity located in the poem of which both poet and reader partake. Directly after his "ia"-dominated description of finding the bottle, which ends with "Therefore, I am the secret addressee," Mandelstam places the (untitled) Boratynsky poem:

> Мой дар убог, и голос мой не громок,
> Но я живу — и на земле мое
> Кому–нибудь любезно бытие:
> Его найдет далекий мой потомок
> В моих стихах — как знать — душа моя
> Окажется с душой его в сношеньи,
> И как нашел я друга в поколеньи,
> Читателя найду в потомстве я.
>
> My gift is poor, and my voice not loud,/ But I live, and on this earth my/ being is amiable to someone:/ My distant descendant will find it/ In my verse—who knows—my soul/ Will find itself in intercourse with his,/ And as I've found a friend in my generation/ I will find a reader in posterity.
>
> (I 184)

The poem repeats several of the thematic markers in Mandelstam's reading model: the importance of deep time; the orientation towards a distant, unknown interlocutor; the "intercourse" of "souls" that takes place at the moment of reading. Indeed, in the paragraph that follows, Mandelstam gives an explicit analogy of the poem to the found bottle that centers on the anonymity of address from the sailor/poet's side:

> The letter, like the poem, is not definitively addressed to anyone personally. Nevertheless, both have an addressee: the letter—the one who noticed it by chance in the sand; the poem—to "the reader in posterity."[61]

But in the next sentence he highlights again the confusion of anonymity and personal subjectivity from the finder/reader's side, which he's claimed marks the act of poetic reception:

> I'd like to know who has come across these lines of Boratynsky and not shuddered with joy and an uncanny trembling, as when one is called suddenly by name.[62]

There is a difference between identifying with a poem—even feeling oneself in "intercourse" with the poet's soul, as in the Boratynsky poem—and feeling oneself called by name.

Boratynsky and Mandelstam seem to agree that reading can only happen over deep time, that the poet has to disappear before the reader can participate in the poem. Mandelstam also sets Boratynsky's poem up to be read as a statement of subjective confusion: the sharing of the poetic "ia" by poet and reader. The salient "ia" at the poem's end echoes the sentences of Mandelstam's that introduce the poem: *"Ia* vprave byl sdelat' eto. *Ia* ne raspechatal chuzhogo pis'ma... Nashel *ia." (I* was in the right to do this. *I* didn't open someone else's letter… *I* found it.) Mandelstam likely intends his reader to read his "Nashel ia" (I found) against Boratynsky's "naidu...ia" (I…will find). These simple clauses

[61] Письмо, равно и стихотворение, ни к кому в частности определенно не адресованы. Тем не менее оба имеют адресата: письмо — того, кто случайно заметил бутылку в песке, стихотворение — «читателя в потомстве».

[62] Хотел бы я знать, кто из тех, кому попадутся на глаза названные строки Боратынского, не вздрогнет радостной и жуткой дрожью, какая бывает, когда неожиданно окликнут по имени.

thus bear comparison within the scene of Mandelstam reading Boratynsky's poem. Boratynsky, as poet, "finds" a reader; Mandelstam, as reader, "finds" a bottle, which stands in for the poem. In a sense, however, each is also finding a "ia." For Boratynsky, this finding of a "ia" may justify his word order from a thematic point of view. His "ia," if it can be said to be metonymous for his soul ("dusha"), is what will couple with the reader's soul in the scene of future reading. As Mandelstam's reader encounters Boratynsky's "ia" following upon Mandelstam's "ia," he hears Mandelstam reading Boratynsky's poem. Two voices thereby sound at once, binding also the positions of poet and reader. On both sides, a "ia" comes into being.

But these voices and positions, though they share a "ia"—a subjectivity—, do not become one voice or one position; they do not align, as in Ivanov, to flesh out a divinely guaranteed signification. Rather, they are introduced into a dialectic between the epistemological spheres, of self and other. In "François Villon," Mandelstam has described Villon's poetic appropriations as literary theft: "...he appropriates for himself unobtainable gifts with the aid of pointed irony..." (I 173). Villon, unable physically to possess the object he desires, appropriates it through language, here manifest as irony. In a similar move, the reader-finder in "On the interlocutor" appropriates the bottle by means of irony: "I had a right to do it. I didn't open someone else's letter. I found it." This move is ironic because it switches the epistemological sphere of the intention behind the address. In the sailor's sphere, the intention behind the address is anonymous: the letter is addressed to whomever finds it. Meanwhile, in the finder's sphere, the letter is addressed to the finder in particular—even though that may only be true in the moment of finding (that is of reading, or *being* addressed). In this sphere, the intentionality switches location from the sailor to the finder, from the poet to the reader. This ironic act in both Villon's and the finder's case is intrinsic to what Mandelstam understands as poetic thievery. In each case, the thief

(whether poet or reader) appropriates the object not through ownership (which is impossible—it isn't theirs) but through internalization. This act is ironic because the thief claims to wield an object that no one gave him and to which he has no right. The object's not-belonging-to-him is maintained after he appropriates it—thus can Villon in essence split, and carry on an internal dialogue with the objects of his poetry; thus can the speaker in Mandelstam's scheme of empathy be constantly surprised at hearing his own words, as if they have been spoken to him in dialogue rather than monologue. The presence of the other within the self—as a speaker, a voice—is what enables poetic discourse to approach dialogue.

Dialogue, in fact, is what's missing from Ivanov's scheme of poetic reception: the poet-priest that Mandelstam criticizes can indeed be surprised, but not by words—rather by harmonies in higher spheres. In the final section of "O sobesednike," Mandelstam recapitulates this critique: "One shouldn't concern oneself with acoustics: that will come on its own. Better concern oneself with distance" (I 187).[63] Here he implies that "distance" can replace "acoustics" as a poetic orientation towards the reader—and distance turns out to be a key factor in Mandelstam's poetics of reception. Already in "François Villon," Mandelstam valorizes Villon's appreciation for the distance between subject and object as an admission of the "impossibility of ownership."[64] In "On the interlocutor," distance allows an *interesting* orientation towards the interlocutor: "...the savor of conversation is inversely proportional to our actual knowledge of our interlocutor and directly proportional to our eagerness to interest him in ourselves..." (I 187)[65] For Mandelstam, language must be surprising to be interesting, and, it seems, the primary force pushing a speaker into

[63] Не об акустике следует заботиться: она придет сама. Скорее о растоянии.
[64] See p. 75.
[65] Вкус сообщительности обратно пропорционален нашему реальному знанию о собеседнике и прямо пропорционален стремлению заинтересовать его собой.

conversation or a poet into poetry is a desire to be surprised—surprised, moreover, by language that originates from the subject: what makes us want to speak is a "desire to be surprised by our own words, to be captivated by their novelty and unexpectedness."

This attitude is thus more solipsistic than the Ivanovian scheme that Mandelstam is attempting to revise, because it is wholly centered in the subject even as it demands an interlocutor. However, Mandelstam does not privilege the speaker over the listener, or vice versa. Rather, he privileges the "ia," no matter who it belongs to at any observable moment. His dialectic between speaker and listener consists of two exclusive epistemological spheres—two discrete subjectivities—that are capable of mutual apperception, and in the performance of the poem bring each other into being.

This model is backed up by the Hegelian epistemology of perception that Mandelstam invokes in "Morning of Acmeism," basing its poetics on the limits of the self rather than otherworldly intuitions and correspondences. Claiming that "there is no lyric without dialogue," Mandelstam will not go so far as to place this dialogue outside the borders of perception and logic. His epistemology states that we can read the world outside ourselves (he will imagine twenty years later in "Conversation about Dante") only as flags on a map denoting positions of a battle that is actually raging somewhere else. Mandelstam's scheme of reception is solipsistic not by choice, but rather by necessity. He complicates this solipsism by multiplying it, allowing for two subjectivities—in a simple model consisting of a poet and a reader—or more than two, in a more realistic model of poetic textuality, which can bear not only multiple readers and interpreters, but also (especially in Mandelstam's case) multiple sources.

Mandelstam's constant engagement with ideas of intertextuality will be expanded in Chapter Five, which deals principally with the *Conversation about Dante.* In that essay Mandelstam makes as complete a model of multiplicity as he will devise: a multiplicity of

texts and a multiplicity of subjectivities will flow together to create a consciousness particular to a singular reading of a singular poem. But the brightnesses in Mandelstam's essays of the early 19-teens will mostly be buried for the Great War and the Revolution and the hungry peripatetic years of the Russian Civil War—the poems of *Tristia* will present a desperate elegy to classical antiquity, hurling the word to the underworld until it learns how to emerge again; and the essays of the early 1920s will inhere the word into a Eucharistic totem of the humanistic spirit. The word will go into hibernation, and in doing so will enter the deep rift that Mandelstam has already claimed is necessary for the word to survive until its next reading.

CHAPTER THREE

1920-25: FAILURE OF SPEECH

О, глиняная жизнь! О, умиранье века!
Боюсь, лишь тот поймет тебя,
В ком беспомощная улыбка человека,
Который потерял себя.

O life of clay! O dying of the age!/ I fear that only he will understand you/ In whom is the helpless smile of a man/ Who has lost himself.

"1 января 1924/1 January 1924"

The Word Goes Underground

The three central programmatic essays Mandelstam composed around 1913—"Francois Villon," "On the interlocutor," and "Morning of Acmeism"—were not to find their equals in his critical prose until nearly ten years later. Over this turbulent time, during which Russia entered the Great War, plunged into revolution, suffered through civil war and War Communism, and finally emerged into the breathing space of the New Economic Plan, Mandelstam charted his personal, social, and literary development largely through poetry. Perhaps during those peripatetic years he simply never felt at home enough to write sentences or to pose a critical standpoint—perhaps in the absence of his friends and colleagues in the Guild of Poets he felt no call to think about poetry from the outside. When Mandelstam did return to prose in 1921 (the same year as the inception of the NEP), he

returned with a vengeance; indeed, for the rest of the decade he published almost exclusively in prose.

One would be hard pressed, at first, to discover the reader as a theme of Mandelstam's essays of this period; however, it is there, waiting and maturing until Mandelstam will bring it back to life in his prose of the late 20s and early 30s. His most salient foray into reader reception, an essay called "A thrust" (Vypad, 1924), presents a curious claim that can serve as an umbrella over the thinking in these early essays: he praises Russians for not understanding their poets. "The most comforting thing about the state of Russian poetry," he writes, "may be the deep and pure ignorance, the unknowledgeability of the people [narod] about their poetry" (II 412).[1] This valuing of ignorance is at least partly meant ironically—but it also falls in line with another claim in the essay, one that harks back to the model of reading Mandelstam proposed a decade earlier in "On the interlocutor": poetry "has not yet reached its readers, and maybe will reach them only after the poetic luminaries that sent out their rays to this distant [otdalennyi] and still unattainable goal have been extinguished" (II 412).[2] In the earlier essay, reading only happened after a deep distancing by time and space; the poem had to bob willy-nilly across an ocean to find its addressee. Even more prophetically of this later essay, Mandelstam in "On the interlocutor" likened poetic communication to trading signals with the planet Mars. According to that early essay, there would be something untrustworthy about poetry that pretended to reach its readers before its time came due—before it had accomplished its journey. If in "A thrust" the Russian reading public doesn't

[1] …Быть может, самое утешительное во всем положении русской поэзии — это глубокое и чистое неведение, незнание народа о своей поэзии.

[2] …еще не дошла до своих читателей и, может быть, дойдет до них только тогда, когда погаснут поэтические светила, пославшие свои лучи к этой отдаленной и пока недостижимой цели.

accept its poets in the present day, they are only reacting honestly to a poetry that must ripen along with its culture before it can be read.

Mandelstam will spend the early 1920s theorizing this ripening, in a way that both derides the cult of "machine poetry" taking root via Mayakovsky (promoting "poetry for all")[3] and predicts the survival of the word through "free incarnation." Without being overtly Christological, Mandelstam enacts a Eucharistic metaphysics for the word. His language when discussing philological topics, as well as the language of Gumilev, and also the leading theorists of Symbolism, Andrei Bely and Vyacheslav Ivanov, demonstrate that the debates between the Symbolists and the Acmeists on the nature of the word run in parallel with theological debates occurring at the same time; and Irina Paperno makes a convincing argument that Mandelstam's solution to these questions lies in the word's dual nature (see below).

Perhaps the most salient point for these debates on the word was the heresy of the Russian monks on Mt. Athos, who believed that the name of God was itself divine.[4] The debate over imiaslavie, or veneration of the word, sparked a long and heated discussion among Russian theologians and philologists, which culminated in 1912-13 as Symbolism entered its famous decline and new groups such as Acmeism and Futurism emerged as its inheritors. Bely and Ivanov took up positions alongside the imiaslavtsy of Mt. Athos, claiming that the poetic word is of a different nature than the word in everyday speech, holding up Potebnia's idea that the word is an "inner form" (vnutrennyi obraz) of the thing it denotes, and going further to propose that the poetic word presents an "inner form" smacking of myth or divinity.

[3] See p. 114.
[4] For a detailed discussion of the Athos heresy and its role in the Symbolist-Acmeist debates, see Paperno, *passim.*

Mandelstam in his essays of 1920-21 will also partake of Potebnia's "inner image," writing in "The word and culture" that "even before one word exists, the poem is already sounding. It is the inner image [vnutrennyi obraz] that sounds; the ear of the poet can make it out" (I 215).[5] But as Irina Paperno notes in her article "On the Nature of the Poetic Word," Mandelstam, unlike Bely and Ivanov, believes that there is only one type of word—no words that purport to be divine, "destined…exclusively for liturgical use" (I 228),[6] no words that establish a closed system of signification with their proper symbolic referent. For Mandelstam, every word is a significant inner image, which is free not only from the burden of divine or mythological portent but also from the burden of fixed signification. "The word is Psyche," he claims in "The word and culture,"

> —the living word doesn't denote an object, but freely chooses, like a domicile, this or that objective significance, phenomenality, tender body. And the word wanders freely around the thing, like a soul around an abandoned but not yet forgotten body.[7]
>
> (I 215)

Thus, the word is subject neither to metaphysical nor to physical assignations. It is, rather, "speaking flesh" ("On the Nature of the Word"), an image that Thomas Seifrid in his book *The Word Made Self* traces back to Potebnia, in that it reveals the word as "a living being, a self, rather than pure external form" (74). Seifrid points out that Mandelstam's understanding of the word "combine[s] Potebnia's idea of the word's structure with a personification of the word that derives from Christian doctrine" (77). In addition to Mandelstam's analogy of the word with the Eucharist and with "flesh and bread" in "On the

[5] Ни одного слова еще нет, а стихотворение уже звучит. Это звучит внутренний образ, это его осязает слух поэта.
[6] …предназнач[ены...] исключительно для литургического употребления.
[7] Слово — Психея. Живое слово не обозначает предметы, а свободно выбирает, как бы для жилья, ту или иную предметную значимость, вещность, милое тело. И вокруг вещи слово блуждает свободно, как душа вокруг брошенного, но не забытого тела.

Nature of the Word," Seifrid cites the "free incarnation" that Mandelstam claims makes the Russian language into "flesh that makes sounds and speaks" (77-8).

The idea of free incarnation, of course, introduces a paradox: on the one hand, the word is free to choose its dwelling place; but on the other hand, it is subject to the demands and restrictions of the flesh once it begins to dwell in it. Irina Paperno finds a solution—or at least an image—for this problem in the Chalcedonian Creed (451AD), which

> …maintains the oneness of Christ's two natures, the human and the divine. This oneness in no way diminishes the distinction between the two natures united within the one figure of Christ. In the person of Christ (the Word made flesh) human nature, in no way lessened, is united with the divine. In a similar manner, Mandelshtam's "word as such" represents a unity of the word's denotative ("common") and symbolic meanings.
>
> (301)

Thus, the word can't be pinned down either as a semantic category (divine or earthly, symbolic or denotative) or in one, as a marker of a specific meaning. It is essentially hard to pin down, so that (one could argue) its spiritual freedom is indistinguishable from its fleshly responsibility.

Moreover, it is implied, since in a Chalcedonian scheme the word already contains symbolic valence, it is spurious if not dishonest to further convert the word into a symbol, as the "false Symbolists"[8] of (actual) Russian Symbolism have done. In "On the nature of the word," Mandelstam describes the action of language as the domestication of the phenomenal world into the human sphere: "humaniz[ing] the surrounding world, warm (sogret') it with the most genuine teleological warmth (teplo)." Language "creates forms, like pieces of equipment, for the use of man." Any object given linguistic form, and thus

[8] Mandelstam's term is "*lzhe*simvolisty," trading on the nuance of "pretender to the throne" implicit in such formulations as *"lzhe*dmitry," or "the false Dmitri."

humanized, "may become a piece of equipment, and consequently a symbol[9]"—which prompts the question: "do we then need an additional, intentional Symbolism in Russian poetry?"[10] Henri Bergson is one of the touchstones of this essay, and he appears here to give a theoretical foundation to Mandelstam's scheme of linguistic domestication: this is "a system in the Bergsonian sense of the word, which a person unfurls about himself like the [Bergsonian] fan of phenomena,[11] freed from dependence on time, subordinated to their intrinsic connection via the human I" (I 227).[12] The human I now takes precedence not only over extrinsic symbolic cosmologies but over the action of time itself, and Mandelstam uses that focus on individual subjectivity to assign his word-symbols a special teleology: one of transfiguration and redemption of the person.

However, as Grigory Freidin points out in his book A Coat of Many Colors, this "adherence to the sacramental, chthonic, and ultimately Eucharistic narrative" is only one "pole" of Mandelstam's poetics. The other half is "the principle of existential uncertainty, the 'perhaps,' whose rhetoric he and his contemporaries had absorbed from Annenskii, Shestov, and, ultimately, Nietzsche" (185). This "perhaps," Freidin writes, makes up Mandelstam's principal departure from the idea, championed by the Symbolists but going all the way back to St. Paul, of the poet as kenotic martyr.

Literature, Mandelstam claims in "On the nature of the word," must be constructed so as to preserve the word, to keep its associations and history intact, like "the funerary bark of the Egyptian dead, in which are laid everything necessary to continue the person's

[9] This theme is treated quite elegantly in Mandelstam's poem "Nashedshii podkovu" (The finder of a horseshoe, 1923) in which whole forests are envisioned as the masts they may become.
[10] ...очеловечивание окружающего мира, согревание его тончайщим телеологическим теплом."
[11] The "fan of phenomena" is detailed in Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution.*
[12] ...система в бергсоновском смысле слова, которую человек развертывает вокруг себя, как веер явлений, освобожденных от временной зависимости, соподчиненных внутренней связи через человеческое я.

earthly wanderings, right up to the jug of fragrances, the mirror, and the comb" (I 227).[13] Here, we see cultural memory as the controlling force, and the bark as the forum of domestication: the "pieces of equipment" that accompany the deceased not only remind him of where he came from but are presumed to continue to be necessary to him. It is a strange picture of domestication and symbolism, as the central I around which the objects are arranged is of course dead, and the symbols of "equipment" thus deprived of any power or potential. It seems Mandelstam cannot let go of the "Hellenism" implicit in the Eucharist; he can imagine the body (and the word) on the way to a new existence, but will stop short at the door of their transfiguration. It is not for nothing that his visions of the afterlife stop at Hades—both in the Psyche-Antigone poems of the early 1920s and in the "Conversation about Dante" (1933), which concentrates on the Inferno, transfigurations of people and words are metaphorical—that is, they are products of intellectual play; they do not cease to be literary. He cannot, as Ivanov does, cast language aside for Christ. For Mandelstam, Christos and Logos are equal parts of the godhead. Since 1909, in his long letter to Ivanov, he has been a proponent of doubt (as distinct from Ivanov's "closed system" of signification), and doubt again informs his messianism.

In this chapter I will argue that the two "poles" identified by Freidin in Mandelstam's writing of the early-mid 1920s—the "perhaps" and the (secular) Eucharist—are bound together into Mandelstam's idea of reading: the unstable guarantee of the high seas, and the finder who, by dint of the unknown, unpredictable other (author) in himself, will allow the message to come out of the bottle and be composed anew. In order for this to happen, however, the word first must be decomposed, pushed under and brought apart—as in the poem "Swallow," the word must first be set free among the shades in order to come

[13] …могильная лада египетских покойников, в которую кладется все нужное для продолжения земного странствия человека, вплоть до ароматического кувшина, зеркальца и гребня.

back again. In exploring this process, Mandelstam uncovers in the early-mid 1920s two scenarios of failure, in which the word is transmitted without being decomposed and therefore losing the potential to be recomposed, that is read. These are the theater and translation. In each of these non-poetic literary activities, the word is interpreted rather than written or read—in the theater, by the actors; in translation, by the translator—and that interpretation keeps the audience from reading. These visions of non-reading will become nightmares by the time Mandelstam's poetic muse runs out around 1925. This episode in the growth of his poetics sees the word descend into Hades, without much idea of how it might return.

Clay into Flesh: The Fate of the Vessel

Mandelstam's poetry of the late teens and early twenties dwells on the theme of cultural inheritance. By the time of his third collection of poetry, 1921-1925 (which contains "The age" *(Vek)* and "The horseshoe-finder" *(Nashedshii podkovu),* among other significant works on the theme of cultural inheritance) he has developed the naïve longings of 1915's "I have not heard the tales of Ossian"[14] into a complex scheme of literary reception and creation in which culture behaves much like the word: both gain survival by being creatively appropriated in new works of art. A specifically messianic teleology for both the word and culture is key to this conceptual scheme.

In the 1922 essay "A word on Georgian art" (Koe-chto o gruzinskom iskusstve) and on through some ten essays written the same year, Mandelstam continues the work of "The word and culture" and "On the nature of the word," laying the groundwork for a messianism that is not only literary but also humanistic and cultural. Faced in the War Communism years with the breakup of society, the institutionalization of a collective

[14] See Chapters Two and Four.

identity, and the resulting "machine" literature—death threats to culture and the individual—Mandelstam envisions the redemption of both culture and the individual through death and resurrection. "A word on Georgian art," written upon Mandelstam's first sojourn in the Caucasus in 1921 and infected by his enchantment with Georgian poetry, presents the image of an isolated artistic tradition form still awaiting its appearance on the world stage. "Georgia never merged with the East, was always separate from it," he claims[15]; thus it has already produced work similar in development to Picasso's, and the poetry of Vazha Pshaveli (whom Mandelstam greatly admired, and translated) receives Mandelstam's approval in that it "displays European values" (II 234).[16] Mandelstam at once lauds the isolation of Georgian art from the East and its place in European culture, and places this isolation and imminent brotherhood in an image of wine vessels, a cultural symbol both of preservation and of development:

> The Georgians preserve their wine in long, narrow jugs which they bury in the earth. Herein is the prototype of Georgian culture—the earth has preserved the narrow but noble forms of its artistic tradition, has sealed the vessel, full of ferment and fragrance.[17]
>
> (II 233)

When Mandelstam goes on to explain this image, he lauds the Georgian "spirit of drunknness, product of a mysterious inner ferment"[18] but doesn't clarify the importance of the vessels' being buried in earth, a fact which he repeats: "a narrow clay amphora with wine, buried in the earth" (II 234).[19] Reference to earlier essays from 1921, however, cannot help but connect this image of burial to a scheme of literary resurrection. Perhaps the most salient formulation from these essays is the thought from "The word and culture" that

[15] Грузия никогда не сливалась с Востоком, была отдельной от него.
[16] …представляет европейскую ценность.
[17] Грузины сохраняют вино в узких, длинных кувшинах и зарывают их в землю. В этом прообраз грузинской культуры – земля сохранила узкие, но благородные формы художественной традиции, запечатала полный брожения и аромата сосуд.
[18] ...дух пьянства, продукт таинственного внутреннего брожения.
[19] …узкая глиняная амфора с вином, зарытая в землю.

"poetry is the plow that turns up time, so that the deep layers of time, its black earth, end up on top" (I 212).[20] Here the deep earth, metonymic for deep time, is churned up, and what was buried in it presumably comes to life. A line from a poem written the previous year declares, "Time has been plowed up by the plow, the rose too was once earth" (I 143).[21] In this line, new life rises explicitly from the deeper layers of time/earth.

In the essay "Human wheat" (Pshenitsa chelovecheskaia), published in Berlin six months after "A word on Georgian art," the idea of resurrection returns, but this time the metaphor of transfiguration changes from wine to bread, from burial and fermentation to milling and baking. Here, the central metaphor is not the clay vessel but the grain of wheat. Mandelstam describes a sack of grain, each grain representing an individual person—but "human wheat longs to be ground up, transformed into flour, baked into bread" (II 248).[22] The grain of wheat as a symbol for the individual soul is a metaphor famous from St. Matthew and Dostoevsky; in the Evangelist's formulation, the wheat-seed ("pshenichnoe zerno," in the canonical Slavonic text) must die in the earth in order to bear fruit. For Mandelstam the image is more violent: in order to attain what he calls "a rebirth [or Renaissance] of European consciousness, by means of a restoration of Europeanism as our great common nationality" (II 250),[23] individuals must be ground up, mashed together, and baked into a new form. The idea—and reality—of violent and massive cultural upheaval brought in by Mandelstam's experience of recent history melds here with his longstanding preoccupation with Europeanness and cultural survival. Though the image of the individual ground up into a common mass is of course frightening given the violent

[20] Поэзия — плуг, взрывающий время так, что глубинные слои времени, его чернозем, оказываются сверху.
[21] Время вспахано плугом, и роза, землею была. "Sisters heaviness and tenderness/Sestri tiazhest' I nezhnost'," 149.
[22] Пшеница человеческая жаждет быть размолотой, обращенной в муку, выпеченной в хлеб.
[23] …возрождение европейского сознания, через восстановление европеизма как нашей большой народности...

socialist rhetoric of Mandelstam's time, not to mention the looming specter of Stalinism—the vision of the wheat-seed dying in order to live and multiply is overtly Christian; moreover it is in line with Mandelstam's own ideas of reading and the life of the word. His vision of history as a series of violent turns ("Political life is essentially catastrophic," II 249[24]) is Leninist only in its terms—its teleology is not political, but cultural.

Around the same time, Mandelstam published essays in three consecutive issues of the journal Rossiia (August through October 1922) that take his ideas about culture's survival in the face of history and place them in the literary and political realities of his own cultural-historical moment. In these essays, Mandelstam provides the first glimpse of the enemy of the word: the "machine poetry" that is coming to dominate popular conceptions of literature in the rising Soviet state.

"A. Blok," published in August 1922 in *Rossiia* (and in 1928 in Mandelstam's essay collection *O poezii (On Poetry)* under the title "Badger hole" (Barsuch'ia nora)), presents a complex set of images related to soil that at once recall Mandelstam's aphorism about poetry and time from "The word and culture"—"Poetry is the plow that turns up time..."—and address the cultural millenialism explored in "Human wheat" and "A word on Georgian art." Mandelstam posits the poetry of Aleksandr Blok (1880-1921) as a successful admixture of old and new European poetic traditions. He cites Blok's poem "The steps of the Commendatore" (Shagi Komandora), claiming it as a "triumph of European myth" because it "is not afraid of anachronism and contemporaneity" (II 254).[25] Blok's poem describes the moment that the statue of the Commendatore enters Don Juan's house; Mandelstam highlights the second line of the following stanza:

Пролетает, брызгнув в ночь огнями,
Черный, тихий, как сова, мотор,

[24] Политическая жизнь катастрофична по существу.
[25] ...торжество европейского мифа...не боится анахронизма и современности.

Тихими, тяжелыми шагами
В дом вступает Командор...

Having spattered the night with fire,/ An engine, black and quiet as an owl, flies past./ With quiet, heavy steps/ The Commendatore enters the house…[26]

(*Lirika* 247)

Commenting on the line, Mandelstam combines the Christological overtones of seed and soil and the image of poetry as a plow, which he had explored separately in previous essays: "Here the layers of time lay one on top of the other in a newly plowed-up poetic consciousness, and the grains of the old plot grew abundant shoots" (II 254).[27] Myth and modernity fuse in Blok's line as the speedy machines of the present day (the flying engine, presumably either a passing plane or a rushing automobile) make up a soundscape with the slow steps of the animated statue.

Here emerges a central difference in the way Mandelstam interprets the working of poetry in contrast to his take on history, as explored in "Human wheat." Mandelstam sees Blok's digging through layers of literary history—central to Mandelstam's idea of how poetry works—not as destruction but as hybridization: Blok

> ...felt style in an extraordinarily powerful way as breeding; for this reason he felt the life of language and literary form not as breaking-apart and destruction, but as hybridization, a coupling of different breeds, different blood, as a grafting of various types of fruit to a singular tree.[28]
>
> (II 255)

The cross-fertilization of myth and modernity in "The steps of the Commendatore," then, is a model for various types of hybridization in which Blok engaged. The idea of poetry as hybridization (which will be explored in greater detail a decade later in the essay

[26] Mandelstam actually misquotes Blok: "...тихий, черный, как сова, мотор." (A quiet engine, black as an owl.) SS II, 254. Mandelstam was writing on the run and likely quoting from memory.

[27] Здесь пласты времени легли друг на друга в заново вспаханном поэтическом сознании, и зерна старого сюжета дали обильные всходы.

[28] ...чрезвычайно сильно чувствовал стиль как породу, поэтому жизнь языка и литературной формы он ощущал не как ломку и разрушение, а как скрещивание, спаривание различных пород, кровей и как прививку различных плодов к одному и тому же дереву.

"Conversation about Dante"), implies participation in cultural life, at least in terms of reanimating past cultures in order to graft them to modernity. All this, he claims, is in the service of easing life out of chaos and into form. Again, the singular subjectivity is the model: "The poet's mental makeup disposes toward catastrophe... Poetic culture arises from an aspiration to avert catastrophe, to make it [poetry] dependent on a central systemic sun, whether it be the love of which Dante spoke, or music, at which Blok finally arrived" (II 256).[29] The poet's task, then, is to catch what is tending toward chaos and destruction, whether it comes from himself or his surroundings, and graft it onto a central trunk, or fix it in orbit around a (perhaps provisional) sun.

But the poet is more than a caretaker and arranger. As Mandelstam wrote in an early poem, "I am both the gardener and the flower"; and as the flower, he must go into the ground for the sake of the next gardener (and the next flower). In the Blok essay he figures the poet not only as a caretaker of the earth but also as an animal that burrows into it for shelter. The first published version of this essay was in fact called "Badger hole"; that title comes from this passage:

> Blok was a man of the ninteenth century *(vek)* and knew that the days of his century *(stoletiia)* were numbered. He greedily widened and deepened his inner world in time, much as the badger digs in the earth, setting up his dwelling place, tunneling out two exits. An age *(vek)* is a badger hole, and a man of his age *(vek)* lives and moves in a conservatively measured space, striving feverishly to extend his property and valuing above all the exits from his subterranean lair.[30]
>
> (II 253)

[29] Душевный строй поэта распологает к катастрофе... Поэтическая культура возникает из стремления предотварить катастрофу, поставить ее в зависимость от центрального солнца всей системы, будь то любовь, о которой сказал Дант, или музыка, к которой в конце концов пришел Блок.

[30] Блок был человеком девятнадцатого века и знал, что дни его столетия сочтены. Он жадно расширял и углублял свой внутренний мир во времени, подобно тому как барсук роется в земле, устраивая свое жилище, прокладывая из него два выхода. Век—барсучья нора, и человек своего века живет и движется в скупо отмеренном пространстве, лихорадочно стремится расширить свои владения и больше всего дорожит выходами из подземной норы.

The poet figured here partakes in a cultural cycle of death and rebirth. Fearing the destructive tendency of time, he preserves himself in a meaningful idea of time: the bounded unit of "century" or "age" ("vek" in Russian means both; "stoletiia" means only "century")—but leaving open the possibility for an eventual exit. The earth is figured as a kind of time that can be dug into, domesticized or "humanized" in the language of "On the nature of the word." An age is like the Egyptian funerary bark not only in its masque of the home but also by dint of its journey to the undiscovered country. In a contemporaneous essay, "The nineteenth century," Mandelstam recalls the domestic impulse of the Blok essay as well as "On the nature of the word":

> To Europeanize and humanize the twentieth century, to warm *(sogret')* it with a teleological warmth *(teplo)*—this is the task of these emigrants from the nineteenth century who have suffered its collapse, cast by the will of the fates onto a new historical continent...[31]
>
> (II 271)

Here the denizens of the nineteenth century survive the cataclysmic transition of the age in a seaborne version of the badger hole. The immigrant ship with its capacious holds is a vessel of culture; it too is as valuable for its exits as for the shelter it provides. It is hard in this moment not to recall the aquatic journey of the funerary bark, and indeed the bottle of "On the interlocutor," bearing the self, the artifact, the poem into a new land to be incarnated again. All that is left for Mandelstam is to reintroduce the reader, the finder on the shore of this new continent.

In the next issue of Rossiia, in the essay "Literary Moscow" (Literaturnaia Moskva), Mandelstam envisions the machine without the myth or the "teleogical warmth" of the Commendatore's statue that he valued in Blok. He more directly addresses the issue of

[31] Европеизировать и гуманизировать двадцатое столетие, согреть его теологическим теплом — вот задача потерпевших крушение выходцев девятнадцатого века, волею судеб заброшенных на новый исторический материк. See p. 105.

readership, taking issue with the movement (exemplified, he writes, by Vladimir Mayakovsky), to bring poetry to a wider readership by making it more accessible:

> Mayakovsky, establishing his "poetry for all," had to send to the devil anything incomprehensible, that is anything that assumed in the listener the tiniest bit of background in poetry… He who has not been prepared in any way will understand nothing; or else poetry, freed from any culture, will cease to be poetry at all, and then by a strange property of human nature will become accessible to an immense circle of listeners.[32]
>
> (II 258)

Mandelstam's problem with accessible poetry is first and foremost that (in his conception) it demands a sacrifice of cultural signifiers and abandons the exclusive and valuable common language of participants in culture. We can surmise from the previous essays in this period of his writing that exclusivity is a large part of the value of cultural discourse; in his conception, cultural preservation demands cultivation by dedicated participants, whether writers or readers, as well as insurance against the forces of history, from the masses and mechanization of the new age. Mass poetry is the poetry of machines, of factories—in the mouths of the propagandists (including Mayakovsky), this is a positive epithet, but for Mandelstam it is deadly to culture.

Poetry, as Mandelstam conceives it in this essay, is a trading of signs between cultural acolytes, among an isolated society of "devotees of the artistic word."[33] But this essay also echoes models of poetic communication that Mandelstam was theorizing in much earlier essays, composed before the World War and the Revolution, and discussed in Chapter Two. In "François Villon" (1913), Mandelstam imagines the poet as a "hermaphroditic creature"; here, he complains that the poetry of Aseev (whom he figures as

---

[32] Маяковский, основывая свою «поэзию для всех», должен был послать к черту все непонятное, то есть предполагающее в слушателе малейшую поэтическую подготовку... Совсем не подготовленный совсем ничего не поймет, или же поэзия, освобожденная от всякой культуры, перестанет вовсе быть поэзией и тогда уже по странному свойству человеческой природы станет доступной необъятному кругу слушателей.

[33] See p. 18.

a poet of "organization") is "irrational, barren, and asexual" (II 259).[34] In the earlier essay, Mandelstam connected sexuality with dialogue; here, he connects it with fertility: the bringing forth of something new, a quality which Aseev and the new poetry lack.

This lack of fertility has much to do with the machine-modeled mass culture of contemporary times, as Mandelstam sees it. He writes in "Literary Moscow" that "a spring coil can't give back more than what it knows beforehand" (II 259).[35] This "knowing" makes for a strange formulation—unless one hears an echo of the essay "O sobesednike," written a decade earlier. There, he writes that "in speaking to someone known, we can only speak of what is already known."[36] That is, a poet cannot write for a specific reader if he expects to create anything new. Here, he is denegrating the poetry of the factory, the literature of machines, by complaining that machine parts—unlike the planted seed or the fermenting wine—can only respond with the equivalent of what has been granted to them. (The machine knows only a perpetual present: no past or future.) The nod to "Interlocutor" reminds us that the ante has been upped in the intervening years: a poetry that is accessible to all will end up turning its listeners into machine parts, coil springs that can "know," but know only as much as they're told. The enemy has changed from the hothouse poetics of Symbolism to the culture-leveling accessibility of proletarian poetry. The stakes have are now not only cultural, but also political. And so Mandelstam's discourse has moved, at least in part, from the life of the word in theory to the life of the word in historical-political reality.

Mandelstam's next essay published in Rossiia is also called "Literary Moscow." Between the first "Literary Moscow" and the next, he moves his examination of contemporary literature from poetry to prose. The theme of mass literature is continued—

[34] … не рациональна, бесплодна и беспола.
[35] Пружина не может отдать больше, чем ей об этом заранее известно.
[36] See Chapter Two for a fuller treatment of this essay.

but, where in the first essay it was specifically contemporary Russian poetry that was pushing the individual under, in the second, prose as a whole becomes an art form of multiple and anonymous voices. "Prose belongs to no one," Mandelstam writes, "It is essentially nameless" (II 261).[37] Therefore prose matches the spirit of the time much better than poetry does: "Put individuality to the side. Give way to nameless prose" (II 262).[38]

Mandelstam, who is always a poet first, is more forgiving of the new anti-individual tendencies of prose than he is of the new poetry of Aseev and Mayakovsky. "Nameless prose" is not the mass-culture reduction in the first "Literary Moscow," not a socialist smelting of multiple individualities into a monolithic voice. It is rather a guarantee of dialogism and a source of myth: "Today's prose writers are often called eclectics, that is collectors. I think that this is not an insult—it's a good thing. Each genuine prose writer is precisely this: an eclectic, a collector" (II 262).[39] As a collection of voices, Mandelstam claims, prose is geared toward myth-making, and he holds up "Gargantua and Pantagruel" along with "War and Peace" as examples of "collected" prose works that gave rise to myth. This kind of prose passes over "the personality (lichnost') of the author, avoiding everything contingent, personal and catastrophic (the lyric)" (II 262).[40] Mythmaking, in other words, is not for poets but for prose writers (in marked contrast to the Symbolist program as well as the Futurist program) because it codifies and gives form to what survives—while the perishable individual remains the territory of ever-renewing poetry.

"The end of the novel" (Konets romana), an essay published the same year in the almanac Sails (Parusa), redeploys the ideas of "Literary Moscow (II)" in terms of literary history: while prose is fitted to the dictates of mass literature, this turns out to be not a

[37] Проза ничья. В сущности, она безымянна.
[38] Личность в сторону. Дорогу безымянной прозе.
[39] Нынешних прозаиков часто называют эклектиками, то есть собирателями. Я думаю, это — не в обиду, это — хорошо. Всякий настоящий прозаик — именно эклектик, собиратель.
[40] …личность автора, минуя все случайное, личное и катастрофическое (лирика).

condition of prose in general but a stage in its historical development. The novel, he claims, once lived and died by the individual personality: it was "a narrative, hermetic, extended, and complete in itself, about the fate of one personage or of a whole group of personages" (II 271).[41] The novel of the individual got its form and spirit from the legend of Napoleon's rise and fall, reaching its height in the nineteenth century. Now that narrative arc is fading—or at least radically changing—as the individual personality undergoes a fragmentation according to new cultural myths and norms. The twentieh century has cast the individual out of his biography, Mandelstam writes, and "a man without a biography cannot be the thematic core of a novel; the novel, on the other hand, is unthinkable without an interest in the discrete fate of an individual, in plot and in all that accompanies it (II 275).[42] Moreover, the new cultural understanding of the individual reflects the machinism, the zero-sum game Mandelstam has described as the fate of contemporary poetry in his first "Literary Moscow": "Now Europeans have been cast out of their biographies, like billiard-balls out of their pockets, and the laws of their activity, like the collision of billiard-balls on the table, are directed by one principle: the angle of impact is equal to the angle of repulsion" (II 275).[43] In the former essay, the spring (a synecdoche for the factory, and for machinism in general) returns exactly as much energy as is invested in it. Here, the angle at which a billard ball strikes is equal to the angle at which the other ball caroms off. To this new metaphor is added the multiplicity of vectors introduced by the break at the game's beginning: the billiard balls are cast into the table's field and enter a system of perpetual rebound and collision. Their movement, though mathematically predictable and indeed

[41] ...замкнутое, протяженное и законченное в себе повествование о судьбе одного лица или целой группы лиц.

[42] Человек без биографии не может быть тематическим стержнем романа, и роман, с другой стороны, немыслим без интереса к отдельной человеческой судьбе, фабуле и всему, что ей сопутствует. SS II, 275.

[43] Ныне европейцы выброшены из своих биографий, как шары из бильярдных луз, и законами их деятельности, как столкновением шаров на бильярдном поле, управляет один принцип: угол падения равен углу отражения.

observable, is typically unknown to the acting objects themselves—depriving them of the necessary components of a Napoleonic biography: the will required to act and of the subjectivity required to have a history[44]. Therefore, Mandelstam writes, contemporary prose writers are unconsciously writing chronicles, not novels; and this claim echoes the idea, already expressed in the second "Literary Moscow," that the new ("collective") prose is approaching the creation of myth or legend. In both cases, prose fiction no longer attempts the story of an individual, but instead reflects a concatenation of narrative vectors that need no longer be associated with the action and fate of one personality ("arranged around a central sun").

It seems as soon as Mandelstam shifts his focus to Russian literature, he loses his revolutionary optimism—the clay jar, with its fermenting cargo, that waited to be unearthed; the ground-up grain of humanity that was to be refashioned into bread. In the earlier essays of 1922 the individual is also lost—in the earth or the mill—but now Mandelstam no longer predicts his rebirth. The only writer to whom Mandelstam grants a place in a narrative of individual redemption is Boris Pasternak. In the essay "Storm and stress" (Buria i natisk, 1922-23), which Mandelstam originally wrote as an introduction to a collection of contemporary poetry he was to have edited,[45] Mandelstam gives Pasternak the role of a literary John the Baptist:

> Such a new and mature harmony (garmoniia) has not sounded in Russian poetry since the time of Batiushkov. Pasternak is neither a fabulist nor a conjurer, but a pioneer of a new harmony (lad), of a new composition of the Russian poetic line, corresponding to the maturity and courage attained by the language…

[44] Tolstoy, of course, treats these ideas of history at length in *War and Peace.* For Tolstoy, the Napoleonic narrative and its dissolution are perennially at odds and expressed as a question of free will.
[45] Lekmanov 132.

> Then comes a poet who resurrects the virginal power of the sentence's logical composition. This is what Batiushkov marveled at in Pushkin, and it is his own Pushkin that Pasternak now awaits.[46]
>
> (II 298)

Pasternak has, in Mandelstam's estimation, founded a sonority and a syntax that now only awaits its genius—that is, its actualization. Russian poetry is now undergoing a wave of storm and stress, Mandelstam explains at the essay's opening, in the throes of which it's impossible to identify which movements and poets will survive and which will be cast again to the ocean floor. As one cannot fix which contemporary poetry will receive its actualization in the canon (whose coming may be analogized to a messianic time, and end-time of redemption), one can only, as with Pasternak, identify avenues of possible actualization. It is important, too, that the redemption of the Russian line will come in the "virginal power" and "logical composition" of the sentence: prose, linked in "Literary Moscow (II)" to the idea of survival, in this essay—strangely enough—turns out to guarantee the survival of Russian poetry.

The hope of a "finder" for Pasternak is also important to this thinking, as it reinstates (if only for a moment) the optimism of Mandelstam's model of reading in "On the interlocutor." There, the poet and reader find one another through a subjective splitting, where the "I" of each is compromised, and each engages in a shared subjectivity as the text is read (in both senses of the word). On the one hand, the poet is surprised by his own words; they find his ear as if delivered from outside himself. On the other, the reader speaks another's words in his own voice.

---

[46] Со времен Батюшкова в русской поэзии не звучало столь новой и зрелой гармонии. Пастернак не выдумщик и не фокусник, а зачинатель нового лада, нового строя русского стиха, соответствующего зрелости и мужественности, достигнутой языком.... Тогда приходит поэт, воскрешающий девственную силу логического строя предложения. Именно этому удивлялся в Батюшкове Пушкин, и своего Пушкина ждет Пастернак.

The dialogism of prose and the subjective split of poetry are different deployments of similar terms: in prose, the divisions appear in the text itself, as a multiplicity of voices. Meanwhile, in poetry the split occurs within the subjects involved in the act of literary transmission: it is multiplication of one voice. These judgments help Mandelstam find terms with which to gauge the disappearance of the individual in the sociocultural atmosphere of the early 1920s. The seas of "On the interlocutor" are no longer merely chaotic and wide; now they have become poisonous as well. As he watches his muse disappear into the horizon, Mandelstam will compose a theory of the word in the theater that reflects his encroaching pessimism about poetry and its readership.

Poems in the Theater: Dispersal of the Word

Mandelstam's vision of the theater is, in short, the word brought to life. But it is not brought to life like a text being read; it is rather an animation of the word on the way to reading. The theater is a scene of unreading: of language grasped but not completed in an act of reception. The bottle is still somewhere in the middle of the sea; the funerary bark between this world and the next; the wine-jug (and the badger) underground. But this between-ness turns out to be vital to the life of the word: it preserves the word in hope of a time when it will be readable. In the "twilight of freedom"[47] that has settled over Russia, Mandelstam is envisioning a period of dormancy for the poetic word and is trying out the theater as a model for this hibernation.

In 1915 Mandelstam wrote a pair of poems—fraternal twins—about Racine's tragedy Phaedra (1677), based on the Greek myth as dramatized by Euripides and Seneca. Each presents several sets of tensions, brought together in the theatrical event: the tension

[47] From poem of the same name, composed 1918. The Russian for twilight, "sumerki," may mean the dim light of either morning or evening, though most often evening, as in English.

between modernity and classical antiquity, between the individual and the crowd, between a text and its translation. Each of these tensions, in turn, reveals another aspect of the word "on the way."[48]

The poem "I'll never see the celebrated 'Phaedra'" (Ia ne uvizhu znamenitoi Phedry) is (among other things) about the audience's many-layered isolation from tragic action, whether the cause is the barrier thrown up by interpretation (Racine, of Eurpides), by personal alienation (the narrator is "indifferent to the actor's bustle"), or by weariness of the tragic spectacle and the cathartic release (a neighbor complains: "Exhausted by the madness of Melpomene, /I only want peace in this life; /Let's go, before the spectator-jackals /Decide to tear apart the Muse!").[49] One of these moments of isolations turns out to a line of dialogue translated from Racine's play, which Mandelstam places between the poem's first and second stanzas, and which occupies a fitting place of betweenness that will be emblematic in his conception of the theater, and indeed in poetry:

> ...Я не услышу обращенный к рампе,
> Двойною рифмой оперенный стих:
>
> — Как эти покрывала мне постылы...
>
> Театр Расина! Мощная завеса
> Нас отделяет от другого мира...
>
> (I won't hear the line fledged with a double rhyme /Directed to the footlights: /"How hateful are these veils to me..." /Theater of Racine! A mighty curtain /Separates us from another world...)
>
> (127-8)

Mandelstam's translation is of Phaedra's line, "Que ces vains ornements, que ces voiles me pèsent!" (How these vain ornaments, how these veils oppress me!") in the play's first act,

[48] This formulation is taken from the Conversation about Dante, where Mandelstam writes the word is perpetually on the way ("na khodu").

[49] Измученный безумством Мельпомены,/ Я в этом жизни жажду только мира;/ Уйдем, покуда зрители-шакалы/ На растерзанье Музы не пришли! (Melpomene is the Muse of tragedy.)

third scene. It is "doubly rhyming" because it follows Oenone's line "Dieux tout-puissants, que nos pleurs vous apaisent!" (All-powerful gods that soothe our tears!), with which it rhymes "ornements" and "pèsent." But the poet won't introduce Phaedra's voice into the lived reality of the poem; he won't hear the line he is relating for us. He is separated from the world of that theater, and the multiple veiling in these lines reinforces that separation. The line of dialogue is also veiled from the surrounding stanzas: it speaks, but does not find an audience. Two more stanzas follow, the poem ends, and we don't hear Phaedra's voice again. There is neither ear nor reply.

In the second poem, "How grievous is the splendor of these veils" (Kak etikh pokryval i etogo ubora), Phaedra's voice is much more present. The poem's structure introduces three couplets of Phaedra's speech, which Mandelstam adapts from Racine's text[50], and sets them off against three choral speeches, which he invents. The chorus was not current in classical French tragedy and does not appear in Racine's play; however, it is present in Euripides's Hippolytus (428 BC) and Seneca's Phaedra (1st c. AD), in which Racine sourced his text. Where "I'll never see the celebrated Phaedra" presents veils and rifts, a scene of separation and isolation, "How grievous is the splendor of these veils" presents a multifaceted dialogue: between Phaedra and the chorus, between Mandelstam and Racine (and by extension Euripides and Seneca), and between antiquity and modernity. Yet veilings and separations remain inherent in the exchange between Phaedra and the chorus—or between any classical hero and the chorus. A typical chorus, as is the case here, predicts the action and abstracts it, draws philosophical connections, warns and laments. It explicates the fates but is powerless against them; it is cued by a character's speech but cannot be changed by it, and therefore engages only in the most

[50] "How grievous..."'s first line is a transposition of Phaedra's sole line of dialogue in "I'll never see..." which is a direct translation from Racine. The version of this line that opens "How grievous..." is a freer version of Racine's text, as are the lines of Phaedra's that follow.

oblique form of dialogue. Moreover, Phaedra speaks only to the chorus; no other personages appear in Mandelstam's poem. It could be argued, then, that the presence of a dialogue here only reinforces Phaedra's isolation, only casts in greater relief her monologic outbursts.

Each poem presents different strata of subjectivity and the rifts between them. "I'll never see the celebrated Phaedra" works with the strata of poet, audience, and personage; "How grievous is the splendor of these veils" works with the strata of personage and chorus. Each also implicitly deals with the strata of original and translated text. Voices speak in isolation in these poems. Mandelstam's idea of the word in theater at this early stage (both poems are dated 1915) is that of the word unfulfilled, of speech acts aimed toward dialogue that don't quite find their mark.[51]

Five years later Mandelstam wrote a love poem to the actress Ol'ga Arbenina, with whom he was conducting an affair.[52] Nineteen-twenty was a rather dark year, marked by privation and war, and the poem reflects these hardships along with a nostalgia for former times, marked by the name Petersburg (the city had changed its name during the Great War to Petrograd). Along with that loaded name, Mandelstam makes reference in the poem to a "blissful, senseless word" that he doesn't identify. The poem begins:

> В Петербурге мы сойдемся снова,
> Словно солнце мы похоронили в нем,
> И блаженное, бессмысленное слово
> В первый раз произнесем.
>
> (In Petersburg we'll come together again,/ As if we'd buried the sun there,/ And the blissful, senseless word/ Utter for the first time.)

And the second stanza ends thus:

> Мне не надо пропуска ночного,
> Часовых я не боюсь:

[51] These poems will be taken up in greater detail in Chapter Four.
[52] See Lekmanov 74-6.

За блаженное, бессмысленное слово
Я в ночи советской помолюсь.

(I don't need a night pass,/ I'm not afraid of the watchmen:/ For the blissful, senseless word/ I'll pray in the Soviet night.)

(153-4)

Given the historical-biographical contexts of love and revolution, there are any number of candidates for this word, and good reason for the poet not to specify it. Any word could suffice, and therefore speaking itself takes precedence over the specific meaning or sound of a given speech act. A word to a lover is is a charged event, as is a word flown in the face of an encroaching darkness, political or otherwise. Mandelstam's desire to draw us toward the speech act also reflects his ongoing concern with the fate of the poetic act and the behavior of the word. In the first stanza the blissful, senseless word has not yet been spoken: it has been intuited, presumably, but not actualized. In "The word and culture," completed the following year, he will write that a poem exists before its first word is spoken[53]; and the idea that poetic language exists in a field sensible only to poets, who bring the nascent poem out into the world, runs through his work in general. Here as well we can feel the presence of Pushkin, known since Belinsky as the "sun of Russian poetry," and buried now in this dark time. Pushkin, and with him all of Russian poetry, is dormant and silent—in a way, moreover, that Mandelstam has already theorized in his unpublished 1918 essay "Scriabin and Christianity" (Skriabin i khristianstvo). There, he writes, "I have recalled Pushkin's burial in order to call into your memory the image of the night Sun, the image of late Greek tragedy, founded by Euripides: the image of unhappy Phaedra" (I 201). As Phaedra was caught between muffling veils in the twin theater poems of 1915, here

[53] See p. 104.

Pushkin glows but darkly, and—as far as we can tell—is silent, to the point that his name is unspoken.

In the world of this poem, no act of language is completed: the word remains unspoken, unborn, unpoeticized. The only instance of speaking happens in the third of the poem's four stanzas, when the scene moves to the theater:

> Слышу легкий театральный шорох
> И девическое "ах" —
> И бессмертных роз огромный ворох
> У Киприды на руках.
>
> (I hear a light theatrical rustle/ And a maidenly "Ah!" —/ And a great bouquet of deathless roses/ In Cypris's hands.)

This scene of spontaneity and color, enclosed as it is in the "black velvet" of the Soviet night, in part represents a circumscribed speech act. As in the Phaedra poems, the word spoken in the theater (amid the programs *(afishi)* that fall from the galleries *(kresel)* is an isolated speech act, deprived of a response or even a concrete listener. We see in "In Petersburg" the added quality of nonsense: this "Ah!" is nearly not a word at all, but a spontaneous exclamation, loaded erotically by the abundance of roses in the hands of Cypris (Aphrodite). If the poem contains a blissful, senseless word, this is it. And one begins to see, moreover, that very senselessness as a package in which the word can survive until its time of ripeness. The word is buried, like the sun—like the Georgian wine jugs—as it must be to weather the night. The roses themselves were "once earth," Mandelstam writes n a contemporaneous essay, and thereby also particpate in the narrative of hibernation and survival (see p. 110). The word cannot be heard (or at least understood) from its underground dwelling; but it looks forward to the day when it will be unearthed, pronounced. "In Petersburg" does present a future when the ashes of the present will be collected by the "native hands of blessed women"—but if what is predicted here is

utterance, or any kind of recomposition, it is a strange and frightening version of it. Indeed, any hope for fulfillment for the word seems desperate: a prayer in the Soviet night.

This scene of collection, of the recomposition of human and poetic remains, will reappear a few years later in an unexpected, but appropriate place. In 1924 Mandelstam completed a very successful translation of the German expressionist Ernst Toller's play *Masse Mensch* (Mass Man, 1919), which ran at least three years at the Theater of the Revolution in Moscow (Toller himself attended a performance on a visit to the Soviet Union in 1926).[54] Though the work of translation may have fallen to anyone, Masse Mensch was not unsuited to Mandelstam, and Toller's script gave him a few opportunities to interpolate his own preoccupations and worldview. Mandelstam was not the only thinker of the time fixated on the slipping away of the age and the disappearance of the individual; nor were his contemporaries in Russian letters, who with him survived the Great War and two revolutions, the only ones thus concerned. Many Russians were interested in the discourses of German Expressionism, which alternately were absorbed into existing Russian poetic movements (i.e. Futurism), formed the basis for others (i.e. Emotionalism), or were visible in the contemporaneous poetry of graduates of yet other movements (the Acmeists Narbut and Zenkevich).

Expressionist discourse particularly highlighted concerns about the individual versus the mass and the machine, which found special expression in Toller's play. Thus, for example, Evgenii Zamiatin noted of prose writer Boris Pil'niak:

> In Pil'niak's most recent work there is an interesting attempt to construct a composition without heroes; a task parallel to that of Toller's "Massenmensch." To establish a focus on the crowd, on the mass — it's possible, just as it's possible to pour out of a mass of concrete instead of laying together separate bricks.[55]

[54] See Galareia Dom Nashchokina 43.

[55] В последних вещах Пильняка интересная попытка дать композицию без героев; задача, параллельная толлеровскому "Massenmensch." Поставить в фокусе толпу, массу — можно, так же, как можно отливать из бетонной массы вместо того, чтобы складывать из отдельных кирпичей.

(*Russkii ekspressionizm* 43)

Zamiatin is drawing a clear connection between overt Expressionism (Toller) and the preference for a multiple or divided subject—the crowd—over an individual hero. A 1923 article in Teatr by Mikhail Kuzmin (one of the founders of the Emotionalist movement, which identified as Expressionist) observes that German Expressionism raises a protest against the mechanization of life.[56] The general currents of Russian Expressionism thus discuss the disappearance of the individual in terms of both the fragmentation of the subject as hero, and the loss of the subject as artwork.

Mandelstam, though he never declared himself anything but an Acmeist, was not hostile to Expressionism, and certainly shared concerns with it. In fact, in the mid-teens Nikolai Punin was able to write, "Many of my friends are fans of Expressionism, some unarguably: Kandinsky, Chagall, Filonov,...; Pasternak...; Mandelstam, when he vainly went through his 'Pasternak period'..."[57] (*Russkii ekspressionizm* 42).[58] Mandelstam's ambivalence toward the fate of the individual subject—which he at least makes a show of celebrating in "The end of the novel" and his poem "Let us praise, brothers, the twilight of freedom" (Proslavim, brat'ia, sumerki svobody)—as well as his concern about the zero-sum game of the loaded spring, make Expressionism an apt field for him to explore his own concerns.

Mandelstam wrote an introduction to *Masse Mensch,* which was meant to be published along with the translation. In "A Revolutionary in the Theater" (Revoliutsioner v teatre, 1923), Mandelstam identifies the play's primary thematic and formal conflict: while Toller presents "living blood, real pathos, iron revolutionary will," nevertheless "all of his tragic

[56] See Galereia Dom Nashchokina 434.
[57] From Punin's memoirs;. Lekmanov sets this "period" as 1913-16: see Ivaniusha 48.
[58] Экспрессионизмом больны многие мои современники; одни — бесспорно: Кандинский, Шагал, Филонов...; Пастернак...; Мандельштам, когда он напрасно проходил свой 'пастернакский период'...

pathos hangs helplessly on Symbolist mannequins" (II 284).[59] These mannequins are reminiscent of the shallow and solipsistic staging of Gorky's "Lower Depths" described in "The Moscow Art Theatre and the Word" and of the flat "alphabet of emotions" that supplants the word in the actors' style (II 335). Mandelstam finds similar faults in the MXT's performance style and Toller's dramaturgical style: they flatten, rather than expose, the contours of the word.

There is little that should have brought Mandelstam to Ernst Toller save a commission. Toller (1893-1939) was a political leader as well as a playwright. For six days in 1919 he served as president of the short-lived Bavarian Soviet Republic. Imprisoned for his role in the revolution that had established the Republic, he served five years and wrote a series of well-received, ideologically driven plays from his cell. His word is a vehicle for ideas, not a living bearer of a poetic impulse, and the tensions in his language that Mandelstam would have found interesting come from not from the language itself but from an abiding ideological crisis: Toller was a revolutionary who hated violence, a humanist who was called to preside over killings for the cause. The play reaches its climax when *Masse Mensch's* heroine, a leader of the revolution, submits to execution by her own revolutionary forces rather than condone the murder of others at their hands. Her choice of death reflects Toller's own inner crisis as a pacifist revolutionary. As he himself wrote in "A Youth in Germany," "I hated violence and had sworn to suffer violence rather than inflict it. Could I, now that the revolution was in swing, break this oath? Yes, I had to."[60] Malcolm Pittock writes of Toller's trials as leader of the Bavarian Soviet Republic: "In Munich, unbeknownst to Toller, nine hostages in the hands of the Red Army were shot. When he heard about it, he wept."

[59] ...весь его трагический пафос беспомощно виснет на символических манекенах.
[60] Quoted in Pittock.

Masse Mensch, as the title suggests, derives its action from the conflicts between personal and collective will, between personal and collective ethics. Mandelstam praises Toller when he pronounces the theme of humanism and criticizes him when his style carries him too far toward a "collective" ("machine") language. Speaking about Masse Mensch's heroine, Mandelstam writes: "On the lips of the heroine, perishing because of her duality, he placed the strongest, fieriest words that the old world could have pronounced in the defense of humanism. The tragedy of the woman is that of Toller himself" (II 286).[61] But Mandelstam also claims that Toller lets the collective define his portrayal of the personal:

> They will tell us it's absurd to demand personal characteristics from a portrayer of the collective will...[thus] Toller purposefully removed all the angles from [a character called] the Nameless One. To this I reply: a mass organizer is also a person, and every mass organizer is an organizer in his own way. The dramatic incarnation of an organizer, just like the incarnation of the individualist Faust, demands dramatic characterization.[62]
>
> (II 285)

The play, like its heroine, perishes because of its duality; it can't make up its mind whether it speaks in the voice of the individual or the collective.

Several moments in Mandelstam's translation of Masse Mensch (in Russian, Chelovek-Massa) differ markedly from the German text and reveal Mandelstam's own concerns in this period: chiefly the place of the human being as the nineteenth century passes into the twentieth. One of these moments occurs in the fifth of the play's seven scenes, when the Woman is arguing with the masses and the Nameless One (their organizer) about the role of revolutionary vengeance. The masses demand vengeance, and

[61]В уста героини, погибающей от раздвоенности, он вложил самые сильные, самые огненные слова, какие мог произнести старый мир в защиту гуманизма. Трагедия женщины — трагедия самого Толлера.

[62] Нам скажут, нелепо требовать личной характеристики от представителя коллективной воли...и Толлер нарочно срезал все углы у Безымянного. Я на это отвечу: массовик тоже человек, и каждый массовик — массовик по-своему. Драматическое воплощение массовика, так же как и воплощение индивидуалиста Фауста, требует драматической характеристики.

the Woman responds with a cry for empathy. In the original text, her speech contains the lines:

> Ich rufe:
> Zerbrecht das System!
> Du aber willst die Menschen zerbrechen.
> Ich kann nicht schweigen, heute nicht.
>
> (I call to you: /Smash the system! /But you want to smash people. /I cannot keep silent, not today.)

The rhetorical scheme of these lines is simple enough. The difference between smashing the system and smashing people lies at the core of Toller's ambivalence about revolution. In Mandelstam's version, however, the lines read:

> Я кричу: вдребезги систему,
> Ты ж разбиваешь глину — человека!
> И снова собирают черепки.
> Сегодня я не промолчу... нельзя!
>
> (I cry to you: smash the system, /But you smash the clay—a man! /And again they gather the pottery shards. /Today I will not keep silent... I cannot!)
>
> (IV 338)

Prosodically, this version reflects Mandelstam's desire to homogenize Toller's varied lines into blank verse; thematically it introduces an image absent in the German text. The added image—the smashed clay of the human being—carries with it a complex of associations that infuse Toller's lines with anxiety about the fate of the human being as well as a desperate hope for the survival of literature. As we have seen, Mandelstam has already worked this anxiety and this hope into his contemporaneous poetry, in particular with images of clay, shards, and gathering or assembly.

In order to survive this catastrophe, this coming-apart, the figure must be brought back together. The Russian for "collect" or "assemble" is *sobirat'/sobrat',* which shows up both in Mandelstam's additions to the Toller text and in certain key texts of his own in the early 1920s. In the Toller translation above, shards of human clay are gathered by

unnamed or impersonal agents. This echoes a salient image in the poem "In Petersburg we'll come together again" (see p. 124), where the poet imagines a future in which women will gather the dust of those now present: "We warm ourselves at a bonfire out of boredom, /Perhaps ages will pass, /And the native hands of blissful women /Will collect *[soberut]* our light ashes" (154).[63] The ambivalence of this image is chilling: it is a homecoming and a reaggregation, but the person (and presumably the word) is still missing. "We" must come together *(soitis')* again to pronounce the word, but the gathering *(sobirat'sia)*"we" do in this vision doesn't allow for speaking.

Even if the smashed human clay is to be gathered up again, its does not seem guaranteed to remain whole, or capable of speaking. As Toller's Woman insists, the time to speak is now: before the catastrophe, in order to avert it.

Essays on Theater: Reading Goes Underground

In Mandelstam's essays about the theater, he presents again his desire to preserve the word and his pessimism regarding whether this is now possible. In 1923, the same year as his Toller work, Mandelstam wrote an essay for the journal Theater (Teatr), in an issue marking the 25th anniversary of the Moscow Art Theater. This article, "The Art Theater and the Word" (Khudozhestvennyi teatr i slovo), debuts his idea that the theater depends on the word, that "in the theater, in order to move one must speak, because it is given entirely in the word" (II 335).[64] His judgment of the Moscow Art Theater is predicated upon what he believes to be the respect shown the word in performance. Though his remarks start from the Symbolist conception of the theater as church, he ends up placing primary

[63] У костра мы греемся от скуки, /Может быть, века пройдут, /И блаженных жен родные руки /Легкий пепел соберут.
[64] В театре для того, чтобы двигаться, нужно говорить, потому что он весь дан в слове.

value not on the truths that the word in the theater conveys to its audience, but rather on the nature of the word as it comes into being between performer and audience.

Mandelstam begins by invoking Genesis (Eve's birth from Adam's rib): "The Art Theater was the child of the Russian intelligentsia, flesh of its flesh, bone of its bone."[65] He furthers the religious context with the childhood memory of a "devout atmosphere"[66] about the theater and adds, a few lines later, "To step into the Art Theater, for an intellectual, meant almost to take Communion, to step into a church" (II 333).[67] The intelligentsia seeks something from the theater, something both literary and holy: it "understood theater exclusively as an interpretation of literature," as a place to "touch literature, as [they would] a living body, to feel it and put [their] fingers in it." This hint at the apostle Thomas palpating Christ's wound is followed up in the next paragraph: "The pathos of this generation—and that of the Art Theater—is that of Thomas the doubter" (II 334). The theater allows the doubting intellectual to "feel" literature, to verify it if not to grasp it.

The particular word Mandelstam uses for "feel" (*osiazat'*—to make out by touch) is used nine times over the space of two pages in the article; along with "interpreter" (tolmach, used three times but always italicized) it is the piece's most prominent lexical marker. The pairing of osiazat' with tolmach sets up a model of literature as an ineffable being, groped at by human beings who need an interpreter to help them toward it. It is clear how Mandelstam analogizes literature in the theater to God in the church:

What do the famous pauses mean in Chekhov's "Seagull" and his other plays?

---

[65] "Flesh of its flesh," etc., is a perhaps inadvertent reference to Genesis 2:23, Adam speaking about Eve, which would not only impart an additional religious significance by invoking the Old Testament, but also suggest that the theater is not just the child but also the bride of the intelligentsia, as Eve is the bride of Adam (and as the Church is the bride of Christ). Художественный театр — дитя русской интеллигенции, плоть от плоти ее, кость от кости.

[66] ...благоговейная атмосфера...

[67] Сходить в «Художественный» для интеллигента значило почти причаститься, сходить в церковь.

> Nothing else than a festival of pure palpation *(osiazanie).* All is hushed; nothing remains except wordless touching *(osiazanie).*
>
> The way to the theater came out of literature, but they didn't believe in literature just as they didn't believe in objective reality; they neither heard nor touched *(osiazali)* the words.
>
> An interpreter *(tolmach),* a translator, was demanded for literature. This role was forced upon the theater.[68]
>
> (II 334)

What keeps this from partaking wholly in a conception of theater as church is that the sensation of the word doesn't lead beyond the word, but rather toward it. Osiazanie in Mandelstam's meaning is also more than sensation: it is testing. His vision of the church-theater is one in which the celebrants are there to test the reality of the being in their center. Mandelstam's choice and emphasis of the word *tolmach* (interpreter) emphasizes the real presence of that literary being—as if literature is speaking through the agency of the theater. All the while, the word, not the deity or the symbol, lies at the bottom of everything. As in "On the Nature of the Word," the word comes to us already as a symbol; it is spurious to value it as a pointer toward an additional layer of representation (see p. 105).

The essay goes on to criticize a performance of Gorky's play "The Lower Depths" *(Na dne),* which was performed at the MXAT in 1923,[69] using *osiazanie* as an aesthetic criterion: "...this was a chintzy, slummy masquerade. A spotless dive. A glossed-over slum. They didn't manage to touch *(osiazat')* the stench and filth, and a lot else. In truth they touched *(osiazali)* only themselves."[70] In itself, this critique isn't exceptional: it's not unusual to fault a theatrical production for not portraying a reality that the text holds in potential.

---

[68] Что такое знаменитые «паузы» «Чайки» и других чеховских постановок? /Не что иное, как праздник чистого осязания. Все умолкает, остается одно безмолвное осязание. /Путь к театру шел от литературы, но в литературу не верили как в бытие, слова не слышали и не осязали. /К литературе требовался толмач, переводчик. Эту роль навязали театру.

[69] See Efros.

[70] ...ситцевый и трущобный маскарад. Чистенький притон. Прилизанная трущоба. Осязать смрад и грязь им не удалось, как и многое другое. По-настоящему они осязали только себя.

However, that critique would likely be based on an assessment of the text's content and how it fares in the hands of the director, actors, designers, et al. "They never read the text," Mandelstam continues, "it was always their fantasies."[71] Again, this judgment could be based on the production's faithfulness to content—but then he makes the typically Mandelstamian move of preferring the inner workings of the text (or, per Potebnia, its "inner form"—see pp. 46, 104): "The true and righteous way to theatrical feeling (osiazanie) lies through the word; theatrical direction is hidden in the word. The very highest expression is given in the construction of speech, verse, or prose" (II 335).[72] The emphasis on construction *(stroenie)* takes the focus off content, off of what the word is saying and onto what the word is doing, or even what the word is at all. The words "true" and "righteous" *(istinnyi* and *pravednyi)* reinforce the article's religious focus, now suggesting to the would-be interpreters and translators of the word, the theatrical artists, that a correct representation of a text is actually like exegesis: it is moral in the highest sense, subject to an absolute standard—here, presumably held by faithfulness to the word. He ends the article with this sentence: "In the theater, in order to move *(dvigat'sia)* one must speak, because it is all given in the word."[73] The word becomes the source of movement, the source of animation—suggestive of the image of the Holy Spirit as the agent of God on earth (the source of inspiration[74], hence language[75]) and of the word as God's paraclete in John 1. The

[71] Никогда не читали текст. Всегда свои домыслы.
[72] Истинный и праведный путь к театральному осязанию лежит через слово, в слове скрыта режиссура. В строении речи, стиха или прозы дана высшая выразительность.
[73] See note 64.
[74] Genesis 2:7, KJV: And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.
[75] Acts 10:44-46: While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. /And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. /For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. (Trans. KJV.)

word activates the divine, and the priests of the theater are needed to help this activation along.[76]

In *The Noise of Time* (1925), Mandelstam's theatrical concerns with linguistic activation, of literary animation, will find an apotheosis in Vera Komissarzhevskaia (1864-1910), a celebrated Petersburg actress in the early twentieth century. According to Mandelstam, she was inspired and animated by the word as such; she "raised and lowered her voice as the breathing of the literary construction demanded it. Her game was three-quarters verbal, accompanied by only the most necessary, restrained movements, and these were but few..." (II 385)[77] The emphasis on breathing (dykhanie), construction (stroi), and movement (dvizhenie) will make of Komissarzhevskaia a tolmach worthy of the literary being at the heart of theater. She is free of the solipsism and fantasies with which Mandelstam faults the artists of the Moscow Art Theater; she allows the word to speak through her. Her physical expressions are spare, her movements "restrained" (skupoi)—as opposed to the MXT artists, who express not the word but a visual "actor's 'alphabet of emotions,' and all the same act[...] out not the truth, but an actors' ciphered code." While the MXT artists work the medium, dealing in signs and symbols, Komissarzhevskaia is a celebrant, herself the medium of the word's incarnation—in performance, both she and the word become "flesh that makes sounds and speaks."[78]

[76] Not to reveal any extraliterary symbolic essence. These are not Symbolist priests.
[77] ...подымала и опускала голос так, как это требовалось дыханьем словесного строя; ее игра была на три четверти словесной, сопровождаемой самыми необходимыми скупыми движеньями...
[78] …звучащей и говорящей плотью. This is one of Mandelstam's central images for the word in "The Word and Culture." See II 220 and Seifrid 77-8.

The Human Being as Underground Vessel

Mandelstam's literary memoir *The Noise of Time* (Shum vremeni, 1925) is the story of a poet discovering his artistic inheritance. Among the various aspects and depths Mandelstam packs into this narrative, this study focuses on the development of one idea central to his poetics: the word in hibernation, on the way to its fulfillment. The trap or prison of language presented in the Phaedra poems written a decade earlier is altered now. The thinking Mandelstam has done in the intervening years has seen him develop several images for the word's proper vessel to help it complete the journey from impulse to audition: bottle turns into clay jug and funerary bark (to name a few). In "Komissarzhevskaia" the vessel for the word becomes the human being, and the word comes alive in the theater in the person of a consummate actor.

The idea of the human body as vessel for the word brings "Komissarzhevskaia"'s two very different sections together. In the chapter's first paragraph, which is home to several of Mandelstam's most famous lines of prose, he discusses his linguistic and literary inheritance: from his epoch, from his parents, and from the interaction between the two. His understanding of himself as an individual, he writes, is inextricable from cultural inputs—personal experience does not consitute his biography: "An intellectual doesn't need memory—it's enough for him to tell about the books he's read, and his biography is complete."[79] If the intellectual's memory is inextricable from the books he's read, his language is inextricable from his cultural-historical moment:

[79] Разночинцу не нужна память, ему достаточно рассказать о книгах, кororые он прочел, — и биография готова. The Russian for "intellectual" is *raznochinets,* meaning a commoner without civil or military rank, here with overtones of membership in the intelligentsia.

> Over me and many of my contemporaries weighs our tongue-tied birth. We learned not to speak but to babble, and only by harking to the swelling noise of the age and the whitened foam of its crest did we obtain a language.[80]

In these images, the human being becomes a storehouse for language and a transfiguring agent for the word: language enters the human being as received sight (the text of books) and sound (the "noise of the age")—and exits as speaking. "What did my family want to say? I don't know. It was tongue-tied from birth—nevertheless, it had something to say" (II 384).[81] The tension between having something to say and being incapable of speaking is an echo (perhaps inverted) of the prelinguistic moment in "I forgot the word that I wanted to say," and perhaps, by extension, to Mandelstam's model of language in hibernation as poetic communication. Language—or the possibility of language—sleeps in the individual, until it manages to connect with the outside environment (with the new shore of the bottle-finder, with the nail on the wall in "The Finder of a Horseshoe," with the pan-human bread in "Human Wheat," with the generation that digs up the Georgian wine vessels)—that is, until its spring arrives.

The chapter then focuses on the actress Vera Komissarzhevskaia (1864-1910) as a bearer or host of the word. In doing so, it reflects Mandelstam's ongoing polemic with Symbolism—in particular with Blok, who revered Komissarzhevskaia and involved her in his Symbolist dramatic project. Blok's play "Balaganchik" was produced at Komissarzhevskaia's theater (with her in the lead) in its first season with Vsevolod Meyerhold as director (1907-8)—the same season that saw the production of "Hedda Gabler" (again, with Komissarzhevakaia in the lead) on which Mandelstam focuses his chapter. Blok also delivered an oration at her funeral (1910), reworked later into an article

[80] Надо мной и над многими современниками тяготеет косноязычье рожденья. Мы учились не говорить, а лепетать — и лишь прислушиваясь к нарастающему шуму века и выбеленные пеной его гребня, мы обрели язык.

[81] Что хотела сказать семья? Я не знаю. Она была косноязычна от рожденья, — а между тем было у ней что сказать.

in the journal Speech (Rech') in 1912, which portrays her as an enthusiast of Symbolism, her theater as an apt conduit for Symbolism, and her treatment of texts as decidedly Symbolist.

There is much in Blok's attitude toward the word, as represented in his relationship to theater, that Mandelstam would have found objectionable. In "Komissarzhevskaia," Mandelstam accuses Blok of not understanding Komissarzhevakaia's theater: "When Blok bent over the deathbed of Russian theater, he recalled and named Carmen, that is, that from which Komissarzhevskaia was infinitely distant" (II 386).[82] Mandelstam may be referring here to Blok's affair with another actress, Liubov' Del'mas (1884-1969), with whom Blok became infatuated when she played Carmen in Bizet's opera, produced at the Teatr Muzykal'noi Dramy in Petersburg in 1914. Blok dedicated several cycles of poems to her, most notably "Karmen" (1914). "Karmen" is full of mystery and music, common to the Gypsy mystique of Bizet's opera and Blok's Symbolist aesthetics—and there are also signs of this aesthetic, as one might imagine, in Blok's writings about Komissarzhevakaia four years earlier. In his funerary poem to her (1910), Blok celebrates her voice as a musical instrument: "...youthful voice/ Sang and cried to us about spring,/ As if the wind had touched the strings..." (...golos iunyi/ Nam pel i plakal o vesne,/ Kak budto veter tronul struny...) (*Poeziia* 601). In his funeral oration for her, he claims that Komissarzhevskaia's voice itself supersedes the semantic value of the text she's speaking:

> Komissarzhevskaia doubled the world's orchestra with her voice. Because of this, her demanding and tender voice was like the voice of spring; it called us immeasurably farther than the content of the words she pronounced.[83]
>
> (*Aleksandr Blok i russkii teatr* 135)

[82] Когда Блок склонился над смертным ложем русского театра, он вспомнил и назвал Кармен, то есть то, от чего бесконечно делека была Комиссаржевская.

[83] В. Ф. Коммиссаржевская голосом своим вторила мировому оркестру. Оттого ее требовательный и нежный голос был подобен голосу весны, он звал нас безмерно дальше, чем содержание произносимых слов.

Blok values the voice itself more than the content it bears—the dramatic text seems to be there not to interact with the voice, but to enable its action and then to be superseded by it.

Mandelstam in The noise of time displays an ambivalent attitude towards the Symbolist project in general; he places it in an uneasy relationship with Nadsonism and sentimentalism, and reasserts the importance of the text to the human voice. Already in "The Sinani Family," the chapter that precedes "Komissarzhevskaia," Blok gets a mention in connection with his play "Balaganchik" (in which the actress starred). Symbolism, appreciated through the mind and lyrical tendencies of an adolescent, goes along with the Nadsonism against which the Symbolists were purportedly reacting:

> At that time, in my head modernism and Symbolism somehow coexisted with the fiercest Nadsonism and lines from "Russian Wealth." Blok had already been read through, including "Balaganchik," and perfectly coexisted with the civic themes and all that poetic gibberish. Blok wasn't hostile to it, because he himself emerged from it.[84]
>
> (II 381-2)

In "Komissarzhevskaia," Mandelstam sets Blok against the "miracle" of Komissarzhevskaia's theater, which leaned towards the West while remaining Russian: "Blok scoffed spitefully at this theatrical miracle in 'Balaganchik,' and Komissarzhevskaia, having played 'Balaganchik,' scoffed at herself."[85] When Komissarzhevskaia plays in Blok's drama, she falls under his influence and away from the West; her voice becomes identified with his and joins him in the barnyard of Nadsonism: "Amid the grunting and roaring, moans and declamations, her voice reached manhood and grew strong, a relative of Blok's

[84] В ту пору в моей голове как-то уживались модернизм и символизм с самой свирепой надсоновщиной и стишками из «Русского богатства». Блок уже был прочтен, включая «Балаганчик», и отлично уживался с гражданскими мотивами и всей этой тарабарской поэзией. Он не был ей враждебен, ведь он сам из нее вышел.

[85] Над теалтральным чудом зло посмеялся Блок в "Балаганчике", и Комиссаржевская, сыграв "Балаганцчик", посмеялась над собой.

voice" (386).[86] In Mandelstam's account, her voice—like Blok's own—matures within sentimentalism and never really leaves it behind.

The voice is as important for Mandelstam as it is for Blok, but what he values in Komissarzhevskaia's voice seems to be the opposite of what Blok values. While Blok prefers the voice's unmeasurable, emotional, irrational (alogical) qualities, Mandelstam values a dialogue between the irrational and the rational, between chaos and logos. This emphasis on dialogue picks up where the Symbolist conception of voice leaves off, and his treatment of Komissarzhevskaia's performance of *Hedda Gabler* attests to this.

For Mandelstam, Komissarzhevskaia represents a combination of European and Russian artistic and intellectual traditions, one of his early ideals: "In Komissarzhevskaia the Russian intelligentsia found its Protestant spirit." The idea of the actress's, or her theater's, Protestant spirit is emblematized in her performance of Hedda Gabler in Ibsen's drama. Mandelstam describes her action on stage: "Komissarzhevakaia was Hedda. She grew bored of walking and sitting. It turned out that she constantly stood; maybe she went over to the blue lantern of the window of the professor's parlor" (II 385).[87] Now, Mandelstam makes a theoretical claim for this "professor's parlor": "Ibsen for Komissarzhevskaia was a foreign parlor, nothing more. Komissarzhevskaia broke away from the habitual mode of Russian theater as if from a madhouse... " (II 396).[88] The university and the foreign are brought together in the parlor that Komissarzhevskaia wanders; in entering that world she escapes the "deathbed" of Russian theater, and by extension, presumably, Russian culture. (Blok, unlike Mandelstam, writes straightforwardly—and negatively—about this production of *Hedda Gabler.* In his essay

[86] Среди хрюканья и рева, нытья и декламаций мужал и креп ее голос, родственный голосу Блока.
[87] Комиссаржевская была Геддой. Ходить и сидеть она скучала. Получалось, что она всегда стоит; бывало подойдет к синему фонарю окна профессорской гостиной.
[88] Ибсен для Комиссаржевской был иностранной гостиницей, не больше. Комиссаржевская вырвалась из российского театрального быта, как из сумасшедшего дома...

"On Drama" *(O drame)* he writes that Ibsen was not accurately interpreted, that the actors "didn't understand that the sole tragedy of Hedda is the absence of tragedy and the emptiness of her agonizingly beautiful soul—that her ruin is lawful"[89] *(Poeziia* 421).

Protestantism for Mandelstam represents enlightenment, which comes from the West. Komissarzhevskaia's is a "unique Protestantism from art and from theater. Not for nothing was she pulled toward Ibsen and attained a great virtuosity in this Protestant-professor's drama" (II 385).[90] Here, Protestantism represents the rise of the individual: the artist rises above art, and achieves her peak in an environment that is less artistic and more intellectual. Mandelstam's constant aligning of Ibsen with the academic world (based on the circumstances of this one play) ignores the amenability of many of Ibsen's dramas to Symbolist interpretations—and he further separates his idea of Komissarzhevskaia's theater from Symbolist theater, again with the figure of the intellectual: "The intelligentsia never loved the theater and strove to render the theatrical cult as modest and decent as possible."[91] In positing the "intellectual" and the Symbolist against one another, Mandelstam is either claiming that the Symbolists weren't really part of the Russian intelligentsia (which is unlikely) or that his definitions of these terms—at least of "intellegentsia"—do not quite match their common conceptions. Mandelstam aligns the intelligentsia with the Protestant reformation, and draws the theater and the church together in metaphor. He casts Komissarzhevskaia as an iconoclast: "...she cast off all the theatrical frippery: the heat of the lights, the red tiers of seats, the satin nests of the loges."[92] The result is a "wooden amphitheater, white walls, gray cloth—clean, like on a

[89] ...единственная трагедия Гедды — отсутствие трагедии и пустота мучительно прекрасной души, что гибель ее — законна.
[90] ...своеобразный протестантизм от искусства и от театра. Недаром она тянулась к Ибсену и дошла до высокой виртуозности в это протестантски-пристойной профессорской драме.
[91] Интеллигенция всегда не любила театра и стремилась справить театральный культ как можно скромнее и пристойнее.
[92] ...она выкинула всю театральную мишуру: и жар свечей, и красные грядки кресел, и атласные гнезда лож.

yacht, and bare, like in a Lutheran church" (II 385).[93] Implicit here is a polemic with the Symbolists, who in large part also saw the theater as a religious space. The Symbolist understanding of religion is anything but Protestant; it is theurgic.

Protestantism, as a sign for rationalism and the West, is what drives Mandelstam's understanding of voice. Mandelstam's interest tends towards the West but never leaves Russia behind—in one of his first programmatic essays, "Petr Chaadaev," he values the early 19th-century intellectual Chaadaev not because he left Russia to seek enlightenment in the West, but because he did this in order to return to Russia with the light he'd gathered. Komissarzhevakaia's artistic position suggests a certain point along a Chaadaevian journey, a point which inhabits neither the Russian nor the Western, but the border between them: "Komissarzhevskaia went towards this Protestantism in theater, but went out too far, beyond the limits of the Russian, almost to the European."[94] She leaves Russia but has not yet entered Europe—and this midway point, Mandelstam posits, is the space from which her voice emerges:

> In contrast to all the Russian actors of that time...Komissarzhevskaia was internally musical; she raised and lowered her voice as the breathing of the literary construction demanded it. Her playing was three-quarters literary, accompanied by only the most necessary, restrained movements, and these were but few, like wringing her hands over her head. Founding the theater of Ibsen and Maeterlinck, she felt her way into European drama, sincerely convinced that Europe had nothing better or greater to offer.[95]
>
> (II 385)

Mandelstam draws a connection here between Komissarzhevskaia's "restrained" movements and her "feeling her way into" European theater. The Russian word

[93] Деревянный амфитеатр, белые стены, серые сукна — чисто, как на яхте, и голо, как в лютеранской кирке.
[94] Комиссаржевская шла навстречу этому протестантизму в театре, но зашла слишком далеко и вышла из пределов русского почти в европейский.
[95] В отличье от всех тогдашних русских актеров, да, пожалуй, и теперешних, Комиссаржевская была внутренне музыкальна, она подымала и опускала голос так, как это требовалось дыханьем словесного строя; ее игра была на три четверти словесной, сопровождаемой самыми необходимыми скупыми движеньями, и те были все наперечет, вроде заламыванья рук над головой. Создавая театр Ибсена и Метерлинка, она нащупывала европейскую драму, искренне убежденная, что лучшего и большего Европа дать не может.

nashchupat' carries the nuance of discovering something by feeling for it, groping with the hands; the metaphorical intention is likely to link the actress's gestures with a groping for Europe (and all that Mandelstam associates with it), especially as the style of those gestures conforms to a modest, sober "Europeanness." Moreover, it is in this murky middleground that Komissarzhevskaia finds her unique voice, a speaking style that seems deeply connected to the literariness of the text she's performing—*nashchpat'*, to this end, is close in meaning to *osiazat',* which may mean that Mandelstam wants us to see Komissarzhevskaia groping for the *word* (see p. 133). These claims—the actress's standing between Europe and Russia, and her deep connection with text—follow upon one another in "Komissarzhevskaia," but Mandelstam doesn't draw a clear connection between them. One possible link is the betweenness of both the cultural traveler and the theatrical performer: one is a conduit between the home culture and the foreign; the other between a text and its production in time.

This valuing of betweenness would not be new to Mandelstam's thought, but here it comes along with a revision of the Symbolist dichotomy between the word and music. For Mandelstam the word and music are close to the same thing; in fact, the truer something is to the word, the more musical it is. But music in *The Noise of Time* is a different artistic principle than it is for the Symbolists—it represents not a prelinguistic transcendent harmony, but an intellectual, philological reckoning with time and memory. The first section of "Komissarzhevskaia" describes the attainment of language through a connection with time, here understood as a chaotic accumulation of sound. The connection between chaos and music begins in The noise of time's first chapter, "Music in Pavlovsk," in which Mandelstam describes the scene of a concert at a rail station: "Locomotives' whistles and signal bells intermingled with the patriotic cacophony of 19th-century overtures..." (II

348).[96] Over the rest of *The Noise of Time,* language becomes a tuning in to this multivocal sounding in time, labeled here as music. In Blok's conception, the sound of Komissarzhevskaia's voice was more valuable than the content of the text she speaks: the purpose of speech was the delivery of sound with its attendant aura of an ineffable truth. The spoken word, therefore, was a symbolic marker through which the truthbearing music of the voice communicates. For Mandelstam, however, the end of the literary project is not the attainment of truth, nor of a purer form of communicating it (music), but rather of language itself. The poet-narrator of *The Noise of Time* and its actress-heroine Komissarzhevskaia both occupy unstable positions: he amid a swirl of accumulating sound; she between Russia and Europe, between the text and its corporeal production. Both are (pace Heidegger) on the way to language; in each the word is on the way to becoming.

The final chaper of *The Noise of Time,* which follows "Komissarzhevskaia," is called "In a Fur Coat Above one's Station" (V ne po chinu barstvennoi shube). In it, Mandelstam lauds the "literary spite" *(literaturnaia zlost')* that he inherited from his childhood teacher, V.V. Gippius, and further describes this spite as a guarantee of the survival of literature. "Literary spite!" he writes,"you are the seasoning on the unleavened bread of memory...the conspiratorial salt that with an acid bow is passed from decade to decade..." (II 387).[97] The image of salt carries with it not only flavor and acidity, but also preservation. (Earlier in the chapter Mandelstam has described the remnants of Symbolism as rotting fish, so it is clear he has a culinary metaphor in mind.) Preservation of literature is his subject in the chapters's (and memoir's) final paragraph. Meanwhile Mandelstam is also recalling the folk custom of welcoming guests with bread and salt: thus memory and literature are

[96] Свистки паровозов и железнодорожные звонки мешались с патриотической какофонией увертюры двенадцатого года...

[97] Литературная злость!... Ты приправа к пресному хлебу пониманья...заговорщицкая соль, с ехидным поклоном передаваемая из десятилетия в десятилетие...

passed together as a welcome from age to age, preserved in the cultural inheritance of an inviting, familiar gesture.

The fur coat of the title is both an item of clothing and the covering of an animal, a "prickly beast" *(koliuchii zver')* which Mandelstm employs as another image of literature. The coat's wearer, whether man or beast, has emerged from an "apartment-cave" *(kvartira-peshchera)*—reminiscent of the age that descends into "Blok"'s badger hole—and now stands outside in the winter cold. The chapter ends:

> And, in this wintry period of Russian history, literature as a whole and in general appears to me like something lordly, stifling me: trembling, I raise a skin of waxy paper over the writer's winter hat. In this nobody is to blame, and there's nothing to be ashamed of. An animal must not be ashamed of his fur pelt. Night has furred him. Winter has dressed him. Literature is a beast. His furrier is night and winter.[98]
>
> (II 392)

Mandelstam is making an appeal to evolution (predicting his fascination with Lamarck in the early 1930s): the animal grows fur in response to his environment. The word is likewise becoming armed against the age: in its cave, in its fur, or in its spite. Its carriers will become something like baton-bearers, passing their charge through the generations, and the word is itself frozen mid-beat, waiting to be invited again into a warm place.

Conclusion: Bronzed Lips

> Два сонных яблока у века-властелина
> И глиняный прекрасный рот,

[98] И, в этот зимный период русской истории, литература в целом и в общем представляется мне как нечто барственное, смущающее меня: с трепетом приподымаю пленку вощеной бумаги над зимней шапкой писателя. В этом никто не повинен, и нечего стыдится. Нельзя зверю стыдиться пушной своей шкуры. Ночь его опушила. Зима его одела. Литература — зверь. Скорняк — ночь и зима.

Но к млеющей руке стареющего сына
Он, умирая, припадет.

Я знаю, с каждым днем слабеет жизни выдох,
Еще немного — оборвут
Простую песенку о глиняных обидах
И губы оловом зальют. 1924

(The ruler-age has two drowsy apple-orbs/ And a lovely clay mouth. /But to the drooping hand of his aging son/ He, dying, will fall./ I know, with every day the exhalation of life grows weaker,/ A little more and they'll break off / The simple tune of clay grudges/ And fill his lips with tin.)

(179)

Over the course of five years, 1921-1925, Mandelstam completed only twenty-one poems. Their overriding theme is the place of the individual human being within the grand inexorable movements of time and death—a theme echoed in the essays of the same period, as we have seen—and might be expressed most cogently in the question of what human life and art can mean in the face of a lost past, a chaotic present, and a collectivized future.

In two closely linked poems of 1924, "1 January 1924" and "No, never was I anyone's contemporary" (Net, nikogda, nichei ja ne byl sovremennik), Mandelstam envisions the age as a ruler (vlastelin) on his deathbed, and the poet-speaker as his son. The son (with the poet) is placed in the complex position, on the one hand, of living or dying along with the ruler/age, and on the other hand of surviving it. This timeless space of the deathbed, before the consequential act of death has been accomplished, is shadowed in these poems by the sound of the mechanized future, of the encroaching (kingless) mass culture. Omry Ronen writes in *An Approach to Mandel'štam:*

> Modern Russian poetry, from Annenskij and Xodasevič to Xlebnikov and Aseev, developed two themes of the Iron Age: the theme of Lermontov's 'iron verse' and the theme of mechanical civilization. In 1 Jan[uary 1924] the two meet in the image of the typewriter clicking in the ironware rattle of the winter night.

> M.'s rejection of the 'iron verse'...foreshadowed his transition to the 'iron prose'...which he identified with the present tense isolated from the future and the past, and associated with the fearful delirium of Anna Karenina and the 'railroad' poems of Annenskij...
>
> (Ronen 288)

This moment of Mandelstam's artistic life highlights both rejection and survival: rejection of the mechanization of the new age, represented in 'machine' or 'iron' poetry; and the survival of the self within the transfer from the old age to the new.

This transfer will be a violent parody of the Eucharist with which Mandelstam has allied the word: hot metal (tin/*olovo)* will be poured down the king's throat. Ronen points out this method of execution as especially tied to violent transfers of power: in the first place, "the singing lips of the age are sealed in the manner reminiscent of the symbolic feeding with molten gold, to which Marcus Lucretius was subjected by the Parthians." Moreover, Ronen illustrates, Mandelstam had many opportunities to ingest this image, specifically involving molten tin. Two years prior to the completion of "1 January 1924" he had translated a poem of August Barbier's, in which the furnace of the French Revolution melts the nation down into the idol of Napoleon, fusing "lead" and "tin" (svinets and olovo). The stoker "feeds/nourishes" *(kormit)* the furnace with the mixture, and the alloy is formed (Ronen 252-3). A contemporary of Mandelstam's, N. A. Kliuev, chose tin to speak in poetry of the current revolution, and predicted a likewise grim future: "There will be tin in the throat, manacles and the scaffold…" (Budet olovo v gorle, okovy i plakha) (254). Mandelstam may have chosen the element of tin from either of these poems; he may also have heard it in a Khlebnikov lyric of 1923, in which "—like midwives above a crying infant/ Blacksmiths stood around the half-naked body …/ The tongs brought food — /

Melted tin" (253).[99] In each case, mock-feeding with molten metal is a shockingly cruel and violent end to an already dying body. This body—for Mandelstam, the age—is also murdered. (The "variant" to "1 January 1924" contains the line "Let's live out our lives along with the age" (Davaite s vekom vekovat'), 181.) Rather, the midwives of the new age execute the old one by force-feeding it with the future.

But the king doesn't only ingest the molten tin in Mandelstam's image; also, presumably saturated, he lets the metal fall back out through his lips. This backflow takes the place of speech, of what might have been the king's dying words. Dying words—both in the sense of final words and of words that are themselves dying—are a concept that Mandelstam has been exploring, in the context of reading and authorship, since his first writings. In the essay "On the interlocutor," it is the sailor's last words that the wanderer finds on the dunes, and the poet's death is essential to the way Baratynsky's verse hails the young theorist. In numerous poems (e.g. "Silentium" (1910), "Your image, unstable and pliant" (1912)) the escape of the word from the lips signals the death of the idea, in the sense that the idea returns out of mortal, temporal world and reenters the ideal, or the Hall of Shades—while the word lingers, an inadequate record.[100] Mandelstam takes a step from these, thinking of his early poems in "Swallow" (1920), where the word is forgotten before it's spoken, and what remains is a memory of sound: "But on the lips, like black ice, burns/ A recollection of Stygian ringing" (153).[101] Here the word itself has escaped back to the Hall of Shades, and it is hard to disaggregate it from the idea it represents.

[99] Как бабки повивальные/ Над плачущим младенцем,/ Стояли кузнецы у тела полуголого.../ Клещи носили пищу — /Расплавленное олово.

[100] This is an idea favored by the Symbolists, with its most salient moment in Tiutchev, whom the Symbolists considered their progenitor: in his poem "Silentium!" (1830) Tiutchev famously declares that a thought, once expressed, is a lie ("Mysl' izrechelnnaia est' lozh'").

[101] А на губах, как черный лед, горит/ Стигийского воспоминанье звона.

Words die on the lips, and metal will harden, will bronze. Yet, in "The Finder of a Horseshoe" (Nashedshii Podkovu), a poem written very close to the composition of "1 January 1924," Mandelstam finds value in lips that have spoken, because they preserve, in a way, the words they have let loose:

> Так
> Нашедший подкову
> Сдувает с нее пыль
> И растирает ее шерстью, пока она не заблестит.
> Тогда
> Он вешает ее на пороге,
> Чтобы она отдохнула,
> И больше уж ей не придется высекать искры из кремня.
> Человеческие губы, которым больше нечего сказать,
> Сохраняют форму последнего сказанного слова…
>
> (Thus/ the finder of a horseshoe/ Blows the dust off it/ And rubs it with wool, until it shines./ Then/ He hangs it over the threshold,/ So that it can rest,/ And it will no longer chance to strike sparks from the flint./ Human lips which have nothing left to say/ Preserve the form of the last spoken word…)
>
> (173)

Here, the horseshoe is something like a living metonym for the galloping horse; living because Mandelstam grants it memory. It holds a trace of the gallop, thus acting as a bearer of an ineffable message: like the message in "On the interlocutor"'s bottle, except non-lingual. This emblem, composed of formed metal, is then likened to lips that have spoken their last words: non-lingual but bearing a trace of what must in this case have been a verbal message. Mandelstam seems to be experimenting with the human being as a carrier of the word. The horseshoe, since it survives, tells us that these unspeaking lips may also survive somehow—though not by speaking—and in some new way guarantee the survival of the word whose proper instrument they have been.

But how can lips of clay survive their burial under the metal of the new age? We have seen Mandelstam bury the future of literature in clay wine jugs in "A word on Georgian art"; we have also looked at "1 January 1924," in which the dying ruler has a

mouth of clay. Clay turns out to be a dominant of this poem and its variant, "No, never was I anyone's contemporary," both of which focus on a dying ruler, whose body in the second poem is made entirely of clay. This human element appears in the following formulations in "1 January 1924": "clay lovely mouth" (glinianyi prekrasnyi rot); "a simple song of clay grudges" (Prostuiu pesen'ku o glinianykh obidakh); "O life of clay!" (O glinianaia zhizn'!); and in "No, never…": "clay lovely mouth" (glinianyi prekrasnyi rot); and "strangely the clay body stretched out" (stranno vytianulos' glinianoe telo). Omry Ronen points out in his commentary to "1 January" that "the figurative sense of the epithet glinianyi [clay] is 'transient,' 'fragile,' and has definite scriptural connotations," not only in the book of Daniel's "feet of iron and clay," representing Nebuchadnezzar's divided kingdom, but also in Jonah's complaint to God: "thou hast made me as the clay; and wilt thou bring me into dust again."[102] The fate of clay that speaks and stretches is locked into the discourse of fragility and transience: it must shatter or crumble. So does the age guarantee its passage into silence and death by having its lips and body broken—perhaps as it speaks its final word, delivers its inheritance—and it is up to the ruler's son, the age's inheritor, to find voice for the word that dies on the father's lips.

The "perhaps" that Grigory Freidin identifies as a pole of Mandelstam's poetics; the "perhaps" that says "Perhaps ages will pass, /And the native hands of blissful women /Will collect our light ashes"—this "perhaps" might well be the word frozen on the monarch's dying lips. It casts its double shadow on both the human being and the word: even its predicate is uncertain. A biographical catastrophe at the end of the 1920s will be required for Mandelstam to move those lips again.

[102] See Ronen 1983, 245-6 and 251-2.

CHAPTER FOUR

TRANSLATION AS A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH

The Problem of Translation

In the early 1920s Mandelstam began to earn his living by translating; work that he did not enjoy, and could not have enjoyed. Oleg Lekmanov sums up in his biography of Mandelstam:

> "In 1923 Mandelstam was taken off every contributors' list [of the Moscow and Leningrad literary journals]...'They're only letting me do translations,' he complained'"— attested Nadezhda Mandelstam. "From 1923 he was occupied exclusively with translations" (a doleful statement from an entry in a biographical dictionary). Translation work—primarily prose—at least brought the family some money. But to Mandelstam (as with Akhmatova), it brought little joy.
>
> (136)

Though Lekmanov mentions exceptions (the old-French poem "The Sons of Aimon," which Mandelstam included in the third edition of "Stone," and the poetry of Max Bartel)[1], for the most part Mandelstam did not consider translation as anything like literary art, and his essays that deal explicitly with translation ("Torrents of hackwork" (Potoki khaltury, 1929) and "On translations" (O perevodakh, 1929)) are only interested in its production and cultural effects and not any kind of artistry, and were besides written as Mandelstam was still reeling from the accusations of plagiarism—of a translation, no less (Charles de Coster's *Till Eulenspiegel,* 1928)—that marked his demise as a publishable writer in the Soviet Union.

In 1922, just as his translation career was getting underway (the excerpt from "Aimon" was completed in 1922; his version of Ernst Toller's play *Masse Mensch* would debut the following year) Mandelstam made a rare foray into the theoretical side of

[1] See Lekmanov 136-7.

translation, in the article "Remarks on Chenier" (Zametki o Shen'e). This unpublished article was probably composed for the journal *Iambi,* but may have incorporated parts of a lecture Mandelstam delivered not long before, as well as an earlier article on Chenier written in 1914.[2]

A striking image in the article is the figure of Romantic poetry as a necklace of dead nightingales:

> The laws of poetry sleep in the throat, and all Romantic poetry, like a necklace of dead nightingales, will not betray, will not give out its secrets, does not know bequeathal. A dead nightingale won't teach anyone to sing.[3]
>
> (II 278)

This necklace echoes central images from two poems of August 1920. In "Take, for the sake of joy, from my palms" (Voz'mi na radost' iz moikh ladonei), the poet offers the reader a gift of "a little sun and a little honey" from the "bees of Persephone." Honey and bees were signs of love and poetry in classical Greek poetry, adopted by Russian poets in the 19th century; but Mandelstam offers them to his lover (the poem was dedicted to Ol'ga Arbenina)[4] in this strange form:

> Возьми ж на радость дикий мой подарок —
> Невзрачное сухое ожерелье
> Из мертвых пчел, мед превративших в солнце!
>
> (Take then, for joy, my wild gift —/ A plain dry necklace/ Of dead bees, who transformed honey into sun!)
>
> (157)

The gift, in a large sense, is the poem. The poem is a condensation of essences (like honey) that achieves its form in an arrangement of independent units (the bees), hinting at the

[2] See II, 626. The text survives as fragments, which may indeed represent different drafts or sources spanning eight years, so one cannot assume a strong or intentional connection between separate pieces—though A. G. Mets has built a case for there being no connection between the 1914 and 1922 versions of the article, meaning that it is correct to place the entire surviving text in 1922.

[3] Законы поэзии спят в гортани, и вся романтическая поэзия, как ожерелье из мертвых соловьев, не предаст, не выдаст своих тайн, не знает завещания. Мертвый соловей никого не научит петь.

[4] See notes to Poem 107 in *Polnoe sobranie stikhotvorenii*, 560-1.

Gothic-cathedral metaphor for poetic construction in "Notre Dame" and "Morning of Acmeism," in which stones that "thirsted after another being…asked to be let into the crossed vault, to participate in joyful cooperation with those like [them]" (I 178).[5] The bees' bodies, like cathedral stones, are given the chance by a formal arrangement to be a gift, to carry forth their legacy—just as words, husks of form cast off by a wild linguistic impulse, may recover that impulse once they are arranged in a poem.[6]

The word appears as a dead *bird* in another August 1920 poem, "I forgot the word I wanted to say" (Ia slovo pozabyl, chto ia khotel skazat'). The "dead swallow" that "falls at one's feet/ With…a green twig" (153) represents an individual yet unspecified (forgotten) word: it flies blind through the underworld, consorting with the shades, yet when it meets the one who's seeking it (the poet), it falls dead at his feet. Unlike the bees, the swallow comes of out darkness rather than light; and bears no relation to any others "like it." In "I forgot the word," the poet is a frustrated receiver more than he is a joyful giver or assembler. A necklace of dead birds is a darker gift, bereft of the eros and light of the bees, unfulfilled as language. Looking at the bee and the swallow as parts of the same poetic worldview, the swallow cannot fulfill its mission in part because it is alone—the poet cannot pick it up from his feet and lay it into a poetic construction, because he can't remember it in the first place.

One would expect more poetry out of nightingales than out of swallows, given their close association with the Romantics and with poetry in general—plus in "Chenier" Mandelstam doesn't leave the nightingale to die alone but arranges it in a necklace with its "likes." Nevertheless these dead nightingales don't speak, in or out of chorus, or teach the

[5] …возжаждал иного бытия…попросился в «крестовый свод» — участвовать в радостном взаимодействии себе подобных. Glazov-Corrigan (17) actually draws this connection between "Utro Akmeizma" and "Zametki o Shen'e," but doesn't extend it to "Voz'mi na radost'."

[6] For the sake of space, this reading ignores the poem's erotic dominant: for a detailed reading of this, see Taranovsky, 99ff.

listener to sing. This necklace doesn't perform the work of the bees—or the songs of Ossian in the poem "I've never heard the tales of Ossian" (Ia ne slykhal rasskazov Ossiana, 1914), or the message in a bottle of the essay "On the Interlocutor" (O sobesednike, 1913), or the hair of the beloved in "The Word and Culture" (Slovo i kul'tura, 1921), etc.—that is to say, it doesn't transmit a poetic or cultural inheritance in a dormant, compressed form that awaits transfiguration in the ears (or mouth) of the reader (or poet). Romantic poetry, in this estimation, is a collection of linguistic activity that has already run its cycle—it doesn't retain the creative potential that keeps the bees poetic, nor does it partake of the blind flight of the underworld swallow, who may keep moving as long as it doesn't surface.

But Mandelstam wants to say that in Chenier's poetry, the dead nightingales do sing, and can teach singing—and he does this, in part, with recourse to translation. Mandelstam suggests that Chenier's poetry communicates not only across various times , but also across languages and national literary traditions:

> In these lines [of Chenier's] one hears Tatiana's letter to Onegin...: it is the same in the heart of the French language, just as staunchly unwitting in French as Tatiana's letter is in Russian. For us, through the crystal of Pushkin's poetry these lines sound almost Russian...[7]
>
> (II 282)

Mandelstam is identifying something like a literary or cultural impulse that survives in a package like a bottle or a prosodic convention—but here it survives in the casing of another language. Strangely, once seen (heard) through the prism of Pushkin's poetry, Chenier's lines become not more Pushkinesque, but more *Russian.* They are as if translated into Russian while remaining French on the surface.

[7] В этих строчках слышится письмо Татьяны к Онегину...: это так же в сердце французского языка, так же сугубо невольно по-французски, как Татьянино письмо по-русски. Для нас сквозь кристалл пушкинских стихов эти стихи звучат почти русскими...

Mandelstam follows up this analysis by invoking the brotherhood of all languages: that is, invokes his model of poetic communication between individuals and redeploys it in terms of languages. These can also communicate across space and time:

> Thus in poetry national borders fall, and the elements of different languages call back and forth to one another over the heads of space and time, for all languages are bound in a fraternal union, establishing itself on the freedom and domesticity of each language, and within this freedom they address one another fraternally, familiarly and without ceremony.[8]
>
> (II 282-3)

Here, as in Mandelstam's ideal of poetic transmission, is a dialogue between freedom and convention: each language is free in itself, but shares a framework with the the others through which the elements of each are translatable into the other. Thus, the Romantic freedom in Chenier's lines, analyzed here, is tempered not by elements in the verse itself, but by translatable linguistic elements that become apparent as soon as Mandelstam exposes the lines to the possibility of translation. In this way a Romantic "necklace of dead nightingales" finds a way to enter into Mandelstam's model of poetic communication: it finds its protective vessel in the possibility of translation.[9]

Yet this idea never gained ground after the Chenier essay. Mandelstam didn't write about translation again until the end of the 20s, when he became embroiled in a scandal that has come to be known as the Gornfel'd affair—and by then his view of translation had sharpened and become bitter. The scandal erupted in 1929 over a new translation into Russian of Charles de Coster's novel *The Legend of Thyl Ulenspiegel and Lamme Goedzak.* Mandelstam had been picked to edit a new edition of the novel in Russian that was to combine two existing translations, one of which had been undertaken by the critic and

[8] Так в поэзии разрушаются грани национального, и стихия одного языка перекликается с другой через головы пространства и времени, ибо все языки связаны братским союзом, утверждающимся на свободе и домашности каждого, и внутри этой свободы братски родственны и по-домашнему аукаются.
[9] For a survey of vessels for the word in Mandelstam, see Chapter Three.

translator Arkady Gornfel'd (1867-1941) in 1915. The publishing house Land and Factory (Zemlia i Zavod) credited Mandelstam with the translation on the title page of the new edition, a mistake which inspired attacks on Mandelstam from both Gornfel'd and other critics in various places (including *Izvestiia),* even after Mandelstam had publicly explained the situation. The upshot was the effective end of Mandelstam's officfffial status (and earning potential) as a writer in Soviet Russia.

Mandelstam's situation was somewhat remedied when Politburo member Nikolai Bukharin (the closest thing Mandelstam had to a patron in the Soviet leadership) secured him a five-month trip to Armenia and the subsequent publication of a travel narrative in 1930. Mandelstam's stay in Armenia—the friends he made, the poetry he encountered, the images and ideas with which he became acquainted—are said to have restored his voice.[10]

These biographical events mark an important moment in the development of Mandelstam's ideas of the life and afterlife of poetic language. While, as in his earlier writings, he is still concerned with how poetry (and culture in general) survives death and the passage of time, in the writings of 1929-1931 he switches his metaphor of language (from, for example, architecture or the Eucharist) to the organic life form. This move caps Mandelstam's development of his idea of cultural inheritance, the role of the poet in literary history, and the relationship between the poet and his addressee: looking at his reception theory of "On the Interlocutor" and his images of culture in the essays of the early 1920s through the lens of *Journey to Armenia,* it can be surmised that Mandelstam might consider poetry as the translation of texts that have not yet come to be. Using this formula, we can understand not only why he never talks about translation as such as a literary endeavor (actually considering it the opposite of artistic creation), but also why the organism was an apt metaphor at the time that the poet had fallen out of literary favor—

[10] See Nadezhda Mandel'stam, *Vospominaniia.*

how, in other words, he could complete his idea of literary reception and transmission at a time when the prospect of reaching an audience had suddenly been made hopeless, when, perhaps, he first became convinced of the possibility that he might never reach an audience again in his lifetime.

Journey of the Interlocutor, 1913-1922

The model of reception that Mandelstam sets up in his 1913 article "On the Interlocutor" verges on a model of poetic creation (see Chapter Two for detailed discussion). This model portrays reading and writing as joined in a co-creative act that makes the poem. The figure of the "interlocutor" *(sobesednik)* is both reader and writer—and thus an inheritor and appropriator of existing material. These moments are, first, the bottle-finder's appropriation of the message inside ("The bottle was addressed to the one who found it. I found it. I am therefore its secret addressee") and, second, a poet's desire to be surprised by his own words as he reads them (analogous to the reader's desire to feel as if he has had a part in authoring the text). In both cases a text undergoes transformation: the (other's) message in a bottle attains an aura of appropriateness, and one's (own) speech act attains an aura of unfamiliarity. The author turns out to be a part of the reader, and vice versa. The nexus between self and other is thus analogized to the nexus between author and reader.

The central concepts in this model of reading and writing—appropriation, transformation, the confusion of familiar and unfamiliar, the conflation of subjectivities—are ripe for inclusion into a discussion of translation, and have been for more than one seminal theorist of the subject (i.e. Benjamin, Steiner, Celan). But Mandelstam, as

mentioned above, does not seem to be interested in translation, at least as a theoretical approach to the study of literature. The clues to why he stops at translation also offer insight into what he might have said about translation—or indeed was already saying about it—without actually mentioning it by name. The track begins in "On the Interlocutor," where he first addresses texts as objects of literary transformation, and continues through those isolated moments in his own translation practice where he was actually interested in the text he was translating (that is, when he wasn't doing it at the behest of the state in order to make his living), right up through his final prose testaments on the art of poetry, *Journey to Armenia* and *Conversation about Dante.* The key difference in Mandelstam's conceptions of translation on the one hand and poetic creation on the other is that while the first is a translation of a text that *exists,* the second is a translation of a text that has not yet come to be.

Mandelstam's first recorded translations appear in two poems about Racine's tragedy *Phèdre,* written concurrently or in immediate succession, as well as a fragment of a translation that Mandelstam attempted of *Phèdre* itself in the early 1920s[11]. In these short texts, translation appears as an analogue to Mandelstam's conception of the poetic word in dialogue with an interlocutor, posited for the first time in "On the Interlocutor" but not overtly picked up thereafter in Mandelstam's theoretical writing. "On the Interlocutor" in fact presents the only instance of Mandelstam's model of poetic finding that applies itself to a *text* (rather than a horseshoe, a rhythm, etc., or even a line of poetry[12]) in his entire body of work, and rare in his thought as a whole is an encounter with a text that transforms it. The poems surrounding *Phèdre* are anomalous in Mandelstam's oeuvre in that they deal with the question of a transposed, translated text in, or even as, a poetic creation.

[11] For a discussion of the *Phaedra* poems in the context of Mandelstam's writing on the theater, see Chapter Three.
[12] "A disgraced verse fell, not knowing its father./...a find for a creator" (Упал опальный стих, не знающий отца./...находка для творца...) 264.

Mandelstam's poems on *Phèdre,* written in 1915, were based on Racine's tragedy, in turn founded on the Greek myth as dramatized by Euripides and Seneca. In these poems, he brings himself into conversation with the lost world of antiquity, a conversation that reflects the dialogical reader-writer model of "On the Interlocutor" while also drawing closer to thoughts on translation. The multiple transpositions of culture and art inherent in the meeting of Russian, Greek, and French literatures—as well as the Greek classical, French classical, and Russian modern periods—are echoed by the transposition of Racine's dramatic lines from French to Russian. Translation also comes to the fore through Mandelstam's theoretical interest in the word suspended in anticipation of dialogue: ready to be received by an interlocutor, but not having attained its destination. Transposition and suspension, of course, are key motive elements in the voyage of the bottle in "On the Interlocutor," and here they appear in practice.

The poem "I'll never see the celebrated Phaedra" (Ja ne uvizhu znamenitoi Fedry) is, among other things, about a modern audience's many-layered isolation from classical tragic action, be the barriers thrown up by interpretation (Racine, of Euripides), by personal alienation, or by weariness of the tragic spectacle and the cathartic release One of these moments of isolation turns out to be a line of dialogue translated from Racine's play, which Mandelstam places between the poem's first and second stanzas, and which occupies a fitting place of betweenness—suspension—emblematic in his conception of the word.

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 празднество 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... 1915

(127)

I will not see the famous "Phèdre"/ In an antique, multitiered theater, / From a high soot-stained gallery,/ By the light of candles guttering in their own wax./ And, indifferent to the bustle of the actors,/ Gathering the harvest of applause,/ I won't hear, directed to the footlights,/ The line, feathered with a double rhyme:// —How sick I am of these veils...// Theater of Racine! A mighty curtain/ Divides us from another world;/ Agitated by deep wrinkles,/ The curtain lies between it and us./ The voice strengthens, melted by suffering,/ And reaches the grieving temper/ Of syllables made white-hot by indignation...// I was too late for the festival of Racine!// Once more the rotted programs rustle,/ And it smells faintly of orange rind,/ And, as if from the lethargy of the ages,/ My awakened neighbor says to me:/ —Exhausted by the madness of Melpomene,/ I only want peace in this life;/ Let's go, before the spectator-jackals/ Decide to tear apart the Muse!// If the Greek could have seen our games...

The poem's first stanza is dominated by an apophatic rendering of a performance of "Phaedra" which comes to life in the terms offered by the poet's ineluctable absence. One advantage of such an approach is that the historical/cultural details of the performance remain ambiguous: a suggestion of the classical French theater of Racine's time (17th century) blends with the glory days of classical theater in St. Petersburg in the 1870s,

invoked by Mandelstam in *The Noise of Time* and "The Moscow Art Theater," as well as (by extention) the theater of classical Greece. The poet's presence is negative, but the action is not viewed as any less real; details of the theater's appearance as well as of the spectator's internal state are present and realistic—the emphasis is on the negation of a listening ear. When Phaedra's speech is presented, it in fact suffers a double negation of addressee: the poet, as we know, won't be there in any case—but those who are actually in the theater don't hear the speech either. The actors are too busy "gathering applause"; the audience is presumably too busy providing it. Phaedra speaks: "How hateful are these veils to me..." but it seems there's no one there to listen. Her voice, then, is as veiled as the variations—all unattainable—of the play's performance in the poet's mind. As the various theaters are suspended in mid-realization, so is Phaedra's voice suspended between her lips and any attentive ear.

Of all the lines of Phaedra's that Mandelstam could have introduced into his poem, he chooses one about covers and veils. Mandelstam here translates Phaedra's line, "Que ces vains ornements, que ces voiles me pèsent!" (How these vain ornaments, how these veils oppress me!) from the play's first act, third scene. The poet won't introduce Phaedra's voice into the lived reality of the poem; since he won't see the celebrated Phaedra, he won't hear the line he is relating for us in the poem. He is separated from the world of that theater, and the multiple veiling in these lines reinforces that separation. The line of dialogue—torn without context from a longer speech—is also veiled from the surrounding stanzas: it speaks, but does not find an audience.

Rather than allowing Phaedra's voice to penetrate the surrounding text, to somehow break the veil and allow her to enter the action of the poem, Mandelstam turns his attention to the very veil that keeps her out of it. She is perhaps allowed to enter the action of the play (the shawl, as it were, falls from her shoulders), but the curtain between the

spectators and the stage, between "us" and the "other world," remains down. The action continues to take place behind it, perhaps causes its furrows, but it remains invisible; as against a Symbolist veil, whose opaqueness a poet can penetrate, Mandelstam's veil is "mighty" and carries the weight and intertia of a theatrical curtain. Like the audience, the poet (with his reader) must acknowledge his separation from what's behind it; he must face, and contemplate, ineluctable barriers.

What might penetrate the veil and break through to the spectator is the fact of Phaedra's voice. Likewise, what is available to the poet, who was too late to see the play and won't have another chance, is the artifact of *Phèdre*'s text. But the voice must remain unanswered, the text broken, in order for the poet to fashion it into art—or in the terms of "On the Interlocutor," to *find* it. This idea is right in line with Mandelstam's poetics of assimilation, and indeed the poem's last stanza presents another instance of overt finding. The line "I only want peace in this life!" (Ja v etoj zhizni zhazhdu tol'ko mira!) is a close echo of a line in Innokenty Annensky's translation of Euripides' *Melanippe the Philosopher,* spoken by Aeolus: "My zhe mira, bog, my zhazhdem tol'ko mira!" (We are of peace, God, we thirst only after peace!)[13] This interpolation of Annensky serves multiple purposes. First, it briefly lends the poet's imagined spectator-neighbor the aura of a figure in Eurpidiean tragedy, therby nullifying the impenetrable curtain between the house and the stage, between the lived present and the discrete past. Second, it strengthens the theme of translation, nodding to the poet (Annensky) through whose translations Mandelstam became familiar with the tragedies of Euripides—not least the *Ippolit,* one of his sources for the Phaedra poems. It is also a parody—Aeolus's tragic torment is brought into comparison with the exhaustion of the poet's "neighbor." This unnamed figure is exhausted the "madness" of Melpomene, muse of tragedy, and resists as well the frenzy, reminiscent of

[13] See V. V. Ivanov.

Dionysian revels, that would "tear up" that muse—reflecting a modern theatergoer's lack of contact with the ancients. "If the Greek could have seen our games," he presumably wouldn't have been very impressed, or even have understood how they could be called theater. All the forms of interstitial contact that the poem presents come up short; the curtain is perhaps poked at but never broken through. Translation, like the rest, is unsuccessful at bringing worlds together.

For all the talk about the impenetrable veil, though, it remains that a curtain rises and falls when theatrical action begins and ends. And Mandelstam represents Phaedra's voice as something it takes no effort to hear; after all, it is presented to us while the curtain is raised. But even this is not the desired breaking-through—if the thing is handed to us, it's somehow deprived of the impulsive energy that makes it artistically viable in the first place. Translation is a way for Mandelstam to show us this "unwinged" (or emasculated) line. Coming to us bare, it deprives us of the chance to penetrate its curtain and thereby participate in the act of co-creation necessary to successful reading. Accordingly, the translated line of Phaedra's behaves differently from the poem's other assimilative moments. Mandelstam describes Phaedra's voice not in terms of the content it bears, but rather in terms of its intonation, the "white-hot" coloring of its "syllables." The voice is encased in the poem's amber, unable to break through but always about to flutter. Unlike the Annensky echo, which enters into the poem's fabric, Phaedra's line stands out against it. It remains unassimilated because it is unaltered—or at least because, *like* a translation and *as* a translation, it is designed to appear unaltered—and thereby skips the transfigurative process inherent in the act of poetic finding. The famous *Phèdre* has already been seen, and will not be seen again. Phaedra's line, accordingly, has already been found—by Racine—and cannot be found again.

In the second poem, "How heavy is the luxury amid my disgrace" (Kak etikh pokryval i etogo ubora) Phaedra's voice is more present. The poem's structure introduces three couplets of her speech, which Mandelstam adapts and translates from Racine's text, and sets them off against three choral speeches, which he invents. The chorus was not current in classical French tragedy and does not appear in Racine's play; however, it is present in Euripides's *Hippolytus* (428 BC) and Seneca's *Phaedra* (1st c. AD), in which Racine sourced his text, and according to A. G. Mets, Mandelstam is here again going back to Annensky.[14] Not only did the older poet translate Euripides, he also wrote classical dramas heavily influenced by the Greek tragedian. It is to these dramas that Mets claims Mandelstam gets his choral speeches. These speeches present a different scheme of veiling from that of "I'll never see the celebrated Phaedra."

Both poems present multilayered veils and rifts, a scene of multivalent separations and isolations, but while the first poem veiled Phaedra's voice in a monologic outburst, this poem veils it as dialogue. A typical chorus, as is the case here, predicts the action and abstracts it, draws philosophical connections, warns and laments. It explicates the fates but is powerless against them; it is cued by a character's speech but cannot change the conversation. Phaedra's voice, moreover, is brought into dialogue only with the chorus; no other personages appear in Mandelstam's poem. It could be argued, then, that the presence of dialogue here only reinforces Phaedra's isolation, only casts in greater relief her monologic outbursts. In the reception scheme of "On the Interlocutor," the chorus would look like Phaedra's finder, that is her interlocutor—hearing and understanding her, and reacting according to its own composition and its own concerns. As such, the chorus's responses present a scheme where an already found text (Racine's lines) once again cannot

[14] See *Polnoe sobranie stikhotvorenii* 541.

enter the fabric of the poem—cannot become interlocutory—but may only send ripples, as it were, through the veil, against that forbidden world:

"Как этих покрывал и этого убора
Мне пышность тяжела средь моего позора!"

— Будет в каменной Трезене
Знаменитая беда,
Царской лестницы ступени
Покраснеют от стыда.
. . . . . .
. . . . . .
И для матери влюбленной
Солнце черное взойдет.

"О, если б ненависть в груди моей кипела, —
Но видите — само признанье с уст слетело".

— Черным пламенем Федра горит
Среди белого дня.
Погребальный факел чадит
Среди белого дня.
Бойся матери ты, Ипполит:
Федра — ночь — тебя сторожит
Среди белого дня.

"Любовью черною я солнце запятнала..."
. . . . . .

— Мы боимся, мы не смеем
Горю царскому помочь.
Уязвленная Тезеем,
На него напала ночь.
Мы же, песнью похоронной
Провожая мертвых в дом,
Страсти дикой и бессонной
Солнце черное уймем. 1915, 1916

"How heavy is the luxury amid my disgrace/ Of these veils and ornaments!"// —In stony Trezene there will be/ A famous calamity,/ The steps of the palace staircase/ Will redden with shame./.../.../ And for the enamoured mother/ A black sun will rise.// "Oh, if only hatred boiled in my breast,—/ But look — the confession has flown by itself from my lips."// —Phaedra burns with a black flame/ In broad daylight.[15]/ A funerary torch smokes/ In broad daylight./ Fear your mother, Ippolit:/ Phaedra — night — keeps watch over you/ In broad daylight.// "With my black love I've stained the sun..."/...// —We are afraid, we dare not/ Allieve a kingly sorrow./ Wounded by Theseus,/ Night has fallen on him./ But we, with a funeral dirge/
Escorting the dead to their home,/ Will soothe/restrain the black sun/ Of wild and sleepless passion.

(131)

There are several markers in this poem that hint at the incompatibility of found texts with new poetic creation. The is version cited above, with its marked ellipses, was the version published in *Tristia* (1922), Mandelstam's second collection of poetry. Earlier drafts reveal several different versions of this poem—along with a fragment on the same theme but absent the formal theatrical premise—not all of which feature ellipses, as the published version does. Mandelstam must have regarded the poem as complete, with its ellipses. These reintroduce the presence of hidden or inaccessible texts—texts with which it is impossible to engage—suggested by Phaedra's solitary line of dialogue in the earlier poem.

When these texts emerge in this poem, here as Phaedra's three lines of dialogue, there arises a second element of inscrutability: the weave that binds Phaedra and the chorus in conversation. They do not exchange semantic packages, but rather shift between lenses on the unfolding tragedy of the play, as if reinforcing a musical or intonational development. Again, the dialogue here is not only between stage actors, and thereby between the characters they play, but also between the French classical and the Greek classical, and between the French and Russian languages—these latter cultural and linguistic actors are involved in the tragedy just as much as the physical actors and their

[15] "In the middle of the white day" here is idiomatic for "in broad daylight'; "beloe" (white) nevertheless strikes against "chernoe" (black) in the previous line.

masks. The tragedy in this poem, moreover, is metaphorized in terms of opposites that veil their opposition but are nevertheless irreconcilable. The black flame, black sun, night lurking in broad daylight—these are malicious veilings of light, but, as Victor Terras points out, it is implied that light will triumph and the veils will be cast.[16] Night will return to blackness, day to white, when the guilty are brought to justice and the calamity has passed. Likewise, cultures, epochs, languages may be thrust into the same work of art or the same mode of consciousness, but they are pregnant with their own return home—unless, as Mandelstam claims throughout his critical writing, they are transfigured by their finder, the poet, and fused into something new. Phaedra's lines, despite their transposition both from *Phèdre* and from French, remain untransfigured and therefore can only darkly hint at dialogue. This dialogue would then happen on a deeper level that subtends both Phaedra's and the chorus's modes of communication—a level that Mandelstam, in his essay on Chenier, proclaims lies underneath all languages—analogous to the place of shadows in "I forgot the word I wanted to say," a precognitive, prelinguistic realm, out which language has not yet emerged. Intertextuality here is mere juxtaposition—but this will soon change, and intertextuality will become a key part of the model of reading advanced in "On the Interlocutor" and its surrounding writings.

Intertextuality and reading, meet, for example, in the 1914 poem "I have not heard the tales of Ossian" (Ia ne slykhal rasskazov Ossiana), which celebrates appropriation of other texts as worthy and necessary poetic endeavors—but with a Mandelstamian twist that calls the other text into question:

> Я не слыхал рассказов Оссиана,
> Не пробовал старинного вина;
> Зачем же мне мерещится поляна,
> Шотландии кровавая луна?

[16] See Terras.

И перекличка ворона и арфы
Мне чудится в зловещей тишине;
И ветром развеваемые шарфы
Дружинников мелькают при луне!

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. 1914

I have not heard the tales of Ossian,/ Nor sampled ancient wine;/ So why does a glade seem to appear to me,/ The bloody moon of Scotland?// And the calls between raven and harp/ Appear to me in malignant silence;/ And the wind-blown scarves/ Of men-at-arms flicker in the moonlight!// I have received a blessed inheritance —/ The wandering visions of other bards;/ My kinship and my tedious proximity/ Are free for me to despise.// And more than one treasure, perhaps,/ Skipping the grandchildren, will pass to the great-grandchildren,/ And again a skald will compose another's song/ And pronounce it as his own.

(120)

There are many convergences between this poem and the essay "On the Interlocutor," not least of which is the idea that poetry cannot come from one's immediate surroundings, but must rather be formed out of some surprising new place and time, from something that is neither one's own nor one's neighbor's but seems clearly other. There is the implication that not having heard the tales of Ossian permits the poet to envision and recount them, moreover in his voice, through his own poetic medium. The glade and the men-at-arms appear to him precisely because he has not read about them. Similarly, the performance he describes in “I’ll never see the celebrated Phaedra” is one he has not seen. In both cases, the poet's absence from these moments ensures that they are his to create; this freedom necessarily brings with it an abiding interest in barriers of space and time and personality, veils of various sorts that both enable and obscure poetic communication.

An interest in translation enters "I've never heard the tales of Ossian," but through a side door. The tales of Ossian, including fragments of ancient Scottish poetry and an epic, were purportedly found and translated by the Scottish poet James Macpherson from the Gaelic and Erse languages. These works appeared in the early 1760s and proved extremely influential on the Romantic movement across Europe. Goethe introduced the tales of Ossian into *The Sorrows of Young Werther,* and they first appeared in Russian when this novel was translated in 1781. Ossian became a popular subject among the poets of the Russian golden age (Derzhavin, Pushkin, Lermontov, etc.) even as controversy was heating up about whether the tales were authentic or forgeries committed by Macpherson. Thus, when Mandelstam composed his poem, Ossian's tales were a foundational trope in modern Russian literature as well as a famous scandal of authenticity. The tales are at once a cultural inheritance and a nonexistent text, both of which, according to the young Mandelstam, are food for the creative faculty and the poetic voice.

If Macpherson had found and translated an existing text, if there had been no doubt about Ossian's authenticity, this poem would not have fit so well into Mandelstam's scheme of poetic creation. If Macpherson is a forger, then he is a poet and not a translator, since the supposedly translated text doesn't exist. But as a poet, Macpherson is creating the text he supposedly translated—not as a finished piece of art (which, per Mandelstam, would not be worth translating) but as a pretext, or nonexistent text, which demands realization and completion by its finder. Through this turn, the tales of Ossian—the "treasure," the "inheritance" he describes in the poem—are not yet in existence when Macpherson wrote. Macpherson translates a text that does not exist, and therefore creates both poetry and the pre-text that survives his poem and awaits its next instantiation as language (adrift, as the bottle is on the sea). If translation can be valued in Mandelstam's conception of poetic creation, it must be translation of a non-existent text.

"I will not see the celebrated Phaedra" and "I have not heard the tales of Ossian" are unique in Mandelstam's ouevre, and in key ways closely related. In addition to the thematic correspondences mentioned above, they share a common meter (iambic pentameter) and closely related first lines, which sound even closer in Russian (Ia ne uvizhu znamenitoi Fedry; Ia ne slykhal rasskazov Ossiana) than they do in English; they were also written close to one another (1914, 1915). Mandelstam seems to have been trying out a theme of apophatic ekphrasis, in order (perhaps) to create a field that will allow different epochs, cultures, traditions, and languages to meet and exchange energies in a thematic and linguistic system of tensions (fitting his metaphor of a Gothic cathedral for a poem in "Morning of Acmeism")—but also perhaps to thematically suggest the scheme of poetic creation he has debuted in "On the Interlocutor," in which the creative finding upon which poetry depends must follow upon a darkness, a nonexistence. These two poems present creative phenomena that come into being, that take form, as they are pulled from an abyss of negation—likewise, a poem's finder catches its being out of emptiness and brings it into existence.

This is a strange breed of intertextuality, one that depends on the negation of texts. Indeed, a fuller reading of Mandelstam's ideas of intertextuality, which extends far beyond the early poems discussed here, is less mystical. On the whole, Mandelstam won't admit the abiding influence of a text once it is seen as complete. Intertextuality is only poetic if the texts are always in the process of completing themselves and one another—something like the way the subjectivities of author and reader come to grips in the field of reading.

The Word Interrupted, 1924-1930

In the latter half of the 1920s Mandelstam suffered a five-year break with poetry. In these years he produced his great non-critical prose works *(The Noise of Time, Feodosia, The*

Egyptian Stamp) but, occupied professionally (like many of his contemporaries) with the translation of poetry, he found his own poetic muse departed. In this period he uncharacteristically addresses translation by name; but he associates it mainly with state-sponsored literary production and doesn't give it theoretical legs. However, he does continue the conversation about creation and reception that began in "On the Interlocutor" and evolved through the Phaedra texts, bringing it now into the sphere of ethics. Most importantly, by the end of the 1920s (and the bitter resolution of the *Thyl Ulenspiegel* affair) Mandelstam's central metaphor for poetic language has completed its Eucharistic circle—and the "flesh and bread" that became the mouthpiece of the word in the progression from "The Word and Culture" to "Komissarzhevskaia" now becomes a full-fledged person, as much a human incarnation as a verbal one.

In these writings of the late 1920s, Mandelstam implores his readership that both literature and the human being should be allowed to live out their natural course; neither should be plucked too early out of its development. Lambasting the Russian reading public in "A Thrust" (Vypad) for lacking the capacity to understand their poets, he relents to wonder whether it's not a boon that the Russians won't read a poet before they're ready to. In his two essays on translation and in *Fourth Prose (Chetvertaia proza),* all given their fire by the Gornfel'd-*Thyl Ulenspiegel* affair, he attacks state-sponsored literature and translation in particular as interruptions in the natural life of a work of art. All the while, he is developing a biological metaphor for literature (birthed all the way back in 1921, in "On the Nature of the Word"), which he opposes to the anti-biological violence of "official literature," translation, and the Soviet literary establishment as a whole. This biological metaphor will free itself of its "official" counterweight and come into its own when Mandelstam visits Armenia (see pp. 184-212).

In 1924, Mandelstam published in the journal *Rossiia* an article that revises the reception theory of "On the Interlocutor" in a historical context: the fate of contemporary Russian poetry in terms of its readership. "A Thrust"[17] *(Vypad)*, takes reception out of the abstract and metaphorical (the bottle, the finder—perhaps the ideal reader) and into the phemonenological and cultural, allowing Mandelstam to apply his model to real-life projections based on (what he sees as) evidence. It also presents an analysis of the way poetry is read that is less metaphorical, more concrete, than that of "On the interlocutor." Lamenting that the Russian reading public is fickle and generally unprepared to read its poets, Mandelstam opposes the ideal action of reception:

> ...poetic writing on the semantic level presents a great gap, a yawning absence of the majority of implicit signs and pointers which alone make the text comprehensible and logical. But these signs are no less precise than musical notes or the hieroglyphs of a dance; the poetically literate reader draws these out of himself, as if drawing them out of the very text.[18]
>
> (II 411)

This estimation suggests that a reader must be steeped in the cultural contexts out of which poems emerge in order to be able to draw out their implicit signals and thus properly to read them. This would be a pragmatic transposition of the appropriation that Mandelstam champions in "In the interlocutor": one can envision the reader's self here not as a primarily appropriative faculty but as an aggregate of inherited material—a vision of the self as a cultural acculumation that closely corresponds with Mandelstam's writings of the late 1910s and early 1920s. Because the reader draws the poem out of his "self" *(ot sebia),* and not out of his education or even his reading, the appropriative part of reading

[17] *Vypad* is translated by the British as "slump." Mandelstam's meaning is a thrust in terms of fencing, or a sudden attack or falling-upon in general.

[18] … поэтическое письмо в значительной степени представляет большой пробел, зияющее отсутствие множества знаков, указателей, подразумеваемых, единственно делающих текст понятным и закономерным. Но все эти знаки не менее точны, нежели нотные знаки или иероглифы танца; поэтически грамотный читатель ставит их от себя, как бы извлекая их из самого текста.

from “Interlocutor” can’t help but return. The self is an organ that appropriates what it has read; when it reads something new, it draws on a organic compost of previous reading—that is, draws both on that reading and on the self, the boundary between which is porous. This image also looks forward to *Journey to Armenia* (1931) with its similar image of reading as recapitulation: in the later piece the reader's history will be expanded beyond his education to his very biological history, which he would revisit (as he did his cultural history) in the process of reading a poem.

At the article's end, Mandelstam expands the scope of his analysis beyond the present moment and looks to the (immeasurably) distant future. Once the perspective is thus shifted, the reader is placed beyond the poet's ken, as he as in "On the interlocutor," and it is again possible for the writer to imagine being read:

> The masses, retaining a healthy philological intuition, those strata where the morphology of a language grows, strengthens and develops, have simply not yet made contact with individualistic Russian poetry. It [poetry] has not yet reached its readers, and maybe will reach them only after the poetic luminaries that sent out their rays to this distant and yet unattainable goal have been extinguished.[19]
>
> (II 412)

Instead of cultural contact, Mandelstam turns his eye to the future, when poetry will experience a resurrection across time and death. In fact, Mandelstam suggests, "the most comforting thing about the state of Russian poetry may be the deep and pure ignorance, the unknowledgeability of the public *[narod]* about their poetry" (II 412). Ironic though this comment may be, in light of the seriousness of Mandelstam's focus on survival and reception across insurmountable biological and epistemological divides, evidenced both before and after "A thrust," Mandelstam may be positing the contemporary reading

[19] Массы, сохранившие здоровое филологическое чутье, те слои, где произрастает, крепнет и развивается морфология языка, просто-напросто еще не вошли в соприкосновение с индивидуалистической русской поэзией. Она еще не дошла до своих читателей и, может быть, дойдет до них только тогда, когда погаснут поэтические светила, пославшие свои лучи к этой отдаленной и пока недостижимой цели.

public—or the Russian people in general—as carriers of Russian poetry, much like the buried Georgian wine vessels or the bottle that preserves and floats the message: ignorant, unconscious, but as nutritive to language as the earth is (in biological terms) to the planted individuum or (in redemptive terms) the buried individual.

When Mandelstam writes about translation in the late 1920s, he doesn't envision it in terms of the life of literature. Rather, he raises his voice against the tangible phenomena of Soviet literary culture. Predictably, he does not think very highly of official literature or the translation industry: in two 1929 articles, "On Translations" (O perevodakh) and "Torrents of Hackwork" (Potoki khaltury), he lambastes Gosizdat and the other major houses for not paying translators enough, not valuing their work, and not distinguishing within the wide range of quality of translations. Nevertheless, in these two articles Mandelstam presents the only direct estimations of translation, both theoretical and practical, of his entire critical project. Strikingly, though Mandelstam never analogizes the work of a translator to that of a poet—he never hints that the two literary actions are at all commensurable one with another—there are nonetheless functional parallels in these articles that place translation teasingly close to Mandelstam's lifelong vision of the poet as assembler of received linguistic and cultural material.

The two articles differ widely not only in their estimation of translation as an industry and an art form, but also in their style. They present a variance of attitudes toward language in both content and form that reflects a personal and professional storm through which Mandelstam was fighting—a storm that kicked up by the Gornfel'd affair. The articles he published on translation the following year accordingly present a picture of conflict, a struggle between accommodation of the state powers over literature and defiance against them, revealing an uneven portrait of the translator's task.

"Torrents of Hackwork," published in *Izvestiia* in April 1929, is a call to arms for translators, with the goal of accelerating Russian culture to the level of its European competitors. It tone is hortatory and invective, its mode the blunt aggressiveness common to Bolshevism and Russian Futurism. Here, amid an exposé of the going rates per page for translation work, Mandelstam correlates two vague and difficult concepts—translation and culture—as if they were measurable quantities: "The quality of translations in a given country is a direct indicator of its cultural standard" (II 510).[20] This kind of prosaic reductionism is uncharacteristic of Mandelstam as a writer. Further, he makes a rare excursion into the Soviet Russian lexicon: "Translation is one of the most difficult and crucial types of litwork [*litrabota*]. In essence, it is the foundation of an independent speech system on the basis of foreign material."[21] It is very rare for Mandelstam to use a Soviet-style abbreviation like *litrabota* (from *literaturnaja,* "literary," and *rabota,* "work"); moreover, his conceptions of literary art characteristically take on the form of metaphor and very rarely, if at all, partake of mechanistic formulations like laying a "foundation" on a "basis." But when he continues in the same article to list the qualities of a good translator, he sounds a little more like himself. In fact, the qualities that make a translator sound very much like Mandelstam's conception of what makes a poet: "…colossal effort, attention, and will, a rich inventiveness, intellectual originality, philological intuition, a wide lexical keyboard, the ability to listen attentively to rhythm, to grasp the design of a phrase, to convey it—and all this under the strictest self-control. Otherwise it is simple improvisation" (II 511).[22] Certain key words in this definition sound immediately like

[20] Качество переводов в данной стране — прямой показатель ее культурного уровня.
[21] Перевод — один из трудных и ответственных видов литработы. По существу, это создание самостоятельного речевого строя на основе чужого материала.
[22] …громадного напряжения, внимания и воли, богатой изобретательности, умственной свежести, филологического чутья, большой словарной клавиатуры, умения вслушиваться в ритм, схватить рисунок фразы, передать ее — все это при строжайшем самообуздании. Иначе — отсебятина.

qualities of a creative act (inventiveness, originality) while others hint at an interpretive act (attention, listening, grasping and conveying a presumably preexisting design). Still others incorporate both creation and interpretation (effort, will, intuition, lexical keyboard, self-control). It is not a stretch, however, when considering Mandelstam's body of poetry and prose that deal with the act of poiesis, to argue that all the key words in the definition of a translator indeed apply—and strongly apply—to the poet's task. For Mandelstam, probably more than for any other Russian pre-post-modern poet, art-making is based on an economy of culture where nothing is created ex nihilo and the poet is consciously a caretaker of received cultural information and aura. That the poem exists before the poet does is a staple of Mandelstam's idea of literary art and his conception of the way language works. Not by accident will the term "keyboard" return in the "Conversation about Dante" (1933) when Mandelstam describes Dante's poetic range as a "keyboard of references" (upominatel'naja klaviatura).

Mandelstam's apparent lack of theoretical interest in translation goes further to undercut the theses of "Torrents of Hackwork." The defense of both translation and translator therein is unheralded in his prose up to this point; in hundreds of pages of literary and cultural criticism spanning nearly twenty years, Mandelstam has not yet thought to mention translation either as an art or an industry. In 1929 Mandelstam has already spent six-odd years earning his bread almost exclusively by translation. Nowhere in these six years does he mention translation in his (copious) prose, and his poetry is exactly as amenable to thoughts about translation as it has been since the beginning and will continue to be until the end. It stands to reason that when Mandelstam defines the task and qualities of a translator in "Torrents of Hackwork," he is giving a defense of poets, whether they act as poets or translators, in the abstract or in the grim quotidian of Soviet letters.

Mandelstam's article "On Translations" was published a few months later in *On the Literary Guard (Na literaturnom postu).* Here, Mandelstam figures the translator as lacking the self-control lauded in "Torrents of hackwork." In this new estimation, the translator's role as mediator between original text and reader gives rise to uncontrollability, characterized here as something unconscious:

> A translator is a powerful interpreter of the author: in essence, he is uncontrollable. His unconscious commentary seeps into the book through a thousand cracks. Working up old translations of Walter Scott, I noticed that they were done with the police language of passport officers, and it was impossible no matter how I tried to wipe away this boorish stamp."[23]
>
> (II 517)

Putting the epithets of "Torrents of Hackwork" and "On Translations" next to each other, one at first sees the image of a translator who is at once in control of his work and not; one who both carefully employs all the sensory and intellectual tools of the poet in the service of the source text and willy-nilly deposits his own linguistic and cultural sod wherever he happens to tread, without even realizing it. The estimation in the later essay, full of bile and vitriol—and metaphor—is much more in line with Mandelstam's voice in the late 1920s, arising out of the whirlwind of the Gornfel'd affair. The idea of language working outside the consciousness of its practitioner ("seeping" into the work through countless "cracks") is in tune with Mandelstam's conception of the poet as the dowser of an already existing poetic stream. More pointedly, the epithet "police" (policejskij) is emblematic of Mandelstam's prose of the late 20s, which often pits Mandelstam himself—or the figure of the poet *(Fourth Prose)* or of the Petersburgian "little man"[24] *(The Egyptian Stamp)*—

[23] Переводчик — могучий толкователь автора: по существу, он — бесконтролен. Его невольный комментарий просачивается в книгу сквозь тысячу щелей. Обрабатывая старые переводы Вальтер-Скотта, я заметил, что они сделаны полицейским языком паспортистов, и это хамское клеймо нельзя смыть никакими усилиями.

[24] The "little man" *(malen'kii chelovek)* is a recognizable figure in Russian literature since Pushkin ("The Station-Master") and Gogol' ("The Overcoat"). Emblematic of the left-behinds of the Imperial civil service and its Socialist inheritors, he is untalented, unwealthy, friendless, not terribly smart, but well-intentioned and likely heaven-bound.

against the rational, soulless, implacable agency of state authority and official literature. Reaching back to the "world literature" invoked in "Torrents of Hackwork" and invoking the Gornfel'd affair, the following excerpt from *Fourth Prose* could almost serve as an extension of the two essays on translation, completed around the same time:

> All the works of world literature are either sanctioned or written without permission. The first is dross, the second stolen air. I want to spit in the face of writers who compose deliberately sanctioned things; I want to bash them in the head with a stick and sit them all behind a desk at Herzen House, placing before each one a glass of police tea and handing each an analysis of Gornfel'd's urine.[25]
>
> (III 171)

It appears that the lack of control with which Mandelstam faults the translator in "On Translations" here gains a political coloring: a sanctioned work cannot help being sanctioned, and when the translator's unconscious agency slips into the work of ferrying a text from one language to another (in "Torrents of Hackwork," this agency takes the form of *otsebiatina,* or self-motivated improvisation), it is really the agency of the "police" literary establishment, putting its piece in despite whatever protestations the original text (or the translator's conscious mind) might make.

Judging from historical and biographical circumstance, from the history and patterns of Mandelstam's thought over his critical oeuvre, and from his use of language in these articles in particular, when Mandelstam speaks of translation in "Torrents of Hackwork" and "On Translations," his meaning is twofold: First, translation is code for the agency of the literary establishment, indistinguishable from the police. Second, it is a foil for poetry: as translation work puts clothing on poets' backs, the word "translator" can

---

The little man has access neither to the luck of the *schlemiel* nor to the cunning of the *raznochinets* (p. 137). He is in the game to lose.

[25] Все произведения мировой литературы я делю на разрешенные и написанные без разрешения. Первые — это мразь, вторые — ворованный воздух. Писателям, которые пишут заведомо разрешенные вещи, я хочу плевать в лицо, хочу бить их палкой по голове и всех посадить за стол в Дом Герцена, поставив перед каждым стакан полицейского чаю и дав каждому в руки анализ мочи Горнфельда.

signify a poet who is doing a translator's work to stay alive. In neither case does it actually describe, comment on, or theorize what happens when a translator sits down to translate, or what happens to a text in translation.

In *Fourth Prose,* Mandelstam hints that what happens to a text in translation is violent and destructive. Famously, he claims in this piece that real art is analogous to "stolen air"—here, the idea is likely that that artist is stealing back air that's rightfully his from an authority that withholds it. One could argue that this is also the case in his pre-Revolutionary visions of artistic appropriation (e.g. "On the Interlocutor," "I have not heard the tales of Ossian," both discussed above)—but the body, it seems, must go through its own natural cycle of life and death, and any appropriation of the body is not a creative, but a destructive act. Looking more deeply into *Fourth Prose*—especially the figure of critic-translator Arkady Gornfel'd—one sees a complex of associations that tightly binds bodily violence and translation.

In expressing his ire at the world of professional Soviet letters in *Fourth Prose,* Mandelstam draws some interesting images. The "stolen air" passage mentioned just above introduces two symbols that say something about the *process* of literature that harks back (rather unpleasantly) to the body. The "police tea" that he wishes upon hack writers is at its most literal the tea one receives at the police station; to drink it is to play into the hands of the authorities, to cooperate. Gornfel'd has presumably drunk police tea, a fact Mandelstam wishes to demonstrate by a public display of Gornfel'd's urinalysis. Gornfel'd, as an example to sanctioned litterateurs, is a literary body that processes dictates alien to art, whose processes can be graphed, printed, displayed, and understood. In the same way, the "police language of passport officers" is revealed in translations of Sir Walter Scott (see above). Mandelstam goes on here to propose that such writers be forbidden from having children, because "...children must continue for us, must finish saying for us what is most

important..." (III 171).[26] What these writers are capable of producing, rather than the "speaking flesh" which Mandelstam attributes to the word and human life, is a substance that speaks only of its components. The body in this case acts as a simple transmitter of fluid, without adding or transforming what it takes in.

In a similar vein, several times in *Fourth Prose* Mandelstam compares sanctioned writers to parrots. He singles Gornfel'd out in particular: "To die by Gornfel'd is as funny as to die by bicycle or a parrot's beak. But a literary murderer can also be a parrot... I'm glad that my murderer is alive and in some sense has outlived me" (III 173).[27] The obvious association hints that such writers cannot say anything original but merely repeat what's said to them—but Mandelstam opens the image out to at least two less obvious possibilities of meaning. The first is that a parrot's beak is not only a mouthpiece, but also a weapon: something that causes physical impact, as a bicycle would. Another is that parrots are characteristically long-lived and often survive their owners. This already points a shadow toward translation, as the translator figure (Gornfel'd) is poised to survive the artist figure (Mandelstam). Going further, Mandelstam expands the image to indicate that Gornfel'd is his not only his murderer, but also his pet:

> I feed him sugar and listen with satisfaction as he repeats from *Eulenspiegel:* "The ash beats in my heart," alternating this phrase with another no less beautiful: "There are no torments in the world more powerful than the torment of the word."[28]
>
> (III 173)

The latter phrase is a line from S. Ia. Nadson's poem "I know, dear friend, I know deeply..." from which Gornfel'd picked the title for his own long critical essay of 1906, "The Torments of the Word" (Muki slova). Gornfel'd's parroting speaks with the voice of a critic as well as

---

[26] ...дети должны за нас продолжить, за нас главнейшее досказать...

[27] Погибнуть от Горнфельда так же смешно, как от велосипеда или от клюва попугая. Но литературный убийца может быть и попугаем… Я очень рад, что мой убийца жив и что он в некотором роде меня пережил.

[28] …кормлю его сахаром и с удовольствием слушаю, как он твердит из "Уленшпигеля": "Пепел стучит в мое сердце", перемежая эту фразу с другой, не менее красивой: "Нет на свете мук сильнее муки слова".

the voice of a translator, thus representing two major flanks of the literary establishment. But the image of these two voices perpetually twirling around one another in a literary *pas de deux* recalls recalling the eternal Symbolist nodding of the girl to the rose, and the rose to the girl, in "The word and culture." In a parody of speaking, the parrot/translator/critic first emits another's words in translation (Gornfel'd's 1915 translation of *Thyl Ulenspiegel),* then the line from Nadson (who carried his own burden of sentimentality and shallowness) that is the source for Gornfel'd's essay *The Torments of the Word.* If Mandelstam indeed read and remembered this essay as he wrote *Fourth Prose,* he would have seen ideas of language and translation he'd have been happy to attack on their own merits.

Published in St. Petersburg when Mandelstam was still an underclassman at the Tenishevsky Institute, *The Torments of the Word* presents a defense of the inadequacy of words to express ideas, arguing that this inadequacy is actually a strength and enriches literary language. This assertion sounds like something that Mandelstam may have agreed with in some form, but Gornfel'd's essay privileges the idea over the word to such an extent that Mandelstam, if he had indeed read it at some point, would likely have found Gornfel'd's angle of attack (never mind his critical style) distateful. Near the end of the tract, Gornfel'd discusses the word in translation as a "transference of the subject into a somewhat alien sphere of ideas, not just words" (34).[29] Such a claim already breaks in upon Mandelstam's valorization of the primacy of the word (cf. even his description of translation as the construction of a "new speech system" in "Mountains of Hackwork"), but Gornfel'd goes further. Demonstrating through several literary citations the phenomenon of words acquiring various nuances when translated, he arrives at Goethe's stated preference for several of his own works in foreign translations to their original *(Faust* in French, *Hermann and Dorothea* in Latin). Gornfel'd describes Goethe going so far as to describe in

[29] …perenesenie predmeta v neskol'ko inuiu sferu idei, a ne tol'ko slov.

poetry his feelings at seeing his work transformed, as Gornfel'd puts it, into "foreign words—foreign ideas" (inye slova — inye poniatiia):

> Having picked a little bouquet of wildflowers, the poet brings them home; the flowers have already wilted in his warm hands. He puts them in water, and they revive, straighten up, freshen, as if they'd grown anew from their mother-earth:
>
> So it was when I wondrously
> Heard my song in a foreign tongue.[30]
>
> (35)

Mandelstam either did not have the chance to see his own work translated into other languages, or, if he did, left no record of his reaction. However, two foundations of his thoughts on language may be able to predict his view on being translated. First, the idea of writing as theft and appropriation is a constant of his theory of creation. Second, his idea of literary inheritance is somewhat mystical and depends on knight's moves of cultural material through time and space. One claim that these ideas produce in conjunction is that a writer, or any creator, appropriates art but not *people* as part of his inheritance. It's not for nothing that Nadezhda Mandelstam describes how rarely her husband invoked Pushkin's name[31]—Mandelstam's fear of treading on discrete beings had worked itself, in this extreme case, into a superstition.

Mandelstam would not have accepted that flowers could rejuvenate in a vase—he would see them continue the natural process of wilting, then die, return to the earth, and become transformed according to natural processes in their natural time, into whatever they happened to be transformed into. Here it is illustrative to recall a line from one of Mandelstam's earliest published poems, titled "Breathing" *(Dykhanie)* in the first edition of

---

[30] Набрав букетик полевых цветов, поэт приносит их домой; цветы увяли в горячей руке. Он ставит их в воду: они оживают, выпрямляются, свежеют, точно вновь срослись с матерю-землей./ So war mir's als ich wundersam/ Mein Lied in fremder Sprache vernahm.

[31] "O.M. …считал, что нельзя упоминать всуе ничего, что связано с именем Пушкина." (O.M. forbade the mention in vain of anything connected with Pushkin's name.) *Vospominaniia.*

"Kamen'" (1913): "I am a gardener, but I am also a flower."[32] The gardener's role is not to cut the flowers, but to enable them to grow; such is the role of the poet. Likewise, a flower should live out its natural life and not be cut and transplanted; such is the right of the human being.

Backwards into Being: 1931

The journey of the subject into being is the focus of Mandelstam's great prose work *Journey to Armenia (Puteshestvie v Armeniiu,* 1931), which treats that journey with an equal measure of enthusiasm and anxiety. The metaphysical questions with which Mandelstam has been concerned surrounding the emergence of the text (or the word) out of absence in the 1920s are here reimagined in terms of the living organism.

In Armenia Mandelstam staked out an important friendship with biologist Boris Kuzin. Kuzin shared with Mandelstam an interest in Goethe and the German Romantics, and Mandelstam found new poetic inspiration in evolutionary biology, especially the theories of Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (1744-1829). Lamarck's version of evolution (discredited today, but popular in the Soviet Union in the 20s and 30s) depends on "soft inheritance," or the passing on of acquired characteristics to offspring. To Mandelstam's mind this was a more attractive scheme than Darwinistic determinism, in which life forms have no control over their genetic legacy, and only the ones already best suited to the environment by dint of a lucky mutation get to pass their genes along. As Mandelstam writes in the section of *Journey to Armenia* called "Among the Naturalists":

[32] For a fuller treatment of this poem, see p. 39.

> No one, not even the notorious mechanists, consider the development of an organism as resulting from the caprice of its environment. This would be extraordinarily impudent. The environment merely invites the organism to develop. Its function comes to light in the well-known benevolence which is gradually and inevitably canceled out by a severity which binds the living body and rewards it with death.[33]
>
> (III 202)

Two features of soft inheritance which Mandelstam valorizes for their literary and cultural values are *invitation* and *acquired inheritance.* Invitation has been a feature of Mandelstam's thought on poetry since his first literary essays. In "On the Nature of the Word," for example, his take on scholarship is bound into the idea of the family, a domestic setting into which literature (and, it turns out, plants) are invited: "…literary scholarship is a university seminar—a family…where five students, familiar to each other, calling each other by first name and patronymic, listen to their professor, and the limbs of familiar trees from the botanical garden climb in through the window" (I 223).[34] Further back, in "Francois Villon," Mandelstam has already begun to imagine a quasi-scientific scheme of acquired inheritance, which will go on to inform much of his thinking about the development of poetic culture and its cycles of return: "It may be that the very 'soul of things' is none other than a sense of proprietorship, given soul and ennobled in the laboratory of successive generations" (I 173).[35] Both these concepts will find themselves developing over the teens and twenties, and have been treated in this and previous chapters. But in the beginning of the 30s they find a new form that splices these previously literary and cultural interests with biology.

---

[33] Никто, даже отъявленные механисты, не рассматривают рост организма как результат изменчивости внешней среды. Это было бы уже чересчур большой наглостью. Среда лишь приглашает организм к росту. Ее функции выражаются в известной благосклонности, которая постепенно и непрерывно погашается суровостью, связывающей живое тело и награждающей его смертью.

[34] …филология — университетский семинарий, семья…где пять человек студентов, знакомых друг с другом, называющих друг друга по имени и отчеству, слушают своего профессора, а в окно лезут ветви знакомых деревьев университетского сада.

[35] Быть может, самая «душа вещей» не что иное, как чувство собственника, одухотворенное и облагороженное в лаборатории последовательных поколений.

Mandelstam's preferred brand of biology is corrective in essence: in Lamarck, the organism adapts into what it *should be* in order to match its environment. His and Kuzin's interest in Lamarckism coincides (not coincidentally) with the rise of Trofim Lysenko in the ranks of Soviet agriculturists; Lysenko was a Lamarckist and applied (famously, unsuccessfully) the theory of acquired heritable characteristics to crops. Lamarckism, which for Lysenko sparked a wide corrective strategy for Soviet agriculture (and, unfortunately, Soviet plants), for Mandelstam was an *individual* corrective: if handled right, each living body grows into the thing it should become.

The *Journey's* final section, "Alagez," begins with two lines of dialogue:

> —Ты в каком времени хочешь жить?
> —Я хочу жить в повелительном причастии будущего, в залоге страдательном — в "долженствующем быть".
>
> —Which tense do you want to live in?
> —I want to live in the imperative future participle, in a pledge of endurance — in the "ought to be."
>
> (III 208)

This snippet puts the writer in the position of the organism. The writer wants to be subject to the draw of the environment upon its inhabitant that he values in Lamarck; he wants to "ought to be." Here is an enthusiasm for being—more exactly, an enthusiasm for coming into being, which Mandelstam seems to desire as a continuous state—and also an inherent anxiety that there is actually no such tense of being, that there actually is no "ought," an anxiety which is explored in the *Journey*'s final section. The paradigm of the organism coming into being is in some way reminiscent of the way the poem comes into being in "On the interlocutor": in both cases, something new emerges out of absence thanks to a receptive being that becomes its body—in the case of the natural environment, through its physical body; in the case of the poet, through his voice. But the theme of invitation that obtains in the *Journey*'s naturalistic metaphor is itself something new: the finder doesn't

invite the bottle, nor does nature find the organism. Invitation, as is already clear by its placement in the natural world, acts upon life as well as language, and the anxiety of death that inheres in Mandelstam's talk of life in the *Journey* brings his discussion of artistic creation ever closer to questions of translation.

The pull toward becoming which Mandelstam seems to invoke in the "imperative future participle" is echoed in other forms of drawing and pulling throughout *Journey to Armenia.* The piece is suffused with a sense of being on the road and lorded over by mountains whose gravitational force is constantly palpable. In the section "Ashtarak," Mandelstam writes, "I developed in myself a sixth sense — the 'Ararat' sense: a feeling of attraction by the mountain. Now, wherever I happen to be pulled, it's already been conceived and will remain" (III 206).[36] This physical pull is echoed in several forms of conceptual gravitation. There is a biological pull downwards—the poet feels himself "In a backwards, downwards movement with Lamarck along the staircase of living beings..." (III 201).[37] This movement is reminiscent of the poem “Lamarck” (1932), in which the poet imagines himself sinking to the lowest levels of organic life. In both there is reference to Dante, who like Lamarck narrates the descent of man into the depths—a movement matched in the *Journey* by the dynamic upward (or outward) development of the organism: "A plant is a sound, drawn out by a theremin's baton... A plant in the world is an event, an occurrence, an arrow...!"

Natural forces also hold sway in the human spheres of art and intellection. The process of looking at a piece of art, Mandelstam advises in the section "The French," is an expression of thermodynamics: "Standing before a painting" depends on "having adjusted

[36] Я в себе выработал шестое — "араратское" чувство: чувство притяжения горой. Теперь, куда бы меня ни занесло, оно уже умозрительное и останется.

[37] В обратном, нисходящем движении с Ламарком по лестнице живых существ… The sentence continues: “…lies the greatness of Dante. The lower forms of organic being are Hell for man. (…есть величие Данта. Низшие формы органического бытия — ад для человека.)

one's body temperature" to the artwork's (III 199). Also, reading is tied to the sciences of physics and biology, uniting the reader's understanding of his physical being and biological history in his cognizing (and therby self-cognizing) self:

> Out of all material things, out of all physical bodies, a book is the subject that instills the most credence in a person... Seized wholly by the activity of reading, we delight mainly in our own lineal characteristics, we experience something like ecstasy before the classification of our various ages.[38]
>
> (III 201)

In these human types of natural attraction, two important themes begin to develop: the idea of an organism's adaptation to its environment (the adjustment of body temperature—earlier in the *Journey* Mandelstam has described the human being as a "thinking salamander"[39]), and the act of reading as a recapitulation of phylogeny of the species and of the self.

The importance of the biological metaphor to poetry is manifest in more than one of Mandelstam's major prose works. Already in "On the nature of the word" (1921), Mandelstam has proposed a connection between biology and poetics that, surprisingly, hints at a connection between art and the organism that is oddly Aristotelian, and thereby casts biology as more than a metaphor for poetry, but on par with it as a way of understanding the world.

Biology and art are related, both here and in *Journey to Armenia,* by a physical exchange that leads to a form of equalization. Hellenism, for example, Mandelstam characterizes as "any stove by which a person sits and values its warmth as kin to his own

[38] Из всего материального, из всех физических тел книга — предмет, внушающий человеку наибольшее доверие... Будучи всецело охвачены деятельностью чтения, мы любуемся главным образом своими родовыми свойствами, испытываем как бы восторг перед классификацией своих возрастов.
[39] III 186. The reference to Pascal's "thinking reed" is clear; cf .also "Iz omuta zlogo i viazkogo," 95.

internal warmth."[40] He draws this metaphor out through Bergson's non-linear idea of time: "it is a system in the Bergsonian sense of the word, in which a person spread out around himself—like a fan of phenomena, freed from dependence on time—collaterally subordinated to their internal connections by means of the human I."[41] The reason for this interest in (what Mandelstam calls) Hellenism is its use as a metaphor for his poetics that he can oppose to that of Symbolism. The latter, he rails, is dominated by empty semantic reciprocities: "A frightful *contredanse* of 'correspondences,' nodding to one another... The rose nods to the girl, the girl to the rose. No one wants to be himself" (I 227).[42] Hellenism, on the other hand, promises a linguistic reappraisal of the image, a return to a conception of the image in which it remained undivided from the word: "It would be handiest and most scientifically correct to examine the word as an image, that is a verbal representation...an intricate complex of phenomena, a connection, a 'system'" (I 228).[43] The invocation of a complex is reminiscent of Mandelstam's discussion of equilibrium in "Morning of Acmeism" (1913), in which he proposes giving equal weight to form and content when examining a word. In both articles, he is warning against focusing on a word's semantic load to the detriment of its physical properties—a warning given out by the post-Symbolists in general.

Mandelstam then moves the idea of equilibrium past aesthetic debates and onto the philosophical grounds of perception, moving poetry closer to an analogue of phenomenology. Switching his terms to "psychology," he posits the idea of the "given" (dannost') as a relic of outdated theories of perception:

---

[40] Эллинизм — это всякая печка, около которой сидит человек и ценит ее тепло, как родственное его внутреннему теплу.

[41] …это система в бергсоновском смысле слова, которую человек развертывает вокруг себя, как веер явлений, освобожденных от временной зависимости, соподчиненных внутренней связи через человеческое я.

[42] Страшный контрданс «соответствий», кивающих друг на друга… Роза кивает на девушку, девушка на розу. Никто не хочет быть самим собой.

[43] Самое удобное и в научном смысле правильное — рассматривать слово как образ, то есть словесное представление…сложный комплекс явлений, связь, «система».

> The givenness of the products of our consciousness converges with the subjects of the external world and lets us examine representations as something objective. The exgtraordinarily quick humanization of science, including the theory of consciousness, prods us onto another path.[44]
>
> (I 228-9)

Mandelstam seems to view the given as an unnecessary medium between the external subject and the internal perception; the "other path" upon which he now embarks takes him past a Descartian dualism, back to Aristotle. In *De Anima* Aristotle describes perception as "an event in the sense organs,"[45] bypassing any activity by a mind or (per Descartes) soul. Mandelstam now makes a similar case for direct communication between external objects and internal organs: "It is possible to examine representations not only as an objective given of consciousness, but also as human organs, precisely like the liver or the heart."[46] In a sense, this is Aristotle turned on his head: Mandelstam invokes not the organs of perception but vital internal organs, organs felt rather than seen, whose traffic with the world of phenomena is metaphorical at best. All this leads to Mandelstam's proposal of an "organic poetics, with a biological, not legislative, character, destroying the canon in the name of the internal convergence of the organism, with all the features of biological science" (I 229).[47] In *Journey to Armenia* Mandelstam attempts to describe this organic poetics, and it is useful to keep in mind the earlier work's emphasis on perception in light of the latter's emphasis on life. When Mandelstam in *Journey to Armenia* draws a line from the word to the organism, he speaks of something coming into being—but through the lens of "On the nature of the word" we may be able to view this becoming as an emergence into perception,

---

[44] Данность продуктов нашего сознания сближает их с предметами внешнего мира и позволяет рассматривать представления как нечто объективное. Чрезвычайно быстрое очеловечивание науки, включая сюда и теорию познания, наталкивает нас на другой путь.

[45] See Slakey 470.

[46] Представления можно рассматривать не только как объективную данность сознания, но и как органы человека, совершенно так же точно, как печень, сердце.

[47] …органической поэтики, не законодательного, а биологического характера, уничтожающей канон во имя внутреннего сближения организма, обладающей всеми чертами биологической науки.

and therefore make it more closely amenable to aesthetics (which is, after all, Mandelstam's ultimate field of inquiry).

Mandelstam's equivalence of coming into being with coming into consciousness is most evident in the section "Among the Naturalists." Here he describes two analogous, simultaneous processes: first, his process of reading the works of naturalists such as Linnaeus, Pallas, and Lamarck;[48] second, the process of reading in general, in which the reader discovers himself as if he were discovering his own natural history. One pillar of this metaphorical pairing is the idea of individual wholeness and purposefulness, that biological and psychological beings are essentially monads.

Speaking of Pallas, Mandelstam compares his work to that of Haydn, Gluck, and Mozart, writing that "he carried over the bodily circularity and courtesy of German music onto the Russian plains" (III 201).[49] Aside from having been a contemporary of the early classical composers and a fellow German speaker, Pallas, according to Mandelstam, shares with them a circularity *(kruglost').* This may be a hint at the relative predictability of sonata-allegro classical form, which unfailingly delivers the listener back to the tonic no matter how many modulations have occurred over the course of the piece. The circularity lies in the promise of that return to the tonic—which may also hint at the "courtesy" *(liubeznost')* that Mandelstam invokes. "Courtesy" also evokes the elaborate ritualization of eighteenth-century European court life, in which two of the three composers, as well as Pallas, held positions.[50]

Circularity, once Mandelstam mentions it, reveals itself as a key to the following difficult passage in "Among the Naturalists":

---

[48] Carl Linnaeus (Swedish, 1707-1778): father of modern taxomony. Peter Simon Pallas (German, 1741-1811), explorer and biologist under Catherine II. Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (French, 1744-1829): naturalist and early theorist of evolution.

[49] Телесную круглость и любезность немецкой музыки он перенес на русские равнины.

[50] Haydn with the Esterházys, Mozart in Salzburg, Pallas at the court of Catherine II.

Кто не любит Гайдна, Глюка и Моцарта — тот ни черта не поймет в Палласе.

Телесную круглость и любезность немецкой музыки он перенес на русские равнины. Белыми руками концертмейстера он собирает российские грибы. Сырая замша, гнилой бархат, а разломаешь — внутри лазурь.

Кто не любит Гайдна, Глюка и Моцарта — тот ничего не поймет в Палласе.

Whoever does not love Haydn, Gluck, and Mozart won't understand a single line of Pallas.

He carried over the bodily circularity and courtesy of German music onto the Russian plains. He collected Russian mushrooms with the white hands of a concertmaster. Damp chamois, decayed velvet—but once you burst it: azure.

Whoever does not love Haydn, Gluck, and Mozart won't understand a single line of Pallas.

(III 201)

These three paragraphs look as if they were written in something like sonata-allegro form, corresponding to the three musical sections of exposition, development, and recapitulation. The identity of the third paragraph with the first approximates the identity of the sonata's recapitulation with its exposition (though in the musical case, of course, the recapitulation does not repeat the exposition note for note). Moreover (as mentioned above) circularity is a theme of the passage, stated clearly in the second paragraph. The second and third sentences of the middle paragraph are possible to parse with recourse to Mandelstam's other writings, explored in the preceding chapters in the present work. As we have seen in "On the Interlocutor," the poem "The Finder of a Horseshoe," and other examples of his work, Mandelstam views finding as a creative act: the object in the finder's hands becomes a synecdochic emblem for a lost life or past action, and revivifies that life or action. (Later, Walter Benjamin would write in a similar vein, that "the collector…replaces content with pure originality or authenticity."[51]) Thus, finding can be a metaphor for returning an object to its original state—a backwards movement that we will see Mandelstam lauding and further exploring elsewhere in *Journey to Armenia.* Further, the found mushrooms,

[51] This is Hannah Arendt's summation in her introduction to the Zohn translation of *Illuminations,* p. 44.

retaining their natural dampness and decay, switch surfaces with those of human-constructed interiors: chamois leather and velvet. This is already a step into the European drawing room inherent in the concertmaster's white hands—and then there is a step even farther back, into an azure that bespeaks the sky's infinite regress or the very formlessness of color. We are then rescued from this primary formlessness by the third paragraph, which (politely) returns us from a primal return (towards terra incognita) to a formal return (to familiar territory).

Mandelstam then steps outside the circles he's just drawn to turn our attention to the "physiology of reading" itself. The theme of return is now turned to the reader's self, which discovers itself in return to its personal (psychological and biological) history: "Seized wholly by the activity of reading, we delight mainly in our own lineal characteristics, we experience something like ecstasy before the classification of our various ages" (III 201).[52] This puzzling statement is illuminated somewhat by a draft of an unpublished prose piece called "Reading Pallas" *(Chitaia Pallasa),* in which the above-quoted sentence also appears, but framed by supporting (perhaps clarifying) arguments. In this draft, immediately before this sentence is the following claim: "We read in order to remember [what we read]—but there's the trouble: one can only read while in the act of recollection" (III 389).[53] Given Mandelstam's longstanding preoccupation with the emergence of the word out of oblivion by means of memory (e.g. "I forgot the word I wanted to say…"), it may be that he means by "recollection" the calling forth of words from the reader's memory by the letters on the page. He may also intend something deeper and harder to fix, like the extralinguistic personal evolution hinted at by "the classification of our various ages." Reading, then, is at once a return to the self and a return to a primal

[52] Будучи всецело охвачены деятельностью чтения, мы любуемся главным образом своими родовыми свойствами, испытываем как бы восторг перед классификацией своих возрастов.
[53] Мы читаем книгу, чтобы запомнить, но в том-то и беда, что прочесть книгу можно только припоминая.

being that subtends all selves. Words, which emerge by means of the self, make a claim for the self over the material being read—"A book, confirmed on a student's reading stand, is like canvas stretched over a frame" (III 201)[54]—but the words themselves come from a place deeper than one's person (memory, consequently, also exceeds the self). Reading recapitulates phylogeny, in a way that both aggrandizes and sheds the self.

Mandelstam settles on this prelinguistic, preconscious state as the starting point for both life and art. As we will see explored in the poem "Lamarck," this state is one of unity between human and non-human forms of life, all the way down to the simplest vegetation. A vegetable, then, is as worthy a metaphor for the human (and, along with it, the creative) element as anything else. In an important part of the section "Moscow" in *Journey to Armenia,* Mandelstam reaches back to this state to propose his reading of Lamarckian evolution: as a model for the development of the human species, the individual psyche, and the work of art. The key elements of this model are the potential of the unfinished form—the less instantiated, the better—and the influence of the environment as a goad to the subject's development.

It is no accident that Mandelstam introduces his proposal of biological development with a mention of Goethe's seminal Bildungsroman *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrhahre (Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship),* an artistic test case in the development of the (human) subject. Mandelstam focuses on the character Jarno, who in the novel introduces Wilhelm to the works of Shakespeare and thereby opens his theatrical and spiritual horizons. "This Jarno," Mandelstam writes,

[54] Книга, утвержденная на читательском пюпитре, уподобляется холсту, натянутому на подрамник.

> ...was a member of a unique order, founded...in order to educate its contemporaries, in the spirit of the second part of Faust. The society had a wide net of emissaries, stretching all the way to America, with an organization close to that of the Jesuits. Secret lists were circulated, tentacles were extended, people were collected. Thus precisely Jarno was entrusted with keeping watch over Meister.[55]
>
> (III 193)

This net of secret influence, here a biographical indicator of Wilhelm Meister's development (enlightenment, in the mystical cast of the secret fraternity), is in strange counterpoint to the "secret lists," "collection" of people, and "tentacles" of a far-reaching apparatus that were by now commonplaces of political reality in the Soviet Union. Mandelstam might be parodying the collectivization of Russian society by inserting Shakespeare—a literary revolutionary and an insatiable seeker after the individual soul—at its head. This humanist brand of influence will inform Mandelstam's celebration of the nasturtium leaf, where *rationality,* a concept so tragically abused by the loudspeakers of the new Soviet reality, is absorbed into an unmistakeably human gesture of invitation.

The key to the analogy between the character of Wilhelm and the leaf of the nasturtium is the influence from the outside—taking on a rational, mathematical form—on the development of each. The nasturtium leaf also has its Jarno, now transformed from a representative of rationality into geometry itself. Mandelstam brings the leaf to life by multiplying its dimensions. Beginning with the coordinates of the two-dimensional plane, he brings the leaf into three dimensions as a natural result of its geometrical tendencies. The tendency towards life—here indistinguishable from the laws of geometry itself, frees the leaf from the ideal plane and casts it into (three-dimensional) phenomenality.

[55] Этот Ярно был членом своеобразного ордена, учрежденного крупным помещиком Леотаром — для воспитания современников в духе второй части «Фауста». Общество имело широкую агентурную — вплоть до Америки — сеть, организацию, близкую к иезуитской. Велись тайные кондуитные списки, протягивались щупальца, улавливались люди. Именно Ярно поручено было наблюдение за Мейстером.

> It also resembles the flint arrows of the Paleolithic. But the tensile force raging around the leaf transfigures it at first into a figure in five segments. The lines of cave-age arrowheads take on a curved expansion.
>
> Take any point and connect it (with its bundle of coordinates) to one of the radii. Then extend the coordinates, crossing the radius at various angles, to a segment of equal length, connect them with one another—the result is a convexity.[56]
>
> (III 193-4)

Mandelstam's description of the leaf's development brings to mind his deployment of architecture in "Morning of Acmeism," written almost twenty years before: namely the geometric dynamism of architecture, which he figures as the endless "probation" of a Bach fugue, and the tensile force that allows the stones to reach every skyward. But in *Journey to Armenia,* the productive tension that prompts creation in the leaf does not come from an arrangement of units (as with the stones of a Gothic cathedral). Rather, the leaf is drawn out by a tensile force that "rages" outside of it, an image Mandelstam picks up two paragraphs later: "A plant...is an envoy of a living storm permanently raging in the universe—kin in the same degree to both stone and lightning!" (III 194).[57] A few years later, in the *Conversation about Dante,* Mandelstam will draw a similar metaphor clearly to language: that words are like flags that generals stick into a map of the battlefield—and here, in the drafts of the *Journey,* we find this fragment: "In good verse one can hear how the seams of the skull are sewn together..." (III 381).[58] In all these cases the subject (the plant, the head, the word) is a sign of a yet unrepresented (and, since it is eternally raging, assumingly unrepresentable) universal force that, itself beyond form, grants form to

---

[56] Он похож также на кремневую стрелу из палеолита. Но силовое натяжение, бушующее вокруг листа, преобразует его сначала в фигуру о пяти сегментах. Линии пещерного наконечника получают дуговую растяжку.
Возьмите любую точку и соедините ее пучком координат с прямой. Затем продолжьте эти координаты, пересекающие прямую под разными углами, на отрезок одинаковой длины, соедините их между собой, и получится выпуклость.

[57] Растение…посланник живой грозы, перманентно бушующей в мироздании, — в одинаковой степени сродни и камню, и молнии!

[58] В хороших стихах слышно, как шьются черепные швы…

phenomena. These phenomena then bear the dictate of life, becoming subjects. These subjects, again, are busy at work becoming *themselves.* In parallel with the reader-figure in "A thrust," who draws his reading out of himself, the nasturtium grows into three dimensions in fulfillment of its individual destiny. (We will see reading merge most completely with the biological metaphor in "Conversation about Dante": see Chapter Five.) The reader as finder and as co-creator now acquires a theoretical backing in *geometry.* Mandelstam is attemption to guarantee the co-creation of poetry and of self (and of one *by means of* the other) with hard science.

This drawing force then takes on the character of an invitation. This is where Mandelstam draws closest to Lamarck's theory of the inheritance of acquired characteristics.[59] In "Among the Naturalists," Mandelstam explains his understanding of this theory:

> Ruminant bucks knock their foreheads together—they do not yet have antlers.
>
> But an inner feeling, an offspring of anger, directs "fluids" to the frontal processes of the maxilla, enabling the formation of horny and bony matter.[60]
>
> (II 203)

An organism, consequently, finds itself in a constant state of development through its interaction with the environment. Mandelstam places this development directly opposite Darwinian natural selection, but his argument isn't with the idea of survival of the fittest—rather, he seems to take objection to the very idea of genetic mutation. The first sentence of "Among the Naturalists" places the theory of evolution inside the bounds of chivalry; per

[59] It should be noted that while Mandelstam became fixated on this theory in the early to mid 1930s, during the ascendancy of T. D. Lysenko, he evinced no interest in the practical application of acquired characteristics, and never extended his discussion outside the scope of the organism in isolation (as opposed to a wider field like agriculture or economics).

[60] Самцы жвачных сшибаются лбами. У них еще нет рогов.
Но внутреннее ощущение, порожденное гневом, направляет к лобному отростку «флюиды», способствующие образованию рогового и костяного вещества.

Mandelstam, Lamarck is a knight and nature is the lady in whose service he acts: "Lamarck did battle for the honor of nature with a sword in his hands."[61] The eighteenth-century courtier is not only enlightened but also prurient:

> Do you imagine that he resigned himself to evolution like the scientific barbarians of the nineteenth century? No, in my opinion, shame for nature inflamed Lamarck's swarthy cheeks. He did not forgive nature that piece of nonsense called variability of species.[62]
>
> (III 200)

Significantly, Mandelstam will not approach the border between organisms—between a progenitor and its offspring—in his take on evolution. Sex and death do not enter into the picture, nor does any interest in the evolution of a species. He is only concerned with the individual organism. This focus on the individual, of course, is a departure from any practical read on biology, including Lamarckian evolution. In Mandelstam's image of the bucks, there is no talk of the animals' passing down the developing antlers to their offspring: they themselves butt heads, they themselves grow the antlers.

It's not surprising, then, that when Mandelstam speaks of the environment's "invitation" to developing forms of life, he avoids the taxonomical categories of family *(semeistvo),* genus *(rod),* and species *(vid),* but mentions only the organism itself *(organizm).* Since multiplicity and heredity—and therefore natural selection—are out of the picture, a Darwinian scheme of evolution, with its reliance on long hereditary lines, variability of environment and genetics, and deep-time mutations, simply doesn't make sense:

> No one, not even inveterate mechanists, examine the development of an organism as result of the variability of the external enviromnent. This would

[61] Ламарк боролся за честь живой природы со шпагой в руках.
[62] Вы думаете, он так же мирился с эволюцией, как научные дикари XIX века? А по-моему, стыд за природу ожег смуглые щеки Ламарка. Он не прощал природе пустячка, который называется изменчивостью видов.

> be an excessive piece of insolence. The environment only invites the organism to develop.[63]

As above, Mandelstam is employing a language of civility (if not actually suggesting courtly manners) and thus presents the life form in question as having the capacity to be insulted, and also to respond to an invitation. Further, he portrays the environment as a master who is sometimes gracious, sometimes stern, but always concerned, in a way that Darwinian nature simply is not:

> [The environment's] functions are expressed in a well-known benevolence, which is gradually and uninterruptedly snuffed out by severity, binding the living body and rewarding it with death.[64]
>
> (III 202)

The environment here has an emotional stake in its relationship with the object; growth and death are functions of the will and personality of the environment, which—like the organism—consists not of an aggolomeration of variables but rather of an integral personality. Indeed, a few sections earlier, when describing the growth of the nasturtium leaf, Mandelstam extends his image to the human being, specifically the processes of cognition and recognition, tied elsewhere to the act of reading:

> All of us are unsuspecting carriers of a great embryological experiment, as the process of recognition *(uznavanie),* crowned by the victory of the efforts of the memory, is surprisingly close to phenomenon of growth. In each case: a sprout, an embryo, and—the glimpse of the line of a face, or half a characteristic, half a sound, the end of a name, something labial or palatine, a sweet pea on the tongue—developing not out of itself, but just answering an invitation, just stretching itself out, justifying an expectation.[65]
>
> (III 195)

---

[63] Никто, даже отъявленные механисты, не рассматривают рост организма как результат изменчивости внешней среды. Это было бы уже чересчур большой наглостью. Среда лишь приглашает организм к росту.

[64] …функции (среды) выражаются в известной благосклонности, которая постепенно и непрерывно погашается суровостью, связывающей живое тело и награждающей его смертью.

[65] Все мы, сами о том не подозревая, являемся носителями громадного эмбриологического опыта: ведь процесс узнавания, увенчанный победой усилия памяти, удивительно схож с феноменом роста. И здесь и там — росток, зачаток и — черточка лица или полухарактера, полузвук, окончание имени, что-то губное или нёбное, сладкая горошина на языке, — развивается не из себя, но лишь отвечает на приглашение, лишь вытягивается, оправдывая ожидание.

It is interesting that, as Mandelstam's interest in a "biological poetics" begins in the essay "On the Nature of the Word" (written in 1921, ten years before *Journey to Armenia),* his fixation on recognition as a key to poetic formation stems from an essay of the same period, "The Word and Culture" (1921). Here, as in the previous essay, the recognition is erotic; the memory is (it seems) of a lover—and moreover incomplete, just as in "The Word and Culture" what is recognized are elements, confused in time and place: "When a lover gets lost in tender names and suddenly remembers that this has already been: the word, and the hair..." (II 214).[66] In the 1921 essay, the developing recogntion is of a confluence of epochs, a merging of individual memory with classical texts (in this case Ovid). In the most salient moment of Mandelstam's contemporaneous "Tristia," he condenses the confluence of epochs into these lines: "Everything has already been, everything will repeat anew,/ And only the moment of recognition is sweet to us" (146).[67]

In this passage in the *Journey,* Mandelstam puts forth a different inerpretation of the meeting of the individual with art, or of the present with the past. Here it is no longer a text or a time that calls the recognition, but a biological force. Mandelstam's poetics remain preoccupied with the idea of recognition—of texts or phenomena, moreover, that have not yet come to be (e.g., as in "The Word and Culture," "I say: yesterday has not yet been born. It has not yet come to be in reality. I want Ovid, Pushkin, Catullus, again—and I'm not satisfied with the historical Ovid, Pushkin, Catullus") (I 213).[68] But now, as the imperative toward recognition (and therefore language, and poetry) becomes less cultural

[66] Когда любовник в тишине путается в нежных именах и вдруг вспоминает, что это уже было: и слова, и волосы…
[67] Все было встарь. Все повторится снова./ И сладок нам лишь узнаванья миг.
[68] А я говорю: вчерашний день еще не родился. Его еще не было по-настоящему. Я хочу снова Овидия, Пушкина, Катулла, и меня не удовлетворяет исторический Овидий, Пушкин, Катулл.

and more biological, Mandelstam's anxiety about their survival also moves away from the cultural towards the biological.

The final chapter of *Journey* opens with Mandelstam's wish to live in the imperative future tense, discussed above: "I can breathe that way," he continues, "...accordingly I like the glorious Latin 'gerundive'—that verb on horseback" (III 208).[69] Mandelstam then continues with a narrative that involves his own trip on horseback, effectively entering himself into the linguistic imperative he's just described, giving a picture of what it's like to "live" in it. As Jane Gary Harris writes in her 1986 article on the *Journey:*

> The itinerary concludes in the "variegated terrain of wild and cultivated uplands, nomadic territories and vast pasturelands of Alagez," as the poet, while "riding horseback" and "conversing with myself," not only discovers, but *becomes,* his own imperative.
>
> (8)

Harris's article claims that the end of the *Journey* tells the story of Mandelstam finding his call to live and to write poetry after a messy and injurious scandal (over *Till Eulenspiegel,* see above) and a long period of poetic silence. As the biological processes he's described earlier in the piece—along with their cognitive and creative analogues—find themselves in a constant state of potential, of becoming, in response to a call or challenge from the environment, so must he continue his own state of becoming and to answer life's challenge.

The chapter's (and the *Journey's* last sentence) indeed sum up the piece in these terms. "Sleep walls me, walls me up," Mandelstam writes. "A last thought: I must ride around another ridge..." (III 211).[70] But the story of the imperative of language and life which dominates "Alagez" is interrupted right before this last thought. Before settling down for the night (mid-journey, significantly), Mandelstam retells the legend of Arshak, the King of Armenia in the 5th century AD who was overthrown by the Persians under

[69] Так мне дышится… Оттого-то мне и нравится славный латинский «герундивум» — этот глагол на коне.
[70] Сон мурует тебя, замуровывает... Последняя мысль: нужно объехать какую-то гряду...

Shapukh and imprisoned in the fortress of Anush. In the original legend, a former servant of Arshak's named Drastamat saves Shapukh's life, and to thank him Shapukh grants him one request. Drastamat asks to see the imprisoned Arshak for one day, and ends up taking both their lives. But Mandelstam's version does not end with death; rather the abiding theme is one of reprieve. His retelling ends with Drastamat's request:

> Let me enter the fortress of Anush. I want Arshak to spend one more day full of sound, taste, and smell, as it was before, when he amused himself with the hunt and busied himself planting orchards.[71]
>
> (III 211)

Harris argues that the change "reinforc[es] the theme of life's continuum, and the theme of unpredictability of life as the ultimate challenge to death," and goes further to assert its biographical implications: Mandelstam himself felt he'd been reprieved thanks to his supporter Nikolai Bukharin, who relieved the poet temporarily from his literary non-status and arranged the restorative trip to Armenia (Harris 19).

If the *Journey* ends with an assertion of life, it is nonetheless ringed by death. Even if we are spared the legend's original end, in which the deposed king dies in a dungeon, Mandelstam's version ends with a sorrowful cry for a life held firmly in the past. For most of Mandelstam's retelling, Arshak resembles a living corpse, overrun with vermin, his flesh rotting, deprived of his senses. Whether he dies at his servant's hand or returns to his living death after one day's reprieve, his end is still bitter, his soul and body still conquered. The biographical implications, if hopeful, are soberly aware of the limits of that hope. Not for nothing does Mandelstam describe his falling asleep (his last gesture in the piece) as being walled in. His final thought, the will towards the next ridge, toward a continuation of

[71] Дай мне пропуск в крепость Ануш. Я хочу, чтобы Аршак провел один добавочный день, полный слышания, вкуса и обоняния, как бывало раньше, когда он развлекался охотой и заботился о древонасаждении.

the journey, seems no more or less final than the darkness that besets it. Life and death embrace, perpetually contextualizing one another.

The walls that wall in the poet—the fortress or dungeon that imprisons Arshak (perpetually, in Mandelstam's vision)—bring a solemn echo of the idea of the vessel as a medium of poetry, an in idea upon which Mandelstam has been fixated since "On the interlocutor." In the essay "A word on Georgian Art" (1922, see Chapter Three), Mandelstam praises the Georgian custom of burying jugs of wine to let them ferment, and in essays that follow develops the idea of the word ripening underground. "On the interlocutor" (1913), of course, has already presented the text as requiring a long journey over space and time to become poetry. In "On the nature of the word" (1921) the word is analogized to "the funeral bark of the Egyptian deceased, in which everything was laid that a person would need to continue his earthly travels."[72] In each case the word requires a vessel to bear it across an interstitial region between times and lives—across death—in order to bring it to an ear that is prepared to listen, and thereby to poetic fruition. The imprisoned Arshak provides a counterweight, however. In Arshak's case, the end is the cell; the human weight dies unredeemed and darkened. Here we see a teleological pessimism unusual for Mandelstam: a tunnel that has forgotten what light is.

The Breath of Air and the Hollow Book

In *Journey to Armenia* and surrounding writings, Mandelstam introduces into this model the idea of reprieve—poetry called "stolen air," for example, in *Fourth Prose* (1930), or the deep-breathed open moments of the *Armenia* cycle (1930): e.g., "Snow, snow, snow on

[72] See page 106.

painted paper/ The mountain floats to my lips/ I'm cold. I'm glad..." (190).[73] His Arshak legend climaxes with a reprieve, as Harris points out. Yet there are hints, at least in the *Journey,* of Mandelstam's former model of poetic reception, which requires a vessel and a journey across death, and that Mandelstam is attempting to reconcile these two ideas: that poetry happens in death and resurrection, and the poetry happens in the stolen breath that we are allowed before we die. Vessels are also buried and unearthed in the poetry Mandelstam wrote just before composing the *Journey,* especially in the *Armenia* cycle and surrounding poems. One recurring image in these poems is of the clay vessel as a hollow yet readable book, a bottle-like carrier of a human impulse, even a sort of text. A buried vessel, if sealed, may also preserve air—a stolen breath.

The eleventh poem of the *Armenia* cycle is especially interesting in light of the young Mandelstam's interest in the inheritance of cultures. This poem feints an apophatic conceit along the lines of "I have not heard the tales of Ossian and "I'll never see the celebrated Phaedra,"[74] which draws out their images and ideas through a thematic negation. This poem, though it does not follow this conceit of negation, nevertheless begins "I will never see you," only later amends "never" to "no longer," and finally to "never again." Not only does the poem's form recall the knight's-path transference of cultural inheritance, which is one of the themes of the two earlier poems, it also devotes half its content to a new vision of this inheritance. The poem reads:

> Я тебя никогда не увижу,
> Близорукое армянское небо,
> И уже не взгляну прищурясь
> На дорожный шатер Арарата,
>
> И уже никогда не раскрою
> В библиотеке авторов гончарных
> Прекрасной земли пустотелую книгу,

[73] "Снега, снега, снега на рисовой бумаге,/ Гора плывет к губам./ Мне холодно. Я рад..."
[74] See pp. 171, 184.

По которой учились первые люди.

(I will never see you,/ Nearsighted Armenian sky,/ And I'll no longer look squinting/ At the traveling tent of Ararat,/ And I will never again uncover/ In the library of potter-authors/ The hollow book of lovely earth/ With which the first people studied.)

(191)

This confluence of book, earth, and vessel tie up Mandelstam's current vision of the life of letters: a more primitive vision, where cultural inheritance is less tied to the contents of a given culture (the myths of Greece, the legends of Scotland, etc.) and more emphatically grounded in the idea of culture as such. Here, culture is unlettered but still civilized—pottery being a major pointer to the transition from a hunter-gatherer to a sedentary culture. Moreover, this image reverts the idea of reading back to its preliterary roots, to the pictorial engravings on the vessels, and even beyond that, to a prerepresentational, preconceptual "reading" of the makeup and patterns of the earth itself.

In twelfth poem of the *Armenia* cycle, the image of "book-earth" (книжная земля) reappears, and in the poem "Thorny speech of Ararat's valley," written at the same time as the *Armenia* cycle, several important images of "I will never see you" reappear:

...А близорукое шахское небо —
Слепорожденная бирюза —
Все не прочтет пустотелую книгу
Черной кровью запекшихся глин.

(And the nearsighted Shah-sky — / A turquoise blind from birth — / Still will not read the hollow book/ Of clay baked with black blood.)

(192)

Here the idea of reading is even further abstracted than in "I will never see you." The "reader" is no longer the poet but the blind eye of the sky (equated with an emperor—likely a Persian, thus foreign, Shah—and thereby inhabiting an imperial distance). The read (or unread) object retains less of a trace of human craft; the only hint of an organism at all is

the "black blood" that's been mixed in with the clay. The baking could be read as a natural process, just as much as it could be read as a human production. We are thus brought even further back than the preconceptual, prelinguistic "reading" of the eleventh poem—in the twelfth, man can no longer read his own text; he is read (or not read) by an alien being, represented by the inhuman element of sky (as opposed to the human element of earth).

The poem "Lamarck" (1932) presents a different relationship between an organism and a master—a version of a poet-Tsar or Adam-God relationship. The poet imagines himself sinking to the lowest levels of organic life, replicating the downward motion of return invoked by burial in the abovementioned poems. The master, Lamarck, describes the gaps along an evolutionary regression from man to the lowest life forms, narrating the poet's journey downward:

> Он сказал: природа вся в разломах,
> Зренья нет — ты зришь в последний раз.
>
> Он сказал: довольно полнозвучья, —
> Ты напрасно Моцарта любил:
> Наступает глухота паучья,
> Здесь провал сильнее наших сил.
>
> (He said: nature is all in rifts,/ No sight — you're seeing for the last time./ He said: enough of sonority, —/ In vain have you loved Mozart:/ A spider's deafness is descending,/ Here the pit is more powerful than our powers.)
>
> (213)

Nadezhda Mandelstam comments on these lines as a statement of anxiety about the disappearance of culture—represented by Mozart—in a coming dark age marked by blindness and deafness. Certain lexical and tonal markers, however, point back to an earlier place in Mandelstam's oeuvre: namely, the poems dedicated to Bach and Beethoven in 1913 and 1914, respectively, and indicate a dialogue between "Lamarck"'s dark descent out of the human and the earlier poems' joyous struggle and ascent into it.

"Lamarck," like the Bach and Beethoven poems—and indeed like other poems Mandelstam dedicates to artists ("Batiushkov," "Ariost")—begins with an epigrammatic image of the dedicatee, and then attempts to characterize and essentialize his work. Like these poems, "Lamarck" is titled after its dedicatee (while the majority of Mandelstam's poems are untitled). "Lamarck" shares rhetorical devices with both "Bach" and "Ode to Beethoven." Both Lamarck and Bach are epigrammatized as "old man" *(старик).* Lamarck and Beethoven are both introduced with an aporia of identification: for Beethoven, "Who is this alarming walker?" *(Kto etot divnyi peshekhod?);* for Lamarck, "Who is this fencer for the honor of nature?" *(Kto za chest' prirody fekhtoval'shchik?).* More tellingly Beethoven shares with Lamarck the qualities of a flame: each is inflamed by his mission, be it scientific or artistic. Of Beethoven, Mandelstam asks, "Who can, flaming brighter,/ Sanctify the effort of the will? *(Kto mozhet, iarche plameneia,/ Usil'e voli osviatit'?),* and later lauds Beethoven's Dionysian ardor: "Oh, flame of sublime sacrifice!" *(O, velichavoi zhertvy plamia!).* Meanwhile, Lamarck, despite childlike shyness and clumsimess, is "flaming" *(plamennyi).* But flame suffers differnet fates in each poem. In the "Ode," Mandelstam analogizes the sacrificial fire of the Dionysus cult to the human spirit: "Fire blazes in man,/ No one could ever calm it" *(Ogon' pylaet v cheloveke,/ Ego uniat' nikto ne mog).* In "Lamarck," on the other hand, Lamarck's flame is never extended to the poet or to humanity at large; rather the poem becomes less and less illuminated as the poet sinks deeper down the ladder of life.

Both Lamarck and Beethoven are illuminators in these poems, but, again, the nature and fate of those illuminations differ. Interestingly, both poems develop through a loss of hearing and sight. In "Ode to Beethoven," these losses expand and empower the illumination—in the case of "Lamarck," they see it extinguished. Deafness enters the Beethoven poem as the first epithet the poet applies to his subject: "And in the dark room of

the deaf/Beethoven a fire blazes" (*I v temnoi komnate glukhogo/ Betkhovena gorit ogon'*). This epithet makes obvious sense, the poem being an ode and deafness being one of Beethoven's chief attributes (probably second only to composer). The placement of the word "glukhogo" (deaf) at the end of the line has an interesting effect. It makes up a slant rhyme with "Betkhovena" which follows as the first word of the next line. That the first line of the couplet ends with a feminine foot (the poem is in octets of iambic tetrameter, as befits a Russian ode, with alternating feminine and masculine endings) and therefore forces a bit of a pause before the reader can continue onto the next line. This breathing space reinforces the assonance between "glukhogo" and "Betkhovena," binding Beethoven to his deafness through the stressed syllables "khog" and "khov," which are pronounced essentially the same—almost as if "Betkhovena" were the poet's second attempt to pronounce "glukhogo." Moreover, in the inherent pause between the lines, while the modifier "glukhogo" hangs in the air before its referent is named, it enjoys an instant as an adjectival noun, which would be translated as "the deaf one." Beethoven therefore carries his deafness across stanzaic boundaries, and when he appears at the end in the context of blindness, he is still the deaf one, or even deafness itself:

> И в промежутке воспаленном,
> Где мы не видим ничего, —
> Ты указал в чертоге тронном
> На белой славы торжество!
>
> (And in an inflamed interval,/ Where we don't see a thing, —/ You pointed, in the throne room/ To the festival of white glory!)
>
> (121)

This quatrain, which follows the poet's invocation of a Dionysian ritual bonfire, finishes out the poem in a synesthetic ecstasy worthy of the wine god. Mandelstam relocates the fire into a synecdochal "interval" (presumably a musical interval), in which vision is invoked as a possibility for experiencing music. Though vision is denied—it is music after all—it is

indicated by descriptors that are much more suited to the eye: "inflamed" *(vospalennyi),* "point out" *(ukazyvat'),* "throne room" *(tronnyi chertog),* and finally "white" *(belyi).* These are things one sees more than hears; yet we experience them without sight. Conversely, we may project, Beethoven experiences the aural without hearing, "pointing" rather than singing. If this is a Dionysian triumph, as the poem indicates, it is a confluence of essences and perceptions, nouns and adjectives, of sight and sound—a confluence so absolute that, in some sense, a deaf composer is its greatest totem.

"Lamarck," on the other hand, is about dissolution, coming apart. The loss of sensations marks a descent rather than an ascent, a step backwards rather than forwards. Blindness is simply a loss of vision ("You're seeing for the last time"), and when deafness descends, it is a spider's, not a god's or prophet's. These losses hint not at a divine confluence but at an individual deprivation: they point towards a nothing rather than an everything. The result is not more than Mozart (which is what Beethoven represents); it is less. Rather than fusion, the end of "Lamarck" stresses separation:

> И от нас природа отступила —
> Так, как будто мы ей не нужны,
> И продольный мозг она вложила,
> Словно шпагу, в темные ножны.
>
> (And nature receded from us —/ As if she[75] didn't need us,/ And she enclosed the spinal column[76],/ Like a sword, in a dark sheath.)

"We" (the poet, presumably, and his Virgil-like guide Lamarck, or humankind as a whole) are now abandoned by nature itself. Her enclosing the spinal column in a sheath could be read as a kind of building—founding the subphylum of vertebrates—but this movement upward would go against the downward direction of the rest of poem. A more justifiable

[75] *Priroda,* "nature," is feminine. It is possible to translate "it" instead of "she."
[76] *Prodol'nyi mozg,* literally "lateral brain," is a likely stand-in for *spinnyi mozg,* "spinal brain" or spinal column. As the poet descends down the ladder of organic beings, it stands to reason that he'd be interested in the difference between vertebrates and invertebrates, and that he'd prefer not to use the standard expression for spinal column but "estrange" it a little.

reading is that nature has closed herself off from "us," at least from our consciousness, and surrounded us in darkness. This reading is bolstered by the following, final stanza, which describes the isolation of those with "green graves" *(zelenaia mogila),* towards whom nature has neglected to lower a bridge: "And she forgot, was too late,/ to lower a drawbridge.." *(I pod"emnyi most ona zabyla,/ Opozdala opustit'...)* This laying-in of the spinal cord is brought into further relief by Mandelstam's attitude toward the spine in other poems as a guarantor of survival. In "The Age" (Vek, 1921), the poet imagines himself fusing the nineteeth and twentieth centuries like an animal's broken spine, creating a bridge from one age to another. And in a variant of "Today we can take off the decals..." (Segodnia mozhno sniat' dekal'komani..., 1931), Mandelstam ends the poem with an optimistic revelation at the sight of workers' backs:

> Какое лето! Молодых рабочих
> Татарские сверкающие спины
> С девической повязкой на хребтах,
> ...
> Здравствуй, здравствуй,
> Могучий некрещеный позвоночник,
> С которым проживем не век, не два!..
>
> (What a summer! The brilliant Tartar backs/ Of young workers/ With a maidenly band on the spine,/ .../ Greetings, greetings,/ Mighty unbaptized spine,/ With which we'll last out not one century, not two!...)
>
> (212)

The spine in "Lamarck" stands opposite to the spine in "The Age" because it remains buried, unable to achieve the immanent self-extension that Mandelstam wishes for the departed century. It also counters the spine in "Today we can take off the decals..." because it is enclosed in darkness, rather than "brilliant" in the (presumed) sun. The latter poem also features a complex made up of the words "brilliant," "spines," and "unbaptized" *(sverkaiushchie, khrebtakh, nekreshchennyi)* that is dominated by fricatives; the end of

"Lamarck," meanwhile, is more fluid, softer, less dynamic—as befits a letting go of life (rather than a struggle to retain it).

Yet the speaker of "Lamarck" does not die; the poem maintains the sense of a subterranean journey, recalling most immediately Dante's but also echoing Mandelstam's own visions of journeys into the realm of death, whether they be of the word ("Swallow") or of the human being ("In Petersburg we'll gather again") in poems of the 1920s. However, "Lamarck's" speaker is not depicted emerging on the other side of that realm, like the word or the ashes in the abovementioned poems, as a trace of the subject's journey into death. The speaker of "Lamarck" is left, as it were, existing in death, speaking from it—similarly to the voice of the king Arshak in the legend that Mandelstam retells at the end of *Journey to Armenia.* Neither can effect the crossing.

In that legend, the imprisoned Arshak is deprived not only of his freedom but also of his senses, and therefore comes to lose basic elements of his humanity. The retelling begins with a list of these losses:

> 1. Тело Аршака неумыто, и борода его одичала.
>
> 2. Ногти царя сломаны, и по лицу его ползают мокрицы.
>
> 3. Уши его поглупели от тишины, а когда-то они слушали греческую музыку.
>
> 4. Язык опаршивел от пищи тюремщиков, а было время — он прижимал виноград к небу и был ловок, как кончик языка флейтиста.
>
> 5. Семя Аршака зачахло в мошонке, и голос его жидок, как блеяние овцы...
>
> (1. Arshak's body is unwashed, and his beard has grown wild./ 2. His nails are cracked, and woodlice crawl up and down his face./ 3. His ears have gone daft from silence, but once they heard Greek music./ 4. His tongue is mangy from the dungeonkeepers' food, but there was a time when it pressed grapes to his palate, as agile as the end of a floutist's tongue./ 5. Arshak's seed has withered away in his scrotum, and his voice is weak as the bleating of a sheep...)

It is appropriate, therefore, that Drastamat's request to King Shapukh to let Arshak have one day of freedom is marked by "sound, taste, and smell"; it is specifically these sensations that Drastamat wishes to give back (at least for a day) to their rightful master.

In the next lines, it appears that Shapukh is not only depriving Arshak of his life but actually appropriating it for himself:

> 6. Царь Шапух — как думает Аршак — взял верх надо мной, и — хуже того — он взял мой воздух себе.
>
> 7. Ассириец держит мое сердце.
>
> 8. Он — начальник волос моих и ногтей моих. Он отпускает мне бороду и глотает слюну мою...
>
> (6. King Shapukh — thus thinks Arshak — has gotten the upper hand of me, and what's worse, he's taken my air for himself./ 7. The Assyrian holds my heart./ 8. He is the master of my hair and my fingernails. He grows my beard and swallows my saliva...)
>
> (III 211)

This bodily appropriation can be seen as a counter to previous notions of poetic appropriation that Mandelstam has held from the writing of "On the Interlocutor" right up to the given moment. The early poems of poetic creation maintain a confluence between subject and object, and blur the line between the experience of art and culture and its recreation into something new. Mandelstam's seminal essays from the 1910s and 1920s tend to champion an assimilative-appropriative model of poetic creation, a conscious mobilization of the human faculty of cultural digestion. But he never explores what it might be like to be the appropriated rather than the appropriator. The sailor in "On the Interlocutor" dies (presumably) before the bottle-finder gets the chance to become his interlocutor (his death is actually a condition for the finding). The cultural inheritance that Mandelstam claims in essays and poems both contemporaneous and subsequent to this model is just that: an inheritance, granted by the already dead. At the turn of the fourth

decade of the 20th century, Mandelstam has tasted literary death; he knows what it's like to be silenced. The Arshak-Shapukh legend he retells may be a sign that he's ready to think about occupying the other side of the equation: that he understands, perhaps more fully than before, that he has at some point to die and that his work has at some point to go underground, and is worried now that his person and his work won't be given the chance to achieve their natural fate without interference from the outside.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE APPROACH TO THE BORDER

"Don't tempt foreign dialects, but try to forget them:
In any case, you won't know how to bite glass with your teeth!"

—Mandelstam, untitled poem, May 1933[1]

The spring of 1933 found Osip and Nadezhda Mandelstam in the Crimea, in the company of Andrei Bely and Anatoly Mariengof; there, in the spa towns of Stary Krym and Koktebel', Mandelstam began his longest work of critical prose and arguably the most important testament to his understanding of the art and practice of poetry, the *Conversation about Dante.* At the time he was reading not only Dante but other medieval Italian masters (Petrarch, Tasso, Ariosto) in the original, and both his prose and poetry of that season reflect an abiding interest in these poets as well as a visible interest in reading them in Italian, which was still to Mandelstam a very foreign tongue.[2] His poem "Ariosto" (1933, discussed below) was one of two poems dated from this spring; in it, he attempts to bridge the gap between the Renaissance Italian poet's artistic/biographical contexts and his own—aided not in the least part by the presence of the Crimean coast and the attendant "mixing of waters" through which image Mandelstam attempts to share his poetic subjectivity with Ariosto's. Mandelstam's interest in the intermingling of subjectivities attendant on reading goes all the way back to his 1913 essay "On the Interlocutor" (see Chapter Two), but now, for the first time in explicit form, this concern finds itself occurring between languages. In

[1] Не искушай чужих наречий, но постарайся их забыть:/ Ведь все равно ты не сумеешь стекла зубами укусить! (223)
[2] See Lekmanov 233. Mandelstam was studying the Italian language at the same time as he was reading these four poets.

this chapter I will argue that reading in a foreign tongue helped Mandelstam reconceptualize theories of poetic language and reception that he'd been developing since his early essays—that reading in Italian brought into greater relief the volatile membrane separating and joining linguistic impulse and linguistic expression—as well as writer and reader, and even self and other—and helped Mandelstam focus on literary hybridization from the vantage point of linguistic production.

This chapter traces Mandelstam's thinking about poetic discourse in the early 1930s by following (1) his treatment of the prelinguistic, and (2) his thoughts on translating the prelinguistic into the artwork which (I will argue) is attendant on the particular metaphors he uses to designate the prelinguistic. The two primary metaphors for the prelinguistic that I will track are noise *(shum)* and babble *(lepet).* Noise is operative in Mandelstam's early connections between waves and poetic discourse; babble takes over in the *Conversation about Dante,* concurrently with Mandelstam's study of Italian, and allows him to occupy a metaphor for poetic discourse that includes the interlocutor but begins and ends with language. Noise, in other words, can accompany a linguistic or a non-linguistic wave form, but babble belongs to the linguistic realm, and the dialogues discussed in previous chapters which make poetry possible, whose metaphors always came from the nonhuman world, are now brought for the first time into a metaphor lying completely in the human realm of the linguistic. The poet-figure no longer translates from inchoate nature into language; he now translates from inchoate language into phenomenal language, and at the end of the *Conversation* indeed introduces his first-ever theoretical deployment of the figure of translator.

Side by side with (and perhaps subtending) these interests is some salient biographical evidence that shows anxiety and even shame on Mandelstam's part with regard to reading foreign languages. Nadezhda Mandelstam, for one, attests more than

once in her memoirs that Mandelstam considered enjoyment of foreign material a betrayal of the Russian tongue. Concerning the poem "To the German Language" (*K nemetskoi rechi,* November 1932), she writes:

> For him a foreign language, foreign poetry, pleasure at foreign speech amounted to treason. He would say the same about Italian and Armenian. This was some kind of heightened sensation of loyalty and devotion when love for foreign poetry was felt as something forbidden.[3]

This feeling of Mandelstam's is also suggested by textual evidence surrounding his revision of the poem "Ariosto" (1933, 1935). Though the poet himself is not quoted expressing anxiety and shame, such feelings would coincide with his anxiety about translation in general at the end of the 1920s and beginning of the 1930s (see Chapter Four) and provide a sobering yet unsurprising counterweight to his celebration of the Italian language in the *Conversation.*

READING AND SPEAKING NOISE

During the years surrounding *Stone* (1913), Mandelstam makes salient use of the image of poetry, or the word, borne on water. Several of his seminal earlier poems feature the ocean as a stand-in or conduit for the poetic word; specifically, these try to reconcile the artistic (often specifically poetic) act with the prelinguistic rhythms of breaking waves. The model is basically as follows: The poet is a figure on the shore, and the transmission of the poem to the poet happens on the border between ocean and solid ground, which is where the waves break. The waves communicate visually and aurally, in foam *(pena)* and noise *(shum),* respectively, and it is the poet's task to translate these rhythmic sense experiences into

[3] …для него чужой язык, чужая поэзия, наслаждение чужой речью равно измене. То же он скажет об итальянском и армянском. Это какое-то повышенное ощущение верности, преданности, когда любовь к чужой поэзии ощущается как нечто запретное. NM III, 178.

comprehensible, readable art—to translate the ocean's roar into human rhythms. Through this process, an artwork comes into being that at once is recognizable as artifice and carries with it a trace of the chaos to which it gave form. In addition, Mandelstam sees the figure on the shore as a reader of sounds, who is often indistinguishable from the figure of the poet. The presence of *shum* in particular conflates the poet and the reader, as both figures hark to the noise that subtends language, whether language is being brought out of noise or serves as a doorway back to its original inhuman rhythm.

The poem "Silentium" (1910) is a programmatic aesthetic statement involving an oceanic metaphor that predates "On the Interlocutor" by three years. At this early stage in Mandelstam's thinking, the ocean is already a bearer of a prelinguistic esthetic impulse, but it is the spectacle rather than the sound of the sea that takes center stage. At this point in Mandelstam's poetics, the visual and silent hold sway over the dark and noisy as a sign of the artistic process; the main effect is a Tiutchevian renunciation of art as communicative possibility.[4]

In "Silentium" the sea "breathes tranquilly" *(spokoino)* in anticipation of the imminent birth of Aphrodite from foam, a birth from turbulence which will mark an elemental break in both nature and esthetics: "She has not yet been born," the poem opens, "She is both music and word" (94).[5] The poem's speaker, bound to the post-break world by his existence through language, desires nevertheless to return this prelinguistic unity, this very Symbolist fusion of music and logos:

> Да обретут мои уста
> Первоначальную немóту,

[4] See especially Tiutchev's own "Silentium!" (1829) and its oft-cited line "The thought expressed is a lie" (Мысль изреченная есть ложь). To call Mandelstam's poem Tiutchevian, however, is a bit of an exaggeration; Tiutchev in other poems gave plenty of attention to the dark and noisy as a positive creative power.

[5] "Она еще не родилась,/ Она и музыка и слово,..." The Russian pronoun *ona* (she) might refer here either to Aphrodite, or to silence *(tishina),* which is feminine—though, since silence reigns before the word and music come to be, it makes more sense that the poem refers here to Aphrodite.

Как кристаллическую ноту,
Что от рождения чиста!

(Let my lips attain/ The original muteness,/ Like a crystal note,/ That is pure from birth!)

In the next, final stanza, the poet goes so far as to command Aphrodite not to be born, in order to preserve this original unity. Mandelstam employs foam as an emblem for Aphrodite's origin, and by extension for the original element that will divide into logos and music when she is born:

Останься пеной, Афродита,
И, слово, в музыку вернись,
И, сердце, сердца устыдись,
С первоосновной жизни слито!

(Remain foam, Aphrodite,/ And, word, return into music,/ And, heart, be ashamed of heart,/ Poured from elemental life!)

It is not surprising that "Silentium" ties water to silence—a survey of surrounding poems reveals an interest in silence as well as in water as a generative field. One finds in the poems of 1911 the pair of swamp *(omut)* poems as well as the meditations written after the death of Mandelstam's close friend Boris Sinani, which feature silence and distant sails. But the absence of sound in these subsequent poems contains the potential for sound, and the absence is often questioned: "Why is there so little music/ And such silence?" (99); "From the fogbound bell-tower/ Someone has stolen the bells,…" (97). A movement toward the speaking, generative sound of "Seashell" can be detected in the 1911 poems that lead up to it.

Mandelstam's 1911 poem "Seashell" *(Rakovina)* celebrates the sound of the sea as a creative power while tempering it with the Appolinian force of the artist. Here, the poet is figured as a shell that collects the wild sounds of nature (mutually metonymic with the chaos of night) and domesticates them into an apprehensible, transmittable form. The

poem's second stanza, addressed to the night, sets a sort of reciprocity between wild, elemental nature and the extraneous, incidental world of human creation:

> Ты равнодушно волны пенишь
> И несговорчиво поешь;
> Но ты полюбишь, ты оценишь
> Ненужной раковины ложь.
>
> (You indifferently foam the waves/ And recalcitrantly sing; /But you will come to love, you will value/ The useless seashell's lie.)
>
> (99-100)

In this stanza, both the night (nature) and the seashell (poet) are given a kind of voice. Nature sings; the shell lies. One speaker, night, is explicitly given the capacity to listen to the other's echo of itself. Night must be able to hear the shell's reflection of it—its "lie"—in order to value it. It is likely that the shell can also hear, at least when it's extended metaphorically to the poet. The two are engaged in a kind of dialogue, with night/nature speaking its essence to the shell/poet, which offers back its own domesticated[6] version of the wild sounds, which in turn are accepted and loved by their original source, night/nature. There is an an echo of Pushkin's "Poet," in which the poet in good Romantic fashion runs from people and declaims to the roaring (*shumiashchie)* wastes of nature (Pushkin II, 179).[7] In "On the Interlocutor," he will reveal that poet is talking to people after all, but obliquely—and metaphorically speaking, at least, the dialogue is very much between the poet and the elements. We can also track here an early version of the poetic locus of identification that is central to "Interlocutor's" model of reader reception. In "Seashell," identification happens in the shell, which echoes chaotic natural elements. As the shell is as a receiver or a theater for the infinite and inchoate, the poet in "Interlocutor"

[6] The idea of domestication is brought out more concretely in the final stanza: "И хрупкой раковины стены,/ Как нежилого сердца дом,..." (And the brittle walls of the shell,/ Like the house of an uninhabited heart...")

[7] Бежит он, дикий и суровый,/ И звуков и смятенья полн,/ На берега пустынных волн,/ В широкошумные дубровы... (He runs, wild and severe,/ Full of both sounds and disarray,/ To the banks of desert waves,/ To wide-roaring oak groves…)

also receives a message from the unchartable, uncharitable deeps and reenacts it through his own subjectivity, in his own voice. Only in "Interlocutor," it is not nature itself which is being received and reenacted: it is another human voice—though it is stilled in its flow by inscription and sealing, as "Seashell's" wild sounds were spliced off from nature and recultivated in the seashell. The element of transmission remains—the bottle carries its provenance as saliently as its content; that provenance supplies as much of the poet's identification with it as does its message (the seafarer's note, the Baratynsky poem)[8]. In both "Seashell" and "On the Interlocutor," however, the receiver does not yet know how to articulate its voice—to speak: the "finder" is still only a reader, and the seashell strips rhythm from the elements (in its echo the surf roars but no longer breaks) without granting them a new one.

The element of ocean and the artifact of the spoken (or printed) word is further developed in the poem "Insomnia. Homer. Taut sails." (Bessonitsa. Gomer. Tugie parusa., 1915) Here the word is instantiated both in the text of the *Iliad* and metonymically in the ships that the text presents:

> Бессоница. Гомер. Тугие паруса.
> Я список кораблей прочел до середины;
> Сей длинный выводок, сей поезд журавлиный,
> Что над Элладою когда-то поднялся.
>
> (Insomnia. Homer. Taut sails./ I have read to the middle of the list of ships;/ This long brood, this train of cranes,/ That once rose over Hellas.)
>
> (126)

This first stanza unfolds along three planes: the speaker's lived reality (represented by the "insomnia" of the first line and the entirety of the second); the presence of the text (represented by "Homer," "list of ships," and the act of reading); and the fictive world of the *Iliad* (represented both by elements that the poet narrates—"taut sails"—and by poetic

[8] See Chapter Two.

turns through which the poet augments the text he's reading—"long brood," "train of cranes," etc). As should already be evident, these planes do not exist exclusively of one another, and as befits a poem freely partake of one another's referents and echoes. "Long brood" and "train," therefore, can apply to the words on the page as much as to the ships at sea, and the sea *(more)* is already present in the first line, as inscribed into "Homer" *(Gomer).* The words are adrift on (or through) their Homeric element as ships are on the water.

The encoding of *more* in *Gomer* is made clear in the final stanza, when the text (represented by Homer) is set against its nonverbal or subverbal medium (represented by the sea):

> И море, и Гомер — всё движется любовью,
> Кого же слушать мне? И вот, Гомер молчит,
> И море черное, витийствуя, шумит
> И с тяжким грохотом подходит к изголовью.
>
> (Both the sea, and Homer — all is moved by love,/ Who should I listen to? And now Homer falls silent,/ And the black sea, orating, noises *(shumit)/* And with a weighty rumble approaches the headboard.)

While the scene of "Seashell" presents an elemental chaos upon which a shell or poet acts, domesticating it into the human realm, "Insomnia" shows us the other side of that narrative. Here, words (representing the human and semantic) call up the element of their origin and transmission, a "voice" that "noises" (or roars), "orating" without words. Words slip away, and the primordial elemental voice once more holds sway as the poem's speaker (presumably) falls back to sleep. Language has brought with it the ocean's roar. Moreover, this *shum* behaves more like language than the *shum* in "Seashell." Is on the move, "rumbling" as it "approaches" the headboard; it partakes of a rhythm signaled in the penultimate line, in which only every other iambic stress is realized (I more chérnoe, vitíistvuia, shumít—/--/-´/--/-´/--/-´/), perhaps echoing the cycle of withdrawal and surge as

the surf draws ever closer. Language brings the noise, which in turn begins to sound like language: the ocean's rhythm is translated into the rhythm of the human tongue.

Both "Seashell" and "Insomnia" feature images of foam: "You indifferently foam *(penish')* the waves" in the former, "Divine foam *(pena)* on the kings' heads"[9] in the latter. In each case, sea foam signifies the action of waves. In "Seashell" it is the mark of crashing surf; in "Insomnia" it is a sign that the ships (and the "kings" carved on their prows) are sailing through active seas. By the time Mandelstam composes "Insomnia," Aphrodite has been born and there's no going back. His sailing Greeks have love on their minds: "…If it were not for Helen,/ What would Troy alone be to you, men of Achaea?"[10] Helen is the erotic trope par excellence; Aphrodite was instrumental in arranging her romance with Paris. In the poem's final stanza, Mandelstam goes on to proclaim, "Both Homer, and the sea — all is moved by love." We can trace "love" back to its identification with Aphrodite, and also to its identification with sound (music, the word) in "Silentium." But in "Insomnia" it appears that the motive element (love) is closer to sound than to vision, closer to the roar and rumble of the waves that move the ships and return the poet to sleep than it is to the foam that adorns the heads of the sailing kings. To become food for logos (and in turn for poetry), the word must be born, must be carried to the poet by the generative *shum* of the sea.[11] Further, as that sound is granted human rhythm, it becomes language; it gains poetic valence. The rumble that approaches the headboard is not the "lie" in the seashell, which drones incessantly. This rumble is not a fully domesticated sound, cut off from its parent sea, as the shell's is. It is a hybrid of the wild rhythm of nature and the meter of man.

[9] "На головах царей божественная пена—",126.
[10] "...Когда бы не Елена,/ Что Троя вам одна, ахейские мужи?" 126.
[11] I will revisit "Insomnia" in the next chapter, where the generative *shum* will be revisited in the context of translation.

A striking deployment of this generative *shum* occurs in Mandelstam's 1913 essay "On the Interlocutor." This essay, as discussed in Chapter Two, sets up the water-borne word as a figure for poetic communication: a model of reader reception that depends on an immeasurable, perhaps infinite gap between poet and reader, and a "message" that acquires its poetic character because it is not addressed to anyone in particular and yet is delivered as something intimately personal. The ocean as a bearer of the poetic and a catalyst to the merging of subjectivities has been discussed in detail in Chapter Two. But in a seemingly casual reference to Pushkin's "Poet" early on in the essay, Mandelstam also devolves oceanic elements onto land forms, conflating earth and ocean and instantiating the poet (as the poems above do) in a border region between them, as a translator among the ocean's beating *shum* and solid, unrhythmical land.

At the essay's opening, Mandelstam defines the poet's stance through the idea of conversation with a madman, whose speech is horrifying precisely because it is not directed at his present interlocutor. After a brief discussion of madness, Mandelstam makes the Romantic move of comparing this speech habit of the madman with that of a poet, quoting Pushkin's "Poet" (without directly citing it, perhaps on the assumption that his reading audience would understand the reference):

> Usually, when one has something to say, one approaches other people, seeks out listeners—a poet does the opposite, runs "to the banks of desert waves, to wide-roaring oak groves." This is clearly abnormal…[12]
>
> (I 182)

Like a madman, Mandelstam goes on to say, the poet addresses his discourse not to living people, but to nature and inanimate objects. People would be justified in claiming that the

[12] Обыкновенно человек, когда имеет что-нибудь сказать, идет к людям, ищет слушателей; — поэт же наоборот, — бежит «на берега пустынных волн, в широкошумные дубровы». Ненормальность очевидна...

poet was mad if his speech really were not addressed to people—but after all, Mandelstam asserts in the end, the poet does address other human beings.

But he addresses them from a position of "desert waves" and "wide-roaring oak groves," two loci that, though they come from a Romantic point of view (man alone, able to discover his voice only when thrust up against forbidding nature), serve Mandelstam's essay in a different way. Rather than the sublimity of nature, these loci in "On the Interlocutor" introduce the essay's central figure for poetic medium, the ocean—and they do it by hypostasizing the fluid and deathly substance of seawater in loci that take place on solid ground. The ocean's waves *(volny)* are here instantiated as desert dunes; the ocean's roar *(shum)* is likewise diverted to the sound of trees in the wind. When Mandelstam introduces the ocean in the next section (along with the sailor and his message in a bottle), the reader has already been prepared to find the poet on the dunes of the shore, in a location that partakes of an oceanic essence (waves) but nevertheless consists of solid material: dunes. Sand, in a poem of the 1930s (see p.), will become a mode of inscription—and here in this essay it also hints at inscription. Motile like the surf but chaotic in its movement, sand is unrhythmical; like paper it waits for a hand (of wind, as in the 1933 poem, or of man) to fix it in a pattern. In the 1930s the idea of pattern will become the key to reading as revivifying the primal *rhythmic* wave, which in the *Conversation about Dante* will reenter the discourse as "ornament."

Over a decade after "Interlocutor," Mandelstam builds the sound of the surf into perhaps the central image of his great autobiographical prose work *The Noise of Time (Shum vremeni,* 1925). The penultimate section, "Kommisarzhevskaia" (for a detailed analysis of this section, see Chapter Three), begins with Mandelstam's explanation of his own biographical style: "I don't feel like speaking about myself, but rather tracking the age,

the noise *(shum)* and germination of time. My memory is hostile to all that is personal."[13] He goes on to eschew the personal-historical narratives of the nineteenth century, based in personal and family history, again invoking the noise of time: "Where the epos of the happy generations speaks in hexameters and chronicles, for me there is the sign of a hiatus, and between me and the age a chasm, a ditch filled with roaring *(shumiashchim,* 'noising') time."[14] The onomatopoeia of *shumiashchim* is especially striking and suggests the nonrhythmical ocean-echo of the seashell; the channels of chasm and ditch also suggest a formless (nonrhythmical) liquid running through them. Thus, the forms and genres suggested by "hexameters and chronicles" give way not to white noise, but to a watery element, which is reinforced in this paragraph's final, recapitulating image:

> Over me and over many of my contemporaries hangs the tongue-tiedness of our birth. We learned not to speak, but to babble *(lepetat')*—and only by harkening to the swelling noise *(shum)* of the age and of the whitened foam of its wave-crests did we acquire a tongue.[15]
>
> (II 384)

The *shum* that is heard here is an event: it is swelling *(narastaiushchii).* This event is somewhat like the weighty approach of the ocean to the poet's headboard in "Insomnia"; each involves a gathering and increasing oceanic sound. But in "Insomnia," it is implied, this gathering will sweep the poet up and deliver him to sleep—while in "Komissarzhevskaia" one imagines the wave breaking around the poet, leaving him in fact more conscious than he was before—and now left with his own language.

Evgeny Pavlov in his book *The Shock of Time: The Autobiographical Poetics of Walter Benjamin and Osip Mandel'shtam* brings up several interesting points about this

[13] Мне хочется говорить не о себе, а следить за веком, за шумом и прорастанием времени. Память моя враждебна всему личному.

[14] Там, где у счастливых поколений говорит эпос гекзаметрами и хроникой, там у меня стоит знак зиянья, и между мной и веком провал, ров, наполненный шумящим временем…

[15] Надо мной и над многими современниками тяготеет косноязычье рожденья. Мы учились не говорить, а лепетать — и лишь прислушивались к нарастающему шуму века и выбеленные пеной его гребня, мы обрели язык.

passage as a whole and this image in particular; chief among them is his binding of the "whitened foam" *(vybelennaia pena)* of the age to the "original foam" *(pervorodnaja pena*—Pavlov's words) of Mandelstam's key early poem "Silentium" (discussed directly above). Pavlov writes:

> When [in *The Noise of Time]* Mandel'shtam once more begins to speak about original language (this time his own) he rejects it as babble and tongue-tiedness, clearly having nothing in common with that pure muteness [in "Silentium] in which it is impossible to conceive of music and the word as separate from one another.
>
> (120)

Pavlov is justified in making this connection, even though the publications of the two works are separated by fifteen turbulent and fertile years; the markers of foam and language are too clear, not to mention the verb *preobresti* (to obtain), which in "Silentium" is directed at *pervonachal'naia nemota* (originary muteness) and in *The Noise of Time* is directed at *iazyk,* language. Pavlov, however, seems to read the white foam in *The Noise of Time* as delivered wholesale from "Silentium" and pointing to places within the noise of time that retain an originary purity: "Would it be impossible in this case to suppose that memory seeks these traces of crystalline purity within the noise of time?" he asks, and then, "Isn't it possible to say that Mandelstam seeks to discover precisely such traces by means of autobiographical whitening *(otbelivanie)?"* (Ibid.)

But these seem the wrong questions: an approach more befitting Mandelstam's texts would read 'noising' time as subverting the mute purity of "Silentium." First, the "original language" of the poet (described in *The Noise of Time)* cannot be assumed to be analogous to "original language" in general. In *The Noise of Time* Mandelstam is very much concerned with the individual (lichnost') and his personal claim to language and literature, while in "Silentium" the voice and its concerns—despite its intimate tone—are impersonal and abstracted. Pavlov himself points out that the ideas of "Silentium" are fed by the

philosophy of Nietzsche and the exalted, abstract poetry of Fyodor Tiutchev (Ibid.). Second, the element of sound is thematically absent from "Silentium" while dominating *The Noise of Time.* "Silentium's" foam is undoubtedly a visual element, and Pavlov uses this to assert that the foam introduces a visual aspect to *The Noise of Time.* However, the foam in *The Noise of Time* is heard, not seen: Mandelstam is describing a harkening *(prislushivanie)* "to the swelling noise of the age and of the whitened foam of its wave-crests" *(k narastaiushchemu shumu veka i vybelennye penoi ego grebnia).* Foam here is not important because of its visual aspect (representing purity in "Silentium")—it is important rather because it marks the crest *(greben')* of the wave: the part that makes sound, that 'noises.' If Mandelstam places the foam in the image to remind us of his earlier work, it is probably to mark a contrast with his old idea of originary purity. Here, foam is a sign of noise, not of silence.

A poem written even before "Silentium" perhaps reaches closer to the play of sound and foam in *The Noise of Time.* "Where the stream breaks free" (Где вырывается из плена, c. 1910), like "Silentium," invokes foam as a sign that takes place outside of time—but unlike "Silentium" places it in dialogue with time's passage, which is marked (as in *The Noise of Time)* by noise *(shum):*

> Где вырывается из плена
> Потока шумное стекло,
> Клубящаяся стынет пена,
> Как лебединое крыло.
>
> О, время, завистью не мучай
> Того, кто вовремя застыл.
> Нас пеною воздвигнул случай
> И кружевом соединил.
>
> (When breaks free/ The noisy glass of a current,/ The seething foam freezes,/ Like a swan's wing./ O, time, do not torture with envy/ The one who froze at the right time./ Chance tossed us up like foam/ And united us like lace.)
>
> (320)

Omry Ronen draws a connection between this poem and the "Komissarzhevskaia" section of *The Noise of Time* based upon the first-person plural that marks the foam images in both works.[16] Pavlov argues that Ronen's connection is flimsy because time is not acting upon the poem's foam: "He who appears from the foaming whirlpool is already a crystallized being, frozen in time" (120). But in so claiming he neglects the poem's appeal to time—"O, time, *do not* torture…him who froze in his time…" (italics mine)—and consequent implication that time might break apart or change the foamy form that has appeared on top of the whirlpool. Pavlov, with Ronen, also neglects the possibility of the speaker's joining or binding with another person at the poem's end—indeed, the first-person plural may not be the impersonal voice of a generation (after all, Mandelstam is still the poet of "I have been given a body" and not "Let us glorify, brothers, the dusk of freedom," and his voice is still fired by the intensely personal, years away from stretching toward collective or generational statements), like the voice of *The Noise of Time,* but simply the voice of someone in love, jealous of the "chance" that brought him together with another, imploring time to leave him alone. In that case, the poem is witness to Aphrodite's being born: the foam is the form of love, continuously thrown up and then destroyed by the noisy stream of time, and the poet is trying to rescue the momentary forms on the surface from disappearing into that flow. The idealist of "Silentium" and the lover of "Where the stream breaks free" are still young: petulant plaintiffs against time. *The Noise of Time's* modernist chronicler neither will neither complain nor legislate, but will attempt to swim with the Revolution (and revolutions far greater and more permanent), and attempt to describe the action of those waters.

[16] *Approach*, 109-110.

In these early poems, and more fully in *The Noise of Time,* the voice emerges out of the struggle and play between the chaotic, insoluble noise of time and the impulse to capture moments out of it, through language or memory. Traces of 'noising' time make up an important component of the voice. This becomes evident in an interesting observation that Pavlov makes about the "Komissarzhevaskaia" passage, namely that the "age" *(vek)* appears to occupy two places in the poet's relationship to memory: it stands between memory and the poet, and at the same time it coexists with memory. "Strangely," he writes, "the age appears both as a subject of mnemonic concentration and as that which divides the 'I' from its subject" (118). As in "Seashell," the medium turns out to be part of the message: the vessel (shell) that in that poem is both ear and mouth, both listens and speaks, is here instantiated as memory, which speaks itself as memory even as it rehearses its trove of content. No wonder that Mandelstam in "Komissarzhevskaia" claims that he learned to babble *(lepetat')* rather than speak: babble *(lepet)* is incomprehensible, cloaked in the noise that Mandelstam claims for time: "Only by harkening to the swelling noise of the age *(shum veka)*…did we acquire a tongue."

Another decade later, Mandelstam revisits *shum* from the other side of freedom's dusk. The poem "Ariosto," composed in May 1933 as he was working on the *Conversation about Dante,* reinstantiates noise and babble as markers of poetry standing against an unpoetic age—but also introduces them into a dialogue between languages, encountered both through pan-European cultural intermingling and through the physiological experience of pronouncing a foreign tongue. Cultural intermingling, so often a theme of Mandelstam's poetry and prose, is here understood in the context of an oceanic storm, a scene of chaotic violence reminiscent of the storm that shipwrecks the author of the bottle-message in "On the Interlocutor." The third and fourth stanzas present this storming:

На языке цикад — пленительная смесь

Из грусти пушкинской и средиземной спеси,
Он завирается, с Орландом куролеся,
И содрогается, преображаясь весь.

И морю говорит: шуми без всяких дум,
И деве на скале: лежи без покрывала...
Рассказывай еще — тебя нам слишком мало,
Покуда в жилах кровь, в ушах покуда шум.

(In the language of cicadas — a captivating mix/ Of Pushkinian sorrow and Mediterranean pride,/ He lies blatantly, playing tricks along with Orlando,/ And shudders, transforming completely.

And says to the ocean: roar *(shumi)* without any thought,/ And to the maiden on the cliff: lie there without your shawl…/ Tell some more tales — there's not enough of you for us,/ While there's still blood in our veins and noise *(shum)* in our ears.)

(222-3)

The Pushkinian subtext of this poem goes beyond the mention of "Pushkinian sorrow": Pushkin's poem "Storm" *(Buria,* 1825) is referenced explicitly in the "maiden on the cliff" (*deva na skale,* common to both poems) who stars in "Storm" opposite a seaside storm that causes her shawl (*pokryvalo,* common to both poems) to fly up around her. Mandelstam sees the mixing of the Pushkinian with the Mediterranean as a generative locus for poetry; this is signaled by the word "transforming" (*preobrashchaias')*—for Mandelstam, especially at this time, unceasing transformation is a key element of poetic discourse (see section following). It is also perhaps signaled by the presence of cicadas, whose unceasing sounding Mandelstam presents in the *Conversation about Dante* as a figure for literary citation: "A citation is a cicada. Its carries a characteristic incessantness" (III 220).[17] Cicadas, along with grasshoppers, mark several of Mandelstam's key poems of the early 1920s, but the Dante work is happening simultaneously with "Ariosto," so it is tempting to read the cicada in "Ariosto's" third stanza as a comment on the citation of Pushkin that follows five lines later. Such a reading places the mixture of the Pushkinian and the Mediterranean (that is,

[17] Цитата есть цикада. Неумолкаемость ей свойственна.

of Mandelstam's linguistic/cultural sphere and that of the Italian Renaissance) on the tongue of a citation: the introduction of Pushkin's text into a poem about an Italian poet creates the hybridization that enables poetry. The creation of poetic energy through insertion of foreign texts into one's own (especially juxtaposition across cultures and languages) is reminiscent of Mandelstam's earlier poetry and prose that dovetails with discourse on translation (see Chapter Four). Here, however, that idea also feeds off of an even earlier and more lasting interest in the primal and chaotic (the prelingual) as generative of poetry. The storm and its attendant noise is seen as vital to artistic creation and even to life itself.

Here, also, Mandelstam introduces the tongue in its physiological aspect, and directs his discourse on cultural mixing and poetic inheritance toward several images of the physical tongue. This happens in a key place, the poem's final two stanzas:

> А я люблю его неистовый досуг,
> Язык бессмысленный, язык солено-сладкий
> И звуков стакнутых прелестные двойчатки...
> Боюсь раскрыть ножом двустворчатый жемчуг.
>
> Любезный Ариост, быть может, век пройдет —
> В одно широкое и братское лазорье
> Сольем твою лазурь и наше Черноморье.
> ...И мы бывали там. И мы там пили мед...
>
> (But I love his furious leisure,/ His senseless tongue[18], his salty-sweet tongue/ And charming twins of banded sounds…/ I'm afraid to reveal with a knife a bivalve's pearl.
>
> Gracious Ariosto, perhaps an age will pass —/ Into one wide and brotherly azure/ We'll pour together your azure and our Black Sea./ …We too were there. There we too drank mead…)
>
> (223)

Two ideas come to the fore to close out this poem: pairing/joining and the action of the tongue. Pairing and joining involves (1) the phonetic components that make up words and

[18] As in English, the Russian *iazyk* means both language and the organ of speech.

which the poet is afraid to split up even to glimpse the treasure they contain, and (2) the respective subjectivities of the poet and Ariosto, which join together in a locus outside of historical time ("an age *will* pass/*we'll* pour" versus "we *were* there/we *drank").* This idea, as already mentioned, is familiar to any reader familiar with Mandelstam's lifelong concerns with pan-Europeanism and cultural/poetic heritage. What marks a new deployment of these concerns is the physical action of the tongue, which lies under the metaphorical tendencies of the figures "senseless tongue" and "salty-sweet tongue." Both these epithets find strong echoes in the *Conversation about Dante.* Senseless speech is nearly identical with babble, which is an important marker for the late Mandelstam as generative of poetic language; babble is revisited in the *Conversation,* and senseless speech can be reconciled with the *Conversation's* all-important "first sounding" of poetic discourse (see below). Moreover, "salty-sweet" corresponds with the front half of the tongue in the famous (and famously disproven) "tongue map"[19] that positions bitterness toward the back, sourness in the rear middle, saltiness in the forward middle, and sweetness at the tip of the tongue. In the Part I of the *Conversation* Mandelstam will describe his efforts to move his whole linguistic apparatus toward the front of the mouth and the tip of the tongue when he attempts to pronounce Italian. The poem's final image of the two poets drinking mead reaffirms the physicality of the tongue—honey and inebriation are metonyms for poetry dating from the classical age and often employed by Mandelstam; now the reader is also left with the taste of honey on his tongue.

The poem's final line, "…We too were there. There we too drank mead…" (…I my byvali tam. I my tam pili med…) carries additional valence because it is reminiscent of the stock ending of many Russian folk tales. Rather than putting up a moral or some such summation, these tales signal their end with this coda: "I was there too, drank mead-beer;

[19] Sourced in Hänig, D.P., 1901. *Zur Psychophysik des Geschmackssinnes.* Philosophische Studien, 17: 576-623.

it ran over my mustache but didn't land in my mouth" (I ia tam byl, med-pivo pil, po usam teklo, da v rot ne popalo). The ellipses around Mandelstam's line in fact suggest that it was torn from something, and the imagination of the Russian reader would likely go to this famous bit of folksy irony. For the purposes of the poem, it may suggest the timelessness that goes along with folk tales; it may even stave off the absurd (but somehow tragic) loss of the mead-beer in the tale-teller's mustache. The poet and Ariosto are left commingling their properties and getting drunk on honey, the shift to past tense painting an eternal moment, not subject to irony, humor, or change. The folk coda, which has traditionally helped the reader come back to reality, now places us more deeply in the poem's moment, constructs a lacuna in our memory where the poem continues despite its having ended. The honey stays on the tongue, where it belongs: we can have our mead and drink it too.

The physical apparatus of the tongue, placed in such proximity to the image of cultural and literary intermingling, suggests that the physical experience of speaking is key to the blending of cultures that enables poetic creation as well as to the blending of subjectivities that enables literary communication. The noise and babble that predict and accompany poetry are also present at the moments of creation and communication. The *Conversation about Dante* will reaffirm and complicate these connections, and bind them in the moment of textual performance.

BABBLE, OR LANGUAGE ON THE WAY

In the *Conversation about Dante* and in surrounding poems, Mandelstam is clearly concerned with the value of babble *(lepet)* as a generative source for poetic discourse. *Lepet* appears but once in the *Conversation,* but it occupies a central place and is moreover echoed throughout the essay in other figures of prelinguistic or halted speech. The word

appears in the first section of the essay, and is deployed to connect linguistic performance (a dominant of the essay; detailed below) with the biographical moment of Mandelstam's learning to speak and read Italian:

> When I began to learn Italian and had barely become acquainted with its phonetics and prosody, I suddenly understood the center of gravity of my vocalization had changed: closer to the lips, to the external part of the mouth… The other thing that struck me was the infantile nature of Italian phonetics, its lovely childishness, its proximity to childish babble *(lepet),* some kind of age-old Dadaism.[20]
>
> (II 218)

In this passage Mandelstam locates *lepet* in the phonetic mechanism of the Italian language, but its conceptual salience is broader than this, stretching all the way to the rudiments of discourse itself, across linguistic boundaries and accompanying any and all phonetic production. The salience of *lepet* in Mandelstam's mature thought can be traced through the poetry of the 1930s; its appearance in the *Conversation* not only points to all the work with *lepet* in this surrounding material but also marks its latest positioning in the space between languages—a vital moment for poetic discourse as Mandelstam explores it in the *Conversation.*

When Mandelstam introduces *lepet* into the poems of the Octets (May 1933-November 1934, revised 1935) it is located not between one language and another but between chaos and logos; the discourse of language is represented in these essential terms.[21] Interestingly, both the wave and the dunes that first appear in "On the Interlocutor" are recapitulated and condensed in "Tell me, draftsman of the desert," an

[20] Когда я начал учиться итальянскому языку и чуть-чуть познакомился с его фонетикой и просодией, я вдруг понял, что центр тяжести речевой работы переместился: ближе к губам, к наружным устам… Еще что меня поразило — это инфантильность итальянской фонетики, ее прекрасная детскость, близость к младенческому лепету, какой-то извечный дадаизм.

[21] A detailed examination of the Octets in relation to Mandelstam's theories of the word in the early 1930s can be found in Pollak, *Mandelstam the Reader, passim.*

Octet poem that presses these images in a different direction than their meaning in the essay of twenty years before:

> Скажи мне, чертежник пустыни,
> Арабских песков геометр,
> Ужели безудержность линий
> Сильнее, чем дующий ветр?
>
> — Меня не касается трепет
> Его иудейских забот —
> Он опыт из лепета лепит
> И лепет из опыта пьет.
>
> (Tell me, draftsman of the desert,/ Geometer of the Arab sands,/ Is the impetuousness of boundaries/ Really more powerful than the blowing wind?/ —It doesn't concern me,/ The trepidation of its Judaic cares—/ It fashions experience from babble/ And drinks babble *[lepet]* from experience…)
>
> (229)

In its brief eight lines, the poem sets up a tension between form and formlessness, between logos and chaos. The geometer argues for his "impetuous" boundaries against the elemental, changing force of the wind by claiming "Judaism" for the latter—something that in Mandelstam often symbolizes prelinguistic, prelogical chaos which is remedied by the logos of Christ (see especially *The Noise of Time).*[22] The wind's activity is essential because it creates perceptible experience out of primordial babble (presumably, here, through the medium of sand), which in turn allows the geometer to draw his lines. These lines are impetuous because they attempt to chart the unchartable: no matter how well he draws, the boundaries of the desert are sure to change the next time the wind blows. Nevertheless, the geometer cannot help drawing his boundaries, just as any human observer cannot help imposing logos on even the most chaotic vision. Like the shell, his perceptual apparatus helplessly captures and transmits the wild material it encounters.

[22] See Pollak's chapter "Judaic Chaos, Judaic Cares."

In fact, it is the boundaries (and their constant shifting) that lets us know the action of the elements that shape and reshape them. When the wind "drinks babble from experience," it can be said to draw its proper numenal chaos (babble) from the phenomena it has created (experience), perhaps to feed its next (unpredictable) action upon material. What is left after this "drinking" are the logical traces that the geometer has recorded in his boundary sketches—soon to be effaced, but records nonetheless of the wind's action. If these records can be analogized to words on the page (or even spoken), then the wind and its babble can also be analogized to the generative babble that for Mandelstam births language. Moreover, the image of drinking echoes the poet's transformation of the ocean's wild rhythms into human meter—again, the elemental form that engenders poetry enters the scene of poetry as water; again, it is inscribed upon sand. But here the scene of poetry is internalized, incorporated, in the action of drinking; and in the *Conversation,* which pays great attention to performance, the scene of poetry will more clearly become the poet's body.

The harmonic tension between chaos and logos, which gives birth to poetry, is further developed in another of the Octetes: "I Shubert na vode, i Motsart v ptichem gam'e." The conflation of chaos and logos that in *The Noise of Time* finds form in the churning wave-crest is here represented in a further conflation of progenitor and progeny:

> И Шуберт на воде, и Моцарт в птичем гаме,
> И Гете, свищущий на вьющейся тропе,
> И Гамлет, мысливший пугливыми шагами,
> Считали пульс толпы и верили толпе.
>
> Быть может, прежде губ уже родился шепот,
> И в бездревесности кружилися листы,
> И те, кому мы посвящаем опыт,
> До опыта преобрели черты.
>
> (Both Schubert on the water and Mozart in a din of birds,/ And Goethe, whistling on a winding path,/ And Hamlet, thinking in fearful steps,/ Measured the crowd's pulse and trusted the crowd./ Perhaps before the lips the whisper was already born,/ And leaves whirled in woodlessness,/ And those to whom we dedicated the experiment,/ Acquired features before the experience.)

(229)

Here we see another instance of "experience/experiment" *(opyt),* representing the phenomenal, observable world subject to the laws of time and space. In "Tell me, draftsman of the desert" *opyt* is opposed to chaotic, creative "babble" *(lepet),* but in "Both Schubert on the water…" is rather set off against "whisper" *(shepot,* pronounced to rhyme with *opyt).* The whisper, interestingly, seems almost a blend of *lepet* and *shum,* both babble and noise, and figures the linguistic impulse as an articulated breath that awaits instruments of vocalization. These versions of chaos and logos participate more clearly in the linguistic sphere than do those of "Tell me, draftsman of the desert" and introduce well the dialectic of impulse and text that Mandelstam introduces in the *Conversation.*

Nancy Pollak in her book *Mandelstam the Reader* reads the sixth line of the poem as a vision of Goethe's idea of the *Urpflanze:* the originary form of the tree existing without the tree itself, but rather as a formal gravity recognized by the leaves[23]. The fifth line, of course, presents another instance of the object preceding its progenitor, and corresponds with Mandelstam's essay "The Word and Culture," in which the word is figured as a "mold of form": "Not one word yet exists, but the poem is already sounding" (I 215).[24] There may be a yet more direct subtext in Goethe's poem "Am Flusse" (On the River), which was set to music by Schubert in 1822 and then became known as one of his "water songs." The first two lines of Mandelstam's poem seem to ensconce an intentionally Bergsonian conflation of time and causality, both in content and in form. "Both Schubert on the water" may be an echo of Goethe, especially as "Am Flusse" contains the line, "Ihr wart in's Wasser eingeschrieben" ("You were inscribed in the water"—the poet is speaking to loves and cares past). In Mandelstam's first stanza, Schubert is almost reading Goethe's inscription on the

[23] See Pollak 15-19.
[24] Ни одного слова еще нет, а стихотворение уже звучит.

water as he sets the poem to music. Chiastically, in the next line of Mandelstam's poem Goethe is whistling, predicting the musical setting of his poem. The winding path on which he whistles reminds of Mandelstam's valorization of crookedness, which is a sign of poetic activity (see, for example "What street is this?", 240) belies straight correspondence between a word and its meaning, and here may leave open the possibility that Goethe's whistling will be further transfigured into something else, that its impulse will be carried forward and react with another field of poetic material. Since Schubert precedes Goethe in Mandelstam's poem, there is a confusion of progenitor and progeny; in Bergsonian fashion, events expand through space rather than time, and the only "story" is that of the articulation of the creative impulse.

This conflation, as in "Draftsman of the desert," is accompanied by prelinguistic sounding, and the emergence of form out of that sounding. But that emergence sheds new light on the forming and reforming of the sand in "Draftsman." Here, the chaotic "din" of birds and formless "whirling" of leaves become the essence of form exactly insofar as they become surfaces atop the emerging structure—the originary chaos transforms not into the structure of a sonata or the trunk and branches of a tree; rather they transform into the colorations of a Mozart score and the tree's outermost shape and color. Chaos here sits atop logos, while in "Draftsman" it lay invisibly behind it. In this poem chaos reveals itself to the eye, while in "Draftsman" it was logos that was visible. Between these two poems Mandelstam sets up a dyadic model of poetry in which chaos and logos unceasingly interact as the impulse and the articulation of a text.

The body is also increasingly becoming the site of poetic creation. None of the figures in these poems is writing: rather, the artists and their stand-ins walk, whistle, palpate, see, and hear. They move through and take in the world. When they reason, it is

to chart the forms of the world and their transformations; to attempt to make sense. The ethos of Dante's *Commedia* was clearly on Mandelstam's mind.

In the *Conversation about Dante,* Mandelstam rediscovers the perpetual dialectic between chaos and logos as separating and joining elements of language itself, embodied in every word and every utterance: on the one hand the prelinguistic impulse that occasions linguistic expression, and on the other hand the linguistic implements that give that expression form. Similar interplay between irrational and rational elements of language can be found in Mandelstam's early theory; yet impulse and implement find a new, more confident form in the *Conversation* that culminates in a model of poetic discourse expanding from the word out to the interlocutor, through the performance of the poet-speaker. This model takes much of its energy from reading in a foreign tongue and thus brings Mandelstam's discourse on reading all the way to the shore of translation.

The essay's first sentence contains the kernel of the theory of impulse and implement: "Poetic discourse is a hybrid process, and takes shape out of two soundings: The first of these soundings is the audible and palpable alternation of the very implements *(orudie)* of poetic discourse, appearing in motion within the impulsive action *(v ee poryve)* of the discourse; the second sounding is the discourse itself, that is the intonational and phonetic work fulfilled by the abovementioned instruments *(orudie)"* (III 216).[25] This is a complex and perhaps slippery idea, but the notion of a discourse or speech *(rech')* that reveals itself through the alterations of perceptible or cognized phenomena should be somewhat familiar from the wave-crest of *The Noise of Time* as well as from "Draftsman of

[25] Поэтическая речь есть скрещенный процесс, и складывается она из двух звучаний: первое из этих звучаний — это слышимое и ощущаемое нами изменение самих орудий поэтической речи, возникающих на ходу в ее порыве; второе звучание есть собственно речь, то есть интонационная и фонетическая работа, выполняемая упомянутыми орудиями.

the desert" and "Both Schubert on the water…" In the prose work it is the constant churning up of mnemonic and linguistic material that creates the chaotic rush of time's passing, emblematized in the wave-crest. In the two Octets analyzed above, chaos and logos switch places as impulses and manifestations of the poetic act. Here in the *Conversation,* the second sounding, the "implements" of poetic discourse—that is, the tools of linguistic production, or what is perceptible to us as speech—are intercrossed with a first sounding, composed of the very alteration between these implements—that is, what happens between their respective actions, or what is revealed behind or underneath them when they switch off or fall silent. This primary, perhaps nonlinguistic "sounding" reminds of "Komissarzhevskaia's" wave-crest as well as the "babble" of "Draftsman" and the "whisper" that precedes the lips and the "woodlessness" of swirling leaves in "Both Schubert on the water." Yet here its weight is thrown clearly into the linguistic sphere.

The next sentence furthers the idea by fixing the relationship of poetic discourse to nature, and in doing do throws out an echo of "Seashell," in which the poetic act domesticates natural elements, translates them into human terms: the poet, cast off, unnecessary to nature, nevertheless provides the ear (figured as a seashell) into which nature may relate herself. In the opening to the *Conversation,* the relationship is laid out in theoretical terms rather than through metaphor:

> In such an understanding, poetry is not a part of nature…and is even less its reflection, which would lead to a mockery of the law of identity, but rather with a striking independence it settles in a new, extra-spatial field of action, not so much recounting as performing nature with the help of the instrumental means that in common parlance are called images.[26]
>
> (III 216)

[26] В таком понимании поэзия не является частью природы…и еще меньше является ее отображением, что привело бы к издевательству над законом тождества, но с потрясающей независимостью водворяется на новом, внепространственном поле действия, не столько рассказывая, сколько разыгрывая природу при помощи орудийных средств, в просторечье именуемых образами.

The location of *both* aspects of poetic creation (the generative and the expressive, the chaotic and the logical) in the linguistic sphere is underscored by their relationship with nature, which implies their location outside of it.

The performance of nature, of course, moves beyond the world of art in Mandelstam's more mature poetry, and this theme reaches its philosophical height in the Octets, both in the two examples mentioned above and in the work as a whole. In these poems, the very actions of perception and cognition are explored; not only is the physical world performed by the perceptive/cognitive apparatus (as in "Draftsman of the desert" but time is also performed through the same apparatus (as in "Both Schubert on the water"), and finally these two are bound together with space and self-consciousness in an attempt to *circumvent* the apparatus:

> И я выхожу из пространства
> В запущенный сад величин
> И мнимое рву постоянство
> И самосознанье причин.
>
> And I go out of space/ Into the neglected garden of dimensions/ And sever ostensible constancy/ And consciousness of reasons.
>
> (230)

The garden into which the poet escapes is reminiscent of the silent state into which he wished Aphrodite to return in "Silentium," a prelinguistic, preconscious state where the Octet poet reads through a "textbook" *(uchebnik)* of "roots" *(kornei)*—presumably those of existence—outside of time and space and causality. The movement out (of space and time) and down (among the roots) is of a piece with the poet's movement through the inferno as through an extra-spatial, extra-temporal movement among the essences—both as hinted in Mandelstam's underworld poetry of the 1920s and as explained in detail in Elena Glazov-

Corrigan's book *Mandel'shtam's Poetics: An Answer to Postmodernism.*[27] Once Mandelstam sets his observations in the inferno rather than in the observable world, poetry no longer threatens to be confused with nature, and there is no danger that the seashell's "lie" of identity will be believed. Here, if poetry plays out nature, is it not in terms reconcilable with nature's. Or, more to the point, poetry will not pretend that nature has terms to begin with: the "whisper," "fog," and "rain" that he describes nature (more exactly, "night") filling the seashell are already outside of nature just by virtue of their having been imparted and named—they are manifestations within the realm of human perception; further, they are becoming language. As Mandelstam realizes in his mature period, even the act of perception is not as simple as having ears to hear: there is a translation that occurs, a process that will come to greater light when Mandelstam discusses the movement of metaphor in the *Conversation about Dante.*

Moreover, already in the *Conversation's* third sentence Mandelstam claims that poetry isn't even audible without going through a sort of translation:

> Poetic discourse, or thought, can only extremely provisionally be called sounding, because we hear in it only the hybridization of the two strains, one of which, taken by itself, is absolutely mute, and the other of which, taken outside the instrumental metamorphosis, is deprived of any significance or interest and submits to paraphrase, which is in my view the surest sign of the absence of poetry…[28]
>
> (III 216)

That is, the first sounding (the alternation of the instruments of poetry) is not activated as a sounding until it is grafted to the second sounding (the phonetic work that presumably would be audible even in non-poetic discourse), which itself is not activated as poetic until it meets the first. To draw a rough analogue, what was in 1910 a dialogue between sound and

[27] See especially her Chapter Five.

[28] Поэтическая речь, или мысль, лишь чрезвычайно условно может быть названа звучащей, потому что мы слышим в ней лишь скрещиванье двух линий, из которых одна, взятая сама по себе, абсолютно немая, а другая, взятая вне орудийной метаморфозы, лишена всякой значительности и всякого интереса и поддается пересказу, что, на мой взгляд, вернейший признак отсутствия поэзии…

silence, and within sound between the word and music ("Remain foam, Aphrodite,/ And, word, return into music") is now a dialogue between two soundings which need each other to become audible and poetic, respectively. The primary difference is that in "Silentium" unity was achieved before poetry came into being; as soon as beauty or the word emerged from the silent deeps, that unity was lost. In the *Conversation* and in the mature Mandelstam in general, the unity reigns not before, but during poetic discourse. This late formulation of the hybridization of two soundings is the end of a long development of this question of unity in the poetic word, which went through questions of bridging and uniting cultures, epochs, and personalities (among other factors)—now we see it formulated in linguistic terms, terms that deal with the phonetic apparatus as well as the structure of metaphor.

But the great link between "Silentium" and the *Conversation* (and strung along many works composed in the intervening 23 years) is the idea of the wave. The breaking wave as a primal generator of poetic sound is consistent throughout these works. In the *Conversation,* finally, the wave breaks free of the element of water, and becomes something like an airwave, if not a pure waveform. This wave bears a poetic signal and then disappears in order to give way to a new wave: "Signal-waves of thought disappear, having fulfilled their work: the stronger the are, the more yielding they are, the less inclined they are to linger" (III 217).[29] Though *The Noise of Time* and the *Conversation* are almost a decade apart in composition, the wave in the latter work helps us see the wave in the former in a new light—Mandelstam doesn't mention it in "Komissarzhevskaia," but foam appears when the wave is breaking, when it is nearing the destruction of its form (which it may indeed have retained over thousands of miles), and therefore when it is about to yield

[29] Смысловые волны-сигналы исчезают, исполнив свою работу: чем они сильнее, тем уступчивее, тем менее склонны задерживаться.

to new waves. Conversely, the "signal-waves" of the *Conversation* may also retain elements of their watery forebears, at least as carriers of the unrealized "babble" that was in the earlier work "noise," the sublinguistic sounding that only the poet can consciously piece out. The breaking that allows the rhythm of ocean waves to become audible is lost when the waves become electromagnetic ("signal-waves of thought"); they no longer sound, but they still yield one to the other. As we saw in the Octet poems, the landscape of poetry is moving inside the body, and the body thus replaces the natural world as the source of generative sound (i.e. *lepet)* and its attendant (wild) rhythm.

In the second part of the *Conversation,* the signal-waves are (obliquely) analogized to the human gait, and through the gait to breathing. The entire *Commedia,* claims Mandelstam, "glorifies the human gait, the measure and rhythm of the stride, the step and its form" (III 219).[30] In a gait, as in the ocean's roar or an exchange of magnetic signals, each step gives way to another. Assuming that the "measure and rhythm" of strides are based on a regularity that can be analogized to prosodic regularity, Mandelstam here redeploys natural phenomena (a magnetic wave, and its attendant shadow of an ocean wave) in human terms: the inhuman distances between trough and crest, between crest and crest, oceanic periods, and the slough of terms that measure electromagnetic waves are all recast in terms with which any reader can identify. Anyone who can walk, it is implicitly claimed, can understand the fundamentals of Dante's poetic work. This idea helps along one of the *Conversation's* major ideas, that poetry occurs only in performance—and that reading is a co-performance of the work along with its author (already previewed in the idea of reading as self-discovery in the *Journey to Armenia).*

Here, performance is boiled down to the essential (and essentially) human action of walking—and walking contains within it at least two significances that speak about

[30] …прославляет человеческую походку, размер и ритм шагов, ступню и ее форму.

Mandelstam's idea of poetry. First, walking is connected to both breathing and thinking—specifically, "The gait [is] bound up with breathing and filled to the brim with thought *(mysl'iu)*..." (III 219.)[31] Walking as thought is an idea that finds an echo in at least one place in Mandelstam's poetic work, namely "Both Schubert on the water …" There, the second stanza finds both Goethe and Hamlet engaged in creative acts based on walking: "And Goethe, whistling on a winding path,/ And Hamlet, thinking *(myslivshii)* in fearful steps *(shagami)…"* Goethe is walking as he whistles out the future of his poem, hinting at its immanent transfigurability—but Hamlet actually suffers a conflation of walking and thinking. Mandelstam may have chosen Hamlet because of some chief attributes of Shakespeare's hero: indecision and overthinking. Hamlet's steps in Mandelstam's poem are "fearful" *(puglivyi);* his thoughts are likewise deliberate yet interrupted. Besides this echo between thoughts and steps, there may be a foretaste in this Octet of the gait's significance in the *Conversation,* namely that in the gait is a valuable image of poetry because its steps supplant one another. As Hamlet spends most of his tragedy on the way toward action, so does poetry, according to Mandelstam, find itself perennially "on the way" *(na khodu)* (III 220).

Breathing, in connection with gait, still indicates the physical and metaphysical spirits that constitute an essential "tool" of the linguistic (and poetic) apparatus, but also a regularized exchange of those spirits (inhaling, exhaling) that may correspond to the regularized exchange between left and right that makes up a gait. Its connection to the state of walking (and, metonymically, poetry) as being perpetually "on the way" is deepened and complicated later in the second part of the *Conversation,* when Mandelstam is discussing the word as a "bundle" *(puchok)* of sense which doesn't concentrate itself toward a particular "official" point:

[31] Шаг, сопряженный с дыханием и насыщенный мыслью...

> Pronouncing the word "sun," we complete something like a great journey, to which we have become so accustomed that we take it while sleeping. Poetry distinguishes itself from automatic speech in that it wakes us up and shakes us in the middle of a word. Then the word turns out to be much longer than we'd thought, and we remember that to speak means to forever find oneself en route.[32]
>
> (III 226)

In this passage, breathing is something like a long exhalation that doesn't foresee its own end; this idea works strangely with that of breathing as an exchange of inhalations and exhalations that supplant one another. On the one hand, these are different ideas of motion—one is a perennial exchange between A and B, the other a perennial sojourn along the arc of A—but they have in common Mandelstam's idea that poetic language has no foreseeable end.

Looking back to *Journey to Armenia,* we can locate the perennial sojourn inside the perennial exchange. The *Journey* ends with the poet saying that he "must ride around another ridge," though that ridge is deliberately left beyond the text and the poet's reported experience. At the same time, the same section features a retelling of an Armenian legend which reveals an anxiety about bodily supplantation. (See end of previous chapter.) It is possible that what Mandelstam intends us to understand as supplantation (which occupies the center of his definition of poetic discourse in the *Conversation's* opening) is an action that the discourse takes but which it does not impress upon the psychological ego-continuity of the reader (who in the *Conversation* is figured as a speaker, a co-creator through reading and speaking the poem). The reader, like the imprisoned king in the *Journey,* wants to survive; his narrative of himself rebels against the idea of being supplanted bodily by his Persian conqueror. The *Conversation's* reader, of course, breathes

[32] Произнося «солнце», мы совершаем как бы огромное путешествие, к которому настолько привыкли, что едем во сне. Поэзия тем и отличается от автоматической речи, что будит нас и встряхивает на середине слова. Тогда оно оказывается гораздо длиннее, чем мы думали, и мы припоминаем, что говорить — значит всегда находиться в дороге.

and walks—that is, he partakes of these metaphors of poetic supplantation—but his experience of reading (and speaking) is one of rarefied continuity, of never even getting to the end of a word. What keeps this experience of continuity dynamic (and therefore worthy of poetry) is that it is a continuity of change.

Mandelstam illustrates the continuity of change from several different angles. One of the primary modes of illustrating this poetic phenomenon is that of liquidity. In the *Conversation's* first part, the hybridization that marks poetic discourse is likened to a carpet in which several themes of color are woven together like rivers: "It is the most durable carpet, woven out of moisture—a carpet in which the streams of the Ganges, taken as a textilic theme, do not mix with samples from the Nile or the Euphrates, but remain motley..."[33] The medium of water helps Mandelstam illustrate what he means when he differentiates ornament from pattern, the former of which he valorizes as indicative of poetry, while the latter is a sign of paraphrasability (which for him is the opposite of poetry). The motley streams of the adjoined rivers, accompanying one another in the poetic weave—but not mixing—do their work in ornaments, not patterns, because "the ornament…preserves traces of its origin, like a *performed* piece of nature" (III 218).[34] Here Mandelstam may be referring to two features often found in classical (Egyptian and Greek) ornaments: that they idealize forms found in nature, and that they form their patterns out of one continuous line. Water helps illustrate ornament, because a river (like the Ganges or the others that Mandelstam mentions), is at any point both the same river (according to form) and not the same river (according to content).[35] Each iteration of an ornament can be

[33] Она прочнейший ковер, сотканный из влаги, — ковер, в котором струи Ганга, взятые как текстильная тема, не смешиваются с пробами Нила или Евфрата, но пребывают разноцветны…
[34] Орнамент…сохраняет следы своего происхождения, как разыгранный кусок природы.
[35] Heraclitus, incidentally, is found in line 138 of Canto IV of the Inferno, sitting among dozens of ancient Greeks representing the worlds of art, science, and myth, stemming from various classical ages, but conversing together: a verbal redeployment of the carpet of intermingling yet alien streams.

identified with any other iteration but is at the same time not identical with them. Unlike a "pattern," an ornament is connected to all its other iterations at any point, as a river is connected to every point of its general form. The mutually identifiable iterations of an ornament, again, combine the discrete steps and the unifying general motion of a gait: discretely identifiable segments (steps—like the breaking of waves) and perpetual motion (flow—of the ornament and the river). Ornament, like the *lepet* that births the poetic word, can here be "drunk from the experience" of nature (see "Tell me…", p. 235).

With his talk of pattern and ornament, Mandelstam may be reminding us of the thought in the epigrammatic couplet of "Tristia": "Everything has already been, everything will repeat anew,/ And only the moment of recognition is sweet to us." This idea is picked up in the essay "The word and culture" (1922), where Mandelstam sees fit to quote the second of these lines. In the essay, he describes a moment in an erotic "ornament" that takes place over deep time:

> When a lover in silence confuses the names that are dear to him and suddenly remembers that this has already happened: the words, the hair—and the rooster that crowed behind the window has already crowed in Ovid's *Tristia*—a deep joy of repetition overtakes him, a dizzying joy.[36]
>
> (II 214)

Recognition marks the iteration of the ornament; recognition cups the moment out of the duration that subtends (and constitutes) it. In "The word and culture" the image point to individual psychology and cultural inheritance: the "joy" of repetition comes from a "recognition" (or re-cognition) of a moment out of a duration of time. In *Conversation about Dante* Mandelstam is attempting more generally to chart the behavior of "poetic discourse"; the sphere of action is, appropriately, linguistic and literary. Each word, it might be, is a

[36] Когда любовник в тишине путается в нежных именах и вдруг вспоминает, что это уже было: и слова, и волосы — и петух, который прокричал за окном, кричал уже в Овидиевых тристиях, глубокая радость повторенья охватывает его, головокружительная радость.

"moment of recognition" (or, again, re-cognition) that brings into form one iteration out of the indivisible flow of a poetic impulse.

In Part IV of the *Conversation* the play of step and flow receive yet another metaphorical instantiation, when Mandelstam is discussing the episode in Canto 17 of the *Inferno* where the monster Geryon takes Dante and Virgil on his back to help them descend to the Inferno's eighth level. The ostensible aim of his discussion in this chapter is to refute the image of Dante (held by the Russian symbolists, among others) as a mystical figure, the "'mysterious' Dante of French engravings"[37] in favor of a more straightforward Dante, who "strove after clear and precise knowledge" (III 229).[38] He does this via a now familiar trope: color. Whereas the "mysterious" Dante is marked by the "brownness" (*korichnevost')* of the aforementioned French engravings, the real Dante (per Mandelstam) is rendered in the bright colors of Perugian miniatures. The Geryon episode in the *Inferno* helps Mandelstam extend his discussion of Dante and color, as well as bring it back to the liquid carpet he introduced in Part I of the *Conversation.* Of the monster, Mandelstam writes: "His back, chest, and sides are gaily painted in an ornament of knots and cymes. Dante explains that neither Turkish nor Tatar weavers use brighter coloring for their carpets…"[39] Mandelstam is especially interested in Dante's "unexpected trade-manufacturing perspective" (III 231).[40] when discussing Turkish and Tatar brands. This perspective, Mandelstam claims, goes toward proving that Dante was grounded in the phenomenal world and not engaged in mystical essays.

But in a sidenote to this argument, Mandelstam also reminds us of his valorization of ornament in Part I. Describing the scene where Dante and Virgil climb onto Geryon's

[37] ..."таинственный" Дант французских гравьюр...
[38] ...стремился к ясному и отчетливому знанию.
[39] Его спина, грудь и бока пестро расцвечены орнаментом из узелков и щиточков. Более яркой расцветки, поясняет Дант, не употребляют для своих ковров ни турецкие, ни татарские ткачи...
[40] ...неожиданна(я) торгово-мануфактурная перспектива...

back, Mandelstam notes that Dante pauses to describe three moneylenders near the edge of the abyss, each of whom carries a bag sewn with his family crest, claiming that Dante inserted these moneylenders and their bags into the scene in order to talk about color: "I will turn my attention to the fact that the moneylenders' bags are presented as color samples. The energy of these epithets of color, and the way they are placed in the verse, hushes up the heraldry [of the crests]" (III 232).[41] The color sample is just as much a sign of poetry as the ornamentation on Geryon's back, and the two images are very much of a piece. Just as the ornament combines discrete steps with perpetual motion and connectedness, so does a color sample carry the aura of an illimitable font (color) while remaining phenomenologically discrete (here, as discretely bound as a portion of a herald on the bag of a moneylender). The Acmeist undertones of this play between the phenomenological and noumenal (the crest and the color, respectively) are just as strong as Mandelstam's stated preference for a Dante concerned with the perceivable world. Even in such an unearthly and unpredictable landscape as the *Inferno's*—a landscape which moreover Mandelstam will compare to the perpetually coming-into-being strata of poetic material—the gateway to the noumen is always the phenomenon.

Mandelstam is subtly laying an analogy between the step (already analogized to the breath and the thought) and the color sample (already analogized to the bend of a river): the discrete perceptible portion (step, sample) is locked with its ineffable, illimitable essence (walking, color) as the two "soundings" of poetry are locked, in a wrestler-like embrace. Immediately following his discussion of the Geryon episode, Mandelstam—still speaking about flying—provides yet another window onto his idea of poetic discourse as a hybridization of step and flow, or of phenomenon and noumen. At this point the idea of

[41] Обращаю внимание на то, что мешочки ростовщиков даны как образчики красок. Энергия красочных эпитетов и то, как они поставлены в стих, заглушает геральдику.

hybridization is bound up with the perennial mutability of poetic material—the dynamic continuity invoked when (for instance) speaking the word "sun" and finding it longer than one expected, the continuity that says poetry always finds itself on the road. Mandelstam writes that he imagistic thought marking any true *(istinnaia)* poetry is characterized by what he calls convertibility (III 233). But he gives both the imperfective and perfective senses of convertibility *(obrashchaemost',* which is formed out of the imperfective verb, and *obratimost',* formed out of the perfective), indicating that poetic discourse maintains both the inherent potential for transformation (perfective: *obratimost')* and the ability to be in the process of being transformed (imperfective: *obrashchaemost').* Again, we see a play between step and flow, between phenomenon and noumen. Perfective convertibility (to have been converted) may act like the perceptible, inscribed performance of poetry (or, as here specified, of imagery): a completed image or metaphor. Imperfective convertibility (to always be in conversion) indicates a constant process of transformation, of which the inscribed, completed image is only one instantiation along an infinite series.

To illustrate the play between *obrashchemost'* and *obratimost'* Mandelstam introduces one of the *Conversation's* more bizarre images of poetic discourse: "Imagine an airplane…which in full flight constructs and ejects another airplane. This flying machine, exactly like the first, fully absorbed in its own flight, manages nevertheless to assemble and eject a third." This creative activity, moreover, is not detrimental or even extraneous to the business of flight, but rather "constitutes the most necessary property and aspect of flight itself, conditions its possibility and safety no less than the preciseness of the steering or the uninterruptedness of the engine" (III 233).[42] As the series of airplanes rolls out, they

[42] …представьте себе самолет…который на полном ходу конструирует и спускает другую машину. Эта летательная машина так же точно, будучи поглощена собственным ходом, все же успевает собрать и выпустить еще третью./ …составляет необходимейшую принадлежность и часть самого полета и

become instantiations of flight; the first airplane loses its status as progenitor and becomes equal to the others as perfective reifications (steps, phenomena) of flight itself (flow, noumen). Here, Mandelstam for the first time in the *Conversation* brings together his ideas of poetic speech as hybridization and of metaphor as a perennially unfinished business.

In the *Conversation's* fifth part, Mandelstam further complicates the play of step and flow by bringing them back into a literary context—the question of Dante's drafts—a specific literary context that is concerned with the creative process, with the life of letters, and with the convertibilities of the word. Dante's drafts did not survive for us to see, Mandelstam observes, but his poetry could not have emerged ready-made "like Leda from the egg or Pallas Athena from the head of Zeus" (III 234).[43] There must have been drafts—otherwise, again, the Romantic-Symbolist myth of the mystical Dante in touch with otherwordly powers might be convinced to hold sway. Moreover, Mandelstam claims, all drafts survive as ghosts of the "final" version. The work that created the drafts is never lost, is in fact preserved according to a law of conservation of artistic energy: "...the preservability of a draft—is the law of conservation of the dynamics *(energetiki)* of creation *(proizvedeniia)"* (III 235).[44] This thinking leads Mandelstam to the formation of two principles, each corollary to the other: first, "Drafts are never destroyed"; second, "In poetry, the plastic arts, and art in general, there are no ready-made things" (III 234).[45] These statements can be reconciled in a certain way with the image of the airplanes birthing other airplanes in the previous section. Most clearly, if we analogize the airplanes to drafts, we can see that above each new airplane several (if not hundreds) of previous aircraft are still

---

обусловливает его возможность и безопасность в не меньшей степени, чем исправность руля или бесперебойность мотора.

[43] …как Леда из яйца или Афина Паллада из головы Зевса.

[44] …сохранность черновика — закон сохранения энергетики произведения.

[45] В поэзии, в пластике и вообще в искусстве нет готовых вещей.

flying, still in the process of accomplishing or instantiating the original impulse of flight according to which they were birthed. The question then becomes, what are we looking at when we behold a text? Are we seeing all the airplanes at once, or sensing their presence while we observe only the one which happens to be within our field of vision? At what point does the reader encounter the metaphor (or other forms of poetic impulse) along the immeasurable road of its fulfillment? And what characterizes that point of encounter?

Part III of the *Conversation* offers—if not an answer—a series of images that returns us to the idea of water as bearer of raw poetic material, to which a poet must turn his ears and his attention. First, the Heraclitean mutability that is implied in Mandelstam's discussion of pattern versus ornament (see page 247) is now made apparent, and moreover moves from a dialogue about ornamented fabric to one about water—the medium of Heraclitus's aphorism. Focusing on Dante's extended metaphors, Mandelstam claims the medieval poet is employing "…Heraclitean metaphor—with such a power of accentuated fluidity of phenomena, and accentuating it with such flourishes, so that direct concentration, after the affair of the metaphor is settled, cannot in essence get hold of it" (III 236).[46] Mandelstam then presents a long metaphor of Dante's that occurs in the *Inferno's* 26th canto, in order to demonstrate the fluidity of Dante's imagery, challenging his reader to reconstruct the metaphor's mechanics. As with Heraclitus's stream, a reader cannot comprehend the entire metaphor from one vantage point, though he may in some sense apprehend it. Like a stream, such a metaphor (and Mandelstam extends this comparison to all metaphor) cannot be pinned down, cannot be paraphrased, and its whole is apprehended rather than comprehended.

[46] ...гераклитовой метафорой, — с такой силой подчеркивающей текучесть явления и такими росчерками перечеркивающей его, что прямому созерцанию, после того как дело метафоры сделано, в сущности, уже нечем поживиться.

A few pages later in the section, Mandelstam widens his aquatic image to ocean waves, already a familiar Mandelstamian image of poetic communication and now, in the *Conversation,* also one of poetic impulse. The wave returns as something that demands listening, but is now also linked with the bodily motion introduced earlier in the discussion of gait. Writing of Dante's feeling for the waltz and the place of the waltz in European cultural history, Mandelstam claims that "the waltz is primarily a dance of waves" (III 239).[47] The European love for the waltz is based on "a passion for repeated, undulating movements"[48]; moreover, that passion is founded on "hearkening to the wave" (III 240),[49] as Mandelstam described himself doing when wrestling with the noise of time in "Komissarzhevskaia." Here, however, the wave proclaims musical time, as distinct from the historical time evoked in *The Noise of Time.* Listening to the wave's rhythm, moreover, here leads not to language but to bodily movement—to performance. Performance, which brings together the two "hybridized" strains of poetry and engages the reader at a moment of poetic communication, will be a central image of the *Conversation* and constitute Mandelstam's approach to the figure of the poet as translator. Performance brings "Interlocutor's" rhythmic, oceanic *shum* to the *Conversation's* internalized "thought"-waves; the generative rhythm of poetry is no longer told by the sounds of nature, but by the movements of a performer's body.

There are two ways in which Mandelstam imagines performance in the *Conversation:* performance of music and performance of text. In music, the interplay between impulse and instruments with which Mandelstam opens Part I will be clearly illustrated later in the essay as a performance bound by time and carried along by the movement of the conductor's baton, which is at once the cause and the effect of the musical

[47] Вальс по преимуществу волновой танец.
[48] …пристрастие к повторяющимся колебательным движениям…
[49] …прислушиванье к волне…

performance. In Part II, well before he begins his discussion of the orchestra and the conductor, Mandelstam proposes a compass needle that "does not only indulge the magnetic storm but itself forms [the storm]" (III 222).[50] In Part VI Mandelstam presents a similar question of cause and effect, now placing it clearly in a musical context: "Which comes first: listening or conducting?."[51] He goes on to give a short history of the conductor's baton, concluding that the baton, rather than an oppressive dictatory force, is rather a "dancing chemical formula, integrating reactions to the ear…" (III 244)[52] Like the work of poetry that hybridizes two different soundings, orchestral conducting chemically combines musical impulses into a living, perceivable performance.

The other figure of performance in the *Conversation,* that of a text, is more complicated. While Mandelstam gives musical performance a fluid integrative character, he seems to found textual performance on interruption: rather the opposite of fluidity. One of the primary differences between the two images is that Mandelstam's experience of musical performance is based on watching a conductor conduct; therefore the conductor's dance (and the corollary dance of his baton) work within and around the aural phenomena of the performance—while his experience of textual performance occurs inside his own body. As soon as he begins talking about language as such, he can't ignore the many interruptions that, in their own way, enact the integration through which he also valorizes musical performance. Over the course of the *Conversation* Mandelstam sets up a complex interplay between interruption of the linguistic apparatus, on the one hand, and the fluidness of the Italian language, on the other.

In Part I, Mandelstam describes such interplay when he details the workings of Italian phonetics. He hails the "infantilism of Italian phonetics, its lovely childishness, its

[50] …не только потакает магнитной буре, но и сама ее делает.
[51] Что первее — слушанье или дирижированье?
[52] …танцующая химическая формула, интегрирующая внятные для слуха реакции.

proximity to childlike babble *[lepet]…"*[53], declaring: "Take the entire Italian dictionary and leaf through it as you wish… Here everything rhymes with everything else. Every word begs for *concordanza* (correspondence, harmony)."[54] However, this fluidity (babble, again, suggesting liquid) seems to be of a particular type, something that matches the perpetual hybridizations and Heraclitean (ornamental) transformations which Mandelstam develops throughout the *Conversation* as the machinery by which poetry inscribes itself. This image of fluidity is especially apparent, in fact, when Mandelstam is describing the physical apparatus of Italian phonetics: what it's actually like to pronounce Italian sounds. "The lips work," he writes, "a smile moves the line of verse, the lips redden intelligently and happily, the tongue presses trustingly against the palate."[55]

But this apparent harmony between the language and the phonetic apparatus is also marked by uneasiness and distortion: "The artifice of speaking in fact distorts our face, ruptures its peace, destroys its mask…"[56] This apparent discord in the workings of (the Italian) language is perhaps resolved by this essay's particular idea of babble and fluidity, which combines harmony with ceaseless transformation and which insists on an interplay (even coexistence) between identification and difference. "The inner image of the line of verse is inextricable from the countless changes of expression that flash on the face of the speaking—and thereby disturbed—speaker" (III 218).[57] This image corresponds to Mandelstam's initial (in Part I) description of the hybridization of poetic discourse, in which the "instruments" of poetic discourse change unceasingly, and corresponds also to the numerous images of poetry described so far in this chapter. The face, like Heraclitus's

[53] …инфантильность итальянской фонетики, ее прекрасная деткость, близость к младенческому лепету…
[54] Возьмите весь словарь итальянский и листайте его как хотите... Здесь все рифмует друг с другом. Каждое слова просится в *condordanza (соответствие, созвучие).*
[55] Уста работают, улыбка движет стих, умно и весело алеют губы, язык доверчиво прижимает к нёбу.
[56] Искусство речи именно искажает наше лицо, взрывает его покой, нарушает его маску...
[57] Внутренный образ стиха неразлучим с бесчисленной сменой выражений, мелькающих на лице говорящего и волнующегося сказителя.

stream (and the multiple rivers in the fluid carpet), is at once consistent with itself and always changing, moved by the dynamic, inexhaustible force of a poetic impulse.

In the *Conversation's* eighth part, Mandelstam returns to the theme of interrupted and interrupting speech, returning even more clearly to the tools of articulation, featured as one "sounding" in the hybridization that makes up poetic discourse. In the opening of Part VIII, Mandelstam valorizes speech defects *(defekty rechi)* as food for poetry, claiming that Dante "harkened to the stammerers—lisping, snuffling, not articulating [their] letters—and learned much from them."[58] One aspect of this "defective" speech relates directly to the distortion of the face Mandelstam describes in Part I—this happens when Mandelstam describes the action of Italian labials on the (defective) speaker's face. The interruption by labials of the speaker's air flow forces a deliberation, a concentration on sound production that distorts the speaker's speech organs and his face: "The lips now thrust themselves out, now stretch into a little proboscis."[59] This concentration, moreover, is childlike: "It is as if a nanny were participating in the foundation of phonetics" (III 248).[60] The image of the nanny coupled with the transformation of the lips into a "proboscis" recall Mandelstam's ideas of reading and self-discovery in *Journey to Armenia,* bound as these concepts are in that work with the idea of evolution. The child echoes the organism that has been invited in the *Journey* to develop itself—the lips, central to Mandelstam's image of poetry in the physical world throughout his work, being transformed by the words they speak into a hint of a different, perhaps more perfect speech organ. The nanny fills the role of the natural world in the *Journey:* that which invites the organism to develop—here

[58] ...прислушивался к заикам, шепелявящим, гнусящим, не выговарывающим букв и многому от них научился.
[59] Губы то ребячески выпячиваются, то вытягиваются в хоботок.
[60] В создании фонетики как бы участвует нянька.

inviting the young speaker to speak. Between this essay and its predecessor, ontogeny is recapitulating phylogeny.

Mandelstam goes on to introduce other types of consonants, which build on the "basso continuo" of the labials to produce a ceaseless harmonic interchange: "Dentals join to [the labials], smacking, sucking, whistling… The pinches, smackings, and labial outbursts do not cease for a second" (III 248).[61] In the following section, he makes a general statement about poetic discourse *(rech')* that, while developing the image set up at the essay's beginning, also incorporates his late discussion of the concrete speech apparatus: "Poetic discourse creates its implements in process and also in process annihilates them" (III 257).[62] The "implements" invoked in poetry's second "sounding" now seem amenable to the physical processes of speech—in fact, to these processes as exaggerated by defect. Each labial or dental sound, each sucking or whistling or smacking is supplanted by the next sound, creating a flow of endlessly alternating phonetic events.

The idea of speech defect also sheds light on Mandelstam's emphasis on impulse *(poryv),* which again comes to the forefront in the *Conversation's* eleventh and final section. Speech defect and speech impulse share the attributes of spontaneity and unpredictability—the latter made especially relevant if taken literally: as the inability to predict (fore*say)* that to which poetic speech is tending. In Part XI, Mandelstam introduces a final injunction towards the study of poetic discourse: to determine the subject of a sentence not with the nominative case, but with the dative case, claiming that "this is the law of convertible and self-transforming poetic material, which exists only in the

[61] К (лабиальным) пристраиваются чмокающие, сосущие, свистящие... Щипки, причмокиванья и губные взрывы не прекращаются не на одну секунду.
[62] Поэтическая речь создает свои орудия на ходу и на ходу же их уничтожает.

performative impulse" (III 259).[63] This is an idea of a grammatical subject which is not a semantic given but rather a goal toward which the linguistic impulse is always underway. The ideas of babble *(lepet)* and defect serve to highlight the procedural basis of poetic discourse. Babble and defect stress their own being-underway—perhaps most saliently when the semantic goal of the utterance is known to the listener before the speaker can produce the appropriate sounds, that is when a word is clearly underway toward its own fulfillment.

Part IX brings Mandelstam's idea of the word as underway back to "On the Interlocutor," first implicitly and then explicitly. He invokes both the figure of the reader as interlocutor and the figure of the wave as integral components of a model of reader reception—at the same time developing a central theme of the *Conversation:* poetic discourse as a hybridization of two linguistic "soundings." In Parts I and III, he has described poetic discourse as a piece of nature in performance and suggests that the task of poetry is in fact to perform nature (see page 240). In Part IX, he brings his thought back to the relationship between poetry and nature—now, however, poetry is not concerned with performing nature but rather with halting it in the course of its movement, so that it may be made readable. This model recalls Mandelstam's concern with the preservation of poetry against time in the essays of the early 1920s, and indeed the model of reader reception in "On the Interlocutor," in which the text survives in a dormant state (a message in a bottle) until it is reanimated through a reader's act of co-creation. Nature halted, as Mandelstam elaborates in Part IX, reveals the sublingual impulsive energy germane to poetry's first sounding: "We are describing precisely that which cannot be described," he writes, "that is, the halted text of nature, and have unlearned how to describe the only

[63] Это закон обратимой и обращающейся поэтической материи, существующей только в исполнительском порыве.

thing which according to its own structure gives itself up to poetic representation, that is impulses, intentions, and amplitude oscillations" (III 251).[64] ("Representation" *(izobrazhenie)* here might fill in for the second "sounding.")

Halting is a far cry from performing, and thus the treatment of poetry and nature in Part IX seems to contradict that in Parts I and III—until we remember that "On the Interlocutor's" reception model also includes halting in reception. In the early essay, the poem's journey from poet to reader is performance as well, but performance that is necessarily halted along the way. Without halting, the relationship between poet and reader cannot be called dialogue; the necessity halting creates the respective presences of the poet and reader for each other. And indeed, once Mandelstam begins to speak of poetry halting nature in Part IX, he returns a few lines later to a central idea of "On the Interlocutor," that of the yet unsaid: "Dante's multinomial, multi-sailed and kinetically scorching comparisons to this day maintain the charm of that which has not yet been spoken to anyone" (III 251).[65] One of the earlier essay's central theoretical claims, as discussed in Chapter Two, is that one can (and must) speak the unknown to an unknown respondent. These Dantean comparisons, then, are multifarious bundles of meaning, or indeed of linguistic charge, that preserve the mystery of their true valence through countless speakings, in wait for in ideal listener far off in the future. They are halted on their path to being read in the ideal, halted in a function of time whose limit approaches eternity.

This *ceaseless* halting revises the reception model of "On the Interlocutor," in that the teleology of the word is never actually spent; rather, it arcs indefinitely, as if in orbit.

---

[64] Мы описываем как раз то, чего нельзя описать, то есть остановленный текст природы, и разучились описывать то единственное, что по структуре своей поддается поэтическому изображению то есть порывы, намеренья и амплитудные колебания.

[65] ...дантовские многочленные, многопарусные и кинетически раскаленные сравнения до сих пор сохраняют прелесть никому не сказанного.

But it also helps understand a key process in that essay, namely the conflation of poet and reader that occurs when they share the subjectivity of the poetic "I." No reader can be an ideal reader, or else the poem would stop being read. It continues to exist as poetry, and to maintain its energy or its "charm," precisely because it will never be fully read. Mandelstam invokes the interlocutor for the first and only time in the *Conversation* precisely at this point and in this context, in a way that both recalls the subjective conflation of "On the Interlocutor" and recapitulates the *Conversation's* stress on performance as a necessary condition for poetic discourse:

> [Dante's] "reflexology of speech" is astounding—an entire science, yet unfounded, of the spontaneous psycho-physiological influence of the word on interlocutors, on those surrounding the speaker, and on the speaker himself, and at the same time of the means by which he gives his impulse over to his speaking, that is, gives light-signals of his sudden desire to express himself.[66]
>
> (III 252)

Mandelstam gives the word power to bring speaker and interlocutor together in the speech act, which spreads the influence of the word in the becoming-through-language of its original (and, as we have seen, inexhaustible) impulse. The speaker's "light-signals," again, hark back to "On the Interlocutor," during the course of which Mandelstam describes poetic speaking as akin to exchanging signals with Mars. He invokes that light in the *Conversation's* next sentence, returning to the "wave theory of sound and light" *(volnovaia teoriia zvuka i sveta)* (III 252)—and thus represents the word as a wave, with elements of both sound and light, that is implicitly always on the way to a receiver. Like the signals to Mars or the wave-crest that bears the noise of time, the poetic discourse in the

[66] Изумительна [дантовская] «рефлексология речи» — целая до сих пор не созданная наука о спонтанном психофизиологическом воздействии слова на собеседников, на окружающих и на самого говорящего, а также средства, которыми он передает порыв к говоренью, то есть сигнализирует светом внезапное желание высказаться.

Conversation is a complex mode of an inexhaustible signalization that is always "on the way" *(na khodu).*

A speaker or a poet discovered in the act of language or poetic discourse is a medium of this signalization, a mode in which it continues its travels. But Mandelstam also accounts for the aspect of writing that records, and in Part X specifically discusses orthography in the context of Dante's poetry. Interestingly, while the *Conversation's* previous images of the poet at work present him behind a giant keyboard of references or performing a piece of nature—that is, at the helm of a nexus between the natural and artificial, between the external and the internal—when Mandelstam sees the poet writing he is doing so under outside influence, as if hypnotized. Dante "writes under dictation," Mandelstam asserts, "he is a scribe, a translator" (III 253).[67]

Mandelstam introduces the poet as a passive conduit in order to combat the ideas of "French romantics" who depict Dante as prone to his own "fantasy": he claims, rather, that the poet brings nothing out of himself but gathers riches from phenomena and language—seashell-like—plucking them out of the wild in an attempt to preserve them, [68] "so that the generosity of overflowing poetic material won't pour through his fingers…" (III 253).[69] He goes on to invoke the poet as automatic writer, coming rather close to the "mystical Dante" that he derides in the colorless and unidimensional Symbolist view of Dante (see page 249). But table-turning is too "loud" *(gromko)* a version of the influence under which Mandelstam conceives Dante as having written; he is rather shown operating under a set of varied dictates, which include visual aesthetics, nature, and religious orthodoxy.

---

[67] Он пишет под диктовку, он переписчик, он переводчик...

[68] Plucking phenomena out of *time* for the sake of poetry was an abiding concern of the young Mandelstam (see Chapter Two *passim).*

[69] …чтобы щедрость изливающейся поэтической материи не протекла между пальцами…

Mandelstam claims in this section that in Dante's time calligraphy stood on equal footing with painting and music, implying that if Dante was a scribe and his work consisted of only "dictation, cribbing, copying," (Ibid.)[70] he was no less an artist than a painter or composer. Like the conductor's baton in Part II, the pen becomes a conduit between the dictated and the performed text, catching impulses from a natural text and transfiguring them into perceptible forms. The key metaphor linking the metonymically close pen and the baton is flight. Introducing a discussion of writing and the pen, Mandelstam returns to the baton through flight: "Now I will attempt to describe one of the countless conducting flights of Dante's baton" (III 254).[71] The pen, in fact, is "a piece of avian flesh" (III 255)[72] and in this way "partakes of avian flight" (III 254).[73] But the metaphor is more complicated than identity with the conductor's baton. Like the flight of the baton, that of the pen marks a spontaneously self-generating and self-annihilating arc that signals the linguistic impulse on the (endless) road toward its fulfillment by the phenomena of language. But since the pen carries the aura of the animal from which it was plucked, it also obeys the dictates of that creature's nature. Mandelstam analyzes a metaphor of Dante's from Canto XVIII of the *Purgatorio i*n which wheeling birds in flight form different letters in the sky. Mandelstam comments:

> As letters under the scribe's hand, obeying their dictor and standing outside literature as a finished product, go after the lure of sense *[smysl],* as after sweet feed — exactly thus do birds, magnetized by green grass, now separately, now together peck indiscriminately, now unrolling into the surroundings, now stretching out into a line…[74]
>
> (III 255)

---

[70] ...письмо пид диктовку, списыванье, копироваье."
[71] Теперь я попробую описать один из бесчисленных дирижерских полетов Дантовой палочки.
[72] ...кусочек птичьей плоти...
[73] ...участвует в птичьем полете.
[74] Подобно тому как буквы под рукой у писца, повинующегося диктору и стоящего вне литературы как готового продукта, идут на приманку смысла, как на сладостный корм, — так же точно и птицы, намагниченные зеленой травой, то врозь, то вместе, клюют что попало, то разворачиваясь в окружность, то вытягиваясь в линию...

In this way Mandelstam brings the pen's flight back to the idea of the word on the road: the letter, like the birds, trace their paths around the attraction of *sense*[75]—a story not unlike that of the word on the lips of the defective speaker, caught in perpetual striving toward the goal of meaning. The poet as scribe partakes of a similar journey; the letters themselves are essays at discovering the speech act that is perpetually unfolding.[76]

The inscribed letter, Mandelstam concludes in the *Conversation's* eleventh and final section, is a "calligraphic product, ineluctably left behind as a result of the performance of an impulse" (III 259).[77] In this section, Mandelstam continues to depict written text as retaining traces of impulse, as he did in the previous section (see directly above); he mentions again the flight of the conductor's baton *(dirizherskii polet)*—but now he seems as interested in the record itself as in the impulsive traces it retains. Part XI has Mandelstam in search of some "formula of Dantean impulse, taken at once as flight and as something ready" (III 258),[78] and indeed he will finish the *Conversation* with an injunction that literary science should devote itself to studying the relationship between impulse and text. An essential part of this interest, however, again recalls the reader-reception model in "On the Interlocutor," and turns the *Conversation's* central dualities—the two soundings; the impulse and the text—toward a consideration of dialogic hibernation reminiscent of the message in a bottle theorized twenty years before. In Part XI, Mandelstam claims that Dante's metaphors "designate the standing-still of time" *(oboznachaiut stoianie vremeni)*

[75] The Russian *smysl* is "sense" as in "meaning."
[76] It is difficult to say what importance Mandelstam assigns to the epithet of "translator" that accompanies that of "scribe" when he describes the poet in this case. Translation, if anything, heightens the sense of the scribe's perpetual approach toward language. Like the wheeling birds, the translator is lured by the feed of sense and can never fully reach it. Granted, the scribe also cannot surpass language to get to sense—but the translator is professionally concerned with sense and thus professionally conscious of this deficiency. More on this in Chapter Six.
[77] ...каллиграфический продукт, неизбежно остающийся в результате исполнического порыва.
[78] ...формула дантовского порыва, взятого одновременно и как полет и как нечто готовое.

(III 257). Further, Mandelstam offers an "admission" *(priznanie)* that in order to derive the inspiration for the *Conversation* he:

> …consulted openly with chalcedony, cornelian, crystalline gypsum, feldspar, quartz, and so on. Now I realized that a stone is like a diary of the weather, like a meteorological accumulation. A stone is nothing else than the weather itself, taken out of the atmosphere and secreted into functional space.[79]
>
> (III 256)

With this image, Mandelstam imports an echo of his idea in *Journey to Armenia* of a plant as "envoy of a living storm" *(poslannik zhivoi grozy)* (III 194) and redeploys it in terms even older—reaching all the way back to the Acmeist stone. While the plant lives and grows according to the dictates of life's vital forces, the stone remains a record in "functional space"—an accumulation of natural forces (amenable to Mandelstam's idea of impulse, that is a piece of nature that has yet to be performed by the phenomena of poetic discourse) that also exists as a "ready" phenomenon with functional potential.

Also telling is Mandelstam's use of a dialogic verb—"to consult" *(posovetovat'sia)*—instead of something like "to read" when he describes his interaction with these stones. To "consult" with a text (and these stones are meteorological texts) means to engage with it, to participate in co-creation of meaning. Though the *Conversation* continues for four more pages after Mandelstam mentions these stones, and though (of course) Mandelstam manages to introduce several more metaphors for poetic discourse before the essay's end, I would like to propose that these stones be taken as Mandelstam's final word (which is allowable, I think, because they are clearly not the text's final words) about how poetry works: it is a verbal interaction between a finder and a ready linguistic phenomenon that is itself in constant conversation with the impulse that gave it rise.

---

[79] откровенно советовался с халцедонами, сердоликами, кристаллическими гипсами, шпатами, кварцами и т.д. Тут я понял, что камень как бы дневник погоды, как бы метеорологический сгусток. Камень не что иное, как сама погода, выключенная из атмосферического и упрятанная в функциональное пространство.

TRADUTTORE, TRADITORE

Two years after composing "Ariosto" (see p. 229)—a fraught two years that spanned his first arrest, suicide attempt in Cherdyn, and eventual exile to Voronezh—Mandelstam attempted to reconstruct it from memory, along with other poems lost since the spring of 1933. Perhaps the most salient change in the new version of the poem was the wholesale excision of the stanza beginning "But I love his furious leisure," which contains the kernel of the poem's expression of pleasure at pronouncing Italian. Mandelstam had not forgotten the stanza: it reappears in 1935, but as a separate poem, only four lines long. He replaces the first line (describing the "furious leisure" of Ariosto's hero Orland0) with the line "Friend of Ariosto, friend of Petrarch, friend of Tasso." This line recontextualizes the stanza outside of the context of Ariosto, allowing it to stand on its own as a poem now explicitly about reading in Italian:

> Друг Ариоста, друг Петрарки, Тасса друг —
> Язык бессмысленный, язык солено-сладкий.
> И звуков стакнутых прелестные двойчатки —
> Боюсь раскрыть ножом двустворчатый жемчуг.
>
> Friend of Ariosto, friend of Petrarch, friend of Tasso —/ The senseless tongue, salty-sweet tongue/ And charming twins of banded sounds…/ I'm afraid to reveal with a knife a bivalve's pearl.
>
> (224)

Nadezhda Mandelstam suggests in her memoirs that Mandelstam removed this quatrain from "Ariosto" so that it could stand alone as a poem "about a traitor who enjoys himself with a foreign language, foreign sounds" (NM III 180).[80] One could, however, read the textual evidence to contradict this assertion. Mandelstam did revise the material of the

[80] …об изменнике, который наслаждается чужим языком, чужими звуками.

1933 "Ariosto" into something more anxious and regretful, but perhaps not in the way that his widow interprets the change. The 1935 "Ariosto," for example, is a much more mournful poem than its earlier counterpart; the shadow of the poet's misfortunes (and his view on his Russian surroundings) looms much lower and darker over the text. The later version opens with the earlier version's darkest couplet, which before occurred in the middle of the poem, and follows it up with two new lines that stress a feeling of imprisonment:

> В Европе холодно. В Италии темно.
> Власть отвратительна, как руки брадобрея.
> О, если б распахнуть, да как нельзя скорее,
> На Адриатику широкое окно.
>
> (It's cold in Europe. It's dark in Italy./ The authorities are disgusting as a barber's hands./ O, if only I could throw open, as quickly as possible,/ A wide window onto the Adriatic.)
>
> (III 71)

The rest of the 1935 version develops these feelings of imprisonment, revulsion, and desperate longing, and the ending—rather than the calm eschatological optimism of the earlier version—projects loss without return or recapture. One is tempted to make the argument that Mandelstam separated out the lines on reading Italian not to cast them as a discrete negative screed on the betrayal of the Russian language, but rather cut them out to save them from the hopeless soil of exile which had birthed the poem anew, to let the quatrain stand as an isolated moment of pleasure—a window of hope, artificial as it may be.

That hopeless soil is dominated in "Ariosto" by the figure of Peter the Great: the Westernizing reformer, the cruel autocrat. Peter is the great barber *(bradobrei)* who forced the boyars to shave their beards; Peter is the founder of Petersburg as Russia's window onto the West. Instead of a window onto the cold, dark Gulf of Finland, Mandelstam wants one onto the Adriatic; he wants to escape the authorities' stinking hands. But opening a

window is not the same as making an escape. It will clear away the stink, at least for a moment; it will let light in. And—we cannot escape the fact that he's opened it over the *sea*—it will allow him to throw something into the water. This chapter ends with an excised (plucked) quatrain, appropriately themed with a foreign language, and a wish for a window and a receptive, bottle-bearing sea. We now leave Mandelstam at the window he's drawn on his prison wall. In the next and final chapter we will find the thread of his poetics where he left it in 1934, at the border of translation, and cross the border with his great reader and conversation partner, Paul Celan.

CHAPTER SIX

CELAN AND MANDELSTAM: AN OVERHEARD CONVERSATION

> The poet writes himself toward another, "strangest" time.
>
> —*Paul Celan, "The Poetry of Osip Mandelstam"*

So far we have looked at Mandelstam's speculative and theoretical writings through the following model: writing and reading are based on an othering of the self for the purpose of conversation. More pointedly, this othering of the self occurs in order to *continue* a conversation—as we have seen, in Mandelstam's worldview a poet is largely a reader, and his poems in large part a response to the words he has read and the traditions he has inherited.

Time, of course, is a key factor in this process—and time is doubly natured. Especially in the essays and poems of the 1920s, Mandelstam emphasizes *collapsible* time, a folded-up (Bergsonian) fan in which events and ideas and subjectivities separated by stretches of biographical time actually touch one another. One may recall the lover in "The word and culture" lifted into bliss by the recognition that the present night, the present hair of his beloved and the present crowing of the rooster outside the window have all occurred in Ovid—and "Tristia's" epigram: "Everything has already been, everything will repeat anew,/ And only the moment of recognition is sweet to us."

But this unvectored connectivity would hardly be interesting without the ineluctable understanding that time moves forward too—that we feel its directionality as surely as we feel its collapsibility. The poem that strikes a note with the past does so within an

inescapably contemporary frame. Mandelstam lifts Villon's bell into his own essay in order to let us hear it striking *now.* Classical poetry, he claims in "The word and culture," ought to be perceived as "what should be, not what was"—in other words, "classical poetry is the poetry of revolution" (I 214, 216). *Now* can only be revolutionary if it is not *then.* The mind may move backwards in time—as it does in recollection, for instance, or speaking—but writing is an instantiation in the present moment even if the linguistic material it instantiates draws the reader back to the past. Both the Bergsonian leaps across time (sometimes very deep time) and the directionality of those leaps are certainties. The poet writes the past into the present toward the future.

At several points in his theorization of reading, Mandelstam stops short of translation—or just skirts its borders—and this lack of interest or wherewithal may be connected to the directionalities of time and of writing inherent in his thinking. When Paul Celan "found" Mandelstam after his death and after the war, he made a step toward completing this thinking by challenging these directionalities—and by pushing Mandelstam toward translation. If Mandelstam asks us to imagine a sailor addressing his bottle "to the one who finds it" and casting it into the stormy sea, Celan asks us to imagine a situation delivered to the next exponential power of absurdity and faith: a finder on the shore who not only recognized himself as the "secret addressee" but thought it appropriate to toss the bottle back to the sailor.

In her article "Poetry of Bringing About Presence: Paul Celan Translates Osip Mandelstam," Elena Glazova outlines a concept of poetry and time that Celan shared with Mandelstam. In his 1960 radio address on Mandelstam, Celan speaks about the Russian poet in the present tense, as if he were still alive; Glazova claims this is to introduce Celan's "notion of presence…as the essential premise of poetry." Presence *(Gegenwart)* is the intersection of directional time and non-directional time, as Glazova explains:

> The poet's speech establishes a relation to the past—in other words, to the poetic tradition—and, in transforming it, makes the distance to the past perceptible. This distance—by no means a mechanical implication or imitation of tradition—provides a poem with a time index which is, again, legible only at a distance.
>
> (1109)

The poem simultaneously engages in two temporalities: that of the past and that of the present, constructing a lens of one in order to view the other. But the poem also engages the two temporalities of the poet and that of the reader. And it is the relation of the poet and reader in time that occupies much of Celan's thought in the radio address.

Interestingly, Celan frames Mandelstam's early work in terms of his membership in the Acmeist movement. The program of the Acmeists was primarily to counter the mystical, transcendental strivings that marked much of Russian Symbolism and to establish the primacy of the phenomenal world as the scene for poetic investigation. Celan describes the mission thus:

> The place of the poem is a human place, "a place in the universe" certainly, but here, down here, in time. The poem remains with all its horizons a sublunar, terrestrial, creatural phenomenon. It is speech that has become the image of a singularity; it has objectivity, contemporaneity, presence. It stands up into time.[1]
>
> (Im Luftgrab 71)

He follows up this definition by invoking Acmeism's official founder, Nikolai Gumilev, and the movement's various names over time, making it clear that his definition speaks to Mandelstam's poetic aims in the context of the Acmeist movement.

Celan's definition of the poem's place is unique in its concentration on time, and as he goes more deeply into Mandelstam's focus on the poetics of the phenomenal world (a goal

[1] Das Ort des Gedichts ist ein menschlicher Ort, "ein Ort im All," gewiß, aber hier, hier unten, in der Zeit. Das Gedicht bleibt mit allen seinen Horizonten, ein sublunarisches, ein terrestrisches, ein kreatürliches Phänomen. Es ist Gestalt gewordene Sprache eines Einzelnen, es hat Gegenständlichkeit, Gegen*ständig*keit, Gegen*wärtig*keit, Präsenz. Es steht in die Zeit hinein. (The citation is a line from Celan's own translation of Mandelstam's 1914 poem "Let the names of cities in flower" *(Pust' imena tsvetushchih gorodov"),* which Celan does not identify in his text.

he shared with the other Acmeists), he presents Mandelstam's exploration of phenomena as uniquely dependent on time. He writes: "In the poetry of Osip Mandelstam the apprehensible and attainable seek to flower, with the help of language; to become *current* in its truth. We should thus "understand the 'Acmeism' of this poet as language *brought about in its time"* (Ibid. 71-2).[2] Celan is positing a quasi-Platonic view of language, in which a poetic utterance is a striking-off from an essence or a potential that lies ready in language, and which reaches its fullest development for Mandelstam in the *Conversation about Dante*. This view echoes a central image in an essay of Martin Heidegger's, "A Conversation about Language" (Aus einem Gespräch von der Sprache, 1953/54), in which language is also presented as a flowering of phenomena out of essence. However Celan, unlike Heidegger, is explicitly concerned with the creation of an interlocutor, which he claims is intrinsic to a poetic utterance and essential to the flowering of language—and his discourse on Mandelstam allows him to discover time as bound up in this catalyzing interlocutory presence.

The condition of time already inheres in the poem's journey in Celan's acceptance speech for the Bremen Prize for Literature[3]: it will arrive "sometime," "somewhere." An immeasurable time becomes the prime conduit between the poem's address and the reader, making the reader into the poem's (if not the poet's) interlocutor or interlocutors. Celan remarks that Mandelstam's *Stone* contains:

> …the poems of something that apprehends and attends, facing toward the phenomenal, interrogating and addressing the phenomenal; [it is] a *conversation* [Gespräch]. In the space of this conversation the Addressed constitutes itself, realizes itself, assembles itself around the I that addresses

[2] Im Gedicht Ossip Mandelstamms will sich das mit der Hilfe der Sprache Wahrnehmbare und Erreichbare entfalten, will es in seiner Wahrheit *aktuell* werden. In diesem Sinne dürfen wir wohl auch den "Akmeismus" dieses Dichters verstehen als *gezeigte* Sprache.

[3] See p. 281.

> and names it. But the Addressed, which by being named has also become a kind of *You,* brings into this present its otherness and foreignness.[4]
>
> (Im Luftgrab 73)

Celan is speaking of the poem's addressing "appearances" or "that which appears" *(das Erscheinende)* as if it were an addressee, a "You" *(Du)*—that is, the poet pays attention to his poetic subjects as if he were in an I-Thou *(ich-du)* relationship with them. Though it is impossible to avoid the suggestion that the poet's reader also occupies the space of the Addressed *(das Angesprochene)*—Celan is familiar with Mandelstam's early emphasis on the poetic addressee, going so far to refer to the message in a bottle in his Bremen Prize speech—Celan in no way makes this possibility explicit in the radio address. To take Celan at his word is to imagine Mandelstam bringing his material into presence *(Präsenz)* and currency *(aktuell)* by addressing it as a subject, yet without explicit consideration of the reader's presence.

This is an interesting absence, not only because of Celan's (in other writings) and Mandelstam's respective preoccupations with the reader's presence, but also because of the turn Celan's radio address takes directly after the above-quoted passage. Celan speaks of a "stress ratio of various times, one's own time and alien time" *(Spannungsverhältnis der Zeiten, der eigenen und der fremden)* in which "things approach one another" *(die Dinge treten zueinander)* while "even in this togetherness, the question of their spatial and temporal origins is being spoken" *(noch in diesem Beisammensein spricht die Frage nach ihrem Woher und Wohin)* (Ibid. 72). This question, which for Celan preserves the openness and alienness that ensure the presence and currency of the poem, speaks itself (even within

---

[4] …die Gedichte eines Wahrnehmenden und Aufmerksamen, dem Erscheinenden Zugewandten, das Erscheinende Befragenden und Ansprechenden; sie sind *Gespräch.* Im Raum dieses Gesprächs konstituiert sich das Angesprochene, vergegenwärtigt es sich, versammelt es sich um das es ansprechende und nennende Ich. Aber in deise Gegenwart bringt das Angesprochene und durch Nennung gleichsam zum *Du* gewordene sein Anders- und Fremdsein mit.

the connections and concurrences that the poem draws) through the poem's tendency towards the "substantive" *(das Substantivische)*—that is, through the abolition of verbs and the consequent removal of time to the expression of its potential: the infinitive.

> …the word—the name!—points at an inclination toward the substantive; the epithet fades away; the "infinitive," the verb's *nominal forms,* dominate: the poem remains *temporally open;* time can make an appearance; time *participates.*[5]
>
> (Ibid. 73)

The poem, then, does not so much conflate the time of the poem's "I" and the time of its other/addressed, but keeps them in suspension, draws them toward an infinitive in which both may coexist.

At this point, Celan inserts into the radio address a trio of poems that he has translated from Mandelstam's first collection, *Stone (Kamen'/Der Stein).* He does not comment on these poems or the process of their translation—but right away it is apparent that Celan is exercising his interest in "temporal openness" when he reads and translates Mandelstam. That is, he pushes Mandelstam's poems past their inherent concern with time in order to express his own interest and his own reading. The first of these is Mandelstam's 1911 poem "Sound stretches a sensitive sail," a Tiutchev-heavy[6] piece of melancholy written after the death of the best friend of Mandelstam's youth:[7]

> Слух чуткий — парус напрягает,
> Расширенный пустеет взор,
> И тишину переплывает
> Полночных птиц незвучный хор.
>
> Я так же беден, как природа,
> И так же прост, как небеса,
> И призрачна моя свобода,
> Как птиц полночных голоса.

[5] …das Wort — der Name! — zeigt eine Neigung zum Substantivischen, das Beiwort schwindet, die "infiniten," die *Nominalformen* des Zeitworts herrschen vor: das Gedict bleibt *zeitoffen,* Zeit kann hinzutreten, Zeit *partizipiert.*
[6] For Fyodor Tiutchev's influence on this poem see SSDT I 457-8.
[7] On this poem and the death of Boris Sinani, see Lekmanov 46-7.

Я вижу месяц бездыханный
И небо мертвенней холста;
Твой мир, болезненный и странный,
Я принимаю, пустота!

(A sensitive sound — a sail stretches/ A widened gaze empties out/ And across the silence sails/ A soundless chorus of midnight birds.// And I am just as poor as nature,/ And just as simple as the skies,/ And my freedom is illusory,/ Like the voices of midnight birds.// I see the unbreathing moon/ And the sky deader than canvas;/ Thy world, sickly and strange/ I accept, O emptiness!)

(94)

Celan translates the poem as follows:

Das horchende, das feingespannste Segel.
Der Blick, geweitet, der sich leert.
Der Chor der mitternächten Vögel,
durchs Schweigen schwimmend, ungehört.

An mir ist nichts, ich gleich dem Himmel,
ich bin, wie die Natur ist: arm.
So bin ich, frei: wie jene Stimmen
der Mitternacht, des Vogelschwarms.

Du Himmel, weißestes der Hemden,
du Mond, entseelt, ich sehe dich.
Und, Leere, deine Welt, die fremde,
empfang ich, nehme ich!

(Im Luftgrab 73)

(The harkening, the finely stretched sail./ The gaze, broadened, that is emptied./ The chorus of midnight birds/ swimming through silence, unheard.// I have nothing, I am like the sky,/ I am, like nature is, poor./ So am I, free: like those voices/ of midnight, of flocks of birds.// Thou sky, whitest of shirts,/ thou moon, lifeless, I see thee./ And, emptiness, thy world, the strange (one),/ I receive, I take!)

Two translating moves are here apparent which further Celan's stated interest in time and timelessness. First, Celan pushes the first stanza firmly into the "substantive" and "infinitive" by actually removing all the verbs, redeploying the images of Mandelstam's stanza in three predicate-less sentences. Second, Celan skews the poem's first and last

lines to deviate from the otherwise regular meter of iambic tetrameter with alternating feminine and masculine rhymes (a scheme mirroring the meter of the Russian original). The translation's first line adds a foot, and—perhaps more importantly—its last line removes a foot from the tetratmeter. The space that yawns up at the reader from the end of the last line (among any number of possible purposes and effects) lends an alienness to the poem's time, throws it off-kilter, in a way that is amenable to Celan's description of Mandelstam's poetry, keeping time "open" and bringing it into "suspension" together with another's time.

Thus, if Celan has not brought the reader explicitly to light in his examination of "the Addressed" *(das Angesprochene)* of Mandelstam's poetry, he has demonstrated that in his own reading of Mandelstam, he has felt himself addressed to a degree that allows him to participate in the poem's afterlife—to participate, along with "time" and "appearances" in what he has called a conversation *(Gespräch)* that the original poem opens up, by bringing *his own* time and alienness into the conversation. This understanding of both the subject and the "addressed" of poetry allows (or even depends on) the participation of the reader—that is, the reader cannot simply observe an openness in time, or the suspension-together of different times, without bringing his own time to the space opened up by the poem. The reader and the "appearances" with which the poem engages are addressed simultaneously and as one.

In the *Conversation about Dante* (1933), Mandelstam clarifies the importance of performance (specifically linguistic performance) in the reception of poetry; here, in Celan's translation of the above poem, performance also comes to the fore, enabling the confusion of subjectivities and times proper (respectively) to the poet, the poem, the poem's subject, and the poem's reader, which Celan claims stand in a tension of suspension relative to one another. The "I" of the poem is an important locus of subjectivity; Celan in fact posits it as

the source of the poem's subjectivity—the addressing voice—in the passages quoted above, and he reflects this concern in his translation of Mandelstam's poem. The Russian "ia" (I) appears three times in Mandelstam's original; Celan adds another *four* instances in his translation, to bring the total to seven (six instances of "ich," one of "mir"). Whatever his goal in making this move, the effect is to draw attention to what for him is a center of subjectivity, which causes the reader, in reading along with the poem, to inhabit a subjectivity that is at once his own and not his own—to inhabit the subjective suspension of which Celan speaks. Through translation Celan can highlight, if not demonstrate, the creative action of a poem upon a reader—*its bringing the reader into being*—and in so highlighting, or demonstrating, he shows us a laboratory of Mandelstamian reading.

Michael Eskin's book *Ethics and Dialogue in the Works of Levinas, Bakhtin, Mandel'shtam, and Celan* offers a wide and detailed reading of Celan's Mandelstam translations, whose thesis is that Celan assiduously speaks his position as receiver and reader into the translations. As Eskin demonstrates, Celan often interposes *ich* and *du* into his German versions where neither *ia* nor *ty/vy* exist in the Russian original. He thus asserts continuously that a speech act is taking place, that a speaking *I* and a listening *you* are central to the discourse of the poem. One of the most interesting of the many examples Eskin introduces is Celan's translation of "Tristia," in which Mandelstam's famous epigram

> Все было встарь. Все повторится снова.
> И сладок нам лишь узнаванья миг.
>
> (Everything has already been, everything will repeat anew,/ And only the moment of recognition is sweet to us.)

becomes

> Ach, nur Gewesnes kommt, zum andern Male:
> der Nu, das du's erkennst — dein Glück.
>
> (Ah, only what has been, comes another time:/ the instant where you recognize it — your good fortune.)

For Eskin, Celan is going beyond "dialogizing" the poem; he's directing his translation toward a *specific* interlocutor, Mandelstam himself:

> Celan's affirmation…can plausibly be interpreted as genuinely addressing Mandel'shtam—the person and the poet—himself, insofar as the latter will have always already relied on the future reception and, consequently (re)enactment of his poetry, which will consequently 'come a second time' by way of the other.
>
> (189)

This assessment depends on an idea of poetry as dialogue, and Eskin's book on the whole assumes that poetry can be discussed with Bakhtinian and Levinasian dialogue as models. While both Bakhin and Levinas theorize the presence of an interlocutor, both begin their conception of dialogic presence in bodily presence. Our dialogic responsibility toward the other depends upon our understanding that he is *there,* in relation to us. We must do some work to transfer this dialogic responsibility and responsiveness to a relationship between a reader and a text.

The act of writing *backwards* at Mandelstam, which Eskin ascribes to Celan, thus presents a problem. It tempts admission into the category of dialogue, yet though living people can engage in dialogue, and texts can be theorized into it, the terms and the stakes are different, and more complicated, when we begin to theorize a person talking *back* to a text. Mandelstam's movement is forward, after all; in his conception the reader and the author both talk *forward* with material from the present and past. But in Eskin's eye, Bakhtin claims that primary speech genres (the verbal forms of everyday interaction[8]) and secondary speech genres (self-conscious uses of language, literary language, poetry) both participate in the same dialogic rights and responsibilities:

[8] See Eskin 105.

> If any utterance by definition enacts singular co-existence in its dialogic responsiveness and addressivity, that is, as a nexus of interpellations and responses…poetic utterances…reveal themselves as only thematically and constructionally distinct from utterances belonging to the realm of primary speech genres.
>
> (106)

Missing from this estimation is an accounting for the (interesting) difference that arises from the absence of the interlocutor in a literary "dialogue." As soon as the poem is placed in a dialogue with a person, the game changes entirely, and the distinction between this secondary speech genre and live conversation are far from limited to theme and "construction." The problem with Celan talking back to Mandelstam is that the latter isn't there to hear. Any "good fortune" for Mandelstam the poet is a fantasy—neither Celan nor Mandelstam are interested in fantasy; they want real readers, no matter how removed in space and time. Both poets are interested in *our* good fortune, as readers, with which theirs comes together in the unpredictable, recursive moment of reading. But the reader must remain as real as he is undetermined: one in fact depends on the other.

In the Bremen Prize speech (1958), Paul Celan begins to make a claim for the indeterminable reader that will not fully find itself until the Meridian speech, delivered two years later. The Bremen speech begins by illuminating Celan's journey to Bremen from his birthplace in Bukovina, invoking the topography along which his traveling might be charted, along with the many detours along the way:

> The landscape from which—after such detours! but are there really such things as detours?—the landscape from which I've come to you is probably unknown to most of you. This landscape was home to a not inconsiderable portion of those Hasidic stories that Martin Buber has retold for all of us in German. It was, if I may add one more thing to this topographical sketch…a region in which men and books lived.[9]

[9] Die Landschaft, aus der ich—auf welchem Umwegen! aber gibt es das denn: Umwege?—, die Landschaft, aus der ich zu Ihnen komme, dürfe den meisten von Ihnen unbekannt sein. Es ist die Landschaft, in der ein nicht unbeträchtlicher Teil jener chassidischen Geschichten zu Hause war, die Martin Buber uns allen auf deutsch

(GW IV 185)

Here, landscape (*Landschaft*), the earth rationalized, is brought into conversation with detour (*Umweg),* the break in direction, the unexpected turn in which one must suddenly reckon with a landscape which had heretofore been experienced as the realization of an intention. Detour at its worst euphemizes the loss and horror associated with Celan's biography and his artistic preoccupations, and which at its most valuable suggests the poetic turn, the turn of breath *(Atemwende)* that marks his poetry collection of the same name as well as the Meridian speech. Throughout the complications of the journey, language has remained the only constant, withstanding its suffering and always pressing on:

> This one thing has remained within reach, near and never lost in the midst of all the loss: language… But it had to pass through its own answerlessness, to pass through a dreadful silence, to pass through the thousand darknesses of death-bringing speech.[10]
>
> (Ibid. 185-6)

This is a survival story, replete with unexpected turns and changes—a tortuous, dangerous passage that Celan superimposes on the "topographical sketches" with which he introduces his biographical and linguistic origins in Bukovina. The anaphora of "to pass through" *(hindurchgehen)* repeats the word as it moves forward through the sentence; the journey of the Word presses on even as the form of its journeying is reiterated. The reiteration itself suggests changes in direction; but these changes appear to be imperceptible, as they take place in voids: answerlessness, silence, and multiple darknesses the end of whose procession would presumably be nowhere in sight. In fact, Celan's question of whether

---

wiedererzählt hat. Es war, wenn ich diese topographische Skizze noch um einiges ergänzen darf…es war Gegend, in der Menschen und Bücher lebten.

[10] Erreichbar, nah und unverloren blieb inmitten der Verluste dies eine: die Sprache… Aber sie mußte nun hindurchgehen durch ihre eigenen Antwortlosigkeiten, hindurchgehen durch furchtbares Verstummen, hindurchgehen durch die tausend Finsternisse todbringender Rede.

there are even such things as detours blurs the line between the different spaces of topography and detour. This question allows both spaces to be valued as essential parts of the life of language, a valuing that will be more fully realized in the image of the meridian.

Near the end of the Bremen speech, Celan recasts the landscape of poetic travel as ocean, an image in which topography becomes nauseous: height and measure become unstable; there is no ground to stand on, and the word is borne along an unpredictable and turbulent medium. On the water, it seems, there is no detour, and the path of the word is less a mark against directionality and abstraction than it is a stab across infinite odds at finding a place to come to rest. Celan writes:

> A poem, being an instance of language, hence essentially dialogue, may be a letter in a bottle thrown out to sea with the—surely not always strong—hope that it may somehow wash up somewhere, perhaps on a shoreline of the heart.[11]
>
> (Ibid. 186)

Celan owned a copy of the Struve-Fillipov Collected Works of Mandelstam, which had been published in New York in 1955 and included Mandelstam's published prose. Celen's notes in that edition indicate that he'd begun to translate Mandelstam's poems as early as 1958[12]; thus it is likely that by the time of the Bremen speech he was familiar with "On the Interlocutor," and borrows the bottle from that essay. For both writers, the poem is a message in a bottle, cast out with no direction. Like Mandelstam, Celan intends the poem to be received—he invokes it as an instance of dialogue—but unlike Mandelstam, Celan does not posit a *reading* receiver on the other end. It is enough for him to imagine the bottle someday, somehow washing up on a "heart-land," in this way bypassing the shore (the dunes, the inscriptive medium), which we may associate with reading, and going right

[11] Das Gedicht kann da es ja eine Erscheinungsform der Sprache und damit seinem Wesen nach dialogisch ist, eine Flaschenpost sein, aufgegeben in dem—gewiss nicht immer hoffnungsstarken—Glauben, sie könnte irgendwo und irgendwann an Land gespült werden, an Herzland vielleicht.

[12] This edition is among the Celan papers in the Deutsches Literaturarchiv in Marbach: see Eskin 165.

for something at the receiver's core. Reading becomes an unreliable end for the poetic journey: if the poem is on the way to a heart, then reading, with all its mechanisms of process and evaluation, becomes just another set of detours. Celan continues: "In this way, too poems are en route: they are headed toward something. Toward what? Toward something ajar, occupiable, perhaps toward an addressable You *(ansprechbares Du),* an addressable reality *(ansprechbare Wirklichkeit)*[13] (Ibid.). " Here lie three touchpoints with which Celan will cleave his thinking about poetry to Mandelstam's: First, poems are always headed toward something—this idea finds fullest expression in the poetological dynamics of the *Conversation about Dante.* Second, an addressable *You* is something like an addressable *reality*—Celan will press this idea further in his radio address on Mandelstam, in which he will align, within the act of address, a totality of phenomena with an individual human subjectivity. Third, the place toward which the poem is headed is occupiable *(besetzbar)*—Mandelstam in "On the interlocutor" makes a claim for mutually occupiable subjectivities (nominally those of the poet and the reader) which merge in the act of reading. Here, as Celan reaches back to Mandelstam, the direction of the speech act becomes unreliable; the detour is hard to see, as the word that Celan sets adrift goes both forward and backward to land on the beach in "On the interlocutor" at the same time as it reaches us in this moment.

In Mandelstam's essay, we see the bottle's finder defining himself as its addressee according to the fact that he has found it. In so doing he inhabits the "addressable reality" or "addressable *You,"* even the "heart-land" of Celan's reception model, and thereby assumes the unfinalizability of anonymity while retaining the individuated, dialogically ready self brought to light by reading. Concretely, he performs the actions of finding: he comes upon the message in the sand, he reads it, he learns its details. But to fill the space

[13] Something "ansprechbar" is something that can be addressed, but also appealed to.

of reception posited by Celan, this finder must also find himself in a sort of dialogue: if not dialogue with the poet himself, then with the poetic address. The problem with this model is imagining an interlocutor participating in a dialogue with a bodiless being—a being who is incapable of the spontaneity and unpredictability, just to name a few factors, that mark the presence of the other and render dialogue authentic. The question that Eskin fails to answer, and which must be answered is how to read the poetic other as enough of an authentic other that it supposes the personal freedom and independence necessary to participation in dialogue.

The key may lie in the inexhaustibility of the anonymous. Elsewhere in "On the interlocutor," Mandelstam writes, "In speaking to someone known, we can only speak of what is already known." Or, to put it another way, "In order to speak the unknown, you must speak to someone unknown"—that is, the transmission of poetic language depends on the mutual unfinalizability of poem and addressee. To the poet, the addressee must be unfinalizable; to the reader, the poem must be unfinalizable. In the Meridian speech, Celan makes a gesture towards both specificity and unfinalizability in connection with the addressee, which constitutes a deeper response to Mandelstam's essay than that of the Bremen speech.

In the Meridian speech, Celan, like Mandelstam, finds value in approaching the problem from the side of the other, the side of the addressee. In the Meridian Celan tells the story of finding as an estrangement of the self, marked by what he calls a date: that is, a mark in whose recognition the reading I is confused with the self or selves incarnated by the poem. Specifically, Celan writes that "every poem is marked by its own 20th of January." This date, which Celan draws from Büchner's narrative work "Lenz," is the day that the historical Jakob Lenz arrived to visit Johann Oberlin, a date reflected also in the narrative. Celan writes in the Meridian: "He, the real one, Büchner's Lenz, Büchner's

image, the person we could perceived on the first page of the story, the Lenz who 'on the 20th of January walked through the mountains', he—not the artist, the one occupied with questions of art—he as an I" (DM 7).[14] Derrida, in his essay "Shibboleth," comments: "The singular turn of this phrase, 'he as an I,' will support the whole logic of individuation, of the 'sign of individuation' that each poem constitutes" (SiQ 5). That is, there is an essential connection between a poem's sign of individuation—its date—and uncanny empathic link between a poet and his subject. But Celan's terms immediately expand the link beyond that of poem and subject: "Can we perhaps now find the place where the strangeness was, the place where the person was able to set himself free as an—estranged—I?" (DM 7).[15] Celan goes on to locate the poetic encounter itself in this estranged I—the same poetic encounter that inspired Celan to name Mandelstam as his brother, his estranged I—the same poetic encounter that Celan fashions into the interpellating movement. Now the estranged I is no longer just a *he-as-an-I* but also a *you*—Büchner, then, would be writing to Lenz as well as writing him.

This intermediary other—the thing that is between I and you and overlaps with both—is hypostasized in Mandelstam's poem "The Finder of a Horseshoe." This poem, which Celan later translated, formally posits a gesture towards the addressee that is emblematic of the image of addressee as an unidentified, perhaps negatively idealized "finder," whose unfinalizeability provokes a scene of encounter. Mandelstam provides his poem with a subtitle: "Pindaric fragment," suggesting a reader who is already a finder of an ancient relic, before the poem even begins. Celan's translation, naturally, is also accompanied by the image of a reader-finder: Celan the reader-translator. In each case, a

[14] Er: der wahre, der Büchnerische Lenz, die Büchnerische Gestalt, die Person, die wir auf der ersten Seite der Ehrzählung wahrnehmen konnten, der Lenz, der "den 20. Jänner durchs Gebirg ging", er—nicht der Kunstler und mit Fragen der Kunst Beschäftigte, er als ein Ich.

[15] Finden wir jetzt vielleicht den Ort, wo das Fremde war, den Ort, wo die Person sich freizusetzen vermochte, als ein—befremdetes—Ich?

poem is presented as something discoverable—more precisely, as a fragment of a larger system of meaning which as such is irretrievable: intuited through the boundaries between the modern world and that of classical antiquity; between one language and another, between the living and the dead.

Thematically, the poem develops an image of creative discovery that indeed conflates the poet and the reader. Two of the poem's key images, the forest and the horseshoe, work in different directions to envision "finding" as a creative act that defines the human itself. The poem begins: "We look at a forest and say:/Here is a ship-forest, a mast-forest..." and immediately sets up a discovering observer in an essentially human position: the bearer of a gaze that rationalizes what it sees in terms of potential use. Later, the arched neck of a dying horse is said to preserve the memory of the horse's running, and the horseshoe that it leaves behind is hung over the door to "rest," is domesticated and removed from the sphere of potential action (never more "to strike sparks from the flint stones"). The first image presents the impulse to cut raw material into something human; the second presents the impulse to cut something out of the flow of life and recast it as a talisman. In each case, we have something that approaches a Heideggerian *Ereignis,* that is something like an event that is bound up with the act of making-one's-own: the forest and the horseshoe make themselves present through a transforming human act—one that looks towards the future (expressed as potential), one that looks towards the past (expressed in the death or passing-on of the animal). But for Mandelstam such an appropriative gesture is also bound up with communication, or at least transmission. The life of the talisman doesn't end with its being bound up or buried; it is rather transformed and awaits further transformation, further reading.

For Mandelstam, the timestamp of that complex propriative and generative gesture, the date of reading, conjoins infinite remove with infinitesimal proximity. The addressee's

intimacy in being secretly chosen is coupled with the necessity of his unfinalizeability in the eyes of his addresser, his interpellator, the poet. "In speaking to someone known," Mandelstam writes, "we can only speak of what is already known." Graham Pechey in his essay "Penultimate Words: The Life of the 'Loophole' in Mihkail Bakhtin" draws a connection between Mandelstam's bottle-finder and Bakhtin's concept of "loophole." Pechey claims that Mandelstam constructs the addressee in "Interlocutor" as a loophole in the poetic text, granting the poem multiplicity and unfinalizability:

> The poem itself is the correlative of the (Dostoevskian) hero, and its 'loophole addressee' is neither some faceless anonym or abstract mass posterity but each one of us in our singularity... There are as many loopholes as there are readers of poems; poetry's 'loophole' is as wide as the heavens overarching the sea in Mandelstam's little allegory of the message-bearing bottle.
>
> (12)

Bakhtin's idea of textual unfinalizability is expressed in his *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* as a "word with a loophole," which "...should be an ultimate word and does present itself as such, but in fact...is only the penultimate word and places after itself only a conditional, not a final, period" (233). Moreover, the word with a loophole is perpetually penultimate because it finds itself in address: "...there is no word-judgment, no word about an object, no secondhand referential word—there is only the word as address, the word dialogically contacting another word, a word about a word addressed to a word" (237). The "word about a word addressed to a word" is reminiscent of Celan's conflation of subject and addressee, and also of Derrida's date (or, as he expresses it in "Shibboleth," circumcision). A word which cannot land suffers a constant vertigo, an orbital falling toward meaning. The word as a sign of poetry allows (or forces) a near-absolute proximity—this kind of anticipation is reminiscent of Celan's proximity of encounter, the vertiginous position of a point along a meridian that leads simultaneously to the other and to oneself.

Without this gift of vertigo, the word falls to earth—or is indeed buried. Clare Cavanagh, in her book *Osip Mandelstam and the Modernist Creation of Tradition,* reads "The Finder of a Horseshoe" as presenting a failure of poetry[16]:

> ...the horseshoe finder himself, the latter-day poet who stumbles on this memento of past greatness, can answer a fragment only with a fragment... The verbal fragment echoes the physical fragment, and both are metonyms for a cultural unity that is, perhaps, lost forever... Taken together, they seem to spell failure.
>
> (160)

Cavanagh sets this "failure" against the perceived optimism of Mandelstam's contemporaneous literary essays:

> ...the plough's circling motion—what was below is now above; what was past is now present; what was buried returns to life and will be buried again...—is the central movement of all his poetry... We see one version of this motion at work in [the essay] "Humanism and the Present," as the buried coins [of past cultures] return to circulation. The coins that end 'The Horseshoe Finder,' however, stay buried, and this unfinished cycle, this broken circle dominates the poem from the start...
>
> (161)

This halt in the perpetual cycle, however, need not be interpreted as failure, but may be understood as an immediate experience of the creative absence—the oceanic rift—that suspends the addressee away from the poet. At the poem's end the coins are still buried and have not yet been claimed, but after all they cannot be claimed unless they are first buried. Cavanagh points out that, as this poem is Mandelstam's only work in free verse, he is drawing attention to the failure of poetic cycles, which include rhyme and meter as well as less palpable and predictable modes of return (161). But this great and egregious gap only opens out a further space for the reader to enter—a larger reader, even absurdly large—but maybe this is part of the point. If the poet laments the destitution of his tools, he is still crying out; and a hopeless gesture toward the depths where coins are buried can be a redoubled challenge to dig them out.

[16] See Cavanagh 157-178.

Even in the early essay “Morning of Acmeism,” a stone can't thirst after the heights of Gothic architecture if it has not first fallen from some lofty place. In a Voronezh poem, written decades later, a fallen verse (which is compared directly to a stone that “wakes the earth” with its fall) becomes a lucky find for a creator because, unlike most earthly things, it is unalterable and cannot be judged. The “creator” of the latter work, along with the architect of the former, finds a place for the found word or stone in a structure (poem, cathedral) that will allow it to achieve its latent potential. The coins at the end of “The Finder of a Horseshoe” can be said to lie in wait for their finder, as the horseshoe does, and though it is tempting to mourn the loss of the horse and to lament the almost automatic taming and forgetting that people perform upon its synecdochal referent, the horseshoe (hanging it over the door, for instance, for luck), Mandelstam himself in essays contemporaneous to “The Finder of a Horseshoe” puts forth the very actions of taming and forgetting as essential to cultural transmission: one must tame in order to humanize; one must forget in order to later recollect. "Horseshoe" is indeed a poem about a broken cycle, as Cavanagh details—but it retains a shred of optimism when read against "O the Interlocutor," in which desperation and hope are two sides of the same coin. When Mandelstam ends the poem "And I am no longer enough for myself" *(I mne uzh ne khvataet menia samovo),* he may still be calling out for his own finder, a reader, despite the failure of his text.

A poem enters its afterlife as an appropriative but also mnemonic and communicable *Ereignis,* one that combines the look towards the past with the look towards the future, and in so doing also brings the poet and the addressee to one another. Mandelstam's message-bearing bottle is cast towards the future, into the unforeseeable vicissitudes of the ocean, whose perturbations obscure not only the course but also the duration of the bottle’s

journey. The oceanic chaos that stands between the poet and the addressee enables the risk which, Derrida writes in "Shibboleth," is "the only chance for blessing" that is not "a judgment, a certitude, a dogma." A willing orientation towards the unknown is reflected in both Mandelstam and Celan as each looks back (towards antiquity and towards Mandelstam, respectively) and also forward (towards an unknown and not-yet-existent addressee) into an oceanic void that predates perceived time itself and therefore stands outside of time, outside of any date at all. Each reading casts its date onto the poem, yet the poem, like the self, resists inhabiting a date itself. Casting the poem into the unknown attempts to obviate the casting of the self into time, into necessity and mortal definition.

The Meridian itself is also something found, as Celan makes clear at the end of his speech, and like the horseshoe its arc points the finder in the direction of its source. The meridian is the counterpart of the journey across both terrestrial and oceanic topographies; existing outside phenomena, outside hypostasis, it reflects neither detours nor turbulence, but rather points assuredly toward the place where the journey began, and beyond. Though your finding, your reading, casts this instantiation of the poem as yours, the meridian that is joined to the poem at the moment of reading, nevertheless brings its arc, its unfinalizability which keeps open the potential of the dialogic word.

Without an open *you* as an addressee, Celan's poetics lose focus and his meridian goes flat. In the *Meridian* speech, the poetic word comes about by dint of the absurd: "homage is being paid to the majesty of the absurd that bears witness to the presence of the human… I believe that this is … poetry" (DM 3-4)[17]. The poetic encounter is marked by "mystery" in which a totality of human experience is inscribed together with the individuality of the other:

[17] Gehuldigt wird hier der für die Gegenwart des Menschlichen zeugenden Majestität des Absurden… Ich glaube, es ist… die Dichtung.

> The poem wants to head toward some other, it needs this other… Each thing, each person is, for the poem that heads toward this other, a figure of this other… The attention the poem tries to devote to everything it encounters…is not…the achievement of an eye competing with (or emulating) machinery that becomes more perfect every day, but is rather a concentration that remains mindful of all our dates.[18]
>
> (DM 9)

The poem acquires signification on the way to the other; each piece of signification is also a manifestation of the other. Meanwhile the poem holds a totality of "dates," markers of historical time, from each of which the poem may be viewed anew: a number of potential readings equal to the number of potential readers. The reader, in reading, joins the other toward which the poem is headed (toward which it was written). He "finds" (in Mandelstam's terms) on the strength of the other to which he belongs in the moment of reading. The reading eye (to which we will shortly return) is not a tireless inspector or predictor—recall the "machine poetry" against which Mandelstam inveighs in Chapter Three—its openness is an embrace wide enough for the other as other.

Nevertheless, Celan is addressing Mandelstam in particular. This singular, nameable focus is undeniable in the poems of *Die Niemandsrose* (The no-one's rose), published in 1963. The collection is dedicated to the memory of Osip Mandelstam *(Zum Andenken Ossip Mandelstamms).* Mandelstam's name appears many times in the poems of the collection, both wholly and severed into parts; moreover, themes of Mandelstam's poetry as well as the theme of translation serve as dominants for the book. *Die Niemandsrose* opens many windows onto Celan's readings of Mandelstam in the years of the collection's composition, and the most windowlike may be "Mandorla," from the second of the book's four sections. In this short poem Celan brings Mandelstam's name into contact with

[18] Das Gedicht will zu einem Anderen, es braucht dieses Andere… Jedes Ding, jeder Mensch ist dem Gedicht, das auf das Andere zuhält, eine Gestalt dieses Anderen… Die Aufmerksamkeit, die das Gedicht allem ihm Begegnenden zu widmen versucht…ist…keine Errungenschaft des mit den täglich perfekteren Apparaten wetteifernden (oder miteifernden) Auges, est ist vielmehr eine aller unserer Daten eingedenk bleibende Konzentration.

another dominant of Celan's poetry as a whole: the theme of nothingness *(das Nichts).* The Nothing, we shall see, is an important term in Celan's understanding of poetic communication; is also happily read back into Mandelstam's poems and writings on poetry; and helps us return, via Celan, to the idea of translation as an ontology of the self. Here is the poem:

> "Mandorla," 1963
>
> In der Mandel — was steht in der Mandel?
> Das Nichts.
> Es steht das Nichts in der Mandel.
> Da steht es und steht.
>
> Im Nichts — wer steht da?
> Der König.
> Da steht der König, der König.
> Da steht er und steht.
>
> Judenlocke, wirst nicht grau.
>
> Und dein Aug — wohin steht dein Auge?
> Dein Aug steht der Mandel entgegen.
> Dein Aug, dem Nichts stehts entgegen.
> Es steht zum König.
> So steht es und steht.
>
> Menschenlocke, wirst nicht grau.
> Leere Mandel, königsblau.
>
> (In the almond — what stands in the almond?/ The Nothing./ It is the Nothing that stands in the almond./ There it stands and stands.// In the Nothing — who stands there?/ The King./ There stands the King, the King./ There he stands and stands.// Jewish lock of hair, you will not grow gray.// And your eye — whither does your eye stand?/ Your eye stands opposite the almond./ Your eye, opposite the Nothing it stands./ It stands by the King./ So it stands and stands.// Human lock of hair, you will not grow gray./ Empty almond, royal blue.)
>
> (DNS 41)

The poem's abstract topos of "almond" is most immediately resolved by the title "Mandorla," which is not only "almond" in Italian but also a feature of sacred architecture and iconography, in which the image of Christ is framed in a vertical almond shape (sometimes

formed by the intersection of two circles). The word "Mandorla" prepares for us the poem's visual and aural setting, which is taken up chiefly by the almond ("die Mandel"), the eye ("das Auge"), the king ("der König"), and the Nothing ("das Nichts"). These elements come into play in an encounter, mediated by seeing, between a living eye and a timeless image: the contemplation of an atemporal figure by a (mortal) human being.

The king in the almond—the Christ[19], presumably, in the mandorla setting, "stands and stands" (or "dwells and dwells") and stands still *in* the Nothing—a locative construction signaled by the prepositional phrase "steht *im* Nichts"—much as the Nothing stands *in* the almond ("steht *in der* Mandel"). The eye, on the other hand, moves. It stands *up*: *wohin* (whither) and not *wo* (where). The eye belongs to the phenomenal world: it exists in time. Celan also links "standing into" and time in his radio address on Mandelstam, when he claims that "the poem…stands into time" (IL 71).[20] Anna Glazova comments on this phrase in her article "Poetry of Bringing About Presence": "The poem is a language in the sign of radical individuation only because it is *gezeitigt,* 'temporalized'…brought about, timed, and performed as time." The poem (and its constituents: the word, the reader, and the poet) thus exist in a "poetic present tense" (1112). The poem "Mandorla," following and acting upon this model, stands *into* time (one could say, as Glazova almost does, that it *makes* time) as it sets its objects standing *in* time. The king and the Nothing "stand and stand" where they are (the king in the Nothing, the Nothing in the almond)—but the eye (along with the poem "stands and stands" up toward something: *wohin?* whither?—toward the king-Christ, toward the nothing, toward the mystery in the almondine frame of the artwork. The eye moves in its incarnate binding to time; the poem must as well. Neither can stop.

[19] See Mackey 135.
[20] Das Gedicht…steht in die Zeit hinein.

Time and the eye were much on Celan's mind between 1958 and 1960, when he was translating Mandelstam's poems and contemplating his poetics (Mandelstam's "metaphysics," as Celan wrote to Rudolf Hirsch); working on the poems for "Die Niemandsrose"; and compiling materials and drafts for his Bremen Prize and Büchner Prize acceptance speeches. We have seen Celan, in his Bremen speech, profess a hope that the poem, "a letter in a bottle thrown out to sea…may sometime wash up somewhere, perhaps on a shore of the heart." Behind this profession, of course, is Mandelstam's model of reading in "On the interlocutor"; for Mandelstam, "sometime" and "somewhere" are the precise coordinates by which a poem orients itself toward its reader, or a bottle finds its proper shore. In the notes to "The Meridian," we find the reader figured as an eye, whose gaze becomes the conduit for an experience of the poem's time. Celan sees Mandelstam's poetry as exemplary of this mechanism of reading.

The notes headed with Mandelstam's name in effect brand that name on the suspended visual moment of "Mandorla." One note headed "Mandelstamm" reads: "the gazed-at, not the unlocked enigma" *(das angeschaute, nicht das entschlüsselte Ratsel)* (DM 127). Another reads: "Arrangement, the asyndetic character of phenomena/ that which binds: the poetic I—" *(Reihung, der asyndetische Charakter der Phänomene/ das Bindende: das dichterische Ich —)* (DM 145). There seems to be a desire to forestall any resolution in reading poetry: no "unlocking," no subordination of phenomena to any logical conjunction (syndeton). The ordering that Celan seems to wish poetry to conduct upon phenomena is that of personality, or of voice: the stamp of individual subjectivity. If these two notes are of a piece, that the stamp of personality is analogous to vision, to the visual rationalization of phenomena (better, rationalization of realia *into* phenomena) by the eye. Both the eye and the I frame the inputs of the world as phenomena; they give them body (though only as

image).[21] Mandelstam, for Celan, creates that process in his poems, thereby (in Glazova's words) bringing about presence. Another "Mandelstamm" note works toward fashioning this claim:

> The things: more thingy in the sense of their presentness, the presentness for the one who sees them and deals with them. Not idealized, not overhauled [not dipped into a [symbolic] vagueness]—but looked at{,}[and set into words...] [from the nearness] [with] mortal eyes[22]
>
> (DM 148)

The *Meridian* text will make explicit the encounter inherent in such apprehension of presence. Indeed, perhaps its most cogent expression comes in a paragraph lifted almost verbatim from Celan's radio address on Mandelstam (see opening of Chapter 1):

> The poem becomes—by means of such conditions!—a poem of something that is always apprehending, facing toward that which appears, interrogating and addressing it; it becomes dialogue—*often a dialogue of desperation.*
>
> Only in the space of this dialogue does the Addressed constitute itself, assembles itself around the I that addresses and names it. But the Addressed, which by being named has also become a kind of *You,* brings into this present its otherness. Even in the poem's here and now—the poem itself has always only this one, singular, select present—even in this immediacy and nearness the Addressed lets what is most proper to it—to this Other—speak along with it: its time.[23]

But even in the "Mandelstamm" notes (none of which survived into the *Meridian's* final text; likewise Mandelstam's name) we see signs of encounter. Bring the notes back to "Mandorla," and Mandorla becomes a stand-in not only for Mandel and thereby Mandelstam, but also for the eye. The eye of the reader now comes in contact with the almond eye of the poem, its ever-locked enigma, its other I. The poem makes the time in which these two eyes (and two Is) to engage one another. Celan's frequent alignment of

---

[21] See also Note 486 of the Meridian materials (p. 141), which is headed by the title of Mandelstam's first collection *Kamen'* (Stone): "Only in the apprehending *[wahrnehmende]* eye does the object constitute itself."

[22] Die Dinge: dinglicher im Sinne ihres Gegenwärtigseins, dem sie Sehenden und sich mit ihnen Auseinandersetzenden Gegenwärtigsein. Nicht verklärt, nicht überholt [niche in ein [symbolisches] Ungefähr getaucht]—sondern angeschaut{,}[und in Worte gefaßt…] [aus der Nähe] [mit] sterblichen Augen[22]

[23] See p. 58 for original.

Mandelstam with the eye may point toward this encounter, this engagement, where—as Celan expresses in another "Mandelstamm" note—"finite and infinite allow themselves to be recognized one by the other *(sich einander zu erkennen geben)*" (DM 147). It may be that we see in the poem a simulacrum of a finite eye (an almondine frame) with a virtually illimitable capacity to take in, and which thus reflects back to us the "track of the everlasting *[Fährte der Immerwährenden]"*—perhaps a trace of the meridian—which we may imagine is shared with our own "everlasting." Such a model of encounter and reflection might enable Celan to claim "that M[andelstam]'s poems are not…'hermetic' but are in fact open, wide open to the eye that seeks to grasp them in their entire temporal depth" (DM 141).[24]

The poem is thus an encounter in which the reader (the "addressed/*Angesprochene")* speaks his time along with the poem. The encounter is twice temporalized, once in terms of the finite and once in terms of the infinite. The ephemeral encounter happens according to the rhythms of the body, which Mandelstam and Celan address throughout their work—one major confluence, certainly not unique to these two poets, being the breath on the panes in Mandelstam's "Breathing" (see Chapter One) and Celan's *Atemwende.*[25] The infinite-scaled encounter can occur on the plane of what Celan calls "meridian" or "the absolute poem," while in Mandelstam it occurs in impulse and prelinguistic murmur (see Chapter Five), all of which occasion the incarnate instance of language that is the poem. ("Poem," it should be made clear, refers to the poem that exists in the moment of reading.)

---

[24] …daß die Gedichte M<andelstamm>s nicht…"hermetisch" sind, sondern vielmehr offen, weit aufgetan dem Auge, das sie in ihrer ganzen Zeittiefe zu begreifen versucht.

[25] From *The Meridian:* "Poetry: that can mean an *Atemwende,* a breathturn. Who knows, perhaps poetry travels this route—also the route of art—for the sake of such a breathturn? …perhaps it is exactly here that the automatons break down—for this single short moment? Perhaps here, with the I—with the estranged I set free *here* and *in this manner*—perhaps here a further Other is set free? TM 7.

All the same, the moment in Celan's "Mandorla" and the moment of reading as conceived by both Mandelstam and Celan contain a central Nothing. Anna Glazova constructs a model of this central Nothing when she describes the authorial play in Mandelstam's poem "Insomnia" (discussed above in Chapter Five). Glazova claims that while the poem begins with Homer (the speaker reads down the list of ships in the Iliad's second book as he tries to fall asleep), it drops him halfway through and adopts Dante as its guide. She points to the poem's second and final lines as allusions to the *Commedia,*[26] and also proposes Dante as "Insomnia's" true thematic core:

> Dante, who finds himself in the beginning of the *Divina Commedia* in the middle of earthly life and in the dark sea of spiritual confusion, is led by Virgil to the light of divine love. Mandelstam, who finds himself in the beginning of this poem in the middle of a Homeric sentence and in confusion about Greek syntax, is led by Dante to the darkness of sleep. Love, the impulse moving not only the Achaean warriors but also Dante's faith, becomes an impulse directed solely towards language in Mandelstam's poem.[27]
>
> (1116)

Thus, the poem's moment of reading comes with an incipient departure out of language, marked not only by the falling-away of the list of ships and by the approach of the ocean's roar, but also by a confluence of authors. Glazova writes that the roar of the sea might be read as "language-as-such, language without a speaker" (1117) and that "this pre-articulate language allows for a continuity of conversation in individual poems and by individualized speakers" (1118), because such unfinalized, speakerless language is necessarily a shared language: an omni-language. This all-embracing Nothing, effacing the borders of the authorial self, permits the poem to hand over to its reader not only itself—but all of poetry. The means by which poetry is poetry—the guarantee of poetry—is an essential transmission in the moment of reading, analogous to the guarantee of being in "Mandorla's"

[26] Cf in particular the *Paradiso's* last line: "l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stele" vs. Mandelstam's "vse dvizhetsia liubov'iu" ("love, which moves the sun and other stars" vs. "all is moved by love").
[27] That is, love (Aphrodite) moves the Achaean warriors through Helen.

extended moment of encounter.[28] The orientation of poetry toward the other, for Glazova, is a means by which poetry "as a whole" is transformed with each reading: "The task of a poet…is to hand over poetry as a whole to his conversation partner. The obligation of the conversation partner is, correspondingly, to receive poetry as a whole" (1111). But in order for this to happen, the handing-over must look like a desperate toss: the chaotic, rhythmic sea, as Mandelstam writes, must come to the poet's aid to take the poem willy-nilly toward "the one who finds it." The Nothing in the mandorla must intercede.

And for Glazova, the self-blurring Nothing is what makes translation possible, because "only in translation does the intention towards language free itself from the individuals who speak… It is impossible to deny that translation…belongs neither to the body of work of the author nor to that of the translator" (1121). In fact, Glazova claims that Celan's translation of Mandelstam's poem "Insomnia. Homer…" (see above) thematizes translation as a separation of *reading* from the reader and the read. Reading becomes the oceanic element that both removes the individual reader and guarantees the survival of the read. While the voices that speak in the Mandelstam poem—Homer, Dante, Mandelstam—are distinct and recognizable, in Celan's version they are confused. For instance, Celan gets rid of the opening reference to Dante, changing "I've read up to the middle…" to "I did not get that far" and thereby effacing the echo of Dante's "Midway upon the journey of our life" (1122). Glazova sees such a move as translating the "darkness" in Mandelstam's poem as well as the words that convey that darkness. As the poem's voices give up their individuality and merge in the oceanic rumble of the final line, "the silence that unites them…begins to speak."[29] And what it says, through Celan's reordering of priorities in that last line, is "here." Both versions speak of the ocean:

[28] "Poems are sketches for Being," Celan writes at the conclusion of the radio essay on Mandelstam. IL, 81.
[29] Ibid.

Mandelstam: "И тихим грохотом подходит к изголовью."
(And with a quiet roar [it] approaches the headboard.)

Celan: "zu Häupten hör ichs tosen, es fand den Weg hierher."
(I hear it roar up to my head, it has found its way here.)

Celan's line shows us the moment of reading once again, lays it bare for us—the readers in the present moment—as well as for the readers caught in the *poem's* present. Glazova concludes:

> The movement of translation and transformation is itself being translated up to this "here"—the "here" of Celan's text and of "this present moment," of the text and its reading… This "shore," this "here," and the final period after it mark the extreme limit of the intention that has propelled the speaking until "here."
>
> (1123)

Celan's translation highlights the presentness of the reading moment; when the speaking voices are effaced in their individuality, the "here" can be anyone's. A reader and a poem can thus enter into one another, can partake of each other's (oceanic) voice and (present) time.

Here, the Nothing in the eye becomes the Nothing in the I. Returning to one of Celan's "Mandelstamm" notes, we see the I as a guarantee of phenomena in relation, or perhaps *as* relation. That is, the I binds; it is a boson that grants constitution: "Arrangement, the asyndetic character of phenomena/ that which binds: the poetic I—" *(Reihung, der asyndetische Charakter der Phänomene/ das Bindende: das dichterische Ich —).* In another of *Die Niemandsrose's* poems, the I's constitutive power assists rather explicitly in an apparent model of translation. "Es ist alles anders…" begins with a talisman of language placed in the speaker's mouth, a scene that not only points the poem's speaker toward an encounter specifically with Mandelstam, but also translates into the same encounter one of Mandelstam's images of reading:

> Die Silbermünze auf deiner Zunge schmilzt,
> sie schmeckt nach Morgen, nach Immer, ein Weg

nach Rußland steigt dir ins Herz,
die karelische Birke
hat
gewartet,
der Name Ossip kommt auf dich zu…

(The silver coin melts on your tongue,/ it tastes like morning, like forever, a way/ to Russia ascends in your heart,/ the Karelian birch/ has/ waited,/ the name Osip appears to you…)[30]

(DNS 75)

Before entering the scene of encounter that follows, it's worth stopping on the silver coin that melts on the poet's tongue. This is, on the surface, an image of receiving currency, an idea already tuned toward metaphor, intensified in that orientation by being placed on the tongue (the speaker now speaks by partial means of this coin, which is at once gift, encumbrance, and constraint), is further intensified because it is melting there. Speaking now becomes an ordeal, perhaps a holy one. One recalls the bitter scrolls the prophets are commanded to eat in Ezekiel and Revelation; also Moses guided by the angel to take the live coal in his mouth, gaining his slowness of tongue—and also distantly echoes the "ruler" in Mandelstam's poem "1 January 1924," in which the dying potentate, standing in for the dying age, has molten tin poured down his throat in a violent transference of authority to the new age.[31] The silver coin may partake in this much more violent image of metal in the mouth which seals off the dying word *and* transmits it to its new receiver. If Celan's speaker takes the place of the son in Mandelstam's poem who inherits the legacy of the dying age, then "Es ist alles anders…" takes that image of death and inheritance into a scene of translation.

The scene takes place outside of time—the coin tastes of morning, or an eternal tomorrow (depending on whether the reader allows an uncapitalized *morgen,* tomorrow, to

[30] In the German, *Morgen* (morning) carries a hint of *morgen* (tomorrow). The poem is at least partly aimed at the future.
[31] See p. 146ff.

shadow *Morgen,* morning). It stage dressing is the Karelian birch, signifying the northern region of Russia that begins at St. Petersburg, the city with which Mandelstam is famously associated. Then, in these woods, Mandelstam's name appears as if conjured, and the encounter between the two poets begins:

> der Name Ossip kommt auf dich zu, du erzählst ihm,
> was er schon weiß, er nimmt es, er nimmt es dir ab, mit Händen,
> du löst ihm den Arm von der Schulter, den rechten, den linken,
> du heftest die deinen an ihre Stelle, mit Händen, mit Fingern, mit Linien,
>
> (the name Ossip comes toward you, you narrate to him,/ what he already knows, he takes it, he takes it from your hands,/ you loosen his arm from his shoulder, the right, the left,/ you fix your own in their place, with hands, with fingers, with lines,)[32]
>
> (DNS 75)

This scene of translation is seeded with references to Mandelstam's writings on reading. Perhaps most saliently for this study is the nod toward "On the Interlocutor," in which Mandelstam claims that "in speaking to someone known, we can only speak of what is already known." When Celan's poet speaks to "Ossip" what Ossip already knows, we imagine a scene of active reading or translation in which the reader speaks the words of an author (an other). Anna Glazova describes Celan's response to Mandelstam as such a scene of active reading: as "the articulation of individuation through the language of an other." As we have observed in the previous chapters' analysis of "On the Interlocutor," the language of the other illuminates parts of the self that were previously unknown, revealing them as alien but also appropriate. Returning to Glazova, we may see that the "already known" which Celan is speaking back to Mandelstam is not exactly Mandelstam's original poem, nor Celan's translation, but the shared oceanic silence that absorbs the speakers' discourse even as it invites them into it. The poem (each poem) grants a script by means of

[32] The pronoun *er/ihm,* of course, might refer either to the "name" or to "Ossip" himself; the move toward the parts of the body suggests "him/Ossip" (rather then "it/name") as the likelier referential pair.

which that silence (or guarantee of discourse) may be spoken. The "already known" utterance is coterminous in Mandelstam's essay with the "already known" conversation partner; since the "Ossip" that appears in Celan's poem is an image, a name, it is "known" only in a certain sense: as an image, a sound, a weight of words and intuition, but not yet an articulation.

Ossip then picks up *(nimmt ab)* the gift of the "already known" with his hands, and once more we are reminded of a central image of Mandelstam's. His poem "Take, for the sake of joy, from my palms" *(Voz'mi na radost' iz moikh ladonei,* 1920) shows the poet's palms bearing the reader a gift: "a little sun and a little honey," which becomes "a necklace of dead bees, honey transformed into sun" (157). These bees, as Kirill Taranovsky details in his essay "Bees and Wasps," are emblematic of both poetry and eros; this is a love poem which offers itself as a gift. When Celan translated it, he gave hands prime place, changing Mandelstam's "palms" to "hands" and moving the hands to the opening of the first line:

> Mandelstam: "Возьми на радость из моих ладоней"
> (Take for the sake of joy from my palms)
>
> Celan: "AUS MEINEN HÄNDEN, dich zu freuen, nimm"
> (FROM MY HANDS, to make yourself happy, take)

"Aus meinen Händen," moreover, suffices for the poem's title in the table of contents of Celan's Mandelstam translations.[33] It is striking that Celan takes care to show us "Ossip" accepting the "already known" with his *hands.* It places the scene within Mandelstam's poem, mixes this utterance of poetry back to its creator with the gift of embodied sun to a lover.

These hands now lead the encounter into a quasi-erotic exchange in which the encountering selves lose themselves in each other—and, in Glazova's words, reclaim the

[33] Celan chose titles for Mandelstam's untitled poems (of which "Take, for the sake of joy" was one) from their first lines.

"darkness" or the "silence that unites them" (1113). Now the hands (with their arms) come off the poets' bodies.[34] The poetic exchange is no longer by means of the hands; it is now of the hands themselves. The two selves that meet partially migrate into the other, along with their "lines": their features, their directionalities. This migration is a way in which Celan distinguishes the exchange in "Take, for the sake of joy" from the exchange in his own poem. One is an act of reading, the other translation. In Glazova's words, translation indeed presents an ambiguity in proprietorship of a body: "translation, in the strict sense, belongs neither to the body of work of the author nor to that of the translator." Celan merely lifts "of work" from this idea and presents us with an actual bodily exchange—a disassembly for the sake of reassembly.

The exchange then delivers us to a totality, derived from these once separate selves, that is at once the property of both and neither:

> — was abriß, wächst wieder zusammen —
> da hast du sie, da nimm sie dir, da hast du alle beide,
> den Namen, den Namen, die Hand, die Hand,
> da nimm sie dir zum Unterpfand,
> er nimmt auch das, und du hast
> wieder, was dein ist, was sein war,
>
> (—what broke away grows back together —/ there you have them, there take them for yourself, there you have both of them,/ the name, the name, the hand, the hand,/ there take them for yourself for a pledge,/ he takes it too, and you have/ again, what is yours, what was his,)
>
> (DNS 75)

Here we see the poet's name mentioned for the first time (one of the "names" must be his); we see, then, the poet giving as well as taking, lending his own name to the process. Likewise, we see "Ossip" participating in the dialogue, "taking" for himself. At the end of this movement, the poet ends up both with what *is* his and what *was* Ossip's, suggesting

[34] The Russian *ruka,* of course, means both hand and arm. Mandelstam may have chosen *ladon'* (palm)—even though *iz moikh ruk* would not have been confusing to a reader—to focus on the hand as separate from the arm.

that an appropriation of Ossip has taken place—but this is complicated by "again," which for its part suggests that this encounter was happening before the movement began, that what was Ossip's was already the poet's even before they initiated the exchange, before the translation began. If we see this confusion of proprietorship in Glazova's terms, if we imagine it as part of a shared oceanic silence and darkness, we see that this element is also timeless: an eternal morning or an eternal tomorrow. In order for poet and reader to encounter each other from their respective times, the poetry of the poem has first to be detemporalized. Reading the poem—or, as here, enacting the aggravated reading of translation—Celan can have *again* what was not "his." We are reminded of the self-made-strange in "On the Interlocutor," the words that return to the poet's ears to surprise him. The name Ossip appears to Celan's poet so that he can speak to himself the part of himself that he is unaware is named Ossip—always unaware, except in the act of speaking it.

Viewed another way, this response of Celan to Mandelstam is a *private* conversation of which Celan lets us see glimpses. This is evident in the way that Mandelstam's words appear in Celan's poem. We have seen Celan take Mandelstam's "already known" and gift-bearing hands and turn them back toward their source, interrogate them by re-speaking them, take them into himself even as he interrogates them. These moments are a re-gifting (a re-presenting) of poetry between two conversation partners, a dialogic movement that runs as a counterpoint to the exchange we readers have with Celan's poem. Our reading enacts its own version of this private conversation, which, even if we don't know how to participate in Celan's response to Mandelstam, will invite us into the darkness and silence that subtends and guarantees poetic discourse.

CONCLUSION

NOTES FROM UNDERGROUND

Sehr geehrter Herr,

Sie haben mich unglücklich gemacht.

Ich habe Ihre Verwandlung gekauft und meiner Kusine geschenkt. Die weiß sich die Geschichte aber nicht zu erklären.

Meine Kusine hats ihrer Mutter gegeben, die weiß auch keine Erklärung.

Die Mutter hat das Buch meiner anderen Kusine gegeben und die hat auch keine Erklärung.

Nun haben sie an mich geschrieben. Ich soll Ihnen die Geschichte erklären. Weil ich der Doctor der Familie wäre. Aber ich bin ratlos.

Herr! Ich habe Monate hindurch im Schützengraben mich mit dem Russen herumgehauen und nicht mit der Wimper gezuckt. Wenn aber mein Renommee bei meinen Kusinen zum Teufel ginge, das ertrüg ich nicht.

Nur Sie können mir helfen. Sie müssen es; denn Sie haben mir die Suppe eingebrockt. Also bitte sagen Sie mir, was meine Kusine sich bei der Verwandlung zu denken hat.

Mit vorzüglicher Hochachtung ergebenst,
Dr Siegfried Wolff

(Dear sir,

You have made me unhappy.

I bought your "Metamorphosis" and sent it to my cousin. But she has no idea what to make of it.

My cousin gave it to her mother, who can't figure it out either.

Her mother gave the book to my other cousin, and she can't figure it out.

Now they've all written me, saying I should explain the story to them, because I'm the doctor in the family. But I have no idea.

Sir! I've been in the trenches for months on end trading blows with the Russians and haven't batted an eye. But if my reputation with my cousins went to hell, I couldn't stand it.

Only you can help me; you must, for you've landed me in this soup.

So please tell me what my cousin should get out of the "Metamorphosis."

Respectfully yours, etc.)

—Letter to Franz Kafka, 1917

If as an article in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* claims, this letter is genuine and not some trick played by a friend[1], it is a hilarious sendup of reception in Mandelstamian terms: a message in a bottle about a message in a bottle, a book being traded from hand to hand with no sign of its having been read. Once the laughter stops, though, this can become a horrible scene: sound and fury in the trenches, a turned-up seaful of sailors marking their papers and throwing the bottles over in an almost automatic gesture, with no trace of voice or person and no attention to language. A scene of literature—as it was in the high Soviet period—as a purely social function, a book as something to be passed around like a crib sheet for a general examination (at times with very high stakes).[2]

In any case, this letter is that of a doctor writing to another doctor (requesting a prescription, in fact)—not a writer writing to a reader. While what Mandelstam was working on, it seems for his whole life, was a real letter from the trenches.

In March 1937, more than twenty years after the sailor of "On the Interlocutor" has inscribed his name and date and cast his message overboard, Mandelstam would write his "Verses on the Unknown Soldier" (Stikhi o neizvestmon soldate, closing the poem by inscribing his own date: "I was born at night between the second and third/ Of January in the unreliable/ Year of ninety-one…" (Ia rozhden v noch s vtorogo na tret'e/ Ianvaria v devianosto odnom/ Nenadezhnom godu…) "Verses…" is a mysterious poem, long and formally liberal, pulsing with the ternary stops and intermittent rolling of an execution drum-call. It is commonly read as an apocalyptic vision in the old style, marked with elements of modern warfare. Mandelstam wrote it in exile in Voronezh, after a

[1] See Jochen.
[2] The temptation to read the letter as something Kafka himself might have dreamed up cannot be fulfilled here, for better or worse.

psychologically destructive legal process (which occasioned at least one suicide attempt), amid hunger and isolation, and awaiting acknowledgement from the state literary apparatus of his just-completed Ode to Stalin (which never came).

Throughout the poem, images familiar from Mandelstam's writing about poetry are recast in a scene of war and apocalypse. Each of the first two stanzas presents the image of an "ocean without a window" *(okean bez okna),* recalling (among other images) the ocean of "On the Interlocutor," the surf of *The Noise of Time,* and the window onto the sea at the end of "Ariosto." Here, though, Mandelstam is presenting an ocean that does not communicate:

> Этот воздух пусть будет свидетелем,
> Дальнобойное сердце его,
> И в землянках всеядный и деятельный,
> Океан без окна — вещество.
>
> До чего эти звезды изветливы!
> Все им нужно глядеть — для чего? —
> В осужденье судьи и свидетеля,
> В океан без окна, вещество...
>
> (Let this air be a witness,/ Its wide-beating heart,/ And in the dugouts the omnivorous, active/ Ocean without a window — a substance.// How denunciatory these stars are!/ They still need to gaze — for what? —/ In condemnation of the judge and the witness,/ At the ocean without a window, the substance…)
>
> (272)

It is a strange and frightening landscape, where the only life seems to be split between ethereal witnesses and judges (necessary characters in an apocalyptic vision) and the subterranean dwellings (trenches, perhaps, or graves teeming with gustatory activity) that comprise this strange "ocean." There seems to be a lot of looking without seeing—a rote seeking for blame, for reasons, when there is actually nothing worth looking at. The "substance"—unlike "Interlocutor"'s ocean, or "A. Blok"'s badger hole—does not seem

primed to release its contents for rebirth, resurrection, or reading. This is a deadly space, a no-man's-land with no abiding eschatology nor premonition of escape.

A few verses later, Mandelstam revisits the "swallow" *(lastochka)* of his underworld poem of 1920 (see Chapter Four). In that poem, the swallow was a messenger who brought the word back from the land of the dead, only to fall dead itself at the poet's or reader's feet. Now, we see a swallow who can no longer make that journey, essential to poetry:

> Научи меня ласточка хилая,
> Разучившаяся летать,
> Как мне с этой воздушной могилой
> Без руля и крыла совладать.
>
> (Teach me, frail swallow,/ Who has unlearned how to fly,/ How I'm supposed to master this air-tomb/ Without a wheel or a wing.)
>
> (272)

The swallow, who has been a stand-in for the Orphic word, might here be more explicitly a stand-in for the poet in unreceptive times: Mandelstam has had to unlearn his own nature to reconcile himself with (or at least survive inside) the Bolshevik regime—this is attested by the fact of the Stalin ode and numerous attempts in his verse to reckon with the realia and the idea of Soviet life. It's interesting to note that the swallow in the 1920 poem fulfilled itself by flying to the underworld, and then falling dead upon its return from it. The bird who can no longer fly is also then deprived of the ability to die—a vital stage in the life of the word. If the word can't die, it can't reach a reader. Here both poet and swallow are stuck in an uncommunicative space of exile that won't let them out, either to take wing or to fall dead.

Finally, at the end of the poem, Mandelstam gives us a moment of dialogue, of at least an attempt at communication in language:

> Напрягаются кровью аорты,
> И звучит по рядам шепотком:
> — Я рожден в девяносто четвертом…

— Я рожден в девяносто втором...
И в кулак зажимая истертый
Год рожденья, с гурьбой и гуртом
Я шепчу обескровленным ртом:
— Я рожден в ночь с второго на третье
Января в девяносто одном
Ненадежном году, и столетья
Окружают меня огнем.

(Aortas tauten with blood,/ And a whisper sounds down the rows:/ —I was born in '94…/ —I was born in '92…/ And clutching in my fist the worn-out/ Year of my birth, along with the crowd, en masse/ I whisper with bloodless lips:/ — I was born in the ninety-one/ Unreliable year, and the centuries/ Surround me with fire.)

(275)

This speech is distinguished from poetic discourse in that it's not unique to the poet-speaker—others are speaking the same way he does (except in the strange locution "in the ninety-one...year" *(v devianosto odnom...gody)* instead of "ninety-first" *(devionosto pervom))*—and, key for Mandelstam, that it doesn't hint at its own reception, even in the far future. A month previously, still working on the Stalin ode, he had written a quatrain that saw the speaker marched off into the distance in a crowd, but resurrected in a distant scene of reading:

Уходят вдаль людских голов бугры:
Я уменьшаюсь там, меня уж не заметят.
Но в книгах ласковых, и в книгах детворы
Воскресну я сказать, что солнце светит.

(Hills of heads go off into the distance:/ I shrink there, soon I won't be noticed./ But in tender books, and in the games of children/ I will rise again to say the sun is shining.)

(361)

In "Lines on the Unknown Soldier" there is no resurrection—rather, up rises a ring of fire (or multiple rings), with Biblical-prophetic as well as Dantean overtones. The poet is cut off by the ages, like Eden after the fall: a very picture of the isolation against which Mandelstam's poetry and criticism had been so long fighting.

These images in "Lines" do not represent a step backwards, however, as much as a step back: the shot of reality that overcomes the sailor after he's thrown the bottle over and the ship begins to break apart. Or Mandelstam may have felt in Voronezh that he was writing from inside that ocean: that the feeling of reprieve that Nadezhda Mandelstam reports of the Voronezh years brought with it a sensation of death-in-life. The boat had already foundered and sunk; the crew were not quite drowned but the ocean was about to shut its window. And Mandelstam, the Acmeist, *"the* metaphysician," was reporting the facts of this suffocating transitional space.

Celan may have been looking for a metaphysician when he first wrote of having discovered and translated Mandelstam in 1958. One can only imagine the hunger to scientifically describe states of the soul, if one is already inclined that way, if one has survived the camps. Maybe Celan was looking for a theorist of disaster and loss, such as Mandelstam was, to give possible shapes to his own. In Celan's eagerness to see Mandelstam's address to the world as constituting a listener out of its very intentionality and language, we can also read Celan's desire to be a listener of the most intimate kind—recall the exchange of body parts in his "Es ist alles anders"—and imagine that, having lost his family, he was looking for a brother as much as for a doctor.

The first poem of *Die Niemandsrose,* following upon the dedication "Dem Andenken Ossip Mandelstam," rehearses some of the key elements of Mandelstam's "Verses on the Unknown Soldier," to the extent that it can be read as picking up where that poem leaves off: we find graves, earth, seas, an unnamed host in a no-man's-land, and a final image of encircling. As the poem stands so immediately close to the dedication, and as this volume came into being along with Celan's Mandelstam translations, "Es war Erde in ihnen" may be read as directed toward the Russian poet, and as a story of reading and translation:

Es war Erde in ihnen, und

sie gruben.

Sie gruben und gruben, so ging
ihr Tag dahin, ihre Nacht. Und sie lobten nicht Gott,
der, so hörten sie, alles dies wollte,
der, so hörten sie, alles dies wußte.

Sie gruben und hörten nichts mehr;
sie wurden nicht weise, erfanden kein Lied,
erdachten sich keinerlei Sprache.
Sie gruben.

Es kam eine Stille, es kam auch ein Sturm,
es kamen die Meere alle.
Ich grabe, du gräbst, und es gräbt auch der Wurm,
und das singende dort sagt: sie graben.

O einer, o keiner, o niemand, o du:
Wohin gings, da's nirgendhin ging?
O du gräbst und ich grab, und ich grab mich dir zu,
und am Finger erwacht uns der Ring.

(It was earth in them, and/ they dug.// They dug and dug, so went/ their day there, their night. And they didn't praise God,/ who, they heard, wanted all this,/ who, they heard, knew all this.// They dug and heard no more;/ they did not become wise, thought up no song,/ invented no kind of language for themselves./ They dug.// There came a calm, there also came a storm,/ there came all the seas./ I dig, you dig, and the worm digs too,/ and the one singing there says: They dig.// O one, o none, o no one, o you:/ Where did it go, as it went nowhere?/ O you dig and I dig, and I dig myself toward you,/ and on our finger the ring awakens.)

(DNS 13)

The poet digs himself ever closer to a "you" that emerges out of a permutation of grammatical categories: one, none, no one. As he gets closer, the poem approaches a stanzaic form: a quatrain of ternary meter (some lines amphibrachic, some lines anapestic) alternating between lines of tetrameter and trimeter, alternately rhymed. It is not an entirely regular form—the poem is still on the way to such a form when it ends—but its prosody is established enough that it echoes the anapestic trimeter of Mandelstam's "Lines," so that the endings of both poems stand in pronounced, if yet mysterious, relationship.

The "du" that Celan has theorized in his radio address on Mandelstam here lies within the digger ("It was earth in them, and/they dug"). An "I" digging myself toward a "you," who lies inside of me, can be either an image of reading or one of writing. Celan's speaker is seeking a connection that can be achieved only by simultaneously digging toward the self and toward the other—something that happens, and may only happen, on either side of a text. At the end of "Lines on the Unknown Soldier," Mandelstam finds himself trapped inside a text, encircled by fire, named by his date, locked into a windowless ocean of earth. Celan's answer, perhaps, is to dig, and to recast the circle, which for the fading Russian means isolation, as a ring of brotherhood that awakens when the address is respoken.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Althusser, Louis. "Essays on Ideology." Verso: London & New York, 1993.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics.* Ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays.* Trans. Vern W. McGee. Ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986.

Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations.* Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968.

Bergson, Henri. *Creative Evolution.* Trans. Arthur Mitchell. New York: The Modern Library, 1944.

Blok, Aleksandr. *Lirika.* (Lyrics). Moscow: RIPOL Klassik, 2009.

Blok, Aleksandr. *Poeziia, drama, proza.* (Poetry, drama, prose.) Moscow: Olma-Press, 2001.

Carlson, David Gray. *A Commentary to Hegel's Science of Logic.* Basingstoke, England; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

Cavanagh, Clare. *Osip Mandelstam and the Modernist Creation of Creation.* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995.

Celan, Paul. *Gesammelte Werke.* (Collected Works.) Franfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1983.

Celan, Paul. *Die Niemandsrose. Sprachgitter.* (The no-one's-rose. Speech-grille.) Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 2003.

Celan, Paul. "Die Dichtung Ossip Mandelstamms." In *Ossip Mandelstam: Im Luftgrab.* (Osip Mandelstam: In an air-grave). Ed. Ralph Dutli. Zürich: Ammann Verlag, 1988.

Celan, Paul. *Der Meridian: Endfassung — Entwürfe — Materialen.* (The meridian: final text, drafts, materials.) Ed. Bernhard Böschenstein and Heino Schmull. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1999.

Celan, Paul. *Collected Prose.* Trans. Rosmarie Waldrop. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Celan, Paul. *The Meridian: Final Version — Drafts — Materials.* Trans. Pierre Joris. Ed. Bernhard Böschenstein and Heino Schmull. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011.

Derrida, Jacques. *Sovereignties in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan.* Ed. Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005.

Efros, Nikolai. *"Na dne": p'esa Maksima Gor'kogo v postanovke moskovskogo Khudozhestvennogo Teatra.* ("The Lower Depths": The Moscow Art Theater's production of Maksim Gorky's play.) Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1923.

Freidin, Grigory. *A Coat of Many Colors: Osip Mandelstam and His Mythologies of Self-Presentation.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987.

Galereia Dom Nashchokina. *Russkii ekspressionizm.* (Russian expressionism.) Moscow: Galereia Dom Nashchokina, 2004.

Gerstein, Emma. *Moscow Memoirs.* Ed. and trans. John Crowfoot. London: Harvill, 2004.

Gerstein, Emma. *Novoe o Mandel'stame: Glavy iz vospominanii.* (New material on Mandelstam: Chapters from memoirs.) Paris: Atheneum, 1986.

Glazov-Corrigan, Elena. *Mandel'shtam's Poetics: A Challenge to Postmodernism.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000.

Glazova, Anna. "Poetry of Bringing About Presence: Paul Celan Translates Osip Mandelstam. *MLN,* vol. 123, no. 5 (December 2008), pp. 1108-1126.

Gornfel'd, Arkadii G. *Muki slova.* (Torments of the word.) St. Petersburg: Biblioteka "svetocha," 1906.

Gumilev, Nikolai. "Zhizn' stikha." (The life of the poem.) *Nikolai Gumilev: Elektronnoe sobranie sochinenii.* Web. 1997-2003.

Gumilev, Nikolai. "Nasledie simvolizma i Akmeizm." (Acmeism and the Legacy of Symbolism.) *Nikolai Gumilev: Elektronnoe sobranie sochinenii.* Web. 1997-2003.

Gumilev, Nikolai. "Chitatel'." (The reader.) *Nikolai Gumilev: Elektronnoe sobranie sochinenii.* Web. 1997-2003.

Harris, Jane Gary. "The 'Latin Gerundive' as Autobiographical Imperative. *Slavic Studies,* Vol. 45, No. 1 (Spring 1986), pp. 1-19.

Hegel, Georg Friedrich Wilhelm. *Science of Logic.* Trans. A.V. Miller. London, Allen & Unwin; New York: Humanities Press, 1969.

Heidegger, Martin. *Basic Writings.* Ed. and trans. David Farrell Krell. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993.

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time.* Trans. Joan Stambaugh. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996.

Heidegger, Martin. *On the Way to Language.* Trans. Peter D. Hertz. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.

Ivaniushina, I., ed. *Literaturno-khudozhestvennyi avangard v sotsiokul'turnom prostranstve rossiiskoi provintsii: istoria i sovremennost'.* (The literary-artistic avant-garde in the sociocultural space of the Russian province: history and modernity.) Saratov: Publishing center "Nauka," 2008.

Ivanov, Vyacheslav Ivanovich. *Po zvezdam. Borozdy i mezhy.* (By the stars.) St. Petersburg: Astrel', 2007.

Ivanov, Vyacheslav Ivanovich. *Selected Essays.* Trans. Robert Bird. Ed. Michael Wachtel. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001.

Ivanov, Vyacheslav Ivanovich. *Sobranie sochinenii.* (Collected works.) Ed. D. Ivanov and O. Deshart. Brussels: Foyer Oriental Chrétien, 1971-1987.

Ivanov, Vyacheslav Vsevolodovich. "Sovremennost' antichnosti. 'Chernoe solntse' Fedry." (The contemporaneousness of antiquity. The "black sun" of Phaedra.) *Inostrannaia literature,* No. 1 (1997).

Kafka, Franz. *Briefe 1914-1917.* Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2005.

Lekmanov, Oleg. *Osip Mandel'shtam.* Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 2009.

Lekmanov, Oleg. *Kniga ob Akmeizme.* (Book about Acmeism.) Tomsk: Volodei, 2000.

Lekmanov, "Mandel'shtam i Simvolism: stat'ia iz ne vyshedshego slovaria." (Mandelstam and Symbolism: an article from an unpublished dictionary.) Silverage.ru. Web.

Mackey, Cindy. *Dichter der Bezogenheit: A study of Paul Celan's poetry with special reference to Die Niemandsrose. Stuttgarter Arbeiten zur Germanistik,* Issue 306. Stuttgart: Hans-Dieter Heinz, 1986.

Maeterlinck, Maurice. *Serres chaudes.* (Hothouses.) Brussels: Paul Lacomblez, 1912.

Mandel'shtam, Nadezhda. *Kniga tret'ia.* Paris: YMCA-Press, 1987.

Mandel'shtam, Nadezhda. *Vospominaniia.* Paris: YMCA-Press, 1982.

Mandel'shtam, Nadezhda. *Vtoraia kniga.* Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1990.

Mandel'shtam, Osip. *Kamen'.* (Stone.) Saint Petersburg: Akme, 1913.

Mandel'shtam, Osip. *Polnoe sobranie stikhotvorenii.* (Complete collected poems.) Saint Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 1997.

Mandel'shtam, Osip. *Sobranie sochinenii v dvukh tomakh.* (Collected works in two volumes.) Ed. A. Mikhailov and P. Nerler. Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literature, 1990.

Mandel'shtam, Osip. *Sobranie sochinenii v chetirekh tomakh.* (Collected works in four volumes.) Ed. G. Struve and N. Filippov. Moscow: Art-Bizness Tsentr, 1993-1997.

Matich, Olga. *Erotic Utopia: The Decadent Imagination in Russia's Fin-de-siècle.* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005.

Mayer, Jochen. "Diese Suppe hat ihm Kafka eingebrockt. Was haben 'Die Verwandlung', ein Berliner Bankdirektor und Hedwig Courths-Mahler miteinander zu tun? Eine Spurensuche." (This is the soup Kafka landed him in. What do "The Metamorphosis," a Berlin bank-director, and Hedwig Courths-Mahler have to do with each other? A forensic search.) *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 8 July 2006: S. 53.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Basic Writings.* Trans. and ed. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Modern Library, 1968.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Will to Power.* Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage, 1968.

Nikulin, Dmitri. *On Dialogue.* Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006.

Paperno, Irina. "On the Nature of the Poetic Word." *Christianity and the Eastern Slavs,* Vol. 2. Ed. Robert Hughes and Irina Paperno. London: University of California Press, 1994.

Pechey, Graham. "Penultimate Words: The Life of the 'Loophole' in Mihkail Bakhtin." *Literature and Theology,* vol. 20, no. 3 (September 2006), pp. 269-285.

Pittock, Malcolm. *Ernst Toller.* Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979.

Pollak, Nancy. "Mandel'shtam's Mandelstein (Initial Observations on the Cracking of a Slit-Eyed Nut, OR a Couple of Chinks in the Shchell)." *Slavic Review,* vol. 46, no. 3/4 (Autumn-Winter 1987), pp. 450-470.

Pollak, Nancy. *Mandelstam the Reader.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.

Puskhin, Aleksandr Sergeevich. *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii.* (Complete collected works.) Ed. Blagi, Bondi, Vinogradov, and Oksman. Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1959-1962. Vols. 1 and 2.

Slakey, Thomas J. "Aristotle on Sense Perception." *The Philosophical Review,* vol. 70, no. 4 (April 1961), pp. 470-484.

Pickford, Henry. *The Sense of Semblance: Philosophical Analyses of Holocaust Art.* New York: Fordham University Press, 2013.

Rodina, Tatiana M. *Aleksandr Blok i russkii teatr nachala dvadtsatogo veka.* (Aleksandr Blok and Russian Theater of the Beginning of the Twentieth Century.) Moscow: Nauka, 1972.

Ronen, Omry. *An Approach to Mandel'štam.* Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1983.

Ronen, Omry. "Akmeizm." *Zvezda* 7 (2008): 217-26.

Seifrid, Thomas. *The Word Made Self: Russian Writings on Language 1860-1930.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005.

Solovyov, Vladimir. *Smysl liubvi.* (The meaning of love.) Elektronnaia biblioteka "Magister." Web.

Taranovsky, Kirill. *Essays on Mandel'štam.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976.

Terras, Victor. "The Black Sun: Orphic Imagery in the Poetry of Osip Mandelstam." *Slavic and East European Journal,* Vol. 45, No. 1 (Spring 2001), p. 48.

Toller, Ernst. *Masse-Mensch.* (Mass-Man.) Stuttgart: Phillip Reclam, 1979.

Vandevelde, Pol. "Dmitri Nikulin: *On Dialogue." Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews.* Web. 11 August 2006.

Verlaine, Paul. *Selected Poems.* Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1948.

Villon, François. *The Poems of François Villon.* Trans. H. De Vere Stacpoole. New York: John Lane Company, 1914.

Wachtel, Michael. *The Cambridge Introduction to Russian Poetry.* Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004.